THE 17th Indian Science Fiction Conference was organised by the Indian Association for Science Fiction Studies, Bangalore, in collaboration with the Science Fiction Writers’ Association, Ayodhya, and MCIIE, IIT, Benaras, at Indian Institute of Technology, Benaras Hindu University, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, on 15th and 16th of December 2018.

The theme of the conference was “Technology and Science Fiction”. The conference included presentation of 25 papers; release of two Science Fiction books; sessions on science fiction writing and broadcasting; interactive session of Indian SF writers with Korean SF writers; celebration of the Bicentennial year of the publication of the first SF work *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley; a show on mentalism and science fiction, and beaming of a Tamil Science Fiction short movie.

Dr. Manoj Kumar Patairiya, Director, CSIR-National Institute of Science Communication and Information Resources, New Delhi in his inaugural address highlighted how the present conference is coinciding with the 200th year of first science fiction novel *Frankenstein* (1818) and the 500th death anniversary of Saint poet Kabir who worked against myths. Speaking about the history of Indian SF, he cited the contribution of physicist Dr J.C. Bose and *Vishwa Parichay* by Rabindra Nath Tagore.

In his Keynote address, the Secretary-General of the Indian Association for Science Fiction Studies Dr Srinarahari said the Science Fiction of today is the science
of tomorrow. He concluded that there is a convergence of Indian philosophy, culture, tradition, way of life and the adoption of technology in the development of what he christened as “Techno-Fiction”.

Suhyeon Lee and Boyoung Kim, writers from Korea were introduced to the audience. The former is a prolific writer of Korean SF and has bagged many honours at a young age. She has written about minority groups, terra-farming in outer space and under water cities. The latter has a base in game development, graphic designing and scenario writing.

SF books *Trends in Science Fiction in Tamil* by Nellai S. Muthu (former scientist at Indian Space Research Organization) and Dr Archana Mirajkar’s *All the Way Home* were released. A 21-year-old Indian science fiction writer Rishab Dubey also introduced his *Krikos* during the conference.

Dr Pramod Jain Director of Indian Institute of Technology, Benaras Hindu University in his presidential address pointed out that the conference theme “Technology and SF” was the first of its kind in the history of the institute and hoped the two communities would exchange ideas in their future positive ventures.

Dr Arvind Mishra, convener of the event, welcomed the dignitaries and participants. The vote of thanks was given by Dr P.K. Mishra, Chairperson of the Malviya Center of Innovation Incubation and Entrepreneurship, IIT, Varanasi.

Immediately after the inaugural function, Dr Srinarahari presented an “Introduction to Science Fiction with Special Reference to Indian Ambience”. He briefed about the origin, history, concept, definitions, themes, movements, representative world class writers, and kinds of SF in general. However, the focus was on Indian Science Fiction beginning with Indian states which have promoted SF studies. Universities, Colleges and organizations which have taken up research works at the higher education level by providing facilities to the scholars for pursuing their Master and doctoral degrees in SF; SF writers in English, Hindi and vernacular languages; Indian SF visual media and others were also highlighted in his lecture.

A Tamil language Science Fiction short movie of thirty minutes duration was also beamed. It is based on the SF novel *Munusami 1.2.1* by Sujatha, a stalwart of Indian Science Fiction writing.

The post-lunch session focused on paper presentations. Mr Abhishek Kumar Mishra presented a paper on “Hindi Cinema aur Vignyan Kathaye”, followed by “Deconstructing Myths: Narrating the Story of Sita” by Indrani Das Gupta. The paper was based on several modern Indian SF works which have overcome gender bias in characterizing Sita. Dr Shiva Kumar Sonalkar’s “Jayant Narlikar’s Science Literature: A Study” served as a base for Meenal Kale’s paper on “Time and Space in Return of Vaman”. Both dealt with astrophysicist and renowned SF writer Jayant Narlikar’s works. “The Concept of Avatar in Science Fiction” by Dr Reema Sarwal and Dr Arvind Mishra generated vibrant discussion among the group.

