

A step towards cultural revival

By Manohar Singh Gill

Mr Parkash Singh Badal will today lay the foundation stone of the Punjab Arts Council building near the Rose Garden in Chandigarh. This will be an important step in the cultural revival of the State.

Ever since 1966, when the miracle wheat seeds came to Punjab, we have all been obsessed with the green revolution phenomenon. Economic progress is undoubtedly an important requirement, and it was necessary for our people to devote their energies to increasing farm production. The results have been worthwhile, and though we still have a long way to go in ensuring a minimum living standard for our people, in relative terms Punjab's achievements have been impressive.

NOT BY BREAD ALONE

But man does not live by bread alone. It is the arts that feed the spirit. It is time, therefore, for Punjab and the Government to devote some attention to the promotion of the arts. The Punjab Government over the past year has taken some significant steps in this direction. Considering the size of the State's annual Budget, the money allocated for cultural affairs is negligible. In past years the feeling has been that this is an unnecessary and wasteful activity. The planners prefer to put all their money on irrigation, power, agriculture and roads.

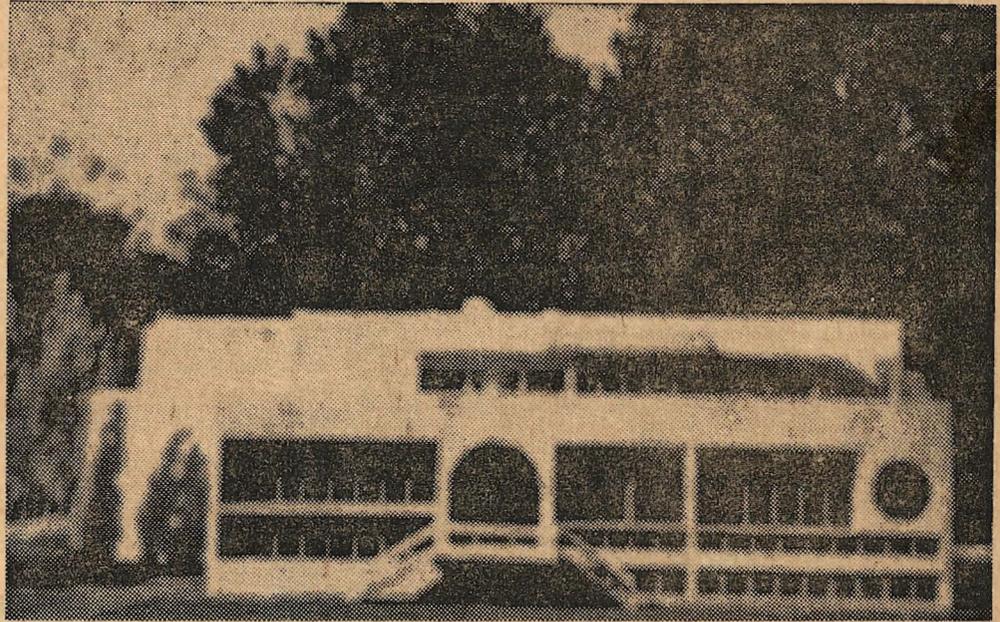
The realisation has now come that for the all-round development of our people it is necessary and worthwhile to spend some money on cultural and artistic activities. There is every expectation that the grants for these purposes will be substantially enhanced.

The State Arts Council was not a very active body in the past. What is more, it was an appendage of the Home Department. At the Secretariat level the Deputy Secretary, Home, of all people, serviced the Council as best he could. It was later felt that the Government had no business to exercise such stultifying control. The Council was made autonomous, given a constitution of its own, a hired office with adequate staff, and left to manage its own affairs free of Government control.

LAND AND FUNDS

It was also felt that the Council must have a permanent home in Chandigarh. A request was made to the Chief Commissioner and a very attractive plot has been secured next to the Rose Garden. The Punjab Government has made a special allocation of Rs 20 lakh for the building of which the foundation stone will be laid by the Chief Minister today.

The Tagore Theatre being in great demand, Chandigarh badly needs another such facility.



A model of the Punjab Arts Council building.

The Punjab Arts Council building will have an air-conditioned theatre, a library on the arts, committee rooms and other facilities to enable poets and artists to meet and conduct their affairs in a worthwhile environment. This building, which it is hoped to complete in a year's time, should help the Arts Council and its three subsidiaries to function effectively. The Government's policy is to give the Punjab Arts Council a worthwhile home, adequate funds and all freedom to promote artistic activity in the State.

CONCESSIONS

Films are an important medium of expression. They also are a valuable vehicle for promoting the Punjabi language. Most States in India have given tax concessions to their regional cinema, and the result has been considerable expansion of the local film industry in States like Gujarat and Kerala. The Punjab Government too has given some tax concessions which have benefited a large number of films.

It is hoped to further simplify these concessions so that the scheme is implemented without any delay or harassment. These steps should lead to the production of a much larger number of Punjabi films. While we all wish for quality, this will ultimately emerge partly out of quantity. Once Punjabi films prove to be a commercial success, better artists will gravitate to them.

Today Punjab, in spite of its prosperity, has a very limited number of cinemas. The whole mechanism of putting up a cinema is governed by obsolete re-

gulations framed during the British period. These regulations tend to restrict activity and convert it into a very special power of patronage. Tamil Nadu has gone for a Statewide cheap cinema movement. One sees in Army cantonments simple barrack-like structures, or even open-air theatres, used for cinema shows.

Considering our usually dry climate, there is no reason why, like the U.S.A., we should not go in for simple open-air enclosures. The cost of a cinema building will thus go down. Even if a few individuals can somehow put together the large sums of money required for the concrete blocks that pass for cinemas in our country, is it correct national policy to allow such large quantities of resources in the way of cement, steel, and power for air-conditioning to be used on these "picture palaces"?

LICENSING

The Government is, therefore, examining the possibility of simplifying the whole procedure of cinema licensing in such a manner that a large number of cheaply built cinema houses can come up in small towns and in rural areas. These would give a larger circuit to Punjabi films and a greater revenue to the State.

As a positive step towards encouraging better standards in Punjabi films, the Government has sanctioned State awards. These awards will be on the lines of those given by the Central Government and will be decided by a committee headed by Dr Mulk Raj Anand. The first awards are expected to be given by the end of February, 1980.

Another feature on the cultural front is the number of cheap and badly made statues of national heroes in our cities. While our city fathers like to be seen honouring national figures, they like to do it on the cheap. Kartar Singh Sarabha's statue in Ludhiana or Dr Ambedkar's in Jullundur are but two examples of ugly and inartistic efforts at honouring our heroes.

An effort is now being made to put up worthwhile statues in bronze, and sculpted by known artists.

STATUES OF HEROES

Last week Major Bhupinder Singh's statue was unveiled in Ludhiana. Sarabha's statue is also to be replaced by a proper bronze one, and the island on which it stands re-designed artistically. Statues of national figures such as Lala Lajpat Rai, Bhagat Singh, Maharaja Ranjit Singh and others will be put up in the major towns.

Attention is also being paid to setting up some more museums and cultural centres. The Guru Teg Bahadur Museum at Anandpur will be ready by April, 1980. A big Punjabi cultural centre is planned for Delhi. This will include a library, an auditorium and other facilities.

These are just a few things that are being attempted to improve the cultural climate of Punjab. It is hoped that the Punjab Arts Council, functioning from its new home in Chandigarh, will be the fulcrum from which all these activities will radiate out to promote the arts in the State.

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