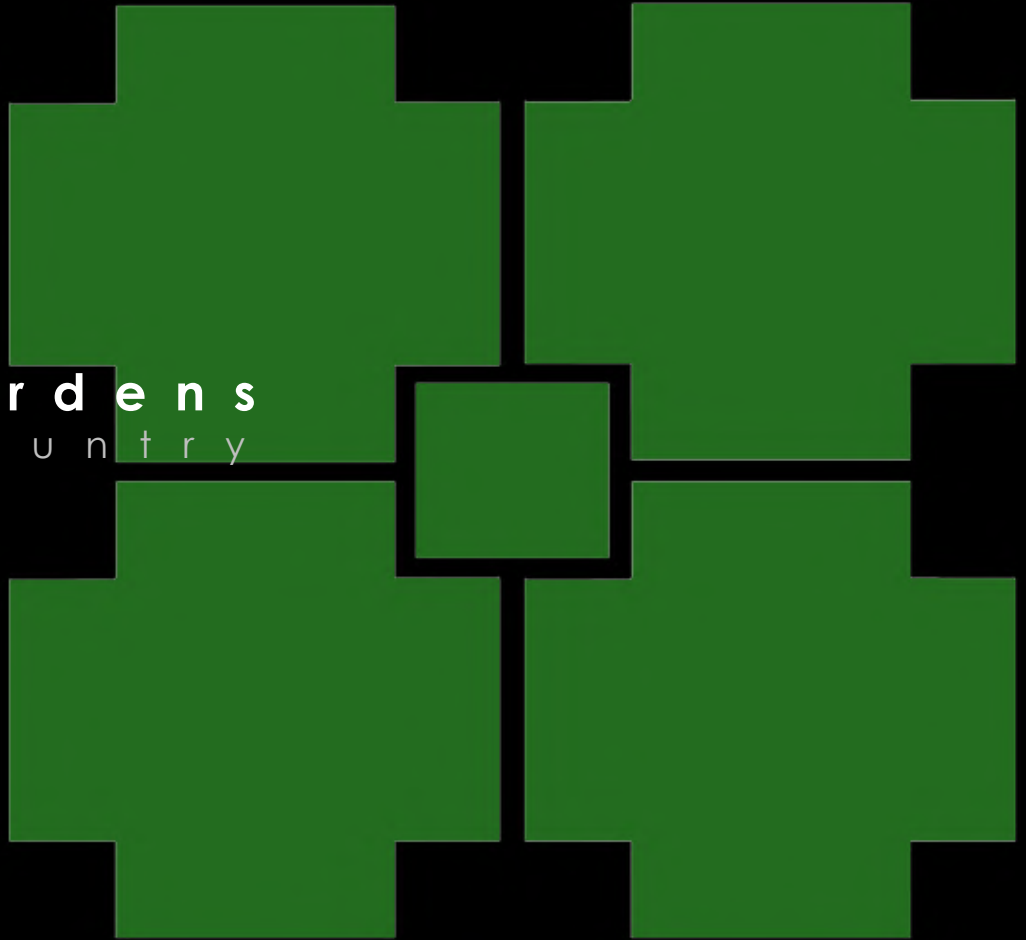
