



An analysis of the circumstances and factors that have influenced the development of Animation Industry in Iran in the 1960-2002 periods

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Abstract

In the early part of 20th century animation emerged as a revolutionary way of making art. It evolved into a powerful means of expression and creativity of artists who could merge all art genres into one art form. The subsequent developments of animation have opened its diverse uses in entertainment business, education and political propaganda. This article attempts to examine the factors that have influenced and shaped the development of animation industry in Iran. It takes a historical view and investigates the impacts of changing socio-economic and political forces that have determined the functions of animation in the Iranian society. The study traces the establishment of the industry to the government-run centres, describing the pioneering role of artists who gave rise to the 'golden age' of animation in the pre-revolutionary Iran. Especial attention is throughout paid to the long and rich cultural and artistic heritages, as the thematic basis for indigenously produced animated films in Iran. The growth of the industry is considered in conjuncture with the expansion of feature films cinema and expansion of television networks. The latter is particularly important for the fact that it provides a secured market for a sizeable audience of children and young people in Iran. The study analyses the impact of the 1979 Islamic Revolution on the animation industry from a period of stagnation to a highly promoted and government sponsored artistic and industrial activity. In the post-revolutionary period, the industry was transformed from one reflecting the Iranian history and culture to the one that emphasises the Islamic-Iranian values and Islamic traditions; hence animation has become an ideological means in propagating the cultural policy of the state. Thus, animation has increasingly become a cultural industry assigned to supply growing needs of television and artistic works reserved for international festivals. This research is largely based on extensive interviews with animation artists and those who are working in the industry complemented with a sample of questionnaires addressed to both Iranian artists and foreign observers and participants in the Iranian International festivals on animation. The research methodology is also supplemented with the research on printed materials – very few and often descriptive- and personal experience of working over twenty years in the industry.

Introduction

Modern animation in Iran is often traced back to long history of artistic activity in calligraphy, miniature painting, ceramics and alike which are highly individualistic and require training, acquisition of skills, patience and imagination, all necessary elements of animation making. However, animation is essentially a teamwork involving different skills and expertise, akin to cottage industry rather than capitalist industrial production. Historically, animation industry has been supported and maintained by the state-run agencies or some forms of patronage system. Under pressure of market forces and financial constraints over government expenditures the animation industry has increasingly become venerable either to total extinction or full-fledged transformation into an

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industrial activity. The latter option means to forego the basic feature of this art-form, and adapt to the market demand. In many countries, including Iran there is already steps taken to industrialise the animation through exposing it to market forces. However, the Iranian government is reluctant to total privatisation partly for the importance of animation as a powerful means of education as well as a means of propaganda. Hence, attempts are made to restructure the industry into more efficient organisation cutting down waste and duplication and adopt international standards and norms helping the industry to withstand competition both at home and abroad. Moreover, the government is keen to encourage the development of animation in Iran. With expansion of television channels and the growing needs of programming especially for growing younger audiences, animation is best type of programmes, which can be easily manipulated stories to convey ideas that support the ruling



ideology. Yet Iran depends on import of animated films to satisfy domestic demand. Currently, Iran has five domestic TV channels which serve as platforms for animation broadcasts in the country and along the borders. However, the industry's level of development is clearly illustrated by the fact that of the ten thousand minutes of animation currently broadcast only 300 minutes are locally produced. This exposure to Iranian animation has been further diluted by the popularity of satellite broadcasting. Iranian animation has a long way to go before it realises its full potential in influencing the cultural landscape of the country.

Furthermore, an efficient industrial/production system requires a long-term technical training and recognised educational qualifications that establishes a demarcation between amateur and professional productions. The early days of animation in Iran (1960), were characterised by generous governmental benefits and large budgets, which insulated artists from the market forces and led to a situation where animators did not seriously recognise or consider the concepts of customer, producer, market and audiences. Consequently, when the animation pioneers entered the education field as teachers they were not able to acquaint new generations with these concepts. Such a lack of knowledge has led to a gap in the understanding the different needs and attributes of commercial, experimental, industrial, TV series and feature animation. To alter such a state of affairs requires animators, researchers and cultural pioneers to come together to discuss their mutual problems and proposed solutions so that a coherent development programme with specific aims and targets can be fully implemented. The purpose of this thesis is to provide an analysis of various factors that have influenced and shaped the development of animated films in Iran. It seeks to examine the institutional setting and the contribution of master animators who helped to lay down the foundation of an indigenous animation industry in Iran.

Research questions

How has the development of animation been shaped by political change in Iran?

How has animation reflected/ constructed/ helped to reflect national identity? And finally, what effect will the above factors have on the future development of the animation industry in Iran?

Research Sources

Animation as an art form displays cultural ingredients of a nation and cannot be properly understood without reference to the socio-political forces that help to shape the specific characteristics of the industry over times.

The researcher benefited much from animation books written from an international perspective emphasizing cultural and historical events as determinant factors in shaping national animation industry.

Throughout my research work, I have tried to develop upon theoretical arguments presented in these books and adapted them to the particularities of the Iranian situation.

Besides books, I have also used three other textual sources.

1) Journals and magazines are important sources of information; they often reflect new developments in the industry, views and comments of artists regarding new animated films. I have extensively consulted the ASIFA magazine, Animation UK Directory, Animation UK Magazine as well as Iranian film magazines and daily newspapers such as Iran, Ettelaat, Soroush and Film.

2) Unpublished conference and seminar papers and theses can be useful sources of information. I have made use of papers delivered in international conferences and consulted a few theses written in the British universities and Iranian universities. These theses gave me some pertinent information regarding social and cultural changes that Iranian society has undergone through, and helped to bridge the informational gaps in my research work. Equally important was the papers I read and discussions I held with the participants of seminars on animation. I learned much about evolving new challenges and opportunities and the need for rethinking on theoretical models that could accommodate both technological changes and globalisation of animated films.

