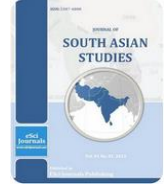




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OF PLEASURE, POWER AND PIETY: USES AND PERCEPTIONS OF GARDENS AND MANAGED FLORAL SPACES IN EARLY INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The Judicial system of India and France was highlighted by French travelers and adventurers who traveled in India during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Their records became significant source of information to compare the judicial system of both the countries. This article makes attempt to give these voyagers treatise on judicial system of the oriental and occidental worlds. In which significant French travelers such as Francois Bernier, Jean Chardin, Anquetil Duperron and Comte de Modave wrote extensively about the positive and negatives of the judicial system of both countries. Several first-hand French sources [translated and untranslated] have been referred in this article to make a comprehensive review of judicial system of India through French prospective.

Keywords: Ancient India, Early Medieval, Floral Space, Hermitages, Landscaping, Royal garden.

INTRODUCTION

A historical review of the origin of gardens in ancient societies illuminates an important dimension of the social history of environment. In the context of the designed floral spaces that constitute gardens, we come across clues to both the human instincts for control as well as the initiative for preservation of nature. At the level of practices, however, the human engagement with gardens and other intervened floral spaces assume dimensions beyond the issues of ecology and conservation of nature. The interventions take varied forms and crystallize into congeries of social and cultural ideas and institutions, which invest these engagements with deeper cultural nuances. The garden assumes the scope of both a real and an imagined space, often with pronounced semiotic significance at ideological levels, ranging from the elite to the popular conceptualizations. These conceptions and practices play out within the rubrics of socio-political paradigms in specific historical contexts. It is possible to turn the stones of evidence to locate the various intents and utilizations that invested the floral spaces of gardens with multiple symbolic and material significances in ancient Indian history. The

work is riddled with the problem of pinning down the physical evidence for gardens in terms of field remains. Hence we must primarily go by the concepts and practices reflected in literary forms and in artistic renditions. In some rare cases the structural remains are available in the form of the built - up monuments that often contained and qualified these spaces, as in the case of tanks, wells, arboreal structures, covered arches and so on found in early medieval contexts. But identification of the peripheries of actual gardens around such structures is generally unattainable. We must rely primarily on literary and art sources to cull out evidence for gardens in the context of ancient Indian society. While this situation may be perceived as limiting the perusal of history, one cannot but appreciate that such sources, being cultural devices of sorts themselves, offer interesting insights on the human imaginings and practices related to gardens. They reveal newer horizons of history where the landscaped floral space as garden evolved as a complex socio-cultural site. This article attempts to trace the clues to understanding some of the major socio-cultural themes in these engagements.

SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

Varied sources have been investigated for tracing the evolution of built floral spaces in the context of ancient India, including literature, epigraphic evidence and art

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forms. The whole optic of the investigation here is to tease out the comprehensive cultural scope of the phenomenon under study. To do so we need not only to look at the information on normative practices in ancient texts, but also review the information from fictional literature like the Sanskrit plays. These last, although representing the view of the individual playwrights, carry the contemporary voices, often critical and wide in perspective. Taken together, the literary evidence represents certain socio-political background at given temporal junctures that has been discussed in the article. In fact, the method here is to set all these sources in their social contexts to understand the significance of the information they provide. On the other hand, the epigraphs reveal more specificity and authenticity of provenance. They also bear evidence of direct and proactive engagements between man and his surroundings, providing direct, contextualized information on landscaping for gardens and other related activities. Therefore, attempts have been made to glean into specific epigraphic sources to bring more time – space based verisimilitude to the investigation. Information from a few technical treatises has been added as these reveal a systematic garnering of knowledge and practices including those related to gardens. The brief citations from specific texts on Horticulture or Arboriculture have been included in order to draw attention to the emergence of a professional knowledge – based approach to the subject of plant studies, which was corollary to the practices related to the built floral spaces or gardens. The artistic and symbolic forms in which flora and floral enclaves have been found to be represented in the given context have been cited as corollary to the data culled out from the literary and epigraphic sources. Moreover, these were deemed important as associated spiritual - cultural products arising out of human engagements with flora and gardens.

Basically we have tried to conduct a critical reading of specific primary sources, positing them in historical context in order to draw inferences pertaining to those contexts and then visualize a running pattern of historical evolution, through which the phenomenon under study could be observed to be crystallizing. In order for us to keep to the original message in these sources, the primary editions in Sanskrit and Prakrit versions have been consulted and these have been juxtaposed with authentic translations in English, so that

wider reader community may have access to the information.

POWER AND PLEASURE: CONSTRUCTING DISTINCT FLORAL SPACES AND GARDENS FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION

References to gardens, parks and manipulated or managed floral spaces had been intertwined with the ideas of planned settlements, often exhibiting prevalence of practices related to organized land use as state initiative. Not all of it was related to accessing natural resources and some engagements stemmed from cultural and even moral concerns. One of the earliest instances is from epigraphic records of the mid third century BCE. In the form of declarations of the Maurya monarch Asoka. The second edict of Asoka claims to have initiated presumably a wide operation for planting medicinal fruit – bearing trees, herbs and roots for the benefit of humans and animals and digging wells and ordinary shady trees for the travelers on the long - distance roads (Hultzsich, 1925: 52, 85; Barua, 1943/1990). Interestingly enough there was possibly a clear planning indicated here. The versions of Asoka's second edict posted in Gujarat and Orissa claimed to have both dug wells and planted trees beside the regular thoroughfares, while the one posted in the frontier region of Shahbazgarhi, now in the Mardan District of present Pakistan, declares only to have dug wells beside the roads. Whether this was due to the soil and climatic conditions prevailing in the region is not clear. The urge of the monarch indeed stemmed from his concern for the subjects and his orientation towards the society reflecting his personal engagement with morality or *Dhamma*. Most importantly, the nature of intervention is clearly indicated when we note the repeated and hence emphatic use of the term 'harapitani/halapita', in case of the medicinal plants especially, meaning importation and planting of species which were normally not growing in the area. A clear reference to selective gardening at the ruler's initiative in relation to medicinal plants could also imply general prevalence of such methods of gardening/cultivation.

