

Rahul Bose

Actor

'To remain healthy as an actor, you must have a certain philosophy'

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Rahul Bose is an actor.

What does spirituality mean to you?

It is the evolution of human consciousness. What is consciousness? It is the unit of energy I add to this earth. And this unit can be good, bad, ambivalent, muddy. And what is the end goal of spirituality? To be an all-compassionate human being, all loving. That is the end goal for me. Nothing is more difficult. Nothing is more exciting. Nothing is more rewarding. If you can increase the amount of love you feel every day for yourself and everyone else around you, that's the game!

How do you manage to do so?

I have reconciled myself to believe that I will die while I am yet on the path, that I will never get there, I will never be a human being entirely suffused with love in every cell. But it is the only path worth to be on. If it were something I knew I could achieve, it would not be a path worth pursuing.

So how does spirituality work for you?

First of all, I only believe in a force or a God in each and every one of us. When I used to pray - I was young and didn't know any better - I used to pray to a wise, funny, forgiving God. The kind of

person who would relax on Sundays and love hanging out. Then I realized that at my best, the one percent of my distilled best is wise, funny and forgiving. So I realized I was actually praying to myself. Then I hoped I could make that one percent 100% and realized that basically God is within me. So I don't believe in God, I don't believe in a larger dimension ruling my fate. I don't control my fate but nobody else does either.

I basically have my own version of the chaos theory. There is a lot of stuff going on. There is a finite amount of pain and pleasure in this universe and they get randomly scattered on a daily basis. The difference, and this is where I use my spirituality, is what do you do with that? What do you do with the pleasure that hits you? Do you turn around and say 'thank you for this extra drop of encouragement, I am going to use it on my quest to become all loving'? What do you do with the pain that hits you? I like talking about the lightning conductors of pain. The spiritually strong, those with a strong sense of self, and self respect, and a strong moral compass, when pain hits them, they are the ones who can break down pain and convert it into a positive energy. We have to decide if to be a lightning conductor of pain and ask that if pain has to strike, let it strike me because I am capable of processing it.

So you feel capable of transforming pain into positive energy?

Yes I do. So when pain hits me I should be thankful that it is not going to someone else and that I can actually deal with it.

Is life all chaos or is there a larger order?

There is a natural order of course but that doesn't mean someone is organizing it all. When someone says "this is your destiny" I say no! There is a certain intuitive sense of self-knowledge that those are the things I will be best at, that this will be my calling. And we convert that into saying that this is our destiny. No! All of us have some kind of inkling.

Did you always have?

No, it develops with your consciousness. And as a child, I certainly had no idea. Those who know from their childhood, I guess it is a question of being an old soul.

How did you develop all this understanding of things?

I really don't know. I have no clue. It just happened. I had experiences which were eye opening, but not responsible for me deriving something out of it.

Did you have a religious upbringing?

There was nothing religious in our life. My father prayed every evening but did we ever, ever feel we were Hindu? No. We did not have to attend festivals or other such things. It was a massively secular upbringing.

When did your interest in those matters begin?

I am 42, and I guess it started ten years ago or so. Being an actor imposes a certain kind of philosophy on you if you are to be healthy. I never know where the next job is going to come from. So I can only do what I am doing right now as beautifully and as well as I can. You stop being goal driven, you become journey driven. And you'd better enjoy it, because the movie may never release, and if it does, people may simply hate it. So just enjoy what you do!

We often hear that acting is the most insecure profession in the world, isn't it?

The first day I quit advertising and became an actor, I was terrified. It was Monday morning, the wheels of commerce were clicking, everybody was busily going to work, and I was doing nothing. At that moment, I thought: I could die of insecurity every day, and a sense of meaninglessness, thinking I have got nothing, and my self-esteem would crumble. Or I could say, I can go to Jehangir and see some art that nobody else can see, then go and swim, then buy some music at Rhythm House, then go for a run at 3.30 in the afternoon, whereas nobody in the country has that luxury. I had two months of salary from my agency and I knew I could go back if all else would fail. So I picked the second solution.

In fact, I am prepared for anything. I am prepared for my entire profession to collapse. What is the worse that can happen? I realized that if you are prepared emotionally for the worse case scenario, then life is a dream, everything else is a bonus. Of course deep in it is embedded a feeling and an instinct of self-preservation.

I am so used to the kind of fame I have, whatever degree it is, that I feel I would miss it, and I would be distraught without it. I don't like that and so I decided recently that I should work on myself and do something about it. I think my ego is far healthier than that. I am not in this game. To a large extent, in my life, I have never been in that game. If I had wanted to be famous, I would have done mainstream films and not the types I have been in, I would have played cricket for India rather than rugby, and opened a foundation for some "sexy" cause like HIV or climate change, rather than one that picks up a few kids from the Andaman Nicobar islands and puts them through school.

I do what my heart desires. I am therefore lighter, more joyous and less responsible than I was in six grade. There, there were expectations of me, I had to go through exams and excel. I performed superbly and became a creature of that system but every day in school was a torture.

What were your dreams as a kid?

I very quickly understood there are three main drivers in life: fame, power and wealth. And I realized that the driver for me is going to be fame. Power and wealth really don't matter to me at all. The ability for me to exercise power over anyone feels pathetic to me.

So why did I pick fame? I was on stage as a child, and I loved the free ice creams I would get at the end of the plays. Playing rugby, I realized girls liked me if I'd play well. So I realized that fame could open many doors.

