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Garden Tradition of Mughals in Kashmir

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Abstract

The Mughal gardens are the places of rest, reflection and reminder of heaven. These gardens are influenced by the historic gardens of Iran and Mughal India. The study investigates architectural glory and importance of the Mughals gardens in Kashmir, and reveals how these gardens are the source of earning even today. The outcome of the study will enhance the understanding about the garden design as cultural heritage for next generation.

Keywords: Garden, Mughal, Bagh, Cascade, Architect, Kashmir, Heaven, Glory.

Introduction

The conspicuous contribution by the Mughals to the Architectural wealth of Kashmir lies in several gardens with their schemes of foundation and cascades which they built at several beauty spots in the valley.¹ The gardens are famous throughout the world. Tom More in his immortal *Lalla Rookh* has painted some of these in colors so brilliant as to leave a lasting impression on the readers. The history of the development of the garden designs in Kashmir is closely associated with the Buddhist landscape gardening in China and Japan.

From early times flowers and plants have been admired and cultivated in India. There are many references to gardens in old Buddhist literature and Sanskrit plays. In section CCIX of the *Adi Parva* and section III of the *Sabha Parva* of the *Mahabharatha*, minute descriptions of the gardens as laid out by the architect Maya are given. The sacred groves round Buddhist shrines were also among the early forms of Indian gardening.

¹ P.N. K. Bamzai. *Cultural and Political History of Kashmir: From Earliest Times to the Present Day*. Metropolitan Book Co., New Delhi (1973), p. 588.

The ancient Indian, like the Chinese, preferred still, lotus-bearing water, pent up within paved embankment. Pleasure houses and crowding the garden were the additions of later time. No attempt was made at ensuring running water or *ab-i-rawan* simply because in both countries rivers and water was plentiful.²

Kashmir which has been endowed with an abundance of springs lakes, glens and mountains and all kinds of beautiful flowers, it is nature's own garden requiring no human hand to improve upon. Numerous sites can easily be found which are symptomatic of the Hindu conception of landscape gardening. Siva, the water diviner, always on the prowl in the hills and helping in releasing pent-up water for the fertilization of the cultivated area, is the presiding deity of Kashmir. It was Siva who cut open the pent-up water of the primeval lake in the valley near Baramula.³ And thus wherever a hill came down gently sloping to a water reservoir or wherever there was a spring gushing out cool and neutral like water, the area was utilized by the early Hindus in laying out a landscape garden.

In Central Asia and Persia this garden tradition took different shapes under Muslim rulers. The first condition was the running life-giving water. The rivers were reproduced by directing the water flow through paved channels to the central reservoir. The artificial cascades and scheme of fountains in the garden design were introduced and thus was created the emblem of immortality and youth, the never-ending water and the ever renewed tree.⁴

Shalimar

According to a legend, Parvarasena II, the founder of the city of Srinagar, who reigned in Kashmir from 110 to 170 A. D., had built a villa on the edge of the Dal lake in its north-eastern corner, namely Shalimar, which in Sanskrit means "the abode of love." The king often used to go to visit a saint, named Sukarma Svami living near Harwan, who took rest in this villa on his way to, and from that place.⁵ In the courses of time this villa vanished and then the village had sprung up in its neighborhood which was called as Shalimar after the name of the villa. In 1619 the Mughal emperor Jahangir laid out a garden at this village and called it "Farah-Bakhsh" meaning "Delightful."⁶ It was spread over an area of 7500 square yards. The canal passing through the garden was paved with stone under the supervision of Prince Khurram.

The Shalimar is 590 yards long and its width at the lower end is 207 yards, while that to upper end is 267 yard. It is surrounded by bricks and stone wall about ten feet high and arranged in four terraces laying one above another and of nearly equal dimensions.⁷ There is a line of tanks or reservoirs along the middle of the

² Ibid.

