



RESEARCH PAPER

**A Study of Settlement of Refugees in the Thal Desert
(1947-1969)**

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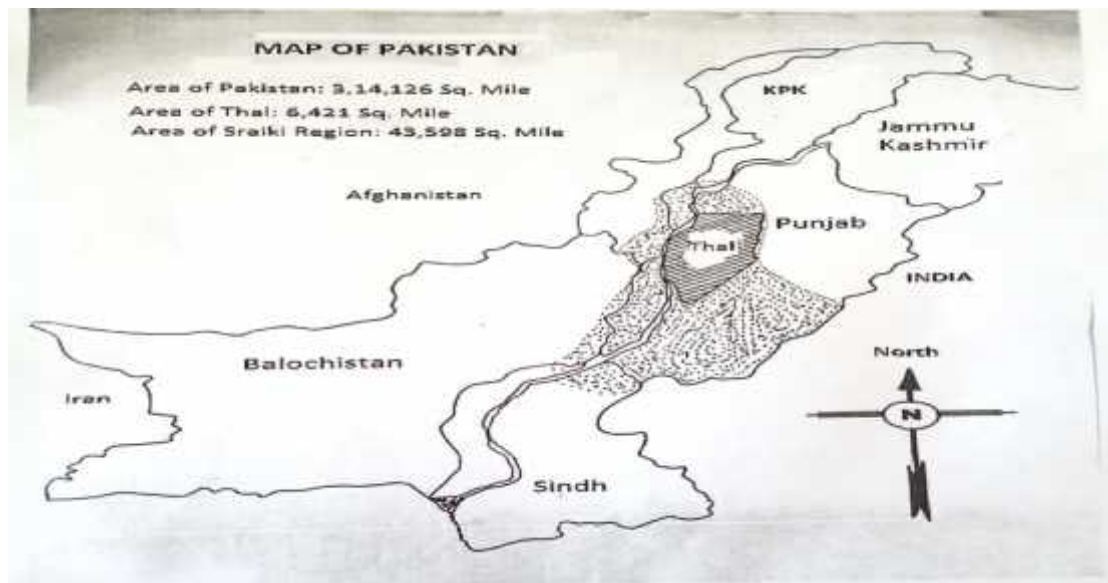
The refugee problem was a big challenge for the newly established state of Pakistan after 1947. Millions of refugees, who migrated from India, were looking forward to the Government of Pakistan for the provision of food, medicine, accommodation, employment and whatever they needed. It was an uphill task for the newly established state surrounded by numerous hardships. The main focus of this paper is to look into the whole process of settlement of more than thirty-one thousands of families of refugees in the desert of Thal, which lies in the west of Punjab Pakistan during 1947 to 1969. The historical research approach has been applied to study the settlement of refugees in the Thal desert. It was not an easy task for the government to develop the desert of Thal so that the refugees could be settled. Thal Development Authority during twenty years of its functioning not only settled more than thirty-one thousand families of refugees in the Thal desert but also provided them with all basic facilities of life such as education, health, roads, employment etc

Introduction

The partition of Subcontinent in 1947 resulted in the migration of almost 15 million people and the death of 0.5 Million as well (William, 1953). The newly established state of Pakistan was surrounded by numerous hardships and influx of the refugees was one of them. According to the census of Pakistan 1951, 7.15 Million people migrated from India to Pakistan out of which 4.8 million in the province of Punjab alone constituting 68.22 per cent of the total refugees in the country (Census of Pakistan, 1951, P. 3). This migration process resulted in a perilous and unprecedented humanitarian crisis. The Muslims, who ran for their lives from India to Pakistan, were either injured or ill and were in dire need of food, medicine,

clothes and a roof to live under. Furthermore, the outbreak of Cholera in migrant's camps added insult to injury. Though the Government of Pakistan was successful in handling the issue temporarily, it needs a permanent solution. As most of the migrants were farmers by profession and they were left out of the jobs without cultivable land of their own. On the other hand, they increased the population of upper Punjab significantly. Therefore, the Government of Punjab with the help of the Government of Pakistan decided to settle the refugees permanently in a sparsely less populated area of the Thal desert (Leel, 2019).

