



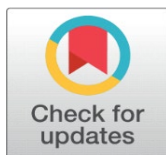
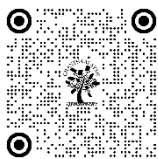


## EXPERIMENTAL ANIMATIONS IN INDIA: AN EMERGING NEW MEDIA ART FORM

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### ABSTRACT

Since the beginning of civilization, humans have always been inquisitive about ways to uniquely express their sides of stories. Traditional Art forms like drawing, painting, sculpting, literature, music, and many others have helped to make it possible. More unconventional new art possibilities have emerged with the introduction of new technologies and industrial revolutions. Motion Pictures and Animation are the two most fascinating forms of artistic expression in these areas.

Often, animation is considered a fascinating medium of entertainment for kids and the younger generation. However, many artists have demonstrated that it also has enormous potential to articulate and express life experiences and their minds creatively. As Walt Disney rightly said *Animation can explain whatever the mind of men can conceive* Thomas (1912-2004). It can take you as far as human imagination can go.

This paper delves into how animation has been used as an alternative medium in contemporary New Media Art practices in India. It explores the potential of animation as a medium for creative expression and representation of complex ideas, and how it reflects changes in society brought about by technological advancements. The paper examines the approaches and experiments of Indian contemporary artists, such as Akbar Padamsee, Nalini Malani, and Vivan Sundaram, who have used animation to break free from the confines of traditional mediums and push the boundaries of visual storytelling through technology-based art.

**Keywords:** Experimental Animation, Traditional Animation, New Media Art

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Animation is a creative medium that brings our imagination to life and makes the impossible possible. It is commonly associated with entertainment for children, but it can also be a medium of creative expression and a form of art. The definition and boundaries of art have continuously expanded over time due to advancements in social, cultural, political, and technological aspects. Art is a manifestation of human emotions, beauty, and imagination, and evolving technology has opened up endless possibilities for creative expression. *We often use the word New Media Art to define the unconventional new art practices which could be only possible because of the use of latest technology like digital, internet, video, photographs etc. More*

*emphasize over New Media Art that means the use of latest technology in art practice* [Grau \(2016\)](#).

Today animation is one of the most trending New Media Art practices in the contemporary art context after motion pictures. Through Animation, human imagination started getting visual forms that amazed the viewer and gave the artists immense creative satisfaction. Now artists can represent the forms and shapes of their conscious and subconscious minds but *for some reason, the human feels the need to create something of their own that appears to be living, that has an inner strength, vitality, a separate identity- something that speaks out with authority- a creation that gives the illusion of life* [Thomas \(1912-2004\)](#). In this quest, the advent of new technology played an important role.

The origins of animation can be traced back to early forms found in Palaeolithic-age cave paintings depicting hunting scenes. However, it was not until the late 1800s that inventions like the printing press, motion pictures, cameras, and projections opened up new possibilities for creative expression. Artists like Winsor McCay and Emile Cohl used multiple drawings to create an impression of movement, while later experiments by Marcel Duchamp, Norman McLaren, and John Whitney further expanded the potential of animation as a medium for creative expression.

McLaren's experiments with camera-less filmmaking and hand-drawn animation paved the way for new techniques in animation, including his discovery of "animated sound," which he created by making pen and ink marks on the film's soundtrack area. His unique approach to animation allowed him to create films that were both visually stunning and innovative in their use of sound, making him a major influence on the field of animation. He believed that if sound makes a pattern on film, then a pattern on film can make a sound. He said in an interview that It fascinates him to realize that I was capable of drawing on the sound without being able to hear it. I start slowly. Approximately one rhythm per sixty frames. Then I can start on another rhythm. It is simple mathematics based on the frames ([Michaels, L. Interview, 1977](#)). McLaren's abstract forms and audio- visual relationships go beyond simple compatibility with different media, elevating visual music to a superior level achieved by few in the field of animation.

Today, with the rapid advancements in technology, animation has become a prevalent art form that reflects the changing historical experience. New Media Art practices are emerging that utilize evolving technology, such as audio-video projections, graphics, digital arts, and interactive AR/VR/MIX art, among others, under the larger umbrella of New Media Art. Though often associated with entertainment for children, animation can also be a medium for profound philosophical or imaginative concepts and is considered an art form that involves creative minds and imaginative talent to manifest human emotions, beauty, and imagination.