³ Banzai P.N K, *Cultural and Political History of Kashmir, From Earliest Time to the Present Day*. Metropolitan Book Co., New Delhi(1973p. 589.

⁴ Ibid, p. 590.

⁵ Anand Kual, *Archaeological Remains in Kashmir*, part ii, Lahore, 1935, p. 89.

⁶ Jahangir, *Tuzuk-i-Jahangire*, Ed. A. S. Beveridge, 2 vols. New Delhi, p. 303.

⁷ Anand Kual, *Archaeological Remains in Kashmir*, part ii, Lahore, 1935, p. 93.

whole length of the garden, a leading feature of every Mughal garden which is connected by the canal of 18 inches deep and from 9 to 14 yards wide. The tank and the canal are lined with polished lime stone, resembling black marble, and are provided with fountains. The water is obtained from the Harwan stream behind the garden that enters at the upper end and flows down from each successive terrace. Further, in beautiful stone chutes, carved in many ingenious patterns of shell and fish, which lead to the reservoir below containing numerous fountains and after leaving the garden it falls into the outer canal by which it is connected to the lake.

The fourth terrace was a private portion of the garden where the ladies of the Harem resided and where they stayed in the palms days of the Mughal Emperors. It contains in its center a magnificent black stone pavilion—a romance in stone which is raised upon a platform of more than three feet high and 65 feet square. Its sloping roof is about 20 feet high and is supported on each side by a row of six elaborately carved black marble pillars, which are of polygonal shape and flute. It was used as a banqueting hall favourite place for entertainments of various kinds.

The emperor Shah Jahan visited the garden in 1636. The Poplars and the Chinars planted some fourteen years earlier were full bloom. He directed Zafar khan to add another garden adjacent to Farah Bakhsh. A tank forty square yards, was built in the centre, a Barahdari, ten feet by eight, was also constructed in it. This part of the garden was called Bagh-i-Fiza Bakhah that was reserved for harem only.⁸

Nishat Bagh

It is situated at a distance of seven miles from Srinagar on the farthest end of the Dal Lake. It is the brightest of all gardens and that surpassed the Shalimar garden both in layout, design and architecture.⁹ It was put up by Asaf Khan during the reign of Jahangir. In 1635 Asaf Khan hosted a feast in honour of Shah Jahan, who was highly impressed by the layout of garden. The garden comprised 9 terraces and last terrace was reserved for the Zanana (Women's).¹⁰ Later on the side of ninth terrace a magnificent palace was built for the *Zanana*. An 18 feet high arched wall separated the harem garden from the rest of the garden. A channel about 13 feet wide runs across the garden foaming down from one terrace to other in the shape of cascades.

Each terrace in itself was a complete garden, in the centre of each terrace there was a tank decorated with fountains made of stone.¹¹ Sexagonal marble *Chabutaras* were erected in each terrace bridging the canal at the head of every water fall. These *Chabutaras* are out-standing examples of the Mughal architecture. These marble thrones are special feature of Nishat Garden. There were two *Barahdaris* in the two storeyed building

⁸ Lohari Abdul Hamid, *Badshahnama*, ii, 2 Vols. Bib, India Ed. Maulwi Kabir-ud-Din and Abdul Rahim, 1868.p. 24.

⁹ C. M. Viller Stuart, *Gardens of The Great Mughals*, Cosmo Publications New Delhi (reprint)p. 168.

¹⁰ Qazvini Amin, *Shahjahan Nama*, iii, f 317.

