

# Together

an annual family magazine

## Make Life Medicinal

### INDIA INCLUSION AUDIT 2025

An annual national survey to assess the state of inclusivity

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**T**ogether 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 also 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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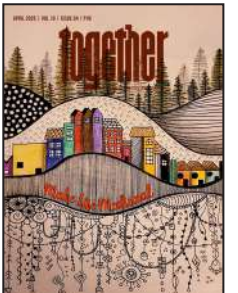
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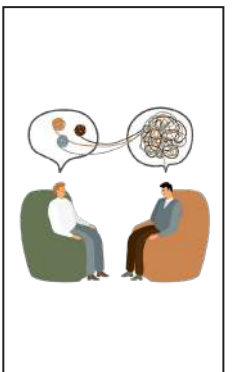
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# The Purpose Is Not Just to Get Well, But to Remain So

SAJIP MATHEW OFM

For life's sake, create lung space with the arts. A society that spends more on the arts will spend less on hospitals.

A person, who prays with books, art, music, dance, cinema, and the like (I call them THE ARTS), will spend less time searching for hospitals. Medicines, psychiatric treatments, and hospitals, of course, do a great service to get us back on our health track, but remaining on track always is the key—I recommend the arts. An individual or society who ignores books, unplug music, disengage with theater and cinema, and disregard the arts would find themselves spinning along the defeating cycle of falling ill, getting treated, well again, sick again, medicine again, ill again, almost dead, back to health, fall sick again, and die. For life's sake, create lung space with the arts. A society that spends more on the arts will spend less on hospitals—yes, prevention is better than cure.

Sir Ian McKellen, an English actor and British cultural icon, says, find out what makes your soul grow: draw a picture, dance home after school, sing in the shower, make your face in mashed potatoes, write a six-line poem, not to show anyone, don't show it to anybody, discard them, you will find you have already been gloriously rewarded for your work. It not only enables your becoming, but also a proactive health management tip. Proactive physical and mental health management is critical to a vital, vibrant, and rewarding life. The little arts that we engage in daily contribute to proactive health-care; and making it a habit compound over time, creating remarkable improvements in overall health and quality of life.

The modern urban existence with its daily grind and rat race, where individuals are trapped in an exhausting cycle of overwork, constant stress, and perpetual pursuit of financial and professional success, has devastating implications for personal health. Escaping the rat race is fundamentally an act of radical self-care and personal liberation, and the arts help do it.

How do the arts protect one from being consumed by the rat race? Art helps in uncoiling, unwinding, and opening up one's own doors to the outer world; it shines on other doors so that one can see and move out through it. Art helps one go further. The further one goes, the lesser the weight one feels of one's inherited and native masks, the baggage of his/her past, and expectations of the future; the world is better without masks, baggage, and the burden of expectations. The arts and candidness and openness are almost synonymous; and doing them, and engaging with them sets people free. The more one is industrious and orderly, less likely they are to embrace the spontaneity of the arts. Monetised arts, like monetised spirituality, have no healing powers. There

are fewer chances that a really free person creates arts primarily for profit. This realisation makes one embrace both, the arts and frugality. He is content and happy with a frugal life, and might even look like a loser.

The arts make you want less. I don't know how it works, but it does. The French says, that 'our appetite grows with eating', I would say that our appetite dies down with the arts. The relationship between artistic engagement and frugal living might seem counterintuitive at first glance, but the arts offer profound insights and practices that can fundamentally transform one's approach to consumption, value, and personal fulfillment. Perhaps a musician who finds joy in playing an instrument, a writer crafting a poem, or a painter exploring colour and form discovers wealth that cannot be purchased, which is the inner joy of creative expression and self satisfaction.

Healing engagement with the arts is a deliberate decision to be free of systems; for systems do not nurture creativity, and so also therapy; they are the antithesis of creativity and healing. Every system is power hierarchical, and at the bottom of the hierarchy you should do what you are told to do, you are not there to think outside the box, or think without the box; you are there to learn what you are supposed to do and implement it. Systems place obedience above creativity and conformity above healing. They prefer submissive machines and not imaginative, resourceful artists. Obedience and conformity does not liberate, but binds people even more strongly in the box.

Make life medicinal. Be mindful, engage in the arts, treat every act and choice as a potential source of healing. Transform everyday life moments into a healing practice that creates the essential ingredients for a quality life—meaning, connection, purpose, and freedom.



Mandala by Mani

COVER STORY



Rangoli design by a woman in a slum

# Art for Healing

MANI KAROTT

I have been interested in art, and painted some pictures for my pleasure without any pretension to becoming a professional artist. I stumbled into art therapy due to my work as a special educator working with mentally challenged children. Later I worked as a rehabilitational therapist with mentally ill persons and later as a street educator for street children who were addicted to drugs. I was constantly faced with such persons who could not put into words their struggle with confusing emotions that possessed them and prevented their full participation in normal society. I discovered that they were not at ease with verbal communication when it came to sessions of counselling and that they were more attuned to symbolic expressions of their inner emotions and conflicts through the use of art materials.

Art for healing gave me access to the inner beauty of persons who suffer from powerful conflicts of personality and which prevent them from expressing their hidden potential to the world.

## Art Therapy

Art Therapy is born of an encounter between art and psychology. During the First World War, due to the trauma of violence there were a lot of persons affected by severe mental health problems in Europe. Many psychiatric asylums were newly started to welcome patients of all types suffering from the trauma of war. There were also artists among them. In England, Adrian Hill, an artist, considered as the founder of art therapy, discovered that art could heal persons who were affected by mental health problems and other diseases. He says in his seminal work on art therapy, *Art versus Illness* that “When creative energy is satisfied, it becomes a reliable support giving comforting nutrition in dark moments and paves the way towards health”

He first experimented it on himself and later applied it to persons affected by tuberculosis. He later presented his findings in books like *Painting Out Illness* and *Art versus Illness*. So today art therapy is part of therapeutic practices used in mental health institutions, hospitals, educational settings and in helping professions. Though art therapists use all sorts of art materials for this work, we ought to distinguish it from art for aesthetics as the primary aim of art. Therapy is encouraging in individuals spontaneous expression of creativity for healing through the use of materials like clay, collage, modeling, etc. Clients express their inner states of mind through colours, symbols, simple drawings and other creative activities. Another art therapist who initiated art therapy in the United States, Margaret Naumberg states that, “The process of art therapy is based on the recognition that man’s most

fundamental thoughts and feelings, derived from the unconscious, reach expression in images rather than words”.

Art therapy is built on the belief that each human being is capable of creative expression and that art is not the monopoly of professionals of art. Naumberg adds that “The techniques of art therapy are based on the knowledge that every individual, whether trained or untrained in art, has a latent capacity to project his/her inner conflicts into visual form. As patients picture such inner experiences, it frequently happens that they become more verbally articulate”.

This belief has also a theological basis because Judeo-Christian religions believe that each human being is made in the image and likeness of God, the Supreme Artist who created the heavens and the earth by the power of His Word. If we accept that the human being is in the image and likeness of godhead, then each one of us is also an artist, capable of creative expression, though often this skill is suppressed through environmental pressures.

Therefore one of my efforts in my workshops is to reach out to persons in order to reawaken spontaneous creativity through play with materials like clay, colours and other materials. The Child within us is a natural creative artist. When we watch children at play we see how they create wonders with simple raw materials at hand.

In India, the practice of art therapy is within our cultural ethos of everyday life: the creation of rangolis, painting of pots, making masks for theyyams, kathakali, therukoothu, yakshagana, decorated rathams for religious processions, folk and tribal art, all these con-

tributed to experiences of healing in Indian culture. Such popular celebrations which combine art with music, dance and theater aim at catharsis, both individual and collective.

### Workshops of Art Therapy

My experience of art therapy has been through work with mentally ill persons, persons who are mentally challenged, students of psychology, urban population in slums, street children, physically challenged, trans-genders and other marginalised populations. I have developed a method of initiating people who have no prior experience of artistic activity so that they can overcome inhibitions; discover the joy of expression using art materials with great spontaneity. Thereafter I gradually introduce them to their inner world, through a progressive discovery of their anxieties, fears, inner wounds and to learn how to cope with them by a parallel discovery of their inner strengths through creative methods of expression. This method includes moments of looking back at their creations with critical awareness so as to activate auto-healing mechanisms hidden in the Unconscious. My experience is that healing comes from the discovery of the wholeness of the self within and as a result of that discovery, an awareness of one's own inner beauty. This discovery is a source of great joy and cathartic release. In turn it generates healing and integration into normal society. This, I would say is the secret of using art for healing in therapy.

I would like to illustrate my point with a description of some of the themes that I use in my workshops of art therapy.

*The Child Within:* Based on the well experimented theories of Transactional Analysis (Child\Adult\Parent transactions) initiated by Eric Berne, using clay and colours, we can reach out to the child within us through play, and discover spontaneity and creativity and that is one of the most healing experiences of life; "The Child is the father of the man" so said William Wordsworth.

*The Inner Self:* There are inner strengths within the personality, which, when discovered can lead a person to overcome blockages and obstacles which inhibit his/her personal growth. Creating a collage with images,

which capture the history of our journey of life, gives us a glimpse into the continuum that underlies our brokenness and that can pave the way of overcoming obstacles of our journey of life.

*The Hidden Self:* There are experiences within us that we have forgotten, there are experiences that are buried in our unconscious, both positive and negative, which contain potential for healing; if we make an effort to bring them to our conscious mind and integrate them, it can reconcile contrary energies which are hidden in us. This principle is well known in physics as connecting positive and negative poles for production of light and heat in electricity. This principle is applicable to psychology as well, illustrated by the ying-yang theory of personality in Eastern philosophy. There are exercises of modelling in art therapy, like, making an Inner Shield, designing doors to our Inner self, painting masks, which are healing experiences of our wounded selves and the beauty hidden within these wounds.

Working with clay  
by a client



**Despite facing extreme poverty, marital strain, and having no access to mental health facilities, women in slums and villages find solace in daily acts of artistic expression, like creating rangoli, polishing brass, and cooking, which provide them with moments of creativity and satisfaction.**

*Folk Art:* I have always wondered why women in our slums and villages have not ended up in mental health asylums though they face severe ravages in their lives due to economic strains, stressful marital relationships, extreme poverty and deprivation. I discovered that it is because, there is, in their daily lives, moments of artistic expression: they make rangoli patterns everyday in front of their houses, they polish to perfection brass vessels with ashes, they cook simple meals which though seemingly banal which gives them satisfaction because there is creativity involved in it. These are moments when they are in touch with experiences of beauty, and the secret of their mental health. Going a step further, we could say that rangoli patterns are mandalas, because, there is always a center and with the help of a predetermined number of dots around the center, they create mandala-like drawings often coloured with rangoli powders for festivals and special occasions. Art for healing is thus integrated into the daily life of Indian population, especially among the poor.

### Mandala Painting in Art Therapy

One of the most important forms of art for healing in Indian culture is the practice of mandala painting, commonly used in Hindu and Buddhist traditions for meditation. Carl Gustav Jung, the famous Swiss Psychologist popularised it as a method of psychotherapy after his own personal experience of healing through the painting of mandalas which he saw in dreams when he was going through a period of depression. "When I began drawing the mandalas, however, I saw that everything, all the paths that I have been following, all the steps that I had taken, were leading me back to a single point-namely to the midpoint. ...it is the path to the center, to individuation".

