

## ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM OF SWAT STATE: ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF ATAULLAH AS CHIEF SECRETARY

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### ABSTRACT

*With the foundation of princely State of Swat in 1915, a number of administrative posts were created. These newly created positions provided an opportunity for aspirants to fill it and to prosper in their professional careers. This article will discuss the challenges faced by the rulers of Swat State in finding suitable candidates for the newly created positions. Furthermore, it will shed light on the career of the Chief Secretary of Swat State, Ataullah who migrated from Punjab, served the State for forty-three years and made Swat his permanent abode. This article will also trace his place of origin, his role in the State administration and the subsequent events that took place after the merger of the State in 1969.*

Key Words: Secretary, Chief Secretary, Swat State, Wali, administration, communication

### Evolution of the Administrative Structure of Swat State

The pre-Swat State era, commonly referred to as *da Pukhtu dawar* (age of Pukhtu) lacked a well-defined administrative structure with clear lines of authority, proper hierarchy and coordinating mechanism. The society was organized on tribal and clan structure. The decision making power was enjoyed by the tribal elders and *Jirga* (Council of elders). The rules were mainly unwritten and decisions were based on established customs and traditions.

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The administrative structure owes its origin to the formation of Swat State in April 1915, when Sayyid Abdul Jabbar Shah (1880-1956) was made the ruler by a *jirga* (Uddin, 2022, p. 67). Sayyid Abdul Jabbar Shah introduced some basic reforms in the State, mainly for the collection of tax and creation of a popular army (Barth, 1985, 156). However, archival data about his administrative set up and governmental structure is scarce and hence is insufficient for analysis. Still, it is evident that due to the internal disturbances in the State during his short-ruling era, Sayyid Abdul Jabbar Shah was unable to establish a full-fledged administrative system with proper hierarchical structure.

When Miangul Abdul Wadud (1881-1971) popularly known as Badshah Sahib, was installed as the second ruler of Swat State in September 1917. He was innovative in his outlook and was able to consolidate his position as ruler of the State. He subsequently followed a strategy to devise a workable administrative structure for managing the affairs of the State. Fredrick Barth has adequately described the administrative system of Swat State:

I have asserted that the State represented a new and emergent structure, that its organization was not simply copied and introduced from elsewhere. I shall return below to the intricate and changing manner in which Swat State's government organization interpenetrated with the organization of local society, and thus necessarily represented an emergent structure. Here, it is sufficient to point to the absence of any neighboring states with a similar organization. Certainly, most or perhaps all of the elements can be found represented in various organizations in the larger region: the bodyguard pattern shared with Dir, the tax auctioning known from Moghul India, the Tahsil divisions and officers of British India, the Islamic institution of ushur, etc. Abdul Jabbar Shah's procedure for the swift creation of a popular Army may have been innovative - at least it was unknown to the Badshah... but it may well have been an introduction from Amb. But the essential structure of Swat State, which assured its survival, did not emulate the pattern of any other state: not the pluralistic and coercive Khanate of Dir...the intricate centralized feudalism of Chitral...the ritual absolutism of Hunza...or the colonial bureaucracy of British India (Barth, 1985, 156).

The *Walis* of Swat were the heads of the state and government and were assisted by other administrative officers with specific titles and roles. When Miangul Abdul Haq Jahanzeb (1908-1987) ascended to the rulership of Swat State on 12<sup>th</sup> December 1949, he further refined the administrative system introduced by his father. The renowned writer, Muhammad Ismail Zabeeh

observed in 1954 that the “foreign affairs and matters of policy and general administration” in Swat State were dealt by the Chief Secretary, Commander-in-Chief (Sipah Salar) was the head of all military forces, Wazir Maal was in charge of finances and commerce, private secretaries were responsible for all matters that fell within the purview of Ruler’s power, the treasury officer looked after treasury, the Principal supervised Jahanzeb College, Director of Education supervised the lower, middle and secondary education while doctors were incharge of different hospitals (Zabeeh, 1954, 22).

