

ARAVANIS

A
FINAL PROJECT

Submitted to

Indian Institute of Technology Hyderabad

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF DEGREE

of
Master of Design

Submitted By

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Under the Guidance of

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July 2019

DECLARATION

I hereby certify that the Final Project entitled **Aravanis**, which is being submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of **Master of Design** is a record of my work carried out under the supervision and guidance of **Delwyn Jude Remedios**, Professor, Department of Design, Indian Institute of Technology Hyderabad.

The matter presented in this Final Project has not been submitted elsewhere for the award of any other degree.

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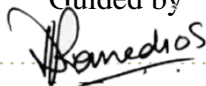
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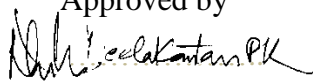
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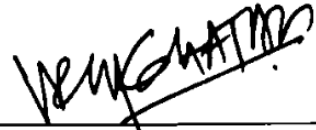
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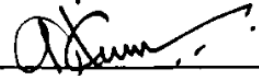
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BRIEF

This project is a self-sponsored animated short film which aims to portray the story of transgender people in India, their journey of finding themselves as who they are and accepting it gracefully.

Trans people have always been a part of Indian culture, though they had to suffer a lot during colonial rule due to Victorian laws. After independence, while most Indians celebrated the life of dignity and equality, trans people were left on the margins of society, along with other members of the LGBTQIA+ community.

The narration of this film showcases voices of many trans people, how they wish to overcome the taboos of our society and how they look forward to being a part of the community without any discrimination, as we all are humans at the end of the day.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Story

Aravanis is a story about Albin an 8 yrs. old Christian boy who always identifies himself as a girl. The elders in the family frequently tell him that it is just a phase, and it will pass. He loves playing with girls and accessorizing himself with his mother's belongings. However, society is unable to accept him the way he is due to which he gets harassed by the boys in his school and ultimately the community as a whole. These incidences scar him, but on the other hand, also make him realize more than ever that he is a girl's soul trapped in a boy's body. He feels sure of himself as he experiences a new way of living his life and transitions into a thriving, proud, and a beautiful woman that he always dreamt of, as a child.

1.2 Origin of this Idea

Since the day I started learning about animation, the short films that I made depicted stories from my personal life and incidences, which were light-hearted and funny. Although for my final project, I wanted to tackle a serious and sensitive topic so that I could challenge my storytelling style. Initially, I had planned on making a film about the LGBTQIA community in the form of a docu-fiction. After research and brainstorming, I narrowed it down to the story of people from the transgender community brought back the memory of my encounter with them.

During my stay in Delhi, I went to India Gate for an evening walk with my male friends. We were having a jolly good time when a bunch of people from the transgender community surrounded us and started asking us for money. In a hurry I got out of their hold, as they didn't bother girls or women much, it was the men who were bashed by the transgender people till they gave them money and the police couldn't do anything about it.

It was the first time I witnessed a scene like this, which was embedded in my memory. Thinking about the incident mentioned above, a question arose as to why the majority of trans people rely on begging for their source of income?

The second incidence took place in Chandigarh when I was with my friends in a marketplace, and a cross-dressed man passed by us. Some men noticed him and started laughing and commenting. Realizing what was happening, he turned towards them, told them to mind their own business and walked away with confidence. These two incidences were the base of my inquisitiveness regarding trans people and their life in India.

In my journey of research for this film, I observed that some people willingly use the prefix "trans" as a part of their identity when they introduced themselves to others while some just wanted to be known as a man or woman. It's is because a Cis-gender person would never use "cis" as a prefix for

themselves as well. Using the prefix “trans” still makes some people feel that they are marginalized in the eyes of society.

1.3 Gender

Gender is categorized into identity, expression, and sex. It’s not about “this or that” but “this and that” and that it is undoubtedly interrelated, they are not interconnected.

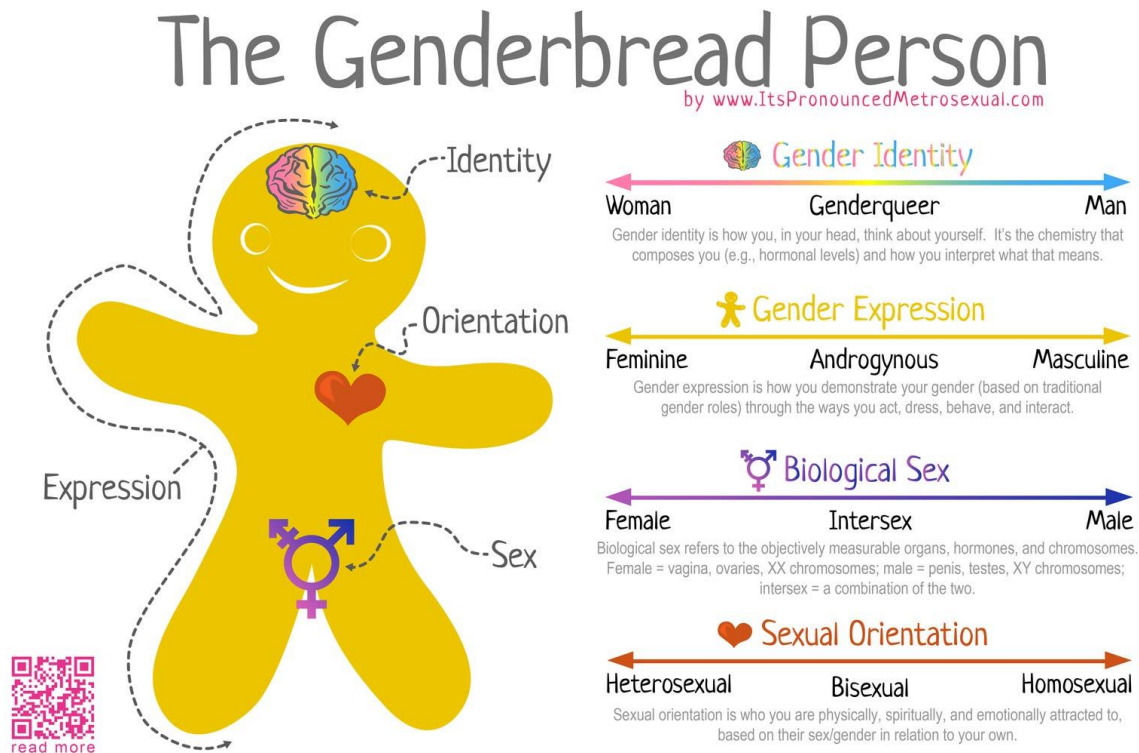


Figure 1. The Genderbread Person

1.3.1 Gender Identity: Who You Think You Are.

On the left of the spectrum is “woman,” and on the right, there is “man.” We have the term “genderqueer,” in the middle which, is used for an identity that is somewhere between woman and man. It’s also vital to note that a lot of people consider their identity to fall outside of the traditional woman to man range. These identities can be named genderqueer, agender, third gender, bigender, and many more.

Gender identity about how you think about yourself. Who are you on the inside and how you interpret the chemistry that composes you (e.g., hormone levels).

It is proven that we form our gender identities around the age of three, and after that age, it is challenging to bring about change in a person’s gender identity. Formation of identity is affected by the environment and the hormones just as much as it is affected by biological sex. Often, difficulties arise when someone is assigned a gender based on their sex at birth that doesn’t match how they come to identify themselves.

1.3.2 Gender Expression: How You Demonstrate Who You Are.

Gender expression is all about how you determine your gender through the ways you act, dress, behave, and interact—whether that is deliberate or accidental. Gender expression is interpreted by others observing your gender based on traditional gender roles (e.g., men wear pants, women wear dresses). Gender expression is something that frequently changes from day to day, outfit to outfit, event, or setting. It’s about the way you express yourself aligns or doesn’t with the traditional forms of gender expression. Gender identity has a lot of room for flexibility.

1.3.3 Biological Sex: The Equipment Under the Hood.

Biological sex is defined by organs, hormones, and chromosomes possessed by an individual. A cis-female has a vagina, ovaries, two X chromosomes, predominant estrogen, and can grow a baby in her stomach area. A cis-male has testes, a penis, an XY chromosome, dominant testosterone, and can put a baby in a female’s stomach area. Being intersex can be any blend of the male and the female body in varying percentages.

1.3.4 Sexual Orientation: Who You Are Attracted To.

On the left of the spectrum is “heterosexual,” which means people who are attracted to people of the opposite sex, or being straight. On the right, it is “homosexual,” which means attracted to people of the same sex, or being gay or lesbian. And in the middle, we have bisexual, meaning attracted to people of both sexes.

There is no place on the scale for “asexual,” because it is the absence of any sexual attraction to others whether male, female or the third gender, as it doesn’t fit into this spectrum.

Sexual orientation talks about who you are physically, spiritually, and emotionally attracted to. If you are a male and you’re attracted to females, you’re straight. If you’re a male who is attracted to males and females, you’re bisexual. And if you’re a male who is attracted to males, you’re gay. Revolutionary research conducted by Dr. Alfred Kinsey in the mid-20th century exposed that most people aren’t unquestionably straight or gay/lesbian. As a substitute to the question, “do you like dudes or chicks, he asked people to describe their fantasies, dreams, thoughts, emotional investments in others, and regularity of sexual interaction. Based on his research, he broke sexuality down into a seven-point scale (see below) and stated that most people who recognize themselves as straight are somewhere between 1 – 3 on the scale, and most people who recognize themselves as lesbian/gay are 3-5, meaning most of us are a little bisexual.

0 – Exclusively Heterosexual

1 – Predominantly heterosexual, incidentally homosexual

2 – Predominantly heterosexual, but more than incidentally homosexual

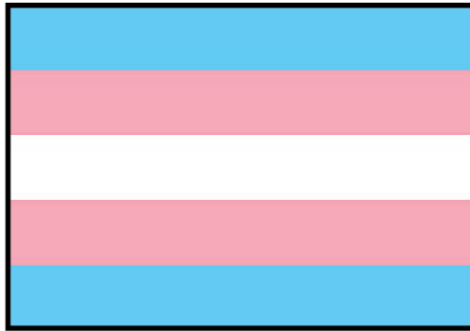
3 – Equally heterosexual and homosexual

4 – Predominantly homosexual, but more than incidentally heterosexual

5 – Predominantly homosexual, incidentally heterosexual

1.4 Transgender Umbrella

Transgender-identified activists and their allies now refer to a “transgender umbrella,” which includes a much broader diversity of people who identify or express themselves in several ways. Many individuals do not use hormones or surgery to change their bodies; but, they insist their bodies are what they say they are — regardless of biological reality. Their gender may be purely an internal state of mind. And, it may change from day-to-day.



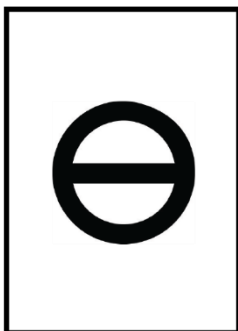
1.4.1 Transgender

Gender identity or gender expression which is different from the gender assigned during the birth.



