

THE CROSS-CULTURAL INTERACTION BETWEEN THE ART OF GARDEN DESIGN OF OLD CITIES OF IRAN AND INDIA ALONG THE SILK ROAD

Mohammad Reza Pourjafar¹, Mohammadjavad Mahdavinejad¹, Mostafa Shamshirband^{1*}, Saeed Farmahin Farahani¹, Razieh Hoorshenas¹

¹ *Tarbiat Modares University, Iran*

* *Presenting author*

Key words: Silk Road, Garden design, India, Iran

1. Introduction

The silk roads which are defined as a network of land and sea paths built with commercial purposes in Asia and connected East Asia to the West and South Asia as well as the northern Africa and East Europe, resembling a chain of countries (Christian, 2000). This interactional network of roads has preserved the solidarity between the important areas of Africa, Europe, and Asia.

From its early prominence in the 2nd century B. C. until the fourteenth century, this historical network was the liveliest international area in the world. Although there is no more economic activity in this region nowadays, a reconsideration of the area can be regarded as a sort of revision and rehabilitation of the past cultures and civilizations. A closer look at these roads shows that it was through this path that nations used to introduce their identities and ideologies to each other. In fact, as a result of the trades of goods being done via this route, businessmen could get familiarized with the customs and culture of other regions, which sometimes in turn led into their immigration to foreign lands.

Among all, the art of garden designs and landscapes has always been favored by the residents living near the silk path. In those eras, being surrounded by green mass gardens, most of the Iranian cities were regarded as convenient havens for the residents and cities such as Isfahan, Shiraz, Qazvin, and centuries earlier, cities of Neyshabur, Balkh, Herat, Samarqand, and Bactria were famous for their beauty, liveliness, delicacy, and numerous marvelous gardens in those days.

In the same vein, the cities in eastern countries have been inspired by Iranian gardens. King Baber, one of the Mogul kings ruling over India, took the Iranian Garden design methods to India and made some gardens in Acura in northern India, from which, very few are still available. Later, Jahangir, one of his successors, built a number of other gardens in Kashmir, which are now regarded as the most well-known Mogul gardens in the East.

In his book entitled "the Story of Civilization" (The Age of Faith), Will Durant states: "Iranian gardens have been imitated by other nations, getting prevalent among both Arabs and Muslims as well as in India. They have also inspired the Europeans in Middle Ages"(Durant,1980).

The introduction of topics such as "the simulation of Garden design throughout the silk roads" can easily indicate the attention paid to the issue in line with the importance attached to the silk route. But the unanswered question is that of how and to what extent the silk roads can affect the design of gardens in different cities. In this regard, the present study aims to find the answer to the question that whether the silk roads have affected the similarity between the gardens located throughout these roads and how such possible effect could be interpreted.

In order to find the answer to the above questions, a logical argumentation was utilized to analyze the case. As far as the case studies are concerned, four gardens were selected to conduct the analyses. Two of the chosen gardens are located along the silk roads, one in Iran and the other in India. The other two samples are chosen in a way that are not influenced by the silk roads. The four selected gardens, which are far from the main route of the Silk Road, are similar in terms of their distance and climate.

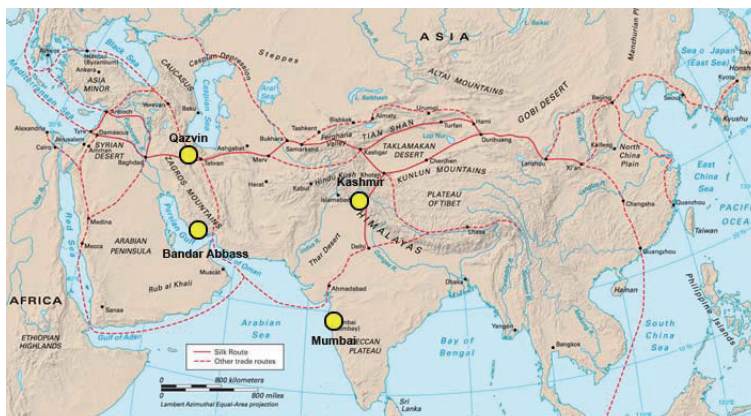


Fig. 1: The location of the cases studied along the Silk Route

The results of the present study revealed that the silk roads were not only used for the exchange of goods, but they were indeed a means of communicating cultures, beliefs, ideologies, languages, and religions among different nationalities. Such cultures form the old history of the East and this has caused similarities between the art and architecture of the neighboring countries along the silk roads(in this case, Iran and India), especially in the field of Garden design and landscaping.

