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LALBAGH CENTENARY YEAR (2012)



It will be recalled that in the BET newsletter of January 2011 we had expressed great concern about the future of Lalbagh and what was planned then by the Government for the future. Among the projects put forward by the Government were:

AMUSEMENT / FUN PARK : LASER SHOWS
WATERFALLS : LARGE FOUNTAIN
ROCK GARDENS (32 ACRES): CHILDREN'S
PLAY
AREA FOOD COURTS : BOATING ON
LAKE

Previous amusement activities such as 3-month long Karnataka Jatre caused disruption to bird life... not to be repeated.

BET protested vigorously and gave a presentation to the Secretary, Horticulture Department, indicating that all these projects should be scrapped. We are pleased to report that the Government shelved the above plan under pressure from BET and other organisations.

BET's recommendations for Lalbagh were as follows:

Make Lalbagh the LEAD GARDEN of Pensinsular India.

Enhance facilities for botanical research. Have weekly talks on botanical subjects.

Implement the plan for a an Orchidarium on the island in the lake. Upgrade the Herbarium.

Set up a botanical museum for education of the public. Subjects that could be covered would be:

- * How Lalbagh evolved over the years – its history.
- * Exotic plants and trees in Lalbagh – an audio-visual presentation.
- * Rare Plant Species of Karnataka and the world.
- * Display of different woods of trees and their uses.
- * All paintings, etchings, lithographs in Lalbagh to be archived, catalogued, scanned (originals to be stored carefully as per the highest standards for such storage), prints to be made available for sale to the public.
- * Library to be run professionally to encourage and facilitate research work.
- * Mount regular plant collecting expeditions sponsored by Lalbagh.
- * Food courts, if considered necessary, to be located outside Lalbagh perimeter gates; no food stalls/vendors to be permitted within the park. This also means prohibiting visitors from bringing food and drink into the park.



The value of Lalbagh and its essential raison d'être are:

It was affiliated to the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew, London through the Royal Botanical Gardens at Calcutta.

Lalbagh has the greatest diversity of trees found in any garden worldwide within 200 acres, grown without any aids (greenhouse etc.). It also has the greatest concentration of exotic trees and plants in India.

Lalbagh's Superintendents included world-famous botanists such as Heyne, New, Black, Cameron, Krumbiegel, Javarayya and Mari Gowda. All of them were trained and/or worked in Kew Gardens.

In addition, the reputed botanist Dr. Wallich, was the first to survey and recommend to the Marquis of Hastings, Viceroy of India, that Lalbagh be developed into a botanical garden.

Megalithic burial mounds with urns and potschards were found east of the Rock in Lalbagh, establishing Lalbagh as a stone and iron age man's habitat. "Hero Stones" dating to the early Vijayanagar empire (1400 AD) have also been found here. There is currently a 20 million year old fossil prominently displayed in the garden.

Many structures of special architectural significance were built after 1820 – Directorate building, library building (previously Krumbiegel's residence), the famous Glass House, Dovecote, etc. The Glass House erected in 1889 is the only existing replica of the famous Crystal Palace constructed in 1851 in Hyde Park, London.

Lalbagh has a library of invaluable books on botany/horticulture. It also has a matchless collection of botanical art (750 paintings), etchings and lithographs. BET appreciated that the park is run by qualified and dedicated executives and staff members. Periodic lectures on botanical horticultural subjects are arranged. The garden is well maintained by skilled and trained workers. The famous Glass House has now been refurbished and the 40 acre lake is installed with a water treatment plant. Most of the old structures in the garden have been retained and the garden is well protected by a wall encompassing its perimeter.

Twice a year Lalbagh holds spectacular flower shows which are attended by upto 200,000 people.

In the latter part of 2011 BET received a contract from the Department of Horticulture for archiving

and cataloguing 1020 original botanical illustrations which were commissioned from 1874 - 1908 by Mr. John Cameron during his stewardship of Lalbagh. These illustrations have not been previously published anywhere, though they are of considerable significance to the history of botany and horticulture in India, as well as the cultural and artistic heritage of Bangalore. The story behind this rich collection originates in a unique collaboration between Colonial masters and colonised artists. The artists who made these paintings, draw their lineage from their ancestors who served in the Mysore and Tanjore courts, where they had come from the Vijayanagar court after the empire's demise, where they had been trained by Persian book illustrators and miniature painters. BET brought to light this collection of illustrations and succeeded in archiving and cataloguing them for posterity.

BET had farmed out this work to Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology, which resulted in 3 volumes of these illustrations being presented to the Horticulture Department.

