

Epics Re-imagined: Consumerism, Market Strategies and the Revival of Mythic Narratives in Indian Animated Cinema.

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ABSTRACT

Concerning the unexpected resurfacing of Indian Animated Cinema, this paper prioritizes the texts, Mahavatar Narasimha (2025), Kurukshetra (2025), and Baahubali: The Eternal War Part-I (2027) in order to trace how Indian epics from Mahabharata, Vishnu Puraan, etc. are reanimated for the consumers via. marketing strategies. The paper focuses on a tripartite structure focusing upon historical foundations that fostered the early experimental and grounded phases; to the current climate of Indian Animation that harbors cultural and commercial synergies; and future proclamations, prospects and predictions regarding the same. This research adopts a theoretical analysis of Myths, Modernity, Cultural Memory, and Industrial & Global Innovations and the consumer oriented approach mandated to the same. Thus, establishing Indian Animated Cinema, as a confluence of modern and cultural forces.

Keywords: Indian Animation, Coming-of-Age, Indian Animation Industry, Media Marketing, Cultural and Commercial collaboration, Consumer Market....

INTRODUCTION

Being the flag-bearer of Bollywood, one of the most culturally veritable and profitable ventures of the world, India has catered to the entertainment of the multitudes residing in and outside it. Responsible for generating, “USD 61.2 billion (INR 514K Cr) in 2024 (TNN)” and expected to increase exponentially, “potentially reaching between ₹14,052 crore and ₹14,614 (Iyer)” in 2026, representing “a substantial increase from last year’s ₹11,242 crore (Iyer)”; Bollywood or the collective of the Indian Film industry has often remained a benchmark for entertainment hubs across the world. While live-action films may have remained the face for the Indian film industry for decades, animated movies account for a niche, if not a prominent stake-holding in the same. However, they remain under ignorance replete with untapped potential.

Earlier attempts within Indian Animation consolidated with Dadasaheb Phalke’s makeshift stop-motion animated film called *Pea Brothers* (1915). Subsequently other pioneers and their works like Gunamoy Banarjee’s *Peacemaker* (1934) and Ram Mohan’s *Havoc in Heaven* (1961), followed by the establishments of studios like Cartoon Films Limited and Films Division in the 1950s ushered the initial days of Indian animation. Although, it “was labour-intensive work. It blended Indian stories with

global methods. These efforts built a creative foundation (Sharma).” In the 1970s, Doodarshan’s efforts through Bhimsain Khurana’s *Ek Anek aur Ekta*, western imports like *Mickey Mouse*, local contents like *Ghayab Aaya* (1986) and early computer experiments “brought structure and purpose to this industry in India (Sharma).” Hence, “According to the Nasscom report by 1979, more than 300 employees were working in this industry (Sharma).” The commercialization that followed since the 1990s saw, “The animation industry hit \$500 million by 2000 (Sharma).” While hits like the 2005 animated feature film titled *Hanuman*, software like Toon Boom revolutionized 2d animation, professionalizing the scenario --- “Indian studios blended local talent and achieved global demand (Sharma).” Experiments like *Roadside Romeo* (2008) and *Delhi Safari* (2012) marked the crossing over of Indian animation to the mainstream Indian film industry. Regional efforts saw *Kochadaiiyan* (2014) which integrated motion capture on the Tamil actor Rajinikanth and “reportedly earned Rs. 42 crore (Sharma).” while *Char Sahibzaade* focusing upon Sikh history released in the same year “grossed Rs. 70 crore (Sharma).”

Animation within the Indian sub-continent already remains a nascent and stereotyped genre, since, “Out of 51 Hollywood animation releases in India since January 2021, only 13 have grossed even ₹10 Cr (Kulkarni and Bhatia).” Despite consistent attempts Indian animation still faces disparities in demands & supplies, education

systems prioritizing animation and related ventures, payment structures & payouts and updated technologies. However, thanks to the arrival of the 2025 surprise blockbuster, *Mahavatar Narasimha*, a breath of fresh air greeted Indian screens and the long struggling Indian animation industry “closing in on the ₹300 Cr gross mark (Kulkarni & Bhatia)” The success of *Mahavatar Narasimha* not only points out the exposition that within India “when a film is rooted in religion, culture, and collective identity, the story matters far more than the format or genre (Kulkarni & Bhatia).” but also suggests the unexpected victory of a genre that has fought for existence since decades. Subsequent testament comes through with the sudden emergence of likened animation projects like *Kurukshetra* (2025) and *Baahubali: The Eternal War Part I* (2027) based on the Indian epic *Mahabharata* and S.S. Rajamouli’s *Baahubali* franchise, respectively, which should eventually push the Indian animation industry “to reach at USD 14.69 Billion in 2030 and project robust growth in the forecast period with a CAGR of 35.04% through 2030 (Verma).”

