

# Socio-Economic Uplift In Swat After Its Merger With Pakistan

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## Abstract

Swat was merged with Pakistan 1969. Previously it enjoyed the status on an indecent princely state in India before partition and even in Pakistan for more than two decades. The socio-economic conditions of this state were better than the other areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It was after merger that a gradual decline in the socio-economic conditions of the people was clearly discernible. But soon after merger, the people of the valley started immigration to other parts of the world and foreign remittances were sent by them. Education also paved way to the social change and economic prosperity of the valley. This study aims at exploring the socio-economic uplift of the valley in the wake of its merger with Pakistan. It also takes into account the different factors that contributed to the said uplift. It highlights some of the negative trends in the society in Swat.

**Keywords:** Swat; Wali; merger; immigration; socio-economic.

## Introduction

Swat, which is commonly known as the Switzerland of Pakistan, is located in the northwest of the country (Yasin, 2009). It lies at a distance of 170 km in the northeast of Peshawar – the capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Previously North West Frontier Province). Total area of the district is 5337 sq. km. Nearly 497,969 acres of which is covered by forests. According to a survey in 2009, almost 86.62 percent of the people in the valley inhabit in the rural

areas while the urban population makes only 13.38 of the whole (Bangash, 2012). Saidu Sharif is its district headquarters while Mingora is the main town of the valley. It is famous for its fascinating land, crystal clear water torrents, the densely forested mountain, the snaking rivers, fertile land and minerals. Swat is archeologically and culturally a rich area. The valley has a variety of ethnic groups in which the Yousafzai<sup>1</sup> Pashtun clan is a dominant one. Beside Pashtuns, Gujars, Ajars, Sheppard, Mian and other ethnicities

are living in the valley. Pashtu is the predominant spoken language of Swat.

### **Socio-Economic condition**

The people of Swat are in a better socio-economic condition among the seven districts of Malakand division. Comparatively they have good standard of life, health and education facilities and better infrastructure. It is obvious that the former rulers of Swat state, Miangul Abdul Wadood alias Bacha Sahib and Miangul Jahanzeb alias Wali Sahib were devoted, patriots, committed and hard working. They did for the state and their people which they can do. Their policies, reforms and struggle had made Swat one of the developed state of Pakistan. Despite they ruled autocratically, they contributed much to the development of the area. Apart from the role played by these rulers, the fertile land, thick forests, tourism and natural resources also added to the development of the valley. But the dominant role played in the social and economic uplift of this valley has been played by the foreign remittances sent by immigrants of this princely state who work hard abroad. No doubt, their role is matchless.

In Swat valley, agriculture had been the biggest source of income of the area since long time. Before the government of Miagul Abdul Wadood, there was a unique system of land distribution among the tribes. According to this system, allotment of the land had to be made for ten, seven or five years. This system of land division was called Garzenda Wesh (moving division of the land) (Sultan-i-Rome, Land ownership in Swat: Historical and Contemporary Perspective). This system was abolished by Miangul Abdul Wadood in mid 1920s because of the fact that he considered it as

a hurdle in the way of social and economic uplift of the valley (Khan, 1963). Prior to the merger of this princely state into Pakistan, almost all the people of the valley depended on agriculture. Since 1917 till 1969, the largest source of State's revenue was Ushar,<sup>2</sup> which contributed about 78% of the State's revenue (Shirazi & Yasin, 2010). It was imposed on crops, vegetables and livestock (Sultan-i-Rome, Administrative System of the Princely State of Swat, 2006). In the agrarian society of Swat, land was the source of political and economic power and served the basis of subsistence and prosperity (Barth, 1959). State services, especially police and armed service were also a source of income as well as a sign of honor for the people. But excessive state interference was a perpetual source of concern for all the sections of the society. The dictatorial form of government had confined the people to grow properly. Under the state system landlordism, limitations on trade and business and absence of job security were main hurdles in the economic development of the area. Besides these, some sections of the society like Gujar, Ajar<sup>3</sup> and other lower classes were deprived of the land ownership and they had grievances in this regard.

