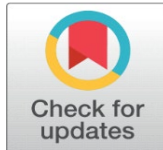
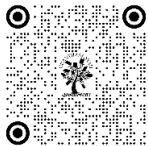


TRACING THE HISTORY OF 2D TRADITIONAL ANIMATION IN CHENNAI

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ABSTRACT

The present paper explores the historical development of 2D traditional animation in Chennai, India, starting from its early influences in the 1950s and 1960s to its current growth and challenges. The research traces the contributions of pioneering animators and studios that were instrumental in establishing and evolving the animation industry in Chennai. Through in-depth interview analysis, the key findings highlight the early influence of Disney animator Clair Weeks and studios like Prasad and Gemini during the 1950s and 1960s. Subsequently, the contributions of Albert Zacharias, Ram Mohan, and Venki Sambamoorthy facilitated the emergence of innovative animation techniques and the training of new talents. The industry further expanded in the 1990s and 2000s with the establishment of animation training programs and studios.

However, the industry has faced significant challenges due to a lack of government support and global competition. The paper concludes that Chennai's animation industry has significant potential for developing original content rooted in Indian stories and culture, targeting both domestic and international markets. The research underscores the necessity for continued investment and support for animation-related programs and productions.

Keywords: 2D Traditional Animation, Media, Industry, Artist, Chennai

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. HISTORY OF 2D TRADITIONAL ANIMATION

Traditional animation, also referred to as classical, cel, hand-drawn, or simply 2D animation, is one of the earliest and most significant techniques in the history of moving images. In this technique, each frame is meticulously illustrated by hand, creating the illusion of movement when played in sequence. Long before the introduction of digital technologies such as CGI and 3D animation, this labor-intensive process was the foundation of animated cinema and became a visual language for storytelling that has endured for generations. The evolution of 2D animation has been remarkable, influencing not only entertainment but also education, advertising, and cultural narratives worldwide. Many pioneering artists and studios have transformed this medium by experimenting with various styles,

techniques, and storytelling methods, leaving a legacy that continues to inspire modern animators. Over the years, traditional animation has grown beyond its entertainment value to become an important academic subject, taught in art and design schools, film institutes, and communication programs. Its lasting relevance underscores how hand-crafted visuals can bridge creativity and technology, preserve the essence of artistic expression while shape new media practices.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research primarily employed a qualitative methodology, utilizing in-depth interviews, document analysis, archival research, and chronological mapping.

In-depth interviews: Interviews were conducted with pioneers and significant figures in Chennai's animation sector, including:

- Preethy Paul
- Ravi Prakash
- Phani Tetali
- M. Trotsky Marudu
- N.K. Narasimhan

2.1. QUESTIONS ASKED

- 1) Can you share your background and your journey within the animation field?
- 2) How was your experience collaborating with industry experts and the Films Division of India?
- 3) Could you discuss the shift from government employment to establishing your own animation studio?
- 4) What challenges did you encounter while developing the animation industry in India?
- 5) Can you recount your experiences working on notable projects?
- 6) How has the animation sector in India changed since you began your career?
- 7) What are your views on the shift from traditional 2D animation to 3D and CGI?
- 8) In your opinion, how can animation education in India be enhanced?
- 9) What guidance would you offer to aspiring animators in India today?
- 10) What do you envision as the future of Indian animation on the international stage?

3. DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

Pioneers of Animation in Chennai

- 1) Clairs Weeks
- 2) Ram Mohan
- 3) Venki Sambamoorthy
- 4) Trotsky Marudu
- 5) N.K. Narasimhan

- 6) Phani Tetali
- 7) Preethy Paul
- 8) Ravi Prakash

3.1. CLAIR WEEKS

- **Birth:** September 14, 1911 – Mysore, India
- **Death:** August 26, 1996 – Los Angeles, California

3.2. EARLY LIFE

Clair Weeks, often referred to as the "grandfather of Indian animation," established a remarkable career that encompassed sixteen years at Walt Disney Studios. He was born to a Methodist missionary who had dedicated nearly forty years of service in India, and he spent part of his formative years in the country before his family moved to the United States.

3.3. EDUCATION/TRAINING

Clair attended Chouinard on a scholarship. As he approached graduation in 1935-36, Disney was recruiting new artists. They publicized job openings in educational institutions and dispatched talent scouts, including George Drake, to search for potential artists.

Clair Weeks received an initial two-week trial at Disney after showcasing his portfolio from Chouinard. During this trial, he focused on intensive life-drawing sessions to enhance his skills. After the trial, he was placed on probation and offered a temporary role with a modest weekly salary of \$15. With the mentorship of figures like Johnny Bond, George Goepper, and George Drake, Weeks steadily honed his craft. In the initial phases, he worked on previously completed projects before advancing to original production tasks. As his skills improved and he gained recognition, he was assigned more substantial animation responsibilities. Like many aspiring artists at Disney, he aimed to work alongside established animators whose work he admired and aspired to replicate.

3.4. CAREER OVERVIEW

Clair Weeks commenced his full-scale production career at Disney in 1936, initially serving as an assistant to Jack Campbell, who was under the guidance of Grim Natwick during the animation of *Snow White*. His career saw significant advancement following this project, as he came under the mentorship of Milt Kahl, from whom he learned the fundamentals of strong draftsmanship, expressive character development, and the nuances that imbued animated figures with a lifelike quality on screen. Subsequently, Weeks contributed to the story team for *Bambi*, working closely with Kahl and under the supervision of Perce Pearce. His career further expanded to encompass projects such as *Peter Pan*, *Cinderella*, and *Sleeping Beauty*, where he animated scenes featuring Tinker Bell and Princess Aurora. He also played a role in *Alice in Wonderland*, receiving official screen credit for his contributions to *Peter Pan*.

In 1956, Weeks journeyed to Bombay at the invitation of the Films Division of India (FDI) as part of the American Technical Cooperation Mission. His assignment involved establishing and training the nation's inaugural professional animation

unit. He guided a generation of Indian animators, including Ram Mohan, Bhimsain, Satam, Ezra Mir, A.R. Sen, and Pramod Pati, and supervised the production of *The Banyan Deer* (1956–57), one of India's pioneering animated films.

After his contributions in India, Weeks continued his global endeavors through the U.S. Agency for International Development. His career led him throughout Southeast Asia, including Nepal, where he directed a communications office in Kathmandu, creating films and audiovisual materials aimed at fostering social development and economic awareness in developing countries. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, he also returned to India as an educator, imparting his animation knowledge at the National Institute of Design (NID) in Ahmedabad, thereby further solidifying the foundation of animation education in the nation.

3.5. THE SUBTLE INSIGHTS LEARNED AT DISNEY

In a conversation with Milt Gray, Weeks shared that he felt an extraordinary sense of sharing during his early years at Disney. He noted that there was a remarkable absence of selfishness; everyone willingly shared what they had learned. Individuals acted generously and felt secure. Jack Campbell dedicated hours to him, carefully explaining how to achieve what he was doing on *Snow White*. Milt Kahl also assisted by analyzing Weeks' drawings, correcting them, and teaching him because he wanted the best results. Everyone focused on the final product and contributed to it.

When recalling his work on *Bambi*, Clair Weeks considered it one of the most enjoyable phases of his career at Disney. He explained that the artists were given considerable creative freedom during the project, with minimal direct intervention from Walt Disney himself. According to Weeks, Walt visited the production only on a few occasions, while most of the responsibility was managed by Perce Pearce, who encouraged the team's independence. This autonomy allowed the animators to experiment and refine their storytelling approach. Over his sixteen years at the studio, Weeks not only contributed to several landmark films but also lived through pivotal moments in the company's history, including the 1941 animators' strike. His career was briefly interrupted when he served in World War II, after which he continued to build on his animation expertise.

3.6. PIONEER OF INDIAN ANIMATION

From the June 10, 1994, issue of the Disney Newsreel:

"Former Animator Brought Disney Magic Around the Globe"

Disney's animated films have had a significant global impact, creating characters like *Bambi*, *Snow White*, and *Tinker Bell* that are still widely recognized by both children and adults. While the majority of Disney animators contributed to this legacy from within the studio, Clair Weeks set himself apart by taking the art of animation beyond Hollywood. His efforts reached several countries in Southeast Asia, where he played an essential role in introducing and nurturing animation practices outside the United States.

"Being able to introduce this art form to the developing countries was very challenging and very rewarding," Clair recently reflected.

Clair was born in India to missionary parents. He spoke Hindi before he learned English and did not arrive in the United States until he was 17 years old. After completing his college education, Clair moved west to California. "Disney was

advertising for people because he (Walt) was getting into making Snow White," Clair explained. "I thought, 'What the heck, I'll get a job, anyway.'"

