

# Bobby Bedi

Film Producer

## 'I do not believe in rituals'

Sat Jan 29 2011



**Film Producer Bobby Bedi, who is known for his works like Bandit Queen, Fire and Electric Moon, calls spirituality an internal, personal process**

### **What does spirituality mean to you?**

Spirituality is the actual soul of what different religions try to portray with their practice. If you denude any religion of its practice and rituals, you find spirituality inside.

It is a very internal, personal process. Some places, circumstances, or people might help us find it, but at the end of the day, we can only find it within ourselves - if we focus on it.

### **Has it been a focus for you?**

For some years now. It started with my proper appreciation of art, in particular through my friendship with Manjit Bawa. Not that he was practicing any particular form of spirituality because that would have been religion, but just the kind of thought he had and what was going into his paintings. Trying to understand the meaning of what he was trying to do was like a trigger. Then, I could find it in many more things - in cooking, in my work, in some of my reading.

Of course, you can live perfectly happily without any spiritual experience. You can endlessly bow to a stone deity, go to a Gurudwara, put a flower in your ear and never ask yourself why. But if you do ask, you have reached the first stage of inquiry. You may then realize that you are not meant to do any of these things.

I am very fortunate because Sikhism is a modern religion, and in any case I am not a practicing Sikh. I wear a turban because had I cut my hair, my parents would have been offended. But I have absolutely no religious reason for wearing it.

Only a few years ago did I start reading more about Sikhism, and in particular about Guru Nanak. Like all Bedis, I am a descendant of Guru Nanak. I tried to understand what he said.

And in fact, he was saying the same thing. Please do not be involved in any ritual at all. Just believe in the cosmic order. Things are happening because they are happening. Within it, keep doing your bit. And spirituality somehow emanates from that.

### **What is this cosmic order?**

"Hukam" is the word used in the text. It can be translated as "order". Some people call it God though it is not a word that talks to me so much. There are many ways to try and get a sense of it all – getting our mind off everything else to be able to focus on it. Every tradition describes a way of doing so. Some people meditate, while a whole generation got to it through drugs. But artists and creative people are lucky because for them it is easiest.

### **What about you?**

Sometimes I concentrate through yogic breathing, at other times I concentrate on a verse of Nanak's, or a verse from Dylan. Music is a huge way for me to concentrate. Music is my way to create my own little world around me. Then I don't care about anything. For instance if I go to an unknown hotel room, I put my playlist and then suddenly it becomes my own space.

### **Did you have a religious upbringing?**

Zero. Absolutely not. Different cities, different schools, half in Bombay in a Protestant school, the other half in Delhi in a Catholic school. And I never read a scripture in my life.

### **Yet, when you mentioned a cosmic order, do you have a sense that things are preordained in some way?**

Certain things are in your control and others are not. That's all.

### **So how did your journey evolve, how did you end up in the world of movies for instance - did you always feel you have to be part of it?**

Not at all. I had absolutely no clue about it. I used to sell music systems for Philips. At times I was going to sell radios to villages of Bihar. I got into movies totally by accident.

One day a friend asked me to help him with a film. I quit my job and suddenly I was a full-on producer. I had no learning curve. It was straight-on, full-on.

### **And how has it been going?**

It's been quite amazing. We've been lucky. The first movie was a lovely film written by Arundathi Roy and directed by her now husband Pradeep. Then it was Electric Moon then Bandit Queen. Sometimes it requires you to make ten movies to get there, sometimes it goes quicker. There is so much which is not in your hands ! Anybody who says "I did this" is wrong.

### **What about creativity – how does it work for you?**

Genuine creativity is to make something out of nothing. Creativity and spirituality go together. I don't know anybody who is both creative and bad. Or at least I've been lucky enough never to meet such an artist.

### **How do you choose the topics of the movies you produce – they all seem to aim at a definitive impact, don't they?**

I always get naturally drawn to topics that impact people. If you try to find what is common to all the films I produced, you will find no red thread but the attempt to have an impact, to make people think. Sometimes, like with Bandit Queen, the viewer may never be the same; sometimes it is much lighter; but still, it has to make you think. I sometimes feel handicapped because I can't make a movie just because it will do very well. I need to feel that it will make a difference.

### **Where do you find your energy at times of major challenge?**

From December 2008 till about a month ago was the worst period of my life. I could have just walked away from everything. There was the lawsuit about the Mahabharata, there was a collapsed IPO, and more. I just worked at it, and worked at it, and worked at it. I didn't go into aggression mode. I was upfront with people. And I really, really tried not to worry about it.

### **But many people would say it is impossible for them not to worry in such circumstances?**

I am blessed with one characteristic: I can completely switch off. I can go into a problem, be fully there, then go to a party, and the problem won't be on my mind for a moment. Or at any point, I can switch off and sleep. I need my music to crash out, that's all. If I listen to something, it blocks out the whole world.

### **If there were one question you could ask God, a mystery you would like to know about, what would it be?**

Why are there inequalities? Trying to answer it is what pushes people to the business of karma and rebirth. But I don't believe in it. There is no such thing as this whole idea of bank balance of good and bad deeds. You just need to do what you can do with your own life here and now.

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

Probably to be born as a poet or a spiritual leader, because that's when you can actually communicate, and be totally independent. In a movie you are still dependent on many things and many people. Even as a painter you do. Maybe writers are the luckiest. No matter what happens, they

only need a pen and a paper to create. They are totally independent. They can survive without anything.

**Any regret in life?**

Well, I think that two or three years ago, I deviated from believing that filmmaking is a very, very personal space, and got to think that it is a corporate space. I lost a lot because of that. But nowhere near as much as the people who actually succeeded in doing what I failed at (i.e. raising money to make a whole lot of movies).

**What is your idea of happiness?**

I need to be at peace with myself, have a nice space, and be surrounded by good esthetics, including music.

**To be at peace with oneself is a challenge though, isn't it?**

It is very easy, as long as you can genuinely convince yourself that there is nothing, absolutely nothing you can take away with you; and of all the things that you leave behind, the only things that remain are your esthetics, what you have created. You can leave a lot of zeroes in a bank account, nobody will care.

Once you understand that, you can be at peace with yourself.