

The Winning Flight



75-year-old Ashok Purandare has a unique hobby — raising and training 150 pigeons for annual races

training the young ones for the upcoming race. "A piece of cloth is attached to a long stick and waved gently to signal their flight. In the course of such a single flight, the young pigeons can fly to a distance of eight kilometers and more. Their flight ends when the stick is waved by the owner several times to signal their landing. They are often lured back when grains are strewn over the rooftop along with a bar of salt," he describes. Wild and sick pigeons flock along with Purandare's birds for food but he avoids such breeding as they carry germs.

The terrace of the Purandare residence has four large, wired enclosures with separate compartments for the males, females, injured, 'pension wallahs' and the young ones. There is a different 'maternity hospital' for the birds to breed in winter. "Summers and the monsoons make the breeding birds more susceptible to illnesses. The moulting birds are rarely set to fly as they are in a process of growing feathers.

"The pigeons are my military boys," says Purandare, who treats the birds as his children. They are subjected to a disciplined military training which prevents any liaison with female birds. "When attracted to them, the faujis refuse to fly. They keep chasing the girls!" he chuckles.

SWASTI CHATTERJEE

SEVENTY-FIVE-YEAR-OLD Ashok Purandare, who resides at Kapila Society, Gokhale Nagar, has a unique way of keeping busy in the afternoons. He whiles the hours away with the 150-odd pigeons he has as pets on the rooftop of his house! From the Royal Indian Navy Bloodline pigeons to the Carriers and the Madras Club pigeons got from

Orissa, Chennai and England, Purandare has been a proud owner for 60 years now. "Something which started as a reason for escaping school has now become a full-time hobby for me. As a child too, I was very interested in keeping pigeons and connecting with them," says Purandare who was a senior vet officer at the Institute of Veterinary Biological Products, Aundh.

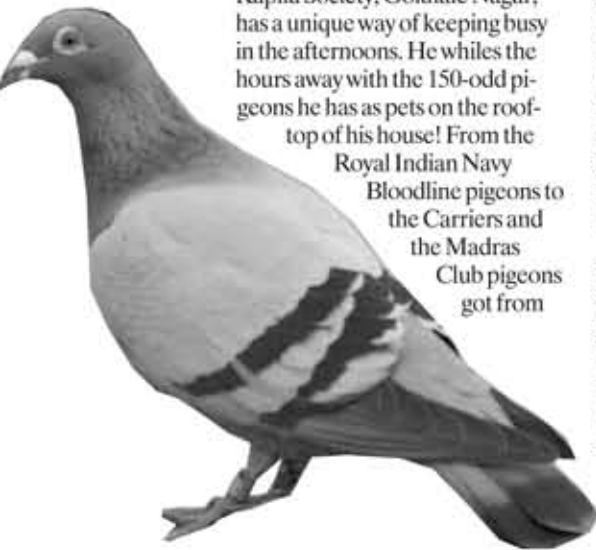
Purandare was initially fond of low flying, fancy pigeons. However, after his two-month casual 'observation' in England and the USA, his eyes fell on the Homing pigeons - a breed of domestic racer pigeons. "They are named so because they can locate their nests even over extremely long distances after fly-

ing for three hours at a stretch," Purandare explains. When on holiday, Purandare takes the pigeons to Panchgani or Mumbai and leaves them there with "no worries whatsoever. They fly back in an hour or three hours, depending on the location" he says.

The Pigeon Club of Pune organises races between November and March. During this period, pigeons from the entire region of Pune and Mumbai are set free to race. The time it takes to cover the distance is measured and then compared to the flight time of the other pigeons. The owner of the fastest pigeon is rewarded.

The training for the races continues throughout the year with only a month of rest in the monsoons. Purandare is currently

The real cool dude



Shuja Ahmed at his store in Camp; (below) Feroz Ali and Ashfaq Attar

The FESTIVE SCENT

It is only during Ramzan that the attar sales shoot up, say attar sellers who supplement their income by selling bottled sprays, incense sticks and candles through the year

ROHAN SWAMY

IN the winding maze behind Bhopla Chowk in Camp, at a blink-and-you-miss corner, Shuja Ahmed sits in a small shack with a collection of perfumes in pretty glass bottles in the background. With people buzzing in and out of his shop to get a whiff of the scents, it is business as usual for this third-generation perfume seller. At the other end of the city, near the Tamboli Masjid, sits Ismail Shaikh, who runs the two-generation-old Shiakh Attarwala shop. The same bottles and the overwhelming fragrances engulf you. Like every year, Ramzan has resulted in the sales shooting up at the stalls of attar sellers at Tamboli Masjid, Babajan Chowk, Deccan, Bhopla Chowk, Sacchapir street and Synagogue Street.

