



**Saju George**  
sajugeosj@gmail.com

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# KALAHRDAYA

## AN OASIS OF ART, LIFE AND PEACE



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## **A**rt: The Creative Necessity

Art, in its broadest sense, embraces every human creative activity that serves the pursuit of beauty. Art, life, and peace are integrally interconnected and mutually enriching; art serves humanity by fostering reconciliation and promoting life.

Oscar Wilde once famously wrote, “All art is quite useless.” In this context, it simply means that art is “quite” something else—a fundamental necessity for everyone, everywhere. A world without the arts is unimaginable; it would be a dull existence, devoid of imagination and creativity. It is our artistic faculty that truly distinguishes us from all other species.





Kalahrdaya (The Heart of Art)—the Universal Home of Art and Culture—was established to promote a world immersed in the arts. It serves as an oasis where artists can experience complete creative freedom, building peace and harmony in and through their work.

### **Life: From A Swamp to A Sanctuary**

My upbringing in the rich artistic and cultural traditions of Jorasanko Thakurbari (Rabindra Bharati University) and the Visva-Bharati, Shantiniketan of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, provided a deep well of inspiration. Over fifteen years, the vision for a center of art and culture slowly matured, eventually taking root at the present location of Kalahrdaya.

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on the fringes of Kolkata along the road to the Bay of Bengal, it is now being transformed into a vibrant oasis of art, culture, and community building.

This arduous task has taken a heavy toll on me. While I sit back and reminisce the days passed by, with a hip implant and other heavy health issues, I say to myself, ‘God has indeed done a miracle.’

The subtle agony of building up Kalahrdaya over a decade—both mental and emotional—has brought untold pain. Initially, the foundational philosophy of Kalahrdaya as a centre of art and culture for the underprivileged was not widely accepted, resulting in disappointingly slow progress. Placing oneself at the service of the marginalized through a non-profit venture is by no means a bed of roses.

The mental, intellectual, emotional, physical, aesthetic, and financial labour invested in building Kalahrdaya is almost unimaginable. Conceiving and finally bringing it to life has not been a labour of ten months, but a yajna—a sacrifice of nearly thirty years, to be precise.

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In the beginning, some neighbours even threatened to chase me away, as most disbelieved the good intentions behind the project. Kalahrdaya was the first of its kind in this area. I recount these obstacles only to highlight the profound ignorance and the hurdles an artist must overcome to serve art, life, and peace. To put it mildly, living among those who do not respect or support art is a pathetic struggle. I am, however, immensely grateful to the handful of enlightened souls who continue to support this vision.

Since my middle school days, I have believed that the arts are life-enhancing. They possess an inherent ability to celebrate existence and express life in its most profound forms. To be an artist is a journey of both sheer joy and, at times, great frustration. Yet, it is difficult to imagine a single day without being enlivened by music, dance, drama, painting, sculpture, cinema, or poetry. To be an artist is a calling—a true vocation—just as being a connoisseur of the arts is a life-enchanting pursuit. Both must be diligently cultivated and nurtured.

### **Peace: The Architecture of Reconciliation**

The Art Peace Foundation serves as a sister concern and the “main artery” of Kalahrdaya. Our mission is to create a serene environment for children, parents, and all who visit us. Almost everyone who enters this campus shares the same first impressions: “It is such a peaceful place,” and “This is an ideal setting for nurturing art and culture.” To me, these comments are my greatest laurels.

Art and peace initiatives foster dialogue, empathy, and healing, particularly in conflict zones. By utilizing theatre, poetry, and audio-visual arts, we build bridges and dissolve divisions. These mediums heal trauma, amplify marginalized voices, and transform conflicting communities into coexisting ones. They instill a fresh energy that can influence decisionmakers to prioritize peace over war and harmony over conflict. Ultimately, the fundamental role of art is building reconciliation.

Artistic and cultural diplomacy is essential for any society seeking to improve its quality of life and foster international understanding. Through creative imagination, empathy, and daring action, we can smooth human encounters and soothe long-standing tensions. Art has the power to transform health, inspire quality education, and spark innovative thinking. By bridging cultures and promoting dialogue within conflicting societies, we can truly revive a weary world.

