

The 1930 Civil Disobedience Movement in Peshawar Valley from the Pashtoon Perspective

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Abstract

Like other parts of India, the civil disobedience movement was also launched in North–West Frontier Province (Khyber–Pakhtoonkhwa), although initially with little success. The local Congress sought help from the Khudai Khidmatgars, the most popular socio-political organization of the province; 23 April 1930 saw the worst kind of massacre in Peshawar, followed by other parts of the Province. During the civil disobedience, the colonial administration tried all kinds of draconian methods to suppress the movement but in vain. The purpose of the present research is to investigate and analyze the civil disobedience and its impact in the Peshawar Valley, hitherto neglected by the scholars and thereby help provide a new and deeper understanding of the whole scenario. In a much broader context and in a wider perspective, however, the present study will encompass the following main issues: (a) Indian Muslims and the civil disobedience movement launched by Congress under Mahatma Gandhi; (b) the Frontier Congress and its failure in mobilization of people to support civil disobedience; (c) the altruistic leadership of Abdul Ghaffar Khan and the Khudai Khidmatgars' tangible support within the masses; (d) the atrocities of the colonial administration and the predicament of the local population; (e) adherence to non-violence, a unique phenomenon for the Pashtoons; (f) the interplay of the religion and politics; (g) the complexity of the Khudai Khidmatgar–Congress relations; and, (h) the role of charismatic leadership. The present research will be focusing on these and other similar crucial issues previously undervalued.

Keywords

Freedom movement, 1930 civil disobedience, N–WFP, Peshawar Valley, Pashtoons, non-violence, Kissa Khani Bazaar massacre

In 1930, the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi launched its civil disobedience movement against the British Indian government

demanding 'Complete Independence'. Responding to the call of Gandhi, like other parts of India, the North-West Frontier Province's (N-WFP, renamed as Khyber-Pashtoonkhwa) Congressmen also embarked on the civil disobedience but in view of their small number the local authorities ignored it. To give a boost to their movement, the local Congress leaders requested Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the prominent social worker of the Province, famous for his altruism, to support them in the next round of the intended civil disobedience in Peshawar to which he agreed. The colonial administration had no further tolerance for such activities. They decided not to allow the scheduled activities of the local political workers which might cause disturbance to the peace and tranquillity of the province. On the selected day, that is, 23 April 1930, brutal force was used to disperse the demonstrators. The tragic firing on the peaceful mob in the Qissa Khani Bazaar, Peshawar, resulted in the killing of more than two hundred people in one single day and can be ranked at par with the massacre at the Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar, in April 1919. It was followed by a reign of terror in the whole Frontier Province. The Khudai Khidmatgars and their supporters were subjected to the worst kind of humiliation. After Peshawar, similar atrocities were committed at Takkar, Utmanzai and Bannu. Despite the worst kind of repression by the government, the Pashtoons remained non-violent. Under the circumstances they were compelled to join INC, a friendship which continued till the partition of India in August 1947.

While lot of research has been done on the civil disobedience movement in other parts of India, the Frontier Province and in particular the Peshawar Valley have been neglected hitherto for unknown reasons. Very little research has been conducted on this particular region. The absence of written record on this area and subject has meant that the social scientists, historians, analysts and other scholars belonging to various disciplines who have special interest in South Asia, have been deprived of crucial information on a very important phase of twentieth-century history. The only available information is the official record, written from the colonial perspective which is not entirely reliable. According to the official estimate, about thirty nine people lost their lives on 23 April, a highly contestable figure provided by the Frontier administration and unfortunately quoted by many historians writing on the civil disobedience movement, without further checking its authenticity. The present research will focus on this neglected aspect of the civil disobedience movement, relying upon the primary sources including the personal interviews, conducted by the author in various parts of Pashtoonkhwa and unpublished memoirs and autobiographies. While details will be provided of the civil disobedience movement in the Frontier province in general, special attention will be given to the Peshawar Valley. Why 1930 is an important year in Pashtoon history and how it is reflected in the local poetry will be evaluated. The present research will also analyze the Pashtoon perspective of the whole civil disobedience movement. Despite admonition from various circles, what motivated them to join the movement? What kind of mobilization techniques were adopted by the leaders to attract the common man to join in and with what results? What

was their thinking? How were they treated by the Frontier authorities? What kind of methods of torture were used against them, so that rather than abandoning the struggle, they showed pertinacity and instead flocked into the Khudai Khidmatgar movement? These and similar questions will come under discussion in the present research article. How the Pashtoons interpreted the whole scenario, why did they not retaliate, were complacent in difficult situations and despite suffering the worst kind of humiliation were able to avenge repeated insults are some of the questions I am concerned with. The present article will also investigate the Pashtoons' adoption of non-violence as a creed and their commitment to it which earned them a good reputation at an all-India level. Whether Abdul Ghaffar Khan emulated the non-violence preached by Gandhi in other parts of India or developed his own particular variety will also come under discussion. Why the Pashtoons were inclined to join the Congress rather than the Muslim League, their co-religionists in the freedom struggle, will be thoroughly investigated. What was the role of the pro-British landed aristocracy, title holders and other loyalists during the whole imbroglio and what were its repercussions? What was the impact of the civil disobedience movement on the region and how it influenced the future course of South Asian politics will also be analyzed.

In its historic forty-fourth session, held in Lahore in December 1929, the INC demanded complete independence—'Swaraj', instead of 'Dominion Status' for India. Jawaharlal Nehru, the Congress President, made it absolutely clear that they wanted 'fullest freedom of India' and 'will not acknowledge the right of the British Parliament to dictate to us in any way'.¹ It empowered Gandhi to plan and decide on the nature and timings of the civil disobedience against the Empire to achieve the desired goals.² Gandhi was fully convinced of the peaceful and non-violent mass movement.³ In the Lahore Congress he was absolutely convinced of the attainment of independence by non-violent means. He expressed his views to the participants in the most daring manner and stated that 'Let me however tell you my conviction that if the nation carried out the non-violent programme loyally, there need not be any doubt about the attainment of our goal....'⁴ He elaborated further and said that 'I admit and believe that cool courage is mightier than the sword. Cool courage can very well implement civil disobedience. If one thinks that complete independence cannot be achieved through peaceful means, it implies that he has no faith in cool courage. The moment we acquire cool courage,

¹ Jawaharlal Nehru's Presidential Address, 29 December 1929, Lahore, *Congress Presidential Addresses From the Silver to the Golden Jubilee* (Madras: G. A. Natesan & Co., 1934), 893.

² Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi Prisoner of Hope* (New Havens: Yale University Press, 1989), 234.

³ '...In a place like India', remarked Gandhi, 'where the mightiest organisation is pledged to [non-] violence, if you really believe in your own creed, that is to say, if you believe in yourselves, if you believe in your nation, then it is civil disobedience that is wanted;'. Speech at the 44th Session of Congress, Lahore, 31 December 1929, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi XLII (October 1929– February 1930)*, (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Trust, 1970), 355.

⁴ Lahore, 29 December 1929, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, XLII*, 332.

complete independence will be ours.’⁵ Gandhi started preparing people for the intended civil disobedience campaign.

While formally inviting his countrymen to join them in the great struggle for the liberation of the country from the foreign yoke, the Congress President, Jawaharlal Nehru, made it clear from the beginning that they should be prepared for ‘the rewards that are in store for you are suffering and prison and it might be death. But you shall also have the satisfaction that you have done your little bit for India...’⁶

Direct confrontation between the Congress and Government seemed inevitable. Gandhi decided that he would himself perform the first act of civil disobedience and would lead selected satyagrahis from Ahmedabad to Dandi in Bombay to breach the Salt Law.⁷ On 2 March 1930, Gandhi informed Lord Irwin, the Viceroy, of his views by terming the British rule in India as a curse. Because, according to Gandhi, ‘It has impoverished the dumb millions by a system of progressive exploitation and by a ruinously expensive military and civil administration which the country can never afford’.⁸ He elaborated on the miseries of the tenants and considered it beneficial for a few big zamindars and not the tenants. He demanded a full revision of the whole revenue system, which, according to Gandhi, was designed to crush the poor. He showed indignation over the salt tax which he regarded as an extra burden upon the poor. He informed the Viceroy that on

11 March he would be proceeding along with the inmates of the Ashram to break the Salt Law. He regarded the salt tax to be the ‘most iniquitous of all from the poor man’s standpoint’.⁹

On 12 March 1930, Gandhi along with seventy eight satyagrahis set out from Sabarmati Ashram, Ahmedabad, towards Dandi, a Bombay coastline about 240 miles away, which they covered in about four weeks. The group of seventy nine satyagrahis, including Gandhi, comprised people from various social backgrounds including scholars, journalists, untouchables, Muslims and weavers and belonged to different age groups. The oldest one was a 61-year-old leader and the youngest one was a boy of sixteen. The historic march to Dandi was a unique experiment, which attracted many people. Throughout the way Gandhi preached non-violence and informed the curious villagers of the meaning of Swaraj.¹⁰ On 6 April they reached Dandi and immediately broke the Salt Law ‘by picking up a lump of salt mixed with mud’.¹¹ On this occasion in an interview to the Free Press of India, Gandhi announced that

⁵ *Ibid.*, 351.

⁶ Nehru’s Presidential Address, *Congress Presidential Addresses*, 902.

⁷ B.R. Nanda, *Mahatma Gandhi: A Biography* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1958), 291.

⁸ Gandhi to Lord Irwin, 2 March 1930, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, XLIII, 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁰ Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi—Prisoner of Hope*, 237. More details can be seen in Thomas Weber, *On the Salt March: The Historiography of Mahatma Gandhi’s March to Dandi* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2009).

¹¹ *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, XLIII, 199.

