



# 15<sup>th</sup> THAAP Conference on Architecture of Central Asia, Persia and Punjab-The shared cultural roots

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**"The integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and traditions was canvassed over in the 15<sup>th</sup> THAAP Talk on the "Cultural Roots of Central Punjab" by Arunah Zahra Ashraf, who later on, introduced Ar. Neelam Naz to preside over the talk"**

The integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and traditions was canvassed over in the 15<sup>th</sup> THAAP Talk on the "Cultural Roots of Central Punjab" by Arunah Zahra Ashraf who was trained as an architect at National College of Arts, Lahore and is currently the Chief Architect to Government of the Punjab, Communication and Works (C & W) Department, Lahore.

Ar. Amna Jahangir introduced Ar. Neelam Naz to preside over the talk. Ar. Pervaiz Vandal commenced the session by instituting the nature of the discourse to the fellow attendees. He established the basic idea of what was to come and with great enthusiasm invited Ar. Arunah Zahra to initiate her declamation on her research.

Culture captures the contextual, contingent, and social aspects of resources available in a certain place and to clear the basic perceptions, Ar. Arunah Zahra elaborated the concept of culture by quoting *Edward B. Taylor* who offered a broad definition, stating that culture is "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society".

**"Architect Arunah Ashraf skilfully explained the extent to which cultures can fuse and expressed the concept of silk routes between Persia, Central Asia connecting the cities to the core of Central Punjab"**



The guest speaker also grasped the basic concept of the cultural roots of Punjab by investigating the initial silk routes responsible and the ethnic identities of the traditions and architecture flowing in through these roots. Like the veins circulate blood in a human body, it was explained that these silk routes provided a similar course in communities, regulating customs, superstitions and ethnicity in the bazaars and streets in the urban society.

During this discourse, the architecture of different buildings and monuments was discussed. Included in the talk were the Mausoleum of Bukhara with its intricate and unique brick masonry and the Mausoleum of Shah Rukn - e- Alam with its intriguing octagonal structure, with sloping towers, supporting a massive hemispherical dome.

The basic construction techniques were discussed through historic illustrations which, interestingly, clarified the perceptions for the methods of construction in the olden days.

Moreover, to understand the concept further, the subject of trade, crafts and the life style of the locals was conferred. The goods, like carpets, food, vehicles, instruments, silk, rag dolls and *topi* acted out a pivotal role in the merging traditions of the locals because the grand art and architecture was constrained to just the monumental buildings.

During the question and answer session, only a few people queried about the paper and were somewhat satisfied with the response from Ar. Arunah Ashraf. Some of the attendees added to the subject at hand including Dr. Anis A. Siddiqui who referred it to a spark igniting the society.

It was regarded by many of the listeners, after the talk was concluded, that the entire discourse covered topics ranging from architecture and art to astronomy and medicine.

**"After a very long time, I got to listen to a paper which grasped and discussed the basic ideology of the foundations of everything. Marvellous!" (Ar. Pervaiz Vandal)**

When asked about how she felt about the talk, overall, Ar. Arunah Zahra calmly responded that she thoroughly enjoyed the talk for it was one of the most attended sessions. She also regarded that researching this paper was an equal experiential learning for her as it was for others and that the research was done in layers during the course of time which eventually merged when the paper was compiled.

This paper was an interesting take on the entire concept of the shared cultural roots of Punjab, Central Asia and Persia. It was presented with an abundant use of images of referred buildings, customs, the historic routes and the methods of construction which made it appealing and interesting.

Cheers of agreement resounded in the beautiful rustic residence of Ar. Pervaiz Vandal with any disagreements and doubts faltering due to strong roots of the subject. It is hoped to see presentations like such to become a prevailing part of the society enabling the scholars to advance in cultural and educational outlooks in Pakistan.