

SHIFTING TRENDS IN WILDLIFE FILM MAKING

21 November 2005

2:30 pm – 5:30 pm, Amaltas Hall, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi



Panelist

- *Mr. Naresh Bedi*, nationally and internationally acclaimed filmmaker on wildlife and natural history; recipient of Green Oscar for Best Wildlife Cameraman in “Wildscreen 1984”
- *Mr. Mike Pandey*, internationally renowned wildlife filmmaker and conservationist and recipient of Wild Screen Panda Award also known as the ‘Green Oscar’ thrice.
- *Mr. Shekar Dattatri*, recipient of Rolex Award for Enterprise for his work in conservation filmmaking
- *Mr. Haroldo Castro*, Vice President, Global Awareness at Conservation International
- *Mr. Richard Brock*, Executive Producer, Living Planet Productions, U.K. (chairperson of the workshop)
- *Mr. Doug Allan*, award winning under-water cinematographer, U.K.
- *Ms. Harriet Nimmo*, Chief Executive, Wildscreen, U.K.

Background And Purpose

The workshop entitled ‘*Shifting Trends in Wildlife Filmmaking*’ was organized as a platform bringing together renowned wildlife and environment filmmakers from India and UK. It was designed keeping in mind two specific purposes. These were, firstly, to enable eminent speakers to share their experiences and discuss how the profession or art of wildlife filmmaking has changed over the years and secondly, it sought to juxtapose wildlife filmmaking scene in India as against that of UK for mutually enriching exercise.

Presentations By Panelists

Naresh Bedi pointed out that the wildlife documentary scene is very different from what is happening internationally as there is no support in terms of finances or the final output on television. He holds that there is no dearth of talent in India, but the problems facing Indian filmmakers have remained the same as even international players try to pay the minimum possible.



Dr. N. Bhaskara Rao, Chairman, Centre for Media Studies welcoming and introducing the speakers



Richard Brock maintains that filmmaking is the most effective media in communicating with masses as it enables reaching out to people in terms of the ground realities. Films are not just television but a lot more than that. It has a better option of reaching the masses than any other media

Doug Allan spoke on the history of television. He mentioned that despite of cultural differences in audiences; wildlife filming has importance in UK and American television. The foremost criteria of making wildlife film is to make money and should be commercially successful. He added that film or programme must attract audience, good packaging, tricky and commercial viable. The Indian culture for making wildlife film is very different from UK and America. The main challenge for them is to get finance especially for issues.

Harriet Nimmo showcased Wildscreen award winning films to reflect on the shifting trend in wildlife filmmaking. She enumerated that she shared legacy with wildlife through making wildlife films. With the help of satellite and new terrestrial channels, wildlife filmmaking is receiving more support today than it used to before. Channels like Sky are now showing environmental films. BBC is doing more and more co-production on the wildlife environment, which helps in making of the films. She holds that for the increase of the production of the films, these films need to be reproduced into all other languages of the world for the international audiences. She reported that there are a lot of event programming shows on wildlife in Britain's back gardens. She feels that although a lot of these shows may seem sensationalizing but if they can help create interest then they are working.

Mike Pandey referred to broadcasters like the BBC that are financially and technically sound. This is something lacking in India. India is not lacking in talents but the right effort has to be put for making good films on wildlife. 'Vatavaran' is good and excellent media of communicating wildlife films. He mentioned that there is a long way to go before documentary films on environment and wildlife found a place on every day television shows. He described content as a key element

Haroldo Castro shared his experiences of how he has been using video for awareness campaigns, as it is much bigger and effective than TV. Booklists, posters stickers are the important part of his campaigns. He showed clips on “Madagascar campaign”.

Shekar Dattatri seconded Naresh Bedi’s concern on the difficulties faced by Indian wildlife filmmakers. He remarked that there is no dearth of talent in the country but added that it is important to think why in a billion people we have only a thousand filmmakers. The problem of funding persists with the option of corporate sponsorship being out of question, as it becomes an ethical issue of not being involved with anyone who might be involved in mining or anything that destroys the environment.



Sentiments were echoed among the India filmmakers on the lack of funding and broadcasters as being the biggest challenge facing environment filmmakers in India. Richard Brock expressed that if a filmmaker has a good story and a way to tell it, then it can be done even in a low budget set-up. Mike Pandey described content as the key element, provided the storyline and approach was good, even a film made on a small budget could touch the mind and heart of the audience. Equipments and support from the government, geographic discovery and the ability to trigger young minds are some of the other important elements that need to be taken into consideration



From the point of view of a starter the question was raised on how a fresher can commence on wildlife filmmaking.

Swati Thyagarajan, a wildlife filmmaker from NDTV, remarked that she is getting all the possible support from the channel. She uses mostly ordinary cameras for the shooting. Naresh Bedi remarked on the use of modern techniques and equipment and their intricate uses that enables the handling and telling of a more effective story. He cited his efforts on a particular film, which had not been able to harness much response, but his son and nephew through the use of these better techniques have retold the same story. This he remarked as one of the changing trends.

Key Issues of Concern

Constraints due to lack of funding and support from the government and the nascent market in India is a major challenge. This further translates into the lack of better equipments required to capture and tell wildlife stories.