



INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY JURY CHAIR FARJAD NABI

In the FSA of 2024 we witnessed something never witnessed before. Over 2,000 submissions flooded in from around the South Asian region. The sheer breadth of talent and vision encountered was both humbling and inspiring. To the creators of the 40-plus films that made it to this year's festival I would like to say this: your work, your dedication, and your passion have already made you winners.

Only this morning I learnt how close we came to Film South Asia not taking place this year. But here we are once again. A wise person once said to me, “no matter how many times you mow the grass it keeps growing back, therefore grass is a moral lesson” . I would like to add that how Film South Asia keeps returning is also a moral lesson.

FSA is so big hearted that it welcomes and accommodates all of us again and again and again. Why? Because this festival embodies the one trait all South Asians share: Dil mein jagah honi chahiey, if there is space in the heart, the rest is taken care of. Kanak Mani Dixit and Mitu Verma you are the OGs and on behalf of all of us I extend our deepest gratitude and salute your tireless work and dedication. The seeds you planted in 1997 have borne fruit, as we witnessed in our alumni Chief Guest Kabir Khan. Today a nursery of new saplings is ready to go forth into the Anthropocene to represent and fight for a better future for one fourth of the world's population that is called South Asia.

This year's theme—Anthropocene—is not just timely but essential. It's a stark reminder that what we share cannot be restrained by borders. As we speak the brown cloud of stubble fires and fossil fuels from Lahore to Delhi is depositing a layer of carbon on the pristine snows of the Himalayas. And when the snows melt, that water is flowing right back to Lahore and Delhi. But who is going to tell these stories?

I've sat in the various sessions of this festival and heard young Nepali filmmakers ask such precise and practical questions that I've never heard at any film festival, not even in Europe. I promise I'm not just saying this, I really mean it. And so I would like to share some breaking news: Nepali cinema is on the brink of taking flight—if you like we can take a bet on it after the ceremony.

There is a palpable new energy, a shift in the air, an eager and bold new generation wanting to tell their own stories. And guess who is going to play a pivotal role in this? Film South Asia who else.

Ok now we move on to the citations and awards but before that, Pawas Manandhar, Rati Sharma, Abhishek Budhathoki and the host of volunteers whose names I should know but don't, none of this would have been possible without you. Thank you for making this celebration of creativity and culture a reality.



And how do I thank my fellow jury members, the amazing Anitha Pottamkulam and the fabulous Shrestha. Your insights, debates and willingness to fight for every inch have made this process not just enriching but a genuine honour to be part of.

And now, it is my privilege to announce the jury citations for this year's festival.

Best Student Film Award

The first category is the Best Student Film Award. As is evident by the name, this award encourages and celebrates the work of our student filmmakers. The quality of films was very high as usual, however the jury would like to recommend that we find ways to reach out to educational institutions all over South Asia for a more crowded and spread out field for future festivals.

Among the forerunners in this category was, "*Love Like Ours*" an intimate film that explores the deeply personal yet universally resonant story of interfaith love in Myanmar. It's a moving portrait of love and identity in the face of cultural and religious intolerance.

Another very strong contender was "*A Forgotten Summer*", a tender exploration of memory or more precisely, the loss of it. Its protagonist, a retired journalist whose once-commanding presence in India's media world now contends with the quiet erosion of Alzheimer's in Delhi elder care facility.

The winner amongst such high quality contenders is a sharp and heartfelt look at modern India, where accessible internet meets big dreams in a society shaped by class, caste, and gender divides. The film follows Sumita, a woman using social media to break free from a stifling domestic life and chase her acting ambitions.

This film is like TikTok itself—fun, messy, and surprisingly deep.

The Best Student Film Award goes to Hello Guyzz! by Samiksha Mathur.

TAREQUE MASUD BEST DEBUT FILM AWARD

Our next award is named after the most visionary filmmakers of Bangladesh Tareque Masud whose film *Muktir Gaan* remains one of the most moving and iconic films to have premiered at the very first FSA in 1997. Tragically, we lost Tareq in a road accident. To honour his memory FSA awards the TAREQUE MASUD BEST DEBUT FILM AWARD.

