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Opportunities in Indian animation industry

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Hype usually precedes anticipated success, and is usually more than is warranted. As far as the animation industry is concerned, however, the hype surrounding it, is justified; at least, if the industry's expected development in the coming years is any indication.

Sudhir Srinivasan converses with animation experts in South India and analyses the industry, and the multiple opportunities it provides students with

According to a recent report by Pricewaterhouse Coopers International Limited, an international business consulting service provider, the Indian animation industry is poised to grow by, hold your breath, about 23% in the next four years! This means that the value of the industry that was

estimated at 18.5 billion in 2009 will be a whopping 54 billion by 2014.

This income has mainly come about as a result of the growing reputation of India as a quality place to outsource animation work to. Production for films including the Lord of the Rings, the Harry Potter series, The Chronicles of Narnia, and Spiderman 3 have taken place here during the last few years.

Cartoons that were strictly in the domain of Cartoon Network are now a regular feature of many channels including POGO, Hungama TV, Nickelodeon, Disney XD and Disney Channel. From merely being a country that helps Hollywood studios make animated films, we are now witnessing several Desi production houses evince interest in making such films.

Some of the films that will be made during the coming years include Walt Disney's Zokkomon and Krayon Pictures' Delhi Safari, amid others. What also works in the favour of the growth of the animation industry, is the anticipated phenomenal growth of an allied industry - the gaming industry - that is expected to grow by about 36 per cent in the next four years.

All in all, the growth of the industry means that the time is perhaps the ripest it has been in recent years for students interested in dabbling with the virtual world.

Philip Thomas, Regional Head - Kerala, IMAGE, one of the oldest multimedia institutes in the country, explains that the primary growth of the industry results from the increased volumes of outsourced work that the country's animation studios have received.

"The industry is short of people with quality skills," he says. IMAGE, which has over 40 centres across India, presently has almost 7,000 students enrolled in its courses. Y Nageshwar Rao, Business Manager - Hyderabad, ICAT (Image College of Arts Animation & Technology), while encouraging these courses to be pursued by students, is also wary of the number of small-time institutes that have come up to take advantage of the demand for animation studies.

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"The Government has to form a body like the UGC (University Grants Commission) to standardise animation courses in the country like the US has," he says, "This will also help provide the Indian animation industry that needs about 25,000 skilled employees in the coming year." The alumni of IMAGE have found work in several leading companies including Rhythm & Hues, Prime Focus, Prasad EFX, EA Sports and DQ Entertainment.

M Satish, who works for the Asian Institute of Gaming and Animation, Bangalore, as a Marketing Co-ordinator in Business Development, suggests that a student interested in making a career in this industry take up courses in animation or game development after finishing Class 12.

"It is a creatively fulfilling industry," he says. Navaneeth Ramamurthy dropped out of his engineering course to pursue Professional Diploma in Game Art from the Asian Institute of Gaming and Animation.

He says, "I realised that my interests lay elsewhere - in art and computer games," he says. Now, after completing his gaming course, he works for SR Unify Interactive for its maiden iPhone project at a starting salary of about 3 lakhs. "The animation industry is like any other industry," he says, "As long as you are genuinely interested, are willing to learn continually and have a desire to contribute creatively, you will find a job."

Opportunities for students are abundant in the industry, as S Manohar, Project Head, Pentamedia Graphics Limited (which is presently working on an animation movie titled Tarzan and Aliens), Chennai, agrees. "Things are definitely looking upbeat. We are planning to release at least two animation films by next year," he says, "Also , more than 100 students have passed out of our institute in the last year and have found wellpaying jobs."

Courses in this industry can cost anywhere between 10,000 and 3 lakhs based on the duration of the course and any possible affiliations that the institute may have with foreign unversities.

That students of animation can find jobs in allied industries like advertising is best exemplified by Rathish Subramaniam, Creative Director of JWT (an advertising agency), in Bangalore. Rathish, who has won the Cannes Award twice, explains that after he finished his course in animation at IMAGE - Bangalore in 2001, he realised that he was more interested in advertising.

"IMAGE offered me good leads in the industry," says Rathish, who earns more than 14 lakhs/annum, "With experience, I have found that even though the animation industry may not seem too accommodating initially, if one is prepared to spend time and gather experience, it will reap rich dividends."

The skills needed to carve a name for oneself in the animation industry are perhaps best encapsulated by him when he says, "Technology can only render as an output what one's mind visualises." The more creative the mind, the better the results.

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