



Nyaay Kala

Artistic Impressions of Judgments that Shaped India



Select works on display have been generously donated by S. K. J.
Law College, Muzaffarpur

Artists may be contacted to commission artworks. Kindly scan the
QR code on display in the artwork's description.

ABOUT

Nyaay Kala is an exhibition featuring original works by ten artists, each piece reinterpreting ten of among India's most significant constitutional judgments. In transforming landmark legal decisions into powerful visual stories that centre the people behind them, these artworks go beyond the courtroom, turning legal precedents into compelling visual narratives that resonate with modern audiences. Each rendering serves as both historical documentation and contemporary commentary, presenting these precedents as living ideas that continue to shape our everyday freedoms, and our understanding of justice, equality, and accountability.

Nyaay Kala uses art to open up dialogue and make conversations about justice more relatable and inclusive. In doing so, it invites viewers to see justice not as a concept confined to the bar and bench, but as a foundation for social capital that belongs to all of us, in our shared spaces, memories, and collective imagination.

KESAVANANDA BHARATI V. STATE OF KERALA (1973)

In the 1970s, a spiritual leader in Kerala, Swami Kesavananda Bharati, lost part of his temple land to government reforms. The Kerala Land Reforms Act had redistributed vast temple lands to the landless tenants, a push for equality that raised questions about the right to property. In 1970, he took his fight to the Kerala High Court and eventually to the Supreme Court, challenging the Parliament's 24th, 25th and 29th Constitutional Amendments that placed land reform laws in the Ninth Schedule, effectively shielding them from constitutional challenges and seemingly granting lawmakers unchecked power to rewrite the Constitution.

In 1973, a Bench of 13 judges, the largest in the country's history, heard the case. They reviewed old cases where the Court shifted between positions on whether Parliament could amend fundamental rights. By a 7:6 majority, the Court established "the basic structure" doctrine. While Parliament has wide authority to amend any part of the Constitution, it cannot destroy its very core. Thus, it does not have the power to interfere with or dilute the democratic structure, secularism, federalism, judicial independence, fundamental rights, or the welfare mandate.

The massive 700-page judgment continues to shape democracy, ensuring that the Constitution's foundational principles are protected from the legislature. As the Court upheld the validity of the Kerala Land Reform Act, Kesavananda Bharati could not regain his lost lands. Yet his writ petition gave the basic structure doctrine, a safeguard intended to protect the Constitution's beating heart and a jurisprudential doctrine that continues to shape the very core of what it means to be citizens of India.



*Constitution at 76
[and Beyond]*
Aban Raza

*Collage
Size: 25 x 46 inches*



Untitled
Hasnain Soomar

*Digital Print on Archival Paper
Size: 27 x 27 inches*



*The Game No One
Wins*
Anjana Prakash

*Mixed Media on
Canvas
Size: 25 x 46 inches*

MANEKA GANDHI V. UNION OF INDIA (1978)

In July 1977, Maneka Gandhi received her passport back, stamped “impounded” with just a vague “public interest” note from the authorities. No reasons, no hearing, no chance to respond. Just a faceless administrative act that clipped her wings without explanation. What unsettled her was not merely the inability to travel. It was the arbitrariness. The sense that the State could curtail liberty with a stamp and silence. She turned to the Supreme Court of India.

In 1978, a seven-judge Constitutional Bench rewrote Article 21’s heart. Until then, Article 21—“No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law”—had been read narrowly. If there was a law, and the State followed it, that was enough. But now the judges asked, “what kind of law?”. And the answer was, any law limiting liberty must be “right, just and fair”.

Articles 14, 19 and 21 were woven together into a golden triangle, guarding citizens from executive whim. No more mechanical “procedure established by law”, now substantive due process guards against tyranny.

Maneka could not fly, but her case unlocked broader protections, ensuring no one faces unexplained restriction without recourse, embedding accountability into everyday rights.



The Golden Triangle
Danyal Zaheer

Acrylic on Canvas
Size: 42 x 40 inches

MOHD. AHMED KHAN V. SHAH BANO BEGUM (1985)

At 62, Shah Bano was cast out after four decades of marriage to her lawyer-husband Mohammed Ahmed Khan. He took a second wife, divorced Shah Bano by triple talaq, and abandoned her to destitution with nothing but a meagre amount for the three-month period of iddat. In 1978, she went to court seeking maintenance under Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code, not to challenge faith, but to claim fairness.