Map 1: Thal Desert in the Map of Pakistan



Literature Review

The Thal Development Act of 1949 provides basic information about the Thal Development Authority, its formation, powers and duties, limits and rules, working area, audits and accounts, finance and dissolution of the Authority. Public relation division of Thal Development Authority's books, "A Handbook of Thal Development Authority" is a big source of information about development, settlement and TDA organization. But it only highlights the first five year's work carried out in the region and the researchers have to read other sources for remaining fifteen years. A book of Malik GhulamShabirKhokhar, "Thal Development Authority and Galaxy of Revenue Tenures" provides significant information about the acquisition and adjustment of land by TDA and issues regarding it. This book did not provide information about the settlement of refugees. The book of J.M. Qureshi, "An Economical Survey of Eight Typical Villages in the Thal" simply provides valuable information in detail about the economic conditions of the people of relevant villages after the colonization of Thal area. Indebtedness in the Pastoral and Agricultural Zones of the Bhakkar Thal by T. D. Bedi is research work. It only contains significant and valuable information

about Bhakkar and Thal, its physical aspects, social and economic conditions of the people of the area before partition in detail. District Gazetteers of Mianwali and Muzaffargarh also provide comprehensive information about Thal region, its physical aspects, history of the region, social and economic conditions of the people in detail.

A book, "Colony Manual" written by Sameer Ijaz & Sharjeel Ijaz and published by KLR Publisher is a very informative book having a full record of colonization notification of the whole country since the British era. It also provided the colonization schemes notifications of Thal area in detail. Book, "Tareekh Riasat Mankera" of Malik Dost Muhammad Khokar published by Bhakkar Printing Press is a very important book about the history of the area, especially of the Mankera state. It provides comprehensive information about the Sadozai, Sikh and British rule. The book "Thal" written by Mehr Abdul Haq published by LokVirsa Publishers is the only book written about the Thal desert in Urdu. It not only discusses the natural division, flora and fauna of the Thal desert but also provides valuable and in-depth information about the social and economic condition of the masses of the area. The book, "The Punjab under Imperialism 1885-1947" written by Imran Ali is a big source of information about the history of canal colonies during the British rule. It only provides basic information of the pattern, implemented by the British administration to settle the people in the canal colonies. Land Revenue Settlement Report of Dera Ismail Khan 1872-79 published by W. Ball Publishers prepared under the supervision of H. St. George Tucker is a very important report which provides in-depth information about socio-economic conditions before the development process of the Thal area. It is a comprehensive report and a big source of information. Only research work on Thal development process was carried out by Muhammad Wasim Abbas in 2015 with the title, "Role of TDA in the Progress of Thal with Special Reference to Bhakkar Region". It provides valuable and significant information about the development and settlement of the Thal region and especially the Bhakkar region. The yearbooks from 1950 to 1968 in English and Urdu published by The Public Relation Department Lahore are a big source of information about the development work carried out from 1949 to 1968. It provides the year wise development work from the beginning till the end and it is very easy for a researcher to understand the difficulties and challenges which were faced by TDA officials. After a careful study of literature available about Thal development and settlement, it is very clear that not even a single research work has been done by any researcher about the whole process of settlement of refugees in the Thal desert. This study will provide in-depth information about acquisition and adjustment of land, allotment of land to the migrants and development of the area carried out by Thal Development Authority during 1949 to 1969.

