

**SOME ASPECTS OF THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE
NORTH-WEST FRONTIER PROVINCE
AN OVERVIEW IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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Some Aspects of the Geography of the North-West Frontier Province An Overview in Historical Perspective*

**“The geography of a country shapes its history
just as surely in the East as in the West.”
Thomas Holdich**

**“The North-West Frontier is a well-defined region
with a long and unique history.”
David Dichter**

Introduction

Being the juncture of the three prominent and significant geographical regions and entities of Asia rather the world, namely South Asia, Central Asia and China, the North-West Frontier Province of formerly British India and the present-day Pakistan is a significant and geo-strategic area of the world. The settled areas of the Province became an integral part of British India in 1849 when the English annexed them as being a part of the then Sikh Kingdom of Punjab.¹ Whereas the tribal areas, both the present-day Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (PATA), were later on brought under a sort of British protectorate and loose control. Nevertheless, the then Princely States that existed in the areas of the present-day PATA held somewhat different status. The area remained a part of the province of Punjab of British India, till its separation from Punjab was at last decided, and in November 1901 it was made a separate province, with the name of the North-West Frontier Province, during the viceroyalty of Lord Curzon.² In this article an attempt has been made to

*This article will form part of the author's book on the history of the North-West Frontier Province.

¹For detail see Sultan-i-Rome, *History of NWFP: Selected Topics* (forthcoming), chap. 4.

²For details see C. Collin Davies, *The Problem of the North-West Frontier, 1890-1908: With a Survey of Policy since 1849*, 2nd edn. revised and enlarged (London: Curzon Press, 1975), chap.

present an overview of some aspects of the geography of the Province in historical perspective.

Location

The Province is situated between 31° 4' and 36° 57' north latitude and between 69° 16' and 74° 7' east longitude on the world map. The extreme length of the Province between the parallels is 408 miles and the maximum breadth between the meridians is 279 miles.³ According to James W. Spain the distance between the Indus and the mountain crest in the focal central section is hardly ever 100 miles.⁴ Whereas David Dichter states that the minimum breadth is “something less than 60 miles in Kohat District.”⁵

The sources neither give actual area of the Province nor do their approximately given area is the same. The same is also the case in respect of both the settled and tribal areas. For example according to Lal Baha total area of the Province being approximately 39,000 square miles. Among which total area of the Settled Districts was about 13,419 square miles and that of the Tribal Agencies 25,500 square miles.⁶ Whereas the *Imperial Gazetteer of India* states that the approximate area of the Province is 38,665 square miles, of which only 13,193 are Settled Districts and the reminder, i.e. 25,472 square miles, are the Tribal Areas.⁷ According to James W. Spain the total area of the Province is approximately 39,259 square miles in which the Tribal Areas cover 25,140 square miles and the Settled Districts 14,119 square miles.⁸ Whereas Abdul Qayum Khan states that according to the census report of 1941 the Tribal Areas cover an area of 24,986 square

6; Lal Baha, *N.-W. F. P. Administration under British Rule, 1901-1919* (Islamabad: National Commission on Historical and Cultural Research, 1978), chap. 1; Sultan-i-Rome, *History of NWFP: Selected Topics* (forthcoming), chap. 7.

³*Imperial Gazetteer of India, Provincial Series, North-West Frontier Province* [henceforward *IGIPSNWFP*], reprint (Lahore: Sang-e- Meel Publications, 1991), p. 1.

⁴James W. Spain, *The Pathan Borderland*, reprint (Karachi: Indus Publications, 1985), p. 21.

⁵David Dichter, *The North-West Frontier of West Pakistan: A Study in Regional Geography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 8.

⁶Baha, *N.-W. F. P. Administration under British Rule*, pp. 1, 2.

⁷*IGIPSNWFP*, p. 1.

⁸Spain, *The Pathan Borderland*, pp. 21-22.

miles and the Settled Districts an area of 14,263 square miles,⁹ the total of which comes to 39,249 square miles.

At its formation as a separate province, the Hindu Kush Range/Afghanistan bounded the Province on the north, Baluchistan and the Dera Ghazi Khan area of the Punjab on the south, Kashmir and the Punjab on the east and Afghanistan on the west.¹⁰ Whereas at present it is bounded by the Hindu Kush Range/Afghanistan on the north, Afghanistan on the west, Zhob and Musa Khel districts of Baluchistan and Dera Ghazi Khan district of Punjab on the south and Leiah, Bhakkar, Mianwali, Attock and Rawalpindi districts of the Punjab,¹¹ Kashmir and Northern Areas on the east. A part of the Indus Kohistan and the Hazara area of the Province lay in the cis-Indus region or in other words is located on the eastern or left side of the Indus. Whereas the remaining area is in the trans-Indus region or in other words is situated on the west or right side of the Indus.

Political Division

The Province was and still is divided into two political divisions namely the Settled Areas or Administrative Districts and the Political Agencies or Tribal Areas. At the time of its formation the Settled Districts comprised of the five districts of Hazara, Peshawar, Kohat, Bannu and Dera Ismail Khan. Whereas the Political Agencies were the Agency of Dir, Swat and Chitral; Khyber Agency; Kurram Agency; North Waziristan Agency; and South Waziristan Agency. Besides its boundaries with the surrounding neighbouring areas the Province has another internal political boundary which separated and still separates the settled and tribal areas.¹²

⁹Abdul Qaiyum, *Gold and Guns on the Pathan Frontier* (Bombay: Hind Kitabs, 1945), p. 45.

¹⁰*IGIPSNWFP*, p. 1.

¹¹It is to be noted that on most of the eastern side it is basically the Indus that separates the North-West Frontier Province from Punjab. However, the said districts of Punjab borders the Indus in the respective area and hence borders the Province in a sense.

