# ANIMATION BASED ON INDIAN ART FORMS

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## ABSTRACT

When Indian art is thought of many things come to mind. From the extremely detailed Kalamkari art to the very simplistic Miniature paintings. There is a huge variety from place to place, culture to culture. One thing common in all of them though is they all tell stories. Stories that have been passed on from generations through oral culture and through art. Unfortunately, despite all the richness in art, Indian art is rarely seen in animation. This paper takes the art of Jamini Roy as an example as focusses on methods to bring his stories to life.
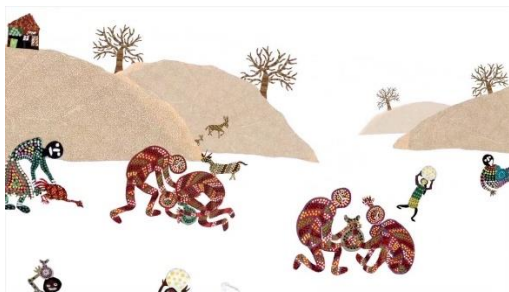
## MOTIVATION

The motivation to do this project comes from the desire to study about various Indian art forms in detail. Indian art carries a certain charm and fascination. The extraordinary variety in art and the huge bundle of indigenous stories is a very attractive factor to take up this project. But more than that, the fact that Indian art is almost absent in commercial as well as artistic animation is a strong driving force to come up with a method to animate the art in a way that can be achieved in a commercial environment while also retaining the essence and quality of the original style.

## BACKGROUND NOTE

A very little work has been done in this area. Only a very people like Prof. Nina Sabnani (Tanko bole che, Ham Chitra Banate Hain), Prof. Shilpa Ranade (Goopi Gavaiya Bagha Bajaiya), animator and actress Gitanjali Rao and a select few are working to use Indian art in animation. Such experimentation with style is not supported in the industry. Acclaimed Indian animator Gitanjali Rao says -

*"They want to follow the same ghisa pita (tried and tested) formula. They feel somebody else should do it first. They have this fascination for the phrase 'first time in India' but when you actually take it to them, they step back. It is a chicken and egg situation."*

- From an article from **the Hindu**[1]



*Hum Chitra Banate Hain* by Prof.Nina Sabnani (Art style of Bhil culture)

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[1] https://www.thehindu.com/entertainment/movies/%E2%80%98Technology-wears-off-stories-live-on%E2%80%99/article16832528.ece

Goopi Gavaiya Baagha Bajaiya, by Prof. Shilpa Ranade inspired by Togalu Gombeyaata, the leather puppet show unique to Karnataka[2]

## INTRODUCTION:

India is probably the most diverse country in the world when it comes to culture and art. Many art forms have originated and died here and many have prevailed over centuries. Despite this immense cultural and artistic richness, Indian animation films and shows seem to replicate western culture and art. The approach towards animation is very commercial and hence people are copying the success formula as it is. From an interview of Gitanjali

*"She gives the example of* Arjun: The Warrior Prince, *where the director apparently wanted to retain Indian body type and expressions but had to change them when the producer intervened. "He was told it should be like Disney films because it works."*

- From an article from **the Hindu[3]**

The urge to tell local stories in the local way is very less. Even when local stories are told, the characters would have western look. This is highly in contrast with the extremely successful Japanese Manga and Anime industry. The approach there is to tell Japanese stories. The people, the backgrounds, the movements, everything comes from Japanese daily life. This is

[2] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bxnGGJRqrew&t=779s
[3] https://www.thehindu.com/entertainment/movies/%E2%80%98Technology-wears-off-stories-live-on%E2%80%99/article16832528.ece

also one of the reasons why Japanese culture is becoming so popular. People get to know Japanese culture in their films and anime and naturally get attracted to it.

Indian art reflects local stories in an amazingly beautiful manner and inculcating it in animation to tell stories based in India should not only result in a new, unseen animation style, but also has the potential to popularise Indian culture worldwide.

## SUBJECT

This paper looks into the art style of Jamini Roy and aims to figure out a way to animate it.

## SELECTION OF ART FORM

India has a huge variety in art forms. There is a large number of cultures each having their own art forms to represent their lifestyle.

India also boasts a number of incredible artists who have made their mark not only in India but also across the world by their unique and beautiful interpretation of life around them.

One such artist is Jamini Roy. He, through his paintings, tried to capture the essence of the simple lifestyle of the folk people, make art accessible to all people and most of all give Indian art its own identity.

This approach of his is very much in line with the motivation of taking up this project, that is to tell Indian stories with art that is derived from the local lifestyle and to give Indian art a place in the animation world. Hence Jamini Roy's art was chosen for the project

## ABOUT JAMINI ROY

Jamini Roy was born on 11th April 1887 in the Bankura district of West Bengal. He received his Diploma in Fine Art from the Government College of Art, Kolkata, where he was taught traditional drawing Classical nudes and oil painting.

He soon left commissioned portrait painting to discover his own way of painting. He took a lot of inspiration from Kalighat paintings of West Bengal which clearly reflects in his art. He tried to paint from the life of local Bengali cultures especially the Santhal culture. He is considered to be the earliest and most significant modern artist of India.

