

# cinema



\* Indian filmmaker Girish Kasaravalli and actress Pavitra Lokesh pose before the screening of their film *Nayi Neralu* at the Southern Cinema Film Festival in Granada southern Spain, in this June 15, 2007 file picture. Kasaravalli, an auteur in the true sense of the term, was given the Padma Shri award only at the age of 60.

## Not a rewarding experience

India's highest civilian awards are rife with favouritism and often late in recognising true talent, writes **Gautaman Bhaskaran**

India's Padma Awards are its highest civilian honours, which are announced on the eve of every Republic Day on January 26. Not surprisingly

— and in tune with what happens in just about any sphere in the country today — the awards evoke major controversies every year. One important reason is the

anomalous manner in which selections are made. Favouritism is rampant here, and allegedly money changes hands. So, one can have a Padma Award for a fee. A doctor



\* Sarod maestro Buddhadeb Dasgupta turned down the Padma Shri, as he felt it was recognition too little and too late from the Indian government.

friend of mine, who of course does not want to be named, was once offered a Padma Shri for a hefty sum of money. Since there was no money-back-guarantee in the event of him not securing the prize, he declined the offer.

The Indian government lends itself to serious disagreements in the way it selects the awardees. Let us look at this year's choices. Buddhadeb Dasgupta (not to be mistaken with Bengali poet, novelist and film director of the same name) is a brilliant sarod maestro and recipient of the prestigious Sangeet Natak Academy Award. He is 80 today, and the Indian government suddenly woke up to the fact that this celebrated musician has not been conferred any Padma prize. So, they quickly thought of a Padma Shri, the lowest of the three in the Padma category. Padma Vibhushan and Padma Bhushan are the higher ones.

Dasgupta turned down the Padma Shri. He said, "it was too late in the day for me to accept it. Many musicians, much junior to me, got the award years ago", he averred. "I do not wish to run anybody down, but I think that many of those who got it were less deserving than me. I do not think that I should accept the award 10 years after being honoured by the Sangeet Natak Academy. If I do I will be ridiculing myself", he was firm but polite.

Hemant Kumar, who sang many, many Hindi and Bengali songs, also once declined a Padma award saying that the honour was coming to him years after his juniors had got it. There have been other cases of Padmas being turned down.

Such selection inconsistency gnaws into the credibility of the

Award. Kannada movie director, an auteur in the true sense of the term, Girish Kasaravalli, has just been given the Padma Shri. At 60! The man who made outstanding films, such as *Ghatashraddha* (1977), *Tabarana Kathe* (1986), *Thaayi Saheba* (1997) and *Gulabi Talkies* (2008), went unnoticed for years.

Now he has been bracketed with the likes of actresses Tabu and Kajol, who have also been given the Padma Shri. Not only are they much junior to Kasaravalli in age and achievements, but these two actresses have really not done much in recent years.

I would think Vidya Balan has more to her credit than Kajol and Tabu — with *Paa*, *Ishqiya* and *No One Killed Jessica*. Balan's performances have been admirable in all these. In fact, she has been consistently good since her debut in *Parineeta* in 2005.

Again, the eminent documentary movie director S Krishnaswamy, received the Padma Shri only in 2009, when he was 70-plus. The man who once made the superb *Indus Valley to Indira Gandhi* and has never treated documentaries as a stepping stone to glamorous features, remaining consistently faithful to the genre, Krishnaswamy should have by now got at least the Padma Bhushan.

And, look at film-helmer Buddhadeb Dasgupta with an impressive basket of work (*Neem Ammapurna*, *Bagh Bahadur*, *Tahder Katha* and many more) who has not yet caught the eye of the Padma jury. I wonder what they are waiting for.

Obviously, like much else in India, the Padma Awards are subject to the personal whims and fancies of those in the higher echelons of politics.



### Double trouble

I have always felt that a rank bad Hollywood film was better than a rank

bad one from the Bollywood basket. Now, I am beginning to conclude that a rank bad Tamil movie is far worse than a rank bad Mumbai feature.

Let us take Shiva's latest *Siruthai* as an example. Actor Karthi essays two men, who look alike (but are not twins or related!). One is a patriotic police officer, Ratnavel Pandiyan, who swears to die with his uniform on, with a smile on his lips. He wants to be seen twirling his moustache as he breathes his last. Never mind if that does not happen. The other Karthi is Rocket Raja, a petty thief, who humours men and women into parting with their precious goodies. Again, never mind if he succeeds in fooling all the men all the time.

The story develops into its more serious tone with the cop trying to eliminate a don in Andhra Pradesh who terrorises the village into total submission. Women walk up to him to be raped, while their husbands, and

they include police officers, shiver and stay silent. Despite Pandiyan's valiant efforts to destroy the don, he lives on. It is then that Raja enters the scene to make a fool of the don and a mockery of the police forces. There are two subplots running along.

One about Shweta (Tamannaah seen left with Karthi), and the other about Pandiyan's little daughter. While Shweta's behaviour is boringly irritating, the girl manages to pull the emotional chord in you. One really wonders why an actor like Karthi has let himself degenerate into this.

He did show an awful lot of promise in the beginning. He was refreshing as the protagonist in his debut work, *Paruthiveeran* in 2007. The film was a

critic's delight, and clinched for him the Filmfare Award for Best Actor. His later movies — *Aayirathil Oruvan*, *Paiyaa* and *Naan Mahaan Alla* — while placing him firmly on the pedestal of the Tamil film industry, clearly indicated that Karthi was no exception.

He was beginning to ape his elder brother, Surya, by playing clichéd characters, stuffed with anger and anguish in their extreme forms. Tamil cinema desperately needs a higher IQ. Otherwise, it runs the risk of being run over by the undoubtedly more sensible cinema from neighbouring Kerala.

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