

JULY, 2021

# INDIA Forbes



Padma Shri, Krishn Kanhai



Sanjeev Fadnavis



Dr BS Ajaikumar



Pavan Kumar Prasad



Shrivats Singhania



A. B. Doddamani



Rabindra Narayan



K Srinivas Rao



Dr Piyush Dwivedi

== **TOP LEADERS** ==  
**TORCHBEARERS OF  
VOCAL FOR LOCAL**

FORBES INDIA

MARQUEE

A special marketing presentation complimentary with Forbes India. Not for Sale.

Network 18





Padma Shri, Mr Krishn Kanhai

## Krishn Kanhai: The Man with the Midas Touch



**A**lways prepared to draw things that take his fancy, Krishn Kanhai is one of the most enigmatic and internationally recognized artists of contemporary India.

Best described as an artist with the Midas touch, Mr Kanhai, has earned multiple accolades throughout his artistic career, including India's fourth-highest civilian honour Padma Shri in 2004.

Born in 1961 in Uttar Pradesh's Vrindavan, Mr Kanhai's journey began at a very young age of 15 years.

"To be true, it all began after seeing my father (Kanhai Chitrakar). And as a son of a renowned artist, my friends at the school used to push me to draw something on the blackboard," says Mr Kanhai.

Notably, Krishn Kanhai's father Padma Shri Kanhai Chitrakar was also an acclaimed artist and a painter who pioneered an art form known as Kanhai gold painting.

Kanhai gold paintings are somewhat like the well-loved Tanjore paintings, but the Kanhai's are proportionate, unlike the Tanjores, which feature short, stout figures. In addition, the Kanhai paintings use only 24-carat pure gold, which is applied more liberally than the fine-touch gold typically, used in other Indian paintings.

"So initially just with chalk, I used to draw peacocks, flowers, and sometimes Radha-Krishan on the blackboard. At the age of 15 after completing my High School education, I completely focused on the painting," said Mr. Kanhai.

Pertinent to mention, Mr Kanhai, throughout his artistic career spanning over four decades, has painted thousands of portraits on the now perishing theme of Radha-Krishna and their tales.

Mr Kanhai has, however, not confined himself to the traditional style, but, has also introduced certain significant techniques of his own that make the canvas aesthetically appealing and spiritually rich.

Most aptly, Mr Kanhai can be called a fusion artist for making beautiful use of enchanting Radha-Krishna postures and turning them into contemporary modern art that is eye-catching and unforgettable even after a single gaze. So following the footsteps of his father and mentor Kanhai Chitrakar, young Kanhai was encouraged to carve out his own niche in the artistic world, which he did earlier than expected. His son Mr Arjun Kanhai has received his BFA degree from University of Southampton, UK and is also an expert in traditional and portrait painting.

It is seldom, that a father and a son have been honoured with a



national award like Padma Shri. The Kanhai family and the Bachchan family are the only two families in India where both father and son have won the Padma Shri.

"What I learned from my father at the age of 15 gave me recognition after 25 years of struggle into the painting world," underlines the dexterous artist.

Mr Kanhai's first magical work with his rapier-like fingers was a portrait of Swami Haridas, which he sold for Rs 4 in 1975.

"This Rs 4 was my first earning through a painting and it gave me a sense of satisfaction that my paintings are being liked by the people," the humble painter remarked.

After this Mr Kanhai completely joined his father to learn the art of painting and later presented art that was embellished with aesthetic appeal, spiritual richness, and exemplary beauty.

Narrating a three-decades-old experience, Mr Kanhai said when he was 27-year-old, he decided to create his own art form. It is after this realization, Mr Kanhai started working on folk themes to revive the Brij and Yamuna bank culture into his artwork and gradually came to evolve a style of his own, which bore his personal stamp. It did not take much time for him to get known, as the precursor of the Yamuna Ghat Painting School.

Since then Kanhai's paintings have received great acclaim due to their improved artistic composition, use of oil paints and embossing material, realistic style on large canvases, excellent gem-setting work, and an opulent 24-carat gold foiling. Yes, he often uses pure gold and precious gems as raw materials for his paintings.

