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CONTINUITY OF INFLUENCE AFTER ABDICATION: MIANGUL ABDUL WADUD AND THE TAX EPISODE IN SWAT STATE ERA (1955-1956)

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Abstract

This article examines the persistence of informal authority after abdication through the case of Miangul Abdul Wadud as Wali of Swat and his interactions with the Government of Pakistan during the income tax dispute of 1955–56. Drawing on official correspondence, it analyzes the controversy arising from attempts by tax authorities to assess income on the basis of "world income," including assets within Swat State. The study argues that, despite his abdication in 1949 in favour of his son, Miangul Abdul Wadud retained significant informal influence, enabling him to shape administrative outcomes through formal appeals and personal networks. The response of political authorities, who emphasized the primacy of political considerations over fiscal enforcement, reveals the negotiated nature of state authority in the frontier princely entities. It contributes to broader debates on state formation by demonstrating how sovereignty and administrative integration remained contingent and negotiated rather than absolute.

Keywords

Swat State; Wali of Swat; Tax; Pakistan; Political Agent; Miangul Abdul Wadud

1. INTRODUCTION

Primary sources pertaining to the Swat State era (1915-1969) remain widely dispersed across a range of repositories, both institutional and private, within the country and abroad. A number of historical events relating to the Swat State era surface only fragmentarily within formal archival repositories in Pakistan. In many cases, official records

provide merely a cursory reference to an occurrence, without preserving the fuller documentary trail that would allow for a comprehensive reconstruction of the episode. While such references are valuable in establishing the occurrence of particular events, they frequently lack the accompanying correspondence and contextual documentation that would illuminate their causes, processes, and consequences. This absence of continuity in the archival record results in significant gaps in the historical narrative, leaving many episodes only partially understood. The missing layers of correspondence are essential for capturing the broader socio-political context in which these events unfolded. Consequently, such fragmentary documentation renders many aspects of the Swat State era incomplete and, at times, liable to oversimplification. The recovery and integration of dispersed or privately held sources, alongside a more systematic exploration of underutilized archival collections, are therefore crucial to reconstructing these episodes in their fuller historical essence.

A substantial body of literature has examined the integration of princely states into the successor states of South Asia following the end of British rule in 1947. These studies have generally focused on the accession, constitutional incorporation, administrative reorganization, and the extension of central authority into formerly autonomous political entities. The princely entities "have been notoriously absent from the historiography of South Asia" and are "treated as one homogenous group" (Bangash, 2015: 13). Rather, the princely states differed markedly in their origins, constitutional arrangements, administrative institutions, relationships with the British colonial state, and the political circumstances surrounding their accession after 1947 (Bangash, 2015: 14). Although the existing scholarship on Swat has significantly advanced our understanding of the state's political and administrative history, it has paid comparatively little attention to the informal relationships and personal networks that continued to shape political interactions after integration into Pakistan. The relationship of the central government with Swat State, was neither linear nor uniform; rather, it depended upon negotiation, accommodation, and collaboration with influential rulers whose authority persisted alongside formal institutions. This perspective is particularly relevant to the States in the Frontier, where governance combined state authority with indigenous leadership structures, making sovereignty a negotiated rather than absolute process. Viewed in this context, Swat State was not simply a peripheral territory but a dynamic arena in which formal authority and informal influence continuously intersected.

The present study developed on un-consulted correspondence highlights the important aspect of informal authority and political influence after the formal withdrawal of Miangul Abdul Wadud (reign 1917-1949) from rulership of Swat State. The study demonstrates that his relinquishment of official power does not necessarily signify the disappearance of his political relevance and that the former princely ruler of Swat continue to exercise considerable influence through personal prestige, patronage networks, symbolic authority, and longstanding relationships with the Pakistani state institutions. In addition to it, the article contributes to study of taxation and the capacity of governments to assert authority, regulate economic activity, and define political relationships between the centre and princely

rulers. The study also examines how authority was negotiated between a former ruler of Swat State and the Pakistani state in the years following the independence of Pakistan. In doing so, it contributes to broader debates on state formation by demonstrating that the incorporation of princely states into Pakistan was not solely a matter of formal constitutional arrangements but was also shaped by personal relationships and informal influence. The episode offers insights into post-princely authority by revealing how former rulers could continue to exercise political relevance and prestige long after relinquishing office, thereby challenging the assumption that abdication necessarily marked a complete withdrawal from public and political life.

