

THE FRAGRANT GARDEN
Curated by Amra Ali

Dr. Ali Akbar Hussain

Amaan Khalid Aslam

Amber Sami with

Masooma Syed & Hamna Khalid

Arshad Faruqui

Bunto Kazmi

Hamra Abbas

Meher Afroz

Naveed Sadiq

Noorjehan Bilgrami

Sumaiya Durrani

& Jalaluddin Ahmed

Usman Saeed

Ustad Rafaqat Ali

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the exhibition The Fragrant Garden.

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The curatorial interest, a work in progress,
has been in the fragrant garden in Deccani court
poetry and it's interface with the artists' vision.

The curator is indebted to the research by
Dr. Ali Akbar Husain in his book,
Scent in the Islamic Garden.
(Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2000)



GARDEN DESCRIPTIONS

from Qissa-e Benazir, Sana 'ati Bigapuri

*When one division of the night advanced
I sighted on top of a mount by chance*

*The vision of trees, resplendent and bright,
Each radiant leaf like a candle enkindled*

*Each tree as comely as peacock appeared
Each leaf like a chandelier candle appeared*

*Above the emerald tree with beauty exquisite
Hung fireflies, the jewels of evening lamps*

*So amazing this spectacle of light did appear
I proceeded towards it to view it from near*

*When I had progressed to the tree (at the fount)
Great wonder filled me, bewildered I stood....*

*There seemed present there many trees fruit-laden
More fruit than foliage each tree bore*

*And yet the leaves in great plenty did seem
Large leaves of a kind I had never seen*

*The breeze at this time a fragrance diffused
The musk of Cathay in the air was infused*

*I beheld close by many trees marvellous
With fragrance far sweeter than ambergris*

*From the leaves seemed distilled in great excess
The droplets of attar like rose essence*

*That fragrance I perceived not in musk, ambergris
In sandalwood, saffron, in parmal even*

*The fragrance appealed to my heart so much
I stayed until morn at the very location*



READING THE FRAGRANT GARDEN

By Amra Ali

The curatorial invites the viewer to meander through the gallery, into a garden or gardens as a space of contemplation, a means to seek beauty in the fragrance and imagery as evoked in the *masnavis* and Deccani court poetry. This exhibition is the interface of garden descriptions in texts from the sixteenth and seventeenth century and artistic narratives already situated within the concept and imagery of the *baagh*. The critic/curator delves into the scholarly and comprehensive research by Dr Ali Akbar Husain, in his book, *Scent in the Islamic Garden* (Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2000). The initiative brings the imagination of the artist: the *naqqash* (master artisan), the present day miniaturist, the architect, the textile and jewelry designer, the painter, the photographer, the writer and critic in a holistic conversation. These sensibilities are gathered to celebrate each narrative as a whole and in this interface with the arrival of *bahaar* or spring in Karachi. The manifold *Garden* at Koel Gallery weaves the imagery in the verse and the physical manifestation of it, in moments that would inspire a passionate engagement; a space intoxicated with fragrance as if 'to brighten the eye, each (flower) was a cup colourful, to perfume the heart, each was a box of permal fragrance'. (Ali Nama, Mulla Nusrati)

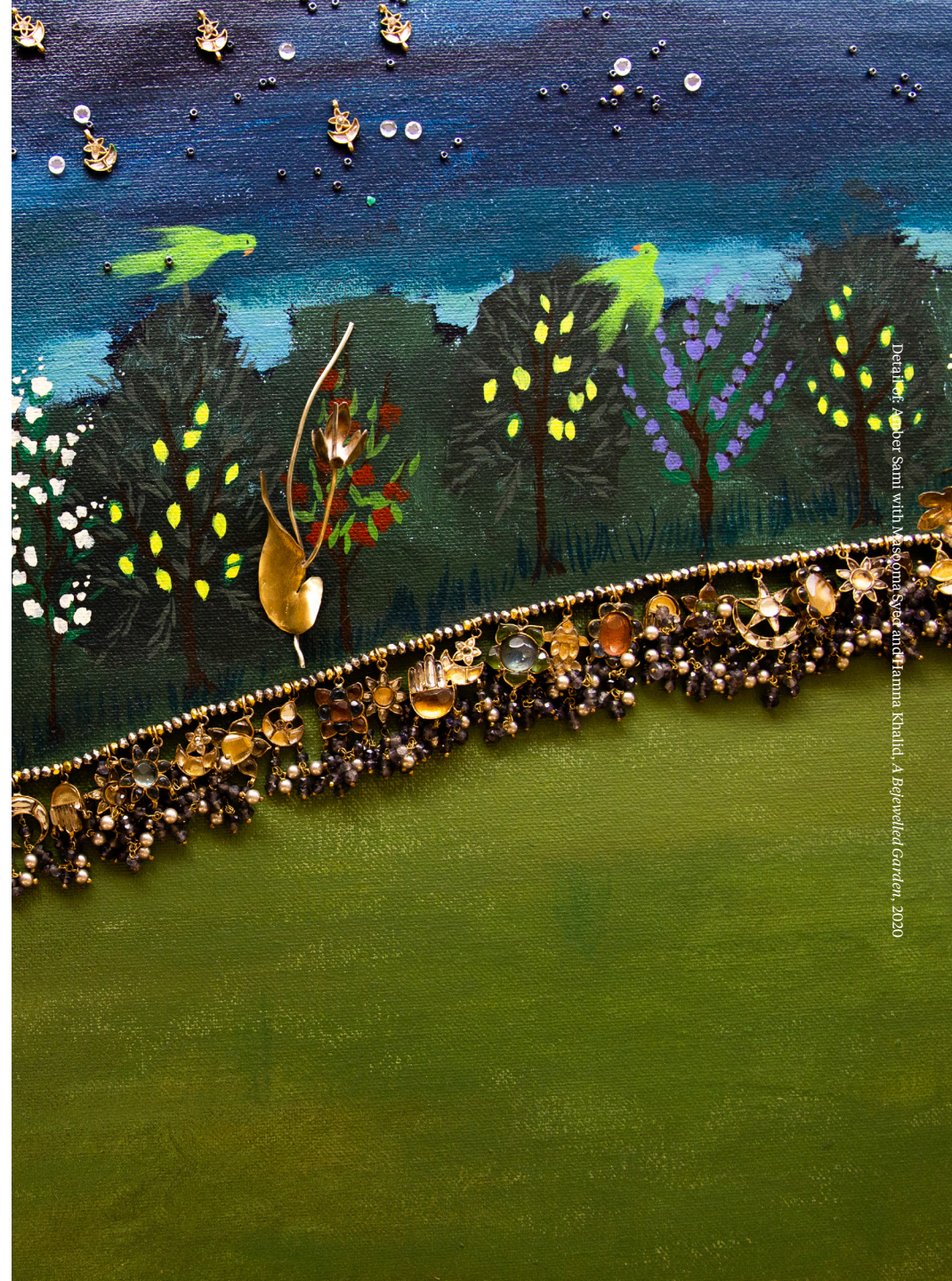
The invited artists were Bunto Kazmi, Meher Afroz, Noorjehan Bilgrami, Sumaya Durrani, Ustad Rafaqat Ali, Amber Sami, Naveed Sadiq, Arshad Faruqi, Amaan Khalid and Jalaluddin Ahmed. In a tier within the curatorial, Amber Sami envisioned 'A Bejewelled Garden' by curating Masooma Syed and Hamna Khalid. Sumaya Durrani collaborated with Jalaluddin Ahmed on sound and performative work, apart from showing works from a larger body that is part of her Doctorale research (2012-present) at the University of New South Wales, Sydney. Noorjehan Bilgrami invited *naqqash* Rafaqat Ali, drawing from her extensive engagement with the traditional work of craftspeople. The *ustad* was commissioned to paint referencing the floral imagery at the Wazir Khan mosque.

The space builds upon the contrast of the *maidan* (open ground) and the courtyard, the inner and outer. Here, the viewer has to walk a distance towards the meticulously detailed imagery of the *mangoe* and the *keekar* trees in Naveed Sadiq's work on paper. The illusion within this space is to be aware of the receding and distant, almost ephemeral compositions in their faint and delicate balance that open themselves only at close proximity. A pair of two rectangular

compositions equally balance a larger central composition, juxtaposing the depiction from the artist's lived space to the contrasting view of the earth (water), as a possible 'garden', and the work aptly titled, '*Dunya*' (world). The water fountain created by Arshad Faruqi is important to the experiential nature of this exhibition. It carries with it histories of similar features in the gardens of the Mughals and countless associations of birds, flora, and its significance as a purifier, inviting the viewer to form a personal connection to the object, sound, and the imagery. Naveed's central square references the *chaharbagh* or four sectioned garden, while simultaneously evoking the architectural within the gallery. Hamra Abbas' work is inspired by floral motif at the Wazir Khan mosque in Lahore. The marble inlay, 'Gardens of Paradise 3', sits opposite Naveed's imagery, next to a floral motif painted by Rafaqat Ali, on a larger scale, on wood. Hamra has worked extensively on aspects of the gardens and water. Her work, '*Gardens in which Rivers Flow*' (2019) was inspired by the 17th century frescoes in Lahore as well as influenced by the work of Sol Le Witt. The current work emerges from ongoing study and extensive series of works such as '*Flowers: Gardens of Paradise*' were influenced by Mughal inlay patterns (*parchin kari*). The significance of the current work is her engagement as a sculptor, (or an artisan), in conversation with the visual trajectory and its purpose as a channel to look beyond, in another realm. Kamil Khan Mumtaz writes in his essay, 'Reading Wazir Khan Mosque' that the 'elaborate entrance is intended to symbolize the transition from this life to the next. Looking up the 'Chahar Taq, we find symbolism of the dome, emphasized by frescoes round its base. These display 'fruits of every kind on silver platters' and 'pitchers of wine' and 'trees in pairs'; an unmistakable reference to the Koranic paradise.' It is indeed amazing that one work by the artist contains such a rich reservoir of knowledge and awareness.

These dynamics of space and proximity also address what is 'distant' or peripheral to the mainstream art discourse.

