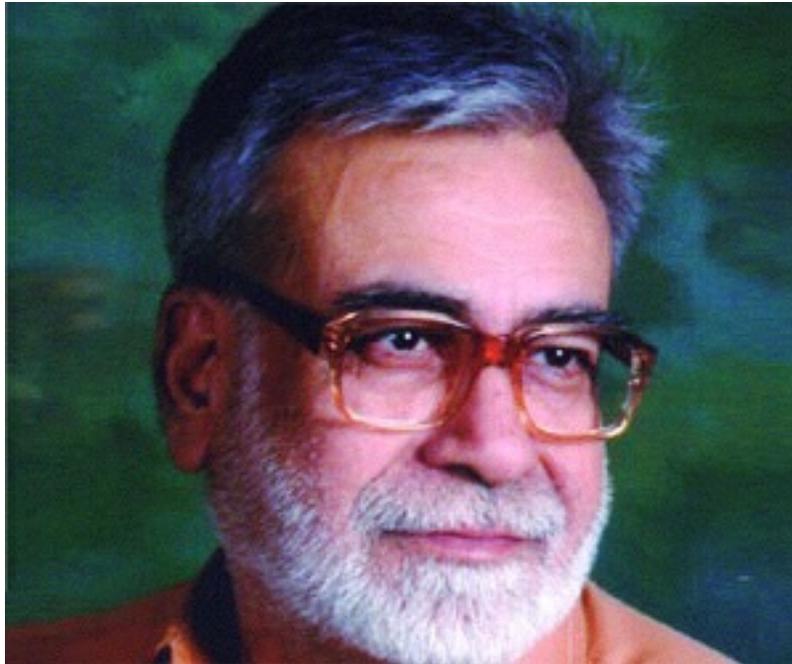


# Narendra Kohli

Novelist

'To improve and clean yourself, that is the journey'

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**Narendra Kohli is a noted Hindi novelist, short story writer, playwright and satirist. His famous works include novels based on the epics, Abhyudaya, Abhigyaan and Mahasamar.**

**What does spirituality mean to you?**

All ways of worshiping and religions are very much bellow spirituality. Very few people understand it. Going to a temple with offerings and asking for something in return is not spirituality. If you are spiritual, you simply have to be in love with God or however you call it, without asking for anything. Vivekananda said that Hinduism is about struggling to be like God, and ultimately to become God, to merge with God. It's about self-realization.

**How does it happen concretely in your life?**

I wrote about the Ramayana and Mahabhart, now about Swami Vivekananda. Someone asked me what I achieved from it all. I said that previously I didn't know all my faults. Now at least I am aware of them! That's the first step. Then of course, I should try and get rid of them. I pray God and ask Him to help doing so.

### **But I thought you were not supposed to ask God anything?**

I don't ask Him for money or other things in exchange for some offering. I only ask for His grace and love. It is not counted as asking.

### **So what is God for you?**

The only existence in this whole creation is God. You and I are His manifestation. But the problem is that I know this in words. Yet, how much do I actually feel and live it... That is the question!

### **Why did you choose to write on all those mythical or spiritual topics?**

If you ask any writer, if he is honest enough, he will tell you that he did not choose a topic – the topic chose him. I don't take up subjects. That subject takes a hold of me and doesn't relieve me until I write. I have no choice.

For two years I tried not to write about Vivekananda, but every time other things subsided, it would come back to the surface. It would not leave me. Same for the Mahabharata. Even my father opposed the idea, thinking I would be doing some mischief. But the subject had gotten a hold of me, and I could not get rid of it.

Then when I write, it's like being in a trance. When I am deep into it, I don't know what I am doing. And then when I read what I wrote, I am surprised. It is something beyond me. Whatever I have written, if you ask me to do it again, I could never do it.

It is like the words of the Gita: "don't think you are the doer, I am the doer". Sometimes I try to write something for days and days. And nothing happens. Only when He wants, in spite of everything and all odds, a particular thing can be written.