¹²Baha, *N.-W. F. P. Administration under British Rule*, pp. 1-2. It is to be noted that Lal Baha has sometimes mentioned Malakand Agency but the official name of the Agency was at its formation the Agency of Dir and Swat and latter on when Chitral was affiliated with the Agency it was renamed the Agency of Dir, Swat and Chitral, the name with which she too has mentioned the Agency at occasions.

The Agency of Dir, Swat and Chitral included the princely states of Chitral, Dir and later on the newly emerged Swat State, and the Malakand Protected Area or as it is commonly called the area of the Malakand Agency. The mentioned areas of the Agency of Dir, Swat and Chitral along with a portion of the cis-Indus Hazara and Kohistan Area were made as Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (PATA) under the Interim Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1972¹³ and the status was retained under the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973.¹⁴

There was and still is a second kind of Tribal Areas known as the Frontier Regions (FR), which were and still are connected with the adjoining Settled or Administrative Districts for the administrative purposes. FR Kurram, however, is a third Sub-Division of the Kurram Agency. Some of these areas such as Orakzai and Mohmand have however been made separate Agencies. These areas (Frontier Regions), however, have not been subservient to the formal laws and administrative system in vogue in the Settled Districts, with which they are connected, but are considered as Tribal Areas and hence were and still are governed under the special laws applicable to the Tribal Areas, though under the Deputy Commissioners (DCs) now District Coordinator Officers (DCOs) of the respective districts. These Frontier Regions are now FR Dera Ismail Khan, FR Tank, FR Bannu, FR Lakki, FR Kohat, FR Peshawar and FR Kurram Agency.¹⁵

Geographical Division and Physical Features

The Province has been divided into three main geographical divisions namely the cis-Indus Indus Kohistan and Hazara region; the comparatively narrow strip between the Indus and the hills, constituting the then trans-Indus settled districts of Peshawar, Kohat, Bannu and Dera Ismail Khan; and the rugged mountainous region on the north and west between the four trans-Indus settled districts and the border of Afghanistan, namely the

¹³Article 260, *The Interim Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1972* in Safdar Mahmood, *Constitutional Foundations of Pakistan* (Lahore: Publishers United Ltd., n.d.), p. 720.

¹⁴See *The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan [Passed by the National Assembly of Pakistan on the 10th April, 1973 and Authenticated by the President of the National Assembly on the 12th April, 1973]* in Mahmood, *Constitutional Foundations of Pakistan*, p. 880.

¹⁵For details see Sher Muhammad Mohmand, *FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan): A Socio-Cultural and Geo-Political History*, n.p., n.d.

tract that comprised the Tribal Areas,¹⁶ now divided into Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (PATA).

The physical features of the Province vary in respect of different localities. The northern area of the cis-Indus Hazara region formed a wedge extending northeastwards and tapering to a narrow point at the head of the Kaghan valley. The mountain chains that enclose the Kaghan defile sweep southwards into the broader portion of the District. Towards the base of the wedge, adjoining Punjab, the hills open out and fertile plains take the place of the terraced hillsides and forests of the northern uplands of the District.¹⁷

The four Settled Districts in the trans-Indus region, from north to south, were Peshawar, Kohat, Bannu and Dera Ismail Khan. Each of these Districts comprised a minor natural division. The Peshawar District situated in the north was plain on the whole encircled by hills. To its south was the Kohat District, a rugged tableland broken by low ranges of hills. There have also been some relatively fertile valleys. The Salt Range situated in the District made the internal communications difficult, beyond which lie the sandy plain. The Jowaki Range separated it from Peshawar. To the south of Kohat was the Bannu District, which was situated in the broad basin of the Kurram River and was completely surrounded by low ranges. Despite the arid character of the surrounding area good agriculture yield was made possible due to irrigation and crop rotation. In the south of Bannu stretched the southernmost district of the Province namely Dera Ismail Khan. It was a vast expanse of barren and stony plain enclosed between the Sulaiman Range and the Indus. It tapered to a blunt point at its southern extremity. There, however, also have a fertile strip along the Indus and a clayey deposit called *daman* (plain) along the lower slopes. These five districts have been mainly plain areas comprised of both cultivable and non-cultivable and irrigated and non-irrigated lands.¹⁸ The areas of the five districts now constitute the districts of Batgram, Mansehra, Abbottabad, Haripur, Swabi, Mardan, Nowshera, Charsada, Peshawar, Kohat, Hangu, Karak, Lakki, Bannu, Tank and Dera Ismail Khan. Besides, Indus Kohistan has also been given the status of a district in 1976, which is comprised of both the right and left hand areas of the Indus Kohistan.

¹⁶*IGIPSNWFP*, p. 1.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 2; Spain, *The Pathan Borderland*, p. 23.

The tribal territory, lying between the Indus and the Settled Districts on the one side and the Durand Line on the other, varied in composition and have been wilder and more rugged in character. It contained terrain, rugged and rocky areas, and wild lofty mountains with narrow, deep, remote and less accessible fertile valleys. In the tribal areas on the north, in the Agency of Dir, Swat and Chitral the territory of Chitral was mountainous with deep valleys and lofty ranges. Most part of Chitral has been bare and treeless. In the south of Chitral has the hilly areas of Dir and Bajawar, which have thickly wooded hills, and the fertile valleys of the Swat and Panjkora rivers, which have been famous for bumper crops and high yield of both grain and fruits as well as a variety of medicinal plants. The territory that fall in the Agency of Dir, Swat and Chitral was more penetrated into the Himalayas than that of the Hazara District on the left bank of the Indus.¹⁹ The territory of Swat Kohistan, Shangla and right hand Indus Kohistan has also been mountainous and thickly forested. But the country of Buner has been mostly plain but less yield giving because of scanty water. The areas of the Agency of Dir, Swat and Chitral now constitute the districts of Chitral, Upper Dir, Lower Dir, Swat, Shangla, Buner, and the right hand portion of the Kohistan District, and Malakand Protected Area (commonly called Malakand Agency) with status of a district.