"Painting using pure gold was done a long time ago, but this form of art had become extinct in North India in recent times. Thinking of creative ways to make a painting more beautiful, I revived this form of painting," said Kanhai.

It is often said that stand before Kanhai's portrait of Krishna and, very often, you lose the sense of time as you keep on gazing at the Lord of Vrindavan, which seems to cast a spell over the onlooker.

He brought a new dimension to the art arena by creating paintings that recited visually mesmerising stories. Groomed under the expert guidance of his father and Guru, Kanhai Chitrakar, he earned international recognition and the epithet of the artist with the Midas touch. But it is not just the Radha-







Krishna paintings or the portraits that depicted folk culture for what Mr Kanhai is known. He kept experimenting with his artistic work.

Mr Kanhai is also known to the political elite of the world, with several Presidents and Prime Ministers among his clients whose portraits were done by him. The list includes names like former Prime Minister of India Atal Bihari Vajpayee and former Deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani, former US President Bill Clinton and his wife Hillary Clinton, former US President Barack Obama and his family, besides eminent industrialists like Aditya Birla and his wife Rajshri Birla, and veteran Bollywood actor-turned-politician Hema Malini.

In 2016, on a special request from the Uttar Pradesh Government, Mr Kanhai painted a life-size portrait of 22 Chief Ministers of UP- past and present along with 19 past and present Speakers of the UP Assembly, besides two life-size portraits of Mahatma Gandhi.

"I feel that I am fortunate to be the only artist whose 40 portraits are on the walls of Uttar Pradesh Vidhan Sabha," Mr Kanhai said.

The paintings of the father-son duo are so highly acclaimed in the art circles of India, that in 2004, two research scholars – Sangeeta Gupta of Bhimrao Ambedkar University Agra and Mohammed Wasim of Jiwaji Rao University, Gwalior – were awarded a Doctorate degree over their academic work based on Krishn Kanhai and his father Kanhai Chitrakar, respectively.



12th Feb, 2019, Inaugurated by President of India in Central Hall, Parliament



To be exact, the versatile artist has so far painted more than 300 portraits, 700 contemporary ones, 300 fusions, and 3000 gold paintings on the theme of Lord Radha-Krishna. Apart from this, he has also trained more than 200 students.

Mr Kanhai has numerous received awards and honours to which the humble artist says, "It is not me who is making these paintings, it is God, I'm just a medium."

But noting down some of his achievements, Mr Kanhai was internationally acclaimed by Mr A.H. Nelly President of International Publishers for Gold Paintings of Krishna Chitrakar on 30th Jan, 1992. He was also honoured with the 'Achiever of the millennium' award in 1999. Mr Kanhai has also been included in World Book of Records, London for his contributions.

The then Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh, Raman Singh, awarded "Raja Chakradhar Samman" to him in September 2009. In the same year, he was conferred "Rashtriya Kalidas Samman" by the Madhya Pradesh government. Later in 2015, the Uttar Pradesh government honoured Mr. Kanhai with the Yash Bharti Samman.

With surfeit recognition globally, we asked Mr Kanhai of his success mantra to







which he averred that there is 'no shortcut to success.'

"Sheer hard work is the only key to success. You have to give everything to achieve something in your life," says Mr Kanhai. In a message to young artists and painters, he tells them not to remain in a hurry to achieve success. "This artwork requires decades to gain finesse in your work."

In the future, the veteran artist plans to open a "Kanhai Art Academy' in Vrindavan – the land of Radha and share his four decades of skills with the young generation. In the coming years, the name Krishn Kanhai, will be remembered as the man who was profoundly influential in changing the idiom of Indian Art!



**Q** To be true, it all began after seeing my father (Kanhai Chitrakar). And as a son of a renowned artist, my friends at the school used to push me to draw something on the blackboard."

– says Mr Krishn Kanhai

[krishnkanhaivb@gmail.com](mailto:krishnkanhaivb@gmail.com) / [www.krishnkanhai.com](http://www.krishnkanhai.com)