

00:00:10 **Sinéad Burke**

Welcome to episode two of crippling Ulysses. A podcast that explores. The friction between how we see ourselves. And how the world sees us. But what does that mean? Specifically, through three conversations, we explore the notion of disability consciousness, which Joyce was supposed to have. Within three conversations across geographic boundaries and identities, we look through the lenses of physical disabilities, neurodivergence, chronic pain to learn a little bit more about who people are. How they navigate the world and how they're observed. Today's conversation is with somebody who. Is incredibly special to me. And has had an enormous impact. On my life. And how I think about myself and the world. Alok V Menon is a poet, a writer, an activist, a thought leader. And a stand-up comedian. Over the past 12 months, I've seen them perform twice in person. Here in Dublin, at home in Ireland and at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, and while both performances had a similar script, what I took from each of them was extraordinarily different. I've been fortunate to get to know Alok across coffee tables at parties. In intimate conversations and I am always. So moved by firstly their command of language and their use of it. And secondly, just their insightfulness in how they push us all to think. Beyond. Going into this conversation, I felt like I had a great understanding of what the output would be. There are moments when you can probably sense that. The cogs are turning live, at least for me. This conversation ends with some amazing moments. Where it's not just thinking about the practices that we all know about to create change. But actually. What role does love play? And a disability consciousness. Both in terms of how we love ourselves. And how we love each other. It's a theory of change that I haven't given much time to. But I'm going to do it after this episode. This is episode two of crippling Ulysses. I am so pleased and feel very grateful to be joined in conversation today by Alok V Menon. Alok is a writer, a thought leader, and somebody who has genuinely shaped how I think about myself. And also has given me tools to see the world from a different perspective. But I'm conscious that they're on the end of the line and me waxing lyrical about how I see them. It's probably not the greatest start to a podcast whose whole purpose is about how they see themselves. I guess to start, for accessibility reasons, I'm going to give a brief visual description of myself and then I'm going to throw to Alok to do the same. Oh, hi, my name is Sinéad and I have been

your host for these three episodes. I'm a white cisgendered woman who uses the pronouns she and her. I identify as queer and physically disabled. I have brown shoulder length hair and today I am wearing. A burnt orange pangaia jumper in the hope that it feels warmer than it is in Ireland currently and I'm wearing just comfortable, leisurely trousers because it has been a long week of working from home. But Alok I'll pass to you now. Do you describe yourself visually today?

00:04:29 **Alok V Menon**

Hi everyone. Thanks so much for having me. My name is Alok and tell me a joke, Alok. I use they/them pronouns and it's Fashion Week, which means in protest I'm wearing a T-shirt and a pair of gym shorts and utterly unfashionable and glamorous in it. I've got multi coloured green hair. I'm being interrupted by a siren so you know that I'm truly in New York City. And I am Indian and gender nonconforming and live with chronic pain.

00:05:08 **Sinéad Burke**

This podcast was born out of a piece of academic research which talked about James Joyce having a Disability Consciousness, both because he himself had low vision, though he never in his own descriptions described himself as having a disability or being disabled. But in Ulysses, there are many characters who have disabilities, and across Joyce's work, disability exists, though disability is often used as a metaphor to talk to political paralysis. So unintentionally describing the ableism that exists within society. And that notion of Disability Conscious has really rooted in these three conversations. I guess. I'd love to ask, have you ever thought of yourself as having a Disability Consciousness based on how you've just described yourself there, or do you think it's something that is continuous? Work in progress for result.

00:06:04 **Alok V Menon**

I tend to believe that everything is a work in progress. That nothing is absolute. Everything is always becoming. And I think so often there's an emphasis with modernity, big word, that things are real and permanent. But my view of the history of time is that everything is energy and circulation. And that's why I have a very ambivalent relationship with definitions, categories and identities. Because I think we

keep on trying to believe that there's one standard way to be. To be man, to be woman, to be disabled, to be anything. And I don't know if that's really the goal. I think what's more interesting to me about identity is how we all deploy them differently. And so in my life. This framework of invisible disability has always been a real provocation for me because. I think that we don't question that realm of visibility enough. Is it that these things are invisible? Or is it that they become invisible, lized? Is it that the only framework that we have to observe each other is one in which foregrounds a particular form of vision, precluding the possibility of other ways of witnessing each other? And that's why I was excited to have that conversation with you.

