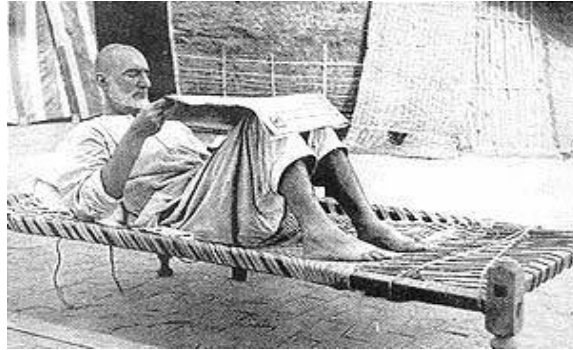


Bacha Khan in Afghanistan

Memoir by Dr. Sher Zaman Taizi, June 2002¹

<http://www.asianreflection.com/khanafghanistan.shtml>



Introduction

Abdul Ghaffar was born into an aristocratic family of Utmanzai, Hasht-nagar, in 1890, according to school records. He grew tall and handsome, inspiring the hopes and ambitions of his family to become a brutal feudal lord and uphold the family's leading position in the area. He was the second and last son of Bahram Khan who was then known as the *Mashar Khan* (the great Khan or the Khan of Khans). Bahram's first son was Dr. Khan Sahib.

Pukhtuns form a tribal society living *ferae naturae*,² in which a family needs men and wealth to defend its properties and keep up its honour, prestige, pride, status and position against neighbouring contenders. The feudal lords heading these families are forced by circumstance to enter into a rivalry for narcissism, vanity, glory and superiority. Impoverished tenants provide all kinds of menial services to them and are also required to produce wealth and manpower to raise and magnify the status of their respective lords.

This type of feudal lordship normally tempts and provides opportunities for the ruling junta to act as arbitrator in feudal affairs. Every lord wishes and strives to belittle the competing rivals who normally fall within the circle of the family. This diabolical trend introduced the term *tarboorwali* in the Pukhtuns' traditional life. It means "inter-cousins relationship"—a relationship that is normally strained due to the lords nonsensical struggle for vainglory. Pukhtun society thus became vulnerable to external intervention and fertile ground for superstitions, mental retardation and spiritual gloom, which ultimately created the parasite strata of pseudo mullahs and pirs³. For the sake of their subsistence and survival, these strata frighten, shock, suppress and numb mental potentialities. These institutions oppose literacy, education and awareness, which pose threats to their wishful and selfish mastery in the field of knowledge. Pukhtun social life was in danger of being stagnated like the water in a

1 Edited by Damon Lynch, August 2002.
2 Wild by nature and not usually tamed.
3 Religious and spiritual Muslim teachers.

natural pool, which stirs only through the introduction of foreign elements but does not flow out to make its own course and move on to its destination.

Abdul Ghaffar was the product of that society. If studied in this perspective, one can imagine that his mission was not easy, simple and indulgent, and that his achievements were much more significant than his contemporaries who had risen out of enlightened societies. Leaders normally stand out on the pedestal of their society. Those leaders are seldom born who raise their society from the ignominious depths of ignorance and obscurity to the heights of enlightenment and glory. Abdul Ghaffar Khan was one of this rare breed of leaders. He blew new life in the dormant people heretofore groaning under the burden of the worst type of feudalism. It was his stamina, struggles, patience, devotion and determined tolerance in the face of suffering that lifted Pukhtuns from the lowest level of serfdom to the high status of nationhood. That was the reason that not only the British and later Pakistani rulers opposed him tooth and nail, but also the feudal lords and parasitic clergy. Therefore, his name will glitter eternally through the pages of Pukhtun history.

Those leaders are seldom born who raise their society from the ignominious depths of ignorance and obscurity to the heights of enlightenment and glory. Abdul Ghaffar Khan was one of this rare breed of leaders.

