



The Universe We See and Feel

Just look at our Earth! It is so big that you cannot completely explore it. Now, when you look at the sky and observe that cosmos, you realize how tiny you are. But is that all? No, the things you see and feel account for less than 5 per cent of the entire Universe. What are other things that we cannot see? They are dark matter and dark energy. These forms of matter and energy are not observed but needed so that our observations come in accord with our knowledge.



Normally, people ask me what I would do for shooting. But I am a Sports Minister, and I am for overall development of all the sports, and for this development, budgetary provisions have been made. No doubt, shooting as one single sport, has brought the state a lot of glory and we have plans to update the Shooting Range in Jaipur. Similarly, other sports would be developed through organised coaching at the district and at the divisional headquarter level. We would announce the *new sports policy* that would deal with the issue more elaborately. I, as an Industry Minister, is keen to develop the sports goods' industry, which is growing very fast. I am sure that with our policies, Rajasthan would soon become the hub of the sports goods' industry.



Rathore, in an intimate interview with Arbit, talked about his life and times. A tete-e-tete:

● **Arbit:** You became an Olympic medal winner in double trap shooting, a sport that you took up at the age of 28. But in your childhood, you insisted your mother to buy an air rifle. You had any hunch in your boyhood that it's the sport in which you would excel one day?

RVS: No, I, as a child, just asked for an air rifle as I would shoot with the pellets and enjoy doing it. My mother was a teacher and taught in various army schools. She even served the Jaipur's Army School and she bought me an air rifle from her hard-earned savings. This gesture of my mother I would never forget, and later, when I was an active shooter and needed money to buy extra cartridges, I looked for some sponsor, who could buy me some cartridges. But I did not get any support. It was my mother, who asked me not to worry about the money and she shelled out Rs. 50,000 in 2003, that helped me buy cartridges and practice hard.

● **Arbit:** Tell us about your preparation for the Athens Olympics and how you shaped yourself for the Athens Olympics?

RVS: I aimed big and built a solid resume and was ranked NO. 2 in the world before the Athens Olympiad. Before that, I had won the gold at the Commonwealth Games and a silver in the 2003 World Championship at Sydney. I won the silver medal for India after 40 years. India had not seen a victory since Karni Singh of Bikaner, who won a Silver at the 1962 World Shooting Championship in Cairo.

● **Arbit:** Can you recreate the Athens story as you became the first Indian to win an Olympic medal in shooting?

RVS: I was in good touch on August day in Athens. In double trap, which has now been discontinued as an Olympic sport, one has to shoot two clay targets, released simultaneously. In less than five seconds, you have to hit two targets. It needed tremendous concentration and focus.

In the qualification round, I shot 135 out of 150, and was placed fifth among the six finalists. I shot 46 out of 50 in the first preliminary round, but was under pressure after a poor second round, with just 43 points. But I came back strong in the third with 46 points in a very competitive field, and reached the final.

In the final, I finished with a total of 179 out of 200, scoring terrific 44 under pressure. UAF's Sheikh Ahmed Al Maktoum, who had qualified with an Olympic record of 144, was already a frontrunner for the gold medal and clinched it with 45 points in the final. The real test was the silver and bronze medal battle between me and China's Wang Zheng.

If only the final scores would have been counted as per the new rules, I would have been comfortably placed on silver. But back then, it was a matter of one shot. On my last attempt, I had to hit both targets to try for a silver. I won the silver with my last shot. And I did just that, in a manner so calm and collected, that the nickname 'Chilly' got stuck with me.

I was crowned with silver glory I may have appeared calm inside. But I was dying a thousand deaths out there.



● **Arbit:** How were the immediate feelings?

RVS: As I went to the podium and stood there, I remembered my mother and my wife, Maj (Dr.) Gayatri, who always stood by me. When I used to practice, at Delhi's Karni Singh Range (the long hours of practice), I would get pain in my shoulders after a gruelling practice session. My wife, Dr. Gayatri, an army doctor and a Major would give me pain killer shots to enable me to sleep properly. Both my mother and my wife truly deserved a few ounces of the silver medal that I won.