¹¹ C. M. Viller Stuart, *Gardens of The Great Mughals*, Cosmo Publications New Delhi (reprint).p. 171.

in Kashmir-Mughal architecture standing on stone foundation. It is fifty-nine feet long and forty eight feet wide.¹²

Chashma Shahi

Chashma Shahi, the famous spring of pure, sparkling and cool water attracts people from across the world. It is situated on the slope of the Zebarwan Hill commands a superb view of the lotus on the Dal below and of the verdant vale across.¹³ The spot could not, therefore, escaped from the artistic eye of the Mughals. Under orders of the emperor Shah Jahan a small garden on the traditional Mughal pattern was laid out here by the Governor, Ali Mardan Khan in 1642 A.D. There are three terraces, and the central aqueduct, tank, water-fall and fountains, are fed by the sparking water gushing out of the spring from the south end of the garden. The main aqueduct passes through the ground floor of a central pavilion and after feeding a small round reservoir, fall to the lower terrace in fine cascade about sixteen feet high.¹⁴

Bagh-i-Wafa

Mansbal lake is at a distance of 15 miles from the Srinagar City and the garden was laid out on the right side of the lake near village, Safapur.¹⁵ It was founded by Mirza Haidar Duglat, but the garden enhanced and renovated by Nurjahan Begum.¹⁶ In 1642, the garden was assigned to Jahan Ara Begum.¹⁷ The garden was spread over a slope of Diyar-Lar Mountain, it was divided into three terraces, tanks, and fountains were installed in each terrace.

Verinag

Verinag is a village situated on the foot of the Banihal pass. It is called after the name of the spring known as Verinag. According to the legends the goddess Vitasta (Jhelum) wanted to take her rise from that place, but it happened when she came, Siva was staying there, wherever she had to go back and she took her rise from Vithavatur a spring about a mile to the north west of this place.¹⁸ This spring was originally an irregular, shapeless pond, and water oozing out from different places in it, spread about and formed a little marsh. The emperor Jahangir, whose artistic taste for polishing up the beauty of Nature was well known, saw this spring at once and decided to improve it. He built the octagonal tank of sculptured stone round it, so that all water

¹² Ibid, pp. 166-68.

¹³ Banzai P. N.K, *Cultural and Political History of Kashmir, From Earliest Time to the Present Day*. Metropolitan Book Co., New Delhi(1973 p. 594

¹⁴ *Ibid*

¹⁵ Mattoo A. M, *Kashmir Under The Mughals*,) Kashmir Golden Horde Enterprises. Srinagar (1988) p. 200.

¹⁶ Jahangir, *Tuzuk Jahangire* Ed. A. S. Beveridge, 2 vols. New Delhi , p.314.

¹⁷ Lohari Abdul Hamid , *Badshahnama*, ii, p. 195.

¹⁸ Banzai P. N.K, *Cultural and Political History of Kashmir, From Earliest Time to the Present Day*. Metropolitan Book Co., New Delhi(1973 p. 597.

issuing from north-eastern side of the wooden hill was collected therein. The overall structure of above spring was completed in 1620 A.D.

Seven years later, Jahangir's son Shah Jahan, who was also a staunch lover of the natural beauty, constructed cascades and aqueduct in straight line through and around a fine garden which he laid out in front of the spring, in order to enhance further the beauty of the place. He also built cold and hot baths to the east of the garden, just outside of it, of which little trace in now left.¹⁹

Achawal Bagh

It is situated at a distance of 6 miles from Islamabad. A small but a pretty garden was laid out there by Jahangir in 1622.²⁰ It was improved upon and renovated by Shah Jahan in 1636. A pavilion was built in it. The garden was called Sahibabad. In 1662 Aurangzeb assigned the garden to Zebunnisa Begum.²¹ The garden is 467 feet long and 450 feet in breadth is divided into two portions. The water of the spring issues from several places near the foot of a low spur which is densely covered with deodar trees. At one place the oblique fissure from which the water gushes out, is large enough to admit a man's body.²² The water of the spring flows through the garden is traversed by three aqueducts, the central one being about 16 feet, and those on each side about 7 feet wide. Along the central aqueduct, there are two large tanks. A wooden pavilion, which is about 18 feet square, rests upon a platform of masonry. There are three waterfalls in the upper part of the garden and three outside its lower end.²³ Tanks and aqueducts are lined with stone, and a large number of fountains have laid in them.

