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From left, director Feroz Abbas Khan with New York Indian Film Festival Founder Aroon Shivdasani and Festival Director Aseem Chhabra



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# Bollywood beyond Borders

Arthur J Pais on Nitin Kakkar's *Filmistaan*

It might have missed an award or two at the New York Indian Film Festival, but Nitin Kakkar's *Filmistaan*, an ode to Hindi films and a celebration of a bond that could transcend nationalities, was a clear favorite at the festival.

It received sustained applause for several minutes after the closing night screening, and more applause followed when the audience was reminded that it had won the National Award for the Best Hindi Film in India.

Some viewers in New York said if there were a people's award, Kakkar's movie would have run with it.

"I consider a film successful only when it reaches an audience," said Kakkar.

The film has found a distributor and could be out in the multiplexes in India within weeks.

Making the film and raising money for it was far from easy despite offbeat films doing well at the box office in recent years, the first-time filmmaker said: "Especially when you have no stars in it and the usual popular ingredients."

"But there are people who say, 'Let us

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## 'We are telling a universal story'

Feroz Abbas Khan, whose film *Dekh Tamasha Dekh*, opened the New York Indian Film Festival, in conversation with **Arthur J Pais**

**A** fight over a dead body and the question of giving him the last rites tears apart not just a town but also a community in *Dekh Tamasha Dekh*, a gripping satire directed by Feroz Abbas Khan, his second film following the acclaimed *Gandhi My Father*.

Was the man in the film — killed by the falling effigy of a politician — a Muslim or a Hindu? Was he Hamid, as the people in the locality and his companions called him, or Kishan, as he was born? Should he be buried or cremated?

Satish Kaushik and Tanvi Azmi lead a cast of talented artists like Sudhir Pandey, Vijay Jain and Sharad Ponkshe.

Khan brought a rough cut of the film to the NYIFF, insisting that he had plenty of editing left and, hence, it should not be part of the competition.

"Technically it opened the festival," he said. I offered it to the festival because it had given my film *Gandhi My Father* an excellent platform."

The 54-year-old Khan — who worked

with Mumbai's Prithvi Theater in his 20s and has since adapted several prize-winning plays from America and Britain and toured with them in India and North America — made time for this interview after the festival closed.

**Is it true that you had the idea for making *Dekh Tamasha Dekh* before you made *Gandhi My Father*?**

True, but then I could not find a producer for the project. Many of my well-wishers and those who had seen my plays thought I should work on something else for my first film project, and that is how *Gandhi My Father* came to be made.

But things are changing in India. Many high-quality films made for a small budget are enjoying good runs and returning more than their investment.

Sunil Lulla of Eros Pictures liked the subject of my film, and though it is very different from most of the films Eros is releasing decided to back it up. That made all the difference.

**How did you get the idea for *Dekh Tamasha Dekh*?**

About 11 years ago, a retired police commissioner (*of Mumbai*) Satish Sawhney had told me about the strangest case he had handled. He was very new to the police when he was faced with two communities fighting over a dead man's body.

The man who had been living with a Muslim widow was electrocuted, so it was assumed by some he was a Muslim, but his brother said he had never been converted from Hinduism.

His wife did not have a problem with a Hindu cremation, but a dispute broke out when religious bigots got into the picture, leading to bizarre developments.

I worked on the movie treatment of the story with the well known playwright Shafaat Khan, but we were not getting a producer.

Meanwhile, the Gandhi project came along but *Dekh Tamasha Dekh* never went away. It kept brewing, and I had to get it out of my system.

As we continued working on the script, we were realizing day by day that the real

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Nitin Kakkar

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