One of the early references to landscaping and gardening for adornment of settlements, especially urban spaces is found in an inscription of the Kalinga king Kharavela of the Meghavahana Dynasty, possibly dated to the beginning of the Common Era (Neelis, 2011). The Hathigumpha inscription, which remains the sole yet most illuminating evidence for this context of early

history of Orissa, provides eulogizing the King's glorious deeds and achievements in grand terms. The narration begins with description of the great work undertaken by Kharavela upon his access to the throne. This included first of all the task of repairing all the gardens in the royal city of Kalinga along with the gates, walls, houses and tanks which were devastated after a severe storm and these were mentioned in praise of his merit. (Jayasawal & Banerjee, 1929-30) The indication here is not only that gardens were a part of the royal space and featured in the architectural lay - out of cities and administrative centers but also that maintenance of floral spaces was considered for meritorious value in early Indian society.

Indeed planning of settlements naturally fell under the purview of the political authority in view of the rising territorial states. If we are to consider the information in Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, not only settlements and agricultural land, but floral spaces beyond that were also sought to be brought under administrative regulation. The nomenclature and associated connotation for the terms like *vana*, *aranya* and *arama* indicate that different kinds and ranges of floral spaces were brought under scrutiny. The *Arthashastra*, Book II, categorized six different types of *vana* or middling forests, of which three were not related to revenue or material yield. For reading this ancient text R.P. Kangle's authoritative and acclaimed translation and analyses has been consulted and we may note here that R.P. Kangle has considered this as a categorization of non - agricultural land. Besides *vana*, we have references in chapter I of Book II that imply there was the prevalence of *arama*- gardens or parks for promenade. Flower gardens and fruit orchards adjacent to ordinary urban quarters were termed as *puspaphalavatan* (Kangle, 2010).

The composition of the section (Book II) of the *Arthashastra*, which lays down these parameters evidently belonged between the 100 BCE and 100 CE (McClish and Olivelle, 2012), a time when northern India was completing the first major spurt of urbanization, beginning with the Mauryas. The process was complex and impacted the perception of land as it did its utilization. There was also an enhanced sensitization about occupied and wild space at the same time. The rapid expansion of urban complexes and the built environment, especially in the Upper and Middle Ganga valleys - extending down south to the north of the *Vindhyas*, led to encroachment into nature's space. The

perception of this natural space was, however, at best supplementary to human requirements, and, at the worst, as a deterrent to human expansion. The sensitization about natural space led to grading of different kinds of topography as is reflected in the third chapter of Book II when discussing the choice for the best or ideal location for capital city or a fortress in the *Arthashastra*. This could be a water - fort, a mountain fort a desert fort or a jungle fort (Kangle, 2010). The recommendations are indeed significant in terms of the clear scrutiny that was indicted in the action of making choices, taking out the best from the wilderness for human occupation. The text is in the nature of a manual for royal administrators of the times and smacks of the concern for utilization of natural resource that was playing uppermost amongst the political agenda of the fledgling territorial states. Thus although here one might evince concerns for preserving nature in the shape of spaces for hermitages, game hunting and forest products like timber and elephants, these were declared to be maintained under strictly guided parameters. The advices and plans for appropriated natural spaces included specific proposals. In this regard we may observe how the denotation of the distinct terms *vana* and *aranya* bear significance. In general the term *aranya* signified the deep, wild forest, while *vana* would indicate a milder terrain. The *Arthashastra* in fact categorizes different *vana* according to the uses of the designated floral spaces, a few of which come under our present purview. But to come to terminology and cognitive approach to space utilization, such distinction in nomenclature of forests imply a clear consciousness of the degrees of intervention in natural landscape. A *vana* may still be a forest enclave, but it would be under human surveillance and use.

The ulterior utilitarian and power-oriented overtone is manifest in the way instructions are set in the verses 2 -3 of the Chapter II of Book II, *Arthashastra*, specifying the use of non - agricultural land. Only a limited and minimal floral space was to be earmarked for hermitages for ascetics for *vedic* learning - in the form of *brahmasomaranya*. This came to be more commonly denoted as *tapovana* in other later sources. The shift in nomenclature could imply a change in the nature of the space designated for hermitages. The other space - termed amorously as '*anyamrigavana*' was conceived in benevolence towards animals. This was to be kept for animals of all kinds, distinct from the game forest. Both

are mentioned quite negligently, if we compare with the elaborate description for the expansive animal park for the king's recreation, as Kangle had put it (Kangle, 2010). The deeply invasive plan for landscaping in nature is most critically illuminated when we look at the recommendations for the rules to lay out this royal game hunting park in the text. The area earmarked for the *mrigayaka* or the royal gaming - park (*mrigavana*), was to be provided with only one entrance and should be rendered inaccessible by the construction of defense wall all around. It was imperative that the natural wilderness of the area chosen for royal game hunting should be enhanced with the promotion of delicious trees, bushes, hedges, bowers, flowering trees and thornier shrubs and with expansive lakes. The forest should be full of harmless animals and the more ferocious - tigers as well as beasts of prey, male and female elephants, young elephants and bisons were to be rendered harmless by removal of their claws and teeth. These should be kept for the king's game hunting. The *mrgayavana* was available for occasional hunting only by the king and his associates and were to be free from regular poaching. The intention was to create some kind of a captive game - reserve exclusively for the enjoyment of the royalty and the elite. Compared to it, the '*anyamrigavana*' in fact represents 'the other'. But, even in its negligently cast status, the significance of this concept to plan for a free space for animals is quite striking, in the sense that it reflects the idea that it was considered to be the ruler's prerogative to bestow land for animals, - that forests were not free spaces. There might have been a vision that is packed in the text where all land, whether wild, cultivated or settlements, were perceived as the sovereign's domain, to be categorized, cast and put out for specified uses and purposes according to the monarch's discretion.

