

The Thal Paradox: A Legacy of Golden History and Systemic Neglect in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT: The Thal region of Punjab, Pakistan, presents a profound paradox. Historically known as the "Golden Palace" for its ancient, advanced civilization and fertile past, it is geographically a challenging arid plain. Despite producing a significant number of the country's political, literary, and artistic leaders, Thal suffers from severe and systemic developmental neglect. This analysis examines the disconnect between the region's substantial political representation, 19 National Assembly and 37 Provincial Assembly seats, and its stark infrastructure deficits. The region lacks essential institutions such as universities, medical colleges, and hospitals, forcing youth to migrate and stunting local economic growth. This neglect is attributed to a cycle of unresponsive local leadership, whose priorities lie with party central command rather than constituent needs, and a populace disillusioned by unfulfilled promises. Consequently, Thal remains marginalized, its potential stifled by a lack of investment in education, healthcare, and industry, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and underdevelopment despite its rich historical and human capital.

KEYWORDS: Thal Region, Political Neglect, Developmental Disparities, Infrastructure Deficit, Pakistan, Punjab

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Introduction

The word "Thal" originates from Sanskrit, meaning "mountain of gold" or "golden hills", a name that reflects the region's historical prosperity rather than its physical reality as a dry, tough, sandy plain situated between two rivers. The term is also linked to 'tal,' meaning bottom, as the area was once the riverbed of the Indus, which flowed east of Layyah. This past contributed to a high underground water table, making Thal a fertile and rich territory, poetically known as "Sonay da Mahal" or the palace of gold (Shafi, 2023). Much of its early history is not derived from formal archaeological surveys but from travelogues, linguistic analysis, and religious texts, indicating that it was inhabited by nomadic communities like the Thalochoi and Awans, who adapted to its extreme climate. Thal's history is deeply layered, with legends linking it to the era following the flood of Hazrat Noah (AS), describing it first as a land of rivers, then valleys, and finally a desert, and some traditions even associate it with Noah's son, Lai. The region has been a crossroads of civilizations, initially home to the Deraweri tribes, who by 4000-3000 BC had abandoned nomadism for settled farming and cattle breeding in villages and cities across the Sindh Sagar Doab. Between 2500-2000 BC, the Aryan people, whom historian A. L. Hashim connects to the progeny of Prophet Noah's son Yafith, entered from the plains of Poland and Central Asia. They conquered the local Deraweri tribes, and their name, interpreted by D. D. Kosambi as meaning "free from birth" or a superior caste, introduced a kingly government system to Hindustan. Thal's

strategic location made it a target for successive empires; it was the 20th province of the Persian Empire under King Dara I, who captured it around 510 BC, and it attracted conquerors like Alexander the Great. The region shows evidence of Buddhist influence during the rule of the Rai Dynasty and the Kushan Empire, with engraved statues of Buddha and coins found near Layyah. The message of Islam reached Thal in 622 AD, leading some local Jaat tribes, oppressed by Brahmans, to embrace the faith. Ruled by various dynasties from the Persians and Macedonians to the Mauryas, Kushans, and Huns, Thal has experienced both tyranny and justice, yet it remains a largely unfarmed and neglected desert, a testament to the enduring challenge of its environment despite its golden past (Khan, 2010).

Thal: A Geographic and Administrative Profile

Geographically, the Thal region in Punjab, Pakistan, is a distinct zone bounded by the Salt Range to the north, the districts of Khushab and Mianwali to the south, the Jhelum River to the east, and the Indus River to the west. This area experiences a hot and dry micro-climate, characterized by extreme summer heat and considerably cold winters (Shafi, 2023). Administratively, the Thal spans the districts of Muzaffargarh, Mianwali, Bhakkar, Layyah, Khushab, Jhang, and Kot Addu. Shaped like a carrot, it forms part of the Sindh-Saagar Doab, signifying the land between two rivers, specifically situated between the Indus and the Jhelum, which converge with the Chenab and Ravi rivers to form the region's eastern boundary. The Thal covers an extensive area of approximately 16,500 square kilometers (or 9,965 square miles), stretching 306 kilometers from north to south with a maximum width of 112 kilometers, totaling nearly five million acres, and is located between 71° to 72° longitude and 30° to 32.5° latitude. Historically, a treeless, barren desert where irrigation was primarily dependent on wells, the region's development was spearheaded by the Thal Development Authority (TDA), established in 1949. Over two decades, the TDA undertook major initiatives, most notably the construction of the Thal Canal to irrigate the land, and was dissolved in 1969 upon completion of its mandate. Of the region's cultivable land of about 2.2 million acres, a significant portion was under private ownership. Politically, the Thal region is now represented by 19 seats in the National Assembly and 37 seats in the Punjab Provincial Assembly, with local governance administered through seven district governments under Punjab's municipal system (Amin et al, 2020).

