

HISTORY OF GARDENING IN INDIA

Gardening has been popular in India since ancient times, India is the place of origin of many plants of floricultural importance like orchids (*Cymbidium*, *Dendrobium* etc.), Asoka tree, *Cassia fistula*, jasmine, *Barleria*, *Clitoria* etc. The epics of the Aryans, the Ramayana and the Mahabharatha (compiled during 500 BC) mentioned about gardens, trees and flowers.

In Mahabharatha, reference has been made about the beautiful gardens of the city of Indraprastha. We have also read about the garden named 'Ashokasvana' in the Ramayana, in which Sita was in captivity. Kalidasa in his play 'Shakunthalam' referred to pleasure gardens with beautiful ornamental trees and climbers.

During the Buddhist period, gardens were laid out around the monasteries and stupas and there were beautiful gardens in Nalanda and Takshashila. The custom of use of flowers in worship was borrowed by the Chinese and Japanese from India. Since time immemorial some trees were considered sacred in India.

The early Islamic gardens in India were designed by Persians and very much resembled the gardens of Iran. The greatest Islamic gardens in India were those



planted by the Mughal emperors. Mughals were the true lovers of plants and gardens. They introduced many new ornamental and plants in India. Moreover, several historic gardens were developed during Mughal period. Babar (1526-1530AD), /Akbar (1556-1605 AD), Jahangir (1605-1627 AD), Shah Jahan (1627-1658 AD) were the mughal rulers who made significant contribution in garden development in India and laid the foundation of ‘Mughal style gardening’ and its popularization. Remarkable gardens like ‘Nishat gardens’, ‘Shalimar gardens’ etc. were built during Mughal regime.

The great Emperor Asoka (264-227 BC) adopted arboriculture as one of his state policies. He encouraged the planting of avenue trees. Hinduism always nurtured plants besides giving religious sanctity to plants like Tulsi, Hibiscus, Lotus etc. During the rule of Hindu kings (the regime of Gupta) which is considered as ‘Golden Age’, many /Indian trees and plants were in use like *Anthocephalus cadamba*, Lotus, Ashoka tree, etc. During this period, gardens were mostly attached to the residence or temple. Flowers were mainly used for worship or as ornaments in various forms by ladies.

British rule in India (1600-1947) had a great and long-lasting impact on Indian gardens. A partial transformation from orthodox Hindu and Mughal style to non- conventional and informal designing gradually came in. The influence of English style gardening was in peak during 18th and 19th centuries. Indian gardens had fragrant trees, shrubs and bulbs. But these were not so colourful. On the otherhand, flowering annuals like aster, carnation,

Nasturtium, Pansy etc introduced by the English were more attractive. Symmetrical gardening style was replaced by serpentine paths, flat lawns, colourful herbs in combination with trees, shrubs and climbers, which completely altered the old gardening style.

The concept of systematic botanical planting came into practice by the establishment of botanic gardens by the English people. They also made ornamental and pleasure gardens in the form of parks and gardens around forts and monuments.

After independence, gardening style had not been subjected to any major change. Both formal and informal styles of gardening have been followed depending upon suitability of the place and purposes. Buddha Jayanthi Park, New Delhi (established in 1956) in memory of 2500th birth anniversary of Gautam Buddha is an example of informal garden laid out under the influence of English garden. Another example is Rose garden in Chandigarh (est. in 1966).

Rapid urbanization and industrialization in India during the last quarter of 20th century and sudden spurt of land requirement for housing and industries drastically reduced the scope of development of large gardens. There was change in the gardening style and purposes also. Small space gardening, container gardening, roof gardening, vertical gardening are the requirements of present-day garden designing.