


## CHRIST THE GURU

### Artistic representations of Jesus Christ in south India and their meditated notions of guru-ness



'Christ the Guru':  
artistic representations  
of Jesus Christ  
in south India  
and their mediated notions  
of guru-ness

E.Dawson Varughese  
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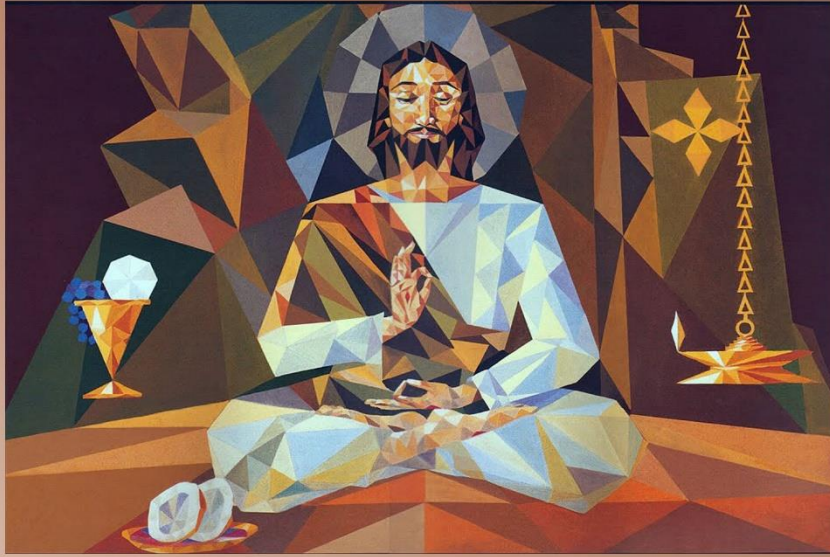
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# GURUS AND MEDIA

SOUND, IMAGE, MACHINE, TEXT AND THE DIGITAL



EDITED BY JACOB COPEMAN,  
ARKOTONG LONGKUMER AND KOONAL DUGGAL

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## Gurus and media: an introduction

Jacob Copeman, Koonal Duggal  
and Arkotong Longkumer

‘The importance accorded to the spiritual master, the guru or *ācārya*’, writes André Padoux (2001, 41), ‘was a general characteristic of Indian culture from very early times .... A reason for the guru’s importance may lie in the fact that Indian traditions always gave precedence to the oral/aural/verbal, rather than to the written, form of religious or spiritual teachings. The Vedic Revelation is not scripture. It is *sruti*, that which has been heard and which is transmitted by word of mouth.’ This correlation between the guru and ‘the oral/aural/verbal rather than ... the written ... form of religious or spiritual teachings’ is convincing in considering the early emergence and consolidation of guru forms, as Padoux was seeking to do. Chapters in this book demonstrate the continuing importance of the oral, aural and verbal. Yet they also demonstrate the profound significance of the non-oral, non-aural and non-verbal. Indeed, as Arvind-Pal Mandair puts it in his chapter on the Sikh tradition, the *sabda-guru*, or Guru as Word, ‘is dispersed between sacred text, community and digital forms of media (digital text, sound, in multiple languages) and available on laptop, tablet and smartphone’:<sup>1</sup> that is to say, from weapons as a medium of guruship (Murphy 2009), to the guru as medium and material of weaponry (Banerjee and Copeman 2020, 8, 16), to guru-penned airport bestsellers (Urban 2015), dolls (McCartney and Lourenço, this volume), information and digitality (Lucia, this volume; Srinivas, this volume), robots (Grimaud, this volume), paintings (Dawson Varughese, this volume), photographs (Chowdhuri, this volume; Voix, this volume), cinema (Copeman and Duggal, this volume) and other imagistic modes besides (Bhattacharya, this volume; Landau and Rageth, this volume), the guru has both found and been thrust into a whole host of media inhabitations that certainly include but also drastically exceed its oral/aural/verbal origins.

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The pervasive presence of gurus has had many incarnations across time and space. As pedagogues, gurus mediate between the past, the present and the future, carrying ancient knowledge of various kinds – not only sacred but also pertaining to the visual and performing arts, though the latter also are often sacredly derived – ideally conveying it to disciples and devotees, or, better, imbuing them with it through embodied interactions (subject of course to an array of restrictions on who might form appropriate – for instance, sufficiently pure – mediators and recipients).<sup>2</sup> The present volume explores manifestations of, and changes to, what we call the guru's methodologies of presence, as media forms and guru embodiments ebb, flow and come to nest within one another. The book is as interested in continuity as in innovation and innovations that occur in the cause of continuity, since novelty can only be gauged in the light of an understanding of the variety of long-standing and non-novel – but still under-theorised – ways in which gurus have operated as mediating subjects who are also subjects of mediation. Technologies of mediation that carry forth and sometimes compromise the guru mix performative and spiritual registers in ways that can allow us to see the guru afresh, and this is as true of historical as of contemporary mediations.

Nick Cave's song 'Red Right Hand' (1994) contains the lyrics:

He'll wrap you in his arms  
Tell you that you've been a good boy  
He'll rekindle all the dreams  
It took you a lifetime to destroy  
He'll reach deep into the hole  
Heal your shrinking soul  
But there won't be a single thing that you can do  
He's a god, he's a man  
He's a ghost, he's a guru

(Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, 'Red Right Hand')

Underscoring the global media dispersion of the guru concept by its very presence in a song by an Australia-born singer-songwriter based in the UK, the lyrics point to the profound comfort and depth, but also the terror and exploitation, that can lie within guru–devotee relationships, a kind of devotion that lies on the edge of the precipice: 'there won't be a single thing that you can do' in the face of the god who is a man, a ghost, a guru. They hint at the abuse that can result from the 'extreme authoritarianism' (McCartney 2018) that structures many if not all

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## 'Christ the guru': artistic representations of Jesus Christ in south India and their mediated notions of guru-ness

E. Dawson Varughese

It was in a hotel lobby in Munnar, Kerala, south India in late 2016 that I spotted the image of Christ as guru; he seemed to be watching over me, a framed image, hanging high above the reception desk. Positioned alone and located centrally in a panel of wooden wall cladding, the radiant and luminous white of his robes emanated from the otherwise dark surface surrounding him. This moment of 'seeing' was powerful for me, not having experienced such an intimate moment with a visual rendition of Christ portrayed as a guru in such a 'secular' space before. I experienced the guru-ness through his seated, cross-legged posture and his lightly closed eyes, and in his symbolic hand gesture (*mudra*). The owner of the Munnar hotel is a friend and so I was able to find out about the image, which I came to learn is entitled *Christ the Guru*. Eventually, I purchased an A1-sized print of it through the Christian Musicological Society of India based in Kochi, Kerala,<sup>1</sup> where this particular image has been adopted – practically, if not formally.<sup>2</sup> The appellation of *Christ the Guru* for this piece came from Dr Palackal, the founding member of the society.<sup>3</sup> The circulation of images of Jesus Christ is common in south India – on paper, as framed prints and in other ways – and Visvanathan, in her book *The Christians of Kerala* (2010), talks of the importance of visual representation of Christ in Keralite homes when she writes:

A Christian house can be recognized by the 'holy' pictures on the walls. ... Pictures of Mary with the infant Christ are also frequently

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displayed, as also those of the saints Gevarghese and Thomas. Gevarghese [*sic*] (St George) is shown in combat with a dragon, referred to as *pambu* or snake by the Christians, while Thomas is often represented as standing with his feet placed on Malabar, on a globe in the centre of a starlit universe.