A magistrate granted her INR 25/month, later raised by the Madhya Pradesh High Court to INR 179.20/month lifelong. Khan appealed, claiming Sharia limited his duty to iddat period's mehr, igniting a battle of reality versus dogma.

In 1985, a five-judge Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court of India ruled that Section 125 transcends religion; maintenance is a universal duty rooted in Article 21's dignity. It confirmed that Shah Bano was entitled to INR 179.20/month lifelong beyond iddat, personal laws yielding to constitutional justice.

Her victory unleashed a furore. Clerics decried "judicial overreach", and amid riots, Rajiv Gandhi's government passed the 1986 Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, capping financial support to iddat. Shah Bano was forced to accept the mehr amount. Yet, her quiet insistence on fairness forced a nation to confront a larger question: when tradition and justice collide, where does the law stand?



A Gamble called Justice
Anjana Prakash

Mixed Media on Canvas
Size: 41 x 28 inches



Who Am I?
Hasnain Soomar

Digital Print on Archival Paper
Size: 27 x 27 inches (each)

OLGA TELLIS V. BOMBAY MUNICIPAL CORP. (1985)

In 1980s Bombay, thousands, drawn by work but trapped in poverty, were encamped along pavements across the city. In 1981, the State Government unleashed bulldozers on these “encroachers” in the name of urban beautification. No notice, no alternatives: just eviction pushing the poor to the margins.

A journalist, Olga Tellis, petitioned the Supreme Court of India, arguing mass evictions stripped its subjects not just of their homes but of their very survival. Citing Articles 19 and 21, it was contended shelter-less eviction meant joblessness, hunger, death. A five-judge Bench agreed that livelihood is inseparable from dignified living. However, it also said that the pavement dwellers did not have a permanent right to occupy public land. Evictions could still happen, but they could not be arbitrary, and would require fair notice, hearing and feasible resettlement.

Critics noted that it fell short, as not imposing a ban on evictions left room for the State to clear settlements in the name of development, ultimately favouring the privileged over the poor.

Yet, the case forced the Constitution to confront the nuances of urban poverty. Today, as cities expand, and millions of the urban poor still live under the looming fear of the bulldozer, the arguments in Olga Tellis continue to remain relevant.



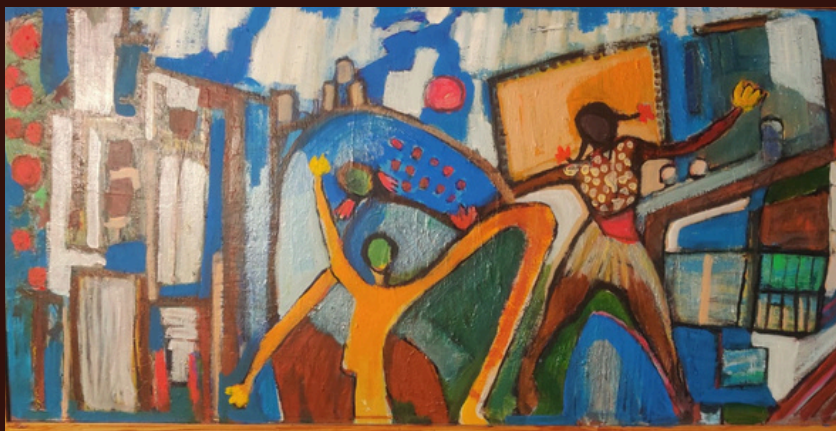
In the Name of Beautification
Danyal Zaheer

Lino Print
Size: 28 x 15 inches

The Room with a Red Horse
Niyati Singh

Oil on Canvas
Size: 17 x 22 inches





I own the streets
Anjana Prakash

Acrylic on Canvas
Size: 22 x 42 inches



The Shield of Fairness
Swamy Pashikanti

Mixed Media on Paper
Size: 32 x 13 inches



The Golden Filament
Swamy Pashikanti

Acrylic on Canvas
Size: 37 x 25 inches

VISHAKA V. STATE OF RAJASTHAN (1997)

In 1992, Bhanwari Devi, a young Sathin (rural social worker) in Rajasthan, dared to speak against child marriage, angering powerful men in her village. As punishment, five of these men gang-raped her in a field, using violence to warn any woman who dared challenge custom.

