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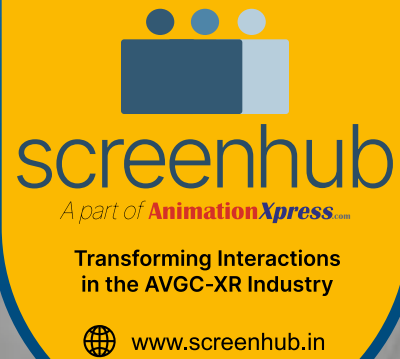
□ LIGHTS, CAMERA, BHEEM!

□ NAMASTE MIFA
INDIA PARTNER PITCH

□ VAIBHAV KUMARESH'S
'RETURN OF THE JUNGLE'

□ ANIMATED SERIES:
'BHARAT HAI HUM'





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such as the Zee-Sony merger, have faltered. The uncertainty of layoffs looms large, keeping everyone on edge.

Yet, amid these challenges, creativity has flourished. The industry has witnessed the rise of remarkable works across feature films, short films, and series, demonstrating that the Indian diaspora has embraced animation beyond just the kids' genre.

Renowned directors and ad agencies are increasingly integrating animation into their creations. Notably, the National Award winner director S S Rajamouli continues to expand the *Baahubali* universe with a new animated series on Disney+ Hotstar, following the 2017 release on Prime Video. Following suit, Telugu cinema director Nag Ashwin is delving into animation for his upcoming science fiction live-action epic, *Kalki 2898 AD*, with the animated series *B&B: Bujji & Bhairava* on Amazon Prime providing rich narrative context. Established director Imtiaz Ali, known for his acclaimed films such as *Jab We Met* and *Rockstar*, boldly blends animation with live-action in his recent biographical drama film streaming on Netflix, *Amar Singh Chamkila*, showcasing animation's evolving potential in Indian cinema.

The media and entertainment industry has been navigating a roller coaster of changes, with the Hollywood writer's strike and numerous mergers and acquisitions setting the tone. While some deals, like the Reliance Industries and The Walt Disney Company merger, have materialised, others,

India's beloved IP, *Chhota Bheem*, from Green Gold Animation, has reached a milestone of 16 years, with its live-action feature film, *The Curse of Damyaan*, setting new benchmarks for the animation industry. In advertising, Vaibhav More Films' festive campaign for Coke, produced by Hungry Films, has been on an award-winning spree, recently clinching the Kyoorius Creative Awards that recognises the best of Indian marketing communications.

Boutique studios and independent creators are also making their mark. After a decade-long wait, Vaibhav Kumaresh completed his passion project, *Return of the Jungle*, which was showcased at the Cannes Film Festival market. Studio Eeksaurus celebrated 15 years of delivering visually stunning and awe-inspiring short films and commercials with the animated short *The Seed*. Spirited independent creators like Upamanyu Bhattacharyya, Debjyoti Saha, Dhruv Sehgal, Ujwal Nair, Krishna Chandran Nair, Pari Satarkar, and Isha Mangalmurti are crafting short films that captivate with their visuals and strong storytelling. To immerse yourself in the vibrant Indian animation scene, be sure to watch the screenings of these remarkable projects, attend sessions by these innovative creators, and visit the India Pavilion.

We at AnimationXpress in an attempt to connect creators and studios initiated the Animation Creators Pitch program which witnessed two winners who are now bringing their animated visions to life. Say hello to our AnimationXpress team (Mishaal Wanvari, Neha Mehta, Anshita Bhatt), who will be there to share the latest from our dynamic industry.

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Studio Eeksaurus: 15 Years of Nurturing Animation in India

The studio celebrates its milestone with 'The Seed,' a claymation film premiering at Annecy Film Festival

By Binita Das

With over 300 films and 200 odd awards, Studio Eeksaurus has established itself as a significant name in Indian animation. As the studio celebrates its 15th anniversary, its team has crafted a nearly two-minute claymation project, *15 Years of Studio Eeksaurus "The Seed,"* celebrating the passion they've nurtured since their inception.

Animation filmmaker Suresh Eriyat, who won the first-ever Annecy Cristal for India at the Annecy International Animation Film Festival and Market, is attending the prestigious festival with this short film, which is to be screened in the competition section under the Commissioned Films category.

Eeksaurus founder and creative director Eriyat explained the idea behind the story to AnimationXpress, stating, "For me, this marked the 25th year of my association with the industry as an animation filmmaker. The film had to resonate with the studio's ethos and reflect how we approach every project developed at Eeksaurus. We liken ourselves to gardeners or farmers who carefully nurture a tree from a seed."

Laying the studio's foundation

Eriyat knew he wanted to make animation films independently when he came to Mumbai at the age of 23 in 1997. He was always drawn to artistic films and meaningful content.

After graduating from the National Institute of Design (NID),

Ahmedabad in 1997, Eriyat established Famous House of Animation, creating unforgettable animated ads, shorts, and music videos. His films have been selected at Annecy more than ten times, and he bagged the prestigious Annecy festival Cristal for his film *Fateline* in 2015, a first for India.

Eriyat shared how Indian studios and media houses were initially unaware of the significance of this victory. However, the international appreciation for their work changed perceptions. "This change was likely apparent to many Indian studios when they participated in international competitions or conferences. Until then, Indian studios were only recognised for the services they provided to Western animation content and not for the original animation capabilities we possess in India."

In the beginning, it was challenging to convince agencies and clients that animation could effectively serve communication and brand objectives. Projects like *Simpu*, *MTV Poga*, and the *Bindu* music video became popular, demonstrating the efficacy of animated films. This success led to greater trust in animation for advertisements, as seen in campaigns like *ICICI Chintamani* series and Amaron Battery TV ads.

Coinage of the studio's quirky name

The studio's name Eeksaurus is inspired by Eriyat's nickname, 'Eeks', from his NID days. The name that sounds like a breed of dinosaurs, was initially meant to be an ice breaker with stone-cold corporates

and evoke little humour. He recalls, “I still remember how sceptical I was when my wife (co-founder & executive producer Nilima Eriyat) suggested Eeksaurus as the name for our venture. I was doubtful if clients or even our team would be able to pronounce it correctly. But today, after 15 years, with over 300 films and 200 odd awards, the journey has been wonderful.”

Mastering animation styles, techniques, and collaborations

The studio’s versatility and diversity stem from their view that every story or message is unique. They explore distinctive visual narrative styles for each project. On choosing clay animation for *The Seed*, Eriyat shares, “Clay, being the soil that moulds and nourishes a plant from its seed form, seemed like the natural medium. Eeksaurus stands as the bed for good ideas to grow into beautiful films. We decided to style it unlike any other clay-animated film we had produced before.”

Eriyat noted that 95 per cent of Indian animation lacks originality, often adopting styles—both visual and storytelling—that are more trend-based. He comments, “If something is working well internationally, we unknowingly ape it. I am not against this, as long as people continue making content. It will take time for passionate animation filmmakers to become entrepreneurs and drive their studios into creating cutting-edge storytelling using animation.”

Eeksaurus values collaboration, believing that working with

individuals who possess different skills can lead to astonishing results. At the studio, young team members are often given significant responsibilities, leading to innovative ideas. Key team members Rajib Mandal, Nijin Nazeem and Adithi Krishnadas, are film directors and managers, working on their own projects with the support of Eriyat and Nilima.

Notable projects

Eriyat holds all his projects very close to his heart. “However, because *Kandittund!* is a film based on the stories I grew up hearing from my father, it always holds a special place in my heart. *Legend of Arana* follows a similar format, and I adore it! *Fisherwoman and Tuk Tuk* (FWTT) and *Tokri*, both national award winners, are also significant. *What’s Your Brown Number?* is another film I am very proud of. The fact that some of these films are directed by young animation filmmakers under our mentorship is another reason for us to feel good about them,” he exclaims.

FWTT garnered 42 million views and *Tokri* got 10 million views on YouTube, organically, proving their direct connection with the audiences. In ad films, several projects deserve more than a mention for being pioneers in their own right. Rajasthan Tourism, JSW Steel, Rotary, Google Tanjore, Embassy, the Krok films, Kitkat Astronaut, etc., are few such examples.

Building great ideas and creative liberty

Eriyat encourages his team to “voice even the crappiest thoughts

that come to their mind” as that can lead to great ideas that eventually turn into an unforgettable product.

Young aspirants who dream of joining Eeksaurus should have enthusiasm, a strong desire to make films, and excellent drawing skills. “We place a lot of emphasis on the 2D method of pre-production as the foundational element across all animation mediums. From the design stage to prototyping, or in our field, from story boarding, character design, and world design to animatics — these steps are crucial for all mediums. So, even our stop-motion animators are encouraged to draw and create animatics for whatever they are going to animate, to gain a deep understanding of what they are trying to achieve as a film. I have seen that the ownership of a film increases with this level of involvement right from the onset,” he shares.

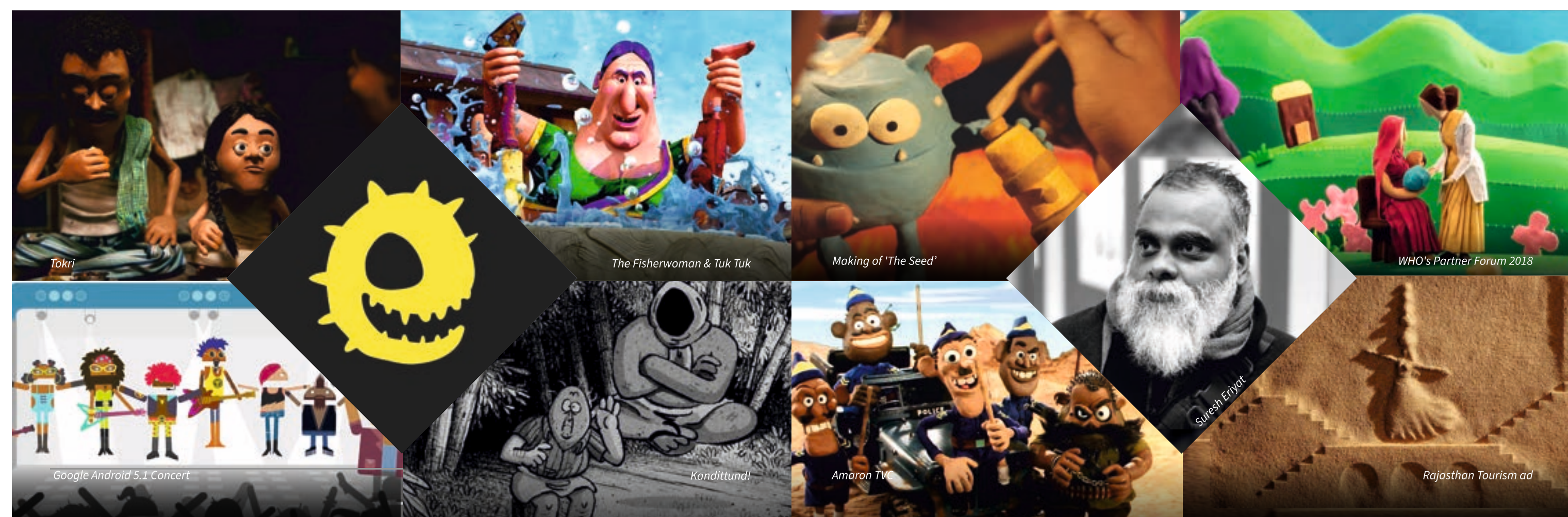
Eriyat shared that working with big corporate houses can sometimes be challenging, especially when clients are inflexible. “I have observed when a client or an agency becomes too adamant about how I should make a film, the film never does well. And I believe it’s not my doing; the lack of creative freedom suffocates a creative output, preventing it from evolving beyond its original form/scope.” Certain times when the client is not receptive to new suggestions and not on the same page, they refuse the project.

Upcoming projects

The Eeksaurus team is currently working on several in-house short films and feature film/series pitches. Over the last two years, the studio was working with Netflix US to create a short film for an upcoming anthology of 10 shorts directed by 10 global animation film directors. Being part of that esteemed lineup was an honour for Eriyat. “Unfortunately, the project was called off last year due to a change in strategy at Netflix HO but they were generous enough to return our rights. This is a project with huge global potential, and we are currently seeking funding partners to realise this project on a larger scale,” he discloses. They are also developing a feature film that includes a live-action VFX world.