Mandala tradition originated in India. It has influenced architectural design of sacred spaces and rituals and celebrations across India as we see in the rangoli patterns, the onam pookkalam etc. Mandala as a sacred space is a circular design with a center. It can also be octagonal or pentagonal in shape. Tibetan Buddhism embraced it as a practice of meditation by building elaborate mandalas as monks work together for days

and weeks using fine sand of varied colours.

I have discovered that all cultures across the globe are influenced by the mandala system: stained glass windows in cathedrals and churches, elaborate dome patterns in the mosques, the circular tribal houses, the concept of human habitations built around a sacred place in many cities, for example the temple of Madurai Meenakshi in Tamilnadu, all speak of a spontaneous internalisation of mandala system as an unconscious collective phenomenon.

Anthropologically too, a human being can be imagined as a mandala, composed of enveloping layers which lead us from the visible layers to the invisible center of our personality. It is the tradition of Saiva Sidhantha philosophy in India, which illustrates it best, through the 'kosa theory'.

### The Healing Power of Mandalas

The first Psychotherapist who used mandala painting as a tool for therapy in the West is Carl Gustav Jung. This is what he says about this method, "The fact that images of this kind (mandalas) have under certain circumstances a considerable therapeutic effect on their authors is empirically proved and also readily understandable, in that they often represent very bold attempts to see and put together apparently irreconcilable opposites and bridge over apparently hopeless splits. Even the mere attempt in this direction has usually a healing effect".

In my workshops of Art Therapy, I propose a time of meditation to facilitate concentration and to focus on images that emerge spontaneously to the conscious mind. I do encourage the participants to draw these symbols within a circle and to colour them. This process is creative and creates a dialogue between the author of the mandala and the therapist. This dialogue lays bare the layers of expression of the unconscious hidden in the mandala through colours, symbols, and numbers, which appear in the mandala; whether they are consciously, or unconsciously depicted.

Often, these mandalas contain messages from the unconscious mind, which clamour for the attention of the person, but often ignored or suppressed. With careful and respectful guidance, these messages take on

deep significance in the lives of the person painting the mandala, calling for decisions that can lead to healing of wounds which inhibit the growth, and development of such persons. Therefore the healing power of mandala painting is obvious to those who have gone through this process.

### Healing Power of Dreams

Another therapeutic tool in Art Therapy is dream analysis by drawing and painting dreams. The dream world is a favourite field of study in most schools of psychology starting with Sigmund Freud whose path breaking work “ Interpretation of Dreams” using word association method for analysis and therapy initiated a whole series of studies by other eminent psychologists. “According to Freud the dream, like every psychic product is a creation, a piece of work that has its motives, its trains of antecedent associations” In art therapy, we use pictorial representation of dreams and create a space for dialogue based on symbols that appear in such representations. Jung has initiated an elaborate study of dream symbols in his work, *Dreams*. Unconscious material deeply buried within oneself can safely be brought to consciousness and used for clarification and acceptance.

### Methods of Art Therapy

There are several methods of art therapy depending on the various schools of psychology. Allowing total spontaneity to the clients to choose their preferred material like clay modelling, sketching, painting, making figures with cloth, making masks, etc. is one method. Interpretation and analysis with the therapist can be a secondary moment. There could be also guided sessions where the therapist initiates and guides the work depending on the level of handicaps that the client may suffer from. Another method is group work so that group therapy can help persons by mutual stimulation of working in a group, sharing of insights gained and working towards group building.

Psychological safety, freedom to innovate, individual space for silence are necessary for creativity and expression. It is the therapist’s responsibility to assure that such conditions of environmental security is provided to the clients. “I interpret mainly to let the patient know the limits of my understanding... the principle is that it is the patient and only the patient who has the answers” says Winnicott, the famous Child Psychologist.

### Relationship between Art Therapy and Experience of Beauty

It seems important to see the relationship between art therapy and beauty within a theological framework in order to evaluate and interpret the significance of art for healing.

There is a difference between a discourse on the attraction of beauty when we talk of art for aesthetics and art for healing. All human beings are in need of healing from wounds, physical, psychological and spiritual. Art Therapy finds its relevance, precisely in this work of healing the wounds, which we suffer from in our existential human condition.

The experience of beauty is not only related to the external world, of the senses and sensorial perceptions but also related to internal realities of the soul and the spirit. This is because the inner beauty of the soul is a participation in the eternal beauty of God himself. Restoration of the beauty of the soul is the work of healing achieved through professions like art therapy. This necessarily means restoring the attraction to beauty that is congenital to the primal human condition intended by God for all human beings. This capacity to enjoy life in all its dimensions is the right of every human being, even those handicapped physically, psychologically and spiritually.

It is here that art therapy finds its true mission and its orientation: participation in the healing work of God.

### Conclusion

Beauty heals. This is true of art in general, though there are at times works of art which provoke psychological confusion, when artists do so intentionally. Even in those cases, when interpreted with psychological distancing from the work, we can profit from works of art for healing. If this is so for art in general it is all the more so in the field of art for healing. Bringing out the beauty of the inner self of persons affected by illness and leading them back to the appreciation of their own selves and that of the world around them is the work of art therapy. Art Therapy is a participation in the “Soundarya Leela” of God.

**Mani Karott**, with his sincere interest in art, is a practicing art therapist who has worked with various client groups and individuals using the medium of art for healing.  
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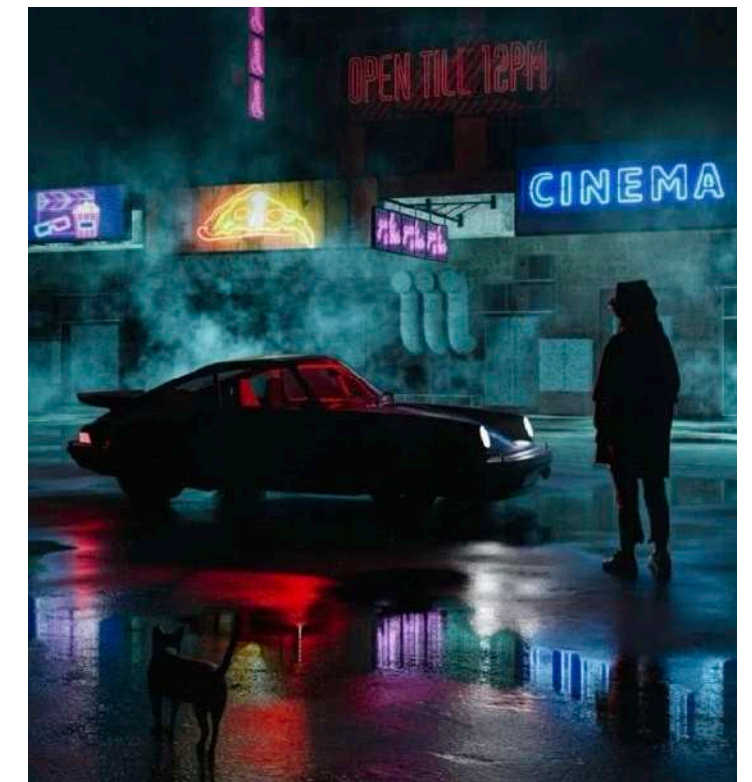
# Cinema as Therapy

Cinema has long transcended its role as mere entertainment, emerging as a powerful medium for psychological exploration, emotional catharsis, and therapeutic intervention, writes NIKITA S.

**M**ovies are often seen as an escape from reality. But what if they’re actually a way back to it? What if the films we love are quietly guiding us toward healing and self-discovery?

Each of us connects with cinema in our own way. For many, it’s a shared experience with family or friends, while others prefer watching alone for a quiet, introspective retreat. Some view films through a more analytical lens, focusing on the technical aspects of cinematography and filmmaking and others marvel over the visual appeal.

I have had the privilege to be a part of each of these experiences. This, along with my love for films made me curious about the possibility of using them as a therapeutic tool. As part of my post-graduate studies, I conducted an intervention-based pilot study on cinema therapy and found that it significantly reduces hopelessness in individuals struggling with emotional distress.



The American Psychological Association defines hopelessness as, “the feeling that one will not experience positive emotions or an improvement in one’s condition.” Hopelessness is an emotional state of feeling that one’s conditions in life will never get better. Hopelessness is often associated with: Apathy, Cynicism, Depression, Learned helplessness and Pessimism.

Hopelessness is common in severe major depressive episodes and other depressive disorders and is often implicated in suicides and attempted suicides. This direct link makes it necessary to look out for signs of hopelessness before it grows into symptoms of depression. Therapists need to psychoeducate more people on this so that it is easier to nip the bud of depression when it is possible and comparatively manageable. There are a number of ways in which hopelessness can be addressed.

Cinema therapy is a viable option to reduce hopelessness. The feeling that comes after watching a film is something that is unparalleled as an affective experience. The idea is to use that to our advantage to see if we can instill hope and reduce hopelessness in the process. We could make use of films to facilitate emotional processing and personal growth.

Cinema therapy comes in two major categories: cinema viewing and movie making therapy. Cinema viewing therapy is further divided into self-help and interactive cinema therapy. Self-help cinema therapy is where the therapeutic effect occurs automatically in the film viewers or clients themselves while watching a film. Interactive cinema therapy is when the counsellor helps a client to integrate certain aspects of their life, with locating the film text between them.

Cinema therapy is apt to deal with clients who are largely resistant to the process for it involves a very non-directive method of therapy where change is largely unconscious.

The roots of Cinema therapy can be traced

back to ancient Greece. Drama was used to show the distinction between wrong and right paths in life. Drama was seen as a manner of learning about and coping with one’s emotions, as a sort of Catharsis, a ritual purification that gives origin to the Greek word pathos, meaning “instructive pain.” Much like ancient drama, film as a contemporary medium does the same.

Katz theorised that motion pictures were typically used in group settings because of the reality that films afforded counsellors the opportunity to affect several clients on an emotional level, simultaneously. The Naval Department’s successful use of films to assist soldiers in understanding the effects of poor mental hygiene in the military is seen as one of the earliest applications of films in group therapy.

Although films have been used by the US military since the early 20th century to educate soldiers about the detection, prevention, and treatment of mental illnesses, the term cinema therapy was coined in 1990 by Berg-Cross and team. Veterans were shown short films and documentaries to help them identify any potential symptoms and to ensure that they understand the importance of seeking help.

#### Why and How the Process Works

Metaphors speak directly to the aspect of the psyche that manages change, cutting through conscious resistance. Similar to Milton Erickson’s concept of the conscious and unconscious mind metaphors are appealing to the conscious mind not just because they are intriguing but also because they are useful in triggering automatic connection patterns. By intellectualising or refusing to examine ideas that are personally significant, clients occasionally have a tendency to reject interpretations from the therapist. Metaphors offer a less direct style of communication, which speak to more receptive parts of our personality.

