Wah Academia Journal of Social Sciences
Volume 4, Issue 2, Dec 2025, pp. 694-710
ISSN – E 2958-8731 P 2958-8723
https://doi.org/10.63954/WAJSS.4.2.33.2025

From Timber to Concrete: The Historical Evolution of the Kanju Bridge in Swat State Era (1915–1969)

Jalal Uddin[1]

Abstract

This article traces the century-long evolution of bridge construction over the River Swat near Kanju, arguing that the successive constructions of the Kanju (1929), Mingora (1962), and Ayub (1966) bridges were central to the political consolidation and infrastructural modernization of the Swat State. By juxtaposing colonial and postcolonial archival materials with vernacular historical narratives, the study reconstructs the chronological and technical development of these projects to reveal how each bridge, frequently damaged and rebuilt after seasonal floods served as a catalyst for economic integration, shaped emerging administrative practices, and symbolized the Walis modernizing vision. Methodologically, it combines textual analysis of British archival record and other relevant sources with spatial-historical contextualization to uncover how infrastructure mediated relations between territory, and community. Besides, the article illustrates a model of State formation in which infrastructure functioned as both a material and symbolic instrument of governance, marking Swat's transition from a nascent polity to a modern, institutionally organized State.

Keywords: Bridge, Swat River, Miangul, Abdul Wadud, Swat State, Kanju, Mingora

Introduction

In the case of Swat, the River Swat constitutes the principal natural and aesthetic feature of the valley, serving as its central axis. The river bisects the valley, creating a distinct geographical division. Historically, the two sides of the river have been referred to as the 'left bank' and the 'right bank' of the River Swat, terms that have acquired both topographical and socio-historical significance in discourse and administrative references. In the pre-State era, the construction of durable bridges across the mighty River Swat posed significant challenges. The absence of an

[1] Department of History, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad – Pakistan

organized political authority and administrative framework further impeded such infrastructural undertakings. Consequently, before the establishment of the Swat State, no stable or enduring bridge structures existed over the river, and crossings were largely dependent on temporary or rudimentary means. Hence, traditionally in Swat, the people were compelled to cross the river using makeshift rafts made of inflated sheepskins, a practice embedded in the local life (Barger & Philip, 1941). These improvised rafts, though innovative, reflected the fragile state of Swat's early infrastructure. For the emerging Swat State's polity, the construction of bridges emerged as a central priority, signifying a shift from fluid, tribal modes of mobility to a system of connectivity regulated and consolidated under State authority. The river Swat itself functioned as an active agent in the process, periodically destroying or weakening the very structures that symbolized state control and technological advancement.

The extant documentary and archival evidence do not indicate that the first ruler of the Swat State, Sayyid Abdul Jabbar Shah (from 1915 to 1917), initiated any efforts to construct a permanent or durable bridge across the River Swat. It was under the leadership of Miangul Abdul Wadud (reign from 1917 to 1949) that efforts were initiated to develop and expand the communication sector, aimed at facilitating the masses, its consolidation and administrative integration of the nascent State. Recognizing infrastructure as the bedrock of administrative integration and economic development, the Ruler prioritized roads and bridges as essential instruments of statecraft (Ali, 2020). The Wali of Swat acknowledged the fact that his official recognition by the British Government in 1926 greatly facilitated the work on infrastructural development within the State. He stated that his foremost priority following this recognition was to establish connectivity across various parts of the State through the construction of roads. Prior to these initiatives, the existing routes were little more than tracks suitable only for horses and mules, with the sole exception of the Mingora–Malakand road, which had been developed to accommodate motor vehicles and lorries (Hussain, 1962).

Taj Muhammad Khan Zebsar described the experience of crossing the River Swat as a great ordeal. He noted that, in the absence of proper bridges, local inhabitants relied on the traditional a primitive raft-like arrangement (locally known as Jaala) to traverse the river. One such crossing point began from the right bank at Damghar, a location that came to be regarded as a place of suffering or death (maqtal) by the people, owing to the frequent hardships and dangers associated with it (Zebsar,

1361). Zebsar's account vividly reflects the perilous nature of river crossings at that point of time. The renowned archaeologist, Sir Aurel Stein recounting his experience in Swat in 1926, offered a vivid description of the challenges posed by the River Swat and the traditional means employed to cross it. He observed that "throughout the main portion of the great valley, the river was flowing in several branches. The principal one, about a hundred and fifty-yard-wide, was far too deep to be forded on horseback, in spite of the early season" (Stein, 1929). Consequently, he and his companions "took to a raft of goat-skins, steered by a strong-armed old ferryman, which brought us in safety to the opposite bank." However, he noted that "the frail contrivance could carry only five people and was at each crossing swept by the swirling river over half a mile downstream" (Stein, 1929). Stein's account illustrates not only the formidable physical conditions of the river but also the ingenuity and resilience of local communities who depended on such rudimentary yet vital modes of transport in the absence of durable infrastructure.