3) Internet is becoming an important research facilitator, allows to creating a library, achieve on specific subject-matter, capable of instant updating and reflecting the changing our physical and mental achievements in a global scale. I found it a useful means particularly in filling the gaps, when one cannot easily found relevant information in the printed materials. However, effective use of Internet requires some experiences in finding wanted sites. I have visited the sites with strong



academic content, such as AWN (Animation World Network), irananimation.com, clutureofiran.com, netiran.com, webmemo.com (cinema Iran – Persian article and information), iranian.com, giving me the access to a whole host of current and archive articles on all aspects of animation throughout the world. AWN with a catalogue of some 1,200 articles, stretching back some five years, is an extremely useful site.

In addition to the textual sources, I have used three categories of non-textual sources. They are primary sources and used to compensate for the lack of the required information in an area of research, that was, until quite recently, totally neglected.

1) Questionnaires: questionnaires is perhaps best method for collecting specific information that one cannot find in published forms, in particular on those practitioners with long experience in making animated films in Iran. I have also taken advantage to distribute questionnaires to selected non-Iranian animator artists. During my fieldwork in Iran, extending from September to December 2001, I met and distributed questionnaires to selected Iranian animator experts. Further, I participated in international conferences and festivals – Norway 2000/2001 and Annecy 2002- where I held discussion (and delivered questionnaires to) with artist animators from the participated nations in the conferences. To those to whom I did not have personal access, I posted or e-mailed questionnaires, in particular to a selected members of ASIFA (International Animated Film Association) and ASA (Society for Animation Studies).

The content of questionnaires was slightly different whether they were addressed to Iranian or non-Iranian animators. For Iranian animators, the posed questions were related to the issues and influences that have either helped or hindered the development of animation in Iran, the impact of the 1979 Islamic revolution on the industry, and whether it has caused a re-orientation and discontinuity in the structure and conduct of the industry or it has rather strengthened the existed pre-revolutionary organisational structure of the industry. While, questions intended for non-Iranian animators were related to the globalisation of the animation industry, and in particular all-pervasive impact of the American animation industry on the indigenous animation of other nations, and other issues such as

animation as a educational means to revitalises cultural values and as means of ideological indoctrination and the ways by which national animation industry can encounter the global forces of homogenisation of cultural values.

The quality of questionnaires varied, some 56 percent respondents provided detailed answers and the remaining 44 percent were either medium or low quality.

2) As a complementary to questionnaires I have conducted an intensive interviews with a number of people who had either worked in pre-1979 period and those who are now working in the animation industry I chose the method of unstructured personal interviews' where interview is carried on the basis of one-to-one and is usually conducted in an office or in the respondent's home.

3) In addition to all above-mentioned sources of information, I have utilized my own personal knowledge and experiences working as artist animator, filmmaker and lecturer over past two decades. I have also taken part in the development of animation in Iran and witnessed the upheavals that the industry has gone through in the post-revolution era.

Literature Review

The Characteristic Feature of National Culture/Art in Iran

The essence of each nation is traditionally seen as a combination of social and political life, technological innovations and cultural and artistic traits. These factors are in constant evolution and development throughout the progression of history. For Iran the essence of its identity can be seen top lie in the combination of an ancient Persian cultural heritage with an Islam tradition, brought to the country by invading Arabs in the seventh century. It is the tension between these two contrasting elements in conjunction with Iran's geographical position as the meeting point between East and West that has contributed to the unique and cultural heterogeneity of its cultural national essence. Historically Iran is, and most likely has always been a place of immense ethnic and linguistic diversity, a continental crossroad open to influences from a wide variety of cultural sources. It is this position as a geographical crossroads that has resulted in Iran's exposure to a multitude of different cultural forms, which, given the Iranian tradition of assimilating outside influences and



making them uniquely Iranian, has resulted in some of the most original forms of artistic expression e.g. the Persian-Islamic style architecture of the 16-17th century Safavid period, such as Ali-Gapoo in Esfahan, Sultaniya in Zanzan or the literature and poetry of such notables as Ferdosi (d.c.1020), Hafez (d.c.1390) and Sadie (d.c.1290). Indeed, it is this combination of elements and the interplay of Persian and Islamic elements that gives Iranian identity its strength and uniqueness.

Cultural Traits

Iranian art has been traditionally influenced by the twin cultural traits of the belief in the individual as the sole creator of a work of art combined with an adherence to an Islamic morality. The former has meant that Iranian artists have historically produced meticulous works that have required time and perseverance, whilst the latter has infused the creative ethos with a sense of selflessness and an effacement of the individual, which has seen most Iranian art adhere to a particular stylistic code with the identity of their creator remaining unknown. However, in recent years, primarily due to the influence of Western artist traditions, these traits have become less and less noticeable. Whilst some of these developments, such as artists now signing their work, are less than welcome, others, such as the establishment of a co-operative team work ethic are more beneficial in establishing a comprehensive and proficient form of artistic production. The establishment of such work practices are particularly essential in the media and plastic arts, which rely on a co-operative division of labour.

Another positive cultural trait evident in much Iranian artistic traditions is the idea of respect for the teacher and the establishment of a master apprentice hierarchy governed by respect and humility. However, this element has negatively metamorphosed into a situation whereby a heavy emphasis was placed on the portrayal of adult themes, usually patriarchal in nature, to the detriment of all other topics. Indeed the patriarchal influence is one that is extremely pronounced throughout all levels of Iranian society.

Cinema in Iran as a modern media

In examining the historical development of the moving image in Iran it is important to note that the medium developed differently from that of the West. In the latter, from the outset, animation and live action cinema developed hand in hand. For Iran

this was not the case with animation only emerging some sixty years after the coming of cinema to the country. For this reason before turning to an analysis of animation in Iran it is necessary to look at the historical development of the Iranian cinema in order to highlight some of the main issues concerning the medium in general. Historically, Iran has always been a place of immense ethnic and linguistic diversity, a continental crossroads open to influences from a wide variety of cultural sources which she has managed to harness into unique cultural forms. It is the Iranian artists' ability to Persianise foreign cultural influences that has been one of the hallmarks of cultural production in Iran. This was a situation that was to persist with the coming of cinema to the country, during the reign of Mozaffarad-Din Shah (1896-1900), and its development throughout the subsequent decades. Indeed, the beginning of cinema in Iran was marked by its use as an amusing tool of the rich and powerful. The Iranian sources have claimed that:

The first film to be made in Iran was probably that of Mozaffarad- Din- Shah's coronation in 1895, although it is possible that some shots of the Tazieh passion plays were taken even earlier. The cinematographer was a certain "Rusikhan, "a Russian as his name implies.

