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Animating Indian production culture: an interview with animation filmmaker and educator Ram Mohan

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Recent studies in global creative industries have helped reveal how media practitioners conceive professional identities and generate communities around cultural production. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the evolving space of Indian cinema, where the first century of filmmakers have not only devised vibrant industries but played key roles in conceiving national identity. Indian Animation, often misunderstood as a recent arrival, has roots early in this joint project of national development and entertainment. Filmmaker, educator and ‘father of Indian animation’ Ram Mohan has been active at every stage, and continues to contribute to a new Indian culture of animation filmmaking. In this interview Ram Mohan traces the rise of animation within Indian filmmaking across his long and varied career.

Recent studies in global creative industries have helped reveal how film, television and other media practitioners conceive professional identities and generate communities around cultural production. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the evolving space of Indian cinema, where the first century of filmmakers have not only devised vibrant industries but also played key roles in conceiving national identity. Indian Animation, often misunderstood as a recent arrival, has roots early in this joint project of national development and entertainment. Filmmaker, educator and ‘father of Indian animation’ Ram Mohan has been active at every stage, and continues to contribute to a new Indian culture of animation filmmaking today.

In this interview at Graphiti Multimedia in Mumbai, Ram Mohan traces the rise of animation within Indian filmmaking across his long and varied career. Beginning in 1956 by creating publicity shorts in the Cartoon Unit of the Government Films Division, he went on to negotiate a series of industrial milestones, including the 1972 founding of Ram Mohan Biographics, an educational and professional wellspring of today’s industry leaders. Having created sequences for directors such as BR Chopra and Satyajit Ray, in 1992 he co-directed India’s first animated feature film *Ramayana* and from 1997 became a pioneer in outsourced animation in collaboration with UTV. Today as President Emeritus of the

Animation Society of India (TASI) and Dean of the Graphiti School of Animation, Ram Mohan offers unique perspective on challenges faced by Indian animation: demands for quality professional education, original domestic content, industrial outreach, and the crucial need for animation to become an embedded part of cultural life for another century of Indian cinema.



Figure 1: *Ramayana: The Legend of Prince Rama* (Ram Mohan, Yûgô Sakô and Koichi Sasaki 1992), an Indian-Japanese Coproduction and perhaps India’s first animated feature.

Beginnings

Ram Mohan came to animation from outside the arts, as a self-taught enthusiast. A science student at the University of Madras with a passion for caricature, he created cartoons in his spare time, beginning with editorial illustrations for the *Illustrated Weekly of India* and in 1954 cartoons for the oil company magazine *The Burmah Shell*:

I created a character called Buddhu the impossible pump attendant, and he used to do everything wrong. Each month, there

was a two-page feature of Buddhu doing something wrong and then being corrected... That is when I got more interested in story telling through cartoons, not just single panel cartoons, animation as a medium for story-telling... and of course, I never missed a single Disney movie that was in town – the only source of feature films in those days.¹

Animation for National Development (1956-1968)

In 1948, a year after independence the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting founded in Mumbai the Films Division of India, which today still serves to “project an objective image of the country” and “inform, educate and motivate” its people (“Citizens Charter” 2013). This included a specialised Cartoon Unit. Mohan credits much of the initiative to Jehangir [Jean] Bhowmaway who worked with UNESCO in Paris, James Beveridge at the National Film Board of Canada and the donation from the US Technical Aid Program of an ACME Rostrum Camera, which was soon put to use on Bhowmaway’s miniature painting film *Radha and Krishna* (1956). Crucially for Mohan’s career and the subsequent history of Indian animation, they also sent Indian-born Disney animator Clair

Weeks to conduct a training program for prospective animators in the unit.



Figure 2: *Radha and Krishna* (J. S. Bhowmaway 1956), one of the first Films Division films made with the ACME rostrum camera donated by the US government (Films Division of India).

