IRVI
Indus River Valley Institute

Summer 2026 | Edition 008

INDUS CULTURE & ARCHITECTURE HERITAGE

Newsletter

Picture Courtesy: Shayhaq Baloch

CELEBRATING THE COLOURS OF PAKISTAN'S CULTURE AND HERITAGE

The Indus River Valley, a cornerstone of human civilization, has been a beacon of cultural and historical significance for over 9,000 years. Pakistan's journey, marked by its rich and diverse heritage, continues to unfold through dedicated efforts to preserve and celebrate its illustrious past. At the Indus River Valley Institute (IRVI), we are committed to rekindling the ancient flames of our shared heritage, stitching together the frayed but vibrant threads of our cultural tapestry.

This newsletter brings together a wide range of knowledge, aimed at fostering a profound connection to the deep-rooted cultural lineage of the Indus Valley. In this edition, we discuss the Conservation of Gor Khatri conducted by the KP Archaeology Department. We highlight the work of the Yasmeen Baloch, first female Benju player in Pakistan. We appreciate Abdur Rehman Malik, a skilled Camel lamp maker from Multan. In the field of literature, we take a look at The Tappa, a book written by Dr. Salma Shaheen. We also feature a short film called the Forgotten River Beas, which pays tribute to River Baes. We explore the culinary adventures of Saliha Khan Sadozai. We aim to promote Pakistan's Classical Music by providing a glimpse into the Classical Music Heritage Trust (CMHT). And last but not least, we focus on Derajat Museum: A Testament of Southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Rich Heritage. We are particularly honored to feature IRVI's participation in the Heritage Exchange event held in Lahore by British Council. Lastly, we have our book review, which takes a look at The Indus.

As our community grows, we're excited to collaborate with cultural producers, architects, artists, and storytellers to cultivate a vibrant network dedicated to celebrating and preserving the rich heritage of the Indus Valley. We welcome Mariam Rehman and Syed Baleegh Uddin to the IRVI ICAHN team, who oversee the research and design for this document. And special thanks to Farid Alvie for reviewing the ICAHN newsletter and Junaid Chida for his support in this Edition!

Zain Mustafa
Managing Editor
ICAHN

April 2026, Islamabad, Pakistan

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CULTURAL HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION OF WESTERN GATE OF GOR KHATRI

(IMPLEMENTED BY KP ARCHAEOLOGY DEPARTMENT – PAKISTAN)

Gor Khatri stands at the heart of Peshawar as a powerful symbol of continuity, embodying centuries of cultural, religious, and architectural evolution. Unlike monuments associated with a single era, the site reflects a layered narrative where successive civilizations have built, transformed, and adapted its space. Its elevated position within the walled city further reinforces its historical prominence as both a strategic and cultural center.

Gor Khatri is a significant archaeological complex located within the old city of Peshawar. Accessible via Chowk Yadgar and situated near the historic Sethi Muhalla, it sits atop an ancient cultural mound and marks one of the highest points in the city, underscoring its long-standing urban importance.

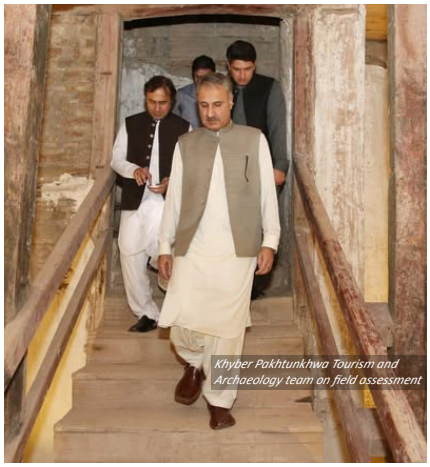
Inside view of Gor Khatri

The name "Gor Khatri" (or "Gor Khutree") is often interpreted as "Warrior's Grave." The earliest recorded account of the site appears in the memoirs of Emperor Babur, who noted the presence of a temple where large quantities of hair were found, suggesting the performance of Shraddha rituals by Hindu devotees. Another interpretation links the site to ascetic traditions, where Buddhist monks or jogis cut their hair as part of spiritual initiation. Later Mughal rulers, including Akbar and Jahangir, also described it as a gathering place for jogis and a site of Hindu pilgrimage.

The site acquired architectural prominence during the Mughal period. In 1641, Jahan Ara Begum, daughter of Emperor Shah Jahan, transformed Gor Khatri into a grand caravanserai known as Jahanabad. Designed to accommodate travelers, particularly those arriving from Central Asia, the serai featured a Char Bagh layout with cells arranged around a central courtyard.

Jahan Ara further enhanced the complex by commissioning a mosque and a hammam, reinforcing its role as a well-equipped transit hub. Although many of the original cells were later replaced, Gor Khatri remained the largest surviving serai among several constructed during the Mughal, Durrani, and Sikh periods, including Sarai Mahabbat, Sarai Chonkidar, and Sarai Suleman. These caravanserais not only facilitated travel but also enabled trade and cultural exchange.

Prior to its Mughal transformation, the site functioned as a Buddhist pilgrimage center and later came under Hindu influence from around the 5th century CE. The Shiva temple within the complex was eventually dedicated to the Hindu saint Gorakhnath, believed to have migrated from Kashmir and settled in Peshawar, further embedding the site within regional spiritual traditions.



Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Tourism and Archaeology team on field assessment

During Sikh rule, Gor Khatri assumed administrative significance. The temple of Gorakhnath was maintained, while the site also served as the residence and headquarters of General Paolo Avitabile between 1838 and 1842, reflecting its continued political importance.

Under British colonial administration, the function of the site shifted once again. Gor Khatri became the headquarters of the city police and fire brigade, housing fire engines manufactured by Merryweather & Sons in 1919 and 1921, some of which remain preserved within the complex today.

The British introduced further architectural modifications, employing materials such as mud and hay mortar alongside wooden ceiling beams. These interventions, though primarily functional, diverged from earlier Mughal and Sikh construction techniques.

The resulting integration of Mughal, Sikh, and British elements created a distinctive architectural palimpsest, particularly evident in the Western Gate.

Before

Progress

After

Before | Progress | After

Before | Progress | After

Gor Khatri also holds immense archaeological significance. Systematic vertical excavations initiated by Dr. Farzand Ali Durrani in 1992–93, and continued until 2007, revealed over 2,400 years of continuous habitation. Excavation work across various sections concluded around 2012, firmly establishing the site as one of the oldest continuously inhabited urban settlements in South Asia.

In 2013, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Tourism and Archaeology Department undertook efforts to revitalize the site by converting the caravanserai rooms into an artisan village. Approximately 49 rooms were restored and reinforced, reflecting an early attempt to integrate conservation with adaptive reuse.

Despite its historical importance, the Western Gate faced increasing threats that necessitated urgent conservation. Rapid urbanization, environmental exposure, and structural neglect contributed to its deterioration. Recognizing these challenges, conservation work on the Western Gate commenced in 2018 under the KP Archaeology Department, in collaboration with architects, Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), the University of Engineering and Technology (UET), Peshawar, and consultants, with support from the Gerda Henkel Stiftung.

One of the most critical challenges was the site's urban context. Surrounded by heavily congested roads, the monument was subjected to constant vibrations from traffic, including buses, rickshaws, and municipal vehicles. Parking along the western boundary further exacerbated the problem, gradually weakening the foundations and compromising structural stability.

Condition Assessment and Documentation: The conservation process began with a comprehensive condition assessment. Detailed surveys documented cracks and structural damage, ranging from minor hairline fractures to significant fissures. These were attributed to factors such as water infiltration, unplanned modifications, and historical layering. While the removal of certain structural elements reduced load stress, it also exposed parts of the building to environmental vulnerabilities, requiring careful management.

Removal and Relocation of Intrusive Municipal Utilities: A key initial intervention involved the removal and redirection of municipal utilities installed around the monument. Pipelines and electrical cables posed serious risks to both structural stability and visual integrity. Their relocation required close coordination with municipal authorities to ensure minimal disruption while protecting the monument's foundations.

Water Percolation Control and Drainage Management: Water infiltration posed a persistent threat due to the adjacent lawn and natural rainfall. Over time, moisture seeped into the soil beneath the gate, weakening its base. To mitigate this, drainage trenches were strategically excavated to channel excess water away from the structure, preventing further damage.

Structural Stabilization and Crack Repair: Simultaneously, structural reinforcement was undertaken to address existing damage. Cracks and fissures were repaired using compatible materials, including epoxy resin for fine fractures, while walls were strengthened to restore stability. These interventions ensured the long-term integrity of the monument without compromising its historical fabric.

Surface Cleaning and Architectural Restoration: Conservation efforts extended to the restoration of the gate's visual character. Layers of grime and pollutants accumulated over centuries were carefully removed from stone and brick surfaces. This process revealed the original textures and colors of the structure, restoring its architectural clarity and historical presence.

Community Engagement and Heritage Awareness: The project also emphasized community engagement as a vital component of conservation. Educational initiatives were developed to involve local residents and schools, fostering awareness of the site's historical significance and encouraging a sense of shared ownership.

The conservation and restoration of the Mughal-era Western Gate at Gor Khatri represent a significant achievement in heritage preservation. The project successfully balanced structuralstabilization with historical authenticity while reintroducing the monument into contemporary urban life. By addressing both physical deterioration and social relevance, it demonstrates how conservation can serve not only to protect the past but also to sustain it meaningfully in the present.

Excavation work at Gor Khatri

GOR Khatri

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/lgcdpunjab/posts/inauguration-of-the-khilwat-khana-subterranean-chambers-at-lahore-fort-was-suc/1083819233927092/

Picture Courtesy: A. R. Tahir Khattak

YAASMEEN BALOCH

(REDEFINING TRADITION: PAKISTAN'S FIRST FEMALE BENJU PLAYER)

Yasmeen Baloch, a sixteen-year-old from Nushki , a small town in the heart of Balochistan quietly become one of the most significant voices in Pakistan's indigenous music revival. The first female benju player to emerge from the region, her distinction carries not only artistic weight but profound cultural and social meaning in a place where the boundaries between tradition and change are negotiated daily, and rarely in favour of young women.

Yasmeen playing Benju

Yasmeen's entry into this world was neither planned nor permitted. Her father, Ustad Anwar Baloch, is among the foremost guardians of Balochi folk music, a benju player and maker who has dedicated over two decades of his life to the instrument, having travelled from Balochistan to Sindh to learn the craft of benju-making from his own Ustad, Micheal, in Mirpur Khas.