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT: RULE AND ABDICATION OF MIANGUL ABDUL WADUD

For a proper understanding of this specific research, it is necessary to situate it within the broader historical background of the reign of Miangul Abdul Wadud and his relationship with the state of Pakistan. Miangul Abdul Wadud ruled the Swat State from 1917 to 1949, playing a foundational role in its political consolidation, administrative organization, and the establishment of centralized authority in the region (Barth, 1985: 58-59). His long tenure not only shaped the internal structure of the state but also defined its external relations, particularly during the transitional period marking the end of British paramountcy and the emergence of Pakistan in 1947. It is worth noting that Miangul Abdul Wadud served within the Pakistani era for a brief but significant period of two years, from 1947 to 1949 (Uddin, 2025: 24). During that time, his relationship with the Government of Pakistan have been marked by cordiality, cooperation, and mutual respect. His role in the post partition era of Pakistan extended beyond mere accession, encompassing active mobilization of support during the referendum of 1947, where he sent personal envoys and utilized his "moral and spiritual influence" to secure votes in favor of Pakistan. Financially, his contributions were substantial and varied, including direct support to the Muslim League and donations to national funds (Hussain, 1962). Thus the integration of Swat State into the new political framework was managed without overt conflict, reflecting both the pragmatic approach of the Pakistani state and thus the "interests of Swat and the rest of the country were not at variance" (Hussain, 1962: 127).

In 1949, Miangul Abdul Wadud abdicated power in favour of his son, Miangul Abdul Haq Jahanzeb, thereby formally withdrawing from direct governance (Barth, 1985, 104). With this transition, his direct interaction with the Pakistani administration ostensibly came to an end, and the affairs of the state were thereafter conducted under the leadership of the new Wali within an evolving administrative framework. The abdication might, at first glance, suggest a clear rupture in political engagement; however, as the subsequent evidence indicates, such a conclusion would be overly simplistic. Despite his formal withdrawal from power, Miangul

Abdul Wadud continued to engage with the Pakistani state and to exert a degree of influence in matters affecting his interests and status.

3. THE TAX EPISODE FROM THE LENS OF CONTINUITY OF INFLUENCE (1955-1956)

Before examining the fiscal correspondence of 1955–1956, it is important to note that a significant shift had occurred in the relationship between Pakistan and the Swat State in 1954. During the first seven years after independence, the Government of Pakistan largely refrained from intervening in the internal affairs of Swat, and its officials exercised considerable caution in their dealings with the state. This policy changed during the reign of Miangul Abdul Haq Jahanzeb, who had succeeded his father as Wali in 1949. The political settlement of 1954, marked by the promulgation of the Swat Interim Constitution Act, 1954 and the Supplementary Instrument of Accession, formally redefined Swat as a federated unit of Pakistan while introducing constitutional changes in its administrative relationship with the centre (Mayne, 1955: 155).

In 1955, a significant dispute emerged between the former ruler of Swat, Miangul Abdul Wadud (ruling era from 1917-1949) and the Government of Pakistan concerning the assessment of income tax on his private properties and financial assets. The present study draws upon a set of six key letters preserved on file at Tribal Affairs Research Cell (Peshawar), which are discussed here as primary evidence of the episode.[1] These documents collectively trace the evolution of the dispute, from the initial notices issued by the Income Tax Officer, to the formal protest and personal interventions by Miangul Abdul Wadud, and finally to the involvement of political and central authorities seeking to mediate the matter. Taken together, these letters provide valuable insight into the contested nature of fiscal authority, the persistence of informal influence after abdication, and the negotiated character of state integration in the early years of Pakistan. Rather than recounting each letter in chronological detail, the following discussion analyzes and interprets the correspondence thematically. By examining the documentary evidence through key analytical themes, it seeks to explain the mechanisms through which Miangul Abdul Wadud continued to exercise influence after his abdication and to draw broader conclusions regarding informal authority, frontier governance, and the relationship between the former princely rulers and the postcolonial Pakistani state.

The first notice issued by the Income Tax Officer, Nowshera, on 2 August 1955 illustrates this duality. While the letter required him to comply with statutory income tax obligations by declaring his "total World income", it simultaneously addressed him with the honorific "The Founder of Swat State" (No.1462-M, dated: 2/8/1955, Office of the Income Tax Officer,

[1] The Tribal Research Cell (TRC), Peshawar, is a major archival repository containing an extensive collection of primary sources relating to the former princely states and tribal areas of the erstwhile North-West Frontier Province, Pakistan.

