

This Film Star Prefers To Stay In A Homeless Shelter

New Delhi: (IANS) Sometimes some stories seem right out of a movie script. Salim's is one of them. With 40 films, including an Oscar-nominated one, under his belt, it's sheer pleasure to watch this talented 17-year-old perform. Especially among his applauding friends in a shelter for the homeless which has been his home for the last one decade.

Wearing a pair of denim shorts and a red T-shirt, Salim — the young actor who had won hearts the world over in Ashwin Kumar's short film "Little Terrorist" — walked around the boys' shelter home near the New Delhi railway station, chatting with his friends.

At the sharp glance of their young tutor however, he quickly took his place among the 16 on the bench and started reading his text. Unaffected by the hues of the tinsel town, Salim prefers staying with his friends at the shelter home to living outside.

While his acting skills have been much appreciated the world over, dancing also remains close to Salim's heart.

"I enjoy acting and have acted in a number of films as well as two serials. Among the most well known is 'Little Terrorist' in which I play the role of a Pakistani boy who crosses over to India by mistake. The film was nominated for the Oscars in 2005 and won a lot of awards like the Montreal Short Film Festival competition, Tehran Festival, Sao Paulo Festival and others," the teenage actor said.

One of his upcoming projects is another Ashwin Kumar film, "The Forest", which also stars Nandana Sen. The film is slated for release in September.

"But I love dancing too and I hope to become a professional choreographer some day," Salim told IANS.

If you put on the music and ask him to show a few dance steps, the teenager doesn't think twice. Moving his body effortlessly, he breaks into a jig that can put a lot of well-known dancers to shame.

"I have been trained by famous choreographer Ashley Lobo for four years and now I am learning Kathak here. I also train people sometimes, but other than the commuting fee I don't charge them anything," he said.

Life however has not been easy for this versatile youngster, who is preparing for his Class 12 exams from the Open school.

At the age of eight, Salim was discovered by a social worker, crying inconsolably on a roadside. Coming from a family of rag pickers, he had got separated from his mother. He was brought to the shelter home of the Salaam Balak Trust, famed film director Mira Nair's NGO which works for street children.

According to the NGO members, it was quite a task to trace Salim's family and when they did so three years later, they realised that economic deprivation would not let his family give him the education and training that Salim needed to hone his talent.

Deciding to stay back at the trust, Salim, who said he was in touch with his family, started attending tutorials and learnt to dance.

"Salim is a naturally gifted performer. What is distinctive about his abilities is a rare sense of discipline, patience and responsibility that makes him a delight to work with," said a crew member who worked with Salim on the sets of the film "Little Terrorist".

Sharing a joke with the other boys at the shelter home and enjoying his care-free days acting, learning and dreaming, Salim signed off saying: "I am happy with how life has turned out for me. I have not got as much fame despite the movies I have done, but my dream is to be a good choreographer so I am okay with it."



Guiding AIDS Victims On How To Face Death

Bhubaneswar: (IANS) Ajay Patra is a unique guru. He teaches AIDS victims how to face death.

Patra, 39, plunged into the exercise after he was diagnosed with AIDS and told that he had an uncertain future.

The pain of impending death propelled him to look at life afresh, leading to the birth of a network of men and women in Orissa who help fellow HIV positive and AIDS patients to prepare

An engineering graduate, Patra contracted the disease through infected syringe because he was a drug addict in his student days in Chennai. When he learnt he was HIV positive in 2002, he lost hope.

He then read about a Kolkata hospital that provides one year free treatment. After returning from Kolkata, he decided to help other affected people overcome the trauma.

"I know I will have to live with this disease. I decided to help others," said Patra, who says his family members help him financially now that he does not have a job.

He prompted other victims to go to Kolkata. When some said they did not have money to travel, he arranged monetary help. As word spread, many more people flocked to him.

"Disclosing one's status is a Herculean task, but only after doing that can one go for treatment," Patra said. "When people came to know that I am HIV positive and helping affected people, my acceptability as a friend increased. Soon many came forward disclosing they had AIDS."

