



IN HIS SERVICE

DECEMBER / 2018

A NEWSLETTER FROM MEHERABAD

Road Expansion to Affect Meherabad

The road from Ahmednagar to Daund (Dhond), known as Maharashtra State Highway 10, passes right through Meherabad. Construction is now beginning to widen this road into a four-lane highway, as part of a Government highway expansion project. The new highway will undoubtedly change the face of lower Meherabad, the unavoidable “progress” of modernization. What the impact will mean for the preservation of Baba’s Home and for pilgrimage to it is not entirely known yet, and the Trust is working with Government representatives to minimize unwanted effects.

Reaching back into Meher Baba history, we remember that Baba first arrived at the Meherabad location in May 1923, on foot from Ahmednagar, traversing this same route when it was an unpaved roadway that led to the village Arangaon and the old abandoned British army camp on the village outskirts. The camp property had been purchased from the government by Baba’s disciple Adi K. Irani’s father Kaikhushru, and it became Meher Baba’s ashram and headquarters from that time forward. In early years, the traffic was mainly bullock carts, horse carriages, bicycles, and pedestrians. The road was lined with neem trees planted by the government and we know that Baba took rest in that isolated place, on that very first day, under the shade of a neem tree next to a nice large well.

We also know that the early development of Meherabad took place on both sides of that road: Baba’s Table House, His Jhopdi, and the Dhuni on one side; the old Post Office, Hazrat Babajan School, Sai Darbar, and the Path up the Hill on the other. With half the ashram operating up the Hill, the road

was crossed on foot countless times by the Avatar Himself, as well as all the mandali, residents, and visitors to Meherabad throughout the ensuing years.

The road has of course been paved, repaired, and widened over the years, but this new expansion is on a different order of magnitude for Meherabad. For almost two years now, representatives of the Trust have submitted proposals and met with Government Highway Department officials, designers, and road contractors in Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, and on site at Meherabad, to mitigate the effect the expanded highway will have on Lower Meherabad.

The Trust has explained to the Government the extreme importance of preserving, as it is today, the side of the highway where we have the Dhuni, the Dhuni Tree, Gilori Shah’s Samadhi, the neem tree under which Baba sat when first coming to Meherabad, and the

Original Well, which Baba first drank from and which provided water for Meherabad in the early days.

To protect these sites, the Government has agreed to move the center line of the highway where it passes Meherabad, creating a curve through that section,

so road expansion will not take place on that side of the road. This means that road expansion will take place on the other side of the road, the side toward the Samadhi, which will not disturb existing Baba sites.

An old neem tree on that side of the road had to be taken down, and another had already died some years ago. These stately old neems, on both sides of the road, are from Baba’s time and hold a special place in the hearts of Baba lovers, for their part in the story of Meherabad, and also for their beauty

and shade. But in fact these trees are not on Trust property and they belong to the Indian Government as part of the road easement. For this reason, we are grateful that the Government is working to accommodate our wishes for the preservation of the trees and the important Baba sites on one side of the road.

Construction on the highway expansion project is well underway coming from the direction of Ahmednagar, and has now reached the outskirts of Arangaon, with preliminary widening, and installation of huge drainage culverts. Currently, the Trust is working with the Government on a proposal to build a 50-foot-wide pedestrian tunnel under the expanded highway for the safety of Baba pilgrims.

Perhaps these changes indicate that Baba is paving the way for His future lovers to come to Meherabad in ever greater numbers.



Baba standing at the edge of the Meherabad (Daund) Road, near the Dhuni and Table House, early 1940s.



Baba walking past the Table House on the Meherabad Road in 1954. The tall tree is the one now known as the Dhuni tree, which will be preserved along with the other Baba sites on that side of the road.

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Dear Baba Family,

As the upcoming Amartithi approaches, I cannot help but feel amazed that fifty years have passed since Beloved Baba left His physical form. In some ways it seems just a short while ago that His precious body was laid into the crypt in His Samadhi, as mandali and Baba lovers worldwide struggled to come to terms with His departure. I recall the mandali determining day by day that His body was still fresh and the crypt could be kept open just a little longer, giving lovers from far-flung places the chance to arrive and feast their eyes on His physical form one last time. At last on February 7th, which was Baba's birthday according to the Zoroastrian calendar, the Beloved was interred in His tomb, in the presence of His closest ones and all those who had been blessed to be present.

