

MEHERA

Part I

This book has been compiled and edited
by Janet Judson
with the assistance of
Shelley Marrich

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Mehera

compiled and edited
by Janet Judson
with the assistance of
Shelley Marrich

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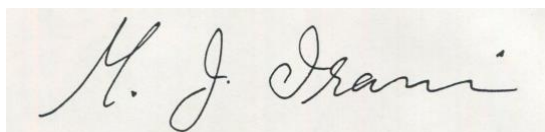
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Mehera

MEHERA

A rectangular image showing a handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature is written in a cursive style and reads "M. J. Irani".

COMPILED FROM TALKS
AND ORIGINAL TAPE RECORDINGS
OF MEHERA J. IRANI



MEHERA

She is My very breath without which I cannot live ...

Meher Baba



BELOVED BOOKS

This book has been compiled and edited
by Janet Judson
with the assistance of
Shelley Marrich

**PUBLISHED BY NAOSHERWAN ANZAR
BELOVED BOOKS**

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FOREWORD

by Mani S. Irani

MEHER BABA, the Divine Beloved of all hearts, has called Mehera His Beloved. I'm sure His lovers must wonder what this can actually mean. As Mehera's constant companion throughout our life with Baba, I can be said to be entitled to answer this unspoken question in so far as words can be entitled to speak for the heart! My words can only try, through this introduction to Mehera's book which gives a glimpse of her unique life and role in this Avataric Advent.

As Sita was for Ram, Radha for Krishna, Mary for Jesus, for this Advent of Meher Baba it is Mehera who plays the leading role. This role, of being the chosen counterpart to the God-Man, amounts to the highest, purest, most spiritual relationship, consisting of a divine love which the world cannot imagine.

This love between Baba and Mehera is in an inner realm which has nothing to do with "love" as defined in the world's dictionary. In these times, when the outer has become the altar of worship, when the wrapping of a gift often receives more attention than its contents, it is natural that everything concerning "love" should be translated into the external, the physical. But do not make that mistake about Mehera's relationship with Baba; or for that matter, about any of us living with Baba. The keynote of our life with Baba was purity, and Baba was very, very particular and strict about it. He never allowed the slightest compromise in this regard, so our relationship with Baba and with each other was always totally innocent of physical involvement.

You could even say that we were as children together around Baba. Easterners and Westerners, young and old, Baba kept us like children in this respect and shaped that childlike quality of life which leads to true purity of heart, involving self-forgetfulness and self-sacrifice of the highest order. And so, just as Mehera is

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Baba's Beloved, she is also His "child" in the spiritual sense. The absolutely clear mirror of Mehera's immaculate heart, which Baba took great pains to keep unclouded by the dust of the world, reflects Baba's image, the image of the Divine Beloved, as none other can.

From the beginning, and throughout her life with Baba, Mehera's status as His Beloved grew obvious to us in many ways. Her place was foremost in all things concerning Baba. All personal privileges in attending to Baba's Form were hers - combing His hair, trimming His moustache, cutting His nails, seeing to His clothes, and all things concerning His precious person.

Let me give you an example of Baba's relationship with Mehera that clearly indicates her special position in the kingdom of His Love. When we would be seated at the dining table, it would be Mehera who had the privilege of serving Baba. And, when Mehera would offer Him something from her plate - something she knew Baba was partial to, like a piece of cheese or some such delicacy - Baba would taste it to please Mehera and return it to her saying, "No, Mehera, you eat it; it will be just the same as if I am eating it."

Another example of Mehera's No. 1 position among us; while on occasion Baba would offer His hand to us to kiss, it was He who kissed Mehera's hand. We witnessed this natural gesture many a time, at Meherazad and Guruprasad, and happily it is captured on one of the films for you all to share.

Repeatedly Baba has said, "If Mehera is happy, I am happy." He not only said it, but He demonstrated it in a number of ways. I would notice that Baba always agreed with anything that Mehera stated. If she said, "Baba, such-and-such is so, isn't it?" He would reply, "Yes, it is so." Baba always agreed with whatever Mehera said, even when, to my mind and logic it seemed that what Baba was agreeing to could not possibly be so! Although I never said anything at such times, one day I became exasperated enough to tell Him, in Mehera's absence, "Baba, I guess if Mehera were to say that the world is square, You would agree!" Baba looked at me and solemnly nodded, "Yes, I would." Baba's reply stunned me. And it taught me a lesson as to how one pleases one's beloved. Playing the role of the lover in His relationship with Mehera, Baba was showing us how we should please Baba, our Beloved. If Baba were to tell us that the world is square, our answer as befitting a true lover should be: "Yes, Baba." If in the midst of bright daylight, He were to say it is dark, we should not only say, "Yes, Baba," but run and fetch the lantern, just as a disciple and slave of an old-time Master had done.

Foreword

So it is that Mehera, in the eternal role of Beloved to the Divine Beloved, gave Baba the opportunity to play the role of lover and show us how it should be done. This drove home to me His immense love for us. By taking on the role of lover, the Beloved demonstrates to us how we should please Him.

Every action of Baba's was multi-purpose. Even the most casual thing that Baba did not only affected each of the persons around Him, but also had universal reactions and repercussions as well. So it was with Baba-Mehera's relationship; a pure mountain stream bubbling from the heart of the world, it is not only for Mehera but for all to drink from. Anyone who misconstrues this relationship, who allows even a passing thought or doubt from a narrow mind to adulterate its purity, deprives himself from receiving of that wellspring of true love.

On 31st January, 1968- one year to the day before He set aside His lovely Form (although at the time we had no idea of the significance of that date) - Baba initiated a more public role for Mehera, who had always lived a life completely sheltered from the world. Baba kept all of the women who stayed with Him strictly apart from the men, but in Mehera's case it was again very special. For many years she could not even hear the name of any man, even for example when the newspaper was read out. Her cloistered life was the most singular. Not only had Baba given her the all-time restriction not to be touched by men - a restriction which continues even now - but not once had Mehera ever met or greeted or even seen at close range any of the men mandali who lived with Baba. But on 31st January 1968, exactly a year before the time when Mehera would perforce begin to meet Baba's lovers in the physical absence of her Beloved, Baba asked Mehera to stand beside Him on the porch of the women mandali's residence, now known as "Mehera's porch", and to greet the men mandali for the first time. He wanted her to see the men and say "Jai Baba" to them; and after the years and years of her sheltered life, Mehera was understandably nervous. Baba told her, "Don't be nervous. You'll be holding My hand, I'll be holding your hand." Baba had Mehera wear a sari for the occasion, and in His frail health He sat on a chair on the porch while she stood beside Him, her hand in His. All the resident men mandali of Meherazad, along with those from Ahmednagar and Meherabad (like Adi, Padri, Ramjoo, Chhagan etc.) silently walked up to the porch towards Baba and Mehera, and stood before them. Then, as directed by Baba, Mehera greeted them with folded hands and said, "Jai Baba". Little did we know then that with this totally unprecedented event, Baba was planting the seeds for the part Mehera would play after He dropped His body. We

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went to Poona in 1969 for that incredible "Great Darshan" in Guruprasad, when Baba's promised children came for the darshan of their unseen Beloved. Each darshan morning, we would see Mehera stand up and come to the microphone, looking up to see the large hall full of mostly new Baba-lovers, and she would greet them with a shy but clear "Jai Baba".

And, as you know, she continues to do so, day after day, week after week, month after month and year after year, as countless more of His lovers have joined those beginners' ranks towards the flood tide of humanity which will come to Baba.

Baba is the Sun and Source of all things, and whatever we offer to Him has been received by us from Him. By asking us to love Him, He is giving us the Love to love Him with.

This was even so with Beloved Baba's last message to Mehera. Shortly before He dropped His body, Baba asked me to take a message to Mehera. He told me to tell her, "Mehera, be brave." And, although it seems that Baba was asking something from Mehera with these words, in actuality Baba was giving her the courage with which to be brave. And because it came from Him, she was able to be brave during that most difficult period after He left His Form.

And so, when we were among the crowd of His lovers on Meherabad Hill during that unforgettable week of February '69, we saw Mehera greeting the Baba-lovers who came, embracing the women, comforting them with the assurance of His continued Presence. Many came from South India - even not knowing their language was no barrier. Just "Baba, Baba, Baba", the simple exchange of the Beloved's name between them and Mehera proved ample communication for their adoring hearts.

Along with our pain of separation, Baba's presence grows stronger with time. It is natural that His presence should be particularly with Mehera, whose heart He has made so pure as to perfectly reflect Him. Beloved Baba has said of His Beloved, "Mehera loves Me as I should be loved."

This Divine Romance of infinite beauty will be sung and celebrated through-out the world, inspiring lovers of God to aspire for Mehera's one-pointed love for the Beloved God-Man.

MANI

(Mani S. Irani, Baba's sister)

March, 1989

MEHERA



Beloved Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai!
May we be worthy of Your most beautiful, precious Love,
Baba, darling. May we keep loving You more and more
through good thoughts, good words, and good deeds,
and may we please You by remembering You always.

MEHERA

1

The First Glimpse

Sakori 1922



The very first time I saw Beloved Baba was in Sakori at Upasni Maharaj's ashram in 1922. I was fourteen years old. At that time in Sakori, He was known as "Merwanji".

My mother already knew of Baba and also Babajan from her sister Freny Masi (Padri's mother) and she wanted my sister and me to love and follow a Master, too. But we had no idea of spirituality or Masters, and she could not explain these things to us. How can you explain how to love and have faith in a Master; you have to feel it. She had heard of Upasni Maharaj and that Merwanji had been at Sakori with Him, so she visited His ashram in Sakori with her sister, Freny Masi, to see how it would be for us to stay there. Liking it, she decided to take us there immediately so that we could be in and feel the atmosphere of a Perfect One.

"You'll like it there," my mother told us. "The countryside is lovely, and there are some young Brahmin girls there who sing beautifully and will be company for you." She was trying to tempt us into going to Sakori. We were young and did not feel attracted to going, but of course we wanted to please her, so we went.

We arrived at Sakori (Chitali) railway station at one o'clock at night. It was almost deserted, and we girls waited while my mother searched for a tonga to take us to the ashram which was ten miles from the station.

It was still dark when we arrived at Upasni Maharaj's place, where we were met by Freny Masi. She had stayed on there while my mother had come for us girls, and we

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shared the room she had been given to stay in. We were very tired and sleepy, and so we rested a little. And in the early morning we got up, washed, and had breakfast. Then my mother told us, "The sun is up, and it's time for you both to go and see the temple."

So my sister and I went off hand in hand, but the place was quite new to us and we did not know which way to go. We wandered for some time, and then went onto a porch and into a courtyard that was surrounded on three sides by two-storied buildings. When a young Brahmin girl, whom we later discovered was Gangi, Upasni Maharaj's niece, came running up to us, we asked her to kindly show us to the temple. She took us to a very big doorway set in green lattice walls which was the entrance to a superstructure that covered this tiny temple. The temple was really very small and was inside the super-structure at the far end from the entrance.

We had barely crossed the threshold of the superstructure when we heard footsteps outside on the wooden staircase of a nearby building. Upasni Maharaj's niece said, 'Wait! Come quickly! Merwanji is coming! You must see Merwanji!'

We stepped outside without seeing the temple, and stood there while Baba came down some steps very quickly, quite close to us. Nobody had told us about Merwanji, nobody, not even my mother. She felt that we would not understand.

Baba was so near and walking very fast. He was very, very thin, and His face was also very thin from many fasts and from not caring for Himself. And He was very beautiful. He was wearing not a sadra, but a peerhan, a white top with pajama pants that Mohammedans used to wear. Baba did not look towards us. He looked straight ahead, so we only saw His profile. And we saw His very fair skin and His brown, curly hair, that was quite short - only about one and a half inches long - and quite matted. A coloured kerchief was tied around His head. So we had a long glimpse of Him while He walked quickly away from us.

We had come to visit Upasni Maharaj, but we saw Baba first, before we saw even a photograph of Upasni Maharaj or Sai Baba. At that time we did not know how blessed we were.

Maharaj's niece then took us inside the superstructure and showed us the temple. It was carved in stone, and it was so tiny that there was only space enough inside for one person to stand. Only a Brahmin priest was permitted in the temple. Side by side were two big pictures: one of Upasni Maharaj, and one of His Master, Sai Baba, Who was no longer living. It had a very nice atmosphere.

After seeing the temple we met a Brahmin woman called Durgamai, a disciple of Sai Baba, who had been told by Sai Baba that when He dropped His body she should serve Upasni Maharaj. She was a very important person in the ashram. She lived in a hut with

The First Glimpse

a thatched roof just outside the temple superstructure. Then Gangi introduced us to another woman called Subedhra, who, like Durgamai, had also been a disciple of Sai Baba and had been sent by Him to Upasni Maharaj. In this way Upasni Maharaj's niece introduced us to the whole ashram.

My sister and I returned to our room, and when at noon the arti bell rang, we all gathered around the small temple under the superstructure. All the men stood on one side, and all the women on the other; and several artis were sung. One arti that was always sung was, we found out later, the arti that Beloved Baba had composed in Gujarati for Upasni Maharaj. After arti we were given a tiny piece of prasad.

This was now the time for all to go to Upasni Maharaj's hut. So the group of men went out the front door of the superstructure, and the group of women and children went out the back door. Many were visitors who had come for a few days from places like Bombay and Poona. We went through an old hand-made gate, and walked down a lovely path which led through a mango orchard that had some young and some old and shady trees, to Maharaj's hut. We had never seen a hut like this: it was made from mud and stones with a thatched roof and a floor, not of stone, but of stamped-down earth. It was very clean and very nice.

Maharaj was inside, seated against a wall of the hut in such a way that He could look out a window and see who was entering the gate and coming down the path to the hut. All sat down inside, men on one side, women on the other, and we were in the front line. Maharaj saw that we were new, and He asked my sister and me when we had come and from where. Then He asked our names. I told Him, "Mehera."

"Mehera," He said. "That will be difficult for the Brahmin girls to pronounce; they are not used to it. I will give you the name Mira, it's the name of a saint, and from today we will call you Mira." So at home I was Mehera (which is Persian), at Sakori, Mira (which is Hindi), and in the convent school they had called me Mary (which is English).

Then Maharaj's face brightened and He looked very pleased. We were all curious to see what He was looking at. It was Baba, coming down the road towards the hut. Before entering, Baba, in respect, bowed to Upasni Maharaj at the threshold of the hut. Then He came in with His hands joined as we do when we pray, and He bowed again to Maharaj. I was very shy, and I never liked to stare, so I was looking down when Baba entered. But then I said to myself, "I must look." Baba was so very lovely standing there in front of Maharaj. Although His cheeks were hollow from many fasts, Baba's face was very beautiful. He had a moustache, but it was not a full one as He had later on.

Maharaj said to Baba, "I'm happy that You've come in time, Merwan. I was waiting for You. Wait outside for Me under the shade of a mango tree, and I'll come in a few

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minutes when I've sent the devotees home." So again Baba bowed, and He left the hut without turning His back to Maharaj. He bowed again at the threshold, and He went to sit in the shade of a mango tree.

That was the second time that we saw Beloved Baba that day, our very first at Sakori. Maharaj then told everyone to take their leave. "Quickly, quickly!" He said. He was in a hurry to meet Baba. And after joining hands to Him, we all left the hut. As we came out of the door, we glimpsed Baba sitting under the mango tree. We were somehow attracted to Him, and Baba, in white, looked very lovely under the shade of that tree.

Out of respect, we circled the hut three times, and each time we came to the front we could see Baba sitting under the tree. The Brahmin girls kept telling us, "Walk quickly," but we wanted to see how Upasni Maharaj would greet Baba. So we walked slowly down the path to the gate, and luckily the road was quite long. At the gate, we looked back again to see Maharaj come out of His hut with His sackcloth around Him and with His hand on His hip. He walked up to Baba and sat down in front of Him, very close to Baba, but they did not embrace. And then they began to talk.

So that was our third glimpse of Baba that day.

We returned to our room and had lunch. At the ashram in those days the rooms were free, and we had only to pay for our food. Many devotees ate at an inn run by a Brahmin woman, but we ate in our room. We, being young, were very hungry, so we ate well and enjoyed ourselves.

After lunch we - my mother, Freny Masi, my sister, and I - sat talking in our room. These particular guest rooms at the ashram were all in a row and had no verandah. There was a little open ground in front of them, and then a road for tongas that ended a short distance from our room. People taking tongas to and from the ashram had to take this road near our room.

Suddenly we heard the jingle-jingle of the horse bells of a tonga, and it stopped quite close to our room. Then we heard the voices of women - laughing, happy sounds - and the sound of many footsteps coming quickly. We leaned out of our door and saw Baba walking very fast towards the tonga, and many women running and laughing as they tried to keep up with Him. There were Brahmin women, young and elderly also, and some children, and some Parsi women, too.

Baba reached the tonga, caught the tonga rail, and jumped in. Baba, though so thin, was very quick and energetic in His movements. He sat in the tonga, and now Baba's feet were on the footboard of the tonga where one's feet have to rest. All the women took advantage of this and rushing, they started to bow their heads at His feet. Baba was bending down and saying, "No, no, don't, don't." Baba was talking at that time, and

The First Glimpse

we could see Him trying to stop them from doing this. But they were all hurrying and pushing, one by one, to bow down to Him, as they knew that the tonga would start at any moment. Baba turned to the tongawalla and said, "Come on, hurry up, hurry up!" And the horse started to trot, and the younger girls began to run after the tonga trying to reach Baba's feet. Baba was saying, "No, no," but still they would not listen. They wanted to touch Baba's feet. That is called taking darshan, and to Hindus it means to touch the Lord's feet. How else would you touch Him?

Then the tonga turned and Baba left Sakori, and the younger girls had to stop running and come back.

We saw all this, but we did not have the sense to have Baba's darshan. It was not in our destiny to touch Baba's feet at that time. I had Baba's darshan first at Meherabad.

So the very beginning of my story is my seeing Baba four times on that first day at Sakori. The first time was at the entrance to the temple. He was so beautiful. Secondly, we saw Baba with His hands joined in respect in Upasni Maharaj's hut, looking very lovely standing in front of Maharaj. The third time we saw Him sitting under the shade of the mango tree talking with Maharaj. And the fourth time was when He was leaving Sakori in the tonga, and the women tried to touch His feet.

That was Baba's last day at Sakori while Upasni Maharaj was physically present. Their work there together was completed, and we were so fortunate to have come that very day.

We can say that seeing the face of the Master is having darshan, too, and we saw Baba four times that day. We had come to see Upasni Maharaj, but first we saw Baba. Our connection was with Him.

2

Childhood



Forests, Jungles, and
Government Bungalows
1907 -1915

•

In 1907 when Baba was thirteen years old and attending St. Vincent's High School in Poona, Mehera was born in Sukkar, now in Pakistan, the younger daughter of Jehangir and Daulatmai Irani, both of whom were from Zoroastrian families settled in Poona. In January 1914, when Mehera was six years old, Babajan kissed Baba on the forehead, and He experienced Infinite Bliss.

My stories are not about spiritual matters. Baba told me that He has given everything in His books. What I can tell you about is our life with Baba, what happened when we were with Him.

It's a very long story... I was born in Sukkar, a city now in Pakistan, then in northwestern British India. Both my parents' families were from Poona, and my father had a high post as a senior forest officer in the Indian Forestry Service. We lived in Sukkar for four years, after which we were transferred to other places; my father's last posting being to Junagadh in Gujarat. By "we" I mean my father, my mother, and my sister, Piroja - whom Baba later renamed Freni - who was five years older than I. My parents had had a son, too, but he had died at a very young age before I was born.

In Sukkar we had all the conveniences of a very comfortable Government bungalow with many servants: a cook, bearers, grooms, and a sweeper, and also a washerman; all staying in our compound. I remember, too, that we had our own carriage, a two-horse victoria



Mehera's parents, Daulatmai and Jehangir Irani, soon after their wedding.



Mehera as a young child

Those were such happy days. My sister and I were very much loved by our parents, and especially by my father, who enjoyed playing with us and spoiling us and seeing us happy. He was a fine-looking man, very tall, with a broad chest and good posture. And his nature was very fine, too. So big-hearted and loving was he, and full of energy and playfulness. I cannot remember him being tired. He was fond of jokes and games, and he also loved music. While he was gentle and soft-hearted, he was also very brave. My father truly did not know the meaning of fear.

Because he loved people, we had many friends and relatives visiting us from Poona, and from other places, too. My father used to take our guests sightseeing around Sukkar. Sometimes we visited a Hindu temple on an island in the river. We would cross



Daulatamai and Jehangir Irani with their daughter Piroja (later called Freni) and Mehera

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the river in a small boat, and I remember that there were monkeys and peacocks roaming around the island. When we came to the temple we took off our shoes and walked barefoot in a carpeted room full of pictures of holy men. Outside the temple there were marble steps leading down into the river where we would watch fish being fed. One fish had a gold nose ring, and that sight fascinated us children.

Then I remember going to a mosque where the mullahs would light incense sticks and offer prayers, and then bring out this silken box. What do you think was inside this box? Another box! And inside that, another box. And finally, in the innermost box was a hair of the Prophet Mohammed. As you can see in Baba's room at Meherazad, we have His beautiful hair preserved in plexiglass. But in those days there was no such thing, and this was their way of keeping it airtight.

Sometimes, too, our guests were taken to sample toddy, a light refreshing drink made fresh from the toddy palm, or taken for a picnic; or we would go to a lovely lake in a park very close to our house. Our bungalow was on a hill, and the park was at the foot of this hill.

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Part of my father's work was to inspect the forests in his area, and when he went on tour we often went too. Sometimes, even when we were transferred, we travelled by camel. There were no motor cars or tongas in Sukkar. It was all forest and sand, with very little rain; instead of rainstorms, we had sandstorms. That caravan was such a sight! Our tents and luggage went ahead by camel, and my father's staff went on horseback.

My mother travelled on the back of a very quiet she-camel, sitting in a saddle made from an easy chair, with a sun-shade over her head. She took her books and knitting with her to pass the time as she rode along. My father had a big, male camel, a very powerful, willful animal, who could usually only be controlled by two able-bodied Sindhis. But my father was so strong that he would seat me behind him on the camel, tell me to hold on tightly, take the reins, and off we would gallop. And I did not fall off. Camels run very smoothly. This camel was almost white, and I remember that he had some coloured beads and a beautiful woven collar with tassels around his neck. I also remember standing in front of him when he opened his mouth. His tongue was huge, and so were his teeth; and I was both frightened and fascinated.

Our servants pitched our tents ahead of us. Such lovely tents they were, all decorated with scallops and tassels, with windows and furniture and carpets, and a separate drawing room and bedrooms, too. The kitchen tent was separate. My father was a good shot, and often he would shoot a deer for our cooks to prepare, and we always shared

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it with all of those with us. We took a gramophone along too, and at night we listened to music.

I still recall a number of incidents when we were camping in forests and jungles that made a strong impression on me as a child. I cannot remember the name of the nearest town, but I especially remember one night when we were camped in a jungle. Every night, a blue enamel jug of milk was kept near my father's bed in the tent. Before going to sleep he drank most of it, and then put the jug back on his bedside table. This night we all went to sleep, but in the middle of the night, suddenly in the dark, something hit me on the head, and then bumped my mother. My mother started to scream, and so did I. What a commotion! Everyone was running around in the dark, and we could not see what it was.

We finally managed to light the lantern, and we saw a big wildcat running around inside the tent with the enamel jug stuck on his head. He must have been attracted into the tent by the smell of milk. He had put his whole head into the jug, lapped up the milk, then found he could not get it out. The poor cat was frantically rushing around with this jug on his head and no one could hold on to him. My father rolled up the canvas door, and eventually the cat felt the fresh air and ran out with the jug still on his head. The next day my father, feeling worried about the trapped cat, sent our servants out to look for him. Under a tree, near a big stone they found the battered jug. The cat had managed to bang the jug on this stone until it was free, so we were happy that the cat was safe.

My mother was not fearless like my father, and at night, in a dark, thick forest, she would feel frightened. My father had a water spaniel and when tigers caught his scent, they would circle around and around our tent roaring. Naturally, my mother was terrified, but my father would tell her, "Just go to sleep. It's all right. Nothing will happen." My mother would reply, "But they're so near the tent. They might rip it open and come in!" So my father would comfort her. He was never afraid of anything.

At another village in a forest my father heard of a thief who was stealing from the poor villagers. This thief was a tribal person who lived in the forest, and who came out in the middle of the night to steal. One night my father and one or two others waited in the little village, and somehow, in the middle of the night, my father caught the thief. He was tied to a post on the verandah of the forest officer's tiny office until morning, and

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in the daylight everyone saw how strong the thief was. How brave my father had been to tackle him, especially when the thief could have been carrying a knife.

Our tent was not very far from the forest officer's little office where this man was tied, so I walked across to see my father. What fascinated me was not the thief, but a huge, black scorpion that someone had hung up on the same verandah by a piece of string tied around its tail. Its pincers were enormous, and so was the stinger in its tail. In its pincers it held a fairly thick stick, which this scorpion turned back and forth. It was so strong it could hold this stick without dropping it!

Often, when we were on tour, we would go together for an evening stroll in the surrounding forest. One night we were just returning to our tents when we heard a rustling in the dry leaves on the ground. My father knew at once that it was a big snake, and he told my mother to take us children and the dog back to the tent. My mother tried to stop him, but he did not listen to her. He did not even have a stick, but somehow he managed to kill the snake with a rock. Then he picked it up with part of a branch from a tree, and brought it back to our tent where we were waiting with hurricane lanterns for him. My mother was horrified! "Why have you brought that thing back here? Throw it away," she told him. But my father wanted to show us the snake's poison sacs, so despite her protests he opened its jaws and pointed them out to us. I was very young, but I remember that snake's fangs and poison sacs very clearly. And my mother looked into this snake's mouth, too, even though she did not want to. Like this, she gave my father loving companionship.

I also remember that when he was on tour my father wore leggings to protect his legs. Leggings are like long, leather socks which cover your legs from the shoe tops to your knees. They wrap around your legs and are fastened on by buckles. When my father came back to our tent feeling very hot after being in the forest, he would sit in a folding chair while I sat at his feet and unbuckled his leggings. I loved doing this, and I was very proud of myself.

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Finally, my father was transferred to the Junagadh District in Gujarat, and while we were staying there my sister and I were sent to boarding school in Poona. I was six years old. My father had wanted us to be educated at home with tutors, but my mother was afraid that, with their love for us, they would spoil us. So we were sent as weekly boarders to the Convent of Jesus and Mary in Poona.

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On our school holidays we came home. We had a nice, two-storied Government house at Veraval. It was in a beautiful spot overlooking the ocean, with just a little open ground between it and the beach. My sister began piano lessons at school which made my father very happy. I was very young, and I began lessons later. Because my father was always on the move, we did not have a piano, but my parents had some European friends who had one, and on holidays we visited these friends. On their piano my sister would play the tunes she had learned, and I remember that my father's favourite one was "Home Sweet Home".

Our neighbours in Veraval were a Christian family, and amongst other children they had a daughter just one year older than I. I remember that in the evenings the servants would bring some chairs outside, and these neighbours then joined us there for games and conversation. They had a son, too, who was of college age. His name was David, but I could not pronounce this and instead I called him "Devil"! We children loved to frolic on the beach, and "Devil" used to put me on his shoulders, then carry me out into the sea. What fun it was! My father was very sportive, and he wanted to teach my mother how to swim. She, however, was not very keen to learn, and they would squabble lovingly about it. Then, to please him, she would go in just to her waist.

In the mornings we children used to walk along the beach. In one direction the beach gradually became rocky, and there we had to gingerly pick our way. One morning on our walk we saw something moving amongst the rocks. We did not know what it was, but somehow we managed to catch it. Very excitedly we carried it home and showed it to my mother. "It's a crab," she told us, "but what am I going to do with it? Take it down to the cook." The cook was very, very happy with our present. "But why bring one?" he said to us. "Bring me more!" "More?" we asked. "How can we catch more?" So he showed us how to make a little lasso with string, and how to catch the crab's pincers with the loop, then pull it tight. Back to the beach we went. My sister and I managed to catch another six or eight crabs which we brought home in a pail with a little sand in it. We handed them over to the cook, and he made us a delicious crab curry.

My father, when I was six, gave us our own ponies, and taught us to ride. And I remember, when I was tiny, being put on an elephant, too! So as a child I rode elephants, camels, and horses. I loved to ride my pony along the beach in front of our house. We always had servants with us to look after the horses and one day I galloped away down the beach. I can still hear one of the servants shouting after me, "Stop, Mary baba, stop!" He was a Muslim, and they call children "baba".

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While we were at Junagadh my father also took us up a mountain not too far away from where Baba later sat in seclusion. It is called Gimar mountain, and living there in caves are holy men with long hair and nails. We left very early in the morning, and my mother and some of our guests were carried up in sedan chairs. It was a steep climb, and we all, except my father, stopped at a rest house and temple on the way up. He climbed up much further and visited an even higher temple. He was always full of energy and never tired.

Just a few final memories from my early childhood. I remember how my father saved his bearer's wife. They were a Muslim couple, and very faithful to my father. She was a nice, young woman, and one day when she was outside walking in some grass, a poisonous snake suddenly bit her. My father knew that he had to act very fast, and he also knew what he had to do. Quickly he made some cuts across the snake's bite, tied a tourniquet of handkerchiefs around her leg to stop the poison circulating in the blood, and put some potassium permanganate on the wound. She was very fortunate that my father was there, because she did live.

And I remember, too, how my father saved some villagers. Around Junagadh the forests are very deep, and once some people from a nearby jungle village came running to my father saying, "Oh, please, sir. There are some tigers who are stealing our calves and goats and sheep. This is a great loss to us. Please kill the tigers." So my father had a "hide" built in a tree, and he waited there for the tigers to come. He was a sure shot and managed to shoot these man-eating tigers and save the villagers and their animals from attack. So brave was he that once he even went into the forest alone after a wounded tiger, found it in its lair, and shot it so that it would not suffer. He shot these tigers not for the sport or for love of shooting, but to help the poor.

These are some of my early childhood memories. My early years were very, very happy ones. We had an interesting, carefree life, full of love and adventures.

Poona 1915-1921

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In 1915 Mehera, with her mother and sister, came to live in Poona and during that year Meher Baba, then known as Merwan, met the remaining four Perfect Masters of the time: Narayan Maharaj, Tajuddin Baba, Sai Baba, and Upasni Maharaj. Upasni Maharaj, on seeing Baba, flung a stone at Him, hitting Baba on the forehead where Babajan had kissed Him in 1914, and thus began Baba's return to normal consciousness. During the following years Baba stayed mostly in Poona. He managed a theatrical company for two months, worked in His father's teashop and toddy shop,

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all the time constantly visiting Babajan, and sometimes Upasni Maharaj. In 1918 Baba opened a toddy shop in Kasba Peth, in Poona city, and the same year Sai Baba dropped His body. In 1919 Baba's family moved from Pumpkin House to nearby Baba House in Poona, where Baba knocked His forehead on a stone in His small room there. (This knocking of His forehead had first begun after Upasni Maharaj had fiung the stone at Baba in 1915.) At the toddy shop, Merwanji now began to attract a group of spiritual seekers, some of whom later became His mandali.

Throughout 1920 and 1921 Baba's frequent visits to Upasni Maharaj continued, culminating in a six-month continuous stay at Sakori from July to December 1921. By the end of this stay Baba had been unveiled as the Avatar of the Age.

It was in Junagadh, when he was forty years old, that my father had a fall from a horse that was to change our lives. In this fall he hurt his ear, and he went to Bombay to the Masina Hospital to consult a doctor about it. Surgery was recommended, but before having it, my father decided to visit his parents in Poona. His mother suggested that he also consult their family doctor there in Poona, and to please her, he did. This doctor told my father that the operation was so minor that he could easily do it then and there. My father believed him, and he had the operation in this doctor's house, in a small, ill-equipped and dusty surgery. His parents did not inform my mother, who was in Junagadh, about the operation. The incision became septic, and my dear father suddenly passed away.

My poor mother was absolutely heart-broken; and so were we. The last time we had seen my father he had been strong and healthy, and now, suddenly, because of a careless operation, he was gone. The shock was terrible for my mother, and after this we rarely saw my father's family. Many years later I heard that Baba's father, Sheriarji, had helped to carry my father's body to the Tower of Silence, and that when he returned home that day Sheriarji had said that he had never seen anyone with such a fine, strong, healthy body as my father.

My mother now had to return to her family house in Poona. I was eight years old when, at the invitation of my maternal uncle Ardeshir, we moved into his house, a very big bungalow in the vicinity of Bundgarden where my grandparents and two maternal uncles, their wives and children lived. Ardeshir was the eldest uncle and head of the household, and he always was very kind and generous to us. He owned a successful soft drink factory in the Sachapir Street area of Poona.

Another of my mother's brothers, Colonel M.S. Irani, was a surgeon serving in a hospital in Aden, in the Middle East, as the First World War had then started. He was very fond of my mother, so when my father passed away, he took leave and came

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quickly to Poona to comfort and console her. When he arrived, my mother clung to him and sobbed her heart out.

My mother was so shocked and heart-broken by my father's passing that she took to constant prayers, morning, noon and night. She would walk alone with our spaniel down to the river, which was not far from our house, and there, near a well, she would light an oil lamp and offer flowers and pray. When she later heard of Babajan from her sister Freny Masi she would be seated by Babajan's side every evening.

Now that we were settled in Poona we became day-girls at the same school, the Convent of Jesus and Mary, where we had been boarders, and I loved to hear the nuns tell stories about Jesus and His disciples. When I was nine years old, on the first anniversary of my father's death, my Navjote, initiating me into the Zoroastrian faith, was performed.

One day, when I was ten or eleven years old, one of my school friends named Zeena, came running to me at recess time when we children were playing after lunch and said, "Mehera, let's go to Babajan. She is very great. Whatever we ask for She will give us. You ask for something, and I'll ask for something. Come on, do let's go and see Her!"

"Yes, but what about the school bell?" I asked. I thought Babajan was always seated under a neem tree some distance from our school, and we might be late for class.

"Today Babajan is sitting right outside. She is so near that we won't be late for class," Zeena replied.

