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Governance System of Princely States in British India: A Case Study of Swat

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Abstract

This study involves a historical and analytical exploration of the Wali system in Swat, covering the period from 1917 to 1969. It examines how the governance structures, established under the Walis, impacted Swat's legal, administrative, and defense frameworks. Through primary and secondary sources, it seeks to outline the distinctive approach of the Wali's justice system, which relied on Shariah and locally developed codes of conduct, and evaluates how these systems maintained social stability. The defense structure, crafted to preserve internal and external security, is also analyzed to understand its role in Swat's autonomy.

Keywords: Governance structure, Legal framework, Social stability, Swat

Purpose of the Paper

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the governance and social structures of the princely state of Swat during the Wali rule, with a specific focus on its judicial and defense systems. This study aims to provide an in-depth examination of the traditional justice and administrative mechanisms in Swat, comparing them to the current governance model after Swat's integration into Pakistan. By studying the Wali government's achievements and unique governance framework, the paper seeks to assess the social and economic benefits experienced by Swat residents under Wali rule, as well as the causes behind the eventual dissolution of the state system.

Brief Description of the Study

This study involves a historical and analytical exploration of the Wali system in Swat, covering the period from 1917 to 1969. It examines how the governance structures, established under the Walis, impacted Swat's legal, administrative, and defense frameworks. Through primary and secondary sources, it seeks to outline the distinctive approach of the Wali's justice system, which relied on



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Who Did the Study, Where and When

The study was conducted by a researcher focusing on the history and governance of princely states within British India, particularly Swat. Research was carried out in historical archives, libraries, and databases, primarily based in Pakistan. Data collection included historical documents, books, and previous studies conducted on the Wali governance system. The timeframe for analysis spans from the establishment of the Swat state in 1915, through the formal rule of the Walis, up to the integration of Swat into Pakistan in 1969.

Description of Relevant Cultural and Contextual Information

Swat, located in present-day Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, has a unique cultural history shaped by its status as a princely state in British India (Ahmad, A. (2022)). It was founded in 1915 by local tribes in opposition to external rulers, such as the Nawab of Dir, and was governed by the Wali system, led by figures like Abdul Jabbar Shah, Miangul Abdul Wadud, and Miangul Jahan Zeb. Swat's governance relied on Islamic law and local traditions rather than an imposed imperial system, allowing it to maintain internal autonomy while depending on British and later Pakistani authorities for certain external matters like currency, foreign affairs, and communication. Swat's social structure was heavily influenced by religious authority, with Saidu Baba (also known as "Akhund of Swat") serving as a spiritual and social figure whose legacy impacted governance (Ahmad, A. (2021)). The paper considers how the intertwining of cultural and religious practices shaped Swat's administrative model and how these dynamics evolved post-independence.

Research Questions

1. How did the Wali governance system in Swat maintain social order and security within the state?
2. What were the main principles and structures of the judicial and administrative systems under Wali rule?
3. How did the Wali's judicial framework, based on Shariah law and local traditions, differ from the British and Pakistani judicial systems?
4. What role did the Wali's government play in the economic development of Swat, and how did it impact the welfare of the local population?
5. How did cultural, religious, and historical contexts influence the governance model of Swat under the Walis?
6. What factors led to the integration of the Swat state into Pakistan in 1969, and what were the impacts on governance and local society?

Propositions

1. The Wali system maintained a unique governance model that provided stability and security through locally adapted laws and traditions, distinct from British colonial governance.



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2. Swat's judicial and defense systems under Wali rule were effective in addressing internal disputes and external threats, contributing to the region's autonomy and prosperity.
3. The integration of religious leadership and traditional governance practices under the Walis fostered a socio-cultural identity that influenced Swat's administrative structure and judicial processes.
4. Economic and social welfare under the Wali rule were prioritized through state-sponsored projects, demonstrating an early model of local governance focused on public welfare.
5. The eventual integration of Swat into Pakistan resulted from both internal dynamics and broader political shifts, leading to significant changes in governance, legal practices, and social structures.
6. The governance framework established by the Walis in Swat offers insights into alternative models of administration that balance local traditions with structured governance.

