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Sacred Garden to Space Garden: Where Tradition, Healing and Innovation Meet

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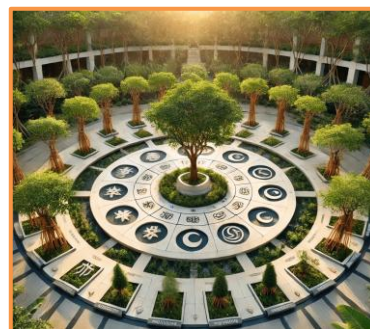
Throughout history and across cultures throughout time, gardens have always served more than just the purposes of creating beautiful locations with plants. Gardens have also provided many different types of spaces, such as for worship, healing, contemplation, and even survival. Even before the advent of modern scientific research into how green spaces benefit people, people had already recognized that plants could promote and enhance physical health and emotional wellbeing. The relationship we have with gardens continues to evolve. Where sacred spaces that were established based on historical traditions were previously the only green systems we had available, many of today's innovative green systems have been created with new forms of green cities in mind, including the eventual colonization of planets beyond the Earth. The story of gardens is clearly not limited to landscaping issues. It encompasses how humans have relied on plants as sources of meaning, medicine, a sense of balance, and ultimately, survival (Kumari and Lal, 2023; Moffatt *et al.*, 2019).

Sacred Gardens: Where Plants Meet Belief

Plants in earlier cultures were not only decorative but also included within the rituals, medicines, and belief systems they held. An example of this would be Nakshatra Garden (Gardens of the Moon) that are integrated into the Indian astrological system, where 27 lunar constellations (nakshatras) correspond to specific species of plant life. Thus, Indian belief maintains that one's existence on earth is connected to the cosmos via rhythm and cycle. Creating Nakshatra gardens will preserve the use of native plants while perpetuating significant cultural beliefs. The nine planets of the Navgraha Vatika (Garden of Nine Planets) provide another important example. The species of plants within Navgraha Vatika gardens are positioned according to their planetary affiliations resulting in a place where both spiritual and ecological beliefs are made manifest through improved air quality and biodiversity conservation (Shah and Patel, 2014; Kumari and Lal, 2023).

Healing Gardens: Where Plants Meet Well-Being

Since Romans built their gardens, those who have considered the relationship between plants and health/medicine are many. Many of these same plant species reside in the above-mentioned sacred gardens and are associated with traditional medicine systems and are used in healing or curing many ailments and enhancing one's immunity. Presently, there are modern healing gardens located within hospitals and wellness centres to create a healing atmosphere that creates a sense of decrease in stress, increase in positive mood, and promote



Nakshatra Van (Celestial Garden)
- Ranchi, Jharkhand

recover. Creating these gardens reinforces the notion that nature directly influences the health of humans, as medicine/healthcare has professed throughout history (Kumari and Lal, 2023).

Ecological Gardens: Where Plants Meet Sustainability

Historically, gardens have been used to support balanced ecosystems. They helped promote a healthy habitat for pollinators; helps retain moisture in the soil; helped lower heat levels; and helped create greater biodiversity. The Navgraha Vatika is an example of how a spiritual garden can also be ecologically beneficial. These types of gardens offer important lessons about environmentally sound design, especially considering today's climate change and urbanization.

Space Gardens: Where Plants Meet Innovation

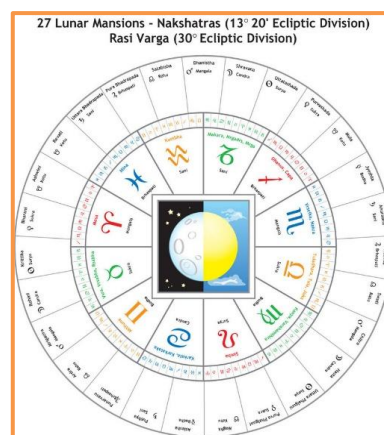
As we advance in space exploration, we are beginning to develop gardens on what will one day be called "space," or "astro," gardens. They will provide a source of long-term food and oxygen, a way to recycle carbon dioxide and purify water, as well as having a positive psychological impact on those who must spend extended periods in isolated environments. All of these new concepts clearly shows that humans will always depend upon plants, even when they exist in some of the most extreme environments in the universe (Moffatt *et al.*, 2019).