Abdul Ghafur Qasmi (in 1940) has also vividly described and captured the physical hardships endured by the inhabitants on both sides of the River Swat before the advent of modern infrastructure. Qasmi provides a striking portrayal of the difficulties faced by the people in the absence of permanent river crossings. He notes that:

Hundreds of creatures of God were drowned in the river while crossing it. The width of the river increases in summer and decreases in winter. The river was fordable in winter. The cold water, slippery stones and severe winter were the hardships from which the people of Swat suffered. The water rose in summer and the people crossed it in small rafts of skins. Every person boarded the boat in a hurry. Generally, more than a fixed number of passengers boarded the boat. Abuse and quarrel were an essential feature in this boarding and unloading. There was no distinction of rank. Men and women, young and old, all crowded into the raft in distraction. The raft was a model of hell, everyone cried for his own person. Often the boat was upset on account of overcrowding. All the passengers fell into the river. Some were drowned, others escaped. At least shoes, turbans or bundles were lost in the river (Qasmi, 1940).

This harrowing depiction highlights the precarious nature of river crossings before the construction of bridges. The Swat River, swelling during the summer months and shrinking in winter, acted as both a life source and a deadly obstacle. The use of makeshift rafts made of animal skins reveals the technological limitations and

everyday risks faced by the people in their attempts to maintain mobility and social contact across the valley. Thus, the major challenge that lay before Miangul Abdul Wadud was the construction of bridges across the River Swat, a task essential not only for facilitating the movement of people and goods but also for strengthening administrative control and consolidating his political authority (Hussain, 1962). It is worth mentioning that though he constructed durable bridges at key sites during his reign, still at a number of places the traditional rafts were used for crossing the river (Barger & Philip, 1941). The geographical terrain, the powerful current of the river, and limited financial and technical resources hindered the establishment of bridges at short distances.

Although some studies have examined processes of modernization in the princely states of British India, the trajectory of modernization and urbanization in the Swat State remains largely unexplored. How a tribal society, grounded in customary structures and decentralized authority, gradually transformed into an administratively organized polity is a question that merits closer scholarly attention. The present study contributes to this emerging line of inquiry by situating Swat's infrastructural development, particularly the construction of bridges over the River Swat. This research aims to provide a foundation for future scholarship on how modernization unfolded in Swat State. The article will first examine the available sources concerning the construction of the first bridge over the River Swat, then analyze its socio-economic and political impact on the communities residing on both sides of the river, and finally explore the circumstances that led to the destruction or removal of these bridges during different phases of Swat's history.

Miangul Abdul Wadud's Initiative to Construct a Wooden Bridge on River Swat near Kanju

Miangul Abdul Wadud in an effort to establish connectivity between the right and left banks of the River Swat, specifically linking the areas of Babuzai and Nikpikhel, identified a strategic site between Kanju and Naway Kalay for the construction of a bridge. The initiative reflected his broader vision of infrastructural integration and administrative cohesion, aimed at facilitating mobility, promoting economic activity, and symbolically uniting the two sides of the valley under the emerging Swat State. Interestingly, historical sources provide no definitive evidence regarding the existence of a bridge at the site near Kanju village, prior to Miangul Abdul Wadud's initiative. Abdul Ghafur Qasmi, writing in 1940, provides a perspective on

the infrastructural state of Swat prior to the rise of Miangul Abdul Wadud by stating that "there was no bridge across the Swat River within the State and perhaps no bridge was ever constructed in these parts" (Qasmi, 1940). His assertion is significant as he states about the absence of any substantial or permanent bridge-building tradition in Swat before the establishment of centralized authority under Miangul Abdul Wadud and affirms the pioneering and transformative character of his public works.

It is important to take into account that the bridge that forms the focal point of this study is commonly referred to as 'Kanju Bridge' (also called da Kanju pul in Pashtu), a designation derived from its close proximity to the village of Kanju on the right bank of the River Swat. In various historical references, the structure has also been identified by alternative appellations. It has been termed 'Ayub Bridge', in recognition of its reconstruction during the era of President Field Marshal Muhammad Ayub Khan. Additionally, the bridge is also termed as 'Mingora Bridge', a bridge near Kanju and sometimes described more descriptively as the bridge between Kanju and Naway Kalay, denoting its geographical function as a vital link connecting the two settlements situated on opposite banks of the river. It is also noteworthy that, alongside the varying nomenclature employed in the historical records to describe the bridge, the precise location of the structure demands careful attention. This particular bridge over Swat River has not been constructed repeatedly on an identical site over the past ten decades. Instead, each reconstruction phase reflects slight shifts in length, alignment or position, primarily dictated by technical, hydrological, and engineering considerations.

