



Scent in the Islamic Garden:: A Study of Literary Sources in Persian and Urdu

Ali Akbar Husain

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Scent in the Islamic Garden is an interdisciplinary study that bridges across medicine, horticulture, and poetry in Islamic India. It was first published in 2000 and this new edition is much improved with better-quality illustrations and an updated and partially revised text that makes for greater coherence. The introduction by William Dalrymple expresses the perceptions of a writer who is familiar with the region and its history. It also indicates how the work engages the reader.

Scent in the Islamic Garden seeks to find relations between cultural values and landscape expression. It does so through particular reference to the significance of fragrance in Islam as understood in medicinal and horticultural texts, and through essential focus on Hyderabad, one of the last bastions of Islamic culture in the Indian subcontinent. The nature-culture question is examined in garden poetry, a genre associated with the Arabo-Persian and Urdu literary tradition and, at Hyderabad, the Deccani Urdu tradition.

The study makes clear that Deccani gardens, as gleaned through literary texts, are Persian in inspiration but rooted in India and permeated with the rasas of Indian forests. The idea that scents, by enhancing sensory perception, can be a cue for certain kinds of behaviour in garden settings is also strongly suggested.

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