

# Domination over Nature in Tomb-Gardens of India

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## Abstract

Garden is one of the most characteristic and notable places in landscape field, and the state of how are connected and related natural parts with artifact and build parts in gardens can define and specify the spatial system and ambiance of it. The context of India, due to its specific character of natural and climatic features with a rare diversity in religion aspects and Isms which exist in human society, significantly has affected the spatial character of Iranian style gardens. In this paper we will categorize and explore some of these affections. Iranian garden is a place for the nature dominates and this is resulted in the perception of landscape natural elements in maximum rate. Whiles in Indian Mughal gardens, which are adopted of Iranian Islamic gardens, the geometry of building and constructed parts of garden are obviously dominant on the whole area and other natural parts, in other words in Indian Mughal garden the emphasis is on constructed parts instead of natural parts. Significant increase in the surface area and volume of the tomb in comparison with the garden surrounding in analogy with the Iranian samples, Increase the height of tomb building with creating an elevated platform, emphasizing on the vertical elements of building such as tall arcs and minarets and having an ornate fence are among the reasons that are offered to prove the hypothesis. Indian garden despite the Iranian samples is taken from a humanistic and constructivist approach which the developers are seeking to demonstrate a manmade concept and ambiance instead of a naturalistic atmosphere and environment.

## Keywords

Mughal tomb-gardens, Building of tomb-gardens, Essence of landscape, Dominant over nature, Contextualism.

## Introduction

Indian Mughal dynasty<sup>1</sup> was descendants of Timur, and just like him had a great passion for nature and garden up build (Richards, 1993). "Babur" (1483-1530 A.D), the founder of the Mughal dynasty, constructed several gardens in Kabul and other Afghan cities and this way continued until "Aurangzeb<sup>2</sup>". The peak of these gardens up build was during the reign of "Shah Jahan<sup>3</sup>" and then from Aurangzeb time due to lack of interest and the declining power of the kings of this dynasty, the rate was reduced gradually. Although the style of tomb-gardens in Mughal era in the subcontinent was rooted in the Iranian garden features but due to the requirements of social and historical context of its creation, it was changed so that it can safely be independent style and can be considered as a specific landscaping appearance. "Garden is the result of interaction of mind and human life in the natural environment" (Mansouri, 2005), so how components interact with manmade and natural elements, and how human intervention in nature and the degree of dominance of each other, defines the atmosphere and the essence of garden landscape. Mughal period gardens influenced by India climate and social context of aristocratic manners and tastes of Muslim sultans of the dynasty, had demonstrates and performed a specific style of tomb-gardens which there dominating and conquering of artificial elements, especially the main buildings on the natural environment is clearly understood.

## Research Questions

- What are the proportion of the garden (with an emphasis on natural areas) and the main building of it in Iranian style Indian gardens?
- Reasons for greatness and grandeur of the main buildings in the gardens of India in what aspects and goals can be searched and should be sought?

## Hypothesis

In tomb-gardens of India, garden manmade parts in compared to natural areas is a priority. According to this concept, the garden is designed in a way to emphasize the importance of the constructed artificial elements and the natural parts of it are used to highlight and emphasis on the main building, the tomb.

## Initial perception of the tomb-gardens landscape

Entrance to the tomb-gardens takes place through a certain axe and this leads to the definition of the observer perspective on arrival moment and receive a profound influence on his early view of the garden. In Iranian garden is also a similar phenomenon

occurs in the main street of the garden. The major difference between these two is the types of interaction between nature and build environment and how nature is represented in landscape. When you enter Iranian garden through the main road of it nature and the sense of it is the viewer's perception dominant (Ibid). While at the same time in tomb-gardens of India what is dominant on the landscape in front of viewers is the grandeur of the building and the unlimited entrance axe with the endpoint focus on the main building. In this perspective, nature plays the role of the background of the huge building and natural landscaping details and accessories have been used to give grandeur and to emphasize on the main building (Fig.1).

