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1979-2012

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**THE PRE-PRODUCTION PHASE IN THE MAKING  
OF IRANIAN FULL-LENGTH ANIMATED FILMS  
1979-2012**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements of the University of West London  
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To:

Shahrzad and Ail, who patiently tolerated staying far from their parents through the course of the study.

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## **Abstract**

As the pre-production phase is a vital process in feature-length animation filmmaking, this study focuses on the arrangement of this phase in Iranian animation film projects. They are *Mouse and Cat*, *Tak Taz*, *Namaki & The Giant*, *The Sun of Egypt*, *Jamshid & Khorshid*, *Simorq's Heart* and *Tehran 2121*.

In support of the investigation of these, the research reviews the background of Iranian cinema, television and animation. It looks also at the emergence and evolution of the pre-production phase in Disney and Pixar studios. Moreover, comparisons of pre-production phases implemented by Japanese, British and Pixar filmmakers are complementary contexts highlighting this process. It comprises four key stages: writing stages e.g. script; visualization stages e.g. concept design; scene setting e.g. storyboard, and a rough version of a film in the form of a story reel (Yun Mou et al, 2013). Implementation of these stages needs strategies to be employed by successful filmmakers.

Based on such facts, a theoretical comparison analyses the arrangement of the pre-production phase in the seven projects. The findings indicate two types of factors affecting the arrangement of this phase. Indirect factors such as the dependency on management by government and its financial support constitutes issues influencing productions. Direct factors include filmmakers' abilities and their direct actions on production.

Consequently, owing to the negative effects of both sets of factors on production, certain recommendations are proposed to refine the role of government organisations, filmmakers' knowledge and abilities, as well as the academic teaching of animation.

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## **Chapter 1**

The chapter opens the thesis discussion with an introduction on the study's focus followed by addressing the problem and the contributions to the knowledge of pre-production in full-length animation filmmaking and Iranian animation. This is followed by the thesis structure which presents an overview of the chapters and the context body materials.

### **Introduction**

Among countries having with a domestic film industry, Iran was one of the earliest. Taking the first steps<sup>1</sup> in 1897 (Mirbakhtyar, 2006), it formed in special conditions, was affected by various constraints, such as being located far from Europe, the birthplace of cinema, where it was constantly developing. This meant that the technology of cinema e.g. essential equipment, training and learning the ways of dealing with such a newborn industry, were inaccessible to Iranians. Iran was then mainly an agricultural economy with little infrastructure, which was not conducive to the development of cinema. But these hurdles could not put off the emergence of Iranian cinema. It tried to be flexible and adapt itself to the realities of initiation and growth.

With contributions from a number of investors and filmmakers, Iranian cinema matured over time. It was affected by various social vicissitudes such as the Constitutional Revolution and the World Wars. After World War II, Iranian cinema set out to make further productions and to develop its fundamentals under the State's new rules (Sadr, 2006). During the early days of television and animation filmmaking in the country, cinema was the main modern entertainment medium, and it was driven mainly by the private sector. Having its own infrastructure,

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<sup>1</sup> Mozafaradin Shah was the first Iranian who watched a cinematography show in Paris. This was a preliminary step to the emergence of Iranian cinema which followed with the making of early Iranian documentary films from 1900.

Iranian cinema carried on its activity only in live-action filmmaking until the first attempts were made to make animated films for exhibition in cinemas.

Similarly to cinema, the private sector initially funded television in Iran in 1958. A decade later, the government took control of television, thus removing the private investor. Since then, television has been a government organization playing a key role in the development of animation in Iran. Despite the appearance of Iranian cinema and television, the emergence of animation was totally dependent on government support from the outset. This situation did not change later, even decades after the Islamic revolution when the Iranian animation sector had found a place in three types of activities: in education; production; and screening. By 2013 the animation sector had developed into a domestic industry employing substantial numbers of people.

The first Iranian animation production in 1979 was never completed. In the 1990s-2000s, several Iranian animation filmmakers tried to make full-length films. Among such projects, six cases are notable in terms of the way in which the productions were run. At the time, Iranian animation filmmaking had three decades of experience in making other types of animation films supported mostly by government budget. The filmmakers assumed that the time was come to make films for audiences and move toward a trade of animation filmmaking. Half of the projects encountered failure, but efforts on subsequent projects did not stop. Finally, the last one was successfully screened in 2013 after overcoming hurdles such as gaining essential funds, completion of production phases, development of advertising campaigns and using the distribution and screening services of the cinema industry. Iranian animation filmmakers found this type of filmmaking to be a means by which they could pave the way for the birth of real professional animation filmmaking. However, in practice they encountered problems mainly in

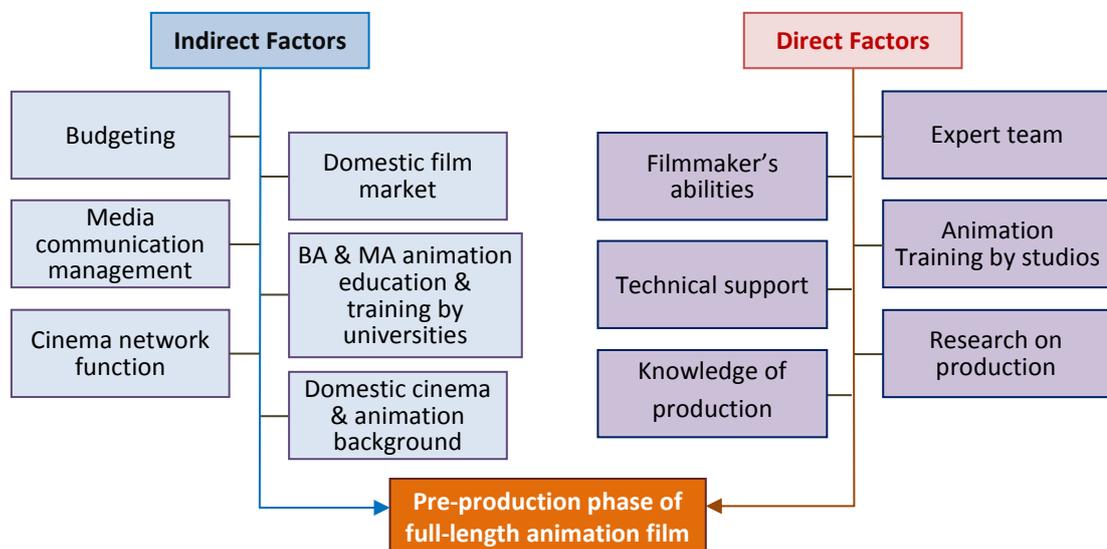
the beginning phases of production. All the projects had similar major problems which affected their pre-production phases.

### The problem

Iranian full-length animation filmmaking has been under the influence of indirect and direct factors. These cause problems when a film is put into production. The problems primarily affect the film's pre-production, which hugely influences its outcome.

Indirect factors are those which affect a film's production without direct control of its filmmaker. In contrast, all the activities of a filmmaker in progressing production to make a film are direct factors. Thus, with regard to the subject of the research study, the main problems relate to both sorts of factors affecting full-length animation films' pre-production phase as indicated in chart A.

Chart A



In terms of indirect factors, the main problem comes from budgeting. Animation filmmaking has been totally dependent on the government budget, which includes full-length filmmaking. This policy has led filmmakers to lean on government organizations to obtain productions costs. The organisations do not do vital quality controls on the productions and products. Thus, there is no tendency among

filmmakers to compete in making quality works. Consequently, the process of production, particularly its fundamental phase, is not done properly. For this reason, filmmakers are not concerned about the pre-production phase in production practice.

Moreover, because of filmmakers' dependency on the government's budget, the flow of filmmaking depends on government management as the producer and sponsor of projects. This issue usually has its own effects on the production activity, which may appear as

- replacing a new manager with a different view on the ongoing projects,
- limitations in budgeting and dictating changes to the content of films.

Naturally, in this situation, the activity of filmmaking has to carry on under a style of management which is more administrative in nature, with no concern for creative practices and requirements of filmmaking.

On the other hand, some Iranian animation films were screened on television first of all. The cinema market was for live-action films, not animations. However current animation films stand a better chance in the cinema. This has led full-length animation filmmakers to be more hopeful of finding a way to use the existing cinema industry network to present their films. Circumstances are changing, but the problems in the past were considerable.

Among the indirect factors, academic teaching of animation filmmaking has no notable role in the implementation of full-length film projects, although scholars can play a very helpful role in promotion of such productions.

In chart A, the expert team is the top direct factor and has the main role in running a full-length film project. In the projects under investigation in this study, the team members had backgrounds in animation filmmaking, but were novices in full-length animation filmmaking. They set up and conducted the production relying on

anything they had experienced and learned during their careers. Initiating the projects, they found themselves in a tough, challenging situation. This proved that they do not know about many aspects of the work.

This awareness led them to try to learn to make their films through trial and error. Using this approach, the production progressed chaotically, mixing implementation of pre-production and production phases together.

Consequently, key steps of pre-production were implemented incompletely, or some of them were neglected or ignored. Sometimes during the pre-production phase, the filmmakers were unaware of how they could use methods and strategies in creating the film's elements and concepts. As part of the problem, such matters became worse when productions faced limitations of technical support.

Another factor is the process of doing research for the projects. Most of the filmmakers researched their project's story or the animated films produced by well-known companies. But, their studies did not cover the methods of filmmaking or even the experiences of their Iranian peers.

Training in filmmaking is also a solution by which the filmmakers tried to increase their teams' skills in accordance with the production's requirements. The training was mostly aimed at improving the teams' abilities in implementation of production steps. In these projects, the main shortcomings originated from the pre-production phase in that its steps and function were not sufficiently clear to the filmmakers.

In brief, all these factors together have caused the shortcomings below, influencing the production of the full-length animation film projects.

- Insufficient skilled personnel,
- Lack of competition among filmmakers,
- No defined vision and scheme of actions in this type of production,
- Low experience and knowledge of filmmakers in their productions,
- Lack of awareness of pre-production methods and strategies,
- Lack of fundamental research and development,
- Dependency on the government budget,
- Government mismanagement issues,
- Dependency on the cinema network for distribution and screening,
- Unclear scope of academic teaching of animation,
- Uncertainty of the cinema industry about the success of full-length animation films,
- Low collaboration between universities and the film industry, and
- Limitations in technical support.

### **Contributions to the knowledge of animation film production**

Part of this study's focus is on the primary phase of full-length animation filmmaking. Through the relevant context, its key parts are investigated from two standpoints. One is steps and process of implementation in this phase, and two is how filmmakers organise and handle these.

The study discusses aspects and roles of this phase in the intended productions in order to clarify what the filmmakers had done in making their films. Spelling out the details of their actions helps to review the process of creation in animation filmmaking through their different approaches. The study also itemises and discusses four aspects of the subject to contribute a better understanding of this part in animation filmmaking;

- First, developing an understanding of the importance and the role of the pre-production phase in developing a successful full-length animation film;

Making such an animation film, filmmakers have to bring the content of the story to life through a series of harmonic audiovisual concepts. It is feasible to do this during the course of pre-production, when filmmakers try to build up the concepts initially through the generation of many ideas. It is only possible to achieve this by applying systematic methods and strategies in support of the creative ability of the filmmaker. This systematic implementation is used by professional full-length animation filmmakers e.g. in Pixar and Disney studios.

There is no specific model to indicate how to utilize these strategies in this systematic approach. Their application may vary from studio to studio. But they all use these methods:

- writing steps e.g. script,
- visualisation steps e.g. storyboard,
- sound creation steps, e.g. creation of characters' voices,
- motion tests e.g. character action test, and
- composition step as story reel during the pre-production phase.

When creating audio-visual concepts, a filmmaker has to count on a skilled team assisting him in making these outputs ready to use for the next phases of production. Thus, the pre-production phase effectively builds the values of a film, which needs to attract the attention of audiences.

Accordingly, the study spells out multiple aspects of this process in order to develop a better understanding of its function in full-length animation filmmaking. This also includes the functions of storyboard and story reel in ensuring the production of a film of the highest quality.

- Second, showing how the pre-production phase has developed historically in Iran;

In general, the study primarily notes the emergence of Iranian animation filmmaking followed its years of development. Based on this background, the discussion carries on with an explanation of subsequent events paving the way for full-length animation filmmaking. In this part, the study's focus is particularly on pre-production in the leading projects. This part shows how the filmmakers deal with the hurdles of filmmaking and the methods they have used in driving the productions.

- Third, analysing data gathered from Iranian animation filmmakers in order to develop an understanding of the process

Relying on the contextual data mentioned as the basis for the domestic animation sector, the organisation of pre-production by Iranian animation filmmakers is the key part of the findings of the research. The filmmakers had come up with their own solutions in the pre-production of these projects to handle the production and completion of films. Thus, the focus is on the way they dealt with the pre-production phase as the vital factor in animation filmmaking.

- Fourth, presenting an analysis of the issues affecting the pre-production phase;

In this regard, as mentioned earlier, two sorts of factors, indirect and direct, which affected the primary phase of production, constitute the main sections of the analysis. After analysis of factors such as governmental, historical and economic, the study concentrates on indirect factors.

### **The structure of the thesis**

Eight chapters cover the thesis contents and include three main areas consisting of Iranian filmmaking, animation length filmmaking in the world, and analysis of these various data.

After introducing the study and its scope in chapter one, chapter two explains the research methodologies used in processing the data. After that, chapter three presents literature reviews relating to the pre-production phase in full-length animation filmmaking and the organisation of seven animation length films by Iranian filmmakers. Beginning with a summarized history, the first part investigates the emergence of methods and strategies utilized in the pre-production of animation length filmmaking as well as its recent evolution. The next part begins with a brief background of Iranian cinema and animation. Then it continues with a description of seven early Iranian full-length animation film projects.

Chapter four analyses the differences in execution of the pre-production phase by Ghibli (Japan), Aardman (UK) and Pixar (USA) animation filmmakers. The ways they treat the story, create its audiovisual contents and use strategies, shows that they execute this phase significantly. Among them Pixar has developed a process which is appropriate to use as a theoretical example.

Chapter five illustrates the Iranian background to animation filmmaking during two main periods: before animation and after its emergence. The early period highlights how different types of art and performance in Iran communicated with people or entertained them before the emergence of modern media such as cinema and television. Subsequent to that is the period of the advent of cinema, television and animation. Iranian animation filmmaking has four eras of evolution: its emergence during 1957-69, growth during 1969-79, stagnation during 1979-90 and revitalization in the 1990s.

Two primary eras spell out the evolution of animation filmmaking during the two decades before the Islamic revolution in 1979. The third era reflects the stagnation of activities in the animation sector after the revolution and during wartime (1980-1988). The fourth era is the time of revitalization when parts of the animation sector became active and all types of animation films were put into production (1990s-2000s).

The seven full-length film projects are the main subject in chapter six, focusing on their productions from 1980 until 2012. The background mentioned in the previous chapter and the data obtained from the domestic filmmakers support the contents in this chapter. It talks about the filmmakers, the projects and their circumstances in organising the pre-production phase of full-length animation filmmaking.

Chapter seven concentrates on a comparison of two kinds of approaches to the implementation of pre-production: a theoretical example and a trial-and-error method. The main parameters in this comparison relate to the way by which the filmmakers drive initial filmmaking steps in the production of their films.

The final chapter primarily gives a brief overview of the findings, of the animation sector and the condition of animation filmmaking. It also reviews the ongoing teaching of animation filmmaking. After that, the chapter presents a series of actions constituting a strategy for improvement of animation length filmmaking in the country.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Data and methods**

#### **The research questions**

As mentioned in the introduction, there are both direct factors and indirect factors which have an impact on the production of full-length animation filmmaking in the country.

Indirect factors include the dominant conditions which influence the activity of production and limit the progress which can be made. Reliance on the government budget, limitations of screening on national TV, government management issues and lack of effective relationships between the animation sector and the universities are the main indirect factors. These commonly come from outside of the core of the production activity. Thus, the filmmaker has no influence on these factors.

In contrast, the direct factors are the filmmaking activities by the filmmakers and their teams, and these affect the process of production. They need to be aware of the basics of production practice and related areas, and that they are the key to helping them make considerable improvements and progress. It also assists them in solving any problems which may arise. In this case the primary shortcomings relate to the implementation of the pre-production phase by the film-makers; these can cause subsequent problems and failures in their work. In this context, the following questions arise:

- Why were Iranian filmmakers unsuccessful in making their forerunner full-length animation films?
- Why does the pre-production phase in Iranian full-length animation filmmaking not sufficiently support the development and creative basis of the film?

- How did they implement the pre-production phase in the first seven<sup>2</sup> Iranian full-length animation films?
- What factors affected their practices during planning and production of the projects?

### **Aims**

Focusing on the relevant domestic subject areas of the study, the research work aims:

- To find out what paved the way for the introduction of the first full-length animation film projects in Iran,
- To discover how the filmmakers implemented the stages of pre-production e.g. storyboarding and story reel in making full-length animation film projects,
- To understand why the first three projects remained unfinished,
- To find out why the finished projects were not screened, and
- To illuminate what kind of factors affect implementation of the pre-production phase in the projects

### **The specifics of the research**

The research questions indicate that the study deals with resources and data in the areas of media and culture, which relate particularly to the activities of animation filmmaking. The research investigates the types of human actions which are qualitative in nature. Animation filmmaking as a creative practical process involves a series of creative practices and decisions by its filmmaker. A filmmaker and a team set these into motion through various ways of thinking, research,

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<sup>2</sup> As the central investigation of the research study, these are the early full-length animation film projects which were put into production by Iranian filmmakers. The first three were left unfinished, then two were completed but not exhibited and two were exhibited to the public. Chapter six investigates how the filmmakers dealt with the fundamental phases of these projects: 1. *Mouse & Cat* (unfinished), 2. *Tak Taz* (unfinished), 3. *Namaki & The Giant* (unfinished), 4. *Sun of Egypt* (screened), 5. *Jamshid and Khorshid* (not screened), 6. *Simorq's Heart* (screened in Fajr Film Festival), and 7. *Tehran 2121* (screened).

inspiration, coming up with ideas, visualising them, showing them and getting feedback and then preparing audio-visual concepts by combining images and sound into a film.

At the same time, a variety of direct and indirect factors affects the filmmaker's involvement with the process. It is possible to understand their activities by the language they use and the stories they tell. Such an approach provides a deeper understanding in investigating actions and interactions in this subject matter. This includes a large amount of qualitative data that would be impossible to illustrate using quantitative methods. Accordingly, applying qualitative methods seems an appropriate method for underpinning the research study. Hornig Priest (1996: 5) states, 'qualitative methods are designed to explore and assess things that cannot easily be summarized numerically'.

Thus, these methods are used in this study – especially because – the historical, governmental, cultural, and economic factors also affect such types of creative activity. Illustrating the influence of these indirect factors in implementing the pre-production phase is feasible through narrative description. This enables the researcher to clarify connections among the dominant conditions in the production, allowing him to analyse and evaluate the cases by explanation and interpretation. Therefore, the workable method here is interpretative.

Again, in line with the intended scope, the research questions are in open-ended form, implying the research tends to be developed through a process-oriented manner. As Strauss and Corbin (1998: 36) state, it starts with the research problem; in this case, the defining characteristics and qualitative shortcomings that apply to full-length animation filmmaking in Iran. Considering the nature of these

type of data, the grounded theory<sup>3</sup> aligns well as a research methodology for this study. Using this method, supported by inductive logic, the study investigates relevant areas including usable data with regard to the perspective of the topic and the questions.

The appropriateness of this method is also notable, because of two specifics of the subject: first, full-length animation filmmaking in the country is in its infancy; secondly, no study has yet been undertaken to understand the issues arising from it.

Consequently, the study benefits from application of grounded theory as a research methodology. This enables the formulation of a view on how the pre-production phase can best be implemented in Iranian full-length animation filmmaking. The main components in the process are: research design, data collection and analysis.

### **Research design, the study's areas**

Animation filmmaking in Iran, the core area of this study, includes the production of seven different full-length animation film projects between 1979 and 2010. As a reflection of the filmmakers' actions and the practice of animation filmmaking in general, these constitute the essential technical background.

On the other hand, the general literature provides a background to help explain the fundamental concepts in support of the study. Similarly, the researcher looks at the context and technical literature of pioneer filmmakers in America. This provides comparative data on the pre-production phase.

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<sup>3</sup> Strauss and Corbin define this method as follows: 'the grounded theory approach is a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon'.

Silverman (1993), Corbin and Strauss (1998: 35, 53) categorise these two data types as nontechnical and technical literatures that are the sources of research. They categorise these as primary and complementary data.

Accordingly, table 2-1 (in the appendix) shows the relevant areas of animation filmmaking as primary and supplementary data. The first area includes two parts:

A, nontechnical literature reflects the indigenous artistic and cultural background related to the aspect of the subject matter; and

B, the domestic background of the cinema industry and the animation sector denotes the essential basis of the study.

The second area covers two parts, as: C, in general, the literature covers the pre-production phase, emergence and evolution of full-length animation filmmaking, and D, in particular, the technical background consists of the implementation of the pre-production phase in Pixar studios. Relying on these, the research goes through the following stages to form its theory systematically.

### **Categorising data through the collection**

The primary data, in the form of nontechnical literature, reveal parts of the domestic history of art and culture pertaining to the image, motion and background of filmmaking. The non-technical literature contains data in connection with the technical literature of the pre-production phase including roots of cultural context in imagery works such as characterisation and story as well as efforts to visualize the story. This part of the data ends with the background of Iranian cinema and animation.

Gathering and categorising the data of technical literature, the focus is on two types of subjects.

- One, effective factors in the pre-production phase of the projects,

- Two, examples of prevalent implementation of the pre-production phase by successful filmmakers.

In the first type, the key concepts are those that convey how and why these factors cause problems in the implementation of the pre-production phase. Also in the second type, effective factors are illustrated to show their role in this phase in successful films. The data afford general insight into the circumstances of domestic animation filmmaking activities, demonstrating what has happened up to now.

This also reflects how the pre-production phase was carried out in the seven domestic full-length animation film projects. This part is the core subject of investigation in the study. All of these data were obtained using evidence such as documentation, archival records, direct observation, physical artefacts and interviews, as reflected in table 2-1.

### **Data collection**

Corbin and Strauss (1998: 73) mention that in theory development, both enquiry and theoretical comparison develop the understanding of a researcher. Here, the research questions lead the researcher. They indicate specific areas in which to look for the essential data. Collecting such data, the researcher must search carefully in order to find the segments containing applicable and reliable facts with dimensions and properties fit to provide a suitable background. Such background information explains fundamental concepts about the function of various factors in the pre-production phase.

Along with this, as Corbin and Strauss (1998: 94) suggest, the researcher makes a choice of a theoretical sample in order to explore different ranges of dimensions and aspects of the phase in the cases at hand. The sample's traits make possible theoretical comparisons in order to establish dimensions, properties and multiple

aspects of this phase as applicable in evaluating the seven project case studies already mentioned.

Looking at the theoretical example, the technical data indicate that the process of the pre-production phase evolves through time by making a number of full-length animation films. It shows that after this experience, the comprehensive model for implementing the pre-production phase was formed in Pixar (chapters 3 & 4). The model represents the essential dimensions and properties of the pre-production phase, providing a benchmark basis for theoretical comparison. The stages of the pre-production phase include practice, methods and strategies; the theoretical example enables a theoretical comparison to be made in order to identify dimensions and properties of implementation of the pre-production phase in the seven projects.

Therefore, the foremost area is the technical literature of animation filmmaking, with a focus on the pre-production phase. In reviewing this part of the data, any piece of information pertinent to the pre-production phase is gathered. The collected data comprise four major aspects, including stages of the process, position and role of skilled personnel and their tasks in this phase, both in the general background and in the technical literature. The researcher must search carefully in order to find and collect suitable examples. The range of relevant concerns may include:

- **One**, determining, developing and writing a story for a film: coming up with an idea, 'brainstorming' and developing it as a film narrative to the point of writing it in cinematic form (key terms: script, screenplay, sketching, director, story man/artist, script writer, brain trust),
- **Two**, converting the narrative's elements into audio-visual forms: translating the afore-mentioned written elements into audio-visual works as part of the

procedure of pre-visualisation and sound design (key terms: concept artist, character designer, talent voice, dubbing, character voices; concept design: environment, character and props),

- **Three**, continuing the process by compounding the designed visual elements: visualizing the whole story by combination of the visual elements in cinematic form depicted through still images as shots retrieved from the screen-play (key terms: layout artist, storyboard artist, layout design, storyboarding, pitching), and
- **Four**, completing the compounding practice by animating selected key moves of characters in shots and scenes: preparing a preview-film by filming storyboard images cut together with some leading actions of characters, camera moves, temporary music and sound (key terms: story reel, animatic, sequence, timing)

Another area of data is any non-technical literature that helps to identify indirect factors relating to the process. Focusing on the fundamentals on which production of a full-length animation film depend, I gathered the data presenting historical, cultural, economic and networking infrastructures. The researcher may categorise these as follows:

- Historical and cultural background of domestic animation filmmaking
- Political issues and the role of government in running the productions
- Academic and vocational teaching of animation filmmaking
- Budgeting a full-length animation film
- Distribution and exhibition network and regulations

Dealing with the data along the collection process enabled the researcher to understand more deeply the function and the role of the pre-production phase in this type of filmmaking. Understanding the details of the subject was essential

through the research study stages such as dealing with the filmmakers as interviewees. As Kvale (2007: 121) mentions that 'dialogical intersubjectivity refers to agreement through a rational discourse and reciprocal criticism between those interrelating a phenomenon.'

Based on this understanding, the researcher planned to arrange qualitative interviews with key domestic filmmakers directly involved in producing full-length animation films.

In the event, except for the first project, availability of filmmakers from the six projects<sup>4</sup> made it possible to obtain two sorts of key valid facts. The first is in relation to their motivation in running the projects. The second is how they approached and implemented the pre-production phase. For the first project, owing to its specific character, the documentation data explained the aspects mentioned.

As this part of the data is the core of the study, the limitations of qualitative interviewing, pointed out by Kvale (2007: 85-87), were obstacles to obtaining valid and generalized information. To prevent such bias, collection of the data was managed through multiple resources in connection with each of the six full-length animation film projects. These consisted of monitoring and gathering any published news, reports and interviews about these projects that had been published when these productions were in progress and after that until the time of carrying out this study. These different data make feasible the systematic crosschecking with the data obtained in the main interviews with the filmmakers. Thus, multiple types of data serve to illustrate each project depending on its own particular situation at the time of its production.

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<sup>4</sup> 2. *Tak Taz*, 3. *Namaki & The Giant*, 4. *Sun of Egypt*, 5. *Jamshid and Khorshid*, 6. *Simorq's Heart*, and 7. *Tehran 2121*;

Moreover, in some projects the team members central to the projects carried out data collection as well as relying on observation practice. This happened in the *Tak Taz* project when the researcher was a key member of the filmmaking team. He worked on this project, where he witnessed every ongoing activity in the production. As a whole, every known and accessible related source of data was referred to, to support the process of the research work.

### **Data analysis**

Analysing data from qualitative research, Corbin and Strauss mention that a systematic set of procedures is a method 'to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon'. Applying this method, the suggested process is utilised to design analysis of the research procedure by defining a set of concepts in the study. Dealing with the data during the research, finding and collecting appropriate parts, two main types of concepts come up that represent:

- A, actions on pre-production practice, and
- B, related and influencing matters coming from outside this activity.

**A**, The concepts in pre-production represent a progressive activity, whereby, during its process, filmmakers plan, make and compound imagery and audio elements of the film through distinctive stages. In this practice, they use visual and audio media to turn a story's elements into visual and audible contents. They also apply particular methods enabling them to create audio-visual concepts as unique ideas conveying a story in the best and most appropriate manner for the film. Through the technical literature, we repeatedly come across this type of data that represent such concepts. These axial segments relate to story setting, element design, scene setting and story reel, which trace out significant concepts in relation to the essence of pre-production practice.

**B**, In this type of data, the concepts consist of factors, e.g. historical, cultural, financial, educational, regulations and infrastructure, which may influence the activities of the pre-production phase.

In analysing both types of data, as Strauss and Corbin suggest, we specify them through a process of coding and classification consisting of open coding, axial coding and selective coding.

### **Open coding analysis**

The primary step is to apply open coding, analysing the data line by line. Using this process, the researcher tries to understand what is going on during the process of the pre-production phase. Thus, the first step is to classify the concepts that convey elements of this activity, including a team that prepares outputs utilising particular methods and strategies. This allows us to discover the key factors that play an effective role in the implementation of the pre-production phase. Consequently, the analysed concepts of the technical data are classifiable in four categories: story setting, element design, scene setting and story reel, as shown in table 2-2 (appendix).

In analysing data type B, apart from the factors within the production activity, the question is what factors influence the pre-production phases of the seven full-length animation film projects. Applying open coding, the analysis identifies four key categories of concepts; one, the domestic motion image background; two, domestic film and cinema; three, domestic animation filmmaking, and four, Iranian full-length animation filmmaking.

### **Analysis by axial coding**

In the next stage of the analysis, the researcher attempts to identify a variety of properties and dimensions existing in the categories. Using who, what and how questions as analytic tools in the analysis, leads us to formulate four

subcategories that are key factors in the main categories. The subcategories were labelled based on the latent concepts in the technical data, which are abstract enough to take into account any pertinent concept.

Thus, as table 2-3 shows, the subcategories are labelled as four types, each one classifying the concepts by the relevant question. 'Specialist' categorises the concepts that respond to 'who questions'. They relate to the responsible person/s who implement, supervise or collaborate in part of the process. 'Method' responds to 'what questions' with answers revealing the kind of method employed in production. The specialists use these to present the outcome of pre-production stages in the team sessions.

'Strategy' classifies concepts that answer 'how questions' and consists of methods and solutions that promote achievement of better quality of output during each stage of the pre-production phase. And, 'Output' categorises the respondents' answers to 'what questions' that are about the finished work of each stage of the process. This work is submitted for approval or revision by the head/s of production. Then, the outputs are ready to be used in the subsequent steps and references.

Again, in data type B, the concepts analysed by questions fall into four subcategories. 'Fundamental' identifies those concepts responding to 'where, when, what and why questions', revealing origins, backgrounds and infrastructures, which have relevant roles in the pre-production phases of the projects. 'Facilitator' classifies those factors that make the progress of activities in their pertinent area feasible, based on 'what and who questions'. Then, 'Limiter' sorts the concepts containing preventing factors in their own area where they create obstacles to the flow of the activities. Finally, 'result' clarifies those concepts which answer 'with what' questions as outcomes of every process.

### **Selective coding**

In this stage of the analysis, the process continues through the identification of a central category. As the core theme in the study is investigation of the pre-production phase of full-length animation filmmaking in Iran, so the central category can be identified as 'full-length animation filmmaking in Iran'. The general and specific concepts of this category are seen frequently in both types of A and B data, which are essential in building up the theory. Therefore, these concepts are the basis for developing the theory of the study; the researcher does this by a process of building blocks.

The analysis is completed by a story line accompanied by tables and diagrams that constructs blocks of the theory in relation to two aspects; one, the factors influential in running full-length animation film in the country and, two, implementation of the pre-production phase in the seven projects.

### **The relevant ethics**

This thesis contains some unique and unpublished information which was given by the animation filmmakers who were active in filmmaking when the research was being conducted. The filmmakers explained the process of their work describing in detail their approach to making their full-length animation films. More importantly, they spoke about how they managed their teams, handled the stages of pre-production and worked with managers from government.

Concerning the ethics of the research study, the researcher explained and clarified the purpose of the interview when recruiting the respondents.

Thus, they attended the interview sessions fully aware of and in agreement with the proposed outcomes of the study. Bertrand and Hughes (2005: 18) mention these ethics as 'informed consent'. The following points were covered with the respondents by the researcher prior to the interviews:

1. All those interviewed were informed that their voices would be recorded during the interview
2. They answered a series of questions in writing in relation to the interview contents and their personal information.
3. They also signed an answer sheet as a formal part of their awareness about giving their data to the researcher.
4. They understood and consented that the information would be used for academic purposes and processed in a research study and would be written and published in English in the UK.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Literature review**

This chapter covers a literature review relevant to the pre-production phase in full-length animation filmmaking and the approaches of Iranian animation filmmakers to this type of filmmaking. It begins with the background of the emergence of this phase, then its role and importance in the creative process, and utilization of strategies and methods in its implementation. After that, a brief history of Iranian cinema and animation focuses on Iranian filmmakers' attempts to arrange production of the most important full-length animation films.

### **Emergence and evolution of the pre-production phase**

The origin of animated films goes back to the early stages of animation history when filmmakers started to discover this medium's capabilities for filmmaking. The invention of technical devices and early experiences of image motion occurred primarily in Europe. These assisted pioneer filmmakers in making the first animated films by 1900. Since then, the significant evolution of animation filmmaking came about mostly in America, where individual filmmakers made the first films. Among them, Winsor McCay, skilled in graphic novel drawing, made his third film *Gertie, The Dinosaur* (1914) which showed a character of a trained dinosaur (McLaughlin, 2001). The dinosaur's behaviour revealed characterization designed by McCay.

The happened at the same time as the first studios<sup>5</sup> started to produce animation films, mainly after 1912 (Lund, 1999). In those years, filmmakers followed the techniques of McCay showing animal characters in their films. Accordingly, Furniss (2007:27) notes that casting popular cat characters was how American animated cartoons developed. Most of these films were based on a simple

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<sup>5</sup> Raoul Barre Studio 1913, The John Randolph Bray Studio, William Randolph Hearst's International Film Service.

structured-plot comprised of a series of gags, happening one after another every few seconds to entertain audiences. When making these animated cartoons, their filmmakers were influenced by the comedy actions of the stars in silent live-action films at the time. The most successful cartoon stars were *Krazy Kat* (1916) and *Felix, The Cat* (1919), which became popular and influenced other filmmakers' works, including Disney.

Felix's creator and producer, Otto Mesmer and Pat Sullivan, used Charlie Chaplin's photos, showing him in different poses, to design Felix's actions (Goldmark and Keil, 2011: 21). This shows that filmmakers of animated cartoons were trying to discover ways of creating attractive behaviour for their characters. Thus, their team working efforts can be summarized as the screening of action characters with no consideration for the story line. However, this activity grew and improved, more through basing subsequent animation cartoons on the silent era.

With the release of *Steamboat Willie* in 1928, an animated cartoon with sound, filmmakers had to consider adding sound as a new element in their next productions. After this, talkie animated cartoons rapidly became popular and the business flourished. But, maintaining characters as popular stars was dependent on the further refinement of the basis of animation production.

In the early 1930s, the animation studio system had two decades of experience in organizing and managing animators and artists in production. Among the existing studios at the time, Disney employed such techniques in improving various aspects of production. Accordingly, the story department (from 1930) became the leading department; it was staffed by story-men and artists who worked on the development of stories under Disney's directions.

Making the *Silly Symphonies* series during 1929-39, Disney and his studios dealt with a great number of different characters during the production of seventy-five

short animated films. The story department had the main role in determining the values of the Symphonies' stories as they transformed their concepts into images. Every aspect of work on the Symphonies brought up new issues, highlighting how production, storytelling and characterization could be improved using innovative techniques. In the development of processing practices, storyboarding<sup>6</sup> became a key method for presenting film in its first visualization phase. The storyboard facilitated the continuity of a film's story through a series of drawn images. Its usage enabled Disney and the directors to evaluate the visual developments of stories and give feedback on essential changes and refinements.

In storytelling, the Symphonies considerably helped filmmakers to discover:

- the use of gags in relation to narrative,
- elimination of meaningless actions of character,
- development of depth of characters (North, 2008: 75),
- adjustment of the number of characters and their roles to serve the story, and
- driving the story forward by showing emotions, moods, and musical themes.

Along with Disney, other studios released their own films with famous characters. *Ko-Ko The Clown*<sup>7</sup>, *Betty Boop*<sup>8</sup>, and *Popeye The Sailor Man*<sup>9</sup>, produced by Fleischer Studio, were attractive characters because of their specific personalities. However, in *The Three Little Pigs* (1933) and *The Big Bad Wolf* (1934) Disney successfully created gags and actions synchronized with music, all based on a storyline.

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<sup>6</sup> Webb Smith developed the storyboard during the late 1920s as Stempel states (2000: 111). Johan Canemaker (1999) also points out that for the first time the storyboard was used to prepare concepts for *Steamboat Willie* and *Plane Crazy* (1929). David Whitbread (2009:114) also mentions that 'storyboarding was developed at Disney studios in the 1920s and 1930s by Webb Smith, one of Disney's animators'.

<sup>7</sup> The main character in *Out of the Inkwell* series (1919-61).

<sup>8</sup> Creating this character in the early 1930s, Max Fleischer tried presenting a plausible character attractive to a larger audience (Telotte, 2010: 85).

<sup>9</sup> Debuted in Betty Boop cartoon in 1933, It was one of Fleischer's main cartoon characters, which appeared on the screen through this popular series during the 1930s and the early 1940s (Lenburg, 2006: 90).