Thus was born a network of similar thinking people guiding AIDS victims how to spend their final months and years.

Initially he tied up with voluntary agencies but felt they were driven more by monetary interests. Later he began the Kalinga Network, which now boasts of about 1,000 HIV positive members.

Patra is not alone.

Bhaskar Behera, Dillip Rao and Amarendra Behera head different groups in different Orissa districts. The Beheras command 600 supporters each.

Rao, who is active in Ganjam district, the worst hit in Orissa, raises awareness among the vulnerable people.

"In Ganjam there is a substantial number of migrant people. They often contract the disease through sexual contacts with affected people outside the state and carry the disease back home," he said.

"Apart from helping in the treatment of those who have been affected, we focus on raising awareness among the migrants," said Rao, who heads the Ganjam Network of Positive People.

The various networks also provide asylum for HIV women who get ostracized once it becomes known that they suffer from AIDS.

"I lost my husband to AIDS. I was blamed for his death. I was shunted out of the house. I left with my kid and now help other infected people," said Prabhasini Pradhan, a coordinator with Kalinga Network of Positive People.

The networks run by Patra and others are proving to be very effective.

Patra said: "Many international agencies are trying to woo us. But we are not here to earn money. What will we do with money when our days are numbered?"

"We are here to help others so that they can face life valiantly without going through the trauma we underwent," he said.

India is home to 2.5 million HIV positive people including over 70,000 children below the age of 15 years. Though Orissa is not one of the high risk states, Ganjam is one of the high risk districts in the country.



for their final years. "Only an affected person can understand another affected person better. Approaching a person with AIDS is easier than approaching a doctor or NGO volunteer. They know the same fate awaits us," said Patra, head of the Kalinga Network of Positive People.

From Jeans To T-Shirts, Silk Gets A New Spin

Bhubaneswar: (IANS) Donning denim could soon mean slipping on silk. The Central Silk Board is trying to give a whole new meaning to the material which is predominantly associated with women's wear in India.

As part of product diversion, the government-promoted organisation for development of sericulture and the silk industry is planning to introduce fabric spun out of silk that will be used for making jeans.

"We will soon introduce some special fabric made of natural silk into the market. The special denim yarn has been developed by our scientists at the Central Silk Technological Research Institute at Bangalore," board chairman H. Hanumanthappa said here.

The institute has also developed fabrics that will be used for making everyday-wear like T-shirts other than saris and women's dress material, he said.

"Indian silk is often associated with women's wear. Also, it is often said that silk wear is meant for the rich and the well-to-do. We are trying to revamp this image," Hanumanthappa told IANS.

"We are going to have diverse silk products other than the sari and dress materials for women."

As part of a move towards product diversification, a slew of items like carry bags and visiting cards made out of soft yarn developed by the Bangalore institute have been introduced in the market.

"We have developed a special type of soft pure natural silk fabric, which is being used in making T-Shirts by some private garment companies in Ludhiana and Tirupur," added Dinkar Bhatt, an official from Bangalore's silk research institute.

The silk board believes that the new experiment will not only help promote Indian silk but also help beat the double whammy of the economic slowdown and slump in demand.

"Due to the recession, the demand for Indian silk has gone down drastically. Exports have fallen by about Rs.1,000 crore in the last one year. It has hurt about 63 lakh (6.3 million) people working in this sector. Weavers are the worst hit as most of them are poor," said Hanumanthappa. The silk board is gearing up to not only raise demand in the domestic market but also to face competition from China.

"Cheap Chinese silk is giving us stiff competition. Considering the slump in demand in both domestic and foreign markets, this is like salt in a raw wound," he said.

Faced with the situation, the ministry of textiles has taken an initiative to promote the "Silk Mark", an official mark or series of marks on items made of silk, on the lines of "Hallmark" for precious metals and "Woolmark" for wool and woollen products.