Now today we commemorate that moment in time, and our connection to Avatar Meher Baba, the God-Man who walked this earth in our time. We still have many among us who knew and served Baba

during His lifetime. If they were in their 20s when He dropped His body, they are now in their 70s. If they were in their 30s, they are now above 80! Let us reach out to one another and share the reminiscences as well as our current experiences with Him, as we go forward into the next era.

Our activities at Meherabad continue to give expression to the forms of love inspired by the Beloved. In October, we conducted the second annual Century of Love program, a one-day focus on the year 1918 in Baba's life. In November, the Bombay Centre delighted us with a continuation of their series of dramas on Baba's advent.

In late December, we are expecting a group of twenty school children and their teachers from Harvan, Kashmir, the place Baba had visited and where He indicated Jesus was buried. Supported and organized by a group of Baba lovers from Hyderabad, known as Endless Journey of Love, the trip is being offered to children of low economic means and is the first time any of them have come to Meherabad. For some it may be the first time they have been outside

their village. During their visit, they will have tours of Meherabad and Meherazad and they will perform skits and dances on the topic of Baba in Kashmir! We are really looking forward to their visit.

Shridhar Kelkar, Chairman
Avatar Meher Baba Trust
Avatar Meher Baba ki Jai!

Avatar Meher Baba Trust Chairman Selected

At the latest meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Avatar Meher Baba PPC Trust, Shridhar Kelkar was again selected as Chairman of the Trust. He will serve as Chairman until 2022, when he retires as per the Rules and Regulations of the Board of Trustees.

Jai Baba!

Remembering 50 Years Ago



Baba's body rested on ice blocks for 7 days, remaining unexpectedly fresh, while His lovers came from afar to glimpse His form one last time.

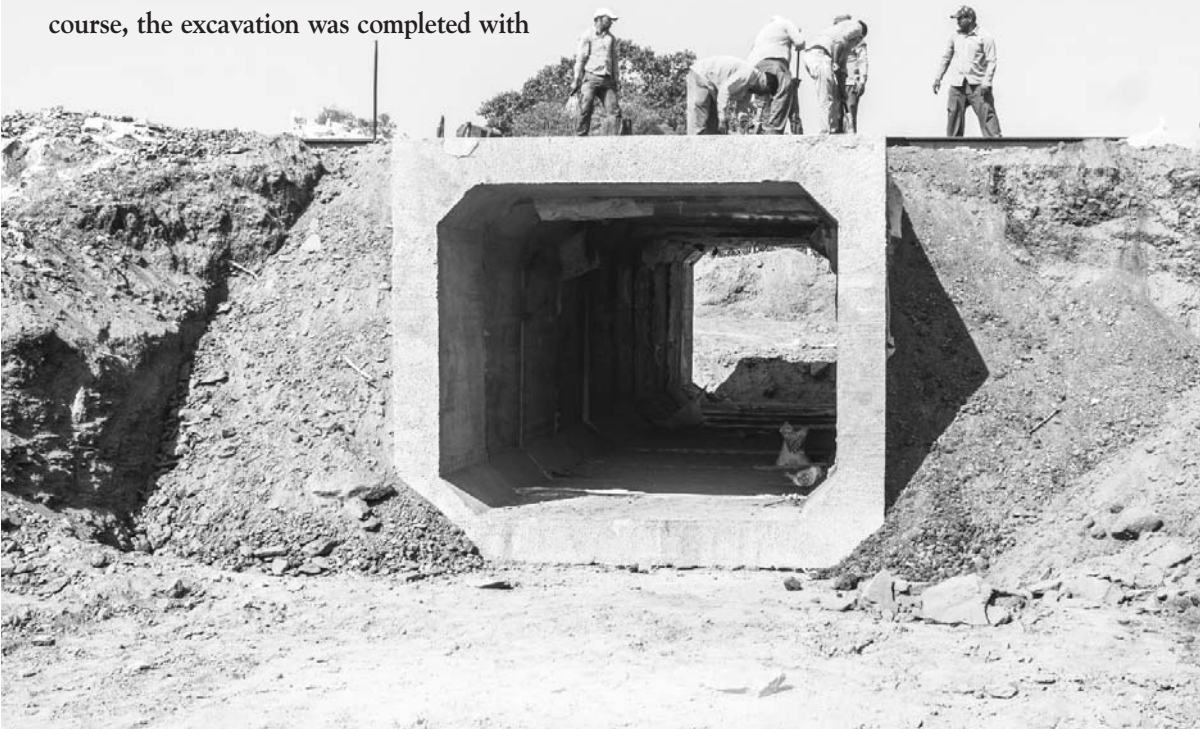


Sitting with Baba in the Samadhi—Rustom and Sohrab Irani, Harry Kenmore, Don Stevens, Delia DeLeon, and Sarosh Irani.