In making *The Three Little Pigs*, Disney attempted further revisions to characterization as he wanted to make its characters much more credible. Chuck Jones, the creator of 'Bugs Bunny', believes that personality in animation really began with 'Pigs' (Gabler, 2007: 184).

Launching production of *Snow White and Seven Dwarfs*<sup>10</sup>, a full-length animation film by Disney in 1934, revealed two facts. Pre-production, production and postproduction had been formed as the main phases for this type of filmmaking. And, it seemed that the story department had had sufficient experience to allow it to drive a creative process to produce a long story. The film's pre-production phase took fifteen months to work on (Barrier, 2003: 125-27).

Despite this, in the middle of Snow White's production, it turned out that some scenes needed to be revised. This happened because the main emphasis was on the Dwarfs rather than on Snow White and the Queen (Thomas, 1991). On laying down the scenes, it became apparent that the project required further pre-production work. This event established the principles of full-length animation filmmaking, showing the importance of story development during the pre-production phase.

Through subsequent full-length film productions<sup>11</sup>, the process improved further with the introduction of the Lieca<sup>12</sup> story reel and 'Animation Board'<sup>13</sup> and use of 'experimental animation'. In general, the evolution of the pre-production phase in Disney studios emerged in three main areas:

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<sup>10</sup> Released in 1937.

<sup>11</sup> *Pinocchio* 1940, *Fantasia* 1940, *The Reluctant Dragon* 1941, and *Dumbo* 1941.

<sup>12</sup> This term's origin goes back to German camera called Lieca, the first device used in making story reel from storyboard images.

<sup>13</sup> Organized in the early 1940s, this board was responsible for the animation department, but later, from 1950, nine supervising animators, known as 'Nine Old Men', constituted its permanent group. Beyond the tasks they were responsible for, their influence extended to picture development and similar types of entertainment (Thomas & Johnston, 1981: 159)

- creation of expert teams including a director, story-man and artist, in story units.
- development of presentational methods such as storyboard, Lica story reel, and experimental animation.
- introduction of strategies for story development such as daily feedback, refining, and quality control by Animation Boards.

These shaped a process of creativity in which the concepts of a story were systematically translated to audio-visual cinematic outputs, which could be used in production. Through the films Disney studios made in the 1940s, the process and implementation were developed. Since then, it has been used not only by studios making full-length animation films but also by other animation studios. Thomas and Johnston describe the stages of the pre-production phase used in Disney studios at the time as:

- Script; the creative process relied more on talking and visualising practices; but, in the initial stage, a script was written to provide some suggestions about how to use the story material (also called 'story treatment').
- Idea development; story-men tried to come up with ideas by creating gags, character acts and story situations through debate, artistic creativity and teamwork. They brainstormed ideas in various ways, discussed possible changes, added or deleted some aspects or details, and rearranging them numerous times until they were sure that the end result would wow audiences.
- Style design; visualising key concepts and scenes of a film's story by an artist who (in some cases) was invited by Disney to come and create characters and the world of the story. The artist created illustrations showing the unique atmosphere of the world of the story and character

traits. As 'inspirational sketches', the images stimulated the team to start thinking about the visual form of the story and its elements. The stylist artist was more concerned with capturing the whole concept of the story in visual form, and therefore the sketches did not show enough detail. The team members did this later by extracting ideas from the artist's sketches and matching and fitting them to the needs of production.

- Character model department; aided by a group of artists, they prepared pre-visualisation of the elements of a film by a variety of illustration media including pencil and pastel. Their artwork specified the proportion of characters, costume, props, actions, and moods (action sheet). The department also prepared illustrated situations, and locations for the story.
- Choice making; choosing the best ones among the suggested character designs, story situations and scenes, this gradually led the team to realise what might display the right quality and continuity of film on the screen.
- Story sketch was a type of early or pre-storyboard version consisting of a series of rough drawings by which the artist showed character, attitude, feelings, entertainment, expressions, and type of action. This method revealed what was going on in the story. In story sessions, the sketch-man and the story-man were the two main team members interactively trying to develop as many interesting ideas as possible. The story-man described the idea in an attractive way and the sketch-man drew its staging from his own perspective and attempted to present it better on the board. Through this collaboration, they prepared different approaches, which needed to be presented to Disney or the Animation Board.

Once the stylist's illustrations were ready, the story sketch-man was responsible for matching and fitting everything to work together in his storyboard. Then in the

story approval meetings, he presented the concepts through a storyboard pitching process. After this, the storyboard might be reworked again through a jump board to create new suggestions from the 'critical' group (Animation Board). The group was made up of experienced staff from the studio, from senior animators, story-men to background and layout artists (Ohmer, 2006: 211).

- Storyboard; its final version revealed a whole sequence of film that might be pitched by the director to the production team. The director, layout man, animators' supervisor, story sketch-man, and story-man collaborated in preparing the storyboard.
- Layout; led by the director, the layout-man worked on the dramatic staging of the scenes based upon the approved storyboard. He was also responsible for designing locations, camera positions, and moves in order to capture the most effective shots. Moreover, the main task of the layout man related to camera moves through the scenes and among the characters when he has to consider and display the right orientations and not confuse the audience. The outcome was usable in the creation of the story reel.
- Voice recording was the medium by which the production unit searched for the right voices to match the designated characters.
- The story reel was operated to present a prototype of the film. Assisted by a cartoon cutter, images of the storyboard were photographed, cut together, and synchronized with a sound track.
- Experimental animation, Thomas and Johnston have used this term to mean the final medium used in the pre-production phase. The studio applied this, after approval of the lead story sequence seen through the story-reel, to see how perfectly the character came to life on the screen.

As a result, in this procedure the narrative passes through four phases until it is turned into cinematic elements workable in production during the next phase.

One: the writing process includes film treatment, script and/or screenplay,

Two: the visualization process consists of concept and set design, sketching and storyboard. Designing visual elements of the story and utilizing them in scene setting in the next phase of storyboard creation.

Three: sound preparation comprises of recording characters' voices, music and effects. Preparing audio elements (particularly temporary music), which may initially be used in making the story reel and experimental animation.

Four: the composition process includes the story reel and experimental animation, two final methods by which the audio-visual materials are cut together to test how these elements serve the film in connection with each other on the screen.

This gradual processing phase requires precise implementation, enabling filmmakers to create a large number of original audio-visual ideas conveying story concepts through a cinematic form. Thus, the outcome of pre-production directly affects the film's quality and its success. Thomas Dorval believes that "a problem in pre-production is multiplied a hundredfold during the production itself" (Dorval, 2011, 3-4).

Revealing the importance of the pre-production phase, filmmakers kept using these techniques and processing practices to underpin feature animated length films for years. In the 1980s, after a period of stagnation owing to television as a rival medium and the use of digital technology in filmmaking, animation production required new changes. Major changes took place during the productions of the first few digital animated films made by the filmmakers who founded Pixar in 1986. Taking lessons from previous experiences, they reinvented the process of pre-production through the production of full-length animation films, beginning with *Toy*

*Story* (1995). The process was refined in ways such as involving experts in the creative process, developing strategies and utilizing methods of story development and visualization.

By recruiting talent in storytelling and characterization, Pixar has attempted to organize them as members of a peer culture working in a specific studio environment. They create original stories and ideas within a mutually trusting collaborative team and this makes an effective contribution to their creative efforts. This is in line with Pixar's vision in creating stories for its films by relying on its own sources rather than choosing ready-made stories.

In terms of strategies, as the first step of development, Pixar initiates research to develop its original stories. This was a revised strategy, introduced to enrich the basis of a narrative under consideration for production of an animation length film. Katherine Sarafian, the producer of *Brave* (2012), gives examples of several field research programmes they undertook to collect the essential data to support the creation of elements for this film. They created concepts for the film by relying on the materials they collected when visiting places, talking with people, and conducted visual studies on related subjects (Sarafian, 2012).

Pixar's filmmakers also use methods for pre-visualization of the story including storyboards, which are presented through a pitching process. Sims (2011: 59) states that as a blueprint for the character and actions, the storyboard is a hand-drawn comic book version in Pixar. Filmmakers began to use the number of storyboards more intensively after the success of *Finding Nemo* (2003), *Ratatouille* (2007) and *Wall-E* (2008).

For filmmakers, the story reel, complete with a sound track of a character's voice and music, is a tool of quality control for estimation of timing and evaluation of character actions in shot and scene sequences (Henne et al., 1996).

In Pixar, the duration of working on a high quality pre-production is quite long. Its filmmakers spend a period of between four to five years building up a story for a full-length animation film. Processes which are done repeatedly (including preparation of storyboards and story reels) take up a large amount of this time. With respect to this, digital paperless tools have emerged to make the process of refinement of storyboard and story reel faster and easier (Simon, 2013).

Overall, greater attention has been paid to the role of the pre-production phase owing to the existence of competition between animation studios and the risks of failure in attracting audiences. For example, *Rise of the Guardians* (2012), produced by DreamWorks, was unsuccessful owing to imperfect aspects of its story and characters (Hooks, 2012).

### **The pre-production phase in Iranian full-length animation films**

Animation filmmaking in Iran has a history dating back to the advent of cinema in 1900. About six decades later, the first Iranian animated films emerged, while the Iranian cinema industry was active opening cinema halls and there had been a background of three decades of filmmaking (Naficy, 2011).

During the 1960s to the early 1970s, animation filmmakers had been involved in making short films through which they experienced cinematic expression and techniques of animation. Then, production facilities provided by the cinema centre of Kanun<sup>14</sup> led filmmakers to making good quality short films. These were produced by small teams of filmmakers who were concerned with making films which would be successful in film festivals (Omid, 1995).

By the late 1980s, activities related to animation existed in three places: television, Kanun and the University of Farabi. The centre of production was still in Kanun, when the first few homemade animated advertising films appeared on television,

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<sup>14</sup> 'Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults' is a cultural organization known as Kanun.

which also broadcast imported animated films. All these constituted part of an animation sector which was being newly formed at the time.

In 1979, the first Iranian full-length animation film, *Mouse and Cat*, was put into production. This occurred after the Islamic Revolution and at the beginning of the war. Despite war conditions, the film's production continued its pre-production in Tehran. Then, the filmmaker relocated the project to complete it in a studio in Bulgaria (Omid, 1995).

Although the project received a budget from government, its production was never completed. This happened because of the filmmaker's lack of familiarity with the fundamentals of animation filmmaking. In particular, the production was stopped because of disagreements between the studio and the filmmaker over the lack of sound design and complicated design of the figures of the characters. These were two important parts of design the filmmaker had omitted when the film was under development in its pre-production phase.

Later on, from the mid 1990s, a new generation of animation filmmakers subsequently set out to make six full-length animation films. Two of these were never finished, one was screened, and the rest were completed but not exhibited in public. The first project, *Tak Taz* (1997-99) failed, because both its sponsor and producers did not realise what resources were needed for such a large production. In making *Namaki and The Giant* (2000-02) its filmmakers tried implementing a story development process using mostly standard methods and strategies. Despite attaining quality outputs suitable for use in production, the available funds ran out and it forced the filmmakers to shut down the project.

In the next production, the story of *The Sun of Egypt* (2002-04) was initially written as part of a TV animation series. Later, in the middle of production, its filmmakers decided to upgrade the film to a full-length film. The filmmakers used previously

designed elements, but did not fundamentally rework them or implement new development practices on the story. The film's production resulted in a film of full-length duration, but low quality. The filmmakers invested their own funds in the production, but had to sell the film's concession to a government organization, which deprived it from an organized screening. Thus, *The Sun of Egypt* was screened infrequently and in inappropriate conditions.

*Jamshid and Khorshid* (2004-08), was a sequel project from the same filmmakers who attempted to use their experiences in making this film. They set up a pre-production process in which the steps were implemented more accurately. The filmmakers paid attention and devoted time to creative and pre-visualization processes. Consequently, the outcome had much more value as a full-length film. But, unfortunately, *Jamshid and Khorshid* missed the chance of being screened owing to the shortcomings of the distribution and screening network of Iranian cinema. The network<sup>15</sup> was reluctant to service this type of film as it assumed box offices might lose money on it.

*Simorq's Heart*, the next film in this series, encountered a similar fate after it was completed. The pre-production stages of *Simorq's Heart* had no particular logic or order of implementation relating to the next phases. Its filmmakers made this film through trial and error mixing up both the pre-production and postproduction stages.

Matters improved when making *Tehran 2121* for a couple of reasons: experience gained to date and a significant budget for the film's production. Pre-production of *Tehran 2121* dealt with the creation of its story world, designing Tehran, its urban aspects and atmosphere of a very modern city existing in the next century. This took most of the team's efforts, while the characters had the main role in

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<sup>15</sup> Belonging to the private sector and the government.

conveying the story. Acting out the characters, the filmmakers asked a team of theatre performers to play the film's key scenes, figuring out how the characterization and character actions should be designed. This method had already been used in making *Namaki and The Giant* and *Simorq's Heart*. In any case, although *Tehran 2121* had the chances to be better crafted than the previous films, its pre-production was implemented without a specific plan. Moreover, its story, based more on dialogue than action, was criticized as not being suitable for an animation film.

As a result, although *Tehran 2121* was screened in early 2013, Iranian animation filmmakers still have two main obstacles to overcome in the way of animation filmmaking for the big screen. First is the way they deal with the production of animation, particularly in full-length filmmaking. The second is that they need to improve their abilities in implementation of the pre-production phase in making films in future.

Also, the Iranian cinema industry has no regulations for the licencing of animated films. The filmmakers have to find solutions to resolve this issue.

## Chapter 4

This chapter presents the data in support of the study's theoretical comparison investigating the properties and dimensions of the pre-production phase in seven Iranian full-length animation film projects<sup>16</sup>. The data demonstrate the execution of the pre-production phase as implemented by well-known full-length animation filmmakers. The main processing stages are divided into four types, and consist of the writing process, concept/set design, storyboarding and story reel. Each type is described in relation to its output and strategies applied by filmmakers through the creative process. They also use some specific strategies to facilitate the process of creation. In this process the director is the key person.

### **The making of full length Animation film in the Ghibli Studio**

As a director-driven<sup>17</sup> animation studio based in Tokyo since 1985, Ghibli has produced a number of full-length films of note, including *Princess Mononoke* in 1997 and *Spirited Away* in 2001. Hayao Miyazaki directed these films whose pre-production phases were not organised in a similar manner to the way his American peers might organise theirs. The emergence of ideas, story development and characterization were heavily dependent on the sketches and drawings created by Miyazaki.

For instance, in the making of *Princess Mononoke*, Miyazaki's storyboards were the main source of production. Inspired by a Japanese fable, Miyazaki developed the final storyboard based on the actual fable and early sketches, and by assembling complementary ideas, and research filled in the domestic details. He and his team visited the ancient forests of Yakushima and the Shirakami-Sanchi mountains to do a visual study for designing parts of the film's setting.

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<sup>16</sup> Discussed in chapter six.

<sup>17</sup> Director is the source of ideas and responsible for all aspects of a film

Reviewing the development process of *Princess Mononoke*, there was no script in its initiation. Instead, the storyboard was turned into a detailed blueprint for the film, clearly reflecting the characters, their actions, scene setting, together with full notes about sound and every visual point in each shot. In an interview Miyazaki admits that he starts his films with storyboard drawing and does not have a finished and finalised story when he and his team commence the production phase of a film (Mes, 2002). As a result, script writing is not part of such a development process as Miyazaki relies mainly on visualization of the story from the beginning.

This kind of approach to underpinning animation length films puzzles American animation filmmakers. Accordingly, Johan Lasseter<sup>18</sup>, the leading director at Pixar, states “when we make animated films we will start with a script and then we have a staff of storyboard artists that work and rework the storyboards.” While, in Ghibli, Miyazaki starts the production phase by animating shots along with development and completion of storyboards (Hawker, 2003).

The strategy Miyazaki uses in development and refinement of his storyboards is one where he imagines himself repeatedly in the situations of the characters. Having their outline in mind, Miyazaki reviews them in locations of the story numerous times. This enables him to figure out the audiovisual aspects of film through a number of redrawn versions of storyboards. He continues working on the storyboards even close to the deadline (Mes, 2002).

Another strategy is the utilization of an ‘image album’, a well-known step in Japanese animation filmmaking, which is created prior to the production phase. Joe Hisaishi, who has composed most of the scores of Ghibli’s full-length animation films, reflects on his experience about the ‘image album’ and its usage.

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<sup>18</sup> Co-founder and director of the *Toy Story* films.

He states that, firstly, Miyazaki gives him four kinds of information: a simple version of a storyboard, a short explanation of the story, an introduction to the characters, and ten keywords, which form the basis to construct the music for the film.

With these, Hisaishi composes an early version of the music for the film during the first year of a three-year production span. The availability of the music, the storyboard and the images of the characters facilitates the making of an audiovisual version of the film which is recorded on a CD. Hisaishi states that there are two purposes of the CD: it helps him to compose the final music and score for the film. Also Miyazaki uses this music as a source of inspiration helping him to do further development on the film's storyboards (Bellano, 2012).

There are differences when comparing Ghibli's pre-production phase, with Pixar's pre-production arrangements. On top of that, it is necessary to proceed with the production phase when pre-production has not yet been completed. The production phase begins as soon as the director approves parts of the storyboard. In such situations, there is no room for mistakes, as Miyazaki himself admits that this method of his is a dangerous way for animation filmmaking to proceed (Mes, 2002).

Isao Takahata, another Ghibli director, employs a similar process. While making his fifth animation length film, *Kaguya-hime no Monogatari* (2013), it turned out that the release date had to be delayed owing to its storyboard still being under development (The Asahi Shimbun Co., 2013). Another difference is the non-utilization of the story reel, since it is of no use for Ghibli's full-length filmmakers, as working on the storyboard and development of the story is not completed before the production phase.

In general, although these filmmakers do not prepare a script, screenplay and story reel, as is done at Disney and Pixar, they have been successful in executing the creative process. Their films have succeeded in keeping the attention of audiences around the world. Also a number of Ghibli's full-length animation films<sup>19</sup> have been notable in winning significant domestic and international awards.

### **The making of full length Animation film in Aardman Animations**

Co-founded in Bristol, UK, in 1972, Aardman has been active in various kinds of animation filmmaking. It became famous owing to the unique use of stop-motion techniques in animated films. *Chicken Run* in 2000, directed by Peter Lord and Nick Park, is its first full-length animation film using the technique after *Wallace and Gromit* shorts. Considering the specifics<sup>20</sup> of stop-motion production, a developed and approved story plays a vital role in the implementation of the production phase.

Both Lord and Park imply the importance on this technique in their interviews, mentioning that *Chicken Run* was initially based on generated ideas, a written story and a screenplay (Jackson, 1997). They had experience in making short animation films and then shifted to full-length filmmaking. Nick Park confirms this when he states, "that was our biggest challenge – fashioning a story that could hold an audience for eighty minutes" (Lyons, 2000).

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<sup>19</sup> *Castle in the Sky* 1986, directed by Hayao Miyazaki; *Kiki's Delivery Service* 1989, directed by Hayao Miyazaki; *Pom Poko* 1994, directed by Isao Takahata; *Howl's Moving Castle* 2004, directed by Toshio Suzuki; *Ponyo* 2008, directed by Hayao Miyazaki;

<sup>20</sup> Frame-by-frame filmmaking in stop-motion is a complicated technique particularly in this unique style by which these filmmakers reform and reposition puppets in every frame. Positioning a puppet as a character for taking each frame, they have to make essential changes to it, including its posture and/or facial expression. Owing to the changes, they have to reposition the puppet for grabbing the next frame. This causes omissions from the previous position. Thus, filming frames of a shot in such a style needs careful scene setting in advance. Depending on the character actions, grabbing frames in this manner results in no more than a few seconds of production per day (Lyons, 2000). The making of *Chicken Run*, which was eighty-four minutes long, is a good example. This indicates that any mistakes or revisions to the story are a disaster, which means spending extra time and incurs additional costs.

In executing the steps of pre-production and applying strategies, Aardman's filmmakers acted similarly to American animation filmmakers. In their early efforts towards development of the characters and story setting, they decided that the chicken is the funniest animal in creation. They also visited a chicken farm in Yorkshire UK, and used real audiovisual references in their film (Bot, 2003).

The main idea, originating from Park's sketch, a chicken digging out of a coop, led them to build up the primary version of the film's story. Then, inspired by *The Great Escape* (1963), *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and *The Sound of Music* (1965), they came up with 'an escape movie with a chicken' (Swietek, 2001).

Developing the story and its characters took two and half years from a total of three and a half years' production. Many ideas came up through the discussion and review process. But the directors realised that many further revisions were unworkable in the film.

Lord writes that they cut the film's three-hour storyline down to make it fit the allotted time after their screenwriter encouraged them to summarise and simplify the early version of the story. Then following further reviews, they started drawing a storyboard based on a primary draft of the script.

Lord gives details of the experiences he and Park had when creating the storyboard in their first full-length film. He introduces storyboarding as another form of writing through which ideas turn into visual images and direction of film forms. Choosing shot transitions, camera moves, shot sizes and scene setting, are all directorial decisions, which are made during creation of the storyboard. They initially attempted to draw the film's storyboard themselves, but afterwards they had to get a storyboard artist to help them. Lord mentions that they rethought time and time again and redid the storyboard over the course of making *Chicken Run*.

He compares the process of storyboarding in making a short film with a feature length film. Creating storyboards for a short film is relatively easier, because most of the first visual ideas have a chance of staying in the film. On the contrary, holding a whole eighty-minute film in the filmmaker's head is extremely difficult when he is working on its storyboards. Here, the strategy is that he considers the film to be divided into manageable sequences. However, he needs to be aware of big dangers lurking in this approach; Lord calls it Sequencitis<sup>21</sup> (Lord and Sibley, 2004).

It happens when a filmmaker focuses on refining and polishing a few-minute section of film. Then, trying to make it match with the other sections, he realizes that the section does not fit with others because of Sequencitis. In fact, he has not paid attention to the relationship between all parts of the film. To prevent such types of errors, the story in feature length filmmaking needs to be developed along a continually evolving process (Lord and Sibley, 2004).

Aardman filmmakers also produce story reels by using storyboard drawings enriched with additional drawings to facilitate showing a clear impression of ongoing action in each shot. Inserting audio materials, they enhance the story reel with temporary voices, sound effects and music.

Lord explains that they use story reels for three purposes: to explain the film to other people involved in the work; to help filmmakers to understand their film better; to allow more edits to be done by adding image and sound including dialogue. Thus, just as with US filmmakers, the story reel is a means by which Aardman filmmakers can check how all their audiovisual elements work together in a rough version of film. Having experience of the pre-production phase, Aardman

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<sup>21</sup> Lord means that the filmmaker may focus on one sequence of his film more than others. This approach emphasises one part of the film, making a sequence spectacular which may not be in balance and harmony with the rest of the film's sequences.

produced four full-length feature films<sup>22</sup> by 2012. But none of them could repeat the success of *Chicken Run* in terms of box office and critics.

### **Pre-production in Pixar Animation Studios**

Established in 1986, Pixar became the first to make a 3D CGI full-length animation film when it released *Toy Story* in 1995. It was a successful beginning for its filmmakers, winning awards and gaining audience approval. Pixar repeated the success in subsequent films<sup>23</sup>, making it into an outstanding animation studio. Since then, Pixar's filmmakers have been trying to keep up their reputation through their sequels.

Each film is produced with great effort put into creating the story and perfecting pre-production. In this regard, Johan Lasseter, Pixar's chief creative officer, believes in "a compelling story that keeps people on the edge of their seats, so they can't wait to see what happens next" (Bryson, 2011). Also, memorable and appealing characters, whether good or bad, are important in a film's story. Well-developed characters are not only limited to screening time, but they also remain alive beyond the film in the audiences' mind. Such characters need to inhabit a believable world where the story's adventures come to life (Paik and Iwerks, 2007: 266).

### **The bases of pre-production in Pixar**

Filmmaking in Pixar has these specific basic principles: talented filmmakers, honest collaboration in team working, origination of story, and innovation in strategies. These emerged through filmmaking experiences, initially in Disney

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<sup>22</sup> *Wallace and Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit* 2005, *Flushed Away* 2006, *Arthur Christmas* 2011, *The Pirates! In an Adventure with Scientists!* 2012.

<sup>23</sup> *A Bug's Life* 1998, *Toy Story 2* 1999,

Studios, and then from the lessons the Pixar leadership learned during the making of their three vanguard full-length feature films<sup>24</sup> (Giroux, & Pollock, 2011, 113).

Facilitated and supported by basic principles, the underpinning of a film commences with a small incubation team helping a director to develop his own idea towards turning it into a film. In 'How Pixar fosters collective creativity', Ed Catmull, Pixar's president, defines the function of an incubation team, explaining how Pixar's development department runs such teams to plan full-length animation films (Catmull, 2008).

An incubation team, consisting of a director, a writer and some visual and storyboard artists, assists a director in refining his own ideas. They enrich its values with a series of potential ideas to create a perfect film. Presenting the ideas which have evolved to Pixar senior directors (the brain trust), the director tries to convince them that the ideas can fashion a great film.

During the period when ideas are refined, an incubation team faces many problems, which may raise difficulties in progressing the work. The strategy here is that the brain trust gives suggestions on how to resolve the problems. But, the director and his team are not obliged to accept the suggestions.

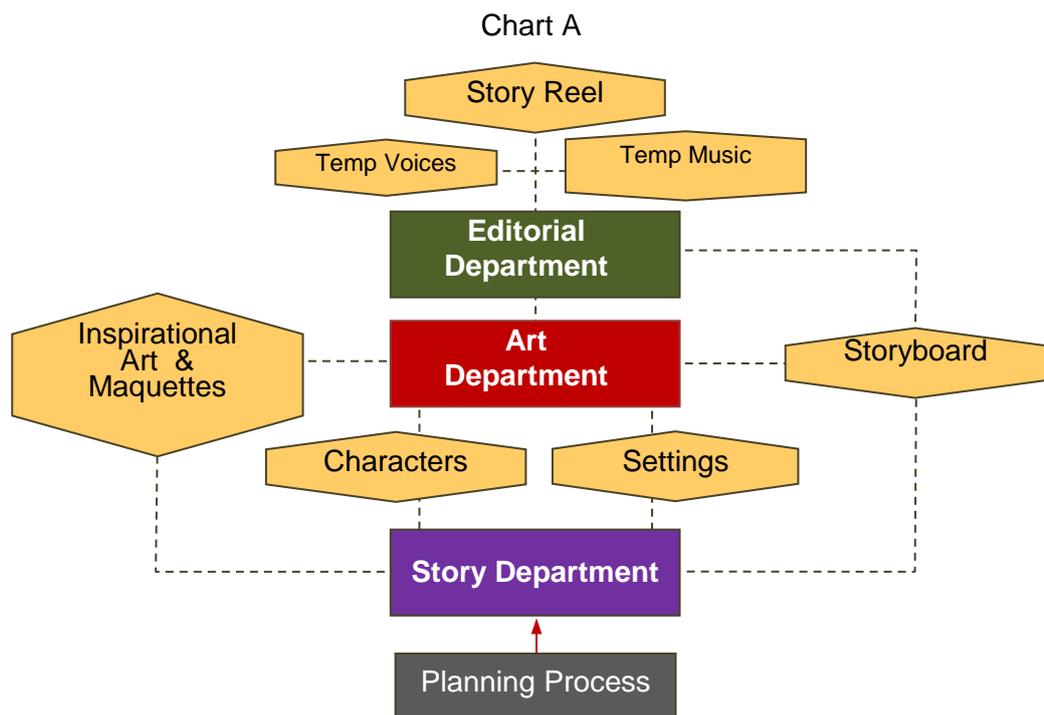
Emerging in Disney studios and evolving later in Pixar, 'dailies' is another strategy which helps these filmmakers to refine the underdeveloped works effectively, although 'dailies' are not limited to animation. Catmull describes it as 'a process for giving and getting constant feedback in a positive way' (Catmull, 2008). In regular daily meetings, artists present their unfinished designs, storyboards and art works to the whole animation team for feedback.

In these sessions, everyone is encouraged to comment on the work. Such repeated everyday practices motivate people to try new changes and test ideas to

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<sup>24</sup> *Toy Story* 1995, *A Bug's Life* 1998, *Toy Story 2* 1999.

improve their work. They continue these refinements until the story of the film is fully developed in visual form, where character, location and setting seem to be perfected. It is usually completed when the director or storyboard artist pitches the last version of the storyboard to get approval. Availability of a finalized storyboard allows the making of the story reel to complete the pre-production phase (chart A).



Adapted from 'Designing a Pixar film' (Pixar Animation Studios, 2008)

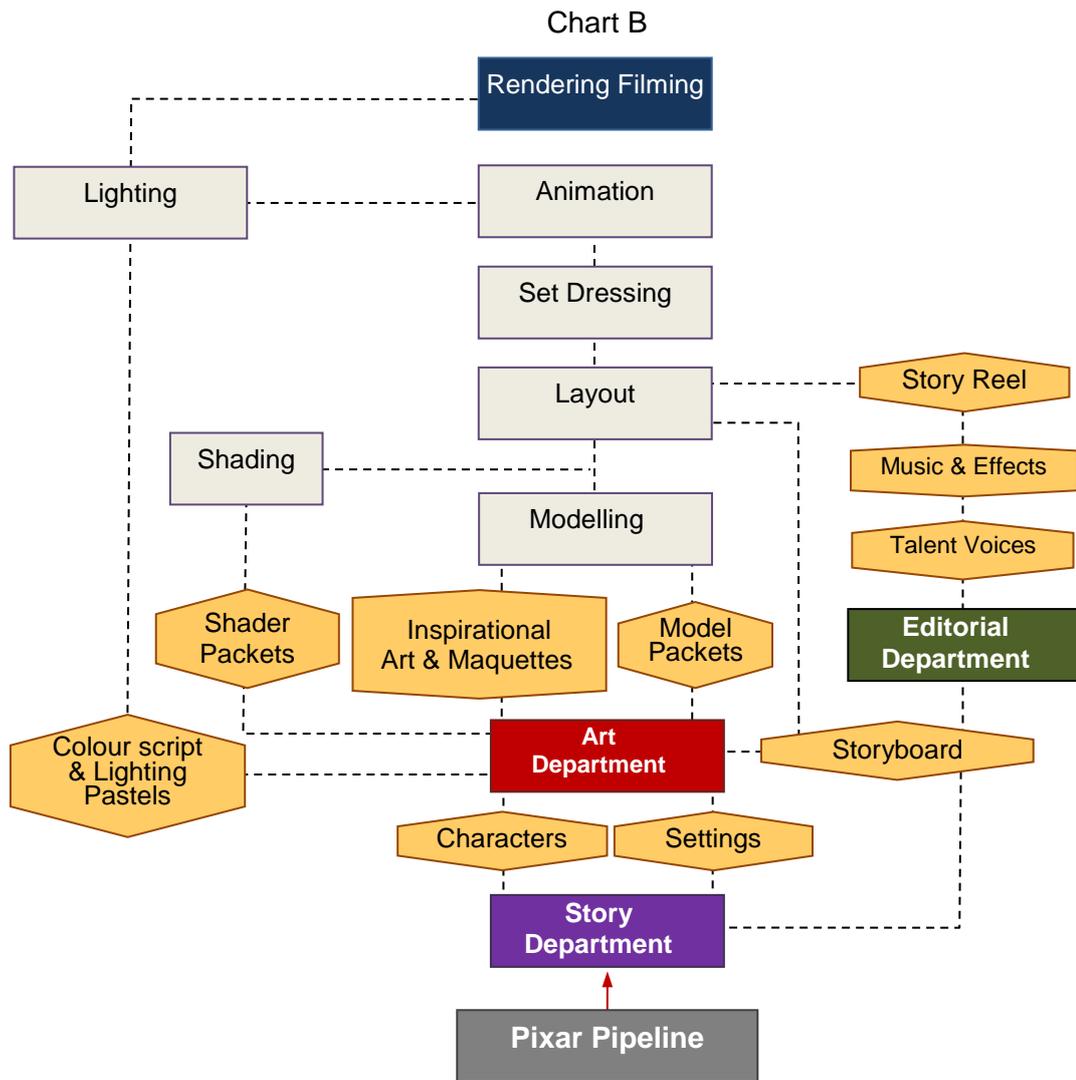
During the planning process in Pixar, the story and its elements are subject to revision in those departments responsible for the story's elements as well as the first visual versions of the film in the form of a storyboard as indicated in the chart.

Defining its design process, 'Designing a Pixar film' mentions three traditional design techniques which its filmmakers use in designing a film: decomposition, abstraction and approximation. Using decomposition facilitates the breaking of a whole into parts in order to design each part separately. For instance, designing a character has a wide range of aspects from its emotional feelings to its figurative appearance and actions.

The aim of the abstraction technique is to purify a designed output by eliminating unimportant details in favour of other critical ones. Colour-scripts are an example of showing a film entirely in a sequence of rough colour images without timing and scene details. Apart from the storyboard, Pixar filmmakers usually prepare it in pastels, gouache or collage. Colour-scripts reflect a film's emotions scene-by-scene in colour (Pixar Animation Studios, 2008).

The approximation technique is used when the designed parts of the film are available, to evaluate their function in relation to each other. The story reel is an example of approximation utilizing approved storyboard images to show a very rough version of the film. Approval of the story reel opens the way to begin the production phase which occurs at the end of the fourth year of making a film in Pixar.

In general, the filmmakers use four types of processing as the main stages of pre-production: script/screenplay writing, concept and set design, storyboarding and story reel. The main unit which undertakes these tasks is the story department collaborating with other departments as shown in chart B.



Extracted from 'Designing a Pixar film' (Pixar Animation Studios, 2008)

### Theoretical sampling and comparison

As this chapter reveals, the organisation of pre-production in Pixar has the biggest scope and consists of all its methods and strategies. These are mainly technical data relating to the implementation of the pre-production phase, which is used to support the study analysis through theoretical sampling and comparison. Using these facts helps to understand what Iranian filmmakers have done in the arrangement of this phase when making their animation films.

Choosing this approach is based on Straus and Corbin's grounded theory research methodology indicating the way that theoretical sampling and

comparison should be used. They say, 'we are just looking for a list of properties that we can use to examine the incident in the data. These properties will not be applied to the data; rather, they give us a means for examining the data' (Straus and Corbin 1998: 83).

With regard to the role of theoretical comparison in analysing the data, the method is used to assist the researcher in:

- Being sensitive to possible properties and dimensions in the data; it identifies the direct factors in implementation of the pre-production phase in seven Iranian animation film projects.
- Helping the researcher to move quickly towards a level of abstraction; here is the evolution of indirect and direct factors affecting the implementation of seven Iranian animation film projects.

Answering the questions on the implementation of pre-production in the seven projects requires a sample reflecting the essential traits. Thus, what other full-length animation filmmakers do in the arrangement of the pre-production phase helps the study to determine certain properties for the purpose of theoretical comparison.

## Chapter 5

This chapter primarily presents the domestic background of artworks and activities in relation to trends in producing motion images, stories, storytelling and performances over time. This is followed by a description of the advent of cinema in Iran and the formation of its film industry. These relate to the early years of Iranian cinema, cinema halls, filmmaking, filmmakers, and films. Finally, the last part describes the emergence of home animation filmmaking in four eras of its evolution over five decades from 1957 to the 2010s.

### Before animation in Iran

The development of motion images and related arts in Iran has concentrated on old stories originating from ancient times. Among the artworks still in existence from ancient times, are various 2D and 3D artworks. The earliest known one suggests motion in its images. Exhibited<sup>25</sup> in London is a 5200-year-old goblet, discovered in Iran's Burnt City<sup>26</sup>, showing five paintings on its round surface (CAIS, 2007). The paintings depict a simple story of a goat in five positions jumping up onto a bush trying to eat its upper leaves. The order of the goat's positions is similar to the order of frame-by-frame positions in animated films.

Journeying into the depths of history, one can find other examples e.g. Persepolis<sup>27</sup>, an ancient monument from 500 BCE, has relevant significant artworks. There are ranges of bas-reliefs and sculptures showing humans and animals, in particular poses. As Honour and Fleming (2010: 106) describe, Persepolis 'remains bound by the rules of grammar and syntax of visual language.'

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<sup>25</sup> CAIS arranged an exhibition in London in May 2007 called '10,000 years of Persian Culture and Civilization' in which the goblet and a sequence of frames extracted from its images were presented.

<sup>26</sup> Shahr-e-Sokhteh is located in Sistan & Baluchestan, a province in the east of Iran.

<sup>27</sup> Persepolis consisted of a series of palaces and forum halls, and was the centre of ritual and formal ceremonies in the era of the Kingdom of Achaemenids 550-330 BCE.

These artworks depict humans, animals, griffins and lamassus in key poses of actions conveying stories from a time in the distant past. Among these, the statues of griffins and lamassus reflect fictional mythology characters. Lamassus in exaggerated figures have a human head and shoulders, a cow's body and an eagle's wings. These works portray the mental ability of humans and the physical power of two animals. Their creators intended them to ward off evil spirits at the gates of Persepolis. This is one of the examples of an early caricature of a character reflecting a positive personality. These and other domestic historical works are part of the visual sources referenced by some Iranian animation filmmakers.<sup>28</sup>

Traces of such visual representations emerged through subsequent ages during the Parthian<sup>29</sup> and Sasanian dynasties. A vast bas-relief in Taq-e Bostan<sup>30</sup>, from the Sasanian era, exhibits a hunting scene comprising of many key poses of dynamic movements and actions. It is as though it indicates a film master shot showing a series of chases.

