



Research Paper

An Observation on the Growth of Floriculture Tradition in the Development of Himachal Pradesh under the British Rule

Ashish Kumar¹, Dr. Ishan Khan², Dr. Irfan Ahmed³

¹(PhD Scholar (History), Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IEC University, Baddi (H.P.))

²(Assistant Professor (History), University Institute of Legal Studies, Chandigarh University, Mohali (Punjab))

³(Assistant Professor (History), Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IEC University, Baddi (H.P.))

ABSTRACT: Himachal Pradesh is one of the most beautiful hilly state belonging to northern region in India that has a suitable geographical and climate structure to support agriculture, horticulture and floriculture. The significant of floricultural development was observed during the British rule with mid-19th century, through independent India till 1947. The British influence in the Indian land especially for Himachal Pradesh seems to have been the point of change in the agricultural, horticultural and floriculture. Being aware of the potential of the region the colonial administration initiated the systematic horticultural and floricultural practices in the region. Planting of these trees especially the “apples, pears, plums and cherries” became synonymous with the British presence. “Samuel Stokes” an American expatriate who settled in the region contributed to the apple cultivation as early as the first half of the 19th century. This research paper provides a discussion on how these practices developed, how geography and climates played a part, and the incorporation of traditional knowledge at this time. This paper focuses on the expansion of floriculture tradition in the development of Himachal Pradesh under the British Rule.

KEYWORDS: Floriculture, Development, Himachal Pradesh, British Rule, British Policies.

Received 11 Sep., 2025; Revised 20 Sep., 2025; Accepted 22 Sep., 2025 © The author(s) 2025.

Published with open access at www.questjournals.org

I.INTRODUCTION

Introducing the new species of plants was one of the important steps made during this period by British administration. Flowering plants were introduced by British horticulturists and these yielded well in the warm climate of Himachal Pradesh. Through high altitude, floriculture was adopted in growing of ornamental flowers for regional use and export¹. The physical feature of Himachal Pradesh from Shivalik to the Himalayas was suitable for different horticulture and floriculture crops. The climate in the region was cold during winters and moderate during summers which was suitable for mainly temperate fruits and flower growing². These natural amenities were not wasted by the British. Such areas as “Shimla, Kullu and Manali” became the experimentation grounds for horticultural development. The soil drainage and light condition of these areas favoured the cultivation of crops and growth of flowers. Moreover, because of the higher and colder grounds, Himachal Pradesh was ideal for the farming of crops that could not be planted in the plains³. The introduction of irrigation systems in the British era was crucial to raising agricultural output. The old ways of water management were combined with the contemporary method of watering the fruits and flowers in the garden through irrigation even during dry weathers⁴.

The British administration which introduced modern techniques in Himachal Pradesh understood the importance of these indigenous systems. Local fruits were grown, and the organic manure was adopted from Britain and combined with the traditional methods to increase productivity. Both the “Gaddis” and “Kinnauras” of the region were well aware of the different flora and fauna that were found in the area. They embraced vertical farming and in the process of managing the productivity of bio-resources they used materials that were available to maintain the soil fertility and to combat the diseases that affected crops. The British usually relied on these communities to help them introduce exotic crops to their environment. Another area that received boost from

traditional knowledge was floriculture. Local flowers including “marigolds, lotuses” etc., which had social and religious importance were grown along with new varieties brought from Britain⁵.

II.FLORICULTURE PRACTICES IN BRITISH PERIOD

The British imperialism was a turning point in the development of floriculture in Himachal Pradesh influenced by aesthetic landscaping during the Britishers regime and geographical suitability. Modern floriculture practices were also initiated by the British along with new ornamental plant varieties compatible with indigenous knowledge of the local people. This integration made the region as a hub of floriculture mainly in the colonial places like “Shimla, Dalhousie and Kasauli” etc. The British passion for ornamental gardens was the major reason why new varieties of flowers were imported into Himachal Pradesh. Local growers raised European varieties like roses, dahlias, chrysanthemums, and marigolds familiar with the tropical weather. Some experimental gardens were developed in Shimla and other high-altitude regions to assess the suitability of these species to the Himalayas⁶.

