

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

The Rock Garden:

A Study of Memory, Place-Making,  
and Community in Chandigarh, India

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Art History

by

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Professor Saloni Mathur, Chair

This dissertation disrupts the constructed opposition that has long been integral to scholarly and popular accounts of both the planned city of Chandigarh and the forty-acre artwork and built environment, the Rock Garden, contained within its parameters. The dominant mythology has consistently pitted the city’s architect, Le Corbusier—the heroic mid-century modernist “master”—against the Garden’s creator—the humble villager and “outsider artist” Nek Chand. This work, positioned within colonial and post-colonial studies and urban history discourse, proceeds by analyzing the materiality of both the Garden and the city’s physical structures, the narratives surrounding the international circulation and display of Chand’s sculptures, and the processes of codification and fetishization of the work’s origin narratives. The dissertation excavates the complicated ways in which the work intersects with local, national, and

international concerns and illustrates how intricately connected the mechanisms of the Garden are to the central operations of the city. By situating Chandigarh's complexities as indicative of a contested experience, and by placing the Rock Garden within the field of these complications rather than in opposition to them, this dissertation deconstructs the dominant myth and establishes instead a more carefully connected understanding of artist Nek Chand, the Rock Garden, and, indeed, of Chandigarh itself.

The dissertation of Tracy Ann Buck Bonfitto is approved.

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## *Preface and Acknowledgements*

I first visited the Rock Garden in the summer of 2012, out of curiosity and armed with little more knowledge than that it was a large-scale conglomeration of sculptures constructed out of found, discarded materials. I knew also that it was located in the mythic modernist city of Chandigarh, a city I had never had occasion to visit on previous research trips to India. Having stooped down to pass my 20-Rs entrance fee through the child-height service window, I entered the Garden for the first time alongside teenage couples, groups of school children, Punjabi families on a day-out and one or two other Western tourists, not knowing exactly what to expect. Perhaps the immediate impression on the first-time visitor is the uncanny feeling of disorientation. Having heard mostly about the Garden's Phase-II sculptures, I was surprised and delighted at the marvelously haphazard-seeming paths, sculptures, formations, displayed rocks, and vistas positioned not always quite within complete view. One very soon gets the sense that what is visible from the path is only a fraction of what the Garden is. The size of the space, which seems even larger due to the winding path and lack of clear views, only adds to this impression.

Curiously, the Garden seems simultaneously made and not made for the visitor, and I felt as though I had happened across a great secret—despite the fact that on that day, like any other at the Garden, thousands of other paying visitors are also enmeshed in the same “secret.” Making my way through Phase I, I passed through many displayed river stones, each one treated as a sculptural form or relic, before finding something I thought I recognized from images I had seen online: a large, Mughal-inspired façade overlooking a man-made waterfall. The spray of the waterfall was especially welcome on this oppressively stifling, pre-monsoon day. People congregated in this area, happily posing for pictures and, in violation of the written notices

prohibiting it, scrambling up the concrete “vines” that seemed posed to overtake these “ruins” in the jungle. The site seemed simultaneously natural and unnatural, as though it had both sprung up from and been imposed upon the land.

Moving through the remainder of the site, I was struck at being amazed and amused by the works but also repeatedly frustrated by my own limitations. The viewer is never quite tall enough to interact—physically, certainly, but also visually—with the Phase-II sculpture fields. At one point I could see what appeared to be a Shiva figure posed on the side of a constructed “mountain” but I could not quite make it out, situated as it was on an impossible angle from the path. The buildings of the miniature village beg, as a dollhouse does, to be looked into, the viewer ready to imagine miniature people and lives and indeed a whole tiny world, but these buildings in the Garden are set far too high off the path to enable any such voyeuristic make-believe. The path itself—doubling back, taking sharp angles, never affording a clear view to the next section—was bewildering, and what was viewable when I reached the next given section was oftentimes even more unexpected. Despite the entrance fee, the “do not touch” signage, and the clearly designated path, the first two phases in their entirety support the initial impression that the visitor is happening upon them by accident. And I had the distinct impression that many of these phases’ features and wonders were out of reach, not available to visitors. Phase III, the final section of the Garden, reversed that impression, and with the exception of the small area that seemed decidedly in-progress here the visitor feels jarringly catered to with a snack shop, camel rides, and “laughing” mirrors. A fluke of the Garden’s layout is that the visitor must retrace his or her steps back through Phase II in order to exit the site; far from being frustrated at the backtracking, however, I appreciated the chance to feel again like a happenstance viewer, coming upon a new discovery that could not quite be entirely known.

The trip that summer was a reconnaissance mission of sorts. I had completed my first year of Ph.D. coursework at UCLA and, through the generous support of the Art History Department, was “scouting” possible dissertation topics to pursue in the years ahead. My time in Chandigarh during that trip was not long and I had intended to spend only one morning at the Rock Garden. One morning turned into one day, and then a second day, as I omitted a visit to the Capitol Complex during my last day in Chandigarh during that summer to return to the Garden. During that summer I also visited the Chandigarh City Museum, where a small collection of several of Chand’s Rock Garden sculptures are displayed on the floor towards the end of the permanent exhibition. How disorienting in a different way it is to see these human- and animal-figures arranged not above eye-level and en masse but rather unceremoniously positioned at one’s feet. Here the experience of viewing the figures is mitigated not by the fantastical setting and the uncanny phenomenological experience of moving through the Garden but rather by the setting of an underfunded government museum. To see the figures removed at all from the Garden seemed simultaneously understandable and unnatural—the impulse made sense but any display outside of the context of the Rock Garden seemed injudicious—and this impression has since only been complicated by additional visits and by the endeavors of other museums displaying Nek Chand’s sculptures in the U.S. and the U.K.

The present project began to take shape, then, based on my impressions of that first trip; additional site and archival research has expanded the scope of my initial impression to contextualize the work within the city and to include further issues of display, conservation, promotion, myth, and heritage. I am grateful to the members of my dissertation committee, Dell Upton, William Glover, and Alka Patel, and to mentor Robert Brown for their interest in my project and for their support and encouragement. A particularly warm and indebted thanks to my

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This project is indebted to several individuals and institutions that provided me access to their archival and material collections, including the Rock Garden in Chandigarh, UCLA Special Collections, John Maizels' *Raw Vision* archive at his home near London, SPACES in Aptos, California, the RIBA archives at the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Chandigarh Art Museum, the Chandigarh City Museum, The National Museum in New Delhi, and the National Archive in New Delhi. A note of posthumous appreciation goes to artist Nek Chand, with whom I had the fortune to meet briefly in 2014. The generous funding to research and write the dissertation came from the Edward A. Dickson History of Art Fellowship, Patricia McCarron McGinn Memorial Award, Ruth Nagle Watkins Scholarship, Mellon-Urban Initiative Grant, Lenart Travel Fellowship, and the Fowler Museum Arnold Rubin Award.

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## ***Introduction: The City, the Rock Garden, and the Chandigarh Binary***

In 1951, Nek Chand arrived in Chandigarh. The concurrent events of Independence and Partition in 1947 had ushered in subsequent waves of communal violence and the mass migration of some five million people.<sup>1</sup> Many South Asians, but particularly those in the state of Punjab, suddenly found themselves on the “wrong” side of the Radcliffe Line as the newly independent countries of Pakistan and India were split along religious lines. A twenty-three-year old Chand and his family left their ancestral homeland in the village of Barian Kalan, settling first in Jammu and then Gurdaspur.<sup>2</sup> By October of 1950 Chand found work in the state highway department and had received an offer of employment as part of a program to assist Partition refugees, in the new city of Chandigarh, which was then in its earliest stages of construction.<sup>3</sup>

Plans concerning the establishment of a replacement capital for the city of Lahore had been in the works by 1948. After proposals to expand an existing city were eventually dismissed, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, together with regional officials, pursued the idea of developing an entirely new, planned city—one that would serve not only as a replacement capital but also as an architectural laboratory for modern design and as symbolic faith in the nation’s future. Within a few years of Chand’s arrival in Chandigarh, architects Jane Drew, Maxwell Fry, and Pierre Jeanneret had completed work on Sector 22. City construction expanded and a steady stream of new arrivals, driven by the promise of an improved life and higher standards of living, flowed into Chandigarh. By 1959 most of Le Corbusier’s Sector 1 Capitol Complex buildings

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<sup>1</sup> See the Government of India’s *First Five Year Plan: A Summary*, December 12, 1952, pp. 129-130, which notes that this figure represents only the male population.

<sup>2</sup> Iain Jackson, “Cataloging Nek Chand’s Rock Garden, Chandigarh: An Analysis and Interpretation of the Sculpture, Architecture, and Landscape,” unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Liverpool, 2008, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Iain Jackson and Soumyen Bandyopadhyay, *The Collection, the Ruin, and the Theatre*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007, p. 11.

were complete, and the damming of a seasonal river had resulted in the adjacent Sukhna Lake. Chandigarh Chief Architect P.L. Varma, envisioning an extensive walking promenade and views of the hills and forested areas beyond the city, had suggested its creation in the mid-1950s. Although the lake was not part of Le Corbusier's original city plan or official edict, the use of it and the surrounding area was soon tightly controlled and these restrictions firmly enforced. Various city reports detail ongoing concerns of illicit bicycle riding, the theft of florescent lighting fixtures, and the problem of replacing dead border shrubbery.<sup>4</sup> Sukhna Lake is today a protected wetland, having become a space of controlled leisure early in its history: motorboats are not allowed and the permitted peddle-boats must be rented from the lake's official sailing club.<sup>5</sup>

Not long after the lake was established in 1959, Chand—by then working as roads inspector—began fashioning rafts and small sailing vessels. He crafted one from empty tar drums and wooden logs with the intent of sailing across the lake, and had amassed additional timber in the hopes of enabling friends to do the same.<sup>6</sup> However, local authorities quickly halted the project: the sailing of any vessel not rented from the official club was strictly forbidden. Chand abandoned this project but the curtailment of his efforts had lasting consequences. Soon after this incident Chand began collecting local river rocks with unusual shapes, arranging them on the undeveloped land adjacent to Sector 1 and Sukhna Lake. After his visible act of boat-creation was halted, Chand shifted his efforts instead to work in secret on his growing “kingdom.” Chand's original collected rocks today make up a significant portion of

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<sup>4</sup> “Development of the Second Phase of Chandigarh,” August 18, 1966. Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 3, UCLA Special Collection 1364.

<sup>5</sup> *The Collection, the Ruin, and the Theatre*, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> Recounted by Chand's longtime friend and fellow Partition refugee, Kedar Nath Mahajan, in “Nek Chand, Unassuming Genius,” *The Tribune*, June 13, 2015. A version of this story is also related in *The Collection, the Ruin, and the Theatre*, p. 11.

Phase I of the Garden, and this earliest phase advanced in secret as the city continued to develop and expand. Chand's covert project of arranging rocks would soon lead to creating sculptures and built environments using other local materials. In the coming years, work on the site continued and by the early 1970s it had expanded to some twelve acres in size. Upon discovery, local officials debated the curtailment of the project, but in 1976—thanks in part to overwhelming public interest and support—the site was christened the Rock Garden and opened to the public. Today the eighteen-acre site,<sup>7</sup> with its serpentine walkways, constructed waterfalls, Mughal- and village-inspired architecture, thousands of sculptures constructed from concrete and urban and household discards, displayed riverbed rocks, and mosaic tile walls is reported to receive some 3,000 a visitors a day. Such numbers make the Rock Garden India's second most popular tourist attraction, outranked only the Taj Mahal in number of visitors.<sup>8</sup>

By opening with this portrait of a Partition immigrant supervising city construction by day and building a private and today very well-attended “kingdom” by night, I mean to highlight not only the beginnings of the Rock Garden but also the terms of the dominant mythology concerning the site and its creator. This dissertation begins with the observation that the Garden has overwhelmingly been configured as one element of the larger Le Corbusier-centered, modernist-focused city myth, and that, by constructing the Garden as the planned city's polar

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<sup>7</sup> Estimates of the total size of the Rock Garden vary widely from around eighteen acres to forty acres. The discrepancy in size may be the result of including in the calculation the proportion of undeveloped land that is adjacent to the developed portion of the Garden and is protected by the city. A 2007 letter signed by Nek Chand states that the Garden “covers over 25 acres;” Letter from Nek Chand to U.S. Council for the International Exchange of Scholars, March 4, 2007; Anton Rajer Archive, Box 6, SPACES Collection. I rely on Iain Jackson's estimate of eighteen acres, a figure that includes both the portions opened to the public and the portions Chand has developed that are inaccessible to the visitor. For more on Jackson's comprehensive site cataloging project, see See Iain Jackson, “Cataloguing Nek Chand's Rock Garden, Chandigarh,” unpublished dissertation, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> This is an oft-reported statistic, appearing in newspaper articles in both Indian and Western sources, and brochures produced by both Chandigarh Tourism and by the Nek Chand Foundation.

opposite, this myth has ironically elevated the “master” architect-hero Le Corbusier and his modernist project even as it valorizes his humble counterpart, Nek Chand. positioned the Garden as proof of, rather than exception to, its dictates. Throughout this dissertation I refer to this polarizing myth, which, broadly speaking, renders the city as a series of opposites, as the Chandigarh binary. Falling in line with this overarching tendency, accounts of the Rock Garden have primarily tended to adapt to the contours of the Chandigarh binary, rather than to resist them. Accordingly, Nek Chand is cast as the untaught foil to the genius Le Corbusier, and the Rock Garden as an alternative project separate from and in opposition to Chandigarh. One result of such a phenomenon has been the ossification and silencing of the Garden’s varied dynamics rather than an exploration of the site’s arena of possibilities and reverberations. This dissertation works against the grain of this polarizing tendency within accounts of the Rock Garden and the city, combating the facile binary of the egocentric modernist master and the humble untaught villager, the planned and the unplanned, the constructed and the organic, the rational and the spiritual—and, indeed, the West and the East—and illustrates instead how intricately connected the mechanisms of the Garden are to the central mechanisms of the city. It does so by disrupting the terms of the Chandigarh binary itself. The groundwork for this expanded field established, I then proceed to follow these dynamics, weaving them into a more nuanced account of the methods and practices of the Garden. The tensions surrounding the Rock Garden—the surreptitious, recalcitrant, unplanned art environment built not by plan but by accretion—that have been rendered in oppositional relation to the larger city are in fact, as I demonstrate, shared tensions that are inherent and endemic to the city beginning from its earliest conception. By describing Chandigarh’s deep complexities as indicative of a contested experience, and by placing the Rock Garden within the field of these complications rather than in opposition to

them, the dissertation dismantles the dominant myth and calls instead for a more careful and connected understanding of Nek Chand, the Rock Garden, and, indeed, of Chandigarh itself.

### ***The Rock Garden—Origins and Mythology***

The opening episode to this dissertation has provided the necessary elements for a well-established origin myth, one that has been widely circulated by local and national press and by international interests alike. The contours of this creation story, which has recently been reiterated and recirculated in the numerous media sources following Chand's death in June 2015, tend to outline a few nearly universal elements. After Nek Chand was forced from his project of building sailing vessels at Sukhna Lake, he began assembling his collected rocks on the undeveloped land near Sector 1. Chand collected the rocks—and later, the construction and household debris used in his sculptures—and transported them on his bicycle. He worked during the evenings and weekends, collecting and burning discarded tires for light during the nighttime hours<sup>9</sup> and skimming off small amounts of cement and rebar from city construction projects for his own work.<sup>10</sup> Construction was taking place all over the city, and, given that Chand supervised staff and construction work as a city-employed roads inspector, no one took much notice of his efforts to amass such ubiquitous materials. Chand collected broken ceramics first from city dumps and the abandoned homes of displaced villagers and later from commercial manufacturers. He began sorting the ceramic fragments by color and size, pressing them into the

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<sup>9</sup> This is a much-repeated detail offered in accounts of the Rock Garden's origins. It features in media accounts (for one example, "Nek Chand's Garden Fantasy: The Life Work of a Self-Taught Artist in Chandigarh," *New York Times*, April 3, 1983), city promotional literature (see "Rock Garden: The Fantasy World of Nek Chand," brochure produced by Chandigarh Tourism, n.d.), and scholarly studies (Jackson and Bandyopadhyay quoting S.S. Bhatti, *The Collection, the Ruin, and the Theatre*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007, p. 12).

<sup>10</sup> "People Pay to See the Waste they Discarded," *Times of Chandigarh*, November 23, 2004.

concrete- and sand walls he was constructing to make mosaic surfaces. Eventually, when the site had become an established—even if contested—fixture in the city, broken tableware and crockery was increasingly supplied directly by local hotels and manufacturers. From the 1980s local residents themselves donated their discarded materials at the collection centers that, with government support, Chand established throughout the city.<sup>11</sup>

The Garden existed in its pre-discovery years on a small scale, and Chand, working primarily with, rather than against, the natural physical features and existing plants and trees on the site, was able to keep his expanding project hidden from the public until the early 1970s. In these early years Chand operated out of a small makeshift hut structure, which, if discovered, could easily have been taken as the temporary home of a displaced villager. The hut is today preserved and folded into the Garden's foundational mythology via an explanatory sign authored and placed by the Nek Chand Foundation [Figure 1]. Such structures were common in the early years of city development and likely would not have raised immediate concern; rather, if it were discovered a city official might have made casual note to mark it for demolition at a future date.<sup>12</sup> Chand had arranged bitumen drums to block the view into the area;<sup>13</sup> the presence of these drums apparently prevented seeing from outside the then-small scale site and did not raise suspicion, presumably given the number of active construction projects in the area. Bitumen drums, in visual reference to the Garden's clandestine origins, feature heavily in the Rock Garden today [Figure 2]. Work continued in this way for some time. Eventually the site was discovered by city officials and opened to a curious general public, which, the story goes,

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<sup>11</sup> "Nek Chand Garden," *The Daily Star*, November 10, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> John Maizels, "Nek Chand's Wonder of the World," *Nek Chand Shows the Way*, exhibition catalog, 1997, p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> M.N. Sharma, "Nek Chand: An Early Encounter," *Raw Vision*, vol. 35, p. 28.

flocked to the “kingdom” adjacent to the Sector 1 Capitol Complex, responding to Chand’s work with universal admiration, curiosity, and respect. By 1976, favorable public opinion had forced initially reluctant city officials to award Chand a salary and a dedicated staff, in order that he may devote his entire working day to continued construction of the site.<sup>14</sup>

Descriptions of the eventual discovery of the site by city officials vary, perhaps depending on the interests of the local bureaucrats who originally relayed it to scholars and journalists. In Chief Architect M.N. Sharma’s telling, by 1969 Chand had become nervous about the possible repercussions of discovery and arranged a meeting with the official. Sharma then reportedly took the unusual act of maintaining the site’s secrecy, claiming that he admired its “creative potential” and therefore did not “have the heart to go by the rules,” instead advising Chand to continue with the project.<sup>15</sup> Sharma went on to claim his own genius at recognizing the site’s potential in these early years, noting in support of this view that Chand eventually approached him to design the small café stand in Phase I after the site had been open to the public for some years, stating “perhaps [Chand] was confident at my being in harmony with his self-created environment.”<sup>16</sup> By his own account, in 1972 Sharma had secured the (unspecified) means of “keep[ing] his promise” to Chand in getting him the “recognition he deserved,” and the site was soon after opened to the public.<sup>17</sup> In this version, it seems clear that Sharma was at least as interested in promoting his own sagacity as he was in acknowledging Chand’s creativity.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> John Maizels, “Nek Chand’s Wonder of the World,” 1997, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Iain Jackson has noted that Sharma’s claim of discovery came only following “acceptance and foreign interest in the work.” See Iain Jackson, “Cataloguing Nek Chand’s Rock Garden, Chandigarh,” unpublished dissertation, 2008, p. 57.

Another, more prominent version of the discovery exists that does not include M.N. Sharma: in this telling a team of anti-malaria researchers, unaware and unprepared for what they stumbled upon, happened across the burgeoning site hidden away behind the bitumen drums. This government working party, tasked with clearing the area out of concern for public health, came across the “almost two thousand sculptures of various sizes [that] inhabited the undergrowth.”<sup>19</sup> This number of sculptures seems quite high for the small size of the site at this early date; at this time the Garden would have been modest in size and likely contained a larger number of displayed rocks than it did fashioned sculptures. In any case, the public health team was reportedly in awe of what they had found on the undeveloped land adjacent to Sector 1. The Assistant Director of Chandigarh Administration Health Services who led the team, S.K. Sharma (no relation to M.N. Sharma), reported being so taken with the fantastical inspiring “dream” behind the creation of the site—“Nek Chand had a dream (...) [that] a king and queen lived here (...), and their kingdom had collapsed at the zenith of their power”—that he, in much the same manner reported by M.N. Sharma in his version of the discovery, did not have the heart to see the site destroyed.<sup>20</sup> Instead, S.K. Sharma immediately reported the team’s discovery to a sympathetic Chief Commissioner M.S. Randhawa.<sup>21</sup>

M.S. Randhawa was a major figure in Chandigarh’s early history.<sup>22</sup> In 1946, after a career in the Indian Civil Service, Randhawa was appointed Deputy Commissioner of Delhi; part of his role was to help settle Partition refugees arriving in India. In 1955 he was made Vice

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<sup>19</sup> John Maizels, “Nek Chand’s Wonder of the World,” *Nek Chand Shows the Way*, exhibition catalog, 1997, p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> S.S. Bhatti, “Nek Chand,” *Nek Chand Shows the Way*, exhibition catalog, 1997, p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> Jackson and Bandyopadhyay note that this is the version circulated in the city’s tourism literature. Jackson and Bandyopadhyay, *The Collection, the Ruin, and the Theater*, 2007, p. 13.

<sup>22</sup> For a more detailed examination of Randhawa’s career, see Aparna Kumar, unpublished dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles (in progress).

President of the Indian Council of Agriculture before assuming post as chairman of the committee to plan Chandigarh that same year. Throughout his subsequent career in Chandigarh he played an active role in the establishment of the city's arts, planned landscaping, and parks. M.N. Sharma does not mention Randhawa in his version of the discovery published by *Raw Vision*, the magazine edited by Nek Chand Foundation co-founder John Maizels. Sharma's rather pointed omission of Randhawa's role, frankly, lends credence to the alternative version, as there is no doubt that Randhawa was instrumental in what happened next.<sup>23</sup> For his part, architecture and art critic S.S. Bhatti has remained adamant that M.N. Sharma had no involvement with the Garden prior to 1973.<sup>24</sup> Regardless of the discrepancy regarding the particular city official who first laid eyes on the site, the main feature of the Garden's discovery as recorded in this origin story is the feeling of reported awe and astonishment at first seeing the site—whether this was first felt by M.N. Sharma or by S.K. Sharma and his team. This feeling of awe is sometimes registered in order to create a ready counterpoint to the actions of “jealous” city officials who later attempted to curtail and destroy portions of the Garden.<sup>25</sup> To return to the site's discovery, it is clear that Chief Commissioner M.S. Randhawa played a critical role in officially naming Chand's site the Rock Garden and opening it to the public. In addition to serving as Chief Commissioner of the Union Territory of Chandigarh from 1966 to 1968, and before that as chairman of the committee to plan Chandigarh in 1955, Randhawa was

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<sup>23</sup> By 2001, when he claimed in *Raw Vision* that he had been personally invited to the site in 1969, M.N. Sharma had a vested interest in promoting himself as a preserver of unsanctioned and unofficial projects within Chandigarh. See my related discussion in the following section. Other individuals have made claims related to the “discovery” of the Garden; see for example that by then-police superintendent Gautam Kaul, who reported to Rajer via email that Chand had approached Kaul in the mid-1970s to “intervene” on this behalf and persuade city officials to protect the Garden. Printed email, Kaul to Rajer, October 14, 2007; Anton Rajer Archive, Box 5, SPACES Collection.

<sup>24</sup> Jackson and Bandyopadhyay, *The Collection, the Ruin, and the Theater*, 2007, p. 14.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Anton Rajer, “Nek Chand: Victor of Circumstances,” *Envision Newsletter*, July 2001, vol. 6, issue 2.

instrumental in the establishment of Chandigarh Museum, the Punjab Arts Council, and much of the city's public parks and landscaping. S.S. Bhatti, architectural historian and former principal of the Chandigarh College of Architecture, has suggested that Randhawa was interested in the site primarily as a potential landscape project for the city;<sup>26</sup> I discuss Randhawa's involvement in Chandigarh's landscaping, as well as his specific interest in promoting the arts, in detail later in this dissertation. Interestingly, Randhawa, who was himself heavily involved in planning for the city, recommended that the Garden be "preserved in its present form, free from the interference of architects and town planners."<sup>27</sup>

By all accounts, it was Randhawa—rather than Nek Chand—who gave the site the name "The Rock Garden" when it was promoted within the city and opened to the public. It is unclear how, precisely, Randhawa arrived at that name. It can be partially explained by the fact that in those early years the site would have been primarily composed of Chand's rock collection. Additionally, Randhawa had been instrumental in establishing Chandigarh's various official public gardens, including the Zakir Hussain Rose Garden in 1967, and perhaps "Rock Garden" seemed an apt compliment to his vision for Chandigarh parks. It was a name that Chand himself took at least mild issue with: in a 1996 interview, he stated, "it's a child's dream and not a garden of cold rocks. It is my poetry with rocks."<sup>28</sup> It has been said that Chand himself preferred to call the Garden by a Hindi name: *devtaon ki dunya*, or "world of the gods."<sup>29</sup> Randhawa's name for the site, however, stuck; "Rock Garden" is the title given not only to

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<sup>26</sup> As noted by Jackson and Bandyopadhyay, *The Collection, the Ruin, and the Theater*, 2007, p. 14. Despite repeated attempts, I was unable to acquire Bhatti's 1982 unpublished dissertation that relates these views.

<sup>27</sup> Randhawa quoted in Swati Daftuar, "Working Wealth Out of Waste," *The Hindu*, June 6, 2011.

<sup>28</sup> Jackson and Bandyopadhyay, *The Collection, the Ruin, and the Theater*, 2007, p. 14.

<sup>29</sup> M.S. Aulakh, "The Legendary Nek Chand Celebrates his 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday," *Raw Vision*, vol. 85, Spring 2015; pp. 16-21; p. 20.

Chand's original project in Chandigarh but also to his later commissioned gardens in India and abroad.

Within the tale are several key themes underlying the representation of Chand and the Garden; all of these have been formulated and propagated via the lens of the Chandigarh binary. First, uneasy yet consistent categorization has led to the tendency to identify Chand as an “outsider” or “folk” artist. Accordingly, Chand registers as the simple creative genius, an untaught man who was inspired by an irrepressible dream to build something philosophically asynchronous with the larger city as a whole. Working in tandem with this is an overwhelming interest in maintaining a narrative of the site as the unwavering, single-focused vision and labor of Chand. Very little is included in the standard origin tale about the Rock Garden's paid staff members who, in recent decades, have been solely responsible not only for the upkeep and maintenance of the Garden but also for the actual creation of the site's sculptures. Less still has been said about the dozens of Western volunteers who, since 2000 and in conjunction with the U.K.- and U.S.-based Nek Chand Foundation, have worked to clean and promote the site and also to design and construct a substantial number of the mosaic walls, sculptures, and architectural elements found in Phase III. As site director, Chand himself did very little if any of the actual construction or sculpting labor on the site in recent decades, and discard-collection centers located throughout the city precluded the need to collect debris in the manner than had been original to the practice of the Garden.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, the practice adapted by local manufacturers to donate excess whole pottery, which then had to be broken into fragments at the

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<sup>30</sup> These centers were established by at least 1989; see S.S. Bhatti, “The Rock Garden of Chandigarh,” *Raw Vision*, vol. 1, Spring 1989, pp. 22-31; p. 25.

Garden for use in sculptures and mosaics,<sup>31</sup> shifted the action from trash collection to trash creation, further increasing the actual (if not acknowledged) community-oriented process of the Garden. The shift towards a more communal and multi-authored nature of the Garden tends to be documented only in passing, elided in favor of the narrative claiming Chand's single authorship.

The tendency towards promoting a single author for the site is in pointed correlation to the idea, part of the Chandigarh binary, that Le Corbusier is the single "author" of the larger city. The construction of this categorization relies on the emergence of two personalities, continually fashioned as oppositional as part of the familiar Chandigarh binary: the infantilized genius Chand and his nostalgic, whimsical Rock Garden are pitted against Le Corbusier and Chandigarh, the meticulously planned adversary of spontaneity and creativity. This insistence on a philosophical and logistical opposition continues to dominate the record: a *Tribune* article opens, for example, with the well-understood imagery, "Chandigarh as a city evokes the images of two individuals, a foreigner and an Indian."<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the concept of this opposition is not only normalized but promoted for preservation in a recent official city long-term planning document, *Chandigarh Master Plan 2031*: "The Rock Garden, by its organic forms and non-

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<sup>31</sup> Interestingly, the act of breaking whole objects for use in sculptures and mosaics was repeated in Tony Rajer's conservation work in the 2000s. In order to repair bangle-sculptures at both the Chandigarh Rock Garden and the American Folk Art Museum in New York City, Rajer and his team purchased inexpensive plastic and glass bangles, which they then broke into pieces for inclusion in the repaired sculptures. Conservation work photographs, Anton Rajer Archive, Boxes 1 and 7, SPACES Collection.

<sup>32</sup> "Nek Chand versus VIP Road," *The Tribune*, July 24, 1990. Interestingly, the author sets up a discussion of the sometimes contentious relationship between the city and Chand with the note that "Le Corbusier gets his annual ritualistic tributes, even as his basic concept for this city gets a knock ever so often. Chand is praised across the world (...), even as his work in Chandigarh gets a beating ever so often."

geometric layout, offers an apt counterpoint to Chandigarh's stylized architecture and [like the city] has also been recommended for heritage status."<sup>33</sup>

In most versions of the tale the foundational "dream" behind the Rock Garden is rooted in Chand's childhood, and, importantly, predates the events of Partition and Chand's subsequent migration to newly independent India. As the stories have it, the reverberations of this pre-Partition childhood dream were what led him to create and populate his "fantasy kingdom." Accordingly, Chand's use of specific materials, motifs, and features in the Garden are read as specifically contradictory to the foundational vision of Chandigarh as a modern city "unfettered," in Nehru's terms, to the past. Among the materials and features upon which these claims have been staked include the Garden's rocks, its collected city-construction refuse and villager-discarded debris, and Chand's use of Harappan-inspired motifs. Included also are the site's landscaping and both its real and artificial plant life. This tendency to fold the Garden's materials and motifs into an anti-modern, tradition-focused orientation for the site has been of particular interest to individuals and museums responsible for the circulation of Chand's sculptures abroad, beginning in the late 1980s and continuing to the present day.

The Rock Garden's concerns, processes, and material make-up in fact closely co-exist alongside those of the larger city of Chandigarh itself. Many of the elements of the origin tale I draw attention to here were solidified during the 1980s-1990s. As we will see, this period was a particularly tumultuous one for the Rock Garden: the site and its creator were at the time subjected to concurrent waves of support and real threats of site curtailment and destruction. An examination of this volatile period as it affected both the Rock Garden and the city as a whole reveals some of the agendas and motivations behind the recurring elements of the origin tale.

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<sup>33</sup> *Chandigarh Master Plan, 2031*, 2015, p. 236; accessed at [www.chandigarh.gov.in](http://www.chandigarh.gov.in)

Tellingly, a shift in describing the Rock Garden's trajectory occurred in years to follow. In many of the Chandigarh newspaper accounts published up to the early 2000s there was much discussion about the Garden's reportedly imminent completion. Reports of this looming "completion" have ceased to be mentioned in more recent media reports—and not only because Chand, officially titled Creator-Director of the Rock Garden, himself died in 2015. Phase III, earlier news articles were in the habit of suggesting, had weathered insecure financial support and setbacks at the hands of various city officials, but by the early 2000s was on the road to completion. This claim was promoted in both local and international sources and existed in spite of Chand's own assertion that "the day will never come when this kingdom is finished."<sup>34</sup> The dissertation, focused as it is on squaring the process and materials of production of the site with the mythical elements of its origin tales, demonstrates my underlying acknowledgement that the Garden, by its very nature and in defiance of the established Chandigarh binary, is an ongoing process, never to be "completed"—much like the city itself.

### *A Visit to The Rock Garden Today*

The Rock Garden is situated on a plot of largely undeveloped land, which in its entirety is approximately forty acres in size, and is located at the northern edge of Chandigarh between Sukhna Lake and the Sector-1 Capitol Complex [Figures 3, 4, 5]. The sizable parking lot on the site's northwestern edge accommodates the large number of visitors who arrive at the site in private vehicles or tour- and school buses. As the visitor proceeds from the parking lot or the rickshaw/taxi drop-off point, he or she encounters a panel of commemorative text, hand-painted onto the surface of a large stone [Figure 6]. The stone that makes up this sign is roughly circular

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<sup>34</sup> As quoted in "Kingdom of Nek Chand," film by Ulli Beir and Patrick Cox, 1985.

in shape and forms part of a larger arrangement of stones that together create a vaguely humanoid form. The text is in English, and announces that the Rock Garden has been created by Nek Chand but has been “dedicated to the spirit of creativity by the people of India.” The date of the official inauguration ceremony is given as July 7, 1988. This stone formation is set back from the main entrance gate, situated outside of the perimeter gate and a small entrance used by Garden workers.

The perimeter of the Garden is walled and access to the site is controlled via a narrow entrance gate adjacent to the main parking lot on the site’s western edge [Figure 7]. Before entering the gate the visitor pays a modest admission fee; standing at around three feet in height, the admission fee window is set low and the visitor must physically stoop down in order to interact with the ticket sales staff [Figure 8]. From here the visitor enters through the gate and into the first of the Garden’s three interconnected phases. The phases, as the visitor observes during the course of his or her movement through the site, are roughly demarcated in terms of the dominant material used in their construction and their method of display: Phase I is comprised largely of displayed river rocks, walls of pebbles and terracotta vessels, constructed waterfalls, and small, discrete huts set into the site’s foliage; Phase II features sculpture fields of figures constructed out of collected urban and domestic debris, connected via winding pathways and low doorways that obstruct the ability to view the area ahead; Phase III features large-scale mosaics, commercial buildings such as a gift shop and café, and open vistas that contrast with the serpentine paths of the earlier two phases. Despite these distinct phases, the transition between them—particularly between the first two phases—is subtle, and the visitor is only tangentially aware of the flow from one phase to the next. As such each phase feels distinct but interconnected, with the most jarring difference noticeable in Phase III.

Even before entering the site, however, its exterior suggests several impressions that linger and develop during the visitor's progression through the Garden: the site is simultaneously rustic and developed, organized but free-form, situated prominently on the landscape and with a designated visitor walkway but also containing a number of hidden, unexpected elements and continual possibilities for discovery. The site's exterior wall is constructed largely of bitumen drums, with each section of wall stacked three drums in height. Because the drums have been partially covered with a mixture of sand and cement they register to the viewer as stone or aged concrete pillars, implying, perhaps, the presence of ancient ruins [see Figure 6]. The visual fabrication of the wall as stone is partially disrupted by the presence of a pipe and wires that run horizontally along the length of this portion of the wall. Such reminders of the site's structure and mechanics occur throughout the Garden, demonstrating that the site is not, in fact, open to free exploration and discovery: prohibitive signage, barbed wire, structures that block paths that diverge from the main route [Figures 9 and 10] occasionally act as devices that rupture the visitor's suspended disbelief. Several Phase-II style sculptures are displayed along the top of the portion of the wall that flanks the entrance gate: large birds, perhaps geese or swans, which are constructed of rebar and concrete overlaid with broken white ceramics pieces. These hint at some of the fanciful features inside, specifically those encounters in Phase II, and act as a visual invitation through a gate that is otherwise foreboding in appearance. The entrance gate, left ajar during the site's opening hours, is constructed of the same stacked bitumen drums and so obscures the site's entrance when closed, appearing to be just another section of wall. Furthering the effect of this obscured view, the visitor immediately enters into shelter or "lobby," the roof of which precludes the visitor's ability to see further into the site. This limitation of sightline produced by the winding pathways, low-height doorways, and covered portions of the walkway,

is an element that occurs frequently through the Garden. Such limited line of sight has the effect of creating an element of continually encountering the unexpected.

Upon entering Phase I, the visitor encounters a curved stone wall, the top surface of which is covered in a mosaic of broken white and pastel shade tiles [Figure 11]. Some ninety natural local river rocks are mounted against this mosaic; the rocks, of various and roughly alternating heights, are installed at regular intervals as though on display as at a museum. Nearby, similar rocks are displayed in concrete niches [Figure 12]. The stone and mosaic wall runs alongside the walking path in this first section of the Garden and is broken by several arched doorways, some of which lead into small shelters that contain additional displayed rocks. The presence of these doorways—but more particularly the inability for the visitor to get a sense of what lies beyond them—increases the impression that there are multiple available paths, alternative directional choices, and the possibility for discovery throughout this section. Adding to the sense of discovery and stimuli is the variety of textures, colors, and surfaces found in this area: smooth, pastel ceramic surfaces coexist alongside the grainy surface of volcanic rock, the curvature of handmade terracotta vessels, and the undulating surface of pebble screens.

At the end of this path the visitor next passes into a small shelter, which exits onto a longer and narrower pathway. Here, individual stones are displayed along a portion of the wall; elsewhere smaller-scale stones are grouped in a manner that evokes miniature landscape or architectural scenes [Figure 13]. Several partition walls—some constructed of terracotta vessels, others of pebbles pressed into the surface of concrete, still others of wires covered with cement and gravel—are arranged both in the visitor's path and along the upper edge of the wall. Because neither the terracotta nor the rebar partitions completely obstruct the visitor's view when he or she is standing directly in front of them, they act almost as screens through which a

limited slight line is possible, encourages the notion that some the Garden's features remain just out of sight or reach [Figures 14 and 15]. There are trees and potted plants situated throughout this area that, although carefully placed, appear haphazard; additionally, there are several small excavated ponds that fill with water during the rainy season [Figures 16 and 17]. These elements suggest to the visitor that the Garden is unplanned, perhaps, and is operating in tune with rather than imposing itself upon its natural environment.

As the visitor progresses, the path opens into a small courtyard with a cement-and-clay hut at the far side [see Figure 1]. Two traditional millstones flank its doorway. These stones serve as exhibition-style signage, introducing the historic importance of the hut. Written in Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu, and English, the explanatory text reads, "This is the hut where from [sic] Mr. Nek Chand made modest beginnings of his immortal masterpiece Rock Garden" [Figure 18]. The rather rustic atmosphere of this section is heightened by the placement of several concrete walls, upon which have been scrawled—as though by hand with a stick, perhaps—a series and symbols and designs. These resemble something of a private, primitive language of pictograms or hieroglyphics [Figure 19]. While some of the images are vaguely familiar as stylized birds, teacups, or foliage, in large part these symbols, together with the deserted hut, the overgrown foliage, and the surface cracks and moss on the concrete, contribute to the impression that the visitor has discovered an long-abandoned site containing the undecipherable elements of a forgotten civilization.

This impression continues as the path extends into the subsequent section of the Garden; here the high stone and cement walls and curvature of the narrow path together restrict the visitor's view. Many of the stones used in the construction of the wall are vaguely figural, some resembling human torsos, for example [Figure 20]. Inserted into the wall at eye-level at one

point along the path is a small votive that resembles a shrine or temple with a central divine figure [Figure 21]. At this point the path diverges, where it on one hand narrows further and is blocked to access by a bitumen drum, and on the other directs the visitor into a cave-like structure. While it contains no overtly religious imagery this structure—perhaps also due in part to the shrine votive mounted at its exterior—is similar in feel to the excavated caves in other parts of India, such as at Ajanta and Ellora.

The visitor exits this covered “cave” into an open space that contains a stone and tile amphitheater structure [Figure 22] and, more prominently, a roughly Mughal-style structure—with columns and *chhatris*—that sits atop a wide waterfall [Figure 23]. Smaller waterfalls cascade down the adjacent stone and cement walls [Figure 24]. There are inaccessible and partially accessible stone steps on either side of the main waterfall, and additional architectural structures and façades extend along the top ridge of the constructed hillside. These structures, similar in appearance to grottos or partially ruined fortresses, are connected via a bridge that is also inaccessible to the visitor. The area’s large, central waterfall flows onto one of three connected stone walkways, where it trickles into two sunken “streams” to be recirculated through the waterfall<sup>35</sup> [Figure 25]. Opposite the main waterfall and on the other side of one of the streams is a large reinforced concrete wall similar in appearance to aged stone. The wall features a grid of deep-relief sculptures: a lower register depicts architectural forms with cone-shaped roofs, and an upper register stylized human, perhaps skeletal, figures [Figure 26]. Due, perhaps, to the way in which the water flows directly onto the portion of the walkway that is adjacent to the waterfall, together with the system of narrow bridges that connect the three pathways, the presence of moss, actual foliage, and the convincing appearance of a fabricated overgrowth of

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<sup>35</sup> This circulation of this water back to the waterfall, however, is not obvious to the viewer.

concrete “roots” [Figure 27], reiterates the impression that the visitor has happened across the ruins of an ancient civilization. The architectural structures in this section incorporate stylized elements of Harappan, Mughal, Hindu temple, and colonial-era fort architecture and motifs, and as such register as pan-Indian rather than regionally or religiously specific.

This section of the garden is a popular one for visitors to gather, take photographs in front of the waterfall, and, despite the posted prohibitive signs, explore the area by climbing onto the concrete “vines” and stone stairways. During the busiest times of the day at the Garden visitors often stream through the initial sections, stopping only when they reach the waterfall vista. To some extent during the far less crowded early hours of the day, the architectural structures, overgrown foliage, and motifs imply the visitor is an adventurer who has happened upon a series of lost ruins; at other hours the crowds and jubilant atmosphere make this impression difficult to sustain. Despite the crowds, however, the open vista—with its large-scale architectural features and dramatic waterfalls—serves as an unexpected surprise after the narrow paths, displayed rocks, and high walls of the earlier sections.

From this open vista the visitor proceeds via another narrow, winding path, the walls alongside which are constructed of stone and cement nodules, which together create a rough texture [Figure 28]. Along the top of the left-hand side of this wall as the visitor progresses is a series of small-scale buildings, paths, and waterways, constructed of stones, terracotta, and cement, where small plants are positioned to appear as trees and bushes [Figure 29]. Unlike, for example, a diorama situated in a more typical display, this miniature village is set higher than an easy viewing height and so is simultaneously presented to the visitor and yet out of easy view: from the path one can see individual buildings and features but not a clear layout of the village [Figure 30]. The village gives the appearance of existing on its own terms, interrupted by rather

than existing for the visual edification of the visitor. It also creates the possibility of the illusion that the village is actually full-scale but viewed at a distance, as on a hillside. Moving through this section the visitor is compelled to pass through quickly—the narrowness of the walled path creates uncomfortably tight quarters for crowds of people—while at the same time she or he is encouraged to linger: the miniature village is highly detailed and complex. This flow of movement through this space increases the sense that the village is accessible but not entirely or immediately so.

As the path proceeds through Phase I, the visitor is able to glimpse one more view of the main waterfall as well as a view into the upcoming Phase III [Figure 31] before passing into the Garden's next section. This layout of interconnected views recasts previously seen areas in a different perspective, and hints at areas to come that are not presently accessible from the current path. As the visitor proceeds the next section consists of several concrete huts and fortress-like structures with arches, steps, and stone and tile walls [Figure 32], and reiterates the sense experienced in the waterfall vista that the viewer is happening across a set of ruins. In this area it is difficult to distinguish the natural landscape features from the created architectural ones, and the stone walkways, walls, and paths undulate as though they have been altered by a history of seismic forces [Figure 33]. Here a variety of methods have been employed in the creation of the physical elements: short partition screens are made from concrete, with rows of linearly placed pebbles; a mosaic of multi-colored ceramic fragments decorate the curved walls, some betraying the curved sides of cups and the hallmarks printed on the underside of plates [Figure 34]; nearby a structure that resembles Le Corbusier's smooth-surfaced concrete Sector-1 Tower of Shade is finished with a textured rock and tile exterior [Figure 35]. Stone steps that terminate at stone walls flank low arched doorways constructed of highly textured volcanic rocks, and throughout

the scene are situated unusually shaped rocks, similar to those found in the Garden's first sections. Here, the rocks are placed amongst ceramic- and terracotta-surfaced mounds, with the mounds repeating the forms of the found rocks in a stylized manner [Figure 36]. Other wall surfaces are decorated with a mosaic of irregularly shaped fragments of electrical moldings [Figure 37]. Intermixed with the curved surfaces of the archways, the undulating walls, and the found rocks and created mounds is a repeated angularity: a row of stacked terracotta vessels appear as spikes [see Figure 36], and several of the structures terminate in jagged parapets [see Figure 35]. The appearance of the angular moldings is surprising among so the curved surfaces by the ceramic fragments and the natural stones. Elsewhere there are other unexpected juxtapositions. A small, enclosed lawn appears to be the remains of a sunken garden and gives the impression that the formerly landscaped terrain is now left forgotten [Figure 38]; in an adjacent region trees are manicured and situated within stone planters [Figure 39]. The experience of so many different textures and surfaces, together with the juxtaposition of the haphazard and the orderly, creates something of a confused and fractured sensory experience. These experiences are complimented and heightened by the general feeling of discovery and the chaos of unexpected views.

The visitor progresses, and, in a reversal of the experience in the previous sections where the viewer was situated amongst or below the structure, the next portion of the Garden is seen from above. A viewing platform allows for a visual survey of the entire scene below, where a concrete and stone courtyard features a central village-style well on a raised platform [Figure 40]. The visual contrast of such a vantage point is noticeable: the visitor has the sense for the first time that everything in this section is visible, that there are no hidden components beyond the reach of sight. Upon descending, however, it becomes obvious that this impression is

deceptive. The courtyard is in fact populated with over one hundred displayed rocks, and exits via a winding path through a partially visible shelter.

No sign or other marker at this point denotes the shift into Phase II, but nevertheless the visitor is soon aware of a distinct structural difference as the path proceeds. The next sections are composed largely of sculpture fields, which are set above eye level and situated on walls constructed of stones, concrete, and tile mosaic. The sculptures are grouped by type, and so the visitor is confronted with successions of grouped like figures—humans, animals, birds, fantasy beasts—constructed of rebar, concrete, pebbles, fragments of cups, bottles, and plates, terracotta vessels, broken glass and plastic bracelets, bicycle handlebars, electrical fixtures. There are groups of figures that depict mediating sadhus, sari-clad ladies, peacocks, children in school uniforms, musicians, monkeys, peacocks, geese, bulls; there are arrangements of conjoined figures that share bodies and appendages, figures whose arms terminate in whole teacups, trapezoidal forms covered with a mosaic of pebbles and featuring a human face [Figures 41-47]. Throughout this section there is a striking juxtaposition of recognizable objects—particularly ones that connect with daily life—and fantastical forms. A local visitor might well imagine that some of the household objects used in the construction of these sculptures had come from his or her own household, or from those of neighbors. The uncanny is frequently positioned alongside the familiar in ways that are sometimes amusing or curious, such as when figures constructed of broken teacups hold serving trays of intact tea sets, or when reclining figures appear to be incapacitated by drink [Figure 48]. At other times the effect is unsettling—a section of repeated concrete female figures, starkly pale in contrast to the earlier vibrant figures constructed of broken bangles, appear hauntingly skeletal [see Figure 80]. The complexity of this interaction is intensified by the placement of the sculpture fields, which lay on each side of the walking path

and well above the comfortable viewing height of the visitor. One result of this placement is the impression that at times the sculptures on one side of the path appear to be engaged in an interaction with the figures on the opposite side rather than with the human viewer in between. At others the figures in a single field appear to be engaged in conversation, interaction, or conflict with each other. Because of these impressions the visitor often feels he or she is an unseen witness rather than a participant in the environment created in Phase II: the path passes below the eyelevel of the figures, and the visitor is unable to engage in or, at times, even fully witness the fantastical scenes being carried out in the sculpture fields above.

Although there is much to see on either side of the path, this portion of the Garden tends to be less densely populated by visitors than either the waterfall vista or the upcoming Phase-III courtyard. Visitors often pass through the area relatively quickly, with fewer people stopping to take photographs or to marvel at the features than occurs in the Garden's open vistas. This is perhaps due to the thoroughfare nature of the viewing path: the same pathway that proceeds towards Phase III at one point diverges in the opposite direction and towards the exit, and visitors must retrace their steps through this earlier section rather than leave the Garden through Phase III [Figure 49]. Furthermore, the path, while not particularly narrow, features few of the open vistas or shaded areas that in other parts of the Garden encourage gathering and leisurely observation. Continuing along the path into Phase III, the exterior walls appear increasingly standardized and, unlike in earlier sections, less piecemeal in their construction. A large section of this wall is crafted from stacked burlap bags, which are filled with concrete or rocks and covered with a cement mixture [Figure 50]. This treatment gives the effect of a stylized stone wall, almost amusingly bulbous in its construction, and though at a much larger scale similar in shape to the curvaceous rocks displayed in earlier regions. Other portions of the wall in this

section are created from stones of various sizes pushed into concrete. A number of these stones feature handwritten graffiti produced by previous visitors [Figure 51]. Although this practice is discouraged by signage and, presumably, staff, there are many areas in the Garden where such graffiti exists.

The third and final phase of the Garden is marked by a commemorative sign, which announces the phase's official inauguration on September 23, 1993 [Figure 52]. Adjacent to the commemorative sign is a small souvenir shop, the presence of which signals a shift into a more consumer- and visitor-oriented experience [Figure 53]. Overall, there is a noticeable unity across the design elements in Phase III, and a greater sense that the structures and features are oriented with a mind to the visitor's experience—most design features and sculptures are clearly within sight, for example, and are positioned at eye-level rather than above it. The impression given in Phase III is that it was planned rather than built gradually by accretion and then later fitted with a visitor walkway. Whereas many of the earlier sections were notable for their blocked or incomplete visual access and their divergent paths inaccessible to the ordinary visitor, Phase III is on the whole markedly open, its features designed for easy access and—although it may not be immediately obvious during all hours of visitation—available as a rented event space. Before reaching the large open Phase III plaza, the visitor passes through shaded paths alongside an excavated stream with adjacent waterfalls [Figure 54]. Along the top edge of a wall that has been constructed from concrete and burlap bags are a series of figures, barely visible from the ground but who appear to be seated in cross-legged meditation. A Shiva-like figure holds a three-pronged trident and stands among them, and in the background the domed finial of a *chhatra* structure is visible<sup>36</sup> [Figure 55]. These features add to the vaguely religious but largely

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<sup>36</sup> This domed structure is part of a larger architectural feature not visible or accessible from the visitor path at the time of writing: the structure contains several large water tanks and features eleven *chhatra*

pan-Indian nature of much of the Garden's imagery and, unlike most of Phase III, connects with the impression from Phase I and Phase II that the Garden exists outside of and beyond the viewer's gaze.<sup>37</sup>

Passing through this walkway the visitor enters into the large Phase III plaza. To the left immediately upon entry is a large, amphitheater structure with stepped seating, the surface of which is covered with a mosaic of broken ceramic tableware [Figure 56]. The back wall of the stadium features panels of designs, many of which—in contrast to the motifs found in earlier phases of the Garden—are stylized or self-referential in that they depict architectural or sculptural features found in earlier phases. There are simple mandala forms, a large grinning cat, and imagery of Phase-II sculptures. Similar patterns are repeated on the walls of the pavilions and structures at the far side of the plaza. The ceramic pieces used in the Phase-III mosaics are noticeably uniform in terms of size, quality, and surface texture when compared to most of the ceramic mosaics found in the earlier phases. Immediately to the right of the plaza entrance and at the opposite side from the stepped seating is a rectangular building featuring columns and arches and a rectangular railing along the roof [Figure 57]. This structure houses the site's aquariums—a series of fish tanks arranged behind viewing windows [Figure 58]—and is adjacent to a tiled wall of spigots available for hand-washing [Figure 59]. A second adjacent rectangular building is labeled “LAUGHING MIRRORS” and features “fun-house” style distorted mirrors [Figure 60]; there is a small café/drink stand located at the building's opposite side. A curvilinear structure of arches extends along the center and far perimeter of the plaza,

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structures in total. See Iain Jackson, “Cataloging Nek Chand's Rock Garden, Chandigarh,” vol. 2 (catalog report), 2008, p. 433.

<sup>37</sup> However, according to photographs from 2008 both the seated figures and the standing figure were once oriented towards the visitor path and were more clearly placed amid the waterfall's origin point. See Iain Jackson, “Cataloging Nek Chand's Rock Garden, Chandigarh,” vol. 2 (catalog report), 2008, p. 429.

atop which are large-scale horse sculptures [Figure 61]. Beneath each arch hangs a wide plank-board swing [Figure 62], which many visitors choose to use. Beyond this, a series of low, rectangular shelters feature interior mosaic-clad columns, walls, and ceilings, as well as relief sculptures [Figure 63]. In addition to stylized and self-referential imagery [Figure 64], some mosaics depict landscapes, symbols, and animals. As such they are strikingly different from the mosaic walls and display platforms of the earlier sections, which do not depict images at all. The perimeter shelters appear to be more decorative than functional, except for the furthest shelter: this structure is used as a storehouse for many of the site's construction materials and uninstalled sculptures [Figure 65]. Many of the structures throughout this area remain unfinished; the visitor is struck with the impression that not only is Phase III perpetually in progress but also that the unfinished works provide a rare glimpse at the construction process that in other areas can only be guessed at [Figure 66]. Wire and steel interior framework, uncompleted mosaics, and rebar extensions signal active construction but, because no artists or craftspeople are present, leave the visitor to wonder when, or if, the structures will be completed.

There are a number of natural trees spaced irregularly throughout the plaza, and among these are several "tree" trunks constructed from cement [Figure 67]. The central area of the plaza appears to the visitor to be a somewhat flexible space, but one in which a number of semi-regular features generally appear: a camel available for rides at a fee, a small train for children, and an inflatable slide [Figures 68]. Many visitors stream through the earlier sections to congregate here in the open plaza. Although few people seem to take advantage of the camel and train rides or inflatable slide, there are many families, couples, and groups talking, observing, eating snacks, and taking photographs. Unlike earlier sections of the Garden that

seem to encourage the notion that the visitor has happened across a series of ancient or fanciful ruins, Phase III appears primarily as an amusement park.

At times in the Garden the visitor has the experience of engaging in an unrestricted exploration of the site's features, but this impression is periodically disrupted by the elements that block access or otherwise dictate a course of action. The potted plants that block access to the original hut or the haphazard-appearing bitumen drums that prevent the ascension of a stairway in a later section may be calculated to restrict visitor access but because they make use of common elements found in the Garden—pots and drums—they tend to have the appearance of being unplanned and incidental. The signs posted at regular intervals and with instructions in English, Hindi, Punjabi not to climb on the Garden's walls, "muddy" its paths, or touch its sculptures mitigate the visitor's experience in ways that are more direct. Similarly, the metal trash bins with the hand-painted instruction to "USE ME," signs that discourage littering more generally ("KEEP CITY CLEAN") and signs announcing a fine for littering in the Garden contribute to the impression that the Garden is in reality a tightly restricted space. In contrast, the winding pathways that vary in width, frequently prevent distant sightline, seem to diverge, and often circle back on themselves establish a carefully planned walk-way that encourages the feeling of free-form exploration on the part of the visitor.