(Visvanathan 2010, 75)

*Christ the Guru* – the image I saw hanging in the Munnar hotel – is an oil painting by M. P. Manoj which he completed in 1993 as a commission for a Fr Mathias in Bangalore. Fr Mathias commissioned ‘an Indian-style Christ’<sup>4</sup> and M. P. Manoj’s original oil painting currently hangs in Christu Jayanthi Kindergarten in Kakkanad, Ernakulum, Kerala. In this chapter, I place M. P. Manoj’s *Christ the Guru* (Figure 11.2) in dialogue with two other visual portrayals of Christ as ‘guru’, namely a 2003, concrete-moulded tableau in St Anthony’s Friary Church, Bengaluru by artist Fr Saji Mathew (Figures 11.3, 11.4), and the ‘source’ artwork for both M.P. Manoj’s and Mathew’s works (Figure 11.1), a mosaic installation from 1974, mounted on the façade of the Dharmaram College in Bengaluru. In order to examine the visual representation of Jesus Christ as guru in a comparative manner, I examine two additional paintings which are not associated by artist or style with the ‘Christ the Guru’ works noted above. I focus on two paintings from the 1980s by the renowned Bengaluru-based Christian artist Jyoti Sahi, which have known various titles (in English, German and other languages) over the years, and so I reference them here as *Missio I* (Figure 11.5) and *Missio II* (Figure 11.6). Both pieces were created by Sahi in 1986 for Missio Germany (which is part of the International Catholic Mission Society),<sup>5</sup> and they formed part of a series of 16 paintings on ‘The Sermon on the Mount’ (referencing the Gospel of Matthew). With its main offices in Aachen and Munich in Germany, Missio Germany describes itself as providing ‘both financial and non-material support for the mission of local Churches in Africa, Asia, and Oceania’ ([www.missio.com](http://www.missio.com)). In my analysis below, I discuss Missio Germany in connection with its magazine publication *Weltweit* (‘Worldwide’), in which some of Sahi’s works appeared.

By virtue of being visual artworks, these portrayals of ‘Christ’, or, as I will argue in the case of three of the pieces, ‘Jesus’, engage with the apophatic, reminding us that no matter how many words or how careful the choice of words, none can suitably or properly describe the holy mystery that is the divine. Voss Roberts, a scholar of comparative theologies, acknowledges the apophatic – how God is ultimately ‘unknowable’ – in both Hindu and Christian thought when she writes:

The apophatic strand of theology, including its experiential dimensions, has provided fertile ground for theologies of Hindu–Christian encounter. If – as both traditions affirm – the ultimate reality is beyond human grasp, and if all of our words ultimately fail, then there is a place of silence, beyond doctrines, where the traditions meet.

(2021, 347)

In my discussion of these five visual representations and visual expressions of Jesus Christ, I recognise here that such portrayals are far more entrenched in Catholic and Orthodox Christian traditions than they are in Protestant traditions such as Methodism or some Baptist denominations, a difference that is often foregrounded even in the display of Christianity's iconic 'cross': a crucifix (representing the crucified Jesus) for Catholic and Orthodox, and a (simple) cross, without the crucified Christ figure, for Methodist and Baptist denominations. All five artworks examined here stem from a Syro-Malabar Catholic tradition, namely 'St Anthony's Shrine' at St Anthony's Friary Church, Bengaluru; Dharmaram College, Bengaluru (a major seminary of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate congregation) and including Jyoti Sahi as a Catholic Christian artist based in Silvepura village, in north Bengaluru. Additionally, *Christ the Guru* by M. P. Manoj circulates in Orthodox Christian traditions within south India in particular (see <http://christianmusicologicalsocietyofindia.com/>), and Manoj's original painting is on display at a CMI (Carmelites of Mary Immaculate – the Apostolic Church of St Thomas) school in Kerala, south India. Whilst researching the five images discussed here, I happened to be reading *Names of the Women* by Jeet Thayil (2021), an author of Indian fiction in English whose works have received great acclaim during the post-millennial years. Born into a Syrian Christian family in Kerala in 1959, in *Names of the Women* Thayil radically reimagines the lives of the women who met and spent time with Jesus. In the opening pages Thayil writes of Jesus's relationship with his mother, and a particular passage from the novel returned to my mind on several occasions as I developed my ideas around Jesus as 'Son of God' and Jesus as 'Christ'. It reads:

Imma, I said to her, Gabriel was his name, don't you remember? She said, I remember only what he said, that my son would die on the cross, the terrible words that made me forget every other thing. Then she told me to live the days of my life fully. To learn the ways of men. To seek in my spirit first, then in my mind and at last in my body. To give myself to the answer.

(Thayil, 2021, 2)

## The trope of the (Indian) ‘guru’

As Copeman and Ikegame’s volume *The Guru in South Asia* neatly outlines, the guru has always been ‘a social form of peculiar suggestibility’ (2012, 2) and a ‘prolific producer of “domaining effects”; effects that occur when the logic of an idea associated with one domain is transferred to another, often with interesting or unanticipated results’ (2012, 2). For my interests here, I refer to scholarship on ‘guru-ness’ in relation to Jesus/Christ that has been produced from a Christian-oriented perspective, in order to examine this body of research against the five Christian-oriented artworks (‘Christian-oriented’ by virtue of the artist or the nature of the commission).

Significantly, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the Jesuit missionary Roberto de Nobili separated out the Christian and Hindu ideas of incarnation by distinguishing ‘the Christian doctrine of Incarnation as *mānusa avatāra*, “human descent”, from the Hindu concept of *avatāras* as *deva avatāra*, “divine descent”, on the basis that according to the Christian view God assumes human nature, which is body and soul together as one reality’ (Brockington 1992, 41). In other words, God assumes human nature or is human and divine simultaneously in the Christian tradition, whereas in Hinduism the Divine may reside within the human being itself (*antaryami*), be omnipresent as Brahma, or may exist as individual deities within a spiritual world. In this vein of exploring the various facets of Hindu–Christian traditions, de Nobili adopted the term ‘guru’ for ‘Christ’; Brockington documents this, explaining that de Nobili especially used *sadguru*, ‘true teacher’, partly because of ‘its intrinsic appropriateness’ (1992, 41). Furthermore, Richard Lannoy acknowledges that ‘The *guru–shishya* [teacher–disciple] relationship incarnates a specific form of psychological bond; with the disintegration of traditional social roles and institutions it tends to be diffused or imprinted on relationships in no way connected with, let alone confined to, the religious domain with which it was originally associated’ (1974, 348). Here Lannoy reminds us of the extensive ideas and semantics associated with the notion of the guru and of the importance of various agents, institutions and organisations which play a central role in how the notion of guru is refracted through societies, within India and beyond. We might consider the psychological bond that Lannoy calls attention to as an integral part of a relationship ‘imprinted’ by power, redolent of a ‘knower’ and a ‘seeker of knowledge’, clearly applicable to the religious domain, and also beyond it. With this in mind, we might read the notion of the guru in significantly fluid terms, and, as this edited volume deftly identifies, the notion of ‘guru’ within, and indeed outside, India is