One of the foremost contenders for this award was *When Pomegranate Turns Grey*, a personal exploration of Hyderabad's 1948 annexation. It tells the story of Gulnaar, a survivor of post-Police Action violence. The film's ability to ground historical events in the weave of lived experience makes it stand out.

Zende: The SuperCop distinguishes itself by stepping beyond the headlines to explore the man, Madhukar Zende, celebrated for capturing the elusive Charles Sobhraj. The craft of this film was



extraordinary with its used of graphics and mixing non fiction with fictive elements, a demonstration of the changing nature of documentary filmmaking.

Now for the winner. The TAREQ MASUD BEST DEBUT FILM AWARD goes to a stark and unflinching look at the lives of women in Kashmir, caught in the aftermath of the 2019 abrogation of Article 370.

Through personal testimonies and unseen faces whose voices we hear, it captures the disorientation of a reality where time feels suspended, and freedom becomes an abstract concept. In its simplicity, the film manages to say so much about survival, agency, and the toll of isolation. It's not just about what happened in Kashmir—it's about the human cost of being forgotten by the world.

The TAREQUE MASUD BEST DEBUT FILM AWARD goes to *Siege in the Air* by Muntaha Amin.

Award for the Best Depiction of the Climate Emergency

Once again FSA has taken the lead by putting the spotlight on an issue that is literally shaping the lives of billions with each breath they take.

I would like to invite Mr. Shekhar Ghimire, Director of Administration, Operations and Finances at ICIMOD the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, to present the Award for Best Depiction of the Climate Emergency on behalf of the organisation.

We start with the standout film *Abundance: Living with a Forest* which offers an immersive meditation on the bond between indigenous communities and their environment. Set in the lush forests of Nagaland, the film follows Zareno, whose daily life revolves around gathering wild edibles, practising a philosophy of abundance—how to thrive not by taking but by coexisting with Nature. The very key to our future in the Anthropocene.

Also in the running was *Sometimes Even the Shore Drowns*, a haunting exploration of Karachi's intertidal mudflats. The film lets the landscape breathe, drawing us into the quiet pulse of life along the mangroves. The film's strength lies in its understated urgency. It reveals the poetry in the rhythm of tides, the meticulous habits of crabs, and the silent threat of human encroachment.

The Best film on Anthropocene & the Climate Crisis has been more than two decades in the making. It is a searing exploration of the cost of modern conservation. Focusing on the Soliga adivasis of Karnataka's Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple Tiger Reserve.

What sets this film apart is its refusal to simplify. The narrative is not about a clash between tradition and progress, but about the consequences of sidelining indigenous knowledge in shaping ecosystems. The filmmakers spent over twenty years with their subjects, uncovering how the Soligas' practices, such as controlled burns and rotational farming, have maintained the forest's balance for generations. By contrast, the restrictive policies imposed on the reserve have led to



unintended ecological imbalances, creating a haunting irony at the heart of the story. The Soliga adivasis remain at the centre of this story and not a backdrop or prop seen from the outside.

The Best film Best Depiction of the Climate Emergency award goes to *A Flaming Forest* by Salman Javeed, Vivek Singh Sangwan and Satya Ambasta.

JURY AWARD

Before we move towards the final awards, a few special mentions about films that added many hours, coffee cups and missed lunches to our debates.

While We Watched is a gripping and profoundly relevant exploration of journalism under siege, following Ravish Kumar's relentless pursuit of truth in an era of rising propaganda and public mistrust. A critical film for critical times.

Cinema pe Cinema, a love letter to Indian cinema. With a sharp eye for detail and a reverence for the medium, the film captures the magic, contradictions, and evolution of this storytelling tradition.

Trans Kashmir is a deeply moving and essential documentary that shines a light on the lives of transgender individuals in Kashmir, a region often defined by its political turmoil but rarely seen through the lens of gender identity and personal struggle. It bears witness to the courage of individuals going through multiple layers of marginalisation.

Agent of Happiness is a rare look at Bhutan's audacious experiment to measure well-being on a national scale. The film follows two officials tasked with collecting data on Gross National Happiness. But what begins as a bureaucratic exercise transforms into something far more profound.