In describing this path through the Garden, there are innumerable features that continue to surprise even the frequent visitor—the large ceramic fragment that is recognizable as the rim of a urinal and built into a doorway in Phase II, the tiny, detailed model house set within a collection of displayed rocks, the mosaic-clad chair that brings to mind the "Grand Modele" armchair designed by Le Corbusier [Figures 69, 70, and 71]. Additionally, the Garden's static features are unpredictably enlivened in a variety of ways: staff members are glimpsed moving in

and out of buildings that are inaccessible to the visitor, pigeons and chipmunks adapt small holes in walls for their own use, feral dogs occasionally manage to access and walk along the top edge of an interior wall. As a result the visitor encounters the Garden as a site that seems to delight in unexpected scenes and juxtapositions, that encourages another look, and that rewards multiple visits.

### ***Partition***

The discussion of the mythic origins of the Rock Garden and its relationship with Chandigarh, as well as the description of its current appearance, have brought us to the present day. However, it is necessary now to return to the actual historic conditions of the city's origin. The decision to construct the new city of Chandigarh was a direct result of the events of independence from British rule on August 15, 1947. With Independence came Partition, the splitting off of the northwestern and northeastern portions of the subcontinent into countries from India: West Pakistan and East Pakistan respectively, the latter known today as Bangladesh. These twin moments of Independence and Partition coupled promise and hope with trauma and communal violence. South Asians learned of the final decision to partition the British Indian Empire via a radio broadcast issued by Mountbatten, just two months prior to Independence, on June 3, 1947.<sup>38</sup> Word spread slowly in many of the affected rural areas, rumors were rampant, and there was mass confusion and speculation as to what the implementation of the Radcliffe Line and the creation of two separate, distinct nations would mean for the subcontinent. This mass confusion gave way to tremendous upheaval. In the months to follow Independence, some 6.5 million Muslims migrated from India to what was then West Pakistan, while an estimated

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<sup>38</sup> Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.

five million Hindus relocated in the opposite direction. Partition- and migration-related violence and riots were rampant; casualty estimates vary widely (between 200,000 to two million), but one million deaths has become the commonly accepted statistic.<sup>39</sup>

For many years Partition literature, particularly that produced in South Asia, was overshadowed by more celebratory nationalistic accounts of Independence and by the interest in developing separate identities as nation-states. Accordingly, early historiography was concerned largely with the politics that accompanied the transfer of power and with the process of dividing land and assets.<sup>40</sup> Recent Partition scholarship undertaken since the 1990s has shifted to focus instead on the under-told personal toll and trauma undergone in this period of displacement and violence, relying on individual accounts and oral histories to grapple with events and effects that cannot be fully explained by political negotiations and statistics. This scholarship has focused in large part on the experiences of women, whose stories had hitherto been largely silenced.<sup>41</sup> These shifts in historiography that occurred in the late twentieth century are particularly poignant when considered against the background of continued communal violence in South Asia. In her important 2007 book, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia*, historian Vazira Zamindar notes that Partition scholarship has tended to view Partition as a single event, rather than a long process; this tendency has obscured the complexities of culture and history that

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<sup>39</sup> Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2000.

<sup>40</sup> Pippa Virdee, "Remembering Partition: Women, Oral Histories, and the Partition of 1947," in *Oral History*, Autumn 2013, pp. 49-62, citation p. 50.

<sup>41</sup> See for example Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1998; Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*, New Delhi: Penguin, 1998; Veena Das, ed., *Mirrors of Violence, Communities, Riots, and Survivors in South Asia*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990; Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.

deeply connect the two now separate nation-states.<sup>42</sup> The act of viewing Partition as a single event, or approaching it primarily as a catalyst for nation-building, has led to the construction of artificially detached and separate accounts of India and Pakistan. The process of migration itself, Zamindar argues, together with its surrounding complexities, makes discussing the histories of India and Pakistan as though they had separately sprung from a single moment on August 15, 1947 misguided and inadequate.

The visual culture of South Asia has, until recently, tended to remain silent on the subject of Partition or to deal with it indirectly. Film historian Bhaskar Sarkar has noted that cinematic representations of Partition enable different forms of engagement than those allowed by other forms of historiography, as he traces the relative silence during the 1950s-1970s gave way in the 1980s to more explicit Partition-related narratives.<sup>43</sup> Many of the recent efforts to grapple with issues of Partition trauma and nationalist historiographies have been undertaken in the space of contemporary exhibitions, such as *Lines of Control* in 2013, which argued for partition as a “productive space.”<sup>44</sup> As art historian Aparna Kumar has noted, several exhibitions of South Asian art in the past decade have more generally “taken nationalist historiography to task;” she names *Edge of Desire* (2005), *Karkhana: A Contemporary Collaboration* (2005), *Hanging Fire: Recent Art from Pakistan* (2009), *Zarina: Paper Like Skin* (2012), and *The Sahmat Collective: Art and Activism in India Since 1989* (2013) as primary examples of this recent curatorial turn.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.

<sup>43</sup> Bhaskar Sarkar, *Mourning the Nation: Indian Cinema in the Wake of Partition*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2009.

<sup>44</sup> Iftikhar Dadi and Hammad Nasar, eds., *Lines of Control: Partition as a Productive Space*, London: Green Cardamom, 2012.

<sup>45</sup> Aparna Kumar, “Unsettling the National in South Asia, *My East is Your West* and *After Midnight: Indian Modernism to Contemporary India 1947/1997*,” *Museum Worlds*, vol. 3, 2015, pp. 142-150.

This turn continues to evolve in significant ways in the present moment. As Kumar noted in her review of *My East is Your West*, a recent collaboration between Pakistani artist Rashid Rana and Indian artist Shilpa Gupta featured at the 2015 Venice Biennale, the work and its installation highlight the fragility of the national divisions created by Partition.<sup>46</sup>

It has been said that Nek Chand undertook his work at the Rock Garden out of a desire to recreate a fantasy of his lost ancestral village.<sup>47</sup> I will explore and expand the dimensions of this rather poignant claim—one that has been particularly circulated by the UK-based Nek Chand Foundation—in Chapter Three. In Chapter One, I will be primarily concerned with the plight and resettlement of Partition migrants, such as Chand, in Punjab, and with the heavy symbolism invested in the city of Chandigarh as a replacement city for Lahore. Chandigarh’s origins are deeply implicated in the modernizing thrust of Nehruvian nation-building, but are just as deeply concerned with the traumas of displacement and the upheavals of identity construction. As we will see, this displacement concerned not only Partition migrants like Nek Chand but also includes the repeated displacements of area villagers and low-wage laborers, whose material discards figure literally into the construction of the Garden.

### ***Existing Literature on Chandigarh and the City in South Asia***

Much literature has been produced on the subject of Chandigarh. Many of these accounts, particularly those authored in the mid-to-late twentieth century, have tended to project Chandigarh as a late-career trial run for many of the urban planning ideas that Le Corbusier had developed and promoted, but as yet had not realized on a large scale over the course of his

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<sup>46</sup> Aparna Kumar, “Unsettling the National in South Asia,” 2015, p. 143.

<sup>47</sup> Rock Garden signage produced by the Nek Chand Foundation and on display on site promotes this message.

career. These have generally been written by architectural historians examining the pinnacle project of an important Western architect's career rather than from the standpoint of examining a city embedded in the political and social landscape of India.

There have been notable exceptions to this tendency, produced both in the early years following the inauguration of the city and in recent years. Norma Evenson's 1966 monograph *Chandigarh* was perhaps the first volume to offer something of a definitive approach to the history of the city's development.<sup>48</sup> Featuring a substantial number of photographs, floor plans, and architect sketches, Evenson's work provides an important collection of early views of Chandigarh. In her text she describes the tenets and conception of Le Corbusier's plan, together with its system of roads, philosophy of population density, landscaping, parks, sectors and zoned layout, and its dictates for the control of the city's periphery. She prefaces this, however, with a careful consideration of an earlier plan for the city proposed by Albert Mayer and Matthew Nowicki, gathered from her investigation of material and commentary provided directly by Mayer's architectural firm in Chicago. It is significant that Evenson spent a number of years in India in conjunction with her doctoral studies at Yale; her broader interest in Indian cities rather than in Western architects resulted in well-balanced early examination of the planned city.

A later definitive volume on Chandigarh appeared twenty years later, written by urban historian Ravi Kalia. His *Chandigarh: The Making of An Indian City* devotes substantial attention not only to Nehru's post-independence drive to create Chandigarh but also to the efforts of chief engineer P.L. Varma and Chandigarh Capital Project administrative head P.N. Thapar, and, like Evenson, carefully details Albert Mayer's preliminary designs for the city before

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<sup>48</sup> Norma Evenson, *Chandigarh*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966.

turning to those of Le Corbusier and his team.<sup>49</sup> In short, the book in large part focuses on the driving idea behind the decision to plan a city in post-independence India.<sup>50</sup> The book's final sections describe the realized city as something separate from either the Mayer or the Le Corbusier plans—an inhabited reality rather than a set of architectural plans put into action—noting what has sometimes been the disconnect between the planned way of life and that experienced by Chandigarh's actual residents. Kalia's focus on the idea over the physical has sometimes been met with criticism: a review by Indian architect Gautam Bhatia, for example, reproached the book's lack of architectural drawings and photographs.<sup>51</sup>

More recently, increased interest in expanding the conversation has resulted in studies that look beyond Le Corbusier and his Sector-I Capitol Complex. Vikramaditya Prakash's *Chandigarh's Le Corbusier* includes important insight into the role of the team of Indian architects; for this, Prakash relies heavily on the contributions of his own father, Aditya Prakash, who was an Indian member of the city's planning team.<sup>52</sup> Iain Jackson and Jessica Holland, in *The Architecture of Edwin Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew*, highlight the important contributions of British architects Fry and Drew.<sup>53</sup> Atreyee Gupta, in her essay "In a Postcolonial Diction," notes that Vikramaditya Prakash's work is valuable more generally for its efforts to rework the

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<sup>49</sup> Ravi Kalia's *Chandigarh: The Making of An Indian City*, New Delhi: Oxford India Paperbacks, 1987.

<sup>50</sup> It is worth noting that Kalia later produced a study of the planned city of Gandhinagar, in Gujarat; Ravi Kalia, *Gandhinagar: Building National Identity in Postcolonial India*, Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2004.

<sup>51</sup> Gautam Bhatia, review of *Chandigarh: Making of an Indian City*, in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 27, no. 2, 1990, pp. 248-249.

<sup>52</sup> Vikramaditya Prakash, *Chandigarh's Le Corbusier: The Struggle for Modernity in Postcolonial India*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002.

<sup>53</sup> Iain Jackson and Jessica Holland, *The Architecture of Edwin Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew*, Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014.

established binary of the modernized West and the non-West as merely willing receptacle.<sup>54</sup> Recent efforts by Maristella Casciato, formerly of the Canadian Centre for Architecture, have developed the record of Pierre Jeanneret’s contribution—corresponding in large part to a recent sizable acquisition of Jeanneret archival materials by that Montreal institution. Urban theorist and activist Madhu Sarin has drawn important attention to the unplanned realities of squatter settlements and the displacement of low-income Chandigarh residents.<sup>55</sup> Calling further attention to the hitherto limitations of the literature, Nihal Perea’s article “Contesting Visions: Hybridity, Liminality, and Authorship of the Chandigarh Plan” attempts to disrupt some of the misleading ways in which Le Corbusier has been positioned as the “author” of the city.<sup>56</sup> Seeking as he does to maintain, albeit shift, the concept of “city authorship,” one could argue that although such a shift is an important contribution it still relies upon the limited notion that cities are the result of a single individual or team. Most recently, Shanay Jhaveri has considered the ways in which visual artists from within and outside of India have drawn upon Chandigarh to influence their works.<sup>57</sup>

And yet, as I continue to describe throughout this dissertation, these important studies offer little mention of the Rock Garden, the large-scale work that has, in the words of one Indian journalist, “brought Chandigarh on the international map of tourism and art.”<sup>58</sup> This is a debatable claim about a city that has such historical architectural and urban planning importance,

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<sup>54</sup> Atreyee Gupta, “In a Postcolonial Diction: Postwar Abstraction and the Aesthetics of Modernization,” in *Art Journal*, vol 73, no. 3, Fall 2013; pp. 30-47.

<sup>55</sup> Madhu Sarin, *Urban Planning in the Third World: The Chandigarh Experience*, London: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1982.

<sup>56</sup> Nihal Perea, “Contesting Visions: Hybridity, Liminality, and Authorship of the Chandigarh Plan,” *Planning Perspectives*, vol. 19 no. 2, 2004; pp. 175-199.

<sup>57</sup> Shanay Jhaveri, *Chandigarh is in India*, Mumbai: Shoestring Publisher, 2016.

<sup>58</sup> “UT Administration to Pay Tribute to Creator of Rock Garden on Birth Anniversary,” *Indian Express*, December 15, 2016.

but its underlying acknowledgment of the Rock Garden on the physical, artistic, and philosophical landscape of Chandigarh is an important one. The significance of the Rock Garden has hitherto found no steady footing in the dominant scholarship on Chandigarh. Little academic study has been devoted to the Garden or to Chand, and the published material that does exist tends to position Chand as an outsider artist whose concerns are akin to those of such figures as Simon Rodia and Sid Boyum.<sup>59</sup> Preferring the term “visionary artist,” the journal *Raw Vision*, edited by Nek Chand Foundation co-founder John Maizels, has featured a number of articles devoted to the Rock Garden and to Chand since its first issue in 1989, and published a booklet with text and photographs by architecture and art critic S.S. Bhatti.<sup>60</sup> Bhatti’s 1982 doctoral thesis for the University of Queensland had focused on the Rock Garden, and as such served as the first large-scale study of the site.<sup>61</sup> A more thorough and meticulous study was undertaken by architectural historian Iain Jackson in conjunction with his 2008 doctoral dissertation at the University of Liverpool. As a funded researcher and volunteer for the newly established Nek Chand Foundation, Jackson lived on-site at the Garden for a number of months while he worked with a team of volunteers to carefully catalog the site’s sculptures and architectural features.<sup>62</sup> In addition to the serving as an important site catalog, Jackson’s dissertation offers a well-researched history of the Garden and analyzes some of the

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<sup>59</sup> See, for example, Lucienne Peiry and Philippe Lespinasse, *Nek Chand’s Outsider Art: The Rock Garden of Chandigarh*, Paris: Flammarion, 2005; this volume was produced in conjunction with an exhibition by the same name. The tendency to categorize Chand as an “outsider artist” is also noted by Iain Jackson, in his “Cataloguing Nek Chand’s Rock Garden, Chandigarh,” unpublished dissertation, 2008, p. 26.

<sup>60</sup> *Nek Chand*, booklet published by *Raw Vision*, n.d. (ca. 1989).

<sup>61</sup> Despite repeated attempts, I was unable to acquire Bhatti’s 1982 unpublished dissertation. Iain Jackson has noted its significant contributions but also its limitations, citing among other challenges Bhatti’s lack of transcribed interviews and identified sources as well as his reliance on a highly inflected rather than objective analysis. See Iain Jackson, “Cataloguing Nek Chand’s Rock Garden, Chandigarh,” unpublished dissertation, 2008, pp. 30-35.

<sup>62</sup> Iain Jackson, “Cataloguing Nek Chand’s Rock Garden, Chandigarh,” unpublished dissertation, 2008.

controversies between the site and the city that played out in the later decades of the twentieth century. Elements of this study were included in *The Collection, the Ruin, and the Theatre*, a short volume co-authored by Soumyen Bandyopadhyay that features a significant number of site photographs, maps, and drawings.<sup>63</sup>

These studies exist against a developing backdrop of literature that has taken an urban turn in South Asia more generally. Acknowledged by Gyan Prakash<sup>64</sup> and later elaborated by Geeta Kapur,<sup>65</sup> this academic trend signals a shift towards privileging the city as the primary site for scholarly consideration beginning in the 1990s and gaining substantial momentum in the decades to follow. Importantly, the large urban center or burgeoning “megacity” of developing countries has emerged as the primary focus of study. Although Chandigarh does not fit within the category of “megacity,” which in India includes Delhi, Calcutta, and Bombay, studies of the planned city have been inflected by the evolving methodologies produced by this so-called urban turn. Tensions concerning the rural/urban distinction in South Asia were well in place by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century; however, the category of the city has a different set of implications today than it did in the Nehruvian era, and the urban is present in contemporary South Asian art historical inquiry and visual culture where it was once largely absent. The urban metropolis has thus become a site of heavy stakes, and a location through which the mechanisms of colonial-era modernities and of present day globalization have been considered and understood. This turn has manifested in both architectural and curatorial sites of discourse.

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<sup>63</sup> Iain Jackson and Soumyen Bandyopadhyay, *The Collection, the Ruin, and the Theatre*, 2007.

<sup>64</sup> Gyan Prakash, “The Urban Turn,” in *Sarai Reader 02: The Cities of Everyday Life*, Ravi S. Vasudevan, ed., Delhi: Sarai Media Lab, 2002; pp. 2-7.

<sup>65</sup> Geeta Kapur, “subTerrain: Artists Dig the Contemporary,” in *Body City: Siting Contemporary Culture in India*, Indira Chandrasekhar and Peter C. Seel, eds., Berlin: Haus Der Kulturen Der Welt, 2003; pp. 47-83.

In a manifestation of the urban turn, a distinct body of architectural/art historical studies has emerged since 2002. These studies consider the modern-era South Asian city and its built environments both as physical and as ideological sites. Three recent monographs on Delhi, Calcutta, Lahore, and Bombay written by Jyoti Hosagrahar, Swati Chattopadhyay, William Glover, and Preeti Chopra, respectively, provide important contributions.<sup>66</sup> Relying largely on architectural designs, city planning documents, and artistic records of the use of space as their sources, and taking up common but distinctly developed lines of inquiry such as hybridity, performance, and negotiation, these texts consider the city as a site upon which modernities developed and where the dynamics of colonialism and postcolonialism were staged. Standing alongside these studies is Kavuri-Bauer's *Monumental Matters*, which extends and complicates this city site-specificity by considering the interrelated symbolic and subjective meanings of Mughal monuments.<sup>67</sup> Taken together, this city-focused body of work locates the process of South Asian modernization and the experience of modernity within the built environments of the late-nineteenth–mid-twentieth century city.

A second site of recent discourse, exhibitions of contemporary art, shifts its focus instead to the visual culture of the contemporary twenty-first century megacity and to the rapid visual, environmental, social, and architectural changes found within it. The emerging stakes of the curatorial urban turn have been developed in several recent exhibition catalogs of South Asian contemporary art abroad. Exhibitions such as *Century City*, *Body City*, and *Edge of Desire*,

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<sup>66</sup> Jyoti Hosagrahar, *Indigenous Modernities: Negotiating Architecture and Urbanism*, New York: Routledge, 2005; Swati Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism, and the Colonial Uncanny*, New York: Routledge, 2005; William Glover, *Making Lahore Modern: Constructing and Imagining a Colonial City*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, Preeti Chopra, *A Joint Enterprise: Indian Elites and the Making of British Bombay*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

<sup>67</sup> Santhi Kavuri-Bauer, *Monumental Matters: The Power, Subjectivity, and Space of India's Mughal Architecture*, Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011.

which featured selections of works by such artists from India and Pakistan as Vivan Sundaram, Atul Dodiya, Rashid Rana, and Jitish Kallat, employed the city as a means of examining the mechanisms of globalization and its resonances in visual culture.<sup>68</sup> Within these exhibitions and the artworks themselves, the city is used to stake new claims about the message and orientation of art, but also to examine contemporary issues of identity and subjectivity, to challenge the nation, to critique the results of liberalization/globalization, and to reposition global and local networks and economies. Here, the complex relationships between the city, its economies, and the artist resist settling and instead illustrate, rely on, and explore the volatility of the contemporary megacity.

This scholarly and curatorial landscape has continued to evolve in directions that consider the ways in which ephemerality, aesthetics, and casual discourse on and within the city also form part of a city's archive. Recent studies such as *Kumbh Mela, January 2013: Mapping the Ephemeral Mega City* by Rahul Mehrotra and Felipe Vera have increasingly turned attention to the importance of the kinetic "city"—in this case, the kinetic activity takes place not among permanent city structures but instead amidst repurposed infrastructure and street grids.<sup>69</sup> Geography scholar D. Asher Ghertner, in his *Rule By Aesthetics*, details the ways in which appropriated aesthetic norms have dictated the work of city planning in Delhi that was previously governed by methods of mapping and surveying.<sup>70</sup> The impulse to record and consider the city not as confined to architectural structures but rather in relation to extraordinary and mundane

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<sup>68</sup> Iwona Blazwick, *Century City: Art and Culture in the Modern Metropolis*, London: Tate Gallery Publishers, 2001; Indira Chandrasekhar and Peter C. Seel, eds., *Body City: Siting Contemporary Culture in India*, Berlin: Haus Der Kulturen Der Welt, 2003; Chaitanya Sambrani, ed., *Edge of Desire: Recent Art in India*, London: Philip Wilson, 2005.

<sup>69</sup> Rahul Mehrotra and Felipe Vera, *Kumbh Mela, January 2013: Mapping the Ephemeral Mega City*, Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2015.

<sup>70</sup> D. Asher Ghertner, *Rule By Aesthetics: World-Class City Making in Delhi*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

experience is offered in the form of remembrances or journal entries in such literary projects as Sarai Collective's 2010 *Trickster City*.<sup>71</sup> As Cees Nootboom notes in his essay in Iwan Baan's photographic study of Chandigarh and Brasilia, "a city is an accumulation of everything that has ever been said there [...], all of these sounds combine to form a ceaseless litany that has always accompanied the history of the city."<sup>72</sup> The spirit of these approaches, and in particular, Nootboom's idea that the conversations within and about a city are an integral part of the city itself, informs the present undertaking.

### ***Methodology and Chapter Outline***

This dissertation is interdisciplinary in its scope, and incorporates methodologies of architectural history, anthropology, museum studies, postcolonial studies, and the discourses of heritage together with those of art history. Research for this project was undertaken via on-site study and documentation of the Rock Garden and at museums and other spaces of display, as well as through interviews with guides, visitors, staff, and Chand himself. It has also included significant archival work in India, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Chapter One describes Chandigarh as an unprecedented project on the post-colonial landscape. By the time construction on the new city began in 1952, several years of debate had taken place concerning the ways in which the symbolic magnitude and rehabilitative mission were to be best achieved via the mediums of architecture and urban planning. This debate was staged in the wake of Independence and on the landscape of Partition-related migration, violence, and ongoing trauma. Its sights set on providing India with a "laboratory" of

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<sup>71</sup> Sarai Collective, eds., Shveta Sarda, trans., *Trickster City: Writings from the Belly of the Metropolis*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2010.

<sup>72</sup> Cees Nootboom in Iwan Baan, *Brasilia-Chandigarh: Living With Modernity*, 2010, Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, p. 113.

invigorating design and tangible evidence of faith in the nation's future, Chandigarh nonetheless created its own displacements. Thousands of villagers who were established on the land slated for development were forcibly removed; these same villagers, and many low-income residents like them, were repeatedly relocated throughout the city's early decades. By examining this varied landscape of promise and displacement as integral to Chandigarh's development, I demonstrate how the politics of these post-Partition dynamics set for the stage for later considerations of Nek Chand and the Rock Garden.

Chapter Two is rooted in the early period of city and Garden construction during the 1950s-1960s, and it narrates the city as a deeply contested experience. The voiced criticisms and concerns regarding housing designs and the enforcement of city regulations during this period shaped and impacted the implementation of the architects' proposals, and small-scale, unofficial adjustments continued to restructure the city decades after the architects deemed the city "finished." Likewise, literary accounts of the city as a site of promise further expose the tensions and stakes of the Chandigarh project. In privileging an account of these ongoing negotiations with city spaces, this chapter emphasizes the pressing practical considerations and adjustments that have sometimes been obscured by the grand narratives of nation-building and twentieth-century modernism. Taken with these considerations are the ways in which debates over materials and landscaping formed parallel, rather than oppositional, concerns for the city and Garden alike. I demonstrate how intricately connected the mechanisms of the Garden are to the central mechanisms of the city.

The first two chapters lay the groundwork for the third, which attends more closely to the contours and effects of the mythic Chandigarh binary. Here I examine how the concerns of the city have been continually rendered in opposition to the concerns of the Rock Garden, a process

that has tended to ossify and eclipse a consideration of the site's varied dynamics and that has curtailed an exploration of the Garden's arena of possibilities and reverberations. Media accounts dating from the 1980s to the present pit Chand and the Garden against Le Corbusier and the city, perpetuating a dualistic, simplistic account of modernist master against untaught villager, planned against unplanned, rational against spiritual. The propagation and circulation of this mythic opposition gained additional credence when it was instrumentalized by the U.K.- and U.S.-based Nek Chand Foundation beginning in the late 1990s. Chapter Three considers the post-colonial context of the Foundation, and as well as the political aims of relying on the portrayal of a victimized Chand to promote its actions. Further, this chapter raises several questions concerning the colonial residue of making the Rock Garden the center of calls to "preserve" India's "heritage," and of the politics of projecting the site as an idealized fictional "village" amidst the region's tight control of actual villages and villager lives. In an ironic culmination of the characterization of Chand as the humble anti-modernist master, he has been cast as "master recycler" and "keeper of Indian heritage," designations that have themselves curtailed a closer examination of the site's psychological remnants and fissures.

Finally, the epilogue takes stock of several recent events to signal what these acts of memorialization and mobilization on the international stage might mean for the Rock Garden following Chand's death in 2015. This closing section picks up on some of the ways in which Chand's sculptures have themselves become "migrants" on the international stage. Since the mid-1980s, a number of commissioned gardens have been created in India, Europe, and the United States; a greater number of Chand's sculptures have been exhibited abroad and collected by Western institutions. Accompanying this international circulation has been an adjusted narrative that promotes the Garden's universality while reiterating its status as "victim" of the

city's egos and edicts. One effect of this visibility on the global stage has been the promotion of Chand and the Garden as the single stand-ins for the city's displaced—those whose homes and livelihoods were displaced by Partition and by city construction and code, as well as those whose stories have been displaced by the city's master narrative. Thus, recent episodes, presented in the epilogue as three “scenes,” further demonstrate how the dominant and evolving exhibition narrative has tended to cancel recognition of the Garden's power to act as community project and site-specific archive of the city and its concerns. The dissertation thus closes by signaling the continuing process of unfolding the effects of a binary writ large on the global stage.

By drawing attention to narratives, official records, memoirs, and images and positioning them as foundational rather than tangential to the interwoven stories of Chandigarh and the Rock Garden, the first two chapters of the dissertation advance a richer account of the stakes of the city as a post-Independence project. This richer account in turn works to disrupt the dominant mythology and to preclude a simple, polarized understanding of the Rock Garden within the city. In addition to the construction of a nuanced backdrop, Chapters One and Two also assemble a collection of psychological and material remnants of these early years of city history. These remnants—signifiers of aspirations and trauma, of promise and loss—themselves become part of the material makeup of the Rock Garden, as we see in greater detail in the final chapter. The Rock Garden—with its methods and impulses limited not only to the specific history of Chandigarh but also resonant with more generalized experiences of loss and creation—is both intimately site-specific and highly mobile.

As a study of urbanism and art history in South Asia, the dissertation is situated at the convergence of several themes: the discourse surrounding post-colonial “heritage” sites in India, the relationship between material culture and Indian Independence/Partition narratives, and the

fashioning and deployment of the interrelated categories of “outsider,” “visionary,” and “folk” artist. This work expands the existing scholarship in significant ways. First, it serves as the first major monograph on Nek Chand and the Rock Garden to be written from the perspective of art history, bringing to light little-accessed archival material and narratives. Second, it is the first of its kind to pointedly undo the myth-making that has been instrumental to the promotion and circulation of the artist, the site, and its sculptures both in India and abroad. Finally, these implications reach beyond Chandigarh: by focusing on the Rock Garden—a large-scale and intensely controversial element in a planned city—my dissertation contributes a richer understanding of the ways in which not only vernacular architecture but also South Asian cities themselves are conceptualized in scholarly literature.

***Chapter One***  
***Creating Chandigarh: The City as Symbol, Rehabilitation, and Laboratory***

“..nearly every Punjabi who has some money in his pocket will wish to find a living place or himself in the new capital.”<sup>1</sup>

Before any individual architects got involved in the planning, local and national officials had begun articulating the multidimensional desire for replacing Lahore with a new capital city for Punjab in 1947. Designs for a replacement for Lahore began almost immediately following the events of Partition, when the implementation of the Radcliffe Line left the state without a capital city. At that moment of nation-building the city had heavy symbolic weight in addition to practical purpose: the guiding vision behind the new capital was to create a modern city that would serve as a symbol for the future of the newly independent country. As I will elaborate in this chapter, the practical purpose of a replacement city included the rehabilitation of refugees and security against Pakistan, increasingly portrayed as a threatening neighbor. As a symbol, a replacement city for Lahore was looked upon as an energizing and morale-boosting center of possibilities, a bid of faith in the newly independent country, and an opportunity to set standards as an example to other cities in India.

Accordingly, although Chandigarh was at one level a symbolic post-Independence national project, there was considerable practical local interest in promoting and strengthening the vitality of the region. As the tragic months following Independence made evident, Partition had generated a large number of displaced refugees in desperate need of stability, employment, and a share in the promise of Independence. This instability was particularly felt in Punjab, and officials pressed the plan for a new capital city as a rehabilitative measure. Regional officials feared that the failure to create a substitute capital city would result in the depletion of the

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<sup>1</sup> Author unknown, “Notes on Appendix A of the Agenda for Sc2’s meeting to be held on December 3, 1948,” p. 9; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 3, UCLA Special Collection 1364.

business and enterprising population of Punjab. In a January 24, 1949 memo, Deputy Commissioner of Punjab A.L. Fletcher notes:

I consider the project of the new capital [to be] the most important single effort towards rehabilitation. In fact I am convinced that if we give up the capital scheme, or postpone it for a period of four or five years, we shall most certainly lose forever the bulk, if not the whole, of the business and enterprising population of the united Punjab. If we do not put up a capital [Partition refugees] will settle down in Delhi or go to places further afield. This will be a great permanent loss to this province.<sup>2</sup>

Without a capital city in Punjab, there was no natural location for displaced persons to flock and officials feared that refugees would merely pass through the Punjab, taking their labor value and economic resources with them to points further south. Thus migration away from Punjab, due to the refugees' need for stability such as that provided by established centers like Delhi, could double the existing loss already felt following the shift in population.

Albert Mayer, the first architect brought on board to the capital city-planning project in 1949, had physical rehabilitation in the form of housing at the forefront of his mind. In the midst of planning, Mayer wrote a number of impassioned pleas for aid, making his rally cry, "We have got to help these people;" in an unpublished letter he chastised the *New York Herald Tribune* for not making the need more clear in an article about the new city designs.<sup>3</sup> Mayer, in an early draft for a manuscript later published in the *New York Herald Tribune*, also described support for the city project as support for "the Nehruvian concept of democracy," which, in his mind, was "being challenged."<sup>4</sup> These pleas were directed not just to Indian national officials but also specifically to American architects and city planners—although Mayer's aim was more to draw

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<sup>2</sup> A.L. Fletcher, memo dated January 24, 1949, Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 3, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>3</sup> Letter, Albert Mayer to Ralph Chapman of the *New York Herald Tribune*, October 2, 1950, Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 1, Folder 3, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>4</sup> Unpublished document sent to Ralph Chapman of *Herald Tribune*, September 27, 1950; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 1, Folder 2, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

international attention to the plight of the displaced rather than to drum up actual hands-on planning support from abroad. Although, as I will detail later, Mayer was eventually released from the project, similar concern for refugee housing informed the realized city plans as well. Jane Drew, who, together with Maxwell Fry, was largely responsible for the thirteen housing types for government employees that were built in Chandigarh, called construction of the new city “a sober necessity for a shattered state” rather than a “vainglorious” project.<sup>5</sup> Her statement was issued in defense against allegations that the concerns of the Le Corbusier team had more to do with an ego-driven bid for a high-profile project rather than a crucial rehabilitation project.

What resonates more distinctly today, however, is less the desire to accommodate Partition refugees than the inclination to develop a high-profile project in the early years of post-Independent nation-building. Despite these stated intentions of both architects, the architectural possibilities and prestige of such a large-scale city-planning project was certainly a factor in signing on to the project. Mayer, quoted in a *Montreal Daily Star* article, stated that, “to a planner, it’s tremendously exciting. We start with just a blank sheet of paper and do as wonderfully or as badly as we can. It’s an architect’s dream.”<sup>6</sup> Such a statement has the unsavory effect of dehumanizing the city project and undermining the real needs of the region: Mayer’s “blank sheet of paper” was in reality a region traumatized by Partition and already occupied by twenty-five existing villages. Taking a similarly skeptical view, architecture historians Jackson and Holland have noted that Drew’s above-stated assessment, if sincere, was “naively optimistic” in the face of the sheer number of refugees.<sup>7</sup> Drew, for her part, claims that

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<sup>5</sup> Unpublished lecture, “Town the Country Planning Summer School Overseas Section, Cambridge, 1963,” p. 4, RIBA Archive, F&D/4/1.

<sup>6</sup> “India Plans a New City,” *Montreal Daily Star*, January 25, 1950.

<sup>7</sup> *The Architecture of Edwin Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew*, p. 223.

the team “housed 20,000 refugees in three years.”<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting that Drew’s speech to student participants in a Cambridge Summer School, from which her quote above is taken, opens with a lengthy romanticized description of the so-called “timeless village” in India. In the following quote Drew set the scene for that audience by picturesquely describing the “Punjab hamlet” in which the new city was being built:

Beauty is everywhere; inherent; no more in the courtyards than in the swelling tree trunk; no less in the sweetly arching ironwork of the well-head than in the mild-eyed milk-white bullocks that wait their turn. All is beauty; timeless. The feeling evoked is one of harmony.<sup>9</sup>

Her denial of the effects of Partition-related violence and migration on the region are particularly egregious: “[Here] there was nothing that could have changed much over a thousand years.”<sup>10</sup> Drew’s “blank sheet of paper” for the project, to borrow Mayer’s phrase, was a primordial, unchanging land where human life was intimately and harmoniously connected with that of plant and animal, a fantasy space idealized but barely imaginable to the urban British audience of her lecture. Although the romanticization of villages and village life was by then a well-established Orientalist trope, one perpetuated both in anthropological literature and in visual culture by foreigners and elite urban Indians alike, it is noteworthy that an architect tasked with providing housing for Partition-displaced refugees would take such a sentimentalized view of the affected region.<sup>11</sup> As I elaborate later in this chapter, the formulation of the timeless idealized village was integral not only to city design but also to the articulation of Chandigarh’s foundational myths.

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<sup>8</sup> Jane Drew, “Reflections on My Life and Work,” unpublished document, March 1993; RIBA Archives, F&D/25/3.

<sup>9</sup> Unpublished lecture, “Town and Country Planning Summer School Overseas Section, Cambridge 1963,” RIBA Archives, F&D/4/1, pp. 2-3.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed account of the colonial establishment of the idealized and romanticized Indian village during the Victorian period, see Saloni Mathur, “The Indian Village in Victorian Space,” Chapter I of her *India By Design*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2007.

In addition to the practical need for the rehabilitation of the region's displaced, the proposed new capital was also intended to provide military and defense fortifications against Pakistan.<sup>12</sup> Tensions between the two countries remained high following the events of Partition, and the strategic placement of a capital city for Indian Punjab figured heavily into location discussions. In some of the earliest discussions, distance from the border, rather than physical fortification, was a strategy of primary concern. In his preliminary notes for the Punjab capital city site selection Nehru described this anxiety:

[The new capital city must] be a safe distance from native states and particularly those ruled by Muslim rulers. The province being on the frontier of India, it is necessary in view of the apparently hostile attitude of the community occupying the neighboring state, to have the capital at a considerable distance from the border.<sup>13</sup>

Kalia notes that in the early years of Independence, "an all-out war with Pakistan was considered imminent," and the concern for security to avoid tragedy in addition to the waves of communal violence already suffered in the region was a top-most priority.<sup>14</sup> Such discourse must have had a profound effect on the population of Partition migrants newly arrived from Pakistan, and likely further magnified the loss of their homes, villages, and cities. Already suffering from physical separation, loss of property, and in many cases extreme violence, migrants were subject to additional ideological estrangement as Indian officials doubled down on defense and security measures as part of the rhetoric surrounding the building of the new city.

Other locational concerns for the proposed city included easy access to an established railway line. In a report produced in May of 1949, then Deputy Commissioner M.S. Randhawa

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<sup>12</sup> Ravi Kalia, *Chandigarh: The Making of An Indian City*, New Delhi: Oxford India Paperbacks, 1999, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Prime Minister Nehru, "Preliminary notes on the selection of the site for the new capital of Eastern Punjab," unpublished, n.d., pp. 2-3; Nehru papers from the Prime Minister's Office, Delhi, in Ravi Kalia Archive Box 2, Folder 2, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>14</sup> Ravi Kalia, *Chandigarh: The Making of An Indian City*, 1999; p. 6.

rejected the proposed Chandigarh site on the grounds that it was not near a railway line and too far from a ready source of water.<sup>15</sup> Further concerns included, as I will elaborate below, the destruction of existing villages and the “bad use” of fertile agricultural land for urban development.<sup>16</sup> In the same document Randhawa championed as alternatives the expansion of Baldev Nagar, a town with close proximity to the Grand Trunk Road and main railway line, and Nangal, for its climate and scenic beauty “similar to that of Dehra Dun,” its ready water supply, strategic defense location, and existing electricity grid.<sup>17</sup> The case in support or against each of these site proposals was much debated—a similar report prepared a month later by Sahni and Iyengar refuted most of Randhawa’s statements and attacked his proposed sites as inadequate.<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, by 1966 Randhawa himself had, at least in print, changed his mind in favor of the advantages of the Chandigarh site. In his “Problems of a Growing City,” an assessment of a city not yet completed but inhabited and evolving, Randhawa, by then Chief Commissioner of the Union Territory of Chandigarh, reversed his earlier assessment and listed the site’s distance from the Grand Trunk Road as one of its “highly desirable factors for security against an unpredictable neighbor.”<sup>19</sup> In this same document he also stated that the “evil forebodings” regarding ready access to water “proved incorrect,” and that, overall, “when one looks back, the site could not have been better chosen.”<sup>20</sup> He does not name himself as the author of these “evil forebodings,” but the historical record demonstrates that he was one of their earliest propagators. But if the

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<sup>15</sup> M.S. Randhawa, “Sites for the Capital Town of East Punjab Province,” May 16, 1949; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 3, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Sahni and Iyengar, “Report on the Survey of the Capital Site for the Proposed East Punjab Capital near Chandigarh,” June 30, 1949; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 3, UCLA Special Collection 1364.

<sup>19</sup> M.S. Randhawa, “The Problems of a Growing City,” Ambala: Tribune Press, 1966, p. 1; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2; UCLA Special Collection 1364.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

other concerns proved to have a satisfactory solution in the long run, the issue of the pre-existing villages did not.

### ***Displacement of Villagers***

It is a tragic irony that the city intended to provide jobs and labor for so many displaced refugees created a significant number of “refugees” of its own: the land for Chandigarh was acquired from twenty-five villages, fifteen in their entirety and ten partially, via the colonial-era initiated Land Acquisition Act of 1894.<sup>21</sup> This amounted to about 9,000 people in some estimates, and up to 36,000 in others.<sup>22</sup> The relocation of so many villagers and the loss of such fertile agricultural land to urban development spurred a contentious debate among local and national government officials. There was considerable deliberation as to whether the proposed city should be an adaptation of an existing city—the leading candidate for a time being Shimla, the colonial-era hill station that had acted as the administrative headquarters during Punjab’s hot summer months and was then currently acting as the temporary administrative headquarters—or the expansion and conjoining of a series of smaller towns, or, alternatively, the creation of a completely new city. A March 17, 1950 press release titled “Change Capital Site: Do Not Create Another Refugee Problem” and authored by the Anti-Rajdhani Committee highlights the most pressing concerns.<sup>23</sup> This “anti-*rajdhani*,” or “anti-capital,” committee was against not the

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<sup>21</sup> “Chandigarh Socio-Economic Survey,” Government of Punjab, 1958; M.S. Randhawa Papers, Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 3, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>22</sup> Statistical variation is partly related to the fact that some reports count displaced “families” rather than individuals. Statistics concerning Partition displacement in Punjab and villager relocation are briefly mentioned in the introductions of Kalia and Prakash, respectively. See Ravi Kalia, *Chandigarh, Making of an Indian City*, 1999, pp. 1-3; Vikramaditya Prakash, *Chandigarh’s Le Corbusier: The Struggle for Modernity in Postcolonial India*, 2002, pp. 7-8.

<sup>23</sup> “Change Capital Site: Do Not Create Another Refugee Problem,” March 17, 1950; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2 Folder 3, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

development of a replacement capital city but rather the founding of an entirely new one on otherwise fertile land. The group argued that, in addition to dislodging some 36,000 villagers, the loss of fifty square miles of rice, sugar, jaggery, and wheat-producing land would “deprive the state of its food grains” and would “directly hamper the Grow More Food Campaign,” a post-Independence sustainability development initiative.<sup>24</sup> The release goes on to call such a move “suicidal” for the already “torn and shattered economy of [post-Partition] Punjab,” and states that the only reasonable way to address the administrative, economic, and symbolic needs for a replacement capital for Lahore would be to “extend Ambala,” a nearby city on the Grand Trunk Road that is today located in that state of Haryana.<sup>25</sup> Chief Minister of Punjab Bhargava admitted in a 1949 confidential report to Nehru that the “socialist-driven” agitations against the capital construction are “not without justification: the land is very fertile and the persons to be displaced cannot be rehabilitated elsewhere.”<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, for all the arguments launched that attacked the unproductive use of fertile agricultural land, Mayer took the opposite position in a *New York Times* article: he maintained that the Chandigarh site was selected for its very “lack of agricultural possibility” or existing structures.<sup>27</sup> It is unclear whether Mayer, whose architectural practice was not at the time located in Punjab, was witness to the debate surrounding the land use or not. His characterization of the land was due either to denial, strategic public relations, or, perhaps most likely given that he was then relying on the reports of those who wished to hire him to construct a new city, simply ignorance.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> “Confidential Report from Chief Prime Minister of Punjab to Nehru, June 13, 1949,” Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 2, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>27</sup> Mayer quoted in “American to Plan New City for India,” *New York Times*, January 25, 1950.

Unsurprisingly, there was substantial resistance on the part of the villagers whose fate was to be relocated. In accordance with the Land Acquisition Act they were told they could remain on the land they had owned as paying tenants of the government. Yet this status was available only until such time as the land was required for building purposes.<sup>28</sup> Most of the villagers in question were small-land owners employed in agriculture and living on land inhabited by their families for many generations. Unpublished reports reveal that officials considered adequate financial compensation from the government for villagers' land to be fiscally "out of the question."<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, there was some attempt made to sustain the villagers' "traditional vocation" of agriculture by staggering the process of dispossession in order to allow for time to relocate to other fertile land.<sup>30</sup> There is little evidence that this relocation was successfully achieved on any considerable scale, however.

At the same time, Hindus displaced by Partition and newly arrived in India from Pakistan received preferential treatment in purchasing land in the proposed city. For example, as construction plans moved forward in the early 1950s the State Rehabilitation Department scheme offered loans of 4,000 rupees to selected displaced persons who were willing to build in a particular area; rebates of 5-10% were offered to refugees who finished construction in a certain amount of time, with additional rebates of 25% for completed construction in selected commercial sectors, such as Sector 17.<sup>31</sup> Reports published in the 1960s show that as ongoing

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<sup>28</sup> Kalia, *Chandigarh: The Making of an Indian City*, 1999, p. 12.

<sup>29</sup> "A Rough Forecast for the Cost of Constructing an Advance Neighborhood Unit on the Site of the Capital During the Year 1949-50," unpublished report, M.S. Randhawa Papers, Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 3, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Letter from Nehru to Bhimsen Sachar, May 6, 1954; Nehru papers from the Prime Minister's Office, Delhi, Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 2, UCLA Special Collections 1364. The highest amount of rebate was allotted for those building in commercial center Sector 17.

conflict with Pakistan and related communal violence disturbed the region, affected Punjabis continued to receive assistance in the form of land and building discounts in Chandigarh. In 1966 then-Chief Commissioner M.S. Randhawa noted that, due to high demand for plots, allotment had been made “on the basis of priorities,” with “widows and other next of kin of personnel killed in action during the past Pakistan conflict” given the highest priority.<sup>32</sup> Randhawa goes on to note that the project “has raised the morale of army officers.”<sup>33</sup> Chandigarh as a project continued to be positioned, then, as an ongoing tonic for a shattered state decades after Partition.

This “tonic” was distributed unevenly, however, and did not apply to the villagers already occupying the proposed Chandigarh site. An attempt was made to classify displaced villagers as “refugees,” a designation that would grant them the same preferential benefits enjoyed by refugees displaced by Partition. In a land compensation policy report produced in around 1948, an unnamed official posed the revealing question, “why should [displaced villagers] not be treated on a similar basis [as Partition refugees], particularly when the area in question is so small and the villagers are displaced on account of the construction of the capital of East Punjab, which is also the direct result of Partition of our country?”<sup>34</sup> The official goes on to suggest that the displaced villagers be offered either the 34,000 acres of vacant “Muslim land” then available in nearby Kharar Tehsil as a result of Muslim migration to Pakistan, or given the ability to purchase land in the new capital at a 50% discount. The official is careful to note that the

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<sup>32</sup> M.S. Randhawa, “A Brief Review of Work Done in Chandigarh Since November 1, 1966,” p. 3; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Author unknown, Appendix C of “A Rough Forecast for the Cost of Constructing an Advance Neighborhood Unit on the Site of the Capital During the Year 1949-1950,” n.d., p. 6-7; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 3, UCLA Special Collection 1364.

treatment of villagers should not be preferential to that of the Partition refugees but that compensation should instead be decided on equal terms between the two.<sup>35</sup>

Despite this reasoned argument, however, the villagers did not in the end receive preferential or Partition refugee status. Local officials who were sympathetic to the plight of the villagers encouraged a “peaceful and non-violent *satyagraha*,” or civil resistance, for villagers and non-villagers of the region. The stated purpose was to draw awareness and national support “against the injustice being done.”<sup>36</sup> These organized acts of resistance came to very little, however, and as plans for the city moved forward the existing villages were increasingly subsumed by construction plans. During this process many villagers continued to protest the eviction with demonstration parades and torchlight protests, but such maneuvers were ultimately to no avail.<sup>37</sup> In the end, the buildings that composed the acquired villages were destroyed, with the purported exception of the each village’s “religious buildings.”<sup>38</sup> Despite the asserted protection of these “religious buildings”—coupled with the irony that the city itself is named for a local village temple to the Hindu goddess Chandi—there is no evidence that the structures were ultimately preserved and incorporated into the city plans.<sup>39</sup> Following the destruction of their buildings, many villagers who did not move altogether took work as construction laborers in the developing city and were incorporated into the city’s limits (in such areas as Buraill), or

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> “Change Capital Site: Do Not Create Another Refugee Problem,” March 17, 1950, Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2 Folder 3, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>37</sup> “Foreign News: India,” *Time*, vol. LV no. 25, July 8, 1950.

<sup>38</sup> “Regional Plan, Chandigarh,” 1982, Town and Country Planning Organization, Ministry of Works and Housing, Government of India, p. 33; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 6, Folder 1, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>39</sup> On the contrary, the removal of “illegal religious structures” built on government land continues in Chandigarh today. See “Illegal Religious Structures Razed,” *Hindustan Times*, January 3, 2010 for one such example.

established a somewhat liminal existence at the city's borders or in make-shift, technically illegal, work camps. As we will see in Chapter Two, the psychological and material traces of their presence, as well as their displacement, figure importantly into the Rock Garden.

### ***Chandigarh as Architectural "Laboratory"***

“The Sanskrit word *silpin* remains untranslatable: it means everything from artisan, stone mason, craftsman and decorator to sculptor, painter and architect [...]. This was a wonderful unity that many a bold architect would gladly see revived.”<sup>40</sup>

Despite the unsavory history of this displacement, the city was slated to serve as a sign of progress and to act as a “tonic for Punjab’s shattered morale.”<sup>41</sup> Both the process of construction and the architectural elements of the realized city were to function as laboratories for post-colonial development in India. There was widespread consensus among Indian elites that the development of Indian architecture had been stifled during colonial rule. Many colonial building projects had relied on imported British Palladian designs out of a frustrated, rather than inspired, necessity. Others, as Thomas Metcalf details in his *An Imperial Vision*, adopted grand façades and interiors out of a desire to announce Britain’s domination; later, building designs incorporated Indian-styled architecture in an attempt to “conform” to Indian “prejudices.”<sup>42</sup> Moreover, any attempts to “revive” Indian styles that predated the colonial period had resulted in nostalgic mash-ups seen to be of no relevance to a modern, independent nation. In a 1963 issue of *Marg* devoted to contemporary Indian architecture, Mulk Raj Anand described the British

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<sup>40</sup> Charles Fabri, “Problems of Indian Architectural History,” in *Design*, vol. 6 no. 7, July 1962, pp. 118-123; quote p. 122.

<sup>41</sup> Taya Zinkia, “India’s Most Modern City: Cool, But Not Clean;” Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 1, Folder 2, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision: Indian Architecture and Britain’s Raj*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

borrowing of ancient Greek, Roman, and Mughal architecture, and summed up its effect in India as follows:

[The British] impressed the natives with Imperial grandeur. As in all such borrowings, the juxtaposition of motifs created novelty without integrity, a montage of superficial impositions, which led the imitators in India to the complete vulgarity of a hotchpotch style, neither Eastern nor Western.<sup>43</sup>

Anand goes on to describe New Delhi—the colonial-era urban development led by British architect Sir Edward Lutyens—as an attempt to synthesize “Mughal splendor with British sentimentality” that resulted in occasional charm but much “pompous show” and a lot of “mixed metaphor with neither beauty nor utility.”<sup>44</sup> Chandigarh was intended to signal a concerted end to this colonial-era practice, and was further set to act as a teaching tool towards what was possible in a new era. For maximum effectiveness, it was decided that this city-as-classroom should have a team of international architects at its helm to make use of both new and traditional elements.

The importation and adaption of design features, rather than the development of entirely new ones or the revival of older styles, was not considered at odds with the sensibilities of the newly independent nation. Rather, consultation with Western architects was positioned as natural and appropriate. Albert Mayer—the American architect first hired to design Chandigarh—stated that his most “important problem was to combine [Western] architectural discoveries with the genius of the [Indian] people.”<sup>45</sup> He went on to describe a belief in his team’s “superior ability” over that of contemporary Indian architects to achieve a more “Indian” result:

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<sup>43</sup> Mulk Raj Anand, “Notes on the Social and Spatial Imagination in Indian Architecture,” *Marg* vol. 17, no. 1, 1963, p. 31.

<sup>44</sup> Mulk Raj Anand, “Notes on the Social and Spatial Imagination in Indian Architecture,” 1963, p. 32.

<sup>45</sup> Mayer quoted by Ralph Chapman, “New Yorker Designs City for India,” *New York Herald Tribune*, October 11, 1950.

[A] group of Westerners can approach India objectively, while even the most forward-looking Indians educated in the West are still dazzled by Western ideas and lack the cultural self-understanding to do *Indian* work.<sup>46</sup>

Mayer's goal was to build a city "not in the Western but in the Indian idiom, infused with Western functional honesty."<sup>47</sup> Not that Mayer lacked complete faith in innate Indian ability: in an early proof of a *New York Herald Tribune* article he described the abilities of Indian engineers and architects as promising—"when trained."<sup>48</sup> Presumably he meant trained by Western engineers and architects. In a document prepared for a 1950 Urban and Regional Planning Symposium in Washington, D.C., Mayer reiterated, "I believe we can not only do a more viable job, but a more *Indian* job than they could" [emphasis added].<sup>49</sup> In Mayer's reckoning, achieving this goal included the implementation of "village"-modeled super-blocks, lively but relatively low-density market areas, variable-width road systems that favored foot- and bicycle-traffic over automobiles, and modern standardized sewage and water systems.

However patronizing and imperialist in tone, Mayer's sentiments on his "superior abilities" were largely shared at the national level. The Nehruvian Five-Year Plans encouraged the adaptation of architectural and economic ideas from the U.S., Europe, Japan, and the Soviet Union as a progressive means of breaking with India's colonial past and "catching up" with modernity on the international stage.<sup>50</sup> Several nods to "Indianness"—the-sector-as-village,

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<sup>46</sup> Albert Mayer, "The New Capital of East Punjab," *Middle East Institute Newsletter*, n.d. (ca. 1950), Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 1, Folder 2, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Unpublished document sent to editor Chapman of *Herald Tribune*, September 27, 1950; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 1, Folder 2, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>49</sup> Albert Mayer, "The New Capital of Punjab," address before Convention Symposium I, "Urban and Regional Planning," May 10, 1950, Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 1, Folder 1, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>50</sup> See Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India*; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999; Vikramaditya Prakash, *Chandigarh's Le Corbusier*, 2002, p. 10; Saloni Mathur, "Charles and Ray Eames in India," *Art Journal*, vol. 70, no. 1, 2011, pp. 34-53.

modified bazaar space, and design features such as *jalis*—were included in both the initial Mayer and the realized Le Corbusier plans, but a major aim of the city was to introduce and promote new standards. Nehru’s vision for the newly independent country included the adaptation—not to be confused with the blind borrowing—of outside influences. Nehru referred to the ability to adapt as an inherent aspect, and, indeed, strength, of being Indian: “It was India’s way in the past to welcome and absorb other cultures. That is much more necessary today.”<sup>51</sup> This adaptation went deeper than issues of style and aesthetics to a fundamental core of change. For Nehru, modernization was not just a question of style, but rather the “antidote to stasis.”<sup>52</sup> In addition to the hiring of architects from abroad to further the interests of the country and to combat “stasis,” engineers were also sent to Europe and the U.S. during the early years of Independence in order to study the ways in which infrastructure met the needs of other countries. East Punjab’s Chief Engineer, P.L. Varma, for example, spent several months in mid-to-late 1947 in the United States studying road construction—he was in the U.S., in fact, during the time his family was compelled to leave their home following Partition.<sup>53</sup>

It should be noted that among Indian officials there was not a single, unified vision of what progress would and should look like in India, nor what form “modernity” would take in the newly independent country. Architectural historian Nihal Perea has noted that some of the difficulties in moving forward logistically—deciding which architects to select and from where—had much to do with competing views of modernity put forward by different officials. Varma and Thapar, in opposition to Nehru’s view, wished, for example, to aspire to a “European

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<sup>51</sup> Nehru as quoted in Nihal Perea, “Contesting Visions: Hybridity, Liminality, and Authorship of the Chandigarh Plan,” *Planning Perspectives*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2004, pp. 175-199.