1.4.2 Agender

Someone who doesn't identify oneself with any existing gender identities, neither a male or a female.



1.4.3 Androgyne

The person identifies with both the male and female gender at the same time. They can be termed as gender-neutral as well.



1.4.4 Bigender

The person can have any two genders at the same time. It can be a combination of any existing genders.

Figure 2. From top to bottom: Symbols and Flags of Transgender, Agender, Androgyne and Bigender communities

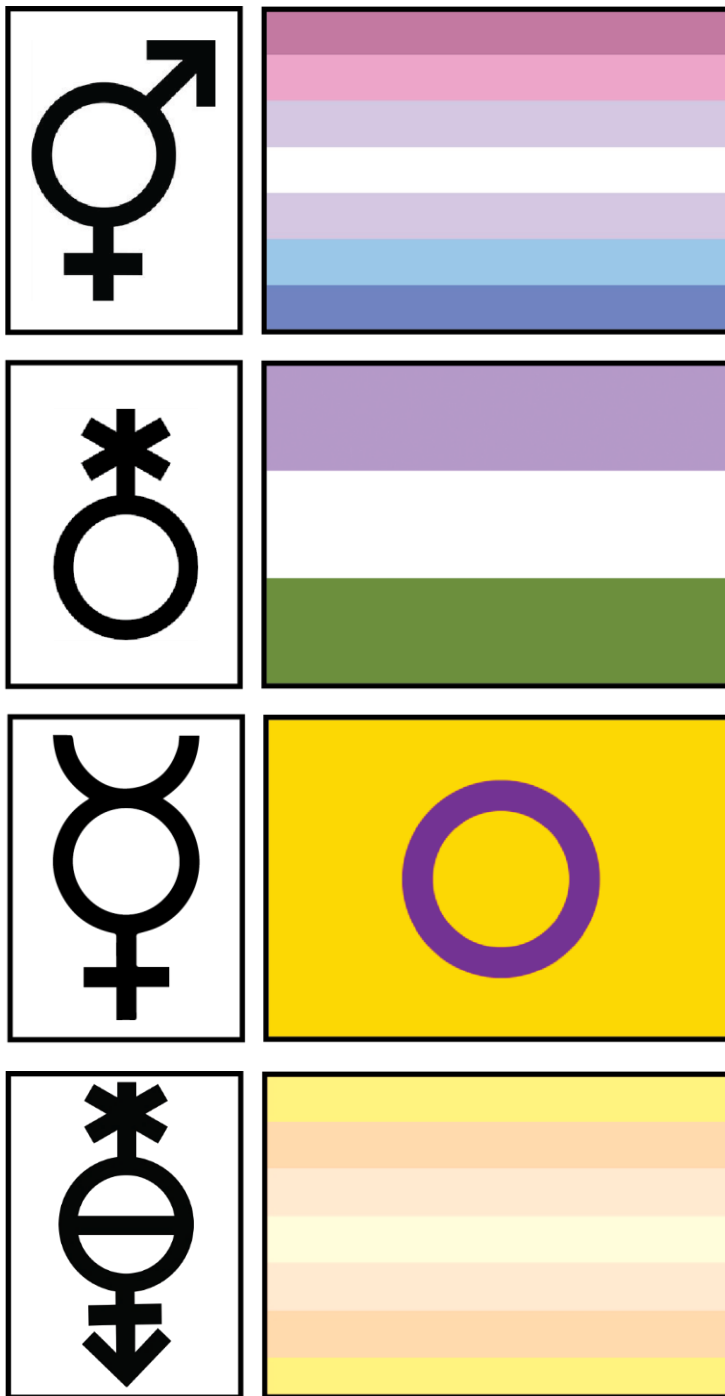


Figure 3. From top to bottom: Symbols and Flags: Genderfluid, Genderqueer, Intersex and Pangender

1.4.5 Genderfluid

A person who prefers to remain flexible about their gender rather than identifying with a single gender. They may vary between genders or express multiple genders at the same time.

1.4.6 Genderqueer

It is a spectrum of gender identities that are not exclusively masculine or feminine. Identities that fall outside the gender binary.

1.4.7 Intersex

A person born with any of the variations in chromosomes, gonads, sex hormones or genitals. They do not fit the typical definitions for a male or female body.

1.4.8 Pangender

A person having a non-binary gender who identifies with all the genders.

Apart from these, there are other gender identities under the transgender umbrella term such as the drag kings and queens, cross-dressers, masculine females, feminine males, and transvestic fetishist.

2. LITERATURE STUDY

2.1 Evolution of the Term “Transgender”

In 1965, Dr. John F. Oliven published a medical text that included one of the first acknowledged use of the word "transgender." He wrote: “Where the compulsive urge reaches beyond female vestments and becomes an urge for gender ('sex') change, transvestism becomes 'transsexualism.' The term is misleading; actually, ‘transgenderism’ is what is meant, because sexuality is not a significant factor in primary transvestism.” At this point, Dr. Oliven used the word “transgender” as a substitute for “transsexual” about people who transition through surgery.

In 1969, Prince first used the term “transgenderal” to differentiate herself from transsexuals, or those who went through surgery to transition. Her use of the word “transgenderal” evidently distinguished between the ways people selected to transition. “I, at least, know the difference between sex and gender,” she wrote, “and have elected to change the latter and not the former. If a word is necessary, I should be termed a ‘transgenderal.’”

The same year Virginia Prince first used the term “transgenderal,” 1969, was also the year that the Stonewall Riots kicked off the modern gay rights movement. This moment marked a sea change in terms of broader visibility for the LGBTQ+ community.

The other major origin point for the word "transgender" is with activist and trans pioneer Virginia Prince, who popularized the term through her advocacy and writing in the 1970s.

A few years later, in 1974, social workers, medical professionals, and activists put on the first ever Transvestite and Transsexual Conference, at the University of Leeds. This literature, some of the earliest conference literature available on trans health, made clear distinctions between transvestites (people who dressed as the opposite gender), transsexuals (people who transitioned genders through surgery), and transgender people who did transition but did not elect to undergo surgery.

In 1975, another major milestone: the first-time protections for transgender people were codified into civil rights law. The city of Minneapolis was the first to do so by passing a non-discrimination ordinance preventing discrimination based on “having or projecting a self-image not associated with one’s biological maleness or one’s biological femaleness.”

Throughout the 1980s, artists like Bruce Laker, who also went by Phaedra Kelly, had coined other terms like “gender transient” to refer to being transgender, which was still distinct from “transsexual.”

By the 1990s, the distinction between “transgender” and “transsexual” began to fade. According to Oxford English Dictionary lexicographer Jonathan Dent, this was around when the broader LGBTQ+ community began to embrace “trans*” as an umbrella term that would “cover a wide range of identities” that might not fit with “traditional notions” of gender, similar to “queer” for sexuality. Despite this, the term “trans*” didn’t make it into the OED until earlier this year. [2]

2.2 Transgender people in Indian Subcontinent

In the Indian subcontinent, Hijra is a word used for eunuchs, intersex people, and transgender people. Also known as Aravani, Aruvani, Jagappa, or Chhakka, the hijra community in India prefer to call themselves Kinnar or Kinner. Hijras are formally recognized as the third gender in countries in the Indian subcontinent.

Time and again, these communities embraced the people who were in abject poverty, rejected by, or flee, their family of origin. Many also work as sex workers for survival.

Age-old texts such as the "Mahabharata," "Ramayana" and the "Kama Sutra" refer to eunuchs, and there are tales of gods — even the most powerful of them — who modify genders in the blink of an eye

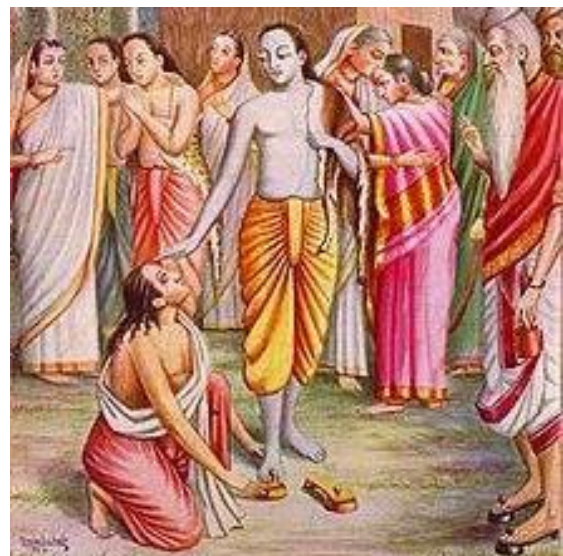


Figure 4. Left: Brihannala, Arjun as a eunuch in Mahabharata; Right: Lord Rama blessing Hijras after returning to Ayodhya after 14 yrs. of exile

The Ardhanarishvara form of divine energy, created by merging Shiva and Parvati is worshiped in Hinduism; Bahucharan Mata is a Hindu Goddess both associated with transgender behavior; Krishna as Mohini who married; Shikhandi and many more.



Figure 5. Left: Hindu god formed by the merging of Shiva and Parvati, Ardhanarishwara; Right: Hindu god Krishna in his transgender form, Mohini

Traditionally, hijras were hired as singers and dancers, often serving the retinues of rulers both Hindu and Muslim. During Mughal rule in India, trans people were given vital posts of security and decision making. Additionally, they were, and are, seen as mediators of fertility and attend the occasions of birth and marriages, and bless them in return for payment. They are a particular part of the country's social landscape and enjoy high visibility, with most Indians encountering them regularly while going about their lives.

In 1871, the British colonial government passed a sweeping law that criminalized entire sections of society, including hijras, who they said was "addicted to the systematic commission of non-bailable offenses." From then on, hijras and other "third-gender" communities could be arrested on the spot.

It was only in April 2014 when trans people got legal recognition by the Supreme Court, but still, there is a lot of work to be done in terms of social acceptance, equality, dignity, and social awareness. There's been a slow start towards achieving this aim after the NALSA (National Legal Service Authority v. Union of India) judgment.

The Supreme Court on 6th Sept 2018, struck down Article 377 of the Indian Penal Code and said, "The sexual orientation of a person is natural, and discrimination based on sexual orientation is an abuse of freedom of expression. The LGBT Community has the same rights as any ordinary citizen... Criminalizing gay sex is irrational and indefensible. The provision of IPC had caused collateral effect in the consensual sex between LGBTQ people and is violative of Article 14." [3]

2.3 Aravan

Iravan, one such minor yet one of the most crucial characters of Mahabharata. It is from his lineage that the trans people are said to have been born. That is why the transgenders or hijras are also known as Aravanis. He was the son of Arjuna and Naga princess Ulupi. Aravan is the central God of the cult

of Kuttantavar. The earliest source of mention regarding Aravan was found in Peruntevanar's Parata Venpa, a 9th-century Tamil version of the Mahabharata. 'Kalappali' was believed to be the ultimate sacrifice which ensured victory for Pandavas on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Aravan volunteered to sacrifice himself in front of Kaali. In return, gaining three boons, one of which was to marry before he dies. As no one volunteered to be his wife and eventually become a widow, Krishna in the form of Mohini agrees to marry him. The Koovagam version moreover narrates Krishna's mourning as a widow after Aravan's sacrifice the next day, after which he returns to his original masculine form for the duration of the war. [4]



Figure 6. Left: Iravan's head in Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore; Right: Procession during Koovagam festival



Figure 7. Transgender people from all over the world visit the Koothandavar temple



Figure 8. Priest of the temple following rituals of Koovagam festival



Figure 9. Transgender people enacting as widows of Aravan in Koovagam festival

During Koovagam festival the story of Aravan is re-enacted from the start of his marriage with Mohini, his sacrifice for the Pandavas' victory in Mahabharata and then the mourning of his death.