Anwar has crafted over 110 instruments, and his playing carries what can best be describes as the accumulated memory of a people, their migrations, stories, grief, and celebrations. Yet despite this immersion in music, or perhaps because of it, he initially did not encourage Yasmeen to follow the same path. In a society where girls are rarely afforded the space to pursue music professionally, his hesitation was not indifference but a father's understanding of the world his daughter would have to navigate.

According to Yasmeen, despite her circumstances, she already made her choice long before anyone asked her. From early childhood, she watched her father play with an absorption that fascinated her. At the age of seven, when Ustad Anwar was away from home, she first touched the benju. The experience, by her own account, was transformative.

She continued to practise in secret for years playing when her father left, setting the instrument aside before he returned navigating the quiet negotiation between longing and constraint that defines the interior lives of so many girls in similar circumstances. When her father eventually discovered her, the moment held more grace than confrontation: he recognised in his daughter what he had spent a lifetime pursuing himself.

Yasmeen Practicing Benju with Ustad Baksh

Her formal emergence into the public eye came in November 2025, when Parveen Naz, a social activist from Lyari, Karachi, working at the intersection of community, literature, and art arrived in Nushki with a documentary film team.

The project, funded by the British Council, sought to document the lives and work of female musicians across Balochistan. Though Ustad Anwar was initially reluctant, Parveen Naz persisted, and Yasmeen was taken for the first time in her life to the desert of Nathoo , an experience she describes as both unfamiliar and quietly empowering. This journey, and Yasmeen's story more broadly, were made accessible through the on-ground efforts of filmmakers Faheem Shad and Shayhaq Baloch.

In a province where insecurity is a lived reality and where 98 percent of Pakistan's population has never had reason to travel, their willingness to take that risk was the hinge on which everything turned.

The documentary opened a door that led Yasmeen to Karachi, and subsequently to her debut public performance at WOW Pakistan, a stage she shared with Ustad Noor Bakhsh, the legendary eighty-year-old Balochi benju maestro, under the rhythm section of Damburgi.

That Yasmeen's debut should place her alongside one of the instrument's most celebrated living practitioners was itself a statement about the quality of what she had taught herself in the margins of her domestic life.

She performed on an instrument crafted by her father's own hands, accompanied by a Phil Jones Bass cub amplifier brought from London, a pairing that quietly embodied the tension and possibility at the heart of her story: the deeply local and the carefully global, held together by one young woman's hands on a string.

Coming from a musically inclined background in Balochistan, Yasmeen Baloch developed her expertise in the benju through dedicated practice and exposure to traditional performance settings.

The benju, though influenced historically by East Asian instruments, has evolved into a uniquely Balochi folk instrument characterized by: Bright, rhythmic melodic tones, Fast finger technique and Fusion of melody and percussive rhythm.

Her playing style blends traditional folk co mpositions with contemporary arrangements, allowing the instrument to appeal to wider audiences.

Following her debut, Yasmeen has continued to learn from senior practitioners of Balochi folk music, including Ustad Abdur Rehman Surizai, Ustad Noor Bakhsh, and Fareed Baloch, among others.

Her playing style reflects this exposure, blending traditional folk compositions with contemporary arrangements in ways that expand the instrument's reach without severing its roots.

What makes Yasmeen's story significant beyond its individual dimensions is what it illuminates about the conditions under which cultural heritage survives or disappears.

The benju is not taught in conservatories. It is passed, imperfectly and contingently, through families, communities, and chance encounters through a father who learned from a man in Sindh, through a daughter who listened through a doorway, through a filmmaker who drove into a province others avoided.

Yasmeen Baloch is the product of all of these transmissions, and she is acutely aware of it. Her stated ambition is not merely to perform, but to bring the benju to other girls, to build a collective space where young women in Balochistan can learn the instrument together and create the opportunities that were not created for them.

Yasmeen Baloch with her Father, Ustad Anwar Malik

Yasmeen's debut public performance at WOW Pakistan, with Ustad Noor Bakhsh

In a landscape where cultural identity is frequently discussed in the abstract, Yasmeen Baloch represents something more concrete: a sixteen-year-old from Nushki who heard something in her father's playing that the world had not yet thought to ask her about, and who decided quietly, persistently, across years of practising in secret, that she would answer anyway.

Yasmeen Baloch's work reflects a broader movement of safeguarding Pakistan's intangible cultural heritage. By keeping the benju alive in performance circuits, festivals, and media appearances, she helps ensure that regional sounds continue to resonate nationally.

Her artistry stands at the intersection of tradition and empowerment, preserving Balochistan's musical identity while opening new spaces for women in classical and folk performance traditions.

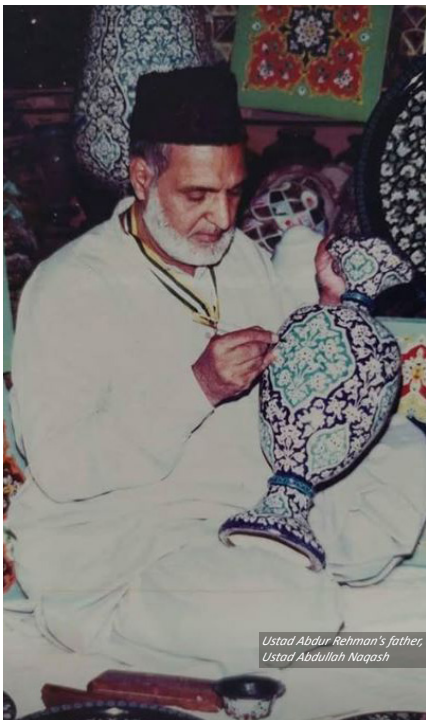
Yaasmeen Baloch

Facebook: *https://www.facebook.com/profile.hp?id=100057619591836&locale=sq_AL*
Email: *classicalmusic097@gmail.com*
Website: *https://www.classicalmusicheritagetrustpk.org/home*
Instagram: *https://www.instagram.com/yaasmeenbaloch/*
Picture Courtesy: ***Shayhaq Baloch***

MALIK ABDUR REHMAN
(AN ARTISAN PRESERVING MULTAN'S NAQASHI TRADITION)

In the historic city of Multan, known for its shrines, crafts, and centuries-old artistic traditions, the art of Naqashi continues to survive through the dedication of a few master craftsmen. Among them is Malik Abdur Rehman Naqash, a third-generation artist whose work reflects both the legacy of his ancestors and his commitment to preserving one of Pakistan's most distinctive crafts.

Malik Abdur Rehman belongs to a family that has devoted centuries to the art of Naqashi, a decorative painting tradition deeply rooted in Multan's cultural heritage.



Ustad Abdur Rehman's father, Ustad Abdullah Naqash

His father and grandfather were celebrated masters of the craft and earned widespread recognition for their artistic excellence. According to Rehman, Multan has long been a hub of Naqashi, and historically many of the craftsmen who contributed to decorative works at the Taj Mahal were also from Multan, demonstrating the long-standing reputation of Multani artisans.

The lineage of the Naqash family traces back several generations. The evolution of camel-skin lamp artistry is often attributed to Rehman's grandfather, Ustad Malik Ashiq Naqash, who built upon the innovations of earlier artisans. Among these earlier contributors, artisan Ustad Abdullah Naqash introduced decorative naqashi designs on camel-skin lamps around 1910, transforming a simple leather craft into a celebrated artistic tradition.

Growing up in such an environment, Abdur Rehman learned the art directly from his father, mastering the delicate brushwork, color composition, and traditional motifs that define Multani Naqashi. Today he continues to uphold this heritage while also teaching others and conducting workshops around the world.

Multan is internationally known for its traditional handicrafts, particularly those made from camel skin. Decorative objects such as lamps, vases, and ornamental pieces are enhanced by intricate hand-painted Naqashi patterns, which often feature floral motifs, geometric designs, and elements inspired by Islamic art.

Camel skin lamps one of Multan's most distinctive crafts are admired for their delicate glow. When light passes through the semi-transparent skin, the intricate painted patterns illuminate beautifully, transforming each lamp into both a

Abdur Rehman's Camel Lamp

functional object and a work of art. For Malik Abdur Rehman Naqash, the making of these lamps is a carefully coordinated process that brings together generations of knowledge and the expertise of multiple craftsmen.

Dabgar carefully removing hair and flesh from the camel's skin to make lamp's outer layer

Abdur Rehman using fine brushes and traditional pigments to adorns the lamp with

The production of camel skin lamps begins with the clayman, who prepares a clay mould based on the desired design and shape of the lamp. This mould forms the structural base around which the lamp will be built. Once the mould is ready, it is passed on to the Dabgar, the craftsman responsible for preparing the camel skin. The Dabgar carefully removes hair and flesh from the skin and treats it through a cleaning and thinning process until it becomes flexible and suitable for shaping. After preparation, the wet camel skin is stretched and wrapped over the clay mould. The skin is then left to dry for several days, allowing it to harden naturally and take the shape of the mould. Once fully dried, the clay mould is gently broken and removed from inside, leaving behind a perfectly formed camel-skin structure.

At this stage, the piece reaches Abdur Rehman Naqash, who completes the final and most artistic stage of the process. Using fine brushes and traditional pigments, he adorns the lamp with intricate Naqashi patterns often inspired by floral motifs, geometric designs, and elements of classical Islamic art. These detailed paintings not only enhance the visual beauty of the lamp but also create a luminous effect when light shines through the semi-transparent skin.

Camel skin is particularly suited for this craft because it contains little fat and is naturally durable. It can be thinned into delicate layers that allow light to pass through, giving the lamp its characteristic warm glow. Once the painting is completed, the lamp is treated with varnish or lacquer to protect the artwork and strengthen the structure. When properly cared for, these handcrafted lamps can last 50 to 100 years, making them enduring pieces of both cultural heritage and functional art.

Abdur Rehman Naqash's work has been displayed internationally, showcasing Pakistan's artistic heritage across the globe. He has conducted workshops in countries such as India, the United States, and Germany, sharing the techniques and cultural significance of camel-skin craftsmanship with new audiences.

In 2015, he participated in an international competition in Tabriz, competing with artists from 42 countries. His work won first prize, reflecting the uniqueness and sophistication of Multani Naqashi compared to similar traditions found in Central Asia, Iran, and Turkey.

