

# Vasundhara Raje

BJP Leader

## 'I love challenges'

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**Vasundhara Raje, BJP leader and former Rajasthan CM believes that she truly focusses when she faces a challenge.**

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

The sound of the word itself gives me a wonderful feeling of peace. I associate it with meditation, the speaking of the mantra, learning about yourself, emptying your mind of all unnecessary thoughts, becoming one with nature.

### **How do you go about all that?**

By repeating the mantra given by my guru, over and over again. It is called perfecting the mantra.

When the guru looks at you, he sees everything about you, and he gives you this mantra like a prescription.

It is all based on the science of sound. A sound uttered does not just vanish into thin air. It leaves an impact and an imprint. It reverberates through you. Uttering the mantra resonates through your mind and body, and those sound-waves rejuvenate you, so you can do whatever has to be done.

### **The mantra is unique to you?**

It is supposed to be. And in any case, the way you say it is as unique as a fingerprint – the timber of your voice, the longing with which you utter it, the understanding that comes with it.

It requires huge faith. But if you have it, the mantra becomes a support system. It can even cure illnesses.

**Have you experienced such things yourself?**

No, but I have seen it in the ashram. It could all be explained by the science of the brain. Some people can bend spoons or transmit thoughts. The potential is there, but most of us use only 7 or 8% of our brain's capabilities. We need to train our minds to tap into that potential and repeating the mantra is a way to do so, it is a way to harness than energy.

Then you can use it like a laser to clean up certain things, to touch and transform others. But for this, discipline is needed. One is supposed to recite the mantra at least 108 times a day (the equivalent of one mala), then take it to the next level with eleven malas, and so on.

**You also associated spirituality to learning about yourself – how does that happen?**

As life goes by, you understand your boundaries and where you can push your limits. You have to keep pushing yourself.

**Was it meant for you to meet that guru?**

There are things that every human being is supposed to do in life. There are people you are meant to meet to finish your life's journey. Each of these people gives or takes something from you. The guru is part of that life. And when those very evolved souls touch your life, they make a huge difference.

My guru was in my conscious thinking for about ten years, from the moment I became a shishya of his, till he left his body. He left a huge imprint on my life and will always be with me.

**You mentioned things that are meant to be - do you believe in destiny, in preordained events?**

Yes, definitely. You come with your life. It is all planned. Even when you go, it is preordained. And there is the fear of dying, of what is planned thereafter. I guess we should spend our life honing ourselves towards that end.

**So you look at every event in your life as preordained?**

Absolutely. It is all part of what was supposed to happen. Then through your strength of will and character or through learning, you make something out of it. Or you don't.

**Is there such a thing as free will?**

In Urdu they talk about "tadbir" and "takdir", your fate and what you make of your fate. You can't just sit there like a vegetable and wait for things to happen. Things are going to happen but you also make them happen. By putting your life force in what is in your fate, you can maybe change some directions.

I do question it all the time though. If you haven't hurt anybody, if you haven't done anything wrong, then why do bad things happen to you? But now, I feel there is something greater, there is some bigger life-force. A hand is dealt by God and it is almost like a puzzle: once the hand is given to you, you must decide what to do with it - will you just float and let it happen or will you work with it?

I wasn't looking at things that way before. But now I have started.

**What is God for you?**

An entity beyond me, a force, an energy, something greater than us.

**Did you always feel its presence?**

Always, since I was a child. You put it into imageries; it can be a devi, a god, a trinity.

Some people give it a shape, others don't.

**Is it important for you to give it a shape?**

I have done that all my life. I have never questioned it.

**Did you have a religious upbringing?**

Yes. My mother was very religious. Festivals and feasts used to happen around us. I heard the priest recite the mantras.

And I always asked people what brings them to an emotional pitch. Music can take you to such a pure space, the speaking of the mantra does it as well; watching a beautiful sunset can bring a lump in your throat or tears to your eyes. Sometimes a book can do the same.

It is all about something much, much beyond you. And all those things are ways of being in touch with that greater power, or energy, or God.