undeniably a multifaceted figure. I suggest that the term 'guru' is rendered thus through *specific* cultural interpretations as much as through *transcultural, globalised* ideas of the same. As I demonstrate by my choice of five artworks, a major feature of the 'visual' guru trope is a male figure, seated in *padmasana* – also known as the 'lotus posture' – whereby the legs are crossed with the feet laid in the hip crease with the soles of the feet turned uppermost, in meditative mode, usually positioned under a banyan or peepal tree and often displaying hand gestures (*mudra*) that are associated with 'teaching'. These aspects, when taken together, are emblematic of a yogi in meditation as well as referencing Lord Buddha in meditation, specifically when visualised under a fig tree (known as the 'bodhi' tree in popular parlance because of this cultural association). If we reflect on this demonstration of 'teacher-ness' as part of the guru figure, then, I suggest, the artworks examined here rely on certain visual 'clues' to reveal an almost intrinsic sense of the guru as teacher, and the motif of the seated, meditative male figure is one of them. The theologian and sociologist Jan Schouten emphasises the relational dynamics between a guru and their student(s):

[A] guru is more than a teacher in the usual sense of the word. He not only passes on knowledge but embodies that knowledge himself as well. Doctrine and life are linked very closely. He does not present any theses for academic discussion. He does not stand alongside his students in order to seek out the truth with them. On the contrary, he teaches with absolute authority. He has appropriated the mystic insight about which he speaks. And the way in which he travels the pathway of life is in complete agreement with his message. That is why his followers can entrust themselves to him without any hesitation. Thus, in Hinduism, the relationship between a guru and his students is of a particularly intense nature.

(2008, 269)

Similarly, Lannoy writes: 'The realized man becomes a sacred authority who radiates a beneficent numen; he is worshipped as an embodiment of Truth, the man who has resolved the contradictions of life. Whether he teaches or not is immaterial, for his charisma itself is a sermon' (1974, 347). If, then, the notion of guru is bound by ideas of 'power' and a seeking-offering of knowledge, what Lannoy refers to here as 'Truth' is an extension of what might be considered the 'knowledge' that is being sought by the pupil. Following Lannoy's idea of guru-ness, I argue that it is the idea of 'the realized man' worthy of being 'worshipped' because he

has attained a freedom from life's 'contradictions' that we see visualised in the images analysed in this chapter, and that this is realised through a variety of artistic means, including colour palette, style and composition.

The scholar Enrico Beltramini describes the work of the eminent south Indian theologian Michael Amaladoss (b. 1936) as being 'characteristic of a certain period in the development of Indian theology, a period marked by the independence of the country, the rise of an Indian liberal state, and the ambition of a new generation of Indian theologians to articulate a true Indian Indian theology' (Beltramini 2021, 1). For Amaladoss, the motif of guru-as-teacher is paramount, as he states in his important text *The Asian Jesus*:

Used in a spiritual context, it ['guru'] refers to those who have walked along the way and have experienced, or at least have had a glimpse of, the goal one is looking for. Therefore they are capable of guiding disciples (*sishtyas*) in their own search. They can instruct them, solve their doubts and difficulties. They can authenticate their experiences. It is traditional in India that gurus do not go out looking for disciples. On the contrary, it is the disciples who seek a guru, someone competent to guide them along their spiritual path because of the guru's prior experience of having walked successfully along that path.

(2006, 69)

Moreover, Amaladoss describes Jesus as a 'guru of an apostolic social movement' when he writes:

The foreseen goal is double. Every person reaches personal fulfillment. But this is part of the fulfillment of all. We can recall here the Buddhist bodhisattva ideal in which the bodhisattva – a person who has attained liberation or fulfillment – postpones its completion in order to help others attain final liberation so that at the end everyone is fulfilled together. As a guru, Jesus is not merely guiding people toward personal fulfillment. He is launching and animating a global project that works for the fulfillment of all humans and of the whole universe. The project of Jesus is therefore both personal and social/cosmic.

(2006, 75)

Central to this 'global project' is the recognition and practice of prayer. Amaladoss writes of the apostles:

They do[, however,] ask him to teach them to pray, and Jesus teaches them the Our Father (Lk 11:1–4). Made up of praise and petition, it has become a model prayer. It can also be seen as a summary of the mission on which Jesus is sending them.

(2006, 82)

In the case of Jesus Christ as guru, we might recognise the multitudes that followed him as his ‘disciples’, whilst we learn in the Gospel of Luke (6:12) about the ‘apostles’. The Gospel explains that Jesus walked up a mountain to pray. It is reported that he prayed to God all night, and in the morning he returned to those who had accompanied him, choosing 12 of them to be his apostles. The 12 apostles were *chosen* by Jesus whereas those *who chose* to follow him (in multitudes) might be considered disciples of a guru, all embarked on their own search for spiritual guidance and support. These combined definitions of ‘guru’ from Lannoy and Amaladoss allow us to identify seven tropes of guru-ness; I find these particularly productive when analysing the artistic depictions of ‘Jesus/Christ as guru’ in this chapter. These seven tropes describe the guru as: (1) a sacred authority who radiates beneficent numen, (2) a guide (who can initiate and lead), (3) one who ‘becomes’ (a sense of ‘formation’), (4) one whom others seek out for discipleship, (5) one who works for the fulfilment of all peoples, (6) one who fosters ‘community building’, and (7) one who recognises and practises the importance of faith and prayer. I attempt to trace these tropes through my analyses of the five pieces of artwork in order to understand how these visual portrayals of Jesus Christ embody and communicate a sense of ‘guru-ness’.