### **Sanctioning of the Post of Secretary/ Chief Secretary**

During the British Raj, the rulers of princely states of India communicated with the British government through official correspondence in English. The correspondence included letters and telegrams, treaties and agreements, reports and memoranda, petitions and representations, official notifications and circulars. The official correspondence played a vital role in maintaining the relationship between the princely rulers and the British Empire. When Miangul Abdul Wadud ascended to the kingship of Swat in September 1917, he faced the challenge in finding employees with proficiency in English to handle English correspondence and the key managerial posts. Due to lack of educated individuals in the State, he had to train certain individuals and also had to hire services of educated people from outside the State. The backwardness of the area in terms of modern education can be “gauged from the fact that even the ruler of Swat State was unable to find a scribe for conducting his official correspondence” (Uddin, 2022, p.68). Ultimately, he had to send his trusted officials outside the State to acquire basic education so that they may facilitate him in conducting his official communication. Badshah Sahib elaborated on this point and stated:

One of my servants, named Sardar Ali, who had read one or two books of Persian poetry in his time, suggested that if sent him to Thana, he could learn to write in not a very long period. There being no alternative, I acted on the suggestion. During his sixteen months’ stay there, Sardar Ali learnt a little bit of the epistolary art and returned to take up duty with me as a scribe. Later, when I was obliged to engage a second penman, the same course had to be adopted and another of my employees was sent to Thana (Malakand Agency) for the purpose. In those early days my two scribes were probably the only literate persons to be found far and wide (Hussain, 1962, 67-68).

Thus in the initial phase of Badshah Sahib's reign, the correspondence was handled by Sardar Ali who would draft responses to routine matters. However, it was felt that a specialist in the relevant field was needed to take over the responsibility of official correspondence.

### **Arrival of Ataullah to Swat State**

Ataullah popularly known as Wakil Sahib was born on 10<sup>th</sup> January 1901, at Garhi Awan, Hafiz Abad, Gujranwala, Punjab (Confidential, Who's Who of the Dir, Swat and the Chitral Agency, TARC Peshawar, 23) and his tribe was Chauhan Rajput (Serial No. 74, Admission and Withdrawal Register, Wadudia School, Saidu Sharif, Swat). He served as tutor of the Heir Apparent (Miangul Abdul Haq Jahanzeb) during his school days. Wali Sahib gives an account of the initial phase of his ties with Ataullah in these words:

He [Ataullah] had come to Swat first in 1923, while he was a student in Law College, as my tutor in place of a more senior person, Professor Abdur Rahim, who was supposed to have come, but was prevented. Ataullah was from Gujranwala District in Panjab, and he spent the summer learning Pashto, and teaching us English - not so much, because my cousin was very naughty and would always make fun of him. Next year, Professor Abdur Rahim came - he was a very respectable person and a great philosopher. But when I was about to go back to College, my father said: "Next year, why don't you bring that fellow again, that young Ataullah?" So in 1925, I brought him here again. And my father took a liking to him; and later, he told me: "You tell him that if he can get a job elsewhere, that's all right, but otherwise, he can come and be my secretary (Barth, 1985, 41).

Wali Sahib proceeded to state about the response of Ataullah:

So I wrote to him while he was in Lahore at Law College, and he wrote back: "Why should I waste my time in Swat - I will practice law and earn more money here! But he was a shy fellow, and when he appeared in court, he could not speak. So after a while he wrote to me, to say that if the offer still held, he would come. He started on a salary of 150 Rupees a month, which was reasonable pay at that time. He arrived about the middle of April, two weeks before I came. My father trusted him, and I trusted him very much (Barth, 1985, 41-42).