The Golden Palace on a River of Sand

The Thal region holds significant geographical and cultural importance, shaped by its demographics and political landscape. The Chinese traveler Faxian, who traversed the area in 415 AD, described it as a "river of sand" and noted its pivotal role as the cradle of the Indus Valley Civilization, suggesting that human evolution in the region began there (Shafi, 2023). Historically, Hindustan has been celebrated as a "golden sparrow," and the land of Bhakkar, part of this rich heritage, is renowned as the "Thal sonay da Mahal" (Palace of Gold) and "Kacchi sonay di Pachhy" (the golden belt of Kacchi), reflecting its abundant resources (Government of Punjab, 2021).

The Thal's Ancient, Advanced, and Aromatic Historical Legacy

The Thal region is home to a remarkably ancient civilization, predating and believed to have been more advanced than the renowned cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro. This 5000-year-old culture spanned an immense area of approximately 500,000 square miles, extending from the Himalayan foothills to Kathiawar

and from Quetta to Rajputana. Archaeological evidence suggests the inhabitants of Sindh, Baluchistan, and Western Punjab were pioneers from whom the Indus Valley Civilization learned its foundational civic rules. This rich history is substantiated by numerous sites, including the tombs of Notak Khan, Laddo Khan, and Fateh Khan, the ruins of Haider Abad Thal Fort, and the mandars (mounds) of Shairan Wala, Darya Khan, and Haider Abad Thal, alongside the historic Commissioner's Bungalow in Layyah. Beyond its historical significance, the region, particularly Bhakkar, is nationally famous for Bhakri Karna Oil. Celebrated for its unique and light fragrance, this oil is highly valued for its purported benefits in strengthening the brain and elongating women's hair. Considered a luxurious item, it is a traditional and esteemed gift, with the people of Bhakkar often presenting it to friends as a token of high regard (Thind, 2009).

Social Development Initiatives in the Thal Region

Under the title of the potential inherent in the people of the Thal region, their significant talent and enduring contributions to the area's name and fame will be discussed, with a particular focus on their extensive work in social welfare, as evidenced by the multitude of active organizations across its districts, including the Sanjh Foundation, Rafique Foundation, and Nahar King Welfare Organization in Muzaffargarh; the Mianwali Youth Development Society, Ehsas Welfare Foundation, and Imam Khomeini Trust in Mianwali; the Awam Dost Foundation, District Anti TB Association, and Azhar Mahboob Memorial Trust Hospital in Bhakkar; the Rabita Welfare Organization and Awami Development Organization in Layyah; organizations like Jaman Social Welfare Society and Pasban Welfare Society in Khushab; the Abbas Welfare Society, Akhuwat, and Anjuman Hussainia in Jhang; and groups such as Umeed Welfare Organization and Saiban Welfare Foundation in Kot Addu (Abbas et al, 2020).

The Thal's Literary Heritage

There is a great potential in the form of literature among the people of the Thal region. There have been many famous poets, writers and intellectuals in the land of the Thal. Likely, some famous personalities of District Muzaffargarh are Nawab Muhammad Muzaffar Khan Shaheed (1757-1818) (Founder of Muzaffargarh, Saraiki Poet), Khan Bahadur Nawab Sardar Kaoray Khan Jatoi (1800-1898) (Reformer, Politician and Poet), Dillu Ram Maoji (1860-1925) (Poet, Playwright and Prose Writer), Mian Muhammad Hussain Chajra Naz (1871-1936) (Politician, Tourist, Social Worker, Landlord and Poet), Professor Maulana Haji Kareem Bakhsh Shakir (1892-1946) (Freedom Fighter, Educationist, Religious Scholar, Tourist and Poet), Ghulam Haider Khan Yateem Jatoi (1894-1972) (Soldier, Educationist, Politician, Poet and Reformer), Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan (1918-2003) (Politician, Freedom Fighter and Poet), Ghulam Rasool Khan Janbaz Jatoi (1924-1994) (Poet), Abdul Ghafoor Sattari (born 1927) (Journalist, Comic Poet and Founder of Bazm-e- Farogh-e- Adab), Rasheed Ahmad Khan Qaisrani (born 1930) (Urdu, Saraiki and Persian Poet, Pilot, Commanding Officer Air Force Recruitment Center, Military Trainer and Bureaucrat), Raza Hussain Khan Raza (born 1948) (Poet, Novelist, Prose Writer, Hockey Player and District Sports Officer) and Sajjad Haider Pervaiz (born 1961) (Advocate, Lecturer, Journalist, Poet, Researcher, Critique, Biography Writer, Novelist, Story Writer, Essayist, Travelogue Writer, Fiction Writer, Seerat Writer and Translator) (Pervaiz, 1979), from District Mianwali are Jagan Nath Azad (1918-2004) (Poet, Writer, Educationist, Bureaucrat, Critique, Biography Writer and Travelogue Writer), Mansoor Afaq (born 1962) (Poet, Playwright, Novelist, Short Story Writer, Columnist, Religious Scholar, Social Worker, Political Worker,