On the southwest of the Agency of Dir, Swat and Chitral have been the Mohmand country, a rough and rocky tract, which also extends into Afghanistan, mostly without vegetation and difficult for communication. In its south have been the territory of the Khyber wherein lies the famous Khyber Pass. In the south of the Khyber area have been the rugged and mountainous area of Tirah, wherein also lie fertile little valleys and which on the western extremity of its northern border have been bordered by the Safed Koh (White Mountain). Most of the Tirah highlands have also been less accessible. To the west of the Tirah, which lie in the Khyber Agency, has been the fertile Kurram valley. It stretched southeastward along the Kurram river from the peak of the Sikaram and the Peiwar Kotal Pass to the western extremity of the Miranzai valley. Divided into upper

¹⁹Baha, N.-W. F. P. *Administration under British Rule*, p. 2; IGIPSNWFP, p. 2; Spain, *The Pathan Borderland*, pp. 23-24.

and lower Kurram valley by a spur of the hills, the Kurram valley have been famous for bumper crops of fruits and the medicinal plant, artemesia.²⁰

Below or in south of the Kurram valley has been the territory of Waziristan, divided into the Political Agencies of North and South Waziristan. The Waziri country has been comprised of a mass of hilly areas, the Tochi valley and the plain of Wana. The Tochi valley have been divided into upper and lower parts by a spur of the hills which come down to the bed of the Tochi river, the river from which the valley took its name. From Kaniguram in North Waziristan a series of steep gorges lead in the hills to the Wana plain in South Waziristan. The Gomal River also intersected the hills in the southern area and has been providing the famous route from Afghanistan to Dera Ismail Khan, Baluchistan and lower Punjab. The valleys of the North and South Waziristan have been broaden out into plains, formed fertile and well-irrigated dales and some of the higher hills have been wooded, but the hills have been mostly barren and treeless, from the border of the Kurram valley in the north till their merger with the Sulaiman Range in the south.²¹ As mentioned earlier the territories of the then Agency of Dir, Swat and Chitral have been made part of PATA, but instead of remaining four Agencies there are now seven Political Agencies namely the Agencies of Bajawar, Mohmand, Khyber, Orakzai, Kurram, North-Waziristan and South Waziristan, which are also called Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and has still a separate status under the Constitution of 1973.

Mountains

There has been the confused mass of mountains, formed by the meeting of the Outer and Mid-Himalayan ranges in the cis-Indus part of the Province. Two mountain ridges run from this mass of mountains, which enclose Kaghan, in unbroken lines till they meet at the Babusar Pass (13,589 feet). On the western side of the Indus the mighty range of the Hindu Kush run almost due east and west along the north eastern and eastern frontiers of the Province. The Hindu Kush Range meets at its northeastern corner with a continuation of the Outer Himalayan chain, which crosses the Indus above the Kaghan valley. Minor

²⁰IGIPSNWFP, p. 2; Spain, *The Pathan Borderland*, p. 24.

²¹IGIPSNWFP, p. 2; Spain, *The Pathan Borderland*, pp. 24-25.

ranges descend from this chain in the north-westerly direction, traversing Bajawar and Swat, till they meet the curved range of the hills which connects the Mid-Himalaya with the Safed Koh and encircles the Peshawar valley on the north.²²

A long broken line of mountains run almost due south from the Dorah Pass in the Hindu Kush, which separates the Province from Kafiristan and farther south also from other parts of Afghanistan. The Hindu Kush and the two ranges which run southward from the Hindu Kush enclose the Agency of Dir, Swat and Chitral. And the minor ranges that descend from these ranges have filled the intervening space. The western line of these ranges are merged in the Khyber hills, which forms eastern extremity of the Safed Koh.²³

The Safed Koh runs almost due east and west and has formed the watershed between the Kabul and Kurram rivers. Minor ranges descend from the southern slopes of the Safed Koh, in the eastward, to the Indus, which forms the Chirat hills. Whereas the Sulaiman Range, wherein lie the famous Takht-e-Sulaiman (Solomon throne) run up the western border of the Province to meet the Safed Koh. It also throws out a series of parallel spurs to east, which has traversed the whole of the Kohat District (the latter Kohat Division). The Sheikh Budin Range, which has been the southern extremity of the Salt Range, formed the boundary between Bannu and Dera Ismail Khan and has eventually been merged into the Sulaiman Range.²⁴

Besides, the Black Mountain is a mountain range on the north-western border of the Hazara region of the Province, which has a length of 25 to 30 miles from north to south and an elevation of 8,000 feet above the sea level. Another famous hill is the Mahabanr, which is situated on the right bank of the Indus at the eastern end of a spur of the Ilam Range.²⁵

There are also the low mountains of the Khyber hills, running southwards with the Tartarra Peak (about 6,800 feet); the Jowaki Range, an extension of the Safed Koh and which has separated the Peshawar and Kohat regions, with the Kohat Pass; the spur of

²²*IGIPSNWFP*, p. 3.

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

²⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 107-108.

hills that divide the Kurram valley into upper and lower portions; the low ranges of the hills and the extension of the Salt Range that intrudes into the southern and eastern portions of the Kohat region; the rough and broken Wazir hills of both the North and South Waziristan areas; and the western Sulaiman hills in the Dera Ismail Khan region.²⁶ Besides, there are hills that extend down into Dir, Swat, Shangla, Buner and Bajawar, among whom the famous ones are the Morah and the Ilam ranges.