His craftsmanship has also been recognized at international cultural events. For example, he represented Pakistan at the First International Craftsmanship Festival in Uzbekistan, where Pakistani artisans were honored for promoting traditional arts on the global stage.

According to Rehman, camel skin lamps from Multan have been exhibited in more than 32 countries, symbolizing Pakistan's cultural heritage worldwide.

Despite its beauty and international recognition, the art of camel-skin Naqashi faces serious challenges. Once practiced by over fifty families in Multan, today only a handful remain involved in the craft. The decline is largely due to reduced tourism, limited government patronage, and competition from cheaper mass-produced decorative items.

Rehman emphasizes that younger generations are increasingly reluctant to adopt such labor-intensive crafts because they offer limited financial returns. Without sustained support, training programs, and market development, many traditional crafts of Multan including camel skin Naqashi, risk fading away.

Beyond producing artworks, Abdur Rehman Naqash is deeply committed to preserving the intellectual and cultural legacy of Naqashi. His father, Ashiq Naqash, even designed an exercise book documenting the techniques of this art form, hoping that it could one day be published to guide future generations.

Rehman believes that promoting handicrafts through educational programs, workshops, and tourism initiatives can help revive interest in this ancient tradition. For him, every camel skin lamp is more than just a decorative object, it is a story of heritage, skill, and artistic dedication.

Malik Abdur Rehman Naqash stands as one of the key custodians of Multan's centuries-old Naqashi tradition. Through his artistry, teaching, and advocacy, he continues to illuminate the world with the delicate glow of camel skin lamps each one reflecting the enduring spirit of Pakistani craftsmanship.

At a time when traditional arts struggle against modernization, artisans like Abdur Rehman ensure that the cultural identity and craftsmanship of Multan remain alive for future generations.

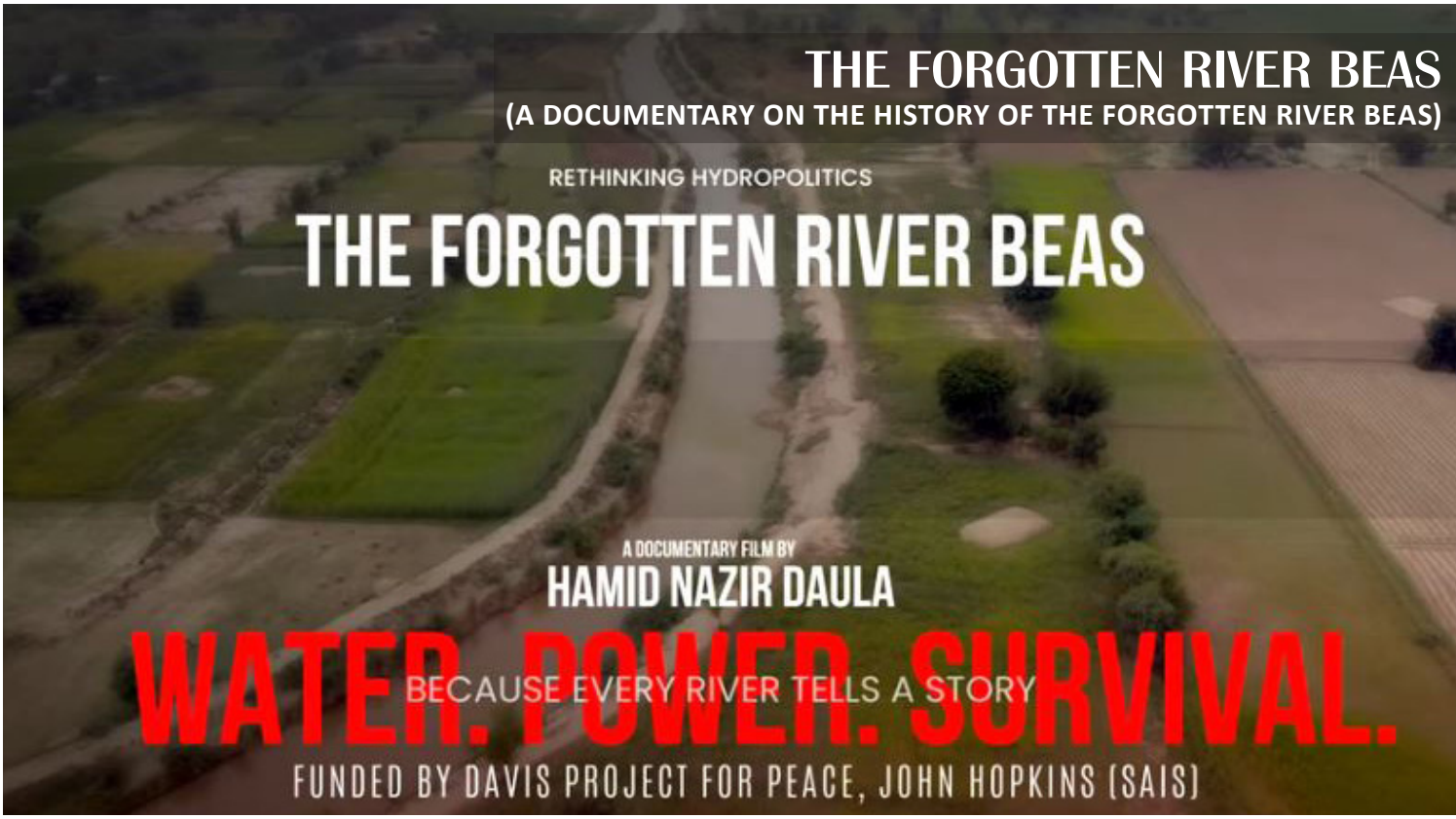
Abdur Rehman's beautiful work

Camel lamp with blue Naqashi

MALIK ABDUL REHMAN

Instagram: Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/abdulrehmannaqash/

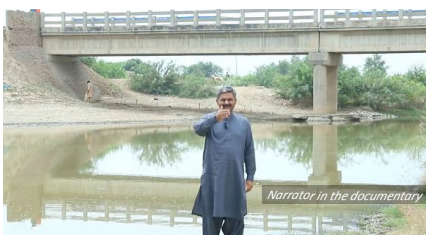
Image Courtesy: Abdur Rehman Malik



The Forgotten River Beas is a reflective and politically conscious documentary by Hamid Nazir Daula, an Archeologist. Hamid's documentary revisits the Beas River as more than a geographical feature it presents it as memory, rupture, and possibility. The film situates the river within the historical landscape of undivided Punjab, tracing how Partition and subsequent water governance transformed not only territorial control but also cultural consciousness. Rather than treating hydropolitics as an abstract legal matter, the documentary humanizes it through lived experiences, showing how a river can disappear from collective imagination even when it continues to flow.

The opening sequence establishes this tone through expansive landscape shots of the river terrain, intercut with old maps and archival references. The camera lingers on still water, dry riverbeds, and agricultural fields, creating a visual metaphor for absence. This is followed by elder voices recalling a time when the river shaped everyday rhythms—seasonal flooding, fishing practices, irrigation patterns, and communal gatherings. One particularly moving segment features elderly villagers recounting how the river's "sweet water" once sustained both livelihood and social bonds. Their testimonies transform the film from a policy discussion into an oral archive. These scenes are not nostalgic for sentiment alone; they function as counter-histories to state-centered narratives.

As the documentary progresses, it turns to the political rupture of 1947 and later to the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty. Through narration and contextual explanation, the film shows how the Beas, along with the Ravi and Sutlej, became part of the eastern rivers allocated to India, effectively removing it from Pakistan's hydrological domain. The treatment of the treaty is not overtly accusatory but critical in tone. It suggests that while the agreement resolved immediate interstate tensions, it also reconfigured ecological belonging. The river, once part of Punjab's integrated ecosystem, was reframed within rigid national boundaries. This shift, the documentary argues implicitly, narrowed how communities understood their own geography.


Narrator in the documentary

Thematically, the documentary explores rivers as shared ecologies rather than divisible assets. It challenges the nation-state paradigm that views water primarily through the lens of sovereignty and security. Instead, it frames rivers as cultural anchors, sites of folklore, agricultural practice, and collective belonging. The use of oral history is central here; by foregrounding aging voices, the filmmaker preserves intangible heritage that rarely enters formal archives. This methodological choice is particularly significant in the Pakistani context, where much of Partition memory survives primarily through generational storytelling.

It moves beyond forts, shrines, and monuments, arguing implicitly that ecological landscapes, especially rivers are repositories of identity. For Punjab, whose very name signifies the land of five rivers, the fading memory of one river signals a deeper fragmentation of historical continuity. By revisiting the Beas, the film symbolically reconnects present-day Pakistan with a broader civilizational geography that predates 1947.

What makes the documentary especially compelling is its closing gesture toward peacebuilding. Rather than ending in lament, it proposes that shared ecological systems could form the basis for dialogue across borders. The Beas becomes a metaphor for interdependence: water flows regardless of political lines, and memory resists containment.


Hamid Nazir Daula, Director of Forgotten River Beas

Overall, The Forgotten River Beas is not merely a documentary about hydropolitics; it is an intervention into how Pakistan understands memory, territory, and ecological heritage. By blending landscape imagery, oral testimony, and political analysis, it challenges viewers to reconsider rivers not as margins of the state but as central to cultural identity and possibilities for peace.

A Pakistani field anthropologist, researcher, and emerging documentary maker. He is a graduate student in anthropology based in Islamabad, associated with Quaid-i-Azam University and his work explores how ecological change, displacement, climate dynamics, and cultural memory shape the lives of riverine and marginalized communities in South Asia.

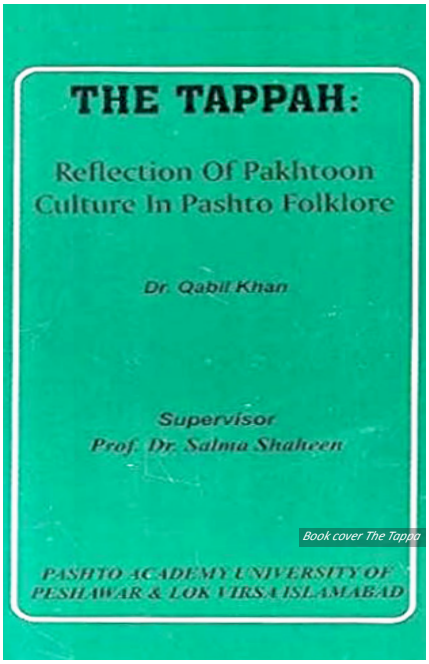
Unlike many filmmakers who come from traditional cinema backgrounds, Hamid brings an ethnographic and academic sensibility to his documentary work. His methodology draws on long-form field engagement, qualitative interviews, and oral histories, approaches common in anthropology but uncommon in mainstream documentary practice. This lens allows him to give space to voices often excluded from official archives, particularly elders who carry lived knowledge of places like the Beas that were central to the everyday life of pre-Partition Punjab.