Among all introduced landmarks, the Britons made the most significant impact by creating ornamental gardens near the administrative and recreational areas. Floral decorations in houses and streets became a specialty of the then summer capital of British India, Shimla. The gardens of the “Vice regal Lodge” had well maintained flower beds, pathways with flowers in season and exotic shrubs. These gardens were not only providing leisure but also the place to demonstrate new floricultural technologies. Although British brought new exotic plants and modern methods of cultivation, traditional forms of floriculture were still to be found in local societies. These include Marigolds and lotuses which were considered as religious and cultural plants important for festivals, religious ceremonies and temple uses. Organic fertilization with compost and pest control was done traditionally while the British introduced new methods of farming. Thus, the integration of conventional and innovative approaches improved the variety and longevity of floriculture in the area⁷.

The British applied scientific practices in order to increase yields and quality of floriculture. To manage ornamental gardens, it was possible that soil sampling, methods of watering, and seasonal calendars were important. Greenhouses were built in order to grow delicate and exotic plants which needed special conditions to grow. Local gardeners were trained to continue the education of scientific floriculture and were able to maintain and cultivate colonial gardens. The cities of Shimla, Dalhousie, and Kasauli that have temperate climate regimes became centers for cultivating seasonal flowers and raising lawns of European standards. These settlements were also adorned with flowers, which also evolved into showing the colonials’ pride. Flower fairs and competitions held by British every year inspired people of the region to indulge in horticulture and floriculture to the best of their abilities⁸.

Floriculture during British rule had social economic impact on people in the area. Flowers were used in homes of colonial settlers and there were local farmers and labours who were involved in growing flowers in nurseries, landscaping and gardening. Besides, growing of ornamental plants for sale in local and regional markets was another income generating activity. The British also contributed to the commercialization of floriculture through the transport of flowers to urban centers thus extending the integration of the region into other economic circuits. However, floriculture industry during the British era encountered some problems. The use of exotic species sometimes caused the exclusion of native plant species, and hence change of plant diversity in the affected areas. However, the high cost of inputs particularly for the infrastructure required to support modern floriculture practices was also a constrain to small-scale farmers. These challenges, however, were somewhat offset by the continuing strength of traditional practices and the flexibility of local populations⁹. The floriculture practices that were developed during the British regime were well practiced in Himachal Pradesh. Even today the gardens and the ornamental landscapes designed by British are of considerable importance and have contributed to the further development of horticulture in the state. Incorporation of both the conventional and the new floriculture system was the main cornerstone of a profitable and diversified floral market that boosted the horticulture and floriculture sector of the region¹⁰.

Floriculture in Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh, which has been famous for scenic beauty and cultural heritage, was also given boost during British rule. The Briton’s brought ornaments such to the region to act as beautification elements for colonial facilities. The climate of Chamba was not very hot, and the soil was auspicious to grow both local and foreign varieties of flowers. These flowers were planted in the garden of administrative offices, bungalows and other public places with European horticultural influence. Flower shows, which took form of competitions that were normally organized seasonally by the British also boosted floriculture in the district. In Chamba new species were introduced but traditional floriculture of marigolds and lotuses used in religious ceremonies persisted. Local people were actively involved in the management of British-established gardens especially since they adopted traditional practices such as the use of organic manure while adopting other practices brought in by the colonial masters. Flowers beautified Chamba apart from providing employment to the people as flowers were being sold in the regional markets. These two approaches to floriculture during the British time paved the way for horticulture in Chamba which has continued up to this time^{11 & 12}.

III.DEVELOPMENT OF FLORICULTURE IN HIMACHAL PRADESH DURING THE BRITISH RULE

Floriculture during the British rule made a transition in the agriculture and culture of Himachal Pradesh. The British due to their fascination for decorative gardening and the suitability of the area for growing a large number of flowering plants introduced modern methods of floriculture and exotic flower plants in the region. These transformed not only the colonial belief of establishment and the outlook of the colonial settlements but also indirectly shaped the future floriculture industry of Himachal Pradesh. Many exotic flower species introduced were mainly cultivated in the colonial centers which the British had evolved as gardens and other open spaces^{13 & 14}.

For the development of floriculture, the British introduced many scientific ideas and techniques. Local gardeners were trained on new floriculture techniques to enable them to maintain the ornamental gardens properly. The British also brought in irrigation systems so as to provide adequate water during the flower growing period when water is scarce in some areas¹⁵. Thus, the colonial settlements in Himachal Pradesh turned into the center of growth of floriculture. Flowers were used in plenty as adornments for homes, public places as well as offices. Flower shows and exhibitions held on yearly basis within these settlement provided incentive for competition and development of floriculture. Such events involved the colonial officials and local people in mass and helped in popularising the practice in those areas.