2.4 Koovagam Festival

Aravan is known as Kuttantavar in the cult which bears his name, and in which he is the principal deity. Here, the marriage of Aravan and Mohini, her widowhood and mourning after Aravan's form the central theme of an 18-day annual festival on either side of the night of the full moon in the Tamil month of (April-May) Cittirai. The Alis or the Aravanis (transgenders) take part in the Koovagam festival by recreating and visualizing the wedding of Aravan and Mohini. It is believed that all the Aravanis are married to Aravan, and hence when the sacrifice is re-enacted, the Aravanis become widows of Aravan and mourn his death. [4]



Figure 10. Procession during Koovagam Festival in Kuttantavar

2.5 Aravani Art Project

The Aravani Art Project is an artistic community, based in Bangalore that creates spaces for people from the transgender community to interact with other communities and cultures in their local neighborhoods. Through public art and interventions, the Aravani Art Project regains the streets on which so many transgender people suffer violence and discrimination. In collaboration with fellow artists, photographers, filmmakers, neighbors, friends, and family, we mark these spaces with the colors of life in celebration of the community.

The amplified visibility of transgender people in popular culture is yet to translate into increased safety and awareness for the lives of transgender people on the streets of their cities, towns, and villages. The project aims to reduce the discrimination, stigma, and systemic inequality faced by

transgender people in many parts of the world. Their interventions become safe spaces for alternate voices and open minds. [5]



Figure 11. Mural by Aravani Art Project during Lodhi Art Festival 2019, Delhi

2.6 101 India

101 India brings stories of culture, subculture, and counter culture across the Indian subcontinent. From extreme travel to underground music, sex and relationships to irreverent humor.

101 India allows you to experience this rich and diverse culture through stories from the fringes - surprising untold stories of incredible people doing incredible things, made more vivid and relevant for young people by the experiential journeys of our hosts. Stories which connect us all.

One such story is that of the Koovagam Festival where city boy Rosh was sent in to experience the festival the way the locals do. India's culture, festivals, and people can only be truly understood when they are experienced to their fullest. When you don't just see them, you live them. It's one thing to see a cultural festival; it's quite another to experience it up close and personal. From meeting (and bathing) the star attraction of Thrissur Pooram's elephant festival to spending time working in a makeshift brothel at Koovagam, Asia's largest transgender festival, a city boy and party animal Roshmin experiences India's people and culture. Not just to see how they live but to live their lives. [6]

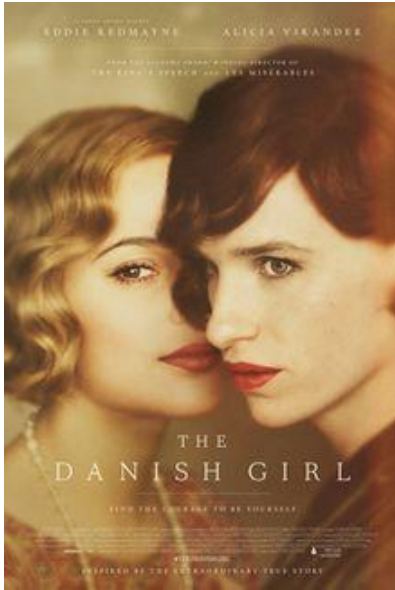


Figure 12. Koovagam Episode 1: The Hotel, 101 India with host Roshmin



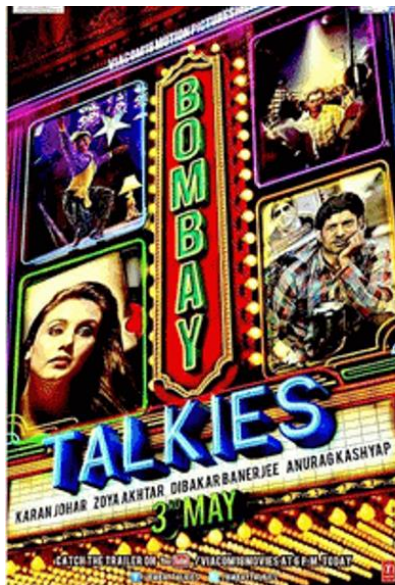
Figure 13. Koovagam Episode 2: The wedding of Lord Aravan, 101 India

2.7 Movies



2.7.1 The Danish Girl

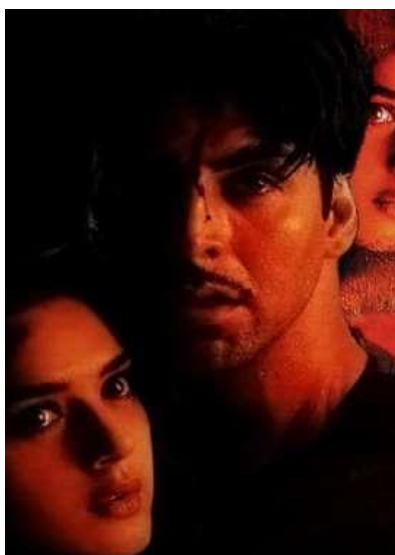
A 2015 biographical romantic drama film directed by Tom Hooper, based on the 2000 novel of the same name by David Ebershoff, and loosely inspired by the lives of Danish painters Lili Elbe and Gerda Wegener. The film stars Eddie Redmayne as Elbe, one of the first known recipients of sex reassignment surgery. [7] The film revolves around a man who poses for a painter as a woman and realizes his feminine side. It shows his journey in finding his identity and taking an initiative to transition, against all the odds. The narration makes the viewer feel the dynamics of people around him who support him as well as bully him in a very poetic yet intense manner.



2.7.2 Bombay Talkies

A 2013 Indian anthology film consisting of four short films, directed by Anurag Kashyap, Dibakar Banerjee, Zoya Akhtar, and Karan Johar. The film released on 3 May 2013, coinciding with and celebrating the 100th year of Indian cinema and the beginning of a new era in modern cinema. [8]

In the film, Sheila Ki Jawaani by Zoya Akhtar shows a 12-year-old boy aspires to be a Bollywood dancer. Inspired by Katrina Kaif, he dresses up like her when no one is in his house and gets caught by his parents. His father disapproves of it and discourages him. Although his elder sister supports him, and he finds a confidant in his sister.



2.7.3 Sangharsh

A 1999 Indian psychological thriller film directed by Tanuja Chandra. It stars Akshay Kumar, Preity Zinta, and Ashutosh Rana in lead roles. The plot of this film is based on the 1991 American film The Silence of the Lambs. [9]

The film shows Ashutosh Rana as a religious fanatic, who abducts and murders children for his immortality. The depiction of him as a woman might seem like a vague portrayal of his split personality or the possibility of him being genderfluid.



2.7.4 Samantaral

A 2017 Indian Bengali-language psychological drama film directed by Partha Chakraborty and starring Parambrata Chatterjee and Riddhi Sen. The movie revolves around a Bengali man who is always locked in a room because of his presumed mental retardedness. However, at the end of the film, it is revealed that he is a woman's soul trapped in his male body. The family always knew about it but were in denial and never considered helping him in any way. [10]

It shows the realization of a young adult and his nephew, who loved him dearly and still didn't know what his family was hiding from him all this while.



2.7.5 Nia Nal (Supergirl)

A fictional character from the television series Supergirl, portrayed by actress Nicole Maines. Nia Nal is the first transgender superhero on television.

In January 2018, Supergirl creator and executive producer Greg Berlanti spoke at an event about the lack of trans representation in the broader Arrowverse. "We don't have an active trans character across the shows[...], And so I still feel behind the times every day on that issue," Berlanti said. [11]



2.7.6 Sophia Burset (Orange is the New Black)

Laverne Cox is an American actress and LGBTQ+ advocate. She rose to prominence with her role as Sophia Burset on the Netflix series Orange Is the New Black, becoming the first openly transgender person to be nominated for a Primetime Emmy Award in any acting category, and the first to be nominated for an Emmy Award since composer Angela Morley in 1990. [12] [13]

2.8 Tedx Videos

2.8.1 Laxmi Narayan Tripathi on Changing Gender Dynamics in India

Laxmi Narayan Tripathi is a transgender rights activist, Hindi film actor and Bharatanatyam dancer in Mumbai, India. She was born in 1979 in Thane. Laxmi is a hijra. She is the first transgender person to represent Asia Pacific in the UN in 2008 as well as an active member of UGC. At the assembly, she spoke of the plight of sexual minorities. "People should be more human-like. They should respect us as humans and consider our rights as transgenders" [14]

As a transgender woman and as a part of the oldest ethnic transgender community, she speaks about the rich culture India had in the olden days when the transgender people worked as courtesans, sex workers, and other occupations with equal respect. She talks about also talks about her vision for the future of India, where people respect the gender of a person and where all can live their respective lives, the way they want to, without any inhibitions.

“We, as the citizens of modern India, should realize that if we want to accept anybody, we should use our heart and not our brain. It is because the heart speaks the truth. It is necessary that we don’t keep biases whether it’s about gender or femininity. The biggest weapon of a community is not to surrender. Thus, we have to stand together as one nation without morality, boundary thoughts of any political or religious leaders, for a new India where there is inclusion of every person whether a guest or a fellow Indian.”



Figure 14. Ted Talk by Laxmi Narayan Tripathi

2.8.2 Gauri Sawant on Transgender Rights in India

Gauri Sawant is a transgender activist from Mumbai, India. She is the director of Sakshi Char Chowghi that helps transgender people and people with HIV/AIDS. She was featured in an ad

by Vicks. She was made the goodwill ambassador of Election Commission in Maharashtra. Her mother died when she was nine years old, and her grandmother raised her. Her father is a police officer. She was asked to leave the house by her father at age 18.