He received an invitation to audition by sketching a model. He recalled that when they received the news of their success, they assigned him to in-betweening. After a few weeks, if they demonstrated any potential, they moved across the street to the main Hyperion Studio, where Clair worked on the Snow White character.

While the animators shared Walt's vision for Snow White, they also had to remain committed for economic reasons given the circumstances. Clair remembered that it was a job during the Depression, and they were aware that their positions were at risk. Despite a brief interruption during World War II, Clair contributed to numerous animated feature films, including Peter Pan, Fantasia, Alice in Wonderland, Sleeping Beauty, and Cinderella.

Reflecting on his experiences, Clair recently stated, 'Introducing this art form to developing nations was both a significant challenge and a deeply rewarding endeavor.'"

Clair, born in India to missionary parents, initially spoke Hindi before learning English. He did not arrive in the United States until the age of 17. Following his college graduation, Clair moved westward to California. "Disney was seeking talent as Walt was beginning the production of Snow White," Clair recounted. "I thought, 'Why not? I'll apply for a job.'"

He received an invitation to audition by creating sketches of a model. Clair recalled the moment they learned they had been selected, which led to his assignment in in-betweening. After a few weeks, those who showed potential were invited to the main Hyperion Studio, where Clair contributed to the character development of Snow White.

While the animators were aligned with Walt's vision for Snow White, they were also acutely aware of the economic pressures of the era. Clair remembered that it was a job during the Great Depression, and they understood the precariousness of their employment. Despite a temporary halt during World War II, Clair played a role in the production of several animated feature films, such as Peter Pan, Fantasia, Alice in Wonderland, Sleeping Beauty, and Cinderella.

In 1956, the Indian government sought artists to assist in establishing an animation studio aimed at educating their predominantly peasant population. Clair applied and was accepted, though his colleagues at the studio thought he was crazy. Walt reassured him that if it didn't work out or he was unhappy, he could always return. Walt was so supportive of Clair that he connected him with all his suppliers, enabling Clair to acquire the same materials used by the studio. Whenever Clair returned to the United States, he would visit Burbank to see Walt and his former colleagues. Clair noted that Walt always greeted him warmly and was interested in his activities.

During his three years in Bombay, Clair Weeks founded one of India's first animation studios, which initially concentrated on creating animated segments for documentary films. However, he quickly recognized the challenges of establishing such a facility in a new setting. One of the unforeseen challenges arose from the materials he had imported from the United States, particularly the cel paints, which did not dry correctly in the Indian climate. Even technical guidance from Disney's Ink and Paint Department could not resolve the problem. To tackle this issue, Weeks adapted to local conditions by purchasing poster paints from a nearby market, which functioned effectively and enabled production to proceed.

After his tenure in India, Clair Weeks went on to make international contributions, spending time in nations like Nepal, Thailand, Malaysia, and Bangladesh before ultimately returning to California. In every place, he fully engaged with the local culture, frequently learning the language and recruiting young artists from local schools. His instruction always commenced with a core principle—drawing as the foundation of animation. He stressed that animation is not just about static images but about capturing the rhythm and essence of movement, whether it was the manner in which a person walked, ran, or conveyed emotion.

Despite the fact that many of his Disney peers, famously referred to as the “Nine Old Men,” gained enduring recognition within the studio, Weeks never felt regret about leaving to follow a different path. He characterized his career outside Disney as profoundly fulfilling, providing experiences that influenced both his professional trajectory and personal development.

Among the archival materials related to Weeks is a significant Disney pamphlet released in 1943, titled Dispatch from Disney. This wartime document, circulated to studio employees who were serving in the military, featured an introduction from Walt Disney himself, an essay by Major Alexander P. de Seversky discussing the educational potential of animation, along with creative contributions from Roy Williams and updates regarding animators such as T. Hee, Freddie Moore, Frank Thomas, and Woolie Reitherman.

In 1956, Weeks journeyed to Bombay, India, at the request of Information Films of India to establish and train the nation's first animation studio as part of the American Technical Co-Operation Mission. What began as a one-year initiative evolved into nearly a decade of service abroad with the US Agency for International Development. Weeks traveled throughout Southeast Asia and led a community actions office in Kathmandu, Nepal. He created films and audiovisual materials that contributed to the social development and economic advancement of developing countries.

During his approximately year-and-a-half stay in India, Clair Weeks mentored a group of young artists at the Films Division of India (FDI). Under his mentorship, the team created *The Banyan Deer* (1956–57), a film that is often regarded as one of the earliest significant milestones in Indian animation. Among his students was Ram Mohan, who later achieved recognition as a pioneering figure and is frequently referred to as one of the founding fathers of Indian animation. Weeks' influence was not limited to this initial training program; in the late 1960s and early 1970s, he also imparted his knowledge to students at the National Institute of Design (NID) in Ahmedabad, further contributing to the advancement of animation education in India.

4. ALBERT ZACHARIAS (1923 – 65)

Albert Zacharias is recognized as one of the foremost animators in India. His remarkable and extensive contributions to animation within Bollywood and the advertising industry are noteworthy. Mrs. Sireesha Chandrasekaran, the esteemed granddaughter of Albert Zacharias and a 2D animator based in Chennai, expresses her feelings: In a touching tribute, Sireesha Chandrasekaran articulates her admiration and respect for her grandfather, Albert Zacharias, who was a pioneer in Indian animation. Although she was born after his passing, she emphasizes how his legacy continues to shape her life and career in animation. For her, celebrating his birthday each year is not merely a family custom but a way to honor his significant

contributions to the art form. The influence of Albert Zacharias can be seen in productions such as the 1962 Bollywood film *Naughty Boy*, which starred Kishore Kumar and Kalpana, where his title animation displayed exceptional creativity and vision during an era lacking modern digital tools. His ability to conceptualize and execute animated sequences with innovation and artistic skill has created a lasting legacy, even many years later. Rather than commemorating his memory through traditional celebrations, Chandrasekaran honors his life by emphasizing his accomplishments, ensuring that his impact on traditional animation in India is recognized and remembered. More About Albert Zacharias by Mrs. Sireesha Chandrasekaran "Animation is not simply the art of moving drawings; it is the art of movement that is illustrated. A. Zacharias was a master of this craft." He would have turned 87 years old today if he were still alive. I am delighted to share further information and historical details that I have gathered about my granduncle Albert Zacharias. While clearing out her attic, his niece stumbled upon an old, tinted, delicate piece of paper. It was a typed letter on his letterhead, revealing his address in Bombay.

Over the years, as Bombay transitioned into modern Mumbai, the area's landscape may have undergone a complete transformation.

Nonetheless, Mrs. Sireesha clings to hope and is certain that she will ultimately find the place where he once lived.

The letter, dated July 2, 1963, was addressed to the Chief Producer of the Children's Film Society in Bombay. It detailed his story, illustrations, and script for a short film titled *Adventures of Manoj*, which had a duration of 3,000 feet (32 minutes). He wrote the letter to seek approval for the production costs of this short film. While many people admire the history of ancient civilizations and our nation, it is truly remarkable to explore our own family's history and acknowledge the contributions of our ancestors. Mrs. Sireesha was thrilled to find a photograph of her granduncle with his parents—my great-grandparents.

5. THE DESTINY

"The willing, destiny guides them; the unwilling, destiny drags them." — Roman philosopher, mid-1st century AD.

Mrs. Sireesha has a deep belief in spiritual guides and the practice of honoring ancestors. For her, these beings are not only sacred but also whole, interconnected with all of existence, acting as the universe's messengers to help us understand our purpose on Earth. She believes that when we choose to enter this world to fulfill our missions, we attract a collective of such souls—each connected to us through a shared history.

Among these guiding spirits, Mrs. Sireesha consistently feels the unique blessings of one particular soul—her mother's uncle, who left this world 46 years ago. Despite his short life, he made notable contributions to the field of cartoon animation. Using advanced tools like the Oxberry animation stand, he was a pioneer in Indian animation for Bollywood and the advertising industry. Although animation is flourishing today, A. Zacharias left a lasting legacy six decades ago in this vibrant art form.

