



Motu Patlu



The Jungle Book



Chota Bheem

Cracking The Curse

Animation is a stepchild of the Hindi film industry. How can we turn it into a money spinner?

* ROHINI NAG MADNANI & SOUMITA SENGUPTA

This week, we're returning to a conundrum that's been plaguing the Hindi film industry for a long time – why aren't animation films popular in India? Yet it is ironic that Hollywood animation franchises score at the box office in India, *The Jungle Book* being a recent case in point. So what can we do explore this underrated genre to its full potential?

A few years ago, we saw a handful of Indian animation films releasing with many corporate houses backing them. However, in the last year or so, the number has nosedived to a mere one or two films a year. And this year, despite the massive success of *The Jungle Book* in India, no Hindi animation film has been announced, apart from *Motu Patlu* and the sequel to Harry Baweja's *Chaar Sahibzaade*. Earlier, only a few homegrown films like the

included Amitabh Bachchan, Ajay Devgn, Vidya Balan, Sunny Deol, Anil Kapoor, Jackie Shroff, Manoj Bajpayee and Deepti Naval. *Delhi Safari* featured Akshaye Khanna, Govinda, Suniel Shetty, Boman Irani and Urmila Matondkar; while *Ramayana: The Epic* had voiceovers by Manoj Bajpayee, Juhi Chawla and Ashutosh Rana. Still, the genre failed to gain momentum.

India is one of the most flourishing film markets in the world, churning out more than a 1000 films a year, and this includes a mix of genres and languages. Yet animation barely figures on the radar of filmmakers and even the audience, especially when it comes to homegrown content. But the number of films that has stirred the imagination of the audience is so few that they have not made so much as a dent at ticket counters in India.

We made *Mahabharat* and despite the support of all the actors in promoting the film, it didn't do great business at the box office. In stark contrast, Hollywood animated films released in India, like *The Jungle Book* and *Finding Nemo*, do massive business.

The reason our animated films don't do well is because, in spite of having the technology, talent and infrastructure, we don't have the kind of budgets it takes to make a quality animated films. *The Jungle Book* was made on a budget of Rs 1,000 crore, which even our superstars' films don't recover. We need to wait for our market to grow, which has started to happen as our films are now opening in some new international markets.

We, at Pen, have made 13 animated films. We released 12 of these on television and they did good business.

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Apart from theatrical revenue, animation also has huge merchandising opportunities along with impressive TRPs with their satellite release. So, what's holding Indian animation back?

Many top Bollywood actors and actresses have supported animation films by lending their voice to these movies. Shah Rukh Khan dubbed for the Hindi version of *The Incredibles*; Nana Patekar, Om Puri, Irrfan, Priyanka Chopra and Shefali Shah dubbed for *The Jungle Book* while Chopra also dubbed for *Planes*. And Imran Khan and Sonakshi Sinha dubbed for *Rio 2*.

A few Bollywood actors have also promoted Hindi animation films. For instance, YRF's animation film *Roadside Romeo* had Saif Ali Khan and Kareena Kapoor Khan's voices; *Jumbo* featured the voices of Akshay Kumar, Lara Dutta, Dimple Kapadia and Gulshan Grover; *Mahabharat* featured a voice cast that

Kapoor, Jackie Shroff, Manoj Bajpayee and Deepti Naval. *Delhi Safari* featured Akshaye Khanna, Govinda, Suniel Shetty, Boman Irani and Urmila Matondkar, while *Ramayana: The Epic* had voiceovers by Manoj Bajpayee, Juhi Chawla and Ashutosh Rana. Still, the genre failed to gain momentum.

India is one of the most flourishing film markets in the world, churning out more than a 1000 films a year, and this includes a mix of genres and languages. Yet animation barely figures on the radar of filmmakers and even the audience, especially when it comes to homegrown content. But the number of films that has stirred the imagination of the audience is so few that they have not made so much as a dent at ticket counters in India.

On the other hand, Hollywood has had much better luck in India, with animation releases such as the *Kung Fu Panda* series, *Minions*, *Inside Out* and the most successful *The Jungle Book*, booking handsome profits here, even weeks after its release in India.

All these arguments point to the huge potential for animation films in India; we simply haven't been able to tap into it yet, locally. This week, we asked the experts why, in an age of experimentation and evolved audience sensibilities, Hindi animation films are still commercially unviable.

