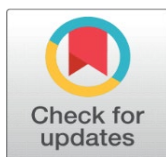


EXPLORING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HISTORIC GARDENS IN CONTEXT TO CULTURAL DIVERSITY: THE CASE OF THE ROYAL GARDENS OF PUNJAB

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Received 29 June 2023
Accepted 19 November 2023
Published 21 November 2023

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DOI
[10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i2CDSAD.2023.597](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i2CDSAD.2023.597)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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ABSTRACT

Historic gardens are a precious component of our cultural heritage and a valuable resource for understanding the past. They are tangible reflections of a society's values, beliefs, and practices offering glimpses into the aesthetic preferences, horticultural practices, and social values of bygone eras. These gardens often reflect the fusion of different cultural influences, acting as a visual tapestry of human creativity and ingenuity. To highlight the significance of historic gardens with regard to cultural diversity, this study examines the historical, cultural, botanical and architectural aspect of five famous royal gardens of Punjab that were originally created as private retreats of the Monarchs but now have been transformed into public spaces. Drawing upon archival research, scholarly literature, and site visits, the study delves into the architecture, symbolism, and historical context of each garden, revealing their unique cultural expressions. The argument put forth in the paper is that historic gardens are not just physical spaces but cultural artifacts that serve as a testament to the rich cultural diversity of the region, exposing visitors to a plethora of different artistic and cultural influences. This research highlights that historic gardens significantly contribute to cultural diversity and further facilitate cultural exchange and cultural education. The study further emphasizes the importance of valuing, preserving and valorizing historic gardens, not only for their continued relevance but for fostering cultural sustainability and enriching our collective heritage.

Keywords: Historic Gardens, Cultural Heritage, Cultural Diversity, Architecture, Royal Gardens

1. INTRODUCTION

Historic gardens, characterized as 'designed landscapes' by World Heritage Committee under the broader category of "cultural landscapes" UNESCO (2021), are a prominent part of a nation's precious cultural and natural heritage Singh (2021). They are a remarkable expression of human creativity, blending art, culture and nature in a synergistic manner Athanasiadou (2019). The Florence Charter (1982) defines historic garden as an architectural and horticultural composition of public

interest both from historical as well as artistic perspective. It delineates historic gardens as 'living monuments' and irreplaceable heritage sites that are testimony to a specific culture, a style, an era, and the artistic endeavor of the creator. Since the ancient times, gardens have been an integral and indispensable part of different aspects of human life, offering valuable insights into the deep and inspirational kinship between mankind and nature Babnik (2020). With the growth of cities and urban life, spaces were culled from natural scape and manipulated in different garden styles and design, reflecting the unique ideologies, culture, aesthetic preferences, identity and lifestyle of different communities or societies Dasgupta (2016). Through their evolution across different historical periods, gardens accrue a range of cultural, social, historical, environmental, architectural, botanical and aesthetic values that earmark them as meaningful spaces and define their statement of significance ICOMOS. (2017); Singh (2021). Currently, 22 historic parks and gardens across the globe, owing to their outstanding value to humanity, have attained a prestigious status in UNESCO's World Heritage list. Simultaneously, numerous imperial gardens worldwide have been transformed into public parks to cater to the social needs and demands of urban residents Paraskevopoulou et al. (2020).

While these gardens may not garner international or national recognition, their local significance is profound Li and Huang (2022) as they embody rich heritage values, serve as prominent recreational and touristic resources, and above all, reflect the unique image and identity of the respective regions Silva and Carvalho (2022). Protection, conservation and management of historic gardens is of paramount importance are regulated by ratified world conventions and charters as well as legislative frameworks developed by national authorities of respective countries Dreijja (2012).

