

Can Bharat Bhavan regain past glory?

Rakesh Dixit

TO THOSE who once marveled at Bharat Bhavan's architectural grandeur or cherished its international stature as multi art complex, it should be impossible not to feel a tinge of nostalgia now.

More so, when 21st foundation day celebrations of the premier art institution are on. Of course, the performances are enthralling; the audience turn out and response are encouraging. Nevertheless, something is remiss. For an institution that has hosted a host of international cultural extravaganzas from world poetry meet to Asia theatre festival, the present level of functions is a definite

climb-down.

Can Bharat Bhavan regain its past glory? And how?

Not just cognoscenti, any one with some refined taste for art and culture has something or the other, good and bad, to say about the rise and fall of Bharat Bhavan: that the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had termed Bhopal as cultural capital of India during inauguration of Bharat Bhavan in 1982; that the complex could not have had more suitable candidates to head its various art branches than J Swaminathan (Rupankar), BV Karanth (Rangmandal) and Nirmal Verma and KB Vaidh (Vagarth); that the then Chief Minister Arjun Singh's gen-



erosity with state funds and Ashok Vajpeyi's penchant to use the funds brought about a renaissance of sorts.

Despite that - or probably because of that - the Bharat Bhavan began to court controversies faster than it could handle. From literary polemics to sex scandal,

Bharat Bhavan suffered all kinds of opprobrium. Marxists led by Dr Namvar Singh called the Bharat Bhavan group a cultural mafia and Vajpayi the Mafioso. Recalling

Karanth's jail journey and its lurid coverage would be an insult to the departed thespian. No amount of remembrance could possibly redeem the loss of face Karanth suffered in those days. Incidentally, the ongoing celebrations devoted to the memory of BV Karanth can hardly be befitting homage to the departed soul. A theatre festival featuring only his plays could have been a better tribute to Karanth.

Back to history. The flip side was more exposed to the media than positive achievements. Before too long, the multi art complex began to be seen as an epitome of cultural decadence. That was unfair judgment though.

In the hindsight, it is tempting to assume that had Ashok Vajpeyi been a little more patient with what he used to famously sneer as "tyranny of mediocrity", things may not have come to such a sorry pass in Bharat Bhavan.

Ashok Vajpeyi, all said and done, was a visionary. He used to think big. He proved it unmistakably. The first five years of Bharat Bhavan are indeed a memorable chapter of contemporary history of Indian art and culture.

A plethora of reasons can be cited for decline of Bharat Bhavan thereafter. The advent of Sundar Lal Patwa government in 1990 and subsequent exit of Ashok Bajpeyi, of course,

was the most obvious one. Vajpeyi's so-called successor and RSS ideologue DP Sinha was an unmitigated disaster.

But more than that, it was resource crunch that did the multi art complex in. In there sheer naivety, the members of the Bharat Bhavan trust convinced themselves that they can run the institution without the State Government's patronage. They packaged the idea in fashionable phrase - autonomy of culture.

Incidentally, Chief Minister Digvijay Singh was only too happy to let the trust manage the affairs on its own. Poor artistes! It didn't take long for them to realise that pooling resources to run art and culture is a different kettle of fish. It was not surprising either. For, all the trustees from Habib Tanveer to Ashok Vajpeyi

Continued on page 3

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Continued from page 1

had substantially banked upon government doles and political connections to reach the height they could reach.

Desperate for funds, the trustees also toyed with the idea of creating a corpus of Rs 10 crore to run the activities in Bharat Bhavan. Corporate aids were also solicited. But somehow, both the plans fell flat. Crestfallen, the trustees again approached the Chief Minister for help.

He reminded them of the lofty "autonomy of culture" idea and politely declined to intervene.

A disillusioned Ashok Vajpeyi left Bhopal. Bharat Bhavan fell on harder days.

Now the institution stands shorn of ideas and administrators. Those at its helm can at best ensure that the building is properly maintained, paintings

housed in it do not gather dust, invited artistes are suitably lodged and entertained and the show somehow goes on.

But Bharat Bhavan needs much more than that, if it has to regain the past glory.

Undoubtedly, this is not possible without the State Government patronage. Culture Minister Ajay Singh has floated the idea of an all-compassing Art Council to nurture art and culture in the State through one agency. Does Bharat Bhavan fit into this scheme of things?

Greenpeace to stage demo

Continued from page 1

CBI on its part had submitted a fresh application for Anderson's extradition with supporting documents and the MEA was supposed to take up the issue with the US administration.

Greenpeace, which of late has been taking keen interest in the Bhopal gas