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An Initiative by Animation Xpress.com

OCT 2026

VOL 8. ISSUE NO.1

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From the editor-in-chief

The phone has stopped ringing. For years, India's animation studios could count on two paymasters: the domestic television broadcaster and the international studio looking for a cheaper pair of hands. Both have gone quiet. Broadcasters have more or less stopped commissioning fresh animation for kids. Outsourced work from abroad still trickles in, but it lands on the desks of a select few who have the scale and the track record to win it.

The Indian animation, visual effects, gaming, comics and extended reality (AVGC-XR) industry is going through a painful transformation. Plenty of studios are feeling the squeeze.

Yet founders are not sitting around nursing their wounds. Many are doing what they should perhaps have done a decade ago. They are creating their own IP and putting it out on YouTube first.

The logic is simple. A broadcaster commission gets a studio paid once, and the channel keeps the upside. An outsourcing contract pays for labour, not ownership. A studio that owns its characters owns the future earnings too.

YouTube lets a studio test an idea without asking anyone's permission. There is no programming head to pitch to and no committee to wait on. If kids watch, the numbers show it within weeks.

What has changed is the cost of production. Studios are now pairing human creativity with Gen AI tools to build characters and churn out episodes at a pace and price that was unthinkable five years ago. Artists and prompt engineers are working side by side. That combination keeps the lights on while the studio waits to see whether a show catches on.

The plan runs roughly like this. If the IP starts working on YouTube, ad revenue begins to flow. That money keeps the artists and the prompt engineers busy. A hit also puts the studio on the radar of broadcasters and streaming platforms, who may want to acquire the show.

The studios are hoping those deals will be non-exclusive. That would let them license the same content to other platforms, recover their production costs and perhaps even turn a profit.

It is a sound plan on paper, but a few cautions are in order. YouTube is not a gold mine for kids' content. Videos marked as made for children do not carry personalised ads, which keeps earnings per view well below those of adult content. A studio needs very large viewing numbers before the revenue covers a monthly payroll.

The platform has also grown wary of mass-produced, repetitive videos. Studios leaning heavily on Gen AI will need to make sure their shows have a distinct voice and real storytelling, or they risk losing monetisation altogether.

Then there is the matter of exclusivity. Streaming platforms and broadcasters like to own what they buy. A studio can only insist on a non-exclusive deal if its audience numbers give it leverage. A modest hit will not.

These are early days for most of the studios trying this. But the model is not untested.

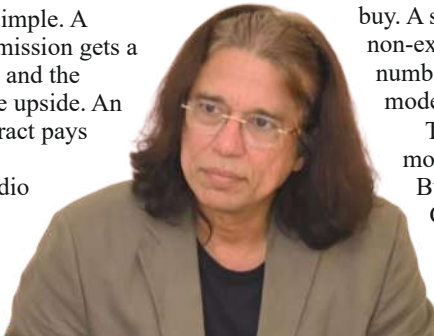
ChuChu TV, Toonz Animation, Green Gold Animation and Powerkids, among others, have shown that home-grown IP on

YouTube can build audiences in the hundreds of millions and rake in the moolah. Green Gold's *Chhota Bheem* began life on television and built a merchandising and film franchise around the character. ChuChu TV built its empire on YouTube from the start.

The newcomers are betting that they can follow the same path, and do it faster and cheaper with AI in the toolkit.

Our cover story in this issue examines this trend, which is gathering momentum. Many of these studios are at MIPCOM in Cannes this year. Some of the independents are exhibiting inside the Palais des Festivals, and the Indian pavilion is at P-1 D1.

Buyers looking for the next *Chhota Bheem* would do well to make that hard stop. Some of these studios are not waiting to be discovered anymore. They have already built the audience. Now they want the deal. **SPARK**



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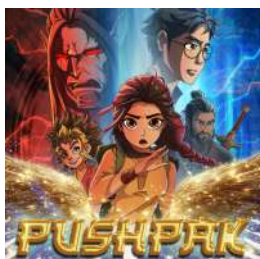
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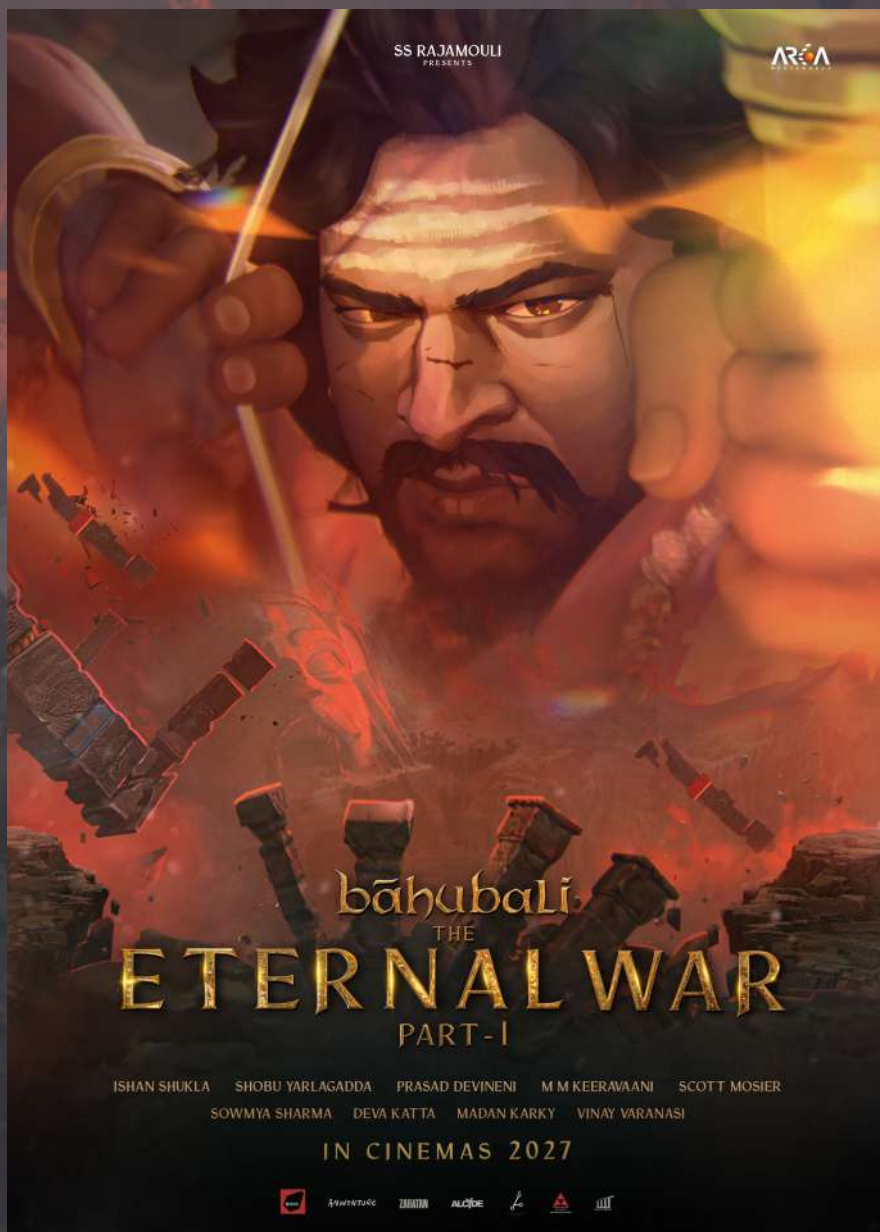
How do you bring an iconic cinematic world into animation? By balancing scale, emotion, colour, and a legacy audiences already love

By Pooja Raj Thakkar

Baahubali has such a passionate fan base that there's a constant awareness of not wanting to let that expectation down.

For Ajey Lele, art director on *Baahubali: The Eternal War*, that pressure is part of the everyday creative process. Bringing the franchise into animation means more than translating a familiar world into a new medium. It means creating an animated world that feels distinctly its own while holding on to the spirit, scale and grandeur audiences associate with *Baahubali*.

Lele joined the project after working as a background painter on *Avatar: The Legend of Aang*. He interviewed with director Ishaan Shukla and started as a colour visual development artist, exploring how different locations should look and, more importantly, how they should feel. Some environments were already in development. Many remain under wraps because of the project's ongoing production and NDA restrictions.



“Concept art comes first, rough explorations of how locations should look and feel, followed by cleanup and visual development, with the colour script happening in parallel,” Lele explains.

The challenge is not to reproduce the live-action films frame for frame. It is to understand what makes the world recognisably *Baahubali* and then reinterpret it through animation.



“It’s less about matching specific details and more about staying true to the spirit and scale people already know from *Baahubali*,” he says.

That approach gives *The Eternal War* room to develop its own visual identity. Animation offers a freedom live-action cannot always match. Environments can be built from scratch rather than being limited by existing locations or physical sets.

Most characters had already been designed before the environments around them were developed, but the process did not stay strictly linear. As the world evolved, some characters evolved with it.

“It wasn’t always a strict one-way process,” Lele says. “Some characters evolved alongside the environments as we went.”

Working with the director has been one of the most rewarding parts of the job. Lele describes Ishaan Shukla as one of the most collaborative filmmakers he has worked with, someone willing to listen and give ideas room to develop.

“Over time that collaboration has turned into something more than just a working relationship,” he says. “He’s become like a mentor and a friend to me.”

Meeting S.S. Rajamouli initially carried a sense of intimidation. “He’s not someone who makes people feel small around him,” Lele recalls.

Behind the scenes, Lele’s role as art director is to maintain the larger visual direction set by production designer Sam Klughertz and FLO, keeping the environments consistent as the animated world takes shape. The work has pushed him on architectural language, colour choices and the need to stay connected to the franchise without simply repeating what has already been seen.

The pressure of the fan base is real. So is the excitement. *Baahubali: The Eternal War* lets its artists explore a world audiences already feel connected to, while using animation to expand what that world can look and feel like.



“It’s also been genuinely fun, and one of the best learning experiences I’ve had so far,” Lele says.

His hope goes beyond recognition. “More than anything, I want people to walk away seeing how much potential India’s own stories and characters have.”

That is the quiet ambition behind the project. Take a world audiences already know and give it an entirely new canvas. **SPARK**

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Indian animation studios turn YouTube into their launch pad

From *Chhota Bheem* to *Emomee*, homegrown studios are using billions of views to test new characters and send them around the world

By Pooja Raj Thakkar and Pankti Vora

A toddler somewhere in Jakarta taps a bright thumbnail. A cartoon boy with a tuft of hair starts singing. Nobody at a television network scheduled that moment. Nobody bought a slot. The child simply chose it, and will probably choose it again tomorrow. Multiply that tap by a few billion, and you have the new economics of Indian animation.

For decades, an Indian animated character had one front door: the television screen. A studio made a show, sold it to a kids' channel and waited for the ratings to trickle in. If the broadcaster said no, the character never saw daylight. That door is now half shut. Domestic commissions have thinned out, and the channels have grown cautious.

So the studios have built a new door of their own. It is shaped like a YouTube thumbnail.