2. HISTORIC GARDENS AS SIGNIFICANT REPOSITORIES OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY

"Culture takes diverse forms across time and space. This diversity is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups and societies making up humankind. As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature. In this sense, it is the common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations" UNESCO. (2001)

Cultural diversity refers to the coexistence of multiple cultural groups within a society, characterized by variations in beliefs, values, practices, and traditions. It recognizes and embraces the unique identities and expressions of different communities. Cultural diversity is vital as it promotes inclusivity, fostering a society where diverse perspectives are valued, understood, and appreciated. It enhances social cohesion, encourages dialogue, and enriches individuals' experiences by enabling the exchange of ideas and the celebration of human differences. Within this framework, historic gardens hold immense significance as they serve as valuable repositories of cultural diversity. They are tangible reflections of a society's cultural values, beliefs, and practices, providing a vivid display of the ingenuity, ideologies, aesthetic sensibilities, and horticultural expertise of their creators across different historical periods Grant (2013); Singh (2021); Silva and Carvalho (2022) From the medieval cloister garden, reflecting Christian theology, to the formal Persian Gardens, capturing the concept of paradise on Earth, to the serene and contemplative Japanese Gardens, expressing Zen philosophy, each era's gardens were shaped by prevailing values and philosophical or religious principles Turner,

(2005) Gardens often embody the prevailing architectural styles and design philosophies of their respective eras, serving as cultural artifacts and testaments to the prevailing artistic and societal trends Cazzani et al. (2022). Through their intricate designs and thoughtful arrangements, they demonstrate the artistic prowess and imaginative visions of those who conceived them. For instance, the Renaissance gardens, with their harmonious design principles, embody the revival of humanism and artistic excellence; whereas the extravagant and theatrical Baroque gardens, like Versailles, symbolize the opulence and authority of the monarchy; Neo-classical gardens reflect the rationalism of the Enlightenment, while romantic and picturesque English landscape gardens evoke a sense of natural beauty Grant (2013). Hence, these remarkable spaces represent a unique expression of cultural values, showcase the rich tapestry of human creativity and demonstrate the dynamic relationship between humanity and its environment. They remain a memento of the centuries past with their invariable style and character reflecting their times despite changes in urban and rural environments over time Hodor et al. (2021). Exploring these gardens allows us to appreciate the myriad ways cultures have interacted with nature, shaping our identity, cultural diversity and collective heritage.

3. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This paper is an attempt to highlight the rich and multifaceted significance of historic gardens in the context of cultural diversity. It examines the historical, cultural, and architectural aspects of royal gardens of Punjab that were originally created as private retreats of the Monarchs but are now actively used by the public and are also major tourist attractions of their respective regions. Drawing upon archival research, scholarly literature, and site visits, the study delves into the architectural elements, symbolism, and historical context of each garden, revealing their unique cultural expressions and the influences that shaped their development.

4. UNVEILING THE CULTURAL DIVERSITY OF HISTORIC GARDENS IN PUNJAB

Punjab, a region rich in history and cultural diversity, is home to several noteworthy historic gardens that hold immense significance as cultural heritage sites. This research paper examines 5 famous historic gardens of Punjab, including Aam Khas Bagh Sirhind, Ram Bagh Amritsar, Shalimar Bagh Kapurthala, Baradari Garden Patiala, and Banasar Bagh Sangrur, to explore the cultural diversity manifested through their design, features, and historical significance.

4.1. AAM KHAS BAGH, SIRHIND

Aam Khas Bagh, a 16th-century Mughal- era garden in Sirhind, was initially constructed as a highway inn or resting place along the historic Grand Trunk Road, bearing the stamp of three prominent Mughal emperors: Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan Parihar (2006). This exquisite garden complex was divided into two sections: the 'Aam', open for public use, and the 'Khas', exclusively reserved for the Royalty. Its architectural composition, influenced by the formal garden tradition of Central Asia and Persia, is marked by notable structures like the Sheesh Mahal, Daulat Khana-e-Khaas (private palace), Mubarak (lattice window), Khabgah (sleeping apartments), Mehiabi Chabutara (moonlit platform) and a hamam (traditional bathhouse) equipped with unique water heating methods Figure 1. The garden was