The systems meant to protect her failed. The trial court acquitted the accused, clouded by caste prejudices: the prospect of upper caste men having touched a lower caste woman was declared unworthy of credibility. Yet Bhanwari's pain did not collapse inward. Her story raised a question too loud to ignore, "What safety does a working woman have in India?"

Women's groups approached the Supreme Court of India. In August 1997, a three-judge Bench invoked constitutional guarantees of equality, freedom to work, and dignity, and issued the Vishaka Guidelines, a set of binding rules to address sexual harassment at workplace. Employers could no longer look away. They had to prevent harassment, and punish offenders. The Vishaka judgment laid the foundation for the 2013 Prevention of Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act.

Bhanwari's own criminal appeal remained pending before the Rajasthan High Court, with a 2017 BBC article noting that it had seen just one hearing in 22 years. Beyond that, little seems to appear in the public record. Thus, while her pain eventually became the foundation for collective action to reform workplace law in India, Bhanwari Devi's own quest for justice quietly retreated into near invisibility.



The Prophecy of Vishaka
Roshni Shanker

Acrylic on Paper
Size: 36 x 30 inches

UNION CARBIDE CORP. V. UNION OF INDIA (1989)

On a December night in 1984, a city went to sleep and awoke into poison. From the Union Carbide pesticide plant in Bhopal, more than 40 tons of methyl isocyanate gas had leaked into the winter air; by dawn, thousands were dead. Official figures first spoke of around 2,000, but later estimates would climb far higher and last beyond the lifetimes of those present.

Exposure to the poisonous gas scarred bodies quietly and permanently. At the time, Warren Anderson, CEO of Union Carbide, was in the United States. He flew briefly to India after the disaster. He was arrested, granted bail, and allowed to leave. He never returned to face trial.

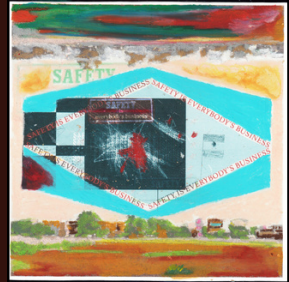
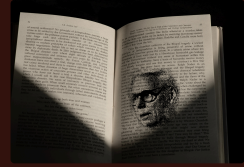
The Government of India sued the company in civil as well as criminal courts, cases dragging through US and Indian courts. In 1989, a five-judge Bench of the Supreme Court of India stepped in, approving a settlement of \$470 million as “full and final” compensation. \$470 million proved insultingly low given the scale of the disaster. For many families, compensation amounted to modest sums, often delayed, often insufficient against lifelong illnesses. Some died before their claims were processed. The abandoned factory site remained contaminated, its waste seeping into soil and water and poisoning generations.

The Bhopal gas disaster was not only an industrial accident. It was a reckoning with corporate greed and regulatory failure, showing how the poor bear the heaviest costs. It left a lingering question: what does accountability mean when harm permeates through generations?



The Bhopal Gas Leak tragedy that occurred at midnight on 2nd December 1984 by the escape of deadly chemical fumes from the world's largest pesticide factory was a horrendous industrial mass disaster, unparalleled in its magnitude and devastation and remaining a haunting reminder to

Those who trust this Court will not have cause for despair.



Mirror, Mirror on the Wall
Khusi Mishra

Mixed Media

Size: 1) 14 x 24 inches, 2) 14 x 23 inches, 3) 14 x 11 inches, 4) 31 x 22 inches, 5) 12 x 19 inches, 6) 12 x 19 inches, 7) 12 x 29 inches, and 8) 12 x 19 inches

Absolute Liability: The Fractured Weave of Bhopal
Swamy Pashikanti

Stone Lithography
Size: 16 x 24 inches



Rear Window: A Search for Justice [and Clean Air]
Chhering Negi

Woodcut
Size: 30 x 23 inches

NILABATI BEHRA V. STATE OF ORISSA (1993)

One September evening in 1987, in Jagatsinghpur, Odisha, Nilabati Behera's 22-year-old son Suman stepped out for a movie. A minor scuffle over tickets led him to the police station, from where he never returned home.

