

Manjadikalam Project III Report

Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of
Master of Design in Animation Design

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INTRODUCTION

Children are naive, they can be easily manipulated. That's why people use their power over them. With childhood abuse, victims are often too young to know how to express what is happening and seek out help. In such cases it's not a sudden realization, it is comprehended over the years what had happened and trauma extends far into adulthood. As I have experienced it, through this project I would like to bring out the feelings and emotional journey of someone who was deeply rooted and later uproots themselves from their surroundings while dealing with the trauma.

Childhood was not all dark. Even with all these things, I still like to remember it as happy times in life. Growing up among the rural lives of a small town in Kerala, I heard stories of intimate relations among humans. I heard stories of the culture, folktales, and history of brave humans and believed in them. I experienced all the magic of nature wandering.

There are lots of movies talking about child abuse and trauma. Most of it leaves us in the dark and will be traumatic to watch. Through this project I am trying to show more of feelings rather than showing the violence itself which doesn't make people run away from it. Something like this can trigger people into sharing their own stories.

INSPIRATION & RESEARCH

The topic came along with my own memories of childhood growing up among rural lives of a small village. There were a lot of canals and streams in the village which connected the sea and the lake on both sides, as the people lived there. Growing up among those lives, I heard stories of intimate relations, folktales, myths, and culture. The friendly neighborhood with houses without fences, the magical things of nature, the collection of red lucky seeds kept in the attic, the canals and streams, the guppy fishes, neighborhood temples, sacred groves were the wonderful things I remember. There was the vague memory of child abuse also which I comprehend over the years and the trauma that followed.

What has remained with these memories are feelings which are difficult to comprehend. It is not anger or dejection but lots of questions asked myself or to the world.

The research for the project included recollecting and writing memories and experiences, details of the surroundings and neighborhood. I also collected stories from people around me who had gone through abuse. I listened to their stories and childhood memories which will help me to express a shared experience. There were too many similarities between all these stories I collected along with mine. Most of them didn't know what was happening at the time of abuse, the revelation happens in the early teenage. Most of them are still struggling with the issues.

Some of the works that I have been inspired me in terms narratives and visualisation:

Kummatty is a feature film written and directed by G. Aravindan. The film is about Malabar's folklore of a partly mythic and partly real magician called Kummatty (bogeyman). It has a wonderful translation between reality and myth as the film travels through different stages of life beginning, myth, metamorphoses and revelation. It also captures the space, people and culture very beautifully.

Children of the heaven is an Iranian family drama film written and directed by Majid Majidi. It deals with a brother and sister and their adventures over a lost pair of shoes.

Anantaram (Thereafter: Monologue) is a feature film written and directed by Aloor Gopalakrishnan. A very experimental film which does not have a linear structure which is clearly depending on viewers perception. I really love the way of storytelling where the story is narrated by the protagonist in two different ways and it's up to the viewer to decide on the conclusion.

My Story is an autobiographical book written by Indian author and poet Madhavikutty. The memories are depicted in a linear narrative with some amount of fiction and magical realism. It honestly captured a woman's inner life in a poetic manner.

Photo is a short story by M Mukundan. This story also talks about child abuse. It begins with showing the main characters life and their innocence later shows how they are going through abuse. Instead of showing the violence itself the writer leaves us with a pain rather than a traumatic experience.

My father's room is animated short by Na-ri Jang. The film shows the memories and feelings of the protagonist towards her abusing father. The use of visual metaphors that strike the viewer in a raw and true way.

PHOTO COLLECTION





METHODOLOGY

Journaling

I started with looking at old pictures from childhood, trying to recollect memories associated with it. I started with journaling as a memoir. As I was writing the initial draft of my memoir, along with memories of abuse and all the other wonderful things were also coming. Most of my memories of the past were repressed memories. All I had was some bits and pieces that need to be connected to form some kind of narrative and visuals. All I remember are a bunch of unsequenced events and some faded visuals. Still I wrote how it came in my mind.

Collecting stories from people

I talked among people around me about the project and asked them to share their personal stories if possible. Lots of them came in and shared their stories and experience with me. It was shocking to see these many people even from a small group. It was more like conversations. They told me about how it happened, how it had affected them and dealt with it in the past and in the present. All of them had similar questions to ask themselves or to the world.

Sketching

As part of the initial concept development process, I sketched places and things from childhood, which also helped me get back to memories. Some of the incidents were made into short comics and illustrations.

STORY CONCEPT

Magical realism through Yakshe(the seductive ghost)

Yakshi is a female goddess associated with the fertility of earth, love and beauty. Yakshi is doing sentry duty to the main deity and the kavu. In the popular narrative, Yakshi is female spirits with vampire image and detailed with immense sex.