So together, hand in hand, we ran out of the school grounds and towards Babajan, who was seated behind the convent wall. But as we came near to Her I began to feel very shy. I said to my friend, "How can I go up to Babajan? I've never thought of asking for anything. I don't have anything to ask for! You go first!"

But Zeena replied, "Never mind. Think hard!" And when we reached Babajan Zeena knelt before Her and made her request. Then it was my turn, and I still could not think of anything to ask for. But I went very shyly up to Babajan and knelt before Her. She looked at me sweetly and said, "What is it, my child?" Still I did not know what to ask for, because I had everything. I started thinking very hard, and as I looked across the road I saw a horse and carriage pass by. The thought came to me that I would like a horse to ride because, since my father's death, my mother had kept only a carriage horse. A horse needs to be looked after, and she did not want the bother of more servants and more work. So I told Babajan, "Babajan, I would like a horse."

Now that sounds a bit childish, but at the time it did not seem childish to me. I loved

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horses. And Babajan looked at me, gave a slight, very sweet smile, and nodded Her head. Then She looked up towards the sky. "Yes, He will be very beautiful. You will get a horse, and all the world will see Him and love Him." She spoke very softly and in Urdu, and I could not hear Her very well, but those words I caught. Then She patted me and told me, "Now you can go, my child."

And I was glad to leave as I was feeling very, very shy, but I also felt happy because I thought that I would have a beautiful horse that many would admire when I rode it.

Just then the school bell rang, so my friend and I caught hands and ran back to school. I completely forgot that I had asked Babajan for a horse!

Then one evening some months after this meeting, after I had come home from school and was playing gilli danda in our compound with my cousins, my aunt said to me, "Mehera, go and see what a beautiful horse your mother has bought."

I thought she was teasing me, but she repeated it, "Go to the stables and see." I ran to the stables, and I was overjoyed to see there this very, very beautiful horse. I could not believe my eyes- he was so beautiful. He was snow-white, with not a speck of colour anywhere. His nose and his skin were pink, not black. One of his eyes was blue, and the other one was black. And he was very well-fed and well-kept. In the stable he started to prance and shake his head and mane, and I knew he was a spirited horse. I was even happier, as I am not fond of very quiet riding horses. My mother later told me that she had been returning home in a tonga from an outing and had seen a crowd of people. She stopped, and in the middle of this crowd there was this beautiful white horse which she liked so much that she immediately bought him and had him brought home.

Just two days after the horse arrived I began to think, "Why am I not riding this horse?" I loved to ride, but since my father's death I had not had the chance. I knew that I would not be allowed to ride this white horse as he was new and very spirited, and my elders would be afraid that I would have a fall. But my father had taught me well, and I was not at all afraid.

All our saddles and bridles had been brought to Poona after my father's death and dumped in a big storeroom at my grandparents' house, so I went quietly inside, found a saddle and bridle, and had the groom saddle the white horse. He thought I had permission to ride, but I had not. He helped me mount, and I quietly rode the horse out a back gateway so my elders would not see me. But my aunt did see me, and though she called me back, I kept riding down to a lovely, sandy bridle path near Bundgarden along which the British liked to ride. There I tried out this horse's paces: trotting and cantering, and after a long, lovely ride, I came home safely. So my elders saw that I could manage the horse, and they allowed me to ride him again. I used to give him treats of sugar, so he came to know me.

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A few years passed and my mother bought, as an investment, a very beautiful house on Todiwalla Road in Poona, which had been rented to a European couple, a Mr. and Mrs. Mandy. A little later, perhaps it was in 1919 after we had been staying in my grandparents' house for four years, my eldest uncle Ardeshir died. He had been very sympathetic towards my mother but, with his death, she no longer felt comfortable in her family's house. So when our tenants returned to England, we moved into No. 9 Todiwalla Road. I was about twelve years old.

It was a very lovely place. The house was large, with separate servants' quarters and stables. The garden was twice the size of Meherazad, with several hundred beautiful trees and a broad shaded drive up to the house from the road. On returning from school we could feel the coolness of our garden as we turned into the drive. The house was at the end of Todiwalla Road, a very good and quiet locality. Nearby were fields, and it was very quiet and dark at night. We had a carriage horse, the white horse, and our pet water spaniel. Our neighbours were some Europeans, the Raja of Kolhapur, and a wealthy family from Bombay, the Todiwallas, after whom the road had been named and who later come into my story.

One day while we were living at Todiwalla Road, I remember riding the white horse across a low-lying field near our house towards a raised road. As we came close to the road he started to lunge and rear. I jumped off and landed quite safely in the field. And what happened next was this: the saddle immediately slipped off the horse! The girth had broken, and had the horse not reared when he did, I would not have jumped off and could have had a very bad fall later. I managed to catch the reins, but the horse was too strong and excited for me to hold for long. Fortunately, at that moment two servants from the nearby houses of the Raja of Kolhapur and some Europeans came running up. So I remounted him, and they very kindly led me home riding bareback.

Now this white horse was very mischievous. He had a friend, a carriage horse from next door, and my white horse would somehow get loose and visit him. Then both of them would prance and frolic around our compound, and around other people's, too! This would upset our neighbours, and that would upset my mother!

However, because of my school work, piano lessons, piano practice, theory of music lessons, and other things I had to do, I had very little time to ride. Since I only rode the white horse a few times, my mother decided that he should be useful and learn how to draw a carriage. So our groom would tie a plank behind the horse to get him used to pulling a weight. One day he even let me stand on this plank and off we went across a field. It was such fun!



Pencil drawings by Mehera of literary heroines done when she was about 14 years old and living on Todiwalla Road, Poona (shown here actual size) a) Lady Rowena from Ivanhoe b) Miranda playing chess c) Rebecca d) Katherine the Shrew.

My mother later built a second smaller house on the foundation of a broken-down house in our compound. We moved there when it was finished, and rented out the main bungalow. My mother also bought three small cottages: "White House", "Cosy Cottage", and "Beehive", in Mahabaleshwar - a hill station between Poona and Bombay. As a child I knew Mahabaleshwar well, and later spent much time there with Baba. My mother often took my sister and me to stay in Cosy Cottage.

We now changed schools from the Convent of Jesus and Mary, which was far from our new house, to St. Helens. At school I loved Shakespeare's plays, especially *The Tempest*; stories of saints; the novels of writers like Dickens and Sir Walter Scott; and playing the piano. But I was never top of my class; I much preferred playing games with my friends to school work.

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Awaiting Baba's Call

Early 1922 to May 1924



In 1922 Baba, Who was still known as "Merwanji", began His work as Avatar of the Age. He spent the first part of the year mostly at a hut on Fergusson College Road, Poona. During this time He was given the name Meher Baba. He also visited Upasni Maharaj at Sakori, and at the end of May 1922 Meher Baba set out walking to Bombay with His intimate, chosen men for the stay in Manzil-e-Meem. In October 1922 Baba made a brief trip to Sakori, and this was the last time that He visited Upasni Maharaj's ashram while Maharaj was physically present. A year later, in May 1923, the phase of Manzil-e-Meem was finished; Baba attended the wedding of Mehera's sister, Freni, to Rustom K. Irani; and stayed at Meherabad with some of His mandali. While making short visits to Meherabad between June 1923 to March 1924 Baba travelled extensively in India and also made His first visit to Persia (Iran). In late March 1924 Baba returned to Meherabad for several months, and these few months were known as the phase of "Ghamela Yoga", hard physical labour, for His men Mandali.

Daulatmai's Faith Grows Poona 1922

As I have said, my mother first heard of Baba from her sister Freny Masi, Padri's mother, who told her that Babajan had kissed Baba, and that He was enlightened. Of course, my mother did not understand then that Baba was the Avatar, but she had real love and feeling for Him. In those days Baba had few followers, and very few from the Zoroastrian community. On the contrary, most of the Zoroastrians were against Baba, and although Baba was so pure, nothing was

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left unsaid about Him. So it was very difficult at this time to have conviction and to follow Baba. Human beings are such that they can take their minds to the lowest level, and also to the highest level, to become God.

Baba at that time was not settled at Meherabad. He sometimes came to Poona from Bombay for a day or two, and then He stayed at one or the other of His lovers' houses. It was then that my mother had Baba's darshan for the first time. After that when Baba came to Poona, Vishnu Master, one of Baba's early mandali, would ride to our house on his bicycle to let my mother know that Baba had arrived. When she was not with Baba, my mother spent her evenings with Babajan. She had not told my sister or me about Baba and she did not take us with her as we were still in school and busy with our school work and friends.

During Baba's visits to Poona He gave darshan, and His lovers sang devotional songs and offered garlands and coconuts to Him. One day when the programme was over and all had left, Baba turned to see my mother still seated by His side. He asked her, "You are still waiting? Do you have something to ask Me?"

My mother had not come with any questions in her mind. She just loved to be in Baba's presence, but she felt that Baba must have a reason for asking her this. Baba gave her time to think. The first thought that came into her mind was that my sister was not at all well. Piroja (later called Freni) was not eating, and she was feeling very depressed. So my mother told Baba about this.

"Take her to Udwada," Baba told her. Udwada is in Gujarat and is a very important place of pilgrimage for Zoroastrians. It is here that the sacred fire was brought from Persia to India, and since then it has never been extinguished. Going to Udwada was thought to be a little old-fashioned, a pilgrimage that only the very orthodox made. So my mother was very surprised that Baba wanted her to do this when she had full love and faith in Him, but she replied, "Yes, Baba!"

After some time Baba turned again to find my mother still sitting there. He asked her, "Do you want to ask Me something else?" Again she felt that Baba must have a reason for asking her this, and this time what came into her mind was her neighbour's daughter, Miss Todiwalla's plight.

As I have said, the Todiwalla family, after whom the road in which we now lived was named, had a house near ours. They were a very wealthy Bombay family who spent several months in Poona every year during the racing season. Our families were very friendly, and while they were in Poona my mother often visited them. One day it happened that the daughter of the Todiwallas was alone when my mother called, and this woman opened her heart to my mother. She told her that she was

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almost forty years old, and although all the rest of her brothers and sisters were married, her family had not arranged a marriage for her. In those days in India all marriages were arranged by the parents for their children. This poor woman was very worried about her future when her parents would no longer be there to provide her with a home.

On hearing this, my mother had felt very sad and concerned about Miss Todiwalla's situation, and she now explained it to Baba.

"Take her to Udwada," Baba told my mother. "Yes, Baba," my mother replied. Although my mother was wondering how going to Udwada would help my sister and Miss Todiwalla, she did not hesitate to obey Him. So my mother invited Miss Todiwalla to accompany us there, and she very happily accepted our invitation. My mother did not tell Miss Todiwalla that it was Baba's order, as she was a Zoroastrian.

Udwada is near the sea, and it has a beautiful beach where children love to play. A long pilgrimage there is not thought to be necessary, and most people stay only a couple of days. Pilgrims go to the big fire temple where they offer sandalwood to the sacred fire, pray, and have darshan of the fire; that is considered pilgrimage. So when we arrived in Udwada we went to the fire temple, offered our sandalwood and prayers, and had darshan of the sacred fire.

On our second day there we noticed that my sister's appetite had returned, and that she was very cheerful. In fact, she was well again! My mother felt so happy, and she realised that the real medicine that had restored her daughter's health was not the pilgrimage, but her obedience to Baba's orders.

One month after our return to Poona Miss Todiwalla was still single, and my mother began to worry, "What to do, she's still not married!" Then quite suddenly this woman, who was almost forty years old and who had not had a proposal in her life, received an offer of marriage and was soon married.

My mother felt so happy, and through these incidents her faith and love for Baba grew. Baba showed my mother that when you obey Him, He sees to everything. This all happened because mother obeyed Baba implicitly. That is the experience my mother had obeying Baba.

It was after this that my mother took us to Sakori where I first saw Baba. She could not take us to Baba, as He was not settled in one place. But she wanted us to be in a spiritual atmosphere, and she knew there were other young girls at Sakori.

Awaiting Baba's Call

Opposition

It was by Beloved Baba's grace that we had left my grandparents' house when we did and moved to Todiwalla Road. As my mother's love for Baba and Babajan grew, so did the opposition from her family grow. Her family had no understanding of spiritual things and were, like the Zoroastrian community at that time, not at all for Baba. So it would have been very difficult for my mother to freely go to Baba and Babajan had we still been staying in that house.

My uncle, Colonel Merwan Sorab Irani (he had the same initials as Baba) who as I mentioned before, was serving in an Aden hospital, would return to Poona for some months on leave every two years. This brother was a very fine man who moved in the best society. Out of all his family he loved my mother the most, and she loved him. As I have said, when my father died he immediately took leave and came to Poona from Aden to console my mother, and from that time he gave her much helpful advice in financial matters and also loving support. She always followed his advice and looked up to him.

He now returned from Aden to hear from our family that my mother was visiting Babajan, and also Meher Baba. When he was in Poona the family poisoned his ears. "Daulat is sitting on the street with an old Muslim woman, and even going to this Parsi, Meher Baba!" they told him. My uncle came to Todiwalla Road feeling very upset and said to my mother, "I hear you are visiting sadhus. Why do you want to do that? Why do you need to? Are you short of money?"

He also had no understanding of spirituality, and he felt that one went to saints only to ask for material benefits. He continued, "All this time I have looked after you and loved you. Why do you go after these saints and sadhus? We have Zoroaster to pray to. If you want your daughters to be married, I will look after that. I'm friendly with many influential people, and I will see to everything."

My mother explained, "I am only going to them for spiritual reasons. I find peace being with them."

Colonel Irani became very angry. He told her, "They are false and frauds. There's nothing spiritual about them, and they will swindle you!"

My mother replied, "You may say anything you like, but in this I will not listen to you. I will not give this up!"

He was so upset that at this point he left his chair and turning around saw Baba's lovely photo sitting on the piano. Somehow my uncle recognized Baba.

"Who is this?" he asked. "Isn't that the One they call Meher Baba?"

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"Yes, that is He, and we love Him and follow Him."

"Don't you know He is the ring leader of a gang?" my uncle asked.

"He is a disciple of Upasni Maharaj and He is God-realised," my mother told him. It had happened that my uncle, when in Aden, had bailed an Irani out of jail who was being held on some charge. Being an Irani himself my uncle had felt embarrassed for this man when he had heard of his imprisonment. This person had been a Baba-follower from the very beginning, but he did not have a good reputation. And this added to my uncle's already bad impression of Baba and His followers. He did not know Who Baba was, and that He was for both saints and also sinners. He really believed that my mother was making a terrible mistake, and because of his deep love for her, he did his best to dissuade her from following Baba. But my mother would not budge.

"I will stick to Meher Baba," she told him. "I love Him and want to serve Him and be in His ashram."

My uncle left very upset, and we did not see him again at that time.

Later on, sometime after my mother and I had come to stay with Baba at Meherabad, my uncle came to see us there. Baba asked my mother and me to meet him. My uncle was amazed to see us living in such a simple, quiet place. He was standing beside his car with a cane in his hand. "What are you doing in this wilderness, Daulat?" he asked my mother. "There are no trees, no compound, nothing! How can you bring your young daughter here with all these men around?"

Still having no understanding of Who Baba is, he demanded that we return to Poona with him. But my mother was very strong, and we stayed on at Meherabad.

By this time my uncle had returned from Aden to settle in Poona. His marriage had not been a fortunate one, and his wife had gone back to live with her family. He loved my mother and wanted us all to live with him and be his family, and he thought that when we girls married he would have sons-in-law, too. Not only did he want to take my mother away because he felt she had been duped, he also felt very hurt that she had chosen to stay with Baba instead of with him. He felt she no longer loved him. He had no idea how fortunate we were to be with Baba.

Because of all these feelings, my uncle began to publish derogatory articles about Baba in the newspapers and Gujarati magazines. My mother felt very upset about her brother's behaviour, but Baba told her that her brother was in fact helping Him, saying, "This is all according to My will. No one would be interested if he wrote favourable things about Me, but by writing against Me, My Name is spread throughout."

Awaiting Baba's Call

Baba Comes to Meherabad

Now we go back a little to the time in 1922 when I first saw Baba in Sakori. Baba's aunt, Dowla Masi (Shireenmai's sister), also visited Upasni Maharaj's ashram while we were there. On seeing my sister, who was then nineteen years old, she asked my mother if she wanted her elder daughter to be married. Dowla Masi had in mind Rustom Kaikhushru Irani (Gulmai's son and Adi K. Irani's brother), from Ahmednagar. My mother asked her, "Is he following this path?" by which she meant was he spiritually inclined.

"He is a Baba-lover and a fine person. If you see the boy you will like him. He is in Bombay with Baba in Manzil-e-Meem," Dowla Masi told my mother. "It will be a very nice match for Piroja. These Iranis are a very good family and are well-respected in Ahmednagar."

Then my mother felt very happy with the match. So she and Dowla Masi went to Upasni Maharaj Who, on being asked, was also quite pleased with it. He allowed the three of them, my mother, Piroja, and Dowla Masi to go to Bombay to discuss the matter with Baba in Manzil-e-Meem, while I stayed on at Sakori.

At Manzil-e-Meem they greeted Baba and had His darshan. After being told, Baba was also agreeable to the match.

"Call Rustom," He said, "they must see each other."

So Rustom and Piroja met each other and agreed to marry. In early March 1923 my sister's engagement to Rustom was held in Manzil-e-Meem in Baba's presence. Up till then my sister's name had been Piroja, but at Manzil-e-Meem Baba changed it to Freni. Baba had had a younger sister called Freni whom He had dearly loved, but she had died when she was still a child. Now Baba said to my sister, "I loved My sister Freni very much, and I give you her name, Freni." And so from that day my sister was called Freni.

The wedding was to take place in Ahmednagar, where Rustom's family lived, on 9 May 1923. Rustom had told Baba that he would marry only if Baba attended the wedding, and Baba had promised to come. This is why Baba left Manzil-e-Meem and came to Ahmednagar. My mother was very busy making arrangements for the wedding, so I stayed on at Sakori with Freny Masi.

Rustom had arranged for Baba and His mandali from Manzil-e-Meem to stay at what was then called Khushru Quarters, and which now is the Trust Office and named Meher Nazar. It was owned at that time by Rustom's family, though they stayed not there, but in a new three-story house nearby called Sarosh Manzil. Khushru

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Quarters had been empty for some time and was rather dilapidated and in need of repair. When Baba and His party arrived in Ahmednagar some days before the wedding, the repairs had not been finished and they could not stay there. Rustom then arranged for Baba to stay for a few days at Happy Valley near what is now Meherazad, and a place where Ram and Sita had rested so long ago.

When Khushru Quarters was ready, Baba with His mandali, returned to Ahmednagar. They stayed at Khushru Quarters, and a few wedding guests, who were close family members or friends, stayed with Rustom's family at Sarosh Manzil. The rest of the guests stayed at the nearby Parsi Fire Temple, which has space for many guests.

Now Adi K. Irani was staying not with Baba at Khushru Quarters, but with his family at Sarosh Manzil. Every morning Adi would come to visit Baba, and Baba would ask him for any news. On this particular morning Adi told Baba that a guest had made some derogatory remarks about Baba. I do not know what they were; I was not there. I only know the gist of it.

Baba was very upset. "I've been invited to this wedding. I've only come here to please Rustom and they behave like this!" Baba immediately got up and started to walk out of the compound.

It was early morning, just after breakfast, and the mandali were not yet ready for the day. Some were in the bathroom, some just finishing their tea. Their tea glasses (they had their tea in aluminium glasses) were dirty, and their bedding rolls were untied. Those who saw Baba leaving shouted to the others, "Come quickly! Baba has left!" They were frightened that they would lose sight of Baba, and they came running from everywhere: out of bathrooms and bedrooms, stuffing dirty glasses and plates into their bags, and hastily tying up bedding rolls.

After Baba they all came running, and they caught up with Him on Station Road. It was just after the First World War, and at that time it was so quiet. There were no motor cars, no buses, no trucks in sight. Occasionally a bullock cart would pass by, or a bicycle, or two or three people. There was no traffic and hardly any houses along that road.

Baba was walking very quickly along this road which leads to the railway station. The mandali thought that Baba, because He was so upset, would leave Ahmednagar. But when they came to the fork in the road Baba did not continue straight ahead towards the station, but paused for a second and turned to the left. Now they decided that He was taking them to Dhond, the next town along this road, and many miles away, but after five or six miles Baba stopped under a neem tree around which a stone seat had been made. Nearby was a well, and after Baba rested there a while

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He said, 'We're thirsty. The well is so close, but how shall we draw water from it? Ask the first person you see to bring us a rope and a bucket.'

One man came by and the mandali stopped him and told him, "We need some water. Please help us. Bring a pail and a rope so we can draw drinking water from this well." So this man ran to his home in nearby Arangaon village, and he brought the bucket and rope. Baba and all the mandali had some water. This man was a Hindu, and he was very fortunate to serve Baba like this. His name was Mr. Patel, and he became quite devoted to Baba. It was his bullocks that later pulled Baba's car out of a bog in Toka.

Then it began to get dark and Baba said, "We need some light. Ask the next person you see to bring us a lantern." Another man came by, and when asked for a lantern he ran to the village and brought Baba a lantern. Baba blessed this man and said, "May there always be light in your house." This man was a converted Christian.

By this time, Rustom had discovered that Baba had left Khushru Quarters, and he began to search frantically for Him, asking everyone, "Have you seen a man who looks like this?" describing Baba. Eventually someone pointed Rustom towards Arangaon. Rustom was so relieved that Baba had not left by train! He followed the road until he found Baba.

"Baba, if you don't come back to Ahmednagar, I won't marry! You promised You would be there, so please, Baba, forgive those people. At least come to the wedding," he begged.

So Baba returned to Ahmednagar, and He did not stay in Khushru Quarters where He had previously been, but at Sarosh Manzil in the very top room. It was a lovely little room with its own entrance, so the mandali could come and go and bring Baba His meals. As all four sides of the room were half glass and half wall, it had a bird's eye view of Ahmednagar.

Baba attended the wedding, and Rustom felt happy.

Deciding My Destiny *May 1923*

I did not attend my sister's wedding, and this is how that happened. As I have said, prior to the wedding my mother was very busy with all the arrangements to be made, and so she had me stay in Sakori at Upasni Maharaj's ashram.

Just before my mother came to Sakori to take me to Ahmednagar for the wedding, my knee quite suddenly became very swollen, and it was so painful that I could

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hardly walk. I had not fallen, and nothing had happened to cause this swelling. It had just appeared. Maharaj told me to have Durgamai, the woman disciple who had been sent to Upasni Maharaj from Sai Baba, put warm poultices on it, but they did not help the swelling.

When my mother arrived to take me to Ahmednagar for the wedding, Maharaj told her, "But she can't walk, and she's limping badly. How is she going to attend the wedding? And she is quite happy here. Why do you want to take her? Won't the marriage take place without her? Anyway, it wouldn't look nice for her to limp in a sari on such a fine occasion."

Maharaj showed His disinclination to send me, and my mother did not want to disobey Him. She knew not to go against the wishes of a Perfect Master so she agreed to leave me at Sakori, although it was very awkward for her to do this. It was my only sister's wedding, and the whole family would wonder where I was.

So I was not at the wedding.

This next part is awkward for me to tell, but I have to as it explains why I was not to attend my sister's wedding. There was a young man, some relative on my father's side, who had not seen me since I was eight years old. After that, we had had no connection with each other. We never met, although he may have once seen me from afar at a wedding when I was fourteen. Now his family felt that it would be convenient if he and a suitable girl announced their engagement at my sister's wedding as our families would be present there. In those days, there was no courtship as there is in the West. When a suitable match was arranged, the engagement was quickly announced, and at that time gifts and rings were exchanged. When the boy's family asked him whom he wanted to marry, he gave my name! And they came to the wedding with a gold ring and a gold sari and other engagement gifts, but I was not there.

Now, amongst Zoroastrians, another little ceremony takes place about eight days after the wedding where the bride and bridegroom put sweets in each other's mouths, and also perform some other rituals. Baba had returned to Meherabad after the wedding and before this next ceremony my mother visited Him there for darshan. Baba asked whether I would be coming for this ceremony, and my mother replied, "No, Upasni Maharaj would not let her come to the wedding, so He would not want her to come for this."

Baba told her, "Tell Upasni Maharaj that she is your daughter and bring her!"

My mother was so scared. How was she going to say this to Upasni Maharaj? But she said "Yes" to Baba. She did not realise it, but Baba was testing her to see

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if it was to be Maharaj's word or Baba's word, whom would she please? So my mother came to Sakori with her heart in her mouth. She asked for a private audience with Maharaj, and they met and talked a little. Then Maharaj asked her why she had come. She replied, "I've come to take Mehera with me for the ceremony in Alunednagar." And Maharaj said, "Yes, you can take her." Baba knew that Upasni Maharaj would agree, but He wanted to see if my mother would obey Baba!

Now this is what happened next. After my mother brought me to Ahmednagar, where we stayed at Sarosh Manzil, Baba's message came from Meherabad to say that Baba's mother (Shireenmai), Gulmai (Adi K. Irani's mother), my mother, Baba's aunt (Dowla Masi), my sister and myself were to come to Meherabad for His darshan.

This is the very first time that I was to bow down to Beloved Baba and have His darshan. When we arrived at the Post Office near the railway line, Baba was at what is now called the Old Dharamshala. We waited outside, and when Baba was told that we had come, He came walking very fast across the road and field to meet us. Baba looked very beautiful striding across the field. His hair - lovely brown shining hair - was quite short, and He was wearing a sadra and a kerchief on His head. Baba quickly entered the Post Office, where there was no furniture at all, just a big cotton carpet on the floor.

Baba told us all to come inside. This was in May 1923, and Baba was still talking at that time. Baba's mother greeted Him first. She did not bow down to Baba, but she did join her hands and then sat in front of Him. Gulmai and my mother took darshan next. Then my sister took darshan, followed by Baba's aunt. I saw how they were taking darshan and so I took Baba's darshan too, last of course, but I was very shy at that time. Baba's face was so lovely. Just one little glance at Him and I felt so happy. Then I sat on the edge of the circle facing Him. So this was the first time I saw Baba properly and had His darshan.

Baba asked, "Have all the guests gone? How many have gone and who is left?" And my mother replied, "Only the boy's aunt is still here (meaning the boy who wanted to marry me). The rest of his family have all gone."

Baba said, "Good," and He then asked my mother whether she wanted me to marry this boy. My mother said, "Yes, it's a very good match." My mother wanted to get both her daughters married and settled so that she would be free to come to stay with Baba and to serve Him!

Then Shireenmai gave her opinion, and then Dowla Masi said something. Then Baba said something, and Shireenmai started to argue a little with Baba, asking Him, "Why, Merwan, do you say that?" She always called Baba Merwan or Merog. And

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so it went on. It was a serious issue, and they were all discussing it quite hotly until Baba said, "Why are you all arguing? Why don't you ask Mehera what she wants to do? It's for her to decide."

Everyone turned and looked at me. I felt very embarrassed because they were all suddenly staring at me instead of concentrating on Baba. But I felt firm about what to say. I mustered up all my courage and said, "I don't want to marry."

"What!" all the older women exclaimed, and they looked at me as if I had gone a little mad. "What did she say?" they all looked at each other. "All right, not this person, then some other person."

"No," I said, "No other person. I don't want to marry at all!"

"Did you hear what she said?" Baba asked all the women. "Leave it like that. Don't try to persuade her or coax her, and don't bring up the subject again."

So I was quite free. These were Baba's orders.

How Upasni Maharaj and Baba had saved me! Maharaj from the wedding where I would have been on my own, with my family and the boy's family pushing me to marry, and Baba, from my having to stand up to my elders alone.

Baba decided my destiny with all of us in front of Him!

Baba's Call

May 1923 - May 1924

Three or four days after this meeting with Baba at the Post Office we all set off by train for Poona. By we, I mean Baba's mother, Dowla Masi, the boy's aunt, my mother, myself, and perhaps Gulmai. The train started from the Ahmednagar station, and after some minutes someone said, "Oh, Meherabad has come, and we can see Baba!"

I could not believe that I was seeing Meherabad from the train! I leaned out the window and saw Baba standing near a wire boundary along the railway track. As the train came near, Baba looked so sweet in His white sadra with the sun shining on Him. We were all waving to Him, and He was waving to us. And we kept waving to Baba as the train passed by until He became so tiny we could hardly see Him. And still He waved to us.

Then, in August 1923 Baba came to Poona, and my mother and I went for His darshan. Baba asked me whether there was anything personal that I wanted to speak to Him about, but as I could not think of anything, I replied, "No, Baba."

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Baba then said, "Do you keep fasts?" I replied, "Yes, Baba, I fast on Ekadasi (tenth lunar day according to Hindu religion), but I'm never quite sure when it is." So Baba told me, "Never mind, from now on keep fast every Hormazd Roj and Behram Roj (first and twentieth days of the month according to the Zoroastrian calendar)." And this I did for many years.

As I have said, by now my mother's love for and faith in Baba were such that she wanted to serve Him and to be with Him always. So when she went to take Baba's darshan, she told Him, "Baba, I want to stay with You and serve You always."

Baba replied, "How can you serve Me? I'm not staying in one place. But when I do decide to stay in one place, then I will call you."

Then I went to Ahmednagar from Poona to stay with my sister Freni who was now married to Rustom. Baba was still travelling, but I did have His darshan once at Khushru Quarters when He stopped at Meherabad for a brief time.

Staying with my sister I found that I did not like family life; somehow I felt aloof from it. And when Gulmai had to visit Sakon, I went with her. We wanted to stay with Baba, but as I have said, in those very early days Baba had no women mandali, and He was not settled anywhere.

I liked the life at Sakori and the atmosphere there. It was so different from family life. There was devotional singing, arti and meetings with Upasni Maharaj. "Upas" means "fast" and "maharaj" means "great king", so Upasni Maharaj means "the great king who fasted". He was given this name because He fasted for a very long time before He received God-realisation from Sai Baba. The young Brahmin girls who stayed in the ashram sang songs and played on their drums in the temple. I, too, joined them, and learned to play the little drum called a dholak, the kind that Baba used to play, and we would sing Mirabai songs and Krishna songs, Upasni Maharaj songs and Sai Baba songs. We were all just girls; there were no men with us.

And while I was there I also helped to build some small huts for the ashram. Small Khorshed (Soonu Masi's daughter) was also there, and we kept each other company.

One day we were all in Maharaj's hut, ready for arti, when a Brahmin woman came to Maharaj and offered Him a gold ring. This woman wanted to put it on Maharaj's finger as a bond and expression of love. She tried to take His hand, but Maharaj got upset and refused to permit it, saying, "What are you trying to do? Can't you see I'm wearing a gunny sack? I'm a fakir and you want Me to wear a gold ring?"

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She replied, "Maharaj, I'm offering this to You." He told her, "I don't want any gold. Put it down!" She looked so dejected that Maharaj finally told her to put the ring on His little toe.

After arti the men took darshan and left; then it was the women's turn. Darshan means bowing down and putting one's head on Maharaj's feet, then joining hands to Him. The ring was still on His toe, and the Brahmin girls this time were taking longer to bow down, and they were lingering afterwards. I felt inside that they were wondering to whom Maharaj would give the ring, and that each one was hoping it would be she. After most of the girls had taken darshan, I approached Maharaj. As I lifted my head after darshan, Maharaj said, "Wait." He took the ring off His toe and put it on my finger. He told me, "Keep it on, wear it, and never take it off." I was very surprised that He had given it to me, but it fitted my finger perfectly. I bowed to Maharaj and left.

A little later, at the beginning of 1924 while I was still at Sakori, Baba went to stay at the Bharucha Building in Dadar, a suburb of Bombay. Soon after, Baba sent Gulmai to Sakori to bring small Khorshed and myself to Bombay to be near Him. When Gulmai told me the news that we were to go to Bombay, I went to say good-bye to Upasni Maharaj and have His darshan. As I was leaving, Durgamai told me not to go. She said that the ring had been given by Maharaj to me and that I should stay, but I insisted on going to Baba.

In Bombay we stayed at small Khorshed's parents' house in Irani Mansions, Dadar, and my mother joined us there from Poona. In the evenings we went to Bharucha Building to be with Baba, and there we would see Gustadji combing Baba's golden-brown shining hair. How we admired His lovely hair, so soft and full. And how we stared at His beauty.

I remember one day Baba, with Gustadji, came to Irani Mansions, and He asked Khorshed to sing and play the harmonium for Him. Gustadji sang, too, and Baba enjoyed the singing, swaying His head to the rhythm of the music. Before Baba left we served Him tea.

Baba now left for Persia, and my mother, my sister, and I returned to our home on Todiwalla Road, Poona.

In the evenings we would sit with Babajan. Many of Her followers sat with Her then because they had to go to work in the mornings. We went in the evening for

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a different reason: it shocked the Zoroastrian community to see us sitting with Babajan whom they were also against. Zoroastrians coming and going along the road where Babajan was seated recognised us in broad daylight, and they would say to each other, "What are they doing there? Why are they sitting with this old woman instead of going to the fire temple?" My mother's reply was, "Never mind, let them say what they like. We don't care." She was not afraid, and she did go to Babajan in the mornings to take fruit and vegetables from the nearby markets. Freny Masi, who was close to Babajan, went with her.

Babajan was seated on a seat that Baba had had made for Her after He was God-realised and had come from Sakori. She was of a very advanced age now, and it was not good for Her to sit on the ground in all weather. As is the Indian custom, the men devotees sat on one side of Her, and the women on the other. Babajan always sat so that She was turned more towards the men. People brought food for Her, and Babajan used to send someone to bring tea from a nearby tea stall. She often gave each one prasad, and sometimes hot tea, too. On many evenings qawali songs were sung. It was a very beautiful sight. We never referred to Babajan as "She", but always as "Babajan". Inwardly Babajan was so strong; She was stronger than any man. She was like an emperor. She looked so beautiful with Her fair skin and bluish eyes.

Babajan hardly spoke, and when She did it was very softly. People would talk to Her, and She would sit and listen and nod Her head, sometimes turning to see who was sitting amongst the women. I remember one evening when Babajan turned to look at the women. She looked at each one, and then a little longer at me. I was so surprised that She would look at me, and I felt very shy. Babajan hardly ever smiled, but now as She looked at me She had a slight, very sweet smile on Her face, as if She knew me. Then Babajan turned away.

