

## **Animating Cultural Essence: Translating Pashto Literature into Digital Storytelling**

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### **Abstract**



Literature of a specific region is source of diffusing the knowledge of varied culture, rituals, history, tradition, stories and much information reflecting the timeline of different cultures and communities (Klarl 2010). The research follows a practice-led approach, combining creative output, content analysis, and exploration of past research. It explores how literature from a specific language can be adapted into a digital medium, making it accessible to a broader audience without compromising its essence. Primary and Secondary sources are used and after careful deliberation the literary work Ghani Khan's "Reidi Gul," was selected for its modernist essence and relevance (ALi 2014).

The project explores the context of the poem and translates it into an interactive visual story. The resulting animated film encapsulates the essence of the poem, utilizing story, animation, production management, cultural music, sound design, and Pashto voice-over to engage the audience. Moreover, it aims to preserve Pashto literature and folk traditions using digital mediums.

The modern digital era has transformed communication mediums entirely, impacting the dissemination of cultural knowledge, history, and traditions embedded in regional literature (Edwards 2015). This practice led research project aims to find how cultural literature of a specific language can be presented in a digital medium of animation, making it understandable to an audience on a broader scale, without affecting its essence and originality.

**Keywords:** Animation, Interactive Story, Digital Era, Visual Story, Regional Literature, Pashto

### **Introduction**

The study was originated by otherwise untapped inclination towards exploring Pashto literature as a whole comprising both written and folk literature. To gain an insight of the renowned poet or scholar, the knowledge that is documented and written down in specific regional language, which is an asset to the cultural domain, that is waiting to be explored and to be transferred down to new generation despite language barrier. Translating it into audio, visual, representation in order to revive it in a digital age by transcription/adaptation through animation to prevent generation loss was the agenda.

Pragmatic approach was used for the research and various methods of studying books, journals and published sources, studying interviews and talks of various poets, critics, and analyzing animated films that helped to understand how to translate literature without affecting its essence and to emphasize the importance of keeping Pashto literature alive using digital mediums.

For this research, the conceptual framework employed research findings of literature review, including articles, past research paper and visual review of movies, short films, and a significant multimedia tool of animation

This research topic "From Vanishing to Visible: Animating Pashto Literature in Digital Age" will be effective in taking the initiative to establish a way for professional and designers to consider the transcription of literature and folk literature into animations and other effective mediums to preserve and protect in this advanced technological and digital age.

Some various communities around the world have converted their folklores and literature into animation films to gain extensive engagement of audience globally. This process of adaptation helps old traditions of these communities and cultures to popularize so that the new generation can realize its importance in the present-day settings of digital mediums. Also, it connects people across the

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world together by extinguishing the line of the geographical separation, through its usual thread of lesson learning literature and folk traditions<sup>1</sup>.

**Aim**

The aim is to produce an animation that artistically explores the Pashto literature, visually captivating the essence and revive the knowledge and translate the message in animation for audience of digital age.

**Significance of the study**

Firstly, the research is beneficial for the one's own learning about Pashto literature and folk literature. The research aims to revive the disappearing essence of Pashto literature and folk tales in the digital age. It underscores the lack of initiatives in preserving this cultural heritage and emphasizes the need to transpose these traditions into contemporary mediums like animation.

The traditional meanings of knowledge transfer for instance, hujra's, mela's, Bethik's, (gathering of people at a specific place) through cultural gatherings have evolved into digital platforms like film and animation.

By developing a usable conceptual and practice oriented framework within animation, the research aims to unravel the impact and resolutions of this issue. It highlights the struggle of Pakistani artists, animators in localizing cartoons and the potential for animators to use digital mediums to resurrect lost literature. which is why to find solution we have to translate that lost practices of transferring knowledge into mediums of today. Moreover, it strives to promote cultural diversity and inspire Pakistani animators to explore and represent their cultural values through localized content creation. This cultural understanding within media arts serves as a bridge between folk wisdom, communication, semiotics, creativity, and contemporary aesthetics.

**Methodology**

**Research Design:** This study, titled "From the Vanishing to Visible: Animating Pashto Literature in the Digital Age," is an art-based project rooted in practice-led research. It integrates a conceptual framework that accommodates creative practice, methods, and output, notably animation, within the research design. Practice-led research in art and design primarily consists of two components: a textual aspect and a creative output. In this context, the final product—an animation—acts as both the outcome and response to the research questions.

**Mixed Method Approach:** Given the exploratory nature of the research, a mixed-method approach was conducted. This involved analyzing content and forms of animations and films as case studies within the domain, as well as perusing observations, reading various books, journals, and articles to gather knowledge pertinent to the research domain (Community Engagement Program 2023). Exploring past research papers helped identify limitations and gaps, enriching the literature review and enhancing overall comprehension. Secondary data sources such as books, journals, articles, and research papers were pivotal in this process.

**Data Collection:** The data gathered underwent critical analysis and was stored in descriptive formats (Habbar n.d.). This comprehensive analysis formed the basis for the creation of the 2D animation, establishing a direct link between the research findings and the final output.

**References:** A multitude of resources including books, journals, and published works aided in comprehending the research topic. Notable mentions include works like "Folk Culture and Animation: Influences and Safeguarding of Oral Traditions" by Marievi Mastoraki, "Cultural Heritage Preservation of Traditional Indian Art through Virtual New-media" by Saptarshi Kolay, and "The Pathan" by Ghani Khan, among others. Despite limited literature specifically in Pashto, recent attention to this area is encouraging further significant exploration.

