

Badshah Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan Muslim campaigner for nonviolence in the liberation of India

For those who listen to the news on almost any day of the year, the picture that one has of Muslims worldwide is one of fighting, warfare, atrocities and violence in its myriad forms. Can it be then that we are to explore a Muslim man of the twentieth century, who lived by an Islamic code of nonviolence, inspired a hundred thousand Muslims to follow him and justified all this on the basis of the life of the Prophet Muhammad himself? A topic indeed of true relevance to the world today.

It is an unfortunate fact of history that many of those Muslim scholars and leaders, who campaigned to retain an independent, united India, freed from British rule, and who opposed the creation of Pakistan, such as Maulana Abdul Karim Azad, the Qur'an commentator and first Minister of Education in modern India, and Husain Ahmad Madani, the great scholar of Deoband, have received little notice since Partition. To this list must be added Badshah Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan (1890-1988), the Pashtun khan, who campaigned with Mahatma Gandhi and used nonviolent resistance as a weapon against the British in the independence struggle.

Just as 'Mahatma' (Great Soul) is an honorific title given to Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, by which he is commonly known, so 'Badshah Khan' (the King of Khans) is an honorific title given to Abdul Ghaffar Khan by his fellow khans after his travels through the Frontier Province of India from 1915 to 1918. We are indebted to two studies written on him in recent times, to make his life and work better known: Eknath Easwaran, *Nonviolent soldier of Islam: Badshah Khan, a man to match his mountains* (1999), and Rajmohan Gandhi, *Ghaffar Khan: Nonviolent Badshah of the Pakhtuns* (2004).

To understand his significance, we need to know something of the Pashtun people, from whom he came, and the experience and example of the Prophet Muhammad during the twelve years of his prophetic ministry in Makka. The importance of these preliminaries can be seen in two statements by Badshah Khan:

We [Pashtuns] know only too well the bitter results of violence from the blood feuds... We indeed have an abundance of violence in our natures. It is good in our own interests to take training in nonviolence. Moreover, is not the Pathan amenable only to love and reason? [If you win him,] he will go with you to hell, but you cannot force him even to go to heaven. I want the Pathan to learn to do unto others as he would like to be done by.

There is nothing surprising in a Musalman [Muslim] or a Pathan like me subscribing to nonviolence. It is not a new creed. It was followed fourteen hundred years ago by the Prophet, all the time he was in Mecca... But we had so far forgotten it that when Mahatma Gandhi placed it before us we thought that he was sponsoring a new creed or a novel weapon...

Gandhi, p. 91

The Pashtun People

The Pashtun people have their geographical centre in Pashtunistan, which was divided between Afghanistan and India by the Durand Line of 1893, with about one-third in Afghanistan and two-thirds in today's Pakistan. This is known as the Frontier Province and so Badshah Khan is known sometimes as the Frontier Gandhi or the Muslim Gandhi. The Pashtun people are sometimes called the Pakhtuns/Pukhtuns or the Pathans, the name by which they were known during the time of the British in India. They comprise up to four hundred clans and Badshah Khan's family were amongst the hereditary chiefs (khans) of one of these, the Muhammadzai, whose seat was in the Charsadda valley.

In the nineteenth century, the area of Pashtunistan and the wider country of Afghanistan acted as a buffer between the Russian Empire to the north and the British Raj to the south. It is a mountainous region containing the famous Khyber Pass and was thus never fully subjugated by the British. The Pashtun people were renowned warriors, who operated by a strict ethical code of revenge (*badal*), which could trigger a cycle of vendettas that could pass on through generations. Freedom and honour were their highest values. Any resistance movement arising amongst them in the time of the British was put down with main force. Although British forces penetrated beyond the Khyber Pass on a couple of occasions in the late nineteenth century, they were driven back by the Afghan warriors, who were more at home in the mountains, and so the Durand Line represented the furthest extent that could reasonably be controlled by the British. To imagine Pashtuns being committed to nonviolent action was unthinkable; the established British reaction to such a movement was that it was a dangerous camouflage to advance the murderous Pashtuns towards their goal of the end of British rule. It is then no surprise to learn that Badshah Khan spent a total of fifteen years in British prisons for 'inciting insurrections' prior to Partition.