To trace the historical development of the bridge near Kanju from its initial construction, it becomes imperative to turn to primary sources for evidence and context. In this regard, British archival materials provide valuable insights that illuminate the early phases of bridge-building activities in Swat. In this connection, a significant piece of correspondence on 13 December 1927 provides valuable insight into the early stages of its construction and the collaborative nature of the project. In the communication, the Political Agent (Swat, Dir and Chitral) reported that Miangul Abdul Wadud was "engaged in building at Rs. 30,000/- and under M.E.S. supervision a bridge over the Swat River at Mingaora, and has asked the M.E.S. to supervise also the building (at his own cost) of a road up the left bank of the Swat from Mingaora to Mangalor" (Directorate of Archives & Libraries, Peshawar, NWF Provincial Diary, 1927). This document reveals the colonial dimension of Swat's

modernization, establishing that the project began under the technical supervision of the British Military Engineering Service (M.E.S.). This collaboration positioned the colonial government as a necessary partner in this particular engineering structure. The P.A characterized Miangul Abdul Wadud's initiatives as "efforts to extend civilization among his people" as such projects symbolized not merely physical connectivity but also a form of socio-political advancement and integration of areas within the State into a more organized and administratively coherent framework (NWF Provincial Diary, 1927).

A particularly significant reference appears in the North-West Frontier Province Diary for the week ending 14 April 1928, which records a tragic incident during the bridge's construction. The Diary states that "a temporary bridge used as an aid to the construction of the permanent structure over the Swat River, now being built by the Wali at Mingaora, was carried away by a flood on 8th April. Five men, including the bridge contractor, lost their lives and 60 were seriously wounded" (NWF Provincial Diary, 1928). This archival account not only confirms the initiation of a major bridge-building project by Miangul Abdul Wadud's but also highlights the formidable natural challenges faced during such infrastructural undertakings. Further evidence from the British archival record provides crucial details about the successful completion and inauguration of the bridge with the assistance of the Government of India. The NWF Provincial Diary for the week ending 06 April 1929 reports that "on 4th April, the Wali of Swat, after calling in the Nikpi Khel and Shamizai Jirgas, opened the bridge over the Swat which he built with help from Government at Mingaora" and "the bridge is over 2,000 feet long and built on piles driven some eleven or twelve feet into the river bed", "should withstand flood waters but logs and timber floating down may cause serious damage to it" (NWF Provincial Diary, 1929). This primary source not only marks the official opening of the bridge but also reflects the dual nature of the project, wherein the Wali of Swat received technical and possibly financial support from the Government of India. The inclusion of local jirgas, particularly from the Nikpikhel and Shamizai tribes (on the right bank of River Swat), indicates the significance to the infrastructural undertaking for these two tribes on the right bank of River Swat. Structurally, the bridge represented a remarkable engineering achievement for the period as its length was over 2,000 feet and the use of piles driven deep into the riverbed suggest a combination of indigenous labor and external technical expertise. Following the construction of the wooden bridge over the Swat River, a number of oral traditions and local narratives emerged surrounding its building and early use. These accounts,

preserved through collective memory and vernacular storytelling, highlighted the human cost associated with the project (Zebsar).

As foreseen in the earlier reports, the bridge over the River Swat suffered severe damage only a few months after its inauguration, when catastrophic flooding struck the region. According to archival evidence, on 27 August 1929, exceptionally heavy floods occurred simultaneously in both the Panjkora and Swat rivers, resulting in widespread destruction across the valley. The North-West Frontier Province Diary provides a detailed account of the disaster, noting that at Chakdarra, the river rose six feet above the previously recorded highest flood level. The intensity of the floodwaters breached protective embankments, washed away the road approaches to the Chakdarra Bridge, and submerged the road from Jalawan to Chakdarra for more than two days. The devastation in Swat Valley was equally severe. The same source reports that "up the Swat, the road at Landakai has ceased to exist, and the Wali reports heavy damage elsewhere to roads and bridges, including the bridge over the Swat River at Mingaora" (NWF Provincial Diary, 1929). This account confirms that the newly constructed bridge, opened only in April of that year was among the principal casualties of the flood. The event was recorded as the most destructive in living memory, surpassing even the great flood of 1908 in magnitude and impact (NWF Provincial Diary, 1929).

