

Indo-Iranian Gardens

Garden Sites In The Deccan In Southern India

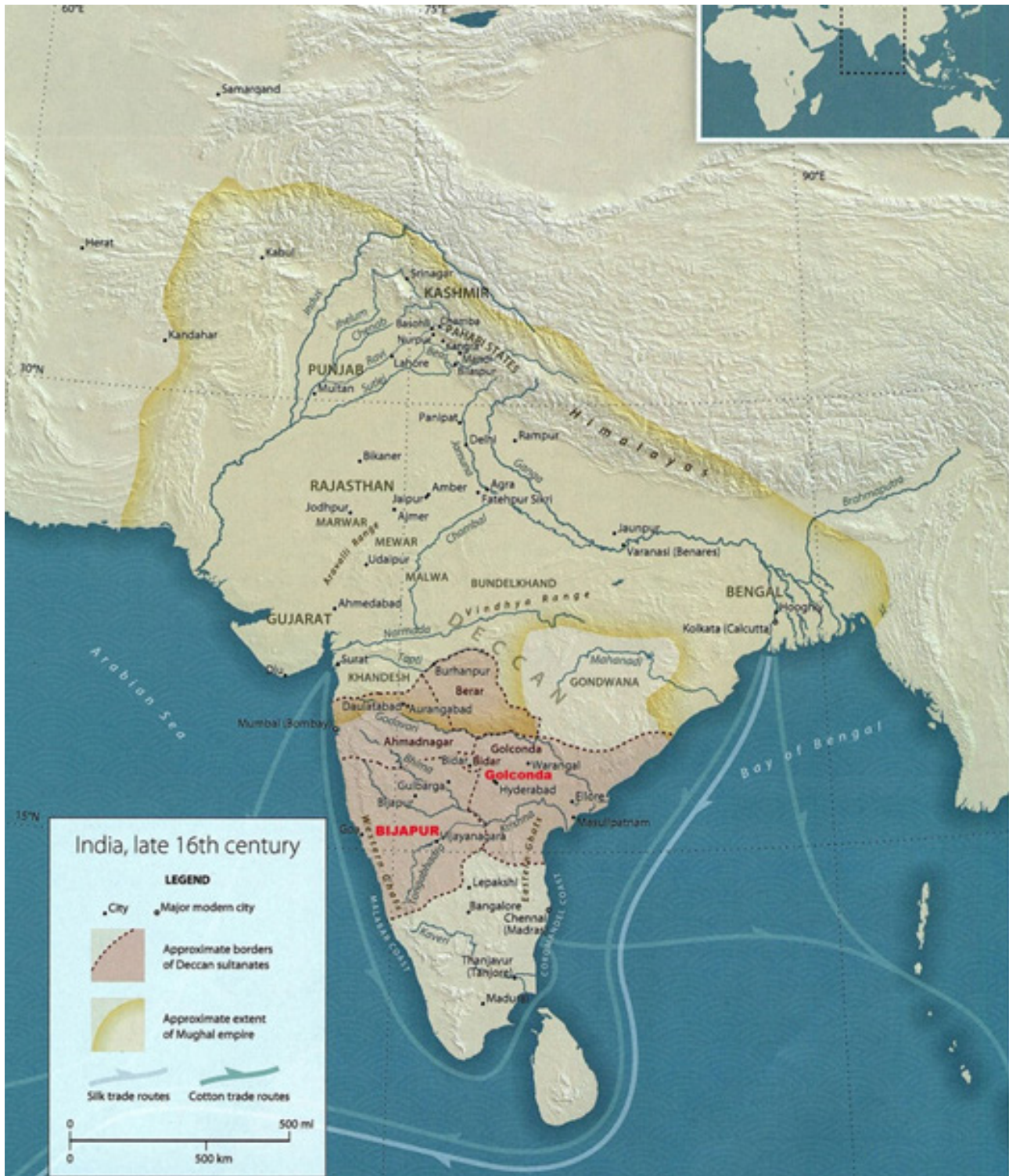
Ali Akbar Husain

Professor and Chairman, Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment, Nazeer Hussain University, Karachi, Pakistan.