Pedestrian Underpass Update

After an inexplicable delay of several months, the Railway Department performed their magic and installed the cement sleeves for the Pedestrian Underpass under the railway line at lower Meherabad. Trains were halted, of course, the excavation was completed with

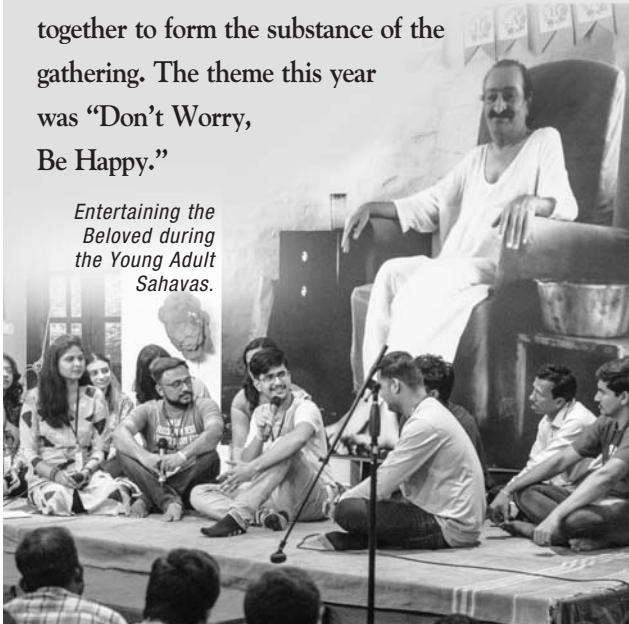
heavy machinery, and the massive pieces were fitted into place by crane. Generations of Baba pilgrims will benefit by being able to safely navigate the crossing of the railway line that divides upper and lower Meherabad.



Young Adult Sahavas

Approximately 130 young adult Baba lovers from all over India (and one person from America) gathered at Meherabad in June for a 7-day Sahavas with Baba. The annual event is a full week of special activities focused on the participants' relationship with Meher Baba. Arts and entertainment, service projects, discussion groups, tours, and Baba history all weave together to form the substance of the gathering. The theme this year was "Don't Worry, Be Happy."

Entertaining the Beloved during the Young Adult Sahavas.



BEGIN THE BEGUINE: Not an End but the Beginning

This year, as we commemorate the completion of 50 years since Baba dropped His body, we take a look at our tradition of playing the recording of the song “Begin the Beguine” during Amartithi, as it originated with Baba Himself.

Every year, on 31st January, when Meher Baba’s lovers converge on Meherabad Hill to commemorate Amartithi, just before noon the recording of “Begin the Beguine” is played over the loud-speakers. Baba said it was His favorite English song and that it had “eternal meaning.” He listened to it many times during His lifetime, and instructed His women mandali to learn to sing it. Most specifically, Baba ordered Eruch to play the song when He dropped His body.

Although Baba did not explain why He wanted the song played, time and again throughout the years He would remind Eruch to have it played, whatever the circumstances, when He dropped His body. Whether in India or Timbuktu, two orders stood: Bring My body back to Meherabad Hill and play “Begin the Beguine.”

Often His lovers have speculated about the spiritual significance of this song and why it should have been played on 31st January 1969, the date that Beloved Avatar Meher Baba dropped His physical form. One can attribute many qualities to the song, as it is a love song of human regret at separation from one’s beloved, a renewed remembrance of the time when they were together, and the longing to be with one’s beloved again. These qualities are comparable to those of the divine romance between the lover and the Beloved. However, the answer to why Baba wished it to be played remains a mystery. What is of lasting significance is not just the song itself but His order to play it.

