

## **International Science Film Festival of India 2021**

**NIMISH KAPOOR AND CHAVI BHATNAGAR**

THE International Science Film Festival of India (ISFFI) was virtually organised during 22-25 December 2020 by Vigyan Prasar as part of the India International Science Festival (IISF).

This year the ISFFI received 634 science film entries from 60 countries, of which 210 nominated science films from 31 countries were screened during the festival. The Festival was inaugurated on 22 December 2020 by Dr Harsh Vardhan, Union Minister for Health & Family Welfare, Science and Technology, and Earth Sciences. Speaking on the occasion, he said, "India is home to talented filmmakers and science enthusiasts. Through ISFFI, we want to connect all such people with popularizing science and spreading scientific consciousness."

Film star, Mr Amitabh Bachchan, appreciated the efforts being made by the Union Ministry of Science and Technology to help take science to the common masses through various means including films, television programmes and other modes of communication. In a video address, Mr Amitabh Bachchan noted that science and technology had an important role to play in the socio-economic development of the country and emphasised that there was a need to impart knowledge and disseminate information on science and technology to the general public. The organisation of the science film festival was commendable, he added.

President of the Film and Television Institute of India and internationally acclaimed filmmaker Mr Shekhar Kapur, who was the chief guest of the award ceremony, said there was a need for scientists and filmmakers to work together as scientific pursuit requires a sense of curiosity and adventure and good filmmakers could help develop this quality among the younger generation by producing inspiring films on science and scientists.

“Every year the film festival is growing. There is a huge potential and we can share our experiences to nurture young filmmakers,” said Mike Pandey, well-known filmmaker and ISFFI jury chairman, in his inaugural remarks.

Mr Jayant Sahasrabuddhe, National Organising Secretary of Vigyan Bharati, said, “A very big vision was envisaged to take science to the common people, which is being realised today through science films. The knowledge of science can be passed on to people so as to create a scientific outlook in them.”

Dr Uy Hoang, President, Public Health Film Society, United Kingdom addressed the ISFFI and said that science communication was poised to face the challenge of bringing people together and filmmakers have started addressing this issue and hopefully it was going to be achieved.

Renowned personalities and jury members of ISFFI 2020, former ADG of Doordarshan Ms Usha Bhasin and former DG of Films Division Dr Mukesh Sharma graced the event.

On the occasion, Dr Nakul Parashar, Director, Vigyan Prasar said, "This time the event has successfully emerged as a global platform for science filmmakers, 634 entries from 60 countries is a strong proof of this. Apart from India, filmmakers and experts from the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Israel, Germany and the Netherlands are addressing master classes on important aspects of film production. Apart from this, science films from across the globe have been screened online during the festival. Germany's world-renowned institutions like Deutsche Welle and Discovery Channel are also participating in the event.”

Mr Nimish Kapoor, Principal Coordinator of ISFFI and Senior Scientist, Vigyan Prasar informed, "The jury has selected 209 films from 32 countries for screening. These include science documentaries, short films and animation videos. Apart from India, films from Switzerland, Israel, Chile, France, Belgium, Austria, Afghanistan, Iran, China, Spain, Turkey, Netherlands, Germany, United Kingdom, and Taiwan have made it to the festival this year.”

### **Panel Discussions**

A panel discussion on “Indian-International Efforts to promote Public Understanding of Science through Films–Challenges and

Opportunities” was moderated by Dr C.M. Nautiyal, Programme Consultant (Science Communication), Indian National Science Academy, New Delhi. During the discussion, Mr Kartik Sharma, Filmmaker, Public Arts Health & US and Public Health Films Society from London, UK, shared his experience on making a science feature film on mental health.

“Science films can create awareness and make the students think with a larger perspective,” said Ms Rama Marinov-Cohen, a Filmmaker, Writer and Expert of E-Learning from Israel.

Dr Uy Hoang, President of the Public Health Film Society from London, stressed on public health and said in the present pandemic situation science films makers played an important role in bringing people closer to science and public health.

Dr Nakul Parashar, Director, Vigyan Prasar presented a glimpse of the activities of Vigyan Prasar. He explained about Vigyan Prasar's OTT channel “India Science”.

### **Master Classes**

Three master classes were organised on the second day of ISFFI 2020. These were headed by eminent science filmmakers and experts. Mr A.G.A. Van de Laar, a filmmaker from The Netherlands, took the first master class on “New trends in science film-making”. During the class, he talked about freely available editing software and apps such as Adobe Premiere Rush, Filmora Go, Funimate and In Shot, that could be useful for new filmmakers.

The second master class on “Science Filmmaking is Your Passion-Provoke the Change” was by Ms Brigitte Uttar Kornetzky, a German-Swiss filmmaker. She said that a science film must present the subject factually. She said that through her films, she tries to connect the common people with the scientific context.