I knew from a young age that I could act. I could move people. I was not empowered enough though to follow that kind of dream. Upper middle class India didn't give you that chance in the late eighties. You had to get an MBA, become an investor banker, go to an Ivy League school. You were ashamed to be Indian, you had to be white. And I was sucked into all that. I was planning to become a banker. I

did my B.Com. here, was admitted to a US business school but had to wait for two years before joining.

One day I took a pen and paper and asked myself what I would really want to do if there were no financial considerations. I wrote 'acting' and then crossed it. English-speaking acting at the time? 500 bucks a show!

Writing – I crossed it too because making a living out of it would be difficult.

Then I thought of copywriting in advertising. It would require ease of writing, which I had. So within six days I changed my whole life and decided to join an advertising agency and become a copywriter. I took two months off and did my first movie while working there. And then decided to quit. Why? Because I felt people would never take me seriously as an actor if I didn't quit advertising and did acting full time, and could say "I am an actor". I had to quit, create a vacuum for things to be able to come in.

Did it feel like a calling?

It was the thing I always knew I am best at. So when there was a chance to make a living out of it, I went for it. I went chasing that dream. You can't drive directors to cast you. So I waited. And then luck...

Do you see a larger meaning in acting, with the fact that you can touch and transform people?

I don't. I see a larger meaning in art. Great art purifies you. When you come out of a great museum or a great piece of music or a great movie, if only for 30 seconds you are a more vulnerable, less complicated, more sensitized human being, that's the function of art. And that's all I try to do.

Genuinely, every time I act, I try and maximize the pleasure you feel when watching. I must make it an unforgettable experience. I must add one more centimeter to your life's pleasure. It is purely about that. It is never about becoming more famous.

But you said you decided to go for fame?

If I had to choose between the three. But today, as I have a bit of fame, I am not chasing more. I am happy in the niche I am in. I never shifted into Hindi commercial films. I am releasing three small art movies this year and I am happy.

But apart from fame, power and wealth, you could pursue meaning?

There is no question that today, this is the underlying force and quest of every single thing that I do.

How do you maintain your centeredness, do you introspect often?

Every twenty-four hours or so, I have a few minutes of ruthless introspection, which can happen anywhere.

I have also become very good at apologizing. Because it feels so terrible, apologizing is a great way of making sure I won't do some awful thing again. I don't want to be a perfect human being, but I want to be lighter. So better not to fuck up. I am obsessed with lightness. I am obsessed with joy. To be morally honorable is now extremely important for me. It is too tired to be morally shifty. I am done with all that. There is too much of this world to handle anyway.

I learnt one day, ten years ago, that my self-image is a kid with only a pair of shorts, on a bright sunny day, walking down a beach, with the sun on my back, nothing on my hands - and people are passing me by. Some of them wave and move on, some stop and chat for a while, some walk with me for a while and then carry on wherever they were going. That is me going through life.

Don't you want some of them to walk for a longer time with you?

Maybe. But I don't see that in the image.

But if some people have a gorgeous energy it would be lovely to walk for a long time with them? Would I turn around and walk with them? I guess not. Because I would not get wherever I was going.

What about someone walking in the same direction?

It has happened, now and then. I keep people with wonderful energy very close to myself. I don't let them go.

At times of really full challenges and tests, where do you find your energy? Where is your anchor? The fact that I have been through those things before. So I can do it again. I look back and say "you proved yourself, you can do it again". Especially the challenges I faced when I was very young. We had a very turbulent family life, with a devastatingly unhappy childhood from the age of 10 to 20. And I had to do a lot of the emotional uplifting. I cannot recall one single happy dinner conversation. Not one. That was the fire. Everything else is easy in comparison.

If you could choose the next round of reincarnation, what would it be?

I would like to be a woman and bring my experiences of this life to other women. I would also like to understand what it means to be a woman.

But actually, I really hope I am done. I hope I don't have to come back. Essentially, I am done. I could go today. If I am alive, I will try and evolve more and more. But is it interesting me? No, I am not interested. I am done. All the little ambitions and petty desires are done. The bigger questions that I am wrestling with are engaging me, but if I die today, do I die with any sense of "Shit"? No. I am living every day to the maximum capacity of my soul and body. I love this country, I love its people. But this entire universe situation? It's not particularly interesting. I've checked it out, ok, I get it! But if I'm here, of course I will be playing hard. If I'm on the field I will play 100%.

My spiritual connection with rugby is actually huge. Much more than my parents. It taught me to lose - I was an obnoxiously bad loser. It taught me you can't do anything alone, you need a team. It also taught me that everyone is wonderful when there is no pressure. But under pressure, the worse side of

people comes out. And if under pressure someone behaves with nobility and grace, never let them go. So I've made my closest friends on the rugby field. They literally threw their body in front of me to save me.

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

Why the hell don't You step in when there is cruelty in this world? You have never, ever stepped in! Seeing cruelty was my first disillusion with God. We have to do it ourselves. So come on, get Your act together!

What is your idea of happiness?

To be proud of my moral compass. To live by my moral compass unstintingly. Nobody ever consciously decides what kind of life they want to live. Why? It's the only thing to decide! If you die today, what would you like your best friend to say at your funeral? For me, I am absolutely sure it is about love, being just and fair, and truth. It is something I don't do very well occasionally. But what to do...

Does it all give you contentment?

Massive contentment, yes. That's why I can say I am done. Sometimes it is tiring to hang around.