Consequently Ataullah took charge as Secretary to the ruler of Swat State. He served as "a sort of majordomo of the ceremony" and "made all the arrangements for tents and furniture for the Durbar" that was held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May 1926 for the recognition of Badshah Sahib as ruler of

Swat State (Barth, 1985, 41). Initially, the foremost duty of Ataullah was correspondence with the British officials on behalf of the ruler of Swat State and improve final drafts of letters having vital importance. He was assigned with the same duty in exceptional cases, even by the last Wali of Swat and was asked to make improvements in vital official letters. When the “precedence between the States, depending on their times of recognition” was to be highlighted before the Government of Pakistan, the last Wali of Swat prepared “a long letter-drafted” letter and was polished by Ataullah for its English (Barth, 1985, 189).” The Political Agent for Swat, Dir and Malakand, W.R. Hay summarized the State administration and the key officials in 1934 in these words:

Outside the Wali’s family the leading positions in the State are held by the Wazir K.S Fateh-ul-Mulk Hazrat Ali, and his brother the Sipah Salar Ahmad Ali. These two brothers are the sons of a Chitrali Mulla (some say a slave) who came of Swat with the Wali’s mother and both are thus devoted to the Wali’s cause. The Wazir is level-headed and most capable and efficient; his advice is always sound. The Sipah Salar appears to lack personality and probably owes his success to his faithful carrying out of the Wali’s orders. Mr. Ataullah, B.A, LLB of Gujranwala District in the Punjab is the Wali’s Secretary, and he conducts all his English correspondence and attends to the wants of his European guests with urbanity and efficiently. He first came to Swat as vacation tutor to the heir apparent Jahanzeb (Hay, 1933, 18).

Interestingly, Ataullah accompanied Badshah Sahib on the trip that might have been proved fatal to them. In October 1927, when the Wali was inspecting the road up along the river till Madyan, the sons of Darmai Khan and “conspired also with Habibullah Khan of Miandam” laid an ambush near Fatehpur bridge (Barth, 1985, 68).” Fortunately, luck favored them, they returned half way and thus avoided the fatal ambush (Barth, 1985, 68).

When the relations between the Badshah Sahib and his Heir Apparent got tense in 1934, Ataullah stood with the Wali Ahad as he had “no one to speak to or confide in; no one who could console” him. Wali Sahib stated, “Deep inside, I knew what would happen; and I told Ataullah, my father’s chief secretary: “My father will change some day; let us wait” and thus Ataullah was on the side of the Wali Ahad but at the same time, “he was very cautious, and he did not want to annoy the Wazirs.” According to Wali Sahib’s account, Ataullah knew that Badshah Sahib was not going to deprive him from power for a longer period of time and that he will eventually give him power. As Ataullah knew that his future laid with the Wali Ahad, so he covertly backed him,

though “very cautiously” and was at the same time obedient to the Wazir and acted according to their instructions (Barth, 1985, 87).

With the passage of time, other administrative responsibilities were also given to the Secretary as he increased in stature and won the confidence of the *Walis* of Swat. In the course of time, Ataullah turned into an essential component of the State administration and was made the Chief Secretary. In Wali Sahib’s era, Ataullah dealt with “foreign affairs and matters of policy and general administration (Zabeeh, 1954, 22).” He also received and entertained the high-level officials from outside the State on behalf of the ruler and facilitated them according to their needs (Mayne, 1955, 189). Additionally, the Chief Secretary was informed by the foreign guests about their arrival in the State (Mills, 1962, p.45).

The Chief Secretary was destined to serve the *Walis* for forty three long years and thus got aware of the minute details about the State’s organization, administration and the working of its different departments. The Political Geographer, David Dichter revered the Chief Secretary for his understanding of the State affairs. He commented:

The boundaries shown on the map of Swat State are those claimed by the present Swat State Government. This qualification becomes necessary in view of a difference of opinion that exists between the two governments over the residual ownership of the Kalam area. Whereas the State Government never likes to think of Kalam as being anything but part of their State, the general opinion of the central government is that it is only temporarily being administered by Swat State on their behalf. Were it not for the fact that the Central Government is planning a dam there, and possibly that the area is an attractive tourist resort of people in the Punjab and lower Pakistan, it would be hard to see why Pakistan persists with this policy. This dispute over Kalam immediately raises the question why the Central Government tolerates Swat’s existence as a separate state. Many answers have been advanced in explaining this phenomenon, but none is better or more realistic than that put forth by the Wali’s Chief Secretary, when he said that “it would probably be far more troublesome for the Central Government to take over Swat than it would be to leave things as they are now (Dichter, 1967, 51-52).