● **Arbit:** Who coached you and prepared you for the Athens Olympics?

RVS: I am indebted to Mark Russell, he added fire-power in me. Veteran Australian marksman Russell Mark, had won gold at the Atlanta 1996 Olympics and a silver medal at the 2000 Games in Sydney. When I won the silver, he told media persons that I was the toughest competitor whom he has ever faced.

● **Arbit:** Post Athens, what were your achievements and disappointments?

RVS: After the Athens silver, I won the Asian clay target gold, three times in a row, up to 2006. I also won the individual bronze in Doha Asiad in 2006. After Athens, I won more than 20 individual medals at various events till 2006 for Double Trap.

But, Beijing Olympics was disappointing. I shot a series of 43, 45, 43, 131 to finish 12th among 19 shooters.

I was struggling for form in the run-up to the games, and the score of 131 was just not enough in a qualifying round that saw Italian Francesco D' Aniello finish at the top of the heap, with a total of 141.

I sealed the Beijing berth by winning a gold medal by winning the men's double trap event at the 2006 ISSF World Cup at Cairo.

I had also won gold in the individual and team events in Men's double trap at the Bangkok Asian Clay Shooting championships in 2005. I was also a member of the winning team that won a double trap team gold in the 2005 Commonwealth Shooting Championships.

Though, I missed a medal in Beijing, I was honoured when I was given the task to be the flag-bearer of the Indian contingent at the opening ceremony. That came as a consolation. As the Olympics are on, I remember how proud I felt holding the tricolor and leading the Indian contingent.

In 2011, I participated in the Asian Clay Target Championship in Kuala Lumpur and won gold. My score of 194 in that tournament equals world record. I retired from army in 2013 as a Colonel, and also decided to hang my rifle and joined the BJP in 2014 and was asked to contest the

2014 Lok Sabha elections from Jaipur (Rural). I contested, fought, and won.

● **Arbit:** It seems that your dreams are unending. You are an achiever. Did you ever dream that you would become a Minister for Sports, both, at the Centre and in the state? What was your contribution to sports as a minister in the Centre?

RVS: Yes, it was my parent's dream that I should be in the army and I was there. Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, wanted me to join politics and I did, and he made me a minister and I shall be ever indebted to him.

During my tenure as a Sports Minister, I tried to encourage sports at the school level and *Khelo India* school games was a big success.

The primary requirement of India is to have a broad base of sports, where opportunity is available to every village, district and school. It is like a pyramid where the base should be strong, which is *Khelo India*, and the peak is the Olympic podium, which should be the target.

● **Arbit:** Now, as Rajasthan's Sports Minister and also Minister for Industries, what are your plans?

RVS: Normally, people ask me what I would do for shooting. But I am a Sports Minister, and I am for overall development of all the sports, and for this development, budgetary provisions have been made. No doubt, shooting as one single sport, has brought the state a lot of glory and we have plans to update the Shooting Range in Jaipur. Similarly other sports would be developed through organised coaching at the district and at the divisional headquarter level. We would announce the *new sports policy* that would deal with the issue more elaborately. I, as an Industry Minister, is keen to develop the sports goods' industry, which is growing very fast. I am sure that with our policies, Rajasthan would soon become the hub of the sports goods' industry.

● **Arbit:** Your son, Manavadiya Singh, is coming up as a shooter. What are your plans to groom him?

RVS: Yes, I am told that he is talented and it amuses me when people tell me that he is far more talented than his father. He is serious about shooting and also studies. After being a respectable achiever as a junior, he is now in senior's grade. But, he will have to be an individual achiever and for that, he will have to work hard. He practices both, in Delhi and Jaipur, and loves to shoot at all the Jaipur Range. The Jaipur Range has produced four Olympians. I only wish the son to be as lucky as his father!