A. Zacharias, Mrs. Sireesha's granduncle, was someone she never had the opportunity to meet in person, knowing him only as her mother's uncle. Her realization of his identity as an artist and animator came about unexpectedly after she entered the animation field herself. Currently, only a handful of people from his generation are still alive, with the exception of his 84-year-old sister, who retains a

clear recollection of him. Mrs. Sireesha, who graduated in fine arts from Stella Maris College in Chennai, describes her foray into animation as fortuitous—but she now perceives it as her genuine vocation. Hailing from a family of doctors, engineers, scientists, and educators, Mrs. Sireesha feels fortunate to have the opportunity to pursue a career in art and animation, even marrying into a similar professional milieu. The realization that a relative had engaged in animation two generations earlier filled her with both pride and enthusiasm. This newfound knowledge sparked a desire to delve deeper into his life. Through her investigations, she discovered that A. Zacharias had left home as a teenager, returning later as a trained artist with limited means—a story reminiscent of classic Bollywood narratives. Information about his art education or animation training is scarce, yet he frequently visited family, claiming to be a successful artist in Mumbai. He contributed to Bollywood projects and maintained a close association with the legendary singer-actor Kishore Kumar. Notably, he participated in the title animation for *Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi*, directed by Satyen Bose, which starred Kishore Kumar and Madhubala, and designed cartoon characters for commercial campaigns, including the creation of “Smily the Kolynos Kid” for a toothpaste advertisement. Mrs. Sireesha’s research encountered obstacles, as few individuals from his time could provide further information. She learned that he spent the majority of his life in Mumbai, remained unmarried, and passed away at the age of 42. At that time, little effort was made to preserve his artistic creations or personal effects.

The purpose of this blog is to document and share both the recognized and lesser-known contributions of A. Zacharias to Indian animation. As an animator herself, Mrs. Sireesha aims to honor his legacy by highlighting his extraordinary work and the lasting influence he had on the animation industry in India.

6. RAM MOHAN

Ram Mohan is frequently regarded as a trailblazer and a significant figure in Indian animation, having made substantial contributions to the industry’s development and evolution. Throughout his career, he worked on over a hundred films, showcasing a remarkable variety that encompassed 2D classical animation, early ventures into 3D computer graphics, and projects that fused animation with live-action cinema. In addition to his creative achievements, one of his most lasting impacts is his role as a mentor and educator. By training and motivating a new generation of animators, he laid the professional groundwork upon which modern Indian animation continues to flourish.

7. EDUCATION

Ram Mohan, who graduated in science from the University of Madras, initially aimed for further studies but chose to leave them behind when he was presented with a chance to join the Cartoon Films Unit of the Films Division of India in 1956. During this period, he received formal training in animation under the mentorship of Clair H. Weeks, a Disney animator who had come to India through the U.S. Technical Aid program. This early guidance was instrumental in shaping Ram Mohan’s future in the animation industry.

8. CAREER

From 1960 to 1967, Ram Mohan made substantial contributions to the Cartoon Films Unit of the Films Division, where he engaged in scripting, designing, and

animating various projects. Notably, his film *Homo Saps* was awarded the National Award for Best Experimental Film in 1967, while another of his creations, *Chaos*, received recognition at the Leipzig Festival of Short Films in 1968. These accomplishments established him as a prominent creative force in Indian animation during that era. His burgeoning reputation also reached international levels, as evidenced by his involvement in the World Retrospective of Animation Cinema held in Montreal in 1967. The subsequent year, aiming to venture beyond government-sponsored projects, he took on the role of head of the animation division at Prasad Productions. By 1972, motivated by a quest for creative autonomy, he established his own production company, Ram Mohan Biographics, which became one of the first independent animation studios in India and signified the beginning of his entrepreneurial journey in the industry.

9. MILESTONES

1956 - Underwent training with Clair Weeks through the US Technical Aid Programme and later worked at the Cartoon Film Unit at Films Division.

1967 - Engaged in the 'World Expo of Animation Cinema' in Montreal, Canada, and worked alongside Norman McLaren at International Films Division for 6 weeks.

1968 - Became the head of the Animation Department at Prasad Studios.

1972 - Established his own studio, 'Ram Mohan Biographics'.

1990 - Collaborated with Yogo Sako from Japan for the co-production of the cartoon series 'Ramayana'.

1995 - Worked on the 'Meena' and 'Sara' cartoon series in partnership with UNICEF.

1997 - Joined forces with UTV to create RM-USL, which was later renamed UTV Toons.

2001 - Took on the role of Chairman at Grafiti studio, focusing on 2D, 3D, and CG animation.

10. AWARDS

1969 - National Award for the Best Film on Family Planning, "Baap Re Baap".

1972 - National Award for the Best Animation Film, "You Said It".

1974 - Commissioned to script, design, and direct a series of educational films on population and environment, "Down to Earth", for the International Planned Parenthood Federation and the Family Planning Association of India.

1996 - Communication Arts Guild Hall of Fame award for Lifetime Achievement. Series director for "Meena", a UNICEF series of 13 episodes addressing issues concerning girls in South Asia.

2001 - Advertising Club Award 'ABBY' for Lifetime Achievement.

2002 - Chairman, Grafiti Multimedia Pvt. Ltd.

2003 - I.D.P.A. "Ezra Mir" award for Lifetime Achievement, Broadcast India.

11. FILMOGRAPHY

1968 - Script, design, direction: "Baap re Baap", produced by Prasad Productions, Madras. 11 min, 35 mm, colour. National Award for the best short film on Family Planning, 1969.

1971 - Script, design, direction: "You Said It", produced by Prasad Productions for Film Division. 10 min, 35mm, colour. National Award for the best film in 1972.

1972 - Script, design, direction: "Down to Earth - Part 1: The Friendly Planet" and "Part 2: The Ravaged Elements", produced by Prasad Productions for the Family Planning Association of India. 12 min each, 35mm, colour.

1973 - "Down to Earth - Part 3: The Island of Graph", produced by Prasad Productions for EPAI. 12 min, 35mm, colour.

1974 - "Down to Earth - Part 4: The Fourth Revolution", produced by Ram Mohan Biographics for EPAI. 12 min, 35mm, colour.

1983 - Design and direction: "Fire Games", produced by Shilpa Bharati Publicity. 10 min, 35mm, colour.

1984 - National Award for the Best Animation Film: "Fire Games".

1989 - Design and direction: "Taru", produced for Children's Film Society of India. 18 min, 35mm, colour.

1992 - Co-direction (with Koichi Sasaki of Japan): "Ramayana: The Legend of Prince Rama", Tokyo. 135 min, 35mm, colour.

1992 - Inducted into the IAAFA Hall of Fame by the Indian Academy of Advertising Film Art.

1994 - In collaboration with ACCU, Tokyo, the production titled "The White Elephant" was created, drawing inspiration from an Indian fable.

1995 - The "Meena" project was initiated with UNICEF, comprising 13 episodes featuring 20-25 artists, in partnership with FII Cartoons, Manila. Additionally, the "Sara" project was also developed with UNICEF.

Ram Mohan recounted his journey in the industry, noting that cartooning was merely a hobby for him. He had a passion for drawing cartoons and had not considered a career in animation at that time, as opportunities in the field were scarce. Only a handful of individuals were experimenting with animation independently, acquiring knowledge from books, yet there were no animation studios in Bombay.

In Madras, Gemini Studio had commenced some animation work, and Prabhat Studios had initiated projects such as Jamboos Kaka. The announcement from the Films Division was particularly intriguing. They had received an animation camera through the U.S. technical aid program and were set to bring in Disney animator Clair H. Weeks to provide training and establish a formal animation studio. Ram Mohan, who had always harbored an interest in cartooning and animation, decided to meet the Disney representative. Despite his lack of formal qualifications as an animator, when he presented his cartoons to Clair Weeks, they were well-received, leading Weeks to inquire why Ram Mohan had not enrolled in the training program. This unexpected turn of events resulted in Ram Mohan joining the Films Division training program, presenting him with an opportunity to pursue animation as a career. Concurrently, Prasad Productions in Madras extended an offer for him to lead their animation department in Bombay, prompting him to believe it was an opportune moment to transition into the private sector.

In 1972, Ram Mohan established his own organization known as Ram Mohan Biographics. They continued utilizing equipment from Prasad. With Clair Weeks at the Films Division, Ram Mohan was given his first opportunity to engage in animation. At that time, he had neither anticipated nor envisioned a career in animation. Cartooning was merely a pastime for him, and he did not take it seriously. He held a degree in science. Upon arriving in Bombay, his intention was to pursue

further studies in science. In fact, he had even enrolled in a Master of Science program. However, this unexpected opportunity emerged and dramatically altered his career trajectory. Otherwise, he likely would have found himself working in a laboratory or a similar environment.

In 1956, Clair Weeks came to India as part of the U.S. Technical Aid Program, an initiative backed by the American government. This program provided not only equipment—such as an animation camera—but also professional guidance from Disney Studios, with Weeks playing a pivotal role in nurturing local talent. The aim was to establish the Cartoon Films Unit within the Films Division of India, which would act as a creative entity for producing educational and promotional films. This initiative was closely linked to India's inaugural Five-Year Plan, as the government aimed to utilize animation as a tool to elucidate its objectives and showcase the advantages of planned development to the populace. They aspired to create an awareness program. All the films were intended to develop structured programs. Some were engaging, while others fell short of interest. The topics were not particularly dramatic or extraordinary but concentrated on matters such as small savings, health initiatives, and fisheries.