The level of intervention in the concept of *mrgayavana* as spelt out in the Arthasastra was to some extent ideal and may not reflect actual practices. Yet, to all intents and purposes, when we try to underpin the imaginings of the society concerned, these peculiarities in conceptualization becomes an important matter for studying the attitude towards nature and even the nurtured idea of the ideal space for recreations like game hunting. The part of the Arthasastra which discusses these matters, i.e., the Book II, was evidently composed by a group of counsellors between the first centuries BCE and CE in the context of the burgeoning post - Maurya

polities. It reflects the aspirations of the rulers, administrators and the statist enclave in aristocracy. The plans reveal the priority for recreational arrangements for this elite community. The elaborate discussions also throw light on conceptualization of landscaping and the essential features that were required to be part of the pleasure ground.

In the same vein we might point out how the same text in chapter I of Book II advises the administrators to aid in building the sites for religious shrines with gardens around them in the *janapada* or general settlements within the state territory, while at the same time discouraging the laying out of promenades and parks or *arama* as well as halls of recreations in the villages. The recreational garden was evidently meant for the urban elite. The idea was that the *Arama* and *Vihara* would distract the ordinary folks in the villages. This evokes the concept of gardens as a specially privileged venue. Indeed the landscaped floral space was invested with especial material and cultural value, if we take the tone of this text to be representative of the attitude of the predominant sections of the early historic India. The tone finds resonance in the creative literature of later times.

MODIFIED FORESTS, GARDENS AND LITERARY IMAGINATIONS

From the post Maurya period we see the proliferation of a genre of fictional literature, mostly written in Sanskrit which took the forms of drama, poetry, epic narratives and biography. In these texts we are afforded glimpses of more aesthetic and imaginative conceptions of the garden, perhaps reflective of the contemporary historical situation. Gardens, parks, sylvan seclusions in the hermitages were visualized in their beautified ambiance and evolved as the poets' and novelists' choice spots for situating romantic fables. The Sambhava Parvan section of the Mahabharata waxed lyrical with the charms of the tapovana attached to the hermitage of the ascetic Kanva as the alluring setting where King Dushyanta had the romantic encounter with the maiden Sakuntala. It was an enchanting space where mighty kings might lose their sense of discretion and be induced to the seduction of innocent virgins. (Dutt, 2004).

The date of the Mahabharata is problematic since the work has many layers of composition. However, most scholars agree that the earliest literary deliberations for the Mahabharata must have begun around the 4th century BCE while the final shape was perhaps given

around the 4th century CE, in the Gupta period (Buitenen, 1978). Recently Hildebeitel provides a more specified time for the core composition which falls between the 2nd century BCE and the beginning of the Common Era (Hildebeitel, 2001). These were the times when, on the one hand, the post Maurya witnessed the growth of states in the major revenue yielding regions and expansion of economic pursuits on the other. The efflorescence of literary creativity is reflected in the composition of the epics. The nuances of the growing resplendence of royal power are amply reflected in the text of the epics. There was also a great deal of romanticizing of the relationships and negotiations between the royalty and the ruled in the epics. Of all the parts of the layered Mahabharata especially it is the *Adi Parvan* where such negotiations and encounters are projected in small anecdotes which were employed as the formative layers in building the discourses of lineage, rights and dynastic agendas. The *Adi Parvan* also reflects the growing territoriality of the kingdoms and appropriation of natural space for settlements lay out. Such appropriations were even more personally visualized in the Mahabharata and man - made floral space or gardens of various kinds were emerging on the horizon of literary imaginations in a more intimate way. We get poetic representation in the *Sambhava Parva* section of *Adi Parva*, of the beautiful, almost surreal sylvan scape of the *tapovana* of *Kanva*, where Sakuntala and Dushyanta first met and cohabited. The floral space was described as creating a situation alluring enough for the king to lose all restraints and sense of discretion and transgress the moral codes that might have been binding in more ordinary and populous spaces. The culpability of this beautiful place and places such as this was reiterated when we are told that this *tapovana* was comparable to the beautiful park of the *gandharva* Chirtaratha, where the King Yayāyī had carried out his amorous liaisons with the *Apsara Viswachi*.

The *Mahabharata* belongs to the post - Maurya times and Kalidasa's rendering of Sakuntala's narrative in his play on *Abhijanānam Sakuntalam* belongs to the Gupta period. By this time probably luxurious floral spaces for the relaxation of the elite were already emerging in the shape of beautiful landscaped gardens. The imagination of the gardens therefore takes cue from actual practices. The idea that was previously exhibited in the Mahabharata - of the beautiful romantic park owned by a powerful *Gandharva* should also be looked into. There

are two aspects to this. First, the *Gandharvas*, or minor mythical celestial beings, were traditionally credited in ancient literature with all kinds of skill and knowledge, the most primary being their skill in music as well as architecture (Patil, 1973; Acharya, 1998). But in the Mahabharata, especially in the Chaitraratha Section of the *Adi Parva*, they were also fabled as immensely rich in wealth (Dutt, 2004). This illuminates upon the association of ideas that the *Gandharva* would be responsible for landscaping the most wonderful of gardens for the relaxation of the rich and the powerful and that then such floral spaces would become spots of uninhibited behavior because these spaces are controlled by demigods to whom rules of norms did not apply. The *tapovana* and the associated imaginings of romance were rendered more articulately by Kalidāsa in his dramatized version (Stoler Miller, 1984). Both these compositions reflect how the gardens as controlled floral spaces had evidently begun to be appreciated in the steadily urbanized climes of state societies. With the burgeoning of nascent urban complexes and further encroachments into nature, a part of the tamed floral space was increasingly brought in, shorn of its capricious wilderness, to fit in with the taste of the growing urban elite. In Kalidasa's play both the *tapovana* and the women associated with it were rendered at the same stroke a surreal quality with enhanced magical beauty. Compared to the palace and its settings, its women and plants their counterparts in the *tapovana* appeared rare, almost unattainable and unsurpassed: "*durlabhamidam*".ⁱ (Monier -Williams, 1876) Thus the ambiance of *tapovana* was depicted as almost bordering on the magical world. The tone of the above descriptions in the Mahabharata was no doubt oriented in a growing monarchical and urbanized context. In fact, a distinctive cultural idiom was nurtured in the environs of the rising courtly culture in the Gupta phase, which was eloquently evident in the poetic idiom of Kalidasa's play and in the entire creations of the great litterateur. The background to this phenomenon has been amply analyzed by Daud Ali (Ali, 2006) and more recently by Shonaleeka Kaul (Kaul, 2010). Sanskrit as a language medium and the refined literature composed in it became devices of this new cultural idiom. The image of the *tapovana* as a beautiful, celestial and peaceful floral space culled out from the fiery wilderness of natural forest was unveiled before the new urbanized literati. The garden was perceived in terms of both the reality of the many uses to which the

floral space was put and in its more surreal imaginings. This perspective also indicated that gardens as spaces of pleasure were getting hierarchised and hegemonized.

