

**AVATAR MEHER BABA
PERPETUAL PUBLIC CHARITABLE TRUST
ARCHIVES AND MUSEUM PROJECT**

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J *AI BELOVED MEHER BABA!* We would like to take this opportunity to share with you highlights from the activities undertaken by the Archives, Museum and Research Committee during 1998-99:

ARCHIVES, MUSEUM AND RESEARCH BUILDING. One of the most visible fruits of our labours is the large and beautiful storage facility nearing structural completion on Meherabad Hill. Concurrent with the next phase of plastering, plumbing, wiring, etc. will be the design and arrangements for furnishing the building with the archivally correct storage units, equipment and materials required to care for and document the Baba treasures and archival materials which will reside there; and to make the complex plans for safely re-locating these items from their current locations at Meherabad and Meherazad.

PRESERVATION FACILITY AT MEHERAZAD. In addition to the building at Meherabad, a much smaller, but essential storage and working facility is planned for Meherazad. The architectural plans are nearing completion, with the construction timetable yet to be established.

ADVICE AND HELP FROM EXPERTS. An important ingredient in all aspects of our preservation efforts over the past few years has been the professional help and advice we've received from leading archive and museum experts in the US. In 1995 Vince Wilcox, facility director of the Smithsonian Institution, and Joan Bacharach, registrar of the National Park Service, spent several weeks at Meherabad to assist us in finalising the plans and design of the Archives, Museum and Research Building. Through the assistance of Beth Ganz and others, we have also been able to consult with Nobuko Kajatani of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and this year she has graciously accepted our invitation to visit here at the end of November. As conservator in charge of the Department of Textile Conservation at the MET, Nobuko's guidance will be of great help to us in assessing how to best provide for the care and documentation of Baba's clothing and other textiles. Nobuko was instrumental in developing the MET's new state of the art storage and treatment facility for textiles, where a sophisticated computerised system (which includes digitised photographic images of the textiles) is used for management and access. Her experience and expertise with the many practical details of setting up the MET's facility will be invaluable to us as we plan and prepare for the completion and use of the new storage facility at Meherabad.

PRESERVATION OF BELOVED BABA'S SAMADHI. Careful and professional attention to the maintenance of this most sacred edifice is of the highest priority. The effects of environment as well as human contact on the Samadhi's physical integrity are regularly monitored. Repairs and restoration work are only attempted after exhaustive and careful consultation with experts, balanced by constant referral back to the fundamental goal of access to the atmosphere of Baba's presence in the Samadhi. An example of this is the recently fabricated ramp which can be placed over the entrance when wheelchair bound pilgrims wish to enter, so that even in such cases no one need put pressure on the sacred threshold.

PRESERVATION OF BUILDINGS, STRUCTURES AND GROUNDS. If we were to list the activities in this category it would become a massive thesis in and of itself. At Meherabad, Meherazad, and Meher Nazar, the essential conservation work of maintaining and caring for the historical buildings, structures, and grounds is a daily affair under the close attention and guidance of the Mandali, as well as the concerned staff.

TREASURES. As a result of our December 1997 Circular, its companion publication "Tips For Preserving Your Precious Baba Treasures" and personal letters sent to those who may have received correspondence from Baba, many of His lovers throughout the world, who have the guardianship of Baba treasures and archival materials, have communicated with us for further guidance regarding their care and status. This two-way communication has been very heart-warming and productive, and helps to assure us of the continued safety and availability of these precious items for generations to come.

FILM WORK. In conjunction with Meher Prasad and MEFA (Meher Baba European Film Archives), plans have been laid and work commenced on identifying the best existing originals or copies of the precious films of Beloved Baba held by or currently cared for on behalf of the Trust by those organisations and others. When this work is done several copies will be produced, so that the originals may be safely stored using the newest archival techniques.

