***Tarikh-e-Peshawar***

The *Tarikh-e-Peshawar* (History of Peshawar) is an encyclopedic collection of colonial era information assembled by Gopal Das in Urdu and published by the Kohinoor Press in Lahore about 1878.[[1]](#footnote-1) In 1,682 pages of essays, tables, lists, and images, the book presents a voluminous survey of the geography, society, culture, and economy of the Peshawar valley. This edited selection reprints original sections from the *Tarikh-e-Peshawar* that are representative of the broad range of subjects surveyed in the full text. Subjects presented include regional geography, the genealogies of leading clans, clothing, jewelry, household items, marriage customs, traditional weaponry, and agrarian methods and implements.

At first the *Tarikh-e-Peshawar* impresses as a monumental literary production unique in the level of detail devoted to documenting the political economy and culture of one region’s towns, villages, farms, communities, and resources. In fact, the production and structuring of the book were directly related to the primary economic activity of the British-Indian government, the measuring and taxation of agricultural holdings and produce. Gopal Das was a colonial revenue officer active in previous Punjab districts and was mobilized with others from 1869 to 1874 to produce an official land Settlement Report of the several hundred villages of the British colonial Peshawar District.[[2]](#footnote-2)

This introduction discusses Gopal Das’ literary legacy as both the unique work of a curious, active observer and a work representative of a genre of regional and district-level studies long written up by British colonial field officers and published in district gazetteers, scholarly journals, and popular magazines and memoirs. Much of the *Tarikh-e-Peshawar* was narrative exposition detailing the economic holdings and activities of Peshawar Valley social communities (primarily Pashtuns/Afghans, but also those labeled Hindus, Qizibash, and others). There was a heavy emphasis on the listing of village land holdings, water and irrigation resources, and the fine details of community lineages and social relations. These facts were of primary interest to Settlement Report officers revising agricultural field maps, crop yield estimates, and land revenue taxation rates. In fact, much of the *Tarikh-e-Peshawar* was the Urdu prose presentation of material collected for and written up in the formal Peshawar District Settlement Report published in English in 1878 by superintendent of the settlement, Captain E. G. G. Hastings. Those familiar with the series of District Gazetteers produced by the British, including the *Gazetteer of the Peshawar District, 1897-98*, will recognize the mixed format of summary history, detailed geography, and sections on manufactures, trade, crop production, and village revenue dues and exemptions (including *zamindari inam*, *mafi*, and frontier remission exemptions).

But, if framed by official categories and constructions of colonial knowledge and control, the *Tarikh-e-Peshawar* transcended the routine cataloguing, statistics, and tables of the settlement report and district gazetteer genres. Spending years visiting the many villages and communities across the Peshawar valley, Gopal Das and other settlement officers officially recorded clan and family genealogical charts (“pedigree tables”), “tribal” relations, and “customary law” social practices. Much of this information was related to property and inheritance to better serve colonial collectors and magistrates sorting out local power struggles, land disputes and inheritance claims. But, in an approach that made the *Tarikh-e-Peshawar* an exceptional colonial document, Gopal Das also deployed an ethnographer’s sensibility to collect and present a visual archive of pencil sketches recording village social practices and material culture. His interests and methods had been shaped by previous experience as an official involved in similar land settlement work done in the Gujranwala District near Lahore.

Later scholars and the public recognized the value of this accumulated store of formal and popular history and narrative. The Sikh scholar, Ganda Singh, treated the volume as an encyclopedia from which to draw material for his bibliography:

“A book full of information on Afghan-Sikh relations and struggles, forts in Peshawar district, 53-55; system of government before the Sikhs, 386; Sikh government under Kanwar Nau-Nihal Singh, 386-7; and under S. Tej Singh, Avitabile, S. Sher Singh Attariwala, 387-91; Maharajah Ranjit Singh and Dost Muhammad, 162, 169; S. Hari Singh, 166, 170-76; S. Mihan Singh, 170; battle of Naushera, 308-9; battles with Sayyed Ahmad Barelavi, 309-323; Yar Muhammad and Ranjit Singh.”