Birthing “an appetite for a new kind of animation, one that isn’t tied to children as the primary target audience (Parasuraman)”, Indian animation as a whole has reached a new height where *Mahavatar Narasimha*’s overall “reported haul of ₹118.5 crore at the Indian box-office (Team THR India).” has opened the path to new horizons. However, somewhere in between the pride and glory remains an unquoted concern towards the audience/consumers who remain the driving force behind its success --- the strategies behind garnering their attention and catering to their entertainment preferences remains understated. Hence, concerning this unexpected surfacing of the animated movies pertaining to the Indian subcontinent through 2025’s epoch making *Mahavatar Narasimha* and successive projects, announcements and recollection of previous attempts; this study takes into consideration how the market forces culminate to garner consumer attention which at the current juncture is prioritized towards the repackaging of mythic Indian narratives. Taking *Mahavatar Narasimha*, *Kurukshetra* and *Baahubali: The Eternal War Part I* as primary texts, this study focus primarily upon the development of the texts and how it is marketed to cater to the entertainment preferences of its consumers. Eventually, a detailed conclusion on lacuna and future prospects/potentials shall round off the study shedding light upon the understated soft-power capabilities of Indian animation industry in a global context.

Consumer Marketing and Mythic Repackaging in Indian Animation

The sudden resurgence of Indian animated cinema and *Mahavatar Narasimha*’s humble contending with movies like *Saiyaara* (2025) which ran parallel and concurred a worldwide collection of “₹570.33 Cr (Sacnilk Team).” seeks an analysis that bases itself on multiple contexts.

Prior to the release of *Mahavatar Narasimha*, Ormax Media’s 2023 poll concerning the factor of appeal was conducted on the regular Hindi-goers at their theaters, Ormax Cine Sense, suggesting that “Animation sat at the bottom of the genre ladder, with an Appeal score of just

33% (Kulkarni & Bhatia).” Opposing the poll, *Mahavatar Narasimha*’s release not only “aligns with the larger movement in Indian cinema, where mythological and culturally-rooted narratives are increasingly cutting across demographics (Kulkarni & Bhatia)” but also fills the disparity that arises with the demand and supply of the same, while also “paving the way for big, broad-chested experiments that don’t just cater to the kiddie market (Team THR India).” The success of *Mahavatar Narasimha* and mythological/religious driven content as a whole owes itself to the age old trajectory of Indian Cinema which began with Dadasaheb Phalke’s *Raja Harishchandra* (1913); following upon the presiding political climate of India which “swap the common romantic heartthrob archetype with heroes that champion Modi’s Hindu-first policies (Young & Mogul)” and the COVID-19 years that brought back Ramanand Sagar’s *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* and “witnessed record-breaking reruns, introducing a new generation to their grandeur (Singh).” Although, “for decades, gods and demons dominated the silver screen before slowly fading from the spotlight (Singh)” however, Ayan Mukherjee’s *Bramhastra: Part One - Shiva* (2022) “acted as a cultural turning point (Singh)” igniting the collective religious/ mythic approach in Bollywood. Similarities run parallel in *Stree* (2018) and *Maa* (2025) which occupied “mythology’s darker, more folkloric corners (Singh).” Thereafter, *Adipurush* (2023) became “a blueprint for what not to do, reminding creators that mythology cannot be treated like just another action script (Singh)” while, Prasanth Verma’s *Hanu-man* (2024) became the ultimate nexus of Marvel Cinematic Universe’s superhero stylization with the *Pranaverse* film universe tag and its mythological repackaging. Hence, becoming suggestive of the pathways considered by *Mahavatar Narasimha* whose subsequent film universe *Mahavatar Cinematic Universe* and its second installment, *Mahavatar Parashuram* (2027) remains eagerly awaited.