One evening after Baba returned from Persia, a car stopped near the gate of our house on Todiwalla Road. Someone came up the drive to our door and said, "Baba wants you to come to the car!"

My mother and I were so happy as we ran to Baba's car. It was almost dark, and we could see Baba's white sadra glowing as we drew near His car. Baba did not get out, but He allowed us to bow down to kiss His feet. He and my mother then spoke for perhaps five minutes. Baba was on His way somewhere, and He had stopped so we could greet Him. So Baba never came inside our house in Poona, but we had His darshan outside the gate.

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My sister was now pregnant with her first child, and when she was near her time, she came to stay with us in Poona. It is our custom that a daughter returns to her mother for the birth of her first child so that she can be looked after properly and be taught how to take care of the baby. Freni gave birth to her first child in late April 1924, in the same ward, in the same hospital, Sassoon Hospital, that Baba had been born in thirty years earlier.

Within days of the birth a telegram came from Baba at Meherabad saying, "Come as soon as possible!" He also instructed us to bring only one trunk of clothes, which was to last a whole year, and our bedding. We were so happy! And also very busy. My mother quickly bought material and had the tailors make us new cotton clothes, and she bought new cotton saris for us, and so on. There was much to do, but as Baba had said, "As soon as possible," when the baby was about ten days old we locked the front door of our house with a big padlock, and with only telling our servants that we were going to another place, left everything behind us to come to Baba for good. We thought just of Baba; nothing else is important when you are coming to Him.

On arriving in Ahmednagar, we received a big welcome from Rustom's family as we were bringing home a first-born son. We settled Freni and the baby at Khushru Quarters and went to Meherabad for Baba's darshan. In the middle of May, 1924, we went to stay in the Bathing Rooms at Meherabad.

Baba sent Rustom to Poona to settle our affairs. Rustom, after seeing the white horse, informed Baba that it would be a pity to sell such a beautiful horse, so Baba had Rustom bring him to Meherabad. Baba decided to name him Sufi. And I heard that when the horse arrived at Meherabad Baba blessed him, put vermilion on his forehead, and sat on his back for a minute or two.

Sufi stayed at Meherabad for a short time, and then Baba sent him to Ahmednagar to Khushru Quarters to be used as a carriage horse. When we were staying at Khushru Quarters later in 1924 we sometimes rode in a carriage drawn by Sufi, but he was not a very good carriage horse. He was much too spirited, and he liked to kick the bottom of the carriage as we rode along in it! So that is the story of Sufi, the white horse. How blessed he was to have had the "White Horse" Avatar sit on his back.

And Baba kept His promise to my mother to call us - the very first women at Meherabad - to stay with Him for good.

4

The Very First Women

May 1924 to Late 1924



When Mehera and her mother, Daulatmai, first came to stay with Baba at Meherabad in May 1924, they left behind them a life of wealth and ease, of large houses and many servants. The life they entered was very simple. They cooked, often for many people, cleaned their quarters, wore cotton saris, and lived in very basic accommodation.

We were the very first women to stay at Meherabad. Previously, Baba had never allowed women to stay there, but we stayed at Meherabad for some fifteen days to cook for Baba, and also for the mandali. My mother, myself and Baba's aunt Dowla Masi stayed in the Bathing Rooms which were across the road from the Post Office where the little cottage facing the Main Bungalow at Lower Meherabad now stands. They are no longer there. They were two very nice, clean, rather large rooms, with an arch in the middle, that the British had built as bathing rooms during the First World War when there was an army training camp at Meherabad. But they were not at all like ordinary bathing rooms; they were large enough for many people to bathe in at one time.

When we first arrived Baba was in seclusion in the Agra Kuti that had just been built. Later, that sacred room was re-named the Jhopdi. The mandali were staying in the Post Office near the railway line.

One day I saw Baba coming across the field from the Post Office. His lovely hair, brown and golden at the tips, was shining in the sun, and He was wearing the black

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Kamli coat which in 1924 had no patches. I was washing some utensils outside our rooms, because we had no running water at Meherabad then, just a tub with a tap on it. Nervous, one of the mandali, would draw water from the well to fill it. When I saw Baba coming I quickly ran inside to tell my mother, "Baba's coming, Baba's coming! Wash your hands and tidy up."

It was morning time, and my mother and Dowla Masi were cooking for Baba and the mandali. Baba came in and told them that He and the mandali enjoyed their cooking, and that they were to prepare food for two extra people the next day, and to send it to the Post Office early. Perhaps Rustom and Adi were coming from Ahmednagar for the day.

Then Baba turned around and asked me, "And what do you do?" I replied, "Baba, anything that needs to be done. I clean the fireplace, sweep the floor, peel the garlic, wash the rice and dal, Baba, and wash the dishes, too."

And Baba said, "Good, I am happy. That is serving Me." A few words, and Baba went away! He never had long conversations with me at that time.

Then one evening, as we were lighting the lantern for the night, we heard the beat of a drum. At sunset everything was so quiet in those days that we could hear the slightest sound. We were attracted to the beat of the drum, and we realized that it was Baba playing in the Post Office. Then Dowla Masi said, "Listen! Baba is singing, too." This was the first time that I had heard Baba sing and also accompany Himself on the drum. We said, "Let's go to hear Baba sing! The mandali are there, so why can't we go there, too." So we tidied up, crossed the road and the field, and came to the Post Office.

When we arrived Baba was singing in His lovely voice. We went inside very quietly without disturbing Him, and sat down. Baba was seated with the mandali all on one side of Him. He was still singing and reaching the high notes very beautifully.

When it came to the chorus Baba stopped singing all of a sudden, pointed to me, and asked, "What are you thinking?" I was very startled. I did not know that Baba asked about your thoughts, and it is very awkward to have to say out loud what you are thinking.

Fortunately, at that time I was thinking only of Baba. I was admiring His fingers, thinking how lovely His hands looked playing the drum. In the light of the hurricane lantern Baba's hands looked very beautiful.

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So I said in Gujarati, "Baba, I am looking at Your hands, how beautiful they look playing the drum. You have lovely hands."

I felt very shy saying this, but I had to say what I was really thinking. I could not lie. Baba looked at His hands as if He had never seen them before, and just nodded, and continued to play the drum and sing. But Baba was pleased because I was thinking only of Him. The men mandali were sitting around on one side of the room, and I could easily have looked to see who they were. But I never even glanced at them; I looked only at Baba.

So that was a time, perhaps, that I pleased Him. It is very difficult to be with Baba; you cannot think of anything without Him knowing your thoughts.

At the end of May 1924 Baba came to our room to tell us that He was leaving Meherabad to go to Bombay and then to Quetta, and that we were to follow Him after a few days. Again He looked so beautiful as He came towards our room. Baba said that He would be at small Khorshed's parents' house in Irani Mansions for a few days, and that we should leave for Bombay when He left for Quetta so that Irani Mansions would be vacant for us. Masaji (Pendulal and Naja's father, Baba's uncle), Rustom, and Gustadji were to travel with us and take care of us.

I remember that during our few days in Bombay Rustom took us all out for a drive in a convertible. That is the only time I have ever been in one, and I enjoyed it. And Gustadji took us to the theatre to see a play. That must have been the first time I wore a matha banu in a fashionable place. A matha banu is a white muslin scarf that had once been worn by all Zoroastrian women, but in those days only elderly and old-fashioned women still wore them on their heads. And they wore them with several inches of hair showing, but with Baba we had to wear them right down on our foreheads so that no hair at all showed. Baba had told us, "Only if you wear matha banu can you stay with Me; not even a single hair is to be showing." We did not mind what we looked like as long as Baba let us be with Him.

So we went to the theatre wearing these matha banu. And later that year I went to Sarosh's sister's, (Mota) wedding wearing one. She married a distant relative of my father and all the guests were fashionably and elegantly dressed. I also went to Baba's birthday celebration years later wearing one. We looked like old women, but I did not care what people thought. I only cared what Baba thought, and that I was obeying Him. I wore this scarf for a long time, perhaps nine or ten years.

From Bombay we then we went on to Quetta.

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We arrived in Quetta from Bombay in June 1924. I remember that there were many of us in Quetta with Baba: big Khorshed (wife of Baba's brother, Jamshed), Naja, myself, my mother, Gulmai, Baba's aunt Dowla Masi; and some of the men mandali. We were all staying in a rented house right next door to Goher and Katie's parents' house. Baba stayed with the mandali across the landing from our quarters.

One morning Baba called us to come to Him with our plates, so we all went across to the mandali's room where Baba distributed fruit to us. Baba gave us each such big helpings of an assortment of fruit, and especially large were the servings of some white, seedless grapes. And He told us to finish everything He had given us, because it had been given by His hand. We were very happy to receive this fruit straight from Baba's hands.

We took our plates back to our room and started to eat the grapes. How very sweet and delicious they were! But they were so sweet that after awhile our throats got sore, and we still had many left. We did not know what to do, but we had to eat all our grapes, and the other fruit too, in one sitting. We went onto the terrace to look out on the road; Baba was not so strict at that time, and He did not mind us being there. By being interested in the occasional carriages and passersby, we struggled to forget our throats and to finish the fruit, which we did.

The next morning Baba came across the landing to our room. He stood in the doorway, and He looked very beautiful with His hair down. Baba had just had His bath, and He was wearing a clean white sadra and open sandals. Baba walked in very gracefully. There was not a stick of furniture in our room, just a carpet, and a little mattress and a cushion for Baba. When Baba came to our room, He sat on the mattress with the cushion at His back, and Gulmai combed His hair.

Then one day Baba said to Naja, big Khorshed, and myself, "Come girls, bring a pad and pencil, and sit down." We sat in front of Baba with our pads and pencils, and Baba asked, "What prayers do you say?"

We told Him, "Our sacred thread prayers, Baba." Baba knew this prayer only took five minutes to say.

"What!" Baba said, "You only give five minutes to God! All day long you are eating and talking and washing and sweeping and enjoying yourselves. All day you're tending to yourselves. and you can spare just five minutes to remember God

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and to praise Him? That's not enough. I'm going to dictate a prayer to you, and you write it down!"

I had had my schooling at a convent where we had learned to write in English, not in Gujarati. And while I spoke Gujarati fluently, I wrote it very slowly. However, I started writing. It took Baba about five minutes to dictate the prayer.

When He had finished, Baba took big Khorshed's pad to see if she had taken the prayer down properly. He corrected it, and gave it back to her. He then took Naja's pad, corrected that, and gave it back to her.

It was my turn, and I was still struggling with the first line. Baba looked at my pad and said, "You've written only one line. Why is that?"

I replied, "Baba, I have had very little practice in writing Gujarati. I went to a convent and not a Parsi school, and before that I studied Gujarati for a very short time. All these years I've had no practice writing it."

Baba was all smiles, and He said, "All right, give Me your pencil." He took my pencil and wrote down the whole prayer for me. I was very glad that I did not know how to write Gujarati, because now I had the prayer in Baba's own handwriting.

The prayer is a very beautiful Persian one called "Monajat". When Baba was a young boy at His parents' house He would get up early every morning, and with His beautiful voice, sing this prayer with His parents. It must have been so lovely to hear Baba's voice singing this beautiful prayer.

While in Quetta our food was served in the room next to our bedroom where we kept our trunks. As I mentioned, we had no furniture, so this big cooking pot would be brought in and placed on the floor in front of Baba. Baba liked to serve food and to see people eat it. He would bang the big ladle on the cooking pot and say, "Come quickly." The mandali would all bring their plates to Baba, and He would serve them first. They would leave the room and next would come the older women followed by us young girls. Big Khorshed and Naja would go in front of me, so I was always the last to be served.

One day Baba got very upset with me. He took the plate from my hand and threw it out the door onto the landing. The plate went "bang" on the landing of the upstairs floor where we were staying (in America, this is the second story landing) and then clattered down the stairs one by one. I felt so frightened that I did not know what to do.

At that moment somebody pushed a plate into my hand and whispered, "Give

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this to Baba." So I gave Him the plate. Baba served me food and said to me, "Next time you are not to come last. You come last every day. See that you don't come last again, ever." So I tried my best not to be last. That was another order.

When Baba served the food He sometimes gave us very big helpings. "No, Baba, it's too much," we would tell Him. "No," Baba would reply, "you have to eat every bit of it. You're not to waste anything. I have given it to you, so you must finish it all!"

"Yes, Baba," we said, and we would sit in our other room and eat and eat. We could not swallow the last mouthful, we had eaten so much, but we had to.

A few days later Baba came to our room and said, "Today we're going for an outing; be ready at four!" So at four o'clock in the afternoon, we were all downstairs.

Baba, with the men mandali and two of the older women, got into a small bus that Rusipop, Goher and Katie's father, had arranged for Him, and we girls and the rest of the older women rode in a second smaller car.

We drove out of Quetta, far out to some lovely, bare mountains. Baba chose the highest mountain, had the car stop there, and He started to climb it. He was wearing open sandals, and I cannot imagine how He climbed in them. Yet He moved so fast that the mandali could not keep up with Him. They were struggling on all fours, while Baba was very nimbly climbing up this barren, rocky mountainside. About half way up Baba stopped, and while He was sitting on a rock Rusipop's brother, who always carried a camera, took a snapshot of Him. Baba looked very lovely sitting alone on that mountainside.

By the time they came down the sun was setting. Baba came down the mountain and said we were to go straight back to Rusipop's house on Bruce Road. The older women fitted into the small bus with the men mandali, which left us three girls for the second car with Baba. Baba turned to Rustom who was driving our car and told him, "Remember the way we came so we will know which road to take back. We are going back the same way." The bus with the mandali drove off, turned a corner, and disappeared from sight. Baba called to us, "What are you standing there for? Come quickly and get in the car."

Baba got in the front of the small car with Rustom, and we girls got in the back. By the time we started the sun had set, and Rustom did not remember the way. There was no sign of the small bus, and he took the wrong road; so we got further and further away from Quetta.

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Baba told him, "Ask the first man you see the way to Bruce Road." But for some time we did not see anyone to ask, so we kept driving around and around, getting more and more lost. We girls were very happy to be lost. We were driving with Baba, so we did not care how long it took to find the road. As long as Baba was with us we would not have minded driving around all night!

Eventually, we did see a person who gave us directions, and at last we reached Bruce Road. But we enjoyed being lost and having a long drive with Baba!

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From Quetta we went to Karachi for a short stay where I remember watching Baba play cricket. Then, towards the end of July 1924, we came back to Bombay. We again stayed at small Khorshed's family's house in Irani Mansions at Dadar. It was a nice flat on the second floor, with a very big drawing room, two bedrooms with a separate dressing room, a good-sized kitchen, and two terraces. Baba stayed in the drawing room, and the men mandali stayed in the same room, I believe. I do not really know, as we seldom went to that room. We girls stayed in one of the bedrooms.

Baba's food was cooked by the older women who were with us: Dowla Masi, my mother Daulatmai, and small Khorshed's mother, Soona Masi. As Baba never had breakfast, just one cup of weak tea at the crack of dawn, He would feel hungry rather early. So they would hurry to have His dal, rice, and chutney ready by nine o'clock.

After some days small Khorshed and I said to each other, "How lovely for them to be able to cook for Baba. Why don't we try to cook something for Him that He'll enjoy? But what shall we make?" We really did not know how to cook at that time, but we thought of one dessert called dudh-pak puri that we knew slightly. So we decided to do that.

Puris are like little fried pastry biscuits made with butter and flour. We decided to use semolina flour which makes them very light. It is a lot of work as you have to pound the semolina until it is very fine, but they are very light and taste delicious.

So we made the puris, which turned out well, and we were feeling very pleased with ourselves as we started to make the dudh-pak, which is like a custard made from milk, sugar, nutmeg, and cardamom. We put the milk on the fire, but the milkman must have put water in it as it would not thicken.

Just then Baba asked for His food! The older women took in His rice and dal, and by now we were desperate.

I told Khorshed, "Baba eats very quickly. He'll be finished in five or six minutes, and it won't be ready. Oh, what shall we do?" So we decided to thicken the milk

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with semolina, and after stirring a tablespoon into the milk it did thicken very nicely. Baba's empty plates were brought back to the kitchen and we rushed in, one carrying the puris, the other the dudh-pak, and put them in front of Baba.

"What's this?" He asked.

We replied, "Dudh-pak puris, Baba. We do hope You'll like it." And we trotted back to the kitchen feeling quite proud of ourselves.

Then a big shout came from Baba. "Send those girls who cooked this dudh-pak puri!" We were a little afraid as Baba did not sound very happy, but out we went and stood in front of Him. Baba said, "What did you make? What is this?"

We replied, "Baba, it's dudh-pak puri."

"Dudh-pak puri!" Baba said, "Have you ever tasted dudh-pak puri? This is not dudh-pak. It's invalid's food. I'm not sick!"

What could we say? We just stood there. And we were no longer feeling at all proud, but rather downcast instead. Baba then did have some so that we would not feel sad, and He sent us back to the kitchen with His used plates.

A short time later Baba called the girls in the kitchen to Him, so big Khorshed, small Khorshed, Naja, and I all went.

"Forget about the dudh-pak puris," He told us. "The taste was good and I ate it, so don't worry about it."

There was a hamper full of soft drinks near Baba, and He told us each to take a bottle of whichever flavour we liked and to drink it. But He did not tell us to leave the room, so we had to stand in the room drinking from the bottle.

In those days the bottles had marbles on the top instead of caps to keep the gas from escaping, and the drinks were very fizzy. As soon as you opened the bottle it went "Fzzzzzz". As the mandali were there, we felt very self-conscious and shy, and we tried to hide as we were drinking from the bottle.

Suddenly the whole situation struck me as very funny. First the failed dudh-pak, and now our trying to drink this very fizzy soft drink. I wanted to laugh, but I laughed at the wrong moment and I started to choke and cough instead.

Baba turned and asked, "What are you doing?"

"I'm choking, Baba," I replied.

"Then go to the kitchen and finish your drinks there!" He said. As we were making sights of ourselves we were sent back to the kitchen, where we were very happy to be and to finish our drinks quietly without anyone looking on.

So Baba gave us drinks and made friends with us. He saw to it that we did not feel upset about our funny dudh-pak puris.

The Very First Women

The next day Baba asked us, "Do you know how to make potato patties?"

"Not quite, Baba," we replied, "but we will try!"

He said, 'No, you should know how to do them properly. I'll teach you. First boil some potatoes, then peel them. Grind together a little ginger, garlic, and green chilli, and chop some fresh coriander, and I'll come at nine o' dock to show you what to do.'

We were so happy! We got all the ingredients together exactly as Baba had told us.

When Baba came He had us mash the potatoes, and then told us, 'Now add a little salt, and mix it all up together.' And Baba mixed it with us Himself. Then Baba took a little of the mixture in His hands, patted it into shape, and coated it with semolina. He showed us how we could make the patties round or oval, and how to fry them. He looked so sweet; He was so intent on what He was doing.

Then Baba left, and we continued to make patties for His lunch. This time we felt very happy; Baba had taught us what to do. We patted the mixture, and fried the patties, and served them to Baba. Baba liked the patties very much, and He told us that they were very good. Baba was very fond of potato patties and it was so sweet of Him to have taught us how to make potato patties properly.

In early August 1924 Baba sent most of the mandali to their respective homes, and Mehera and her mother to Khushru Quarters in Ahmednagar. Baba then left to travel far and wide in India until mid-September with only a few men mandali, including Gustadji and Padri, accompanying Him. This was a very arduous journey for Baba and the mandali with Him. In mid-September 1924 Baba returned to Irani Mansions in Bombay, and He spent the rest of the year travelling between Bombay and Meherabad. Towards the end of 1924 Baba was again at Meherabad, and He permitted Mehera, Daulatmai, Naja, small Khorshed, and big Khorshed to move to the Post Office there. Dowla Masi also came to the Post Office for short stays.

Baba left Bombay in early August 1924 to travel in different parts of India for His work. We had left Poona for good now to be with Baba, so He sent us to stay at Khushru Quarters. As Baba came only for short visits to Meherabad during this time we could not stay there. Baba told us that when He came to stay permanently at Meherabad, and to start activities there, He would call us to be with Him.

Small Khorshed later joined us at Khushru Quarters, and I shared a very nice room

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there with her and Dolly (Adi K. Irani's sister). My mother had a small, corner room next to ours. There was no furniture in our room, but we knew that Baba was sleeping on the floor when He was at Meherabad, so we were very happy to sleep on the floor in our room, too.

One day Baba returned to Meherabad after having been away for some work, and He called many of us from Ahmednagar for His darshan. We all were very happy. Several private horse carriages full of people went from Ahmednagar, and ours was drawn by Sufi, the white horse my mother had bought for me years before.

The road to Meherabad was, in those days, very, very quiet, not at all as it is now with factories and houses springing up everywhere. There were lovely trees along the road, many of which have since been chopped down, and riding in the carriage towards Meherabad all the countryside looked so beautiful to us. Because we were going to Baba, everything made us happy.

As we came closer to Meherabad we could see Baba standing on the Post Office verandah. From afar Baba looked very lovely in the white sadra with His hair loose. We saw that Baba was looking out for us, and we felt so excited with that beautiful feeling of seeing Him again.

We all got down from the carriage and went to Baba on the Post Office verandah. We had Baba's darshan, and we girls then sat on one side of Baba and the elders on the other. Baba chatted a little with the older women, then turned around to us girls and asked, "What do you do all day long at Khushru Quarters?" There were many people staying in Khushru Quarters, and He wanted to know whether we were spending our time gossiping.

"Baba," we replied, "we keep to ourselves and stay in our room. We write and sew and wash our clothes, and in our spare time small Khorshed tells us stories about Manzil-e-Meem when she used to visit You there."

"Good," Baba said, "but now I want you to write the name of YEZDAN in Gujarati on paper in tiny, tiny letters for one hour each day." YEZDAN is one of the Zoroastrian Names for God.

Then Baba told us, "And for a half hour each day you are to meditate. Take Zoroaster's photo or My photo and concentrate on it, think of the photo. When your mind wanders, don't worry. The mind is such that it will travel, so just bring it back again and concentrate on the photo." Our mind is always distracted, and in this way Baba showed us how to concentrate; how to think of the right thing. We were so happy to have our own beautiful orders from Baba!

On our way back to Khushru Quarters a very funny incident happened with Sufi

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Small Khorshed and I were seated in the back seat of Sufi's carriage. This seat faces backwards, so I was facing Meherabad as we left, with a bedding roll at my feet. I do not know what happened. Perhaps I bent over the bedding roll to stop it from falling out, but we had just started off when I suddenly flew out of the carriage onto the ground! What a shock everyone got! They quickly stopped the carriage. But I was very young then, and I dusted myself off, ran back to the carriage, and climbed in. Luckily I was not hurt, and I thought it very funny that, although he was so spirited, I had never fallen off Sufi when riding him, but I did fall out when riding in his carriage!

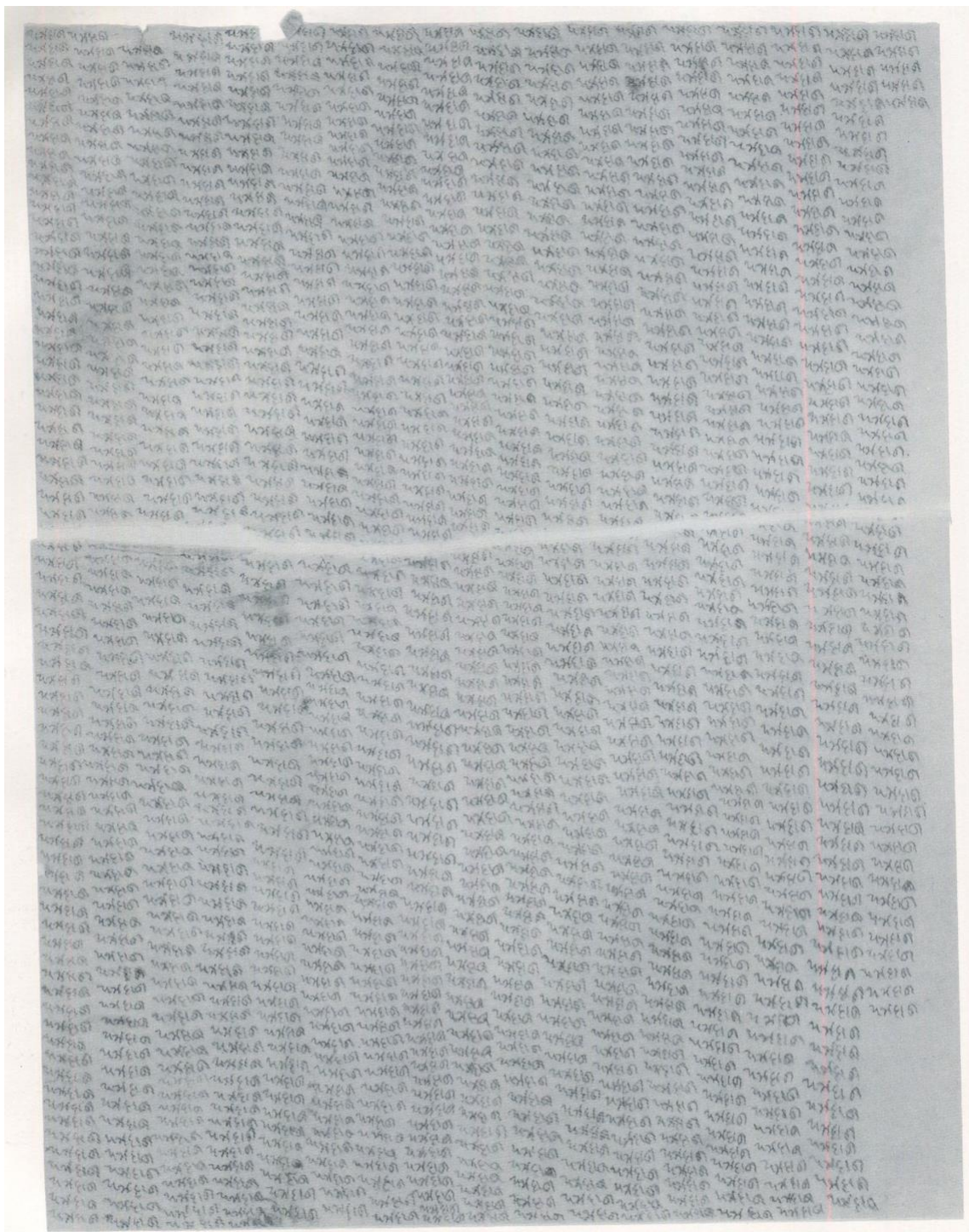
When we got home we sent for writing pads and pencils. Then in the mornings we each sat in our own corner of the room so we would not disturb one another, and meditated on Baba's beautiful Form for half an hour. After a little break we returned to our corners, and we each wrote God's Name, YEZDAN, for an hour. Very lovely was the feeling of seeing Baba's picture, and then writing God's Name. This is how Baba taught us to concentrate and meditate, and with our other work this kept us quite occupied.

Baba later had us cut the sheets of paper on which we had written "YEZDAN" so many times into tiny pieces, each with YEZDAN written on it once. There were hundreds and thousands of these tiny slips of paper. Baba told us that later He wanted the slips mixed into wheat flour pellets, and that these pellets were to be thrown into the sea for fish to eat. He said this would be good for the fish, but somehow there was much work to do and the slips of paper were never made into pellets.

Baba again left Meherabad. When He next returned there He sent word for us to come. After we greeted Baba He asked us how we were getting on with our writing and meditation. "We love it, Baba," we replied. Baba then told us, "Now I want you to make shirts for the village people of Arangaon." We were very happy and felt very important and proud of ourselves to have another order from Baba to obey.

My mother was to supervise us. She bought the material for the shirts, and a big carpet for the floor of our room on which we sat to work. My mother cut out the shirts in different sizes to fit from small children to grown men, and we girls did the stitching. We had three sewing machines, both hand and foot-treadle types, each one again in a separate corner of our room. I never liked sewing, but I did my best.

So in the mornings we did our personal work, meditated on Baba's photo, and wrote "YEZDAN". And all afternoon we stitched shirts. Baba had our minds completely occupied.



A page of Mehera's handwriting in Gujarati script of YEZDAN, one of the Zoroastrian Names of God.

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When Baba again came to Meherabad we went to see Him. Baba asked us how we were getting on with the sewing, and how many shirts we had made. We replied, "Oh, Baba, quite a few, about two dozen."

And He said, "Only two dozen? That's not enough! You have to make more."

"Yes, Baba," we replied, and when we went back to Ahmednagar we stitched faster and faster. The next time Baba came He again asked how many shirts were now ready, and when we told Him about fifty He said, "That's good, but I need still more. There are not enough for the villagers." So we began to race each other and sew very, very fast. When Baba came to Meherabad again we had finished over one hundred, and He said, "Now it's the right number."

Baba then told my mother to buy prasad - big sacks of a dry mixture of peanuts, chickpeas, and puffed rice called chura - which was to be distributed with the shirts to the poor of the village. Baba always liked to give prasad, and this was something the villagers would appreciate. The shirts were tied in bundles, and were packed off with the chura sacks in a bullock cart for Meherabad.

We arrived at Meherabad in the afternoon. Baba was seated on the Post Office verandah playing the dholak, a cylindrical drum, and singing bhajans very beautifully. The whole village of Arangaon was there: not only the men, but also all the women with their children. When Baba saw us He told us, "Sit down and wait until I finish this song." We sat behind Him on the verandah and listened to His singing; it was a Tukaram bhajan. I do not remember exactly which one, but perhaps it was the one that says:

"What shall I give Him of which I can be proud?
Shall I give this small life of mine at His feet?
Even that is not enough to surrender to Him."

The villagers loved to listen to Baba singing. His voice was so sweet and lovely, and His pronunciation very beautiful.

Baba then turned around, had Padri open the prasad sacks, and told us to open the bundles of shirts. All the villagers were there to receive their prasad from Baba. Sitting on the verandah Baba looked so happy as He called a little child from his mother's lap, held his hand and caressed it, then gave him a nicely folded shirt with the chura prasad on it. And the child was very happy to have a nice new shirt to



A pencil drawing by Mehera of Meher Baba done in 1924 when she was staying at Khushru Quarters, Ahmednagar (actual size)

wear and some prasad to eat. All the children were given their share, then the older boys, and lastly the men.

Baba gave so much prasad that in the younger children's small hands, it spilt on to the ground. Baba would always give abundantly, with both hands, so generous He was. And Baba loved to see another eat. He loved to give food.

So the villagers were happy. And when Baba told them to leave, the children were shouting and laughing and chattering excitedly, all eating their prasad. It was such a beautiful scene.

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Baba turned to my mother and said, "See how happy they are! Don't you feel happy to see them so happy?"

And my mother replied, "Yes, yes, Baba. It's lovely to see them happy."

"I always feel happy to see others happy. I am happy today," Baba said. Then Baba told us that in a few days we were to come to stay with Him for good! And we, too, were very, very happy!

We were very excited about moving to Meherabad and we returned to Ahmednagar to get ready for our move. It was now towards the end of 1924. Small Khorshed told me, 'We're going to stay with Baba at Meherabad, and Baba likes to sleep on the floor. He's like a fakir, you know. We should also be like that and not have too much comfort; Baba would appreciate it. We must give up something. What shall we give up? Let's stop using pillows.'

"All right," I said. "Yes, before going to Baba it would be so nice to do that." We were already sleeping on the floor, and now we started to sleep without pillows. And, fortunately, I could sleep without one, but the floor under my head felt very hard.

Then Baba called us to stay at Meherabad in the Post Office. We were feeling very happy to be staying with Baba at last, and with a "You take this corner and I'll take that corner," we got settled with our bedding and unpacked our trunks.

Then Baba came into the room, and He asked, "Have you got enough bed clothes? Nobody is to get sick here."

"Yes, Baba," we replied.

"Let Me see," said Baba. Baba knew that something was missing that should have been there. We opened our bedding and showed it to Him. Baba looked at our bedding and said, "Where are your pillows?"

"Baba," we replied, "we don't use pillows."

"What!" Baba exclaimed, "And why don't you use pillows?" He did not look at all pleased.

We did not know what to say. We were very surprised, for we thought Baba would be very pleased with us. We were so silly in those days. We wanted to please Baba, but this was not pleasing Him at all.

As I did not want to say that it had been Khorshed's idea, Khorshed and I looked at each other and we said, "Baba, we don't need pillows."

Baba said, "If you stay here you are to use a pillow and stay healthy. We have

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no doctors and no medicine. You are to sleep well and keep well, otherwise you all will go straight back to Ahmednagar."

"No, Baba, please," we begged.

"All right," Baba said, "then tonight you are to sleep with pillows."

So Baba sent for pillows from Ahmednagar, and it was very nice to have them again. We found out that Baba did not like such nonsense. We were trying to be fakirs, but you have to be a fakir inwardly.

5

Post Office Days

Late 1924 to End 1926



Near the end of 1924 Baba returned to Meherabad, and He called us, the first women, to join Him permanently there. We - my mother, myself, Naja, big Khorshed, and small Khorshed and from time to time Dowla Masi - stayed in the Post Office building near the railway line. This building was a post office during the First World War when, as I have said, what is now Meherabad had been a military training camp built by the British.

Most of the military buildings there were not built to last, but the Post Office had been. It was such a strong, well-made building, with thick walls of big, black stones. It had one good-sized room, and there were verandahs on the south and east sides. There were windows only in the south and north walls, and they had bars on them. The British had built it close to the railway line so that the mail bags could easily be taken on and off trains as they passed by. Later, as it was no longer being used as a post office, the railway authorities ordered it to be pulled down, and we felt very sad about that, but I am told that the stones from the Post Office walls were used to build Baba's Samadhi.

How we loved the Post Office. It was there that so many things happened for the first time with Baba: I had Baba's darshan there for the first time; I first heard Baba sing there in His lovely voice; Baba had His bath there; and He had His tea and His food there. Baba has slept there, and the villagers of Arangaon first came to know of Baba and have His darshan there, too. So that place was sacred to us.

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These very first days were so special to us. Only three of the men mandali were with Baba: Gustadji, Padri, and Masaji. And Baba slept with them on the Post Office verandah on the windowless east side facing the road.