Animation in Iran

Long historical experience and the desire of humans to animate can be seen from early man who drew pictures on his cave wall depicting spear – waving hunters in pursuit of a wild boar and attempted to convey the illusion of movement by showing the beast with multiple legs. The first visual representations in Iranian history are the bas-reliefs in Persepolis (c.500 B. C), the ritual centre of the ancient kingdom of Achaemenids. "The figures at Persepolis remain bound by the rules of grammar and syntax of visual language." Movements and actions are articulated in a sophisticated manner comparable to many contemporary pioneers in Europe and America who explored ways of capturing images of real life and attempted to analyse and replicate movement. Thus, all historical experiences worldwide indicate that cinema and animation are closely related to the same sources of inspirations, and are the subject of the prefaces of most historical books in the field of cinematography. Because of this historic relationship, the initial periods of cinema and



animation have a joint history and are sometimes non-separable. Animated films have been subject to two misunderstandings: a) mistaking animation for animated drawing (like taking an aeroplane for a kite); and b) considering it simply as a sort of 'cinema'. According to Christine Panushka the potential power of animation lies in its "ability to deconstruct a movement and reassemble it in a new or convincing way is the animator's territory. Many artists have realized their visions using animation as a means to externalise their inner thoughts and unique points of view. Animation gives the viewer the opportunity to gaze at a frozen moment of thought and to experience another person's rhythms."

Factors contributing to a Golden Age in animation

The emergence of modern animation is closely associated with a set of reforms and initiatives introduced by the government to link the Iranian economy to the world market economy.

1- Economic development and oil income

In the 1960s and early 1970s, the Iranian society underwent a fundamental change in both in composition of class structure and in the sectoral contributions to the national economy. John Foran called this period "the second period of the multilateral crossover of Iran to a capitalist economy". During this period the continually rising oil income deepened the rapid shift in the economic base of the country. New industries were founded with high investment from the government and other industrial countries. During these years, manufacturing industries such as car and electric home appliance assembly registered a high rate of growth. For example, annual car production (most of which produced by multinational companies) rose from 7000 in 1965 to 109,000 in 1975, TV production rose from 12000 to 31000, telephones from non-existence to 186000, and gas cookers from 87000 to 220000.

2- Manufacturing, urban life and consumer demand

Economic development was also accompanied with a process westernisation in the consumption technologies and the values that underlying them. The results of which crystallized in public life and shaped a new lifestyle. The government emphasis on industrialisation and urban life encouraged landless peasants (those who did not benefit from

the land reform) to migrate to urban areas, especially to the capital city Tehran. In the late 1970^s around 3 million people immigrated from villages to cities. One third of these people were unskilled labourers employed by the building industry and the rest of them were temporary workers, peddlers, servants and porters. These immigrants settled in newly established slums on the border of Tehran and many tragically joined the unhealthy marginalized part of society as prostitutes, vagrants, drug smugglers and addicts or beggars. The imbalanced socio-economic development resulted, on the one hand, in the appearance of many necessities of modern life such TVs, refrigerators, telephones, personal cars and on the other, the expansion of large industrial and trading centres which attracted increasing numbers of illiterate people who lacked the skills necessary to work in manufacturing and service sectors in cities, and hence suffered from acute poverty. Within this context, the I.I.D.C.Y.A was established to provide cultural activities to the children who made up 50% of the countries population.

3- Necessity of attention to education for the new generation

Children's literature prior to 1951 was confined to the books of Mirza Jabbar Asgharzadeh (Baghcheh Ban) and Fazlollah Mohtadi (Sobhi). From 1951 to 1961, Nour-e Jahan was the sole publishing house active in the domain of children's books and literature. Though in later years such publishing houses as Marefat, Franklin, Book Publishing and Translation Company and finally Nil, Ibn Sina and Amir Kabir made some efforts in satisfying growing demands- their contribution, however, was insignificant for reasons of the contents and presentation which could address the needs of children and young adults. Through an active policy of cooperation and assistance of prominent authors, poets, painters and artists at the time, the Publishing Organization of the I.I.D.C.Y.A managed to extend the scope of its activities, thus considerably improving the quality and quantity of its publications. Although the first two years, the publication of the I.I.D.C.Y. was limited only two titles, in the third year it rose to 13 and each had a print run of 30,000 or 40,000 copies. In the 1969, *The Story of Pigeon* (toqi), *Away from Home* and *The Little Black Fish* were chosen as the best books



by the Children's Books Council. The books 'The Little Black Fish' and 'Flower and Glass of Sun' won prizes at the Bologna (Italy) exhibition. In the same year, besides participating and winning awards in the Bratislava (Slovakia) exhibition, the Publishing Organization succeeded in getting six titles of its books translated and printed in the United States in cooperation with two American publishers.

Five Masters of Iranian animation

Esfandiar Ahmadieh

Esfandiar Ahmadieh was born in 1928 to a well-known family in Tehran. His father Abdollah-Khan Ahmadieh was a famous medical researcher. Under the influence of a well-educated father and a prudent mother his natural talent was carefully nurtured and actively encouraged and he began to experiment in creating sculptures and shapes from a variety of materials such as wood, iron and fabric. At school he studied design and drawing under the tutelage of Ostad Asqar, before moving to the Technical Art School in 1948. During the five years that he spent there he was taught by some of the masters of Iranian painting such as Esmail Ashtiyani, Hosein Sheykh and Mahmoudieh Oliya. His style and artistic education was further honed and developed by a number of trips he made to the Soviet Union, Romania and the United States where he was able to research the work of other artists. Esfandiar Ahmadieh's career can be divided in two periods. The first covers his activities in the field of painting, which resulted in several successful exhibitions, including the Mehraqan Club in 1961 and the Gallery of Kamal-Ol Molk in 1948 to 1950, and the establishment of various cultural links between Iran and a number of countries abroad, most notably with the Soviet Union in 1956. The second period of his artistic life could be said to have begun from 1956 onwards when he founded the Animation Centre in the Ministry of Art.

