

# together

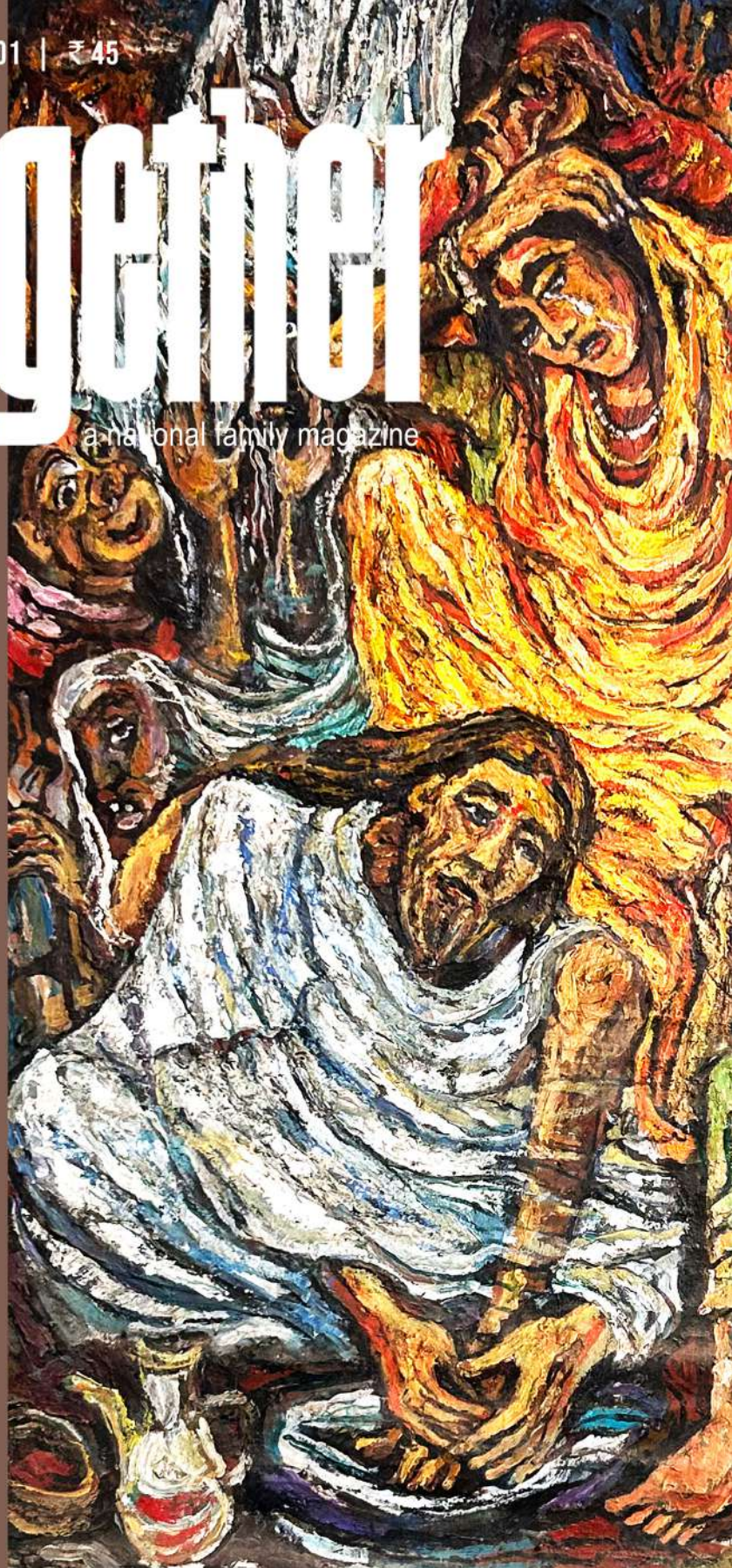
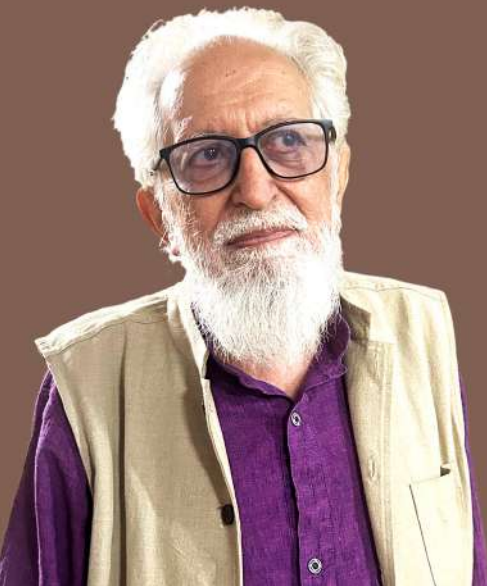
a national family magazine

**16** The Healing Power  
of Art: A Pathway  
to Emotional and  
Cognitive Well-being

Dr George John

**10** “Art Is Dialogue”

An Interview with  
Dr Jyoti Sahi



**Together** is a national family magazine. It is a monthly, published by the Franciscans (OFM) in India. It was started in 1935 in Karachi, now in Pakistan. It got its present name in 1966.

The magazine **Together** is a conversation platform. Nothing changes until our families change. It is an effort at making worlds meet by bringing down fearful, pretentious and defensive walls. **Together** is a journey, an ever-expansive journey—from me to us, from us to all of us, and from all

of us to all. Let us talk, let us cross borders. The more we converse and traverse, we discover even more paths to talk about and travel together. **Together** is an effort to uncover our shared humanity.

Your critical and relevant write-ups, that promote goodness, inclusivity and shared humanity, are welcome. Your articles must be mailed to [editor@togethermagazine.in](mailto:editor@togethermagazine.in) before the 15th of every month.

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**EDITORIAL**

08

**2025 Must Create Its Own Art**

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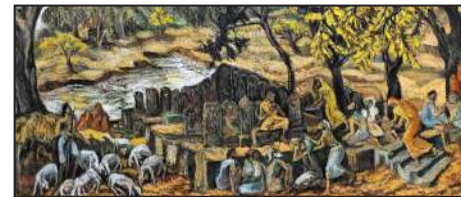


**COVER STORY**

10

**For Me Art Is Dialogue: An Interview with Dr Jyoti Sahi**

Saji P Mathew OFM



16

**The Healing Power of Art: A Pathway to Emotional and Cognitive Well-being**

Dr George John

**DECEMBER TOGETHER**

19

**“A Feeling Is Just a Feeling”**

Arshia Chidambaram

22

**Gossips: Good, Bad and Ugly**

Leo Antony

24

**Election Campaign: Battle Field of Undemocratic Acts**

Gerry Lobo OFM

32

**Always the Muse, Never the Artist: The Non-existent Film Industry of Kashmir**

Rakhshaan Shamoodah

42

**Forgiveness**

Bobby Jose, Capuchin

04

**15 Reasons Behind the What, Why, and How of It All**

Sumit Dasgupta



27

**From an Imperial City to the Cathedral City**

Saji Salkalachen



40

**SHORT STORY**

**Achu's Amma**

Joseph Joyson (Jo) OFM Cap



38

**TELEVISION**

**10 Best International and Local Web Series in 2024**

Nikhil Banerjee

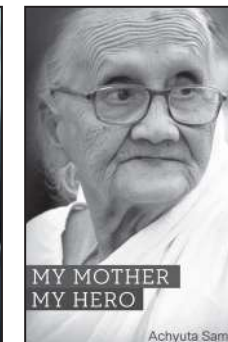


36

**BOOKS**

**The Story Behind the First Smart Village in India**

Dr Venkatappaiah & Dr Ramakrishna



34

**CINEMA**

**10 Must Watch Indian Films of 2024**

Nithin G Tom



30

**MUSIC**

**Top 10 Best-Selling Music Albums of All Time**

Kapil Arambam



# 2024

## 15 Reasons Behind the What, Why, and How of It All

SUMIT DASGUPTA

The year 2024 has felt unusually long—perhaps due to fatigue or the relentless sociopolitical chaos stretching time like bad chewing gum. Over 8,760 hours, post-pandemic life has become oddly peculiar—or maybe we're just more aware of it now.

As the year ends, people fall into three camps: optimists excited for 2025, pessimists counting down to say good riddance, and those muddling through in denial. To make sense of the madness, we turn to what always works—a list. Not to rank events or assign cosmic meaning, but simply to recount the moments that defined the year's vibe.

Lists bring structure to chaos, and everyone loves them. So, without further ado, here's a summary of 2024's noteworthy events. Let's dive in!

### 1. Uttarakhand Welcomes UCC

In February, the Uttarakhand Legislative Assembly became the first in India to pass the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) bill—a move hailed as groundbreaking (or not, depending on whom you ask). CM Pushkar Singh Dhama declared the UCC will fully roll out by 2025, though only time will tell. The deeply intellectual (read: dictatorial) bill aims to enforce common laws on marriage, divorce,



Uttarakhand CM Pushkar Singh Dhama declared the UCC will fully roll out by 2025. (Photo: NDTV)

property, and inheritance for all citizens, excluding Scheduled Tribes.

That's not all—if you're in a live-in relationship, you'll need to register it within a month of the law taking effect—or cough up a ₹10,000 fine. Landlords and housing societies hiding unregistered couples could face penalties too. Romance in Uttarakhand just got very bureaucratic.

### 2. Conflicts and Tensions Continue

**Israel-Palestine Conflict:** The conflict between Israel and Palestine, spanning seven decades, has been marked by multiple wars, including those in 2008, 2012, 2014, and 2021. Israel's war on Gaza has claimed over 45,000 lives, including 17,000 children, according to Gaza's Ministry of Health. The grim toll, announced mid-December, comes 14 months into the conflict and excludes 11,000 missing Palestinians believed to be buried under rubble.

**Manipur Remains Tense:** Manipur has been facing ethnic violence between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities, leading to over 250 deaths and displacing at least 60,000 people since May 2023. Displaced individuals are enduring squalid conditions in relief camps, with limited prospects for return due to ongoing threats. Sporadic gunfights, curfews, general strikes and internet bans have been recurring frequently.



An Israeli strike killed five Palestinian journalists outside a hospital in the Gaza Strip overnight, the Health Ministry said on 26 December 2024 (Photo: Reuters)

**1,000 Days of Ukraine War:** The war in Ukraine raged on for the third consecutive year since its genesis in February 2022. Talks of a possible peace deal kept cropping up intermittently throughout the year, with both Moscow and Kyiv agreeing to India acting as the mediator, but there appear to be no signs of that as the year ends, and Ukraine goes into winter with a severely debilitated power infrastructure.

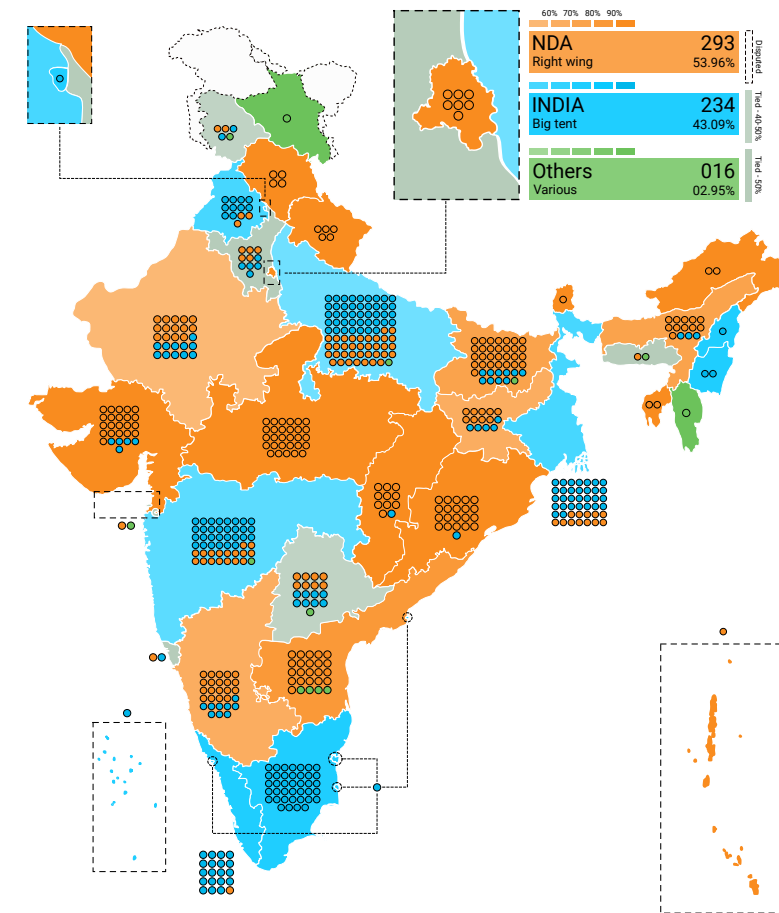
**Turmoil in Bangladesh:** Sheikh Hasina Wazed, Bangladesh's five-term prime minister, flees the country amid mass protests against her government. Several days later Muhammad Yunus, a Nobel laureate, becomes the country's interim leader.

### 3. Indian General Elections

Prime Minister Narendra Modi secured a third term on June 4, but the BJP, with 240 seats, fell 32 short of the 272-seat majority, relying on allies for support. The BJP-led NDA claimed 286 seats, while the Congress-led INDIA bloc secured 231, with Congress improving to 99 seats from 52 in 2019. If you're thinking, this was to be expected and Modi/BJP has a huge following, then you would be wrong. This election showed the BJP that their grip over the country is slowly slipping. The populist propaganda of us versus them, totalitarian undertones and other typical markers you can find in right-wing ideology were not enough and for many good reasons. If this continues, tides may change next time general elections roll up, or they may not.