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Prakash Bhandari
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After hockey, if there is any other sport, where India has repeatedly performed well, is shooting. Abhinav Bindra, who won the 10 m air rifle at Beijing in 2008, gave us not only the first individual gold, but also the first after hockey.

But prior to that, it was Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore, who started the trend by winning the Athens Olympics silver medal in the double trap shooting, overcoming the stiff challenge from China's Wang Zheng. The gold went to the UAE royal Ahmed Al Maktoum.

India has won four medals through Rathore, Bindra, Gagan Narang and Vijay Kumar. Our shooters, this time to Paris, are our best bets and the large contingent include two shooters, Anant Naruka and Maheshwari Chauhan, who will aim for a medal at the Paris Olympics. At Tokyo Olympics, Apurvi Chandela and Divyansh Panwar, from Rajasthan, were part of the Indian contingent.

India has sent to Paris one of the strongest contingents, with multiple Asian Games and World Cup medal winners, who are likely to rise to the podium.

But, it was Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore, who started writing the success story by winning the double trap silver, and it was the only medal that India won at the 2004 Athens Games. It's 20 years since Col Rathore brought glory to India, but this two decade long journey after Athens brought so many transformations in the life of one of the greatest sportsmen of the country. He could never have imagined that the glory earned on the shooting range would change his life and he would become a public figure, sitting in the Lok Sabha and now, as a Minister of Sports and Industries in Rajasthan.

It was India's first-ever individual silver medal at the games and the first medal in shooting, as a sport India was not traditionally good at. The medal was won by an army officer, who took up shooting at the age of 28, and excelled at a

#THE GAMES



fast pace to clinch an Olympic medal. Ever since his childhood, he showed the urge to excel. Son of an army officer, Col Laxman Singh, who came from Garabdesar in Sardarshahar Tehsil of Churu district and as an army officer, he moved from place to place and Rathore studied in the Kendriya Vidyalaya and excelled in sports. His mother, a teacher who taught in various army schools, was his mentor and it was she who presented her son with an air rifle as a schoolboy. Parents wanted him to join the army as he showed leadership qualities even as a child. The shooting was not in his mind and at the school level, he excelled in cricket as an all-rounder. He would bowl medium pacer and batted with determination to excel as a cricketer. He worked hard to make it to the National Defence Academy (NDA), where the written examination is a tough competition. At the NDA, he excelled in all the sports.

After graduating from the NDA, Rathore attended the Indian Military Academy (IMA), where he was awarded the *Sword of Honour* for the best all-round Gentleman Cadet. He was also the recipient of the Sikh Regiment Gold Medal, awarded to the best sportsman of the course.

He was later commissioned in the 9th Grenadiers (Mewar) Regiment in 1990, and was promoted to captain in 1995. Like his father, he was posted in Kupwara in Kashmir. He fought the Kargil War and was promoted to Major in 2000. While serving in Jammu and Kashmir, he participated in the counter-terrorist operation. He was a tough officer and the terrorists knew him by his name, and the enemy's intelligence always warned terrorists to make sure that they don't confront Rathore.

"It was a 'double trap.' My first big shot came from a weapon and not a sports gun," remembers Rathore, sitting in his plush house in Jaipur's Panchyawala.

He was later building a squad of marksmen and exposing the army personnel to sports guns and the idea was to encourage the armed forces personnel to take

Commonwealth Games in Manchester, Rathore won a gold medal and set a new Commonwealth Games Record of 192 targets out of 200, which still stands. He also won the Team Gold Medal along with Moraad Ali Khan Rathore, went on to successfully defend his Commonwealth Champion title at the Melbourne Commonwealth Games in 2006. He also won the silver in the Team event with Vikram Bhatnagar. He won gold medals in the World Shooting Championships, at Sydney in 2004 and Cairo in 2006.

In 2006, Rathore won a bronze medal in the World Championship in Spain, an event held for the top 12 shooters of the world. He was ranked third in the world for most of 2003 and 2004, and briefly climbed to the first in early 2004 and second after the Athens Olympics. He won a silver at the World Championship in 2003 in Sydney for India, after a gap of nearly 40 years. India had not seen a victory since Karni Singh of Bikaner, who won a silver at the 1962 World Shooting Championship in Cairo.