## ABOUT JAMINI ROY'S ART

Jamini Roy's artwork is more than often about common people's life and common folklore. His bold sweeping strokes flowing from thin to thick to thin fashion. These strokes create a sense of motion, fluidity and natural organic feeling.

His choice of colours also reflect the artistic aesthetic values of the indigenous people of that region. His choice of colours can also be derived from the choice of colours used in indigenous art like the Kalighat paintings.

But the most spectacular thing about his art is that almost everything in his paintings carry a certain meaning. A very few elements are present just for the aesthetic value. If the painting, the battle between Ram and Ravana (the one animated for this project) is studied,

it can be noticed that there are flowers on the side on Lord Rama and arrows on the side of Ravana. It clearly conveys who is the victor. Lord Ram's side is blooming with flowers, while Ravana's side is showered with arrows.

One more thing that can be noticed is Lord Ram's side is placed at a higher level than Ravan, again portraying who is dominating.



Clear influence can be observed in Jamini Roy's art (right) from the Kalighat Painting (left)

## CHALLENGES

There are many challenges to be faced in animating an art form like this.

One simple and best approach could have been animating each frame painting by painting. This way the quality of his paintings would be retained and smooth beautiful animation can be achieved.

But this comes at a cost, a cost of time and effort. The art style has a lot of detailing involved in it. Each frame would take a lot of time. This kind of approach cannot be used in the industry that is constantly looking to speed up animation. So, although valid this approach will not be used for the aim is to find a method to animate it in a way that it can be produced relatively easily and can even be considered for commercial cinema.

Since the art form is flat in nature, 3d animation and Claymation animation would not be a very good choice either.

So another way to animate it would be the puppet animation technique. In this technique the characters are rigged on the software and after that motion only key frames need to be created. The computer automatically creates the in-betweens. This saves a lot of time and a pretty precise effect is achieved.

While puppet animation technique is not a very novel technique to be used in animation, the novelty here lies in how animation is done. That is to say, Jamini Roy's paintings have certain features.

For example, his paintings have smooth, fluid lines all over. It is to be maintained not only in the key-frames, but also in the in-betweens. The challenge was to create the mesh and then rig it in a way the once bent, the arm/leg creates bends similar to as observed in Jamini Roy's paintings.

Also since his paintings are totally flat, the turnarounds in animation would have to be snappy. For example, the torso in his paintings is flat. A change in direction would require a horizontal flip. Same goes for the head.

The challenge here was to rig puppets smartly so that the fluidity of Jamini Roy's art work is not lost. The process is looked in the next section.

## PROCESS

The open source software "Opentoonz" has been used to animate the paintings. Opentoonz allows extensive drawing (both vector and raster) and rigging capabilities. It also allows the modification of mesh and total control over the movement of mesh points which is essential to achieve the kind of fluidity that is needed in replicating the art form. Apart from that the software also allows hand drawn animation alongside puppet animation simultaneously.

The vector brush strokes are of high functionality in achieving the look and feel of Jamini Roy's work. Thus Opentoonz was considered the most suitable tool for the cause.

The below painting was chosen to animate.



Battle between Ram and Ravana, note the arrows, the motion is represented with multiple tails.

It was chosen for two main reasons

1. The painting depicts a clear story.
   It depicts the battle between Lord Ram and Ravana. Arrows can be seen flying over from both sides (the depiction of multiple tails in arrows is worth noting, they have been drawn as if they are moving.). Lord Ram's army is clearly dominating over the Raxas army.

2. The landscape orientation is more suitable for film.

The scene was planned; it was decided that this would be the painting where Ravana's death would be portrayed. Lord Ram will shoot the arrow and Ravana will fall. The scene was traced in layers accordingly.

Only hand is moving for Lord Ram, so three layers were made, the body, arm and hand. A mesh was created for the arm, which was rigged with bones. Proper editing of the mesh was done to get the best effect of the bending arm. Hand and arm were attached to the mesh. The mesh was then attached to the body.

Similarly, the whole body of Ravana was created in different layers because every part of his is moving. Every layer was connected in a hierarchy, the waist being at the top of that (since everything moves as the waist moves in the human body). Arms and legs were rigged and Ravana was ready to be animated.

The background characters were created in a separate single layer, not much animation was given to them to give main action more prominence.

The arrow and flowers behind Lord Ram were animated in Adobe After Effects for convenience. The camera movement was also done on After Effects.

## LEARNINGS AND CONCLUSION

This project offered an insight into Indian traditional art. A lot of Indigenous styles were looked at and studied an appreciation towards the beauty of Indian art was developed.

Jamini Roy's art was studied thoroughly, and a method to animate in a relatively fast and digital medium while still retaining the style and essence was explored. A better sense of using composition and visual elements like altitude was understood. Inspiration was taken from his technique of using props to add extra layers of meaning to a composition.

With this, a new way of telling stories of the paintings was developed which can be used further to animate other Indian styles like Kalamkari, Madhubani and so which contain extremely detailed images.

This research is just a starting point in delving into the animation of Indian traditional art. As more research goes into it, new and better ways to animate the paintings may develop rooting from this. Hope this paper proves insightful to anyone who is looking to animate Indian art.

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