## **2. THE OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

The main focus of this paper is to examine the early stage of experimental animation in India from the late 1960s to the late 1990s. During this period, pioneering artists embarked on innovative explorations, which paved the way for animation to emerge as a fresh and exciting medium of expression for upcoming artists. Unfortunately, these experimental works by these renowned artists have received limited recognition, as they are more renowned for their other successful achievements. The paper aims to shed light on these early attempts and the doors of possibilities they opened, marking a significant shift in the artistic landscape.

### 3. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study's importance lies in its investigation into animation's extended role beyond mere entertainment for kids and the younger generation. It sheds light on how numerous Indian artists have skillfully employed animation's technological complexity and experimental nature to forge a unique channel of expression. This research endeavors to emphasize these innovative initiatives and the potential avenues they revealed, accentuating a significant shift within the artistic landscape.

### 4. METHOD

The methodology for this study requires conducting a qualitative comparative analysis of artists' preferences for animation as a medium of creative expression, with the objective of tracing the evolution of animation as a new media art form in India. Various sources of data, such as literature, videos, interviews, and artworks, will be used to gather insights. The study aims to explore how animation is progressively emerging as a compelling and viable option for contemporary artists to express their artistic expression.

### 5. RELATED WORKS

My research endeavors to explore the utilization of animation as an alternative medium for creative expression within the Indian context. Simultaneously, I aim to gain insights into the inception of new media within the Indian art landscape. This exploration embarks on a journey through the realm of art and visual culture, unveiling themes that traverse both temporal and technological dimensions. The expedition commences with notable milestones like Akbar Padamsee's "SYZYGY" and Nalini Malani's "Dream Houses," where the fusion of art and technology seamlessly unfolds. Transitioning to the realm of Indian art, this study traces its evolutionary path, characterized by the impact of cultural dynamics and historical transitions. From the ancient origins of the Indus Valley civilization to contemporary luminaries like M.F. Husain and S.H. Raza, India's artistic narrative echoes a vibrant interplay encompassing culture, politics, and innovative creativity.

Key scholarly works, such as "Art and Visual Culture in India" by Gayatri Sinha and "Video Art" by Michael Rush, contribute to enhancing our comprehension of evolving artistic methodologies within the Indian context. Furthermore, "Detecting Meaning in RSVP at 13 ms per picture" by Mary C. Potter sheds light on the intricate process of visual perception within sequential images or animation.

This assessment envisions a future where digital technologies democratize art, transcending cultural confines. This interconnectedness amplifies the status of Animation as a universal language, enabling the dissemination of diverse narratives on a global scale. It encapsulates the journey of art across historical epochs, fostering connections between creativity and technology that traverse the constraints of time and space.

### 6. ANIMATION ART PROCESS

The Latin word "anima" means breath or soul which gives a sense of liveliness and "Animate" literally means to give life to. *Often described in terms of the mind, soul, or spirit (psyche or anima) or by way of vitalist vocabularies ("energy" or the "breath of life"), animation uniquely expresses itself as the manifestation of absent causes where such causes may be literally imperceptible or simply insufficient in*

*accounting for our experience* Andrew (2014) . Animation is an optical illusion occurred due to the persistence of vision while continuing the display of sequential images. These images can be created through different techniques like sequential drawing, keyframing, data-driven motion capture, procedural rules, simulation, and stop motion time-lapse. Film theorists and scientists often refer to this phenomenon in motion picture technology. Scientifically human brains are capable to process a maximum of 10 to 12 images in a fraction of a second. According to MIT neuroscientists Mary Potter, *the human brain required 13 milliseconds to process a single image* Potter et al. (2013). While traditional animation involved artists drawing each frame by hand, modern animation tools have made the process much faster and more efficient. Digital tools and virtual materials have opened up new possibilities for animators, enabling them to experiment with different techniques, processes, and paradigms. As a result, contemporary animation has become a highly dynamic and diverse art form, with endless possibilities for creativity and expression.