As Eeksaurus prepares for Anancy, Eriyat looks forward to recharging creatively by observing the latest trends in animation filmmaking, storytelling, and technology.

“Anancy Festival provides an overview of the globally pertinent issues that animators as a community are representing through their works,” he concludes ■



Tokri

The Fisherwoman & Tuk Tuk

Making of 'The Seed'

WHO's Partner Forum 2018

Google Android 5.1 Concert

Kandittund!

Amaron TVC

Suresh Eriyat

Rajasthan Tourism ad

Rediscovering Ancient Tales

Vaibhav Kumaresh blends indigenous storytelling and modern animation in his feature film 'Return of the Jungle'

By Anshita Bhatt

Since childhood, Vaibhav Kumaresh has been captivated by Indian folk tales and mythology. Believing these stories to be both entertaining and rich in timeless lessons, he embarked on creating *Return of the Jungle* (ROTJ), his first 3D animated feature film, produced by his independent studio, Vaibhav Studios.

A modern adventure rooted in ancient wisdom

Set in contemporary India, *Return of the Jungle* is the story of a group of junior school classmates who are faced with the daunting task of outwitting the biggest, meanest bully in school. To help them ride through this impossible journey, they have Thatha – the coolest grandpa in town, who peps them up with his highly inspiring stories from the ancient jungles of India. Together, they must build a ruthless Dinosaur, fight a nerve-racking game of cricket, and travel all the way to the Indian state of Rajasthan, to rediscover the power of friendship, compassion and determination.

“I had a strong desire to retell our folk stories my own way and I found animation to be a highly potent medium to execute them. Moreover, I didn't see anyone making these films the way I had them in my head! So I was even more determined to do it,” exclaims the film's director Kumaresh.

The story takes shape

With a small team of artists, Kumaresh took a step-by-step approach to producing the film. He delved into India's popular

folktales—*Panchatantra*, *Hitopadesha*, and *The Jataka Tales*—drawing inspiration and gradually building a story structure that excited him. Characters and situations began to emerge, a dedicated team was assembled, and they even taught themselves new tools to bring the film to life. Songs were written and recorded, dances choreographed, and storyboards timed to scratch dialogues, making individual scenes come alive.

Business and creativity go side-by-side

The 105-minute feature has been in production since 2012, a time when Indian animation films were struggling at the box office, and funding was scarce. Kumaresh and his core team of 17 artists decided to self-fund the film by saving from their commercial projects.

Vaibhav Studios has created commercials for M&E giants like Disney and Nickelodeon, as well as FMCG companies like Hindustan Unilever, Havmor, and DS Group. Notably, the studio produced the Emmy Award-winning series *Lamput* for Cartoon Network. Conceptualised by Kumaresh, produced by Vaibhav Studios, and released on TV and digital platforms by Turner, *Lamput* instantly became globally popular.

“Creating original and successful IPs for our clients in varied mediums has been our core strength and our main source of business. We would save from our commercial projects and then



Vaibhav Kumaresh



The team at Vaibhav Studios



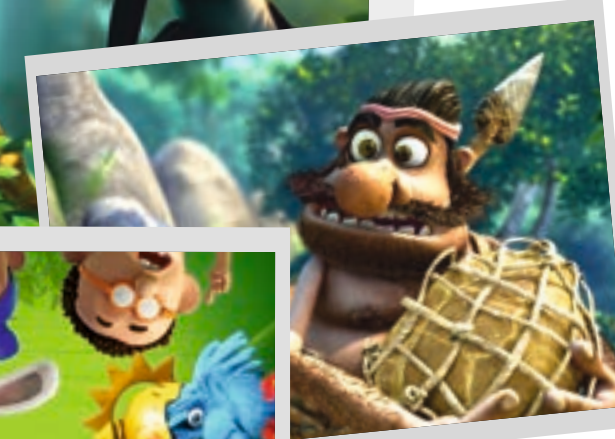
together. For the first time, they will see India captured in animation with such everyday realism.”

ROTJ was one of the five films chosen by India's National Film Development Corporation to be screened at the Cannes Film Festival market. The film has won at the New York International Film Awards and the Oniros Film Awards, New York. It was also selected for competition at the Cartoons on the Bay Pulcinella Awards, the Tokyo Lift-Off Film Festival and the Uganda Film Festival.

India's Toonz Media Group is exploring the global sale of the film (excluding India) until August 2024. Back at Vaibhav Studios, a full *ROTJ* universe – comprising a series and two more films – is in development.

“Stories by indigenous storytellers need to be captured in our films,” believes Kumaresh. “I strongly believe that the more local and personal our stories are, the more unique they become for our audiences – especially in today's context when there

is such an overdose of content from all over the globe!” ■



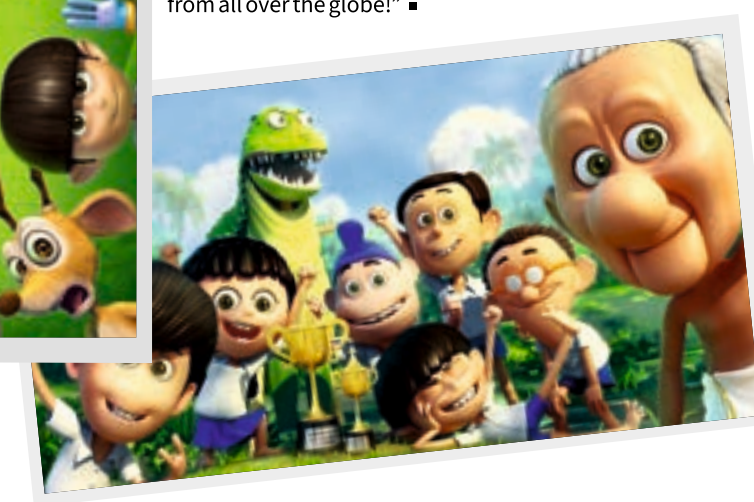
invest it right back into the feature film,” shares Kumaresh.

Kumaresh reveals, “When business was good and we had saved enough, we would target to finish large chunks of work. The same team would make the money and then make the film.”

The self-funding approach led to intermittent starts and stops in production. “I congratulate the team for their persistence in sticking to the vision and the sheer passion they have shown in completing the film,” he says.

Indian in spirit, universal in appeal

Although deeply rooted in Indian culture, *ROTJ* carries universal themes. Be it the emotional journey of the school children or the fun-filled animal stories, the themes of friendship and courage shine throughout. “I am sure families across the globe will enjoy watching this film





Dog Denied Visa

In his animated musical 'Lucky Dog,' Ujwal Nair tells the story of a pet dog who wishes to immigrate to Canada

By Anshita Bhatt

Back in 2016, the now independent animation filmmaker Ujwal Nair wanted to immigrate to Canada but was denied a visa. Around the same time, one of his friends moved to Canada with five of her cats. Nair couldn't help but find the situation ironic; while his own visa application was rejected, the feline companions were granted entry. This whimsical disparity sparked a thought – "What if Indians are so obsessed with going abroad that it rubs off on their pets?" This intriguing notion laid the foundation for Nair's 21-minute 2D animated film *Lucky Dog*.

Lucky Dog tells the story of Dice, a pet dog that wants to immigrate to Canada. In many ways, the film can be called a tragicomedy. Dice, who has it all but still wants more, makes for a character that in many ways represents human emotions. But what got our attention is the way his story is woven in songs, and how through songs, other characters too get a voice in the story.

The film had its world premiere at Animela –

India's international animation festival in Mumbai in January 2024. AnimationXpress caught up with Nair to speak about his independently produced film. Below are the excerpts from the interview:

From drawing board to animating, how have you made this film?

The film took four years to make. I wrote the story outline followed by the lyrics and screenplay in 2020. In 2021 my co-producer and wife, Indou Theagrajan, came on board and we hired Aditi Ramesh, our composer. In 2022, we received the final mastered tracks and I completed the layouts, animatic and rough animation. In 2023 we completed the clean-up, backgrounds, compositing and sound. As is the case with most productions, the final stretch was the most intense.

For the script, I took inspiration from stage musicals like *The Book of Mormon*, Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton* and musical comedy acts by Tim Minchin and Bo Burnham. Those were some of the

references I shared with Aditi as well. For the visual aspects I was influenced by the work of Brad Bird, Genndy Tartakovsky and Cartoon Saloon.

Why a musical and what preparations went behind it?

The film's structure was such that the dog had to provide a lot of back-story. Doing it through voice-over was an option but I wanted it to be more exciting. I was drawn to musicals because I enjoyed the wordplay and wanted to bring that element to the writing. This is an emotional story with ups and downs so I thought music could elevate the emotions of the film.

Before writing the lyrics, I got a basic understanding of song structure. I learned what a verse, chorus and bridge were. To break the monotony from one song to the next, I played around with the lengths of the verses while being conscious of the syllable count in every verse.

The songs were going to impact the pacing of the film so along with the final script and



UJWAL NAIR

lyrics, I gave Aditi detailed briefs for every song. This included how long each song needed to be, the tonal shifts, the changes in the pace. I mentioned where I wanted musical interludes with no vocals, where I wanted silence, where I wanted lines to be spoken rather than sung. I was concerned she would find it overwhelming but she welcomed it. Along with her skilled team of musicians, she delivered a soundtrack that hit all the right notes.

Tell us about designing the characters in Lucky Dog.

Since the film had multiple characters, I went for a simple and stylised approach to the character design. I wanted the characters to be interesting to look at and somewhat easy to draw. Luck plays a big role in the dog's life so I named him Dice and based his appearance on a playing dice – white with black spots. His triangular shape allows him to keep his nose up in the air, which felt appropriate for his character because he's a bit snooty and thinks he's better than everyone else!

How many people have worked on this film?

A team of 18 has worked on the film. The music team comprised eight artists. The sound and foley team consisted of five artists, led by our sound designer Dinesh Kumar. The animation team consisted of three cleanup and in-between animators – Subhajit Kar, Suman Manna and I; and one animation colourist, Labani Ganguly. Indou (Nair's wife) and I co-produced the film. She

was also instrumental in budgeting, making schedules, file management, creating and maintaining tracking sheets, being a sounding board for creative ideas, and thinking on her feet in difficult situations. We brought one of my favourite animation filmmakers Krishna Chandran on board as a consultant to help guide us through the production process.

The goal was to keep the team small because the project was entirely self-funded. In order to do that, I took on most of the visual art requirements including visual development, storyboarding, rough animation, backgrounds and compositing.

How did you fund this film?

At the beginning of pre-production, we applied for a few art grants but that didn't work out. At some point, I realised that if I wanted to get the film made, I had to finance it myself. I was getting a steady income from my day job and I had some money saved up. I decided to spend most of it on this film.

We allocated a significant portion of the budget to the music and sound and with the money that was left, we hired a couple of animation artists. As with my previous shorts I took on a majority of the visual art roles to keep costs down.

What are the challenges of producing independently?

Lucky Dog is the third animated film I've written, directed and self-financed. In my previous productions I did almost everything

myself so the financial cost was not a factor. *Lucky Dog* required a variety of skills and more time and effort to produce so I had to hire artists to help me make it. It ended up costing quite a bit of money.

The biggest challenge in making an independent film is the lack of funding. However, I really enjoyed having time and creative control to make the film the way I wanted. Apart from decent budgets and possible limits to creative freedom, I think the process of producing an independent short film is not that different from producing a film for a studio. Both require discipline, skill, strong will and an appetite for collaboration.

From an idea to turning it into a film, how has your journey been?

It's been exciting and rewarding but there were times when it was very challenging. We had our share of setbacks and moments of self-doubt. But even when things got really difficult, I had to acknowledge what a privilege it was to be able to self-fund and work on a passion project.

What is brewing next?