aahusaiin@hotmail.com

Abstract | The paper examines some sixteenth and seventeenth-century Indo-Iranian garden sites of the Deccan in southern India. It argues that terrain and water management practice in southern India resulted in a landscape expression that differed markedly from that in northern India and Iran. The gardens of the Deccan, located near large water storage tanks, were responses to the geographical context and to native cultural practice. This is strongly suggested in the evidence of water pavilions and the detailing of water edges at, or near, Bijapur, in the sultanate of the Adil Shahs. The placement of palaces on hills overlooking expanses of water and gardens, as at Hyderabad and Golconda, in the sultanate of the Qutb Shahs, was also a contextual response. Gardens were enjoyed during the season of the rains, at Bijapur as well as at Golconda/Hyderabad. Although ladies accompanied the sultans during their visits to gardens, gardens specifically for ladies, called zenana gardens, were located only in the citadels where the privacy of ladies could be ensured. The public, in general, could enjoy royal pleasure gardens only occasionally, following a royal visit. Gardens in the Deccan, in common with those elsewhere in the Indian subcontinent, were used not only by day but especially in the evening. Because many Indian flowers open for pollination in the evening and are white, strongly scented, and tubular to attract nocturnal insects, an Indic tradition of an evening, or moon garden, existed. Traditionally, in the Indian subcontinent, scented flowers have long been associated with love and arousal and it would seem that amorous pursuits were enjoyed in gardens, in particular, at the cooler time of the day when flowers released their fragrances. In conclusion, it could be said that although the gardens of the Deccan share a family likeness with other Indo-Iranian gardens and were used in similar ways, the terrain of the Deccan and the reliance in this region on native Indic practices of water storage and management resulted in landscapes that were rooted in the Indian soil; if, stylistically, these gardens could be considered Iranian, temperamentally they were very much Indian.

Keywords | Indo-Iranian gardens, Indian gardens, Iranian gardens, Deccan



Pic 1: The Deccan Sultanates, Bijapur and Golconda.
Source: Husain, 2011.

Introduction | Gardens in the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent whose built evidence exists have long been associated with the period of Mughal domination of northern India, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. This was a time when the subcontinent remained under the cultural and political influence of Safavid Iran, so these gardens could also be termed Indo-Iranian. However, Iranian garden traditions

had been transmitted to the subcontinent by scholars, Sufis, and sultans long before the first Mughal ruler of India, Babur, set up his capital at Agra in northern India, in 1526. Moreover, Iranian influence was not limited to northern India and Pakistan. The cultural traditions maintained at the contemporary Deccan sultanates of the Adil Shahs and Qutb Shahs in southern India owe as much to Iran as to India and



Pic 2: Pavilions on hills overlooking gardens.
Photo: Ali Akbar Husain.

contributed towards a unique syncretistic cultural identity at Bijapur and Golconda, the two principal sultanates of the Deccan (Husain, 2012: 30); (Pic. 1).

This paper discusses a few sixteenth and seventeenth-century garden sites at Bijapur and Golconda. As landscape settings, the “mesa-like terrain” of western Deccan and “the tor-boulder-tank” topography of eastern Deccan (Alam, 1974) are wholly different from the flat, alluvial expanses along the perennial rivers of northern India and Pakistan; so landscape expression in southern India differed from that in the north. In much of the north, approximately half of irrigation needs are met through ground water, while the canal system was a feature of irrigation even before the Mughal sultans set up their rule. In the Deccan states, on the other hand, wells supply only a fifth of the irrigation water today, and extensive areas of irrigation have depended on the native Indian practice of surface storage of water, in tanks and stepped wells (bāolis); (Goodin & Northington: 85,87).

Garden Sites in the Deccan

• Garden Sites in Golconda:

The royal pleasure gardens in the Qutb Shahi cities of Golconda and Hyderabad were located, for the most part, around water storage tanks. Pleasure gardens also surrounded large, tank-fed cisterns (hauz), and royal gardens were occasionally built along perennial streams, as in northern India. The Qutb Shah sultans of Golconda exploited the terrain to build tanks and gardens, utilizing land hollows for water bodies and hills for

lofty viewpoints that provided panoramic views of water and greenery. The citadel of Golconda, once embowered in greenery and ringed with tanks, was a clear expression of such a concept. Many other “tank-and tor” settings for gardens existed both at Golconda and Hyderabad. In Hyderabad, a garden cluster surrounded a sixteenth-century tank called Husain Sagar, while a hill (tor) nearby, the Koh-i-Nabāt Ghāt, was exploited as a natural viewpoint. Near the Golconda citadel, two pavilions on top of hills (tors) overlooked a tank and a sixteenth-century garden, now a rice field (Pic. 2). Gardens were also part of a network of tanks. Within the citadel extension of Golconda, a seventeenth-century royal garden site remains, approximately forty acres and now mostly rice field. The garden formed part of a tank network with two perennial tanks on higher ground outside the citadel supplying water to a tank within, which served as the source of the garden’s water supply. The garden drained to yet another tank on lower ground outside the citadel¹ (Pics. 3&4).