Prophet Muhammad in Makka

For the first twelve years of his prophetic ministry (610-622), Muhammad led a small community of Muslims in Makka. At this time, Makka was both a trading centre and an important place of pilgrimage for the Arabian Peninsula. Groups of Bedouins from the interior came to worship their gods and to purchase goods for their lives in the desert. Two of the most central messages of the Qur'an during these years were that there is no god (nothing worthy of worship) except God and that human individuals and societies are called to the central ethic of justice. This threatened the pilgrimage trade in Makka because people who ceased to worship the many idols that were assembled there would have no reason to visit the city. No merchant wanted to be told that all his trading practices – prices, measures and quality – should be governed by the ethic of justice and that he would be accountable to God on the Day of Judgement for the way in which he had conducted his life. No wonder then that the opposition to Muhammad and his message was led by the merchants of Makka. The message of Islam could diminish the honour and prestige of the sanctuary of the idols in Makka and divert customers elsewhere.

The demands of the message of the Qur'an called for equality amongst people and between the sexes, as well as an end to tribal affiliation, with the accompanying stress on the whole community of Muslims as one's primary identity and a deeper awareness of everything being dependent on God rather than upon the wealth or social position of an individual. The kind of people who converted to Islam during this early period tended to be young men, those who were weak within society because they did not have the protection of a powerful clan, women, freed slaves, servants, people from minor clans, and younger sons of influential families. Gradually a few more prominent members of second-degree clans and those who had already been on the path of seeking deeper spiritual enlightenment, the *hanif*, joined the Muslim community. The motivation for such conversions was overwhelmingly religious; they were going to face hardships and opposition as a consequence of their newfound faith.

Those Muslim converts who came from good families were ridiculed for bringing dishonour on their lineage. Pressure was exerted by families and clan elders to give up this new religion. Those without protection were subjected to beatings and torture; the first martyr of Islam was a woman, Sumayyah, who was tortured and eventually killed. The case of Bilal is often told. He was a slave who converted to Islam and was beaten while staked out under the desert sun and then a rock was placed on his chest so that he could not move; despite all this, he would not renounce his faith. Bilal was eventually freed by Muhammad sending one of his companions to buy his freedom. Such slaves and servants who became Muslims would be denied the right to pray by their masters. Young men were confined and restrained until they gave up the faith. For two years, the clan of Muhammad and his followers was put under a boycott so that no-one would trade with them or allow them to marry into other clans. Muhammad's response to such persecution was to sustain people in their faith and encourage them not to give in but to endure with patience, secure in the knowledge that their strength came from God, who would not desert them. Chapters of the Qur'an exhorting people to patience and forbearance were revealed at this time, e.g., Q. 73 and 103.

Muhammad himself was not spared criticism and ridicule. He was alleged to be possessed by a *jinn*, or to be a magician, or a poet who made up the verses of the Qur'an himself. He was counselled to be patient and resist such insults (Q. 20:130); he was to be tempted just as earlier prophets had been. The clan chiefs made offers to Muhammad of great wealth and beautiful women if only he would give up his claims to prophecy and the negation of their traditional gods, but he famously replied that he would not desert his faith even if he were to be given the sun and the moon.

It was from the example of Muhammad and the early Muslim community in Makka that Badshah Khan drew his understanding of the power of nonviolent resistance against the might of the British imperial forces in India. He called such patient but resolute resistance "The weapon of the Prophet".

I am going to give you such a weapon that the police and the army will not be able to stand against it. It is the weapon of the Prophet, but you are not

aware of it. That weapon is patience and righteousness. No power on earth can stand against it.

When you go back to your villages, tell your brethren that there is an army of God and its weapon is patience. Ask your brethren to join the army of God. Endure all hardships. If you exercise patience, victory will be ours.

Easwaran, p. 117

The early life of Abdul Ghaffar Khan

Born into a landowning family in the village of Utmanzai in the Frontier Province of undivided India, Abdul Ghaffar had a traditional start to his education by memorising the Qur'an (*hafiz*). His father, Bahram Khan, had a reputation for fairness and leading an upright life, being entrusted with the savings of the villagers, who lived on his lands, and characterised by a willingness to forgive wrongs rather than seek the customary revenge. Likewise, his mother was known as a pious woman. He had an older brother, who was to go to London for his university education and become a medical doctor before eventually returning to take part in the struggle for an independent India and becoming a politician in his own right. Abdul Ghaffar followed his older brother in attending Edwardes High School in Peshawar. At the completion of his schooling, he was offered a commission in the Corps of Guides, the élite regiment of the British army in the Frontier Province, but when he learnt that being an officer would not save him from having to accept insults from the English officers, he declined the offer as it would have offended his Pashtun sense of honour. He settled instead to overseeing the farmers on his father's lands.