Given this background, for the centenary, BET has, after many meetings with Horticulture Department, suggested the following programme:

1. Select from among the 1020 illustrations, 500 of the best ones to be brought out in 2 volumes for sale to the public and other worldwide institutions.
2. The previous scanning of these illustrations was poorly done and BET strongly recommends that a professional body scan the illustrations. The scanned illustrations could be used for further work and the originals should be stored away after restoration.
3. BET recommended special storage systems for these illustrations with permanent humidity and temperature controls.
4. Prior to scanning it was recommended that several hundred paintings needed to be restored and remounted.
5. BET further suggested that the Horticulture Department arrange suitable wall space and independent panels in a structure in Lalbagh for a permanent painting gallery for public viewing.
6. BET also suggested that prints of these illustrations be made available for sale to the public.
7. At the peak of the centenary year in August 2012 when the second flower show takes place at Lalbagh, BET suggested that an international conference be held, covering botanical illustrations and gardens worldwide, and related subjects. Sixteen papers over a 2 day period with the assistance of A-Tree and Dr. Anna Spudich to be identified and presented at this conference.
8. Though a structure has not yet been identified within Lalbagh, nonetheless BET feels strongly that there should be a museum within Lalbagh covering its history, an audio-visual presentation on exotic plants and trees within Lalbagh, listing out with illustrations and photographs of rare plant species of Karnataka and a display of different woods of trees and their uses.
9. A library to be run professionally to encourage and facilitate research work.
10. In the last 200 years there have been various articles and reports on Lalbagh. More recently satellite imagery has revealed the outline of the original plots of land which constituted Hyder Ali's and Tipu Sultan's Lalbagh. (See illustration) BET would like to undertake the preparation of a definitive history of Lalbagh, using all prevalent sources and material in Bangalore and the British Museum among others, which will cover the early years of Lalbagh - Hyder Ali and Tipu undertake the preparation of a definitive history of Lalbagh, using all prevalent sources and material in Bangalore and the British Museum among others, which will cover the early years of Lalbagh - Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan and Lalbagh after the British took over in 1800 upto 1947. The reasons for setting up Lalbagh, the botanists involved, the Government officials from British administration and Mysore State, will all be covered in detail in this book.

With considerable relief at the shelving of the proposed projects of the Government, we now look forward to Lalbagh being valued for itself as a botanical garden which could rank among the best in the world. With the projects now suggested, it could be as attractive as any of the best botanical gardens in the world.

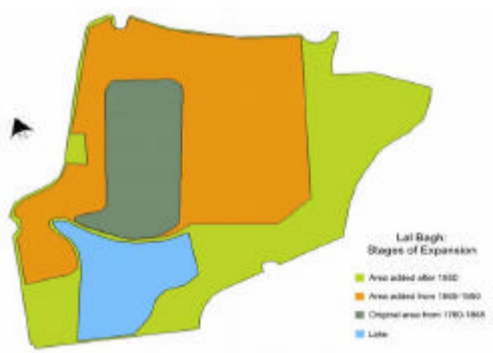


Figure 1. Map showing the presumed original extent and location of Lalbagh in 1760; based on maps published by the Department of Horticulture, Government of Karnataka.

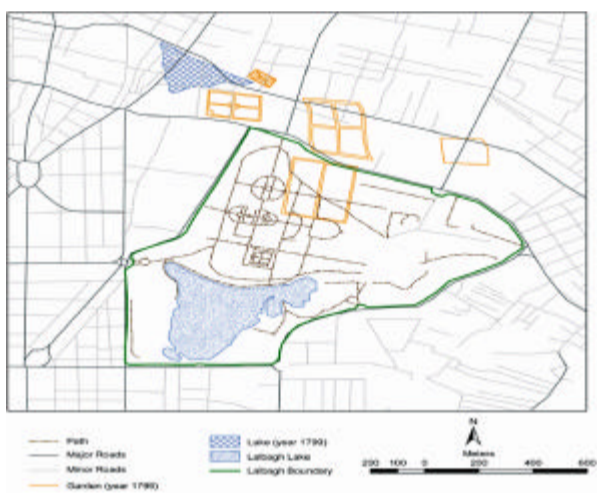


Figure 2. Map of the area around modern Lalbagh, also depicting the locations of the five patches of gardens in 1799, and the lake.



Figure 3. Oblique view illustrating spatial locations and orientation of Lalbagh and its environs in the eighteenth century.



Figure 4. Simulated view corresponding to views in the paintings by Home and Colebrooke.

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