Now that a technical or ceremonial breach of the salt law has been committed, it is now open to anyone who would take the risk of prosecution under the salt law to manufacture salt wherever he wishes and wherever it is convenient. My advice is that a worker should everywhere manufacture salt and where he knows how to prepare clean salt should make use of it and instruct villagers to do likewise, telling the villagers at the same time that he runs the risk of being prosecuted...¹²

Speaking on their future course of action, he remarked that

Those who are now engaged in this sacred work should devote themselves to vigorous propaganda for boycott of foreign cloth and use of khaddar. They should also endeavour to manufacture as much khaddar as possible. As to this and prohibition of liquor I am preparing a message for the women of India who, I am becoming more and more convinced, can make a larger contribution than the men towards the attainment of independence.¹³

He further advised the Congress workers the following:

Let every village fetch or manufacture contraband salt. Sisters should picket liquor shops, opium dens and foreign cloth dealers' shops. Young and old in every home should ply the *takli* and spin, and get woven, heaps of yarn every day. Foreign cloth should be burnt. Hindus should eschew untouchability. Hindus, Mussalmans, Sikhs, Parsis, and Christians should all achieve heart unity. Let the majority rest content with what remains after the minorities have been satisfied. Let students leave Government schools and colleges, and Government servants resign their service and devote themselves to service of the people, and we shall find that Purna Swaraj will come knocking at our door.¹⁴

The British Indian Government tried to belittle the impact of the civil disobedience movement. The District Administration was given the responsibility of touring the villages through which the Salt March Satyagrahis had passed 'to repair the damage and to improve the morale of the loyalists'.¹⁵ In the last week of March, reported Nanda, the biographer of Gandhi, the Central Government issued the instructions to the provincial governments to show maximum restraint and to avoid wholesale arrests. They were further advised not to enter into direct confrontation with the protesting Congress workers and to arrest the leaders only. This will surely discourage the Congress workers and will also disorganize the movement. In some cases if the Government was compelled under the circumstances to use force, they should use the minimum possible force because the use of brutal force will create sympathy among the general public for the Congress organization and the demonstrators.¹⁶ But the attitude of the Government did

¹² Interview to the Free Press of India, 6 April 1930, *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Message to the Nation, 9 April 1930, *ibid.*, 215.

¹⁵ Nanda, *Mahatma Gandhi: A Biography*, 296.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

not remain the same. With the growth of the movement, it changed its policy. In March and April, the prominent leaders of Congress including Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, C. Rajagopalachari, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, J.M. Sen Gupta, B.G. Kher, K.M. Munshi, Devadas Gandhi, Mahadev Desai and Vithalbhai Patel were arrested and put into various prisons. Finally, Gandhi was also arrested on the night of 4/5 May under the Bombay Regulations XXV of 1827 and put into Yeravda prison in Poona.¹⁷

Unlike the previous occasions the Muslims' response to the call of civil disobedience movement was lukewarm. Gandhi did not attract the same number of Muslims to follow him which he did previously. He failed to mobilize a big number of Muslims to join him against the British government. The participation of the Muslims was insignificant. Except in the N-WFP, an overwhelming Muslim majority province, which would be discussed later on separately, the Indian Muslims as a whole seemed to be unmoved by the Gandhian call. Gandhi did not succeed in mobilizing the Muslims in Bengal and the Punjab, the two Muslim majority provinces, to join him against the British Indian government. According to Brown, by middle of November (1930) out of a total of 29,000 prisoners only 1,000 were Muslims.¹⁸ But it is not clear whether this number also includes the Muslims belonging to the N-WFP or whether this is the overall number of the Muslims who were imprisoned by the colonial administration for taking part in the civil disobedience movement.

Since the adoption of the Nehru Report (August 1928), many prominent Muslims developed distrust of the Congress policies.¹⁹ The situation further aggravated when the Congress leadership announced that the issue of communal settlement would be suspended until the attainment of Purna Swaraj. Swaraj, according to the prominent Congress leaders was to be achieved by the civil disobedience movement, 'a movement in which the Muslims were not likely to figure prominently, and even if it were achieved by that method, it was unlikely that it would result in a communal settlement to their advantage'.²⁰ This resulted eventually in the resignations of prominent Muslims from various positions in the Congress. Those who tendered resignations from their positions included M.A. Ansari, Choudhri Khaliqzaman and Tassaduq Ahmad Khan Sherwani. Ansari warned Gandhi a couple of months before the launching of the intended civil disobedience movement that he was taking a 'great responsibility' on himself by declaring war against the government. He compared the situation with the

¹⁷ Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, 238; Nanda, *Mahatma Gandhi: A Biography*, 297; Weber, *On the Salt March*, 476–84.

¹⁸ Brown, *Gandhi Prisoner of Hope*, 243.

¹⁹ For details, see David Page, *Prelude to Partition: The Indian Muslims and the Imperial System of Control 1920–1932* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982), 168–94.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 237.

Hindu–Muslim unity in 1920 and termed it the ‘Lowest watermark’ in the Hindu- Muslim relations.²¹ He informed the Mahatma that

...it is my conviction that the country is not at least ready for starting a campaign of civil disobedience in any shape or form, and it would do an incalculable damage should you decide to embark on such a campaign now or in the near future.²²

Gandhi responded immediately and stated that:

I agree that the Hindu–Muslim problem is the problem of problems. But I feel that it has to be approached in a different manner from the one we have hitherto adopted—not at present by adjustments of the political powers but by one or the other acting on the square under all circumstances. Give and take is possible only when there is some trust between the respective communities and their representatives. If the Congress can command such trust the matter can proceed further, not before. The Congress can do so only by becoming fearless and strictly just. But meanwhile the third party—the evil British power—has got to be sterilised. There will be no charter of independence before the Hindus and the Muslims have met but there can be virtual independence before the charter is received. Hence must civil disobedience be forged from day to day by those who believe that there is no escape from non-violence and that violence will never bring freedom to India.²³

Ch. Khaliqzaman, another prominent Muslim from UP, showed indignation over Gandhi’s reply and termed it ‘disappointing’. According to him,

Uptil now we thought Hindu–Muslim unity was the pillar over which the superstructure of the constitution of free India was to be laid, but from Mahatmaji’s letter one can infer that while recognising the utility of such a unity he does not consider it *sine qua non* for a fight for independence. If we accept the formula, laid down therein we indirectly proclaim to the Muslim community to find its champions in people who believe that communalism in India is a fact. No one can deny that in time to come nationalism would grow and envelop every one of its sons—Hindus and Muslims, but that would certainly require ages.²⁴

On the forthcoming civil disobedience movement, he commented that

As for Mahatmaji’s civil disobedience programme, to tell you the truth, I have not been able to understand it, much less appreciate it. I am very glad you have made your position clear in the matter. No one can now say that you forsake them when the time

²¹ M.A. Ansari to M.K. Gandhi, 13 February 1930, in Mushirul Hasan, ed., *Muslims and the Congress: Select Correspondence of Dr. M. A. Ansari 1912–1935* (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1979), 99.

²² *Ibid.*, 100.

²³ M.K. Gandhi to M. A. Ansari, 16 February 1930, *Ibid.*, 101.

²⁴ Choudhry Khaliqzaman to M. A. Ansari, 1 March 1930, *Ibid.*

came...Let us hope we are false prophets, but to all intents and purposes the course adopted is doomed to failure.²⁵

After going through the views, expressed by Ansari and Khaliquzzaman, one can easily deduce why the Muslims in general and their prominent leaders in particular stayed away and showed a lukewarm attitude to the civil disobedience movement launched by Gandhi. During the course of the movement, Maulana Shaukat Ali, elder of the famous Ali Brothers, termed it a movement not for Swaraj but for Hindu Raj and against the Mussalmans²⁶ and advised them to stay away from it. He complained why he was not consulted by Gandhi before embarking on the civil disobedience movement. Gandhi replied that there was no sense in consultation with him because he knew that they had different views on such issues. He also pointed out to Shaukat Ali that

Can you not see that, although I may act independently of you, it might not amount to desertion? My conscience is clear. I have deserted neither you nor the Mussalmans. Where is the desertion in fighting against the salt tax and other inequities and fighting for independence?²⁷

Gandhi reiterated it time and again that the repeal of salt tax will benefit every Indian irrespective of their belonging to any caste, community or religion. Gandhi made an emotional appeal to the Muslims to support the Congress in eradication of salt tax, boycott of foreign cloth and picketing the liquor shops. He made it abundantly clear that ‘this movement of self-purification is not a monopoly of any community, and wish that all people should heartily join it’.²⁸

Following the historic decision taken at the Lahore Congress, 26 January 1930 was observed as the ‘Independence Day’ throughout India. In conformity

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 111–12.

²⁶ ‘What It is Not’, M.K. Gandhi, *Young India*, 12 March 1930; *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, XLIII, 55.

²⁷ Gandhi to Shaukat Ali, 17 April 1930, *Gandhi Collected Works*, XLIII, 281.

²⁸ Gandhi’s Speech at Rander, 1 May 1930, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, XLIII, 373. Gandhi made the following compassionate appeal to the Muslims:

I appeal to Muslim friends to realize that at present we have embarked upon a movement of self-purification. The time has not yet come to divide the gains among ourselves. When that time comes, we shall decide the share of each. If it is our misfortune to fight then, we shall fight it out. But personally I believe that when that day comes, there will be no need for us to fight. There will be no cause then for mutual distrust or fear. At present our fight is directed mainly against the salt tax. Such a tax is forbidden in Islam. Salt is a necessity for all. The majority of Hindus and Muslims are poor people and the burden of the tax falls on them. In Rander, however, we have millionaires and multi-millionaires. They can see the facts if only they go with me into villages.

Our second task is to banish foreign cloth. Everyone can see from the accounts of the Spinners’ Association that because of this movement we pay thousands of rupees to Muslim women and weavers. The large numbers of women in Vijaypur who earn a living through this work and bless me are all Muslims. These poor women have often wept when my workers could not supply them enough slivers.

with other parts of India, despite having limited number of registered Congress workers, the Frontier Provincial Congress Committee also decided to observe it in Peshawar. However, little interest was shown by the local people and because of the small number of the Congress workers, the provincial authorities took no action against them.²⁹ The next step was non-payment of taxes. The local chapters were authorized by the Central organization to do in an appropriate and organized manner 'where ever and whenever it considers desirable'.³⁰

The prominent leaders of the provincial Congress and the recently formed Naujawan Bharat Sabha, Agha Syed Lal Badshah, Maulana Abdur Rahim Popalzai, Khan Mir Hilali, Dr. C.C. Ghosh, Ghulam Rabbani Sethi, Rahim Bakhsh Ghaznavi, Sanobar Hussain, Abdur Rahman Riya, Roshan Lal and Lala Paira Khan, met in Peshawar to devise the strategy for the next round of civil disobedience movement. It was resolved to start the boycott of the foreign cloth and picketing of liquor shops simultaneously.³¹ It was also discussed how to attract more people to their intended civil disobedience. They decided to invite Abdul Ghaffar Khan and the Khudai Khidmatgars to support their movement. Meanwhile, on 5 April, a delegation of the local traders dealing with the liquor business met the Congress leaders and requested them to grant them fifteen days to dispose of the existing stock. They promised that in future they would not trade in liquor. On 7 April, the local Congress Committee informed the liquor contractors that their request has been accepted and the picketing has been postponed till 23 April.³²

Before proceeding further it is pertinent to provide some details of the local Congress leadership. Unlike other parts of the country, in the Frontier Province the centre of power politics remained the rural areas. The traditional kinship ties

The third task is eradication of the drink evil. In which religion is drinking not forbidden? In the course of my life I have mixed a great deal with Muslims and attended many dinners given by Muslim hosts. Muslims cannot but join the movement for banishing liquor and other intoxicants from the country. Are those mill workers not Muslims who picket liquor booths in Ahmedabad and plead with proprietors and drink-addicts, patiently submitting to assaults and abuses?