2. Garden design in the Orient

In the Zen Buddhist school of thought, nature has been generally defined as including all the objects and phenomena in the world, thus all the creatures are considered as valuable. In the oriental culture, however, the term "nature" include different aspects such as: 1. To understand the beauty of the nature and the visual appreciation of that, 2. A collection of myths and concepts, 3. Nature as the basis for creation and thus something to be admired and adored, and 4. Nature as it is a place for human's life and existence.

An example of the interaction between eastern human and the environment is Tea ceremonies, dating back to sixteenth century. The tea ceremony is an old Zen Buddhist tradition which is also favored by people from other far eastern countries. The ceremony was held in a small room named Chatsio in one corner of a garden. The room was made of simple materials and its unique decoration and flower ornament indicated a deep interest in recording a spiritual experience through reviving the old cultural and religious traditions (Varley, 1989).

The art of garden designs and landscapes is dated back to very old days in the East. In fact, in countries such as China and Japan it is of a history of thousands of years. In her famous book named "the gardens of China"(Keswick, 2002), Maggie Keswick overviews the theoretical principles and historical background of gardens and landscapes in China and emphasizes that a Chinese garden is a combination of a tendency towards nature and spiritual peace.

Gardens in China are also defined in urban scale. Such constructions are available in many of the Chinese old cities. The most important features of Chinese landscaping and Garden

design include the realization of behavioral virtues, human society, and intact environment. Among all, one of the most famous gardens in China is the ancient gardens of Suzhou which were recorded in the World Heritage List in 1997 (Mahdavinejad, 2010).

Similarly, Japanese gardens are considered as an example of human's effort to access the ideal world and environmental imaginations. In the Japanese culture, a garden is regarded as the true reflection of people's thoughts and beliefs. Indeed, a Japanese garden is a metaphor of the universe and the Japanese ideologies in interpreting the creation system. Using stones in the art of building Japanese gardens and landscapes is an illustration of mystery and imagination in eastern schools of thoughts.

3. Iranian gardens

It may not be easy to prove the fact that Iranians were the first group of people who established gardens as a pre-designed and organized place that include natural elements being decorated in a unique manner, and has been repeated noticeably throughout the history. However, one cannot deny the special Iranian style in organizing the landscapes and its influence on some other communities. There are frequent documents showing that Iranian gardens have appeared in many different forms for many centuries. This stability throughout long periods of the history is an indicator of the deep solidarity and compatibility between this feature and other aspects of Iranian culture. It is noteworthy that even after huge revolutions such as the entrance of Islam to Iran and the acceptance of such great ideological change, the Iranian style of gardens is being continued by many in this region.

Form the ancient eras, the form and appearance of Iranian gardens has always been in harmony with the climate, environment and the amount of water available to them. The phenomenon of garden designs has an old history in Iran and the paintings of springs and forests on the pottery found in the city of Susa along with other similar patterns could indicate the importance of gardens in the lives of people who were used to deserts and sunshine in the ancient region of Iran. In fact, most of the Persian gardens had a sustainable design (Ansari, 1998).

In a comprehensive article about Iranian gardens, Victoria Sackville-West has referred to a pottery bowl detected by professor Hertzfeld in the city of Sumer and writes: here is a pottery bowl which is estimated to date back to 2000 years B. C., and there are pictures of intersecting streams of water on it showing four gardens, in each of which, there is also a tree and a bird (Ansari, 1998).

Cyrus the great has built a huge garden in Sard and he himself planted some trees in his book entitled as " Oeconomicus ", Xenophon has stated that Cyrus the great had personally took Alexander to see his garden in sard and that Alexander admired the beauty of the trees, the order with which the trees were planted, the direct rows and accurate angles along with the multiple pleasant scents smelled while they were strolling along the garden.

The Achaemenidan gardens were of accurate rectangular shapes with intersecting streets and trees. The stone carvings and pictures remained from the Achaemenidan era along with the upright standing trees, indicate the significance of gardens among Iranians as well as the geometric order in the Iranian types of gardens.