**Faith was always important for you?**

Faith always was extremely important for me. And is.

You can feel it when you go to temples. They are not just regular buildings. You can feel the energy of thousands of people who sat and prayed there. It is different from walking into a regular building. So going to temples and sacred places has always been very important for me.

**You never revolted against your fate to the point of becoming an atheist?**

Never.

**If things are preordained, do we each have a specific mission or purpose in life?**

We are all here to do something, for sure. Everybody leaves a mark. That is what you have to believe in and then go out and do it.

**How would you define yours?**

Seva I guess. I believe that through what I do, I can make a few lives better. If I get a hand water-pump installed in a village where people used to walk kilometers just to get water; if I bring a school to an

area and change the lives of children; if with good governance I can turn certain things around and people watch it, incredulous – then it all makes me very happy.

Basically, in this line of work, when people say they love you, it is a huge reward.

### **It must be a high?**

Yes, it is a high of huge proportions. When you are in government people say you are wonderful because they have to. But if, when you are out of government, people still say they appreciate you for what you did, and they love you for that, it is such a high. You know it's real. And you really don't care if nothing else happens. Because you know that in the period that was given to you, you were able to do something that touched those lives.

For me that is the biggest reward.

### **When did you realize all this?**

When I lost the elections. That is why I say there is always something to be learnt from the unpleasant, from things not going your way. In fact, even if they seem not to go your way, things actually go your way: everywhere you can pick up and learn something, even though the reasons and teachings only clearly appear later on.

My first reaction when losing was "why me". Then as I traveled and felt this affection and love, I was so touched and began to understand.

Basically, I believe that all of us, even without knowing it, strive to do something, to take our lives somewhere, to somehow attach ourselves to that greater power.

And it is so simple! One day you wake up and the realization hits you. One morning actually, it hit me. I used to look at our lives and would compare them with small creatures. I would be full of pride and pity them for having such short lives. One day though, I realized that for a butterfly, life from birth to death also feels very long. Only for me - so-called 'greater power' - looking at its life seems so short and little. But surely and similarly, some greater power must be looking down at me, and thinking 'oh poor thing, what a small and short life!'

The only problem is that by the time we come to such a realization, most of our life is gone!

### **Did you grow up knowing you would be in politics?**

It was completely part of my life. Everybody around me was involved in it, and - whether people believe it or not - they were trying to make a difference in people's lives.

When they had power as maharajas and maharanis, they were trying to do it by bringing education into people's lives, by developing a close understanding with them, by being loved by them and loving them. And it continued with the advent of democracy. It used to happen around us all the time. So it was only natural to become a part of it too.

My mother always told me that my purpose in life should be to care – not to divide people through caste and creed, but to be able to love everyone equally.

**So as a little girl it was your dream to be in politics?**

I didn't know anything else. I actually was wondering how I could escape it. But I grew up knowing there was no other way around. The thing was to be able to work with it, and make it work for me. It sounds silly to have such a conversation these days, and mention such ideals. In fact, my mother used to speak that way and many people would think she'd better stop and come back to pragmatic ground realities. But I am happy to be this way. I am happy to believe in the goodness of people. It is better to really care than not care at all.

**Don't you have to develop a thick skin sometimes?**

It happens. You develop a thick skin. But you should still be able to cry and laugh. If you can't cry or laugh or love, then why be around.

**Where do you find your energy at times of huge challenges?**

I love challenges. Because that is the time I really focus. Once there is a challenge and I know what is the goal, I can fully focus.

**Challenges get the best out of you?**

Yes.

**Difficulties too?**

Yes. I think I would just be a vegetable if there were no challenges.

**You would just float?**

Float, or sink to the bottom. This way, you do something you know, you fight not just for yourself but also for a bunch of other people. If it works, you spread cheers. And whenever there is that happiness, people begin to focus and start to take pride. All this produces a good energy. That good energy is crucial to achieve things.

**Any major unrealized project?**

There is always one step better. I have achieved some goals. But there are so many more to be attained. There is no stopping. There is no saying I have achieved everything, there is nothing to look forward to. I must just focus my energies on what is the next step.