'Distancing' is a point of celebration here, and the viewer and (especially) the curator is required to walk the distance to an artist's narrative. There are particular, varied histories and contexts, without hierarchies of art, craft or other, from which the work is drawn. It is necessary for curatorial narratives to safeguard the subtleties and intricacies of each by allowing work to exist in an uneven, natural (uncensored) manner, as they would exist outside the exhibition space; the reading and sharing of art within the wider cultural context. Spatial enclosure, writes Dr Husain, 'affords the means to awaken the senses, and indeed, to revel in that awakening; for reflection and fantasy', and that 'trees and shrubs along a water channel, or around a pool or tank, reduced evaporation losses, shaded adjacent walks, and created suitable growing conditions for moisture and shade-loving perennials. The pleasures of such planting—the glow of fruit and foliage, the pictorial aspect of a tree form—were multiplied in the pool and perfume, too, was more perceptible in the calm, humid conditions by the water'. To shade the *hauz*, trees such as the *neem* and tamarind were planted. Water ponds are also situated within the courtyard of mosques, as it is at the Wazir Khan, surrounded by tiled depictions of trees



Detail of Amber Sami with Mesqum Naeed and Hamra Khalid, *A Begonned Garden*, 2020

and flowers on the outer and inner façade. In the same courtyard, or garden so to speak, are Amaan Aslam's subtle miniatures on *vasli*. His work, 'Pahari Horse', is a Mughal equestrian portrait inspired by the renowned Pahari painter Nainsukh. The horse trots under a dusky sky across a field of over 600 mustard flowers. The works mirror garden descriptions from the *Ibrham Nama* and many others, in a subtle conversation of image and verse: 'The army of spring trees like numberless horses, with fruit filled up as though with princely riders'.

'The gardens of Deccani *masnavis* enable a sense of how gardens were perceived by the poets and 'the evocation of the garden unveils a vision for the delight of the soul, or in the words of the Deccani poet, 'to brighten the eye and perfume the heart', writes Dr Ali Akbar Husain in his book, *Scent in the Islamic Garden* (Oxford University Press, 2000, Karachi). Standing before an excerpt from a garden description from *Qissa e Benazir*, or 'Wondrous Account' by Sana 'ati Bijapuri, the viewer delves into the imagination of the poet, writer and of the curator. This is an allegorical account of the journeys of the Prophet's (pbuh) Companion Abu Tamim Ansari. It ends in twelve spiritual stations, in stories of despair and hope, and when his faith is sufficiently restored, the wind blowing to Mecca blows him back to it. In the soujourn, Ansari perceives unusual fragrance ('neither musk or ambergris; neither *chandan* nor *kesar*'), which writes Dr Husain, 'draws him further into the forest (of his heart as it were).' The curator takes the viewer from this outer sphere right into the 'heart' in the last room in a reflective and private space with Sumaya Durrani's work, 'Fatima-tu-Zehra (RA) Contractions of the Heart' (2008-13). The work consists of 20 parts, digital prints on canvas, depicting the heartbeat. Hazrat Fatima was seen as the Prophet's fragrance. Thus, 'fragrance' lingers in the gallery in many manifestations and forms, visible and invisible. Some of it is merely felt. In the first gallery, the viewer is able to view and smell the sandalwood and the musk in their original form from which the *ittar* is extracted, as well as sample the fragrance of the *ittar*, such as the *naag champa* (plumeria pudica), *chambeli* (jasminum grandiflorum), *motia* (jasminum sambac), *gulaab* (rose) of four kinds, *sandal* (Santalum album), *khass* (Lactuca sativa), *mushk*, *amber* and so on. Mr. Sanaullah and his family's distillery *Mashallah Bismillah Perfumery*, in Karachi and Mumbai provided a valuable link to a living tradition that has been integral to the ethos of garden scent. The connections of location, climate, temperament of the seasons, light and landscape are contained within these fragrances-as are the memories of those who gather here. The fragrance was available for viewers to purchase, therefore taking a part of the experience with them. At the same time, new conversations take one to experiences located in peoples' lived experience. Noorjehan Bilgrami's work, 'Under the Maulsari Tree' (2015, 20), references her recall of afternoons in Hyderabad, when she and other children would string the Maulsari flowers into necklaces. Maulsari flowers picked from her garden are collected and placed by the artist near the work, providing an intimate moment as you smell the subtle fragrance, and it seems to still time. Images of it reappear in three compositions, which delve into the subtle beauty of its form. The maulsari flower is mentioned many times in the *masnavis*,





especially in the Ali Nama. Noorjehan's childhood was spent in the very place from where the references emerge, and so the *maulsari*, surrounded by its recall forms a core inspiration for this show: 'The Madan flower seemed benumbed by this beauty, the fragrance of the maulsari was distilled quickly'. And again as 'The maulsari flowers had scented the air, the akas flower carried aloeswood fragrance...the glow of the garden spread far and wide'.

Bunto Kazmi's exquisitely embroidered shawls displayed in the same room surrounded by the rich green of the walls are breathtaking. A nine-foot vertical embroidered panel in faint tea pink 'shows an array of *gulab* and *gulnaari* strewn across, the golden birds introduce an element of magic that the coming of spring represents'. Whilst, a second folded panel in red depicts a royal wedding procession on one side, and a court scene on the other side. It is almost as if the garden descriptions from the Ali Na'ma come alive, through the show and especially in this work on which are 'strung lovely new necklaces of flower climbers and lined the garden with borders of keoras.' A poem, in medieval Islam, writes Ali Husain, can be crafted like a garden too, a poetic garden. Nusrati's Ali Na'ma of 1665, is 'adorned with flowering trees (*phool jharan*) of a kind (*yek saz ke*) and with variously coloured (*rang barange*) garden plots (*chaman*). Husain writes about 'the embellishment of the page (*safa*), words of the *nazm* woven like a string of pearls. The intricately detailed borders and their embellishment with rows of flower beds likens the panel to an illuminated page'. On view, also in the centre gallery is Usman Saeed's work, 'Rosewater', referencing the margins (*hashia*) and divisions of space of the illuminated manuscript. The paper is colored by rosewater, the association to the local rose (*desi gulab*) traverses the personal and the historical. 'In the timeless realms of paradise, she wanted to know how the tides of time work, and to find what 'yesterday' and 'tomorrow' are, she descended into a rose bough, opened with a smile, and withered, her last sigh remained in the garden and was called fragrance' (an excerpt from Anne Marie Schimmel's essay, 'The Celestial Garden in Islam, referencing Allama Iqbal's poem, '*bu-e-gul*'). Usman's 'rose' emerges from an ongoing engagement with his late mother's garden, *baagh-e- Sadia*. The work is situated between reflection, recalling the purity and goodness of his mother, mother earth and the cycles of nature as a source of continuous strength and joy.

Amber Sami conceived the moonlit garden, using pieces of her jewelry within the form of flowers, birds, sun, moon and the stars. A garden within a garden or many gardens, the assemblage of uncut diamond (*polki*), shimmery glass, and semi-precious stone form a landscape of streams and tree lined sections, that captivates the viewer into a spectacle of fantasy and wonder. Amber practice in jewelry making and garden vocabulary constitutes references to the celestial world. In her words, 'the fragrance of Sub-Continental garden is the unseen magic which is almost a medium of transcendence'. In this unique collaborative garden, she invited Masooma Syed and Hamna Khalid to form a sculpted *Bejewelled Garden*. Masooma's sculpted earrings add shadows over Hamna's painted *chaharbagh* and its environs. This *baagh* is a departure for

Amber, a synthesis of her functional *kundan* jewelry encrusted with the architectural formations of the Mughal gardens. So beautifully is this mirrored in these verses from the Ali Nama:

*'The sirne (Abutilon) flowers like ear pendants appeared
They dangled face downwards much crazed it appeared*

*The clove flowers resembled pendant earrings
And Michelia buds resembled their pearl fringe*

*The gulshan-e-iftikhan, without doubt, were the jewels of a crown
The cumin flowers like crests of a coiled ornament*

*The yellow jasmine climber seemed a laced bodice
The line of argand (Withania) buds was a pearl necklace*

*To revel in this sight again and once more
The moonflower had become a polished mirror*

The rich floral beds, trellises, and arabesques of Bunto's textiles embroidered in her atelier, as well as Amber's jewelry are the outcome of artisans and specialists who have been trained in their craft (and art) as it has been passed through generations. This is an important sub-text within the exhibition. On view are wrapped reels of *zardozi* borders, one in red with golf floral patterns and another in gold lace, conversing with the idea of creepers as they appear in the *Ali Nama* and *Gulshan e Ishq*. A border in *pattal*, with encrusted florals in gold on pink fabric, these also allude to the bejeweled bride, in the *Ali Nama* like this: 'As if she had a shimmering attire, a shade-shine fabric bordered with green.'

I drew connections of the verse to the textile traditions, and also to the art, such as in the portrayal of herself as a bride, in Sumaya Durrani's work, '*Nek Larki* (pious girl). The aged black and white photomontage and mixed media work from 1991, shows the artist as a bride, adorned by jewels and an ornate and rich *farshi gharara*, designed for her wedding by her mother, Tahira Begum. The distant gaze of the bride and groom looks to the image of a rose, in sepia. The connections to the Decaani poetry, the relationship of Amber's Bejewelled Garden, the rich borders from the collection of Bunto, and her textile panels to Sumaya's work are temporary, but it seems at this moment that they needed to engage, to be in this conversation and space. The beauty of the narratives is that they belong to different worlds, vision and intention. They exist differently outside of this curatorial narrative.