**Interviews:** Listening to interviews and discussions surrounding Ghani Khan and other Pashto Poets provided valuable insights into their thought processes. This understanding contributed significantly to developing the narrative perspective for the animation.

**Analysis of Animations:** Studying animations created over the past 10 to 25 years based on folklores and folk literature offered insights into animation techniques and audience reception. These insights complemented the research.

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<sup>1</sup> Animating Folktales: An Analysis of Animation Movies based on Folktales of three different Indian Languages, Bhowmick - Litinfinite Journal - 2020

**Conclusion:** The research methodology aims to discover improved methods of transcription and emphasize the importance of preserving folk traditions, breathing new life into fading literature. In an increasingly digital world, technology permeates every aspect of our lives, offering novel ways to share cultural and moral values (The Wisdom of Myth and Folklore: Why We Need Stories to Keep us Alive as a Society 2019). Critically analyzing past research and related work underscores the necessity of using technology to transmit old traditions, folklore, and folk literature to future generations, preventing their extinction.

**Selection of literary persons and their literately work**

After Studying Several Pashto Literature work, Folk lore's, Poems, Poetry works by several Pashto writers, ] "Ghani Khan" poetry was selected as it it had the most modernist thoughts in his poetry. Several of his books were read including "Da Ghani Kulliyat" which is a huge collection of his poems and poetry with 698 pages, and "The Pathan" by Ghani Khan.

**Literature Review: Ghani Khan's Impact on Pashto Literature**

Ghani Khan (1914-1996), a revered Pashto poet, writer, and politician, was widely acknowledged as the "Mad Philosopher" (known in Pashto as "Lewany Falsafi") and "the Ocean of Knowledge" (da ilm samandar) (Khan 2013). His birth in the village of Charsada district, KPK Pakistan, greatly influenced his work, which notably reflects his profound love for nature and the local Pashtun way of life. He often conveyed, "Pashtun is not merely a race but, in fact, a state of mind; there is a Pashtun lying inside every man, who at times wakes up and overpowers him."

A progressive thinker, Ghani Khan expressed a vision for his people to be educated, enlightened, and imbued with a strong sense of justice, capable of forging a harmonious future in tandem with nature (Mahmood 2011). Despite facing multiple imprisonments, he utilized his time in jail to craft poetry, notably his seminal work "Da Pinjrey Chagar" (The Chirping of the Cage). Beyond his poetic prowess, Ghani Khan demonstrated a profound understanding of both foreign and native cultures, encompassing sensual, psychological, and religious dimensions of life.

Translating many of Ghani Khan's poetries, remarked that his verses resound with messages of peace, pertinent and beneficial in today's context. Ghani Khan departed from centuries-old thematic dominance of morality in Pashto poetry, shifting focus to new aesthetics. He opposed radical clerics, viewing them as seeking social control under the guise of religion. His diverse poems covered patriotism, freedom, love, and nature, rooted in the essence of humanism and the pursuit of truth. He advocated for a true romanticism that integrates deed, action, and the beauty of thought as essential for civilization.

Artist Saif Toon highlighted the dynamic nature of Ghani Khan's poetry, distinguishing it from poets like Rahman Baba, whose work leans towards Sufism and a preachy style. Toon emphasized the relevance of Ghani Khan's work to today's youth, offering a fresh perspective.

Humaiyun Kasi, a student of Ghani Khan's work and a faculty member at a private university, underscored the contemporary necessity of Ghani Khan's poetry, citing the prevailing loss of hope among people. Kasi advocated revisiting figures like Ghani Khan to reignite hope before it deteriorates further.

An excerpt from Ghani Khan's poetry collection, specifically "Reidi Gul," sourced from the book "Da Ghani Kulliyat" (page 333), showcases his profound impact and enduring relevance in Pashto literature.