Journalist and Film Critique), Sardar Umar Farooq Khan Farooq Rokhri (born 1929) (Poet), Doctor Rahmat Changaizi (born 1986) (Poet, Writer, Advocate and Philosopher), Asad Mustafa (born 1970) (Poet, Writer and Columnist) and Muhammad Mahmood Ahmad (born 1986) (Poet), from the District Bhakkar are Malik Qadir Bakhsh (Government Teacher), Malik Dost Muhammad Khokhar (Writer of the History of Mankeera), Prof. Dr. Ashraf Kamal (Poet, Critic), Ghulam Muhammad Taqi Mateen Kotla Jami (Writer of the History of Kallur Kot), Farhat Parveen Apa (Short Story Writer), Prof. Qalb Abbas Abis (Poet, Literary Critic), Prof. Falak Shair Leel (Writer of the History of Bhakkar), Jamil Ahmad Rana (Writer of the Mashaheer-e- Bhakkar wa Mianwali), Dr. Ishtiaq Ahmad (Educationist, VC Univ. of Sargodha), Dr. Muhammad Saleem Choochan (Educationist, CEO Education Bhakkar), Prof. Naseem Haider Khan Shahani (Educationist, Principal Govt. College. Bhakkar), Prof. Muhammad Azizullah Khan (Educationist, Principal, Govt. College of Commerce), Prof. Malik Javaid Ali Bhidwal (Educationist, Principal, Govt. College of Technology), Maulana Muhammad Abdullah (Religious Scholar), Sheikh-ul- Hadees Maulana Muhammad Sharif Rizvi (Religious Scholar), Maulana Muhammad Noor Sultan al Qadri (Religious Scholar) and Prof. Dr. Hafiz Muhammad Akram Khan Niazi (Religious Scholar), from District Layyah are Maher Noor Muhammad Thind (Research Scholar and Writer) from District Khushab are Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi (1916-2006) (Freedom Fighter, Poet, Dramatist, Journalist, Fiction Writer, Short Story Writer and Literary Critique), Hazrat Wasif Ali Wasif (1929-1993) (Sufi Saint, Prose Writer, Poet, Educationist, Mystic Intellectual, Reformer), Sohail Warraich (born 1962) (Journalist and Writer), Malik Feroz Khan Noon (1893-1970) (Writer, Politician, Barrister, Freedom Fighter, Prime Minister, Statesman, Diplomat) and Khushwant Singh (born 1915) (Writer, Novelist, Journalist, Lawyer, Politician and Ambassador), from District Jhang are Abdul Majeed Amjad (1914-1974) (Founding Father of Modern Urdu Poetry, Prose Writer and Bureaucrat), Ishtiaq Ahmad (1941-2015) (Scholar, Educationist, Researcher, Editor of Books, Historical Writer, Fiction Writer, Short Story Writer and Journalist), Shair Afzal Jaafiri (1909-1989) (Poet), Syeda Farrukh Zohra Gillani (Poet, Writer and Educationist), Safdar Saleem Siyal (1936-2018) (Poet, Writer, Activist, Journalist, Live Stock Expert, Politician), Hasnain Siyalvi (Writer), Fahmeeda Musarrat Ahmad (born 1968 (Poet) and Darvesh Bharti (born 1937) (Writer) and the major men of letters of District Kot Addu are Shri Chandragupta Vidyalankar (Writer), Hazrat Allama Abdul Aziz Periharvi Quraishi (1794-1824) (Religious Scholar, Poet, Commentary Writer, Critique, Inventor of Bright Surface Paper and Saint), Syed Ameer Haider Shah Bukhari Meeran (1858-1898) (Wrestler, Writer, Poet, Alchemist, Hakeem and Peer), Malik Ahmad Bakhsh Goraya Ghafil Gormani (1870-1960) (Government Servant, Miner and Poet), Hakeem Maulvi Allah Wasaya Safdar (1873-1958) (Teacher, Hakeem and Poet), Ahmad Bakhsh Bhatti Saif (1892-1971) (Poet, Prose Writer and Zakir), Faqeer Allah Bakhsh Kashfi al Asadi Qalandar Din Panahi Jatt Hans Kashfi Multani (1902-1976) (Poet, Teacher, Journalist, Politician and Critique), Nawab Mian Mushtaq Ahmad Khan Mushtaq Gormani (1905-1981) (Politician, Freedom Fighter, Statesman, Diplomat, Bureaucrat, Humanitarian, Social Worker, Poet and Prose Writer), Hakeem Charagh Ali Azad (1916-1985) (Freedom Fighter, Teacher and Hakeem), Faqeer Noor Muhammad Jaafiri Jatt Hans Noor (born 1906) (Teacher, Poet, Prose Writer, Musician, Calligrapher, Playwright, Drama Director, Painter and Zakir), Riaz Anwar Faqeer Jatt Hans (born 1931) (Teacher, Advocate, Member Pakistan Writers Guild, Secretary Idara Fikr-o- Fun, Secretary Bazm-e- Saqafat, Secretary Pakistan Foundation, Secretary Anjuman Taraqqi Pasand Musanifeen, Critique, Translator and Poet), Faqeer Akhtar Hussain Jaafiri Jatt Hans Akhtar (born 1934) (Government Servant, Military Officer, Secretary Khana Ferhang Iran, Poet and Playwright), Peerzada Wali Muhammad Jaafiri Naseem (born 1943) (Government Employee, Advocate, Oath Commissioner, Government