Abdul Ghaffar became convinced that the key to the future of his people was education and so he set up his first school in Utmanzai in 1911. He faced opposition from the local religious leaders, who saw education as a threat to their power over the people, and from the British, who did not want the peasants to be awakened to thoughts of 'human rights'. He married in 1912 and travelled in India, meeting Maulana Abdul Karim Azad at Aligarh in 1913 and visiting Deoband in 1914. This was followed by a time of fasting and seclusion, during which he sought to discern his life's calling. His was to be a life of service to God expressed in the service of the poor and ignorant. The next three years, 1915-1918, were spent in a tour of hundreds of villages in the Frontier Province, trying to inspire the local khans to work for education, embrace forgiveness rather than revenge and opt for a life of nonviolence. It was during this time that he was given the honorific title of Badshah Khan by the local khans whom he inspired.

Initial resistance against British rule

Around this time Gandhi returned to India from South Africa and began to develop his resistance movement against the British. Badshah Khan was inspired by Gandhi's call "to pit one's whole soul against the will of the tyrant" and thus end British rule. Badshah Khan took Gandhi's 'weapon of truth', *satyagraha*, and interpreted it as: *satya*, meaning truth, and *graha*, meaning firmness, and therefore *satyagraha* as "the truth that is born

of the firmness of love and nonviolence”. In 1919, when Gandhi called for a day of fasting and prayer to protest against British misrule in India (occasioned by the Rowlatt Act, which allowed imprisonment without trial for suspected ‘terrorists’), there was a huge response amongst the Pashtun people, inspired by Badshah Khan, who was sentenced to six months in prison. The people of Utmanzai were punished collectively with a fine being imposed and hostages being imprisoned until it was paid.

In 1920 Badshah Khan attended the meeting of the Indian National Congress, which called for complete independence for India. This was the occasion of his first meeting with Gandhi. The work of setting up schools in the Frontier Province had drawn the attention of the British, who wanted it ended. They called in Badshah Khan’s father and asked him to use his influence on his son. When his father went to him to ask Badshah Khan if he could not stay quietly at home like everyone else, the son recalled that he responded by asking his father if he should follow the example of everyone else if they stopped doing their daily prayers. His father replied that the daily prayers are a sacred duty and should never be abandoned. To this, Badshah Khan responded, “To my mind, educating the people and serving the nation is as sacred a duty as prayer”. His father concluded the discussion by saying that if it was a duty as sacred as the daily prayers then he must never give it up.

After the failure of their strategy to use his father to stop Badshah Khan’s activities, the British decided to imprison him and sentenced him to three years hard labour for the offence of inciting unrest by opening schools. He refused to pay bribes for better treatment, so spent much of his time in solitary confinement, but was reported to have had a good influence on both prisoners and warders. Eventually he was transferred to a political prison, where he met other freedom fighters: Hindus, Christians and Muslims, and together they studied their scriptures and sought to refine their vision.

Badshah Khan’s first wife had died of influenza in 1918 and he had re-married in 1920. His mother died whilst he was in prison in 1923 and his father in 1926. After that, Badshah Khan decided to make the *hajj* with his second wife, who died in an accident in Jerusalem whilst on pilgrimage. After her death, Badshah Khan decided to adopt a life of celibacy expressed in the service of his people.

Call to rebellion

It was in 1929 at a meeting of local people in Utmanzai that Badshah Khan laid out the position of Indians as he saw it and issued the call to rebellion:

There are two ways to national progress, one is the path of religion, and the other is the road of patriotism... You have all heard of America and Europe. The people in those countries may not be very religious, but they have a sense of patriotism, love for their nation, and social consciousness. And look at the progress that has been made there. Then take a look at ourselves! We have hardly learned to stand on our own feet yet. Look at their standard of living and then take a look at ours. If we are on the road to ruin, it is because we have

neither the true spirit of religion, nor the true spirit of patriotism, nor love for our nation... A great revolution is coming and you haven't even heard about it!