Indian players celebrate with the T20 World Cup trophy, Bridgetown, Barbados, June 29, 2024. (Photo: Reuters)



General elections were held in India from 19 April to 1 June 2024 in seven phases, to elect all 543 members of the Lok Sabha. The map is shaded according to the winning alliance's/party's vote share, with shades denoted in the legend above. (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

### 4. India Wins T20 World Cup

Suryakumar Yadav's brilliance in the final over secured India's T20 World Cup 2024 title in a nail-biting win over South Africa. Defending 16 runs, Hardik Pandya's full-toss was smashed by David Miller, seemingly for six. But Surya leapt, caught it mid-air, lobbed it back before crossing the boundary, and returned to complete an incredible catch—clinching India's victory in style.

### 5. The Biggest Scam of the Year

After years of secrecy, the Supreme Court's February 2024 ruling declared the electoral bonds scheme unconstitutional, forcing the SBI to disclose detailed records to the Election Commission. These revelations, now public, have exposed what investigative reports call India's biggest corruption



Illustration: The Reporters' Collective

scandal since independence. Introduced in 2018 by the Modi government, the scheme claimed to increase transparency in political funding. However, critics argued it legalised large-scale corruption, removed donation caps, and enabled foreign influence. Despite this, PM Modi defended the scheme during the 2024 elections, insisting

it curbed black money and brought transparency. Yet, the Supreme Court's findings reveal a starkly different story—one of opacity and unprecedented corruption in India's electoral system.

## 6. Olympic Games Paris 2024

The Paris 2024 (26 July – 11 August) was a meme goldmine. From Gojira's satanic-panic ceremony song to a pole vaulter losing a medal due to his "god-given gifts," it had it all. In sharp-shooting, South Korea's Kim Yeji channelled *The Matrix*, while Turkey's Yusuf Dikeç strolled in nonchalantly. Choe Daehan became a Gay Twitter icon, and Jiang Ranxin's pistol stare nailed "email annoyance." Australian breakdancer Raygun flopped hilariously, while Vinesh Phogat's Olympic dream ended after missing the weight limit by 100 grams, leading to her retirement. Algerian boxer Imane Khelif faced a gender controversy, sparking debates and celebrity comments.

### Top 10! 2024 Summer Olympics Medal Table

NOC*	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
United States	40	44	42	126
China	40	27	24	91
Japan	20	12	13	45
Australia	18	19	16	53
France	16	26	22	64
Netherlands	15	7	12	34
Great Britain	14	22	29	65
South Korea	13	9	10	32
Italy	12	13	15	40
Germany	12	13	8	33

PS: India managed to secure the 71st position with one silver and five bronze medals.

\*A National Olympic Committee (NOC) is a national constituent of the worldwide Olympic movement.



## 7. Bouncy Pork

Moo Deng—sounds like a dish, but it's 2024's viral sensation. This six-month-old pygmy hippo, whose name translates to "bouncy pork," has charmed the world with her playful antics, joyful squeals, and relaxed vibes. Videos of her carefree life have racked up millions of views globally. Moo Deng

is everywhere—on tops, hats, bath mats, and even your grandmother's sweater. She's the unexpected celebrity bringing joy to a chaotic year. Moo Deng: the star we can't live without.

## 8. Donald Trump Assassination Attempt

From a cute baby hippo let's move on to a geriatric Elephant. In a scene straight out of a political thriller, Donald Trump narrowly escaped an assassination attempt during a rally in Pennsylvania on July 13, 2024. The assailant, 20-year-old Thomas Crooks, fired eight shots, grazing Trump's ear and tragically killing an audience member before being subdued by the Secret Service. Ever the showman, Trump, bloodied but unfazed, reportedly yelled, "Fight! Fight! Fight!" before being whisked to the hospital.



Photo: Sky News

Hours later, he was back on his feet, continuing his campaign and eventually winning a second non-consecutive term. He is also now the new president of the States. To all the NRIs who love India, Modi, and Trump, hope you don't get deported.

## 9. Coldplay

Forget Green Day coming to India for the first time and the tickets are priced for IT dudes, influencers or CEOs, Coldplay is coming back to India, and chaos ensued. The band announced concerts in Mumbai (Jan 18, 19, and 20) and Ahmedabad (Jan 25 and 26), sparking a frenzy. BookMyShow crashed almost instantly when ticket sales opened, leaving over 11 lakh fans stranded in virtual queues. Within 20 minutes, day-two tickets were gone. Coldplay: 1, Internet: 0.

Coldplay will be bringing their critically acclaimed Music of the Spheres World Tour to India this month. The British band will perform at five concerts across two cities. (Photo: BBC)



## 10. Youngest Chess World Champion

Gukesh Dommaraju earlier this month became the youngest chess grandmaster by beating Ding Liren of China. At only 18 this makes Gukesh the second world champion after Viswanathan Anand, who won five titles before the current chess royalty Magnus Carlsen took it from him in 2013. There is now a viral video of Gukesh at the age of 11 saying that he wants to be the youngest world champion. He wins the hearts of Asian parents, nerds, Gen Z and alphas all alike.



## 11. All We Imagine as Light

Payal Kapadia was awarded the prestigious Grand Prix for her debut fiction feature film *All We Imagine As Light* at the 77th Cannes Film Festival. She is the first Indian woman to receive such an accolade. If you believe India's official submission for The Oscars, this movie was not representative of the cohesive nature of India and it was technically bad. Meanwhile, Christopher Nolan's *Oppenheimer* was the big winner at the Academy Awards, receiving seven Oscars, including for best picture.

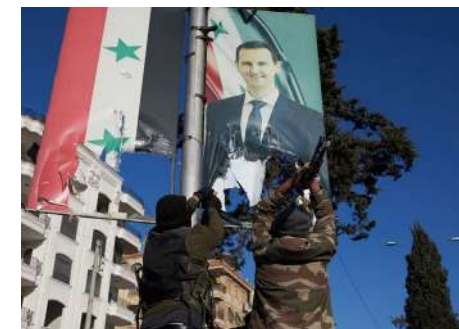


## 12. Fall of Assad

In a historic turn, opposition forces declared Syria free from President Bashar al-Assad, ending 53 years of al-Assad family rule. Assad reportedly fled to Moscow; his destination remains unknown. Nearly 14 years after peaceful protests spiraled into civil war, the decisive blow came on November 27, with Operation Deterrence of Aggression. Within three days, Aleppo fell to opposition forces, led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and a coalition of allied groups.

**From top to bottom:** Gukesh Dommaraju in action (Photo: PTI); *All We Imagine as Light* has dialogues in Malayalam, Hindi and Marathi (*The Mint*); Charli's brat energy is here to stay (*The Gauntlet*); Hanumankind is making global waves with his *Big Dawgs* (*Republic World*); and the July Wayanad landslides were the deadliest in Kerala's history (Wikimedia Commons).

**Right:** Syrian President Bashar al-Assad fled as insurgents claimed control of parts of Damascus. (*The Wall Street Journal*)



## 13. Brat Summer

Lime green is still thriving, thanks to Charli XCX's hit album *Brat*. Released on June 7, the high-energy dance-pop record has taken over pop culture, from underground clubs to crossword puzzles. Collins Dictionary even crowned *brat* as 2024's word of the year, defining it as "confident, independent, and hedonistic." The album, packed with themes like partying, Von Dutch, and womanhood, has sparked TikTok dances, marketing trends, and the so-called "brat summer." Safe to say, Charli's brat energy is here to stay.

## 14. Hanumankind on the Way

Indian rapper Sooraj Cherukat, aka Hanumankind, is making global waves with his track *Big Dawgs*. The hit single has cracked the Billboard Global 200 Top 10, even surpassing Kendrick Lamar's *Not Like US*. The August 24, 2024 chart places Hanumankind alongside global stars like Billie Eilish and Jimin. Released in July, *Big Dawgs* features producer Kalmi and a jaw-dropping music video shot inside a "Wall of Death," where cars and bikes defy gravity. Hanumankind's rise is anything but ordinary!

## 15. The Wayanad Landslides

It killed 230 people and 119 are still missing. It damaged 1,555 houses, 209 shops, two schools, and the list could go on. Three bridges were washed away and 626 hectares of agriculture was lost. The landslides, which occurred on in the early hours of 30 July, was one of the deadliest natural disasters in Kerala's history.

**Bottom Line:** The year 2024 was a whirlwind of events, from groundbreaking legislation and viral sensations to global conflicts and pop culture phenomena. It showcased resilience, absurdity, and contradictions of humanity, while blending moments of triumph with chaos and controversy. As we step into 2025, these stories remind us to stay curious, critical, and hopeful about what lies ahead in this ever-surprising journey.

# 2025 Must Create Its Own Art

SAJIP MATHEW OFM

**People are afraid of art, because real art brings the question and the answer into your house.**

Tonight's art becomes inadequate and useless when the sun rises in the morning. The mistake lies not in creating art for tonight, but in assuming tonight's answers will serve tomorrow's questions. Louise Bourgeois, a French American artist, reflected, "art is a guaranty of sanity;" but that guarantee must be renewed with each dawn, each cultural shift, and each evolution of human consciousness. If some art endures through generations, it is only because of its capacity to speak, its ability to demand fresh interpretations that test and challenge the new. To guarantee sanity in the coming year, 2025 must create its own art. Why create art? Why watch art? Why read literature? True art, in the words of Sunil P Ilayidam, shakes that which is rigid and unchangeable. Art serves as humanity's persistent earthquake, destabilising comfortable certainties and creating space for new ways of seeing, thinking, and being in the world. An artist's duty is to reflect the times, and we see this in works like Picasso's "Guernica," which shattered comfortable illusions about the glory of war, forcing viewers to confront its brutal reality. We are limited by culture, philosophy, ethnicity, value system, religion, and family. In each case, art serves as what philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche called "the hammer of the gods," breaking apart ossified structures of thought and feeling to make room for new possibilities.

Incidentally, 2024 was the 150th anniversary of Impressionism. In 1874, 30 artists, including Claude Monet and Paul Cézanne, staged the first Impressionism exhibition. They broke away from the academic traditions, and embraced modernity with all its vulnerabilities and humanness. They moved away from subjects like, glorified history, hyped religion and myth; instead focused on the fleeting moments of everyday existence; executed art with short, broken, and bold brushstrokes, used unblended colours, and articulated with the transient beauty of the sunlight. Art was not static and composed from a fixed perspective anymore—art moved. The Impressionists were questioned, ridiculed, and rejected as 'unfinished, vulgar, lacking structure, subversive' by the existing salons ruled by established academy artists and sponsored by the government. Impressionism art movement survived, more people began to frequent the galleries of impressionists than the traditional official salons; and eventually has become one of the most influential art movements in history—thus was the birth of modern art.

What was modern art declaring? In the opinion of Arnold Hauser, the author of *The Social History of Art*, it tried to say that truth and realities as we have known is trembling from its foundations.

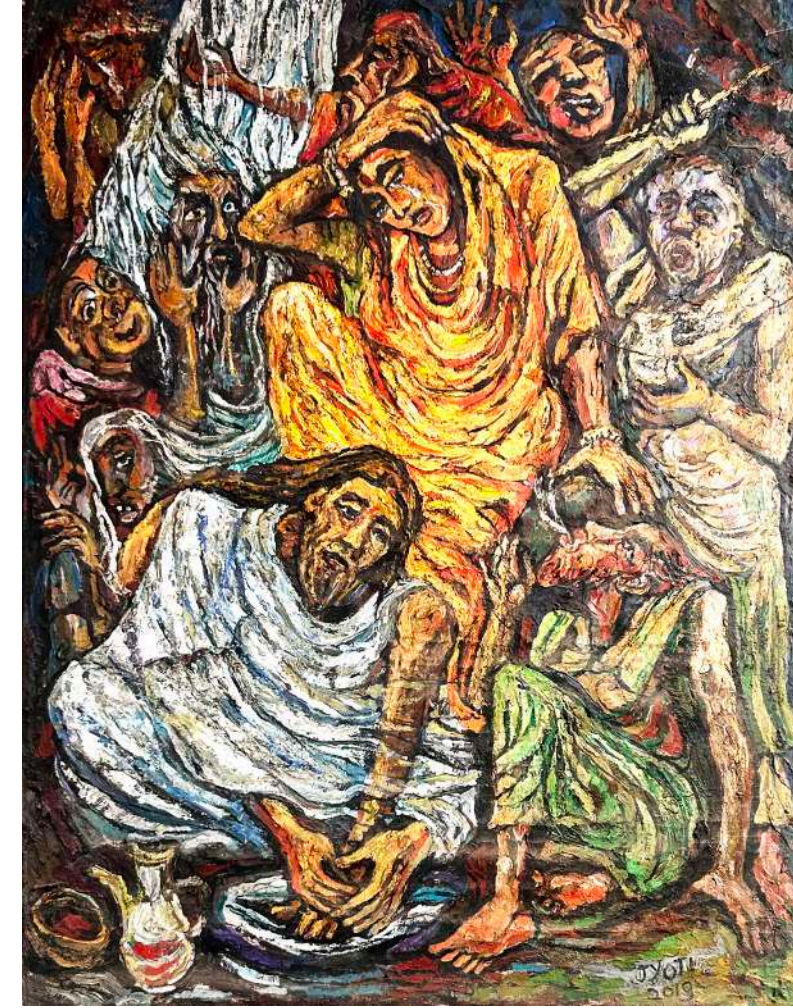
## Jesus Washing the Feet of a Woman Disciple

Jyoti Sahi

Even now the Church can't fully accept the fact that Jesus would have washed the feet of women. And the men around in the picture, whom the artist calls as navarasas (different moods and passions), are ill treating, mocking, and questioning both Jesus and the woman—one is spiting, another is hitting, one is hiding his face in shame, and so on. No church wanted this picture; they can't comprehend how it is Christian.

In the second half of the 19th century, in *Capital*, Karl Marx says, 'all that is solid melts into air'. What we thought as eternal will succumb to decay. TS Eliot borrows a nursery rhyme to say on a serious note in his *The Waste Land*, 'The London Bridge is falling down'. However big or stable something would seem, in the words of WB Yeats, 'things fall apart'. Modernism eventually becomes postmodernism with its watchword, relativism. Nothing is permanent, everything is changing; and even what you see at this fleeting moment exists in relation to culture, society, and historical context; and not absolute.