Ram Mohan: Being a great Disney fan, when I heard that Clair Weeks from Disney Studio is going to be in India and going to help film students set up a cartoon film unit, I went and met him. I had no hope of actually getting into this training program because I did not have the necessary qualification of being a graduate from an art school or college, but since Weeks liked my cartoons and characters and certain designs, he said I could apply and appear for the test. If I got selected, I could be in the training program. That’s how I got in. The very first film that we worked on that was a part of the training program was called *Banyan Deer* (1957)... Everybody remembered *Bambi* (1942), and... the characters were designed very much with the *Bambi* characters in mind. Initially [...there] was an attempt at making them look very Indian. We took a princess from the murals of

¹ Ram Mohan, interview with author for this paper

Ajanta, but then somehow the treatment was difficult for people who are trained in Disney tradition to suddenly switch to flat painting of Indian miniatures... Really, it was a little difficult, but then, I think it was a good exercise as a process of learning... That is how I started my career. Initially, because of my background as a cartoonist, I was mostly given story-boards to do, which was okay for me. I liked structuring stories with cartoons, cartoon characters, trying to work in some humor and so on.

Timothy Jones: What was this Films Division Cartoon Unit set up to accomplish?

RM: The purpose of setting up this cartoon film unit was... as a part of the Planned Publicity Program. India had launched at that time the first of the 5-year plans... and it was more of the Soviet model. There were going to be films essentially aimed at the rural audiences or the individual film-going audience, and it was mostly about social communication... and about programs that the government was introducing. The cartoon film unit was part of this animation for social communication and development, and that was what you were expected to do, to make films on various subjects like how to prepare a compost pit or how to convert the village pond into a fishery. It was not great exciting work in terms of the story, but we did manage to bring in some humor, some characters that were

typically Indian... [as in] *Dreams of Mojiram* (-1968). He has an enormous turban that covers his eye and it slips over his brow and sits on his nose, and most of the time, he doesn't know what is going on around him. He sits in a bullock cart and he keeps complaining, 'there is no progress, nothing ever changes, nothing ever happens, nothing exciting happens,' and so on, but at some point, somebody tells him to look up. His turban falls off, and for the first time, he sees that India has changed. He sees that dams have been built and steel plants have come up... This was a recurring message of the Plan Publicity Program. We think of various ways of showing what the government has been investing in and what has been happening around the country, how things have changed.



Figure 3: Storyboards for *The Banyan Deer* (Clair Weeks 1957), produced as part of the training course for animators in the new Cartoon Unit (Films Division of India).

TJ: So, animation was a tool they were interested in using for national development?

RM: Yeah. In fact, that was my first exposure to animation in actual production, and I was quite happy with doing that because it was not just telling stories about cats and dogs and creatures chasing each other or gags. This was communication with purpose. There was a lot of skepticism and cynicism around even in those days whether these things are going to work at all, but it was interesting trying to work out the stories and trying to communicate this whole idea of development.

TJ: What caused you to decide to leave the Film Division?

RM: In 1967, there was a World Retrospective of Animation Cinema in Montreal along with the 1967 Exposition. So, I decided to go on my own and fortunately, Pramod Pati was at that time the Deputy Chief Producer [and] he was very supportive... He gave me a letter addressed to Norman McLaren and so, I had the opportunity to go and spend three weeks in Montreal with the National Film Board. What I saw there – the kind of work that was being done, the variety of techniques they were using, the concepts they were developing – made me feel that Films Division was perhaps not the right place to be... Norman McLaren himself was very, very open. He took me around his little studio and showed me various techniques that they use, including hand-drawn animation, hand-drawn sound. He was at that point putting the finishing touches to his *Pas*

de Deux (1968)... He showed me how he had worked out the moments in a very complex exposure with several levels of frequent exposures. It was really an eye-opener, and when I came back I was frankly dissatisfied with being in Films Division where things were moving very slowly... I was just waiting for an opportunity to move beyond what was being done in the Films Division.

