

# The trap within

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

**"A**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)**

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