renowned for its efficient air conditioning system known as "Sarad Khana." and featured an ensemble of tanks, water channels and fountains, water being drawn from a huge tank on the southern side of the city and circulated through underground conduits [Parihar \(2006\)](#). Sheesh Mahal with curved roof and the domed pavilions surmounted on octagonal bastions at corners of the enclosure wall feature distinct cusped arches, reflecting the exquisite architectural style prominent during the Shah Jahan period. The integration of pointed arches in alcoves, entrance gateways and openings, typical of Islamic architectural style, enhances the aesthetic appeal of this garden.

Figure 1

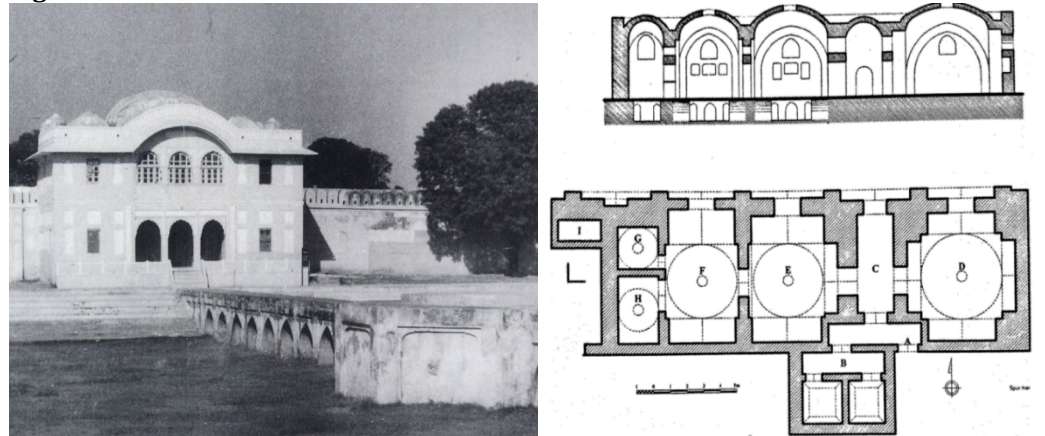


Figure 1 Front view of Sheesh Mahal and Plan Section of Hammam in Aam Khas Bagh

Source [Mahn and Murphy \(2018\)](#)

Source [Parihar \(2006\)](#)

The surviving structures at Aam Khas Bagh bear traces of various ornamental styles that once adorned these magnificent buildings. For instance, parts of the ceilings in Hammam and Sarad Khana display intricate stalactite formations with stunning star patterns; faint remnants of painted designs can still be observed on the walls of Daulat Khana-I Khas and Sarad Khana and the glazed tiles that once decorated the domes of Sheesh Mahal remain subtly visible. The sprawling complex also encompasses an extensive 11-acre orchard, housing mature mango, pear, apricot, beri, laughat, leechi, and guava trees, some of which have flourished for over 70 years.

Owing to its historical and cultural significance, the garden has been declared as a National monument by the Government of India. The garden has lost its original glory, but the dilapidated buildings inside the complex speak volumes about the past opulence and grandeur of this remarkable monument. As part of the renowned Shaheedi Jor Mela held at Fatehgarh Sahib, a captivating light and sound program is presented to visitors at night within the Aam Khas Bagh, showcasing the history of Sirhind and the martyrdom of the younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh through a compelling theatrical performance.

4.2. RAM BAGH, AMRITSAR

Ram Bagh, located in Amritsar, was built in 1818 AD, as a summer retreat for Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the legendary Sikh ruler. Spanning across an expansive 84 acres, this significant heritage site houses a royal palace, magnificent gates, and many other elegant structures including the hammam, watchtowers, and pavilions [Malhotra \(2013\)](#). The garden's original design was based on the concept of Mughal

charbagh (a Persian style quadripartite garden layout), with centrally aligned water channels and fountains [Figure 2](#) making it an important example of the 19th century Sikh provincial garden-palace complex [Singh \(2021\)](#). Rambagh complex has been built using features and embellishments from a broad spectrum of historical periods and architectural styles, which underscore the maharaja's belief in the inclusivity of all traditions [Rai \(2021\)](#).