In the last gallery, overlooking a water body, at least in its illusion, is a seven-part panel created by Meher Afroz. The artist has stitched together pieces of paper to form seven manuscripts like pages, which translate to seven stations. The concept references *Bustan e Saadi*, parts of which Meher writes by hand onto a drawing. The translation, next to it, also handwritten

by her, is a narration of challenges and tests that must be overcome in one's journey. Meher's work has been text based for many years, most prominently in her earlier *Datawez* (2007) or *Chronicles of Our Times* series of works, where she referenced Faiz Ahmad Faiz's poem *Waadi-e-Sina* (1971) and read it as a present day *marshiya*. The work made especially for this exhibition titled, '*Guftaar*' seems as if drenched in blue. The blue reminds one of a water channels, and of the many references in the *Ali Nama* and also in *Gulshan-e-Ishq*, which as mentioned earlier in the essay, were essential to garden aesthetics. They were seen as a symbol of purification. Embedded within the brilliant blue, there are imprints of a difficult journey or journeys, perhaps alluding to her own. The thread appears as if holding the wound or the pain. Surely, only an artist who has mastered the traditions and poetic nuances of our literature, and lived them, can bare the dichotomy of pain and pleasure with effortless measure.

A swirl of brocade border from the collection of Bunto Kazmi, in *ganga-jamni* (silver-gold) is placed next to an intricately carved mirror in silver, from the collection of Noorjehan Bilgrami, is placed by Meher's work; the objects: the mirror, the textile border can all be seen as water bodies. The associations seem endless, much like the title of Arshad Faruqi's fountain titled, '*Aab-e-Rawaan*'. The two ends of the exhibition space are thus held by water, not to forget the main water body outside Koel Gallery, which we can view from the main gallery. One can also see rows of the *genda* or marigold flower, some of the early spring flowers, popular to this season in Karachi. Overlooking this area that looks also like *chandni* or moonlight with its silver and blue, looms a large two paneled canvas with the drawing of a yellow rose by Sumaya, titled, '*Gulshan-e-Raaz*' (1991). This is by far the most gestural work in the exhibition. It is as if the work was made for this space and time. Placed on the walls the height of two levels, and overlooking the galleries below, the enlarged roses in pale and aged yellow seem to be unfolding, and yet the artist decides to partly conceal areas by using butter paper and masking tape. This seems to be an erratic and impulsive gesture, disregarding the protocol of viewership. One does not know how to read it, except to partake in the feeling of discomfort. The artist is at ease with her pain, acknowledging her inability to see clearly due to her ongoing illness and tumor in the brain. The baring of the soul, also in her performative and video works, is a daughter's plea to raise funds for a museum, to contain the lifetime work of her mother, Tahira Begum, the pioneer of bridal embroidery at 'Ideal', her atelier in Lahore (now a disputed space under a trust). This was once the studio of Amrita Sher Gil. Tahira begum devoted her life perfecting the embroidery of the rose and doing *zikr*, therein is also the link to Fatima-tu-Zehra, according to the artist. Sumaya's work, '*Rukh-e-Mustafa*' (pbuh) in a predominant green hangs within the working space of the gallery staff, providing a strong connection to healing and magical blessings. The only rose, she says, is the Prophet himself. '*Whoever's mind is filled with the fragrance of these flowers,
his body will be charged with a new spirit*' -
(from the Sabras of Mullha Wajhi, Scent in the Islamic Garden)

Amra Ali, curator, The Fragrant Garden

February, 2020 Karachi

The references in this essay have been taken from Ali Akbar Husain's book, 'Scent in the Islamic Garden' (Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2000).

‘The sight of marble and the garden’s gravel dust
Put to shame ambergris, musk and *randha* perfume’

Ali Nama. Mulla Nusrati

Hamra Abbas, *Gardens of Paradise 3*, 2019, Marble, 24 x 18 x 0.75 inches





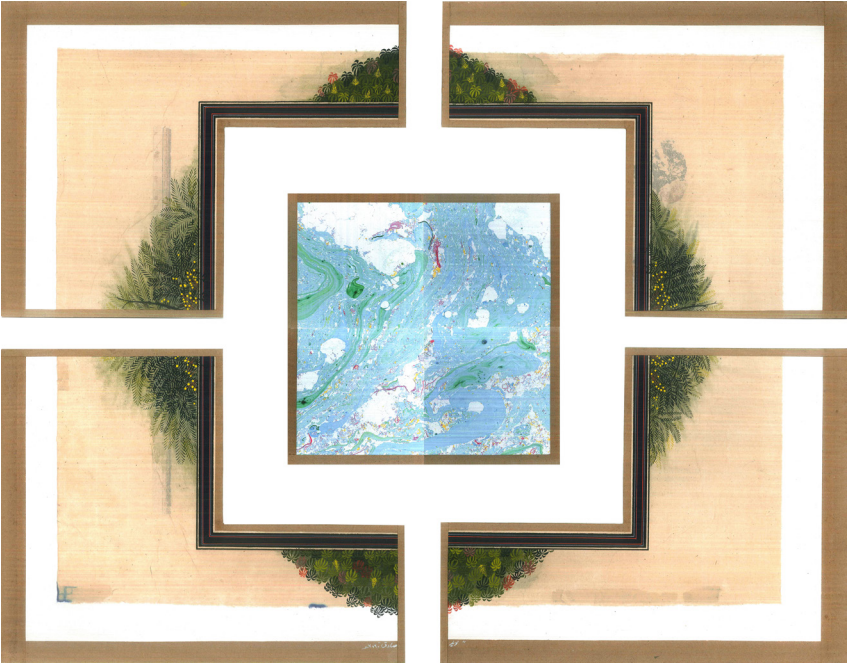
Ustad Rafiqat Ali, *Inspired by the motifs of the Wazir Khan Masjid*, 2020, Handcrafted, 6 x 3 feet.



Naveed Sadig, *Meeting 1*, 3, 2020, Natural pigment on wasli, 10 x 14 inches each.



Naveed Sadiq, *Garden*, 2020, Natural pigment on wasli, 21 x 27 inches each.



Amaan Aslam, *Pahari Horse*, 2020, Natural pigments on Fabriano paper, 9.5 x 7 inches

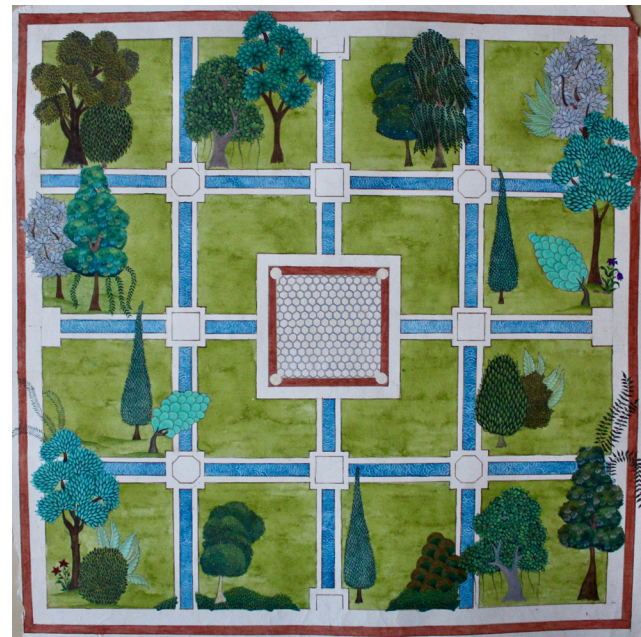


‘The season of ambergris, aloeswood, musk and saffron has arrived
These by themselves transform the world into a flower garden’

The wind everywhere, all scents carrying
With pleasure it stirs up a thousand green gardens’

Kulliyat Mohammad Quli Qutb Shah

Amaan Aslam, *Jahangir's Garden*, 2020, Natural pigments & watercolour on hemp paper, 16.5 x 16.5 inches



Arshad Faruqi, *Aab-e-Rawaan*, 2020, copper, slate, stone, diameter 30 inches, height 10 inches.



‘Spring has arrayed the flower gardens with bouquets
And lined the garden borders with rows of *Keoras*

Strung lovely new necklaces of flower climbers
And lovely new crests of African marigolds

The bottles of lotus bud are full of rose water
And sunflower salvers are filled with saffron

The buds of the moonflower are fragrant with sandalwood
The henna flowers are redolent of henna attar

The fragrance of jasmine is like the attar of molsari
The champa flowers like droplets of yellow musk

The willow catkins are like ambergris incense sticks
The scent of basil is like dry ambergris

The jasmine climber has begun its ascent
To become a necklace around the *champa* tree

The tender green herbs sprout continually
The basil’s spike is filled up with *Madan’s* fragrance’

Ali Nama. Mulla Nusrati



GARDEN DESCRIPTIONS From *Queen's Retreat*

When one division of the night advanced
I gazed on up of a moon by chance
The vision of trees, vegetation and bright
Each radiant leaf like a costly necklace
Each tree so closely as greened appeared
Each leaf like a thousand costly appeared
Above the emerald tree with leaves exquisite
Hanging drooping, the result of evening breeze
So amazing this spectacle of light did appear
I proceeded towards it to view it from near
When I had progressed to the tree sat the forest
Great wonder filled me, bewildered I stood
There seemed present there many trees fresh laden
More fresh than foliage such to tree here
And yet the leaves in great plenty did seem
Large leaves of a kind I had never seen
The breeze at this time a fragrance diffused
The smell of Calypso in the air was infused
I beheld close by many trees marvellous
With fragrance far sweeter than ambergris
From the leaves seemed distilled in great excess
The droplets of oil the rose essence
That fragrance I perceived was in much, ambergris
In cedarwood, affinis, in perfume rose
The fragrance appeared to my heart so much
I gazed until more on the very location



READING GARDENS IN DECCANI COURT POETRY

A Reappraisal of Nusratī's *Gulshan-i 'Ishq*

by Ali Akbar Husain

How may one read gardens in Deccani verse romance, the '*ashqiyyā masnavī*'?