Children are told about ghost stories in their childhood. They are told these ghosts are dangerous. Adults create these scary images inside their heads. But no one tells them about the dangers that lie in humans itself. Yakshe is one such character that is portrayed much differently than in real life. Yakshe is told as to the kid as a ghost but she actually turns out to be friendly. The kid encounters Yakshe in the sacred grove, she gives her the red lucky seeds. She could be the imagination of the kid which might not be real at all. It is ironic that here the child goes through abuse by familiar trusted people and Yakshe, a scary ghost who should not be trusted, becomes a friend.

Collection of the Red lucky seeds

The protagonist has a huge collection of red lucky seeds that is kept secretly in the attic of her house. The attic is where we usually keep abandoned old things. It was full of dust and clutter. She climbs the wooden stairs to reach there. She keeps in a secret place that no one could reach or see. She counts them each time she adds new seeds to make sure someone hasn't stolen them. She thinks of it as a treasure.

Later after the abuse happened, she stops collecting the seeds and she forgets about it. Later the seeds grew roots but she uprooted and walked away, showing the abandonment of childhood. The red lucky seeds are part of the good memories of childhood. She leaves it, forgets about it when the trauma starts. Later in adulthood, she comes back to the memory of red lucky seeds when she decides to hold on to the good memories of childhood by recognising the power of it rather than being stuck in the past.

Houses without fences, Canals, streams and the people

Houses without fences and neighborhoods show a sense of safety. Canals and streams are connected like the people living there, which she feels connected and intimate. But she is being abused in the same environment by familiar people which ironically breaks the safety of it and she feels disconnected.

STORY NARRATIVE

I was born in a small village that is surrounded by water. There were a lot of canals and streams in the village. The streams and canals connected the sea and the lake on both sides, as the people lived there. Growing up among those lives, I heard stories of intimate relations, folktales, myths, and culture.

Those streams carry a lot of memories. During the rainy season, they get filled with water, and we kids use to catch fish. Guppy fish was the popular one because of its beautiful tail. Kids used to fight for them. We keep them in glass bowls for a few days, and soon they die. I didn't know swimming, so I always stayed on the side.

I was a very silent kid, one who doesn't speak up. I was not at all interested. I used to sit in some corner silently, doing nothing at all, watching everything. Even though I didn't talk much, I liked to be around people. I used to roam around in the neighborhood a lot. Houses were without fences, surrounded by trees and streams flowing side by them. The trees, the streams, and the people... All of them were similar in some way... connected.

The neighborhood temple and the annual temple festival carries a lot of memories. We kids used to stay around the elephants most of the time. Midnight stage programs, the colorful toy/bangle shops, fireworks in the night were the other wonderful things I remember.

Being in a rural atmosphere, made me discover a lot of magical things in nature. Appoppanthaadi(Grandfather's beard, woolly pod), fireflies, Manjadikkuru(Red lucky seeds)...

I used to have a huge collection of the Red Lucky seeds. I kept it in a glass jar somewhere in the attic of the house. The attic is where we usually keep abandoned old things. It was full of dust and clutter. I have to climb the wooden stairs to reach there. It would make a sound when someone climbs it, so I usually climb slowly and gently. I found a special place for it there. A secret place that no one could reach or see. I count them each time I add new seeds to make sure someone hasn't stolen them. I kept it like a treasure, my only treasure.

Once I was roaming around in the neighborhood. It was near the temple, that's when I saw it. Red lucky seeds. I looked around. I couldn't find the tree. But I saw a few more seeds. I started collecting one by one following it. Suddenly it came into my senses. I was in a place I am not supposed to be. I was inside a sacred grove. It was complete silence except for the sound of crickets. I looked around. There were idols of different deities made of stone. Some of them were covered with anthills, bushes, and cords. I had heard stories about this sacred grove and the Yakshe who live there, who don't like intruders. I heard a noise of footsteps. Suddenly I remembered all those things I heard about Yakshe.

"She has sharp long nails and long teeth."

"She has long hair and she walks in the air!"

What if it is yakshe? Is she gonna do any harm to me?

I looked up and there she was. I knew it was yakshi or I assumed. She reached out to me and gave me something.

It was the seeds.

It was a familiar building in the neighborhood. It was yellow in color with no windows. The people living there were also familiar. One sunny afternoon I was playing outside and a familiar voice called me inside. I went there. I went inside. It was dark inside. A tv was running in the background. Now why are you playing alone, let's play together, they said. And then I played the game I had never played before. I thought it's something that everyone does. I was not frightened or anything since they were familiar people. I just stayed there.

"Don't tell anyone," they said.

I had my doubts about it, I didn't tell anyone about it because I trusted them? I believed it should be kept as a secret. Or Did I keep it as a secret because I thought it was normal? I walked out of the building like nothing unusual happened.

I walked. I walked away.

Life went on as I kept on collecting the seeds.