What began as a place to dump old episodes has turned into something far more valuable. Indian studios now use YouTube to introduce characters, test stories, measure what children return to and carry their IP into languages and countries that no Indian channel could reach. The numbers have become too big to ignore. PowerKids Entertainment alone claims more than 32 billion lifetime views. Videogyan says its network has crossed 40 billion.

But the harder question is what a studio does with them. We spoke to seven of the country's biggest players on the platform. Each is chasing the same prize by a different road.

Emomee: from a thousand fans to a billion views in 18 months

Emomee is the new kid on the block, and it is running fast.

In April 2025, its YouTube channel had 1,000 subscribers. By September 2026, it had more than 2.6 million, over a billion views and an audience spread across more than 100 countries. That is roughly 18 months from standing start to billion-view

club. Few Indian IPs have moved that quickly.

The show is built around three characters called E, Mo and Mee. Its motto is entertainment first, learning underneath. The episodes are short and bouncy, pegged to the questions children ask all day long. Underneath the fun sit lessons on curiosity, confidence, resilience and emotional intelligence, along with money sense, critical thinking and a child's first brush with technology and AI.

The old way of launching a kids' show was slow and linear. Make a pilot, find a broadcaster, lock distribution and then wait months for audience data. Emomee flipped that. It put its characters straight in front of children and let the viewing numbers do the talking.

"YouTube is one of the fastest ways to test whether an IP can travel," says Emomee founder and chief executive Pooja Jauhari.

The test appears to have worked.



Emomee founders Pooja Jauhari (left) and Varun Duggirala (right)

Emomee now has two shows on Netflix globally, and it is working on consumer products, live entertainment and licensing. It is now pitching at international markets such as MIPCOM.

Jauhari is careful not to oversell the YouTube cheque. Revenue from the platform is still at an early stage. The real prize, she argues, is the equity being built in the characters. A view today is also an advertisement for the franchise tomorrow.

That franchise has a plan with a catchy label: the 3S strategy of Screen, Shop and Stage. Screen covers YouTube, streaming and syndication, and is where children first meet the characters.

Shop takes *E*, *Mo* and *Mee* off the screen and into toy boxes and school bags. Stage puts them in front of families in live shows and musicals.

The company sees the business settling at roughly 40 per cent Screen, 40 per cent Shop and 20 per cent Stage. The roadmap has Screen and Shop scaling up in 2027, with a bigger push into live events from 2028.

The picture Jauhari paints is easy to imagine. A child spots *E*, *Mo* and *Mee* on YouTube, meets them again on Netflix, carries a plush *Mo* to bed and one day sits in a darkened auditorium watching them sing live. The ambition is to be a globally recognised children's brand, not merely a well-watched channel.

Green Gold: *Chhota Bheem* finds a new generation

Green Gold TV went live on YouTube in 2011, back when digital was treated as a sidekick to television. The Hyderabad studio simply uploaded what it had. More than a decade and a half on, the flagship channel has over 22 million subscribers, 11 billion views and more than 3,500 videos. It crossed 10 million subscribers in 2020 and collected YouTube's Diamond Creator Award for it.

The big shift, says the company, is discovery. Television tied a show to a channel, a time slot and a country. YouTube tore up all three. A child can stumble on a *Chhota Bheem* song one afternoon, binge a compilation the next day and graduate to a full-length



Green Gold Animation founder
Rajiv Chilaka

movie by the weekend. The character is available whenever the child wants him.

That has done wonders for the back catalogue. On television, an episode lived and died in its broadcast window. On YouTube it stays searchable for years. Episodes made long before today's toddlers were born are still finding fresh fans. The strongman from Dholakpur is being introduced to a second generation of viewers without a single new commission.

Green Gold offers several ways in. There are full episodes and movies for the long sit, and songs, clips and compilations for a quick fix. *Chhota Bheem* shares the shelf with *Mighty Raju*, *Super Bheem* and *Krishna*.

The company does not disclose what YouTube earns it, and it does not treat the platform as a separate revenue line. Its digital business also includes apps, games and social media. YouTube is the shop window. The money is made in licensing, merchandising, gaming and films.

Green Gold's own figures do carry a warning sign worth watching. Annual watch time on its channels slid from 191 million hours in 2021 to 147 million hours in 2025, even as the subscriber base kept climbing.

Children are subscribing but spending less time per visit, a pattern consistent with the rise of short-form viewing. Holding attention is getting harder, even for a household name.



The studio's next bet is to use YouTube earlier in the life of a new character. Try a character out online, watch how children react and then decide where to invest. *Mighty Little Bheem* proved on Netflix that an Indian toddler hero could charm viewers far beyond India. Green Gold now wants to find the next character that can make the same journey.



Reliance Animation: a channel for every audience

Reliance Animation has taken a department-store approach. Different floors for different shoppers.

Big Animation, the flagship channel, houses kids' entertainment, mythology and superheroes. This is home to *Little Krishna*, *Little Singham* and *Smashing Simba*. It has about 7.16 million subscribers, more than 3.19 billion lifetime views, over 1,500 videos and more than 71 million views a month.

Little Krishna on its own shows how long the tail of a children's show can be. Its publicly identifiable views have crossed 1.34 billion, with several individual videos notching up tens of millions each. The blue-skinned boy god playing his flute in Vrindavan is still pulling crowds long after his television debut.

Big Story World caters to the whole family, with live-action stories, nostalgic classics and catalogue shows remastered in 4K. Little Kids Magic TV is for the youngest viewers, with nursery rhymes and early learning.

The studio is also making shows purely for YouTube, starting with a character-led original called *Bhaiyyaji Bahwan*.

"Localisation is one of our big levers," says Reliance Animation chief executive officer Tejonidhi Bhandare. The company plans to dub its key shows into several international languages.

Going the other way, it is buying rights to bring selected foreign content into Indian languages. It is also building regional live-action and animation programming.

Bhandare is candid about the catch. Content marked "Made for Kids" on YouTube cannot carry personalised ads, and some data-driven features are switched off. That puts a cap on advertising income. Premium animation costs serious money, and ads alone rarely cover the bill for new content.

The answer is to earn from as many places as possible. Reliance Animation stacks advertising alongside licensing, brand partnerships, syndication, music and merchandising. A character that becomes famous on YouTube can then earn in all those other places.

Behind the scenes, the studio has been retooling. It has built up 2D, 3D and Harmony-based production pipelines and is folding AI into development and production. The target over the next five years is digital-first characters and more regional-language shows. Each character would come with its own ecosystem of long-form videos, Shorts and music.

Powerkids: one front door, many rooms

Powerkids Entertainment plays the portfolio game, and plays it at size.

Its channels carry a stable of children's titles: *The Jungle Book*, *Peter Pan*, *Robin Hood*, *Dragonero* and *Young Achievers*. The content mix swings between full episodes, compilations, Shorts, music and short clips built around individual characters.



The growth has been steep. Company figures show subscribers rising from 23.72 million in 2021 to 49.88 million in 2025, a jump of more than 110 per cent. Lifetime views rose from 11.84 billion to 29.76 billion over the same period, up 151.4 per cent. By September 2026 Powerkids TV stood at about 50.7 million subscribers and more than 32.36 billion views.

"With the proliferation of content, the challenge is no longer simply producing



content," says Powerkids Entertainment chief executive and managing director Manoj Mishra.

Each format has a job. Shorts act as the flyer pushed through the letterbox, introducing a character to a stranger. Full episodes and compilations are the living room where the viewer settles in and stays. Mishra's team watches which titles work in which formats and in which countries, and packages content accordingly.

The trick is to pass the viewer from one room to the next. A child who comes in through *Mowgli* might wander over to *Peter Pan*, then to *Robin Hood*. Powerkids sketches the journey as acquire, engage, retain, monetise and build IP.

YouTube, in this model, is the reception desk of a much bigger building. Beyond it lie licensing, distribution deals, Fast channels and merchandising.

"YouTube gives us the audience," says Mishra. "Our job is to turn that audience into enduring global IP."

Videogyan: from nursery rhymes to AI-assisted IP

Videogyan Studios started where many Indian YouTube studios did: animated nursery rhymes and a cheerful sing-along.

The Bengaluru studio has since grown well beyond *Twinkle Twinkle*. It now owns a line-up of original characters: Baby Ronnie, TooToo Boy, Zool Babies, Demu Gola, Jack & Emilie and Baby Bluka.

The output has widened from single songs to animated series, compilations, Shorts and longer viewing formats. What started as an English-language play is now spread across several Indian and international languages.

The scale is enormous. Across its network, Videogyan says its content has clocked more than 40 billion views, and several of its channels have crossed the Diamond Creator Award mark.

"There is more content being produced today than ever before, so the real challenge is no longer just production or distribution," says Videogyan Studios founder and chief executive Vishal TM. "It is discovery and sustained audience attention."



Vishal TM: Building IPs Through YouTube

Vishal describes the shift simply. The studio used to make videos for YouTube. Now it builds IP through YouTube. Put a new character out, try a few treatments, watch the engagement and let that shape how the property develops.

The studio's more striking move is its work with AI-assisted production. Vishal is at pains to stress that the goal is not to flood the platform with cheap clips. It is to bring down costs, try more ideas and iterate faster.

The obvious payoff is in localisation. If a single episode can be reworked for a dozen languages at a fraction of the old cost, an Indian character can land in far more homes around the world.

Advertising still matters to the business. But the studio increasingly judges its success by the lifetime value of a character: licensing, OTT and AVOD distribution, apps and expansion to other platforms. The five-year aim is a portfolio of preschool characters that children around the world actively search for by name.



Toonz: dubbing its way across borders

For Toonz Media Group, the magic word is localisation.

Its YouTube network has more than 30 million subscribers and pulls in roughly five million views a day. The shelves hold *Gummibär*, the singing green bear, alongside *Zoonicorn*, *Rat-a-Tat*, *Darwin & Newts* and *Cat & Keet*. The mix spans animated series, short-form clips, music and regional-language programming.

India, with its patchwork of languages, taught Toonz an early lesson. Children stay longer with a story told in the language they hear at home. The company now applies that lesson in both directions.

A recent example is *Rokuro*, a Japanese children's series that Toonz has brought to Indian viewers in Hindi on its digital platforms. The company is now talking to Planet Studios about carrying *Rokuro* into more markets and languages. A show that started in Tokyo could end up being watched in Lucknow and beyond.

Toonz has also leaned hard into data. It tracks where viewers drop off, which characters draw the most engagement and how behaviour differs from one market to the next. Those findings flow back into programming and distribution.

The result is a feedback loop running constantly between the studio's writers and its audience.

Like its peers, Toonz does not measure YouTube only by its ad cheque. The audiences it builds there feed licensing, merchandising, streaming, Fast channels and broadcast deals.

"Audiences will care less about where content originates and more about whether the content is relevant, engaging and available when they want it," says Toonz Media Group chief executive Viswanath Rao.

Over the next five years, Toonz expects the lines between television, streaming, YouTube and Fast to blur almost completely. The company wants to be ready on every screen at once.