I'm excited about the prospect of making a feature film. I'm eager to get back to writing! Although it can get frustrating, for me it's one of the most rewarding stages of the filmmaking process. ■



A Blend Rarely Explored

Imtiaz Ali and philmCGI collaborate on an unprecedented blend of animation and live-action for Indian film

By Anshita Bhatt

Anyone who has watched Indian director Imtiaz Ali's films will attest to his distinctive storytelling, memorable characters, and masterful filmmaking, evident in works like *Highway*, *Love Aaj Kal*, *Rockstar*, *Jab We Met*, *Cocktail*, and *Tamasha*. However, his latest Netflix film, *Amar Singh Chamkila*, takes an unexpected turn, setting a new benchmark in Indian cinema.

Ali's film is a biopic based on the life of Punjabi singer Amar Singh Chamkila – who at the mere age of 27, along with his wife was shot dead by assailants in 1988. While the film has been applauded for its portrayal of the young singer (popularly known by the name "Chamkila") who was known for his notorious lyrics, it has also been hailed for its narrative that blends animation with live-action, a style yet uncharted for Indian cinema.

Segments of Chamkila's life are depicted through animation, crafted by VFX and animation studio philmCGI. Under the creative direction of Kanchi Kanani, the team of 10 artists pitched three distinct styles to the film's director Ali: traditional 2D animation, roto animation (drawing frames over live-action footage), and comic-style sequences. "Imtiaz Ali was so impressed that he made the bold decision to incorporate all three styles into the film – a move unprecedented in the film industry," shares Kanani. "His enthusiastic approval marked our entry into the world of *Amar Singh Chamkila*."

The film's script had pre-identified sequences for animation, with Ali envisioning the rawness of 1980s rural Punjab. "To align with his vision, we provided a diverse range of references and videos, refining the desired aesthetic to ensure the animation seamlessly integrated with the live-action," explains Kanani. "This innovative approach worked out beautifully, as each style served a purpose within the narrative, enhancing the storytelling in unique ways."

The Pune-based studio's team engaged in numerous creative discussions with the director and DA, and developed rough thumbnails to ensure a cohesive vision before filming began. Kanani was present on set to oversee the shots before and after the



animation sequences. "Following the shoot, we followed the regular animation process - creating animatics, character designs, environments, animation and final compositing. Since integrating live-action with animation is rarely seen in Indian mainstream cinema, we were particularly focused on making this transition smooth and maintaining the integrity of the live-action narrative," highlights Kanani.

The young creative director believes that the fusion of animation and live-action in *Chamkila* is a big moment in cinema. "This innovative approach not only expands the possibilities of storytelling but also showcases a new and captivating form of filmmaking that has yet to be explored on celluloid. With animation, the director has the freedom to depict scenes and concepts that may be impossible or impractical to achieve in live-action, unlocking endless potential," she says. "As Imtiaz Ali aptly



Photo: instagram/imtiazaliofficial



Photo: instagram/imtiazaliofficial



Photo: instagram/imtiazaliofficial

describes it, this venture was akin to discovering a new tool—one that added a fresh dimension to storytelling."

Chamkila marked philmCGI's first project with the acclaimed director and his production house Window Seat Films. "For our team, this opportunity was the culmination of our aspirations. To have the chance to bring this vision to life alongside such esteemed collaborators is nothing short of exhilarating. Working with the best directors, actors, and production teams, we're proud to contribute our craft to the film while carving out our own unique space in the cinematic landscape," she points out.

For Kanani, the highlight was being on set and working closely with the director and DOP. "It was a learning experience like no other," she exclaims. "What made it truly special was the director's commitment to creative freedom, his genuine eagerness to listen, and his openness to our opinions and feedback. Under his leadership, each department was motivated to showcase its talents and share its perspectives on the project. In *Amar Singh Chamkila*, this approach has yielded remarkable results!"

Kanani's team at philmCGI is currently immersed in a documentary *Indira's Emergency*, where their animation styles will again drive the story.

For Kanani, "despite the challenges, the opportunity to contribute to something remarkable like *Chamkila* has made every moment of hard work utterly worthwhile. It's moments like these that fuel my drive and remind me why I love what I do." And isn't that the same for all passionate artists?

India Spark: Illuminating the path to global content syndication

India Spark, a subsidiary of Animation Xpress under the Indian Television Dot Com group, is making waves in the global syndication and distribution market. Specialising in the dissemination of films, television series, documentaries, and particularly animation content, India Spark has swiftly emerged as a key player in the industry.

The company's primary focus lies in simplifying the process of content transactions, making them seamless and efficient. With a profound understanding of the video content ecosystem, both domestically and internationally, India Spark caters to the diverse needs of the entertainment spectrum. From content aggregation to collaborating closely with platforms and rights holders, the company also provides tailored marketing and programming solutions.

Diverse portfolio and global reach

India Spark boasts an impressive portfolio of syndication productions, featuring catalogues from leading Indian studios like Balaji Tele Films, Excel Entertainment, Beano Studio (UK), Adda Times (Kolkata), SPI International (Poland), and more. Its current representation extends across the Indian subcontinent, encompassing regions like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal.

In the realm of animation syndication, the company has secured deals such as selling two seasons of *Dennis and Gnasher - Unleashed!* to ETV, which has been dubbed into 10 Indian languages besides English. Its expertise extends to acting as an acquisitions agency, with a notable presence in major content markets throughout the year, including Mip TV, Mip Jr, Mipcom, Mip Cancun, Annecy International Animation Film Festival and Market, Content



Dennis and Gnasher - Unleashed!

Tokyo, ATF Singapore, ACE Fair Korea, and Kids Screen USA.

Comprehensive localisation services

The company has successfully dubbed numerous animation short series into multiple languages and even localised an entire Turkish channel into Hindi. With language offerings spanning English (UK/US), over 10 Indian languages, French, Italian, Serbian, Bhasa, Urdu, and more, it ensures accessibility across Southeast Asia at competitive pricing.

In addition to its syndication efforts, India Spark introduces innovative technology-based solutions to the media and entertainment industry. One such standout offering is Megaphone TV, a pioneering viewer engagement tool that enhances interactive experiences for audiences.

In conclusion, India Spark's presence in the entertainment industry resembles that of a crucial puzzle piece. With its extensive portfolio, deep industry understanding, and commitment to innovation, the company continues to play a pivotal role in shaping the global content landscape ■

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DISCOVER THE POWER OF GLOBAL SYNDICATION WITH INDIA SPARK!

Indian government boosts incentives for foreign film productions with Rs 300 million cap

When it comes to global entertainment and filmmaking, India has been earning accolades owing to the creative genius of the country's content producers. The government of India (GOI) has also been fueling growth with lucrative initiatives and schemes, attracting more business in the entertainment sector.

To streamline foreign film productions and ensure Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) in India, GOI announced "Incentive Scheme for Production of Foreign Films in India" at Cannes, offering filmmakers a reimbursement of up to 30 per cent of the expenses incurred for film production in the country, capped at a figure of Rs 2.5 crore. Later, this incentive was enhanced from 30 to 40 per cent. Today, the incentive for foreign film production in the country stands at 40 per cent of the expenses incurred, with an increased cap limit of Rs 300 million (USD 3.6 million approximately) and an additional five per cent bonus for Significant Indian Content (SIC).

These incentives are provided on the recommendation of a Special Incentive Evaluation Committee. India's Film Facilitation Office (FFO), which is set up under the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC), executes this incentive scheme, acting as a single-window facilitation mechanism that eases filming as well as creates an ecosystem, promoting the country as a filming destination. The services rendered by the FFO have now been extended to Indian filmmakers as well.

International productions (for documentaries only) that have been granted shooting permission by India's Ministry of Information & Broadcasting (I&B) and Ministry of External Affairs after 01.04.2022 are also eligible for this incentive. The scheme is aimed at live shoots

as well as animation, post-production and VFX services and for official co-productions with foreign countries.

Under the Incentive Scheme for Production of Foreign Films in India, for all qualifying projects, the Indian service company on behalf of the international production can claim a cashback incentive of up to 30 per cent on qualifying expenditure. In addition, producers can claim two more bonuses - 1) a five per cent bonus for employing 15 per cent or more Indians and 2) another five per cent for SIC.

The official co-productions under the co-production treaties signed by the Indian government include films like *Last Film Show* (Indo-French), *Union Leader* (Indo-Canada), *The Hero of Centopia* (Indo-German) and *Sir* (Indo-French). International co-productions with NFDC include *Beyond The Known World* (Indo-New Zealand), *Sunrise* (Indo-French) and *Chauthikoot* (Indo-French).

India has also provided incentives for animation and VFX works. Foreign productions that undertake pure animation, post-production and VFX services in India can claim up to 30 per cent of the qualifying expenses (75 per cent of contract value) plus an additional bonus of five per cent for SIC, subject to a maximum of Rs 300 million. No prior permission is required for such projects. Indian service companies apply for interim approval on signing of contracts. Under the incentive scheme for audio-visual co-production, the Indian co-producer can claim a payable cash reimbursement of up to 30 per cent on qualifying expenditure in India, subject to a maximum of Rs 300 million (USD 3.6 million approximately). The project must have been granted a "co-production" status by the I&B Ministry and the participating country(ies),

under one of India's official bi-lateral co-production treaties on audio-visual co-production.

India has audio-visual co-production treaties with 16 countries - Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Russia, Spain and the United Kingdom.

In November 2023, NFDC Film Bazaar partnered with Southeast Asian AudioVisual Association (SAAVA) and the ATF IP Accelerator Project Market (AIPA) for a multi-year collaboration, enhancing film and TV co-productions across Asia.

Apart from the centre, state governments are also crafting policies tailored to the AVGC-XR sector, exemplified by Karnataka's revised AVGC-XR Policy 3.0, spanning 2024-2029. The report mentions incentives for international productions; it provides reimbursement of up to 20 per cent of the qualified expenditure, capped at Rs 1 crore per company limited to two sanctions during the policy period. The contract value of the project should be at least Rs 2.5 crores to qualify for this incentive.

At the core of this strategy is the Global Innovation Alliance (GIA) initiative by the Karnataka government. Through GIA, the state will foster collaborations with international tech hubs and innovation epicenters. GIA has partnerships and market access with 32 plus countries spread across Europe, Asia, Oceania, North America, South America, and Africa ■



Celebrating Friendship, Adventure, & Indian Folklore

Ele Animations and Toonz Media Group bring 'Jay Jagannath' – a vibrant new series to Pogo

By Binita Das



With a shared vision of promoting cultural diversity through animation, Ele Animations and Toonz Media Group have come together to create an adorable animated series *Jay Jagannath* (52 x 11'), immersing viewers into Indian heritage and folklore while delivering bite-sized storytelling experiences.

The 2D episodic debuted on Warner Bros. Discovery's kids TV channel Pogo on 20 May 2024. "While we initially released the show in six languages - Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Marathi, and Malayalam, we are open to expanding to more languages in the future based on audience demand," says Ele Animations founder-director Durga Prasad. "Odia is also on the cards, given the Indian state Odisha's significance as the abode of

Lord Jagannath. We understand the importance of honouring this heritage and are exploring opportunities to bring *Jay Jagannath* to audiences in languages that resonate with Eastern India. English is definitely a possibility, considering its universal appeal and the diverse viewership it can attract."

Toonz Media Group chief executive officer P Jayakumar explains that the project's unique storytelling approach and thematic depth drew them to collaborate with Ele Animations. "We recognised the potential to introduce audiences to the lesser-known narratives surrounding Lord Jagannath and were eager to bring these stories to life," he says. Toonz holds exclusive distribution rights for the IP.

The show will be accessible to viewers across South Asia wherever the WBD's Pogo channel is available.

"Stories infused with local flavours possess a unique charm and authenticity that often transcend geographical boundaries. While *Jay Jagannath* celebrates Indian culture and folklore, we believe its



universal themes of friendship and adventure, and stories derived from India's rich cultural heritage have the potential to resonate with global audiences," said Warner Bros Discovery South Asia kids cluster head Uttam Pal Singh.

Jayakumar too feels that Indian stories with a local flavour resonate with the Indian diaspora worldwide. "We've seen this with other successful Indian animated properties and believe that *Jay Jagannath* will captivate viewers across the globe."

When asked about important aspects to connect with the Pogo's audience, Singh replies, "A crucial element is highlighting relatable and culturally resonant content with characters that are not just fun but present strong role models and heartwarming personalities, such as the lead characters of *Chhota Bheem* and *Little Singham*. Pogo has strategically secured a commanding market share in kids' programming by offering animated content spanning multiple genres from comedy to slapstick to adventure to mythology. These diverse range of stories in varied and engaging formats cater to kids across two to 14 years."