## The flat lands of India

Imperial Gardens during the Mughal period often have a trichotomous plan to reach a system that follows the sloping form and each part of the garden area is higher than the previous level. This feature regardless of the benefits which have in perform the method of using water supplies and organize the spatial system of the garden, in fact had a royal aristocracy domination goal due to the symbolic mastery of the highest level of the garden which was the location of the royal family. "We can guess that the bottom level, with its large door to the urban area, were special for common people, royal tents were set up in the middle level where dedicated to levee and the highest level was the place of king's harem" (Faghih, *et.al.* 2004: 49).

In India, gentle slopes and flat lands bothered Babur in creating steeped gardens and supply water for them (Ibid). Unable to take advantage of the natural slope of in the Indian flat terrain makes placing the garden tomb built on a high platform to reach the same aims. Using this platform that called Soffah, which sometimes up to 16 meters high, has dominated the tomb building on the flat and tree low numbered area around it in a way which we can see the tomb building is the most important and notable part of the landscape form all four corners of the garden.

## Costly Architecture, the Reflection of King's Power

Expression ruling powers, especially the Kings and influential people in society has always been one of the functions of architecture. As a newcomer with a new religion to the diverse land of India, Mughals quite became aware of the ability of the architecture to demonstrate their power and influence and expand their sphere of influence. Take advantage of the magnificent architecture to prove the power



Fig.1. Monument Taj Mahal in Agra is one of the most famous Indian Mughal period tomb-gardens which the domination of building and its geometry on natural surrounding area is well visible, Taj Mahal tomb-garden, Agra, India. Photo: Maryam Akbarian, 2012.

is a fact which "Akbar<sup>4</sup>"shah as Louis XIV needs (Grube, *et.al.* 2001: 48). It seems which this fact and binding had been more obvious, after the defeat of "Humayun<sup>5</sup>" from The Syrian "Shirshah" and his forced into refugee to Safavid court for a 15 years long period. Humayun's tomb in Delhi which had been constructed by his son and wife after his death is one of the best examples of Mughal era tomb-gardens.

"The goal of these luxurious buildings is showing the power of royal family instead of creating a paradisiacal place to enjoy gifts of nature" (Faghih, *et.al.* 2004: 49). In other words, Mughal era gardens, were the venue for celebrations and rituals associated for kings and royal family, birthday celebrations, weddings, coronations and funerals, all held in these palace gardens and because of this the atmosphere of these places coincide with these events and the glory of them (Wescoat & Wolschke-Bulmahn, 1996).

#### **Planting design and grandeur to the tomb**

Sparse vegetation with highly ordered free of large woods and Use decorative trees that are largely influenced by the taste Hindi, lead to further dominate of tomb and built parts on the landscape of these tomb-garden. The order of main building and its symmetric geometry has continued through whole parts of garden and geometry of building architecture completely dominants on planting design style (Fig.2)."The plants will gradually become less and less, until the late sixteenth century Mughal gardens are summarized in a series of awe marble palaces" (Faghih, *et.al.* 2004: 49). Nature that is seen in the perspective view of Mughal tomb-garden plays the role of background for the massive building and all details belonging to the natural landscaping of trees and seasonal flowers and water streams have been used to emphasize and greatness of it. "Although we can see the geometric order of Chahar Bagh pattern in Mughal gardens but gradually buildings and



landscaping occupy a position more important than plants and green areas" (Ibid).

### Native Materials in Conflict with the Nature of the Garden

Construction of a pavilion at a certain point in the Iranian garden which called Koushk is so common. But monochromatic nature of Iranian Garden (Mansouri, 2005) and its Pavilion causes an adaptation between pavilion and its natural surroundings in terms of materials and appearance. Using special native materials in the Mughal tomb-gardens such as white marble and red stone combinations lead to more conflict of building with the surrounding nature. Also this made the tomb a heavy point of view focusing on the landscape with a complete dominant on surrounding nature (Fig.3).

