

PARADISE IN CONFLICT: REEXAMINING AND SAFEGUARDING THE GENIUS OF THE MUGHAL GARDENS OF KASHMIR

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1 ABSTRACT

The history of garden making in Kashmir goes back to ancient times with garden making closely linked to the natural beauty and spirit of the place. During the Mughal period in Kashmir these traditions reached unprecedented heights. Through the implementation of the Islamic chahar bagh and Paradise Garden concepts onto the topography of Kashmir hundreds of Mughal gardens were created.

Since the decline of the Mughal Empire many of these gardens suffered neglect and only a small number of the gardens still exist today, with the traditional use and significance of these sites and their wider settings being undermined. The paper's focus is on the gardens in Indian-administered Kashmir. To date this heritage remains under-examined and at risk, particularly given the context of the ongoing conflict in Kashmir, with Nishat Bagh and Shalimar Bagh included in the 2008 World Monument Fund List of 100 Most Endangered Sites.

The paper presents evidence of historic and new threats to this irreplaceable heritage due to inappropriate development and change and a limited understanding of the history and significance of the sites. In the meantime the paper raises awareness of the importance of this heritage and illustrates recent preservation initiatives to address these issues, including the ongoing preparation of a UNESCO World Heritage nomination dossier. In doing so, the paper hopes to garner support from the international landscape architecture and preservation communities in investigating this heritage and safeguarding the genius of the Mughal gardens of Kashmir.

1.1 Keywords

Mughal gardens, Kashmir, preservation, landscape planning, UNESCO World Heritage