A late but most exemplary instance of literary imagining is available in a unique form of historical device, which could also be regarded as a sequel to the genre of Kalidasa's literary creation. This is the Dhar inscription of the first two decades of the 13th century CE (Hultzs, 1981). Primarily composed as eulogy for the rulers of the Paramara Dynasty and its contemporary king Arjunavarman, the whole inscription actually embodies portions of a small play, entitled as *Parijatamanjari*, composed by Madana, the court poet of the Paramara ruler Arjunavarman. The locational context of this record is in the Paramararoyal capital of Dharcity in Malwa in the Madhya Pradesh. The theme of the play (*natika*) was built around the historical royal figure of Arjunavarman and his romance with *Parijatamanjari* or Vijayasri after whom the play is named. The playwright had set the scene of the royal lovers' secret meeting during the occasion of a royal festival amidst the royal garden, which he variously termed as *lilodyanam* or *pramadodyanam* located atop Dharagiri, a hill near the city of Dhar. Interestingly enough the royal gardener and his wife appear to be important characters in the play and the whole scene of romanticism in the second Act is played out on the occasion of the festival for trees in the royal garden. In this instance the Queen was to marry off a creeper and a mango tree. While the literary rendition highlights upon the poetic presentation of the events, describing the setting for romance in the garden in beautiful terms, one might note how, the practices of the days provide the props for the setting of the events themselves. This small drama is not only relevant for the history of literature, or for the varied proliferation of literary forms, but also in affording glimpses of the ways in which the personalization of elite aspirations featured in the early medieval state societies and how it was taken up for literary entertainments. For the whole play was meant for enactment with the hero King as its audience and, as already stated in the inscription itself, it seems to have been already enacted on the occasion of the spring festival, *vasantotsava*, which indeed constituted a celebration of planting trees (Hultzs, 1981).

SOCIAL DYNAMICS OF FLORA AND GARDENS: POST MAURYA AND GUPTA PHASES

As early as in the second century CE, the *Arthashastra* had already recommended making provisions for the

common householders building spaces for flower gardens and orchards within the capital city and the royal fort (Kangle, 2010). The idea of the private gardens spilled over as a private pleasure place for the rich and elites later on. Although we do have early instances of privately owned gardens in case of rich merchants in the stories of the Pali Buddhist *Jataka*, the sense of personal pleasure - space or *arama* is more evident from the textual references belonging to the 5th - 6th centuries CE. Use of the public garden for romantic rendezvous is reflected in the *Mrcchakatika*, a drama composed between the 1st and the 3rd centuries CE. Reputed for its very realistic portrayal of characters and recounting of everyday in an urban context, the play is especially oriented towards focusing on contemporary sociopolitical complexities. The culmination of the play (Acts 6 - 8) was mostly enacted in the setting of an old but beautiful pleasure garden, named Puspakarandaka, where a tryst was planned between the protagonists, the hero and the heroine. A twist of events, accidental reversals in the plan led to an attempt at rape and murder and the final apprehending of the villain in the same secluded spot. In fact, the whole idea of the seclusion offered by such gardens located at the end of the town, little frequented by people, was spelt out in the way in which the crime was sought to be enacted (Ryder, 1905). We do get here a shocking sequel to the perception of secluded gardens as spaces for amoral, or indeed, immoral activities, first glimpsed in a romanticized form in the *Mahabharata*. The dangers of seclusion as represented in fictional literature - whether in the *tapovana* or in large public gardens - were possibly quite real in the times. Moreover, one might observe a subtle message packed in the *Mrcchakatika* - in the way in which it narrates the urgency in the plan for the tryst, the selection of a spot for rendezvous at the periphery of the town and transportation to it - all involving decisions taken by the urbane but impoverished lover for his courtesan amore. Such might not have been the case where women from other social backgrounds were indicated. Access to the garden and issues regarding the spheres of the private and the public in space was possibly looming up.

The proliferation of private gardens becomes evident when we look at the text of *Amarakosa* of the fifth century CE. The text provides certain terminologies for different categories of floral spaces listed in *Vanausadhivarga* or the section on flora, indicating the

crystallization of diverse practices related to gardens. There are distinct terms referring to artificial gardens attached to mansions. The airy *Griharāma* denoted the gardens attached to houses for the general well-to-do householder and the second, the *Vriksavatika* or garden house, for the rich ministers, counsellors, aristocrats and courtesans. The general recreational parks for the royalty were termed as *akriḍa* or *udyana*, while the gardens attached to the Royal Harem were known as *pramodavana*. These terms bear the implications of the uses and appreciation of the floral space for pleasure and even a hierarchically nuanced sense of proprietary right over landscaped floral spaces. Most significantly, the categorized nomenclature illuminates the fact that by the time this text was composed there were clearly earmarked landscaped floral spaces for diverse yet specific uses especially in the urbanized contexts of the state society, far from the wilderness of forests (Sharma, 1929.)

The need for the *tapovana* for enacting romantic trysts was no longer prevalent in the days when clearly specified *Pramodavana* and *Vriksavatika* were already functioning for the pleasure - seeking royalty, aristocracy and the wealthy. In post Gupta times the *tapovana* was considered a lackluster spot meant typically for the meditating recluse. We note this change in perception in the light of the rather dry reality portrayed in the political play of *Mudraraksasa*. Composed by Visakhadatta this is an important play, dated definitely after the sixth century CE (Dhruva, 1923) and possibly even later in the early 8th century CE (Telang, 1915). The protagonists in the *Mudrarakshasa* were urbane sophisticated elites embroiled in court intrigues, which culminates in Act 5 in war and clashes resulting in loss of power and frustrations. But even in such circumstances, the contemplation of retreating into *tapovana* was not the ideal alternative. Away from the bustle of urban crowd and exciting political prospects, the *tapovana* was not considered a happy option. The space was visualized quite categorically as a retreat for the ascetics (Kale, 2011).