While the British rulers were generous in granting different titles to Pukhtun lords and purchasing their loyalties, Bahram Khan lagged behind in that race due to the “eccentricity” of Bacha Khan. Furthermore, Bahram Khan himself had inherited the spirit of freedom. His father Saifullah Khan had supported the people of Buner in defending their soil against British expansionist designs, having taken active part in the battle of Sukawa. Obeidullah Khan, father of Saifullah Khan, had been executed by Durrani rulers. Bahram Khan was advised, coaxed and tempted to honours and rewards by the government to dissuade his son from what they considered anti-British activities. Yet at that time Bacha Khan was concentrating on awakening Pukhtuns—he was concerned more about their education, mannerism, self-respect and self-reliance than he was on directly fighting the British. These activities worried the British rulers who speculated beyond their threats to their presence in the sub-Continent. The British rulers, obsessed by such fears, dragged Bacha Khan into their politics to find an excuse for his persecution and elimination. However, Bacha Khan defied all their intentions with his selfless devotion and nonviolence.

Bacha Khan was not considered for any title or reward by rulers—British as well as Pakistani. However, his own people gave him three titles—Fakhr-e-Afghan, Bacha Khan⁴ and the Frontier Gandhi—like the man himself a rare phenomenon in the political history of the sub-Continent.⁵

Khan in Afghanistan

The biography of Bacha Khan is not a mystery for peoples of Pakistan and India in general and Pukhtuns in particular. Besides a number of good and authentic books on

4 *The pride of the Afghan and King of Khans* respectively. “Fakhar” means pride, honour, dignity; Pukhtuns in Pakistan were also classed as Afghans. Additionally, *Bacha Khan* is often spelled as *Badshah Khan* in India.

5 The Government of India in 1987 conferred on him the Bharat Ratna Award in addition to the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding he received in 1967. See below.

his life and struggles, Bacha Khan himself has written a full size autobiography in Pushto.⁶ Hence, in this paper, I will reveal some reminiscent events related to Bacha Khan's stay in Afghanistan.

At this juncture, we have to admit that we have no record of events in the form of any type of documents. I, as an Assistant-Translator in the Pakistan Embassy in Kabul, had the opportunity to see Bacha Khan frequently. Syed Fida Yunus was then the Second Secretary, Sher Mohammad Khan the Finance Secretary, Dil Jan Khan the First Secretary and Amir Usman the Cultural Attaché in the Embassy. We invariably reported outcomes of my meetings with Bacha Khan to our respective departments in Pakistan. Bacha Khan knew that and had expressed his satisfaction over my approach to him that enabled us to submit first hand and correct information on him to the government.

After release from detention on 30 January 1964, the government of Field Marshal Mohammad Ayub Khan issued a passport to Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan to enable him to go to England for medical treatment. While there, he received an invitation from a group of Pukhtuns in the United States to go there and live with them. The U.S. government disapproved of that. Bacha Khan himself did not want to live far away from his people and homeland. He received an offer from Jamal Abdul Nadir, President of Egypt, to go there. He refused the offer for similar reasons. However, when he received an invitation from King Zahir Shah of Afghanistan through his Prime Minister Dr. Mir Mohammad Yusuf,⁷ he readily accepted that.

The Afghan government accorded a warm welcome to Bacha Khan on his arrival in Kabul on 12 December 1964. A large number of people gathered to aggrandise the show.

Bacha Khan visited different parts of Afghanistan, including remote areas, and addressed the people with his typical message of peace and brotherhood.

Pakistan's One Unit Collapses

In Pakistan, peoples of smaller provinces, Pukhtunkhwa,⁸ Sindh and Balochistan continued opposition to the One-Unit of West Pakistan. When the people of Pakistan revolted against Ayub Khan in 1968, he handed over the government to General Mohammad Yahya Khan Qizilbash from Peshawar.

Through his brother Agha Mohammad Ali, President Yahya Khan established contact with Bacha Khan. Agha Mohammad Ali, who was a Police Officer, assigned Arbab Hidayatullah Khan (Assistant Inspector General of Police) from Landi Arbab, Peshawar, for the mission. Arbab Sahib paid several visits to Bacha Khan. He used to call on Syed Fida Yunus before and after the meetings. Both Syed Fida Yunus and I were living in a big house of Abdul Sattar Shalizai in Karta-e-Parwan, Kabul. There we discussed matters relating to dismemberment of the One-Unit and the restoration of old provinces. We proposed that the States in the Frontier Province should also be annexed to the province. Similarly, the tribal belt should be either annexed to the province or given autonomous state as a separate unit so that the tribesmen could get rid of the system of Political Administration.

6 See *Further Reading* below for more details.

7 Dr. Yusuf was made the first Prime Minister of Afghanistan out of the Royal Family in accordance with the Constitution promulgated in October 1964. He died in exile in Germany in 1997.