Apart from the visual works, the earliest known evidence of a human story discovered in Mesopotamia is a sign of the existence of stories and storytelling in these ancient territories including Iran as the largest among them. That is an epic story about Gilgamesh, a Sumerian king who lived in 3000 BCE (Lockett, 2007). His story is part of a discovered library of clay tablets in Mesopotamia, prepared for Ashurbanipal, who was the last great king of Ashore 200 BCE (Monshizadeh, 2003).

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<sup>28</sup> Ali Akbar Sadeqi, an Iranian animation filmmaker, designed a flying character in *Malek Khorshid* 1975, based on Persepolis's Lamassus, easily facilitating the hero on his journey to reach his destination; Persepolis has generally been the key source for domestic filmmakers who look for relevant sources for their films. In particular, the animation filmmakers of *Simorgh's Heart* and *Jamshid & Khorshid* (among the main cases in this study) used works from Persepolis.

<sup>29</sup> Known as 'Ashkanian' as well.

<sup>30</sup> Located in Kermanshah province, in the west of Iran.

Written by carving on clay and stone pillars, the tablets show evidence of early storytelling about Gilgamesh as an ancient epic hero, describing his life, desires and adventures. Lockett believes that his story was passed on through generations and was eventually turned to a written story. He concludes that storytelling was prevalent among people in these territories at the time, and the tales survived. This worked as a medium, and not only communicated and entertained them but also passed on their cultural values to their next generations. Related to this, some historians speak about storytellers in subsequent eras including Achaemenids 700-330<sup>31</sup> BCE. The Greek historians, Xenophon and Herodotus, point to storytelling and storytellers<sup>32</sup> in this age, who narrated stories by singing, spreading the art of storytelling and singing songs (Gera 1993: 15). However, Boyce (1957) believes it can be traced to the time of Parthian 200 BCE. They were storytellers, known as 'Gosan', who told love and epic stories. They also entertained kings and their courts. Gosans played music, sang, narrated and acted to convey their stories. In fact, it was a kind of a live musical storytelling, which not only entertained people but also made them familiar with values through the behaviour of heroes in adventurous situations. These storytellers saved the cultural values which came from different parts of their nations and passed them on for the future. The same happened with their art of domestic storytelling. This continued through the next dynasties until the coming of Islam to Iran. As mentioned earlier, by the end of this era, written works were not limited to inscriptions or religious contents such as Avesta<sup>33</sup>; as there were books and

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<sup>31</sup> Encyclopaedia Iranica.

<sup>32</sup> Persian texts mention that there were musicians called 'Khonyagar' who collaborated with storytellers in storytelling.

<sup>33</sup> The holy book of Zoroastrians.

libraries at the time, but nothing has been left except a few books<sup>34</sup>. Instead, oral culture was prevalent and storytellers could transmit some stories to future generations.

In subsequent eras, some remaining stories were turned into written poems after the coming of Islam. It brought changes to the making of artworks and the way of performing storytelling when Islam replaced Zoroastrianism owing to the Islamic conquest of Iran in the seventh century.

The new religion influenced social and cultural aspects. Islamic rules restricted music and the creation of visual subjects, including humans and animals. Islam counted making statues and images as religious taboos owing to the Arabs' background of worshipping idols. These led Persian artists to develop innovative approaches through various artistic methods.

In painting, Persian Miniature emerged gradually as a painting style without applying the principles of perspective. Miniature artists improved this style to the extent that they could depict recognizable multi-scenes to viewers. Specifically, some of these works include an observer<sup>35</sup> somewhere in the scene, not too obvious, witnessing everything there. It is as if such a witness is acting as a camera, recording ongoing adventures in the scene. The masterpieces of Persian Miniature were created during 1300-1400 when book-making schools became active and developed their style to a high level of quality (Titley 1983).

In the first few centuries after the spread of Islam in Iran, itinerant storytellers continued recounting myths and epic stories, and also landlords<sup>36</sup> who were

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<sup>34</sup> One is 'the Karnamak-i Ardeshir-i Papakan' (the book of the Deeds of Ardeshir, son of Papak) a mythological story, which reflects the adventures of Ardeshir, the founder of the fourth Persian dynasty, written during 224-651 C.E.

<sup>35</sup> In Farsi language it is called 'ravi' (narrator).

<sup>36</sup> Dehqanan.

interested in national values, attempted to save this cultural heritage. Ferdowsi<sup>37</sup> made reference to them in his epic poem 'Shahnameh'<sup>38</sup>. This book is a perfect example of Iranian myths and epic poetic stories.

Later, Persian literature became enriched when poets gradually composed a number of masterpieces during the next few centuries. Some of their works are: Vis and Ramin<sup>39</sup>, Golestan and Boustan<sup>40</sup>, Khamseh Nezami<sup>41</sup>, Asrar-o-tohid<sup>42</sup>, Masnavi Maanavi<sup>43</sup>, Aql-e Sorkh<sup>44</sup>, Avaz Par Jebreeil<sup>45</sup>, Tarikh Beyhaqi<sup>46</sup>, Qabous-nameh<sup>47</sup>, One thousand and one Nights<sup>48</sup>, Hossein Kord Shabestary<sup>49</sup>, Samak Ayyar<sup>50</sup>, and Amir Arsalan Namdar<sup>51</sup>. These examples using various themes, constitute part of the treasure of Persian stories, and acted as resources for storytellers at the time and then for filmmakers.

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<sup>37</sup> Ferdowsi (935-1020) composed Shahnameh during 977-1010.

<sup>38</sup> A well known popular epic book of poems containing stories about ancient Persian mythical heroes, composed by Abol-qasem Ferdousi 940-1020.

<sup>39</sup> A love story by Fakhredin Asaad Gorgani, a Persian poet, about 1000-1050.

<sup>40</sup> Boustan, a book of poems consisting of stories with moral themes, written in 1275 and Golestan, a rhythmic prose book from 1276 consisting of eight chapters about inclinations of kings, morality of dervishes, the joy of contentment, the advantage of remaining silent, love and youth, weakness and aging, the effect of upbringing, and etiquette of speech; both books written by Saadi 1189 or 1209-92.

<sup>41</sup> Or Five Treasures (Pang Ganj), consisting of five main stories in poetic form, from 1174, by the Iranian poet Nezami Ganjavi 1141-1210 or 1215.

<sup>42</sup> By Mohammadebn Monavar, about 1174, consists of three chapters, include poems and stories in prose, especially in the second chapter where the author relates stories and poems about his ancestor Sheikh Abou Saeid Abolkheir, a well-known mystic of the time, and told one hundred and thirty years before writing the book.

<sup>43</sup> by the well-known Iranian philosopher and poet, Molana Jalaaluddin Mohammad Mowlavi, 1208-1274.

<sup>44</sup> A philosophic story full of symbolic, interesting places and subjects written by Shahabeddin Sohrevardi 1154-1191.

<sup>45</sup> By Shahabeddin Sohrevardi 1154-1191.

<sup>46</sup> History of the previous eras and Qaznavid Empire 975-1187 by Abolfazl Beyhaqi 995-1077.

<sup>47</sup> In prose and includes forty-four chapters by Qabousebn Voshmgir 1080.

<sup>48</sup> Or One Thousand and One Nights is a collection of different tales, published under titles such as 'Alf Layla wa Layla' in Arabic and 'The Arabian Nights' in English. 'Encyclopaedia Iranica' mentions a source book of 'Hazar afsana' (the thousand tales), translated fables from Persian, Sanskrit, and Greek, noting its Persian origins because of calling a tale 'afsana'.

<sup>49</sup> A folk tale about heroes known as 'Ayyaran' who lived in Safavid during 1587-1629; based on this story Esmail Koushan, one of the early Iranian filmmakers, made *Hossein Kord* in 1966.

<sup>50</sup> Collected prose tales in a three-volume book by Abdolah Kateb Arjani in 12th century; this is a well known Persian novel whose whole text was edited by Dr Parviz Natel Khanlari and published during 1958-74.

<sup>51</sup> Narrated by Mirza Mohammad Ali Naqibalmamalek who was the storyteller of Nasereddin Shah Qajar in 19th century; in 1966 Esmail Koushan used this story to make a film under the same title.

After five centuries of Islam, some religious themes emerged in domestic stories and storytelling. The storytellers communicated these themes in different ways. Some admired holy Islamic figures and others the early Islamic rulers and told epic stories. Gradually, each group of performers gave a different interpretation depending on the type of tale, story and use of music and rhythmic storytelling. They found names pertinent to the type of content and performance (Ashour-pour, 2010). As a whole, they formed a culture of storytelling called 'Naqqali'<sup>52</sup>, which became popular in the age of Safavied Empire 1501-1722.

In this era, Qahveh-khaneh<sup>53</sup> became a popular place where people gathered in the evenings. Apart from being a public place for chatting and drinking tea, it was felt that there was a need for some entertainment there. The storyteller fitted in well here and storytelling became popular and drew enthusiastic audiences.

At the same time, Safavied rulers installed the Shiite cult as the official religion of the country. This led to the development of religious ceremonies, particularly the mourning of Imam Hossein<sup>54</sup>. Such ritual commemorations took place more frequently and every year in the month of Moharam<sup>55</sup>. Gradually, from the middle of this era, the show makers of these rituals arranged some performances simulating some key scenes relating to the martyrdom<sup>56</sup> of Imam Hossein. Thus the prologue 'Taziyeh' emerged as a religious performance (Chelkowski, 1975).

According to the beliefs of some researchers', the origin of Tazieh goes back to before Islam, to the story of the killing 'Siavosh', a popular mythical Iranian hero.

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<sup>52</sup> Or 'Qavvali' which means storytelling and Naqqal is a storyteller. Naqqals had told types of stories in qahve-khaneh (tea house) in the evenings.

<sup>53</sup> In the early Safavied age, Shah-Abbas attempted unifying the country's people against the threats of neighbouring countries such as the Ottoman Empire which occasionally attacked Iran. He increased the number of qahveh-Khaneh (tea houses) in order to gather people together. The role of Naqqal was to invoke their feelings of bravery when he entertained them through telling epic stories.

<sup>54</sup> The 2nd Imam in the Shiite cult, one of the main schools of Islam after the death of the holy Prophet Mohammad.

<sup>55</sup> One of the four holy months of Islam for Shiite Muslims when they arrange special ceremonies in memory of Imam Hossein, their third Imam who was the grandson of the holy Prophet Muhammad.

<sup>56</sup> Their enemies murdered Imam Hossein and his 72 followers who wanted to defend the values of Islam.

There is also evidence relating Tazieh to the ancient events and myths of Mesopotamia, Anatolia or Egypt. There is evidence demonstrating an early form of Taziyeh performance from the middle of the Safavied age (1667); Tavernier observes that this religious theatre was likely to have been present in Isfahan (Shahriari 2006). After that, Franklin<sup>57</sup> in his report talks about this show being performed in public in Shiraz in 1787.

In the meantime, Taziyeh had become more popular and it was developed on the basis of:poetic dialogues, music and performance. As it evolved, Taziyeh also prepared the appropriate opportunities for Naqqals who were already engaged in the practice of storytelling. They participated in this performance relying on their skills, particularly singing and narrating. At the time, Taziyeh, Naqqali and other ritual ceremonies together resulted in the emergence of a cultural form of religious performances. This culture provided the appropriate conditions to generate or revitalize 'Pardeh-khani' from its heart (Art & People, 1975). It became prevalent in the era of Qajar 1796-1925, and affected the subsequent stages of domestic visual and performance arts.

In the age of Qajar, with the support of Naseredin Shah<sup>58</sup>, ritual commemorations became more prevalent than before. The most popular one was Taziyeh. It was performed in special places called Tekyeh, located in most districts of Tehran. Among these, Tekyeh-dolat was one of the magnificent ones designed for watching rituals and Taziyeh, with appropriate space for gatherings of large numbers of people.

More rituals resulted in individual shows, such as Naqqali and Pardeh-khan,i becoming widespread during these times. Nevertheless, there were other types of

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<sup>57</sup> William Franklin, British orientalist, 1763-1839, 'Observations made on a Tour from Bengal to Persia, in the years 1786-7'.

<sup>58</sup> The fourth Shah of Qajar 1848-1896.

public individual street shows<sup>59</sup> and live performances<sup>60</sup>, which occasionally entertained people. But none of them were performed in a specific place on a regular basis except Naqqali which existed in Qahveh-khaneh. Later on, after cinema attendance started to boom in the country, most types of these shows were gradually forgotten.

Among these, Pardeh-khani appeared with its imagery contents somewhat different from the others. As an individual performance, it is performed by a 'Pardeh-khan' or Naqqal as the storyteller who tells a story or stories in front of a large painted scene of the story on a canvas called 'Pardeh'. During the storytelling, Pardeh-khan (storyteller) appears in various poses to show the mood of the characters; Pardeh-khan or Naqqal also narrates, sings and uses a pointing stick to demonstrate the actions of characters as he draws attention to the images on 'Pardeh'. He also utilises his pointing stick, depending on the actions of the characters, as a sword, mace, stick and other things which help him to depict the contents of the story.

'Pardeh' is a large illustrated canvas showing different scenes of a story or related stories. It may reflect key scenes and events of a story on the larger parts of its surface. Influenced by the Persian Miniature style and Qahveh-khaneh painting, painted images of a Pardeh with no perspective depict the main characters larger than others. Pardeh demonstrates protagonists and allies with innocent faces and handsome bodies unlike the antagonist and his assistants.

Pardeh-khani is very similar to pitching practice in storyboarding. Presented by a storyboard artist in the pre-production phase of animation filmmaking, he utilises storyboard images to tell the story as Pardeh-khan does. Both need to be

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<sup>59</sup> Maarekeh-giri shows.

<sup>60</sup> Kheyneh-shab-bazi (puppet theatre), Sayeh-bazi (shadow theatre), Rou-Houzi (performance of a show on a covered pool in a house or a public place) and Siyah-bazi (commonly acted by two people, a lord and a black servant who performed a comical show).

performed by a skilful performer with acting ability, conveying the story in a pleasant way to the audience. Pardeh-khani is still performed in Iran.

As this part of the background reveals, all the works mentioned emerged in connection with the events and social evolution of the time. They either entertained people or not. They appeared as visual artworks, as storytelling or performances. In the meantime, artists, storytellers, and performers attempted communicating with their audiences through types of media in order to portray the inherent soul of their stories. The more interestingly they depicted the stories, the more audiences were attracted and impressed. Their works have inspired subsequent generations. In general, all these were types of communication and entertainment available to Iranians prior to the appearance of cinema in Iran.

### **The arrival of cinema in Iran**

The first film made by Mirza Ebrahim Khan Akkasbashi in 14 August 1900 paved the way for the advent of cinema in Iran. He learned photography and gravure making in Paris when he lived there with his father. Back in Iran, Akkasbashi became special photographer to the court of Mozafareddin Shah, the fifth monarch of the Qajar dynasty. Accompanying the Shah on his first travels to Europe, Akkasbashi filmed him when was visiting the festival of flowers in Belgium.

Before this, while on his travels in Contrexeville in France, Akkasbashi received an order from the Shah asking him to buy a cinema camera. His father, who was in Paris at the time, purchased the camera (Omid, 1995). The film is among the earliest documentary ethnographic films of Iranian cinema. In this manner, cinema became a luxurious form of entertainment in the court in Iran, and aristocrats used it in their weddings and other ceremonies.

Later in 1905, Mirza Ebrahim Khan Sahafbashi opened the first movie theatre in Tehran. It was after experiencing the first public screening, which he had already

arranged in 1904 in the back of his shop. As Abdolah Entezam and Mohamad Ali Jamalzadeh<sup>61</sup> state in their memoirs, they were among the first people to watch films in the Sahafbashi movie theatre (Adl, 2000). Jamalzadeh describes his first experience of cinema as a memorable event where he watched motion images of the scenes of a film. Such memories are the only remaining evidence of the first movie theatre in Iran. It is because of Sahafbashi who dealt with other businesses at the same time. He could not keep his movie theatre open for long and ultimately had to close it down.

Immigrants from Europe such as Charlie Chaplin were very influential in early films in the United States. In Iran Roussikhan, a Russian-Armenian immigrant, set up a movie theatre in the national capital, which remained active until 1909. In the meantime he was supported by the court of Mohammad Ali Shah; but it coincided with the revolution against the constitutional monarchy<sup>62</sup> which led to the eventual fall of the Shah. Thus, with no backing from the opposition, Roussikhan remained defenceless when they destroyed his movie theatre.

Movie theatres started to appear again systematically from 1912. Ardeshirkhan, an Iranian-Armenian, operated his movie theatre on a commercial basis. His success was copied by others and resulted in an increase in the number of movie theatres to fifteen in Tehran and eleven in the other cities by the early 1930s.

Among the newcomers, Ali Vakili, a successful businessperson, became interested in the business of cinema during a journey to Baghdad. Back in his

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<sup>61</sup> Iranian writer 1895 - 1997, born in Isfahan then moved with his family to Tehran. According to his memoirs, it was the first time he watched a film in the Sahaf-bashi theatre, when cinema and film were unfamiliar subjects to him. Then he retold the film to his father. His description conveys types of highly exaggerated actions by the characters of the film. With respect to the time, these types of actions could be also seen in animated films.

<sup>62</sup> Begun in 1904, the Constitutional Revolution resulted in the opening of the first parliament in 1906; but, it was shut down a year later when Mohammad Ali Shah's forces shelled it. In 1909, the revolutionaries reopened the parliament, which functioned until 1921 when it closed down owing to the coup of Reza Shah. The third parliament resumed in 1941 relying on the background of the revolution. It remained active until the fall of Dr. Mohammad Mosaddeq, the second prime minister of Pahlavi, in 1953.

country, he opened a movie theatre, in an attempt to develop the business in any way possible. Establishing the first real movie theatre, allocating specific places there for women, and publishing the first cinema magazine, were the main efforts of Vakili, who tried to manage them during about six years of his activities in the film industry. He suggested also to Khanbaba Moatazedi, a well-known cameraman at the time, to translate the stories of imported films into Farsi in order to bring more viewers to the cinemas. This was the start of translation of films' intertitles and subtitles, which preceded dubbing practice in Iran, which developed further later. Although some of Vakili's ideas were not successful at that time, his works affected the development of cinema in the country.

Other filmmakers tried executing his ideas. Moatazedi, who was educated and worked for the film industry in Paris, became the court photographer of Qajar. Working in the cinema industry, he also set up specific public screening for women in 1928. Moatazedi was active in different parts of the industry until Pahlavi the First<sup>63</sup>. In the meantime, he also filmed some important events, including news footage (Naficy, 2011: 193).

In the late 1920s various moves were occurring in Iranian cinema, such as the emergence of pioneer filmmakers, the first cinema institute, importing foreign films and producing the first films. Ovanes Ohanian<sup>64</sup>, who had graduated from the Cinema Academy of Moscow, produced *Abi and Rabi*. Moatazedi filmed that as the first Iranian silent film, which was screened in 1931. A few years before producing his film, Ohanian had established a cinema institute<sup>65</sup> owing to the needs of casting. The actors were being training when the production of *Abi & Rabi* began. The film's plot was similar to *Pat and Patachon's* films, the famous

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<sup>63</sup> Reza Pahlavi I 1878-1944, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi II 1919-80.

<sup>64</sup> In some resources he is mentioned as 'Ovanes Oganians'.

<sup>65</sup> Parvareshgah Artistiye Cinema, The Institute of Film Acting, establishing this centre in 1930 was the first instructional step in cinematic training of forces in the history of Iranian cinema.

comedy couple of Danish silent cinema, whose film series had been screened in Iranian cinemas.

*Haji Aqa, The Cinema Actor*<sup>66</sup> was Ohanian's subsequent film released in 1933. Despite *Abi and Rabi*, this silent comedy film did not attract the attention of the public. Its release came at the same time as the screening of the first Persian talkie film which was produced in India, *Aalam Ara*, which reduced the public's interest in the Ohanian film.

Along with the growth of the film industry in Iran, there were some collaborative relationships between domestic filmmakers and their Iranian counterparts in India. Among them, the founder of 'Imperial Film' in Bombay, Ardeshir Irani, and Abdolhossein Sepanta, who had graduated in India, were the figures who attempted running the film industry in Iran.

The outcome of their collaboration was *Lor gir*<sup>67</sup>; the first Iranian talkie film in Farsi, co-directed by Sepanta and Irani, based on a love story in which the filmmakers tried to show also some national values. After release in 1933, the film remained on the screen for two years, owing to it being a huge hit at the box offices. The film was very popular with audiences. This astonishing success encouraged Sepanta and Imperial Film to produce four further films: *Ferdousi* and *Shirien & Farhad* in 1934, *The Black Eyes*<sup>68</sup> 1935 and *Leili and Majnoun* in 1936. At the same time, Ebrahim Moradi directed *The Freakish Man*<sup>69</sup>, a melodramatic story, and the last silent Iranian film, released in 1934.

Apart from a few Iranian films, cinema halls presented short silent comedy films and animated features from European and other countries which dominated the worldwide film industry.

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<sup>66</sup> Haji Aqa Actore Cinema.

<sup>67</sup> Dokhtare Lor.

<sup>68</sup> Cheshman e Siah.

<sup>69</sup> Bolhavas.

During 1939-48, as a result of the country's involvement in World War II, and its aftermath, film production was shut down for over a decade. This provided an opportunity for Hollywood films to penetrate the market from the late 1940s. They were very popular.

Audiences had a problem with the majority of imported films, as they did not know the language of these talkie films or could not read the subtitles and intertitles. They watched the image alone. The film industry resolved the problem by setting up dubbing studios. Such studios started up after the war, during the Pahlavi era, and their number increased when the film industry boomed again.

As foreign films were being shown in cinemas, there was a new move in Iranian filmmaking. Esmail Koushan, who was educated abroad in economics and communication, founded the 'Mitra Film' studio, where he started working initially by screening two European films he had imported. This was a financial success and the money was used to produce homemade films.

*The Storm of Life*<sup>70</sup> was the first Mitra film, made in 1948 and directed by Ali Daryabeigi, a theatre director with no background in cinema. The film was not a success. Despite this failure, using singers, Koushan planned and set about producing *The Amir's Prisoner*<sup>71</sup> in 1948, *Variety of Spring* in 1949 and *The Ashamed*<sup>72</sup> in 1950. The last film achieved significant success through the box office owing to the casting of popular singing stars. Koushan had used singers with less success in previous films.

*The Vagabond*<sup>73</sup>, made by Mehdi Raeis Firouz in 1952, was the next film that enjoyed similar success. These two films were notable at the time in Iranian cinema because their profits brought a new hope to the film industry and allowed it

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<sup>70</sup> Toufan Zendegi.

<sup>71</sup> Zendani Amir.

<sup>72</sup> Sharmsar.

<sup>73</sup> Velgard.

to survive (Issari, 1989). These films also paved the way for making films in the melodrama genre. Thereafter, the number of films increased year on year, reaching a total of one hundred and sixty nine films exhibited by late 1960.

Naturally, this growth encouraged the film industry to increase the number of cinema halls. The dominant theme of these films was social melodrama, usually arranged with some musical scenes showing a singer/dancer in a saloon and so on. The singing was provided via voice-over by popular singers of the time.

During this decade, Iranian cinema had been concerned with quantity rather than quality. The filmmakers imitated some specifics of melodrama (sensational drama) without any noteworthy innovation in the creativity of their films.

This manner of filmmaking continued until Siyamak Yasami directed and released *The Treasure of Qaroun*<sup>74</sup> in 1965. The filmmaker tried to improve this kind of approach by comparing aspects of life between two social classes.

After that, in the late 1960s, Iranian film started to move in a new direction. It began by releasing two films in 1969: *Qeysar* directed by Masoud Kimiaei, and *The Cow* directed by Darush Mehrjoui. Using a different approach, *Qeysar* tried to reflect a realistic story among people of a lower social class, where its main character challenged his living environment on important moral values. *The Cow* was also a realistic story about a rural man and his cow, illustrating the psychological crisis he experienced after the death of his cow.

The movement found followers, among them some who had graduated abroad in filmmaking, and were keen to make films in the country. The outputs of these filmmakers could not achieve financial success against the growth of commercial films, but they prepared the ground for films of a realistic genre for those who made films after the revolution in Iran.

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<sup>74</sup> Gang e-Gharoun.

## **Key points on the background**

The historical representatives of Iranian visual and dramatic arts have appeared in various forms depending on the dominant conditions of every era. Sometimes the rulers affected them; at other times a new religion or wars did so. In any case, both types entertained, taught and conveyed moral messages through different stories. They also reflect the essence of domestic cultural values which originated from and were transferred to ancient domestic occurrences. This method of communication continued until the advent of cinema as a modern medium.

When cinema came to Iran (1900), it firstly grew through the development of cinema halls. Three decades later, in 1931, when the first homemade film emerged, Iranian cinema began filmmaking (Sadr, 2006). It started producing films in its own specific manner under different limitations. Whether in setting up cinema halls or arranging production and screening, cinema was dependent on the facilities of the private sector. Moreover, it required accessible film technology for its activities and development. Although, finally, a domestic film industry emerged and survived, its development remained dependent on the patronage of the monarch.

Being in a pre-industrial condition, Iran had no essential infrastructure of economy, education and technology.

Cinema entered Iran only five years after its first public screening<sup>75</sup> in France, when such new technology was totally unknown in the country. For this reason, the forerunners who brought it to the country were those who worked for the court or came from abroad.

Both of these groups had learnt about cinema outside of Iran. On the other hand, the monarch believed in cinema as a luxurious entertainment medium that people

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<sup>75</sup> The Lumiere brothers held it at Salon Indian de Grand Cafe on December 28, 1895 in Paris.

did not need. While they had been to cinemas many times during their European travels, going to the cinema was obviously a public event. Even after Qajar in the era of Pahlavi, not only did this view not change much, but also the government was unaware about the advantages of cinema in serving its political aims. Thus, it had no inclination to support the film industry.

As we see later on, when in 1930 Ohanian established the first institute for teaching acting in Tehran. Thus, cinema remained unknown and seemed unnecessary as a subject to be included in education.

It should be noted that film as a discipline was not introduced until about 1964 in the Dramatic Arts Faculty<sup>76</sup>. It occurred while the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Tehran<sup>77</sup> had already opened in 1939 without paying attention to the need for teaching film and filmmaking.

Other difficulties which had made execution of production slow and costly were the lack of technical knowledge, materials and devices for processing a film. Consequently, as a solution, Moatazedi set up a film processing lab in the basement of his house in 1928. His experience in Paris, in addition to development materials and devices he had already brought from France, enabled him to operate his lab. Then, in response to the need for inserting translation of dialogue into imported films, he adopted a process to produce subtitles on films.

However, to produce sound for the first few films, such as *Lor Girl* in 1934 and other Sepanta films, the filmmakers had to perform all the technical processes of production in India. Later on, sound-making services became available in established domestic studios and labs.

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<sup>76</sup> The first academic art faculty in Iran was established by the first few people educated in art who came back from France.

<sup>77</sup> The first University in Iran opened in 1934 in Tehran.

Iranian cinema gradually found its own way when fresh forces came and formed it. Some of the first filmmakers were immigrants who knew something about cinema and filmmaking, while subsequent filmmakers learned filmmaking in Iran. Some famous filmmakers emerged; they learnt filmmaking through the production process as well as through watching and analysing films, and through self-study. In fact, the existing filmmaking practice and cinema business in the country had provided an appropriate environment generating opportunities which favoured the growth of filmmakers. Such an environment was an essential basis for the infrastructure of animation filmmaking. This acted as a basis for facilitating the emergence of the first approaches and subsequent evolution in Iranian animation filmmaking.

### **Animation filmmaking in Iran**

The early stages of animation filmmaking began after the mid 1950s, when it was unknown to the domestic film industry, and considered to be a very mysterious practice. This drew the attention of Iranian artists who wanted to discover its secrets, and who relied on their own capabilities even without access to the appropriate resources.

At that time, there was still no sign of television in Iranian homes, but the government was making progress in that direction. In 1958, based on parliamentary approval, Iran TV (run by private sector) aired some live programmes every evening from eight to ten p.m.; this did not change significantly until 1966 (Dehqan, 2013).

In those years, there were nearly one hundred cinema halls in the national capital where a few animated films were occasionally screened (Pourkand, 2013). It was the only way for anyone who wanted to know animation, thus learning filmmaking through watching a film on the screen.

Despite these limitations, eagerness and curiosity to learn animation provided the first steps towards the emergence of Iranian animation.

### **Emergence**

Sfandiar Ahmadiéh, a painter artist who was a member of staff at ‘the Head Office of Culture and Arts’<sup>78</sup>, was fascinated by animated films. In 1957 he made *Mollanassredin*, the first Iranian animated film, which was thirteen seconds in length. Ahmadiéh describes these early days as follows: “one day walking through ‘Toupkhaneh square’, I came across a street trader selling some used pieces of 16 and 35 mm footages of Disney films. Looking at the footages’ frames against the sun light, I realised something interesting in their images. After purchasing some of the pieces, I investigated their frames by extracting each frame’s image on a large paper sheet.”

Studying the frames, Ahmadiéh realized that their images had a specific continual order. This made him curious about the frame-by-frame arrangement in animated films. He initially tried capturing the extracted images on individual slide frames. Then he filmed each frame based on every moment of a movement. Through this practice, Ahmadiéh discovered that this was the basic technique in animation filmmaking. To make his film, he needed a camera, which was not available. Finally, he borrowed an aged wind-up camera from Fanian, a cameraman in head office.

Ahmadiéh describes that the camera had been abandoned for years in a dusty store. Hoping it would work, he adopted a building stool as a stand for the camera and captured *Mollanassredin*’s frames. Head office sent the footage to the UK for development. A while later, after receiving the developed film, Ahmadiéh invited

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<sup>78</sup> This governmental organization was established in 1949 with the scope of expanding national arts. From 1961 the management of the office continued under the authority of the Ministry of Culture and Arts based on a statute giving support to expand national arts as well as facilities for related artists.

the chairman of head office to see the work. Ahmadiéh recalls, “when showing *Molla-nasredin* the film, it finished after thirteen seconds, the chairman looked at me and asked “Is that it?!. Is that what you call a film?!” In fact, he had assumed that he would watch a full-length film like in cinemas.”

Ahmadiéh explained to him that this film was produced without essential facilities, and if they were available, better productions would be possible. The chairman welcomed animation filmmaking, introduced training and supplied the technology. Nevertheless, it was also a new national art that head office would support, as it met the aims and objectives of the organisation. Ahmadiéh states that they subsequently sent Parviz Ossanlou, a cameraman in head office who knew English well, to the United States. Fourteen months later, after finishing the training, on his return, he bought an Oxberry animation stand<sup>79</sup> purchased with head office funds. That was a professional rostrum animation camera that Ossanlou had learned to use.

Everything now seemed ready in head office. Ahmadiéh, Ossanlou, Asadollah Kafafi, Petros Palian and with Jaafar Tejaratchi as a cartoonist, they teamed up for animation filmmaking. They were people who activated the first Iranian government animation studio. The idea of setting up such a studio had already been mooted around 1956 in a ceramics workshop in head office. Later on, Head Office joined the Ministry of Culture and Arts where the studio commenced working.

By establishing this studio in 1960, the government began assisting animation. But it was insufficient to allow progress to be made taking into account the team’s knowledge of animation, whether in terms of its technology or its style of

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<sup>79</sup> Animation camera stand, USA, Oxberry’s 1<sup>st</sup> camera made in 1947,

storytelling. Nobody else was sent for training while the team had no access to essential resources and equipment.

They started training themselves by self-learning. By precisely studying the relationship of the contents of the frames with respect to their order in film reels, they discovered the details of frame-by-frame filmmaking. Using this method of study, they had to rely on their own talents and practical filmmaking. In any case, producing *Molla-nasredin* was an individual case, which led to the development of moving animation filmmaking in the country.

### **Primary Ministry-funded animated films**

The animation studio in the Ministry started to make its first films. The team produced several short 2D animated films between 1960 and 1964. The films were: *The Satellite*<sup>80</sup>, *Mouse & Cat* 1960 (the first Iranian animated film in colour), *The Unflinching Mouse*<sup>81</sup>, *The Wheat Cluster*<sup>82</sup>, *The Bold Duck*<sup>83</sup>, and *The Fish Eater Bird*<sup>84</sup> and they were only a few minutes long.

Their stories were from Persian tales with animal characters doing comedy actions. The filmmakers used the style of Disney's works as a benchmark.

Cinematic narration, animation, imagery techniques and sound were not perfect in these films. The main reason was that the filmmakers did not have sufficient animation filmmaking skills in drawing, cartooning, painting, and cinematography techniques.

In fact, they were at the beginning of learning animation through putting production into practice. As the first generation of animation filmmakers, they created work, which contributed to the emergence of animation filmmaking in Iran. Considering

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The films' titles in Persian:

<sup>80</sup> Qamar Masnooe

<sup>81</sup> Moush ba Eradeh

<sup>82</sup> Kousheh Gandom

<sup>83</sup> Ordak Jasour

<sup>84</sup> Morq Mahikhar

the subject of animation in Iran in the 1960s, the only thing that people knew about it was its different imagery which could be recognised from live action films. In this situation, there was no way of learning animation filmmaking except through practising production. Thus, their work could not demonstrate the skilful aspects of animated filmmaking.

After this warm-up stage, a new member joined the team in 1964. He was Nosrat Karimi who had twenty-three years' experience and training in animation and cinema, and had worked in filmmaking in Eastern European countries before he returned Iran. Under his supervision, the quality of the product improved and the team made ten further films<sup>85</sup> by 1968.

They were puppet animation, puppet show and cut-out animated films. *The Life* in 1966, directed by Karimi, was the most notable one. It was a quality film, twenty minutes long, which won the fifth award at the Cannes festival in 1967. *The Life* is a cel animated film telling a story<sup>86</sup> about two tulips as a symbolic couple who experience different situations during the four seasons of their life. It has no dialogue, and Iranian music conveys the characters' moods in the film's scenes. The concept imagery style of the film was inspired by an Iranian Miniature painting, enhancing its imagery details and elements with cel animation techniques. Other products<sup>87</sup> of the studio in the 1960s were examples of the quality of animation filmmaking in the first decade of Iranian animation.

Although these films were an improvement on earlier ones, the skills of the filmmakers still had a long way to go. In addition, the ministry had no plan to develop animation, which prevented the studio from growing. The peak activity of

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<sup>85</sup> *Baba Karam* (puppet), *Del-e Moush*, *Poust Palang* (puppet show), *Shekar Mah* (cut-out), *Malek Jamshid* (cut-out), *Adam Shakh Dar Miareh* (puppet), *Taasob* (silhouette), *khorous Bimahal* (puppet show), *The Life* (cel-animation) and two other short films.

<sup>86</sup> Karimi based its story on a story in 'Masnavi Maanavi', a book by a well-known Iranian philosopher and poet, Molana Jalaleddin Mohammad Mowlavi, 1208-74.

<sup>87</sup> *Your Friend, The best, The Flower & The Nightingale, The Value of Everything, The Weal, The Turtle & The Ducks, The Remuneration, The Acquaintance's Foot Trace & Golden Fish.*

the studio was during the mid to late 1960s; after that the number of productions gradually diminished and its team members left one by one.

The situation was made worse by irresponsible management, which did not run the studio properly. The management oversaw the studio as it would any other administrative unit. It highlighted the lack of ability and knowledge on the part of the managers.

For instance, Karimi makes reference to an argument between him and a member of staff who had become an animation camera operator. Seeing it as solely his responsibility, the operator prevented Karimi looking through the camera visor when they started making the film. Karimi asked the manager to resolve the problem, explaining that it was a misunderstanding. He was shocked to realise that the manager could not figure out who was right (Rezaei Khoshnoud, 2013).

There was no room in such an atmosphere for a novel form or art such as animation, which require costly fundamentals. In any case, animation filmmaking did not stop when the first animation studio in the ministry stopped working, as the situation in the country was changing.

In the 1960s, a series of economic and social initiatives from the government led to the development of new industries, numbers of organisations and companies, as well as increasing the population of large cities. The government was implementing programmes through which Iran turned into an industrial and modern country. Rising oil income at the time also enabled it to set up and preserve social and communication affairs including cultural infrastructures (Sadr, 2006). In line with this, the government established the first television transmitters and cultural organisations. One of these was 'Kanun', which primarily opened libraries for young people, then expanded its cultural activities to include holding film festivals and sponsoring various types of films.

### **Growth: 'Kanun' and animation filmmaking**

In 1965, the 'Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children & Young Adults', known as 'Kanun', was set up by the government as a non-profit organisation in charge of cultural affairs. Its strategy was to set up libraries and publish books. Kanun gradually added to its activities by arranging workshops, theatre shows, inviting circuses from overseas and arranging film festivals, all in order to develop a domestic youth culture.

