

# A LIFE LESS ORDINARY

A noble narrative with twist and turns, Princess Rajyashree Kumari of Bikaner's life is anything but ordinary

BY ROCKY THONGAM

“It won't be only about handsome princes, for sure” she declares about her autobiography, “but rather a gritty story.” It's a nippy winter morning; tea has been served in flawless China, only the scones and jam are missing. Princess Rajyashree of Bikaner is holding an early court. Her story is indeed about resolute and resolve but not without spectacles as she announces. If there is an element of drama in royal fables, the princess' story takes centre stage. She took up a gun when she was six years old and shot her way up to an Arjuna award. When she had collected enough trophies, she left for England to live an ordinary life. But fate had grander plans. She came home to take over the erstwhile royal house of Bikaner and its interests.

Today, she dons many crowns. Apart from taking care of the hotels and other business interests under her patronage, the techno-savvy royal is the chronicler of her family's past and has authored books on her family history. She campaigns for road safety and against animal cruelty. At the midst of numerous engagements, Rajyashree Kumari chairs a number

of charitable and religious trusts too. But work doesn't keep her away from finding time to get pensive. Her childhood memories are as sharp as a whip. “My father represented the country in five Olympics and he trained me well. By the age of 15, I found myself competing at the National Shooting Champion in Madras (Chennai) in 1968. Next year, the Arjuna Award was in my lap.” She fails to mention the fact that, in Madras, that year, she had won every category she had competed in, winning the largest number of medals. By 1975, she had a treasure trove of trophies of her own, but winning one has special value for her. She won the second place in trap shooting in the National Championship held in Chandigarh the same year. The first place went to her dad, Dr. Karni Singhji. “I use to tease him

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to retire and let me win a few more medals. Had I beaten him in that Championship, I think he would have been extremely proud.”

In an era, while most of her counterparts have given up their purple robes and donned the khadi, she stands out as an exception. Though pursued and wooed by the major political parties, she rejects being at the helm of affairs when it comes to politics. “My father Dr. Karni Singhji, the Maharaja of Bikaner was my biggest influence. He taught me the values I stand by today,” she states. “I enjoy politics but I'm a passive participant. I doubt, I'll make a good politician, I shoot too straight to be one. But I admire what the Aam Admi Party is doing,” she pronounces.

Going back to those golden days, the shooter in her, still remembers the look on the army captain's face when the princess, a 14-year old at that time, defeated him during the National trials in 1967. “I can never forget the look on his face, shocked to be defeated by a chit of a school girl,” she says.

The chit of a girl's score, 358/400 set at Ahmedabad, is still the highest, shot in the standing position by any Indian. ■

