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BEAUTY FROM



The Rock Garden in Chandigarh stands as a living testament to the passion, creativity and imagination of Nek Chand.

WORDS: SANDY RAO

As you walk through the garden, you'll be greeted by sculptures of noble dancers, women with pots on their heads and graceful animals, among others. As seen here are sculptures of ladies made of broken bangles.





Nek Chand's creativity displayed in art then pictures. His works have found their way into museums across the world and have been a part of various prestigious exhibitions globally.

Who would have thought that a garden started by a government official in his spare time six decades ago would eventually become one of the most popular tourist attractions in India? Spread over 40 acres of land, the Rock Garden in Chandigarh has been constructed entirely out of industrial and home waste. It is an embodiment of imagination and novelty. Located between Sukhna Lake and the Capitol Complex in Sector 1 of Chandigarh, this unique sculpture garden is visited by over 5,000 people daily and has welcomed more than 12 million visitors since its inception in 1976.

SURREAL FANTASY As you walk through the garden, you'll be greeted by sculptures of nubile dancers, women with pots on their heads and graceful animals, among others. These sculptures are made up of bottles, glasses, bangles, tiles, ceramic pots, sinks, electrical waste, broken pipes and other waste materials. Walls made of terracotta pots and the maze of paths, canyons and chambers give the whole garden a mysterious quality. The sculptures blend with man-made waterfalls and transport visitors to another world.

THE CREATOR The story of Rock Garden's founder Nek Chand and how his creation took shape is fascinating.

Nek Chand was born on December 15, 1924 in Shakargarh. The region became a part of Pakistan after partition in 1947. His family, like many others, came to India and settled in Chandigarh. Those were the days when Chandigarh was being remodelled as India's first planned city under the leadership of French architect Le Corbusier. Chand landed a job as a roads inspector with the Public Works Department in 1951.

In his spare time, Chand started collecting waste from demolition sites across Chandigarh. For Chand, it was more of a passion, than just a way to pass the time. Once, he found a ravine in a forest near Sukhna Lake where he secretly started to work. The site, where the garden stands today, was earlier used as a dumping ground for urban and industrial waste. Chand picked up pieces of lime-kiln and metal workshop waste from around and recycled them into human, animal and abstract form figurines.

TAKING SHAPE It was only after 28 years in 1975 that Nek Chand's dream world was discovered by all. By this time, the garden had grown into a 12-acre complex of interlinked courtyards filled with hundreds of concrete sculptures of dancers, musicians and animals.



ABOUT NEK CHAND



PADMA SHRI Nek Chand was honoured with the Padma Shri Award in 1984.

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT He received a lifetime achievement award from the Folk Art Society of America.

ACCOLADES He also received the Grand Medal of Verdun from the city of Paris.

HONOURING WINNERS A postage stamp was released in 1983 by the Indian Postal Department in honour of the Rock Garden and Nek Chand.

THE GARDEN Nek Chand's Rock Garden has a footfall of 5,000 visitors per day.



ABOVE A view of the monument from the walls of the iconic Rock Garden.

RIGHT Sculptures with cemented faces and stone bodies. These figures are made out of industrial and home waste and thrown-away items.



ABOVE A well made of ceramic electrical sockets. Nek Chand started working on this garden secretly in his spare time in 1967. He began by clearing a small forest patch near Sushma Lake.

LEFT Walls made of terracotta pots and the maze of paths, temples and chambers give the whole garden a mysterious quality. In this pic, one can spot visitors enjoying at this iconic garden.



The land on which Chand single-handedly built his garden was a designated forest land. Any construction on it was deemed illegal. But it was public opinion that ensured the garden's survival and made it what it is today. The Rock Garden was formally inaugurated on January 26, 1976.

However, when Chand left the country on a lecture tour in 1996, the city withdrew its funding and vandals attacked the park. The Rock Garden Society then took over the administration of this unique environment.

END OF AN ERA Nek Chand passed away in 2015 at the age of 90. But, he continues to live in more than 2,000 sculptures that he, in a way, brought to life. As you move around the garden and stare at the architectural and sculptural wonders – thousands of statues, a stone amphitheatre, courtyards and archways – you can almost hear the laboured breathing of a young Nek Chand toiling away in the dead of night.

NEW INITIATIVES In an effort to boost local talent, the Rock Garden Society on March 2017 held its first cultural programme. The inaugural function began with an Art Exhibition put up by the Chandigarh Lalit Kala Akademi in Phase-II of the Rock Garden, wherein two artists from Chandigarh demonstrated live painting. The association is also planning to hold cultural shows every Thursday. 📍

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