It was now the beginning of winter, and the verandah was open to the chilly east breeze. Baba had no bed, just a thin mattress on a mat on the floor, and He would feel so cold at night that He could not sleep. Baba also had no mosquito net, and a snake or scorpion could have easily crawled into His bedding for warmth. As Baba could not sleep, He would be sitting up by 3:30 a.m. with His blanket wrapped around Him, and at about 5 a.m. Baba would wake the mandali, however deeply they were snoring. Baba would take His sandal and throw it at one of them; He especially loved to aim for Masaji, who would wake up, see Baba's sandal, and feel very happy. Masaji would get up, kiss Baba's sandal, and give it back to Him.

We girls were sleeping very comfortably on our bedding rolls inside the Post Office room, and here was Baba, the King of Kings, sleeping in the open with no proper bedding. Now in the night at Meherazad I think of Baba and remember all these details; how Baba used to give others comfort and go without it Himself. How dense we were! Here were we girls feeling so cosy inside, while Baba was so uncomfortable outside. But we could not tell Baba to use the room. We girls could not have slept on the verandah, so Baba had to be outside with the mandali. He went through all that discomfort.

Our food was very simple. In the morning we, including Baba, of course, had only weak tea, and we girls got up very early to get it ready. I have never liked getting up early, and when I came to stay with Baba, that was one thing that was difficult for me. We would be up by five or earlier to prepare Baba's tea, and by five-thirty we could hear Him coming to us, singing in His beautiful voice.

We had a little wood fire outside on the verandah for cooking our food, but we made the tea on a kerosene stove inside our room as Baba did not like the taste of wood smoke in His tea. The tea was very weak, made with a little fresh mint, lemon grass, and only a pinch of dried tea leaves. We had sugar in it, but no milk; as well as no chapatis, no butter, and no bread. This weak tea was our only breakfast!

I would give Baba His tea on the east verandah where He would be sitting on a packing case and chatting with the mandali and Naja or my mother would give the mandali theirs. Baba's tea was served in a big aluminium mug, and this same mug Baba used for washing His face, having His bath, and for drinking water.



A view of the Post Office at Meherabad as it was when Mehera first had Meher Baba's darshan there. The east verandah without windows is where, in 1924, Baba slept while Mehera and the other women stayed inside. Meherabad Hill is in the background beyond the railway line. (Photo taken from model)

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When we served the tea it was freshly made and steaming hot, so Baba's aluminium mug would be too hot for Him to put to His lips. My mother noticed this, and she taught us to put Baba's mug of tea in half a pail of cold water to cool it to the right temperature before serving it to Baba.

We had just the dire necessities, and all our utensils were either brass, aluminium, or enamel. Baba had told us that everything was to be unbreakable for we would not be able to replace anything.

For lunch we had rice and spiced dal, and in the evening we had rice and plain dal. A little later on Baba let us make curry and rice, too. As a child I was very fond of meat and fish. I did not like vegetarian food at all, but Baba made me forget all about meat. I was very young, and with just weak tea without milk as our breakfast, I would be so hungry that I eagerly looked forward to our rice and dal.

Naja cooked the rice and dal on the wood fire on the verandah, and I helped her by washing pots and pans and grinding the spices. It is not so easy to grind spices on a stone. Dry coconut and coriander seeds are particularly hard, but I would try to make them very, very fine, especially when Baba allowed us to make curry, for finely-ground spices make the curry very smooth.

Baba, Who was young then, would get very hungry after having only weak tea at dawn, and then working hard with the mandali. He came for His lunch as early as nine-thirty, and for His evening dal and rice at 4 or 5 p.m.

Naja made the fire and put the dal on early so that it would be ready for Baba, and when He came in He would call not "Naja", but "Najari", so sweetly to her.

"Najari, what's the time? Is the food ready?"

And Naja would say, "Baba, the dal is just ready, but the rice isn't quite."

Baba would reply, "Never mind, I don't want rice, just dal."

For meals Baba sat on His little rug on the floor near the fireplace on the verandah, and I would serve Him His food in His brass plate. We were so new and unaccustomed to staying with a Master that we did not have the sense to take our sandals off. We served Baba still wearing them. Now I remember these little things. Baba must have thought that we were very ignorant, but Mani says Baba wanted us to be like that; that very clever people might have argued too much and made His work more difficult.

With His food Baba would sometimes ask for bread. Gulmai would bring it for Baba from Ahmednagar when she visited Him; just a small loaf that we would try to keep fresh by wrapping in a cloth and keeping in a saucepan. The bread would

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become a little stale, but Baba would break it into small pieces and put it in the dal. Baba always broke bread, He never cut it. And seeing Baba eat, we would feel hungry, too.

We girls were still a little shy with Baba. We peeped at Baba from a distance, but we were not bold enough to talk to Him unless He spoke to us. And Baba was strict with us.

Baba had told me not to read or write, so I could not even take down the things that He told us. I had brought some of my favourite books with me in a trunk - *David Copperfield* and others - to share with the girls, but I quickly sent them back to my sister in Ahmednagar, and I never saw those books again!

I was also not to touch or speak to any men, and the food that I prepared was given only to Baba, or later to the school children, but not to men. Gustadji was the exception to these rules. His storeroom was on one of the Post Office verandahs, and Baba sent him to us for messages. Even Baba Himself seldom entered our room. He would take His meals and tea on the Post Office verandah.

And there were many other little orders even in the beginning. For example, we were to wear warm jackets in the evening and, as I have said, keep our heads covered with white scarves. We could come onto the verandah to cook and, in these very early days, go to the well to wash our clothes; otherwise, I was mostly inside our room. We did not roam about outside, and Meherabad Hill in those days was completely out-of-bounds to all.

Baba was very fond of music, and as I have said, His was a very beautiful and sweet voice. Sometimes Baba would sing in the early mornings, and so lovely was His voice that He could sing beautifully even before brushing His teeth and having tea.

Early one morning, after we had quickly rolled up our bedding and put it aside, splashed our faces with cold water, and brushed our teeth, we were rushing to make tea for Baba. I was pumping the kerosene stove which is very noisy, when my mother said, "Listen! You can't hear because of the stove, but Baba is singing. How beautifully He is singing!"

As we listened we could hear Baba's voice coming nearer and nearer. He was singing a new song, not a qawali, but an ordinary song with a pretty tune. At first we stayed in the middle of the room as we knew Baba would not like us to stare at Him from the windows, but we could still see out. Baba's voice came still nearer,

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and then around the corner of the Post Office He came; and we saw Him. It was just at the crack of dawn, and the dawn light was on His lovely face. So beautiful He looked in His white sadra with His hair loose. And as He sang He danced so gracefully. It was just a glimpse for a few seconds, but the sight of Baba dancing and singing in the dawn light is something I shall never forget.

As Baba turned towards the corner of the verandah we rushed to the window to see more, but He had gone from our sight. But we did see Him for those few seconds, so slim and beautiful in a white sadra, dancing and singing spontaneously because He was happy.

Baba would often walk on the verandah of the Post Office singing qawali songs, which were His favourite kind, but He never would finish the whole song. Baba would just sing the three or four lines that He liked best in the song, and sing those lines again and again.

This particular day Baba was walking back and forth on the verandah singing a few lines from a song, while we girls sat peeling the garlic. Baba came up to us and said, "You're listening to My singing, but do you understand the meaning?"

It was a qawali song written in high Urdu, and I had only learned enough Urdu to talk to our servants when I was a child.

"No, Baba, we don't understand it at all," we replied.

So He explained it to us. Its meaning in English is: "If in the midst of enjoyment (masti) you remember the Beloved, then that is love. At that time you must have your head on His feet."

There is no exact word in English for "masti". It means being engrossed in something you love doing - seeing a beautiful film; enjoying good food; talking happily to someone. It is that feeling of happiness that does not have to do with the Beloved. So the song says, even if when you are enjoying yourself your head is on His feet, then you are loving Him.

Having your head on His feet in plain words means remembering the Beloved; thinking of Him, so that when you are thinking of Him your love is for Him at that moment, and not for what you are engrossed in. And that is how He should be loved.

It is very difficult to do this. When you are eating very tempting food you think of the food and not of Baba. But if you remember Baba, that is love.

Now before meals at Meherazad we say Baba's "Jai", and I say to Baba, "Come

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eat with us." Invite Baba to be with you, to eat with you, and Baba will feel happy that you have thought of Him.

One morning Baba was sitting on His carpet on the Post Office floor. He called me and told me to sit down, and then asked me, "Do you know any English songs?"

"No, Baba," I said, "I don't know any songs, and I don't even have a good singing voice."

"Never mind," Baba replied, "when I ask you to sing, you must sing. Don't you remember any songs that you sang at school?"

Baba knew that I did know a song, but I could not think of one at all. With Baba one would sometimes go blank and forget what one knew.

"Try to think of one," Baba said. I thought and thought, and then remembered this one English song that I had sung with the girls at my school. It was called "Swanee," not "Way Down Upon the Swanee River" but "Swanee, how I love you, how I love you, my dear old Swanee!"

I felt very shy, but I had to sing it for Baba and He liked it very much.

"Now sing it again," He told me. "I want to learn it." So Baba repeated each line after me, and in a few minutes He had learned the whole song.

The next morning we heard Baba loudly singing "Swanee", and He sang it beautifully. Baba told us that this was the first English song He had sung, and I was very happy that He had learned it from me.

Once Baba even taught us a song, a whole song, not just four lines. It was a song to Krishna. He called us girls to sit in front of Him, and He taught us so sweetly line by line. Naja and I did not have strong singing voices, but both big and small Khorshed did. And so we learned a song from Baba!

In those very early days at the Post Office Baba would sometimes let things slip, and many of the things that He told us then have since come true.

Once at this time Baba said to us, "One day I will bring out My sword!" We looked at Baba feeling very startled and not knowing what He could possibly mean. In His white sadra, with His hair loose and flowing, Baba looked so loving and gentle. At that time we had never heard of the Kali Yuga Avatar, nor had Baba told us Who He is. Now that we know that holy books call this age the Kali Yuga and that the Avatar of this Age is always shown riding a white horse with a drawn sword in His hand, we understand what Baba meant.

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For thousands of years the Avatar has come again and again to tell us how to behave. In different ways, He has told us to practice "good thoughts, good words and good deeds" but we have not listened. Now, as a mother has to bring out a stick for her children who will not listen, so Baba will have to bring out His sword to make His children heed Him. This I feel will happen.

Baba was very energetic and, of course, He was young and beautiful. During these early days before Baba had the Post Office enclosed, we would see Him walking so fast through the fields, back and forth from the Post Office to the old house (now Dharamshala) that the mandali were repairing. In the evenings at twilight Baba sat on the floor with my mother and us girls, and we massaged His feet and legs. Baba loved to have music at that time, so often we sang Him little songs. Sometimes Baba used to tell us funny stories, and sometimes He would say, "Now you tell Me some funny stories." When Baba asked me, I told Him that I had never read any funny stories; we were always studying at school and had no time for such books. The other girls told Baba, "We only know a very short one," and Baba sweetly said, "No matter how short it is, tell Me!" So they did, and Baba enjoyed the story very much. But the next time Baba asked for a funny story the girls had to tell Him that they did not know any more. "Never mind," Baba said, "tell Me the same one again." So they repeated the story, and Baba enjoyed it as much as He had the first time! Baba was very childlike and enjoyed fun and funny things like a young schoolboy. Baba liked to hear of funny incidents in people's lives, and He Himself was very witty and clever. With the slightest excuse Baba would find humour in a situation, and He used to amuse everybody. Baba had so much serious work on His mind, and He told us that humour lightened the burden of it. He was so lovely, Baba was. He still is beautiful, but you cannot see Him!

At the Post Office one day (I think just Baba, myself, and my mother were present) Baba told me, "Sit down," so I sat on the floor in front of Him. Of course, He was also sitting on the floor; we had no chairs.

"Do you like working and staying here?" He asked me. "Yes, Baba, I love to be here and to be serving You," I replied.

"Then from today you are My orderly!" Baba told me. "Orderly?" I said, "Baba, I don't know what 'orderly' means."

Baba explained that it meant I was to look after His clothes, His trunk, see to His

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tea, wash His clothes, and so on. And I was very happy! "Take My things from Gustadji, and you are now to do everything for Me," He said. Up until now Gustadji had been the only one permitted to touch Baba's things.

So from that day on I began attending to Baba. When He wanted to wash His face I would get the water ready, and then I would pour the water into His hands and give Him the soap; and again pour water for Baba to rinse His face and hands, and give Him the towel. When Baba shaved I gave Him His razor, and I made His tea, and served Him His food.

I felt so happy and proud, too, to be allowed to wash Baba's clothes. I loved washing His clothes. We girls all went together to that well on the roadside which Baba drank from the very first time He came to Meherabad in 1923. The road was empty except for the occasional farmer or bullock cart passing by. There was a lovely stone parapet around the well that is not there now, and on that we washed the clothes. With a small bucket we drew water from the well and washed the stones clean, then I washed Baba's clothes. And after that we washed our own. While we did the washing we could see Baba coming and going through the fields. It was a very beautiful time.

Back at the Post Office I tied a separate line to dry Baba's clothes, and while they were still a little damp I folded His sadras in a clean sheet and pressed them with my hands so that when I unfolded them, they looked ironed. And again I aired them, and then put them in Baba's trunk.

In December 1924 Baba took us to Bombay on the night train. In those days there was no direct train, so we had to change trains at Dhond in the middle of the night. Baba told us to be ready to leave by five o'clock and, as it was December and would be chilly on the way, He told us to take our warm things and not to catch colds.

We got our things ready, and I had my warm, pink knitted coat lying on my packed bedding. My mother loved to crochet and knit, and she had knitted it for me while I was still at school. It was very loose and came almost to my knees, but it was warm, so I always kept it with me. The pink was a pretty colour, not too bright, and it had a white band knitted into the border.

Baba came into our room with a bundle of light pinkish-mauve cloth in His hand and, to our surprise, He threw this bundle onto the big cotton carpet on our floor still holding one end in His hand. Baba then started to wrap the cloth around His head very, very quickly, looking so beautiful with a slight turn of His head this

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way, then that way, until His hair was hidden inside a turban! Baba did not want His hair to be seen while we were travelling.

Then He asked us, "Are you all packed and ready? We have to leave in fifteen minutes. Have you left your warm things out?" Baba saw my pink coat lying on my bedding and picked it up asking, "Whose is this?" "It's mine, Baba," I said. He put the coat on and, because it was knitted, it fitted Him.

"This is a nice, warm coat," Baba said. "Remember to wear it if you feel cold on the train."

Baba looked so lovely in the pink coat and pink turban, but before we got into the tonga to go to the station, He took the coat off.

Now at night when I think of Baba and remember every little thing that we did with Him, I realise that this was the first pink coat that Baba had worn. Baba always wore white or almond-coloured or very pale-blue coats, not pink ones, but at Guruprasad Baba wore a pink coat at darshan time. Someone had given it to Him, and it suited Him, so we said, "Baba, why don't you wear it?" But the very first pink coat Baba wore had been knitted for me by my mother!

We went by tonga from the Post Office to the station. In those days there were very few people at the train station. It was twilight when we arrived, and Baba told us to sit on a bench as we waited for the train, while He began walking from one end of the platform to the other looking so beautiful in the Kamli coat, sandals, sadra and turban.

As Baba walked He began to sing quite loudly at each end of the platform where there were no people, and very softly as He passed us and the others waiting for the train. Baba went back and forth singing loudly and then softly. It was so sweet to hear Him, and it shows He loved music and singing, and how much He suffered in keeping silence for all those years.

When the train came the mandali first rushed to find Baba's compartment. It was a very small one with two seats only, one for Baba, and one for Gustadji. Baba told us that we were to sit in the ladies' compartment. Then He got into His tiny compartment, and Gustadji pushed His bedding inside. While we were waiting on the bench for the mandali to find the ladies' compartment Baba sent Gustadji to call me to Him.

"Oh, what's happened," I thought. "Have I made a mistake? What could I have done that has made Baba send for me?" I went to Baba's compartment and climbed in.

Baba was very sweet. He told me to sit down and said, "Massage My feet." So

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I massaged Baba's feet for about half a minute, and then He said to me, "You know, if you massage My feet every day without fail I'll make you like Babajan!"

I was so surprised. I had never even thought of such a thing. I had never aspired for such greatness, to become like Babajan! I only wanted to be with Baba, and to love Him, and to serve Him. But what could I say? So I just said, "Yes, Baba."

But Baba knew I would not be able to massage His feet in Bombay without missing a day. He kept silence there for seven days, and fasted for some days, too, and at that time no one could even enter His door. Baba had wanted to see how I would feel about it, and what I would say! It was very naughty of Baba to say that, but very sweet, too! He had to startle people sometimes with certain things.

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On that visit to Bombay in December 1924 we stayed at Bharucha Building in Dadar, not far from Manzil-e-Meem, and it was during this visit that Baba composed the "Gujarati Arti".

Baba's room in Bharucha Building was at the far end of a hall next to Gustadji's, and after Gustadji's was yet another room. We women - my mother, myself, and Naja - were in the last room along that hallway, and next to our room was the kitchen.

During the day, we were with my mother in the kitchen preparing the food, and when Baba left His room Gustadji showed me how to make Baba's bed and clean His room and bathroom. And I washed Baba's clothes and kept His trunk tidy, too.

Sometimes in the evening Baba called my mother and us girls to sit with Him in His room, and sometimes a singer would come to sing for Baba. I remember, too, that one morning Baba told us that He had had no sleep at all that night, but had stayed up to listen to a ghazal singer. That shows how much Baba loved beautiful music.

At this time, 1924, Baba was still speaking, but in Bombay, as I have said, He kept silence for about seven days. I think Baba must have wanted to see how it would feel to be silent. Baba also fasted, taking only weak tea made with a few tea leaves and a little mint.

We kept a tea tray for Baba on which there were a small tea pot, a sugar bowl, and a cup, and we were very particular to see that it was kept spotlessly clean. Naja made Baba's tea, I took the tea tray to the door of His room, and Baba took the tray from me at the door.

One day Baba saw a tiny ant somewhere on the tray. Ants are a great problem

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in Bombay, and this one little ant must have been hiding underneath the tray and then crawled up to the top when I gave it to Baba. Baba was very upset. "There are ants near My tea and the sugar pot! Why are you so careless?" He said. And Baba threw the teapot into the bathroom where it shattered into pieces.

We quickly made Baba some more tea and took it to Him. Though we had done our best, Baba taught us to be still more tidy and clean.

One day at Bharucha Building, Baba was, as we say in Gujarati, "quite out of mood". I did not know why then, and I still do not know. I never asked - it must have had something to do with Baba's work - but He was in a very fiery mood. It was in the morning around nine or ten o'clock, and Baba began to get angry with every little thing we did.

Then Baba suddenly said, "Why are you all here? Get out at once!" We got very scared. Baba told Naja, "You leave first, take your trunk and bedding with you. Your father will take you to the train station, and you are to board the first train and go straight to Poona."

"Oh my," poor Naja said half weeping. "Where is my trunk? Where are my clothes?" She began to shove her things into the trunk as fast as she could, because she did not want to displease or disobey Baba. As there was no porter, Masaji, her father, had to carry the trunk himself, an unheard of thing in those days when there were many servants. Both of them came downstairs and went out into the street with the trunk on Masaji's head.

I felt very sorry for Naja; I did not know my turn was also coming. After Naja left, Baba turned to me and said, "Why are you standing there? Get out at once and don't come here again! I don't want to see you!" I do not know what other things Baba said. He was very angry and speaking very loudly.

Baba had said, "At once", so I had no time to pack. I just started walking in the clothes I was wearing in the house which had dal stains on them, old sandals and with a matha banu on my head. I do not know what I looked like. Baba just stood there, still very angry, so I went quickly down the steps onto the pavement and started walking.

I did not know my way around Bombay, but I knew that Naja had gone to the Dadar train station, so I set off in that direction. Then I got the urge to look back to see which was Baba's window, and which was our window, and how far I had come. I turned and very timidly looked up. Baba was looking out the window! He

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called out very angrily to me, "Why are you looking up? Don't look up. Go at once!"

So I started walking again, but I walked very slowly thinking, "What am I to do? Where am I to go?" In those days in Bombay there was hardly a person or a car on the streets. And as I was walking so slowly and wondering what to do I heard footsteps behind me. I turned and what do you think! I saw Baba. He was walking very quickly towards me with Gustadji and looking very stern. Baba passed me without saying a word, but I was so happy to see Him. Baba was there, and so I did not feel lost anymore. Then Gustadji gestured to me to follow.

A little further on Baba turned into the street of a Parsi follower's house. They had a small shop with their house, and Baba went into the shop. I was still following Baba at a distance, and I felt so relieved to see Him go inside; that meant He was not going to the station. So I came to the gate of the house and waited, thinking, "When Baba comes out, I'll follow Him. I don't know where to go in Bombay, and He hasn't told me not to follow." And when Baba came out He said to me, "Come on!" So Baba and Gustadji walked ahead, and I walked behind.

I found that while Baba was at that Parsi's place He had told one of the family to go to the station, which must have been quite near, to call Naja and Masaji back. So they, too, came back, with Masaji still carrying the trunk on the top of his head. Only one minute more and Naja would have been on the train back to Poona. How happy and relieved we felt. We had been very frightened when Baba sent us away. We did not want to go home. We wanted only to stay with Baba.

So Baba saw that we obeyed His orders, and every time you obey Baba you please Him and make Him happy. We never asked Baba why this happened; there is always some reason with Baba.

One morning Baba told us, "Put on some better saris, we're going for an outing!"

We were very excited. We had only been in our room and the kitchen at Bharucha Building for quite some days, and we were very happy to be going outside the house.

Baba took us to a park called Victoria Gardens. This, we found, consisted of some gardens, a small zoo, and a path where Baba could take a long walk.

Baba told us, "I'm going for a walk. You all can do whatever you like." We knew that Baba did not want us to be with Him; that He wanted to walk alone. So we watched Him stride away with that fast pace of His, and we went to look at the

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nearby zoo. Unfortunately, we were there at the time the animals' cages were being cleaned, and the smell was rather strong. When the cleaning was over, Baba had not yet returned so we watched the zoo-keeper feed big chunks of meat to the lions.

After perhaps an hour Baba came back from His walk, and we returned to Bharucha Building.

The next day Baba again told us to put on our better saris, and He again took us to Victoria Gardens. Off He went for His walk, and we once again watched the animals' cages being cleaned and the lions devouring their big chunks of meat.

When, on the third day Baba told us that we were going out, I timidly asked, "Where are we going, Baba?" "Victoria Gardens!" Baba replied. We had seen all that there was to see there, and we must have looked a little dismayed, because Baba changed His mind and took us somewhere else.

I am telling this story about Victoria Gardens because Baba then told us of another time He had visited there when He was still known as Merwan. It was much, much earlier, at a time during those years between Babajan's kiss and Baba's long stay with Upasni Maharaj. Baba was in a different state in those days. He told us that He had stayed in Bombay for some time, and that while there He had often walked in Victoria Gardens. On this particular day a Parsi man with his family was sitting on one of the benches that Baba passed by on His walk. Suddenly this Parsi man jumped up and slapped Baba's face, loudly accusing Him of gazing at the women in his family! But Baba's stare was because of His state. We were so shocked. How humiliating this must have been for Baba. Baba was so pure, and yet for our sakes He had to put up with being misunderstood like this.

I remember another outing that Baba took us on while we were at Bharucha Building. Chanji (Faramroz Dadachanji), who at this time had recently come to Baba, owned a cinema in Bombay and, of course, he wanted Baba to visit this cinema.

One day Baba again told us, "Put on your good saris, we're going to the cinema." Another outing! How happy we felt. We were very young then and still new to Baba, and not yet accustomed to the cloistered life that we were beginning to lead.

Naturally, Chanji gave Baba the very best seats, and we all sat upstairs in a private box. This was the first film that we had seen for a long time, and it was a very, very good silent one about, I still remember, Marie Antoinette and the French Revolution.

We were engrossed in the story when, all of a sudden, Baba got up and told us

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we were leaving! I was very surprised. I did not know then that Baba had this habit of walking out in the middle of films. So we left with Baba, and as we were going out we kept glancing over our shoulders to try to catch a last glimpse of that film.

Meher Baba returned to Meherabad from Bharucha Building in Bombay in late January, 1925, and a new phase of His work began. He was in residence at Meherabad for the next two years until late November, 1926, and this period has sometimes been called "The First Great Stay at Meherabad." Meherabad was now transformed from a deserted military camp into a thriving settlement. Mandali who had been sent to their homes began to return. Baba opened Meher Charitable Dispensary and Hospital, began the Hazrat Babajan School, gave darshan to the large crowds who were now coming every Thursday, and had built many temporary buildings of bamboo matting at what is now Lower Meherabad to house the new residents and activities. Baba stayed in the tiny, stone room across the road from the Post Office known as the Jhopdi. He supervised every detail of the activities at Meherabad, and during this intensely busy phase Baba fasted, wrote "The Book", lit the Dhuni for the first time, and began His silence.

Mehera, Daulatmai, Naja and small Khorshed returned to the Post Office and were joined by big Khorshed (Baba's sister-in-law), Soona Masi (small Khorshed's mother) and, from time to time, Dowla Masi (Baba's aunt). Mani also came to stay during her school holidays, accompanied by Shireenmai. As always since joining Baba, they slept on mats on the floor. Amidst the hustle and bustle of Meherabad their lives were very secluded. A bamboo-matting fence was built to enclose the Post Office and they did not leave this compound. Except for Baba and Gustadji, who had a storeroom on the Post Office verandah, men were forbidden to enter their quarters.

After our return to Meherabad Baba, for some reason, decided to send us to Sakori for a few days. We got ready to leave, then went to say good-bye to Baba Who was waiting for us on the Post Office verandah.

Baba came first to my mother. "Take care of yourselves and look after your health," He told her. And then Baba embraced her.

Baba then turned to Naja, "Naja, come here. I'll embrace you, because you are My cousin." And Baba embraced Naja. "And now I won't embrace anyone else!" He said.

I was standing there, and I cannot describe how I felt. I just ran away. I wanted Baba to embrace me, too, but He embraced only my mother and Naja, not me. And then we left for Sakori.



Meher Baba's birthday celebration on the Meherabad Post Office verandah in 1925.

Baba is seated and the women standing behind Baba are: Daulatmai, small Khorshed, Dina Talaii, Gulmai, Baba's mother Shireenmai and Pilamai (of Karachi). Behind Gulmai and Shireenmai are standing sisters Freni and Mehera, and Padri's mother Freni Masi who is partially out of view behind Shireenmai and Pilamai. The young child standing to Baba's left is His sister, Mani.

On Baba's right holding a child is Khansaheb, Baba's uncle Faredoon (long beard), Masaji and Behramji. Gustadji is standing to Baba's right with his arm across his chest, and Kaikhushru Masa is seated at Gustadji's right. Ramjoo and Rustom K. Irani are by far left pandal pole and Padri is behind Gustadji and Daulatmai.

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I believe it was on our return from that short trip to Sakori that we stayed at Akbar Press in Ahmednagar before returning to Meherabad. We spent four days there, and then took a tonga back, a distance of perhaps five miles. On reaching Meherabad we heard that Baba was coming on foot from Ahmednagar. In those days there were no buses or rickshaws, so the only way to travel from Ahmednagar to Meherabad was in a tonga, by bicycle, or on foot; and many times Baba has walked that distance.

By now a lot of the villagers from the nearby Arangaon loved Baba and, to show their love for Him, they went with drums and bells to welcome Baba back to Meherabad. We were eager to catch a glimpse of Baba returning, and what a sight we saw! There was Baba looking so lovely, striding along the road to Meherabad, while around Him a throng of villagers joyfully danced and sang to the rhythm of their drums and bells.

On Baba's 31st birthday in February 1925 we were to get up at around 2 a.m., but at that hour I could not open my eyes. "What's happening, please?" I asked when awakened. "Hurry, Mehera, get up. It's Baba's birthday!" the girls told me. "Oh, yes, Baba's birthday," I remembered, and I jumped out of my bedding and quickly got ready.

It is our tradition to make pretty designs with powdered coloured chalk on the ground at the entrance of the house, and to hang freshly-made garlands over the doorway on special occasions. So in the early, early morning I helped with the chalk designs and made the garland for the doorway.

In 1925 Baba's birthday was celebrated down the Hill. As I have said, in those days the Hill was out-of-bounds, and no one was allowed to cross the railway line.

Baba had His bath quite early, and then my sister's husband, Rustom, picked Him up in his arms and carried Him to a chair. Baba looked so sweet with His beautiful hair loose, but it was cold at that hour of the day and He must have been feeling chilly after taking a bath and then sitting in the open with just a thin sadra on. Someone, realising this, put a shawl around Baba.

Handfuls of people from Ahmednagar, Arangaon, and Poona had gathered at Meherabad for Baba's birthday, and each one wanted to wash Baba's feet. A big basin was placed under His feet, and the men's turn was first. One by one they

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poured a little water on Baba's feet, and then touched them. Baba was gesturing, "Hurry, hurry." He did not want people to make a fuss about taking His darshan and kissing His feet. He always wanted everything to be fast. And Baba sat in the cold and allowed this, because His devotees wanted to wash His feet and to celebrate His birthday.

Then the women were called. So we girls, one by one, poured water on Baba's feet and lightly touched them. Some splashed the water that had touched Baba's feet on their faces and their eyes. For the first time Baba allowed us to wash His feet on His birthday.

We all had our work to do: I attended to Baba, Naja cooked, and we all helped her by cleaning the rice and dal and washing the pots and pans. Then we had the room to sweep, sewing to do, and so on. Baba had told my mother to repeat God's Name for an hour every day, so she also had that to do.

Baba was very fond of chutney and one of the duties that He had given me was to prepare the chutney to accompany His rice and dal. It was a very simple one, of just garlic, salt, and a little red chilli ground together. I, too, loved chutney, but Baba now told me that I was not to eat it.

One day the food was ready, and Baba was seated on His rug on the floor. I served the chutney to Him and He quickly tasted it.

"Who made the chutney?" Baba asked. "I did, Baba. You told me to make the chutney," I replied.

"But there's no salt in it!"

"Oh," I said, "I thought I put some in."

"No," said Baba, "it needs salt. Why didn't you taste it before giving it to Me?"

"Baba," I replied, "You told me not to eat chutney, so how could I taste it?"

"Eating is one thing and tasting is another. You must taste what you give Me, otherwise, how will you know if it is done properly? You must make sure that what you serve Me tastes right. You can't just serve Me anything. So from today you are to taste it."

"Yes, Baba," I replied, and from that day I tasted the chutney. Sometimes we want to obey Baba, but in doing so we make more mistakes. Baba was showing me that I should have used my common sense, and that I was to take more care about what I gave Him.

As I have mentioned, Baba told my mother to meditate by repeating God's Name

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for one hour each day, and while we did our household work she would sit on the carpet in our room and quietly repeat God's Name.

At this time Mani was a young child of perhaps six. She had come from Poona to stay with us for some days, and she was mischievous and full of fun. When it came time for my mother to meditate, Mani saw how serious my mother looked as she sat repeating God's Name, but Mani did not take her meditation seriously at all. In short, Mani could not resist teasing my mother. She knew that Daulatmai loved to hear Persian spoken. And although Mani could not speak this language, she is a very good mimic and could imitate the intonation of Persian in such a way that she sounded as though she were speaking it. So Mani began to speak "pretend" Persian to my mother, and Daulatmai was so fascinated by Mani that she stopped meditating and turned around to listen to her.

At that moment Baba came into the room. He immediately saw what Mani was up to, and He seemed very upset.

"Come here," He told her. Mani was very startled for Baba did not look at all pleased with her. She went over to Him, and this is how Baba punished her: He took a cooking pot from the shelf and put it on Mani's head. Poor Mani! It went right over her eyes, down to her ears, and she could hardly see.

"Now come and stand in this corner, and remember this punishment," Baba told her. "Never again interrupt people's prayers. Didn't you know she was praying? Why did you interrupt her? Now turn your back!" And Baba left the room.

So Mani stood in the corner feeling very ashamed of herself.

A little later small Khorshed came into the room, and when she saw Mani standing in the corner with the pot on her head - Mani looked very funny - Khorshed started to laugh. At that moment into the room came Baba again! "What are you laughing at?" He asked Khorshed.

"Mani looks so funny standing there with the pot on her head," Khorshed replied.

"Oh, so you think she looks funny, do you?" said Baba, "Then come here." And He took another pot and put it on Khorshed's head! "Now you can both stand in the corner," He told them.

They both looked so funny that we had to quickly leave the room before we, too, started to laugh.

So Baba taught them their lessons: not to interrupt others' prayers, and not to laugh at others' misfortunes. And their punishment was itself funny; it appealed

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to Baba's sense of humour. It was not Baba's way to punish them by slapping them. Of course, Baba then embraced them, and they were completely forgiven.

One day Baba was sitting on the verandah of the Post Office. As I have said, Baba seldom came into our room. He always sat on the verandah. Someone, whom I do not know, had given Baba a gold ring, and on this day Baba sent Gustadji to our room to tell us that whoever had a gold ring should give it to Baba, and that Baba would give another in exchange.

Only two of us had gold rings: I had the one that Upasni Maharaj had given me, and big Khorshed had a lovely one with a design on it. I tried and tried to get mine off, but it would not come off my finger. And big Khorshed's was her wedding ring. Gustadji went out and told Baba that mine would not come off my finger, and Baba sent him back to us, telling him that he was to bring Baba a ring. So again I tried and tried, and at last the ring came off my finger. Gustadji took it out to Baba, and after a few minutes Baba came into our room holding both rings in His hand.

Resting on a window sill in our room we had Baba's photograph and two silver vases. We kept flowers in the vase, and each morning we would bow down to Baba's photo. Baba now stood in front of His photo and said to me, "Take this ring and keep it," and He put the ring on my finger. It was the ring that I had just given to Baba that had been given to me by Upasni Maharaj in Sakori, and I realised that Baba wanted to put that same ring on my finger with His own hands. He then put the other ring, the one that someone had given to Him, on the same finger. It was a very beautiful ring with Baba's Name inscribed on it, and He told me, "Wear it always," which I do. So both the rings that I wear are from Baba.