In 1966, its first annual international film festival was inaugurated in Tehran. At first Kanun hoped that the festival would motivate Iranian filmmakers to make films for young people. However, the absence of filmmakers during the first four festivals persuaded Kanun that it had to begin filmmaking on its own.

This led Kanun to set up its Cinema Centre in 1969; its initial budget came from the income of the Moscow Circus which Kanun held in Tehran and Abadan. In the fifth film festival of 1970, three animation<sup>88</sup> and four live-action Iranian films participated in addition to films from other countries. Iranian films received critical acclaim from audiences and critics, but these were mainly for live-action films.

In relation to animated films, the critics mentioned two key points: the films had no domestic national traits and their concepts were not sufficiently easy to understand by young audiences. Apparently, the filmmakers were not concerned with Kanun's vision.

Supported by the facilities of the Cinema Centre, subsequent animated films were characterized by much better concepts, visual imagery and cinematic form. Their filmmakers were mostly visual artists who adapted their skills to domestic animation filmmaking, which began during its second decade. The 1970s witnessed an increasing number of animated films and success of filmmakers' in

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<sup>88</sup> *Mr Monster* and *Misunderstanding* 1970, directed by Farshid Mesqali; *Captive* and *The Wight Lifter* 1970, directed by Arpik Baqdasarian.

international film festivals. Among the awards won by Kanun's films at international film festivals, ten noteworthy awards went to animated films<sup>89</sup>.

Cel-animation and painting animation were the two main techniques used by the filmmakers in fashioning these films. Winning the most awards, *Flowers Raining* and *The Castle*, directed by Ali-akbar Sadeqi, reflect characters and concepts influenced by mixing styles of Persian miniature used in book-making schools<sup>90</sup>, Qahveh-khaneh painting<sup>91</sup> and illustrations in lithographed books. There are similar traits in N. Zarin-kelk's films *The Mad, Mad, Mad World* and *Prince Amir Hamzeh*, which both received awards.

Sadeqi's films and *Prince Amir Hamzeh* are examples representing three key traits: national audiovisual elements, specific styles of animation and Persian stories. Both filmmakers have a background in the visual arts and are familiar with the characteristics of Iranian art styles and schools which affected their animation practice and storytelling. As a result, their films had the potential to develop a special style of Iranian animation.

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<sup>89</sup> One: *The Boy, The Musical Instrument and The Bird*, directed by Farshid Mesqali, the golden award of the 23rd Venice Film Festival. Two: *Flowers Raining*, directed by Ali-akbar Sadeqi, was awarded Diplomas of Honour at Tampere Film Festival 1973, Moscow Film Festival 1973, Beirut Film Festival 1973, and special award of Los Angeles Film Festival 1973, and special award of San Francisco 1973. Three: *Independence*, directed by Parviz Naderi, the award of the Astoria Film Festival 1974, and the Diploma of Honour at Khikhon Film Festival 1974. Four: *I Am He Who...*, directed by Ali-akbar Sadeqi, the award of Mahatma Gandhi at the Berlin Film Festival 1974. Five: *The Very, Very Good Worm*, directed by Farshid Mesqali, the Diploma of Honour at Karlovy Vary Film Festival 1974. Six: *Rokh*, directed by Ali-akbar Sadeqi, the Diploma of Honour at the Krakow Film Festival 1975, the silver award at the Chicago Film Festival 1975, the golden award at the Virgin Island International Film Festival 1975, and the award of Mahatma Gandhi at the Children Film Festival (France) 1975. Seven: *The Violet Pencil*, directed by Nafiseh Riyahi (the first Iranian woman animator), the Diploma of Honour at the Khikhon Film Festival 1976, and the Diploma of Honour at the Tampere Film Festival 1976. Eight: *The Mad, Mad, Mad World*, directed by N. Zarin-kelk, the special award at the Thessaloniki Film Festival 1976, the bronze award at the Hugo of Chicago Film Festival 1976, the Diploma of Honour at the Paris Film Festival 1977, and the Diploma of Honour at the Oberhausen Film Festival 1976. Nine: *The Sun King*, directed by Ali-akbar Sadeqi, the Diploma of Honour at the Paris Film Festival 1977. Ten: *Prince Hamzeh*, directed by N. Zarin-kelk, the best award for animated painting film of Cinanima International Animation Film Festival 1977.

<sup>90</sup> Iranian painting styles in the book-making school era existed in 1300 -1400; this style lacks the principles of perspective, includes the presence of a witness in the scenes and the use of monotone colours in this type of works seen in this era.

<sup>91</sup> These works had been used in decorating teahouses. Demonstrating a special style of Iranian oil painting, it appeared in the 1900s during the fall of the Qajar dynasty in 1904. According to some historians, its origin goes back to ancient traditional Iranian storytelling and historical events, when teahouses had been opened for a long time as public places.

Other animation filmmakers were also active in the Cinema Centre which had become a place with a dynamic atmosphere which motivated filmmakers who worked energetically on productions. The Cinema Centre also held an annual film festival. This regular event not only kept filmmakers fresh and motivated to work on productions, but also developed their communication with their peers, executives and film scholars from around the globe. This contact kept their filmmaking knowledge up-to-date, familiarised them with different kinds of animation and the scope of production in different cultures.

Iranian animation filmmakers also became aware of other styles and schools of animation filmmaking. Some of them found Zagreb<sup>92</sup> animation had characteristics which had worked effectively in experimental animation filmmaking. They looked at their own filmmaking practices, which had similarities with those of their Zagreb peers. Creation of animation films in the Cinema Centre was dependent mainly upon the filmmaker talents in cartooning, drawing and animating stories through minimal form of visual elements and imagery techniques. A small team of artists assisted in the execution of production.

Moreover, the films made by both groups were aimed at international film festivals rather than at mass audience engagement. Thus, animation filmmakers in the Cinema Centre did not look to commercial animation filmmaking. Instead, they attempted to enrich the creative values of their films by applying the principles of frame-by-frame filmmaking. Some in the Cinema Centre also paid attention to the value of the Zagreb films, which had influenced their work. Examples include: *Mr Monster* by F. Mesqali, *The Independence* by P. Naderi, *Association of Ideas* by N. Zarrinkele among others. Another effective influence related to those who were educated or trained abroad in place such as European countries. One was Zarin-

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<sup>92</sup> From 1945

kelk who had studied animation in Belgium, then worked in Jiri Trnka's studio. Later he taught early learners of animation in the Cinema Centre.

After several years of dealing with different animation systems, the time had come in the Cinema Centre to set up a system for the teaching of animation. This led the Cinema Centre to arrange an animation course as an associate degree in 1974. Initially professional filmmakers were invited to teach novice filmmakers. In the second year of the course, the Cinema Centre sent Zarin-kelk and his two students, Abdolah Alimorad and V. F. Moqadam, to Czechoslovakia. During their Czech studies, they learnt puppet and painting animation filmmaking under the supervision of Karl Zeman and Hermina Tyrlova, masters of animation. This had an influence on their subsequent work.

As the course reached its end, the idea of starting up an MA in the discipline of animation was proposed by the Cinema Centre. The first attempts to introduce this idea involved negotiations between the Cinema Centre and the University of Farabi. After the decision was taken, they set up the first MA in Animation in the University of Farabi, which admitted the first MA animation students in 1978.

All the activities mentioned above contributed to the Cinema Centre experiencing a prolific period of evolution in different parts of animation. Within this period, particularly during the 1970s, the basics of the Iranian animation sector were formed. The key ones were the emergence of an early generation of animation filmmakers<sup>93</sup>, organising special teams for filmmaking, and early systematic teaching of animation. By the end of 1979, the animation sector emerged when

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<sup>93</sup> Farshid Mesqali: *Mr Monster* and *Misunderstanding* 1970; Arpik Baqdasarian: *Weight Lifter* and *The Captive* 1970; Nafiseh Riahi (first Iranian woman animator): *How much do I Know?* 1972, *The Rainbow* 1973, *The Violet Pencil* 1975; Morteza Momayyez: *One Who Imagined*, *One Who Did* 1971, *The Green Point* 1972, *The Flying Black* 1973; Sohrab Shahid-sales: *The Black and The White* 1972 (a Pixilation animation); Parviz Naderi: *The Independence* 1973, *The Man and The Cloud* 1974; Abbas Kiarostami: *I Can Also!* 1975 (mixed animation and live-action); V. F. Moqadam: *The Intruders* 1975, *The Imitation* 1979; *The Man & The Bird* 1979;

homemade animation filmmaking had two decades of experience in making experimental films.

In general, the Kanun Cinema Centre affected the atmosphere of filmmaking in Iran by supporting production of cultural films. In particular, animation filmmaking in the Cinema Centre became the main part of the animation sector while screening of animated films and progression of a few productions used national TV.

### **Television and animation in the growth era**

Along with the Kanun Cinema Centre, national TV started to become more active from 1966, with budgets allocated for filmmaking. This was based on its main objective to provide TV programmes for young audiences. One of these was a puppet animation series<sup>94</sup> made in 1969 and Channel Two supported its production. This series is one of first few animated TV films made for Channel Two. National TV also imported animated films from America and Europe. Before this, during 1958-68, Iran TV occasionally showed animated films of *Felix the Cat* and *Mickey Mouse*. However, as national TV developed, these types of films appeared on television more than before. These animated series were popular on television, while Kanun's animation filmmakers were engaged with experimental animation filmmaking.

Children's programmes on TV were dominated by animated series from American producers such as Hanna Barbera Productions<sup>95</sup>, Terrytoons<sup>96</sup>, Fleischer Studios<sup>97</sup>. When announcing the time of airing of these animated films on a daily

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<sup>94</sup> Abolfazl Razani: 'Mah Pishani' 1969,

<sup>95</sup> *Wally Gator* 1962-63, *Dastardly and Muttley in Their Flying Machines* 1969, *The Flintstones* 1960-66, *The Ruff & Reddy Show* 1957-61, *Augie Doggie & Doggie Daddy* 1952-62, *The Yogi Bear Show* 1961-62.

<sup>96</sup> *Deputy Dawg* 1962-63, *Mighty Mouse* 1966-67,

<sup>97</sup> *Superman* 1941,

basis, TV announcers referred to the series as 'cartoon'. Subsequently, people used the term to identify any kind of animated film.

National TV presented animated series on two channels using the dubbing process<sup>98</sup>. It was not very effective in employing domestic filmmakers to make homemade TV animation during these years. It was even reluctant to screen films which could attract very young audiences.

National TV continued with this policy because; it had no plans to make TV animation; filmmakers were not organised to produce mass productions; there were limitations in production facilities and technical support; and, their products were not comparable with imported films owing to the gaps in aspects of imagery and animation. The managers apparently assumed that foreign films were better in many ways for home audiences. Hence, they had no chance to watch homemade films in addition to foreign animations.

After the mid 1960s, people gradually became interested in using television, especially as their economic circumstances and style of living changed. Television became a common household item. Subsequently, national TV increased its hours of broadcasting, showing a greater variety of programmes (Bayne Fisher et al, 1991, 811). These provided the early opportunities for producing better TV advertising films. As demand increased, advertising films were aired in prime time. The first ones were commissioned by the private sector in the late 1960s. By the mid 1970s there were several advertising films which were broadcast by national TV promoting food products, services and industrial products<sup>99</sup>. Filmmakers used frame-by-frame animation techniques to depict fast motion in them. These were the first approaches to making animated advertising films by

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<sup>98</sup> Dubbing studios and services had already been set up for imported movies; later on national TV used their services for dubbing imported animated films.

<sup>99</sup> 'Sadaf Salt', 'Vegetable Oil', 'Bank Saderat of Iran' and 'Making of Peykan' by Samad Qolamzadeh on 16mm film footage which was about the first era of car manufacturing in Iran from 1967,

Iranian filmmakers. Subsequently, the first few homemade animated advertising films<sup>100</sup> appeared on TV after the mid 1970s and drew the attention of audiences.

In general, by the time of the Islamic revolution, the Kanun Cinema Centre and national TV had formed the basis of the Iranian animation sector. Television played an important role in introducing animation to a wide range of audiences across the country. The regular airing of different series of animated films, in addition to showing full-length films, made television more interesting for audiences, and animation became a popular form of film entertainment mainly for children and youngsters. The advent of the revolution affected the ongoing functions of both national TV and the Kanun Cinema Centre.

### **The signs of a new era**

In 1978, some political events in Tehran led to the outbreak of protests against the regime, initially in some large cities and then spread rapidly across the country. Within a few months, the protests were occurring daily, creating a serious political crisis for the regime. As the turmoil deepened, it became an early sign of important changes to come in the near future. A worsening of the situation encouraged society to organise strikes in key organizations and public institutions including universities.

Universities became the centre of the strikes where students protested and avoided attending classes. All courses were shut down, including the MA animation course at the University of Farabi. At the time, its seventeen students had no idea that their course would remain closed for many years after the revolution. Other parts of the animation sector, namely Kanun and national TV, faced a similar situation.

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<sup>100</sup> 'Bank of Saderat' and 'Iran insurance' animated advertising films in the mid 1970s;

## **Stagnation:**

### **Animation filmmaking in the 1980s**

One of the effects of the revolution<sup>101</sup> was an opportunity to review everything, particularly cultural matters such as critical areas of media communication and related organizations. The new situation resulted in the suspension of ongoing activities, some were left incomplete and some awaited revision. The condition of the animation sector was no different from the others. Regarding the nature of animation filmmaking and its requirements, the situation which had arisen made its recovery slower than the rest. Moreover, no one was aware that an unexpected event was about to happen.

In 1980, shortly after the revolution, when the new government was trying to achieve stability, Iraq invaded Iran. The outbreak of the Iran-war<sup>102</sup> affected all domestic activities from its outset and then for the following eight years. Obviously, the conditions for developing the media sector were inappropriate, particularly for the new sector of animation. Thus, apart from some unfinished productions in the Kanun Cinema Centre, no significant numbers of film projects were put into production.

At the same time, the function of organizations and operational regulations were subject to revision, updating them in accordance with Islamic values. Hence, the new government needed to rearrange or establish new structures in line with its priorities.

This began initially with changes in academic teaching in universities and the management of media communication, which were strategic priorities. The government closed down universities as the first step of the 'Cultural Revolution' in June 1980. They remained closed for the following thirty months. This happened

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<sup>101</sup> The victory of the revolution on 11 Feb 1979,

<sup>102</sup> Iraq attacked Iran on 22 September 1980,

because everyone was concerned with the war. In that situation, cultural matters, such as animation, seemed unimportant. Ongoing development in the animation sector was interrupted, and no significant production emerged from the Kanun Cinema Centre during wartime (1980-88) (Fowzi, 2006).

As part of the process of managing media communication, the government established a new cultural organization in July 1981, the Islamic Development Organization<sup>103</sup>; at the same time as the other relevant organization 'the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance'<sup>104</sup> was set up. Shortly after the inauguration of this organization, several related institutions were set up to take charge of cultural matters relating to media production in accordance with Islamic values (The Ministry of Culture & Islamic Guidance, 2012).

Among these was the Department of Artistic Islamic Advertisements<sup>105</sup> whose objective was to manage the visual arts, and film and cinema productions. However, owing to involvement with the war, this institute was involved in film and video productions for war propaganda purposes. This was mainly because these mediums facilitated quicker and easier achievement of outputs. No one thought that the medium of animation could serve a role in war propaganda.

As animation filmmaking progressing in Kanun, some extremist political voices accused it of being a corrupt organization founded by the former government and recommended it to be shut down. The government opposed this demand<sup>106</sup> and supported Kanun in remaining active according to a revised policy. In its new era, a few young filmmakers joined the Kanun Cinema Centre and began making animated films alongside filmmakers already there. In the meantime, several

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<sup>103</sup> Or the Organization of Islamic Advertisement, (Sazman Tabliqat Islami).

<sup>104</sup> In 1979 the former 'Ministry of Culture and Art' merged with the Ministry of Science and became one administrative unit; then it opened as the 'Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance' in 1981.

<sup>105</sup> Hozeh Honari Tabliqat Islami.

<sup>106</sup> The President M. A. Rajaei, the Prime Minister M. R. Bahonar and the Cultural Revolution Board.

animated films<sup>107</sup> were produced there. Some filmmakers made puppet animations, claymation and used different techniques of stop motion. The filmmakers also attempted making documentary<sup>108</sup> films using animation filmmaking.

An example of a rare type of homemade animated film was some animated titling made for *Mirza-Nowrouz's Shoes*, a live-action film released in 1985. Its animator, Ahmad Arabani<sup>109</sup>, animated the titling through a short animated film depicting a brief story of the film together with the casting. Its imagery technique was 2D cel-animation. Other examples were a few TV programmes<sup>110</sup> and TV series.

Another example was a full-length animation film project<sup>111</sup>, whose production commenced in 1979. The next year, the project was transferred abroad where its production lasted until 1985. For the first time a domestic filmmaker decided to work up a large animation production aiming to engage the audience.

Nouredin Ashtiani, who had about four decades of experience in the Iranian live-action film industry, had an approach to animation filmmaking which was different from Kanun's filmmakers. *Mouse and Cat* was a length film production project which he set up and managed its beginning. But it turned out to be unsuccessful owing to his lack of awareness about this type of filmmaking. Although Ashtiani's efforts were fruitless, his approach to that production provided lessons in animation length filmmaking.

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<sup>107</sup> F. Mesqali: 1980, the series of *Why & How: The Tumbler, The Nail & the Hammer, The Pen & the Match* 1985. Parviz Kalantari: *The American Liberty* 1980. Ahmad Arabani: *The Axe* 1981, *The Treasure* 1989. Parviz Naderi: *The Apple Tree* 1982. N. Zarinkelk: *One, Two, Three, More...* 1982, *The Superpowers* 1988. M. R. Abedi: *The Little Sparrow* 1984. V. F. Moqadam: *The Return* 1986, *Tree Friendship* 1988. Nafiseh Riahi: *From Tehran to Tehran (from the old Tehran to the Modern Tehran)* 1987. N. S. Sarbandi: *The Carpet* 1980, *The Alliance* 1989.

<sup>108</sup> *The Look* directed by E. Forouzesh 1983; *Tajrebeh va Tarfand* directed by A. Alimorad in 1991.

<sup>109</sup> A cartoonist who joined Kanun in 1973 with some cartoon drawing experiences in 'Towfiq', a cartoon magazine by Hossein Towfiq and his son M. Ali during 1923-1972.

<sup>110</sup> Titling of a programme for children and youngsters, programme on Channel One of national TV, 'Keduy qelqeleh-zan' a TV series.

<sup>111</sup> *Mouse and Cat* an unfinished full-length animation film, which was put into production by N. Ashtiani.

In general, the Iran-Iraq war era affected all areas. However, the animation sector experienced some new methods in animation filmmaking, such as animated titling, approaches to animation length filmmaking and the survival of Kanun. Also, national TV was involved in some activities related to animation.

### **National TV in the era of stagnation**

In contrast to other cultural institutions during Iran-Iraq war, activities in this organization were making more dynamic progress. Channel Two attracted younger audiences and children by showing popular programmes. It also allocated a specific budget to support a limited number of animation TV series<sup>112</sup>; they were produced during wartime and aired weekly. Other than these, national TV aired some series of foreign animated cartoons and films. In the 1980s, young audiences watched a variety of animated series from different countries. They included products from America<sup>113</sup>, Europe<sup>114</sup>, Eastern Europe<sup>115</sup> as well as Asian countries, such as Russia<sup>116</sup> and mostly from Japan<sup>117</sup>. By the end of this decade, all programmes on national TV were broadcast via two channels. Young audiences watched their favourite animated films mainly on Channel Two every evening.

National TV also arranged training programmes in animation. Its faculty ran a production course at associate degree level, which was upgraded to a BA degree in 1982, adding complementary teaching material including the basics of animation. With this background, the faculty ran a BA course in animation from the

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<sup>112</sup> A. Razani: *The Adventures of Thought & Work*, the first series in 12 parts from the early 1980s; *The Little Ali* a series in photo animation, 1980s.

<sup>113</sup> *Yogi Bear and Yogi's Gang* 1973-75, *The Great Grape Ape Show* USA 1977, *The Adventures of Gulliver* 1968, 'Tennessee Tuxedo and His Tales' 1963.

<sup>114</sup> *The Herbs* 1968 BBC, *Here Comes Mumfie* 1975, *Colargol* 1967-74 France.

<sup>115</sup> *Professor Balthazar* Zagreb Film Studio 1967-74, *Zaczarowany ołówek* (Enchanted pencil) 1964-76 Poland. *Bolek and Lolek* (Jym & Jam or Bennie & Lennie) 1964 Poland, *Vizipók-Csodapók* 1980 Hungary, *Reksio* 1968-88 Poland.

<sup>116</sup> *Nu, pogodi!* (Well, just you wait!) 1969, *Мешок яблок* (A Bag of Apples) 1974.

<sup>117</sup> *The Adventures of Hutch Honeybee* 1970-71, *Capitan Tsubasa* 1981 known as *Footballers* in Iran, *Katri, Girl of the Meadows* 1984, *Serendipity the Pink Dragon* 1983.

early 1990s; it remained the only academic animation BA course in the country until two universities introduced MA degrees in animation.

National TV also made some documentary series about filmmaking and special effects. Aired in 1982, *Another Side of the Coin*<sup>118</sup> discussed the use of animation in the special effects of *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963). Later on, similar further documentary series<sup>119</sup> about animation films and filmmaking appeared on television, when national TV increased the number of its channels.

Animation progressed slowly in Kanun and national TV, where such activities depended on a budget and help from the government. But cinema had a different situation because the private sector had a main role in the film industry before the revolution.

### **Cinema in the stagnation era**

During the final months before the victory of the revolution, demonstrators burnt most of the cinemas as a symbolic gesture opposing cultural corruption of the regime. It happened in the capital and other large cities and was of concern to some in the film industry. They felt that they would be at risk as the regime's collapse was imminent. In this situation, those who had relations with the regime or were concerned about their future, because of having an immoral background<sup>120</sup> in cinema, went into exile albeit unwillingly. The escape of these people, in addition to the destruction of cinemas, increased the likelihood that the incoming religious regime would completely close down the film industry. However, that was not how fortune panned out for Iranian cinema.

In a speech in the early days after the victory of the revolution, the leader of the revolution stated that the country needed a cinema without immorality. He said

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<sup>118</sup> *An Rouy-e Sekeh*, by Akbar Alemi, was a documentary series about special effects and behind the scenes of films, in the early 1980s.

<sup>119</sup> *Frame-By-Frame Cinema* aired by channel four.

<sup>120</sup> They had appeared in films in nude and erotic scenes.

that *The Cow*<sup>121</sup> was an acceptable film (Naficy, 1995). His words brought hope to the film industry, which had been worried about its fate.

Subsequently, in 1979 a newly reshuffled ministry<sup>122</sup> announced the reactivation of cinemas (MCIG<sup>123</sup>, 2012). From then on, cinema halls were refurbished and reopened one after another, and began showing intellectual and anti-colonial films. In March 1979, the head offices of foreign films shut down and importing movies was forbidden. In line with this, the new ministry cancelled all screening licences for Iranian movies which had already been issued for exhibition in 1979-80. The ministry also revised the audit regulations which were to be applied to new film products.

Filmmakers became active again and began making different films in this era. Some films<sup>124</sup> obtained international awards in the early 1980s. They were *Viva!*<sup>125</sup>, *Mr Haq-doust's House*<sup>126</sup>, *The Castle*<sup>127</sup> and three films about Iranian *Brick Kilns*. The official management of cinemas did not pay proper attention to these successes. Apparently such events seemed unimportant during these years owing to the changes in the organizations responsible for managing cinemas. The new managers were not familiar with or aware of the importance of such cultural achievements. This indicates that such subjects were not mentioned in their objectives and required revision with the assistance of filmmakers.

Shortly afterwards, these conditions began to improve when the first annual Fajr International Film Festival was inaugurated in 1982. It promoted the position of

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<sup>121</sup> *The Cow* by Dariush Mehrjui 1969.

<sup>122</sup> It was a newly organized ministry after merging the Ministry of Culture and Art and the Ministry of Science together. Called the Ministry of National Guidance in 1979, then named as the Ministry of Islamic Guidance in 1980.

<sup>123</sup> Ministry of Islamic Guidance (bibliography).

<sup>124</sup> *Viva!...* by Khosrow Synai 1980, *The house of Mr Hahgdoust* by Mahmoud Samiei (Sami'ie) 1981, 3 films about *Brick Kilns* by Mohammad-reza Moqadasian 1980, Manouchehr Moshiri 1980 and Farideh Shafaei 1981, *The Castel* by Kamran Shirdel 1966.

<sup>125</sup> Zنده Bad . . .!

<sup>126</sup> Khaneh Aqaye Haq-doust.

<sup>127</sup> Qaleh.

cinema in the view of the officials. On the other hand, with improving relations between filmmakers and government organizations, cinema received government support, enabling it to present reputable films<sup>128</sup> mostly in the realism genre. These works contributed to a new era in Iranian cinema in the 1980s, known as the brilliant years of Iranian cinema.

However, no products appeared on the screen from the second generation of filmmakers who were working during the 1960s-1970s. They could not adapt to the fast pace of change, or adapt their abilities in line with post-1979 values in filmmaking or come up with different themes in the stories. Thus, a fresh generation of filmmakers became the main players in the film industry.

In general, those parts of the cinema industry consisting of production, distribution and exhibition, were revitalized through actions of both the government and private sectors; while the animation sector was still dependent on the activities of government. The 1980s was the period affected by the Iran-Iraq war. In the meantime, media communication affairs were revised and adapted by the reorganised government organizations. Animation filmmaking existed in Kanun and national TV.

The end of the war in 1988 marked the start of the recovery and reconstruction phase in the country after eight years of devastation, damage and stagnation in many fields. The onset of the reconstruction era was an opportunity for media communication, particularly for the animation sector, in not only recovering its unfinished jobs but also moving quickly towards updating itself, based on the latest advances.

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<sup>128</sup> *Kamalolmolk* directed by Ali Hatami 1984. *The Runner* (Davandeh) directed by Amir Naderi 1985. *The Tenants* 1986 and *Hamoun* 1989 directed by Dariush Mehrjuei. *Bashou*, *The Little Stranger* 1986 and *Maybe Another Time* 1988 directed by Bahram Beyzaei. *Where Is The Friend's Home?* 1986, *The Homework* 1989, *Close Up* 1990 directed by Abbas Kiarostami. *The Snake Teeth* (Dandan Mar) directed by Masoud Kimiaei 1989. *Capitan Khorshid* (Nakhoda Khorshid) directed by Naser Taqvaei 1989.

## **Revitalization:**

### **Further evolution of Animation**

It commenced with the recovery in the academic discipline of animation, then carried on through advances in production. These two actions facilitated subsequent developments in:

- academic teaching,
- prevalent use of computers in animation filmmaking,
- further TV channels and new animation organisations,
- private studios and new filmmakers, and
- various types of animation films.

### **Academic teaching**

When setting up new disciplines in 1990, the Ministry of Science organized a board to design the animation curriculum for its MA course in universities. The Council of Cultural Revolution had come into existence a year after the Islamic revolution itself, and it approved the curriculum. Subsequently, after successfully passing the national examination<sup>129</sup>, the first group of animation students started the course in 1992. It took place in 'the Complex of Academic Arts'<sup>130</sup>.

The course covered basic teaching materials consisting mainly of concepts of traditional animation. With access to the essential elements, the course was delivered using the facilities prepared for the existing BA course in cinema at this university. They included workshops and had access to well-equipped studios, making feasible the setting up of the new MA animation course.

Students were taught by 2D animation filmmakers and those who had experience in stop-motion and puppet animation. Two years later (1994), Tarbiat Modares

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<sup>129</sup> Konkour is a national annual examination for admission of Iranians who apply to study in domestic universities.

<sup>130</sup> (Mojtame Daneshgahi Honar) It was comprised of several academic organizations including the former university of Farabi. Later on, this centre was called The Art University.

University (TMU), a postgraduate university, attempted to set up another MA animation course. Its faculty of art arranged several meetings with VGIK<sup>131</sup> in Moscow to organize a joint MA animation programme. They agreed that students would attend the first year of the course in TMU and the rest in VGIK. TMU admitted the first group of students in 1995; but they were not sent to Moscow owing to the shortcomings of TMU management.

Later on, TMU invited Vladimir Tarasov, a Russian animator, to teach animation in both universities. During 2000-03, MA animation students learned the subject based on two aspects: the course programme and extra workshops conducted by the animator. At the end of this course, the students were not satisfied, partly because of the lack of computer animation in the teaching materials. The new students preferred a course based on a curriculum including computer animation. After a while, the programme was revised to include two units of learning about computer animation software.

The teaching at the universities had two notable results:

- an increase in the number of short experimental animated films made by the students, and
- graduates went on to serve in the setting up of animation studios in broadcasting centres in the provinces as well as teaching animation units and courses.

To achieve an MA degree in animation, students must make a short animated film, in addition to writing a thesis as part of the final exam. The universities admitted eighteen students on average every year in the 1990s. As a result, at the end of this period, a number of short animated films came out; some of which were eligible to send to national and international film festivals. In fact, the academic

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<sup>131</sup> Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography.

teaching led students to making films suitable for film festivals. As with Kanun animation filmmakers, students targeted film festivals, focusing on the aspects which would be acceptable in such competitions.

Some of the graduates went to the broadcasting centres of Hamedan, Khorasan, Broujerd and Oroumieh, where they set up animation studios supported by national TV. They also trained some local applicants interested in animation, to set up small production teams. They produced a number of animated films, some of which appeared on television<sup>132</sup>.

Another group of graduates turned to teaching. From the late 1990s, a significant number of them worked in the art universities in Tehran and other cities, teaching the basics of animation filmmaking.

In 1998, The Islamic Azad University, which had a greater number of art students than Tehran, requested that one of these new animation lecturers teach an animation unit to BA students. During an academic term<sup>133</sup>, the instructor and his two colleagues could teach the basics of animation filmmaking to about three hundred students.

At the end of that term, two thirds of the students could successfully make a short animated film. It was a significant move in academic animation teaching as it produced good results, which became apparent several years later in animation workforces. It happened after the students graduated, when a significant number of them were accepted to work in animation studios to collaborate on animation projects.

They declared that the animation unit made them interested in animation filmmaking. Having their own short animated films in hand, they succeeded in

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<sup>132</sup> In the mid of 2000s, the National TV produced a TV programme series called *The Short Film* (Film-e Kwotah). Each weekly part showed several selected Iranian and international animated and live-action films. Among short animated films were Iranian animated films made by Iranian animation students.

<sup>133</sup> Seventeen two-hour learning sessions within four and a half months.

getting job interviews. Their films served as rich portfolios helping them gain employment in productions.

Unfortunately, this process did not continue because of shortcomings at the University. It did not provide the essential equipment for animation workshops that were previously facilitated by TMU. After this, the academic teaching of animation continued at MA level, but it needed fundamental revision and updating of materials based on the application of computers in animation filmmaking.

### **Applying computers in animation**

Early computers became available in shops in the country in 1955 when such devices were completely unknown as machines for daily use. They began to be used in 1963 when the National Oil Company of Iran trained some staff as computer operators. Later on, in the 1990s, this device gradually became of common use in some of the main government centres and universities.

In 1992, a research centre and a few universities were connected to the internet and started communicating with the world. Since then, the use of computers and the internet started increasing significantly. This led to rapid development in many areas as well as in animation filmmaking.

Along with this evolution, the fast development of animation filmmaking emerged with digital technology. One after another, Iranian animation filmmakers and studios found computers to be effective tools in promoting their production aspects. This was a new season in Iranian animation filmmaking.

In about mid-1995, it became apparent that production of animation films using a PC removed the limitations of traditional animation filmmaking. It was a very important step in how to approach animation filmmaking, as this type of filmmaking was considered to be very labour-intensive and very time-consuming. Producing a short experimental film was as difficult as producing a professional film, as it had

the same essential stages and requirements. However, the availability of capturing an image with a digital camera, then editing it using a software package, paved the way for fast and inexpensive production. Using this facility, freshly qualified filmmakers and animation students realized the importance of learning how to use 2D and 3D animation software packages, which provided them with the skills and tools for a career in filmmaking. Shortly afterwards, with the assistance of a computer in production, the first advertising animated films appeared, followed by TV series and full-length animation films. At the same time a new organization and further channels were set up by national TV, which increased production in the animation sector.

### **TV channels and new organizations**

In 1993, the third channel of national TV became available with the aim of supplying a variety of programmes for young people. By inaugurating two further channels, Tehran<sup>134</sup> in 1995 and instruction (as four) in 1996, the need for a greater variety of programmes was revealed. Each channel had to provide its own TV programmes for its target audience. The procurement of animated films seemed more crucial than before, requiring further action to be taken.

In 1995, national TV set up The Institute of Cultural and Artistic Centre of Saba<sup>135</sup> which was put in charge of animation to respond to the channels' demands. The main purpose of opening Saba was to serve as the main place for producing and developing home-animated film products. Its manifesto was to highlight children, youngsters and young people as the main audiences for Saba's products. Its products were to be supplied based on the religious, cultural, artistic, social,

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<sup>134</sup> This channel began showing programmes for five hours per day for Tehran residents only; subsequently the other provinces each ran their own provincial channels.

<sup>135</sup> In 2003 after developing activities in the animation sector for eight years, Saba's management changed the name of this organization to The Cultural Artistic Centre of Saba.

instructional, guidance and pedagogical needs of society as laid down by the government.

Saba became the major government organization dealing with the domestic animation film industry; it had its own management and received an annual budget from national TV. The scope of Saba's activities covered many types of animation filmmaking with different imagery techniques and documentary films about animation. Saba managed these through in-sourcing and outsourcing productions. For in-sourcing productions, Saba was equipped with good facilities consisting of venues and equipment. Its cinema hall was equipped with 35mm and video movie projection facilities. A virtual studio, two camera work studios, eight puppet and clay animation studios were available for professional productions. To support these studios, Saba purchased a motion capture system and Oxberry film recorder-scanner for special effects. Saba also set up workshops on puppet structure, decor and props and devices for composite animation.

In outsourcing, Saba sponsored animated products made by private and semi-private studios as well as professionals and amateurs among animation students and experimental filmmakers.

Despite the reported quantity of products sponsored by Saba in the late 1990s, the channels' demands for animated films were not satisfied. Some of Saba's animated films were broadcast by national TV. However, not all of these could attract the audiences that imported films could. At the time, Saba also started sponsoring animation films with religious themes and full-length animation films.

On the whole, Saba has been the main sponsor of animation filmmaking since 1995. Its role in the animation sector was somewhat similar to the Kanun Cinema Centre in 1970s. Saba increased the quantity of animated films as a result of receiving a substantial budget from the government, enabling it to be a key player

in the domestic animation economy. It promoted a domestic film market with local distribution mainly between itself and the national TV as the exhibitor of its products. Saba staffs were involved in defining employment rights for animation jobs positions in the country. This became a benchmark for employment in the animation sector and already existed in Kanun.

Some studios carried on their collaboration with Saba but some filmmakers criticised its function in relation to the animation sector. They believed that frequent changes in Saba management caused a lack of stable policies in dealing with animation. It had many negative effects on the productions which relied on Saba's support. This issue affected the quality of Saba's films owing to inadequate quality control of the execution of productions. Consequently, animation filmmakers did not attempt to make films of a sufficiently high quality.

Another organization, 'the Centre of Developing Documentary and Experimental Cinema'<sup>136</sup> commenced presenting its services in the early 1990s. It supported filmmakers in teaching and producing films, including animated films. This centre facilitated the necessary cooperation and investment in producing animated films. It was an excellent opportunity for suitable first time filmmakers. Two full-length animation film projects were set up with such support in the 2000s. This centre also sponsored a composite animation TV series<sup>137</sup> giving safety tips on gas consumption. The series was the first Iranian infomercial film; it became a basis for subsequent infomercial films.

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<sup>136</sup> As one of the dependent sub-organizations, it is under the management of The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance.

<sup>137</sup> Having live and animated characters, *Watch Out* was directed by Bahman Abdi in 1994, known as *Mr Safety*, (Aqaye Eimani).

In the early 1990s, some 3D stop-motion films were put into production in Kanun. Among the second generation of animation filmmakers, Abdollah Alimorad<sup>138</sup> and Ali Asqar-zadeh, made several puppet and clay animated films. These examples demonstrate the level of quality and technique of this type of homemade film.

### **Private studios and new filmmakers**

A number of private studios had been active in filmmaking since the late 1960s. A few of these remained open during wartime. They became animation studios, particularly in the 1990s when animation filmmaking boomed again. In conjunction with this, the number of young people interested in animation began to increase from the mid 1990s. It happened when there was an increase in the number of graduates with a BA<sup>139</sup> in visual arts, then in MA animation. Some came to work in the animation sector. Meanwhile, the quality of TV advertisements was changing as new demands were placed on them. These came from the growth of the economy along with the era of reconstruction and the setting up of additional TV channels, which needed promotion and TV programmes. It was the growth of the market for filmmaking of various types which led to the setting up of animation studios and employment of more personnel. Consequently, the business of filmmaking promoted productions in such studios<sup>140</sup>.