This is a God's work. He alone can do it who is ready to sacrifice his life for it. Only he who is ready to dive into the sea can bring up pearls from it. I only beg my Muslim clients and other Muslims to realize that this movement for self-purification is not a monopoly of any community, and wish that all people should heartily join it. We will see afterwards how to share the gains when the Government asks us what we want. My prophecy about that day, however, is that we shall then no longer think it necessary to fight, that one brother will invite another to take anything he wants. We shall then have nobility among us and the bargaining spirit will have disappeared. We have to do this work in God's name, in the name of the poor. Let all the communities help in it and let the town of Rander, too, give all the help it can and bring glory to its fair name. (*Ibid.*, 373–74)

²⁹ 'Summary of Political Situation in the N-WFP', *CID Reports*, Special Branch Peshawar, 1 February 1930, 153.

³⁰ *Congress Presidential Addresses*, 900.

³¹ Abdul Khaliq Khaleeq, *Da Azadi Jang sa Auradeli sa Leedali* (Pashto) (Peshawar: Idara Ishaat i Sarhad, 1972), 67.

³² *Report (With Evidence) of the Peshawar Enquiry Committee* (Allahabad: 1930), 6–7.

served as the best tool for the popularity of a certain individual in a particular locality. Like many other tribal societies of the world, the traditional Pashtoon society focused on the leadership qualities of the individuals keeping in view their support base and their belonging to well-established tribes. The strength of the leader mostly depended upon the number of his supporters. Although no one can deny the role of charisma of an individual, the tribal links served as the most important factor in the whole process. Hence the failure of the Peshawar-based urban Congress politicians to attract large crowds to their political gatherings. Despite their excellent leadership qualities, even the best of the urban leaders could not convince the majority rural population to support them in the intended Congress civil disobedience movement and hence they depended upon Abdul Ghaffar Khan to provide them the required strength and support for the forthcoming civil disobedience to be launched in Peshawar.

The annual meeting of the Azad School, Utmanzai was held on 19–20 April 1930, attended by members of Khudai Khidmatgar and its affiliated organizations and by a large number of people. Before providing further details of the appeal of the local Congress workers and its acceptance by the Khudai Khidmatgars, it is appropriate to give a brief account of the Khudai Khidmatgars and their relation with the local Congress. The Khudai Khidmatgars emerged as a powerful political force in the 1920s. Abdul Ghaffar Khan (1890–1988), a social worker from one of the influential Khan families of Utmanzai (Charsadda), had started taking keen interest in the reform movement of Haji Fazli Wahid, popularly known as the Haji Sahib of Turangzai. They concentrated on religious and social reforms. They were deadly against illiteracy and aimed at providing education, both modern and religious to the Pashtoons. For this purpose many *Azad Madrassas* were established in various parts of the Peshawar Valley. However, the British could not tolerate these steps and soon Haji Sahib was forced to leave the settled areas and with his departure to the tribal areas, all such *Madaris* ceased to exist. Abdul Ghaffar Khan actively participated in both Khilafat and Hijrat movements.³³ After the bitter experience of the Hijrat movement, he concentrated on Pashtoon politics. He met like-minded people and discussed with them the miserable condition of the Pashtoon society. Abdul Ghaffar Khan tried his best to convince them that they should work together from a single platform for the reformation of the Pashtoon society, to which they agreed. Their combined efforts resulted in the formation of *Anjuman-i-Islah-al-Afaghana* (Society for the Reformation of the Afghans). On 1 April 1921, the formal formation of the *Anjuman* was announced and Abdul Ghaffar Khan became its president. The main objectives of the *Anjuman* included the eradication of social evils, promotion of education and unity amongst

³³ For details see Sayed Wiqar Ali Shah, 'N-WFP and the Khilafat and Hijrat Movements', *Central Asia*, no. 20 (1987), 121–41; M. Naeem Qureshi, *Pan-Islam in British India: The Politics of the Khilafat Movement 1918–1924* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2009).

the Pashtoons and encouragement of Pashto language and literature.³⁴ Side by side with the *Anjuman*, they decided to focus upon the educational activities and revived the old network of the Azad Madaris. In April 1921, the first branch of Azad School was opened in Utmanzai, followed by other branches in different parts of the Province.³⁵

Since the details of the Azad Schools and its impact upon the Pashtoons is out of the scope of the present research, I will confine myself to the formation of the Khudai Khidmatgar organization formed by Abdul Ghaffar Khan, supported by the same group of Pashtoon intelligentsia who were vocal in the reformation of the Pashtoon society since 1921. Actually they started with the setting up of *Zalmo Jirga* (Youth League) on the pattern of other similar organizations like the Young Turks, Young Afghans, etc but later on to accommodate the older people in November 1929 they formed the Khudai Khidmatgar (Servants of God) movement. Besides promotion of Pashto, their main objectives included the attainment of independence for Hindustan from colonial rule, through peaceful means, promotion of harmony between Hindus and Muslims and the political awakening of the Pashtoon youth.³⁶ Within a short span of time it became very popular particularly in the rural areas, which were neglected by other organizations in the past. Its insistence upon the Pashtoon identity and adoption of non-violence attracted many people to its fold. There were some other factors, given below, which contributed to its popularity.

Various sections of the Pashtoon society interpreted the Khudai Khidmatgar programme in their own way. To the Pashtoon intelligentsia, it was a movement for the revival of Pashtoon culture with its distinct identity. To the smaller Khans, it was a movement that demanded political reforms for the province that would enfranchise them and give them a greater role in governance. Its anti-colonial stand suited the majority of the anti-establishment ulema, who always regarded British rule in the subcontinent as a 'curse'. For the peasants and other poor classes it was against their economic oppressors, British imperialism and its agents—the pro-British Nawabs, Khan Bahadurs and the big Khans.³⁷

As per the decision of the Peshawar Congress Committee, Agha Lal Badshah, Ali Gul Khan, Karim Bakhsh Sethi, Agha Jan Mohammad and Lala Usman also went to Utmanzai to participate in it.³⁸ They were invited by the organizers of the meeting to speak to the audience. They made a fervent appeal to the participants of the meeting and urged them to support them against the British imperialism and join in the intended civil disobedience movement to be commenced on 23 April.

³⁴ Sayed Wiqar Ali Shah, *Ethnicity Islam and Nationalism: Muslim Politics in the North-West Frontier Province 1937–1947* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 22–23.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 27–28.

³⁸ Ahmad, *Khudai Khidmatgar Tehreek I* (Pashto) (Peshawar: University Book Agency, 1991), 181.

The Khudai Khidmatgars and other volunteers present on the occasion pledged their participation to bolster the civil disobedience against the Raj.³⁹

April 23, 1930: Massacre at Kissa Khani Bazaar, Peshawar

23 April 1930 is a milestone in the freedom struggle of the Pashtoonkhwa. This day created myths, symbols, heroes and sagas. ‘*San Tees Shaheedan*’ (Martyrs of Nineteen Thirty) enjoys a very respectable and prominent place in the province’s history. The incident has been highlighted by many prominent poets both in Pashto, Urdu and other languages. The focus of these poets remained on the atrocities committed by the British Government and the details of how the people of the Pashtoonkhwa faced it with resilience. Surprisingly, no communal colour was given to it and always was treated as a joint struggle of all communities living in the province against the imperialists to procure their freedom from the alien rulers. Mostly, in the narration of the ‘*San Tees*’ events, these poets focussed on the suppression and brutalities of the Government and the sufferings of the Frontier inhabitants. To arouse the public sentiments even in the present times, the leaders belonging to different walks of life always refer to the sacrifices of the *Shuhada i Qissa Khani* (the Martyrs of Qissa Khani) who ultimately won them freedom and are reminding people to follow their footsteps in courage, forbearance, defiance and steadfastness. Unfortunately, outside the province, it did not attract many readers and was not treated at par with 13 April (1919) another unforgettable day in Indian history when many Indians were brutally killed in Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar (Punjab). Before turning to the events of 23 April, it is pertinent to mention that the Colonial administration provided a false figure of the casualties in Peshawar. According to the official estimates, about forty people were killed and around the same number were injured. The actual number of both dead and injured was far higher. After best efforts to collect the accurate information from various published and unpublished sources I place the estimate at around two hundred thirty killed and more than five hundred injured.

On 22 April the members of the Congress Committee Dr Syed Mahmud, Dr Saifuddin Kitchlew and Lala Dunichand, who were deputed by the central organization to inquire into the oppressive measures of the Government in the Frontier Province, were precluded from entering the province.⁴⁰ When the news reached Peshawar, it worsened further the already tense situation in the city. To protest the government prevention order, the local Congress workers took out a procession which culminated in a public meeting at Shahi Bagh, Peshawar. Almost all the prominent leaders of the Congress and Naujawan Bharat Sabha

³⁹ Full details can be seen in Khaleeq, *Da Azadi Jang*, 63–66; Ahmad, *Khudai Khidmatgar Tehreek*, 181–193; and Abdul Akbar Khan Akbar, *Da Barri Saghir Pak au Hind Pashto Azaadi ke da Pakhtano*

Barkha (Pashto), (Peshawar: University Publishers, 2009), 94–98.