During my recent visit to the subcontinent, I noticed that men and women were fully prepared to serve the nation. And here? Leave alone your women, even your men do not show any desire to serve. They hardly seem to understand the meaning of the word 'nation'! A revolution is like a flood! A nation can prosper by it, and it can perish by it as well. A nation that is wide awake, that cultivates brotherhood and national spirit, is sure to benefit through revolution. If the people are vigilant, they will be ready for the flood. When it comes, the whole nation will move along with it. But if the people are asleep! If they are indifferent to each other and indifferent to the country, the whole nation will be swept away by the flood when the revolution comes.

O Pathans! Take a look at the developed countries of the world. Do you think that their prosperity has just dropped from the sky? It has not, no more than our prosperity will drop from heaven! The secret of their prosperity is that they have men and women who sacrifice their luxuries, their pleasures, and their comfort for the sake of the prosperity of the nation. We do not have such men among us. We look only to our self-interest and let the country go to the devil! In other countries, people have learnt that no man is an island. But in our country, everyone lives in a dream world of his own – like the animals. Any animal can find a place to live, find a mate, rear its young. Can we call ourselves the crown of creation if we do just that and nothing more?

Please remember this. If the nation prospers, it will affect everyone. Every man, woman, and child will benefit. Do not think that by acquiring riches for yourselves your country will become prosperous. It will not. If you want your country and your people to prosper you must stop living for yourselves alone. You must start living for the community. That is the only way to prosperity and progress.

Easwaran, p108-110

'The Servants of God'

The next morning, Badshah Khan fell into discussion with a young Pashtun man, who wanted to think of a way for them to fight for their honour and rid the country of British rule. They agreed that they needed men of great courage and discipline to stand against the military might of the British regiments; men committed to nonviolent resistance without retreating or retaliating, no matter what kind of attack they faced. Such a force must be bound by the tightest oaths to stand on their honour even unto death. They must be a disciplined, drilled Pashtun army of nonviolent soldiers with uniform, officers and a strict code of conduct. Badshah Khan named them the Khudai Khidmatgar, the Servants of God. Membership was open to any Pashtun who was willing to take the oath:

I am a Khudai Khidmatgar; and as God needs no service, but serving his creation is serving him, I promise to serve humanity in the name of God.

I promise to refrain from violence and from taking revenge.

I promise to forgive those who oppress me or treat me with cruelty.

I promise to refrain from taking part in feuds and quarrels and from creating enmity.

I promise to treat every Pathan as my brother and friend.

I promise to refrain from antisocial customs and practices.

I promise to live a simple life, to practice virtue and to refrain from evil.

I promise to practice good manners and good behaviour and not to lead a life of idleness.

I promise to devote at least two hours a day to social work.

Easwaran, p. 111-112

Most of the early volunteers to join the army had been educated at one of Badshah Khan's schools. Membership was open to men and women. Over the course of a few months, they recruited five hundred members, who were drilled in military style with a uniform dyed in the local tanneries and so brick-red; hence their nick-name 'the Red Shirts'. They devoted themselves to social work in the community and prepared themselves for the battles that were to come. One discipline was marching through the hills, during which they sang their song, which sums up the spirit of the Servants of God:

We are the army of God,
By death or wealth unmoved.
We march, our leader and we,
Ready to die.

We serve and we love
Our people and our cause.
Freedom is our goal,
Our lives the price we pay.

Easwaran, p. 113

The message and example of the Servants of God touched something deep within the Pashtun people and their numbers swelled dramatically to around eighty thousand within a year and eventually to a reputed one hundred thousand.

The Indian Declaration of Independence

On the stroke of midnight on 31 December 1929 in the city of Lahore, the leadership of the Indian National Congress issued their unilateral declaration of Indian independence. It had strong echoes of the American Declaration of Independence of 1776:

We believe that it is the inalienable right of the Indian people, as of any other people, to have freedom and to enjoy the fruits of their toil and have the necessities of life so that they may have full opportunities of growth. We believe also that if any government deprives a people of these rights and oppresses them, the people have a further right to alter it or to abolish it. The British Government in India has not only deprived the Indian people of their freedom, but has based itself on the exploitation of the masses and has mined India economically,

politically, culturally and spiritually. We believe, therefore, that India must sever the British connection and attain complete independence. We hold it to be a crime against man and God to submit any longer to a rule that has caused this fourfold disaster to our country. We recognise, however, that the most effective way of gaining our freedom is not through violence. We will prepare ourselves by withdrawing, so far as we can, all voluntary association from the British government, and will prepare for civil disobedience, including the non-payment of taxes. We are convinced that if we can but withdraw our voluntary help, stop payment of the taxes, without doing violence, even under provocation, the end of this inhuman rule is assured.