Overall, animation is a constantly evolving field that is both fascinating and exciting to explore. The digital age is also an age of animation. *As several critics have noted, animation has a special affinity with digital media that goes beyond cartoons* Coleman (2012).

## 7. ANIMATION IN INDIA

Indian animation industry has come a long way since then, with pioneers like Patwardhan Brothers, Ram Mohan and Bhim Sain who made significant contributions to the field. Today, India has a thriving animation industry producing content for television, film, and streaming platforms, with studios like Toonz Animation, 88 Pictures, and Green Gold Animation leading the way. Indian animation is also known for its unique styles, with influences from traditional art forms like Tholu Bommalata (Figure 1), Madhubani, Warli, and Pattachitra, and popular culture. With a young and talented pool of artists, India's animation industry is poised to grow further and make its mark on the global stage. *Catching a glimpse of the puppet's strings does not undo the magic of the puppet show. Indeed, animation has much in common with stage magic. A bit like the magician who entertains his audience to watch closely only to beguile with prestidigitation (literally, "fast fingers"), the animated moving image hides nothing yet inspires talk of invisible forces* (Kittler, F. A. Interview, 1996).

Figure 1



Figure 1 Tholu Bommalata, A Traditional Shadow Theatre in Andhra Pradesh.

Source <https://www.sahapedia.org/tholu-bommalata-show-adishakti-theatre#lg=1&slide=0>

It was in the 1860s that Mahadevrao Patwardhan introduced the first magic lantern [Madhusudhanan \(2008-09\)](#) under the name "Shambarik Kharolika" ([Figure 2](#)- Image source: Film Division of India), The Magic Lantern is an early projection device that uses a light source to project images or slides onto a screen or surface.

**Figure 2**



**Figure 2** Screenshot of Animation Projection Using Magic Lantern for Shambarik Kharolika.

Source [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L2jwyBAg\\_-I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L2jwyBAg_-I)

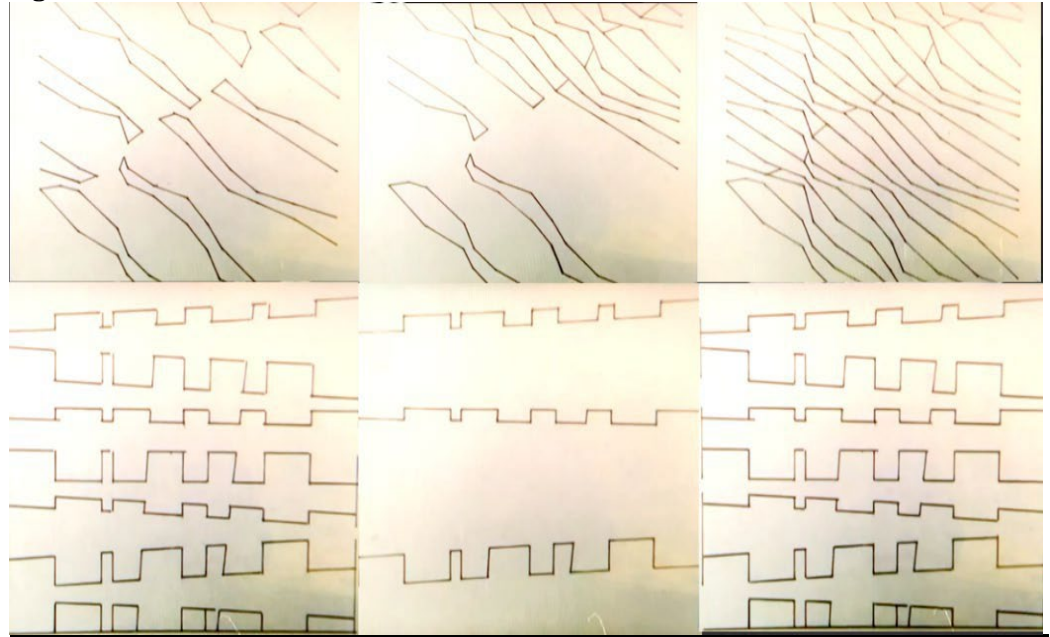
Going forward artists like Dhundiraj Govind Phalke (*Agkadyanchi Mouj* -1917 and *Setu Bandhan*-1932) [Agarwal and Tetali \(n.d.\)](#), Raghunath K. Kelkar (*Jambu Kaka*-1937), and Ram Mohan (*The Banyan Deer*-1956) have tried their ways to create innovative animation films. Initially, most of them were based on mythological stories and propaganda narratives. They have successfully transformed their imaginations into a believable reality on screen.