Thal Development Authority

The desert of Thal is situated in the south of Salt Range, between the river Indus, Jhelum and joint streams of Jhelum and Chenab, having a total area of five

million acres (Bedi, 1934). Some part of Thal region lies in District Mianwali, Khushab, Jhang and Muzaffargarh but largely it is located in District Layyah and Bhakkar. The shape of the Thal is like an irregular triangle having length and width of 175 miles and 65 miles respectively. Naturally, Thal is divided into three parts: Northern Thal, Thal Kalan and Dagggar Thal (Abdul Haq, 2003). After the partition of Sub-continent, some area in the northern Thal was colonized by the Military Families Resettlement Organization for the military families but extreme conditions of the desert and non-availability of canal water prevented the civilian settlers. Government of Punjab planned to irrigate the area and settle the refugees and others. The gigantic task of development in Thal was a big challenge for the planners. The climate, the sandy soil, the influx of thousands of refugees and countless other problems necessitated the harmonious and speedy mode of work which was not likely to be achieved routinely (Leel, 2015). Therefore, a corporate body, known as Thal Development Authority (hereafter TDA) was constituted in 1949, under the provision of the Thal Development Act (XV) of 1949. TDA was headed by the Chairman whereas Deputy Commissioners of Mianwali, Muzaffargarh and Sargodha were the members of the Thal Development Authority Board. It was dissolved in 1969 by the Government of Punjab after twenty years of its working and completing its task (The West Pakistan Gazette, 1969).

Acquisition and Adjustment of Land

A total of approximately five million acres is occupied by Thal desert and Thal canal was initially intended to irrigate around 2,195,733 acres of land out of which 371,000 acres was state land whereas the private landowners occupied around 1,824,733 acres. For the settlement of the refugees, TDA Act of 1949 conferred full powers for the acquisition of land upon the authority. It is pertinent to mention that the areas of well irrigated, rainwater irrigated and entitled land were exempted from the acquisition and would remain intact with their private owners (The Thal Development Act, 1949). TDA during the acquisition and adjustment of the lands, classified lands falling within irrigation boundaries and outside the irrigation boundaries into three categories which are as follows:

- Un-cultivated land.
- Wellirrigated land.
- Rainwater irrigated land.

All the acquisition proceedings were to be restricted only to the un-cultivated wasteland of Thal lying within irrigation limits which were original to a certain extent property of Government and at the first settlement was separately earmarked for different villages for grazing purposes and in the village, records were either shown as common land or as a joint holding of the owners. On the other hand, all well-irrigated lands were to remain intact with the proprietors and adjustment thereof was to be made without any reduction. Thirdly, rain irrigated

lands had also to be given to the owners without making any reduction there-from (Gazetteer Layyah District 1984, 1984). Even the acquisition of land-owning rights of wastelands was not restricted. So, TDA needed another 938778 acres of local land under section 36 of the act of 1949 but the Act did not provide any guidelines for the acquisition of land from the private owners. The prolonged process of land acquisition from the private owners continued till 1955. It was decided that the land inside the irrigation boundaries of Thal would be owned by local owners as well as central government. The process of the distribution of land ownership rights amongst local owners, TDA and central government is known as adjustment. The government had to issue a notification for the grant of particular areas of acquired land to the locals as they were deprived of their lands under adjustment (Abbas, 2015). On the successive demands of local landowners, the provincial government had to issue the following notification time and again:

1. Notification No. 53-C, dated January 5, 1952.
2. Notification No. 226-Th, dated January 29, 1953.
3. Notification No. 713-54/1199-Th, dated May 1, 1954.
4. Notification No. 5284-C, dated November 27, 1954.

The above-mentioned notification No. 713-54/1199-Th of 1954 is known as marginal adjustment formula. The salient features of the formula are as under:

1. All the acquisition of land in Thal would be restricted, as far as possible only to the uncultivated part of Thal wasteland which was original to a certain extent. The land after acquisition would become the property of Government and at the first settlement, was separately earmarked for different villages for grazing purpose and in the village, was either shown as common land or as a joint holding of the properties.
2. For these orders, the cultivated area would be area which was not shown either as uncultivated land, land which has remained fallow for at least four and eight successive harvests for winter crops of 1951.
3. All well-irrigated land would be allowed to remain with the present owners intact except for minor adjustment. As regards other cultivated land, the owners at their option are given equal land because of the area which could not be left intact.
4. Within the irrigation limits of Thal, land owners having less than fifteen acres would not lose their land.
5. Half of the land located inside the irrigation boundaries would be acquired from the landowners having a total property of fifteen to hundred acres.