00:07:40 **Sinéad Burke**

I often wonder if. That categorization of visible. And invisible disability creates. A hierarchy both of needs and. Of who qualifies most to be disabled and how is that often articulated through a nondisabled lens, whether that's based on access to services, whether that's based on representation and really further marginalises people in a way in which identity. Is potentially supposed to create a sense of community and pride.

00:08:16 **Alok V Menon**

Yeah, I feel like it's, it's not organic, it's superimposed. And I think that this is the difficulty and so many of the worlds that I orbit. We just said that language and the frameworks that we've inherited don't come from us, they come from the language of biomedicine. And biomedicine's approach to queer people, to trans people, and to people with disabilities has always been one of elimination, and has always been one of pathologization. Trying to say there's one standard body. This is what a healthy body is, and anyone who I don't even want to use, the word deviates because that's loaded. Anyone who flirts with anyone who transcends expands out of this framework. Is suspect and criminal, and So what happens often is that the only vocabularies that we have to narrate ourselves are so steeped in that history and ongoing present. Of biomedicine. And that's why I actually really turned to literature as an alternative vocabulary to describe myself, because I actually feel like writings for and by

marginalised people give us so much more of an abundant sense of self. What I'm saying is I think. I would have only seen myself as lacking or as broken if the only framework I had to describe myself was Western medicine. And then when I began to read. I realised that actually maybe the reason that I have pain, and maybe the reason I live with pain. Is not because I have some disorder. Maybe it's actually because the society itself is disorderly. Maybe it's not actually my fault. Maybe it's actually that we live in a world where people are only valued for their labour and their output, not for their soul, their dignity. And maybe my pain is a result of that, the external indictment of a world rather than my internal failure.

00:10:35 **Sinéad Burke**

So how do we as a collective? Begin to embed or even design. New frameworks and is it by finding as you shared there? New routes to discovering who we are and how we define ourselves, or what we compare ourselves to, if there is need for comparison at all. But your route was literature. How do we do that as a collective rather than relying on individuals, particularly those? Who are from previously marginalised and continue to be marginalised backgrounds. Loading them with the labour of creating the change.

00:11:16 **Alok V Menon**

I said we need to get more experimental. You know, this is a long standing conversation that we have off the record. I've been trying to convince you around the poetry of stand-up comedy and what I really enjoy. There's a lot to not enjoy about contemporary stand up, but what I really enjoy is the idea of the bit. Which is, I'm going to go on for 5-10 minutes about something I'm riffing. I don't know what's going to happen, but I'm in a rift and I'm going to see what happens. I'm going to improvise. And there's so few places and culture where people are rewarded for improvisation. Everyone is expected to already know, to already have a resolute sense of conviction. This is what I believe, and I think that's way too much pressure, because I actually think there's something really precious and sacred about figuring it out. And the only way that we can figure it out is whenever we create spaces where we allow one another to improvise and riff, and then we process. What came up? And I wish that we

could start romanticising and glorifying improvised lives. I really find that the most incredible people are people who are experimenting with things like freedom. They don't know if it's possible. They don't know even if they believe in it. Yeah, but they try it. And I think trying is an ethic that I really have taken from a lot of creative communities, which is, yeah, I'm not a trained singer, but I'm going to try. I'm not a trained painter, but I'm going to try. And there's beauty in trying. So I say the way forward is we create more spaces. For people to try it out. And then for people to dialogue about what that felt like when they tried it out. And I imagine that if we create more spaces for imagination, that's where we can create a more abundant. Vocabulary on how to understand ourselves.

00:13:24 **Sinéad Burke**

And create space for imagination, but similar but simultaneously creates space for error or for growth. And to your point around this notion of fixed ideas or fixed confidence or fixed understanding of who we are, I think many communities have taken the stance and the belief system that that is a continuous iteration of oneself. But I think so much of the world that we live in there is this. Not even. Assume that mistake is an error, but we don't take the notion of failing better and continuously improvising to your point or improving even if it's not a betterment. But we're so rigid based on who everybody needs to be that. It takes real bravery. To carve out those new.

