

Geetanjali Thapa, who won the best actress award at the New York Indian Film Festival, with Nawazuddin Siddiqui in *Liar's Dice*.



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## Small films with a big heart

at least in a few theaters across the country and not limit them to a handful of film festivals?”

Mohan Agashe, who was representing the excellent drama about dementia, *Astu*, said filmmakers were glad that such festivals existed.

Perhaps these festivals need to be more energetically advertised so that non-South Asians too come to see these films in bigger numbers, Dr Agashe added.

Manjule, who honed his filmmaking skills in short films like the award-winning *Pistulya*, said he felt exhilaration and dismay as he wrote the film and directed it.

A lot of sad and burdensome memories came to him, but he felt invigorated as he hoped his story could be a well-crafted film that could reach thousands.

Using a love story between an upper caste girl and a Dalit boy, Manjule narrates his film without resorting to didactic postures and packs it with humour, irony — and in the last 15 minutes — a wallop of surprises and twists.

Speaking in Hindi (*which was translated into English by Chhabra*), Manjule recalled how he had seen and experienced caste discrimination for as long as he could remember.

He grew up in the small town of Karmala in Maharashtra's Solapur district, said he was always angry and conflicted because of the burden of caste discrimination and his father's source of livelihood — apart from being a stone-crusher, he also had to catch wild pigs. “

*Fandry* draws heavily from

my adolescence and of those around me,” he added.

Describing the parallels with his life, Manjule said he was that boy who bunked school and roamed around in the afternoons searching for that bird (as in the movie).

“It was not so much about liking a person as it was about gaining respect and being considered worthy enough to be talked to,” he had said. “Like *Jabya*, (*the boy in the film*) I too wanted jeans trousers...But because of poverty, they kept eluding me — from one month to the next, from one Indian festival to the next.”

Actress and filmmaker Geetu Mohan Das's best film winner *Liar's Dice* unfolds against the background of construction workers recruited from poor towns in north India and taken to accident-prone sites in the big cities.

In the gritty film — which fetched Geetanjali Thapa the best actress award — a mountain woman, who stubbornly ignores the village elders takes off with her little child in search of her missing spouse.

Her encounter with an army deserter Nawazuddin Siddiqui triggers unforeseen events.

Mohandas directed a short film *Kelkunnundo* (*Are You Listening?*) four years ago. It focused on child fantasies.

In *Liar's Dice*, which has traveled to a number of festivals, including the Sundance Film Festival, ‘a child is a catalyst for the drama in a road movie that caresses the senses,’ said film critic Rada Sestic.

The very well cast actors playing the inquisitive child, the head strong young mother and the rugged smuggler perform in a way that makes the characters look very natural and convincing, she added. Siddiqui is the new favorite of art cinema in India, but it was the veteran Naseeruddin Shah who took home the best actor trophy for his work in *Coffin Maker*.

Watch out for the scene in which Anton Gomes (*Shah*) takes his wife of many years, Isabella (*played by Shah's wife, Ratna Pathak Shah*) on a dinner date.

The actor could not attend the New York film event, but there was no doubt that it was one of his best performances till date.



A scene from *Fandry*.