The Forgotten River Beas
Linkedin: https://www.linkedin.com/in/hamid-nazir-d/
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/hamid.chaudary.14/

THE TAPPA

(A BOOK PRESERVING THE LIVING FOLK VOICE OF THE PASHTUN PEOPLE)

Pashto Tapa is a two-volume research compilation that serves not only as a scholarly record of one of the oldest folk poetry traditions in the subcontinent but also as an act of cultural rescue, a determined effort to preserve, in written form, a vast body of oral verse that rural Pashtun women had been composing and singing for thousands of years with no expectation that anyone would ever write it down.



Book cover The Tappa

Compiled by Prof. Dr. Salma Shaheen and published by the Pashto Academy at the University of Peshawar, the work brings together approximately 35,000 tappay, the two-line folk verses that are as old as Pashtun civilization itself, gathered from wedding gatherings, roadside bookstalls, private collections, and the author's own childhood memory.

The tappa is a deceptively simple form. Each verse consists of two unequal lines, the first shorter, the second longer yet within those two lines, a Pashtun woman could compress the weight of a marriage, a war, a grief, or a defiance. The form has no single author and no single era.

It belongs to everyone and to no one. What makes Dr. Shaheen's compilation extraordinary is the sheer scale of what she recovered: love poems sung while grinding wheat, laments composed at the moment of a forced marriage, tributes to fallen warriors, and quiet protests against injustice that had circulated for generations with no name attached to them.

Researchers estimate that some 85 per cent of all tappay were the creation of rural women, women who had no access to the written word but found in these two lines a precise and powerful language of their own.

The book does not merely collect. It contextualizes. It explains the tappa's place within the broader landscape of Pashto folk literature, which also includes the charbeta (a longer sung verse form), the neemakai (a short women's song of one to three lines), and the badala (an epic or ballad form requiring two performers to reply to each other in verse).

Dr. Salma reading her poetry

It places the tappa alongside the hujra, the traditional Pashtun communal gathering space for men and illuminates how these folk forms functioned differently across gender lines: men sang in hujras and open fields, while women's voices carried through the domestic spaces of home and godar.

The compilation also traces the themes that recur across thousands of individual verses, romance and separation, honour and its price, the land, the river, the harvest, and the particular sorrow of women who loved men who went to war.

Salma Shaheen was born on 16 April 1954 in Baghdada, a small town in Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, into a family where education was not taken for granted for women. Her father, Amir Muhammad Khan, was a well-regarded figure in the region, a man who actively encouraged his daughter's intellectual ambitions.

It is believed she began writing as early as the eighth standard. She completed her secondary education at a government school in Mardan in 1971, and later pursued further studies at Government College for Women, Mardan and now Women University Mardan, before earning her doctoral degree with a thesis on modern Pashto poetry, published in 2004.

She joined the Pashto Academy at the University of Peshawar in 1978, and it was there that her lifelong relationship with the tappa began.

The project that would become Pashto Tapa started in the 1980s, when Shaheen recognized that a vast body of folk verse was quietly disappearing not through neglect alone, but through the erosion of the rural life that had produced it.

She searched for tappay in old books being sold on Peshawar's footpaths. She attended weddings to listen to and record what women sang. She wrote down the verses she remembered herself from her childhood in Mardan.

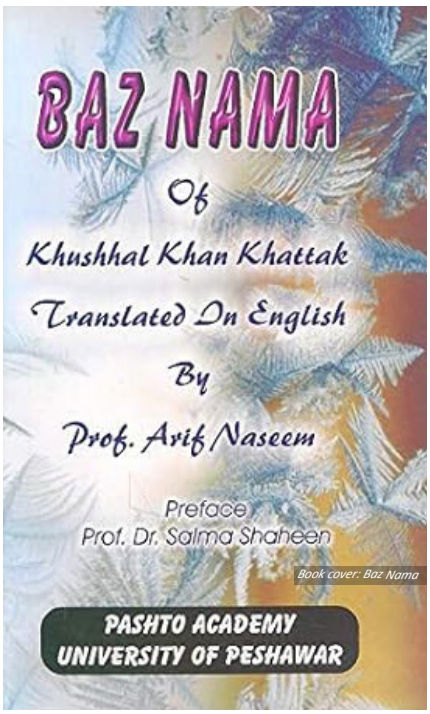
Nationalist leader Khan Abdul Wali Khan, recognizing the value of what she was doing, donated his personal collection of tappay to her project, as did many others.

Over years of accumulated effort, the 35,000 verses she recovered were organized into two volumes, a body of work that no single generation had been able to produce but that one determined woman, over decades, managed to assemble.

Shaheen's connection to this tradition was never merely academic. She is herself a poet of the tappa form, known for composing verses with the precision and economy that the genre demands.

As the first woman to serve as Director of the Pashto Academy, an institution she also rescued in 2011 from an administrative merger that had effectively dissolved its identity. she used that position to extend the work of preservation beyond her own books.

Dr. Salma inaugurating the Pashto Cultural Museum at the University of Peshawar



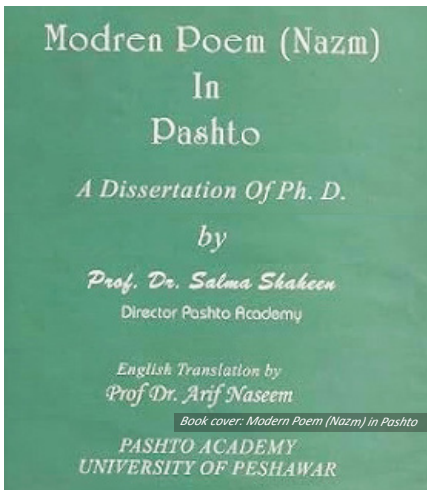
Book cover: Baz Nama

Under her leadership, the Academy published 120 Pakhtunwali books covering subjects ranging from the hujra and the jirga to Pashtun music and dance traditions.

Beyond Pashto Tapa, she has authored over 19 books across multiple genres: two novels, including Ka Rana Shawa (1988), the first novel ever written in Pashto by a woman from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; poetry collections such as Nawey Sahar, Za Hum Haghse Wara Way, and Abasin Da Tarikh; and research works including Muasharati Au Saqafati Asar and Awami Sandare.

She has published 42 research papers and represented Pakistan at literary conferences across the world, including as a member of the cultural delegation to China, where she also authored a travel memoir, Dil Aur Ankhein Cheen Main.

For her services to literature, she has received the Tamgha-e-Imtiaz from the Government of Pakistan and the Presidential Award from the Government of Afghanistan in 2018.



Book cover: Modern Poem (Nazm) in Pashto

Her instinct for preservation did not stop at the printed page. Under her directorship, she also inaugurated the Pashto Cultural Museum at the University of Peshawar, a space she envisioned as a living repository of Pashtun identity.

Open to the public, the museum displays an array of traditional Pakhtun crafts collected and contributed by Pakhtuns from across the province: ancient weapons, traditional clothing and jewellery, and musical instruments sit alongside exhibits on Pashto language, literature, history, and art. The museum was not conceived as a passive archive but as an active centre for research and cultural engagement, another effort, like the tappa compilation, to ensure that what has been lived is not lost.

But it is Pashto Tapa that sits closest to the bone of what Pashtun cultural heritage actually is not the poetry of courts and scholars, but the voice of women in fields and homes, women who never wrote anything down and yet managed, across centuries, to say everything.

As Shaheen has put it herself: "The interesting thing about the Pashto tappa is that in just two simple-worded lines, one can convey the meanings of a lifetime."

The TAPPA:
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/share/v/18p53sicH3/
Picture Courtesy: Dr. Salma Shaheen

SALIHA KHAN SADOZAI

(A CULINARY EXPERT CELEBRATING KASHMIR THROUGH FOOD)

In a world where food brands often prioritise novelty over narrative, Saliha Khan Sadozai is a voice that blends heritage, story, and community into every jar and flavour she creates. Rooted in this connection to land and tradition, she grew up among the very trees her family tended, observing their care for the land from an early age. The scent of ripe fruit, the rhythm of harvests, and the warmth of shared meals shaped her love for food. She saw how flavours told stories and how tradition was preserved through every dish. where three generations of her family have nurtured the land. This intimate connection to agriculture instilled in her a deep respect for the people behind every ingredient.

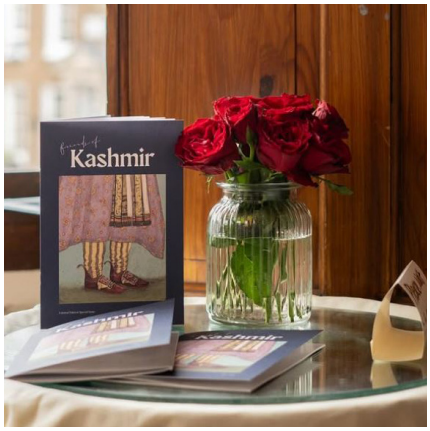
A chef, entrepreneur, and culinary storyteller, Saliha is the founder of Third Culture Kat (TCK) a condiment company rooted in South Asian flavour traditions yet crafted for modern palates.

Saliha's love for food isn't accidental, it's generational. She grew up in Khangarh, South Punjab, Pakistan, amid mango orchards planted by her great-grandfather, Nawab Safiullah in the early 1900s. The scents of ripening fruit and the rhythms of harvests were part of her earliest memories, shaping her appreciation for food as culture.

Her culinary path took her to Le Cordon Bleu London, one of the world's most prestigious culinary institutions, where she earned the Grand Diplôme, mastering classical techniques while retaining deep ties to her homeland's flavours.

Founded out of a desire to recreate that feeling of home in every meal, Third Culture Kat is more than a brand and it's a narrative project. Saliha's condiments tell stories of place, tradition, and memory. From Kashmiri Chilli Oil, her first creation and a tribute to her family's cultural roots and political heritage to Multani Mango Chutney and Lahori Tamarind, every product is crafted with a clear, curated connection to the South Asian agricultural and culinary legacy.