6. Seventy-five percent of the acquired land would be taken from the landowners having land resources of more than a hundred acres.
7. To provide the canal irrigation and land levelling facility, the landowners would be charged the development fee at the rate of sixty-five rupees per acre (Khokhar, 2002).

The table given below shows the details of acquisition, adjustment and development of land available to TDA.

Table 1
Land Available for Development to TDA

Sr. No.	Detail about the acquisition of land	Area in acres
1	Total land of Thal desert	50,00,000
2	The area under Thal Project Canals	21,55,733
3	State land in the area of Thal Project Canals	4,06,555
4	The land occupied by local landowners	18,24,733
5	Total land acquired by TDA from local landowners	9,38,778
6	The land returned to the local landowners through adjustment	4,07,297
7	Remaining acquired land under TDA control	5,31,481
8	The total area available to TDA for Development within the irrigation boundary	9,06,036

Source: West Pakistan Year Book 1965, P. 41.

Settlement of the Refugees

Government of Punjab assigned the whole responsibility to TDA to permanently settle the refugees in the Thal desert. Thal desert was chosen because it was sparsely habited and the facility of canal water was also provided by TDA. Settlement in the Thal was not only confined to refugees but was made also in favour of local landowners whose land had been compulsorily acquired or damaged by waterlogging and saline or river action and inhabitants whose main sources of livelihood were grazing the cattle in the state forest reserved areas and proprietary wasteland before the advent of canal irrigation accordingly by Thal Development Project (Maqsood, 2017). But it is important to mention here that this paper will only focus on refugee's settlement. And the land was allotted to those refugees who were not only landless and but also the cultivators. TDA allotted land through three different colonization schemes given as under;

1. Sheep Breeding Scheme 1952
2. Sale/Auction Scheme 1954
3. Peasant Grant Scheme 1955

Firstly, The TDA initiated a sheep breeding scheme with notification No. 817-Th dated 28 March 1952 under which lots of 15 acres each of land were carved out for sheep breeding and poultry inside the irrigation boundaries of Thal Canal in Thal. Total 3135 acres of state and TDA land was allotted, on the conditions that the allottees had to maintain a breeding flock of 50 sheep, two hens and one cock and would pay the price of land under specific terms and conditions. This scheme came to an end in the year 1967 (Khokhar, 2002).

Table 2
Sheep Breeding Scheme 1952 Allotted Lots Statement

Serial No.	Name of scheme	Total No. of Allottees	Total land in acres	Area
1	Sheep breeding scheme	211	3165	In whole Thal

Source: Colony File, 1969.

Secondly, Between 1954 and 1964, an open auction scheme was introduced by the government of the Punjab vide notification No. 331/53-Th dated March 15, 1954, to sale the land resources to the refugees in the irrigation limits of Thal canal. According to the terms and conditions of the auction scheme, land segments of twenty-five acres and fifty acres were allocated in Khushab, Mianwali, Bhakkar and Layyah. (Ijaz&Sharjeel, 2012). The main features of the auction scheme of 1954 are as follows:

1. An open auction would be conducted for all sales.
2. At the time of the auction, the tenant would deposit twenty-five per cent of the total prices of the land to the authority.
3. While the remaining price would be paid in the form of ten equally distributed installments to the authority, once the land is handed over to the grantee.
4. First installments would be due after two years of the agreement while the rest of the installments would be due on the 15th of July and 15th of January every year.
5. If the tenant failed to deposit the installment to the authority in prescribed time, he would pay an additional amount of interest at the rate of four per cent.
6. The tenant would shift his permanent residence to the allotted land within six months and would build their house of his own within one and half year.
7. The grantee would cultivate at least one by five of his piece of land within three years and one by three within five years.

8. After successfully receiving property rights of the whole lot, the grantee would also receive the ownership rights of the land at a village site at the same rate as of agricultural land.
9. The grantee shall be bound to contribute 2.5 per cent of his gross income to the common welfare fund that would be used for road cleaning, hand pump and well maintenance, meeting place of elders and repairing and maintenance of village forests (Khokhar, 2002).