JAYANTILAL GADA PRODUCER



The reason animated films made in India don't do well at the box office is because, let's face it, the animation market here is television.

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We, at Pen, have made 13 animated films. We released 12 of these on television and they did good business. With *Mahabharat*, we tried experimenting with the theatrical but it didn't work out in terms of money, whereas the film is still running on satellite. Since animated films don't do much business here, no one wants to experiment with this genre.

RAJIV CHILAKA DIRECTOR



With the zeal to make it big constantly driving us, we have produced four 2D animated features despite them not being very

profitable, business-wise. Since 2D as an art form has not been giving us the right response, in 2017 we will be presenting to the world our first 3D animated film, *Chhota Bheem - Kung Fu Dhamaka*. While the Indian animation market might not be at its peak at the moment, it is just a matter of time before Indian studios cross this barrier.

and *Devi Sanyal* but the characters in these films were not famous. One needs to build up the characters, like Motu-Patlu, who started on television and are already a household hit among kids.

We have made more than 500 episodes, released 10 films on television so far. So the brand has been built and kids are aware of the characters. The same goes for parents too, who are therefore more likely to watch the film.

Why was *The Jungle Book* such a hit in India? Because the film catered to people across all ages, people who grew up in the '90s are parents today, so kids and adults alike saw the film. Hence one needs to create a base before one makes an animated film.

In India, the animation business is not at all impressive but we need to work towards this together. Our technology puts our animated films at par with the West, quality-wise, but our budgets are nowhere near those of Hollywood.

Also, we cannot make animated films for kids only. Since children go to the movies with their parents, these films must appeal to adults as well.

VIJAY KAKWANI

SVP OPERATIONS, PRIME FOCUS ANIMATION



It may not be entirely correct to say that the Indian film market hasn't dared to make animation films, but it is true that there have not been many theatrical animated Indian releases. We have seen a few films on offer, but yes, most recent animated

animation in the Indian film industry.

Prime Focus is delivering animation and 3D conversion services for this movie, and our intention is to bring top-class animation quality to audiences in India and abroad.

Also, I think that markets and products follow each other. With the release of more quality animation films like *Chaar Sahibzaade: Rise of Banda Singh Bahadur*, we're hopeful that audiences will develop more of a liking for Indian animation, which will encourage more filmmakers to venture in this direction and expand the market.

The Indian film industry is evolving every passing day and so is the audience, which is receptive to new offerings, more so now than ever before. We are hopeful that animation films will also ride this change and soon become an integral part of it.

As far as trust in Indian animation is concerned, it shouldn't even be a question! The rest of the world trusts Indian animation – the evidence of this lies in the fact that a lot of top quality films and TV series abroad have actually been animated right here in Indian studios by Indian artists. Animation artists in India are definitely on a par with the other animation artists across the globe.

It's a fact that animation films typically take a long time to make. Top-class animation is a complicated business, which needs a lot of planning, conceptualization and a long production process. If I were to try to explain this in layman's terms, imagine having to conceptualise a puppet, model it using clay, colour it and then manually move it frame-by-frame, pose-by-pose to create a 90-minute movie.

And every second of the movie has

between the director and the artists.

Creating an animation movie in a way means doing all this and more, albeit in a virtual world, inside the computer with the help of software. And, of course, all of this needs time... and so does a quality animation film.

SURESH ERIYAT

FOUNDER & DIRECTOR, EEKSAURUS



Animation in India is still considered a technique rather than a storytelling medium. When you consider it a technique, you won't give it the right treatment in terms of writing and evolving the ideas into a film.

In our country, distributors and producers like to play safe when it comes animation feature films. Producers or distributors bet on films with mythological characters as they think are known to the audience. 'If you are working on Hanuman or Krishna, at least there is recall value,' they believe.

If I make a film on an animated character called 'Suresh', whether action or comedy, it will not be accepted by production companies immediately because there is a fear factor associated while attempting unknown characters as protagonists. They believe the audience may not go to watch the film.