In cognitive-behavior therapy, movies are used along with the established modalities as a supportive device for cognitive restructuring and to explore maladaptive core beliefs. Movies can also be assigned as

### According to Jung’s Shadow Theory, identifying with a character can help clients develop ego strength, which is buried in their subconscious mind or referred to as their shadow.

give them the motivation to follow through with the plans made. Watching movies can support Behavior modification treatment, where a character demonstrates courage in the face of a challenge. The client is encouraged to model the behavior seen on screen.

According to Jung’s Shadow Theory, identifying with a character can help clients develop ego strength, which is buried in their subconscious mind or referred to as their shadow. The shadow is a source of strength, power, and creative force. He had the opinion that we could live more fully if we could access our shadow. Following a session with the therapist and watching movie characters create a safe space for the clients to connect to their underlying personality traits, or shadows.

Gardner’s Multiple Intelligence and Education Theory suggests that we have seven intelligences. The more of these intelligences we access, the better we learn because they employ different methods of information processing. When we watch movies, we can engage all seven intelligences simultaneously: the logical (plot), the linguistic (dialogue), the visual-spatial (pictures, colors, symbols), the musical (sounds and music), the interpersonal (storytelling), the kinesthetic (moving), and the intrapsychic (inner guidance). Participants may have new affective experiences inspired by the movies. These may trigger them to adopt new and desired behaviors.

*Morawski’s Three Stage Concept:* identification, catharsis and insight help clients

develop a better awareness and understanding of issues and/or situations relevant to their own life. The first stage is identification, in which clients see some similarity or feel some connection with a fictional character. Examination of the behaviors and motives of the fictional character leads to self-exploration. Secondly, observing an identified character work through a problem and release emotional tension can be cathartic for the client. Finally, through understanding the behaviors and motives of a character that they empathise with, clients can develop a better awareness and understanding of issues and/or situations relevant to their own life.

Jeon identifies an additional fourth state, which is universalisation. By observing characters, clients are able to recognise that others have experienced similar difficulties, thereby reducing their sense of uniqueness and isolation. This aspect is further enhanced in group sessions.

**A Current Study**  
I designed and conducted a pilot study on cinema therapy as an intervention to assess its effectiveness in reducing levels of hopelessness among emerging adults.

The Psychoeducation based cinema therapy intervention has shown to be effective as seen in the post-intervention data analysis. All five participants showed a significant reduction in hopelessness in their post-intervention assessment and case study analysis. Notably, the results of the study are consistent with previous studies which have tested the feasibility of cinema therapy. Mental health practitioners and Counsellors can adopt similar programmes to assist their clients in reducing hopelessness. Cinema can be brought into therapeutic settings to create a non-directive and subconscious process of change in clients.

The evolving relationship between cinema and psychological health promises continued innovation, challenging traditional therapeutic boundaries and offering increasingly nuanced approaches to understanding human emotional wellbeing.



# Read, Write, Make Art

## Get in Touch with Your Unconscious

RAKSHAAN SHAMOODAH

Reading is essential for those who seek to rise above the ordinary.  
—JIM ROHN



Literature is one of the creative arts. Around 2600 BCE, Mesopotamians gave birth to cuneiform, a script used to record transactions. Soon, it took the form of creative self-expression and storytelling. With writing was born its inseparable twin: Reading. Print revolution augmented solitary involvement with reading and writing.

Reading provided a means to gain knowledge, and relax. While writing brought onto the page, more intimate thoughts and feelings, unburdening people of worries, and unspoken words. Journals and letters, apart from classic literature, offer a peek into the author's innermost feelings about themselves, their beloved and the politics surrounding them. Franz Kafka, Vincent van Gogh, Albert Camus, John Keats, Virginia Woolf, Jane Austen, Sadat Hasan Manto and many more, wrote intricate letters, expressing their feelings and opinions to friends, lovers and family.

Frida Kahlo, Keith Haring, Leonardo da Vinci, Susan Sontag, Kafka and Anne Frank maintained journals and diary entries, which provide a glimpse not only in their daily life, but also their thoughts and feelings about it. In fact, Frank's first diary entry somewhere includes 'paper has more patience than people', hinting at the comfort she felt while writing. In modern terms, the therapeutic advantages of writing and reading are achieved by Scriptography and bibliography, respectively.

Studies have shown how writing can help with trauma processing, by externalising their experiences, gaining perspective, and also expressing their deepest thoughts on it, people with complex trauma can gradually process it. Take the example of Anne Frank, who journaled until she was captured by the Nazis. She wrote meticulously about her trauma, and fear, in the atrocious times of holocaust. Through writing she also grappled through adolescence changes. With healing as a long standing benefit of writing, scriptotherapy is used as a tool to address various mental health issues like anxiety, depression, PTSD, and hypomania. Although the term scriptotherapy was coined by Suzette Henke, Freud had already emphasised writing as a release of pent-up emotions and memories. He called it 'catharsis' or automatic writing.

Charles Dickens presumably wrote about his childhood and neglect in *Great Expectations*, and *David Copperfield*. More recently, Liam Corley, a veteran writer, who spent considerable time in Afghanistan revealed how poetry therapy helped him process the trauma he witnessed during the war. More recently, Kashmiri writer Zahid Rafiq, in his *The World with Its Mouth Open*, delves deep into the trauma that fractured his mind and soul, due to the unending war in Kashmir. Other writers that wrote their traumas into memoirs are Basharat Peer (*Curfewed Night*), Akiyuki Nosaka (*The Cake Tree in the Ruins*), Erich Maria Remarque (*All Quiet on the Western Front*), Veronica Gorrie (*Black and Blue: A Memoir of Racism and Resilience*) and Savitribai Phule (*Kavya Phule and Bavan Kashi Subodh Ratnakar*).

Bibliotherapy has its roots in ancient Greece, with Aristotle's works considered as 'medicine for soul'. The term was coined in 1916 by Sameul Crothers. Reading the Holy Qur'an has been used as a therapeutic tool for anxiety, depression, survivor's guilt, etc, since the time of its revelation, about 1,500 years ago. A study on incarcerated federal inmates in the USA, revealed that they found guidance and salvation by reading the Qur'an. They reported low levels of anxiety, aggression and depression. Other sacred

books and texts, like Bible, and the vedas, have also been used for their therapeutic benefits. It is an excellent coping mechanism, which widens one's problem solving skills, as one approaches a problem through different angles, while simultaneously becoming aware of one's own feelings. Bibliotherapy is done as a way to distract a patient's mind from the problem, so as to re-approach it with more information and a fresh mind. Furthermore, reading about characters in

books or poetry which resonate with the feelings of the reader, provides a sense of catharsis, and emotional release. Studies show that reading reduces the levels of loneliness, in a sense that the reader knows that they are not the only ones going through the feeling. These studies were surprisingly done on voracious manga readers, who felt they did not fit in with their peers, but felt a sense of belonging to a particular fictional group after reading a manga series.

Reading is known to foster critical thinking skills. This is because it stimulates analytical thinking by exposing an individual to vast perspectives. Readers tend to critically evaluate not only the authenticity of what they are reading, but also examine their own feelings. This leads to a more fulfilling experience of life. Undoubtedly, this is the reason experts link reading to a longer lifespan. Reading is shown to lower stress levels, blood pressure levels, and leads to improved mood, communication skills, cognitive abilities and vocabulary.

Both reading and writing can be therapeutic, and promote wellness by boosting emotional intelligence, critical thinking, empathy, self-awareness, reduce stress, lower blood pressure, improve immune system functioning and bestow a life full of enriching experiences.

**Both reading and writing can be therapeutic, and promote wellness by boosting emotional intelligence, critical thinking, empathy, self-awareness, reduce stress, lower blood pressure, improve immune system functioning and bestow a life full of enriching experiences.**



**Art is the triumph over chaos.**  
—JOHN CHEEVER

Art has evolved over millennia, embracing within it, precious expressions from hundreds of movements. From cave paintings to Romanticism to cubism to Fauvism and more recently, minimalism. Art can be described as a mirror to one's identity. It is an expression of who we are inclusively and exclusively. The role of art has forever been a topic of controversy. Is it only for the entertainment of the eyes, or can it pierce inward and transform our souls? The truth is, art is an array of complex emotions which pour out of an individual when words fall short. Therefore, not only is art a medium of expression, it is also a conduit of feeling tranquil during internal battles. Art, without a doubt, is therapeutic, whether one is the creator, or the witness.

Although art is not a definite cure for ailments, it is a form of relief, treatment, and a way to foster positivity and wellness. According to research, engaging in art, especially those activities which involve fine motor skills like sculpting, and drawing improve dexterity and coordination, as well as bone health. Art therapy has proven effective for patients with chronic pain. In older adults, appreciation of, or engagement in art helps boost immune function and reduce frailty.

Creating and appreciating art is a mindful activity, which can promote relaxation and reduce anxiety. Engaging with any kind of art has shown to release endorphins, the body's natural painkillers, which boost overall happiness. Moreover, art positively impacts the mind's cognitive function like memory, problem solving, attention, and decision making.

Therapeutically, expressive art therapy provides a non-judgemental forum to facilitate personal growth and healing. Art is an outlet for people to express their feelings when words leave the emotion felt unarticulated. This is called emotional processing. One of the most prominent artistic movements fostering emotional processing is Surrealism, pioneered by Salvador Dali, Frida Kahlo, Andre Breton, and Rene Magritte. Surrealism was highly influenced by Freud's Psychoanalysis, em-

phasising on the hidden conflicts and desires of the unconscious, subconscious, while also challenging societal norms. These artists claimed they projected their unconscious desires onto the canvas. Their art often featured scenarios with 'bizarre', disturbing images as a method of pure automatic expression, called automatism (Freud). Kahlo, is perhaps the best example of how art can be a therapeutic conduit to processing pain, both physical and emotional. Although she never agreed formally that she was a surrealist, her self-portraits are a testimony to her chronic pain as well as internal conflicts. One of her works, called *The Broken Column*, shows her with a metal graft instead of a spine. This was done after her spine surgery, which left her bedridden until she passed away at 54. Her other works during this time were *The Wounded Deer* and *Without Hope*. Kahlo and Breton both agreed on the fact that the subconscious and the unconscious can be accessed through painting. In fact, both of them used the technique of automatism (in painting). In this a line or a free-hand pattern is made. This acts as a stimulus. Patterns are added consequently, which elicit responses from the subconscious and thus what we see on a canvas is a result of our unconscious/subconscious mind. Examples from other painters include *The Son of Man*, by Magritte. This self-portrait also explores themes of self identity, and subconscious desires. *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans (Premonition of Civil War)* is a prototypical surrealist artwork by Salvador Dali, which is a depiction of his memory of the horrors of war.

To conclude literature, reading, art, cooking, baking, knitting, photography, meditation, and so much more is therapeutic. Undeniably, the experiences of an individual are subjective, and what works for one may not work for the other. There is also a fine line between getting triggered and finding something therapeutic. The first line of treatment should always be visiting a doctor. What needs to be worked on as well, are the triggers. As soon as one learns to deal with what is causing the problem, and makes peace with one's thoughts, art and the above mentioned therapies, facilitate healing.