It is futile to expect poetry to lead to a reconstruction of Deccani gardens whose material traces have largely disappeared since the garden is never seen as a complete unit in Deccani poetry. However, the 16th and 17th century *masnavīs* written at the courts of the 'Adil Shahis (in Bijapur) and Qutb Shahis (in Golconda) enable a sense of how the garden was perceived by poets, their courtly audience and patrons, and what it signified to them. The spatial dimensions of the gardens written about may be difficult to establish but the evocation of qualities reveals a vision of the garden for the 'delight of the soul' or, in the words of the Deccani poet, 'to brighten the eye and perfume the heart'.²

As the genre of descriptive and narrative poetry in the Arabo-Persian literary tradition (within which Urdu poetry is included)³, the *masnavī* — with its rhymed couplets and potentially limitless length — offered the Deccani poet the possibility of versifying history and storytelling. Moreover, the *masnavī* could incorporate 'themes entirely alien to the Persian tradition' and 'flowers and trees that did not exist in the Central Asian and Iranian landscape', as noted by Thackston in his appraisal of Mughal Gardens in Persian poetry.⁴ By allowing poets to manipulate the conventions of the genre, the *masnavī* suited the Deccani poets whose works had to be embedded in the kingdoms of their royal patrons on the Deccan plateau and in the evergreen and deciduous forests of peninsular India where the 'Adil Shah and Qutb Shah sultans had established their control in the 17th century.

Although the 'Adil and Qutb Shah sultans upheld the Persian speaking cultures of Central Asia and Iran as their predecessors in the region, the Bahmanis, they also promoted Deccani as a language of poetry at their courts. Conceivably, Deccani helped the sultans in declaring their hold over the Deccan plateau. In fact, it would seem that court poets like Mulla Nusratī (d. 1675 AD) were commissioned to compose their *masnavīs* in Deccani rather than Persian during the course of the 17th century when the cultural syntheses promoted by the sultans, as an expression of their

identities, seemed most threatened by the Mughals.

As a plot, Nusratī's *Gulshan-i 'Ishq* is similar to the north Indian *masnavī Madhumālati* of Mir Sayyid Manjhan Rajgiri, written in the 16th century in Hindavi.⁵ It also bears resemblances with the *masnavī Mihr-o-Māh* of 'Aqil Khan Razi 'Alamgiri, written in Persian at the Mughal court three years before Nusratī composed his own work. While Nusratī is silent on the sources of his work, 'Aqil Khan is believed to have credited his narrative to one Mīr Jamman, as also to Mīr Manjhan.⁶

Deccani poets were inspired by the style of Persian poetry. They also admired the treatment of language in the Sanskrit poetical tradition, especially the art of idiomatic expression (*bachan*) which they thought uplifted a poetical work like the Indian trellis-climber (*bel mandvā*) 'ascending the sky' gave dimension to a garden. Thus Nusratī's claim that

The trellis climber of my words lovingly nourished,
Rose to scale the canopy of the sky.⁷

To Nusratī, a Deccani *masnavī* combined Persian eloquence and Sanskrit idiom or, in garden terms, combined the Persian garden plot (*chaman*) with the flower-filled trellises of the Sanskrit tradition. Deccani litterateurs have commented that Deccani poetry is a mingling of two cultural streams: if its style (*pirayā*) is Persian, its flavour (*mizāj*) is distinctly Indian.

The correspondence between garden and poem is a common element of poetry written in Persian and Deccani. The similarity of his work with a garden served the poet to lay emphasis on the significance of his poem's meaning and/or its usage of the 'word' or idiomatic expression. For, if his poem was like a garden, the poet was like a gardener whose task was to nourish his garden to produce flowers and fruits of 'meaning'. Thus the Ismā'ili poet Nasir-i Khusrau, writing in Iran in the 11th century declared that a poem that was meaningful was like 'a garden in which flowers and fruits are the mā'ani (notions) borne by the supporting trees of elegant style (*lafz*)'.⁸ In a somewhat similar manner Nusratī declares that his *Gulshan-i 'Ishq* is woven with the flowers (of noble thoughts) from his garden that, through His Grace, God has brought into bloom.⁹ Writing in praise of his patron Sultan 'Ali 'Adil Shah II, a writer of Deccani verse himself, Nusratī comments on the flowers his patron's verses reveal and the 'meaningful' fruit of his verses savoured by his readers.¹⁰ Another court poet of the 'Adil Shahs, 'Abdul Dehlavi, who authored the *Ibrahim nāma* in praise of Sultan Ibrahim 'Adil Shah II, likens the use of idiomatic expression (*bachan*) in Sanskrit verse to 'the fragrance of the flower of intellect' adding that each word in Sanskrit poetry is 'laden with meaning as the pomegranate is with seeds'.¹¹

The analogy of the garden with the world and/or cosmos in Deccani poetical works has been

traced to Persian court poetry from the 10th to 13th centuries. The growth of analogical thinking in medieval Islamic thought and literature is attributed to the writings of the *Ikhwān al Safā* (‘Brethren of Purity’) of Basra in the 10th century, and in the expression of parallelism between the universe (an ordered whole) and man (a microcosmic embodiment of that larger whole).¹² With the diffusion of Persian poetic forms in the Indian subcontinent, the analogical modes of poetry composed in medieval Iran came to characterise the Deccani verse romance, or ‘*ashqiyyā masnavī*. So, if in a 12th-century Persian court romance such as Nizami’s *Haft Paykar* (‘Seven Portraits’), the spring-time garden stands for an ordered, ‘justly-governed world’ that is a man-made reflection of the heavenly garden and a microcosm of the ‘divinely-ordered cosmos’,¹³ we may rightly expect that this was what a garden in bloom signified to a Deccani poet writing in the 17th century. A garden of love, or *Gulshan-i ‘Ishq*, by extension, signifies worldly order and harmony created or restored in love’s fulfilment. Conversely, the neglected garden parallels the chaos resulting from the loss of loved ones and disharmonies among the stars.

The analogy of the garden with a larger ‘ordered whole’ which came to characterise Deccani romantic *masnavīs* may be traced to early Indian court poetry just as it is credited to the Persian court romance. Daud Ali draws our attention to the earthly and celestial Buddhist gardens; his review of the texts suggests that the analogy of a garden with ‘a properly ruled and inhabited realm’ is ‘developed variously and copiously in both religious and courtly literature’¹⁴. He refers to the Buddhist text *Pali Digha Nikaya*, which recounts the story of a king while making ‘a seamless link between the king’s garden and a morally ordered realm’. He adds that in this account the kingdom’s prosperity is suggested by ‘the beneficence displayed in this garden’ and its change in fortune by the ‘disarray’ of the garden.¹⁵

The *Gulshan-i ‘Ishq* testifies to a civilisation made possible by the triumph of love, a reordering of peace, justice and prosperity that, as the poet states, ensues in the union of Venus (*Zohrā*) and Jupiter (*Mushtārī*).¹⁶ Clearly, one purpose of the *masnavī* was to edify by illustrating the civilising power of love. Love, according to the poet, for the one who has drunk of this wine, is like collyrium for his heart’s eye whose radiance is the means to God’s hidden treasures. It is therefore a continuous yearning for the beauty of God (the beloved), for an eternal state that no *imrat* or life-giving elixir can bestow, the Philosopher’s stone (*pāras*) par excellence. Nusratī would have his readers see with the eye of love and discover, in the enhanced perception, that unique sensation of pleasure that presumably he himself has experienced. He would have his patron and courtly audience recognise that the passion that consumes his own heart, firing his verses and transforming his poem into a flaming flower garden is, or can be, the basis, the essential meaning, of their lives too. He would have his readers affirm that the pursuit of love with single-minded passion leads to the perfection of the garden of love, the eternal sanctuary and abode of peace.¹⁶

Nusratī’s *Gulshan-i ‘Ishq* was completed in 1657 AD, a year after ‘Alī ‘Adil Shah’s accession to the



Detail of Bundo Kazmi, *Untitled*, 2020



throne following the death of his father Muhammad after a 30-year reign. In praise of his young patron, Nusratī lists all the virtues that a ruler of his time was expected to cultivate. Justice, honesty, kindness, sympathy, and compassion were essential attributes of one who was the Shadow of God (*Zil-i Khudā*) and whose sultanate was blessed, inevitably, with peace and stability, but the young Shah is also said to combine a spiritual bent of mind with a practical, down-to-earth orientation, much-needed in a ruler. Above all, he was literate and cultured, sensitive and insightful. With his taste for music and poetry, it was his patron, writes Nusratī, who had refined the sensibilities of his court and distilled the essence (*rasa*) of the nine essences (*nauras*) credited to that great worldteacher (*jagat guru*), Sultan Ibrahim 'Adil Shah II (deceased for 50 years at the time of Nusratī's composition). After all, argues the poet, who would know about love better than one through whom love is exalted, the flame that kindles the hearts of beautiful women? Recounting the young Shah's generosity to the poet, Nusratī prays that the trees planted by the Shah remain a canopy for the sultanate so that the Shah's name as a skilful gardener continues to be upheld.¹⁷

Nusratī's story of love's quest was an apt subject with which to greet the young sultan and his court. Nature held to be 'a repository of moral examples' in medieval cultures in general, the story's nature settings undoubtedly served as precept and example to the sultan who needed instruction in the principles of good kingship. At the same time Nusratī emphasised, through the example of the lover's unswerving devotion to his beloved, what his patron could expect of him and his courtiers, in general. As such, the story of the lover and the beloved also served the poet as an analogy illustrative of his own relation with his patron. It would appear that the Deccani court drew heavily on Persian models of court conduct and etiquette where loyalty and service were important both in the context of love and as virtues in themselves. As Meisami observes, the correspondence 'between the ethics of love and courtly conduct' that characterises medieval court poetry of both western and Islamic cultures, is reason enough to equate love poems with 'poems about courtliness and courtly ethics and ... issues of loyalty and justice.'¹⁸

The story of the *Gulshan-i 'Ishq* is recounted for the most part through descriptions of palaces and of nature, both ordered and unadorned. The focus is on man's artifacts, the palace-court and the man-made pleasance. The series of palaces and gardens that form part of the story may be seen as stages in Prince Manohar's search for the essence (*rasa*) of love at Maharsanagar, in the vision of beauty that is Princess Madmalati, the common name of a popular climber of the Indian groves. As such, the gardens of the poem become 'emblematic' landscapes, or as the poet himself says,

Each account is a garden heart-rejoicing,
Each couplet an exalted palace on high.¹⁹

Each palace and garden, moreover, is a reference to the building and garden craft of the sultanate at Bijapur, and the glimpses of garden settings, garden architecture and garden

planting that the poet enables us could be read, therefore, as impressions of actual gardens. And rightly so that, at a time of fluctuating fortunes for the sultanate,²⁰ the poet's Garden of Love, the image of an ordered world, should be located in the fortresses and forests of the sultanate rather than in the dimly perceived landscapes of Central Asia and Iran.