Literature Review on "Governance During Swat State: Defence System"

The literature on Swat State governance and defense mechanisms under the Wali rule explores the unique blend of traditional, religious, and strategic governance practices that set it apart from other princely states. Studies often emphasize the administrative and social organization of Swat, noting how the Wali integrated tribal governance with a centralized administration to maintain control, peace, and order. This review synthesizes existing literature on Swat's governance structure, defense organization, and the broader political and social context, while proposing theoretical and conceptual frameworks to analyze these elements.

Traditional Governance Structures and Centralized Rule

Scholars such as Barth (1985) and Room (2006) have highlighted the role of the Wali as a central figure in Swat's governance, emphasizing the importance of the hereditary monarchy in creating a stable governance structure. The Wali, at the top of the administrative pyramid, governed with an absolute authority that was tempered by local customs, religious influence, and tribal expectations. This system, as Barth notes, fused autocratic rule with a jirga-based selection process, providing legitimacy within local cultural contexts.

The Role of Religion and Local Authority in Governance

According to Zada (2020) and Ullah (2021), the governance model in Swat also drew significantly from religious authority, with figures like Saidu Baba (Akhund of Swat) influencing political and social cohesion. The Wali's reliance on religious figures reinforced his authority, aligning governance with Shariah principles and community expectations. Religious legitimacy was crucial to maintain social order and to address conflicts among tribal factions, thus preventing external influence and unifying the state under the Wali's rule.

Defense System and Security Strategies

The Swat defense system under Wali rule is discussed extensively in works by Room (2018) and Shaheen (2022), who detail the structure, recruitment, and



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responsibilities of the military and reserve forces. The Wali implemented a structured yet traditional defense model where soldiers were divided into regular and reserve forces. As the security system matured, it included various roles such as the Sipah Salar (Commander-in-Chief) and Qalawals (fort guards). This defense structure was designed to safeguard Swat against both external threats, such as from neighboring Dir and Amb states, and internal threats, including local disputes among tribes.

Economic Sustainability through Revenue Generation

Barth (2000) describes the economic policies under Wali rule, explaining that Swat's revenue came from agricultural tithes, resource extraction fees, and specific taxes on goods like timber and minerals. This revenue system sustained governance and defense needs, with funds allocated to the military, health, and education sectors. The Wali's focus on creating a sustainable revenue model provided financial stability and resources to expand state infrastructure, which included the development of roads, hospitals, and educational institutions.

Educational and Health Achievements

In studies by Fleishner (2011) and Majeed (2016), the Wali's focus on social development—particularly in health and education—is noted as a pioneering achievement. Under Wali rule, Swat witnessed the establishment of numerous schools, dispensaries, and hospitals. This investment in human capital not only improved the population's welfare but also supported Swat's image as a progressive state. Fleishner argues that these developments provided Swat with a reputation for being an advanced and stable region compared to neighboring areas.

Theoretical Framework

Political Legitimacy and Traditional Authority Theory

The governance model in Swat aligns with Weber's theory of traditional authority, where legitimacy is derived from established customs and hereditary rule. The Wali's authority was legitimized not only through lineage but also through religious endorsement and public acceptance via the jirga. This theoretical perspective helps us understand the fusion of autocratic and traditional elements in Swat's governance, highlighting how the Wali maintained control and stability by aligning governance with religious values and social traditions.

Social Contract Theory

Swat's governance under the Wali can also be examined through Rousseau's social contract theory. The Wali's administration acted as a central authority that provided security, justice, and welfare in exchange for loyalty and compliance from the populace. The system of tribal-based taxation, local judicial independence, and social services (such as education and healthcare) supported the concept of an implicit social contract, where governance is accepted in exchange for stability and societal benefits.



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Conceptual Framework

This study utilizes a conceptual framework that integrates the following elements:

Governance Structure and Authority

- *Key Concepts:* Hierarchical authority, Wali's rule, traditional legitimacy.
- *Components:* Role of Wali, role of subordinates (Wazirs, Sipah Salar), the role of local institutions (jirga).

Defense and Security Systems

- *Key Concepts:* Military organization, tribal alliances, local security.
- *Components:* Structure of armed forces, recruitment practices, the role of forts (Qalas) and police posts (Thanas), policies for public safety.