## 8. EXPERIMENTAL ANIMATION IN INDIA

India has a rich cultural heritage that has given rise to various art forms, and animation is no exception. While many Indian artists have used animation to express their creativity and imagination, others have explored animation as a medium of artistic expression beyond traditional practices. These artists have used animation to explore the possibilities of new creative experiments, combining it with various technologies to create innovative and hypnotic works. As Norman McLaren famously said, "Animation is not the art of drawings that move but the art of movements that are drawn." Animation enables artists to bring imaginative characters and creatures to life, endowing them with a sense of vitality that matches reality. It has evolved into a crucial medium for storytelling and content creation, captivating audiences across various platforms. Akbar Padamsee is an exemplary artist who has made noteworthy contributions to this dynamic field. His filmic and photographic experiment *Syzygy*, 1969 [Adajania \(2009\)](#), ([Figure 3](#)) is an excellent example of his use of animation to explore the forces of energy occurring in astronomy. During his Vision Exchange Workshop (VIEW, 1969) *Padamsee*

collaborated with renowned Indian animator Ram Mohan to create this 11-minute-long silent black-and-white stop-motion animation *D'Mello* (2018), which repeats permutations and changes of lines, shapes, letters, numbers, and drawings inspired by Paul Klee's Pedagogical Diagrams.

**Figure 3**



**Figure 3** Screenshots of Animation Video from *Syzygy*

Source <https://lux.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/forweb1.jpg>

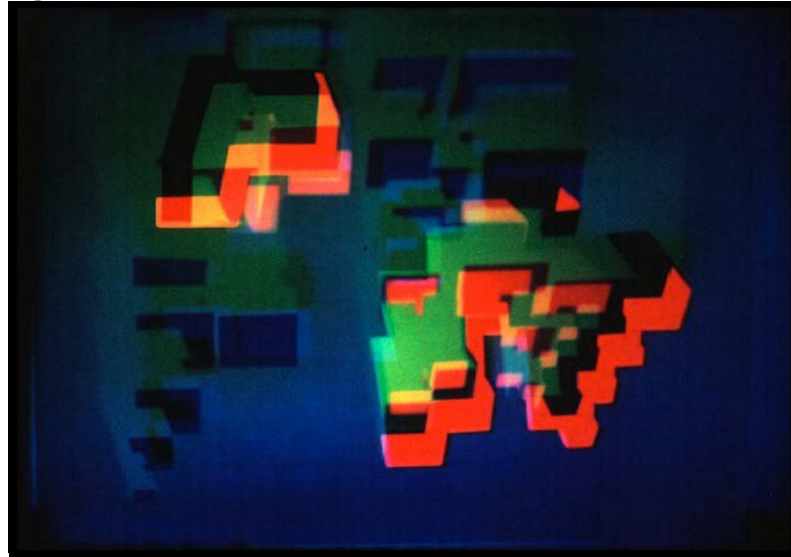
Padamsee's animation is a result of approximately 1000 sequential drawings that begin with a line that stubbornly refuses to be fixed in a circle. Horizontal and vertical lines appear immediately and rearranged to form a matrix of numbers, from which Padamsee draws combinations to draw a grid. By connecting the dots in this grid, Padamsee creates an infinite intersection of lines and a matrix of magnificent shapes that dissolve to reveal what else is hidden within increase.

Padamsee's other experimental animation film, *Events in a Cloud Chamber* (1972), unfortunately, has been misplaced. It lasted 6 minutes and showed a monochrome image of trembling great terrain. In it, Padamsee attempted to "reproduce" one of his own oil paintings using projected light instead of applied pigment, with colored filters and stencils reproducing different colored parts of the paint. The footage of each color was then superimposed individually to create a composite image that reproduced the scenery of the original painting.

