

Thal Development Authority and the Contentious Promise of National Development.

Abstract

This fellowship will support the final stage of my dissertation work, where I look at the planning of D.G Canal Project, the Colony Thal Textile Mill as two formative projects carried out by the Thal Development Authority (hereon, TDA). The TDA was formed in 1949 with the objective of transforming large parts of Thal desert (measuring some 2.6 million ha) into agriculturally productive land. Modeled after the great canal colony schemes, the TDA represents the south-westward expansion of irrigation schemes in the postcolonial era. Unlike earlier schemes the TDA projects embodied national aspirations for development as well as new uncertainties faced by the Pakistani state in its early days. Land reclamation in Thal, along with construction of large dams was seen as the solution to the challenges of food security, settlement of refugees and economic development. The building of metalled roads, canals and a cotton mill took on added significance as they embodied the ideals of self sufficiency and national modernity in a remote hinterland. Like their colonial counterparts, the TDA engineers showed remarkable disregard for Thal's complex ecology by regarding it as a wasteland, the state bureaucracy devalued Thal's inhabitants pastoral modes of livelihood.