The conduct of general election was an important event in Swat State that was held in 1954. For the delimitation of the Swat State into fifteen constituencies, the Wali of Swat constituted a Delimitation Committee and Ataullah (the Chief Secretary) was made its President while Sher

Mohammad Khan (Wazir e Mal), Amir Said (Musheer) and Ihmadud Din Khan (Asstt: Sam Ranizai, Malakand) were made its members (No. 2089-C/St/15, Dated:30th July 1954, File No. 37-S/54, Bundle No. 59, Directorate of Archives and Libraries, Peshawar). Subsequently, an Election Board was constituted by Wali Sahib for the conduct of the election. The Chief Secretary, Purdil Khan (Secretary to the Ruler) and Ihsanuddin Khan (Asstt: Swat Ranizai) were nominated as its members (File No. 37-S/54, Bundle No. 59, Directorate of Archives and Libraries, Peshawar).

A Regent Council was also constituted by Wali Sahib that used to run the affairs of the State in the absence of the ruler and his Heir Apparent from the State. It had “three members with equal status, namely, the Chief Secretary, Wazir-Mulk Sahib and Wazir Mall Sahib” (Shahab, 2020). Wali Sahib allotted the female block of Wazir’s bungalow to the Chief Secretary as his official residence, after the departure of the Wazirs from the State in 1943 (Shahab, 2020).

It will not be out of place to mention that every year the State issued a protocol order of precedence. According to it, the Chief Secretary was always No. 1, along with Wazir Mulk, Sepah Salar and Wazir e Mall (Shahab, 2020). Thus all these key officials were treated as equally by the ruler of Swat State with respect to protocol. Interestingly, the other key posts were abolished after the death or retirement of these officials; however, the only exception was the Chief Secretary who held the post till the merger of the State (Shahab, 2018, 216). The brother of the Chief Secretary, named Habib Ullah Khan also served as Road Engineer in the State (Shahab, 2018, 369). He claimed to have a Diploma in Civil Engineering” (Shahab, 2020). Ataulah was the owner of Swat Cinema and also purchased lands in the State. The English historian and philosopher, Arnold Toynbee has adequately analyzed the role of the Chief Secretary:

The Wali recalls, to an historian’s mind, one of the enlightened monarchs of the eighteenth-century Europe. In the pre-revolutionary age of European history there were many European principalities of the size of Swat that were government autocratically to the advantage of the people...The Chief Secretary of Swat State would have found himself at home of an eighteenth century European sitting. Years ago, before the founder of the state had completed his work of state building, the present Chief Secretary came, at the founder’s invitation, to serve as tutor of the present Wali for a term of three months. He was a stranger from the Panjab; his home-town Gujranwala... he came for three months; he has stayed for life. When the three months were up,

the founder asked him to stay on to be his right-hand man. At that time the prospects of the state that the founder was building were still obscure. But the young Panjabi put his faith in the Yousafzai statesman's rising star, and his faith has been justified by the outcome. From that day to this, he has served first the founder and then his successor, the reigning Wali, in all their manifold undertakings. His is an exacting job. He has never been away from his post for more than a fortnight on end. He has never travelled beyond the frontier of Western Pakistan. But he has had a hand in conjuring a modern state out of Pathan anarchy; and that is a life-work that has been worth-while (Toynbee, 1961, 146).