People are afraid of serious art, for it speaks to their ultimate depths. While visiting the art ashram of Jyoti Sahi, he extensively engaged me with stories, narratives, and meaning of numerous works of art. As we moved from one painting to another we came across a painting portraying *Jesus washing the feet of a woman disciple*. Jyoti Sahi almost moved on, not wanting to say much about it; but commented that nobody would want



such art in their chapels or churches; for it would constantly challenge patriarchy and colonial religion.

Art in 2025 must challenge majoritarian and religious fundamentalism, Hindutva nationalism, fascism, crony capitalism, erosion of democracy, environmental and climate change, gender inequality, caste discrimination, and, on a personal front, mental illness.

Creating art looks foolish to the nationalist, capitalist, patriarchal society—it is a very dangerous game. It is like discussing colour with someone who is colour-blind. It is a real challenge; more and more in most conservative and rigid businesses and establishments people do not encourage art, lest they be challenged and forced to change. People are afraid of art, because real art brings the question and the answer into your house.

# FOR ME ART IS DIALOGUE



Through his masterful synthesis of Indian artistic traditions and Christian spirituality, **Dr Jyoti Sahi** (born 1944) has emerged as one of the most influential artists of contemporary India, creating works that bridge cultural divides and invite interfaith dialogue. He has redefined Indian Christian art by grounding it in local traditions and earth-based aesthetics, earning him the moniker ‘the theologian with the brush.’ Few artists have done more to indigenise Christian art in India than Jyoti Sahi, whose work seamlessly weaves together Hindu symbolic language with Christian themes to create a uniquely Indian expression of spirituality. With his versatile mastery in visual art and architectural design, there are numerous churches and chapels bearing his distinctive aesthetic vision. Since founding the Art Ashram at Silvepura near Bangalore in 1972, Jyoti Sahi has not only produced a remarkable body of visual work but also authored numerous influential articles and books exploring the intersection of art, theology, and culture, cementing his legacy as a leading figure in contemporary Indian Christian art. Jyoti and Jane (his wife) promote Peace and Education through Art.

After a long drive from the hustle and bustle of the city, we, **Mathew Joseph** and **Saji Mathew**, reached the art ashram. Inside, children from the neighboring government school gathered for lessons with Jane, their voices mingling with the patter of raindrops. Dr Sahi welcomed us warmly, leading the way to his studio—a sanctuary filled with completed works and pieces still emerging. As we wound our way through this visual labyrinth, we settled into a corner of the studio, ready to begin our conversation amid the artwork that surrounded us.



**SM:** In your paintings, there is a lot of colours that are very earthy: brown, pastel, kind of a mix, and other such hues. Could you say something about your colour palette?

**JS:** I use the earth. I take mud and mix it with gum. I, along with my son Roshan, made a collection of different coloured earths in the land near our art ashram. We managed to find seven colours of earth. I have been interested in the ideas and art of the Goan Christian artist Angelo da Fonseca (1902–67). He used to mix earth with gum and paint with these earth colours. He used the earth as a way of painting and aesthetic founded on the land (*swadeshi*). Fonseca was influenced by Rabindranath Tagore and Nandalal Bose. Nandalal Bose used to get his students to mix earth colours for their paintings and wall murals. These are quiet and meditative colours. I like the idea of contemplative images based on the moods of the earth over which I paint using brighter acrylic colours.

**SM:** What is Christian art? Is there anything distinctly called ‘Indian Christian art’?

**JS:** I have taught in schools, colleges, theological seminaries, and various Protestant institutions. In 1978, a Protestant group called the Christian Council of Asia (CCA), brought together Asian artists who had been inspired by Biblical themes. This Asian art was published as a book, *Christian Art in Asia*. Dr. Masao Takenaka, a Japanese theologian, photographed my paintings along with the work of other artists from Asian countries. About forty Asian artists were invited in 1978 to a meeting in an ashram in Bali in Indonesia. Out of that meeting an inter-denominational and cultural organisation was initiated called the Asian Christian Art Association.

## Shakuntala

*Jyoti Sahi*

It is the story about the king Dusyanta, who went on a hunting expedition in a forest where he was chasing a deer. The deer ran into an ashram; which was a forest sanctuary, where the deer could not be killed. It is in this Ashram that the king discovered Shakuntala. The king finds the woman who is part of the landscape/forest; and he wants to possess her, but she does not want to be possessed.

Both of these associations are not functioning now.

Many artists who were part of these associations were not linked to any Christian denomination. Several of the artists were Buddhists or Hindus or secular artists. Dr Masao Takenaka, clarified that ‘Christian Art’ could be understood



## Christ the Dancer

Jyoti Sahi

In the Acts of John, at the last supper Jesus asked the disciples to dance with him, for he is the Lord of Dance. Jesus dances and steps over, passes over the river. It is a redemptive dance. The 'Lord of the Dance' or 'Nataraja' in the Shaivite tradition, is the Creator who is both a giver of life, but also a destroyer of all that stops us from being set free.

as art drawing from Biblical themes, concerned with human justice and our relation to God's Creation. Early Indian Christian Ashrams were part of a reaction, often coming from lay people who felt unhappy with the way institutional Churches functioned, being linked to colonialism. Christian ashrams helped to involve those anxious to express Gospel values linked to a freedom movement that both Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi were involved with.

**SM: So the Christian ashram movement was a parallel movement along with the Indian Independence movement from colonial rule?**

Yes. That was the beginning over a hundred years ago. In Kerala, Sadhu Matthias began by saying that Christianity should follow the Gospel, which was

not what the colonial Churches did. He was critical of the structured Churches. After Independence, Nationalism took over. Nationalism also uses religion, as colonialism did in the past, to legitimise what was being done politically. Today we observe that many ashrams have been taken over by the political agenda of Hindutva. Hindutva is suspicious of Christian ashrams. Christian ashrams fall between colonial Christianity on the one side, and a religious Nationalism known as Hindutva on the other side. Christian Ashrams have been criticised as having a hidden agenda to convert Hindus to Christianity. A number of Indian Christians have felt that Ashrams are a way to make the Church in India more Hindu. That, I feel, is why the Christian ashram movement has faced various misunderstandings from both Indian Christians, and Hindus.

**SM: What is your concept of Ashram?**

JS: One of the earliest classical Indian dramas that describes life in an ashram is to be found in the story of Shakuntala which is told in the Mahabharata, but dramatised by the great Indian poet Kalidasa in around the 4th Century of our Common Era. It is the story about the king Dusyanta, who went on a hunting expedition in a forest where he was chasing a deer. The deer ran into an ashram; which was a forest sanctuary, where the deer could not be killed. It is in this Ashram that the king discovered Shakuntala, who had been adopted by a sage living in the Ashram, as she had been abandoned as a baby in a stream flowing near the Ashram.

Ancient ashrams in India were associated with what is termed a shramanic tradition in Indian spirituality, linked to an ascetic life of renouncers similar to what developed as the monastic life in early Christianity. This approach to spirituality was different from the Brahmanic approach that was more concerned with rituals. The Shramanic movement of dwellers in the forest, gave birth to Jainism and Buddhism, that are more focused on an inner transformation of the heart.



Rabindranath Tagore conceived of Santiniketan as a modern way of thinking about an ashram which led to his approach to education, and what he called a "Vishwa Bharati" or 'Culture of the Universe'. Gandhiji first visited Santiniketan in 1915, soon after he returned to India from South Africa. He was impressed by the idea of an Indian Ashram that he found at Santiniketan, and he later decided to start his own Ashram in Gujarat. This was followed by other Ashram experiments following Gandhi's approach to an Ashram which he felt could be the place where his idea of sarvodaya (development of all) could transform the life of rural India. Mahatma Gandhi related his notion of Savodaya to what he called the anthyodaya (development of all those who are last). Jesus said that in so far as his followers worked for the least of their brethren, they did this service to Christ himself. It was this ideal of living in harmony with those who are close to the earth, that became the guiding idea behind Christian Ashrams which were started around 1920.

**SM: You have said that the Indian Christian ashram movement is on a decline; do you find a decline also in Indian Christian art?**

JS: I am one of the few Indian artists working full time on Christian themes as a way to dialogue with Hindu symbols and culture. I have been involved with the designing of windows and other features in the cathedral that was built in Varanasi in 1992. It was in this year that the Babri Masjid was demolished.

## Jesus the Living Water / Water of Life

Jyoti Sahi

Originally done as a painting on cloth as part of Misereor's Hunger Tuch (towel/veil) project in 1982; now it is being recreated.

Portrays biblical persons and events—woman at the well, healing the blind man, linked to Moses striking the rock, Mary weeping for her brother. Sadhu Sunder Singh said, 'I want the water of life, but I want it in Indian vessel. these people have come with Indian vessels to collect water. Kabir said, there are different types of vessels but the water is the same.

Unfortunately the cathedral was built on a large scale, with space for 250 priests to concelebrate in the sanctuary on important feast days like Christmas. The result is that this building is an imposing structure visible from the Railway station as people arrive in this holy city.

I was not happy that the Cathedral was so big. Designing the large windows for the Cathedral was an important Church commission for me in those days. However, after the events of 1992 when the Babri Masjid was broken down in Ayodhya, not far from Varanasi, the Christian community in India began to feel nervous about a majoritarian ethos in Hindu nationalism. The whole idea of dialogue between Christians and Hindu forms of popular culture, began to be seen by Christians in a negative light. Subsequently the kind of artistic work that I had been involved with for the Indian Church, became problematic. This led to my decision to work in a secular educational project called Srishiti in Bengaluru, where Indian approaches of design are taught to students interested in arts and crafts.

Srishti is a secular venture. Among the young people who come to study at this school of art and design, most come from a Hindu cultural background. The founder of this design school knew that I had been involved with religious art and the role of visual art forms in creating a culture of exchange and inter-religious understanding. I have always been interested in a dialogue between Hindu and Christian approaches to the spiritual in art, because my father was brought up in a reformed Hindu tradition, and my mother who was British, was very much involved with her Christian Faith. My parents met in 1936 as teachers in an experimental school in Udaipur, in Rajasthan. All my Indian relatives are Hindus. My Indian grandfather, after retiring as a forest officer, became a sannyasi. From my childhood I felt very concerned with the inter-relation of Christian and Hindu forms of spirituality.

There are Christians who have wondered whether I am not a proper practicing Christian, as many of the symbols that I use appear more Hindu than Christian. However, I feel that artistic forms of expression can be an important way of inter-faith dialogue. On one occasion when my paintings were exhibited in Germany, a priest from Poland asked me, “How many Hindus have you converted to Christianity through your art?” I was very surprised by this question, as I have never thought of my artwork as a way of trying to convert anyone to become a member of any Church. According to the Polish priest it seemed I was an artistic failure, as he thought Christian art should be concerned with conversion. I did say on this occasion that I have a personal sense of mission in the art that I do. For me, the mission of art is to cross boundaries, and help Indian Christians to engage more positively with the spiritual traditions that have given rise to Indian art. For me, conversion is an inner path of sharing my Faith with people of other Faiths, or those who do not profess to have any Faith. My effort is not to convert others, but rather to experience through my art, an inner conversion that is open to people of other Faiths. I believe that conversion is about this inner process of accepting and including others. I find that this approach to the Mission of art is what many Christians find difficult to understand, as a form of religious fundamentalism is increasingly focused on building walls that separate communities rather than on making bridges that try to connect cultures.

**SM: What is your take on art generally, and in the Indian context, its capacity to cross boundaries and arrive at a more inclusive space?**

JS: For me, the teaching of Jesus that we find in his ‘Sermon on the Mount’, was about a rejection of violence, and the use of political and social power. I believe that this approach to spirituality explains why many artists have been drawn to the life and culture of St. Francis of Assisi. St. Francis tried to have a dialogue with Muslim leaders in Egypt. He wanted to bring about a peaceful



end to the Crusades. He was interested in finding common ground between those searching for Truth; and was against using the Christian Faith as a way of overpowering other religious traditions.

There are Hindus who question the approach of Rabindranath Tagore who wanted a “Vishwa Bharati” or Universal Culture. Rabindranath Tagore criticised Gandhi’s political ideas which he felt might confuse nationalism with religious identity. Tagore believed that Hinduism is not a nationalist belief system, but is essentially an inclusive spirituality.

Art is a sadhana. Sadhana is spiritual search. Art is connected with satsang, the old name for ashrams. This community of Truth seekers is essentially ecumenical. Anybody who is searching for truth can be a member of an ashram.

### Mary as the Dalit Mother

Jyoti Sahi

This image echoes the Indian folk symbol of the grinding stone, found in every traditional home. This has two parts. The larger “Mother Stone” is fixed and stable, whilst the smaller “Baby Stone” moves to grind foodstuffs on the Mother Stone. Relating Mary and Jesus to this symbol links the bond between them to the preparation of daily bread on the grinding stone so we can think of it when saying “Give us this day our daily bread”. The word, Bethlehem means house of bread. Dalit means broken, regarded as low caste or untouchable.

One of the important theological statements on art is a book by Jacques Maritain, entitled ‘Art and Scholasticism’. What did art mean to the scholastics who followed St Thomas Aquinas? Art, they taught, is the ‘radiance of beauty’. Art should be an expression of goodness and beauty. This approach to art has influenced many Christian artists. Art is about truth, goodness, and beauty. Art ‘calls’ us, as the Greek word *kalos* (meaning beauty) implies a kind of calling. The radiance that we understand as beauty attracts us.

My art is of interest to people who are trained in theology. The way to my art is through theology. If you don’t have theology, you only have pretty pictures. Once when I was giving a talk at a national centre, someone put up his hand and asked me, “why do you paint such ugly pictures?” I said, I am trying my best; but what do you mean by ugly, what do you mean by beauty? Beauty is not pretty. In German they call it kitsch, meaning, in the context of art, just pretty, worthless, and not having depth. When they come to India they ask why are your churches full of kitsch? We have thrown them out of our churches long ago; it is the art that the colonials have brought into India, and it does not have any deep theology in it.