She narrates her journey of finding her gender identity, the difficulties in attaining respect as a trans woman, a mother, and moreover a person. “There’s no gender in being a mother,” she says. Gauri speaks about why it is essential to bring about a revolution in gender laws in India. Gauri encourages safe sex and provides counseling to transgender people from the Mumbai suburbs. She is also the petitioner of the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) judgment that was passed in 2013. Three years after the Supreme Court recognized transgender people as the third gender, her community is still striving for fundamental civil rights. [15]



Figure 15. Ted Talk by Gauri Sawant

2.8.3 Sophia David on Inclusion

Sophia David is an Inclusion & Diversity advocate and prefers the pronouns “she, her and hers” while she self identifies. She works with one of the top 4 professional services firms in the world. She works in Organizational Development with a talent group that proctors learning in Leadership, Behavior, and Communication. She is a Facilitator, a Consultant, and a Leader Coach with 16 years of work experience. Sophia works with several Diversity & Inclusion panels and councils in bringing awareness and sensitization for issues faced by people in the work environment. She is a significant contributor in bringing policy changes and benefits awareness to people from different walks of life. She is a Human Rights Activist with a focus on Women & LGBTQ issues and believes everyone should lend their voice to issues that affect people. She does a lot of pro bono work, presenting and talking to leaders and professionals from different walks of life from universities to multinational companies. [16]



Figure 16. Ted Talk by Sophia David

2.9 Student Animated Short Films

In the initial stages of ideation, I planned on keeping a monochromatic color scheme for my film. On further discussion with my guide, he suggested to me that I could experiment with colors so that it reflects the story, which is to be portrayed. Following are some of the frames from student animated short films which I watched for inspiration.

2.9.1 Gumball machine by Jeongho Lee, CalArts 2018 short film



Figure 17. A frame from Gumball Machine

2.9.2 “Spegelbarn” Looking Glass by Eric Rosenlund



Figure 18. A frame from Looking Glass

2.9.3 Who's hungry? By David Ochs CalArts 2009 short film



Figure 19. A frame from Who's Hungry?

3. PRIMARY DATA COLLECTION

During the process of collecting data, I learnt about the people of the transgender community, the journey of their lives, goals, who they aspire to be and how deeply they want to bring change in the society for the betterment of India. The process helped me realize how to be sensitive to others as a human being, and to approach them with respect, irrespective of their gender identity or expression.

3.1 Questionnaire

- Who do you identify yourself as?
- When did you accept your gender identity?
- How did you deal with it?
- How did the others around you react about it (family, relatives, friends and other immediate group of people with whom you would socialize)?
- Did you know about the LGBTQIA+ community?
- How did you get to know about the community? Did you try to reach out to them?
- Did you start talking or interacting with them, and what was your response to it?
- Were you involved in scouting and socializing after you knew about the community?
- What was your journey like, after you recognized your gender identity?
- What were the high-points and low-points in your journey of identifying yourself as who you are now?
- What is the significance of the pride parade for you and the community? In India and abroad.
- Have you come across negative perceptions (not being inclusive) of people towards your community, and how did you react to the same?

3.2 Personal Interview

Date: 7th March 2019

Time: 2130 hrs.

Duration: 25 mins

Interviewer: Hi! How are you?

Interviewee: I am good. Thank you so much. How are you, and how can I help you with your research for your movie?

Interviewer: Yeah, so I am planning to make an animated short film on the life of people of the transgender community — their lifestyle, when they found out and how they tackled the taboos in India revolving around them. To carry out my research, I would love to know about you, your life, and the journey of finding your identity.

Interviewee: Ok. So, I was a young Christian boy from a lower-middle-class family and brought up by my grandmother. There was no struggle in identifying my gender identity. I was always sure of being a girl rather than a boy and would love to play with the girls or dress up using my mother's accessory. I used to confront my parents and grandmother. However, they said that it was a phase and would pass away eventually.

Once when I was in Class III, a group of boys in my school raped me. My family was shocked; I told them that this is what would happen if I continue to be a girl in a boy's body. I would be bullied because I didn't fit society's concepts of being a boy.

In Class VIII, I was a very bright student academically. I also started to participate in various activities and competitions. Over some time, the teachers started noticing me, and I was on the radar of teachers. So, the bullies stopped acting around me, and I felt much safer. There was a point of time when I felt like attempting suicide, but I could not as I would lose the passage to heaven.

I came from a staunch Christian faith, lower-middle-class family, and thus, education was a luxury. I had a supportive family, and I completed my graduation in English, Psychology, and Mathematics.

At the age of 29, I was hired as the Communication and Leadership Trainer in a very reputed company. I was diagnosed with stage III cancer. My family and friends were tormented, but I was happy because the misery of my life was going to end. The doctors cured me of my cancer, and I was puzzled. I believed that I was given a second chance to live my life by the Almighty, and thus, I wanted to live my life the way I wanted to. I transitioned from a man to a woman. At that time there were no policies in the company where I was working, for the people of LGBTQIA+ community. It was at this moment where I felt like a legacy and wanted to bring change for the betterment of society. There were amendments in the policies, and now they have medical insurance, among other benefits.

Interviewer: It has been a very inspiring story, and I would love to interpret it into a movie. So, how do you deal with the stigma around the transgender community in our society?

Interviewee: People still stare at me when I go to malls, streets, and other places. I keep my confidence intact and think to myself that it's because of how beautiful I am.

After the interview, I shared my Poem with her, which was to be used as a narration for the film. I also took inspiration from her photos of her childhood to develop the main character for the film. She constantly encouraged me. She was excited about the film as she wondered how her story would look like through the imagination of an artist. A film which would inspire others to bring change in our society.

4. PRE-PRODUCTION

After talking to Sophia, I tried to empathize with her story and wondered if I could take inspiration from her journey and translate it into a narration for my film. So, I planned on writing a poem about it with the mix of Koovagam festival, keeping in mind hero's journey to make an impactful narrative for the film.

4.1 Poem (First Draft for the script)

Who am I
Who am I
doubtful society

Who am I
Who am I
Asking repeatedly

Dysfunctional, disturbing, distraught eyes
Lurking behind for drama and spice
With their confused and questioning why's

Who am I?
Who am I?
Girl or a boy

is it wrong
don't feel right,
In the body that's not mine.

Through the windows
I look outside and wonder!
Girls I play with
Do not criticize me,
Do not make it just about gender.
Itchiness, stare,
male gaze, hunting bear;
on the lookout,
Ready to pounce,
Knockout. !!!

Who am I
Who am I
Finding my identity.

Lost in my dreams,
some people around me

They smile and glide
Through my way.
Leading me to a place.
From behind, I say, "hey !!"

music is deafening,
Calming at the same time.
Colors all around
Feeling brighter than the sunshine.

They are the mohinis
Mohinis of the world
On their way To marry Aravan
Great warrior, the one!

Wife one day,
Widower the other,
But a proud one nonetheless.
The acceptance is what mattered.

Who am I
Who am I
What do they think?

"We are aravanis"
Their soul reaches out to me
And together our worlds sync

I know who I am now
I embrace it all.
Within, There is harmony
Above all!

4.2 Voice-over (Final Script)

Finding my identity, lost in your whims,
You ask me to be myself,
But you don't know what that means
Don't you see the nature
Distorting and gracing the universe unfolding?
A bunch of hypocrites

Dysfunctional, disturbing, distraught those eyes
Social issues and their falsified lies
You look at me like I'm some crisis to blame
All you keep asking, ain't you ashamed?
Who am I? You make me question myself

Am lost in the body of someone else
Who am I?

Who am I?

Drained out of existence, the captain of the vessel, so to speak
Was tired and trapped
Like a runaway slave, her back to the wall
She broke out of my chamber halls
I stood with shrugged shoulders, and my soul went for a time out-
All of a sudden I realized the pain of existence,
The ire of subjective typecast and an annoying bunch of words
For a moment, I was free, all eyes on me,
Yo, I was the queen and the king of my dreams, at the same time,
Oh, is that right?

Scuba diving into myself with no O2 to carry
Kinda making me feel like in a choke hold
Of reason, of people, of people, of nature's creation
Cutting through this life, I seek no afterlife
How to live is a question I got no answer to
Let alone life after this
Through these constructs of ages to confirm, I don't know
I can't dammit
I can't begin to explain how it feels inside my head
Hell!
I don't even know that- follow me!

4.3 Music Composition and Audio Recording

I was very excited to compose an original track for this film as this was the first time I was experimenting with an animated music video. I took help from my friends and music enthusiasts Mark, Sumit, and TJ in understanding the basics of composing a song. All of this would not have been possible without them. They were very supportive and helpful in the process of developing the soundtrack. They introduced me to an app known as BandLab, which helped us create the original soundtrack for the movie. The voiceover was recorded and then edited on WavePad Audio Editor. The process of storyboarding and music composition was done side by side so that both complimented each other rather than going in different directions.

4.4 Storyboard



Title sequence transitions to wind blowing in the sky.



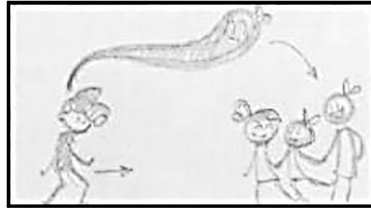
Long shot of Albin sitting in the park.



Close shot of Albin contemplating.



Eyes pop out in the bg depicting the society.



Long shot of Albin walking across girls playing together.



Albin's soul leaves the body as he dreams of being a girl.



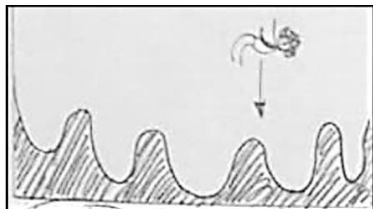
Albin's dream sequence starts. Mid shot of girls playing.



Mid long shot of Albin being devoured by the evil souls.



Slime covers the screen.



Long Shot of Albin falling down.



Top view of Albin falling down.



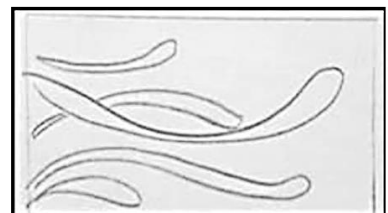
Mid shot of Albin.



Close shot of face. Eyes closed.



Close shot of face. Eyes open.



Hair flowing in the air. transition for Aravani sequence.

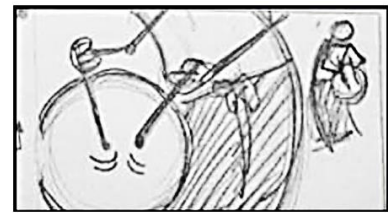
Figure 20. Storyboard I



Close shot of Aravani's face.



Long shot of Aravanis dancing to the beat of the music.



Close shot of drummers.



Long shot of crowd raising hands and cheering.



Procession long shot.



Close shot of Aravan.



Bonfire mid long shot.



Fade to white.



Dupatta flies in the air.

Figure 21. Storyboard II

Storyboard included the visuals for my animated short film supported with the camera angles and the type of shots required to attain the visuals.

The storyboard was shared with Sumit Saha and TJ Kartha so that they could compose the music and rearrange the lyrics for a compelling narration in a rap format, keeping in mind the first draft of the poem. Once the soundtrack was completed, I worked upon the animatics so that I was sure of the visuals that represented the narration.