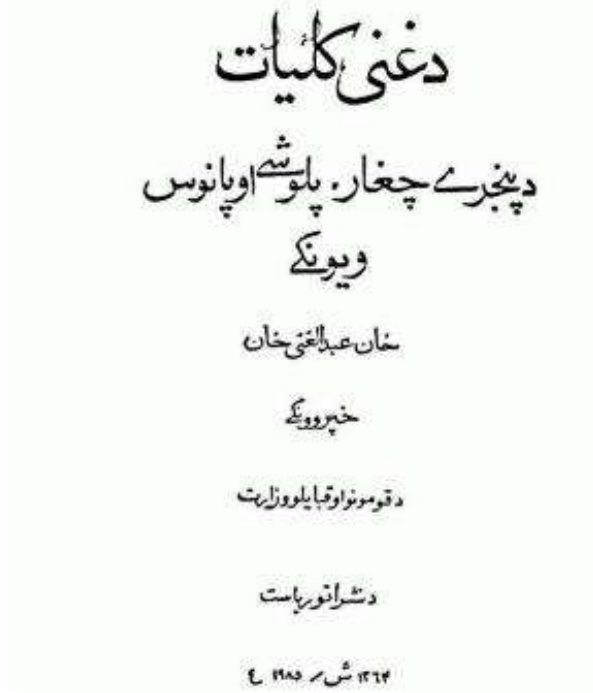


Figure 1 Da Ghani Khan Kulliyat Book Intro Page

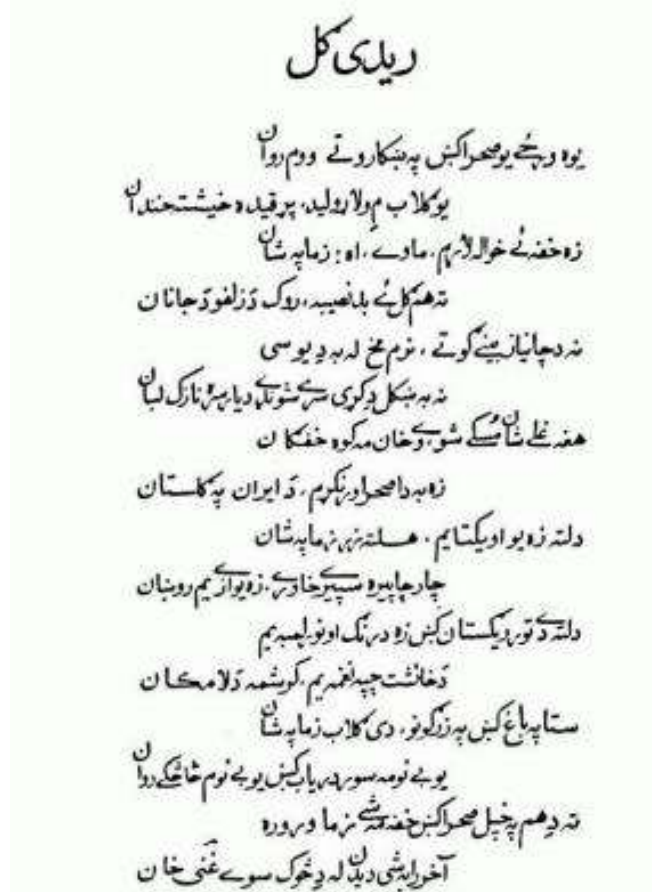


Figure 2 'Reidi Gul' by Ghani Khan

“Reidi Gul” Translation in English  
Translated form Pashto by Taimur Khan<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Khan, Taimur. “A Tulip.” Ghani Khan. September 13, 2012. URL:  
<https://ghanikhan.wordpress.com/translation/a-tulip/>.

In a desert, once, on a hunt did I find,  
 With a radiant smile, a flower so fair;  
 Sadly, I approached and sighed, "Ah! Of my kind  
 Are you too – a hapless flower from a beloved's hair?  
 Frail fingers wouldn't take you to a soft face so close,  
 Nor would you be kissed by lips delicate and rose."  
 With a silent smile the flower replied, "Don't lose heart!  
 This desert I wouldn't give up for the gardens of Iran,  
 A solitary I am here while legions are there,  
 Amidst this cursed soil I stand apart.  
 In this Gray desert, a flamboyant flame of divine light am I,  
 Beauty's silent song, a miracle from the sky.  
 In your garden, there are thousands of flowers like me –  
 A nameless droplet in a nameless sea.  
 You too, in your desert, don't feel forlorn,  
 To behold you at last shall come a score Ghani Khan.

Figure 3 "Reidi Gul" - Translation

**Animation Production Pipeline**

The Animation development pipeline is the process of creating an animation from concept to completion. It helps organize the flow of work so that everyone knows when they need to deliver and what. A pipeline should be flexible enough as the project requires several approvals and disapprovals and revisions.

Animation making process is generally divided into 3 stages: Pre- production, Production and Post-production.

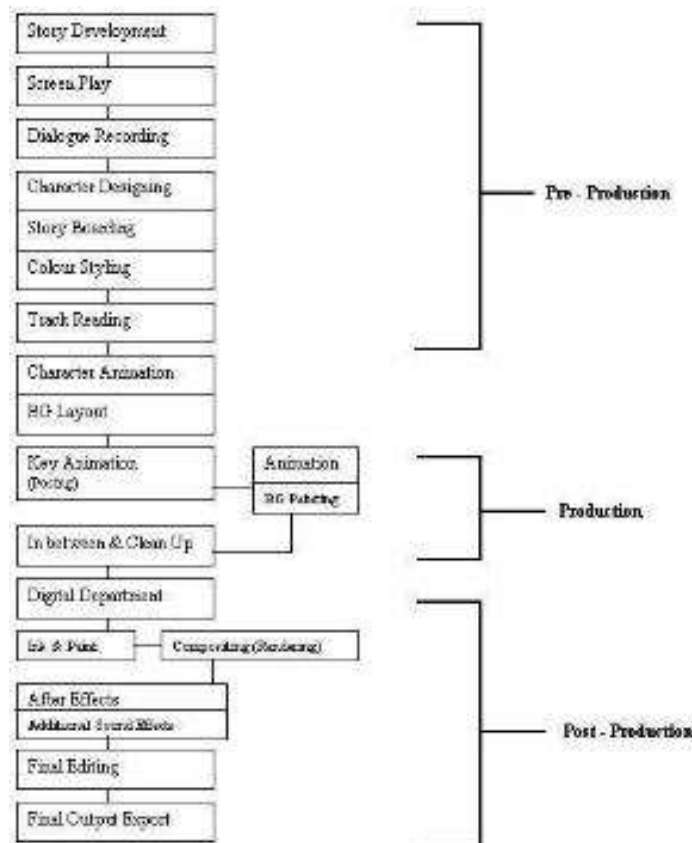


Figure 4 Animation Production Chart

**Pre-Production**

The first step of every animation project is where developing ideas is planned prior to their production and defines what is the concept of animation, what is the purpose of making this animation and how will it out product be like. This phase of Pre-production involves following steps<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> MC Gunnis, Karen. "Preproduction Checklist for Animation" 2021. Retrieved from URL: <https://boards.com/blog/6-step-pre-production-checklist-for-animated-video>

**Conceptualization– What's the big idea?**

Working on the concept, dealing with the execution strategies, the animation artist goes through several ideas before finalizing the story, its style and all.