Cosmos-Maya: speaking a dozen languages

Cosmos-Maya has gone wide on languages and fast on Shorts.

Its content and dedicated channels are available in Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Marathi, Bengali, Punjabi, Gujarati and Kannada, as well as Indonesian, Spanish and Arabic, among others. The same character can crack a joke in Chennai, Kolkata and Madrid in the local tongue.



The numbers are big and steady. Company data puts views at about 7.38 billion in 2022, rising to 7.43 billion in 2023, 8.58 billion in 2024 and 8.62 billion in 2025.

The channels rack up hundreds of millions of hours of watch time a year across long-form and short-form content.

The standout figure is in Shorts. Views on its short-form portfolio exploded from about 2.6 million in 2022 to more than 843 million in 2024. That is more than 300 times in two years. Few statistics capture more vividly how quickly children's thumbs have moved to vertical video.

"YouTube has moved beyond its role as a digital distribution outlet to become a discovery, engagement and IP-building engine," says Cosmos-Maya chief operating officer Dheeraj Berry.



The studio learnt that simply uploading television episodes was not enough. Content had to be repackaged, cut down, dubbed and optimised for how children now watch. A 22-minute episode might become a string of Shorts to hook new viewers, who are then steered back to the full story.

Berry sees YouTube increasingly as an audience intelligence platform. It tells the studio which characters, stories, formats and markets are working, and those signals feed into wider content decisions. The biggest change, he argues, is that an Indian animated character no longer has to start life on television. It can start on a phone screen and grow from there into a full-blown brand.

The scoreboard

Studio	Headline YouTube numbers (company-reported)	Key IPs
Emomee	2.6 million+ subscribers; 1 billion+ views; 100+ countries	<i>E, Mo and Mee</i>
Green Gold TV	22 million+ subscribers; 11 billion+ views; 3,500+ videos	<i>Chhota Bheem, Mighty Raju, Super Bheem, Krishna</i>
Big Animation (Reliance Animation)	7.16 million subscribers; 3.19 billion+ views; 71 million+ monthly views	<i>Little Krishna, Little Singham, Smashing Simmba</i>
PowerKids TV	50.7 million subscribers; 32.36 billion+ views	<i>The Jungle Book, Peter Pan, Robin Hood, Dragonero, Young Achievers</i>
Videogyan	40 billion+ views across network	<i>Baby Ronnie, TooToo Boy, Zool Babies, Demu Gola, Jack & Emilie, Baby Bluka</i>
Toonz	30 million subscribers	<i>Gummibär, Zoonicorn, Rat-a-Tat, Darwin & Newts, Cat & Keet</i>
Cosmos-Maya (WowKidz)	41.4M billion views; 24 billion + views (2022-24)	Multilingual kids and family portfolio

The catches nobody should ignore

For all the billion-view bragging, the model has fault lines.

The first is money. Children's content on YouTube earns far less per view than adult content, because personalised advertising is switched off on videos made for kids. A billion views sounds like a fortune. Spread across a studio's payroll and production costs, it is often a modest one. That is why every studio in this story talks about licensing and merchandise more than about AdSense.

The second is attention. Green Gold's falling watch time and Cosmos-Maya's Shorts explosion point in the same direction.

Children are watching more but in smaller bites. A two-minute Short is a fine way to meet a character, but it is a poor way to fall in love with one. Studios need to find ways to walk viewers from the Short to the series.



The third is AI. It promises cheaper episodes and faster dubbing, and several studios are already using it. But a platform crowded with machine-assisted clips will make standing out harder, not easier. A character still needs a face children remember and a personality they miss when the video ends.

And finally there is dependence. Every one of these studios is building on land it does not own. One tweak to YouTube's algorithm or advertising policy can change the economics overnight.

Studios that are spreading their characters across Netflix, Fast, merchandise and live shows are the ones building a safety net.



The thumbnail is the new pitch meeting

Line the seven studios up and the strategies look very different. Emomee is building a brand-new franchise from scratch.

Green Gold is giving a beloved old hero a second childhood. Reliance Animation is slicing its audience into neat channels.

PowerKids is walking viewers from one classic to the next. Videogyan is betting on AI to scale its characters. Toonz and Cosmos-Maya are dubbing their way across borders.

The question used to be which channel would air a show. Now it is whether a child will click on it, and whether that child comes back the next day.

For years Indian animators waited outside broadcasters' offices with pitch decks under their arms. Today the first audition happens on a phone in a child's hand, and the verdict arrives in days.

The studios that learn to turn those taps into toys, tickets and streaming deals will build the next *Chhota Bheem*. The rest will just have very large view counts. **SPARK**



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From India to the world: Kynzo's big animation play

Kynzo Media Group eyes global growth through IP, partnerships and co-production at MIPCOM

Jayakumar Prabhakaran Nair spent more than two decades at Toonz Media Group, rising to CEO and taking Indian animation into international co-pros, partnerships and markets. He stepped down late last year founding the Kynzo Media Group in January 2026 and is headed to Cannes with original concepts and a clear brief: build the full ecosystem around content, not just the story.

Kynzo works across content development and production, consultancy, distribution and franchise growth. Its consultancy arm partners with IP owners on creative direction, business models and domestic or global deals. The content side develops, finances and produces animated and live-action for children and families across digital, TV and theatrical platforms, with a focus on feature films and branded digital-first series that carry consumer-products potential. Studio networks in India supply the production muscle while partnerships handle financing, distribution and licensing.

Nair spoke with Nikita Kujur about the studio's mission at MIPCOM 2026 and its vision going forward. Excerpts:

On what Kynzo is bringing to MIPCOM.

Kynzo is a young company with an international outlook, building a slate of original concepts and projects developed with creative and commercial partners. We bring together development and production capabilities through our studio network in India, and a partnership-led approach to distribution and franchise building.

At MIPCOM, we look forward to introducing Kynzo and sharing selected projects in development. We are also keen to meet partners who can help us take projects forward, whether through co-production, financing, distribution or audience development.

Our focus is on building relationships that can support a project



Kynzo Media Group
founder and CEO
Jayakumar Prabhakaran Nair



from its early creative stages through to its life in the market.

On the partners he wants to meet.

We welcome conversations with international buyers, broadcasters, streaming platforms, distributors, producers and licensing partners. We are particularly interested in co-production and financing opportunities, as well as digital-first partnerships that can build audiences and create long-term value around content.

We are also open to working with IP owners seeking strategic support to grow their properties in India or internationally.

The most valuable partnerships align creative ambitions and commercial objectives, and each partner brings something meaningful to the project.

On budgets and production costs.

Changing commissioning budgets and production costs call for careful planning from the earliest stages. We consider the format, target audience, platform, production scope and budget together, then shape a suitable model for each project. This helps ensure creative ambition matches a realistic financing

and distribution plan. Our studio network provides access to strong animation capabilities in India, while international partnerships can bring complementary creative input, financing and market access.

We believe flexibility is essential: the production approach should serve the story while keeping quality and commercial viability in view.

On getting Indian animation IP to travel.

A global franchise needs more than a distinctive setting or visual style. It needs memorable characters and stories that connect emotionally across cultures, supported by thoughtful creative development and a clear understanding of the

audience.

Indian stories can bring fresh perspectives and worlds to the global market, while universal themes help make them accessible to viewers in different territories. International collaboration from an early stage can help projects travel while preserving the perspective that makes them distinctive.

Digital platforms can also help a property find and build an audience, creating a foundation for wider distribution, licensing and consumer products.

On what will drive Indian growth.

Growth will come from combining storytelling with dependable production capacity, global partnerships and stronger routes to market. India has talent and scale.

We need to build on that through thoughtful development, sustainable financing and a focus on audience-building and IP. It will also be important to create business models that support projects beyond initial production, including distribution, licensing and digital engagement. At Kynzo, we are working to bring all this together through a flexible, partnership-led model. **SPARK**

From temple town to tinseltown

Ele Animations is betting that a god from Odisha can pull crowds far beyond India, and Durga Prasad Dalai wants the world to stop treating Indian animation as cheap labour

By Pooja Raj Thakkar



Ele Animations founder and CEO
Durga Prasad Dalai

confidence that the opportunity is much bigger than what the industry has traditionally believed.”

For years Indian animation has been boxed into children’s slots and warmed-over versions of familiar characters. Dalai reckons that box is starting to crack. Creators are reaching for stories with cultural roots, while audiences have grown a sharper eye from watching bold animation from around the world.

Ask him what has shifted most in five years and he does not point to fancier kit. He points to hunger for original Indian intellectual property. Tools have improved, but tools are only half the job. India’s mythology, history, folklore and literature sit there barely touched.

“The next phase of Indian animation should be about building original Indian worlds and characters that can travel beyond India,” he says.

Indian studios have long been the reliable hands behind other people’s blockbusters. Dalai wants his lot to stop taking orders and start writing them.

“The biggest gap is scale of ambition,” he says. “We have artists and technicians who can work at a global level. But we need to think beyond being a production destination and become creators and owners of IP.”

That thinking travels with him to Mipcom Cannes. He is open to co-productions, distribution and financing, but he is not chasing a one-off cheque.

A story can sit inside a culture for centuries, painted on temple walls and sung at festivals. Then someone decides it belongs on a cinema screen. That leap is where Durga Prasad Dalai has staked his studio.

The founder and chief executive of Ele Animations has taken *Mahaprabhu Jagannath*, a tale steeped in Odisha’s spiritual life, and pushed it into theatres. For him it is not a business punt.

“This film is much more than a theatrical release,” he says. “*Mahaprabhu Jagannath* is a story and a culture that I have grown up with, and bringing it to the big screen has been a deeply personal journey.”

He will not oversell it as some grand industry turning point. But he does spot an opening. Ele wants to make theatrical animation rooted in Indian soil, not simply borrow formats cooked up elsewhere.

“Indian animation has a very long way to go,” he says, “but the fact that audiences are willing to watch an Indian animated feature in theatres gives us



Experience the magic of true Bhakti



A still featuring Jagan and Balram from the film

“I am particularly interested in finding partners with whom we can build something for the long term rather than simply make a transaction around one project,” he says.

What makes a foreign buyer look up? Story, he insists. Production economics and good visuals can open the door. What makes them remember the project is the world behind it.

Indian tales, he argues, carry a built-in edge. They can be rooted in one specific place and still hit an emotional nerve anywhere.

Authenticity is non-negotiable. “I strongly believe in authenticity,” he says. “The world doesn’t need India to become less Indian in order to be understood.”

Mahaprabhu Jagannath proves the point. It is Odisha to its core, yet its themes reach well past the map.

On artificial intelligence he draws a firm line. It will shake up pre-production, storyboarding, asset building and the repetitive grind. It will not replace the storyteller.

“I don’t believe AI can replace the fundamental role of a storyteller,” he says. “The decision about what a character should feel, why a story should be told, what cultural detail matters and what emotion we want an audience to carry home, that has to remain human.”

His verdict is neat. Technology should give creators more freedom, not take creative ownership away from them.