4.5 Doodles

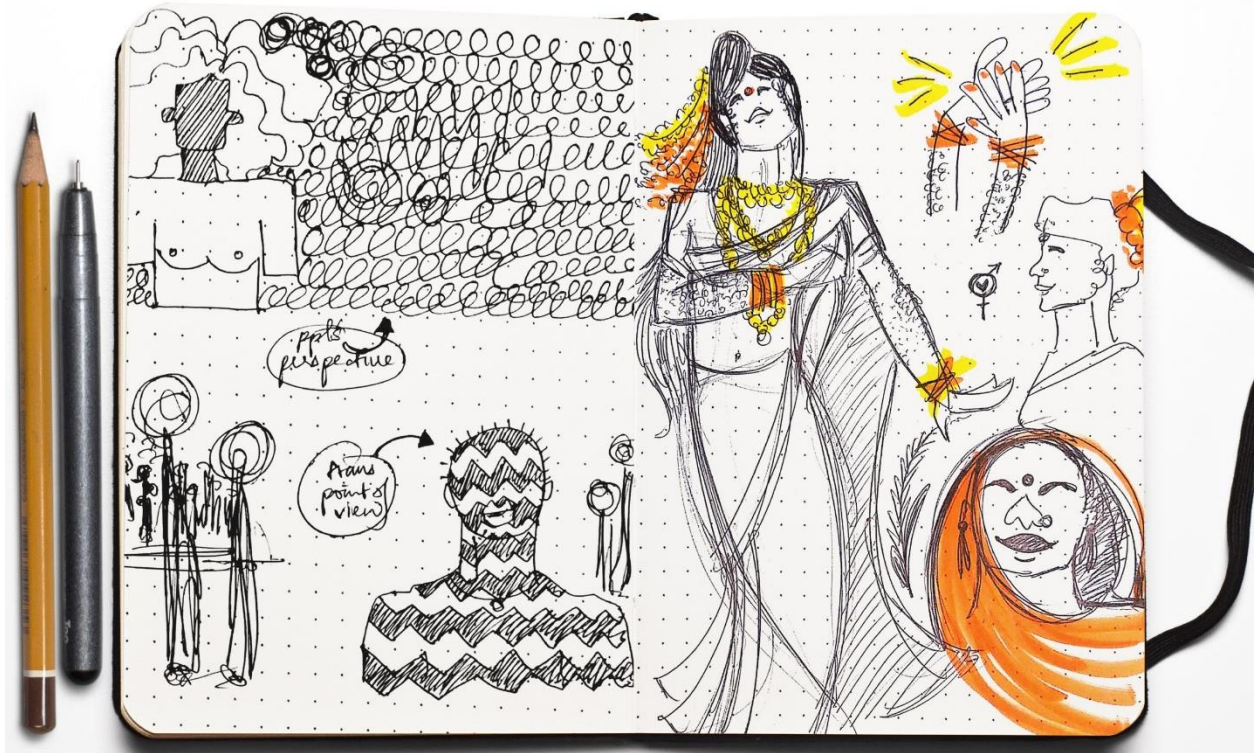


Figure 22. Doodle I

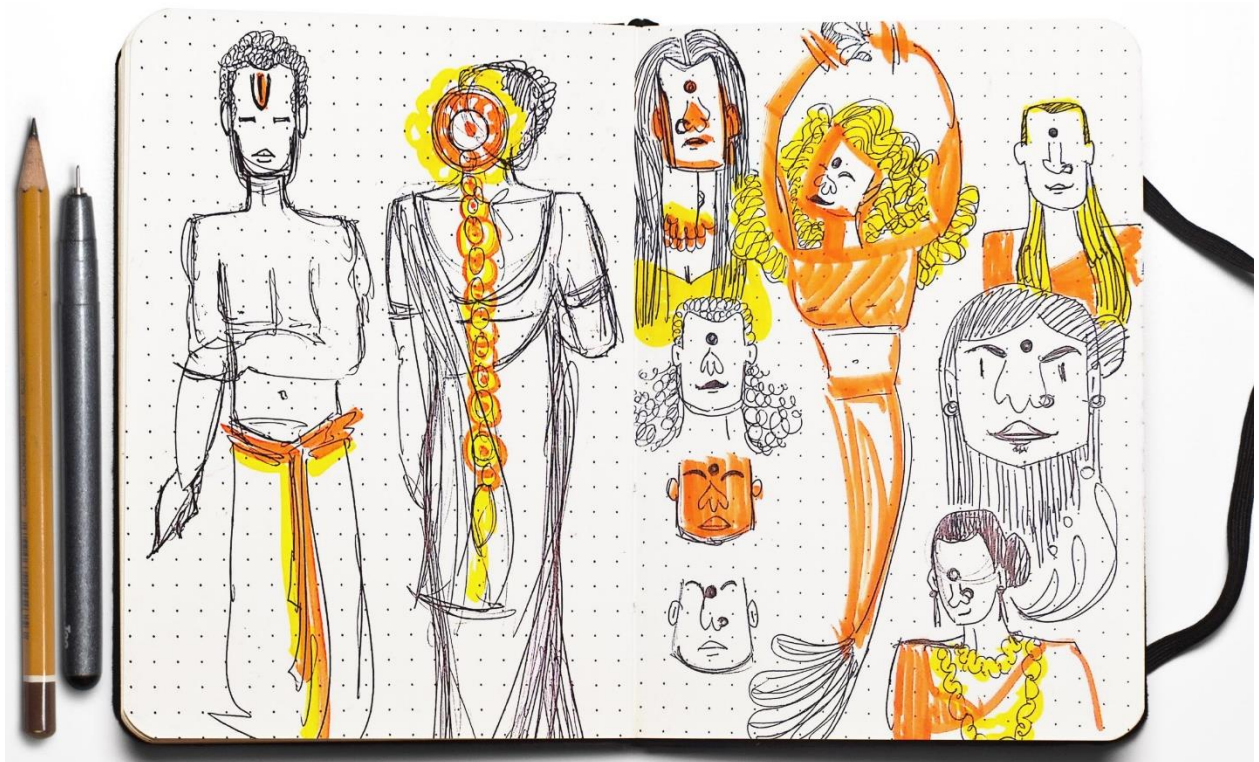


Figure 23. Doodle II

4.6 Transgender Pride Flag and its significance



Figure 24. Transgender Pride Flag

The Transgender Pride Flag was created by American trans woman Monica Helms in 1999 and was first shown at a pride parade in Phoenix, Arizona, the USA in 2000. The flag consists of five horizontal stripes: two light blue, two pink and a white in the center. [17]

Light blue represents baby boys; pink represents baby girls, and white represents those who are transitioning or consider themselves having a neutral or undefined gender.

I wanted to use the colors of this flag to create a color palette for my film. To do that I went through several films, posters, and artworks with similar colors as well as revolving around the topic of Transgenders and their lifestyle, issues, dreams before creating the mood board. I also watched several movies revolving around the stories of transgender people.

4.7 Inspiration for the Color Palette of the movie

4.7.1 Music Video



Figure 25. A frame from Crossfire animated music video I



Figure 26. A frame from Crossfire animated music video II

The images shown above are from the song, Crossfire by Stephen. In this video, there are two colors which act as the primaries in the whole video, where blue and its tint, tone, and shades are used in the place of black. This animated music video also helped me learn the flawless way of intertwining music, its beats with the flow of animation, including pauses and breathing spaces.

4.7.2 Posters on LGBTQIA+

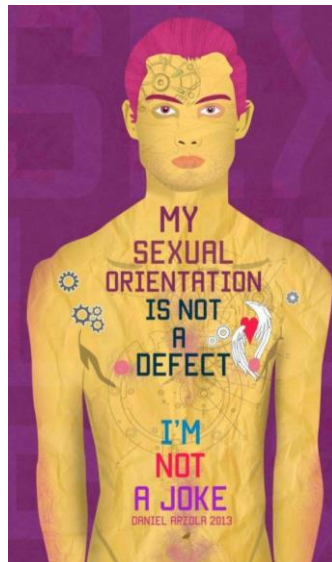
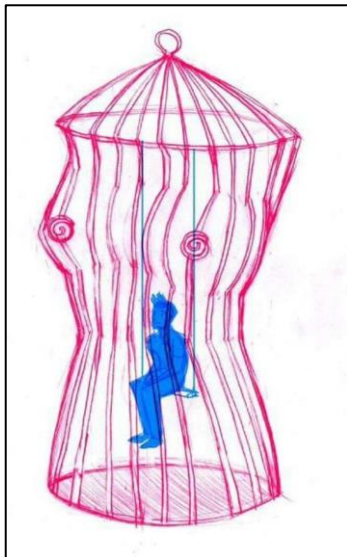
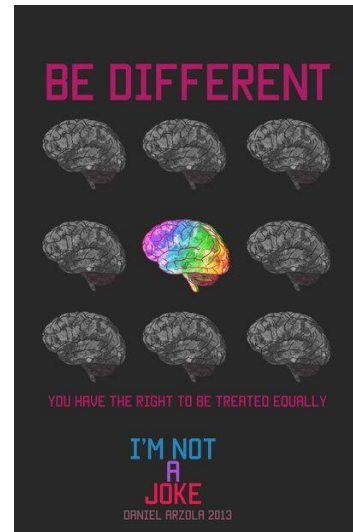
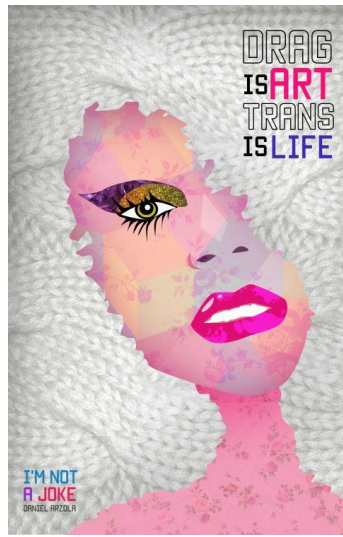


Figure 27. Posters on LGBTQIA+ rights

I saw these posters on Pinterest and observed how bright colors were used to portray the nature and characteristics of people who fall under the transgender umbrella term, the composition and its implementation. All these visuals gave me a lot of insight and helped in creating visuals for my film. The color combination in these posters helped me in creating the mood board for look and feel of the film.

4.8 Character Design (Doodles)



Figure 28. Doodle III

In the process of doodling, I explored a variety of shapes and styles for the character. During which, I understood how different forms show different personalities of a person. To complement the film, I had to make a character who was shy, introvert nevertheless a dreamer.