### Analysis of the artwork

Of twentieth-century south Indian artists, the names Jyoti Sahi (b. 1948), Angela Trindade (1909–80), Angelo da Fonseca (1902–67), Vinayak Masoji (1897–1977), Solomon Raj (1921–2019) and, sometimes, Francis Newton Souza (1924–2002) are generally associated with a body of Christian-themed artwork by Christian artists in south India. These artists have collectively contributed to and curated an immense oeuvre, and this body of work has been complemented by north Indian Christians’ works, as well as by non-Christian Indians’ artworks. Of the south Indian artists listed above, the motif of the guru can be traced across a number of their paintings and artworks; examples of this are: Angela Trindade’s *Christ and the Woman of Samaria*, in which we see Christ positioned under a

banyan tree, in saffron robes, a halo of light emanating from his head, a serene and pensive look upon his face; Vinayak Masoji's *The Last Supper*, of Jesus Christ surrounded by his disciples; and Solomom Raj's batik *Padmasana*, in which Jesus Christ is seen sitting within a lotus flower, afloat on water with his head in heaven, as the Lord of the universe, his hands in *mudra* and wearing a saffron-coloured robe. In my examination of five artworks, I notice how the trope of the seated, cross-legged image of Jesus Christ is central to building a sense of guru-ness. So is the use of *mudra*. In terms of their provenance, all these five visual representations of Jesus/Christ as guru analysed here share a territory – the city of Bengaluru<sup>6</sup> and the hinterland of Kerala – through the artists Fr Joy Elamkunnappuzha, Fr Saji Mathew and M. P. Manoj.

The most recently created artwork I examine is *St Anthony's Shrine*, a painted, concrete-moulded tableau installed in 2003 at St Anthony's Friary Church in Bengaluru. It was designed and created by the Keralite artist and Franciscan priest Fr Saji Mathew. At the other end of the timeline, the well-known, large mosaic on the façade of the Dharmaram College, which is also in Bengaluru, was created by Keralite artist V. Balan in 1974. The image of Jesus sitting cross-legged was originally sketched by the Keralite Fr Joy Elamkunnappuzha, and it was from this drawing that V. Balan created the mosaic façade. Another interpretation of this image was created in the early 1990s when a Keralite artist, M. P. Manoj was commissioned by a Fr Mathias to paint 'an Indian-style Christ', inspired by the Dharmaram mosaic of 1974. M. P. Manoj painted this piece in oils and the image has come to be associated with the Christian Musicological Society of India and its founding member, Dr Palackal, who entitled it 'Christ the Guru'; it is the image used on the Society's home page, and the site offers prints of the painting for sale.<sup>7</sup>

My overall interest here is in notions of 'guru-ness', but in order to help me to focus the analyses of the artworks, I take as a starting point the linguistic specifics of the appellations 'Christ' and 'Jesus', the former denoting an appellation of 'deity' (with the same meaning as 'Messiah') and the latter being the 'human name' given to the Son of God. I suggest that two of the three visual portrayals of 'Christ the Guru' examined here help us to ruminate on this semantic distinction. On the one hand, M. P. Manoj's oil painting, entitled *Christ the Guru*, from 1993 is inspired by the large 1970s mosaic, and both these images of 'Christ as Guru' represent, I suggest, a deified, revered Christ. On the other hand, the 2003 concrete tableau *St Anthony's Shrine*, by Fr Saji Mathew, represents something more of Jesus in his 'human nature', that is, Jesus as 'the Son of God'. In the analysis below, Fr Saji Mathew acknowledges that his

design was inspired by having seen Jesus as guru 'here and there over time'<sup>8</sup> but makes no direct reference to V. Balan's or M. P. Manoj's works. Furthermore, I recognise that Jyoti Sahi's two paintings, which he prepared for Missio Germany in 1985–6, have tended to be referred to as representations of 'Jesus' and not of 'Christ'. This appellation of 'Jesus' is in line with most of Sahi's work in which the Son of God is pictured (see for example [Lott and Sahi 2008](#); [Amaladass and Löwner 2012](#), 268–76; [Jyoti Art Ashram 2007](#)) rather than a deified Christ figure. In my discussion of the *Missio* paintings below, I suggest that Sahi's interest in and commitment to folk art (especially that of Karnataka and the Konkan coast), Dalit identities and experiences of marginal (broken) existence resonate with the 'Jesus' figure ('Son of God') more than with the deified appellation of 'Christ'. Beldio writes of Sahi's interest in expressing and representing marginal existence, suggesting: 'Sahi seeks a union of justice and beauty in his work, a way to create culture and a way of life that can discover the risen Christ within the brokenness of the Earth and those who are marginalized like the Christian *dalits* of his community near Bangalore' (2021, 276, emphasis in the original).

### Christ the Guru

I begin by looking at the two interrelated 'Christ the Guru' images ([Figures 11.1 and 11.2](#)). The mosaic from 1974 ([Figure 11.1](#)) can still be seen on the façade of Dharmaram College in Bengaluru. [Figure 11.2](#) shows the oil painting from 1993 by M. P. Manoj that I came across in the hotel lobby in Munnar. In examining both pieces, which are separated by 20 years, I note that M. P. Manoj has created a painting that is particularly faithful to the 1974 mosaic created by V. Balan and designed by Fr Joy Elamkunnapuzha in terms of both composition and subject. Although V. Balan died in 2002, Fr Joy Elamkunnapuzha is still in service, currently working in north India.<sup>9</sup> Fr Joy's design of the mosaic clearly looks to display a meditative Jesus Christ, as we see him in *padmasana*, his eyes lightly closed, a serene expression on his face and his hands in the *jnanamudra*, a symbolic hand gesture in which the index finger and the thumb lightly touch and the remaining fingers stretch upwards. This *mudra*, usually held at chest height, signifies knowledge, teaching and 'the Wheel of Law' (specifically the circle made with the forefinger and the thumb). This visual semiotic might be read as one which demonstrates Amaladoss's notion of guru 'as a guide' (trope 2), and Lannoy and Amaladoss's one who 'becomes' (trope 3), since he has experienced what his followers are going through (in Amaladoss's



**Figure 11.1** Façade of Dharmaram College, Bengaluru; mosaic by V. Balan (1974), design by Fr J. Elamkunnappuzha.



**Figure 11.2** Oil painting: *Christ the Guru* by M. P. Manoj (1993).

words, ‘the guru’s prior experience of having walked successfully along that path’ (2006, 69)).

The visual artist V. Balan was a Hindu Keralite from a Pillai family who studied at Cochin School of Art before becoming a freelance artist, residing mostly in south India (Chennai, formerly Madras; Bengaluru, formerly Bangalore), although his work took him all around the country. The ceramic materials that V. Balan used in creating the 1974 mosaic (Figure 11.1) were integral to the form and thus the final appearance of the artwork; here we experience ‘Christ the Guru’ denoted by straight lines and angular corners according to the nature of the small ceramic tiles that he used to build up the image. In M. P. Manoj’s oil painting rendition (Figure 11.2), *Christ the Guru*, the process and creation of the image were not bound to such a geometry, given the materials M. P. Manoj chose to work with: brush, oil paints and canvas. It is curious, therefore, that M. P. Manoj decided to recast his portrayal of an ‘Indian-style Christ’ (commissioned by Fr Mathias), using lines and angles as ‘triangles’ specifically, to paint his 1993 piece. This decision meant that the two artworks, different in material, era of production and location (the mosaic is chiefly a static artwork, although images of it can be found online; the oil painting circulates widely as both a physical print and an electronic image), are placed in dialogue: an intertextuality that works productively to sustain a body of art in south India that celebrates Jesus Christ as a ‘guru’ figure. Moreover, the intertextuality foregrounds a sense of the reverence and respect that Manoj has for the original Balan mosaic; the junior artist holds the artist-elder in high regard and celebrates the earlier work of the master. In short, I suggest, a type of guru–pupil relationship exists between the two artists.

