



Children Fest throws up compelling cinema from Middle East

By Gautaman Bhaskaran

The 17th International Children's Film Festival in Hyderabad threw up an exciting lineup of movies from the Middle East and Africa that spoke of intimate relationships in times of crisis.

“David and Kamal” by Japanese director Kikuo Kawasaki was by far the best in this bunch. Part of the 15-film international competition, the Kawasaki work is an affecting look at a relationship between two boys that crosses the barriers of religion and State. Set in the walled city of Jerusalem, the film shows how David, a Jewish American lad from Denmark, who while visiting his estranged father, befriends Kamal, an Arab street kid and petty thief.

Kawasaki in a very mutedly compelling way conveys the warmth of a bond that grows between two unlikely individuals, who first meet in an extremely volatile atmosphere. For David, Kamal is the guy who has taken away his most valuable possession, a bag of rare coins, and for Kamal, David is but a rich “American” with loads of money that the street-boy can use to reach Chicago, where his uncle lives, a life that can take him away from the humiliating cruelty of his grandfather.

Another captivating work came from Iran, Mehran Kashani's “The Other” that traces the transformation of a relationship from one of hostility to one of affection. A young boy, forced to go on a trip to Tehran with a man who would soon be his stepfather, violently resents the older guy's presence. Handled with sensitivity and without dramatising the situations, Kashani, who also wrote the script, conveys the fluctuating moods of the two individuals, both getting over their personal losses and grief.

If the man, a widower with a young daughter craving for the warmth of a mother, is desperate to fulfil that little longing, the woman in Vibeke Muasya's “Lost in Africa” is as despairing when her adopted African son goes missing in Kenya while the two are on a holiday.

Packed with excitement, some of it being violent, the movie takes us through several groups of characters – slums gangs, kidnappers, corrupt police officers and over-enthusiastic media men.

Also from Iran, Mohammad-Ali Talebi's “Meadow”, presents the distress of a little girl, whose mother is taken away from her after a family quarrel over a small plot of land. A fine performance by the girl, whose heart-rending sorrow ultimately melts hearts, and leads to a happy rapprochement.

Photo: Vibeke Muasya's “Lost in Africa”