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The healing effects of crossbow shooting

- By Ravi Nagahawatte
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Indian national crossbow shooting team members Rajat Vij (right) and Kamaljeet Singh who were in Sri Lanka a few days ago want to promote the sport in this island (Pic by Ravi Nagahawatte)

One can use the crossbow for many things starting from hunting to relieving stress. India is a country which is fast making progress with the crossbow in terms of championship shooting. Two members of the Indian national crossbow shooting team, Rajat Vij and Kamaljeet Singh were in Sri Lanka a few days ago. The duo in an interview with The Nation spoke about their passion for crossbow shooting and their intention to popularize the sport popular in the Asian region.

A striking feature about these shooters is that they were calm as cucumbers during the interview. Rajat, fondly known as Ravi, is a businessman dealing in leather and does crossbow shooting to relax and take part in competitions. "It's a great way to relax after a hectic day at work. I am a national player, so I even practice at home. I have a shooting range at home. Sometimes, I do a round of shooting at home before heading to office," says the 31-year-old Rajat who is from Agra, a stone's throw away from the world renowned Taj Mahal. His teammate Singh is not very fluent in English, but manages to tell me that crossbow shooting helps an individual build character and most importantly self-image. The duo did India proud by finishing with a rating of four in the Forest round at the 2013 Sixth World Championships, hosted by Sweden.

Rajat says that bringing a medal in any form of shooting is not a dream anymore for Indians, thanks largely to Abhinav Bindra who won gold for his country at the 10 M rifle event at the 2008 Beijing Olympics. "What Indian now needs is a medal in crossbow shooting," Rajat points out while talking about the requirements to make the sport popular.

Crossbow shooting has healing powers. There was a period when Rajat was coping hard to negotiate his mother's demise. He was shattered by this death in the family. There was one man who noticed this and recommended that he try crossbow shooting. This man was Anil Kaushik, the National President of the Crossbow Shooting Association of India. "I was postponing this meeting with Kaushik eternally, but one day I went and met him and fell in love with the crossbow instantly. I immediately inquired about prices and invested money on a crossbow," recalls Rajat.

The use of the crossbow dates back to the second half of the 4th century BC. It was used for military purposes. This weapon was also used in medieval warfare. History also reveals that the crossbow was used in hunting, especially in whaling. But the crossbow received wide attention from audiences when a filmmaker chose it as the main weapon in the television series 'Crossbow'. This television series was created by Anthony Horowitz. The weapon became even more popular with the television series William Tell, which caught on like influenza among kids and teenagers in Sri Lanka in the 1980s.

Crossbow is an expensive sport and according to Rajat expenses for the sport is borne in India by private associations. However, the Indian Sports Ministry is happy with India's performances in crossbow despite the country having taken to the sport only one year ago. One has to have strong arms to carry the weapon and shoot during championships. A weapon weighs between 6-10kg. "The sport brings the mind into play a good deal, so it helps develop concentration. You have to control the shaking of the hand and you can't be concentrating elsewhere," Singh explains. Singh has a spiritual side to his being and says he lives in a home which is very close to nature. It doesn't come as a surprise when he reveals he doesn't use internet and is not on Facebook. Singh is also a vegetarian.

Indian crossbow association boss Kaushik, via an email interview, showered praise on Rajat and Singh for being committed shooters. These two crossbow players intend to promote the sport in South Asia. Rajat even has ambitions of taking to coaching if the Sri Lankan authorities present him with an opportunity.

The only low point in the trip to Sri Lanka was that they failed to bring along a crossbow. "The crossbow is a dangerous weapon and requires the clearance of foreign authorities if a player intends to take it to another country. This is why we dropped the idea of bringing it here and thus saved ourselves from inviting unwanted problems," explains Rajat. Rajat and Singh are firm believers that age is no barrier when it comes to crossbow shooting. "When the crossbow bug bites you the passion you develop for the sport stays with you forever," says Rajat.