Once Chanji, who, as I have said, had a cinema business in Bombay, brought a film called *Sant Sakhu* for Baba to see. It is the beautiful story of a woman who was, like Mira, a saint. Baba decided to show it on Upasni Maharaj's birthday in May 1925, and He invited all the village people to see the film. When it started, we girls quickly made our way up to where Baba was sitting and sat behind Him.

Baba was very close to us, and Naja quietly reached out and touched His sadra very lightly. Then small Khorshed did the same. I thought, "If they can touch Baba's sadra, why shouldn't I?" So I also reached out and touched Baba's sadra. I hardly touched it, I just lightly put my finger on a loose fold in it, when immediately Baba turned around and demanded, "Who touched My sadra?"

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It was so embarrassing with the crowd there to have to say that I was the one and, of course, Baba gave me a good scolding. "Why did you do that?" He asked. "Are you in the habit of touching men's clothes?"

He made it so difficult for me. "No, Baba," I replied. "I've never done it before. This is the first time."

The other girls, Naja and Khorshed, could do something like this and Baba did not mind, but He was very, very strict with me.

Baba was so fond of sports, especially cricket, and with cricket He was very particular about the rules. One morning some extra men had come from Ahmednagar so that there were enough for a cricket match, and Baba was in a very happy mood. "Get ready," He said, "we'll have a game of cricket!"

While the mandali were setting up the wickets, Baba came into our room and told me, "Quickly, tie my hair back, I have to play cricket!"

I ran to the ribbon box, chose a nice satin ribbon, and while Baba held His hair for me I tied it back with a pretty bow. As Baba's sadra was always open a little down the front, it was loose at the back, and the nape of His beautiful neck was showing. When Baba walked away from our room He looked so lovely from the back, so slim, with His brown hair shining and curling, and a pretty bow resting on His fair neck.

Baba was very serious about cricket, and since to play well one needs to be able to move freely, He tucked His sadra into His pants. From afar we watched Him play. Baba looked very beautiful in the sunlight, playing so intently. I especially loved to watch Him run.

Sometime later, at the end of 1926, when Baba took us to Lonavla and then Bombay for a month, we again saw Him play. It was in Lonavla, and it was quite a short game. Baba's mother, Shireenmai, was there, and also my mother and Gulmai and my sister. Baba did not like us to stare when men were playing, so from the verandah of our house we peeked from behind our elders at Baba playing in the garden.

Baba was strong and wiry in those days, and He was an all-rounder, good at batting, bowling, and wicket-keeping.

One day, when we had first come to the Post Office and before the bamboo-matting

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fence was built, we saw Baba walking across the field, and we could hear Him singing beautifully as He walked. Baba stopped singing and came towards us where we were cooking and working on the Post Office verandah.

"Do you know how fortunate you are to be with Me at this time, during these days?" He asked us. "Yes, Baba," we replied, but at that time we did not really know how very fortunate we were. Now we appreciate those days when Baba was still talking and singing. We had no idea that Baba would keep silence for forty-four years, and how we would miss His talking and singing and laughing.

Sometime later Baba told us that from 15 June 1925 He would keep silence for His work, but this is what happened: Sparrows had made a nest in the roof of the Post Office, and it had become infested with lice. Gulmai came from Ahmednagar to spray the lice, but while she was standing on a ladder it slipped from under her and she fell and was slightly hurt. It was because of Gulmai's fall that Baba postponed the commencement of His silence until 10 July 1925.

On 9 July 1925 Baba came to our room. Baba was staying in the Jhopdi and He had not been coming to see us at all lately. Now I think it was so that we should get used to not seeing Him so that we should not miss Him too much.

He told us, "From tomorrow, 10 July, I will observe silence, and when My work is finished I'll talk. You are all to stay cheerful and happy and to take care of your health and to obey My orders." By telling us like this Baba made us feel that this silence was not very serious, in order that we should not feel sad. Baba said that we were to put our warm jackets on in the evening when it was cold; that we were not to gargle with cold water; and that we were to remember whatever other orders He had given us. He also told us that we were to cook for the Babajan High School children, and to make sure that we cooked properly for them. We were not to think of them as village children, but as our own, and to cook for them with love and care. Baba's love for the poor was so beautiful. He then told us that He would not be coming to see us, and reminded us to be happy, and to obey His orders.

Baba then turned to me and told me that He would also be fasting for some time, and that everyday I should boil one big cup of milk and send it to Him. He said I was to see that the milk did not smell of onion or garlic, so after that I did not touch onion or garlic. I was also to make for Him a hot green chilli pepper, slit and stuffed with chopped garlic and salt, then fried. Naja helped me with this as I could not touch the garlic. From that time on I took care that my hands did not smell of anything, not even kerosene from the stove, before I touched Baba's cup. I kept the milk and chilli ready so that when one of the girls came rushing in to say, "Padri

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is waiting for Baba's milk and chilli," I could quickly boil the milk and freshly fry the chilli.

So Baba was on fast of just one cup of milk and a chilli a day at the beginning of His silence. He must have been doing some very special work at that time.

From 10 July we heard a new sound; it was the sound of loud claps. "Oh, it must be Baba clapping to draw the attention of the mandali," we realised. Those first days of keeping silence must have been very difficult for Baba. Baba was outgoing. He loved to talk, to sing, and to laugh, and He was not used to being silent. Baba had so much work, and He still supervised everything and saw to everything. Nothing was done without consulting Him, so naturally He would want to talk, but He did not. It was very, very difficult for Baba. It is so natural to laugh, but when the mandali around Him said something funny Baba could not laugh out. He covered His mouth with a kerchief to remind Himself not to make a sound. Baba put so much strain on Himself. At first Baba wrote very quickly on a slate, as those around Him could not understand His gestures. I remember that He used English and Gujarati.

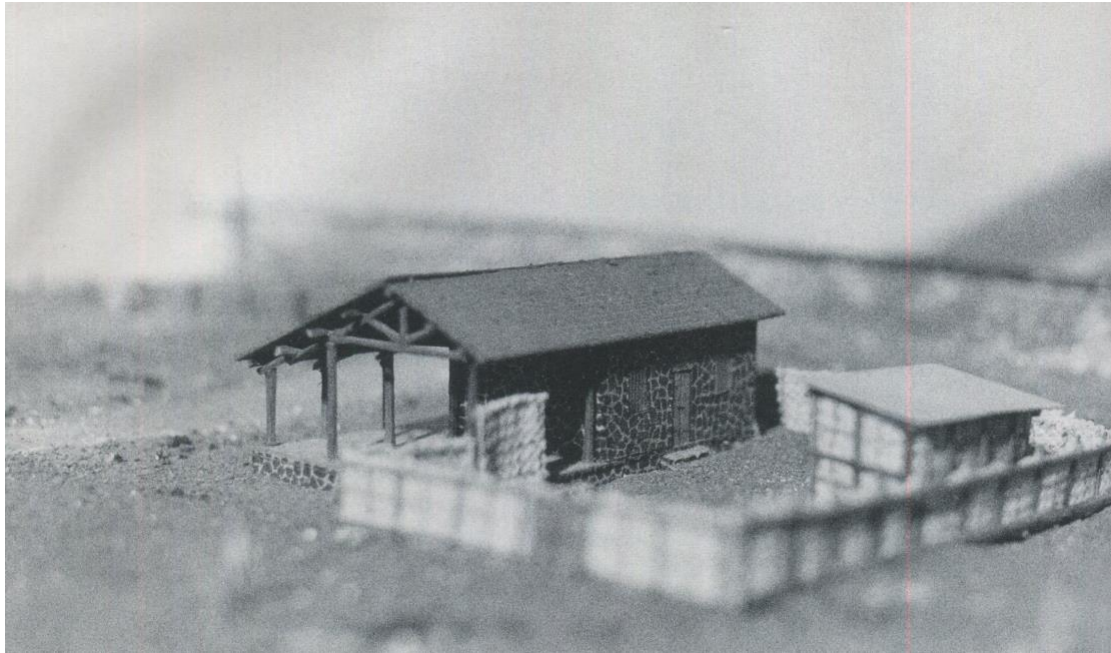
Now at night when I think of darling Baba I wonder if He sang out loudly in the Jhopdi just before twelve o'clock on 9 July. He loved singing, and He knew that in a few minutes He would no longer be able to sing for the rest of His life.

We took Baba's silence very lightly at that time. When, at the very first, Baba had told us about it He had said that when His work was finished He would talk. So we thought, "Oh, yes, seven days will pass, and then Baba will talk!" But seven days went by, and Baba did not talk. And then we waited and waited, and now it was seven months and still Baba was silent. This was serious to us, and we asked each other, "When will Baba speak?" We missed His voice, His talking, Baba's beautiful singing, and His cheerfulness.

One day we asked Baba, "When shall we hear Your lovely voice, Baba? When shall we hear You sing and talk again?" And Baba replied on His slate, "I'll talk again when I finish My work."

Baba kept giving us hope so that we would not feel hopeless, but for the next forty-four years Baba kept silence.

Our compound had for some time been barricaded with bamboo matting, and a big temporary kitchen made of bamboo matting with a tin roof was built in our enclosure. Many new people were now coming from Ahmednagar for Baba's



The Post Office at Meherabad during 1925 and 1926 showing the bamboo screening Baba had erected to ensure the women's privacy. The shed inside the compound is the outdoor kitchen used for preparation of Babajan High School children's food. (Photo taken from model.)

darshan, and they were curious about us. Baba quietly had this fence put up, and we were happy about it. We did not go outside it, and no men except Baba and Gustadji could come inside. The new kitchen had five wood-burning fireplaces, and in this kitchen the food for the Babajan High School children was cooked. My mother supervised the work. She showed Naja and the girls the right proportions of dal and rice, spice and garlic to use for so many people, and then they cooked it on these fireplaces.

There was a lot of work to do. We had no running water, just a tub with a tap inside our compound some distance from the kitchen, and there was much running back and forth to wash the rice and dal. Then it had to be cooked in big pots over these fires, and the heat was terrific. The fires were very hot and very smokey, and the tin roof would get very hot, too.

Every day food for more than one hundred people had to be cooked, and it was

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to be ready by ten o'clock in the morning. So everyone was very busy, all rushing to get their work done.

Baba, Himself, served the food to the children, and to anyone going along the road who was hungry. Sometimes He tested the rice with His fingers to see whether it was properly cooked.

Then Baba said that He wanted a vegetable dish to be cooked in the evening. The vegetables had to be carefully cleaned of grit and bits of grass and washed well before cooking, and so many chapatis had to be made for the school children and the mandali.

Each one of us was allotted their separate duties, and everyone was busy all the time in those days. There was no school in the village at that time. Baba was the first to open a school for these villagers, and the first to give them the idea that they could learn to read and write.

One morning, perhaps a month after Baba started His silence, He came into our compound and stood on the east verandah of the Post Office. Baba had not come there for some time. I did not see Baba as I was inside the room cleaning His breakfast utensils, but He must have given a clap for one of the girls working in the temporary kitchen. When they came running up to Him He gestured, "Send Mehera!" They came rushing to the room and told me, "Quickly, Mehera, Baba wants you!" "Oh," I thought, as I went to the verandah, "Baba wants to tell me something. I hope I have not made a mistake."

Baba had freshly bathed, and He was standing on the verandah beside the wooden packing case that He used as a seat. The verandah was raised about eighteen inches above the ground on which I stood looking up at Him. I could not believe my eyes. Baba was so beautiful. He was very young and very, very slim. Baba's skin was very fair, and this morning there was a pink flush on His face. His brown hair was loose, shining in the sun, with the tips golden and looking like a halo around Him. Baba was wearing a new sadra, fresh and white, which was open at the neck, and the little vee of His chest showing was pink from His being in the sun.

Baba asked me, "What were you doing?" "I was doing my work, Baba," I replied. "Are you happy?" "Yes, very happy," I told Him. He was making small talk with me.

Then Baba sat on the packing case, took the slate, and on that He wrote down what He wanted to tell me.

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"From the first time I saw you I recognised you as My Radha," He said. And He told me some other things, too, but that much I can tell you.

The atmosphere at Meherabad was very beautiful. Everyone was happy to be serving Baba; we were all laughing and running as we did our work. Then one day someone said something to Baba that upset Him very much, and He called us girls.

"You all leave at once," He told us. "Leave Meherabad this very minute. Go back to Ahmednagar!"

Without packing, dressed as we were in our old saris which we draped over our heads, we walked across the field and started down the road to Ahmednagar. "Go" means "Go", and we could not stop to change or to find an umbrella for the sun.

"What have we done?" we wondered. "Why are we being thrown out?" We had left everything to be with Baba, and now we did not know to whose house we should go.

So we walked and worried and worried and walked very slowly down the road, and a stray village dog, which we had been feeding, followed us.

It was fortunate that we went so slowly, because after a while we heard someone clapping and the sound of footsteps running up behind us. We turned to see one of the mandali coming after us. He told us that Baba had said we were to come back. We were so relieved and happy! We turned around and with very quick steps we returned to Meherabad and resumed our work!

It was now February 1926 and Baba's birthday. Instead of having a cake we celebrate birthdays by serving a very rich dish called "rava". It is made from semolina, ghee, sugar, raisins, and almonds, and is served hot. It not only tastes delicious, but it has a very tempting aroma. We usually serve it with tea early in the morning of a person's birthday.

On His birthday morning Baba was seated on the Sai Darbar near the Post Office, and Masaji, Naja's father, who was an excellent cook, placed before Baba a big pot of steaming rava. The mandali were called first, and Baba gave each of them, one by one, a generous helping of rava on their plates. Then it was the women's turn. I loved rava, and I was feeling very happy that Baba was giving such big portions. We seldom had a treat like this, and in that early morning I was eagerly looking forward to a plate of delicious, steaming rava and a glass of hot tea.

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Some of the older women took theirs, and then it was my turn, so I gave my plate to Baba. Baba put His hand in the pot and brought out a pinch of rava the size of a peanut and put it on my plate! I looked at Baba, and I did not know what to say.

Baba said to me, "You have a cold, don't you?"

"No, Baba," I said, "I don't have a cold."

"A sore throat?"

"No, Baba, no sore throat."

Baba then said, "All right," and He put the ladle in the pot and gave me a good helping! And with a plate of rava and our aluminium glass of tea we girls went back to our room to quietly enjoy our feast.

Baba looked so beautiful serving rava to all, and I still remember how sweet He was that time. Baba was very playful, and He loved to tease us! But He also knew that I had been feeling greedy, and He showed me that He knew!

One evening after four-thirty someone called out, "Baba is coming!" So we quickly put our work aside and tidied our saris, and Baba arrived with a cricket bat, ball, and wicket.

"I'm going to show you how to play cricket," He told us. So Baba showed us how to bat and how to bowl. He explained how to score and how to hit a boundary and so on. With Baba teaching us we all had great fun! That day we played for a short time, and when Baba saw that we understood the game, He told us that we were now to play for one hour every day.

We were still very young, and we did not leave our compound; but Baba did not want us to feel confined. He also knew that we needed the exercise. So by playing cricket we could shout and laugh and feel free, and our minds would not feel that we were cooped up and shut in.

Baba's Samadhi was not yet built, and the only building on the Hill was the old army water tank, which in 1926 had not been renovated. All the new temporary buildings were on the Lower Meherabad side of the railway line, as was the Post Office, the Main House (Dharamshala), Jhopdi, and Bathing Rooms. After Baba began His silence, and for some time even before that, we hardly saw Baba. One day in mid-1926 Gustadji called to us from his storeroom on the Post Office verandah, "Look quickly! See, Baba's going up the Hill. Look over there," and we all rushed to a point in the Post Office compound where we could see over the railway line.

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As I have said, the Post Office had a high, bamboo-matting fence which enclosed our room and our temporary kitchen, so that from the outside people could not look in and we were free to do our work. But we also did not have an open view of the outside, and we could not know that Baba was going up the Hill. It was still out-of-bounds, and it was unusual for Baba to be going up there.

We rushed to the one high spot from where we could see the railway line, and there we saw Baba going up the Hill alone in His white sadra, with His hair loose. He looked very lovely. Baba had just left the railway crossing to start up the Hill, and we excitedly jostled each other to see Baba after so many days. He must have heard our "Let me see, let me see!" because He turned around.

"Baba's looking!" we exclaimed, and we waved to Him, and He waved back. We were so happy.!

Then He walked a little further and turned around to see if we were still there watching, and again we waved and He waved back.

So like this Baba went up the Hill, stopping and turning and waving to us. There were no trees on the Hill in those days, and we could see Baba going up very clearly. Baba looked so sweet. Then, when He got to the very top, He turned again, and we were still there. Baba looked so tiny to us, and we so tiny to Him, yet we waved again to Him, and Baba waved to us.

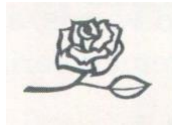
There was no gate and no wall up there in those days, just a large water tank with two big rooms inside. Because it was a tank, there was no door at ground level (that was made later for the Prem Ashram boys), but instead there were steps leading up to an opening in the top of one of the walls. The upper floor had not then been built. Baba stood on the very top of these steps, then turned around and made a sign to us that He was going inside the tank. So we came away, and Baba went inside this big water tank to be in seclusion for His work.

Then, at the end of 1926, Baba disbanded everything. The school was stopped; we packed up all the kitchen utensils and got our trunks ready to leave with Baba. Baba had all the temporary buildings at Meherabad - the Sai Darbar, Babajan High School, and so on - pulled down, and only the Post Office, Main House, Jhopdi, Table House and Bathing Rooms remained at Lower Meherabad. And we left with Baba for Lonavla and Bombay.

6

The Prem Ashram Years

December 1926 to 1929



Baba and His party spent a month in Lonavla and Bombay, and at Christmas 1926 they returned to Meherabad to begin what became known as the "Second Great Stay at Meherabad". Baba quickly reopened the Hazrat Babajan High School for the village boys, now located at the Family Quarters on the outskirts of nearby Arangaon village, and He also started a separate one for village girls.

Then, in May 1927, Baba began the boarding school for boys known as the Meher Ashram. Children came from as far away as Persia (Iran) to join it. Initially, it was also housed in the Family Quarters, but within two months Baba had most of the students, along with the Hazrat Babajan High School students, move to the old water tank on Meherabad Hill.

On first returning to Meherabad Baba stayed in either the Jhopdi or the Table House down the Hill. In August 1927 Baba moved up the Hill to a make-shift room that was later to be rebuilt as His Samadhi, and in November 1927 Baba began a five and a half month fast and seclusion in this room. In March 1928 Baba divided the Meher Ashram, and one section was called the Prem Ashram.

After Baba moved up the Hill, Mehera and the women mandali seldom saw Him until Baba, in June 1928, moved the entire ashram to Toka. They stayed there until November 1928 when Baba moved everything back to Meherabad.

At Christmas 1926 we returned to Meherabad from Bombay and Lonavla, and we girls stayed, not in the Post Office, but in the Bathing Rooms near the Dhuni where my mother and I had lived during our very first stay at

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Meherabad in May 1924. Baba had a bamboo-matting fence put around the building, so we felt quite comfortable and private there.

There were just a few of us; my mother, myself, Naja, small Khorshed, and later her mother, Soona Masi, and also big Khorshed. Baba would come and go to our room to tell us something or to have His lunch.

My mother and Naja cooked and I took care of Baba's clothes and made His tea and served His food. We also washed vessels and made chapatis and swept the rooms and washed our clothes and so on. Baba saw to it that we were kept busy.

When we first returned Baba was staying sometimes in the Jhopdi and sometimes in the Table House. The mandali stayed in the Old Dharamshala.

In the evening after the lanterns were lit Baba went to the Dharamshala to be with the mandali, and they began to sing arti for Him. This first arti was in Marathi. It was composed by a Brahmin college boy who came to know of Baba, and while he was quite a new Baba-lover, he had enough faith in Baba to write this beautiful arti.

We did not have work in the evening, and from a far distance we could hear the mandali singing. There were no proper windows in our rooms, only high ones for ventilation, so we could not look out, but by standing on our toes and straining our ears near a window we could hear the sound of the arti being sung.

And we would think, "How lovely for the mandali, they're singing arti to Baba. Baba must be seated there; how beautiful!"

So one evening passed, then another, and then a third. And we would all be thinking, "If only we could touch Baba by singing arti to Him; if only we could have that chance. How nice for the mandali. Well, never mind, we can hear them singing and we can picture Baba seated there looking pleased and happy."

Then one evening as arti was being sung and we were straining under the window to listen to it, we heard footsteps outside our door. "Oh," we thought, "who's coming? Nobody is supposed to come here. Who is it?"

We turned around, and Baba was in the doorway! Arti was still being sung, but He had left and come to us. Baba had come to us! And He sat with us and had us massage His feet. That shows that Baba is God, because He knew our thoughts and heard our longing. He knew that we were clinging to the wall, listening to the arti, and longing to be with Him. Baba had thought of us, and that made us happy!

In August 1927 Baba left the Jhopdi and Table House where He had been staying

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at Lower Meherabad to stay on the Hill and to be near the Prem Ashram boys who were living in the water tank. Before moving up the Hill Baba came to our room and told us to be happy, and to obey His orders, and to take care of our health. After He left us we saw little of Baba for some time.

On the Hill Baba stayed in what is now the Samadhi, but in those days it was not a nice stone building, but a very rough-looking room made from odd bits of tin sheets and tarpaulins. It was full of cracks, and a snake could easily have crawled inside. And at night Baba not only stayed there, but He slept down in a pit He had had dug inside the room that was later to become His crypt.

We were still not permitted on the Hill, so we did not see where Baba was living until later on Baba's birthday in February 1928, when as a special treat, He allowed us to go up there. At that time Baba was in seclusion in this make-shift room, and He did not step out of the room but He stood in the doorway, and from afar we had His darshan and saw how He was living.

From mid-November 1927 Baba was on fast up the Hill for about five and one half months, and for some of that time He was in seclusion in this make-shift room.

All that Baba had to eat during those months were two cups of milk-coffee a day, which He had sent word for me to prepare and to send up to Him everyday.

I prepared it very carefully, keeping the flask for the coffee very, very clean, properly measuring the milk, and taking great care that no onion or garlic smell tainted the milk. Every morning I sent two cups of coffee in a flask up the Hill to Baba with a small village boy of eight or nine years.

And it is so sad. Baba could not talk, and now He was on this very long fast, taking only these two cups of coffee a day, and He did not even have these two cups. After the fast was over the subject came up, and we found that the boy who carried the flask up the Hill would stop just over the railway line, sit in a ditch, and drink a part of Baba's coffee. And Baba never complained about getting less coffee.

During His seclusion in the crypt room, Baba did sometimes allow certain visitors to see Him. Gulmai and, occasionally, my sister would come to Meherabad and would see Baba for a few minutes. Otherwise, no women were permitted on the Hill, and we had not seen Him for several months. Now Kaikushru Masa, small Khorshed's father, was not in good health, and Baba permitted him to go up the Hill to see Baba. And when Kaikushru Masa came down the Hill he told us how

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much the Prem Ashram boys loved Baba, and how they clung to Him. We began to feel a little jealous and to think, "For the last few months Baba has completely forgotten us. He has been so engrossed with the Prem Ashram boys; He's not thinking of us at all. We must remind Him that we're here!"

So we girls talked it over, trying to decide how we could draw Baba's attention to us. We could not send Him food as He was on fast, and at last we decided that we would send Him a garland.

But from where were we to get flowers? We were not allowed to send for anything from the bazaar, so we could not buy flowers, and there were no flowers at Meherabad. There was, however, a young Hindu woman who lived in Arangaon village called Valu, who came to Meherabad to serve Baba. She loved Baba very dearly, and later she came to stay with us. At that time she swept the compound, carried water from the well to fill our big water tub, and did other odd jobs. So we asked Valu whether there were any wild flowers in Arangaon. She told us, "There are no flowers in the village; there isn't enough rain for flowers to grow." But then she remembered that she had seen some oleander trees growing in a dry creek bed some distance from the village. So in the evening, when her duties at Meherabad were finished, she went alone to this river bed and filled her sari with these very lovely single oleander flowers, both pink and white. It was getting dark, so she quickly came all the way back to our room at Meherabad to give us the flowers.

We were very happy and excited, imagining the big surprise that we would give Baba. We, as always, had no furniture, just a cotton carpet. So we sat on the floor and measured our own necks to decide how long this garland should be, and chattered about how much allowance we should make for Baba's height. And we happily argued about how to arrange the pink and white flowers. We made a garland, and there were flowers left over; so we made flower bracelets for Baba's wrists. And still there were flowers, so we made Baba a little crown of flowers. Then we wrapped them all up in a damp cloth to keep them fresh until morning when we could send them with Kaikhushru Masa to Baba. When morning came we told him, "Please take this bundle of flowers and give them to Baba. Even if He doesn't want them, try to leave them on His doorstep."

As I have said, Baba was in seclusion. When Kaikhushru Masa came near the door he joined his hands out of respect as we do in prayer, to Baba. From inside the room, Baba said pointing to the flowers, "What is this?" Baba gestured for him to open the wrapping and said, "How very lovely they look," and Baba put His

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hand through the doorway to take the flowers from Kaikhushru Masa. As no one was allowed to touch Baba at this time, Baba Himself placed the garland around His own neck, and then He put on the flower bracelets. Lastly, with an amused smile, Baba placed the crown of flowers on His head, and He told Kaikhushru Masa to tell us that He liked the flowers and had put them on Himself.

When we heard this, we were so happy, and the next day we asked Valu to bring us more flowers!

So that is how we made Baba think of us. Baba thinks of and knows everyone, He is God, but in those days we were still ignorant!

While Baba was still keeping this very long fast Babajan came from Poona to Meherabad to see Him. She never travelled anywhere or even rode in a car in Poona itself, but at the beginning of April 1928 Babajan came all that way to meet Baba. Her car stopped at the railway line, and word was sent up the Hill to Baba that Babajan had come. Baba left His seclusion and came down the Hill to Babajan's car. Nobody saw this meeting, not even the mandali. But we were peeking through the bamboo matting around our rooms and, although we could not see very much, we did see Baba approach Babajan's car. How Baba greeted Her we could not see, but Baba and Babajan made contact with each other after many, many years. Babajan wanted to see Baba again. This was the last time I saw Babajan in Her physical body, and we realised later that She had come to say goodbye to Baba. Babajan dropped Her body in 1931, just after Baba had left for His first trip to the West.

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In mid-1928 Baba came down the Hill to us from the Prem Ashram, and He told us that we were moving to Toka, which is about 50 miles from Meherabad, between Meherabad and Aurangabad. So we went to Toka.

We arrived in Toka in the afternoon feeling hot and tired after the drive in the summer heat, but we went straight to work, getting settled in. Baba's things, our own things, pots and pans, cups and plates all had to be quickly arranged, as from the next morning we girls had to start cooking for the Prem Ashram boys and the mandali.

We were very, very busy, so by the time we went to bed we felt very tired. We had decided to get up at five the next morning in case Baba came to our compound

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early. In Meherabad Baba used to come after five, and we wanted to be ready for Him. But Baba did not come at 5 a.m.; He came at 3:45 a.m., and we were still in bed. Baba clapped loudly and gestured, "What! You're still sleeping? Why are you so late?"

We all jumped out of our beds, and I ran to get Baba's water ready for His morning face wash and shave. I got everything ready for Him: His water, soap for His face, towel, shaving things, and the seat for Him to sit on.

Our quarters here were in a field. They were surrounded by bamboo matting, and this made our compound private so that we could feel free to do our work. There were many of us in Toka - twenty-five or thirty women - some of whom were Hindu, some Parsi, and some Irani. We had a row of rooms, and another big room that was supposed to be a kitchen, but which, as we were quite crowded, was partitioned into a kitchen and sleeping space for two of the elderly women. We girls slept on the floor quite close together. Next door my sister Freni stayed with her children, and there was yet another small room.

So in Toka we got up around four in the morning, and Naja and we girls had to see to the cooking of chapatis and vegetables for more than one hundred people. We prepared and kneaded the dough for the chapatis before we went to bed the night before so that it would be ready early in the morning. Lunch had to be ready by 11 a.m., so we started making chapatis by eight in the morning. And there were the vegetables to be washed and chopped, and the onions and garlic to peel and cut. At that time we did not make the rice and dal, but there was much work in the kitchen.

Baba was very, very busy, too, supervising everything and looking after all the details, and He came to us for His meals when He was not on fast.

Lord Krishna's birthday fell while we were there, and we heard that the Prem Ashram boys wanted to celebrate it.

That morning Baba had a bath and put on a new sadra. And then I brushed His beautiful hair, and He went to meet the boys. They dressed Him up as Krishna, and His photo was taken in that costume.

We girls also wanted to celebrate Krishna's birthday, but what should we do? Then we remembered that Hindus make a small cradle, put Krishna's picture in it, and sing lullabies to the photo. Flowers are also offered and sweets distributed. So we decided that we would make a cradle, not a small cradle, but an extraordi-

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nary one! We were going to make a large cradle for Baba Himself to lie in!

We girls all got together, and we were very excited. We found a nice sheet, some good strong rope, and we hung the sheet tied tightly at the four corners from the roof. Then we decorated this cradle with flowers.

When Baba came to us we garlanded Him and said, "This year, Baba, we want to celebrate Krishna's birthday. Would You like to lie in this cradle we've made for You?"

So Baba got in the cradle and, smiling, He lay down. He knew that all the Prem Ashram boys were happy, and He wanted to please us, too. Small Khorshed had a good voice, and she knew a cradle song, so she and some others sang to Baba while we very gently rocked the cradle with Baba in it.

About halfway through the song we heard a strange noise. Baba asked, "What's that noise?" Then He quickly jumped out of the cradle, and He was just in time. There was a big tear in the sheet, and a second longer and Baba would have slid onto the floor through the slit. The bed sheet was not quite new, and it had torn under Baba's back. It was fortunate that the cradle was only about two and a half feet off the ground.

Baba laughed, and we all laughed. He teased us, saying, "This is a very nice kind of cradle, this cradle! I like it very much. Now never mind."

Baba then had Khorshed finish the cradle song, and that was the way we celebrated Lord Krishna's birthday!

That year the rains were very late. The villagers of Toka had sown their grain, but only one small shower of rain had come and they were frightened of losing their crop. They heard that Baba was a "great saint", and they decided to ask for His help. Many men came with flowers and bowed down to Baba and asked Him for rain. "It will be a great disaster for us," they told Baba, "if it does not rain. We will lose our grain for the whole year, and that is our food!"

"Be patient," Baba told them, "I will see to it. It will rain." So the villagers went home feeling happy.

Within two days the sky clouded over, and that night it began to rain and rain and rain. Our rooms had just an earthen floor on the same level as the field, and we slept, not on beds, but on bedding rolls on this floor. That night it rained so hard that water came into our room and drenched us and our bedding. We quickly rolled up the bedding and put it on our trunks, but soon it was raining so hard that

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the trunks were also sitting in water. So we had to pick them up and when Baba came, we were holding up these heavy trunks.

"Bring some earth and barricade the doorway," Baba told us. So we got some mud and made a mound at the door, and the water somehow stopped coming in.

Then Baba said, "Bail out the water," and with our basin and buckets and tin mugs we managed to get rid of the water. But the floor was still damp, and we could not sleep at all that night. Those farmers had asked for rain, and we were drowning!

The next day the rain still did not stop. It was not so heavy, but it rained and rained lightly all day. The farmers who had asked Baba for rain now came to beg Him to stop the rain. Baba gestured, "All right." And by the next day the rain had stopped, and it was clear and sunny. We all gave a sigh of relief and dried our damp bedding.

The farmers were so happy that their crops had been saved. Beating drums, they came to Baba and offered flowers and sweets to Him and requested Him to go to their village. Baba agreed, and they all rushed to Him and lifted Him up in this big seat. Some of the men carrying Baba were tall and some were short, and they gave Baba a very uncomfortable ride. Every time that they shouted Baba's praises they threw the chair up in the air, and Baba had to cling very tightly to it so as not to be thrown out. In their enthusiasm to thank Baba they forgot His comfort. Baba did not enjoy this ride at all, but to please the villagers and make them happy He put up with all this discomfort.

In November 1928 Baba decided to return to Meherabad. It had been a very wet November, and we were all tired of the dampness. Toka is on the confluence of three rivers, and when leaving Baba crossed one of them by boat to get to His car on the opposite bank. Baba's driver, trying to make it easy for Baba to get into the car, brought it too close to the river bank, and the car got bogged there in a wet, sandy dip.

The driver tried to drive it out, but it was too firmly bogged. Baba then called for some bullocks, and the villagers quickly brought six pairs of them. They harnessed the bullocks up to the car, and the villagers shouted at the bullocks to move. The six pairs of bullocks pulled and strained, but the car did not budge. Again and again they tried, but still the car would not move. It was stuck in the wet sand.

Baba said, "Wait, let the bullocks loose," and He called to Patel, the headman of

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Arangaon, who loved Baba (he had given Baba a bucket and pail to draw water from the well at Meherabad in 1923) and who had come to Toka with his two bullocks. "Bring your two bullocks and harness them up."

Everyone looked at each other wondering how one pair of bullocks could pull the car out when six pairs had failed, but Patel brought his bulls and harnessed them to the car. Baba went up to them, and He gave them a good, hard pat on their rumps with His palm, as if urging them, "Come on, come on, do your best." As they started to pull, very gradually and very slowly the car came out of the wet sand.

Everyone standing by was very surprised. Here were two bullocks doing what twelve had not been able to do, and then they realised that it was Baba who had given the bullocks the strength to pull the car out.

Baba kept these two bullocks when they were brought back to Meherabad, and from that time He did not let them work very hard. When they died Baba did not allow them to be treated like other bullocks. They were buried with great honour in a place selected by Baba.

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When we returned to Meherabad from Toka we stayed in the Post Office. Baba returned to the Hill with the Prem Ashram boys, and He was not coming to see us at all. Syed Ali, who was then quite a young boy, took Baba's food up the Hill from us when Baba was not on fast. Ali would come to the Post Office and say to us, "Give me food for the Emperor, please!"

Although I never spoke with him we enjoyed hearing him speak of Baba like this. I would help prepare Baba's food, then Naja or my mother would give Baba's tray to Ali.

One day a message came from Baba saying that He would come to the Post Office for a bath and then lunch. During this time Baba usually had His bath on the Hill, but on that day it must not have been convenient for Him.

