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Su Sutana, a transsexual whose life is the subject of a film to be shown at the Digital Talkies fest, tells Ashwin Ahmad why his life doesn't veer around his sexuality

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S far back as I can remember, I was born different. I very much wanted to do arts and not follow in the traditional doctor-engineer mode that my family were keen on.

I used to draw and paint from an early age and I soon realised that all I wanted to do was fulfil my creative urges. So, I moved from Bhubhaneshwar to Delhi around seven years ago, where I met a painter called Renjan, who became my teacher and guide. I then joined a

course that taught me illustrating. This honed my skills and I draw for many children's books even today.

I met Neeraj (the director of My Friend Su) at the illustrating course. We were friends but then we lost touch. Four years later, he suddenly got in touch with me asking if I would mind him doing a documentary film on me. I kept saying 'no, no' but he was very persistent, so I finally thought 'okay, why not?' Siddharth Kumar (the cameraman) and his crew helped me by making me feel comfortable. And so My Friend Su became possible.

I have to admit, however, that I'm scared. I still haven't seen the film's final version.

Throughout my life I remember that I was different from other boys, but I was never able to fathom why. As a result I kept aloof from the others, which, I think, was what Neeraj found very intriguing. He used to call me 'mysterious.'

I do think that the film is part of the process of my coming out. What I mean by that is that I am slowly getting to the point of feeling comfortable with my sexuality. This is made more complicated by the fact that I am a transsexual. So, unlike gay men I not only have to accept my sexuality but my body too. A gay man can be gay but still feel comfortable being a man. Transsexuals are homosexual but imagine

themselves to be women. That's what I am; a woman trapped in a man's body.

I have come to terms with my sexuality but sometimes I still feel loathing for my body. However, contrary to what people think, sexuality and gay issues are only a part of my life. I work with many NGOs one of them called Iranthar, which provides literacy through booklets for people in rural areas. I am a clothes designer. I have illustrated many books, and am planning to hold an exhibition of my paintings

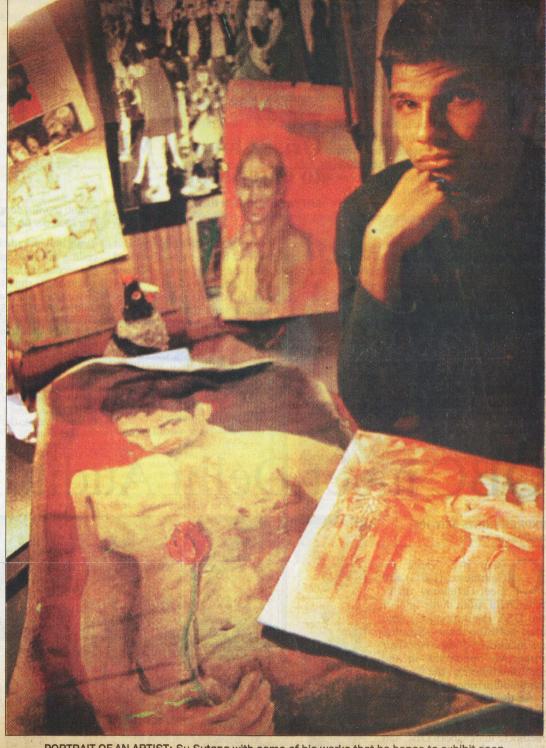
in the near future. I also want to write a book about my life, but I have no intention of getting it published right now. It is intended just for me at the moment.

The gay scene in Delhi has changed rapidly in the last four-five years. There is increasing space for homosexuals in the Capital, both in terms of media coverage and nightclubs, which are seeing more gay couples. However, I am not into the party scene and I have got moral strength from my friends and the organisation where I work. In fact, the organisation is one of

the few, I think the only, place in Delhi where one can get gay literature.

I saw Nishit Saran's coming out film, Summer In My Veins which was nice. But for me it's just a film, so when people ask whether I feel emboldened enough after seeing it to tell my parents about my sexuality, the answer is no. I can't imagine telling my mother, who is very keen for me to get married soon. But I will deal with that problem when it arises. Since I've come out I'm enjoying my life."

(My Friend Su will be showing at the Digital Film festival at the Habitat on March 29.
Watch out today for Boxes, by Rene Besson, USA)



PORTRAIT OF AN ARTIST: Su Sutana with some of his works that he hopes to exhibit soon