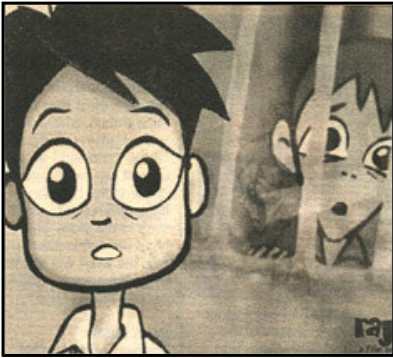


RAJU AND I ANIMATES NATIONAL FILM AWARDS PANEL - Bandra-based Aseema Charitbale Trust produced the cartoon film.



The animation film on the rights of children, *Raju and I*, has just been voted the Best Animation Film at the 52 nd National Film Awards. The film, which is produced by Bandra-based Aseema Charitable Trust, adds one more award to its international awards.



The 30-minute film directed by Gayatri Rao of animation studio Animagic Special Effects Pvt Ltd, explores the issue of child rights in India through the story of two young friends, Raju and Atul. "Atul, a young boy from a privileged background, makes friends with Raju, his poverty stricken friend in a village, and they have fun together. One day, Raju goes missing. The film is about what happens after that," explains Dilbur Parakh, chairperson, Aseema.

The appeal of the film - Aseema's maiden venture - according to Parakh and Rao is that it can be enjoyed by children and adults alike. "The film is meant for classroom audience, but its beauty lies in the fact that it works for all age groups," explains Rao.

Originally designed as a classroom aid for Aseema, the film is now an exploration of the horrors of child labour and the poverty of children across the country. "The point of the film is that there are hundreds of Rajus in the country - nameless, faceless child labourers with no hope of a future. When Atul sees the harsh realities of Raju's life, he becomes aware of the issue of child labour. He, then, talks to his friends and teachers in school about it," explains Parakh.

The film also demonstrates how the most mundane and innocent activities involve child labour. "Did you know that the football children play with is a product of child labour?" asks Parakh. "The film looks at different industries where children work," she adds.

Both producer and director are excited over the citation. "I feel great. The film transcends all categories and moves people of all ages, classes and nationalities. It will be an honour to receive the National Award from the President. I'm a huge fan of his," laughs Rao. She adds, "The film has been received very well, and we're very happy with the response."

Aseema now hopes the film can be released commercially. "We want people of all backgrounds to see the film, because that is the message. We're hoping that someone approaches us to release it all over. That would be great," says Parakh.

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