**SM: You began your work as an artist, over five decades ago. When you look at your own art journey, how has your art evolved in terms of its content and form?**

JS: I haven’t changed from the original idea that drew me to work as an artist. Perhaps my present change of direction has been that formerly I was very much involved with the institutional Church. Now I find that more difficult. My wife, Jane and I have always been attracted to the Charles De Foucauld group. For them the idea of the hidden early life of Jesus, when he worked with his father as a carpenter in Nazareth, has been the basis for a working and socially engaged spirituality.

We have been very troubled by what is happening in Palestine and the way that politicised Zionists are trying to destroy Palestine. The ideology of Zionism cannot be equated with the Jewish Prophetic tradition that we find in the Bible, any more than a Hindu nationalism ought to be equated with the spirituality of Hinduism.

**SM: What is the greatest challenge that you have faced as an artist?**

JS: The artistic culture of India has often been co-opted by a narrow religious nationalism. Art must not become a means to legitimise Nationalism or Colonialism. The colonialists were interested in a kind of socially engineered conversion, serving the purposes of those intent on colonising Indian culture. The art that Western powers introduced was a colonial art that promoted the art of Europe, which was considered to be the only authentic Christian art.

**SM: How do you reconcile the ideas ‘art for art’s sake’ and ‘art is for truth, goodness, and beauty’?**

JS: “Art for art’s sake” came from an intellectual position that art should not be used for the purposes of propaganda. Gandhi said that if people become Christians simply for political reasons, this was not true spiritual conversion. Gandhi was inspired by the book of Tolstoy entitled, ‘The Kingdom of God is Within You.’ Conversion should come from an inner change of heart. Ambedkar thought at one time of becoming a Christian, as Christianity offered an alternative to a social system dominated by caste. But then Ambedkar realised that Christianity in India was too much aligning to Western colonial powers. So he decided to become a Buddhist. Buddhism has influenced many forms of art in Asian culture.

**SM: Moving away from what we were speaking of so far, we are now in the age of Artificial Intelligence. Perhaps one of the areas that will be hit hardest would be on creativity in art. What is your take on this?**

JS: Institutions and organisations are rewarding people’s capacity to use Artificial Intelligence. The proper name for what is termed Artificial Intelligence, would be Information Technology. Modern ways of storing data is the basis for the Information revolution that we are seeing today.

Intelligence, on the other hand, should be creative. The creative imagination brings together the conscious and the unconscious mind. Much of what we understand as the imagination comes from the Unconscious. The Unconscious is drawn on by the conscious mind through meditation. This process is very different from our scientific and technological access to data, which is what Artificial Intelligence is all about.



# The Healing Power of Art: A Pathway to Emotional and Cognitive Well-being

Dr GEORGE JOHN



## A Tribal Creation Myth

Jyoti Sahi

Light came down from the Tree of Light into the womb of mother earth. The Kashi tribe was born out of it.

Art has been an integral part of human civilisation since the Palaeolithic period, shaping culture and influencing the course of history. Beyond its aesthetic appeal, art has the profound ability to heal, transcend barriers, and connect deeply with the human spirit. It is more than just decoration—it plays a pivotal role in mending emotional wounds, fostering resilience, and contributing to psychological well-being. In today's complex world, art's role in mental wellness has never been more essential.

### The Evolution of Creative Capacity: Why Humans Make Art

Human creativity is an extraordinary force, although its expression varies widely. From celebrated figures like Picasso and Einstein to those less artistically inclined, all individuals can derive immense psychological benefits from engaging with art. Anthropologists suggest that art served as a key communication tool for early humans, facilitating social cohesion, survival, and cultural development.

The creative impulse appears to be innate in humans, transcending time and cultures. From prehistoric cave paintings to contemporary digital creations, art is a fundamental human need—expressing emotions, sharing experiences, and creating community. This universal drive highlights that art is not just an aesthetic luxury but a crucial element of our collective journey.



### Art and Neuroscience:

#### The Brain's Response to Creativity

Scientific research shows that art has a direct impact on the brain, triggering increases in neurotransmitters like dopamine and serotonin. Professor Semir Zeki's work in neuroaesthetics reveals that viewing art increases blood flow to brain regions associated with pleasure, producing responses akin to love and attachment. This effect is universal, transcending cultural and personal preferences, and suggests that art is a unique and powerful tool for promoting well-being.

Engaging with art fosters neuroplasticity, the brain's ability to reorganise itself and form new neural connections. Simple activities like drawing or colouring can improve cognitive functions, including memory, problem-solving, and attention. Creative engagement strengthens cognitive flexibility and emotional balance, promoting brain health and resilience throughout life.

Research also shows that artistic activities can help maintain cognitive function in aging populations, delaying the onset of dementia and promoting emotional well-being. Art not only enhances cognitive flexibility but also fosters greater emotional and mental resilience, making it an invaluable tool for navigating life's challenges.

### The Teacher

Jyoti Sahi

It is a local sacred place where a teacher, rather like the Buddha, is teaching his disciples near the sacred Aswatha tree, which is thought to be a tree of wisdom. It connects to the Sermon on the Mount, and to the good shepherd.

**EVERY CHILD IS AN ARTIST. THE PROBLEM IS HOW TO REMAIN AN ARTIST ONCE WE GROW UP.**

**PABLO PICASSO**

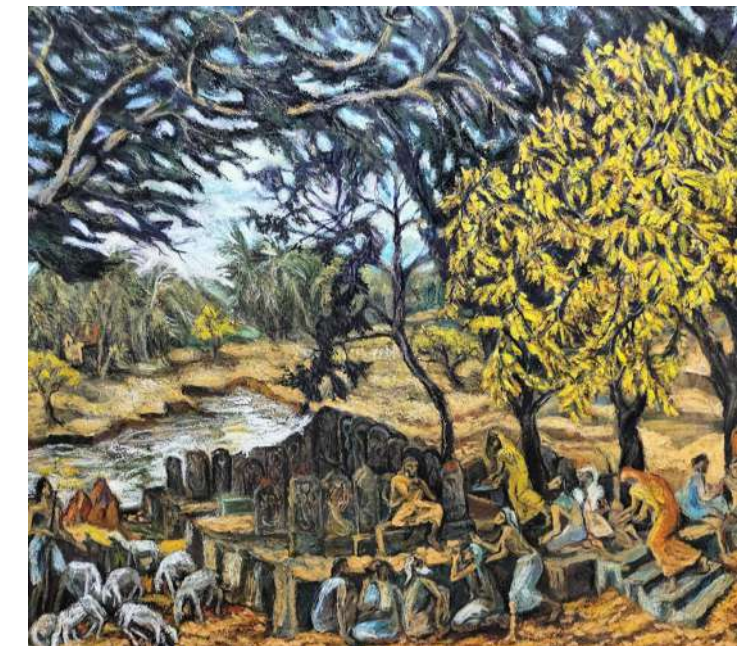
### Art as Therapy: Healing the Mind and Soul

Art therapy has become a significant tool in psychiatric and psychological treatment. The American Art Therapy Association defines it as using art to improve mental, emotional, and physical well-being. This therapeutic approach helps individuals resolve conflicts, build self-esteem, and manage behavior.

For those suffering from trauma or mental illness, art often serves as a vital medium for expressing emotions that are otherwise difficult to articulate. Art therapy provides a non-invasive, accessible, and transformative alternative for those who struggle with verbal expression. It encourages deeper exploration of the mind, offering a healing path for individuals who might be reluctant to seek traditional forms of therapy.

### The Integration of Art in Healthcare

Historically, art and healing were intertwined, with ancient cultures using music and visual art for therapeutic purposes. Over time, Western medicine shifted focus to scientific practices, but art is regaining its place within healthcare. The UK's "social prescribing" initiative allows doctors to prescribe art and music activities as treatments for various health conditions. Evidence suggests these interventions improve mental and physical well-being and provide cost-effective alternatives to traditional medical treatments.



Art therapy has been particularly successful in managing the needs of individuals with conditions like Alzheimer's disease, chronic pain, and stroke recovery. In palliative care, art offers patients and families comfort and meaning during end-of-life care. Studies show that art-based interventions can also enhance communication skills in patients with neurological conditions and alleviate anxiety, creating holistic pathways to recovery.

### Awe and the Healing Power of Beauty

Experiencing awe through art can profoundly impact health. Awe arises when we encounter something vast and extraordinary, and studies indicate that awe-inspiring experiences can reduce stress, lower inflammation, and boost immune function. These physiological effects promote healing and foster emotional well-being.

Art provides countless opportunities to experience awe, from breathtaking landscapes to intricate sculptures. These moments of awe remind us of our shared humanity, inspiring compassion, and offering profound psychological shifts. Engaging with awe-inspiring art helps individuals reframe challenges, rekindle hope, and embrace possibilities.

### Art in Education and Social Healing

Art not only heals individuals but also has the power to positively impact communities. Research by Eric Jensen shows that arts education nourishes cognitive, sensory, and emotional systems, forming the foundation for learning. Programs like The Big Draw and the Young Artists Programme demonstrate art's capacity to bridge social divides, fostering creativity and collaboration.

In medical education, art appreciation enhances observational skills and empathy, preparing healthcare professionals to connect with patients on a deeper level. These programs contribute to more compassionate and effective healthcare practices by integrating creativity into professional training.

Public art projects also have a significant social impact, transforming communi-

ties and promoting cultural understanding. By fostering collaboration and dialogue, art becomes a powerful tool for community healing and development.

### The Future of Art in Healing

As technology advances, new forms of artistic expression and therapeutic applications continue to emerge. Virtual reality and digital art therapy tools offer innovative ways to engage with art, potentially expanding its therapeutic reach. Research in neuroscience and psychology will likely further uncover the connections between artistic engagement and well-being, leading to more integrated approaches to healthcare and mental wellness.

As awareness of mental health issues grows and stigma diminishes, the role of art in healing will become even more vital. The therapeutic potential of art to reduce anxiety, enhance cognitive function, and foster emotional resilience offers a promising path forward for mental health treatment.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, art is not just a medium of expression—it is a bridge to understanding, a balm for the soul, and a catalyst for healing. From improving cognitive abilities to enhancing emotional well-being, art's transformative power reaches across physical, emotional, and social boundaries. Its ability to heal, inspire, and connect makes it an invaluable tool in our pursuit of holistic well-being.

As Leo Tolstoy noted, "Art is the activity by which a person, having experienced an emotion, intentionally transmits it to others." This transmission of emotion, in all its forms, is what gives art its transformative power. It connects us to each other and to the deepest parts of ourselves, making it an indispensable element of human life and healing.

Let us embrace art as a salve for our individual wounds, a bond for fractured societies, and a light that guides us through the darkest of times. Art is the path to healing, and it is through art that we can find peace, resilience, and hope.



## "A Feeling Is Just a Feeling"

**Shangreila Sharma** is a psychotherapist with expertise in anxiety, addiction, and depression. Her approach to psychology and psychotherapy has deeply intrigued me, **Arshia Chidambaram**. Her inspiring work experience and unwavering desire to improve lives have significantly boosted my motivation as a student of psychology. Unlike many psychologists who focus on reducing negative emotions, she encourages individuals to confront painful memories and face their fears of unpleasant feelings, rather than avoiding them. This fearless approach truly stood out to me. Her words, "A feeling is just a feeling; why should we give it so much value and power over us?" left a lasting impact. Here is my conversation with her.

### Arshia Chidambaram: How does growing up in an alcoholic or dysfunctional family shape an individual's emotional and psychological development in adulthood?

*Shangreila Sharma:* Children can be exposed to elements of family dysfunction in the form of drama, which could be violence, episodes of haranguing, or fights. Although they are not capable of completely comprehending these situations, evidence suggests their emotional and psychological development is severely impacted. In the preverbal

stage, if children are deprived of food and security, they may become very avoidant or anxiously attached to either one or both parents. Similarly, during puberty, a lack of parental support may cause teenagers to socially withdraw, due to their identity issues, which stem from a lack of understanding of these unfamiliar biological and social issues. In the case of an "only child," the lack of parental support often drives the child toward self-sufficient behaviour, making them self-focused and, at times, forcing them to take on a parental role for their parents. This is a well-known concept in psychology called 'parentification.'

In some situations, parents later change their behaviour into being more role model-like. This causes more conflict, as reversing a child's set behavioural patterns after the age of eight is nearly impossible. Children from such families tend to exhibit either dominant, submissive traits or both of these traits. Dominant children show characteristics that involve a superiority complex or oppressive behaviour, whereas submissive children exhibit people-pleasing behaviour or extreme responsibility. The thought framework that such children have is one of mistrust. This makes communication a problem, as they refuse to share their vulnerability, which later harms their ability to be emotionally intimate in friendships and relationships.



Shangreila Sharma is a psychotherapist with expertise in anxiety, addiction, and depression.



**AC: What are some of the most common patterns of behaviour or coping mechanisms you see in adult children of alcoholics (ACoA) or those raised in dysfunctional families?**

SS: The most common behavioural pattern is avoidance. It is a result of denial as a defense mechanism. There is a four part rule that is commonly used while treating adult children, which is; don't talk, don't trust, don't feel, and don't remember. Invariably, when I have spoken to adult children, I find they do not have clear childhood memories. On a timeline, these periods, which they have forgotten or cannot clearly remember, are periods where there was extreme trauma or chaos at home. And so their body's ability to remember the good times they might have had in school is overshadowed by the trauma they faced at home thus, they do not have clear memories of their childhood. This leads to a further disconnection from the parents.