A more active engagement related to the planning of the pleasure garden comes from the 11th century CE text of *Manasollasa*. Generally speaking, the *Manasollasa* (Shrigondekar, 1925) comprises an encyclopedic form, focused on varied subjects. Famed as a work of profound wisdom coming from the Chalukya monarch Somesvara Bhulokamalla, it indeed includes subjects ranging from

discussions on administrative rules to social mores, and technical subjects like veterinary science to gemology. This work features a chapter, titled *Bhudharakrida*, devoted to the matter of laying out pleasure gardens for the royalty and provides descriptions and prescriptions for varied outdoor games concerned with the gardens surrounding a pleasure mountain.¹⁴The whole chapter describes how to landscape the garden around the mountain for the purposes of games. We may note that it is exclusively in the context of planning pleasurable games that laying out gardens was considered important. In the process, however, elaborate and meticulous technical details are provided about the plants to be chosen, seed preparations, soil preparation for sowing of seeds as well as planting of transported trees from forests (Sadhale & Nene, 2010; Ali, 2012). The discussions, while revealing the contemporary practices related to gardening, also indicate the demand for professional knowledge in the business. Gardens with gardening as a part of the related activity might have emerged as a prominent mode of entertainment for the royalty and the aristocracy.

Planted orchards and gardens had already become a regular feature around general well - to - do households by the Gupta period. This is apparent in the way in which the *Brihat Samhita* of Varahamihira (Sastri, 1946) discusses the planting of certain trees around houses or looking out for auspicious trees in the surrounding when choosing a site for constructing houses. The text also talks about the trees which should be planted in orchards and shady trees around excavated water tanks or ponds as they enhance the beauty of the spot. Finally, the entire chapter on *Vriksayurveda* throws the most important light on how floral resources had assumed enough importance for the science of treatment of trees and arbori - horticulture in general to have taken the shape of a knowledge system or discipline. This would later become the subject for composition of technical treatises in the early medieval period along with other such subjects like architecture, iconography, metal sculpting and agriculture. This textual culture had obviously emerged in the wake of long traditions of nurturing and mending trees in early societies, but the knowledge would have been formalized only when it gained significance for the business of organized economies in state societies. The lexicons of the 5th - 6th centuries CE like the *Amarakosa* and the *Brihat Samhita* provide meticulous empirical information regarding the

floral world, both cultivated and natural. The data documentation itself highlights the build – up of close knowledge of plant life, its categories and distinctive features. The rich resource of practical information continued to grow while the floral space was perceived in a more amorphous way in the literary renderings. The subject of plant health appears to have assumed more importance with time since the days of Varahamihira's *Brihat Samhita* and treatises exclusively focusing on the subject like Surapala's *Vriksayurveda* began to appear on the scene in early medieval times. The topic later featured in the 14th century compendium of *Sharngadharapaddhati* (Ali, 2012). The tendency of a textual orientation on the subject of plant life indicates a complex cultural phenomenon to be understood in terms of the expanding horizons of agriculture and horticulture in face of territorial and demographic expansions of state societies. There is also the indication for the vertical development of diverse socio - cultural practices related to the use of gardens as noted in the discussions posted in the *Manasollasa*.

PIETY: SEEKING THE SURREAL IN FLORAL SPACE

The popular mentality towards tamed nature in the form of landscaped gardens and orchards is also illuminated when we turn to observe how such spaces were especially chosen as venues for religious congregations and pilgrimages. The Buddhist Pali canon refers time and again to the Buddha's retreat in the gardens of his favorite disciples like Anathapindaka and the Courtesan Amrapali (Feer, 1898). Referred as *vana*, *ārāma* and thus denoting the pleasure ground of the rich in an urban context, the Buddha's selection of such spots was quite clear. Not exactly a *tapovana*, yet the seclusion in these gardens provided possibly ideal setting for preaching before large audiences. The act of the Buddha staying in these retreats is termed *vihara* and the connotation was later extended to include the Buddhist monastic establishments. Hiuen Tsang had indicated how the places of meditation for the *sangha* and the Buddha were generally secluded and located in the midst of lush floral enclaves or how the spots where old monasteries were built were generally amidst naturally bountiful and peaceful surroundings. (Beal, 2003) Early *Stupas* and *Caityas* were generally built within floral enclaves as we note in the case of Sarnath. This was emblematic of the religious philosophy of Buddhism. In the early historical context the principle of seclusion factored in the setting within which the Buddhist and Jaina orders chose to

build their precincts and the open natural caves in ravines and forests, as at Bagh, Kanheri, Karle and Ajanta could almost be seen as extensions of the idea of *tapovana*.

Visual representations of flora and imagined floral space were styled into the panorama for religious art in murals and in relief sculptures on cave walls, like those at the Ajanta caves (Behl, 2005; Foucher, 1917) as well as at the earlier sculpted stupas at Bharhut (Cunningham, 1879) and at Sanchi. Alexander Cunningham in his observation of the art at the Buddhist stupas of Bharhut and Sanchi had in fact connected the wonderfully sculpted depictions of trees with traditions and rituals prevalent in ancient India as gleaned from different literary sources, including the comment of Alexander's accompanist Quintus Curtius Rufus (Cunningham, 1854). Curtius Rufus had observed that Indians worshipped trees to the point that wounding a tree was considered a sin (Curtius Rufus, 1946 This was indeed an early aspect of faith in the Indian tradition. In Buddhism the association of the Buddha with the symbolized Bodhi tree, in actuality denoting a kind of *ficus* species had grown in the aesthete of the artists in Buddhist art. With time the visible manifestations of religion in the form of monuments embellished with artistic depictions bore the tradition of representing nature as an integral part of faith. Flora and fauna from nature and motifs from the celestial realm intrinsic to Indian religion appeared alongside temple or monastic architecture. The visual illustrations, ancient and medieval, were not always accurate, neither was it intended to be so. In fact, the plant world was often stylized to suit the artistic idiom. The flora in the Ajanta paintings was stylized to fit into the total design and ideology of the representation. The ancient Near Eastern type of floral scrolls might have been imbibed to begin with forming borders to painted panels, separating sections of the narrative rendering of stories of the *Jātakas*. Such painted representations of flora and fauna were likewise represented, - sometimes with enhanced features - keeping with the demands of the faith as well as art.

