

Gursharan secured the future of theatre in Punjab

—Ramaninder K Bhatia & Neel Kamal

Chandigarh : Old age and frail health due to a kidney ailment, could hardly keep Gursharan away from theatre for long. Just 10 days prior to his death, the ailing playwright, who was on a wheelchair by then, visited Chandigarh's Kala Bhawan on September 16, where he was invited to celebrate his 83rd birthday among his friends and admirers.

“He was 82-year-old but his enthusiasm was so infectious. Being present inside a theatre seemed to uplift him on that day. He was not just a theatre person, he was a movement in Punjab,” recalls Neelam Man Singh, whose family and that of Gursharan knew each other. It was Gursharan who introduced the institution of “Naquaals” to Neelam, when she started foraying into theatre back in the 70s.

Playwright Dr Atamjit, who was present at the function, recalled, “Bhaaji could barely speak but managed to mumble his feelings at the occasion.”

He said, “Iss umar vich lok natakkaar nu milan jande han, lekin main rang manch de darshan karan aaya haan ate theatre da future dekh ke khush haan (At this age, people come to see and meet the playwright but I am here to see the rang manch and am contended to see the future of theatre).”

Though Gursharan Singh had grown very weak by then, due to his kidney ailment and repeated dialysis, his thoughts and willpower

remained strong as ever, said Kanwaljit Khanna, a close associate. “I am yet to come across a person with such a strong willpower. Gursharan had lent his strength to the movement against oppression of tribals in form of operation Green Hunt, and was a frequent visitor at the activities organized by the activists”.

Playwright Kewal Dhaliwal, who recently compiled Gursharan Singh’s 170 plays in seven volumes—*Sade Samya da Lok Nayak Gursharan Singh* (Hero of our times. Gursharan Singh)—said, “The urge in him to uplift theatre was so strong that he never allowed age to come in its way. Such a person is born only in a century.”