

Aesthetic Grandeur of Mughal Gardens



A garden by any yardstick is an ordered design of the outdoors, particularly if the garden is one of the numerous Mughal gardens in India, designed to exude the feeling of an exquisitely enclosed bit of paradise on earth, through its dignified rules of layout philosophy.

For the emperor himself, the garden space was an exterior imagery depicting the grandeur of the imperial power, while for the mystic and religious minded, its serene landscape embodied the concept of the *Charbagh* (four gardens) or the even

older concept, described in the Book of Genesis, of a river that ran out of the Garden of Eden and thereafter, parted into 'four heads'.

Paradoxically, this highbrow thematic connection with ideology completely sloughs off when one is actually inside one of the Mughal gardens. What strikes one at that time is the manner in which the space has been arranged for both utility and ornamentation. The engineering skill of constructed water channels to irrigate the garden forms its rigid persona. On the other hand, the planted fruit trees and exotic plant species growing luxuriantly, relay a comfortable duality of form and freedom.

Currently, these gardens might have outlived their horticultural importance as fruit orchards or botanical exhibits, but their close link with agricultural traditions lives on, as these spaces were outstanding examples of water utilization. Their rectangular arrangement is the most economical way of irrigating land. Instead of letting these channels run mundanely the Mughal penchant for aesthetics exploited this essential element into the focal point of their garden art.

Using feats of engineering, visual appeal and even aural accents the water was made to descend into the garden from a height, simulating the effect of a cascading waterfall. Dismissing notions of creating the wild outdoors, these channels were contained within a stone cascade, which had its sides carved, with the wash of the stream running over these designed engravings. In the moonlight, when the carvings were obliterated, the pearly lustre of the water element suggested a living force, caressed by the surroundings.



Who then were the builders of these gardens? Apart from the emperors themselves, it was the princesses of the royal household who have left their mark on garden building in Mughal times. The very first significant one of them was Hamida Banu Begum, the principal widow of Emperor Humayun, who had ordered a garden to be laid around the tomb of the late emperor. It became the first tomb garden in India, with its 30-acre premises adjoining the banks of the river Yamuna. While incorporating the *Charbagh* design style of Emperor Babur, its square grid was subdivided with the help of water channels. A wall built of rubble surrounded this piece of paradise. Centuries later,

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Cultural Calendar for May 2010

May 10

Film: Sampurn Ramayan (In Hindi)
Episodes: 129 to 136
Venue & Time: ICC 5.30 p.m. Duration: 3 hrs

May 13

Film: Land of Buddha (Documentary in English)
Venue & Time: ICC 6.00 p.m. Duration: 1 hr

May 14

Kathak Recital
Ms. Rangana V. Navagamuwa, Ms. Anjali Yashodhara & Mr. Sadara Supathum Peiris, Indira Kala Sangeeth University, India
Venue & Time: ICC 6.00 p.m.

May 18

Programme to mark the 149th Birth Anniversary of Gurudev Rabindranatha Tagore
Venue & Time: ICC 6.00 p.m.

May 21

One character Dance Drama 'Kutrala Kuravanchi' written by "Thirikuda Rasapa Kavirayar" in the 17th century by Ms. Subashini Patmanathan
Venue & Time: ICC 6.00 p.m.

(Admission to all programmes is free and on first come first served basis)



Bagh. It was a replica of the garden by that name in Kashmir.

Not just pleasure retreats for royalty, the Mughal garden also symbolised territorial control. The emperor resided in this orderly space and every blade and every bough, grew and was nurtured at the emperor's behest. Naturally, ceremonial occasions of importance were preferably held in the garden, explaining why Aurangzeb chose to be crowned at the Shalimar Bagh, rather than the grander Red Fort, built by his father.

In life as in death, the garden complex of the Mughals was to serve the emperor in equal measure. Hence the plants for these gardens were chosen with a view to keeping alive the idea of eternity. The dark cypress

Contd.