• Garden Sites in Bijapur:

The city of Bijapur of the Adil Shahs received its water from tanks outside the city and a subterranean canal, engineered by Iranian afaqis, transported water to various points in the city where it was stored for use in hauz. Gardens and palaces were created around these hauz, as at the Āsār Mahal whose hauz, with tiers of steps marking the corners, is typically Indian. The hauz was not excavated but constructed with thick



Pic 3: Source of water supply of garden in Golconda citadel.
Photo: Ali Akbar Husain.



Pic 4: Remains of garden in Golconda citadel.
Photo: Ali Akbar Husain.



Pic 5: Asar Mahal, Bijapur and hauz.
Photo: Ali Akbar Husain.

masonry walls, and along its two longer sides, and at its upper level, are walks adjoining shallow pools, the whole bordered on three sides with a garden, about 3 m below the upper level of the hauz. The palace forms the fourth side. The royal seat (*shāhnashīn*) overlooks the cistern and surrounding garden across a two-storeyed portico with a gilded wooden ceiling held up on immense columns of teakwood, a reminder of Safavid Iranian palaces (Husain, 2012: 31); (Pic. 5).

Kumatgi, a hunting resort centred on a tank some miles outside of Bijapur, furnishes reasonably well-preserved evidence of a pair of royal pavilions that were part of extensive gardens and plantations around the tank. These pavilions came into use occasionally when the sultan wished to hunt. The “shower pavilion”, as it is now termed, was a two-storied structure with

a water storage tank that provided for a “cloud shower” that could be enjoyed in a tub built in below the perforated ceiling of the upper storey. The pavilion was centred within a pool and peacock brackets on the outer wall faces spouted water in the pool, simulating the monsoonal rains (Pic. 6). This celebration of the monsoon rains, or in anticipation of the season, is uniquely Indian and can be noted at other garden sites within the subcontinent. The other pavilion at Kumatgi, a picture gallery (*chitarsāl*) with wall frescoes and pools, served as the royal *khwābgāh* (bedroom) and as an area for receptions. Dense planting surrounded each set of pavilions presumably, keeping the sun out and providing necessary privacy for the pursuit of pleasure; while sights, sounds, and fragrances blended to effect a welcome escape from climate and responsibility. The sultan’s personal model of pleasure pavilions within a garden was emulated by his court nobles, who built many similar pavilions at other sites around the vast tank. Unfortunately, these have all but crumbled away. The gardens around these pavilions have disappeared, too, although evidence of hydraulic arrangements at the sultan’s pavilions, which brought water from the lake, stored it in a water tower, and channelled it to feed the pools and gardens, has been restored in part. A pavilion at the centre of the vast Kumatgi tank survives to illustrate the enjoyment of water and breezes by the sultan and his ladies (Husain, 2016).

Located in waterside settings, with water as a “key” element of their spatial layout, the gardens of the Deccan share a family likeness with other Indo-Iranian gardens. In common with these, Deccani gardens were centres for court activities and “sites for major rituals from birthdays, marriages and coronations to entombment” (Wescoat & Wolschke-Bulmahn, 1996). Commonly, too, they provided for revelry and amorous pursuit and for the enjoyment of water. The enjoyment of water is, indeed, manifest everywhere in the Deccan—in the tiers of steps marking the edges of water

bodies (as at the Āsār Mahal mentioned above), in the steps descending to a pool or hauz shared by a mosque and mausoleum (mentioned below) (Pic. 7), in the “shower” pavilions at Kumatgi and in the tiers of steps descending to the subterranean chambers of a stepped well (bāoli).

Mausoleum Gardens at Golconda and Bijapur

As for mausoleum gardens, Golconda’s royal necropolis is perhaps its only remaining attraction now. Little remains of the blue and green glazing of the mausolea domes, but the structures have been repaired and the lime (chūnam) lining of the domes is “white-washed” periodically. Some of the mausolea here involved a lifetime of labour, while in the case of others, even a lifetime was not enough, apparently, in the preparation of a last resting place. Stepping up in tiers from the surrounding ground, each mausoleum is a “mountain of light” at the centre of a crossed axis plan, and the relationship each bears to the other is predetermined and planned to some degree, resulting in a series of connected garden courts.