The point of note for *Mahavatar Narasimha* apart from its risky choice of the animation-oriented medium, retains in its almost promotion-less approach and the director’s religious attitude proclaimed through various interviews. While, the reputed production house, *Hombale Films*, responsible for contemporary hit franchises like *KGF* and *Kantara*, was reeled into the project adding to a brand image; the prominent factors leading this film to success ran elsewhere. The positive ‘Word-of-Mouth’ movement that seemingly shadowed this film showed intense developments, where within 16 days, it collected ₹107.65 crore, “by becoming the 8th biggest Hindi grosser of 2025 so far, surpassing the lifetime totals of Sunny Deol’s *Jaat* (Rs. 88.26 crore) and Akshay Kumar’s *Kesari 2* (Rs 92.73 crore) (TOI Entertainment Desk).” With a modest collection beginning with ₹1.35 crore, soon the positive ‘word of mouth’ took over where, “Day 2 jumped to Rs. 3.25 crore, and Day 3 soared further to Rs. 6.8 crore (TOI Entertainment Desk)” approaching the weekly total of “Rs 32.45 crore in Hindi, while overall collection across languages was at Rs 44.75 (TOI Entertainment Desk).” The unprecedented success of *Mahavatar Narasimha* lies directly in relation with the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) where special

previews for Jayapataka Swami, Radhanath Swami, and ISKCON delegates and devotees and private screenings at the director's residence in the presence of Indradyumna Swami, Bhaktimarga Swami, Guru Prasad Swami, and Bhakti Vijnana Swami, were organized, "all of whom bestowed their blessings on the endeavor (Dasi)." The influence of ISKCON remains strong with ISKCON Silliguri where Public Relations Officer of the institution, Nam Krishna Das claimed to have booked a whole theatre for *Mahavatar Narasmha's* screening suggesting that "It will send a great message to the people (@ANI)". Additionally, the director Ashwin Kumar, who remained under limelight in various interviews following *Mahavatar Narasimha's* success, remains suggestive of a hybrid, aiming to coagulate the 'Sanatani Bhakti'/Hindu Mythology/Hindutva principle particularly with the highly western-influenced youth of the modern generation, and the preceding generations holding the stereotype of animation being reminiscent of childish initiations. This exposition remains justified in his own verdict in an interview with Baradwaj Rangan on *Galatta Plus* --- "So the most authentic way's to go to the Shastra because we are trying to stay true to the Shastric source as well, giving them the hype, *paisa-vasool* film but we want to stay true to the Shastri truth (Kumar)." Thereby, suggesting the director's pathway on the crossroads of religious faith and modern initiations, i.e. Marvel Superheroes and violent Indian anti-hero characters. In an interview with *Mana Stars*, pertaining to the fact on how animation became a mode of expression, he claims it to be a "very pure medium (Kumar)" and calls it "the purest medium for the purest God (Kumar)." In the previously mentioned interview with Baradwaj, he states that "Generally when you see animation it basically means in India that it's for toddlers and we had to break this stereotype. So hence, the stylization of the film is rather more realistic (Kumar)." --- suggesting the contemporary approach to animation where it becomes palpable while avoiding generalized initiations. At *Mana Stars* he quotes the example of how *Ne Zha 2* despite being an animation movie based on Chinese mythology made 2 billion dollars in revenue, he comments upon the sorry state of Indian animation which according to him, "it is there, but it is not there (Kumar)." and further adds upon the untapped potential within India, saying that, "Bhaarat has so nice stories, leelas, purana, tales, but you don't see it in a big way on the big screen which is very sad (Kumar)." While the aforementioned remain verdicts given on prominent daily news platforms, his virtual interview on the joint YouTube discussion channel, *Men of Culture*, however, suggests positive impact of the animated movie upon the youth, targeting their contemporary preferences and modern curiosities and making known his collective approach. The interview highlighted how popular culture products like video-games became a point of reference for the director --- "I've grown up on games, I have grown up on video-games, and you see that impact on the content, in the film (Kumar)." Director Ashwin's approach as a nerd and a devotee becomes evident with the already existent in-film announcement of parallel content production through comics and video-games in line with the *Mahavatar Cinematic Universe*. It gets further accentuation in the *Men of Culture* interview where he

claims that "Having the comicverse, we are also developing the game now that we're gonna be starting. So around the entire cinematic verse, and this is authentic to what our *shastras* are trying to say but its gameified, its experiential, because people are not moving towards shastras. But its resonance is true. Its spirit is true (Kumar)." The director's risky debut armed with his personal devotion, previous and current affiliations with pop-culture forums, all have culminated into what is to be understood as a primary revival of the India's dead animation industry. Hence, the movie stands as a materialization of what the director claims with regard to the choice for animation and the nature of Indian audiences, "We are devotional people, we have *Bhakti* in our hearts. We are looking everywhere for *Bhakti* in our *Swami*. So we try to project (Kumar)." While, Kumar suggest that "In India, we do not have a skill issue, it is a will issue (Joy)." he hails Mahavatar Narasimha not "to be the best animation in the world, but it is a step in that direction (Joy)."