⁴⁰ Shah, *Ethnicity, Islam and Nationalism*, 32.

registered their protest by condemning the government act and announced that they would stick to the decision of picketing from 23 April. To avoid public protest and picketing, the Government decided to arrest the prominent local leaders. Although the Government did not take any action against the local Congress leaders, they were kept under strict surveillance since Gandhi launched his Salt Satyagraha. The authorities were aware of the close association of some of the Congress workers with Abdul Ghaffar Khan and were a bit perturbed over the Khudai Khidmatgars' pledge of full support to the planned picketing of the liquor shops. Olaf Caroe, a British officer then posted in Peshawar, reported that to avert unrest in the rural areas of the province, the authorities further resolved to also arrest all prominent leaders of the Khudai Khidmatgar organization.⁴¹

On the night between 22 and 23 April, nine⁴² prominent Congress and Sabha leaders were arrested and taken to Bala Hissar Fort. Two members of the recently formed War Council, Allah Bakhsh Barqi and Ghulam Rabbani Sethi, escaped arrest during night and decided to surrender peacefully to the authorities in the morning. On 23 April, around 9 o'clock, the aforementioned leaders were arrested from the Congress office and were taken to the Kabuli *Thana* (police station). Meanwhile, the news of the arrest of the national workers spread in the city. People in large numbers gathered in front of the Congress office and started raising slogans of 'Long Live Revolution' and '*Mahatma Gandhi ki Jey*'. They were excited and angry to see their leaders in police custody. The leaders advised them to remain calm and move towards the Kabuli *Thana*. On its way, a tyre of the lorry carrying the prisoners got punctured. No one can say precisely whether it was by an accident or someone from the crowd did it intentionally. Alauddin Shah, the sub-inspector of police, was about to call another lorry when the arrested leaders requested that they would surrender to the authorities in the Kabuli *Thana* of their own accord and they should be let loose. The sub-inspector, who was observing the situation closely, sensing the gravity of the situation and the mood of the crowd, roughly estimated about eight hundred, immediately agreed to the proposal and left the scene. The charged but unarmed and peaceful procession reached the Kabuli *Thana* and continued raising slogans in support of their leaders and Gandhi. The sub-inspector appealed to the crowd to disperse peacefully. The leaders went inside the *Thana* and the crowd started dispersing but still raising the slogans of '*Gandhi ki Jey*' and '*Inqilab Zinda Bad*,'⁴³ while all of a sudden an armoured car came running at a great speed and without blowing horn or raising any other kind of alarm, rushed into the crowd, in front of the *Thana*, and crushed twelve to fourteen people under its wheels. Seven people were killed on the spot while

⁴¹ Olaf Caroe, 'Spring of Enchantment' (unpublished manuscript), Caroe Papers, Mss. EUR., as quoted in Shah, *Ethnicity, Islam and Nationalism*, 32.

⁴² The arrested persons included Syed Lal Badshah, Maulana Abdur Rahim Popalzai, Achraj Ram Ghumandi, Ali Gul Khan, Khan Mir Hilali, Rahim Bakhsh Ghaznavi, Abdur Rahman Riya, Lala Paira

Khan and Abdur Rashid Siddiqui.

⁴³ *Congress Enquiry Committee*, 7.

the remaining was left seriously injured.⁴⁴ This was the first of the four armoured cars called by H.A. Metcalf, the Deputy Commissioner of Peshawar, who was alarmed at the presence of a big crowd in front of the Kabuli Thana. He probably wrongly perceived their presence as an attack on the Thana and sent an SOS to the army officials, stationed at the Peshawar cantonment to save them from the 'hostile' crowd. It was supplanted by brickbats from the exasperated crowd injuring some officials including the Deputy Commissioner. Someone from the refractory crowd set ablaze the armoured car and this was ensued by firing upon the protesting people. According to some sources, the indiscriminate firing started around

11 o'clock and went on till 3 p.m. in the evening. Initially the shots were fired only from the armoured car. But later on when it was resumed it was on a more extensive scale, for a longer duration and both troops and armoured cars were used for firing. According to the Government-appointed the Sulaiman-Pankridge⁴⁵ inquiry committee, thirty people were killed and thirty-three wounded, but this was not the final figure according to the same report.⁴⁶ However, the Congress Inquiry Committee,⁴⁷ chaired by Vithalbhai Patel, put the figures between two hundred and three hundred killed and many more wounded.⁴⁸ Another report entitled, *The Frontier Tragedy*, published by the Khilafat Committee, Peshawar in 1930 while mentioning other atrocities of the British Government on the locals, did not give the exact number of people killed or wounded. It simply referred to the indiscriminate firing of the British troops on unarmed people in the Qissa Khani Bazaar and which left the whole bazaar 'strewn with dead bodies'. According to the same report,

Firing was continued for hours after the people had dispersed, in the by-roads, lanes, sub-lanes, balconies and roofs. Anybody and everybody were to be shot at sight. Such was this terrible day of 23 April—a red day in the Calendar of the Pathans—a day of wholesale slaughter'.⁴⁹

The volunteers were not allowed to collect the dead bodies. The Khilafat Volunteers were fired upon and six of them were shot dead. According to eye-witness

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁵ Two judges Shah Muhammad Sulaiman of the High Court, Allahabad and H.R. Pankridge of the High Court, Fort William, Bengal were deputed by the Government to probe into the Peshawar riots.

⁴⁶ Stephen Alan Rittenberg, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Pakhtuns: The Independence Movement in*

India's North-West Frontier Province (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 1988), 79.

⁴⁷ The Peshawar Enquiry Committee with Vithalbhai Patel Bar-at-Law, as Chairman and Mufti Kifayatullah (President Jamiatul Ulema), Sardar Sardul Singh Caveeshar (President, Punjab Provincial Congress Committee), and Lala Dunichand, Bar-at-Law, (Lahore) as members, was appointed by the Working Committee of the INC to inquire into the tragic events of Peshawar on 23 April 1930. They were not allowed to enter the Frontier. They started holding meetings at Rawalpindi. Its 357 pages Report was published on 25 June 1930.

⁴⁸ *Peshawar Enquiry Committee*, 8–9.

⁴⁹ Khilafat Committee Peshawar, *The Frontier Tragedy* (Lahore: Ripon Printing Press, 1930), 15.

accounts⁵⁰, closed Lorries were sent and many dead bodies were placed in them by British soldiers who secretly transported it to unknown places. After consulting many sources, a careful estimate suggests the total number of the dead around two hundred and thirty.⁵¹ However, this figure does not include the casualties of the second firing in Peshawar on 31 May killing eleven people and the deaths in other parts of the province including Takkar (Mardan), Utmanzai (Charsadda) and Spin Tangi (Bannu).

Apart from the massacre of the unarmed people in the Kissa Khani Bazaar, the day witnessed some other noteworthy incidents which require further highlighting as it proved to be a milestone in the freedom movement of South Asia but unfortunately remained unknown for decades and due to the sheer ignorance of scholars working upon the area, does not enjoy a deserving and appropriate place in South Asian history.

⁵⁰ Syed Amir Badshah, President of the Zamindar's Association, Peshawar, gave the following statement:

...The people were dismayed and were trying to remove the dead and the wounded when an officer ordered a bayonet charge against them. To save themselves, the people tried to remove the dead and wounded behind the cover of the wooden boxes that they had brought from the shops and used these boxes and wooden planks as a shield against the bayonet charge. They continued raising national slogans despite this official violence which they bore peacefully and patiently. The Kissa Khani Bazaar appeared a veritable field of slaughter. I with my comrades, Mohammad Akram Khan and others, fully witnessed the orgy of this wholesale slaughter from the upper storey of the house of Abdul Rauf, pleader. Everything was clear to our view. Every one sighted in the street and by-lanes of the Kissa Khani was indiscriminately fired at and the soldiers moved on. Everyone who appeared in the balconies or roofs was shot at. Therefore we closed the doors of our upper flats and so did the others, and lay hiding inside. At every by-lane were posted three or four British soldiers for firing at the people. The firing continued from 1:15 to 3 p.m. and from 4 to 5 p.m. occasional firing was heard. The firing at the roofs and balconies was resorted to in order to secretly remove the dead bodies. A large number of dead bodies were taken in closed lorries and disposed of at some unknown place. I was peeping through a hole on hearing the noise of the Lorries. I saw the dead bodies being packed in lorries. I had seen three such lorries. (*Peshawar Enquiry Committee*, 30–31)

Mohammad Akram Khan (witness no. 40), a member of the Zamindar's Association, Peshawar corroborated the above facts. He along with Amir Badshah and Sanobar Hussain went up to the balcony of Abdul Rauf pleader and saw 'general slaughter'. He stated that the

British soldiers proceeded to fire on the balconies and the streets. We closed the doors but witnessed all the scene through a hole. At about 2:30 p.m. the noise of the lorries was heard. From a hole we saw the closed lorries and the British soldiers at different places who were collecting the dead bodies and were placing them in the lorries. After this I went on the 3rd storey and when I just had a peep I saw that the road was being flooded with water by a fire brigade and blood marks were being washed away. While I was observing this, a bullet passed just above my head and I came down. The firing was going on till 4 p.m. Between 4 and 5 firing went on at intervals. (*Ibid.*, 31–32)

⁵¹ Malik Shad Mohammad, 'Deed wa Shuneed' I (Urdu), (Peshawar: unpublished memoirs), 143.

One of the remarkable episodes of the 23 April was the refusal of Garhwalis to fire upon the unarmed people. Like many other momentous events, this remarkable feature of the Kissa Khani Bazaar massacre, regarded as ‘very grave and more disturbing incident’⁵² also went unnoticed. After deciding to disperse the mob by using all available force, the British Commanding Officer ordered the Gurkas in the 2/18 Garhwal Regiment to fire. But to the utter surprise and aberration of the authorities, the Garhwalis, known for their loyalty to the Raj, defied the authority, refused to fire and argued that they would not fire upon the unarmed civilians. They bluntly told their officers that they were recruited to protect their people from foreign invaders. They would definitely guard the frontiers of India against a foreign aggression but would not fire even a single shot against their own unarmed countrymen.⁵³ This infuriated the British official to the extent that he immediately fired upon the Jamadar (a petty official) of the Garhwali regiment. The bullet missed its target and hit his horse which died on the spot. The Garhwalis were disarmed, arrested and sent to Abbottabad.⁵⁴ Later on, seventeen of them were court-martialled in Bombay and sentenced to various terms of harsh imprisonment, varying from ten to twenty years’ duration.⁵⁵ Chander Singh, the group leader, was sentenced to transportation of life; Narain Singh, for fifteen years and the rest, fifteen in number, were given three to ten years’ Rigorous Imprisonment.⁵⁶ Garhwalis’ refusal to fire on the unarmed countrymen was eulogised by the local people who gathered in Chowk Yadgar under the auspices of Naujawan Bharat Sabha. Speakers paid glowing tributes to the Garhwalis for showing resilience and courage to refuse to fire upon the unarmed people and through various resolutions expressed their solidarity with them.⁵⁷

Casualties at Kissa Khani: A Review

As pointed out, 23 April 1930 has been regarded as a ‘Red Day’ in the history of Pashtoonkhwa. A careful study suggests that about two hundred and thirty people were killed on that day. Keeping in view the big number of casualties, it is only second to Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar (Punjab), where more than three hundred people were killed on 13 April 1919. In Jallianwala Bagh, the troops occupied the main gate and other entrances of the walled public park and fired directly on the people, many of whom died by jumping in the wells located in the park. The

⁵² Manoranjan Jha, *Civil Disobedience and After: The American Reaction to Political Developments in India During 1930–1935* (Delhi: Meenakashi Prakashan, 1973), 75.

⁵³ D.G. Tendulkar, *Abdul Ghaffar Khan: Faith is Battle* (Bombay [Mumbai]: Popular Prakashan, 1967), 70.

⁵⁴ *Peshawar Enquiry Committee*, 126, 154.