At Bijapur, where royal mausolea are to be seen at various sites in the town, much can be said for scale and boldness of conception on the one hand, and for architectural detailing and compositional harmony on the other hand. The Gol Gumbaz (the mausoleum of Muhammad Adil Shah, d. 1656) is a clear landmark. Its dome, unsurpassed in size in the subcontinent, is illuminated by four gigantic minarets which appear more like dipdāns (lanterns) of a Jain temple nearby (Pic. 8). The Gol Gumbaz encloses twenty-six acres of land (approximately 10.5 hectares), and an extensive area along its eastern side is taken up by arrangements for water storage and supply, including bāolis, water towers, and the like. In comparison, the Ibrahim Rauza (the mausoleum of Ibrahim Adil Shah II, d. 1627) is only 4.2 acres (or approximately, 1.7 hectares). In essential terms, both the Gol Gumbaz and the

Ibrahim Rauza comprise tomb and mosque on a platform, with a shared hauz that is framed with bands of steps in Indic fashion, and suggestively, a place for meditation, if also for ablution. At Ibrahim Rauza, however, the hauz is centred in the plan, and the mosque and tomb masses on either side complement each other, whereas Muhammad’s tomb is clearly dominant, both on its platform and within its setting. Much else can be compared and contrasted at the Ibrahim Rauza and the Gol Gumbaz and summed up in the experiences of these gardens. At Ibrahim Rauza, there is consciousness of arrival once inside the doorway, a sense of calm, of enclosure. At the Gol Gumbaz, one is overwhelmed by the scale, and the impression of emptiness, of broad, flat terraces sweeping up to the tomb, accentuated by isolated dots of shrubs struggling in the heat, seems to make a mockery of the mausoleum. Lacking trees and a sense of enclosure, it is no longer a garden, merely a monument to be engulfed in the encroaching desert (Husain, 2012: 32,33).

Literary Evidence of Use

The use of gardens has not been discussed so far. How and when were gardens used? Were they publicly accessible? Was public access a matter of timing? And where were women positioned in the gardens? The distinction between private and public gardens, in the limited sense of these terms, is acknowledged in the use of the expressions Bāgh-i Khās and Bāgh-i ‘Ām to denote the private and public domains, respectively, of a Mughal terraced garden, such as at Lahore and Kashmir. The upper terrace(s) in such situations were for private, royal, or nobility use and the lowest terrace for the public; while the uppermost terrace was reserved for the ladies of the royal family (zanānā). Evidence of such terraced gardens in the Deccan is rare and where it exists it appears to date from the period after the Mughal occupation of the



Pic 6: Shower Pavilion at Kumatgi, Bijapur.
Photo: Antonio Martinelli.



Pic 7: Hauz shared by mausoleum and mosque at Ibrahim Rauza, Bijapur. Photo: Ali Akbar Husain.



Pic 8: Gol Gumbaz, Bijapur.
Photo: Ali Akbar Husain.

Deccan in the later seventeenth-century.

Occasional public use of a royal garden may have been a matter of timing in the Deccan. As court historians have noted, royal gardens outside the city were sometimes accessible to the public following a royal visit, to enable the public to marvel at the waterworks, beds of annuals, and all such special, seasonal arrangements made for the royal visit. An extensive *zanānā* garden was an important feature within citadels in the Deccan as well as in northern India, a decorative attachment to the royal *khwābgāh*, (bedroom), and a prospect to be enjoyed by the sultan as well, from the royal seat. The intimacy of the *zanānā* enclosure may still be experienced in the ruins of the Bahmani Lā'l Bāgh (Ruby Garden) at Bidar, its cusped water cistern, at the end of a long water axis, a treasure closely guarded, seen by few (Pic. 9).