**AC: In your experience, what role does shame play in the lives of adult children of alcoholics, and how can it be addressed in therapy or support groups?**

SS: When shame is a paramount emotion, the child develops psychosomatic issues. Shame becomes the primary thought that drives outward behaviour. Shame is invariably accompanied by guilt. Both these emotions evoke thoughts of self-deficit, low self-worth and self-blame, leading the individual to believe they are not deserving of happiness and therefore should not engage in

activities they enjoy. This prevents people from participating completely in life.

These thoughts of self-deficit and self-blame often lead to overcompensating behavior, and are driven by justifications like, 'If I do better, they will start loving me.' This overcompensation can manifest as rescuing others, including the very family that causes these negative thoughts. Unfortunately, because we cannot control or save other people, these efforts often result in further rejection and dissatisfaction. This, in turn, creates a never-ending cycle of shame.

Addressing shame involves a root cause analysis in therapy, which is based mainly on remembrance. This is induced by looking at paper, at photographs or reading clippings from newspapers from that time and has to be done under a very carefully controlled, environment so that it does not trigger a negative emotion. It involves bringing the inner-self out, and showing them that they don't need to do anything to deserve a place in this life. They deserve because they are human beings.

There's a document in ACA (adult children of alcoholics), which is called the Bill of Rights; have them read it over and over again. It states that it's okay to, be yourself. It is okay to say I don't know. It's okay to say I don't want to know. It's okay to do your own thing, and it's okay not to help people when you don't want to. These affirmations, supported by a lot of self-talk, and listening will not fix or eliminate shame but will help people cope with it better.

**AC: Can you explain how the concept of "family roles" often found in dysfunctional families, persist into adulthood?**

SS: There are a few family roles that children adopt in order to cope with the chaos in dysfunctional families, which only further evolves during adulthood. A hero child represents early parentification and the role of taking on all the tasks in order to rescue the family. They take the responsibility to look after the home and will be good in school. They will be the general quintessential good kid that everybody wants. However, this is maladaptive, and can cause dissociative behaviour, as they feel there is nothing more to their identity than these roles.

A scapegoat is the glue of the family, they often find themselves fixing every situation to maintain peace. This often involves taking the blame for mistakes they didn't make, this continues later in the scapegoat's workplace, as well as personal relationships.

**AC: What are some of the most effective therapeutic approaches or interventions for helping adult children of alcoholics heal and break free from the cycles of dysfunction?**

SS: In my opinion, every adult child should be a part of the adult children of alcoholics and dysfunctional families support group. As soon as they are 18, they could join, and start listening and working with the material that is provided there.

Therapeutic approaches such as EMDR are very effective. They need long-term sustained support, guidance and attachment with a therapeutic figure. A trained

therapist should be able to, terminate the patient or the client at the end of a period, which is discussed in advance in the child, and the adult child is prepared for it, but nothing less than three to four years is desired. Can we get that in India? I don't think so. So we do the best that we can.

Acceptance and commitment therapy works great because it works with the allied, comorbidities such as depression, anxiety, and extreme dissociation. A certain amount of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy aids certain practices, especially desensitisation practices that are extremely important for the therapist to know, to help their clients to desensitise themselves to certain triggers.

Trauma awareness, especially information about complex PTSD, which is just emerging, is extremely important for the therapist to have. Lastly, transference is a very major tool. And transference to a healthy, relationship with the therapist and then gradually, learning that termination does not mean the end of the road. So keeping the doors open for the client to be able to come back occasionally, a month, or three months, and then a six monthly visit, gives them the gradual drifting away from their ankle, but it also gives them a healthy connection.



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# Gossips: Good, Bad, Ugly

LEO ANTONY

The habit of gossip is so well seasoned, indulged in and universally enjoyed, that it needs no introduction at all. When we hear the word, we immediately get flashes of some negative, idle, malicious talk or juicy details about the private affairs of someone who is not on the scene. It is good to know that it need not always be so, and that gossip is something that happens everywhere and everyday and can have a benign and positive side too.

## Who Started It All?

Like gossiping itself, the subject of gossip has travelled a long way and has come to stay! It has its own history. Even the ancient Greek Philosopher Socrates of 3rd century BC had some very practical advice for his friends on gossip. Interestingly, evolutionary scientists compare gossiping to primates which we notice engaging in picking lice and dirt from each other in order to bond and form groups. Scholars liken this to the human practice of chit chatting and sharing interesting tidbits about other people's personal lives. As humans evolved and formed groups which grew in size, it made things difficult to connect or bond with others, communicate and interact with one another. This is when gossip slowly came in handy as a form of social interaction that helped groups and individuals to collect and share personal as well as group information, some true, some juicy, and others fallacious or even damaging.

## Are Gossips Always Offensive or Can They Sometimes Help?

Yes, they can help as long as both the subject as well as the object of gossip are positive, factual and healthy or necessary. Gossip is something that comes naturally to most of us when we are with people. It is human but should always remain civil and within limits of propriety.

Gossip provides an opportunity to get useful information about others and share personal details which otherwise would be impossible or difficult to obtain.

Gossips of either type offer us examples of what is and what is not socially and morally acceptable. They also help as antennas or warnings about both people and issues.

Gossip could be a valuable feedback. The popular saying: "Your reputation precedes you" implies that people have heard something about someone earlier- perhaps something good or otherwise. It can be an echo of how you go about.

Psychoanalysts explain that gossips can sometimes help in getting and sharing information about people when we are unable to observe or gather them by ourselves.

Positive gossips promote intimacy and trust between people as they share experiences of similar interests and feelings.

While all this sounds good, it is wise never to forget that Gossip is called 'gossip' because it may not always be the truth. It is also a fact that while some forms of gossip may appear harmless, they can also be destructive for the person who is the target of gossip. Frank A Clark warns us about this when he says that gossip need not be false to be evil; there's also a lot of truth that is never meant to be passed around.

## Why People Indulge in Negative Gossip

While gossip can be helpful as long as it revolves around facts and remains healthy, it can unfortunately graduate into the negative or even vicious category of sharing. Here are some of the factors that make gossip cross the borders of nicety and fairness.

*Sense of insecurity:* People who feel insecure or find their personality wanting are known to earn some temporary satisfaction while judging others. Some, though, talk about other people so that they will not be talked about- a diversionary tactic, if you may call it.



*Sadistic tendency:* Some gossipers derive satisfaction and delight in chewing and sharing with their cronies, details of the fact that others are going through a bad patch and are suffering more than they themselves do. Plainly speaking, the pain of other people becomes their pleasure.

*Shrinking interests and boredom:* This popular quote of Eleanor Roosevelt: "Great minds discuss ideas. Average minds discuss events. Small minds discuss people" is self explanatory and revealing.

*Self-righteousness:* People tend to gossip and point out faults in others in order to feel good about themselves.

*Dislike for someone:* "Gossip is when you hear something you like about someone you don't" - Anonymous. It involves little effort but much 'thrill' to spread negative chatter more quickly than to share something positive or good.

*Connecting with others:* For some, gossiping can sometimes just be the cheapest means of closely connecting with someone or winning their confidence when isolated.

*Craving for attention:* Habitual gossipers crave to be at the centre of gatherings and thus try to enjoy a sense of belonging in the group.

*Jealousy and/or Frustration:* Those suffering from a nagging and hidden fear of losing their position of importance, generally feel frustrated and threatened. They then resort to gossip in an attempt to bring others down. For such people, gossiping is a cover to escape from the haunting nightmare of being overshadowed by others.

*Curiosity:* Nosy people generally master the art of collecting news about people and issues that are of no importance to anyone and skillfully turning them into scoops of spicy gossip, blissfully unaware of the truth that in the end curiosity kills the cat.

## Coping with Gossips and Gossipers

Even though we cannot always control things others say about us, it is true that we can control how we respond to them. A former US Vice president, Adlai E Stevenson who had to endure some nasty gossips from his political opponents tactfully gave them this brilliant proposal: "I offer my enemies, a bargain. If they will stop telling lies about us, I will stop telling the truth about them".

The following advice from Denise Swanson, an American best-selling author is meant for habitual gossipers: "If you did not see it with your own eyes or hear it with your own ears, please don't invent it with your small mind and share it with your big mouth".

If you happen to be in a group that starts a noxious gossip, change the topic into something more interesting. Shoot one or two excellent, admired qualities of the victim into the discussion and the conversation can surprisingly shift or even end there. Ignoring, rather than reacting makes the gossip fade with time. We are the reason for our happiness. Why let others rule it. Moreover, gossipers do not deserve our time or attention.

And finally, the golden rule, also called the Three Filter Test on gossip offered by the great Greek philosopher Socrates: "If what you are going to say to others is not true, and/or not good, and/or not useful, don't ever say it."



# ELECTION CAMPAIGN: BATTLE FIELD OF UNDEMOCRATIC ACTS

GERRY LOBO OFM

**E**lections to State Legislative Assemblies and by-elections, and the General Election in our country - they do not necessarily result in democracy in flower, although elections are a vehicle of democracy; instead, there has been an increase of undemocratic practices, foul plays, hate-laden and aggressive rivalries, sometimes leading up to criminal act of elimination of persons in the fray, leaving democracy in thorns. Politically, though, competition (tooth and nail war), belongs to the game of politics, extreme form of competitive rivalry produces strong inimical stand between the opposing partners, thus only widening the distance between them and leading up to the building of walls, hard to break down. Society, in this manner, turns into a divisive human family embedded in animosity, bitterness and fierce anger causing, in the long run, violence which could be uncontrollable. People, even those, not taking sides with one or the other, are eventually drawn into the electoral conflict.

The electoral process in our nation leaves more and more a bad taste of deep resentment in the citizens and the memory of the bitter battle gets glued to one's consciousness, thus persons become psychologically and emotionally imbalanced. The society which is basically built on inter-connected relationships and of inter-related existence becomes an environment of fear, uncertainty, anonymity and a silent grave yard of the living dead! The frequent elections have become for politicians in our country in the last decade in particular, an occasion for behavioral changes, not for the good but towards destruction of human character and personality. In these elections deliberate attempt is made to malign the opponent by vomiting poison, by assassinating human character with false and rash criticisms, unfounded accusations and by defaming the entire family. The human person is disregarded and disrespected by hurling against one another the latest dysphemisms. This is observable even in the American election. The sad note is that the private life of the candidate is made a mockery, with even sometimes washing the dirty linen in the public sphere. The electioneering of this kind is becoming more and more a common phenomenon with no wisdom whatsoever.

**The ethics of political campaigning have often come under scrutiny, raising questions about fairness, transparency, and the boundaries of acceptable conduct.**

Cheap type speeches at campaign rallies are going spree these days with no one condemning such public exercises done in the name of politics and free speech, and by even desecrating the Constitution of the nation. Verbal duel, derogatory and abusive accusations have converted the democratic space of election campaigns into a battle field of enmity. This has grossly affected human rights, gender dignity and societal harmony. In these war zones of electioneering even the religions have become scapegoats, thus one religion opposing another religion. India, the land of sacred religions, is in an unfortunate situation because of the misuse of religion in the election campaigns by political leaders and their goons. These, of course, are a recent phenomenon in the trajectory of elections in the country. What would the future bring as the elections have become every-day events?

Apprehension about the election campaigns turning politics more and more into war zones has diminished the value and the sacredness of the human person and are threatening human rights in the bargain. One forgets that respect and love ought to be extended also to those who think or act differently, who stand as candidates for political roles with their own manifesto and ideology, and even to those who hold their own religious beliefs and convictions. Electioneering today has melted down to annihilating the infinite dignity of human beings. There is a rash and abrupt manner of treating the opponents in the campaigns. Politicians, having lost all decent, human, courtesy particularly during the election times, forget conveniently and roughly their own human dignity and human consciousness and sell themselves for cheap power and profit. They become, in these circumstances, ferocious wolves ready to devour

their rivals. Their language, postures and attitudes do not manifest an inch of character within them. Intimidation, disinformation and psycho-social attacks in our election campaigns have degraded the human face. Brute tongues of jungle raj seem to be permitted by the Election Commission and the Judiciary. Political demagogues sit on armchair of power and exercise dominion over the widows and the orphans. The education qualification which they proudly fill in their nomination forms is quickly transformed into animalism. Hence election campaigns have become these days a license for free and uncontrolled tongue-twisting exercise to degrade the humanity of the opponent. These verbal attacks, even in an election campaign, are a blot on the human dignity. Moreover, the media and journalists wallow in their profit by false propaganda and a biased picture of those who oppose their masters. These too offend and profoundly disfigure the humanity of persons, their freedom and their dignitas humana, human dignity. Elections held in the name of democracy have created eventually undemocratic practices. This is not to say that the elections should be banned in a democracy, but that the election campaigns should be conducted without damaging the human person. All said and done, one knows well that in politics hatred works!

Democracy is not a mere concept in the encyclopedia. It is development of people, development of human resources and a space for the well-being of the populace. Political campaigns simply bring to a standstill the developmental works undertaken by the government causing enormous difficulties for the ordinary people. One cannot condone the bad state of the roads or left half-done, bridge constructions lying low, and so many other public works not attended to. Politicians' only aim is to garner votes from the electorate and forget their needs and aspirations. Politicians tune themselves to one thing alone: get the masses to cast their vote for themselves or for their candidate even if people suffer their wants and go hungry. So insensitive do our leaders become, they protect themselves within their glass houses secured by the army. So much of their energy wasted into the garbage of political gain, their consciences get numb, pretending to be honest servants of the citizens. When one election passes another one arrives, only to benefit the political clout. Hardly any development work is taken up, not to miss the next election. Hence entire life of many politicians is spent on party concerns, not the wider public. In this entire enterprise, money takes the centre stage and determines the victory of a candidate in the fray. This has become a norm in our country. The Electoral Bond practice that has

been going on for some years has visibly indicated the type of election campaigns that have been conducted. The underhand dealings in this regard is being continued despite the verdict pronounced by the highest court in the country few months ago against the Electoral Bond practice since no drastic steps are projected by the same court, letting the game go on. Democracy, in this way, is misused, disrespected and shunted out, with election campaigns becoming an easy space for open lies. 'Democracy' in the election campaigns has become 'hypocrisy'!