⁵⁵ Khaleeq, *Da Azadi Jang*, 69.

⁵⁶ S.R. Bakhshi, *Abdul Ghaffar Khan* (New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 1991), 102.

⁵⁷ Farigh Bokhari, *Bacha Khan* (Urdu), (Peshawar: Naya Maktaba, n.d.), 121–22.

question that continues to bother scholars working on the area is rationale behind the large number of casualties in the massacre at Kissa Khani Bazaar which has so many entry and exit points. There could be multiple reasons for this. The armoured cars started firing upon the people suddenly, without even firing the warning shots. Usually in such situations, the accepted norm is that troops initially fire warning shots and only if they see a persistent stubbornness in the people, which poses a serious threat to the authorities should minimum fire be used to disperse the people. In this particular case, no warning shots were fired and the people were targeted directly. Many dead bodies were found having more than one bullet wound. This was in itself a clear fact that the troops were not interested in the mere dispersal of the mob, but were directed to kill as many as possible. In some cases, the injured who were unable to move, were also killed, while the firing went on indiscriminately for hours. The protesting people in the main bazaar were the direct target of the bullets fired by the troops because 'shoot on sight' orders were issued by the officials. Many people who appeared on the balconies of their houses were also fired upon and killed. Even beggars were not spared, two of them being found among the dead. Two women, who most probably had climbed on to the roof tops of their houses out of curiosity to see what happened in the main bazaar, also perished. Local leaders advised the protesting people to disperse peacefully. Hakim Abdul Jalil Nadvi, a prominent national worker, precipitating violence, addressed the gathering and requested them to leave that place immediately because he sensed the changed attitude of the colonialists who were not willing to excuse the people for defying British authority. He knew the nature of Ise Monger, the Police Official, who was seen giving instructions to the troops by pointing out his fingers towards the mob. But as was expected by many, the charged people refused to listen to the advice of Hakim Abdul Jalil, slogans were raised against him and some of them even accused him of being a British agent. Hakim Abdul Jalil became disappointed with the attitude of the people and he left the place immediately. In the absence of sincere leaders, the protesting people were masters of their own destiny and they were not giving heed to any advice. In addition to that, many were killed while retrieving the dead bodies from the main bazaar. They were not even allowed to rescue the injured ones and help the wounded in providing them medical care. A popular perception developed that the British Government disposed of the dead bodies in three ways: that they secretly threw them in the rivers; that they were buried in a ditch at an unknown place; and, that they were burnt to ashes.⁵⁸

Dr Khan Sahib (d. 9 May 1958), elder brother of Abdul Ghaffar Khan and a retired Captain from the Indian Medical Services, played a vital role in treating the injured who were denied medical treatment in the local Government hospitals. Since his early retirement from the IMS, Dr Khan Sahib was doing his private

⁵⁸Statement of Illah Bux Mir, Timber Merchant, Peshawar, *Peshawar Enquiry Committee*, 143.

medical practice in a rented house at Mohalla Fazlul Haq Sahibzada in Charhi Kooban Bazaar, Peshawar. While the younger brother was fully involved in socio-political activities, Dr Khan Sahib kept himself aloof from the public life. After his return from England, he lived in Peshawar along with his English wife, which was his second marriage and visiting family in Utmanzai occasionally. On the day of the occurrence, he was informed of the firing, depredations and a big number of deaths in the Kissa Khani bazaar. He rushed from his clinic and tried to reach the place as early as possible. Although he was stopped from proceeding further by the troops initially, since, he himself was a retired commissioned army official and had friends both in the army and civil administration, he managed to reach the troubled spot. He immediately started rescuing the wounded to the nearby Khilafat office.⁵⁹ He made a futile attempt to carry the injured to the nearby Government Lady Reading Hospital, located only a few hundred metres away, but was prevented by the troops moving further in that direction.⁶⁰ The Khilafat office was declared as a facility for medical treatment and Dr Khan Sahib himself treated the firing injured. In the late evening, after hectic efforts, he succeeded in convincing local authorities that to save their lives some of the seriously injured patients should be shifted to the Lady Reading Hospital for emergency treatment.⁶¹ This facility, according to the *Peshawar Enquiry Committee*, also could be secured after ‘great difficulty and with the help of Dr Khan Sahib’.⁶² Many dead bodies were brought to the Khilafat office where under the direct supervision of Dr Khan Sahib they were handed over to their relatives. Many unidentified and unclaimed bodies were buried in the Municipal Committee’s graveyard, located in Yakatoot Gate. Many injured preferred the treatment of Dr Khan Sahib over the Government doctors.⁶³ Dr Khan Sahib rendered great services during the civil disobedience movement in the Peshawar Valley and treated all the national workers and the volunteers who were denied the medical facility by the Government hospitals. His rectitude earned him a reputation as a national worker⁶⁴ and during the next few months the Government ‘recompensed’ him by accusing him of ‘disturbing the peace and tranquillity of the region’ and imprisoned him along with other Khudai Khidmatgars.

As pointed out earlier, the day became a turning point in the nationalist history of the province. Although the events initially were confined to only one place but its repercussions were tremendous. The locals decided to change the name of the bazaar to *Bazaar i Shahidan* and Kabuli Gate was called *Khooni Darwaza* but after few days the old names prevailed. Many poets remembered the horrible

⁵⁹ Abdur Rehman, Peshawar City, Witness No. 46, *Peshawar Enquiry Committee*, 210.

⁶⁰ Shad, Deed wa Shuneed, 145–46.

⁶¹ Khaleeq, *Da Azadi Jang*, 68.

⁶² *Peshawar Enquiry Committee*, 9.

⁶³ Mohammad Saleem, Peshawar, Witness No. 36, *Peshawar Enquiry Committee*, 181.

⁶⁴ Rajmohan Gandhi, *Ghaffar Khan: Nonviolent Badshah of the Pakhtuns* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2004), 87.

events of 23 April in their own particular styles. How people saw the massacre? How they felt it? A glimpse is given below:

According to Abdul Malik Fida,

Dasey toye karhi hecha nadi da chargano weeney
Laka toye karhi dee Angrez da mazloomano weeney
Zaka leekaley de Santees April harcha pa weeno
Che pa de wraze bande werhia we da khwarano weeney
Qissa Khana qasabkhana wah pa nazar da khalqo
*Che ye bazaara ke bahedalay da khwarano weeney.*⁶⁵
(No one has ever pour forth the blood of chickens mercilessly in that manner
Like the English shed the blood of innocent people on that day
That's why everyone has written *Santees* (1930) April in red letters
On that day the blood of the poor people was easily available
Kissa Khana (i) became a slaughter house in the eyes of the general masses
Because the blood of poor innocent people was seen split/scattered everywhere).

Abdul Khaliq Khaleeq laments that
Ae asmana! Walay na sholey ranaskor?
Ae aftaba! Walay na ye la ghama tor?
Loyo ghronoo! Walay rez au marez na shway?
Wano booto! Walay na swazey pa hor?
Zmkay! Prhaq la dhera dharda walay na chway?
*Stha da pasa somra weer dey somra shor.*⁶⁶
(O sky! Why you did not fall?
O sun! Why you did not turn black in grief?
O high mountains! Why you did not scatter in dust and particles?
O trees! Why you are not burnt in flames?
O earth! Why you are not torn to pieces in the anguish?
Can you hear the moaning of agony and suffering at your back?).

Zafar Ali Khan also commended the intrepidity and daring of the people of Pashtoonkhwa in these words:

Mulkulmoth ko khatir mey na laney walay
Goolian taney hoye seeno pay kaney walay
Qabar thak sabar ko sehthey hoye janey walay
*Sabar ka mojiza dunya ko dekaney walay.*⁶⁷
(They were not being afraid of the Angel of the Death
They faced bullets valiantly on their chests
They preferred death over giving up their serenity
They showed the miracle of their perseverance to the entire world).

⁶⁵ Abdul Malik Fida, *Deewan* (Pashto) (Peshawar: Darul Tasneef, 1957), 120.

⁶⁶ Abdul Khaliq Khaleeq, *Za au Zama Zamana* (Pashto) (Peshawar: Idara e Ishaat Sarhad, 1974), 66–67.

⁶⁷ Maulana Zafar Ali Khan, *Habsiyat* (Urdu) (Lahore: Ali-Faisal Nashiran wa Tajiran Kutab, nd), 122.

The Khudai Khidmatgar leaders Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Mian Ahmad Shah, Sarfaraz Khan and Shah Nawaz Khan were arrested at Nahaqi, in the suburbs of Peshawar. They were on their way to Peshawar to participate in the picketing scheduled for that day. They were immediately taken back to Charsadda and put into the local prison. The people of the Charsadda and the surrounding areas were furious on the arrest of their leaders. They gathered in front of the prison in a very large number, raising slogans in support of the arrested leaders and against the raj.⁶⁸ Sensing the gravity of situation, the jail authorities requested Abdul Ghaffar Khan to restrain the furious/charged people from storming the prison. Abdul Ghaffar Khan appeared in person on a mounted place and appealed to the protesting crowd not to violate the law and reminded them of the pledge⁶⁹ taken before enrolment in the Khudai Khidmatgar movement that they will not resort to violence even in grave situations like this.⁷⁰ His adroit handling of the situation saved it from further deterioration. Mian Jaffar Shah and other prominent Khudai Khidmatgars who were not yet arrested by the authorities also requested the people to remain non-violent and appealed to them to disperse peacefully. Majority of the people, although unwilling, had left the place with a heavy heart. Abdul Ghaffar Khan and other arrested leaders were taken to Risalpur, tried summarily by a court and sentenced to three years' imprisonment.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Akbar, *Da Pukhtano Barkha*, 99–109.

⁶⁹ The volunteers had to take the following pledge (reproduced here from Shah, *Ethnicity, Islam and Nationalism*, 44) at the time of getting enrolled into the Khudai Khidmatgar organization:

'I call on God as a witness, and solemnly declare on oath that I will abide by the following principles:

1. With sincerity and faith, I offer my name for Khudai Khidmatgarship.
2. I will sacrifice my wealth, comfort and self in the service of my nation and for the liberation of my country.
3. I will never have '*para jamba*' (party feeling), enmity with or wilfully oppose any body; and I shall help the oppressed against the oppressor.
4. I will not become a member of any other rival party nor will I give security or apologize during the fight.
5. I will always obey every lawful order of every officer of mine.
6. I will always abide by the principle of non-violence.
7. I will serve all human beings alike, and my goal will be the attainment of the freedom of my country and my religion.
8. I will always perform good and noble deeds.
9. All my efforts will be directed to seeking the will of God and not towards mere show or becoming an office-holder.