**Is art only for the entertainment of the eyes, or can it pierce inward and transform our souls? The truth is, art is an array of complex emotions which pour out of an individual when words fall short.**

# The Emerging Relevance of Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy is 'life-giving', as it helps individuals to be 'seen, heard and held' by empathic and non-judgmental therapists.

A FRANCIS OFM

The past decade has seen a remarkable upsurge of interest in, as well as scientific quest upon the therapeutic effect of psychotherapy. Gone are the days when psychotherapy was viewed with negatively colored, naive popular conceptions, the so-called myths about psychotherapy, such as 'just a pricey venting session' and 'not many people go to therapy'. There is today a growing body of literature exploring the emerging trend of openness and acceptance towards it, particularly among the youth and couples, globally.

Statistics suggest that in the US, more than a quarter of the total adult population sometime or other in their life span utilises psychotherapy. About 50% of couples receive marriage and family therapy. And interestingly, 80% of those who receive therapy find it effective in healing their psychological, emotional, relational injuries and traumatic wounds.

During the pandemic, psychotherapy took center stage in many countries where the profession is regulated, as the essential partner in healthcare for effectively combating and responding to the tsunami of mental health crisis unleashed by the COVID-19 virus. Reassuringly, psychotherapy provided

individuals with strategies for coping with the dynamics of their defenses, such as rationalisation, grief, denial, loss and trauma. Caught in a debilitating traumatic mind loop triggered by the lack of social connection, excessive fear of contamination, hopelessness and 'survivor guilt', individuals found the virtual spaces of psychotherapy 'life-giving', as these helped them to be 'seen, heard and held' by empathic and non-judgmental therapists.

The attitudinal shift towards the growing acceptance of the therapeutic significance of psychotherapy certainly has a lot to do with the surge of evidence-based data presented by research, particularly on the specific influence of psychotherapy on the brain in changing its structure and functions.

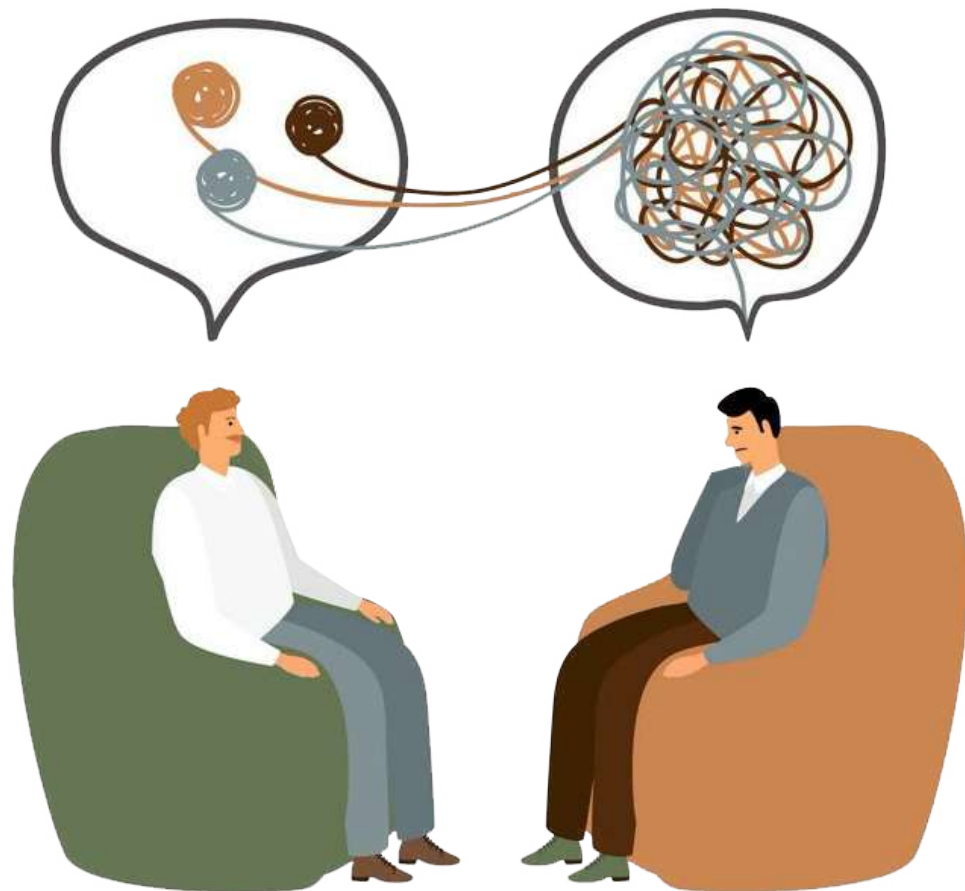
## The Neuroscience of Psychotherapy

Until a few decades ago, neurologists considered the brain as fully wired at birth, but with the revolutionising discovery of the concept of neuroplasticity, we now have significant insights into the development and functioning of the neural architecture, namely, the brain is not 'predetermined and unchanging'. The brain can be rewired. It has been empirically established that for

the normal development of the neural architecture, the role of the mutual and reciprocal interplay of various components such as genetics, environment, and experience are important. Genetics is the blueprint, social environment (e.g., nurturing relationships) is the context for the development of neurons, and experience is the mode of an individual's interactions with the environment.

Neuroscience approves today, with the support of empirical data, the potential of psychotherapy to provide an enriched environment—'an interpersonal matrix', that is capable of 'debuilding' the neural pathways that reinforce the maladaptive behaviors learned from the unhealthy environment of home during childhood, and its potential to rebuild the corrective neural pathways that enhance the rewiring of the brain.

In this vein of exploration on the potential of psychotherapy for brain changes, scholars highlight the possible activation of mirror neurons during psychotherapy. Mirror neurons are a type of brain cells that get activated while an individual is doing an action or watching another doing the same action. Though neuroscience is not conclusive about it, neuroscientists, like Marco Iacoboni attribute to mirror neurons our ability to understand the actions and intentions of other people, and highlight mirror neurons as the basis for empathy and social connections. These neurons are also considered to be capable of making brain-to-brain connections. Applying this data to the empathic therapeutic context of psychotherapy, neuroscience explains psychotherapy's potential for changing the brain structure and functions of the client.



Research also highlights the positive impact of psychotherapy contributing to the rewiring of the brain through increased production of a neurotrophin called the 'brain-derived neurotrophic factor' (BDNF) which is found in the brain regions of the hippocampus, cortex, and basal forebrain. Neurotrophins are a family of proteins responsible for the 'maturation, differentiation, and longevity of neurons.' BDNF is a member of the neurotrophin family which plays an important role in normal neural development and is a vital component in maintaining long-term memory. People with psychiatric disorders are found to have decreased levels of BDNF.

Thus, it is not wrong to state that the new wave of brain studies that highlight the potential of psychotherapy in rebuilding neuroplasticity has boosted the image of psychotherapy as a go-to treatment for the enhancement and well-being of our mental health.

#### **A Personal Encounter with Psychotherapy**

I am a fervent advocate of psychotherapy for issues of mental health, ranging from mental illness and maladaptive behaviors to all kinds of day-to-day emotional and relational difficulties. I firmly believe in the potential of psychotherapy to heal and to augment mental health, in general.

My assertive stance in favour of psychotherapy is not based on the fact that I am a psychotherapist myself, or that I blindly vouch that all my clients experience 100% healing from my work with them. I garner this personal conviction from my experience of being healed from a debilitating past trauma, resulting from an encounter with a group of burglars who held me captive at gunpoint. Though I escaped the situation unscathed, I developed a migraine-like headache which I suffered on and off after this incident, without really comprehending its cause or cure or even its potential association with the actual traumatic incident.

My headache persisted until the time I worked with an EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing) therapist who guided me through a painful clinical experience of exposure in the context of a safe therapeutic

relationship. In gently accessing my psycho-somatically locked trauma, she helped me gain a valuable insight: the gun was pointed not to the right side of my head, but to the left. Incidentally, my headache too was unilaterally located on my left.

In a semi-hypnotic-like clinical setting, she created, my therapist inquired of me with utmost empathy, "What is your headache all about? What do you see/feel about the headache?" My response flowed from what sounded like a pre-reflective unconscious realm of the mind, where all painful and traumatic memories are stored: "It is the gun that is touching the left side of my head, causing me the headache."

Since the incident until this session, in all of my careful and censored narration of the incident to a close circle of friends who cared for me, I always presented the gun as being pointed on my right. And about the headache, I located it on the left. I seldom made any interconnecting association between the two. Once the association was made, and the reception of the subsequent therapeutic help from a therapist who maintained a non-judgmental and empathic stance throughout the course of therapy, my headache eventually became non-existent.

In retrospect, the psychotherapy I received taught me various self-regulating strategies to support me whenever I encountered a fear-inducing situation potentially triggering my traumatic memory. Besides, through therapy I gained a new body-based awareness—an 'implicit somatic knowing'—into the various psychological and physiological needs of my body, and the sense of safety and emotional regulation it requires from time to time. Resultantly, I am able to muster the needed body-mind resilience for combating stress and the mind loop associated with it.

**Research also highlights the positive impact of psychotherapy contributing to the rewiring of the brain through increased production of a neurotrophin called the 'brain-derived neurotrophic factor' (BDNF) which is found in the brain regions of the hippocampus, cortex, and basal forebrain.**

# Personal Aesthetic Preferences and Mental Health Patterns

SIDDHIKA SHARMA

Recently, researchers have observed an increasingly significant correlation between people's mental health patterns and their aesthetic preferences. This connection extends beyond fashion choices, encompassing an individual's entire lifestyle aesthetics as a form of identity expression. The growing popularity of aesthetic subcultures, especially among young adults, has made it possible to examine mental health manifestations in various groups.

Research has uncovered distinct patterns of mental health symptoms across different aesthetic subcultures. One study found that individuals are attracted to aesthetics that resonate with their psychological needs and emotional experiences. Notably, people drawn to darker, more somber aesthetics such as grunge or gothic styles demonstrated higher rates of anxiety and depression compared to control groups. However, it is crucial to understand that these associations reveal a complex interaction between emotional states and artistic expression, rather than a direct cause-and-effect relationship.

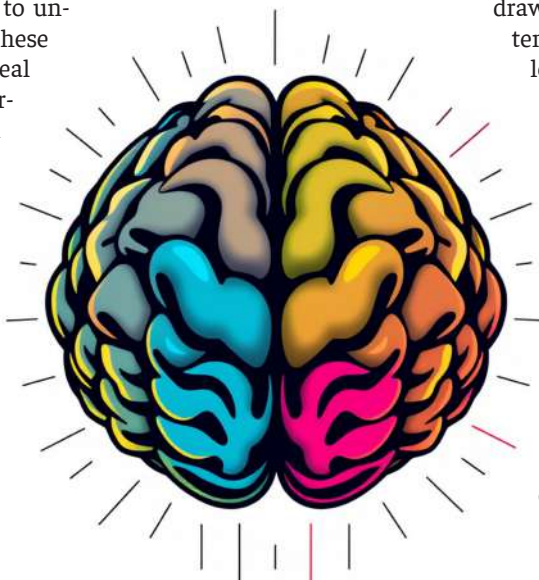
Conversely, individuals identifying with nature-in-

spired styles like cottagecore or soft girl aesthetics showed reduced anxiety and improved well-being scores. These aesthetics emphasise positive emotional expression, community, and natural elements. Study participants associated with these styles reported more effective stress-coping strategies and stronger social connections.