After having His lunch Baba told us, "Now there is no money left. Everything is finished, and you can't stay here any longer. You will have to go to Nasik and stay with Rustom and Freni," my sister and her husband.

Then Baba told us that we must not worry about being sent away from Meherabad. All that mattered was that we obeyed Him, and that when He had time He would come back and forth to Nasik to see us. We did not know it at the time, but Baba had plans that He had told no one. It was not that the money had run out, but that Baba was planning to go to the West!

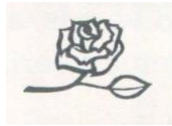


Nasik in the early 1930's. Standing (from left to right): small Khorshed, Freni, Gulmai, Valu, Naja, Mehera. Seated (from left to right): Mani, Soona Masi.

7

Nasik

Early 1929 to November 1933



In early 1929 Meher Baba moved Mehera and the women mandali to Nasik. In May 1929 Baba visited Quetta, amongst other places, and in July and part of August Baba went again as far north as Srinagar in Kashmir.

In September 1929 Baba made His second visit to Persia (Iran) and by now the Prem Ashram boys had been sent to their homes. Mehera and the women mandali did not accompany Baba on these travels.

At the end of October 1929 Baba also moved to Nasik, and this was His base until November 1933.

Throughout 1930 Baba was in India, sometimes travelling, sometimes in seclusion at Nasik, Meherabad, or Tiger Valley near Panchgani. In May 1931 Baba made His third trip to Persia (Iran). At the beginning of September 1931 Baba sailed from Karachi (then in India) to England on the Rajputana for His first visit to the West. In 1932 Mani left school and joined the women mandali permanently. Up until now she had stayed with them at Meherabad during school holidays ..

This began Baba's phase of world travel, and between 1931 and 1937 Baba made ten trips to the West. Mehera and the other women accompanied Him only for the visit to Cannes in 1937.

So we moved to Nasik, and this later became Baba's headquarters, too, although He was away for His work much at that time. As I have said, we stayed in my sister Freni's compound. She and her husband, Rustom, had

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previously moved there from Ahmednagar, and they had started a motor works business.

It was in Nasik that Baba told my mother, Daulatmai, to keep silence, and this she did for about twenty-two years. My mother did not return to Meherabad to stay, but under Baba's orders she continued to live with my sister in Nasik to help her with her many children. Because she was obeying Baba by serving her family, this was the same as serving Him. In silence my mother managed all her work; she even went to the bazaar where she would carry a slate and pencil and write in Marathi, Hindi, or Gujarati what she needed. There they called her the silent woman, and she died keeping silence in November 1952. She died obeying Baba's order.

In the middle of 1931 Baba told us that He was going to visit the West, and that He would be sailing on the *Rajputana*. We had seen so little of Baba lately and had felt so excited about this visit with Him, and now He gave us this news. "When will we see Baba again?" we sadly wondered to ourselves. "As soon as My work is finished there," Baba told us. And He told us we were to be happy, to take care of our health, and to obey the orders that He had given us. So we obeyed Baba. We knew that for His work He had to go to the West.

Baba knew that we would miss Him, so before He left He told us that when there was a good film at Circle Cinema, a theatre run by the mandali, we could go see it. After so many years at Meherabad and no contact with the outside world, this was a great treat for us. That was how we came to see *Leyla and Majnun*, and *Shireen and Farhad*. I remember that the cinema had seven circles of lights in the colours of Baba's flag which lit up one after the other!

Now we knew that the Westerners must be entertaining Baba, and naturally there was a little feeling in us of competition. So we decided that we, too, would entertain Baba when He returned.

We had seen a very amusing Indian film at the Circle Cinema, and we wanted to put the whole plot on for Baba. Mani had now joined us for good, and as she is a very good actress we put her in charge of the play. Since there was singing and dancing in the film we sent big Khorshed to see the film again to catch the tunes and the dance steps. She also bought a programme at the theatre with the words to those songs. Each of us, myself included, had a dance, and those with good voices had songs, too. I also played another small part disguised as a boy.

So we practiced and practiced our parts, and made some lovely costumes, and even false moustaches from real hair. And when Baba returned to Nasik at the



Mehera dressed as a Persian girl for her part in the play performed for Meher Baba in Nasik on His return from the West in 1932.

beginning of 1932 from His first trip to the West, we put on our play for Him.

Our makeup was so beautifully done that Baba could not recognise who each one was! He enjoyed the play very much and said to us, "It's so good. Tomorrow you must do it again, and I'll bring the mandali to see it!" This first time only Baba and a few women, those from Ramjoo's family, had watched, so I had done my dance. Now that the men mandali were coming to see it I asked Dina Talati to dance in my place and wear my costume, but I did play that very small part I had disguised as a boy!

So Baba's treat to us of going to the cinema inspired us to give Him a treat!

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Between 1931 and 1937 Baba made ten trips to the West, and during each we missed Him very much. While He was gone we tried to occupy our minds by making a garland and a crown and an embroidered robe for Him to dress up in when He returned. In those days we were very young, and we liked these sparkling things. Luckily, we had some silk saris to use as material, and somehow we got gold thread, sequins, and paste jewels. I designed the embroidery patterns and the jewelry, and we sat together when our household work was over and made the individual flowers and buds, or stitched gold thread on net for the embroidery on the robe and so on. In this way we would keep ourselves busy, with our attention always on Baba, and surprise Him with our handiwork when He returned from His work.

One day in early 1933 Baba told us, "We're going to Bombay in two days to receive the Westerners, so pack your good saris and look your best." For the very first time Baba's Western disciples were coming from England to India, and we wondered, "How can we look our best wearing these matha banus?" We had been wearing them now for years but Baba said that for this meeting we could take them off.

We excitedly packed for Bombay. There were many of us women at that time in Nasik, and we travelled to Bombay by train. There we stayed on the upper floor of a very big and nice bungalow in Kandivali, a suburb of Bombay. The men mandali stayed downstairs.

Before the Westerners arrived Baba reminded us, "Be sure to wear your good saris and do your hair nicely." We did not know any hairstyles at all. At that time my hair was very long, and I just wore it in a bun tied under the matha banu. However, I knew that Baba wanted us to look smart, and to please Him I left my hair down and clipped it back. This was a new experience for me.

Instead of our usual cotton saris we put on our best silk ones, and obeying Baba to the letter we wore lipstick and powder, too, something we had only done before for plays. Baba was very pleased, and He was very naughty, too! When in England Baba had told the Westerners about us; that we had left everything to be with Him; that we lived very simple lives; and that we were very spiritually-minded. And here He was introducing them to fashionable-looking young women in silk saris! Now we understand that He was testing the love of His Westerners for Him.

Baba sent my sister Freni to the pier to receive the Western women on His behalf

while we got ready. "When they arrive," He told us, "tell them that I'm hiding, and that I'll only embrace the one who finds Me - no one else!"

So Baba did not greet the Westerners when they arrived. Instead, He hid Himself in the house, and His lovers had to seek Him! When everyone arrived they greeted us very lovingly, but quickly asked, "But where is Baba!" We explained that they had to find Him, and that only the one who found Him would receive His embrace.

Off they all rushed; some to the drawing room; some to the bedrooms, and so on. Small Khorshed, who knew very little English in those days, was standing in the drawing room when in ran Norina. "Do tell me where Baba is," Norina implored. "Found Him, found Him," said Khorshed, muddling up her tenses. "Oh, where was He?" asked Norina. "Found Him, found Him," Khorshed kept urging. It was so funny.

Then came some happy sounds and Baba's clap, and we saw Baba coming out of the bathing room holding Delia's hand. How happy she was to have found Baba first! He had been hiding in the corner of the bathroom between a cupboard and the wall, and only she had thought to look there. All the Westerners were so happy and excited to see Baba again. "Delia found Me," He told them, "so I'm going to embrace only her." "Yes, Baba," they replied, and their happy expressions vanished. They now all looked sad and left out. Baba embraced Delia, but then He turned to the others and embraced them, too, one by one. And their sad faces again lit up with joy.

A little later Baba said, "Now you can entertain Me!" And they did. Margaret did a lovely dance solo; Audrey danced, too, wearing a skirt with a hoop; and Mabel also performed. After the Westerners had danced for Baba, Baba had Mani do an Indian dance to entertain them.

Then one day the Westerners wanted to wear saris. They came to our room, we dressed them in saris and I remember helping Delia. This was a new experience for them all, and they wanted their photos taken. Onto the upstairs terrace they went and, with Baba in the middle, Minta on one side of Him, and Audrey on the other, the photograph was taken.

It was now April and Bombay was very hot. Baba decided to send us girls back to Nasik while He took the Westerners up to Kashmir, with sightseeing on the way.



The old water tank on Meherabad Hill when Mehera and the women mandali moved there in 1933. The entrance to the East Room (on right hand side of building) where Mehera lived, is concealed by bamboo screening.

8

Meherabad Hill

November 1933 to December 1938



At the end of November 1933 Baba moved His ashram from Nasik back to Meherabad, and the heart of the women mandali at this time - Mehera, Mani, Naja and small Khorshed, with Soona Masi and Valu - now stayed on Meherabad Hill in the old water tank.

Since joining Baba to stay in 1924 Mehera's life had, by Baba's order, become increasingly sheltered, and during these years on the Hill her life was supremely cloistered. With all the women on the Hill Baba was very strict, and especially with Mehera.

Between Mehera's room and Baba's kitchen on the Hill Baba had built a bamboo-matting passage, and Mehera left her room, which just had windows near the ceiling for ventilation, only to go through this passage to the kitchen for work, or to the bathing room. She was not allowed to go anywhere else, not even in the compound except occasionally when accompanied by Baba.

By Baba's order Mehera was not to see any man, hear a man's voice, or even to hear a woman mention a man's name, nor for some years was any man permitted to see her. One woman, either Soona Masi or Kaku (Vishnu's mother who lived down the Hill), was always on watch in a room under a small water tank outside the gate, and whenever a man had to come on the Hill, for example, to bring supplies from the bazaar, the watchwoman rang a bell and the women had to close the door to their room. When a workman, such as a plumber who could not be depended on not to speak, came to do repairs, Mani had to play the sitar, sometimes for hours, to block any sound of male voices. Even later when the Westerners came and read to Baba from newspapers they could not say a man's name while on the Hill or in Mehera's presence, so sometimes the news became very confusing.

When Mehera did travel, for example, to Mysore in 1936, Mani would be at one side of

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her holding her arm, another woman would be on her other side, and one would be in front, and one behind. Mehera wore dark glasses with the lenses covered with brown paper so that she could not see at all. She just looked down and walked, and those around her would guide her.

When Baba's birthday was celebrated on a large scale in 1938 at Meherabad and Eastern women lovers from Bombay, Poona and Nagpur stayed on the Hill for the first time (along with the few Western women already there) there were signs at different corners of the compound instructing the women not to mention any man's name. No men came on the Hill for that occasion.

In these days Baba did not permit anyone, not even the other women, to touch Mehera. The only exception to this order was His sister, Mani. When the Western women came to stay at Meherabad - some in late 1937 and others in 1938 - some of them made clothes for Mehera, but Mehera's measurements and fittings were done only by Mani. Baba also did not allow anyone to keep Mehera's photo or the negatives of her photo or any clothes that she had worn. These orders were in force well into the forties.

While in Nasik Baba had allowed Mehera to see the occasional film, but now, by Baba's order, Mehera could not see any films, or write or read anything. In the kitchen, staples such as rice, dal, and sugar were kept in old tins which had writing on them. So strict was this order not to read that Mani covered the writing on all these tins with paper. And at that time Mehera's name was never written, so if any note went to Baba concerning Mehera she was referred to as "M" or "she".

When the women needed supplies from the bazaar they wrote their request on a piece of paper and sent this list to Baba, who would scrutinize it. If He approved, He passed the list on to the bazaar man who bought the items and gave them to Soona Masi on watch in the little tank room outside the gate. Soona Masi would tell Baba that the order had come, and she would then give the items to the women.

Whenever Baba went to the West the women were given a small amount of money for their food and necessities and this was to last them until Baba returned. Sometimes Baba stayed away for a longer time than expected and it was very hard on their rations. They lived extremely frugally, eating the simplest food, patching the patches on their clothes, and stretching out their few supplies such as soap. Baba's order was that they were not to wear torn clothes, so if there was a tear or hole in their clothes they had to immediately change or sew up the hole. Sometimes their clothes were so patched that they could only obey this order by sewing one garment inside another, and many of their clothes were of several layers. Not wanting to burden Baba by asking for anything they tried to hide their threadbare condition from Him by wearing their good clothes when Baba was at Meherabad, and their patched and layered ones when He was travelling. One day Baba returned without informing them of His coming, and when Baba found them in their threadbare clothes they received a scolding from Him for not having told Him of their need. In this life nothing was to be kept from Baba.

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While Mehera was totally secluded from the world, within her room and the kitchen she had no privacy at all. By Baba's order Mehera was never to be alone. Mani's foremost order from Baba was to be constantly with Mehera, leaving the room only for her baths and personal necessities. As Mehera was never to be alone, another was appointed along with Mani; at first Khorshed, and after 1938, Kharman Masi. This meant that even when Mehera went through the short bamboo-matting passage to the kitchen someone was always with her.

In addition, when Baba was absent, travelling in either India or the West, by Baba's order, Mani kept a diary for Him, noting every detail of Mehera's health and moods, and every action from the time she woke up until Mehera went to bed. Every movement Mehera made was noted down by Mani, as was the time she did it - down to the minute!

This life of poverty, purity, and obedience that the women led during these years was experienced by them not as one of deprivation, but of joy and fullness. They had nothing, but they also had everything. Throughout this period, and also during the 1940's when there were many women staying in the ashram, up until the New Life, Mehera was always aloof. Her whole attention was focused only on Baba; to think of Baba, to be with Baba, and to do everything for Baba. She was very quiet, and even in the forties she stayed in her room, hardly mingling with the others unless Baba was also there. At these times Baba would have Mehera sit beside Him, and when Baba left she would return to her room. Those women who saw her during these years immediately recognised her role, and knew that she was very special. Baba around this time said of Mehera, "Mehera and I are one, and many times what I feel Mehera also feels at the same time." He told the other women, "I love you all, but Mehera is My Beloved. She is like My Radha..." "She is My very breath without which I cannot live," and Baba kept Mehera only for Himself.

We returned with Baba to Meherabad from Nasik at the end of 1933, and we four girls - Mani, myself, Naja, and small Khorshed, with Soona Masi and Valu - now stayed on the Hill. We were the very first ones to be there after the Prem Ashram boys, and the atmosphere there was very beautiful. We could feel Baba's Love and Presence there, all that He had given to the boys. Baba had loved those boys very much, and they had loved Him. And at last we were staying in the room in the water tank where the Prem Ashram boys had lived, and where we had so often pictured Baba during those years when we were not allowed on the Hill.

Our room, the East Room, had and still has no proper windows, just very high ventilators set in the wall near the ceiling. We had only a bed, a trunk, and a little stool each; so we were not very crowded. When we were first there Baba

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slept in the little room adjoining the kitchen as His Cabin near the Samadhi had not then been built. Baba even slept outside sometimes, on some flagstones near His Samadhi where the Prem Ashram boys had sat.

The upper floor had not been added to the water tank, but before we came from Nasik Baba had the kitchen, where Mansari now stays, built for us in which to cook His and our food; and this is also where we ate. It was known as Baba's kitchen. The tin shed, where the Western and Eastern women who came later had their meals, was not yet there. Baba had bamboo screens put up to make a passage from our room to the kitchen, so we were very secluded.

Our life was very strict, and for several years we only left our room to go to the kitchen for work, or to the bathroom, or when Baba very occasionally took us for walks. I never walked in the compound, and for exercise I would walk in my room or in the kitchen. Later on Baba did allow us to play badminton where the tin shed now stands.

Soona Masi, and sometimes Kaku, Vishnu's mother, kept watch from a small room under the little raised water tank, and when anyone came up the Hill she rang a bell. This was the signal to us to close the door to our room until she rang again to signal that they had left. When we heard the all-clear bell we opened our door. So our lives were very strict, but we had Beloved Baba to ourselves; and how filled with joy we were! His love and His company were all we ever wanted.

Baba got up very early, and we would be up by half-past five or six, even in winter. After washing our faces and hands we heated Baba's washing and shaving water, and when Baba had shaved, I gave Him His tea and a slice of bread. That was our breakfast: tea and a slice of bread, or at other times tea and bananas. With just the very few of us there with Baba, those quiet early mornings were very precious and very homey.

When Baba went down the Hill to the mandali we did our work in the kitchen. I filled Baba's water jar, folded His napkins, tidied His shelf, washed His soap dish and His hair-brush and comb, and so on. Then I helped with the kitchen work: cleaning and washing the rice and dal, peeling and cutting up vegetables, grinding masala and coconut for Baba's food, churning butter from the cream we saved, and whatever else needed doing. Naja at that time was cooking for Baba. A little later, from just before the Blue Bus Tours, Naja was not well for some years, and then I cooked for Baba.

Baba used to come up the Hill for His lunch around a quarter to eleven after working with the men mandali at Lower Meherabad. As I was never in the

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compound I could not see Baba coming up the Hill, but Soona Masi would see Him from her post under the water tank. When she let us know "Baba's coming!" we would rush to have everything ready for when He arrived. In the summer that kitchen is very, very hot, so then we served Baba His meal in our room which, having thick stone walls, was a little cooler. Then when Soona Masi gave us the signal, we would quickly take some luke-warm water and Baba's basin and towel to our room to be ready for when He arrived.

Now the ground is very hot in April and May at Meherabad, and Baba walked up the Hill in the heat of the day in His open sandals. One day Gulmai, who was visiting us, said to me, "The ground is so hot, and Baba has been walking so much in the hot sun. The soles of His feet must be burning," and she explained to me how to help relieve this burning. After that I followed her advice and during the hot summer days I applied cow's ghee (clarified butter) to the soles of Baba's feet, and then rubbed them with a small copper bowl which helped to take away the heat. After that I put Baba's feet in a bowl of water for a short while, and then gently wiped them dry. After this Baba felt more comfortable, and He would then have a short rest before lunch. Such lovely feet Baba had. Even with all the walking He did they stayed slender and beautifully shaped; and His legs were slim and strong.

In the cooler days Baba ate in the kitchen. I poured the water for Him to wash His hands, and I gave Him His towel. And then Baba sat under a window at a low table at the opposite end from the stove against a thick cushion, and I served Him His food: usually rice, dal and chutney, or rice, vegetable and chutney.

Baba's order was that we were not to lie down during the day, so in our room after lunch I did a lot of sewing. I mended Baba's sadras and coats, made Him new ones, mended my clothes, and also stitched new ones when we had material. And I tidied Baba's gadi and kept His clothes and trunk tidy. Everything was for Baba, and we thought only of Him. Baba's order was still that I should not read or write, and when the kitchen and mending work was finished I made photo frames and embroidered brooches from His hair and nails for Baba's beautiful photos. I remember, too, that I peeled cucumber seeds, which I then roasted and kept ready in a jar for Baba to enjoy!

In the evenings Baba sometimes played badminton with us, where the shed now is, and once in a long while, when Baba was in the mood, He took us girls outside the compound for walks along the ridge of the Hill. We never went alone. We would walk some way, and then Baba would sit down with us around Him, and we would talk for a while. In 1935 we had a lovely white donkey and we took the



Mehera standing in the doorway of Baba's kitchen on Meherabad Hill in the mid-30's



Mehera grinding masala (spices) on an Indian-style grinding stone, on Meherabad Hill in the 1930's.

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donkey with us on our walks. One day I asked Baba to ride him and so the next time we went for a walk Baba did ride the donkey a little. He looked so sweet sitting on that white donkey's back.

On some evenings Baba took us to sit behind the kitchen. Baba would be seated on a cotton rug, and we could look out at the hills in the distance; there was no wall then. Sitting there, Baba gave us a spiritual discourse or told us a story, or He made Mani or the others tell Him a joke or a story. Baba would say to us, "Enjoy this; take in as much as you can, because later it won't be like this."

We had our evening meal around six o'clock. It was usually a vegetable and bread or some cheese, with a chapati or a cup of milk, and perhaps some jam.

Until the beginning of 1935 Baba generally wore His hair loose, but the wind at Meherabad in the summer is very strong, and coming up the Hill Baba's hair would blow in His face and eyes. So one day He told me to braid it; that was the first time I braided Baba's hair. In the early days I sometimes tied it back with a bow, but I had never braided it for Him. (Baba started to grow His hair after He left Sakori; every time the Avatar comes He has long hair.) And when Baba's fingernails grew rather long I would remind Him, "Baba, Your nails are very long." Baba would reply, "Yes, they need to be trimmed," so I would cut them. Of course, I saved the clippings.

It was during these years on the Hill that I began to trim Baba's moustache. Baba, in the early years, never cut His moustache. He trimmed it first before going to the West for the first time in 1931, and after that the men mandali must have cut it for Him. This is how I learned to do it. The little room that is now the library was empty. Mani would occasionally go there for injections that she had to have for her health, but at that time I never went there. One day Baba called Kaka Baria, one of the men mandali, up the Hill and had him wait in this little room. Then He called Mani and told her on the alphabet board which He was still using, "Now watch carefully. Kaka will show you how to trim My moustache, and you are to explain it to Mehera."

Then, after fifteen days or so, when Baba's moustache again needed trimming, He came up the Hill to our kitchen and told me to trim it. Mani had explained how Kaka Baria had done it, but still I was feeling very nervous about doing it. With a tiny little comb I gently combed Baba's moustache straight down, and very, very carefully I cut first one side, then the other. Then I stood back and looked at it. One

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side was shorter than the other! "Oh, Baba," I told Him, "it's not quite even." "Let Me see," Baba said, so we brought Him our looking glass. "Yes, I see," Baba told me. "Cut a little more from this side." So I trimmed the longer side, and again stood back to look. The side that had been longer was now too short! But that was not all. By now Baba's whole moustache was a little shorter than He usually wore it. Baba again looked in the glass and said, "Leave it like this. Don't cut it any more." He did not want a moustache like Charlie Chaplin's!

From that time I always cut Baba's moustache. After that first time I knew how to do it, and it was not lopsided again. Baba does not mind if we make mistakes the first time, because then we learn how to do things properly.

During these years on the Hill Baba came and went a lot as He was travelling to the West for His work and also touring in India.

While He was gone Baba saw to it that we were kept busy. We still had our kitchen work and after lunch - often a boiled potato, butter, chapati and pickle instead of rice and dal - when our sewing work was finished, I made more photo frames and brooches and pins. We could not just send for anything we wanted from the bazaar, so I made frames out of sticks, shells, pieces of looking glass, coloured paper, ribbon, and even one from cardboard that I decorated with sealing wax. And I continued to make locket and brooches containing Baba's photo in which I used Baba's lovely hair and nails in the design. I even filed bits of glass into the shape I wanted to cover these photos. We also finished making the garland, crown and robe that we had started in Nasik and darling Baba wore this for the first time on His birthday.

On Baba's trip to the West at the end of 1934, during which He visited Canada, Baba knew He would be away longer than usual, and He gave us a special project. Baba said that we were to make a very big frame containing twelve photos of Him. We did everything ourselves; we made the frame from wood; we made flowers from crepe paper which we arranged around each photo; we made the backing ourselves. In short, we did everything except cut the huge piece of glass for the frame. It took us almost the whole time Baba was away to make it, and it is still hanging in my room at Meherabad. Baba knew how much we would miss Him, so He gave us this to occupy our minds while He was gone. And while we were making it we were not only obeying Baba's order, but we were always seeing His lovely face in the photos!



Mehera and Meher Baba in the East Room on Meherabad Hill on Baba's birthday celebration in 1938. Baba is wearing the crown, robe and garland designed and made by Mehera with the help of the other girls. (These articles are now on display in the Museum Room on Meherabad Hill.) Behind Baba on the wall is the finished photo project that Baba had given Mehera and the girls to occupy them during His 1934-35 visit to the West.

It was just before this same trip that Baba introduced us to two white rabbits which were amongst the first of His animal family that we cared for over the years and that occupied much of our time. Later there were parrots, mynahs, salunkis, canaries, a peacock, sparrows, and guinea fowl; a mongoose, monkeys, deer, dogs, pigs, sheep, and even a snake.

One day Baba came up a little earlier than usual for His lunch. We rushed to quickly prepare His tray and to be ready to wash His hands, but Baba instead put His hand in His pocket and told me, "Take this!" I put out my hand, and Baba placed a baby bird in it! "Oh," I said, "It's so ugly, Baba!" It was a green parrot, but it had not a single feather, only this skinny, scrawny neck, and a big, red beak. And it looked very, very ugly. Baba replied, "But when its feathers grow it will be very beautiful. Just wait, you'll see."

Then again Baba put His hand in His pocket, and He brought out another little bald bird for Mani. And yet again Baba's hand went into His pocket, and out came a third one for Khorshed.

As we were holding these little, bald birds they started to cry. "They're hungry," Baba told us, "we'll feed them." We kneaded some chick pea flour with a little ghee and gave it to Baba. He was sitting down with the three parrots perched in front of Him, and they were crying and crying for food. Then they opened their beaks very, very wide like open suitcases, and Baba put some food in one baby's beak. The second one cried, "Me too," and Baba fed that one, and then the third one. And by that time the first one was crying very hard again; he wanted more. So Baba hurried to feed him, and so it went on. They ate and they ate, until they just sat in front of Baba and groaned.

Baba said, "Now they've eaten too much, and they'll get upset tummies. We'll give them a walk."

So Baba set them down on the kitchen floor, and you cannot imagine how ugly they looked without their feathers and covered with this awful pink skin. "Now let's push them forward," Baba said, and He pushed them with one finger. But because they had eaten so much, they did not want to walk. But Baba told us, "No, we have to make them walk." So we walked them all the way to the far wall of the kitchen, then Baba turned them around and pushed them forward for another walk. Two or three rounds of the kitchen later Baba said, "Now they're all right; put them in the basket. They'll be fine." They were fine, and in the evening they were hungry again!

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These parrots grew up to be very beautiful big birds, and Baba brought them a lovely large, brass cage. As they had grown up together they were friendly and did not fight, but they did play tricks on one another. There was a swing in their cage and they liked to swing on it, but it held only one bird at a time. Now parrots are very fond of red chillies; they like the seeds. So when the parrot at the bottom of the cage wanted to play on the swing he would take a chilli by its stem, hold it like an umbrella, and go around and around with it, tempting the one on the swing. That one would look down and think, "Oh, he's got a nice, red chilli," and climb down. Then the other would quickly drop the chilli and climb onto the swing. That is how they played tricks on one another. Parrots are very sweet birds. Later, when we began to travel, Baba gave them to some Baba-lovers to keep.

My sister's husband, Rustom, had given Baba a Nepalese mynah that he had brought from Bombay. He was a very beautiful bird with blue-black feathers and short orange legs. His beak was a matching orange, and from his ears there hung two lace-like flaps of skin. He also was a very intelligent bird. When Mani played the sitar the mynah would dance to the rhythm, keeping perfect time, and his lacy ear flaps would sway in time to the music, too. Mynahs are good mimics, so I decided to see if I could teach him to say, "Baba darling". Every day I would say, "Ba-ba dar-ling, Ba-ba dar-ling", quite slowly to him before going to the kitchen. Within five or six days he did say "Baba darling".

I was so happy to have this surprise for Baba, and when He came for His lunch, we told Him, "Baba, the mynah can speak and say very beautifully 'Baba darling'." We waited and waited, but the mynah did not say a single word. Then just as we were leaving the room, the mynah said very clearly, "Baba darling". Baba was so happy to hear the mynah speak. This bird had a very sweet voice, and he sounded so lovely. Not only could he say "Baba darling", but he could imitate each of our voices and could sound like me or Mani or Naja or Khorshed or Valu. We were also excited about him saying "Baba darling", because the Western women were expected soon, and after our secluded life we felt a little shy about meeting them. We were glad to have this beautiful bird that said "Baba darling" in so many different voices to show them. But as it turned out, they did not meet our mynah.

What happened was this: one day in the kitchen with Baba we were all so deeply engrossed in serving Him food and talking to Him that when a big storm came over, we forgot about the mynah. It rained so heavily and the wind blew so hard

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that the mynah, whose cage was in our room, though some distance from the open window above the door, got completely drenched.

He caught pneumonia, and birds are very difficult to treat. When Baba came up the Hill we told Him how ill the mynah was. We were all in my room gathered around this sweet bird, and everybody was feeling upset. We asked him, "Mynah, when are you going to say, 'Baba darling'?" And he opened his eyes and said just, "Baba," then died. Baba took him so lovingly in a soft cloth, and with His own hands He buried him under the neem tree which He had planted outside our kitchen. So that mynah was very fortunate.

At another time on the Hill we had four salunkis that lived in a very big cage. They are common birds and they sing very sweetly. It was small Khorshed's job to look after them and to clean their cage, but one day she cut her finger while working in the kitchen and it became infected. Baba told her, "Don't clean the cage with your sore finger. Mehera and Mani will do it together."

We were quite happy to do this. We took the cage out into the sun so that the birds and the cage could have an airing. We cleaned it and gave the salunkis fresh food and fresh water, with a little snack of nice field lettuce on the side. We did everything, and we did it beautifully!

It was now time for lunch and off we went to eat, feeling very pleased with ourselves for having cleaned the cage so well. While we were eating a woman who swept the compound and did other jobs came running to us in the kitchen and told us, "The salunkis are on the roof!"

There were always many salunkis on the roof, because they are such common birds. So we said, "Oh yes, of course there are. Just let them play."

"But," she said, "they are our salunkis!"

"Our salunkis?" we asked.

"Yes, from the cage."

"From the cage!" We could not believe our ears. We had cleaned the cage so well but when we went to look, the whole cage was empty. We had forgotten to shut the cage door. We were both so absent-minded that neither of us had remembered to do this. We were very worried. "What shall we do when Baba asks about them?" we said to each other. But when Baba came up the Hill we had to tell Him what had happened.

"What?" Baba said. "Neither of you remembered to shut the cage door?"

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"No, Baba," we replied. "We did everything perfectly, except we left the door open."

Baba was not pleased, and we remembered how proud of ourselves we had felt. "Never mind," Baba told us. "Let them be free."

So these little things did happen.

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In 1935 Baba was in seclusion for a long time. In the middle of the year Baba went to Mt. Abu where He was in seclusion in one of the caves in the Ambika Hills for a couple of months. Baba did half of His work there, and then in August He returned to Meherabad to finish it. For His seclusion work Baba wanted a quiet place where He would not be disturbed, and He chose a spot next to His Samadhi to build a room. Baba was in such a great hurry that He had Padri build this room, which is now called Baba's Cabin, in a very short time. After Padri had finished the foundation, he wanted to build the walls with bricks so it would be permanent, but Baba did not give him time. "No, do it as fast as you can," He told Padri. So Padri hurriedly constructed the walls from tin sheets; that is why Baba's Cabin on the Hill has such a strong foundation and only tin walls.

Baba would be at the Cabin watching the work, and then He would come the short distance to our kitchen and ask, "Is the food ready?" We would have to say, "No, Baba," so He would go back to see if the workers were hurrying on the Cabin. Baba was so impatient and restless while that Cabin was being built, going back and forth from the kitchen to the Cabin in the hot sun. He hurried the work so much that in a very few days it was finished and ready for Baba to use for His seclusion.

This Cabin is a very small room, and much of the space was taken up with a very big bed. It was not nice at all to stay cooped up in that little room, but for His work Baba suffered these discomforts. His work was much more important to Him than His comfort.

At the beginning of this seclusion in the Cabin, which started in August and ended in December 1935, Baba was on fast. When He broke His fast Baba sent word to us that we were to send Him plain dal and rice the first day, and patties the next day.

So the first day we sent Him dal and rice. Then the next day came, and it was time to make the patties. Naja and I went to a great deal of trouble to make those patties delicious for Baba. We carefully prepared the ingredients: potatoes, garlic,

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fresh ginger, fresh coriander, and salt, and we rolled them in bread crumbs and fried them until they were golden-brown and looked very tempting. Knowing Baba had just broken fast we did not put in any chillies as we thought it not good to have hot food after fasting. Off we sent the patties to Baba feeling sure that Baba would love them and so be as pleased with us as we were with ourselves. How happy we felt!

After some time the tray came back, and on the tray was a note that Baba had dictated to someone for us. Naja eagerly read it to me, and what it said was this: "The patties were hopeless, dumbless, and tasteless!" To properly understand the note one needs to understand a little Gujarati. In Gujarati dumb means "breath" so by "dumbless" Baba meant without any life in it.

"Oh, Baba didn't like them," we told each other. We had thought Baba would praise the patties, but this was just the opposite. We were very disappointed and we realised that Baba wanted spicy hot ones.

The next day we made the patties spicy hot and Baba liked them!

Now, at this time, Baba's pet dog was Chum. I call Chum a pet, but he was a very good watchdog, too. And he loved Baba with such possessiveness that he would not allow anyone to come near Baba.

There was a cow on the Hill too and this cow also loved Baba. We would send Baba bread to give to Chum, and when Baba would throw a piece to this cow, Chum could not stand it. He became so jealous of the cow that he would try to chase her away. But the cow did not want to go away and she would go round and round the Cabin with Chum chasing her. Soon Baba could not tell who was first and who was chasing whom. Everyday these two entertained Baba like this, and when He came out of seclusion He told us about it.

At first Baba always stayed inside the Cabin during this seclusion, then came a period when He left the room and went outside into His little compound. Baba did not come through the gate to our quarters. One day when Baba was outside, He found some wild flowers in the grass and He picked a few and tied them up with a blade of grass. Valu was allowed to go near the gate, and she must have been nearby as Baba gave her this little bunch of flowers with the message, "Give these to Mehera and tell her that these are the wild flowers that Baba loves best."

These flowers are quite common here. They do not have a strong scent, but they are very pretty little flowers, with five cream-colored petals and a yellow center.



Mehera on Meher Baba's left and Mani on His right, taken during their visit to Mysore in 1938

It was Baba's whim to send me something that day, so He found these flowers, and I still have them in my room at Meherabad.

A few days after this Baba came out of seclusion and went back to His normal routine of going down the Hill to the mandali and so on. It was now December 1935, and Baba must have been in seclusion in that Cabin for nearly five months at that time.