Nowshera to the ruler of Swat State, File No.202-S.Sts, 6/Swat, Political Branch, Tribal Affairs Research Cell, Peshawar). This mode of official address is significant because it reflected an enduring acknowledgment of his historical and political stature despite the transfer of State's authority to his successor. His continued recognition and status became even more evident in subsequent official correspondence as the Political Agent observed that the Income Tax Officer's action had "seriously upset the Founder of Swat", while senior officials later recommended that "it is not advisable to compel the Founder of Swat and his son to disclose all their property in Swat" (Political Agent, Dir, Swat and Chitral, Malakand to Khan Saadullah Khan, Esquire, Political Secretary to The Governor, NWFP, Peshawar, D.O.No.3352-C/St-1, Dated: the 5th September, 1955, TARC). Such expressions indicate that governmental authorities did not regard him merely as a common citizen subject to ordinary administrative procedures. Rather, his identity as the founder of Swat State[2] continued to shape official perceptions and administrative responses. His symbolic authority therefore remained an important political resource long after his formal abdication. The correspondence also reveals an important tension between bureaucratic administration and political governance. The Income Tax Officer approached the matter strictly as a legal obligation, requiring the ex-ruler to submit returns of his "total World income" and comply with the provisions of Pakistan's income tax legislation. From the perspective of the fiscal bureaucracy, the issue was a routine matter of tax assessment. The ex Wali, however, interpreted the issue in fundamentally political terms and argued that the Income Tax Officer's actions represented "official interference in the internal affairs of the State" and warned that such measures were "bound to lead to most grave political consequences" (Copy of a D.O letter dated the 3rd September, 1955, from the Founder of Swat, to the Political Agent, TARC). He maintained that "political considerations precede monetary gains" and cautioned that the existing policy towards the frontier states should not be undermined by routine fiscal enforcement (Copy of a D.O letter dated the 3rd September, 1955, TARC, Peshawar). In his view, compelling members of the ruling family to disclose their worldly income would discourage investment and destroy the confidence that had encouraged capital to remain within Pakistan. The disagreement therefore extended beyond taxation itself. Whereas the Income Tax Department sought administrative uniformity under statutory law, Miangul Abdul Wadud framed the dispute as one involving political commitments, historical understandings, and the special constitutional position of the frontier states. The correspondence thus illustrates the coexistence and occasional conflict between bureaucratic rationality and political pragmatism in Pakistan's early administration.

The documentary evidence also demonstrates that Miangul Abdul Wadud exercised influence through well-established political and administrative networks. Rather than

[2] The debate surrounding the term "Founder of Swat State" has been briefly discussed in existing literature; however, its repeated inclusion in official government correspondence makes it particularly intriguing and underscores its potential for further scholarly debate and future research.

limiting himself to formal legal procedures, he communicated directly with senior political officials responsible for frontier administration. His appeal was addressed to the Political Agent, who subsequently forwarded the matter to the Political Secretary, thereby ensuring that his concerns reached higher governmental authorities. The Political Agent openly supported many of his concerns, recommending that "suitable instructions may kindly be issued to the Income Tax Officer, Nowshera" (Political Agent, Dir, Swat and Chitral, Malakand to Khan Saadullah Khan, D.O.No.3352-C/St-1, TARC, Peshawar). Later correspondence from the Tribal Affairs Department similarly requested that "necessary steps may please be taken for the exemption of the Founder of Swat State and his son from declaring their 'World Income'." These communications indicate that his representations received serious consideration within the highest administrative circles. Besides, the importance of personal relationships is further illustrated by his decision to send his Private Secretary, Talemand Khan, to discuss the matter directly with the Political Secretary (Ruler of Swat State to Political Secretary of Minister for Frontier States & Tribal Territory, Govt. of West Pakistan, TARC, Peshawar.). Rather than relying exclusively upon written correspondence, he employed his trusted official to facilitate personal engagement with the senior officials of the province. These interactions demonstrate that informal authority operated alongside formal bureaucratic procedures, with personal networks functioning as an important component of political influence.