Pioneering the Private Sector (1968-1997)

In 1968 prominent film-producer L.V. Prasad imported an Oxberry animation stand and optical printer with the objective of setting up a commercial animation unit, one of the earliest examples of sustained private-sector animation in the country. He approached Mohan to run it.

RM: I visited his studio in Madras, but... I said I don't have any intentions of leaving Bombay and shifting to Madras because I thought the opportunities were better here, but if they were willing to bring all their equipment over to Bombay, I would leave Films Division and join them. So they brought the equipment over from Madras to Films Center in Tardeo. That was in '68, and two of my colleagues who were working with me in the Films Division also resigned and came with me. Bhimsain [Khurana] also joined me and he set up his own studio. The advantage of being [at Prasad] in Films Center was that it was one of the three major color processing labs, and a lot of feature

film producers used to come to the laboratory. Occasionally one of them would come up to the animation studio and look at the work, and then, they would say in the end, they would be releasing a film very soon. ‘Can you give us some animated titles for these films?’ ...They would come just a couple of weeks before the release date and say we want an animated title. So, we had to rush through these things, but it was funny.

In 1972 Ram Mohan founded his own independent studio which went on to become a proving ground for many of India’s most prominent animators. During this time he created sequences for such films as Ray’s *Shatranj Ke Khiladi* (*Chess Players*, 1977) and Chopra’s *Pati Patni Aur Woh* (1978).

RM: In the early ‘70s... we started doing commercials for cinemas and they used to be one-minute long. Later, [in] the ‘80s, when television commercials started, then it really picked up and we did a lot of those, but all this while, there were very, very few people who actually did animation in the private sector... These were very small boutique corporations, including minor projects. At that time, we were hardly five or eight people doing these small commercials, and it stayed that way for a long, long time.

People used to come, students from Arts schools [and] we used to encourage them to take up animation... nothing like a big

animation production was over the horizon, it was essentially all advertising commercials, but the interest was there. The young people did come and wanted to try it out, and I used to keep it open house... Some of them stayed, some of them moved out and gradually by the early ‘90s, I had a small unit of about 18-25 people.



Figure 4: Animated sequence from *Shatranj Ke Khiladi*, *Chess Players* (Satyajit Ray 1977) (Artificial Eye).

Meena

Meena (1995) was a UNICEF initiative to address discrimination against South Asian girls, using a relatable character and stories to educate and entertain across national, religious and class boundaries.

RM: When the *Meena* project started in ‘91, it was the decade of the girl child... Neal Matthews, a Canadian, who was the Communications Officer, was the one who had thought of Meena as a character, representing the girl child in South Asia. There was a conference in Prague in 1990 when UNICEF

invited Disney, Hanna-Barbera and asked about using animation for development... they wanted me to design Meena and be a part of the team. It was like going full circle, back to animation for development, but then this was a much better structured program... It was a very well researched initiative.

Initially work on the Meena project was divided between India and the Philippines, with Mohan providing pre-production services.

RM: Hanna-Barbera had offered to do the animation in their studio... at cost, so we packed it out. The first one was done there, and then Neal said he would prefer to get the work done in South Asia itself... Gradually more of the work was taken in our studio Ram Mohan Biographics.

TJ: It seems that is the point when many people who are in the industry now first got a taste of animation, working on *Meena*?

RM: Yeah, that is when we had an opportunity to take on more people, and we did not have a school or an institution to teach animation. What we did was let them come in and work with the senior guys, who guided them through the initial processes, and it was all learning while doing. You can see that many of the *Meena* films have a raw edge because some of the people who worked were new, not experienced enough, but gradually as we went along, they got better. Ajit [Rao] had just come back from... Canada, to Sheridan [College],

and we got him to conduct a small course...