In the initial phase, the government exercised complete control over the Films Division. Technical experts were responsible for supervision, and while they had the necessary technical skills, they often lacked imagination and creativity. Despite having access to high-quality equipment and cameras, they restricted the possibilities of what could be accomplished. Creative insights were introduced by experts such as Bhavnagri and James Beveridge. Additionally, the arrival of Pramod Pati, who had been trained at Zinca studio in France, led to the creation of engaging work. The training program offered numerous learning opportunities, and Ram Mohan, a science graduate, began with the basics of storyboarding and character design, learning animation from Clair Weeks with a focus on cel animation. After Pramod Pati's departure from the Cartoons Film Division in 1966, the scene became less vibrant and innovative. The Government of India initiated a 5-year Planned Publicity Program that encompassed topics such as health initiatives aimed at cleanliness and fly prevention, fisheries (cultivating fish in small ponds), combating malaria, and family planning. Animation proved to be an effective medium for reaching a diverse audience from small towns and villages across India. Utilizing live actors would have localized the content excessively, while cartoon characters representing villagers or sarpanches were more iconic and universally relatable. By dubbing only the language, animation became more impactful, enabling audiences to form emotional connections with the characters. Initially, animation was predominantly perceived as a medium for children, but the Meena project transformed this viewpoint. Research conducted on Meena indicated a remarkable response, captivating both children and their parents. UNICEF recognizes animation as a potent tool for conveying social messages and fostering development. Concurrently,

Prasad Productions studios in Madras obtained an Oxberry animation stand and decided to establish a Special Effects Department in Animation. They approached Ram Mohan to lead their department, and he agreed on the condition that they would transport their equipment to Bombay. Thus, the Prasad Productions Animation Department was founded in the Film Center in Tardeo, Bombay. Ram Mohan joined them, stating that he would stay for only 3 to 4 years, as he wished to become independent afterward. They started with films like 'Baap Re Baap' and 'You Said It,' which were centered on how democracy functions. They also produced a series called 'Down To Earth,' which won several awards. After that, Ram Mohan decided to establish his own company, Ram Mohan Biographics, in 1972. Bhimsain,

who had left the Films Division at the same time, joined Ram Mohan, and they created a film called 'Harmony' using cutout animation techniques. At that time, Hindi films had just begun to incorporate animation. Ram Mohan created animation sequences for films like 'Hasina Man Jayegi,' 'Do aur Do Paanch,' 'Biwi O Biwi,' and song sequences for films like B.R. Chopra's 'Pati Patni aur Woh' and Hrishikesh Mukherjee's 'Khubsoorat,' where the studio animated scenes like the moon coming down and fish flying. 'Bhuvan Shome' was one of the first films where animation was utilized, and it was also done during this time. Since Prasad Productions was in the Film Center, producers would come there to get their films developed and processed. They had access to Ram Mohan's department and asked them to create animation for their title sequences, which was enjoyable work.

Satyajit Ray reached out to Ram Mohan for his film 'Shatranj Ke Khiladi.' He sought animation for a scene in the introductory passage that depicted the political climate in India during the reign of Wajid Ali Shah. Collaborating with Ray was a rewarding experience, as he had a precise understanding of his needs. He requested that the British characters be illustrated in the 'Company drawing' style. This task was completed while Ram Mohan was still affiliated with Prasad Productions. Upon founding Ram Mohan Biographics, his primary focus was on advertising. His studio was likely the only one equipped with the necessary camera technology and infrastructure. He undertook numerous advertising projects, especially commercials. Nevertheless, the company never expanded significantly, with the workforce remaining between 10 to 15 artists. There was a general reluctance to pursue animation as a career, as it was perceived as a niche field with limited advertising film production and minimal potential for substantial growth. From 1972 to 1997, when Ram Mohan ultimately closed Ram Mohan Biographics, the company only increased from 10-15 individuals to approximately 20-25 artists over a span of 25 years. It was difficult to persuade people to enter the animation industry because they perceived it as a domain lacking in challenges and opportunities. In the mid-1990s, a sudden surge of interest in contract work and outsourcing from overseas emerged. Ronnie Screwvala from UTV reached out to Ram Mohan for a potential collaboration. He considered this a promising idea, as he felt he had hit a wall after twenty-five years. The limited infrastructure left little room for further growth. They founded what was initially named 'RM-USL,' which was later rebranded as 'UTV Toons.' They began to explore possibilities for outsourced work.

Rhony and Ram Mohan made a visit to Los Angeles, touring a number of studios, including Disney and Fox. They showcased a selection of high-quality commercials that Ram Mohan had produced at Ram Mohan Biographics. Their presentation was positively received, and they encountered no difficulties in securing work. Their first project was an adaptation of 'Oliver Twist,' where Oliver was represented as a small dog and other characters were depicted as animals, such as Fagin as a wolf. While working on these episodes, they realized they did not have enough animators. They had a core team of 25 individuals, primarily from RMB, which was inadequate for ongoing outsourced work. To expand, they needed to train more individuals, as there was no other way to acquire the necessary skills. They established a training program alongside their production work. The six-month program allowed trainees to learn while working on productions, starting as inbetweeners and then progressing to clean-up artists and animators. Their staff eventually grew to 450, which proved unsustainable due to fluctuating workloads. They shifted to hiring on a contract basis. Unfortunately, in India, individuals tend to prefer permanent jobs that offer security and lifelong employment, which they could not provide. Consequently, some employees chose to retire or leave their positions. Fortunately, during that time, other studios were emerging. Toonz in Trivandrum, Esca Toon in

Delhi established by the Escort group, and studios in Hyderabad, Bangalore, and Chennai were among them. These studios recognized that individuals trained at UTV Toons could find employment anywhere, provided they were willing to travel. There were no issues in securing jobs because anyone with training experience from UTV Toons had no difficulty being absorbed elsewhere; that experience itself was a valuable qualification. This is how they expanded, and they were doing quite well.

In the year 2000 and thereafter, numerous studios in India began to engage in competition with one another. Furthermore, India found itself in competition with China and other nations within the same industry. Studios were consistently undercutting one another, striving to operate at increasingly lower prices, which ultimately proved to be unsustainable. Ram Mohan experienced frustration because his original intention of collaborating with UTV was to secure more work to sustain the company and to train a greater number of individuals. Once a team of trained personnel was established, they should have focused on developing original content, creating their own shows for the global market or, at the very least, for the Indian market. Unfortunately, this was not occurring. As business and work from international sources increased, the allure of earning in dollars became irresistible, leading companies to prioritize that over other ventures. Ultimately, Ram Mohan concluded that this was not the path he wished to pursue for the remainder of his life.

Despite the abundance of work available, he sought to delve deeper into animation by developing indigenous animation programs that featured Indian narratives, content, and characters tailored for Indian audiences. He also aimed to investigate the potential of 3D animation, particularly as CGI technology was advancing rapidly. He recognized the necessity of progressing forward. The challenge with 2D animation lay in its demand for extensive labor, numerous personnel, and substantial physical space. The sole reason for the survival of 2D animation was the presence of inexpensive labor in Asia. Consequently, CGI emerged as the only viable avenue worth pursuing. However, the challenge remained that CGI was often viewed as a mere imitation of the movements characteristic of 2D animation. After viewing films produced by Pixar, he noted that they were successfully overcoming these limitations, addressing challenges, and creating movements that closely resembled those found in 2D animation. Ram Mohan believed they should investigate the potential of applying classical animation principles to CGI.

They sought to explore the limits of their abilities concerning stretch, squash, and secondary movement, aspects that are frequently taken for granted in effective 2D classical animation. Ram Mohan opted to transition from classical animation to 3D and assumed the position of chairman at Graphiti. Their first action was to deliver fundamental and intensive training in Maya 3D software to those already engaged in hand-drawn classical animation. They found that within 3 to 4 weeks, these individuals could adeptly navigate the software. The animation results they achieved were markedly superior to those produced by other schools lacking a classical animation background. As a result, they have instituted a policy of hiring individuals with classical animation experience. They then provide training in software like Maya, which leads to impressive outcomes. Of course, there is a specialized dimension of 3D that includes modeling, rigging, textures, and lighting, which are intricate technical aspects of 3D animation that cannot be replicated through classical animation. These skills must be developed independently. Nevertheless, animation itself, assuming a well-designed and rigged model is in place to facilitate natural movements, is the responsibility of a classical animator. They are considering the creation of 3D animation that is rendered as 2D to achieve

a 2D appearance. They have not yet undertaken significant projects in the realm of 3D animation as practiced abroad, except for special effects where they blend special effects animation with live action in such a way that the viewer cannot discern which is live and which is animated. This technique has been primarily applied in films like Terminator, Titanic, and Jurassic Park. Such projects are yet to be realized, but this is the field they wish to explore. Ram Mohan has students located across the country, including in Bangalore, Mumbai, Delhi, Ahmedabad, Chennai, and Hyderabad, etc. They are currently training new students, while some are teaching at various institutes and others are working in studios.