A further theme that emerges from the official correspondence concerns the legal ambiguity surrounding the constitutional relationship between Pakistan and the Swat State. Miangul Abdul Wadud based his appeal upon Section 60 of the Pakistan Income Tax Act and argued that Pakistan should adopt an approach similar to that followed in India, where non-residents were not necessarily required to declare their worldwide income. More significantly, the Political Agent questioned the legal basis of the Income Tax Officer's actions, observing that "the Income Tax Act has not yet been made applicable to the Frontier States and Regions," making it "doubtful whether the Founder of Swat is liable to pay tax" on income derived from property within the state (Political Agent, Malakand to Esquire, Political Secretary to The Governor, NWFP, the 5th September, 1955, TARC, Peshawar.). This uncertainty transformed what appeared to be a straightforward fiscal matter into a constitutional question concerning the relationship between the central government and the frontier states. The correspondence therefore illustrates that sovereignty within Pakistan's frontier regions remained negotiated rather than absolute. Administrative decisions were shaped not solely by the statutory provisions of the country but also by political agreements, constitutional uncertainties, and the distinctive status of formerly autonomous princely states.

Finally, the correspondence demonstrates that taxation could not be separated from the internal politics of the ruling family. The Political Agent observed that Miangul Abdul Wadud had not submitted a list of his private property because he maintained that "as long as he was alive, he was the full owner of his property with powers to alienate it as permitted under the

Mohammadan Law" (Political Agent, to Khan Saadullah Khan, TARC). The issue therefore extended beyond taxation to questions concerning ownership, succession, and authority within the ruling household. The Political Agent further warned that continued pressure by the Income Tax Department might revive Miangul Abdul Wadud's suspicion that the matter represented "the revival of the old game at the instance of the Wali and with the connivance of the Government." He cautioned that compelling the former ruler to disclose his assets would "cause bad blood between the father and the son," thereby creating unnecessary political complications (Political Agent, Malakand to Khan Saadullah Khan, TARC). These observations reveal that fiscal administration in the frontier region was inseparable from broader political considerations. Government officials recognized that routine tax enforcement could affect not only state finances but also the stability of the ruling family and, consequently, the political order within Swat. The correspondence therefore demonstrates that frontier governance required continuous negotiation between bureaucratic objectives, dynastic politics, and the enduring influence of former ruler of Swat.

Interestingly, in his autobiographical reflections, Miangul Abdul Wadud offers a revealing insight into his post-abdication position, particularly concerning the question of financial entitlement and personal expenditure. Writing in the context of his retirement after 1949, he emphasizes a deliberate renunciation of state-supported privilege, noting that "at the time of retirement I did not apportion a Privy Purse to myself, nor have I asked for it afterwards" (Hussain, 1962: 132). This is significant within the broader framework of princely integration in South Asia, where privy purses were commonly institutionalized as a means of compensating former rulers following the transfer of sovereignty. Equally important is his assertion that "I just cannot bring myself to demand anything I may need" and rather than relying on state provisions, he highlighted his financial independence by stating that "I bear all my personal expenses from the revenue of my personal property." At the same time, Miangul Abdul Wadud maintained the continuity of his symbolic and social standing, observing that "nevertheless, I have been able to retain my status as the Founder and the first Ruler of Swat, and meet all the requirements of my position as such" (Hussain, 1962: 132). This suggests that, despite the absence of formal financial arrangements such as a privy purse, his position continued to carry expectations of representation, hospitality, and prestige. Taken together the above primary sources, illuminate an important dimension of Miangul Abdul Wadud's post-rulership identity: a conscious balancing of financial independence, personal dignity, and the preservation of status. In the broader historical context, they reinforce the argument that abdication did not entail a complete withdrawal from public life, but rather a reconfiguration of authority in which symbolic legitimacy and personal resources continued to sustain influence.

Although the six letters do not reveal the final resolution of the income tax dispute or the ultimate decision reached by the concerned authorities, leaving the episode archivally incomplete. Nevertheless, these documents provide sufficient evidence to reconstruct the principal contours of the dispute, the issues under negotiation, and the nature of the

interaction between the former ruler of Swat State and the Pakistani state during the early years following accession. More significantly, the correspondence demonstrates that the dispute extended well beyond a routine question of taxation. As the thematic analysis has shown, the letters illuminate the complex relationship between formal state authority and the enduring informal influence exercised by Miangul Abdul Wadud after his abdication. Although he no longer occupied the position of ruling sovereign, his political stature, historical legitimacy, and personal prestige continued to command exceptional respect among the government officials. The correspondence consistently reflects a tone of deference and careful diplomatic engagement rather than the detached bureaucratic language typically associated with ordinary tax assessments. This suggests that the issue was approached not merely as a legal or fiscal matter but as one carrying broader political implications. The correspondence therefore illustrates how bureaucratic decision-making in the early post-independence period remained shaped not only by statutory regulations but also by considerations of political expediency, regional stability, and the management of influential local elites.