It was somewhere in my early teenage years. It was becoming clear to me about what had happened back then. I was feeling all these mixed feelings of shame and guilt and it left me with hopelessness and grief. By then I was already distanced from all those people I could share these with. I avoided spending time in my neighborhood. I tried to be invisible to the world around me.

I stopped collecting the seeds. I never went to the attic. Maybe the seeds might have gone missing with all the clutter of abandoned things. It became one such abandoned thing which doesn't know who it belongs to or where it came from. Maybe it might have grown roots. I uprooted myself and walked away. The pain and anger had begun to fade.

While living in this big city having mundane life, I am struck with revelations about my life. It leaves me with confusion.

What was my childhood ? What was it about? I was told stories about Yakshe, but why wasn't I told about the people? Sometimes I feel like it was all a lie. Maybe I am trying to overcome the grief and loss that I feel about my childhood with the beautiful nostalgic memories. But I like to keep those things.. Those little things.

I have walked miles. But I still feel like I haven't gone so far, that I am still sitting in the attic, counting those kakkathollayiram (numbers which are uncountable) red lucky seeds. Those little things!

STORY BOARD



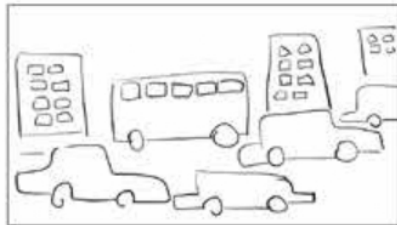
Sound: Rain



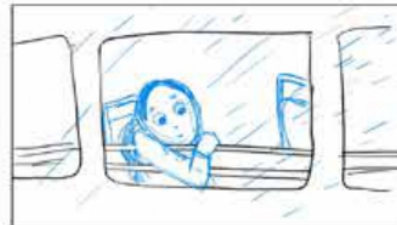
Sound: Rain



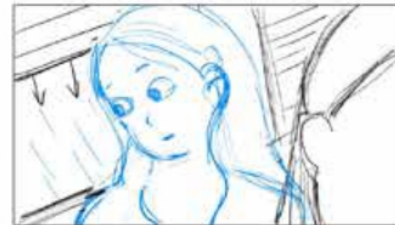
Title



Sound: City Traffic



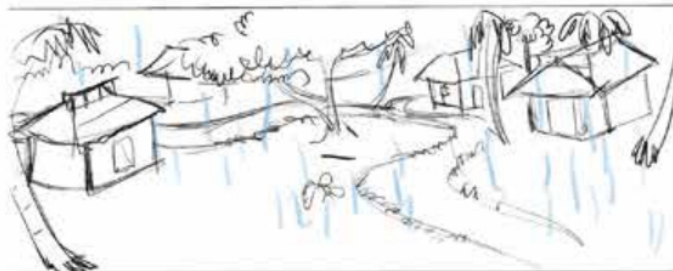
Action: Starts Raining, Sound: Traffic, Rain



Action: Shutter closes, Sound: Traffic, Rain



Sound: Rain



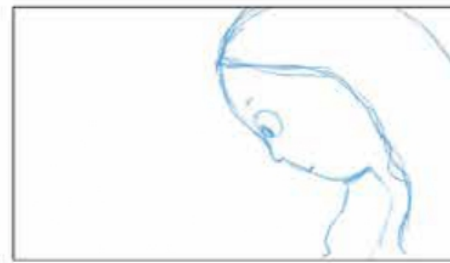
Action: Pan, Sound: Rain



Sound: Rain



Action: Pan, Sound: Stream of water flowing



Sound: Stream of water flowing



Action: Catches one fish using hand, Sound: Stream of water flowing



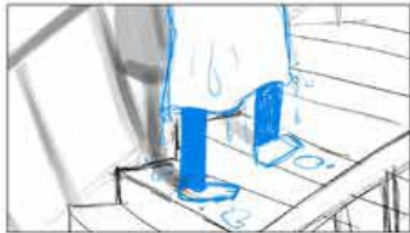
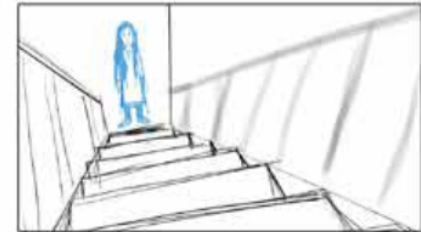
Sound: Stream of water flowing



