

Thinking Animation



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One among my many deep concerns about Indian animation is that it has been eternally young, never maturing, growing, graying and becoming wise. We have perpetually been on the threshold, stepping once in a while very tentatively into the future without leaving many significant or emphatic markings along the way. Considering our long animation history which is essentially devoid of a strongly rooted connect, it seems that we have never really engaged with the medium meaningfully or significantly.

When will the Indian animator grow up and seriously think about the medium and its intricacies, or be a voice that echoes immediate and real concerns, or take into account our ancient and vibrant culture? When will we be telling our own tales for ourselves and about our lives? When will we really think about what this magical medium means to us? When will we stand up and be recognized as a personality with intelligence, intellect, character and a serious agenda?

From what one is seeing with the fledgling batch of animators from the Industrial Design Center it is obvious that these concerns are certainly being addressed. As a teacher it is heartening to see a newly nurtured, yet deeply thoughtful young Indian animator who is beginning to grow beyond what the market demands and is able to finally engage with the medium on many levels.

This is amply borne out by the choices made by these

young people of areas that animation can address, the depth of research in these areas, the translation to the visual and moving medium, an innate understanding and judicious use of technology. All this single handedly and with the ease and conviction of a veteran animator.

So what does the new animator think? Among the varied subjects they have chosen to address and bring to the medium that is now theirs to shape are a deep concern for the environment, intricate and little known details from our traditional mythologies, world mythologies and their interpretation and resonance in our lives, the deep wisdom in our folk songs, personal autobiographical narratives, the many shades of wit and humor, the instinct for war, adventures in history ... the list is long, diverse, interesting and sometimes even surprising.

For years we were not willing to look at animation as a medium that could straddle many areas. It was essentially seen as a children's medium that could at best be funny, 'cartoons' could never communicate to the adult or have anything of value to say. Today animation has pervaded every medium of communication, dynamizing almost every platform and space we encounter. Our threshold has increased and we are now the savvy and visually literate consumers of the moving image. This sophistication of syntax is not necessarily reflected in the content of these moving images.

In contrast a deep maturity in terms of content is now being addressed by these new young animators.

Among these is Deepa Chordia who has a background in textile design and brought this sensibility to her animated film, *My Father's House* She makes use of Kutchi embroidery on silk to speak of a daughters connection to and longing for her childhood home. The poignant film is all the more meaningful since girls in the region embroider their trousseaus right from childhood to take with them to their married homes. Her other film, *Orpheus*, based on Greek mythology takes visual cues from Greek pottery and is an interpretation of the love story of Orpheus and Eurydice and underlines the deep divide between life and death.

Sunil Tungaria with a background in computer engineering made two sensitive biographical narratives which recall a wonderful carefree childhood in contrast with a present that is not necessarily so. Visually the films make use of 3D technology, which crosses over to integrate with a more organic handcrafted feel.

Shaunak Samvatsar, an engineer who for many years has engaged with cartoons to make tongue in cheek political comment naturally is concerned with environmental issues and the fallout of our consumerist attitudes. His work recalls the quickly drawn feel of the editorial cartoon with the same dynamic rhythm reflected in the animation as well.

Varunjyoti Deori, with an applied art background is skilled in drawing and animation, which allows the viewer to immediately connect to the stories told entirely through the visual. The graphic visual elements and

the great sensitivity to timing make for immediate access to the telling. This strategy has been equally successful in communicating both the horrors of war and the pleasures of bird watching.

Rishikesh Joshi took on the formidable task of adapting the happenings in Maratha history in the time of Shivaji to a game format. While the backdrop was the capture of forts by Shivaji, the stories in traditional Powada style glorify the contribution by his able supporters. The warriors and their weapons were represented authentically via research in weaponry and garb of the time.

Ajay Sing Supahiya has won several awards for his unique visualization of incidents from the epics. What sets these apart are his mastery over the medium and the ease with which he brings to animation his interest in gaming, film techniques, comic and fantasy art. The visualization is in itself ironical, unsettling the viewer by subverting the traditional stereotypical characters and incidents.

These fertile minds are now ready to make a transition to the world of professional animation. The breadth and depth of their work is a good indicator of how the young animator is thinking, the leap that is being attempted and now finally the refreshing new directions in which their thought processes are traveling.

The hope then is that this newfound individuality is retained and flowers in a direction of their choice.

(Pics provided by the columnist)