Gardens As Living Systems of Knowledge

Gardens are more than just collections of plants; they are also systems of knowledge about how to understand their relationship with the natural worlds. Sacred gardens keep the memory of culture alive. Healing gardens continue the tradition of using plants for medicinal purposes. Ecological gardens provide society with a way of understanding and maintaining ecological balance in its surroundings. Space gardens offer humanity the option to exist in the future. As gardens evolve with the human race's changing needs, we may think of them as dynamic and living, rather than static and unchanging. Throughout history, and even today, the core relationship between humans and plants has remained unchanged. In traditional sacred cultures, humankind expressed their relationship with plants through ritual and symbolism. In the traditional practice of medicine, that relationship was expressed through methods of healing and restoration. The evolution of that relationship to ecological practices has provided us with the tools necessary to establish sustainability and resilience in our communities. By applying this relationship to the field of space science, we help humanity design to survive in the future through the creation of technology. Regardless of how we choose to express the relationship between humans and plants, gardens have always existed as examples of the interdependence of these two species (Shah and Patel, 2014; Kumari and Lal, 2023; Moffatt *et al.*, 2019).

Plant as Carriers of Cultural Memory

A vital role of traditional gardens is the preservation of information that has not previously existed. Sacred landscapes such as Nakshatra Gardens and Navgraha Vatika have not only spiritual significance, but they also serve as living repositories of traditional knowledge about plants. Many of the species that were grown in these gardens were chosen by earlier societies because of their practical value as well as for use in religious rituals. A number of trees including Peepal (*Ficus religiosa*), Banyan (*Ficus benghalensis*), Bael (*Aegle marmelos*), Amla (*Phyllanthus emblica*) and Palash (*Buteamonosperma*), were very important to earlier cultures due to the multiple functions they performed; they provided shade and medicine, contributed to environmental stability, and had symbolic ties to spirituality. This multi-functionality adheres to one of the basic principles of traditional environmental design, which is that plants were rarely chosen



Vedic Astrology (Jyotish)

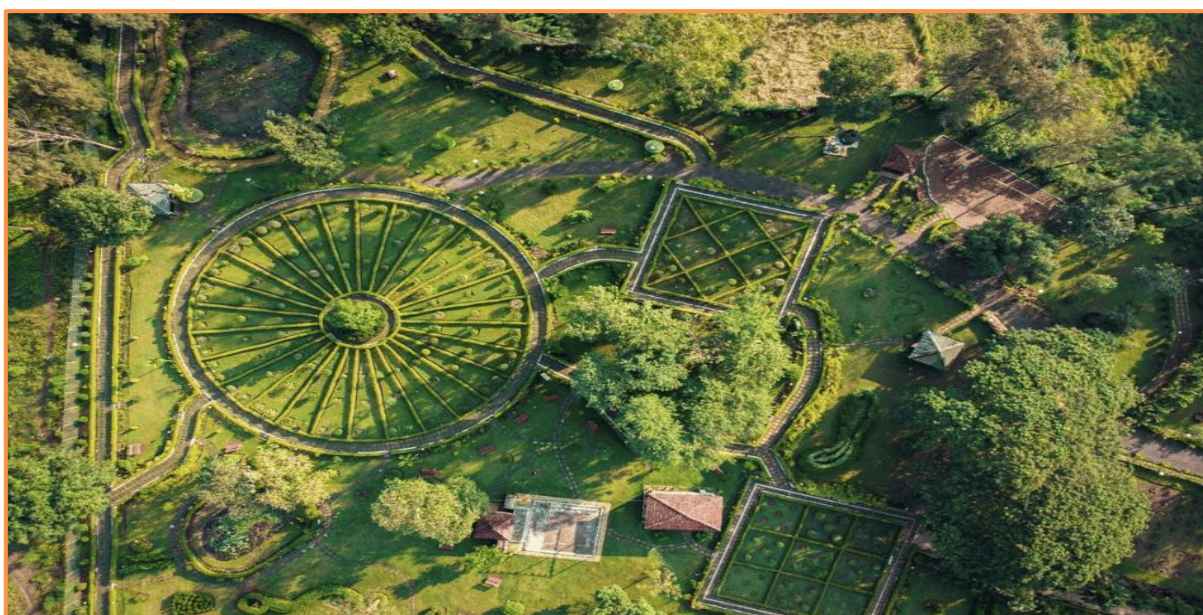
with a single function in mind. A sacred tree may have been used for both its medicinal properties and as a place for rituals and worship.