Following the severe floods, the ruler of Swat State communicated with the Political Agent on 29th August 1929, highlighting the extent of infrastructural damage caused by the natural calamity. In his correspondence, he stated that "on account of the recent floods some bridges on the road to Malakand have been washed away; the road, too, has been seriously damaged" and "at present there are no funds available to me" (Ruler of Swat to Political Agent, 1929). The reference to washed-away bridges emphasizes the vulnerability of early state-era infrastructure to natural disasters and the limitations of available resources for immediate reconstruction. Two weeks after the devastating floods, another British archival source provides valuable insight into the immediate and organized response initiated by the ruler of Swat. These records explicitly acknowledge the Wali's progressive developmental vision, noting that "in pursuance of his progressive policy of improving communications by means of roads, bridges, and telephone after consultation and technical advice" and the fact that he had already commenced work on reconstructing the Mingora Bridge, which was intended to reconnect the left bank with Nikpi Khel (Political Agent, 1929). The letter specifically mentions that "more

than one-third of the Mingora Bridge had been carried away" by the torrents, emphasizing the scale of destruction inflicted upon one of the State's most crucial infrastructural asset (Political Agent, 1929). His prioritization of the reconstruction of the bridge within weeks of the calamity highlights its strategic and socio-economic centrality, as the bridge functioned as a vital source for mobility and state control.

Miangul Abdul Wadud recognizing its significance approached the British authorities seeking financial assistance for its reconstruction. However, the British Government of India declined to provide the requested funds as a grant, offering instead to extend a loan on interest for the repair of the damaged infrastructure. While the ruler of Swat sought to restore vital communications as swiftly as possible, he also recognized that accepting a loan on interest would impose an undue financial burden on the newly consolidated State. In his subsequent letters to the Political Agent, he elaborated on his concern and stated that his people "didn't like my idea of thus burdening the State, as they willingly came forward and promised to raise up a subscription from the Public Works in hand" (Ruler of Swat to Political Agent). He further detailed that the people had already raised a significant amount of Rs. 52,000 for the Karakar road and although the repair of Qazagat road and the Mingora bridge remained difficult, he was confident that "if the Government did not help", then his "people have a mind to collect another subscription for the bridge, which for them is very necessary." The ruler also expressed his reservations regarding the conditions attached to the proposed British financial assistance and stated that he was "not prepared to accept the loan on the terms quoted" as he "was given to understand from time to time that the Government would very kindly help" him in some of his "public works, namely would pay towards repair of Gaza Ghat [Qaza Gat] and also the bridge" (Ruler of Swat to Political Agent, 1930).

Another valuable primary source, a letter from Thomson Glover, Political Agent, addressed to the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, North-West Frontier Province, written on 20th March 1930, provides direct evidence of the Wali's financial prudence and proactive leadership. Glover documented the Wali's final refusal of the interest-bearing loan, noting the ruler's assessment that it would impose "too heavy a burden on his State" and thus to be considered as cancelled. Glover added that "the Wali has made great efforts to cope with the damage caused by the floods" and has "deposited Rs. 6,000 with me to repair the immediate and urgent damage on the big Mingora Bridge as estimated by the M.E.S., and work is

in progress thereon" (Thompson Grover to Secretary to Chief Commissioner, NWFP, 1930). The correspondence offers significant insight into Miangul Abdul Wadud's governance style, economic realities of the State and his commitment to avoiding financial dependence and indebtedness to the colonial administration. Instead, he relied on internal mobilization of resources, both through public subscriptions and direct state allocations, reflecting a conscious effort to maintain fiscal autonomy while addressing urgent infrastructural needs. The document also attests to the Wali's immediate and practical response by depositing Rs. 6,000 with the Political Agent to initiate repairs on the "big bridge" near Kanju.

The completion of the wooden bridge near Kanju constituted a watershed moment, fundamentally altering the infrastructural logic of the State and catalyzing profound changes in the daily lives and economic prospects of the inhabitants living on the banks of the river. What had once been an unsafe crossing became a symbol of modernization, order, and governance. The bridge not only facilitated safe passage for people and goods but also served as instruments of economic integration and state consolidation. The establishment of police pickets and the imposition of a modest road tax reveal on bullock-carts, taxi-cabs, lorries and tongas, that was used for the repair and roads of bridges, highlighted an emerging system of infrastructural regulation and maintenance. It also reflected a shift from tribal informality to structured state administration. The bridge remained "open day and night" was "free of charge" for pedestrians and was used for the collective good of the populace (Qasmi, 1940).