Ram Mohan Biographics at that point was not a school... but overall, there was a nice atmosphere there where people could learn and develop their own skills, which I personally think is a good way of learning. I mean this is the old Indian Gurukul system. Gurukul is a Sanskrit term for an extended family of students surrounding a teacher. It is notable as since the teacher does not traditionally take a fee, the students complete tasks around the ashram. In the context of animation described by Mohan it is a unique take on social learning through apprenticeship.

Outsourcing Booms but at what cost? (1997-2006)

TJ: What has changed from a setting which was not a school, but had an apprenticeship environment, to the conditions in the industry today?

RM: At that time, we didn't even think of animation as an industry. It was more an art-form that some people who liked it came in and wanted to be a part of, but we did not think of it as something that could grow into an industry pipeline... It was not going to develop [like Disney or Warner Brothers]. It was more intimate.... The way it grew after the big '90s, when people who were in the IT industry, who had invested a lot in hardware and software

suddenly decided to set up studios, they thought they could go out and get work from abroad and start outsourcing. That was really too sudden because many of them had the equipment. They had the space but they didn't have the people. We did not have that many people who were well trained or even had picked up the fundamentals of animations on their own... They could not deliver on time. They could not deliver on project, and there was a bad start, but later on it got a little more organised. Then a lot of these institutes sprang up which basically trained young people in how to use the software... What happened when they set up these studios to do outsourced work – usually the supervising director would come from the studios that had sent them the work. These people were getting exposed to work, but pre-production work... was being done abroad. They could see the model charts and all the story boards and how they were developed, and when they were working on the animation itself, the supervising director from abroad [would] be over there to correct them... This exposure gave them a lot of confidence in handling this kind of work, and I think that was a good thing to happen initially. They got the kind of opportunities that they wouldn't have had... isolated in India... But at the same time, it brought in a lot of young people who now began to look up on animation as... livelihood, as a job that they could take up, and they would earn their living out of it. Initially, I think the

young people who came to RMB, for example, did not even have any idea of whether they could make a living of animation, but they loved the medium. They just wanted to be a part of it and they really liked to do something in animation, but now, people came up and they said, 'we already have training in this software.' 'We have a certificate from this institution', and 'give us a job,' and the first thing they ask was, 'how much are you going to pay me?' ...The studios were themselves competing against each other... They were looking for people with experience. So these artists were constantly being called and there was a lot of poaching for talent. This is when the whole atmosphere – the attitude completely changed, and that I think is the negative side of what happened to animation in those days, the animation industry.



Figure 5: *Will Meena Leave School?*(1995)(Hanna-Barbera, Fil-Cartoons and Ram Mohan Biographics).

TJ: What impact did this have?

RM: That went on for a while, and then they found that it was counterproductive because

getting talent from one studio, you have to pay them more than what they were paying. This was escalating, and then it went beyond a point where people coming from abroad began to complain. They said, ‘what is the point of our sending our work here? You guys seem to be getting as expensive as the ones at home.’ It was a period when there was also a lot of enthusiasm for getting into this business, but more for the money rather than for the heart. That was something that was a little depressing, but what happened was after a while – a lot of other countries like China and even smaller countries like Thailand and Vietnam and Indonesia and Malaysia, the Philippines – they all were competing and there was only so much work that was there to be spread around. So, because of this competition, outsourced work in itself could not sustain large studios for a long time unless they did it very cheap, and then, they were not able to pay good salaries. That is when people started talking about IP [Intellectual Property].

A Need for Domestic Animation

TJ: How did this discussion about domestic IP come about?

RM: Yeah, we had to have a market for Indians. What we thought was if we had Indian subjects with Indian characters, original content made in India, it would especially be for the Indian market. Everybody initially

thought, ‘oh, we have a huge audience here.’ There are so many channels, but we found that the kids’ channels, essentially Cartoon Network, Nickelodeon, and Disney; they preferred to bring in their own work from outside [and] dub them in local languages, so that for them it was much cheaper to do that than to invest in original content. Unless one was prepared to do shows at a very low cost, it was impossible to compete with them. Actually to some extent this is what happened in Japan, but in Japan they decided that they will find a way of making low-cost films which would still look interesting, and they had to animate... a style which was unique and went with their aesthetics.