Table 3
Sale/Auction Scheme 1954 Allotted Lots Statement

Serial No.	Name of the District	No. of allottees	Total land in acres	Total No. of allotted lots
1	Khushab	125	3536	117
2	Mianwali	35	848	32
3	Bhakkar	1342	31325	1245
4	Layyah	3005	53663	2120
5	Kot Adu	-	-	-

Source: Colony File, 1969.

Thirdly, peasant grant scheme of 1955, generally known as Abadkari scheme was intended for the settlement of the migrants coming from India. The deputy commissioner of the relevant districts selected the grantees of the scheme while military personals who were also refugees were selected for settlement by the military authorities themselves. Inside the irrigation boundary of Thal canal, Chairman Thal Development Authority introduced the development scheme with notification No. 1477-54/2130/Th dated June 27, 1955. Allotments were made at a rate of 15 acres per lot (Maqsood, 2017). The leading terms and conditions of the scheme are as under:

1. The allotted land shall only be used for agricultural purpose.
2. As per the desires of TDA, the grantees would construct the boundary marks or would plant various types of trees around their segments of lands.
3. The tenant would be bound to shift to his lot for six months and would build his permanent residence in the next one and half years.
4. The grantee would at least plant three trees in each acre his segment of land.
5. If the canal water was not available for the whole year, the tenant would construct a well on his expenses.
6. For the common good of the community, the tenant would deposit 2.5 per cent of his total income to the authority as per the agreement.

7. The tenant would buy the property in seventy equal instalments after the completion of ten years of tenancy.
8. He would pay two installments every year.
9. The grantees would cultivate one-third of his allotment in two years of the agreement and complete lot within four years.
10. The price of the land was fixed as one hundred and fifty rupees per acres.
11. When grantees would acquire property rights of the whole lot, they would also receive the land rights at the village site (Ijaz&Sharjeel, 2012).

Table 4
Peasant Grant Scheme 1955 Allotted Lots Statement

Serial No.	Name of the District	No. of allottees	Total land in acres	Total No. of allotted lots
1	Khushab	4602	69083	4582
2	Mianwali	2930	43950	2845
3	Bhakkar	4523	67861	4336
4	Layyah	6614	99210	6283
5	Kot Adu	1376	20640	1216

Source: Colony File, 1969.

Development of the Thal Desert

During the entire tenure of TDA, from 1949 to 1969, it established 1110 villages in the whole region of Thal. The agricultural land was allotted through different schemes. The land was offered to the new settlers on easy instalments of payments after the fulfilment of the due requirements laid down by the government (Qureshi, 1995). Additionally, Residential plots to the new settlers were allotted apart from the agricultural lands. Basic facilities including Schools, dispensaries and post offices were provided at their doorstep. TDA managed the construction of 8002 peasant houses, 1712 huts for artisans and 2570 cattle sheds in the new villages. It was because of these arrangements that nearly 31377 families of refugees and others were settled in Thal (Statistics of TDA, 1969).

In the whole Thal development process, the most difficult challenge for the authority was the leveling of the land. The area consisted of huge dunes in the south and very hard stiff land in the north. For the first time in 1950, tractor division took the responsibility of leveling the land in the northern part but soon the authorities realized that having machinery was direly needed for the accomplishment of the task. So, with the help of the International Bank of Reconstruction and Development, the Government of Pakistan established AMO to import the heavy machinery. AMO was intended not only to break and level the land but also to contribute to the construction of roads and water channels (A Handbook of Thal Development Authority, 1954). Between 1953 and 1969, AMO

succeeded to level approximately 690 thousand acres of land; constructed 2000 miles main and link roads connecting new villages and also built 63.90 thousand miles long water channels. The TDA was also aimed at the extension of the existing irrigation system of Thal which was continuously damaged and choked up by the sand storms. For this purpose, the research centre of the authority worked on the environment of Thal and recommended the plantation of Arhar, Kaho, Khaghal, Jantar, Villw and Sarkana alongside the water channels for the pavement of embankments and to prevent the stoppage of water flow because of sand storms (West Pakistan Year Book 1961, 1961).