**Storyboarding– What scenes will be in your animation?**

A good storyboard gives you the freedom to explore a world that you haven't even built yet. The more detail you put into your storyboard, the less likely it is that you'll run into problems when you move into production.

**Animatics– How will the scenes be timed?**

An Animatic is the initial rough draft of your film, it is created by playing the storyboard frame by frame and adjusting timings, a process called as "time-out." The Animatic is your first visual chance to bring life to a skeletal version of the animation. Your Animatic will help you measure the pace, momentum and dynamics of your project. It's also easier to identify scenes that don't land that aren't fully implemented when your work is presented in animatic form.

At this stage, you'll also want to make sure you plot camera angles and any key shots needed to support your narrative.

**Design– What's your animation going to look like?**

An essential part of the pre-production process is setting up visual cues, especially if you are working without dialogue. The experiments in this phase will help to discover if your concepts translate to the screen.

**Logistic– How will the production process work?**

Creative block, changing expectations and rapidly approaching deadlines are just some of the factors that can easily throw your project into a tailspin.

**Animation Design**

- The concept or idea
- Genre
- Story and characters
- Narrative
- Art and/or sketches
- Environment Design
- Sound Design

**Production**

Production phase is the longest stage of the Production pipeline, it Ranges from one to four years, or sometimes. After much revisions, the story is refined, assets (characters, creatures, props and environments) are finalized, the animators start creating the scenes, character position, environment designing, narrative and dialogues are created. The animators start creating the actual scenes that make up the animation film, by acting out the different poses and situation that a character assumes in each scene. They combine the model sheets, storyboard, layout and backgrounds defined in earlier processes to produce scenes that put all these elements together in harmony. The animation is being constantly examined and refined.

**Post-Production**

Once production is completed and the Animation scenes are compiled, sound design with effects and animation compilation, editing, exporting in a good quality output is done in this phase.

**Deliverables**

**2d Short Animation Film**

A five-minute 2d Short Animation Film titled “Reidi Gul – The Desert Flower” with voice over, proper culture music, with English subtitles used for the translation of Pashto poem is created.