<sup>52</sup> Vikramaditya Prakash, *Chandigarh’s Le Corbusier*, 2002, p. 10.

<sup>53</sup> Christopher Rand, “City on a Tilting Plain,” *The New Yorker*, pp. 25-62; citation p. 35.

modernity.”<sup>54</sup> Nehru, who had particular positivist views of progress for India, envisioned a distinct social component to the architectural changes, which led him to champion early on Western architects who had substantial experience in India, such as Mayer and Otto Koenigsberger.<sup>55</sup>

As far as the physical architecture went, however, the general aesthetics of the International Style was agreed upon amongst officials as the most appropriate and progressive. Rather than taken as a symbol of the West, the style, with its rectilinear forms and reliance on glass, steel, and concrete as fundamental materials, was instead considered a “placeless” approach with universal validity and appeal. Its appropriateness for India was argued for in the article “Architecture and You,” which was published in the December 1963 issue of *Marg*. In this article the editors questioned the “truth” of the architectural tendency to employ decorative elements borrowed from Hindu temples and Mughal palaces for their “nostalgic” value. Such blind adaptation of styles, they argued, did not suit modern living and instead ignored the needs of architecture’s users and inhabitants.<sup>56</sup> Likewise, in the same issue of *Marg*, Mulk Raj Anand critiqued the outright dismissal of the International Style as misguided and articulated the Nehruvian desire to look forward rather than back:

[In any proposed project] there is inevitably the cry for Indianness, by which some people mean the revival of the memory of the grand palaces of Magadha under the Guptas, or of Mughal splendor, [...] or even of the British bungalow. Almost all that is built in the new, easily accessible materials is called the “International Style,” and rejected because it looks “foreign.” [In Chandigarh] there is an advance beyond any previous constructions of the modern period, in so far as the role of *imagination* has been accepted [...] into new shapes and new forms, according to the new vision.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Nihal Perea, “Contesting Visions,” 2004, p. 182.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> “Architecture and You,” *Marg* vol. 17, no. 1, December 1963, p. 6.

<sup>57</sup> Mulk Raj Anand, “Notes on the Social and Spatial Imagination in Indian Architecture,” *Marg*, vol. 17, no. 1, December 1963, p. 33.

Passages such as this one, published in the important Indian journal, *Marg*, supported the actions behind Mayer's rather patronizing words. In Anand's view as in Mayer's, architecture in colonial India had become a muddled affair, and the abandonment of outmoded decorative styles was the surest way to move ahead towards a functional, modern, well-articulated, and relevant Indian architecture. Nehru lauded Chandigarh, together with other mid-century projects such as the Bhakra Dam, calling them the "temples of modern India" and promoting not only their practical and modern features but also their instructive and inspirational capacities.<sup>58</sup> *Marg* shared and promoted this view, as stated in a 1963 issue: "*Marg* considers architecture to be the mother source of all arts," and, "realizing the disruption caused by the British Imperialists," "[the journal seeks] to explore the possibilities for a fusion of the new vision in Europe with the deeper postulates of Indian techniques."<sup>59</sup> The guiding principle behind these projects was to break with a past mired in colonialism and nostalgia while making bold but sensible decisions that would conscientiously advance architecture in India.<sup>60</sup> As such an India "unfettered" by its history was to look to the instructive salvation provided by its secular "temples" of design rather than of religion.

The Chandigarh-as-laboratory model had important influence on, for example, the decision to establish urban planning education in the city. Randhawa, in a letter pushing for the

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<sup>58</sup> Nehru quoted in Vikramaditya Prakash, *Chandigarh's Le Corbusier*, 2002, p. 10. Similar language referring to the "honesty" of architectural façades and elements came to be enshrined in Le Corbusier's edict: "The truthfulness of materials of construction [...] shall be maintained in all buildings constructed or to be constructed." See *Edict of Chandigarh*, booklet published by Union Territory Administration, Chandigarh, 1967, p. 3.

<sup>59</sup> Editor, *Marg* vol. 17, no. 1, December 1963, p. 37.

<sup>60</sup> Perhaps ironically, then, the realized plans for Chandigarh have been compared to Lutyen's New Delhi—a space intended to communicate the power of colonial rule. Although hoping to depart from them, Le Corbusier had a known affection for Lutyen and his designs. See Vinayak Bhatne, "Le Corbusier's Ruin," *Journal of Architectural Education*, 2011, pp. 99-112.

creation of a school of architecture and town planning as part of the Punjab Engineering School, stressed that engineering was wholly different than architecture: he stated, “architecture did not arrive in India until Chandigarh.”<sup>61</sup> Engineers, Randhawa continued, produce only “colonial type” buildings, makeshift solutions that “shut out nature” and that cannot be considered modern. He concluded: “In order to produce architects worthy of the name, our [proposed] School of Architecture should breathe a new spirit, like the city of Chandigarh.”<sup>62</sup> This prioritization of the suggested pedagogic function of Chandigarh coexisted awkwardly alongside the practical and pressing needs related to refugee housing and rehabilitation. The proposed city—intended to act both as an efficient solution to Partition-related mass migration and a secular “temple” that would advance nation-building agendas—was formulated at the multi-leveled crossroads of complex aspirations and needs.

### ***The Chandigarh Master Plan: From Mayer to Le Corbusier***

It was perhaps the multi-faceted nature of the project and its goals that resulted in the national and regional difference of opinion on how best to tackle the work of designing the city. Le Corbusier arrived in India to begin implementation of his designs in March of 1951—but as previously mentioned, he was not the first candidate for the job of designing the new city. American Albert Mayer and his assistant Matthew Nowicki had originally been selected for the task, largely because Mayer had extensive experience working in India—having first arrived as an officer in the United States Army Corps of Engineers during World War II, Mayer had worked on plans to reduce overcrowding in the city of Kanpur and on model villages at Etawah

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<sup>61</sup> Letter, Randhawa to Partap Singh Kairon, July 24, 1960; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 3, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

and Gorakhpur.<sup>63</sup> Nehru wished to employ a Western architect already working in India rather than to “import” one directly from Europe or the United States, in opposition to the wish of Punjab officials Varma and Thapar.<sup>64</sup>

By 1950 the Mayer team had produced and promoted a developed design plan<sup>65</sup> [Figure 72]. Mayer noted in a report to Nehru that the plan’s “spirit and objectives” were that “the city should be modern while avoiding the excesses of hectic living and development which have accompanied modern work, but which are not integrally a part of it.”<sup>66</sup> It was planned, in short, to shore up what had been learned in city planning worldwide, in order to result in a city that offered the best, minus the worst, of modern urban environments. For all that, it was intended to remain “Indian in feeling,” and be “not a city of bold winged engineering and cantilevers, but a city in the Indian idiom with modern simplicity, functional honesty, and imaginative sweep.”<sup>67</sup> As we will see, one strategy to achieve this goal was the construction and implementation of an idealized village as an ideological building block for Chandigarh.

It is worth noting that in Mayer’s reckoning the Chandigarh plan was not a one-sided endeavor: in relation to the benefits to be gleaned from such a unique experience of city building he noted, “[Americans] shall get as good as we give.”<sup>68</sup> Mayer’s words were issued in part to garner awareness and financial support for development projects in India, and to pitch such projects as strategic for American investors. Particularly given the scale of the project and Le

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<sup>63</sup> “AIA Medal of Honor for Mayer,” *Hindustan Times*, June 9, 1952.

<sup>64</sup> Nihal Perera, “Contesting Visions,” 2007, p. 182.

<sup>65</sup> Ravi Kalia, *Chandigarh: The Making of An Indian City*, and Kalia, *Chandigarh: In Search of An Identity* offer perhaps the most complete account of Albert Mayer’s designs.

<sup>66</sup> “Mayer report on Master Plan,” submitted to Nehru May 12, 1950, Nehru papers from the Prime Minister’s Office, Delhi, Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 2, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Albert Mayer, “The New Capital of East Punjab,” *The Middle East Institute Newsletter*; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 1, Folder 2, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

Corbusier's high international profile, Chandigarh did garner significant Western interest, and architects and urban planners abroad tended to regard it as an experiment unique to the setting of a developing country but with potential application to urban planning in developed countries. The ways in which these accounts were framed in media reports and essays abroad helped to create and solidify the dominant modernist myth of Chandigarh, as we will see. As recently as 2010, a collection of essays and photographs entitled *Chandigarh 1956* takes the notion that Chandigarh was a laboratory for international urban planning as its premise.<sup>69</sup> 1956, the year that the second, heavily industry-focused of Nehru's five-year plans was launched, also saw Le Corbusier's submission of the final plan for the Capitol Complex, as well as the publication of Sigfried Giedion's *Architektur und Gemeinschaft*, a book that "confirmed Chandigarh's rank as a Mecca of contemporary architecture and urbanism."<sup>70</sup> The year 1956, according to this text, marked the point at which the city "began to establish itself in the professional media as a prime laboratory of contemporary architecture and urban planning."<sup>71</sup> It should be noted that, despite the book's claim, significant media coverage galvanized not in 1956 but in the late 1940s, and was originally centered not around Le Corbusier's designs but instead on the earliest stage of Mayer's planning and development of Nehru's philosophy on the project.

Mayer, citing the details of successful "super-block" projects such as the Baldwin Hills post-war neighborhood in Los Angeles, created a plan for Chandigarh on a roughly geometric grid.<sup>72</sup> The grid was curved to take advantage of sight lines and to mitigate building and road orientations made unfavorable by the intense sun. Much of the city was to be constructed from

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<sup>69</sup> Sanislaus von Moos, ed., *Chandigarh 1956*, Zurich: Scheidegger and Spiess, 2010.

<sup>70</sup> Sanislaus von Moos, ed., *Chandigarh 1956*, 2010, p. 17.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Letter from Mayer to Varma, February 15, 1950; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 1, Folder 2, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

locally sourced limestone, a material, as I detail in Chapter Two, that Mayer associated with a rich (Mughal) past in the subcontinent. Like Baldwin Hills, Chandigarh was to be composed of “super-blocks,” neighborhood units that were designed to be “intimate, reasonably preserved in traditional form, [and] undisturbed by traffic.”<sup>73</sup> Architecture scholar Perea has noted that Mayer’s overall approach was the result of established garden city principles that had been very influential in the US in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Garden City advocates sought a spatial escape from industry and cleaner living in urban areas. Perea suggests that modernists like Corbusier, on the other hand, imagined not “a better place” in the form of a residential and leisure escape from urban industrial elements but rather “a better time,” seeking in their designs not an escapism from the industrial workplace but rather a radically different post-industrial future that they then attempted to create in the present.<sup>74</sup> Perea’s analysis is perhaps best confined specifically to Le Corbusier’s career-wide, overarching approach rather than to the realized Chandigarh plan as a whole; Iain Jackson, in an article focused specifically on the work of Fry and Drew in Sector 22, has highlighted the heavy influence of British and American applications of Garden City notions in the building designs of those architects.<sup>75</sup> In any case, such architectural features as cantilevered floors, projecting balconies, roof overhangs, and open corners were used to express the modernist ideals in urban planning of the open interface between interiors and exteriors.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Mayer, “The New Capital of East Punjab,” *Middle East Institute Newsletter*, n.d. (ca. 1950), Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 1, Folder 2, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>74</sup> Perea, “Contesting Visions: Hybridity, Liminality, and Authorship of the Chandigarh Plan,” p. 186.

<sup>75</sup> Iain Jackson, “Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew’s Early Housing and Neighborhood Planning in Sector-22, Chandigarh,” in *Planning Perspectives*, vol. 28, no. 1, pp. 1-26, 2013.

<sup>76</sup> Kiran Joshi, ed., *Le Corbusier’s Concrete: Conserving Modern Heritage, Concrete, and Chandigarh*, New Delhi: Thomson Press, 2005; p. 23.

Mayer's super-blocks (later modified into "sectors" by Le Corbusier) prevented motor traffic in block interiors and set aside unplanned space in pockets, to be adapted informally at a later date as "odd places for a small temple" or "small inoffensive industry."<sup>77</sup> In an attempt to foster a "rather lively character" in the community, Mayer included "variously narrowing and widening streets," which he felt added "both an Indian character and a pleasant un-rigidity."<sup>78</sup> In a letter to James Brandt, editor of the student publication of the North Carolina State University School of Design, Mayer described his developing design for a shopping center:

The spirit of the old Indian bazaar is re-captured. The modern principles are applied, such as freedom from traffic, ample parking space surrounding it, the essential color, gaiety, individuality, [and] exuberance are sought to be attained."<sup>79</sup>

While Mayer stated that he "hope[d] that doesn't sound too flowery," his description of the shopping center encapsulates his empathetic but sentimentalized view of the Indian people whom he was serving. According to Mayer, "Indians [were] still villagers,"<sup>80</sup> and his designs for Chandigarh reflected this belief—one that captures the paradoxical paternalism and empathy characteristic of Mayer's approach.

Unlike the realized Corbusian Capitol Complex, Mayer's capitol did not make use of concrete or include a set of cryptic and highly personalized symbols—such as those developed by Le Corbusier and showcased on the painted enamel mural on the door of the Assembly building [Figure 73]. Nor did Mayer rely on abstracted symbols of modernity—such as the visual reference to a nuclear cooling tower, also an element of the realized Assembly [Figure

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<sup>77</sup> Mayer, "The New Capital of East Punjab," *Middle East Institute Newsletter*, n.d. (ca. 1950), Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 1, Folder 2, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> Letter to James of the School of Design at North Carolina State University, January 11, 1951; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 1, Folder 2, UCLA Special Collection 1364.

<sup>80</sup> *op. cit.*

74]. Instead, Mayer had deliberately avoided what he deemed monumentality, “over-scaled sterility,” and “stiltedness,” which he attributed to Lutyen’s designs for New Delhi.<sup>81</sup> Although he reported that he did not wish his team to act as “archeologists digging up and restoring an ancient civilization,” Mayer did develop a visual lexicon that had, to his eye, historic significance.<sup>82</sup> In a report submitted to Nehru, Mayer notes, “of particular importance [to the project] are great symbols to create pride and confidence in [Indians and their] country.”<sup>83</sup> Having admired what he characterized as the “beehive”-shape and “general effect” of “temples in various parts of India,”<sup>84</sup> his Capitol Complex was intended to resemble the “cone-shaped” Buddhist monuments he had seen while traveling in Bodhgaya.<sup>85</sup> Bodhgaya, located in the modern-day state of Bihar, is celebrated as the location in which the Buddha obtained enlightenment, and Mayer had traveled there earlier as part of a tour of Buddhist sites in India. The purported site of the Buddha’s enlightenment is memorialized by the Mahabodhi Temple, a fifth-century brick temple that replaced the original third-century BCE shrine established by Ashoka. The temple was restored in both the eleventh and nineteenth centuries and is, presumably, the monument that served as a source of inspiration for Mayer. Presumably based on the structure’s appearance in sketches, Kalia speculates that Mayer’s “cone-shaped” designs were inspired not by the temple at Bodhgaya as Mayer reports but instead by the Great Stupa at

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<sup>81</sup> Albert Mayer, “The New Capital of Punjab,” address before Convention Symposium I, “Urban and Regional Planning,” May 10, 1950, Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 1, Folder 1, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>82</sup> Mayer quoted by Ralph Chapman, “New Yorker Designs City for India,” *New York Herald Tribune*, October 11, 1950.

<sup>83</sup> Mayer, “Report on Master Plan,” submitted to Nehru May 12, 1950, Nehru papers from the Prime Minister’s Office, Delhi, Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 2, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>84</sup> Mayer quoted by Ralph Chapman, “New Yorker Designs City for India,” *New York Herald Tribune*, October 11, 1950.

<sup>85</sup> Mayer quoted in “Foreign News: India,” *Time* vol. LV, no. 25, July 8, 1950.

Sanchi, a third-century BCE hemispherical brick structure built over the remains of the Buddha<sup>86</sup> [Figure 75]. Mayer himself referred to the Sanchi *stupa* in a letter to Maxwell Fry, noting that it was “most important for national pride and self-respect to tie in [India’s] past with the modern and the future.”<sup>87</sup> The Sanchi *stupa*, although likely visited by Mayer on his tour of Buddhist sites in Northeastern India, is hemispherical and could not reasonably be described as “cone-shaped.” Regardless of the specific site that influenced Mayer and whether it was a temple or a *stupa* that provided the inspiration, in Mayer’s reckoning a visual connection to a site devoted to the Buddha’s enlightenment was an apt one: he justified his design choice by connecting the spiritual enlightenment of the Buddha with the “enlightened” future of India.<sup>88</sup> If one of Mayer’s stated claims was to “seek symbols” in his architecture that would “create a sense of pride in the Indian,” in his mind a visual connection to the fifth-century brick Buddhist temple did just that.<sup>89</sup>

However confused his choices may seem, the adaptation of Buddhist architectural aesthetics for use in modern architecture had notable precedence in colonial India. It is unclear whether Mayer had design elements of New Delhi in mind when he drew up plans for his Capitol Complex (rejecting, as he did, other New Delhi elements). Monica Juneja has noted that Lutyens’ Viceroy’s House incorporated such Buddhist architecture-inspired elements as the Sanchi *stupa* shape and the railings (*toranas*) in its main façade.<sup>90</sup> Similarly, Juneja describes

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<sup>86</sup> Kalia states that Mayer’s “cone-shaped” designs were instead inspired by the Buddhist *stupas* at Sanchi; Ravi Kalia, *Chandigarh: In Search of an Identity*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1987, p. 67. Quite possibly the confusion is Mayer’s own.

<sup>87</sup> Albert Mayer, letter to Maxwell Fry, February 23, 1951; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 1, Folder 2, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>88</sup> “Foreign News: India,” *Time* vol. LV, no. 25, July 8, 1950.

<sup>89</sup> Albert Mayer, “The New Capital of Punjab,” address before Convention Symposium I, “Urban and Regional Planning,” May 10, 1950, Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 1, Folder 1, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>90</sup> Monica Juneja, “The Making of New Delhi,” in *Modernity’s Classics*, Berlin: Springer, 2013, pp. 23-54; pp. 45-46 (citation). Juneja notes that among colonial Orientalists, Buddhist architecture was, due to

additional examples of de-historicized and de-contextualized components that Lutyens appropriated from Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain temple architecture, particularly noting Lutyens' use of bell, snake, and lion motifs. Lutyens apparently felt these symbols had a pan-Indian appeal, noting, for example, that bells provided "an Indian note" to such structures as pillars and fountains.<sup>91</sup> Mayer, for his part, was participating in this rather haphazard re-appropriation at a very different moment than the one that informed Lutyens' colonial-era choices. In Mayer's mind, the use of Buddhist aesthetic signifiers projected a sense of continuity with the past while engendering pride and offering an auspicious gesture towards an enlightened independent county, rather than serving as shorthand symbols or "Indian flair."

Mayer's plans were the result of significant time spent in India, first with the U.S. military and in conjunction with several missionary projects, and later working on several smaller-scale development assignments. As mentioned earlier, his exuberance for the Chandigarh project appears to have been based on significant compassion for the Indian people in the aftermath of Partition, together with an interest in promoting democracy in the newly independent nation. He outlined, for example, the importance of allowing the legislative building to dominate the Capitol Complex: "spiritually and morally, the hall of the people's representatives should dominate."<sup>92</sup> Mayer's compassion as expressed in architecture has largely been lost to history. In a 1954 article entitled "Friendly Architecture," Charlie Abrams bemoans the lack of credit given to Mayer for his work on the city pre-dating that of Le Corbusier, and describes Mayer as "the one foreign expert the Indian villagers have taken to their hearts because

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the classification efforts of James Fergusson, considered of the highest form. Accordingly, Lutyens had dismissed "Hindu" architecture, for example, outright. See p. 40.

<sup>91</sup> Monica Juneja, "The Making of New Delhi," p. 48.

<sup>92</sup> Albert Mayer, letter to Maxwell Fry, February 23, 1951; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 1, Folder 2, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

he alone has lived among them.”<sup>93</sup> Despite Mayer’s personal appeal and the approval of his designs at the local and national levels, the sudden tragic death of Nowicki in August 1950 in a plane crash, together with an increasingly unfavorable post-WWII currency exchange of the American dollar, contributed to Mayer’s decreased involvement by January 1951.

Indian urban planning scholar Norma Evenson has suggested that Mayer’s plans were ultimately rejected, at least in part, for their very lack of monumentality, although the Indian officials were initially satisfied with his designs.<sup>94</sup> Her statement may point to the distance between Nehru’s desire to hire Mayer and the Punjab officials’ wish to set their sights at a more prestigious, grandiose level. All accounts seem to suggest, however, that Mayer’s plans in themselves met with little displeasure. Indeed, Punjab Chief Minister Gopi Bhargava projected Mayer’s unrealized city to be “the world’s most charming capital.”<sup>95</sup> Logistically, however, execution of the Mayer plan was proving to be too difficult in light of the events of late 1950. In a private letter to Nehru dated immediately after the death of Nowicki, Bhargava stated his intention to move forward with the Mayer plan, but notes the difficulty of having lost in Nowicki their on-site director: “The trouble is that we really cannot get good architects [in India]. It should be possible to recruit one or two moderately good whole-time architects in England. If so, it will not be necessary for Thapar and Varma to go to France or the Scandinavian countries.”<sup>96</sup> Bhargava’s letter, with its bid for a “whole-time” architect, reiterates the desire of Punjab officials to secure the talents of on-site planners for the duration of the project. It is

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<sup>93</sup> Charlie Abrams, “For Architects Only: Friendly Architecture,” *Forum, the Magazine of Building*, April 1954.

<sup>94</sup> Norma Evenson, *Chandigarh*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966, p. 18.

<sup>95</sup> “Foreign News: India,” *Time* vol. LV, no. 25, July 8, 1950.

<sup>96</sup> Letter from Bhargava to Nehru, September 8, 1950; Nehru papers from the Prime Minister’s Office, Delhi, Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 2, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

unclear whether or not Bhargava specifically had Fry and Drew in mind as the “moderately good” architects in India, or Le Corbusier as the French architect that he was hoping it would not be necessary to pursue. Nehru, for his part, remained firm in his stand against seeking out Western architects with no experience in India simply for the sake of their being high-profile Western architects. In an earlier letter to Bhargava, Nehru had praised the Mayer plan, noting that Mayer “had brought to bear on the subject not only the knowledge of Western technique, but also an understanding of Indian ways and habits.”<sup>97</sup> In the same document he added, “I am very interested in the [Mayer] capital scheme, and I hope you will go ahead with it.”<sup>98</sup> At that juncture of writing, then, Nehru had every intention of seeing the drafted Mayer plan to fruition.

Given the apparent support of both Bhargava and Nehru for the Mayer plan, why was it ultimately dismissed, rather than implemented with a revised team? The answer would seem to result from a combination of logistical difficulties, a desire amongst some for a higher-profile name attached to the project, and the professional interests of the individual architects who eventually realized the project. Logistical concerns included the difficulty of finances. The official record attributes Mayer’s need to be paid in dollar currency, rather than in rupees, as a major cause,<sup>99</sup> although Chandigarh scholar Ravi Kalia notes that Mayer had conceded that 40% of his rate be paid in rupees.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, with Nowicki tragically gone and Mayer unavailable to live on-site for the duration of the project, the Punjab authorities were left without local architectural supervision for construction. Interestingly, on-site supervision of the plan’s

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<sup>97</sup> Letter from Nehru to Bhargava, August 30, 1950; Nehru papers from the Prime Minister’s Office, Delhi; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 2, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Untitled press release, 1951, describing change of leadership “due to dollar;” Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 1 Folder 2, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>100</sup> Ravi Kalia, *Chandigarh: In Search of An Identity*, p. 71.

implementation had not originally been a requirement. But Mayer and Nowicki were earlier dismayed at the convolutions and sluggish pace of Indian bureaucracy, and, in an attempt to move the project along, Nowicki had accepted a three-year contract for the post of Chandigarh City Architect almost immediately prior to his death.<sup>101</sup> Nowicki's duties would require him to live on site for the duration of the contract, thus resolving both the American team's apprehension of local government procedure, as well as a growing concern amongst state officials for substantial project oversight. Kalia notes that Nowicki's extensive on-site presence was also set to meet the Punjab officials' wish for a resident architectural consultant paid in Indian currency.<sup>102</sup> In addition to the once-resolved logistical troubles thrust again to the forefront by Nowicki's sudden death, Varma and Thapar had long desired the involvement of a higher-profile international architect—something blocked by Nehru in the early stages of planning. With Nowicki gone and Mayer's on-site involvement not forthcoming, Varma and Thapar were increasingly in a position to press for different project leadership. As I describe later in this section, together with that higher profile came the particular desire among the individual architects ultimately hired for the project to leave their mark.

It is unfortunate that Mayer's years of work in India and developed plan for the city have today become little more than a footnote to Chandigarh city planning discourse. Mid-century sources written during the final years of construction in Chandigarh—such as an essay by Mulk Raj Anand published in 1963 by *Marg* and Norma Evenson's 1966 monograph on the city—occasionally refer to the realized plan as the “Mayer-Le Corbusier Master Plan” and take care to

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<sup>101</sup> A.E.J. Morris, “Chandigarh: The Plan Corb Tore Up?” in *Built Environment*, December 1975, p. 232. Note that Morris states erroneously that August 31, 1951, rather than 1950, was the date of Nowicki's tragic death.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

highlight the innovations of Mayer and Nowicki.<sup>103</sup> Most sources written after this period of construction, however, have tended instead to focus on Le Corbusier's role to the exclusion not only of Mayer and Nowicki but also Fry, Drew, Jeanneret, and the team of nine "junior" Indian architects. Indeed, Christopher Rand, writing in a 1955 issue of *The New Yorker*, noted even at that early date in city development that, although there were other architects responsible for Chandigarh outside of Le Corbusier, "this fact is rather widely overlooked."<sup>104</sup> Scholarship in more recent decades has attempted to reinstate Mayer's role into the historic record: in addition to Ravi Kalia's Chandigarh monographs, for example, an essay by Nihal Perea and a brief section in Vikramaditya Prakash's book have in part addressed Mayer's absence in city planning discourse.<sup>105</sup> For years in the interim, however, Mayer's role, to say nothing of his humanitarian pleas for American aid and urban planning resources, have gone largely unnoted. In a 1975 article, for example—tellingly titled "Chandigarh: The Plan Corb Tore Up?"—A.E.J. Morris reveals to the readership of *Built Environment* journal that Le Corbusier's plan was not the only or the first for the city.<sup>106</sup> As the title suggests, by the mid-1970s, the plan is not only no longer referred to as "the Mayer-Le Corbusier plan," but, indeed, Mayer's contributions were supposedly "torn up" by Le Corbusier. Although acknowledging that Mayer's designs had "considerable merits," Morris refers to what was in reality a fully-fledged plan as merely a "plan of sorts." He then goes on to describe a history of the plans in what is largely a summary of

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<sup>103</sup> Mulk Raj Anand, "Notes on the Social and Spatial Imagination in Indian Architecture," 1963; Norma Evenson, *Chandigarh*, 1966.

<sup>104</sup> Christopher Rand, "City on a Tilting Plain," *The New Yorker*, April 30, 1955, pp. 35-62; citation p. 35.

<sup>105</sup> Perea, "Contesting Visions: Hybridity, Liminality, and Authorship of the Chandigarh Plan," 2004; Prakash, "First Plan: Albert Mayer and Matthew Nowicki," in *Chandigarh's Le Corbusier*, 2002, pp. 39-43.

<sup>106</sup> A.E.J. Morris, "Chandigarh: The Plan Corb Tore Up?" in *Built Environment*, December 1975, pp. 229-234.

Norma Evenson's 1966 research. In his article Morris reproduces a portion of the Mayer plan for comparison against the realized Le Corbusier plan, adapting a version found in Evenson's text.<sup>107</sup> Presumably because Evenson's original reproduction of the Mayer plan does not support his argument, Morris significantly altered it for inclusion in his article. Referring to the Mayer plan as "sketchy," Morris doubts whether a "*pukka* version" did indeed exist—implying with his question that there was very little pre-existing material for Le Corbusier to "tear up" upon his arrival.<sup>108</sup> As should be clear from this dissertation, the archive provides significant information to the contrary, and even a cursory investigation reveals the existence of a very *pukka*—solid and well-developed—version. Evenson's original plans, which Morris is very clearly altering for the sake of his argument, are far from being "sketchy" and provide detailed views of the Mayer grid and its super-blocks.<sup>109</sup> Aside from his wildly irresponsible rewrite of the archive, at any rate Morris' big "reveal" makes it clear that, by the 1970s, public memory had largely eclipsed the contributions of Mayer and Nowicki.

In any case, by early 1951 Punjab officials took advantage of Mayer's diminished involvement to seek out higher-profile architects working in Europe: Chief Engineer Varma and Chief Administrator Thapar quickly began assembling a replacement team.<sup>110</sup> It had been the intension of Varma and Thapar to pursue a high-profile European firm from the beginning; they had approached Mayer only at the suggestion of Nehru, who wished to have a master plan created by someone with an existing presence in India.<sup>111</sup> Randhawa sums up the post-

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<sup>107</sup> A.E.J. Morris, "Chandigarh: The Plan Corb Tore Up?" December 1975, p. 231.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Evenson, *Chandigarh*, 1966, plates 1-3.

<sup>110</sup> Perea, "Contesting Visions: Hybridity, Liminality, and Authorship of the Chandigarh Plan," 2004, discusses the desire to bring in higher-profile, European architects.

<sup>111</sup> Prakash, *Chandigarh's Le Corbusier*, 2002, p. 39.

Mayer/Nowicki search as follows: Thapar, “a man of good taste and a progressive administrator,” was deeply involved with modern trends in architecture through *Marg*:

“*[Marg]* has made an impact on many persons holding key assignments in the administrative set-up of India. In Bombay [Thapar] was advised by architect Fazalbhoy that in India there were no architects or town planners of stature and experience who could grapple successfully with the problems of building a new city.”<sup>112</sup>

After their initial offer was declined by Le Corbusier—likely due to financial reasons, as the Indian recruiters had relatively few funds to offer—Varma and Thapar next contacted English husband-and-wife architects Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew, who, with some resistance on the part of Fry, agreed to work on the project. Because of several preexisting projects (with the Festival of Britain at the forefront of these) and a consequently limited time frame available to devote, Drew suggested that Varma and Thapar persist in their plea to Le Corbusier to serve as project head—much to Fry’s chagrin. In an unpublished memoir-style text from 1983, Fry recalled thinking that Le Corbusier’s earlier high-rise designs were “fit for a race of morons” and reportedly answered the request of Varma and Thapar with, “honor and glory to you, no doubt, but a hard row and perhaps bitterness for me.”<sup>113</sup> It is further apparent in this memoir that Fry felt his talents could better serve his legacy as an architect by continuing projects in England, rather than in developing countries (although Fry and Drew had just completed significant work in West Africa):

“[In retrospect] the three years I spent there seemed to me to have been wasted when set beside what I might have done had I stayed in England (...). There are buildings done at

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<sup>112</sup> M.S. Randhawa, “The Problems of a Growing City,” Tribune Press, Ambala, 1966, p. 1; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2; UCLA Special Collection 1364.

<sup>113</sup> Maxwell Fry, “India,” 1983, RIBA Archives, F&D Box 4, Folder 2. Ravi Kalia, quoting a letter from Fry to Richard Neutra, records the quote as “fit for a race of robots,” in Ravi Kalia, *Chandigarh: In Search of An Identity*, p. 73. Given Fry’s apparent contempt for the project and the frequency with which one encounters variations of the phrase in the RIBA F&D archive, it is likely that Fry may have issued both versions (“morons” and “robots”) at one time or another.

a certain time that make the final reputation of an architect, and these I might have had and lost, and losing them made me angry with myself.”<sup>114</sup>

In addition to viewing it as a loss in regards to his professional career, Fry disliked the prospect of doing any project in India—he describes feeling, as an Englishman, “unwanted” there in the early years of post-independence. Although Fry resisted the project on these professional and personal grounds he eventually agreed to work under Le Corbusier, largely due to what he records as his wife Jane’s goading: “These Indians came and I yielded to them, and to Jane, and went.”<sup>115</sup>

Upon being approached a second time with the offer, this time together with the appeal from Jane Drew if not Maxwell Fry, Le Corbusier agreed with several stipulations. The first of these was that his cousin, Pierre Jeanneret, must join the team as his assistant. Another condition dictated that Le Corbusier be required to spend minimal time in India, with the plan of establishing Jeanneret as his surrogate presence in the subcontinent. It seems that as the project moved forward Le Corbusier’s conditions were agreeable, at least financially, to Indian officials—the French architect had come at a higher price than was originally hoped would be necessary, and Indian officials were apparently more than agreeable when it came to restricting his paid project travel and labor. For the preliminary phase of the project, Le Corbusier reportedly accepted the rate of two thousand rupees per month, plus three per cent of the cost of any building he designed personally, as well as expenses during time spent in India.<sup>116</sup> Later in the project, a memo from Punjab official Sapuran Singh to Le Corbusier extending the latter’s contract into 1965 allows for only one paid visit to India per year, not to exceed thirty days, with

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<sup>114</sup> Maxwell Fry, “India,” 1983, RIBA Archives, F&D Box 4, Folder 2, p. 1.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Christopher Rand, “City on a Tilting Plain,” *The New Yorker*, p. 37.

a limited per diem stipend and no honorarium; Singh cites a “very difficult [currency] exchange” as the cause for these restrictions.<sup>117</sup> At this point in his career—Le Corbusier was at the time nearly seventy—the greatest compensation he received was arguably the opportunity to test and exercise many of the principles he had developed over the course of his professional life. Most of these had remained untested theories until the Chandigarh assignment materialized.

As has been discussed earlier in this dissertation, by the time consensus on the new team members was reached, Indian officials were largely satisfied with Mayer’s overall existing plan and Le Corbusier’s team was hired primarily to implement it. However, as Kalia has pointed out, it would have been “out of character” for Le Corbusier not to impose his own designs.<sup>118</sup> The arc and tone of several letters written by Mayer to Fry strongly suggests that Mayer made every effort to “pass the torch” of his plan off to the Le Corbusier team; Mayer had been led by Varma and Thapar to believe that he would continue to advise the newly formed core team as the plan went forward. However, despite Mayer’s well-intentioned efforts and many prior years spent working on various architectural and humanitarian projects in India, the newly assembled European team had little interest in his recommendations and were keen to develop and test their own designs.<sup>119</sup>

Although the blame for the dismissal of Mayer’s plan is often largely shifted to Le Corbusier (and his oversized ego), the archive reveals that Fry and Drew were perhaps equally eager to be rid of Mayer and his pre-existing plans. Such eagerness resulted at times in a

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<sup>117</sup> Sapuran Singh, Memorandum to Le Corbusier, “Renewal of Contract from May 19, 1962 to February 18, 1965,” January 22, 1965; Le Corbusier papers in Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 1, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>118</sup> Ravi Kalia, *Chandigarh: In Search of An Identity*, p. 72.

<sup>119</sup> It has been suggested that the absence of Nowicki, whose important contributions are largely unsung in the official record of city planning, played a significant role in the difficulties moving forward. See Perea, “Contesting Visions,” 2007, p. 177.

misrepresentation of the facts. In an unpublished manuscript Jane Drew states that, although the two master plans had much in common, that of Le Corbusier's was "undoubtedly better."<sup>120</sup> The "great difference," she suggests, was the positioning of the government center, which, according to Drew's account, Mayer had placed at the city's center.<sup>121</sup> Most critics (aside from Morris' refuted argument) agree that the two plans varied little, and Drew's claim as to the location of Mayer's capitol complex, as evidenced in the broader architectural record, is patently untrue. As with the plan that Le Corbusier was to develop, Mayer had also placed the high court and capitol complex at the northern edge of the city, with the business, not governmental, area—roughly equivalent in function and placement to Le Corbusier's Sector 17—at the city's center [see Figure 72]. As Randhawa summarized it in a 1966 report:

“[Mayer] also suggested the location of the Capitol group of buildings at the top of the town below the hills, of the main business area in the [city] center, the industrial area on the east, and the educational center on the west. The sector idea was also contributed by Mayer.”<sup>122</sup>

Perhaps it was Drew's professional regard—and personal affection—for Le Corbusier that clouded her memory of the Mayer plan, or perhaps it is simply the second team's considerable efforts that explains her eagerness to shift authorship away from the original Mayer plans. Neither Drew nor Fry register much respect for Mayer in their personal accounts of the events of 1951, and both architects make much of an incident in which Mayer, upon first meeting Le Corbusier when the entire party was assembled in India, claimed in imperfect French to speak

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<sup>120</sup> Jane Drew, "Le Corbusier, The Relevance of His Work in Chandigarh for India," unpublished manuscript, n.d., p. 5; RIBA Archives, F&D Box 4, Folder 1.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> M.S. Randhawa, "The Problems of a Growing City," Tribune Press, Ambala, 1966, p. 1; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2; UCLA Special Collection 1364.

and understand French.<sup>123</sup> In what reads in the retelling as an effort to put Mayer in his place, Le Corbusier then made his arguments against Mayer's plan in rapid French. Mayer, whose exaggerated assurance of his French language abilities left him unable to follow the diatribe let alone respond, stood confounded and speechless. In Fry's telling Mayer had here been "unfortunate;" in Drew's, he was "foolish." Both agree that all members of the replacement team from then on dismissed Mayer. Although neither Drew nor Fry were fluent in French and the audience also included Varma and Thapar, neither of whom had any degree of fluency in the language, this anecdote serves in the British architects' accounts as shorthand for Mayer's ineffectual status in the face of Le Corbusier. The episode, the retelling of which has the effect of dismissing Mayer's substantial body of work on rather a minor failing, is offered in nearly every version of the events by either Drew or Fry. Tellingly, the British architects' judgment of Mayer's struggle with the French language is considerably harsher in the unpublished accounts of the story.

Not long after this incident Mayer's suggestion to build two "trial" neighborhood blocks was denied—one block was to feature his designs and the other those of Fry and Drew, in order to gauge which was the more effective. Notably, the suggestion to build two test blocks was initially verbally agreed to, but as meeting minutes and a series of letters between Mayer and Fry make clear, the new team had no real intention of seeing this through.<sup>124</sup> At this point Mayer reluctantly suspended his involvement. In an emotional letter to Fry, who had become something of a middle man between Mayer and the rest of the European team, Mayer wrote, "I

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<sup>123</sup> See for example Jane Drew, "Le Corbusier, The Relevance of His Work in Chandigarh for India," unpublished manuscript, n.d.; RIBA Archives, F&D Box 4, Folder 1; Maxwell Fry, "India," unpublished test, 1983; RIBA Archives, F&D Box 4, Folder 2.

<sup>124</sup> Letter from Mayer to Fry, October 16, 1951 and "Meeting Minutes from Architects' Office, June 15, 1951 Meeting with Mayer," Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 1, Folder 3, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

will not further attempt to influence the plan. I am not tough enough to undertake further the struggles that seem inevitably to be involved in our dealings.”<sup>125</sup>

Mayer had been essentially strong-armed out of the project. With Mayer’s plan in hand but with no obligation to enact it, Fry arrived in India in early 1951. Jeanneret joined him in Shimla soon after, and the two—in Fry’s telling—had an awkward time during which progress was thwarted by difficulty in communication and personal difference in disposition.<sup>126</sup> In Fry’s rather ungenerous assessment, “Pierre was a decent man of his type but with fewer mental and cultural resources than ever I have met with.”<sup>127</sup> Satisfied neither with his team nor the planning headquarters, Fry begrudgingly accepted Shimla as a “haphazard” place that was to be his “tomb for months to come.”<sup>128</sup> Drew joined the two after her completion of the Festival of Britain project and her interpersonal skills seem to have softened relations between the architects. Shimla, at that time the most convenient and established city near the proposed Chandigarh site, acted in these early months as a home base for the planning team. As earlier discussed, in the early years of planning Shimla itself had been a candidate for the year-round replacement capital for Lahore, and during Chandigarh’s development the city served as an interim headquarters for the East Punjab government. Separated physically from the proposed site at a distance of approximately thirty miles, somewhat isolated in the mountains, and subject to harsh winters, the proposal was rejected. Shimla did serve for some time, however, as a temporary base, and the architects were tasked with designing the new city from the very different vantage point of a

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<sup>125</sup> Letter from Mayer to Fry, October 16, 1951; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 1, Folder 3, UCLA Special Collections 1364. For Fry’s part, he categorizes Mayer as pleasant but anxious and ineffectual in the face of the overpowering presence of Le Corbusier; unpublished text, “India,” 1983, RIBA Archives, F&D Box 4, Folder 2.

<sup>126</sup> Maxwell Fry, “India,” unpublished text, 1983, p. 10; RIBA Archives, F&D Box 4, Folder 2.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

colonial hill station. After several months Le Corbusier joined the other three European architects and arrived for his first brief initial stay in India. Although Le Corbusier's mythical stature (and legendary outsized ego) overshadows much of the historic record on the city's plans, his work was confined primarily to the Capitol Complex and to the overall grid and sector structure of the city. The bulk of his early involvement—according to the story maintained in the archives and circulated in the city's mythology—amounted to a fevered afternoon in a closed Shimla office, at the close of which he produced his plans. In Fry's unpublished and candid description of Le Corbusier's efforts that legendary afternoon he describes the scene as follows:

“Before lunch time, to a running commentary on the various grids employed by city builders since the times of the Romans to those of the Americans from Jefferson onward, the main lines of the city were on paper [and] it was as good as done. It was a plan the sheer audacity of which took my breath away but one that, from every angle, seemed to answer the basic needs of city dwellers, and I accepted it as such.”<sup>129</sup>

In the end, Fry—a man who for personal and professional reasons was inclined to dislike Le Corbusier—records the results of that mythic afternoon as an audacious but somehow practical plan. The rest, it seems, was history. The record of this history, as promoted and canonized in the decades to follow, would favor the reduced, mythic account of Le Corbusier's sweeping, overarching plan and bold modernist Capitol Complex at the expense of not only the earlier contributions of Mayer and Nowicki but also of the remaining European and Indian architects who implemented the realized plan. Despite the rich archival record to the contrary, the account of Chandigarh has frequently been reduced to straightforward myth; the myth, as we will begin to see in the following chapter, has subsumed not only the various members of the architectural team but also the Rock Garden.

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<sup>129</sup> Maxwell Fry, “India,” unpublished text, 1983, pp. 20-21; RIBA Archives, F&D Box 4, Folder 2.

## *Chapter Two*

### *Building A 'Worth-Seeing Place:' The Development of the City and the Garden*

Chapter Two opens with a city under construction—after several years of planning and a sudden overhaul of the architectural team, ground was broken in Chandigarh’s Sector 22, the area intended to serve as an early “test” sector for the team’s housing designs and traffic flow organization. As Fry, Drew, and Jeanneret continued to make construction progress in the other sectors of the developing city, Le Corbusier’s attention had turned primarily to the Capitol Complex slated for Sector 1. These early years and the realized buildings of the Capitol Complex—both much inflected by Le Corbusier—have come to stand in for much of the dialog on Chandigarh. This chapter, in its exploration of archival materials, media reports, and literary works, establishes a much broader, richer account of the contested experience of constructing, inhabiting, and adjusting the city and its public and private spaces.

As we will see in the following sections, early development in Sector 22 started an ongoing conversation regarding the efficacy of the team’s housing designs in terms of layout, size, and features. At the same time, construction throughout the city first necessitated, and then obliterated, the makeshift housing constructed illegally by low-income laborers; ironically, in many cases these laborers were responsible for actually building Chandigarh’s officially sanctioned structures. As the “official” elements of the city continued to develop and expand, the laborers’ improvised buildings were marked for destruction by city officials. Many of these laborers were villagers whom city construction had already displaced; as their displacement continued concurrent with the city construction they themselves were largely responsible for, their homes were pushed further and further beyond city limits.

The ongoing conflicts between low-income residents and city officials on the subject of housing found reverberation in the “squatter” techniques Nek Chand employed in the early years

of the Rock Garden. At the same time, even “official” buildings—graded-level housing structures, in particular—were subject to small-scale adjustments by their individual inhabitants. These adjustments of space and use were enacted to meet the unanticipated or, simply, the unique individual desires of inhabitants and were technically illegal under the Chandigarh Edict. In the following sections I highlight some of the experiences of Chandigarh’s residents in order to draw attention to the correlations, as well as the distances, between the projected and the realized city. This chapter argues that “unofficial” projects—including the Rock Garden, but also smaller-scale, quotidian efforts to rework buildings so that they might better meet the needs of their inhabitants—have long been undertaken in an attempt to sort out at a personal level the realities of a post-Independence, post-Partition India, as they intersected with expectations in the planned city. Relying on surveys, population studies, media reports, and on literary sources and memoirs, I explore the ways in which city residents have squared the architects’ much-publicized housing scheme and sector layout against their own experiences of inhabiting the newly designed, government-subsidized housing. Many of these fissures between the idealized city and the realities of its population are evidenced in the methods and materials of the Rock Garden. And as we will see in the closing sections of this chapter, as both the city and the Garden continue to develop through the 1950s-1960s the material and landscaping concerns of each existed in dialog rather than in binary opposition.

### ***The Plan Realized***

The city of Chandigarh was formally inaugurated on October 17, 1953. Fry, Drew, and Jeanneret designed the majority of the buildings; Le Corbusier was responsible for the overall layout, the Capitol Complex, and the governing edict that was to direct the city in the present and

future. In Le Corbusier's own words, the division of labor was as follows: "Pierre Jeanneret is a specialist at the drawing board. Maxwell Fry is very capable at dealing with the [Indian] authorities. [Le Corbusier] will provide guidance, reserving the design of just a few buildings for himself."<sup>1</sup> Notably, Jane Drew—for whom Le Corbusier had professional respect and with whom he came to have a close personal relationship—is left off this list of organizers. The French architect, it would seem, viewed Jane Drew and Maxwell Fry as a single professional unit. Also notable is the lack of design credit given to the British team beyond their diplomatic abilities. Drew, of course, designed a significant number of housing types, schools, and health facilities, while Fry designed many housing types, as well as commercial buildings in Sector 17, notably Kiran Cinema. Drew's diplomatic efforts, at least, did not go otherwise unnoticed: in addition to her prowess in dealing with officials she was said to have set up a "make-shift village court" where she acted as judge in settling disputes that area residents brought to her.<sup>2</sup>

The guiding ideology for architectural modernists like Le Corbusier is largely laid out in the literature produced by the *Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne*, or CIAM. The CIAM was an organization of European architects, co-founded in 1928 by Le Corbusier and particularly invested in the notion that the methodical reorganization and transformation of the built environment had the power to result in positive social change.<sup>3</sup> As a founding member of CIAM Le Corbusier formed many of its universalist philosophical notions of urban planning. In Chandigarh, several significant adaptations were made to Le Corbusier's long-held doctrines: for example, due to restrictions on materials and construction infrastructure, Chandigarh was a

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<sup>1</sup> Letter, Le Corbusier to Maxwell Fry, as translated and quoted in Stanislaus von Moos, ed., *Chandigarh 1956*, 2010, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Maxwell Fry, "India," unpublished text, 1983, pp. 28; RIBA Archives, F&D Box 4, Folder 2.

<sup>3</sup> See Eric Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928-1960*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000.

horizontal rather than a vertical city—no building higher than a few storeys was constructed. Perhaps in part due to some of the necessitated changes, Le Corbusier did not seem to believe that achieving his vision for the city was possible without looking outside of India. He pleaded with Thapar and Nehru, for example, to have the Sector 1 Open Hand monument constructed abroad, due to “lack of worker experience” in India.<sup>4</sup> A decided shift in his thinking in regards to executing a CIAM approach in India appears to have happened during the first year of planning: having called the Chandigarh project a “great victory for CIAM and an opportunity to show that the participants in CIAM are capable of great action” in 1950, in the following year he reported, “I found myself dealing with a country that cast doubt on everything I thought I knew about architecture and urban planning.”<sup>5</sup>

The clash between the hubris of a resolute faith in universality—hitherto untested at so grand a scale—and the unique concerns of both national and local interests in Chandigarh affected but did not halt the project. While scholar Perea has noted that CIAM’s concern for humanity was “abstract,” and that the city was conceived “from a European vantage point to provide the inhabitants with a particular economic future and social identity,” plans were subject to regional budget constraints and availability of materials.<sup>6</sup> Together with these concerns was the pressing need and physical reality of Partition refugees and a region’s uprooted economy. However, Le Corbusier does not seem to have developed a particular humanitarian philosophy that connected work on the symbolically charged city with the welfare of Partition refugees, in the way that Mayer did.

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<sup>4</sup> Le Corbusier letter to Thapar, July 22, 1955; Le Corbusier papers in Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 1, UCLA Special Collections 1364. The Open Hand was not completed and installed until 1985.

<sup>5</sup> As quoted by Maristella Casciato in Stanislaus von Moos, ed., *Chandigarh 1956*, 2010, p.27.

<sup>6</sup> Perea, “Contesting Visions: Hybridity, Liminality, and Authorship,” 2004, p. 187.

Given Le Corbusier's rather dim view towards available Indian design talent—as evidenced above, for example, in his push to construct the Open Hand abroad— it is perhaps no surprise that the work of Indian architects in Chandigarh is largely unsung in the record. With the notable exception of Randhawa, who in a 1966 report credited several Indian town planners and architects for this assistance on the Le Corbusier plan, local officials seem to have shared this view that there was a dearth of Indian talent available.<sup>7</sup> In a telegram sent to the Secretary of Economic Affairs in Delhi, Thapar notes that in India “only junior and assistant architects” were available, and goes on to reiterate his desire to “contract out foreigners.”<sup>8</sup> In a 1951 letter to Fry, Mayer similarly mentions “the difficulty of getting satisfactory design and drafting personnel,” despite his having received a number of unsolicited applications for employment.<sup>9</sup> To recall the view articulated by Mayer and shared by Nehru as mentioned earlier in this dissertation, there was widespread belief among Chandigarh's planning team that an attuned Western architect was capable of achieving not only a superior but indeed a “more Indian” result. Accordingly, such a view has assisted and contributed to the implementation of an origin myth that constructs the West as represented by Le Corbusier's modernist urban planning in opposition to the East as represented by India's timeless villages. On a more immediately tangible level, it has directly contributed to the dearth of information on the team of Indian architects who worked closely with Fry, Drew, Jeanneret, and, occasionally, Le Corbusier. The team consisted of nine Indian architects with “junior” status, many of whom, like Vikramaditya Prakash's father, Aditya Prakash, had been educated in and were living in the West; they returned to India on invitation in

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<sup>7</sup> M.S. Randhawa, “The Problems of a Growing City,” Tribune Press, Ambala, 1966, p. 1; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2; UCLA Special Collection 1364.

<sup>8</sup> Telegram, Thapar to Secretary of Economic Affairs in Delhi, dated January 11, 1950; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 3, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>9</sup> Albert Mayer, letter to Maxwell Fry, February 16, 1951; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 1, Folder 2, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

order to assist on the Chandigarh project. The Nehruvian call to create a city that would serve, at least in part, as an architectural laboratory for the education of future generations of Indian architects had been persevered from the Mayer to the Le Corbusier plan. This vision extended not only to future programs of the architecture college in Chandigarh, but also to training of architects during the construction process—and, eventually, to the design teaching tools of the Capitol Complex (such as an architectural instruction model known the Tower of Shadows, or Tower of Shade [Figure 76]) and array of more quotidian buildings.

The slim account of Indian intellectual labor and accomplishments in Chandigarh is shot through with a rather self-deprecating attitude. British observer and trained architect Harold Elvin notes his surprise and disbelief that the Indian architects “glowed with pride to have the chance to work under [Le Corbusier, Jeanneret, Drew, and Fry. They said]: ‘We are learning every day and minute.’ They thought it was very kind and decent of those four to have come here!”<sup>10</sup> Jane Drew, it seems, acted not only as impromptu local judge but also as impromptu instructor. She reportedly sent for training manuals from England and offered informal night courses for Indian architects, further fostering a teacher-student relationship and dynamic of subordination between the Western architects and their Indian counterparts.<sup>11</sup>

Vikramaditya Prakash’s *Chandigarh’s Le Corbusier* is an important exception to the overwhelming silence regarding the role of the team of Indian architects. The younger Prakash records the feeling of awe that his father Aditya Prakash reportedly experienced working with Le Corbusier. Moods of reverence amongst junior staff and local residents alike were reinforced by Le Corbusier’s habit of keeping to himself during his brief bi-annual follow-up visits; additionally, the language barrier prevented easy communication and further added to his

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<sup>10</sup> Harold Elvin, *The Ride to Chandigarh*, London: Macmillian & Co., 1957, p. 322.

<sup>11</sup> Maxwell Fry, “India,” unpublished text, 1983, p. 27; RIBA Archives, F&D Box 4, Folder 2.

mystique. Le Corbusier spoke no Indian languages and although he could communicate in it his English was halting. As such it seems he was regarded as a mysterious genius who deigned offer assistance in a rather cryptic code. One observer noted that, due to the language barrier, Le Corbusier “had to rely on gestures and sketching in order to communicate with his Indian subordinates,” but more often it seems he simply let the other Western architects communicate his designs.<sup>12</sup>

The frustrations that might have been justifiably felt in such a case seem to have been expressed instead as reverence. Vikramaditya Prakash notes that his father, Aditya, had drawn up designs for the Chandigarh School of Art at his own initiative, only to have “The Master” dismiss them in hardly a glance. Le Corbusier returned the following day to show Prakash “how to design,” which amounted to instructing Prakash to sketch a design based on dimensions that Le Corbusier dictated. The younger Prakash notes: “Communicated to him like a revelation, those dimensions my father can still recite from memory.”<sup>13</sup> The reader today, encountering this anecdote many years after the tenets of modernist universalism failed to be convincing, might record such a tale simply as a starry-eyed subordinate contributing to the mythic lore of a egocentric modern-era male “hero.” However, it is important to note that, for all the flaws we might read into his lore and his plans today, Le Corbusier’s designs carried no small weight. Many admired Le Corbusier’s work for its mathematical soundness, which was purportedly demonstrated by the fact that the High Court was built, unaltered, from the drawing board rather than from the more traditionally relied-upon three-dimensional mock-up.<sup>14</sup> Thapar and Varma, two seasoned observers of urban planning both in India and abroad, reportedly categorized

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<sup>12</sup> Christopher Rand, “City on a Tilting Plain,” *The New Yorker*, April 30, 1955, p. 50.