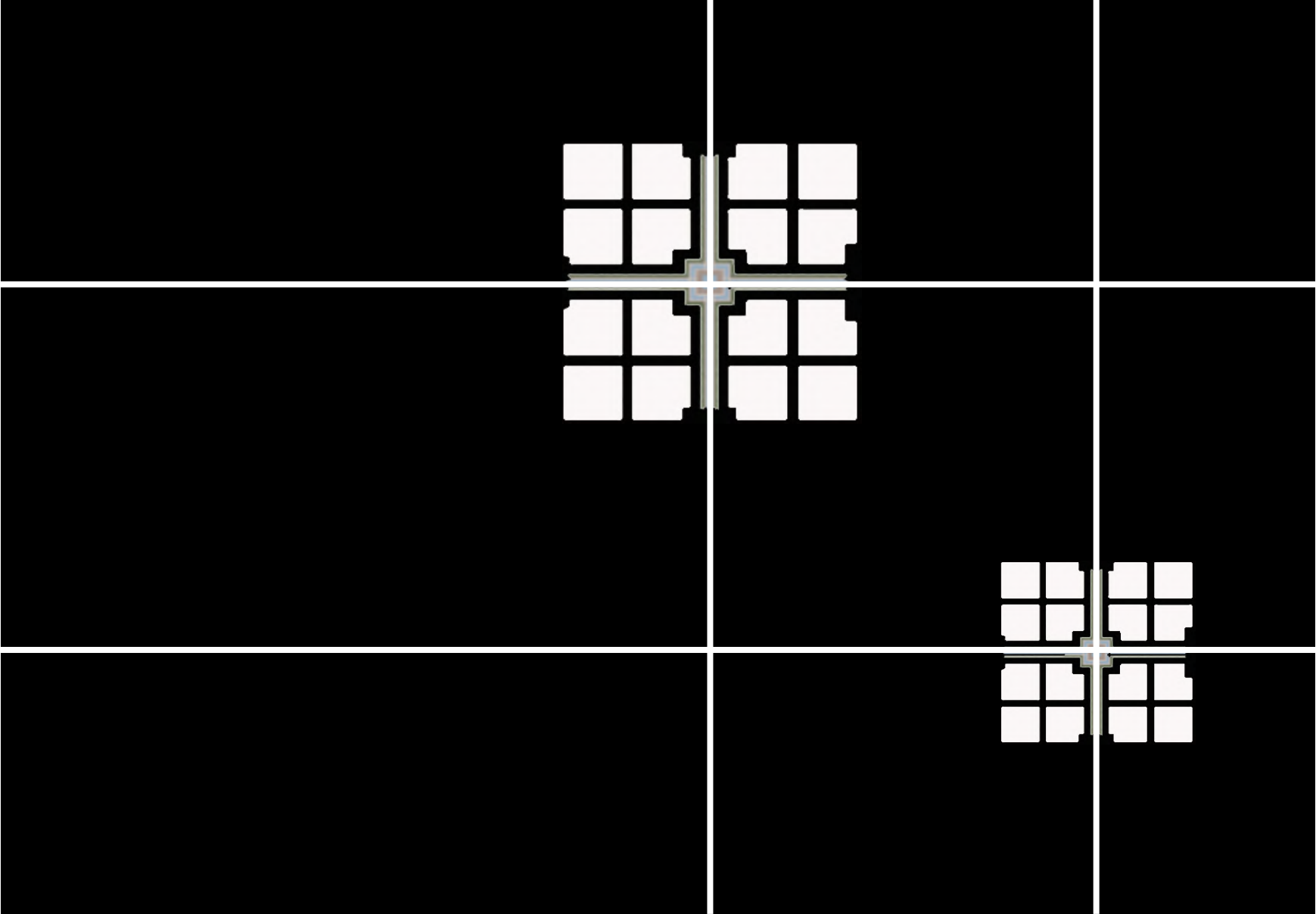