Back at Mipcom he returns to the myth he most wants busted. Indian animation is not just a cost-effective production destination. The real treasure is the material itself: thousands of years of history, hundreds of cultures, a teeming cast of legends still waiting for their close-up.

“There is a new generation of Indian creators who don’t just want to execute someone else’s ideas,” he says. “We want to create, own and take our stories to the world.”

Mahaprabhu Jagannath is his opening gambit. The god has left the temple. Now Dalai wants him to conquer the multiplex, and then everywhere else. **SPARK**

NuNu TV: Building a kinder, more emotionally confident start for every child

Sprout Studios' YouTube-first preschool brand puts emotional learning at the heart of Baby NuNu's adventures

With more than 32 million subscribers across its network and over 800 million monthly views, NuNu TV has grown into a widely watched preschool entertainment brand. Yet behind these numbers is a simple purpose: to create joyful content that helps young children understand themselves, connect with others and approach everyday experiences with greater confidence.

Created by an India-based animation company Sprout Studios, NuNu TV was built as a YouTube-first property for children between one and four years old. At the centre of its world is Baby NuNu, a curious, cheerful and emotionally expressive young boy through whom children can recognize their own routines, feelings and discoveries.



"We want to create meaningful content for children. We want our characters, music and stories to become a positive part of a child's early journey," says Sprout Studios founder Rahul Rohilla.

Beginning with the child.

Every NuNu TV concept begins with a familiar childhood moment, bedtime, sharing, visiting the dentist, tidying up, staying safe, making friends or trying something new. These experiences become simple stories, memorable music and age-appropriate repetition, helping children understand both the idea and how it feels.

This child-first approach shapes every creative choice: clear expressions, purposeful actions, gentle pacing and music children love to repeat and parents enjoy hearing. The ambition is to create joyful and engaging content that families welcome into everyday life.

YouTube-first, globally minded.

YouTube has helped NuNu TV reach families across countries, cultures and languages, while giving the team a clearer sense of the stories and characters audiences connect with.

Being YouTube-first means learning continually from what families watch and return to. Those insights inform creative decisions, while the team's judgement and child-first approach guide each story. Together, they help NuNu TV grow across languages through everyday childhood experiences that feel familiar to families everywhere.

From individual songs to a connected preschool world

NuNu TV's next chapter brings its songs and characters into a more connected world through themed musical collections, character-led stories, dialogue episodes and short-form content. Music remains at the heart, connecting stories and everyday routines that support young children's emotional growth and learning, while

giving Baby NuNu and friends personalities families can know and love.

The brand is also exploring streaming, FAST channels, music platforms, licensing, consumer products and interactive experiences, reaching families wherever they watch, listen, play and learn.



Looking for global partnerships

At MIPCOM, NuNu TV is seeking distribution, broadcast, streaming and licensing partners. "We've built a strong connection with families online," says Rohilla. "Now we're looking for partners who share our belief in thoughtful preschool entertainment and can bring NuNu TV to new audiences and experiences."

Each partnership carries the same promise: helping children make a kinder, more emotionally confident start in life. SPARK

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Contact the
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Build in Telangana. Create for the world.

Telangana's MIPCOM pitch: come make your next hit here

Hyderabad already has the talent, the studios and the space. Now it wants the world to notice.

Picture a boy in a dhoti, laddu in hand, punching his way across television screens from living rooms in India to Netflix feeds overseas. That is *Chhota Bheem*, born in a Hyderabad studio run by Green Gold Animation. A few streets away, artists at Powerkids Entertainment once helped Disney, Nickelodeon and Cartoon Network deliver their shows on time and on budget. Further out, the same city gave the world the thunder of *Naatu Naatu* and an Academy Award.

Telangana is done being a quiet supplier of frames and effects. It wants to become the place where global producers, platforms and investors set up shop, make content and own the next big properties. The invitation is open and practical.

An established animation industry sits ready. More than 150 animation, visual effects and related creative companies already operate in the state, according to official sector figures. They have handled original Indian properties and international service work for years. Green Gold turned a local character into a full entertainment business that now spans television, streaming, licensing and even themed cafés. Powerkids showed how Hyderabad teams can plug into global pipelines. Together they give incoming partners real reference points: start with one project, then grow into recurring work,



co-owned franchises or a permanent studio presence.

The people behind the frames matter most. Roughly 30,000 direct jobs exist across the animation, visual-effects and related ecosystem. Hyderabad's edge is the way artistic craft sits next to engineering depth. Animation and film teams work alongside a large software and technology base. Specialists in production tools, automation, rendering and interactive experiences are never far away.

The education pipeline keeps the supply flowing: fine arts and design schools sit alongside 171 engineering colleges. International studios can recruit across disciplines and shape training around their own pipelines. As content moves freely between animation, games and immersive formats, that mix of creative and technical skill becomes more valuable every year.

Base for the next phase of innovation.

Recent moves show the city is already attracting the next wave of work. In March 2026 Netflix opened Eyeline Studios in Hyderabad, a 32,000-square-foot facility for advanced visual effects and virtual production. It is Eyeline's fifth global location after Los Angeles, Vancouver, Seoul and London, and its first in India. The studio plugs Hyderabad into Netflix's international network and

brings the latest workflows in real-time engines, virtual production, cloud collaboration and AI-assisted tools. Specialist incubation facilities already support businesses working across animation, gaming, computer vision and artificial intelligence. The opportunity is not only in finished content. It extends to the technology that makes the content possible: production tools, pipeline development and creative research.

Infrastructure to establish and expand.

Space is expanding to match the ambition. The IMAGE Tower, a 1.6 million-square-foot development dedicated to animation, visual effects, comics, gaming and XR (AVCG-XR) is rising in Hyderabad's technology district. It is designed as a flagship creative hub for international studios, independent producers and specialist partners looking for a long-term base.

Plug-and-play studios and shared facilities form part of the plan, lowering the barrier for growing companies. Nearby, Ramoji Film City still stretches across more than 2,000 acres, offering stages and post-production capacity for projects that mix live action, animation, visual effects and virtual environments.

The city already knows how to handle large-scale production. Now it is building dedicated capacity for the digital side of the business.





Policy is being shaped to turn capability into commercial success.

The AVGC IMAGE 2.0 framework covers animation, visual effects, gaming and comics. It addresses production competitiveness, investment, talent development and creative infrastructure. Practical levers include support for production expenditure, employment, rental facilities, technology adoption and industry-linked training. The same framework emphasises original intellectual property, commercialisation and routes into international markets.

For companies looking at the full content value chain, the direction is clear: stronger connections with commissioners, co-producers, publishers, distributors and licensing partners.

This sits inside a longer roadmap called Telangana Rising 2047. The year marks 100 years of India's independence. The state's creative ambition includes Hyderabad-based studios contributing substantially to one in five major international

animation and visual-effects productions by that date, alongside a string of globally successful home-grown properties.

Stories. Games. Dreams – continue the conversation in Hyderabad. For the crowd gathering at MIPCOM the offer is straightforward. Explore a production partnership. Develop an original property. Establish a studio. Invest in a creative business. The next conversation happens closer to home. The Telangana Rising Global Summit runs from 7 to 9 December 2026 at Bharat Future City in Hyderabad. It brings together government leaders, international businesses and investors across the state's priority industries. IndiaJoy forms an integral part of the summit under the banner "Stories. Games. Dreams." Expect creators, studios, publishers, distributors and investors in the same rooms, looking at co-production, publishing, licensing and investment relationships.

Telangana's invitation is simple and visual. A creator finds a producer. A studio finds a partner. A local story finds a global audience. Build in Telangana. Create for the world. SPARK

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Telangana's leaders roll out the red carpet for partners

"Telangana is no longer just participating in the future, we are actively engineering it. With our Telangana Rising Vision 2047, we laid down a robust economic framework centred on speed, transparency, and innovation. Building upon our successful 2025 summit, Invest Telangana Global Summit 2026 invites international visionaries, industry leaders, and investors to partner with us as we scale new heights."

A Revanth Reddy
Chief Minister
Government of Telangana

"From being Asia's undisputed life sciences and tech powerhouse to pioneering India's first dedicated Mobility Valley and AI City, Telangana offers unmatched ease of doing business. We look forward to forging transformative cross-border partnerships at the Invest Telangana Global Summit 2026."

Minister for ITE&C, Industries & Commerce
Sridhar Babu Duddilla

"Telangana is building one of Asia's most ambitious ecosystems for animation, visual effects, gaming and digital content. Hyderabad already combines a deep creative and technology talent base with global studios, a strong production ecosystem and dedicated infrastructure such as IMAGE Tower. Our next ambition is larger- to make Telangana a preferred global destination where international companies can create, produce and scale, while enabling original Indian stories and locally created IP to reach audiences across the world. We invite studios, platforms, creators and investors to partner with Telangana in building the next generation of global content from Hyderabad."

Chief Secretary, Government of Telangana
Sanjay Jaju IAS



Canada's cartoon incubator heads to Cannes with India on its mind

The NFB's Nathalie Bourdon on selling art-first animation to the world, and the big market it has yet to crack

By Pooja Raj Thakkar

Every October the Croisette in Cannes in the south of France fills with buyers clutching lanyards and sizzle reels. Somewhere in that crush sits Nathalie Bourdon, with a vault of 7,000 films behind her. This year she has India on her mind.

Bourdon is director, distribution and market development at the National Film Board of Canada (NFB). She has been coming to MIPCOM for years. For her, it is where she shakes new hands, catches up with old buyers and sees where the business is heading.

The NFB has between 6,000 and 7,000 titles in its catalogue and adds 40 to 50 new ones each year, split between animation and documentary. Bourdon does not push them all down one conveyor belt.

"Each title has its unique way to get into the world," she says. "We need to follow those unique ways, specificities, and then we sell it to the market, the broadcaster, the platforms."

This year's calling card is *The Anta Claus of the South Pole*, a new animated TV special from Canadian animator Cordell Barker. The NFB made it with Tonic DNA, an independent studio in Montreal. Crave, Bell Media's streaming service in Canada, has already bought it. The rest of the world is up for grabs.

Barker is NFB royalty. His *The Cat Came Back*, about a man who cannot get rid of a cat that keeps coming home, is still one of the board's best-loved shorts. He is exactly the sort of filmmaker the NFB exists to back.

"We really care about the talent," says Bourdon. "We're like an incubator, and we take the time it



Nathalie Bourdon believes NFB is an incubator

takes to produce an animation that will be top of the art, innovative, pushing the boundaries."

That patience has filled a trophy cabinet. The NFB has 79 Oscar nominations and 12 wins. In 1989, the Academy handed it an honorary award for overall excellence in cinema. Bourdon points to the Oscar-nominated *The Girl Who Cried Pearls* as proof of what happens when filmmakers get the time and freedom to chase a big idea.

She is just as keen on partners. "Canada is one of the best partners to do co-production," she says, citing the country's co-production treaties and its deep bench of animators.

At the NFB, working with others goes hand in hand with taking creative risks and letting a film take as long as it needs.

Then comes the pitch. "We're always open for business with India, to co-produce or to sell our work."

