

# Bharat Bala

Creative Director

## 'Happiness is about giving things up'

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**Bharat Bala, the creative director of the opening and closing ceremonies at the 2010 Commonwealth Games believes in uncomplicating life and achieving simplicity for true happiness.**

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

Love.

Spirituality is not something devotional or religious. I rather see it through experiences of love, joy and happiness. And I get those experiences when connecting with people, while traveling all over India or the rest of the world.

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

My mother was devotional. And when you are young you don't understand devotion.

You think it's religious and boring. Today at the age of 40, I am able to understand why she was devotional and what energies she was drawing through those means – basically, just asking for her family to do well.

**Your father was a non believer?**

He was more of a spiritual person. He was a Gandhian, so truth and honesty were the best gods he made friends with.

**Did you ever experience what some people call God?**

I have faith in something. I think there is somebody beyond us, guiding us and doing some impossible things. I have really faced some completely impossible situations, and saw some miracle happen.

I am not defining though what this faith is or what that force would be. I only want to submit myself to it. And receive its guidance.

**How do you receive the guidance?**

It comes with your focus and your devotion to what you do. When you put your heart and soul into something and you don't want to fail, there is guidance in the last mile.

For instance I can see it when nobody believes in something I do, then how they react once it finally comes out. That response is a sign. So it's not a physicality or something tangible.

**Do you sometimes pray to it?**

Certain things I do just mechanically. And praying for me is a way to connect with my mother. If I need to connect to her, I do things the way she would do it. Which means praying.

**You mentioned some miracles at difficult times, what about the contrary, when nothing happens and helps you?**

I really don't believe in trying to find explanations. You just need to do your best and trust that when needed, the guidance will come. And when it happens you just keep quiet, humbly, and then move on.

**Is there for you a sense of destiny and things being preordained?**

Only if you analyze you start thinking like this. I don't.

**What about the idea of us having a certain purpose in life?**

It's not about some preordained purpose but it is nice when some elder fires us up to do something meaningful. For instance my father encouraged me to recognize my strengths and put them in the service of some larger good.

He was a Gandhian, and had been part of the freedom struggle. I was in advertising which was light years away from it. There was a large generational gap between the Gandhian and advertising lifestyles.

So in 1996, he sat me down. He said 'you create big ideas for products in advertising and you sell the product to consumers. Why don't you create a big idea for India?

Why don't you create an idea to sell India back to Indians emotionally?' He showed me marks on his leg and said "do you see these marks? Every time we used to say "Vande

Mataram", we would be beaten up". That triggered something in me.

I went to A. R. Rahman - we were friends from school - and told him this will be your first music album. It is called 'Vande Mataram'. Vande Mataram served a certain purpose during the freedom struggle. We will now create music to generate a new national pride and a new sense of belonging for young Indians.

I gave up my advertising business for the next 14 months. I self financed the Vande Mataram idea as nobody believed in it. There was no shape or form. It was all about a passion that would emerge gradually and unfold in the form of films, music, ideas and people. It was so exciting. That journey took us through the country and it was so amazing to see in every ordinary person their love for the country. People are innocent but they have true love. That's what I found, especially in the villages.

And we have to bow down to the people of this country, and their great faith. That is the underlying spirit that binds the country together.

I saw the same thing during the Commonwealth Games rehearsals. We had about 2,000 people from all parts of India, without a single common language, and yet they lived together for five weeks. That underlying faith and their devotion for the country – you cannot describe it in words. What they feel is unbelievable.

So my father had actually tapped into some kind of creative spark, and a sense of national pride. He acted as a catalyst in bringing it all out of me. It led me to discovering new things, and doing Vande Mataram, the Incredible India campaign, a film for the HRD encouraging girls to go back to school, those Commonwealth Games and more.

### **At moments of acute challenges, where is your anchor, your source of energy?**

I have been in situations fighting lone battles like the man on Tiananmen Square, alone in front of the tank. Even during the Commonwealth Games for instance. In those moments, only with your perseverance, your commitment, your passion, your honesty, can you win. Only when you believe in it, there is no stopping. At times I can be like a bulldog because such a strong belief in what I do, and some kind of energy, are there with me.

### **If there were such a thing as God and you could ask one question, what would it be?**

Where are You?

Though I should share this anecdote: before the CWG opening, there was so much negativity, everybody thought everything would collapse. A member of a foreign crew told me after the opening, when everything actually went well : "I now truly believe God lives in India".

Sometimes when on an early morning flight above the continent, I imagine the millions of people praying simultaneously. Imagine the spirit and the strength of such a collective energy. Not everybody is selfish, only asking 'do something for me', many are asking for everything to be fine. I don't think you can find a population of this size with that energy. So imagine the strength.

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

I am happy to come back, as long as I learn from the mistakes in this life. Though I think that pain and suffering are important. Because without it you cannot become a better person. I have gone through my share of hardship, which has helped me become a better person. Though I am not begging for more!

**Do you believe in rebirth?**

I am not questioning it. All those ideas of the soul and so on are too complex. If I can bring a bit more joy to some people who need it, then all is fine.

**What is your idea of happiness?**

Going back to a very simple living. We try and complicate things all the time, whether with technology, or the so-called urban lifestyle. If you shed all this, there is a sense of happiness. I can see it in rural India. Simplicity is happiness. When giving things up I find happiness.

For instance a few years ago, if my computer crashed, I would completely freak out. Today, I can't be phased. Even though I am a complete geek. If something is meant to be lost, it is fine!

**How did you acquire that wisdom?**

All through experiences.

**So are you content?**

I am a very positive person. I am very optimistic. Sometimes to the point of being unrealistic. But so be it ! I fail because I am unrealistic, but where I win, I win solidly, hands-down. That optimism is what drives me and makes me feel younger. I don't want to become too calculated and lose the spontaneity and free spirit of youth.