With *Mahavatar Narasimha* ushering a new age of modern *Bhakti* on the big screen, OTT platforms have also simultaneously catered as a hub of animation entertainment, where "there are 40.5% of them who have Netflix subscription (Ambikar & Aparna d534)." suggesting that the "demand of animated shows in India is very much higher than expectation (Ambikar & Aparna)." Before, the onset of any of the primary texts taken under consideration, JioHotstar's animated series *The Legend of Hanuman* (2021-present) stood as a humble initiation ushering the current development of the Indian animation industry. Produced by Graphic India, and co-created by Sharad Devarajan, Jeevan J. Kang and Charuvi Agrawal, the show "has climbed to the #6 spot on Ormax Media's prestigious list of Top 50 Streaming Originals in India from January to June 2025 (SSZEE Media)." --- a feat often not expected from an animated feature. It also remained "the #2 most-watched show on JioHotstar (SSZEE Media)" as per 2025 and has recorded in its latest season "15.2 million viewers within its first three weeks (SSZEE Media)" --- an exponential jump "from the 9.4 million who tuned in for Season 5 (SSZEE Media)." Following similar initiations and digging into the success of *Mahavatar Narasimha's* theatrical run, Netflix's *Kurukshetra* (2025) also capitalizes upon the growing market of Indian mythological animation. However, the project criticism remains divided amongst viewers. Various YouTube shorts claim the project to be a "cash-grabbing scheme" and a forced addition to the long line Mahabharata projects dreamed by stalwarts like S.S. Rajamouli and Aamir Khan (@NTCAnimeShorts & @PJexplained)." --- citing the idea that "This isn't India's first flirtation with mythological animation (Deccan Chronicle)". However, the viewership reports claim that *Kurukshetra* remains, "at the top, amongst the viewership of series on the streamer, according to *FlixPatrol* (Cinema Express Desk)." and also "quickly climbed to No. 1 on Netflix India (Chacko)." Along the same lines, the report on the most watched series of the week from October 20-26 by *OTTplay* cites Ormax media reports the same to have "earned 2 million viewerships (Kar)". Subsequently, India Today rates "3 out of 5 to 'Kurukshetra' (Keshri)." citing that it "might not reach the same heights

as 'Mahavatar Narsimha' in terms of animation quality, but it holds its own with solid visuals and a universally captivating story (Keshri)." --- worthy for "a weekend watch for anyone interested in exploring the ancient epic through a fresh lens (Keshri)." Claiming it to be a turning point in Indian animation a post in LinkedIn suggests that "This is not just a show. It's a signal. A reminder that the audience is ready. The real question is — are we (@Ashish Mall)?" *Kurukshetra*, despite its mixed reviews suggests a victory of the Kumar's previously stated idea that India harbors devotional ideals, but modern Indian audiences are not blind to it alone. @PJexplained points out a stark lacuna in "style, charm and flair" where Indian animators often force 3d animation which rather "makes you feel like you are living in the 2000s" and India Today denotes the lack of leveling up to Gulzar's initial narrator voice claiming the other voice actors "are hardly that evocative or distinct (Keshri)." with the already existing animation lacuna where "the facial features of key characters could have been more distinct to make them stand out (Keshri)." The mixed reviews that Netflix's *Kurukshetra* has catered for reveals a financially planned but not creatively backed stance, where the focus on the 18 days of the war, captured in 18 episodes remains commendable but retained at the cost of animation and voiceovers.