Like the neighboring state, Dir, literacy rate in Swat state was almost nil before 1917. When Miangul Abdul Wadood became the ruler of Swat, he gave priority to education and different educational institutions were established. Along with modern education, religious education was also encouraged. But during his reign, literacy rate increased to a small extent. It was his son, Miangul Abdul Haq Jahanzeb who gave great importance to the promotion education. He gave special priority to education, and the number of schools increased under his rule. He financially assisted the construction of a

Christian missionary school (Zeb & Barth, 1985). During his rule from 1949 to 1969, he issued an order for the construction of 3 colleges, 36 High Schools, 30 Middle Schools and more than 270 primary schools and lower primary schools (Sultan-i-Rome, Swat State (1915-1969): From Genesis to Merger, 2008). The talented students were awarded with scholarship. This way the students started getting education across the country. Consequently, literacy rate increased to the encouraging level but female education was still very low. At that time, literacy rate was 7.1 percent for both the sexes, for males it was 12.4 percent and females only 1.3 percent (Sultan-i-Rome, Swat State (1915-1969): From Genesis to Merger, 2008).

People were still hesitant to enroll their children in school after the state was merged. In particular, sending girls to school was viewed as an affront and a dishonor. The worst of this crisis was in rural areas. Overall, compared to state time, the area made a small improvement in schooling. The value and significance of education gradually became apparent to the populace, who now prioritize and view it as essential. Though the Pakistani government only constructed a few new institutions, the fact that parents began enrolling their kids in schools and universities was encouraging. It was a commendable effort that gradually changed the educational landscape for the better. This transition was brought about by increased sociopolitical consciousness, prosperity, and national and international emphasis on education. People were drawn to school by social prestige and job chances for educated individuals. Above all, global mobility of people had a crucial part

After the merger of the princely state of Swat with Pakistan in 1969, writ of the government of Pakistan was extended to the valley. Special status was given to Swat under Provincially Administered Tribal Area (PATA) Regulation Act. Under

this act, relaxation was given in taxes. Industrialization and investment were encouraged and government services were increased. But this was only paper manifestation. After its merger, a large number of state's servants were forced to resign and their pensions were stopped. Old cases of land disputes were reopened which gave way to a new socio-economic disorder. The government gave assurance for the resolution of these disputes but could not succeed (Sultan-i-Rome, Swat State (1915-1969): From Genesis to Merger, 2008). Land reforms were also introduced by the government of Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhatti. In short, all these policies and reforms added nothing to the economic growth of the area. Serious economic degradation and backwardness were felt. Great expectations of the people were substituted by disappointment and frustration.

People began migrating in huge numbers to other nations towards the beginning of the 1970s. Many people travelled in quest of work to the Middle East, Far East Asia, Europe, and other nations. As a result, overseas remittances began to arrive in Swat, which helped to raise the standard of living for the locals. With the introduction of remittances from overseas, the socioeconomic circumstances of the population gradually changed. Increased prosperity led to a greater understanding of the importance of education in human life. Therefore, the promotion of education in Pakhtunkhwa in general and in Swat in particular was greatly aided by people's exposure to other environments abroad. Private schools started popping up in the neighbourhood in the middle of the 1980s, and as time went on, their numbers increased significantly. The residents of Swat began to care about educating their kids. Families that were unable to pay their daily expenditures prior to immigration are now enrolling their

children in the nation's priciest universities and colleges. Immigration has undoubtedly played a significant role in improving the Swat Valley's quality of life and educational opportunities.

The immigration and foreign remittances also had a great role in alleviating poverty and generating economic activities in the valley. Muzammil Shah<sup>4</sup> says that they were three brothers living in a small house. They could afford hardly their daily expenses. He remembered that several time they did not eat meal twice in a day. One of his brothers got employment in foreign country. Gradually his second brother went to foreign countries. He started a small business here at Mingora. Currently, they are in a far better economic condition” (Shah, 2014). After examining this and such other cases we can understand easily that foreign remittances have supported economically a number of families in Swat.