Figure 2

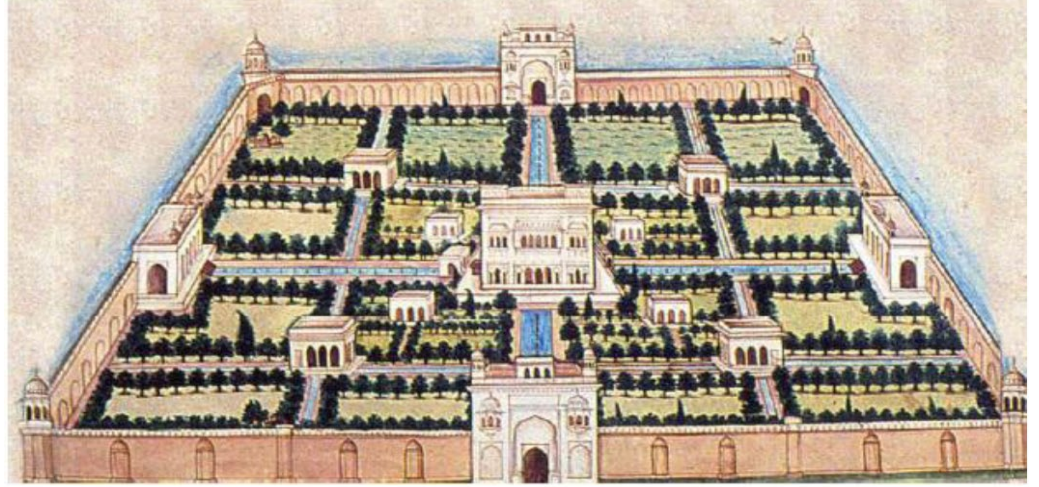


Figure 2 Original Layout of the Historic Rambagh Garden, an Adaptation of the Mughal Char Bagh Concept

Source [Rai \(2021\)](#)

Summer palace, located at the intersection of the east-west and north-south axis, is the most remarkable monument within the complex. It is a symmetrically planned double-storied structure with subterranean chambers for use in summers. The architecture of this palace is a confluence of Mughal, Rajput and Sikh styles featuring prominent elements such as multifoil cusped arches, pilasters, bracket-supported eaves and jharokhas topped by a ribbed semi-dome [Figure 3](#). Remnants of wall paintings in a single chamber on the terrace floor and several rooms housing the highly decorative wooden polychrome 'khatamband' ceilings reveal the original richness of surface embellishments in the palace building [Rai \(2021\)](#).

Figure 3



Figure 3 Elevations of Summer Palace that blends elements of Mughal, Rajput and Sikh Architecture
Source [Malhotra \(2013\)](#)

After the Anglo – Sikh war, Rambagh garden came into the possession of Britishers who transformed it to a great extent and therefore a distinct layer of colonial intervention can be witnessed in the complex [Malhotra \(2013\)](#). A circular road was integrated within the historic core and three clubs were established amidst the garden to cater to the European population residing in the city. In spite of the fact that Rambagh has lost much of its original identity, spatial character and glory due to the transformative layers of development, the garden is still one of its types amongst the royal gardens of the Sikh kingdom and holds immense cultural significance. It is a unique example of the confluence of Persian principles with the Sikh architectural traditions and is also valued for the botanical collections it possesses [Malhotra \(2013\)](#). Owing to its historical, cultural and architectural value, this garden is the only historic site in the city that has been declared as a ‘protected monument’ under Archaeological Survey of India [Singh \(2021\)](#).