Easwaran, p. 117-118

The street celebrations that night in Lahore were led by two hundred Pashtun men in a traditional circle dance. The message spread throughout India; and to the British. There followed a tense waiting period until Gandhi decided to act by beginning publicly the salt march, which ended on 6 April 1930 with him taking a pinch of sea salt on the beach at Dandi and thus breaking the British monopoly on salt production. This triggered similar acts of disobedience all over India.

In Badshah Khan's home village of Utmanzai on 23 April 1930, he called a mass meeting of people to acts of civil disobedience and they marched on Peshawar. On the way, Badshah Khan was arrested and imprisoned but they carried on. Such huge numbers of men and women on the move unnerved the much smaller number of British troops and their officers. Clashes took place in Peshawar, including an infamous massacre in Qissa Khawani Bazaar (the bazaar of the storytellers), in which some two to three hundred unarmed protesters were shot at point-blank range and many times that number suffered injuries. Throughout, the discipline of nonviolence was maintained. Two platoons of one of the élite regiments of the British Indian Army, the Garhwal Rifles, were present in Peshawar and ordered to fire on the unarmed protesters but they refused and were court marshalled and severely punished as a result. This sent a message of great encouragement throughout India and brought considerable anxiety to the British, who feared anything that could lead to another mutiny.

The response of the British was to attack, round-up and beat any Red Shirts that could be found in the area. This led to some deaths, many injured and much damage to property. Throughout, the Servants of God remained defiant but nonviolent. Badshah Khan, who was imprisoned at this time, later wrote that "The British feared a nonviolent Pathan more than a violent one. All the horrors the British perpetrated on the Pathans had only one purpose: to provoke them to violence" (Easwaran, p. 125). It was even asserted by the British that the wearing of red clothing was a sign that they were really Bolsheviks.

One Indian report of the time following on from the massacre summed things up as follows:

The two years that followed formed an astounding period of darkness for the province. Shootings, beatings and other acts of provocation were perpetrated

against these people, who had never suffered before without avenging themselves. “Gunning the Red Shirts” was a popular sport and pastime of the British forces in the province, observed an American tourist. At Kohat, in the bitter cold of the winter, our men were beaten up and later thrown into the icy stream running through the city. It was the same story at Bannu (where the British made an unsuccessful blockade to starve the villagers into submission) and Dera Ismail Khan. The residents of Swabi saw their fields destroyed, their wheat stocks ruined by oil poured upon them. But the Pathans, notwithstanding the fact that they had been brought up in an atmosphere of violence and bloodshed, stood unmoved by such provocations and died peacefully in large numbers for the attainment of their goal.

Easwaran, p. 128

The next couple of years fell into a familiar pattern of nonviolent protests brutally put down by the British forces, with those in leadership positions imprisoned. Badshah Khan himself spent three of these years in prison without charge or court hearing. An Englishman who was sympathetic to the cause of Indian independence managed to enter the Frontier Province and report on activities there:

Since December 25th [1931], the chief activity of the Red Shirts has been to send volunteers for picketing from the villages to Peshawar. The police take down the names and addresses of these picketers, which are always – it is their rule – faithfully given. Then a column of troops goes out by night to raid the village from which the picketers come.

The column normally arrives at about three in the morning. The village is surrounded. The leading men are ordered to produce Red Shirts. If they refuse, they are severely beaten. If any Red Shirts are found, they are arrested, beaten, and their uniforms removed and burnt.

The local Khudai Khidmatgar office is burnt to the ground. Police raid the homes and take whatever they can. No one knows if he is safe.

Easwaran, p. 137

Reports came in of mass firings on crowds, beatings, public floggings, wholesale confiscation of property, extortion of money by the soldiers and the sacking of whole villages to recover fines. Throughout this time, the nonviolent resistance of the Pashtuns held with only minor blemishes. Eventually the campaign was called off by Gandhi in April 1934. This triggered a slow release of political prisoners, including eventually Badshah Khan, who had been imprisoned with his brother far away in Bihar in an effort to break their influence over their followers. Both were released in August of that year but sent into exile away from the Frontier Province.