The next day his body was found near railway tracks miles away. His skull was fractured; his body bore deep wounds. Police claimed he jumped from a train. Nilabati's world collapsed in grief and disbelief, but she refused to believe the narrative she was given.

Refusing to let her grief be buried under official denial, Nilabati approached the Supreme Court of India. A three-judge Bench sifted evidence. The injuries were too grave for a fall; van routes mismatched; and autopsy indicated custodial torture. It held that when a life is lost in police custody, the State cannot hide behind procedure. In 1993, the Court awarded Nilabati INR 1.5 lakhs, as public law compensation.

No judgment could bring back Suman. No sum could mend Nilabati's broken heart. But her courage changed Indian law and affirmed that custodial violence is not an individual act of misconduct: Article 21 demands state accountability and custodial violence is a wound to constitutional justice. Nilabati's fight demonstrated that when the State fails, justice must answer to hold power accountable.



Systemic Strain
Niyati Singh

Mixed Media on Canvas
Size: 19 x 19 inches and 29 x 22 inches

ARUNA SHANBAUG V. UNION OF INDIA (2011)

On November 27, 1973, in a room meant for experimental surgeries on dogs at King Edward Memorial Hospital (KEM), a sweeper raped and sodomized staff nurse Aruna, choking her with a dog chain. The world blurred into agony as oxygen left her brain, eventually leaving her in a persistent vegetative state.

For 42 years, she lay in a hospital bed. Through the crushing loneliness, her KEM colleagues became her lifeline, their love a defiant warmth against the cold. The fierce devotion of the nursing staff of ward-4 of KEM worked to preserve her dignity in the midst of despair; a family was forged in her endless night.

In 2009, writer Pinki Virani petitioned the Supreme Court of India to let Aruna go, to let her rest under Article 21's promise of "life with dignity". The judges examined medical reports and affidavits. Doctors testified that Aruna was not brain-dead, breathed on her own, and showed minimal responses. Crucially, the nurses who cared for her for four decades did not want her life taken. A Division Bench chose life for Aruna but recognised the legality of passive euthanasia in India under strict safeguards.

Aruna's attacker had been in prison for robbery and attempted murder, never even charged with rape. He walked free in seven years, while she remained confined to a hospital bed for the rest of her life. In 2015, pneumonia finally loosened the thread that bound her to mortality.

Violence tried to erase her. Care kept her visible. And in that long, silent vigil, her life altered a nation's conscience.



Chained by Life, Consoled by Care
Vasundhara Prakash

Digital Collage
Size: 41 x 28 inches (each)

SHREYA SINGHAL V. UNION OF INDIA (2015)

In November 2012, two young women in Maharashtra were arrested for an opinion typed on a phone, about a bandh. One posted a comment on Facebook questioning the necessity of a city-wide shutdown in the context of a public funeral and the other, a friend, liked the post. The arrests were made under Section 66A of the Information Technology Act, 2000, on the ground that their expression on social media was allegedly offensive and capable of causing annoyance or inconvenience. The incident triggered widespread concern regarding the scope of Section 66A and its use in regulating online speech. The language of the provision was extremely broad, covering expressions that were “grossly offensive”, “menacing”, or likely to cause “annoyance” or “inconvenience”.

A law student, Shreya Singhal, examined these developments and identified the lack of clarity in the provision as a serious issue affecting freedom of expression. The matter was brought before the Supreme Court, where the constitutional validity of Section 66A was challenged.

In 2015, a Division Bench of the Supreme Court struck down Section 66A in its entirety, holding that its language was indeed vague and overly broad, and therefore beyond the scope of “reasonable restrictions” to the right to freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(2) of the Constitution. The Court held that terms like “grossly offensive” and “causing annoyance” are too vague to be law, giving excessive discretion to those enforcing them. It noted that such uncertainty invites misuse and creates a chilling effect on speech.

What was preserved that day in the courtroom was the right to speak freely and not be afraid of who is listening.



