

Cine project on witch hunting



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In what could be described as a highly-encouraging news for Indian children's cinema, a script that takes a look at the issue of witch hunting as seen by a small Assamese kid has found itself to be the only non-European project chosen for the co-production market of Cinekid, the world's largest film, TV and cross-media festival for children.

Adapted from acclaimed Assamese writer Manikuntala Bhattacharjya's children's novel "Ishu" by National Award-winning film critic Utpal Borpujari, the script, also titled "Ishu", is among the 15 film projects chosen to be presented before a high-profile panel of co-producers, distributors and sales agents who will descend from all over the world at Cinekid Junior Co-Production Market for four days on October 23 & 26, the final two days of the Cinekid Festival which started on October 17.

The selection of "Ishu", which thus becomes the only representative of all the continents outside Europe at the event, was done by Cinekid for Professionals (CfP), which also chose 15 TV and 10 cross-media projects – again all from only Europe – for children for the Co-production market.

“The Junior Co-production market is an integrated co-production market that will enable financiers, broadcasters and professionals to assess new and innovative projects across the cross-media, film and television sectors,” an official statement of CfP said announcing the selection.

“The number of project entries more than doubled compared to previous years, enabling a very high quality of projects selected that will hopefully lead to many new, fresh and attractive children productions in the upcoming years,” it said.

“I think the selection is a great news not only for children’s cinema of India as a whole but also for Assamese and North-East Indian cinema, where only a few children’s films have been made over the years. If everything goes well, and the funds are in place, I plan to shoot the film in the near future,” says Delhi-based Borpujari.

“At the same time, I am aware that securing funds to make an Assamese film is not that easy, so I am keeping my fingers crossed,” he says. The film’s script is under consideration of the Children’s Film Society, India, (CFSI). “I am awaiting their decision, depending on which I will decide if I have to look for financing of the film in Assam,” he adds.

The story of Ishu is set in the Rabha community, and Delhi-based Borpujari intends to shoot this Assamese film in Rabha villages near Goalpara. “I have already visited a few Rabha villages near Agia, and I am in touch with noted theatre director Sukracharya Rabha from whose Badungduppa Natya Kendra I plan to source quite a few of the film’s actors so that I remain true to the backdrop of the film, particularly as Rabha’s theatre group comprises mostly Rabha villagers whom he has trained in various facets of theatre,” he says.

As and when the funding is secured, Borpujari intends to finalise his cast through auditions. “While my first priority will be the actors from Badungduppa, I am open to looking for other good actors who would fit into the milieu of the story. As my protagonist will be a seven-year-old kid, I think that will be the most crucial and difficult part in the casting,” he says, adding that he will hold a workshop for the actors before shooting the film.

With the theme having its backdrop in witch hunting, Borpujari plans to dedicate the film to Birobala Rabha, the crusader against the social scourge. “I have not met her and I also do not know if Manikuntala Bhattacharjya had her in mind while writing the novel, but I am inspired by her life story. Hence, I plan to dedicate the film to her,” he says.

The film’s production work will be handled by Eleeanora Images, a company led by director Nila Madhab Panda of “I Am Kalam” and “Jalpari” fame.

Over the past quarter century, Cinekid has grown into the world's largest multimedia festival for children, covering the entire spectrum of audiovisual product designed and produced for young audiences. Cinekid for Professionals is renowned for its meetings, its marketplace for international media professionals and its focus on highest quality media productions.

More than 350 international professionals will visit the CfP event and over 100 financiers, potential co-producers, commissioning editors will attend the Junior Co-production Market.

editor

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