Nalini Malani was also part of the *Vision Exchange Workshop* Jhaveri (2014) convened by Akbar Padamsee. Nalini Malani and Nasreen Mohamedi were the only female participants in this workshop. Indian artist's first experimental colour stop-motion 8 mm animation film, *Dream Houses*, 1969 (Figure 4), produced at the Vision Exchange Workshop and transferred to digital medium was created by Nalini Malani Mendes (2021). It is a single-channel stop-motion animation that reflects the artist's interest in the idealism and hopes that modernism brought for India's middle class and poor in the 1960s. It was an aspiration for a different kind of modern India, a society that provides public housing to those in need of safe and affordable homes. It was also used in Malani's first multi-screen installation, *Utopia*. The film accompanies the film *Utopia*, which was shot after the artist moved into a modest

apartment on the outskirts of Bombay. This form allowed her to contrast her 1960s idealism with her 1970s urbanist dystopia.

**Figure 4**



**Figure 4** Screenshot of Animation Video from Dream Houses

**Source** <https://lux.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/d-Dream-Houses-1969.jpg>

"Can You Hear Me?" is a panoramic stop-motion animation that features overlapping projections of Malani's drawings, texts, images, colors, and lights. The installation utilizes rotating, transparent cylinders arranged in a circular formation, creating an immersive and multi-sensory experience for the viewer. It explores themes of power, violence, and oppression, and serves as a response to the current political and social climate in the world. Malani's use of multimedia and immersive installation techniques has been highly praised, and the installation is considered a significant work in her career.

Vivan Sundaram is an Indian artist known for his experimentation with various mediums and is considered the country's first installation artist. He was also the first to manipulate digital photographs in India. In *Indira's Piano, 2002-03* (Figure 5), a 12-minute-long animated video inspired by French Filmmaker Chris Marker's *La Jetee* Sinha (2013), Sundaram used simple animations intentionally to represent the actual time phase. Despite being simplistic, the video is a great example of motion using images and transitions and showcases Sundaram's versatility as an artist.

**Figure 5**



**Figure 5** Screenshot from Indira's Piano.

**Source** <https://cdn.aaa.org.hk/w900h500/vivan-indiras-piano-page-01.tiff.jpg>

The photographs and video projections in "Indira's Piano" was an attempt to make alive the archives into an animated video clip.

In conjunction with the ongoing Vision Exchange experiments, the concept of expanded cinema also intersected with the practices of the Films Division, notably exemplified in Pramod Pati's work "Explorer" (1968). Following his education under animator Jiří Trnka in Prague, Pati assumed leadership of FD's cartoon film unit, creating captivating stop-motion films in India, including notable titles like "Trip" (1970) and "Abid" (1972). "Abid, 1972" (Figure 6) is another rare experimental film in this series. It is about a contemporary painter, using stop-motion abstract cinema techniques Ramnath (2020). Created in collaboration with Pramod Pati and Vijay Raghav Rao, it features a series of animated sequences that depict Abid moving through urban and natural environments. He said "Unlike [animation in] a cartoon film, which is a rapidly moving series of photographed drawings, in pixilation, a moving object is shot frame by frame, and then through clever editing made to appear in motion. By its nature, this movement is agile, energetic, and unpredictable just like the pop art movement." The innovative animation techniques include hand-drawn and stop-motion animation, as well as live-action footage integrated with the animation. The soundtrack features ambient sounds and music, creating a sense of movement and atmosphere. "Abid" is a remarkable example of an artist's experimentation with animation to express inner ideas.

**Figure 6**



**Figure 6** Screenshot from Abid.

Source <https://www.25fps.hr/en/film/abid>

The pioneering experiments of renowned artists have instilled a sense of confidence to venture beyond the boundaries of traditional mediums, leading to the emergence of new possibilities through the integration of technology and art. Building upon this foundation, contemporary artists like Manjunath Kamath's Just Stupid (2003-04), The Talk (2003-04), and A to Z - Z to A (2003-04), Nina Sabnani's Tanko Bole Chhe & Bemata, Nina Paley's Sita Sings the Blues, and Shrimanti Saha's Bulldozer Babu & Clash of Perspectives have furthered these explorations, utilizing animation as a dynamic medium for their creative expressions.