Toonz has aimed *Jay Jagannath's* viewership at everyone from children to adults. While young viewers will be enchanted by the colourful characters and engaging storylines, older audiences will appreciate the narrative depth and the cultural significance. When asked if this series would appeal to youth who feel distant from traditions and devotion, Prasad says, "We believe that Jay Jagannath can resonate with youth by presenting timeless themes of loyalty and self-discovery in a modern and relatable context. The series aims to bridge the gap between tradition and contemporary values, making it relevant to a diverse audience."

To maximise the reach of the series, Toonz is considering distribution on OTT platforms. Jayakumar also discusses merchandise and

licensing opportunities, "Plans are in motion to develop a range of products inspired by the series, including toys, apparel, books and more, to further engage with fans and extend the brand's presence beyond the screen."

The promotional efforts and the post-launch response have been overwhelmingly positive across social media and other platforms. "While we focused on the successful launch of the first season, we are optimistic about the potential for future seasons. Discussions are underway, and we're excited to continue exploring the adventures of the show's characters Jagan and Balram in subsequent seasons," adds Prasad.

The first season of this poignant tale focuses on captivating viewers with rich storytelling and cultural heritage. Eventually, it will explore innumerable untold stories of Lord Jagannath ■



Biren Ghose's Anney Affair

Celebrating global success and Indian animation's future



Biren Ghose

By Binita Das

Mikros Animation, the animation arm of Technicolor Group, continues to make significant strides in the animation industry, showcasing its expertise at prestigious events like the Anney Film Festival. This year as well, at the 62nd edition of Anney, the studio will have a substantial presence at both the recruitment pavilion and in various sessions.

Technicolor Group Asia Pacific managing director Biren Ghose highlights the importance of the Anney Film Festival, stating, "Anney is first and foremost a competitive creative congregation and in parallel has a marketplace [MIFA] which has become a venue to forge new relationships and business alliances. Overall, it's a world forum to celebrate both the creative and the commercial world of animation."

Mikros Animation showcases *Thelma & the Unicorn*

Mikros Animation will be showcasing its amazing talent who have worked on titles such as *Thelma & the Unicorn*, which has reached the second spot in the Top 10 most-watched films worldwide on Netflix, garnering 17.3 million views in just two weeks.

Mikros Animation Bengaluru (India) played a crucial role in the film's production, handling modeling, animation, effects, lighting, and rendering. Ghose emphasised the complexity of transitioning from episodic content to feature films. "Long form content requires studios to massively upskill, as well as creates a palpable shift in the mindset of the artist. Unlike episodic content, features are a much larger and longer-term commitment- for both a studio as well as for an individual artist."

Regarding *Thelma & the Unicorn*, Ghose explains, "More specifically, when it comes to the posing of the characters, they are very pushed to exaggerate what they are doing physically or emotionally, especially when it comes to a character like Vic, who is over the top. When it comes to Thelma however, she is more grounded, and her animation and acting choices are more naturalistic since she is the dramatic centre of the movie."

The Bengaluru team thoroughly enjoyed working on the project, motivated by the script's beauty, humour, and the diversity of characters.

Other projects delivered by Mikros Animation Bengaluru

Over the past year, the Bengaluru team has contributed to several high-profile projects. On the features side, they worked on *Orion and The Dark*, and *Paw Patrol 2*, both achieving resounding success. On the episodic side, they have worked on a diverse slate of projects, including *The Legend of Hanuman*, *Strek Trek Prodigy Season 2*, and *Mickey Mouse Funhouse* (all three seasons).

Orion and The Dark, a DreamWorks Animation production streaming on Netflix, is based on a successful book with a compelling storyline. “The experience of working on this feature was an exceptional one, as we delivered end-to-end work - right from modelling to post-production. It was a very visual-effects and compositing-intensive project. From an animation point of view, the style was very subtle and grounded,” Ghose mentions.

Future of Indian animation

The Indian M&E sector grew over eight percent in 2023 to cross INR 2.3 trillion (EUR 25.5 million), while the Indian VFX and Animation segment grew six percent in 2023 to reach INR 114 billion (EUR 1.27 billion). Despite this optimistic outlook, Ghose acknowledges challenges, notably the proliferation of free animation tools posing a significant barrier to market expansion.

“The Government of India has seized the tremendous opportunity to tell our stories, to create jobs with new skills, to foster an IP development climate and to look at services as a major earner of foreign exchange through global production in India. Accordingly, it is in the pilot phase of launching a major National Center of Excellence [NCOE] for AVGC. As a part of the task force with a mission to propel this sector I shall be scouting for opportunities and partners for the NCOE at Anancy,” he shares.

Ghose elaborates on the Anancy experience

Having attended the event for a couple of decades, Ghose believes it is essential for those in the M&E business and AVGC stakeholders to participate in Anancy. He highlights the convergence of industry giants alongside students and startups as a unique aspect of the festival.

Asked about his favourite segment of the festival, Ghose pointed to the gathering of brilliant minds. “The Women in Animation momentum, the picnic in the park with the who’s who of the industry, the masterclasses by the leading creatives in the world and importantly the student film categories which are bold and pioneering when it comes to new styles and techniques. We are in the business of imagery and storytelling. Collaboration, creativity, innovation, and passion are key ingredients to thrive in this business. The Anancy Festival is an incredible showcase to demonstrate how these blend together,” concludes he ■



India Pavilion at Anancy Festival

The India Pavilion at **The Anancy Festival** - the leading showcase and marketplace for the animation industry, is **spearheaded by the Ministry of IT & BT, Government of Karnataka, and curated by ABAI.**

The India Pavilion is all set to showcase the accomplishments, potential and prowess of the country’s animation, visual effects, gaming, comics, and extended reality (AVGC-XR) sector and its evolution to become an important contributor to global production. As the **Anancy International Animation Film Festival and MIFA (Anancy Animation Film Market)** witness the presence of the crème-de-la-crème of the entertainment business, the pavilion will bring to the forefront India’s animation and VFX companies as they acceleratingly shine on the global stage.

The India Pavilion is all set to witness a bouquet of Indian talent **showcasing their brand prowess and IP / production services offerings.** Driven by the goal of creating a bridge between Indian studios and the rich business of animation, the contingent is poised to create business opportunities and network with leading professionals and businesses to advance the India AVGC story. The Anancy International Animation Film Market is the world-leading animation market to promote the Indian AVGC-XR ecosystem to international exposure and visibility.

As the festival and MIFA witness cutting-edge animation including emerging tech, the funding from the Indian central and Karnataka state governments is key support for the growth of the India story.

One of the key goals of India Pavilion is to empower IP from Indian creators and

Indian themes. It is a major impetus for both ABAI and Karnataka, and the **Namaste India - Partner Pitch** on 12 June at Anancy, is a crucial step in that direction. **Anancy is also in an alliance with Animela;** an important initiative and these selected IP-creators were brought to ABAI’s Bengaluru GAFX - a key congregation of India’s AVGC industry.

Minister of ITBT of Karnataka (India), Priyank Kharge comments, “Karnataka is synonymous with high technology across several sectors and has also become the gold standard location for startups. The Bangalore Model has exhibited exemplary proficiency in enabling global majors to leverage India both as a global and domestic base for their business. We pioneered the AVGC space being both the skilling and production epicentre for the sector and are innovating new ways to accelerate and incubate the animation and gaming sector.

We are deeply cognisant of the salience of the AVGC-XR sector, which has spurred the Government of Karnataka to launch the new AVGC-XR policy. This policy will further grow the state’s AVGC ecosystem. Our first-of-a-kind Centre of Excellence (CoE) will act as a catalyst for further growth and opportunity. At Anancy, we are amplifying our strategy to make Karnataka the “go-to” state for AVGC IP creation production of projects as well as for technologies that will transform content creation in the new age of AI and ML. We are focused on building skills at scale to realise that outcome and maintain our leadership.”

Government of Karnataka Department of Electronics Information Technology Biotechnology and Science & Technology IAS, secretary Dr. Ekroop Caur mentions, “The AVGC-XR sector’s vast potential is underwritten in its estimated worth of USD 366 billion globally. With a significant share

of 46 per cent in animation and VFX and 54 per cent in gaming, India emerges as a formidable player. The state of Karnataka, in particular, has a deep impetus to create more AVGC sector startups as well as boost original IP creation. We want Karnataka to be seen as the hub with an 'end-to-end ecosystem' for innovating and growing businesses. We aim to bridge the digital divide to ensure the benefits of technology reach every citizen, regardless of their background.”

Technicolor Group Asia Pacific managing director and ABAI president Biren Ghose says, “From exploring and underscoring emerging trends in the AVGC industry to leveraging cutting-edge technologies and fostering collaboration across diverse stakeholders, India has continued to drive innovation and growth in the dynamic world of AVGC-XR. At Technicolor Group, we have been the pioneers, helping scale talent and technology to persons at world-class awards-winning levels across movies, episodes, games, and branded content.

Leveraging our rich creative history we have proven that India is a premium player in digital production of imagery across VFX and animation. We have supported and been supported by the Government of Karnataka to create an enabling environment in which our craft can showcase its pre-eminence. The India Pavilion supported by Karnataka shall showcase the Karnataka Model and use this to advocate the state’s new policies and incentives to further accelerate the talent development and production industry.

Intellectual Property (IP) and co-productions are now our focus and Anancy provides a springboard towards those ambitions.” ■



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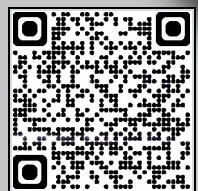


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Lights, Camera, Bheem!

Creator of beloved dhoti-clad animated superhero Chhota Bheem, Rajiv Chilaka looks back at his 15 years long journey



By Binita Das

Chhota Bheem, the laddoo-loving chubby little boy, has captivated children's hearts since his debut on Indian television screens in 2008. Created by Green Gold Animation CEO Rajiv Chilaka in 2003, *Chhota Bheem* premiered on Indian television screens in 2008 when Turner Broadcasting System took the bold step of entering uncharted territory and launched it on their kids' entertainment channel, Pogo.

"Launching *Chhota Bheem* in 2008 was a bit of a leap of faith. Back then, there wasn't much Indian content for kids on TV, and the industry wasn't sure if a homegrown hero would resonate. But we believed in the potential of creating a show that captured the hearts of Indian children," Chilaka recalls. However, the

gamble paid off, transforming *Chhota Bheem* into one of India's most successful animation IPs over the past 15-plus years. "It's been a fantastic journey, filled with challenges and triumphs, but ultimately, it's all about bringing joy to kids," he adds.

A big part of the success can be attributed to the show's availability in multiple Indian languages, like Hindi, Tamil and Telugu, as it made *Chhota Bheem* accessible to a vast and diverse audience, promoting regional languages and fostering cultural inclusivity.

The secret to longevity

The sustained popularity of *Chhota Bheem* can be attributed to several



Rajiv Chilaka

factors. "There's no single secret ingredient, but a few things have definitely helped the IP stay popular for so long," says Chilaka. Firstly, the show focuses on relatable stories that revolve around friendship, bravery, and overcoming challenges—universal themes that resonate with children everywhere. They have also kept the humour simple and fun, using slapstick and silly situations that make kids laugh.

Chilaka stresses, "We never forget our roots." The series incorporates Indian culture and mythology, showcasing a fictional Indian village that helps kids see themselves reflected on screen.

Innovation has also been key. "We're always coming up with new ideas and adventures for *Chhota Bheem*. There have been movies, games, and even theme park rides! It's all about keeping the experience exciting for kids," Chilaka explains.

Financial success and company growth

The IP's success has significantly impacted Green Gold Animation's growth. "Financially, it has given us the security to take some creative leaps," Chilaka says. This stability has allowed the company to develop new shows like *Chhota Startup*, *Mighty Little Bheem*, *Mighty Raju*, *Arjun* etc, bringing fresh stories and characters to Indian children.

"Most importantly, *Chhota Bheem*'s success has allowed us to invest in our most valuable asset: our people," he exclaims. Green Gold was able to attract and retain talented animators, writers and other creative minds, creating a thriving animation studio while staying true to its core mission of bringing joy to kids through storytelling.