8 The Northwest Frontier Province of Pakistan is referred to using this term by Pukhtun nationalists. See below for more discussion on this.

In the light of the reports and recommendations of Arbab Hidayatullah Khan, the One-Unit was disintegrated and the States were annexed to the Frontier Province. We learned that there were some elements in the bureaucracy and defense forces of Pakistan who did not want disintegration of the One-Unit. They opposed Yahya Khan to the last moment. Some national dailies in English and Urdu also carried out a hostile campaign.

It was in those days that Shakirullah Bacha of Gujar Garhi, Mardan, had visited Kabul. In his informal visit to the Embassy, some officers gathered around the table to offer him tea. During their chat, Colonel Ahmad Khan of the ISI⁹ asked him about his views on Pukhtunistan. Shakirullah Bacha replied that such queries could best be answered by daily the *Nawai Waqt* because the office of Pukhtunistan was there.

Bacha Khan was so pleased over the disintegration of the One-Unit that he sought special permission to broadcast a message over radio Kabul and offer his gratitude to President Yahya Khan.

Visit to India

In 1969, Bacha Khan went to India to attend the inaugural ceremony of the centenary of Gandhijee. Before his departure for India, I was directed by Ambassador Hakeem Ahsan to arrange his meeting with Bacha Khan. I accompanied the Ambassador to the residence of Mohammad Ali Lawangin Momand of Kama, an official of the Tourist Department, and held a meeting with Bacha Khan there. The Ambassador conveyed to him a message from President Yahya Khan that he might not say something in India against Pakistan. Bacha Khan received the message with a smile of approval. The house was near the Embassy in Shahr-e-Nao, Kabul. When we left the house, the Ambassador expressed his utmost satisfaction over the response and also uttered something in praise of Bacha Khan.

Another interesting event that took place was the renewal of Bacha Khan's passport. Bacha Khan sent his passport through Mohammad Ali Lawangin for renewal. Then, we found that it was only valid for one year and had long expired. We referred the case to the foreign office. Bacha Khan himself sent a letter in Pushto to Sardar Abdul Rashid, then Interior Minister. The embassy received approval and issued a new passport to him. It was signed by Syed Fida Yunus as the Second Secretary. When the news reached Pakistan that Bacha Khan had gone to India with valid travel documents, Ghulam Mohammad of Lundkhwar, Mardan, and some other enthusiastic rivals demanded of the government to take action against the officials in the Embassy who had issued the passport. Later I came across Ambassador Hakim Ahsan on the stairs while he was at the threshold of his office. The Ambassador smiled at me—an encouraging gesture—and said; “Be prepared for action. Lundkhwar has demanded it!” I replied, “Yes Sir, I know it! But it would be a great event for us to be mentioned in a case of the historical figure of Bacha Khan!” The Ambassador enjoyed it and entered the office with a smile.

The visit of Bacha Khan to India followed a communal riot in Ahmadabad in which Muslims suffered heavy losses at the hands of extremist Hindus. Bacha Khan visited that State. He did not give his bundle of clothes to the local governor or any government official and kept it, as usual, under his arm. The State government had planned to hide the scene from him and conduct his visit to some peaceful Muslim

⁹ Pakistan's intelligence service

quarters. A Socialist Hindu reached Bacha Khan and told him about the plight of Muslims. Bacha Khan followed him to the camp where a number of displaced Muslims were lying helplessly. There, he asked the ruling junta of India ; “Had Gandhijee taught you to treat your people like this?” He blamed Hindu extremists for persecution of Muslims. In protest, Bacha Khan kept fast for three days. He also addressed the joint session of the Indian Parliament, where he protested against the communal riots.

A large number of admirers of Bacha Khan turned up to have a look at him. The government built a place for Bacha Khan to sit whereby a steady stream of people walked past and paid respect to him.

In celebration of the centenary of Gandhijee, the Indian government in 1969 conferred upon Bacha Khan the Jawaharlal Nehru award for International Understanding with 8 million Indian rupees. Bacha Khan brought and deposited that money in the National Bank of Afghanistan. He informed his party in Pakistan to form a committee to restore publication of his weekly the *Pukhtoon*. For that purpose, he bequeathed 2.5 acres of his land also. He wished to raise a trust and use that money for the development of the Pushto language and the welfare of the Pukhtun nation.