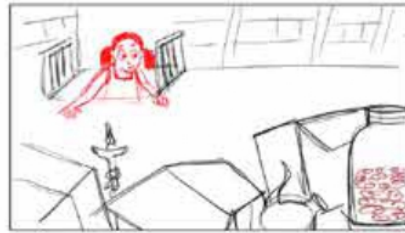
Sound: Stream of water flowing



Sound: Stream of water flowing



Sound: Wooden stair creaking



Sound: Counting



Sound: Walking on dried leaves



Action: Pan, Sound: Birds chirping



Action: Girl walking through the forest, Sound: Nature



Action: Camera Pans, Sound: Nature



Action: Girl looks backward, Sound: Creaking trees and roots



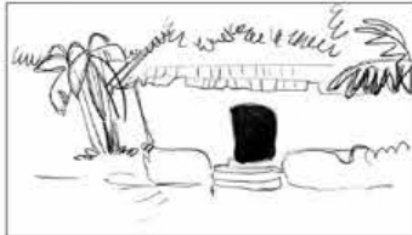
Action: Girl comes forward, Sound: Creaking trees and roots



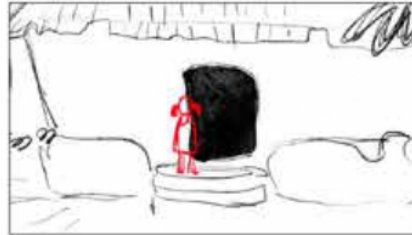
Action: hand appears and gives sees



Action: Seeds falling from top



Sound: TV sound from inside



Action: Girl walk towards door, Sound: TV sound from inside



Sound: TV sound from inside



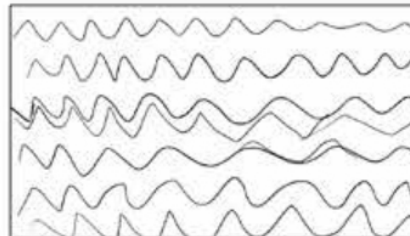
Sound: TV sound from inside



Action: Girl enters the room, Sound: TV sound



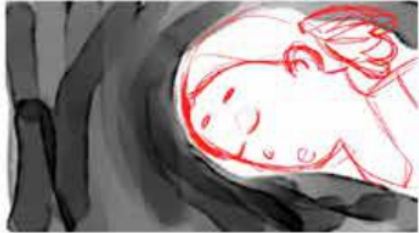
Action: Girl hears noise and turns backwards, Sound: TV sound fades into noise



Action: Zooms out, Sound: Noise



Action: Zooms out, Sound: Noise



Action: Girl wakes up, Sound: Noise



Action: Girl wakes up, Sound: Noise



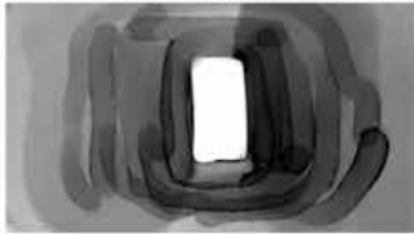
Action: Girl looks around, Sound: Noise



Action: Seeds fall, starts walking, Sound: Noise



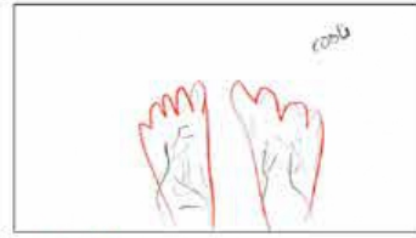
Action: Runs out of door, Sound: Noise



Action: Walks away from the roots, roots following



Action: Looks down



Action: Roots reaching feet, breaks the roots and walk way



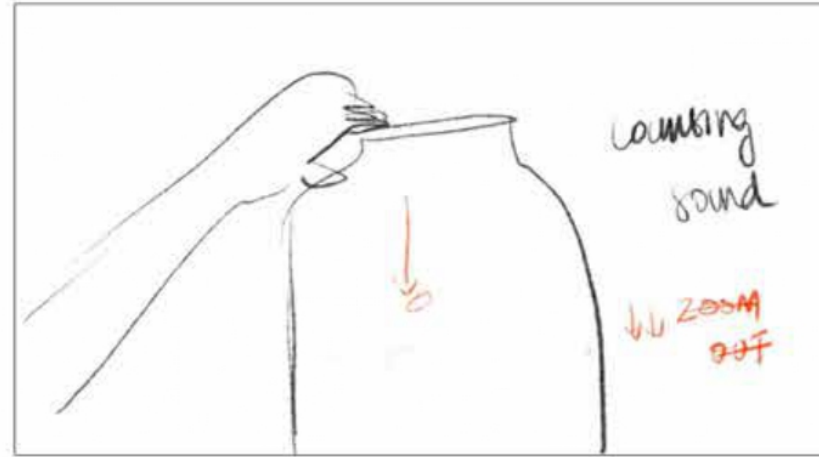
Action: Attic getting filled with boxes, Seed jar disappears



Action: Camera Pans



Action: Take seed from the hand



Action: Puts inside, Pan downwards



Sound: Counting seeds.

AGE -22



CHARACTERS

Character designs for the two main characters the younger and older self. The main character is silent, shy and innocent. The older self is 22 years old and the younger self is 7 years old. The whole story is being narrated by the older self.