Nosratollah Karimi

Nosratollah Karimi is one of the few Iranian animators who came to the field with a background in cinema. In this sense he is somewhat unique in that most Iranian animators start their careers in either graphic design, illustration or painting before progressing onto animation production. For Karimi it was the cinema that was to be the most important influence on his artistic development; In 1952 I

went to study in Europe and ended up spending about six months in Rome. In Iran I had seen De Sica's *The Bicycle Thieves* and I was completely entranced by it. About this time De Sica was in the process of producing "Central Station". I received a recommendation from the ambassador of Iran and approached De Sica asking him if he would allow me to work on the film. He offered me the job of third assistant director. During the two-month shoot I received a thorough practical education on all I needed to know about the cinema". Most Iranians, particularly the pre-revolution generation, know Karimi through his work in the cinema, both as a director or actor, in productions such as the television serial, *Dai Jan Napoleon* (the Dear Uncle Napoleon) in 1976, rather than in the animation field. However, his animation films exhibit a formal and stylistic innovativeness coupled with high technical values that can be attributed to his cinematic background.

Noureddin Zarrinkelk

As a result of his father's profession Zarrinkelk was to spend much of his childhood travelling and living in numerous cities where he experienced many different cultures, all of which had a marked influence on him and his later career. The sociological situation in Iran at this time was very different to that which exists in the country at present. Most children followed a traditional style of education that was based on pedagogical learning by rote under the harsh supervision of teachers and the individual discipline of the father. In this respect Zarrinkelk was no different, falling under a dual system of tutelage, one which he received from his teachers at school and the other from his father at home.

Born in Mashad (Iran) in 1937, Zarrinkelk spent his childhood in Tehran, Tabriz, Orumiyeh, Isfahan and Rasht, before returning to Tehran to finish high school. After high school he entered Tehran University in 1955 to study pharmacology, graduating in 1961. It was his father who first introduced him to the pleasures of calligraphy and painting and Zarrinkelk began to pursue this new found interest by taking a number of art courses in parallel to his formal education. He started illustrating as early as 1949 and joined the press as a political cartoonist when he was only 16. In 1956, due to military service regulations, he was prevented from entering the only Fine Art School to



exist in Iran at that time. Unperturbed, he continued to paint and develop his art form.

Ali Akbar Sadeqi

Sadeqi was born in Tehran in 1937 and because of his interest in art and painting quickly earned for himself the nickname "Painter Akbar" among his schoolmates and friends. However, in the social environment of the 1930s and 40s in Iran such a title was problematic, as previously mentioned, given the generally low standing in which artists were held. Given their precarious economic situation, and the hostility and problems they received from their immediate families, the authorities and religious quarters, in no surprise to learn that most of the artistic pioneers in Iran were strong willed and moral individuals who were determined to confront and document the socio-political conditions of their time no matter what the cost. Sadeqi clearly illustrates these points when he speaks of his own formative years." In school I was generally poor at subjects such as maths and spent most of my time painting, as this was where my real interest and passion lay. I became more and more interested in art and in 1957 I succeeded in entering university as one of the top students. It was only during my time at university that my father became aware of my success, through announcements made on the radio and television, and this helped to allay some of his doubts about my career choice. I managed to continue and extend my studies for almost twelve years in a bid to avoid doing military service before succumbing to the inevitable. However, it was during this period that I became aware of the activities of the newly established I.I.C.D.Y.A. and applied to serve my military service with this organisation.

Abdollah Alimorad

Animation is a difficult task but the relevant artists accept these difficulties in order to protect the nobility of this art. "Alimorad is a calm and extremely active artist who works alone without any pretensions" (Ardeshire Keshavarzi). The first time I heard about Abdollah Alimorad and his work was when he came to the Animation Faculty of the IRIB in 1982 to teach Set and Skeleton techniques in Model Animation. In those days, Alimorad was not a very well known filmmaker. During his time teaching Alimorad was asked about the establishment of the Model Animation Studio in the

I.I.D.C.Y.A: "the studio that I am working now is the very place where we are now learning Model Animation in the I.I.D.C.Y.A. My first model animation production *The Old She Demon* was in fact a workshop project done with the assistance of students as part of a class I was teaching at the time. When the course finished everybody left the school but I stayed and began working and experimenting with ready set and puppet skeleton techniques. I started creating pre-plot structures that eventually evolved into full stories which I began to photograph and in that way the studio developed".

The impact of the Islamic revolution on animation

First, because of a fatalistic replacement of political, cultural and sociological values, particularly in the immediate aftermath of the revolution, there was a general sense of pessimism regarding the future management of animation. This was especially true at the I.I.D.C.Y.A where many of its ex-managers were seen as being affiliated, and having close ties with, the former regime that operated under the Shah. This pessimism and unease was to quickly spread among all the producers, directors and writers at the centre. The production centre was placed under constant surveillance and revolutionary committees censored much of its work. The relationship between the inspector committees and the artists was similar to that between a victor and his vanquished foe. The lack of consultation between both parties wasted much energy and valuable investment. An example of this process can be seen in the case of Zarrinkelk's famous animation film *Atal Matal* (1974). The screening of the film was forbidden by the revolutionary authorities for many years because it included a line from a children's game that was seen as blasphemous: Mahmoud up, up, leader group of Jackals "*Mahmoud bala bala, sar-dasteye shoghala*". The name Mahmoud was seen as referring to, in less than reverential terms, the Prophet Mohammad. Another example is the highly valued and much praised film *Amir Hamzah* (1977) which also ran into problems with the authorities: *Amir Hamzah* is a pleasantly ironic tale about a hunter freeing a princess who had been transformed into a zebra by a demon.



