

FROM PAGE 03

In his spare time, Chand began collecting materials from demolition sites around the city. He recycled these materials into his own vision of the divine kingdom of Sukrani, choosing a gorge in a forest near Sukhna Lake for his work. The gorge had been designated as for land conservation, where nothing could be built on. Chand's work was illegal, but he was able to hide it for eighteen years before it was discovered by the authorities in 1975. By this time, it had grown into a 13 acre complex of inter-linked courtyards, each filled with hundreds of pottery-covered concrete sculptures of dancers, musicians and animals. Chand created the majority of the sculptures out of a cement and sand mix before adding a final coating of smoothly burnished pure cement.

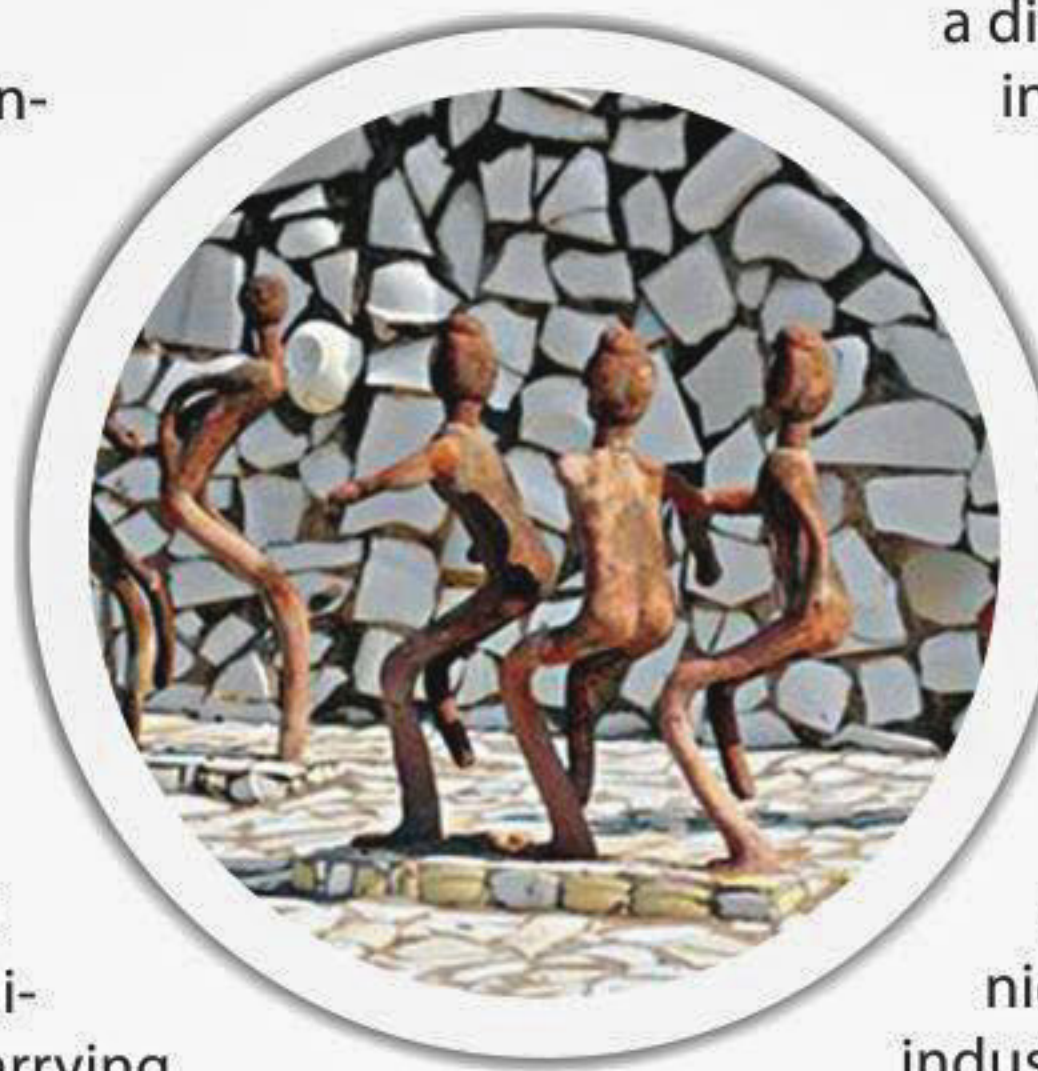
His work was in serious danger of being demolished, but he was able to get public opinion on his side, and in 1986 the park was inaugurated as a public space. Nek Chand was given a salary, as "Sub-Divisional Engineer of Rock Garden", along with a workforce of 50 labourers so that he could concentrate full-time on his work. It even appeared on an Indian stamp in 1983. The Rock Garden is still made out of recycled materials, and with the government's help, Chand was able to set up collection centres around the city for waste, especially rags and broken ceramics. By night he slipped onto a patch of land and artfully arranged rocks and construction waste behind a barricade of empty tar drums.

When Chand left the country on a lecture tour in 1996, the city withdrew its funding, and vandals attacked the park, after which The Rock Garden Society took over the administration and upkeep of this unique visionary environment. The garden is visited by over five thousand people every day, the second most popular location in India, after the Taj Mahal, with a total of more than twelve million visitors since its



inception.

We headed to this splendid stone garden during the afternoon; initially we thought we could finish the tour of the garden within one hour, but it is really impossible; we found one magical room after another, waiting to be explored. We were enthralled. Chand created enormous innovative traditional craft rooms, each carrying



a different Indian style of living. He was not only a great sculptor, but also an anthropologist and an interior designer. The rooms are decorated with furniture and human figures. These doll figures such as "Mother and Child" capture his unique creative spirit. Rag dolls of mythical figures sit in niches made of broken tiles, industrial slag and clay beads.

The main sitting room is decorated with Nek Chand's home-grown building models. The old wicker chairs are enlivened with bright colours sewn together by hand. Chand's bathroom design and installations are also different. Normal tiles in a small area of the Spartan bathroom are inventively used to contrast with walls lined with broken tiles. At the end part of garden we found some beautiful open space with various plants. The setting was dramatic, with the sky turning a dark grey after the sun had set, coupled with the vivid greens of all the plants around us.

The story of the Rock Garden's humble beginnings have become somewhat of a local lore. "I started building this garden as a hobby in the 1950s", he said in an interview with Agency France-Presse in December. "I had many ideas, I was thinking all the time. I saw beauty and art in what people said was junk."

Chand's statues have found their way into museums across the world, including the Capitol Children's Museum in Washington D.C., the American Folk Art Museum in New York City and the Collection de l'Art Brut in Lausanne, Switzerland. The John Michael Kohler Arts Centre in Wisconsin, USA owns the largest collection of Chand's work outside of Chandigarh.

Nek Chand has received many accolades, including a Padma Shri, one of India's highest civilian honours, and has held a handful of exhibitions across the world. India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, issued a statement saying that Nek Chand "will always be remembered for his artistic genius and fabulous creation that is cherished by many."

Nazneen Haque Mimi
Interior Consultant

JOURNEYMAN

E-mail: journeyman.interiors@gmail.com

Photo: Collected