⁷⁰ Ahmad, *Khudai Khidmatgar Tehreek*, 200–01.

⁷¹ At the Gujarat Special Jail they were confined with other prominent Congress and nationalist leaders including Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr M.A. Ansari, Syed Ataullah Shah Bukhari, Maulana Zafar Ali Khan, Dr Saifuddin Kitchlew, Dr M. Alam, Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani, Barrister Asif Ali, Maulvi Kifayatullah, Maulana Ahmad Saeed and K. Santanam. Abdul Ghaffar, *Zama Zhwand au Jaddo Jehad*, (Pashto) (Kabul: Government Press, 1983), 373–80; Akbar, *Da Pukhtano Barkha*, 102.

Peshawar, which was both in shock and fear, was put under the army. Armed troops were seen on patrolling duties to keep the situation under control. As Rittenberg correctly argues, though the riots were limited to one particular locality their repercussions were tremendous. For all practical purposes, the administration was paralyzed in three out of five *tahsils* of Peshawar district.⁷² The Government was more sensitive to the refusal of the Garhwalis to follow the orders of their officers. They wanted to stop the recurrence of such incidents at all costs since it would have a negative effect on the morale of the Indian troops in general. This led to another drastic decision in the late evening. Panicking at the possibility of serious questions being raised regarding the reliability of all Indian troops following the Kissa Khani incident, they suddenly decided to withdraw all soldiers from the city.⁷³ Only at a few selected spots, were some policemen visible. Within three days, the locals resumed their routine but were amazed to see hardly any policemen on duty. This was criticised by the locals and perceived as tantamount to leaving the people of Peshawar to the mercy of plunderers and dacoits. The local Congress and other traumatic volunteers decided to execute the police duties and helped the citizens to regain their confidence. They were seen performing the traffic police duties, controlling traffic to avoid untoward accidents.⁷⁴

Meanwhile, the civil administration also went through some sweeping changes. Sir Norman Bolton, the Chief Commissioner, was immediately recalled and replaced by Sir Courtney Latimer, the then Revenue Commissioner, as the acting Chief Commissioner.⁷⁵ Almost all sources agree that Bolton had a nervous breakdown and left the province on 28 April. Sir Evelyn Howell, the Foreign Secretary of the British Indian Government was also directed by Lord Irwin to go to Peshawar to help the local administration to restore normalcy to the province. The tragic news of the firing in Kissa Khani and massacre at a level never imagined before infuriated the Pashtoon tribesmen. The commotion in the tribal areas reached such an extent that the Afridis, settled around Peshawar, raided the city to avenge the killing of 23 April. However, they were repulsed by the British troops.⁷⁶ Haji Sahib of Turangzai, another anti-British religious figure, antagonized by the atrocities on innocent people, recriminated the colonialists for oppressing blameless Pashtoons, and organized his disciples in Mohmand area, threatening the edges of Peshawar. The British were alarmed at the movement of Haji Sahib's *lashkar*⁷⁷ and in retribution started aerial bombardment of the Mohmand area to defuse the threat and stop their advances towards Charsadda.⁷⁸

⁷² Rittenberg, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Pakhtuns*, 79.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 79–80.

⁷⁴ Shad, *Deed wa Shuneed*, 148.

⁷⁵ *The Frontier Tragedy*, 32.

⁷⁶ Full details can be seen in Shad, *Deed wa Shuneed*, 192–201.

⁷⁷ Literally, a tribal armed gathering for battle.

⁷⁸ Noor Mohammad Nowshervi, *Mujahid i Sarhad: Jangnama da Ghazi Sahib da Turangzo* (Pashto) (Peshawar: Mian Brothers Book Sellers, n.d.), 64–74.

On 4 May, Peshawar was re-occupied by the troops. Congress Committees and all its affiliated bodies including the local chapter of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha were declared unlawful. The offices were raided, papers, cash furniture, etc. either seized or burnt. It was followed by a general crackdown on the political workers. Mr Latimer took impetuous decisions to bring Peshawar under control and was successful at least for the time being because all kind of political activities seized. However, the situation was not the same in other parts of the Peshawar Valley, in particular in three *tahsils* which were dubbed the centres of Khudai Khidmatgar activities.

The arrest of the leaders provoked the people in general and it raised the number of the Khudai Khidmatgars to thousands. The whole outlook of the majority of Pashtoons changed. In the face of British atrocities and maltreatment of the locals, the pertinacity of the Khudai Khidmatgars and their adherence to non-violence, more people were allured to the nationalist movement. They started enrolling themselves in the Khudai Khidmatgar organization *en masse* and although no accurate figures are available according to a careful estimate the enrolment reached more than one hundred thousand, a figure unimaginable few months previously.⁷⁹

According to Rittenberg, 'Civil disobedience plunged much of Peshawar Valley into turmoil. Volunteers paraded daily in military formation; meetings drew audiences as large as 10,000 people; and liquor and foreign cloth stores were subjected to constant picketing'.⁸⁰ Soon the area was declared as unruly and difficult to control. Sir Steuart Pears, the new Chief Commissioner, informed Lord Irwin, the Viceroy that 'Peshawar District itself, as far as the Charsadda, Mardan and Swabi tahsils were concerned, was being overrun by bands of 'red shirts' holdings meetings everywhere and moving across country to different centres everyday...'.⁸¹

The Government responded by crushing the civil disobedience movement with an iron fist. Every kind of brutal method was adopted to suppress the movement. Many villages, including Utmanzai, the home town of Abdul Ghaffar Khan were besieged and the inhabitants tortured. Their homes were searched, people beaten, the grain stores were plundered and grains like wheat, oat, lentils etc were scattered on the ground and kerosene oil poured over them to make them inedible. Standing crops were destroyed while bedsheets and other clothing were torn to pieces and crockery broken. It was reported that cattle were prevented from going outside for grazing while *hujras*⁸² were burnt and libraries destroyed. Many

⁷⁹ Khaleeq, *Da Azadi Jang*, 70; Rittenberg, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Pakhtuns*, 82.

⁸⁰ Rittenberg, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Pakhtuns*, 80.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² In Pashtoon areas the term *hujra* refers to a separate place/house, with a big court yard having two, three or more rooms, meant for the male members of the community where the women are strictly prohibited. Usually it is a central place in the village where men gather in the evenings to discuss the daily affairs, politics, drink tea and smoke the *chilum* or *hookah*. In olden times people used to enjoy listening stories and poetry also in *hujras*. The unmarried members of the village community usually slept in the *hujra*. Every clan, tribe and family has their own *hujra*. In contemporary times it function

deaths from starvation were reported from these villages. The villagers inhumanly treated; the sanctity of the four walls violated and in many cases they were stripped naked and subjected to all kinds of humiliation.⁸³ On one such occasion, Dr Khan Sahib issued the following medical certificate highlighting the British atrocities in Pashtoonkhwa:

This is to certify that I admitted eighty patients to a special hospital which was arranged by public subscription at Peshawar. These were the *Khudai Khidmatgars* from Charsadda Tahsil who were beaten by the police at picketing at a liquor shop in Charsadda. Several of them were very cruelly treated; most of them had more than thirty marks on their body caused by *lathis*. The majority of them could not lie straight in bed, their buttocks being a mass of bleeding red flesh. I was surprised by those cases specially, who suffered from swelling of the testicles which were squeezed and twisted by a British Officer according to the statements of the patients. In my opinion these poor people were treated even more cruelly than the wild beasts.⁸⁴

One of the noteworthy features of the civil disobedience movement was the observance of non-violence by the Pashtoons during the whole span of the movement. To all kind of brutalities, the Pashtoons did not retaliate and bore all the atrocities with forbearance and patience. They adopted non-violence as a creed and remained loyal to it during the whole time. According to *The Frontier Tragedy*,

The Government, on one hand, did its worst to make the people leave the path of non-violence. In all sorts of ways, they were goaded, persecuted, insulted, somehow to make them resort to violence. This would give the Government some semblance of justification to resort to still more bloodshed. The people on the other hand, bore all this calmly and quietly without raising a finger in retaliation. They bared their breasts to British bullets and laid down their own lives rather than resort to violence. Their property was looted. To the Pathan nothing is as dear as the sanctity of his four walls which are a symbol for the honour of the women folk. This sanctity was violated in order to poke him at his most sensitive point. Nevertheless he was true to Non-violence. Many were stripped stark naked—another great personal insult to a Pathan. Many were roughly handled in their private parts—a brutality perhaps unknown to the history of repression and an ingenuity of the Frontier official. But not a hand went up in active resistance.⁸⁵

is also akin to a guest house where visitors are provided free food and lodging. It continues to play an important role in community life, particularly in initiating the youth into Pashtoon norms and values.

⁸³ Further details of the atrocities perpetuated on the inhabitants of Pashtoonkhwa can be seen in *The Frontier Tragedy*, 39–55; Ahmad, *Khudai Khidmatgar Tehreek*, 201–465; Shah, *Ethnicity, Islam and Nationalism*, 32–33; and, Mukulika Banerjee, *The Pathan Unarmed: Opposition & Memory in the North West Frontier* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), 111–20.

⁸⁴ *The Frontier Tragedy*, 55.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 16–17. ‘Of all the remarkable happenings in India in recent times,’ commented Bakhshi,

nothing is more astonishing than the way in which Abdul Ghaffar Khan made his turbulent and quarrelsome people accept peaceful methods of political action, involving enormous suffering. That suffering was indeed terrible and has left a trail of bitter memories; and yet their discipline and self-control were such that no act of

The Kissa Khani massacre (23 April) was followed by another brutal firing incident in Peshawar on 31 May 1930. A peaceful funeral procession of the two children shot dead by an English soldier was not allowed to proceed to the cremation ground. Despite requests from Hakim Abdul Jalil Nadvi and other noted citizens of Peshawar then accompanying the procession, they were not permitted to proceed towards Gorkhatry. The thirty six British soldiers under the command of Olaf Caroe, who came from the opposite direction, i.e. from the Clock Tower side, opened fire upon the procession without any provocation resulting in the death of twelve people and injury to more than twenty two people.⁸⁶ On 26 May, the prominent Khudai Khidmatgars of Baizai area, Mardan were arrested in Takkar and Pathay, two villages considered to be a stronghold of the Khudai Khidmatgars. Prominent among them included Shamroz Khan, Shahzada Bacha, Malik Masim Khan, Khan Bahadur and a few others. Local people decided to accompany their leaders in a procession to Mardan jail. Near Gujar Garhi, a strong contingent of troops stopped the people from proceeding further. Mr Hay, Assistant Commissioner of Mardan, started negotiations for a peaceful dispersal of the procession. Meanwhile, Mr Murphy, a notorious police inspector, initiated the lathi charge and used abusive language against the people, offensively castigating their leaders. He was knocked down by an anonymous person and shot dead. On getting information of Murphy's death, the police resorted to violence and used every kind of force under their disposal to disperse the mob. It was followed by a siege of Gujar Garhi. The next few days were like a nightmare for the local population. To avenge the murder of Murphy, they were subjected by the troops to the worst indignities. The whole village was fined and the security forces let loose to deal with the 'rebellious population' on their own 'free' will. It was followed by a general massacre at Takkar, the village the imperialists had targeted from the beginning. The forcible entry of the troops and their indiscriminate firing upon the unarmed innocent people without any prior warning resulted in the death of about twenty people; many more were wounded. The *hujras* of Malik Masim Khan and Malik Amin Jan, two noted Khudai Khidmatgars were burnt to ashes.⁸⁷ The story of repression in Baizai area did not culminate there; it went on unchecked in other villages of Swabi and Mardan including Yar Hussain, Marghuz, Mainey, Kota, Maneray, Tordher, Jalbai, Sawal Dher and Lund Khwarh. In addition to the Peshawar Valley, the recrudescence of violence and the reign of terror was also extended to other parts of the province such as Kohat, Bannu and Dera

violence was committed by the Pathans against the Government forces or other opposed to them. When it is remembered that a Pathan loves his gun more than his brother, is really excited, and has long had a reputation for killing at the slightest provocation, this self-discipline appears like short of miraculous. Bakhsbi, *Abdul Ghaffar Khan*, 129–30.