It is gratifying to have established the third generation of animation in India, and there is hope for its perpetual growth and expansion. Ram Mohan perceives that some individuals regard animation merely as a profession or job. They seek a monthly salary akin to that of a telephone operator. For these individuals, it would be beneficial to have polytechnic institutions that provide instruction in in-betweening, clean-ups, and the fundamentals of animation. For them, animation does not represent an art form; rather, it is a 'dhanda,' as they refer to it, a business. It serves as their means of livelihood. Such individuals are indeed essential; without them, classical animation cannot be accomplished.

Consequently, there should be two categories of educational institutions: polytechnics that offer instruction in the foundational aspects of classical animation production at reasonable fees, and short-term courses tailored for them. These programs are in demand, at least they are currently sought after. Initially, there was significant demand because there was no need for designers, storyboard artists, or character designers, as all of that was sourced from abroad. What was required were individuals capable of taking those storyboards and executing the design and animation. Now, Ram Mohan recognizes that there is a shortage of qualified personnel, and he is aware of the extensive efforts required when he was at UTV Toons to train these individuals. The training commenced at the outset and continued as they progressed to productions where they would further their learning on the job.

Additionally, there exists another type of institution where animation is taught in conjunction with filmmaking. It is not solely about animation but rather about animation as a medium of filmmaking. Therefore, students should also be educated in music and sound, and it is crucial for animation students to possess knowledge of world classical literature, dance, performance, choreography, lighting, and more. With this comprehensive education, they evolve into well-rounded filmmakers with a broad perspective across all artistic disciplines. In fact, animation is a unique art form that integrates numerous other art forms. Thus, the education provided to animators—apologies, to animation filmmakers—must reflect this comprehensive approach.

A comprehensive 5-year program should be established, incorporating a minimum of 4 years of education in animation, which includes 2 years of undergraduate study followed by 2 years of specialization. Animation education ought to be integrated into art schools, similar to other specialized subjects such as typography and photography. This introduction should occur shortly after students complete their foundational studies, allowing them the option to select animation as a primary focus. By the conclusion of the 5-year program, students would acquire essential animation skills, enabling them to refine their abilities further in postgraduate institutions like IDC or NID, ultimately preparing them for careers as filmmakers. Currently, India lacks a robust animation culture akin to that found in Western countries. Institutions such as NID, J.J. School of Arts, IDC, FTI Pune, Films

Division, and TASI must collaborate to foster this culture. While TASI is making efforts, these initiatives are limited in scope. There exists significant potential for the advancement of animation in India, necessitating a shift in public perception and awareness. The stereotypical 'cartoon' image must be dispelled. In Western nations, animation caters to diverse audiences, including both children and adults; India should adopt a similar approach. There is ample opportunity for original content creation, yet the necessary infrastructure remains lacking. Countries like China, Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Indonesia have surpassed India in this domain. Although 'Amar Chitra Katha' has contributed to content development, it falls short of what could be achieved. Furthermore, children in the West engage with numerous comic books, a practice that is not prevalent in India and should be encouraged. Therefore, it is imperative to cultivate and advance an animation culture within India.

12. VENKI SAMBAMOORTHY

Venki Sambamoorthy was an individual who achieved success through his own efforts, having left school to enroll in the School of Arts at the tender age of 10. His roots trace back to Thanjavur. He pursued his education solely through scholarships and cultivated his passion for animation independently.

In 1975, he completed his postgraduate education, focusing on commercial art. His learning was entirely self-directed.

His career commenced with advertisements, leading him to engage in numerous government-related projects. He contributed to various ad films in the Japanese language.

Venki Sambamoorthy made his debut in Tamil cinema with the film *Apoorva Sagodharargal* (1989), where he utilized the rotoscoping technique to introduce innovative visual effects to the audience. Building upon this initial success, he contributed to several Telugu films, including *Bobbili Raja* (1990), a project that garnered him a National Award for his contributions. Throughout the years, Sambamoorthy became linked with several iconic films, such as *Gentleman* (1993), *Shankar's Indian* (1996), and *Jeans* (1998), all of which highlighted the increasing sophistication of visual effects and animation within Indian cinema. In 2011, he expanded his creative endeavors beyond feature films by producing an Anime Music Video (AMV) for the Saboten-Con AMV contest, showcasing his ability to connect traditional filmmaking with the global fan-based animation community.

Venki has won the National Award for Best Special Visual Effects four consecutive times. He has also received numerous accolades and nominations for various awards outside of the National Award in the country multiple times. Over his 20-year career, he has participated in more than 100 productions, both large and small, across various languages.

Venki has collaborated with the most esteemed feature film production companies, directors, and well-known artists in the nation. He has frequently played a pivotal role in the inception of films, with Special Effects being a central component, and has been solely accountable for the creative content and execution of a film's SFX.M.

13. TROTSKY MARUDU

Date of Birth: 12.08.1953

Place of Birth: Madurai

Father's Name: M.R. Maruthappan

Mother's Name: Rukmani Marudu

Wife's Name: T. Rathinam

Marudu Trotsky Marudu was born in Madurai, hailing from an agricultural lineage. He has two brothers and four sisters. His brothers, Thilagar Marudu and Bose Maruthanayagam, pursued careers as a documentary director and an artist, respectively.

Trotsky Marudu recalls his father's early connections with the Gandhi Ashram. At the age of 19, his father became involved in the Commonwealth movement. In 1930, he provided support to individuals fleeing the Commonwealth movement in Sri Lanka, a movement referred to as Trotskyism (Trotskya Vaadhigal). Those who escaped from Sri Lanka arrived in Madurai, where Trotsky Marudu's father aided N.M. Paraira, Kolwin, and R.T. Silva. His strong advocacy for this movement earned him the moniker 'Trotskya Vaadigal,' and he named his son Trotsky Marudu in honor of this movement.

During his childhood, Trotsky Marudu's father introduced him to animation films, English cinema, and a variety of literature. In 1950, he facilitated Trotsky Marudu's viewing of animated classics such as Peter Pan and Sleeping Beauty in Madurai's theaters. His father nurtured his artistic aspirations and encouraged him to explore significant works from their home library. Even amidst examination periods, he would take Trotsky Marudu to watch quality films.

Trotsky Marudu's mother frequently questioned his father's decisions during exam times. On one occasion, following the release of 'Lawrence of Arabia,' Trotsky Marudu's father remarked, "Your teacher described the desert only in words, but you can see the real desert in this movie," and permitted Trotsky Marudu to attend the screening.

- 1st Class Diploma in Painting, 1976, (1st Class, 1st Rank)
- Post-Diploma in Painting 1977, at Government College of Arts and Crafts, Madras
- Trained in Graphic Arts (Lithography and Etching) at Garhi Artists Studio, New Delhi, 1978
- Art Exhibitions Participated In: • Association of Young Painters shows since 1975
- Exhibition of Graphics, sponsored by Mayur Art Gallery, Hotel Sundarsan, 1976
- South Indian Society of Painters, Annual and Group Shows since 1977 at Madras
- Tamil Nadu Ovium Nunkalal Kuzhu Annual Art Exhibition 1976, 77, 78
- Association of Young Painters and Sculptors Group shows in Bangalore 1975, Bombay 1978
- Graphics Demonstration sponsored by S.I.S.P. 1977
- Forty-First and Forty-Second Annual India Art Exhibition, Calcutta, 1976, 77
- Participated in Kala Mela, New Delhi, 78, 82

I joined the 'School of Arts' and developed more interest in animation. The craze for animation did not vanish or decrease in me. As a result, I passed out with first marks. As time passed, I started doing magic scenes and title animation for my close friends in the Tamil film industry. I created an animated advertisement of 3 minutes duration. I did it all alone for almost 2 and a half months, which brought me more

success. In the 80s, I was the first person to start adapting new technologies like computers, which helped me go to the next level.

In a row, I worked on 42 films in Tamil and Telugu using computer graphics. I also worked as Art Director for 6 films.

It feels extremely gratifying to know that I have been an inspiration to many students for the past 25 years who are doing great in their profession across the world.