Baba did not say in His lifetime that “Begin the Beguine” should be played in the future after He dropped His body. But by continuing to play this song at His Amartithi observance, His lovers may take the opportunity to remember Him in the most personal way, as the Perfect Man among men. It offers us a special connection to that sacred and momentous time



Mehera and Mani inside the Samadhi after Baba dropped His body in 1969. The gramophone can be seen in the corner playing the record “Begin the Beguine.”

when the God-Man dropped His human form to live in His lovers’ hearts eternally.

Baba’s sister Mani recounted in *82 Family Letters* the events she and the mandali were witness to in those last hours and minutes after Baba had passed away from their midst, and at that time she wrote about the playing of “Begin the Beguine”:

“Although we started out from Meherazad on that Friday evening with hearts numbed and empty, our hands had been kept occupied in doing the things that the Beloved would want us to do. In the midst of many practical details that Eruch was seeing to, he reminded me to take along our gramophone and the record of “Begin the Beguine.” Eruch said that Baba had told him, many times over the years, to play this song by His side when He dropped His body. And so on that night of 31st January, and the next day, seven times I played the song of “Begin the Beguine” by His side—at first in the Cabin where His body rested for a while and later in the Tomb. And while the song played, it seemed to convey to us His message that this was not an end but the beginning—the beginning of His completed work bearing fruit. A day before dropping the body, even while the movement of His fingers brought on a renewed spasm, Baba told us, ‘All this, all that I have been through all along, has been a preparation for the Word—for just the One Word!’ And with a quizzical smile He added ‘Just imagine!’”

A “beguine” is a type of dance from the Caribbean region, similar to a slow “rumba.” It became more widely known in the 1930s after the song by Cole Porter became popular. The words of the song evoke romantic images of tropical sea breezes and swaying palms. By the end of the song, the lover is once again dancing with his/her beloved. During Amartithi, Baba’s many lovers and new followers will be “dancing” with Him, too, in love or joy or memory or new-found delight, even for a day or two. As the final refrain of the song says:

*Oh yes, let them begin the beguine, make them play,
Till the stars that were there before, return above you,
Till you whisper to me once more, “Darling I love you,”
And we suddenly know what heaven we’re in,
When they begin the beguine.”*

Mahogany Trees to Grace Path to Samadhi

In anticipation of the huge crowds that will gather around the Samadhi in the future, thousands of shade trees have been planted all around Meherabad Hill. To allow pilgrims the sight of Baba’s Samadhi and the future Superstructure, view corridors have been designed radiating from the Samadhi. One view corridor has recently been planted with seeds of Mahogany trees. This corridor is a wide pathway extending from the area of the Amartithi New Site straight to the Samadhi.

Mahogany trees were chosen for their size, longevity, and shading canopy. They are fairly fast growing, reaching their mid-height of 20 feet in 2 years. For these trees to live long and healthy lives, they were planted by seed so that they can establish their root systems naturally, in

situ. Great care is being taken to protect them from drought, sun, insects, goats, etc., and they are carefully placed to eventually cast shade along the corridor without obscuring sight of the Samadhi.

The line of “tree cages” protecting the young shoots. Shade cloth and drip irrigation lines protect and support each growing seedling.

Tree Plantation

In July this year, truckloads of sapling trees, and the accompanying workers for planting them, were seen being delivered to two large tracts of Trust land to the west of the main part of Meherabad. The Maharashtra Government’s Social Forestry Department has provided these huge plantations for environmental enhancement. Ten hectares (25 acres) in all were planted, with a mixture of ten different species of drought-hardy trees. One site is west of the Pilgrim Education (Amartithi) Site and the other is in the same direction but further to the north, near the boundary of the town Kedgaon. At each site, 5,555 trees were planted, totaling over 11,000 trees. The Forestry Department will

maintain the plantations for three years, providing water by trucks.

The species represented are both large- and medium-sized trees, and include the Neem tree, so well known in this area for its many excellent qualities, and associated with Baba as the type of tree He first rested under at Meherabad in 1923. Another is the Peepal tree, famous in India as the species under which Buddha attained enlightenment. Some of the species are flowering and fruit-bearing, and one, the “Monkey Jack,” is known for a chutney made from its fruits. The saplings appear to be doing well, despite a poor monsoon season.



Unloading and planting the new saplings.

Baba’s 93rd Silence Day Anniversary

“Things that are real are given and received in silence.” Meher Baba began His silence on July 10th, 1925, which He continued throughout His advent. For many years before He dropped His body, Baba asked His lovers to honor the beginning of His silence by keeping silence themselves for 24 hours on July 10th. This opportunity has been continued ever since, as Baba lovers around the world join their Beloved in keeping silence on that day each year.