ROW	TITLE	TECHNIQUE	TIME	FORMAT	YEAR OF PRODUCTION
1	The Old Demon	Model Animation			
2	Children at the Museum	Model Animation	10 min	35 mm	1987
3	The Role Key	Back Light and Cut out	6 min	35 mm	1990
4	Parrot and Grocer	Model Animation	32 min	35 mm	1991
5	Experience and Technique	Model Animation and Live action	15 min	16 mm	1992
6	Jewellery Mountain	Model Animation	37 min	35 mm	1994
7	Travelling to the Puppet's World	Model Animation	20 min	35 mm	1995
8	One is not Enough	Model Animation	27 min	35 mm	1997
9	Bahador	Model Animation	27 min	35 mm	2000

Table 1: Animations Produced by Abdullah Alimorad listed by year, 1987 – 2000

Reconstruction of economy and Arts under Rafsanjani (1988-1996)

The revolutionary period was very short. The Iran-Iraq war, which started in September 1980, required some rethinking of the extreme position taken by the leadership. During the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88), despite efforts to produce entertainment works with socio-cultural themes, a number of factors forced filmmakers to fall in line with the propaganda of Islamic ideology. When a country is at war, people allow government to take full control in order to protect national interests. However, once war ends things should return to their normal order. However, in the case of Iran, because of the need to show the respect for the holy defence [Islamic state] of the country by young people and to memorialise the martyrs of the war, this did not happen in the immediate post-war period. During the era of reconstruction and economic adjustment, politicians were put in charge of cultural activities. Because senior leaders in the country were much concerned about the condition of culture in the country the cultural activities and media were placed under the supervision of conservatives and traditional forces who had no experience in keeping the government's cultural aspirations. These leaders believed that artists were only technicians and were supposed to produce cultural products according to what they are asked to do. Such political supervision was exercised on book publication and the press as well; the scope of the activities available to creative artists was continually narrowed and their creativity diminished. During the Pahlavi regime there was a mild form of

ensorship concerning the extent of sexual relationships or drug use in the cinema although overt political criticism of the regime was severely censored. During the reconstruction period, much harsher censorship prevailed which promoted the defence of revolutionary values, and prohibited examination of the loss liberties and choice. Under such circumstances a film director could not reflect the people's real problems so audiences dwindled because they could not see the realities of community life in films that were being produced. This situation also prevailed for films that covered the Sacred Defence where the themes of war-related films were limited to the propagation of war spirit. This was justified during the war because of the need to raise the public spirit and foster resistance. However, after the war, film directors should have rebuked the war, but they were not permitted to because cultural policy – makers, who had a clichéd approach to the question of war, looked at everything related to the war as sacred. As a consequence this prevented film directors from examining the cause of the war in the films produced after the war or the social distractive consequences arose from it.

Animation under Khatami (1996 – 2000): dialogue between civilizations

The 1979 Islamic revolution, which overthrew the Pahlavi system, and the impact of the various political movements, which opposed the establishment of the Islamic state, were not forgotten, and the majority of people actively demanded democratic change. This was evident when Mohammed Khatami won a landslide victory in the 1996 presidential election. For the first time



since the establishment of the Islamic state, Nehzate Azadi (liberation movement), a secular liberal organization, became active with their activities including the publication of a magazine Iran Farda (Tomorrow's Iran). During the period 1998-99 the constant demands of the majority of the population led to a democracy movement and a bitter power struggle with the conservative clergy and their supporters, now in the minority within the political institutions and rapidly losing their popular support.

The relationship between global developments and dominant local values

As a result of the removal of copyright laws and the general anti-American atmosphere that existed in the country at the time, almost all American productions disappeared from Iranian screens. In order to fill the programming shortfall Iranian television producers began to look to Japan to supply them with increasing numbers of animation productions. However, the Iranian audience had little or no experience of Japanese animation and it took some time before they became familiar with and understood the style and content of the new form. The Japanese animations that are broadcast on Iranian television fall broadly into two main categories. The first category is referred to as the Japanese indoors cool-animas. These productions are marked, both stylistically and thematically, by their strong and specific location within Japanese culture. The second category belongs to those groups of productions that are usually produced for a global market and tend to exhibit 'worldwide culture'. The characters and stories of these animations are usually familiar to most audiences and include famous stories and myths such as Pinocchio, Ali Baba or Sindbad. One final point needs to be made in relation to the importation of Japanese animation and that is the fact that television producers in Iran do not buy the violent and at times sexually explicit Manga type animation. Due to the constraints and restrictions placed on broadcasters in Iran the productions that are bought and exhibited on Iranian screens are usually of an educational or moral nature. However, the sadness, despair and at times hopelessness, that is portrayed in many of the Japanese animation broadcast on Iranian TV has caused some concern among Iranian parents. The central area of concern is the effect that such thematic depictions have on

young children: "these animation serials are often centred on the hopeless search of the main character, usually a young child, for their parents. It is a concern that children viewing these animation productions will start to worry about the possibility of losing their own parents". Whilst such concerns are expressed by many, perhaps the most immediate ideological influence on the attitudes of children can be seen to arise from the structuring and personal experiences of their existing cultural environment.

Islamic Rituals and values and Narrative Arts (animation)

In order to consolidate its power, the Islamic Republic instigated a process of wholesale Islamisation of media, defining the role and functions that it has to play in an Islamic society. Indeed, media is ritualised in a sense that it has to replicate religious themes and formats approved by the Islamic clerics.

The paternalistic perspective and the female

According to Islamic tradition, visual media should strengthen the character and real place of woman as mother and educator and making clear her sociological duty in relation to rebuilding Islamic society. (The third article of the production policies of Saba Animation Company). This implies that animated films should be structured around the centrality of male character that is wiser and make rational decision. He is the protector of family and defender of his woman- these should provide the background to all family based-stories. Thus, the model for Islamic women is a traditional, passive and religious one. Without man woman has no identity. She spends most of her time at home. A woman, before appearing as a woman is portrayed as a mother of her children. It is only in the realm of motherhood that women "evolve". If there is a heroine in a story, she is inevitably married, and if she is a girl she will not face a man at any stage in the story. Housebound permission and financial benefit (*nafaghe*) to women are two crucial aspects that justify the current situation of women in an Islamic state. According to *sharia* women must obtain permission from their husbands and / or another male head of the family to seek employment or to be employed. The ideological effect of the institution of marriage and the concepts of *mahr* (the contractual payment to the wife for the consummation of marriage) and



nafaghe give the responsibility for domestic work exclusively to women. The Islamisation of the state and the emphasis on women's place at home meant that the only domestic work that men were willing to help with was shopping, which was an activity outside the home, and carrying heavy objects. The above themes is often implied in the narrative of an animated film.