Pleader and Poet), Ghulam Qasim Siyal (born 1952) (Journalist, Orator, Bank Manager, Poet and Prose Writer) and Professor Shri Hans (Poet) (Kalasra, [2024](#)).

Celebrated Artists and Personalities of Thal

Some popular artists of District Muzaffargarh are Aashiq Ali Perwaz Rumani (Painter), Captain Ghulam Rasool (Spy), Professor Maulana Haji Kareem Bakhsh Shakir (1892-1947) (Explorer/ Tourist), Mian Muhammad Hussain Chajra Naz (1871-1936) (Tourist), Hafiz Abdul Ghafoor Chandia Saleem (born 1937) (Tourist) and Tauqeer Nasir (born 1957) (Actor and Director General of Pakistan National Council of the Arts), from District Mianwali are Attaullah Khan Eesa Khailvi (born 1951) (Singer and Musician) and Mansoor Afaq (born 1962) (playwright), from the District Bhakkar are Mujeeb Alam (singer), Reshman (singer), Ahmad Nawaz Chheena (singer), Naghmana Jaffri (singer), Ustad Javed (singer), Munir Hussain (singer), Mumtaz Malik (singer), Mushtaq Ahmad Cheena (singer), Wazeer Ahmad Toti (singer), Zafar Awan (singer), Muhammad Iqbal Dehlvi (actor), Qandeel Jaffri (actress), Veena Malik (actress) and Tasawar Ali (actor), Younis Kamal Lodhi (Scout, President Award in 1984, 1991) Zubaida Khatoon (Women Scout), Dr. Falak Riffat (Women Scout), Prof. Muhammad Akram Khan Niazi (Athlete, Gold Medalist), Muhammad Asghar Asad Ali Jaffri (Compare/Announcer), Najaf Ali Shah (Compare/Announcer Radio Pakistan), Qandeel Jaafiri (Compare/Announcer) and Dr. Akram Aziz Mirza (Compair/Announcer), from the District Layyah are Franck Mehtab, Chaman Laal and Mushtaq Kanwal and International Players of the District Layyah in various International games are Muhammad Akram Ghourai (Kabaddi), Muhammad Arif (Football), Asim Ejaz (Taekwondo) and Miss Mehr-un- Nissa (Taekwondo), artists from Khushab include Humna Haider (Peace Activist and Artist), Manazir Khan (Truck artist), Amjad Hussain Amjad (Folk Saraiki Singer) and Malik Farooq Awan (Shahnai Player), from District Jhang are Ghulam Abbas (born 1955) (Singer) and Mumtaz Hussain (Film Maker) and Ustad Pathanay Khan (1926-2000) (popular folk singer) of District Kot Addu (Kalasra, [2024](#)).