As a prelude to the story we are acquainted with Raja Bikram of Kanakgīr, the personification of perfect kingship who is blessed with everything but children. That this is a scar borne by the raja becomes evident when a mendicant (*faqīr*) comes to his door but refuses the food he is offered by the raja and leaves without blessing him. In a bid, therefore, to obtain the blessing he never received, the 'scarred' raja sets out on a search for the *faqīr*. To be rewarded in his quest, however, he has to renounce his material comforts, take up a staff and begging bowl, and live the life of an Indian ascetic, his body smeared with ash. It is by burning away worldly desires and by experiencing want that he can become worthy of the blessing of a son who will bring order and harmony to the world. Thus the raja's search takes him through hunger and thirst to many countries, groves, caves, and mountains.

When the next scene of the *Gulshan* opens, we find him within a grove (*ban*), in a garden that ancient frankincense (*agar*) trees, creating shady vaults and canopies, have filled with fragrances. The garden is clearly intended to symbolise a stage in the journey that the raja has attained and, as fairies alight before his eyes in the garden pool (*hauz*), drawn to the garden by its fragrances, and cast off their clothes to bathe, the raja realises that this vision of light is his means to be delivered to the *faqīr* where he is to be instructed in his final lesson before the 'fruit' of his labours can be granted him.

Appropriately titled *darvish sarmast ka mast ban* ('Tavern of the Intoxicated Dervish'), the garden of the *faqīr* where the raja finds himself next within, apparently, a forest hermitage, is one to which bird and beast alike have been brought together by the joy of Creation and the ecstasy of love that fills the heart of the *faqīr*/dervish. It is a garden of pools brimming over with this love, trees that wave joyously having drunk of this glorious wine, and flowering bushes that, with hyacinth-like ringlets arranged on each floral stem, diffuse fragrances. Underneath the tree canopy are intoxicated flowers with flushed cheeks and languorous eyes that are bestirred by wind-scattered water-drops and, as the wind glides through the trees, their leaves set a beat into motion to whose accompaniment the birds among the trees swell forth with rapturous song, dancing and whirling with ecstasy or somersaulting in the air.²¹

We find this sense of intoxication when we visit other gardens in the *Gulshan*, although nowhere is it as marked as in the garden of Dervish *Raushan Dil* ('Of the Illuminated Heart'). This is to say also that the poetic impressions of gardens vary in terms of the situations presented by the poet, whether it is love's kindling, search, fulfillment or intoxication. Likewise, the

imagery of flowers and birds in and around trees and pools prevails in other gardens visited in the *Gulshan* to greater or lesser degree, setting off the garden as an ordered ecosystem, a bringing together of the 'mineral, plant and animal kingdoms' and their unity with man.

The story unfolds, alternating between scenes of palaces and forests and gardens that are accounts of journeys and destinations, toil and respite, separations and unions, the celebrations of birth, accession, marriage, moments of despair and exhilaration. The 'reborn' raja returns to his kingdom in Kanakgīr to father a son who, on the advice of court astrologers and sages, is brought up in a wholly sheltered environment, literally under the palace canopy, to protect him from the affliction of love that could descend on him from the sky. Fate cannot be averted of course and, ironically, fairies descend on the palace from the sky one magical, moon-lit night as the prince slumbers, and transport him across the seven seas to Mahārasanagar to enable him the vision of Madmālātī for a night.

The affliction of love having thus descended upon him, the prince seeks to claim the beautiful Madmālātī in distant Mahārasanagar when he awakens to find himself back in his palace. A convoy of boats is made ready to carry and escort him safely on his journey across the seven seas to Mahārasanagar, but because he must make the journey of love on his own, alone and unescorted, nature intervenes to ensure it shall be so, and the prince becomes the sole survivor of a sunken convoy some days after they set afloat.

Subsequent trials await the prince when he is washed ashore, first a winter of ice that must be braved and then the *Kājālī Ban* ('Lampblack Forest'), with its imprisoning tangle of thickets, its all-engulfing darkness and its unspeakable terrors that must be traversed. Prince Manohar overcomes the darkness and cold with the glow of love in his heart that lights up a passage for him in the dark depths of the forest. A sparkling fountain 'within a bubble of light' where he encounters a sage (*ṣaṇyāsi*) after six months in the forest signifies the lover's spiritual awakening and the beginning of another stage in the journey of love. Six more months follow, this time across a desolate high plateau, a burnt wasteland, with 'the sun a cloud of fire and the sunlight a flaming river'. The lover finally descends on the plateau arriving at a plain where he sets sight on a radiant palace garden but once inside he realises that, although it sparkles with precious stones, this garden devoid of people is soulless, a wine cup without wine, and not his journey's end. The guiding light in the lover's despair proves to be the princess Champāvātī held captive in the palace by a demon. It is her beauty in fact that illuminates the demon's palace like a brilliant chandelier.

Champāvātī, a friend of Madmālātī, is the means by which the poet unites lover and beloved. Manohar is the means whereby she is freed from the demon's hold. In the Deccani *masnavī* as in the medieval court romance in general, chivalry, like other virtues, had to be cultivated by

the lover in his pursuit of love. The poet would have Manohar destroy the demon and escort Champāvati to her grieving folk in Kanchannagar from where the demon flew her away in a whirl of dust. And because an appropriate match has to be found for Champāvati, Prince Chandersen must now be brought in the story. Chandersen is introduced as Madmālātī's saviour when, in a final lesson of separation and longing following her brief union with Manohar (contrived by Champāvati), she is unwittingly transformed into a parakeet that flies away from prince Manohar's heart to the distant land where Prince Chandersen discovers it. The flight of the 'bird of love' and its restoration to the lover's heart is the poet's means of bringing together Champāvati and Chandersen. As Madmalati's kind-hearted saviour, Chandersen becomes worthy of Champāvati. Thus harmony flows from Manohar's union with Madmālātī, following which Chandersen and Champāvati are united and the two princes return with their princesses to rule over their kingdoms with justice and integrity, illustrating that love's fulfillment restores the order of the world. The joy of Manohar and Madmālātī's union is described in terms of the spring-adorned, *Farāh Bakhsh* ('Joy-Bestowing') garden, and the anguish of the lovers' separation represented by the drought-ravaged garden and images of a desolate battlefield. The engagement celebration that ushers in their wedding day is revealed in the splendour of a palace and garden constructed for the event, and in a feast spread out on colourful *kanduriyyān* ('floor spreads') that appear like a series of garden-plots (*chaman*) filled with strange and wonderful garden-plants. On the wedding day, the bride's radiance as she is perfumed brings down the heavenly spheres and the brilliance of starbursts herald her union with the sun-like Manohar. Finally, the imagery of fire and flame is used to reveal the garden that the vision of *Champāvati* kindles in Chandersen's heart as a parallel to the Mount of Moses set ablaze in God's glory. A painting preserved in a remarkable manuscript of the *Gulshan-i 'Ishq* at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (Plate 7.1) shows Chandarsen struck by 'Love's arrow and lightning bolt' on his first glimpse of the radiant Champāvati, who is shown adjusting her veil and walking away, followed by her companion. Manohar is seen holding up the unconscious Chandersen while Madmālātī hurries to revive Chandersen. The garden in full bloom corresponds to the kindled heart.

Appropriately enough, it is the *Farāh Bakhsh* garden that comes closest in the *Gulshan-i 'Ishq* to describing a state of transcendental bliss. It is a destination marking the end of a journey of longing, a garden to cool the fire that has long smouldered in the lover's heart, a garden in celebration of love's fulfilment, a gift and reward, a blessing and balm. How does it function as a 'celebrational image'? What image clusters give it identity? What flowers are found in this Deccani paradise?

Farāh Bakhsh is a spring-adorned garden. For the celebration of the native Indian pageant of Holi, spring has set the candles aglow in the *takhte* ('flower beds') of its garden-plots, draping the garden *bārī* ('enclosure') and *mandvā* ('bower') with fabrics and tapestries woven by flowering climbers, and spreading a velvety mandap ('canopy') of foliage above. Flower-filled and of the greenest green, it is a reflection of the star-filled, emerald sky and truly joy-bestowing. *Farāh*





Detail of Bunto Kazmi, *Untitled*, 2020, Jamawar shawl, 3 yards, 15 inches x 34 inches

Bakhsh is woven with light and perfume. Each flower bed of its plots is a brilliant floor spread whether of *gend makhmal* (African Marigold) or of *gul-i aurang* (Globe Amaranth), whether made with *kalghā-i ātishi* (Cockscomb) or with the *lāla* (Poppy). The slender arching floral stems within each bed, bearing rubies or glowing candles, are images crafted by the jeweller. Among individual flowers that receive focus are the poppy, a ruby idol its radiance set off by *missī*, the mesua (*nakesar*, the flower of the ironwood tree) whose stamens are the brilliance of henna-dyed fingers, the cinnamon jasmine (the flower of the *madan bān* bush, *Artabotrys odoratissimus*) that, intoxicated by its own scent, gazes with the wine-filled eyes of the narcissus, and the *raiḥān* (basil) which entices the lover with its hyacinth-like curls. The spring garden in its radiance and perfume is also the aspect of the heavens. The *gul-i chānd* (moonflower) scars the breast of the moon, the *gul-i sūr* (sunflower) is the envy of the sun, the fragrance of the screwpine, sent aloft, is a comet with a long tail, the line of cypresses is the line of *hourīs* (maidens) in *jannat* (paradise).²³