CHARACTER EXPLORATIONS AND FINAL DESIGNS

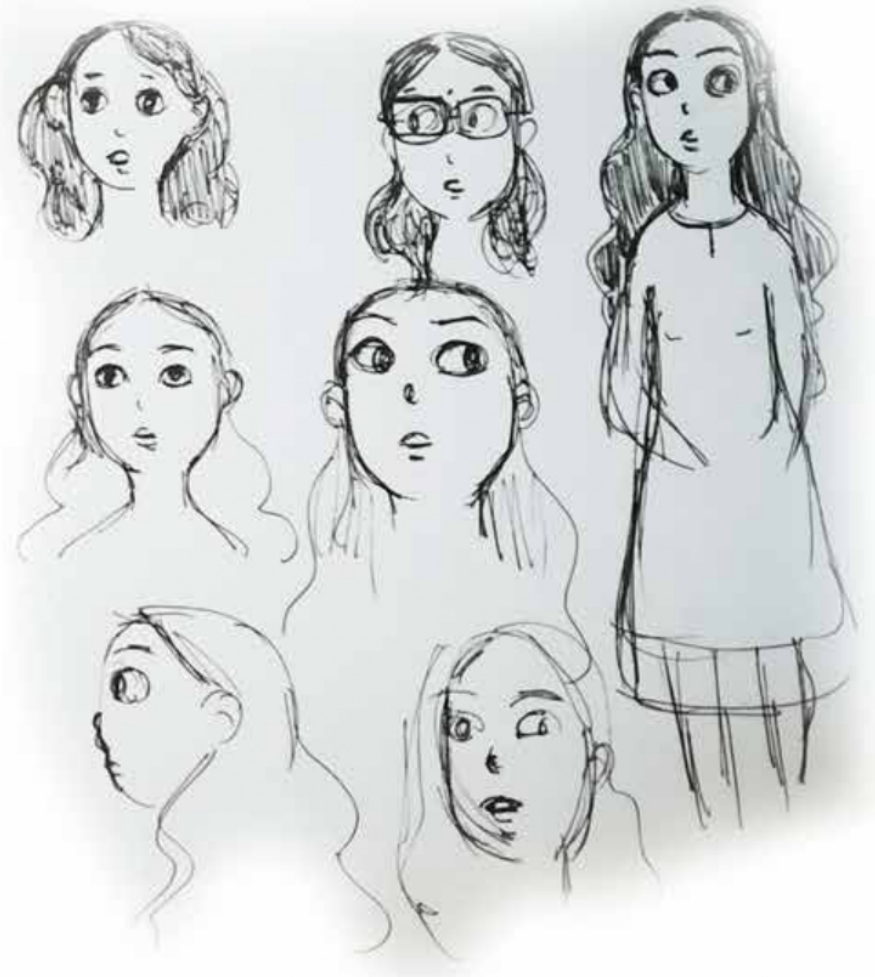






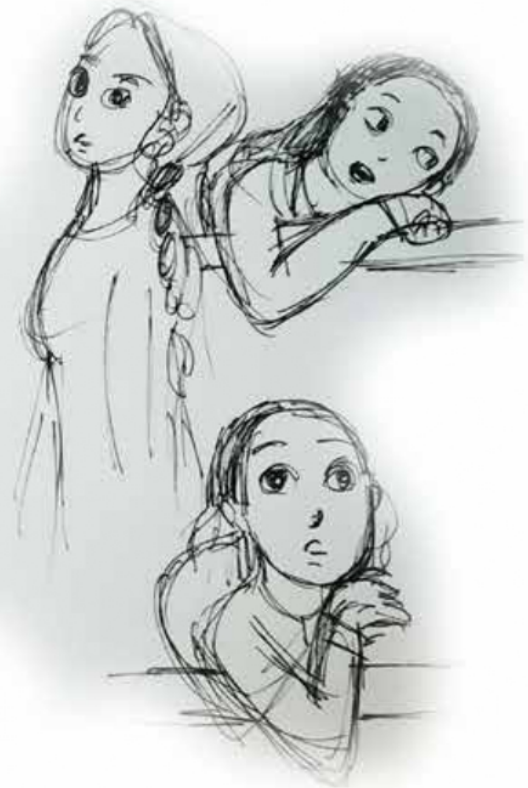


AGE - 7
SILENT
SHY
INNOCENT

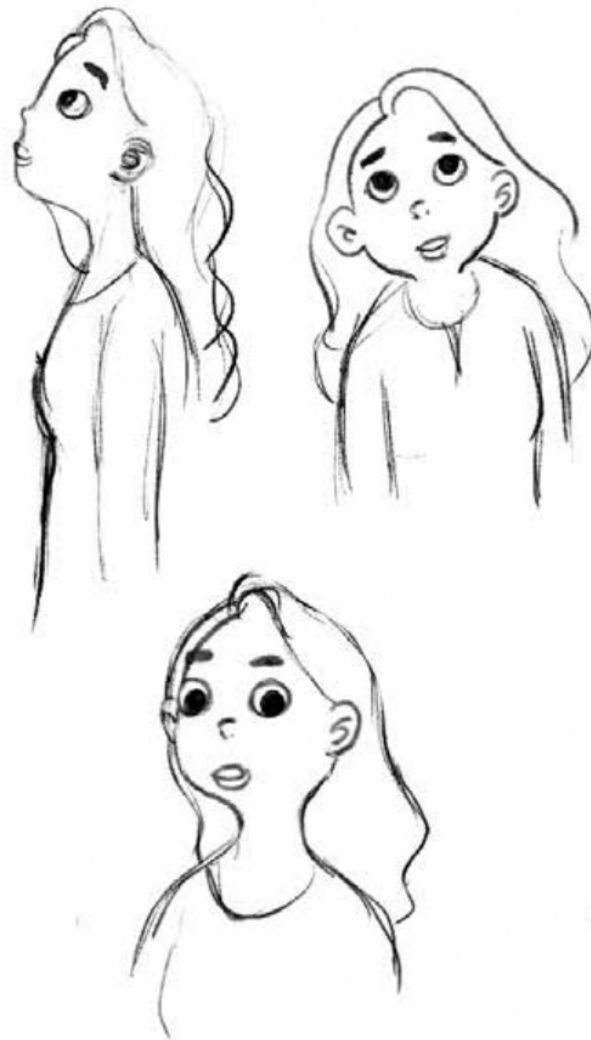




am
Ami / m



AGE - 22



MOOD BOARD



INITIAL VISUALIZATION









ANIMATIC

Animatic was created with revised storyboard in Adobe Premier Pro. Rough sounds are added. Several iterations were made on the animatic to convey the story meaningfully. Edits were made and few scenes are added and removed to get the narration properly.



PRODUCTION WORKFLOW

No	Description	Rough Animation	Cleanup	Coloring	BG layout	BG coloring	
Shot 1	Stepping on water						rain effect remaining
Shot 2	Girl in rain						rain effect remaining
Shot 3	Rain						rain effect remaining
Shot 4	title						
Shot 5	Mumbai pan						
Shot 6	Bus outside, shutter closes						
Shot 7	Bus inside						
Shot 8	Rain on cloud						
Shot 9	Village pan						
Shot 10	Rain house side						
Shot 11	Village vazhi						
Shot 12	Thodu pan						
Shot 13	Catching fish						