⁸⁶ Shad, *Deed wa Shuneed*, 191; Statement of Lachaman Das (Witness No. 53), *Peshawar Enquiry Committee*, 240–41.

⁸⁷ Ahmad, *Khudai Khidmatgar Tehreek*, 241–54; *The Frontier Tragedy*, 45.

Ismail Khan in southern Pashtoonkhwa. However, the worst kind of atrocities was perpetuated in Bannu where on 24 August a protest meeting of unarmed and non-violent people from Hathi Khel led by the local Waziri tribal leaders was fired upon in Spin Tangi; more than seventy people were killed and the number of wounded was in hundreds.⁸⁸ The local authorities did their best to keep the number of dead and wounded concealed. Visits to and from the province were under the strict vigilance of the Government. It was rumoured that the Frontier authorities were bent upon declaring the Khudai Khidmatgars as agents of the Bolsheviks in Russia, who were given the task by the communists to create anarchy and dissension in India to destabilize the British Indian Government.

In the absence of frontline leaders, the command passed on to the second tier of leadership. Interestingly, despite apprehensions from the authorities, none of them was found involved in preaching or practising violence. The protesters almost in all cases remained non-violent. Abdul Ghaffar Khan's preaching of non-violence prior to their participation in the civil disobedience movement had its impact upon the inhabitants of the Frontier Province. Despite the worst kind of atrocities committed by the authorities and all kind of provocation, the Pashtoons did not retaliate. They knew that laying down their own lives rather than taking someone else's is the real test of their forbearance and courage. They were ready to sacrifice everything they possessed for the sake of the liberation of the country from foreign yoke. Some scholars working on the area misunderstood the nature of the leadership during the civil disobedience movement. The presence of a large number of smaller potentates or Khans struggle to get their leadership recognized through the Khudai Khidmatgar movement has been traditionally viewed as part of their insatiable desire to get more benefits from the government to counter the influence of the big Khans. While this might be true for some particular cases, it cannot be implemented as a general rule. If one looks at the various stages of the civil disobedience movement, it is evident that there were many persons at the forefront of the movement who belonged to the professional classes. Abdul Ghaffar Khan emphasized from the beginning upon the participation of these professionals, known as *Qasabgars*⁸⁹ in the local society, and gave them important positions in the organization. They had roots within the masses who decided *en masse* to join the Khudai Khidmatgar movement which provided it with a boost. The British Government, on its part, utilized the services of a few big landlords, title holders and Jagirdars to suppress the movement. The authorities tried to convince the big Khans, the traditional allies of the Empire, to control these people, who mostly belonged to 'menial' castes. If not checked, according to the Government circulars, these people would deprive the 'traditional

⁸⁸ Shah, *Ethnicity, Islam and Nationalism*, p. 33.

⁸⁹ Deriving from *qasab* meaning craft, the term literally refers to occupational groups such as barbers and carpenters.

leaders', that is, the big Khans, of their influence in the Frontier. These big Khans, on their part, adopted all kinds of draconian methods to torture these people but such tactics eventually came to naught. The oppression prevailing under British rule further provided a boost to the movement enhancing the prestige of these people in the eyes of the masses. It also resulted in greater sympathy for the Khudai Khidmatgars and the civil disobedience movement. Some officials of the Raj misunderstood Pashtoon psychology. In several places, the Raj official's mistreatment and rough handling of the situation provided more members to the Khudai Khidmatgar organization. In Utmanzai, after the violent crackdown upon the Khudai Khidmatgars, whose belongings had been destroyed and offices sealed, a colonial official publicly claimed that they were finished and challenged the audience to show their sympathy with them or face his wrath. On hearing these remarks regarding the Khudai Khidmatgars, Abbas Khan, a cousin of Abdul Ghaffar Khan who was not on good terms with him, turned up along with a large number of his servants and tenants and declared openly his support for the leader and the Khudai Khidmatgars. Though this can be interpreted as an act of a single individual it offers us a glimpse into the manifestation of the aspirations of the general public regarding Abdul Ghaffar Khan and his cause.

In Search of Friends

Abdul Ghaffar Khan and the frontline leaders of the Khudai Khidmatgars were imprisoned in the Gujarat Special Jail. Mian Jaffar Shah Kaka Khel and Mian Abdullah Shah of Qazi Khel, Charsadda, two prominent leaders, were still out of prison. They went to Gujarat Jail in disguise, met Abdul Ghaffar Khan and apprised him of the gravity of the situation in the Province. According to some reliable sources, they also conveyed to him the message of Sir Sahibzada Abdul Qaiyum Khan, a prominent Pashtoon elder, enjoying confidence and respect in government circles, who had secretly advised them to affiliate the Khudai Khidmatgar movement with an all-India organization because the local British administration was bent upon declaring them as Bolshevik agents in India. This association, according to Sir Sahibzada, would save them from further annihilation at British hands.⁹⁰

They discussed the matter and on the advice of Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the two aforementioned leaders met Malik Lal Khan, a prominent leader of Gujranwala whom Jaffar Shah knew since the days of the Khilafat movement. Through him he contacted other prominent Muslim leaders including Malik Feroz Khan Noon, a Muslim Leaguer and Mian Fazli Hussain of Muslim Conference, a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council. The present author had the honour of asking

⁹⁰ Mian Atauddin, *Memoirs (Pashto)*, (Nowshera: unpublished memoirs), 18; Khaleeq, *Da Azadi Jang*, 89–90.

Abdul Ghaffar Khan personally about the names of Muslim leaders whom the Khudai Khidmatgars met and was very kindly provided with these names. Jaffar Shah narrated the whole ordeal of the Frontier people and requested them to provide help and support in this particular connection. However, to their utter surprise, the Muslim leaders showed their inability to help the Frontier people against the Raj. Since a majority of them were 'loyalists', it was almost impossible for them to support the Pashtoons' cause against the British imperialism in South Asia.⁹¹ However, for Rittenberg their denial of support was because these parties were weak and fragmented. Moreover, they had their special reservations on the declaration of immediate independence and also were opposed to the civil disobedience movement launched by Congress under Gandhi.⁹² Probably they were also afraid that any step weakening the British authority in South Asia would indirectly bolster the Congress cause.

The dejected leaders came back to Gujarat and informed Abdul Ghaffar Khan of the refusal of the Muslim leaders in providing help and support at that critical juncture. The whole matter was discussed in detail and it was decided to approach the Congress which was also on the warpath with the British Indian Government. The envoys went around the country, met Congress leaders and sought their help in this regard. 'As a drowning man tries to catch hold of any straw' commented Abdul Ghaffar Khan, '—being thwarted by the Muslim League—we requested the two colleagues to seek help from the National Congress. When they met the Congress leaders, they readily agreed to help us in every way, provided we joined them in the struggle for India's freedom'.⁹³ As both had the same agenda, so without reluctance the Congress leaders immediately responded positively to the request of the Khudai Khidmatgars and declared them as part of the Congress national movement⁹⁴ and allowed them to retain their separate identity.⁹⁵

Jawaharlal Nehru, while paying special tributes to the Frontier comrades, mentioned particularly the great sacrifices rendered by them in the cause of the Indian freedom struggle. He stated that he 'have read with amazement and admiration the record of their doing and their sufferings...' and the Pashtoons who 'are known to be brave fighters but they have shown that even in our non-violent struggle they can take the lead and set an example which is not easy to emulate'.⁹⁶

He further stated that,

⁹¹ Abdul Ghaffar, *Zama Zhwand au Jaddo Jehad*, 386–87.

⁹² Rittenberg, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Pakhtuns*, 83.

⁹³ Tendulkar, *Abdul Ghaffar Khan*, 75.

⁹⁴ Abdul Ghaffar, *Zama Zhwand au Jaddo Jehad*, 387–89; Khaleeq, *Da Azadi Jang*, 89–90; Akbar, *Da Pukhtano Barkha*, 109–10.

⁹⁵ Mian Atauldin, *Memoirs*, 18–19.

⁹⁶ Jawaharlal Nehru's Message to the North–West Frontier Province, 16 October 1930, Mussoorie, S. Gopal, ed., *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* Vol. Four (London: Orient Longman Ltd, 1973), 401.

There used to be in past years talk of pretty reforms in the Frontier Province. Today we are not fighting for reforms but for independence. Our comrades of the Frontier have shown in the fire of suffering what metal they are made of. Out of our common suffering we shall fashion free India, in which all of us, including the Frontier Province, will be equal sharers. The men and women of the Frontier Province have purchased by their blood and suffering a full right to this freedom. For the brave no gift can be too much, and those who know how to die know also how to live as free men.