In this garden reception hosted by Spring, the birds and bees are the guests and form a male and a female *majlis* (assembly) in the garden. The poet describes an apparently localised forest association in terms essentially of colourful fabrics.²⁴ The female birds wear saris, shawls and scarfs: the *pīlak* (Golden Oriole) in *pitambar* (yellow silk) and brown shawl, the *bulbul* (nightingale) in black sari with red border, her hair done up in a knot, the red-headed *tirmitī* (merlin) in purple *dandhāras* (the name of a fabric), the koel in black, the myna in smoky brown, the starling (*shārik*) in red. The jhakkar appears with kohl-lined eyes, the *tatorā* (sandpiper) with henna-dyed feet, and the parakeet's (*totā*) lips are stained red with *pān* (betel-leaf). As for the male assembly, the *hoopoe* (woodpecker) shows off a crown, the *kabūtar* (pigeon) sports a white satin *kurtā* (shirt), the *kākatuyyā* (cockatoo) wears a green silk *jāmā* (cloak), the *mor* (peafowl) is in green and blue *tāftī* (taffeta), the shrikes are in white, the *fākhtā* (spotted dove) in brown, the *kulangan* (herons) appear like Arabs, and the watchman *kavvā* (crow) is bundled in a dark blanket.²⁵

In turn, the colours of the birds are coordinated with the fragrances celebrated at the court to create image clusters, and the moon is drawn into the spectacle of the spring celebration. It is the moon, the poet reminds us, who, in the early hours of the morning, has brought the colours of the flowers with which to scatter and douse the birds and bees — the brilliant red of the poppy for the kusumbhā, the saffron threads of the *zā'frān* (saffron crocus) for the *pīlak*, the sandalwood white of the *shab-i gūsh* (tuberose) for the *qubuk* and *qumriyyān*, the distilled *chuā* (an ambergris preparation) from the violet for the *bhanwar* (drone bee) and the *bhangrāj* (dronko) ... and 'ūd *battī* (aloeswood incense sticks) from willow catkins, ambergris from the basil's curls and rosewater from flower buds. The wind as cup-bearer fills the floral cups with wine from the bowl of the sky, and the birds and bees delighting in the blessings of fruit and flower, are delirious with happiness as they wander from flower to fruit garden to the brimming pools that are to be found all around the garden.²⁶ It is love, the poet would have us note, that has brought this harmony among the various levels of God's creation.

Nusratī perfects the image of *Farāh Bakhsh* garden with a long account of the palace within the garden. The sun and moon and the sky and stars are brought down once more in references to its brick-tiling and lime-plaster, the splendour of the columned wood portico and the frescoes of the palace pavilion (*chitarsāl*; lit., picture gallery), and in the cloud-like cisterns placed before the pavilion where the plumes shot up from fountain jets return to the earth in a shower of stars. For the lover this experience of beauty is an elixir-like wine that dispels in one gulp his heart's bitterness, cooling, cleansing and perfuming his spirit.

Thus, each account, whether of the garden's flowering plants, of its fruit garden, its birds and insects, or of its palaces, pools, and fountains is the discovery of a new treasure, infused with a sense of wonder. To the poet, the garden is an experience of pleasure, a place to appreciate its ambience as an ecosystem, contemplate its patterns, and above all marvel at its treasures. It is an 'artifice' set apart from nature, a human creation and artifact and paradoxically, a 'fragment of nature' and nature's expression as a 'dreamed, idealised totality'.²⁶ While allegory and allusion govern our understanding of the gardens of the *Gulshan-i 'Ishq*, it is the experiential aspects of these gardens with which the poet seems concerned too, and in illustrating how the rasa of love (*prema rasa*)²⁷ is savoured in the garden.

A garden of native and naturalised trees and shrubs of tropical and sub-tropical India is suggested by the fruits and flowers listed by the poet. He mentions *naghzak* (mango), *mauz* (banana), *jāman* (black plum), *jām* (rose apple), *kamrakh* (star-fruit), *phannas* (jack-fruit), *duryān* (durian), and *annas* (pineapple), some of which recall the semi-evergreen forests of peninsular India. Among others that he mentions, the *ber* (jujube), *tūt* (mulberry), *anjīr* (fig), *safarjal* (quince), *angūr* (grape), *neshkar* (sugarcane) and the citrus family characterise sub-tropical regions in general, including the high plateaus of the Deccan. The cool temperate region fruit listed, such as *seb* (apple), *bādām* (almond), *akhrot* (walnut) and *chilghozā* (pine-nut) are few in number, so in effect the poet's fruitgarden is stocked with the produce of tropical and sub-tropical India. The bedding annuals that the poet lists — globe amaranth, celosia, marigold, poppy, basil — are floriferous over a long period in the Deccan as well as in northern India and Iran where their use was common in medieval Islamic times. Indian trees like the *nagkesar* (*Mesua ferrea*) and the *chamṭā* (*Michelia champaca*), combined with Indian shrubs like the *madan bān* and the *keorā* (fragrant screwpine, *Pandanus odoratissimus*) help to locate this garden in an Indian, if not Deccani, setting and, if other garden descriptions in the *masnavī* were considered, this list of Indian plants could be expanded to include trees like the *molṣarī* (*Mimusops elengi*) and *kesū* (*Butea monspesia*), shrubs such as the *gul chīn* (*Plumeria* spp.), the *chambelī* (*Jasminum* spp.), the *marwā* (*Artemisia* spp.), *daunā* (*Origanum* spp.), *bālā* (*Abutilon* spp.), and *sewantī* (*Rosa moschata*), and the *kanwal* (pink lotus) and *kamūd* (white, night-opening water lily) among aquatics. As noted before, *Madhmālātī*, the name of Prince Manohar's beloved, is a popular climber (*Hiptage benghalensis*) of Indian gardens, so one could

expect the garden arbors (*phūl mandvās*) to be permeated with the fragrance of *Madhmālātī*.²⁸

It is in its suggestions of garden planting that the *rasas* (essences) of peninsular Indian forests seem permeated in the *Gulshan-i 'Ishq* but, as noted earlier, Nusratī claims more for his poetry. He maintains that his works combine the Persian *chaman* (garden plot) with the Indian *bel mandvā* (arbor), so it would seem the poet wishes to delight his audience with both its Persian and Indian garden features: the illuminated *takhte* (beds) of annuals in the garden-plots (*chamans*) as well as the high *mandap* (velvety canopy) formed by closely-spaced trees along the walks; the floral tapestries of the typically Indian *phūl mandvās* (trellises for flowering climbers) and the patterns created by scandent shrubs among the *phūl bārīs* (upright trellises) with which presumably the entire garden and/or its various parts were surrounded. Garden descriptions also make mention of the *kālviyyān* (watercourses) bordering the green plots and the pools (*hauz khāne*) centred within each, which are Persian in conception, and other, presumably larger, pools filled with *kanwal* (pink lotus) or white, night-opening *kamūd* (water lily) that are a common sight in Indian tanks; and the poet also makes note of smaller ornamental *chehbeche* (cisterns) that are said to adorn the *āngan* (terraces) fronting the *chitarsāl* (palace pavilions). In the fruit garden, hung among the mangoes of the Irano-Indian paradise, a *hindolā* (swing) is an inevitable Indian addition, and the glowing lanterns of the *dāk mandvā* (grape trellis) and the musk of *chamṭā*, frangipani and fragrant *keorā* (screwpine) are other *rasas* to be savoured.

The *Gulshan-i 'Ishq* may be read as a progression of gardens centred on the conception of love — its kindling, longing, fulfillment, and intoxication. While the organisation of space in the garden, its form and layout remains unclear throughout the *masnavī*, we are made aware of the qualities — the light and perfume and the sounds of nature — with which each garden description is woven. A human creation and artifact, the garden also stands for nature, and the gardens in the *masnavī* may also be read as a record of the culture's engagement and relationship with nature.²⁹

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Footnotes

- For an initial appraisal of the work, see *My Scent in the Islamic Garden: A Study of Deccani Urdu Literary Sources*, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 154–56; 164–70.
- Mulla Nusrati, *Gulshan-i 'Ishq*, (ed.) Syed Muhammad, Haidarabad, Dakkan: Majlis-i Isharat-i Dakkani Maktutat (Silsilah-i Yusufi yah series), 1954, p. 304: *Wo tabaḍā'a mu'atr disse rangin nazar/ Jin sair karre 'ishq ke iss gulshan men*; Mulla Nusrati, *'Ali nama*, (ed.) Abdul Majid Siddiqui, Hyderabad, 1959, p. 152: *Nazr ke rang dene kūn har yik gul rang kā kāsā/ Mu'atr mann ke karne kūn kalī har huqḡā parmal kā*.
- Julie S. Meisami, *Structure and Meaning in Medieval Arabic and Persian Poetry*, London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003, p. xii.
- Wheeler M. Thackston, 'Mughal Gardens in Persian Poetry', in James L. Wescoat, Jr. (ed.), *Mughal Gardens: Sources, Representations, Places, and Prospects*, Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1996, p. 239.
- Mulla Nusrati, *Gulshan-i 'Ishq*, (ed.) Maulvi Abdul Haq, Karachi: Anjuman-i Taraqqi-i Urdu, 1952, p. 10.
- As per a communication with (late) Aditya Behl; also *ibid.*, p. 17.
- '*Ali nāmā*, p. 37: *Kiya mayn bachan bel kun yun barri/ Barri so falak ka'ch mandwa charhi*.
- Meisami, *Structure and Meaning*, p. 17.
- Gulshan-i 'Ishq*, (ed.) Maulvi Abdul Haq, p. 59.
- ibid.*, p. 36.
- Abdul Dehlavi, *Ibrahīm nāmā*, (ed.) Muhammad H. Khan, *Qadim Urdu*, vol. 3, 1969, pp. 22, 34.
- Julie S. Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 33.
- ibid.*, pp. 352, 369.
- Daud Ali, 'Gardens in Early Indian Court Life', *Studies in History*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2003, pp. 221–52, especially p. 249.

