

METRO PLUS

The stories children tell

 **Shilpa Nair Anand**

NOVEMBER 10, 2018 00:00 IST
UPDATED: NOVEMBER 10, 2018 04:56 IST

SHARE ARTICLE | f | t | [social icons] | PRINT | A | A | A



Children's Film Academy's first outing won international recognition. It is set to conduct its second edition in Kochi

Tragedy strikes two friends, sons of fishermen, in a coastal colony when one of the boys loses his father. Heartbroken at the loss, the boy finds comfort as he writes a letter, puts it in a bottle and flings it into the sea. Grown ups mock the children. But a surprise awaits all of them.

The Letter was made by children who were part of Children's Film Academy's (CFA) maiden filmmaking programme in Kerala, held from November 2017 to June 2018. The film resonated with children, across nationalities; it won the second prize in Argentina (Patagonia) at 'Cine a La Vista', a film festival for young filmmakers, and is an entry in the competition section of Youki International Youth Media Festival in Austria, which is to begin later this month.

"Children come out with very good stories!" says filmmaker Rajesh K. one of the founders of CFA. Rajesh along with fellow FIITian and filmmaker Ganga Mukhi and Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute alumni and cinematographer Arun Bhaskar founded CFA in 2015 as a "meaningful alternative" to the content children are exposed to via cinema and television. The others on the team are still photographer Shibir Balakrishnan, cinematographer Rakesh Haridas and sound designer Neeraj Gera. In Kochi the team also works with photographer/artist KR Sunil.

The programme is an introduction to films – "in order to influence the way of seeing, develop a taste for good films and giving children more options beyond just animation films."

Knowing films

Working with children, aged between 8 and 17, over a span of 32-52 hours and around eight months, the mentors take the children through the ins and outs of cinema and its making. "Of course, a lot of the time parents are more interested in the acting input, which is not so much the accent here," he adds.

Since 2015, CFA has worked with a number of schools and organisations in and around Mumbai and has completed 25 workshops and 60 films therein. CFA's collaborator is the Paris-based Cinémathèque Française, which curates the *Cinema Cent ans de Jeunesse (CCAJ)* programme for children under 18. Around 15 countries are part of the initiative. The members meet twice a year, in Paris, to assess the work done as part of the programme and to discuss the themes. Each year CCAJ announces a theme – last year's theme was 'spaces' which resulted in *The Letter*. This year it is 'situations'.

"The mentors meet under Alan Bargela and Nathalie Bourgeois, of Cinémathèque Française in Paris, to assess clips of the 50-odd best films (from world cinema), on the same theme, that are submitted by the participating groups. How the particular theme is dealt in each film by the masters, the aesthetics and semiotics besides other factors are discussed. It gives the teacher/mentor a deeper understanding of the theme," Rajesh says.

Associating with Cinémathèque has the added advantage of being able to upload the films on its CCAJ blog network, which will not only be viewed by an international group but also gives CFA access to their content. "We are flexible with our programme, if there is a shortage of time then we customise the programme accordingly." Though each short film spans only 5-6 minutes, the work involved is intense. "It is not easy - we cannot make the children work continuously at a stretch, there are frequent breaks in between. At most we manage around 10 shots a day!" Rajesh says.

The course has four parts – the Lumiere Minute, a tribute to the Lumiere brothers, (a dramatic activity covered in a single shot) two group exercises (themed) where 2-3 minute long short films are made and finally the group film. At the end of a programme around 6-7 short films get made.

CFA's other projects include workshops at Gandhi Shikshan Bhavan (Mumbai), Bombay International School, Orchid International School (Nashik), SIES College (Sion), Vidyalankar College (Matunga) and now in association with Edubrisk in Kochi. For the time being the focus is on Mumbai and Kochi, as the team is equipped to conduct sessions in both cities but they are open to conducting classes anywhere in the country.

As CFA gears up for the next edition of the programme, set to begin today, sustaining the programme is a challenge. "We are going forth, in the hope of finding some means of sustaining the project. The programme fee is not enough, we have been dipping into our funds to keep the show running. We'll try our best; it is close to our hearts to stop!" he says. Contact: 9619463545