This past Silence Day, Meherabad hosted 1,537 visiting (overnight) pilgrims who came to Baba’s sacred ground to commemorate His Avataric Silence together. The Samadhi as always was the central point of devotion, and the Jhopdi, the small room where Baba stayed in 1925, was open for darshan on that day.



Pilgrims visiting the Jhopdi where Baba began His Silence in 1925.

How to Contribute

The Avatar Meher Baba Trust is supported entirely by love-gifts from Meher Baba’s lovers around the world. In truth, it is Baba Himself who gives through your hands, and it is Baba Himself who brings the objects to completion which He Himself laid down in the Trust Deed, when it pleases Him to do so.

Contributions can be made directly to the Trust at: AMBPPC Trust, Post Bag No. 31, King’s Road, Ahmednagar 414001, MS, India. Donations may be sent by personal check or demand draft payable to Avatar Meher Baba PPC Trust and may be in any currency. In addition, a few Baba organizations in the USA and UK have established legal means to accept tax-deductible donations and transfer them to the Trust.

In the UK: Please send tax-deductible contributions to Meher Baba Association, c/o Sue Chapman, 2 Chapel Hill Row, Craster, Northumberland NE66 3TU, tel. 01 665 57 69 57, e-mail suchapman@hotmail.com.

In the USA, to make tax-deductible donations to support the Development Plan and/or Operating Expense grants being made to the Trust, please see the Trust’s website (click on the “How to Help” button or search www.ambppct.org/fNat.php). The webpage lists the names and addresses of the U.S. Meher Baba tax-exempt organizations that make grants to the Trust and also provides information on making donations to the Trust by bequest or beneficiary designation.

Trust financial information is provided annually in the Trust Financial Report, sent out with the June/July issue of this newsletter and posted on the Trust website. The Financial Report details information on Trust receipts and expenditures; it also provides a current and projected expenditures report for the Trust Development Plan. More information can be found in the Trust’s website at www.avatarmeherbabatrust.org.

Coaching Classes for Pimpalgaon-Malvi Students

Last year we shared with our readers the opening of the Trust’s new Educational Facility near Meherazad, for eighth and ninth standard students who wish to avail themselves of extra tutoring in English, Science, and Mathematics.

Since that time many more students from Pimpalgaon-Malvi village have joined these morning classes before their regular school day begins to get an extra boost in their learning process. For many rural village children overcoming the roadblocks they face in their educational experience can seem insurmountable. Many live in one-room homes where the atmosphere is not conducive to study. They might not even have a reliable supply of electricity. It is quite common in India for children to take tutoring sessions throughout their educational journey. But for poor, rural families, these facilities are not easily available.

So, to help those children who are motivated to advance in their education, tutoring (“coaching”) classes were initiated last November in three subjects. The children arrive in the morning before regular school begins and attend two 45-minute classes. Sixty-three children are registered at the tutoring center this year. Next year the number will

