

A still from *My Friend Su*

En-Suing Success

Neeraj Bhasin's reflections after his *My Friend Su* bagged the FIPRESCI award in Japan last week



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NEERAJ Bhasin, 28, has got the validation every struggling filmmaker needs not to give it all up. For his 55-min documentary, *My Friend Su*, bagged the FIPRESCI (International Federation of Film Critics) award, last week, at the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival in Japan.

Chosen from among 30 short-listed entries in the New Asian currents section, his citation reads: 'For the subtle combination of cinematographic poetry and human understanding in a very fluent and often humorous way, the film reveals the complicated feelings of a young man who feels that inside he is really a female'.

Co-produced by Digital Talkies, *My Friend Su* was also in the reckoning at their International Film Festival last year. But it got nothing. "Frankly, I was expecting to win. I had thought, this is an honest story, and the format wasn't that of statistic-laden dull documentary with a droning voice-over. It was a let-down when I didn't win. And here, I wasn't expecting anything at all, and I won!" says a still-elated Bhasin.

But he attributes the film's success to his protagonist and college-mate from college, Sutanu or Su. "He takes it beneath the layers and elicits a strong spiritual reaction. You feel after the film, that you have some sort of connection with Su." And so predictably, for Bhasin, the best compliment came from Su himself. "He told us (me and the associate director Harish Vyas) that we'd handled it well, without making it exploitative."

As for his own relationship with Su, he says: "I didn't know him very well at college but I felt drawn to him." He had friends but was quiet and closed. There were rumours about his sexuality. A few years later, they became friends and the experience developed into this film. Reflects Bhasin: "For a gay person, once he comes to terms with his sexuality, he can find a partner that'll reciprocate. But for a transsexual, who doesn't want to undergo a sex-change operation, how difficult it must be to want a straight man who loves him like he's a woman." One question which several people put to Bhasin is that what if Su looks for that person in him? To which he responds with: "Well, he hasn't proposed to me and I don't think he will. And besides, he's friends with both me and my wife." Bhasin is now looking for funding for his next film on "being trapped in the techno-world".

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