From the mid 1990s to the mid 2000s the number of animation studios and companies in Tehran rose and fell. Most of these failures related to the founders thinking that the animation filmmaking business could be profitable and that they could run them easily and successfully. However, after a while, only those studios survived that knew the job and understood the needs of local clients. A few of

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<sup>138</sup> Some of his works: *The Parrot & The Grocer or The Bazaar* 1991, *The Gem Mountain* 1994, *The Look, How to Make A Puppet Animated film* 2000, *Bahador* 2000, *Sepidbalan* 2002, *The Farmer and the Robot* 2011.

<sup>139</sup> This period witnessed the establishment of art faculties in universities including The Islamic Azad University, founded in 1982, primarily in the capital then in the main cities.

<sup>140</sup> 'Rasaneh Fard Animation' in the early 1990s. 'Hoor Animation' in 1994, 'Film Tehran' in the early 1990s, 'Abnous film' in the mid 1990s.

these studios, experienced in computer animation, made their first series of digital 3D animated advertising films. It was the beginning of CGI animation filmmaking in the country.

### **Various types of animation films in the 1990s**

Making advertising films was a significant move towards modern animation production. In the era after the war, during a period of recovery and development, there was an expansion of infrastructure facilities of gas and electricity networks in more places across the country. In line with this, the relevant organizations and industries ordered infomercial films which advised people on safety and consumption. Addressing this need, the first series revealed on TV in 1992 used a composite animation technique.

After that, during the mid 1990s the first series of digital 3D animated advertising films appeared on television and audiences became familiar with this type of animated film. These early films were of low quality; however, such short films drew the attention of young people to their CGI technique. This was concurrent with the success of *Tin Toy* and *Toy Story* which used the same imagery technique known to these young audiences at the time., Some were interested in this technique, and searched to find out more about making this type of film. They assumed that a PC equipped with 3D imagery software facilitated the making of such animation films.

Although at first such an approach seemed naive, after a while some operators of 3D animation tools emerged this way. They taught themselves using tutorials and trial and error. Some of them found opportunities to work in animation film projects from the mid 1990s when the need for computer users increased in new animation film studios<sup>141</sup>. Making early digital animated films in these studios and other

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<sup>141</sup> Studio Hoor Animation from 1994, studio Abnous Film from 1998.

centres created digital animation experts who later came to work in the production of TV animation series and full-length films.

Apart from making animated advertising films in the 1990s, some studios arranged making full-length animation films and TV series. In 1996, Tehran Film studio began production of *Tak Taz*, a ninety-six minute animated film. *Tak Taz* never appeared on the big screen because its production was never finished. It was outsourced by Saba, and was co-financed based on an agreement between Saba and Tehran Film and its collaborator studio. Some disagreements took place between the two parties during production, resulting in the film being unfinished.

In 1998, the next project put into production was by Abnous Film, which undertook this difficult process again. Its filmmakers made significant efforts in planning and designing *Namaki and The Giant*<sup>142</sup>; but financial shortcomings and lack of a sponsor resulted in the same fate for *Tak Taz*. These are discussed in chapter six.

Private studios also dealt with making primary animation TV series. Sponsored by Saba, this type of filmmaking was in line with supplying products in response to the demands of national TV. Rasaneh Fard Animation and Hoor Animation, as pioneers in the field, started producing animated TV series<sup>143</sup> in 1998. The series were about the life of the prophets. The series about prophets produced by Rasaneh Fard was in 2D and The Holy Rulers made in the studios of Hoor was in 3D. These productions, in addition to other ongoing projects, created further opportunities of employment in the animation sector.

The process of animation production such as TV advertising films, full-length films and TV series, together provided suitable conditions for the development of more

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<sup>142</sup> *Namaki va Div*, the second full-length project.

<sup>143</sup> 'Prophet' series produced by Rasaneh Fard Animation 1999; 'The Holy Rulers' produced by Hoor Animation 2000.

skills and jobs. These activities were reinforced during a film festival when workers from the animation sector met and were able to discuss their experiences.

In 1999, the first biennale international animation film festival<sup>144</sup> was inaugurated by the supporters of Kanun. The festival generated a dynamic impression among the participants who mostly came from related areas of animation. The film festival facilitated people who were active in the animation sector in meeting face to face as well as informing each other about ongoing productions. The atmosphere also created energy for the filmmakers, motivating them to be active in their productions.

### **The development of productions in the 2000s**

During this decade, the results of actions implemented to develop animation bore fruit. The first few years of the 2000s witnessed the growth in the quantity and variety of animated advertising films. Audiences watched 3D CGI homemade animated films more than before. In line with this, some pertinent publications such as animation magazines<sup>145</sup> were published. Discussions were held in formal and informal groups on the quality of homemade animated products in the animation sector. The second animation film festival<sup>146</sup> took place and reminded the public about the subject of animation. With all of this happening, it seemed the time had come for animation filmmakers to make better products, while in some private studios<sup>147</sup> filmmakers had already begun making quality films.

Meanwhile, Hoor Animation studio succeeded in attracting a significant number of people with an animated TV series. The series was in line with publicising a cultural safety issue sponsored by government organizations after the experiences

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<sup>144</sup> The reopening the festival was an attempt at resurrecting Kanun's initial festival in the 1970s. On this occasion a series of items had been included to introducing animation to the public with its new terms in Persian. Terms like 'pouyanemaei' instead of 'animation' and 'pouyanema' for 'animator' were suggested, and TV anchors used these terms when the festival was in progress (Amir Shahkarami, 2006).

<sup>145</sup> Pilban from 2002, a magazine focusing on animation subjects.

<sup>146</sup> In 2001.

<sup>147</sup> Hoor Animation, Rasaneh Fard.

of the 1990s. Audiences watched the first episodes in 2001; they appeared in 3D CGI short animated films and advised on traffic regulations

In this series, each one-minute part depicted an adventure related to traffic incidents. In the first series, adventures happened because of a character who behaved as an anarchic driver. Driving a rental car, he frequently ignored traffic rules. His dangerous driving caused accidents and police came to the scene to give advice. The driver's dialogue was based on local slang with some stress on the words taken from the accents of hooligans. Portraying the key main characters as bad men, the filmmaker tried to exaggerate their behaviour to illustrate their criminal side. Overall, each episode attempted to be a reminder of one or two traffic rules and to do this using entertainment.

The 3D CGI feature of the series was another effective factor in attracting audiences. The audiences assessed this series as a modern approach to animated films, welcoming further similar series. Thereafter, a demand emerged among government organizations and companies for infomercial animated films. However, not all of the subsequent work could repeat the success of the traffic series. The new series appeared as a stereotype of the previous ones. Despite this apparently negative opinion, 3D CGI filmmaking increasingly laid the groundwork for this type of animation. In fact, by increasing the number of these series, the level of experience of production practice in terms of skills, methods and applying different types of tools, grew considerably. As a result, these had positive effects on the quality of subsequent animated series, moving them towards becoming more professional, mostly in their visual imagery.

Meanwhile, the other studios were dealing with large projects. Tehran Film Studio finished a full-length puppet animated film<sup>148</sup> but it was not released owing to the

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<sup>148</sup> *Work and Thought* 2003.

shortcomings of its producer who did not support the film's distribution and screening. On the other hand, Rasaneh Fard Animation studio produced *The Sun of Egypt* in 2003 and gave it to a government organization for distribution. It was not publicised properly and it was not a success. After this failure, Rasaneh Fard tried again, producing another full-length animation film.

The studio finished the production of *Jamshid and Khorshid* in 2009, but it was not released, again because of unforeseen and unplanned circumstances related to the film's distribution and exhibition. These two products had an effect on similar ongoing projects.

*Simorq's Heart* was under way, a full-length animation film project sponsored by the Centre of Developing Documentary and Experimental Cinema. Its production ended in 2010 and was premiered at the Fajr International Film Festival<sup>149</sup> as a 2D CGI animated length feature film.

Another one was *Tehran 2121* in 3D CGI, the last full length animated film produced in the late 2000s. The film premiered at the Fajr International Film Festival in 2012. Its production was initially sponsored by the municipality of Tehran and a private producer. Later on, near the end of the film's production, the private producer replaced the producer of the film. Relying on experiences to date, *Tehran 2121* became the first full-length film, and it was successfully screened in early 2013. The following chapter focuses on the pre-production phase in these seven projects.

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<sup>149</sup> The Annual International Film Festival has been taking place in Tehran since February 1982, an event in favour of Iranian animation sector and accessible to animation students who wish have this opportunity attending in such event having international communications. It attracts participants from all over the Middle East and further afield, for example Europe and North America.

## **Chapter 6**

The chapter investigates seven full-length animation film projects implemented in Iran during 1980 to 2011. The focus is on the arrangement of the pre-production phase through which the filmmakers fashioned their films. The investigation analyses what factors affected their filmmaking practice over the course of the planning phase of the productions.

### **The study stages**

The research area is the animation industry as the main context in which the chosen full-length animation film projects form the central part of the study. This constitutes two parts of the investigation, and ends with a descriptive case study. Considering the specifics of the subject matter of the research work, the methodology and the techniques of applying the case study are in accordance with the suggestions of Robert K. Yin, Helen Simon and Robert E. Stake. Based on their suggestions, the study consists of six steps:

- realising and defining the case study questions
- selecting eligible cases, deciding on data collection and analysis techniques
- arranging data gathering for each project
- data collection from the sources
- evaluation and data analysis
- finalising the results in a report

### **The Questions**

For each project, we use case study research methodology based upon two questions:

- Why did the filmmakers tend to make full-length animation films?

As chapter three and four reflect, making a full-length animation film is a big challenge for the filmmaker owing to the dimensions of production. However, some

Iranian filmmakers were motivated to put such kinds of films into production. Studying their way of filmmaking and understanding their motivation helps to identify the factors which affected the projects. As these influenced the way they conducted the production, the next question which arises is how to assess their practice.

- How did they implement the planning phases of production?

Chapter three also looked at the influence of pre-production phases on the next stages of production. In line with this, the approach and activity of filmmakers in each project are investigated to elucidate which factors affected the first phase of production.

### **The cases**

Seven projects were chosen from twelve cases, and are appropriate cases for the study with regard to the planning phases of production that their filmmakers completed or were involved with over a period of time. Each case has its own specifics in terms of the scope of execution of production, the filmmaker, financial support, planning, technical matters, skilled workforces, distribution and exhibition. Taking this into consideration, the study concentrates on various examples reflecting Iranian full-length animation filmmaking during three decades. Thus, the outcome of this chapter completes one of two levels of the whole investigation of the research study.

### **Data collection**

Part of the data in this chapter was gathered through interviews with the filmmakers who were active in and worked on the projects. Other sources, such as observation and various publications, have also been referred to in order to complete the data in relation to each case. For example, in the first project, *Mouse*

and *Cat*, its producer Noreddin Ashtiani has passed away and therefore other available sources were referred to in order to collect essential data.

### **Evaluation and analysis**

Regarding the research questions, each case is studied individually in relation to its own specifics and the actions of its filmmaker. The aspects and conditions of each case are investigated using analysis techniques such as within case and cross check including specific and comparative analysis. Additionally, the points mentioned in the literature review are also referred to in order to enhance the validity of the study.

### **The Projects**

The seven projects are *Mouse & Cat (in one Hundred and one Nights)*, *Tak Taz*, *Namaki & the Giant*, *The Sun of Egypt*, *Jamshid and Khorshid*, *Simorq's Heart* and *Tehran 2121*.

#### ***Mouse & Cat***

Project profile; full title: *Mouse and Cat in One Hundred and One Nights*

Key people: producer: A. A. Noreddin Ashtiani, Director: Vahik Martirosian, assistant: Chris Karapetian, and a team of visual artists,

Imagery technique: 2D cel-animation (traditional technique), planned duration: ninety seven minutes, production beginning date: autumn 1979, end date: indeterminate.

The outcome: some rough shots and painted cels and concept designs of the film according to the official evidence.

#### **The Making of *Mouse and Cat***

Noureddin Ashtiani is probably not the first person to have come up with the idea of making the first Iranian full-length animation film, but the evidence seems to

suggest he made the first moves in this direction. With experience in the Iranian film industry over four decades, Ashtiani had good knowledge of the film industry and was active in supplying superior foreign films for its distribution network.

In the fourth decade of his career, Ashtiani also became the director of the first international film festival in Tehran and then a board member of the exhibition council. He was involved in an unfinished collaborative project to make a full-length animation film. Ashtiani decided to produce *Mouse and Cat* in 1979, seven months after the onset of the Islamic revolution.

The film industry was in a period of deep stagnation and most of the cinema halls were not yet active. The condition of filmmaking seemed not to be appropriate for those who had been working in this business. At the same time there were changes in management across the country as well as in media communication.

Despite this, Ashtiani arranged a team of visual artists under the direction of V. Martirosian to make a film based on a story from a poem about Mouse and Cat by Obeid Zakani<sup>150</sup>. It is about a huge wicked cat keen on hunting mice. After hunting a drunken mouse, he has regrets and feels guilty for what he has done. Praying in a mosque, he asks God to forgive him. The mouse is informed of this by a mouse who witnessed the cat's actions. This is good news for the mice, and they assume there is no threat from the cat anymore and prepare gifts to thank him. While presenting the gifts, the cat suddenly attacks them and it results in some more adventures.

The theme of the story required it to be shown via dynamic actions through figurative drawings of animals, a complicated practice in animation with regard to the technique of frame-by-frame in traditional cel-animation style. However, the

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<sup>150</sup> Iranian poet and writer about 1300-1377.

team designed characters and concepts and began animating the film's scenes. Ashtiani funded the start of the project.

Late on in the first year of the project, he realised that the production materials, consisting of cel sheets, colours for painting on cel and film footages, were unavailable. This was when he had spent about two hundred thousand dollars on the project, with many parts remaining to be done. These led Ashtiani to find a way to complete the project. At the time, Iran had just been attacked by Iraq, involving it in a war with an unknown ending.

The disappointing situation of the film industry and the war led Ashtiani to find a solution to complete the project by collaborating with an equipped studio abroad. An experienced producer like Ashtiani should have been aware of the risks of doing such a project in such a tricky situation. But he saw that this was a pioneering project, the first full-length animation film in the history of the Iranian film industry. Moreover, he believed in and relied on his lifetime experience which apparently gave him the self-confidence that he could manage and resolve any problems along the way.

In any case, Ashtiani had come such a long way, that perhaps it seemed to him that stopping or turning in another direction was impossible, mostly because of his reputation and background in the film industry. He put his efforts into gaining financial support from the new government at the same time as making contact with foreign studios such as 'Toho' in Japan and a studio in France. On meeting 'Ch. Tsatchev' in Paris, he realized that a studio in Sofia Bulgaria had modern animation filmmaking equipment.

Two years later, in 1981, Ashtiani and 'Tsatchev' signed a pre-agreement, firstly to make a ninety-seven-minute film of *Mouse & Cat* and a one thousand and then a six hundred minute TV series. Initially, Ashtiani estimated that the film needed

116,400 sheets of drawings for its production, on average twenty drawings for every second. Relying on this estimate, six hundred and fifty thousand dollars was agreed in the pre-contract, payable in instalments.

Based on the implemented stages of the project, the estimate and the signed pre-agreement, Ashtiani persuaded the Iranian organizations<sup>151</sup> to allocate the budget. They agreed to pay the budget in six instalments on the condition that the last two instalments would be paid after delivering the completed version of the film in Iran. Having obtained this important support for the production, Ashtiani signed the final agreement in March 1982 in Sofia.

Back in the country, he pursued receipt of the instalments and permission to transfer the completed parts of the project. As mentioned in the official letters and contracts, the parts included all concept design, including characters, locations, scene colour guides and painted celluloids provided by the primary team. Ashtiani took these in addition to two instalments when he left Sofia in 1983.

Apparently, everything was progressing well, and the third instalment received, when Ashtiani reported, in October 1984, that the paintings of all scenes, cels and filming would not be ready until March 1987. However, after a while, it became apparent that some conflict had occurred between the two parties, mainly over the film's sound. Apparently, they had forgotten to clarify the matters concerning the sound of the film in the contract. This was also an excuse for the studio to renege over the theme of *Mouse & Cat*, saying it was a hard and time-consuming project and requested three hundred and fifty thousand dollars more.

This unforeseen problem coincided with a delay in paying the fourth instalment. This caused Ashtiani serious hardship. After much negotiation and discussion, he ultimately convinced the studio to continue with the production, receiving one

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<sup>151</sup> Ministry of Commerce.

hundred and fifty thousand dollars more. He came back to the country to chase up payment of the overdue instalment, but, the payer had changed owing to administrative changes. He found the relevant organisations through the officials; the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance was determined to pay the rest of the instalments.

Ashtiani sent a letter to the ministry reporting on the progress and the current condition of the project, and saying that the fourth instalment needed to be paid. Ashtiani also noted the four stages of the project; one, the first team in the country had prepared one hundred and twenty four thousand sheets of drawings and paintings for the film's frames. Two, eighty people had worked on the project in the studio in Sofia. Three, all tracing and painting work on the cels had come to an end and was ready for filming. Four, after finishing this stage, the film would be brought to Iran for its sound process to be done. He ended his letter by pointing out that the rent on the studio would be due by the end of February 1987 and the studio would be working on another project according to the contract. Therefore, any delay could cause problems putting the whole project and investment at risk.

Dated six years after the start of the project, the letter shows that at least half of the production was already done in the country. The remaining stages, consisting of key framing, in-betweening, cel-tracing, painting and filming were done in Sofia to complete the film and return it for the sounding process. Additionally, he was concerned with the rest of the work that needed to be finished within the remaining time.

However, after passing a few hurdles with the new administration, the instalment was ultimately paid, although it took a while, causing a delay. It apparently caused more problems for Ashtiani. He finally left the country in December 1986, with not very much time left to finish the work.

After that, no news came from Sofia except for two contacts Ashtiani made with the ministry. One was about receipt of the film's pictorial profile showing its characters and scenes in eight pages saying 1987 Merry Christmas as well as introducing the key casts. And, one year later, Ashtiani called the ministry asking them to pay the fifth instalment according to the request made by the studio. After investigating the circumstances, the ministry responded that it is required the studio itself to contact them.

These are the last tracks of *Mouse and Cat's* production; the producer had promised it would be the first Iranian full-length animated film, comparable with the best ones in the world.

Regarding the first question of the study in this case, we find Ashtiani was the one who had an idealistic belief in doing this kind of production. He wanted to make the first film of this type, of the best quality, assuming it would be the first significant one in the history of animation filmmaking in the country. He emphasised these points in his letters years later when the future of the project was still not clear. Despite his intentions, Ashtiani appeared to be an inexperienced animation filmmaker, who assumed he was making the first and best Iranian full-length animation film (Omid, 1995).

In general, *Mouse and Cat*, as the first approach to full-length animation filmmaking in Iran remained forgotten because of its production time, transferring its production abroad, and lack of availability and accessibility of its artworks. Consequently, later on, those who followed were not aware of this film. They were deprived of using the lessons learnt in their filmmaking, which took place eighteen years later.

## ***Tak Taz***

Project profile; full title: *Tak Taz*

Key people/org.: producers: 'The Cultural and Artistry Institute of Saba', the key sponsor, Tehran Film Studio and Scanimation (a Swedish studio), Director: Abolfazl Razani, a team of visual artists

Interviewee: A. Razani; Place: Tehran (in the studio), Date: 28 Sep. 2010

Imagery technique: 2D cel-animation, planned duration: eighty minutes, one hundred and fifty minutes TV series in twenty six parts,

Production beginning date: Late 1996, end date: unfinished

Outcome: about fifteen minutes rough animated film

### **The making of *Tak Taz***

In the late 1980s, Iran embarked on a recovery phase to revitalise various fields which had stagnated during the Iran-Iraq war. Among cultural matters, the animation sector witnessed new organisations dealing with animation filmmaking. Saba, a government organization, was one of the foremost at this time. *Tak Taz* was one of the early outsourced projects where Saba shared its sponsorship with private studios. This was in line with Saba's manifesto aimed at development of animation filmmaking in the country. It happened about two decades after the unfinished *Mouse and Cat*, when recovery in the animation sector had begun with the reopening of MA animation courses in universities in the early 1990s. Since then, the activities and number of people involved in the sector had begun to increase. It seemed the right time to approach the making of professional animations including full-length films.

At the same time, Saba publicized its facilities in support of animation films. Some filmmakers, including Tehran Film Studio and Scanimation, welcomed such facilities. Saba needed to be active in production because it was responsible for

spending the allocated budget within a specified period of time. Therefore, a big production was one of the most eligible and justifiable projects showing the suitability of Saba in performing its task in line with its manifesto.

On the other hand, A. Razani, an animation filmmaker since 1969, who owned Tehran Film Studio, wanted to activate his studio after the era of stagnation. Among the first generation of domestic filmmakers, Razani, educated in animation in Germany, commenced filmmaking with a puppet animated TV series of *Forehead Moon*<sup>152</sup>. Five 2D short animated films, *Orian* (produced in collaboration with Scanimation) and *The Timid Eagle*, a cel-animated film, were among his films. He also made documentary films about Iranian nomadic tribes and several animated advertising films. Tending to make stop-motion animation, most of his career was spent in making puppet animation films, among which the series of *Work and Thought* attracted audiences because this was the first time that a home-made puppet animation film was aired on the national TV.

At the time, Saba announced that making a full-length film would be a great pride for its filmmaker because no visible sign remained of *Mouse and Cat*. It could therefore be the first one in the country. Moreover, the prestige of being the first Iranian animation full-length filmmaker was also another strong motivation in its own way.

The time also seemed right to make this production with regard to emerging opportunities in the country, particularly in the animation sector which was admitting new people, and there was more funding for private and semi-private studios. New channels on national TV revealed a need for more animated films. All this indicated that animation activities were booming again. In such conditions, the

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<sup>152</sup> 'Mah Pishouni'

parties signed an agreement to make *Tak Taz*, an eighty-minute film reflecting the world of a young boy and his foal as outlined in a script written by Razani.

The story begins in a tribal habitat describing a boy who lives with his family who camp in vast grassland near their neighbours. Most have nomadic animals, including horses, for riding. On a stormy midnight, a mare in his father's herd gives birth through a hard delivery to a lovely white foal. The foal fascinates the boy after he helps his father to save the mare's life. Witnessing this love, the father and family make him the owner of the foal. After a while a good relationship develops between them. Their main adventures begin when they take part in a local race which they could win. They go to different natural, urban, local and foreign racing environments. In each of these, the boy and his foal face interesting and exciting situations.

After getting approval for the story, Razani as the director gets a team of visual artists to design the characters and prepare the concept for the film. The author apparently joined the team once parts of the set had been designed and the main characters had been developed. But the design aspects, specifically the boy's character, did not seem to appeal to the director. The boy was not good enough as an energetic youngster, according to the story. The character as designed had no energy, nor were his eyes, face and figure attractive.

Also, some locations, such as grassland scenery portraying tribal habitats, tribal camping, mountain landscapes, and cliff edges, were designed somehow hastily. At this stage the director was trying to achieve a set primarily designed to lead the process of creation towards the final visual style of the film. However, there was no particular strategy to execute this. In creating the film's elements, the available sources were just the story and the guidelines of the director

In this project, two major shortcomings had made the initial outcome of pre-production fruitless. One, the team was inexperienced; two, it did not know to what extent it was unaware of the process it was dealing with. Thus, it was not clear to the team how to turn the content of the story into acceptable visual elements. On the other hand, the realistic world of the story needed a pictorial study and a variety of visual resources to help the artists develop their visual ideas. Although, in addition to the director's guidelines, a few pictorial books showing Iranian tribal scenery were available to foster the creative process, they were insufficient.

Therefore, when the first outcomes appeared poor and unusable, the director reshuffled the team, inviting a cartoonist and several visual artists to redo the characters and the set. Additionally, during the production, he arranged training sessions to teach the stages of production in animation to the new team. Further visual materials were supplied to help redesign the boy's character and the concept. The cartoonist redesigned the character in a new fashion with a different character from the first one. The other key characters, including the foal, the father and the family, were slightly refined, and all were apparently ready to use in the storyboard and animation.

Working as a member of the team, the author concentrated on redesigning the location, sets of mountains, cliffs and different tribal environments. During the implementation of each step, everyone on the team was learning the job by trial and error. It took extra time to create an acceptable level of output.

For several months after the start, Saba asked about the progress of the project. Being unaware of the complexity of the job and the ability of the filmmakers, Saba expected to hear that a significant part of the film was ready and some scenes could be watched. But, it was not so. Saba's managers were surprised to hear this and remarked that the progress had been so slow, and it made them worry about

the completion date. In response, the director justified the delay by saying that owing to the nature of the production, it was taking extra time to get the concept design to the right level of quality. But that during the production process the daily output would be greater and faster.

In any case, the view of the sponsor was that it was important for the project to progress, continue and survive. This influenced the remaining stages of the pre-production phase, which primarily included planning of the film. After that, the director tried to speed up the implementation of the various stages. Consequently, drawing of the storyboard was still in progress when animation of the scenes that had been drawn began. The story reel stage was eliminated and pre-production and production were executed together.

As soon as each shot had been prepared for the storyboard, and checked and approved by the director, the animators used the shot in designing key frames and in-betweens. As animators required layouts of every shot, the director attempted to find a way to realise the proportions and relations of the visual elements in each shot. It happened because of the elimination of the completed storyboard and story reel prior to production. After performing many tests, he and his assistants found a practical way to do the layout. They devised a Multiplan set<sup>153</sup> of standing layers to hold 2D parts of an image constituting a shot in front of an animation camera. Using a camera's field guide, they could determine each shot's layout when viewed through the camera's visor.

The important point here was that utilization of the set appeared to be a very complicated process in practice, while the director just wanted to know what a finalized shot looked like. Seeing the image of each shot through the camera somehow helped him evaluate the final feature of each one. Soon it became

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<sup>153</sup> Similar to Disney's Multiplan animation camera set, but the layers of this set were devised horizontally.

apparent that this process was slow, time-consuming and boring, but no other solution came to mind at the time.

Along with these challenges, the director had to manage his storyboard artist and animators who needed continual direction. As the production progressed, the lack of a completed storyboard and story-reel resulted in a lack of clarity in the film's story. Although the storyboard was drawn based on a script, its visualization had not been implemented clearly. The animators were also struggling with animating characters' actions because of unclear shots in the storyboard.

In the second year of working on the project, Saba requested to see any footage which had been produced. By that time, about fifteen minutes had been produced. Eight minutes of that were edited to present to the sponsor. They welcomed the outcome asking when the final film would be ready. The question ignited discussions between the various parties over the project. Saba urged that the film be completed on time in accordance with the agreement, while the director explained that the completion of the film needed extra time.

The disagreement between the two intensified; the sponsor cut the budget and complained. This bad news disappointed all members of the team whose skills had developed as a result of the experience of working on the project. The director and Scanimation tried to preserve the project by replacing a foreign sponsor, but firstly it was essential to sort out the existing problem by resolving the sponsor's claim. Subsequently, the team broke up when the argument did not lead to an agreement. So *Tak Taz* was left unfinished as the second Iranian full-length animation film project.

### ***Namaki & The Giant***

Project profile; full title: *Namaki and The Giant*

Producer: Abnous film

Key people: producer: Hassan Sharifi, director: Nariman Granmayeh, production manager: Ali Ahmadi, location design: Hossein Safi, character design: Parvaneh Shahsamandi, Habibi and a team of visual artists

Interviewees: N. Granmayeh and A. Ahmadi; Place: Tehran; Date 18 Oct. 2010, Imagery technique: 2D animation, (computer assisted), planned duration: eighty five minutes, beginning date: 1999, end date: unfinished

The outcome: a short demo reel of the film

### **Abnous Film's background**

During the second biannual international animation film festival in Tehran (2000) Abnous Studio decided to make *Namaki and The Giant*. The second festival brought much excitement to the animation sector. This was at the same time as other developments were happening in the production of animation, including the application of computers in animation filmmaking.

Abnous Studio, founded after the mid 1990s as a private studio, had made animated TV series, shorts, and advertising films. The studio appeared successful in producing two animated films which had been ordered by foreign companies. During these productions, an efficient team had emerged which gradually became skilled in executing quality stages of production. For instance, in the making of *Palangi*, a TV animated film, they designed a high standard model sheet and a pictorial reference<sup>154</sup> for the characters. That was a perfect reference of the designed characters rarely seen in the other domestic productions. Dealing with another project, the team experienced designing a highly crafted storyboard and a demo reel ordered by a French company. By doing this, they realized what professional details made the designing of a storyboard perfect. Granmayeh states “although we had already prepared such a design in our previous work, we

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<sup>154</sup> A pictorial reference of the characters in forty five pages.

learned new details while doing these projects, which significantly improved our skills.” Later, these new findings became their benchmark to use for the same stage in Namaki’s production.

Having achieved success and received positive feedback for this production, and having a skilled team on hand, Sharifi and Granmayeh were led towards making an animation length film. As Granmayeh explains, “it was several years after starting to run the studio that we thought we could afford to run an important project.” They also hoped that by presenting high quality work it would encourage officials and investors to invest in the project.

### **The making of *Namaki & The Giant***

Based on this background, work on the project began in 2000 as Sharifi funded its production. Granmayeh emphasised that the studio had other income which could be spent on the projects. But keeping the production active was impossible without Sharifi’s investment. He added that the cost was high as it included the expenses of a team with forty-five members working three years on average.

The original idea for *Namaki & the Giant* came from an Iranian tale rewritten as a play by M. Ehterami and A. Behrouz-nasab. As a rhythmic poem, the play relates the adventures of a little girl who gets kidnapped by a huge giant. The story leads to a series of exciting and interesting adventures. Using the play as the basis, the team struggled at first on how to start turning it into some audiovisual contents.

Understanding the world of the story, Granmayeh asked the team to design freely what they imagined about the world of the film and its characters. They designed twenty four concepts representing the story from different viewpoints. Some members illustrated an interesting atmosphere fit to use in the production. Sharifi, Granmayeh and Ahmadi evaluated the work to determine the best values appropriate for the film.

At the time, they had to relocate their studio because the project needed more people to work in a larger space. In the new location, they assigned two artists to design characters according to the chosen concepts. Testing the physical actions and movements of the characters was done by three animators.

Granmayeh remembers that at this time, in a discussion over the progress of the work, they concluded that a live performance showing the play could help them to better understand the atmosphere of the story. Subsequently, four performers were invited to the studio. They performed the play in front of the team. It was very helpful as their acting highlighted some vague parts of the story that might be neglected in writing the script for the film. Additionally, the voices and actions of the performers created audio and visual moods which contributed to the team being able to feel and understand further details of the story. The performance was recorded to act as a reference for artists and animators throughout the stages of pre-production.

Granmayeh explains, “Even later on, we used some of the performance’s dialogues in creating the initial storyboard. The performance helped us to find the right way to do scene-setting and driving forward the sections of the story. And, I think if this was not done, my next revision of the work could not have emerged properly.”

After the performance, the director wrote a brief story for a demo reel which was used by the character designers, background artist and animators in the visualization process. To create unique aspects in the concept design, Granmayeh asked the team to refer to their feelings, impressions, experiences and anything relevant from their lives in Tehran. They should then use these as a source of inspiration for creating the concepts. The results of this strategy appeared in the designed characters and the story’s locations. Namaki’s house and the city where

she lives were taken from the city of Tehran in the 1900s. The giant character and his castle were inspired by 'Arge Bam'<sup>155</sup>. These were created through the director's directions and reviewing practices in the studio.

In regular weekly meetings, the artists presented the progress of their work to a board consisting of Sharifi, Granmayeh and Ahmadi. Every member explained how each character or location had been developed and what resources had been used throughout the process. After that, they received feedback from the board.

Granmayeh and Ahmadi acknowledge that this approach not only allowed each member to try to find the best way of developing the visual aspects of each element, but they also learned how to do the process systematically. Granmayeh states that they needed to keep learning until they reached a certain stage but sometimes they were disappointed in some of the team. In such cases, he supported them by talking, persuading, advising and saying to them "Do not give up! Carry on! You can do it."

Most members of the team were young artists who felt they were not limited in creating something perfect and appropriate for the project. This feeling existed in the studio, because they believed it would be a pioneering film in the country; thus, its success would be their achievement. Another reason was the board of directors' feedback on the work of the artists. After receiving feedback they felt they could work freely on the creative aspects and improve the work they were responsible for.

After further progress, the film's script was written for use in designing the storyboard. Granmayeh designed the first storyboard based on its first three scenes. Ahmadi mentions that it was a very complete and detailed storyboard showing camera angles and moves, locations, lighting, objects and characters

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<sup>155</sup> A ancient city (248 BC) in Kerman province built from clay and bricks,

very clearly in its images. The storyboard also became a reference for designing the layout.

Granmayeh adds that the storyboard was illustrated by pastel. The key scenes were coloured in order to achieve a harmonious continuity of colour and light throughout the film. This also contributed expression to the storytelling and helped in holding the attention of audiences throughout the film.

As working on the planning stages of the film became prolonged, shortages in the budget were gradually revealed. The problem concerned the director and his assistant who were attempting to manage ongoing activities. Ahmadi states that apart from financial problems, some in the team were students who worked part time; it created extra tasks for the production manager and the director, as they had to arrange replacements for those who were coming and going one after another, to keep the production going. It was a tough job for them, particularly with regard to control of the style of imagery that could not change during the process of implementation.

Granmayeh emphasises, “we did it in this manner, but it took lots of energy from us especially from Mr Sharifi who was trying to provide the money and keep the project going.” This situation led them to focus mostly on preparing a demo reel for presentation at an international film event in order to attract investors to support the project.

Along with finding solutions for recovering the financial situation, the project continued to make progress. Granmayeh remembers, “when we reviewed the story again, there seemed a distinct lack of action after the giant kidnaps Namaki along the way until they reach the giant’s home. We realised we needed ideas to fill the gap between these two scenes to allow the story to flow dynamically.”

Finding a suitable idea to refine this section, they came up with the idea that Namaki escapes somewhere along the way. The escape was reworked by adding some comedy when the storyboard was revised. As the scenes now seemed to fit together, they decided to make a story reel to make sure the scenes worked properly on the screen. Granmayeh remembers, “at the time, part of the team was preparing character movements and action tests, when we felt the need to make a story reel.” Ahmadi describes “the story reel appeared to be truly wonderful, and I had never seen anything like that in all the previous productions. The images in each shot, consisting of layers of background, character and foreground, had facilitated the showing of some key moves of character and camera. We even inserted some voices of the performers in the shots.”

After improving the main parts, providing sound for the film was the next stage that was primarily intended for use in the demo reel. Apart from the voices of some of the performers, several members of the team had voice tests to see if their voices fitted the personalities of the characters. Some of them were selected for the dubbing process.

In terms of music, as the director was looking for a musician who could do the task professionally, he became aware that Shardad Rohani, a highly reputable composer, was coming to Tehran to perform a concert. At first, Sharifi doubted whether Rohani would accept this commission as he worked in the United States. But Granmayeh believed that they should try their luck, because it was a significant opportunity for their film to have music of the highest quality, which could have a positive effect on other aspects of quality.

They finally met Rohani and gave him a demo reel of the film, which had been in preparation until a few minutes before the meeting. Much to their surprise, Rohani declared that he would be eager to compose the music for the demo.

Granmayeh states that it brought an extra energy to the studio because everybody was confident and optimistic about the music. He also gives some details “Rohani’s comments on the storyboard taught me some important points that I was not really aware of. For instance, in a big production, the director may be assisted by experts who suggest ups and downs of action in connection with the mood of the music, it helps if the ongoing movements and actions in the images are in harmony with the flow of the music.”

Completion of the demo was concurrent with the third International Animation Film Festival of Tehran. Namaki’s demo was presented at this event and the filmmakers hoped their work could attract investors’ support for its production. At the time, they had worked for three years on the different parts of the pre-production phase, consisting of characters and set design for use in production.

Studio Abnous actively participated in two main events of the festival; in the film competition they presented the demo of *Namaki and The Giant*, and in the exhibition they arranged a significant show stand with a large screen displaying the demo and other Abnous film products. The presence of Abnous at the festival caught the eye as everyone watched the demo as a home product with incredulity. At the end of the festival, the judge dedicated a special award to Sharifi for his courage in investing in animation filmmaking as a private investor. Before this, the author met Sharifi at the festival and asked him to participate in an interview as part of an ongoing research project on Iranian animation filmmaking at the time (Amir Shahkarami, 2006).

A while later, a session was arranged in Studio Abnous. The studio was active and working on routine projects, but there was no sign of Namaki’s project when the interview took place there. It was expected that Sharifi and Granmayeh would both participate in the interview but Sharifi turned up on his own.

He explained “we had to shut down Namaki and the Giant project because no domestic sponsor came forward to invest in it. After that, we sent a representative to present it at an international film market in France. At the market, a few international producers welcomed the demo but they requested some changes to the story and concept design of the film so that it could be acceptable for investment. Obviously, implementing their requests was impossible to do by the studio because of its critical financial situation. Inevitably, we had to close it down and it made all of us so depressed, particularly Mr Granmayeh, who was involved directly in every step of the project. Thus, he was reluctant to take part in this session as being reminded of the production of Namaki makes him annoyed again.”