4.9 Color Exploration

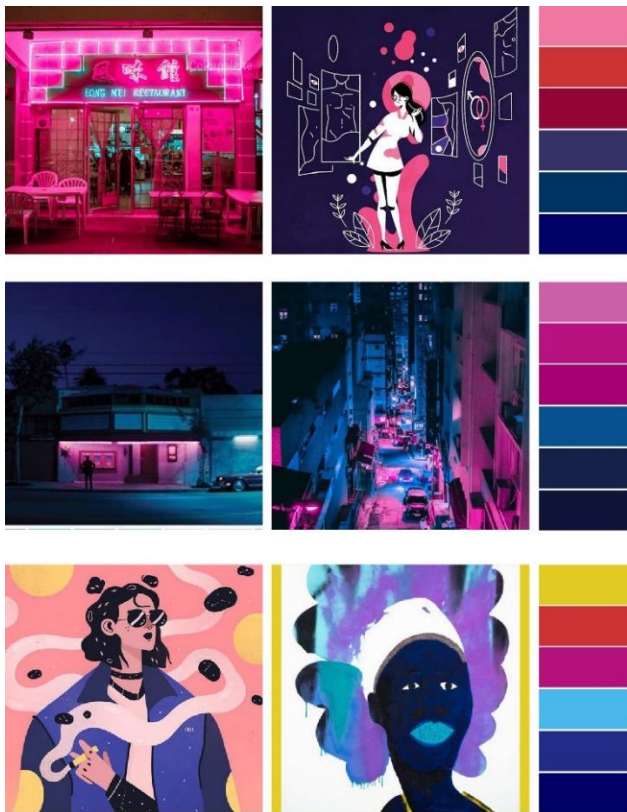


Figure 29. Moodboard for the main character's color scheme

The image on the right shows the final colors used to define the look of Albin, the film's main character. I chose pink for the outline of his body to indicate that he considers his gender identity to be that of a girl/woman more than that of a boy/man. On the other hand, I chose blue to signify the gender expression that the character tries to portray because of what the society perceives of him. Thus, depicting an amalgamation and contrast of what he wants to be and what he is.

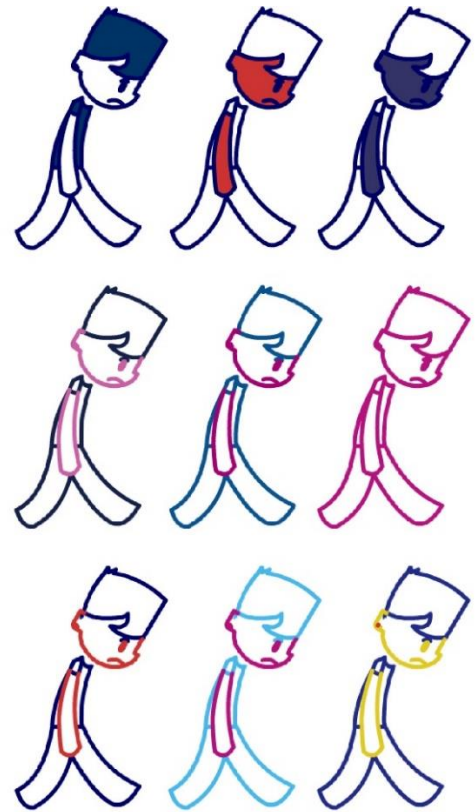


Figure 30. Final color scheme for the main character

4.10 Expression sheet

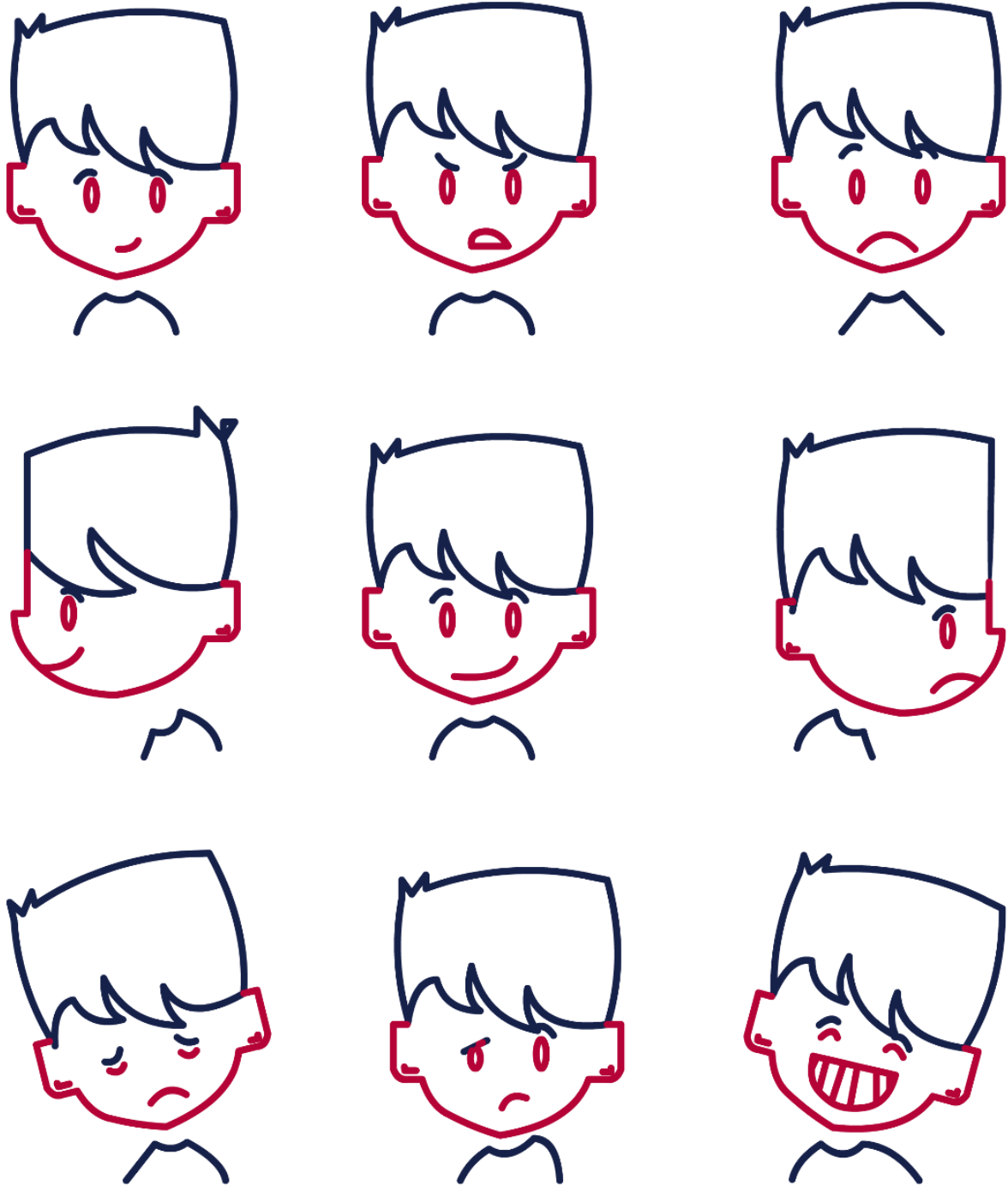


Figure 31. Expression Sheet

4.11 Gesture Sheet

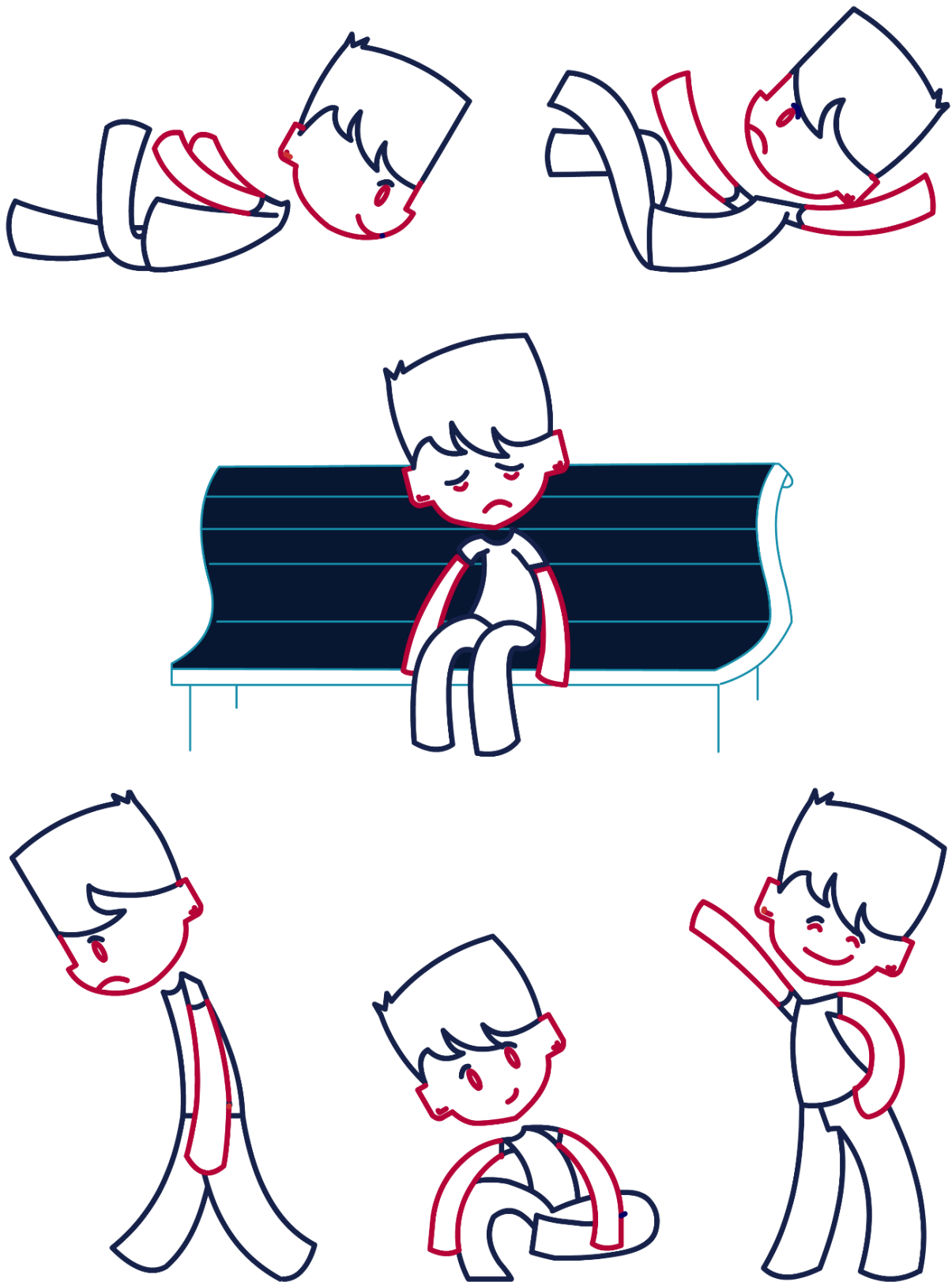


Figure 32. Gesture Sheet

5. PRODUCTION

5.1 Animatics

In order to make an animated film, it is vital to create animatics beforehand so that the visuals compliment the sound and vice versa. The animatics was created using Adobe Flash 2015.

