

NOMINATION DOSSIER: SRI SUMAN KUMAR

Nominee for: Padma Shri (Field: Art & Culture - Theatre/Performance)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sri Suman Kumar is a distinguished theatre director, actor, cultural administrator, and educator with an active career spanning over six decades (since 1962). Known as a "Doyen" and a trendsetter in modern Hindi, Magahi, Bhojpuri, and Maithili theatre, he has bridged the gap between traditional folk idioms, particularly the preservation of Bhikhari Thakur's *Natch* format, and modern performance art. He has directed 150+ stage plays, performed in 200+ stage productions, and conducted 1000+ street plays. His distinguished career also includes a deep commitment to broadcasting, education, and cultural governance. He utilizes theatre as a platform for social transformation, specifically focusing on critical issues such as caste discrimination, communal harmony, and HIV/AIDS awareness.

Significant Contributions & Historical Impact

- **Pioneering Gender Equality in Theatre:** During the conservative era of 1966-1971, Kumar broke strict patriarchal taboos that barred women from the stage. By casting women from respected households in the landmark play *Amrapali* at the Bhartiya Nritya Kala Mandir, he permanently opened mainstream theatre to female artists in Bihar. His performance as Ajatshatru earned him the lifelong title of "Samrat."
- **Social Reform & Public Activism:** Kumar actively weaponized art against systemic evils. His play *Zaruraat Issi Ki Thee* tackled child trafficking and was selected for the National School of Drama's (NSD) *Jashne Bachpan*. His realistic production *Dayeen* confronted the horrific practice of rural witch-hunting. During the JP Movement (1970s), he co-founded the *Kalakar Sangharsh Samiti* under literary stalwarts Baba Nagarjun and Phanishwar Nath Renu, facing state censorship for his anti-corruption play *Andher Nagari Chaupat Raja*.
- **Heroism During the 1974 Patna Floods:** Kumar's dedication extended beyond art to frontline public service. When the catastrophic 1974 floods submerged the AIR Patna building, he braved treacherous waters by boat and swimming to reach the isolated Fatuha transmission center. Without food for 48 hours, he single-handedly managed the emergency broadcast, delivering life-saving information to stranded citizens.
- **Revival of Regional Roots & Folk Idioms:** He is a leading proponent of the *Naach* format, dedicated to preserving the legacy of Bhikhari Thakur-often called the "Shakespeare of Bhojpuri." Through his innovative direction, he has revitalized this vital theatrical idiom, integrating traditional formats like *Bidesiya* and *Londa Nach* into modern frameworks, with productions reaching over 100,000 audience members across Bihar, Jharkhand, and Uttar Pradesh.

PRESTIGIOUS AWARDS & HONORS

- **Sangeet Natak Akademi Amrit Award (2023):** Conferred by Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi, Govt. of India.

- **Life Time Achievement Award (2025):** Conferred by the Dept. of Art & Culture, Govt. of Bihar.
- **Bhikhari Thakur Saamaan (Senior):** Conferred by the Govt. of Bihar for lifetime contribution to theatre.
- **Natya Bhushan (2001):** Conferred in Cuttack, Odisha, as an Eminent Theatre Luminary & Cultural Personality (Olympiad 2001).
- **Pataliputra Saamaan:** Conferred by *Prangan*, Patna, for lifetime artistic contribution.
- **BBC Best Spot Presenter Award:** Organized by AIR Patna.
- **Institutional Recognitions:** Honored by Lions Club (Patna), Rotary Mid Town (Patna), and Pandarak Rang Samman (Bihar).
- **Other Honors:** Recognized multiple times by the Indian Theatre Recipient for contributions to Art & Culture.
- **Natraj Kala Samman (2019):** Conferred by Nataraj Kala Mandir, Patna, for exceptional contributions to drama.

ARTISTIC CONTRIBUTIONS: DIRECTION & PRODUCTION

- **Stage Direction:** Directed 150+ plays in Hindi, Magahi, Bhojpuri, and Maithili.
- **Notable Productions:** *Dayeen, Andha Yug, Tamra Patra, Ret Ki Diwar, Modern Anarkali, Aur Jhopri Sulag Gail, Phansri, Babuji Ka Passbook, Sikka, Naya Sabera, Bibeon Ki Hartal, Swatantrata Ki Pukar, Jo Kitabo Me Nahi, Pujari Kaka, Patthar Kaat, Sanha, Lakshman Rekha, Bedhab Thanedar, Sikandar Poras, Peer Ali, Gopa, Karagar, Nar Danka, Amrapali, Ek Aur Suryastya, Baze Dhindhora, Amali, Peer Ali, Chanakya, Khamosh Adalat Zari Hai, Wadh Sthal se Chhalang, Parinda Udd Gaya, Sur Sundari, Aaks, Safar, Tukro Tukro Me Aurat, Chori, Ghoosh, Naya Bangla, Gandhi Ke Charan Champaran Mei, Madhvi, Kankal, Makan, Kalankani, Shivaji, Arawali Ka Sher (Maharana Pratap), Hakimaeen Ka Nuskha, Kabutari, Diyan, Vo Ab Vi Pukarta Hai, Patliputra Ka Rajkumar, Bunkar Ki Beti, Urwashi, Mai Yahi Hoon, Durga Bhabhi, Shri Krishna, Gaath, Baap Re Baap, Ravan, Sagun, Abaghi Ka Swarg, Nayaka Pokhra, Binodini.*
- **Children's Theatre:** Directed acclaimed productions including *Halla Gulla, Beti Aaye Hai, Naya Sabera, Vardan Ka Pheer, Meena, SatyaWadi Chauraha.*
- **National Recognition:** The play *Zaruraat Issi Ki Thee* (on child trafficking) was invited to perform at the National School of Drama's prestigious *Jashne Bachpaan* festival.