360-degree development of the IP

The incredible fan base for the IP fueled the creation of Green Gold Licensing and Merchandising, which led to partnerships with over 100 brands. "It's been amazing to see *Chhota Bheem* on everything from toys to stationery to clothes!" Chilaka exclaims. Collaborations with FMCG companies like Asian Paints, Dabur, Mattel, Oral-B, Cadbury, Kellogg's, Milton, and household favourites like Parle-G have brought the character closer to its fans through a wide range of products.

In today's digital world, the IP has a strong online presence. Green Gold has developed engaging apps and online games that let fans interact with the characters in new ways, taking kids on exciting journeys through Dholakpur (the fictional town where the show is set) while sneaking in valuable lessons about logic and memory. This keeps the experience fresh and exciting for a new generation of kids discovering the character for the first time.

Chhota Bheem-centric events and campaigns have also become popular, including fan meet-ups at leading malls across the Indian cities of Mumbai, Delhi,

Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Pune, Hyderabad, and Mangalore, featuring engaging challenges, live performances, and games.

The highlight of the development of *Chhota Bheem* IP is its live-action debut. Marking the 15th anniversary, the studio leaped into live-action feature film space with *Chhota Bheem and the Curse of Damyaan*. "It felt like a natural step. We wanted to offer something new and exciting for our fans," shares Chilaka. The film was released in theatres on 31 May 2024. "The response so far has been fantastic! Seeing kids (and adults!) enjoying the movie in theatres has been incredibly

rewarding. While it's still early days, the film definitely seems to be adding to its popularity." It's a new way for audiences to experience the world of Dholakpur and its characters.

Global expansion with *Mighty Little Bheem*

Bringing *Mighty Little Bheem* to Netflix in 190 countries worldwide exposed *Chhota Bheem* to a massive new audience. Suddenly, kids all over the globe were discovering the adventures of an Indian animated hero. "This global recognition was a huge boost for brand awareness. It went





from being a popular Indian show to a character recognised by kids globally,” Chilaka notes. The international popularity also made it more attractive to potential brand partners, leading to collaborations with global companies. Netflix streaming solidified the IP’s place as a truly global phenomenon.

Key performance indicators (KPIs)

Green Gold Animation monitors several KPIs to gauge its IP’s success. These include tracking merchandise sales, licensing revenue, and social media engagement. Strong and consistent growth in these areas indicates a popular and desirable brand.

Another aspect is the content consumption. They track ratings and viewership numbers for television, and high ratings and growing audiences on streaming services show continued interest in the IP’s content.

Healthy download numbers and in-app purchases for mobile games indicate strong brand recognition and user engagement. Additionally, the effectiveness of live events and promotional campaigns is measured through attendance and success rates.

“By monitoring these KPIs across consumer interest and content consumption, we gain valuable insights that allow us to make strategic decisions to ensure Chhota Bheem’s continued success for years to come,” reveals Chilaka.

Future prospects

Green Gold Animation continues to strengthen the popularity of its long-time franchise. Their creative team is overflowing with new ideas for episodes, tele-movies, and even special projects. They want to bring *Chhota Bheem* to life in exciting new ways like theme parks, live events, and

interactive experiences.

“In essence, the future of *Chhota Bheem* is brimming with possibilities. We’re dedicated to keeping him a beloved character for generations to come by innovating, expanding, and staying true to the core values that made him special in the first place,” Chilaka concludes.

Chhota Bheem’s journey from a bold idea to a beloved character is a testament to the power of creativity, cultural relevance, and unwavering dedication to bringing joy to children. As he celebrates his 15th anniversary with the first-ever live-action movie, *Chhota Bheem and the Curse of Damyaaan*, the little hero’s adventures continue to inspire and entertain kids around the world ■

India's Freedom Struggle, Animated

High-budget animated series 'KTB Bharat Hain Hum' brings over 100 freedom fighters to life in a multilingual release

By Binita Das

Breathing life into India's rich heritage, culture, and legacy, Mumbai-based Graphiti Studios brought a captivating series in 2023. A high-budget animated project featuring over 100 characters from India’s freedom struggle, *Krish Trish Baltiboy (KTB) Bharat Hain Hum* has been co-produced with the country’s Central Bureau of Communication (CBC), Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB).

Divided into two seasons (each 26 x 11’), S1 launched in October 2023, and the team is set to release S2 in July 2024, continuing the series’ exploration of India’s journey to independence.

Origin of the mega-animated series

The genesis of *KTB Bharat Hain Hum* can be traced back to the time when CBC invited creators to

produce an animated series as part of the government initiative Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, celebrating India’s 75 years of Independence. Graphiti’s proposal, showcasing the stories of unsung heroes from 1500 to 1947, was approved by the CBC’s evaluation committee.

Creating a series rooted in India's freedom struggle involved extensive research and navigating a complex approval process that included multiple stakeholders like the Ministry, broadcasters, and OTT platforms. The journey, though challenging, reaffirms the significance of *KTB Bharat Hain Hum* as a landmark national project.

What sets this project apart is its global

debut. The series was released simultaneously on Netflix and Amazon Prime Video in 19 languages including English, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, Chinese, Korean and Japanese. It was also released on Indian pubcaster Doordarshan Network in Hindi and 10 regional languages: Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Bengali, Odiya, Assamese, Punjabi, Marathi, and Gujarati. This ambitious release strategy made it the most extensive launch for any animated show in India.



two episodes featuring multiple characters—Nana Saheb and Tatya Tope—S2 expands this approach, offering a multifaceted exploration of key historical events.

Each story in S2 encapsulates pivotal moments in history – the Vasai Fort siege under Chimaji Appa's leadership, the Kakori vidroh (revolt) where, as a mark of protest, the train carrying the British Treasures was robbed, and more. Bhagat Singh's role in pushing the idea of “Purna Swaraj,” or “Complete Independence,” is another instance.

Touching upon the storyline of the upcoming season, Graphiti Studios co-founder, director & CEO, and series director Tilak Shetty mentions, “Chittagong Raid unfolds over six parts, chronicling Master Surya Sen's remarkable feat

The series features the KTB world in 3D while rendering the story world in 2D. Talking about the grand scale of production, Graphiti Studios co-founder, director, and COO Munjal Shroff reveals, “The challenge was that the amount of pre-production that we would usually do for an entire series, we were doing for each episode! Hence the cost of production is fairly high.”

Season two: A deeper dive into history

The show’s S1 covered events from the late 1500s to the early 1900s and S2 covers narratives from the late 1800s to the early 1900s, a pivotal time preceding India's independence struggle. While S1 had only

of rallying teenagers to briefly liberate the city from British rule. Meanwhile, the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association saga, spanning four parts, depicts the daring exploits of Bhagat Singh and his comrades, whose audacious actions shook the very foundations of the British Empire.” *KTB Bharat Hain Hum* represents a significant achievement in Indian animation, offering a rich, educational, and entertaining portrayal of the country's freedom struggle, celebrating the heroes who paved the way for independence ■

Baahubali's Legacy Continues

Disney+ Hotstar's 'Baahubali: Crown of Blood' takes viewers back to the origins of Baahubali and Bhallaladeva, the lead characters of the fictional universe

By Binita Das

Baahubali, the epic fantasy franchise created by S S Rajamouli, stands as a monumental testament to Indian cinema's prowess and potential. The franchise, which began with the groundbreaking two-part live-action film series, has evolved into a multi-platform phenomenon encompassing animation, a graphic novel, and a trilogy of novels. Its success is not merely measured in box office receipts but in the depth of its world-building and the fervour it ignites among fans.

The films, boasting a combined budget of INR 430 crore (USD 65 million), shattered records and redefined the cinematic landscape upon their release. *Baahubali: The Beginning* unveiled the majestic realm of Mahishmati kingdom in 2015, setting a new standard for grandeur and storytelling in Indian cinema. Its sequel, *Baahubali 2: The*

Conclusion, continued the saga, captivating audiences worldwide with its scale and spectacle.

Expanding the universe with animation

The 2017's animated series, *Baahubali: The Lost Legends*, streaming on Prime Video, served as an appetizer to the grand narrative, exploring untold stories within the Baahubali universe. However, it's the recent spin-off, *Baahubali: Crown of Blood*, that delves into the earlier days of the protagonists, offering fresh insights into their journey. Directed and produced by Jeevan J. Kang and Navin John, this series expands upon the rich lore established by Rajamouli, weaving a tapestry of intrigue and adventure.

A Graphic India and Arka Mediaworks

production, *Baahubali: Crown of Blood* is produced by Rajamouli, Sharad Devarajan and Shobu Yarlagadda, and streaming on Disney+ Hotstar.

Graphic India co-founder Devarajan met Rajamouli, and Arka Mediaworks founders Prasad Devineni and Yarlagadda shortly after the first *Baahubali* film launched. "We shared the same passion for 'world-building' and what they had achieved with the film was one of the most ambitious and inspiring projects to have come out of India — similar to the type of mission we are on at Graphic India which is to spark a creative renaissance in this country across new genres and stories," Devarajan tells Animation Xpress.

The idea behind the prequel story

The idea behind the prequel series, *Crown of Blood*, was to explore the rich backstories



and intricate world-building that Rajamouli had developed during the scripting of the films. "The Baahubali franchise has captured the hearts and minds of millions across the country, and its rich universe offers endless possibilities for storytelling," Devarajan explains. Creating a prequel animation series allowed for the exploration of untold stories and hidden secrets that shaped the characters from the films.

According to Devarajan, Rajamouli's ability to craft intricate storylines, develop complex characters, and create a rich, immersive universe that spans multiple mediums is a testament to his unparalleled vision. His world-building skills are up there with the greatest cinematic universe storytellers of today's time, such as George Lucas (*Star Wars*) or James Cameron (*Avatar*).

From the live-action films to the animated series and comics, Rajamouli has been the inspirational force behind every iteration of the Baahubali franchise, ensuring that each element fits seamlessly into the larger narrative tapestry, opening avenues for new possibilities in Indian entertainment.

Contribution to the existing storyline and style

The animation style and techniques used in *Crown of Blood* have evolved from those in *The Lost Legends*. The previous episodes were designed as more self-contained and shorter story arcs within larger seasonal arcs. This series had over five seasons and 70 episodes.

When asked about the connection between these two animated series, Devarajan says, "They both fall under the Baahubali universe, but *Crown of Blood* exists separately and was designed as an older, more gripping and sophisticated story with a more serialised longer story-arc that goes across nine episodes and delves into the early years of Baahubali and Bhallaladeva and some of the critical psychological moments that shaped them into the characters we see in the films."

Crown of Blood offers fans a fresh and exciting new chapter, expanding the universe in meaningful ways while also staying true to the core elements of the franchise. The series follows the young princes Baahubali and Bhallaladeva as they navigate the complex political landscape of

Mahishmati, facing new challenges and forging alliances. A mysterious warlord, Rakhtadeva, threatens the kingdom, forcing the brothers to work together to protect their people and birthright. The tale of brotherhood, betrayal, duty, dharma, and destiny promises to keep fans on the edge of their seats.

The animation style and technique used in *Crown of Blood* bears some similarities to those used in *The Lost Legends*. However, they have made "significant improvements and changes to the visual style and quality to ensure that this new series delivers an even more impactful and immersive experience for fans." Kang led the visual character designs and development for both the shows and worked hard to make the news series distinct.

Success and future plans

The prequel ranked as the number one show in Hindi on 20 May 2024, above all other live-action shows and films on Disney+ Hotstar. Independent media consulting and data analytics group Ormax Media listed it among the top three Hindi shows or films (across all

streaming platforms in India), in its opening week. Ormax estimates the show received 3.3 million viewers in just the first few days.

The world of Baahubali is vast and rich with possibilities. "We are always open to the idea of further exploring this universe in future seasons or other creative projects. We still have a lot of stories we want to tell," concludes Devarajan.



Sharad Devarajan



Baahubali: Crown of Blood

Namaste MIFA - India Partner Pitch

For the first time, Indian animation will take center stage at the prestigious India Pitch Event at MIFA (Marché International du Film d'Animation) in Annecy. This groundbreaking event – organised by AniMela and co-hosted by India's Assemblage Entertainment and Zebu Animation Studios – will see four remarkable stories being presented to the jury.

