



INDO-JAPAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY

Bonsai - A Living Japanese Art

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BONSAI



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PREFACE

This Resource Paper on 'Bonsai' is an effort to highlight the unique nature of Bonsai, the Japanese art, among the Indian population. The year 2017 marks the 60th Year of Japan-India Friendship Exchanges and IJCCI has been showcasing a number of Japanese cultural aspects; one such effort was a two-day exhibition on Bonsai at IJCCI premises recently by Mr. K. Sivaji of Sivaji Bonsai, that attracted a large number of audience. The Resource Paper is an outcome of an interview of the undersigned with Mr. Sivaji and we thank him for his cooperation.

The mushrooming of high rise buildings does not spare much of land area and the present robotic life-style has no time to usher in greenery within the house environs. It is our earnest effort to take Bonsai into every house, to cultivate interest among people and to train as many students as possible. Establishing a Bonsai Club is also on the anvil. There are a good number of dedicated Bonsai associations and teachers in India and IJCCI appreciates them and salutes them for their contribution and, it is our earnest desire to establish this centuries-old divine Japanese art firmly in Indian soil.

Mr. K. Sivaji, Founder of Sivaji Bonsai is a renowned Bonsai, Suseiki and Saikei Artist in Chennai and one of the leading Bonsai Masters in India dedicated to popularising the art. He has participated in several workshops, conferences and exhibitions all over India and has been training a good number of interested students. Mr. Sivaji has mastered the art from world renowned Bonsai Masters from Japan, Vietnam, Indonesia, Philippines and England.

We hope that the readers not only find the resource material useful and informative but also firmly believe that it would kindle an urge in them to learn and practice this art.

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Suguna Ramamoorthy
Secretary-General

Bonsai A Living Japanese Art

Bonsai is a Japanese Art. It means a tree or a shrub grown in a flat tray or a pot. “Bon” in Japanese means tray and “Sai” means plant - together they make Bonsai, meaning a miniaturised tree with all its natural resemblance grown in a pot.

How the mini world of bonsai came into being is a question that is often debated. There are two schools of thought in Japan - one advocates that Bonsai is a modification of a potted plant which originated in India, cultivated by the sages who were the medicinal practitioners then, and this art is referred to in the Ayurveda as “Vamanathanu Vrishadi Vidya” - meaning the science of dwarfing the plant. This art was taken to China by the Dyan Buddhist Monks and travelled to Japan. But the undisputable fact is that the Japanese perfected the art of Bonsai to the present day, in a matured state. Now Bonsai is almost synonymous with Japan.

The other school advocates that Bonsai is from Japan. The earliest reference of dwarf plants in pots is found in the scrolls of Priest Honen preserved with the Kasuga Shrine Records, dating back to the military regime of Kamakura (1192 to 1333AD). The scrolls depict trees in their natural form, planted in pots and displayed in shelves. Even though the scrolls were produced in the Kamakura era, they depict the life in the earlier Heinen period (794 to 1191 AD).

There is the famous Noh- Play called “ Hachi No Hi” written during the reign of YoshimitsuAshikaya (1358 - 1408),the play narrates the incident from the life of ToshiyoriHojo , the fifth ruler of Kamakura.A poor soldier named Genzaemon Sano is visited by the King disguised as a Priest. Unable to procure firewood to keep the Priest warm at night in his cottage situated in the wilderness, Sano cut his collection of Apricot, Cherry and Pine Bonsai to make fire.

Bonsai in the earlier days remained as a hobby of Aristocrats. Common people were not allowed to practice it and were executed if they grew bonsai. However the technique of growing bonsai spread throughout Japan and during the late 19th century, bonsai became a common man's hobby and every house in Japan had a bonsai. The dreadful Kato earthquake virtually decimated the bonsai promotion group which had come into being by then. The bonsai artists who escaped the fury of the floods and earthquake moved to Omiya village, far away from Tokyo and started growing bonsai as a co-operative society. In 1923, they convened the First Bonsai Conference and formulated certain rules for Bonsai. Those are the basis of the rules being followed till now throughout the world.

