

# Best of the fest

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defeating the mighty Kali, the kite flown by a mysterious force.

It triumphed over the Tamil film *Aadukalam*, the Bengali period drama *Chitrangada* and the freedom struggle thriller *Chittagong*.

The Marathi film *Shala*, about an eventful time in the life of schoolmates, won two awards, Arvind Deshpande for best screenplay and Sanjay Dahake for best direction. Dahake triumphed over directors Rituparno Ghosh (*Chitrangada*), Vetri Maaran (*Aadukalam*), Prashant Nair (*Delhi in a Day*) and Bedabrata Pain (*Chittagong*).

Some of the patrons who have been seeing films presented at the festival said this year the quality of the films in all categories had improved considerably and regional films had also found a good slot.

Shyam Benegal was the recipient of a lifetime achievement award. The director, nearing 80, said whenever he received a lifetime achievement award he felt the recognition was a bit premature. "I feel I have started my career just now," he added.

Though some of the popular artists like south Indian actor Dhanush could not make it to the festival. His wife Aishwarya Rajnikanth Dhanush, whose maiden directorial vehicle *3* was also shown at NYIFF, introduced *Aadukalam*.

"He did not want *Aadukalam* to be an orphan," Aishwarya said, adding that the film was close to her heart. She revealed how the director, Vetri Maaran, had overcome all odds and stayed in a rural area near Madurai, Tamil Nadu, to get to know the dynamics of cockfighting. Even when leading banners and financiers had turned down the project, Maaran remained steadfast in his vision and determination.

The Oscar winning *Saving Face* by Daniel Junge and Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy about the efforts of a British doctor of Pakistani origin to help acid attack victims heal was declared the best documentary.

The Best Young Actor Award, presented by director Prashant Nair went to Mohammad Samad for *Gattu*. Tannishtha Chatterjee bagged the Best Actress Award, which was presented to her by director Dev Benegal, for *Dekh Indian Circus*. The Best Actor Award went to Nawazuddin Siddiqui for the same film.

*Dekh Indian Circus* is the story of how a young girl is mesmerized by the idea of a circus character and the struggle of a poor family go to take their two little children to the circus.



Writer Suketu Mehta, right, presents Avinash Deshpande the Best Screenplay Award for the Marathi film *Shala*

PHOTOGRAPHS: PARESH GANDHI



Tannishtha Chatterjee receives the Best Actress Award from director Dev Benegal