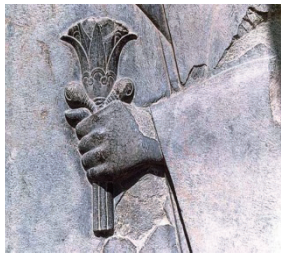


Fig. 2: The pattern on the walls of Persepolis, based on the Achaemenid king's desire for the nature (www.googleearth.com)



Fig. 3: The pattern of the walls of Persepolis, based on the respect for the nature (www.googleearth.com)

During the Islamic period, the palaces were surrounded by masses of trees which were considered as parts of the palace architecturally, in a way that the gardens encompassed all the main facades of the building symmetrically. The entire area of the palace was divided into rectangular sections through which passed small water streams. These gardens were built following the ancient Iranian styles. The major geometric characteristics of Iranian gardens include: 1. A wide view, 2. Water axes, 3. A rectangular shape, 4. Symmetry, and 5. Centrality (Pourjafar, 2010).

The Iranian garden of Saadat in Qazvin, located along the silk roads was selected for the purpose of the present study. This garden was built by Shah Tahmasp, the Safavid king of Persia, after selecting the city of Qazvin as his capital. This garden is a collection of 23 private gardens and flowerbeds. There are four gardens and a plateau in the main part of the area, where the building, or the garden pavilion, is located. The other case study is the city park, in Bandar Abbas, which is placed in the center of this harbor.



Fig. 4: The Saadat garden of Qazvin



Fig. 5: The Saadat garden in Qazvin, and its central palace.

4. Indian gardens

In the early days of Gurkanies kingdom in India, gardens were regarded as one of the important urban elements in cities. The first person who attempted to build Gurkany gardens was "Babur" who was trying to establish order in India and create beauty. His successors (Taymor and Changiz) concurred many regions including the middle Asia, northern India, Iran, Syria, and Asia Minor and could expand their empire with Samarqand and later Heart as their capitals. In a century, Taymor had gathered many of the artists and craftsmen from all around Asia and as a result, the Islamic art and civilization reached to its stable form under the influence of Arabs, Iranians, people of middle Asia and even the Chinese people.

The tradition of garden designs before the Taymor, which was prevalent from the Atlantic beaches to Bengal bay, is divided into two main branches, one going to south and form the Iranian gardens and the other to east, leading to the emergence of Gurkany gardens.

The main features of such gardens are the water canals, four gardens, and the irrigation systems which are connected to the all the four gardens and form an organized geometric network with unlimited capability of expansion. In an Indian garden, water plays a key role,

even more important than that of the soil. The possibility of water movements modifies and balances the spatial relationships between different parts of the garden. a summer palace is located in the back of the gardens, and usually the owner is also buried there. Such gardens mostly expanded in Agra, Delhi, Lahore, Kashmir, etc (Pourjafar, 2005).

The other selected garden is the Kashmir Shalimar Park, which was located along the silk roads near Srinagar. The primary plan of the garden was designed in 1638 by Alimoradkhan, an Iranian nobleman who sought refuge in Gurkanies territory. The plan included four gardens with two terraces that surrounded a central water stream. The water was supplied by a spring and the palace was also located in the center of the garden.