These innovative projects emerged from the International MIFA Campus in India, held at AniMela 2024. AniMela is India's first international animation, VFX, gaming, comics and XR festival held with the support of the Government of India (GoI) and in partnership with Annecy International Animation Festival. Participants received invaluable mentorship from Annecy experts during an intensive four-day workshop and showcased their work at the Annecy Festival's AniMela event in Mumbai.

Hide & Seek

By Krishna Chandran Nair



- **Type of project:** Short film, 2D animation
- **Synopsis:** In the wake of a tragic accident during a game of hide and seek, a 10-year-old boy is pursued by his guilt, embodied as the mystical mythological creature Garuda, interweaving the realms of ancient ritual and childhood innocence.
- **Credits:** Krishna Chandran Nair (writer & director), Sunil Doshi (producer)

While playing hide and seek as a kid, one of the places that Krishna Chandran was scared of was the dingy attics in the traditional homes of the Indian state of Kerala. This fear, combined with vivid memories of Kerala's Garudan Thookkam ritual in which a man dresses as a mythological figure and dances aggressively, led Chandran to create *Hide & Seek*, which delves into these deep-rooted fears while exploring the theme of childhood trauma.

"Annecy is one of the biggest platforms for animation films worldwide. Pitching my project there to an international audience will significantly boost the reach of *Hide & Seek* and increase its chances of attracting international collaborators," shares Chandran. "This is possibly the first time that so many original IPs from our country are getting the opportunity to present at Annecy and I am thrilled to represent India as one of its creators. Personally, these small milestones along the way motivate me to continue pursuing the goal of bringing original Indian content to the global stage."



Krishna Chandran Nair

भरतीच्या लाटा (Rising Tides)

By Pari Satarkar

- **Type of project:** Short film, 2D animation
- **Synopsis:** When a marine researcher strains her friendship with a young fisherman's daughter, she realises she needs to change her own perspective to share the beauty and value of the marine world.
- **Credits:** Pari Satarkar (writer & director), Studio Mikudi (production company)

Pari Satarkar firmly believes that the protection of our planet must not happen in isolation and should be everyone's business. Shedding light on the balance of conservation and consumption, Satarkar's project *Rising Tides* aims to empower people with knowledge to bring about change. "And to produce films with underrepresented Indian narratives and ecological themes, I

founded Studio Mikudi," she reveals.

Talking about the mentorship experience at AniMela, she says, "The mentors – Johanna Goldschmidt, Delphine Nicolini, and Reza Riahi are intelligent and experienced. In a matter of four days, they identified key strengths and weaknesses in the project and outlined strategies to strengthen it. The compassion and kindness of the mentors, as well as the AniMela team (especially Neha Jain and Anne Doshi), made the entire experience very positive and inspiring." She adds, "The Namaste Mifa - India Partner Pitch is a monumental opportunity to spotlight the kind of storytelling Indian animation filmmakers are bringing to the table. I sense a collective intent and responsibility among us to represent authentic Indian stories with integrity."



Pari Satarkar





Lala

By Isha Mangalmurti

- **Type of project:** Series, 2D traditional animation
- **Synopsis:** The year is 2010 and 14-year-old Lala and her ragtag football team are thick as thieves. Through countless everyday mischiefs and challenges, both big and small, these girls are hurtling undeterred towards their ultimate goal of becoming the city champions.
- **Credits:** Isha Mangalmurti (creator & director), Shreeya Wagh (co-creator), Studio Iksa (production)

Isha Mangalmurti loved playing football as a kid but discontinued due to lack of opportunity and spaces to play in. Today, she sees multiple women's clubs emerging all across the country. "My series *Lala* is an ode to these changing times, to all the people working tirelessly to grow the Indian women's football scene and

to the country's immense wealth of talent, skill and hard work," she exclaims. "My project has taken a team effort to build and has evolved over the years, just like the sport itself!"

On being mentored at India Parter Pitch, she highlights, "There is so much knowledge around developing independent projects which is still alien to us. The workshop gave us great insights and helped bring the much-needed clarity to our ideas for shaping our stories." Mangalmurti and her co-creator Shreeya Wagh are delighted and excited to be pitching at Annecy MIFA. "We hope to connect with and meet various wonderful folks attending the festival and take this project to new levels," concludes Mangalmurti.



< Isha Mangalmurti



Shreeya Wagh >

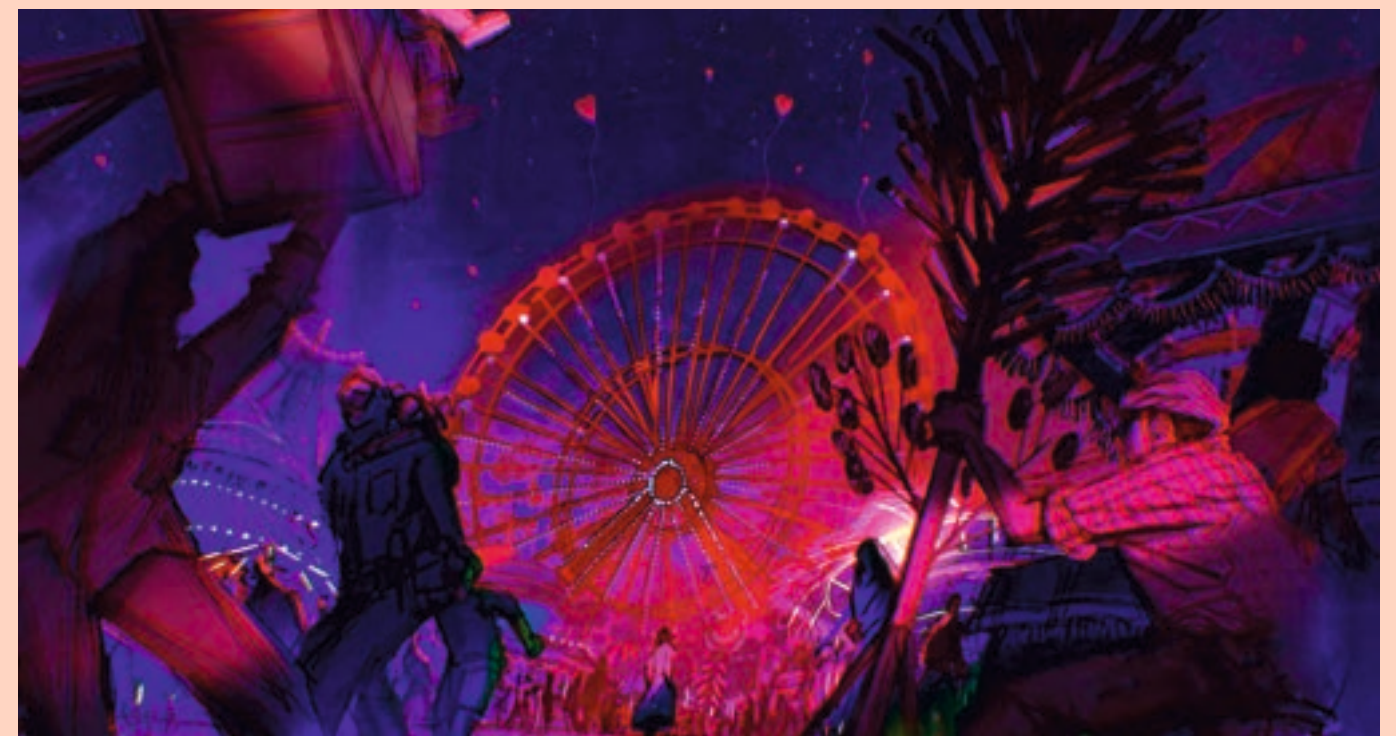


Table For One

By Dhruv Sehgal & Debjoti Saha

- **Type of project:** Series, 2D animation
- **Synopsis:** An animated anthology of short stories told from the prism of food from across India that explore a variety of personal narratives about their people.
- **Credits:** Dhruv Sehgal (creator-writer), Debjoti Saha (creative director)

Dhruv Sehgal and Debjoti Saha see India as a complex union of a variety of cultures, languages, and stories. "Food is perhaps the first form of cultural transaction through which we learn about people and where they're coming from," Sehgal tells us. And that gave birth to *Table For One*. "We want to tell homegrown stories about our people, move away from the lens of cultural appropriation we are often viewed under, and showcase the sheer variety of India, through its unique cultures, stories, and lip-

smacking food. And animation just makes it all the more exciting," exclaims Saha. "As independent filmmakers in animation, we know that creating an animated anthology series about various topics is not easy in today's market, especially in India. But that challenge just makes it more exciting. We are hoping to continue approaching this project with complete honesty and that should take care of the rest."

On being trained by the jury at AniMela, Sehgal shares, "That one week gave us a lot of clarity and confidence in what we want to say through our project, and added fuel to our motivation for the long haul." The young creators feel incredible about pitching their project at Annecy MIFA: "We feel sheer gratitude for being able to represent India. All we can say is, this is just the beginning and we are excited!"



Dhruv Sehgal >



< Debjoti Saha

Indian films competing in Annecy Festival



Govinda Sao



Anirban Paul

By Binita Das

Indian talents are making waves in the global animation circuit, with projects from young animation filmmakers travelling to international circuits alongside stalwarts from the country. This year, three Indian films have been selected for official screening under the competition section at the prestigious Annecy Festival 2024, namely 15 Years of Studio Eeksaurus' 'The Seed,' *Maatitel*, and *Basha*.

Animation Xpress got in touch with Studio Eeksaurus co-founder & creative director Suresh Eriyat in a separate article (Page 7). This article explores the journey, inspirations, and passion for storytelling of *Maatitel*'s writer-director Govinda Sao, and *Basha*'s creator Anirban Paul. Both the films of these young filmmakers are deep-rooted in Indian culture and family bonding.

Govinda Sao's *Maatitel*

Raised in an artistic family, surrounded by epic tales, soulful bhajans and rhythmic beats, National Institute of Design graduate Sao's formative years were wrapped in artistic practices. His 2D animated short *Maatitel*, which means kerosene—a vital liquid fuel used in rural domestic India—got selected in the competition section under the Graduation Films category in Annecy 2024.

The story of the Chhattisgarhi language film (with English subtitles) frames a family of four. As parents prepare dinner after a joyful day, an argument unfolds in front of their children, escalating to an unbearable intensity.

Maatitel, set in rural India, is an attempt to redirect our attention to the prevailing social issues. "The film underscores the importance of addressing lives that deserve upliftment with frequency. Through its rooted and nuanced narrative, it takes us back to the pain of the majority, leaving us with countless questions and a glimmer of hope," the film's director delves.

This journey has expanded Sao's perspective on storytelling and its powerful mediums. There were inevitable ups and downs as part of the process, but each step offered unique and informative experiences.

Sao had no single source of inspiration for the narrative, but multiple ones from his earlier days. Growing up in a rural setting fostered a sense of detachment from the wider world for him. His exposure was confined to the local community, with limited awareness of broader systems and issues. "Over time, the transition from lush greenery to industrial encroachment, alongside struggles with education, infrastructure, and well-being, sparked a deep curiosity in me. Witnessing the extreme mental and societal challenges faced by the communities, I felt compelled to explore these themes and transform my observations and emotions into a narrative," he says.

Expressing his gratitude for all the support, Sao reveals, "The film is the culmination of constant motivation and the invaluable contributions of my friends, including talented animators, actors, sound and music designers, who helped bring the vision to life. I am especially grateful to Somnath Pal, a close mentor and remarkable artist and filmmaker, who produced the film under his creative firm GOIA. These unwavering support and encouragement made our film possible."

For the budding storyteller, the Annecy selection is like a journey of his film *Maatitel* from a corner of rural India to an international stage where it will have its own voice and talk to people. An excited Sao shares, "I am eagerly looking forward to meeting inspiring artists and immersing myself in the diverse mediums of storytelling and art. Attending numerous film screenings, talks, events and programs will be a visual and emotional treat, offering bundles of different perspectives."

Anirban Paul's *Basha*

The short film *Basha* has been selected under the Young Audiences category. In this story, two brothers' playful adventures in nature take a sombre twist after a haunting dream exposes consequences. Their quest navigates environmental consciousness and the pursuit of redemption.

"*Basha* is a film that resonates with everyone, especially those who grew up in the 90s. I've included moments in the film that are designed to evoke a strong sense of nostalgia for 90s kids," Paul shares.

Paul derived inspiration for the film from his childhood visits to his maternal uncle's house. "The landscape of that place inspired me the most. Picture vast green fields, tranquil rivers, and serene ponds, all dotted with traditional mud huts with thatched roofs. Dense forests nearby added a sense of mystery and adventure. Small temples and shrines, reflected a deep cultural heritage and spirituality."

The film is made using 2D and 3D digital techniques of animation. "The style I've chosen for *Basha* is reminiscent of watercolour paintings, aiming to tap into the essence of childhood nostalgia. Just as watercolour paintings blend colours softly and evoke a dreamy, whimsical feeling, the film's visual style aims to capture the innocence and magic of growing up."

He began working on *Basha* in August 2020, during the challenging times of the pandemic. Initially, the film was intended to be only seven to eight minutes long. However, as the story progressed and evolved, it expanded to 21 minutes. "Finishing a 21-minute film alone was

incredibly challenging. I had to handle every aspect of the production. Keeping my focus and concentration in one place throughout the entire process was extremely tough. It took me almost three and a half years to complete the film."

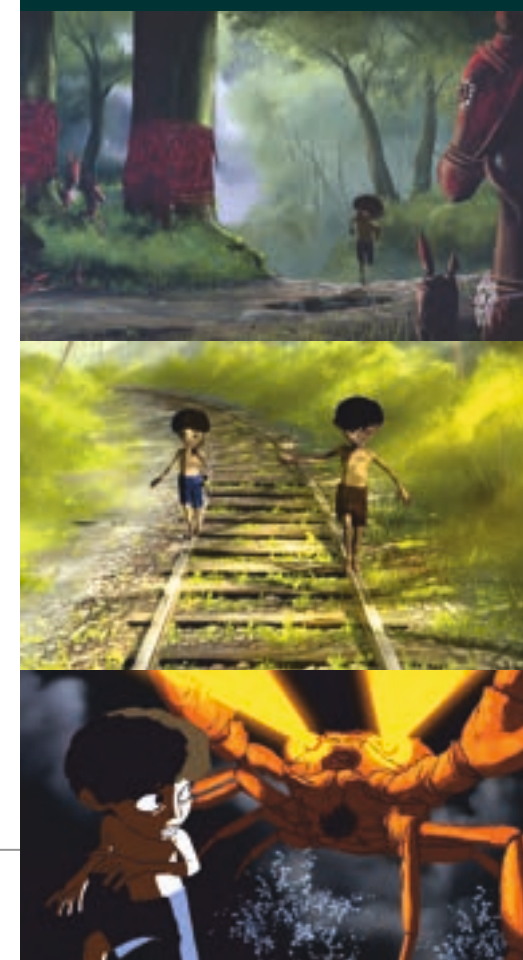
Paul, who was intrigued by vibrant worlds and dynamic characters in *The Jungle Book* TV series and *Batman: the Animated Series*, solely took care of the film's direction, production, story, screenplay, background, and animation. Adding soul to the film is the music, composed by Ysorja Mallik from Bangladesh.

Talking about his expectations from Annecy, he mentions, "It's a unique opportunity to network with other filmmakers, industry professionals, and animation enthusiasts from around the globe. There's also the anticipation of gaining valuable feedback and insights from seasoned professionals and audiences, which can be incredibly enriching and helpful for future projects." The excitement is palpable, knowing that his film will be showcased alongside some of the best in the industry, allowing him to represent his country.

After working in the animation industry and spending nearly a decade honing his skills and gaining experience, two friends and Paul decided to take the leap and establish their own venture. Thus, Zoetrope Animation Studios was born—a culmination of years of dedication, learning, and unwavering determination to bring their creative visions to life.

Paul has released the trailer of *Basha* on YouTube which has garnered an "overwhelmingly positive response." It makes him even more eager to share the entire film with the audience and continue creating meaningful animations in the future. Currently, he is working on a script for an animated feature.

The selection of 15 Years of Studio Eeksaurus' 'The Seed', *Maatitel*, and *Basha* at the Annecy Festival 2024 showcases the vibrant talent and storytelling prowess emerging from India, highlighting the deep cultural roots and innovative spirit driving these filmmakers ■

Stills from *Maatitel*Stills from *Basha*

Baby Elephant On A Mission

New Indian feature film brings awareness on wildlife conservation through a heartwarming story

By Anshita Bhatt

Animal poaching is an under-explored yet significant subject. Even rarer is its introduction into children’s content. In India, this critical topic is yet to be addressed within the realm of kids’ animated entertainment. But Appu Series’ Sanjay Raheja changed that with his animated feature film *Appu*.

Appu is a lively, naughty elephant calf who loves his life in the forest. His world is devastated when poachers kill his mother and take away his father. Determined to rescue his father, *Appu* embarks on a journey that helps him discover his inner strength and latent powers, which he uses to stand up against injustice.

This 3D animated film from Indian edutainment content creator Appu Series hit 160 big screens across major cities in the country on 19 April 2024 in English and Hindi. The film is directed by Prosenjit Ganguly, Ajay Velu and Archisman Kar, and produced by Sanjay Raheja, Suraj Raheja, Suresh Raheja.

“Elephant poaching is a grave concern that could severely impact our environment if measures aren’t taken to curb it. And we felt that a film would be the perfect way to spread awareness and drive this cause,” says Appu Series director Sanjay Raheja.

The making-of *Appu*

Crafting a film on such a sensitive topic is no easy-feat. However, director Raheja rose to the occasion by onboarding Ganguly – a top-tier story writer who painstakingly researched and gathered factual data from relevant sources for the 90-minute feature. With a workforce of approximately 1,000 people, the collaborative effort behind this project was immense. Shares Raheja, “Our writers wove the story keeping in mind *Appu*’s vibrant character and his deep attachment to his forest family, all the while having the issue of poaching at the core.”

Mature concept with relatable character

While *Appu* has special powers, he also has his own set of weaknesses. The elephant calf feels fear yet summons the courage to face it. Despite feeling under-confident, he taps into his fullest potential and remains determined to succeed. “All these attributes make him real, relatable, and an inspiration for children,” mentions Raheja.

Regarding the exposure of children to mature concepts like animal conservation, he explains, “They are the future of the world. It is necessary to make them aware of realities that could impact the

environment. This awareness would only lead to responsible actions as they grow into adults.”

The film, however, is also targeted at adults. *Appu*’s positive attributes have a message for parents too, says Raheja. “Parents must prod their children to embrace their limitations and fears, push them to overcome them and encourage them to treat all beings with kindness.”

At the box office

From the time of its release, the film ran for four weeks and is still showing at a couple of cinema halls in the country. “The reviews have been excellent. *Appu* has been a great success with schools that bring in large numbers of students for a movie that both entertains and educates with its strong message about elephant conservation,” shares Raheja.

It has so far recovered about 20 per cent of its making cost, a remarkable feat for an Indian animated film. “The total earnings remain undetermined as schools in Delhi continue to get children to the theatre to watch *Appu*,” he adds.

What makes the IP “*Appu*” stand out

Starting with multimedia training, CD-ROMs, books and moving to web, TV and now a full-length animated feature, Appu Series has come a long way. The IP’s YouTube channel currently has more than two billion views and close to two million subscribers.

Raheja created the IP to change the way children learn, by making learning as entertaining as possible. At Appu Series, his team creates engaging learning aids in the form of videos (stories, songs, rhymes, and learning modules) as well as

physical products. The adorable elephant calf *Appu*, has captured the hearts of children worldwide as the lead character of Appu Series’ stories and the mascot of its rhyme videos.

Raheja wants to use the appeal of animated content to improve the quality of education in India. “We have decided to focus on creating animated content for kindergarten to grade seven in Mathematics. We hope to take this to the underprivileged communities across India, where quality education is the need of the hour. We aim to bust the notion that access to quality education is a privilege.”

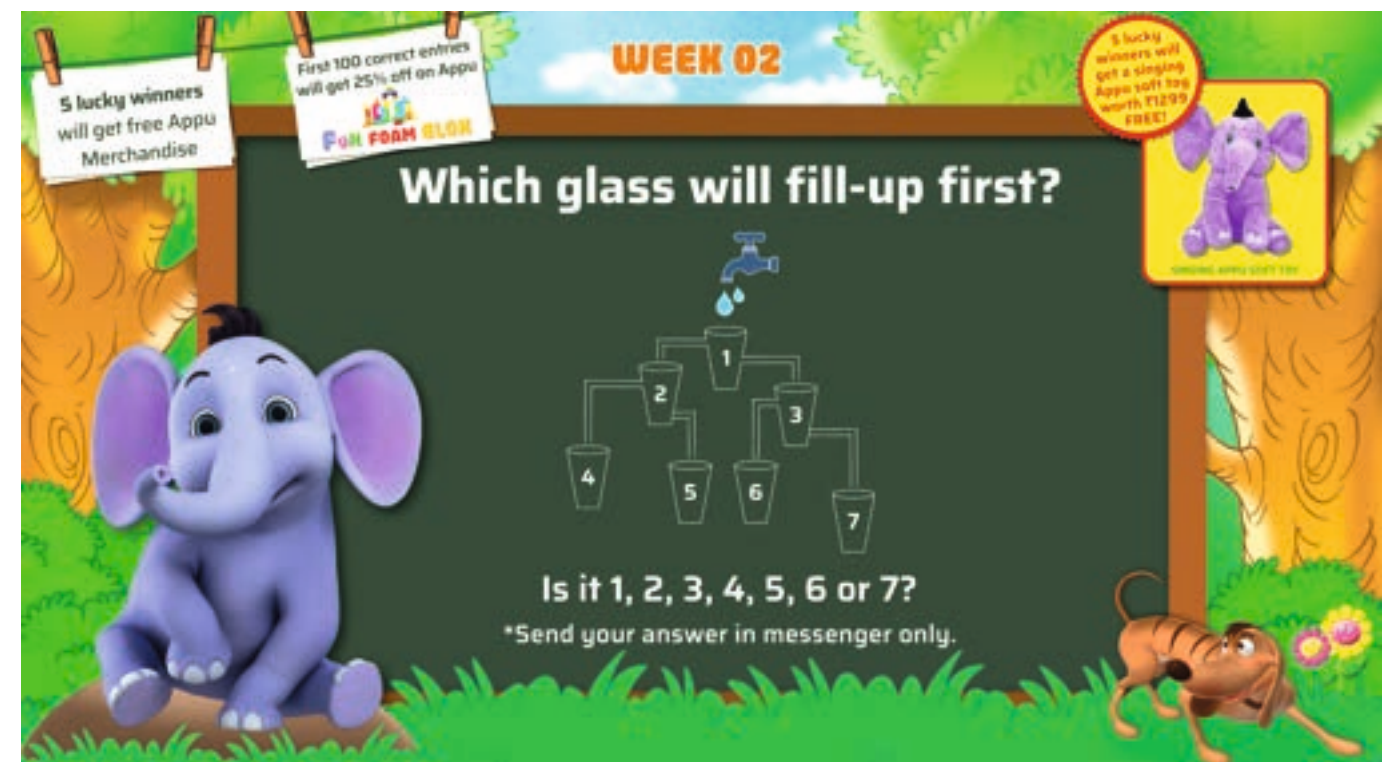
With *Appu*, Raheja believes he has filled the gap of animated Indian IPs that have a global appeal.

“The film *Appu* is a curtain raiser on the cruelties inflicted on animals by people riding on greed. Apart from being a kids and family entertainer, it is an initiative to draw attention towards the unrestrained and widespread poaching that is severely affecting the elephant population. We hope and believe that *Appu* will sensitise the world to the plight of elephants and have them join hands to conserve this priceless species,” concludes Raheja.



Sanjay Raheja

“Appu hit 160 big screens across India and has recovered about 20 per cent of its making cost”





Young Entrepreneurs

Green Gold and Disney India bring the perfect animated series for kids

By Anshita Bhatt

Just in time for summer, Green Gold Animation and Disney India have introduced the perfect animated series for children. Created by Green Gold and Wackytoons animation studios and airing on Disney India network's Hungama channel, the show – titled *Chhota Start Up* – follows the story of three ingenious youngsters as they help businesses in their city of Pocketpur navigate challenges with their quirky yet practical solutions, fostering an entrepreneurial spirit among young viewers.

The 2D animated show is created by Green Gold Animation founder and managing director Rajiv Chilaka, Wackytoons CEO Niloy Kanti Biswas, and independent animation writer and director Sonam Shekhawat. It is directed by Ravi Shankar Gunda and



Amruta Anant Kulkarni, and produced by Chilaka and Srinivas Chilakalapudi.

“While brainstorming, we created a list of what kids aspire to become and how we can inspire them to achieve their aspirations,” says Chilaka. “After discussing various themes like superheroes and mythology, we started discussing professions and something just clicked when we

landed on “entrepreneur.” Initially, the idea was about our main characters kicking off their own start-up, but we realised that we shouldn’t just limit ourselves to one start-up. So the show evolved into our characters helping various start-ups across their city.”



The team at Wackytoons studio working on the show Chhota Start Up

Once the concept was developed, Green Gold and Wackytoons began pitching it to platforms. Disney India recognised the potential and commissioned not just 13 or 26 episodes but an impressive 156 episodes. “The team at Disney understood the need of the hour and took up the challenge to bring this show to life,” Chilaka reveals.

Soon after the show was greenlit, the pre-production began. A creative team was put to work for the ideation and story development while the visualisation began in the 2D production unit simultaneously. “A team from Disney India also joined the pre-production and provided its constant and valuable feedback,” reveals Chilaka. “During production, we encountered difficulties as the show was not action-packed. So we came up with creative ways to incorporate fun-filled drama, action-comedy, and lots of innovation to keep it engaging.”

Green Gold, a big name in the Indian animation industry, had its humble beginning with the 2D animated show *Chhota Bheem* which started airing on Warner Bros. Discovery's (WBD) Pogo channel and became an instant hit with kids. So for *Chhota Start Up*, using the word “Chhota” (“small” in Hindi) was a conscious decision since it has proved lucky for the studio. “As our work on the show progressed, the word not only made sense but also became profoundly meaningful. We found that it resonated perfectly with our show's essence, and we couldn't help but fall in love with our working title.”

Chilaka believes that this project represents a refreshing change for kids' programming. “*Chhota Start Up* brings forth a contemporary theme that resonates with the dreams of youth. By showcasing the journey of young entrepreneurs, the show not only entertains but

also inspires, instilling the values of innovation and creativity.”

For Green Gold, collaborations with broadcasters like WBD and Disney have offered a blend of seasoned expertise and fresh talent. “With Disney, the highlights include a dedicated team for our show and a genuine openness to collaborate with multiple writers. Ultimately, what truly matters is that our goals remain aligned,” he mentions.

Green Gold has always been a powerhouse of new ideas and stories. “We understand the need to widen our horizons and offer something fresh and relevant to today's audience. *Chhota Start Up* represents a bold step in this direction.”

As India rapidly develops, Chilaka sees the next generation playing a key role in economic advancement. “We would need many more entrepreneurs, and this show is just our way of contributing to the growth of the nation ■



Upcoming Projects From India

Assemblage Entertainment

Project: Sneaks
Format: Feature film
Release: 2025
Credits: Directors: Rob Edwards & Chris Jenkins; producers: Len Hartman, Gil Cloyd, Laurence Fishburne, Helen Sugland; represented by CAA Media Finance and GFM Animation

Synopsis: *Sneaks follows the adventures of Ty, a misguided designer sneaker who doesn't know life outside the comforts of his velvet-lined shoe box. After his sister is stolen by a shady collector, Ty must venture into NYC to find and rescue her. In his adventure, Ty meets a rag-tag group of footwear friends from all walks of life who help him find the courage to step outside of his shoe box and find his "sole-mate."*



Project: Stitch Head
Format: Feature film
Release: 2025
Credits: Writer/director: Steve Hudson; co-director: Toby Genkel; production: Gringo Films GmbH, Fabrique d'Images, Wild Bunch, Traumhaus Studios, Aniventure, GFM Animation

Synopsis: *Stitch Head tells the story of a small creature awoken to almost-life by a Mad Professor in a castle, who must protect the professor's other creations from the townspeople of Grubbers Nubbin. When a travelling show comes to town, its desperate owner Fulbert Freakfinder sees Stitch Head as a star who can turn his fortunes around.*



Nina Sabnani

Project: Ghar Aangan (Courtyard)
Format: Film (Fabric and water colours)
Release: July 2024
Credits: Writer & director: Nina Sabnani; animation: Piyush Verma; music & sound: Vedanth Bharadwaj; producer: Varsha Navin Dewaji; voice: Snigdha Karmahe

Synopsis: *Based on the memories recalled by the filmmaker's 91-year-old mother about her life and times in Sindh around the partition of India, the film explores the persistence of memory, the after-effects of forced migrations, separations and the tenacity to endure.*



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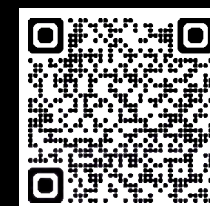
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Charuvi Design Labs

Project: The Ballad of Prahlad: Narsimha Awakens
Format: Feature film (blend of photorealism and Indian art)
Release: 2025

Credits: Director: Charuvi Agrawal; producers: Charuvi Agrawal & Aditya Singhal (Charuvi Design Labs); executive producer: Aditya Singhal; writers: Tarun Jain, Aditya Singhal & Charuvi Agrawal; music composer: Krishna Beuraa; lyrics: Tarun Jain

Synopsis: A visual poem, the film shows the protagonist Prahlad, through the eyes of the demons sent to vanquish him by his own father. Yet, through his own unrelenting belief, he survives through the protection of lord Vishnu, who finally takes the form of Narsimha, a half lion, half man deity to annihilate Prahlad's father – the mighty demon Hiranyakashyapu.



Saffronic

Project: Mary Margaret Road Grader
Format: Short film (Using live action characters shot against a blue screen, Saffronic built the props and sets required for the story. The entire set of MMRG which includes vehicles, environment props, and digital matte painting was all done through the magic of CG. The final output uses Trioscope's SEE® tool to redefine conventional storytelling and deliver a unique, comic-like feel.)

Release: 6 June (world premiere at 24th Deadcenter Film Festival)
Credits: Based on the writing of Harold Waldrop; director Steven Judd; producer George R.R. Martin

Synopsis: Mary Margaret Road Grader is a feminist tale, set in a post-apocalyptic world where Native Americans reclaim a portion of America.



Graphiti Studios

Project: YOM season 2
Format: Series (2D animation)
Release: October 2025

Credits: Director: Tilak Shetty; producer: Munjal Shroff

Synopsis: Yom, a yoga-master turned super-sleuth is armed with an extraordinary arsenal: his Awesome Animal Avatars! Yom may appear as your average kid, dodging homework and revealing gadgets, but beneath this facade lies a remarkable secret. With every fluid yoga pose he strikes, inspired by the essence of a specific animal, Yom harnesses the formidable powers of that creature. From the graceful agility of a panther to the keen senses of an eagle, Yom's transformations know no bounds. Watch as he fearlessly navigates the challenges of schoolyard bullies and unravels mysteries with wit and finesse. Join Yom on his exhilarating adventures, where each yoga stance unlocks a new realm of possibilities!

Prayan Animation

Project: Bobby & Beta
Format: Series (2D animation)
Release: 2025-26

Credits: Writer: Andrew Sabiston; director: Vinayan V; production: Prayan Animation Studio

Synopsis: When four-year-old Bobby and his loyal robot buddy Beta travel through a cool portal to a whimsical world of toys, they go from being a regular kid and his robot to amazing superheroes dedicated to helping toys in need. They can fly! They've got super strength! They've got super hearing, super vision, and a ton of other super abilities! Their greatest superpower? The awesome might of their friendship!



Graphic India

Project: Cinnamon
Format: Film
Release: TBA

Credits: Story: Neil Gaiman; screenplay: Neil Gaiman, Sharad Devarajan, Sarena Khan & Sujatha SV; director: Jeevan J. Kang; producers: Neil Gaiman & Cat Mihos (The Blank Corporation) / Sharad Devarajan, Sarena Khan & Jeevan J. Kang (Graphic India)

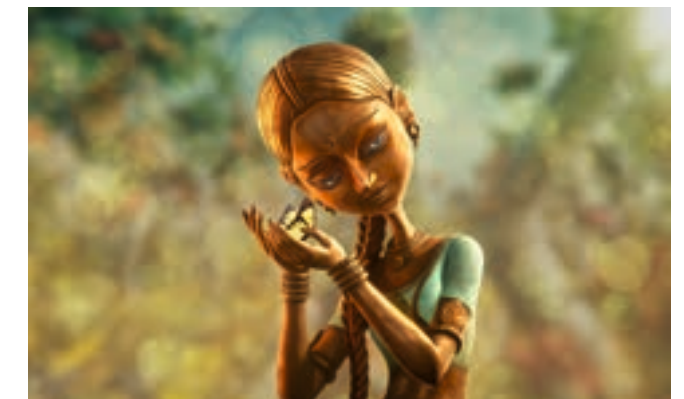
Synopsis: Born with pearl eyes that render her blind to the physical world, Cinnamon's destiny is shaped forever when a mysterious talking tiger appears. Offering to lead her through the wonders and trials of the wild, Cinnamon begins a perilous adventure that will shape her path and test her resolve. She enters a hidden realm where the line between the mundane and the mystical is as thin as a whisper and where the ancient wisdom of India breathes life into a jungle thrumming with secrets.



Project: Rachel & Camy
Format: Series (2D animation)
Release: 2025-26

Credits: Writer: Andrew Sabiston; director: Remesh Ram; producer: Prayan Animation Studio

Synopsis: Rachel Raccoon and her spirited sidekick Camy Chameleon are preschool sleuths who use their big imaginations, creative thinking and budding detective skills to solve mysteries in a community named Nivood that's populated by a colourful cast of forest creatures.



AnimationXpress presents Animation Creators Pitch A unique opportunity for Indian filmmakers

Last year, AnimationXpress launched the Animation Creators Pitch at its Animation & More Summit to redefine the cultural and geographical scope of animation. This initiative saw participation from creative artists, students, and professionals with innovative story ideas, aiming to create content with global appeal.

At its core, the Animation Creators Pitch connects creators with industry professionals who possess the expertise and resources to realise animated projects. This platform emphasises the freedom to pitch and present one's vision, fostering innovation and diversity in animation storytelling.

The inaugural Animation Creators Pitch, held in collaboration with 88 Pictures and Zebu Animation, highlighted two winners: seasoned writer Asha Girdhar and young animator Nagesh Chakilam.

Asha Girdhar, a National Award-winning scriptwriter, author, educationist, storyteller, and podcaster, had her pitch selected by 88 Pictures. The Mumbai-based studio, known for 'Star Wars: Visions Vol 2 - Bandits of Golak' and 'Trollhunters', is now developing her short film.

Nagesh Chakilam, a lead modeling artist from Zebu Animation Studios, presented a storyboard and synopsis

conceived during the pandemic. Zebu Animation Studios is partnering with him to bring his vision to life.

Zebu Animation Studios founder and creative director Veerendra Patil expressed his admiration for the event: "This was a truly remarkable experience. The passion of the creators was not just evident but infectious, and I found myself completely captivated by the energy of the moment." He further highlighted the significance of such platforms in India: "Pitch platforms are not just stages—they act as catalysts. We envision these catalysts setting off a chain reaction, turning isolated sketches into defining masterpieces that shape the future of our creative landscape."

Buoyed by the positive response, Animation & More Summit is returning with the Animation Creators Pitch on 3 and 4 September 2024, now open for submissions. Creators from across the nation are invited to submit their pitches, showcasing the world's most innovative and exciting animation ideas. This event welcomes directors, creative artists, students and professionals passionate about the Indian animation industry.

Shortlisted pitches will be evaluated by a panel of industry experts. To join this exciting journey, submit your first pitch deck by 25 July 2024 ■



Shortlisted winners of Animation Creators Pitch 2023



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