In 1933, the Political Agent, W. R. Hay, in his monograph on Swat State stated about the infrastructural conditions and administrative progress of the Swat State, made reference to two strategically significant bridges that played a crucial role in the region's communication network. He noted succinctly that there were "bridges over the Swat River at Mingaora and Paiti (now Fatehpur)" (Hay, 1934). Similarly, in his reflections on the infrastructural achievements of his reign, Miangul Abdul Wadud offered an insight into the extent and sophistication of bridge construction undertaken during his rule. He emphasized that one of his most notable accomplishments was the construction of "an enormous wooden bridge which joined the areas lying north and south of the river, constructed over the River Swat at about two miles from Mingora" (Hussain, 101). He described the bridge as "a feat of engineering illustrative of Pathan architecture," further noting its remarkable capacity, "a truck carrying fifty maunds of load can easily pass over it" (Hussain, 101).

He further highlighted two other significant bridge projects of his tenure and noted that Shamizai was connected to the areas across the river by an iron bridge at Pul Dheri (Now Bagh Derai), followed by an iron bridge at Madyan, extending infrastructural development into the upper valley and facilitating inter-regional movement. Besides, these two bridges, the Wali also constructed two other bridges for pedestrians near Branial (now Bahrain)" (Qasmi, 49).

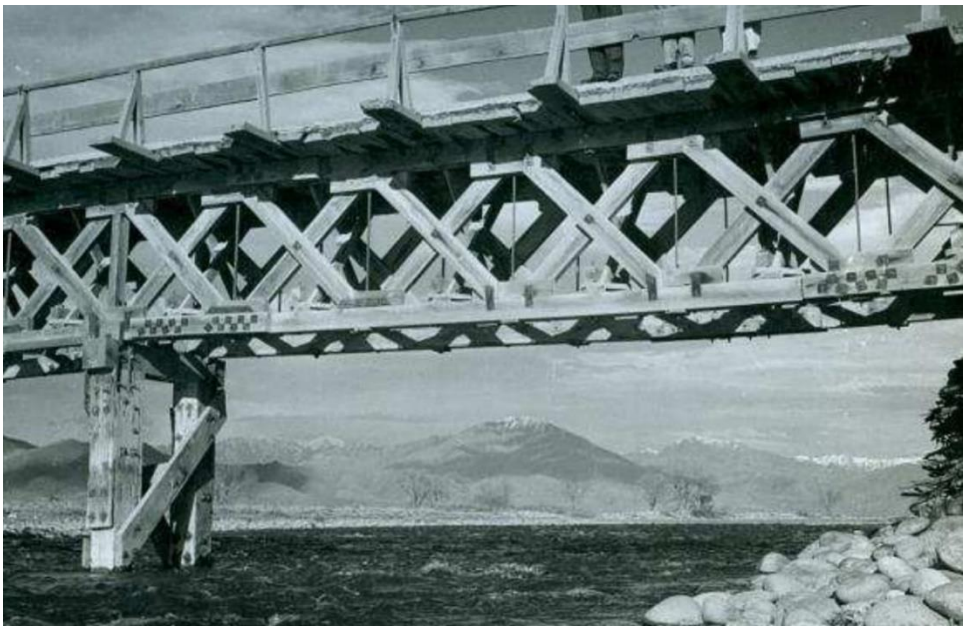

Figure 1: Partial view of the historic wooden bridge in 1940s (Courtesy: Dr. Luca Maria Olivieri) (Miangul Archive)

Construction of Mingora Bridge over River Swat (1962)

The period between 1961 and 1969 marked a transformative phase in the infrastructural development of the Swat State, characterized by unprecedented progress and modernization. This era, under the leadership and strategic planning of Miangul Abdul Haq Jahanzeb (reign from 1949 to 1969) witnessed a systematic and well-coordinated expansion of the State's communication network, particularly in the domain of bridge construction over the Swat River and its tributaries. During the period, a number of key bridges were constructed at Gwaratai, Kanju, and Khwaza Khela, significantly improving connectivity between the various valleys and administrative divisions of Swat. In addition to these bridges, the Wali's administration also embraced modern engineering techniques, reflecting a decisive

shift toward technological advancement and material innovation (Shahab, 2021). Thus, the last Wali of Swat decided to replace the historic wooden bridge constructed during his father's reign. Recognizing both the strategic and economic significance of the crossing over the Swat River, Miangul Jahanzeb undertook the construction of a modern bridge designed to accommodate increasing vehicular traffic and withstand the hydrological pressures of the river system. The project signaled a generational shift in modernization ideology. Where his father's wooden bridge utilized local materials and labor, Miangul Jahanzeb's concrete structure embraced international engineering standards, reflecting Swat State's deeper integration into the technological paradigms of post-colonial Pakistan. This time the bridge was named as Mingora Bridge and the construction work commenced in August 1959. The project was financed by the State while Pak PWD was responsible for its construction and supervision. After a sustained period of work involving both local and external engineering expertise, the bridge was completed on 15 March 1962 (Muhammad Said Khan versus Government of West Pakistan, 1969).

