



# Science Reporter

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## THE CHALLENGE OF HIGH QUALITY SCIENCE FILMS

The recently concluded 98th session of the Indian Science Congress held at the SRM University in Chennai acquired the distinction of hosting the country's first ever National Science Film Festival or the Rashtriya Vigyan Chalchitra Mela. In an effort to boost and encourage Indian science filmmakers, the first National Science Film Festival was organized by Vigyan Prasar, New Delhi. Of course, perhaps because due to lack of advance publicity of the event, participation in the film festival was sparse, to say the least. But it was definitely a good beginning and a new initiative that should be taken up in all seriousness in the future too.

High quality science programmes and science films in the country are few and far between. After all, *Discovery Science* or *National Geographic*, or perhaps, *Animal Planet* are the only channels that pop up in your mind when science programmes or science films are mentioned. Are there no good science programmes and films being made in the country then? Are Indian television channels right in their belief that there is no market for science films or science programmes in the country?

Although the numbers may not be too high, yet there have been flashes of brilliance as far as science programmes are concerned. Programmes like *Turning Point* have enjoyed high and committed viewership and have caught the imagination of the TV audiences from time to time. Of course, such programmes can be counted on fingertips. In the maddening race for TRPs, very few science programmes seem to be "commercially viable" in that they fail to attract adequate sponsorships that would enable them to stay afloat. The challenge for science programmes, therefore, is indeed great.

Perhaps some amount of government patronage is still required for science programmes and films to flourish. During his introductory remarks at the inauguration of the science film festival in Chennai, Er. Anuj Sinha, Director of Vigyan Prasar stressed as much when he said that it was necessary for government agencies to look at ways of increasing the number of science films and programmes being made in the country. Noted Film Director Dr Adoor Gopalakrishnan, who gave away the awards at the valedictory function of the National Science Film Festival, also said that science films have great potential and science film makers needed to be encouraged.

Of course, science film makers too need to rise up to the challenge. Content is the key as far as science programmes are concerned. Authentic and balanced scientific content should be at the core of any such programme. Science programmes need to be made in simple spoken language without much jargon. The catch line should be: Do I understand it myself? Analogies could be used as good visual aids for deconstructing complex concepts but caution needs to be exercised. Often science communicators tend to go overboard with analogies ending up conveying misrepresentations. It is also the duty of science film makers to promote rationality and fight superstitions, something that most existing TV channels have consistently shied away from.

In this context, a dedicated science channel would also not be such a bad idea not only to provide a platform for Indian science film makers to showcase their talent but also to combat superstitious beliefs and irrational thoughts that most TV channels willingly or unwillingly end up promoting through their soaps and discussion forums.

The organization of the National Science Film Festival during the 98th Indian Science Congress at Chennai was indeed a unique opportunity. There is a need to build on this opportunity to ignite young minds and launch a movement towards making inspiring, informative and impactful science films and programmes in the country.



Er Anuj Sinha addressing the audience



Dr Adoor Gopalakrishnan giving away the awards

Hasan Jawaid Khan

Printed and published by Deeksha Bist on behalf of the National Institute of Science Communication And Information Resources (NISCAIR), CSIR, Dr K S Krishnan Marg, New Delhi-110 012 and printed at Brijbasi Art Press Ltd., A-81, Sector-5, Noida-201 203.

*Science Reporter* is published monthly by the National Institute of Science Communication And Information Resources (NISCAIR), CSIR, Dr K S Krishnan Marg, New Delhi-110 012. NISCAIR assumes no responsibility for statements and opinions advanced by the authors or for any claims made in the advertisements published in *Science Reporter*.

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**Subscription:** Inland: 1 yr: Rs 200/-; 2 yrs: Rs 380/-; 3 yrs: Rs 540/- Foreign: 1 yr (Air Mail): US \$ 65

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