Bagh-i-Ilahi

It was laid out by Yousf Khan Rizvi during the tenure of his offices as *Subahdar* in the vicinity of Batspora.²⁴ A canal, three yard in width was brought from the Sindh for the irrigation of this garden. A pavilion was built in the Centre with a tank in the front; Rows of fountains were installed in it. It was beautified by the plantation of Chinars, later on Shah Jahan built two more pavilions on the either side of canal included this garden among the imperial gardens.²⁵

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ *Jahangir, Tuzuk-i- Jahangiri*, (Ed. A. S Beveridge p. 313.Qazvini Amin,*Shahjahan Nama*, iii, f. 327.

²¹ Mohammad Kazim, *Alamgir Nama*, II,Ed. Khadam Hussain and Abdul Hai, Calcutta, 1947 p. 836-37.

²² Banzai P. N.K, *Cultural and Political History of Kashmir, From Earliest Time to the Present Day*. Metropolitan Book Co., New Delhi(1973 p. 596.

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Fazl Abul, *Akbarnama*,(Ed. A. SBeveridge, 1876 iii, p. 618.

²⁵ Lohari Abdul Hamid , *Badshahnama 2 Vols. Bib, India Ed. Maulwi Kabir-ud-Din and Abdul Rahim*, 1868 p. 28.

Bagh-i-Naseem

It stands in a fine open position well raised above the Dal Lake. A cool fragrant breeze blows throughout the day and night. It was laid out by Akbar, and improved and enlarged by Azam Khan, Saif Khan and Afzal Khan.²⁶ It was enclosed by a massive wall and a canal was dug out from Lar defile to irrigate the garden it retained its fame on account of its beautiful Chinar trees. The Chinar were planted by the Akbar and later on Ali Mardan Khan also added and planted more Chinars trees.²⁷

Bagh-i-BaharAra

Bahr-Ara is situated on the bank of the western arm of the Dal lake. It was a spacious garden laid out by Nur Jahan, queen of the emperor Jahangir. A stream of water from the Joi-Shahi, running from the Sindh Nullah vai Bahi Bagh, used to flow into it, which watered the flower beds arranged in terraces.²⁸ A mansion, seven stories high, had been built here on the highest point of vantage from which the emperor and his consort used to have full view of the Dal Lake on moon light.²⁹

Conclusion

The Mughal gardens are highly elegant, delicate, and attractive and are part of rich cultural and architectural heritage. Mughal gardens are scattered all over Kashmir valley, and have tremendous importance from the historical point of view. The gardens exhibit utter grace, magnificence and artistic excellence. The vigorous efforts made by the Mughals from time to time in developing the remote scenic spots into health resorts producing healthy and beneficial effect on the economic activity of the people of Kashmir. Presently, huge numbers of people of Kashmir are dependent on the tourism and related activities. The Mughal rulers, Subhadars, and other high officials contended one another in laying out these gardens, buildings, and monumental palaces. Every Mughal ruler, Subhadars, and high officials wanted to surpass their predecessor, the competition among the Mughal rulers resulted in the continuous development of these scenic gardens in Kashmir valley. The above gardens are being frequently visited by the elite families and often get reserved for the ruling classes. These scenic spots attract foreign as well as local visitors from across the world, and are favorite destination for the general masses, film stars, businessmen, and ruling class. The modern tourist industry owes a lot to the Mughals. These gardens had laid great impact on the employment generation and checked the economic drain out of the Kashmir valley. The Mughal-built gardens have also provided a greater impetus to the horticulture sector as well.

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Jahangir, *Tuzuk Jahangire*, Trans.. A. S. Beveridge, 2 vols. New Delhi pp. 296-301

²⁸ Anand Kual, *Archaeological Remains in Kashmir*, part ii, p. 108.

²⁹ Ibid.