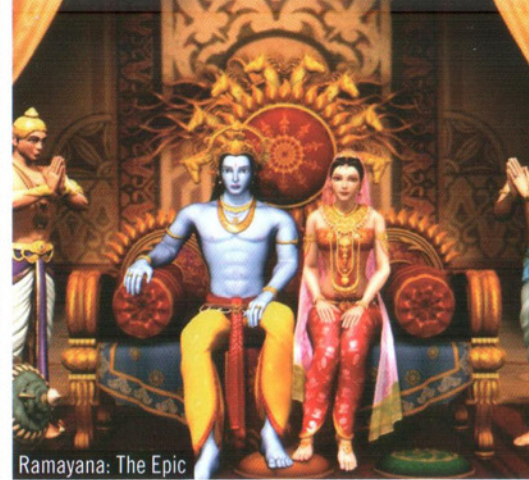
After judging and attending many animation festivals in India and abroad, I have seen many young people with exceptional story ideas that can definitely work with our viewers but don't have enough resources to create a film. My film *Fisherwomen And Tuk Tuk* won a National Award but still things didn't



Planes



Delhi Safari



Ramayana: The Epic

SUHAS D KADAV DIRECTOR



I believe Indian animated films don't do much business in cinemas because we don't present them as we should. Most of our animated films have a mythological background because it is easy to promote them. One also needs to create a backdrop for the film or it will fail. Our filmmakers did make *Roadside Romeo* and *Delhi Safari* but the characters in these films were not famous. One needs to build up the characters, like Motu-Patlu, who started on television and are already a household hit among kids.

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content in India has been targeted at kids using characters from successful TV series.

One of the notable animated releases in recent years was Harry Baweja's *Chaar Sahibzaade* (2014), which was targeted at a family audience of all ages. Towards the end of 2016, the audience will get to see the sequel, *Chaar Sahibzaade: Rise of Banda Singh Bahadur*. It's a story of spirituality and valour, and we are confident that audiences will love it and that the movie will push the envelope for animation in the Indian film industry.

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roughly 24 frames. Now multiply that by the number of characters in the movie, and lighting considerations, and creating the right look and feel, and I guess it doesn't sound so simple any more!

To speed up the process, we have many animators working on the same character, but then aligning everyone's execution to maintain the uniformity of the character's actions is a challenge – and across the movie itself becomes a mammoth task which needs flawless alignment between the director and the artists.

Creating an animation movie in a way means doing all this and more, albeit in a virtual world, inside the computer with the help of software. And, of course, all of this needs time... and so does a quality animation film.

SURESH ERIYAT FOUNDER & DIRECTOR, EKS SAURUS



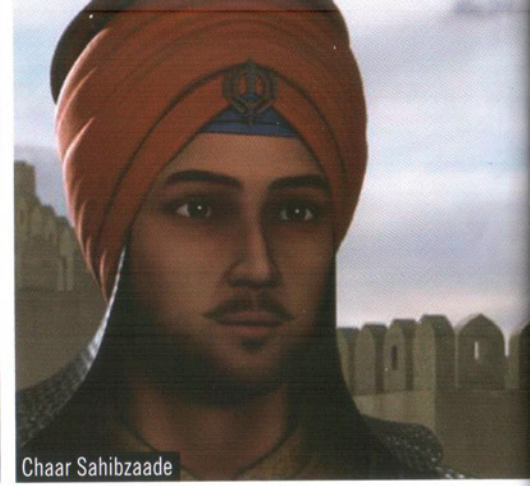
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Rio



The Incredibles



Chaar Sahibzaade

change much for me in spite of that.

RANJIT THAKUR
FOUNDER, MEDIA KONNECT



Animation is a huge sector, and without a doubt, a lot of creativity is left untapped in India. We do not have adequate distribution

channels for animation, especially short films. The Indian animation industry has great potential as we have a wide and culturally vibrant audience to cater to.

Globally, I have seen an acceptance which needs to be translated in India as well. It is important for entry-level filmmakers to identify cost-effective options in order to ensure quality content. As a producer myself, I can say that the right content is not reaching the right people at the right price.

DEVIKA SHROFF NIHALINI
FOUNDER, SPOT ON FILM
MARKETING



It is surprising that most animation films across the globe are outsourced to India. Indian animators have worked on some of the highest-grossing films, and yet we don't

support animation films as they have dubbed for a lot of films. It's just that filmmakers have to pick up the right kind of content and not restrict it to children.

franchises. Those who tried them in the past were, perhaps, ahead of the times but recent successes suggest that the time is not far when animation catches on in India.