May 19

Film: Ladakh – A cradle of Buddhism
The way of the Buddha (Documentaries in English)
Venue & Time: ICC 6.00 p.m. Duration: 40 mins

May 24-26

Exhibition
• Kalpana – Masterpieces of Figurative Indian Contemporary Paintings
An exhibition of reprints curated by Anjolie Ela Menon
• Religions of India
Photographic exhibition by eminent photographer Amit Mehra

Venue: Lionel Wendt Gallery, No.18, Guilford Crescent, Colombo 07

(For updated details please check – www.hccolombo.org or contact the Indian Cultural Centre on tel # 11 2500014 / 11 2598674 or on email iccrcolombo@gmail.com)

May 25

Film: Religious Linkages between Bhutan & Ladakh (Documentary in English)
Venue & Time: ICC 6.00 p.m. Duration: 30 mins

SANDESH

The monthly newsletter of the Indian Cultural Centre, Colombo



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May 2010

Radha Waiting for Krishna in Kunjawan - Raja Ravi Varma

Past Events

17th March

Carnatic Vocal Music recital by Isai Kalai Mamani Bagawathssing Nithiyandan



Kalai Mamani Bagawathssing Nithiyandan presented a memorable evening of Carnatic Vocal Music recital at the Centre. His programme lasted for an hour and half and he sang several ragas and songs. Some of the songs and ragas he sang were Maha Ganapathim, Maya Dheera Sorubini, Sathananda Thaandavam and many more. It was a treat for all music lovers. Around 30 - 40 guests participated.

19th March

Kathak dance recital by Thanuja Samanmali Ranaweera



Ms. Thanuja Samanmali Ranaweera presented a brilliant Kathak dance performance at the Centre. She presented a traditional Kathak solo which included various items of Kathak dance such as Upaj, Taat, Utaan, Aamad, Tukda, Paran, Tumri, Holi, ghazal, Gath & Tharana.

The evening was very well enjoyed by the audience gathered at the Centre. Around 75 - 100 guests participated.

26th March

Nav Pratibha – 2010 - a display of new talent in North Indian classical music and dance, a performance by the students of the Indian Cultural Centre



Nav Pratibha – A display of new talents in North Indian classical music & dance - performances on sitar, violin, tabla, Hindustani vocal music & Kathak dance recitals by the students of the Indian Cultural Centre held at the Kularathne Hall, Ananda College on 26th March. Renowned musician Prof Sanath Nandasiri graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. The High Commissioner, His Excellency Shri Ashok K Kantha, was also present.

The evening started off with a classical sitar recital in which the students trained by Dr. Nirmala Kumari Rodrigo presented an item "Sitar Sandhwani", a composition based on raag Kafi set to Madhyalaya and druta teental that was composed by their guru Dr. Nirmala Kumari Rodrigo.



The classical sitar recital was followed Hindustani Vocal music recital. The students trained by Dr. Premadasa Mudunkotuwa presented a duet item in raag Asawari. This was followed by a group recital of devotional bhajans.

This was followed by Violin Sandhwani based on raag Kafi, an instrumental composition and a solo performance based on raag Jaya Jayawanthi presented by the students trained by their guru, Visharadh Somasiri Illesinghe.



Next followed a tabla recital by the students of the Centre trained by their guru, Visharadh S.W.Randoowa. Various aspects of tabla playing, viz. Uthaan, Mukhda, Tukda & Gat in teen taal were displayed. There was also a solo performance.



The instrumental and vocal music recitals were followed by dance recital. The Kathak dance students trained by Ms. Moksha Samarasooriya presented a traditional kathak solo, Tharana and concluded the evening with a dance item choreographed for a song from film Agni varsha.

About 300 guests, including the parents, relatives, friends and well-wishers of the students, witnessed the performance.



Films in May

Sampoorn Ramayan (Episodes: 129 to 136)



Sampoorn Ramayan was the first mythological serial shown on the Indian television, created by Dr. Ramanand Sagar. The serial portrays the story of Lord Ram in a most aesthetic manner and carried a lot of devotional value. Sampoorn Ramayan gives a lesson on deep rooted culture of India, traditions and the heritage of pure ethics and principles.

Land of Buddha

A film on various Buddhist sites in India.