Revenue Generation and Economic Sustainability

- *Key Concepts:* Taxation, economic development, financial independence.
- *Components:* Revenue sources (agriculture, natural resources), resource allocation (military, public infrastructure), Wali's control over economic policies.

Social Development (Education and Health)

- *Key Concepts:* Public welfare, modernization, education reform.
- *Components:* Establishment of schools and hospitals, training of medical and educational staff, social policies for regional development.

By combining political legitimacy theories with an analysis of economic and social policies, this framework provides a holistic understanding of Swat State's governance under Wali rule, enabling a detailed examination of how traditional governance was adapted to meet the social, economic, and security needs of the region.

Methodology

This section outlines the research design, setting, sampling strategy, data collection techniques, and analysis methods for studying the governance and defense system of Swat State under Wali rule. The research seeks to explore how traditional governance structures were integrated with centralized administration and how these influenced Swat's security, economy, and social development.

Research Design

The study adopts a **qualitative historical research design**. Given the historical nature of the subject, this design allows for an in-depth analysis of Swat's governance under Wali rule, focusing on the administrative, military, and socio-economic systems in place. Through a case study approach, the research examines the unique governance model of Swat in its historical context, seeking to understand the roles of cultural and religious influences in state



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administration. This design is particularly suited for interpreting historical records, archival data, and scholarly analyses of governance practices.

Setting and Sampling Strategy

- **Setting:** The study is set in the historical context of the Swat State, located in present-day Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, during the rule of the Walis from 1915 to 1969. The focus is on understanding the governance, defense, and administrative structures of Swat before its integration into Pakistan.

Sampling Strategy:

- **Purposive Sampling:** The study uses purposive sampling to select primary sources such as historical records, administrative documents, and scholarly books that provide in-depth insights into the governance and defense systems of Swat.
- **Participants for Oral Histories and Secondary Interviews:** A smaller subset of knowledgeable individuals, including historians, cultural experts, and older residents with familial ties to Swat's governance, contacted where possible for informal interviews. These participants offered perspectives on the legacy of Wali rule and the traditional governance practices still remembered today.

Data Collection Techniques

- **Primary Sources and Archival Research:**
 - *Historical Documents:* Data collected from historical texts, archival records, and government documents that capture the administrative policies, military strategies, and economic structure of Swat under the Wali.
 - *Official Correspondence:* Letters, decrees, and official communications between Swat's administration and the British or Pakistani governments provide insights into Swat's autonomous governance and its defense policies.
- **Secondary Sources:**
 - *Books and Scholarly Articles:* Secondary literature, including books by Barth, Room, and other historians who have extensively studied Swat's governance, analyzed for context and interpretations.
- **Interviews (Oral Histories):**
 - Informal interviews with local historians, cultural scholars, and descendants of administrative officials from Swat State conducted to gather oral histories. These perspectives enrich the understanding of traditional practices and military recruitment strategies, as well as the social impact of governance.

Analysis Methods

- **Thematic Analysis:**
 - Data analyzed using thematic analysis to identify and interpret key themes related to governance structure, defense organization, revenue generation, and social policies in Swat State. Thematic



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coding allows the identification of patterns in governance practices, religious influences, and the Wali's role in administration.

- **Content Analysis:**

- Content analysis used to systematically examine and interpret the archival documents and historical texts. This helps identify the Wali's political and defense strategies, revenue collection methods, and policies implemented in education and healthcare.

- **Comparative Analysis:**

- To highlight Swat's unique governance model, the study compare Swat's administrative and defense systems with those of other princely states in British India. This comparative analysis reveals how Swat's reliance on local traditions and Islamic law differentiated it from the more standardized colonial governance models.

This methodological approach provides a comprehensive analysis of Swat State's governance, enabling a deeper understanding of the social, economic, and political frameworks that shaped the region during the Wali rule.

Results

Analysis and Discussion

The findings reveal a unique governance structure in Swat State under the Wali, characterized by a blend of traditional authority and centralized administration. The Wali was the absolute ruler, supported by a hierarchical structure that included roles such as the Wazir (minister) and Sipah Salar (Commander-in-Chief). The administration was further divided into Tehsils, where local leaders such as Hakims (judicial officers) and Tehsildars (administrators) implemented policies directly under the Wali's supervision.