- Worked as a Freelance Illustrator for leading weekly/monthly Tamil magazines and played a major role in converting illustrations from traditional styles to contemporary modes since 1985.
- Contributed considerably as an artist to avant-garde literary magazines run on an experimental basis during the past 25 years.
- Worked as Poster Designer and Animator at different levels since the 1980s for socially conscious voluntary groups.
- Since the 1990s, I have been an Art Director and Special Effects Director for over 45 Tamil, Telugu, and South Indian language films. Devathai, Assuran, Rajakaliyamman, Palayaththamman, Nageshwari, Naina, Nandalala, Sarabha, and Nagesh Thiraiarangam are important films in SFX.
- First artist to use computers for painting in all of South India since the early 1990s.
- Participated in Animation camps at Thiruvananthapuram and NID, Ahmedabad in the early 90s.
- Exhibited at the Andhra Academy of Arts Annual Exhibition in Vijayawada since 1979.
- Participated in "Linear Art Movement of Madras Artists" sponsored by Alliance Française, Madras.
- Exhibited in "Art Trends in Southern Region" organized by Regional Centre, Madras.
- Participated in Weaver's Service Centre Artist's Exhibition in Delhi, Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras in 1985.
- Exhibited in National Exhibitions since 1987-88.
- Held One-Man Shows in Madras (1979), Calcutta (1986), Bombay (1988), and in 2010.
- Created murals for P.S.G. College of Technology, Coimbatore.

As Designer, Art Director, Animator, and Special Effects Director:

- Worked for many advertising agencies and as Art Director for Tamil women's magazine "Mangaiar Malar" in the late 70s and for the popular Tamil magazine "Kumudam" in the 90s.
- Employed as Textile Designer at Weaver's Service Centre, Chennai from 1978-89.
- Currently working as a freelance painter and illustrator; also undertakes assignments in films as Special Effects Director.
- Traveled and exhibited in France, England, Germany, Canada, Italy, Dubai, Singapore, Malaysia, Japan, and the United States.

Awards:

- Tamil Nadu State Award – 1978.

- Kalaimamani Award from Tamil Nadu Government in 2006.
- Honoured by Bharathidasan University at Tiruchirappalli with the title "Oviya Thendral" in 2014.
- Honoured by Mallai Tamil Sangam at Mallai with the title "Perunthachan" in 2015.
- Honoured at Pongal Vizha by the Mayor and Members of Council, Markham City, Canada in 2016.
- Honoured in Dallas by America Tamil Sangam in 2018• Trained over 50 leading animators who are currently active in the field.
- Founder member of "Tamil Nadu Film Movement," one of the two important such movements in the state.
- Conducted the first three Animation Camps for Children in 1998, 1999, and 2000, organized by Don Bosco Communication Centre, Chennai.
- Chief Designer of Tamil Nadu Government Organized Chemozhi World Tamil Conference 2009.
- Member, Curriculum committee for Education (SRET), Government of Tamil Nadu.

14. N.K. NARASIMHAN

Narasimhan, commonly referred to as Narsi, is a celebrated Gold Medalist from the College of Arts in Chennai. With over 15 years of experience as a Creative Director in the advertising industry, he has received multiple awards for excellence from advertising club competitions across India.

Alongside the iconic cartoonist R.K. Laxman, Narsi illustrated the book *The Executive Whirl*. He has also authored and illustrated two comic books in the Super Sadhu series: *Treasure Trouble* and *Passing Clouds*.

As a natural cartoonist with a strong sense of creativity and humor, Narsi is also a self-taught animator who has been a trailblazer in Indian animation. His notable works have achieved international acclaim:

- **A Gift Divine:** A 5-minute animated short about Christmas, which was screened at the Bombay International Film Festival (BIFF) in 1994 and aired on Star Plus and the Indra Dhanush Network in London.
- **The Pest Friend:** An 11-minute animation that was showcased in the competition section at the 10th International Film Festival for Children and Young People in Hyderabad (1997) and the 1st Tehran Animation Film Festival in Iran (1998).
- **Film on Environment:** A 1-minute animated short produced for BIFF 1994.
- **Life:** A 1-minute film on AIDS for BIFF 1994.

In addition to his work in animation, Narsi has created a multitude of award-winning advertising campaigns and television commercials. He has also produced and licensed exclusive animated content for Jongla, a European instant messaging application. Moreover, he works as an icon designer for The Noun Project in the USA and Iconfinder in Denmark, and he designs instant messenger stickers for the Line Creators Market of Line Corporation in Japan.

15. PHANI TETALI

Phani Tetali was born in Andhra Pradesh but spent his formative years in Chennai, where his father served as a professor at IIT Madras. Growing up on the campus, he and his peers frequently engaged in games such as 'Monkey on the Tree' and were consistently immersed in an intellectually enriching atmosphere. Phani attended Kendriya Vidyalaya located on the campus, where his first significant artistic influence came from his teacher, Mr. Parameshwaran. This teacher inspired him to draw while he worked on his own canvas paintings, leading Phani to often skip regular classes to spend time with him. Another pivotal influence in his life was his uncle Bapu, a celebrated film director and cartoonist, whose visits encouraged Phani's mother to have him draw in an effort to impress his uncle. Although Phani did not initially recognize that cartooning was his destined path, his interest gradually transformed into a genuine passion.

After completing his schooling, Phani encountered the typical pressures associated with preparing for the JEE but was unable to pass it. He subsequently enrolled at IIT BHU, where he earned a four-year B.Tech. degree in mining engineering, a discipline quite distant from animation. Nevertheless, he relished his college experience, took part in magazine programs, and designed cartoon covers for advertisements. Following graduation, he worked as a mining engineer in a remote region near West Bengal; however, the job proved to be frustrating due to lengthy daily commutes and a lack of creative outlets. He continued to draw during his leisure time and ultimately made the decision to resign from his position, returning to Chennai without notifying his parents.

While in Danapur, he came across an advertisement for the SEED exam, which was tailored for individuals holding master's degrees in visual communication. Although he was initially unaware of the program, its focus on creativity and art piqued his interest. During the admission process, Phani composed a Statement of Purpose outlining his aspiration to create animated content for Indian children. This vision resonated with the committee, resulting in his acceptance into the IPC program.

After completing his graduation, Phani pursued formal education in animation. Ram Mohan's studio was among the few in India that employed traditional animators, offering a salary of only Rs. 800 per month. To support himself, Phani worked during the day at Ram Mohan's studio and at night for Western Outdoor in Mumbai, where he earned Rs. 2,000 monthly. Eventually, he relocated to Chennai and joined Prasad Video Digital Labs, where he gained valuable experience in special effects for Bollywood films.

In 1997, Phani finished Tara Ki Duniya, a project he takes great pride in due to its narrative about a baby elephant and the positive reception it received. Following this, he was invited by Ms. Radhika Menon of Thulika Publishers to develop animated content for a children's program, Chiragugal, producing 45 episodes for Asianet over a span of six months. Motivated by this achievement, he undertook a more ambitious project, Off Home for Tara, a 13-episode series financed by First Serve Entertainment. Despite having limited experience with longer formats, he welcomed the challenge and established a studio named Animatics in Chennai. He recruited final-year BFA students from the Government College of Fine Arts as animators, many of whom now hold senior roles in the industry.

Phani encountered difficulties when some of his television content was not broadcast in a timely manner, leading to frustration. He subsequently moved to

Gandhinagar, Gujarat, to set up a studio for a TVS Group Company, but management issues led to the failure of this venture. Later, he was invited by Mr. Tapas Chakravarti to join DQ Entertainment as its first employee, contributing to the establishment of the company, which now boasts over 4,000 employees. During this time, he also collaborated with App Labs, concentrating on outsourcing pre-production tasks for foreign companies—a sector that, while not ideal, offered substantial employment opportunities during the 1990s and 2000s.

Phani has long held the conviction that animation, cartoons, gaming, and various other media can effectively teach children subjects such as history, geography, and science. In 2009, after nearly twenty years in the industry, he made the transition to teaching at IDC, where he promotes a gurukul-style mentorship system that allows students to learn from faculty engaged in live projects. Additionally, he has played a significant role in advancing online animation education through *dsource.in*, collaborating with Professor Ravi Koya, his former teacher, to create freely accessible educational modules.

In conjunction with his teaching and research endeavors, Phani is currently engaged in a substantial cartoon illustration project that aims to portray the diversity of India, featuring scenes with between 500 and 2,000 individuals, with the ultimate goal of compiling this work into a book. He is of the opinion that for India to progress within the animation sector, it is essential to cultivate indigenous companies and produce content tailored specifically for Indian children, which he views as a crucial step towards sustainable growth.

Phani has consistently believed in the power of animation, cartoons, gaming, and other forms of media to educate children in subjects like history, geography, and science. In 2009, after nearly two decades in the industry, he shifted to teaching at IDC, where he champions a gurukul-style mentorship model that enables students to learn from faculty involved in live projects. He has also made significant contributions to online animation education through *dsource.in*, where he collaborated with Professor Ravi Koya, his former teacher, to develop freely accessible educational modules.