Early in 1936 Baba took us to stay at Mysore. It was so unexpected as we had not left Meherabad for years. We were very excited to be travelling, but it was while we were there that Mani had to have an emergency ear operation. Afterwards we realised that this must have been the reason Baba had taken us there. It was a very serious mastoid operation, and at that time there were no proper facilities for such surgery in Ahmednagar. Our very strict life continued while we were there.

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At the end of 1936 a group of Baba's Western lovers - including Norina Matchabelli, Elizabeth Patterson, Nadine Tolstoy, Kitty Davy, Nonny and Rano Gayley, Margaret Craske, Delia DeLeon, Ruano Bogislav, Malcolm Schloss, Jean Adriel and Garrett Fort - arrived in India to stay at Meher Retreat in Nasik. Baba now divided His time between Meherabad, the Nasik Ashram, and a mast and mad ashram He had at Rahuri, a town situated about one hour by car from Meherabad. On Baba's instructions the Western women at Nasik came regularly to visit Mehera and the Eastern women on Meherabad Hill.

In February 1937 Baba's birthday was celebrated on a grand scale in Nasik, but Mehera and the Eastern women's sheltered life continued, and they did not attend it.

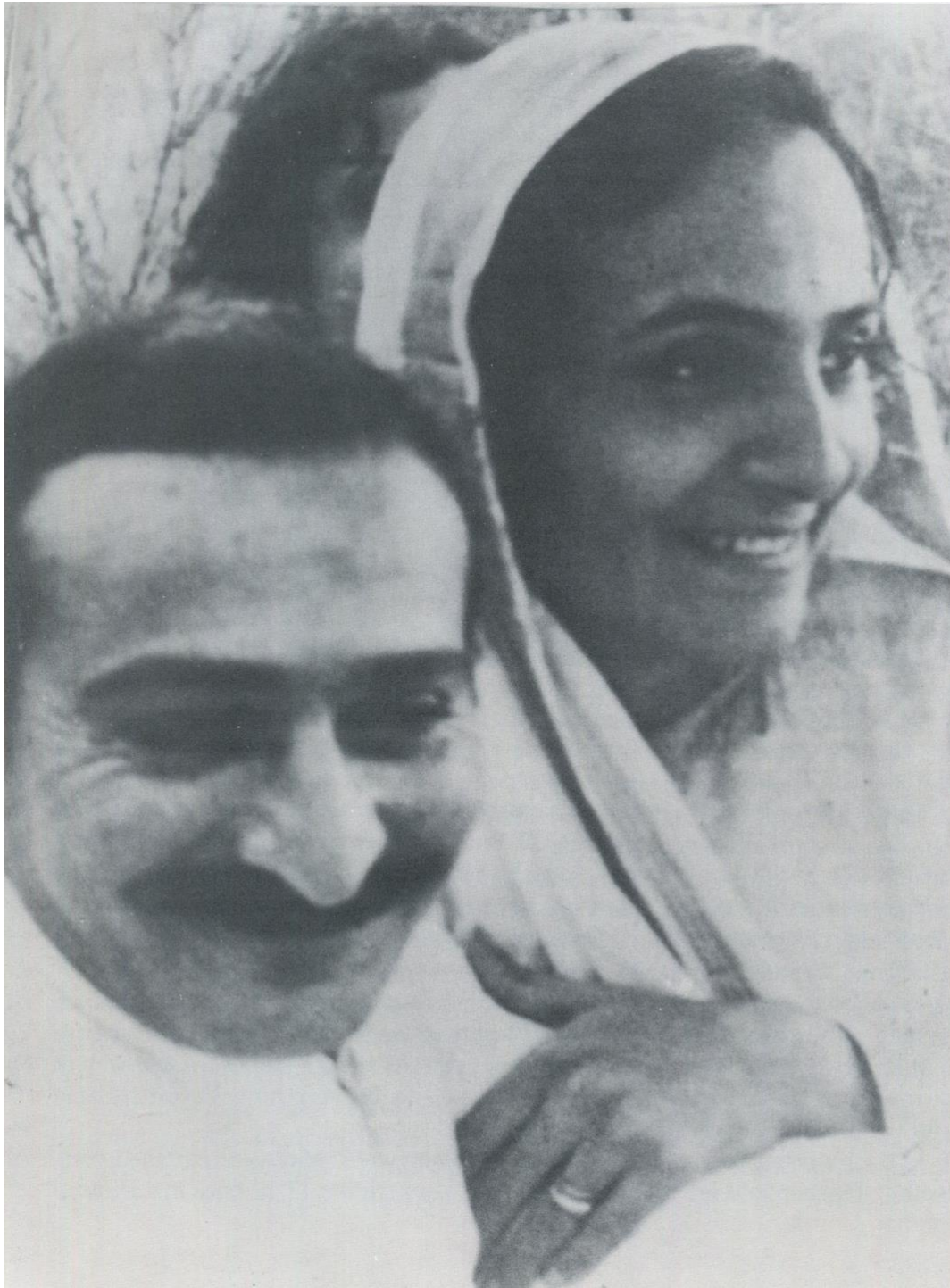
At the end of July 1937 Baba, with Mehera, Mani, Naja, Khorshed, Soona Masi, Valu, and some other Western women, including Norina and Rano, sailed from Bombay on the Strathnavar for Marseilles. The quiet years on the Hill when just the six women stayed there were drawing to a close. They were all travelling tourist class, and Mehera and the Eastern women were still, in the midst of activity, strictly cloistered. Their cabin was over the engine, and they did not go on deck or to the dining room or see other passengers.

We sailed through the Arabian Sea, where I got very seasick. Baba was so sweet. He ordered sodas to settle my stomach and fed me orange juice, which helped me feel better. Baba was so loving and concerned and took great care of me. Then we went through the Red Sea, which was very, very hot, and across the Mediterranean to Marseilles. Baba hurried us down the gang plank. We quickly passed through the crowds, to which we were unaccustomed, and drove to a villa in Cannes.

When we first sailed I had been seasick, and Naja had not but as soon as we reached land poor Naja got "landsick"! We were very surprised as we had never heard of such a thing. As we chose our bedrooms and unpacked at this villa Naja just lay in a chair with her eyes closed. In all the bustle I eventually managed to send a message to Baba Who came as soon as He could. Baba looked at Naja and asked me, "What's wrong with Naja? Why hasn't she chosen a bedroom?" "Baba," I explained, "she's landsick." So Baba chose a room for her and she went to bed.

Mani, Khorshed and I, that first night, shared two upstairs rooms. This house had electricity, and after years of kerosene lanterns at Meherabad we were not at all used to it. When we turned out the lights, suddenly everything was pitch black, and we could not find our beds!

In the morning Baba asked us, "Did you sleep well? Have you brushed your teeth?" He then told us, "Now don't unpack your trunks, I'll be back in an hour."



Meher Baba and Mehera in Cannes, France 1937.

Meherabad Hill

Off Baba went, and on His return He took us to a lovely villa that He had found. Baba had not liked the first one, and we now moved into this new one, "Caldana Villa."

Even during their visit to France, which included a trip to Paris where they were the only sightseeing party at the Eiffel Tower, the cloistered life continued for Mehera and the Eastern women. In November 1937 they returned with Baba on a new one-class ship, Circassia, to Meherabad. Kitty, Rano and Norina joined them and stayed in the West Room (now the Museum) of the water tank, and they were later joined by Elizabeth, Nonny, and Margaret.

Norina, Kitty and Rano returned with us from Cannes, and they, too, stayed on the Hill. Kitty had told Baba that she wanted to serve Him, so Baba instructed Naja to teach Kitty Indian cooking. In those early days Kitty did not know how to speak Marathi, and Naja knew very little English, just a few words, and sometimes they were very funny together.

On this particular occasion Naja was showing Kitty how to make some dish in which the first step was to brown chopped onions. Naja heated the oil in a saucepan, and then added the finely chopped onions. When onions are first added to oil they should not be stirred. The onions are cold, and they are not to be stirred until the oil and onions both become hot. Naja tried to explain this to Kitty but what she said was, "Don't move!" and so Kitty stood perfectly still, almost at attention. For the cook to stand at attention was a new style of cooking for us, and we all had a good laugh about it. Baba, too, was very amused when we told Him of this incident.

As the Westerners were not used to the summer heat at Meherabad and Baba did not want them to get sick, in mid-March 1938 He took us to stay in Panchgani, a hill station about twelve miles from Mahabaleshwar. While Baba was in Panchgani He had Pendu and Padri begin to build the upper floor (now Study Hall) and tower of the water tank on Meherabad Hill. We travelled to Panchgani by car and as always, when there was someone other than Baba and one of us women in the front, a screen was securely fastened between us to separate the front and back seats. In our car, Elizabeth drove, and Baba and another person (we do not know who as we did not see them) sat in the front, and Mani, myself, Naja, Khorshed and

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two birds travelled in the back. In a second car were Soona Masi, Rano, Kitty, Norina, Nonny, Valu, a driver and Kippy, Elizabeth's dog. I remember that we had several punctures on the way.

In Panchgani we stayed at a bungalow called "Dilkhush" and while there Baba called other close ones, such as Arnavaz and Nargis Dadachanji, to stay with us, too. Baba was very relaxed, so this was a very happy time for us all. In the evenings He often took us to sit in the garden where we enjoyed the beautiful scenery, and He played cards and charades with us, and took us for walks. One evening Baba took us to Tiger Valley, which was very close to our house, to see the cave where He had been in seclusion for some months. There were bars across the entrance, and we all crawled into the cave through a tiny door. The view looking out through the bars was lovely. Later on in our stay Baba allowed Elizabeth to stay over-night in this cave.

Baba also took us a number of times to nearby Mahabaleshwar for picnics at the various beauty spots such as Bombay Point, Elphinston Point, and so on. I was able to show Baba and the others around Mahabaleshwar as I had spent some months there in my childhood at "Cosy Cottage" which was one of the three cottages my mother had owned there. Among other sights, we visited "Cosy Cottage" and a pond called Yenna Lake where, as a child, I would go every day with my mother, and while she prayed there, I would play. And I showed Baba and the others a spring which I often drank from as a child.

Sometimes we had unexpected guests at our picnics. Once we heard a rustling in the bushes, and there suddenly appeared a huge black water buffalo. She stood and stared at us, and she was soon joined by two more buffaloes and their tiny shepherdess, all of whom stared! On another excursion we were visited by a number of the big grey monkeys that abound in Mahabaleshwar.

When, after several months, Baba was ready to leave Panchgani, the addition to the water tank was not finished, and Baba arranged for us to stay in a district commissioner's bungalow known as the Irrigation Bungalow in Ahmednagar, situated just off the road towards what is now Meherazad.

More Easterners and Westerners joined us, and there were now many of us staying in Ahmednagar: Helen Dahm, Nadine Tolstoy, Irene Billo, Heidi Merten, and Gaimai, Eruch's mother, with her two daughters, Mehru and Manu. Nargis Kotwal and her daughters, Najoo and Hilla, now joined us, too. This bungalow

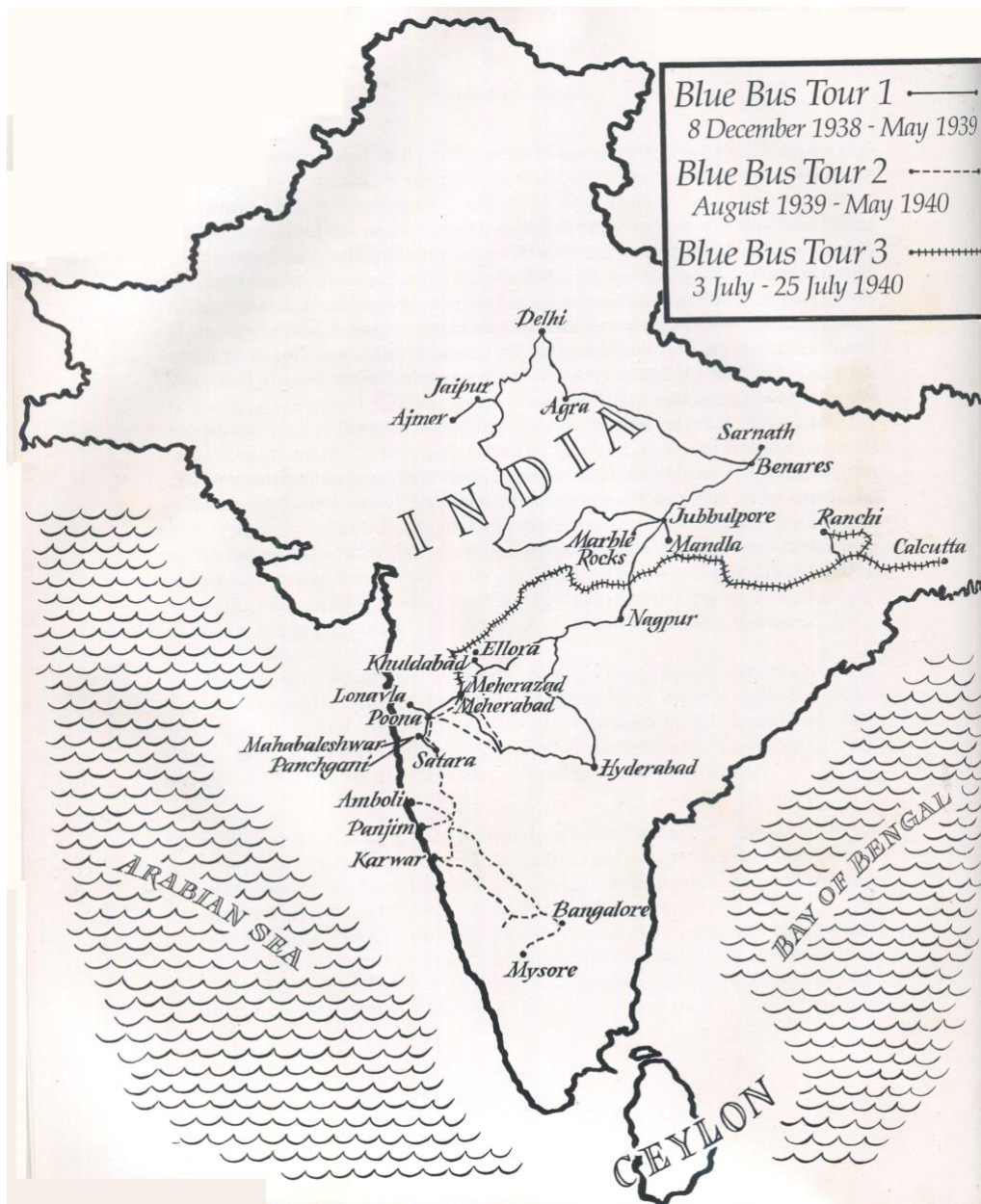
Meherabad Hill

had several rooms which were usually offices, but with all of us there every room was filled with beds.

This, too, was a very happy time, so we liked this bungalow. Baba often took us for walks. It was very quiet there in those days, and we could walk across the fields to where "Meher Manzil" is now. There was nothing there then, not a single house, just a few banyan trees. Elizabeth would drive the car there and bring the picnic basket, drinking water, cushions and rugs, and Baba would sit on a cushion under that big banyan tree that now is in Meher Manzil's garden, while Norina told Baba funny stories. She liked to amuse Baba, and she always called Him "Baba darling". And Kitty and Elizabeth and Nadine would chatter away to Baba, too. We all enjoyed those times with Baba.

In August 1938 the water tank, now called Meher Retreat, had its new upper floor and tower finished and we moved back to Meherabad. Mani, myself, Naja, Khorshed, with Soona Masi and Valu were in the East Room, and the other women, and there were many of them, stayed in the West Room (which is now the Museum), the library, and on the top floor.

We were only there a few months when, in early December 1938, we set off on the Blue Bus Tours.



9

Always On the Move

December 1938 to October 1949



Since joining Baba we had moved often and stayed in many different places: at Meherabad itself, at Khushru Quarters, travelling in North India, in Bombay, Toka, Nasik, Mysore, Cannes, Panchgani, and Ahmednagar. But from the Blue Bus Tours, which started in December 1938, until we returned to live permanently at Meherazad, nearly twenty years later, we were "always on the move".

Blue Bus Tours

December 1938 to November 1941

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On 8 December 1938 Baba set off on a series of journeys around India in a small blue bus with a large group of His women disciples. Except for those driving, the men mandali included in these journeys travelled ahead by train. On these tours Baba was constantly contacting masts, in addition to seeing to the welfare and moods of a large group of people living under trying circumstances.

Prior to the fourth Blue Bus Tour Baba told the women, "On tour there will be plenty of hardships and fun, both! Anyway, I promise you heaps of excitement!" This described all the tours.

A prominent feature of the Blue Bus Tours was sightseeing. Wherever they stopped Baba usually took the girls to see local, well-known sites, which must often have been tiring after strenuous travelling on India's roads. For Mehera and the few women who had lived the

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cloistered life on the Hill, their lives suddenly changed from their going nowhere and seeing nothing, to their going everywhere and seeing everything! Baba was still very strict with Mehera, but she no longer wore dark glasses with paper covering the lenses when she went out as she had even in France; and during this period Baba took them often to the cinema, both Sarosh Talkies in Ahmednagar and to cinemas on their travels. This phase ended in November 1941.

In the Blue Bus we travelled with Baba throughout India from north to south and east to west. We were all women on the Blue Bus except, of course, for Baba, Who sat with us, and Eruch and Kaka or Dr. Donkin who sat in the driver's compartment. The other men mandali travelled ahead of us by train and made the arrangements for our stays at various places.

Sometimes there were up to thirty of us Eastern and Western women in a bus built to carry only sixteen. Everyone was packed in very tightly. There were even small stools in the aisles for the younger ones, like Meheru, who joined us during her school holidays, to sit on. Arnavaz and Nargis and other close ones joined us, too, when they could. Baba would then arrange for extra cars to hold us all, but they often broke down. Then even more people than usual had to be squeezed into the bus. Sometimes we travelled part of the journey by train and the Blue Bus then met us at an arranged place.

We made five main Blue Bus journeys. In between these trips we returned to Meherabad Hill, sometimes for a month, sometimes for several. In some places we stayed a long time. We were eight months in Bangalore and quite a long time in Ajmer, Jubbulpore and Panchgani, and sometimes we just stayed overnight.

While travelling Baba did His mast work continuously. Baba never spared Himself and, on top of that, He had the great strain of seeing to the arrangements for so many different people with their different moods. And when we settled in a place like Bangalore or Ajmer, Baba would set up a mast ashram.

What can I tell you about the Blue Bus Tours? We left Meherabad in December 1938 and the first tour took us to Hyderabad, and then north to Jubbulpore where Baba made His headquarters. From there we travelled north to many places including Benares, Delhi, Agra, Ajmer (where Baba had a mast ashram) and then back to Jubbulpore, and finally Meherabad. We were away about six months.

On this tour, as on all of them, we stayed in dak bungalows (government rest houses, with varying degrees of cleanliness and furniture), hotels, and rented



Meher Baba and Mehera at Marble Rocks near Jubbulpore during the first Blue Bus Tour, taken in December, 1938.

bungalows. In dak bungalows there was usually little furniture, so we would put our bedding on the floor. Then sometimes when we stopped for the night, Baba would ask us, "Can you do without your bedding just for the night? We start early in the morning, and it will save the mandali tying it up then." "Yes, Baba," we would reply. And we would sleep on the floor on a dusty carpet, on chairs, on tables, on anything we could find.

In some places, like Benares, we were very, very cold, and in others we were

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very hot. In Nagpur, on one of the tours, we stayed in a beautiful dak bungalow which had a long verandah overlooking a lovely lake. We sat on the verandah, but we felt too hot to enjoy the view or even to feel hungry. It was so hot that we would wash our clothes before taking our baths, and when we finished bathing fifteen or twenty minutes later, we could put on the same clothes - they were bone dry!

Because of the heat, Baba had us get up very early, often at 2 a.m. We would have our tea, pack up, and leave at 4:30 or 5 a.m. Elizabeth, who was one of our drivers, always hated to wake up early. It took her a long time to wake up properly and when she first awoke she did everything very, very slowly. Baba would sometimes come to the corner where she was sleeping on the floor, and snap His fingers to get her up. Elizabeth would slowly open her eyes and say, "Yes, darling Baba, I'm getting up." But it was very hard for her to rise. Baba would tell her, "Don't hurry, Elizabeth, but be sure you're ready to leave on time!"

So by 4:30 or 5 a.m. we were on our way. And, often, when it came time to eat, Baba did not stop the bus. We would drive on all day, and we would all be very hungry. The roads in those days were seldom tarred, so by evening, after travelling on hot, dry, dusty roads all day, we were covered with powdered dust. When we arrived at our destination we would find that there was very little water, so we could not bathe. And the dal that had been cooked the night before would be sour and bubbling, or the potatoes would be bad, so Baba would say, "Have tea." But we then would find that the milk had curdled, so it would be black tea for dinner and perhaps bread and a small piece of cheese. Or sometimes, when this happened, we would make what Elizabeth called "soapy soup" - cut up potatoes, onions, and garlic all cooked together in a big pot of water. Baba shared all these discomforts with us.

On the Blue Bus Tours Naja was not well, so I cooked for Baba. I kept Baba's stove, pots and so on in a trunk that was unloaded when we came to a halt. We would arrive late at some dak bungalow, and I would rush to prepare Baba's food. It was rather difficult to quickly cook by lantern light in a new place, to unpack the pots and pans, and find the water and so on. Kitty cooked for the others, and one funny cooking incident I remember is this:

When we were in Benares Baba took us to Sarnath to see the place where Buddha had first initiated His disciples. We returned to Benares rather late, and we were all very hungry. Kitty lit the fire, but the cooking pots were all on top of the bus. So instead she took an earthenware pot in which water is normally stored, and

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began to cook our "soapy soup" in that. All was well for a little while, but then the soup began to leak out of the pot. The earthenware pot had cracked, and what was to have been our dinner was now putting out the fire! You can imagine how everyone felt. Kitty took a pail that we had with us and emptied the half-cooked soup into it. Somehow she managed to bring it to a boil in that bucket. It was a thin, watery broth, with a few pieces of potato and onion lying in it, but we did not care how uncooked it was. We were so cold and hungry that we were happy to have something warm inside us. And we did have some bread, too.

Another funny incident I remember was when Kitty was mistaken for a thief! In the middle of the night she remembered that she wanted to cook potatoes first thing in the morning. The potatoes were in a sack on top of the bus, and Kitty decided to climb then and there onto the bus to get them down. There was a little iron ladder on the side of the bus, and up it Kitty climbed. But someone was sleeping inside the bus to guard it, and Kitty woke him up.

Naturally, he thought Kitty was a thief, and he came rushing out of the bus waving his stick and shouting very loudly. "No, no, it's me," Kitty shouted back.

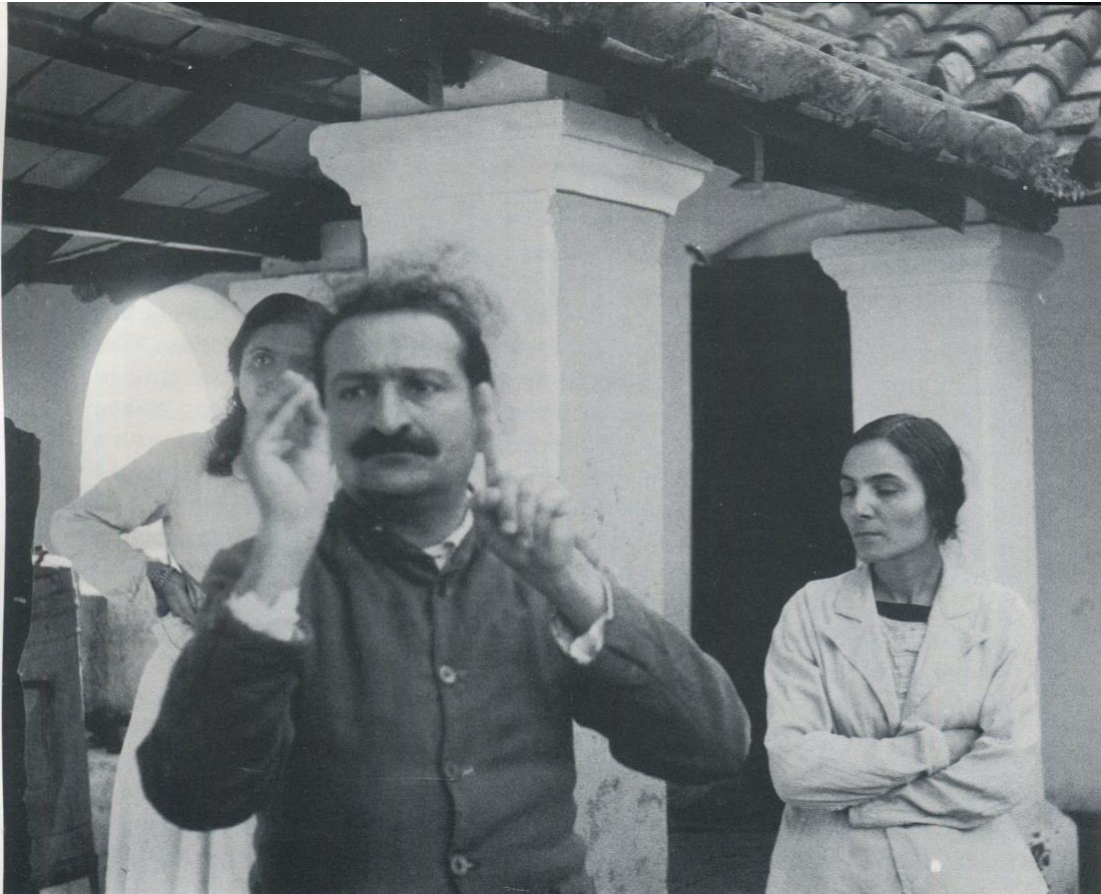
"Who's me?" shouted the watchman. By this time Baba and we all were awake and came rushing out to see what was happening. All this commotion in the middle of the night, and it was only Kitty searching for potatoes!

When we reached a town or city Baba very often took us sightseeing. In December 1938 we were staying outside Jubbulpore, and for my birthday Baba took us to a place called Marble Rocks where we went boating on the Narbada River.

In Benares we saw the Ganges, and in Agra, the Taj Mahal, in Jaipur, the Amber Palace, and other sights. And Baba also took us to the places in North India connected with Lord Krishna and Lord Buddha. In this way Baba showed us many of the famous sights of India.

Near the middle of 1939 when we had returned to Jubbulpore before returning to Meherabad, Baba told Mani to put on a play, and Baba Himself gave each one their part. Mani played Hitler, Katie Mussolini, and Rano took the part of Chamberlain. It was a pantomime, with no talking at all! And this was some months before the start of the Second World War.

We returned to Meherabad Hill from the first Blue Bus Tour in May 1939, and stayed there over two months.



Meher Baba and Mehera, with small Khorshed in background, in Jubbulpore during the first Blue Bus Tour.

Meherabad Again

Back at Meherabad Baba was busy with His work, but He took His meals with us, and in the evening played badminton, and took a round of all the animals we had in our compound. Baba's bedroom now was always that little Cabin near the Samadhi that Padri had built earlier.

During the day Baba would often call us, too. He would come to the room I shared with Mani, Khorshed, Naja, Soona Masi and Valu, and sit on my bed with a big pillow behind His back.

"Call everyone!" Baba would tell us. And the word would go out, "Baba wants everybody. Baba wants everybody." And everyone would drop whatever they

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were doing, cooking in the kitchen, grinding spices, washing clothes, writing letters or reading upstairs, and come rushing to my room to be with Baba.

Now that there were so many of us we no longer had our meals in Baba's kitchen, but instead we sat together under the newly-built tin shed. Long benches were made for us as tables, and each one had their own little stool with her name on it, and a chipped enamel plate and cup. We carried these same plates and cups in cotton satchels on the Blue Bus.

At 11 a.m. sharp the lunch bell rang, and everyone dropped whatever they were doing and quickly came for their food. Baba wanted everyone to be very prompt.

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In August 1939 we left Meherabad to travel on the Blue Bus to Bangalore on our second tour where we remained until the end of April 1940. The whole of Meherabad moved there, including our zoo from Meherabad Hill. There was Lucky the miniature monkey, Lily the gazelle, Bingo and Jingo the two dogs that we got in Jubbulpore, Nutty and Gutty our two pigs, Bundy and Dundy the red monkeys, Snowie the rabbit, Elizabeth's dog Kippy and several other dogs, including two sweet cocker spaniels, Elizabeth's two birds, and two other monkeys. In Bangalore, Silkie, a black and white Hyderabad cat, was added. She was fully grown, but still the size of a kitten. A goat, a lamb and a peacock also joined us.

At first we stayed in some temporary quarters, and then we moved into "The Links", a very large and lovely house on the edge of the Bangalore Golf Course. Baba had a big mast ashram here, and He supervised every detail of running this large household. Often, too, He was on fast for His work in a little room near the mast ashram.

We were all busy with our own duties: I took care of Baba, Kitty and Eruch's sister, Manu cooked, Elizabeth and Irene looked after the animals and Nadine and Norina gave lectures on Baba in Bangalore and Mysore.

Margaret Craske came from England to join us here, and Shireenmai also came to stay for some time. Other close ones came when they could be free from their jobs.

Mani, Norina, and the others put on many skits here to amuse Baba. Just Baba and I, with sometimes Baidul's wife, Soltoon and her daughters and also Pilamai, Arnavaz and Nargis would be the only audience. Baba loved humour and He loved jokes. He liked people to talk about the funny incidents in their own lives, and He liked people to use the wrong word accidentally; with the slightest excuse

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Baba would find the humour in something. Baba said that humour lessened the burden of His universal work. He did His universal work most of the time with all His fastings and seclusions, so when people amused Him, Baba liked it. He had so many serious things on His mind.

Now Baba-lovers entertain us, and so, through us, Baba is also amused. When anyone is amused Baba is amused, because Baba is in every heart.

It was while we were in Bangalore that Baba laid the foundation stone for the "Meher Baba Universal Spiritual Centre" at Byramangala, twenty-two miles from Bangalore.

From Bangalore we made our way back to Meherabad via Karwar and Goa (where Baba met one of His agents), Mahabaleshwar and Panchgani. We reached Meherabad in May 1940, and were there until the beginning of July.

Back at Meherabad

We now had an extra guest for lunch under the tin shed. In Bangalore, Elizabeth had found a peacock in the vegetable market and Baba had allowed her to keep him. He was called Moti, and he returned with us to Meherabad.

But the fun was this! As soon as Katie and Tara (daughter of Patel, the headman of Arangaon) who did the cooking, rang the bell for food, Moti would jump on one of the benches, spread out his tail and wings, and dance and prance and strut! He was very tame, and he loved to be the centre of attention. Katie would shout at Moti, but he would not listen to her at all. So she would push him off the bench, and in return he would screech loudly at her. It was so funny to watch Katie and Moti.

Baba's gadi (divan) was and still is under the tin shed. I put a little table cloth on it so that spilt food would not stain it. And Baba sat there with us all. I served Baba His food, and then we took our food and sat around Him. Sometimes, instead, Baba ate in my room sitting on my bed.

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Our third tour took us by train instead of the Blue Bus to the east side of India to Calcutta and back to Meherabad. We left at the beginning of July 1940 and spent several weeks in Ranchi, a hill station fairly near Calcutta, and a couple of days sightseeing in Calcutta before our return. We were again at Meherabad at the end of July 1940, this time for three months, but we saw little of Baba during this time. He was now in strict seclusion, working with His masts. We all were in a period

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of stricter discipline, too. Some were given silence, many were not to write, and we had only one meal a day, which was at noon. Baba also divided the women into groups, and no one except Kitty, who was the go-between, was allowed to talk with those outside her group.

Baba at this time, too, had us all gather in the kitchen at 5 a.m. to sing "The Seven Names of God". This took about twenty minutes, and Mani accompanied us on the harmonium. As I said, poor Elizabeth hated to get up early, and we would watch her coming very sleepily down the stairs from the upper floor of the Retreat. She carried a lantern, but her eyes were closed; and we were in great suspense until she reached the kitchen safely.

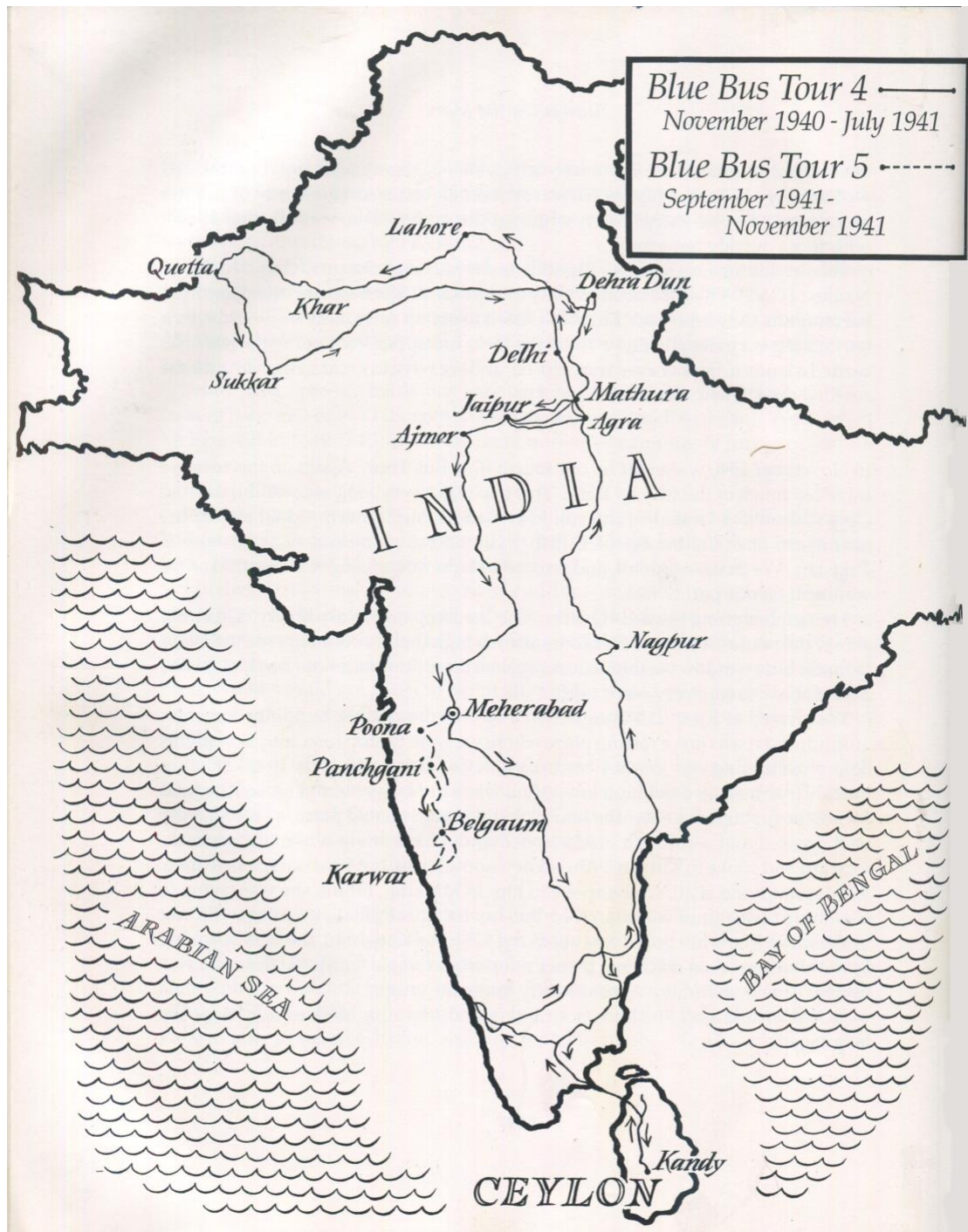
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In November 1940 we set off on our fourth Blue Bus Tour. Again on this tour we travelled much of the way by train. This trip was a very long one, taking us from Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in the south, to Lahore in the north, to Quetta in the northwest, near the border of British India and Afghanistan of what now is Pakistan. We froze in Quetta, and roasted in Lahore, and all got rather thin as we were still on our partial fast.