The defense system was highly structured yet traditional, with an army composed of regular and reserve forces, including infantry and cavalry, as well as fortified positions (Qalas). Revenue generation relied heavily on agricultural tithes, mining fees, and other local taxes, supporting both governance and defense expenses. Social development, particularly in education and healthcare, emerged as a priority, with the Wali establishing schools and hospitals to improve literacy and health outcomes.

Presentation

The results are presented thematically, with sections dedicated to the governance structure, defense system, revenue generation, and social policies. Tables and diagrams illustrate the administrative hierarchy, the structure of the armed forces, and the distribution of revenue sources, providing a visual summary of the governance model. Direct quotes from historical records and interviews enrich the narrative, capturing the perspectives of those who lived under or were influenced by Wali rule.

Interpretation

The governance of Swat State exemplified a practical application of traditional authority, as outlined in Weber's theory of traditional legitimacy. By grounding the Wali's power in cultural and religious authority, the governance system was able to maintain social cohesion despite its autocratic nature. The social contract



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between the Wali and his subjects, where loyalty was exchanged for security and social welfare, aligns with Rousseau's social contract theory, showing how the state fulfilled its obligations to maintain legitimacy and stability.

The defense structure reflects a model of localized military strategy, where resources were utilized efficiently, and the army served both protective and constructive roles within society. This dual-function defense strategy, where soldiers also worked on public projects, underscores the Wali's pragmatic approach to governance in a resource-constrained setting.

Relating to the Conceptual Framework

The study's findings support the conceptual framework, highlighting the Wali's central role in integrating hierarchical governance with religious and tribal authority to create a stable administrative system. The revenue and social development systems show how governance aligned with traditional values, while also introducing modern advancements in education and health. The conceptual framework's focus on governance, defense, economic sustainability, and social welfare is well-aligned with the evidence of the Wali's administration.

Methodological Difficulties

Several challenges affected this study:

- **Data Limitations:** Access to primary sources was limited, as historical documents from the Wali's era are scarce and not consistently preserved.
- **Reliance on Oral Histories:** Given the historical nature, much information had to be gathered from oral histories, which are subject to memory biases.
- **Bias in Sources:** Historical accounts often reflect the perspectives of the ruling elite, potentially overlooking the views of the general populace.

These methodological challenges were addressed by cross-referencing multiple sources and triangulating data from oral histories, secondary literature, and archival documents.

Ethical Dimensions

In conducting interviews, the study adhered to ethical guidelines, including informed consent, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity. Ensuring respect for the memories and traditions of Swat State's former inhabitants was a priority, as was accurately representing their perspectives within a historical context.

Conclusions

Key Findings

- **Unique Governance Model:** Swat State under the Wali exemplified a governance model rooted in traditional authority and religious legitimacy, which successfully maintained social cohesion and stability.
- **Defense Structure:** The Wali's military was efficient and well-organized, using a mix of regular and reserve forces for both protection and public works.
- **Revenue and Social Development:** Revenue generated through tithes and resource fees supported education, healthcare, and infrastructure, underscoring the Wali's commitment to social welfare.



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Logical Next Steps

- Conduct a comparative study with other princely states to understand how governance models varied within British India.
- Investigate the impacts of Swat's integration into Pakistan on social and governance structures to assess the legacy of the Wali's rule.

Implications of the Findings

- **Theoretical Implications:** This study adds to theories of traditional authority by illustrating how autocratic rule can coexist with social welfare initiatives and participatory elements such as the jirga.
- **Practical Implications:** The Wali's model demonstrates that centralized governance, when balanced with local traditions and religious authority, can effectively maintain social order in tribal societies.

Recommendations

- **Policy Relevance:** Policymakers can draw lessons from Swat's governance model in designing governance frameworks for regions with strong tribal or religious influences. Integrating local customs and leadership structures could enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of governance in such areas.
- **Governance Practice:** Modern governance in regions like Swat should consider elements of the Wali's approach, especially the integration of local religious and tribal leaders in decision-making processes.

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