

# Anita Dube

Painter

'Art heals you, it makes you more human'

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**Anita Dube believes every human being has a divine component but not magnetized with spirituality because of prevailing social obligations.**

**What does the word spirituality mean to you?**

All human beings have a divine component – spirituality is being in touch or in tune with it. It is a difficult experience, and a difficult place to be in because the way social systems are now, being in tune is very far from our average life. It often is a very painful experience actually. It is a transformative one, and it also transforms anybody in touch with us – that's the beauty of it, but also the difficulty of it.

**Why is it so painful?**

Because if you are in tune with it, you cannot do all the things you would if you were not in tune with it. You have to put away all corruptions of spirit. A part of you is very human and wants to do everything, while another has a sense of pain because you cannot go there. If you are in tune, you have to bear the pain of not going into consumption for instance, or into a certain kind of sensuality (not that spirituality is not sensual, but it is a different kind).

And you do not choose it. If you are in tune, you are in tune and you are in a bad place.

We always think gods are very happy. But it takes a lot of pain to be in that place. That is why the figure of Christ makes so much sense.

**Have you always been in tune?**

No. Various kinds of experiences get you there. And it is not a willed or conscious choice. It is about being on some journey then one step at a time, experiences trigger off certain things and you arrive to this place.

I actually feel willed spirituality doesn't go so deep. You can try and try, meditating and so on, it may make you feel a certain way while you do it, but the moment you stop it, it's gone, and you are back to where you were.

**How does it manifest in your life?**

I am telling you, it's a bad place. Don't try to go there!

**So how do you cope?**

You may not have anything, but you are not poor, it is also a very rich place to be in. I wouldn't wish it on anybody else but I wouldn't trade it either. I can't go any other place. I am pretty comfortable and happy there.

**Does it mean that over time, being in that place, you get closer to an understanding of who you are, why you are here and so on?**

Well, you are possibly more detached than most people, you can float through life, things happen, they go through you, but they don't affect you to the point of completely destabilizing you. Of course I am human and I get devastated in all sorts of ways, but somewhere I have this awareness that this is life, nothing is absolute and it is our lot to go through it. It is a very big strength in that way.

We are always moving through a stream of experiences. We process them (or not) and it is a continuous process of transformation. The possibility of all those transformations along the way is what is amazing about this journey.

Also, being in tune means being in a calmer place, more still than others. Of course it is not totally placid, but relatively calmer. That is what all spiritual teachers talk about, isn't it – reaching some kind of peace.

**Is this journey part of some larger orchestration?**

Well, I mentioned divinity as being some kind of a tuning – so when it happens I do feel connected to the world in the fullest possible way. It is like becoming one with the energy of nature and the universe. Tuning into that flow and energy is very beautiful. But we do not have it all the time, it comes and goes, and we do not know when. We can only be very prepared subjects so it can come and inhabit us.

**Was religion important at any point in your life, in your childhood for instance?**

I come from a Hindu family but religion wasn't important at all in our childhood. It became more important for my parents as they aged, which really makes me think that religion is like a security blanket. When people face loneliness, aging, mortality and so on they tend to reach out for it.

I am curious about religions though, because I see them as a set of wisdom stories. They tell us how to cope with life and its various daily problems. They are telling us we are not the only ones those things are happening to. They already happened centuries ago to others. And the texts give us knowledge, tools, consciousness about the way to deal with them.

I was trained as an art critic so I read all kinds of texts, Benjamin, Barthes and so on. The wisdom stories do not stop with religion. They permeate the writings of so many. Again, it's like a tuning in. Once you are in tuned with this thing, you travel centuries exploring all sorts of wisdoms.

To be able to live with a certain kind of depth is spirituality.

### **What about art?**

Primarily, in my life, it started therapeutically. And I stand by that. One of art's great values is its therapeutic power.

Second, as an artist, every time you create, you renew yourself. You can put other things aside, explore new avenues of self expression and communication that may take you to other places, from inside out. All human beings need it - to get outside of our own self, our minds, bodies etc. So one of the things art does in a deep way is to make this process possible. It heals you, it cleans you.

This is what it does to you. Then of course, there are things you can do to others. You can sensitize people, make them more human, more in touch with their emotions, so many things! It is a real privilege.

I don't approach art as an activist though. Because it would mean I have a definitive agenda, while actually I am interested in everything about life. Of course politics, gender, sexuality etc. matter to me. But I am also interested in something else, what is that mysterious unnamed other thing that also preoccupies us? I am looking for answers to it. I want to be open so that if possible, when I create, I speak about all those things.

Of course we have our limitations. But art gives you the options, since art is this vastness. Creativity is expansive. It is not a narrow thing. It is so wonderful to be so specific and so expansive at the same time, like a metaphor. That is what amazes me about art. Where else do you get it?

### **What about the idea of being a channel for something beyond you?**

Sometimes I can feel it, but it would be arrogant to assume that position. It only happens sometimes, even though I am in a place where I feel in tune. It is not easy to be a medium. But I would claim something much more ordinary. Spirituality is actually a very ordinary thing. It is inside. It is a part of our being. It is just like a radio tuning in the right station, the right frequency, and not hearing all the static.

### **How did art first come into your life?**

I was trained as a writer. But as a lot of my friends were artists, I started playing with materials. When I did, it felt so easy, so simple, like clairvoyance. I didn't have to labor or kill myself to make something. So I thought when something is so naturally easy, surely it should be my direction. So I changed. I was 30 years' old, which is relatively late to change. But it would have been very stupid not to. And I am so blessed I did. I couldn't possibly have been wiser the day I decided to become an artist.

But we live in a social system, so to make oneself visible within an already established art system took a decade. From the age of 30 to 40 I had to prove to people who had blinkers, who were not looking, that there was some good work to look at. I really had no doubt whatsoever that there was something relevant and good to look at.

### **Tell us more about the creative process.**

For some of my works, I am like in a daydream and I see the entire work finished, executed, like in a vision. Then I just have to make it real. Other times, works are pure process – they unravel in the process. Which is why I keep saying there is no formula.

The only constant is that you have to embrace life so that the work can happen. You cannot step back. You have to completely embrace life's experiences, the positive as much as the negative

ones. There is no stepping back, staying in a place of comfort. That is why I say it is a difficult and painful place to be in – you cannot hide, you cannot lie to yourself, everything is too visible. You see things with much nakedness, like having a strong light coming into your eyes.

**If there were one mystery you could ask God about, what would it be?**

In the same way I would talk to a friend, I would say – Why? What the hell? We know all this is Lila and yet we have to go through it. Bloody hell why? Why do You make it like this? Why do we have to go through all this to understand?

**If there were such a thing as rebirth, what would you pick for the next round?**

God Himself!

Why go for less?

**What is your idea of happiness?**

To be able to fully live and fully flow with all my potentialities. Imagine what kind of energy we would have if every cell were to flow and be at its full potential. But of course it can't be, which is why there is so much negativity in the world.

**Can we ever feel fulfilled in our life?**

It is a dream! A perpetual dream that can haunt you, precisely because it can't ever be fulfilled, and everyone tries in a desperate fashion. We can have partial fulfillment at times – sometimes the body, sometimes the mind and so on. But not all at once. What a tragedy! And knowing that we can't have it all at once, what a painful place to be in.

**How do you protect yourself from all the toxicity and negativity?**

That is the interesting part of being in this place of divine tuning. You feel like a sieve – things pass through you and do not affect you that much. You understand where and why they come, you feel them, but only for a moment, and then you let them go - unless it is an extremely beautiful experience. Then the sieve keeps it.