"They are all pure and do not contain any alcohol. They are natural extracts and essences hence their fragrances linger on for longer time spans," informs Ahmed. His store, Ahmed Perfumes, was established in 1953 by his grandfather Abdul Qadir. Some of the essences sold include



the Majmua, Patcholi and Shamama that comprise ingredients like henna, musk, amber and khus.

Shaikh says, "Unlike perfumes that are sold in millilitres, attar is sold in grams. A 2.5 gram bottle of attar can cost anywhere between Rs 30 to Rs 60. Higher weight bottles like the 5 gm or the 10 gm ones can cost between Rs 70 to Rs 300. Some of the most expensive perfumes include the Oodh, and the Resheequa that use floral extracts." Shaikh's father used to make the perfume extracts himself earlier.

Feroz Ali and Ashfaq Attar, who run FAA Perfumes located on Sacchapir street, say that the art of making the perfumes is slowly dying. "This is because of mass production. Plus, attars alone don't sell. We have to stock perfume sprays too. Even though they are alcohol-based, we have to sell them. People want them. Hence making them in small quantities doesn't justify costs," says Attar.

"Mukhallat-e-Mallaki and the Jannat-UI-Firdaus are some of the most expensive perfumes we sell. They cost up to Rs 5000 per tola (10 grams). These essences come from far-off places like Assam, Kannauj and are made from sandalwood, henna, and rose extracts," says Ahmed.

Twenty-one-year-old Arif Sayyed, whose small 'Bharat Perfumes' near Deccan has been selling perfumes for over 50 years says that the profit margins are very less. "People now prefer sprays. A lot of them say that the strong fragrances of attars are overwhelming. And sales around the year are usually not very high except during Ramzan. During the year, we have to supplement this by selling bottled sprays and perfumes, kohl, incense sticks and even scented candles," he says.

The swish set

Freedom from Plastic

INDEPENDENCE can mean many things. For students, teachers and parents of Aman Setu School, it means freedom from plastic waste. On Independence Day, students collected plastic bottles from their neighbourhoods in various sizes (including saline bottles). When parents arrived at the school for the flag hoisting, they were divided into eight groups and each group was allotted one panel of a 40-foot fence. They had hacksaws, blades, cut-



ters, wire and rope and each group used its imagination to turn bottles into butterflies, prayer wheels and so on. These designs were then embedded in the bamboo frames that had been fixed in the ground. Impromptu music by children and teachers added to the carnival atmosphere. To add to the 'independence' mood, a tricoloured cake and idlis with carrots and beans were served.

On top of the world

ANJALI JHANGIANI

"I was born in the Himalayan mountains and grew up playing at the foothills of the Everest," says Kame, Sherpa who has climbed the summit of Mount Everest 11 times and is gearing up for his next expedition in 2012 with Giripremi's Pune Everest team. The 42-year-old mountain guide, who was in the city for an event by Giripremi, started his career with trekking after a thorough training at Nepal Mountaineering Institution, Kathmandu. "The duty of a sherpa is to guide the climber to the summit of the Everest and the duty of the climber is to co-operate with the Sherpa for his own good," says Kame.

"The journey is extremely strenuous, tedious and expensive," he adds. Having grown up in the district of Solukhumbu, the sherpas are naturally adapted to high altitude, scarce oxygen and extreme cold.

Wongchu Sherpa, Kame's colleague, says, "Some people come to us and say that they will pay lots of money to take them to Everest, but we don't encourage

These sherpas from Solukhumbu district in Nepal share their tales of the might of the Himalayas and their survival strategies

them to embark upon the journey without any training and physical fitness. Our job is to help people organise the entire expedition and get the required permits." The sherpa is the one who can help a climber survive at great heights. They are thoroughly aware of the geographical features of the area as well as survival strategies when one is left at the mercy of nature. "My first expedition to the summit of Everest was in 1997 with the IMAX team," remembers Kame. "They travelled with cameras that weighed over 60 pounds apart from the usual load of equip-

Kame Sherpa has climbed the Mount Everest 11 times



Wongchu Sherpa (left) feels that climbers should cooperate with the sherpas

ments and tents," he adds. The IMAX team was on an expedition to film a 3D documentary on the journey to the top of the world. "Sometimes climbers get over-enthusiastic even when they have no energy. They want to climb to the top at a stretch but they only cause harm to their health in this way," says Kame.

The sherpas suggest necessary breaks to rest and regain energy throughout the expedition. They read the weather correctly and design the route to be taken by the team of climbers. "We pray at the

base camp for clear weather as we proceed to the top. Weather can change in a fraction of a second. If you burn something like paper or garbage, it becomes windy and snowy," says Wongchu.

The Everest is sacred for the sherpas. "We call it the Lady Guard and believe that people are punished for their sins against women when they come here," says Wongchu, as Kame adds, "When you climb to the top of the world, you will find yourself closer to God. Even if you claim to be a non-believer, nature will teach you how to pray here."

the real party

PHOTOS: PAVAN KHENGRE