### **Assistance Given to Individuals/Missions in Research Work**

The princely rulers in some States extended support and cooperation to researchers and scholars who sought to study and document their state's history, culture and administration. Some ways in which the princely rulers helped the researchers, include access to archives, financial support, hospitality and accommodation, introduction with local intelligentsia, permission to conduct field work, sharing knowledge and expertise, facilitating access to restricted areas and providing resources and equipment to aid their work. The *Walis* of Swat were familiar with the value of scholarly research work and the importance of preserving their state's heritage, culture and history. They sponsored a number of research works that were scholarly and semi-scholarly in nature. The renowned Italian archeologist, Luca M. Olivieri lauded the last Wali and his Chief Secretary with the remarks:

In those days (referring to the early days of Italian Archeological Mission in Swat Swat), Tucci and Faccenna established the first fundamental contacts with the Wali of the State, H.M. Major General Miangul Jahanzeb, the Waliahd H.A. Miangul Aurangzeb, also making the acquaintance of the State Badshah Miangul Shahzada. Essential to relations with the royal court was the role of the First Secretary of the State, Ataullah Khan: Tall, well-built, excellent walker, elegantly dressed, speaks perfect English and is extremely pleasantly mannered (Olivieri, 2006, p.26-27).

Similarly, another renowned Italian archeologist, Domenico Faccenna (1923-2008) also testified the viewpoint, when he stated in 1964:

The Wali Sahib of Swat, Major General Miangul Jahanzeb, and Waliaht [Wali Ahad] Aurangzeb never failed to extend their help to the Mission in every possible way while the local officials, and



in particular the Chief Secretary of Swat, Ataulah Khan, have provided us with every comfort during our work. For our part, we have gained a good understanding of the local workmen at the excavations, while they themselves have become proficient over the years. To all of them we would like to express our deep debt of gratitude (Faccenna, 1964, 10).

Fredrick Barth also carried out his seminal anthropological work on Swat State in 1954. He recorded:

The following pages summarize information gathered on a three week trip in July-August 1954 through the areas in question, preceded by exploratory interviews with a few Kohistani travelers and informed Pathans in Swat...Sir Aurel Stein who, in 1941, was the first European traveller to traverse Indus Kohistan gives geographical and historical information only. In that area, I partly followed his footsteps, and partly had the rare pleasure of being the first European to visit some valleys...my own knowledge of Pashto was at the time fair; but to eliminate all possibility of misunderstanding during the rapid collecting of material from a totally unfamiliar culture, I was assisted by Aurangzeb of Parona, at present a student of Peshawar University and a fluent English speaker. My thanks go first of all to H. R. H. the Wali of Swat for offering me all facilities on this trip, and to His Chief Secretary, Ata Ullah Khan, for helping me in my preparations. Further, my thanks are due to all the Wali's appointed administrators and among them most particularly to the Hakim Sahib of Patan, who invariably received me with the most gracious hospitality. In spite of the efforts of the Mali and his officials, however, travel through these areas must necessarily involve one in considerable discomforts and hardships; and I am indebted to Aurangzeb of Parona and Kashmali, my servant, for their patient struggles in what they regarded as the most terrible of countries. For my own part, the magnificence of nature and glimpses into an extraordinary culture offered ample compensations for such discomforts as were inevitable (Barth, 1954, 5-6).

One comes across numerous written sources, produced both in the British and Pakistani era that have reflected on the origin of Ataulah (1901-1981), the Chief Secretary. Some of the written sources are produced here.

*Who's Who in the Dir, Swat and Chitral Agency* (1933) reported "Ataulah of Hafizabad Gujranwala District, B.A., LLB, has been Secretary to the Wali of Swat since 1926. Capable and polite. Has a brother who is a Professor in Kabul (Confidential, 1933, 6)." Furthermore, *Who's Who of the Dir, Swat and Chitral Agency* (1950) stated "Ataulah of Hafiz Abad, Gujranwala, District. BA.LL.B. He has been Secretary to the Wali of Swat since 1926. Capable and polite."

(Confidential, 1950, 23). Muhammad Ismail Zabeeh opined that the Chief Secretary was “loyal, hardworking, efficient and trustworthy (Zabeeh, 1954, 3).” The Iranian traveler, Mahmud Danishwar praised him for his role in the progress of the State (Danishwar, 2006, 216). The English travel writer, Peter Mayne believed that Ataullah was “very important one” at during the reign of *Walis* of Swat (Mayne, 1955, 189). The American photographer, Margarate Bouke-White stated that he was “a scholarly man” (White, 1950, 12).

