

## **Bhaaji developed a new genre**

*—Kewal Dhaliwal*

An era in Punjabi literature and theatre has come to an end with the demise of Gursharan Singh, a great theatre personality and director. He had ruled the Punjabi theatre scene for the past five decades and earned the honour of being referred to as “Shakespeare of Punjab”. He was not just a great artist, director and actor, but also a great philosopher, engineer, writer, editor, and above all, a great human being.

If we glance at history, then, after Shaheed Bhagat Singh, it is only Gursharan Singh who became a “Lok Nayak”. reached the pinnacle of glory and brought recognition for the state. I have had the honour of a decade-long friendship and association with Gursharan Singh in his literary and theatre life, during which I had the chance to study him closely.

I joined him at Amritsar Natak Kala Kender in 1978 and for the next ten years, I worked with him in every theatre-production that he took on. I saw his dedication at the height of militancy, at a time, when even the birds feared to flutter their wings outside, Bhaaji fearlessly went from house to house, village to village, to promote peace and brotherhood through his plays at a time when distrust and terrorism ruled the state.

Gursharan Singh joined hands with his old friend and acclaimed actor Balraj Sahni to set up his own publishing house, through which he distributed quality literature on nominal price to people.

He made it a point to give an independent, non-biased view on raging issue of his time through his publishing house. He particularly high-lighted the plight of Indian woman and atrocities against them. His intense feeling for the downteodden is what set him apart from contemporary writers.

He was not only in the business of entertainment, but made entertainment business a tool to impart values of an independent genre of theatre in Pendu Naat-shaili (rural theatre) just like Brecht, Chekhov, Shakespeare, Meyerhold, Stanislavski and Habib Tanvir evolved their own. University should set up chairs to study the genre and its founder in the coming days. Although he has left the world physically today, he will always be remembered for his writings, his public interest thoughts and progressive thinking.