A Million Gardens
From an Old Country



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A Million Gardens

Gardens from an Old Country

Gardens and Landscapes create opportunities to poetically connect with the world, regardless of their size or location. Many of us might have either seen or experienced such spaces – we decided to combine this passion and curiosity and create a catalogue to discover a new universe right where we are.

The study traces the many ideas of Indian landscape embedded in historical literature, discerned from the physical constructs that still exist.

It takes the liberty to delve into many definitions of the idea of “gardens” from nomadic enclosures, sacred gardens, and gardens of the Islamic and Colonial era, to find certain common narratives that help identify the spirit of the gardens in India.

The work was assisted through a large nationwide collaborative called “A Million gardens” that tries for the first time to map such spaces in the country.

A MILLION GARDENS

LARGEST DOCUMENTATION OF GARDENS IN THE SUBCONTINENT TO EXAMINE THE IDEA OF 'GARDENS' IN THEIR MANY MANIFESTATIONS OF MEANING AND CONTEXT. THE WORD 'GARDEN' IN ITS ETYMOLOGY CONVEYS BOTH INSTINCT AND WILL; OF MARKING OUT A DOMAIN AND THE ACT OF 'MAKING' IT ALSO IMPLIES THIS 'MARKING' AND 'MAKING' OF A PLACE AS OCCURRING WITHIN A LARGER TERRITORY. WHILE THIS MAY TEMPT US TO SEE GARDENS ONLY AS A RUDIMENTARY ACT OF SEPARATING AND CREATING A PLACE APART FROM THE WILDERNESS, THEIR ORGANIZATION AND ARRANGEMENT PLAYS THE ROLE OF NEGOTIATION AND MEDIATION BETWEEN A PLACE AND ITS LARGER MILIEU.



LEAF invites contributors for this collaborative investigation
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image: Banke Biharji ka Bagicha, Vrindavan; Vinay Kushwah



*We are an old country,
a country that came to be
only over 60 years back. While
our roots may be old, our
existence is not. It is a paradox,
one that is expressed in
numerous ways, multiple times,
such that this dichotomy has
become eternal.
India, that which we trace our
allegiance to, has an umbilical
connection with nature; its
reverence and conservation.*



Over 3000 years ago, written in the Vedas, (the Indian Holy Scriptures, assembled from the great oral traditions of the past) rests a truth that is believed to have been recorded, not through learning, or experience, but from divine revealed wisdom whose depths cannot be imagined any other way.

So meticulous and comprehensive are they in scientific and technical knowledge, that till this day, they leave the mind astounded by their grasp of the world .

Seven rishis (saints), or sapta (seven) are represented by the constellation known as the Great Bear, they are known to be the original recorders of these Vedas.

The oldest, the Rig Veda, addresses the elements of nature personified as Gods, and have wisdom to let humanity deal with and understand nature. These Vedas from the alchemist sands of the Hindu construct, till this day.

Many thousand years later, and around the turn of the century, the great poet and writer, Kalidas, wrote in his poem, Meghadūta, The Cloud Messenger, a wondrous verse of enchanting landscapes where words are cloaked with fragrance of wild grass, and seem to glide over snowcapped mountains, as a cloud messenger traverses the land to deliver the message to an estranged wife in the mythical city of Alka in the mountains.

Chanakya or Kautilya, in his seminal work Arthashastra written in 5th cen. BC, which is a precursor to modern economic theories, refers to early gardens and groves, amplifying what now is known about these times; a extremely systematic and detailed classification of gardens, forests and trees.

In the Hindu context, every divine action seems to take place in lush gardens called vaticas or beautiful forests. The ecstatic poetry and ancient literature are evidence to this.

And then of course there is the more recent and glorious history of the Mughal gardens, of the hills and the plains and much later of those of the English, whether nostalgic in memory of gardens back home, or done to stamp the idea of civilization, of course greatly supported by the excellent work done in botanical sciences and recording landscapes and plant material.

The survey of this past made some things clear; that firstly India had and has an intrinsic and religious connection with the idea of nature, one that suffuses its soul and yet, one that does not find expression in daily life in many ways- in fact, the converse seemed and seems true; secondly it is a land that was colonized often and new forms of colonizing continues today, and the rulers or new inhabitants seem to meld in the essential nature of what was and is India and derive a new identity. And this fact has found expression in the landscapes too and finally it is a vast land with many cultural and ecological variations, all very different from each other, and still somehow held together by a tenuous idea of oneness, but this diversity at the same time, allows any single landscape idea to be expressed in many interesting and locally relevant ways.

What is a garden?

The word **'garden'** in its etymology conveys both instinct and will; of marking out a domain and the act of 'making'. It also implies this 'marking' and 'making' of a place as occurring within a larger territory. While this may tempt us to see gardens only as a rudimentary act of separating and creating a place apart from the wilderness, their organization and arrangement plays the role of negotiation and mediation between a place and its larger milieu.

Gardens can thus, be seen as both, a fundamental act as well as a highly refined undertaking of establishing a dialogue between human beings and their surroundings. The manifestation of this dialogue can also question, push and at times even dissolve the boundaries of its primary act of establishing territory.