Saliha Sadozai's chilli oil



Her Instagram presence reflect stories through food. This platform bridges culinary creation with community engagement, inviting audiences to experience food as identity and connection.

Saliha's approach to condiment creation isn't just about enticing taste buds, it's about context. The creation of her Kashmiri Chilli Oil was more than a culinary triumph, it was an ode to her grandfather's lifelong commitment to the Kashmiri cause. Through it, she weaves personal heritage with political memory, blending spice and story to carry Pakistan's culinary soul into the global conversation.

Similarly, the Multani Mango and Lahori Tamarind celebrate regional produce and traditional pantry staples in ways that keep stories alive through consumption.

This philosophy reflects a broader shift in the culinary world where food isn't just nourishment, but narrative. Her products invite users to think about the origin of flavours, the people who grow them, and the histories they carry.

What distinguishes Saliha's work is her emphasis on ethical sourcing and community building. Third Culture Kat collaborates directly with Pakistani farmers, ensuring that the stories and flavours in each bottle are rooted in sustainable practices and fair relationships with growers. This farm-to-flavour model is both a business strategy and a cultural statement: that food heritage and economic justice can coexist.

Her vision goes beyond condiments it looks at how diasporic communities can preserve culinary identity while sharing it with the world via super clubs that are seasonal, curated dinners inspired by South Asian and Central Asian recipes. Every menu tells a story of land, memory, and migration, Collaborative Pop-ups, unique events hosted in partnership with chefs, artists, and cultural spaces. Each one is built around shared values and bold, creative expression.

Among her notable initiatives are curated events centred on Kashmiri cuisine and associated causes. Through thoughtfully designed gatherings such as Friends of Kashmir and Kashmir and Palestine, Saliha Khan Sadozai creates spaces for remembrance, awareness, and solidarity through food and storytelling. Her events feature a diverse selection of traditional dishes that reflect the richness of Kashmiri culinary heritage, bringing people together to experience culture in its most intimate form at the dining table. Among the highlights of her curated menus are Matz Chhiar and Yarkhandi Pulao, two iconic dishes that embody the depth, celebration, and historical influences of the region.

Matz Chhiar (often referred to as Matsch or minced meat dish) is a classic Kashmiri preparation of delicately spiced lamb meatballs, traditionally slow-cooked in a rich, aromatic gravy. Often enriched with walnuts and subtle sweetness from dried fruits like prunes. It is a popular, aromatic preparation seasoned with fennel powder, dry ginger powder (sonth), Kashmiri red chili, and cardamom, often served with rice. The dish reflects the layered flavors and refined techniques characteristic of Kashmiri Wazwan traditions.


Saliha making chilli oil


Saliha's community event for Kashmir


Yarkhandi Pulao

As Wazwan is a traditional, multi-course, meat-based feast from Kashmir, often featuring up to 36 dishes, primarily made from mutton or chicken. It is a symbol of Kashmiri culture and hospitality, with dishes slow-cooked in large copper pots (daigs) by specialized chefs called wazas. It is typically served on a shared large platter called a traem.

Yarkhandi Pulao is a celebratory rice dish deeply rooted in Kashmir's historical trade links with Central Asia. Fragrant saffron-infused rice is adorned with nuts and dried fruits such as almonds, pistachios, and apricots, creating a balanced blend of sweetness and warmth that symbolizes festivity and cultural exchange.

Toshi (also written Tosha), a rich confection made with flour, ghee, sugar, dry fruits, and poppy seeds, which today is largely made only in north Kashmir during special occasions like Niaz, and is almost unknown to the younger generation in central and south Kashmir.


Matz Chhiar

Saliha Khan Sadozai's work stands at the intersection of taste, history, and belonging. Her brand, Third Culture Kat, isn't just putting condiments on shelves, as it's amplifying stories of land, lineage, and culture through every spicy spoonful. In doing so, she represents a new wave of chefs and food entrepreneurs who don't just create food but also curate memory.

Saliha Khan Sadozai
Website: https://www.classicalmusicheritagetrustpk.org/home
Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/3rdculturekat/?hl=en
Website: https://thirdculturekat.com/pages/about
Linkedin: https://www.linkedin.com/in/saliha-khan-sadozai-b49509189/

AHANGE KHUSRAWI CLASSICAL MUSICAL HERITAGE TRUST

(SAFEGUARDING THE TIMELESS TRADITIONS OF CLASSICAL MUSIC)

In an era where Pakistan's rich classical music tradition faces the threat of extinction, the Classical Music Heritage Trust (CMHT), known as Ahange Khusrawi, stands as a beacon of hope and cultural preservation. Founded in 2002 as a voluntary, non-profit organization, CMHT operates independently without government assistance, driven solely by the passion and commitment of individuals who recognize the urgent need to protect this invaluable heritage.

Understanding that centuries-old traditions of classical and semi-classical music were gradually disappearing due to lack of institutional support and waning public interest, a group of concerned individuals came together to establish this trust. Led by President Iftikhar Rasheed and co-founded by Dr. Seema Khan among five founding members, CMHT emerged with a clear vision: to preserve, promote, and encourage an art form on the brink of extinction.

Event of the Week

Alka Yagnik, Kumar Sanu rock Islamabad with melodious hits

Shahina Maqbool
Islamabad

Ranked among India's most prolific playback singers, Alka Yagnik and Kumar Sanu elevated the spirits of an entertainment-starved yet electric audience with their first-ever live performance in Islamabad late Thursday night.

The concert was a brainchild of the Classical Music Heritage Trust (CMHT), a voluntary, non-profit entity established by a group of seven music-lovers with the two-fold objective of salvaging the dying genre of classical music and supporting deserving classical musicians, whose majority is beset with a serious financial difficulty. The event was organized to pay tribute to the legendary Kishore Kumar, with Beyond Time and Miradore Productions offering collaborative assistance.

"The CMHT has taught 15,000 hours of classical music to the younger generation so far under the tutelage of Ustad Fateh Ali Khan of the Patiala family. We are functioning without any kind of assistance from the government or the private sector. Each time I plan an event, I call up members of the Trust, who generously chip in to make it happen," the CMHT President Iftikhar Rashid said. He regretted the general apathy toward promotion of classical music in Pakistan. "Good music should be promoted, regardless of considerations related to language or geographical frontiers," he emphasized.

With a minute's silence having been observed in memory of Jagjit Singh, the event took off with Kanwal Iftikhar and Abbas Ali Khan, both of them students of

Indian singers Alka Yagnik and Kumar Sanu perform in Islamabad.

as an agent of change, and as the ultimate answer to the growing intolerance and violence that plague our society today.

"Kishore Kumar has inspired three generations; he taught us how to express ourselves when we fall in love; how to express ourselves when in sorrow; and how to express ourselves when parting from a beloved. His art represents the finer values of life," Mazhar stated.

Introducing the artists, Bali shared that Alka was born to a Gujrati family in Kolkata and is a seven-time winner of the Filmfare Best Female Playback Award, a distinction she shares with Asha Bhosle, which arguably made him the most popular male vocalist in India during the 1990s. He has sung 17,000 songs in 22 languages.

Just when the audiences' patience was beginning to wane, Kumar Sanu appeared on stage amidst thunderous applause, and started the show with his own super hits which included 'Buss Ik Sanam Chahiye,' 'Aik Larki Ko Dekha to Aisa Lagaa,' 'Yeh Kaali Kaali Aankhain,' and 'Larki Bari Anjaani.' Many an amateur dancers were prompted to swing and swa them was Jehangir, an energetic youngster whose talent ended up being recog-

It was then Alka's turn. She recollecte that her first song established her as folk singer, and it was not until she san 'Ghazab Ka Hai Din' for 'Qayamat Sa Qayamat Tak' in 1989 that her potentia as a romantic singer was recognised. Cla in an impressive black and mauve dres with gold embellishments, and later in shimmering light grey 'sari,' the artist cap tured the hearts of the audience wit songs like 'Kuch Kuch Hota Hai,' 'Baaz gar,' 'Bolain Churian,' and 'Aik, Do, Teen among numerous other hits.

In-between, Bali offered entertainmen with songs like 'Usne Bola Kem Che,' an one of his hit 'Patel Rap'. The concert cu minated with Alka and Kumar singin choicest Kishore Kumar classics includin 'Tairay Mairay Milan Kee Yeh Raina,' 'Pa Pal Dil Kay Paas,' 'Chingaari Koi Bharkay, and 'O Mairay Dil Kay Chain.' Towards th end, when the organisers were invited or the stage, Iftikhar Rashid couldn't resis objecting that the Bollywood stars had no sung a single vintage song of Kishore. A this, Kumar Sanu and the CMHT president together sang 'Ik Larki Bheegi Bhaagi Si, bringing the memorable night to a close.

Earlier on, Iftikhar Rashid specially thanked Nadeem Akbar and his team from Beyond Time, volunteers Amena Kamal and Mazhar Nisar, and members of CMHT Javed Hassan Aly and Majid Qureshi for their support. The concert was attended by eminent personalities from the political arena, the media, the educa tion and health streams of development bureaucrats. It was after a very long time that the people of Islamabad-the once

Snippet of an iconic event arranged by CMHT for Alka Yagnik and Kumar Sanu

CMHT's President Iftikhar Rasheed

The trust's mission extends beyond mere preservation. It aims to support Ustads (master musicians), provide them with dignified teaching spaces, and rekindle public appreciation for classical music, a mission that requires collective efforts from all who value Pakistan's cultural traditions.

Core Objective: CMHT addresses a stark reality: classical musicians who once flourished under royal patronage now face neglect and poverty. The trust works to reverse this decline through several key objectives: providing financial and moral support for classical musicians, preserving and documenting Pakistan's classical music heritage, raising public awareness and education about classical traditions, establishing formal teaching facilities for classical music and organizing regular classical music concerts and cultural events.

The Musical Academy: A Legacy of Excellence One year after CMHT's inception, its musical academy was established under the guidance of the legendary Ustad Fateh Ali Khan from the prestigious Patiala Gharana. His dedication was extraordinary devoting 30,000 man-hours to impart vocal lessons to young classical music enthusiasts since 2003.