4.3. SHALIMAR BAGH, KAPURTHALA

Figure 4

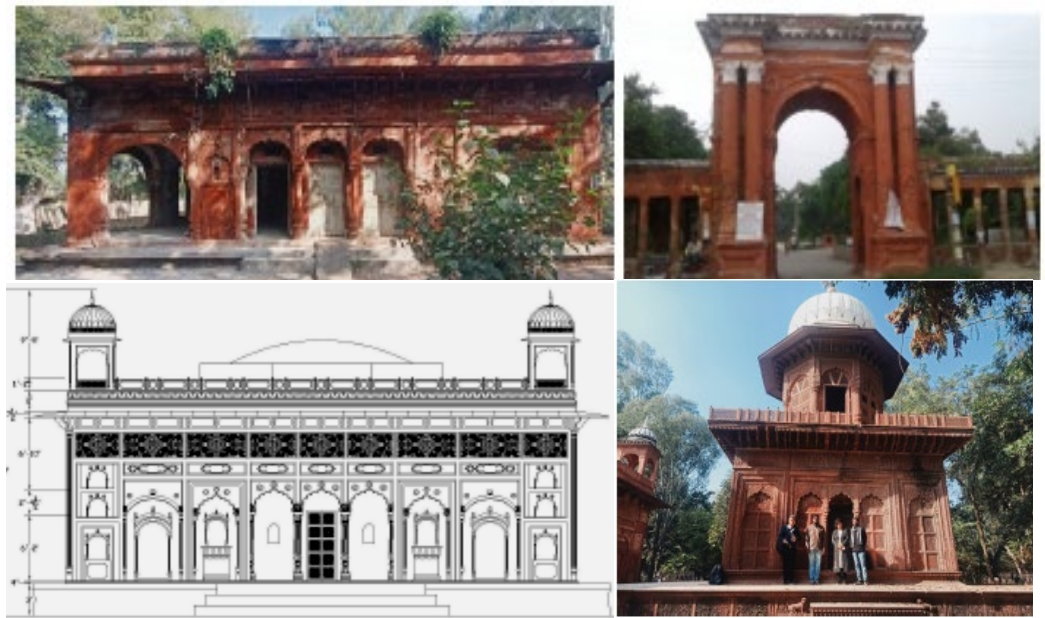


Figure 4 Magnificent Structures within the Premises of the Historic Shalimar Bagh

Source Lovely School of Architecture and Design, Lovely Professional University, Punjab

Shalimar Bagh is a significant historic garden in Kapurthala, which has been one of the pioneer princely states in the Punjab region. It was created as a pleasure garden during the reign of Maharaja Fateh Singh Ahluwalia and later Maharaja Jagatjit Singh made significant contributions to its development [Kanta \(2011\)](#). The garden houses magnificent structures built in red sandstone such as the Baradari, a pavilion and Shahi Samadhs (royal cenotaphs) which are basically chambers that house memorials of erstwhile rulers of the city [Figure 4](#). These edifices showcase a strong Mughal influence, incorporating several distinctive features such as multifoil cusped arches; eaves supported by ornate brackets; jali work characterized by intricate geometric patterns; decorative parapets, fluted domes and chhatris. The chambers display exquisite engraving in red sandstone, reminiscent of the fine craftsmanship seen in royal Mughal buildings. Three separate single chhatris had

been constructed towards the northern side of these buildings for the tombs of the Maharanis of the royal family [Kanta \(2011\)](#).

The entrance gateway is a prominent feature characterized by a large semi-circular arched opening flanked by ornamental pillars. It is further enhanced by a decorative entablature, reflecting the influence of European architectural style. Thus, the garden exemplifies the Indo-Saracenic architectural style that emerged during the 19th century in the Indian subcontinent under British colonial rule, representing a harmonious fusion of Indian, Islamic and European architectural elements.

