Art ought to be an enabler but that is perhaps utopian. Exhibitions have now proliferated and there is a plethora of art events, but whom or what are these events for? For a privileged few who access these spaces which are deeply hierarchical in nature? Galleries in a traditional sense have remained the preserve of the elite. This has led to the emergence of non-normative, alternative art spaces where newer alliances and engagements can be embraced.

The Kochi-Muziris Biennale, which began in 2012, feels like redemption in many ways. It is one of India's biggest achievements in making art inclusive. Hordes of people show up at the venues every day, many of whom have limited or no prior exposure to the visual arts. These are the common masses who turn their Sunday trip to the city into a visit to the biennale.

One of the major initiatives of the biennale during each edition has been to reflect stories of the local people and their histories. Thus, besides a lot of otherwise perplexing art from far removed contexts like Romania or Hungary, the visitors also find a representation of themselves in paintings, videos or photography.

For instance, in the ongoing edition, Nilima Sheikh's painting 'Salam Chechi' is a tribute to the ubiquitous Malayali nurse. Artist Vipin Dhanurdharan has portraits of local people who had welcomed him into their home for meals. He organises a community cooking and dining event every week by inviting experts to cook traditional recipes unique to various communities living in Kochi (in picture). The current edition curated by artist Anita Dube is titled 'Possibilities for a Non-Alienated Life'. Dube's politics are at the forefront. She has tried to make the marginal visible, to situate the unheard and the unseen at the centre of her discourse.

Art without politics is no art at all and could you think of a better place than Kerala to rise up to the challenge? Feminism, identity politics, gender rights, LGBTQ representation and farmers’ issues are replete in this edition. This is art of our ‘contemporary’ ethos because it is reflective of the times we live in. Contemporary is just not cutting-edge art practice, but art that takes a distinct position vis-à-vis the current sociopolitical climate of the country. Amidst shrinking spaces of debate and dialogue and growing apathy for compassion, spaces like these are the need of the hour.

In her curatorial note, Dube writes, “If we desire a better life on this earth – our unique and beautiful planet – we must in all humility start to reject an existence in the service of capital. ‘Possibilities for a Non-Alienated Life’ asks and searches for questions in the hope of dialogue.” Through dialogue, we shall thrive.

The writer teaches literary and cultural studies at FLAME University, Pune