**Let's say you look back at your life in twenty or thirty years from now, what would make you feel that it was fulfilling and a success?**

I told you. It is about people caring. When you are no longer in a position of power, and people still care, it is the high of highs.

I have been through both. I won huge elections, and got a rush when winning elections, when becoming Chief Minister. I saw that massive adulation when you step into power.

Then once I lost, I experienced that rush of affection and love – elderly people touching your hair with such affection, others calling you and telling you how much they care. And I thought to myself, I must have done something good to get all this!

And let me tell you, between those two kinds of rush, the second one is much more powerful. I know there will always be other opportunities for the first one. But the second one... And that is the most important. So I will always try and outperform myself just so that I can touch this again.

**When gaining power, and with all that adulation around, isn't there a danger of being on an ego-trip?**

Well, it definitely was a huge high. But even then, I kept telling myself that this too shall pass... because nothing is permanent.

And I know power and positions are easily attainable. What is much more difficult, and for which you have to work much harder is the second kind of reward. Now, whatever I do, I need to be able to get that response.

**What is your favorite place in the world?**

I am happy with myself, wherever I am, as long as there is greenery around, and books.

**Books are very important for you?**

Absolutely. I must smell them, breathe them, touch them, see them. I always need near me a book I haven't read yet. That is so exciting. And when I read a book, I am excited about all the ones waiting to be read.

I know I will never be at a loss, because there will always be books around. It is like a wonderful and most reliable friendship.

**You always read, since you were a little girl?**

Always, always. Below the bed-covers, with torches... Gardening is another hobby. Because again, you connect with something else. When you see those flowers grow, when you see the garden bloom...

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

There isn't a question actually. It is like opening doors, secret doors. There is a rush of excitement - or a fright. But you always know there is another door behind. There is always something else to uncover and explore. You don't know where you are going. You just have an idea.

**An intuition?**

Well, I always have an intuition. And it is systematically right. But I always try to suppress it with my so-called superior rational mind. When I look back at some of my mistakes, I know that my intuition had told me not to do it.

From my intuition comes the awareness and certitude that what is gone, is gone. If a great love was taken, it is because it had to go. Or when people do not understand me, there is nothing I can do and I should let go of it. There is a whole range of prejudices people have against me for being a Maharani – you are supposed to always be late, to be greedy and acquisitive, to think of people in a nasty fashion (because supposedly people with that kind of money and power always do); and besides, the so-called privileged feudal have never been good for the people. But all those things are wrong ! It is not what I saw around me.

To the contrary, I saw feudal people subsuming themselves for others. I saw privilege and power making them humbler.

In the end, because of this position or those privileges, you have to work harder to prove yourself. But regardless of what you achieve, it can bring tears to your eyes to see that some people will never change their mind about you, refusing to see you for yourself, for who you really are. They have a picture in their mind and they project it over you, directing all their nastiness and hatred to that image. You can feel the angst and irritation.

And it can hurt. But then I keep telling myself that it too shall pass. I build a cocoon around myself and believe that if I am meant to do certain things, there will be a way to do it, or there will be a way to direct my energies into something else. So instead of despairing about it, or feeling a lot of anger and hate in return - which would be a natural reaction - I try not to think about it and worry about my own problems. It all is about those people's angst. So why should I carry it on top of mine? I do not need a double dose of angst ! It hasn't been easy to feel that way, but I am getting better at it.

**If there were such a thing as rebirth, what would you choose?**

I do not think about it. I have too many things to deal with now! And in any case, I would first have to conquer all my fears of dying.

**What is this fear of dying about - is it the uncertainty of what comes after?**

It is not about what happens immediately after one dies, but rather about the uncertainty of what the next birth will be about.

**What is your idea of happiness?**

Listening to some beautiful music, watching a gorgeous sunset, feeling the happiness and gratitude of people whose lives I've touched. Those are small but hugely satisfying things. It gives you a high for a minute. Then you can go on till the next high. Those are amazingly ecstatic moments. And I think that is, in the end, what you live for - from that moment, to the next moment, to the next one