M. P. Manoj takes forward the geometrical form of the image created by V. Balan as well as the contrasting hues of light and dark that V. Balan achieves through his choice of ceramic tiles. However, M. P. Manoj develops this colour contrast by choosing warmer colours of oranges, browns and ochre, whilst rendering Christ’s robes in an iridescent white. The use of the triangular form alongside the complementary colours gives significant depth to M. P. Manoj’s painting, and this style is not unlike some of Jehangir Sabavala’s (1922–2011) works, especially those of his later years (the first decade of the twenty-first century), such as *The Monks* (2006), *Mohalla* (2007) and *Yatra* (2001), all oil on canvas. Through this use of the triangular form, we see in M. P. Manoj’s *Christ the Guru* that the image of Christ in the middle of the painting looks as if he is levitating, given the combination of colour palette and careful use of geometric design. This image might be interpreted as representing Lannoy’s notion of guru as

‘a sacred authority who radiates a beneficent numen’ (1974, 347) (trope 1). Although the European art movement of Cubism, as well as the fact that M. P. Manoj was trained in European Fine Arts in Kerala, might easily be invoked here, we notice that *only* triangles are used, and that unlike in some Cubist artworks, in which a subject is broken up to be reassembled in an abstract manner, M. P. Manoj is careful in his placing and use of scalene, obtuse and acute triangles to recreate a familiar and representational image of Christ. The use of complementary yet contrasting colours means that, as we gaze at the image, the three points of the (various types of) triangles become emphasised, potentially leading ‘the observer to concentrate[,] which leads to silent absorption’ (Amaladoss 2021, 426).

Unlike Balan’s rendition (Figure 11.1), in which triangular shapes organically appear out of the arrangement of small, mosaic tiles, M. P. Manoj works directly and concisely with the triangular form. Even the familiar visual tropes of ‘Christ’ appear as a triangle, the crucifixion marks on his hands and feet as well as the hair and beard detail. Moreover, the chalice, wafer, split coconut and *thookuvilaku*,<sup>10</sup> including its flame, are all crafted through careful use of colour and the triangular form. I suggest that through this dominant motif of the repeated triangle, the form takes on a new role, signifying and referencing *outside* of the image. M. P. Manoj aimed to employ the triangle shape in order to signify the Trinity within Christian traditions, representing a sense of ‘God in three’.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, I read these repeated triangular forms as an echo, inviting a *japa*-like rhythm (a meditative repetition of a mantra or a divine name) to the image as we see over, and over, and over, the presence of the triangular form (trope 7). More interculturally, we might read the motif of the triangle as one which connects with Hindu traditions such as the role of the triangle in geometric temple design, the geometric base of *rangoli* design, the yogic *trikonasana*, and of Shiv/Shakti. And so, rather than reading the triangular form as representing the Trinity (as ‘three’), we might read it as an embodiment of an Indian Christian spirituality as being *advaita* (non-dualistic). Amaladoss (2021) suggests that, in contrast to the Western view of reality as dualistic, ‘the Indian religious tradition affirms that God and the human are neither one nor two, but not-two’ (2021, 425). Amaladoss goes on to connect this notion to moments in the Bible that speak of what Western readers would most likely recognise as the ‘Trinity’; specifically, he quotes the Gospel of John, ‘The Father and I are one’ (John 10:30) and ‘As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us’ (John 17:21).

As noted above, I suggest that the guru-ness we recognise in M. P. Manoj’s oil painting (Figure 11.2) is manifest through Christ’s seated, cross-legged posture, *padmasana* (lotus flower pose), his lightly closed eyes,





**Figure 11.3** *St Anthony's Shrine*, a painted, concrete-moulded tableau installed in 2003 at St Anthony's Friary Church, Bengaluru by the Keralite artist, Fr Saji Mathew.

serene facial expression and, importantly, the *jnanamudra* (the symbolic hand gesture held at chest height). Significantly, all of these aspects feature in the original 1974 mosaic designed by Fr Joy Elamkunnappuzha and made by V. Balan for Dharmaram (see [Figure 11.1](#)). I wish to extend this artistic lineage of 'making' to connect it with a more recent artwork, Fr Saji's 2003 installation ([Figure 11.3](#)), a painted, concrete-moulded tableau entitled *St Anthony's Shrine* (which is around two miles from Dharmaram College, along the Hosur Road), an artwork that I suggest also invokes the notion of guru. *St Anthony's Shrine* was set up in 2003, to provide a quiet place for reflection and prayer.<sup>12</sup> Until then, devotees had gathered at the Blessed Sacrament<sup>13</sup> chapel at the St Anthony's Friary Church complex, where a collection of statues of saints was kept in glass display cases. Because of the number of visitors and the lighting of oil lamps and candles, it was decided that a bigger area was needed, for worshippers to enter safely and to provide adequate space for all who come to worship. As [Figure 11.3](#) shows, the statues in the glass boxes were transferred into this new space, which was named *St Anthony's Shrine* when it was inaugurated in 2003. The tableau of the meditative Jesus, sitting underneath the banyan tree, is far larger than the glass-boxed statues and occupies most of the wall to which it is affixed. Fr Saji Mathew designed the installation in this manner to enable Jesus to 'embrace all' and be 'the central focus' in this meditative space (tropes 6 and 7).<sup>14</sup> Influenced by other visualisations of Christ/Jesus as guru that Fr Saji Mathew reports 'having seen here and there over time',<sup>15</sup>

he worked with a Keralite ‘maker’ from Kochi to construct the concrete tableau. The ‘maker’ is known to Fr Saji Mathew simply as ‘Mr George’ and was, apparently, a student of the late V. Balan, the chief craftsman behind the Dharmaram mosaic, which I discussed above.

In his personal blog, Fr Saji Mathew describes ‘St Anthony’s Shrine’ as a place for healing and quiet. He writes:

Here in the shrine, this large sized relief work of serene image of Jesus has a cathartic effect on people who arrive here with various difficulties and challenges of everyday life. This central image of Jesus gives direction to, scattered, and at times misdirected, personal Christian devotions to saints and other pieties.<sup>16</sup>

Here, we might read the image of Jesus as guru in terms of Amaladoss’s assertion that ‘He [Jesus] is launching and animating a global project that works for the fulfillment of all humans and of the whole universe’ (2006, 75) (trope 5). St Anthony’s Friary complex is located in central Bengaluru, a city that has undergone immense change in urban infrastructure as well as in socio-cultural lifestyles over the last 25 years. The sociologist Smitha Radhakrishnan writes:

Bangalore [Bengaluru] is the beating heart of India’s IT industry, the most visible city in a short but growing list of Indian IT cities that includes Mumbai, Hyderabad, Chennai, Pune, and Gurgaon. ... In Bangalore, more than practically any other Indian city, the positive effects of the IT industry seem pervasive, whether in the crowded mall or the mushrooming tech parks, in the innumerable engineering colleges or the new high-end international airport.