Storyboard Final Draft



Figure 1 Final Story Board Page 1



Figure 2 Final Story Board Page 2

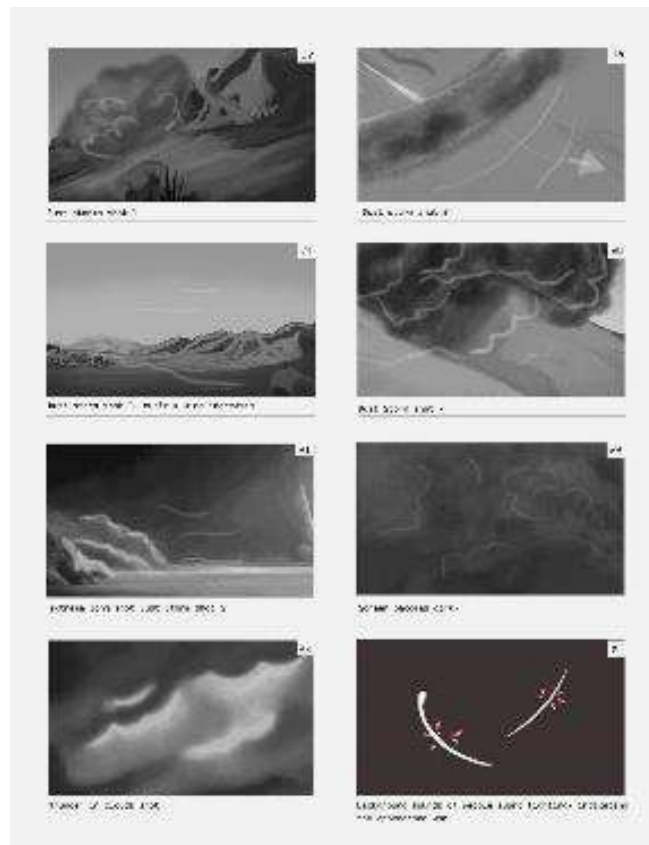


Figure 3 Final Story Board Page 3

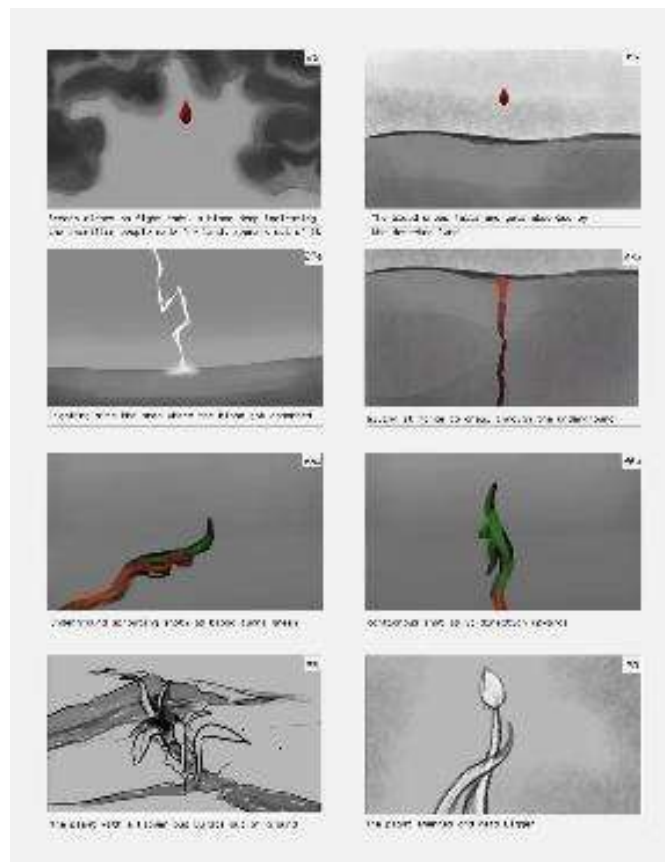


Figure 4 Final Story Board Page 4

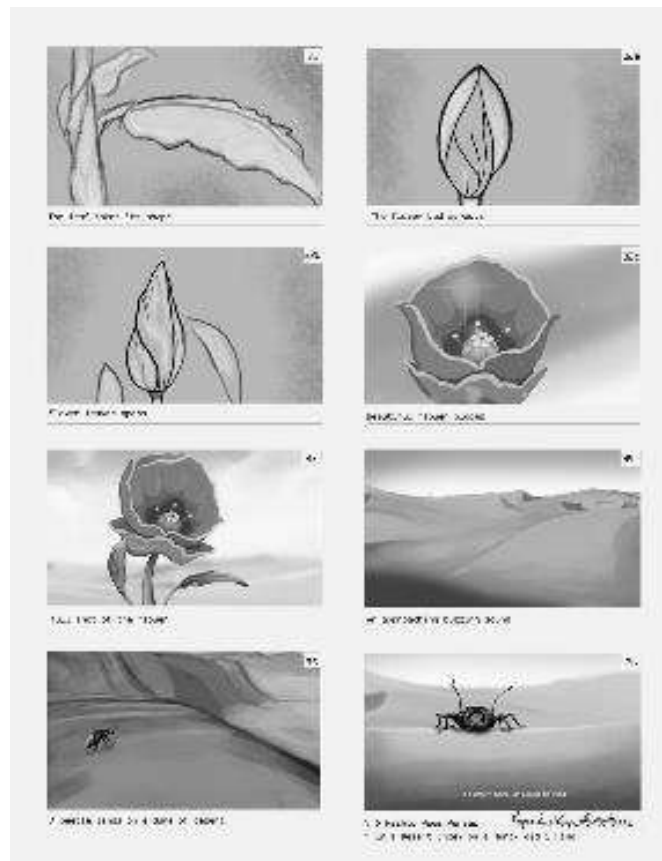


Figure 5 Final Story Board Page 5

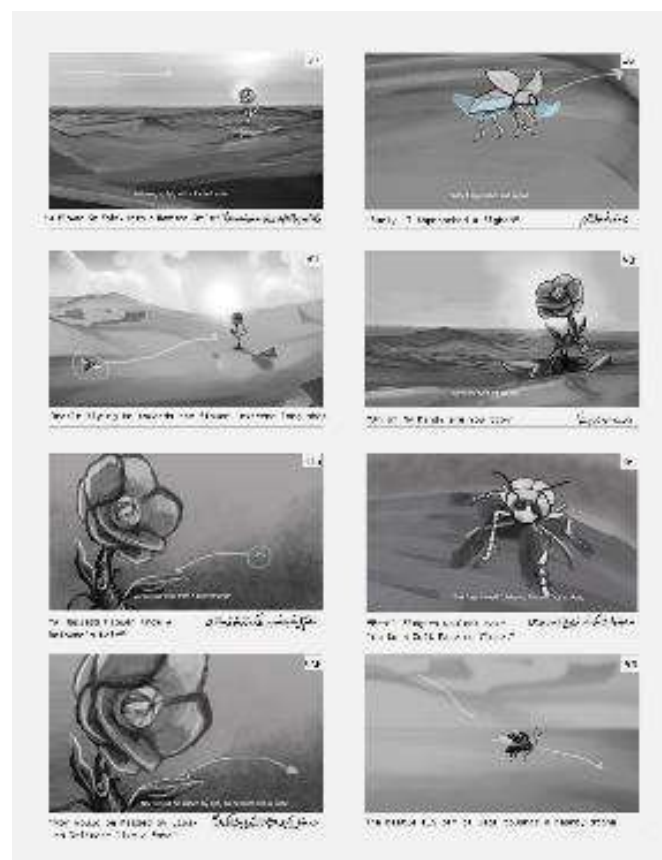


Figure 6 Final Story Board Page 6

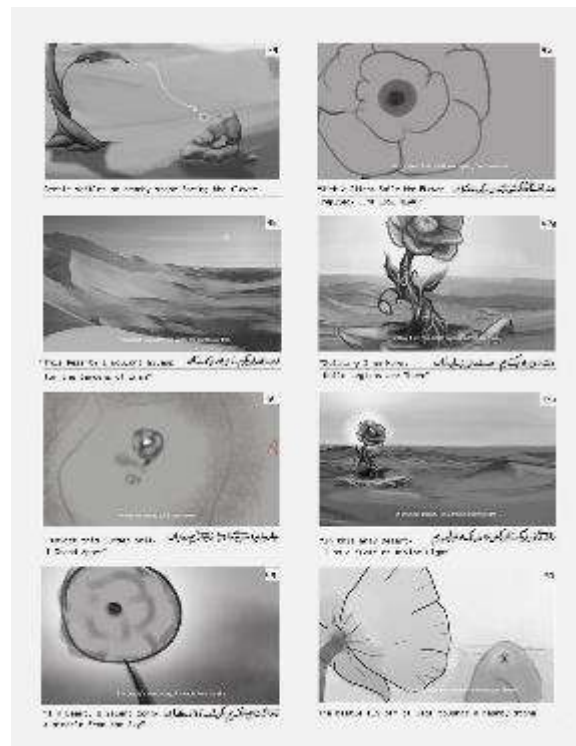


Figure 7 Final Story Board Page 7

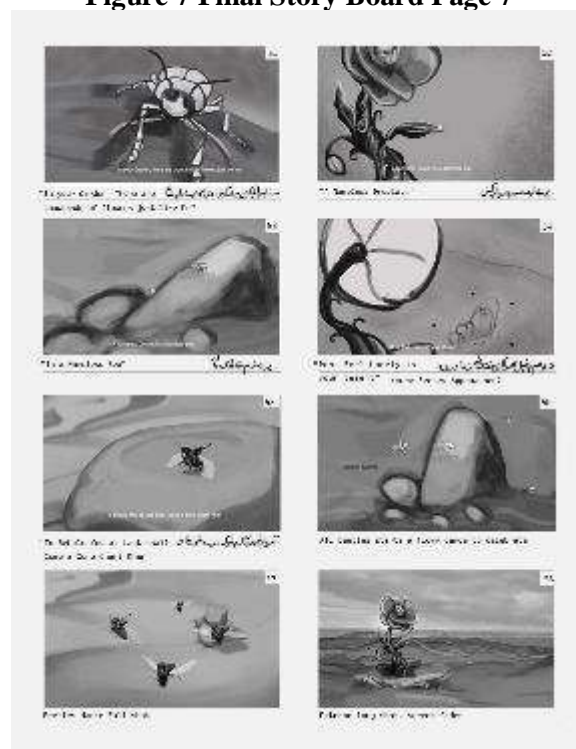


Figure 8 Final Story Board Page 8

After finalizing the idea and concept, the frames are animated in animatics forms, involving all the elements required.