James W. Spain nicely observes:

Perhaps the most important point to be made about the Frontier hills is that, although they are a barrier, they are a barrier with many and major qualifications. First, they are occupied. . . . Secondly, there are many natural routes through the barrier, of which the Khyber is only one. Thirdly, no power – including that of British India at its height – has ever been able to establish full control over the people and the passes of the hills. Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India at the beginning of the twentieth century, accepted these facts and formally divided the tribal area off from the rest of India as a marchland. This has been its role throughout history.²⁷

Passes

H. C. Verma states that like other natural geographical features, the mountain passes contribute towards moulding and shaping of the historical pattern of a region. Frequent movements of the people through the mountain passes not only break isolation of different ways of life but broaden the political horizon of man and make him understand other cultures. Battles for the passes in the regions now forming Afghanistan and Pakistan were not only a prelude to encroachment over the interior of these regions but that of the Indian subcontinent as well, because whosoever captured these passes got an edge over their opponents.²⁸

The mountains that lie on the north and northwest of the North-West Frontier Province and formed the boundary between Afghanistan and the Province have some of the very important passes. As mountain passes have played important role throughout history, the passes that are found in the mountains of the aforementioned areas gave great strategic and political importance to the Province not only after its formation as a separate

²⁶Spain, *The Pathan Borderland*, pp. 22-24.

²⁷Ibid., p. 27.

²⁸H. C. Verma, *Medieval Routes to India: Baghdad to Delhi, A Study of Trade and Military Routes* (Lahore: Book Traders, n.d.), p. 261.

Province but also to the region throughout its known history. These passes ended seclusion of the area; exposed it to external cultural and political influences; and served as routes for trade between Central and South Asia and for invasion from Central Asia over India and vice versa. James W. Spain observe that “since these passes and river valleys have played such a great part in history and are so essential to the maintenance of any kind of life in the wild mountain barrier through which they run, they are still worthy of note.”²⁹

Among these passes Baroghil (12,000 feet high) and Dorah passes lie in Chitral in the northern zone of the Hindu Kush ranges and lead into the Pamir and Afghanistan respectively. Towards the south is the route from the Kunar valley into Bajawar, Swat and the plains of the Province³⁰ through the Malakand, Shahkot, Morah and Karakar passes. It was through this route that Alexander the Great leaded the portion of his forces, commanded by he himself, for an attack over the subcontinent. In the Khyber Agency, in the south zone of the Hindu Kush, is the famous Khyber Pass (3,373 feet high), which, opines James W. Spain, is perhaps the most historic “of all the passes of the world.” The Khyber Pass passes through the Khyber hills for thirty-two miles on almost direct line between Peshawar and Kabul and is the leading pass and main route of communication between Afghanistan and South Asia.³¹

The Piwar Kotal and the Shutargardan passes lie further south in the Kurram valley. These passes lead to Kabul and Ghazni respectively but have been mainly used for ordinary or local communication. The Tochi and Gomal passes in the further south also have their role: strategic, political and commercial. Although James W. Spain has termed the Gomal Pass as “the wildest and most isolated of the routes through the Frontier hills” it is no less significant for its use for trading purposes and also for the provision of access to lower Punjab and Sindh.³² It was through the Gomal Pass that most

²⁹Spain, *The Pathan Borderland*, p. 25.

³⁰Baha, N.-W. F. P. *Administration under British Rule*, p. 3.

³¹Spain, *The Pathan Borderland*, p. 25.

³²Baha, N.-W. F. P. *Administration under British Rule*, p. 3; Spain, *The Pathan Borderland*, pp. 26-27.

of the invasions of Mahmud of Ghazna³³ and Muhammad Ghauri³⁴ in Punjab, Sindh and beyond in India were made.

Besides the above mentioned main passes which are mostly situated in the hills bordering Afghanistan, there is a number of other passes in these hills which were a source of local communication and links but of no great fame and historic significance. A number of passes have also been found in the hills inside the Province, which also have their role and significance from strategic, commercial and communication aspects. Some of these passes are the following:

Babusar Pass (13,000 feet high), which connects Kaghan valley with Gilgit. The Lowari Pass (more than 10,000 feet high), which links Chitral with Dir, Swat and onward with Peshawar plain and the subcontinent. The Katgala Pass linking Bajawar and Dir with Swat and onward with the plains of the subcontinent through the Malakand Pass and vice versa. It also is a source of link onward in the other direction with Afghanistan. The Malakand Pass, where the mighty British arms were strongly resisted in 1895 and heavily fought against in 1897 for seven days³⁵ and which is the main source of link between Chitral, Dir and Swat on the one side and the Province and the subcontinent on the other. The Morah and Shah Kot passes, which are situated in the Morah hills on the southern border of Swat and held great strategic and commercial importance in the past. The Karakar Pass, which is the main pass between Buner and Swat and where the mighty forces of Akbar the Great (the Mughal Emperor of India from 1556 to 1605) met disaster in 1586 at the hands of the tribesmen.³⁶ Kotkay Pass, which links Swat with Shangla and

³³For Mahmud of Ghazna or Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi and his exploits in India see Muhammad Nazim, *The Life and Times of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna*, With Foreword by Thomas Arnold, reprint, Lahore: Khalil & Co., 1973; Mohammad Habib, *Sultan Mahmud of Ghaznin: A Study*, 1st Pakistani edn., Lahore: Universal Books, 1978.

³⁴For Muhammad Ghauri and his exploits in India see S. M. Ikram, *A History of Muslim Civilization in India and Pakistan: A Political and Cultural History*, 6th edn. (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1994), chap. 3.

³⁵For somewhat detail of the Malakand wars of 1895 and 1897 see Sultan-i-Rome, "The Malakand Jihad (1897): An Unsuccessful Attempt to oust the British from Malakand and Chakdara," *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* (Karachi), Vol. 43 (Part. 2, April 1995), pp. 171-86. Also see H. L. Nevill, *Campaigns on the North-West Frontier*, reprint (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2003), chaps. 12-16.