Some names for the committee were considered, but the committee could not be formed the way Bacha Khan wanted. His nephew (daughter's son) Professor Jehanzeb Niaz—a former member of the teaching staff of Pushto Department, Peshawar University¹⁰—later told me that he was considered to head the trust and my name was also considered to be a member. The money was not given to Pukhtoon magazine at all, and its publication was not restored. It was published occasionally by the National Awami Party / Awami National Party.¹¹

Confusion Created over Donation

In Pakistan, a cyclone swept East Pakistan in 1970 with disastrous effects. President Yahya Khan raised a president fund for succour of the affected people in that wing. One day, I received a telephone call from Bacha Khan. He told me that he wanted to donate some money to the president fund. Being a government employee I could not take such an action on my own. I reported the matter of Charge d' Affair' Shahid Amin. He was of Indian origin. He did not like Bacha Khan. However, he said “OK, better if he gives even ten rupees!” Having got the approval, I contacted Mohammad Ali Lawangin and his brother Mohammad Siddique who was an officer in the National Bank of Afghanistan.

Mohammad Ali Lawangin, Mohammad Siddique and Faqir Baezai, sons of Mohammad Hassan Khan Momand of Kama, served Bacha Khan devotedly. Bacha Khan also loved them. Siddique and I visited Bacha Khan. He disclosed that he wanted to give five thousand dollars as a donation. Siddique and I considered the matter there and decided to take the cheque from Bacha Khan, cash it in dollars, exchange dollars with Pakistan currency at Shahzada market and pay those proceeds

¹⁰ Now living in the United States.

¹¹ Until the fall of the regime of Dr. Najib in Afghanistan, the money awarded by the Indian government was in the National Bank of Afghanistan. Dr. Najib was reportedly serious about implementation of the will of Bacha Khan. He was not prepared to give anything from that fund to any one—even members of Bacha Khan's family. He pleaded that it had been willed by Bacha Khan for a Pukhtuns' Trust and would be used appropriately. However, the Trust that Bacha Khan wanted could not be set up mainly due to the uncertain political situation in Pakistan. Unfortunately, after the fall of Najib, the money also perished.

to the embassy. When we informed Bacha Khan, he wanted to know the purpose of that process. We explained to him that official rate of one dollar was five Pakistani rupees whereas it was eleven in the market. Bacha Khan expressed astonishment over the difference between the official and the market rates. However, he allowed us to do as we liked. Hence, we deposited 55,000 rupees in the president fund on behalf of Bacha Khan. The embassy issued a receipt for that.

Meanwhile in Pakistan a vicious circle of the so-called patriots led by Z.A. Sulehri tried to create misunderstanding between Bacha Khan and the embassy. Sulehri was then editor of the daily *Pakistan*, which carried inside single-column news that Bacha Khan had donated 25,000 rupees to the president fund. Arrangement was made to show that news to Bacha Khan, because it was given such an insignificant place that a common reader would not find it. It was clear that someone from the embassy might have leaked out the information that Bacha Khan had given the cheque for five thousand dollars.

Bacha Khan was confused to see that news. He demanded that the embassy return thirty thousand rupees to him. The embassy wrote to the foreign office and the information ministry to issue another statement with a mention of the actual amount, but all in vain. There was no clarification. Bacha Khan therefore insisted on reimbursement. The state of goodwill was thus poisoned by vested interests with their evil designs. Meanwhile, Khan Abdul Wali Khan¹² visited Kabul. I told him all about the matter. What followed was not known to us, but Bacha Khan did not remind us again.

Visit of Qayum Khan

During the campaign for general elections in Pakistan, I attended a party at the Tribal Affairs Department in Kabul. The President of Tribal Affairs Masoud Pohanyar and Bacha Khan were there. I joined them. The atmosphere was quite cordial. During the chat, Pohanyar mentioned to Bacha Khan, "Qayum Khan is coming!" Bacha Khan replied "let him come!" And there was no further discussion on the matter.

Qayum Khan visited Kabul for three days, but we could not meet him. The government accommodated him at some unknown place. Another Muslim League stalwart from Balochistan, Mohammad Khan Jomezai, had also visited Kabul in those days. It was generally believed that Qayum Khan and Mohammad Khan Jomezai sought the blessing and assistance of the Afghan government in general elections. It was later explained by Khan Abdul Wali Khan in a meeting with the Ambassador of Pakistan at his residence in Kabul that the Afghan government would not like to have seen the National Awami Party win the elections in Pukhtunkhwa, because she would then have no point to continue her propaganda for Pukhtunistan.