These historical sources highlight that Miangul Abdul Wadud's political relevance after his abdication was not merely symbolic. Rather, he was able to sustain his influence through various means even after relinquishing formal authority. He continued to exercise his authority through different channels. The most significant mechanism behind his continued influence was his widely acknowledged status as the founder of the Swat State, primarily due to his extraordinary role in introducing numerous reforms and successfully establishing various state institutions and departments (Qasmi, 1940, 59). Consequently, the stature and prestige that he had accumulated during his more than three decades of rule did not diminish with his abdication. Similarly, he continued to enjoy access to Pakistan's political intermediaries, who frequently met him during their visits to the Swat State, thereby facilitating cooperation and coordination (Hussain, 1962: Appendices, viii). Through these interactions, he was able to communicate his concerns, which subsequently reached the higher governmental authorities. In addition, Miangul Abdul Wadud maintained close relations with the ruling elite soon after partition. At a time when the Government was engaged in consolidating its authority over the newly integrated frontier states and maintaining political stability, he remained closely associated with government officials and continued to promote cordial relations with the central government. The exceptional regard in which Miangul Abdul Wadud and the Swat administration were held by senior political officials is evident from the correspondence of the Political Agent. The P.A offered an emphatic endorsement of Miangul Abdul Wadud's administration, describing the state as "a haven of peace" where prosperity was increasing, revenues were being invested in roads, schools, and hospitals, and public contentment was widespread. Such an unequivocal defence by a senior administrator illustrates the extraordinary confidence that political authorities placed on him and demonstrates the close relationship that continued to shape official attitudes towards him in the years that followed (Letter No. 888-s, dated 4th

December 1948, by Political Agent of Chief Commissioner NWFP, File No. 74/ Swat, TARC, Peshawar). Taken together, these factors demonstrate that Miangul Abdul Wadud's continued influence after his abdication was firmly grounded in the political realities of the time and in the significant role he had played during his rule in shaping the landscape of the State.

4. CONCLUSION

The significance of the tax episode (1955-1956) lies not in the final outcome of the dispute, which remains unknown because of the absence of later correspondence in the file, but in what the surviving letters reveal about the nature of political authority in the early years of Pakistan. At first sight, the case appears to concern a routine question of income tax. A closer reading of the correspondence, however, shows that it was much more than a fiscal matter. The issue developed into a broader political question involving the relationship between the newly established Pakistani state and a former ruler whose formal ruling authority had ended but whose personal influence remained intact. The letters clearly demonstrate that government officials did not deal with Miangul Abdul Wadud as they would have dealt with an ordinary taxpayer. Instead, they recognized his unique historical position as the founder of the Swat State and carefully considered the wider political consequences of every administrative step they proposed to take. The correspondence further suggests that the integration of Swat State into Pakistan did not mark a sudden or complete break with the past. Although sovereignty had formally passed to Pakistan and constitutional changes had altered the state's legal position, political relationships developed during the princely period continued to influence official decision-making. Miangul Abdul Wadud retained his influence, that, rested not on constitutional office but on the reputation, legitimacy, and personal relationships that he had built during more than three decades of rule. The transition from princely rule to integration was thus marked by continuity as well as change. The case also demonstrates that the early Pakistani state did not rely exclusively on legal provisions and bureaucratic procedures when dealing with the former frontier states. Instead, administrative decisions were frequently shaped by political realities. Officials recognized that rigid enforcement of legal rules could create unnecessary tensions, not only with influential former rulers but also within politically sensitive frontier regions. More broadly, this episode encourages a different understanding of the integration of the princely states into Pakistan. The process should not be viewed simply as a constitutional event completed through Instruments of Accession, legal enactments, or administrative reforms. It was also a political process that required negotiation, mutual accommodation, and the careful management of relationships with regional elites whose authority remained significant even after accession. The personal prestige, historical legitimacy, informal networks and influence also played an important role in shaping political interactions after integration.

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