Figure 2: View of the Mingora Bridge when it was intact; the remains of the earlier wooden bridge are also visible in the river (Photo credit: Unknown)

The wooden bridge, which had served as the principal crossing over the river for nearly thirty years, had become both a symbol of early development and a relic of a bygone era of limited engineering resources. In an interview with Fazal Raziq Shahab (of Aboha, Swat), he informed that the wooden bridge was auctioned and the highest bid was ten thousand rupees. The entire structure, comprising tons of seasoned timber, iron bolts, and metal fittings went into the hands of the bidder. The newly constructed R.C.C bridge (Mingora Bridge), constructed as a modern

replacement on the right side of the earlier wooden bridge, unfortunately did not endure for long. Despite being built with the intention of providing a more durable and permanent crossing over the Swat River, the structure soon encountered damage due to floods. In June 1964, two piers of the Mingora Bridge collapsed, leading the Governor's Inspection Team to conduct an inquiry into the causes. The findings were submitted to Governor Malik Amir Muhammad Khan, who expressed grave concern over the matter and directed that explanations be sought from the officers responsible, disciplinary action be taken against those found guilty, and even pension reductions be considered for retired officials if their culpability was established. On 16 March 1966, the Governor of West Pakistan ordered a departmental inquiry against Additional (r) Muhammad Said Khan and two Superintending Engineers regarding the collapse of the Mingora Bridge. In response of the Inquiry Report, a writ petition was filed by Muhammad Said Khan, a retired Additional Chief Engineer of the Public Works Department (Pak P.W.D.), against Government of West Pakistan, represented through the Secretary to the Government of West Pakistan, Communications and Works Department, Lahore, and the Secretary to the Government of West Pakistan, Irrigation and Power Department, Lahore. The petitioner, Muhammad Said Khan, in his legal submission, sought "a declaration to the respondents that the charges framed against him... are [were] without lawful authority, as no departmental proceedings can be instituted against the petitioner...since the same are time-barred" (Muhammad Said Khan vs Government of West Pakistan, 1969). In his petition, Muhammad Said Khan, through his legal counsel, stated that he had served as an Additional Chief Engineer in the West Pakistan Public Works Department (Buildings and Roads) and had retired on 4th October 1964. He further clarified that during the period from 1st December 1959 to 4th January 1962, he was in charge of the Peshawar Region in his capacity as Additional Chief Engineer. According to the Ex Additional Chief Engineer, the construction of the Mingora Bridge in the State had commenced in August 1959, a time prior to his assumption of charge, and the project was completed on 15 March 1962, after he had relinquished his position to his successor. By emphasizing these dates, the Additional Chief Engineer sought to establish that he neither initiated nor supervised the project throughout its completion phase, thereby distancing himself from any direct administrative or technical responsibility in relation to the bridge's eventual failure. The Additional Advocate General, appearing on behalf of the Government, contended that the Additional Chief Engineer, contrary to the approved design specifications, constructed the bridge piers at reduced depths—specifically, 13 feet and 15 feet below Pier No. 1 instead of

the prescribed depths of 40.08 feet and 27.08 feet. It was further alleged that the Additional Chief Engineer violated governmental procedures and technical regulations by failing to obtain the requisite formal approval of the design and technical sanction, thereby acting in disregard of the applicable Code Rules and administrative instructions. The Additional Advocate-General "tried to argue that since the petitioner had constructed the piers contrary to the design and the depth and had also not obtained the previous approval for change of design etc. he had committed breach of "instructions issued by Government" (Muhammad Said Khan vs Government of West Pakistan, 1969). However, the court concluded that the order of the Governor directing departmental enquiry to be held against the Additional Chief Engineer was without lawful authority on two-fold ground. Firstly, that the charge sheets framed against the Additional Chief Engineer did not constitute 'grave misconduct', and secondly the "departmental proceedings could not be directed to be held against the petitioner after more than one year of his retirement." Thus, the court accepted the petition and declared that the order in regard to the departmental enquiry against the Additional Chief Engineer was without lawful authority. Whether the Government of West Pakistan subsequently appealed against the High Court's judgment before the Supreme Court of Pakistan remains unclear from the available record. Hence, to establish whether the judgment was upheld, modified, or overturned, or whether the government accepted the decision without appeal, further investigation is required.