The garden was designed with a set of water canals and ornate fountains while the interiors of the built structures were tastefully decorated with chandeliers, paintings and mirrors brought from Halb (Allipo in Syria) and China [Kanta \(2011\)](#). All kinds of rare fruit trees and flower plants were planted in the garden that provided picturesque settings to the royal structures. It was in this garden that the tradition of Basant Mela (or Spring Festival) was first started by Maharaja Jagatjit Singh where general public was encouraged to participate in range of events or activities like kite flying, acrobatics, wrestling and poetry. These festivities traditionally took place in an open court within the Baradari. Even to this day, the tradition of Basant Mela continues to thrive, with an annual celebration organized in the garden.

4.4. BARADARI GARDEN, PATIALA

Baradari Garden in Patiala was planned as a palace garden in 1876 under the patronage of Maharaja Rajinder Singh in 1868 [Singh \(2021\)](#). At the heart of this magnificent complex lies a rectangular Sikh-Mughal-style pavilion, known as the baradari, which not only lends its name to the garden but also serves as its focal point. The Baradari Palace or the Rajinder Kothi is a resplendent white, colonnaded building that gracefully envelops this open pavilion and is adorned with semi circular arches, reflecting the Colonial architectural influence [Figure 5](#). The Palace stands as an exquisite testament to architectural fusion, harmoniously blending elements of Rajput, Mughal, and Colonial styles. The garden complex encompasses a series of smaller garden spaces, meticulously designed in the English picturesque style, featuring numerous elements reminiscent of 19th-century public parks in England, such as a fern house, statues, sculpted fountains at strategic points and curved pathways [Singh \(2021\)](#).

Figure 5



Figure 5 Rajinder Kothi and Maharani Club Amidst the Baradari Gardens

Source Sketches by the Author (Mona Sood)

In addition to the palace, the garden is adorned with several other remarkable buildings constructed in the colonial architectural style. These include the Maharani club [Figure 5](#), a cricket stadium that stands as a testament to the Maharaja's love for sports and an elegant church, showcasing the cultural and religious diversity of the area. This extravagant garden is remarkable for its rich collection of rare shrubs and trees. Maharaja Rajindra Singh was a lover of nature and beauty; he collected the rare varieties of saplings, floral plants, shrubs and fruit trees from every corner of the country and cultivated them in this garden. The garden has served as a venue for many cultural events, exhibitions, and public gatherings, revealing its deep rooted historical and cultural significance.

4.5. BANASAR BAGH, SANGRUR

The rulers of the princely state of Jind, established a splendid garden known as 'Banasar' during 18th century in the capital city of Sangrur (IDIPT, 2019). The name is derived from the garden's design, which placed emphasis on the meticulous arrangement of trees ('Ban') and the construction of a tank ('Sar'). During the mid-19th century, Maharaja Raghbir Singh, enclosed the garden with a robust rampart and constructed several magnificent buildings within its boundaries [Naresh \(2013\)](#). Notable among these structures are the Diwan Khana, the Kothi, marble Baradari, and the entrance gate to the baradari embellished with small marble kiosks. The buildings embody a remarkable fusion of Mughal, Rajput, and Colonial architectural styles, incorporating a plethora of distinctive elements, showcasing the artistic sensibilities of the era.

The architectural design of Diwan Khana [Figure 6](#) skillfully combines Rajput and British Colonial influences, featuring multifoil and semi-circular arches, minarets ornate with floral decorations and topped by chhatris, decorative parapets and railings, cornices, and a small pavilion adorned with foliated arches and hemispherical domes; showcasing exquisite craftsmanship of the time. Additionally, small domical structures and peacock motifs further enhance the beauty and uniqueness of the building.

