

## Indian animation industry poised for growth

'Hanuman', 'Hanuman Returns' and now 'Bal Ganesh'... the string of successful animation movies is an indication of the fast growth that the Indian animation industry is poised for after the development of some very advanced software.

'As far as the Indian animation movie production is concerned, a new phase has now started after advanced software has been developed. Technology is key to the growth of the animation sector,' Ashish Kulkarni of Jadooworks, a Bangalore-based animation company, told IANS.

As of today, India has about 200 animation, 40 VFX and 35 game development studios, but the country needs more workstations to make optimal use of the potential that the industry has.

A.K. Madhavan, of Crest Animation Studios, says: 'At Crest, we get trainers from the US and Canada to train our staff and help them understand the current trends in animation in the world market. This ensures that the output is on a par with the acceptable levels for international standards, especially Hollywood,' he said.

Both Kulkarni and Madhavan agreed that given the demands, animation movie making will soon emerge as a self-sufficient industry and attain a full-ledged stature.

The Indian animation movie production, however, had a rather shaky start. In 1984, when the renowned artiste Ram Mohan wanted to make an animation movie on the Indian epic Ramayana in collaboration with the Japanese filmmaker Yogo Sako, he was not given permission by the government to go ahead.

The government said that the sanctity of the epic would be lost if a 'cartoon film' was made on it. Finally, Mohan had to go to Japan to make it as he and Sako were determined to present the Ramayana as an animation series.

The movie, 'Ramayan,' executed under Mohan's leadership, created a revolution in the international market in that it made the Western world aware for the first time of talent available in India to make animation movies.

India saw an outsourcing boom subsequently. But, due to the high cost involved, together with shortage of manpower and technology, animation movie making stagnated after 'Ramayan' was released.

Although animation studios sprang up in Mumbai, Bangalore, [Hyderabad](#) and Thiruvananthapuram, they were preoccupied with outsourcing work.

Some of them did create story-based animated work, but those were meant only for the advertising commercials. It was only since 2000 that corporate houses set their sights on producing animation movies.

UTV was the first corporate entity to plan animated versions of India Book House's popular 'Amar Chitra Katha' series in the 1990s. But the project did not get off the ground. A decade later Percept Picture Company (PPC) brought to India its Hanuman series of animation features - 'Hanuman' and

'Hanuman Returns.'

Made on a budget of about Rs.15 million, PPC's first animation movie 'Hanuman' went on to earn Rs.70 million for the corporate entity. PPC followed it up with 'Hanuman Returns'.

Shemaroo in another Indian company that feels animation is good business. It has set up its own animation studio to create animation movies in-house. Though Shemaroo's maiden animation attempt, 'Bal Ganesh', did not see the success of PPC's 'Hanuman' and 'Hanuman Returns', it scored in terms of quality.

'Wait till our next animation production 'Ghatothkach, The Master of Magic' is released. Animation movie-making is still in its infancy. It will take some time for it to stand on its own feet,' Shemaroo vice president Smita Maroo told IANS.

What goes in India's advantage is that an animation movie can be made here 15 times cheaper than the cost of a Hollywood production.

At a one-day conference on animation and gaming in Chandigarh recently, Punit Vatsayan, managing director of Mobera Systems Pvt. Ltd., said the Indian animation and gaming industry is projected to reach the \$1 billion mark by 2010 from the current combined revenues of \$402 million.

Navin Gupta, chief operating officer of the Maya Academy of Advanced Cinematics (MAAC), a Mumbai-based animation training institute, said the Indian animation industry is still hard-pressed for skilled manpower.

Right now, about 300,000 students are undergoing training in animation technology across India. 'Most of the professionals are still at the entry level,' Gupta said, adding that the way the industry is growing, even these 300,000 professionals will not be enough to handle the work load in the coming years.

'We need more than the 10,000 artistes and 2,000 programmers that we have today,' he said. The future for India's animation movie sector, as these experts feel, is bright. A number of Bollywood production houses like B.R. Films, Adlabs, Pritish Nandy Communication and UTV, besides Percept Picture Company and Shemaroo, are into making animation movies.

Some independent producers, like Sajjid Nadiadwala, are also joining the fray.

UTV's recent deal with Walt Disney Studios is expected to provide a good impetus to take the Indian animation movie-making sector to a higher level. UTV already has four animation movie projects in the pipeline and a \$20 million co-production deal with Overbrook, Hollywood actor Will Smith's production house.

It is also planning a \$10 million co-production with Porchlight Pictures. 'Right now, we have five animation projects on hand,' UTV movie production Alpana Mihsra said.

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