Alongside his teaching and research activities, Phani is currently working on an extensive cartoon illustration project that aims to depict the diversity of India, featuring scenes with 500 to 2,000 individuals, with the intention of compiling this work into a book. He believes that for India to thrive in the animation industry, it is imperative to foster homegrown companies and create content specifically designed for Indian children, which he considers a vital step for sustainable growth.

16. PREETHY PAUL

Preethy Paul was born in Chennai on May 30, 1971. She completed her schooling at Fatima Matriculation Higher Secondary School in Kodambakkam before pursuing a degree in literature and subsequently a master's in fine arts at Stella Maris College, Chennai, where she was honored as the best outgoing student and received general proficiency awards in her final year. Her academic journey culminated in a master's thesis on animation in India, which became a pivotal moment in shaping her career path.

Creativity was a legacy in her family: her grandfather, P.T. Thomas, was a proficient furniture designer in Kottayam, Kerala, who worked for British officials, churches, and private clients. Her father, P.T. Paul, moved to Chennai to work as a lithograph artist at Vadapalani Press, where he gained expertise in printmaking

until the shift to digital technologies rendered traditional processes obsolete. His passion for illustrated stories had a significant influence on Preethy.

He frequently returned home with books like Chandamama, Amar Chitra Katha, and Disney comics, while Preethy and her brother ventured into Chennai's Moore Market in search of graphic novels that included Commando war stories, Archie comics, and MAD magazine. Coupled with the exposure to Disney cartoons on Doordarshan and the revolutionary influence of Star Wars at Safire Theatre, these experiences cultivated her enthusiasm for drawing, poster design, and storytelling from a young age.

In 1994, her investigation into the pioneers of animation led her to encounter Ram Mohan, who is widely acknowledged as the father of Indian animation. Mohan commenced his career in 1956 at the Cartoon Films Unit of the Films Division of India, guided by Clair Weeks from Disney Studios. He subsequently founded Ram Mohan Biographics in 1972, which later merged with UTV Toons in 1998, and he continued to be a prominent figure in the industry through his involvement with Graphiti Multimedia and the establishment of the Graphiti School of Animation in 2006. His enduring contributions were honored with the Padma Shri award in 2014. Preethy also established a connection with Shyam Ramana, the founder of Crest Animation Studios, who was at that time delving into computer animation, computer graphics, and video art.

Ram Mohan extended an invitation to her to join the inaugural 2D animation training program at Ram Mohan Biographics—a six-month course focused on traditional animation. Upon completing her training, Preethy relocated to Bangalore for personal reasons and spent two years working as an Animation and Graphics Consultant at Foresee Multimedia. In 1996, she made her way back to Chennai, where she partnered with Ram V. Mani to create Nest Animation Studios. Under Mohan's mentorship, the studio developed a robust team, initially focusing on commercials and short form animated narratives. Preethy even journeyed to the United States to explore outsourcing possibilities with companies like Warner Brothers and MGM.

Despite the eventual acquisition of Nest by Millennium Software and the subsequent disbanding of the animation team, the studio significantly contributed to the education and development of new animation talent.

Preethy stayed with the new organization until 1999, after which she founded her own independent enterprise, Positive Edge Productions, in 2000, thereby continuing her path as an entrepreneur and a creative influence within the Indian animation sector.

17. RAVI PRAKASH

Millitoon Animations Private Ltd

17.1. INCEPTION

Millitoon Animations Private Limited (MAPL) was founded on December 23, 1997, with the aim of creating and producing 2D cartoon series, managing the entire process from layout to digital services, in partnership with Millimages, Paris, France. MAPL functions as a 100% Export Oriented Unit (EOU) registered with MEPZ Chennai and represents a joint venture between Millimages and Mr. A.S. Ravi Prakash.

17.2. WORK DONE

MAPL has successfully produced over 1000 minutes of 2D animation work from the following series:

- Pense Betes
- Celestine 2
- Vampire Aliens and Pirates
- Pablo the Little Red Fox
- 64 Zoo Lane
- Talis and the Thousand Tasks
- Ethelbert the Little Tiger
- Jasper the Penguin
- Pigeon Boy (Ends Sept. 03)
- Lazy Lucy (Ends in July 04)

Among the series listed, PABLO THE LITTLE RED FOX received the esteemed BAFTA AWARD (BRITISH ACADEMY OF FILM AND TELEVISION AWARDS) in 2000, while 64 ZOO LANE was honored with the BEST PRODUCER AWARD in the European continent.

In Chennai, MAPL commenced recruitment in February 1998 and initiated animation production in June 1998, achieving a monthly output of 7 minutes. By January 2000, MAPL had progressively enhanced its capacity to 30 minutes per month. After reaching a production capacity of 40 minutes per month with around 185 employees, the company re-engineered its processes in May 2003 to produce 30 minutes with only 108 employees. MAPL's office, situated in Adyar, a central area of the city, boasted a fully air-conditioned and dust-free studio space of 8000 sq. ft. The location was conveniently accessible from all parts of the city. The company primarily sourced animators and artists from creative animation schools, arts and design institutions, and colleges of arts across India.

18. WORKING METHODS

Before embarking on a new series, the heads of departments would convene for a group discussion to grasp the director's vision and preferred animation style. They would gather all necessary information and clarifications to guarantee that the production adhered to international standards, which they subsequently communicated to the series director. Once the clarifications were obtained, work would commence. Prior to each episode, the department heads would brief animators, artists, and technical staff on the episode's narrative and the anticipated animation style to foster clear understanding and timely completion. Animators and artists were equipped with well-furnished tables and high-quality workstations to ensure a comfortable working environment. Employees at Millitoon also had access to vital infrastructure, including a library filled with the latest reference materials to enhance their skills. All projects produced at Millitoon were aired on major networks throughout Europe and America, showcasing the studio's unwavering quality and commitment to timely delivery.

19. TRAINING

- **Internal Training:** A continuous internal training program was established for artists to consistently enhance their skill levels.
- **External Training:** Skilled professionals from Europe were invited to train the staff in all stages as required. MAPL functioned as a comprehensive production studio capable of managing everything from layout to digital services. An exceptional production management system was implemented to proactively identify idle time, recurring quality issues, and HR challenges, ensuring timely delivery at accepted quality levels within contract prices. The production management system, known as S.P.I.C.E. (STUDIO PRODUCTION, INFORMATION, COSTING, and E-MAIL SYSTEM), was developed internally and served as a primary tool for overseeing production on any scale. Dynamic work-in-progress reports and various other facilities were accessible at the desktop level, which contributed to ensuring quality production on precise schedules.

20. STRENGTHS OF MAPL

The primary advantages of Millitoon included its proficient workforce operating on a variable pay structure, the S.P.I.C.E. system, and its partnership with Millimages.

21. FAST RAMP UP

MAPL generated approximately 28 minutes of animation from layout to rushes. The current facilities could readily support an expansion to around 50 minutes per month by recruiting additional personnel, as the necessary infrastructure such as tables, light boxes, and chairs was already established. A modest investment might have been required for some extra P4 computers. This would have rendered the production costs even more appealing since the fixed costs of rent, electricity, and other expenses would be distributed over a larger output.

22. ANIMATION: HOW TO TAKE INDIA INTERNATIONAL

Ravi Prakash graciously greeted the participants of Enter Media 2002. While the subject matter is extensive and open to various interpretations, he aimed to convey insights based on his own experiences. Although there is a belief in a flourishing Indian animation sector ready for global outreach, the actual situation is more complex. In spite of contributions to advertising films, special effects for Indian cinema, and groundbreaking efforts by individuals like Ram Mohan and Pentamedia, a fully developed Indian animation industry has not yet materialized. This shortfall must be addressed by dedicated industry professionals, governmental entities, and trade organizations. The objective is to create a unique Indian animation identity and subsequently present it on the international platform. India boasts a rich tradition of storytelling, artistic expressions, and a populace well-acquainted with fantastical narratives, indicating that Indian animated tales are likely to soon grace global channels.

Reflecting on the evolution of artistic expression, early humans, 25,000 years ago, adorned moist caves with paintings illustrating animals, hunts, and everyday life, which exuded a distinctive vitality. Animation, recognized as a formal art form,

originated in the late 19th century through the projection of sequential drawings onto screens.

Walt Disney transformed animation into a thriving industry during the early 1920s. The launch of the "Mickey Mouse" series in 1928, followed by the incorporation of sound in 1929, established Disney as a prominent studio. Disney's journey commenced with the Alice in Wonderland series in 1923, succeeded by Oswald the Lucky Rabbit in 1927. Despite these significant advancements, the field of animation continues to evolve.