We got into this problem of not being able to get enough outsourced work and not being able to produce original content with enough funding. There was not much support from the channels either, but we saw that recently that these kids’ channels have started talking about the importance of having local content, and they have started looking at local content.

There is still a lot of work that is being done at low cost, but supposedly gaining in popularity.

TJ: That is looking at recent success of programs like *Chhota Bheem* (Rajiv Chilaka 2008-) successfully doing animation at low-cost but with high volumes?

RM: Yeah, and they say even if it is very simple – maybe the animation is not as good as

the ones we see coming from abroad – they are still Indian stories with Indian characters, and they would much rather have that than a very well-produced, beautifully animated film to which the children cannot relate at all.

TJ: What about feature films?

RM: [With] Indian feature films, I think the main problem is that we don't have good story writers... experienced people who had spent some years doing the animation... We had people like that, but again, I think many of these people thought all they need is software. They don't seem to understand that it requires special skills, special training.

Graphiti School of Animation (2006-)

TJ: I understand you have come very strongly into the training space with Graphiti?

RM: Yeah, that was in 2006. Until then, we had done training in different ways. I was running Ram Mohan Biographics... more like an organic thing. People used to come, learn, work for a while, learn, go away, some of them stay and so on. Later, when I joined hands with UTV, we had actually set up this studio for doing outsourced film, but I told [CEO and founder] Ronnie Screwvala that the first thing I will do is to get a paying program because we need people with substance, basic skills. So we started this program of choosing about 30 people every six months, training them over six months with the fundamentals of animation,

and then, bring them into the studio at the entry level to do inbetweening or clean-ups and things like that, and then, gradually move up the ladder. So, over a period of four to five years that I was there, we had about 300 people who we trained... Some of the industry leaders today, people who are doing very well in the studios... started out as trainees in this program.

That was a good period, but later what happened was when I came out of UTV and wanted to work with Graphiti.... I realised that what [we were] actually doing was... training people here and then losing them... They would move on to other studios, which offer them better prospects. I said if that is what we are ultimately going to do then why not make it a formal education institution? So, in 2006, we decided that we are going to end up running a school.

TJ: According to some counts, isn't the training industry larger than the animation industry, in terms of revenues?

RM: In revenues, yes. It is lucrative because at that point when everybody was talking about animation as the industry in the future, young people – junior college, 12th standard and people out of the Arts schools – they used to come and their parents would help them. We would help them get bank loans because the fees were fairly high. I would say it was more

In the region of one-and-a-half lakhs [150,000 INR] for this 11 month course. [At Graphiti this is] six months of what you call the foundation where they learn all about the interfaces of the software, and... also all principles of classical animation, starting from bouncing ball and walking cycles and things like that. Then after six months, they choose a particular aspect of production for specialisation... [and] make a small film on their own working together as a group. And this worked out well. The first group... we had three batches of 20 students each... and I think they were quickly absorbed into the industry... After the global recession, demand for trained animators seemed to go down because many of these studios that were depending on outsourced work were beginning to lay off people... Now, I think one has to probably think of a new idea.

My own personal feeling is that I should go back to the RMB model where people are taken to work on productions... it may be a slower process than a structured training program, but I think these young people – essentially they need a job... We can pay them initially, but a stipend, later on something more, but let them learn while actually working. I think in the Indian context – particularly in Maharashtra with middle class people – the first thing they look for is job security. They need a job where there is a salary on the first day of the month.

TJ: Considering the cost of animation training and that not everyone will necessarily find an animation placement – does that push you towards for more of a learning-by-doing Gurukul model?