His legacy shaped the academy's foundation and continues to inspire students today. Many graduates of the academy have gone on to excel in classical singing, carrying forward this rich tradition.

A Rich Heritage of Cultural Events CMHT's legacy includes hosting memorable evenings with musical legends. The trust has presented concerts featuring Ustad Fateh Ali Khan alongside his sons Rustam and Sultan, and the incomparable ghazal maestro Mehdi Hassan. In its commitment to cross-border cultural exchange, CMHT has brought India's celebrated singers Alka Yagnik and Kumar Sanu to Pakistan, organizing tributes to legendary playback singer Kishore Kumar, keeping the flame of classical music burning bright.

The strength of CMHT lies in its exceptional pool of musical experts:

Sarfaraz Anwar – Master of Tabla, Harmonium, and Vocals: With over 25 years of experience, Sarfaraz represents a rare mastery of three classical disciplines. Trained under Ustad Mahfooz Khokhar and Ustad Pervez Paras, he has performed alongside legends including Abida Parveen, Ghulam Ali, and Ustad Fateh Ali Khan.

His teaching experience spans prestigious institutions including Lok Virsa, PNCA, and Preparatory School Islamabad (PSI).

He has also performed internationally with ensembles such as "You Miii and Me" and the Pak-China Music Fusion Band, bringing a truly versatile approach to his dedicated teaching.

Ustad Salman Adil – Flute Instructor and Classical & Fusion Music Specialist: A renowned flutist and music director with over 17 years of experience, Salman Adil was trained by Babar Ali and has represented Pakistan on international stages across England, Japan, China, France, Holland, India, and Belgium.

A two-time PTV Best Music Director Award winner, he serves as senior instructor at the Classical Music Heritage Trust Academy, where he masterfully blends tradition with innovation to inspire new generations of talent.

Muhammad Arslan Nizami – Sitar Instructor: An 18th-generation sitarist from the esteemed Seniya Gharana, Muhammad Arslan Nizami traces his lineage directly to Mian Tansen, the legendary court musician of Mughal Emperor Akbar.

He carries forward this 500-year-old classical tradition through the teachings of his grandfather Ustad Ishaq Nizami, father Ustad Akhtar Nizami, and uncle Ustad Ghulam Farid Nizami.

As a dedicated sitar player, he upholds his gharana's legacy with extraordinary skill, discipline, and deep-rooted musical insight.

Muhammad Arslan Nizami, Sitar Instructor


Ustaad Salman
Flute Instructor , Classical & Fusion Music Specialist and Sarfraz Anwar, (Master of Tabla, Harmonium & Vocals)


Sarfraz Anwar taking Harmonium class

A recent collaboration with the Pakistan National Council of the Arts drew diplomats, students, artists, and classical music enthusiasts together for an evening that demonstrated what CMHT has been working toward. The program included choral performances by CMHT students, instrumental collaborations between flutist Salman Adil and tabla maestro Sarfaraz Anwar, a santoor solo by Ali Raza, and powerful vocal renditions. Dancer Nighat Chaudhry's interpretation of Faiz Ahmed Faiz's "Hum Dekhain Gey" proved particularly moving, showing how classical forms can still speak to contemporary concerns.

At that PNCA event, President Iftikhar Rasheed spoke candidly about the trust's journey. Six people contributed Rs. 100,000 each in 2003 to begin this work. Now only three active trustees remain. The mathematics are straightforward without broader participation, whether from individuals, organizations, or the corporate sector, the work becomes increasingly difficult to sustain. PNCA Director General Muhammad Ayoub Jamali responded with a pledge of institutional support, including free music education for underprivileged students.

Rasheed's observation was simple but pointed: "Pakistan is full of raw talent. If we don't nurture it, we risk losing a vital part of our cultural identity." The statement wasn't dramatic, it was merely accurate. Cultural traditions don't vanish dramatically; they fade gradually, as fewer people learn them, teach them, and care about them.

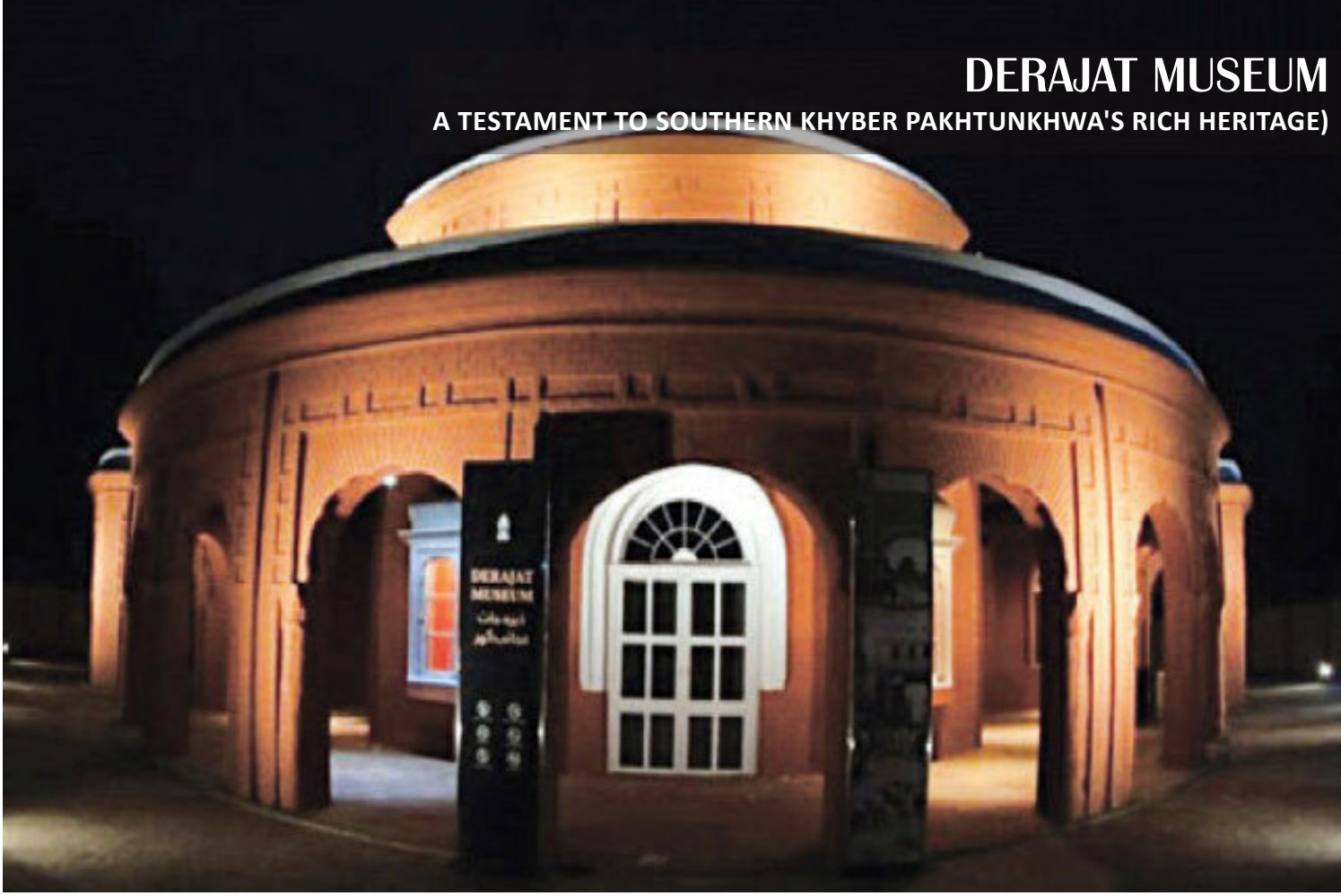
The Ahange Khusrawi Classical Musical Heritage Trust continues its work—teaching students, supporting musicians, organizing performances, and maintaining a space where classical music can still be learned and appreciated.

The question it implicitly poses is not whether classical music is valuable in some abstract sense, but whether we will act to preserve what remains while it is still possible to do so. The choice, as with all cultural inheritance, belongs to each generation. The trust has made its choice. The broader question is whether enough others will join in making the same one.

Ahange Khusrawi
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100057619591836&locale=sq_AL
Email: classicalmusic097@gmail.com
Website: https://www.classicalmusicheritagetrustpk.org/home

DERAJAT MUSEUM

A TESTAMENT TO SOUTHERN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA'S RICH HERITAGE)



The Derajat Museum, housed in the historic Town Hall of Dera Ismail Khan, stands as a remarkable cultural institution that bridges Pakistan's colonial past with its rich archaeological heritage. Inaugurated by former Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur in November 2025, this museum represents a groundbreaking achievement in Pakistan's heritage conservation efforts.

Location and Historical Building: The museum is located in Dera Ismail Khan, a significant city in southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The building itself is a historic landmark constructed around 1875 in classic British colonial architectural style. For decades, the Town Hall served as the city's central hub for social, cultural, and community gatherings, also housing a public library that functioned as an important intellectual center.

After years of deterioration due to official neglect, the provincial government and the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums declared the Town Hall a protected heritage building. Rather than demolishing this architectural treasure, authorities adopted an adaptive reuse approach, transforming it into the Derajat Museum through careful restoration and conservation.

Clay objects at Derajat Museum

A Historic First in Pakistani Museums: The Derajat Museum holds the distinction of being the first museum in Pakistan developed through adaptive reuse of a historical building. This innovative approach preserved the colonial-era architecture while creating a modern cultural institution equipped with specialized showcases and contemporary museum facilities.

The museum operates under the management of the Directorate General of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This provincial body, which has been functioning since 1992, is responsible for the preservation, excavation, and restoration of archaeological sites throughout the province, as well as managing all provincial museums.

The museum's establishment received support from the World Bank and was developed under the leadership of Secretary Archaeology and Museums Dr. Abdul Samad and his team. The project reflects the provincial government's commitment to preserving and promoting the region's cultural and historical heritage.

Collections and Artifacts: The Derajat Museum showcases an impressive collection that spans multiple historical periods, reflecting the diverse heritage of the Derajat region:

Gandhara Period Artifacts: The galleries display artifacts from the Gandhara period, including Buddhist sculptures and relics that represent the ancient civilization that flourished in this region between the 1st century BCE and the 5th century CE. These artifacts demonstrate the unique fusion of Greco-Roman and Indian artistic traditions that characterized Gandharan art.