Bourdon admits the NFB has barely a toehold here. She sees traffic running both ways. Indian buyers could dip into the Canadian vault. Canadian and Indian animators could share a drawing board.

Indian studios with a story to tell and a stomach for risk know where to find her. She will be the one in Cannes with 7,000 films and an open diary.

SPARK

Prayan Animation Studio brings three distinctive kids' IPs to MIPCOM 2026

Prayan is taking *Ria Rabbit*, *Stealing Monkeys* and *Kemet the Time Traveler* to MIPCOM in search of global partnerships and new opportunities

Expanding its international catalogue with engaging preschool entertainment and an inspirational historical adventure, Prayan Animation Studio is heading to MIPCOM 2026 with three promising IPs *Ria Rabbit*, *Stealing Monkeys*, and *Kemet the Time Traveler*.

As part of its Mipcom strategy, Prayan Animation Studio is actively seeking meetings with broadcasters, platforms, distributors, content buyers, investors and potential co-production partners interested in acquiring or partnering on these properties.

Ria Rabbit

Prayan is representing the property internationally and is seeking distribution, acquisition and strategic partnership opportunities for the series.



This IP is created by Ontamo Entertainment, *Ria Rabbit* is an engaging preschool animation series designed to spark joy, imagination and early learning. Through playful adventures and relatable experiences, *Ria Rabbit* introduces young audiences to meaningful concepts while encouraging curiosity, creativity and discovery. Combining entertaining storytelling with age-appropriate

learning, the series offers a colourful and accessible world for preschool audiences and their families, with potential across broadcast, streaming and digital platforms.

Stealing Monkeys

From Ameyukti Studios, *Stealing Monkeys* is a preschool animation property built around fun, playful storytelling and the adventures of its young characters. The series creates an entertaining world that combines humour, adventure and character-driven stories designed to connect with preschool audiences across territories.

With its strong preschool positioning and potential for international adaptation and localisation, *Stealing Monkeys* offers opportunities for broadcasters, kids' platforms, distributors and content partners seeking fresh animated properties. Prayan is representing the IP at MIPCOM and is looking to connect with buyers and partners interested in preschool content and international distribution.

Kemet the Time Traveler

Kids & Family | Historical Adventure | Educational Animation. Created by Joe Young, *Kemet the Time Traveler* follows Kemet, a gifted 10-year-old African prince, whose life changes dramatically when his homeland of Zusa is destroyed by slave traders. After enduring the Middle Passage and slavery in America, Kemet draws strength from his cultural heritage and the wisdom symbolised by the Sankofa bird. His journey becomes one of resilience, learning and discovery as he seeks knowledge and inspires those around him. Following his escape, Kemet encounters the renowned astronomer and mathematician Benjamin Banneker, setting him on an

extraordinary journey through time.

As Kemet travels across history, he encounters influential figures and pivotal moments in Black history and achievement.

Blending adventure, education and inspiration, the series explores themes of resilience, cultural heritage, knowledge and empowerment, creating an opportunity to introduce younger audiences to important historical stories and inspirational figures. Prayan is bringing *Kemet the Time Traveler* to MIPCOM to explore international distribution, acquisition, co-production and strategic partnership opportunities.



Meet Prayan at MIPCOM 2026

With these three properties, Prayan Animation Studio is looking to connect with international buyers, broadcasters, streaming platforms, distributors, investors and co-production partners seeking fresh and distinctive children's content.

From preschool comedy and early learning to culturally rich historical adventure, Prayan's MIPCOM slate reflects its focus on bringing diverse, engaging and internationally adaptable stories to audiences worldwide. **SPARK**

New IPs take the floor at Anime India Mumbai

The convention became a launchpad for homegrown worlds, not just a shrine to imported fandoms

By Pankti Vora & Nikita Kujur

Beneath the cosplay flashes and the roar of the hall, Anime India Mumbai was doing something more ambitious than celebrating old loves. It was minting new ones.

The three-day convention turned the floor into a launchpad. Fresh Indian IPs, new characters and story worlds jostled with global and homegrown franchises for a slice of India's swelling fandom economy. Mythology, manga-flavoured adventure, children's heroes and lifestyle licensing all found a stall, a stage or a trailer.

The parade of new properties was the real story.



Carmond Infinity unveiled its new anime-inspired IP *Maayan* at Anime India.

Maayan, Carmond Infinity's comic-origin IP, is moving into animation after the studio tested the property with its readers. The animation teaser premiered on stage. Takahiro Kishimoto, producer of *Crayon Shin-chan*, then unveiled the movie poster with the team.



The Action G.A.N.G brings *Grandma* and the next gen together at Anime India Mumbai

The Action G.A.N.G – Grandma & Next Gen, from the team behind Bhooshan's *Junior*, arrived as a children's and family IP built around an iconic grandmother and a new generation of young heroes, aimed at global audiences.



Nokoverse introduced audiences to its new world of characters and stories.

Noko: Guardians of the Earth, from Nokoverse, premiered the official trailer for its 3D animated children's series: five friends, friendship, curiosity and discovery.



Meet E, Mo, Mee

Emomee, from Emomee Entertainment, introduced a character-led children's universe built around *E*, *Mo* and *Mee*, stories meant to build curiosity, confidence, adaptability, emotional intelligence and critical thinking, with kindness and problem-solving in the mix.



Garuda brought Indian mythology into the anime-inspired space.

Garuda – The Wings of the Divine, from Neo Entertainment Studios, arrived with *Sacred Legacy*, pitching Indian mythology as raw material for original animation and gaming.



Muse showcased its growing slate of anime and Asian content.

Muse Communication partnered with Bacca Bucci, the Indian footwear and lifestyle brand, to show anime-inspired product, a reminder that fandom now runs through licensing and consumer goods as much as screens. That was the first wave. The rest of the floor was a mix of emerging and established properties.



Panchsheela brought its Indian-rooted story to the Anime India stage.

Panchsheela, billed as the world's first Indian magical-girl anime series from Geek Pictures India and Geek Toys, follows five schoolgirls from different regions of India against an ancient supernatural force.



The Baahubali team brought its epic animated journey to Anime India Mumbai.

Baahubali: The Eternal War, the animated chapter of the *Baahubali* universe, was showcased with details of its development and creative team. The crowd treated it as the next expansion of a world they already know.



An independent IP *The Saviors of Sanjeevani* was present in Anime India.

The Saviors of Sanjeevani, from Small Town Boys, an independent IP incubation engine and creative content studio, was among the original properties that drew attention.



Taarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashmah stepped into the anime space.

Taarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashmah was framed by Asit Kumarr Modi as a multi-format entertainment universe, including the move from 2D to 3D animation.



Rise of Anshaks brought a new generation of heroes to life at Anime India Mumbai

Warner Bros. Discovery brought *Rise of Anshaks: Heroes of Destiny*, an anime-inspired series that puts *Chhota Bheem* and *Little Singham* into a cosmic fight between light and shadow and adds a new squad of superheroes to Pogo's universe.



Muse showcased its growing slate of anime and Asian content.

Muse Communication also showcased *Black Torch*, the supernatural action anime, as a case for IP partnership and consumer products.



Doraemon, the beloved Japanese character returned to the Anime India spotlight.

Doraemon the Movie: New Nobita and the Castle of the Undersea Devil, produced in part by TV Asahi Corporation, was discussed in the context of *Doraemon*'s theatrical run in India, merchandise and India-Japan co-production.

Anime India Mumbai made the argument in public: the convention floor is no longer only a meeting point for fans. It is where IP is launched, licensed and tested.

More than 45,000 footfalls set a high bar. Hyderabad is next, in November. The line-up is still under wraps. If Mumbai is the template, expect another wave of new worlds, bigger IPs, odd collaborations and the same hungry fandom - only louder. **SPARK**

Sutra Digital packs four Indian IPs for Cannes

The studio that draws anime for Japan wants the world to buy its own Maratha warriors

By Pankti Vora



Sutra Digital's 'The Guardians of Pushpak' take on Indian mythology.

Picture a Maratha warrior galloping across a Deccan ridge, sword raised, drawn with the wide eyes and slashing speed lines of a Tokyo anime. That image sits at the heart of Sutra Digital's trip to MIPCOM Cannes. The studio is carrying four original IPs, each rooted in India and built to travel. Its pitch is simple. Pair Indian stories with top-drawer craft and they can share a stage with the biggest names in animation.

Four shows, one suitcase.

Baji retells the story of a Maratha warrior in anime-flavoured visuals. *Mavale* dips into Indian folklore with a contemporary 3D look.

The Last Raid drags a high-stakes sports story onto anime turf. *The Guardians of Pushpak* gives Indian mythology a fresh animated coat of paint.

All four arrive pitch-ready, with decks and teasers in hand. "Our core belief is that Indian stories, told with world-class craft, can travel globally," Sutra Digital chief operating officer Mahendra Saravanan told AnimationXpress.

The day job that pays for the dream.

Service work is the other half of the Cannes plan. The studio wants to grow its international 2D and 3D production business, with anime the hottest area.

It already works hand in glove with Japanese studios, handling the full anime pipeline from time sheets and layout to genga (key animation), douga (in-between animation), shiage (digital paint) and compositing.

Saravanan says those ties were earned the hard way, through repeated market visits, face-to-face talks, test results and deliveries that never slipped. Tiffcom in Tokyo keeps the Japanese relationships warm. MIPCOM opens a door into Europe.

That door is already ajar. Sutra Digital was an animation partner on *Orphan Yakuza*, which was well received when pitched at Annecy. The Middle East is a steady earner too, with work for studios in the UAE,

Kuwait and Egypt, including content built around Ramadan and Eid.

Service muscle, story soul.

Founded by three women from the animation industry, Sutra Digital runs on a practical idea. "Our animation services business funds our original IP development," says Saravanan.

The day job funds the daydreams. That lets the studio develop its own titles without dancing to an outside financier's clock, a useful cushion as commissioning budgets shrink and production bills climb.

Technology is not sold as a magic wand. The studio uses AI for audio and for generating shot and animation video, mainly to speed up exploration. In anime, hand-drawn key animation and clean-up still decide the quality of the finished frame.

The IP is being built for more than one screen, from animation and



Sutra Digital brings kabaddi to the anime arena with 'The Last Raid'



Sutra Digital chief operating officer Mahendra Saravanan

comics to gaming and digital content. An in-house gaming arm already runs titles such as *Number Fusion*, *iVote* and *Find My Pet*. The goal is to become a full-stack creative technology studio that owns its entertainment assets rather than simply renting out its hands.

The talent gap.

Saravanan sees anime-style IP as an engine of India's next phase of global animation growth. The catch is that specialised anime skills are thin on the ground, despite India's deep pool of animators. Training and real production work will decide whether that gap closes.

The mood is shifting already. Studios in Japan, Europe and elsewhere now want Indian partners as creative collaborators, not just cheap outsourcing shops.