### **Reflections on the Namaki and the Giant project**

Looking at the seven projects which had been put into production as full-length animation films up to 2011, none of the filmmakers could work on planning stages similar to Namaki’s project. The reasons relate to two kinds of factors according to its filmmakers’ views of this type of filmmaking and financial matters.

The key filmmakers include the producer and the director, who believed in serving their home culture and liked activities in this field as indicated by their backgrounds. As a publisher, Sharifi had been active in publishing books, mostly for young people, years before establishing Abnous Studio. Granmayeh had his first experiences of filmmaking twenty years earlier before working as a director on Namaki and the Giant.

They both state that making a film of such quality was not only difficult but was also full of unknown points and aspects for them. They initially admitted that they might not have a quality film at the end unless they first learnt the details of every step. It firstly required allocating enough time to let them do the work, see the

result, and evaluate the quality. Based on this view, they directed the team and let them use trial and error in achieving the best outcome. Believing this was the way forward, the producer accepted the possible risks along the way and paid the costs of production as he could.

Therefore, although the outcome after three years was a demo reel, they had learned many valuable lessons in animation length filmmaking. In fact, if everything went according to plan, the costs would be recuperated and a profit made. But things did not go their way. Years later, Saba declared his willingness to support the Namaki project if the filmmakers wanted to complete it. However, discussions over the budget proved fruitless.

As a last action, the demo was evaluated once more, this time abroad. Granmayeh recounts two sets of feedback he received after sending the demo to some US filmmakers in 2008. One is Katherine Durant, a visual effects expert on a successful film in the 2000s, who wrote to him with feedback on some technical points in relation to the demo, surprised that he had not yet found a producer for the project, saying it had the potential to be a successful film.

Another is a 2D expert who explained the strengths and weaknesses of the work, but said the demo's story was not clear for the viewer. Granmayeh explains, "although this feedback came seven years after the demo became available, I was sure that we needed at least one more year to prepare an ideal pre-production phase with a thorough story reel of the film. This could deliver the quality we wanted."

### ***The Sun of Egypt***

Project profile; full/initial title: *The Sun of Egypt and the Prophet*

Producer: studio 'Rasaneh Fard Animation'

Key people: producer: Nader Yaqmaian, director: Behrouz Yaqmaian,

the studio's team of visual artists

Interviewees: N. and B. Yaqmaian; Place: Tehran (in the studio); Date: 5 Oct. 2010,

Imagery technique: 2D animation, (computer assisted),

Duration: eighty minutes,

Beginning date: 2000, end date: 2002

Outcome: a full-length animated film

### **Rasaneh Fard studio background**

Founded as a private studio in the early 1990s, Rasaneh Fard began its activity in animation filmmaking concurrent with the revitalization of the animation sector. The Yaqmaian brothers are the heads of this studio, each one managing his own type of work, Nader as the producer and Behrouz as the director. B. Yaqmaian, with a BA in stage design from Art University, managed to make his first animated series *When Daddy Was a Child* in 1979. Since then in the 1980s, until he ran his own studio, he directed TV animated series such as *Golden Mean Is the Best* and *Old-time Stories*, all sponsored by Channel Two of national TV.

On setting up the studio, Rasaneh Fard's early work included a series of animated advertising films<sup>156</sup> and a 2D TV series<sup>157</sup>. Apart from the advertising films, the 2D TV series constituted the experience of Rasaneh Fard filmmakers, and served as a grounding for producing *Prophets' Lives*<sup>158</sup>, which was a subsequent animated TV series made in the late 1990s. These series<sup>159</sup> and a TV animated film, *Prophet Abraham* in 2001, introduced Rasaneh Fard as a prolific studio. Most of the orders came from national TV and Saba feeding the studio with regular

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<sup>156</sup> *Water, Water, Life, Dae-jan & Jan-dae, One of these Days.*

<sup>157</sup> *Bird & Snake, The Playful Jackal, Sharp Horn, and the Eagle & the Rabbit.*

<sup>158</sup> *Prophet series 1999-2000.*

<sup>159</sup> *Old Stories 1999-2000, Invaders & Alchemy's Cup 1999-2000, The Amazing World of Hamid (composite) 2001, Environment 2001-2002 cultural infomercial series,*

demands. Relying on this demand, the studio had a permanent member of filmmaking staff on board. This situation existed in a number of private studios at the time. The studio won six awards at domestic film festivals and one at a foreign film festival between 1998 and 2003. In the second decade of its activity, Rasaneh Fard produced a full-length animation film and released its first in 2001.

### **The making of *The Sun of Egypt***

This film is the first full-length animated feature film in the country of eighty minutes length, and whose production was completed and exhibited in 2003. B. Yaqmaian, the director, explains how they developed and progressed the project through its production.

The idea of making the film came up when the studio was involved with the production of the *Prophets Series* for television. *The Sun of Egypt* was one of the episodes, and Saba suggested making it separately and ninety minutes in length. During the production of the series, the studio prepared the film's script and sent it to Saba for approval.

The story's core was about the life of Moses, written specifically to be a TV animation film. After some editing and finalising of the script, its production commenced based on a contract signed by Saba and the studio. The film, in 2D technique, was intended to be screened on national TV.

B. Yaqmaian states that the production's framework was intended for video production; it led to the arrangement of pre-production in accordance with standard requirements. The visualization process was begun after a team was set up in the studio. He notes, "after the early stages of output of the work, we presented it to Saba and they gave their comments and views on the outcomes. Their feedback included comments on concept design, characters, locations, storyboard and the first animated tests. But after a while some discrepancies

arose over some aspects of the work, as well as over the contract, so we could not reach an agreement with Saba.”

This led the studio to make a decision on making the production on its own, become the producer and complete the production with its own investment. It meant refunding the payments to Saba, so that Rasaneh Fard could become the owner of the project. Ultimately, the studio decided to remove Saba from the project. After changing the source of financing, it seemed to the filmmakers that it was the right time to turn the project into a full-length animation feature film, because it would be the first film of this type ever to be made in the country. It was a similar situation to earlier cases, such as *Namaki and the Giant*, whose production was concurrent with this project.

The team tried to refine the story and the actions of its characters, and develop capabilities to enhance the film’s values as a full-length film. As soon as some parts were changed, it became apparent that to achieve perfection would require the redoing of most of the steps which had been implemented to date. It was because of this that the episode was intended based on the video format and TV animation.

For the studio, the redoing process involved costs and took time. Evaluating the situation, the studio’s heads could not find a solution to improve the film according to the quality requirements of a full-length animation film. They concluded the practice of redoing would be tricky, and could possibly put the studio at risk with regard to its financial situation at the time. Inevitably, the production continued based on the primary visualization and pre-production outputs they had already implemented at the level of a TV animation video film.

Finally, Rasaneh Fard completed production of the film within two and a half years in 2002. The same year, *The Sun of Egypt*, eighty minutes in length, premiered in

the third Animation Film Festival of Tehran. The studio's funds had run out over the completion of this project and it faced a crisis. To bail itself out of this situation, the studio had to perform a quick recovery. This made the filmmakers sell the film's screening rights to the 'Hozeh Honari Organization'.

*The Sun of Egypt* was released by this government organisation in 2003. It exhibited the film without any advertising, over a short period and in a small number of cinemas; so this arrangement was not very satisfactory. It was a failure for the studio for its first film. B. Yaqmaian states, "they ruined the opportunity for the film to be screened appropriately."

This event provided many lessons for domestic animation filmmakers in general and for Raseh Fard in particular. Lessons such as: the production plan should finish with exhibition of the film; the animation industry needs to be taken into account by the cinema industry; in full-length filmmaking the animation filmmaker needs to create perfect set designs and cinematic storytelling for the film to bring audiences to cinemas. Also, the animation industry needs to be independent in its studio facilities.

After a while, everybody in the studio felt that a recovery was possible. The studio's heads started to prepare the basics for the next animation length film. B. Yaqmaian explains, "we concluded that research may lead us to learn further details about the secrets of the most popular animated films. We did a study on the aspects of storytelling in Disney's films which provided the best examples."

The study revealed that most of these films have stories with adventurous and love themes, which are favourites among young audiences. Their stories flow through events being portrayed in an entertaining, exciting and enjoyable way, enhanced by having appealing and funny characters, different adventures, locations and occasional musical scenes. They also investigated how the type of

story, human and animal characters, action, comedy, gags, and music work together in animation storytelling.

B. Yaqmaian explains the results of the study; “with regard to the study we became interested in an Iranian story of *Jamshid and Khorshid* which we found would be appropriate to turn into a full-length animation film.”

As the study was being conducted, Nader Yaqmaian was trying to obtain a start up budget to run the new project. He succeeded in getting agreement for two loans from related government organizations. Gradually, it seemed that the conditions were ready to commence the next film in 2004.

### ***Jamshid & Khorshid***

Project profile; full/initial title: *Jamshid and Khorshid*

Producer: studio ‘Rasaneh Fard Animation’

Key people: producer: Nader Yaqmaian, director: Behrouz Yaqmaian,

Music: Keyvan Kiaras, Omid Nikbin,

The studio’s team of visual artists

Interviewees: N. and B. Yaqmaian; Place:Tehran (in the studio); Date: 5 Oct. 2010,

Imagery technique: 2D animation, (computer assisted),

Duration: eighty minutes,

Beginning date: 2004, end date: 2008

Outcome: a full-length animated film

### **The making of the film**

Work on this film started in the mid 2000s when various sectors of animation in the country were in full flow, including the fourth Animation Film Festival, an event at which filmmakers and animation lovers gathered; it improved the communication between them. News came out that production of new animation length films were

being planned; the best MA graduates in animation had come to work in the animation studios and national TV had announced the running of a new channel as 'Education' attracting ranges of audiences for the first homemade TV animated series. The airing of an infomercial about an animation series on national TV, attracted people and became popular. The series was the first step towards another large production.

Generally, the existing situation in the animation sector was hopeful for Rasaneh Fard Animation studio, which was just testing the water by investing in another animation length film. The studio team believed in learning from their previous experience to make the second attempt successful. Such belief stoked their self-confidence in making the next film a good one.

The first steps of the production began when a team was organised to work on the story, building it up as an original story with respect to the results of the study. During several sessions, the story team attempted to fashion it into an epic story with exciting adventures, action characters, a love theme, comic gags and musical scenes. B. Yaqmaian explains the planning stage, "we considered those aspects in the film that could be important and popular with young people."

After doing the final edits and amendments to the story, Ali Fayaz-manesh, who had written the stories for previous projects, wrote its script. The script was completed with some lyrics for the musical scenes. The last changes to the script facilitated its approval so that it could be used in the design process. A team of skilled artists was invited to come for the character design and storyboard stages at the studio, as the main team was designing the story's locations.

B. Yaqmaian adds, "in fact, these stages were implemented together; the artists created each part of the pre-production through stages of sketching, refining and amending. The final step was approval of these artworks by the director. There

were discussion sessions to talk over the work in progress. In the sessions, although I requested and pushed everyone to talk about the work to enhance the quality, the team members did not actively talk about the work. It was a kind of anxiety or shyness which led them to talk less; I myself therefore had to evaluate the sketches.”

Animation of the characters was made possible with the availability of the first few sheets of the storyboard. Owing to the need for the story reel at this stage, B. Yaqmaian explains, “we made it to know how the estimated timing works in some scenes of the film.” Using the story reel to only check some scenes seems to suggest that the function of the story reel in improving the quality was not sufficiently clear to Rasaneh Fard filmmakers.

B. Yaqmaian gives the following information, “there were changes and revisions somewhere in the production as we carried on with the implementation. Some shots inevitably changed when we could not work out what was acceptable. We had a number of such situations during the production.”

In B. Yaqmaian’s explanations about the process of the production phase, there are important points which address the problems in the production phase. These problems were rooted in the arrangement of the pre-production phase as revealed by the outcomes of its various stages. One is the style of acting when the key characters appear in various poses, their acting having close similarities to ‘anime’ (Japanese animation style). Or some characters’ features are very similar to the characters in Disney’s films.

The reason is that the team could not prepare an imagery design to present a visual set suitable for the film. According to B. Yaqmaian, “live figure drawing workshops are not available and visual artists have to use published comic strips as the main source to develop their drawing skills.” Whether or not such resources

influence their style of imagery is debatable. Consequently, their artworks reflect other styles of animated films. The style of Disney's films was one influence. This indicates that the basic teaching of the visual artists in the team was not consistent with professional methods so that they could not present a unique visual development.

Another matter B. Yaqmaian notes is that they had difficulties in doing lip-sync processes. He explains, "at first, it was intended that the singing scenes be shown without lip-syncs and facial motion shots, but in the production we realized the film required such shots, but that its implementation was difficult, because of the lack of essential experience in the team."

Finally, they did it through trial and error similar to other cases that were not foreseen in the pre-production phase. In some cases, they inevitably had to ignore unworkable or vague parts of the film's story, because of the extra cost and time of redoing such cases after all the steps were done.

Moreover, at the end of production, the studio came up with the idea of using popular film stars to create the voices of the characters. They hoped that it would help their film not only in terms of popularity among audiences but also in persuading the cinema distribution network to put it into its screening schedule. Dealing with creation of voice-overs at the end of animation production may face the filmmaker with some limitations, impossibilities or changes and redoes. The reason Rasaneh Fard's filmmakers did this at the final stage is typical of practice in Iranian cinema.

As mentioned in chapter five, the animation filmmakers do this stage as it is done for imported films. In fact, the existing skilled dubbing studios provide services for this process, and therefore the animation filmmakers use this skill to create the voices of the characters. The main difference between execution of this method by

Western and Iranian filmmakers is that voice recording is done at the pre-production stage in the West and in postproduction in Iran.

The use of post-recording voice is usual by domestic filmmakers because of its familiar process, lower cost and availability of services. Pre-recording is costly but enhances quality of characterization, lip sync, facial animating and rhythmic actions in connection with voice and sound.

It seems that the animation filmmakers' willingness to apply post-recording voice leads them to postpone working on sound design in the postproduction phase. Because of this, they may not be able to come up with the perfect aspects of voice design in characterization as their Western peers do. Particularly because after implementation of the production phase any new change requires extra costs and time.

Thus, we see that although Rasaneh-fard had managed to produce its second full-length film significantly better than the first, it required further learning about planning a large production. Rasaneh-fard filmmakers researched the aspects of films made by Disney and Hollywood, but did not pay attention to how they do that. The filmmakers also totally relied on trial and error methods to run the production phase rather than employing methods and strategies to create the best possible films in the pre-production phase. Consequently, their efforts did not cover the vital aspects of quality in an animation length film.

The exhibition of *Jamshid & Khorshid* was another problem faced by the studio. The film was not screened in cinemas mainly because the filmmakers did not plan its exhibition. This had happened previously in relation to *The Sun of Egypt*. Again, this was a reminder that such these tasks essentially need to be determined at the pre-production phase.

Other filmmakers became aware of the fate of Rasaneh Fard's films, especially those who were dealing with similar projects. They were concerned with the accessibility of the facilities of distribution and screening of their films.

### ***Simorq*<sup>160</sup>'s Heart**

Project profile: producer: Documentary & Experimental Film Centre (DEFC), a government organization

Key people: director: Vahid Nasirian

Music: Payam Azadi, a team of visual artists

Interviewee: V. Nasirian; Place: Tehran; Date: 11 Oct. 2010,

Imagery technique: 3D animation,

Duration: ninety-eight minutes,

Beginning date: in mid 2006, end date: late 2010

Outcome: a full-length animated film

### **The making of the film**

*Simorq's Heart's* production began when some animation filmmakers wanted to arrange to make such types of films. As the first full-length animation film in 3D format, DEFC, a government organisation in charge of filmmaking, sponsored this project. Its director, Vahid Nasirian, was a painter among a new generation of animation filmmakers who had experienced book illustration and then experimental animated films<sup>161</sup> when he started directing the film.

He made experimental films while collaborating with DEFC. The producer of the project, DEFC, is an organization supporting young filmmakers who make various types of films. This organization increased its support of animation filmmaking in

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<sup>160</sup> A well-known mythical bird in Shahnameh's stories.

<sup>161</sup> Animation filmmaking in Kanun, making animation TV series, *The Silhouette* 2000 (Zede-nour) awards: award from domestic festival for the best script, silver award of UNICA Film Festival (Luxemburg), *The Hole* 2003 (Hofreh), awards: two awards at domestic festivals, award of Ebensee Film Festival (Austria), the second award at the Denmark Film Festival

the 2000s allocating a larger budget to this type of production. DEFC developed its sponsorship from short animated films to supporting full-length films.

Nasirian states that at the time, the manager of DEFC believed in making important projects including full-length animated films, but it firstly required agreement of the ministry. He put the project into action by justifying the advantages of this approach to the ministry, and was able to achieve a budget allocation for two projects.

Productions subsequently commenced; one in Broujerd<sup>162</sup> city and another in the organization's studio in Tehran. The first one collapsed at the start because of the completely wrong approach of its filmmaker in preparing and developing the story. The second was *Simorq's Heart* based on a story about a fictional future.

The story has an apocalyptic theme and takes place in the distant future after a world war when the world faces total devastation. In this situation, Ajidhak<sup>163</sup> comes out from the heart of Damavand Mountain and turns all the people into stone. Only three people remain safe and well. One of them is the main hero who wants to rescue the heart of Simorq; because it is the only symbol of hope left that can keep peace alive in the world. The hero has to pass through seven obstacles; each one with difficult and different conditions involving him in various adventures. The world of the story and its environment apparently happen in the imaginary future but the characters' features and some locations appear similar to ancient epic heroes and historical places. To its director, the main motivation for making the film was to introduce domestic original characters to young Iranian audiences who have never seen anything like them before.

It was also an opportunity for Nasirian and EDFC that if they could finish the film, it would be the first 3D full-length animated film, which would count as a unique

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<sup>162</sup> A city in western Iran,

<sup>163</sup> Or Ichtuvegu, the last king of the Mad dynasty 727-550 BC,

cinematic record for both. But they felt that *Simorq's Heart* was competing with productions being made at the same time such as *Jamshid & Khorshid* and *Tehran 2121*.

The first version of story was based on a project that Nasirain had prepared before. His main resource was the epic stories in Shahnameh but he tried to produce a modern story with regard to the essence of the characters in those stories.

Nasirain states that after several revisions, he prepared a story and presented it to the sponsor for approval and signing of the production contract. Then he and his four assistants worked again on the story in two sections of its events and characters' dialogues. Nasirian says, "I intended that we would not begin the pre-production phase unless a perfect screenplay was available. I believed in that because I assumed that the experiences and failures of my peers belonged to me."

Recalling their failures, he mentions Rasaneh-fard's situation as an example that taught them lessons along the way. In his view, the lack of a developed script was the main cause of problems, giving this as the reason that all concepts and methods of production come from a script.

Bearing this in mind, Nasirian and his assistants worked on the development of the initial steps of the story of *Simorq's Heart*. Nasirian states, "in working on this project, we were unfamiliar with some aspects of 3D digital filmmaking, expecting we would face many problems on the way. Therefore the main basis for us was the script to turn the story into a film."

In terms of designing locations and atmosphere, Nasirian explains, "the film's events and adventures happen in a variety of locations as the hero goes through seven hurdles. His journey needed different types of environment, requiring

specific lighting and colouring to convey the essential atmosphere appropriate to each hurdle. Bringing these together was hard to create because as the hero reached each hurdle, new locations with different lighting appeared. We had to make many changes to the design of lighting and colour of these scenes to convey a particular sense of feeling that each scene was required to show. The point that helped us in this case was the Persian style of historical architectural periods, which gave us the first pieces of this puzzle. Inspired by such resources, it enabled us to create these concepts. Finally, the concept design team could illustrate these parts according to the script.”

Apart from implementing the steps of the production, the ministry did not make regular payments from the budget to the team. They had to challenge it to obtain each instalment from time to time. Nasirian declares, “we did not receive each instalment of the budget on time, it made us pursue the matter through the administrative procedure which took a lot of time and energy, but, there was no other way. We did the project relying on our own efforts and ambitions rather than on other support. This led us also to being concerned with the ongoing steps of the project more than anything else, because any change in the management of government that was sponsoring the project might shut the project down.”

Nasirian gives details of other parts of the concept design. For character design, he employed six well-known artists, but they could not afford to develop the characters’ features as they needed to be designed properly. He explains, “the designed characters seemed charming at first glance but they did not fit with the intended originality of the story. Their features were similar to the personas in Western and European films and comics. This took time and finally persuaded me that I myself had to do this job because the images of the characters were in my head better than in anybody else’s.”

Nasirian mentions also, “nonetheless, their work helped me in the process of redesign. I was dealing with the artists in developing the characters’ traits. This led me to conduct visual research to find the unique aspects for the characters. The redesigned characters were created using the findings.”

However, with respect to the actions and dialogues written in the script Nasirian realized the characters were miscast. They returned to edit the script, as it required new developments owing to the refinements to the characters. Nasirian explains, “the outcome of character design caused their roles to be increased or decreased. For instance, there was a dragon character in the story, which turned into a griffin through the visual development. We realised that there are many types of designed dragons in the world of storytelling and art e.g. Iranian, Chinese, etc, but none of which seemed to fit in with our film. We wanted to have an original dragon and it led us to create an adapted griffin related to Iranian history.”

At this stage, the director designed an early version of the storyboard because he faced the same problems in character design as he worked with storyboard artists. Continuing with the visual developments, new changes occurred, as they worked with the actions of characters and their physical features.

Nasirian talks about another case, “everyone in the team loved the griffin character but to complete its characterization it needed to show internal conflict. The intended dialogue could not do this, and it led us to find a workable solution that could convey this mood in action. Repeated discussions about the character’s moods, actions and situations helped us to come up with the idea of considering a talking tail as its opponent.”

With the appearance of a new character, they had to revise the script once again to find a role for it in relation to the adventures and the flow of the story. But, there were some vague points in the action of the characters, which required them to be

consistent with the epic theme of the story. After discussing this problem, they came up with the idea of arranging a performance, a similar solution that had been experienced in the *Namaki and the Giant* project.

Nasirain states, “it was not clear to us whether the action of the character could work in conveying the story or not, were they funny enough in the comedy scenes or could their action reflect the essential epic moods as we wanted in the scenes.”

To discover the characters’ actions, he asked some theatre performers to play the characters’ roles before the team and a camera. Some significant details were discovered during the performance; they resulted in some changes to some interior and exterior scenes in the storyboard. Nasirain adds; “the second version of the storyboard was drawn after that. The performance helped us to discover unseen aspects of the characters and considerably improved our storyboard as it changed into a new version.”

Nasirian also remembers; “this was in the first year of the production when we were working on the pre-production, although I think after several months the pre-production and production phases were mixed up together. This happened spontaneously without us feeling it.”

In fact, during the visualisation process they were involved in finding ways to show the script contents in cinematic form. During this challenging process, the roles and actions of the characters in the adventures did not evolve in a systematic manner. Discussing the order of implementation of the pre-production and production stages, Nasirian admitted that they had done these in a disorderly manner until they obtained acceptable outputs.

He remembers that editing of the visualized parts of the film continued up to near the end of the process. They frequently made revisions throughout the production; for instance, the last revision of the storyboard cut twelve minutes off the length of

the film. This was mostly done to speed up the pace and flow of the film as Nasirain was concerned with holding the audience's attention, preventing scenes from being lengthy and boring. Applying the story reel as an indicator could be very effective in finding such faults before starting the production phase.

In relation to the sound, Nasirian employed a musician<sup>164</sup> who was not well-known and who was keen to work on an important production. Nasirian states, "He agreed to collaborate with the project in composing its music as the production was in progress. It allowed me to be aware of the emergence of the music as I already imagined it having an epic Iranian theme. We had already edited in some temporary epic music to the story reel to find out how it worked in accompanying the scenes."

The findings highlighted the general traits of the music giving Nasirian relevant clues and enabled him to direct the musician who was composing the music during the production. He states that they had many discussions about providing etudes which gradually formed the music for the film.

For the characters' voices, the dialogues in the script formed the basis for dubbing which had been changed several times through the characterisation. Nasirian invited theatre and film stars to perform the voices of the characters. He revised and edited the dialogues again before dubbing. But throughout the dubbing process, the actors improvised significant dialogues to match the characters, sometimes enhancing the characterization as well as introducing some comedy situations.

This led to the elimination of lip-sync dialogues from the characters actions, replacing them with recorded voices. Nasirian explains, "some of the improvised dialogues confused me in recognising what the character's function should be in

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<sup>164</sup> Payam Azadi

the action or dialogue of the shots. But then we realized that the voices had given significant personalities to the characters and made them more believable; this helped us to specify the actions in the shots. These represented further revisions that happened in the final edit.”

When reviewing the production, Nasirian remarks, “making this film for us, especially its pre-production implementation, was like completing a puzzle. We matched the first and last parts and then gradually tried to complete the middle part. However, that proved very hard to do and we were disappointed from time to time, until we finally got the pieces to match. I can say we had two phases of pre-production and production which were mixed together, while we were concerned with technical matters such as rendering, colour correction, composite and so on.”

### **Points on *Simorq's Heart's* production**

The film was premiered at the Fajr Film Festival in 2010, where it kept viewers on their seats during the show. The production cycle was completed with the appearance of the film on the big screen, which was essential for clarifying some points about the model of having a pre-production phase in this film. To do this, we review the important facts of the project and discuss its pre-production model.

The main facts in the making of *Simorq's Heart*: it was directed by a first time full-length filmmaker, it was supported by a government budget, but the lack of familiarity of the filmmaker and the team with the dimensions of the project and the essential technology caused problems.

With regard to these characteristics, and the statements made by the film's director, the implementation of the production was done in its own particular way. Being unaware of the workability of methods and strategies of implementation of the pre-production phase, and also digital technology on the one hand, and the inexperience of the novice filmmakers and limitations of budgeting on the other, all

together contributed to a special model of production. Apart from trial and error as a way of solving problems in this model, there was no particular order in working on the various phases.

We see in the standard model that perfect outcomes of story development and visualization steps are prerequisites in running the key stages of the production phase. But in this case the filmmakers did these any way they could, because they were learning filmmaking through experiencing production. Therefore, some pre-production stages were implemented incompletely and some were not performed. Some steps were even done in postproduction.

Moreover, the team faced financial limitations; it kept its filmmakers under pressure and extra stress, which affected the quality of the production. In this situation, they tried to progress the production by finding the solutions in visualization of the contents of the story.

The important point is that they required methods and strategies to properly develop the pre-production stages. Their knowledge did not extend to this and they were not aware of the essentials.

Consequently, the development of the story and its elements remained inadequate in some parts until the editing stage of the postproduction phase. Most of the chaotic activities during production could be managed effectively by spending sufficient time, using research and iteration strategy to refine story, and applying pre-visualisation media. A period of three and a half years is a significant period of time in which to do the phases of production properly. But it requires the awareness of filmmakers about systematic production procedures during which they can conduct creative progress.

## ***Tehran 2121 (1500)***

Project profile

Producer: Abdolhossein and Mohamad Abolhasani

Key people: writers: Bahram Azimi, A. M. Alamdari, director: Bahram Azimi, storyboard: Mani Vatandoust, Concept design: Hamid Bahrami, costume design: Faez Alidousti, Music: Fardin khalatbari, a team of visual artists and a group of Iranian film stars,

Interviewee: B. Azimi; Place:Tehran; Date: 5 Oct. 2010,

Imagery technique: 3D animation,

Duration: one hundred and twenty minutes,

Production period: from September 2007 to the early 2012

Screening date: March 2013

Outcome: a full-length animated film

### **The film's background**

As the last animated length film of the 2000s, *Tehran 2121's* production commenced when there had been considerable activity in the animation sector. A TV series of animation infomercials about traffic regulations drew the attention of audiences in the early 2000s. Its popularity later presented an opportunity for its filmmaker, Bahram Azimi, who could not imagine at that time that the series was his first move towards making a full-length film. After this, further activities gradually emerged in line with the promotion of animated films:

- commissioning of further infomercial animation films by government organizations and the private sector,
- Increasing the number of animated advertising films on TV,
- increasing popularity of these products, and
- familiarity of people with home animated films.

These not only led people to recognise 3D CGI animated films but also provided new opportunities in favour of large productions. Moreover, news spread that some full-length animation film projects were proving to be attractive to both animation filmmakers and investors, Television played an effective role in promoting such opportunities, as it was the main medium available for introducing animation to people and showing homemade films.

Azimi believes that television played the main role in his success because it introduced his work and him as an animation filmmaker. He adds that another key factor was 'trust', when a government manager or the private sector needed to be sure of the ability of a filmmaker. This was particularly the case in animation, which was not as prevalent as live filmmaking in the country. Therefore, this could be a big hurdle for first time animation filmmakers, even those who had excellent stories ready for production.

He likens this to his own situation in approaching filmmaking, explaining that he had overcome such hurdles in his filmmaking career. Recalling the animated advertising films he has made for government organizations during the last ten years, Azimi mentions this as something that helped him to be trusted by government managers. But there were still further challenges to overcome, such as negotiating over the film budget, receiving it in several instalments and dealing with changes in managers at government level which affected the on-going productions. In any case, it seemed that he had overcome most of these hurdles when he started to progress the making of the film.

The primary basis for making *Tehran 2121* emerged when Azimi left Hoor Animation Studio in 2005, after working in animation filmmaking there for twelve years. He joined the municipality of Tehran to run its animation house in producing short animated infomercial films for different departments of this organization.

At the same time, he met an investor who knew about 3D animated advertising films and was interested in animation filmmaking. The meeting led to a relationship between them over the next two years. In the meantime, Azimi was engaged with making short animated films in the municipality. Seeing his efficiency in directing these projects, the investor gradually believed in his ability in doing larger projects. During this time, “enjoyable animated films for people” had been Azimi’s motto, justifying animation filmmaking for mass audiences in order to achieve sponsorship for animation projects. The motto, indicating his engagement with audiences, was also his main aim in making each film.

Later on, as soon as he came up with the idea of making an animation full-length film, Azimi asked the municipality to invest in such a project based on his motto. He explains, “in the municipality, when I say ‘a film for people’, they know that it could get the attention of audiences and therefore they trust me. They have also realised that I promote and highlight the municipality and its services in supporting the film in an appropriate manner.”

But approaching a large production is a different story. He explains, “after proposing the idea of making the film, I tried to persuade a high ranking manager to agree to sponsor the project. As the private investor had already agreed to pay part of the budget, I mentioned it as a persuasive argument to stimulate the municipality to come and invest in the making of the film. During the meetings, I also promised that I would make an animated film, which could bring people into cinemas; it would be an interesting film they had never seen as a home production. Eventually, the meetings and discussions proved fruitful and the mayor agreed to support it.”

“But, what is the subject of the film you want to make?” the manager asked Azimi at the same time. The answer was “about Tehran”; “sounds great”; “but, what

about it?”. These dialogues were the few first sentences constituting the primary idea of the film.

Azimi adds; “in a subsequent meeting, when the investor, one of the managers and I were talking about prearrangement matters, the film’s core idea emerged during our talks. Somebody said, “why don’t you make it about the future of Tehran? – as showing such a subject is perfectly feasible through animation.” The idea was brilliant because it gave significant direction to the original idea; the talks then led us to ask “when in the future?”. While discussing potential times about a century later, someone else said ‘Tehran 2121’. All of us welcomed the suggested date, but it was not yet clear what we wanted to make.”

Planning the characteristics of the film, they came up with the idea of using film stars. Azimi explains that in previous short films, some film stars collaborated in providing voice-overs for dubbing of the characters. This experience generated the idea of using film stars again, not just for the voices but also for the characters. Such an idea provided a general view of the story of the film in which the stars perform the main roles.

Formation of the outline of the story facilitated the writing of the first version, which was essential for the project’s contract. Azimi counts the number of hurdles he overcame to get approval from the municipality for the story. At first, a board at the municipality responsible for investigating proposed scripts rejected the written story. They stated that the story needed revising. This initiated a discussion on its contents that led to asking a script writer who was evaluating the story whether it was eligible for turning into a film or not. Azimi states, “the script writer’s view on the story was positive and he defended it in his feedback to the board. This opened the way for passing the administrative steps of budgeting allocation, which was estimated at up to twenty million dollars”.

Belonging to the comedy genre, the story is about modern life with robots and events happening in 2121 in which a one hundred and sixty year old man is still alive because of the advancements in medical science. Such services are available for rich people like him who is trying to achieve his last desires in the final days of his life. He contacts his granddaughter studying on the moon, informing her that he is coming back to Iran to do some jobs prior to his death. But, before that she should come back and find something for him. It is important to him where he would be buried. Thus, he asked his granddaughter to find a document proving he was a theatre performer in his young days. This helps him prove he is an artist because a dead artist is allowed to be buried in the artists' cemetery and this is his final wish.

The story has also some love elements, songs and wedding ceremonies. Azimi believes these can gain the audience's attention. Writing the story for the film, he invited A. Alamdari, editor of 'Pilban', an animation magazine, to assist him in writing the script. Azimi describes his own approach to script writing as follows, "I usually begin writing a script with a series of dialogues, gags and stressed words, developing these up as a sequence. Then through adding further sequences, I try to complete the script. In this project, after writing some parts, I felt the need for a co-writer in order to move the story forward in other parts, evolving different types of gags and events. The writer I knew was Alamdari, who also had skills in developing a script logically."

They completed writing the script. Azimi wrote about fifty percent of the comic dialogues and events suitable for younger audiences. The co-writer created the structure for the script and wrote dialogues and adventures for the mature characters. After preparing an early version of the script, much rewriting was done

so that the two parts merged as closely as possible. It took one month to make the necessary revisions.

Azimi states, "After this, I realized what I had in hand to make the film." To him the script seemed perfect, so he sent it to the film department in the Ministry of Islamic Guidance to obtain its legal licence. This is a standard procedure for films in Iran. Azimi mentions, "I was concerned with the film's exhibition, thinking about the screening time when it would need to be shown in large numbers of cinemas. As I knew the fate of previous films, I did not want it to have the same result as the *Yaqmaians* and others. So, I organised all the administrative proceedings in such a way as to save the film's exhibition rights. And we soon had the licence in our hands."

While waiting for the licence, Azimi and his producers set up a team in a production studio. They selected some domestic artists and also some Iranian artists from abroad. On receipt of the licence, Azimi and Alamdari began writing the screenplay within two months. In the meantime, they selected eight top film stars whose features they could use in character design.

Having received agreement from the film stars, Azimi and the team arranged concurrent implementation of some parts of the pre-production: model making based on the stars' faces and their figures to use in designing characters, concept design of urban elements, environments of Tehran and futuristic vehicles, costumes and other elements, all trying to be original and in line with Iranian-Islamic values.

In doing this, Azimi mentions some facts, "we talked with the concept artists about the originality and unity of the master design because it reflected the film's uniqueness. The worst thing for me was if someone said that something had no original design in the film. Although there would ultimately be criticism for showing

some actions and symbols in conveying the future which might be similar to that of other films.”

Then along with writing the screenplay, any written sheet was utilised in the design of storyboard. When Azimi talks about the order of the stages, not all the concepts were available when they started drawing the storyboard. Thus, Azimi led the storyboard artist through descriptions of details he needed to know. One instance he notes was the urban environment which the storyboard artist designed according to what he understood from Azimi’s descriptions. Then when the concept came out, it was somehow matched to what was designed in the storyboard. Azimi states, “I described the specifics to the storyboard artist at the same time as I did to the concept artist. So, later on, both outcomes sort of fitted together.”

In managing implementation of these steps, Azimi explains, “if we wanted to do the steps in a standard or chronological order, it would cause some significant opportunities in the production to be missed. For instance, there were some animators and artists available and ready to collaborate with the project at the time; if I did not employ them, there was no guarantee that they would be available later. On the other hand, after early several months, I had to show a few parts of the film to those who had supported the project and it was essential then. Thus, we had to do these in parallel.”

Another reason he addresses is the contract, which mentioned a period of twenty months to produce the film; although later, the project did not progress according to the contract, the time limitation initially led them to try to do so. Azimi describes what happened, “having the details of the world of the story in my mind, I could concurrently direct different designers to do their own tasks. The outcome of each part was amended after availability of the master design. As an example, for the

layout step the storyboard was the key reference and some of its parts were redrawn on larger sheets. Then, based on these, we implemented the final layout by computer, mostly in 3D, to know the camera positions and its moves scene by scene.”

Similarly, the amendments and revisions came up in visualising the screenplay, Azimi explains, “as the steps progressed one at a time, the screenplay was the main source for the implementation. But, when some visual and audio work appeared, we realized that some changes could make them better. It happened because these parts were being worked on rapidly and concurrently.”