While the British began to grow imported flowers and introduced new technologies of cultivation, local communities pursued their traditional occupation of floriculture. The traditional practices of organic manuring and water conservation were used in conjunction with the British methods to develop a system that added value to floriculture in Himachal Pradesh. It also made certain that British introduced changes were durable and culturally appropriate.

The development of floriculture during the British time had a great impact on the socio-economic effect. The need for ornamental plants led to employment of people in the society especially as gardeners and nursery persons. With regard to floriculture, its commercialization also occurred in this time when flowers were sold locally as well as in the regions. These changes not only improved the living standards of local farmers, but also tied the Himachal Pradesh into other economy streams. The floriculture practices initiated during British regime have left good impact in Himachal Pradesh. The ornamental gardens and the landscaping that was brought to the region by the Britons formed some of the greatest influences in horticulture. The blend of conventional and advanced floriculture practices defined the course of the floriculture of the modern India as the Himachal Pradesh was emerged as a centre of the floriculture in modern India¹⁶.

IV.HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF FLOWER CULTIVATION IN HIMACHAL PRADESH DURING THE BRITISH RULE

Flower cultivation in Himachal Pradesh during the British phase forms part of the colonial modifications of the natural and cultural geography of the area. Due to its geographical and climatic conditions, Himachal Pradesh became one of the favourite states of ornamental gardening and the British interest in aesthetics and the attempt to replicate the European horticultural styles in the Indian subcontinent. The introduction of floriculture practices and flower cultivation during this period was as a result of colonialism, innovation, and the use of local resources and culture¹⁷.

Floriculture was also helped by the action of the British administration when it set up Shimla as the summer capital of British India. Due to a desire to make offices and other infrastructural common places, and homes gorgeous flowering plants had also immigrated. The ornamental gardens were established in the colonial centres where the systematic pattern of lawns, flower bed and path were represented the European style. To support flower cultivation, the British started having nurseries and experimental garden where species which had been introduced from other parts of the world were grown in the Himalayan conditions. Greenhouses were built in order to provide shelter to the plants and to prolong the periods of the year that such plants can grow in. These measures not only changed the looks of the region but also paved the way for planned floriculture in Himachal Pradesh¹⁸.

On the one hand, the British brought exotic flowers and the most advanced techniques of gardening, on the other hand they used some aspects of local experience and culture. Native marigolds and lotuses species were used to intermix British-style garden elements with what was a traditional and utilitarian horticultural focus. Britain's collaboration with the Indigenous communities made it possible to maintain the sustainable nature of floriculture practices brought about during colonization. Floriculture in British was also associated with economic and social relevance. The growing of flowers provided employment to the farmers and labourers in the locality in form of employment as gardeners, nurserymen and flower suppliers.

The increased use of ornamental plants in colonial territories motivated the flow of flowers in regional markets to integrate floriculture into the economy. Moreover, British promoted technology advancement of flower farming¹⁹. The historical background of flower growing in British-era Himachal Pradesh demonstrates how

imperial endeavours changed the agricultural and cultural landscape of the area. Himachal's modern horticultural development was shaped by the British elements of ornamental gardens and floricultural practices. This legacy supported the combination of indigenous practices with colonial technologies to foster the sustainable floriculture system that exists today²⁰.

V. INTRODUCTION OF ORNAMENTAL PLANTS AND EXOTIC FLOWERS IN HIMACHAL PRADESH DURING THE BRITISH RULE

The British period in Himachal Pradesh can be seen as the starting point for a rational approach towards introduction of horticultural or garden and flowering plants in the region. The purpose of the introduction of the floral species and gardening styles was the developing of the European-style gardens that were in high popularity among the British and, as the Himalayas are suitable for the temperate plants, the British brought many plants and started to alter the looks of the colonies. These endeavours did impact the floriculture of Himachal Pradesh and paved the way for its future floriculture industry. The British made it possible for varieties of flower chrysanthemums, lilies and roses among others to be grown in Himachal Pradesh.

Some of these plants were imported from Europe and other parts of temperate globe and were gradually introduced to the tropical conditions. High-altitude areas offered a temperate climate favourable for the development of these species. There were greenhouses and nurseries to cultivate sensitive stock which required particular environmental conditions. The British also tried other flowers that could be grown all year round to enhance their garden appearances. Agronomic yearly flower fairs and contests in colonial centres demonstrated the effectiveness of these introductions and stimulated the development of improved methods in floriculture.