Figure 3: View of the foundation stone of the Mingora Bridge, commemorating its inauguration in 1962. It still remains on the left bank of the Swat River, although the bridge itself no longer exists. (Photograph by the researcher).

Construction of Ayub Bridge Over River Swat (1966)

Following the collapse of the two piers of Mingora Bridge due to flood, a new and more advanced bridge was commissioned at the same site. This replacement structure was named the Ayub Bridge, in honour of Field Marshal Muhammad Ayub Khan, who was the President of Pakistan at the time. The naming reflected the federal government's financial involvement and administrative support in the project. The construction of the Ayub Bridge represented a renewed phase of infrastructural modernization in the Swat Valley during the 1960s. The bridge that was completed in 1966, its design and materials demonstrated technological advancement, employing improved construction methods to ensure greater durability and resistance to the Swat River's strong hydrological forces. The Ayub Bridge was built by Gammon Pakistan Limited, one of the country's leading engineering and construction firms of the time (Uddin, 2019). Renowned for its expertise in large-scale infrastructural projects, it was Gammon Pakistan's first assignment in Swat State and it ensured that the new bridge incorporated modern design principles, superior materials, and improved construction standards.

The Ayub Bridge remained a vital component of Swat's transport and communication network for forty-four years. However, in the wake of the catastrophic flash floods that struck the Swat Valley, this long-standing symbol of connectivity met its tragic end. The floods wreaked havoc across the region's transportation infrastructure, submerging roads, collapsing dozens of link routes, and sweeping a number of bridges (Khaliq, 2010). Among the structures lost was the historic Ayub Bridge, whose destruction marked not only the loss of a significant piece of engineering heritage. Subsequently, another bridge was constructed at the same site, which presently serves as the primary crossing over and continues to facilitate vehicular and pedestrian movement.

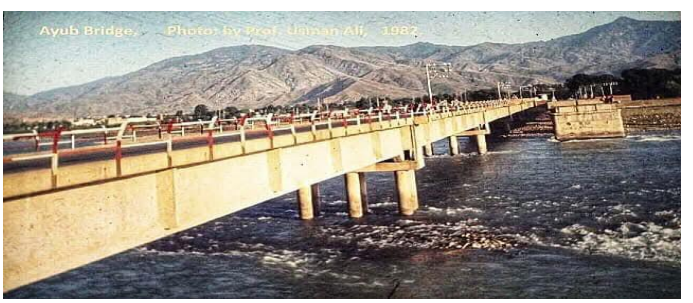

Figure 4: View of Ayub Bridge with the remaining section of the Mingora Bridge to its left, 1982. (Photograph courtesy of Prof. Khwaja Usman Ali)

Conclusion

The construction of the bridge over the River Swat near Kanju under Miangul Abdul Wadud marked a decisive moment in the infrastructural and administrative evolution of the nascent Swat State (1915 to 1969). Initiated in 1927 under the technical supervision of the Military Engineering Service, the project embodied the ruler's aspiration to "extend civilization among his people." Despite catastrophic floods in 1929 that destroyed one third of the structure soon after its inauguration, the Wali's swift mobilization of local resources, refusal of interest-bearing loans, and determination to reconstruct the bridge on indigenous strength reveal a distinct model of developmental leadership rooted in self-reliance and community participation. The reconstruction of the Mingora Bridge in 1962 under Miangul Abdul Haq Jahanzeb represents both continuity and transformation in Swat's infrastructural history. Building upon the legacy of his father, Miangul Jahanzeb's efforts reflected a new phase of modernization rooted in technological advancement. The wooden bridge embodied a polity asserting its sovereignty through indigenous means; the 1962 R.C.C. bridge represented its aspiration to a technocratic modernity, albeit one fraught with new risks of failure, accountability and integration with the broader infrastructural framework of Pakistan. Yet, the structural failure of the bridge in 1964 and falling of its piers due to floods, followed by official inquiries and legal proceedings, exposed the vulnerabilities inherent in that transitional phase. The construction of the Ayub Bridge in 1966 marked the peak of Swat's infrastructural evolution, a trajectory that began with Miangul Abdul Wadud's pioneering wooden bridge of 1927 and continued by his son. Each successive phase embodied the prevailing political vision, technological capacity, and developmental aspirations of its era. The Ayub Bridge thus stood as a physical and symbolic continuation of the last Wali's quest for progress that served the community for forty-four years and connected communities on both sides of River Swat. Ultimately, the story of these three bridges is one of cyclical ambition, adaptation, and renewal. It encapsulates a universal tension in modernization projects: the struggle to impose permanent order onto a dynamic landscape, a process where every engineering solution inevitably sows the seeds for its future re-imagination. Each bridge rose from the remains of its predecessor, embodying the vision of connectivity that lay at the heart of Swat's transformation from a traditional tribal polity into a modern, integrated State. The history of these bridges, culminating in the Ayub Bridge's four-decade endurance and eventual demise, thus encapsulates the broader saga of Swat's modernization.