### **You always felt like you had to write?**

Absolutely. I have been writing from a really young age and always felt like I had to do it. I felt I had to express something and there was no way I could have suppressed it. Like a mother: if she conceives, she has to deliver. Otherwise she will die. If an idea comes, I have to write and express it. Then of course I want to see it in print, I want to see my name printed. Writers are usually very hungry for fame. And fame is actually more dangerous than wanting money.

### **So do you think every one of us has a particular purpose in life?**

Of course. The first purpose is to improve and cleanse ourselves. That is the journey. And if you improve yourself, you improve society, your country, the world.

### **Writing is part of the purpose for you?**

When I write, it is not about touching, transforming or improving others. Everybody is Shiva himself. If I improve myself, it will improve others, since we are all interconnected. I don't need to go and teach them.

### **When there are tough times in your life, where do you find the energy to cope?**

I actually am a very sensitive man and I go into depressions very easily. Many artists have this.

Intellectual work tires you out. So you go for one of these three ways: yoga, psychotherapy or a bottle of whisky. So many writers went into drugs or alcohol. I don't smoke, I take coffee, I don't drink. But I go into depressions. It started when I was 24. I was done with my masters and doing well with my PhD. I was getting married. Everything I wanted was there. On the surface I should have been completely happy. Yet I was really troubled, without knowing why. Now I am 70 and I have gone through so many such spells. When I finish a book, for three months I take some medicine to sleep. It always happens. So at least now it doesn't bother me so much, since I know it will happen. Then after a few months I go back to normal.

But in general, I am not a very strong person. I get disturbed very easily. Something minor happens at home or in the country and I am so quickly upset. I try to tackle it intellectually. But it doesn't really work. So ultimately I have to think of God and say 'whatever Your will is'. It's His design. It depends on Him. I have to wait and see how the leela unfolds. But then I have to face this contradiction: if God is within me, and God is creating this suffering, how can it be? Narendra Kohli is something different than this body. So who is suffering? That atma is not suffering. But when I say "I am disturbed", who is disturbed? I have not sorted out those things. I accept the confusion. I ask questions. Sometimes I get an answer.

### **When you see a child raped or suffering, is that God's will too?**

There is a point after which I just cannot do anything about it, nor comprehend it. Then I have to surrender to the idea that God decides and knows best.

### **And whatever happens, is it preordained, is it destiny?**

Why was I born a writer, with such a love for words, in such and such family? I always loved language so much. It is not in my brother who has the same genes. My mother was illiterate. So to me, everything comes from our previous birth. It's like a bank balance we come on earth with. And then we are free to use it as we like. There is free will within given conditions which are preordained. I could have decided not to come today for this interview. I have problems with my grandchild, tomorrow I am leaving, I live so far away. So I am free to act, within the opportunity that came of being interviewed, which I had not planned.

I was born in a poor family. But I never bothered about it. I had to write and I went on doing it, without thinking of money. That has been my karam. And money always came.

I have been going by this karam and worshipping God by obeying it. While I do this though, I have found a lot of opposition, I will not deny it. It hasn't been the easiest flow for sure. For instance the whole Left is against my writing. They would like me to deny God, religion and all ancient Indian traditions. But of course I won't do so.

### **You talked about past life, what would you choose for the next one?**

I don't want another life; I want to finish it this time. Because the world is not a happy place to be in. This world is hellish. There is too much suffering, so why come back to such a place?

### **Why does God make it that way?**

I do not understand...

### **So if you could ask God one question, what would it be?**

When will You show me light and self-realization, when will that final stage come? I am not getting the answer. Once I know Him, I don't need anything else, I know everything. So why ask anything else? That is what I am doing daily. I have been praying daily for the last 25 years. I start the day with it. There is no guru for me in this. He is my only guru.

### **What is your idea of happiness?**

When I get what I desire! Of course wanting itself is often the cause of unhappiness. I should simply be content, with anand. But do I manage? I try. Practice is the only solution. At times I reach some form of contentment.

But wanting more is so easy.

As a writer for instance, what hurts most is when people ignore my writing. Someone may relate and comment about many aspects of mine yet not read my books. That really hurts. And I used to feel that such a person could not be a genuine friend. Only now do I gradually understand that it may not be the case. That person simply may have other interests and yet care for me. Still, somewhere it disturbs me...