The decks are printed and the teasers are cut. Now the Maratha warrior has to win over a room full of buyers with chequebooks. **SPARK**

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How Bot VFX brought the dark side of wellness to life in ‘Namaslay’

The India-powered studio raced a brutal post-production clock on a yoga horror film. It explains why it still bets on its artists over AI

By Pooja Raj Thakkar

A yoga studio. Candles flickering. A row of mats, a room full of perfect poses, and something very wrong waiting in the shadows.

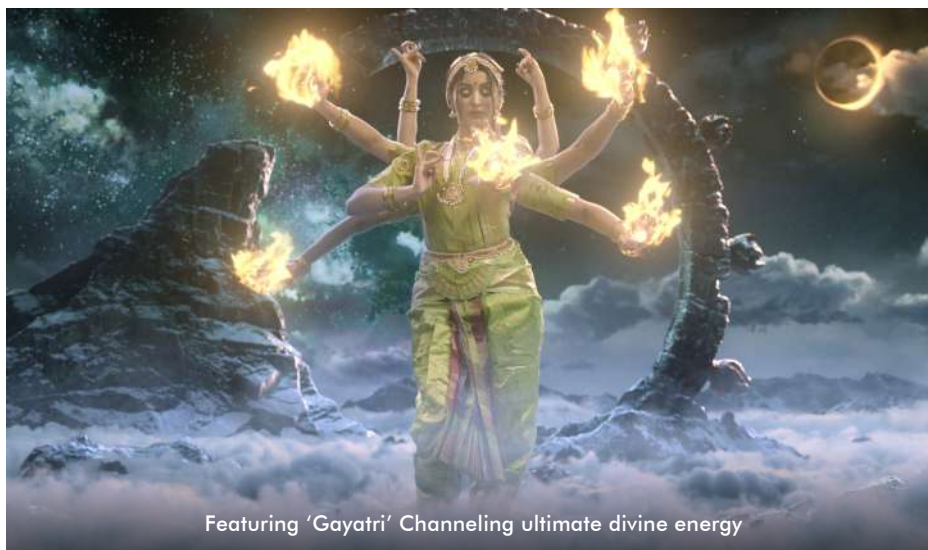
That is the unsettling world of *Namaslay*, a horror satire from Bay Area brothers Rish and Kanish that takes a sharp look at the Western wellness industry. The film opened in Los Angeles and New York on 6 August.

Behind the scares was Bot VFX, which came on board after the shoot as the film approached picture lock. With the post-production window already compressed, the studio had to build a VFX pipeline that could move quickly without compromising the filmmakers’ vision.

Founded in 2008 by Hitesh Shah, Bot VFX operates out of Chennai, Coimbatore and Pune, with a presence in Atlanta. Its artists have contributed to projects including *Stranger Things*, *Westworld* and *The Umbrella Academy*. On *Namaslay*, the studio was brought in during the final stages of production, working closely with VFX supervisor and producer Ron Marelli, Venk Potula, and directors Rish and Kanish.

The first step was understanding the cut and the filmmakers’ creative intent. With limited time and budget, Bot VFX mapped out the scope, divided the shot count into weekly milestones and established asset schedules. Key establishing shots were used for look development, with the artists creating concept art to define the visual language before applying those approved looks across the remaining sequences.

The tight schedule meant there was little room for lengthy review cycles. Bot VFX supervisor Caine Dickinson worked alongside Marelli and executive producer Natasha Francis,



Featuring ‘Gayatri’ Channeling ultimate divine energy

with regular reviews and daily notes helping the team keep each sequence moving towards final approval.

The biggest challenge was the clock. The compressed post-production window left little space for do-overs, making an efficient pipeline essential from the outset.

That urgency did not translate into shortcuts. Every shot received the same level of attention, whether it involved a relatively simple digital paint-out or a complex CG character. To stay on schedule, the team worked extended hours, including late nights and weekends, while maintaining the production milestones.

Some of the more complex work involved translating the directors’ creative vision into CG assets. Rather than keeping departments siloed, Bot VFX brought leads and supervisors together to troubleshoot problems and make decisions quickly. The collaborative approach helped reduce delays and ensured that creative and technical teams were working towards the same result.

The project also highlighted how

much the VFX landscape has changed. With AI and machine learning increasingly entering production pipelines, studios are facing simultaneous pressure for faster turnarounds and increasingly sophisticated visuals.

For *Namaslay*, however, Bot VFX deliberately chose a proven workflow. Maya, Houdini and Nuke formed the core of the pipeline, supported by experienced artists. Rather than introducing unnecessary experimentation into a time-sensitive production, the studio focused on predictability and consistency.

The decision reflects a broader shift in how VFX studios approach new technology. While AI and emerging tools can offer significant efficiencies, knowing when to use them can be just as important as knowing how to use them. For Bot VFX, the project demonstrated that a mature pipeline can still be the most reliable route to delivering complex, studio-grade work under pressure.

Communication with the filmmakers was another critical part of the process.

Early conversations focused on understanding the directors' inspirations and what they wanted to achieve beyond the technical brief. Those discussions helped the team identify the creative cues that would guide the work throughout the film.

As production progressed, communication continued through weekly reviews, written notes, emails and messages. Translating creative language into technical requirements became an important part of the client-facing process. Even seemingly simple words such as "light" or "bright" could carry different meanings depending on the scene and the director's intention.

Caine Dickinson played a key role in translating those creative conversations into practical steps for the artists, helping carry shots from initial versions through to final delivery. For the artists, the strongest validation came when the filmmakers recognised that the intended look had been achieved.

The experience also shaped Bot VFX's perspective on AI. The studio sees AI as an accelerator for repetitive, high-volume tasks rather than a replacement

for artists. Processes such as rotoscoping, camera tracking and first-pass paint work can benefit from machine learning, reducing the amount of manual effort required and freeing artists to focus on more creative decisions.



'Mitchell Nahash', a demonic serpentine creature

The final creative call, however, remains human. Story, emotion, intent and cultural context are difficult to reduce to probability-based processes. A director's subjective note about the mood of a scene or the emotional quality of a CG character still requires interpretation and artistic judgement.

As Bot VFX puts it, "AI brings the speed. The artist brings the eye."

Looking ahead, the studio sees continued opportunities in high-end

episodic content and large-scale cinematic productions. As production becomes increasingly distributed across geographies, studios are looking for VFX partners that can offer secure, adaptable pipelines while integrating seamlessly with their existing teams.

Bot VFX sees its global relationships with studios and post-production houses, combined with India's growing technical talent pool, as an important part of that opportunity.

For *Namaslay*, that meant stepping into a project late, working under a demanding deadline and finding the balance between creative ambition and production realities. The result was a VFX process built less around spectacle for its own sake and more around discipline, collaboration and knowing exactly when to rely on a proven approach.

In a film that finds horror beneath the polished surface of wellness culture, much of Bot VFX's work remains invisible by design. That, ultimately, is the point: when the visual effects work seamlessly, the audience sees the story rather than the machinery behind it. SPARK



Redchillies.vfx moves from the cutting room to the story room

From post-production to pre-visualisation, Redchillies.vfx is rethinking its role in filmmaking

By Pooja Raj Thakkar



Keitan Yadav wants Indian visual effects in the film before the first camera rolls, not after the last take.

When Redchillies.vfx opened its doors in 2006 the brief was simple: show the world that top-flight visual effects could be made in India. Nearly twenty years on, the conversation has shifted. For chief operating officer Keitan Yadav the next step is no longer about proving the studio can deliver. It is about sitting in the room while the film is still being imagined.

“For us, VFX starts with the script, not the software,” Yadav says. The first question is never what the software can do. It is what the filmmaker wants the audience to feel. Only then does the team decide what to capture in camera, what to enhance and what to build from scratch. Previsualisation, technical planning, research and on-set supervision come next. Asset creation, animation, effects, lighting, compositing and finishing follow later.

On a film the size of *King* (the upcoming action thriller starring Shah Rukh Khan) that early work matters more than ever. “The battle of good VFX is actually fought long before a shot reaches an artist.” The spectacular moment that lasts a few seconds on screen may have been shaped months earlier in planning meetings and previs sessions.

There is an old line in the business: if you cannot notice the VFX, the job is done. Yadav still holds to it. Photorealism is unforgiving. Audiences may not know the technology, but they know when something feels wrong. A lighting mismatch, a scale error, a texture that does not sit right can break the spell. When those decisions have to hold across hundreds or thousands of shots the pressure multiplies.

Scale cannot come at the cost of belief. Whether the film is *Jawan* or *King*, the audience should stay inside the world, not step outside to ask how the effect was made. Sometimes the most impressive work is the work nobody notices.

Yadav likens a heavy VFX production to a Jenga tower. The higher it climbs, the riskier any change at the base becomes. Bring visual effects into the conversation early and filmmakers can decide what to shoot practically, what to extend and where the budget will actually show on screen. Supervisors need to stand next to directors and cinematographers on set. Not every problem needs an expensive computer-generated fix. Better planning, sharper previs or a smart mix of live action and effects can often deliver a stronger result. On *King* the rule is clear: put the complexity where the audience will feel it, not everywhere simply because it is possible.

Technology is moving fast through the pipeline. Yadav values tools that bring an idea closer to the screen, not tools that try to replace the person making the creative call. “AI comes in useful when it accelerates ideation, iteration, repetition and vision, not when it replaces creative judgement.” The studio has already tested the ground.



Its work on *Dashavatar* earned recognition for best use of AI. Real-time tools and virtual production are also shifting decisions earlier. Technology, Yadav insists, remains an extension of the artist, never the artist itself.

Ask how the studio keeps consistency across thousands of frames and the answer is direct. “A lot of systems. A lot of human eyes.” There are shared looks, asset libraries, colour pipelines, camera and lens data, review structures and supervisors. Systems alone are not enough. Taste still matters. A trained eye spots the tiny lighting shift or the object that does not belong, the detail software can miss. Technology helps hundreds of artists produce consistent frames. Creative supervision makes sure those frames still tell the same story.

The studio’s past work shows how different the demands can be.

Jawan needed environments, simulations and action sequences that stayed largely invisible. The village, the hospital and the highway each brought their own problems. *Zero* required visual effects in almost every frame so a regular-sized Shah Rukh Khan could become a dwarf-sized character. *Fan* asked for a convincing digital double of the actor. *Ra.One* remains one of the most demanding and rewarding projects the team has tackled.

Across all of them, the test stays the same. What matters is not whether the audience understands how much was created or manipulated. What matters is that they accept the space and stay inside the scene.

The bigger change underway is structural. “The shift happens when VFX is invited into the room before the shoot rather than after it.”

India already has scale and technical talent. The next move is greater involvement in supervision, look development, research, previs and the design of sequences themselves. Indian studios can move from executing someone else’s plan to helping shape the visual language of the film. Growing interest in mythology, action, horror and other invented worlds only widens the opening.

And then there is *King*. Yadav offers no spoilers, only a quiet tease: something amazing is in the making. He will say the film ranks among the studio’s most ambitious projects in scale and complexity. For the rest, audiences will have to wait. The restraint feels right. Visual effects are as much about knowing what to leave unseen as what to reveal.