Ms Aarti Srivastava, a Mumbai-based documentary producer, addressed the third and final master class of the session on “Science filmmaking and storytelling” where she talked about environment and wildlife film production, storytelling and its various forms. She said, “The use of research and data to produce authentic scripts is an important aspect that science filmmakers should emphasize. Research papers provide solid facts, which can eventually form the basis of good films.”

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, two master classes were organised. The first master class “Dimensions of narrative in science documentaries and short films” was taken by Ms Akanksha Damini Joshi, a senior filmmaker and cinematographer. She emphasized on the need to choose different subjects to cover various aspects of learning and making it a multi-dimensional product/film.

Dr C.M. Nautiyal, Program Consultant at Indian National Science Academy, addressed the second master class on the topic “Dealing with difficult themes in science videos”. He discussed about the difficulties faced by a filmmaker while making a science video or science film. He said, “Picturization of conceptual things is not easy. Describing them in words is difficult and very often the details about the topic are not available for the common person.”

### **Valedictory**

The valedictory session was attended by the ‘Star of the Millennium’ Shri Amitabh Bachchan, internationally acclaimed filmmaker Shri Shekhar Kapur and jury chairman of ISFFI 2020 Shri Mike Pandey.

Dr Nakul Parashar, Director of Vigyan Prasar, announced that a special standing committee of filmmakers and other stakeholders would soon be set up for regular deliberations and recommendations on how to tap the potential of films to popularize science.

On the last day of the IISFF 2020, an interactive session was organized on the topic “Science Films: The way forward”. This session was chaired by Shri Mike Pandey. Other jury members were Dr Mukesh Sharma, Ms Usha Bhasin, Prof. Danish Iqbal, Shri Himanshu Malhotra, Dr Sunil Mehru, Ms Monika Gulati, Ms Akanksha Damini Joshi and Dr Shobhna Choudhary.

A total of 20 films bagged awards. Six films bagged the awards for the international categories and 14 for the national categories.

In the international categories, the award winners were: *The Insect Rescuer* (English), produced by ZDF and directed by Andreas Ewels of Germany (Best of Festival Award on the theme “Science for self-reliant India and/or Science for global

welfare”) and *Night Nurse* (Persian), produced by Hasan Rahmani and directed by Ashkan Hatami of Iran (Best of Festival Award on the theme “Science and awareness on COVID-19 and other health emergencies”).

The other winners in foreign categories were: *A natural code* (English), produced and directed by Cristina Ceuca of U.K.; *iRony* (English), produced by Radheya Jegatheva and Jay Jay Jegathesan and directed by Radheya Jegatheva of Australia; *Keep Your Smile* (Silent), produced and directed by Hassan Mokhtari of Iran (Jury Awards) and *Chemical Industries vs COVID-19* (Italian), produced and directed by Vittorio Caratozzolo & Class 3 A (Jury Special Mention).

The awards for Indian films were presented under two classifications: Independent filmmakers and college/school students.

The winners among Independent filmmakers were: *The Trials and Triumphs of G.N. Ramachandran* (English), produced by Vivek Kannadi and directed by Rahul Iyer (Best of Festival Award in the theme “Science for self-reliant India and/or Science for global welfare”); *Raja, Rani aur Virus* (Hindi), produced by Beacon Television and directed by Seema Muralidhara (Best of Festival Award in the theme “Science and awareness on COVID-19 and other health emergencies”).

Among other winners were *Return of The Holy Grain* (Malayalam), produced and directed by G.S. Unnikrishnan Nair; *Worth Their Salt* (English), produced by Vigyan Prasar and directed by Seema Muralidhara and H.B. Muralidhara; *Humans vs Corona* (English), produced and directed by Anshul Sinha; and *My Mom* (Silent), produced by Dark Room Studio and directed by Rakesh Moirangthem, that bagged the Jury Awards.

Besides, *If Everybody be like this...!* (Tamil), produced and directed by Rajkumar; *Mangroves: Nature’s Hardy Foot Soldiers* (English), produced by Educational Multimedia Research Centre, Calicut and directed by Sajeed Naduthody; and *The Cheruvayal Raman Effect* (Malayalam), produced and directed by G.S. Unnikrishnan Nair got the Jury Special Mention.

The winners among college/school students were: *Croaking Frogs* (English), produced and directed by Aditya and *Catching The Sun* (Hindi), produced by Nilambar Pathak and Karunesh Singh and directed by Rahul Kumar (Best of Festival Award on the theme “Science for self-reliant India and/or Science for global welfare”); *Can Break Cancer* (Hindi), produced and directed by Neelu Sharma (Best of Festival Award on the theme “Science and awareness on COVID-19 and other health emergencies”); *Mask* (Hindi), produced and directed by Santu Kumar and *Corona At Doorstep* (English), produced by Raghul M.R. and directed by Moumita Mazumdar (Jury Awards).

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