Akira Shimada has offered a new perspective questioning the generally straightforward interpretation of the uses of artistic renditions of flora and floral spaces in sacred art. In a recent article Shimada has shown how, in the context of Mahayana Buddhism at Amaravati in early historic western Deccan, the imagery of garden in the form of sculpted depictions on Buddhist

architectural art was constructed as a corollary to the growing appropriation of Buddhism into the emerging urban and courtly milieu in the post Maurya environs (Shimada, 2012). According to Shimada the garden here is construed as a bridge between the material and the spiritual world. In fact the world of worldly desire envisaged as *kama* and symbolized in the form of the garden was sought to be vanquished by putting the garden to sacred purposes.

The early medieval phase saw the sacred space expanding in actuality as well as in imagination. Elaborately constructed Brahmanical temples were founded within large enclaves enclosed by walls and ornamented by shrubs and water tanks, perambulatory paths, sculpted figures of demigods and other ornaments. This would be more pronounced in the context of early medieval regional polities, where institutionalized religion became a site for political maneuvering. Integration of these practices into the ritual culture in almost all regional polities is visible in the epigraphic records which are available from the ninth century onwards from different parts of India. Endowments to such temples came either signifying hegemonic control of the regional authority or as tools for enhancing the social status of the dominant socio-economic groups. It is interesting to note how often a sense of authority, political as well as social, found expression in the form of elaborate planning for the endowments, architecture and landscaping.ⁱⁱⁱ This ostentatious show of patronage coming from the rich elites or the aristocracy gets echoed in the posting of inscriptions on stone in the religious precincts (Hultzs, 1891; Hultzs et al, 1987). We find that the layers of agencies in both creating and utilizing the floral spaces were multiplying between the early historical and early medieval phases. The scene of resource utilization was getting complex as actual interventions in socio-cultural life were rooting deeper into the local landscape, both in real and abstract ways. Numerous regional polities were paving their way into what was previously occupied by the forest tribes or was uninhabited. More and more land, hitherto virgin, were brought under the plough. Peasant society widened and encroached into forests and waste lands as evident from more and more land grant records. Religion and religious institutions were major features of this advancing horizon of the state society. The vision of the garden as a part of the ritual landscape was dawning with greater significance on the

social psyche of the times. The Temple estates with rich, extensive floral spaces and even endowed with villages, created a further space for gardens, investing the notion of structured floral space with a qualitatively new dimension.

The sixth century CE text of *Brihat Samhita* reflects the beginning of the trends when it clearly advised for laying the foundations of temples in wide floral spaces with gardens or *upavana* and water tanks (Sastri, 1946). The text encapsulates the idea that was behind the long practice of associating nature with sacred ritualistic functions, at the same time investing the idea with metaphysical significance. Not only that, the tone of the text almost sets a norm to be followed, rendering it into an attainment towards which the aspirant might strive. A chapter that was devoted to the discussions on how to construct temples began with the general observation that one wishing to gain both reputation as well as religious merit ought to build temples and next, that deities take pleasure in places endowed with water bodies and gardens. In fact some of the plant species have especially been declared as auspicious for planting around the temples. Hence, the indication is that while building temples one must take into account the landscape and enhance it with artificial devices that were said to please the Divine. The text provides poetic descriptions of such ideal spots. Gods are imagined as sporting in the forests, near rivers and cataracts, in the vicinity of towns with pleasure gardens. The imagination flows in poetic notes describing the Gods gracing such places where birds frequent, aquatic animals take rest in the shades of trees on the banks of tanks and swans float the water gleefully. Such places are filled with the flowering trees and the melodious notes of happy birds and the land rolls in rounded banks of water and lofty swells of sand dunes. The tone is set and reflected in latter – day temple building spree in the context of the emergent regional states and continued to flourish in often flamboyant monumental projects. Examples from epigraphic sources may be cited which throw light on how landscaping gardens in temple precincts had been integral to both the expression of power and possession that these building projects symbolized. But more than that these records also signify the way in which imagination of the sacred garden had transcended the worldly orbit.

We have wonderful epigraphic records which render the

descriptions in poetic versions of how gardens were especially set up to embellish the surroundings of temples at the behest of royal donors, and lesser administrative cadres, on their own initiative. An example is to be found in the context of the 11th century Paramara rule in Malwa which extended to cover parts of Rajasthan (Halder, 1931-32). The record refers to some lands and a garden being bestowed by local rulers for the purpose of building a Siva temple. The distinct reference to the garden, separating it from general lands being donated, denoted the separate and specified function of the garden. Indeed, since the days of the *Arthashastra*, the revenue system in organized ancient Indian polities had clearly distinguished agricultural land from orchards and plantations of various kinds. The gift of such a garden indicates the use of already existing resource for the temple landscaping. Other records clearly speak of laying out flower gardens adjacent to temple precincts. One such inscription is from the context of the southern Kalachuris of the second half of the 12th century CE. and is located in the Bijapur region of Andhra Pradesh (Fleet, 1898 - 99), while another comes from Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh in the same temporal context but under the northern Kalachuris. It is quite significant how the laying out of gardens along with architectural planning is referred in these instances. The Bheraghat inscription (Jabalpur) of the northern Kalachuri dynasty records the gift of two villages for the building and maintenance of a Siva temple which was picturesquely located on the banks of the Narmada flanked by hills. The scene is described in the inscription along with the information of how two long lines of gardens were laid out adjoining the temple at the behest of the Queen mother, the donor of the grant (Kielhorn, 1894).