Legacy and Leadership: Political Icons from Muzaffargarh to Kot Addu

Some important political leaders of District Muzaffargarh are Nawab Muhammad Muzaffar Khan Shaheed (1757-1818) (Founder of Muzaffargarh), Khan Bahadur Nawab Sardar Kaoray Khan Jatoy (1800-1898) (Honorary Magistrate), Mian Muhammad Hussain Chajra Naz (1871-1936) (Numberdar, Social Worker, Member District Council, Chair Holder in Durbar), Mian Muzaffar Mehdi Hashmi (born 1935) (President Pakistan Society London and Member National Assembly), Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan (1918-2003) (Freedom Fighter, Member Provincial Assembly Punjab, Member National Assembly Pakistan, Vice-President Jinnah Awami League, Founder of Pakistan Jamhoori Party, Father of Opposition, Mastermind Anti-Government Democratic Action Committee, Pakistan National Alliance, Movement for Restoration of Democracy, Alliance for Restoration of Democracy and Chairman Kashmir Committee), Sardar Abdul Hameed Khan Dasti (born 1903) (Lawyer, Chief Minister Punjab and Provincial Minister Punjab) and Sardar Amjad Hameed Khan Dasti (1918-) (Freedom Fighter, Chairman Municipal Committee, Member Punjab Assembly, Provincial Minister Punjab, Lawyer and Director Cooperative Bank), of District Mianwali are Nawab of Kalabagh Malik Ameer Muhammad (1901-1967) (Nawab, Freedom Fighter, Chairman Pakistan Industrial Corporation and Governor West Pakistan Province), Abdul Rahman Khan Niazi (born 1952) (Member District Council, Member Punjab Assembly, Provincial Minister, Advisor to Chief Minister Punjab), Aminullah Khan (born 1971) (Nazim Union

Council, Member Punjab Assembly and Lawyer), Ahmad Khan Bhacher (born 1968) (Member Punjab Assembly and Parliamentary Secretary), Muhammad Sibtain Khan (born 1958) (Chairman Town Committee, Member Punjab Assembly and Provincial Minister) and Imran Ahmad Khan Niazi (born 1952) (Founder Pakistan Tahareek-e- Insaf, Prime Minister, World Cricket Champion and Philanthropist), of the District Bhakkar are Malik Fateh Sher Jhammat, Dr. Afzal Khan Dhandla, Amanullah Khan Shahani, Asghar Khan Shahani, DIG (Rtd) (known as Halaku Khan), Capt. (Rtd) Ahmad Nawaz Khan Nawani, Rasheed Akbar Khan Shahani (Nawani), Malik Atta Muhammad Uttera, Malik Amanullah Cheena, Khan Bahadur Ladhu Khan Kohawar, Taj Muhammad Khan Hassan Kheli, Zafar Ullah Khan Khanan Khel, Najeeb Ullah Khan Niazi and Muhammad Sana Ullah Khan Masti Khel, from District Layyah are Qaiser Abbas Khan (Tehsil Nazim, Member Punjab Assembly, Chairman Standing Committee and Parliamentary Secretary), Maher Ejaz Ahmad Achlana (Member District Council and Member Punjab Assembly), Syed Razaqat Ali Gillani (Chairman Union Council and Member Punjab Assembly) and Malik Ahmad Ali Aulakh (Member Punjab Assembly and Provincial Minister), from District Khushab Khan Bahadur Malik Umar Hayat Khan Tiwana (born 1877) (Member Punjab Legislative Council, Honorary Magistrate, Vice President District Board, Member Indian Legislature and Member Indian Council), Sir Allah Bakhsh Khan Tiwana (Member Legislative Assembly), Malik Feroz Khan Noon (1893) (Member Viceroy Council, Barrister, Member Punjab Legislative Council, Provincial Minister, Military Advisor of British Indian Army, Indian High Commissioner, Permanent Member of India in UNO, Freedom Fighter, President of Republican Party Pakistan, Diplomat, Governor East Pakistan, Chief Minister Punjab, Prime Minister of Pakistan, Foreign Minister and Writer), Malik Muhammad Ehsaanullah Khan Tiwana (District Nazim and Member National Assembly), Malik Karam Bakhsh Awan (Kursi Nasheen of District Durrani and Member National Assembly), Sumaira Malik (Member National Assembly and Federal Minister), Malik Asif Bha (Member Punjab Assembly and Provincial Minister), Sardar Shuja Khan Baloch (Member District Council, Member Punjab Assembly and Member National Assembly), Malik Naseem Aheer (Member Presidential Cabinet), Karam Elahi Bandial (Nazim Union Council, Member District Council, Opposition Leader District Assembly, Member Punjab Assembly, Parliamentary Secretary, Chairman House Committee and Chairman Standing Committee) and Malik Muhammad Waris Kallu (Member Punjab Assembly), from District Jhang Khan Muhammad Arif Khan Rajbana Siyal (1913-2010) (Freedom Fighter, District President Muslim League Jhang, Chairman District Council, Member All India Constituent Assembly, Chief Whip All India Muslim League Parliamentary Party Punjab, Provincial Minister, Federal Minister and Supporter of Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah), Syeda Abida Hussain (born 1948) (Member Punjab Assembly, Chairperson Peoples Workers Program, First Elected Lady Mayor of Jhang, First Elected General Lady Member National Assembly, Federal Minister and First Women Ambassador to USA), Makhdoom Syed Faisal Saleh Hayat Shah (born 1952) (Member National Assembly, Federal Minister and President Pakistan Football Association) and Sahibzada Muhammad Mahboob Sultan (Member National Assembly and Federal Minister) and from District Kot Addu are Malik Ghulam Mustafa Khar (born 1937) (Member National Assembly, Close Friend of Z.A. Bhutto, Member Punjab Assembly, Chief Minister Punjab, Federal Minister and Governor Punjab), Hina Rabbani Khar (born 1977) (Member National Assembly, First Woman Foreign Minister Pakistan), Malik Ghulam Rabbani Khar, Malik Ghulam Mujtaba Khar, Malik Ghulam Arbi Khar, Malik Meeladi Khar and Sardar Jamshaid Ahmad Khan Dasti (Mianwalian, [2024](#)).