(2011, 26)

I suggest that the installation of *St Anthony’s Shrine* might be read as a creative and spiritual intervention into such changed lifestyles and pace of living, and I am reminded of Lannoy, writing in 1974, when he said:

At least as long as India continues to be in transition from a sacred to a secular society, the guru-figure will remain the model for the Indian charismatic leader, not because India is more or less religious than the supposedly advanced cultures, but because the guru-figure answers a cluster of psychological needs.

(1974, 348)



**Figure 11.4** 'In *padmasana* posture': *St Anthony's Shrine*, a painted, concrete-moulded tableau installed in 2003 at St Anthony's Friary Church, Bengaluru by the Keralite artist, Fr Saji Mathew (detail).

Fr Saji Mathew entitles the blog piece I quote above 'Jesus the guru in Buddhist meditative posture', and he writes of the importance of 'the modern, inclusive inter-religious Indian Christian Psyche [*sic*]'.<sup>17</sup> The title of his blog (and thus the artwork) makes direct reference to Buddhism whilst manifestly being anchored in Christian tradition in terms of its physical location in the church in Bengaluru and its Christian (Fr) artist. We might understand this combination of religious traditions as a mindful, *personal* expression of the 'modern, inclusive, inter-religious Indian Christian Psyche' that Fr Saji Mathew both writes of and shares himself. Unlike the earlier pieces of 'Christ the Guru' (V. Balan; M. P. Manoj), where we experienced a deified rendition of Christ, I suggest that Fr Saji Mathew's installation, through the symbolism of quietude and meditation, through the simple 'woodcut-style' depiction of the natural world (the banyan) enhanced by the shades of brown on the installation itself, foregrounds 'Jesus' over a glorified 'Christ'. Here (Figure 11.4), 'Jesus' is represented as guru through the recognisable *padmasana* posture, and the *abhaya* 'fearless' *mudra* communicating a sense of divine protection and safety (the *abhaya mudra* uses an upright, raised, flat hand at chest height with the palm facing away from the body) (tropes 1, 2 and 4). On the presence of

*mudras* in Christian Byzantine art, Rajaram Sharma writes, ‘The gestures of Reassurance, Benedicto Latina, Benedicto Graeca and miscellaneous other gestures in Byzantine Art and religious practices form interesting parallels with the *mudras*’ (2021, 38).

The guru-ness in Figure 11.3 is further exemplified by the figure being seated specifically under a banyan tree, with the tree’s long tendril-like roots searching for the ground below it (emblematic of trope 3). The banyan (*Ficus benghalensis*) tree, ubiquitous across India and the wider region of South Asia, is strongly associated with Lord Buddha as it is believed that he attained enlightenment whilst meditating underneath such a tree. Within Hinduism, as well, the banyan is a revered tree, known as *Kalpavriksha*, representing longevity and the divine creator, Lord Brahma. The tableau at St Anthony’s Shrine clearly identifies the tree as a banyan, the roots hanging down from the branches, the wide trunk within which Jesus Christ is seated and its broad canopy sheltering the Lord and all who seek shelter within and under it (trope 1). Schouten reminds us that ‘Shri Ramakrishna attempted to fathom the meaning of Christ through meditation. He saw in him the mystic who through methodical practice was able to realize the divine in his life. For him, the guru Jesus had become a yoga master’ (2008, 259). This idea of Jesus as a ‘yoga master’ connects somewhat with Lannoy’s reference to ‘a quasi-divine figure and without economic function’ (1974, 347) and as one who ‘must submit to a dedication that largely cuts him off from normal satisfactions. ... [H]e is supposed, first of all, to be a competent therapist, and second, capable of supplying correct answers to the riddles of life because he has transcended the law of opposites’ (1974, 349) (thus tropes 2, 3 and 4 mentioned above).

In order to consider these attributes of ‘Jesus’ and guru-ness further, we turn to two paintings by Jyoti Sahi from the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ series of artworks, made for Missio Germany in the mid-1980s.

### ***Missio I and Missio II***

Whilst I have referred to the three images discussed above as ‘Christ the Guru’ because of their intertextuality in relation to V. Balan and the Dharmaram mosaic, the Jyoti Sahi images I examine here have hitherto escaped such a distinct ‘naming’. What I call *Missio I* and *Missio II* are two of Jyoti Sahi’s images from his 1986 ‘Sermon on the Mount’ series (16 paintings in total), which has circulated transnationally and thus by way of several languages and socio-cultural interpretations. A long-time friend and colleague of Jyoti Sahi, the Rev. Dr Eric Lott,



**Figure 11.5** *Missio I*, 1986, by Jyoti Sahi ('Missio': International Catholic Mission Society, Germany).

chose to entitle *Missio I* 'Teacher on the Plain' in his book (co-created with Jyoti Sahi) *Faces of Vision* (2008). He described the painting in these words:

Jesus is here surrounded by flame-like figures, leaping in ecstasy. They are also the fire-like blossoms that fall from a flame of the forest tree. So brilliant at the time of the pre-monsoon showers, one of these is prominent in Jyoti's garden. For several weeks of the year, the brilliant colours of this flame tree are what Jyoti looks at each day, often too forming a brilliant carpet underfoot.

(Lott and Sahi 2008, 23)

The Rev. Dr Eric Lott's description reveals his friendship with Jyoti Sahi through his significantly personal interpretation of the image in terms of the 'fire-like' blossoms of the flame tree in Jyoti Sahi's garden. The year after the creation of the 16 paintings for *Missio* in Germany, *Missio*'s magazine publication *Weltweit* ('Worldwide') showcased them in a special

feature issue. From this special issue of *Weltweit*, the text in German which accompanies the painting (*Missio I*) reads:

‘Flammende Blütenpracht’: Wie kleine Flammen springen nach dem Monsunregen die Blüten der Regenzilie auf. Dieses Schauspiel hat mich als Kind immer erinnert an die feurigen Zungen des Pfingstfestes. Später fand ich bei einem alten Kirchenvater eine Beschreibung der Verklärung Christi, wo es heißt: Nicht nur die Gestalt Christi habe geleuchtet wie die Sonne, sondern dieser Glanz habe übergegriffen auf den ganzen Berg und jede Blume auf ihm sei verwandelt worden in eine Flamme, so dass die Jünger den Anblick nicht ertragen konnten.

(J. Übelmesser, *Weltweit* 1986, 14)

‘Flaming Blossoms’: the rain lily’s blossoms which always follow the monsoon rains are just like little flames of fire. When I was a child, this spectacle always reminded me of the flaming tongues of Pentecost. Later on in life, I found a description of the Transfiguration of Christ by an early Church Father which said: the figure of Christ not only lit up like the sun, but for those disciples present unable to behold the splendour, his radiance spread out over the entire mountain, whereby every flower was transformed into a flame.

Translation by the author.