In contemporary times, animation has emerged as a multi-billion-dollar global industry, characterized by dedicated satellite channels and blockbuster films such as *The Lion King*, *Tarzan*, *Toy Story*, and *Ice Age*. Although new technologies and special effects have revolutionized the industry, compelling storytelling and skilled artists remain at its core. The universal appeal of animation lies in its capacity to transcend language barriers, enabling characters like Mickey Mouse and Hanuman to connect with audiences around the globe. Nevertheless, apart from a few notable efforts, Indian animation has yet to achieve a substantial global presence.

The term "animation" encompasses a diverse range of activities, including 2D, 3D, gaming, claymation, and puppet animation. There is frequently confusion regarding its breadth, with many individuals' associating animation exclusively with computers and software, rather than recognizing the artistry involved. Ravi Prakash himself encountered skepticism when he expressed his interest in 2D animation, facing inquiries about the absence of 3D and the prioritization of artists over technical personnel.

In 1997, following a year of research, Ravi Prakash established his own studio. He traveled to European studios to gain insights into industry practices and the necessary infrastructure for India. The 2D animation workflow is categorized into pre-production, production, and post-production.

- Pre-production encompasses idea development, character design, scriptwriting, storyboarding, color design, and voice recording.
- Production includes layout, key animation, in-betweens, cleanup, scanning, painting, and compositing within the digital department.
- Post-production entails final editing, music integration, and the completion of the project.

Ravi Prakash characterizes the business mainly as a service contract model. In nations with co-production agreements, both pre-production and post-production activities are confined to partner countries, governed by specific regulations. Given that India has not yet entered into such agreements, international collaboration remains limited. Consequently, personal investment or a gradual entry through production is essential for expanding into additional markets. While it is feasible to create shows for Indian channels, securing funding continues to pose a significant challenge.

At present, the budgets for TV programs are determined by the rates set by advertisers. Ravi Prakash earns approximately \$2,500 (around ₹120,000) per minute from layout to rushes, not including pre- and post-production costs. The overall expense for a fully completed minute of animation is about \$5,000, resulting in a total of roughly \$150,000 (72 lakhs) for a 30-minute episode. Although minor reductions in costs are achievable, it is unrealistic to expect expenses to be reduced by more than 25%. In comparison to the costs associated with producing regular serials, Indian productions are significantly less expensive. To achieve success on a global scale, content must resonate with international audiences rather than being

confined to themes specific to India, which may not perform well commercially overseas.

In Europe, there exists an organization known as "Cartoon." This serves as the media program of the European Union. This organization is well-supported by various governmental bodies across Europe. Its objective is to foster the growth of the animation industry within the E.U. and to promote a diverse array of projects developed by artists residing in the E.U., thereby assisting the industry in establishing a cultural and economic presence in the international market. They have implemented several initiatives, all aligned with a unified policy, aimed at positioning European studios on a solid international foundation. The initiatives are designed to:

- 1) Generate more original content
- 2) Unite the various European studios
- 3) Ensure access to the latest equipment and technology
- 4) Provide adequate training for all professionals
- 5) Spread information by maintaining constant and efficient communication
- 6) Accelerate the acquisition of production financing

Ravi Prakash's visits to studios underscored the significance of the Cartoon initiative and its production handbooks, which are accessible in various European languages. He obtained English versions for examination, deeming them to be outstanding resources. The reference handbook, which consolidates techniques, procedures, documents, and terminology utilized by European professionals, is designed to foster standardized practices in animation production.

The handbooks encompass all sectors of animation production, from the initial story ideas to the final color processing stages. Furthermore, there exists a handbook that outlines job classifications and the requisite skills for each position, which enhanced Ravi Prakash's comprehension of the animation industry.

These resources illuminated several critical insights:

- The necessity for a high-caliber animation school to consistently cultivate artists of international standards, akin to the educational frameworks for software developers, engineers, and medical professionals, highlighting that the development of human resources is fundamental to the animation sector.
- International animation functions as a global partnership, involving the exchange of work among studios across the globe. For instance, layouts may originate from Moscow, key animation could be executed elsewhere, in-betweening in China, and painting in Romania. This requires strict adherence to quality benchmarks, delivery timelines, and ongoing communication throughout the production process.
- Effective communication remains vital, even in the face of language obstacles. Upholding a reliable history of timely deliveries, superior quality, and competitive pricing is crucial for achieving success.

To draw in clients, Ravi Prakash acknowledged the necessity of providing a compelling rationale for selecting his services over those of established competitors.

He effectively persuaded Millimage to establish Millitoon, a collaborative venture in India, with the vision of creating a facility that meets world-class standards in both quality and cost. Millimage acknowledged the potential of the Indian market, the expansion of cable television, and the rising popularity of

animated shows. They foresaw India emerging as a significant producer of animated content for both domestic and international audiences, with the potential for a local production to achieve global acclaim. Furthermore, they recognized the considerable merchandising prospects in India, encompassing both production and sales.

To globalize animation, Ravi Prakash should contemplate the following strategies:

- **Create a Training Facility:** Address the challenge posed by the scarcity of animation schools by establishing an in-house training center to cultivate specialized skills, even in the presence of external animation institutions. Competently trained instructors are essential for the ongoing development of new personnel, particularly in light of potential staff turnover.
- **Begin Modestly and Expand Gradually:** Steer clear of significant initial investments in large studios and instead, initiate operations with a smaller setup, consolidating achievements before pursuing expansion.
- **Engage in Joint Ventures:** Alleviate the risk of inactivity by forming a joint venture with a well-established studio overseas, capitalizing on their expertise and resources. Although partnerships may pose challenges, they can be advantageous without requiring substantial capital for lengthy development periods.
- **Develop an Original Content Department:** Create a specialized department focused on original content production to ensure a functional studio capable of delivering work of international quality. This will provide valuable insights into both successful and unsuccessful styles and narratives, as well as guidance on how to budget for a series, thereby establishing a credible portfolio.
- **Promote Talent Online:** Leverage advancements in information technology to display talents on the internet, which aids in gaining visibility and opportunities.
- **Participate in Trade Shows:** Attend trade shows in Europe and America to gain insights into the animation industry and comprehend its dynamics.
- **Harness Collaborations for Unique Content:** Take advantage of the marketing knowledge and connections of your joint venture partner to promote original content and possibly co-create it.

Animation firms are broadening their reach worldwide by employing strategies such as co-productions, localization, and the development of culturally tailored content. The worldwide animation sector is anticipated to attain USD 590.85 billion by 2033, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 5.28% starting from 2025. To succeed in this highly competitive field, companies should leverage tools like artificial intelligence, commit to sustainability, and investigate new market opportunities.

23. FINDINGS

The narrative surrounding the animation studio that was originally intended for Chennai but ultimately relocated to Bombay (now Mumbai) is quite captivating.

Initially, the studio was planned to be established in Chennai, owing to the city's rich cultural heritage and its burgeoning interest in animation. Chennai boasts a robust artistic community, rendering it an attractive option for animation endeavors. However, as discussions unfolded, the founders came to the realization that Bombay possessed a more developed film industry and a broader market for animation.

Bombay was already the base for numerous prominent studios and offered superior infrastructure for film production, including access to essential resources, skilled talent, and effective distribution channels. The choice to relocate to Bombay was driven by the prospects of enhanced collaboration with fellow filmmakers and the chance to engage with a larger audience.

Consequently, the studio was established in Bombay, where it thrived and emerged as a key player in the Indian animation sector. This strategic move ultimately enabled the studio to capitalize on the flourishing Bollywood market and harness the city's dynamic film culture.

24. CONCLUSION

Tracing the historical development of 2D traditional animation in Chennai illustrates a gradual transformation, shaped by governmental support, the presence of studios, and individual initiatives. The Indian government initially played a pivotal role in the introduction of traditional animation to the country. Nevertheless, the animation landscape in Chennai emerged later than in other areas due to various geographical and cultural influences.

Had studios such as Prasad Studio and Gemini Studio sustained a robust presence in Chennai, the city might have evolved into a central hub for traditional animation during the 1960s. The diminishing interest of the Film Division in producing 2D traditional animation, potentially attributable to shifts in government policies or funding, resulted in a downturn in production.

During the 1970s, artists in Chennai took the initiative to independently acquire animation techniques, allowing them to remain active in the industry. Formal training commenced in 1996, facilitating a more streamlined progression in animation. The advent of the internet and the availability of literature empowered individuals to pursue self-directed learning. Animated documentaries created by the Film Division and broadcast on Doordarshan (DD), along with the incorporation of 2D traditional animation in Tamil movie title cards, motivated numerous individuals to engage in animation.

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