**Characters**

In the adaptation of ‘Reidi Gul’, the story contains two characters, that are used metaphorically to achieve the objective point of view of the poem.

**Bhanwara (The Beetle)**

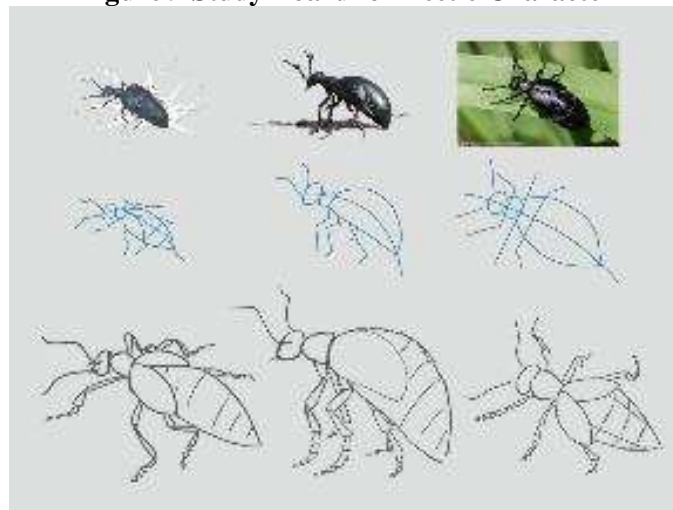
A kind of beetle, shown as wanderer of the desert, in search for his purpose of existence. Its black in color with golden dots and pattern on the middle section of its body.

**Gul (The Flower)**

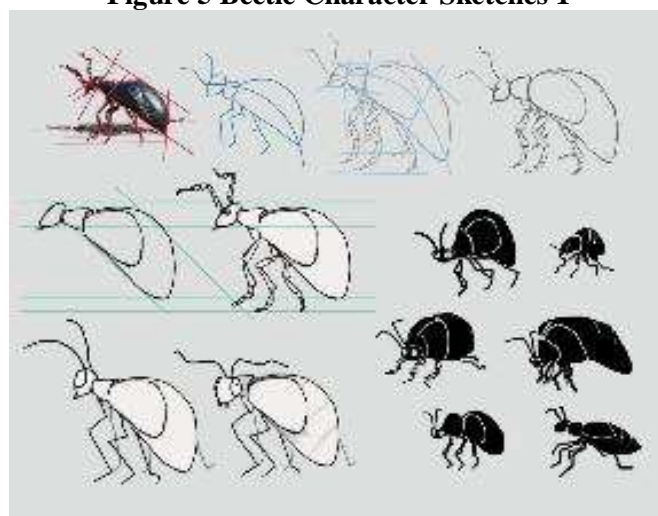
A kind of Poppy Flower, A lonely flower standing tall and proud in desert. his bright colors are quit mesmerizing to the viewers, it grew out of the blood of sacrifice made by the people of the who lost lives in love for their land. Gul is full of life and is wise.