TINKU SINGH
GROUP PRESIDENT/CSO, SRS



Content has come a long way in our films and the audience has developed a mature taste, opting for hard-hitting dramas

compared to run-of-the-mill, boy-meets-girl stories. Yet, on the animated front, India is still lagging. In fact, we have a few of the most accomplished animation houses, its members working for blockbusters such as *Life of Pi*, *Skyfall* and more. Yet, movie makers are sceptical when it comes to making an Indian-origin animated movie.

The root cause goes back to the quality of content created, which will take time to be at par with their Western counterparts. Also, a majority of the Indian-origin animated movies are either targeted at kids or are mythology-oriented, alienating a chunk of the audience. Hollywood is famed for its wholesome animated fare, aimed at the whole family.

Movies like *Kochadaiyan* and *Chaar*

BRIJESH TANDON
DISTRIBUTOR, DELHI-UP



Animation films have a restricted audience yet a few recent Hollywood films did very well in India. The fact that Hindi animation films

don't have a good budget to use good effects whereas Hollywood films have great content as well as the visuals to support it, changes the dynamics of the animation genre in India.

We have had many top actors dubbing for animation films but these films too failed to impress the audience. *The Jungle Book* was an animation film but other than that, many non-animation Hollywood films too are taking a huge chunk out of our collection pie. If Indian animation films have good content along with good visuals and are marketed well just like any other genre, they have the potential to do well at the box office.

RAKESH SINGH
DISTRIBUTOR, BIHAR

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DEVIKA SHROFF NIHALINI
FOUNDER, SPOT ON FILM
MARKETING



It is surprising that most animation films across the globe are outsourced to India. Indian animators have worked on some of the highest-grossing films, and yet we don't exploit this talent for our own industry. Historically, animation films have not done well in India, an exception to this being *The Jungle Book*. It brought with it a sense of nostalgia and was able to attract movie-goers of all ages. Unfortunately, most animation films are made for children and it will be feasible for investors to fund them only if we start targeting a wider audience.

DEVANG SAMPAT
BUSINESS HEAD, STRATEGIC
INITIATIVES, CINEPOLIS



Over the last few years, Indian audiences have accepted all kinds of products and content but quality is key. The Indian audience is maturing day by day. I am sure our producers and directors are taking note of this and it is only a matter of time before we have big, local animation

compared to run-of-the-mill, boy-meets-girl stories. Yet, on the animated front, India is still lagging. India has a few of the most accomplished animation houses, its members working for blockbusters such as *Life of Pi*, *Skyfall* and more. Yet, movie makers are sceptical when it comes to making an Indian-origin animated movie.

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Movies like *Kochadiyaan* and *Chaar Sahibzaade* have done their bit to lift the scene, with *Chaar Sahibzaade* being lauded for its content. Yet there is a long way to go.

RAJESH THADANI
DISTRIBUTOR, MUMBAI



The fact that the Indian audience assumes that animated films are restricted to children is one of the main reasons the Hindi film industry is not churning out animated films. We have the technology and Indian companies are providing the animation to many big Hollywood animated franchises. Where we are lacking is in content for this genre.

The Jungle Book did well in India because of its connect with the audiences. Kids who grew up watching the series on television back in the '90s went to watch the film as it had the nostalgia factor. It is not that actors don't

expect whereas Hollywood films have great content as well as the visuals to support it, changes the dynamics of the animation genre in India.

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RAKESH SINGH
DISTRIBUTOR, BIHAR



We like to believe that our audience has evolved but that is only partially true. Our audience has evolved as far as content goes but when it comes to animation films, they would rather watch a Hollywood movie than a Hindi film. Unfortunately, Indians associate animation with children's films. A good example to the contrary was *The Jungle Book*, which cut across age groups. Of course, let's not forget that the movie had a *desi* connect and our industry thinks of animation as cartoons and hence doesn't make films of this genre.

Chhota Bheem is one example of how successful an animation franchise can be. But if Hollywood makes animation films which don't have a specific target audience but thinks of the audience as a whole, why do Indian filmmakers make animation films with a target audience in mind?