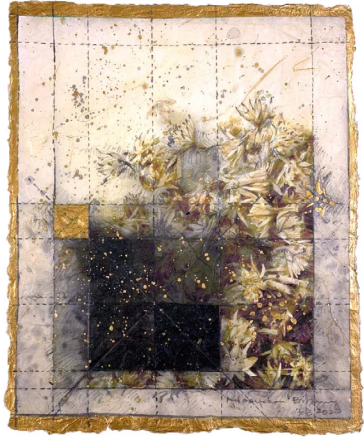
- ibid.*
- Gulshan-i 'Ishq*, (ed.) Maulvi Abdul Haq, p. 246: *Mille jab yo Zohrā jo wo Mushtari/ Dive jag kun it sā'ad tab bihtari*.
- ibid.*, pp. 46–48.
- ibid.*, pp. 36–38.
- Meisami, *Court Poetry*, p. 30.
- Gulshan-i 'Ishq*, (ed.) Maulvi Abdul Haq, p. 303: *Har yik dāstān būstān dil guzīn*.
- The Sultanate of Bijapur came under a joint attack from the Marathas and Mughals in the mid-17th century.
- Gulshan-i 'Ishq*, (ed.) Maulvi Abdul Haq, pp. 72–74.
- According to a communication with (late) Aditya Behl, the 'Kājali Ban' is Nusrati's version of the original Hindavi 'Kādali Vana' (plantain forest), which in Tantric and yogic texts indicates a place of ascetic mortification. According to Peter Gaeffke this forest is the ultimate trial, 'faint reflections' of which are to be found in Nizami's *Sarāf nāmā* about Alexander's search for the Water of Life (*āb-i Hayāt*); see Peter Gaeffke, 'The Garden of Light and the Forest of Darkness in Dakkini Sufi Literature and Painting', *Artibus Asiae*, vol. 48, nos 3–4, 1987, pp. 224–45, especially p. 231.
- Gulshan-i 'Ishq*, (ed.) Maulvi Abdul Haq, pp. 185–87.
- Salim Ali, *Book of Indian Birds*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, rpt. 2003. The author considers 'mixed assemblages a characteristic feature of Indian forests', p. 139.
- ibid.*, pp. 187–89. 26 *ibid.*, pp. 190–92.
- Bernard St-Denis, 'Just What is a Garden', *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2007, pp. 61–76.
- For further discussion of *prema rasa*, 'the savour fit to be enjoyed by kings', see Aditya Behl and Simon Weightman, *Madhumalati: An Indian Sufi Romance*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. xxxvi.
- A longer list of Indian trees and shrubs may be obtained from the poet's '*Ali nāmā*', so it is difficult to follow Peter Gaeffke's argument that the Indian *masnavī* writers reworked 'the scattered comparisons and metaphors' of garden plants and birds in Persian poetry into extended garden descriptions of their 'Dakkini Sufi narratives'; see Gaeffke, 'The Garden of Light', pp. 225, 234.
- St-Denis, 'Just What is a Garden', p. 71.



Noorjehan Bilgrami, *Mausiri key saaye talay IX*, 2015, Acrylic, graphite and rice paper on Arches Paper print segments in archival ink, 23 x 29.5 inches

‘The molsari flowers had scented the air
The *akas* flower carried aloeswood fragrance’

Ali Nama. Mulla Nusrati



Noorjehan Bilgrami, *Mausiri key saayee* (left), X-XII, 2020, Acrylic, graphite on rice paper, Nepalese print segments in archival ink, 10 x 14 inches each.



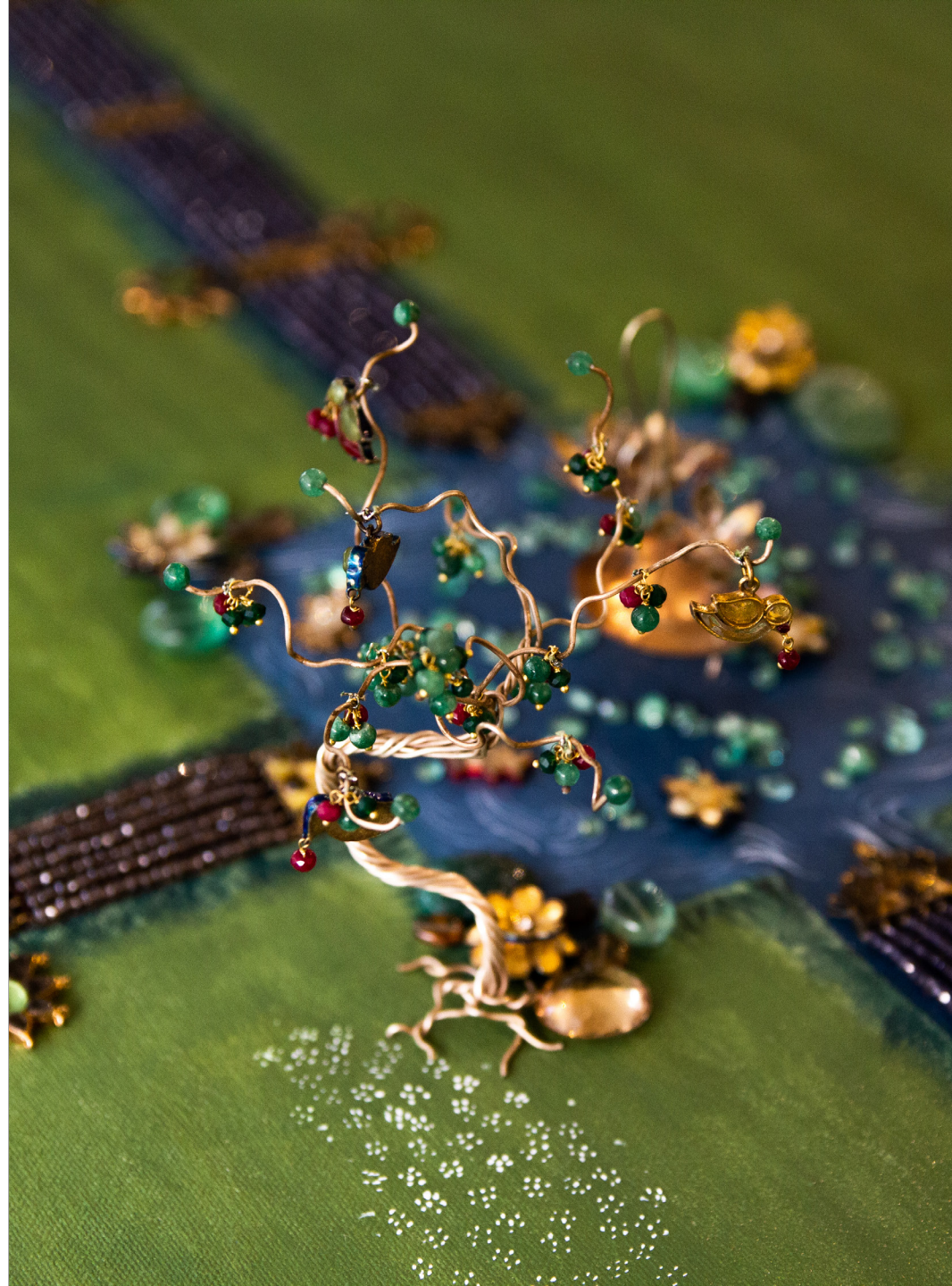
‘This bouquet, so special, of my garden flowers
Is a cure for the scars of all grieving hearts

Every watercourse with silver filled up
Every green leaf with a silver border’

Tuti Nama, Mulla Ghawassi

‘The beloved when revived with fragrance
Was brought on to a platform bejewelled’

Gulshan e Ishq, Mulla Nusrati



Amber Sami with Masooma Syed and Hanna Khalid, *A Jewelled Garden*, 2020, Jewellery and acrylics on canvas, 48 x 30 inches.





Buntio Kazmi, *Untitled*, 2020, Jamnawar shawl, 3 yards, 15 inches x 34 inches

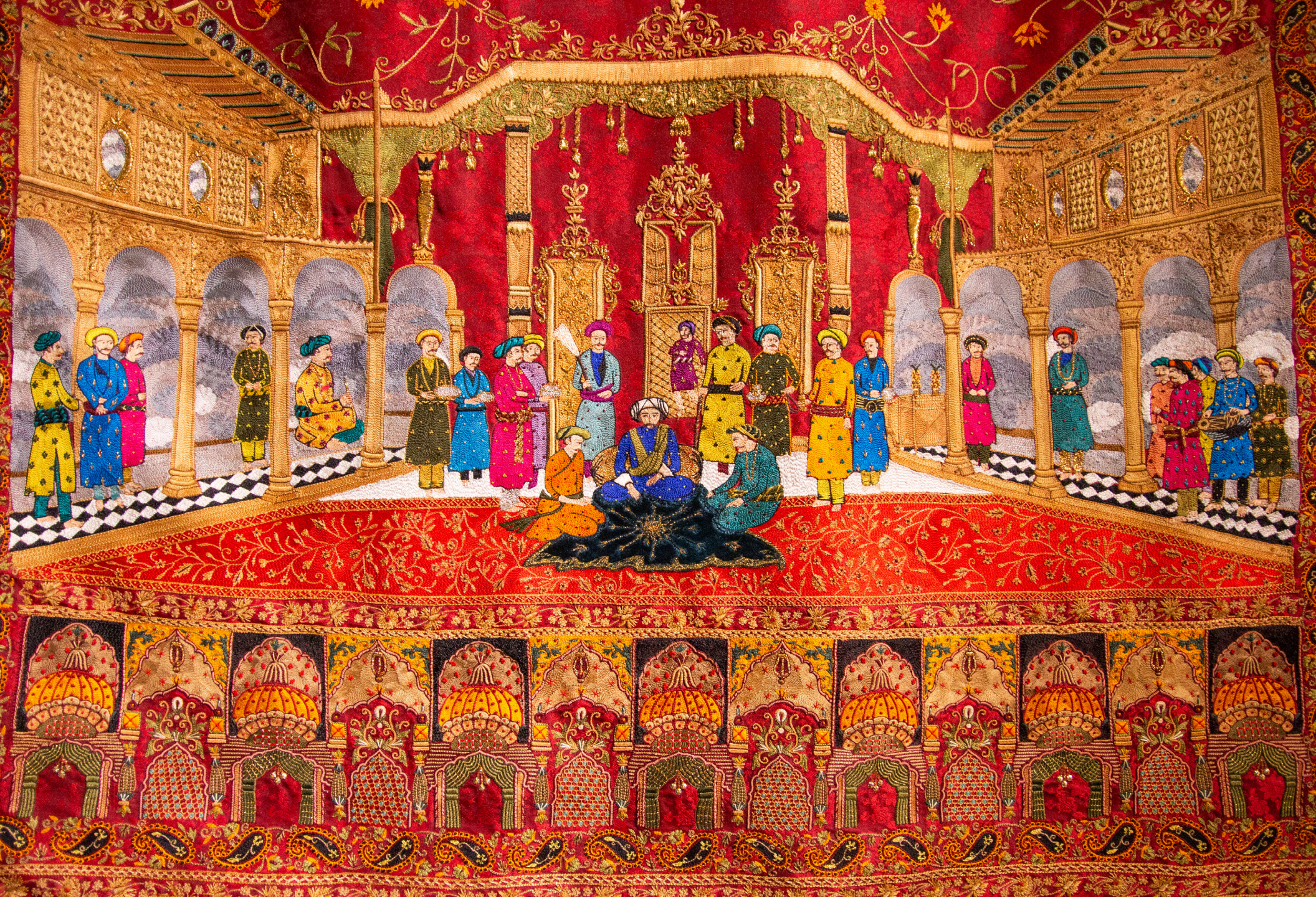
‘The morning breeze ornamenting herself totally
Bedecked the beloved in each garden fully