**Figure 9 Study Board for Beetle Character**



**Figure 5 Beetle Character Sketches 1**



**Figure 6 Beetle Character Sketches 2**

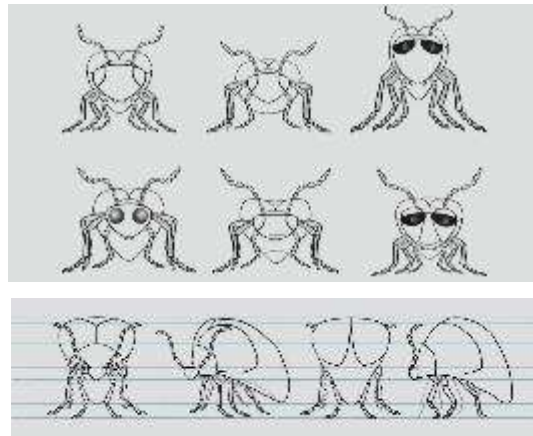


Figure 7 Beetle Character Sketches 3



Figure 12 Beetle Character Draft

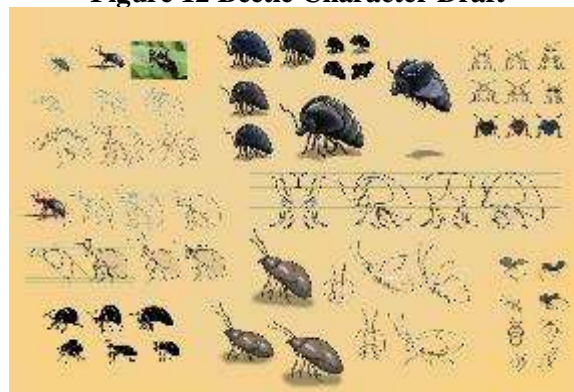


Figure 13 Beetle Character Development Sheet Draft



Figure 14 Final Beetle Character 'Bhanwara' Poses

Gul (The Flower)



Figure 15 Flower Study Sheet

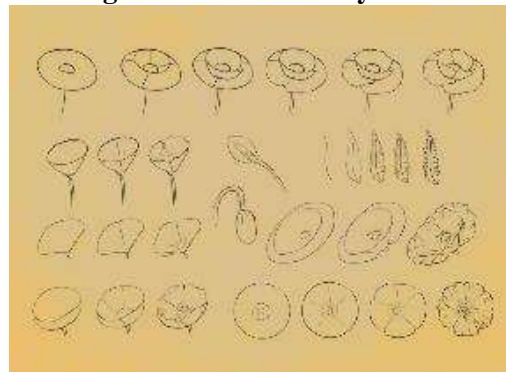


Figure 16 Flower Character Study Sketches

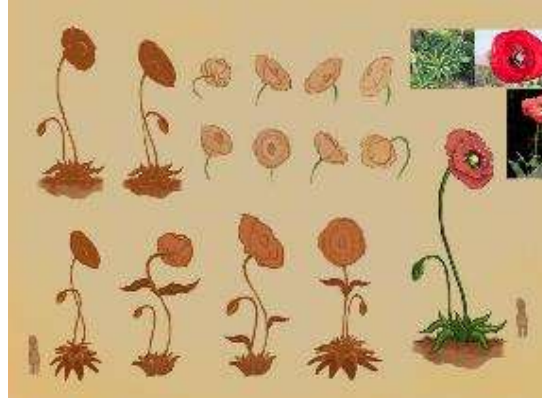


Figure 17 Flower Character Sketches 1

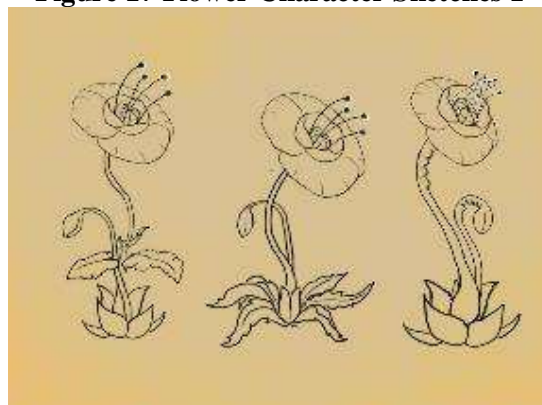
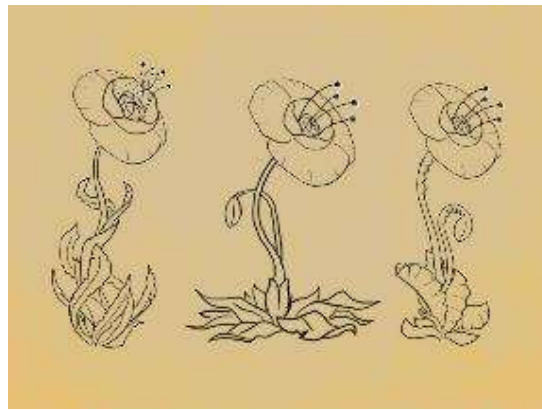
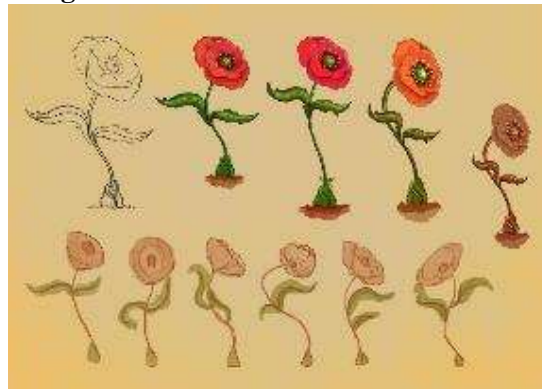


Figure 18 Flower Character Sketches 2



**Figure 19 Flower Character Sketches 3**



**Figure 20 Flower Character Sketches 4**



**Figure 21 Flower Character Development Sheet Draft**



**Figure 22 Final Flower Character 'Gul' Poses**

### **Environments Design**

Environments are the main important element of this animation, as it involves environmental storytelling with experimental method. A local look had to be given to support the region and its beautification, so for that surroundings were explored and studied mainly of KPK and Deserts of Pakistan and art style an art style was selected to better represent it.