As has been stated before, the sultans of Golconda successfully exploited the “tor-boulder-tank” terrain of the twin cities of Golconda and Hyderabad. Palaces crowned the “tors” and gardens ringed the tanks, while beyond the gardens, in the landscape of boulders and jungle scrub, the hunt could be enjoyed. One such palace built on the summit of a hill on the outskirts of Hyderabad was the three-storeyed Koh-i Tūr which, from the mid seventeenth-century account

of the sultan’s Persian-speaking court historian, Hakim Nizamuddin Gilani, seems to have been a harem (*shabistān*), inhabited during Barsāt, the monsoon season, when it was used as a pleasure retreat (*ishrat gāh*). With the onset of rains, in June, royal visits to the gardens surrounding Hyderabad were planned and, as Hakim Gilani records, an entire army travelled with the Sultan when he visited the Bāgh-i Gulshani, the Bāgh-i Lingampalli, the Bāgh-i Dilkushā, and the Koh-i Tūr. Such visits could last the entire period of the rains when the weather remained pleasant. During the day the hunt would be enjoyed by the sultan, while evenings were for wine, music, and poetry, spent in the company of women. Surrounding Koh-i Tūr were about three kilometres of orchards and the garden villas of noblemen (*amīrs*), which became camping grounds for the travelling army, while bazaars were set up around this tent colony (Gilani, 1986: 192).

Another palace, the Koh-i Nabat Ghat to which reference was made earlier, was located on top of a hill near the Husain sagar tank. The palace was surrounded by orchards and, referring again to the sultan’s historian, Hakim Gilani, it was used as a venue during the Safavid Iranian ambassador’s visits to Golconda on at least two occasions. Perched on the hill-place of the Qutb Shahi sultan, the ambassador enjoyed the vistas



Pic 9: La'l Bâgh, Bidar.
Photo: Ali Akbar Husain.

of water and greenery by day as well as the colourful tents set up in the orchards around the tank, and was entertained in the evening by fireworks and illuminations (*chirāghān*) along the waterfront and the tank embankment, the lit up wooden rafts set afloat in the water, and bonfires artfully sited in the landscape of boulders and scrub that formed the background to this setting (Idem: 192,193).

Planting In Deccan Gardens

• Evening Gardens

To the Turco-Iranian sultans gardening in the Indian tropics, an evening garden, prolonging the garden's enjoyment by day, was a new page in the book of the garden. By day, the "flowers of the sun"² could be enjoyed for their beauty of colour, while at night, pleasure could be sought in the fragrances of insect-pollinated species (Loveglass, 1983: 358–361) and the glow of flower, fruit, and foliage. As daylight faded, and the moon arose, a new world emerged where insects and flowers sought each other, nectar was discovered in long-necked goblets, and salvers were dusted with the gold of pollen—a world resonant with the wings of beetles, bees, tropical hawk-moths, and the notes of floral bells, trumpets, and tambourines³. The evening garden of the Deccan was a lamp-lit, moon-lit garden, where the mica-washed, lime-plastered surfaces of palace walls and *māhtābī* glistened like the scales of a fish, and each "fingered citron" hanging from the roof eaves (*chhajjā*) became a true *amritphal* (Pic. 10); when the string of "lime" lotus buds on the parapet sparkled into life and each tiered tree⁴ of the

garden court (*āngan*), glowing with perfumed candles, was transformed into a tree-like lamp (*jhār fānūs*)⁵.

• Perfume Plants

Light and fragrance are significant aspects of both the Iranian and Indian cultures - and a garden in the Deccan was, indeed, a garden of light and perfume. In India, the names of many fragrant flowers recall the Indian god of love, Kama or Madana, and frequently connote sweetness and its arousing power. *Madan mast* is an example, denoting both the edible arum root, *Amorphophallus campanulatus* (which is a renowned aphrodisiac) and the "Love-kindling" odor of a species of *Artabotrys*, a shrub whose flowers diffuse an apple-like fragrance while remaining concealed within the foliage (just like Madana, the god of love, who was condemned to remain unseen in Indic mythology but was able all the same to direct his arrows at his victims' hearts). Indian synonyms for aromatic plants, frequently too, originate in *madh* (honey) to express the honey-like sweetness of a floral odor, of which some examples are: *madhmalati*, a synonym for a climber, a species of *Aganosma* and one of the popular arbor-makers in the Indic tradition), *madhavi*, denoting another popular climber, a species of *Hiptage*, and the tree, *Madhuca indica*, which is named for its cloyingly sweet floral odor. Plant synonyms in the Indo-Islamic context originate in the aroma and/or rasa of plant parts, and aromatic and sweet substances frequently connoted love and arousal in the Indic as also in the Indo Iranian literary traditions.



Pic 10: Detail of vegetal ornament below roof eaves, Hyderabad.
Photo: Ali Akbar Husain.