<sup>13</sup> Prakash, *Chandigarh’s Le Corbusier*, 2002, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Rand, “City on a Tilting Plain,” *The New Yorker*, April 30, 1955, p. 50.

working with Le Corbusier as one of the “most exhilarating” experiences of their lives.<sup>15</sup> It is wise, of course, to register these descriptions of Le Corbusier with a skeptical eye, but they are not altogether easily dismissible.

Chandigarh and the legendary actions of “the masters”—with episodes like the one recounted above between Aditya Prakash and Le Corbusier—set the scene for a generation of Indian architects working in postcolonial India. The attitude that Elvin was so skeptical of has become the standard reading of the Indian architects’ interaction with the European team. Tellingly, a published volume on modern architecture in India from 1990 is titled *After the Masters*.<sup>16</sup> Architect Charles Correa, who was somewhat critical of Le Corbusier and Chandigarh throughout his series of essays, still noted that “in spite of these antagonisms and misunderstandings, there is no doubt that Corb’s work has been of considerable benefit to India. It has stimulated a whole generation of architects.”<sup>17</sup> Perhaps surprisingly, Correa found in “Corb’s” designs the evocation of “a much deeper image of a more real India [...]. His aesthetic evokes our history.”<sup>18</sup> Although many other observers have disagreed with his categorizations of the “naturalness” and efficacy of Le Corbusier’s designs on the city’s landscape, Correa’s words are indicative of a widespread feeling of indebtedness to what the Chandigarh “masters” offered to India. They also signal an interesting paradox: Le Corbusier, who spent in sum very little time in India, had no apparent meaningful personal relationship with any of its people, and who developed, as we will see, a rather simplistic and Orientalist-style conception of its “traditional”

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Vikram Bhatt and Peter Scriver, *After the Masters*, Ahmedabad: Mapin Publications, 1990. This volume and its title are also noted by V. Prakash, *Chandigarh’s Le Corbusier*, 2002, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> Charles Correa, “The Assembly at Chandigarh,” in his *Place in the Shade: The New Landscape and Other Essays*, Ostfildern: Hatje Cantaz Verlag, 2012, p. 14.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

elements—the likes of which were first articulated during his much earlier excursions in the Middle East<sup>19</sup>—was in Correa’s reckoning still indeed able to “do a more Indian job.” This justification—perhaps even championing—of the binary of modern and tradition, West and East constructed by Le Corbusier further fueled the city’s myth.

The European “masters” quickly began putting their designs into action. Chandigarh was devised on a grid and consists of sectors [Figure 77]. An adaptation of Mayer’s super-block, each sector was intended to serve as something of a relatively self-sufficient modern “village” with its own schools, health centers, parks, and grades of class- and income-ranked housing designs, its streets designed to allow motor vehicles only at sector exteriors.<sup>20</sup> As Aditya Prakash, one of the Indian “junior” architects, later phrased it in his reflection on Chandigarh in free-verse poem,

A sector is like a fort / Surrounded by roads instead of a moat / Entries (if not gates) at four positions located / All other areas by walls protected / The Enemy is not the Army with swords / It is the traffic which endangers life, no less.<sup>21</sup>

The sector, Aditya Prakash goes on to note, is not to be taken as “a cage;” rather, one may move about the city as desired, “and return to [his or her] sector, when the desire is satiated.”<sup>22</sup>

Sectors, then, were approached as a protected primary unit for living—a unit that provided not only the required services and resources, but also protection in the form of controlled and minimized traffic. This protection purportedly enabled the experience of “village life” within the city by buffering against the more depersonalized aspects of city living. Furthermore, the sector

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example, *Journey to the East*, Le Corbusier, Ivan Zaknić, trans., Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007.

<sup>20</sup> The sector-as-village, devised by Mayer, was maintained by the Corbusian team.

<sup>21</sup> Aditya Prakash, “The Sector,” in *Chandigarh: A Presentation in Free Verse*, Bombay: Marg Publications, 1978, p. 15.

<sup>22</sup> Aditya Prakash, “The Sector,” p. 17.

sought to act as a non-urban space within the city's limits, providing, in language similar to descriptions of the suburb, the "comfort, peace, and sense of relaxation" that ones seeks after a day in the larger city.<sup>23</sup> Sector 22—the portal for refugees arriving in the city via public transit, including, presumably, Nek Chand—acted as an early experiment: model houses were to be built to the various class specifications, and designs adjusted based on inhabitant feedback. Sector 22, as the first stop in the new city for a visitor arriving by bus, acted as an early advertisement for the city's progress<sup>24</sup> [Figure 78]. Adjacent Sector 23 was soon to follow in development, and by early 1955 some three thousand families were reportedly living in the houses completed in these two sectors.<sup>25</sup> Nearly all of these structures had been provided by the government for its administrative employees.

As is made clear in the record, the architects at both the senior and junior levels wished to implement a idealized "village" model as their guide in designing the sector—one that, importantly, was devoid of agricultural livelihood and that conformed to the newly imposed sanitation and facilities guidelines. Significantly, unlike an actual village in which organic adaptation and change was more flexible and ungoverned by official edict, adaptation of spaces in the sector was limited by the constrictions of the Master Plan; the sector-as-village model had distinct confines and guidelines for its residents. The twenty-five pre-existing villages that were cleared for city construction, along with their inhabitants, were the direct and ironic casualties of the implementation of this fantasy village concept. This fallout continued for decades to follow: the act of village clearing and villager relocation was not limited to the initial land acquisitions

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Early work on Sector 22 lasted from 1951-1954, at the end of which time Fry and Drew departed India for a project in Africa. A detailed description of development in Sector 22 is found in Iain Jackson and Jessica Holland, Chapter 6, "Chandigarh and the Tropics Revisited," in *The Architecture of Edwin Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew*, Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014.

<sup>25</sup> Christopher Rand, "City on a Tilting Plain," *The New Yorker*, April 30, 1955, p. 38.

for city construction, as evidenced in a 1982 regional development plan. As part of its projected 18-year plan, the Ministry of Works and Housing called for the clearance of all additional villages that existed within the newly defined Chandigarh Urban Complex, a zone that included not only the ten-mile area surrounding the Chandigarh's city limits but also the nearby cities of Mohali and Panchkula as well.<sup>26</sup> The report stated that life and work in the area's local villages, "linked" as they were "with agricultural and animal husbandry," were "not at all valid for the new city;" the report went on to recommend the swift governmental acquisition of these lands.<sup>27</sup> Time, according to the report, was of the essence in that regard: the proposed removal of villages "[was] a policy matter that must be attended to on priority, before the problems outgrow the possible alternatives and solutions in the interest of the 'City Beautiful.'"<sup>28</sup> Chandigarh, the City Beautiful, glorified idealized "village" spaces in its sector design but had no tolerance for actual ones.

Those impoverished city residents not employed by the Indian government were casualties too: as noted even by architect Jane Drew during early construction, the sector-as-village construct did not provide or allow for adequate legal accommodations for low-income residents working in non-administrative jobs. In the early 1980s, local officials noted that "unauthorized encroachments on vacant land" and "shabby," unauthorized constructions were abutting dangerously close up to the pre-existing villages. Such constructions were deemed "dangerous" because, the argument went, the "squatters" were likely to claim village-resident

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<sup>26</sup> Document draft, "Regional Plan, Chandigarh," 1982, Town and Country Planning Organization, Ministry of Works and Housing, New Delhi, p. 33; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 6, Folder 1, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

status and thus demand purportedly undue relocation compensation.<sup>29</sup> If villagers had a chance at compensation for their loss of land and livelihood—a chance that, as previously demonstrated in this dissertation, proved to be all too slim—the laborers for whom no adequate housing was provided by the city did not. Significantly, many of the “squatters” identified in this 1982 report were very likely former inhabitants of the original twenty-five villages that were cleared for initial construction, or their descendants; as earlier detailed, many of these villagers, finding relocation compensation inadequate or non-existent, took on intermittent work in the city. Others among these “squatters” were very likely Partition-related migrants who were similarly unable to find work in the administrative sector. Despite its origins as a city that, at least partially, had been created to rehabilitate Partition migrants, Chandigarh’s policies have been decidedly unforgiving to the indigent displaced. Calling as it did for the implementation of Master Plans in Mohali and Panchkula similar to that of Chandigarh, the 1982 report issued by the Town and Country Planning Organization sought to impose restrictions on low-income and displaced persons throughout the entire region.<sup>30</sup>

Chandigarh, then, promoted and relied on an idealized, controlled, urban village, focusing on the traditional village’s supposed social and organizational advantages while simultaneously removing—physically and ideologically—its defining agricultural elements and its ability for organic growth. Local officials actively worked to curtail residents’ efforts to adapt city spaces and peripheries to their needs. In the Rock Garden, which has been described as a squatter-style appropriation of city land,<sup>31</sup> Nek Chand likewise worked to adapt city spaces to his desires.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>31</sup> Iain Jackson, section 3.2, “Architecture in the Rock Garden,” in “Cataloging Nek Chand’s Rock Garden, Chandigarh: An Analysis and Interpretation of the Sculpture, Architecture, and Landscape,” unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Liverpool, 2008, pp. 113-150.

Upon discovery of the site, this adaption was paradoxically met with both threats of curtailment and bids to cast the project as one of universal appeal and relevance.

### ***Growing Pains***

If the needs of disenfranchised villagers and low-income laborers were not accounted for in Chandigarh's plan, significant efforts did ensure the availability of subsidized income-based housing for government employees. Because Chandigarh was designed, from a practical standpoint, to serve primarily as an administrative center, the system of housing grades was directly linked to the income scale of government employees at a flat rate of 10% of income. Accordingly, the highest paid local official (the governor) was provided the largest and best-appointed style of house, at 10% of his income, and the scale continued to a subsidized Level-13 grade, for which the lowest paid governmental "peon" paid 10% of his income.<sup>32</sup> Drew, Fry, and Jeanneret provided at least two separate design options for each of the graded levels with the exception of that of the governor, for which there was only one design and that drawn up by Le Corbusier. The scheme had its limits: Nehru rejected designs for the opulent top grade house to be built in Sector 1 and known as the Governor's Mansion, calling it an undemocratic symbol in a city intended to be an experiment rooted in democracy. Accordingly, designs for the Governor's Mansion were instead transferred to the Museum of Knowledge. This museum, with its unclear and much-debated intentions, projected collections, and mission, today remains unrealized. On the other end of the spectrum, Level-13 housing came about when Jane Drew rightly noted that even Level 12 was financially out of reach of many government employees.

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<sup>32</sup> Original plans only included housing grades 1-12, plus the Governor's Palace. Seeing the need for a more basic level of housing, Drew devised Level 13. See "Chandigarh and the Tropics Revisited," in *The Architecture of Edwin Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew*, pp. 233-235.

What seems an oversight on behalf the original planners regarding a realistic view of low-level governmental employees' income might in fact have been intentional. In a circa 1948 document entitled "A Rough Forecast of the Cost of Constructing," an unnamed official noted "it is neither possible nor absolutely essential to provide government accommodation for every official, much less in the first year."<sup>33</sup> Regardless, officials agreed to Drew's proposal to establish Level-13 grade housing, provided that strict budget restrictions were observed.

Fry and Drew's housing designs were featured prominently in the 1954 International Exhibition on Low-Cost Housing, an event organized by the Indian government and held in New Delhi. Although its income-scaled housing scheme was considered progressive and the indoor water lavatories, private gardens, and low-population density of its sectors provided a higher standard of living than that found in the rest of India, the team's housing designs received significant criticism. Housing in Chandigarh, the consensus in the media reports goes, was an improvement but not perfect. Aditya Prakash summed up the housing structure in Chandigarh in his free-verse style as "not exactly ideal / But better, oh, much better / Than what one hopes to get / For 1,000 rps a month / In Calcutta or Bombay."<sup>34</sup> The affordable price in combination with higher standard was, of course, not a miracle of architectural design but rather only possible due to government subsidies that allowed for the 10% of income scheme at even the lowest income levels. The inclusion of a Level 13 "peon-"wage home was an important innovation—however, as Chandigarh urban theorist and activist Madhu Sarin has noted, Level 13 was still financially out of reach for a large number of laborers and small-scale vendors operating in the

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<sup>33</sup> Author unknown, "A Rough Forecast for the Cost of Constructing an Advance Neighborhood Unit on the Site of the Capital During the Year 1949-1950," n.d., p. 2; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 3, UCLA Special Collection 1364.

<sup>34</sup> Aditya Prakash, "Housing," in *Chandigarh: A Presentation in Free Verse*, 1978, p. 21.

city.<sup>35</sup> At any rate, such housing was only made available to government employees, but Sarin's statement does illustrate the shortcomings in the city's efforts to serve as a center of rehabilitation for Partition migrants. Many of the low-income laborers and vendors Sarin referred to were villagers displaced by city construction who could not afford to live within the city, despite Le Corbusier's "Statute of the Land" that described Chandigarh as a "city offering all amenities of life to the poorest of the poor."<sup>36</sup> Because the housing scheme was intended to accommodate only government employees, affordable housing was not made available for these low-paid non-administrative laborers. Such laborers included the construction workers who actually built the city.<sup>37</sup> Those administrative employees for whom housing was provided were subject to a number of restrictions. Living in a city of such symbolic weight restricted the ability to individualize or legally alter one's house, and the locked-in 10% housing system came with its own price: it precluded the ability to "upgrade" to a larger house such that would have been allocated to a higher paid grade, regardless of family size. Furthermore, it underscored the illegality of making changes or building additions when the existing space became too small or impractical.

Despite Fry and Drew's stated intentions to rely on consumer feedback and suggestions, it is debatable as to how much of the "democratic" Sector-22 model designs were, indeed, subject to user-led adjustment. Rather, the architects, at least according to one observer, seemed "determined to beat old habits"—such as the squat-kitchen, public communal spaces rather than

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<sup>35</sup> Norma Evenson mentions the establishment of Level 14 housing, "intended for economic levels below the lowest government rank." I was unable to find evidence of its implementation, however, and at any rate such housing was unlikely to be subsidized by the government. See Evenson, *Chandigarh*, 1966, Plate 36.

<sup>36</sup> Le Corbusier, "Statute of the Land," December 18, 1959; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 3, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>37</sup> Madhu Sarin, *Urban Planning in the Third World: The Chandigarh Experience*, London: Mansell Publishing, 1982.

private yards, and rooms for servants' quarters—"with new walls."<sup>38</sup> The architects, it should be noted, were subject to stringent guidelines on costs, the limitations of which in turn likely restricted flexibility to adapt designs. However, in many instances conventional domestic staples in an average Indian home were at odds with the architects' plans. Traditional squat-kitchens, for example, were available only in the lowest grade of house, and some observers criticized the standing-kitchen design in the mid-to lower-grade houses as unnatural to their intended inhabitants. Still others criticized the inclusion of squat kitchens in any of the homes as backward, regardless of grade, and Drew noted that she received criticism both when the squat kitchen was removed and when it was maintained.<sup>39</sup>

Criticism over the new kitchen designs did not stop there. Some inhabitants objected that the new kitchens did not allow space for the inclusion of a tandoor oven, considered by many to be an essential component of Punjabi homes.<sup>40</sup> When confronted with this criticism, Drew reportedly attempted to resolve this issue of space, but it also appears that tandoor ovens themselves were redesigned to fit more easily in a modernized kitchen. In a 1966 report Randhawa noted that the tandoor ovens, which he himself called "an integral part of life in India," had been modernized to fit—physically and ideologically—within the new modern kitchens.<sup>41</sup> Randhawa goes on to suggest that "snobs and Anglophiles need not raise their eyebrows," presumably out of disdain for the inclusion of traditional features in the "modern" kitchen, because "modernization does not mean abandoning the good things of our traditional

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<sup>38</sup> Taya Zinkia, "India's Most Modern City: Cool But Not Clean," n.d. (ca. 1952), Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 1, Folder 2, UCLA Special Collection 1364.

<sup>39</sup> Jane Drew, United Nations Housing and Town Planning Bulletin No. 9, The Delhi Seminar on Housing and Planning for South East Asia, conference proceedings; RIBA Archives, TyJ/29.

<sup>40</sup> Christopher Rand, "City on a Tilting Plain," *The New Yorker*, April 30, 1955, p. 44.

<sup>41</sup> M.S. Randhawa, "The Problems of a Growing City," Tribune Press, Ambala, 1966, p. 4; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2; UCLA Special Collection 1364.

life.” Rather, he encouraged the modernizing Indian to keep an open-mind and to get beyond class prejudices, in order to take best advantage of the available options. By way of illustration he stated, “only very recently the Americans have taught our urban middle classes the virtues of popcorn, which was previously regarded as good enough only for rustics.”<sup>42</sup> Despite the awkwardness of Randhawa’s comparison, Drew to some extent seems to have shared this view; she added additional kitchen space as budgets allowed.

Outside of the kitchen, other innovations met with criticism. Such touted features as the concrete *jali* screens were intended to provide homes with air circulation and shade from the intense summer sun but posed real security concerns, and were derided by some as “thief ladders.”<sup>43</sup> Fry reported criticism from upper-class clients that the *jalis* were a waste of space, or too akin to outmoded *pardah* screens.<sup>44</sup> Others considered the *jali*’s dust-catching design to be detrimentally unclean.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, the new home designs did not allow residents to keep cattle, or, as was often the practice for a household, a single buffalo.<sup>46</sup> According to the city regulations, cattle sheds could not be built on a site less than 1,000 square yards, and a proposed shed could not be built within forty feet of any habitable room of the main house.<sup>47</sup> Despite

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<sup>42</sup> M.S. Randhawa, “The Problems of a Growing City,” Tribune Press, Ambala, 1966, p. 5; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2; UCLA Special Collection 1364.

<sup>43</sup> Taya Zinkia, “India’s Most Modern City: Cool But Not Clean,” n.d. (ca. 1952), Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 1, Folder 2, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>44</sup> Maxwell Fry, “India,” 1983, p. 33; RIBA Archives, F&D Box 4, Folder 2.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. See also Elvin, *Ride to Chandigarh*, 1957, p. 324.

<sup>46</sup> Christopher Rand, “City on a Tilting Plain,” *The New Yorker*, April 30, 1955, p. 44.

<sup>47</sup> “Punjab Government Legislative Department, The Punjab Urban Estates (Development and Regulation) Act, 1964, Punjab Act No. 22 of 1964,” Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 5, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

these restrictions—or, perhaps, because of them—stray cattle were rampant in the city.<sup>48</sup> This fact led Le Corbusier to issue an impassioned plea to Randhawa to have a “simple fence” constructed around the High Court in order to protect it from grazing stray cattle.<sup>49</sup> Fault too was found with the ubiquitous sunbreaker, or *brises soleil*. The feature was designed by Le Corbusier, constructed of reinforced concrete, and relied upon to keep out the harsh summer sun while letting in the lower winter sun. Sunbreakers were criticized for several reasons. First, their projection prevented the construction of verandas, a popular traditional feature of Indian homes that was often treated as an extra room.<sup>50</sup> The veranda issue was put forth as another instance of a foreign architect imposing an unwanted solution for a problem that had already been solved: the roofed veranda produced the same sun-blocking effect as a sunbreaker for the interior rooms of the house, while also allowing for the seasonable expansion of livable space and a degree of indoor-outdoor living. Second, a perhaps more damning critique of the sunbreakers came not only from Indian inhabitants but from the European team of architects as well: made as they were of concrete, the *brises soleil* acted ultimately not as a cooling device but rather as “heat sinks, radiating heat all night, without cooling, before reheating in the sun the following day.”<sup>51</sup>

Although these concerns are well established in the literature, it is worth noting that at least one contemporary journalist—Christopher Rand, a reporter for *The New Yorker*—observed

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<sup>48</sup> “Chandigarh Socio-Economic Survey, Conducted in May, 1957; issued by Economic and Statistical Adviser to Government Punjab,” printed 1958, p. 47; Ravi Kalia Archive Box 2 Folder 3, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>49</sup> Memo, “Urgent, as a psychological theme,” from Le Corbusier to Randhawa, December 8, 1957; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2 Folder 3, UCLA Special Collections, 1364.

<sup>50</sup> Christopher Rand, “City on a Tilting Plain,” *The New Yorker*, April 30, 1955, p. 42.

<sup>51</sup> Jane Drew, “Reflections on My Life and Work,” unpublished document, March 1993; RIBA Archives, F&D/25/3, p. 4.

that for its part the New Delhi press produced many potentially misleading “exposé”-style lists of complaints regarding the construction of the new city. It appears there was no ulterior motive, exactly, for such negative press, except that it made for good copy. For more mercenary reasons many Shimla landlords were said to have industriously circulated commentary on the “poor” conditions at Chandigarh in a last-ditch effort to prevent mass exodus from the hill station to the new city. Rand quotes Thapar: “Whenever I hear stories about no water at Chandigarh, or heavy rains and winds, or dust storms, I know the Shimla landlords have been at it again.”<sup>52</sup> As Rand suggests, we might well read such overly critical reports with this motivation in mind. A 1958 report conducted on socio-economic conditions and based on a door-to-door survey of Chandigarh residents found that three-quarters of homeowners responding preferred the current government-constructed housing conditions as compared to their previous living spaces.<sup>53</sup> However, 14% of those responding complained of (unidentified) “defects in the kitchen,” while 35% cited the living spaces as spatially inadequate and 49% reported concerns for safety due to the “thief ladder” *jali* screens.<sup>54</sup> Decades later, by the early 2000s, the brick *jalis* were no longer considered a security threat but rather simply “irrelevant” and “inconvenient.”<sup>55</sup>

Many of the families that took part in the 1957 survey reported that they had engineered their own solutions for some of the reported concerns: many of the outdoor spaces intended by the architects to serve as shared courtyards, for example, were by this time being used as kitchens. Meanwhile, the indoor kitchen had in some cases been commandeered to serve as an

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<sup>52</sup> Christopher Rand, “City on a Tilting Plain,” *The New Yorker*, April 30, 1955, p. 40-42.

<sup>53</sup> “Chandigarh Socio-Economic Survey, Conducted in May, 1957; issued by Economic and Statistical Adviser to Government Punjab,” printed 1958; Ravi Kalia Archive Box 2 Folder 3, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Kiran Joshi and I.J.S. Bakshi, “Conserving Modern Heritage, Concrete, and Chandigarh,” in *Corbusier’s Concrete*, 2005, pp. 10-25; citation p. 15.

extra interior room.<sup>56</sup> Such modification was technically illegal but was presumably overlooked by the reporting team. Residents expressed satisfaction overall with the city's sanitation scheme and regular access to running water, but also indicated a preference for Indian-style commodes—housing grades 9 and above had been designed with Western-style fixtures.<sup>57</sup> More than publishing these stated preferences and housing work-arounds, however, the report as a whole concerned itself with the unsanitary conditions of unregulated housing. The report notes that the “labor huts” built in Bajwara, an incorporated village primarily occupied by the construction workers who were building the new city and by *rehriwallas* or mobile-shop merchants, were in “glaring contrast” to the conditions found in government-subsidized housing. Sanitation in the labor huts is here described as “deplorable,” and the report calls for “attention to be paid to this village.”<sup>58</sup>

A year after the 1957 survey and taking a even less humanitarian tone, Randhawa noted that the “erstwhile villages” adjacent to the city, with their “non-existent lavatories,” were an “unsanitary nuisance.”<sup>59</sup> These conditions were reportedly exacerbated by the villagers’ practice of keeping cows and buffalo that would occasionally wander into the city. Similarly, Randhawa noted that the “illegal shops” that had been established at the outskirts of Sector 22—the entry portal by bus to the city—gave a “bad impression” to new arrivals.<sup>60</sup> He blames part of the situation on the difficulty in securing permits by those wishing to build within the city, as well as

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<sup>56</sup> “Chandigarh Socio-Economic Survey, Conducted in May, 1957; issued by Economic and Statistical Adviser to Government Punjab,” printed 1958; Ravi Kalia Archive Box 2 Folder 3, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Memorandum from M.S. Randhawa, December 16, 1958; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2 Folder 3, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

on the expense of available housing for non-government employees.<sup>61</sup> Upon a return visit to Chandigarh in 1957 Le Corbusier himself bemoaned a similar “bad impression,” but his concerns were centered mainly on the shoddy maintenance and lack of code enforcement concerning the buildings that were then under construction at the Capitol Complex. As part of his larger argument to focus on upkeep in Sector 1, the French architect warned of an ominous and unspecified “dangerous psychological reaction” sure to be suffered by both officials and visitors should the trend of haphazard maintenance continue.<sup>62</sup> Again and again the record reveals city officials’ prevalent concern with restricting or mitigating “squatter” establishments, but, as the previously detailed 1982 “Regional Plan, Chandigarh” document makes evident, there were no ready solutions at hand for providing approved or adequate housing for low-income laborers.

This chorus of concerned official voices led to a second displacement of the area’s original villagers. By late summer 1959 some 2,400 illegal huts had been removed from “various sectors” throughout that city and plans existed to remove that many more; “suitable sites in labor colonies had been provided” in an unspecified location for the displaced.<sup>63</sup> In addition to the huts destroyed within the city limits, some 300 sites at Chandigarh’s periphery had been demolished, and the destruction of 350 additional huts was in progress. One assumes that the living conditions in the labor colonies were not at a higher or more sanitary level than that of the huts being destroyed, but rather that the local officials were adopting an “out of sight, out of mind” approach to the issue. In addition to a wish to conform to the original city plans that banned unplanned and unchecked growth, local officials also expressed a wish to maintain

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Memorandum from Le Corbusier to M.S. Randhawa, December 8, 1957; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 3, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>63</sup> Letter from Vohra to Randhawa, “Slum Conditions in and Around Chandigarh,” August 22, 1959; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 3, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

Chandigarh—with its vigorous and concerted efforts to check urban sprawl and city-adjacent slum conditions—as an example for other Indian cities. By way of illustration, in 1966 Randhawa characterized Delhi as “an odd mixture of buildings,” Calcutta as “disfigured by unsightly slums of the worst type,” Lucknow as “still an eighteenth-century city,” Bombay as a “crude replica” of nineteenth-century London, and Madras as “an overgrown village;” in his reckoning, “Chandigarh alone can claim to be a purely modern city.”<sup>64</sup> With a similar view in mind, Shri B.B. Vohra, Punjab Secretary to the Government in 1959, highlighted the importance of enacting and enforcing a well-developed Master Plan in all subsequent urban planning in India, noting this document’s usefulness in serving as a guide-map to prevent or remove slums.<sup>65</sup> We have already seen how Master Plans of similar scope and design to that of Chandigarh were later developed in nearby Mohali and Panchkula.<sup>66</sup>

Concerns over the newly imposed housing designs and restrictions continued to negatively impact inhabitants decades after construction, at least according to one observer. A telling letter from Mike Labbé to architect John Papaioannou, reporting on the situation in Islamabad and Chandigarh in 1976, found that the then-present planners in both cities (by 1976 “all planners [were] now nationals with no foreigners on permanent staff”):

“are very disappointed in the originators of the city plans they are working with. They feel in both [cities] that not enough effort was made to study the society involved, be it Pakistan or Punjab. As a result many alternations in the plan have been required where a little homework by Le Corbusier or Doxiadis would have adjusted for them ahead of time.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> M.S. Randhawa, “The Problems of a Growing City,” Tribune Press, Ambala, 1966, p. 6; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2; UCLA Special Collection 1364.

<sup>65</sup> Memorandum, “On the creation of a working group on town and country planning,” from Shri B.B. Vohra, August 8, 1959; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 3, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>66</sup> “Regional Plan, Chandigarh,” 1982, Town and Country Planning Organization, Ministry of Works and Housing, Government of India, p. 34; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 6, Folder 1, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>67</sup> Letter from Mike Labbé to John Papaioannou, February 15, 1976; RIBA Archive F&D/4/10.

Among the criticized elements twenty years after construction were the cities' low density, no legal accommodation for the cattle "so important to lower classes," no designated approved areas provided for street vendors, and, moreover, not enough evidence of input from Indians during the planning stage. Despite Nehru's intention to create a laboratory and in opposition to Randhawa's interpretation, Chandigarh and Islamabad both appeared to Labbé to have no practical application for the rest of India and Pakistan: "they are both cities mainly for the rich and do not provide alternatives for the rest of the country."<sup>68</sup> Apparently, to this outside observer, the city intended to serve as a "laboratory" for architectural and design better living had only succeeded in perpetuating class inequalities. Several years earlier, a 1969 memo from Chief Architect and Secretary Chowdhary had called for a regional plan to address the housing issues that many residents faced: multiple families lived in houses designed for single families, and squatters and unauthorized shops were rampant.<sup>69</sup> In residents' attempts to find affordable housing solutions the city's housing was being co-opted in ways that were not only illegal and unintended but also potentially detrimental from a safety and sanitation standpoint.

Taking at least a measure of the criticism to be valid, the issue at its core, perhaps, was not the imposition of misguided or inappropriate standards but rather too much rigidity in the plan's overreliance on a timeless value of the universal. In common with other contemporary "high-modernists," Le Corbusier embraced a sweeping vision of how twentieth-century advances in science and technology might be applied, largely via the state, to benefit and change nearly

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Memo, "Regional Plan for Chandigarh City Region," Chief Architect and Secretary Chowdhary, September 30, 1969; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 3, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

every aspect of human activity.<sup>70</sup> This vision applied not only to housing in Chandigarh but also to the designs for the city as a whole. In accordance with Le Corbusier's modernist design concepts, the city was built to "Modulor Man" (i.e. 6-foot male) scale—and indeed there is today a Modulor Man sculpture in the Capitol Complex and at the Chandigarh City Museum [Figure 79]. This human-based scale has, ironically, been regarded as dehumanizing in its essentializing not only of human physical traits but also of desired activity and living requirements.<sup>71</sup> Le Corbusier defended the Modulor system against contemporary criticism, categorizing it as "harmonizing" and capable of "making peace between the foot-inch and the metric system."<sup>72</sup> His mid-century, CIAM-based universalist desire to create cities as perfectly calibrated, perpetual motion "machines" for living has been widely critiqued (and occasionally defended), and such criticism of the International Style and mid-century design is not unique to Chandigarh.<sup>73</sup> In hindsight, Le Corbusier's plans for Chandigarh did not account for future change, adaptation, or population growth. Originally envisioned with a population cap at 500,000 and with restrictions on expanding city limits and increasing population density, the city today is home to over one million. Whether the discrepancy between the intended and the actual population reflects short-sightedness or the realization of an undesirable, over-blown population are subjects for debate.

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<sup>70</sup> See James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998, especially Chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>71</sup> See, for example, Iain Jackson, "Politicized Territory," 2003, p. 133.

<sup>72</sup> Christopher Rand, "City on a Tilting Plain," 1955, p. 60.

<sup>73</sup> For more on Le Corbusier's design theory as it relates to the concept of city-as-machine, see Norma Evenson, *Le Corbusier: The Machine and the Grand Design*, New York: George Braziller, Inc. 1969; Hasan-Uddin Khan, introductory essay, in *Le Corbusier: Chandigarh and the Modern City, Insights into the Iconic City Sixty Years Later*, Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing Pvt Ltd., 2009, pp. 18-27.

Such topics have ushered in a body of scholarly literature that seeks to correct or fine-tune our understanding of the city's legacy and the team's intentions. One such example is Manish Chalana's calling into question of long-held and propagated assumptions about the greenbelt periphery around the city.<sup>74</sup> Chalana's impetus to write the article is based in his belief that the Periphery Control Act of 1952 has been consistently misinterpreted but also that it, at its core, does not reflect the architectural team's vision. Other commenters, such as architecture scholar Gerald Steyn, have defended Le Corbusier's modulator designs as more organic and humane than the current post-modern perspective has given him credit for.<sup>75</sup> Even Steyn, however, acknowledges that Le Corbusier was perhaps too "paternalistic" in his assumptions that "he knew best" how residents would and should inhabit a city.<sup>76</sup> The implementation of a "master plan" as the eternal governing agent of a given city has been criticized not only in Chandigarh but also in other South Asian cities, such as New Delhi.<sup>77</sup> Regardless of ongoing critique, the "master plan" concept and its authoritative norms are protected and enshrined in Chandigarh to this day. An official edict based on the "Modulator Man"—which Iain Jackson has imagined as the "cosmic tyrant" who "broadcasts a set of instructions for all occasions"—places restrictions on any new development deemed not to be in line with Le Corbusier's original architectural vision.<sup>78</sup> The authoritarian edict was established in accordance with general high-modernist principles that dictated the suitability of science in designing utopian schemes for

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<sup>74</sup> Manish Chalana, "Chandigarh: City and Periphery," in *Journal of Planning History*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2014; pp. 62-84.

<sup>75</sup> Gerald Steyn, "Le Corbusier and the Human Body," *SAJAH*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2012, pp. 259-272.

<sup>76</sup> Gerald Steyn, "Le Corbusier and the Human Body," 2012, p. 271.

<sup>77</sup> Ravi Sundaram, *Pirate Modernity: Delhi's Media Urbanism*, London: Routledge Press, 2010.

<sup>78</sup> Iain Jackson, "Politicized Territory," 2003, p. 133.

social life.<sup>79</sup> Such standardization as was seen in Chandigarh may, however, have largely come down not to the Western-imposed dictations of a “cosmically tyrannical” modular man but rather to very local financial concerns. A strict budget decreased any flexibility of the plan: tight control on costs, down to the rupee, encouraged the implementation and enforcement of standardized housing that did not deviate from the original design. Fry noted that, even with the ready availability of bricks and the standardized nature of the designs, it was only possible to stay within budget because the labor force—men, women, and children that he rather patronizingly referred to as “full of beauty and cheerfulness”—were underpaid and uncared for.<sup>80</sup>

### ***Recording the City: The Promise of Chandigarh***

‘And this city, is it a worth-seeing place?’

‘It will be. It’s only just beginning. They sent for four of the most famous architects in the world to design it. [...] Will you come?’<sup>81</sup>

Omi looked around and blew out a deep breath. ‘Are we still in India, are we?’ Omi said, at his first sight of Chandigarh. The roads were wide and spotlessly clean. The buildings, pink and white and cream and grey, were strange but beautiful. They had straight lines, gridded façades or square pigeonholes stuck to the front. Omi was baffled a little but impressed a lot. ‘Best and beautiful, this is,’ he said.<sup>82</sup>

Six months in a year were torture. The summer sun baked our roof (...). Winter was a different kind of hardship. Our house became very cold. (...) Its walls were always blue with seepage and its taps were mostly dry. Yet, I loved that house...<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 1998, p. 94.

<sup>80</sup> Maxwell Fry, “Chandigarh: New Capital City,” *Architectural Record*, June 1955, pp. 139-148; accessed in RIBA Archive, F&D/4/1.

<sup>81</sup> Harold Elvin, *The Ride to Chandigarh*, 1957, pp. 5-6.

<sup>82</sup> Balraj Khanna, *Nation of Fools, or Scenes from Indian Life*, London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1984, p. 49.

<sup>83</sup> Abhilash Gaur, *Type-II: Memories of My First House (Boy from Chandigarh, Book I)*, Kindle Edition, 2014.

The conflicts and clashes revealed in the archival record—both historic and present-day, foundational and ongoing, staged between architects, city officials, administrative workers, non-administrative laborers, and local villagers—expose the city of Chandigarh as a highly contested experience. In the present section I consider published memoirs and literary works in order to further expose and consider the stakes of living in the new city. Very often the concerns of observers, residents, Partition migrants, and displaced villagers are superseded by the record of architectural and governmental planning; in this section I develop the immediate experience of living in and imagining Chandigarh in the city's early years.

Looked at from a literary vantage point, we can see that, despite its flaws, the city did become at least in part a tonic for Punjab's shattered morale in its quest to elevate its people from poverty with "the promise of progress, plenty, and equality."<sup>84</sup> The promise of Chandigarh is recorded not only in the archives—in allotments for refugees, high standards of housing, and the government's assurance of an almost otherworldly modern—but also in contemporaneous literature. *The Ride to Chandigarh*, published in 1957, records the autobiographical bicycle journey of Englishman and architect Harold Elvin from Bombay to Chandigarh.<sup>85</sup> Repeatedly told there is no road yet to Chandigarh from Delhi, Elvin nevertheless continues (and eventually succeeds) in his journey north. Elvin describes a situation similar to that encountered by photographer Ernst Scheidegger in the early days of city construction: for as many people he encountered who were enthusiastic about the city, there was an equal number of people who had never heard of the project. Scheidegger, for example, recounts his surprise and dismay when, in

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<sup>84</sup> Atreyee Gupta, "In a Postcolonial Diction," 2013, p. 32.

<sup>85</sup> Harold Elvin, *The Ride to Chandigarh*, 1957.

around 1953 at the Interior Ministry of Delhi, an official countered his request for permission to photograph with “Chandigarh? Never heard of it! How is it spelled?”<sup>86</sup>

Word in many circles, it seems, was slow to circulate. Despite the occasional incredulous response he encountered, Elvin continued on his bicycle journey north. Along the way he describes his enthusiasm for the developing city to those he meets, calling the construction project exciting architecturally and an encouraging sign for the future of India. However, when he actually arrives in the growing city his reviews are mixed. Having discussed designs with Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew, he applauds Drew’s efforts in low-income housing: “Her peons’ village is sheer genius of designing for the poor [...], beautifully arranged and compact for £270!”<sup>87</sup> Elvin goes on, however, to bemoan the “damn silly balustrades” of Le Corbusier’s High Court, the grid of intra-sector roads that he deems impractical, and the standing kitchen design found in the upper-income houses.<sup>88</sup> He attacks the separation of housing for rich and poor into separate sectors, and refers to the sun-breakers on Drew’s houses as “shockingly unhealthy” dust-traps: “dozens of cubby-holes are entirely uncleanable [sic] and with the sand that’s creeping around outside they’ll soon be a mess.”<sup>89</sup> Elvin, after several days of meeting with Fry, Drew, and Jeanneret, and several Indian architects assisting on the city’s designs, describes his personal affection for the personalities and many of the efforts of the team, but sums up his reaction to the much-anticipated city in this way:

Then I said: ‘It seems a city without a heart,’  
Answer: ‘Its heart is split up.’

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<sup>86</sup> Ernst Scheidegger, “Looking Back on Chandigarh,” in *Chandigarh 1956*, 2010, p. 9.

<sup>87</sup> Harold Elvin, *The Ride to Chandigarh*, 1957, p. 326.

<sup>88</sup> Harold Elvin, *The Ride to Chandigarh*, 1957, p. 323.

<sup>89</sup> Harold Elvin, *The Ride to Chandigarh*, 1957, p. 324.

One man's meat is another man's poison. There is so much I love here: so much I loathe.<sup>90</sup>

Envisioning during his ride north that Chandigarh was to be something of a social and architectural utopia, Elvin records his disappointment in a city he ultimately views as well-intentioned but essentially out of step with Indian life. Even still, he notes that it is a promising “hive of activity” with much potential, adding, “what praise we must grant to the initiative of the Punjabi Government!”<sup>91</sup> The project's heart and the bustle of activity it has caused, Elvin seems to say, is in the right place—even if the execution has fallen short.

*Nation of Fools*, a novel written from the perspective of an Indian family severely affected by Partition, records the search for upward mobility among migrants:

[T]his was his dream that made this separation bearable and dulled the pain of Partition: one day he, Shadi Lal Khatri [...] would own a proper place of red bricks—not like this wood and corrugated-iron dump, nor like that shapeless mud house in the Camp—in ‘our new capital.’ Khatri liked to call Chandigarh ‘our new capital.’ By doing so he felt he had acquired a stake in it. And in Chandigarh he could educate his son like a gentlemen's son.<sup>92</sup>

The promise of Chandigarh to families like Khatri's, who had been displaced and traumatized by Partition, was the promise of higher standards in living, education, and employment. It offered sturdy homes and possibilities as options to take the place of “shapeless mud huts,” and the sturdiness of these structures, together with the possibility of having a stake in the new city, had the ability to combat the pains suffered at Partition and the loss of a steady life the traumatic events had engendered. Chandigarh, in this reckoning, allowed refugees to harness the positive momentum of Independence, rather than be limited by the negative effects of Partition. Khatri's vision of Chandigarh is essentially one of a caste- and class-less society: equal opportunities and

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Harold Elvin, *The Ride to Chandigarh*, 1957, p. 327.

<sup>92</sup> Balraj Khanna, *Nation of Fools*, 1984, pp. 7-8.

reinvention available for the taking. In a slightly different way, this is the vision that Elvin, too, hopes for, but one that he comes to feel is prohibited by the income-based structure and class-segregated location of the housing. In the Chandigarh of Khatri's mind, however, one's social and economic class are immaterial and one's children could be raised in the manner of a "gentlemen's son." As I describe later in this dissertation, the concerns of class certainly did not diminish in the new city—indeed, they may have been exacerbated by the realities of an immigrant city and the architects' scaled housing scheme. But, importantly, at the city's onset freedom from the class restrictions that weighed so heavily on life in other places seemed in many circles a real possibility, and many of the people attracted to the new city believed it to be so.

In *Nation of Fools*, Khatri's family is never able to fully escape class issues, but establishing a home and business in the new city affords tremendous improvement over their temporary post-Partition existence in a makeshift refugee village. Certain class mobility was possible in Chandigarh that had been impossible elsewhere, particularly for Khatri's son, Omi. After intensive English study, Omi feels confident mixing with and befriending the children of the Punjabi elites, known alternatively as the "'imported shirts,' because of their attachment to imported goods," or the "Shimla Pinks," because of the "healthy pink in their cheeks which only the mountain air and water gives."<sup>93</sup> Omi goes on to attend Chandigarh College, an achievement that his earlier academic performance and lack of connections seemed to preclude. The family opts to keep its allotted land and housing/shop structure rather than to illegally sell it at a profit, and with the aspirational goading of Omi, Khatri decides to expand the sweets shop into a full restaurant and catering business. The venture is successful. This family economic and social

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<sup>93</sup> Balraj Khanna, *Nation of Fools*, 1984, p. 145.

mobility happen against the backdrop of mounting tensions for the separate Hindu state, Haryana, although even as these events unfold they are notably inconsequential in the lives of the protagonists. When told the protest marches would halt for the foreseeable future, the response of Omi and his friends is not relief but rather, “Pity. It was such fun [...]. Best way to waste an afternoon, it was. Better than any *mela* fun-fair.”<sup>94</sup> In actual fact, the tensions surrounding the creation of a Hindi-language state in the region continued for some time, and included not only protests but also riots and coordinated acts of fasting-to-the-death by high-level politicians and religious figures. For some time it even appeared that the newly formed city, a direct result of traumatic partition, would itself be partitioned: actually splitting the city itself between Punjab and Haryana was presented widely in media sources as the likely “solution.” Partition of Delhi rather than Chandigarh was proposed as well.<sup>95</sup> However high the stakes and threat of a partitioned Chandigarh, Khatri’s family find enough class mobility and economic stability to utterly dismiss these concerns.

Eventually, Omi passes his college exams and, at the book’s close, enters into an arranged marriage. The matter of the family’s financial well-being and Omi’s success, as far as Khatri is concerned, is settled—and this success has been fundamentally due to the educational and economic possibilities found in Chandigarh. Many non-fictionalized refugees were anxious to take advantage of such potential: in a report to Nehru, Bhargava excitedly describes the

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<sup>94</sup> Balraj Khanna, *Nation of Fools*, 1984, p. 170.

<sup>95</sup> “Division Plan Opposed,” *Tribune*, June 7, 1970; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 3, Folder 2, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

demand for sites in the new city: “Bidders come from far and wide, including places like Bombay, Gwalior, and several towns in U.P.!”<sup>96</sup>

In his memoir, journalist Abhilash Gaur recounts the daily life of a youth spent in Chandigarh’s governmental housing in the early 1980s.<sup>97</sup> The book is primarily a record of minor childhood incidents and youthful impressions—recollections of products that no longer exist, neighbors and social interactions, improvised games—but also includes notable commentary on twenty years of day-to-day living in Sector-30 government-provided housing. Reflecting on his childhood, Gaur recalls the flawed housing design and lack of maintenance that resulted in the regular seepage of rainwater, the intense heat of the summer matched only by the intense cold of the winter—miseries brought about by the design of the sunbreakers and the predominance of concrete—and the pigeons’ commandeering of the *jali* design for building nests. Although governmental reports promoted the notion that city-wide modern standards had resulted in a ready supply of water in Chandigarh’s taps, Gaur recalls regular shortages of water on the upper level upon which their apartment was located, noting that “water was scarce on our floor” and that buckets had to be filled daily from the taps at ground level.<sup>98</sup> Gaur notes that the intense sun that, in summer months, poured into the home’s interior via its sunbreakers allowed him to start a small fire with a magnifying glass.<sup>99</sup> Praising his home’s *jali* screen for enabling a view of the nearby mountains and of the streets below, Gaur mentions—with fond remembrance rather than criticism—the neighborhood boys who regularly climbed the screens to access the

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<sup>96</sup> Confidential Report from Chief Minister of Punjab to Nehru, dated October 17, 1953; Nehru papers from the Prime Minister’s Office, Delhi, Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 2, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>97</sup> Abhilash Gaur, *Type-II: Memories of My First House (Boy from Chandigarh Book I)*, 2014.

<sup>98</sup> Abhilash Gaur, *Type-II: Memories of My First House*, 2014, p. 323.

<sup>99</sup> Abhilash Gaur, *Type-II: Memories of My First House*, 2014, p. 493.

upper floors and roofs of their buildings.<sup>100</sup> Nostalgia for his childhood prevents any hard criticism of his family's home, but Gaur does note some of the frustrations of his parents. Among these is the inability to move the family to larger accommodations as the two children grew; although larger homes would periodically become available as previous tenants vacated, the long line of others waiting to occupy them always prevented a move for the Gaur family.<sup>101</sup>

At the close of his memoir Gaur considers his youth spent in Chandigarh—in his mind an idyllic, sunlit locale composed of open spaces and trees—as compared to his family's current home outside of Delhi. He describes the home he shares today with his wife and one child in Indirapuram unfavorably, and as remarkable only because of its larger size. There is a name, he notes, for this way of life, one with severely limited free spaces for children to explore, a lack of trees, and an abundance of sooty air, and that is “modernity.”<sup>102</sup> Interestingly, in Gaur's reckoning and from the vantage point of adulthood, Chandigarh, the city synonymous with mid-century modernity in India, is a quaint, leafy town. Here, the sector-as-village takes an interesting shape: for Gaur, the entire city was one large bucolic village when compared with Delhi's “modernity.”

Certainly, the misty outlines of a remembered childhood necessarily prevent Gaur's objective consideration of the city's spaces, housing, and resources. The book does, however, provide a candid account of some of the improvised, low-profile work-arounds to the problems that arose when the city designed to provide universal solutions fell short. Not visible enough to be cited as illegal, the shifting of furniture that made the veranda into an extra room, the application of mesh screens that prevented pigeons from freely entering the home through the

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<sup>100</sup> Abhilash Gaur, *Type-II: Memories of My First House*, 2014, p. 554.

<sup>101</sup> Abhilash Gaur, *Type-II: Memories of My First House*, 2014, p. 70.

<sup>102</sup> Abhilash Gaur, *Type-II: Memories of My First House*, 2014, p. 812.

*jalis*, and the twice-daily filling of buckets to compensate for the tap that would not flow all amount to a mass of small-scale, unofficial improvisations that presumably were repeated in many homes throughout the city.

In Chandigarh as anywhere else, hopes met with realities and adjustments were necessarily made; what was different in this city was the weight of symbolic import and the expectation that such necessary adjustments had been made at the design, rather than the inhabitation, level. As the above detailed literary works illustrate, personalized adjustments were endemic even if not officially permitted, and highly individualized stakes, ambitions, and efforts in themselves work to splinter the myth that has tended to focus more on the moment of the city's origin than on its day-to-day reality. Few in number, such literary accounts are the exception rather than the norm; rehearsals of the fevered afternoon in a closed Shimla office, details of the designs for the Capitol Complex, and comparisons between Chandigarh and Le Corbusier's earlier, unrealized conceptual designs are much more prevalent. Providing not a dissenting voice but rather a fuller one, these literary sources help to illustrate how personal ambitions and the individualized accommodations and adaptations of city spaces, made to seem quite rarefied in descriptions of the Rock Garden, are actually a pervasive element of life in Chandigarh. The following sections turn their attention towards the physical and material components of both the city and the Garden, and demonstrate the interconnected concerns of both.

### ***Material Matters***

Years before his involvement with the Rock Garden, Randhawa had argued for the transformative powers of art and visual culture in Chandigarh's architectural spaces. Displaying

portraits of outstanding Punjabi athletes in young men's dormitories would, he argued, improve the youths' discipline and determination.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, after viewing living conditions in various types of houses a decade into the city's inhabitation, Randhawa determined that "the aesthetic sense of the general public should be improved;" accordingly, in addition to encouraging Chandigarhians to "cultivate the habit of reading good literature," he suggested that Sector-17 stationary markets sell "books of art and paintings and also obtain prints of famous printings done by Indian artists."<sup>104</sup> Displaying such paintings in shop windows would, he argued, make clear to the public that "good paintings at reasonably cheap prices [were] available for decorating their houses."<sup>105</sup> Such availability would, in turn, have a positive, transformative effect on Chandigarh residents. Randhawa considered it one of his key official roles to "improve the standards of people as regards their appreciation for fine art."<sup>106</sup> Randhawa had earlier helped to establish a number of public parks in Chandigarh, as well as the city's Government Museum and Art Gallery. Recalling that Randhawa played a critical role in establishing the Rock Garden as a site maintained by the city and open to the public, what did the Chief Administrator have in mind as the instructive, transformative powers of the Rock Garden?

Randhawa did not publish any material on the site, nor did he issue any known statements concerning his view on the Garden's potential value to the public.<sup>107</sup> Taking his actions together with his reported views on the power of art objects, he may have valued the existence of an

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<sup>103</sup> "Meeting minutes to discuss second phase, Chief Architect's office," August 29, 1966; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 3; UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Iain Jackson has noted the rather surprising lack of records on the topic, stating "no official papers, if they exist at all, have been accessible during the last three years of repeated attempts to obtain them." Iain Jackson, "Cataloguing Nek Chand's Rock Garden, Chandigarh," unpublished dissertation, 2008, p. 24, footnote 9.

ongoing art project, one that directly engaged the public with its unexpected use of ordinary materials, its provoking changes in scale and orientation, and its creativity. Whatever Randhawa's views were, the majority of observers have attached critical significance to the Garden's striking material makeup and use of motifs.

The author of a 1988 *New York Times* article about the Rock Garden noted “it is the *material* that makes [Chand's] work so unusual.”<sup>108</sup> If the titles of other media sources are any indication—such as “India's Vast Trash Garden a Monument to Recycling” and “Concrete Cosmos of Bits and Pieces”<sup>109</sup>—many others have agreed. Particularly when considered within Chandigarh, an Indian city noted for its consistency of forms and extensive use of modern construction materials, the Garden's unexpected and striking use of debris, discards, and natural rocks, as well as Harappan and village motifs, has been established as one of the site's defining characteristics. As I explore in this section, these distinguishing materials, motifs, and site features have been overwhelmingly oriented towards the past—a past that is sometimes configured as biographical, at other times regional, and still at others an imagined collective fantasy. Frequently, the result has been a highlighting of the purported philosophical differences between the city and the Garden. As we have seen with the infantilization of Chand as an untaught genius in the previous section, this formulation of an imagined past similarly crafts the by-now familiar animosity between the site and the city. This time, however, the terms are slightly different: the materials, motifs, and features of the Garden are rendered as an nostalgia-oriented undermining of the founding principle of the city intended to be, in Nehru's terms, unfettered by the past.

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<sup>108</sup> “12 Acres of Garbage Bits are an Artistic Attraction in India,” *The New York Times*, January 13, 1988.

<sup>109</sup> “India's Vast Trash Garden a Monument to Recycling,” *National Geographic*, October 7, 2002; “Concrete Cosmos of Bits and Pieces,” *New York Times* review of *Concrete Kingdoms* at AFAM, August 11, 2006.

In constructing the Garden during its early years, Chand relied on materials made readily available as a result of his employment with the developing city: excess concrete and rebar, broken fixtures—and also by the disrupted lives of Partition migrants and villagers who were coming and going: household discards, traditional pottery, and broken bangles. As earlier described, Chand had for some time been in the practice of collecting unusually shaped rocks from local seasonal riverbeds. As such, Chand’s work might be thought of as a material archive of the region’s geological and human history: the area’s ancient fragments as well as its modern history of migration, displacement, and construction are inscribed, as it were, on the site’s material components. In Chandigarh, however, material concerns did not first find expression in the Garden but rather in the planning of the larger city. Extensive consideration of the symbolic meaning as well as simple efficacy of a particular material was extended not only to construction materials but to landscaping as well. Long before Chand’s creative use of materials engaged a conversation on materiality in the city, Chandigarh, as I demonstrate in the following section, had been concerned with both its projected and realized material makeup.

### ***The Material of the Developing City***

From the earliest days of planning, the materiality of the city’s fabric was given heavy consideration—both in terms of practical, economic matters and in terms of symbolic weight. While the International Style had, in the early twentieth century, done much to equate the use of glass, steel, and concrete with modernity, the early 1950s cast a slightly different light on material concerns of urban planning worldwide as many countries grappled with post-war shortages of steel and timber. In Punjab a tight control of costs dictated that much of the new construction work, particularly housing and public service buildings, was to be executed in brick.

In 1949, prior to and in preparation for groundbreaking on the new city, Chief Engineer Varma had ordered the local manufacture of some five crore (fifty million) bricks. The manufacture of such a significant surplus of specific building material effectively forced the primary use of brick in the construction of the new city. Varma's action was taken without consulting the architecture team, and indeed, was initiated prior to assembling the second, Le Corbusier-led team, and local brick manufacture continued well into the initial construction of the city.<sup>110</sup>

According to Fry's description, the local manufacture of these bricks was a decidedly homegrown affair. In an unpublished memoir of his time in India, Fry describes the use of a makeshift "rusty metal chimney" in the small-scale, local brick production as "the nearest approach to machinery."<sup>111</sup> This chimney was moved from site to site, to wherever bricks were at the time being burnt: "a little brass bowl with a hole in the bottom [told the workers], when the water ran out, that it was time to move the chimney."<sup>112</sup> Fry's descriptions are offered with more than a little disdain at the unscientific and rather haphazard condition of construction at the Chandigarh site. Despite these potential misgivings local officials incentivized the use of brick not only by strictly enforcing the budgets for architects' designs, but also by offering brick at a nominal surcharge of 2%—a significant reduction from the standard surcharge of 12%—when the brick in question was slated for use in home construction.<sup>113</sup> In the words of one local official in a construction report to Nehru, "there [was] no shortage of bricks."<sup>114</sup> This statement

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<sup>110</sup> Jackson and Holland, *The Architecture of Edwin Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew*, 2014, p. 222.

<sup>111</sup> Maxwell Fry, "India," unpublished manuscript; RIBA Archives, F&D Box 4, Folder 2, p. 30.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Similarly, the surcharges for steel and cement were reduced to 3%. Report from Bhimsen Sachar to Nehru, May 6, 1954; Le Corbusier papers in Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 2, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

carried with it to the national level the reassurance that little federal money need be spent on construction material as the project moved ahead.