Ladakh – A cradle of Buddhism

The film depicts the exquisite artistic heritage as well as the continuing cultural legacy of the masked ritual dances of Ladakh. Through the medium of the majestic ritual dances performed by the monks, the exquisite mural paintings and the unique culture of Ladakh, the film aims to create an awareness of Ladakh's ancient culture which has contributed significantly to the artistic and philosophical heritage of mankind.

The way of the Buddha

The film is an evocation of the continued relevance of the life and the teachings of Buddha. It explores his teachings and philosophy which has spread to far corners of the world influencing countless millions. From the heart of India, in Gaya to Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Tibet, Korea, Japan and many others. Buddhism itself is an integral part of the fabric of Indian thought and way of life, and it has given India a strong bond of ideology with many other nations.

Religious Linkages between Bhutan & Ladakh



Bhutan and Ladakh – two places which are most unlike each other in their terra firma, topography and climate, however, the souls of these two places could not be more alike. Both places could not be more alike. Both places of peace, non-violence and spirituality, and happen to share the strongest religious connections that trace back many ages.

Amongst various links binding these two places is an integral faith in the Drupka Kagyu sect of Mahyana Buddhism. Though the basic tenets and teachings in the two religions are absolutely the same; what is interesting is that the religious traditions and practices have developed their own distinctive traits in each county. It is this cultural treasure shared by the two regions that seems to contain all the wisdom of the human trace, and holds the promise of that elusive 'Shangri-la'. Religious Linkages between Bhutan and Ladakh is a documentary film that explores the cross pollination of religious ideas between the two lands.

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tree symbolized the dark unknown, or death. It was invariably intertwined with a flowering creeper or a rose in bloom, symbolizing life. The cycle of life and the continuation of eternity was even engraved in stone as is evident in the floral inlay adorning the Taj Mahal.

Settings for these cameo-like spaces of greenery were another of the astute aspects of the Indian Mughal Garden. They were showcased beside the bank of a river, nestling at the bottom of a hillside, or overlooking a valley. Of the latter, the best example is the garden built in Kashmir, between the surrounding hills of the valley and beside the largest natural lake of the state, the Dal Lake. The flow of water as it is channelised from a height, gives the feeling of life coursing through the veins of greenery. The placid lakefront and the progression of majestic chinar plantings simulate the approach of the emperor.

Sans hills, the garden drew its strength from the adjoining riverfront. The river flowing beside the Taj entombed the mausoleum almost womb-like, while the walls demarcated the hustle of the bazaar and the dusty expanse of the Yamuna plains beyond. Similarly, the gardens in forts and palaces offered a panoramic spread overlooking the countryside. It was an uninterrupted view of one's conquest as one gazed at the sprawl at the foot of the citadel.

Gradually from being scenes of grandiose ceremonies, sources of indulgent pleasures, resting places of the high and mighty, the garden became a place for interpreting the colonial presence. When Delhi became the capital of India, the architect Lutyens, designed a Mughal style garden in the Vice Regal Palace, now known as the Mughal Gardens of Rashtrapati Bhavan. In its architectural setting the garden of the 20th century interprets the traditional Mughal garden technique by enclosing the space within a walled compound. Water channels running north to south and east to west divide the rectilinear plot into four, while the borders of annuals hark back to an English country garden. Instead of becoming a medley without a motive, it is the Mughal element in this garden framework that works as its holistic formula.

And it is this ability to incorporate into its fold the adjustments of the times that make Mughal gardens such a resilient entity. Begun as a beloved imperial pastime, the Mughal Gardens are now blueprints of formal layouts. In their ability to accommodate flexibility and preserve for posterity, these gardens have injected a keynote angle to our culture.

Source: *India Perspectives*, SHUBHRA MAZUMDAR, The author is a noted writer on arts.

New Courses

Bharatha Natyam

Course fee	:	Registration fee Rs.250/=
		Monthly fee Rs.500/=
Registration commence from	:	1st May 2010

Kathak

Age Limit	:	12 years and above
Course fee	:	Registration fee Rs.250/=
		Monthly fee Rs.500/=
Registration commence from	:	1st May 2010