They went to live with Gandhi in his ashram, where they joined in the simple lifestyle and deepened their understanding of Gandhi’s nonviolent message. Gandhi himself commented:

The more that I knew of the Khan brothers, the more attracted I felt towards them. I was struck by their transparent sincerity, frankness and utmost simplicity. I observed too that they had come to believe in truth and nonviolence

not as a policy but as a creed. The younger brother [Badshah Khan], I found, was consumed with deep religious fervour. His was not a narrow creed. I found him to be a universalist. His politics, if he had any, were derived from his religion.

Easwaran, p. 143

Gandhi asked his secretary, Mahadev Desai, to prepare a biography on the brothers, which was entitled *Two Servants of God*. In this he commented on Badshah Khan:

The great thing in him is, to my mind, his spirituality – or better still, the true spirit of Islam – submission to God. He has measured Gandhiji's life all through with his yardstick and his clinging to Gandhiji can be explained on no other ground. It is not Gandhiji's name and fame that has attracted him to Gandhiji, nor his political work, nor his spirit of rebellion and revolution. It is his pure and ascetic life and his insistence on self-purification that have had the greatest appeal for him, and his whole life since 1919 onwards has been one sustained effort for self-purification.

Easwaran, p. 143

When prison and other duties permitted, Badshah Khan and Gandhi made a tour of the Frontier Province together in 1938, finally parting at Taxila. As he journeyed across India on his way home, Gandhi recorded his thoughts on his fellow campaigner:

Whatever the Khudai Khidmetgars may ultimately turn out to be, there can be no doubt about what their leader is. He is unquestionably a man of God. He believes in His living presence and knows that his movement will only prosper if God wills it. Having put his whole soul into this cause, he remains indifferent to what happens.

When we parted at Taxila, our eyes were wet. The Frontier Province must remain a place of frequent pilgrimage for me. For though the rest of India may fail to show true nonviolence, there seems to be good ground for hoping that the Frontier Province will pass through the fiery ordeal.

The reason is simple. Badshah Khan commands willing obedience from his adherents. He has but to say the word, and it is carried out. [His] nonviolence is no lip service. His whole heart is in it. Let the doubters live with him as I have all these precious five weeks and their doubt will be dissolved like mist before the morning sun.

Easwaran, p. 162

The dawning of Partition

Talk of the future of India was rife in the two years following the end of the 1939-45 war. Badshah Khan was opposed to any notion of partitioning the Subcontinent along religious or any other lines. He believed that Hindus and Muslims could live peacefully together once the British had left. He worked alongside Gandhi in touring the country to promote intercommunal harmony. Ten thousand of the Red Shirt army gathered in Peshawar to protect the Hindu and Sikh minorities there; similarly, in other places throughout the Frontier Province.

By mid-May 1947, Badshah Khan was back in the Frontier Province trying to hold on to the ideal of peace in the name of Islam. In a speech in Shabqadar he said:

We are passing through critical times... Some people mislead you in the name of Islam. I feel it is my duty to warn you against future dangers so that I may justify myself before man and God on the Day of Judgement...

What gains will Islam and Muslims reap from these riots and slaughter of children, women and the aged? And how are Pakhtuns going to be benefitted? These happenings are against the tenets of the Holy Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet. To lay hands on an innocent poor man goes also against Pakhtun tradition...

I warn the [Muslim] League brethren that the fire they kindle will spread in wild blaze and consume everything in its way.

Gandhi, p. 181

Badshah Khan had long campaigned for a united India but with the reality of Partition looming, this was no longer an option. He did not want to take part in a referendum that would divide the Subcontinent into a Hindu-dominated India and a Muslim-dominated Pakistan. He knew that in a future independent Pakistan, the Pashtuns would be overwhelmed by the Punjabis and others. He put forward the idea of a semi-autonomous Pashtunistan within the federation of Pakistan but this was not accepted.

Badshah Khan felt that he had been let down and deserted by his former colleagues in the Indian Congress Party. His confidant in these matters was Mahatma Gandhi, who petitioned the future leaders of India and the British Viceroy to take account of the situation of the Pashtuns. The tensions caused them both great distress and sleepless nights. It helped Gandhi to see deeper into the character of his fellow campaigner:

I am seeing more and more of his deeply spiritual nature daily. He has patience, faith and nonviolence conjoined in true humility. Countless Pathans have enshrined him in their hearts as their uncrowned king. For such a person there can be no defeat. I am sure that he will not shrink from any sacrifice or suffering, but will die serving the Pathans with his last breath. He lives only for that. He is a man of penance, also of illumination, with love for all and hatred towards none.