One epigraphic record describes how a standard was setting in the early medieval times for notable praiseworthy cities fit for the royalty to settle in, suitable for setting up great temples. This normative idealization reveals a consideration for landscaped gardens as embellishments for the urban and sacred space. The record comes from the Dharwar region in Karnataka and belongs to the 12th century and connected to a feudatory for some time under the Western Chalukyas and the southern Kalachuryas. The description given is that of Erambarage or Erambapura, the capital of the Sinda Chief Chavunda, who was the son in law of the southern Kalachuri king Bijjana.^{iv} Located in the Dharwar district

of Karnataka, the city is praised as one of the best, equal in beauty to the celestial cities of yore like Amaravati, Ujjain, Ayodhya and Mathura. Erambarapura is said to shine greatly on the face of the earth under the able supervision of Chavunda, endowed with temples, palaces graced by lovely maidens, resided by *brahmanas* and the *vaisyas* who were as rich as Kubera and sacred groves or *tapovana* inhabited by the ascetics. Here the temple of Telligesvara was built in the north-east quarter, with adjacent gardens (Panchamukhi, 1929-30).

A more surreal expression of appreciation for landscaped nature, especially planned lay - out of gardens is to be found from Orissa in the time range of last quarter of the 11th to the first quarter of the 12th century CE. The Bhubaneswar inscription bears the significant instance of a Brahmana scholar - aristocrat initiating the building of the extant local temple of Ananta - Vasudeva in the Puri District recording that the donor caused a tank to be excavated in front of the temple and laid out an excellent garden around it, along the boundary of the temple which surpassed in scenic splendor the abodes of Gods in heaven (Majumdar, 2003). This garden, it was further lyrically expressed, was the essence of all beauty on earth, the receptacle into which all that was delightful was stored. It was described as the place so pleasurable that the God of love himself took rest there after getting exhausted in conquering the three worlds. Its ambiance was said to excite amorous feelings in the hearts of all. The penchant for artificial landscaping of gardens and tanks in sacred precincts was reflective of a growing desire for retaining the sense of awe in nature and the desire for capturing the idea of the pristine and the primordial in a minimized form.

CONCLUSION

The available sources thus provide glimpses of the diverse uses and ideas related to the use of natural space and especially the space culled out from nature and maintained for its flora, whether for material use or for recreational and sacred purposes. The later Vedic literature and the epics indicate that even in the context of early pre - state society the expanse of almost unlimited floral space was perceived as a horizon for otherworldly pursuits and marked it for old age retirement as is indicated in the very term of *Vanaprastha*.^v We have already noted that the *vana* is distinct from *aranya*, the deep natural forest. Life in *Vanaprastha* thus did not mean a life to be spent in the wilderness of forests, but away from settlements and in

seclusion amidst floral environs (Bronkhorst, 1998). Similarly, bordering the actual natural forest, the *tapovana* at the outskirts of the settlements was a spiritual sanctuary for the renouncing ascetic. At the same time it was distinguished as an oasis amongst wilderness of forest. *Tapovana* was thus not *the forest* but a kind of 'surrogate' forest, modified to fit in with the minimum requirements for the ascetics and yet constituting enough of what was natural.

The pleasure garden and the sacred gardens constituted further modifications. In fact the auspiciousness of specific plant species was categorized in the later astrological norms, as we find in the *Brihat Samhita* and the later architectural treatises, laying down rules for building houses and temples within lush surroundings. The more accessible man-made gardens landscaped and laid-out at the temple precincts, proliferated in the early medieval era with the expanding agrarian productive bases which provided the revenue base for the regional state societies as well as the temple estates. At the same time this factor also led to the growth of productive, revenue-yielding gardens and orchards. The burgeoning of various categories of enclosed floral spaces in the ancient times reveals a cultural tendency of the fast developing state societies to preserve modified floral spaces, even something approaching to 'green desire' as has been indicated in case of the post Renaissance western societies by Rebecca Bushnell (Bushnell, 2003). The idea might be extended to represent a certain mentality or orientation towards the nature, indeed towards possessing a part of the floral space and creativity expressed in landscaping gardens and its management. The orientation could be seen to have evolved as a cultural trend, especially among the ancient Indian royalty and the elites, taking a kind of normative form in certain contexts of history.

The rapid rise in demography, expansion of settlements and engulfing of pristine natural world brought sharper polarization between forest and the garden which continued through time, especially in the post Gupta phase. In view of this fast engulfment of forest land, the natural scape was possibly sought to be encapsulated more and more into forms of gardens, in their controlled intervened shapes. What is remarkable is how creative literature absorbed the idea of this secluded space in wilderness, this minimally intervened space adjacent to wild forests as a space for imaginations of the free spirit, often amorous in its flight of fancy. The absorption of the

open floral spaces as gardens of various categories and characteristics for elite entertainment also marked the rising urban and hierarchical sensitivities. On the other hand, in case of the ancient state societies in India, historical sources record the emergence of another and more popularly accessible landscaped floral space garnering the sacred space. However, as epigraphic references reveal, built sacred spaces were also sites of power but their symbolism signified a transcendental form and hence the gardens associated for perambulation were invested with heightened metaphysical sense both in religious faith and creative imagination. They were also accessible for the people in general and hence bore especial significance in wider cultural sense.

In comparison to the early engagements with the floral space we note a marked rise in conspicuous involvement at the state level in the following period. The early modern/medieval period loomed on the scene with gorgeous and conspicuous markers of authority and power of the state system, far exceeding the ancient polities in visible artifices. The networks of exchanges of commerce and ideas, spilling out with connectivity across the western frontiers, ushered in new orientations in thought. This era in India witnessed the introduction of a new kind of particularly landscaped gardens, elegant, grand and with standard designs.

The Islamic rulers brought new ideas related to the uses of open spaces, as a legacy from their original land. The tradition of building elaborately laid Islamic mausoleums began in Samarra, Egypt and Persia and spread to Central Asia and India. With the growth of a large centripetal state structure, the splendor of court life and the emergence of Islamic aristocracy in India, a rich urbane culture rose on the horizon that drew upon resources, natural and human. The Turko-Afghans brought in the concept of formal gardens. The Tughlaqs especially not only laid the foundations of new architectural splendor in and around Delhi but also laid out elaborate gardens (Welch & Crane, 1983).