When VFX teams join a project before the cameras turn, almost everything changes. Early involvement brings predictability. More importantly, it opens creative possibilities. Storyboards, previsualisation and concept art become a shared map for the whole production. Teams can test ideas before an expensive shoot day, decide what can be achieved practically and design clean transitions between live action and computer-generated work. The relationship itself changes. Instead of receiving a problem at the end of production, the VFX team becomes one of the tools a filmmaker uses while designing the film. That is the difference between a service provider and a filmmaking partner.

Sometimes the job is to make the audience ask how they did that. Other times the job is to make sure the question never arises. The technology will grow more powerful. Pipelines will become more automated. AI will speed the earliest stages of an idea. The heart of the craft stays human: knowing what the story needs, knowing what the audience should feel, and knowing when the technology should disappear completely.

For Redchillies.vfx the next twenty years may not be about building bigger worlds. They may be about helping filmmakers imagine worlds that did not exist before.

SPARK



Into the woods with 'Vvaan'

Sidharth Malhotra and Tamannaah Bhatia headline a supernatural forest thriller, while a graphic novel slips back a thousand years to dig up the myth's roots

By Pankti Vora



Indian folklore is creeping out of the shadows and into a haunted forest. *The Vvaan: Force of the Forrest* is taking shape as a fantasy thriller that mixes action, mythology and eye-popping spectacle. Its companion graphic novel, *The Legend of Vvan*, heads the other way, deep into the past.

Sidharth Malhotra and Tamannaah Bhatia lead the film, both cast to fit the grain of their characters. The source from Balaji and The Viral Fever (TVF) team told AnimationXpress that Malhotra's history with action and Bhatia's feel for fantasy and action made them the obvious picks for the leads. Their turns, backed by an ensemble cast, are meant to power the film's entertainment quotient.

But the real sweat happens behind the screen. Conjuring a supernatural folk world takes more than a cracking story and a spooky forest. It needs artists, technicians and whole teams marching in step, especially

when visual effects are carrying a hefty slice of the show.

The Balaji and TVF team says one of the toughest jobs was throwing serious tech at the renders while holding international standards across the VFX. The goal is to make the effects glide along with the story instead of sitting on top like a bolt-on. The spectacle has to serve the tale, not hog the limelight.

A doorway into the myth

Then there is the world beyond the film. Because *The Vvaan: Force of the Forrest* was dreamed up as a film first, *The Legend of Vvan* graphic novel is built as a second way in. Rather than just replaying the movie in comic panels, the team chose to stretch the universe with a companion story, fresh characters, more lore and extra supernatural flourishes. The upshot is a tale that plugs into the bigger film world while handing fantasy fans another piece of the jigsaw. The team calls the comic a way to pile "more layers to the story",

leaving space for ideas that can roam beyond the film's spine.

A spin-off from the past

The expansion comes with a neat twist. The graphic novel ducks the usual movie-to-comic routine.

"We decided to create a spin-off story from the past," said *The Legend of Vvan* writer Alok Sharma, who set the story in the 11th century and dug into the same myth from an earlier age. Instead of spilling the film's plot, the comic uses a short scene from the movie as a bookend, so it stands on its own two feet while still holding hands with the film.

Building that old world took homework. Team TVF and Balaji laid on a set visit and shared footage, but the design team, led by Saumin Suresh Patel, still had to rebuild what the *Vvaan* universe might have looked like in 11th-century India. Poring over the architecture and period detail set the visual language.

The digging went well past buildings and costumes. Sharma says the team treated every sequence as if art-directing a film, fussing even over the sociological grain of everyday life. Historical touchstones, from the sacking of Nalanda to the campaigns of Turkish invader Khalji, are stitched into the backdrop. All the while the comic keeps ordinary folk at its heart, tracing the lot of common people while guarding the myth of *Vvaan*.

So *The Vvaan: Force of the Forrest* and *The Legend of Vvan* get two separate but linked lives. One built for the big screen, the other a portal into the past. The film brings the spectacle, the comic brings the backstory. Put them together and the *Vvaan* universe looks like it has plenty more forest left to explore. **SPARK**

Childhood has no borders

The stories that travel furthest are often those that recognise what children everywhere have in common

By Sourabh Kumar

What makes a children's story travel from one country to another? Is it the language? The culture? The animation style? Or perhaps the characters themselves?

I believe it begins with something much simpler: childhood is universal.

Children may grow up in different countries, speak different languages and experience very different cultures, but the fundamentals of childhood remain remarkably similar — friendship, curiosity, humour, imagination, family, learning, fun and the desire to explore the world around them.

These are values that do not need translation. A child in Mumbai can laugh at the same kind of mischief as a child in Madrid. A child in Jakarta can be just as curious about an adventure as a child in London. The cultural context may be different, but the emotions are often the same.



This belief has been at the heart of our journey at *PunToon Kids*. When we created Gattu & Chinki, our intention was not simply to create animated characters. We wanted to create a world that children could enjoy, learn from and feel connected to — a world rooted in Indian childhood, while being driven by universal experiences.

Gattu and Chinki are Indian characters. Their surroundings, stories and cultural references reflect the world many Indian children recognise. But at the heart of their stories are ideas that children

everywhere understand: friendship, curiosity, problem-solving, humour, imagination, family and the joy of discovering something new.

That distinction is important. Being culturally rooted does not have to mean being culturally limited. In fact, I believe authenticity can be the starting point for international appeal.

The opportunity for Indian children's entertainment today is therefore much bigger than simply dubbing an Indian show into multiple languages. The opportunity is to build original Indian IP around universal childhood experiences — and then explore how those characters and stories can evolve with audiences across markets.

This is where the future of children's entertainment becomes particularly exciting.

A character can begin in a YouTube series and eventually become an animated franchise spanning television, connected TV, games, books, licensing, merchandise and live experiences. And these extensions do not necessarily have to be created by one company or in one country.

Co-production can bring different creative cultures together around the same universal idea.

An Indian IP can retain its cultural identity while international partners bring new storytelling perspectives, production expertise, distribution capabilities, localisation and access to their markets. New stories, formats and experiences can emerge from that collaboration.



For *PunToon Kids*, Gattu & Chinki represent the beginning of that possibility.

Our ambition is to take characters and stories born in India and explore how they can connect with children globally not by making them less Indian, but by identifying the universal emotions and values within them.



Because ultimately, children everywhere want many of the same things: to have fun, to learn, to laugh, to imagine, to make friends and to explore.

The world of children's entertainment may be divided by languages and borders.

Childhood isn't.

And perhaps that is where the next generation of global children's IP will come from — stories that are deeply rooted in where they come from, but speak to something that every child, everywhere, understands.

At *PunToon Kids*, we believe Gattu & Chinki can be part of that journey. SPARK

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The views and opinions expressed by Sourabh Kumar, Founder, PunToon Kids, are solely his own and do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of AnimationXpress. AnimationXpress does not endorse or take responsibility for the opinions expressed by the writer.

How He-Man got a digital muscle-up

ILM Mumbai's David Vickery on turning Adam into a 130 per cent powerhouse, ditching motion capture for Beast Man and making a talking skull emote

By Pooja Raj Thakkar

Picture this. Nicholas Galitzine's lean frame starts to swell. Bones shift. Tendons pull tight. Veins rise under skin that thickens in real time. Tiny body hair catch the light. One continuous visual hit that takes the character from everyday bloke to the most powerful man in the universe.

That is just one of the sequences Industrial Light & Magic's London and Mumbai teams pulled off for Amazon MGM Studios' Masters of the Universe. Across 18 months, they delivered 793 of the film's 2,180 visual effects shots. Beast Man. Half of Skeletor. He-Man's full transformation. Subternia. Snake Mountain.

David Vickery, production visual effects supervisor and creative director of ILM's Mumbai studio, has the BAFTA and VES awards, the Oscar nomination for Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part 2, and a CV that runs through the Jurassic World films and Mission: Impossible – Rogue Nation. Here he walks through the choices that made the fantasy feel solid enough in a conversation with AnimationXpress' Pooja Raj Thakkar.

On the biggest creative challenges across the whole project

A deeper VFX breakdown is particularly valuable with Masters of the Universe because the project gave us several sequences where the creative and technical challenges were very different. Across the film, there were 2,180 visual effects shots delivered by six vendors, with ILM's London and Mumbai studios handling 793 shots over 18 months.

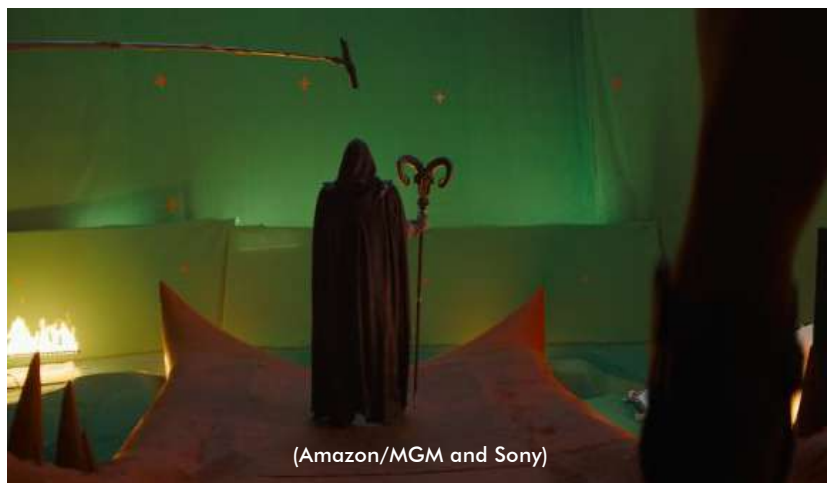
What made the project particularly interesting was that each character required us to think differently about performance and technique. We weren't applying one solution across the board. We had to understand what each character needed and then develop the right approach around that.

For example, He-Man's transformation was entirely digital, while with Beast Man we experimented with motion capture before deciding that keyframe animation was the better way to achieve the performance. Skeletor presented another completely different challenge because we had to create expression and dialogue performance through a largely digital skull.

That experimentation was really at the heart of the project.

On He-Man's transformation and keeping a fully digital body believable.

The transformation was one of the sequences where being fully digital gave us a lot of creative control. All of the body transformation, including the close-ups of the hands and the moment when he turns around, was fully CG. We wanted the lighting and the transformation itself to work as one continuous visual experience.



We built Adam anatomically, taking into account the position of the bones, how the muscles and tendons attach, fat depth, skin thickness and even veins. We then ran creature simulations over that structure so that the muscle and bone felt connected and moved naturally beneath the skin.

There was also a lot of attention paid to the groom because there are tiny hair across the body, and those details become important when you're pushing the transformation into close-up.

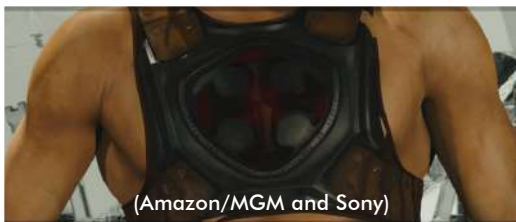
The key was restraint. We were changing the character from around 80 per cent of Nicholas Galitzine's mass to around 130 per cent. It had to be enough for the audience to read the transformation, but it couldn't become so extreme that He-Man would feel disconnected from the photographic world of the rest of the film.

