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JEEVIKA: Documentary film festival on livelihood

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Report by Santanu Ganguly, New Delhi: Centre for Civil Society (CCS) celebrated the 9th Annual Jeevika: Asia Livelihood Documentary Festival during 31 August to 2 September 2012 at the India Habitat Centre. The festival captured livelihood challenges faced by the rural and urban poor, bringing light to policies and regulations that prevent the economically weaker from earning an honest living and attaining the livelihood that brings them happiness.

18 documentary films were shortlisted and screened this year. 5 films were selected of student filmmakers and 13 by professional filmmakers. We were pleased to host Subhash Ghai as our chief guest.

Anjan Roy, Economic Advisor, Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry (ASSOCHAM) gave the keynote speech on the final day of the festivities, followed by a special message by one of the Centre's oldest cause champions, Amir Ullah Khan, Economist & Deputy Director of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Dance troupes Nritya from Sri Venkateshwara College and Oorja from Hansraj College joined Centre for Civil Society in celebrating livelihood freedom for the poor and kept energy levels high for the finale.

The Festival was inaugurated with a screening of 'Wagah' by Supriyo Sen, a journalist turned independent filmmaker and alumni of Berlinale Talent Campus, and the insider trailer of 'Bom: One Day Ahead of Democracy' by Amalan Datta.

Subhash Ghai graced the event and addressed the audience on the importance of reforming the education system in India to bring livelihood issues to the forefront of policy reform. Mr. Ghai also attended a private dinner at India Habitat Centre with the shortlisted documentary filmmakers and jury members of the festival to further show his appreciation.

Mr. Ghai publicly extended his support to Jeevika and the winning filmmakers by inviting their films to showcase at his institute, Whistling Woods International in Mumbai. The organisation of screenings will be facilitated by Centre for Civil Society.

Law, Liberty & Livelihood Panel Discussion with Amit Chandra, National Coordinator of Jeevika Campaign and Parth J Shah, President of Centre for Civil Society added value to the festival as it focused on the importance of deregulating market entry for livelihood freedom.

Talk on documentary & public policy led by Nandan Saxena and Anasuya Vaidya captivated aspiring filmmakers, as the conversation focused on best practices to capture compelling stories and building a following that cares for social change.

Jeevika Law Competition: Participants received spotlight as the top four winning writers received a Jeevika certificate along with prizes ranging from Rs. 25,000 to Rs. 3,000.

The essays recognised for their excellence were: Street Vending in Bangalore by Monal Gera, Preetish Shahoo, and Shreya Shree, Cycle Rickshaw Pulling by Shachin Sharma, Praveen Tripathi, and Amit Gupta, Bricks and Bangles: Experiencing the women construction workers by Harneet Kaur, and lastly, Street Food Vendors and Dhabawalas in India: Rediscovering a Novel Approach to Policymaking by Deepak Jha.

2012 WINNERS

'I was Born in Delhi' by Bishnu Dev Halder – 1st Prize

"I was here in 2007 with my first documentary, as a student filmmaker. I am now returning to Jeevika five years later, with the winning film, as a professional. This is an important platform because as society races towards modernisation, there are certain people who remain neglected. Jeevika is about them. These films are about the neglected sections of society who would not be heard otherwise."

Two sisters, Josna & Hasina run away from poverty, marriage and their impending kitchen centric life in the village to the city for a new life, only to be hounded by insecurity six years later. Ironically, they now find marriage to be their only path to a secure

and respectable future. But will the harsh social realities allow them to have a happy and secure future? The film follows the sisters for five years and documents their changing priorities over the period of times; the choices they make and the impact of the same on their lives.

'Shifting Undercurrents-Seaweeds Collectors of Gulf of Mannar' by Rita Banerji – 2nd Prize

"What makes Jeevika popular amongst filmmakers is that it is every year. We want to enter our films because we know it is shown in other places and it gives opportunity for dialogue and teaches us about the diversity of livelihood issues in India that ultimately boil down to a policy solution."

This is a moving account of women divers/seaweed collectors struggling to regain a hold on their much-curtailed activities in the Gulf of Mannar National Marine Park. Each morning, they ride out into the Gulf of Mannar waters as a first light begins to brighten the skies overhead. Arriving, the women take a deep breath and dive into the cloudy waters to handpick seaweed. They have been pursuing their activity undisturbed until recent years.

We Are Foot Soldiers by Debolina Dutta by Oishik Sircar – 3rd Prize

In 2005, children of sex workers in Kolkata's Sonagachhi red light district came together to form their own organization, Amra Padatik (Foot Soldiers), drawing inspiration from the work that their mothers have been doing to demand their right to sex work as work. The film journeys through the lives of AmraPadatik members whose entangled realities do not paint a picture of helplessness, but of political assertiveness and social consciousness.

'Dimond Band' by Samridhi Dasot - Best Student Documentary Award

"This is my first screening ever. This is also my first documentary film ever, so this is very, very special. Thank you!"

The film revolves around a wedding music band called Dimond Band exploring the profession, the personal lives and background of the members and their equation as a team.

Other Special Mentions Include:

'The Rat Race' by Miriam Chandy Menacherry - Special Mention

"I like that Jeevika addresses livelihood issues and my film was about the rat killers of Bombay and specifically tackling their own livelihood issues, so I found a synergy. I am really glad I made it over here, and found the audience really receptive; diverse range of people from students to academics and activists."

The Rat Race winds its way through the grimy underbelly of Mumbai, through dimly lit alleys and crowded markets to tell the story of the city's rat killers. Using the vehicle of the rat the documentary explores issues of livelihood, sanitation and development to paint a moving account of India at the crossroads and provide the human face of development with all its contradictions. It is the rare documentary that got a theatre release in 3 Indian metros and won critical acclaim.

Hide Under My Sole by Shradha Jain – Special Mention

Covering the craft pockets situated in the Malwa belt of Punjab, this film is an endeavour to celebrate the craft of Jutti making and applauds the artisans, which have put their heart and soul in it. More than the physical endurance, it highlights the emotional aspects of the craftsmen involved and thus speaks volume of the different people from varied castes and backgrounds.

Cycle of Life by Vishal Sharma – Special Mention

The film is based on the life of Street performer Imtiaz Khan (Pappu Bharti) a trick cyclist from Jagadhri. This film reflects how street performers are facing hard times due to no support of the government and local administration. From a super star of stunt cycle,

Pappu Bharti is now slipping into anonymity and finding it hard to carry on with his profession.

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