A Million Gardens
From an Old Country
Contents Page

Introduction to Million Gardens ..... 07
Introduction to Gardens ..... 13
What is a Garden? ..... 30
Definition of a Garden ..... 31
Gardens on a Map ..... 34
The Mirage of Our Cities ..... 41
Mandu ..... 42
God’s Garden ..... 59
Vrindavan ..... 60
Exacting Rigour ..... 88
Khadki War Cemetery, Pune ..... 89
Communion of Man and Nature ..... 104
Lonar Crater Lake, Maharashtra ..... 105
Kala Dunger, Kutch ..... 117
Auroville ..... 137
Poppo and Mona Pingel’s Garden ..... 140
Lutyen’s Garden, Delhi ..... 147
Narismhaswamy’s Garden, Vizag ..... 154
Contents Page

Food Gardens of Bengal ..... 158
Gardens of Kharar, Midnapore ..... 169
Myriad Celebrations of Water ..... 179
Chand Baori, Abhaneri, Rajasthan ..... 185
Adalaj Stepwell, Ahmedabad ..... 193
Pateshwar Temple, Satara ..... 202
Sacred Groves : Early Lessons in Conservation ..... 219
Kalubai Sacred Groves ..... 226
A Voice of Revolt ..... 230
Nekchand Garden: Rock Garden, Chandigarh ..... 231
Gardens of Immersion ..... 254
Jal Mahal, Jaipur ..... 261
Kesariya Bagh, Amer, Jaipur ..... 267
Nishat Bagh, Srinagar ..... 273
Conclusion ..... 293
Credits ..... 308
Gardens and Landscapes create opportunities to poetically connect with the world, regardless of their size or location. Many of us might have either seen or experienced such spaces – we decided to combine this passion and curiosity and create a catalogue to discover a new universe right where we are.

The study traces the many ideas of Indian landscape embedded in historical literature, discerned from the physical constructs that still exist.

It takes the liberty to delve into many definitions of the idea of “gardens” from nomadic enclosures, sacred gardens, and gardens of the Islamic and Colonial era, to find certain common narratives that help identify the spirit of the gardens in India.

The work was assisted through a large nationwide collaborative called “A Million gardens” that tries for the first time to map such spaces in the country.
A MILLION GARDENS

LARGEST DOCUMENTATION OF GARDENS IN THE SUBCONTINENT TO EXAMINE THE IDEA OF 'GARDENS' IN THEIR MANY MANIFESTATIONS OF MEANING AND CONTEXT. THE WORD 'GARDEN' IN ITS ETYMOLOGY CONVEYS BOTH INSTINCT AND WILL, OF MARKING OUT A DOMAIN AND THE ACT OF 'MAKING.' IT ALSO IMPLIES THIS 'MARKING' AND 'MAKING' OF A PLACE AS OCCURRING WITHIN A LARGER TERRITORY. WHILE THIS MAY TEMPT US TO SEE GARDENS ONLY AS A RUDIMENTARY ACT OF SEPARATING AND CREATING A PLACE, A SPACE. SOME OF THEIR ORGANIZATION AND ARRANGEMENT PLAYS THE ROLE OF NEGOTIATION AND MEDIATION BETWEEN A PLACE AND ITS LARGER MI-LIEU.

LEAF invites contributors for this collaborative investigation For details, please contact: landscapeindia@usa.net

Image: Banke Bihari ka Bagicha, Vrindavan; Vinay Kushwah
What is a garden?

The word ‘garden’ in its etymology conveys both instinct and will; of marking out a domain and the act of ‘making’. It also implies this ‘marking’ and ‘making’ of a place as occurring within a larger territory. While this may tempt us to see gardens only as a rudimentary act of separating and creating a place apart from the wilderness, their organization and arrangement plays the role of negotiation and mediation between a place and its larger milieu.

Gardens can thus, be seen as both, a fundamental act as well as a highly refined undertaking of establishing a dialogue between human beings and their surroundings. The manifestation of this dialogue can also question, push and at times even dissolve the boundaries of its primary act of establishing territory.

The discourse of garden making can take innumerable directions subject to the specific physical and cultural framework in which it is working. It can be a manifestation and reflection of needs, cultural beliefs, practice and aspirations.