Shot 14	Looking at fish						
Shot 15	Kids fishing sitting						
Shot 16	Fish in bowl						
Shot 17	Staircase						
Shot 18	Staircase 2						
Shot 19	Attic 1						
Shot 20	Girl with jar						
Shot 21	hand with chembila						
Shot 22	Attic main						
Shot 23	Walking parallax						
Shot 24	hand						
Shot 25	Girl looking up						
Shot 26	sky pan						
Shot 27	Entering forest						
Shot 28	Walking through forest						
Shot 29	Girl appears behind tree						
Shot 30	Kaavu pan						
Shot 31	Girl iwith idols						
Shot 32	idols pan						
Shot 33	Picking up seeds						
Shot 34	girl walking towards big tree						

Background Layout

Backgrounds were sketched out in rough first for testing animation.

Rough Animation

Rough Animation is done for each shot with rough layout in reference to lock the timing in animatic.

Clean up & Coloring

Cleanup and coloring is done for final shots of rough animation.

Background painting

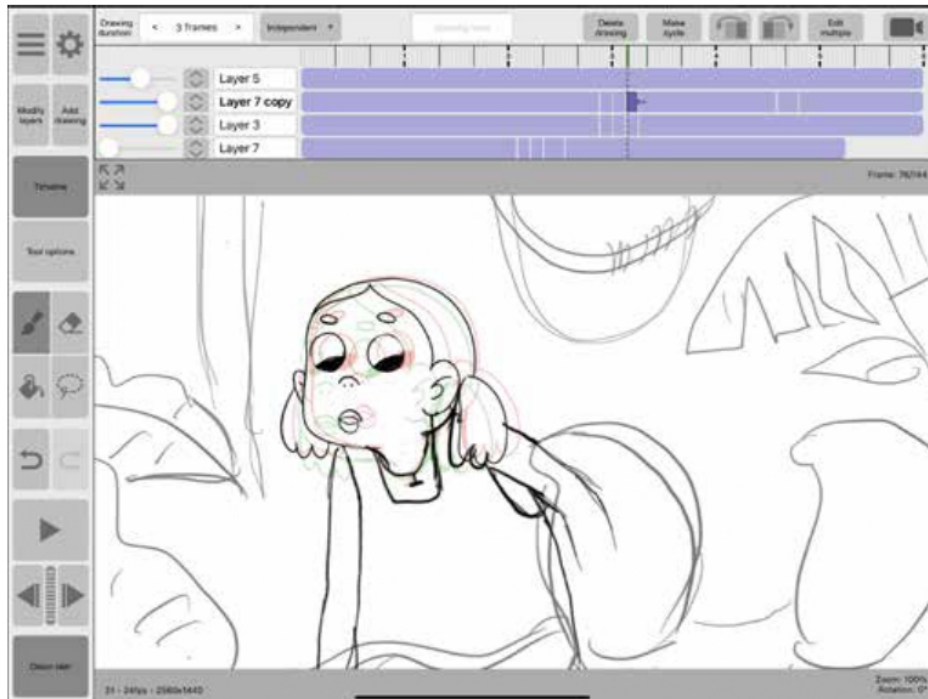
Final backgrounds are painted from the rough layout.