## 9. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Our qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) of conventional art and experimental animations reveals distinct characteristics. Traditional art practices prioritize the development of technical skills and craftsmanship, requiring artists to invest significant time in mastering specific techniques. In contrast, experimental animations aim to break down skill barriers through the use of technology and democratize artistic expression. Quoting Plato's notion that art is *the imitation of truth* Hanfling (1992), traditional art practices are deeply rooted in cultural, historical, and traditional aesthetic values. They embody the values, beliefs, and customs of specific communities, serving as a means of preserving cultural heritage. On the other hand, animation art challenges traditional disciplinary boundaries by merging visual art, technology, sound, and performance. It embraces interdisciplinary approaches and explores new possibilities.

Animation, as a form of new media art, is distinct in its capabilities. It has the power to create ephemeral and time-based artworks using digital or multimedia formats, incorporating drawings, images, and videos. These artworks can be presented through various mediums such as projections, installations, or online experiences. One of the unique aspects of animation is its ability to engage viewers through interactive interfaces and immersive encounters, encouraging their participation and interaction. Unlike traditional art practices that are often limited to specific mediums like oil colour or watercolour, animation as a new media art challenge and transcends medium boundaries, blending different artistic forms of expression.

In recent times, animation has emerged as a powerful medium for creative expression. By introducing motion and emotions to drawings and paintings, it brings a new dimension to traditional art forms. The infusion of movement into these static forms becomes a potent means of conveying emotions that traditional art cannot achieve. Additionally, animation offers exciting avenues for exploring complex themes and ideas, serving as an alternative to traditional filmmaking. Artists can experiment with various animation techniques, enabling them to discover new ways of storytelling and expression. Moreover, animation serves as a valuable tool for new media artists to challenge our perceptions of the world and highlight the impact of technology on our experiences. As technology continues to advance, animation will continue to evolve, providing fresh opportunities for creative expression in the digital age. McLaren believed that the aesthetics of animation is *"What happens between each frame is more important than what happens on each frame" and "How it moved is more important than what moved"*. He defined animation art as *"the art of manipulating the invisible interstices that lie between the frames Bendazzi (1985)"*. So animation as an art form is not just about creating lifelike illusions but it should be a dynamic and versatile medium that can be used to explore a wide range of aesthetic and conceptual concerns of human mind and emotions, which might not have been possible through existing traditional mediums.

## 10. CONCLUSION

The alternate evolutions have opened and extended new possibilities beyond the conventional formats, unhindered by borders and frames. Animation has become one of the most effective media in modern visual arts. It has also become an alternative to filmmaking. However, while Indian styles and content are established

in the global art community, there is a strong Western influence on the medium. *Animation in new media art, in turn, creatively articulates and expresses the widening chasm between lived experience and the insensible technical infrastructure that makes so much of it possible* Paul (2010) . Digital technology and animation have created limitless possibilities for visual narration and storytelling.

Animation has a significant potential for experimental expression of art. Despite the belief that animation is only for kids, it is one of the purest art forms for bringing imagination to life. As technology evolves, animation offers new opportunities for creative expression, but human emotions remain essential. As an aesthetic manifestation of the relationship between humans and technology, animation reflects historical experience and offers a unique perspective on it. *Animation has become one of the most effective mediums of visual art in the contemporary period. It has become an alternative to the filmmaking process as well. However, this medium has a lot of Western influence though Indian style and Indian content have established themselves in the global art society. Digital technology and animation have given limitless possibilities in visual narration and storytelling* Majeed (2018). The study suggests that animation can be used to effectively communicate complex ideas and concepts and that it reflects the changes in society brought about by technological advancements. Technology has undoubtedly made the production process relatively easy, but it cannot replace the artist's creativity. Animation is an exciting and rapidly evolving field of artistic practice, with artists pushing the boundaries of what is possible with animation and exploring new ways of telling stories and expressing ideas.

### **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

None.

### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

None.

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