The emphasis of this much reduced edited version will be less on the basic expository and economic information, already available in archived and published assessment and settlement reports and gazetteers (see bibliography below), and more on the ethnographic and visual material that is unique to the *Tarikh-e-Peshawar*. Gopal Das may not have drawn a single one of the line drawings included in this volume, yet he was the one who collected, introduced, indexed, and published an extraordinary series of drawings as visual evidence of communities and cultures now transformed and reshaped by one hundred-thirty-five years of history.

The British colonial Peshawar District of 1878 was eventually subdivided into the contemporary Pakistan districts of Peshawar, Mardan, Nowshera, Hashtnagar, and Swabi. Before 1878, the district was administered by a Deputy Commissioner and divided into the six subdivisions (*tahsils*) of Peshawar, Daudzai, Doaba, Hashtnaggar, Yusafzai, and Naushahra.[[3]](#footnote-3) The 1878 Settlement officers reorganized the tahsils into the Peshawar, Doaba Daudzai, Hashtnaggar, Yusafzai (Mardan), Utman Bolak, and Naushahra tahsils. The Yusufzai sub-division, administered by an Assistant Commissioner, included the tahsils of Yusafzai and Utman Bolak. The 1878 Report counted 725 villages in the district, with a district total area of 2,504 miles.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Some limited information is available within related texts about Gopal Das and the production of the *Tarikh-e-Peshawar*. In the 1878 Settlement Report, E. G. G. Hastings closed the report narrative with discussion of his staff. After acknowledging Lt. Montgomery, with his useful knowledge of Pashto, Hastings continued:

“Gopal Das-Was the Senior Extra Assistant Settlement Officer. I have frequently given my opinion of the worth and ability of this officer. His great powers of organization and supervision, with a large experience, enabled him to give great assistance in every detail. Without him I should have found it very difficult to work the settlement. His services, I am happy to see, have since been recognized by the Government.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

The Urdu language *Tarikh-e-Peshawar* published in Lahore around this time was mentioned in passing by Hastings,

“A very voluminous vernacular report was prepared under the superintendence of Gopal Das, Extra Assistant Settlement Officer; it will have to be revised by Hakim Rai previous to submission.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

 The cover and table of contents of the *Tarikh-e-Peshawar* reveal colonial hierarchies defined by power, race, and prestige. The book cover, just under the volume title, gives in Urdu central prominence to “Janab Captain E. G. Hastings, Sahib Bahadur, Superintendent Peshawar Settlement”. Then in smaller type it lists as supervisor “Rai Bahadur Munshi Gopal Das, Extra Assistant Commissioner”. Only in the table of contents is the volume mentioned as “compiled by” (*mo’al lifah*) Gopal Das. The compilation work included translation, new prose, editing, and the collection, indexing, and presentation of several sections of unpublished sketches.

This edited selection includes as an appendix a glossary of terms (in English and Pashto) included in the Settlement Report of 1878. These terms will add to understanding of the agrarian practices of the irrigated and rain-fed villages of the Peshawar Valley. The bibliography below includes details of the reports, gazetteers, and publications available in the British Library Indian Office collection in London and detailed by Clive Dewey in his mentioned handbook. While many western colonial officials wrote and published reports and memoirs about the Peshawar valley, Pakhtuns, and the North West Frontier, few comparable nineteenth century “vernacular” manuscripts were produced by non-western writers. As an outsider, a resident of Lahore, Gopal Das was also a distanced colonial manager observing local populations from above. But as a subordinated “native” colonial employee he also was closely involved in village-level life, to an extent revealed by the *Tarikh-e-Peshawar’s* encyclopedic recording of many dimensions of local culture and the mundane details of daily life.

Selected for this edited introductory reading are pages chosen to illustrate the form and contents of the original manuscript. The Urdu language pages are direct reproductions from the original edition. The one page Introduction (*diba’chah*) is presented in an English translation done by James Caron and Rubab Qureshi and in the Urdu original. Next, in an informal part one, is a single page from a section on geography (*jughra’fiyah*) that includes a list of the District tahsils.[[7]](#footnote-7) The second part is a ten page prose essay discussing details (*kaifi’yat*) of the villages of the Kamalzai subdivision (tappa) of the Yusafzai tahsil. Part three presents a section of lineage charts (*shajara’h nasab*) of the ethnic communities (*quam*) and leading headmen (*malik’an*) of the Peshawar District. Part four includes an essay discussing the clothing (*libas*) styles and fashions of the residents of the Peshawar District. This section includes a six page contents listing of the sixteen following pages of drawings of dress for men and women, including caps and turbans (*pagri*), cloaks, dresses, and footware.

