

REDEFINING ISLAMIC GARDEN: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF APPROACHES, IDEAS AND DESIGN FRAMEWORK

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Graphical abstract



Abstract

The term Islamic garden has been defined in various ways considering different aspects and values. These definitions draw a broader perspective to Islamic garden, a key feature of Islamic civilization throughout the history. This paper aims to analyze these views and compare them in order to reach toward a holistic definition for Islamic garden- its origin, evolution, principles and essence. Also searching for a way to revitalize the original essence and application of Islamic gardens in the contemporary societies are discussed in a brief way.

Keywords: Join studio, pedagogical, architecture, design studios

Abstrak

Taman Islam telah ditakrifkan dalam pelbagai cara dengan mengambil kira aspek dan nilai yang berbeza. Definisi ini menarik perspektif yang lebih luas tentang taman Islam, ciri utama tamadun Islam sepanjang sejarah. Kertas kerja ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pandangan-pandangan ini dan membandingkan mereka untuk menghasilkan definisi holistik untuk taman Islam seperti asal, evolusi, prinsip dan kerangka dasarnya. Juga mencari membincangkan secara ringkas jalan untuk membangkitkan semula intipati asal dan penggunaan taman Islam dalam masyarakat kontemporari.

Kata kunci: Taman Islam, taman Parsi reka bentuk landskap

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Conception of heaven and hell was used to represent garden and fire as a metaphor. These conceptions profoundly influenced the development of later Islamic civilizations/ settlements during the mid-century. Every time heaven is mentioned in the holy book of Quran, there is a description of flowing water and fruit bearing trees, signifying their importance to man. The reward for good deeds according to the Quran is a place of shaded trees,

flowing water, gardens with sweet fruits (*bostan*) and fragrant flowers (*gulistan*) [1].

In Islamic tradition gardens are recognized as a representation of paradise on earth. These gardens are designed to evoke a sense of delight and create a space for retreat that symbolizes harmony through plants and rational organization. The paradise garden as an art form expresses the relationship between nature, life, and the soul in Islamic religious belief, creating a place for reflection and observation [2].

2.0 THE CONCEPTION OF ISLAMIC GARDEN: ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION

Although it has already been stated that the Islamic gardens are representation or mimicry of the divine text's description of paradise, some other perspective can also be found regarding the origin of Islamic garden. The Islamic garden was not an exclusively Muslim production. It arose from a specific set of climatic conditions clubbed with the techniques used for controlling the landscape which later reflected in the regional concerns that were common to all the people sharing that particular landscape [1]. Another view is that the seed of Islamic garden was rooted in the traditional agricultural practice of Arabian Peninsula. The Islamic gardens originated from the direct imitation of the early agriculture in Arab. They have been famous for their unique qualities and characteristics, and have long been a symbol of gardens in paradise in people's minds [3].

Quite opposite is the statement of Margaret Balbach who stated 'while almost all of our existing examples of the gardens representing paradise date from the reigns of Islamic rulers in the 10th through 15th centuries, these are just the most recent and best preserved examples of a tradition more than 2,000 years old. And, so far as we may determine, there was originally no religious significance to the gardens and the idea of a "paradise on earth" may be more a cultural than a religious concept' [4].

Referring to the garden design tradition of pre-Islamic Iran, Nazanin Nafisi said religion and philosophy shaped the way gardens were designed there to create peaceful places suitable for contemplation. Moreover she also argued that Persian gardens influenced garden design around the world and became the foundation of Islamic and later European garden traditions, an example of which can be seen in the Mughal gardens of India [5].

Ansari pointed out some key factors that led to the evolution of Islamic garden during the Islamic reign. These factors were the basics for developing an agricultural society to provide sufficient food for growing number of inhabitants in the cities. Of these factors there are: The climate and need of food, Development of agriculture as a means of occupation of people, Development of new methods and technology for the propagation of agriculture, Development of the water system for better irrigation needs. After the cities became self-sufficient the Kings began to construct huge gardens as a symbol of prosperity and health of their kingdoms (Bringing up of Bostan and Gulistan) [1].

