

AIPS Short-Term Research Grant Final Report

Project Title: **Chitral as a “tribal” region: The promise and perils of integration, 1947-1969**

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Dates for Project: **03 July 2023 – 07 August 2023**

Location: **Pakistan (Islamabad, Peshawar, and Chitral)**

1. Significance to Pakistan Studies

This project is significant to Pakistan Studies for several reasons. To start with, it facilitates access to hitherto untouched archival resources about Chitral and creates conditions for telling the history of Pakistan from Chitral. Through a careful reading of official documents, letters, and petitions the project tells the story of Chitral’s accession to Pakistan from a much broader and more complex perspective than previously understood, weaving in ideas of place, anxieties over religious identity, and notions of moral worth that constitute the background for the accession. It also suggests ways of telling the story of how “peripheral” regions like Chitral, and collective identities that historically looked outside the Indian subcontinent to “place” themselves, were made part of the evolving national narrative and national space of Pakistan in the first twenty-five years of its existence.

The project also identified contemporary concerns over the loss of land to outsiders, especially Pashtuns from the neighboring districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, as a major driver of moralizing and othering among the people of Chitral, often within a “Chitralis-are-peaceful-and-others-are-warlike” framework. This suggests not only the significance of land, both as a specific part of the topography of Chitral and a crucial element of the collective identity of Chitral people, in the unfolding history of Chitral but also ties into analogous processes in other parts of Pakistan. The overwhelming majority of visitors at the Archives Library in Peshawar come from the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) looking for land settlement records (*mišl*) and genealogies of various tribes.

The project is also significant to Pakistan Studies in gesturing toward the complex “place” of minorities in the story of Pakistan both before and after its creation. In the context of Chitral, the case of the Ismailis – a minority within a minority – is quite significant. This is because of their often tense relations with the local rulers, the role of their spiritual leader the Aga Khan III in the Pakistan Movement, and how the colonial authorities carefully calibrated their relationship with both the Aga Khan and the rulers of Chitral.

2. Key Outcomes and Deliverables

a. Key Outcomes:

- The issue of land and identity in the erstwhile FATA is a potential area of research.

- While working at the Archives Library in Peshawar, I came to know and also observed that the Pakistan Army is digitizing all records about Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This is a significant development, at the heart of which is anxiety and conflict over who owns particular tracts of land, especially in the mountainous north. This may turn out to be a significant area of research, especially because of what it says about the evolution of the ideas of national place/space in Pakistan.
- The forcible conversion of Ismailis by some of the rulers of Chitral in the period 1860-1947 is often told in oral narratives. I was, however, able to look at petitions to both the British authorities and the various rulers of Chitral. Written mostly in Persian but also sometimes in Urdu, these petitions tell the story of how local administrators in some regions of Chitral forced Ismailis to convert to Sunnism or face seizure of their land, forcible migration, or being sold into slavery. The way the British authorities dealt with these complaints opens a window into how religious issues were handled in the “peripheries” of the British Empire, how the Ismaili faith was understood, and how the communication between the Ismaili Imam (Aga Khan III) in Mumbai with his followers in this “frontier” “princely state” mediated relations between the British authorities and the local rulers. This is an entirely new area of investigation on which I am in conversation with local oral historians.

Deliverables:

1. Dissertation chapter: “Chitral, 1920 -1969: Reorientation, Accession, and Integration”
2. “*Dūr, Bathān*, Frontier, and Princely State: Place, Identity, and Representation in late-19th Century Chitral” – presentation at the Saxena Center for Contemporary South Asia, Brown University – Fall 2023