³⁶Ahmad Hasan Dani, *Peshawar: Historic City of the Frontier*, [2nd edn.] (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1995), p. 102 cf. Vincent A. Smith, *Akbar: The Great Mogal* [Mughal], 2nd

onwards with China through the present-day Qaraquram Highway. The Ambela Pass, which links Buner with Mardan and where the mighty British forces were strongly resisted in 1863 for about two months at the time of the Ambela Campaign in which about one-tenth of the British armed forces, that took part in the Campaign, either perished or wounded in the Pass alone, and which is besides those who were invalidated “from exposure or who died of disease,” which is a record loss to the British in her wars in India.³⁷ Kohat Pass or Kohat Kotal, which links Peshawar valley and upper parts of the Province with Kohat and other southern parts of the Province and also onward with Lower Punjab, Sindh and Baluchistan.

Rivers

Rivers have pivotal role in preserving life and also in the development and progress of civilizations. The North-West Frontier Province has been blessed by this natural source of life, which not only contribute largely to the livelihood of the inhabitants of the Province but also to the areas outside the Province. The main rivers of the Province are the Indus, Kabul River, Swat River, Kurram River, and the Gambila or Tuchi River. There, however, are a number of other small rivers as well.

Indus: With its head in Tibet the Indus flows through Kashmir and enters the North-West Frontier Province in the north of the Black Mountain, near Darband at the western base of the Mahabahr Mountain. It is the main river and drains the entire area of the Province; the Kunhar river – flowing through the Kaghan valley into the Jhelum River – however not making its tributary. In the north the Indus divides the Province from Chilas for some miles. Towards the south it divides the Indus Kohistan into two

edn. revised and enlarged, 1st Indian reprint (New Delhi: S. Chand & Co., 1958), p. 168; Olaf Caroe, *The Pathans: 550 B.C.–A.D. 1957*, reprint (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 215-17; Saranzeb Swati, *Tarikh Riyasat-e-Swat* (Pashto) (Peshawar: Azeem Publishing House, 1984), p. 68. Also see Mahomed Kasim [Muhammad Qasim] Ferishta, *History of the Rise of the Mahomedan [Muhammadan] Power in India, till the Year A.D. 1612*, trans. John Briggs, Vol. 2, reprint (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1977), pp. 259-60.

³⁷For somewhat details about the significance of the Ambela Campaign for the British, the fighting and the significant losses see W. W. Hunter, *The Indian Musalmans*, with Introduction by Bimal Prasad, reprint (New Delhi: Rupa & Co, 2002), chap. 1. Also see Lord Roberts, *Forty-one Years in India: From Subaltern to Commander-in-Chief*, New Edition in One Volume, With Forty-four Illustrations (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1898), chap. 35; Caroe, *The Pathans*, chap. 22.

parts and then separates the Hazara region from the rest of the Province. Further south it separates the Province from Punjab and has formed its eastern boundary for about 200 miles. However, the Isa Khel Tahsil of the Mianwali District of the Province of Punjab has been on its western side. The Indus has been the great natural waterway of the Province. Besides its other tributaries, which feed it before it enters the Province, it has tributaries inside the Province as well. Its tributaries in the Province includes the Uran, Siran, Dor, and Harroh on the eastern side in the Hazara region; Barandu which flows from Buner and joins the Indus near Amb; and the Landai and Kurram rivers are its main and significant tributaries in the Province on its western side.³⁸

It is over the Indus that the multi-purpose Tarbela Dam has been constructed in the Province, which provides water for irrigation, is used for generating hydroelectric power and is a source of fish product. Similarly the Ghazi-Barutha Canal has also been taken from the Indus with its Headwork at Ghazi in the Province, which is used for generating hydroelectric power at Barutha in Punjab.

Kabul River: Rising in the lofty Hindu Kush Range about 45 miles west of Kabul, the Kabul River flows eastward and enters the Province from Afghanistan and, after crossing the Mohmand hills, enters the territory of the Peshawar District at Warsak. It has been another important source of water supply for the Province. It too forms a great natural waterway of the Province. It is also called Landai below its junction with the Swat river. It joins the Indus at Attock. It drains Swat, Dir, Chitral, Tirah and the Peshawar valley. Its principal tributaries are the Yarkhun, Chitral, Kunar, Panjkora, Swat and the Bara rivers.³⁹ The Kabul River Canal, constructed in 1880s, with its headwork at Warsak provide water for irrigation. The Warsak Dam too is constructed on the Kabul River, which is used for the production of the hydroelectric power.

Swat River: The Swat River forms at Kalam by the confluence of the Ushu and Gabral rivers both of whom rise in the lofty ranges bordering Chitral. It drains Swat proper and Swat Kohistan and is serving as the means of supply of water and irrigation not only to Swat but outside Swat as well. It is one of the valuable natural resources of

³⁸IGIPSNWFP, pp. 4, 109-10, 223; Baha, N.-W. F. P. *Administration under British Rule*, p. 3. Also see Raza Ali Abidi, *Sher Darya* (Urdu), Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1998.

³⁹IGIPSNWFP, p. 4; Baha, N.-W. F. P. *Administration under British Rule*, p. 3.

the area. Beside other things it has been a source of transportation of timber and also for its smuggling. Besides its other tributaries the Panjkora River joins it few miles below Kalangai. It joins the Kabul River at Nisatta.⁴⁰ The Lower Swat Canal and Upper Swat Canal (Completed in 1885 and 1913 respectively)⁴¹ fed by the Swat River, not only irrigate vast tracts of land outside Swat in the Charsada, Samah and Swabi regions, but the Upper Swat Canal also generate electricity at the Jabanr and Dargai Power Stations. Work on another branch, below Jabanr, is in progress, which will not only supply water for irrigation but will also be used for generating hydroelectric power. Whereas the Nikpi Khel Canal, with its headwork at Ningwalai, provide water for irrigation in Nikpi Khel tract of Swat.