The role of social media in this dynamic cannot be overlooked. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok have become crucial venues for artistic expression and community building. However, researchers suggest that the pressure to maintain aesthetic consistency online can lead to increased anxiety and diminished authentic self-expression, despite the potential benefits of supportive networks for those with similar aesthetic preferences.

Minimalist and neutral aesthetics present a fascinating case study. Individuals drawn to these styles often report lower stress levels and improved mental organisation. Yet, this correlation may be influenced by socioeconomic factors, as maintaining a minimalist aesthetic typically requires financial stability and access to specific resources.

Age and developmental stage sig-



The relationship between mental health patterns and aesthetic preferences is a complex and multifaceted field of research. While clear connections exist, various factors—including social media, cultural background, and personal developmental stages—influence how aesthetic choices interact with mental health outcomes. Continued research in this area may fundamentally transform our understanding of personal expression's role in mental health, potentially leading to more personalised and effective mental health treatment approaches.

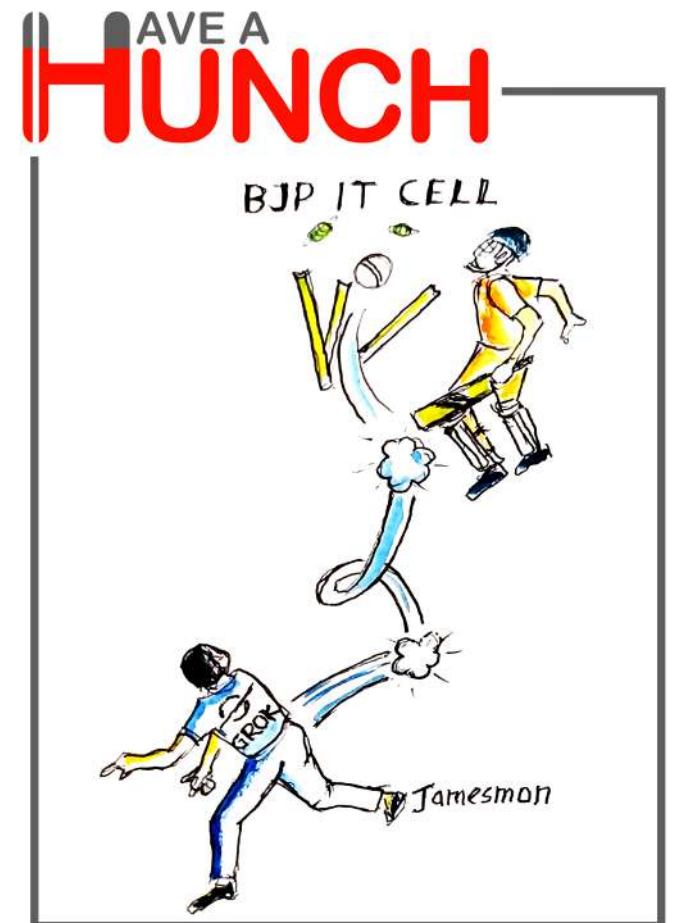
As the field of aesthetic psychology evolves, it promises a more nuanced and practical understanding of the intricate relationship between individual style preferences and mental well-being.

nificantly impact the relationship between aesthetic preferences and mental health. Adolescents and young adults—typically in critical phases of identity construction—demonstrate the strongest associations between aesthetic choices and mental health patterns. Aesthetic preferences can serve as crucial tools for identity exploration and emotional processing during these developmental stages. Cultural factors also play a pivotal role, with research indicating that the impact of aesthetic choices on mental health varies greatly across different cultural contexts.

Researchers are exploring the potential therapeutic applications of understanding aesthetic preferences. In clinical settings, these preferences may become valuable diagnostic and therapeutic tools, potentially leading to more personalised treatment strategies that incorporate patients' aesthetic identities into their overall mental health profile. The implications extend beyond individual mental health to broader societal issues, potentially informing more effective public health campaigns and creating more supportive work and learning environments.

Recent advancements have opened new research directions. Emerging studies are investigating the neurobiological connections between mental health patterns and aesthetic choices, utilising fMRI technology to examine brain activation patterns during aesthetic interactions. The rise of digital aesthetics and virtual identity expression—particularly through the metaverse and digital fashion trends—presents novel opportunities and challenges for understanding mental health connections.

Some mental health professionals are beginning to incorporate aesthetic preference assessments into diagnostic procedures. Preliminary pilot project findings suggest that understanding a client's visual preferences can provide insights into their emotional state and potential therapeutic approaches. Aesthetic-based treatment strategies for youth anxiety and depression have shown promising results.



# ECHOES OF DEVOTION

DHANYA GOWDA

In Huskur, nestled within Bengaluru's embrace, stands a testament to centuries of spiritual resilience—the Sri Madduramma Temple. This ancient sanctuary whispers stories of devotion that stretch back to the magnificent Chola period, its stones echoing with the prayers of generations.

Among the devotees, Madduramma Devi is no ordinary goddess. She is a powerful embodiment of Shakti, revered as a divine healer who stands as a guardian against humanity's most feared afflictions. Local legends speak of her miraculous intervention during a devastating epidemic in the early 20th century, where her divine grace seemingly halted the spread of dreaded diseases like cholera and smallpox, transforming despair into hope.

**Every March or April, the temple comes alive during the Huskur Jatre—a festival that is far more than a mere religious celebration. It is a living, breathing chronicle of cultural memory.**

Every March or April, the temple comes alive during the Huskur Jatre—a festival that is far more than a mere religious celebration. It is a living, breathing chronicle of cultural memory. Massive pagoda-type chariots, known locally as *kurju*, once numbered in the hundreds, cascading through surrounding villages in a magnificent procession that connected communities and celebrated shared heritage. Where once near-

ly a hundred chariots would join the sacred journey, now only three or four remain. The intrusion of modern infrastructure—specifically a railway electric line—has transformed the landscape, making it increasingly challenging for villages to continue their centuries-old tradition of pulling these towering chariots.



# Loving Other Stories

There is only one thing more dangerous than the individual ego or my story and that's the group ego that insists that our story is the measure of all things and so seeks to label other stories as ignorant, dangerous, or inferior.

RICHARD ROHR OFM

If we are going to be the rebuilders of society, we need to be rebuilt ourselves. A healthy psyche lives within at least four containers of meaning. Imagine four nested domes. The first is called my story, the second is our story, the third is other stories, and the fourth is the story. This is what I call the cosmic egg. It's the unique and almost unconscious gift of healthy religion. Much of the genius of the biblical revelation is that it honours and integrates all four, while much of the weakness of our deconstructed society is that it often honors only one level at best. The whole/hailed/saintly person lives happily inside of all of them.

The smallest dome of meaning is my story. The modern world is the first period of history where a large number of people have been allowed to take their private lives and identities seriously. There is a wonderful movement into individuation here, but there's also a diminishment and fragility if that's all we have. This first dome contains my private life. "I" and my feelings and opinions are the reference point for everything. This dome is the little stage where I do my dance and where the questions are usually, "How do I feel? What do I believe? What makes me unique?"

My story isn't big enough or true enough to create large or meaningful patterns by itself, but many people live their whole lives at this level of anecdote and nurtured self-image, without ever connecting with the larger domes of meaning. They are what they have done and what has been done to them—nothing more. This self becomes fragile and unprotected, and therefore constantly striving, easily offended, and fearful.

The second dome of meaning is our story. This is the dome of our group, our community, our country, our church—perhaps our nationality or ethnic group. We seem to need this to contain our identity and security as social beings. It's the good and necessary training ground for belonging, attaching, trusting, and loving. If we don't have a supportive family, group or community with which we can bond, we create people who struggle to bond. Fortunately, most of us have multiple memberships: family, neigh-



borhood, religious affiliation, country. These are schools for relationship, connection, and almost all virtue as we know it.

This second dome of meaning gives us myth, cultural heroes, group symbols, flags, special foods, ethnicity, and patriotism. These tell us that we're not alone; we're also connected to a larger story. We might understand that it's fanciful, but it is shared meaning and that is important. Regrettably, a lot of people stop at the level of this shared meaning because it gives more consolation and security to the small self. In fact, loyalties at this level have driven most of human history up to now.

## Other Stories and the Story

The third dome of meaning is what I call other stories. The term "other stories" illustrates the significant but sometimes painful recognition that our story is not the only frame, not likely the most important frame, and maybe even a frame with a lot of shadow and bias. This is the great advantage of studying history, literature beyond our own language,

anthropology, world cultures and religions, and experiencing some world travel, whether by opportunity or necessity. This is also the invitation modeled by Jesus to move beyond my story and our story, and to stand in friendship and solidarity with other stories.

As we encounter more and more of the world's other stories, many people are broadening their wisdom, while others are broadening their fear. There is only one thing more dangerous than the individual ego or my story and that's the group ego that insists that our story is the measure of all things and so seeks to label other stories as ignorant, dangerous, or inferior. It looks like it will take us some time, perhaps centuries, to resolve the human drive to exclude, to scapegoat, to judge, and to dismiss other peoples' stories. Only nondual thinkers, mystics, and some saints seem capable of such universal capacity.

The fourth dome of meaning, which encloses and regulates the three smaller ones, is called the story. By this, I mean the patterns that are always true. This is much



larger and more shared than any one religion or denomination. For example, forgiveness always heals; it does not matter whether we are Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, or Jewish. Forgiveness is one of the patterns that is always true, although it reveals its wisdom in countless ways. It is part of the story. Also, there is no specifically Christian way to feed the hungry or to steward the earth. Love is love, even if the motivation might be different.

### **The Impact of Our Story on Others**

Using the language of the cosmic egg, author Felicia Murrell shares her experience of growing up with a strong sense of our story that was limited by the power of other stories: I never questioned the world in which I grew up. I followed the rhythms set for me by those around me, understanding the world and how

**Deep, intimate knowing empowers agency, offers reciprocity, and, through mutuality, affords us the opportunity to be the custodians of our own story without being othered as an aside or a concession to dissent.**

to situate myself in it through the lenses and lives of those in authority over me... In the small rural North Carolina town of my youth, Blacks lived on one side of the tracks and Whites on the other.... Nothing about this life seemed abnormal. This was our story....

No one talked about race. No one expressed discontent or named things aloud. No one mentioned the way things were. We didn't buck the system. We kept our heads down and did what we were supposed to do. Success and advancement were others' stories, for people across town on the other side of the tracks. We were to stay in our place and follow the natural order of things, which I did until I no longer could.

Like matryoshka dolls nesting within one another, my story as a small child was a fragmented, compartmentalised part of our story. In the shadow of dominant voices, my story felt

less essential, even unnecessary. Without a clear understanding of the whole, my story was incomplete. But my story was all I knew until I was exposed to other stories.