Martyrdom (*shahadat*), highest model for humanity

In order to endeavour to keep alive the epic valour of the youths of the country [Iran], religious piety and Qur'anic examples should be used in structuring programmes (The fifth article of the production policies of Saba Animation Company).

There is a strong belief among Islamic community that *shohada* (martyrs) follow a spiritual road to save the people, particularly those of women and girls of a Moslem community so as to preserve the chastity of that community (nation). The body is sinful according to Islamic beliefs and is the embodiment of earthy temptations. Body is the gateway to the devil. Moslem believes that when they go to hajj (the holy journey to Mecca which is obligatory for every Muslim during the life) their pre - hajj body, including its material and spirituality dies and they are born again with a new sinless body. In relation to the after life the most crucial issue for a Moslem is how do they want to answer to God about their sin? Among all who address God only martyrs go before God without any question. All the films made in the 1980s portrayed their characters that saw martyrdom ultimate achievement in their life. The characters who become martyrs at the end of films are usually preachers during their earthy life. Throughout a film such characters deliver strong monologues of advice on morals, behaviour and giving attention to the next life. Accordingly, in Iran/Iraq war, Iranian soliders easily accepted that they had to go to war without giving any thought to dying. However, such characterization ignores the reality of life and usually results in a character that lacks credibility.

The existence and celebration of culturally specific religious ceremonies also heavily influence broadcasting schedules in Iran. Foremost among these events are the months of Muharram, which mourns the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, and the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. During these periods religious programmes dominate Iranian

television screens. This extends to the area of animation and the educational needs of children where cartoons and animated films are made and broadcast to reflect the values and religious ethos of these religious occasions.

The Mode of Address in Animation Films

There are three key questions concerning the mode and language used in animation need to be addressed:

How does the illusion of movement define animation?

What is the capacity and function of the animated film?

What is the meaning of animation and its synonyms?

These and other terminological questions have been, and remain, some of the most important issues that animation filmmakers have had to continuously address. Every nation has attempted to articulate its own particular response to these issues by recourse to indigenous cultural and artistic forms. This is further highlighted by the fact that even after a hundred years of animation history, thousands of hours of film and a multitude of different techniques and styles, there still remains no single and easily comprehensible definition of animation. In essence, animation could be described as being an art form in search of its own particular essence through a continuous and ongoing process of self-definition, which serves to highlight the complex and fractured site of its being. There in lies the power of animation, which according to award winning filmmaker Frederic Back; “[Animation] has the power to transcend cultural barriers and become a universal language that is easily understood by those who are word illiterate. Animation is a wonderful media to describe, not always reality, but a strong message. You can create a reality that is very attractive and you can reach everyone - children and adults”. It is in response to these questions, within the context of indigenous political and cultural developments, that I will attempt to define the meaning and function of animation as it exists in Iran. The starting point for such an investigation must begin with the question “what is animation”, which one scholar in the field has described as: To animate, and the related words, animation, animated and animator all derive from the Latin verb, *animare*, which means ‘to give life to’ and within the context of the animated film, this



largely means the artificial creation of the illusion of movement in inanimate lines and forms.

According to the Webster dictionary animation is defined as:

A: motion picture made by photographing the successive position of inanimate objects (as puppets or mechanical parts). An: animated cartoon is an animation picture made from a series of drawings simulating motion by means of slight progressive changes.

Norman McLaren's famous definition of animation sees it as: "Not the art of drawings that move but the art of movement that are drawn; what happens between each frame is much more important than what exists on each frame.

Jan-Bakhshi is a term still very much in use in Iran. This arises from the fact that it offers a comprehensive definition of animation that seeks to include and emphasise its many different styles and techniques. However, as has been seen, it is far from being the definitive definition of animation and it is a term that is constantly changing in response to social and political circumstances. This was clearly evident in 1998 when, at the first animation festival to be held in Tehran since the revolution, a new definition, "*Poya Nemaei*", emerged. This new term defines animation as a process based on "repetition" and "time". However, most participants at the festival, myself included, found the term somewhat clumsy and unsatisfactory.

Poya Nemaei is the new term recently authorised by *Farhang-estane ollom* (The Academy of Science). In my opinion, it is not a suitable definition for animation, because it is based solely on the idea of being the opposite of non-movement. By this definition, *Poya Nemaei* suggests that an animation character has the same potential as a human for movement. This ignores the fact that animation uses a whole host of different techniques that suggest movement with the aim of transferring a particular feeling or emotion to an audience.

It must also be noted that much animation uses static pictures in creating certain moods and rhythms, which leaves a term such as *Poya Nemaei* somewhat redundant. I believe that animation, like "cinema" and "television", is a unique term that defies simple and easy categorisation.

International and Indigenous Views on the Iranian Animation:

A Questionnaire Analysis

Section one: International views on Iranian animation

Questionnaire Results and Discussion

There was general agreement that the following countries had well-developed animation industries – the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, France, Russia, Spain, Germany, Australia, Korea, China and Japan. The experiences of these countries are relevant to Iran because there are three key traits that are shared by all of them: 1) the idea of animation as media, 2) the idea that audiences have a human personality that reflects emotions and sentiments and 3) the idea of local and national culture.

The respondents' views on animation industry in these countries are given below:

- USA - a long history, big traditional and well-developed film industry and popularity of the Disney studios, and an efficient studio system.
- UK- animation courses at many leading art colleges, very beneficial influence of channel 4 in fostering this art form.
- Canada - originated with the National Film Board (NFBC), government support and excellent training institutions.
- France -very talented computer animators, encouraged by very low quotas on French production for TV.
- Russia- films used to be funded under the communist regime, rich heritage in drama, puppetry and story telling in the culture.
- Japan - big national market and indigenous and highly popular animation industry, highly distinctive styles- Anima, Manga- world-wide followers.
- Spain, Germany- in general supported by the EU's cartoon programme and media initiatives.
- Australia- an expanding offshore production and television advertising.
- Korea, China- acting as production houses for western countries.

Eastern European countries and Russia were the first countries that come immediately to mind with regard to government sponsorship. However, it became clear that the success of animation in Canada, France and the UK was also strongly



reliant on government sponsorship. Animation in these capitalist economies could not progress without their government assistance.

