

## THESE SLUM KIDS LAP UP WORLD CINEMA

-Anahita Mukherji

"Once upon a time, there was a man whose wife was going to have a baby. He was travelling by rickshaw when he saw a snake that was also pregnant. He purposely drove the rickshaw over the snake and killed it. When his wife delivered a baby, its skin was like the skin on a snake."

This surreal story, woven into a screenplay, was written by nine-year old Soliya Qureshi from Pali-Chimbai Municipal School in Bandra, Soliya narrates her screenplay with great confidence in perfect English. Before writing her screenplay, though, she had a chance to see plenty of world cinema.

She's part of a group of underprivileged kids from Bandra who are getting their first ever exposure to cinema from round the world, thanks to Amole Gupte, creator of Taare Zameen Par.

The kids from Aseema, an NGO that works with civic schools in Bandra as well as underprivileged children from convents in the area. Gupte, who has been working with Aseema for over a year, thought of teaching them the finer points of cinema.

And so, Charlie Chaplin made his way into a ground-floor room at the Pali-Chimbai Municipal School through a DVD projector. Children, ranging from seven to 17, devoured the films with great enthusiasm.

Chaplin's *The Kid* was a huge hit with the class. Suneeta Gaddam (17), who laughed her way through the movie, said, "I really liked watching a man taking care of a baby. Generally mothers are the ones who look after children. Fathers are too busy to do so."

"Kids are better than adults at understanding the language of cinema, especially those from deprived backgrounds who have fantastic stories to tell," said Gupte.

Some of the children, like Ashish (17), have lent their voice to *Raju and I*, a 30-minute animated film on child rights, produced by Aseema three years ago.

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