CTRL + ALT + SILENCE

Roshni Shanker

Mixed media

Size: 20 x 26 inches

NATIONAL LEGAL SERVICES AUTHORITY (NALSA) V. UNION OF INDIA (2014)

Transgender persons have existed at the margins of access for a long time. They were visible enough to face ridicule, yet denied recognition, dignity, and belonging. In 2014 the Supreme Court of India delivered a judgment recognising that identity is not something others can decide for you. Beneath the language of rights and recognition was the acknowledgement of lives that had long existed at the edges of society.

For years, many transgender people moved through the world unseen. The Court heard stories that carried the weight of this exclusion. Stories of children punished for being 'different'; of people forced to leave home just to survive as themselves; and of individuals who learned to make homes within communities that society had pushed aside. Underneath the legal arguments were something painfully human, the exhaustion of constantly asking the world for permission to exist.

What a Division Bench of the Supreme Court recognised was simple, yet it felt revolutionary. It acknowledged identity as something intimate and deeply personal, not something to be measured against social expectations. It restored a measure of dignity to people who had spent much of their lives being asked to explain themselves.

The decision did not transform society overnight. Prejudice rarely disappears so easily. But, it paved the way for many to step out of invisibility and feel seen. Today, its relevance endures amidst debates on the 2026 Amendment to the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2019, criticised by activists for placing procedural barriers around self-identification and for departing from the autonomy envisioned by the Court in the NALSA judgment.



I always wanted, to return to my self.
Vasundhara Prakash

Digital Collage
Size: 27 x 23 inches

Artists

- **Justice (Retd.) Anjana Prakash:** Senior Advocate at the Supreme Court and former judge of the Patna High Court. She is a passionate artist working in oil and acrylic, rooted in observation and visual nuance. Her art informs her legal thinking, helping her frame complex narratives in court and on canvas.
- **Aban Raza:** New Delhi-based printmaker, painter, filmmaker, curator, and activist. Her work bridges political concerns and philosophical inquiry; she teaches at Jamia Millia Islamia. Recipient of multiple awards, including the 2024 Asia Arts Game Changer Award.
- **Danyal Zaheer:** Multidisciplinary artist working across calligraphy, printmaking, and design. Blends traditional techniques with contemporary storytelling to explore identity and culture.
- **Hasnain Soomar:** Visual artist working between Delhi and Mumbai, trained at Chelsea College of Art and Design. His practice explores spirituality, geometry, and light through analogue and mixed media.
- **Khushi Mishra:** Former corporate lawyer turned independent photographer, based in Delhi. Her work explores nature, selfhood, and the passage of time. Her debut solo exhibition '28' was held at India Habitat Centre.

- **Niyati Singh:** Development Coordinator at MAP, she has a background in policy and research with institutions like CPR and Tata Trusts; Oxford alumna. A self-taught artist, she experiments with colour and form to create deeply personal works.
- **Roshni Shanker:** Founder and Executive Director of MAP, focused on forced migration and displacement. Former corporate lawyer with experience at UNHCR across India, Egypt, and the UAE. A self-taught watercolour artist exploring fluidity, movement, and intuition.
- **Pashikanti Swamy:** Printmaker with an MFA (Gold Medal) from Jamia Millia Islamia. Former Assistant Professor at Delhi College of Art with a strong academic grounding. Recognised with scholarships and distinctions for his work in printmaking.
- **Vasundhara Prakash:** Digital collage artist based in New Delhi creating layered, introspective works. Draws from backgrounds in aesthetics, advertising, Bollywood, and design. Her art blends memory and imagination, revealing hidden stories within each piece.



Founded in 2013 by lawyers formerly with the UN, the MAP, an initiative of The Ara Trust, works to decentralise and democratise justice, making it accessible and responsive at the grassroots, particularly for women and girls from migrant communities. Through community awareness, survivor- and victim-centred legal first response, legal aid, and institutional strengthening, MAP seeks to expand pathways to justice.

MAP also uses art as a powerful tool to translate complex legal ideas into visual and narrative forms that resonate with wider audiences. Creative mediums such as exhibitions, photography, documentaries, festivals, and storytelling help humanise statistics, centre lived experiences, and challenge dominant narratives, while catalysing empathy, accountability, and reform within the justice ecosystem. To know more visit: www.migrationandasylumproject.org

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