Seeking Peace in East Pakistan

When riots erupted in East Pakistan after the general elections, Bacha Khan offered his services for mediation. He proposed to the embassy that he would go back to Pakistan to lead a *Jirgah* of a few elders from Punjab, Sindh, NWFP and Balochistan to meet Mujib-ur-Rahman and settle the dispute through negotiations. The embassy conveyed his messages to foreign office but there was no response. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto of the Pakistan Peoples Party and Qayum Khan of the Muslim League,

¹² Bacha Khan's second son.

supported by some Army officers, were determined to grab power, although the majority had voted for the Awami League of Mujib-ur-Rahman. Jamaat Islami exploited the Urdu speaking community of Indian refugees to form *al-Badr* and *al-Shams* militant groups to terrorise Bengalis. When all these strategies failed to cow down Mujib, Pakistan Army launched an operation in East Pakistan. What then happened is an open secret.

Bacha Khan always stressed the need of unity, brotherhood and peace.

Problems on the Border

At that critical juncture, some tribal Jirgahs called on Bacha Khan that they were prepared to fight for liberation if they were supplied arms. Bacha Khan advised them not to create any problem on the western border for Pakistan. The Jirgahs also met King Zahir Shah who took a similar stand. The King passed on a message to Pakistan's Ambassador that he would not allow any disturbance from that side. The anti-Pakistan propaganda, continuing in the name of Pukhtunistan, was also tuned down.

Thoughts on Pukhtunistan

Normally whenever I visited Bacha Khan at the Dar-ul-Aman guest house, some admirers were there. The majority of them comprised activists from the Afghan Millat and the Parcham faction of Peoples Democratic Party of Pakistan. Bacha Khan always stressed the need of unity, brotherhood and peace. He avoided discussion on the political situation in Pakistan. It was only Pukhtunistan Day,¹³ following independence-day, that Bacha Khan led a procession from the Pukhtunistan Square to the Ghazi Stadium where he delivered a speech.¹⁴ He criticised Pakistan's government for having usurped rights of nationalities and demanded autonomous status for Pukhtunistan (NWFP). In not a single speech did he express any desire for a separate and independent state. His speech was broadcast over Kabul radio that evening. This was a permanent feature during his stay in Kabul.

In a casual meeting with me, Bacha Khan confided that Pukhtuns' economy and education were backward and their country was landlocked. They could not live a better life in a separate state. He therefore demanded due rights for them within Pakistan.

Role of the Intelligence Services

On one occasion I was embarrassed when, on my arrival, Bacha Khan asked me if I would like to see Mardhula Sarabai, a veteran socialist leader from India. Hesitantly I replied—yes. Then Bacha Khan directed me to go upstairs. It was the first time that I explored the first floor of the guest house where an old lady in typical Pukhtun dress of shirt and trousers with Peshawari chapli¹⁵ was standing with Anwarul Haq Gran. Still smart in old age with silver-white hair, she was graceful, cheerful and upright. When we exchanged greetings, she turned to Gran and exclaimed, “How fluent do Afghans speak Urdu!” Gran, hailing from Dir district and already known to me,

13 Pukhtunistan day was on the 9th of Sunbala—which normally coincided with the 1st of September, and sometimes the 31st of August (differences are due to leap years).

14 Speeches from 1965, 1966, and 1967 are in his English language autobiography *My Life and Struggle*.

15 Footwear.

laughed and told her that I am a Pakistani and was serving in the Pakistan Embassy. “Does Pakistan's Embassy keep contact with Bacha Khan!,” she expressed with surprise enhanced by that revelation. Gran introduced me to her in clear and plain words that I was working for an intelligence agency of Pakistan. Sarabai appreciated that such a direct approach being used by workers of intelligence agencies would avoid and remove many misunderstandings. Gran told her that Bacha Khan was well aware of my position and had expressed satisfaction with my contacts with him that led to improvement of relations between him and the government of Pakistan.

We discussed the affairs in East Pakistan. Bacha Khan repeated his proposal that Pakistan should not use force there and try to settle the matter through negotiations. During discussion, Bacha Khan mentioned that there were some selfish people who did not like peace in the country.