The Bahmani Deccan saw the evolution of gardens from informal landscapes to well-defined and regimented spaces. The emergent techniques of supplying water to gardens reveal great care and orientation towards gardens, which were derived of the "Persianate culture" of "laying out gardens" (Rötzer & Sohni, 2012). When one looks at the context of the magnificent royal projects of planning and executing the Bahmani city – fort- palace

complexes, the gardens seemed to have signified as especial embellishments both in real and in artistic depictions, Gardens became integral to conceptualizing the paradise on earth, providing the backdrop to their political realm (Inden, 2012).

But the height of the aesthete of gardens climaxed under the Mughals, who especially put the stamp of sophistication far beyond any that one could note in the previous era. The memoirs of the Mughal rulers provide the most significant clues to keen, almost scientific interest harboured in the rulers' minds with regard to the natural world (Beveridge 1922; Beveridge, 1909). The love for free floral spaces is repeatedly observed in Bābur's references to the *chahar-baghs* in his memoir. The *chahar-bagh* is the classis epitome of medieval design: a four-fold pattern, constructed around a central pool or fountain, with four streams flowing toward the four corners of the earth. It was also a part of the philosophy, where the place of worship, homage and restful peace for the dead found a meaning in the grand design of the mortal world, transcending into the immortal. In fact a true appreciation of an Islamic garden is only ever complete with an understanding of the spiritual symbolism manifested in its design and planting (Clarke 2004; Lehrman 1980; Asher 1991).

In India Babur ordered for *chahar-baghs* to be constructed with exact specifications for tanks and fountains, with references to flora and fauna, thus initiating a new era of landscaping of gardens. The terraced garden Babur chose for his burial-place lies on the slope of the hill Shah-i-Kabul. It has been described as perhaps the most beautiful of the Kabul gardens, and as looking towards an unsurpassable view over the Char-dih plain (Beveridge, 1979). Jahangir's memoirs contain more illuminating example of the Mughal monarch's deep interest in nature, especially the flora and fauna of India (Beveridge, 1909). Akbar later followed the footsteps of his predecessors and managed to impress his own acumen in the uses of gardens. James L. Wescoat and Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn point out that the Mughal emperor had made a unique fusion of Humayun's mysticism, Babur's attempts at linking territorial control with architectural projects and Timur's love for gardens and urban design. Akbar had particularly focused on laying out gardens within cities and citadels. (Wescoat and Wolschke-Bulmahn 1996)

The Mughals had built extensive floral spaces into formal gardens in the new urban centres they founded in Delhi, Agra, Fatehpur Sikri, Lahore to name a few. Besides being private spaces for relaxation and pleasure, the formal gardens also functioned as venues for royal and public ceremonies. J.F. Richards in fact suggests that the Mughal gardens provided the settings for meetings and camaraderie amongst the elite males and that its seclusion provided an open yet private space for the aristocratic ladies too (Richards, 1996). The serene ambiance of the gardens was also the backdrop to piety around the mosques and to the resting places of the dead in the mausoleums.

Abdul Gani Imaratwale (Imaratwale, 2007) and Irfan Habib's (Habib 1996) works focus on the public and charitable gardens in the Deccan and Mughal contexts respectively and attempt to frame the concept of the public uses of gardens that could be traced in medieval traditions, which went parallel to the trajectory of hegemony and royal magnificence/munificence.

This overview of the conditions for the managed floral space in the early modern/medieval phase reveals the impact of the powerful and enlarged medieval state apparatus. The formally managed floral spaces provide us with a sense of the eventual growth of the state authority in its various manifestations. The garden in this era was brought under more direct management and invested with symbolism of authority and assumed public attention of a more politically nuanced kind. The dimension of piety in Islam were pronounced in these open spaces, which were juxtaposed with the built spaces of the mosques and the mausoleums, the symbols of the sacerdotal, much like the temple in the earlier era. However, the degree of planning and material engagement was far greater compared to the earlier era. The floral precincts of the mosques and mausoleums also served as venues of pleasure for the people, from the royalty and the aristocracy to the common public. The royal symbolism in the gardens spread its canopy to the community and the public on the one hand and created a realm of the high aesthete on the other as is amply illustrated in the form of visual arts created in this era. The basic instincts of pleasure, power and piety continued to be the major considerations sought to be addressed in creating the garden in reality and in imagining it.

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ⁱ *Abhijnasakuntalam, prathamanka*, 17, see Monier-Williams' translation: ' If this (beautiful) figure, rarely met with [or difficult to be found] in the inner apartments of palaces [i.e. in harems], belongs to people living in a hermitage, then indeed the shrubs of the garden are distanced [surpassed] in excellencies by the (wild) shrubs of the forest.' (Monier –Williams, 1876).

ⁱⁱ Extensive analyses has been made on the topic of Pleasure Garden included in the Manasollasa by Nalini Sadhale and Y.L. Nene in a joint article and Daud Ali in a lengthy article contextualizing the Manasollasa chapter in the wider scope of the *Vriksayurveda* tradition in early medieval India. (Sadhale & Nene, 2010; Ali, 2012).

ⁱⁱⁱ This is most evident in case of the Rajarajesvara Temple at Tanjavur, where the Cola rulers and other aristocrats made large endowments to the temple and inscriptions on the temple structure itself record the grants. Analysis of this body of records had led scholars to comment on the genius of organization displayed which was quite unusual for the times. (Hultzsck et al., 1987)

^{iv} Probably the famed southern Kalchurya ruler Bijjala I is indicated here. Panchamukhi cited that two inscriptions of Chavunda II, the Arasibidi and Katgeri, which mention his three Queens of whom two were the daughters of the Kajachurya King Bijjala. See Panchamukhi (1929-30: 111). Fleet mentions one of the queens, Siriyadevi, as the sister of Bijjala, which may indicate Bijjala II, a contemporary of Chavunda II of the present record cited here. (Fleet, 1882: 62).

^v The Dharmasutras of Apastamba, Gautama, Vasistha and Vaikhanasa prescribes various rules and processes connected to the third Asrama or stage of life. Note that the vana in Vanaprastha or even elsewhere is distinct from aranya.