While the substantial use of brick was primarily a practical and financial matter, a more heavy symbolic issue was the use of concrete. This is particularly true in the realization of Le Corbusier's designs and in the construction of the Sector 1 Capitol Complex buildings. Although exposed reinforced concrete had been used in Europe since the 1920s and had gained traction internationally in the decades to follow, its use and aesthetics have become attached to Le Corbusier with a special degree of significance. Unlike regionally sourced materials such as wood or locally produced materials such as brick, reinforced concrete was endorsed as a modern but also site-less material, viable in any environment and realizable almost anywhere. This fact, together with concrete's coming-of-age moment concurrent with that of mid-century CIAM tenets, intimately linked the material to the International Style movement. Indeed, several Indian architecture scholars have taken care to point out that concrete is not the unique invention of or importation from any one country; rather, engineers in various parts of the world had been increasingly experimenting with the materials more or less concurrently in the early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>115</sup> Another consideration included a desire for a degree of citywide uniformity—at least for Le Corbusier, who, in a memorandum to Randhawa, suggested that the material aspects of all architectural projects in the city be guided by strict governmental control. In his words, “materials for all houses shall be exposed brick, concrete, and plaster. [Order and unity] must absolutely not be spoiled due to lack of attention.”<sup>116</sup> Apparently, Le Corbusier did begrudgingly submit to guniting as a surface treatment on some of the city's brick façades; the use

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<sup>115</sup> Kiran Joshi and I.J.S. Bakshi, “Conserving Modern Heritage, Concrete, and Chandigarh,” in *Corbusier's Concrete*, 2005, pp. 10-25; citation p. 23.

<sup>116</sup> Memorandum, Le Corbusier to Randhawa, “Urgent, as a Psychological Theme,” December 8, 1957; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 3, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

of gunite resulted in a stucco finish that protected the underlying material but, in the words of a resigned Le Corbusier, “[made] a wall of gunite, not of brick.”<sup>117</sup>

While innovative use of concrete has come to be associated with Chandigarh as a whole, Fry takes care to note that although reinforced concrete was not always readily available for use in Chandigarh construction. He notes, “cement for reinforced concrete was there but in quantities that consigned most to [Le Corbusier’s] concrete monoliths and least to us.”<sup>118</sup> He was here speaking in reference to the more quotidian buildings being designed by Drew, Jeanneret, and himself that were primarily required to make use of the local brick. Christopher Rand, observing the ongoing construction in 1955, noted that “concrete is Chandigarh’s No. 2 material,” with brick, cheap but substantial, being its number one.<sup>119</sup> In the course of Partition, India had lost five of its cement-producing factories to Pakistan, and concrete was in heavy demand for a variety of building projects throughout the subcontinent.<sup>120</sup> The resultant shortage, together with the material’s greater expense, undoubtedly affected the availability of concrete in Chandigarh.

Although early- to mid-twentieth century discourse promoted concrete as a lasting and universal solution to building developments worldwide, the physical legacy of the twentieth-century boom of reinforced concrete International Style buildings has demonstrated that the material is, in fact, vulnerable to environmental conditions. In response the conservation

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<sup>117</sup> Christopher Rand, “City on a Tilting Plain,” 1955, p. 62. Martino Stierli notes in his essay, “Monuments to Modernity,” that the “crude materiality” of the exposed “rough concrete façades” amounted to the “monumentalization of the archaic and the vernacular.” Stierli goes on to identify these rough surfaces as “the ultimate break with the “abstract aesthetics and white elegance of the International Style.” It is unclear in Stierli’s essay whether he intends to refer to actual concrete or to gunite surfaces; as I demonstrate above the two have rather different implications. Stierli, “Monuments to Modernity,” in *Brasilia-Chandigarh: Living with Modernity*, 2010, p. 231.

<sup>118</sup> Maxwell Fry, “India,” unpublished manuscript; RIBA Archives, F&D Box 4, Folder 2, p. 31.

<sup>119</sup> Christopher Rand, “City on a Tilting Plain,” 1955, p. 38.

<sup>120</sup> Atreyee Gupta quoting Kumar B. Das in “In a Postcolonial Diction,” 2013, p. 34-35.

concerns of concrete have today taken on new, unexpected dimensions. In an interesting turn over the last two decades, the buildings of the Capitol Complex have shifted from being regarded as an example of architecture that demonstrates and typifies a belief in the strength of a utopian future to instead being considered a fragile set of buildings subject to decay and in need of repair and conservation. In this reckoning Le Corbusier's reinforced concrete buildings in particular are perceived as stilted museum objects rather than dynamic sites of progress. In perhaps much the same way in which the universalizing doctrines of modernism were found faulty for their projection of a timeless brand of urban planning, it has been discovered in the latter half of the twentieth century that the modernists' very medium of choice was not as "maintenance free" as once believed. In other words, the sociological ideology and philosophical concerns of the modernist era have in recent decades become increasingly archaic along with its architectural endeavors. These concerns reached a tipping point in the 2002 conference on conserving modern heritage, "Conservation of Le Corbusier's Work in Concrete," which relied on Le Corbusier's Chandigarh buildings as its intellectual impetus for what it called an issue with global relevance. The participants recognized the host of environmental challenges that concrete faced but that had only recently been grasped—namely, its vulnerability to fluctuations in temperature and humidity and to other environmental factors such as pollution.

In addition to the perceived need for conservation, the city touted as a laboratory for architectural experimentation and described as the only purely modern city in India has become the center of a heritage debate. Much like the concrete used in its construction—a material once celebrated as a universal solution but now in need of conservation—the city itself was officially

granted UNESCO World Heritage status for “possessing exceptional historical value” in 2016.<sup>121</sup> The moment, it seems, has shifted: the “laboratory” has become largely obsolete in the increasingly globalized world of “pirate modernity”—to borrow the characterization from Ravi Sundaram—that relies less on structures officially governed by a master plan and more on unauthorized physical and virtual ones.<sup>122</sup> What is, in the UNESCO bid, being identified and memorialized as “heritage” is not simply the buildings and city layout designed by “masters” in the mid-twentieth century. The focus is just as much on as the physical components of the city as the latent desire to preserve, for posterity if nothing else, evidence of the very concept of master planning itself. Ravi Sundaram, using Delhi as his case study, has pointed out the vastly different “city” that is today produced as a result of ever-shifting spaces of illicit, “pirated” uses and reallocations of resources and the divergent uses of commercial and residential space. Similarly, Swati Chattopadhyay has called attention to the limits of current vocabulary and ways of understanding the contemporary Indian city and its infrastructures.<sup>123</sup> If the contemporary city is governed primarily by its kinetic, rather than static, elements and regarded as an unpredictable “twitching organism,”<sup>124</sup> the ideology of the modern city was that it was a machine, calibrated to generate the predictable result of consistent better living. The passing of this historical ideologically modern moment, I would argue, is equally at the core of Chandigarh’s newly acquired UNESCO World Heritage status.

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<sup>121</sup> Manish Chalana and Tyler S. Sprague, “Beyond Le Corbusier and the Modernist City: Reframing Chandigarh’s ‘World Heritage’ Legacy,” in *Planning Perspectives*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2013, pp. 199-222; citation p. 199.

<sup>122</sup> See Ravi Sundaram, *Pirate Modernity*, London: Routledge, 2010, which takes Delhi as its case study for a shift in city organization.

<sup>123</sup> Swati Chattopadhyay, *Unlearning the City*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012.

<sup>124</sup> Rahul Mehrotra, “Negotiating the Static and Kinetic Cities: The Emergent Urbanism of Mumbai,” 2008, in *Other Cities, Other Worlds*, Andreas Huyssen, ed., pp. 205-218.

The subjects of the fiercest discussion have ultimately been the physical buildings of Chandigarh. In addition to the long-term conservation concerns related to reinforced concrete, even contemporaneous observers noted the quickly fading grandeur of the building's façades. In 1955 journalist Christopher Rand remarked that the pastel paints used on some of Chandigarh's concrete building exteriors were "already beginning to look a bit streaky and grimy."<sup>125</sup> The visual of Chandigarh's concrete painted in cheery pale green, custard yellow, and robin's-egg blue contrasts rather sharply with the stark and austere surfaces captured in the 1960s black-and-white photographs of, for example, architect Jeet Malhotra.<sup>126</sup> If the paint on the surface very quickly transitioned from elegant to shabby—a process omitted from the existing black-and-white photographic evidence—the underlying concrete, although subject to a slower process of degeneration, has also proven to be a far cry from an everlasting solution.

Concrete was not the first material deemed to be best suited to the symbolically charged Capitol Complex buildings of the new city. Mayer's unrealized plans for the capitol buildings were set to make significant use not of concrete but of locally sourced limestone. Although he offered these plans with the preface that he did not wish to act as an "archeologist digging up and restoring an ancient civilization," Mayer felt compelled by what he claimed was limestone's link to the ancient history of the region: "[it] has been used in northern India for centuries. Many memorials and similar structures were built from it at the orders of the Mughals."<sup>127</sup> The tagline to the above-quoted article reads, "Stone like that quarried by Mughals 400 years ago to help build Chandigarh, East Punjab capital, due for 500,000 population."<sup>128</sup> Mayer's impulse, then,

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<sup>125</sup> Christopher Rand, "City on a Tilting Plain," 1955, p. 38.

<sup>126</sup> See *Marg*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1961.

<sup>127</sup> Mayer quoted by Ralph Chapman, "New Yorker Designs City for India," *New York Herald Tribune*, October 11, 1950.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

had been to conjure up a continuity between the new capital and a generalized ancient past of the region via materials—effectively secularizing any specifically Mughal context for the use of limestone—and in doing so advancing a sense of historicity in Punjab. Similar in function to Mayer’s proposed adaptation of Buddhist architectural motifs discussed in Chapter I, his planned use of limestone reads as a sincere—if confused—attempt to fashion a city that had symbolic import and cultural resonance with its inhabitants. Mayer’s overall intention, after all, was to “visualize a modern city [without] robbing the Indians of what is distinctly theirs.”<sup>129</sup> One could argue the validity of whether or not Indians themselves would identify the previously discussed “cone-shaped” buildings or the use of limestone as elements significantly and distinctly “theirs,” but in Mayer’s mind such materials and designs were rooted in the supposedly “universal” traditions of the region. Mayer’s proposed use of limestone might perhaps be compared to the use of, for example, red sandstone in Delhi. As Juneja has argued in her examination of New Delhi as a colonial-era capital, the prominent use of building materials such as sandstone, and architectural elements such as lattice screens and turrets, were part of an effort not simply to “recast the new imperial capital in a Mughal mould.”<sup>130</sup> Rather, such “oriental classicism” had the imagined ability to “elevate the colonized” as well as to restore in them a sense of their (secularized) lost past.<sup>131</sup>

In her examination of Indian modern sculptures, Atreyee Gupta notes that such geometric modernist concrete sculptures as Dhanraj Bhagat’s *Construction* and *Cosmic Man* (both from 1962) are conceptually and intimately located within post-Independence India’s projects of

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<sup>129</sup> Mayer quoted in “American to Plan New City for India,” *The New York Times*, January 25, 1950.

<sup>130</sup> Monica Juneja, “The Making of New Delhi, 2013, p. 24.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid. See also Thomas Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

modernization, such as Chandigarh.<sup>132</sup> Here concrete, indicative as it is of the very act of constructing, is a modern material with a role to play in the process of modernization. I would draw attention, however, to the ways in which concrete has been used to very different effect by Indian sculptors. Ramkinkar Baij's Santiniketan sculptures, for example, are also composed of concrete. Baij's *Santhal Family*, *Mill Call*, and *Sujata*, however, depict idealized, laboring, specifically rural human bodies and employ a rough surface, evoking not sleek, linear modernity but rusticity. In Baij's sculptures the materiality of the concrete is obscured via the use of color, rocks, and sand to masquerade as local earth rather than admit to being a modern building material. As might be said of Santiniketan itself, Baij's sculptures were made possible by modern material advancements and changing twentieth-century sentiments, but worked as a whole to erase the visual traces of such advances.

Perhaps, then, it is not merely the material but more precisely the treatment of its surface that conjures notions of rusticity or modernity. As Gupta goes on to note, the particular designs and geometric façades being developed in Chandigarh were equally or perhaps *more* significant for their cognitive impact than for their architectural bearing.<sup>133</sup> As images of the buildings under construction were circulated via such venues as the New Delhi Housing Exhibition and in journals such as *Marg* and the worldwide press more generally, photography had the tendency to abstract and fragment the city's buildings into interplays of light and shadow.<sup>134</sup> Gupta goes on to discuss architect Jeet Malhotra's photographic practice as published in the December 1961 issue of *Marg*, and the works' act of rendering intimate and familiar the "alien monumentality"

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<sup>132</sup> Atreyee Gupta, "In a Postcolonial Diction," 2013, p. 40-41.

<sup>133</sup> Atreyee Gupta, "In a Postcolonial Diction," 2013, p. 32-33.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

of Chandigarh's buildings.<sup>135</sup> However, photography such as that by Malhotra ushered in an era of treating urban spaces of Chandigarh as sculptural entities, which, I would argue, has the ultimate effect of rendering these spaces *less* intimate. I explore the legacy of such an approach by examining photographic projects in recent years in Chapter Three.

In common with the larger city, construction of the Rock Garden also entailed careful consideration of its material components, to both related and divergent effect. Drawing on many of the same physical materials as the developing city, Chand's work also incorporated elements unique to local geology and to regional history and shifts in population. I explore this in the following section.

### ***The Material of the Developing Rock Garden***

Recalling that in Nehru's conception Chandigarh was intended to be "a new city, unfettered by the traditions of the past [and] a symbol of the nation's faith in the future,"<sup>136</sup> as detailed in the previous section, careful consideration was given to the types of materials that would purportedly help to meet this goal. In the end, Mayer's concept regarding the material "heritage" of limestone was rejected in favor of concrete, and although Chandigarh's architects made heavy use of local brick it was done out of logistic and financial necessity rather than out of an attempt to align the new city's structures with regional traditions. During the early years of city construction, Chand, working as a roads inspector and employed by the city, had easy access to the concrete, rebar, bitumen drums, and other materials that were ubiquitous in the developing city. Additionally, the large number of razed village buildings and displaced persons moving in

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<sup>135</sup> Atreyee Gupta, "In a Postcolonial Diction," 2013, p. 38.

<sup>136</sup> Nehru is quoted by Norma Evenson in *Chandigarh*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966. See Prakash's Footnote 10 to his *Chandigarh's Le Corbusier*, Chapter 1, for a discussion of the elusive official source for this oft-repeated quote.

and out of the area resulted in the ready supply of discarded household materials. From among these discards Chand amassed such materials as broken pottery and ceramics, fragments of glass bangles, human hair, tube-lights, and bicycle parts. Out of these materials, as we have seen, he began to construct walls, statues, buildings, and walls, adding these to the rocks he had collected and arranged since the mid-1960s.

Chand mixed his concrete with sand, creating something of a proprietary blend for use in his sculptures—the recipe for this blend was later recreated for use by the Garden staff and by conservators repairing damaged works.<sup>137</sup> Mixed in this way the aesthetics of Chand’s blend of concrete bears greater similarity to Ramkinkar Baij’s early twentieth-century Santiniketan sculptures than to Chandigarh’s modernist buildings [Figure 80]. The surface tends to appear grainy rather than smooth, oftentimes resembling clay or dried mud, and this aesthetic—together with the occasional evidence of construction by hand—is consistent through Phase I and Phase II. Chand developed a distinct pattern to his practice, even as he continually emphasized his lack of comprehensive site planning or overarching design.<sup>138</sup> He sorted like fixtures, pebbles, and small clay vessels, separating objects by type and assembling them *en masse* to form decorative walls, barriers, and display pedestals [Figures 81, 82, detail Figure 83]. This repetitive sorting technique was also employed in many of his sculptures, in which materials such as bangle fragments and pottery shards are grouped by color. The effect and collective force of the repeated and grouped materials is emphasized by the multiplicity of the sculptures themselves: the Garden’s Phase I walls appear several times through that section, the Phase II sculptures are

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<sup>137</sup> The following note is taken from Rajer, in regards to conservation work done on the Kerala Rock Garden: “All cement should be mixed with sand for strength. This is how Nek Chand does his work.” Personal site visit note for proposed Kerala Rock Garden treatment, Tony Rajer, ca. October 2008; Anton Rajer Archive, Box 7, SPACES Collection.

<sup>138</sup> Mark Magnier, “In India, a Secret Garden That Rocks,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 6, 2011.

arranged not singly but rather in large fields of like forms, and Phase III is an arena of repeated mosaic walls, arches with swings, and low-pavilion structures. While Chand's collected sculptural-form rocks are displayed in the Garden as individual "works," [Figures 84, 85, 86], often appearing on pedestals and in niches, the Garden as a whole makes overwhelming use of repeated patterns, objects, and forms. The city as a developing center for modern living afforded Chand with a continual supply of mass-produced and otherwise structurally similar discards.

Not only did the city, with its construction projects and population comings and goings in the Garden's early years, supply Chand with his raw material: the area's natural surroundings and the vacated villages did as well. There is little solid evidence beyond the anecdotal for Chand's practice of collecting the discards of displaced villagers; it seems clear that villager-discarded objects were among the earliest items that Chand collected but there is little evidence available to identify which objects, specifically, were collected and can be traced back to the razed villages. It is very likely that Chand himself did not know the specific origins of a given material in many cases, as he collected discards largely from designated city dumps rather than from individual abandoned sites. In the course of his extensive on-site study, Iain Jackson has identified individual "hand-painted and irregular pieces of ceramic" that "stand out from the mass-produced ceramics and porcelain," and has claimed that these fragments originated from the destroyed villages.<sup>139</sup> Jackson has noted that these handmade items tend to receive pride of place within a given sculpture: Chand often placed the fragments in "prominent locations [on] the humanoid sculptures, namely as a breastplate or armband,"<sup>140</sup> or, in at least one case, as face

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<sup>139</sup> Iain Jackson, "Documenting Nek Chand's Rock Garden: Interpretations of Stones and Castles," in *Taking the Road Less Traveled*, unpublished conference proceedings, September 27-30, 2007, John Michael Kohler Arts Center, p. 29; Anton Rajer Archive, Box 4, SPACES Collection.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

[Figure 87]. For Jackson, such placement indicates Chand's desire to highlight and prominently display "pre-Chandigarh village life."<sup>141</sup>

While Jackson's point is well taken I would also add that such placement has simply made these examples of handmade pottery easier to spot in a sea of mosaic fragments; it is unclear how many such fragments, smaller and less easy to identify, exist in less prominent locations on Chand's sculptures and mosaic walls. Also, it should be noted that the prominent placement of relatively large portions of pottery is not restricted to handmade pottery fragments. Chand made use of unusually shaped and intact mass-produced ceramics as well, such as, for example, his use of whole wine bottles and teacups in the construction of his humanoid forms [Figure 88]. Further complicating this interpretation is the fact that villagers were not the only people living in the area who had access to handmade and hand-painted pottery, and it is worth remembering that many of Chandigarh's original residents had relocated from villages themselves during the events of Partition. Taking these matters into consideration it is compelling, but impossible to verify, that the fragments Jackson highlights might in fact have originated in the home of a displaced villager. Jackson's point, however speculative, is nevertheless a striking one—with such inclusions and prominent placements of hand- and potentially village-made pottery, Chand has crafted a material record of the city's acts of construction and displacement. As a result, the Rock Garden is arguably the only place in the city that visually records the original settlements together with the developing and developed city, and that signals, however indirectly, the history of movement, construction, and both upwardly mobile and displaced lives. In the process of doing so the Garden collapses eras of

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

construction and displacement into a single tableau—while placing them within and among the stones, trees, and natural physical features of the landscape.

It is striking, then, that so many interpretations of the Garden’s materials have read the site as decidedly backwards-looking or past-oriented, rather than as an expression of the collapsed time-logic that is legible in the Garden. The Phase-II sculpture field of sari-clad women constructed from bangle fragments offers one such example [Figure 89]. A tension exists between a desire to treat the bangle-women sculptures as indicative of a dynamic web of social interactions, and a competing desire to view the bangle-women as evocative of a past tinged with tragedy. Jackson and Bandyopadhyay have described the sculptures in the former light, seeing in them the possibility to tap into and reconstitute the social function of their parts (i.e. once-whole bangles): “The bangle as symbolic of puberty and femininity has been writ large: the bangle becomes the girl!”<sup>142</sup> For these scholars the bangle-women are dynamic: they reference the activities of purchasing and wearing the original intact bangles, and also signal their wearers’ participation in regional festivals to which they may have been worn.<sup>143</sup> Not only this, the sculptures, in this account, go further to collectively confront their audience with provocative questions about the patriarchal fabric of social life in India itself:

[The sculptures] face the audience in their multitude [...], a primarily Indian audience, hailing from the strictures of the male-dominated society [...]. They ask questions.<sup>144</sup>

The imagined dynamics of the possible social events that at one time procured and later made use of the bangles in their original intact state here lend vibrancy and action to these very

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<sup>142</sup> Jackson and Bandyopadhyay, *The Collection, The Ruin, and the Theatre*, 2007, p. 31. An interpretation is not offered for the peacocks similarly constructed out of broken bangles.

<sup>143</sup> Although bangles are daily wear for many Indian women, Paul Cox has connected discarded bangles specifically to the events of festivals. See his “The Magical Kingdom of Nek Chand,” *The Australian*, October 29, 2011.

<sup>144</sup> Op. cit.

stationary sculptures. Jackson and Bandyopadhyay go on to claim that Chand, in creating these bangle-women sculptures, has been able to transform the unlucky consequences that superstition suggests will befall a woman who keeps a broken bangle. An unlucky broken bangle is thus transformed into a powerful, provocative sculpture with the supposed ability to work for positive change in regards to India's patriarchal social order. Notably, these questionable transformative powers are not attributed to Chand's sculptures of peacocks, which are similarly constructed from broken bangles [Figure 90].

While the focus in the above-recounted interpretation is on the sculptures' possibilities for the dynamic transformation of its materials, other observers have focused on the materials' unique ability to evoke loss and tragedy. Nek Chand Foundation founder John Maizels claimed that "[Chand] made his first sculptures from broken bangles he collected on the ground in the market."<sup>145</sup> This concise claim, although issued almost in passing, casts a very different interpretation on the bangle-women—particularly when lined up with their present-day preponderance in Phase II. Maizels' statement indirectly categorizes Chand's re-creation of the Garden's many bangle sculptures as a firmly nostalgic activity. The sculptures in Maizels' reckoning are, even though perhaps inadvertently, intimately tied to the memory of a lost village—with the further implication that their creation may have been therapeutic in its repetition in the present day. Maizels' interpretation of Chand's bangle-sculptures, which extends not only to the bangle-women but also to the bangle-peacocks, is decidedly nostalgic and spends little, if any, time imagining the bangles' previous owners. It focuses instead on Chand's personal history and a past severed by the events of Partition.

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<sup>145</sup> John Maizels, "Nek Chand Obituary," *The Guardian*, June 15, 2015.

Looking closely at the bangle-sculptures displayed in Phase II, there is significant evidence that Chand engaged in experimentation over time. In comparing the earliest bangle sculptures in the Garden to the later, circa mid-1980s bangle-woman, Chand seems to have experimented with the different effects of the bangles' colors, shapes, and broken edges. A small number of early humanoid bangle sculptures are arranged in a section of Phase II [Figure 91]. The sculptures in this section are notably irregular in terms of size and form—the sculpture fields of the later peacock and bangle figures are much more standardized—and here there is evidence of experimentation of style and form. The broken bangles, rather than arranged by color or with an attention to uniformity of shape, appear to be haphazardly organized. The resulting surface is multicolored and variegated, unlike the later bangle-women whose “saris” are much more uniform in color. The broken edges of the bangles on some of these figures extend from the sculpture's body, resulting in a shaggy appearance. The same technique is used to create the figures' hair, whereas in later sculptures Chand abandoned the practice, preferring a smoother overall surface and using real human hair for the bangle-women instead. The three larger figures in this early section seem to suggest adults, perhaps parents, positioned behind an array of shorter figures, possibly children arranged in the foreground. The “children” appear in motion, as though toddling along the uneven concrete and dirt surface, poised with arms outstretched in an effort to maintain balance or raised to signal their parents' attention. The Phase-II bangle sculptures might instead be read with an inter-Garden comparative analysis in mind.

Another feature that has been interpreted via the lenses of nostalgia and loss is the Phase-II miniature village [Figure 92]. Some observers have directly made the poignant claim that Chand built the miniature village in Phase II out of a longing for his ancestral village, and that Chand peopled his “kingdom” with sculptures and rocks out of yearning for the village's lost

social fabric.<sup>146</sup> A version of this assertion exists as part of the official signage at the Rock Garden. On the other hand, as with the bangle-women sculptures, in his study Jackson has highlighted the Phase-II village's potentially dynamic powers. Jackson interpreted the remnants of the miniature village, with its miniature-scale buildings and life-size well, not as a mournful *lieu de mémoire* but rather as an energetic space that continues to foster interaction among Garden visitors in the way that an idealized village purportedly would [Figure 93]. Jackson described Phase II's village well specifically in terms of its ability to serve as an active "place [today] for exchanges, gossip, and a prop for narrative."<sup>147</sup> Jackson notes that visitors gather in the space surrounding the well—one of the few open vistas in Phase II—to throw in coins, to take photos, or to comment on their surroundings. For Rajer, such harmonious social interaction not only models an ideal village but also extends into a pleasant co-existence with the animal kingdom: he adds to his description of visitor interaction with the village and well, "hundreds of birds live [here], using the small nooks and crannies as nesting places."<sup>148</sup>

On the other hand prominent art historian B.N. Goswamy, in recounting an early visit to the Rock Garden, has perhaps inadvertently assigned a past-oriented meaning to the Phase-II village well. The effect of his statement is very similar to that of Maizel's categorization of Chand's bangle-women. Goswamy described his first encounter with Chand's well, "long before that domain was 'officialized' [sic] and named the Rock Garden."<sup>149</sup> The well constructed by

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<sup>146</sup> Anita Singh Negi, "Nek Chand Visits Home Village," *Raw Vision*, vol. 35, Summer 2001, p. 16.

<sup>147</sup> Iain Jackson, "Cataloguing Nek Chand's Rock Garden, Chandigarh," unpublished dissertation, 2008, p. 170.

<sup>148</sup> Anton Rajer, "Nek Chand's Story: Can the World's Largest Folk Art Environment Be Saved?" *Folk Art Society of America Newsletter*, vol. 13, no. 1, Winter/Spring 2000.

<sup>149</sup> B.N. Goswamy, "A Universe from Nothing," *India Express*, June 22, 2015.

Chand appeared to Goswamy every bit like a functioning, traditional village well, “a common sight in the countryside, except that there was not a drop of water in it:”

I turned to ask [Chand] what this structure was doing in that place. Completely at ease with the question, and looking me straight in the eye, he said in his low, quiet voice, ‘I can bring anything into this kingdom of mine, can’t I? And where else will I get water from if I were to wake up in the middle of the night?’<sup>150</sup>

In the broader context of his article, Goswamy uses this anecdote to illustrate the whimsy of Chand and his “universe from nothing.” It is worth noting that such an observation is consistent with Goswamy’s career commitment to articulating the subjectivity of artists and artisans in India; Goswamy has made a tremendous contribution to the field of art history. As with Maizels’ comment regarding the bangle-women, this memory of the art historian’s first encounter with the well depicts Chand as a man seeking to recreate a pre-Partition life via the recreation of undisrupted pre-Partition motifs: just as Chand endlessly repeats the bangle sculptures he originally fashioned in his youth, so too does he create, and pretend to have functional use for, a non-operating village-style well in the city.

Such interpretations that harken back to Chand’s earlier life in his ancestral village were given increased currency when, in 2001, the Nek Chand Foundation publicized Chand’s first return to his ancestral home, Barian Kalan, the village now located in Pakistan. In an article published in *Raw Vision*, Chand is described encountering a changed village badly damaged in the 1971 India-Pakistan War. In a quote attributed to Chand, “my village no longer looks as it used to, but I am still happy that I have been able to visit.”<sup>151</sup> The reporter goes on to summarize Chand’s reaction at encountering the village landscape, paying particular interest to the river in which Chand’s mother “washed clothes while [telling Chand] stories about a kingdom that [he]

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Anita Singh Negi, “Nek Chand Visits Home Village,” *Raw Vision*, vol. 35, Summer 2001, p. 16.

would recreate sculpting with sand on the banks of the Kareer.”<sup>152</sup> The reporter notes that Chand collected soil and water from the village, with the idea of potting a plant with the soil and sustaining it with the river water: “he will relive memories of his village, watching the plant grown in the soil of his home, irrigated by water from the river.”<sup>153</sup> In a parting gesture upon leaving Pakistan, Chand donated several of his sculptures to the Lahore Museum—an act, incidentally, that carries compelling meaning when taking into account the historical split of the Museum’s collections in the wake of Partition.<sup>154</sup> In illustration of this story, the *Raw Vision* editor included an image of the Garden’s Phase-II miniature village, with the caption, “Part of the Rock Garden inspired by the village.”<sup>155</sup> This image, together with the article’s description of Chand’s childhood gestures of “kingdom” building and his desire to incorporate village soil and water into the Rock Garden, solidify the line drawn between Chand’s severed past and the project of the Rock Garden. V.P. Mehta took a similar approach in his photographic book project made in collaboration with Foundation members. In preface to his description of the Rock Garden, Mehta records a lengthy portrayal of Chand’s childhood village memories, including village and environmental sights, sounds, and childhood activities; the section closes with an image of a hut in the Garden that “serves as a replica of a shop in the native village of Chand.”<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> The Lahore Museum’s collection was itself partitioned, with a percentage allocated to the Chandigarh Art Gallery in correspondence to the percentage of Punjab’s land allocated to India. See Nayanjot Lahiri, “Partitioning the Past: India’s Archaeological Heritage After Independence,” in *Appropriating the Past: Philosophical Perspectives on the Practice of Archaeology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 295-311.

<sup>155</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>156</sup> V.P. Mehta, *Rock Garden, a Vision of Creativity: Memoirs of Nek Chand*, 2010, pp. 17-23. Mehta includes an undated but ca. 1970s image of Chand seated inside the hut, with “hanging rows of dried

This past-oriented view is not limited to scholarship and media accounts of the Rock Garden. At least one example of a city-sponsored development in the Garden glances back at the Garden's own past: the use of bitumen drums in the creation of the site's exterior wall. In the Garden's early, clandestine days, Chand arranged a partial wall of bitumen drums in order to block a clear view into his burgeoning assemblage of rocks and collected material. By 1980, city officials sanctioned a standardized and official version of the bitumen-drum blocker in the form of a perimeter wall; this wall was expanded to allow for the continued development of Phase III.<sup>157</sup> Interestingly, bitumen drums—a city resource originally commandeered by Chand to create a visual barrier to his illegal construction—were reallocated in the construction of an officially sanctioned, city-created wall.

In Phase II Chand fashioned a cast-concrete grid wall, behind which is a walkway not open to the public [Figure 94]. The grid wall features a lower register of stylized architectural forms and an upper register of ambiguously human-form motifs; the latter have been interpreted as representations of human skeletal remains.<sup>158</sup> This feature tends to garner only passing mention, and no developed interpretation for it exists in the scholarly literature. According to Chandigarh tour organizer Santosh Kaushish, the human skeletal forms reference Harappan motifs.<sup>159</sup> While this is impossible to verify, it does signal a compelling relationship not only to the region's distant past but also to the city's history of construction. As chronicled at the Chandigarh City Museum, in the 1950s-60s a number of hitherto unknown ancient Harappan

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pumpkin rinds" in reference to those used to make "snake charmers' flutes." This hut, if it still exists as pictured in the image, is not currently open to the public.

<sup>157</sup> For these dates see Iain Jackson, "Cataloging Nek Chand's Rock Garden," unpublished dissertation, 2008, p. 14.

<sup>158</sup> Brochure, "Rock Garden: The Fantasy World of Nek Chand," produced by Chandigarh Tourism (n.d.); John Maizels Archive.

<sup>159</sup> Personal conversation, September 2014.

sites were unearthed during the course of city development. Teams from the Punjab University's Department of Ancient India and the Punjab Government's Department of Archaeology excavated the site in 1950 and in 1960. Most of these archeological objects are today displayed in the Museum of the Evolution of Life in Sector 10, and in the Museum of Ancient History at Punjab University; a smaller number are featured in a display case at the City Museum in Sector 10. The exhibition label that introduces the latter material also mentions the existence of an ancient "wide lake, ringed by a marsh," from which fossil remains have been uncovered—putting the viewer in mind of the artificially created Sukhna Lake adjacent to the Rock Garden.<sup>160</sup> Interpreting the loosely-humanoid forms on the Garden's grid wall as "skeletal" or Harappan-inspired reiterates the now-familiar stark contrast between the city and the Garden as regards the region's ancient past: here, the modern city disturbed and then removed the historical remains that its building process unearthed, sequestering them away for study in an artificial museum setting. The Garden, on the other hand, highlighted and enshrined stylized interpretations of these ancient motifs, reinserting them into a (pseudo-)natural jungle landscape. Although this comparison has nowhere else been articulated in precisely these terms, the willingness to consider the vaguely humanoid motifs as skeletal remains of ancient peoples, taken together with the established binary of Garden versus city, casts it in this light.<sup>161</sup>

In various ways, then, Chand has been categorized as the so-called "keeper of Indian heritage," and the Rock Garden has as a result been saddled with the rather heavy burden of serving as the soul torchbearer of "tradition" within the modern city. Tony Rajer listed Chand's

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<sup>160</sup> "Antiquity of Chandigarh" exhibition label, permanent exhibition at the Chandigarh City Museum; visited September 2014.

<sup>161</sup> For more on the ways in which Indus Valley archaeology has intersected with post-Independence India, see Nayanjot Lahiri *Finding Forgotten Cities: How the Indus Civilization Was Discovered*, London: Seagull Books, 2006.

ostensible responsibility to serve as “keeper of Indian heritage” as a matter of course, one of a number of Chand’s defining roles that also included “exile, husband, father, roads inspector, [...] and artist.”<sup>162</sup> Further, the Nek Chand Foundation-sponsored 2001 Silver and 2007 Diamond Jubilees held at the Garden included extensive “folk art performances” as part of their programming, and in conjunction with the latter event the Foundation sponsored a three-day Folk Art Festival.<sup>163</sup> In arguably imperialistic terms, the Foundation stated that the Festival was organized as a preventative, preservative gesture, not only to help promote the Rock Garden and Chand but also because, in its view, “folk art is endangered in India.”<sup>164</sup> In tones that read as vaguely colonialist for their ability to conjure nineteenth-century England’s self-professed role as preserver of India’s “traditional” folk art,<sup>165</sup> the Foundation, interestingly, established the Rock Garden as their primary site upon which to argue for the “preservation” of Indian folk art in the twenty-first century.

The categorization of Chand as a folk artist in India wedded to “civilizational roots” has something of a fraught connotation, one rooted in the colonial-era Orientalist classification of Indian arts that called for the “preservation” and promotion of Indian craft traditions while Indian fine arts tended to meet with condemnation.<sup>166</sup> It is rather surprising that for the Foundation Chand’s work typifies “folk art” in India—a classification of forms that had hitherto been associated with anonymous craftspeople working with traditional materials to produce works

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<sup>162</sup> Anton Rajer, “Nek Chand: Victor of Circumstances,” 2001.

<sup>163</sup> “Keeping the Dream Alive,” *Indian Express*, November 15, 2007.

<sup>164</sup> “Preserve the Rock Garden at All Costs,” *Hindustan Times*, November 15, 2007.

<sup>165</sup> See, for one example of a concise analysis of the development of this colonial-era view, Thomas Metcalf, “Arts, Crafts, and Empire” in his *An Imperial Vision*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989, pp. 141-175.

<sup>166</sup> This widespread argument was articulated in the works, for example, of such Orientalists as George Birdwood, in his *Industrial Arts of India*, London, 1882.

typical of a particular region. This classification is thus especially ironic given the Foundation's widespread promotion of the Garden as a virtuosic endeavor, the result of one man's vision; further, it underlines the uneasy ways in which Chand and his work have been categorized. It also has the effect of solidifying the strained position that Chand's practice is backwards looking, more repetitive and tradition-steeped than innovative. Official on-site signage puts it in direct but unspecific terms: "Chand's unique work is deeply rooted in an Indian tradition dating back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC [sic]."<sup>167</sup> The claim is all the more overreaching for its lack of specificity—in a city philosophically severed at its foundation from traditional and colonial urban development, Chand and the Garden are in this construction the repositories of a generalized "Indian tradition." This apparently universal and timeless "tradition" resists—particularly via this signage and through Nek Chand Foundation literature—the purportedly "alien" features of the planned city. And yet, as I have argued, the foundational efforts by Randhawa, Le Corbusier, and others to actively include traditional, regional arts and motifs in some aspects of city planning reveal a logic by which "traditional" and "modern" aesthetics were mutually constitutive of the city itself.

Alongside concerns related to materials used in the developing city and the Garden were those regarding landscaping. As the following two sections explore, substantial thought was devoted to the symbolic and practical function of the plant life in the city's public spaces and official gardens. Equal time was devoted to the landscaping of the unofficial Rock Garden. As I demonstrate, these discourses were parallel, rather than oppositional.

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<sup>167</sup> Rock Garden sign, "Sculpture," Nek Chand Foundation-produced signage.

## *Landscaping The City*

Of equal aesthetic importance as building materials in the minds of the Chandigarh architectural team was the living landscape. In 1954 M.S. Randhawa issued an official document outlining the landscaping stakes in Chandigarh. He called for a visual artist to be in charge of landscaping the burgeoning city, saying “it is the trees and shrubs, if properly selected, that would make Chandigarh an ideal city [and] the envy of the whole of India.”<sup>168</sup> Much, it seems, hinged on the proper selection of Chandigarh’s plant life. In a separate document issued ten years later, Randhawa pressed officials to prioritize landscaping even with their limited funds, saying “Chandigarh requires not only buildings but beautiful trees.”<sup>169</sup> Trees themselves were not imagined as living plants with individual variation but rather as fungible architectural entities: Randhawa noted trees’ “architectural disposition” and ability to “link up individual masses of buildings in a harmonious whole,” and called for thoughtful tree selection that considered the “shape of the crown and the color of the flowers,” groupings, and the impact on the visual line for both pedestrians and drivers.<sup>170</sup> Thickness of foliage in relation to winter and summer sun, volume and speed of traffic on the various road grades, and some consideration of the navigational aid that trees might produce (“the difference in tree-planting [...] at once makes it clear to [drivers] in which direction they are traveling.”) were all taken into account.<sup>171</sup>

Accordingly, in the early years of planning the city, the selection and planting of trees and shrubs was a carefully controlled and managed affair. Randhawa suggested a citywide Tree

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<sup>168</sup> M.S. Randhawa, “Landscaping Chandigarh,” unpublished document, 1954; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 3, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>169</sup> Memorandum, M.S. Randhawa to Sapuran Singh, October 15, 1964; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 1; UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>170</sup> M.S. Randhawa, “Landscaping Chandigarh,” Government Press booklet, September 16, 1967, p. 3-4, 9; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

Preservation Order in 1952 to prevent the unlawful cutting or manipulation of city-planted trees. Attempt was also made for this control to extend not only to public city spaces but also to private ones.<sup>172</sup> The area's fertile land, once cited as just cause to abandon plans to build on the Chandigarh site in order that the land might be preserved for agriculture, was now promoted as one of the city's best resources. Randhawa admonished the "bad soil" of Delhi as the "millstone" around the neck of the city while touting the "good loam" or fertile soil of Chandigarh. He went on to prove his point with the (unverified) claim that "the largest mango tree in the world grows in Burail," a village that has since been incorporated into Chandigarh's city limits.<sup>173</sup>

In July of 1953 Randhawa organized a Chandigarh Landscape Committee, together with the city's chief architects and engineers, including Le Corbusier. The group was first tasked, under the suggestion of Le Corbusier, with creating a chart that depicted not only the types but the ultimate shapes of the trees, the thickness of their foliage, and the colors of their flowers. The main concern of this chart (and, presumably, the committee itself) was to classify "beautiful, ornamental flowering and foliage trees of India, which may be called the aristocrats of the plant kingdom" in order to provide guidance not only for "all tree-planting in Chandigarh" but later on for "all the new townships, hydro-electric dam sites, and universities in India." Although not articulated as such Randhawa here is treating Chandigarh in its familiar role as a laboratory—this time as a testing ground for India-wide planting and landscaping decisions. Ironically, Chandigarh's fertile soil, much touted by Randhawa, is in this reckoning spoken of as universal—what beauty is achieved in Chandigarh can be achieved elsewhere in India. On the

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<sup>172</sup> M.S. Randhawa, "Landscaping Chandigarh," unpublished document, 1954; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 3, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

other side of this coin was the assumption that India's ornamental flowering trees would adapt well to Chandigarh's subtropical environment of significant variability in temperature and rainfall. These issues did not seem to be concerns for Randhawa. Later, in 1955, he was appointed Vice President of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research in New Delhi, a position that allowed him to collect seeds of some of the rare flowering trees the Committee had expressed an interest in.

The Committee set to work planting trees and shrubs according to the chart authored by Le Corbusier and promoted by Randhawa. Trees planted on the high-speed V-1 roads were selected and grouped primarily with the need for shade and the aesthetics of crown shape, a feature expected to be appreciable from a distance, in mind. Trees along the slower traffic, sector-interior V-4 roads, in contrast, were more concerned with short-range visual interest and the use of flower color to differentiate sectors: "The V-4 should be lively (...) To specialize the character, each V-4 has been planted with trees with different colors of flowers. For example, one V-4 is yellow, another red, and yet another blue."<sup>174</sup> Considered from a citywide vantage point, care was taken to ensure that for every month a different type of tree would be in bloom in a different part of the city, transforming each region into "a fairyland of gentle colors" in its turn.<sup>175</sup> Jane Drew recalled in an unpublished memoir that trees did provide something of the desired visual variation to what might otherwise have been fairly homogenous sectors. She notes, "one of the first things we did was to get a tree nursery planted and the various sectors were quickly identified by their trees. Trees provided not only shade but also identification."<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> M.S. Randhawa, "Landscaping Chandigarh," Government Press booklet, September 16, 1967, p. 8; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Jane Drew, "Reflections on My Life and Work," unpublished document, March 1993, p. 8; RIBA Archives, F&D/25/3.

In a separate interview Drew noted another of her methods for using ornamental trees: she reportedly considered Jeanneret's buildings to be "fussy" and when she found herself in charge of planting in certain sectors of the new city she "tried to hide as much of his work with trees as [she] could."<sup>177</sup> It seems that although Randhawa had originally envisioned a visual artist in the role of city landscaper it had instead fallen to the lot of the architectural team.

In addition to the concerns of visual interest and sector identity, landscaping in Chandigarh was also intended to serve a diplomatic function. Randhawa describes a nursery in Chandigarh that was set to collect 200,000 saplings from various nurseries throughout India, in order that the city should act as a botanical microcosm of the country.<sup>178</sup> Seeds and cuttings of ornamental plants were collected, for example, from the "ancient state gardens of Patiala, Amritsar, Attari, Bhunga, and Pinjore."<sup>179</sup> As such Chandigarh was intended to act not only as laboratory but also as a heritage greenhouse. Looking beyond India, in the same document Randhawa described plans to solicit gifts of bamboo from China and Japan, drawing a comparison with the cherry trees of Washington, D.C. and presumably helping to solidify the pan-Asian diplomatic relations between the countries, at least symbolically. Interestingly, by the twenty-first century landscaping at the Rock Garden functioned in a diplomatic fashion similar to what Randhawa had originally envisioned for the city at large. As part of the 2001 Silver Jubilee

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<sup>177</sup> This claim could not otherwise be verified. Interview, Jane Drew with D.V. White, October 6, 1995; RIBA Archives, F&D/28/5.

<sup>178</sup> M.S. Randhawa, "Landscaping Chandigarh," unpublished document, 1954; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 3, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>179</sup> M.S. Randhawa, "Landscaping Chandigarh," Government Press booklet, September 16, 1967, p. 1; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

it organized, the Nek Chand Foundation international delegates planted “peace trees” of unknown variety on the Garden’s grounds.<sup>180</sup>

In his 1957 booklet, “Landscaping in Chandigarh,” Randhawa reported success with dust-belt and shade trees, and with certain exotic nurseries that “served as a source of seed for Chandigarh for many years.”<sup>181</sup> At that point, Chandigarh had not been in existence even a decade, and Randhawa’s claims of landscape longevity and success were premature. Considering the matter decades later, time had made it clear that many of the non-native plants transplanted to Chandigarh had become a liability rather than a success story. Despite Randhawa’s claimed desire to plant “only such trees which were lasting and desirable for landscaping,” including slow-growing trees that would one day provide much-needed shade and dust-shelter belts,<sup>182</sup> the Committee’s choices were not always successful. Jeet Malhotra, who was by 1982 Chief Architect of Punjab, submitted a report that year that included suggestions to remove the “tiny flowery foreign trees” from public areas. Such trees, he stated, “produce too many allergens” and “do not provide needed shade.”<sup>183</sup> Malhotra suggested replacing Randhawa’s beloved ornamental trees—the growth of which was stunted in Chandigarh’s environment—with large, shady, native ones. He recommended native mango, neem, and jamun.

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<sup>180</sup> Unpublished image with caption, delegate Cheryl Rivers planting a “peace tree,” photograph by Anton Rajer; Anton Rajer Archive, Box 1, SPACES Collection.

<sup>181</sup> M.S. Randhawa, “Landscaping Chandigarh,” Government Press booklet, September 16, 1967, p. 2; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Jeet Malhotra, “Chandigarh and its Environment,” unpublished paper, 1982; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 1, Folder 6; UCLA Special Collections 1364.

### *Landscaping the Rock Garden*

By the time Randhawa became involved with Chand's hidden creation, named it the Rock Garden, and opened it to the public, there were already several parks established or in the works in Chandigarh. Le Corbusier had envisioned a system of parks that would serve as the "lungs" of his anthropomorphized city; major realized parks included the Bougainville Garden in Sector 3, the Terrace Garden in Sector 33, the Rose Garden in Sector 16, Butterfly Park in Sector 26, the protected area around Sukhna Lake, including the Garden of Silence, and, acting as something of a land reserve in Sector 1, the Memory Park. The Leisure Valley, a green belt designed as a continuous, fully walk-able eight-kilometer parkland that included several themed garden, was set to extend the length of the city, from its northeastern tip to its southwestern one. This feature was included in city plans by Le Corbusier (an early version having been formulated by Mayer<sup>184</sup>); its ability to serve as a pedestrian link is, however, today precluded by the lack of pedestrian underpasses beneath the V-4 and V-3 roads that cut across it.<sup>185</sup> Early residents enjoyed and demanded additional parks as the city grew. A 1957 report noted that "almost half" of those Chandigarh residents questioned indicated the desire for a larger number of parks, including those specifically desired for children.<sup>186</sup>

Before discovery of the Rock Garden and amidst this backdrop of concerted citywide landscaping efforts, Nek Chand, in addition to collecting rocks and creating sculptures from debris, had created an unofficial nursery of his own. In 1965 Chand purportedly established a

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<sup>184</sup> Interestingly, Mayer's idea—later reissued by Le Corbusier—met with criticism at an early meeting of the new replacement architectural team. Fry, for his part, derided the concept as "too isolate" and its footpath "too tenuous to act as a link." See "Meeting Minutes from Architects' Office, U.S. Club meeting with Mayer," June 15, 1951; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 1, Folder 3; UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>185</sup> *Chandigarh Master Plan, 2031*, 2015, p. 235; accessed at [www.chandigarh.gov.in](http://www.chandigarh.gov.in)

<sup>186</sup> "Chandigarh Socio-Economic Survey," issued by the Economic and Statistical Advisor to the Government, Punjab, conducted May 1957, printed 1958; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 3, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

water tank as one of the site's first features.<sup>187</sup> Stating that plants, in addition to rocks, "are also my hobby," Chand created a nursery that would allow him the ability to "grow trees for my kingdom."<sup>188</sup> Iain Jackson describes Chand's early process of establishing an irrigation source: Chand initially collected water for the site from a nearby city water main that had burst. Later, he dug strategically located ponds to collect rainwater.<sup>189</sup> Tony Rajer described Chand's initial act of transporting water from a Sector-4 water tank in traditional vessels that he carried on his shoulders in order to "turn a sandy patch into a Greenland [sic]."<sup>190</sup> Not only was this water collection an illicit operation; Chand's "nursery" was itself allegedly established from unofficial and informal means. Although it is difficult to verify, Jackson reports that Chand's plant specimens were originally discards from the household gardens of "the more affluent sectors;" changing fashions in gardening, apparently, provided Chand with plenty of available plants ready to move in terracotta containers.<sup>191</sup> It is difficult to imagine the scenario in which affluent Chandigarhians facilitated the secret collection of their "unwanted" garden plants by providing the intact pottery while looking in the other direction. It seems more likely that Chand's work as a city engineer allowed him the opportunity to surreptitiously collect various plants intended for use in city landscaping, much as he reportedly collected small amounts of cement mix and rebar that were intended use in city construction.

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<sup>187</sup> Patrick Cox with Ulli Beier, "Kingdom of Nek Chand" short film, New York: Raw Vision, 1985.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid. Note that the actual voice used in the film is not that of Nek Chand but of one Atindra Mojumder. The lengthy first-person monologue is presented as the narrative of Nek Chand, and its details, indeed, conform to the established literature. No specifics are provided, however.

<sup>189</sup> Iain Jackson, "Cataloging Nek Chand's Rock Garden, Chandigarh: An Analysis and Interpretation of the Sculpture, Architecture, and Landscape," unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Liverpool, 2008, p. 169.

<sup>190</sup> Tony Rajer, draft of speech for Silver Jubilee, "Nek Chand in His House of Gods," 2001, Anton Rajer Archive, Box 4; SPACES Collection. Rajer's categorization of the land as a barren "sandy patch" does not appear to be strictly accurate.

<sup>191</sup> Iain Jackson, "Cataloging Nek Chand's Rock Garden, Chandigarh," vol. 1, 2008; p. 189, footnote 14.

Nonetheless, Chand did amass a sizable collection of plant materials; regardless of his specific method he was able to secret these away and cultivate them in his growing clandestine site. By 1983 the Rock Garden nursery had reportedly grown to several acres in size and contained “hundreds of shrubs, plants, weeds, grasses, and mosses” for use as plant source material in Chand’s landscapes.<sup>192</sup> A press release promoting the issue of a Rock Garden commemorative postage stamp and also published in 1983 called the Rock Garden nursery “the envy of accomplished horticulturalists both in terms of its size and the variety of plants it houses.”<sup>193</sup> It is notable that, in the brief press release for a stamp featuring one of Chand’s bangle-woman sculptures, the nursery—an area not accessible to the public—rates such a mention. It is unclear whether the Garden’s nursery consists primarily of native or foreign plant species, or what, if any, were Chand’s sources beyond the alleged elite-home discards. Although the nursery itself is not today accessible by the public,<sup>194</sup> it is established in the promotional literature as a foundational element of the Garden. Trees and other plants appearing in the public areas of the Garden and most notably in the earliest two phases have been carefully planned and are sourced from the on-site nursery.

In a gesture that parallels the efforts of Randhawa and Le Corbusier to landscape the city as a whole, the effects of size, shape, and flowers were carefully considered by Nek Chand during the early phases of Garden construction. Jackson notes that, although the focus in the Garden increasingly became sculpture rather than vegetation from the early days of being open

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<sup>192</sup> Michael T. Kaufman, “Nek Chand’s Garden Fantasy,” *The New York Times*, April 3, 1983.

<sup>193</sup> Press release for Indian postage stamp “View of the Garden,” September 23, 1983, available at [www.indianpost.com](http://www.indianpost.com); accessed June 14, 2016.

<sup>194</sup> Nursery location, as well as private versus public demarcation of areas, is indicated in Iain Jackson, “Cataloging Nek Chand’s Rock Garden, Chandigarh,” vol. 2, 2008; pp. 8-11.

to the public onward, the selection of trees and plants in the Garden remains important.<sup>195</sup>

Drawing a direct comparison to the early Chandigarh landscaping schemes, Jackson notes that unlike in the city in the Rock Garden the vegetation was planned not only for its “ocular attributes”—crown shape, foliage, and flowers—but for its entire sensory value: the atmospheric quality of the sound produced by wind through leaves, for example.<sup>196</sup> Jackson’s point is well taken; in documents produced by Randhawa and supplemented with descriptions and designs by Le Corbusier, trees tend to take on the quality of non-living, uniform design entities, and the architects seem to expect the living trees to behave predictably and everlastingly in this fashion. I would, however, reiterate the practical (shade, dust-block) and symbolic functions of the city-selected trees, as detailed in the previous section.

Mention is made in the scant literature that exists about the difference between Chand’s impulse to work strategically with the topography of the land—for example, in relation to the position of his rainwater tanks—and the city architectural team’s desire to change the existing landscape. The Le Corbusier team sunk the roadway that leads into Sector 1, so it would not interfere with the general view, and built up the hills to the north of the city. But Chand’s methods were dictated in large part by the secretive nature of his project in the beginning; the later phases of the Rock Garden alter the natural topography considerably. They were also likely due to the unplanned nature of his work—Chand famously worked without plans, sketches, or even with an overarching eye to the completed project.

Interestingly, Chand’s carefully landscaped sections of the Garden visually seem to seek to approximate a beautiful but overgrown jungle. According to tourist literature, Chand imaged the Garden as a ruined and deserted kingdom, evidence of a civilization’s former glory that

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<sup>195</sup> Iain Jackson, “Cataloging Nek Chand’s Rock Garden, Chandigarh,” 2008; p. 178.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

simultaneously languished and was re-animated in the present day. As such the “ruins” of the kingdom exist in an overgrown but carefully selected landscape of nursery vegetation. This feeling of the presence of ruins positioned within an overgrown jungle is further enhanced by Chand’s construction of concrete “roots” and “vines” that appear to overtake the architectural elements of Phase II [Figures 95, 96]. Elsewhere in the Garden, actual trees have been incorporated into the site’s built walls, creating in a different way the illusion that the jungle is overtaking the built environment [Figure 97]. These overgrown-appearing roots and vines act together with the “decayed” stone walls and mossy overgrowth to construct and narrate an invented but tangible, tactile, and visible “past.” The landscaping of the Garden, both in terms of its actual plants and in relation to its contrasted plant-like features, is figuratively and literally rooted in the conception of the site as the “discovered” remains of a fantastical ancient kingdom.