Election campaigning, no one doubts, is a cornerstone of democratic processes. It allows candidates to present their ideas, policies, and visions to the voters. In our country, political campaigning has a pivotal role in shaping public opinion and influencing election results. However, the ethics of political campaigning have often come under scrutiny, raising questions about fairness, transparency, and the boundaries of acceptable conduct. Election campaigns in India are characterised by their scale and intensity. With a large population such as ours, campaigns need to be tailored to a diverse audience. Campaigns involve a mix of strategies such as public rallies, social media, door-to-door canvassing etc. These

are methods which allow parties to connect with voters. However, they demand ethical challenges. There are often in our campaigns false narratives, doctored images, and misleading information and tarnishing of the image of the opponents. Playing on religious, caste, or regional identities to garner support is another divisive practice which leads to polarisation and specific communities being exploited. Lack of financial transparency by concealing the sources of funding which raises ethical questions about accountability and fairness is another of the ethical challenges. Excessive negative campaigning that focuses on personal attacks rather than policy differences can degrade the political discourse. Ethical political campaigning requires accountability by eliminating false information particularly done through the media. Personal ethical conduct of the candidate is of paramount importance, besides education with character. There is a greater need for healthy, sensible and substantial debate in our election campaigns on issues that pertain to citizens which could, perhaps, make the Indian democracy healthy and proactive in leading the country forward. Harmony and unity which the nation upholds must not be undermined for cheap form of exercises in the name of democracy.

## HAVE A HUNCH



TRAVEL

# From an Imperial City to the Cathedral City

SAJI SALKALACHEN

**Top:** The impressive façade of the United Nations Office in Vienna. Security is managed by UN Police, and visitor checks are similar to airport procedures, including nationality verification and passport checks.

Vienna nicknamed Imperial City for its grandeur of being the capital of the Habsburg Empire that ruled parts of Europe for centuries, baroque architecture, and rich royal traditions, is also one of the most liveable cities in the world, having topped the list for the third consecutive year in 2024, according to the Global Liveability Index. This index evaluates stability, healthcare, culture and environment, education, and infrastructure, reflecting the exceptional quality of life in the city. Our travel plans were to participate in a scientific exchange programme at the Technischen Universität Wien.

The public transport system is excellent all across Europe. In cities like Vienna, one can leave the car at home and rely on the convenient trio: tram, bus, and subway to travel anywhere, anytime. An annual transport pass here costs around €365, or just €1 a day, making travel affordable and convenient for locals and tourists; an incredible deal!

A key lesson from this trip was that one must prepare for sudden weather changes. In September beginning, the temperature in Vienna (and all of central Europe) plummeted from summer warmth to a chilly, nine-degree Centigrade, made

worse by incessant rain. The sharp U-turn of temperature and continuous rain required woollens, jackets, and rain gear, essentials for European travel.

Our self-checkout experience at a Lidl grocery store was a new one. It was not an AI-driven system but a standard approach used in most stores. There is an in-tray where you place all the items picked. After scanning them for billing, you transfer them to the out-tray. However, the system does not allow you to pack the items into your bags until you pay the bill using credit or cash. Additionally, you cannot exit the store without scanning the QR code on the receipt. What stands out in this process is that the machine ensures a seam-less, trust-based interaction between the citizens and authorities—a key to good governance and individual rights.

E-bikes are everywhere, and with dedicated lanes, they are safe and widely used by people of all ages. Traffic management maintains time and precision and prioritizes trams, cyclists, pedestrians, and then motor vehicles, in that order, built on mutual trust and discipline.

The Österreichische Post deserves a mention for its efficient, reliable service, often handling deliveries for Amazon.



**Above:** The majestic view of the grand Kölner Dom. The towering façade presents an imposing sight.

If you are not at home, they leave a note and E-mail directing you to a 24-hour, unsupervised collection centre where you can pick up or return your package securely.

A friend took us to the Vienna International Centre and the Office of the United Nations, Vienna (UNOV), one of four main offices worldwide (alongside those in New York, Geneva, and Nairobi). This hub serves as the headquarters for several UN bodies like the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO), and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and hosts various international meetings and conferences. It embodies the commitment of the United Nations to international peace and security, sustainability, and cooperation and its role in facilitating nuclear safety, industrial development, and drug control. The striking modern architecture and beautifully landscaped grounds provide a serene environment for diplomacy and international dialogue, making it an inspiring place to visit.

Vienna is not without its moments of civic engagement, like the peaceful night rally we witnessed. Cyclists gathered to make a statement - solidarity or dissent – when the police switched off the traffic lights to manage the situation smoothly. There was minimal disruption to the public, and the rally ended in a few minutes – an impressive show of organised protest. Now, this is what we may call a mini-hartal!

During our travels in Western and Central Europe, we encountered an unexpected guest: Storm Boris. It disrupted our plans by flooding some parts of Central Europe with continuous rain and overflowing rivers. The ÖBB (Austrian Railways) cancelled our train from Vienna to Cologne and rerouted it by passing a section of Vienna and St. Pölten. The intermediate transfers consumed more time than the original journey; nevertheless, ÖBB made meticulous plans and managed passenger traffic well.

Although the States abolished internal border controls majorly after the Schengen Agreement, allowing free movement

across the 27 member states, Germany has recently reinstated border checks to prevent unauthorised and illegal immigration. Freilassing, a border station just across the Austrian border in Germany, serves as a major railway junction and road crossing point between Austria and Germany, where international trains stop for German police to conduct cursory checks.

Cologne greeted us with the majestic sight of the Kölner Dom (Cologne Cathedral), a Gothic masterpiece with the tallest twin spires in the world. This UNESCO World Heritage Site is more than just a landmark in the city; it offers a journey through history. Construction began in 1248 and was completed nearly 600 years later, delayed by fires, demolitions, and war damage. It became a visual navigational point for Allied bomber aircraft during World War II, was damaged, and restoration completed by 2005.

The title Cathedral City aptly describes Cologne, as the Dom plays a central role in its identity and skyline. The city has remained a spiritual, cultural, and architectural focal point for centuries, symbolizing its resilience. One standout feature is a large modern stained-glass window (the Cologne Cathedral Window) designed by German artist Gerhard Richter, who applied his colour-field painting principles to stained glass, creating an abstract composition of coloured squares. It replaced the original windows destroyed in the Second World War. The main window comprised 11,500 identically sized antique, hand-blown glass squares in 72 colours, the arrangement of which was determined by a random number generator, creating a harmonious and stunning glow of light and colour within the cathedral. Unlike traditional stained glass, the squares are held together with silicone, allowing dynamic colour interactions as light changes throughout the day. The window blends tradition and technology, enhancing the cathedral's spiritual atmosphere.

Due to the constant need for maintenance and repair works, scaffoldings envelop the cathedral most of the time — a familiar sight that does not diminish its grandeur. To us, it was not just the tallest church we have ever seen but also one of the most awe-inspiring.

Cologne is also the birthplace of the famed Eau de Cologne fragrance, created in the 18th century and still produced by the original family-run business. The Fragrance Museum in Cologne offers an insight into this iconic perfume, including a visit to the essence room that houses the secrets of extraction and distillation.

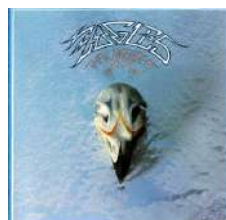
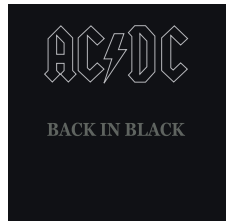
The local beer of Cologne, Kölsch, served in small glasses, is a centuries-old tradition. We could not visit the Schokoladenmuseum (Chocolate Museum) due to inclement weather. Here, a small Lindt factory operates and invites visitors to taste fresh chocolates off the production line. A dose of home comfort and taste came our way when we found one of the five Saravana Bhavan restaurants in Germany and indulged in dosas – a treat we had missed through the travels!

German is arguably the most widely spoken language across Central and Northern Europe, and knowing a few pleasantries, like *danke schön* (thank you) and *Guten Morgen* (good morning), can be handy. However, navigating supermarkets and shops can be more challenging to understand product labels and the nature of contents. Our supermarket mishap occurred when we overlooked the label on a carton of eggs and ended up boiling eggs that already were boiled! It taught us the importance of a translation app.

With a phone in hand, language barriers, directions, transport options, and travel plans all become manageable. Whether on a subway or the road, it guides one seamlessly. It is also a wallet, key, source of food and entertainment, and helps to stay connected. In the current times, aside from the air we breathe, a smartphone might be the most essential and indispensable travel companion and source of survival!

As our journey through Vienna and Cologne was due to end, we had vivid impressions of the connections that define these two cities. Vienna and its unmatched liveability blend modernity with rich cultural heritage, while Cologne, with its towering cathedral and centuries-old traditions, stands as a testament to Europe's enduring history. From the efficient public transport systems to surprising encounters with weather and local customs, every moment was a reminder that travel is not just about seeing new places but about understanding the spirit of those places and the people who live there. This deeper understanding enriches every journey and leaves lasting memories, inspiring us to continue exploring the diverse landscapes of Europe and beyond.

# TOP 10 BEST-SELLING MUSIC ALBUMS OF ALL TIME



Popular music has delivered some of the most iconic albums in history, transcending generations and breaking sales records worldwide. These timeless masterpieces capture the spirit of their eras while continuing to inspire new listeners. From groundbreaking concept albums to chart-topping compilations, these records have defined the genre and set benchmarks for musical excellence. This list explores the 10 best-selling music albums of all time, showcasing their cultural impact, unforgettable tracks, and the enduring legacy they leave behind in music history.

**1 Michael Jackson – Thriller (1982)**  
Michael Jackson's *Thriller* stands as the best-selling album worldwide, with over 70 million copies sold. This groundbreaking album features iconic tracks like *Billie Jean*, *Thriller*, and *Beat It*, blending pop, rock, and R&B influences. Its innovative music videos and record-breaking chart performance solidified Jackson's status as the King of Pop.

Artists who have sold 40 million album copies or more: Figures from BBC News, Billboard, Grammy, The Hollywood Reporter, Guinness World Records, CNN, Rolling Stones, MTV and The Seattle Times

Artists	Album and Year of Release	Sales Figure (in millions)
Michael Jackson	<i>Thriller</i> (1982)	70
AC/DC	<i>Back in Black</i> (1980)	50
Pink Floyd	<i>The Dark Side of the Moon</i> (1973)	45
Whitney Houston	<i>The Bodyguard: Original Soundtrack Album</i> (1992)	45
Eagles	<i>Their Greatest Hits (1971–1975)</i> (1976)	44
Meat Loaf	<i>Bat Out of Hell</i> (1977)	43
Eagles	<i>Hotel California</i> (1976)	42
Fleetwood Mac	<i>Rumours</i> (1977)	40
Shania Twain	<i>Come On Over</i> (1997)	40
Bee Gees / Various Artists	<i>Saturday Night Fever</i> (1977)	40

**2 AC/DC – Back in Black (1980)**  
AC/DC's *Back in Black* has sold over 50 million copies globally. Released in 1980, it marked the band's comeback after the death of lead singer Bon Scott, introducing Brian Johnson as the new frontman. The album features hard-hitting tracks like *You Shook Me All Night Long* and *Hells Bells*.

**3 Pink Floyd – The Dark Side of the Moon (1973)**  
Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon* has sold approximately 45 million copies worldwide. This 1973 release is renowned for its progressive rock sound and concept album format, exploring themes of mental illness, mortality, and the human experience. Its innovative use of studio effects and synthesizers set new standards in music production.

**4 Whitney Houston – The Bodyguard: Original Soundtrack Album (1992)**  
Whitney Houston's *The Bodyguard: Original Soundtrack Album* has also sold over 45 million copies worldwide. Released in 1992, the album features Houston's rendition of *I Will Always Love You*, which became a global hit. The soundtrack's success solidified Houston's status as a leading vocalist of the era.

**5 Eagles – Their Greatest Hits (1971–1975) (1976)**  
The Eagles' compilation album *Their Greatest Hits (1971–1975)* has sold approximately 44 million copies worldwide. It includes timeless tracks like *Take It Easy*, *Desperado*, and *Hotel California*, showcasing the band's blend of rock and country influences. This album remains one of the best-selling albums in US history.

**6 Meat Loaf – Bat Out of Hell (1977)**  
Meat Loaf's *Bat Out of Hell* has sold over 43 million copies globally. Released in 1977, this album blends rock and opera, featuring the epic title track and *Paradise by the Dashboard Light*. Its theatrical style and powerful vocals have made it a classic in rock music history.

**7 Eagles – Hotel California (1976)**  
The Eagles' *Hotel California* has sold approximately 42 million copies worldwide. Released in 1976, the album features the iconic title track and *New Kid in Town*, showcasing the band's signature blend of rock and country. Its enduring popularity has solidified its place in rock history.

**8 Fleetwood Mac – Rumours (1977)**  
Fleetwood Mac's *Rumours* has sold over 40 million copies worldwide. Released in 1977, the album features hits like *Go Your Own Way* and *Dreams*, capturing the band's harmonious blend of rock and pop. Its introspective lyrics and melodic hooks have made it a timeless classic.

**9 Shania Twain – Come On Over (1997)**  
Shania Twain's *Come On Over* has sold approximately 40 million copies worldwide. Released in 1997, this album blends country and pop, featuring hits like *You're Still the One* and *Man! I Feel Like a Woman!* Its crossover appeal and catchy melodies have made it one of the best-selling albums by a female artist.

**10 Bee Gees / Various artists Saturday Night Fever (1977)**  
The *Saturday Night Fever* soundtrack, released in 1977, has sold over 40 million copies worldwide, cementing its place as one of the best-selling albums in history. Featuring disco hits by the Bee Gees like *Stayin' Alive*, *Night Fever*, and *How Deep Is Your Love*, the album became a cultural phenomenon. Its infectious rhythms and dance-floor appeal defined the disco era and solidified its legacy as a timeless classic.

