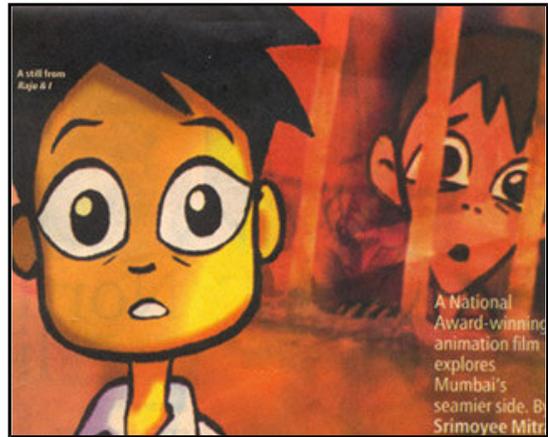


RAJU'S STORY - A national award winning animation film explores Mumbai's seamier side.

It's sad but true. When you think of Mumbai-humid nights, restless sea and BEST buses- you also think of street children - who, once the initial surge of concern is numbed, are easy to ignore.

That's exactly what Animagic's Raju & I, winner of the National Film Award for best animation film talks about. Work on the film, co written by director Gayatri Rao and animator Chetan Sharma, and edited and composed by Rao's husband Sumant, started two and a half years ago.

Raju & I is a heart-wrenching story of two friends. Bright eyed Atul is from a well-to-do family; his equally intelligent, best friend Raju isn't as lucky. After spending a happy summer together - climbing trees, eating mangoes and playing football - Raju suddenly goes missing. Atul and his classmates embark on a journey to find his 'best friend'.



"When the director of Aseema (a Mumbai-based

NGO) approached us to make a 10 minute animation film to educate kids on child labour, we jumped at the opportunity," says Rao, adding that if it were not for budget constraints, the film would have been out much earlier.

By the end of two and a half years of ideas and discussions, the length of the film increased by 20 minutes.

"Our aim was not to present solutions but to sensitise privileged adults and children to the problem," says Sharma. The film informs viewers of the various people who employ children - among others, zari makers, football manufacturing firms and firecracker makers.

When Atul goes out on the streets to find Raju, he is told by the *dada* of the block that every new child on the street is called Raju. Soon he finds a Raju who delivers chai, a Raju who works as a boot-polish *wala* and many more. Ultimately, this search for his friend changes the life of a privileged child.



The film has bagged 13 awards, including the prestigious New York International Independent Film and Video Festival award, and the Cartoons On the Bay Festival award in Italy . The trio now want to dub the Hindi film in other languages.

After almost two years since they made the film, they still feel connected to the character of Atul. Can we expect a sequel? "If there is one, then he'll be like us. A Bombay boy who grows up to be an animator," laughs Sharma.

STREETS AHEAD

- The film was made on a budget of Rs. 50,000
- Raju & I is the first Indian animation film to win the Audience Award - Best Short Film at the Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles in March and Best Animation at Reel Women Film Festival the same month.
- Copies of Raju & I are available at the Aseema office, Bandra (West). Call 2640 7248 or email contact@aseema.org

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