When we remain stuck in the loop of our story without consideration of other stories, particularly when "our" is framed in (or lived in response to) a Eurocentric, patriarchal, dominant paradigm as the standard of measurement for all other stories, we are left with an incomplete model. Exposure to other stories is an invitation, a gateway to knowing. But it's merely that—an opportunity to know. A welcoming and acceptance of diversity may create familiarity, but it's not the same as knowing. Deep, intimate knowing empowers agency, offers reciprocity, and, through mutuality, affords us the opportunity to be the custodians of our own story without being othered as an aside or a concession to dissent....

How do we move toward each other in love, the truth of our authentic power? Perhaps, we welcome change instead of resisting it. To expand my worldview beyond the paradigm of Southern, Christian, rural or working poor to a larger cosmic frame that is inclusive, universal, affirming, and accepting, I needed to see the parts and the whole in all their majestic splendor and their messy complexity.

Transcendence is not a denial or detachment from my story or our story. It is an arduous commitment to truth-telling; to fully seeing; to empathetic listening that requires the work of living and being in the world; of deep, intimate knowing; of moving beyond our theories and maps into relationship building.

### **The Earth Story**

There is a way that nature speaks, that land speaks. Most of the time we are simply not patient enough, quiet enough, to pay attention to the story, says, Linda Hogan. The wisdom we need for this time of great unraveling will be gained as we remember that we are not separate from nature. The voices we need to listen most closely to at this time are the voices that the dominant culture has overlooked, dismissed, ignored, or silenced. The voices of Indigenous peoples who have never forgotten our place in the web of belonging. The voices of women, of communities of colour, of those from the queer community who have suffered the impact of

a dominant culture of supremacy for generations. Voices from the Southern Hemisphere, from religions outside our comfort zone whose perspectives are essential to even see our own blindness. The voices of the trees, the storms, the cicadas, the rivers, and the tiny viruses whose interconnected suffering and resiliency is essential in this time of dramatic change. The wisdom we need at this pivotal time in our history will be found there, outside the edges of the dominant culture. And by listening, we mean practicing kinship, intentionally entering into relationship, through respectful and authentic conversation and presence.

Kinship is recognising that our beloved community includes the whole, alive, interconnected world.... It is falling in love again with the world, considering the well-being of all the sacred others in our decisions. It is taking on the suffering of our beloveds and engaging in their healing.

As we learn the language of leaves and the banter of berries and then share these little moments of poetic wisdom with one another, we are re-storying our place. We are creating new stories that can guide us into a new and yet ancient way of being human.... Re-storying our relationship with Earth as sacred kin provides a spiritual and emotional foundation of belonging we need to support all the layers of work ahead of us.

Earth has her own rituals, expressed in stories of glaciers, seasons, spring blossoms, anthills, wildfires, and birdsongs. As we listen with affection to the stories the land tells, we are compelled to integrate their stories into our stories. To remain alive, our old narratives need to be connected with new meaning particular to our geographies and context. A beloved myth or story from a sacred text or scripture carries deep wisdom that comes alive when it is reoriented to our own time and place.

### **Transcending a Single Story**

The person who lives within the total cosmic egg is the mystic, the prophet, the universal human, the saint, the whole one. These are people like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., St. Teresa of Calcutta, St. John Henry Newman, Dag Hammarskjöld, and Julian of Norwich (my favorite mystic). These are the people who look out—with eyes wide as saucers—at the smaller

pictures because they observe from the utterly big picture. These are the ones who can both honour and listen to smaller, personal stories, and also live in the final state of affairs, already, now. They are often called seers because their perspective contains many eyes, even, somehow, the eyes of God.

Great "seers" operate beyond mere group loyalties; beyond any simple, dualistic thinking that always puts them on the "right" side; beyond winners and losers, good and bad. They are somehow able to live by universal principles while still caring for the specific; honouring cultural norms, yet making room for the exceptions. They have seen in a contemplative way, beyond the shadow and the disguise, beyond the suffocating skin of the private self and the self-serving egotisms of group. The contemplative mind integrates and gives focus to all our calculating and controlling.

True reconstruction will be led by those who can engage reality at all four levels simultaneously. They can honour the divine level and live ultimately inside of a great big story line. They appreciate the needs and context of our story and other stories and don't dismiss them as mere cultural trappings or meaningless traditions. They won't say that my story is not important, either. They won't demean or dismiss people who are working on personal issues or addressing the important identity concerns of the first half of life.

Most importantly, we cannot separate personal healing from societal healing. It's not sequential, but simultaneous. Many in our therapeutically focused society think they first must find healing and integration personally and then they will be free to serve groups or search for God. Yet it seems to me that it all happens in a spiral. In fact, there is a natural ecology of checks and balances between the four domes of meaning. I was lucky and blessed enough to have good family, religion, community, helpful therapy, and time for self-knowledge—overlapping one another like waves from an endless sea. Most people emphasise only one or the other, but those who honor all four levels have transcended the limitations of a single story. True transcendence frees us from the tyranny of I am, the idolatry of we are, and the scapegoating of they are. When all four stories are taken seriously we have a full life.



# The Age of Oligarchy

Obedient public servants fearing their high and prestigious positions make themselves 'good boys' and please their master.

GERRY LOBO OFM

Donald Trump victoriously made it to the White House, Washington, and his second rise to the Presidency of the USA. Now he owns the trump card in the game of cards! Nations of the world are the cards! Ever since he placed his signature when he took over as the President of the USA, there has never been a day without stamping his signature on executive orders on hundreds of interests which he had been containing in him during his campaign trail and after it. He has stunned the world of nations with innumerable orders from the White House's Oval Office. With these the world order is almost shaken. Could this be a sign of return to 'oligarchy' as Trump's opponents have already named his thumping pronouncements and declarations? Oligarchy is simply a government run by the power of the few. It is a kind of despotic power exercised by the privileged group for selfish aim. This is done through their wealth. Russia rose as an oligarchic rule in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, although Gorbachev visualised a democracy for the people. Some say that oligarchy is a debased form of aristocracy which denotes a government run by the vested interests of the influential and wealthy individuals. Elites are recruited, as we find in the choice of Trump to his cabinet, exclusively possessing prestige, wealth and honor.

## Forms of Government

**DEMOCRACY**  
A form of government in which the people are the ultimate power. The people choose their own representatives and leaders directly--either through elections or referendums.

**COLONIALISM**  
One country has political control over another. The ruling power has complete control over the colony's economy, politics, & culture.

**TOTALITARIANISM**  
One person or group has complete control over the lives of its citizens, including their religious beliefs & political affiliations.

**OLIGARCHY**  
Oligarchy is a form of government in which power rests with a small number of people. Power is typically controlled by people from the same family or social group.

**ARISTOCRACY**  
Power is given to a small, elite ruling class--the aristocrats. Members of the aristocracy are often chosen based on wealth, socioeconomic status, race, & genealogy.

**MONARCHY**  
A single leader, usually called a king or queen. The king or queen serves for life and has absolute power over all aspects of the country's government & military.

**SOCIALISM**  
The means of production, distribution, & exchange are owned and controlled by the people as a whole--not the wealthy or ruling class.

**THEOCRACY**  
The state is ruled by a religious authority. In this form of government, the state & religion are one and the same.

**COMMUNISM**  
A political, economic, and social system in which all property is publicly owned. Each person contributes - and receives - according to their ability & needs.

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No nation approves terrorism and wish to perpetrate criminal acts and attitudes. While stringent measures may be in place to bring the criminals to books, which Trump has already commenced executing it, the plight of migrants and illegal ones in his country has become a pathetic story. While Pope Francis has denounced this many times in his official pronouncements, and others who share his concern, the state of these marginalised is still in a desperate condition. With his "America is back" slogan, Trump seems to be building a kingdom of his own with a few billionaire business tycoons, some of whom are inducted into his close circle of advisors. The impression he gives is that America has place only for those who increase the country's independence together with unlimited wealth by new technology created by the brightest brain, by increased products of the consumer nature and the military apparatus to show that the entire universe looks up to America which alone can stand tall in the family of nations and dictate terms to them in order to protect one's own interests. Ukraine is a case in this power game. The show-down during the meeting of the President of Ukraine with Trump at the Oval office recently has dismayed the nations. Obviously it's a disgrace not only for the Ukrainian President but also for his people at home who are under fire and destruction for the last three years, and for the world at large which surely does not approve the conduct of the powerful President towards another leader of a nation who brought his needs in these trying times of unjustified war. Trump seems to bring America Back by trade tariffs imposed on many poor and rich countries without mercy. This only shows the deep rage within the American leader and his hunger for dominating the affairs of the world as the pre-democratic despots of history exercised their power. There is no wrong in building up a nation for the sake of people and their well-being, the ordinary who struggle for their daily bread, who cannot afford housing, education, water and health care. However, when the excessive craze for a gold-glittering wealth and spectacular power play is exercised, the wrong is quite obvious.

The rise of Trump, while it serves those who serve themselves, certainly upset the world order and the stability of democratic principles which have governed nations of Europe and other continents. European Union which had a cautious vigilance over the invasion of Ukraine is angered by the vociferous stand of Trump administration which gives the impression of bringing Russia to their interests, from which one dares to conclude that it was Ukraine which needs to be blamed for bringing about the prolonged conflict which has devastated the life and property of millions, and which goes to say that Ukraine has no right to stand free and independent. This is absolutely a wrong presumption. Ultimately, as events unfold themselves, it is also clear that Trump is demanding Ukraine to bow before the American superpower so that former's wealth of most precious minerals can become its possession. Trump, in a way has upset many nations which have been dependent on USA and it is obvious that his recent announcements declared to the Congress on the Capitol Hill at his first speech after taking over, are only a show of economic strength that has the power to bend many smaller nations of African and Asian continents. This is the "America is back" of Trump which has no place for the very American citizens who live on hard realities.

Perhaps a kind of oligarchy is also making inroads into the Indian democratic system. A trusted few are being depended upon in the running of the government by the ruling monarch, the Prime Minister. Billionaire businessmen and women are the shield to protect the incumbent government as in the past ten years of the majoritarian strength. High offices are filled by hand-picking. New offices are created to make space for those who stood by the Prime Minister even though in the public eyes these had no moral standing. The pillars of the nation's governance, including the judiciary, are made to toe the line. These obedient public servants fearing their high and prestigious positions make themselves "good boys" and please their master. One gets the impression that there is a gradual descending of democracy into dictatorship in India, as in USA, and in



Perhaps a kind of oligarchy is also making inroads into the Indian democratic system. A trusted few are being depended upon in the running of the government by the ruling monarch, the Prime Minister. Billionaire businessmen and women are the shield to protect the incumbent government as in the past ten years of the majoritarian strength.

other countries where the will of the people is not respected anymore, harsh disciplinary measures are set in place and the citizens are demanded to obey for their life. Moreover, if there is no strong opposition to weather the onslaughts of the ruling dispensation, as the Indian case stands, the present communal politics may last for ages, with the result, democracy will obviously turn into monarchical dictatorship and oligarchic powers will ascend to supremacy. The Indian populace, so obsessed with "religion," can still not understand the consequences of promoting politics which favors their religious "gods" and not sense the human predicament surfaced on the faces of the ordinary which needs to be eradicated so that existence does not contain a meaningless death but a happiness that is ordained for all beings by the Creator.

