

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW AND ETHNOGEOGRAPHY OF THE SWAT VALLEY

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Swat Valley is the largest among the valleys of the Hindu Kush. It preserves wide variety of natural resources besides the treasuries of archeological, palaeontological and cultural heritage. People of the valley are very traditional and famous for their hospitality, providing social and physically safe environment to the tourists from all around the world. Three symbiotic ethnic groups, i.e., Pathans, Gujars and Kohistanis, each possessing and exploiting different ecological niches, inhabit the Swat River Catchment. An overview of the history and ethnogeography of people residing Swat River Catchment is highlighted in this paper.

Swat River Catchment spreads over 6226 square kilometre of mountainous terrain in between 34°30'-3°55' N and 71°45'-72°50' E. The valley basin is an eolian deposit of the coenozoic era, which is highly interrupted by alluvial activities particularly that of the Swat river. Administratively, the southern extremes of the valley come under the control of Malakand Agency and Dir District on the left and right banks of the Swat river, respectively. Whereas more than 80 percent of its area in the north comes under the administrative control of Swat District. Phytogeographically most of the area of the valley comes under the Sino-Japanese Region (Ali and Qaisar 1986; Ahmad and Sirajuddin 1996). The valley is bounded from all sides by the lofty Hindu Raj Mountains and is drained by a single watershed, i.e. the Swat River. The valley has altitudinal variations ranging from 600 m in the South to more than 6000 m in the north.

Historical reviews supported by the archeological evidence show that the valley of Swat was inhabited by man during the protohistoric era of 2400 to 2100 BC (Ali and Khan, 1991; Stacul, 1969). It remained under the powerful domains of a variety of civilizations, the most prominent among them is the Gandhara civilization (Khan 1999). The Chinese travellers, Fa Hein, Sang Yun, Hian Tsang and Wiking reported the area in the 5th to 8th century AD (McMahon and Ramsay, 1901 and Wylly, 1998). Fa Hien, who visited Swat area in 403 AD, reported its name as "Won-Chang" in Chinese synonymous to park in English and Udyana in Sanskrit (McMahon and Ramsay, 1901). He also reported that the language of the people of Swat was similar to that spoken by the ruling Gurjara (Gujars) in central India (Shah 1940). Swat remained for more than one thousand years under Buddhist and Brahman Maharajas whose engravings are still preserved on rocks in various parts of the valley.

The Swat Valley always remained self sufficient in natural resources and agricultural products and have therefore seen a variety of invaders marching towards its fertile land, whose remains are still preserved in the forms of people, ruins inside the earth strata and inscriptions and sculptures on the rocks. Muslims came here with the invasion of Mehmood of Ghazni, in the first century of the second millennium. The area was then sparsely populated. The animals and plant products like honey, milk products, dried fruit and vegetables, along with some marginal crop products were the main sources of subsistence. After Mehmood of Ghazna, Pukhtun tribes invaded the area.

Among them the final conquerors were the Yusufzais who invaded the Valley during the first quarter of the 16th century.

At the turn of the 20th century, Swat River Catchment was passing through a situation of sociopolitical anarchy. The valley had lost its political integrity. Its southern territory (Swat Ranizai) was under the administrative control of the British rule. Dir State controlled almost one third of its land on the right hand side of the Swat river. One third of the area on the left-hand side of the Swat river was exhibiting the tribal community system. The area of Swat Kohistan (the north of the valley) was under the political control of Kushwakht ul Mulk of Gizer. Internally the valley was facing a worse sociopolitical situation of enmity at each level i.e., from individuals to the communities of villages, tribes and areas (McMahon and Ramsay: 1901). Within this sociopolitical scenario the Swat State was organized in a part of the Valley during the first quarter of the 20th century. The establishment of Swat State brought about gross changes in the land tenure system, sociopolitical setup farming system and landscape floristics of the area. Complete ban on forest felling and hunting wild life was imposed. The Swat State regime imposed permanent land settlement. The permanent ownership changed the simple based agriculture into a complex fruit and vegetable culture causing vertical rise in the economic and sociopolitical situation of the local communities. Cropping pattern became more complex and the agricultural landscape of the area is passing through a transition from simple towards complex farming system (Ahmad 1999).

Presently, the area is occupied by more than 1.7 million of individuals, separable into three distinct ethnic groups (Barth, 1956), i.e. Pathans, Gujars and Kohistanis, exploiting different ecological niches and sharing the resources symbiotically.

Pathans, representing the Yousufzai and their serving class (who came to Swat during the first quarter of the 16th century), depends mainly upon arable agriculture/horticulture, exploit the deep soil of the alluvial plains generally. They mainly exploit the agroecology where irrigation systems are operated. The climate in the plains is rather hot in summer and generally two crops a year are harvested from their fields. Vegetation of the Pathans exploiting ecology is generally scrubby.

Gujars are pure Aryans in origin (Shah 1940; Anonymous 1978), though highly defused among Pathans and Kohistanis, exclusively occupy the foothills and high altitude areas. They represent

Table 1: Population Distribution in Swat River Catchment

S. No.	Administrative Unit	Population	Percentage
1.	District Swat	1,249,572	72.03
2.	Batkhela Tehsil	247,441	14.16
3.	Chak Dara Tehsil	235,920	13.80
	TOTAL	1,734,933	99.99

Source: Anonymous, 1998

the original tribes of the valley (Anonymous 2000; Bellew 1994). They practice both agriculture and livestock herding. They mostly comprise forest-associated communities and occupy colder climate, mostly supporting the monocrop culture.

Kohistanis are Dardic in origin (Barth, 1956), concentrated in the northern mountain gorges of Swat Kohistan. They mainly occupy the monsoon-excluded ecology of the sub-humid to dry temperate in nature. They practice both agriculture and livestock herding. Their area is too cold and one crop in a year is generally cultivated.

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