Selfish People

One day, Syed Fida Yunus and I went from Kabul to Jalalabad. Accompanied by Pakistan's Consul at Jalalabad, Rab Nawaz Khan, we visited Bacha Khan at his residence at Sheesham Bagh. When we reached there, Bacha Khan was busy in his home garden. He received us and led us to his drawing room—a simple room with ordinary furniture. His personal servant Ahmad Kaka placed some fresh fruit before us. We discussed the affairs in East Pakistan. Bacha Khan repeated his proposal that Pakistan should not use force there and try to settle the matter through negotiations. During discussion, Bacha Khan mentioned that there were some selfish people who did not like peace in the country. Rab Nawaz Khan asked him in a way of satire, “Bacha Khan! You blame what you call the selfish people. But if Pakistan were destroyed, wouldn't these selfish people suffer humiliation! Will they like it?” Bacha Khan just smiled to say “The selfish has no sight!” It means that selfish people are driven so rashly by their selfish designs that they do not see the gloom and doom ahead.

Return from Exile

Following the general elections and bifurcation of Pakistan, in 1971 the National Awami Party and Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Islam formed coalition governments in the NWFP and Balochistan. Governor Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo of Balochistan and Governor Arbab Sikandar Khan of NWFP were from the National Awami Party. Bizenjo invited Bacha Khan to return to Pakistan via Balochistan. Before his return, Bacha Khan went on a tour of western parts of Afghanistan. He was somewhere in Zabul or Hilmand, when Ambassador Gen. Rakhman Gul asked me to go and tell Bacha Khan that Bhutto did not like him to return to Pakistan. I was surprised. I had to obey the order. But I tried to tell the Ambassador that such a message to Bacha Khan from a government functionary would annoy him. The Ambassador wrote back to the government. Then Ajmal Khattak was deputed to convey the message. Arbab Sikandar Khan sharply reacted to the stand of Bhutto and sent a delegation to Kabul to invite Bacha Khan. The delegation included Afzal Khan Lala, then Information Minister, and Maulana Badshah Gul from Akora Khattak. They were accommodated at the Kabul Hotel. I had a chance to have my first meeting with Afzal Khan Lala there.

On the 25th of December 1972,¹⁶ Bacha Khan returned to Peshawar. A large number of people, mostly young activists with red flags of the Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan, accompanied him to Torkham. Similarly, a large number of Khudai Khidmatgars in red uniforms and carrying red flags from Pukhtunkhwa also converged at Torkham. The chain was lifted and the procession from Peshawar greeted their great leader in the foot of Shamshad hill on the Afghan side. Thousands of young flag bearers spread over in the foot of the hill to display fluttering flags. Khan Abdul Wali Khan was also there.

Return to Afghanistan

Bacha Khan went again to Kabul on the 2nd of April 1978, just a few weeks before the Saur Revolution that took place (26 April 1978). He stayed at his residence at Jalalabad. He invited Fazal Rahim Saqi to help him compile his autobiography. In 1980, he went from Kabul to Delhi for medical treatment. Sheikh Abdullah extended an invitation to him to visit Kashmir. Bacha Khan accepted the invitation but could not go there.

Bacha Khan visited the Soviet Union from the 1st of September to the 31st of October 1980 for medical treatment. He returned to Peshawar on 2nd April 1982.

The Government of India awarded Bacha Khan the prestigious Bharat Ratna Award to Bacha Khan in 1987.

For much of 1987, Bacha Khan was almost unconscious in bed for lengthy periods. He was in India for a time and then at Lady Reading Hospital Peshawar where he breathed his last. Bacha Khan died aged 98 on the 20th of January, 1988, and was buried in Jalalabad on the 22nd of January. He had spent 30 years of his life in prison, and fought against oppression, intolerance and violence for more than 70 years.

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16 There is some confusion over this date. In Eknath Easwaran's book, *Nonviolent Soldier of Islam*, the date is given as December 1971. Bacha Khan's son Wali Khan has described the return in the fourth edition of his Pushto Book *Khudai Khidmatgars*, but without dates. Abdullah Bakhtanay Khidmatgar, a follower of Bacha Khan, a renowned poet and writer of Afghanistan, mentions on page 48 of his book *Da Sole au Azadae Qahraman* (The Hero of Peace and Freedom), published in Afghanistan in 1987, that he had returned in December 1972.