3.0 HISTORICAL IMPACTS

Islamic civilizations were mostly characterized by the positive impacts they brought in the society and lives of people through the implementation of ingenious ideas for community development. According to Ruggles, Islamic civilization brought dramatic changes to the landscape it inhabited. With the skilful acquisition and transportation of water, the parched lands of the middle-east and northern Africa flourished with man-made verdant oases that not only transformed the economy with their agricultural products but also became a powerful form of cultural expression [6].

He also stated, though the techniques applied for this change actually originated from ancient Persia and Rome, the Muslim communities pushed it further to improve the system of land ownership and labor, inheritance laws, taxation, urban growth and an idealized vision of country life.

4.0 APPROACHES TOWARDS THE PLANNING OF A ISLAMIC GARDEN

The way of creating an Islamic garden, is making a flat surface that creates an illusion of walking over carpets full of fishes and flowers", declare Bermudez Pareja, curator of the monument during the fifties [7]. In broader perspective the planning of Islamic gardens exhibits a common pattern of axial elongation, symmetry, central water feature and so on. The most common planning approach is called Chahar-bagh. As said by Ansari, in Islamic history there is really only one formal garden plan, with a few variations in it. This is the so-called chahar-bagh, or the four part garden laid out with axial walkways that intersect the garden in the centre [1]. Figure 1 demonstrates the conceptual layout of the Chahar Bagh.

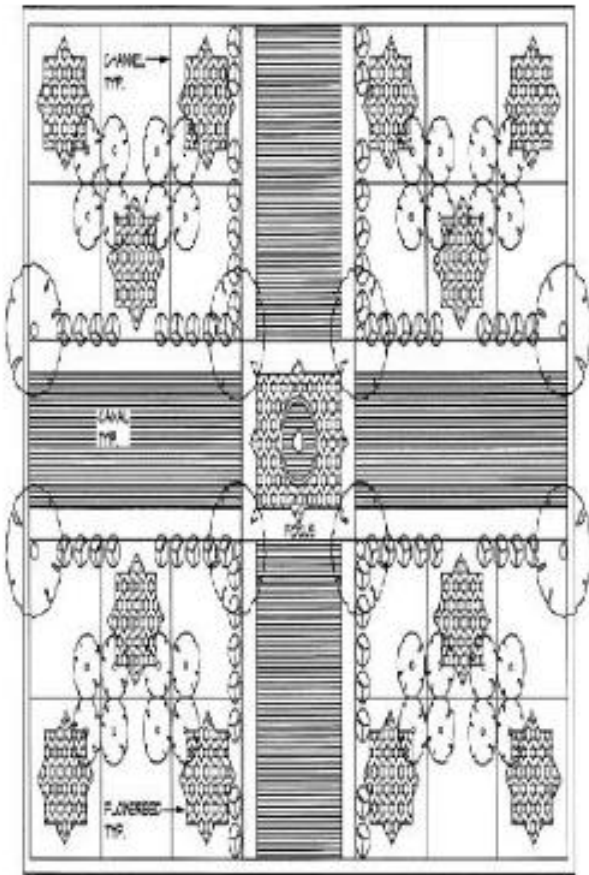


Figure 1 Conceptual Layout of Chahar Bagh

Furthermore Zhou Li described 'with the typical cross-shaped pattern, the Islamic gardens are usually divided into four parts by cross-shaped drains or roads, the drains at the intersection are the centers of the gardens where there are always fountains or bowers, tall shade trees, flower beds and the trim hedgerow plants constitute unique landscape characteristics' [3]. Figure 2 visualizes the Chahar Bagh in Taj Mahal, Agra, India.