Figure 6

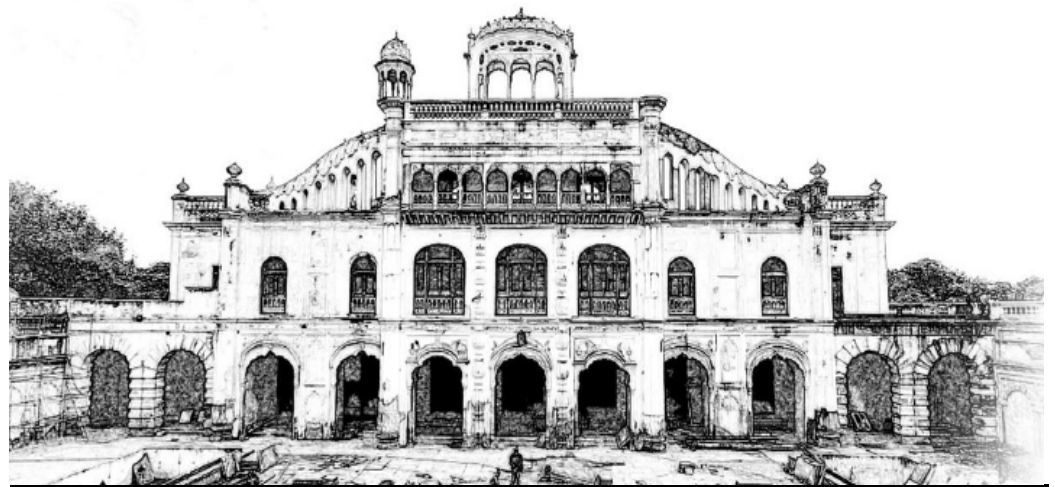
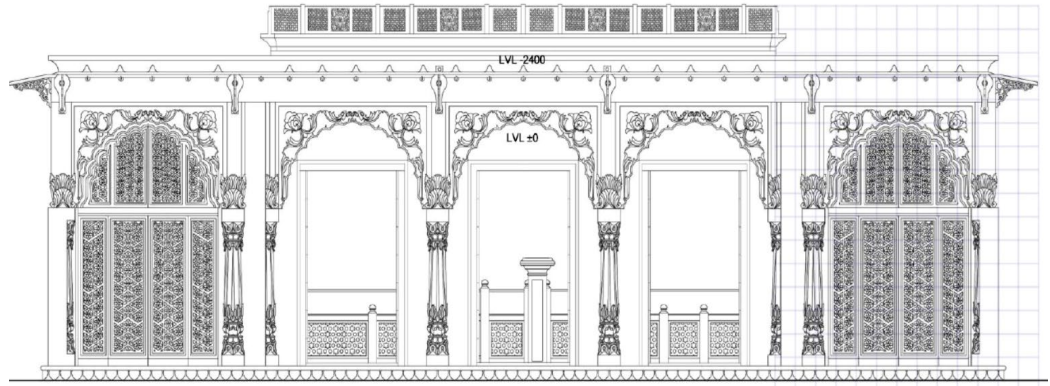


Figure 6 Front View of Diwan Khana

Source Documentation Study by Students of Architecture Department, Guru Nanak Dev University, Punjab

Figure 7**Figure 7** Marble Baradari

Source Documentation Study by Students of Architecture Department, Guru Nanak Dev University, Punjab

The marble baradari, a pavilion, [Figure 7](#) features a central hall surrounded by foliated arched openings, and it is further enhanced by the presence of a large marble water tank encircling it. The intricate jali work, decorative parapet panels, marble inlay work and the eaves supported by brackets, add a touch of architectural elegance and ornamental charm to the baradari. It boasts kiosks on all four sides, each surmounted by fluted domes.

The erstwhile rulers adorned the garden with rare trees and plant species in the garden and would often spend their summers here, enjoying the beauty and serenity of their surroundings. Hence, Banasar Bagh represents the rich cultural heritage of the Jind state and serves as a reminder of its architectural and horticultural achievements.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study of Royal Gardens of Punjab reveals their significant importance as repositories of cultural and natural heritage of the region. They offer a glimpse into the rich tapestry of Punjab's culture, traditions and beliefs, reflecting the cultural diversity of the region in various ways:

Garden Design: The gardens exhibit diverse design styles influenced by various historical periods and cultural traditions. While some resemble typical Mughal-style gardens with symmetrical layouts and water features, others have more informal designs inspired by English picturesque style.