Bodhisattva of Compassion piece at Derajat Museum

Islamic Period Collection: The museum houses an extensive collection of Islamic-era artifacts, including inscriptions, manuscripts, and decorative arts that chronicle the region's Islamic heritage following the arrival of Islam in the 8th and 11th centuries.

Numismatic Collection: Among the museum's treasures is a collection of rare coins spanning various dynasties and periods, providing insight into the economic and political history of the region.

Everyday Objects and Pottery: The museum displays pottery, tools, utensils, and everyday objects from various historical eras, offering visitors a glimpse into the daily lives of people who inhabited the Derajat region throughout history.

Ethnographic Displays: In addition to archaeological artifacts, the museum features ethnographic exhibits highlighting the traditions, crafts, and lifestyles of local communities in Dera Ismail Khan and surrounding areas.

Archives and Digital Preservation: A unique feature of the Derajat Museum is its role as a repository for historical documents. Revenue records from Mianwali, Dera Ghazi Khan, and Bhakkar districts are preserved here, with all historical records of the Derajat region centralized in this location. These documents are currently being digitized through scanning to ensure long-term preservation and easier access for researchers and legal proceedings.

The museum also preserves notes and documents from British colonial officers, which are being systematically scanned and added to a modern archival system.

The museum includes a dedicated section for local artists and artisans from Dera Ismail Khan. This space allows contemporary artists to showcase their work while also preserving records of former artists from the region, creating a bridge between historical and contemporary cultural expression.

Cultural Preservation: The museum plays a vital role in preserving centuries-old cultural heritage, archaeological treasures, and representations of traditional lifestyles. It safeguards the cultural memory of Dera Ismail Khan and the broader Derajat region, which historically served as an important center of trade and culture.

The establishment of the Derajat Museum is expected to boost tourism in southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, attracting history enthusiasts and researchers from across Pakistan and internationally.

Utensils displayed at the Derajat


Buddha head piece at Derajat

The museum offers free admission for students, reflecting its commitment to education and accessibility. The facility includes modern amenities and specialized display cases that meet international museum standards, providing visitors with an enhanced experience of the region's cultural treasures.

The Derajat Museum represents a successful model of heritage conservation through adaptive reuse. By transforming a deteriorating colonial-era building into a modern cultural institution, authorities have created a space that honors the past while serving contemporary educational and cultural needs. The museum stands as a symbol of heritage, learning, and regional pride, ensuring that the rich history of Dera Ismail Khan and the Derajat region will be preserved and appreciated for generations to come.

As one of the key cultural institutions in southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Derajat Museum exemplifies how historical buildings can be given new life and purpose, contributing to cultural tourism, academic research, and community identity while preserving invaluable artifacts that tell the story of human civilization in this ancient region.

Derajat Museum :
Website: *https://www.wangdashowcases.com/derajat-museumd-i-khan-museum-in-pakistan-opens-to-the-public/*
Picture Courtesy

Rifles displayed at Derajat Museum


Swords displayed


Buddha artifacts at Derajat

IRVI AT THE PAKISTAN HERITAGE EXCHANGE

Lahore, A city that has always known how to hold history in the grain of its Mughal sandstone, in the call of its havelis, in the dust that settles between centuries. It was fitting, then, that the British Council chose Lahore as the host of the Pakistan Heritage Exchange: two days of conversation, argument, and reflection on what it means to protect, reimagine, and carry forward the heritage of a civilisation as layered and contested as Pakistan's.

Indus River Valley Institute (IRVI) was present throughout Day 2, as its founder, Zain Mustafa, took to the stage for one of the event's most anticipated sessions. What unfolded was not a polished presentation of solutions, but something rarer and more valuable: an honest reckoning with what we know, what we have forgotten, and what urgently needs to be said.

Activating Research, Training and Practice in Heritage

The session Zain participated in Activating Research, Training and Practice in Heritage, which was framed around a deceptively simple question: how does heritage knowledge move between research, training, and practice? How do ideas born in archives find their way into workshops? How does what a craftsperson knows in their hands become legible to the academy? And how, in an era of mounting institutional frameworks and international conservation jargon, do we keep that knowledge locally grounded, alive, and meaningful?

Zain opened his contribution with a question he posed to the room: how many people knew Ranikot Fort? Of roughly a hundred attendees, only sixteen raised their hands.


Zain discussing about Ranikot

"One hundred people in a room and sixteen hands. That is the gap we are talking about." The statistic was startling, and deliberately so. Ranikot Fort, known as the Great Wall of Sindh, is believed to be the world's largest fort by circumference stretching approximately 32 kilometres across the Kirthar Hills of Jamshoro District, a structure whose ramparts have been compared to the Great Wall of China. It has been on UNESCO's tentative World Heritage list since 1993. Within its outer walls lie three distinct forts Mirikot, Shergarh, and Mohankot. Its stone walls rise up to ten metres in places, flanked by 45 bastions. The world's fifth-smallest country, San Marino, would fit inside its perimeter. And yet, in a room of heritage professionals, educators, and practitioners gathered specifically to discuss Pakistan's built past, barely one in six knew of its existence.

This, Zain argued, is not incidental. It is structural. The way we teach heritage, the language we use, the curricula we inherit all of it shapes what gets remembered and what quietly disappears. Ranikot's story exists in a single Sindhi-language book, later translated into Urdu and subsequently reedited into English by Zain and five collaborators. The fort itself is a complex of three inner fortifications. And yet it remains, for most of Pakistan's educated class, unknown.

One of the session's most striking reframings came when Zain challenged the word 'ruins' itself. What architects and institutions often classify as ruins, he argued, are in fact architectural learning hubs — living repositories of material knowledge, structural ingenuity, and cultural memory. Ranikot's sandstone walls, the phoslite stones of Makli, the river-bank masonry traditions of the Indus delta: these are not just aesthetic objects. They are technical documents, written in stone, about how a civilisation understood its climate, its materials, and its place in the world.

Around these sites, local custodians carry knowledge that no archive has yet captured: love stories lodged in particular gateways, the specific music that belongs to a courtyard, the food that has been prepared near a shrine for generations. These forms of knowing oral, embodied, sensory are heritage too. And they are the most fragile, because no institutional mandate protects them.

Zain with his history teacher from Columbia University's Parsons School Jean Galdon

"There is no way to understand the heritage of these buildings but to understand them, feel them, and hear them."

The conversation turned to Makli Necropolis, the UNESCO World Heritage Site near Thatta that Zain described as one of his most formative teaching grounds. Inscribed in 1981, Makli is one of the largest funerary sites on earth, spanning ten square kilometres near the apex of the Indus River Delta, housing between half a million and one million tombs built across four centuries of Sindhi civilisation. Its architecture synthesises Muslim, Hindu, Persian, Mughal, and Gujarati influences into a visual language unlike anywhere else in the world. Its sandstone is carved with geometric precision; its glazed tiles speak of trade routes and cosmopolitan exchange; its mausoleums contain the remains of royalty, Sufi saints, scholars, and soldiers.

Students at NED University in Karachi
Zain with students from NED University taking a semester to Makli

And yet, as Zain pointed out, countless residents of Karachi, a city barely 98 kilometres away have never been to Makli. Students at NED University in Karachi, among Pakistan's foremost architecture programmes, may pass through years of study without once standing in its shadow. That is why Zain's studio took an entire semester to Makli. Students spent extended time on site — not photographing it from a distance, but working within it, drawing in place, studying the sandstone, the phoslite, the river-bank stones, understanding how these buildings endure the climate they were built for. The experience, he said, transformed how students saw architecture entirely. It gave them a spatial and material intelligence that no classroom could replicate.

He described a parallel encounter with his own history teacher from Columbia University's Parsons School Jean Gardner, then in her eighties who had taught him the history of Pakistan when he was eighteen. She returned to Pakistan to learn. On site, Zain noted, both teacher and student found themselves in the same position: confronting questions about colonial imprisonment of knowledge, about what had been allowed into the historical record and what had been silenced. Learning and unlearning, together, on the site itself.

Among the session's most resonant moments was Zain's reference to master artisan Ghulam Abbas, a craftsperson whom he described as a living library of information, a practitioner who carries within him the knowledge of how to create colour, how to read stone, how to work with materials whose preparation has been passed down through generations. In an age of digitised archives and institutional repositories, this is the knowledge most at risk: embodied, relational, non-transferable by text alone.

Zain pointed to block printing, on-site drawing, and direct engagement with regional architecture including the tomb of Bibi Jawandi as examples of how knowledge can be activated rather than merely preserved. The session included a call for photographers and visual practitioners to take up heritage documentation not as archival duty but as creative and educational practice.

Perhaps the session's most politically charged contribution was Zain's analysis of language itself as a heritage problem. The vocabulary through which Pakistan's built history is currently discussed, he argued, is largely borrowed colonial in origin, or latterly absorbed from international conservation frameworks that carry their own assumptions about what matters and why.

The Mughal period, for instance, dominates mainstream narratives of subcontinental architecture. It is legible, taught, institutionally valorised. But the Indus region had rich aesthetic traditions long before the Mughals arrived, these traditions that are rendered invisible by a framework that privileges what is most easily absorbed into existing Western art-historical categories.

"History in itself is a holistic term. Within it comes textiles, fashion, poetry, crafts, dance, every kind of creative expression." Zain has been working on decolonising education in this space and developing curriculum that replaces obsolete and culturally inappropriate frameworks with one grounded in the actual depth of the region's civilisational history. The Silk Route, he reminded the room, is a nine-thousand-year story. The aesthetic and intellectual inheritance of the Indus Valley is not a footnote to Mughal splendour, it is a world in itself.

His critique extended to the newest wave of academic jargon on ecologies of this, assemblages of that which he argued simply replaces one set of unexamined abstractions with another.

The task is not to find a more sophisticated framework, but to find a language that is accessible, grounded, and honest, one that takes people, especially young people questioning their own identity, back to the places and objects and stories that belong to them.

Zain's session was one of several that made Day 2 of the Pakistan Heritage Exchange a genuinely generative space.

The day opened with the panel Who Protects Heritage? Law, Institutions and Accountability in Pakistan, featuring Marvi Mazhar, Dr. Nadhra Shahbaz, Taimoor Khan Mumtaz, and Zain himself, moderated by Amtul Mateen Ayesha.

The discussion examined how Pakistan's heritage protection law's function or fail to function across federal, provincial, and local levels, and what accountability looks like in practice when political context shifts.