Figure 2 Chahar Bagh in Taj Mahal, Agra, India

5.0 INHERENT ESSENCE OF ISLAMIC GARDENS

Unlike other landscape design patterns found in the late period of the European history, Islamic garden were usually enclosed or fortifies areas which ensures the finest provision for contemplation so that one can have the opportunity to reflect upon oneself. Islamic paradise gardens are typically enclosed spaces, often courtyards, reflecting the "inner life of the individual" [8]. Figure 3 shows place of contemplation within enclosure

The metaphorical meaning of enclosed natural settings, flow of water, terraces for enjoying the pleasure of serenity gave the Islamic garden dimensions beyond measure. The enclosed nature of the garden provides privacy, security, and protection from the arid climates in which paradise gardens originated, thereby creating a cool, shaded environment for fertile gardens to grow. The presence of water represents purity and is often oriented into four watercourses seen reaching the brim of the tank as a symbol of the overflowing water in paradise. Other features such as terraces and canals are included to meet horticultural needs and

provide pleasant sounds, and fruit trees and flowers are common to provide shade, fragrance, and colour [9].



Figure 3 Place of contemplation within enclosure

6.0 DESIGN FRAMEWORK

If it is assumed that the early practices of the people of Persia and Arabia in designing gardens and also the age old traditions of agriculture were the actual origin of Islamic garden, still the sensitive approaches and aesthetic qualities found in Islamic garden designs were directed by the divine revelation of God. The design of spaces evolved out of certain matrix of Islamic laws which set the boundaries of garden design. Even though the technology and typology of gardens remained the same which were practiced by the earlier people of Persia and Arabia, but, the essence was directed towards the principals as guided by the Holy Quran [1].

It can also be said that, the evolution of Chahar-bagh is not in itself a purely Islamic design concept because concept of the precious water irrigating the barren lands was not unknown to the previous settlements in that area. The Paradise gardens could have been an entirely different design rather than the Chahar-bagh, but it was the guiding religion which changed the ideology, but the palette of design elements remained same' [1].

The essence being the same among Islamic garden of different regions, some slight variations in the designs can be seen due to contextual reasons. Despite these variations some common features were usually found like extensive use of marbles, water as a central feature of the garden, use of candles and lights to add glitter [10]. Figure 4 demonstrates the Islamic Garden approach while maintaining the original essence.

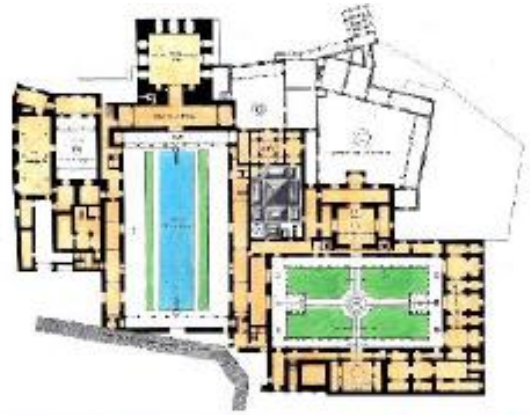


Figure 4 Islamic Garden: Andalus (up) and Mughal (down) different design approach while maintaining the original essence

7.0 CONCLUSION

An Islamic garden was an ideal place for enjoying pleasure and contemplation and it also had significant contribution in community's agricultural development. Around the world there are still traces of past Islamic gardens some of which are also conserved for their historical values.

In recent world the philosophy and ideology of Islamic garden can play a vital role to revive the cultural landscape around the world and address the issue of sustainability. While Islamic civilization was at its peak, Islamic gardens, within the cities, represented not only aesthetics, formal beauty or meditation spaces but also the ingenuity of preserving water, pure air as well as appropriate technology to maintain and upgrade the living quality of the inhabitants. This teaches the lesson for a sustainable city development where respect towards the nature becomes one of the core principle.

As stated by Hamed Akhgar, the role of garden in cities and its design and architecture had once been decided and developed within the context of Islamic culture, and with regards to the local cultures of various countries. As a space of different capabilities and with particular emphasis on the historical heritage of any given land, garden are now of considerable significance in the advancement of

cities in various aspects, some of the most important of which are increasing of sustainability of cities and achieving sustainable cities within the outlines of sustainable urban development [11].

Considering the evolution, Islamic garden designs applied different techniques and technologies throughout the advancement of society but still remained firm on its philosophical origin. The same approach can be applied to revive the environmental and cultural landscape of different contexts in order to accelerate the progress of sustainable development.

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