**Figure 23 Environments Style Exploration Draft**



**Figure 24 Environment 1**

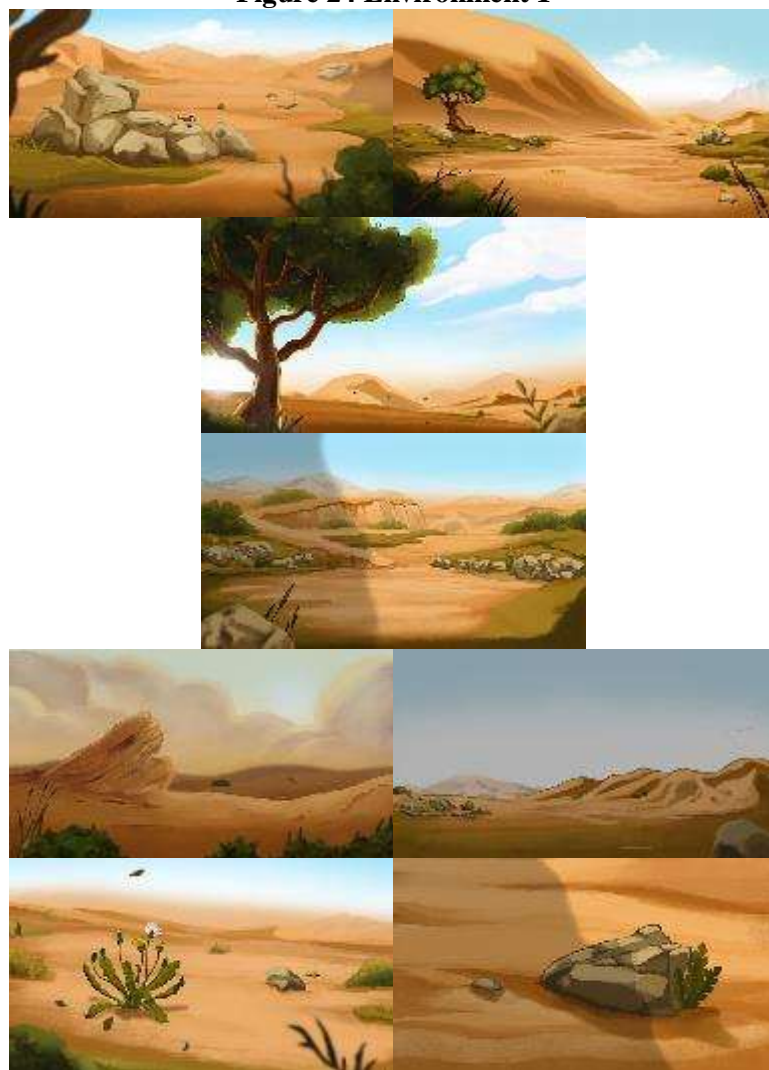




Figure 25 Environment 11



Figure 8 Environment with character

### Post Production

This final phase, all the animated shots are combined together, added Background music, voiceover edited it revisions after revisions, till getting the finalized version.

### Poster Design

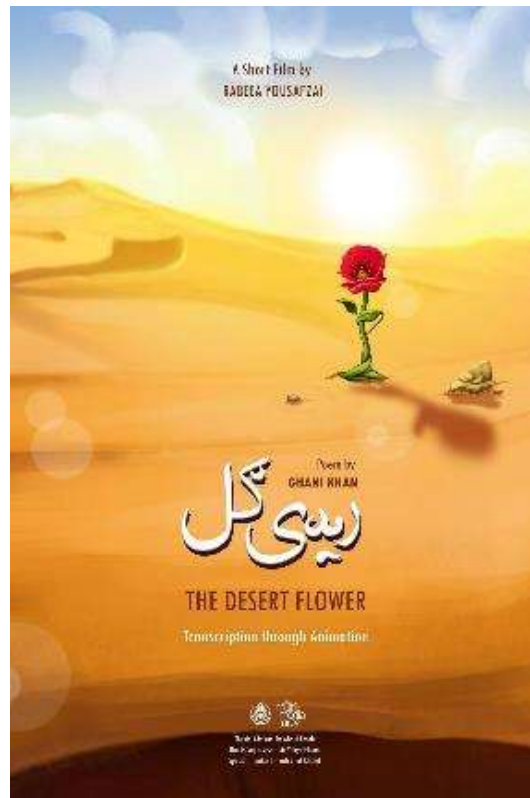


Figure 27 Thesis Poster Design

### **Findings and Discussion**

Taking inspiration from “Reidi Gul” was very apt as it reflected the vanishing culture and the beauty of Pashtun lifestyle and folklore. In the course of this investigation and subsequent discussion, the poem's context unfolded, leading to its transformation into digital media through the creation of an interactive visual story. The project summed up in the production of a 2D animated short film designed to convey the implied message packed in the poem. Elements such as story development, animation, production management, cultural music incorporation, sound design, and the inclusion of Pashto voice-over were meticulously amalgamated with the goal of engaging the audience throughout the duration of the animation. The envisioned film not only aspires to captivate the audience but also endeavors to employ strategies in promoting the utilization of digital tools and techniques for the preservation of Pashto literature and folk traditions. The main aim and objective is to avert the potential removal of the rich cultural heritage due to generational omission.

### **Conclusions**

Unlike other countries, Pakistan has a huge collection of folktales, folk literature that not only links with the main classical stories, but also engages the vast geographical expansion as each region has its own folk stories, folk traditions. As the traditional way of transferring the knowledge was through oral means but in the present time, the medium of transmission has shifted to digital forms like animation due to various circumstances. To cope up with the present time of technological advancements and change in taste of audiences, the age-old stories can be preserved and made popular again through the use of animations. This audiovisual way attracts the present-day audiences and gives them the knowledge and information in a more interesting way.

The most important reason to remake the folk literature into animations in the digital era is to prevent the culture, tradition and history of the region from becoming extinct and to preserve it for longer time so the future generation gets connected with their roots, resulting in prevention of generation loss.

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