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## THE FATE OF BRITISH PLACE NAMES IN PAKISTAN

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### Introduction

A SMALL number of place names survive as reminders of the more than one century of British rule in the region that now constitutes the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Jacobabad and Abbottabad are the two most important names on a very short list of cities and towns that still go by their British designations. Others include Jamesabad, Lawrencepur, and Warburton. The names of several more cities and towns with British origins have been changed in recent years, including Lyallpur (now Faisalabad), Campbellpur (now Attock City), Montgomery (now Sahiwal), and Fort Sandeman (now Zhob). Similarly, many British names for streets, parks, and buildings in the urban areas of Pakistan have been dropped to reflect new political circumstances, though some British names continue to survive on city maps and others can still be heard on the lips of local taxi drivers and shopkeepers. One of Pakistan's four provinces (the Northwest Frontier Province) still goes by its old colonial-sounding designation, while the remaining three (Punjab, Sind, and Baluchistan) reflect more traditional linguistic roots.

### Natural Objects

By and large, British cartographers adopted local names for natural objects such as rivers, passes, and mountains. Major rivers (such as the Indus, Ravi, Chenab, Jhelum, Sutlej, and Kabul) and major passes (such as the Khyber, Bolan, Malakand, Lowari, and Babusar) were named long before the British arrived and remained essentially unchanged, despite some mispronunciation and lapses in romanization. Most but not all mountains and mountain ranges also followed this pattern, with the Hindu Kush and Kirthar mountains and the peaks of Tirich Mir, Nanga Parbat, and Rakaposhi all derived from local sources. One notable exception – Godwin-Austin, second highest mountain in the world – was not visible from populated settlements and hence was named for a nineteenth century British figure. The mountain is now more commonly referred to as

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K-2, itself a British designation. (Of course, Everest in Nepal also continues to bear its British name). A few other peaks and ranges – Golden Throne in the Karakoram, for example, and Black Mountain in Hazara – still bear the clear imprint of British mapmakers. In addition, a small number of coastal features – Cape Monze, Sandspit, Hawkes Bay, all near Karachi – continue to go by their British-designated names.

### Roads and Public Monuments

The names of numerous roads and public monuments in important Pakistani cities such as Karachi and Lahore originally came from British sources. So too, many streets and public places in such cantonment towns as Quetta, Rawalpindi, and Peshawar originally bore British names. Main thoroughfares honored renowned figures of the British Raj such as Nicholson, Hamilton, Napier, Lytton, and Durand. Other streets, though not named for individuals, reflected British Institutions – Mall Road, Mission Road, Church Road, Brewery Road, Club Road, Golf Road, Station Road, and Jail Road, to name some of the major ones.

Following independence in 1947, place names in the cities of Pakistan began to be changed. Public monuments in particular, as constant reminders of the long years of British rule, were especially tempting targets for nationalistic politicians and public officials. Victoria Hall in Sibi became Jirga Hall. Minto Park in Lahore, named for a former Governor-General of India, became Iqbal Park in honor of the intellectual father of Pakistan. Similarly, Lawrence Gardens in Lahore was renamed Jinnah Bagh after Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah, the founder of the country. In fact, the names of Allama Iqbal and Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah, the two most significant figures in the founding of Pakistan, quickly became attached to streets, circles, and parks in cities and towns throughout the country. Other important figures of the past and present – Nazimuddin, Liaquat, Hali, Tipu Sultan, Babar, Aurengzeb, Afghani, Bahadur Shah, and so forth – also replaced British names, though in many cases the old names continued to be used in day-to-day conversation long after they had officially been dropped from city maps.

One reason why there has been a marked reluctance to use at least some of the new names in daily conversation is because many of the new designations are so lengthy. A taxi driver would clearly prefer to be told to go to "Garden Road" in Karachi rather than to "His Highness Prince Sir Sultan Mohammad Agha Khan III Road". Other mouthfuls include "Captain Sarwar Shaheed Nishan-i-Haider Road" and "Major Aziz Bhatti Nishan-i-Haider Road," both of which recently drew some ridicule for their length from a Pakistani columnist.<sup>1</sup> Some seemingly appropriate local names which had been given during the British Raj have also been lost in the rush to remove traces of the Empire. For example, two main roads in Karachi – Bunder (Sindhi for "Harbor") Road and Drigh (Sindhi for "Long") Road – have been changed. The former is now called M. A. Jinnah Road and the latter Shah-re-Faisal.

Despite the speed with which the names of many roads and buildings used during the Raj were officially changed, at least some survive and, despite their vulnerability, remain untouched. Frere Hall in Karachi continues to survive and Empress Market still goes by its old British name, despite occasional demands for a new name. Some in Pakistan think the name "Empress" is especially inappropriate because the market also marks the site where several mutinous soldiers were executed during what the British refer to as the "Sepoy Revolt" and what some Pakistanis call "The First War of Independence".