Bara River: The Bara River issues from the Tirah hills. It drains the Afridi area. Besides other things it supplies water for irrigation purposes. It falls into the Kabul River in the east of Peshawar after a total length of 100 miles.⁴²

Kurram River: The Kurram River rises in the Afghan territory near Ahmad Khel on the southern slope of the Safed Koh. It enters the Province from Afghanistan near Kharlachi in the Kurram valley and passes through the Kurram valley and lower Wazir hills into Bannu District. Traversing the District it enters at last the Isa Khel plain and joins the Indus opposite Mianwali. Besides its tributaries in the Kurram valley, which are mainly streams, it has been joined by the Tochi River below Lakki.⁴³ It provides water for irrigation purposes on its course both in the Kurram valley and down the Province.

Tochi River: The Tochi or Gambila River rises in Afghanistan and flows through North Waziristan Agency and Bannu. It runs through the Dawar valley in the North Waziristan Agency. It drains the North Waziristan Agency and irrigates considerable

⁴⁰Sultan-i-Rome, "Swat State Under the Walis (1917-69)" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of History, University of Peshawar, 2000), p. 21; *IGIPSNWFP*, pp. 4, 116, 216.

⁴¹For details see Baha, *N.-W. F. P. Administration under British Rule*, chap. 6.

⁴²Baha, *N.-W. F. P. Administration under British Rule*, p. 3; *IGIPSNWFP*, pp. 4, 118-19.

⁴³*IGIPSNWFP*, pp. 4, 119, 237-38. Also see Baha, *N.-W. F. P. Administration under British Rule*, chap. 6.

areas in the Dawar valley and Bannu region. It joins the Kurram River below Lakki. Its total length is between 100 and 150 miles.⁴⁴

Gomal River: The Gomal River is the only river worth mentioning in the South Waziristan Agency. It rises near Sarwandi on the Koh Nak Range in Afghanistan. Its bed runs from Afghanistan to the Indus near Dera Ismail Khan. However, all its water is used in Dera Ismail Khan and does not reach the Indus. It receives numerous tributaries most of whom are mere torrents which remains dry most of the year. However, the Tank Zam, its tributary the Shahur, and the Wana Toi are the perennial streams.⁴⁵ It is over the Gomal River that the Gomal Zam Dam Project is in progress, which will provide water for irrigation to some areas in Dera Ismail Khan and Bannu districts.

Other Rivers: The Yarkhun, Chitral, Kunar and Panjkora rivers drain the territories of Chitral, Dir and Bajawar and also supply water to some areas. The Barandu, and Kalpanrai are two main streams, also sometimes mentions as rivers, in Buner.⁴⁶

Ethnicity

Ethnically population of the Province belongs to different origins. The ethnological problem of the Province, according to C. C. Davies, is “complicated and intricate [And] even the folklore, traditions, and legends are singularly silent about the races who inhabited the frontier prior to the Pathan invasions.”⁴⁷ The ‘Pathans’ and ‘Afghans’ are interchangeable terms used for the major ethnic group of the Province but most of them call themselves Pukhtun (also Pakhtun) or Pushtun (also Pashtun) in their own language. The language they speak is called Pukhtu and Pushtu.⁴⁸

Although all the Pukhtu speaking people of the Province are known as Pukhtun/Afghans/Pathans outside the Province, the situation in the Province is

⁴⁴Spain, *The Pathan Borderland*, p. 26; IGIPSNWFP, pp. 4, 119; Baha, N.-W. F. P. *Administration under British Rule*, p. 3.

⁴⁵IGIPSNWFP, pp. 119-20, 249.

⁴⁶Baha, N.-W. F. P. *Administration under British Rule*, p. 3; IGIPSNWFP, p. 223.

⁴⁷C. Collin Davies, *The Problem of the North-West Frontier, 1890-1908: With a Survey of Policy since 1849*, 2nd edn., revised and enlarged (London: Curzon Press, 1975), pp. 37-38.

⁴⁸Qaiyum, *Gold and Guns on the Pathan Frontier*, p. 17.

different.⁴⁹ Inside the Province Pukhtun refer to a specific segment of the population who belongs to the ethnicity by a genealogical line. The artisans, professionals and the religious classes are not considered Pukhtun. Even those who lose their share in the landed property of the concerned tribe, section or subsection somehow or acquire religious education and adopt religious occupation, their progeny lose their identity as Pukhtun after a generation or two and also their say in the tribal council or *jargas*.⁵⁰ Similarly such cases also have not been rare that those who were not considered Pukhtun have been ranked in the class with the passage of time after acquiring a share in the tribal landed property somehow.⁵¹

The Pukhtun population of the Province belongs to various tribes. Their main tribes are the Yusufzi (Yusufzai), Mandanr, Utman Khel, Safi, Shalmani, Mamund, Mohmand, Mulagori, Dawudzi, Muhammadzi, Gugyani, Khalil, Afridi, Shinwari, Orakzi, Bangash, Khattak, Marwat, Banuchi, Turi, Wazir, Mahsud, Bhattani, Dawar, Dottani, Kundi, Lohani, Shirani, Mian Khel, Babar, Gandapur, Sulaiman Khel and Mandu Khel. It is noteworthy that these tribes reside in the trans-Indus area of the Province. The