Section two: Indigenous views on Iranian animation

The place of women in the animation work force
 Before the revolution (1979), Iranian women had, at least on paper, obtained the right to equal employment. Although the post-revolutionary state accepted this right in theory, in practice it did not facilitate female employment. This first response to the questionnaire is made up of personal

information comprising the name and current jobs of respondents. Among the thirty respondents, only eight are women animators; this is representative of the lack of a gender balance in the field. However recent statistics show that in Iranian universities, the number of women is not only equal to that of men but according to Ministry of Higher Education, 52 per cent of those students who passed the September 1998 universities' entry examination (*Konkour*) and entered university in the academic year 1998/9 were women.

	Higher diploma	BA/BSc	MA/MSc	PhD
1992/ 3 - 1993/ 4				
Medicine	51	71	55	40
Humanities	12	32	15	13
Science	20	38	19	22
Technical and engineering	3	7	4	4
Agriculture	1	3	3	8
Arts and architecture	47	45	20	7
1996/ 7 - 1997/ 8				
Medicine	67	66	49	45
Humanities	41	40	19	17
Science	27	45	24	18
Technical and engineering	7	14	5	5
Agriculture	21	29	3	7
Arts and architecture	74	49	22	29

Table 2: women taking further and higher education degrees in different fields of study (%)

Source: Extracted and calculated from Iran statistical Year books 1998:471-2

The high ratio of women studying art subjects partly reflects regulations forbidding females to study in some fields such as agriculture (Keyhan 16 May 1989) and law (Keyhan 25 September 1991) and is partly due to differences in career orientation between men and women. Women have more flexibility to choose the arts with their elegance and the patience that artistic work such as animation needs. As we have seen in the historical account, from the outset, animation has attracted many women filmmakers such as Nafiseh Riyahi, the first female Iranian animator who passed away in 2000. Abase Kiarostamy the well-known Iranian filmmaker who began his activities at the I.I.D.C.Y.A. with Riyahi, gave the following recollections about her in an interview: I think I met Nafiseh Riyahi in 1969 or 1970 when we were both drawing publicity murals for a great circus from

Moscow. Then we both began filmmaking; I made "Bread and the Street" and she found her way into the world of animation. Before entering this world she had experiences in illustrating children books. Her works were not as appreciated by they public as they deserved to be, because they were resourced from contemporary western paintings and there was nothing specifically Iranian in them. She, like me, did not believe in geography for the arts. But the Iranian audience could not comprehend the characteristics of her work though she was always patient about these matters and continued her work as she liked. A second notable group of respondents are four persons who belong to the first generation of Iranian animators and entered the field of animation in the pre-revolution (1970) period. The remainder of respondents includes people who do not have any pre-revolution experiences. Most of



the people in this group began animation in the second decade after the revolution (1980s) i.e. the years that coincide with the end of the socio-political crises of the revolution and war and the start of cultural and educational activity in the country. In those years a wave of investment in cultural and educational aspects developed which led to the creation of new curricula for animation courses in the country. Because of increased investment, the majority of respondents became involved in animation by choosing to study it at university. Fewer respondents reported entering the field through accident, personal interest and experience or through apprenticeship.

Indigenous filmmakers and the professional market

In response to questions about respondents' access to a range of animation techniques and concepts, most responses pointed out that the existing social reality in Iran tended to restrict access to new themes. Television is the only public media for daily broadcasts of serial animation, which is limited to children's animation. A second resource for animation experts and students is short artistic and experimental animation, which is purchased by universities for educational purposes. Although these kinds of animation are ideal for technical practice, they do not have a public function and are not suitable examples for commercial production. Because of the Islamic influence in Iran that increased after the revolution, there exists a paradox between the required break with western manifestations in Iranian work and the educational goals of animation. The twenty-four years past since the 1979 revolution have provided a long period for experimental animation and industrial-based production of animated films in western countries, the best known of which are *The Rugrats* for children and *The Simpsons* for adults which are not limited to simple entertainment but deal with wider social issues. While Iranian animation has, over that period, stagnated for lack of contact with the world animation community- though since 1999 positive steps have been taken to remedy this major problem in Iran. In addition, there is no video market or official access to satellite broadcast, which could legally provide access to newly released animation to the public. Although, most films can be obtained through poorly copied illegal imports. Moreover, the popularity of computer

animation features such as *Toy Story*, *Ants* and *Shrek* has given a misleading impression about western animation. The best of artistic western animation are not easily available even to the professional animators. The lack of access is more acute felt by the Iranian animators who are still thematically and conceptually disconnected from international community- very little discussion is taken place in among Iranian animators on western artistic works in Iran. Therefore, a modern stimulus for the professional animation market still has not been recognized in Iran, and filmmakers are not properly involved in this market. This is an industry that is well developed not only in western countries, but also in many Asian countries while searching for economic development opportunities did not overlook animation as a money-maker industry. These countries, such as Singapore, may have begun animation production relatively late, but they have achieved a high standing globally. In Singapore, everything is an economic unit and it's worth is measured in Singapore dollars. Therefore it's comes as no surprise that the animation industry was born from attempts to attract foreign investment into the country, with a view to turning Singapore into the media hub of the Asia- Pacific. In the early 1990s, Singapore embarked on an ambitious plan to create the infrastructure needed to entice the big players in the media industry. Plans were also set in motion to encourage the creation of local firms. Since then, there has been no looking back. Therefore, in order to develop a professional animation market alongside an academic approach it is necessary to recognize the barriers to such a market within the country and remove them. This strategy could provide satisfaction in that animators could look to the field as providing a viable primary job and more people could become involved with animation full-time. The barriers that have been pointed out through the questionnaire are in the three areas of 1) technical factors, 2) financial factors and 3) socio-political factors.