00:14:13 **Alok V Menon**

Spaces, yeah. And I think that's where, once again, history is the spectre. It's eugenics that makes this feel like we have to be perfect. The goal of Eugenics was the perfection of the human race. And the idea that human beings only had worth if they could appeal to preset criteria. And that has been diffused across every institution that we're in, schools, professional careers, we don't believe that people have an inherent dignity and worth for being. And so I think one of the ways that we can actually protest the continuing Halo of eugenics is actually affording spaces for people to be perfectly imperfect. Challenging the ways in which you require people to be a certain way, speak a certain way, look a certain way in order to have worth, and continue to

return to that sense of we believe that people have fundamental work simply for being, which means that people are not the summation. Of the mistakes that they've made, which means that we believe in redemption, which means that we believe in transformation. And I think that the reason often is that we are so. So scared to say that, scared to see that in each other. It's because we have, we have associated this deeper correlation between our ability to be loved and to be perfect. So it's not even just about worthiness, it's about love, which is a whole other realm I notice with myself. I am so cruel to myself when we're talking about self perception. I think writing is one of the most difficult things for me because I am the most cruel commentator. I can perform in front of thousands of people, but when I'm writing and it's just me, I'm like, this is embarrassing. You're a joke. What makes you think that you could do this? And then I have to confront that, the ways in which even though I can speak on podcasts about challenging a culture of perfectionism. To myself, I say OK, everyone else can be imperfect, but I have to be perfect. And I think that that is an overcompensation mechanism that comes from trauma, is that I was made to feel, because I was different, that the only place I could get a seat at the table was by being exceptional. And so I can't, I just think I'm going to be abandoned if I'm not exceptionally insightful, exceptionally artful, and so I think the work, it's not even work. That word seeps in. The journey I'm trying to do with myself now is to bring this intimately into my self observation, because I would reckon that it's easier for us to forgive others. Often more so than ourselves.

00:17:14 **Sinéad Burke**

And that notion of being. The good disabled person or the exceptional disabled person is so ingrained in me because. In culture, there are often 2 narratives of disability. One is the burden of relying on state benefits or support from caregivers or family members, and the other motif is the superhero, the Paralympic athlete who wins gold. And in all other spaces it seems like there was so little room for failure to be a disabled person. Or you have to prove that you are the exception in order to be accepted by those who consider themselves to be the majority. And the level of expectation and pressure that that places on a person, well, it's something that I've definitely been unpicking in two years of therapy and still have so much to learn and

to do. The format of this podcast is. Four questions which every person is asked. And it's interesting because. The response to each is so different. And you talked earlier about your career. As a stand-up comic, I have had the privilege in the past 12 months to see you twice and in each performance I was so moved in different ways and challenged by those two performances. And I guess a question I have is, you know, how does the world see you and is that determined by the role that you're in in that moment or the ways in which you allow a person or an audience to see you, but. What's your understanding or awareness of that?

00:19:03 **Alok V Menon**

You know, that question really hits deep right now because I'm just off of an 8 month World Tour which I saw you twice. And I've had the first large swath of unstructured time. And a while. And it's been deeply confrontational. Because I've just been wallowing in despair. And I began to realise that it's actually very easy for me to create. An image for other people's consumption. But when I have to encounter my own self-image. My day-to-day when I'm not getting dressed up for events. When I'm not performing. I have to actually confront myself and ask, like, do I? Do I like myself here? Am I myself? Who even am I outside of the narrative of myself? Right? So that's where I'm at to contextualise. And I think that it's this paradox of which I also am responsible for. So I don't want to blame other people for it. I think we're all doing this where I say I want to be seen beyond visibility. But then visibility becomes the way that I am saying that. And I don't want to judge either party because I think that's just the conundrum that we're in right now. If I really want to be experienced, I want to be felt. I want to be appreciated beyond. My physical. Vocabulary. I want to be appreciated beyond my image. I want to be regarded. And I think that's why I became a poet, is because I felt fatigued by being a body. And I wanted to actually have words, because those were so much closer to who I am than anything I look like. I feel like my poems are way better selfies than any camera could ever take, because they catch a glimmer and a glimpse of my soul, which is what I'm trying to do. But I just don't know. If that's. Possible on a large scale. I feel like the closest I felt to being seen as myself is in one-on-one conversations. Um, coffee tables, dinner tables sitting on the floor. And perhaps that's the site. Perhaps it's actually about recalibrating. Maybe