He had also asked those artists, who were working on the concept design, to propose any idea they came up with. “I told them, you have focused and concentrated on the work more than anybody else; so, if you think there is something that can improve the work, to make it funnier or add an interesting point, please suggest that. And it worked; one of these examples was about a scene when two characters were in a flying car. The young man who has fallen in love with the girl wants to convey his feelings to her, but he cannot do that because of coming from a middle class and she seems very rich. Suddenly, he drives the car at speed up and down in odd circular directions. “AH!! What are you doing?! Have you gone mad?” she shouts at him angrily. He quickly returns to driving the car normally, and the girl realizes that he has just drawn a heart shape in the air with the exhaust fumes coming from the car and they are going through that.” This is in line with the strategy used by Pixar filmmakers.

The storyboard artist, Mani Vatandoust, came up with this idea and Azimi was happy for it to be included in the film. He mentions that those who suggested such brilliant ideas held on to their rights and it encouraged others to come with suggestions. Azimi remembers other examples of developing the film using

different ideas, “anywhere I was or went, I observed and searched to find something that might give me the ideas to incorporate major and minor events and adventures into the film. I wrote everything I saw or heard which seemed interesting and stuck them here as you can see.” (he points to a board covered with such idea notes near his desk).

“One of these happened through a meeting we had with some architects who came to design a series of large buildings in the Tehran of the future. After seeing the flying car images, one of them noticed an image showing a flying police car and asked “what do you want to do with the sign writing on these vehicles?” He continued, “you can write ‘police of Tehran, the greater’. It was an excellent idea because the current sign is ‘police of Tehran, the great’. Or in another case, I came across a type of scarf when I was walking in a shopping centre. It seemed perfect as the main part of a costume set for the female robots we had in this film.”

The genesis of these ideas happened as the project was progressing, some of them even after the render stage in the production phase. But these ideas were also inserted into the output. Azimi declares that the only way they could continue completion of the project was by combining the implementation of the pre-production and production phases. The reasons he gives include: managers in government, limitation of availability of a variety of artists and technicians, lack of experience of teamwork and shortages in production knowledge.

He believes also that they made many mistakes but attempted to correct them by spending extra time on them. For example, in character design they intended to make digital 3D faces of characters taken from the faces of the film stars. The output should not be exactly similar to the faces of the stars, but somehow resemble their faces with some cartoonization and exaggeration.

Azimi expresses the challenges in doing this, “our model maker was the best at making a perfect digital face in 3D in a short time. But it took him more than two months to make the faces of the characters. It took extra time because we wanted something between reality and fantasy and it happened gradually, as we watched it step-by-step; editing and refining it again and again. Eventually, the work was deemed to be satisfactory.”

In relation to the sound, the film relies heavily on dialogue in driving the flow of the story. This part of the project had numerous steps as the most of the story is conveyed through the dialogue of the characters. Thus, there are many shots showing characters’ faces speaking, which means lots of animated lip-sync sequences.

To prepare the characters’ voices, the stars perform the dialogues according to the director’s directions in the initial steps of pre-production. Azimi describes the process, “every time one of the film stars and I went into the sound studio to record one of the relevant character’s voice, I asked the actor to imagine he was talking with another person face to face as if he/she hears his words, looks at him, reacts and responds to him. It was based on the roles mentioned in the screenplay. The next time I did the same thing with another actor or actress. We repeated the practice until getting the best performance for every part. This way, one by one, the film stars performed the characters’ voices. During these sessions, two cameras recorded both front and profile views of the stars’ facial motions. The footages were referenced to realize the timing of facial motion in animating the dialogues.”

For the acting parts, a number of theatre performers were invited to perform the characters’ roles based on the content of the storyboard. Azimi and his assistants made this decision when it turned out that the stars were not available to play the

characters. Before this, they planned to design characters acting in accordance with the performances by the stars. They watched all the films in which the stars had acted, seeing how they appeared in playing their roles.

Once again, as in *Namaki and The Giant* and *Simorq's Heart*, the use of theatre performers was repeated to facilitate figuring out the characters' acting. In estimating the action of the character, the filmmakers applied the real time information obtained from the performers acting to illustrate each shot of the storyboard. Then the storyboard was used as the reference in making 3D CGI animation.

In this project, the story reel was employed similarly to the previous ones. They used the story reel mostly to recognise the efficiency of camera positions and timing of the scenes. It seems that the facilities and ease of utilising 3D software in part ignored the functions of the story reel in terms of vital refinements.

In any case, *Tehran 2121* was finally completed and premiered at the Fajr Film Festival in early 2012. It was released in March 2013

### **Points on this film**

The filmmakers had learnt lessons from the former unsuccessful experiences of their peers in this part of the project. This led them to consider the facts that could guarantee the film would be accepted by the film industry's distribution network. To them, a good solution was to rely on the popularity of the film stars among the audiences who would come to cinemas for the sake of the stars. It was a persuasive argument for the distribution network to allocate a number of cinemas for screening the film.

The next point was promotion of the project through television. The filmmakers arranged a series of TV interviews, TV report shows and promotional programmes as soon as the project commenced. In these, the stars' presence, modern Tehran

in the next century, and other dimensions of the film were the main elements stimulating people's curiosity, trying to keep them interested until the film's screening.

Another point was the idea of employing film stars as characters in an animated film. Immediately after it was decided, all activities of pre-production were centralized around such a crucial trait. On the other hand, limitations of time led the filmmakers to rely on the stars to the extent that they tended to imitate their acting rather than create original characterization. This led characters to act towards forming their roles mainly through dialogue rather than actions. In this way, the characters appeared as the stars in rough animated actions. Implementing such actions, the performance was a solution which presented live acting, which became a reference for both character acting and animation.

The filmmakers were looking for practical techniques and solutions in pre-production and production to achieve acceptable image and sound. Although, in practice, they implemented many stages of both phases, their achievements were insufficient to create quality characters and a story line fit for animation.

The final point is the perfect idea of showing the distant future of a big capital city to domestic audiences who had never seen anything like this before. As its filmmakers supposed, this was the main fantasy of the film, which could attract the audiences to come and see how it would be at that time. This led the film to hit box offices in early 2013. In general, the making of *Tehran 2121* used new methods in home animation filmmaking, and its effects on Iranian animation would be invaluable later on.

One important event happened when the municipality of Tehran stepped down as sponsor of the project. It was replaced by private investors who funded the rest of production. The reasons that led the organization to leave the project were partly

related to the length of production and the amount of investment needed to complete it. The government managers assumed that the film would not come out during their time in office. The managers wondered why they should fund something that they might not be able to boast about, as something they were responsible for in the cultural arena, if they were no longer in those jobs. Practically, this change brought about new experiences in Iranian animation length filmmaking such as:

- For the first time a length animation film was finished with private sector investment,
- The film screening was successful to the extent that it encouraged the private sector to think about arranging another animation length film,
- Its success proves that elimination of depending on government as an indirect factor in favour of developing self-reliant animation filmmaking, and
- Despite this success, making further films still depends on how the filmmakers fashion their stories; because there is no guarantee that audiences will come to cinemas to watch film stars as animation characters.

## Chapter 7

The chapter presents the findings from the analysis of the contents of chapter six in addition to other parts of the thesis. These consist of the pertinent events and actions and different backgrounds through which we examine the direct and indirect factors influencing full-length Iranian animation filmmaking. As the major part of the research and its analysis, the content of this chapter also presents a theory about the execution method of the pre-production phase by the Iranian filmmakers who made the first seven full-length animation films.

### The basis of the theory

Studying Iranian animation filmmaking, we deal with different areas relating to the subject, originating from three types of background shown in table 1. As the first part of the findings, there are indirect factors influencing the pre-production phase of full-length animation filmmaking in Iran. In specifying the factors, the subdivisions of each background present the areas and types of actions.

Table 1

Key factors in background of full-length animation filmmaking in Iran							
Row	The general background		The pertinent background		The specific background		
	Visual representations	Domestic performance	Domestic cinema	National TV	Teaching of animation filmmaking	Domestic animation filmmaking	Animation full length filmmaking
1	tendencies to create imagery	existing story and storytelling, domestic storytelling,	advent of cinema (1900), the first film, first movie theatre	in 1958, some live programmes aired by Iran TV every evening,	self learning , discoveries by their own talent,	Emergence - early works - early filmmakers - early organisation - first animation film	<i>Mouse and Cat, 1979</i>
2	domestic historical works, visual representations	Storytellers, Gosan	increasing the number of movie theatres,	animation remained unknown until watching television became routine	associate degree of animation 1974,	Growth - Kanun cinema centre - film festivals	<i>Tak Taz 1996</i>
3	Persian miniature after Islam	written masterpieces stories	cinema industry, the first silent Iranian film	more active from 1966, show imported American animated TV series,	Farabi and Kanun, MA discipline of animation programme, MA animation course 1978,	Stagnation - the Islamic revolution - the Iran-Iraq war	<i>Namaki and the Giant 2000</i>
4	book making schools	cultural heritage,	the Lor Girl 1933, first	expanding national TV	universities were shut down in	Revitalisation - animation film	<i>The Sun of Egypt 2002</i>

		Shahnameh, culture of storytelling,	Iranian talkie film,	coverage, after increasing television penetration in homes,	1980, animation BA course, MA animation,	festivals - Types of animation filmmaking	
5	domestic historical works are referenced to design the concepts of Iranian animation films	the treasure of Persian stories,	imported talkie films, dubbing studios	watching television increased among people, animation was known by TV,	MA animation course reopened 1992	computer was employed in animation filmmaking	<i>Jamshid and Khorshid</i> 2008
6	Qahveh-khaneh painting	Naqqal, Naqqali	melodrama genre, increasing number of cinemas,	catering TV programmes for younger audiences,	Tarbiat Modares University, MA animation course,		<i>Simorq's Heart</i> premiered in 2010
7		Religious theatre, Taziyeh	a new move, emergence of realism genre,	national TV preferred showing imported products,	run animation studios in these broadcasting centres,		<i>Tehran 2121</i> , premiered in 2012 Released in 2013
8		Pardeh-khan, Pardeh-khani	existing filmmaking practice and cinema business, (the only available source, to know about animation)	channel two attracted younger audiences and children,	Educated students tended to teach activities, academic instruction leads students to kind of filmmaking for film festivals,		
9		a very rich resource, cultural heritage,		TV was airing, foreign animated cartoons,			
10		culture of storytelling,		the government budget,			
11				1980s youth audiences, watching different animated series from various countries,			
12				third channel, in 1993, subsequent channels, (Tehran), and instruction (as four) in 1996,			
13				added one more channel as 'instruction', another demand of TV programmes,			

## **Background of full-length animation filmmaking in Iran: factors in the general background**

In the general background, visual representations and domestic performance indicate two sorts of historical roots for the ancient stories. They existed in different visual forms, presenting both stories and styles of imagery depending on the time and their art forms. They appeared as paintings on goblets, carvings on stone, and as paintings known as Persian Miniature or Qahveh-khaneh.

Stories provided a source for performances, the performers acted as storytellers and publicised these stories, allowing them to be preserved as a cultural heritage for future generations. In this way, some of the stories were turned into written books and Miniature images flourished during the book making eras. Both stories and visual works have two major roles:

1. One, they acted as media entertaining people and conveying cultural values for the future;
2. Two, they act as resources for domestic visual works and stories which can enrich today's stories and storytelling in many ways.

As we can see, Iranian filmmakers have relied on both types. For instance, Shahnameh has been a main source of epic stories used by live and animation filmmakers. The films listed in table 2 are examples of animated films. Their filmmakers have used Persian stories and domestic visual resources of historical works in the visual development of these animated films.

Table 2

The use of Iranian cultural resources in homemade animated films				
Row	Film title	Film type	Story resource	Visual resource
1	Simorq's Heart 2010	Full-length animated film	Shah-nameh	Persepolis and art works of Sasaki era
2	Jamshid & Khorshid 2009	Full-length animated film	Story of Jamshid & Khorshid	Persepolis
3	Mouse and Cat 1979	Full-length animated film project	Mouse and Cat	Unrevealed
4	Prince Amir Hamzeh 1977	26 min. animated film	Iranian tales	illustrations in Iranian lithography books
5	The Life 1966	20 min. animated film	Masnavi Maanavi	Persian Miniature
6	Malek khorshid 1975	15.55 min. animated film	Iranian tales	Qahveh-khaneh paintings
7	Zal & Simorq 1977	24 min. animated film	Shah-nameh	Persepolis

### **Background of full-length animation filmmaking in Iran: pertinent background**

The next factors influencing the pre-production phase exist in domestic cinema and national TV. These sectors constitute the pertinent background of animation filmmaking owing to their considerable roles in the animation sector. Primarily, it begins with cinema when it emerged in the country (1900) about six decades earlier than national TV (1958). During this period, it was developed through funding cinema halls and investment by the private sector in filmmaking.

#### **The domestic cinema**

Cinemas made people familiar with film as a new entertainment medium. During the first three decades, the private sector experienced many changes in dealing with the business of cinema halls and importing films until the industry was formed. This prepared the fundamentals for filmmaking relying on the available facilities. The first few silent and talkie films were made in 1931-1933, and the newly established cinema sector sent out homemade films to be shown in cinemas at the same time as imported films. The early successes of homemade films in the melodrama genre led filmmakers to stick with this genre. Following this, the film industry engaged with filmmaking in this genre and exhibition of imported films during four decades. In the meantime, after World War II, the establishment of

dubbing studios was another step in equipping the film industry to favour imported films.

At the end of the sixth decade, the country had a mature film industry with domestic distribution and an exhibition network. The film industry was also witnessing new filmmakers who had grown up in its environment or graduated in other countries.

Their foremost films, released in 1969, were *The Cow* and *Qeysar*. These works led to the emergence of the realism genre of filmmaking alongside mass production of melodrama (sensational drama) films. Being concurrent with the increasing penetration of television into homes, the film industry had acquired two characteristics: industry infrastructure and melodrama and realism genres of filmmaking.

With a film industry in the country, facilities were made available for pioneering animation filmmakers. This became apparent in the 1950s when the first animation filmmaker discovered some footage of animated films as a source from which to learn about animation filmmaking. This footage was imported with foreign films to show in cinemas, and worked as a guide for making the first animated film. Although the film industry played an important role in taking these first steps, it was not very effective in the next stages as mentioned earlier in chapter five.

### **Television**

Television affected different aspects of the animation sector during this time. Funded by the private sector in 1958-68, 'Iran TV' aired some imported early animated cartoons. National TV started broadcasting its programmes from 1966 and showed imported American and European animated series. At the same time, television became more popular, and its penetration into households increased.

After purchasing 'Iran TV' in 1968, national TV (TVI) presented it as its own Channel Two, expanding its coverage nationwide. Since then, regular airing of animated series on television introduced this type of film to people as a popular type of film, mostly for children and teenagers. These audiences had to watch the animated films that national TV preferred to import. In the 1970s, home animation filmmakers were active in making animated films; but initially, it was mainly animated advertising films which appeared regularly on television (Bayne Fisher et al, 1991, 811).

After the Islamic revolution, during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88), national TV carried on showing animated films through imported new series from Eastern European and Asian countries. Channel Two attracted children and young audiences by showing these animated series. National TV also aired two homemade animated series<sup>165</sup> which it had sponsored.

After the war, during the reconstruction era, national TV set up new channels, such as Channel Three in 1993, Channel of Tehran in 1995 and Channel of Education in 1996. These led to increased demand for TV programmes, including animated films. The Channel of Education aimed to supply educational programmes for high schools and university students. It ordered an animation series about 'the life of the prophets'<sup>166</sup>. On the other hand, the development of infrastructure across the country, such as the gas network, raised the need for infomercial animation series. These were the first homemade series of animated films, made in 1992 and shown on national TV.

The role of television in the development of animation was enhanced in the 2000s when the showing of another series of infomercial animated films relating to traffic

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<sup>165</sup> A. Razani: 'The Adventures of Thought & Work' the first series in 12 parts from the early 1980s. 'The Little Ali' a series in photo animation from the 1980s,

<sup>166</sup> The stories for the series were sourced from the stories from the Quran; the film-makers avoided showing the faces of prophets in these series.

police attracted the majority of audiences across the country. The welcoming of this series by audiences led the filmmakers to make a full-length animation film *Tehran 2121*.

## **Background of full-length animation filmmaking in Iran: specific background**

### **Teaching of animation filmmaking**

The first subdivision of the background, the teaching of animation filmmaking found itself in a different situation. In general, two types of teaching methods were employed in assisting the production process. The first was based on self-learning; some animation filmmakers learned filmmaking through trial and error. Secondly, two universities launched academic programmes in animation filmmaking.

Using self-learning, the early filmmakers mostly based their work on available animated films to make their films. Then, a few filmmakers, including N. Karimi and N. Zarrin-kelk, graduated in animation filmmaking abroad. After that, the fundamentals of academic teaching of animation filmmaking were established in Kanun through the introduction of an associate degree in animation in 1974. This led to the establishment of the first MA in an animation discipline at the University of Farabi. Although it was soon interrupted by events such as the revolution, the war and the closure of universities, it became a base for reactivation of academic teaching a decade later.

In 1992, the MA course in animation reopened at Art University, followed by Tarbiat Modares University that ran the same course three years later. The result of these courses gradually materialised when graduates in animation could get jobs in animation productions and as teachers of animation in relevant centres. In fact, some of the personnel who later became active in animation film projects had come from these two universities. On the other hand, those who taught art students in other academic centres aroused the interest of these students in

animation filmmaking. All these actions led to an increase in the number of people who wanted to work in the animation sector. However, most of them had become familiar with animation filmmaking mainly through academic courses and a kind of amateur and experimental approach to filmmaking.

In general, the level of academic teaching has not been at a level sufficient to meet the needs of students to make full-length animation films. Therefore, for such projects, filmmakers arranged training sessions to adequately prepare staff to work on such productions.

### **The areas of animation filmmaking**

There have been four eras of evolution. The first era began with the curiosity of Sfandiar Ahmadieh in animation filmmaking which led to the making of *Mollanasreddin* (1957), as an early domestic animated film. Since then the government has been the main sponsor of animation filmmaking in the country. Relying on its financial and organizational facilities, the early animation filmmakers made their films in the first animation studio (1960) located in the head office of the Ministry of Culture and Art.

About a decade later, when the economy boomed and new ideas of providing cultural products sprang up, the government founded the Kanun Cinema Centre (1969). In this new era, the animation sector witnessed a prolific season of various activities. The most important events include: promotion of animation filmmaking, home animated films winning awards at film festivals, and the start of teaching about animation. The filmmakers started to make experimental animation films. Their works were influenced by the Zagreb style owing to the similar conditions of filmmaking and international film festival events in the two countries. A. Sadeqi and N. Zarin-kelk attempted to develop the basis for an Iranian style of animation filmmaking by depicting domestic visual values and cultural specifics in their films.

These values are rooted in Iranian stories, ancient visual representations, Persian Miniature and Qahveh-khaneh paintings.

Along with evolution in the animation sector, the economic conditions led to a boom in various industries and running of new businesses in the 1970s. As the demand for advertising grew, some turned to animation advertising films which appeared on television in about the mid 1970s. This type of animation film was produced based on early commercial demands and could attract audiences. Making animated advertising films also became a base for some young cartoonists who knew about this type of animation. An example is the early 1990s, when the first few series of animation advertising films were drawn by one of these cartoonists. In any case, by the end of the growth era in 1979, the country had the experience of making two types of experimental and advertising animation films.

After the revolution (1979), the animation sector went into decline owing to the change of government. As in other areas, ongoing activities in the animation sector stopped until they were reactivation when the regulations were changed. The conditions became worse when the Iran-Iraq war broke out, but production did not stop completely. Several animated film projects continued during the war, they were sponsored by Kanun and national TV. There was also an full-length animation film project in production. *Mouse and Cat* was an early example of a film which the filmmaker could not finish. The main reasons related to N. Ashtiani, a veteran producer with forty years experience in the domestic film industry, but who was not aware of the main aspects of animation filmmaking.

After the war, in line with the recovery during the reconstruction era, the animation sector started the decade (1990s) with a series of activities during which it was revitalised (table 3). There were three main ones, such as an increased number of graduates and suitably trained people, the growth of specific organizations and

studios involved with animation filmmaking, and the appearance of new TV channels. At the same time the development of infrastructure industries and the growth of some businesses created a demand for the making of infomercial and advertising films. On the other hand, the availability of computer and digital technology facilities made the making of animation films easier and quicker and required less essential manpower. As a result, these paved the way for the making of early infomercial animation series, TV series, and 3D animation advertising films.

Also, funding support was provided by Saba<sup>167</sup>, animation filmmaking boomed and the lack of homemade full-length animated films led some animation filmmakers to start production of early domestic full-length animation film projects. As a result, by 2000, experience had been gained in the making of the main types of animation filmmaking in the country. There were people working on these projects who became familiar with the homemade production process.

Table 3

Series of events pertinent to the domestic animation sector in the 1990s											
Area	Date	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Production & animation events				First series of infomercial animation 'Safety cautions'	emerging computer assistance in animation	Hoor Animation opened, first 3D advertising films	Saba opened		The second full-length animation film 'Tak Taz'	First TV animation series put into production	First international animation film festival Tehran
National TV					Advent of channel three		Advent of channel of Tehran	Advent of channel four education			
Education				Reopening MA in animation at Art university			MA animation in TMU			Teaching animation units in Azad university	
Actions			<b>Use of computers in animation</b> , increasing manpower in the animation sector, <b>adding TV channels</b> , establishment of relevant animation organizations, <b>making various types of animation films</b>								

<sup>167</sup> Founded in 1995 by national TV as 'The Institute of Cultural Art of Saba', it became a dominant producer of animation filmmaking in Iran.

## **The area of full-length animation filmmaking**

After the first project of *Mouse and Cat*, the second was *Tak Taz* which was not completed in its pre-production phase. Two indirect factors affected this project: one, financial dependency of the filmmakers on the government budget provided by Saba, and two, lack of fundamental regulations for making such products and its related area.

In the 2000s, further full-length animation film projects were set up along with production of other types of animation films. One of these, an infomercial 3D animated series, was successful and became a basis for making the seventh full-length 3D animation film when similar projects were in production. *Namaki and the Giant* was among them as the third project and also remained unfinished, firstly, because of shortages in funding, and secondly, because it was limited to an domestic film market and there was no sponsor.

*The Sun of Egypt* is the fourth project, funded by the Rasaneh Fard studio, and its production was completed within a limited budget. Planned as a TV animation, its pre-production was not extended to a full-length film. The film also had visual elements similar to other projects in production at the time such as *The Prince of Egypt*<sup>168</sup>. This showed that its filmmakers had been influenced by similar styles of design in this animated film. Although the film became the first domestic full-length animated film to be completed, lack of sufficient finance affected its pre-production phase and reduced the quality of story development, set design and also resulted in the omission of the story reel stage. These facts led the studio to be reluctant to attempt screening of the film itself. Apart from the weaknesses in the film itself, its failure could partly be attributed to the lack of routine procedures of distribution and exhibition of full-length animated films. Consequently, the studio gave the

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<sup>168</sup> DreamWorks, 1998.

film's rights to a government organization which arranged exhibition of the film but not very successfully. Thus, the first completed full-length animated film failed.

The fifth film, *Jamshid and Khorshid*, produced by Rasaneh Fard, did not get onto the big screen either, for similar reasons. The important points about this film include two aspects;

- one, in relation to the effects of training skills and teaching:

Owing to some visible influences of 'anime' and Disney films, there was imitation of their style. Deficiencies in basic training skills and teaching of animation filmmaking affected the production. These related to the basics of the method of learning and developing essential skills in animation filmmaking, which are seen in other full-length animation projects.

- two, the filmmakers experience in using popular film stars:

The studio employed the stars to perform the voices of the characters. In fact, it was done to get the consent of the domestic cinema industry scheduling the film for distribution and exhibition. But it did not work, because the decision was made too late. This was mostly because the filmmakers did not think of conducting promotional activities in good time; these included activities such as pre adverts, pre negotiation with the relevant sectors, and giving consideration to the lack of routine distribution and screening procedures for full-length animated films in the domestic film industry.

The sixth film, *Simorq's Heart*, was released at the Fajr International Film Festival, but its quality was not much better than that of previous projects owing to its dependency on the government budget. Although the filmmakers were aware of their peers' experiences, they experienced financial limitations and delays in receiving the instalments of the budget. These affected the pre-production phase

because they had to devote extra time and energy to getting the finance instalments for doing the production stages.

In this case, the pre-production phase was the first part of the production to be affected by mismanagement by government managers. As an indirect factor, the actions of government had an influence on the quality of filmmaking; because the filmmakers had been dependent on its financial backing. These conditions were somewhat different for the seventh project.

*Tehran 2121* was supported by a significant budget<sup>169</sup> compared to former projects, having two sponsors, from the private sector and government, from the start. The filmmakers learned lessons from their peers in this way. They anticipated that success could be achieved by promoting the film through different types of media, particularly television.

Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, the infomercial 3D animated series, shown on television, had already prepared the ground for this film. Therefore, as the audiences got to know the background to this animated film, they became interested in the news on television about it being on and off, until the film came to the big screen.

These actions resulted in audiences giving feedback which had a positive effect on the progress of the project. The feedback, in addition to the experience gained in making infomercial animated films and similar projects, led the filmmakers to plan the film's pre-production phase based on the characters of popular film stars. They believed that this strategy would work and could bring audiences to domestic cinemas, which had no background in showing this type of film.

Thus, there were three main indirect factors which influenced the making of *Tehran 2121*: one, the available experiences of similar previous projects; two,

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<sup>169</sup> About one and a half million \$,

reduction of dependency on government financing; and, three, the lack of routine procedure for distribution and exhibition which led the filmmaker to use the popularity of film stars to make an animated full-length film successful.

Table 4 briefly shows the indirect factors influencing the projects.

Table 4

The indirect factors influencing the pre-production phase of full-length animation film projects								
The unfinished projects and finished films	the domestic resources of visual works and stories	Assistance of TV	Effects of cinema industry	Financial dependency on the government	Limitation of basic teaching and training skills	lacking regulations in full-length animation filmmaking area	Mismanagement by government managers as the sponsors or the producers	lacking routine procedure of distribution and exhibition
1 <i>Mouse &amp; Cat</i>	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
2 <i>Tak Taz</i>	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
3 <i>Namaki &amp; the Giant</i>	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
4 <i>The Sun of Egypt</i>	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
5 <i>Jamshid &amp; Khorshid</i>	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
6 <i>Simorq's Heart</i>	Yes	Yes, partly	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
7 <i>Tehran 2121</i>	yes	Yes	yes	Yes, partly	Yes	Yes	Yes, partly	Yes, partly

### Pre-production practice in the seven full-length film projects

The direct factors reveal the filmmakers' actions in the study of implemented stages of the pre-production phase. They facilitate understanding of the properties and dimensions of each project. The first part relates to the positions responsible for the tasks in this phase and they are labelled as 'specialist'. Table 5, extracted from the coding and classifying process of the analysis, shows the presence of these people who participated in implementing the stages. It also reflects any collaboration and multi-task that they were responsible for.

It should be noted that, in general, the regularity of stages and positions in this table is based on the process that Pixar uses in its productions, excluding 'performance, performer' which is done by some of the filmmakers in the projects.

Table 5

The function and position of <b>SPECIALIST</b> in the seven projects									
Projects		1. <i>Mouse &amp; Cat</i>	2. <i>Tak Taz</i>	3. <i>Namaki &amp; the Giant</i>	4. <i>The Sun of Egypt</i>	5. <i>Jamshid &amp; Khorshid</i>	6. <i>Simorq's Heart</i>	7. <i>Tehran 2121</i>	
Stages									
Preproduction	story setting	Producer	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
		Director	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
		Storyman/ script/ screenplay writer	Unrevealed	Yes, by director	Yes, by director	Yes	Yes	Yes, by director & his assistants	Yes, by director & a co-writer
		Performance; performer	Unrevealed	No	yes	No	No	Yes	yes
	Concept/ element design	Character designer	yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes, by director	Yes
		Background artist	yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
		Prop designer	Unrevealed	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
	Scene setting	Layout artist	Unrevealed	No	No	No	No	No	Yes, by assist
		Storyboard artist	yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes, by director	Yes
		Pitching performer	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
	Animatic/ story reel	animator	No	No	Yes, by director	No	No	No	No
		editor	No	No	Yes, by director	No	No	Yes	Yes
Sound editor		No	No	No	No	No	No	No	

### Direction of the pre-production phase

As we see in some projects, the pre-production phase is directed by the directors, similar to Pixar's method, which is in contrast to the others where it is conducted by both producer and director. Thus, the teams were supervised in two ways to execute the pre-production phase: director driven and collaborative direction.

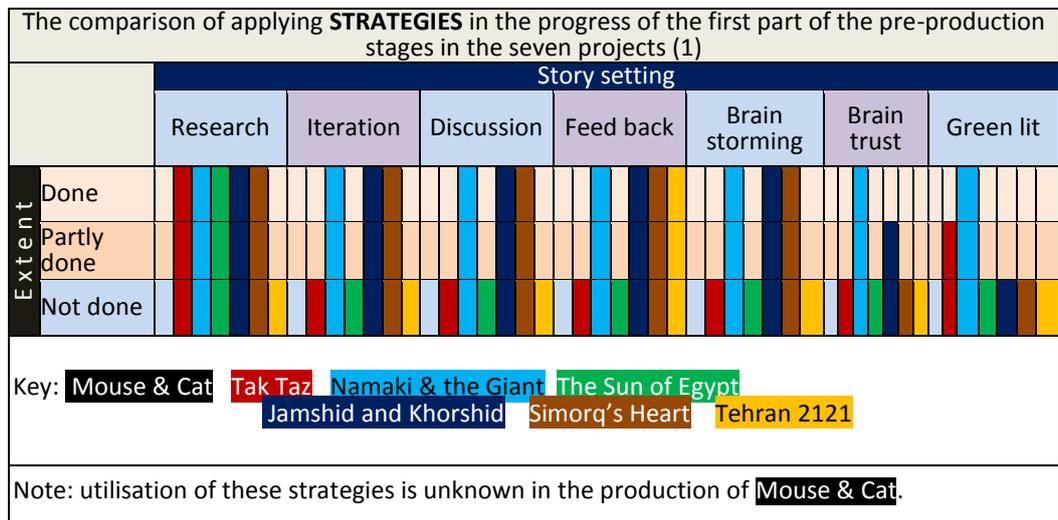
### Lack of specialists and shortcomings in implementing stages

In most of the projects, the director was the person who multi-tasked, e.g. writing the script/screenplay, designing characters, layout, storyboard and also preparing the story reel/animatics. This reveals that there was a lack of experts to execute these tasks. Similarly, stages such as prop design, layout, pitching and story reel, were not implemented in most of the projects. Diagrams 1 and 2 compare the presence and function of the 'specialist' in executing the stages of the pre-production phase. 'Scene setting' and 'story reel design', as the second half of the pre-production phase, are neglected because the method of implementation of the



'brains trust'<sup>170</sup> and 'green lit' are strategies that received less attention. This happened as a result of putting the story into production at the same time as revisions and content editing took place. On the whole, the filmmakers applied the strategies mostly in the concept design stage and did not attempt to promote quality by applying strategies in mainly the first, third and fourth stages of the pre-production phase. In scene setting, none of the filmmakers implemented a 'pitching' strategy to evaluate the storyboard as the initial basis for visual storytelling by an individual performance. Excluding *Namaki and the Giant*, the filmmakers employed a story reel only to know the length and timing of the film.

Diagram 3



<sup>170</sup> A group of veteran animation filmmakers who give feedback on work coming up in the creative process and development of full-length animation filmmaking.

Diagram 4

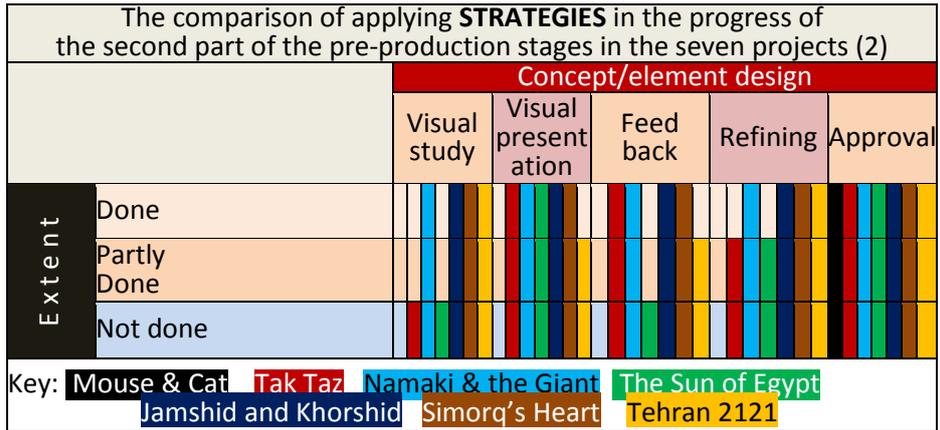


Diagram 5

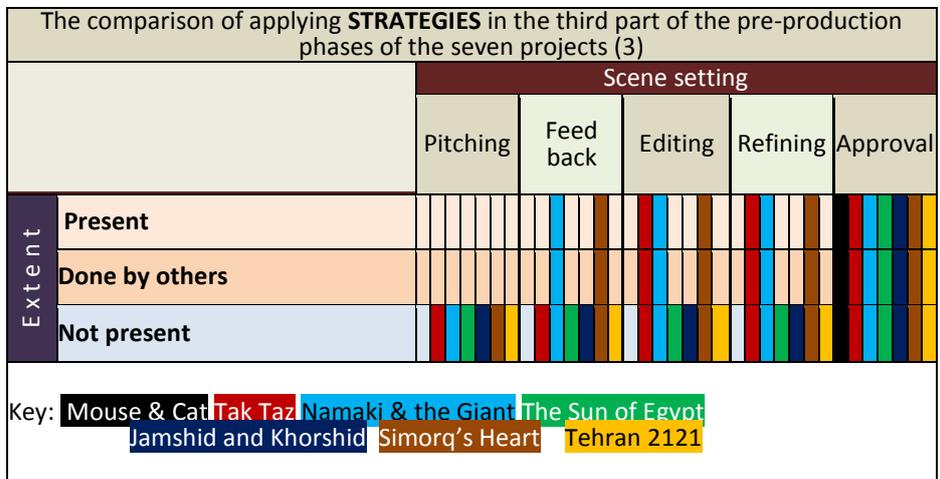
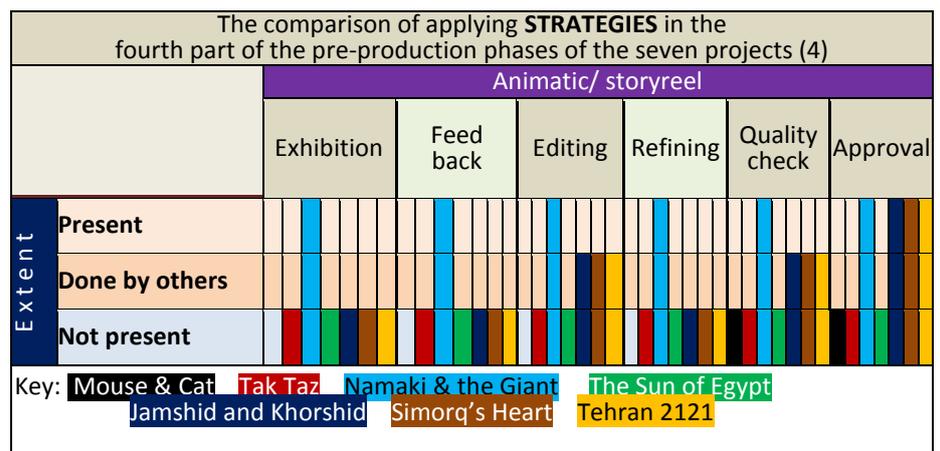


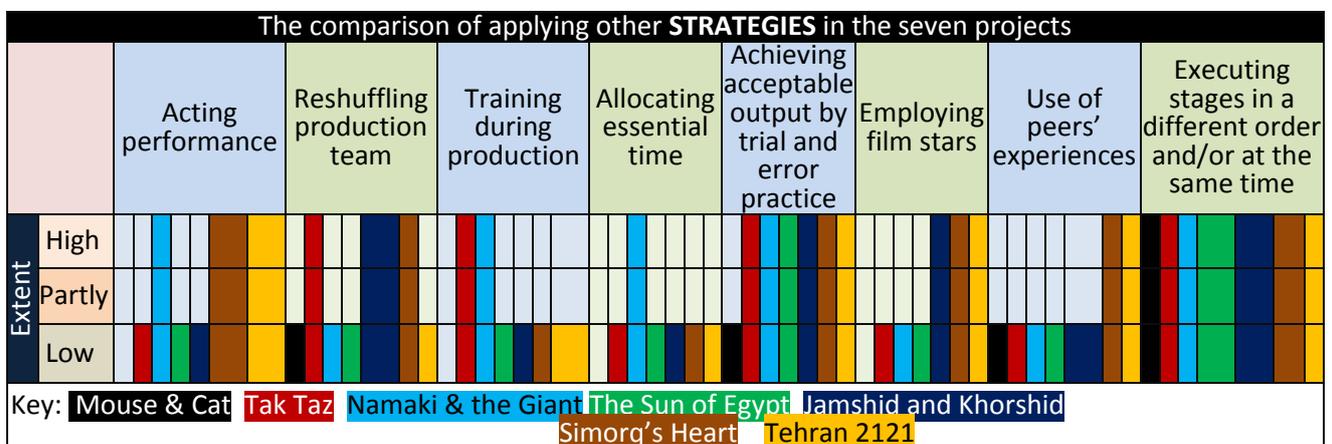
Diagram 6



## Other strategies

The study indicates that the filmmakers did not use strategies similar to Pixar's filmmakers mainly because of different conditions dominating in the country, as mentioned when reviewing the indirect factors. But they were still involved in problem-solving to turn the stories into films; therefore, they came up with other strategies to handle the production. Among the demonstrated strategies in diagram 7, 'trial and error' and 'executing stages in a different order and/or at the same time' applied to all filmmakers in implementing the stages. They attempted to achieve acceptable and well-made parts of their films by observation of the production outputs. In this way, they tried to understand whether the outputs were workable in the films or not. Consequently, as this action was repeated during the filmmaking practice, the stages of pre-production and production were mixed together.