References

Secondary Sources

Ali, A. (2020). Tehsil Charbagh: Historical, political, social and economic perspectives [Bachelor's thesis, Government Postgraduate Jahanzeb College]. Department of History.

Barger, E., & Wright, P. (1941). Excavations in Swat and explorations in the Oxus territories of Afghanistan: A detailed report of the 1938 expedition (Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India, No. 64). Government of India Press.

Hay, W. R. (1934). Monograph on Swat State. Government of India Press.

Hussain, A. A. (1962). The story of Swat as told by the founder Miangul Abdul Wadud Bacha Sahib to Muhammad Asif Khan. Ferozsons Limited.

Khaliq, F. (2010, November 25). Locals want bridge reconstructed before winter rains. The Express Tribune. https://tribune.com.pk/story/81434/locals-want-bridge-reconstructed-before-winter-rains

Qasmi, A. G. (1940). The history of Swat. D. C. Anand & Son.

Shahab, F. R. (2021, February 20). Never ever dream again (autobiography of Fazal Raziq Shahab), Part 33. Swat Encyclopedia. https://swatencyclopedia.com/en/2021/02/3342/

Sami Ullah, & Ahmad, I. (2024). Social perspective of Babuzi during the Swat State era (1917–1969). Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society, 72(2), 45–68.

Stein, A. (1929). On Alexander's track to the Indus: Personal narrative of explorations on the north-west frontier of India. Macmillan and Co., Limited.

Uddin, J. (2023). Muhammad Ayub Khan and the royal family of Swat: An analysis of family ties and their political implications. Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society, 71(2), 91–109.

Uddin, J. (2019, April 19). Kanju Pul ke 90 saala rodaadh. Daily Azadi.

Zebsar, T. M. K. (n.d.). Urooj-e-Afghan (Vol. 1, pp. 251–252) [Verse]. (Published in 1361 A.H.). n.p.

Zebsar, T. M. K. (1957). Naway Swat (Vol. 3). n.p.

Primary Sources

Glover, T. (1930, March 20). Letter No. Nil to the Secretary to the Hon'ble Chief Commissioner, NWFP. Malakand Documents.

Letter No. 23-P-A (Confidential), dated December 13, 1927, S. No. 247, Bundle No. 12 (Confidential, 1927). Directorate of Archives & Libraries, Peshawar.

Letter No. 2842, dated September 10, 1929. Malakand Documents.

Muhammad Said Khan (Retired Chief Engineer, P.W.D.) vs Government of West Pakistan, Writ Petition No. 201 of 1966, All Pakistan Legal Decisions, 21(5), 149–155 (1969).

North West Frontier Provincial Diary for the week ending April 14, 1928, File No. 56-67 (Confidential Diaries), Bundle No. 54, 1919–1930, List No. 1. Deputy Commissioner Peshawar File, Directorate of Archives & Libraries, Peshawar.

North West Frontier Provincial Diary for the week ending April 6, 1929, Ibid.

North West Frontier Provincial Diary for the week ending August 31, 1929, Ibid.

Ruler of Swat. (1930, February 8). Letter No. 703 to the Political Agent. Malakand Documents.

Ruler of Swat. (n.d.). Letter No. 77 to the Political Agent. Malakand Documents.

Article Information:

Received	*9-Sept-2025*
Revised	30-Nov-2025
Accepted	8-Dec-2025
Published	15-Dec-2025

Declarations:

Author's Contribution:

- **Conceptualization, and intellectual revisions**
- **Data collection, interpretation, and drafting of manuscript**
- The author agrees to take responsibility for every facet of the work, making sure that any concerns about its integrity or veracity are thoroughly examined and addressed

- **Conflict of Interest**: NIL
- **Funding Sources**: NIL

Correspondence:

Jalal Uddin

jalaludin512815@gmail.com