As discussed earlier, agriculture was the main source of income of the area. It has been playing vital role in the economy of the area up till now. But the economic condition of the tenant is the same as before. They hardly earn bread and butter and nothing more. Shams Uddin<sup>5</sup> says that he had a piece of land and a small house. He was cultivating that land and could hardly afford his expenditure. He went to UAE in 1992 and was working there as labor for two years. Then he started a small business in UAE. His savings and business increased gradually. He bought piece of land on road side in Swat and constructed a market there. Presently, he has a well-established business in UAE and owned sufficient land (Uddin, 2014).

With the passage of time, income and businesses of the people grew. People

built concreted houses and buildings. The life style of the people changed and public and private transportation increased tremendously and foreign goods and equipment started to flow into the area. Resultantly, a major change occurred in the economic structure of the society.

Swat's industrial sector is still being developed. It employs a smaller percentage of the local population. However, the development of Swat's socioeconomic system is aided by the industries. Investment in many businesses began in 1969, the year the state of Pakistan merged. After the merger, the silk industry was unable to expand, but the hotel industry saw growth, and locals also launched small and large-scale companies. Time passed, and each of these firms grew. It inspired the populace to invest more and more money in commerce and industry. In this way, industry and business aided in the socioeconomic growth of the region.

Like education, health sector has also developed in the area especially after 1990s in which immigrants played a major role. A Number of private hospitals have been established in various areas of the district. Mostly, people prefer private hospitals over government hospitals for good care and health facilities. It does not mean that every person in Swat has an easy access to health facilities. Even today, major portion of the society has small access to health care facilities. Infant mortality rate and death during delivery are very high. Awareness regarding health care in the people is very less. But a little bit improvement can be seen in health care after 1990s. Transport and communication system developed and number of private cars and vehicles are increasing day by day. It is obvious that expansion in transportation is a national phenomenon,

but the case of Swat is different from the rest of the country. The availability of non-custom-paid vehicles and flow of foreign remittances made it easy for an average income family to have their own car.

Immigration factor also has some negative impacts on the society in Swat. Particularly, the young generation has been spending money in destructive manner. The abundance of money made them lavish and erratic. Resultantly, negative competition takes place among the youth that causes social disorder in the society. Some time, in the absence of guardians and parents the youth remains unchecked and uncontrolled and they spend their resources in objectless activities and forget the value of education. Thus, their educational career exposes to danger and sometimes their education remains incomplete.

The paradise valley was severely impacted by a terrible militancy in the first ten years of the twenty-first century. The militants' main objective was to eradicate modern education from the region. 171 schools were destroyed by the Taliban (46 for boys and 125 for girls), and 105 were partially damaged (WB, 2009). Peace was restored following the government of Pakistan's successful military operation, Operation Rah-e-Rast (Right Path), and the rehabilitation of the schools was given special priority. With the aid of international aid for the devastated area, the repair of those entirely and partially damaged schools has already been finished. In both the district's urban and rural sections, an encouraging number of students are enrolled in public and private schools and universities. It is true that there are fewer people with college degrees in rural areas than in urban ones, but this is a national and even an international problem. Low female literacy rates are undoubtedly a hindrance to the expansion of education in the region.

## Conclusion

Swat's socioeconomic situation is not much different from that of the rest of the province's rural districts. Swat, which is still a part of PATA, is regarded as one of Pakistan's most underdeveloped regions. However, compared to Swat's bordering districts like Dir, Bunir, Shangla, and Kohistan, the education system, infrastructure, sociopolitical awareness, and access to basic requirements of life have improved. The policies of the past Swat state rulers, the fertile land, the natural resources, industrialization, tourism, migration, etc. are some of the elements that have influenced the socioeconomic growth of the Swat people.

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