Ashish Kumar Yadav’s “Hindi Vignyan Katha Sahithya” further supplemented the ideas presented by Zeashan Zaidi’s paper which reflected on the application of futuristic technology by the impact of Science Fiction in Hindi SF in general and Zeashan’s stories and novels in particular.
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Young SF writer Rishab Dubey took the audience a step ahead introducing the latest ideas in the field which could bring about a drastic change in the technology of the near future. Young scholars carrying out doctoral research in the field of SF exhibited their ability to open up new horizons in terms of innovative ideas.

Exemplary attempts at making novel interpretations were noticed in the papers presented by Indrajit Patra on “Impact of Science and Technology on Future Science Fiction”; Rishab Dubey: “A Route to a Better Tomorrow: The Power of Science Fiction”; Kailash Atkare: “Post-Colonial Literature: A Critical Perspective”; Debraj Moulik: “Philip K. Dick’s The Man in the High Castle: A post Colonial Study”; Dr Alpana Gupta’s “Science Fiction in the Post Truth Era” and Dr Kalpana Kulashreshtha’s views on contemporary SF trends.

The sessions with Chairpersons Dr Archana Mirajkar, Dr Y.H. Deshpande, Mr Harish Yadav, Dr Harish Goyal, Dr Rajiv Ranjan Upadhyaya, Nellai S. Muthu, Dr P.K. Mishra, Dr Arvind Mishra and anchor persons Dr Bhise Ram, Dr Balaji A. Navle and Kalpa Kulashreshtha created an ever lasting impression upon the general public.

From All India Radio, Ms Meenu Khare and Ms Rajasheer Banerjee talked about making a science fiction script for a radio show. The topic was “Science Fiction on Radio: How to see through ear?” They pointed out that in spite of the advent of TV, radio continues to be accessible throughout the country and FM radio is often preferred to Television. They also told SF writers that the script they write should make the listeners visualize the situation, titles should be catchy, and should include good dialogues, pauses between dialogues, background music, and different expressions, the Navaras – the nine types of emotions namely, Shringara (love), Hasya (laughter), Karuna (kind-heartedness or compassion), Raudra (anger), Veera (courage), Bhayanaka (terror), Bheebhatsya (disgust), Adbhuta (surprise), and Shantha (peace or tranquility).

Harish Yadav, a Guinness World Record holder, presented a show on mentalism – reading the minds of the audience. He also connected the matter to SF telepathy.

The year 2018 marked the completion of 200 years of the publication of Frankenstein or the Prometheus unbound by Mary Shelley, to which an entire session was devoted. Dr Balaji A. Navle in his paper “The Origin of the Species” traced the storyline and also the criticism, reviews and the continuous flow of publication of works on the theme for the past 200 years. As Navle put it, “…it is time tested and deals with the problems of artificial creation as well as revolt against the machine culture.”

Reacting to the paper, Dr Srinarahari dealt with the term “Frankenstein complex” and tracked the works from Rossum’s Universal Robots till the 2018 December release of the Indian movie 2.0.

To mark the occasion, the organisers had also conducted a writing competition for the students. The winner of the prize, Smriti Raghuvanshi, was given a cash prize with a certificate.

There was an interactive session between Indian and Korean science Fiction writers. While the writers from India were Dr Arvind Mishra, Zeashan Zaidi, Nellai S. Muthu, Dr Y.H. Deshponde, Dr Archana Mirajkar, Dr Harish Goyal and Rishab Dubey, the Korean counterparts were Ms Suhyeon Lee and Ms Kim Bo Young. The former is a Korean writer and translator, her area of specialization is fantasy particularly extrapolation. Her protagonists are all perfect characters. She has introduced more than 100 SF/Fantasy works to Korean readers. The latter excels in the field of mythology and science. Evolutionary Myths published by Clarks World magazine deals with the reinterpretation of Korean mythology and evolution.

In his introductory remarks, Dr Srinarahari said, “The initiative taken by China in holding the First SF conference at Beijing has made us to work together. The Asian countries have both myth and technologically advanced modernity. We have ancient cultures which might be due to the impact of the ancient civilisations on the banks of prominent rivers of the respective countries. We want to preserve our past and to adapt to contemporary progress and to foretell accurately the future through the ‘Gedenken experiment’, that is, Science Fiction.”

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