### Islamic- Hindu Architecture Style

With the arrival of Muslims in the Indian subcontinent Hindu tradition architecture style with its

straight lines, flat arches and square section columns had crossed with Islamic style architecture with curved arches and columns based on circular and curved lines and had promoted native Indian architecture in terms of aesthetics to a higher order. This important achievement is what the Muslim Mughal rulers used to build massive and impressive buildings to demonstrate it more and more. Buildings and monuments which have more visual connection in their components now by using arches and harmonic domes of this architecture style located and organized in garden areas in a way that the surrounding framed and encompassed it.

### Order in Chaos

It seems that the original idea of Babar for ordering the territory of India not only was a heritage among the descendants but was increasing with time as well. "Babar" has stating complain by entering into the diverse land of India and the climate which was not as amenity of Kabul and Central Asia region.

Fig.2. Sparse vegetation and planting of trees along a single large area of grass and ground covers puts massive building shrines and other buildings in the center of the viewing audience and dominate it on the landscape in all directions, Humayun tomb-garden, Delhi, India. Photo: Maryam Akbarian, 2012.



He said: "Thus, had emerged in the Indian unpleasant and chaotic, orderly and symmetrical gardens" (Thackston, 2002). Hence, the effort to organize and order of this wild and chaotic community formed the essence of the Indian Space Gardens. In fact, the kings of this dynasty with creating this order and magnificent in atmosphere and design of these palace –gardens, Sought the goal of demonstrate their power and domination over turbulent and tumultuous landscape of Indian society (Wescoat & Wolschke-Bulmahn, 1996). Islamic garden design art always was the result of climatic elements and with considerable regional variations and similarities in having their cosmological implications (Grube, *et.al.* 2001). Influence of the Indian context on the constructivist style of Mughal gardens when can be more obvious in the beginning of 16th century and conquered the land of Kashmir by Akbarshah, na-

ture gradually earns its original place in landscape of the gardens and this approach reaches a peak during Shah Jahan period, The approach which is visible clearly in his ancestor, Babur, garden design style in Kabul.

### Land Ownership Rules

One reason of magnificent and massive construction of buildings in Mughal era royal tombs is back to the way of land ownership in this period. At that time, any of the rulers and members of royal relatives could have their own property and personal garden. But after the death, the garden and the property was transferred to the King, and because of this rule any of the royal family hadn't desire to build costly monument in their own gardens. And just there were royal tombs for kings that have been built at the peak of glory and with exorbitant costs.

Fig.3. One of the most characteristic and astonishing tomb-Gardens of Mughal period is Humayun tomb-garden in Delhi. This collection of materials used in buildings, Built on the main axes of Garden and the sparse planting of surroundings are the most important factors that dominate the monument of the tomb on the landscape of the garden, Humayun tomb-garden, Delhi, India. Photo: Maryam Akbarian, 2012.



## Conclusion

The landscape essence of tomb-gardens of India in the Mughal era illustrated the approach of dominant over nature, constructivism and importance of constructed parts of gardens especially tombs. There are many reasons for this dominant ambiance over nature such as spatial system of gardens in entrance axe, using so high level platforms under the tombs, the will for showing power from kings and royal family, a low rise ground cover planting that was sparse with minimum number of trees, using traditional and native material which are notably distinct from the natural environment, special syncretic architectural styles of the period, Order in gardens space in contrast with nature and the irregular context of India and Land acquisition laws is evident in the Mughal period tomb-gardens in India.

This attitude in tomb-gardens construction to control and dominant over nature can give an overwhelming ambiance to their landscape that is in compliance with Mughal kings domineering. In conclusion we can say contextualism and the influence of climatic characteristics, and social history of India led to the creation of a dominant over nature ambiance and approach in Mughal tomb-gardens in India.

## Endnote

1. 1526-1857 A.D
2. 6th king of Mughal empire (1618-1707 A.D)
3. One of the kings of Mughal empire (1592-1666 A.D)
4. One of the kings of Mughal empire (1542-1605 A.D)
5. One of the kings of Mughal empire (1508-1556 A.D)

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