### **Ataullah in the Post-merger Period**

The *Walis* had great confidence and trust in the Chief Secretary during their ruling era that extended from 1917 to 1969. After the merger of the State, when the general elections of 1970 were held in the country, Wali Sahib stood firmly with Ataullah’s two sons, Ziaullah and Sanaullah. He used his influence for their electoral success, despite the fact that he was in exile from the State (Barth, 1985, 139). However, the sons of the ex-Chief Secretary could not succeed in the elections. Wali Sahib made an interesting comment about their electoral failure stating, “he [Ziaullah] was an alien, since his father came from Panjab... I guess I should say it was a blessing in disguise. If Ziaullah had been elected, he would have become minister and got very pompous” (Barth, 1985, 140). Miangul Abdul Haq Jahanzeb in his autobiography (that was recorded in April 1979 and published in 1985) expressed his critical views regarding some of his key officials and their conduct. He referred to the conduct of Ataullah in these words:

I am sorry to say, in the end after the merger of the State he [Ataullah] proved less than loyal. But for many years he worked very closely with me. *In due course he also became a very rich man, a multi-millionaire, developing very good business here [Italics mine]* and then spreading out into Muzaffarabad, Azad Kashmir (Barth, 1985, 42).

Wali Sahib further recorded:

It is not that kind of physical danger, or the pressure of work, that forms most of the burden of being a Ruler - I have always liked to work. It is the loneliness. From when I was a very small child, I have felt that. Being a Ruler, I feel different, apart. People respect me, and they still look to me as their leader. Yet I feel the distance...and your closest associates, people you have worked with your whole life: when circumstances change, they change. For example Ataullah: he

was my tutor, I knew him since 1923. I trusted him, my father trusted him. I knew he was with me through the difficult years of my estrangement with my father. For all these years he worked closely with me, up to the end of my rule he was close, I trusted him ... People turn about, I don't know why. Either they cannot get more benefit, or something. He is still living; he is a multi-millionaire from the business he developed here, under my protection. But now he never comes to me (Barth, 1985, 187).



Photo of the Chief Secretary, Ataulah

Courtesy: Muhammad Ismail Zabeeh (Glimpses of Swat)

## Conclusion

The pre-Swat State era lacked a viable administrative structure with clear lines of authority and the society was based on unwritten tribal rules and regulations. However, when Swat State was founded in the second decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century, an administrative system started evolving and gained ground. The governance system and administrative structure in the ruling era of Miangul Jahanzeb underwent significant improvements and was modernized. During the British era, the princely rulers had to communicate with the colonial rulers through official correspondence in English and it played a vital role in maintaining a close relationship between them. During the early years of Miangul Abdul Wadud's reign, he faced the challenge in finding employees with

proficiency in English. Thus he trained certain individuals and also hired services of aspirants from outside the State. Miangul Abdul Wadud, thus invited Ataullah popularly known as Wakil Sahib from Punjab, who had served as the tutor of his son previously. He started his service in the State as Secretary to the ruler of Swat State and won the trust of the *Walis* of Swat in due course of time. In the ensuing years, he was elevated to the post of Chief Secretary and became an integral part of the State's machinery. The Chief Secretary served for a period of more than four decades and acquired expertise in all aspects of the State. Due to his understanding of working mechanism of princely Swat, he grew in stature and prominence. He was kept at the top by the rulers in the 'order of precedence' and was given wide range of responsibilities. In the post-merger era, his sons made an attempt to succeed in electoral politics of Swat but met with failure. Wali Sahib in the later part of his life, expressed his displeasure over the conduct of Ataullah. Wali Sahib felt sorry that his close associate proved less than loyal and never came to him. Ataullah passed away in 1981 and was laid to rest in Saidu Sharif, Swat.

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