John Dixon Hunt; “The garden has always been a complex and central human activity, arguably a matrix of man’s and woman’s ambitions, instincts and desires. The histories of it must therefore interrogate and narrate a cluster of concerns: how men and women represent themselves and their place in the world through the garden, and how gardens shape role playing; how the garden becomes a special site of beliefs, myths, fictions, illusions, and the dialogue it maintains between those and the palpable physical world of its phenomena; the design and use of exterior space for inhabitation, an art of milieu or acumen or how that changes from small to regional scale”.

However, the creation and expression of gardens is not just a result of their location in a geographical territory, they are essentially human constructs – in concept and execution. Whether intuitive or consciously designed, the multi hued nuances of a garden come from the human mind.
So we said “a garden was a space that had a circumscribed territory, its limits notional or clearly marked, but at all times discernible and finite; the very marking of this territory could happen by an act of active making or even claiming one already marked and within this would exist a certain prescribed or evolved ritual that allowed the many ideas of nature to be experienced in an articulated manner”
No planting in conventional sense

Communion with elements and ideas of nature

No planting at all in some

Mere architectural subset

Communion with elements and ideas of nature

The idea of open space

Mere architectural subset

No planting in conventional sense

Communion with elements and ideas of nature
In it then are the remnants of the spiral at the Neelkanth Pavilion, which interrupts the flow of the water from the hills to the river and purifies it. Or the stately manner in which the Palace of Ships lays anchored next to the water, Or the misty views from the Palace of the lover queen, that overlooks a palace on lower ground where the king lived and often exchanged lovelorn glances as a besotted lover is given to do.
Chand baori, Abhaneri
Jal Mahal, Jaipur
Kesar Kyari Bagh, Jaipur
Nishat Bagh, Srinagar
Adalaj Stepwell, Gujarat

Banke Bihariji ka bagicha, Vrindavan
Nidhivan, Vrindavan
Seva Kunj, Vrindavan
Ghats at Benaras
Ghats at Maheshwar

Mandu
Jahaz Mahal, Mandu
Roopmati’s Pavilion, Mandu
Neelkanth Palace, Mandu
Baz Bahadur Palace, Mandu

Rock Garden, Chandigarh
Domestic Gardens, Midnapore
Khaadki war Cemetery, Pune
President’s garden, Delhi
Kala Dungar, Kutch

Poppo Pingel’s garden, Auroville
Narsimhaswamy garden, Vizag
Kalubai Sacred groves, Maharashtra
Pateshwar temple, Satara
Lunar Crater Lake, Maharashtra

Kalubai's Sacred groves, Maharashtra
Pateshwar temple, Satara
Lunar Crater Lake, Maharashtra

Mandu
Jahaz Mahal, Mandu
Roopmati’s Pavilion, Mandu
Neelkanth Palace, Mandu
Baz Bahadur Palace, Mandu
These were not really designed or created with any of these meanings to be read into them; nor are these meanings absolute. At different times different people will read their own meanings into them.

And that is to us was the first great learning; unlike many other tools of space making, gardens seem the only ones that allow themselves to become apparatuses of reflection and contemplation- and allow the widest berth to the visitor to traverse many thoughts.

In doing so sometimes stated in their genesis or continuing ritual, at others by circumstance, seminal nature becomes a potent lubricant for thought. This to me was an important point of convergence in our thinking- no other physical making of space, be it a building, or a even a large public park, was as potent as a garden, in the manner in which it allowed internal conversations of the mind, that partnered a grand soliloquy, using nature as a ghost companion.
In some ways all the examples had a strong sense of rootedness; some in their making, others in the myth that defined them, and yet others simply by the manner in which they responded to a context and reinvented themselves.

And they perhaps become more relevant with each passing day, than the day that has just passed.

And thirdly, unlike many gardens in other parts of the world, the gardens in India seem to have been made by an almost Vedic referential frame. The old Vedic ethos was integrative and did not create dichotomies, but rather created value relationships between male and female, day and night, good and bad and also science versus spirituality.

So while not constructed on materiality or linear scientific inquiry, Indian traditions allowed a rigorously manifested personal reality as a valid basis for existence; and this inner reality is at the root of the many gardens we talked about.
India has millions of such gardens; and the more we discover the more meanings will we understand. And the better will we navigate our times.

A well laid out garden then is beautiful; but one that allows many meanings to be read and discussed even more so.