The Science of Old Wisdom

Currently, there is growing scientific evidence that supports traditional people's understanding of what makes them healthy: being around plants and having access to green spaces creates good health for humans. Researchers in the field of environmental psychology are learning that spending time in and interacting with gardens reduces stress, anxiety, improves focus, and aids recovery from emotional trauma. Being surrounded by a landscape of greenery has been linked to lower levels of cortisol, greater ability to concentrate, and greater mental resilience. This sheds some light on why gardens have been associated with peacefulness, contemplation, and healing through history. Traditional sacred sites tended to create a sense of calmness and healing without formally labelling it as such. With their shaded walkways, multiple layers of vegetation, cooler micro-climates, and extensive range of forms, sound, and smell that create comfort, they were pre-designed to induce calmness. Much of what we know about therapeutic garden design comes from traditions of creating these kinds of gardens. One of the most significant realisations from looking at these garden traditions is that they are both culturally accessible, and psychologically insightful. They created a place for us to achieve emotional balance, long before wellness design was assigned a science-based description for achieving these results.

Adding to the design of landscapes for quality of human life

There has been a resurgence in how we view the healing qualities of the outdoors through the creation of healing gardens for healing gardens at hospitals, rehabilitation centres and wellness facilities as places to provide the healing environment for recovery. These healing gardens create a space that encourages an environment of calmness, comfort to the senses, mobility and ease emotionally. Healing gardens incorporate features such as access to sunlight, shade for sitting, plants that have been used for medicinal purposes, different forms of water and soft plant patterns which achieve this goal for both patients and caregivers. In a general way, the healing garden design principles used today reflect many of the same principles used to design for sacred landscapes. Both favour stillness, comfort, shade, sensory engagement and the provide tranquillity. The difference between the two lies primarily in the description. What was understood through the symbolism of tradition is understood today through the disciplines of psychology, medicine and design. Historically, healing gardens are not new; they are contemporary representations of a historically long-held belief that nature provides not only beauty but also the ability to heal one's self.



Rashi / Nakshatra Gardens of Bharatvarsh Nature Farms - Nagpur, Maharashtra

From Biodiversity to Biodesign

One of the most crucial lessons from both sacred and ecological gardens is that plants cannot be treated as stand-alone design elements, rather, they are part of larger ecosystems. Many traditional gardens had features that helped sustain the natural cycle of life for various species-including birds, bees, and other insects, microorganisms in the ground, and seasonal changes. The way these gardens were designed was intended to promote ecological relationships, rather than just focusing on how pretty the garden looked. For instance, if trees were used in the garden, they not only provided shade, but also helped hold the soil in place, flowering plants were selected to support pollinators; and dense plantings were in the soil. These were not simply incidental by products of design; they were representative of the type of ecological intelligence that was built into traditional landscape designs. Modern design is placing an ever-increasing emphasis on systems thinking; as a result, many landscape architects, ecologists, and planners are looking towards bio design as a way of incorporating plants into the built environment as an integral component of the system that makes it function. In a bio design approach, plants provide temperature regulation, air filtration, carbon sequestration, water conservation, and biodiversity support as part of the system they are designed to be a part of. This is essentially gardens have always done in practice; however, it is important to note, for comparison purposes, that modern sustainability attempts to quantifiably measure what traditional landscapes did intuitively and culturally. Today's sacred gardens provide both an excellent source of cultural heritage and offer lessons on how to build a climate-resilient future through the design elements in these traditional sacred gardens (Kumari and Lal, 2023).

Conclusion: The Future Has Always Been Green

The design of the garden has changed greatly over time; the basic functions has changed little over time. Sacred Gardens helped establish communication between humans and God. Healing Gardens aided in healing (physical/mental) individuals. Ecological Gardens helped maintain ecological balance in the environment. Space Gardens are being established for future users on Mars and other planets. Throughout history, from religious practices to modern technology, gardens have continued to grow and evolve while remaining true to their original intention to create a link between humanity and the natural world, promote human health, and sustain human life.

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