we're never going to be seen as we want by the world. And maybe that's not the goal. Maybe that's pretending and practising for this. This means finding people who are actually committed to experiencing you beyond visuality, experiencing soul connection. Because that's what we seek at the end of the day. And I think we seek it often in the wrong places. And I have love for myself and other people and then I mean how I'm in fashion. And sometimes I'll be at fashion events and I'll be like, what am I doing here? You know, there's an abyss of vulnerability. Everyone is in their deepest, most incredible fawning complexes. Everyone is talking without saying anything. This is not spiritually or soul nurturing. Why am I here? Oh, it's out of an earnest desire that maybe if I dress a certain way, then you'll notice me. Enough to listen to me. And so I think of stages that conundrum over and over again. I think we just want to be noticed. And we keep on creating billboards around notice me and very few people are willing to do it.

00:23:02 **Sinéad Burke**

My shoulders have risen up to my ears because so much of what you have just shared there. Completely mirrors my experience and especially in. The past two to three years of the pandemic. My. Advocacy was so much rooted in the fashion industry because, being visibly disabled, so much of my day-to-day life was interrupted by strangers or neighbours making comments or making me feel deeply uncomfortable because of what I look like. And I felt that. Fashion could be a solution. Regardless of the price point that the availability to wear clothes that felt more representative of who I was as a person would. Create this social contract with society around how they would perceive me, and in some ways. That was a solution because if you go about. Wearing a branded garment that has a literal currency attached to it. Both with strangers and with capitalism, people perceive you differently. But. Is it you that they are perceiving differently? Is it you that they are allowed to be seen or is it a motif in the wider world? And I think for me in the past three years, so many of the questions that I have had to ask myself. Is about. The changes that have been made. Within the fashion system, because I've been a part of it, are they for me or are they systemic changes that create access for others? And how does one go about doing that and is it at all possible? And then simultaneously to your point looking to. Whether or not

visibility is at all the goal or. A useful vehicle for the journey and I remember sitting in Edinburgh over a table having coffee and I asked you a question. Based on something that I was really challenged by and continued to be and I asked you how do you manage how other people see you? And often the criticism or the feedback that they have based on their perceptions of you. And you gave me advice that I still think of almost every day, which was? And forgive me if I'm paraphrasing, you can correct me but. People make the assumption that when they see you. That you were at your destination. Not a station on your journey. And they don't have all of the knowledge or the understanding that you possess on where you want to go. And you have to distance yourself from that rhetoric because you're both working with a different shared understanding of what the ambition or the goal is, even if you don't reach it. And for me that has been. So comforting. And illuminating and thinking about. What the ambition is and how do we be more imaginative in the frameworks that we use? And I'm very grateful for that. But I guess a question that I have to follow up on my long monologue is.. In terms of what you just shared there, in terms of how the world sees you? How has that over time changed what you are ambitious to achieve? Whether that be for yourself, for the community. For the greater world. Yeah.

00:26:35 **Alok V Menon**

I've gone through a major. Metamorphosis. In the past few years, I've been so excited because it's the greatest joy in the world. Is having to recalibrate. And. Take inventory and be like, oh, who I thought I was isn't true right now. And I think people are so afraid by that they'll do everything they can. To maintain the fiction that they just have to be oneself for the rest of their life. When I actually think the purpose of being alive is to continue to metaphor metamorphosize. And so I think for a long time. The work I was doing in the world. It was about this category, gender, and my deep investment was in getting people to move beyond the gender binary and perceive the world outside of the. Deeply entrenched binary thinking that we have. And then I realized actually the true binary. Is not between man and woman, it's between you and me. And that actually to truly triumph over the gender binary. We have to triumph over separation, the myth of separation. And so the traditions that spoke most of that were not in political writings, but were in spiritual writings and in literature. And so I had to

