The Pashtuns are a Muslim group that lived in the North-West Frontier Province of British India near the present day Afghanistan. In this area there were repressive laws that stopped anti-government activities and punished whole families and villages for the crimes of one person.

Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan (also known as Badshah Khan meaning ‘King of Kings’) began his resistance by opening up schools throughout the area educating villagers on the reforms he planned for India. He was arrested by British authorities and spent three months in prison along with his 95-year-old father and other members of his family.

When he came out of prison he joined the Khalifat movement, an anti-British group with Hindu participation as well and also formed the Afghan Reform Society to increase education. He taught people that they should become involved in work outside of farming, so that the Indian population would not be completely dependent on the British.

After being jailed for three years for his attempts at reform Ghaffar Khan founded the Khudai Khidmatgar ‘Servants of God’ which became the first professional non-violent army. This was based on Islamic principles of universal brotherhood, submission to God’s will and service to God, with an underlying philosophy rooted in Gandhi’s concept of *satyagraha* – active non-violence.

This was the army’s oath of allegiance:

“I am a Khudai Khidmatgar, and as serving Allah needs no service, but serving Allah’s creation is serving Allah, I promise to serve humanity in his name.

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

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

I promise to refrain from anti-social customs and practices.

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

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

I promise to devote at least two hours a day to social work.
This is the Oath of the Khudai Khidmatgar Army” (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khudai_Khidmatgar>)

The recruits to the army, including women, helped on community projects, maintained order at gatherings and recruited new members. They were given the nickname *surkh posh* ‘Red Shirts’ when a couple of people got their white shirts grimy and so dyed them at a local tannery. This is how the distinctive red brick coloured shirt was adopted as the uniform. They carried walking sticks instead of weapons.

The Pathans’ contempt for fear and cowardice was legendary but they obeyed the oath even in the face of extreme provocation. Musharraf Din wrote about British Army tactics:

"The British used to torture us, throw us into ponds in wintertime, shave our beards, but even then Badshah Khan told his followers not to lose patience…there is an answer to violence, which is more violence. But nothing can conquer non-violence. You cannot kill it. It keeps standing up… The British sent their horses and cars to run over us, but I took my shawl in my mouth to keep from screaming…We were human beings, but we should not cry or express in any way that we were injured or weak." (<https://peacenews.info/node/3937/abdul?page=6>)