Bonsai is easy to grow if the technique of Bonsai is known and if one has the love for plants and dedication, patience and time. All

the trees and shrubs with primary or tap root can be grown as Bonsai. Yet some trees are very good for Bonsai. An interesting trunk line with good arrangement of branches, attractive bark colour, compact and fine textured foliage with small leaves, flowers and fruits in a Bonsai will make it look extremely good.

Size of Bonsai

Mini Bonsaiupto 5 CMs ;
Mame Bonsai.....5 to 15 CMs
Small Bonsai.....15 to 30 CMs ;
Medium Bonsai.....30 to 60 CMs and
Large or Big Bonsai.....60 to 100 CMs

Basic Styles of Bonsai

Formal Upright; Informal Upright; Slanting; Semi Cascade; Cascade and Literati. These are the six Bonsai styles approved at the FIRST WORLD BONSAI CONFERENCE in Tokyo in 1923. They continue to be the Basic Styles in Bonsai. Over a period of time, many more styles have been introduced and approved.

Tools used in Bonsai

Trimming shears; Concave branch cutter; Potting trowel; WireCutter; Root hook; Turn table; Small Saw; Wire mesh and Sprayer. For a beginner, all these tools are not essential. A small shear, cutter and wire will be enough.

Pots used in Bonsai

The pot is very important for Bonsai. Plant and pot should complement each other; neither one should dominate the other for a good Bonsai. There are several shapes of pots like rectangular, oval, round , square etc. The materials used for pots also differ like mud, cement, plastic, terracotta, ceramic and porcelain varieties are available.

Soil mixture

The soil should be loose and should have a good drainage facility. Small and nice soil should be sieved and removed as it will clog the pot. Standard Bonsai soil will be 1/3 compost, 1/3 sand and 1/3 garden soil, along with some organic fertilizer and leaf mould. Soil can be prepared as per the nature and requirement of the plant. But it should have a good drainage facility and fertilizer. Another kind of soil mix would be one part loam, two parts sphagnum moss and two parts granite grit. This will also suit most Bonsai. Another mixture that would be the best for plants is the one which does not require lime in soil and of those which require moisture always, one part of loam, three parts sphagnum moss and one part of granite grit is good.

Pruning

Pruning is absolutely necessary to create an attractive bonsai. Pruning enables light and air to circulate between the branches and leaves. Sharp scissors should be used for pruning.

Wiring

Wiring is the most important aspect in Bonsai to create the shape of trunk and branches. Wire is wound at an angle of 45 degrees around the branches and trunk to change the shape. It should be ensured that the wire should not create a wound in the bark and at the same time it should not be loose also. Generally the thickness of wire can be 1/3 to 1/2 of the diameter of the branch. Correct wiring of a tree needs practice and experience.

Watering

All the plants need water throughout their life. Requirement of water for each plant differs with the size of the plant, pot and season.

Feeding

As the Bonsai is restricted in a pot, regular feeding is absolutely necessary. Liquid and solid manure can be used. Strong fertilizers should be avoided.

Pest control

Like other plants, Bonsai also is subject to pest attack. The right pesticide would be organic ones, like neem oil in a diluted form.

Plants suitable for Bonsai in Chennai

Banyan, Peepal, All Ficus varieties, Bougainvillea, Casurina, Tamarind, Sapota, Guava, Malphigia, Carmona microphyla etc. All trees and plants grown in Chennai which have long life can be grown as bonsai.

Benefits of Bonsai

There are a lot of benefits in growing Bonsai. The therapeutic value of Bonsai is indisputable. There are certain plants like Jade and Ficus religiosa that cure many diseases by sitting near it. Bonsai is the best hobby in the world. It gives a lot of patience, imagination, concentration and the Japanese consider this as the highest form of Meditation. By growing Bonsai, the plants which face the threat of extinction can be saved. For example, Moringa hildebrandtii is extinct in its native country, Madagascar. But it has been saved and grown in many other countries by Horticulturists as Bonsai, potted plant and in nature. Likewise Banyan and Peepal in India face a threat of extinction as nobody is growing it in the ground now-a-days as it occupies a lot of space. The famous Adyar Banyan is no more as it was once. There are only 3 big Banyans in India to be proud of, even though it is a national tree and a native of India. If it is not protected, the Banyan can be seen only as a Bonsai by the future generations if it is grown as a Bonsai or as a potted plant.