actually widen my. Archive. And expand my interlocutors and realise actually the goal here is deeply spiritual and I'm no longer as dazzled. By the vocabulary, that's just speaking about rights. And inclusion. Those frameworks are malnourished to me. I'm interested in dignity. I'm interested in love. I'm interested in a more bountiful and abundant sense of presence. And So what I've been really trying to harness my energy towards now is living the freest version of myself. And challenging this idea that we have to die in order to reach heaven. And actually saying that heaven can be here. And right now, that can feel like 10 seconds, it can feel like a minute. But as I work on myself, that minute is becoming 70 seconds, is becoming 71 seconds. And so the shift has been not staving off discrimination and violence. But rather cultivating pleasure and transcendence. And that's been such a profound shift, because I didn't think that I was worthy of peace on Earth. I think the only way that I knew myself was through perpetual struggle. And talking about self perception, I glorified that I had this martyr complex of being like, well my task on Earth is to struggle and now I'm like, how absurd. That's not fair. Or just to myself, I get to also be free here.

00:30:14 **Sinéad Burke**

And how do you define? Dignity and love? What do those two? Ambitions. And realities look like and feel like for you.

00:30:27 **Alok V Menon**

I say this with someone who is out as ambivalent around definitions. So what I'm saying right now will obviously contradict what I've said in the past and what I will say in the future. And I demand the right to be contradictory and incendiary in that right now, my definition of dignity. Is a non negotiable appreciation for the inherent. Beauty. Worthiness. And divinity. Of each and everything. And my definition of love is. A practice. Of affirming dignity. Of oneself. And the other. So. Intimately, that distinction between the self and the other no longer exists. So love is a practice of abolishing separation. So what love is a compass requires of me is to notice all the ways in which I flinch into judgement and say I'm not, that I'm not someone who I'm better than this. And to actually revisit those sites not as sites of enlightenment, but as sites of injury, and to say there's some unhealed version of me here, because I am that. Because I

am us. And that requires a different form of mobilisation around all of the political issues that we're about. Because it actually is, I think that one of my frustrations often and a lot of my political advocacy was I had to be like, OK, I need you to accept trans and nonbinary rights. And then I'd be like, wait, hold on. The version of the world that I am appealing to is not a world that I'm invested in being a part of. These people aren't happy either, and they don't even realise it, so why am I trying to seek that? The bigger spiritual question is how have you accepted your own grief and misery as reality? And that destroys this binary between those with privilege and those without, because it actually calls to a larger sense of like a lived experience, a somatic experience of a world outside of suffering. And So what? I began to realise that even those who have privilege, quote UN quote, are suffering. And I'm not interested in suffering. And so actually they have to be a part of this too. So the commitment then is not that we're trying to end. The gender binary. But we're trying to create together a world where even thinking about the gender binary would be obsolete because the ways that we relate to each other are so fundamentally loving that we don't need those myths of separation anymore.

00:33:44 **Sinéad Burke**

And Speaking of myths of separation, I think what you and I both talked about just a few minutes ago is. The dissonance is the dissonance or the friction or the contradiction even among ourselves, the idea that visibility is not something we may want to subscribe to or see the value in. And yet it is still and continues to be a vehicle to be seen and to be heard. And looking to that notion of not wishing suffering for ourselves or to participate in it, how do we break? The dissonance, I suppose, between reality. And the ambition of what we want to be and who we want to be. And is it love? And is it practising love for ourselves and creating space too? Acknowledge and recognize the parts of us that. We may wish to change or evolve, but as of yet aren't where we need them to.

00:34:41 **Alok V Menon**

Be it's love. Part West. And I just think we keep on trying to find some deep methodology. We think it's gotta be more complex or complicated, but actually it's