Compositing & Final Edits

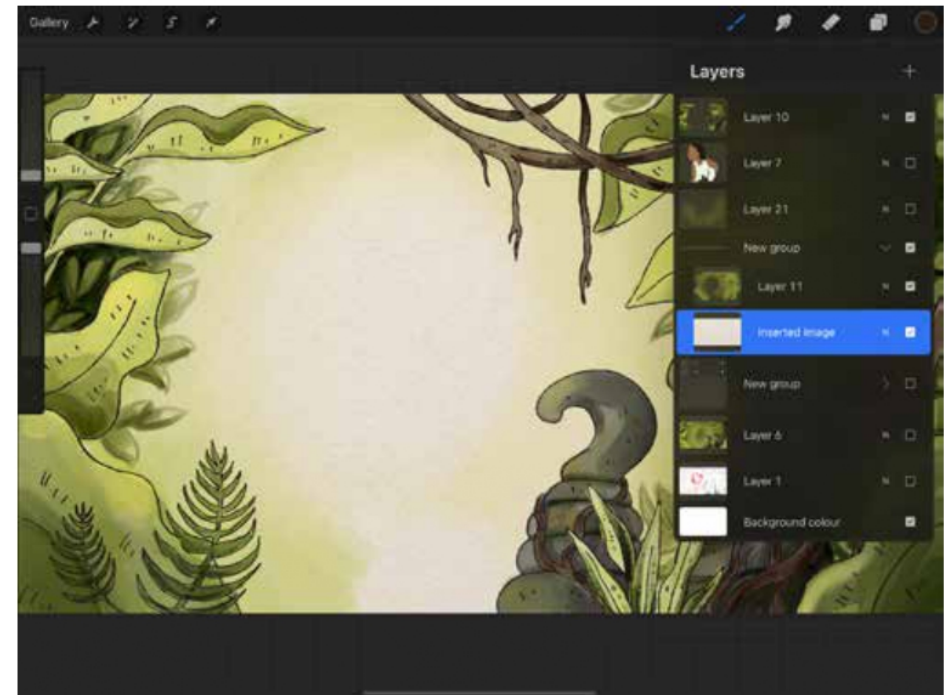
The shots were frequently updated and composited in the main animatic with sound to understand whether it was working.

PRODUCTION PROCESS

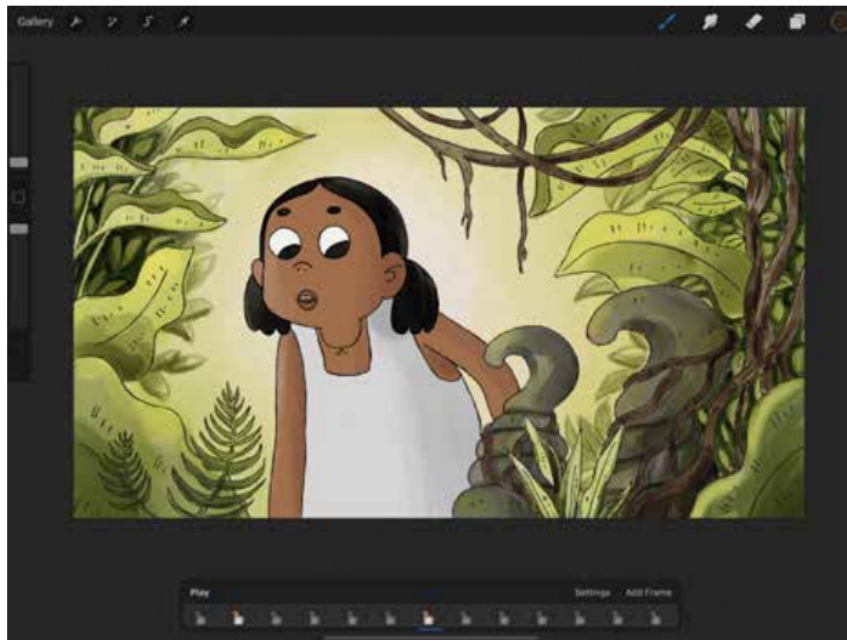
Rough Animation was done of different shots from the film (in Rough Animator app in iPad). The Rough Animations were periodically updated in the animatic to see whether they were working. Final colored backgrounds were painted(in Procreate app in iPad). This was followed by clean-ups and colouring of frames (in Procreate app in iPad). Some of the shots are composited in after effects for parallax effect. Rain effect is added in after effects. The film with all its final shots was then composited in Premier Pro.