In urban areas, the only way to grow plants to produce oxygen is by growing Bonsai. A small plant can generate oxygen sufficient for one person. A three feet Tamarind Bonsai can give oxygen for four persons.

Misconceptions about Bonsai

Many people consider that there is an amount of cruelty to plants in cutting and arresting its growth in a pot. Actually there is no cruelty to the plants in pruning and shaping. The plant needs pruning for its well-being. From time immemorial, big trees have been pruned to give good growth. Only plants which grow well and tolerate pruning are used in Bonsai. Plants which cannot tolerate pruning are not grown as a Bonsai. For example Coconut, Palms, Cycads etc. cannot be cut or pruned and so there are not used for Bonsai. Pruning a Bonsai is just like cutting our nail or hair which will grow again. In fact, Bonsai gives good air, pure water, sufficient food and above all a lot of love. Bonsai outgrows the life of a natural tree. Considering Bonsai Art as a cruelty is only an ignorance of Horticulture and Civilization in general. No Bonsai Artist ever kills a Bonsai. Bonsai can be grown for pleasure as a hobby or for display in exhibitions. It is important to maintain the Bonsai plants carefully and regularly. As the Bonsai matures, it needs refining and pruning for making it look the best. A mature Bonsai is a beauty and this beauty is a joy forever.

Suiseki and Saikei

'Suiseki' and 'Saikei' are the art forms that complement Bonsai. While Suiseki is the Japanese art of stone appreciation, which values aspects like stability, longevity and immortality, formed through time by wind and water, stones can take several sizes and shapes, reminding us of natural objects. Saikei refers to a Japanese ornamental miniature landscape.

Suiseki

The art of Suiseki originated in Japan and the word 'Suiseki' is used for this art in all languages throughout the world. This Art is comparable to the great Art of Bonsai and are complimentary to each other. 'Suiseki' represents a single stone that has many features like mountain, waterfalls in a mountain, a river, pond, animals etc. irrespective of the stone, the viewer can feel the artistic beauty of the things in nature. It is also an abridged word which includes in itself the five elements like water, scene, stone, mountain and sentiment. The literal meaning of Suiseki is 'Water Stone'. A Suiseki should be a single stone, should have specific characters for the viewer to imagine and should be small. Only a single cut is permissible for display. There are many kinds of stone viz. mountain, mountain with water falls and rivers, distant mountain, mountain with lake, rock shaped stones, cave stones, stones resembling animals and human beings etc. It gives the viewer a lot of imagination, joy and peace of mind. Colours of the stones add to the beauty of the scenery. The Art of Suiseki is an eternal one and can be displayed separately or along with Bonsai.

Saikei

'Saikei' is a Japanese word meaning 'Living Landscape'. "Sai" means a plant and "Kei" means a view or a scene. Adapting Bonsai techniques, the young nursery plants and stones are used in flat trays to make Saikei. This is an instant art to create a miniature garden and landscape. Though many people throughout Japan practiced this art for many years, the pioneering effort of establishing the School of Saikei was made by one Mr Toshio Kawamoto of Japan, a Bonsai artist during the 1950s. Using small nursery plants and stones, he produced instant gardens, unlike Bonsai. Small plants can be grown or obtained

from nurseries. It has to be trimmed in the Bonsai way, and using the same kind of trees will add to the beauty.

Creating the miniature landscape and trees is to imitate nature. For this, understanding nature, observation of growth and character of the trees with patience, enables one to observe the beauty of nature through Saikei and Bonsai. Small trees or plants in small poly bags has to be grown or bought from the nurseries and trained like Bonsai. Same species of trees will add beauty to the landscape. Odd numbers of trees like 3, 5, 7 should be used. Different heights, thicknesses are preferable. Stones and rocks with rough and rugged surface will be beautiful. Stones of different sizes and shapes should be used. Mountain like stones with waterfalls, colour, will add more beauty to the Saikei. Grass and small leaved plants, moss can be added as a ground cover. Sphagnum moss can also be used as a ground cover.





SUISEKI



SAIKEI

Courtesy : Mr. M. Ponnuswami



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