The German text above was penned by Fr Joe Übelmesser, and through personal communication with Jyoti Sahi I learnt that Fr Joe had commissioned a series of paintings on the subject of the Sermon on the Mount. These paintings were in memory of Fr Joe Übelmesser’s friend, Fr Matthew Lederle, who had died suddenly in Goa in 1986.

Thanks to a careful, and thorough, archival practice on Jyoti Sahi’s part, he was able to retrieve some of the letters he wrote to Fr Joe Übelmesser in the mid- to late 1980s. During my own correspondence with Jyoti Sahi (via email and online video conversations), I was struck by how central the exchange of letters and thus ideas with the German Missio Fathers had been to Sahi’s creative work during this time. Jyoti Sahi had spent time at the seminary in Pune with both Fr Joe Übelmesser and Fr Matthew Lederle, and a series of talks he gave there was published by Routledge & Kegan Paul, entitled *The Child and the Serpent: Reflections on popular Indian symbols* (1980). In one of our email exchanges Sahi told me:

The typed copy of the letter I sent to Fr. Joe is quite long, in which I set out the underlying ideas behind my work on the ‘Dharma of Jesus’ as articulated in what he presented as ‘The Beatitudes’. Here I talk about

the 'lilies of the field ... and how Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. To see the lilies in this way, requires a new vision.' ... I do not find in this paper mention of the rain lilies, but it is certainly true that for me, especially in my childhood, the way the rain lilies burst into a sudden splash of colour after the rains, was something very impressive. I must have mentioned this to Fr. Joe. I go on to say: 'Both in Matthew and Luke, the transfiguration of Jesus has a central place. One father of the Desert said that at the time of the transfiguration of Jesus, even the flowers on the hill of Thabor were transfigured. Jesus the teacher is transfigured before the eyes of his disciples, reminding us of Moses who also was transfigured when he returned with the tables of the Law, so that people found it difficult to look at the glory [of] his face.'<sup>18</sup>

The insight that Jyoti Sahi's archived letters provides allows us to appreciate the kind of friendship – indeed, a Christian kinship – that these men shared during these years, and the archived letters further document the profoundly intercultural and negotiated ideas of Jesus as a 'teacher' and a 'guru' that were often at the centre of their discussions.

Whereas the three images discussed above have circulated predominantly within India, *Missio I* and *Missio II* have intentionally travelled across cultures and languages. I suggest that this is chiefly due to the friendship Jyoti Sahi and the Missio German Fathers shared. Here, in *Missio I* (Figure 11.5), Jesus is seated cross-legged in *padmasana* whilst those around him seem to be in movement or dance, as indicated by the way the limbs, in particular, are depicted. The guru figure we understand to be Jesus is draped in a robe, seated and with his arms raised. Although the gesture of his right hand is somewhat indistinct, we can see the left hand is raised and we might interpret this as being an *abhaya* or 'fearless' *mudra*, to communicate a sense of divine protection and safety (we see this also in Figure 11.3: *St Anthony's Shrine* in Bengaluru) (tropes 1 and 2). This *mudra* is emboldened by the depiction of those surrounding Jesus as flames, their bodies drawn using heavily curved lines, lines that imitate the licking and flickering of a flame. Moreover, the figures' heads stretch upwards and their bodies flow into one another just as the flames of a fire do. Jyoti Sahi paints these figures in shades of red, ochre and orange which seem to spread outwards, covering the ground around them. I suggest that this depiction of the guru Jesus's followers foregrounds Amaladoss's notion of the guru as one who is 'capable of guiding disciples (*sishtyas*) in their own search. They [the guru] can instruct them, solve their doubts and difficulties. They can authenticate their experiences' (2006, 69) (tropes 2, 3 and 4).

We might assume that the tree under which Jesus is seated is a banyan tree, given the guru trope as one which often combines a seated sage and a broad banyan canopy (see above for a discussion of *Kalpavriksha*). In *Missio I* (Figure 11.5) the tree itself is made up of human forms, their limbs curving and bending as if they were the trunk and branches of the great tree. This section of the composition is coloured in hues of dark blue, grey and black, and frames the bodies dancing like flames around Jesus. The melding of form, human and arboreal, allows the figure of the seated guru to be seen as though he shared the flame-like profile, and this creates the sense that he is simultaneously *with* and *apart* from those who surround him (trope 6). This foregrounding of the guru motif but with a simultaneous anchoring of the guru in and of ‘the people’ communicates the idea of Jesus as more than a ‘Teacher’; rather, as Eric Lott writes, ‘the Guru somehow shares the life of God, within himself and with his disciples. In such a context no one can speak of Jesus as “only as a teacher”; such a Teacher, even with his Word, and imparting his Way, mediates the inner life of God’ (Lott and Sahi 2008, 26).

In *Missio II* (Figure 11.6), we see Jesus once again seated underneath a tree but here he is also seated on an anthill, and the text from a special issue of the *Weltweit* magazine reads:

‘Die vom Ameisenhaufen’: Als der indische Dichter Valmiki das Ramayana-Epos schrieb, war er einmal so sehr in Meditation versunken – sagt die Legende, – dass er nicht bemerkte, wie unter ihm ein Ameisenhaufen aufwuchs. Von dieser Begebenheit leitet sich der Name des Dichters ab: Valmiki – der vom Ameisenhaufen. Und ebenso nennt man heute in Indien die Unterdrückten und Armen: Valmiki – die vom Ameisenhaufen.

(J. Übelmesser, *Weltweit* 1986, 6)

‘People of the anthill’: Legend has it that when he was composing the Ramayana epic, the Indian poet Valmiki was at one point so deep in meditation that he did not realise an anthill was taking shape beneath him. It is from this incident that the poet got the name ‘Valmiki – the one from the anthill’. To this day, in India, the oppressed and poor are called ‘Valmiki’ – the people of the anthill.

Translation by the author.

As in *Missio I*, in *Missio II* the figure of Jesus is seated, cross-legged and in a recognisable visual semiotic of ‘teaching/imparting wisdom’; he is





**Figure 11.6** *Missio II*, 1986, by Jyoti Sahi ('Missio': International Catholic Mission Society, Germany).

central to the composition and people are gathered around him (tropes 1, 2 and 6). We notice in particular, through the luminescent hues of the clothes, the figure that has fallen at Jesus's feet (is it a woman?), the figure's head to Jesus's knee, the arms outstretched towards his feet. This depiction of falling at Jesus's feet further foregrounds the interpretation of Jesus as a benevolent figure, one it is possible to reach out to and touch (tropes 1 and 5), and, as Lannoy writes, "The more active ideal of the spiritual "teacher" is associated with the Indian concept of compassion, or *karuṇā*" (1974, 348). We might also read this act as touching an elder's feet out of respect, seen in many Hindu traditions. This central aspect of both the composition of the image and the message of 'Jesus' (*karuṇā*) works productively with the overarching theme of Jesus's connection with the people of the earth, interpreted here as the *anawim*: the poorest, those who are outcasts and those who are persecuted. Through this connection with the oppressed, *Missio II* depicts Jesus as being literally part of the earth (he is *part of the anthill*), and I suggest that we might read this as emblematic of guru-ness (tropes 5 and 6). If we read the

