

# ***‘There aren’t many women animators in Pakistan’***

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The fourth Thursday of every April is commemorated as ‘Girls in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)’ day around the world. The day is observed in an effort to raise awareness about and encourage more women to work in ICT-related fields. To get a sense of how women working in this realm are faring, Dawn spoke to Komal Butt, a 3D animator, who has worked on Burka Avenger – one of Pakistan’s most popular animated series.'

## **Q: Are there a lot of women in the field?**

**A:** There are very few women in the industry so far. For example, I was the only woman on the Burka Avenger animation team. But hopefully, with more courses being taught at women’s universities now, things will change.

I don’t think culture is the reason why there aren’t many women in technical fields. In such jobs, one often has to work harder for longer hours. I sometimes have to work past midnight to get a single scene right, and I don’t think most women want to put in that kind of work.

## **Q: How big is the animation industry in Pakistan?**

**A:** Until a few years ago, no one knew a lot about animation in Pakistan. But over the past five or six years, it has become an important field and several universities such as Numl and the Fatima Jinnah Women University have started offering courses. There are also online courses, but just like any other subject, most people don’t think they will produce good animators.

But I think people who take up online animation courses are people who are really interested in learning about it and will end up being better animators than those who just ended up here.

When it comes to animation, it really does not matter where you learned the basics, because every individual ends up developing his own technique.

Online schools such as ianimate.net have produced excellent animators, who have gone on to work at Disney, Pixar and Dreamworks.

There are also more opportunities for animators now, with video game companies, as well as animations for advertisements. There are even a few movies in the making.

Even though the scope for animation has increased, there still aren’t a lot of production houses; just two or three in Islamabad, maybe three to four big ones in Karachi and even fewer in Lahore.

But more importantly, there are not that many good animators, so I think production houses have a harder time finding competent people than animators have in finding jobs.

**Q: What does it take to be a good animator?**

**A:** To be a good animator, you have to be a good observer. You have to steal everyday concepts and ideas to incorporate into your characters.

Other than knowing how to animate, you also have to be a good actor because you are the one who has to make your characters act. You are the one who decides how a hand gesture will pan out, how wide a character's eyes will have to be when they get surprised. It is important to know how to act.

A good animator can often be found acting in front of the mirror and after we are relatively sure of how we want the character to react, we will act out the scene ourselves in front of friends and then to our co-workers.

Depending on the character you are animating, you have to put in a lot of research as well. You have to put yourself in the character's shoes and find out everything about it so you know how they will react in different situations.

For example, when working on *Burka Avenger*, we had to think what a 23-year-old teacher in Pakistan is usually like. She could not be too modern and she could not be too typical either.

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