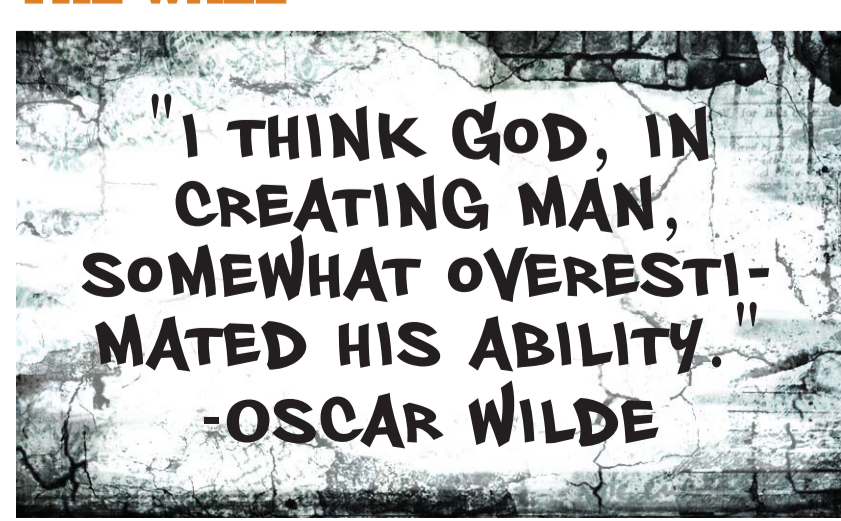
Rathore is credited with winning the Asian Clay Target gold medal, four times in a row, from 2003 to 2006. He also holds an individual bronze medal, which was at the Asiad in Doha in 2006. Between 2002 and 2006, he won 25 international medals at various championships for Double Trap. In 2011, Rathore participated in the Asian Clay Target Championship in Kuala Lumpur and won gold. His score of 194 in that tournament equals a

world record. Rathore's life changed after he won the Athens Olympic silver medal. It was a remarkable achievement for an army officer, who was trained to handle weapons and not a sports gun. Following his silver medal victory in Athens, his life changed. He was honoured by the Rajasthan government that hosted a reception for him and the former Chief Minister, Vasundhara Raje, honoured him in the presence of MLAs and MPs and bureaucrats. From a national hero, he was inducted in politics and the persons behind it were Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Vasundhara Raje. He had many years of life as a shooter, but the politics in the National Rifle Association of India (NRA) and his subsequent ill-treatment, at the hands of the sports officials, made him disgusted. He had to make a very important decision of his life whether to quit army and sport and join politics. He gave up the glamour job of an Army Colonel and hung his rifle to join politics and was elected from Jaipur (Rural) to the Lok Sabha and became a Union minister of Sports. Rathore won his second Lok Sabha election from Jaipur (Rural) again and just before the Vidhan Sabha election in 2023, he was asked by the party to be active in the state politics. He was fielded from Jhotwara, which was part of the assembly constituency of Jaipur (Rural). He had a thumping victory and was made a Cabinet minister in Bhajanlal Sharma's government.

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THE WALL



"I THINK GOD, IN CREATING MAN, SOMEWHAT OVERESTIMATED HIS ABILITY."
-OSCAR WILDE

BABY BLUES



"A MAN ON WITH TWO OUTS..."

"...BALL TWO."

"WE SHOULD HUNT FOR BIGFOOT."

"THAT WAS ONE OF YOUR MORE RANDOM THOUGHTS."

By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

ZITS



"HOW IS IT GOING AT WORK, JEREMY?"

"GOOD."

"GUYS ARE ACTUALLY COMING IN THE STORE AND ASKING ME TO HELP CHOOSE WHAT TO WEAR."

"THEY CALL ME 'THE FASHION SAMURAI.'"

"THIS COFFEE IS TOO STRONG. I'M HEARING THINGS."

By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman