

Big banner animation films will change Indian scenario

The Indian animation industry will get a boost after the release of animation films from big banners like Yashraj and UTV studios, feels Ram Mohan, the doyen of the Indian animation industry.

'I expect that the upcoming big-budgeted films from Yashraj, UTV and Adlabs will take animation films in India to the next level, and revive the animation market,' Ram Mohan told IANS.

Ram Mohan is known as the father of Indian animation, with a career spanning more than 50 years. He is best known as the creator of the feted 'Meena: The Girl Child' for Unicef and had co-directed 'Ramayana: The Legend of Prince Rama'.

On Thursday, Ram Mohan received a Special Recognition Award from the British High Commission at the FICCI Best Animated Frames (BAF) Awards 2008 in Mumbai.

He is the man behind UTV Toons and runs Graphiti Studio at Mumbai. He also runs an animation school there.

A number of Bollywood production houses have recently forayed into animation film production in a big way.

Yashraj Films is making 'Roadside Romeo' as part of a three-film tie up with The Walt Disney Studios. South Indian actor Rajnikant will be seen in a 3D animation film 'Sultan-The Warrior', being made by his daughter. Ace director Karan Johar is making 'Coochie Coochie Hota Hai', an animated remake of his debut hit 'Kuch Kuch Hota Hai'.

Well-known animator Simi Nallaseth is directing 'The Dream Blanket', based on a Tibetan fairy tale for UTV Motion Pictures. Even a serious director like Govind Nihalani is producing and directing an animated movie 'Kamlu', a story about a baby camel's adventure in Rajasthan.

Most of these films are slated for release this year.

'Indian animation films will then no longer be cheap and sub-standard as it is now,' Ram Mohan said, referring to films like 'Hanuman' and 'Bal Ganesh'.

He believes these two animation films 'attracted a lot of attention only because of the huge amount of hunger that the Indian audiences, especially kids, have for original Indian content in animation. Otherwise, they were poor films.'

The three films - 'Hanuman', 'Hanuman Returns' and 'Bal Ganesh' - failed at the box office, but their home videos have sold well. They also made a lot of profit from merchandising of soft toys and stationery.

'The character has a large shelf life in animated movies. And so producers make more money through merchandising than through box office sales,' he explained.

He called the making of the Rajinikat-starrer 'Sultan - The Warrior', a 'clever move'.

'The southern superstar is no more young and cannot do action films like he used to earlier. An animation film is the perfect answer to his old age, as it can retain his action movements.'

On his take on the animation industry in India, Mohan says: 'India is not yet on the world map. We lack specialised writers who can write scripts for a global audience. But we do have good infrastructure, comparable with the Western countries.'

'Earlier, India was an outsourcing destination because of cheap labour. But today we stand in the global market only because of quality.'

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

According to experts, the Indian animation and gaming industry is projected to reach \$1 billion by 2010 from the current revenue of \$402 million.

Although about 300,000 students are undergoing training in animation technology across India, a huge manpower crisis persists.

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