Peace is not an abstract idea; it is something we actively create to ensure quality living in a healthy environment. Throughout history, courage, imagination, and creativity have joined hands to turn artistic expression into a force for peacebuilding and the transformation of societies torn by conflict. Today, peace is the rarest and most sought-after commodity in the world.



The arts serve as powerful, non-violent tools—bridging divides, facilitating dialogue, and healing trauma. Various artistic mediums have long been integrated into reconciliation strategies to transform conflict into “peace blocks.” Artists, peacemakers, and policy experts inspire communities to equip themselves with these essential skills. There is a “magic spell” in every sound, an enchantment in every movement, and an allurements in every line drawn that can soothe hearts and tune minds to become ambassadors of reconciliation.

However, simply dancing, singing, or painting a piece a thousand times will not bring peace on its own. These actions must become building blocks within the hearts of both participants and spectators, moving them toward proactive change. Peace does not emerge spontaneously like mushrooms; it must be created and preserved.

### **The Harmony of the Orchestra**

When artists collaborate—whether in an orchestra, a choreography, a play, or a mural—they are actively bringing peace into existence. In an orchestra, musicians must be perfectly tuned to create harmony, melody, or symphony. Without this alignment, there is only dissonance, chaos, and conflict. Creating peace is much like tuning

a musical instrument; in reality, “tuning” is empathy—the ability to understand and share the feelings of one another.

Kalahrdaya endeavours to harmonise art, life, and peace by employing the principle: ‘catch them young.’ Our students begin their journey at three and a half years old, blossoming into adulthood within this environment.

### **Arts as Agents of Transformation**

The arts possess a unique power of transmission, sending a fundamental message of peace to the world through words, pictures, movements, and forms. To be effective, peace education requires a refreshed methodology—one that is interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary. Art does not merely transmit values; it acts as an agent of transformation, turning conflict into calm.

Numerous artists use their craft to create alternative spaces for discovering inner peace, reimagining relationships, rebuilding communities, and healing the wounds of war. Art is meant for dialogue and for reconciling us to one another.

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### **The Journey of Kalahrdaya**

There was a time when dance was considered a taboo in many communities, remaining out of reach for those who longed to learn. This atmosphere prevailed around Kalahrdaya when I began teaching dance to three Dalit girls, aged four, six, and nine. It took fifteen years of dedication to eventually attract more than 300 students to this home of arts and culture.

Those original three students have since travelled through Europe twice. To date, about fifteen women and six men from our programme have performed with me across India and abroad. They have been exposed to the best of the world—an opportunity they could not have imagined without the arts. Today, many of them are teachers at Kalahrdaya and elsewhere.

Life has changed for these village men and women. By stepping beyond their borders, they have learned to reimagine their perspectives, set higher goals, and deepen their motivation to be promoters of life. They have become leaders in their families and communities.

Yet, even after a quarter-century of dancing across 35 countries and well over 2,000 stages, the response from those in positions of responsibility remains painfully cold. At times, I am misunderstood or silenced, which slows the progress of creating a wider space for art and peace. Today's trends favour financial security and institutionalization, often sidelining the service of the poor and the marginalized. In building a centre like Kalahrdaya, a certain 'apostolic aggressivity' is essential. The 'magis'—the drive for the "more" and the "greater"—is demanded of everyone involved in this mission.

I am often left alone to find resources to continue this initiative. A fear has crept in me whether I would be silenced and even stopped to move ahead, like a number of my fellow artists in India are facing because the art and culture initiatives are non-profit making, non-prestigious as well as non-glamorous. Unfortunately, "Money is the measure of all things," still rules even the religious world.

### **A Call for 'Apostolic Aggressivity'**

The arts are the heart and soul of any society. They are both the preservers and the preservatives of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty—the three most vital aspects of the Divine. Satyam vada, dharmam chara—"Speak the truth and live righteously"—is the motto of Kalahrdaya. The arts are centered on these enduring values; they are born of, and advocate for, the power of creativity and imagination.

"No great artist sees things as they really are; if he did, he would cease to be an artist," wrote Oscar Wilde. This serves as a reminder that we need only keep our hearts and minds open to welcome the surprises of the creative spirit. To sum up: the arts are the outward expressions of an inward seeking, designed to create peace and delight in all hearts, at all times, and in all places.

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*Dr. Saju George is a Jesuit of Kolkata Province. He is a professional Indian Classical Dancer, and the Founder Director of Kalahrdaya.*