Envisioning an America of "plenty" and prosperity by the Trump reign may sound very idealistic or even utopian. Citizens of any country may have the right to dream of prosperity in material wealth providing them ease of comfort. However, if the predicament of the marginalised, the issues of migrants and those who face cultural discrimination is not addressed by governments of the people, the basic structure of human dignity will be at stake. The economic and technological progress resulting in outlandish output of material resources for the pleasure of human beings is not the end in itself. Self-sufficiency, as Trump desires for his nation, is not the ultimate goal of life. If progress in diverse fields of knowledge does not take cognizance of human dignity, then humanity is allowing itself or those at the helm of affairs, to vanish like smoke. That's why

Pope Francis asserts in his document, *Dignitas Infinita*: "Even in sorrowful state, human life carries a dignity that must always be upheld, that can never be lost, and this calls for unconditional respect...Indeed, there are no circumstances under which human life would cease from being dignified and could, as a result, be put to an end" (DI 52).

India, with its capacity to hold multi-religious, multi-lingual and multi-cultural wealth, requires being cautious about its moves. While economic well being of its citizens is necessary, the government of today, instead of a stone-pelting exercise at the Opposition, is required to enhance human dignity, the *Dignitas Infinita*, which is annihilated by violence against women, against the tribal and against the under-side of our society. The daily political bickering, violent accusations razed against each other and the enormous time spent in defending the self-righteous attitude must be eliminated by the will to listen to the human cry and the cry of the earth. India definitely needs America, just as America needs India. Nations of the world require today political love in order to build a common home where lion and the lamb will be able to dwell together, where evil crimes are put to death with the power of love. Politics of hammer, as exhibited by Trump, will not serve the future of humanity. It might serve the billionaires who protect themselves and their greed; but they too will vanish one day with the rest of humanity if their goal in their enterprise is not the stark human reality.

Nations and their leaders today need to heed the call of Pope Francis: "Global society is suffering from grave structural deficiencies that cannot be resolved by piecemeal solutions or quick fixes. Much needs to change, through fundamental reform and major renewal. Only a healthy politics, involving the most diverse sectors and skills, is capable of overseeing this process. An economy that is an integral part of political, social, cultural and popular programme directed to the common good could pave the way for 'different possibilities which do not involve stifling human creativity and its ideals of progress, but rather directing that energy along new channels'" (Fratelli Tutti, 179).

INDIA INCLUSION AUDIT 2025




INDIA INCLUSION AUDIT 2025

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INDIA INCLUSION AUDIT 2025



# How Is Evil So Easy?

The potential for evil exists within us all and will emerge if given the opportunity.

ARSHIA CHIDAMBARAM



History condemns past atrocities, portraying those responsible as uniquely evil. Yet, it often ignores how the same pursuit of power persists in society today. The uncomfortable truth is that we are not so different and the darkest chapters in human history were written by ordinary people. The potential for evil exists within us all and will emerge if given the opportunity.

During the Nuremberg trials, several defendants claimed they were simply following the orders of Adolf Hitler, and that, they were not to blame for any war crimes. This sparked the interest of a Jewish psychologist in America named Stanley Milgram, who revolutionised the field with his work. In his study, voluntary participants were instructed to administer electric shocks to other participants (actors) if they answered questions incorrectly. Although they could not see the participants they were harming (as

they did not exist), they heard the screaming and crying (recorded audio) in pain through the wall. The results were alarmingly sinister. Every single participant pressed the shock button, with 65% administering the maximum shock level despite being warned about the potential risk of death.

This study inspired several other famous studies such as the Stanford Prison Experiment, where participants tortured other people without even being instructed to do so, and The Hofling Hospital Experiment, where nurses knowingly injected patients (fake) with a lethal dosage of a drug.

Unfortunately, these patterns are not limited to experiments but are extremely present in everyday settings. Under the 1949 Geneva Conventions, collective punishment is a war crime. As stated in Article 33, 'No protected person may be punished for any offence he or she has not personally com-

mitted.' Collective penalties and likewise all measures of intimidation or terrorism are prohibited. This international law was formed to reiterate the principle of individual responsibility, as such practices strike at the guilty and innocent alike, violating the principles of humanity and justice.

Despite the law, it is not uncommon that in educational settings teachers use it, making them no different from military psychopaths who abuse their power. Other examples include worker exploitation, police brutality, moral policing, or any form of ostracism. Even these small acts of cruelty reveal the same tendencies toward dehumanisation and dominance. This is demonstrated by Albert Bandura in his study of moral disengagement, which revealed that people use advantageous comparisons of worse behaviour to minimise guilt and avoid respon-

sibility for their cruel and harmful behaviour. In his study participants used moral disengagement to justify physical harm and verbal abuse to Bobo dolls, and were more likely to do so when they observed that another individual did not face consequences for the same action.

This is why it is essential to confront any acts of cruelty regardless of how trivial it may seem to the perpetrator, as such behaviours historically stem from the same psychological foundations of large-scale brutalities. In the words of Fyodor Dostoevsky, "It is not the fact of sin that is so terrible, but the fact of it being so easy." Additionally, it is crucial to introspect and monitor our own behaviour and interactions, to ensure we do not cause harm to others. Ultimately, any form of cruelty is fundamentally inhumane and unjustifiable, and recognising this is crucial in preventing the repetition of history's darkest chapters.

# Ambedkar Jayanti

14 April

TOM JOHN OFM

“Educate,  
Agitate,  
Organise.”  
Ambedkar

**D**r Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar stands as one of the most transformative intellectual and social leaders in the history of modern India. Born on April 14, 1891, in a society deeply entrenched in the discriminatory caste

system, Ambedkar rose from the depths of social marginalisation to become a pivotal architect of India’s constitutional democracy, a champion of human rights, and a beacon of hope for millions of oppressed people.

Growing up as a Dalit (then known as “untouchable”) in colonial India, Ambedkar experienced firsthand the brutal realities of social discrimination. Despite facing extreme prejudice and systemic barriers, he demonstrated extraordinary intellectual prowess. His academic journey was nothing short of remarkable—he became the first Dalit to obtain a doctorate from a foreign university, earning degrees from Columbia University and the London School of Economics.

Ambedkar’s life was dedicated to dismantling the oppressive social structures that had subjugated

millions for centuries. He understood that education was the most powerful weapon for social transformation. Through his writings, speeches, and political activism, he challenged the deeply rooted caste system, advocating for equal rights, social dignity, and opportunities for the most marginalised sections of society.

As the chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution, Ambedkar played a crucial role in creating a document that enshrined principles of social justice, equality, and democratic ideals. He envisioned a nation where every citizen, regardless of caste, religion, or economic background, would have equal rights and opportunities.

Beyond his political and social work, Ambedkar was a prolific scholar. He was an economist, anthropologist, historian, and leader who wrote extensively on social issues. His works like *Annihilation of Caste* remain seminal texts in understanding social inequality.

Dr Ambedkar’s life is a testament to the power of education, resilience, and unwavering commitment to social justice. He transformed personal suffering into a lifelong mission of empowerment, inspiring generations to challenge systemic oppression and work towards a more equitable society.



“I like the religion that teaches liberty, equality, and fraternity.”

Ambedkar

# Green Exercise and Physical and Mental Well-Being

Exercising outdoors can bring about joy, positivity, and a sense of lightness, potentially enhancing one's day and promoting long-term health.

SPARSH BHARDWAJ

Exercise in nature, known as green exercise, is gaining increasing recognition for its potential to improve both physical and mental health by combining physical activity with exposure to natural environments. The concept is straightforward: working out in the fresh air of nature may offer greater advantages compared to indoor exercise, leveraging the soothing and rejuvenating effects of natural surroundings. As individuals seek more efficient methods to enhance their well-being, green exercise has grown in popularity. However, despite the mounting excitement, scientific evidence supporting the superior benefits of green exercise remains ambiguous.

A meta-analysis of three longitudinal trials revealed an intriguing phenomenon: participants reported a slight decrease in perceived exertion after green exercise compared to indoor exercise. This suggests that despite exerting the same physical effort, individuals perceived the activity as less strenuous when performed outdoors. This



reduced perception of effort may stem from the calming and motivating aspects of nature. Imagine a walk in a park with trees, open sky, and expansive space—an experience that can make physical activity seem less challenging compared to walking on a treadmill. Nevertheless, when examining concrete physiological measurements such as heart rate, blood pressure, and cortisol levels (an indicator of stress), researchers found no solid evidence of additional advantages offered by outdoor exercise.

The emotional response emerged as the most notable aspect of these studies. Participants consistently preferred green exercise over indoor exercise, demonstrating strong positive emotions and a clear inclination towards outdoor activities. Virtual green exercise—where individuals view nature scenes on a screen while working out indoors—was distinctly inferior to actual outdoor activity. Nature possesses a unique essence that cannot be replicated virtually, with its fresh air, open sky, and unpredictable sounds and sights. However, despite experiencing improved emotions during and after outdoor physical activity, these positive effects did not translate into significant, quantifiable improvements in overall mood or mental well-being. In simpler terms, while participants felt positive, there was no evidence of long-term emotional or psychological benefits beyond the initial pleasure.

Physiologically, green exercise appeared to have minimal impact. Although participants reported less physical effort and increased enjoyment, their bodies showed no differences in heart rate, blood pressure, or other biological indicators compared to indoor exercise. This finding adds complexity to the discussion, suggesting that while green exercise may seem more enjoyable and less challenging, it may not result in improved physical outcomes, at least in the immediate term.

An additional intriguing element was the exploration of virtual green exercise, where individuals performed indoor exercises while viewing natural scenery on a monitor. The findings indicated that virtual na-

ture provided some benefit, but fell short of the actual outdoor experience. Real outdoor green physical activity was consistently perceived as more enjoyable, highlighting the irreplaceable nature of genuine environmental exposure. It serves as a reminder that regardless of technological advances, our connection to nature cannot be fully duplicated.

The varying results in the reviewed trials exposed significant limitations in the current research landscape. Many studies were constrained by small sample sizes or methodological biases, resulting in overall poor-quality evidence. This makes it challenging to draw definitive conclusions about the long-term advantages of green exercise. Moreover, most existing research focused on immediate, temporary impacts rather than investigating the sustained implications of regular participation in green exercise. Without comprehensive long-term studies, it remains difficult to determine whether frequent outdoor exercise can produce lasting improvements in physical or mental well-being.

Despite these constraints, the results suggest potential benefits, particularly in terms of motivation. Exercising outdoors can lead to increased pleasure and decreased perceived effort, potentially helping individuals maintain consistent physical activity for overall health benefits. If people find exercise more enjoyable, they are more likely to continue, potentially resulting in improved physical fitness and mental well-being over time.

Ultimately, while scientific evidence does not definitively prove green exercise as superior to indoor exercise in terms of physical and mental health benefits, it does offer a more enjoyable and less stressful workout experience. For individuals seeking to enhance their exercise routine, simply heading outside—whether for a park walk or a woodland run—could be key to maintaining motivation and finding pleasure in physical activity. Exercising outdoors can indeed bring about joy, positivity, and a sense of lightness, potentially enhancing one's day and promoting long-term health.