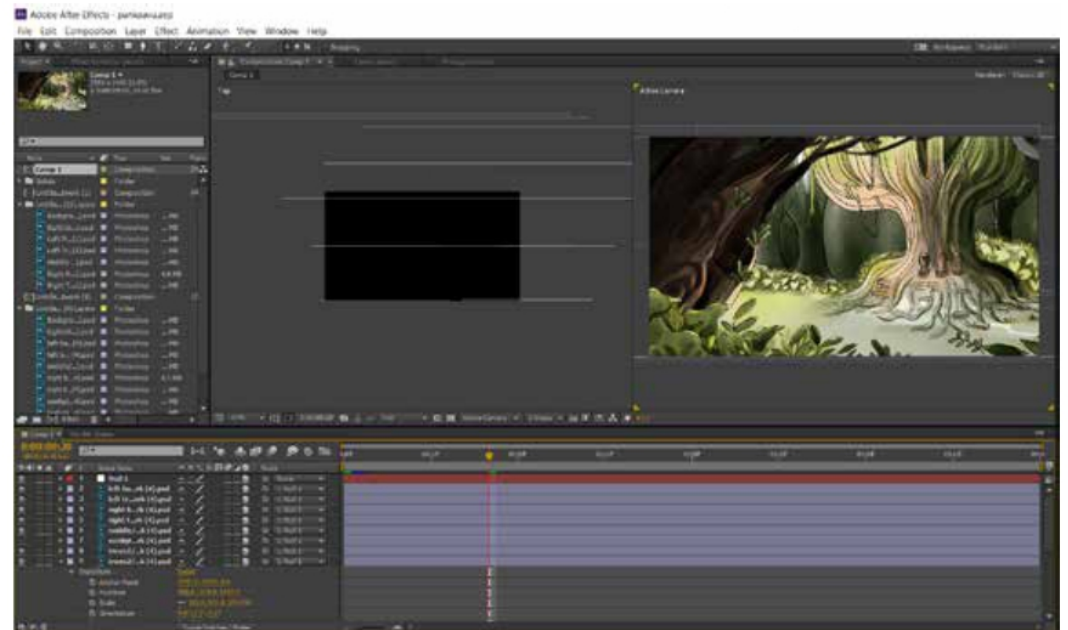
Rough Animation done in Rough Animator App in iPad



Background Painted in Procreate App in iPad



Cleanup and coloring in Procreate



Editing Parallax pan in aftereffects with background layers colored in Procreate

FINAL SHOTS



Indoor shots

Outdoor shots

SOUND DESIGN

A scratch sound-track was created in parallel with animatic.
Added little bit of music and humming in some particular area.
Most of the sequences are happening in outdoor nature and such sounds were added. In parts where incident is happening indoors, eerie sounds had to be added.
Sound design and music is to be done in collaboration with other artists. And there still needs to be done alot in terms of creating the atmosphere and moods.

CONCLUSION

The project was all about retrospective the past life and memories. It involved going back and revisiting memories and experiences, Writing down these memories and deciding what could go into the story was very difficult process. There was a lot of confusion on what should be included in the final version of animatic. But it was also important to figure out where to stop. Another challenge was to figure the order of the narrative. Asking for constant feedback from others resolved that issue. Multiple versions were created and presented. Often showing it to a third person helped understand what was not working. Figuring out the character design was quite easy it was based on real memories.

Being able to keep up with a reasonable plan was quite tough. But it helped with execution. Frequently reviewing and updating the plan based on progress helped evaluate how to move ahead or revisit some aspect of the film. Maintaining consistency in style and characters throughout the film while animating was really difficult.

It has been both a challenging and wonderful journey so far! I am extremely grateful to everybody who has helped me figure out things

REFERENCE

Kummatty, feature film written and directed by G. Aravindan.

Memories of a Machine, Short film by Shailaja Padindala.

Anantaram (Thereafter: Monologue), feature film written and directed by Adoor Gopalakrishnan.

Travalogue, animated short by Samuel Patthey

My father's room, animated short by Na-ri Jang.

My Story, an autobiographical book written by Indian author and poet Madhavikutty.

Photo, short story by M Mukundan