Diagram 7



In three of the projects, the filmmakers rated 'acting performance' as a leading strategy, which facilitated achieving a better perception of visualization of the stories. The filmmakers' attention to arranging a performance is important, because it happened after *Namaki and the Giant*, in the last two projects, when they were involved in finding ways to understand everything about the characters

in the stories. This kind of lesson-learning from previous work is the point that the last filmmakers found useful in the pre-production phase.

'Reshuffling production team' and 'training during production' are also strategies which were used to reinforce the skills of team members in order to enhance the quality of the production outputs.

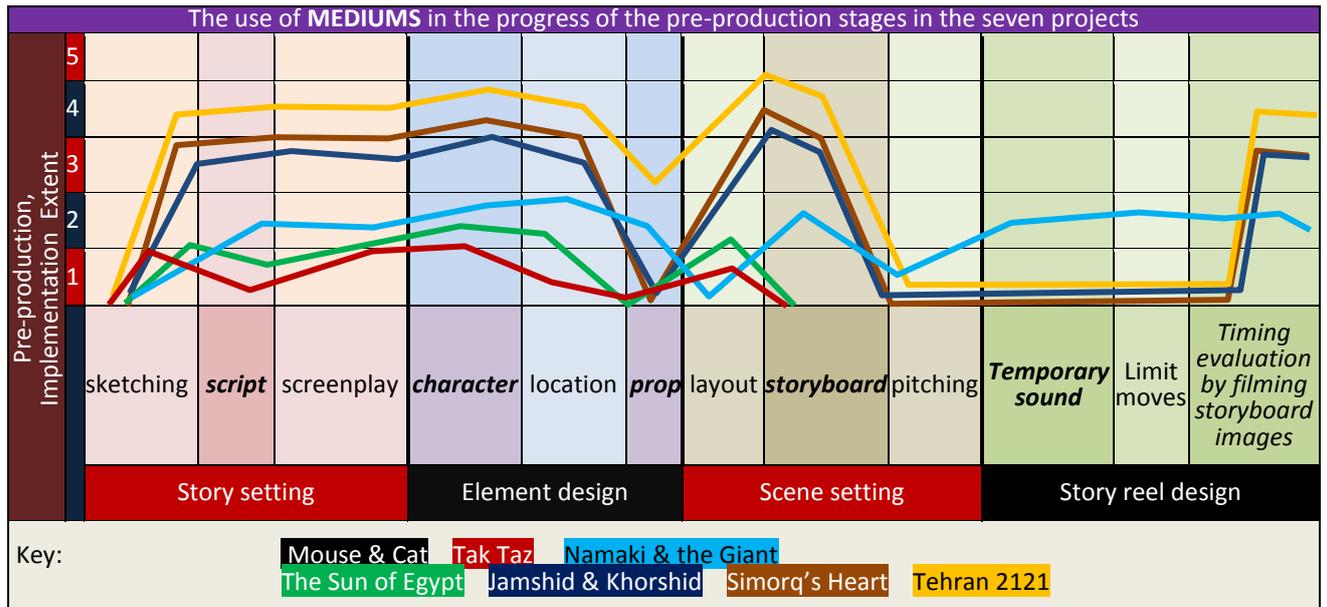
'Allocating essential time' to implement the pre-production phase was considered appropriate only in the making *Namaki and the Giant*.

'Employing film stars' is the strategy that the filmmakers used in the last three projects to improve the characterization as well as increase the attraction and popularity of the films among audiences. And, 'use of the peer's experiences' was used by the filmmakers in the last projects as lessons to remind them to be concerned with the hurdles associated with finishing the production and then exhibiting the film.

### **The media**

Diagram 8 demonstrates the utilization of 'media' in the pre-production phase of the six projects. *Tehran 2121* and *Tak Taz* are the projects that used mediums to the highest and lowest extent. Excluding *Tak Taz* and *Namaki and the Giant*, the other projects completed their films according to the flow of pre-production phases as seen in the diagram. On average, all the filmmakers used the media to run the first two stages of pre-production but there is significant lack of execution in the next two stages, particularly in story reel design. They progressed through the scene setting stage only by using a storyboard and tested timing of the films' sequences by filming storyboard images as animatics/story reels.

Diagram 8



### The shortcomings

The matters relating to shortcomings, labelled as 'shortcomings', are sorted into three types, including specialist, media and strategy, as shown in table 5. Insufficient experience and skills of people who worked on different aspects of the pre-production phase is the main shortcoming in the projects. This issue affected the utilisation of the media and strategies that should facilitate the process of creation, promotion and increasing the quality values of the film, and is based in the pre-production phase. Thus, this issue also led to the elimination of some media and strategies, or their imperfect use, during the pre-production phase.

Table 5

The type of <b>SHORTCOMING</b> in the progress of the pre-production phase of the seven projects								
	1. Mouse & Cat	2. Tak Taz	3. Namaki & the Giant	4. The Sun of Egypt	5. Jamshid & Khorshid	6. Simorq's Heart	7. Tehran 2121	
Shortcomings	limitation Specialist	inexperienced animation film-maker, unforeseen film's sound	Inexperienced team	Inexperienced team, part time members, Extra tasks for production manager and director	studio's heads could not find a solution (film-makers)	could not present a unique style of visual development (unskilled and inexperienced team)	Unfamiliar with some aspects of 3D digital filmmaking, persuaded me that I have to do this job (unavailable character designer), (unskilled & inexperienced team)	limitation in availability of various experts, artists and technicians, having knowledge of the production, many errors,
	Media matters	influenced by the specialist's limitations	insufficient references, Eliminating layout, Ignoring implementation of a whole storyboard, Eliminating animatic	influenced by the specialist's limitations	influenced by the specialist's limitations	influenced by the specialist's limitations	influenced by the specialist's limitations	influenced by the specialist's limitations
	Strategy weakness	No production plan	No particular strategy	influenced by the specialist's limitations	influenced by the specialist's limitations	Kind of anxiety they felt that led them to talk less (in feedback),	influenced by the specialist's limitations	lack of experience in team working

### The outputs of the pre-production phase

As table 6 shows, the outputs of the pre-production phase include those parts that essentially need to be referenced in doing the following parts. The outputs which attracted less attention from the filmmakers, such as the screenplay and story reel, were not implemented completely and perfectly. This happened particularly in relation to the storyreel/animatic, similar to the situation with mediums as noted earlier in diagram 8.

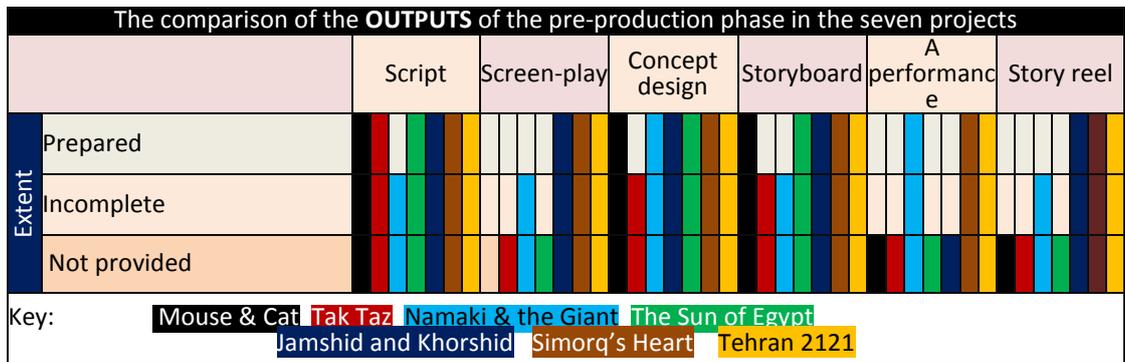
Table 6

The <b>OUTPUTS</b> of the pre-production phase in the seven projects							
	1. Mouse & Cat	2. Tak Taz	3. Namaki & the Giant	4. The Sun of Egypt	5. Jamshid & Khorshid	6. Simorq's Heart	7. Tehran 2121
The outputs	Sheets of drawing, painted cels,	Script, main characters, key locations,	a brief story, concept design, screenplay, storyboard,	script, concept design, storyboard,	screenplay, character design, concept design,	concept design, screenplay, storyboard,	story, script, screenplay, storyboard, perform the

	paintings, film's frames,	storyboard	pastel coloured key scenes, story reel, demo reel,		storyboard, story reel,	a performance, story reel,	character's roles, real time acting of the performers, story reel,
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Diagram 9 clarifies further the condition of the outputs in the projects through a comparison revealing the differences in their execution. It reveals that not all the outputs were provided and the final output as a story reel section indicates that not many projects included this stage.

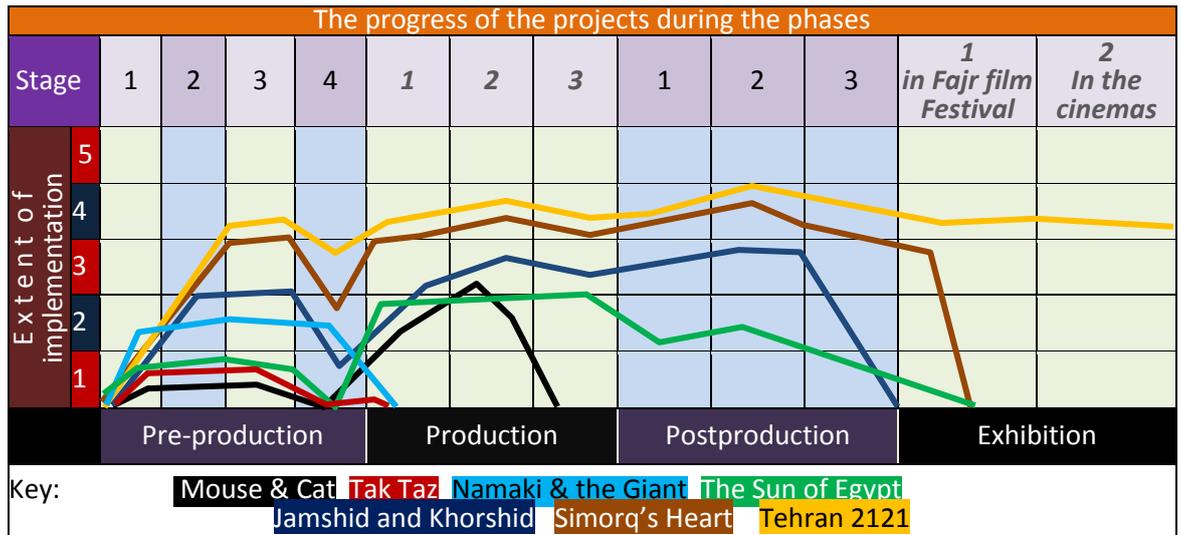
Diagram 9



### The final outputs of the projects

It can be seen in diagram 10 that the three first projects, consisting of *Mouse & Cat*, *Tak Taz* and *Namaki & The Giant*, completed some parts of the production phase and then stopped; the next four projects completed the production phases but the last three went on the screen.

Diagram 10



Consequently, the results of the projects are different as table 7 demonstrates.

Table 7

The <b>RESULTS</b> of the seven projects							
	1. Mouse & Cat	2. Tak Taz	3. Namaki & the Giant	4. The Sun of Egypt	5. Jamshid & Khorshid	6. Simorq's Heart	7. Tehran 2121
The final outputs	unfinished film, unavailable film,	unfinished full-length animation film	an animated demo	First full-length animated feature film, eighty minutes,	a full-length animated film, eighty minutes	a ninety minute full-length animated film,	a one hundred and twenty minute full-length animated film

### Findings in brief

The two types of factors which had the greatest influence on Iranian full-length animation filmmaking were:

- a- Financial dependency, and
- b- Insufficient knowledge and skills.

Financial dependency; historically, animation filmmaking in the country began by relying on financial support from government. This situation existed until the 2010s, and resulted in significant limitations, such as the authority of government organizations imposed on production, and national TV being the only consumer of domestic animated films. Such a situation was not conducive to full-length animation filmmaking, as it needs different film markets or at least accessibility to a booming local film marketplace.

Despite the lack of such basics, Iranian animation filmmakers regularly started testing this type of filmmaking in the 1990s. Naturally, the first attempts failed; because of the filmmakers' unfamiliarity with this type of filmmaking as well as the lack of organisation of film distribution and exhibition.

Although they completed the four last films and exhibited three of these, just the last one, 'Tehran 2121', gained the attention of audiences. This happened mainly because of earlier promotion of the film on television, and also because film stars were employed in designing the characters of the film. As a solution, this helped the filmmakers to achieve these goals:

- 1- opening the way to present this type of film by the film industry network,
- 2- attracting people to come and watch full-length animated films in cinemas,  
and
- 3- turning full-length animation filmmaking into a profitable film industry.

Using this solution, full-length animation filmmakers relied on the popularity of domestic live action filmmaking and audience opinion of such films. Although this could reduce the dependency of the production on government budgets, it did not improve the value of full-length animation filmmaking. It requires filmmakers to have excellent knowledge of its fundamentals and to apply them to make this type

of film based on its own values. In this case, domestic animation filmmakers attempted to learn as they made their films.

### **Insufficient knowledge and skills**

The filmmakers' approach to full-length animation filmmaking was to rely on their experience obtained in short and TV animation filmmaking. This suggests that they were first-time filmmakers, and were assisted by a team in the same situation. Therefore, in practice, they executed the productions based on their insufficient knowledge and skills at the time, for example:

- 1- Commencing the production with no particular plans of timing, action and phases, mainly because they relied on the use of trial and error
- 2- Implementing just those parts of the pre-production phase that the filmmakers thought to be essential to the production, e.g. script, set design and storyboard
- 3- Progressing stages of the production phase before completing the crucial prerequisite stages in the pre-production phase, such as the storyboard; in all cases, the filmmakers used unfinished and unrevised storyboards to run the production before the whole storyboard of the film's story was available.
- 4- The filmmakers were unaware of the functions and advantages of the story reel in improving the quality of the final output of the pre-production phase; thus, in some cases they used it only to realize the timing of the whole film.
- 5- They concentrated more on the production phase and did not take the time to develop different ideas for the stories in the pre-production phase.
- 6- The filmmakers had to come up with special strategies in order to refine the visualization of the elements of the stories that might not be clear, when they wanted to turn each of them into audiovisual contents.

7- One of the workable strategies used by the three filmmakers was to arrange a performance of the key scenes of the stories, realising close to the perceived actions and voices of the characters.

8- Another is the use of film stars as the animation characters in the films. This is a dependency to the dominating form of live-action films, which an animation filmmaker has to adopt his film according to such effects rather than the specific values of animation films.

As a result, Iranian animation filmmakers have improved their methods of filmmaking in practice without referring to the standard principles and arranging basic studies prior to the subsequent productions. Therefore, the practice of full-length animation filmmaking may continue more or less in this fashion but how quality will improve is unclear. Animation filmmaking in this manner may deprive the existing human resources and the related potentialities from the opportunity of a perfect growth and development.

## **Chapter 8**

The final chapter primarily summarises the findings and gives an overview of the issues in the animation sector. Then, an analysis explains why such issues exist. Following that, the circumstances of the educational provision for animation filmmaking are explained to address the effects of current teaching on production. The next part is a description of a strategy suggesting actions to improve this situation. Finally, a summary of the facts in relation to the subject concludes the chapter and the thesis.

Titles of parts:

- Summary of the findings,
- The issues in the animation sector,
- The causes of limitations
- The educational provision of animation filmmaking,
- Recommendations to improve actions,
- Recommendations for government animation organizations,
- Recommendations for animation filmmakers
- Recommendations for the universities
- Conclusion

### **Summary of the Findings**

Both direct and indirect factors affect the practice of full-length animation filmmaking in Iran. In chapter seven, the analysis indicates that direct factors influence the abilities of filmmakers in animation filmmaking. The lack of sufficient knowledge and skills are the main limitations affecting their filmmaking practice, resulting in these issues:

- 1- Relying on a trial and error strategy and neglect in utilizing planning techniques and methods,

- 2- Shortcomings in the execution of the main stages, such as a complete storyboard and a story reel, before production
- 3- Lack of revision and development of main stages in the pre-production phase
- 4- Lack of awareness of the strategic functions of the storyboard and story reel
- 5- Mixing execution of pre-production and production phases
- 6- Paying more attention to production with less concern about what ideas fashion the story of the film
- 7- In the three projects, the filmmakers used performance plays to figure out the characters' acting, and
- 8- Three of the filmmakers employed Iranian film stars to design characters and characterisation

Consequently,

- The flow of progress of full length animation filmmaking is unclear
- Running such professional productions without bringing on skilful filmmakers will waste resources and produce poor films
- Filmmakers need to revise and update their knowledge and understanding of the production of full-length filmmaking

The main indirect factors are rooted in the financial dependency of the animation sector on the government, and full length animation filmmaking is part of that. This dependency has resulted in these issues:

- Full length animation filmmaking needs to be supported by government budgets
- Governmental organizations are highly effective in arranging production of full length animation films

- They have no specific plan or process for supervision and development of this type of filmmaking, thus there is no quality control and final evaluation of these productions
- The film industry is not very proactive in the distribution and exhibition of homemade full length animation films, mainly because of the uncertainty of the audience's reaction
- Promotion of full length animation films by television and employment of popular film stars are the solutions that some of the filmmakers came up with to deal with these matters

Consequently, the animation sector, and particularly animation full-length filmmaking, essentially has to become independent. This helps the sector and this type of filmmaking to become a profitable activity and grow into a self-sufficient industry.

### **The issues in the animation sector**

Since the beginning of animation filmmaking in Iran (1957), this activity has developed in different conditions as explained earlier in chapter five. Here, we pay attention to the important and effective parts of animation filmmaking in the country. After its emergence, by its second era (1957-1979), the number of animated films, filmmakers, and organizations, became significant enough for the animation sector to be taken into account. At the time, there were differences between animation and live action filmmakers. The main differences were:

- The animation filmmakers were making films sponsored by the government for young audiences, while live action filmmakers were concerned with adult audiences and box office profits,
- Kanun was the main governmental organization which supplied a budget for animation films, and

- The animation filmmakers had worked with small teams making short animation films targeting domestic and international film festivals

Thus, the animation sector had no commercial products until the airing of the first homemade animated advertising film series by national TV (after 1975). By the end of the second era (the revolution in 1979), the animation sector had experienced three main series of relevant actions including:

- In production: making experimental animation films in Kanun,
- In exhibition: organizing international film festivals by Kanun; showing imported animated TV series and homemade animated advertising films by national TV; and
- In education: Kanun sent several people to study animation filmmaking abroad; running the first MA in animation at the University of Farabi following completion of an associate degree in animation in Kanun.

At that time, social evolution and economic growth had laid the groundwork for the emergence of the Iranian animation sector. But the Islamic revolution (1979) changed everything and the animation sector experienced an era of stagnation.

Nothing really happened during this era (the 1980s), owing to multiple crises caused by changes of government and the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988). After the war, during the reconstruction era, the animation sector witnessed a reactivation, moving it into a new era.

In the fourth era, during the 1990s, the different parts of the animation sector, such as production, exhibition and teaching, changed significantly. The important events included:

- In production, Saba, another organisation responsible for the development of animation, was funded by the government; establishment of private animation studios; application of computer and digital technology in

production; the coming of a new generation of animation filmmakers; early homemade 3D digital advertising and infomercial animated series; animated TV series, and putting several projects of full-length animation films into production;

- In exhibition: national TV increased the number of its channels from two to five and then added further ones; it aired various homemade animated films including advertising, infomercial and TV series, along with showing imported animated films; holding the international animation film festival of Tehran biennially from 1998, and
- In education: The Art University and Tarbiat Modares University set up MA courses in animation; some government organisations and private studios also arranged training courses in animation separately or during production.

By the end of the 1990s, the outputs and activities in these areas indicated that the animation sector was working actively. However, apart from some animation advertising and infomercial films, all other productions still relied on financial support from the government. National TV, as the main exhibitor, acted as distributor, exhibiting animated TV series, advertising and infomercial films.

In this situation, those animation filmmakers who dealt with making full-length films realised that there was no ready-made basis for distribution and exhibition of their films. Despite these limitations, several more full-length films were put into production during the next decade.

In the 2000s, the animation sector witnessed the advantages resulting from the actions in the previous decade during reconstruction time. The results can be divided into three main categories:

- In production: the filmmakers were involved with making all types of animation films; the amount of people in production increased; the

filmmakers turned to using more digital technology and made 3D CGI films; the MA animation students made short experimental films for their graduation; the number of completed full length animation films reached four in number,

- In exhibition: the exhibition of homemade animated TV series continued mainly on national TV Channel Four (education) and Two; one of the infomercial animation series became popular among audiences; *The Sun of Egypt*, the first completed full length animated film, was exhibited for a short time in one or two cinemas; holding the Tehran Animation Film Festival continued biannually, and
- In education: the first groups of MA animation students graduated from the universities, became active in the academic centres as teachers or went to work for productions;

The 2000s was the time that the animation sector experienced the making of various types of animation films, the appearance of further filmmakers and the education of a number of MA students. But its basic condition did not change owing to the dependency of production on the government. A similar situation existed for distribution and exhibition of animated films, which had no market other than national TV. It did not contribute to full-length animated films that needed to be served by a distribution and exhibition network. Such shortcomings affected *Simorq's Heart* which was not screened.

### **The causes of limitations**

By the late 2000s, the animation sector had more than five decades of animation filmmaking experience but could not survive without government support. Although this is a long time to say that it is still a young industry, it is the case that the animation sector is taking the first steps in high quality animation filmmaking,

particularly in full length filmmaking. It has taken significant steps to reach the point of making animation films of acceptable quality. The causes relate to two types of factors: abilities of filmmakers and dependency on government support. In fact, the animation sector has been actively leaning on these two main factors, which have had advantages and disadvantages for animation production.

The advantages include:

- Government organizations, one after another, have kept active a flow of animation film production,
- The existing activity in productions has prepared a basis for creating a generation of animation filmmakers
- The products have provided some shows for national TV
- These activities have resulted in the setting up of academic teaching

The disadvantages consist of:

- Government organizations have not had a clear vision or a persistent strategy for development of animation filmmaking in the country,
- They have not conducted quality control on the productions,
- A significant number of animation film projects have been left unfinished or not exhibited,
- Almost all types of homemade animated films have been limited to screening on national TV, which is the only available customer,
- There is no concern for audience feedback,
- The filmmakers have no motivation to compete in making quality animation films,
- No significant connection has emerged between the universities and the productions, and

- After more than six decades, animation filmmaking has not yet become profitable industry.

The reasons for these issues are rooted in two main facts: one, government supervision, and two, actions of the animation filmmakers. In relation to government supervision, it has kept animation filmmaking dependent on government action. Although it was essential at the beginning, as animation was an unknown and young activity in the country, subsequent government organisations did not do anything effective or motivating to make at least some productions gradually become profitable and independent. This could cut the dependency of animation filmmaking on government budgets.

On the other hand, some filmmakers tried straight away to making full-length animation films to attract audiences. However, in practice, they realised that there was much about this type of production that they did not know. Therefore, they had to use a trial and error strategy when working on the productions. But it did not work as they expected. Additionally, excluding *Tehran 2121*, the rest had not planned for distribution and exhibition of their films. This film had a successful screening, partly because its filmmakers had learnt lessons from their peers' failures. *Tehran 2121*'s success has highlighted several facts:

- it proved the credibility and reliability of the study's findings in terms of the mismanagement of government managers,
- if a film has the potential to bring audiences to cinemas, then its production can be started by relying on government support. Then it would be possible to replace it with the private sector,
- *Tehran 2121*'s success has raised this belief that the animation sector has begun to move towards the formation of self-reliant animation filmmaking. In

fact, this was the beginning of this movement, requiring consistency based upon the filmmakers' skills and a reduction in the effect of indirect factors.

### **The educational provision of animation filmmaking**

Chapter five presents a comprehensive description of teaching of animation filmmaking in the country. Here, we highlight those parts that can work effectively in relation to the animation sector, especially in full-length filmmaking.

Animation filmmaking is regularly taught at two academic levels, undergraduate and postgraduate. Also, another type is occasional training arranged by some organizations and animation studios. These educate production teams or those who are interested in animation filmmaking. In this section, our focus is on regular teaching pertinent to production.

By the early 2010s, the universities had experienced two decades of teaching MA courses in animation. This is in addition to a BA course in animation, which has been actively taught in the faculty of national TV. The BA graduates occupy job positions in national TV and therefore, a small number of them may apply for an MA in animation. In this manner, most of the MA animation students come from other BA disciplines.

Consequently, most of the MA students have academic backgrounds in the arts such as painting, graphics, photography, performance arts and so on. In practice, having such a degree is insufficient to progress to a standard MA animation discipline. This is because most of them do not know the basics of animation. Thus, during the course they come across a variety of learning materials they need to know and need much extra practice to be able to do.

On the other hand, the duration of the MA in animation is no more than two years. That is a short time to be able to understand and experience the main professional

aspects of animation filmmaking. This relates particularly to those students who are not aware of such basics until they begin studying for the MA in animation.

Owing to this main deficiency in academic animation learning, many MA graduates experience difficulties in professional jobs in animation. In some cases, those graduates who get these jobs have to have additional training to be able to work in production.

As a result, from the standpoint of professional animation filmmakers, the academic outputs do not match the requirements of production. In other words, they believe that universities are running a routine MA animation course that covers only general concepts of animation. Also the course has no teaching materials to support the professional aspects of animation filmmaking. Therefore, universities cannot produce appropriately skilled people ready to work in productions.

This belief has created a gap between the universities and professional producers of animation. This has stopped these two from having a dynamic connection and from collaborating closely. For this reason, the universities have not had a connection with full-length animation film projects. The filmmakers cannot count on the universities to provide the essential knowledge for animation filmmaking. Accordingly, both miss out on the opportunity of using each other's strengths and facilities that could significantly affect their promotion and development.

### **Recommendations to improve actions**

For a film to be successful it is vital that it communicates with audiences and attracts them. After that, it can be expected to affect cultural, economic, and other social aspects. Also, experiences of the foremost animation filmmakers such as Disney confirm that an animation film crucially requires high quality audiovisual elements to perfectly convey its story.

As chapter three reveals, after discovering the basics of animation filmmaking, Disney developed quality of animation through full-length films. Two factors relating to quality have proved important. Firstly, making every attempt to create audiovisual elements of the best quality; secondly, telling a nice story through utilization of such elements in cinematic form. These valuable experiences were obtained gradually through making animation films, leading filmmakers to discover the functions of each stage of creation, which formed the pre-production phase. The sensitivity of this role was further revealed after making full-length animated films in Disney studios, one after another.

After that, Pixar upgraded the skills of story development of this phase by a process of revision and reinvention of the methods and strategies gained through experience. Pixar's creative process also indicated that promotion of quality values and originality of storytelling in animation depends on the way methods and strategies are used.

With this in mind, when we look at the potential of the Iranian animation sector, it already has the main basics: flow of animation production, exhibition and teaching facilities. These all require some changes in their existing arrangements, procedure and programme in order to promote the quality of homemade animation films.

- 1- production of animation filmmaking currently depends on two facilitators:  
government organizations and animation filmmakers;
- 2- national TV is now the main exhibitor of animated films, and can support  
homemade animated films with effective promotion;
- 3- the MA in animation currently provides general teaching materials enabling  
students to make short experimental animation films.

Using a holistic approach, these changes should turn their facilities into supporting independent animation length filmmaking, moving it towards self-reliant production. To reach this level, the organizations and people involved need to implement the suggested solutions, which are feasible with regard to their current situation.

### **Recommendations for governmental animation organizations**

The current support from these organizations is mainly related to allocation of budgets to animation film projects. This policy could gradually start to change with a reduced role in budget allocation, replacing it with support in distribution and screening of full-length-animated films. The organizations can also reinforce the success of films by arranging for them to be promoted on TV.

In this situation, the objectives of these organizations require redefining in order to make their management more effective. This affects their sponsorship role as producer or budget supplier, turning them into organizers encouraging filmmakers to move towards making profitable films. The organizations should undergo changes in their actions in line with a comprehensive plan.

Such a plan could include three main parts: timing of implementation, aims, and policy. Timing depends on the situation of filmmakers and facilities available for production. Covering all aspects, time may be considered in the short, mid and long term.

Short-term considerations begin with informing filmmakers about the plan and ends when ongoing projects are completed. Mid-term is a period for filmmakers who have proposed new projects and require revisions with respect to quality in line with the aims of the plan. And long-term is the time within which filmmakers propose and develop their films under the quality control of the organization, to achieve support in distribution and exhibition.

The plan's aims have two dimensions: changes in the organization's own functions to allow it to cope with its new tasks and facilitate the progress of animation filmmaking towards it being independent.

The plan's policy consists of a series of supportive actions such as scholarships, loans, distribution and exhibition services available to animation filmmakers who make films which have strong potential in attracting audiences. These actions provide motivation for the private sector to invest in animation productions, which is an essential development.

### **Recommendations for animation filmmakers**

The important point at this stage is that the result and success of all the suggested actions is dependent on the quality of films being supported to go on the screen. Prior to taking such action by government organizations, animation filmmakers need to update their knowledge and skills in full-length animation filmmaking. They should be aware of the experiences of their peers in Iran and elsewhere in detail. Initially they need to upgrade their understanding and knowledge of the pre-production phase.

The understanding can be clarified and outlined based on the contents of chapters six and seven, both constitute parts of the contribution to the knowledge of the subject. Based on such facts, the animation filmmakers can improve their understanding about the pre-production phase when they pay attention to and do the following:

- starting a film with a study of the specifics of its story and audience,
- believing that the effect of the pre-production phase on the quality of a film is key in animation filmmaking,
- appropriate step-by-step implementation of the pre-production phase is vital in building up the quality of a film,

- conducting the pre-production phase in an ideal manner takes time, and
- talented artists and experts are necessary in executing this phase.

Once the filmmakers' views and understanding change in terms of dealing with this phase, they become eager to improve their knowledge in this aspect. The study, in both chapters six and seven, indicates that they need to know more about these parts:

- planning and scheduling of the production of full length animation films,
- the organisational aspects of working in a team,
- the usage and the function/s of each stage of the pre-production phase,
- how to manage the use of production methods such as storyboard and story reel to create the audiovisual elements of a film,
- preparing and executing strategies such as iteration to refine story, discussion, feedback etc, to generate brilliant ideas and unique scenes in conveying a story in an ideal manner,
- the use of a story reel as a tool to improve the quality of a whole sequence of a film before starting the production phase,
- studying the attention of an audience to a film and their feedback, and
- realising the importance of reworking and revising practices as crucial strategies in attaining acceptable outputs in this phase.

Additionally, the filmmakers should draw conclusions and learn from the good experiences they had in three of the seven projects. They used live acting to understand characters' acting and creation of key scenes of the story.

And their participation in international film events would inspire their vision of professional animation filmmaking.

Making animation films with the support of policies from organisations encouraging quality films can change the landscape of animation length filmmaking in Iran.

Universities could play a role in effectively speeding up achievement of better quality.

### **Recommendations for the universities**

In line with improving filmmakers' knowledge in production, the universities could collaborate with them and work together on strategy. In fact, this would be an opportunity for both, the animation filmmakers and the universities, to develop a much better link. The role of the universities could take shape in two types of actions:

- One, setting up an academic discipline in order to produce experts ready to work in professional animation filmmaking, and
- Two, facilitating research projects according to the needs of filmmakers and developments of animation filmmaking.

One, setting up an academic discipline in professional animation filmmaking produces experts to work in production. The discipline provides them with both up-to-date knowledge of production as well as the key skills of animation filmmaking. Thus the universities serve the animation industry by training key workforces. These experts also keep the connection between the universities and the animation industry alive.

The educational material can cover three main subject areas, consisting of storytelling in animation, the creative process in animation length filmmaking and understanding audiences for animated films. Each subject includes theoretical and practical aspects to ensure that students receive a thorough education in the subject. To enrich the learning materials, a short internship gives a tangible experience to learners, in addition to other skills they study.

Two, arranging research studies is one of main tasks that is feasible for universities, who have the facilities, and which filmmakers cannot really do on their

own. With respect to the requirements of Iranian animation filmmaking in terms of skills in execution of production and domestic knowledge of animation, basic studies arranged by universities in these fields encourage the development of the animation industry.

### **Conclusion**

At the beginning of animation filmmaking activity in Iran, it seems that government support was necessary with regard to the limitations and the lack of homemade cultural products at the time. But, after more than six decades, not only has this activity not developed adequately to meet at least some domestic cultural needs, but has also left many animated films unscreened. For these reasons, most of those who are aware of such issues in the animation sector would like this situation to change.

On the other hand, making full-length animation films has been the key move towards producing professional and profitable animation films. Although only the seventh film, *Tehran 2121*, was a success, the fact is that the previous projects had already provided a basis for this achievement. *Tehran 2121*'s success was a long step toward animation filmmaking becoming a real industry. This is an opportunity for the animation sector to develop through supporting filmmakers in making quality animation films. It can begin with implementing the suggested actions.

Implementing the recommendations is possible for the relevant organizations and people considering their current abilities. To achieve this improvement, the strategy should be for organizations and filmmakers to perform their own tasks, and for their actions to be compatible with each other.

There is also another point in relation to the country, which relates to development. Giving value to domestic cultural products is one of way of supporting constant development, and animated films are an important example of this.

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## Appendix

Table 2-1

Data variety overview		
Data areas	Evidence type	Unit
1	A: The domestic art and cultural background as nontechnical literature	Documentation, artefacts, Relevant Iranian art and cultural background, cinema and animation
	B: The seven domestic animation film projects as technical literature	Documentation, artefacts, interviews, observation, Iranian full-length animation filmmaking,
2	C: General literature of pre-production phase in full-length animation filmmaking	Documentation, artefacts, From making early animation films to formation of pre-production in Disney's films 1980s
	D: Technical literature of pre-production phase, instance for comparison	Documentation, artefacts, published interviews, Pre-production phase in Ghibli Studio, Aardman Studios and Pixar Studios

Table 2-2

A, In pre-production practice (open coding)					
C A T E G O R Y					
1. Story setting		2. Elements design	3. Scene setting	4. Story reel	
<b>CODE</b>	Developing Idea, writing process, Producer, director, story man/artist, script/screenplay writer, brain trust, sketching, script, screenplay, skill, experience, green lit, research, iteration to refine story, time management, discussion, feedback, brain storming, quality monitoring, work approval, approved script and screen play	Pre-visualization, concept artist, visual artist, character designer, sound & voice design, talent voice, musician, director to do approval, environment, character and props, character voices, music, dubbing, skill, experience, visual study, visual presentation, feedback, work approval	compounding visual elements, layout artist, art director, storyboard artist, director to do approval, layout design, storyboarding, skill, experience, pitching, feedback, editing, refining, approval, approved storyboard and pitch	filming storyboard, adding some actions and moves, temporary sound, film editor, animator, director to do approval, story reel, film sequencing, timing, skill, experience, exhibiting, feedback, editing, refining, quality monitoring, approval, approved story reel	

Table 2-3

A, In pre-production practice (axial coding)						
Key technical Concepts	S U B C A T E G O R Y					
	a. Assignee	b. Method	c. Strategy	d. Output		
Story setting: developing Ideas, writing process	<b>CODE</b>	1	Producer, director, story man/artist, script/screenplay writer, brain trust	sketching, script, screenplay,	green lit, research, iteration to refine story, time management, discussion, feedback, brain storming, quality monitoring, approval	Approved script and screen play
Element design: sound & voice design, Pre-visualization		2	concept artist, visual artist, character designer, talent voice, musician, director to do approval	concept design: environment, character and props, character voices, dubbing,	visual study, visual presentation, feedback, approval	Approved concept design and character voices
Scene setting: compounding visual elements,		3	layout artist, art director, storyboard artist, director to do approval	layout design, storyboarding,	pitching, feedback, editing, refining, approval	Approved storyboard and pitch
Story reel: making a film-look by filming storyboard, adding some actions and moves, temporary sound		4	Film editor, animator, director to do approval	story reel, film sequencing, timing	exhibiting, feedback, editing, refining, quality monitoring, approval	Approved story reel