Chand’s landscaping efforts have been contrasted with those of the city in a different way. In 2001 Foundation trustee Tony Rajer promoted the story that Chand had saved a picturesque pipal tree from being removed from the area adjacent to Sukhna Lake. According to this story, Chand sought the help of the wife of Chandigarh Chief Minister Bhimsen Sachar in his efforts. Chand and several of his friends, feeling strongly that the tree not be removed from the site, “tied several meters of *mauli* or sacred red thread around the tree and impressed upon Mrs. Sachar the need for saving the tree, which was worshipped by many people. And she did.”<sup>197</sup> With this story, Rajer constructs the familiar binary, this time using the terms of the city’s landscaping: the spiritual Chand, acting as a spokesperson on behalf of the “many” who purportedly worshipped the tree, employs a simple but stubbornly nonviolent means for preserving the region’s ancient traditions against the encroaching modern, secular city. Here

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<sup>197</sup> Tony Rajer, draft of speech for Silver Jubilee, “Nek Chand in His House of Gods,” 2001, Anton Rajer Archive, Box 4; SPACES Collection.

Chand, cast as a vaguely Gandhian figure, acts as a single voice against the aggressive and “unnatural,” even un-Indian, forces of the city.

The episode of the rescued pipal tree provides a ready transition to the concerns of the following chapter, in which Chand, projected as the simple, spiritual, Gandhian man with a “fantastical” creation are repeatedly summoned and called upon to serve as the antithesis of Le Corbusier and his city. Chapter Three, building from the groundwork of Chapters One and Two, pays close attention to the specific contours of the Chandigarh binary, particularly as they relate to the ways in which the Rock Garden has been presented to the public and represented in the media. As I demonstrate, such comparisons between the city and the Garden and between Le Corbusier and Nek Chand—many of which have gained power through their telling by the Nek Chand Foundation—have complicated relationships to the area’s colonial and post-Partition history.

### *Chapter Three*

#### *Circulation and Representation: The Rock Garden as Village, Heritage, and “Monument to Recycling”*

Vinayak Bharne’s description of the Rock Garden in his essay, “Le Corbusier’s Ruin: The Changing Face of Chandigarh’s Capitol,” is typical of the way in which Chand’s work is most often introduced. In his one-paragraph mention of the site, Bharne sets up the Rock Garden as the lively foil to the deserted plazas of Le Corbusier’s Capital Complex: “The garden is something everyone happily associates with. It boasts a public magnetism the forlorn Capitol can only aspire to.”<sup>1</sup> Likewise, Vikramaditya Prakash, in his *Chandigarh’s Le Corbusier*, briefly contrasts the vibrant, crowded Garden, the walls and sculptures of which “one is drawn in to touch and caress,” with “the colossal grave,” the dignified ruin” that is Le Corbusier’s Capitol.<sup>2</sup> Prakash goes so far as to liken the twisted, unplanned paths of the Rock Garden to a disorienting intestinal tract—a somewhat unsettling comparison that seems all the more striking when one remembers the way in which Le Corbusier’s city’s designs were meant to evoke the human body.<sup>3</sup> Both historians rely on the Rock Garden to serve as a ready, quirky counterpoint to their larger statements about the otherwise vacant Sector 1, and, more broadly, to the follies of the planned modernist city when considered against the well-loved, much-visited “unusual assemblage” with its “lack of pedigree.”<sup>4</sup>

For Bharne and Prakash, the Rock Garden—despite its being a major tourist attraction with a highly contested history vis-à-vis the city—fits only into their narratives of Chandigarh as a passing counterpoint. As architectural historians, they are perhaps understandably more

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<sup>1</sup> Vinayak Bharne, “Le Corbusier’s Ruin,” 2013, p. 124.

<sup>2</sup> Vikramaditya Prakash, *Chandigarh’s Le Corbusier*, 2002, p. 71.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

invested in the architects' original designs for the city. Their exceedingly brief (and not strictly accurate) mentions of the Rock Garden, however, do more than simply ignore the significance of the eighteen-acre site: they help to place the focus of the two written works firmly in the historical origin point of Chandigarh's conception, ignoring in large part the realities of the actual, existing city. This is a trend that accounts written specifically about the Rock Garden itself have also tended to follow. Accordingly, these typically explain the Garden as the sole subversive unplanned element in a planned, edict-governed city; depictions of the quiet but stubborn erosion of the Master Plan and the comparison between the beloved playground adjacent to the deserted modernist ruin are the nearly universal entry points for descriptions of the Garden.<sup>5</sup> The Rock Garden itself, then, is made to play an active role in the Chandigarh binary: the untamed and the planned, the local rural aesthetic and the imported modern mode, the rustic and the refined, the East and the West.

In the preceding chapters I have expanded the confines of this polarized account of Chandigarh by considering the broader history of the post-Independence city and regional planning in the Punjab, and by focusing on the concerns of Partition migrants and displaced villagers and on their adaptations of urban spaces. By examining the processes, materials, and methods of the Garden, intimately tied as they are to the complicated intersections of Chandigarh's migrations, displacements, promise, and restrictions, Chapter Three continues to argue for the work's site-specificity, and positions the Garden's concerns not in opposition to the planned city but rather as interwoven in the city's fabric.

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<sup>5</sup> Most striking are the myriad media articles that rely on the contradiction as shorthand for the site's—and the city's—complexities. To take a slightly less journalistic example, Piery and Lespinasse's *Nek Chand's Outsider Art* does, via its agenda to connect Chand's work with that of other "outsider" artists, advance a more complex reading of the site; however, even it falls back on binaries of "Indian" and "Western" tradition. Lucienne Peiry and Philippe Lespinasse, *Nek Chand's Outsider Art: The Rock Garden of Chandigarh*, Paris: Flammarion, 2005.

In Chapter Two, I examined some of the ways in which the area's original villagers and low-income laborers in Chandigarh were repeatedly marginalized in the new city. Through this process "squatter" or makeshift structures were destroyed in the course of the development of a city that offered no viable housing alternatives. Even as literary works have demonstrated the promise associated with living in Chandigarh in its early years, the archival records reveal that changes to individual homes were restricted and most adaptations had to be undertaken in secret. At the same time, as we will see in the current chapter, the formulation of an idealized and romanticized conceptual village became key to the architects' design of Chandigarh's neighborhoods. The fantasy village—as distinct from the reality of local villages—created a key oppositional point that became foundational to the successful construction of the city's mythology. As part of this mythology, the Rock Garden became increasingly presented as a controlled "village" space, with Nek Chand as its consummate "villager." The current chapter demonstrates that, far from being the planned city's unplanned and unruly opposite as the Chandigarh binary has presented it, the Rock Garden in fact met an urban need that had earlier been argued for by local officials. At the same time, local tourist literature as well as publications produced by the U.K.-based Nek Chand Foundation promoted Nek Chand as a spiritual figure who stood in contrast to the "calculating" West, the latter represented by Le Corbusier and his modernist Capitol Complex buildings. This "spiritual" figure provided both ready fodder for the propagation of the binary while at the same time presenting Chand as a valuable resource to Chandigarh and indeed India at large.

The chapter opens with a look at the photographic record of the early city, and in particular the ways in which this record both reinforced colonial-era visual tropes and inflected future contemporary modes. Here I examine some of the ways in which the construction of the

modern-versus-traditional binary was achieved via the circulation of city construction photographs. The propagation of this binary, as I demonstrate, is not limited to historic photographs but continues on in recently published collections of documentary photography. Such continued reliance on a polarized account of the city's history has had, as this chapter demonstrates, a profound effect on the ways in which Nek Chand and the Rock Garden have been framed and understood. And as we will see, the propagation and circulation of Chand's mythic opposition to Le Corbusier, and that of the Garden to the city at large, has been instrumental in the garnering of international support and interest in Chand's project.

### ***Constructing the City, Constructing the Myth***

A large share of the credit for constructing and circulating the mythic Chandigarh binary—the Western modern misplaced in a field of Eastern tradition, the sleek lines of the concrete Capitol Complex buildings uneasily situated alongside mud-hut villages—goes to the photographic record of the earliest days of city building. Such images, primarily taken by Western photographers, record and revel in not so much construction progress as uneasy juxtaposition. As I elaborate in this section, the tension created in these historic photographs has not only profoundly contributed to the circulation of the Chandigarh binary but has also established the template for published photographic recordings of the city today. This template continues, sixty years after the city's founding, to circulate the notion that the polarizing disconnect of tradition and modern still defines Chandigarh today.

In a 1956 photograph by Ernst Scheidegger a group of cattle graze in the plains immediately adjacent to the Secretariat Building in the Capitol Complex.<sup>6</sup> This area used for

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<sup>6</sup> Reproduced in Stanislaus von Moos, ed., *Chandigarh 1956*, 2010, pp. 84-85.

grazing—just southeast of the Secretariat—is today part of the secured, moderately landscaped space of Sector 1. At the time the photo was taken the Secretariat was about a third of the way finished; the straight-on shot captures the building’s skeletal grid, through which the sky on the other side is visible. The area had, by 1956, been cleared of Mehla Majra village’s buildings and inhabitants, but the cattle that belonged to either the villagers or the construction workers (who, as I have stated throughout, may indeed have been one and the same) still grazed there. It was a scene such as this one that Le Corbusier railed against in a 1957 memorandum to Randhawa, ominously titled “Urgent! As a Psychological Theme.” Le Corbusier was “appalled” at the way in which “stray cattle” wandered unchecked throughout Sector 1; he ordered the construction of a simple fence so that prospective developers would not be dissuaded from buying plots in the city.<sup>7</sup> Framing as it does the entire horizontal span of the Secretariat, the photograph undoubtedly intends to document the building’s construction. That the grazing cattle occupy the foreground—roughly half of the photograph—is inescapable, however. The focal point of the image is not the building under construction but a cow, the head of which, unlike the others in its group, is turned towards the camera. The viewer’s eye begins at the left edge of the photograph and quickly follows the Secretariat on the horizon; its half-constructed height drops off at the exact off-right center point at which the cow’s head in the lower half of the photograph turns towards the camera. Following the line of grazing cattle, the eye drifts towards the lower right, and away from the seemingly unpeopled construction site.

Such photographs do offer a glimpse into the process of building—a glimpse that, unlike Jeet Malhotra’s photographs featured in the December 1961 issue of *Marg*,<sup>8</sup> do not communicate

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<sup>7</sup> Memorandum, Le Corbusier to M.S. Randhawa, “Urgent! As a Psychological Theme,” December 8, 1957; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 3, UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>8</sup> Malhotra’s photographs are also reproduced in Atreyee Gupta, “In a Postcolonial Diction,” 2013, p. 38.

the buildings' geographical elements and sculptural quality so much as they display the *act* of construction. Photographs like that of the previously described cattle in the foreground of the Secretariat carry with them the possibility of capturing the act of construction—the dawning of the very moment of disconnect between tradition and modernity—rather than the completed project and inhabited city. I ask: is the potential to capture the process of building, as a vigorous, progressive act of a modernizing nation, thwarted or enhanced by the juxtaposition of the traces of traditional life with the evidence of a burgeoning modernity? These photographs, as I demonstrate here, have supported the Chandigarh binary—the visual record of which has had the effect of drawing attention not to modernization in India but rather to the supposed absurdity of the undertaking. The circulation of these seemingly preposterous and incongruous juxtapositions has become a standard way of introducing not only the city, but, as we will see, the Rock Garden as well.

The image of cattle grazing before Sector 1 construction projects is not unlike Scheidegger's photo from the same year that, this time, depicts donkeys. Saddled with heavy blankets and burdened with basket-loads, the donkeys' necks are ornamented with woven bands and bells; all of these elements draw our attention to the animals' traditional use and existence in the village. The donkeys are grazing in front of the completed General Hospital in Sector 16. In this photograph the focal point is the brown donkey at the center of the photograph; the head of this animal is lowered but facing the camera. The viewer's eye then moves to the right towards the other two donkeys, which are grazing in a line behind the first. The eye registers the white concrete and brick building at the horizon line, with its grid of geometric *jali* screens, only last. Again as with Scheidegger's image of cattle grazing in Sector 1, traces of a "pre-modern" rural life are starkly positioned against a background of modern design. During this period of

Chandigarh construction, the camera— most often operated by a European photographer—seems to revel in the contrast of rural tradition and the unambiguously modern.

The subject of these photos is *not* the construction of the city, it is the uneasy contrast between “traditional” India and the “modern” West. As such the images’ potential to record the act of building and of modernization as a key moment in independent India is limited if not thwarted. Scheidegger’s photo of the Secretariat, at that time actively under construction, is oddly devoid of human activity and appears more like a modern ruin, destroyed and deserted rather than in the process of being built: its rebar exposed, it is displaced in time in a landscape where grazing cattle are the only signs of life, and these animals work to signify the presence of a thoroughly un-modernized people. Such images bring to mind stories of villager farmers unearthing forgotten temple ruins in the jungle rather than nation-building projects teeming with contemporary life. Scheidegger is not alone in his photographic effort to juxtapose the rural and the modern. In Le Corbusier’s own photographs from the late 1950s, the early days of Sector 1, people sometimes do figure into the images. However, they are less akin to Norma Evenson’s documentation of life in 1960s Chandigarh—images of people shopping, riding bicycles, walking to work, or otherwise engaged in typical daily activities<sup>9</sup>—than they are to the eighteenth-century painters, the Daniells, and their romanticized images of “natives” idling before the Ellora Caves.<sup>10</sup> This connection must also be considered in the context of Le Corbusier’s aforementioned romanticization of village and traditional “Eastern” life, a view that had apparently changed very little since his trip to the Middle East in 1911.

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<sup>9</sup> Norma Evenson, *Chandigarh*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Daniell and his nephew William were English landscape painters who worked in the picturesque tradition. See, for example, Mildred Archer, *Early Views of India: Picturesque Journeys of Thomas and William Daniell*, 1980, London: Thames and Hudson Ltd.

Vikramaditya Prakash has argued that such juxtapositions of traditional and modern have been incorporated even in the designs for the Capitol Complex buildings themselves, and, as such, are not unique to the inclinations of mid-century photographers but rather are fundamental to the very fiber of the new city. To take one example, Prakash describes the Assembly as resembling an abstracted bull when viewed in profile.<sup>11</sup> Whether one finds this argument to be visually convincing or not, it is clear from Le Corbusier's many sketches in India and his mural on the entrance doors of the Assembly that the architect had something of a preoccupation with the region's brahma bulls, turbaned villagers, veiled woman, and decorated donkeys, and with the nearby Kansal villagers. The architect referred to the latter as "noble savages."<sup>12</sup> In Chapter One I detailed Jane Drew's egregious conjuring of the "timeless village" during her 1963 lecture on post-Partition urban planning in India. My observations of the photographic record are also supported with written evidence of an ongoing fascination with the seemingly at-odds juxtaposition of the traditional villager and the modern city. When *The New Yorker* journalist Christopher Rand visited Le Corbusier during construction of the High Court he too marveled at the sight of Indian laborers, describing them as "yet barely touched by the machine age."<sup>13</sup> Rand noted with interest the villagers' practice of mixing mortar with their feet and of transporting basins and baskets of building materials atop their heads.<sup>14</sup> Such methods, Rand stated, were the "age-old sights and sounds that surrounded the improbably futuristic building before me."<sup>15</sup> In this reckoning the juxtaposition had the effect of making modernization in India appear improbable and fantastical, at least to the Western audience for Rand's article.

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<sup>11</sup> V. Prakash, *Chandigarh's Le Corbusier*, 2002, pp. 119-122.

<sup>12</sup> V. Prakash, *Chandigarh's Le Corbusier*, 2002, pp. 82-87.

<sup>13</sup> Christopher Rand, "City on a Tilting Plain," *The New Yorker*, April 30, 1955, p. 54.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Christopher Rand, "City on a Tilting Plain," *The New Yorker*, April 30, 1955, p. 51.

Such views as Rand's have tended to position Chandigarh as an anomaly, rather than placing it in the context of Bhakra Dam and other Nehruvian modernization projects, or indeed of other planned cities in mid-twentieth century India. Interestingly, Le Corbusier himself took something of the opposite position: he originally envisioned his Open Hand monument, currently located in the Capitol Complex, would be built over the Bhakra Dam.<sup>16</sup> Of course, his intension may have had more to do with a desire to "brand" the separate Bhakra Dam project as somehow his own, rather than coming from a true interest in promoting the continuity and fuller context of modernization in India. Of course, marveling at rural India and classifying its people and practices as "unchanging" dates back to at least the earliest days of European presence in India, as already indicated in my reference to the Daniells' images of Ellora. In Chandigarh, however, these Orientalist fantasies took on a new dimension, placed as they were in the literal and figurative foreground of the modernist landscape of the city, and within the setting of the post-colonial nation.

Eventually, when the initial phase of construction was complete and the European architects departed, the photographic record began to signal something other than a polarized view of traditional Indian verses modern Western. Far from combating and dismantling the earlier binary, which could have easily been called into question as residents began to inhabit the architect-designed buildings and to make them their own, this separate formulation continued to contribute to the establishment of the city's myth. In an act that amounts to a denial of the ongoing inhabitation and alteration of the city's spaces and buildings, many photographs taken in the decades following initial construction were cropped and altered to remove unkempt grass, barbed wire, and guard posts and to focus instead on the sculptural quality of the city's

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<sup>16</sup> Monica Sharma, "Corbusier was Reluctant to Take Up Chandigarh Project, Reveals Memoir," *Hindustan Times, Chandigarh*, August 5, 2016.

buildings.<sup>17</sup> Such acts to crop out and in effect deny remnants of the urban context and inhabitation proclaimed that the efforts to modernize were both complete and picturesque, and, furthermore, need not include Indian residents at all. The effect of this attention paid to the sculptural quality of the city's buildings at the expense of life within and among them has been to continue to focus not on the real, inhabited Chandigarh but instead on the architects' imagined, mid-century city. The altered photographs continue to assert the value of what Vinayak Bharne has referred to as the buildings' "sculptural purity," "as if the only thing that matters is Le Corbusier's original vision, not [its] legacy."<sup>18</sup>

The photographic declaration that Chandigarh's architecture is sculpture more so than inhabited and altered homes, offices, and public buildings continues today. For example, a recently published book of photographs, *Chandigarh Redux*, organizes its images of notable Chandigarh buildings by sector and by European architect.<sup>19</sup> Purporting to record the urban landscape as it exists today, the photographs record very little sign of human life; the deserted streets as well as the quality and tone of the natural light in these images suggests that many of them were likely taken in the very early hours of the morning. On page after page the camera records vacant stairwells, museum interiors, and city plazas; people, in the few photographs in which they feature, are incidental or captured at so small a scale as to register to the eye only secondarily. Much is made visually of the haphazard stacks of bundled papers at Fry's Government Press,<sup>20</sup> the piles of broken mid-century furniture in Le Corbusier's Secretariat,<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Vinayak Bharne, "The Changing Face of Chandigarh's Capitol," in *The Emerging Asian City*, New York: Routledge, 2013, pp. 199-128; citation p. 125.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Martin and Werner Feiersinger, eds., *Chandigarh Redux*, Zurich: Verlag Scheidegger & Spiess AG., 2015.

<sup>20</sup> Feiersinger, *Chandigarh Redux*, 2013, p. 243.

and the rows of empty notary desks that line the plaza in front of Jeanneret's Town Hall.<sup>22</sup> Far from capturing the city of over one million people, the photographs instead proclaim a fictional deserted urban wasteland—an almost uncanny, post-apocalyptic landscape devoid of human life. This eeriness is only briefly broken by the final photograph; in this image smoke billows out from the back of a Sector-3 housing unit.<sup>23</sup> Significantly, this image feels out of place in the context of the rest of the book. The uncontrolled smoke pouring from a Sector-3 flat reads as the sole disruption of the photographer's desire for as near a sculptural purity as was possible.

Even in collections of photographs that purport to record the ways in which people exist in the city—such as Iwan Baan's *Living with Modernity*—the focus very frequently falls on the uneasy juxtaposition of tradition and modernity.<sup>24</sup> Baan captures, for example, a young man washing his clothes in the partially drained reflecting pools in Sector 1, another man rinsing his teeth through the window of the Secretariat, and two elderly turbaned Sikh men sitting outside the Assembly. Baan himself states in his introductory text that he wished to capture not the architects' intended city but rather the inhabitation and co-optation of its buildings sixty years later, and his striking photographs might be said to highlight important fissures that the Chandigarh binary has elided from the record.<sup>25</sup> However, Baan's camera often revels in contrasts that Sheidegger himself might have captured, creating as they do striking images. Many of Baan's images appear less about typical daily life in Chandigarh than they are about

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<sup>21</sup> Feiersinger, *Chandigarh Redux*, 2013, p. 114.

<sup>22</sup> Feiersinger, *Chandigarh Redux*, 2013, pp. 23-34.

<sup>23</sup> Feiersinger, *Chandigarh Redux*, 2013, p. 383.

<sup>24</sup> Iwan Baan, *Brasilia-Chandigarh: Living With Modernity*, 2010, Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers.

<sup>25</sup> Baan does not provide an essay within the body of the text but rather has included an introductory statement, which is printed on the inside cover flap. *Living with Modernity* features the essay, "Ex Nihilo: A Tale of Two Cities" by Cees Nooteboom; Nooteboom also reflects on Baan's desire to show "what happens when the chilly, impersonal drawing from the past is populated by real, live human beings;" *Brasilia-Chandigarh: Living With Modernity*, 2010, pp. 117-118.

ironic collocations. In his work, as in the photographs of Le Corbusier and Scheidegger fifty years earlier, the polarized account of Chandigarh remains firmly in place. Such images capture the ways in which a certain angle of vision has perpetuated over time.

### *Nek Chand As Villager, the Rock Garden as Village*

“What remains in the mind is not the analysis of his work but that simple image of a man sitting by his hut in a forest clearing, mixing cement, mortar, and odds-and-ends discarded by civilization, [...] giving shape to elements of his imagination like no one else had done before.”<sup>26</sup>

Part of what Scheidegger’s photographs establish is the narrative of the rustic villager at odds with the modern city. This is a formulation that has been readily attached to Nek Chand. Similarly, the Rock Garden registers as a whimsical, but controlled, “village” environment available for consumption in the city. Along these lines, Chand and his work have met with uneasy, but remarkably consistent, categorization in the existing literature. As we have seen, his sculptures and built environments are frequently referred to as folk art,<sup>27</sup> vernacular architecture,<sup>28</sup> and the components of a self-fashioned visionary world.<sup>29</sup> Chand himself has been called a folk artist, an outsider artist, an untaught genius, and perhaps most dramatically, “keeper of Indian heritage.”<sup>30</sup> Given the specific and rather tangled connotations of the terms “folk” artist in relation to a colonial past in India and “outsider” artist in relation to modern Western art, both Indian media sources and Western interests have tended to settle on a less

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<sup>26</sup> B.N. Goswamy, “A Universe from Nothing,” *India Express*, June 22, 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Anton Rajer, “Nek Chand, Victor of Circumstances,” *Envision Newsletter*, vol. 6 issue 2, July 2001.

<sup>28</sup> Leslie Umberger, “Nek Chand, A Tale of Two Cities,” *Sublime Spaces and Visionary Worlds*, exhibition brochure, John Michael Kohler Arts Center, 2007.

<sup>29</sup> Rock Garden Guide booklet produced by Nek Chand Foundation, “Passport, Kingdom of Gods and Goddesses, Nek Chand’s Rock Garden, Chandigarh, India,” John Maizels Archive.

<sup>30</sup> See “Foreigners Pay Tribute to the Untaught Artist,” *Chandigarh Tribune*, March 2, 2001; Anton Rajer, “Nek Chand: Victor of Circumstances,” 2001.

fraught—historically, at least—categorization for Chand than what either of these terms imply. Accordingly, he is overwhelmingly depicted as a simple, humble man with little formal education, who miraculously and single-handedly created a large-scale, fantastical unplanned work with lasting appeal and universal resonance. Furthermore, he created this project—billed as a “world” or “universe” made out of “nothing”—because he was driven by the vision of a grand lost kingdom. The origins of this kingdom fantasy are generally attributed to a combination of his vivid childhood imagination, to the mythical stories told to him by his mother, and to the mourning of the ancestral village left behind and lost to Chand and his family following the events of Partition.

The image of Chand as untaught visionary continues even as sources describe Chand’s recognition on the global stage, his far-flung travel related to exhibitions of his work, and his international accolades. M.N. Sharma’s account is typical of such descriptions. In an article published by *Raw Vision*, Sharma described being put in mind of British sculptor Henry Moore and of Spanish architect Antoni Gaudí when viewing Chand’s work; he went on to note that Chand, “of course, [was] unaware of such big names and their works!”<sup>31</sup> Here, Chand is a single-minded man whose project cannot be altered by attention, acclaim, or by exposure to foreign cities, the world of fine arts, or internationally celebrated artists. He instead remains the childlike observer fascinated by everyday rocks and concrete: “he saw [in these objects] the shapes and forms that could be created [...], and he took these ideas into the forest.”<sup>32</sup>

This categorization of Chand exists not only within the dichotomy of “fine” artists who work with and within the established international art market system versus “outsider” artists who do not. It also speaks directly to the history of idealizing and romanticizing village and

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<sup>31</sup> M.N. Sharma, “Nek Chand: An Early Encounter,” *Raw Vision*, vol. 35, 2001, p. 28.

<sup>32</sup> Anton Rajer, *Nek Chand: Victor of Circumstances*, 2001.

“folk” life in India during both the colonial and post-colonial periods, a legacy participated in by Chandigarh’s Western architectural team. This well-established village-fantasy trope played out in a particular and perhaps unexpected way in Chandigarh and in relation to the Rock Garden. As detailed in Chapter One, villages and their inhabitants had a troubled existence on the landscape first of the proposed and later of the actual city. While the *concept* of the Punjabi village was frequently lauded as idyllic and timeless by architects Jane Drew and Le Corbusier, in practice city officials deemed village buildings unsanitary and unfit for inclusion in the modern city. As we have seen, villages were razed and villagers were displaced not only in preparation for initial city construction but on an ongoing basis: makeshift homes were cleared and rebuilt in different locations due to a lack of affordable housing in Chandigarh, only to be cleared again as the city grew.

There had, however, been significant interest amongst both Le Corbusier and the Indian officials in promoting local rural and traditional arts. For Le Corbusier’s part, the unrealized Sector-1 Museum of Knowledge was, at one point, to include a “live display sector” that would showcase the performance of regional folk dances and dramatic performances.<sup>33</sup> The proposal to display human subjects in such a fashion is reminiscent of colonial-era exhibitions, such as the Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851, but also of the post-Independence Indian Crafts Museum in New Delhi.<sup>34</sup> In addition to his proposed museum-setting displays of regional traditions, Le Corbusier also featured a “good deal” of local hand-made tapestry in his design for the High

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<sup>33</sup> M.G. Devashayam, “To Save the Soul of a City,” *Statesman*, August 19, 1983; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 3, Folder 1; UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>34</sup> See Paul Greenough, “Nation, Economy, and Tradition Displayed: The Indian Crafts Museum in New Delhi,” in *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian World*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1995, pp. 216-248.

Court; this he included for both aesthetic and acoustical reasons.<sup>35</sup> Nehru supported this use of tapestry as a means of “encouraging [India’s] cottage industries and the like:”

In all our big public buildings we should definitely encourage Indian artists of various kinds. Thus, we could encourage [the use of] sculptures, some painted designs on the roof or elsewhere, some woven tapestries, etc. These will not add very much to the total cost of building, but they will give it distinction, and, at the same time, encourage our own artists.<sup>36</sup>

The desire to include village arts in Chandigarh’s plans did not at that time, however, extend to any culturally motivated inclusion of “picturesque” village architecture. A degree of backlash against the ongoing destruction of villager- and squatter housing occurred in later years, motivated by concern not over a humanitarian crisis but rather “cultural heritage.” In 2001 former Chief Architect M.N. Sharma approached Nek Chand Foundation head and *Raw Vision* editor John Maizels for the latter’s assistance in promoting the “vernacular architecture” of Punjabi villages as regional heritage.<sup>37</sup> Sharma, making his bid for support of the promotion and appreciation of village architecture, noted that while rural folk art forms had by then found an audience in India and abroad, “what has gone unnoticed are the exotic forms that emerge from the use of basic materials at hand and natural instincts to create beauty in [the villagers’] habitat.”<sup>38</sup> Village houses, Sharma continued, are “highly personalized” and tend to “assume the characteristics of their creators [...]; each has individuality that is in tune with [its] surroundings.

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<sup>35</sup> Nehru letter to C.P.N. Singh, Governor of Punjab, July 15, 1954; Ravi Kali Archive, Box 2, Folder 2; UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> M.N. Sharma letter to John Maizels, April 27, 2001; John Maizels Archive.

<sup>38</sup> M.N. Sharma, “Vanishing Forms,” unpublished essay submitted to John Maizels, 2001, p. 1; John Maizels Archive.

The villages, though fast disappearing, are the living galleries of unmatched plastic forms comparable to any great work of art.”<sup>39</sup>

This is particularly striking language from a man under whose watch the officially sanctioned destruction of makeshift homes occurred within—and even beyond—the city limits. Admittedly, it is unclear in the record exactly what role Sharma directly played in the razing of temporary- or village buildings. By his own account he attempted to maintain at least some of the sites, although the specifics of this asserted effort are unavailable in the archive. In his “Vanishing Forms” essay Sharma claimed that despite his efforts he was unsuccessful “in his endeavors to retain some of the villages [...] within the Chandigarh Master Plan [as] recreation and cultural centers.”<sup>40</sup> Despite this 2001 claim, however, such efforts are, again, not visible in the official record. Tellingly and even by his own statement, his concerns were not, as I have mentioned, humanitarian in nature—Sharma’s interest was not in assisting the urban poor or allowing the villagers to maintain their traditional lifestyles. Rather, his interest was in preserving and presenting regional cultural “heritage” on view to an interested (and paying) public.

Perhaps the key to understanding this discrepancy between the idealized village structures and the razed buildings of Chandigarh is Sharma’s conjuring of an overall village environment. For Sharma these “great works of art” do not exist in isolation or as buildings that feature “primitive” or non-existent plumbing, or are included in the “unsanitary” practice of keeping household livestock, as we have seen such buildings described in the official records

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> M.N. Sharma, “Vanishing Forms,” unpublished essay submitted to John Maizels, 2001, p. 4; John Maizels Archive. Sharma does not completely render Chandigarh and the village (as a concept, at least) as opposites; he goes on in his essay to note that both the Mayer/Nowicki and the Le Corbusier teams had an interest in the “imaginative and inventive forms of the regional villages.” See M.N. Sharma, “Vanishing Forms,” unpublished essay submitted to John Maizels, 2001, p.2; John Maizels Archive.

detailed in Chapter I. Rather, in his 2001 essay Sharma envisioned village architecture within an entire imagined, harmonious environment, one that was filled with the “merry voices of naked little children at play,” “the murmuring of leaves,” and the “plaintive tunes” of song birds, elements which, taken all together, “render a composition of immense though restrained pathos.”<sup>41</sup> At first glance it is striking that Sharma chooses to use the word “pathos” here, given that the bulk of his description paints a scene of harmonious life in which the villagers “rejoice in [their] work,” “never have a dull moment,” and “share joys and sorrows like one family.”<sup>42</sup> His evocation of bittersweet sentiments and poignancy, however, rings with invented nostalgia and this mood is in common with the village literature of other authors writing about rural India, particularly that created during the post-Partition twentieth century; Sharma’s words fit neatly into this broader trope.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, while Sharma focuses in his essay on the sculptural qualities of quotidian village buildings—an appreciation that would seem to be at odds with the destruction of such buildings within the city—he is actually constructing an entire imagined and deeply romanticized village world, one that could not by definition exist within the city’s limits.

While Sharma goes on in his essay to connect village architecture not with Chand’s work but rather with local folk art and regional devotional traditions, the similarities between the ways in which Sharma has categorized the villagers and the ways he describes Chand are unmistakable. The language Sharma uses in speaking of the village structures—these he characterized by their “spontaneous forms” and “sculpturous quality” [sic],<sup>44</sup> made by “simple

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<sup>41</sup> M.N. Sharma, “Vanishing Forms,” unpublished essay submitted to John Maizels, 2001, p. 2; John Maizels Archive.

<sup>42</sup> M.N. Sharma, “Vanishing Forms,” unpublished essay submitted to John Maizels, 2001, p. 3; John Maizels Archive.

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Remembered Villages: Representations of Hindu-Bengali Memories in the Aftermath of the Partition,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 31 (32), pp. 2143-2151.

<sup>44</sup> M.N. Sharma letter to John Maizels, April 27, 2001; John Maizels Archive.

folk who accept hardships as part of their destiny”<sup>45</sup>—is very like the language he used to describe Chand’s work in the previously mentioned 2001 *Raw Vision* article. To take one example, the former Chief Architect states that the villagers:

...are not one bit aware of the artistic quality of their work, and they keep doing what comes naturally to them. The sophisticated art critics may rate these sculptures in space as they like but to the unassuming creators, they are nothing beyond what fulfill[s] their needs of daily life.<sup>46</sup>

Just as Chand had been “unaware” of the art historical narrative surrounding Gaudí or Moore, Sharma’s villagers were reportedly uninterested in the interpretations of the unnamed “sophisticated art critics” who had allegedly lauded the villagers’ everyday buildings as artworks. As in his reaction to Chand—the simple, untaught genius—Sharma marvels at these rural folk, who, with no formal training nor interest in the attention they have attracted, continue to work as before with heads-down concentration, blissfully “rejoic[ing] in the work they do from dawn to dusk.”<sup>47</sup> This single-minded labor and its associated “ignorance” is, for Sharma, part of the villagers’ appeal; they offer both a fantasy and an antidote to urban, post-Partition existence.

Sharma is not alone in describing Chand in ways that mirror the components of the romanticized Indian village trope, specifically its reliance on the notion of a timeless, unchanging, single-minded and consistent effort towards a daily task that is undertaken in blissful defiance or simply ignorance of the broader world. Accordingly, in the words of prominent University of Punjab art historian B.N. Goswamy, Chand “always remained himself:

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<sup>45</sup> M.N. Sharma, “Vanishing Forms,” unpublished essay submitted to John Maizels, 2001, p.1; John Maizels Archive.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> M.N. Sharma, “Vanishing Forms,” unpublished essay submitted to John Maizels, 2001, p. 3; John Maizels Archive.

self-effacing, humble to the core, and ceaselessly working.”<sup>48</sup> This was true even after numerous “honors and accolades” were issued to him; Goswamy exaggerates when he adds, “reams were written on the Rock Garden,” and “learned dissertation after learned dissertation has had [the Garden] as its theme.”<sup>49</sup> Likewise, journalist Michael Kaufman noted in *The New York Times* that, after Chand received “India’s highest artistic medal,” the artist left the special ceremony held in his honor and bicycled home as usual, allegedly oblivious or impervious to the degree of honor bestowed upon him.<sup>50</sup> Kaufman goes on to claim that Chand’s greatest pleasure amidst the grand scale of all the worldwide attention that accompanied the exhibitions of his work abroad was his modest promotion from “caretaker to superintendent of his own garden,” issued as it was with a salary raise “from [the equivalent of] \$120 to \$150 a month.”<sup>51</sup> In Kaufman’s reckoning as in Sharma’s, Chand was “unconcerned with the art world—he [had] never heard of such artists as Jean Arp or Miró or Matisse.”<sup>52</sup> S.S. Bhatti states the connection between Chand and the romanticized villager directly: “[Chand’s] only qualification, as an artist or architect, is his rural background. [...] Like the villagers, Nek Chand approaches and tackles each problem with a certain matter-of-factness.”<sup>53</sup> He goes on to make the rather odd assertion that the “Rock Garden resembles a typical village of Punjab.”<sup>54</sup> It seems clear that the entirety of the Garden cannot accurately be compared to a typical village; Bhatti is apparently referring here to the

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<sup>48</sup> B.N. Goswamy, “A Universe from Nothing,” *India Express*, June 22, 2015.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> It is unclear which “highest artistic medal” Kaufman is referring to. Chand was awarded the Padma Shri, the highest civilian award issued in India but not unique to the visual arts, but this occurred in 1984. Michael T. Kaufman, “Nek Chand’s Garden Fantasy,” *The New York Times*, April 3, 1983.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> S.S. Bhatti, “The Rock Garden of Chandigarh,” *Raw Vision*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1989, pp. 22-31; p. 25.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

Garden's variation of narrow lanes and open vistas in his remark.<sup>55</sup> In his formulation Chand and all villagers are inherently and specifically suited for aesthetic creation due simply to their status as villagers. Villagers, in Bhatti's rather patronizing interpretation, are inherently artists of the picturesque—although it takes an (urban) outsider to acknowledge and appreciate it—and the highly unusual and distinct features of the Garden are normalized as typical of a Punjabi village.

Also telling on this topic is Anton (Tony) Rajer's account of Chand and the Rock Garden. Rajer was a Wisconsin-based conservator and promoter of "outsider" artists and "visionary" environments more generally through the 1980s and 1990s; his interests included such works as Simon Rodia's Watts Towers, Howard Finster's Paradise Garden, and Eddie Owens Martin's Pasaquan. Rajer had done a significant amount of conservation work on both "outsider" and fine artworks in South America, the US, and Europe by the time he met Nek Chand during the latter's 1996 visit to the United States. The conservator first learned of Chand's work via the commissioned Rock Garden at the former Washington, D.C. Capital Children's Museum, a site for which he did conservation work. Intrigued by what he had heard about the sculptures and layout of the Rock Garden, in 1999 Rajer traveled to Chandigarh as a trustee of the newly-formed Nek Chand Foundation. He returned to India several times, as Nek Chand Foundation delegate, Foundation-affiliated tour leader, and, later, volunteer coordinator and conservator; Rajer spent significant time not only at the Chandigarh Rock Garden but also at the smaller-scale, commissioned Rock Garden in Palakkad, Kerala.

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<sup>55</sup> Iain Jackson notes that, in Bhatti's unpublished dissertation, Bhatti makes a rather strained argument that the Rock Garden represents Chand's insertion of "traditional Punjabi" village structures into the city of Chandigarh. In advancing his point Bhatti pointedly avoids inclusion of elements that are decidedly non-traditional. See Iain Jackson, "Cataloguing Nek Chand's Rock Garden, Chandigarh," unpublished dissertation, 2008, p. 33.

I consider the activities of Rajer and the Nek Chand Foundation more broadly in different ways throughout this dissertation. Of importance here is Rajer's outspoken—sometimes aggressive—promotion of Chand and his work, and his related characterization of the Garden in terms of the idealized village. Claiming in a US-published folk art newsletter that Chand's "most cherished memory [was] that of village life in rural India," Rajer went on to assert that Chand built certain elements of the Rock Garden expressly "so that city dwellers in Chandigarh could understand what [the village] was like."<sup>56</sup> Accordingly, "[Chand] created a miniature village on a small artificial hill, complete with houses, shops, temples, a stream, and fantasy structures that only he can explain."<sup>57</sup> Recorded again is the familiar feeling of awe and wonder, as in Rajer's description of unexplainable "fantasy structures." More strikingly, Rajer claims that Chand purposefully desired to create an idealized display village for the education and edification of city dwellers. I would add that many of these individuals would have likely been, in the earliest decades of Chandigarh at least, recently displaced village dwellers themselves who did not require such "education." Elsewhere Rajer implied that Chand's influence was not due to any artistic virtuosic genius but rather Chand's "down to earth" character: "I wonder what makes him a celebrity? His simplicity? [...] Or his love for self-respect?"<sup>58</sup> Rajer concludes that Chand created his "masterpiece of folk as well as environmental art" as a result of his "commonsense."<sup>59</sup> Elsewhere Rajer made the rather bold claim that "Mr. Nek Chand's Rock Garden is the single most important contribution by an Indian to world culture in the 20<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Anton Rajer, "Nek Chand: Victor of Circumstances," 2001. Rajer, who had extensive conversations with Chand over the course of his several visits, does not site his source for this assertion.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Tony Rajer, draft of speech for Silver Jubilee, "Nek Chand in His House of Gods," 2001; Aton Rajer Archive, Box 4; SPACES Collection.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

century. Nek Chand, the “humble Punjabi road inspector, [...] is the living soul of Chandigarh.”<sup>60</sup> Not only, then, is Chand’s project constructed as unlike the works of notable fine artists; Rajer states that it is *because* of Chand’s village-like “down-to-earth” qualities that Chand was able to carry out the endeavor of the Rock Garden.

In Rajer’s account, the Rock Garden performs the role that M.N. Sharma reportedly desired his “sculpturous” village buildings to perform: it provides the city with a sanitized, controlled “rural” cultural heritage center. It is worth noting here that it is readily apparent from Rajer’s unpublished personal notes and records that he had a very cursory understanding of the events of Partition, and of Indian politics, history, and languages more generally.<sup>61</sup> As I discuss in a following section, UK-based Foundation head John Maizels took a different view of Chand’s interest in the village.

These accounts by Rajer, Sharma, Kaufman, and Goswamy—and similar published descriptions by many others—revel in the characterization of Chand as a charmingly and disarmingly humble man, whose primary life ambition was the day-to-day project of building his Garden. Here, Chand had “no wish to leave the garden where he spen[t] at least twelve hours a day planning, building, sorting his piles of scrap or cultivating hundreds of plants.”<sup>62</sup> The characterization of Chand as an unchanging, consistent, humble man is employed in these sources in part to point out the irony of his unexpected ability to realize such a large-scale, captivating project. It is also engaged in the crafting of a particular fantasy, wherein Chand assumes the romanticized traits of an idealized *villager*, unaffected by urban life, and the Garden the traits of natural, pure, sculptural *village* architecture. Through the use of similar language

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<sup>60</sup> Rajer quoted in V.P. Mehta, *Rock Garden, a Vision of Creativity: Memoires of Nek Chand*, p. 9.

<sup>61</sup> See Anton Rajer Archive, SPACES collection, Aptos, California.

<sup>62</sup> Michael T. Kaufman, “Nek Chand’s Garden Fantasy,” *The New York Times*, April 3, 1983.

and categorization, then, the Rock Garden in these accounts becomes a sanitized, whimsical, unplanned but regulated “village” fantasy within the urban space of a modern Indian city. Importantly, it is a village fantasy within which does not dwell any actual “primitive” villager existing in a rural living condition, the like of which had earlier been categorized as “unfit for a modern city.” Rather, it is site of free-form, but managed, pleasure and wonder. Likewise, Chand is projected as the “untaught” but not uncivilized urban “villager,” whose unsanctioned project was not razed—as had been the fate of countless makeshift homes of displaced villagers. Rather, the Garden became a commercial asset to the city and a key component of its identity in India and abroad.

### ***The Rock Garden: The City’s Eternal Contradiction?***

This tendency to present Chand as an idealized villager and the Rock Garden as an idealized village has not only resulted in the rendering of the two as cultural resources for the city. Rather, in a return more directly to the familiar scope of the Chandigarh binary, the artist and the artwork have been positioned as ideological opponents of the city and Le Corbusier. As we have seen in Chapter One, Chandigarh was a site of promise for the newly displaced and for realization of Nehruvian modernization projects; equally, the city with its “imported” modernism and team of Western architects was also the subject of criticism. In accounts of the Rock Garden, Le Corbusier typically figures as the detached, self-interested outsider and the realized city as a sterile, calculated grid of right angles and imposed structure. Nek Chand—the simple, passionate man—and the Rock Garden—the free-form “visionary” site—are enlisted as ready opposites of a city that has been widely characterized as angular and inhuman. To take one illustrative example, poet C.B. Cox describes Chandigarh, in his poem entitled “Nek Chand,” as

follows: “Sikhs and saris / lost in vast spaces, / cubes of blank concrete, / a community of angles, / smudged black, crumbling now in oven heat.”<sup>63</sup> For Cox, a foreign visitor in the city, Chandigarh’s grid and International Style-buildings read as missteps. He goes on to “feel a rage at planning arrogance.”<sup>64</sup> The Rock Garden provides for Cox the one area that alleviates his rage:

Then in Nek Chand’s rock garden / life (as always) / surpasses my conceit. / A private man, / while the ship of state / turned dirty grey, / he built from rubbish, / among mosquitoes and smells, / a secret garden, / fetched on his bike / from mountain streams / galleries of bulbous rocks. / His invention burgeoned / and today I bow / through low doorways / (no angles here)<sup>65</sup>

Cox, in recounting his arrival in the city, states “At dawn I land / inside Le Corbusier.”<sup>66</sup> For Cox, Le Corbusier is not merely the single author of the city; rather, the city *is* Le Corbusier—except, importantly, for Chand’s Rock Garden, which for Cox exists as a philosophically separate entity: “Nehru’s modern city / [is] only radiant here [at the Rock Garden].”<sup>67</sup> In Cox’s poem, Chand’s work is envisioned as an antidote to angularity, as a humanistic intervention to an arrogant folly. In an unpublished essay student Indira Mital put the Rock Garden’s purported animosity towards the city in a rather emotional and sensationalized way: “[Chand] agonized over his ability to raise even a feeble protest against the modern hell-bent on destroying the old and rustic nature of the land.”<sup>68</sup> For Mital, not only does Chand’s work exist as a counterpoint to the city, it was in fact antagonistically created as one. More than this and giving little credit to the generations of residents who have adapted the city’s urban spaces, the Garden serves as the

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<sup>63</sup> C.B. Cox, “Nek Chand,” *The Hudson Review*, vol. 36, no. 4, Winter 1983-1984, pp. 623-625; p. 624.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> C.B. Cox, “Nek Chand,” *The Hudson Review*, 1983-1984, p. 623.

<sup>67</sup> C.B. Cox, “Nek Chand,” *The Hudson Review*, 1983-1984, p. 626.

<sup>68</sup> Indira Mital, “An Old World Stamp on a New World City,” unpublished essay; John Maizels Archive.

city's last gasp of spontaneity and intervention against the destructive "modern" created by the architecture team.

Earlier I described Vikramaditya Prakash's *Chandigarh's Le Corbusier* and Vinayak Bharne's "The Changing Face of Chandigarh's Capitol" as studies of the city indicating (albeit in passing) that the Rock Garden existed as an architectural and philosophical anomaly against the larger city, specifically Sector 1. To take one additional scholarly example, Sharon Irish, in her review of Vikramaditya Prakash's *Chandigarh's Le Corbusier*, describes her view that Le Corbusier's structures "only indirectly address the visitor, preferring uncanny to intimate relationships."<sup>69</sup> She goes on to list the Rock Garden as the primary means of realizing architectural "intimate interactions" in the city. As V. Prakash and Bharne have done, Irish points out the ironic juxtaposition of the highly controlled, and as a result largely vacant, Sector-1 Capitol Complex with the bustling, vibrant Rock Garden. While Irish relies most heavily on the Rock Garden to illustrate her point, she also mentions unspecified parts of the city that were not completed to Le Corbusier's original plans, as well as several informal foot-paths, which were spontaneously created by the collective act of hundreds of Chandigarh residents treading over the years on the same short-cut paths off the established sidewalks.<sup>70</sup> Today, at a time in which modernist urban planning appears woefully short-sighted and lacking despite its claims of universality and longevity—or, as I detailed in Chapter Two, because of them—several artistic as well as scholarly works have been recently undertaken that expose some of these dynamics. Iwaan Baan's aforementioned photographic project is one such example. Such spaces as the

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<sup>69</sup> Sharon Irish, "Intimacy and Monumentality in Chandigarh, North India: Le Corbusier's Capitol Complex and Nek Chand Saini's Rock Garden," *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2004, pp. 105-115; p. 105.

<sup>70</sup> Iwan Baan photographed such a footpath, and the image is discussed in Cees Nooteboom's essay "Ex Nihilo: A Tale of Two Cities," *Brasilia-Chandigarh: Living with Modernity*, 2010 pp. 184-185 and 119, respectively.

Rock Garden, then, have provided in these sources a ready foil to both the largely vacant Capitol Complex and more broadly to the audacity of modernist design as a whole.<sup>71</sup> More than this, under the terms of the Chandigarh binary the work's meaning is necessarily locked into such an interpretation. The Rock Garden as foil is the only possible interpretation in this binary construction.

This comparison is partially constructed via the unique features of the Garden itself. Many observers have taken notice of the Garden's winding paths and varying materials, textures, and scale and have considered them in stark contrast to city's grid. In Surabhi Sharma's 2011 short film, "Tracing Bylanes," a voiceover describes the "boredom" of the city's long, straight roads and "lack of shortcuts" while depicting a series of images of administrative office work, the repetitive circulation of an oscillating fan, stationary guards in Sector 1, and an uninterrupted steady stream of traffic.<sup>72</sup> Later in the film, a long-time Chandigarh resident describes her adolescent excitement in regularly meeting friends in a Sector-22 restaurant in the 1970s. The restaurant featured the enticements of ice cream, non-vegetarian food, and an unchaperoned dance every Sunday; even as a young woman she was able to safely move about the city unaccompanied. This freedom and the excitement of such urban attractions is mitigated in the following interview, this with a woman who, as a teenager with a love interest during this same period, bemoaned the lack of "shadowy bylanes" where "nobody knew us" in the city. The city is designed in such a way, she notes, "that it's all out in the open. [...whereas] we wished there were more secret passageways and [concealed] places, because those are what we were really looking for." The city is depicted in Sharma's film as a strangely ossified space, where the

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<sup>71</sup> See Vinayak Bharne, "The Changing Face of Chandigarh's Capitol," in *The Emerging Asian City*, New York: Routledge, 2013, pp. 199-128

<sup>72</sup> "Tracing Bylanes," film by Surabhi Sharma, produced by SurFilms, 2011.

promises of cosmopolitanism and urban life have sometimes fallen short on the planned city grid. By way of contrast against these images of repetition and an almost Foucauldian level of visual surveillance, Ulli Beier's 1985 film, "Kingdom of Nek Chand," rapidly cuts between still images of Chand's complex sculptures and footage of jubilant Rock Garden visitors; these visuals are featured against a chaotic soundtrack of ringing bells and the building sounds of tabla and tanpura.<sup>73</sup> Ann Lewin, president of the National Learning Center at the Capital Children's Museum, echoed this portrayal in a letter promoting the commission of a Garden in Washington, D.C.:

Visitors [to the Rock Garden] walk from area to area, led by winding paths, steep stairs, and low passageways. Each succeeding area is concealed from view, and visitors happen upon them as if by chance. There is a sense of calm in the Garden, [and] even as it fills with the day's visitors the peace is not broken. On my visit, I felt as if I were walking through a man's soul.<sup>74</sup>

If Chandigarh is soulless and its public areas regimented, The Garden in Lewin's description is a freeform, ludic playground, indicative of a creative soul.

In the midst of such "freeform" representations of the Garden, few observers have noted the system of mechanisms in place to control crowd movement and interaction at the site. Since the late 1990s, designated walkways have dictated and restricted visitor access within the site to a specific area, fences prevent contact with the sculptures in Phase III, and multilingual signage firmly warns visitors not to vandalize or touch the sculptures, litter, or stray from the path. At times this level of control has been presented as desirable for the visitor. In 2001 Foundation delegate and conservator Tony Rajer gave a speech as part of the Garden's Silver Jubilee events, noting, "[Chand was] very keen to ensure that the visitors have only one-way movement in the

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<sup>73</sup> "The Kingdom of Nek Chand," film by Ulli Beier and Paul Cox, 1985.

<sup>74</sup> Open letter, Ann Lewin, June 1985; Nek Chand Archive, SPACES Collection, Cabinet 3, Drawer 1.

Garden, not only to ease congestion but also to end confusion that sometimes bothers visitors.”<sup>75</sup>

Rajer, who was first introduced to the Garden as the result of conservation work to repair sculptures damaged by vandals, had a personal and professional stake in restricting visitor movement in the Garden. It is unclear whether this desired one-way movement was ever enacted; today visitors are required to circle back through Phase II after visiting Phase III in order to exit the Garden. At any rate, CCTV cameras were installed throughout the Garden in 2011, in order to monitor visitor interaction with space.<sup>76</sup> The Garden is occasionally referred to as an art museum in Chandigarh’s tourist literature, and the restrictions placed on interaction with the site’s built environments and the sculptures are certainly akin to those typically found in one.<sup>77</sup> Many of these mechanisms were put in place as part of the Nek Chand Foundation’s involvement with the site, notably following a site assessment by Rajer that had identified a number of damaged works. Indeed, in a personal message from John Maizels to Tony Rajer, Maizels cites one of the Foundation’s long-term aims is to “have the Rock Garden brought under the care of the [Chandigarh] art museum, or otherwise be independent and run to the standards of an art museum.”<sup>78</sup> Of importance here is the fact that the visitor’s physical movement, although it has been recorded as spontaneous and dictated by desire and whimsy rather than by designated walkway, is in fact highly regulated and controlled. Despite this

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<sup>75</sup> Tony Rajer, draft of speech given at 2001 Silver Jubilee, “Nek Chand in His House of Gods;” Anton Rajer Archive, Box 4; SPACES Collection.

<sup>76</sup> “Rock Garden Will Be Monitored by CCTV Camera,” *India Post*, April 28, 2011.

<sup>77</sup> See, for example, “Rock Garden: The Fantasy World of Nek Chand,” Chandigarh tourism brochure, n.d.; John Maizels Archive.

<sup>78</sup> Letter, John Maizels to Tony Rajer, n.d. (ca. 2005); Anton Rajer Archive, Box 4, SPACES Collection.

regulation, the Rock Garden—rather than, say, the much less structured space of the incorporated village Burail<sup>79</sup>—has been widely cited as the primary intervention to the city’s structured grid.

In addition to its winding paths, a much-recorded detail of the Garden is the existence of a number of low doorways. Such doorways, accessible to the visitor today as part of Phase II, are approximately four feet in height, causing many visitors who pass through them to stoop [Figures 98 and 99]. These low doorways dictate that the visitor cannot move through this given zone quickly or as part of a group—rather, the individual visitor must carefully stoop through, single file. The doorway depicted in Figures 3 and 4 separates two areas of elevated sculpture fields. These fields are positioned at slightly above eye level; in order to view the sculptures adequately the visitor is required to crane his or her neck, stand on his or her toes, or record them by holding his or her camera aloft [Figure 100]. The experience of this effort—the attempt to see what is just above and beyond the limits of one’s gaze—is heightened by the stark contrast of having just passed into the area of elevated sculpture fields by stooping low and focusing on the ground. The visitor is thus made aware of his or her height in starkly contrasting ways—first, the visitor is too tall; next, the visitor is too short. In addition to the experience of bodily limitations and controlled movement through the space, the low doorway in the dividing wall prevents the visitor from easily glimpsing the area ahead. As Sharon Irish has pointed out, this feature, together with the need for visitors to pass through one at a time and to make way for others to pass, results in an intimacy of space and the increased awareness of the tactility of the

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<sup>79</sup> Very little has been written about the incorporated village of Burail, which today is located in Sector 45. In a departure from the overall city plan, the interior of Sector 45 is not subject to Chandigarh’s governing edict. A walk through the area has been described as follows: “Suddenly, the familiarity of Chandigarh vanishes and you find yourself in a very dense, complex street system. I immediately got lost. It is not a ‘village’ in the sense of a rural, picturesque type of place—[it’s] more like old Delhi.” [personal conversation with Iain Jackson, October 20, 2015.] See also Mayank Ojha, “Nested Cohabitation: The Modern City and Urban Villages,” in *Contemporary Architecture: Beyond Corbusierism*, New Delhi: Macmillan Publishers India Ltd., 2011, pp. 68-75.

experience.<sup>80</sup> I would also add that features such as these do provide something of a feeling of spontaneity and unexpected interaction that the physical restrictions placed on walkways, for example, might otherwise preclude.

