

Balwant Thakur

Born in 1960, Balwant Thakur is one of the most creative theatre directors of the country who have given a new identity to Indian theatre with their highly innovative theatre productions. Decorated with the highest Indian honor in performing arts i.e, Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for Direction in theatre, Balwant Thakur is credited for being the youngest theatre director of India who has participated over three hundred National Theatre Festivals as director and holding of over 6000 events, which is a record in the country. Known as a magic man of theatre, his outstanding visual poetics on stage like 'Ghumayee' 'Bawa Jitto' 'Sunoh Kahani' 'Chauraha' 'Mata Ki Kahani' and 'Mahabhoj' have vibrated the theatre scene of North India. Credited for bringing Dogri theatre to the National and International limelight, he has been highly instrumental in creating a new cultural renaissance in the U T of Jammu and Kashmir.

He started theatre with a big bang and his maiden entry in the State Academy theatre Festival won the State Academy Award for best production in 1983 and continued this tradition of winning State Academy Awards for best productions in 1984, 1985, and till he left participating the festival in 1986. He represented the State of Jammu & Kashmir twice in the North Zone theatre festival organized by Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi and topped twice and later won top honors at the National level in the year 1987 and 1990.

One of his historic contributions in the field of Indian Culture is the creation of a brand cultural organisation named 'NATRANG' way back in 1983. Equipped with its full-fledged Studio Theatre, Resource Centre, Library, Theatre Laboratory, Documentation Centre, Natrang figures amongst the top ranking professionally managed cultural institutions of India which runs its Repertory Theatre Company, Weekly Sunday Theatre, Children Theatre Club, Folk and Tribal Wing, Theatre-In Education wing, and Music and Dance Repertory,

Recognizing his outstanding contribution in Indian theatre, the Department of Culture, Govt. of India Awarded him the National Senior fellowship for three years to do research on the performing modes of Jammu. In 1992 he was decorated with yet another prestigious award of the country i.e, 'Sanskriti Award' for direction in theatre, which is given once in three years to a theatre person. Same year he got The Ford Foundation (USA) Grant Award for his research project 'Search for a New Theatre Language'. This gave a new flip to his creative endeavours and he won the rarest honors like

‘Abhinayak Samman’ ‘Saptrishi Samman’ ‘Naksha Samman’ and ‘Kala Nidhi Puskar’

In Children’s theatre, Balwant Thakur is one among the very few theatre directors of the country who have revolutionized the theatre scene and have evolved a new dramaturgy for children. His plays like ‘Mere Hisse Ki Dhoop Kahan Hai’ ‘Aap Hamare Hain Kaun’ ‘Hum Hain Naa’ and ‘Bhag Beta Bhag’ are being credited as the most demanded children productions which have been featured in almost all the major theatre events in India. As playwright he has Twenty Seven original plays to his credit which are considered as one of the significant contribution by him to Indian Theatre in the post India Independence period. His most regarded initiative ‘Theatre for a Social change’ under which he conducted five hundred shows in the remote villages of J&K brought a revolutionary change in the mindset of the rural folk of the Indo-Pak border villages from Nagri (Kathua) to Kupwara (Kashmir). As film writer and director he made films like ‘Iss Graan Gi Swarg Banai Lo, Kashmir Live, Rangla Jammu and Gulaab Gatha. Amongst his noteworthy contributions he introduced theatre for mobilizing peace in Kashmir and produced 60 new productions aimed at bringing back the community life of troubled Kashmir.

Back home he was honored by Dogri Sanstha, Jammu Citizen Council, Chamber of Commerce, Amar Rajput Sabha, Brahamin Prathinidhi Sabha, J&K Fine Arts Society, Zorawar Singh Memorial Committee, Laddakh Theatre Organisation and Bakshi Memorial Committee, Manch Rangmanch, Punjab Naatshalla, Chandigarh Sangeet Natak Akademi, Kerala Sangeet Natak Akademi, Abhinaya Kala Mandir, Naksha Gobardanga (West Bengal), Punjab Sangeet Natak Akademi, Harayana Kala Parshid, Language and Culture Department, Himachal Pradesh, Department of Information and Cultural Affairs, West Bengal, Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi, Ras Kala Manch Haryana, Abhinay Rangmanch, Hissar and Punjab Arts Council. He has also been honored with the title ‘Duggar Rattan’. In 2005 he won the best Director Award in the Ist Doordarshan Theatre Festival. In 2011 he was honored by the Royal Award ‘Maharaja Gulab Singh Memorial Award-2011’, Tagore Sammaan-2012, Gursharan Singh Commitment to Theatre Award (World Theatre Day Honor of Punjab Govt)-2013. He was conferred PADAMSHREE by President of India in 2013. J&K’s highest State Award for Life-time achievement-2017, Prithvi Raj Kapoor Samaan 2017, B V Karanth memorial Award for Life-time achievement-2018 and Gandhi@150 by Indian Associations of South Africa.

He worked as Secretary J&K Academy of Art Culture and Languages for over eight years. Among many accomplishments, under his creative

guidance the State of J&K won Best tableaux Award for the first time in 1997 and continued the tradition of winning Best Awards in 1999 and 2001. He also worked as Regional Director of Indian Council for Cultural Relations, Ministry of External Affairs between 2012 to 2018.

He also served on the Boards of prestigious Institutions of the country including, Department of Culture, Govt. of India, Sangeet Natak Akademi, Indian Council for Cultural Relations, North Zone Cultural Centre, Council for Promotion of Urdu Language and as an expert for National School of Drama, Department of Culture, M.P., Department of Language & Culture, H.P. and Association of Indian Universities. Court Member of Central University of Jammu and member of Audit Advisory Committee of Accountant General of India.

Widely traveled Balwant Thakur held his presentations over record 100 International cities including Bangkok (Thailand) Singapore, Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) London, Oxford, Brighton, Stratford, Birmingham, Manchester (UK) Berlin, Frankfurt, (Germany), Rome (Italy) Moscow, Yoroslov, Belgrade, St. Petersburg, (Russia) Turkey, Almaty, Bishkek, Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, Xining, Shenzen, Guiang (China) Denmark, Dubai, Sharjah, Abu Dhaabi, Johannesburg, Pretoria, Durban, Cape Town and Dhaka.

Currently heading Indira Gandhi Centre for Indian Culture in the High Commission of India, Mauritius.