very simple and it's very difficult. Because love is the most difficult task I've ever had in my life. Because I have every incentive. For 31 years on this Earth. To hate myself. Every single day I am invited to quicksand. And I noticed that in a way that I never did before I turn on my phone. And I'm like, wow. I could scroll right now and hate myself because I know where that's going to leave me. It's going to leave me comparing myself to other people. It's going to leave me judging other people. It's going to leave me saying I'm not doing enough. It's going to lead me to having FOMO, which are all. Manifestations of self hatred. Because they refuse to actually accept that who we are is already where we were going. We're already enough. And so I have to make that choice to set down my phone and say I'm going to actually love myself, which means I'm not going to expose myself to harm. And that is something that is so hard because my brain only knows harm and suffering and injury and precariousness and instability, and so it seeks it so desperately. And I think that what I'm trying to really do is not shame myself for not being compassionate to myself, because that's another contradiction that I'm trying to avoid. It's to actually love myself. 4. Being in process. The hardest work is to be able to look at past versions of ourselves, versions of ourselves that we're not proud of, and to integrate that. Like I think fear is not something that we overcome, it's something that we integrate. And it's always going to be there. It's just that it's. Its stranglehold over our imagination becomes less and less. And I think the best is actually a genius strategy that I've learned. From my favourite characters and novels. And my favourite musicians and artists and activists across history. It's a genius strategy of saying when you are committed to. A world that does not exist. Yet you cannot hold yourself to the criteria of this world because you'll be continually seen as failing it in this ableist capitalist, racist, colonialist, eugenic paradigm. The things that I'm saying will be seen as ridiculous, superfluous, idealistic, naive, foolish events. And So what? Because I don't subscribe to those belief systems, perhaps the work of love is recalibration and actually saying the things that I'm going to commit my time to externally are going to look absurd. But I know deeply and intimately they weren't there where I needed to be.

00:38:12 **Sinéad Burke**

I've only recently begun to have a greater hold on what loving myself means. I think I

had very. Performative notions of it, or ones that were stylized by culture and grand gestures and romance and feeling like it was something that other people had to fulfil in me rather than me and myself. And to your point, it is those quotidian daily practices of removing oneself from the things. And the people that may cause us harm, sometimes that might be family, sometimes that might be friends, sometimes that might be ourselves. And to be disciplined with how we treat ourselves in the hope that we reach moments, seconds, hours that we are kinder and fairer to ourselves. But it's a daily practice, at least for me. You talked there about. A world that doesn't exist yet. And for me, if I was to think about that world, two of the pillars. Rooted in my own lived experience, that would be important, for it would be that it be more equitable and accessible. But if we were to design this world. Free of all of the constraints that you spoke to. What would it look and feel like, do you think?

00:39:53 **Alok V Menon**

Hmm. Yeah. It would feel like we no longer needed vacations. We no longer needed escapism. Because all we needed was each other. And the things that we were seeking. Were actually immediately available to us. And it was called friendship. It would look like a world where there are no strangers, they're just potential friends. Where we're not just asking for directions on how to get to the closest. Bakery with vegan and gluten free options. We're also asking for directions on how to get free. And the friends on the street, they're like, hey, I'm, I'm trying to figure that out too. Do you want to, like, figure it out together? And then we would. And then there would be like millions of people figuring it out together. And it would just be so beautiful. Because we realised that we were lonely together. And that loneliness then was obsolete because we all felt the same thing that we were afraid of expressing to the world that we were lost. And everyone was just honest that they were lost and they didn't really know what they were doing or who they were. I suppose it looks like a vulnerability. And I suppose it looks like vulnerability that is so diffused into a culture that it no longer is called vulnerability, it's just called being alive. And it's people just being fairly honest. About their idiosyncrasies and. There are whimsies and. Their dreams. And putting everything on the table. Because we didn't presume a future, we built it instead. I think one of the myths of Western colonial expansion is immortality.

And I think both disability and transness in their own unique and conjoined ways. Come across that man. Because both are expressions of profound humanity. That puncture that and say pain is real. Let's say inconvenience and hardship are real. Let's say suffering is real and a world of people committed to what ought to be and refusing to see what is. They get upset by that. They're like, wait, we were, we were promised. And we say, hey, that promise isn't real. What's real is the fact that I can't get out of bed. What's real is the fact that I don't know who I am. And what's real is that health care is really expensive and those things are really difficult for people to confront. But I actually want to reframe those as liberatory practices of that new world. How has that overtime changed what you are ambitious to achieve? Whether that be for yourself, for the community. For the greater world. Yeah. That new world is actually just actually what it is that it's hard. And I I don't ever want to romanticise that, but I do want to say that I stubbornly and doggedly and fighting for what is. I think that for a long time. I was still critiquing norms. Wow, dreaming of them as my future orientation. I would. I felt like I had to become something or get somewhere, be at a certain place in my career, be it a certain place in my gender and order to receive the gift. That's that narrative I was saying about heaven. As being a carrot stick perpetually in the future and, I suppose, in the world that I want to create. It's one where we realise that heaven isn't always. Happy Heaven isn't always triumphant. Heaven also can feel difficult and fatiguing and exhausting. But at least it's honest. So I guess the future world that does not exist but is becoming is an honest world.