For the development of the agriculture, TDA also worked on the establishment of demonstration centers which included ten farms and twenty-two extension centers in the entire region. These centers looked after the stability of watercourses, supplied quality plants, fruits and seeds. It also introduced the modern methods of cultivation and sowing time of various crops. It also provided vital guidelines to newly settled farmers of the area. The experts of the authority recommended appropriate varieties of fruit and crops and introduced the most viable pattern to harvest these crops (Statistics of TDA, 1969). The TDA offered an amount of more than eighteen million rupees as Taccavi, a type of agricultural loan, to the new settlers so that they might pay for bullocks, seeds and agricultural machinery. This not only helped to increase the cultivation of crops but also stabilized the yield of crops per acre to great effect. In short, the research work carried out by the agricultural experts revolutionized the agriculture of the Thal. TDA also allocated a total land of sixty thousand acres for forestation within its jurisdiction; it included village plantation, compact plantation, roadside plantation and shelterbelt plantation. This massive scale plantation not only prevented the dust storms but also helped to lessen the temperature of area (West Pakistan Year Book, 1962).

The TDA initially contended to construct 13 market towns in Thal region to the sale of the agricultural products of the new settlers at Joharabad, Liaqatabad, Kalurkot, Quaidabad, Ghulaman, Layyah, Bhakkar, Sarai Muhajir, Darya Khan, PattalMunda, Kot Adu, Fatehpur and Karor. But the construction of these market towns was not completed except Quaidabad, Rakh Ghulaman, Joharabad, Liaqatabad, Sarai Muhajir, Layyah and Bhakkar. In these market towns, all the modern facilities of that time were provided including electricity, sewerage system, and pure drinking water, wide and straight paved roads, schools and play grounds for the children, health care facilities, telephone, masjids, post offices, banks and cinemas (Thind, 2009). To employ the settlers of these market towns, a heavy industry was established near every market town but the shortage of the funds on the behalf of the government counted for the incompleteness of these market towns according to the original scheme. The authority also established several power houses which produced 8800 KW's of electricity. This electricity was provided to Mandi towns, heavy industries, tube well schemes outside the irrigation boundaries and also to the private consumers of the area (West Pakistan Year Book, 1963).

Ten heavy industries, such as textiles mills, sugar mills, ginning and woollen mills, dairy factory and cement factory, not only provided employment opportunities to the inhabitants of the area but also utilized the raw material of agricultural production. TDA also established two livestock farms, one at 205 TDA and another at Rakh Ghulaman, for the provision of cheap labour for agriculture and to fulfill the meat requirements of the people. In addition to this, eight animal dispensaries were set up to cure the diseased animals (West Pakistan Year Book, 1965). Although health and education were not included in the original development scheme of the Thal but keeping in view, the importance of these facilities, the authority decided to establish six hospitals, thirty-four rural dispensaries, three healthcare centres and a mobile dispensary. More ever, the arrangement of the training of the health-related staff was also made. Similarly, the establishment of 124 primary schools, one junior model school, six middle schools and five high schools increased the literacy rate of the area up to 16.71 percent which was only 6.2 at one time (West Pakistan Year Book, 1968).

Conclusion

The Thal desert was famous for the scarcity of rainfall, wind storms and barren lands from centuries. In 1948, after the partition of Subcontinent, nobody could imagine and believe that the vast deserted area can be converted into greenery and people can be settled. Thal development project proved a very successful scheme as more than thirty-one thousand families of Refugees were not only settled permanently reducing the pressure of the congestion of population on the upper Punjab of Pakistan but also provided all basic facilities of life in Thal desert. TDA enhanced the socio-economic conditions of the refugees and transformed the dumped desert into lush green fields. Before the settlement in Thal desert, the refugees were landless, unemployed and poor but after the settlement, they have land to cultivate, house to live. The refugees wear a happy look and are full of confidence in their future which is bright and prosperous.

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