Beyond the Glass Case: Museums as Cultural Commons asked how museums in Pakistan can move beyond static display toward genuine dialogue, grappling with colonial legacies, contested histories, and the expectations of audiences who want more than glass cases and explanatory labels.

The session drew on global debates about decolonisation and what it practically means to make a museum an active public space.

A particularly affecting conversation came in A View from Nepal: Anie Joshi in conversation with Usman Sami, which explored how heritage in Nepal is sustained not primarily through formal Protected Monument Zones, but through communities, social systems, and traditional custodians.

As those social contexts shift as specialised crafts disappear even as ritual traditions thrive, what happens to heritage? The Nepali case offered a mirror for Pakistan, raising questions about what thriving and disappearing mean in a people-centred understanding of the past.

The day closed with Walking Cities with a New Generation of Heritage Storytellers , a celebration of young urban guides who bring cities alive through movement, curiosity, and personal narrative.

Through monuments, markets, crafts, and everyday spaces, a new generation is learning to carry heritage not as burden but as a form of ownership, and to share it in ways that are experiential, accessible, and alive.

Session 2 of Heritage Exchange featuring Marvi Mazhar, Dr. Nadhra Shahbaz, Taimoor Khan Mumtaz, and Zain himself, moderator Amtul Mateen Ayesha

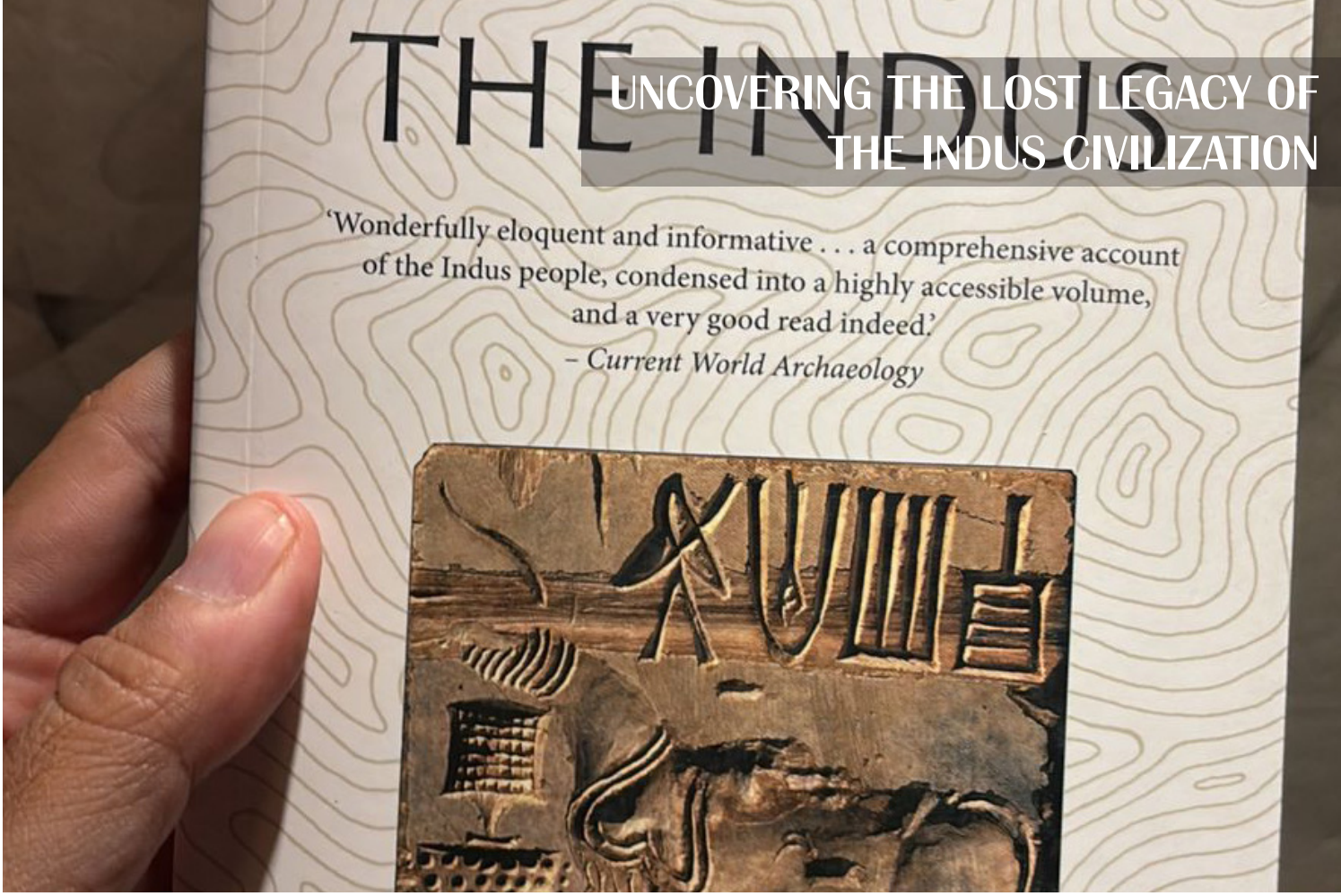
The Pakistan Heritage Exchange was not an event that produced resolutions. It was something more important: a space where honest questions could be asked and held without the pressure of immediate institutional answers. What emerged from IRVI's participation and from Zain's session in particular, was a set of commitments that go beyond any single conference.

The commitment to take students out of classrooms and onto sites. To document the knowledge held in artisans' hands before it is lost. To challenge the languages of academics, colonials, bureaucratic, who decide what counts as heritage and who gets to say so. To help a generation find, in the oldest stones of their civilisation, a vocabulary that is genuinely their own.

Ranikot is out there, in the Kirthar Hills, 32 kilometres of wall in the middle of a landscape most Pakistanis will never visit. Makli is ten square kilometres of carved sandstone, half a million soles, barely an hour from Karachi. They are not ruins. They are lessons. The question is whether we are willing to learn from them.

IRVI at the Pakistan Heritage Exchange
Article Credits: Mariam Rehman

UNCOVERING THE LOST LEGACY OF THE INDUS CIVILIZATION



The Indus: Lost Civilizations is an accessible introduction to every significant aspect of an extraordinary and tantalizing 'lost' civilization, which apparently combined artistic excellence, technological sophistication and economic vigor with social egalitarianism, political freedom and religious moderation. Written by Andrew Robinson, The Indus: Lost Civilizations comprises 208 pages and was published in 2015 by Reaktion Books.

The Indus culture is one of the oldest and least understood of civilizations in human history. It covered a huge area in present Pakistan and India from about 2600 to 1900 BC. Although archaeologists have discovered thousands of Indus sites, we know almost nothing about its origins, how the Indus culture developed, its social structure, its religion or its language, nor when and how it ended. These circumstances make it necessary to describe the Indus civilization with caution and to distinguish facts from fiction. In his book Andrew Robinson has met this challenge in a splendid manner despite the difficulties he faced.

After a short introduction, Robinson describes the discovery of the Indus civilization in much detail. This gives sufficient background to understand both progress and problems of Indus archaeology. The excavations of the two largest Indus sites, Harappa and Mohenjodaro, have unearthed a complex of architecture, pottery, and thousands of small artefacts such as beads, figurines, weights, tablets, seals, metal tools, etc. Despite the wealth of artefacts, we have little chronological control due to the destruction of the upper (Late) levels at Harappa, the non-existent Early periods at Mohenjodaro and the small temporal overlap between both sites. Chronological divisions at Harappa are based on the presence or absence of inscribed tablets. This is because, from start to finish, the "Mature Harappan" ceramics cannot be differentiated.

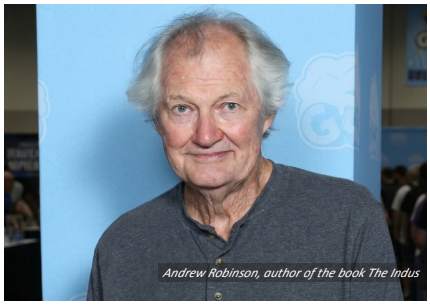
This book covers all aspects of the Indus culture and discusses architecture, arts, crafts, agriculture, trade, social structure, religion, and its decline and disappearance. One of the most controversial topics is discussed in Chapter 10 which deals with the Indus script. Robinson gives an overview of the corpus of Indus inscriptions, argues for the direction of writing, and discusses four unsuccessful approaches to decipher Indus signs by Petrie, Wilson, Rao, and Fairservis. In the discussion of the sign list, he cites Parpola's and Mahadevan's count of 425–225 signs, but both estimates are based on a limited, outdated corpus not updated after the publication of the HARP data recently excavated from Harappa.

One important perspective discussed in the book is the discovery and excavation of major Indus sites, particularly Harappa and Mohenjodaro. Robinson explains how early twentieth-century excavations revealed well-planned cities with grid layouts, drainage systems, public baths, and standardized brick construction. These discoveries demonstrated that the Indus civilization possessed remarkable urban planning and technological capabilities comparable to other ancient civilizations like Mesopotamia and Egypt.

Another key view concerns the economic and cultural life of the Indus people. The book highlights their expertise in crafts such as bead-making, metallurgy, pottery, and seal carving. Evidence of trade with regions such as Mesopotamia suggests that the Indus civilization was integrated into wider ancient trade networks. Standardized weights and seals indicate the existence of organized commercial practices and administrative control.

Finally, the book addresses the decline of the Indus civilization. Instead of a sudden collapse, Robinson suggests that multiple factors, such as environmental changes, shifting river systems, and gradual social transformations, likely contributed to its decline around 1900 BCE. The civilization did not disappear entirely but gradually evolved into smaller regional cultures.

Overall, the central idea of the book is that the Indus civilization was highly developed yet historically enigmatic.


Andrew Robinson, author of the book The Indus

The Indus

Article Credits: Mariam Rehman

IRVI
Indus River Valley Institute

FOR CONTRIBUTIONS & COMMENTS EMAIL US

- Email: newsletter@indusrivervalley.org
- Website: https://indusrivervalley.org/
- https://www.linkedin.com/indus-river-valley-institute/
- http://www.instagram.com/irvi.institute
- http://www.facebook.com/irvi2022
- https://x.com/irvi_institute?s=09

Research by:
- **Mariam Rehman**

Designed by:
- **Syed Baleegh Uddin**

Master Layout by:
- **Zia ur Rahman**