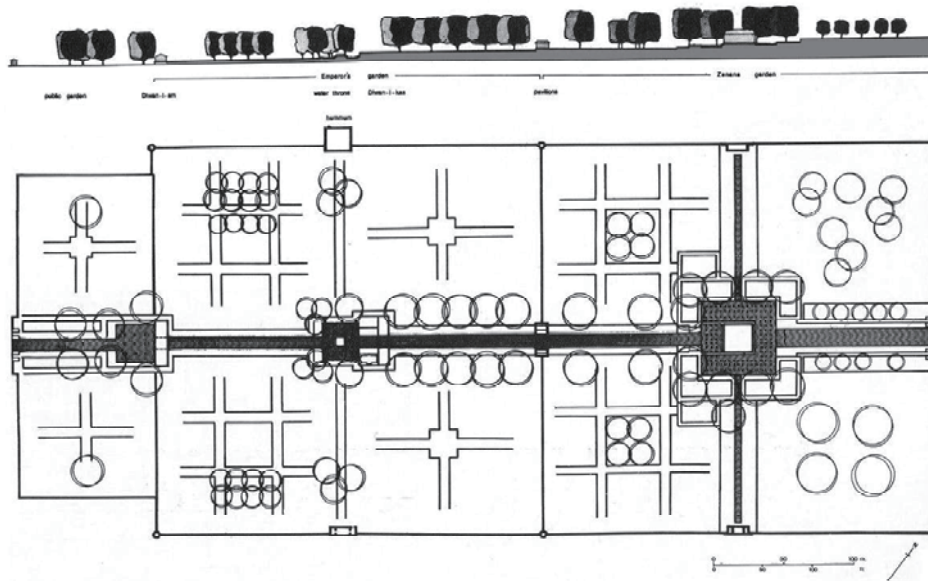


Fig.6: Plan and section from Shalimar Garden, Kashmir

The fourth case study is related to the Mehla Nehru Park in Mumbai. This park is located on top of the Malabar hill, covering an area of 4000 square meters and is named after the wife of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of independent India.

5. Similarities and differences

Given the investigations carried out for the present study, in this section, an analysis of the selected cases is presented based on the main characteristics of gardens, as illustrated below graphically.

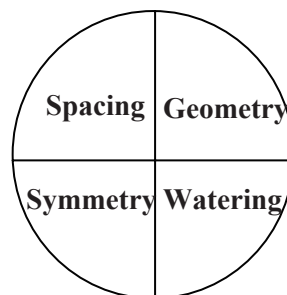


Table.1: Goal achievement chart













	The Saadat garden in Qazvin	The City park in Bandar Abbas	The Shalimar Garden in Kashmir	Mehla Nehru park in Mumbai
The Saadat garden in Qazvin				
The City park in Bandar Abbas				
The Shalimar Garden in Kashmir				
Mehla Nehru park in Mumbai				

Table.2: an overview of the garden features available in the four case studies in comparison to one another

A comparison of the findings shows that both the Saadat garden in Qazvin and Shalimar in Kashmir possess all the main four characteristics of gardens and have the same geometry, symmetry, spacing and irrigation system. However, from all those features, the city park of Bandar Abbas only enjoys a simple spacing and there is no geometric shape or symmetry in this case. Even the watering system is not similar to that of Saadat and Shalimar gardens, which were located along the silk roads. In a similar vein, there is no sign of geometry or symmetry in the Mehla Nehru park of Mumbai.

6. Conclusion

At the end, one may come up with the conclusion that these roads are in fact, a means of exchanging cultures, thoughts, ideologies, and even dialects among various nations. Such cultural elements are indeed the precious background of the East and propagating their ideologies and beliefs, people of these cultures have been in interaction with other civilizations and have tried to establish their identities in foreign areas as well through this route. Rather frequently, the trades of goods done along the roads have caused the businessmen to get acquainted with the traditions and customs of other cultures and occasionally, this led them to leave their homelands and immigrate to other regions.

According to the analyses carried out in the present study, it was found that there are more similarities between the two gardens of Saadat in Qazvin and Shalimar in Kashmir, due to their being located along the silk roads. Given the other two gardens. i.e., those of Park-e-Shahr in BabdarAbbas and Mahla Nehru in Mumbai, however, such similarities are less evident. Therefore, the underlying reason behind such similarities is hypothesized to be the existence of the silk roads and the exchange of arts and architecture between Iran and India by means of this route.

References

- [1] Ansari, Mojtaba, PhD Thesis: The Iranian garden values (Safavid - Isfahan), Faculty of Art and Architecture, Tehran University, 1998.
- [2] Christian, David. Silk Roads or Steppe Roads? The Silk Road in World History. Journal of World History 11, no.1, pp. 1-26, 2000.
- [3] Durant, Will, The Age of Faith, Publish by Simon & Schuster, pp.16-23, December 1980.
- [4] Keswick, Maggie, Chinese Garden, publish by Frances Lincoln; 2nd edition, march 2002.
- [5] Mahdavinejad, Mohammadjavad, The World Architectural, publish by nashr jahat, pp.29-56.2010.
- [6] Pourjafar, M.r, Pourjafar, Ali, Tajmahal, The Reflection of Iranian Islamic Art and Architecture in Indian Subcontinent, International Symposium Tajmahal, 2010.
- [7] Pourjafar, M.r, Taghvae, Aliakbar, , 'Indo Iranian Cultural Paralel Past, Persent, Future', Cultural Paralel, Ahmadabad, India, 2005.
- [8] Varley, Paul, Kumakura, Tea in japan: Essays on the History of Chanoyu. University of hawaiiPress. pp. 4. 1989.