# Invisible Spectrum

## Autism and Mental Well-being

If you don't fall into autistic categories, you might consider yourself a decent human being. But what happens when the disability is "invisible"?

SRUTHI SRIDHAR

In the past couple of years, society's attitude towards disabled people has shifted—from attempting to eliminate the word itself to adopting terms like "differently abled" that inadvertently absolve society of its responsibility for alienation. You might have also heard the platitude "your disability doesn't define you!" which, even when setting aside its toxic positivity, remains ignorant and insensitive. The world is not designed for disabled people—their existence defines disability. Attempting to erase this aspect of disabled people's identities is, in essence, erasing their existence.

Beyond these questionable "positive" attitudes, outright hatred towards disabled people has persistently prevailed. When someone is visibly disabled, people typically respond in one of two ways: either feeling pity or finding humour—and if you don't fall into these categories, you might consider yourself a decent human being. But what happens when the disability is "invisible"?

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurological and developmental disorder that affects how people interact, communicate, learn, and behave. While clinically defined as a neurodevelopmental disorder, the term "neurodivergency" is increasingly preferred. Autistic people navigate the world fundamentally differently from neurotypical individuals, creating a challenging dynamic where they struggle to conform to societal expectations while simultaneously developing an intense urge to comply.

"Masking" describes the phenomenon in which an autistic person suppresses or subdues traits characteristic of autism to assimilate into society. "Stimming" refers to self-stimulatory behaviours involving repetitive movements or sounds. When people view stimming as "childish" or unusual, autistic individuals often stop self-regulating, compromising their comfort to gain social confirmation. This masking process is immensely traumatising. Their well-being is frequently neglected, and in the rare instances when accommodation occurs, autistic people must navigate a rigorous process of societal and institutional reform that is extraordinarily draining.

Balancing social life, personal well-being, and academics can be overwhelming for autistic individuals. Conventional therapeutic interventions often prove ineffective, as many autistic people are hyper-aware of their behaviours and perceived flaws. Simply pointing out traits they need to modify is unhelpful. Research on autism has been predomi-



nantly limited to studying children, which has significantly overshadowed autistic adolescents and young adults who learn to mask early in life, making diagnosis using child-centered criteria increasingly challenging.

Research has revealed that ASD symptoms influence well-being through factors like feeling safe and secure in one's environment and experiencing psychological satisfaction. The severity of symptoms correlates directly with psychological well-being. While it is widely accepted that subclinical autistic traits are continuously distributed across the general population, stigma persists. An umbrella review discovered high levels of comorbid psychiatric disorders among autistic individuals, including anxiety disorders, mood disorders, depressive disorders, ADHD, and even conduct and impulse control disorders. Another study found that 50% of autistic adults meet the diagnostic criteria for social anxiety disorder—potentially stemming from the pervasive fear of misinterpretation many autistic people experience.

Studies have emphasised the importance of community-based research with inclusive samples, acknowledging that factors such as age, gender, intellectual ability, and geographical context contribute to the heterogeneity of autism experiences.

Autistic adults consistently report concerningly low well-being across various life domains, including environmental, social, health, physical,

and sexual aspects, compared to neurotypical individuals. While the factors contributing to their well-being remain partially obscure, research suggests that ASD symptom severity directly influences psychological well-being, which is the most critical factor for general life satisfaction.

Domains of daily functioning—including self-harming behavior, depressed mood, living situation, and leisure activities—are directly associated with the overall life satisfaction of autistic people. These findings suggest that interventions aimed at improving quality of life should focus on addressing feelings of depression, loneliness, and personal environment, rather than targeting ASD symptom severity—an approach aligned with common ASD guidelines.

Beyond statistical analysis, being genuinely empathetic towards autistic people without infantilising them is crucial. One should not require data to practice basic human kindness. Autistic individuals are integral members of our communities. Creating a safe space involves accommodating their unique communication and socialisation methods, respecting their needs, and sincerely listening to and understanding their experiences.

Systemic and societal change begins with genuine care—recognising the humanity in those around us and actively working to create more inclusive, understanding environments. The path to true acceptance is paved with compassion, respect, and a willingness to listen and learn.



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# THE VOICE IN THE CROWD

SARA MARIA

The amphitheater buzzed with restless murmurs.

I stood at the podium, gripping my A4 sheets, scanning the crowd for familiar faces—something to tether me. My fingers pressed into the paper, crumpling it slightly. I had done this before. I knew the words, the pauses. But knowing wasn't the same as being ready.

I took a breath—more of a sigh. A few in the crowd sighed back. Solidarity? Maybe. The mic crackled. No sign of the guest. Might as well rehearse. I looked at my sheet, but my vision flickered, shifting between sharp and blurry. My chest tightened, my throat dried. I tried to speak. Nothing came out.

Then, a whisper, “What is she doing here?” Too close. But no one had spoken. My shoulders tensed. “Why is she faking it?” The voices weren't mine. They multiplied, layering over each other like an interrogation room. “What's with all that attitude?” “I can barely hear her.” “She's such a—”

I knew the word before it landed. Heat crawled up my spine. My feet stuck to the floor. The amphitheater stretched, massive,



swallowing me whole. The ceiling of the amphitheatre shattered.

Glass shards hung suspended in the air. Vibrating. Waiting. Then, they struck. “Nobody likes you.” A shard sliced my cheek. “You're never enough.” Another lodged into my ribs. “Hypocrite.” A sliver buried itself into my collarbone.

Each one screamed an insecurity, a buried failure. The pain was more than physical. It was precise, a dismantling of everything I had built. The voices shrieked, hammering into my skull, carving into my bones.

Then—darkness. (moments pass) I was in my college's washroom. I gripped the sink, water trickling down my face. My reflection stared back—wide-eyed but whole. Footsteps approached. “Sara?”

I turned. Supreetha, my junior, beamed. “That was amazing. You were incredible out there.” Her words settled like a balm. She didn't see fear. She didn't see failure. She saw boldness. I smiled. “Thank you. She hesitated. “I want to be like you, but I'm afraid of being judged.” I exhaled. The weight of my earlier spiral tugged at me.



“Who are these people judging you?” She hesitated. “Well... I imagine that they judge me.” I exhaled. Her words struck something deep.

While I was drowning in that amphitheater, I had believed they knew everything—my failures, my worst moments. But the truth was, they didn't. They weren't there on my worst nights. They hadn't seen me claw my way out of the dark. So how did they know exactly what to say to hurt me?

They didn't. I did. It was my own voice, shape-shifting into theirs. My fears projected onto the crowd. The amphitheater blurred, grounding me back to reality—the wooden podium under my fingertips, my breath steadying. The whispers weren't proof of judgment; they were echoes of my own self-doubt, given form. I had given them a voice.

“Sara?” Supreetha's voice brought me

back. I blinked. “See? Half the time, it's not them—it's us,” I said. She paused, her brows knitting together in thought. “Oh.” I gave her a small smile. “You only know what you tell yourself. Sometimes, we project our fears onto others, assuming they see our worst when, in reality, they might not see it at all.”

She nodded slowly. “That's... deep.” A flicker of relief crossed her face, as if a weight had been lifted. We stood in silence for a moment, the noise of the outside world muffled by the tiled walls of the washroom. Then she smiled. “Thank you, really.” I watched her leave, her steps lighter, her shoulders straighter.

Turning back to the mirror, I met my own gaze. The girl staring back at me wasn't trembling anymore. She looked steady, certain. I touched my reflection, as if making a silent promise. The voices weren't real. But I was. And that was enough.

# Resilience

SANJANA VIJAYAN

Resilience is the ability of an individual to bounce back from setbacks in life. It is a complex interplay of emotional, behavioural, and cognitive traits that enable a person to cope with challenges and emerge stronger from adversity.

The cognitive features of a resilient person include: Optimistic thinking, problem-solving skills, a belief in one's ability to overcome challenges, and attributing success to personal skills and abilities rather than external factors.

Resilient individuals possess a mental framework that transforms obstacles into opportunities for growth. They approach difficulties with a constructive mindset, believing in their capacity to navigate and ultimately triumph over challenging circumstances.

Behaviourally, resilient individuals demonstrate: Healthy stress coping mechanisms, perseverance in the face of challenges, and strong social networks that provide emotional support and encouragement

These behavioural traits enable individuals to maintain forward momentum, even when confronted with significant life challenges. The ability to persist and seek support becomes a critical mechanism for overcoming adversity.

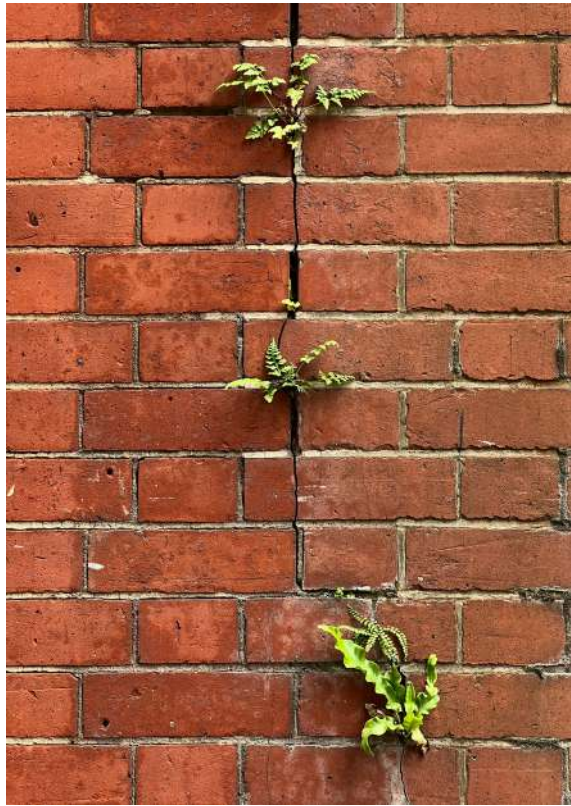
The emotional features of resilience encompass: Hope: a fundamental belief in overcoming current challenges, gratitude: appreciating existing resources and positive aspects of life, and effective emotional regulation: managing emotional responses to challenging situations

Emotional resilience allows individuals to maintain psychological equilibrium, transforming potential emotional setbacks into opportunities for personal growth and understanding.

Several evidence-based strategies can help develop resilience.

- **Cognitive Restructuring:** A technique commonly used in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) that involves replacing negative thoughts with positive and realistic perspectives. This approach helps reframe challenges as manageable experiences rather than insurmountable obstacles.
- **Positive Affirmations:** Repeating constructive, empowering statements to boost self-esteem and reinforce personal capabilities. These affirmations serve as mental reinforcement, helping individuals maintain a positive self-perception.
- **Mindfulness and Meditation:** Practicing self-awareness and improve emotional regulation skills. By cultivating present-moment awareness, individuals can develop greater emotional flexibility and resilience.

It is crucial to recognise that resilience is not about facing challenges alone. Seeking professional support from therapists or counsellors is a sign of strength, not weakness, especially when challenges seem overwhelming. The journey of resilience is not about avoiding challenges but about developing the inner strength to transform them into opportunities for personal growth and self-discovery.



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**"Whatever you do to the least of my brothers you do unto me."  
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