DOCUMENT REHOUSING PROJECT. Some of the correspondence and other documents from the files kept by Baba's two secretaries, Chanji and Adi Sr., were archivally rehoused during September to November of last year. For many months prior arrangements had been carried out to gather the necessary supplies. Archival paper, folders and special enclosures could only be obtained from abroad, but the archivally-safe corrugated polypropylene boxes were designed by us and manufactured locally. When all was in place, a rotating team of twenty-eight white-gloved volunteers prepared, dusted and interleaved thousands of document pages and rehoused them into acid-free folders. Meticulous records were kept of procedures, previous document housing and relationships, and future handling/treatment needs. This enormous effort represents just

the beginning, as there is a huge quantity of documents yet to be rehoused. Not to mention the further processing of each document which will include cataloguing, indexing and scanning.

BOOK INVENTORY PROJECT. In order to insure that the copies of every book and publication by or about our Beloved Baba are preserved, an extensive inventory of all the English and other European language books held by the Trust at Meherabad, Meher Nazar, and Meherazad was completed last year, and the best available copies put aside for archival safekeeping. The next stages will include the Indian language books followed by periodicals. An important result of this inventory-taking will be the development of a “wish list” of titles and editions which the Trust still needs to complete its collections.

COMPUTER RECORDS. We have begun using *MasterLink*, the collection management database being developed by Sheriar Foundation, to computerise our catalogue records. *MasterLink* is an extremely valuable tool for compiling and managing information about all types of collection items and archival materials associated with Meher Baba, including their description, history, significance, condition, and ongoing care and preservation. As enthusiastic users, we have been working closely with the *MasterLink* development team to fine-tune how the database can best accommodate a variety of archive and museum record-keeping needs.

COLLECTION MANAGEMENT POLICY. A series of intensive working meetings were held throughout last year to draft the initial version of a document which defines and details the purpose, scope, goals, structure and activities of the committee and serves as an ongoing guideline for its work. During the first half of this year the wording and formatting of the completed portions were fine-tuned. The result is a 114 page Collection Management Policy, approved by signature of all the Mandali and officially adopted by resolution in the 114th (strictly a Baba coincidence!) meeting of the Trustees of the AMBPPCT in May of this year.

AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST. Highlights of some recent smaller, but essential, conservation and information collecting projects:

- ☛ When it was discovered that the beautiful large Rano Galey painting of Baba in the Rahuri Cabin was deteriorating, emergency measures were taken while help from professional conservators is being sought. These included relocating the painting to curtail the environmental factors which may have hastened its deterioration, as well as taking a thorough photographic survey of the entire painting including the damaged areas.
- ☛ The plexiglas case which houses the precious Kamli Coat in the Meherabad museum needs to be replaced. A custom-built case has been crafted by one of the top American professionals in the field and is expected to be in place in the museum in the near future.

- ☺ Baba's Guruprasad Chair, located in the museum, has a new inner cover which will provide increased protection from dust, insects, and other harmful environmental elements.
- ☺ Some photographic negatives from Mehera's collection have been placed in archival enclosures and the work of cataloguing them in *MasterLink* has begun.
- ☺ Many old photos that are hanging in Baba's Cabin and other buildings at Meherabad have been archivally rematted.
- ☺ As an important part of the ongoing history-taking projects at Meherabad and Meherazad, many hours of recorded recollections of the Mandali are being transcribed.
- ☺ Work has begun on detailed maps of Meherabad, Meherazad, and Meher Nazar to document the location of both historical and contemporary buildings, structures, grounds, and sites.

We are very pleased with the wide range of important work that has been accomplished, even as we realise that this is just the tip of the iceberg. Many of the activities described above are still in progress while numerous others are yet to be undertaken. As always when involved in work for Baba we have seen that things are done in His special way of making seemingly easy things difficult and impossible ones possible.

Throughout it has been so heartwarming to witness the positive responses of support for this project forthcoming from all parts of the Baba world. Many individuals have given unstintingly of their time and skills making possible the work so far completed. To be given the opportunity to help in any project for Baba is a gift in itself, but that does not lessen our appreciation of all those who have given so generously to every aspect of this work. This participation (be it through financial contributions or the arrival of just the right person or source of information when it is most needed) provide clear signs of Baba's guiding hand and perfect timing.

In His Ever Abiding Love and Service,

*Bhau Kalchuri, Meheru Irani, Meherwan Jessawala, Falu Mistry,
and Janet Judson, Meredith Klein, Shridar Kelkar,
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