⁴⁹For different theories and viewpoints about the origin of the Pukhtuns/Afghans/Pathans see Khwaja Niamatullah Harvi, *Tarikh Khan Jahani wa Makhzan-e-Afghani* (Urdu), trans. Muhammad Bashir Husain (Lahore: Markazi Urdu Board, 1978), pp. 31-127; idem, *History of the Afghans: Translated from the Persian of Neamet Ullah*, tr. by Bernhard Dorn, 3rd edn. (Karachi: Indus Publications, 2001); Roshan Khan, *Tazkirah: (Pathanu ki Asliyat aur un ki Tarikh)* (Urdu), 4th edn. (Karachi: Roshan Khan & Co., 1983), pp. 33-114; Caroe, *The Pathans*, chaps. 1-8; Ghani Khan, *The Pathans: A Sketch*, repr. (Islamabad: Pushto Adabi Society, 1990), pp. 3-5; Khushal Khan Khattak, *Dastar Nama* (Pukhtu), with “*Pijandgalu*” by Purdil Khan Khattak (Peshawar: Pukhtu Academy, 1991), pp. 153-57; Sayyad Bahadar Shah Zafar Kaka Khel, *Pukhtanah da Tarikh pa Ranra Kay* (Pukhtu) (Peshawar: University Book Agency, n.d.), pp. 14-125; idem, *Pushtun: Afni Nasal kay Aayenay mayn* (Urdu) (Peshawar: University Book Agency, 1994); Shaheer Niazi, “The Origin of the Pathans,” *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* (Karachi), Vol. 18 (January 1970), pp. 23-38; Preshan Khattak, *Pushtun Kaun?: (Tarikh, Tahqiq, Tanqid)* (Urdu) (Peshawar: Pashto Academy, 1984); Mujawar Ahmad Zyar, *Pukhtu au Pukhtana da Jabpuhanay pa Ranra kay: (La Saki Makhiney Sarah)* (Pashto) (Peshawar: Da Safi Pukhtu Siranu au Parakhtya Markaz, 2001); Sultan-i-Rome, *History of NWFP: Selected Topics*, (forthcoming), chap. 2.

⁵⁰For example see A. H. McMahon and A. D. G. Ramsay, *Report on the Tribes of the Malakand Political Agency (Excluding of Chitral)*, Revised by R. L. Kennion (Peshawar: Govt. Press, NWFP, 1916), p. 17; idem, *Report on the Tribes of Dir, Swat and Bajour [Bajawar] together with the Utman-Khel and Sam Ranizai*, reprint, ed. with Introduction by R. O. Christensen (Peshawar: Saeed Book Bank, 1981), p. 42.

⁵¹For example see Makhdum Tasaduq Ahmad, *Social Organization of Yusufzai Swat: A Study in Social Change* (Lahore: University of Panjab, 1962), pp. 14, 21-22.

Pukhtuns of the tribal and settled areas have been considered “similar, culturally, linguistically, and ethnically.”⁵²

The Yusufzais and Mandanrs have occupied the areas of Dir, Swat, Shangla, Buner, the Malakand Protected Area (commonly known as the Malakand Agency), a large part of the formerly Mardan District till the bank of the Indus, and the western slopes of the Black Mountain. The Utman Khel, Safis and Mamund mainly are in Bajawar and in a portion of the Malakand Agency. The Mohmands mainly occupy the Mohmand area. They are also settled in the Malakand Agency, the Sama area and the Peshawar region. The Muhammadzais, Dawudzais, Gugyanis and Khalils occupy the Hashnaghar and Peshawar regions. The Shalmanis, Mulagoris, Shinwaris and Afridis inhabit the Khyber Agency. The Orakzais occupy the present day Orakzai Agency. The homeland of the Bangash is the Meranzai valley in the Kohat region and the upper Kurram valley. The Turis reside in the Kurram valley. The Khattaks mainly occupy the Karak and Nowshera regions. They are also found in Sama and the Malakand Agency. The Bannuchis occupy the Bannu area and the Marwats inhabits the Lakki region. The Wazirs, Dawars, Bittanis, Mahsuds, Dottanis, Sulaiman Khels and Mandu Khels inhabit the North and South Waziristan Agencies. Whereas the Kundis, Lohanis, Gandapurs, Mian Khels, Sheranis and Babars reside in Dera Ismail Khan.⁵³ It is worth mentioning that sections of these tribes also inhabit among other tribes but they have neither dominant position in those areas nor do they constitute major groups there. Majority of the mentioned tribes inhabits the respected mentioned areas, where they constitute major groups and have their dominance as well.

There are, however, some Pukhtun tribes who inhabit the cis-Indus Hazara region. They are the Yusufzais, Jadoons and the Swatis. The Swatis are those Pukhtun who occupied and inhabited the Swat valley for centuries prior to its occupation and their expulsion by the Yusufzai in the sixteenth century. It, however, is noteworthy that in a recent study Muhammad Akhtar has questioned the ethnicity of these Swatis as Pukhtun.

⁵²Baha, N.-W. F. P. *Administration under British Rule*, p. 4.

⁵³For the location of the areas occupied by each one of these tribes see the map “the North-West Frontier Province (Approximate Tribal Distribution)” in Davies, *The Problem of the North-West Frontier*, at the end.

He is of the opinion that instead of Pukhtun these Swatis are Tajik by origin.⁵⁴ Muhammad Akhtar has tried his best to prove his hypothesis. He is to be termed successful to the extent that the said Swatis were Gabris (fire worshiper) by religion prior to their conversion to Islam and hence Gabris to that extent. But as far his contention about their Tajik origin is concerned he fails to prove and justify his contention. Although Muhammad Akhtar has worked hard and his study is a valuable contribution but besides other weaknesses it suffers from clear-cut contradictory statements and contentions due to which his findings and conclusions could not be accepted in entirety.

People of other ethnic groups also inhabit the Province. Besides others they include the Awans, Gujars, Tanawlis, Dhunds, Tajiks and Kashmiris who mostly reside in the cis-Indus Hazara region. The Gujars inhabit the trans-Indus areas as well. Though Pukhtun tribes also inhabit Dera Ismail Khan region of the Province the Baluchs and Jats predominate.⁵⁵ The Sayyads are found throughout the Province. It is to be noted that Denzil Ibbetson has not ranked the Dalazak, Swati, Jadun, Tanawli and Shalmani tribes as Pukhtun proper but has termed them “allied races, who though not usually acknowledged as Pathans, have by long association become closely assimilated with them in manners, customs, and character” and who chiefly reside in the Hazara area of the Province.⁵⁶ As already mentioned the Shalmanis are also found in great number in the Khyber Agency and the Jadun in the trans-Indus region in the Chamla and Khudu Khel areas and in the southern slopes of the Mahabanr Mountain.