Most published accounts of the Rock Garden do not tend, however, to describe the physical act of moving through these low-level doorways as a means of experiencing site intimacy and tactility. Instead, they overwhelmingly portray the doorways as a planned mechanism for engendering a particular attitude in the face of an implied spiritual realm: in this “kingdom of gods and goddesses,” “bowing” while passing through a doorway “imparts humbleness.”<sup>81</sup> In similar language, a tourism brochure produced by the city of Chandigarh describes the low doorways as “creat[ing] an ambiance of royal grandeur but also impart[ing] humbleness.”<sup>82</sup> I connect this presumed spirituality with the Garden’s purported construction of a shared mythological past in a subsequent section.

### *Civic Disputes*

Much as the city of Chandigarh has been rendered in antagonistic terms against the interests and makeup of the Rock Garden, so too have city officials been called the opponents of Nek Chand and his project. Frequently, in both local and international accounts, Chandigarh city officials are pitted against Chand’s interests and his project; the officials’ ire tends to be attributed to jealousy. This contention does not exist only as an abstract or metaphorical dispute. There is ample media evidence of the day-to-day struggles between the site and the city, and between Chand and Chandigarh officials, played out in the local media. In 1988, the High Court

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<sup>80</sup> Sharon Irish, “Intimacy and Monumentality in Chandigarh,” 2004, p. 110.

<sup>81</sup> Anton Rajer, “Nek Chand: Victor of Circumstances,” 2001.

<sup>82</sup> Chandigarh tourism brochure, “Rock Garden,” ca. 2000; John Maizels Archive.

complex appealed to the city to build a “botanic park” and private road that would directly link the Court’s parking lot with Sukhna Lake; such construction would have required the partial demolition of the Garden’s Phase III.<sup>83</sup> This appeal was later dropped, but a number of officials had argued convincingly that the Garden violated the city’s Master Edict and as a result official opinion remained split for some years.<sup>84</sup> Lost within this debate was the notable point that, despite the argument against the Rock Garden and in favor of preserving the Master Edict, the proposed construction of a direct private link between the High Court and Sukhna Lake would have likely also been a violation of Le Corbusier’s intentions. Earlier, for example, in a 1960 letter from Le Corbusier to Nehru, the architect requested that plans for a proposed cantonment area be halted, due to concern for the “sacred area” around the lake that Le Corbusier desired to be left undeveloped.<sup>85</sup>

Concern over allocation of funds and city land was not restricted to city officials and it periodically continued on in more recent years. A 2009 *Times of India* article describes a complaint filed by social activist R.K. Garg to Chief Electorate Officer Pardeep Mehra that alleges a recent Union Territory Administration announcement to spend over 1.5 crore (15 million) rupees on Rock Garden maintenance to have been a “violation of poll code of conduct.”<sup>86</sup> Garg’s appeal to Mehra likely fell on sympathetic ears; Mehra had been one of the key supporters of the purposed High Court park and road developments and remained antagonistic to continued expansion of the Rock Garden.

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<sup>83</sup> “Part of Rock Garden to be Demolished,” *The Tribune Bureau*, April 21, 1990.

<sup>84</sup> “Nek Chand Allowed to Expand Garden,” *Times of India*, November 4, 1991.

<sup>85</sup> Letter from Le Corbusier to Nehru, May 13, 1960; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 2, Folder 3; UCLA Special Collections 1364.

<sup>86</sup> “Rock Garden Aid Against Code,” *Times of India*, March 13, 2009.

Earlier, in a 1997 open letter to *Raw Vision* readers, Chand had called Pardeep Mehra—who was at that time Chandigarh Advisor to the Administrator—his “worst enemy;” Chand cited “red burning jealousy” as the cause for Mehra’s animosity.<sup>87</sup> In 1997 Chand had recently returned from travel abroad related to the promotion and recognition of his work to learn that, in his absence, the majority of his staff had been dismissed and a number of his statues had been vandalized as a result of this decreased surveillance.<sup>88</sup> The Nek Chand Foundation has tended to imply in published accounts that the damage was sanctioned, even encouraged, by city officials. Such intentions could not be verified in the archival record. John Maizels, U.K.-based co-founder of the Nek Chand Foundation, has reiterated Chand’s above-stated view: “[Chand’s] honor and fame have also brought enemies to his door [...] and there have been those who have resented the glory of an apparently humble man.”<sup>89</sup> The occasion of the city’s dismissal of workers and the seemingly resultant damage to Garden sculptures, ironically occurring as it did during one of Chand’s extended absences in international celebration and promotion of his work, was one of the key impetuses for the establishment of the Nek Chand Foundation.<sup>90</sup> It also became a crucial strategic narrative in promoting an urgency to collect and display Chand’s sculptures in Western museums, such as at the Kohler Center for the Arts located in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. This institution today holds the largest collection of Chand’s sculptures outside of India. In 2007 former director Ruth Kohler described Chand’s response to damage done at the

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<sup>87</sup> As quoted by Seymour Rosen, letter to Ann Oppenheimer of the Folk Art Society of America, n.d.; Nek Chand Archive, SPACES Collection, Cabinet 3, Drawer 2.

<sup>88</sup> For a more complete account of these events, see Jackson and Bandyopadhyay, *The Collection, the Ruin, and the Theatre*, 2007.

<sup>89</sup> John Maizels, “Nek Chand’s Wonder of the World,” *Nek Chand Shows the Way*, exhibition catalog, 1997, p. 9.

<sup>90</sup> The Nek Chand Foundation was established in 1997, in direct response to the vandalism that took place in the Garden during Chand’s extended absence. The Foundation describes itself as a “non-profit organization for the completion, preservation, and awareness of the Rock Garden.” See the Foundation’s website, [www.nekchand.com](http://www.nekchand.com).

Rock Garden during his absence abroad in direct correlation to the Kohler's collection of his sculptures: "Chand [then] sought off-site homes for works of art from his environment; [...] It became his desire to place a major portion of work in a safer environment, and, at the same time, he wished to share his work with Americans who might not be able to come to India."<sup>91</sup>

According to this formulation, a victimized Chand and his equally victimized sculptures are the direct targets of pointed attack. Further, the latter are now compelled, in something of a recreation of Chand's Partition-migration narrative, to become "immigrants" themselves as a means of escape from a hostile city, seeking refuge in art institutions abroad.

In addition to providing a primary incentive for the establishment of an activist Foundation, this purported animosity received a great deal of attention in popular local media reports as well. In many local news articles, city officials are described as the inadequate, inept, or bitter caretakers of a beloved public site. However, from the perspective of city records the case looks more complicated, and at times decidedly supportive. A financial plan issued for 1982-1983 described the highly successful snack bar that had been built on priority at the Rock Garden in order to support and encourage tourist interest in the site.<sup>92</sup> Similarly, a document from the same period that outlined "periphery control" actions in order to check the unsanctioned growth of the city and its surrounding areas, included the Rock Garden on its map of protected areas.<sup>93</sup> In these documents the Garden is an appreciated and protected valuable city asset. The

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<sup>91</sup> Ruth Kohler, introductory essay to conference proceedings, "Taking the Road Less Traveled: Built Environments of Vernacular Artists, September 27-30, 2007, Kohler Center for the Arts;" Anton Rajer Archive, Box 4; SPACES Collection.

<sup>92</sup> "Union Territory of Chandigarh, Annual Plan, 1982-1983," Planning and Statistical Cell, Finance Department, Chandigarh Administration; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 5, UCLA Special Collections 1364. Iain Jackson notes that this "cafeteria" was built as a joint effort by Nek Chand and M.N. Sharma; Iain Jackson, "Cataloguing Nek Chand's Rock Garden, Chandigarh," unpublished dissertation, 2008, p. 57.

<sup>93</sup> Jeet Malhotra, "Chandigarh and Its Environment," 1982; Ravi Kalia Archive, Box 1, Folder 6; UCLA Special Collections 1364.

same attitude is recorded in the planning documents for other cities: smaller-scale Rock Gardens were established in nearby towns such as Ludhiana and Talwara in the hopes of garnering tourist interest. Likewise, a “Nek Chand-style Rock Garden of discarded materials” was proposed in the 1987 three-year development plans for Mauritius as a progressive means of increasing tourism and of “planning with nature.”<sup>94</sup> The city assisted the Garden in direct ways. In addition to providing Chand with a salary and paid staff members, records indicate that by 2010 the Chandigarh Administration paid meal expenses for participants of an international volunteer program. On a semi-annual basis beginning in 1997, European and American volunteers assisted with construction and maintenance projects as part of the Foundation’s Rock Garden International Volunteer Program. Volunteers for the program were selected by Nek Chand Foundation trustees and were provided lodging free-of-charge at a small guesthouse on the Rock Garden grounds during their month-long residencies in Chandigarh. Volunteers paid their own transportation costs, and the Foundation received a fee of £350 for each participant. It is perhaps noteworthy, then, that the city covered meal expenses for participants in a foreign-operated volunteer program in addition to providing salaries for Chand and other Rock Garden permanent staff members.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> B. Prasad, “Planning Strategy for a Natural Endowment in the Island State of Mauritius,” in *Ekistics*, vol. 54, no. 323/324, 1987, pp. 188-191.

<sup>95</sup> According to archival evidence, partially funding and supporting international volunteers was something the city had been pressured to do by the Foundation. The volunteer program was organized on a semi-annual basis from 1997 to at least 2007 and during that time approximately 125 Foundation-selected volunteers participated. After 2007 ongoing issues with the guesthouse accommodations periodically disrupted the regularity of volunteer trips, but volunteer applications were still accepted and processed until the program was halted in late 2015.

See “Nek Chand Foundation Agenda for Board Meeting,” January 26, 2007; Anton Rajer Archives, Box 6, SPACES Collection. By the end of 2015, following Chand’s death, the trips were halted for the foreseeable future; “Volunteer Program Suspended,” John Maizels, December 21, 2015, [www.nekchand.com](http://www.nekchand.com); accessed January 25, 2017.

Far from having no local oversight or advocate, the Garden developed an organization for oversight and protection in 1998. Working with Chand, city officials developed the Chandigarh-based Society for the Maintenance and Development of the Rock Garden; the Society was created in order to “take steps so that [the Garden’s] present artistic glory is kept in tact,” “encourage and plan development of the Rock Garden,” and “protect artistic control of the Rock Garden.”<sup>96</sup> The formation of the Society was roughly concurrent with that of the Foundation.<sup>97</sup> In pursuit of its mission the Society pledged to use any funds it acquired via donation and entrance fees “solely towards the promotion of objects of the Society.”<sup>98</sup> Chand was designated Life President of this organization. The Society’s other managing members consisted at the time of founding of such-level Chandigarh officials as the Deputy Commissioner, the Chief Engineer, and the Joint Secretary of Finance.<sup>99</sup>

It is clear from archival records that the appropriate allocation of funds was an ongoing and consistent source of contention between the foreign members of the Foundation, the Chandigarh-branch Foundation members—who were selected for their roles by U.K- and U.S. trustees—and the city. In addition to calls for increased transparency regarding the use of collected Garden admission fees, U.K- and U.S.-Foundation trustees accused several individual city officials of reportedly misusing Foundation-provided funds. The Nek Chand Foundation’s current website claims that the Chandigarh Administration collects some £350,000 in Rock

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<sup>96</sup> Society for the Maintenance and Development of the Rock Garden Memorandum of Association, Chandigarh Administration, n.d. (ca. 1998); Anton Rajer Archives, Box 5, SPACES Collection.

<sup>97</sup> In a letter to Seymour Rosen, Foundation Director Sara Burns described a “fact-finding trip” to India she had undertaken in August 1997; this was some months prior to the formal registration of the Nek Chand Foundation as a non-profit organization in early 1998. Burns noted that at that time Chandigarh authorities were keen to start a local society and intended to do so shortly. Letter, Sara Burns to Seymour Rosen, January 11, 1998; Nek Chand Archive, SPACES Collection, Cabinet 3, Drawer 1.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

Garden admission fees each year, but that there is “not yet a clear management structure.”<sup>100</sup>

Less nuanced, unpublished details are available in the archive: for example, in a series of letters and emails exchanged between John Maizels, Tony Rajer, and former local manager for the Foundation’s interests in Chandigarh, R.K. Bedi. This correspondence dates from late 2005. In it the Foundation members accuse Bedi of “pocketing” some £3,000 in Foundation-provided funds. Bedi denied this claim, stating that his (unspecified) use of funds was not for personal gain and that “[Chand’s son] Anuj [Saini] and Nek Chand knew all.”<sup>101</sup> In reference to a separate incident Rajer noted in a letter to Anuj Saini that he was “very concerned” when 2007 Jubilee participants who had paid for a DVD of event proceedings had not received it a year later. Stating that the situation was “very embarrassing to the Nek Chand Foundation,” Rajer pressed Saini to either produce the DVD as promised or to return the funds.<sup>102</sup> The result of this exchange is unknown. The implication in the correspondence is that Rajer believed the DVD had never been created as promised by Chand’s son, and that the money had instead been used for personal gain.

In addition to placing themselves in positions of somewhat heavy-handed oversight as concerned local finances and personnel, Foundation members periodically offered unsolicited

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<sup>100</sup> [www.nekchand.com/volunteer-nek-chand-foundation](http://www.nekchand.com/volunteer-nek-chand-foundation); accessed January 25, 2017. I was unable to determine the Foundation’s exact operating budget from the available archival materials. In addition to the aforementioned volunteer fees, the Foundation ran on a subscription and donation basis. Rajer also organized guided tours of India for which participants paid a base price of \$3,850 plus airfare for a two-week trip in 2009-2010; brochure, “Nek Chand Foundation Tour to North and South India,” 2009; John Maizels Archive. The purpose of these trips was, at least in part, to secure funds for the Foundation; personal conversation with John Maizels, November 19, 2015. The Foundation financially supported Garden improvement projects and the addition of such features as the Phase-III aquariums, and Chand’s electric cart vehicle. Foundation funds were also used for trustee travel to India, and in relation to the Jubilee and birthday celebration events.

<sup>101</sup> Series of letters and emails from December 2005; Anton Rajer Archive, Box 4; SPACES Collection.

<sup>102</sup> Draft of letter, Tony Rajer to Anuj Saini, n.d. (ca. November 2008); Anton Rajer Archives, Box 7; SPACES Collection.

recommendations to local authorities on matters of security and maintenance. In 2008 the Foundation sent a letter to Home Secretary Ram Niwas, identifying the Rock Garden as a “soft target” for terrorism following the November 26 attacks on the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel in Mumbai. The letter then strongly recommended that specific measures be undertaken that would purportedly mitigate risk to “personal safety” but also to “reputation” should such an event occur.<sup>103</sup> In separate correspondence during the same year, Rajer drafted a letter to the District Collector to recommend that a Mr. Chanthamaya—a Garden staff member and city employee—not be paid for his maintenance work on the site.<sup>104</sup> In Rajer’s opinion the work was substandard and posed a danger to visitors. Earlier Maizels had called for the Chandigarh Administration to provide additional liquid assets for Chand’s use, increase the number of site security guards, and pay recent medical bills for Chand and his wife.<sup>105</sup> The Foundation, in efforts spearheaded by Rajer, also assumed the role of Rock Garden promoter, establishing among other things the 2001 Silver and 2007 Diamond Jubilees, with their associated large-scale parades, performances, conferences, and workshops, in addition to implementing the international volunteer program and guided tourist pilgrimages. The Foundation engaged in branding and promotion at a smaller scale as well, with, for example, the publication of the “Kingdom of Rock Garden Passport” [Figure 101] and the establishment of a local contest to create official Rock Garden flags for both the Chandigarh and Kerala sites. As part of his 2008 conservation assessment of the Kerala Rock Garden, Rajer issued a list of short-, mid-, and long-term recommendations to increase site visitation and support. He suggested that the site be a mandatory feature in the curriculum of the

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<sup>103</sup> Letter, Tony Rajer on behalf of the Nek Chand Foundation to Home Secretary Ram Niwas, November 30, 2008; John Maizels Archive.

<sup>104</sup> Draft of letter, Tony Rajer to District Collector, n.d. (ca.2008); Anton Rajer Archive, Box 7, SPACES COLLECTION.

<sup>105</sup> Letters, John Maizels to Krishna Mohan and V.K. Bhardwaj, November 9, 2005; Anton Rajer Archive, Box 4, SPACES Collection.

Government Fine Arts College, and that local officials renovate the nearby observation tower and relocate the local bus station in order to increase foot traffic. Rajer further suggested that the Kerala Garden be the site of an annual “Palm Reading Festival,” which he envisioned being held in the observation tower at night; Rajer conceived of this event with the hopes of garnering site interest as well as “spiritual renewal.”<sup>106</sup>

Rajer was not the only Foundation member to industriously seek opportunities for increasing awareness and generating funding. Los Angeles-based member Seymour Rosen worked with Ann Oppenheimer of the Folk Art Society of America to collect signatures of Americans who had pledged support of the Garden. Rosen also distributed the names and addresses of prominent Indian officials and encouraged U.S.- and U.K. citizens to petition them for increased official support.<sup>107</sup> Rosen met with Foundation co-founder Sara Burns in 1998 to discuss ways of increasing publicity for the Rock Garden. In this meeting he suggested the arrangement of traveling exhibitions in the U.S. and the circulation of souvenir postcards; he also recommended that Burns purchase “all of the sheets of the Rock Garden [Indian postage] stamp possible,” in order that they might be resold at “premium prices.”<sup>108</sup> In the same meeting Rosen speculated that “a bunch of money [could] be made and a bunch of favorable publicity will

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<sup>106</sup> “Executive Summary,” Kerala Rock Garden visit-summary by Anton Rajer, November 2005; Anton Rajer Archive, Box 5; SPACES Collection.

<sup>107</sup> Open letter, Rosen and Oppenheimer, n.d. (ca. mid-1997); Nek Chand Archive, SPACES Collection, Cabinet 3, Drawer 1. Other concerned individuals abroad, who were not affiliated with the Foundation, also took it upon themselves to promote the Rock Garden in the hopes of curtailing acts of vandalism and/or neglect. For one example, photographer Piergiorgio Sclarandis hoped to circulate his images of the Garden in order to increase international awareness and thus facilitate a smooth relationship between Chand and city officials. In a letter to Rosen Sclarandis noted, “My part in this is simply that of documentary photographer bringing this particular subject [...] to the attention of a public.” Letter, Sclarandis to Rosen, September 17, 1998; Nek Chand Archive, SPACES Collection; Cabinet 3, Drawer 1.

<sup>108</sup> Meeting meetings, Seymour Rosen with Sarah Burns, February 6, 1998; Nek Chand Archive, SPACES Collection, Cabinet 3, Drawer 1. Rosen had an avid interest in “art environments” more generally, and founded SPACES in 1978 as a resource for documenting and advocating such projects.

follow if a major movie takes place on the site. A James Bond film, Titanic...?”<sup>109</sup> The Foundation, it seems, frequently appointed itself with the task of managing, promoting, and organizing the relationship between local governments, Chand, and the Chandigarh and Kerala Rock Gardens. It is easy to imagine that such actions were sometimes met with resistance.

On the other hand, records indicate that many city officials had relationships with Chand and Foundation members that were more supportive and cordial than contentious. Gautam Kaul, who served as Chandigarh Senior Police Superintendent in the late 1970s, did not collaborate claims that city officials were embroiled in a relationship with Chand that was defined by jealous animosity. On the contrary, Kaul stated, “many officials were charmed after seeing the oddity,” and he “couldn’t recall too many senior officials objecting to the garden.”<sup>110</sup> Any objectors, according to Kaul, were “mostly jealous coworkers.”<sup>111</sup> As we have seen in the introduction to this dissertation, both Kaul and M.N. Sharma each claimed to be instrumental in recognizing and protecting the Garden in its early years. The emergence of these claims, made by high-level Chandigarh officials, signals not antagonism but rather a desire to be positively affiliated with the Garden. Surviving letters written from Chandigarh officials to Nek Chand Foundation delegate Tony Rajer address Foundation members as valued assets to the city and its tourism, rather than as enemies.<sup>112</sup> Rajer replied to these letters in a like manner, warmly expressing gratitude to the city for its “hospitality, kindness, and patience” during the Foundation’s 2001

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Kaul as quoted in Mark Magnier, “In India, a Secret Garden that Rocks,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 6, 2011.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. It is unclear whose “coworkers,” exactly, Kaul is referring to.

<sup>112</sup> See for example, letter written in advance of the 2001 Silver Jubilee, Advisor to the Administrator Neeru Nanda to Anton Rajer, February 23, 2001; Anton Rajer Archive, Box 5, SPACES Collection.

celebration of the Rock Garden Silver Jubilee.<sup>113</sup> Such goodwill had its tumultuous moments, however. A 2007 letter to Rajer from Administrator of Union Territory S.F. Rodrigues was written in order “to clarify that the Chandigarh Administration is fully supportive of the Rock Garden endeavor. It is necessary to put in place certain procedures to ensure that the Garden is maintained at the correct level [...]. Any valid proposal to enhance its appeal will be acted on expeditiously.”<sup>114</sup> The letter was written in reply to a message received from Rajer that had accused the local government of not acting in support of the Rock Garden.<sup>115</sup> Moreover it is clear in the archive that not only did Chand have a close personal relationship with both John Maizels and Tony Rajer, he was eager to have found a champion in his sometimes combative relationship with city officials.

Contention and the accusation of contention between the city and the Garden were ongoing and unfolded over the course of several decades. In direct contradiction to the circulated claims that the city had neglected or otherwise mistreated Chand and the Rock Garden, ten years prior to the above-quoted letter A.K Gupta of the Office of the Chief Engineer sent a letter in 1997 to Foundation founders and delegates in the hopes of “clarify[ing] the distorted picture presented to [the Foundation].”<sup>116</sup> It should be noted that Gupta very likely intended not to clarify the “distorted picture” presented *to* the Foundation, but rather the picture presented *by* its delegates; as previously noted the Foundation relied heavily on the images of a mistreated Chand, not to mention a “world heritage” site hanging in the balance, as part of its

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<sup>113</sup> Letter, Anton Rajer to Neeru Nanda, March 13, 2001; Anton Rajer Archive, Box 5, SPACES Collection.

<sup>114</sup> Letter, S.F. Rodrigues to Anton Rajer, January 25, 2007; Anton Rajer Archive, Box 6, SPACES Collection.

<sup>115</sup> Unfortunately, a draft of the original letter from Rajer to Rodrigues was not included in the archive; Rodrigues’ reply, however, makes the existence of Rajer’s accusations clear.

<sup>116</sup> Anton Rajer Archive, Box 6; SPACES Collection.

foundational and ongoing message. In his letter, Gupta claimed that at the time of writing the city had allocated “Rs 30 million on the development of Phase I, Phase II, and Phase III.”<sup>117</sup> Additionally, Gupta went on to note that Chand had “been provided with a total strength of seventy-five workers,” and that the “entire planning, layout, and execution of the works at the Rock Garden has been left to Shri Nek Chand,” without the influence or oversight of city officials as would have been the norm in any other city-funded park or garden.<sup>118</sup> Gupta’s correspondence reads as an outline of city support and a plea against demonization at the hands of the Foundation.

It seems clear also that at least some officials objected to the Foundation’s establishment of the 2001 and 2007 Jubilee celebrations—if not to the celebratory events themselves then to the rather arbitrary calculation of the anniversary they intended to commemorate. In 2007 former Chandigarh senior police superintendent Gautam Kaul received an email from Tony Rajer on behalf of the Nek Chand Foundation, inviting him to participate in the Diamond Jubilee of the site to be held in November of that year. The designation of “diamond” jubilee, indicating a fifty-year anniversary, created confusion. Kaul responded:

I find it mysterious how the Rock Garden is considered 50 years old. It was inaugurated in 1976. [... At that time] I had recommended it to be saved from destruction when Nek Chand sought my intervention. It was a small garden patch for Chand’s day dreaming as he avoided all outsiders from seeing his patch in the engineerings [sic] junk yard, kept away from public eye by a screen of bitumen drums [...]. So there needs to be some documentation to carry that age. What is the document that makes this garden 50 years old?<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid. This amounts to approximately \$441,000.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Printed email, Gautam Kaul to Tony Rajer, October 14, 2007; Anton Rajer Archive, Box 5, SPACES Collection. There is no evidence in the archive of Rajer’s reply to Kaul, if it existed. The final Jubilee material, however, claimed that the Garden was fifty years old because it had been started in secret in 1957. Given that Chand did not apparently begin assembling the rocks that would one day become the Garden until after his project of creating sailing vessels on Sukhna Lake was halted in 1959, the date of 1957 is very likely an arbitrary one. Archival evidence more generally suggests that Rajer had a keen

Kaul's letter reads in part as a territorial claim regarding the site's early history, but also as genuine puzzlement at the Foundation's calculations. To add to Kaul's understandable confusion, the Foundation had held a Silver Jubilee—an event to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Garden's opening in 1976—only 6 years earlier, in 2001. In a separate document that makes use of Rajer's slogan "Diamonds Are Forever, Like Rock Garden," Rajer noted that the 2007 Diamond Jubilee was intended to mark "30 years of operations for the public good: art education and environmental awareness, and the 10-year jubilee of the founding of the Nek Chand Foundation."<sup>120</sup> The Jubilee, it seems, was at least in part a self-celebratory one for the Foundation, and the document did not make clear how Rajer had arrived at the fifty year designation in any case. In his email not only is Kaul's desire to be taken as an authoritative, even crucial, player in the origin and preservation of the Garden visible; his words also signal the potential existence of a larger resentment at the Foundation's activities.

A separate series of letters from 2011 indicates that the city had a more material reason to take issue with Chand and the Foundation. Several concerned members of the public had complained about the establishment of unsanctioned "mini zoos" at the Garden—that is, the practice of keeping caged pigeons, "badly maintained aquariums," and "a single camel for public viewing" in Phase III.<sup>121</sup> Having received a complaint on the matter from a local university student, city officials requested the assistance of the Government of India Central Zoo Authority

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interest in the high-profile promotion of the Rock Garden—a desire that likely superseded his desire for strict accuracy.

<sup>120</sup> Conference proposal for Diamond Jubilee Celebration, Tony Rajer, 2006; Anton Rajer Archive, Box 4, SPACES Collection. 2007 actually marked the 31<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the Garden being open to the public, rather than the 30<sup>th</sup>; it opened in 1976. See footnote 498 for more on the dubious claim of fifty years.

<sup>121</sup> Letter, Maneka Gandhi to Bishan Bonal, January 22, 2011; Anton Rajer Archive, Box 6, SPACES Collection.

in New Delhi in addressing the issue in Chandigarh.<sup>122</sup> Accordingly, the Central Zoo Authority contacted Nek Chand, as Rock Garden Creator and Director, demanding that “immediate action” be taken to rectify the unapproved “housing of animals” at the Rock Garden.<sup>123</sup> Specifically, the Central Zoo Authority recommended that the camel be transferred to a local zoo and the pigeons be set free. If the current state of the Rock Garden is any indication, the pigeons were indeed released (or at least were not replaced upon their death), but the aquarium tanks and single camel remain. The aquariums reportedly cost 4 lakh (400,000) rupees to establish and were installed with Foundation funding and much fanfare as part of the 2001 Nek Chand Foundation-sponsored Silver Jubilee events; there have been reports of poor maintenance and leaks in recent years.<sup>124</sup> The camel exists as an interactive attraction, available for visitor rides at a fee [Figure 102]. Media reports detailing the 2001 Foundation-sponsored Rock Garden Silver Jubilee noted that Chand originally had intended to establish something of a petting zoo in Phase III, and had hoped in addition to the camel to also include donkeys and ponies for children to ride.<sup>125</sup> Given that copies of these exchanges between Chand and both city and central government officials exist today in the archives of Foundation members, it seems that Chand sought Foundation assistance in fighting these battles—such acts perhaps fortified the Foundation’s continued portrayal of a mistreated Chand.

The above-recounted collaborations and controversies signal something of the ongoing conflict inherent in the foreign Foundation’s self-appointed task of influencing—and, in many cases, directing—management of the site. It seems likely that, however well intentioned such

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Letter, Dr. Brij Kishor Gupta to Nek Chand, February 7, 2011; Anton Rajer Archive, Box 6, SPACES Collection.

<sup>124</sup> “Rock Garden Will Be Monitored by CCTV Cameras,” *India Post*, April 28, 2011.

<sup>125</sup> “Rock Garden Silver Jubilee Festivals Begin Today,” *Chandigarh City and Around*, March 3, 2001.

unsolicited advice and demands were, they may in many cases have been quite poorly received by local Chandigarh and national officials. In a gesture reminiscent of the colonial manipulation of South Asian sites of religious, artistic, and historic importance, the foreign-based Foundation had made it clear it wished to manage both the Rock Garden and the city's interaction with it.

It seems likely that a large share of the uneven treatment of Chand and Garden at the hands of the city may have been the result of the periodic turnover in government offices, as well as local tensions and priorities that had nothing to do with Chand. On its website the Foundation notes that relations grew increasingly strained between the city and the Garden from 1988 onwards into the 1990s.<sup>126</sup> It is crucial to note something not mentioned in Foundation literature: during the 1980s-1990s—the most vigorous period of media-recorded city-versus-Rock Garden animosity—Chandigarh and the state of Punjab as a whole were embroiled in an intense rise of Sikh extremism. Prominent among the associated events was the growing Akali Dal demand that Chandigarh be reinstated as the capital of Punjab, rather than continuing to exist as a separate Union Territory that served as the capitals of both Sikh-majority Punjab and Hindu-majority Haryana.<sup>127</sup> The contours of this battle were nothing new, but the stakes had at that time taken an increasingly drastic turn, reaching culmination with the 1984 assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguard.<sup>128</sup> Throughout the late 1960s, the creation of Haryana from Punjab and surrounding regions had been a hotly and violently contested issue, and, ironically, Indira Gandhi proposed the partition of Chandigarh itself as the most “reasonable”

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<sup>126</sup> [www.nekchand.com/about-foundation](http://www.nekchand.com/about-foundation). Accessed January 27, 2017.

<sup>127</sup> For examples of media reports, see “Rising Punjab Extremism,” cover story, *India Today Magazine*, April 30, 1983; *India Today Magazine*, November 15, 1982; “Back to Square One,” *Surya Magazine*, July 15, 1983; “Khalistan: The Politics of Passion,” *Sunday Magazine, India Times*, October 4, 1981.

<sup>128</sup> For a detailed study of these events and their aftermath, see Brian Axel, *The Nation's Tortured Body: Violence, Representation, and the Formation of a Sikh 'Diaspora,'* Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001.

and “safe” solution to the issue of providing Haryana with a capital city.<sup>129</sup> Other possible solutions had included the wholesale award of Chandigarh to Punjab, with either the creation of a new capital city in Haryana or the allocation of old Delhi to the new state.<sup>130</sup> While a detailed account of these events is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is significant to note that nowhere, to my knowledge, have these events been recognized as the powerful contributing factors they must have been to an understanding of the city’s priorities as concerned the Rock Garden during this period. In the few places in which they do appear, they receive fleeting, unspecific mention, as in Patrick Cox’s memoir of his visit to Chandigarh. Here the unrest and riots figure in passing in Cox’s account of his “harrowing” journey between Delhi and Chandigarh: no trains were available, Cox recalled, because “there were some political problems in the Punjab.”<sup>131</sup>

Media reports of city animosity towards the Garden may have gained ready traction perhaps simply because they make for good copy, portraying as they do an unlikely David-and-Goliath style standoff between a single, soft-spoken man and a bureau of bullying city officials. Such reports created as well as propagated the portrayal of Chand as a simple, hardworking man in an unwitting battle with the city and Le Corbusier’s legacy of dictates. With the involvement of the Nek Chand Foundation this narrative took an interesting turn: increasingly Chand was cast not only as a “simple villager” figure but more specifically as a Gandhi figure as well.<sup>132</sup> As part

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<sup>129</sup> Nandan Kagal, “A Sorry Tradition,” *India Express*, January 22, 1970.

<sup>130</sup> “Dividing a Dream,” *Statesman*, January 9, 1970.

<sup>131</sup> Paul Cox, “The Magical Garden of Nek Chand,” *The Australian*, October 29, 2011.

<sup>132</sup> This comparison to Gandhi has typically been made in relation to Chand’s soft-spoken but determined demeanor. In a somewhat strained connection, Indira Mital positions Chand’s act of “recycling” discarded materials as a Gandhi-style *satyagraha* exercise: “in support of truth, waste not, want not.” Indira Mital, “An Old World Stamp on a New World City,” unpublished essay, n.d.; John Maizels archive.

of this construction, various sources touted Chand's "spirituality," which in many cases was specifically leveraged to highlight the Garden's supposed disconnect from the larger city. Under the terms of the Chandigarh binary, Chand was "keeper" not only of India's "heritage" from a folk art perspective but also from a spiritual one, and as such was called upon to confront and resist the legacy of the "calculating," Western-imported city. I take a closer look at the terms of this confrontation in the following section.

### ***The "Spirituality" of the Rock Garden***

Not only have Rock Garden materials and motifs such as the pottery fragments, Phase-II bangle-sculptures, and the miniature village been interpreted to harken back to Chand's personal, pre-Partition past, in the ways which we have seen in Chapter Two. Some observers have gone a step further. In their accounts, the raw materials of discards and rocks, transformed into sculptures, are able to tap into an invented collective and spiritual mythology. We have already seen the framework for this case: frequently, the Garden's "spiritualism" is claimed in direct contradiction to the familiar categorization of "cold" and "foreign" architecture found throughout the rest of the city. Michael Kaufman, writing for *The New York Times*, for example, compared Le Corbusier's Sector 1 buildings to "alien meteors" and "the rocks of the Rock Garden [as] molded in Indian fantasy."<sup>133</sup> Oriented towards the past but alive in its transformative vibrancy, this argument goes, Chand's work is timeless—in contradistinction to Chandigarh's "alien" architecture purportedly thrust upon the landscape by a team of imposing foreigners.

Kaufman is not alone in his conjuring of a mythical collective "Indian fantasy;" others have been more direct in their characterization of the Garden as rooted in an imagined collective

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<sup>133</sup> Michael Kaufman's "Correspondent's Choice: Nek Chand's Fantasy," *New York Times*, April 3, 1983.

Indian identity. “The conception of the Rock Garden,” according to S.S. Bhatti, “is seeded in a mythological tale.”<sup>134</sup> As the earlier-described *Raw Vision* article detailing Chand’s 2001 visit to Pakistan typifies, the Rock Garden has often been described as the representation of a fantasy kingdom. As we have seen, this “kingdom” tends to be linked directly with Chand’s childhood past—deriving, as in the *Raw Vision* article, from the memory of a tale spun by his mother. Of importance in the current chapter, it has also been aligned with the region’s distant actual and imagined mythological past. A Chandigarh tourism brochure introduces the work as such, offering specifics on the nature of the childhood fable:

Nek Chand had been nurturing a childhood dream. ‘Once upon a time, a king and queen lived and loved here, dined and danced, fought and triumphed, and then their kingdom collapsed at the zenith of their power.’ This strange vision that had gripped Chand’s mind since his early life was to find its expression in his fantasy world. [...] This was his *affaire d’amour* with Nature.<sup>135</sup>

In this description the Garden is imagined as a lost kingdom in harmony with its natural surroundings. Although a comparison with the city is not directly made in this tourism brochure, this categorization of the Garden stands in stark contrast to the familiar characterization of Chandigarh, where the city is cast as a modern, disruptive human intervention on the land that is anything but natural. Similar language to that quoted above is used in the “passport” tourism booklet created by Tony Rajer and produced by the Nek Chand Foundation; this booklet refers to the Garden as “the kingdom of gods and goddesses.”<sup>136</sup> As in Kaufman’s article, the accounts found in both examples of tourist ephemera construct a shared fantasy of an imagined distant past, a past once peopled with benevolent kings and queens and enthralled subjects. The

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<sup>134</sup> S.S. Bhatti, “The Rock Garden of Chandigarh,” *Raw Vision*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1989, p. 22.

<sup>135</sup> Chandigarh tourism brochure, “Rock Garden: The Fantasy World of Nek Chand,” published for Chandigarh Tourism by CITCO, n.d.

<sup>136</sup> “Passport, Kingdom of Gods and Goddesses, Nek Chand’s Rock Garden, Chandigarh,” text by Anton Rajer, ca. 2007; Anton Rajer Archive, Box 5; SPACES Collection.

Chandigarh tourist brochure continues: “each chamber [of the Garden] portrays a different aspect of Chand’s fantasy, peopled by animals, birds, and human beings [...], servants, grooms, queens, warriors and artistes in their varied costumes and accouterments depict the way of life of the people in northwest India.”<sup>137</sup> The representation of this imagined past is in tune, then, with both the natural order of plants and animals but also the diversity of the region’s human population, in ways that resonate with the portrayal of Chand as the “keeper of heritage.” A window into this fantasy past, the story continues as per the Chandigarh binary, is inaccessible elsewhere in the city.

This imagined distant past constructed in popular accounts of the Rock Garden serves as mythology writ large on the landscape, but also simultaneously as an interactive memorial, and a fantasy afterlife. In Ulli Beier’s 1985 film “The Kingdom of Nek Chand,” a voiceover purportedly delivering Chand’s own interpretation of the site outlines this:

I like stones very much. In every stone there is a human being. These human beings are also part of the kingdom. They’re dead, and they have gone to heaven, and the creator will say to them, ‘you please come to this kingdom, it is a very nice place. You stay here permanently.’ And that is why every stone, every figure, will stay here as long as the world will be.<sup>138</sup>

Not only is the Garden an imagined mythological realm, then, it is also something of an imagined afterlife, a place “the creator” encourages human souls to reside in after death. This construction of the Garden is simultaneously forward- and backward-looking: it imagines a possible future afterlife for currently living souls, but it also imagines previously deceased souls now coexisting in harmony, in the present. This interpretation of the Garden as a timeless

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<sup>137</sup> Chandigarh tourism brochure, “Rock Garden: The Fantasy World of Nek Chand,” published for Chandigarh Tourism by CITCO, n.d.

<sup>138</sup> The voiceover is provided by Atindra Mojumder, who is speaking as Nek Chand; it is unclear whether these comments were derived from Chand’s actual words. “The Kingdom of Nek Chand,” film by Ulli Beier, 1985.

representation of an afterlife is particularly striking in a city in which memorial statues are famously not permitted.<sup>139</sup> I will return to this theme at the close of this dissertation.

The loss of a once-powerful “kingdom” to unforeseen and uncontrollable events, as depicted in the childhood tale, registers as a thinly veiled reference to pre-Partition South Asia. Further, it is difficult not to read into the description of a harmonious imagined realm an implied contrast or perhaps wished-for resolution to the tumultuous events of Partition and the region’s ongoing communal violence. This connection has been directly made in several sources. Writing in *Raw Vision* on the occasion of Chand’s 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, M.S. Aulakh claimed, “as a result of these early [Partition-related] migrations, the young and sensitive Nek Chand’s psyche was badly bruised. He developed a pensive state of mind and become introverted.”<sup>140</sup> V.P. Mehta collaborated this interpretation in the opening preface to his photographic and “memoir” book on the Rock Garden. In a statement attributed to Nek Chand: “The memory of those times still haunts me. The trauma of Partition shattered me and I could not recoup my equilibrium and zest for life till I was able to create [the] Rock Garden.”<sup>141</sup> The categorization of this altered state of mind then serves as the basis for Aulakh’s description of Chand’s work. John Maizels offers a similar view. Referring to Chand’s downtrodden facial expression, often captured in photographs, as “Partition face,” Maizels explained, “everyone who went through that time bore

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<sup>139</sup> Memorial statues, which Le Corbusier deemed to be a relic of the nineteenth century, are forbidden in the Chandigarh Master Edict. As I detail later in this dissertation, a particularly interesting exception to this rule has been the UT Administration’s 2015 establishment of a silicone statue of the late Nek Chand. See Vivek Gupta, “As an Exception, UT to Install Statue of Nek Chand Inside Rock Garden,” *Indian Express*, July 11, 2015.

<sup>140</sup> M.S. Aulakh, “The Legendary Nek Chand Celebrates his 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday,” *Raw Vision*, vol. 85, Spring 2015; pp. 16-21; p. 17.

<sup>141</sup> V.P. Mehta, *Rock Garden, a Vision of Creativity: Memoirs of Nek Chand*, Chandigarh: Arun Publishing House, 2010, p. 5. It is perhaps worth noting that the book was created with the close collaboration of the Nek Chand Foundation.

it on their faces for the rest of their lives.”<sup>142</sup> This characterization of the effects of Partition hardship are not iterated in Maizels’ obituary of Chand published in *The Guardian*, but they do seem to inform his description of Chand’s early inspiration:

[Chand’s] vision for the garden appeared to emerge when he was a child. Born into a Hindu farming family in a rural village in the Shakargarh region of the Punjab in British India, he was entranced by his mother’s tales of kings and queens in a beautiful kingdom, and he would play in the local forests, making model buildings by the riverbed.<sup>143</sup>

Significantly, the evocation of the past, whether that of the former glory of a “kingdom” of kings and queens and their courts or of a nostalgically remembered pre-Partition village, constructs a harmonious scene tinged with the pathos of loss and remembrance. These accounts link Chand’s early life in his ancestral village to his creation of the Rock Garden via an account of irreconcilable loss following the events of Partition. The memory of loss—whether that be the “loss” of a mythological realm, discovered after its fall as a “ruin” in the wilderness, or the Partition-related loss of land and social networks—haunts the Garden in these accounts with the specter of tragedy. Far from existing only in scholarly and media accounts, this “loss” is recorded on the official signage on display at the Garden, and, as I detailed in Chapter Two, forms the basis for the Foundation-promoted interpretation of the Phase-II miniature village.

Interestingly, the heavy weight of this Partition legacy does not apparently figure into the typical visitor’s reaction. M.S. Aulakh, decades prior to his above-quoted description of Chand’s defining sense of loss, reproduced a number of early guestbook comments in his 1986 book, *The Rock Garden*.<sup>144</sup> From among them, a visitor from New Delhi called the experience of visiting

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<sup>142</sup> Personal conversation with John Maizels, November 19, 2015.

<sup>143</sup> John Maizels, “Nek Chand Obituary,” *The Guardian*, June 15, 2015.

<sup>144</sup> M.S. Aulakh, *The Rock Garden*, Ludhiana: Tagore Publishers, 1986.

the site “elevating and satisfying.”<sup>145</sup> An American tourist, captivated by the physical experience of moving through the site, noted to Chand, “you have shown me a wonderland of curves and sweeps, in a desert of straight lines. I stoop willingly through each gate!”<sup>146</sup> An Indian observer stated, “If America is proud of its Disneyland, we are proud of our Rock Garden.”<sup>147</sup> Finally, in words that Randhawa himself might have uttered for their belief in the transformative power of art, a visitor notes: “In my opinion school children from different places in India should be brought to see the Rock Garden in order to fire their imagination.”<sup>148</sup> For these everyday visitors—at least as Aulakh records them—the Rock Garden acts as a space of whimsy and creative inspiration, one that fosters physical and visual delight in ways akin to an amusement park. It is worth noting that the Garden has elsewhere been compared to the Disneyland, except that the Rock Garden has the purported advantage of spiritual uplift:

I’ve watched people visiting Disneyland, and I’ve sat for days high on the wall of Nek Chand’s kingdom, watching its visitors. No doubt Disneyland is enchanting, but the people leave it spiritually empty-handed. [At the Rock Garden] they are enriched to such a degree that they leave quietly, holding hands, smiling. They’ve shared something of magic and beauty that will nourish their dreams for years to come.<sup>149</sup>

Not only, then, is the Rock Garden said to act as a repository for a collective Indian heritage, it is also made to stand in as a non-religious spiritual center on an otherwise purportedly secular landscape, with Nek Chand as its godlike sage.

Specific elements and features of the Garden have been called upon to highlight the site’s purported spiritual or religious implications. Early visitors to the Rock Garden recall the

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<sup>145</sup> M.S. Aulakh, *The Rock Garden*, 1986, p. 102.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> M.S. Aulakh, *The Rock Garden*, 1986, p. 103.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Patrick Cox, “The Magical Garden of Nek Chand,” *The Australian*, October 29, 2011.

presence of a sadhu, or Hindu spiritual man, who in the following account appears to be intimately tied to the space of the Garden:

When we arrived [at the Garden], there was an old sadhu sitting on a hill. He was wearing the same colors as the statues that surrounded him. Then he sang an old devotional song from the very heart of India and we became too mesmerized to move. The singing of that old man has always travelled with me.<sup>150</sup>

It matters little that the author had no ability to understand or contextualize the meaning of the “old devotional song” from the supposed “very heart of India” that was sung that day; the song was recognized as (or assumed to be) devotional and ancient. The singing sadhu was, apparently, a regular fixture in the Garden at least through the mid-1980s. According to Ulli Beier’s narration in his film, “The Kingdom of Nek Chand,” “every day a sadhu prays for the Garden and those who visit it.”<sup>151</sup> The film goes on to intersperse footage of a sadhu chanting in Sanskrit with footage of Chand walking amidst the Garden’s sculptures of women constructed of broken bangles. Chand is shown, partially hidden from view at a vantage point inaccessible to visitors, as he watches Garden visitors interact with its sculptures. The effect of the editing of this section of the film is to make a clear connection between the sadhu and Nek Chand, between the Garden and a holy site or place of worship, or, perhaps, between a god-like Chand and the world he has created. Later in the film, the narrator, speaking as Nek Chand (Chand’s “voice” is provided by Atindra Mojumder), states, “It is my play with kingdom. It is not a question of Hinduism. It is for every community, every religion in the world.”<sup>152</sup> The voice goes on to suggest that “in every stone is a human being,” and that, as a collection of displayed stones, the

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<sup>150</sup> Paul Cox, “The Magical Garden of Nek Chand,” *The Australian*, October 29, 2011.

<sup>151</sup> “The Kingdom of Nek Chand,” film by Ulli Beier and Paul Cox, 1985.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

Rock Garden is in part a memorial or afterlife for spirits of the deceased.<sup>153</sup> On a similar note, Ann Lewin of the Capital Children’s Museum reported a difficulty during the 1985 creation of a commissioned Garden in Washington, D.C.: broken china, bottles, and other “scrap” was easy enough to locate, but Chand could not find suitable rocks in the area. Lewin noted, “for weeks the project faltered. Washington has no rocks ‘with soul.’”<sup>154</sup>

To reiterate the claims made via the voiceover in Ulli Beier’s film, Iain Jackson has stated that Chand “created a place where the gods might like to play, or [has] built his interpretation of the places that they do play in.”<sup>155</sup> This view is elsewhere expressed in Beier’s depiction of Chand, whom the filmmaker depicts as hidden from public view and watching Garden visitors respond to his “kingdom.” Philippe Lespinasse relatedly presents Chand as something of a mystic, quasi-spiritual visionary, in the production notes to his 2002 documentary, “Nek Chand’s Rock Garden:” “[Chand] hears murmurs addressed to himself alone. The stones speak to him, as do the trees and the waterfalls, and the vast rock garden [sic] yields to him in a silent symphony.”<sup>156</sup> Patrick Cox states it more directly, quoting the director of the Musee d’Art Moderne in Paris: “God has a competitor...his name is Nek Chand.”<sup>157</sup> If we are to read Nek Chand’s Garden as a vaguely spiritual but not exclusory realm, it seems we are meant to do so with an eye to its contrast against the angular, calculated city, and as the presence of an ancient tradition against a modern, rationalist setting. If God has a competitor, the undercurrent of these sources suggests, so too does Le Corbusier. The Rock Garden, then, is a

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Open letter, Ann Lewin, June 1985; Nek Chand Archive, SPACES Collection, Cabinet 3, Drawer 1.

<sup>155</sup> Iain Jackson, “Cataloguing Nek Chand’s Rock Garden, Chandigarh,” unpublished dissertation, 2008, p. 140.

<sup>156</sup> Philippe Lespinasse, “Nek Chand’s Rock Garden,” unpublished production notes, 2002; John Maizels Archive.

<sup>157</sup> Paul Cox, “The Magical Garden of Nek Chand,” *The Australian*, October 29, 2011.

place of spiritualism that does not exclude based on specific doctrine but instead collapses actual differences between Sikhism, Hinduism, and Islam. The Garden's touted spiritual universality acts in these accounts, perhaps, as something of a resolution to the region's turbulent communal violence.

It should be noted that Chand has indeed included imagery, architecture, and sculptures in the Garden that carry with them potentially religious connotations, such as the Mughal-inspired *chhatris* structures [Figure 103], the Shiva statue located at the top of a waterfall, and the seated sadhu figures in Phase II.<sup>158</sup> Although art critic Lyle Rexer has stated that the specific "vision" behind Chand's creations is "unsupported by any doctrine,"<sup>159</sup> some observers have seen specifically Hindu significance even in some of the rocks that Chand collected. Some observers, such as Tony Rajer, have in a now-familiar manner linked Chand's interest in rock collecting to the repetition of a childhood activity: "recalling his schooldays [Chand] says he had had a great craze for collecting stones and rocks on his way to the river Kareer, near his village."<sup>160</sup> Iain Jackson, on the other hand, has noted that the humanoid forms of Chand's collected and displayed rocks seem to reference "classical" Indian sculptural bodily proportions and forms, such as the "loving couple" motif.<sup>161</sup> Tellingly, the contemporaneous rock collecting activities of Jeanneret and Le Corbusier have not for their part been categorized in such religious terms; rather, they have been described in the context of Western modern art's interest in the

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<sup>158</sup> For a detailed description of the exact location of each in the Garden, see Iain Jackson, "Cataloguing Nek Chand's Rock Garden, Chandigarh," unpublished dissertation, 2008. Elsewhere in India, of course, such architectural features as *chhatris* were used for simply for aesthetic, not religious, effect. See Thomas Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

<sup>159</sup> Lyle Rexer, *How to Look at Outsider Art*, New York: Harry Abrams, 2005; p. 121.

<sup>160</sup> Tony Rajer, draft of speech for Silver Jubilee, "Nek Chand in His House of Gods," 2001, Anton Rajer Archive, Box 4; SPACES Collection.

<sup>161</sup> Iain Jackson, "Cataloguing Nek Chand's Rock Garden, Chandigarh," unpublished dissertation, 2008, p. 196.

found or “primitive” object.<sup>162</sup> Thus, the same act of rock collecting in the case of Chand has been registered as overtly traditional and spiritual, and in the case of Le Corbusier and Jeanneret as decidedly modern. V.P. Mehta draws a similar distinction in relation to Chand’s sculptures:

He had never seen Jean Tinguely’s assemblages or Arman’s accumulations, he could have had no idea that, also in the 1960s, Jean Dubuffet was digging around for gravel blast furnace slag and building rubble to employ as raw materials in his compositions. [...] Chand’s creations differ [...] in essence and projection of ideas. Nek Chand’s figures exult an atmosphere of peace and tranquility, there are no tensions.<sup>163</sup>

Mehta goes on to explain that Chand’s works, unlike those of the aforementioned fine artists, are “not meant for sale” because Chand “simply follows his intuition to create art pieces for his spiritual satisfaction.” Because of this motivation, “he experiences a higher type of joy, which no amount of money can equal.”<sup>164</sup>

As Mehta’s words help to illustrate, more than an interest in religious- or religious-inspired architectural or sculptural elements, the Garden’s observers have focused on the “mystic” persona of Chand himself. Nek Chand—compared to a sadhu, portrayed as hearing guiding voices that further his project, depicted as experiencing a “higher type of joy” from art creation—is cast as a “visionary,” a man to whom stones and plants communicate in a secret language, and this on behalf of the betterment of humankind at large. Chand, then, is deeply humanistic, but is other-than-human, as Lespinasse makes clear in the production notes to his proposed documentary: “to film such a person [as Chand] will be almost like making a nature film.”<sup>165</sup> While Lespinasse goes on to note that in the Rock Garden Nek Chand intended to

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<sup>162</sup> See, for example, Pierre Jeanneret, “Aesthetic: Reflections on Beauty of Line, Shape, and Form,” *Marg*, vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 56-57.

<sup>163</sup> V.P. Mehta, *Rock Garden, a Vision of Creativity: Memoires of Nek Chand*, 2010, p. 69, 72.

<sup>164</sup> V.P. Mehta, *Rock Garden, a Vision of Creativity: Memoires of Nek Chand*, 2010, p. 73.

<sup>165</sup> Philippe Lespinasse, “Nek Chand’s Rock Garden,” unpublished production notes, 2002; John Maizels Archive.

construct “neither parallel, nor counterpoint, nor poetic reply” to the city as a whole, he states that Chand “never calculated anything,” noting so after a lengthy description of Le Corbusier’s calculations.<sup>166</sup> The reader is thus unavoidably nudged towards a comparison.

A similar ready comparison surrounds the related common characterization of Chand as a “master recycler.” This claim to Chand’s recycling agenda is often repeated in media reports and in Rock Garden signage alike, and is notably represented in Rajer’s call for support of the Foundation’s nomination of Chand to receive a Padma Vibhusan award, a high civilian honor: “[Chand] is a global pioneer in recycling and ecology and care for the environment.”<sup>167</sup> Rajer’s claim in this document suggests that Chand’s project is primarily an environmentally focused one. This claim was reiterated in a conference paper abstract submitted by members of the Arid Forest Research Institute for inclusion on the 2007 Jubilee events. The title of this document was “Nek Chand’s Rock Garden, Chandigarh: A Sacred Temple of Environmental Education.”<sup>168</sup> The idea that Rock Garden is intended to serve as a model for urban waste reduction is a fraught one. Iain Jackson has also called into question the use of the term “recycling” to indicate not simply the creative reuse of found objects, but rather an intentional act of environmental activism. Jackson notes that, although Phase III has received some criticism for its lack of recycling relative to the other two phases, the majority of the Garden is constructed of steel and cement—materials that in the Garden are not being “recycled” but rather put to non-traditional use. The claim that any part of the Garden is a vast model for the

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Form letter, Foundation trustee Tony Rajer to Friends of Nek Chand, November 25, 2008; Anton Rajer Archive, Box 6; SPACES Collection. In 1984 Chand had received a Padma Shri award, which is the fourth-highest award issued to an Indian civilian; the Padma Vibhusan is the second-highest award. Recommendation for nominees are not accepted from foreign citizens.