Very soon, the ornamental gardens emerged as a hallmark of the British colonies in Himachal Pradesh. These gardens were well designed, with square-shaped flower beds, paths and water fountains that were much influenced by European designs. The British also brought locals into maintaining these gardens; they educated local gardeners in the modern techniques of landscaping while adopting native knowledge. The British introduced a number of decorative plants and flowers in the region and in addition to beautifying the natural vales of Himachal Pradesh, they left a significant impact on the socio- economic sphere of the region.

Various flowers appeared to be used in decorative and ceremonial processes in local context as a continuity of colonial and indigenous practices. Increase in demand for ornamental plants generated new income producing activities for farmers and labourers within the community involved in production of nurseries and gardens. Gradually the trade of flower and ornamental plants in local markets was found to be an emerging economic activity. The British brought some beautiful plants and flowers that have now become a tradition in Himachal Pradesh. All these species sustained the floricultural sector after independence and helped the state to earn a reputation as a horticulture state. The introduction of these exotic species into contact with local vegetation thereby created the right environments for sustainable and diverse floriculture practices as practiced in the region today²¹.

VI. GARDENS AND ESTATES ESTABLISHED IN HIMACHAL PRADESH DURING THE BRITISH RULE

In the British time, Himachal Pradesh evolved as one of the important regions for gardening and plantation of gardens and estates in European style. The colonial masters motivated by natural picturesque, and favourable climate of the region developed different ornamental gardens and estates. These gardens also majestically beautified the outlook of colonial settlements other than being used as showpiece of floral and foliage activities in the region. Some of the most famous garden designs are those designed around the "Vice regal Lodge", currently the "Indian Institute of Advanced Study". These gardens were laid down in geometric patterns with broad lawns and bright flower beds with multiple varieties. The gardens also included water fountains and terrains and walkways that represented European flair in conjunction with the natural Himalayan geography²².

The Ridge area in Shimla, especially in close proximity to the "Christ Church", became the second centre of ornamental gardening. "Marigolds, petunias and pansies" was grown to provide flowers that beautify the public spaces and therefore became a central place for colonial functions and celebrations. Other modest towns in Himachal Pradesh also boasted of beautiful gardens with exotic flowers as well as flowers which grew naturally in the region. While some of these gardens can be described as "Governor's" or official's office gardens, they exemplified the British desire for ornamented gardens that enriched the official living quality. British officials and settlers also built large homes with extensive yards for gardens and groves of trees. Most of these estates intermingled flowers with fruits, hence the unification of floriculture with horticulture.

Some of the regions like Mashobra and Chharabra got famous for their picturesque and horticultural developments. Most of the garden created during the British period were both research and experimental gardens for growing alien plant species in the region. These were established to grow flowers and ornamental plants with a view of multiplying them for use in various homesteads. These gardens were transformed into experimentation ground where "soil testing, pest control, irrigation" and several other scientific approaches were experimented²³.

Gardens and estates that were developed during Britain period were not only the symbol of aesthetics; they set an official course of the social and culture among colonial elites. Such events as annual flower shows and gardening competition were held at places such as Shimla for the mobilization of strong horticultural culture of the society. Such events not only demonstrated the effectiveness of British gardening activities but also stirred up local people's interest in floriculture. Some of the gardens and estates laid by the British are still present in Himachal Pradesh. These gardens like the ones at the "Vice regal Lodge" are still places of interest, still frequently visited by tourist and remind the people of the colonial history. The horticultural practices and exotic species introduced in these gardens have today become part of the state's image and have impacted on modern landscaping and floriculture in the region²⁴.

VII.CONCLUSION

Floriculture was most popular tradition in Himachal Pradesh during the British period due to its help in the revenue structure and progress of Hilly states. The floriculture practices that were developed during the British regime were well practiced in Himachal Pradesh. Even today the gardens and the ornamental landscapes designed by British are of considerable importance and have contributed to the further development of horticulture in the state. Incorporation of both the conventional and the new floriculture system was the main cornerstone of a profitable and diversified floral market that boosted the horticulture and floriculture sector of the region. British govt. also introduced many policies in the flourishing this tradition which provide the employment for the local Himachali people.

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