Men and women of the Frontier, you have written a golden page in Indian history! That will be an inspiration for us and we shall remember it in the long days to come. India cannot forget those who helped to make her free.⁹⁷

Abdul Ghaffar Khan was castigated by some of his close associates and friends for merging the Khudai Khidmatgar movement into Congress. To them the Pashtoons would lose their identity and the Hindu-dominated Congress would least care for their welfare. They had the bitter experiences of always supporting the political and social organizations of India but those people did not care for the Pashtoons and never uttered even a single word in their favour when they were in crisis. They always preferred their own interests and never supported the Pashtoons previously. Abdul Ghaffar Khan was not apologetic. Responding to these recriminations, he made it clear in an acrimonious way that they needed support and help from any organization at an all-India level. Their first choice was obviously their co-religionists the Muslim leaders but to their chagrin they disappointed the inhabitants of the Frontier. They made the same kind of request to the Congress party who welcomed the Pashtoons to their fold. Since both were struggling in the same direction and the main objective was the same, that is, getting rid of the British imperialism, both would supplement each other in the freedom struggle.⁹⁸ He cited examples from the life of the Holy Prophet of Islam who entered into certain pacts and agreements with the Jews and other non-Muslim tribes in Medina to thwart the threat of the Quraish.⁹⁹ According to him he did no harm to the Pashtoon movement by affiliating it with the Congress, as they would safeguard the rights of the Frontier people in future.

The merger was beneficial for both: Congress got its firm footing in an overwhelming Muslim majority province and refuted all future allegations against it by its opponents in terming Congress as a Hindu body. They cited examples of the Frontier Province with its solid support for the Congress politics throughout the remaining years until the Partition of India. Congress claimed to be a representative organization of all Indians irrespective of their belonging to any religion, caste or creed. The Khudai Khidmatgars on their part were saved from further Government repression. As mentioned earlier, it was rumoured that the Frontier administration would soon declare the Khudai Khidmatgars as the agents of

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 401–02.

⁹⁸ Abdul Ghaffar Khan, *Pukhtun*, 1 August 1938, 19–23.

⁹⁹ Abdul Ghaffar Khan, *Pukhtun*, June–July 1931, 5–10.

the Bolsheviks who were deputed by the Communists to stir the rebellion in India. Even some individuals in the Political Department were busy in collecting evidences against the Khudai Khidmatgars in this particular connection. The peculiarly strategic location of the Frontier Province provided the Frontier administration extra powers to deal with the locals in their own way. Various regulations were implemented in the province to keep the inhabitants under the tight control of the British authorities. To thwart the 'evil' designs of the Tsarist Russia in the Indian direction was the major policy consideration of the British Indian Government. This provided unchecked power to the administration and they were fully confident that whatever they do with the Khudai Khidmatgars on the pretext of being Bolshevik agents, they will get the required support from the Government both at home and in London. After the merger of the Khudai Khidmatgars with the Congress, it was now almost impossible for the Frontier officials to declare them Bolshevik agents. The Khudai Khidmatgar leaders made it clear that the main objective of the Congress was identical to theirs: getting rid of British imperialism from South Asia. They denied their links with foreign powers including the Russians. Moreover, by merging their movement in Congress, the Khudai Khidmatgars, hitherto a provincial organization, achieved popularity and fame at a national level. The Khudai Khidmatgar leader, Abdul Ghaffar Khan, came closer to the Congress leadership and enjoyed the confidence of all including Mahatma Gandhi. The sincerity of the Khudai Khidmatgars to Gandhian non-violence which they accepted as a creed earned them such reverence and veneration that their leader under Abdul Ghaffar Khan was affectionately called by the majority of Indians as Frontier Gandhi, a title enjoyed by none other.

Conclusion

In 1930, the INC demanded complete independence for India and launched the civil disobedience movement under Gandhi to achieve their desired goal. The response was tremendous in many parts of India. In the N-WFP (Pashtoonkhwa), due to various reasons, however, it did not allure public or government attention. The local Congressmen requested Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the popular leader of the Khudai Khidmatgars, to help them organize an anti-British movement in the Province, to which he agreed. On 23 April 1930, the unarmed protesters were fired upon in the Kissa Khani Bazaar, Peshawar, killing about two hundred and thirty people on that fateful day. Unfortunately, this tragic event did not induce the scholars on the level it deserves and it went unnoticed in the historic narrations/ accounts of modern South Asia.

Pashtoons, the majority population of the area, played an important role in the history of South Asia. The strategic location of their area made them vulnerable to many invasions from the North. They took pride in their martial qualities and had more liking for swordsmanship and the like professions. The colonial government of British India exploited the situation and intentionally kept the area undeveloped.

The reforms introduced in other parts of India were denied to the area on clumsy pretexts. However, some locals showed their determination to recuperate and to resist the imperialist's designs with all available sources. Interestingly, while many decided to challenge the Raj through force, Abdul Ghaffar Khan decided to bring the required change through education and social reforms, of course, through innocuous non-violent means. His altruistic efforts had a tremendous effect on the local population. His emphasis on the rural areas for a change had drastic impact on the people of the Frontier Province. He was campaigning for the purification of the Pashtoon society from all evils through non-violent means. His abhorrence of imperialism and special emphasis on the adoption of non-violence has made him popular. He tried to convince his people to abandon violence because violence breeds more violence. In following non-violence there was no defeat. He convinced them to accept non-violence as a creed, which they did and showed their resilience and steadfastness even during the worst kind of provocation by the government. It became one of the most remarkable features of the 1930s civil disobedience movement in Pashtoonkhwa, a fact acknowledged even by the colonial administration. To get the real facts, Congress formed committees and sent various individuals to the Frontier Province who confirmed the adherence of the Khudai Khidmatgars to non-violence and which was termed a 'miracle' by the prominent Turkish writer, Khalida Edib Khanum, who visited India in 1934.

23 April 1930 witnessed one of the worst massacres in the history of South Asia. Unarmed people in Peshawar were fired upon indiscriminately, followed by a general crackdown on Congress workers, Khilafat volunteers and Khudai Khidmatgars. The Khudai Khidmatgar leaders were the most affected people: they had to bear the worst kind of humiliation. Despite the provocation from the Colonial administration, they remained non-violent, a fact confirmed by many contemporary sources.

The repression of the government continued unabated for many months and the Khudai Khidmatgars were compelled under the circumstances to search for their allies on an all-India level. Interestingly, the Muslim League, their co-religionists, did not offer any assistance nor agreed to raise their voice in support of the Khudai Khidmatgars, for obvious reasons. The INC, already on the warpath with the government, extended their full support and friendship because both were struggling to get rid of British imperialism from South Asia. Since their main objectives were identical they had no hesitation to accept the mutual friendship. While it provided a firm base to the INC in an overwhelming Muslim majority province, it helped the Khudai Khidmatgars in gaining popularity on an all-India level. Abdul Ghaffar Khan was scolded by some of his colleagues for this association. They were perturbed over losing their identity by merging the Pashtoon movement into the Hindu-dominated Congress. Abdul Ghaffar Khan regarded it as an innocuous step which had further strengthened their movement. Abdul Ghaffar Khan, for the sake of the larger cause of the Indian independence and opposition to British imperialism, had to merge the Pashtoon national

movement with the 'Hindu-dominated' organization. Thus he had to agree to forsake the territorial nationalism and work together with the forces who believed in Indian nationalism.

Despite being an overwhelming Muslim-majority province, the forces of communalism, which were very strong in other parts of India, did not succeed in the Frontier Province. The slogan of 'Islam in danger' was exploited by various political forces in the rest of the country but in Pashtoonkhwa it did not find its supporters to disturb the communal harmony. The traditional values of the Pashtoon society, which were utilized by the Khudai Khidmatgar leadership, prevented the use of violence against the non-Muslims who inhabit their area. This was the main reason behind the region not witnessing communal violence and strife even during Partition in 1947, then prevalent in many other parts of India and particularly in the neighbouring Punjab. During the whole span of the civil disobedience movement in the Frontier Province, no one raised the communal issue and victims of the colonialist brutality included both Muslims and non-Muslims.

On the gruesome incident of 23 April 1930, Bhagat Singh, leader of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha, then behind bars in Lahore jail, was one of the first persons from outside the province who raised a voice against the barbarities perpetuated on the people of Peshawar by the colonial administration. The firing incident of 23 April also included many non-Muslims, local Hindus and Sikhs, who laid down their lives along with their comrades. Mostly they were cremated in the places reserved for their cremation but in some cases they were buried in Muslim graveyards. Their names were included in the long list of the firing victims and interestingly to date they are remembered as *Shuhada-i-Kissa Khani*,¹⁰⁰ a title usually reserved for the Muslims, along with their fellow countrymen and there is no religious or caste discrimination against them.

Another noteworthy feature of the 1930 civil disobedience movement was the participation of the rural population on a very large scale. Unlike the other parts of India, the leadership of the nationalist politics came from the rural areas. In the Frontier Province, on the call of their leaders, the village population wholeheartedly supported the protest movement and took active part in the picketing of liquor shops. The arrest of the leaders provided a boost to the organization. In fact, after every brutal act of the Frontier administration, the local population joined the Khudai Khidmatgar movement in large numbers as a reaction to the use of draconian methods against them. They remained undeterred by the Government atrocities and always took it as a challenge to the Pashtoon values. The use of force did not prevent the people from joining the civil disobedience movement. Rather it provided a boost to the movement. As noted earlier, the Khudai Khidmatgars had roots in the common masses and it helped them to continue their protest till the final day of the suspension of hostilities between Congress and the British Indian government. Abdul Ghaffar Khan was the only prominent leader

¹⁰⁰ Literally, 'Martyrs of Kissa Khani'.

who remained in prison and was facing various government restrictions including a ban on his entry into the Punjab and his home province, the Frontier Province, while other Congress leaders were busy in negotiations with the Indian authorities for the forthcoming reforms and the implementation of the Government of India Act, 1935, thus enabling them to participate in the electoral politics of India, at least for the time being.

Judged by the later circumstances, the friendship between the Khudai Khidmatgars and the Congress proved a subtle and timely step in the right direction. Throughout the freedom struggle this alliance continued, of course, against the wishes of the colonial administration. During the final years of the Raj, the Congress denied the charges of its political opponents who accused it as a Hindu organization, bent upon the protection of the right of the Hindus only. Congress leaders were perspicuous that being a national organization it enjoys the confidence of all communities in India, particularly the Hindus and Muslims alike and cited the support from the N-WFP, one of the Muslim majority provinces which supported the Congress till the partition of subcontinent in August 1947. Although what Congress did with the Khudai Khidmatgars on the eve of the partition of India is a sad story to tell but is out of the scope of the present research. It was merely this close association of Pashtoons with the Congress that in Pakistan till recent past they were not accepted as 'patriotic Pakistanis' and were always accused of being traitors to Pakistan. This was the main reason why the Kissa Khani massacre and other similar atrocities being committed by the British Indian Government in the Peshawar Valley during 1930 was intentionally not included in the history books and the sacrifices rendered by the Congress workers, the Khilafat volunteers and the Khudai Khidmatgars went unnoticed for decades. It is the duty of the scholars working on South Asia in general and the freedom movement in particular to give proper attention to this and other similar events thus providing an unbiased and objective account of history to the coming generations.