### Institutions

Interestingly, institutions (schools, hospitals, hotels, etc.) named for British figures have by and large fared better than roads and public monuments and many such names from the British era survive. For example, the hotel chain operated by the Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation owns several hotels that have a clear link with the British past, including Flashman's Hotel (Rawalpindi), Dean's Hotel (Peshawar) and Cecil's Hotel (Murree). A number of hospitals also continue to bear the names of their British benefactors. Examples here include Lady Reading Hospital (Peshawar), Lady Willingdon Hospital (Lahore) and Lady Dufferin Hospital (Karachi and Quetta), all named after women who promoted improved health and medical care during their years of residence on the Subcontinent.

Another area of interest that continues to bear a clear British imprint are schools, reflecting a legacy of widespread British involvement in education. King Edward Medical College (Lahore), Aitchison College (Lahore), Edwardes College (Peshawar), Lawrence College (Murree), Gordon College (Rawalpindi), Murray College (Sialkot), and Foreman College (Lahore) all continue to bear Western-sounding names. The latter three were founded by missionaries and, despite nationalizations in the early 1970s, continue to be referred to by their earlier names.

The continued use of British names for educational institutions can be controversial, with the example of Lawrence College in Murree serving as a case in point. The school has gone through three name changes in the past fifteen years – Pine Hills College, Ghora Gali College, and then back again to Lawrence College in time for its 125th anniversary celebrations in 1985. Each of the name changes have been accompanied by considerable controversy in the local press. That the British names for schools have for the most part survived is in large part due to the natural constituency which such institutions develop. In particular, former students are reluctant to change the name of schools that hold fond memories and may have achieved high name recognition. "Old Boys Associations," formed by graduates of institutions throughout Pakistan, often became an active lobby group in ensuring that their former schools continue to bear older and more familiar names.

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### Villages, Towns, Cities and Districts

The survival of British names in cities, towns, and villages provides intriguing clues to British rule, even though many of these names have been changed since 1947. Faisalabad District (formerly Lyallpur District) boasts of several small villages, mostly in "canal colony" areas opened up by new irrigation projects during the late nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries. Examples include two Montgomerwalas as well as a Collegianwala, Burltonpur, King Miraj and Kitchenabad. Some English-sounding names also survive as the designation for villages largely populated by local Christians who were given land grants by the government of British India with the aid of missionaries. Examples here include Martinpur and Youngsabad in Sheikhpura District (United Presbyterian), Ransonabad and Hamiltonabad in Sahiwal (formerly Montgomery) District (Associate Reformed Presbyterian) and Stuntzabad in Multan District (Methodist). On a different plane, the 1981 district census reports revealed a village called Napierabad in Shikarpur District and a Belo Dixon in Jacobabad District. The latter district also includes a "Kaiserabad," a name with intriguing but unclear origins.

The changing of district names has already been alluded to. Three such districts in Punjab province once bore the names of major cities or towns founded during British rule: Montgomery, Lyallpur, and Campbellpur. Montgomery was the first name to be changed, reverting to Sahiwal in 1966. The city had been founded in 1865 by a Mr. Blyth, then Deputy Commissioner of Gujra district. "It receives its present name by way of a somewhat dubious compliment to Sir Robert Montgomery, then Lieutenant-Governor of Punjab," noted one of the early District Gazetteers,<sup>2</sup> referring perhaps to the town's difficult climate and desert location. Montgomery had also played a major role in disarming Indian troops in Lahore in May 1857, at the beginning of the Indian Mutiny. One of the bazaars in the town was called Blyth Gunj in honor of the founder of the city. Montgomery was dropped as the name of the city and the district during the government of Ayub Khan, "honoring the wishes of the people of the district".<sup>3</sup> Sahiwal was selected as the new name because it had been the designation of a small village near where Montgomery was built.

Like Montgomery, Lyallpur was founded as a colony town in a formerly arid region opened up for extensive agriculture through the construction of new irrigation works. The city was first laid out in the 1890s by Sir James Lyall and later became administrative headquarters for Lyallpur district. As settlers poured into the newly-irrigated farm lands, Lyallpur also emerged as an important marketing centre. It continued to grow rapidly following independence and, with a population of more than one million people, is Pakistan's third largest city, surpassed in size only by Karachi and Lahore. Lyallpur was officially proclaimed Faisalabad following the death of King Faisal in 1975, to honor the Saudi monarch who had been widely respected in Pakistan.