Voices from the Heartland: Press Pioneers of Thal

The main journalists of the District Muzaffargarh are Bhagwan Chamman Naqsh Saherai, Bhagat Lachhman Daas Tabassum Alipuri and Bahawal Bakhsh Khaleeq Multani (1912-1982), Abdul Ghafoor Sattari (born 1927), of the District Mianwali is Mansoor Afaq (born 1962), of the District Bhakkar are Zakir Hussain Barni, Rana Jamil Ahmad, Malik Ahmad Khan, Rao Shabbir Ahmad, Syed Kazim Raza Naqvi, Muhammad Akram Ghallu, Mushtaq Dullewalvi, Hafeezullah Shah Hashmi, Nazeer Baloch and Syed Zafar Hussain Burni, of the District Layyah is Khizar Hayat Kalasra, of the District Khushab are Sohail Warraich and Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi, of the District Jhang are Nasir Abbas Nayyar and Mohsin Mighiana and the chief journalists of the District Kot Addu are Faqeer Allah Bakhsh Kashfi Multani (1902-1976), Faqeer Wahid Bakhsh Jaafiri Naqeeb (born 1930) and Ghulam Qasim Siyal (born 1952) (Mianwalian, [2024](#)).

Dark Aspect of Thal

Despite the Thal region's significant topographical, geographical, and cultural importance, along with its historical, agricultural, and political influence, contributions to social welfare, literature, art, government service, and journalism, it has suffered systemic neglect from central authorities in Lahore and Islamabad. This marginalization is starkly evident in the absence of essential institutions like medical colleges, teaching hospitals, and universities, highlighting profound developmental disparities (Punjab Government, [1930](#)).

Poverty of the Thal People

Sir Malcolm Hailey says that poverty was prevalent among the people of Thal. These people were poor in resources, enterprise and intelligence. A frequent struggle with Nature in her most miser and unpredictable mood had left them very much exhausted for any other effort. They would not work nor take any kind of service and admit their lack of enterprise with the excuse that they were camel-hearted (hard-hearted or cruel) (Punjab Government, [1930](#)).

The Political Neglect of Pakistan's Thal Region

The Thal Region presents a paradox of high political representation and persistent neglect. Since Pakistan's inception in 1947, the region has elected a significant number of officials, 19 to the National Assembly and 37 to the Punjab Assembly. It has even produced top-tier leadership at the national and provincial levels. Yet, this political capital has not translated into development. Local leaders have largely ignored their constituents, and countless official announcements of progress have amounted to nothing. Consequently, the people of Thal are deeply disillusioned, having lost faith in promises of change that have never materialized (Kalasra, [2019](#)).