• Literary Evidence of Planting

The Turco-Iranian sultans of India wrote feelingly about Indian plants in the memoirs that they maintained, but, in their initial years in the subcontinent, they were constantly looking back to the flora of Iran and Turan. The cypress, the

Conclusion | In conclusion, it could be said that, just as the culture of the Deccani sultanates was a mingling of two cultural streams, so too the gardens in the Deccan were a

willow, the poplar, the peach, and the rose were perpetually recalled in discussions of Indian trees and shrubs. In time, the Qutb Shahs and Adil Shahs became reconciled to their new homes in the Deccan, and their court poets had discovered, by the seventeenth century, that the coconut's umbrella was as green and shady as that of the Oriental plane (chinār); that the betel-nut palm (supiari) was more graceful than the cypress (sarw); that the paddy fields of the Deccan were more refreshing than fields of melon and watermelon; and that the Indian basil (naz bu; raihan) could boast an imposing spike like the Persian hyacinth (sunbul). And if the hundred-petalled rose (sad barg) could not be made to bloom in the Deccan, one could always find comfort in the hundred-petalled marigold; while the "evening fragrance" of the tuberose (shab bū) excelled that of the wallflower and night-scented stock (also called shab bū), confirming that the tuberose was, indeed, rajnī gandh, the "queen of fragrances". Indeed, as a review of poetry in old (Deccani) Urdu would suggest, an Indian garden could be composed almost entirely of Indian trees at Biapur in the mid-seventeenth century—trees such as the pādāl (*Stereospermum* sp.), tamarind, jack-fruit (*Artocarpus* sp.), tar (*Palmyra* palm), mār'i (*Caryota urens*), the mango, and the jāman (*Syzgium* sp) about whom the poets wrote with great feeling (Husain, 2012: 38).

synthesis, bringing together the Persian chaman and the Indian bel mandwa (arbour), and combining Persian style (or piraya) with an Indian flavour (or mizaj).

Endnotes

1. For an account of these garden sites, see: (Husain, 1996).
2. Gul-e Khurshīd, as in the qita' on the seventeenth-century Gulābī Bāgh Gateway, Lahore.
3. Loveglass, op. cit. writes that "Butterflies and moths have long, sucking "tongues"... in tropical hawk-moths the tongue is sometimes as long as 25cm... There are many flowers with long, narrow, tubular corollas... in which the nectar is so deeply placed that only butterflies and moths can reach it... The hawk-moths, most of which fly at night,

do not alight on flowers but hover in front of them with the tongue inserted in the nectar".

4. Many of the dominant life-forms of the tropical rain-forest have whorled branching arrangements. See: Longman, K.A., and Jenik, J., *Tropical Forest and its Environment*, London, Longman, 1974.op. cit., p. 61.

5. A type of large, free-standing brass lampstand with branched candlesticks called jhār fānūs is described in Hadiqat as-Salātīn, op. cit.

Reference List

- Alam, S. M. (1974). *Planning Atlas of Andhra Pradesh*. Govts of India and Andhra Pradesh.
- Goodin, J.R., & Northington, D.K., eds. (1985). *Plant Resources of Arid and Semi-Arid Lands*. Florida: Academic Press Inc.
- Gilani, H. N. Ahmad. (1986). *Hadiqat as Salatin. Urdu transl. K.M. Sarwar*. Hyderabad: Syed Abdul Qadir Khushnavis.
- Husain, A.A. (1996). Qutb Shahi Garden Sites in Golconda and Hyderabad. In James Wescoat Jr., Mahmood Hussain, & Abdul Rehman Eds. *The Mughal Garden: interpretation, conservation and implications*. Lahore: Ferozsons.
- Husain, A.A., (2012). *Scent in the Islamic Garden*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Karachi.
- Husain, A.A., (2016). Perfuming the Heart: A Study of a 17th c Perfumery Treatise from Islamic India. In Fairchild Ruggles, D. ed. *Sound and Scent in the Garden*. Boston: Harvard University Press (forthcoming).
- Longman, K.A., and Jenik, J., (1974). *Tropical Forest and its Environment*. London: Longman.
- Loveglass, A.R., (1983). *Principles of Plant Biology for the Tropics*. London: Longman and Green.
- Wescoat, J. & Wolschke-Bulmahn, J. eds., (1996). Sources, Representations, Places, Prospects: A Perspective of Mughal Gardens. In *Mughal Gardens: Sources, Places, Representations, Prospects*. Washington D. C.: Dumbarton Oaks.