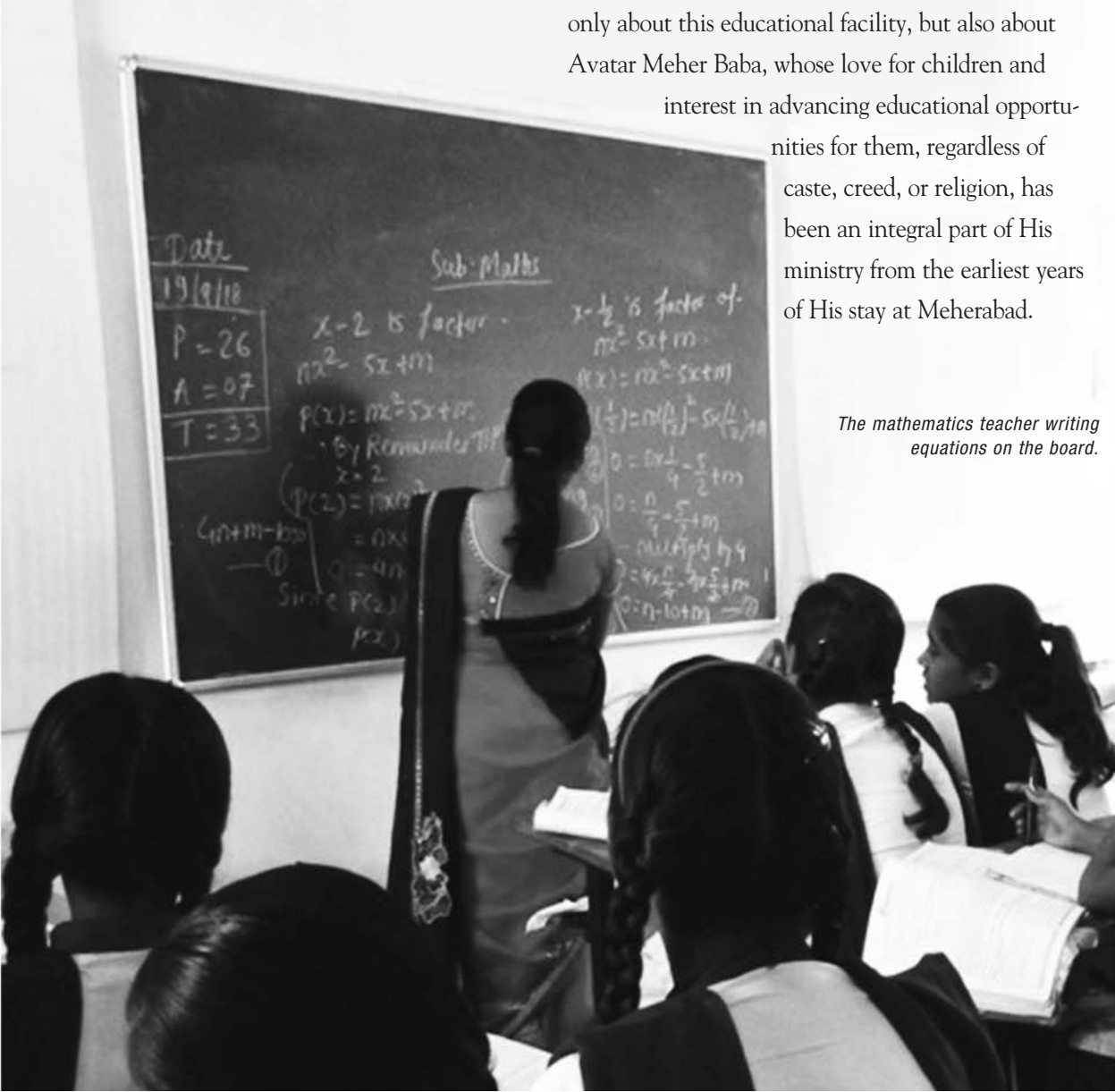
probably be held to 50 to reduce the class size to a more ideal 25 students.

Two teachers are conducting the classes. One teacher instructs in mathematics and science and the other teaches English and science. (The science classes were added at the request of students and parents.) One instructor teaches her subject to one group and then she changes to the other classroom to teach a similar subject to the other group. The Trust provides a bus for the students to easily and safely go back and forth from Pimpalgaon village, which would otherwise entail a 30-minute walk. This arrangement works very well for the school and students.

The local school principal has been involved in the project from the beginning and helped with the hiring of the two teachers. Observers have found the teachers to be enthusiastic in their desire to help the children and excellent instructors who engage the children’s interest during sessions. The science classes are taught in English, which encourages mastery of both subjects. All sessions are free to the students and their families.

Hopefully, as time goes on and the students see results from their efforts, the word will spread not only about this educational facility, but also about Avatar Meher Baba, whose love for children and

interest in advancing educational opportunities for them, regardless of caste, creed, or religion, has been an integral part of His ministry from the earliest years of His stay at Meherabad.



The mathematics teacher writing equations on the board.

WHAT IS THE AVATAR MEHER BABA TRUST?

CREATED IN 1959 under Meher Baba’s direction, the Avatar Meher Baba Trust has the purpose of fulfilling the objectives in the Trust Deed set out by Baba and the Trustees He appointed. The Trust Deed calls for the maintenance of Avatar Meher Baba’s Tomb; for the creation of pilgrim facilities; for educational, medical, and other charitable services; for estate development and procurement of sources of water; for the advancement of Avatar Meher Baba’s love-message through melas, museums, lectures, publications, and the arts; and for spiritual training.

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