However, animation is an expensive media that regularly has problems attracting investment from the private sector. Producers lack of familiarity with the language of international trade and the amateurish tendency of most animators are important reasons why animation is still not a money-making industry in the country. Another factor relates to socio-political difficulties; many



respondents believe that the closed-shop practice of working acts as a social disease which leads to a variety of difficulties. Work falls into the hands of poor management, many budget spends are unnecessary and project potential is not properly evaluated. The existence of bigotry and the airing of partial views is sometimes done under the guise of advice for safeguarding Islamic and moral values. This leads to a fall in the quality of work, offended artists and the politicization of work. As a result of the above barriers, animators mostly prefer to work in the experimental and independent area of animation that can at least cover their attendance at festivals. Also the short length of the production process is a positive aspect that develops opportunities for independent filmmakers to be active in an artistic avenue. In designing the question "If a very large budget was put under your authority for the promotion of Iranian animation how would you spend it?" I was looking for people who deal with the difficulties of animation to provide a reformist view. One response was: "First, I would invite the most experienced people in the country to a gathering period. I would ask them to consider what we could do to progress animation in the country? I am sure they could help significantly". Each of the respondents had different views and explanations, but overall these can be classified into four areas 1) founding a system and organization, 2) training the work force, 3) financial support and 4) absorption of well-skilled work force. After the revolution, the Hoze Honary of Sazeman-e Tablighat-e Islami became an important and influential art centre in the country for most art fields such as film, painting and music. In 1991 they also established an animation centre which is called Studio Basat. This centre quickly provided most equipment that was necessary for animation production such as a single frame video system (EOS), (that in those days was a unique in the country), a 2D and 3D computer animation system. The studio then invited many professional and young talented animators to work for each section of the centre. Apparently, most essential facilities were available for an energetic start. But the lack of definite aims about production markets, methods and production discipline led to a cultural vacuum in the activity. A collection of reasons caused the rapidly established studio to be ambushed by a few self-generated unsuccessful

experiences. These repelled animators and resulted in a change in the studios direction to live action activities.

Three integral aspects in Iranian animation

For more than four decades - from 1960 to 1979 (pre - Islamic revolution) and 1979 to the present time (post-Islamic revolution) children, education and government have been the three key factors in the formation and direction of animation activities in Iran. It was suggested that animation, has had far-reaching effects globally as a pioneering art form for education and children. From its outset in 1960 this artform has increasingly affected the perceptions and behaviour of its major youth-audience. Animation as a cinematic language has also transformed the structure and functions of social institutions and organizations such as education, family, politics and the economy.

Children

There are two factors, which have influenced the development of animation in Iran:

- Iranian children make up more than half of the population of the country and therefore constitute the largest share of audiences for TV and film.
- Children's fascination with animation is widely documented. After physical daily necessities have been met, animation has been accepted as essential to children's mental development. This is illustrated by the fact that even during the political and economic crises of the revolution and the subsequent war with Iraq when there was a lack of programming for adults, cartoons for children continued to be broadcast even though this required importing them from abroad.

Education

Within the history of visual image, animation has played a leading role in the development of visual media. Today with the support of computer software, the utilisation and application of animation is widening. Animation is now used in such various fields as media science, architecture, and natural science and in growing advertising for industry and commerce. This is in addition to its use in entertainment as with computer games and in educational cinema and TV programs.

At present, the student population of the country is approaching to 18 million. The need for media to educate this huge section of society is especially



important. As considered in chapters four and five, the I.I.D.C.Y.A. was established in 1964 with the aim of improving the level of education for children in the country. This was to be accomplished through the development of both book publication and animation. Thus education was the first use of animation in Iran. After forty years the focus on animation for education has not been reduced, although its uses have been expanded. However, my definition of education is not just related to traditional school curricula, but includes the more cultural, sociological and ideological aspects of education that surround children twenty-four hours a day with the aim of influencing children's more spiritual needs. Under this kind of indirect but effective influence, childhood education shapes the socio-political and cultural character of children and is an active force in determining the future of society. Governments, particularly societies such as that in present-day Iran, that have an ideological foundation are not neglectful of this fact and are therefore willing to bear all of the costs and difficulties of establishing institutes such as Saba or celebrating high cost festivals such as the Tehran International Animation Festival in their efforts to progress their cultural, political and ideological goals.

Government

Cinema and broadcasting as a media and animation as a form have given rise to, and also have magnified the scope of, various social issues. This new art form provides a new hope for the future development of education, culture and industry at regional, national and even international levels. Among all broadcasting, animation could be said to have provided wider and more powerful opportunities for manipulation and control. This power has, in fact, been exploited by both pre and post revolution governments for political and cultural propaganda.

The history of animation in Iran has developed completely within a governmental framework. Without the involvement of three governmental centres - the Ministry of Culture and Art, the I.R.I.B and the I.I.D.C.Y.A. - animation in Iran might not have survived in the face of increasing competition from imported foreign animations. The extensive involvement of the government in this field highlights the important role of children and education in instituting political stability and

consolidating the government's base. As considered throughout the thesis, when animation is governmental and benefits from financial support, propaganda animation takes higher priority than the development of free individualistic/artistic aspects. It is therefore predictable that governments such as the current Islamic regime and the pre-revolution secular regime give careful attention to the capability of animation in education to influence the large population of children. They endeavour to use the media for the development of a politically defined version of socio-cultural and ideological programs or banning the production of the type of works which could challenge the existing cultural policy of the government. The crystallisation of the propaganda approaches of governments, both pre-and-post revolutionary Iran, to animation can be vividly seen in their emphasis on the sort of programmes. The cultural policies of the I.I.D.C.Y.A from 1966 to 1979 where the emphasis placed on the epic tales and folklore of the pre-Islamic period (ancient Persian civilisation) serve to illustrate the ideological underpinning of the programmes. Similarly the cultural policies of Saba where Islamic culture and traditions are given high priority in animation production serve to underline the ideological content of much of animation produced in the Islamic Republic.

Finally, there are a number of pertinent questions that should be delved upon:

- How are we as Iranians to define and represent ourselves, in terms of our position within the world, our sense of self, our language, our literature, our customs, our language?
- What has been our history and what will be our future and what role will culture and art play in shaping and contributing to their definition?
- How do we assess the influence of changing socio-political conditions on artists and the art they produce?
- What effect will the advent of new technological tools such as digital animation, have on the animation industry of a country such as Iran?
- How will the animation in developing countries cope with the rapid pace of change occurring in the industry worldwide? Where do they fit in the process of overall development and how do they assess their relationship with larger more powerful animation nations who dominate the global market?



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