Gandhi, p. 191

In the end, in the referendum to decide the future of the Frontier Province, Badshah Khan urged his followers to abstain from taking part. The final results showed a turnout of about 50% of the electorate. Those in favour of the Frontier Province joining Pakistan numbered 289,244 and those in favour of joining India 2,874. Once Pakistan was created, with the inclusion of the Frontier Province, the Muslim League took power.

Badshah Khan's proposal of 'Pashtunistan' as a semi-autonomous province did not win him friends amongst the Muslim League and resulted in him being gaoled by the Pakistani government. Having spent about fifteen years in prison under the British, he was to spend another fifteen in prison on the orders of the Pakistani government plus

seven years in exile, mainly in Afghanistan, before he died in 1988 at the age of ninety-eight. Although he died in Pakistan, he asked to be buried in the Pashtun homelands on the other side of the border with Afghanistan in the city of Jalalabad, where he had lived in exile. A cease-fire was called in the fighting in the border region on that day to allow the estimated twenty thousand mourners accompanying his body to its final resting place to pass in safety.

And so, to today...

The last century-and-a-half has seen a massive increase in weapons of war with the capacity to wreak havoc in a seemingly never-ending spiral of violence. The natural instinct of the warrior lived in the culture of Badshah Khan and the hundred thousand Pashtuns that followed him, but they had learnt through their own code of revenge and vendettas that violence only breeds more violence; this was their dominant example to the world, to seek the weapon of nonviolence and thus to touch the fountain of goodness in the hearts of those against whom they stood their ground. Only the disciplined man or woman, the one who has submitted all to the will of God, can have the courage to absorb the aggression of those ranged against the nonviolent army and refuse to strike back. Such goodness evokes a response from the men of violence, who eventually put away their arms and cease their oppression.

History throws up periodically men and women of outstanding charism, who can lead others to make sacrifices and endure suffering in the cause of right. We can think of contemporaries such as Mahatma Gandhi or Nelson Mandela and add thereto the name of our own subject, Badshah Khan. Such a leader naturally shares in the hardship and takes the risks associated with opposing tyranny; truly a 'general' who leads from the front. Such leadership comes with an exacting price: Badshah Khan sacrificed the warmth of his family, spent around thirty years in prison, often with solitary confinement and hard labour, was abused, beaten and accused unjustly. This seems to have strengthened his godly character and allowed those who met him to have an encounter with the mercy, goodness, constancy and forbearance of God. Prison destroys many people but, in a rare exception, it can build an exceptional character.

Things did not turn out the way that Badshah Khan had hoped. India was partitioned with much bloodshed and ongoing bitterness. His beloved Pashtun people were denied the freedom of self-determination and autonomy. He was carried ultimately to his grave in exile but with dignity and the affection and respect of his people. Has the final chapter been written in his history or will future generations take up his example of patient endurance? Will Muslims finally embrace the weapon of the Prophet and set an example of godly living for all to follow?

In the second part of his prophetic ministry, Muhammad had the awesome responsibility in Madina of putting the men of his community into the field of battle – all too often that is the part of his example that impresses itself on Muslim people. This leads to the conclusion that, in the last resort, legitimate force may be necessary to avert a greater evil – but this is only part of the story. Badshah Khan reminds us of the first part of

Muhammad's life and example, when the only weapon that was available was that of patient endurance and trust in God. The example of the Treaty of Hudaibiyya becomes an important model (see on this website: UI Course – The Big Picture – Part Seven: Who was Muhammad? – page five: Makka becomes a Muslim city). Here Muhammad with his unarmed followers was confronted with a powerful enemy. He agreed to give way at every point in the negotiation, the result of which was that blood was not shed, a way of life that exposed 'the enemy' to the goodness of lives shaped by Islam was established and the result was the victory of good by the bloodless overthrow of the Makkan state. A peaceful co-existence ensued.

Badshah Khan opposed the partition of India along religious grounds. He believed in the fundamental equality of all women and men. God has no favourites but calls all to a godly way of life. The experience of being educated in a Christian mission school stayed with him throughout his life and he was pleased to send his family members to seek an education in Britain. He was proud of the Buddhist heritage of his homeland, expressed in the Bamiyan Buddhas. He sent his nonviolent soldiers to defend the Hindus and Sikhs of Peshawar during the inter-communal violence that ensued with Partition. Do we have here an example for multicultural, multifaith living in Britain today?