RM: This is what I think we should be doing because for somebody from a lower middle class family paying a year's fee like a lakh-and-a-half or lakh-and-eight thousand [150,000-180,000 INR] at one go and then hoping that that kid would get a job at the end of it, which would justify this expense, is a bit risky... If they have something to sustain their benefits, and also gain work experience while they are learning, so they will have more confidence when they step out. They will not just be raw talent that's coming out of school, but a little more than that. It should be knowledge plus experience other than this. ...Ideally, I would have liked to take them through the whole process gradually, starting from the fundamentals of classical animation and so on, but I found that... these young people, today seemed to be in a hurry. Either they want to make some money for themselves and have a good time, or in the context of Maharashtra, I think the middle class families expect their young people to go out and start earning and supporting the family, and they think that if you go and study animation for a year or so, you will probably get a good job. You will probably earn about 10,000 or 12,000

a month, and you will contribute it to the family's revenue... I think it is important to strike a balance. In a school, you should be able to deliver the fundamentals very strongly, very clearly, but practical experience, gaining an experience, I think is important.

TJ: What is the breakdown between training and education? Is training simply the software tools that allow you to get a job?

RM: Things that are routine, but even there, I think the level of skill can be improved by giving them actual work experience. When they go out, they will have more confidence, but education is more exploration, finding new ways of doing things with new applications.



Figure 6: *Krish, Trish and Baltiboy* (Munjal Schroff and Tilak Shetty 2009) Graphiti Multimedia for The Children's Film Society of India (CFSI).

TJ: Education means they are able to learn how to do things that you are not showing them?

RM: Yeah, we don't have to actually tell them step by step. You do this and after that, you

should do this, and then, you will get this. It's like a formula, which as a livelihood, I think that helps if you have [a formula]... but exploration needs that kind of attitude, which in today's world it's becoming more and more difficult... But then, there are not so many animation studios coming up. So, now with the thing having sort of found saturation, I don't know it is going to grow very much larger than what it is now. Again, the new tendency I see is freelancers coming together, making small groups, and taking on jobs.

Informational Animation

RM: What we need then is a large volume of work to be produced, and that I think we'll meet in the area of producing educational animation; what is referred to as informational animation: training, films, and architecture, medicine, engineering.

TJ: Do you believe that moving into these areas, opening up the range of what animation might be considered to be beyond entertainment, would make more work available?

RM: In fact, there is a lot of work available in the sense right now...but there isn't enough funding, and there is no quality consciousness among many of these people. They think if we can make it cheap, we can sell it, but I think that's the wrong attitude. That has what has been killing the Indian animation industry. The

wrong kind of people come in with small budgets. They get whatever talent is available within that budget. They will do something, and finally they come out with some very substandard work... I think you need something on the lines of Children's Television Workshop and *Sesame Street*. Now, if they had that kind of funding and the marketing, I think we would be able to do much, much better. There is a huge market because education is something that is valued in every Indian family.

TJ: Educational content would be a way of creating a need for Indian animation?

RM: All those [tablet] devices are now becoming affordable and they can be used, but then, we will also have to first train teachers to use these devices, change teaching methods. So, it's a huge, huge effort that's needed now, but it might be worthwhile.

TJ: Do you think that the animation industry will be able to support the content that is required?

RM: Yeah, for example, if they had a project today... to create lessons in science... in mathematics; that would be such a huge volume of work and I could apply my [Gurukul] idea of getting young people to come in and start working on small modules on various subjects... It wouldn't be very expensive because we are using new talent, because they're being paid a stipend for

learning the production cost wouldn't be high. What you would have to spend on are [education] experts... I think this is an enormous exercise that we can carry out... We will have to shift the focus away from entertainment to areas like this.

TJ: Do you think it applies even more broadly that animators will need to be more flexible about the kind of work that they are willing to take up?

RM: Yes, right now, everybody is thinking of making a Ramayana or a Hanuman or something successful [like] *Chhota Bheem*, but very few people are thinking in terms of where animation can be applied in other areas.

Essentially it is a matter of orienting them towards the non-entertainment areas.

