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**THE TIMES OF INDIA****Slumdog-type tales of hope in Delhi too**

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NEW DELHI: The triumph of human spirit that has made 'Slumdog Millionaire' speak in a universal language to a global audience is not just a celluloid fantasy. Even as you read this and the film gathers critical and popular acclaim, many people are trying to claw their way up from grinding poverty to give themselves an identity.

There's Vicky Roy, 21 a one-time ragpicker who is now an accomplished photographer wowing international audiences. Next month, Vicky will be flying to New York for a six-month photo assignment, recording the reconstruction of the World Trade Center. He will also study at the Visual Arts Institute in that city.

Then, there's Sanjay Malhotra, 25, who has gone from being a street bully outside the Sai Baba Temple on Lodhi Road to an activist working for rehabilitating street children. In fact, he identifies with the character of Salim in the film.

Similarly, 18-year-old Rani who sold knick-knacks at the Kalkaji Temple was saved from marriage with a 28-year-old man at the age of 14. Today, she leads a 5,000-strong group of street children. Just two days back, she got an award for her endeavour as part of Clean India campaign in Hyderabad.

Their stories are truly remarkable. It was just 10 years ago when other children were laying the foundation of their school life, that Vicky Roy ran away from his home in Purulia in West Bengal in search of a new life. His father was an impoverished tailor and Vicky wanted a way out. He landed among the ragpickers at New Delhi railway station and his dream seemed to have ended.

Something magical happened between then and now. Vicky recalls the plunge in the dark in 1999. "I stole some money from home and ran away, hopping trains and landing in New Delhi," he said. A boy of 10, he began measuring his life in empty mineral bottles and struggled to live, partly by selling leftovers on trains.

NGO Salaam Balak Trust weaned him away from the eatery he was working at, convinced him that he needed to study and enrolled him at one of their centres. Vicky stayed the course and completed Class IX in 2003.

"At that time, a foreign filmmaker came to the trust to make a documentary and I realised photography was where my heart lay. I followed him around and tried to understand the nuances of shooting. But the real break came in 2005 when I was 18 and was picked up by a renowned photographer. I jumped at the job which paid me Rs 3,000 and got me a cellphone and a bike," he recalls.

Vicky's first solo exhibition which showcased the dreams of a street child was acclaimed in London, Durban and Cape Town among other places. He then won a competition which has given him the ticket to New York on an assignment by Wilhelm & Karl Maybach Foundation.

As Vicky copes with his new life, he remembers his family left behind in Purulia. "Now I try and visit them every year." His father died last year. His mother and siblings are happy to learn that he is doing well, he says.

The story of Sanjay Malhotra may not be as spectacular but his journey from being a street bully outside the Sai Baba Temple on Lodhi Road to a child activist working for rehabilitating others like him is equally engrossing. In fact, he identifies with the character of Salim in the film. It was NGO Chetna (Childhood Enhancement Through Training & Action) that changed his life. He left his home in Delhi at the age of seven. Drugs and thefts became routine till the NGO members spotted him at the temple and recognised his potential to be a leader. "I found myself coordinating and organising children to participate in activities of the child leadership group of the NGO, Badhte Kadam," he says.

His parents now live with him and he plans to open a catering business soon.

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