In Zainab's Heaven is a tender and introspective documentary set in the heart of Quetta, Pakistan. The film has a remarkable quality to humanise its subjects—a gravestone maker, a water carrier, and a man who buried part of himself there. Through their stories, the film captures the resilience and quiet dignity of the marginalised, persecuted Hazaras who have been erased from the news.

In Search of Ajantrik surprised us by subverting all expectations of a nostalgia piece. It weaves together archival material, present-day narratives, and reflections on Ritwik Ghatak's creative choices, the film offers a layered, deeply resonant exploration of cinema as a mirror to life.

And now it's time for the Jury Award.

Deciding the Jury Award this year was nothing short of an odyssey. Each film brought its own distinct voice, making the task like choosing one's favourite instrument in an orchestra. Discussions were spirited and, at times, challenging—a mix of lively debates, respectful disagreements, and multiple viewings to truly grasp the layers within each contender.



As Chair of the Jury, the experience was transformative—a rare opportunity to both persuade and be persuaded by two of the most passionate and perceptive minds that have ever been on FSA juries. Ultimately, the choice became impossible to narrow down to a single winner. Two exceptional films, each addressing the profound undercurrents of conflict in South Asia, are being awarded the Jury Prize jointly, standing together as equal bearers of the region’s most urgent stories.

The first film to share the Jury Award is *Devi* directed by Subina Shrestha.

A searing and deeply personal portrait that examines the enduring scars of Nepal’s civil war. With its unfiltered lens the film captures the intersection of personal trauma and systemic failure. The stigma surrounding sexual violence, the conspiracy of silence and erasure of its history are unfortunately known to us all too well. This film is a powerful reminder that the path to justice is both deeply personal and inherently political.

The second film receiving the Jury Award is a film of hope. From protests in farmlands to the collective kitchens, the film highlights acts of every day courage and everyday seva that carry profound cultural and political significance. *Chardi Kala - An Ode to Resilience* by Prateek Shekhar is hopeful without glossing over realities, celebratory without losing depth and humorous without diminishing gravitas. The standing ovation it received at FSA from an audience that consisted of almost all South Asian nationalities is a testament of how much we need stories of defiance that are not just angry but uplifting as well.

I invite the directors of both *Devi* and *Chardi Kala* to come to the stage and receive their shared Jury Award.

DOCUMENTARY STALWART AWARD

Tonight we honour a filmmaker whose work has transcended the boundaries of storytelling to become a vital force for social change. Anand Patwardhan has spent a lifetime crafting documentaries that confront the most uncomfortable truths, holding a mirror to society with courage, compassion, and unrelenting honesty. His latest film, *The World is Family*, is a deeply personal exploration seamlessly blending the private and the political. In this intimate documentary, Anand turns the camera inward, offering a rare glimpse into his family’s legacy, interwoven with the sociopolitical shifts of modern India. It’s a film that feels both monumental and delicate, balancing the universal themes of love and loss with Anand’s signature commitment to truth and justice. It is an honour to present to him the very first Film South Asia Documentary Stalwart Award.



RAM BAHADUR TROPHY FOR BEST FILM

What is the hallmark of a truly great film? Of course there is no single answer but one thing we can't argue with is that some films don't let go of you. After you exit the screening hall, they follow you home, get into your bedroom and then enter your dreams, And this can go on for years if not a lifetime. And the winner of this years RAM BAHADUR TROPHY is one such film.

A mesmerising tribute to the enigmatic Hindustani classical musician Annapurna Devi, whose genius shaped generations yet whose life remains shrouded in mystery. Directed with sensitivity and reverence by Nirmal Chander, the film masterfully combines archival footage, intimate interviews, and rare performances to peel back the layers of a recluse who became a legend.

At its core, it's not just a story about music but about rewriting history, shattering icons and recognising a true master.

The film moves with the same grace as a *raag*, building layers of emotion until it immerses the audience fully in her world.

The RAM BAHADUR TROPHY FOR BEST FILM goes to

6-A *Akash Ganga* directed by Nirmal Chander Dandriyal

On Behalf of film, the jury would like to invite Mr Jeewan Aaley, guardian and teacher of Classical Music and the Director of the Yalamaya Classic to receive the Award.