

TO: Ann Oppenheimer - Folk Art Society of America
804-285-4532

FROM: Seymour Rosen - SPACES
213-463-1629

3 pages total

Ann, If any of this can be put in your newsletter, online, etc., it would be most appreciated. Please spread the word.

NEK CHAND The untutored genius who built a paradise.

One day 36 years ago, Nek Chand, a humble transport official in the north Indian city of Chandigarh, began to clear a little patch of jungle to make himself a small garden area. He set stones around the little clearing and before long had sculpted a few figures recycled from materials he found at hand. Gradually Nek Chand's creation developed and grew; before long it covered several acres and comprised of hundreds of sculptures set in a series of interlinking courtyards.

After his normal working day Chand worked at night, in total secrecy for fear of being discovered by the authorities. When they did discover Chand's garden, local government officials were thrown into turmoil. The creation was completely illegal - a development in a forbidden area which by rights should be demolished. The outcome, however, was the enlightened decision to give Nek Chand a salary so that he could concentrate full-time on his work, plus a workforce of fifty labourers. Nek Chand's great work received immediate recognition and was inaugurated as The Rock Garden of Chandigarh.

Now over twenty five acres of several thousand sculptures set in large mosaic courtyards linked by walled paths and deep gorges, Nek Chand's creation also combines huge buildings with a series of interlinking waterfalls. The Rock Garden is now acknowledged as one of the modern wonders of the world. Over 5000 visitors each day, some 12 million people so far, walk around this vast creation - the greatest artistic achievement seen in India since the Taj Mahal.

Rock Garden Under Attack - Outrage in Chandigarh

After returning from a two month trip to Britain and the USA, Nek Chand creator of the Rock Garden of Chandigarh was shocked to find that the Chandigarh Administration, who are responsible for the upkeep and security of the famous Rock Garden of Chandigarh, had removed the skilled labour force and left the site completely unguarded the very day after he left for his tour of the USA.

Furthermore, the Rock Garden had been attacked and many sculptures and part of the environment were smashed up. Some are now in the process of repair, others are destroyed forever.

Over the last few years the Rock Garden has deliberately been starved of funds. Nek Chand is not even allowed to use the entrance money for the maintenance of the Garden and now there are no funds at all to finish the final phase of construction.

The Rock Garden is in real danger. Not only has a masterpiece of environmental art been attacked but over the last few years Nek Chand has been starved of funds, even though he reckons that with proper resources his work on the Rock garden could be completed in about six months.

While in the USA Nek Chand gave presentations at the Asia Society in New York and at the Kohler Foundation in Wisconsin. He also gave presentations in Chicago and Los Angeles and visited Boston, Washington, and Baltimore. He received honours in both New York and Los Angeles.

In an open letter to RAW VISION readers, Nek Chand reports:

"I must thank you for your concern for the Rock garden and its sculptures. And really, it is painful for me when I see that the very people who should guard this public property, encourage destructive elements. There is so much of jealous and negative outlook being seen and faced by me that it really puts me off from my creative work. But then, I feel that if I succumb to such pressures and techniques by not applying my mind on creating something new, that means the negative elements I am referring to are succeeding in their game plan. The enemies of art should be exposed in public through various means of the media. I urge your readers, those that hold art dear to their hearts, to write letters to prominent people in India to express their outrage at what has happened.

"My worst enemy is the top bureaucrat of Chandigarh, Mr Pardeep Mehra, Advisor to the Administrator. Although he is supposed to have complete control over public property he never visits the Rock Garden, even though he goes to every nook and corner of Chandigarh. Three timers I have tried to see him and on each occasion he has kept me waiting outside his office for over two hours and still claims to be too busy to see me. He and others in the I.A.S. (Indian Administration Service) have done everything to hinder the progress of the Rock Garden. Since 1988 work has only been able to continue in fits and starts, depending on the fancies of administrative officers. I have seen that any sympathetic official is soon transferred elsewhere. It is a pure burning red jealousy, defying all the norms of rationality. They will not even allow me to use the entrance money for the maintenance of the Garden and now there are no funds at all to finish the construction.

"The Administration should be questioned as to why the skilled labour force responsible for looking after the Rock Garden were removed the very day after I left for my tour of the USA. Was it not an intentional act to harm the Rock Garden. The vandalism in my absence was not directed at the sculptures but at Nek Chand as they very well know that my heart and soul lives in them.

"The sculptures are being repaired but their originality is gone for ever as they will be like a man whose leg or arm has been bandaged after injury. Although I'll put in the best in myself the sculptures are damaged all over the area and the fury of the vandalism can be gazed from the fact that even a large wall painstakingly made of thousands of pebbles has been terribly damaged.

"The Rock Garden is not only the property of Chandigarh, or even India. It belongs to the people of the world and I appeal for their help in saving my Kingdom."

Nek Chand needs our help. Please send letters of protest to the prominent Indian personalities listed below. Nek Chand has given his gift to the world and it is up to the international community to make as much of a protest as possible to save it. The Rock Garden is in real danger. A few years ago the Chandigarh Administration attempted to build a road, for the use of VIPs and high officials, through the Rock Garden. They lost this battle with Nek Chand in the High Court and now they are taking their revenge. They have not only attacked a masterpiece of environmental art but have also seen to it that over the last few years Nek Chand has been starved of funds. Although he reckons that with proper funding his work on the Rock garden could be completed in about six months, since his victory in the court case funds from the Administration have dried up.

We need to send letters of protest and support to as many of the people below as possible. If you have an institutional letterhead, are connected with a museum or university, all the better. Please write as soon as possible, and to as many as you can manage. Nek Chand has powerful enemies, people who are not averse to using violent destruction as a weapon against him and he needs all the help we can give.

We hope that you can send letters of support for Nek Chand and protest for the current conditions to MR GOWDA, PRIME MINISTER, and to MR SHARMA, PRESIDENT.

Mr HD Deve Gowda, Prime Minister of India, South Block, New Delhi 110011.

Mr SD Sharma, President of India, President's Secretariat, New Delhi 110011

If you wish, letters can be forwarded by Raw Vision and by SPACES, If you send your letters via us, they can be copied and then sent to the necessary people.

If in the United States send your letters to SPACES, 1804 North Van Ness, Los Angeles, CA 90028-5615 and they will be forwarded to India.

If in Europe send your letters to Raw Vision, 42 Llanvanor Road, London, NW2 2AP UK and they will be forwarded to India.