Amid post-*Mahavatar Narasimha* developments and contrary to the aforementioned texts, S.S. Rajamouli's *Baahubali* franchise with the announcement of *Baahubali: The Eternal War Part-I* (2027) denotes a wild-card entrance, which banks upon the franchise's success as a successful live-action and animation venture. The franchise presents a unique predicament with its coagulation of the theatrical success akin to *Mahavatar Narasimha* which *Buzz.com* claims to be "the sheer success of both part one and part two of the movie franchise made the job easier (Merani)" as well as the likeness to the overall reception received by *Kurukshetra* over OTT platforms. The *Baahubali* franchise's affinity to animation ventures is not new and remains testified with *Baahubali: The Lost Legends* (2017-2020) and *Baahubali: Crown of Blood* (2024) aired on OTT platforms - Amazon Prime and JioHotstar garnering . Although, both the animated features were initiated to cater for the kiddie/family-centered market, the review by *ThinkerViews: Views and Reviews*, claims that "if you compare it will Chhota Bhim, Doremon and other such TV Serials, you have very less to complain about." However, similar to the rating given to *Kurukshetra* by critics, *Baahubali: The Lost Legends* also scores "3.5 out of 5 stars (Merani)" while IMDb suggests user reviews accounting for 7 stars out of 10. Another Reddit user negatively critiques *Baahubali: Crown of Blood* claiming ---"baffled at how BAD baahubali crown of blood is. The animation is just horrendous. Feels like interns did it. Can't believe rajamouli allowed the makers to tarnish his greatest legacy like this (@r/tollywood)." However with the co-joining of the magnum opus duology --- *Baahubali: The Beginning* (2015) and *Baahubali: The Conclusion* (2017) as an almost 4 hour feature titled *Baahubali: The Epic* (2025) racked in upon an already established success and brought in a worldwide collection of "₹51. 72 Cr (Sacnilk)" and an Indian gross collection

of "₹39.47 Cr (Sacnilk)." Leveraging upon the hype of re-release of *Baahubali: The Epic* (2025), the animation feature was announced before the commencement of the re-released movie, as well as over digital platforms where it racked a 2 million views (@IGN). The point of note however, is also how *Mahavatar Narashima's* surprise success as an animated venture, reflects upon the initiation of this project, while also living to garner the legacy of the previous animated projects of the franchise. While the project is still underway, slated for a 2027 release, the buzz regarding the project has itself become a prominent marketing for the animated feature. The 2025 Times Entertainment interview article with director Ishan Shukla reveals that a combined influence from an *Amar Chitra Katha* infused childhood, the extension of idea of extending Bahubali as an animated feature, and a intended exploration of the afterlife leading to a probable inter-dimensional travel, which was officially green-lit by Rajamouli, leading to the plot-line of the animated feature (Shah). Apart from it, the animated feature focuses on a global collaborative effort that sees "Mihira Visual Labs (India), Aniventure (U.K.), Zaratan (Scotland), Aleyde (France), and Les Androids Associés (France); all working in partnership with India's Arka Mediaworks (Animost Team)." However, the limelight is garnered by the inclusion of "former artists from Netflix's Arcane (Creative Gaga)." along with the director's existing portfolio in *Star Wars: Visions - The Bandits of Golak* and writer Scott Mosier's in *Clerks* and *The Grinch*. Apart from the YouTube reception the initial teaser shown in film-theaters suggests that "Within hours, phone-recorded clips of the teaser went viral online, as fans raved about the jaw-dropping animation quality and cinematic scale (Animost Team)." Thereby, "poised to raise the bar even higher (Animost Team)." and capitalizing on the "strong audience for mythological animated films (Animost Team)."

The unexpected theatrical success of *Mahavatar Narasimha*, followed by the emergence of *Kurukshetra* on Netflix and the announcement of *Baahubali: The Eternal War* as a two-part animated feature, suggest a new tide of change that has followed since the release of the former. This has also been backed by director Ashwin Kumar claiming that "the ancients are rising (@Galatta Plus)" --- suggesting 2025's slew of animated movies (released and announced) have culminated into a positive outlook from audiences which have broken traditional beliefs, stereotypical perspectives, despite technological shortcomings. The base marketing for all these movies aim to cater to "a generational divide: younger cohorts, particularly Gen Z, emphasise visual quality, relatability, and global competitiveness, while older generations prioritise moral storytelling and cultural continuity (Gole & John)." Thereby justifying Ashwin Kumar's devotional and collective approach of creating a "generational story (@Menofculture)" from where "people will take their *aadarsha*, their virtue from our Gods (@Mana Stars)." However, the technological and creative lacuna remains an impediment causal to the growth of Indian animation industry. In a research, involving 450 participants ranging from Boomers to Gen-Zs "A large majority of participants (82%) reported awareness of at least one mythological animation film or series (Gole & John)." although