00:44:06 **Sinéad Burke**

And it's one that doesn't have to exist in another universe, solar system or time. But it can exist and should exist right now, even if it's for a moment, be it in a conversation, on the floor, or. Witnessing a performance or a piece of art or writing. And that it can be a dotted line until we get to the continued one which is hopefully a destination for one that is much more promised or continuous. We've talked a lot about what you and I are doing. To hopefully reach that place in ourselves and in the new world, that's becoming, but you and I can't do that alone. We can do it for ourselves, but not for the collective. For those who may be listening to this conversation or reading the transcript, who these ideas are. Being illuminated for them for the first time. What is it

that you can go and begin to do? To create that practice for themselves. In order for us all to get to that place sooner.

00:45:31 **Alok V Menon**

Hmm. OK, this is a really hard question for me because there's an answer that I would normally give, but we just talked about practising the world that we want now, which means being honest. So rather than giving the scripted answer, I'm going to give the honest answer. I have come to believe that even if people hate me, that is ultimately about their healing journey. I need to be the villain in your story right now in order for you to get where you have to go next, and that has nothing to do with me. It's not my responsibility to correct. It's not my responsibility to convince. Each person is on their own circuitous path to freedom. That's where we're all headed, even if it takes people a very long time to get there. And we want everyone to be at our pace. But perhaps one of the lessons we can learn is each person has their own pace. And actually, then, it's not about trying to rush people to get there, it's about living the most free version of ourselves, such that people make the decision unto themselves. To accelerate. To expand. And that's a fundamentally different paradigm than the 1st way I was going to answer was going to be like, you know, sit with your discomfort. Like I was going to give the list of things that you're supposed to do to like listen to marginalised people. And I just don't, I don't know if I subscribe to that anymore. I mean, I sometimes do, but now I'm actually, when I'm looking at the evidence of my life and I'm looking, how have people around me changed? They've changed. Because they've witnessed me become myself. And that was the most compelling argument. The most compelling argument was my joy. No. No amount of textbooks, no amount of analysis, no amount of book reports. And we all know I love a book report. No amount of history could convince them the way that my laughter could, that I could live in this life that eugenics, that colonialism, that all of their evil loved children together. Would say it's an ugly, despicable, unliveable life, and that I could be there in that unliveable life and say it's pretty rad. And we have really great potlucks and we cry and I feel, I feel. Happier than I've ever been. And that is the work that I'm so invested in right now. That's why my latest collection of poems was called your wound, my garden. Because what I was trying to say is that the work is. Shifting not just the modes of production,

but the modes of perception that what these systems think of as an unliveable, despicable life, actually, many of us live incandescently in. And we can celebrate that. And that's the shift. The paradigm shift I've been speaking towards is I'm not interested in aligning myself with the world predicated on misery. I'd rather be here and be honest that I'm in pain. And alongside that pain, there's glory.

00:49:24 **Sinéad Burke**

We have to find the gift. For ourselves. And revel in it now, not later. Even if it's only for a moment. Alok, I cannot thank you enough in the middle of New York Fashion week. Taking the time to share parts of yourself, your ambitions and yeah, your world with me. I am so grateful and I'm going to be thinking about this conversation for a very long time as my own frameworks rebuild and even more as I recalibrate myself. Alok, thank you so much.

00:50:13 **Alok V Menon**

I should mention that in the beginning I'd wish that you had mentioned that you had beautiful floral wallpaper behind you. That adds to so much of this in such a really palpable way for me, because I think what I'm trying to say ultimately is that we should learn from flowers to be like, audacious and extremely flamboyant, and to not predicate our sense of a worthy life on time. Because a flower Wilts, and it knows that it will. But that doesn't make it despair. Instead, it just lives. So. Yes. Totally. And I just, yeah, I'm like, OK, here's an intersection of fashion and ecology and social justice. Maybe the turn to flower plants says something deeper

00:51:06 **Sinéad Burke**

Alok. Thank you. Thank you so, so much. I'm going to stop recording.