On Beast Man and why motion capture got the boot

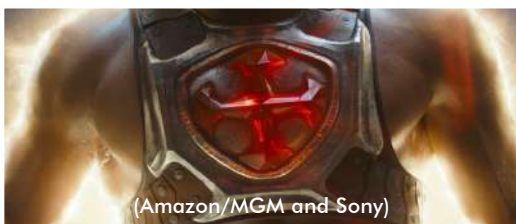
We tested motion capture and initially the results looked fine and realistic, but Beast Man had very specific proportions and was meant to have a strong simian, almost gorilla-like physicality. The motion capture didn't quite give us that character. So we removed it and allowed the animators to do what they do best: animate the character by hand.

A lot of the reference material actually came from the animators acting out the scenes themselves. They would physically perform the actions and use that as a reference for the animation. That gave the performance a very personal quality because they weren't simply iterating on captured data.

We also took Beast Man on earlier than originally required and became heavily involved with the previs. That allowed us to develop the character and the asset much earlier, and it also helped establish the relationship with the client from the beginning.



(Amazon/MGM and Sony)



(Amazon/MGM and Sony)



(Amazon/MGM and Sony)



(Amazon/MGM and Sony)

On Skeletor and how you make a skull talk and feel..

Skeletor was incredibly challenging because you have a jaw that opens and closes, but you need to communicate all the emotion, intent and performance that normally comes from a much more flexible face.

We experimented a lot. We looked at how the jaw could move, how we could use the brows, how we could alter the teeth line and the shape of the mouth, and how we could approach dialogue when there are no lips to help shape the phonemes.

It became a very shot-by-shot process. Something might work beautifully in one shot and then completely fail in the next because the movement or

framing was different. We had to keep experimenting until we found the right solution for each moment.

We also experimented with stepped or 'on twos' brow movement to bring in a little of that stop-motion quality. But again, it was about finding the balance. Push it too far, and the skull becomes rubbery or overly malleable; don't push it enough and you lose the performance.

So there wasn't one definitive solution for Skeletor. It really was about solving each shot individually.

By the power of Grayskull, the skull talks, the beast walks, and the hero grows before your eyes. ILM Mumbai and London made sure you believe every flex. **SPARK**

Powerkids carries off the biggest haul at the Ann Awards 2026

Assemblage Entertainment is crowned studio of the year, and cartoonist Aabid Surti takes home the Ram Mohan award

Mowgli had a busy night in Mumbai. The jungle boy kept sending PowerKids Entertainment back to the stage at the Ann Awards 2026, until its trophies looked like a small forest.

The awards, presented as part of the Animation & More Summit 2026, gathered India's animation, VFX, licensing, advertising and technology crowd under one roof. Studios that draw anime for Tokyo sat a few tables away from teams that make nursery rhymes for toddlers.

The night also saluted the pioneers and handed new prizes to young talent. The biggest crown went to Assemblage Entertainment, named studio of the year. In a room where every corner of the industry had a story to tell, the Ann Awards celebrated the people and studios shaping what comes next.

The Jungle Book rules the night

Powerkids Entertainment walked away with the largest pile of silverware. *The Jungle Book X'mas Special (Jungle All the Way)* won best animated full-length feature film in the digital and OTT categories. *The Jungle Book* took best licensed animated series programme, and *Dragonero: Tales of Paladins* Season two won best syndicated content.

Powerkids TV won best channel packaging, and *The Jungle Book* Experiential Licensing Campaign took best experiential marketing. Mowgli was recognised in best use of an animated character in a brand TVC, and *Itah The Snow Keeper* in best promo. *Little Mowgli* won best preschool show in the programming categories.

It also took best partnered animation work for *Gabby's Dollhouse: The Movie*, and two awards for *Wolf King*, as best animated digital series and best animated series.

Saffronic won best animated series for *Legends of Evergreen Hills* and best animated short film for *Duck*. It also took best preschool show in partners and services for *Gabby's Doll House*. Akshita Tyagi received the editorial choice award for her short, *I Don't Know What to Do*.

Japan had a strong showing. TV Asahi Corporation was recognised for *Shin chan: The Spicy Kasukabe Dancers* in India and won best animated licensed character for *Shin chan*. Avex Pictures took anime series for *Gachiakuta*. Sony Yay! won best animated character merchandise for Sony Yay X Naruto.



A moment of pride for the Ann Awards 2026 winners



L to R: PowerKids Entertainment CEO Manoj Mishra; Indian Television.com Group executive director Perna Wanvari

Manoj Mishra, who heads Powerkids, had a personal hat-trick of sorts. He was named best producer and best showrunner for *Little Mowgli*, and he received the award for contribution to the animation industry.

Assemblage and Saffronic go global

Much of India's animation is now made for the world. Assemblage Entertainment won animated feature film for *Stitch Head*, and won again with it for best animated full-length feature film in the partners and services

section. It also took best partnered animation work for *Gabby's Dollhouse: The Movie*, and two awards for *Wolf King*, as best animated digital series and best animated series.

Bheem holds his ground

India's home-grown heroes were not short of fans. Green Gold Animation won best animated digital series in 2D for *Chhota Bheem Origin of Bheem Part 01*. *Chhota Bheem* himself was named India's most loved animated character. Nobody asked for a recount.

The same 2D award also went to *Chote Tara Ka Bada Gadar* from Kayhan Enterprises and Zee Entertainment Enterprises. Zee picked up best Indian cinema inspired animated IP for that title too. It also won best use of animation in a music video for the *Shivlok Ke Kundakka Mandakka* song on KidZ on Zee5, best 3D content acquired for *Legends of Lego* and best innovative campaign for KidZ Innovation.

Hitech Animation won best animated digital series in 3D for *Kurukshetra*. Makrand Joshi took best animated short film for *Innocent Prisoner*. Neela Mediatech won best preschool for *Taarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashmah* Rhymes.

ETV Bal Bharat had a good evening. It won best acquired anime for *Detective Conan*, best animated full-length feature film for *Bal Bahubali The Rise of the Sun Guardian* and best 3D animated series for *Akasa The Medallion Kids*. Ele Animation and Toonz Media Group won best 2D animated series for *Jay Jagannath*.

Brands, promos and the AI question

Famous Digital Studios won best use of an animated character in a brand TVC, best animated brand film and best animated TVC, all for *Hero Destini*. It also took best effects in the technical categories.

VidUnit Media won best digital campaign for an animated series for *Back To School*. Carmond Infinity shared best innovative campaign for the Maayan Comics x Mathrubhumi Kuttykootam tie-up. Syncink Entertainment won best brand collaboration for its BGMI film, *The Last Supper Ft. Anna & Sara*.

Sutra Digital won best promo for *The Guardians of Pushpak*. AI now has categories of its own. Caizon Creations won best promo with AI for *Noko*, and Shemaroo Entertainment won best animated brand film using AI for *Her Role Her Rise*.

The people behind the frames

The craft awards put names to the work. Studio56 Animation won best producer for *Black Diamond Race*. Lalu Mastan was best lighting artist for *Duck* and Smruti Ranjan Sarangi best layout artist for Team Mekbots. Gowra Hari Perla won best character design for *Zatak*, along with best storyboard artist. Syed Rahim was best compositor for *Legends of Evergreen Hills*, where Ajith Kumar and Anuska Poddar won the animator awards.

Gaurav Malani and Seema Malani were best screenplay writers for *Khel Khel Mein*, the *Chhota Bheem* and *Little Singham* crossover movie. Yash Thakur and Bahaish Kapoor were honoured for *Little Singham & Smaashhing Simmba: Khiladiyon Ka Khel*. Jayant Kumar also won for character design, Saharsh Wardhan Singh Rathore and Sonam Shekhawat for dialogue, and Suman Manna and Subhajit Kar for animation. Arushi Govil and Dalbir Singh were best directors of a digital series. Dhrumit Gada won best director of an animated film for *Dream*.

The Young Ace award went to Kalyani B of the National Institute of Design for *Mareechika: The Mirage of a Dream*.

The first Ramoji Animation Excellence Awards named Unnikrishnan V of Carmond Infinity young animator of the year for *Maayan* and *Kingarakavyam*. Entangled Studio was named best indie studio of the year. For public service messages, NID Jorhat won for *Jhijhak* and the Indian Institute of Creative Technologies for *Stop. Think. Then Act*, a cybercrime series for teenagers.



L to R: Anime India Co-founder Mishaal Wanvari;
TV Asahi Sales Executive, Animation Sales & Development Kaori Hanai.

Saluting the pioneers

The Ram Mohan Award for Excellence in Animation went to Aabid Surti, the artist, author and cartoonist who gave Indian readers *Dhabbuji*, *Bahadur*, *Inspector Azad* and *Inspector Vikram*. The award, instituted by AnimationXpress with Graphiti Multimedia, honours the spirit of the late Padma Shri Ram Mohan.

The Arnab Chaudhuri Director's Awards remember the filmmaker behind *Arjun: The Warrior Prince*. The Animation Ace award went to Triparna Maiti for *The Chair*.



Aabid Surti receives the Ram Mohan Award

Aabid Surti's *Bahadur* grew up on the pages of a comic book. The night's winners live on OTT apps and phone screens, in deals that stretch from Tokyo to Qatar. The stage in Mumbai was crowded this year. Next year the queue to climb it will be longer. **SPARK**

Anime India leaves Mumbai and takes the whole country along

Kolkata and Delhi have had their turn. Hyderabad is next.

It began in Mumbai with a crowd in wigs and wooden swords, and a queue that curled round the block. Anime India has since packed its bags and carried that crowd to Kolkata and Delhi, before rolling back home to Mumbai for another round.

Every stop looks much the same, and fans would not have it any other way. Cosplayers strike poses for a wall of phone cameras. Gamers hunch over controllers in tournament bays. Dark halls fill for anime screenings, while stalls of Japanese goods do brisk business outside. Artists Alley draws the sketchbook crowd. Staff in frilly aprons serve at the Maid Café, the Dome 360 wraps visitors in animation, and the anisong concerts close the day with a hall full of fans singing every word.

Japan has come calling too. *Attack on Titan* and *Death Note* director Tetsuro Araki, has met his Indian fans here. So has *Haikyuu!!* director Susumu Mitsunaka, voice actor Kazuhiko Inoue made the trip, as did *Naruto* and *Naruto Shippuden* director Hayato Date.

Away from the fan floor, the festival has built a business side. The Animation & More Summit gives the industry a stage of its own. The AVGC 40 Under 40 list has taken note, and so have the Ann Awards and the GEM Awards.

Next up is Hyderabad, on 14 and 15 November 2026. More cities join the trail from 2027, and nobody is saying which ones yet. Keep the costume ready. **SPARK**



'Naruto' and 'Naruto Shippuden' director Hayato Date





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