The Cost of Neglect: Thal's Infrastructure Gap and its Consequences

The Thal region in Pakistan is stuck in a cycle of being ignored and not developed. Young people have to give up their dreams and move since there aren't enough good schools, doctors, and jobs. The huge flight, which was caused by a serious lack of basic institutions and infrastructure, makes problems in cities worse and makes Thal even poorer, likely:

- ▶ The Thal region suffers from severe and systemic neglect, particularly in the critical sectors of higher education, healthcare, and employment. While children in major urban centres like Lahore, Rawalpindi, Islamabad, and Faisalabad have access to a wide range of professional universities, the youth of Thal see their aspirations to become doctors, engineers, advocates, and lecturers turn into a distant dream. This dream remains out of reach because the entire region lacks fundamental institutions: there are no engineering or medical colleges, no law or dental schools, no teaching hospitals, and no agricultural or women's universities. For any student aspiring to attend a major university in another city, the prohibitive cost of living and tuition becomes an insurmountable barrier, forcing many to abandon their hopes for higher education. This political and developmental neglect has triggered a forced migration. With no local higher education or adequate healthcare facilities, such as medical colleges and nursing hospitals, residents are compelled to leave their homes in search of both education and livelihood. This exodus to cities like Islamabad, Faisalabad, and Rawalpindi is creating significant urban challenges. The infrastructure deficit extends beyond education and health. The region has no airport, motorway, or High Court bench. The primary roadway, the Muzaffargarh-Mianwali Road, is notoriously dangerous and known as a "killer road." Furthermore, the complete absence of industry in Thal's seven districts stifles local economic opportunity, cementing a cycle of deprivation and outmigration (Mianwalian, [2024](#)).
- ▶ Of the 117 water supply schemes in Tehsil Isa Khel, only 90 are currently functional, with many older rural schemes having become inoperable after reaching the end of their service life. Several long-delayed projects highlight a pattern of stalled development in the region. In Fatehpur Town, a Trauma Center built on MM Road to assist traffic accident victims has remained largely non-operational for a decade. Similarly, a women's technical college, announced during President Pervez Musharraf's era (1999-2008) and housed in a completed building, never opened its doors due to a lack of funding—reportedly 50 lakh rupees (5 million) were needed to commence classes. The District Headquarters Hospital in Layyah continues to operate from the Tehsil Headquarters Hospital building, despite 56 acres of land being allocated for a new facility when Layyah was declared a district. This has led to the hospital occupying 10 acres of land originally meant for the local Degree College. Infrastructure projects have also faced significant delays. The "Layyah-Taunsa Bridge," announced by then-Chief Minister Nawaz Sharif (1985-1988), was only inaugurated 27 years later during his third term as Prime Minister (2013-2017). More recently, the riverine (Kacha) area of Layyah suffered severe damage from river erosion, which swallowed dozens of villages and thousands of acres of land. Despite extensive media coverage and numerous visits by government officials reportedly costing 18 million rupees in official travel no substantive relief work was initiated, with critics alleging the visits were merely for publicity. Furthermore, the education sector in Layyah is critically under-resourced, with only 71 teachers available for 10,623 students across the district's 10 colleges (Mianwalian, [2024](#)).
- ▶ Historically, the people of Thal were poor, backward, and traditional, with limited education but satisfactory access to healthcare. According to the 1883-84 District Jhang Gazetteer, poverty was widespread, particularly among artisans who produced very little. Leather workers were slightly better off, as they could use the skins of animals that died during droughts (Punjab Government, [1984](#)).

The Political Neglect of Pakistan's Thal Region: Causes and Consequences

For decades, the Thal region has been distinguished by systemic governmental neglect and a culture of underdevelopment that runs deep. Even though they have a lot of political power, their leaders have not been able to turn that power into real advancement for their people. Because of this, Thal is still on the outside looking in, with no industry or basic infrastructure, and its people are still under a lot of economic stress, likely:

- ▶ According to Sir Malcolm Hailey, the relentless struggle for survival against a miserly and volatile Nature had so depleted the people of Thal that they were disinclined toward any further exertion. They refused to work or avail themselves of facilities, rationalizing their inertia with the explanation that they were a "camel-hearted" people. This pervasive sluggishness, Hailey notes, was evident across all social strata, from the working class to the landowning elite (Punjab Government, 1930).
- ▶ The farmers of Thal face poverty due to a mismatch between their income and spending. Their crops often fail, yet they continue to spend large sums of money beyond their means on weddings, funerals, religious donations, and other social obligations. This spending is primarily driven by a desire to maintain their status in the community. Instead of saving money, any profit they make is used to buy land, jewellery, or pay for more marriages. This cycle of high spending and debt, combined with unreliable farm yields, keeps them in a state of financial pressure (Punjab Government, 1930).
- ▶ The political marginalization of the Thal Region was evident following the 2013 election. Despite 16 of the region's 19 National Assembly members belonging to the ruling PML-N party, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's cabinet included no one from Thal as a Federal Minister or Minister of State. Out of 81 cabinet positions, only three MNAs from Thal were appointed, and solely to the junior role of Parliamentary Secretary. This suggests that national leadership viewed members from this region as unqualified for senior ministerial positions (Kalasra, 2024).
- ▶ Since Pakistan's inception, the Thal region has suffered from systemic neglect by political authorities. Both National and Punjab Provincial Assembly members representing Thal constituencies have been notably inactive, failing to advocate meaningfully for their constituents' interests. Despite being represented by 18 MNAs and 37 MPAs, the region's concerns are consistently overlooked in legislative debates, as these elected officials appear to prioritize personal gain over public service (Kalasra, 2024).
- ▶ The political landscape of Thal is characterized by a pattern of self-interest among its leaders, who have historically neglected the common good. Political action in the region is driven by party-specific programs and the directives of party heads, who strategize based on immediate political exigencies. This creates a system where elected officials are bound by loyalty to their party leadership, a reality that constrains representatives at both the national and provincial (Punjab) levels from effectively addressing local priorities (Kalasra, 2022).
- ▶ Despite the Thal region producing a significant number of prominent political figures including Nawab of Kalabagh Muzaffar Muhammad Khan, who served as Governor of Punjab under Ayub Khan; Malik Ghulam Mustafa Khar, who was both Chief Minister and Governor of Punjab under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto; along with numerous federal and provincial ministers such as Syed Faisal Saleh Hayat, Abida Hussain, and Dr. Kaosar Khan Niazi, and more recently, Prime Minister Imran Khan from Mianwali the area itself has seen no tangible improvement or change in its developmental situation as a result of this substantial political representation (Kalasra, 2024).

- ▶ The elected officials from the Thal Region have consistently prioritized flattering their party leaders over representing their people. In the assemblies, they avoid independent thought, speaking only from a script designed to maintain their proximity to power and serve their personal interests. The consequence of this subservience is a profound neglect of the Thal Region. For decades, its MPs have failed to deliver critical projects be it universities, hospitals, or a motorway. Their political weakness was starkly exposed in 2013. When Nawaz Sharif formed his cabinet, the 16 PML-N MNAs from Thal were almost entirely overlooked. They were granted zero ministerial posts, receiving only three insignificant Parliamentary Secretary roles out of 81 total positions. The fact that not one of these members dared to challenge this snub is a telling indictment of their flattery and ineffectiveness.
- ▶ The existence of heavy industry or local industry in the era of Thal is at a very low level. It seems equal to zero. There is a very much want of industry in this region (Kalasra, [2022](#)).

Conclusion

Based on the comprehensive information provided, the Thal region of Pakistan is a land of profound contradictions. It possesses a golden historical legacy, immense human talent, and significant political representation, yet it remains trapped in a cycle of systemic neglect and underdevelopment. The conclusion is one of a tragic paradox where potential is consistently stifled by political failure. Thal's ancient civilization, which potentially predated and influenced the Indus Valley, and its rich cultural heritage of poets, writers, artists, and political leaders stand in stark contrast to its contemporary reality. Despite producing figures who have reached the highest echelons of power, including a Prime Minister, Chief Ministers, and federal ministers, the region itself has seen no commensurate development. The political capital of 19 National Assembly and 37 Provincial Assembly seats has been squandered, as elected representatives have historically prioritized loyalty to party leadership in Lahore and Islamabad over the urgent needs of their constituents. This has resulted in a critical infrastructure deficit: the complete absence of universities, medical colleges, teaching hospitals, and industries, forcing the youth to migrate and perpetuating a cycle of deprivation. The region's challenges are compounded by a historical legacy of poverty and a social structure that prioritizes traditional spending over economic prudence. However, these internal factors are severely exacerbated by external political marginalization. Promised projects remain incomplete or non-functional, and essential services are glaringly absent. The narrative of Thal is not one of a region lacking resources or capable people, but of a region whose fortunes have been severed by a political class that has failed to translate representation into tangible progress. Ultimately, Thal stands as a poignant symbol of unfulfilled promise, a "palace of gold" in history and name, but a victim of political neglect in reality, leaving its people disillusioned and its vast potential largely untapped.

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