Finally, the name of the district and town of Campbellpur has been changed to Attock and Attock City respectively. The original name apparently honored Sir Colin Campbell, a major British military figure who fought in the Crimean War and in military engagements on the Indian subcontinent. He was called back from England in 1857 when the Indian Mutiny broke out, became commander of the British Army, and played an important role in the suppression of the revolt. He was received in Britain as a hero and acclaimed as "the saviour of the British Empire in India;" on his death in 1863 he was buried in Westminster Abbey.<sup>4</sup> The new name for Campbellpur, Attock City, derives from Attock Fort, a major military installation built on the Indus River by the Moghul Emperor Akhbar in 1581 as a protection against attacks from Afghanistan. Ironically, "City" was attached to the new name rather than the more indigenous "Pur" (a Sanskrit suffix for town) or "Abad" (a Persian suffix for abode).

A fourth district headquarters – this time in Baluchistan – has also been changed in recent years, from Fort Sandeman to Zhob. Sir Robert Sandeman spent many years in the region and maintained peace by a combination of personal friendship with local tribal chiefs and annual subsidies to various clans. The success of his methods was demonstrated in the Second Afghan War (1879–1880) when the tribes in the region did not revolt. When Sandeman died in southern Baluchistan in 1892 after a brief illness, a local chief honored his memory by building an impressive dome over his grave. The town of Fort Sandeman also continued to bear his name for many years as one of a series of such "garrison posts intended to fortify the area occupied by the British".<sup>5</sup> The names of a small number of more insignificant sites remain intact, including Fort Munro in Dera Ghazi Khan district and Fort Lockhart in Kohat district.

Two other district headquarters – Jacobabad in Sind and Abbottabad in the NWFP – survive as the only major towns left in Pakistan that continue to bear their British names. Though the future of these names is by no means assured, one can speculate that their names remained unchanged because General John Jacob and Major James Abbott are viewed more sympathetically than figures such as Montgomery or Campbell, who were closely associated with the events of 1857. Indeed, Jacob and Abbott both became small legends in their regions and continue to enjoy a measure of local fame. When talk of an official name change occurs from time to time, residents have come forward to say that the names are part of history and should not be changed.

General John Jacob founded the city which bears his name in 1851 near a village known as Khangarh. He commanded a 1600-man irregular calvary troop usually known simply as "Jacob's Horse" that brought peace to the region and "struck terror into the marauding tribes".<sup>6</sup> He was widely respected for his bravery and swordmanship as well as for his interest in irrigation works and public administration. In addition, he invented a rifle used by his troops and built two clocks, one of which reportedly still runs in the Deputy Commissioner's Residence in Jacobabad where he lived. Jacob died in 1858 and is buried in the Christian

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cemetery in Jacobabad. As a mark of respect, 10,000 people are said to have attended his funeral. Jacob's favorite horse is also buried in Jacobabad, under a mud pyramid fifteen feet high. Though no official marker stands at the site, local residents will point it out to visitors to the town.

Abbottabad was named for Major James Abbott, who spent eighteen years in Hazara and founded the city in 1853. As with Jacob, Abbott's long years in the region resulted in a measure of local respect. "The people of Hazara welcomed him as their saviour from Sikh and Dogra oppression," notes one post-independence source. "He had a sanguine enthusiastic temperament (sic) and was chivalrous, warm-hearted and generous . . . he was greatly loved and respected by the people".<sup>7</sup> Abbottabad was first founded as a cantonment town and continues to house important military installations and training facilities. In addition, its cool climate and scenic location have made it a resort town for present-day Pakistanis escaping the summer heat.

### Concluding Remarks

The changing of place names is not a new practice in South Asia. The region has witnessed the rise and fall of numerous foreign invaders and local dynasties. Politically ascendant regimes have changed place names by degree, only to have them changed again by subsequent generations. At the same time, at least some memory of a large number of former rulers and dynasties continues to survive, with existing place names derived from Sikh, Hindu, Mongol, Persian, Turk, and even Greek sources. Nationalistic claims will always be voiced, but it would be unfortunate if the last geographic reminders of British rule were to disappear completely. Occasionally, voices are also raised in Pakistan that reflect this viewpoint:

Our love for history seems to be scant. As time moves on, we are leaving history behind us, not only in our educational institutions but also where history concerns our daily lives.

I mean the lesser architectural landmarks and public works, whether they be cities or buildings, parks or roads; all of them are living tributes to the achievements of great persons and a testimony to the eras that have become part of history.

Those monuments are the indicators of time, when a nation is strong and when it is weak, when it is its own master and when it is not, thus enabling an ordinary citizen of a nation to learn from history in its streets too!