shortcomings identified included “low animation quality(64%), repetitive storytelling (51%), limited global appeal (47%), weak character development (42%) and overemphasis on didactic morals (29%) (Gole & John).” Along the same lines, Ashwin Kumar’s promise of improving upon the upcoming Mahavatar Universe movie, *Mahavatar Parashuram* (2027) and following establishments, the mixed-reception of *Kurukshetra* following audience reviews pertaining to the animation technology and lacklustre voiceovers, and Rajamouli’s choice of including global collaborations, remains suggestive of a arduous journey that Indian Animation must embark upon.

Challenges and Future Prospects in the Indian Animation Industry

2025 by far has remained the year that re-defined Indian Animation as a whole. Following the unprecedented success of *Mahavatar Narasimha*, various animated releases and announcements have taken root in the contemporary context which have otherwise impacted, if not changed, the generalized outlook towards the Indian animation industry. Even so, the Indian animation industry, in the hindsight, remains precarious and “often play it safe, relying on outdated methods and formulas (Mall).” A LinkedIn post regarding the struggles of Indian animation industry immediately highlights the lack of education pertaining to it --- “Animation education in India often focuses on software training rather than storytelling, filmmaking, and the art of animation. Most institutes churn out operators instead of well-rounded animators(Mall).” Therefore, they “focus heavily on tools without teaching fundamental concepts (ACAD).” The lack of animation education also coincides with the studio and market demand which creates a continuous loop of shortcomings, hence remaining “production-focused rather than developmental (ACAD).” Adding to the issue the “lack of innovation prevents Indian animation from achieving the global recognition that studios in Japan, the U.S., and even China have attained (Dewatwal)” --- previously pointed out by *Mahavatar Narasimha* famed Ashwin Kumar, who talked about *Ne Zha 2*’s blockbuster performance overseas. While, “The sector is expected to create of over 160,000 new jobs annually, with a total of 20 lakh new jobs anticipated by 2030 (ANI).” powered from the expected rise “from \$1.3 billion in 2023 to \$2.2 billion by 2026, according to a CII GT report (ANI)” which should reach “USD 25 billion by 2032 (ACAD)” however, low salaries, tight deadlines, and lack of job security “discourages many talented individuals from pursuing long-term careers in the field (ACAD).” Concerning the expenditure to be made, it remains suggestive that “producing a quality animated film discourages many investors, who prefer to fund live-action Bollywood films with proven commercial appeal (Dewatwal).” While, director Ashwin Kumar also quotes his encounter with the childish stereotype pertaining to Indian animation (@GalattaPlus), a 2021 article by *Animator’s Guild India* based on an interview with Longbir Ingti Khatar, alumni of National Institute of Design, primarily focuses upon the *children-only* stereotype catered for Indian Animation and goes on to discuss related issues of the industry. Quite readily Khatar

claims that “Most Indian audiences move away from animation onto movies and other live-action shows. We do not cater to adults at all; animation for adults as a concept is not even tried or tested in India (Khatar).” He adds to the same by adding critique to the market/investors/producers themselves who are under denial of green-lighting content for young-adults/adults -- “in India were we to argue with an industry veteran, they’d probably shoot the idea down saying it won’t work. I’d like to ask why. Why would it not work? Has anyone attempted to create and air such content (Khatar)?” He primarily argues regarding the long standing outcasting of Indian animation claiming that it ...

trickles down from the creatives to the parents of kids watching such shows. The parents too end up dismissing it, since there was no respect given from the outset. They dismiss Indian animation but feel that if the shows or movies have been created abroad or by Disney, then their children will love it and they might too. (Khatar)