**Bottom Line:** These albums have left an indelible mark on the music industry, influencing countless artists and continuing to resonate with listeners around the globe.





# Always the Muse, Never the Artist: The Non-existent Film Industry of Kashmir

RAKSHAAN SHAMOODAH

Kashmir has always been an artist's muse, be it filmmakers, photographers, poets, writers, painters, singers, or music composers. Paintings like *Lake* and *Paintings of Kashmir* by Britisher Gen Col Strahan (1902) testify to an artist's love affair with Kashmir's scenic beauty. Venerated singers like Mohammad Rafi and Shreya Ghoshal have sung songs inspired by Kashmir's elegance.

Its desolate wintry sadness, above and beyond the velvety, vibrant green landscapes, has provided the background for wide-ranging films. Since India's independence, the earliest Bollywood filmmakers like Raj Kapoor (*Bobby*, 1973), Shakti Samanta (*Kashmir ki Kali*, 1964) as well as contemporary filmmakers like Imtiaz Ali, Kabir Khan, and many more have used Kashmir in the backdrop of a variety of their blockbuster films. Other films like *Roti!*, *Singham Again*, *Tubelight*, *Yeh Jawani Hai Dewani*, *Sita Ramam*, and many more have Kashmir as the setting. Bollywood has cleansed its films of the local political conflict, presenting Kashmir as a serene, untroubled, conflict-free setting.

A still from the film *Maagh / The Winter Within*



**One reason contributing to the lack of regional films is the unfortunate political and civil situation of the state. Survival, as opposed to arts, had to be given priority.**

Furthermore, the filmmakers have always created an image of docile, naïve women in the pressing need of being saved by a valorous Indian hero. On the other hand, some films villainise Kashmiri Muslims. After the tumultuous insurgent 90s, films like *Roja*, *Mission Kashmir*, *LOC Kargil*, and the more recent ones like *Article 370*, and *The Kashmir Files* have portrayed the natives as terrorists. These films have acted as a source of political and religious propaganda, enkindling hatred towards the region and its people.

However, other Indian filmmakers like Ashvin Kumar in his films *Inshallah*, *Kashmir* (2009), *No Fathers in Kashmir* (2019), etc, and Vishal Bhardwaj in *Haider* (2014) have managed to illustrate a somewhat accurate picture of Kashmir, culturally as well as politically.

Unfortunately, while other film industries have capitalised on Kashmir, Kashmiri films by Kashmiri filmmakers are an extremely rare exception. The earliest so-called Kashmiri film is *Maenzraat*, released in 1964 by Jagi Rampaul, a Punjabi, albeit written by a Kashmiri writer, Ali Mohammad Lone. No one can represent Kashmir, and its people, in a balanced, humane, and accurate way other than Kashmiris themselves. Present-day critically acclaimed Kashmiri films like *Harud* (2011), *Hamid* (2018), *Half Widow* (2017), and *Maagh* (2022) are all made by the Kashmiri diaspora. Even more sad is the fact that all of them are men. In these films, the filmmakers have, undoubtedly, treated the complex socio-economic issues with sensitivity, and tried to show the heart-rending trauma of loss across generations with respect, evoking empathy.

One of the poignant reasons behind this vacuum called Kashmiri cinema is pervasive censorship. Any film that depicts the political turmoil of the region accurately is either rendered false, investigated brutally, or labeled as terrorist hysteria. Either way, the films are banned. This conceals, not only the undeniable suffering but also the critically indispensable opinions of Kashmiris, along with their authentic culture.

Another reason contributing to the lack of regional films is the unfortunate political and civil situation of the state. Survival, as opposed to arts, had to be given priority. With prolonged conflict and negligible patronage from the government, no academies for film or art have ever been built. Institutions like theatre, film, and art academies, which can foster critical thinking among the general public, are discouraged.

Moreover, a few regional, amateur filmmakers, who did set sail by making films, ultimately failed. The underlying cause is their unoriginal and stale methods of depicting Kashmir. They emulate the styles of Bollywood, Tollywood, and other Indian film industries, essentially stereotypically depicting Kashmiri culture, instead of being creative with the inherent culture.

This year, in August, the J&K Film policy was devised. This policy claims to pave the way for more domestic and international film industries to use Kashmir as a setting. It has promised subsidies to filmmakers as well as easy access to and accommodation in picturesque, aesthetic sites. However, it not only fails to clarify what domestic means, it is yet to assure anything about the regional filmmaking industry or the severe censorship artists face.

Kashmir, with its immense cinematic potential, needs nurturing hands, exemplary vision, and persistent promotion to bring out its latent talent, consequently birthing an independent Kashmiri film industry.

# 10 MUST WATCH INDIAN FILMS OF 2024



Indian Cinema in 2024 was more about big budgets, pomp and glamour rather than content and creativity. Amidst all that noise, some filmmakers have excelled because of their passion and sheer dedication. Particularly, it was a dreamlike year for Malayalam Cinema. This list might be heavily biased towards the gems that came out of Malayalam which just cannot be excluded from the list because it feels like a crime to do so.



**1 FAMILY (Malayalam)**  
Director: Don Palathara  
Available on Manorama Max

This 2023 film was finally released in theatres this year and was definitely worth the wait. Don Palathara pulls off a classic by drawing parallels between the traditional Christian family and society in Kerala to the Italian Mafia, and their strict codes like *Omertà* or the code of silence. The society comes together to protect a predator instead of providing justice to the victims.



**2 AATTAM (Malayalam)**  
Director: Anand Ekarshi  
Available on Amazon Prime Video

My first film of the year in a theatre and it turned out to be an absolute masterpiece. The National Award-winning movie deserves all the praise coming its way. It might be easy for men to say “not all men” but when it comes to handling sensitive issues you might just see many of their masks falling off. The writer and director capture many nuances brilliantly throughout the film.



**3 KISHKINDHA KAANDAM (Malayalam)**  
Director: Dinjith Ayyathan  
Available on Disney Hotstar

A good thriller might not have many layers to the storytelling but what makes a thriller excellent is the different layers of the story. It is a delight to watch the climax of this well scripted thriller as layer by layer the mystery keeps unfolding. It reminded me of Keigo Higashino’s thriller novels and I am sure Bahul Ramesh was inspired by the Japanese Stieg Larsson.

**4 ALL WE IMAGINE AS LIGHT (Malayalam, Hindi)**  
Director: Payal Kapadia  
Running in theatres

Life is filled with darkness for most of us and a little bit of light here and there is what we hope for. It is in search of that light that we struggle and suffer through the mundane. This theme has been poetically depicted on screen with the help of stellar performances by Kani Kusruti and Divya Prabha.

**5 ULLOZHUKKU (Malayalam)**  
Director: Christo Tomy  
Available on Amazon Prime Video

Christo Tomy brings together arguably two of the greatest actors Malayalam cinema has ever seen. Sorry, it’s not Mohanlal and Mammooty but the exceptional Urvashi and Parvathy Thiruvothu. A script which can be easily used for a mega serial on Indian television becomes an excellent film because of the brilliance of the screenwriter. A great reminder for all aspiring screenwriters that it is not about what you write but it’s always about how you write it.

**6 AMAR SINGH CHAMKILA (Hindi)**  
Director: Imtiaz Ali  
Available on Netflix

The comeback of Imtiaz Ali we all have been waiting for. This biographical drama takes you into the world of Amar Singh and the story behind his unsolved assassination. The movie reminds you of vintage Imtiaz Ali and his cult classic *Rockstar*. Diljit Dosanjh as Amar Singh is a delight to watch.

**7 KILL (Hindi)**  
Director: Nikhil Nagesh Bhat  
Available on Disney Hotstar

It is very rare that you see such good action in an Indian movie. Nikhil Nagesh Bhat and team has delivered one of the most brutal action films you will ever see. The action choreography with the story progressing on a moving train might remind you of the zombie classic *Train to Busan*. Raghav Juyal as Fani is pretty impressive as the villain.

**8 MAHARAJA (Tamil)**  
Director: Nithilan Saminathan  
Available on Netflix

*Maharaja* might have been a usual film with a little bit of shock value in the climax if the writing treatment was linear. But Nithilan Saminathan was good enough to have known this before and gives us a rich cinematic experience through non-linear narration and the audience are kept engaged throughout the film trying to fix the puzzle. Vijay Sethupathi proves yet again why he is rated so highly among critics.

**9 MANJUMEL BOYS (Malayalam)**  
Director: Chidambaram  
Available on Disney Hotstar

One of the highest grossing Malayalam films of all time. The box office just went berserk for this one. The real-life story about a gang of friends going to visit the famous ‘Guna’ caves at Kodaikanal caught everyone’s attention because of the storytelling expertise of the writer. The now legendary rescue scene where the yesteryear Ilaiyaraaja classic *Kanmani Anbodu Kadhalan* plays in the background had to be witnessed in a theatre to experience the euphoria.

**10 PREMALU (Malayalam)**  
Director: Girish AD  
Available on Disney Hotstar

The good old romantic comedy genre almost seemed to be dead because of the over use of the trope. Enter Girish AD with *Premalu*, one of the finest romantic comedies you would have seen in a very long time. I don’t think the dubbed versions have done justice to the hilarious dialogues in the original because most of the humour is lost in translation.



**Three films a day, three books a week and records of great music would be enough to make me happy to the day I die.**

François Truffaut



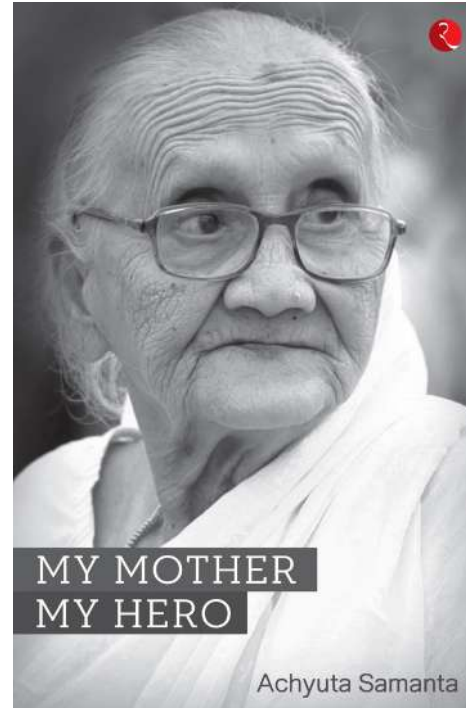
Dr TEKUMALLA  
VENKATAPPAIAH &  
Dr PERUGU  
RAMAKRISHA

# The Story Behind the First Smart Village in India

Before independence, only cities and towns in India had some facilities and support. Villages were pushed to the brink of poverty without any civic amenities. It is true that villages and villagers never had the facilities enjoyed by cities and towns. Villages were completely neglected. In such a remote village called Kalarabanka in Cuttack district of Odisha, Neelima Rani lived in extreme poverty. Although she was born to wealthy parents, she raised her seven children and fulfilled everyone's dreams after the unfortunate death of her husband. Despite being thrown into poverty after her husband's untimely death, she did not lose hope. She overcame grief and poverty and provided higher education to her children. Moreover, due to Neelima Rani's foresight, the village of Kalarabanka became the first 'Smart Village' in India. This success story of Neelima Rani is narrated in the book *My Mother: My Hero* written by her son Achyuta Samanta. Who else knows a mother's life story better than her own son—knowing her from childhood, her interests, likes, dislikes, and desires.

Her childhood was spent happily under the trees and in the gardens of her village. It is noteworthy that an astrologer predicted that she would face some challenges in her life. Although it was not customary to celebrate birthdays for girls in those days, Neelima's mother celebrated her sixth birthday grandly. Neelima loved people so much that she would ask any visiting relatives to stay longer and not leave.

The village of Kalarabanka was limited to agriculture, gardening, fishing, animal husbandry, pottery, and blacksmithing.



Children in the village did not have the opportunity to study. Only those from wealthy families were eligible for education, especially girls who were kept away from education. The existing schools did not have blackboards or even floor mats; education took place in the mud. Over time, progressive parents started sending girls to school along with boys. Neelima Rani, showing great devotion to her teachers, joined the local school and continued her education, earning a reputation as an intelligent girl. Her grandmother used to narrate mythological and epic stories related to devotion.

In those days, child marriages for girls were common. When Neelima learned about her impending marriage, she felt the pain of leaving everyone behind. At the age of 16, Neelima married 24-year-old Anadi Samanta in 1943.

Despite her reluctance to leave her parents, Neelima moved to her in-laws' house. They understood and nurtured love and affection for each other. Anadi got a job at Tata Company. Although Anadi lived separately for some time, Neelima joined him in Tata Nagar during one summer and set up their home there. She liked the environment there. They enjoyed movies and outings together. Once, while in a park, Anadi told Neelima, 'You will never have sorrow in your life, only happiness.' Little did he know how life would turn and who would die and when? Over time, she became a mother to five more children. Anadi's salary was low, and the household could not be managed. When her husband took loans, Neelima scolded him. To make money, she made and sold clay pots to nearby areas and had her eldest son, Mantu, deliver newspapers on a bicycle. When Mantu felt humiliated, she taught him about the dignity of labor, saying that no work in the world is inferior.

One midnight, strangers knocked on the door and informed her that Anadi had met with an accident, breaking his legs and arms, and was in the hospital between life and death. Neelima collapsed upon hearing this. Her eldest son, Mantu, rushed to the hospital on his bicycle, only to be told by the doctors that there was no hope and his father would not survive. Seeing his father's blood-soaked body, Mantu was devastated. Neelima instructed that the body be taken directly from the hospital to the crematorium without bringing it home.