This can enable a father to tell his inquisitive son, as to why such and such a road was named after Lawrence, who Lawrence was and what made him conquer the Punjab and so on. These facts become lessons which enable our ordinary citizens to conduct themselves in a manner that will not allow their democratically elected governments to repeat rotten history.

people are said to be buried in Jacobabad, no official markers to the town. The British who spent eighteen months with Jacob, Abbott's respect. "The people and Dogra oppressors and sanguine enthusiasts and generous . . . Jacobabad was first an important military base because of its cool climate and the day Pakistanis

in South Asia. The foreign invaders and changed place names over generations. After the rule of former rulers, names derived from various sources. Unfortunately if the last names disappear completely, reflect this viewpoint:

As we move on, we are aware of the national institutions but

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In my perception, it does not behove any nation to change the names of places built by earlier rulers, whether native or foreign. The Indian Prime Minister lives on a road named by the British after the last great Muslim Emperor of India (whom the Indians hate the most), but their sense of history did not allow them to change it. Nor have they renamed Connaught Place in New Delhi as Mahatama Gandhi Market.

Even the British did not hesitate to name a number of roads and probably some other public works created by them after great Muslim monarchs who had ruled India. They did not change the name of any old city so much that the new city they built in the suburbs of the old Indian capital was called New Delhi, thus showing a great sense of history.

On the other hand, what we have been doing is to efface history from the face of Pakistan, which is not possible and has not been very successful either, for most of the renaming that we have accomplished hasn't clicked, apart from the fact that it is not honest.

The fact that The Mall is still called the Mall, Davis Road, McLeod Road, Victoria Road and a host of other roads in spite of renaming are still called by their original names. So wouldn't it be a gracious act if the roads, parks, halls and towns whose nomenclature have been changed are restored to their rightful and original names, whatsoever they may be?<sup>8</sup>

Such sentiments are however, rare, and the movement to continue changing the few remaining British-sounding names in Pakistan is quite strong:

The proposal made by a Peshawar-based student organization for changing NWFP's name to Pakhtunkhwa province will be welcomed by the people of Pakhtunkhwa – as well as of other provinces. The first generation did not give much thought to change the colonial names (sic) but the second generation has at least begun to realise that we are an independent nation and must shed our "ferangi" mentality.

Most of the names of cities used by the British colonialists have still not been changed (sic). Although some were changed during the last civilian government, like Sahiwal from Montgomery, Zhob from Sandeman, yet places like Abbottabad and Jacobabad, both very important cities, need to have new names.

The British way of life left a strong and long-lasting impact on the armed forces, not to mention the bureaucracy and the upper-classes. Whereas some terms used in the armed forces have been replaced by Urdu words like "Chapp Raas", "Rukk", "Jaldi-Chal", there are still many names and habits which seem to die hard. About names: an eating place is still called "mess", a helping servant, "orderly" and the serial numbers of the army vehicles are still called BA number, British Army numbers.

The most disgraceful name the colonialists gave to any area is NWFP, which is nothing but a geo-strategic name, besides being in the English language. It should have been changed much earlier, but now that a name has been proposed by our future leaders and saviours of the country – Pakhtunkhwa – it should be honored. One observes from the statements of various political parties and popular organizations that it is catching on fast. Why not grant official assent to the beautiful new Pakhtun name?<sup>9</sup>

With no natural constituency left in Pakistan, such demands are becoming more frequent and the fate of those few British names that remain seems bleak indeed.

#### NOTES

1. See Ibnul Hasan, "Road Sense and Nonsense," *Pakistan and Gulf Economist*, 15–21 March 1986.
2. Government of Punjab, *Montgomery District Gazetteer*, Lahore: Government Printing Office, 1935, pp. 71–72.
3. Government of Pakistan, *District Census Report, Sahiwal*, Islamabad: Ministry of Interior, States and Frontier Regions, 1978, p. 3.
4. Sir Leslie Stephen and Sir Sidney Lee, eds., *The Dictionary of National Biography*, Volume III, London: Oxford University Press, 1917, p. 806.
5. Akhtar Husain Siddiqi and Robert W. Bastian, "Urban Place Names in Pakistan: A Reflection of Cultural Characteristics," *Names* 29:1 (March 1981), p. 76.
6. Sir Leslie Stephen and Sir Sidney Lee, eds., *The Dictionary of National Biography*, Volume X, London: Oxford University Press, 1917, p. 557.
7. Government of Pakistan, *District Census Report, Hazara*, Karachi: Ministry of Home and Kashmir Affairs, 1961, p. 12.
8. "Letter to the Editor," *Muslim* (Islamabad), 16 March 1985.
9. "Letter to the Editor," *Muslim* (Islamabad), 2 April 1986.