An almost hypocritical affinity to foreign studios like Disney, Studio Ghibli, Pixar etc. remain pertinent within India, where the animation remains relegated only to children --- “Most stories remain simplistic, catering primarily to children, rather than evolving into emotionally engaging narratives that can also appeal to adults (Dewatwal).” Khatar’s brief stint at DisneyUS as well as his know-hows of other animation industries across the world also become a comparative point of discussion within the interview. Khatar claims that in DisneyUS, “There was a thorough system in place which was never rushed through into production (Khatar).” Along with it, executives adept in the animation field and highly skilled artists are given due importance in comparison to the Indian animation industry where executives do not encourage new creative visions, while artists remain treated as “a cog in the machine”, claims Khatar. With regard to Japan he claims “Every aspect of their culture is based on perfection. They inherently understand amalgamation of form and function (Khatar).” --- suggesting of Japan’s success as “climbing to JPY3.84 trillion (\$25.25 billion) in total market value (Ramachandran).” Contrary to the same, Khatar refers to the Hindi term for an artist and derogatorily exclaims, “Chitrakaar! There is no value to a Chitrakaar. It’s similar to how Indians treat daughters (Khatar).” Despite such circumstances, it cannot be completely denied that animation centered developments are not happening, however a bottle-neck, courtesy of people’s and producer perceptions, outdated beliefs and technologies, and the lacuna in employability, becomes impediment to the progressive cause. The aforementioned acclaims of *Kurukshetra*, *The Legend of Hanuman*, *Baahubali: The Lost Legends* and *Baahubali: Crown of Blood*, suggests a successful venture of OTT platforms like Netflix, JioHotstar, and Amazon Prime Video, thereby “encouraging more local studios to create high-quality content for both Indian and global audiences (ACAD).” With the noticeable emergence of Indian gaming studios like *Nodding Heads Games*, *Tara Gaming*, etc.; steady initiatives in mobile gaming through *Gametion*, *Studio Sirah*, *Moonfrog Labs*, etc. and online initiatives since Covid-19, heralds that “animation is

becoming central to how content is delivered and consumed (ACAD).” Adding to it, government initiated measures comes “through the National Centre of Excellence (NCoE) for AVGC-XR in Mumbai, which focuses on advanced training and innovation (ACAD).” Ironically, in a niche market like India where animation is often not given due regard, it “offers high-quality animation at significantly lower costs compared to Western countries, due to competitive labor rates and favorable currency exchange (ACAD).” On the contrary, it is also counter-argued that “The skill level in India itself is low to begin with. To hire skilled animators, they’d have to pay an individual far more than what they already do (Khatar).” Subsequently, AI integration within animation remains a brand new chapter which remains a boon and a curse. It has positively “created demand for new skills – prompt engineering, AI oversight, and hybrid creative-tech roles – while enabling smaller studios to produce more (Chinchlikar).” While in the hindsight, “AI adoption in manual tasks like rotoscoping, cleaning, coloring, and compositing could significantly affect India’s outsourcing edge, leading to job displacement (Chinchlikar).” With the advent of AI- generated shows like JioHotstar’s and Starplus’ *Mahabharat: Ek Dharmayudh* (2025) and films like *Chiranjeevi Hanuman - The Eternal* (2026), heralded by Vijay Subramaniam of the Collective Artists Network, the dual-nature of AI as a progressive but often considered, sleazy means of story-telling, devoid of human creativity comes to the fore. Thus, posing the question if this is true vision of Indian animation for the future.

Conclusion

Considering the new age of AI, its usage, prospects, and limitations only remains a tale to be unfolded with time. Although, the inclusion of AI into animation promises a speedy production rate, by the same hand, a lack of putting it into practice and the threat that looms over existing animator positions, remains pertinent. A sigh of relief for the Indian animation industry retains with the exponential boom of the Indian animation industry, more so with the surprise hit of *Mahavatar Narasimha* and announcements of similar projects. The movie’s almost promotion-less approach, marred with a collective vision to cater to the young and old, while making use of the steady trend of religious/mythology themed narratives and cinematic universalization through the *Mahavatar Cinematic Universe* remains fruitful. Along the same lines, *Kurukshetra*’s success over OTT platforms like Netflix, suggests the popularity of the animation medium apart from theatrical spheres, continuing the legacy of a prominent few released within the same. *Baahubali: The Eternal War Part-1*’s case remains, as of now, the pinnacle of Indian animation with its avant-garde visuals in the trailer and prominent with the reeling in of global players into the project. *Baahubali*’s transference from a live-action franchise to an animated franchise, although seems to be a bold venture, its trademark as a transmedia initiative remains suggestive. While, the stereotypical perception of Indian animation industry and animators alike remains pertinent, with regard to the collective consensus of parents and executives alike, it remains probable that Ashwin Kumar’s debut directorial shall

usher a new viewpoint, slow but steady in motion. However, the still persistent disbelief of producers and other executives over Indian animation remains a barrier that still prevents Indian talent to shine, forcing them to choose alternative paths or move out entirely for better prospects...

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