<sup>168</sup> Conference paper presented at 2007 Jubilee, Pradeep Chaudhry and Vindhya P. Tewari, “Nek Chand’s Rock Garden, Chandigarh: A Sacred Temple of Environmental Education;” Anton Rajer Archive, Box 7; SPACES Collection.

promotion of recycling cannot, according to Jackson, be seriously sustained.<sup>169</sup> The recycling narrative does, however, provide an additional element to the construction of Chand as the anti-Le Corbusier, the former creating a “kingdom” only out of the materials found at hand rather than via importation and supposed imposition. I return to this narrative of recycling and give a recent example of its appearance in the epilogue.

In designating Chand as a spiritual guru, a keeper of Indian heritage, and a master recycler—such as we have seen in this chapter—the binary is perpetuated in subtle yet unmistakable ways: Chand is a visionary man to Le Corbusier’s calculating persona, and the Rock Garden is a spiritual, naturally derived realm amidst the secular, designed city. Such characterizations, which focus on establishing the Garden as a single-authored site, preclude the ability to consider it instead as a multi-authored community- and international project. Far from being the fruits of the labor of a single man, the Rock Garden has, since the 1980s, been constructed of materials selected and donated by local businesses and community members. Chand does not rely on his paid staff to “streamline production” but rather in order that they might find artistic ways in which to execute his overarching vision,<sup>170</sup> and Foundation volunteers were responsible for designing and executing the large-scale mosaic walls, stepped-seating, and other elements in Phase III. While Chand’s project began as a personal, clandestine project, for the last several decades it has deeply involved members of the local and international communities. The insistence on Chand’s single-handed stake in the site has made for a poignant, but rather misleading, narrative. The dominant account likewise does not offer the ready opportunity to discuss the Garden, constructed as it is of the very material of Chandigarh, as an

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<sup>169</sup> Iain Jackson, “Cataloguing Nek Chand’s Rock Garden, Chandigarh,” unpublished dissertation, 2008, pp. 16, 62.

<sup>170</sup> Iain Jackson, “Cataloguing Nek Chand’s Rock Garden, Chandigarh,” unpublished dissertation, 2008, p. 55.

archive of the city, its development, and its inhabitants. The following epilogue concludes my dissertation by revealing some of the varied ways in which these dynamics of the Garden have continued to evolve on both the local and international stage.

## *Epilogue*

### **Scene 1:**

In 2006, an arts center in eastern Pennsylvania ran the following class advertisement in the local newspaper, *The Reading Eagle*:

In Chandigarh, India there is a Rock Garden populated with mosaic figures and animals, which create a fantastic landscape over several acres. Nek Chand created this huge visionary landscape space in solitude all night after working all day as a transport official. This class illustrates how to create a sculpture from readily available materials. Using tile and china, give life to one or several small people!<sup>569</sup>

GoggleWorks Center for the Arts occupies the building that was formally the Wilson Goggle Factory Building, and today consists of teaching studios, exhibition spaces, and administrative offices for several local art and culture organizations. Ceramics instructor Francoise Chaveau offered the Rock Garden-inspired, four-session course, entitled “Mosaic Sculptures: 3D Figurines,” for a fee of \$125. It is unclear whether Chaveau was a Foundation member or former volunteer, or whether she had simply visited the Rock Garden or been inspired by images of the site.

Creative endeavors stemming from an encounter with the Rock Garden have taken other forms in recent years. In 2001, after having been inspired by a book on outsider art, American composer and former Black Mountain College instructor Lou Harrison wrote a piece for solo steel guitar entitled *Scenes from Nek Chand*. The book included a number of images of the Garden and recounted the clandestine early years of Chand’s project.<sup>570</sup> *Scenes from Nek Chand* consists of three movements: “The Leaning Lady,” inspired by the Phase-II sculpture fields of

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<sup>569</sup> “Goggle Works Art Courses,” *Reading Eagle*, April 16, 2006.

<sup>570</sup> Giacomo Fiore, “Reminiscence, Reflections, and Resonance: The Just Intonation Resophonic Guitar and Lou Harrison’s *Scenes from Nek Chand*,” *Journal of the Society for American Music*, vol. 6, issue 2, May 2012, pp. 211-237; quote p. 213. Fiore speculates that the book in question was John Maizels’ *Raw Creation: Outsider Art and Beyond*, London: Phaidon Press, 1996.

bangle-women; “The Rock Garden;” and “The Sinuous Arcade with Swings in the Arches,” inspired by Phase III. The piece was performed by David Tanenbaum at the Other Minds Music Festival in San Francisco during March 2002. *Scenes from Nek Chand*—Harrison’s last composition prior to his death in 2003—was a commissioned work; the composer reported that his choice of steel guitar had been inspired by the sound of Hawaiian music he remembered from his youth. According to musicologist Giacomo Fiore, the Indian “outsider” artist and the Hawaiian steel guitar had something in common in Harrison’s mind. Harrison’s innovative tuning and reliance on the guitar’s interior aluminum cones to create resonance re-imagined an instrument that had largely fallen out of popularity—much, in his mind, in the way that Chand had repurposed urban materials and discards in his creation of the Garden.<sup>571</sup> It is also worth mentioning that many of Harrison’s early works were composed for percussion instruments created from found metal objects, such as garbage cans. Fiore states that Harrison had been particularly struck by images of the Phase-III archways and large swings; the final movement of *Scenes from Nek Chand* is marked “amiably swinging,” a performance note instructing the musician to “incorporate a relaxed pushing-and-pulling into the phrasing.”<sup>572</sup> In the first movement, Harrison’s incorporation of sliding tones in alternation with the melody serves, according to Fiore, as “Harrison’s personal interpretation of the *jhala* of classical Indian music.”<sup>573</sup> Fiore concludes, “like the Indian sculptor that inspired *Scenes from Nek Chand*,

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<sup>571</sup> Partial summary of Fiore’s complex musicological argument. See Giacomo Fiore, “Reminiscence, Reflections, and Resonance,” 2012.

<sup>572</sup> Giacomo Fiore, “Reminiscence, Reflections, and Resonance,” 2012, p. 225.

<sup>573</sup> Giacomo Fiore, “Reminiscence, Reflections, and Resonance,” 2012, p. 222. Fiore notes that the *jhala* is a quick section at the close of a *raga* that “features a melodic pattern played against an interrupted drone.”

Harrison took something old and unwanted and made it something vibrant, beautiful, and full of life.”<sup>574</sup>

## Scene II:

From December 13-15, 2015 celebrations in Chandigarh marked what would have been Nek Chand’s 91<sup>st</sup> birthday. While Chand’s December 15<sup>th</sup> birthday had been celebrated annually by the city over the course of the last two decades, 2015 marked the first of such celebrations to be held following Chand’s death in June of that year. Events in recent years had included parades, folk dance performances, and the presentation of a large cake decorated with “Rock Garden figures” inspired by Chand’s sculptures.<sup>575</sup> In 2015 the festival, organized by the Society for the Maintenance and Development of the Rock Garden and spearheaded by Chand’s son, Anuj Saini, acted as a memorial celebration. Media reports referred to Chand as the man who “single-handedly created the Rock Garden.”<sup>576</sup> Events included a “waste art workshop,” *ghazal*, *qawwali*, and *bhajan* recitations, Bollywood-inspired concerts, and performances by “reality star-show children.”<sup>577</sup> A parade, food stalls, and ceremonial presentations were also among the events and features, and the week culminated in the presentation and dedication of a life-like silicone statue depicting a seated Nek Chand. The sculpture of Chand, dressed in his everyday clothing of Western-style button-down shirt and dress pants, was created by local sculptor

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<sup>574</sup> Giacomo Fiore, “Reminiscence, Reflections, and Resonance: The Just Intonation Resophonic Guitar and Lou Harrison’s *Scenes from Nek Chand*,” 2012; p. 234.

<sup>575</sup> Festivities were especially large in scale on the occasion of Chand’s 90<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2014; see “Who’s Who of City Throng Rock Garden,” *Chandigarh Tribune*, December 15, 2014.

<sup>576</sup> “Creator of Chandigarh’s Rock Garden, Nek Chand, Live on in People’s Hearts,” *The Indian Express*, December 13, 2015.

<sup>577</sup> *Ibid.*

Gurpreet Singh and ceremoniously installed seated at Chand's desk in his Rock Garden office.<sup>578</sup>

The desk is the same from which the living Chand regularly met with Garden visitors and his staff. Local newspapers featured the image of Union Territory Home Secretary Anurag Aggarwal touching the feet of the sculpture in an act of respect.<sup>579</sup> In another image, a crowd of family members and Chandigarh officials stands before the seated figure, which is surrounded by floral arrangements and "wreaths" constructed of bangle bracelets.<sup>580</sup>

The move to install the statue was a controversial one, as "personal statues" and commemorative sculptures are not permitted in Chandigarh per the city's founding edict.<sup>581</sup> Le Corbusier famously associated commemorative sculptures with the dying traditions of the nineteenth century:

The age of personal statues is gone. No personal statues shall be erected in the city or parks of Chandigarh. The city is planned to breathe the new sublimated spirit of art. Commemoration of persons shall be confined to suitably placed bronze plaques.<sup>582</sup>

Originally, two memorial statues were planned; the second was proposed for installation elsewhere in the city. In the end the second statue was deemed a "direct negation" of the terms of the edict, due to its proposed location outside of Rock Garden grounds, and was therefore rejected by the Chandigarh Administration. The proposal was also presented to the Chandigarh Heritage and Conservation Committee for its consideration.<sup>583</sup> A spokesperson for the Union Territory Administration Advisory Council reportedly noted that the presence of one statue

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<sup>578</sup> "Memorial to Nek Chand: Festival to Mark Rock Garden's Creator's B'Day from December 12," *The Indian Express*, December 11, 2015.

<sup>579</sup> "Creator of Chandigarh's Rock Garden, Nek Chand, Lives on in People's Hearts," *The Indian Express*, December 13, 2015.

<sup>580</sup> "Four-Day Festival in Memory of Nek Chand Kicks Off," *The Tribune*, December 13, 2015.

<sup>581</sup> "As an Exception, UT to Install Statue of Nek Chand Inside Rock Garden," *The Indian Express*, July 11, 2015.

<sup>582</sup> "Edict of Chandigarh," Union Territory Administration, Government Press, Chandigarh, 1967, p. 3.

<sup>583</sup> "Statues against Admn's [sic] Edict," *The Tribune*, April 5, 2016.

within the Rock Garden was an “apt memorial to [a] unique artist,” while additional statues elsewhere in the city “would be a direct negation of the edict” and “also against Le Corbusier’s plan.”<sup>584</sup> The Rock Garden is currently home to one other memorial: a carved stone tribute to Foundation trustee and conservator Tony Rajer.<sup>585</sup> Birthday celebrations were held for two days in December 2016 and included a memorial floral presentation at the silicone statue, including musical performances and children’s crafts workshops.<sup>586</sup>

### Scene III:

The 2016 Venice Architecture Biennale, “Reporting from the Front,” featured a tribute to Nek Chand and the Rock Garden. Situated at the far end of the Arsenale exhibition space was a three-part installation, an arrangement that signaled the three phases of the Garden in spirit if not exactly content. The first section featured an approximately twelve-foot high replica of the Garden’s Phase-III arches. In place of swings mounted between each archway there was a large-scale photographic portrait of Chand, reproduced quotes taken from the Garden’s guest book, a biographical outline, and several Rock Garden concrete and fabric figural sculptures. The latter were displayed on a stepped platform of mosaic tile. A line of bitumen drums separated this section of the display from the second section, creating something akin to the experience of moving from one of the Garden’s phases to another. Hanging above the Phase III-style archways were two large banners depicting views of the Garden’s sculpture fields, waterfall, and swings. A looped video on the entrance side of the display featured footage of Nek Chand’s son, Anuj

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<sup>584</sup> Ibid.

<sup>585</sup> The memorial was installed near the large waterfall in a February 25, 2012 ceremony. Rajer died suddenly in 2011. See <http://nekchand.com/news/tony-rajer-memorial-nek-chands-rock-garden> Accessed January 28, 2017.

<sup>586</sup> “Chandigarh: Nek Chand’s Birth Anniversary Celebrated,” *The Indian Express*, December 16, 2016.

Saini, speaking in English as he discussed the Garden and its presence “on the international art scene.” The camera then panned over portions of Phase I’s displayed rocks, the huts between Phases I and II, and the open vistas of Phase III, following Anuj as he discussed some of the Garden’s features in Hindi.

Through the row of bitumen drums into the adjacent section of the Biennale exhibition was a smaller-scale recreation of the Garden’s waterfall and *chhatri* structures. Above these was mounted a large banner with a montage of images labeled, from left to right, “Capital Complex,” “Chandigarh,” and “Rock Garden.” Superimposed over the black-and-white photographic images of city and Garden architecture were images of Le Corbusier and Chand, as though in visual declaration of their duo-authorship of the city as it is today. The third section of the installation featured a partially finished mosaic wall, a smaller-scale sculpture field, several cloth figures, and a large-scale map of Chandigarh, installed horizontally and incorporating three-dimensional models of prominent architecture. The banner above this section depicted a grid of frontal images of various buildings in Chandigarh. These included Le Corbusier’s Sector-1 buildings but also buildings with a lower-profile in the Western imagination, such as schools and places of worship in further-flung sectors.

The concept for the show came from the Biennale’s 2016 curator, Chilean architect Alejandro Aravena. In a published statement Aravena recalled an early formative visit to the Rock Garden during an architectural pilgrimage to the city designed by Le Corbusier.<sup>587</sup> Primary credit for the concept and creation of the installation was given to Anuj Saini with support from members of the Society for the Maintenance and Development of the Rock Garden. Special thanks were given to John Maizels, the now-late M.N. Sharma, and Philippe Lespinasse.

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<sup>587</sup> “15<sup>th</sup> Venice Architecture Biennale Exhibition: Nek Chand’s Garden All Set to Rock the World at Venice Exhibition in May,” *The Indian Express*, April 22, 2016.

Crediting Anuj with the creation of the installation makes something of a statement as to the future direction of the Garden; in recent years the press had speculated that Anuj would assume Garden directorship following his father's eventual death, but his exact role has remained unclear.<sup>588</sup> The introductory label for the installation, "The Work of Engineer Nek Chand in Chandigarh," presented the Rock Garden as "invention in its purest state" and highlighted the work as a contrast to the rest of the city. In particular the label made note of the Garden's simultaneous complexity of design and sincerity of foundational spirit:

[...] a Western critic would not hesitate to label [the Rock Garden] as kitsch. The work, however, does not contain a shred of cynicism. It is like nothing ever seen before, a completely honest exploration of artisanship that ignores existing design canons and codes. It is invention in the purest sense of the word. It is the candid and passionate redemption of decoration, as distant from the muteness of a modern box as it is from the sneering, putative lessons from Las Vegas.<sup>589</sup>

True, perhaps, to the claims made of this sincere spirit, the installation acted in stark departure from the other Arsenale installations. Purported to "give visitors from across the world the feeling of being present in the Rock Garden," the installation components were constructed of repurposed tiles and slate in aesthetic similarity to the site.<sup>590</sup> Here the Biennale's sleekly produced architecture and design installations noticeably gave way to over-stylized fonts and over-enlarged images; the seemingly haphazard placement of the cloth figures similarly registered as inexpert. The installation's overall effect was something of an homage to the city and to the Garden, but also to Le Corbusier and Nek Chand; it was presented as though its intended audience would likely need to contextualize the latter figure via the former. In short,

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<sup>588</sup> Although it is worth mentioning that, without prior knowledge, Anuj's identity as Chand's son was difficult to discern from the installation itself.

<sup>589</sup> Exhibition wall label, "The Work of Engineer Nek Chand in Chandigarh," Venice Architecture Biennale, 2016.

<sup>590</sup> "15<sup>th</sup> Venice Architecture Biennale Exhibition: Nek Chand's Garden All Set to Rock the World at Venice Exhibition in May," *The Indian Express*, April 22, 2016.

the exhibition perhaps unintentionally recreated the binary dynamic between the modernist city and the “home-grown” Garden.

Situated next to the Rock Garden installation was an exhibition by Polish architect Hugon Kowalski. Kowalski’s project concerned urban waste and the Mumbai slum Dharavi more particularly; his interest was in promoting the transformation of trash into building materials. The installation relied heavily on the visual impact of large piles of shredded paper, crushed plastic bottles, and flattened cardboard boxes, all of which lined the walkway through the display. Two large pigs, constructed of fabric, were positioned amidst the trash and opposite a large map graphic labeled “Illegal Waste Trafficking,” presumably in order to signal not only a contemporary descent into a “pig-pen” urban environment but also to critique developed countries’ excessive production of disposal commodities. The exhibition continued up a narrow viewing platform, which afforded the visitor an aerial view of the Rock Garden installation below [Figure 104]. The close proximity of the two installations made them inescapably entwined, visually and thematically; the proximity of Kowalski’s project inflected the Rock Garden tribute with the implication that Chand had been above all a master recycler.

### ***Possibilities of the Rock Garden***

The 2015 death of Nek Chand and the 2016 establishment of Chandigarh’s UNESCO World Heritage status have renewed the visibility of both the Rock Garden and the city, and of Nek Chand and Le Corbusier, the two individuals most commonly credited with Garden- and city creation. As both criticism for modernist urban planning and nostalgia for mid-twentieth century design evolve in the twenty-first century, the Garden and the city have tended to be locked into an interpretive dialectic based on the binary logic I have outlined in this thesis. In

excavating the complexities of the city and presenting them as evidence of a contested experience, and by repositioning the Garden within this field rather than in opposition to it, my dissertation has sought to expose and dismantle the terms of this binary.

There is an arresting photograph included within the archival collections at SPACES; the photograph is today part of the Anton Rajer archive and was apparently reprinted from its original in the Chandigarh City Archive. In this circa 1975 photograph, a parade of Chand's large-scale patchwork cloth sculptures are arranged in small groups—human figures in twos and threes, some holding cloth “children”—each group following behind a pair of cloth bullocks [Figure 105]. Cloth figures were a common feature in the Garden in the 1970s-1980s, and were constructed largely with the help of female artisans. Exposed to the elements, the figures needed frequent repair and replacement and as such eventually fell out of use.<sup>591</sup> The cloth figures in the image are all faced in the same direction and are positioned along a path within the Garden. This “parade” of migrating figures recalls Margaret Bourke White's photographs of Partition refugees that captured and monumentalized long lines of figures, their family members and worldly possessions placed on bullock carts, all slowly making their way across the landscape to an unknown future.<sup>592</sup>

Despite its apparent visual reference to the events of 1947 one cannot call this image a memorial, exactly—the patchwork cloth figures read at some level as whimsical and curious—but it recalls if not venerates. The figures in the image are unfixed and movable, unlike the Phase-II sculptures, and appear to be available for visitor interaction, placed as they are along the walking path. As such the image acts as a reminder of the possibilities inherent in the recalcitrant Garden. As the opening episodes in this epilogue have helped to illustrate, the

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<sup>591</sup> This style of cloth figure can still be seen at the High Court Museum in Sector 1; see Figure 100.

<sup>592</sup> Published in Margaret Bourke White, Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1950.

significance of the Rock Garden is not easily reducible; this dissertation, as an intervention to the dominant narrative, has proposed several new possibilities.

The first of these is that the Rock Garden acts as a space of memory—not as a commemoration or memorial to the traumas and hopes of Independence and Partition, or to villager displacement, but rather as a space that has the potential to activate poignant but also ludic reflection on all of these events and their implications. Dealing in the material vocabulary of the displaced but also that of growth, urban development, and regeneration, the Rock Garden has the power to record, integrate, and invigorate the complexity of changes of the city as both a symbol and a lived reality.

Second, the dissertation has made possible the potential to view the Garden not as an entity that stands in opposition to the grid format of the city and to Sector 1 in particular; rather, it has proposed that the site is in opposition to the very conceptualization that Chandigarh is at its core a vacant, mid-twentieth century modernist formulation. In a city commonly discussed in the scholarly record in terms of its architectural origin points, the Rock Garden offers a means of considering instead the vibrancy of encounters between individuals and built environments. As an unplanned but governed site with a controlled plan, the Garden enables a view of the ways in which urban structures are animated by the experiences of their diverse audiences and inhabitants. A study of the Rock Garden can, as this dissertation has demonstrated, usher in studies of other places in the city, particularly on the map of unplanned or “illegally” altered spaces in Chandigarh. To do so would potentially bring to the forefront the existence of additional unscripted projects that also seem to counter the dominant narrative of the city—the incorporated village of Burail, for example, which roughly falls into the exterior confines of the sector plan but the interior of which is ungoverned by the grid’s dictates.

Finally, and perhaps most powerfully, I have proposed that the Rock Garden be considered not a product of a “genius” outsider artist working alone, but rather as a community project with further-reaching possibilities. This dissertation has considered the Garden not as the work of a single “visionary genius,” but rather as a multi-authored arena with a diversity of meanings and possibilities—just as Chandigarh’s inhabited, modified, and kinetic spaces more broadly cannot be sustainably overshadowed by mid-twentieth century architectural intentions and modernist designs.

Put simply, this dissertation has promoted the approach that Chandigarh be viewed as a *contemporary* city, one that has always acted, and continues to act, as a arena of possibilities rather than as a pre-determined fixed entity. The publication of recent book-length photographic studies of the city, and the emergence of memorial installations following Chand’s death; the current increased interest in organizing exhibitions of Chand’s sculptures abroad,<sup>593</sup> and the composition of musical tributes to areas of Chandigarh; the use of the Rock Garden as a photogenic backdrop for the meeting of world leaders<sup>594</sup>—all of these in part dramatize the terms of what I have deemed the Chandigarh binary. But at the same time each signals new opportunities for more complex engagements with both the city and the artwork. To release Chandigarh and the Rock Garden from a binary, oppositional relationship enables, for example,

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<sup>593</sup> For example, at the Pallant House in Chicester, England in 2015; the Rubin Museum in New York City in 2016; and the Kohler Center for the Arts in Sheboygan, Wisconsin in 2017.

<sup>594</sup> Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President François Hollande met for twenty minutes in the Rock Garden on January 24, 2016. The meeting was largely a goodwill gesture and publicity opportunity in conjunction with Hollande’s January 21-06 diplomatic trip to India. Hollande had himself requested the excursion to Chandigarh in order to see Le Corbusier’s architecture; he had also been escorted through the Sector-I Capitol Complex. The event was well-covered in the Indian media; see for example “A Warm Hug and a Rocking Start,” *The Tribune*, January 25, 2016. As part of the increased security measures as a result of the event Anuj Saini had been removed from the Garden immediately prior to Hollande’s arrival; this incident was something of a minor scandal as portrayed in the local media. See, for one example, “Despite Entry Pass, Chand’s Son was Told to Leave,” *The Times of India*, January 25, 2016.

the ability to view both as enlivened, community-authored projects, or for the Garden to be taken as something of an archive of the city's historical and present concerns and material make-up rather than as its antagonistic opposite. Undoing the myth-making that has been instrumental in the circulation of the dominant narrative and insisting instead on a more critical and nuanced approach, as I have argued, allow us to reposition the historical movement of both the city and the Garden into an expanded field of consideration.

## FIGURES



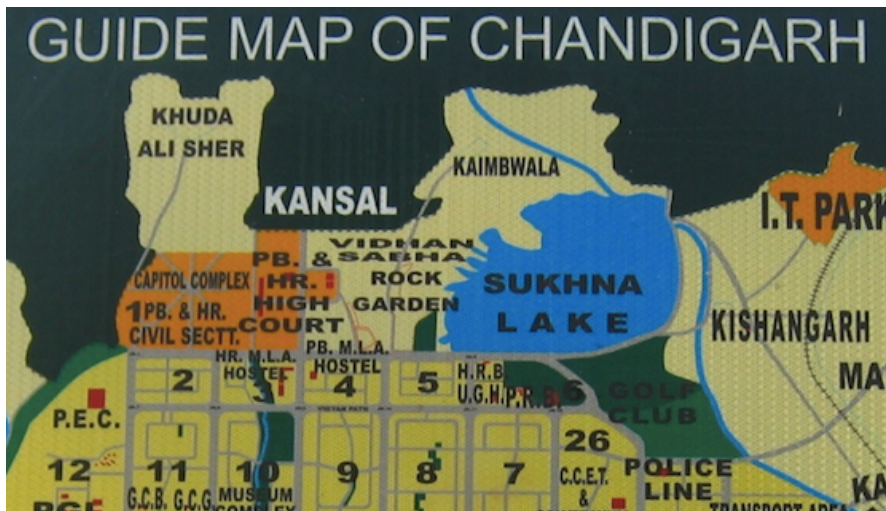
**Figure 1:** Original Rock Garden hut on display in Phase I [photograph by the author, 2014]



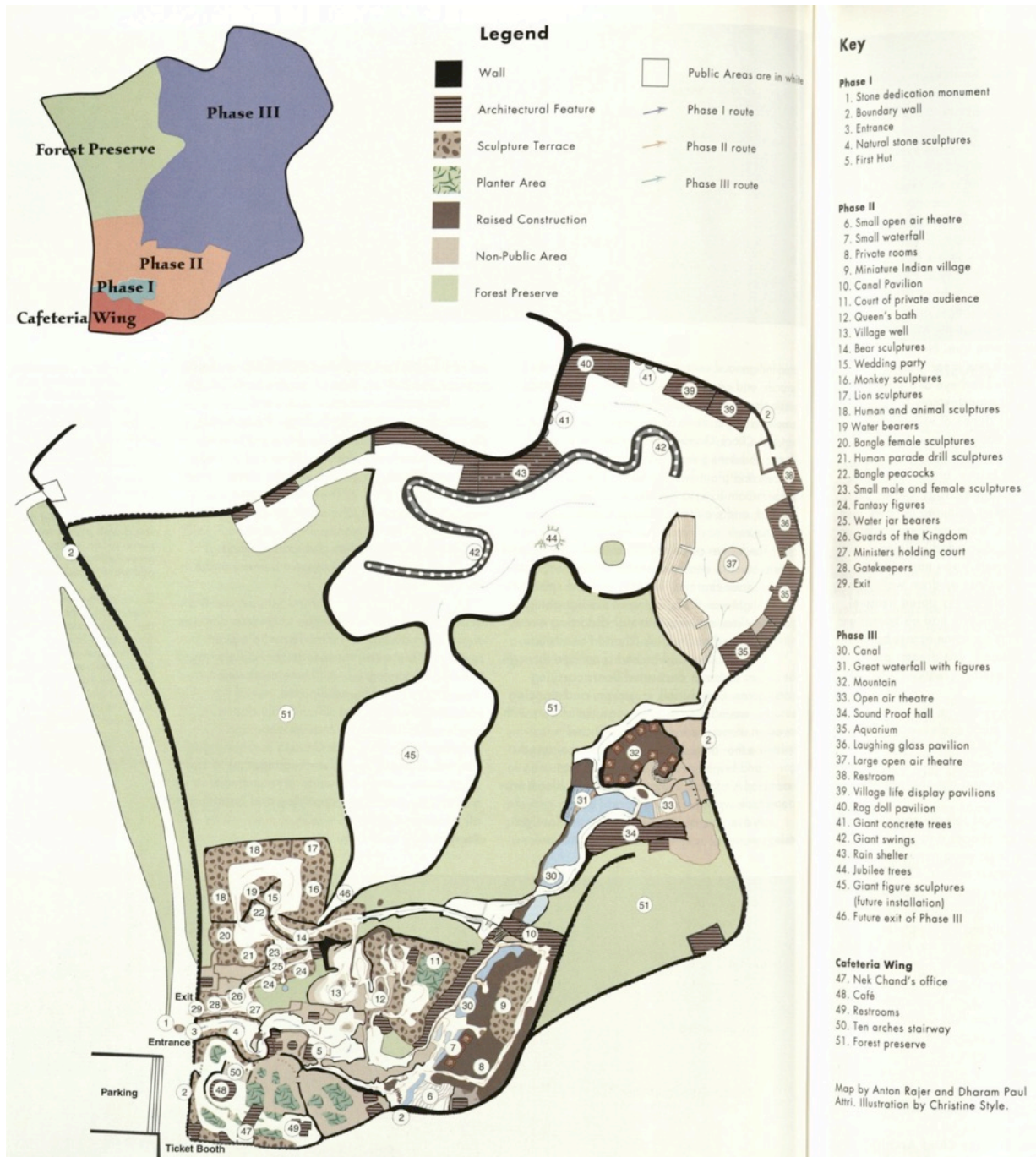
**Figure 2:** Stacked bitumen drums as site border wall [photograph by the author, 2014]



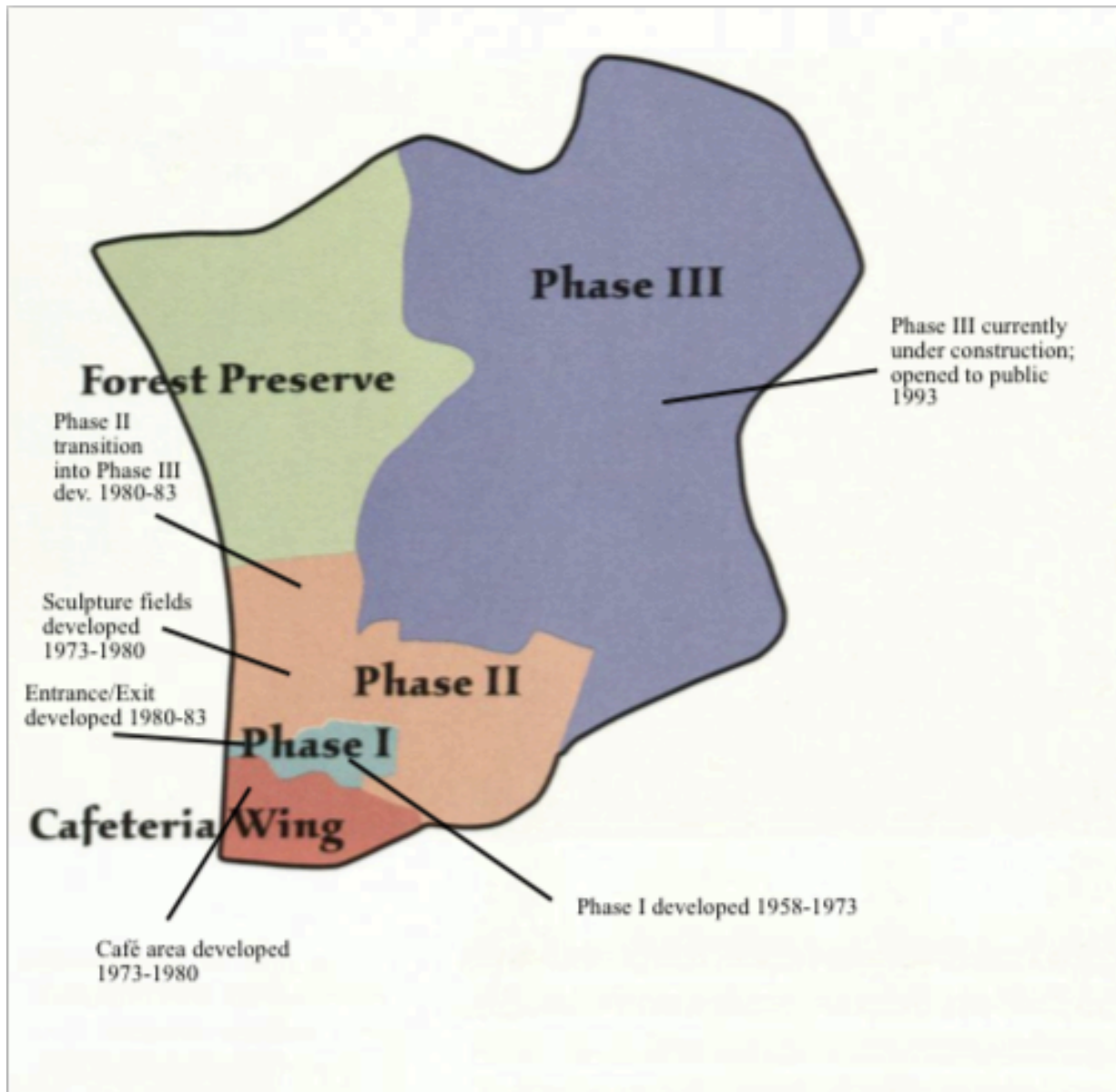
**Figure 3:** Satellite image of Rock Garden, showing extent of forested area and adjacent parking lot [DigitalGlobe, Map data 2017 Google]



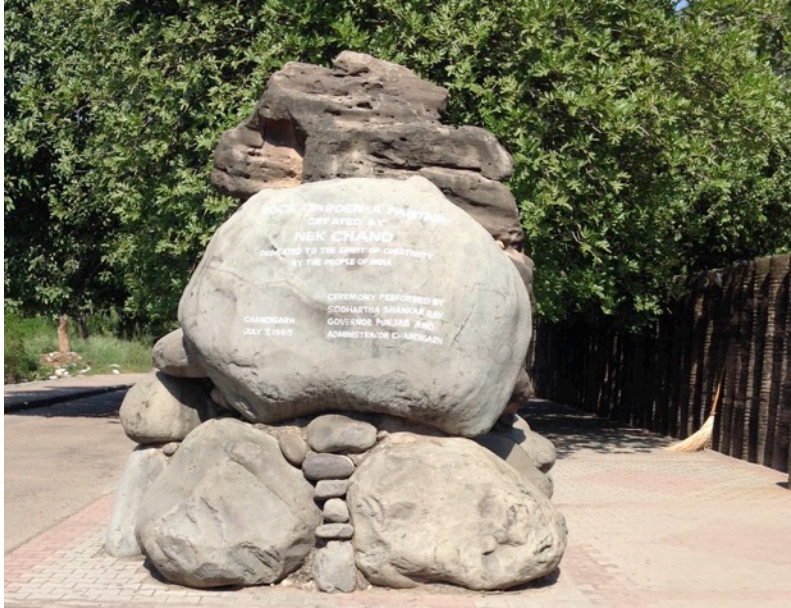
**Figure 4:** Position of Rock Garden [guide map posted in Chandigarh, Sector 16; photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 5a:** Site map produced for Nekk Chand Foundation tourist brochure by Tony Rajer [courtesy of SPACES Collection]



**Figure 5b:** Map detail, annotated with construction dates [map courtesy of SPACES Collection; annotation by the author]



**Figure 6:** Sign at entrance gate [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 7:** Entrance to Rock Garden [Photo courtesy of Michael Kaufman, 2010]



**Figure 8:** Rock Garden ticket counter with entrance fee rates [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 9:** Example of prohibitive signage [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 10:** Path blocked by rocks and bitumen drums [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 11:** Displayed rocks in Phase I [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 12:** Rocks in display niches, Phase I [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 13:** Groupings of rocks along Phase-I path [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 14:** Central pebble screen with roof of hut visible beyond [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 15:** Terracotta screen [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 16:** Hillside rock display and empty tile pool [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 17:** Empty tile pool [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 18:** Commemorative stones placed at hut entrance [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 19:** Designs on concrete wall [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 20:** Displayed rocks [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 21:** Path leading into shelter, with votive figure inserted in wall [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 22:** Stone and tile amphitheater [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 23:** Main waterfall with Mughal-inspired structure [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 24:** Adjacent waterfall [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 25:** “Fortress” architecture above stream system [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 26:** Wall with deep-relief carving



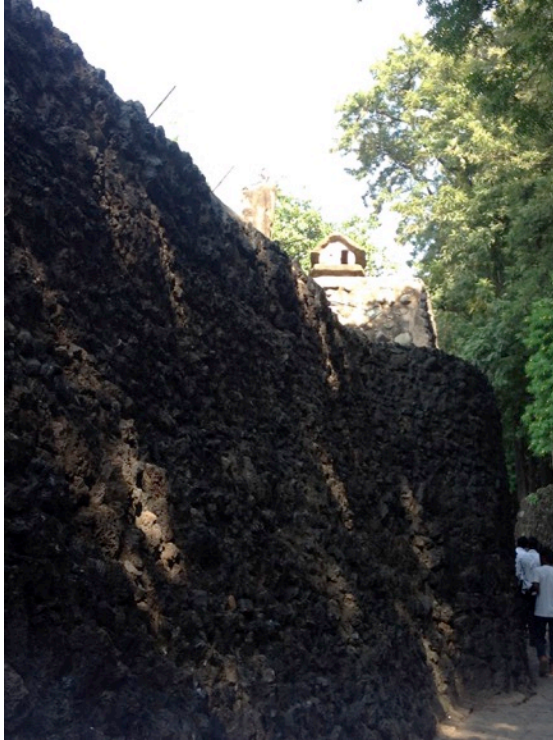
**Figure 27:** “Vine” overgrowth [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 28:** Detail, wall alongside path into miniature village display [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 29:** Miniature village display along top edge of wall [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 30:** Height of village display above visitor pathway [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 31:** View from pathway into Phase III [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 32:** Vista with tiled walls, displayed rocks, and “fortress” [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 33:** Stone basin, steps, and partition walls [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 34:** Detail of ceramic-clad wall [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 35:** Fortress structure in Phase I [photograph by the author, 2014]



Figure 36: Rocks displayed on irregular tile surface [photograph by the author, 2014]



Figure 37: Wall surfaces clad with fragments of electrical moldings [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 38:** Walled lawn [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 39:** Trees arranged in stone planters [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 40:** View into “village” courtyard with central well and perimeter shelter [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 41:** Phase-II figures [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 42:** Bear figures displayed on tile [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 43:** Humanoid figures [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 44:** Phase-II animal figures [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 45:** Rebar skeleton horse and bull sculptures [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 46:** Ceramic figures “emerging” from ceramic background [photograph by the author, 2014]



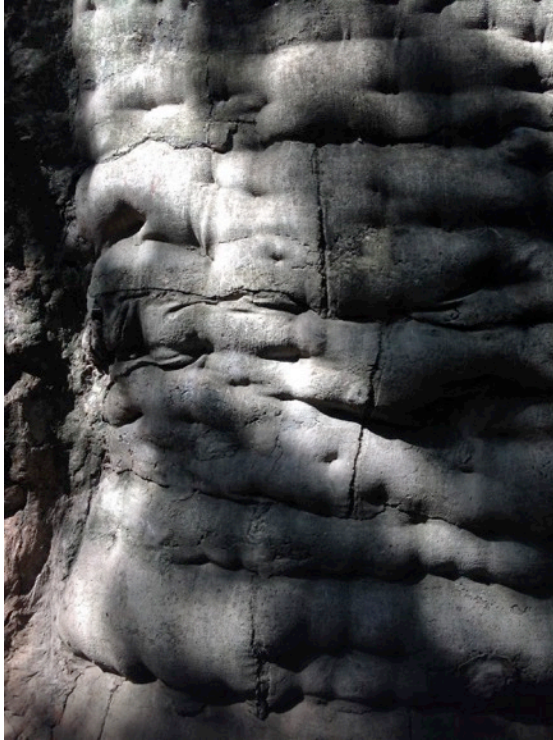
**Figure 47:** Phase-II playground scene [photograph by the author, 2014]



Figure 48: “Drunk” figures [photograph by the author, 2014]



Figure 49: Directional signage [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 50:** Detail of wall into Phase III [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 51:** Graffiti on wall into Phase III [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 52:** Phase-III commemorative sign [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 53:** Nek Chand Souvenir Shop located in Phase III [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 54:** Walkway into Phase-III plaza [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 55:** Figures positioned along top of waterfall [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 56:** Phase-III ceramic-clad amphitheater [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 57:** View of Phase-III building from walkway [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 58:** Phase-III aquarium tanks [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 59:** Phase-III hand-washing spigots [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 60:** “Laughing Mirrors” pavilion [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 61:** Arch-wall with central swings [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 62:** Detail, swing [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 63:** Relief sculptures in reinforced concrete [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 64:** Phase-III mosaic with Phase-II imagery [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 65:** Unfinished Phase-III shelter, used for storage [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 66:** Steel interior of “tree” under construction [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 67:** Natural trees juxtaposed with constructed trees in Phase III [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 68:** Train and inflatable slide, Phase III [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 69:** Detail of wall, Phase II [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 70:** Model house set within rock display [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 71:** Ceramic-clad "chair" in Phase III [photograph by the author, 2014]

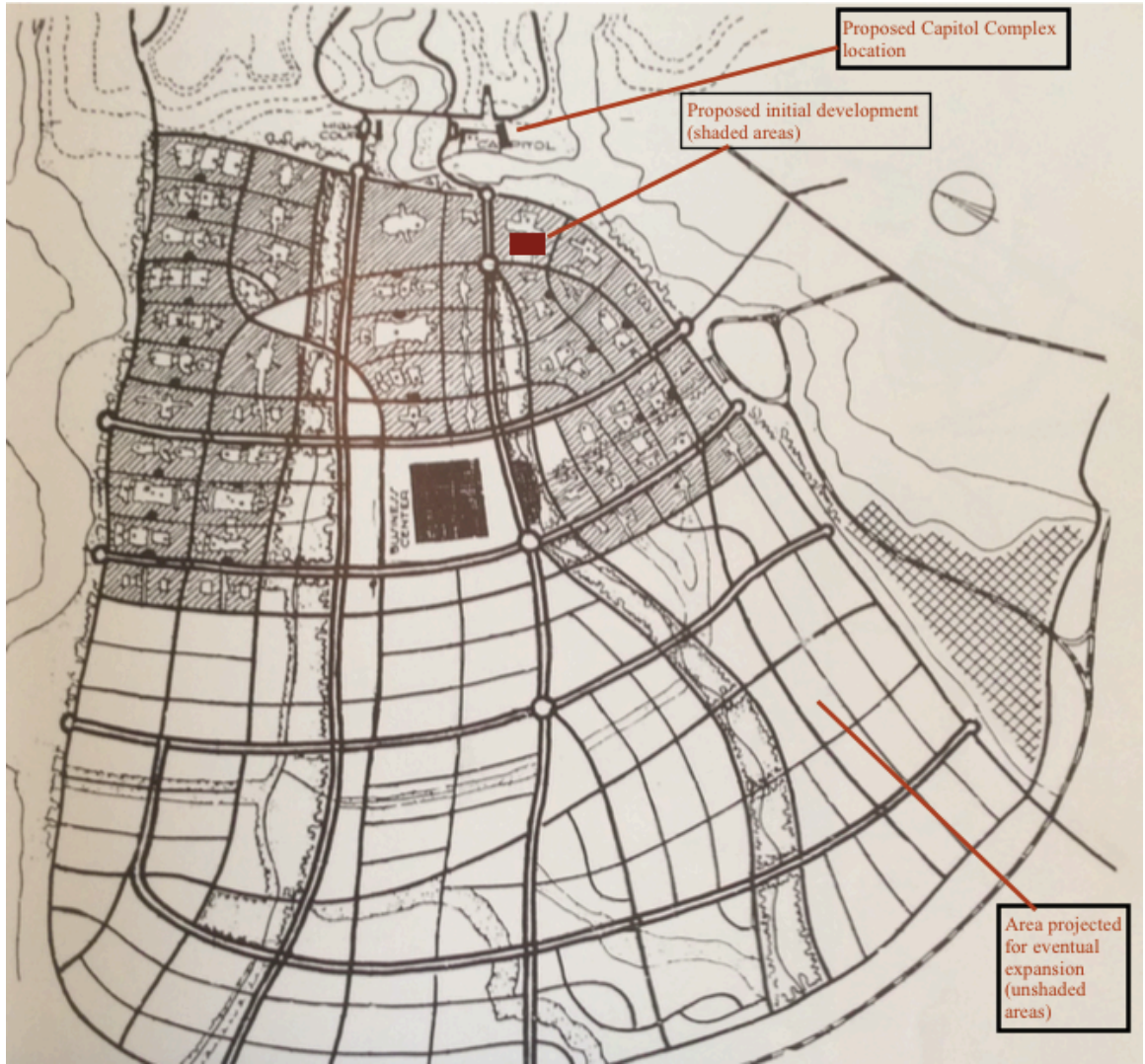


Figure 72: Mayer's proposed master plan [courtesy Chandigarh City Museum], annotated by the author



**Figure 73:** Door of Assembly building [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 74:** Assembly building with nuclear tower motif [photograph by the author, 2014]



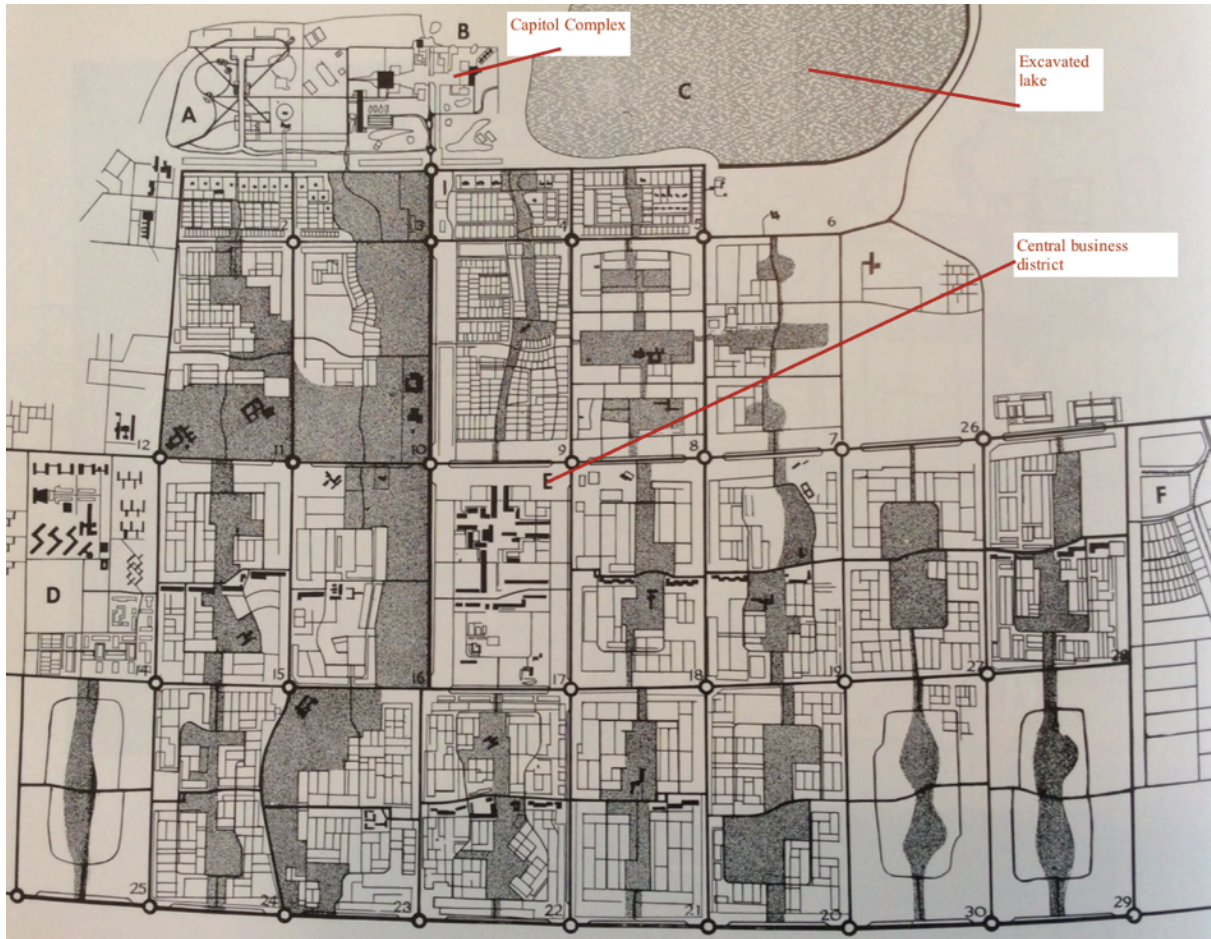
**Figure 75:** Sketch for Mayer's proposed Capitol Complex, with *stupa*-shaped Assembly [courtesy of Chandigarh City Museum]



**Figure 76:** Tower of Shadows, Capitol Complex [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 77:** Le Corbusier with Modulor Man sculpture, Capitol Complex [photo courtesy of SPACES Collection]



**Figure 78:** Le Corbusier's master plan [courtesy Chandigarh City Museum], annotated by the author

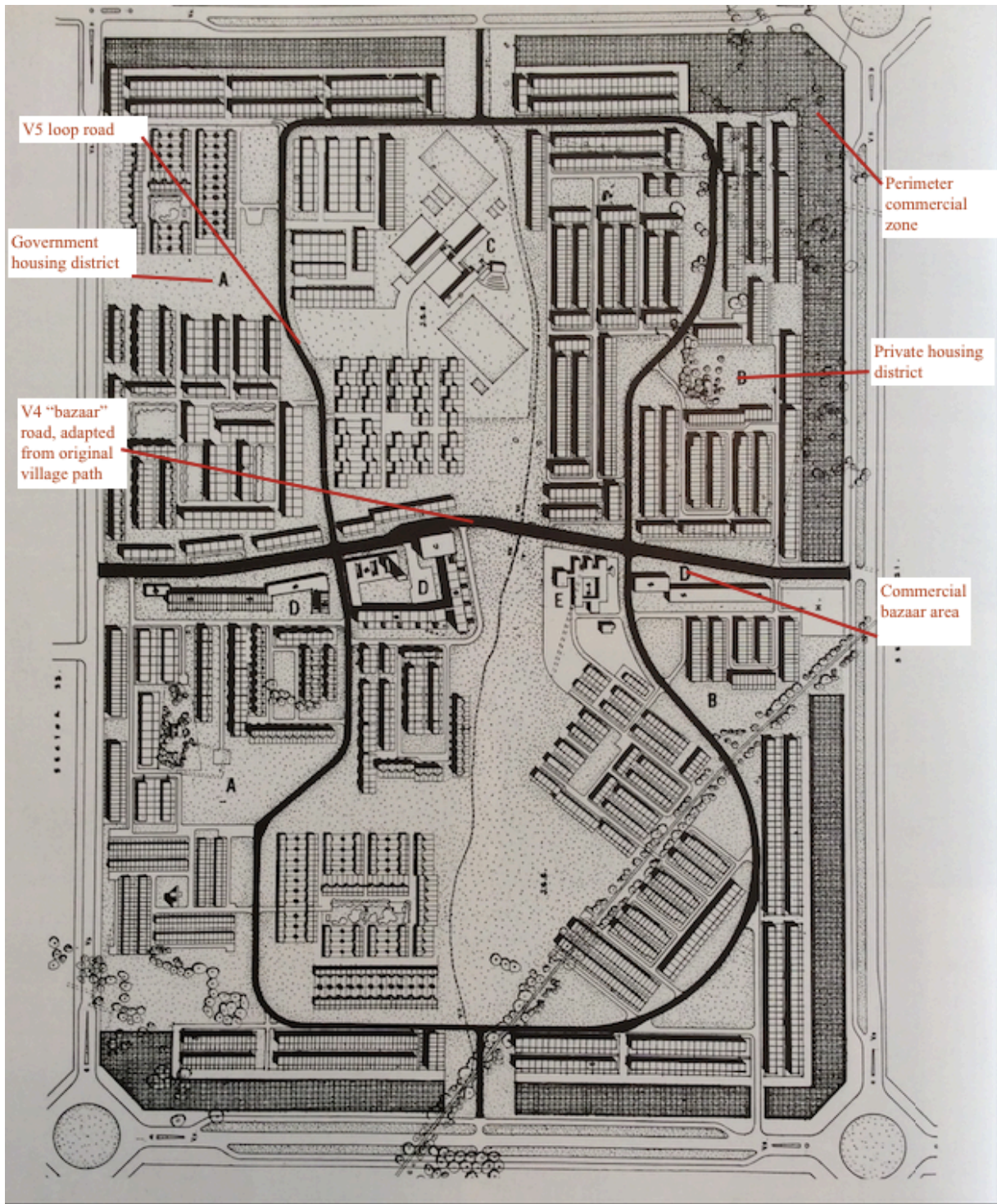


Figure 79: Plan for Sector 22 [courtesy Chandigarh City Museum], annotated by the author



**Figure 80:** Concrete figures, Phase II [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 81:** Wall constructed of terracotta pottery, broken tiles, and fixtures, Phase I [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 82:** Sculptures displayed against backdrop wall of broken fixtures [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 83:** Detail, pebble-surface construction [photograph by the author]



**Figure 84:** Displayed rocks, Phase I [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 85:** Displayed rocks, Phase I [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 86:** Rocks displayed in niches, Phase I [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 87:** Phase-II sculpture with terracotta face (foreground) [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 88:** Phase-II figures with bottles, teapots [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 89:** Sculptures of women constructed of bangles [photograph by the author, 2014]



Figure 90: Sculptures of peacocks constructed of bangles [photograph by the author, 2014]



Figure 91: Early bangle sculptures, Phase II [photograph by the author]



**Figure 92:** Miniature village, Phase II [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 93:** Visitors at the to-scale village well, Phase II [photograph by the author, 2014]



Figure 94: Wall with Harappan-inspired motifs [photograph by the author, 2014]



Figure 95: Concrete "roots" [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 96:** Concrete “roots” [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 97:** Tree incorporated into Garden wall [photograph by the author, 2014]



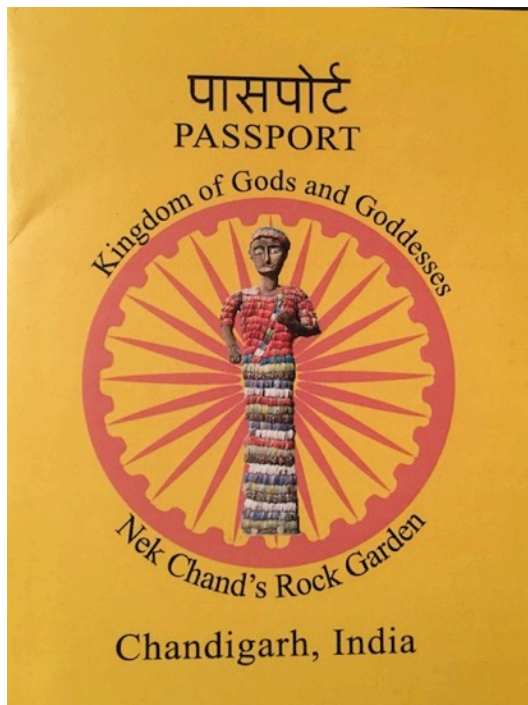
**Figure 98:** Nek Chand passing through a Phase-II doorway, ca. 1980 [photo courtesy of SPACES Collection]



**Figure 99:** A 6-foot tall visitor passing through Phase-II doorway [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 100:** The author taking photographs of Phase-II figures [photograph by Peter Bonfitto, 2014; used with permission]



**Figure 101:** Cover of promotional "passport," created by Nek Chand Foundation, 2007



**Figure 102:** Camel in Phase III [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 103:** Built environment with *chhatra* design [photograph by the author, 2014]



**Figure 104:** View of Rock Garden installation from platform, Venice Biennale [photograph by the author, 2016]



**Figure 105:** Cloth figures, ca. 1975 [photo courtesy of SPACES Collection]



**Figure 106:** Cloth figures displayed in Sector-1 High Court Museum, 2014 [photograph by the author, 2014]

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