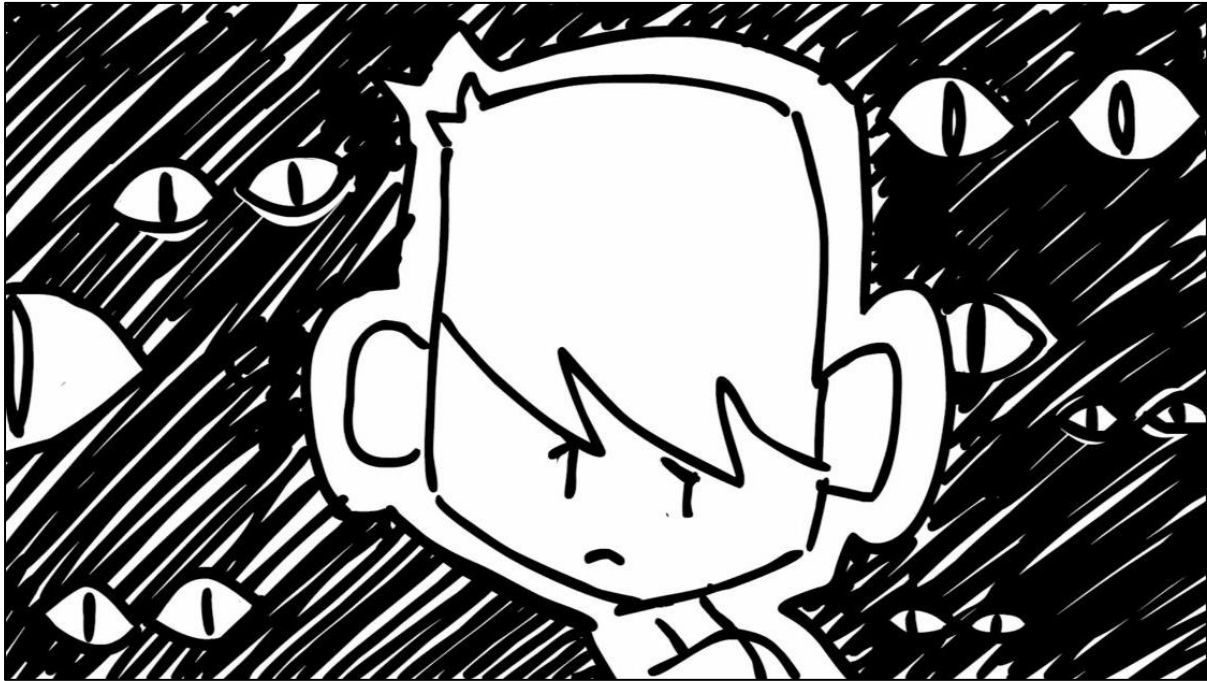


Figure 33. Animatics Frame I

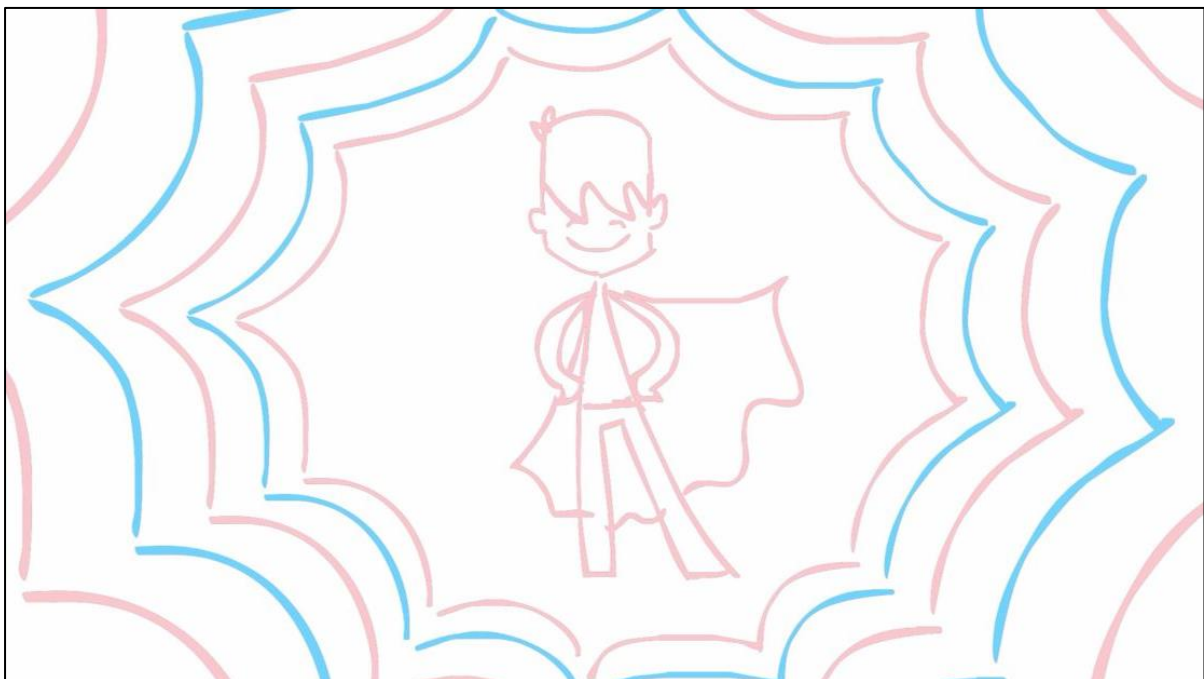


Figure 34. Animatics Frame II

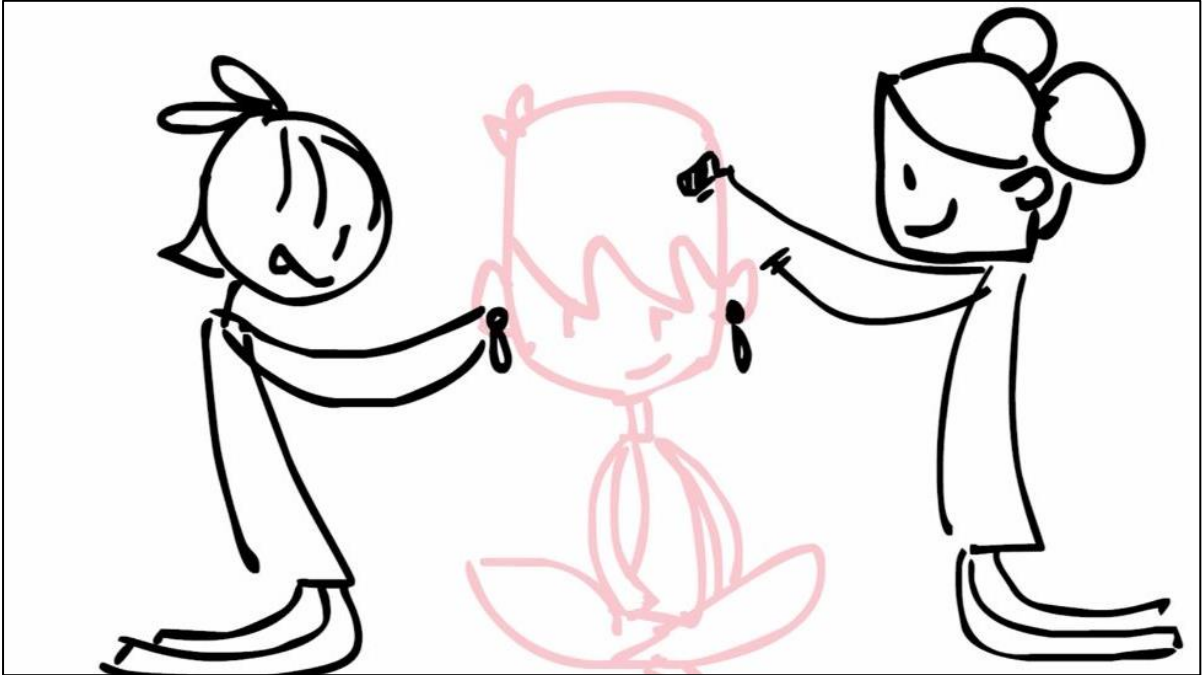


Figure 35. Animatics frame III

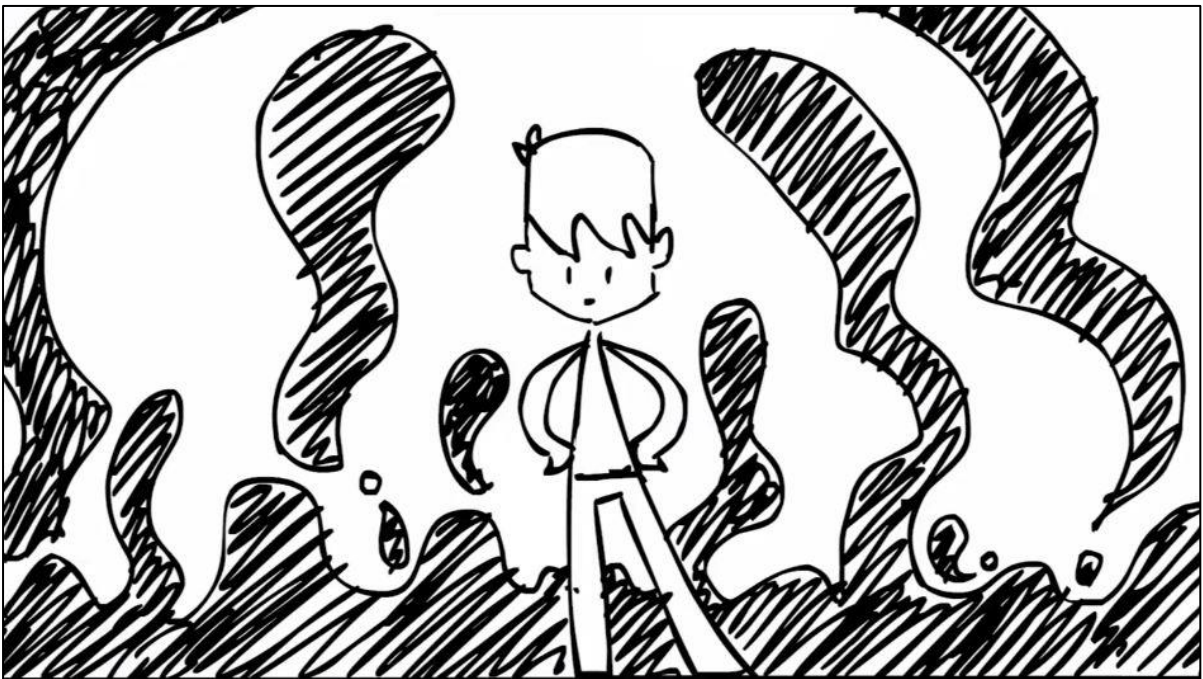


Figure 36. Animatics Frame IV

5.2 Concept Art

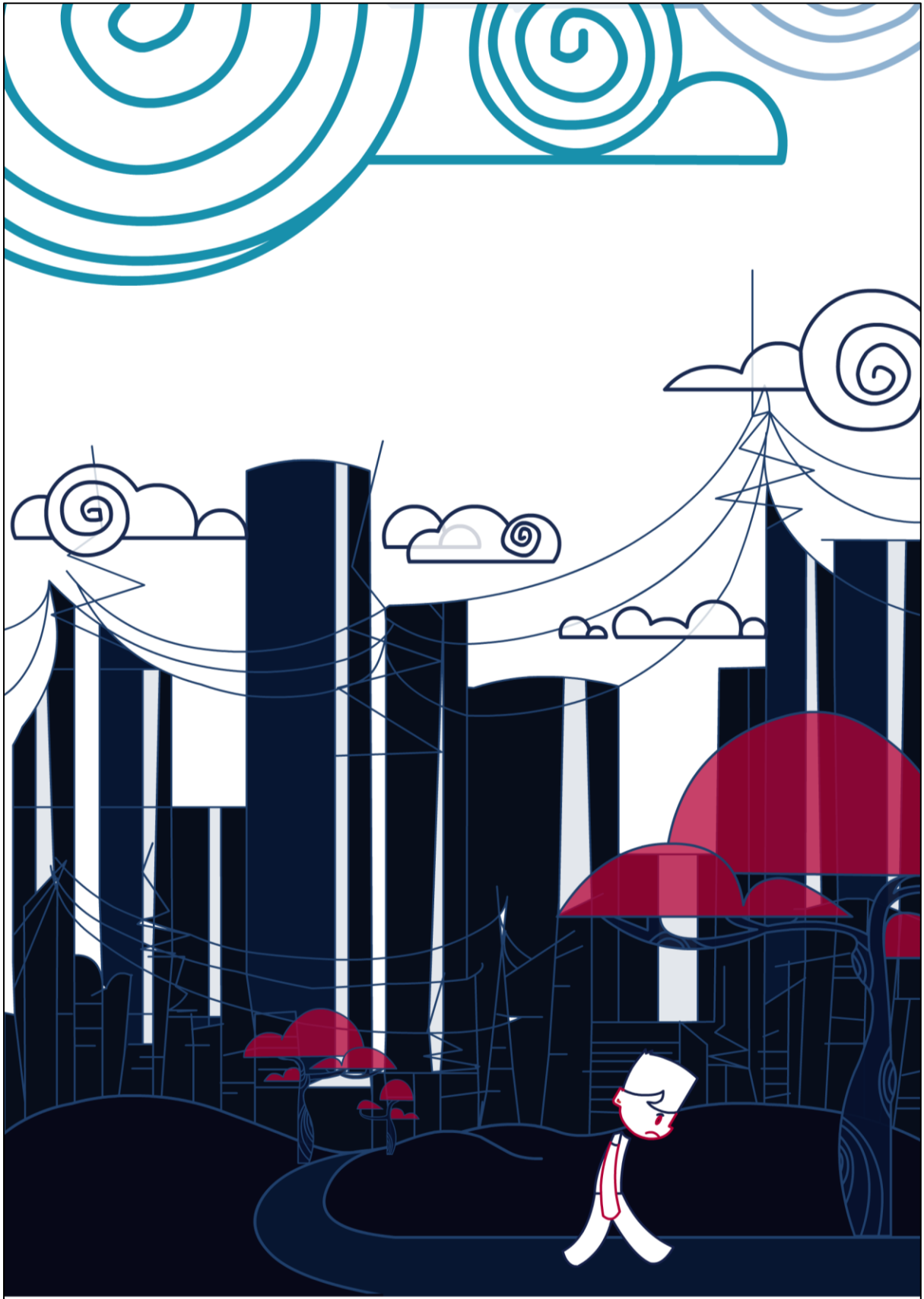


Figure 37. Concept Art for the Film

6. POST PRODUCTION

6.1 Final Frames from the Film



Figure 38. Final frame I

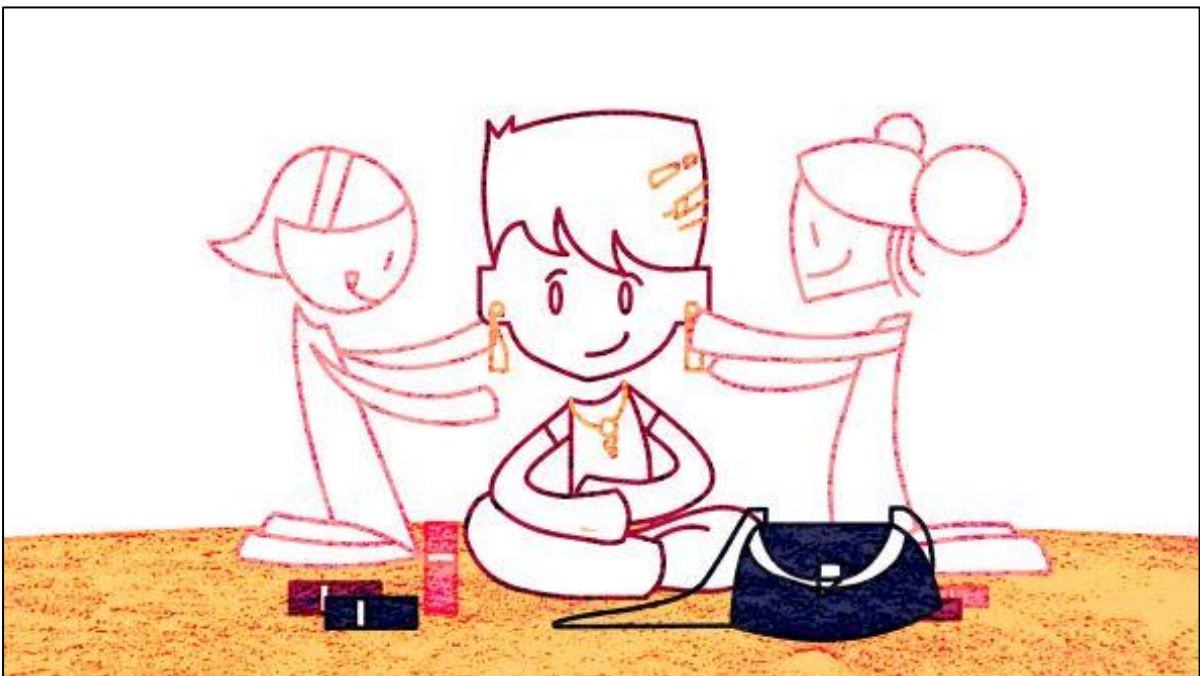


Figure 39. Final Frame II

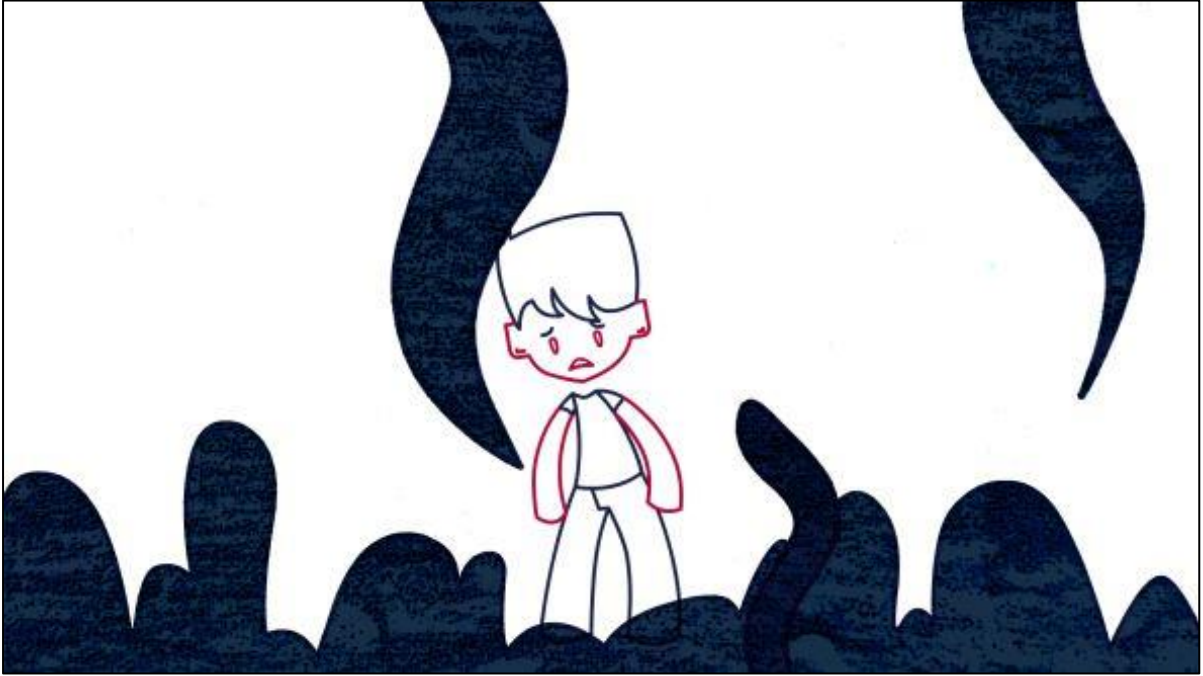


Figure 40. Final Frame III



Figure 41. Final frame IV

7. CONCLUSION

During the whole process of making this film, I learnt a lot about people from the LGBTQIA+ community, specifically the transgender community. It was refreshing to know that there are so many people in India who are trying to bring change in the way our society thinks and perceives about them, whether it's in the form making policies, educating people through different platforms, participating through art, culture, gatherings and community building or spreading information through media.

I was extremely happy as well as excited to take up a project like this, as it helped me gain knowledge about people of the transgender community, the story of their life and how they tackled situations with utmost confidence and courage.

It sensitized me to address every individual with respect and dignity, irrespective of their caste, creed, and most importantly, their gender identity and expression. At the end of the day, it depends on the person to establish his/her own identity, and as a human being, it is their right to do so. It's our time to do our bit in contributing something beneficial for the society, by spreading awareness and removing the stigma for a better future of India, its culture and diversity.

8. LEARNINGS

I was always fascinated by the way great filmmakers and animators implemented their ideas into a mesmerizing and visually appealing story. Films which would question the stigma around specific situations, people, and culture, which still exist in our society. They triggered the elephant in the room and created platforms for people to discuss the problems and offer food for thought.

When I started learning animation, my films would revolve around stories from my childhood. These movies had humorous content, and I loved experimenting with textures and colors. For my thesis, I planned on crossing my limitations in terms of storytelling, narration, and sound design.

Due to the stigma revolving around the transgender community in India, I knew I had to make a film about it. I wanted to do my bit as a designer and an animator, to try and empathize with them and use the medium of film making to spread their stories among a greater mass of people.

In the process of pursuing M.Design from the Department of Design, IIT Hyderabad, I met a lot of people who were experts in the field of music, art, photography, and many more — interacting with people from different streams whether they were Professors, Industry Experts, or my friends, enriched my pool of knowledge and experience.

The experience of two years spent in IIT Hyderabad, among inspiring and motivating people helped me significantly in making a film like *Aravanis*.

This film will always be close to my heart, and I am glad that I came out of my comfort zone to complete it. It was a challenging project which also inspired me to keep making movies in order to bring change in our society.

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11. APPENDIX

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