image as Jesus being ‘one’ with the earth – he is sitting atop the anthill, his body in direct contact with the clay and soil – then we might consider this to be an act that accentuates that ‘the way to God is not through faithful observance of ritual and law but through fidelity to the fundamental demands of a love that reaches out preferentially to the poor and the oppressed’ (Amaladoss 2006, 72). Other works of Jyoti Sahi created around this time – the late 1980s – explored a similar theme, and an image which prefaces chapter 6 in *The Child and the Serpent* (1990) shows a figure not unlike ‘Jesus’, as a yogi, lost in meditation, contained within an anthill. Sahi writes of this picture: ‘The yogi lost in meditation. His body assumes the still, cone-like form of a mountain. (There are even stories of yogis who get lost inside an ant hill as the termites build their clay castle around the yogi without him noticing.)’ (Sahi 1990, 68). Such ‘Indian’ cultural symbolism of the yogi and the anthill is visually manifest in Sahi’s *Missio II* painting (Figure 11.6), making connections outside the frame to specifically Hindu, rather than Christian, traditions. The reading of Jesus the guru/yogi-like figure invokes what Amaladoss asserts is ‘in-culturation’, a term which

is patterned on the term ‘incarnation’, which refers to the Word of God taking on human flesh to become human in Jesus (John 1:14). Christians believe that the Word becomes human in Jesus in order to divinize them as children of God. This divinization of humans also involves the transformation of their cultures and ways of life.  
(2021, 417)

I suggest that across *Missio I* and *Missio II*, Jyoti Sahi employs the visual semiotic of the guru figure to foreground the semiotic of ‘Jesus’ (‘the Son of God’) over a more deified, ‘Christ’ semiotic (tropes 4, 5 and 6). Jyoti Sahi realises this through the combination of composition, style of painting and the colour palettes he employs, which communicate a sense of a *guru* who is connected with the people of the earth, who listens and who also guides and transforms them (tropes 2, 4 and 7).

## Conclusion

In the presentation and examination of five visual artworks in which Jesus/Christ is portrayed as guru, this chapter has attempted to trace a series of seven guru tropes (compiled from the work of Amaladoss, Lannoy and Schouten) across these artworks. Overall, the figure of ‘the

Jesus (Christ) guru' is represented through a seated, male figure, in a meditative and/or teaching state. I have argued that it is through composition, style, artistic medium and colour palette that the tropes of guru examined here are communicated. Furthermore, I have outlined how these are employed to foreground a deified image of Christ or a more grounded, Son of God representation of Jesus. A Hindu reception of these representations of Jesus Christ has not been a focus of this chapter but it is productive to consider Lott's words:

For many more Hindus, though, Jesus was seen as Guru. And the Guru may begin as 'teacher', but one whose personal charisma and spiritual potency – in the case of Jesus especially seen in his self-giving acts of healing and eventual dying – draw us nearer to God and even mediate the very character and being of God. The Guru then becomes far more than 'just a teacher'.

(2008, 25–6)

I suggest that this quote demonstrates the transcultural and trans-spiritual qualities of the notion of guru when it moves beyond a simple understanding of 'guru = teacher'. Notably, Lott describes the guru as one who 'mediates the inner life of God' and therefore might be thought of as a being through which we reach God. Moreover, here Lott's sense of guru even suggests a being who is *of* God and is therefore knowable and yet 'unknowable' in the same moment. The beginning of this chapter referenced the apophatic through Voss Roberts's work; I argue that the visual representation of Jesus/Christ, over the verbal or textual representation of the same, extends and deepens our insight into 'no matter how many words or how careful the choice of words, none can suitably or properly describe the holy mystery that is the divine' (Voss Roberts 2021, 347).

The analysis of the guru-Jesus images in relation to the apophatic and 'seeing' foregrounds the capacity of the non-verbal/non-textual by highlighting 'the alternative cognitive structures of the visual' (Hirsch 2004, 1211). Through the trope of the guru, the gazer is invited into a moment of 'seeing' that transcends the spoken or written word and opens up a more intimate space for 'knowing' and 'feeling'. I argue that the channelling of the nature/character/message of Jesus Christ through the visual trope of the guru reveals facets of guru-ness that encode ideas of what it is to recognise oneself as both Christian and Indian. The analysis of the images has attempted to identify such facets and examine how they find expression through the visual medium. As Fr Saji Mathew's 2003 *St Anthony's Shrine* installation shows us, there is much scope for

post-millennial expressions of guru-ness, and in this particular case we might recognise the effectiveness of such an installation in its ‘attempt to tap various sources of power to overcome challenging situations in life’ (Ponniah 2021, 223). India and ideas of ‘Indianness’ (see Dawson Varughese 2021, 2018a, 2018b) continue to evolve in the post-millennial period. Policy changes, such as the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA, 2019) – whereby ‘religion’ has been used overtly to grant citizenship under Indian law – mean that it is more important than ever that we understand that ‘citizenship concerns more than rights to participate in politics’. Indeed, citizenship ‘concerns the moral and performative dimensions of membership that define the meanings and practices of belonging to a society’ (Holston and Appadurai 1996, 200).

## Notes

- 1 This organisation is committed to building up a ‘digital library of Christian music, arts and literature of India’, and features research work in Syriac chants and Aramaic and Christian art. <http://christianmusicologicalsocietyofindia.com/> (accessed 8 March 2023).
- 2 Dr Joseph Palackal, pers. comm., August 2020.
- 3 M. P. Manoj, pers. comm., December 2021.
- 4 M. P. Manoj, pers. comm., December 2021.
- 5 See [www.missio.com](http://www.missio.com) (accessed 8 March 2023).
- 6 Bengaluru, the capital of Karnataka state, is about 160 miles (260 km) north-east of its border with (northern) Kerala and has various transport connections for interstate travel.
- 7 <http://christianmusicologicalsocietyofindia.com/>.
- 8 Fr Saji Mathew, pers. comm., November 2021.
- 9 Dr Joseph Palackal, pers. comm., September 2021.
- 10 The thookuvilaku (a hanging lamp) hangs to the right of Christ as you look at the image, further situating the image regionally and culturally within South Asia.
- 11 M. P. Manoj, pers. comm., December 2021.
- 12 Fr Saji Mathew, pers. comm., November 2021.
- 13 [http://friaryparish.com/40\\_hours\\_adoration.html](http://friaryparish.com/40_hours_adoration.html) (accessed December 2021).
- 14 Fr Saji Mathew, pers. comm. November 2021.
- 15 Fr Saji Mathew, pers. comm. November 2021.
- 16 See ‘Jesus the guru in Buddhist meditative posture’. <https://www.photographartdesign.com/2012/10/relief-work-jesus-at-st-anthonys.html> (accessed 8 March 2023).
- 17 See ‘Jesus the guru in Buddhist meditative posture’.
- 18 Jyoti Sahi, pers. comm., November 2021.

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