PERFORMANCE: ACTING (STAGE & STREET)

- **Stage Acting:** Acted in 200+ major stage plays. Notable performances include: *Marjeeva, Khamosh Adalat Jari Hai, Asad Ka Ek Din, Thahara Hua Pani, Ballabhpur Ki Roop Katha, Julooos, Lahron Ke Rajhans, Godan, Ek Tha Gadha, Ambapali, Aur Tota Bola, Raja Oedipus, Tamra Patra, Delhi Uncha Suntee Hai, Chor Ke Ghar More, Janshatru, Singhasan Khali Hai, Kisi Ek Phool Ka Naam Lo, Pagla Ghora, Do Kauri Ka Khel, Tuglak, Jaat Na Puchon Sadhu Ki, Amali.*
- **Street Theatre:** Performed in 1000+ street plays in Hindi, Magahi, Bhojpuri, and Maithili across various forms.

MEDIA, FILM & BROADCASTING

- **Broadcasting (AIR Patna):** Retired in 2007 as Senior-most Announcer & Presenter. Experience includes:
 - Presented *Yuvvani Patra-Uttar*, *Khel Parikrama*, *Geeto Bhari Kahani*.
 - Live coverage for Guru Govind Singh Jayanti, Chhath, and various sports programs.
 - Over 15 years of production experience in AIR drama series (including *Hawa Mahal*).
- **Commentary:** Served as a distinguished non-sports commentator for major cultural events, including *Bihar Gauravshali Parv Chhath* and the Guru Gobind Singh birth anniversary commemorations at the Gurudwara.
- **Television:** 'A' grade auditioned drama voice & former news reader, Doordarshan Kendra, Patna.
- **Filmography:**
 - *National: Gandhi* (dir. Richard Attenborough), *Discovery of India* (dir. Shyam Benegal), *Damul* (dir. Prakash Jha), *Bhim Bhawani* (dir. Basu Chatterjee), *Mirza Ghalib* (dir. Gulzar), *Ek Kahani* (dir. Manju Singh & Muzadid Rahim), *Adhikar* (dir. Manju Singh & Muzadid Rahim), *Rahim Khan-E-Khana* (dir. Muzadid Rahim), *Vidroha* (dir. Prakash Jha).
 - *Regional: Mehnatur Maanzil* (Bihar's first documentary drama - dir. Braj Bhushan), *Hamar Devdas*, *Lagal Nathuniya Ke Dakkha*, *Saiyan Driver Bebi Khalasi*, *Lakhera*.
- **Direction Support:** Chief Assistant Director for *Lohe Ke Pankh*.

MENTORSHIP, INSTITUTIONAL & ACADEMIC IMPACT

- **Institutional Leadership:** Founder member of *Kala Sangam*, Patna; Founder Secretary of *Kala Jagran*, Patna; Affiliated with Bihar Art Theatre (UNESCO Bihar Center).
- **Teaching/Faculty:** Faculty for Acting/Voice & Speech (1st & 2nd year regular course) at the Bihar Institute of Dramatics (unit of Bihar Art Theater, Patna).
- **Workshops & Training:** Visiting Faculty & Camp Director for Children's Theatre Workshops since 1992 (Bhagalpur). Directed and coordinated 'Swachh Bharat' awareness programs, alongside street and theatre workshops for Sangeet Natak Akademi, UNICEF, and the Bihar AIDS Control Society.
- **Cultural Governance:**
 - Ex-Executive Member, Bihar Sangeet Natak Academy.
 - Jury Member, Dept. of Culture, Govt. of Bihar (Award Committee).
 - Expert Committee member for Folk Festival/Jhanki (Independence/Republic Day, Patna).
- **Judging Experience:** Judge for All India Civil Service Theatre Festival (2001), Inter-University Festivals (IIT Patna, PMCH, Magadh University), Inter-School One Act Play Festivals (Ravi Bharti), Inter-State Youth Festivals (Dept. of Culture, 2005), English Play Festivals (St. Xaviers), and Inter-College Mime/Cultural activities (PMCH).
- **Digital Outreach:** Actively raising awareness of Indian theatre internationally through digital platforms and a dedicated YouTube channel.

COORDINATION, LEADERSHIP & TECHNICAL DIRECTION

- **Event Leadership:** Organizer & Chief Coordinator of the *National Theatre Historical Festival* (since 2008); Organizing Secretary of Comedy Drama Festival, *Aadi Shakti Natya Mahosav*, and Historical Drama Festival.
- **State & National Coordination:**
 - *Apna Utsav* (Delhi, 1981): Program presenter for Bihar Culture Group (NCZCC).
 - *Vaisali & Rajgir Mahotsav*: Announcer/Presenter.
 - *Bihar Day (Pragati Maidan, Delhi)*: Technical Director (Light & Sound/Dance) since 1998.
 - *Youth/Cultural Festivals*: Camp Director (1997), Coordinator/Choreographer of Yuva Lok Utsav, Technical Director of Indo-Russian Dance Festival, Choreographer for Bihar Gaurav Gaan, Junior All India Badminton Tournament, and Junior Football Tournament.
 - Directed state cultural tableaux at Gandhi Maidan, Patna, successfully highlighting the agrarian and cultural achievements of Sudha.
 - *Workshops*: Workshop Coordinator (EZCC/Bihar Govt, 1998, Purnia), Visiting Director (Tribal Theatre Workshop, Ranchi).

LITERATURE & EXPERT OPINION

- Extensive contributions to the discipline of theatre through articles and expert opinion interviews in electronic and print media.

NOMINEE PROFILE

- **Name:** Sri Suman Kumar
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