The **discourse of garden** making can take innumerable directions subject to the specific physical and cultural framework in which it is working. It can be a manifestation and reflection of needs, cultural beliefs, practice and aspirations.

John Dixon Hunt: "The garden has always been a complex and central human activity, arguably a matrix of man's and woman's ambitions, instincts and desires. The histories of it must therefore interrogate and narrate a cluster of concerns: how men and women represent themselves and their place in the world through the garden, and how gardens shape role playing; how the garden becomes a special site of beliefs, myths, fictions, illusions, and the dialogue it maintains between those and the palpable physical world of its phenomena; the design and use of exterior space for inhabitation, an art of milieu or acumen or how that changes from small to regional scale".

However, **the creation and expression of gardens** is not just a result of their location in a geographical territory, they are essentially human constructs – in concept and execution. Whether intuitive or consciously designed, the multi hued nuances of a garden come from the human mind.

So we said “a garden was a space that had a circumscribed territory, its limits notional or clearly marked, but at all times discernible and finite; the very marking of this territory could happen by an act of active making or even claiming one already marked and within this would exist a certain prescribed or evolved ritual that allowed the many ideas of nature to be experienced in an articulated manner”

Communion with elements and ideas of **nature**

No planting in conventional sense

No planting at all in some

Mere **architectural subset**

Communion with elements and ideas of **nature**

The idea of **open space**

Mere **architectural subset**

No planting in conventional sense

Communion with elements and ideas of **nature**

Baanke Bihari ji ka Bagicha,Vrindavan.		The Rose Garden, Delhi		Kalubai Devrai, Sacred groves.	
Ghat ki Guni, Jaipur.	Neelkanth Mahadev temple, Mandu.		Osho firth garden, Pune.		Temple tanks at South India.
Ghats at Maheshwar, Benares.		Jal Mahal, Jaipur.	Amber palace gardens, Jaipur.		Galtaji temple, Jaipur.
Helical step well, Pavagadh, Gujarat.			Nidhivan, Vrindavan.		Ram bagh, Agra.
Chand baori, Abhaneri stepwell near Bharatpur.			Kaliadeh Palace, Ujjain.		Garden in Midnapore.
Theosophical Society, Chennai.		Jahaz Mahal, Mandu.	Cubbon Park, Bangalore	Slopes of the Hanging Garden, Mumbai.	
Rabindra sarobar , Kolkata.		Courtyard of the David Sassoon Library, Mumbai.			Adalaj stepwell, Ahmedabad.
Pune War cemetery, Pune.	The Hauz-i- Shamsi, Mehraulli, Delhi.		Kala Dungar, Kutch.	Jamali Kamali, Qutub, Delhi.	
Humayun's Garden, Delhi.		Coronation park in Civil Lines, Delhi.		Rock garden -Sector-14, Chandigarh.	
Nishat Bagh, Srinagar.		Barda hills, Kileshwar temple, Gujarat.		Lonar crater.	Tagore Hill, Ranchi.
South Park street cemetery, Kolkata.		Garden for Narasimhaswamy, Vizag.		The banyan trees Kabir wad, Bharuch.	
Popo Pingel and Mona Doctor's garden, Auroville.			Lohia park, Lucknow.	Pateshwar mandir, Satara.	Lodi Gardens, Delhi.
Gaumukhs Narmada kund and Sone kund at Amarkantak.			Banyan tree at the entrance of Botanical garden, Kolkata.		
Mughal gardens, Delhi/President's garden.			Sikander, Lucknow.	Banganga tank, Mumbai.	The Residency, Lucknow.
Banarsi bagh, Lucknow.		Independence garden, Sanawar.		Brindavan Gardens, Mysore.	Kesaria Baug, Jaipur.









Banke Biharjii ka Bageecha
The Garden of Banke Bihari

India has millions of such gardens; and the more we discover the more meanings will we understand. And the better will we navigate our times.

A well laid out garden then is beautiful; but one that allows many meanings to be read and discussed even more so.



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