My son Karthik... works for a studio in Philadelphia where they make medical animation, mostly for pharmaceutical companies that are introducing new product into the market. He said, 'Why can't we get medical animation done in India?'... and I said it is a good idea... This is not for television. This is not for cinemas, but if they had the right kind of orientation, if you think of animation as going beyond the storytelling and working on gags and funny stories. Initially, I found that there was a lot of hesitation. I spoke to some people I know also, but they said this is something we had not done before. 'We would

like to know more about it. What kind of references can we get?"

TJ: Would it help gain awareness if it were to be seen how animation touches on these growth areas like education technology, medicine and engineering?

RM: I think so. I know of one person, Vijay [Raut]... was one of the people who came to Ajit Rao's workshop, back in '95 or '96... He [is] in a smaller town called Amaravati, where he has started a college of bio-engineering [The College of Animation Bioengineering and Animation Research Center], and what he teaches is animation basically. It is how to structure, how to model human figures or animal figures, what is the mechanism of locomotion, and how rigging can give you the right kind of movements... It is essentially teaching it as an engineering problem... It is a new angle to many people, that this is not just about making some frivolous cartoons and entertaining field, but something that is more substantial.

Creating Indian Animation Culture

TJ: Do you think that the process of these things happening, the efforts that you have described creating content via changes in the education space, do these things start to create this 'animation culture' that you have called for?

RM: Well, to a certain extent. I mean, now, more people, youngsters are aware of what's happening in the animation field and they talk about that. They come and view animation films. That is what I think we have to go a little beyond that. I mean, the culture should, sort of, also go into the lay people. I mean, people who are just film goers. Why is that they go and see Salman Khan movies or Shah Rukh Khan movies? Why is it that there is so much resistance to seeing even well-made feature films in animation? When I saw *Rango* (2011) for example... it was a superbly well-made film, but I was so disappointed to see that there were hardly about 20 people in the entire hall... even the best animation that comes from abroad is also not seen and appreciated, and that is why I think there has to be an awareness that should be brought to the people... I don't know how one can do it, but I think it is essentially running some workshops in film appreciation... I think people should know what to look for in animation, something that makes us unique. What is it that you look for? Is it the design? Is it the story? Is it the content? What works in animation? What doesn't work?

TJ: This is an effort from people who are involved in animation now?

RM: Yeah, not just animators and the students. That I think is slowly growing, but it is not such a big body yet. But, for example, if your

son is going to an animation school and learning animation, do you ever bother to sit and find out what it is that your child wants to learn and why has he chosen that profession?

When I was working on the *Ramayana* (1992) series I used to go quite often to Tokyo, and one day I found that there was an animation feature film that was just released. I got in, and I was sitting in the theater. The audience was not all young people. In fact, about 50% of them were adults, [office workers] and at the end of the movie, they just stood up and gave it a standing ovation... You [also] see animation character merchandising. Animation has percolated into their daily lives, a part of their background. That is what we need to have, but unfortunately, it hasn't happened yet.

TJ: What is the difference between supporting animation culture within the small professional community and the kind of pervasive culture that you are describing for the lay person, for the audience?

RM: No that is where the audience will come... These people will appreciate good

design, good techniques, good filmmaking, story-telling, and that is going to happen in this environment of professionals and students working together, coming together, and talking about it. But why is that that we haven't been able to get people generally, like somebody who works in the newspaper, or is a businessman or whatever, why is that that they can't relate to animation? We still haven't made that part of our life.

TJ: So one priority is making sure that the people who enter into this profession can work and another is the wider society?

RM: Yeah, there it is creating an atmosphere where there is this give and take of ideas. It is all about animation, but if you have osmosis, people can absorb that kind of enthusiasm for the medium, the love of the medium, exploring it, running new ways of using animation. That is meant for people who want to stay on in animation as a profession and learn more about it, do more in it, but generally, I want the audience for animation, the people, lay movie goers to understand what animation is all about and learn to appreciate it. 🍿