

# Anuradha Kapoor

'Happiness is the process of creating'

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**For Anuradha Kapoor, spaces, sounds and music create a sense of religion.**

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

Something that would create a sense of peace and tranquility. Something that would keep me calm, like inhaling and exhaling.

**What can do this for you?**

I wouldn't describe myself as religious in any way, but spaces and sounds can create such a sense. Music affects me greatly. And when it comes to spaces, I will remember for the rest of my life the transformation I went through in places like Ajanta, or Amritsar, or Kyoto.

**Was religion part of your upbringing?**

Marginally. My father came from an Arya Samaji family, so there were no rituals as far as he was concerned. My mother came from a family that read the Sikh scriptures, and all of us saw them as beautiful poetry. I actually love Bhakti poetry in general, like Tulsi Ramayan's, or the Shivaites'.

**What about the belief in a so-called supreme force?**

I think there was a sense of it at home and for me, there is some feeling of a positive force. Mostly, the sacred in performances has interested me very much. My PhD was on the Ramlila. I wanted to explore how performance gets into a sacred space, and how the reverse happens, how extraordinary spaces

become ordinary. My experience of the Ramlila was incredibly challenging and interesting precisely because of that. In it, the deities were rendered deities by the audience - I was so intrigued by that transaction, and how it would happen. I presume it is an interest in how performance spaces can turn and make you feel something else, how they can make you more alert to certain things and so on.

### **How did you develop an interest in theatre?**

I was attracted to theatre from childhood. I was extremely shy but I used to enjoy performing, which is a contradiction. In the last years of school, I got an opportunity to work with one of the most charismatic personalities of the Hindi stage back then, Om Shivpuri. He was teaching in my school and became my guru. Thanks to him, I got to perform a lot (this was in the late sixties and seventies), especially with the group Dishantar. I traveled with them and met many artists and theatre people. That is how my decision to be in the world of theatre became definitive.

### **What were you dreaming to be when you were a child?**

As a little girl I felt I would want to be in a space allowing for contemplation. I did not want to be trapped in a race only fueled by sheer ambition.

### **Please describe the feeling of going through the process of creating a play?**

The most important element is the interaction of ideas. Many ideas circulate and the play takes shape by a process of give and take. I may have a finalizing view as a director, but it is definitely not imposed unilaterally.

I love the ephemeral nature of the theatre process and of the theatre project. Somewhere it is connected to the fact that I never tried to create a corpus of work. There isn't necessarily a marked signature, to the point one may say a work is recognizable as mine. On the contrary - I want as many ways and genres of theatre-making as possible.

The process of making theatre makes me very happy despite all the anxieties. Certainly going into performance makes me feel extremely anxious. I must be one of the most anxious theatre directors any actor knows. Before a performance I think of all the worst scenarios that can happen - things not running on time, elements of the decor falling apart, costumes not being ready and so on. I spend a lot of time with my eyes closed but once the show starts I am fine.

So there is some disconnect between this anxiety and the process of making theatre per se, which is not anxious. That process is rather about the patience of letting things unfold. One should not push, one should not try to control the flow. That patience is both helpful and crucial.

### **How important for you is the impact a play may have on the audience?**

Even though everything one does in theatre is ultimately destined to be shown to an audience, we do not think of it when making a play. Of course we do think of the impact once the play goes in front of the public. But in any case, we need to accept that theatre is not a mass media and therefore the impact is quite different from what it might have been in the 19th century for instance, when palace theatres could sit 5,000 people. Today, films play that role, and theatre might be viewed as a more intimate space.

### **At times of challenges, where do you find your anchor and energy?**

It can look like paralysis, but basically I somehow become immobile, I sink down and then I can come up again. Music usually helps a lot in this process.

I guess it borders meditation. It basically is about finding a calm space. But I must be a very un-calm person to always talk about calmness...

### **Is the journey of life random for you, or is there an orchestration, something like destiny?**

I don't think it is random and I also don't think it is completely scripted. We make choices and they are hugely important. Utter randomness leads you to believe someone else has written the script and I do not believe it is the case.

### **What about coincidences and synchronicities?**

It is more about our perception and us deciding to pay a particular attention to certain things.

### **Does the concept of God talk to you?**

Not as a form, but as a force, yes. Otherwise I wouldn't have been so interested in the transformation from profane to sacred, or ordinary to extraordinary. I have the greatest respect for prayer but talking to somebody through prayer doesn't quite resonate with me. It is rather about thinking of some force outside of oneself.

### **What is that force?**

I don't think I own many things, I do not own a particular kind of art-making for instance, when I work on a play. But some forces come together to shape it in a particular way. I recognize those forces as being beyond me and beyond my doing.

Take a piece of music for instance, it may take us to an extraordinary place – yet it is all about a voice, or a combination of instruments, which are 'ordinary' elements. The voice is a channel, a conduit. The same goes for an author creating a great piece of literature. There is an unfolding flow, a force moving him into doing so. So basically, the force I am talking about is the one that moves people through the creative process.

### **Do you feel at times like a conduit or a channel as well?**

At times I make some choices and people may ask why I made them. And I know it is not only about my own creative process, there is also something else at play, an alchemy, and this is where those forces come in.

The only thing one can do is keep open and alert to it so that the process can take place, so that the flow can unfold.

### **So if you are open and allow for that process to happen, it may transform both the people involved in the play and the public - would that be a source of meaning in your life?**

Definitely. Any form of art is like that. You never know exactly what it is that would slightly tilt the way a person looks at the world.

**So if through a play a person comes out and feels differently about things in his or her own life, your work, your life then feel meaningful?**

Indeed. And that is why I enjoy teaching also. Teaching is very much about interacting. It is not a one-way communication process.

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

I do not believe in rebirth. But I do not believe in a complete closure either. I like the notion of cycles. There is a transformation. Matter transforms.

**What is your idea of happiness?**

The process of making, of creating, of seeing things transformed.

**But things are transformed constantly, in life, on stage, in the world, so then you should be constantly happy?**

And of course it is not the case. So I would add a few things. It is a feeling difficult to describe – a sense of calmness, of not having too intense of an imprint; a mixture of being connected and not connected, not having to always do and rather, being in the flow.

I could also answer by telling you what unhappiness would be: if I didn't have the ability to work, to put things together, to create a play. I would be restless without it. The fact that the opportunity is there is a source of happiness. Though of course it is easy to forget being grateful about it.