

RAHUL BOSE

He has been called “the Sean Penn of Oriental cinema”, but the comparison, by Maxim magazine, does not do Rahul Bose full justice. Yes, the Oscar winning star of *Mystic River* and Bollywood's top alternative actor are both also successful directors and have a history of social activism. Yes, too, both rushed to help straight after a disaster — Penn to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, where he helped physically to rescue people; Bose to the Andaman Islands on the day after the Boxing Day tsunami. But the Indian has made the more sustained commitment to recovery, has become a prominent campaigner against climate change and for sustainable development, and is an international sportsman to boot. Which makes him, perhaps, the 21st century equivalent of Renaissance Man.

Time Magazine calls him “the superstar of Indian arthouse cinema” who has “emerged as the front man for everything experimental, new and different in Indian cinema with a string of alternative hits to his name.” At 41 he still plays for India's national rugby team as he has done ever since its first international event in 1998. And in 2007 he became the first Indian to be appointed an Oxfam Global Ambassador.

In all, he has been working with the development charity for five years on issues ranging from women's rights to climate change, from tsunami relief to health and education. “For me,” he told *Our Planet*, “development is a petty dour term for a happier world, a world with more peace, more compassion so that people can spend a life of quality with their loved ones. While economic growth is today the world's most prominent indicator of development, of what use is it without education and health, without peace and good governance, without clean water, germ-free food, permanent housing and an opportunity to achieve – for all”.

He first became involved in social activism after the Hindu-Muslim violence of the 2002 Gujarat riots but adds: “Nothing I have ever done has been a cerebral calculation. It has always been an emotional response to circumstances around me. Then I have let my cerebral judgment (whatever little I have) kick in.”

Born in Calcutta in 1967, Bose started his acting career, aged six, with the lead role in his school play. He also took up rugby and won a silver medal for boxing at the Western India Championships. He wanted to go into show business straight after college, but had to settle for advertisement copywriting. In 1994 he got his first big break with a part in the enormously successful film ‘English, August’. He has since appeared in more than 25 films, winning several awards. And he wrote and directed ‘Everybody Says I am Fine’, the first English-language Indian film ever to be released in U.S. cinemas.

He has also been recognised for his activism, receiving a prestigious Karamveer Puraskar award in 2007 for his work after the tsunami and for starting The Foundation, an anti-discrimination NGO. He went back to the Andaman Islands 23 times, providing vehicles, mobile phones and relief materials, and working on watershed management. Last year he joined a celebrity appeal to the G8 summit to increase aid in the face of the world food crisis, and joined a similar bid, coordinated by Oxfam, to persuade leaders of rich countries to take action on global warming.

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"Climate change is not just an environmental issue, but one with severe socio-economic implications" he says. "It can, and will, erode development gains by the poor and could hamper the achievement of many of the Millennium Development Goals. The Indian subcontinent is a disaster-prone region. Poverty and lack of development makes the impact of these disasters worse — and poor people are the worst affected.

"Rising temperatures and changing patterns of rainfall affect our food production. The government and the private sector need to invest in adapting to climate change so that people don't lose their crops and their livelihoods." GL