The household fell into disarray after Anadi's death. Adding to the burden were the debts Anadi had taken from relatives and friends. Seeing them come to demand repayment left Neelima helpless. Mantu continued delivering newspapers, and Neelima made clay pots. The company where Anadi worked gave them a month's notice to vacate the company quarters. With no other option, Neelima used the ex-gratia and insurance amount of 30,000 rupees to return to her in-laws' house in her native village. The respect and honor given to a widow in the village only deepened her sorrow.

She continued to shoulder the household responsibilities and live her life.

Despite struggle and hunger, with self-respect, they rented a vacant plot next to their house and grew vegetables, which Achyuta Samanta (Sakuta) sold in nearby villages. Once, while playing hide and seek with friends at the village school, a teacher caught Sakuta and asked, 'Don't you have school?' He replied, 'We are poor. My mother cannot afford to send me to school.' The teacher immediately admitted Achyuta to the school for free. His education journey continued until he earned a master's degree from Utkal University. When Mantu got a job in a bank, the family stabilised. Some of her children got married and settled in different places. Achyuta, however, refused to marry, dedicating himself to ensuring no one else experienced the extreme poverty he had. He established various educational institutions.

One day, she was surprised to see all her children visit the village together. She was overjoyed to learn they had come to celebrate her birthday. When Achyuta asked if she had any wishes, she thought for a while and said, 'Develop this village. This village has given us so much. We should give something back to it.' Achyuta adopted the village and transformed it into a model village. By 2014, he established the 'Neelima Charitable Trust' and made Kalarabanka the first 'Smart Village' in India. Neelima Rani's wish changed the face of the village. Today, the village has all the facilities one could need. Neelima Rani was a heroic figure in Kalarabanka.

In 2016, Neelima Rani's death from a heart attack was a heartbreaking event for the community, but she left her memories and legacy on this earth forever. Achyuta Samanta, who believed he was not destined for education, went on to build a university. Losing his father at a young age and experiencing extreme poverty with his mother, Achyuta fulfilled his mother's wish by transforming Kalarabanka into the first smart village in India. He remains unmarried, living in a rented house, dedicating his life to serving the people.

# 10 BEST INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL WEB SERIES IN 2024



## 1. The Three-Body Problem

Platform: Netflix / Episodes: 10

*The Three-Body Problem* is a mind-bending sci-fi epic that blends hard science with historical and philosophical elements. You'll be hooked by its unique premise, which explores the cultural revolution in China and its connection to an alien civilisation. Though dense at times, the series delivers thought-provoking ideas about humanity's place in the universe.



## 2. Shogun

Hotstar / Episodes: 10

*Shogun* offers a captivating immersion into feudal Japan, with stunning visuals and a compelling story of clashing cultures. You'll be drawn into the intricate power dynamics and the personal journeys of the characters. While the large cast can be a bit challenging at times, and the pacing isn't always perfect, the rich historical detail and the overall epic scope make it a worthwhile watch for fans of historical dramas. It's a journey to another world that's both exciting and thought-provoking.



## 3. Dune: Prophecy

Jio Cinema / Episodes: 06

*Dune: Prophecy* offers a captivating glimpse into the origins of the Bene Gesserit, enriching the Dune universe with new layers of intrigue. You're drawn into the complex politics and power plays that shaped this influential order. While it might not reach the epic scale of the original novels, the stunning visuals and compelling exploration of the Bene Gesserit's history make it a worthwhile watch.



## 4. Squid Game S2

Netflix / Episodes: 09

*Squid Game* Season 2 delivers more of the high-stakes thrills and social commentary that made the first season a global phenomenon. While it explores new characters and expands the universe, it doesn't quite recapture the same raw emotional impact. The games are visually compelling, but the narrative feels somewhat uneven.



## 5. House of Dragon S2

Jio Cinema / Episodes: 08

*House of the Dragon* escalates the Targaryen civil war to breathtaking heights. The conflict intensifies with brutal battles and deeply personal betrayals. While the pacing might feel uneven at times, the performances remain captivating, and the visual spectacle is truly magnificent. From the majestic dragons soaring across the skies to the gritty details of the battlefields, the visuals are a feast for the eyes. It's a dark and thrilling continuation, promising an even more devastating war to unfold.



# 10 BEST INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL WEB SERIES IN 2024



## 1. Poru1

Platform: YouTube / Episodes: 05

*Poru1* with relatable characters and realistic dialogues, explores the complexities of love, friendship, and family in modern Kerala. While the production values might be modest, the genuine performances and engaging storylines make it a worthwhile watch. It's a charming and heartfelt series that resonates with its audience.



## 2. 1000 Babies

Hotstar / Episodes: 07

*1000 Babies* is a chilling crime thriller that explores a truly disturbing premise. The series effectively builds suspense, drawing you into the dark world of its characters. While the pacing can be uneven at times, and some plot points feel contrived, the strong performances and the unsettling nature of the story make it a compelling watch for those who enjoy dark and twisted narratives. It's a disturbing exploration of human psychology and the depths of depravity.



## 3. Kota Factory

Netflix / Episodes: 05

*Kota Factory* offers a realistic and relatable glimpse into the lives of students preparing for India's competitive engineering exams. Set in Kota, a hub for coaching centers, the show captures the pressures, friendships, and anxieties of these young aspirants. While the black-and-white aesthetic adds a unique touch, it's the genuine portrayal of student life that resonates most.



## 4. 90s – A Middle Class Biopic

ETVWIN / Episodes: 06

*90s: A Middle Class Biopic* is a heartwarming trip down memory lane. It beautifully captures the essence of middle-class life in the 90s with relatable characters and nostalgic details. You'll find yourself smiling at familiar situations and connecting with the family dynamics. While it may not be groundbreaking, its simplicity and genuine portrayal of everyday life make it a truly enjoyable and comforting watch. It's a sweet reminder of simpler times.



## 5. Aindham Vedham

ZEE5 / Episodes: 08

*Aindham Vedham* offers a unique blend of mythology and modern-day thrills, presenting a compelling narrative with intriguing concepts. The series ambitiously weaves ancient prophecies into contemporary events, creating a captivating mystery. While the complex storyline requires patience, the striking visuals and the exploration of ancient lore provide a rewarding experience.



# Achu's Amma

Originally written in Malayalam by  
JOSEPH JOYSON (JO) OFM CAP

English translation by  
MELODY SANDEEP

“Hey Siri, play the song again. . .”  
and the ever-obedient iPhone  
Siri dear, started to play the world  
renowned instrumental by the band Era, “I  
believe in G.”

I started reading my short story with  
refueled energy a second time. . .titled, *Achu's  
Amma*. . .The story unfolds along with the  
gratifying music. . .

Confined to the hospital bed, my body  
shivering with the cold air-conditioning  
around. . .my melancholic eyes glancing  
through the white walls of the ward room  
. . .suddenly I heard the door open and here  
walks in a red clad man—Santa Claus!!!  
Behind there is a procession of people  
dressed in white and red singing and dancing  
Christmas Carols. . .these songs radiate the  
warmth and love, the very essence of the  
festival itself. As Santa Claus was leaving  
my room, he affectionately handed me a  
chocolate. . .I immediately gobbled it up and  
surprisingly it tasted extra sweet.

The religious background I was brought  
up with, advocated that Christmas was  
prohibited, but unexpectedly here the  
experience of the festivity gifted me was one  
that was engulfed in love, warmth and joy. It  
was a kind of a resurrection of the long buried  
sweet memories of the festival I had treasured  
up deep within my heart all these years.

'My Achu' each time I think of it. . .  
brings back an array of nostalgic childhood  
memories of a Christmas winter vacation.



Art by Jo

I was then a five-year old girl and Achu  
must have entered his teens. Christmas a  
much celebrated festival around the world,  
for me, was a taboo. . .my mamma and papa  
and my dear ones taught me to believe so  
. . .very peculiar though. . .I recall my visit to Achu's  
house to spend my vacation and coincidentally it  
happened to be the Christmas time.

Achu's Amma had prepared a sumptuous  
spread of traditional dishes. I had to my  
hearts full the delicious crab and fresh  
prawns curry specially made for us with lots  
of love. By evening the Christmas stars were  
up and brightly lit up the front porch of the  
house. I simply gazed at the magnificent  
sight of these paper made stars with cheer  
and awe. Just below these stars was a cute  
little crib carefully prepared by Achu and  
friends. I wondered in admiration the little  
figurines beautifully decorated inside the  
crib and walked inside. Suddenly I was  
stopped by the sound of carol songs by a  
group of kids in front of the gate. They were  
cheering and shouting in joy. Dancing to the  
tunes of the carol songs here comes a red  
clad man, Santa Claus with white long beard  
and a golden stick decked with colourful  
balloons. He stationed himself in front of the  
house and danced with exhilaration. Before  
leaving, he gave me a handful of *Eclairs*  
chocolates, waved goodbye and wished  
“Happy Christmas”. I could only stand there  
wonderstruck with my first ever festive  
experience. Achus youngest sister Rachel  
whispered in my ear, “That is Achu!!!” The  
one who came as Santa Claus was Achu!!! I  
was bewildered. . .Aha, now I understand the  
reason behind Achu's disappearance from  
home. Christmas for the first time became  
an experience so sweet. . . So sweet as Achu.

Somewhere in the backdrop the song  
stopped playing. . . “Hey Siri. . .play the song  
again.” Siri started playing the song. . .

My heart started to navigate the tides  
of emotions and thoughts about Achu who  
is thousands and thousands of miles away. . .  
“Tim”, chimed the new message arrival  
on my phone: “Hey, Its Amma's birthday  
today”, reminder from Achu. As I fondly  
remembered Amma, my mouth watered  
at the very thought of crabs and prawns. I  
simply thought as to how Achu would have  
wished Amma on her birthday and how  
that sweet mom would have reciprocated. I

could imagine how precious Achu is to Amma.  
“Happy Birthday Amma”—these three words  
echoed inside me. Amma must have been  
impatiently staring at her phone since morning  
to hear these words from Achu. . .indeed an  
unique bond connecting two hearts thousands  
of miles apart. . .A young dotting mother in her  
prime who had to shoulder the responsibility  
of sheltering her three tiny tots under her  
wings as she battled an alcoholic husband who  
shattered all her dreams. She struggled to hold  
her three kids as close as possible and solace  
them. Sometimes, she felt rather helpless in  
deep sobs herself to see her own life somewhere  
drifting far away.

Years passed by and after the death of her  
husband, on one occasion Amma was on a trip  
with Achu and Rachel. Amma told both her kids,  
“You both don't worry about me now. . .I want  
to fly high. . .now that I have wings”. . . those words  
embodied the tree of life spreading out its  
wings of checkered shade. The first thing Achu  
does when coming home for vacation is to take  
his Amma for a trip for few days which Amma  
also equally longs for and as always it ends up  
to be the most enjoyable moment. Achu always  
had this stethoscopic ability to read Ammas  
heart and strived to spread the wings for Amma  
to fly as far as possible and to live her dreams  
in compensation of all the pains she endured  
all her past life. Its no surprise then that Achu  
became Amma's favourite one among her  
three children. I have always felt Achu had  
this special skill of aptly scanning through  
the minds of people maybe a God given gift.  
No wonder then the birthday of Achu's Amma  
in sync with the Christmas season came to be  
such a sweet loving soul. . . Yes as rightly said:

“True love is always Sweet.”

Just like Christmas is Sweet

Just like Achu is Sweet. . .

So is Achu's Amma so Sweet. . .

Hey Siri ! Play the song again. . .Siri started  
to play the song. . . I walked down the hospital  
stairs to go back to my Sweet Home.



# LITTLE SISTERS OF THE POOR AT THE SERVICE OF THE ELDERLY POOR!

## *Forgiveness* BOBBY JOSE, CAPUCHIN

I am not worthy to have you under my roof. Just say a word, and my soul will be healed. Michael Sean Winters, a writer, describes these as the most beautiful words in the world. What might be that word, which from afar, is enough to bring peace to another? Could it be anything other than the word “forgive,” which can lead the soul to calm waters? Why is it that humans hesitate and delay to utter that word, which can bring solace to a life? Haven’t you realised yet, that the world still needs to become a better place? If you are looking for a magical word in relationships, we should consider which word can create more wonder than forgiveness.

A life crushed under the burden of an unpleasant past calls out with every heartbeat to that consciousness: Bring peace to the world with that one word. Paulo Coelho writes about an angel who surprises a farmer who, even after death, was concerned about the reputation of his children, by taking him into their future. The man had two sons. One was already known as a poet, and the other was a soldier in the Roman Empire.

They are in a field. A large crowd, kneeling, is chanting some lines in unison. They are repeating the words of your son. “My son who is a poet, I have a legacy through him.” The angel corrected him, “Not the poet. The he wrote some good things the world has forgotten him. This is the soldier.” The father’s is stunned: “Him?”

“Yes. For a while, he was in Palestine. His servant fell ill there. The servant’s followers approached a young healer, who had been known through word of mouth that he is a healer. The compassionate man returned with them at once. All this soldier could expect was some instructions for healing. Therefore, his coming shook the soldier deeply. He cried out, halting the healer’s journey, ‘I am not worthy for you to come under my roof. Just say a word, and my servant will be healed.’ These are the words they are now chanting.”

If this beautiful dawn promises an opportune time, peace, and freedom to send a message to dear ones who have drifted away from you for many reasons, what would you begin to write?



In 1839 in cold winter, Jeanne Jugan met and found God in the face of a poor elderly woman, blind and paralysed. She gave her bed to the poor woman, opened her home and her heart to her. Since then, many elderly people were welcomed by Jeanne Jugan and her daughters who are called “Little Sisters of the Poor” present all over the world in 32 countries. Jeanne said, “It is so good to be poor, to have nothing and to count on God for everything.” She literally lived her saying and taught her daughters to trust in God’s divine Providence.

**“Whatever you do to the least of my brothers you do unto me.”  
Would you like to take care of Jesus in the elderly poor?**



**If you hear the call to follow Jesus in the footsteps of Saint Jeanne Jugan,  
COME AND SEE!**

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