As if the beloved had a shimmering attire
A shade-shine fabric bordered with green’

Ali Nama. Mulla Nusrati

Bunto Kazmi, *Untitled*, 2020, Jamawar shawl, 3 yards, 4 inches x 29.5 inches





From the collection of Bunto Kazmi, *Untitled*, Vintage banarsi/zardozi borders, Size Variable.



‘To the fairies, the palace by moonlight in a perfumed mountain drenched in light
Enveloped in a jewel encrusted veil, its terraces shimmering like abrak (mica)

Its garden flowers like china cups filled with the milk of moonlight
It’s an illusion more enchanting than the reality of the heavens it mirrors’

Ali Nama. Mulla Nusrati





Shah Jahan's
Taj Mahal
The Taj Mahal is a white marble mausoleum located in Agra, India. It was built by Shah Jahan in memory of his third wife, Mumtaz Mahal. The mausoleum is surrounded by a large garden and is considered one of the greatest architectural achievements of the Mughal Empire.

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Meher Afroz, *Meher Afroz*, Graphite on wasli, 22 x 13 inches.

Meher Afroz, 2020, *بهار*, Acrylic, silver leaf, thread on handmade Nepalese paper, 13 x 63 inches.



Sumaya Durrani's three sound/video/performative works and in collaboration with Jalaluddin Ahmed literally place the artist's heart out before the viewer listener.

Tahira Arshad Durrani, Sumaya's mother was the pioneer of bridal embroidery in Lahore. Ideal, her atelier was founded in 1955 on Mall Road and was extended to Murree, Karachi and Hong Kong. It was once the studio of Amrita Sher Gil. This space was the centre of Tahira Begum's existence, an artist who spent her entire life perfecting the embroidery of the garden, roses in particular. She was a designer par excellence.

She sought her passion, her focus and her reward from her embroidery. She designed the costumes of Princess Farah Diba of Iran and Benazir Bhutto among others, but she shunned the catwalk.

She went to work even when dementia started to slowly take over. It kept her stable and engaged. But she was forced to abandon her studio, her work, her life and taken away to Islamabad by her son and younger daughter. This happened after the death of her husband, Arshad Durrani.

The trauma of dislocation and displacement led to acute anxiety and subsequent aggravation of her dementia. She is now heavily sedated and lost her will to speak.

She was and remains barred from meeting Sumaya, her elder daughter. This video refers to her meeting with Sumaya after 6 years of separation. Tahira Durrani was known to articulate her intellectual sensibility through verse. This is a conversation in verse that she has with Sumaya's husband

Tahira Begum's last wish was for Sumaya to make her atelier into a museum of her life's work. Her exquisite embroideries remain locked, and it is now for Sumaya to raise the funds (three crore rupees) to reclaim the space and prevent its sale.

They say that paradise lies at the feet of the mother. These earthly gardens are but a reflection...

Arshad Durrani, Sumaya's father, was an artist of incredible imagination and wisdom. He was among the pioneers of Pakistan Television Cooperation. He was the life at Ajoka Theatre in Lahore. His passion led him to many leading roles.

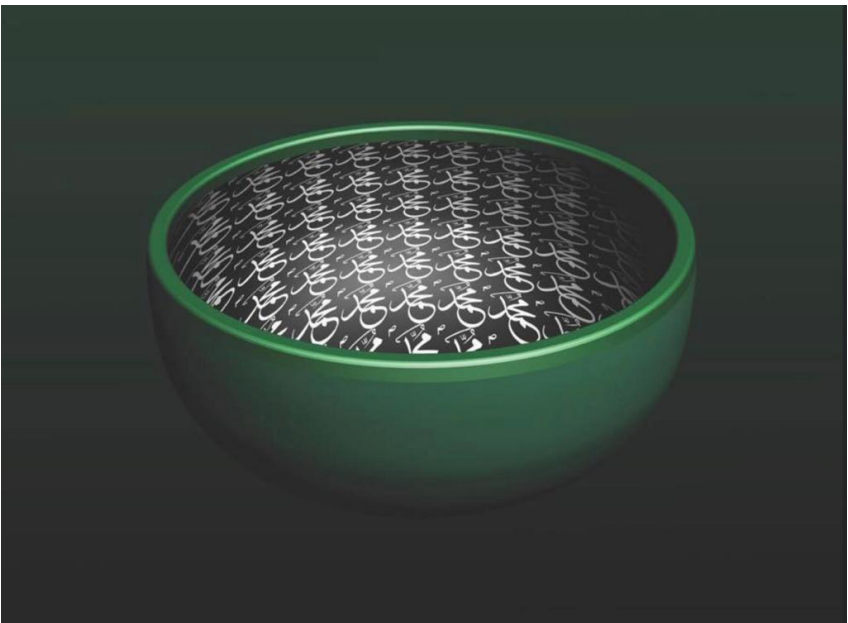
Ailing and aged, Tahira and Arshad had both been abandoned by their son and daughter.

Arshad's love for his wife and his dignity was such that he rejoined Ajoka, despite him being diagnosed with cancer.

He was the beloved father, her mentor and beloved, for whom the artist Sumaya Durrani mourns....

The garden can only heal if there is a wound.

As narrated by Sumaya Durrani to Amra Ali (Karachi, February 2020)



Sumaya Durrani, *Saqi-e-Kausar* from the series *Rukh-e-Musaffa* (PBUH), 2007-2013, Digital print on canvas, 22 x 16 inches.

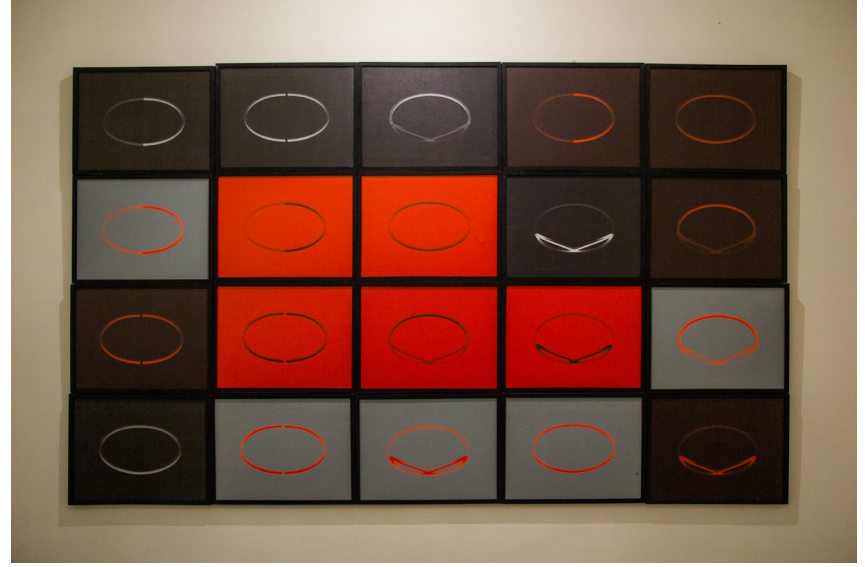


Sumaya Durrani and Jalaluddin Ahmed, *Boi*, Performance and sound work (with Quran), 25 min approx.





Sumaya Durrani, *Fatima-tu-Zehra (RA) Contractions of My Heart*, 2008-2013, Digital print on canvas, Variable.



Sumaya Durrani, Jalaluddin Ahmed, Doctoral Research 2012 to Date, University of New South Wales Sydney



Sumaya Durrani and Jalaluddin Ahmed, *Table-e-Jang*, Photographic print and sound, 5 mins approx.

Sumaya Durrani, Jalaluddin Ahmed, Doctoral Research 2012 to Date, University of New South Wales Sydney



*'The garden's young trees stood bent over,
The flowers lay prostrate as if in prayer*

*The few flowering boughs bowed low in respect
The faces of their flowers were smeared with dust*

*No fire remained on the tulip's cheek
No moisture sparkled in the narcissus eye*

*The few leaves remaining seemed ill and ailing
Weary of their bodies, they stood despairing*

*Clutching at the life ebbing out of the boughs
The buds hung on lifeless, senseless'*

'In an instant, a radiant, bright dawn appeared
The entire world the Throne and Height appeared

He saw (instead) a high place like Tur
Above it a flame, like a flood of lights

The sea of light swelled up like a storm
The world was submerged in those waves mighty

The dry flames of trees lit up with this light
Within each lead the veins showed up alight

The moonflower, aglow, seemed like the full moon
The sunflower's brilliance was like the sun's at noon'

Gulshan e Ishq, Mulla Nusrati



Small rectangular text label on the left wall.



Three small rectangular text labels on the right wall.

Small rectangular text label on the right wall, above a pedestal.



Small rectangular text label on the right wall.