Besides, Chitral too is inhabited by non-Pukhtun tribes. Whereas, the occupants of the northern mountainous regions of Dir, Swat and both sides of the Indus are commonly called Kohistanis because of the mountainous nature of the area they inhabit. The areas they have occupied are known as Dir Kohistan, Swat Kohistan and Abasin (Indus) Kohistan. They are regarded as “remnants of the population which existed in Buddhist times.”⁵⁷

⁵⁴See Muhammad Akhtar, *Tajik Swati wa Mumlikat-e-Gabar Tarikh kay Aayenah Mayn* (Abbottabad: By the Author, 2002).

⁵⁵Baha, N.-W. F. P. *Administration under British Rule*, p. 4.

⁵⁶Denzil Ibbetson, *Punjab Castes*, reprint (Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1993), p. 64.

⁵⁷Davies, *The Problem of the North-West Frontier*, p. 39.

Geo-Strategic Significance

As stated in the beginning, the area of the North-West Frontier Province is a significant and geo-strategic area of the world. It played a remarkable role throughout the known history. David Dichter observes:

Few areas in the world have played so notable a role in a transitional zone between peoples and cultures as the North-West Frontier Region of Pakistan. From a physiographical point of view, the NWF [North-West Frontier] lies between the highland massif of central Asia and the plain of Hindustan. The physical structures which separate these two areas from each other, such as the Hindu Kush Range, as well as these structures, which provide access between the areas, such as the Khyber Pass, are located on the Frontier. As a result, the NWF has been the site for a continual cultural flow across its territory. When populations themselves did not move through the Frontier's passes, armies seeking to conquer or control central Asia and northern India have been almost irresistibly attracted to this region. In their language, customs, and features the Pathans themselves reflect the history of the area.⁵⁸

The Province is part of the geographical area that has the passes and the routes which has the status of not only of the Gates to India⁵⁹ but also that of the Gates to Central Asia and China as well. As a part of the Gates of India for most of the known history frequent migrations and invasions from Central Asia and the west took place to and over India through this area, i.e. from the Aryan migration and invasion which started in about 1900 BC till the invasions of Ahmad Shah Abdali. These include the migration and invasion of the Aryans, Greeks, Scythians or Saka, Parthians, Kushanas, White Huns, Muslim invasions under the Ghaznavids, the Ghauris, Mongols, Turks (Mughals), Iranians and Ahmad Shah Abdali to mention the few major ones.

Invasions and expansions from the sub-continent to Central Asia were also made through this area. The expansion of the Mauryan Empire and the Hindu Shahis encroachments into Afghanistan, Muhammad bin Tughluq's projected expedition of Central Asia, the invasions and expeditions of the Mughal rulers of India into Afghanistan and Central Asia, the English advances into and war in Afghanistan (in the nineteenth century) are evident examples of the area's playing the role of a Gate of

⁵⁸Dichter, *The North-West Frontier of West Pakistan*, p. 3.

⁵⁹For a viewpoint and discussion of the Gates of India see Thomas Holdich, *The Gates of India: Being an Historical Narrative*, First edition published in Pakistan (Quetta: Gosha-e-Adab, 1977).

Central Asia. Not only in the remote past but in recent past too it remained a Gate of Central Asia for it remained a base of the anti-Soviet proxy war in Afghanistan in the fourth quarter of the twentieth century, which culminated not only in the failure of the communist revolution in Afghanistan and the expulsion of the Soviet forces from that country but also in the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the modern Central Asian and a number of other states on the edifice of Soviet Union.

The area played the same role in the anti-Taliban and anti Al-Qaida action and war by the Americans and their allies in the post 9/11 so-called war on terrorism and is still playing it significantly. The present-day military operations, actions and crackdowns against the Al-Qaida members and their allies in the tribal areas and the unprecedented concentration and posting of a huge number of the Pakistani armed forces in the tribal area and on the Pak-Afghan border is an evident proof of the area's role and significance even in this advanced age of technology and communication of the twenty-first century.

In the new global political environment and changing scenario on the international level the area is becoming a Gate to China as well, especially in the American endeavours of encircling China and hence in the would-be US-China tussles too it will play prominent role due to its geo-strategic location.

As stated earlier H. C. Verma has remarked that battles for the passes in the regions now forming Afghanistan and Pakistan were not only a prelude to encroachment over the interior of these regions but that of the Indian subcontinent as well, because whosoever captured these passes got an edge over their opponents.⁶⁰ But we see that the same is also the case vice versa, meaning that whosoever captured and held these passes from the Indian/Pakistani side got an edge over their enemies in Afghanistan and Central Asia, which is evident from the Anglo-Afghan wars of the nineteenth century, the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan in the twentieth century and also in the present-day twenty-first century so-called war on terrorism, after 11th September 2001 events in the United States, and the hunt for the Al-Qaida and Taliban suspects and high command, in these passes and rugged areas.

James W. Spain rightly states that "no power – including that of British India at its height – has ever been able to establish full control over the people and the passes of

⁶⁰Verma, *Medieval Routes to India: Baghdad to Delhi*, p. 261.

the hills”⁶¹ of this area. The present situation in the tribal areas, the actions and operations of the Pakistani forces in the tribal areas and the installation of a huge number of the Pakistani armed forces on the one side and that of the Afghan and American forces on the other of the Durand Line or the border, but then too the frequent accusation of the Afghan and some of the American authorities of the crossing of the border by the Taliban and their supporters and their actions and activities in Afghanistan as well as in the Pakistani tribal areas speaks that the same is the situation even in this advanced age of communication and technology.

It can be concluded that the area of the North-West Frontier Province played prominent and significant role because of its geo-strategic location not only both in the remote and recent past but is doing the same in the present and the same, it seems, will also be the case in the future.

⁶¹Spain, *The Pathan Borderland*, p. 27.