Part five, about jewelry and personal ornaments (*ze’var*), continues the previous section format of an introductory prose essay, then a detailed table of contents that precedes pages of sketches. Twenty-four pages of drawings illustrate the necklaces, bracelets, earrings, and other women’s jewelry attributed to the different communities of the Peshawar valley. Part six is a remarkable section illustrating and describing home furnishings. Drawings include bowls, pitchers, cooking implements, teapots, water pipes, lamps, spinning wheels, baskets, fans, bed frames, and locks. A full sketch of a home exterior illustrates the unique regional architecture of exterior woodworking, balcony windows, and wood framed, brick wall sectioning designed to absorb the shocks of low grade earthquakes.

Part seven includes thirty-two pages about marriage customs (*rasm shadi*). An introductory essay and extended table of prose descriptions of community marriage practices are followed by elaborate sketch representations (*tasvir*-picture) of wedding processions (*barat*) of Afghans, Muslim residents of Peshawar, and Hindus. (*Tasvir Barat Afghanan*, *Tasvir Barat Ahl Islam Sukkan-e Peshawar*, *Tasvir Barat Ahl Hunood*). Part Eight lists and illustrates arms (*as’lehah*) of the Peshawar valley, including swords (*talwar*), knives, muskets, pistols, axes, bows, lances, and armor, including chain mail outerwear.

Part nine, the final section, documents the agriculturalists (singular-*zamindar*) of the Peshawar District. Twenty-eight pages are dedicated to an inventory and drawings of farming tools and methods. Two pages are dedicated to a sketch of a garden plot irrigated by an animal turned Persian wheel accompanied by drawings of the individual pieces of the Persian wheel structure (including gearing, shafts, and waterpots). There are images of farmers and their field tools as they hoe, level fields, harvest, and thresh. The pieces of a disassembled plow are drawn and labeled. One picture shows the process of cutting up sugar cane (*ganai*), crushing out the juice, then cooking it down to unrefined sugar (*gur*). A separate page sketches all the tools used in the cane work. A final two pages first maps the scene of an irrigated garden plot as a farmer uses a counter-balanced weight to draw water from a well, then sketches the individual pieces of the basic, but effective irrigation system.

**Select Bibliography**

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1. Gopal Das, *Tarikh-e-Peshawar*, Lahore: Kohinoor Press, c. 1878. The publication date of 1874 is given in Ganda Singh’s text, see bibliography. In a “Book Review”, Dr. Mohammad Anwar Khan, University of Peshawar, discussed the “Tareekh-e-Peshawar”, published by the “Kohe-Noor Press”, Lahore. See discussion of the Kohinoor Press in Farina Mir, *The Social Space of Language, Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010, p. 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The cover of the *Tarikh-e-Peshawar* listed in Urdu the full honorific titles of Rai Bahadur Munshi Gopal Das Sahib, Extra Assistant Commissioner. He was also described in the Settlement Report of 1878 as Gopal Das, Extra Assistant Settlement Officer. *Report of the Regular Settlement of the Peshawar District* (1878). India Office Library collection, V/27/314/598, p. 141. See bibliography for publication details. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. These spellings are from the 1878 Settlement Report. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Report of the Regular Settlement of the Peshawar District* (1878), p. 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Report of the Regular Settlement of the Peshawar District* (1878), p. 308. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Report of the Regular Settlement of the Peshawar District* (1878), p. 309. For his work on the settlement, Hakim Rai was promoted to Extra Assistant Settlement Officer. *Report of the Regular Settlement of the Peshawar District* (1878), p. 308. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The Part one, two, etc. divisions are arbitrary to this edited introductory selection for simple reference. Original page numbers allow immediate identification of selected pages with pages and sections in the accompanying full text original manuscript. The original fourteen page index outlines by subject (*mazmoon*) seven chapters of 1,682 total pages detailed by chapter (*bab*) and chapter section (*fas’l*). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)