

# Anita Nair

Author

'I always felt I had no choice but to write'

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**Anita Nair is a Bangalore based author Satyr of the Subway and The Better Man. Her novel, Mistress is on the long list for the Orange Prize for fiction for 2008.**

**What does spirituality mean to you?**

I equate it to a deep sense of peace and serenity, to my ability to find that spot inside where everything is calm and in perfect order.

**Do you believe you are guided and protected by a superior force?**

Oh yes, absolutely. I very firmly believe there is a God walking with me, though I do not give It any name or specific manifestation. It has no face or particular religion, but I can feel it in any creative activity, when having a child, or just watching grass growing: where does that will to grow come from? It is obviously the manifestation of God, of a power beyond this, greater than us, that takes life over. It is also a comforting thought that someone is looking after me. I can lean back and someone will hold me. At times of dilemma and difficulties, I sleep over it and in the morning I generally am quite clear about what I should do. I managed to commune with God in the sleep on a level I am not really conscious of. But of course it would be perverse or childish to think that God only makes good things happen. If help is not there, I have to understand it is simply meant that way, and decipher the how and why of it, instead of laying the blame on God.

### **Do you believe you have a special mission or purpose in this life?**

I believe every single individual is born with a certain purpose. I could not fathom that the God I believe in created a segment of society without a purpose in life. Some people though are more aware about it, or focus more their energies in order to further that purpose.

In my case, I have always felt a compulsion to hold a mirror to society – showing who we are and what we can do about it. It mainly manifests through my writing, though not only. Since I was very young, I knew I would write. I wrote some poetry when I was six or seven and felt such joy from it that I decided to do the same thing for the rest of my life. In fact, I always felt I had no choice but write. It is like when thirsty, then you must drink. You cannot stop yourself. It is a very primitive and very basic urge. There is simply no way I could live without writing.

And then the impact of my writing is at times a very humbling experience. I may write what is a simple story to me and then people share how it changed their lives, how they made crucial decisions inspired by it. I could never fathom having the wisdom to advise people to such an extent. But that is what writing can do.

### **What is spirituality for you in your day to day life?**

Of course it is about writing, which feels like my spiritual best, and when I am in nature, though that may sound so cliché. I can sit for hours and look at the sea, at a tree or at some shade of grass. I could not function if I was to live in a place without access to nature – not on a weekly or daily basis, but hourly. I must be able to constantly feel the ground, touch the leaves, smell the herb. It is very physical and sensual for me. When I spot some avocado blossom on my avocado tree it is such joy. It is the sign of some new life and all that is exaltation.

### **What is the role of spirituality as a writer?**

I write long hand, and in the morning when I look at what I wrote the day before, I have no idea where it came from. I also have no idea how and what I will write that day, where I will need to reach inside in order to resume writing. In fact, writing requires a lot of inward looking and once there, it is as if God was speaking to me from a point far beyond any human reach. Words feel fed by a greater power. I call it being the hand of God. And that is why the more I write, the more I am convinced and aware of the existence of God. Those ideas and words come from a source somewhere else. Then when the book is meant to be over, that source simply dries up and I know it ought to come to an end.

### **Can you tell us about a unique experience that changed or shaped your spiritual beliefs?**

At the beginning I would not believe. I wanted nothing to do with the family rituals or with an abstract notion of god. I did not want to believe just as a habit. Faith has to be acquired. And in that context, pregnancy marked a turning point. As I was facing so many fears for the being growing in me, I gradually had a more concrete sense of the divine, the feeling that someone is watching over me, whom I could call God. From then on I began recognizing its presence in every detail of nature or animals, in the force that pushes beings of all kinds to be alive.

**What have been your main spiritual inspirations?**

I come from a very traditional household, with a ritualistic form of worship, whereas I have never believed in rituals. So I have gradually found inspiration on my own, getting away from my religious conditioning and living spirituality as a genuine act of faith.

**If you were to be reincarnated, what would you like to be reincarnated as?**

As a cat perhaps, I like cats very much.

**If there was one question you could ask God, what would it be?**

I would like to ask what makes some people more cruel than others, less tolerant of the rest of the world. I think of murderers, of rapists – what makes them less humanlike. No scientist has ever been able to explain it by some genetic or chemical disorder.

**What is your idea of happiness?**

To be at home with my family and write without too many interruptions – writing well, the way I should be writing, to the best of my abilities.