Historical Significance: Punjab's royal gardens have played a significant role in the region's history. They are associated with famous rulers and offer valuable insights into the distinctive lifestyle, ideologies and aesthetic preferences of the creators. These connections add depth to the cultural narrative of the gardens.

Architectural Diversity: The gardens showcase a fusion of different art and architectural styles from Sikh and Rajput to Mughal and Colonial styles, reflecting the cultural amalgamation and historical transitions that Punjab has experienced over the centuries.

Plant Diversity: These gardens are adorned with a wide range of native and exotic plant species. The rich variety of plants reflects the horticultural knowledge

and preferences of various cultures, emphasizing the connection between biodiversity and cultural diversity.

Cultural Symbolism: Many features within these Royal gardens, such as fountains, specific plants, pavilions, sculptures paintings etc. are linked to distinct eras, embodying cultural meanings and significance.

Events and Festivities: Throughout history, these gardens have served as venues for royal gatherings, ceremonies, and festivities. Even today, they continue to continue this legacy by hosting cultural events, performances, and celebrations. These occasions serve as a platform for showcasing the region's rich and diverse cultural traditions, including music, dance, cuisine, and more, facilitating cross-cultural interactions and the exchange of ideas

The cultural diversity in Royal gardens offers educational opportunities for visitors to learn about Punjab's vibrant past and rich culture. They also attract tourists from around the world, facilitating them to immerse themselves in diverse cultural experiences; thereby promoting cultural exchange and economic benefits for the region.

6. CONCLUSION

Through a comprehensive analysis of the multifarious aspects of the Royal Gardens of Punjab, this study brings to light the value and significance of historic gardens within the context of cultural diversity. The research provides insights into the role of historic gardens in preserving, showcasing and promoting the region's history and culture. The paper highlights that historic gardens are not merely aesthetically pleasing landscapes, but cultural artefacts serving as testaments to their region's growth and development across different historical periods. These remnants of the past, with their diverse cultural expressions, architectural styles, botanical compositions and historical narratives give an account of the cultural values, aesthetic sensibilities, lifestyle and traditions of different societies that created them. The research also underscores the benefits of cultural diversity in historic gardens by shedding light on how it enriches their historical, cultural, aesthetic, educational and economical value. By fostering a deeper understanding and respect for different traditions and cultures, historic gardens contribute to the sustainable development of communities and societies, instilling a sense of cultural identity and continuity.

In this light, it becomes increasingly clear that historic gardens are not mere relics of the past the study but rather integral components of a nation's cultural heritage, serving as bridges between generations. This study concludes that valuing, preserving and valorizing these gardens is of paramount importance, not only for their continued relevance but also for promoting cultural diversity, fostering cultural sustainability and enriching our collective heritage.

The research contributes to the field of cultural studies by providing insights into the role of historic gardens in preserving and showcasing cultural diversity. It adds depth to the understanding of how cultural diversity is promoted and sustained through tangible aspects. It also synthesizes various aspects like history, culture, botany, and architecture, providing a holistic perspective. The study adds to existing literature by offering a focused examination of the Royal Gardens of Punjab, which have been less explored in academic literature.

The research offers practical applications in heritage conservation efforts, tourism promotion and cultural education programs. It can provide valuable information to decision-makers and practitioners regarding preservation and

utilization of these sites for cultural enrichment. The findings can inform local governments and tourism authorities about the potential of historic gardens as tourist attractions. Promoting these sites can boost tourism and stimulate the local economy.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Data collection and preliminary analysis for this research were conducted using documentation prepared by Postgraduate students of Lovely School of Architecture and Design, Lovely Professional University, Phagwara, Punjab and Undergraduate students of the Architecture Department, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, Punjab. We would like to express our gratitude to the students who contributed to the documentation, as their efforts have been instrumental in the completion of this research.

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