I remember going towards Quetta. The landscape was very lonely. On either side of the road rose huge, bare mountains, so high that we could not see their tops from the little windows of the bus, and against these mountains our bus looked like a matchbox. It was very, very cold.

We arrived at Khar dak bungalow. There were no other buildings for miles around, and it was just a resting place where we were to stop for a couple of nights before continuing our journey towards Quetta. Baba told Kitty to take me up quickly to this small dak bungalow. Mani was a little way behind us, so Kitty and I were the first ones to enter the house. In this very isolated place, a Pathan, very well-dressed and wearing a nicely ironed and folded snow-white turban, came forward and spoke to Kitty in Urdu. I knew some Urdu, but I did not speak to men. Kitty spoke none at all, so she spoke to him in Marathi! I think she was trying to tell him to wait until Mani arrived but he, being a Pathan, of course did not understand Marathi. So he was speaking Urdu to Kitty, and she was speaking Marathi to him. And neither of them understood a single word that the other was saying! It was so funny. At times Kitty made me laugh.

"Kitty," I told her, "he does not understand Marathi; he does not know the language."



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"Oh," said Kitty, and fortunately at that moment Mani walked in.

We spent a day or two up there. It was icy cold, with freezing winds blowing across the mountains. The cold made us hungry, and all we had to eat was plain dal, raw onions and, fortunately, plenty of naan. But we were very happy to have something hot to eat. When our food ran out we had to leave that place, because there was no place to buy any provisions; there was nothing up there at all. And Baba told us that His father had walked across these mountains in his search for Him.

On we went until we came to a small settlement. It was a place like an inn where people could come for food or to ask for directions, and so many Pathans were gathered there. Baba noticed three horses tied up nearby, and He chatted with some Pathans and then asked them, "Are they good horses?"

"Oh, yes," replied the owners. "Shall we race for you?" Baba said, "Yes, and I'll give the winner a prize!" The three owners jumped on their horses and entertained Baba and us all with an exciting race. And Baba did give the winner a little money.

From this point on we needed an escort through the mountains, because there were dacoits hiding in the lonely passes and it was dangerous to travel alone. Some Baluchis with their rifles ready accompanied us in a jeep until we came again to a safe place. Then they turned back, and we went on our way to Quetta.

We arrived in Quetta in the Spring, and the many fruit trees there were blossoming. We did not recognise Quetta at all. Since my first visit there with Baba in 1924 it had suffered a severe earthquake, and so many of the houses had been demolished and rebuilt. In those early days some of the buildings had been very smart, but the new buildings were made from mud bricks and were very simple. However, they were safer to be in during an earthquake, and were very comfortable and homey.

It was still very cold, and one day we had a huge hailstorm. The hail stones were as big as eggs, and in the morning we could not open our door because the bank of hail stones resting against it had turned into a block of ice! We only cooked once a day while we were there, but we could have naan with fresh butter and honey at other times. How delicious it was! And despite the cold Baba was fasting for some time. He had me bake Him just an apple or two, with a clove and a little sugar in the middle where the core had been taken out! There were times when Baba put much strain on His body

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Chatti Baba, the mast, had been brought to Quetta, and one day Baba took us to his room to show us how he was living. We were wrapped up in warm coats, and we could hardly believe our eyes. Chatti Baba had poured water on the floor of his room, and he was sitting there in the middle of it. Just seeing him made Norina exclaim, "Oh, my God, how can he do that? It's so cold!" We were half-freezing and Baba explained to us, "See, a mast is like that; he is not conscious of his body." It was in Quetta that Elizabeth found another of the many dogs that Baba allowed her to keep. This fortunate dog was named Foundy.

On that fourth tour, in addition to some of Elizabeth's pets, we took a gold fish in a bowl! Baba gave this gold fish into Mani's care, and really, it was more a silver fish than a gold fish. She nursed the bowl in her lap when we travelled and, when necessary, changed the water. On this tour we again spent a little time in Ajmer, and Ajmer has very unusual water. There is a lot of mica in the soil in this area, and this leaches into the water supply. The taste is not at all nice, and the water looks as if it has an oily film on it. Nearly everyone had upset stomachs from drinking it. While we were there the water in the gold fish bowl needed changing, which Mani carefully did. But when she returned a few hours later, there was no fish in the bowl! She looked around and found him on the floor. The water with the mica must have been so awful for him that he jumped out of the bowl!

While we were in Ajmer, too, Kitty came to hear of a European woman who was returning to England and who had a piano that she wanted to sell. Kitty knew that the piano was my favourite instrument, and that I had learned to play in my childhood. She herself had taught music in England before coming to stay with Baba. Kitty asked Baba if we could buy the piano, as it was secondhand and not very expensive. She must have asked Baba very sweetly as Baba agreed, and the piano was bought and sent to our room at Meherabad.

In June 1941 Baba sent Elizabeth, Norina, and Nadine back to the United States. Kippy and Foundy, Elizabeth's two dogs, went with her, and the rest of us returned to Meherabad which we reached in mid-July 1941.

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Back at Meherabad, Kitty gave me lessons every four days on the piano Baba had bought in Ajmer. At first I told her, "Kitty, I haven't touched a piano for years. How can my fingers work?"

And she replied, "Oh, yes, you'll play beautifully!" To start with Kitty taught

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me some children's tunes. It was a little difficult to begin with, but I soon got the knack of it again. One day I was alone in the East Room when Baba came in. He gestured towards the piano. I knew Baba would enjoy something with a lively tune, and I played "Do Ye Ken John Peel" for Him. Baba was very pleased with it.

Then Kitty said, "You know, Mehera, I have a very nice idea. You'll like it very much." "What is it?" I asked. And Kitty opened a music book and there was the "Blue Danube"! "I can hardly play the children's tunes, and you want me to play this?" I said. Sight reading music is very difficult. I remember at school how nervous I would get during sight-reading exams. "See how beautiful it sounds," Kitty replied and she played it for me. Again, Kitty was encouraging and convinced me I could do it, and she did teach me a page of it.

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In September 1941 we left Meherabad for the last trip in the Blue Bus. We went first to Panchgani, where we stayed for two months, and then in November we went down to Karwar.

There is quite a long story about our stay in Karwar. Mani, myself, Katie, Kharman Masi, Valu, Kitty, Rano, Margaret and Irene Billo, and some others were there with Baba for ten days. We stayed in a very new house a little way from the town. It was a rather ordinary house, but convenient.

One day Baba took us for a morning walk. After perhaps half a mile we turned to the left and came across a cool, shady grove of lovely pine trees. They had very fine needles instead of leaves, and the ground was covered with these needles which were very soft to walk on. We followed Baba through the grove, and came to a beautiful beach. It was not a straight beach, but part of a lovely bay, so the waves broke very gently on the shore.

"How lovely it is," Baba said. He turned around, and Baba Himself looked so beautiful by the sea. We all gathered around Him to admire the view. He told us, "You can all do what you like... talk together or walk or whatever." Baba wanted to have a walk alone, which meant that we should not follow Him.

Baba walked very, very fast and went far away, and we stood talking together until He returned half an hour later. Baba so loved to walk.

"Now we'll go home," Baba told us. As we were walking back through the shade of that lovely grove of pine trees Baba heard whispering and giggling behind Him. Baba turned around to see Mani and Katie whispering together and

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looking as if they wanted to say something to Him, but did not know how to begin.

So Baba asked, "What were you talking about? What is it?" "Oh, Baba," they replied, "we would love to learn to swim." "Swim?" Baba said. "You want to learn how?" "Yes, Baba. How lovely it is here. The sea is not at all rough. This is the perfect place to learn!"

Baba turned and looked at me. "If Mehera says yes, if she wants to learn how to swim, then you can, too, otherwise, no."

"Mehera, say yes, say yes," they cried. I told Baba, "Baba, I hadn't thought of it, but it would be nice to learn. I really don't mind either way." "No," Baba said, "the others can only learn if you want to." "Mehera, say yes, say yes," Katie and Mani together begged me. So I said, "Yes, Baba, it would be nice."

When we got home Margaret explained the various strokes to us and how we had to breathe. Baba told us, "You must first practice on pillows. Lie on the pillows on your tummies and move your hands and feet together, then it will be easy for you when you try it in the sea."

It was very, very hot, but Mani and I did practice in our room. When we got tired and too hot, we went to see how the others were doing. They were all there on their tummies on the floor, young and old, plump and thin, practicing breaststroke. It was such a funny sight! We were so amused that we stood there and watched them for some time. So we practiced like this every day.

Before we went to swim in the sea Irene Billo called me to her room. "Mehera," she said, "I know you don't have a swimming costume. I have a nice pair of knitted slacks that you can wear if you like." Irene was bigger and taller than me, so the slacks were a little long and loose, but I was happy with them as they covered my legs. The next day we set off for the beach to put our lessons into practice in the sea. No one had proper costumes, and we all looked very funny in the various outfits we had chosen to swim in.

Margaret and Irene held me in the water and showed me how to move my arms and legs for the breaststroke. It was a new experience for me to be in the water with the waves bobbing up and down, so that first time I held on tightly to them. Kitty and Rano must have been teaching Katie and Mani. Then we returned to our house and again practised on our pillows, and tried to learn to coordinate our arms and legs. We swam very well on our pillows, but in the water we had no balance. We just sank to the bottom.

After three or four days of swimming in the sea, we still could not swim very well. I could do a stroke or two, but the water-logged slacks pulled my legs down.

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"Mehera, you do know how to swim," Margaret encouraged me. "You shouldn't wear those slacks. They're pulling your legs down, and you can't work with your feet." But I had no costume, so I continued to wear the slacks.

Then Baba said, "Tomorrow I'm coming to see how well you've learned to swim. You are all to do ten strokes each, and then, after that, no more swimming."

The next day Baba took us all to the beach, and He stood on the shore to watch us swim. Baba told us, "I will clap My hands up to the count of ten and you take a stroke on each clap. If you can do ten strokes, you know how to swim." I was to go first. Margaret took me way out until I was up to my chin in the water. "Now don't be nervous, Mehera," she told me, "you know how to swim." She gave me my position in the water, and I was on my own.

Baba clapped one, and I took my first stroke. Two - the water came up to my chin; three - up to my nose; four - up to my eyes; five, and I was completely under water. By the time I had done ten strokes I was on the bottom of the sea, and they had to pull me out!

I looked around at Baba, "What is Baba saying? Is He satisfied? Did I pass the test?" "Very good," Baba said. "Very good, I'm happy. Now come out." Oh, I was so happy. I had passed the test!

Then everyone went, one by one. Katie was next. Margaret took her out into the water. Baba clapped one, two, three, four, five, and she was on the bottom of the sea. "Good," Baba said. "Good, now come out."

It was now Mani's turn. Margaret positioned her in the water and moved away.

Baba clapped one, and down Mani went to the bottom. She could not even do the two, three, and four strokes that we did. In fact, she could not even do the first stroke! "Why didn't she do a few strokes like Mehera and Katie?" Baba asked Margaret. "Baba," Margaret replied, "her legs are very long, and they unbalance her." "No," Baba said, "she must learn a few strokes. I'll give her a few more days to learn, and you all come with her and teach her."

So Mani went swimming with Rano, Margaret, and Kitty for the next few days.

They held her in the water and showed her the strokes, but at this time she still did not quite learn how to swim.

From Karwar we moved to Belgaum, a town where we later stayed at the beginning of the New Life. We were there a short time, and finally we returned to Meherabad. The tyres of the bus were now completely worn out, and we had a halting trip back to Meherabad Hill, arriving at the end of November 1941.

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After the Blue Bus Tours, until His second accident in December 1956, Baba continued to travel constantly in India, contacting masts, and also the poor and the mad. He set up His headquarters in places such as Dehra Dun, Mahabaleshwar, Hyderabad and Satara, and from these bases travelled with a few men mandali to seek out masts. From time to time Baba returned to Meherabad, or after 1944 to Meherazad for short stays.

Until 1943 Baba took all the women in the ashram to His various headquarters, but in Lahore, in 1943, He divided the women's ashram. From that time only Mehera, Mani and Meheru always accompanied Baba on His travels. They would wait at Baba's "base camps" for Him to return from His mast trips. Rano, Kitty and Margaret took turns going with Baba to help with arrangements and with taking care of Mehera while travelling. Elizabeth, Norina and Nadine had returned to the West in June 1941. The other women in the ashram, Eastern and Western, remained on Meherabad Hill, and from time to time Baba sent for them to visit Him wherever He was.

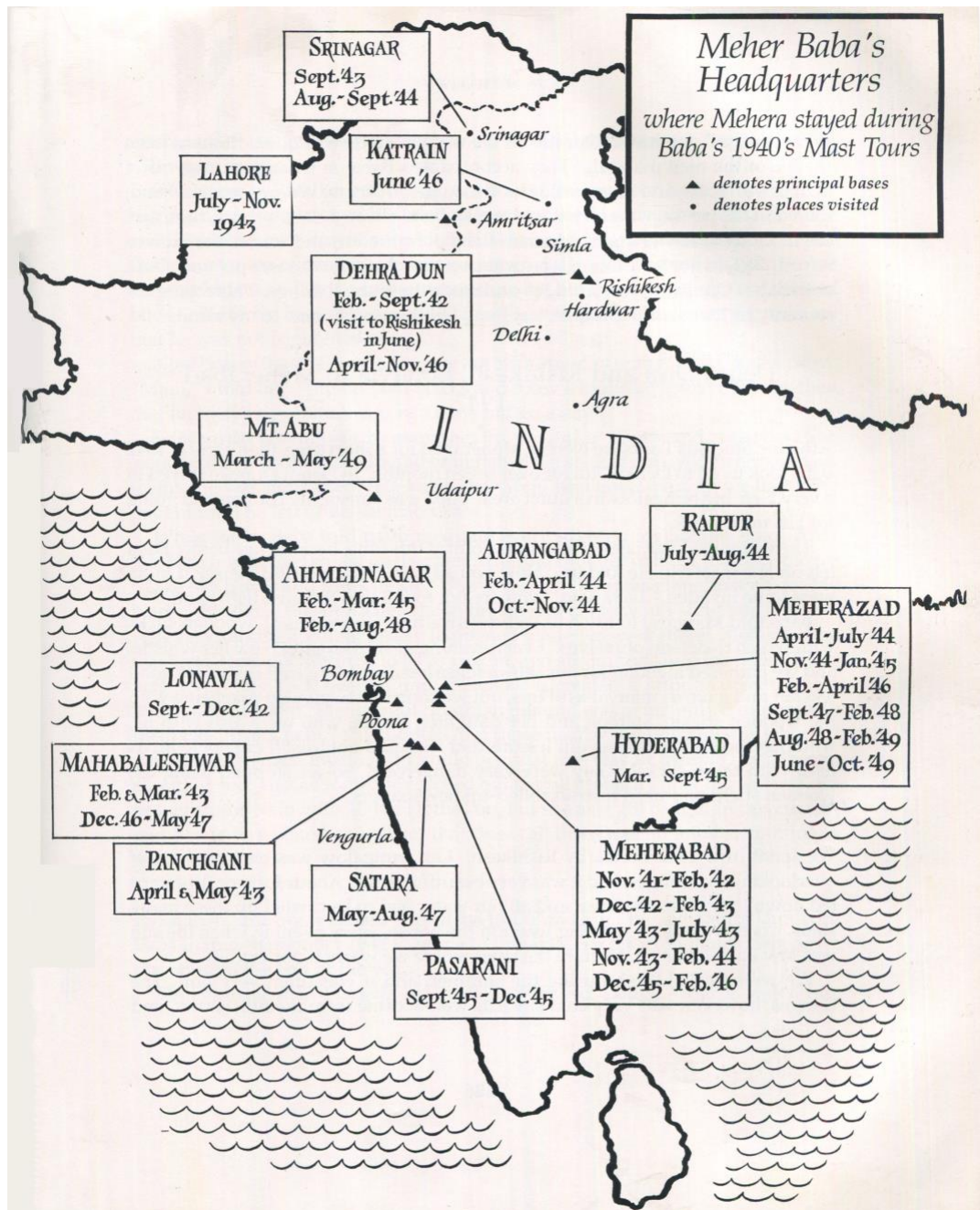
From 1944 Baba, accompanied by Mehera, Mani, Meheru and Margaret, stayed at Meherazad for brief periods. The other women remained at Meherabad.

In 1946 Margaret and Irene were sent to the West, and some of the Eastern women in the ashram were sent to their respective houses in Bombay and Poona.

On 16 October 1949 Baba, accompanied by Mehera, Mani, Meheru and Dr. Goher, who had come to stay in 1947, along with men mandali, left from Ahmednagar on the New Life.

Throughout the forties Baba very gradually lifted many of the restrictions that He had given Mehera during the Meherabad Hill years and earlier, for example, Baba slowly allowed Mehera to read books, to hear a man's name spoken, to see men passing by when travelling, and so on. From 1947 onwards (up to 1959) Baba visited Bombay many times for darshan programmes, to set off to various parts of India for mast trips, to depart for the West, or for medical check-ups and treatment. Baba usually stayed with Nariman and Arnavaz at "Ashiana", and quite often Baba brought Mehera and the women with Him. Baba told Arnavaz to entertain Mehera and the other women by taking them to the cinema, to restaurants, for sightseeing, and on picnics. In this way, Baba showed the women something of the world outside the ashram.

So Baba slowly removed His restrictions on Mehera to prepare her for the New Life. The New Life Baba said, was to be a completely different phase where there would be no restrictions and no purdah. One order that Baba never lifted, however, was that men were not permitted to touch Mehera. And it was only much later, after Baba had dropped His body, that Mehera slowly began to talk to men. Even this Baba had prepared her for by having her greet the men mandali for the first time on 31 January 1968.



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What can I tell you now? Our life on the women's side was quite different from the life of the men mandali. They accompanied Baba on mast trips, met many people with Baba, and interpreted His discourses to others. We, on the other hand, stayed in the house, wherever it was, cooked and cleaned Baba's room, took care of His clothes, sewed and read when Baba permitted it, and waited for Him to return. So I do not have lots of stories such as Eruch does, who was out and about with Baba. Our lives were secluded and made up of small things. There were not so many incidents or highlights, but I will tell those that come to my mind.

Dehra Dun and Rishikesh, Lonavla to Meherabad 1942

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After the Blue Bus Tours we were in Meherabad for a short time, then early in 1942 Baba took us all to Dehra Dun for over seven months. In Dehra Dun we stayed in a very nice, big bungalow in a quiet area. Baba was constantly coming and going for His mast work.

The war must have been at a serious point at this time, because just before Baba left on one mast trip He told us, "Now you all have to learn self-defense. If India were to be invaded," Baba said, "you are not to fall into the invader's hands."

Baba told Margaret to teach us self-defense, and He gave us all wooden sticks with which to defend ourselves. Every evening at six Margaret blew her whistle, and we gathered together for our self-defense lessons. Margaret was a very good teacher and gave us many useful tips, but we soon had to give up practicing with the wooden sticks. Soltoon and her daughter, Daula, who were also with us, would get so excited during our lessons that we could not trust them not to hit us hard with these sticks! They were very dangerous! So we stopped using the wooden sticks and used instead rolled-up newspapers.

We spent June 1942 in nearby Rishikesh. Our bungalow was on top of a cliff overlooking the Ganges, and it was very beautiful there. About forty or fifty steps led down the cliff to the river, and all our water had to be carried up these many steps. As there was no running water in the house, every evening when the sun was low Baba let us go down to the river where we washed our clothes.

We were in Rishikesh during the summer, and it was often very hot. The Ganges, however, was very cold since its waters came from melting snows, and

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washing in this icy water cooled us down. Our clothes dried very quickly on the still-warm rocks.

Our house in Rishikesh had two stories, and the top floor had quite a narrow balcony all the way around it. One day, just Mani and I were alone upstairs. Katie and the others were down in the kitchen, when suddenly a monkey jumped onto the balcony near our room. He was not the friendly kind of monkey, and he was very big. Mani and I tried to frighten him away, but this monkey did not want to budge. He bared his teeth at us, and he was not smiling. He was letting us know that he was not frightened of us.

Now I knew that these monkeys are not at all afraid of women, and I had an idea. "Mani," I told her, "put on your slacks and draw a moustache on your face, then that monkey might think you're a man and go away!"

So Mani drew a moustache above her lip, put on her slacks, and got a stick. She sauntered over to the monkey and brandished her stick at him. Again he bared his teeth! He was not fooled. He knew that Mani was not a man, so we had to be patient until he left of his own accord.

While there, Baba told us to meditate every evening for half an hour. After washing our clothes we sat on the river bank and thought of Baba. He had told us, "Take My Name and think of Me. Don't worry if thoughts come, just repeat My Name. It's like a mosquito net; the thoughts that come won't sting you."

A very serious accident nearly happened while we were there. Meheru, who was just a teenager, decided to have a swim, and she jumped into the river. There was a very big rock nearby, and somehow it created a strong current, like a whirlpool, beside it. Meheru got caught in this and was being pulled underneath the rock. "Help, help," she shouted, but those nearby thought she was joking. I was some distance away, but I could see that she was in trouble. So I began shouting, too. Just as someone reached out to pull Meheru out of the water, Kitty bravely jumped in with all her clothes on, but she also got caught in this current and had to be rescued, too. After that close call there was no more swimming in the Ganges.

From Rishikesh we returned with Baba to Dehra Dun. We left Dehra Dun with Baba in mid-September 1942 to move to Lonavla, not far from Poona, where we stayed until the end of the year.

Our bungalow in Lonavla as called "Prospect Lodge," and it was a big,

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sprawling place with a large compound. Baba took us on some lovely walks, and in the evenings He played gilli danda with us. Baba would be captain of one team, and Mani of the other. And I would be on Baba's side. Baba allowed us to keep on playing when He went on a mast tour, because it was good exercise for us.

I remember, too, that our compound had a brook flowing through it, and over this brook was a small bridge. We sometimes stood on this bridge and looked into the water, and what do you think we saw? Snakes! The brook was infested with them. And they were not just ordinary grey or brown snakes, but of different colours, especially green, with beautiful patterns on their skins.

Baba never spent the night alone. He always had one of the men mandali keep watch while He rested, and He told us that one reason for this was that spirits, unfortunate souls without a physical form, were drawn to Him at night hoping for liberation from their state. They gave Him no rest. But if someone were awake in the room with Baba, these souls did not disturb Him. The point of my telling you this is that the house where we stayed in Lonavla was haunted by a spirit. At night it disturbed us a great deal and terrified poor Gaimai who was with us.

On 22 December 1942 Baba left Lonavla to return to Meherabad for some weeks. The day before leaving, on 21 December, Baba performed the engagement ceremony there of Nariman and Arnavaz Dadachanji by placing rings on their ring fingers.

At Meherabad Hill on 27 December 1942, for the first time, Mehera's birthday was celebrated on a grand scale. Women who were close to Baba were invited from Bombay, Poona and elsewhere to stay on Meherabad Hill. For years Mehera had worn only very simple cotton saris, but on this occasion, at Baba's wish, she was dressed up from head to toe in new clothes. Her sari was of white tulle, embroidered lightly with gold and silver threads, and she wore a necklace from which hung the letters "MEHER BABA". Arnavaz recalls her beauty on that occasion: "Mehera looked so very beautiful, really she looked like an angel. And it was not only her physical beauty that we saw - and she was very beautiful - but her internal beauty, too, that radiated from her."

Meherabad, Mahabaleshwar, Panchgani;

Lahore and Kashmir

1943

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In February 1943 Baba moved the women's ashram again, this time from Meherabad to a house called "Valley View" in Mahabaleshwar. There Baba and Mehera sometimes went for

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short drives in a little horse-drawn phaeton carriage. They spent February and March in Mahabaleshwar, and then in April 1943 moved to Jalki Bungalow in nearby Panchgani for a further two months. In Mahabaleshwar and Panchgani Baba gave a preview of the division that was to happen in the women's ashram in Lahore later that year. Baba came only to the room shared by Mehera, Mani and Meheru, and none of the other women were allowed to even look at Him without permission.

Baba was on tour for a month while they were in Panchgani, and every Sunday during that time He had all the women keep silence, take only one meal of tea and bread, and do no work.

June 1943 was spent at Meherabad. While in Panchgani Baba had permitted Mehera and others to ride horses, and when they returned to Meherabad five horses were kept there for a little while. Their stable was in the women's compound, and they were fed and groomed by Irene Billo, who loved horses. Every day Mehera went for a good gallop on the Hill, with Meheru keeping watch over her on foot.

In July 1943 Baba and the ashram moved to Lahore for five months. It was here that the women's ashram was partitioned. The ashram occupied three bungalows: In the first with Baba were Mehera, Mani, Meheru, Valu, Kitty, Margaret, Rano, and Naja later on. In the second stayed Katie, Irene, Mansari, Kharman Masi, Pilamai and her daughter, Silla, Soona Masi, Khorshed, Tara, and Jangu (Meheru's brother) and Naja for a time. About two furlongs away from Baba's house were the men mandali's quarters.

The women in the first bungalow were allowed to visit the women in the second bungalow twice a week, and bungalow No. 2 inmates were allowed to visit Mehera and the women in the first bungalow once a week. But the second bungalow of women were not permitted to see Baba at all or send any messages to Him. So strict was this order that they could not even look in the direction of Baba's bungalow.

Lahore, July to November 1943

The heat was unimaginable in Lahore. The air was quite still, and not a leaf moved. It was like being shut in a box. Although the soil there is very fertile, it is a fine, white sandy soil, and all day long the sun beat down on that white sand, and we baked.

When we arrived there we were greeted by Pilamai from Karachi, who was wearing a long-sleeved, black blouse. Just the sight of her made us feel even hotter, and we wondered at her choice of clothing. Later she explained to us that someone had told her Baba did not permit women to have bare arms, and in that climate all her blouses were sleeveless except that one black one. She, too, felt very hot in it.

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Sometimes a sand storm would blow across the desert, and we would rush to close all the doors and windows. Those storms were awful. Everything would be covered with white dust and although we were there in monsoon season, there was hardly any rain. We waited for rain all through July, August, September. "When will it rain and cool down," we wondered. And then it would start to sprinkle, and we would be so excited. But it would soon stop.

Somehow we always felt hungry in Lahore. We ate breakfast but by lunchtime we were very hungry. So we really enjoyed a good-sized helping of rice and dal. Then four o'clock came, and it was tea time. There were some Baba-lovers in Lahore and one of them was a very sweet woman who made and sent us delicious currant buns. By tea time we were so hungry that we ate those buns as if we had not eaten all day. We also ate our evening meal with relish. Always before we had lost our appetites in very hot weather, and we still wonder to this day why we were so hungry in Lahore.

We had a nice, new, rented house a little outside Lahore, but it was rather small. Just Mani, myself, Meheru and Valu, with Kitty, Margaret and Rano, and later, I think, Naja, stayed there with Baba. The house had a flat roof, and at night we climbed up on the roof and slept under the open sky.

How could we sleep in our rooms in that heat? Even our mattresses were hot. We had no servants, so we could not manage to take our whole beds upstairs, but every night we struggled up the stairs carrying our mattresses. The first night we went up there thinking how cool it would be, but we had forgotten that the sun had been beating on that cement roof all day. Our mattresses got even hotter, and when we lay down on them, our backs got hotter, too. But still it was cooler than our rooms, and sometimes we even got a little breeze. And under the stars Margaret would tell us very funny stories and make us laugh.

Baba was often away on mast tours. He was very sweet; He knew that in Karwar we had only begun to learn how to swim, and that we wanted to learn properly. Baba was also enthusiastic about us learning. "Now that you have started to learn, why leave it half done?" He told us.

Baba got permission for us to use an Olympic-sized swimming pool in Lahore, and we girls from both houses went together to this pool in a bus. The pool was very lovely, with water constantly rushing in and out of it from huge pipes so that the flow of the water created little waves.

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Margaret was our instructor, and she was an excellent teacher. I learned sidestroke and overarm, but Mani still did not quite grasp it. She could do a few strokes, and then down to the bottom she went.

One day Mani asked a newcomer to our ashram to watch her practice her strokes to make sure she did not drown. (Mani always had someone hold her up by the waist of her swimming costume so she would not sink to the bottom.) Because Mani started out very nicely, this person relaxed her hold and turned to chat with someone standing nearby. When she turned back around, Mani was nowhere to be seen!

"Oh, Mani," she panicked, "where have you gone?" She looked around her, but Mani had vanished. Then she looked down and there she saw Mani on the bottom of the pool. Mani was quickly pulled out to safety.

We all went perhaps three times to this pool, but Mani still sank rather quickly. So Baba arranged for just Mani, myself and Margaret to go to a swimming pool at a Mohammedan girls' boarding school. Margaret had recently been bitten by a rabid dog, and though she was anxious about how the water would affect her, to please Baba she bravely overcame her fear and went with us.

It was very private there, as the schoolgirls were all in purdah, and I now had a swimming costume. Once in the pool I struck out very nicely to the other side and reached it without effort. "See, I told you," Margaret said. "I told you you knew how to swim. Those slacks were pulling your legs down. Now you're light and balanced in the water, and you swam very well. Now do it once again." So I swam to the other side and got out. We came for five or six days to this pool and Mani finally learned to swim, too.

Kashmir

While we were in Lahore nearly everyone except Baba and myself got malaria. Baba had made up His mind to go to Kashmir with a few of us, but Mani had now caught it, too. Baba considered changing His plans because Mani was not feeling at all well, but she told Him, "No, Baba, I can still go. Even with this fever, I can get around."

So in September we left for Kashmir. I remember that we travelled by train and car, and that Mani, myself, Meheru and Rano accompanied Baba from our side, and from the men mandali, Kaka Baria and Chanji, although there may have been others. We were there for only about eight days, and we stayed at the Hotel Sam in Srinagar. It was a very nice hotel, not very big, with a lovely big terrace upstairs

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that served as a dining room, with a view of Dal Lake from three sides. We stayed in all kinds of places with Baba, and this one was not grand, but it was very well kept.

Because of Mani's fever Baba told Kaka Baria to let the hotel's kitchen know that they were to send only soup and toast for her. When told, the waiters called out from one to the other, "Soup and toast, one person, soup and toast, one person," until the message passed from the terrace to the kitchen. So poor Mani, who had never liked soup and toast, had to have tinned soup and toast in bed, while we were having delicious food on that nice terrace.

Then, suddenly, she was quite well. Malaria is like that; every other day you run a fever, and on the days in between you feel quite well. Baba let Mani have breakfast with us and go sightseeing, and in the afternoon when we went for lunch the message went out, "No soup for one person, food for one person," through all the waiters to the kitchen.

So one day Mani was well, and the next day she had fever. Then well again. And everyday these funny messages that amused me were passed from the terrace to the kitchen. Then one day they sent soup when Mani was well, and we heard Kaka Baria shouting at the servants down in the kitchen, "Why are you sending Memsahib soup? She is not sick!" as if Mani had never had soup before.

From Srinagar, when Mani was feeling better, Baba took us to Gulmarg ("gul" means flower and "marg" means path) a very pretty place some thirty miles away, for an outing. In those days the road ended before reaching Gulmarg, and the only way to get there was on horseback or by foot. Where the road ended there was a big paddock with many horses for hire. We all picked our horses according to how well we rode. I looked for a spirited one and set off.

Baba said He would ride with the men, so we did not wait for Him. Then after we girls had ridden some distance up this gentle hill - it was not very steep - Mani said, "Mehera, you must look back. Look how Baba is riding."

I turned around and saw how sweet Baba looked. Baba had chosen the smallest horse, and His legs were hanging down. It was a quiet horse, and Baba seemed very relaxed and seemed to be enjoying His ride on this pretty bridle path with lovely trees lining it. Chanji and Kaka were on either side of Him.

On reaching Gulmarg we left our horses with a groom. The British were still ruling India, and some English people were playing golf on a lovely course there. We saw a hotel, a library, and many little cottages with gorgeous gardens in front of them.

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From Gulmarg we climbed up the mountainside to our picnic spot. When we reached the very top, we got such a surprise. We were on a completely flat and lovely plateau. So beautiful it was, huge, spacious, and as green as if the ground were covered with a green velvet carpet. It was ice cold up there, with just a gentle breeze blowing. Our cheeks and noses were like ice, and the cold felt so nice after our warming climb. We stood there and looked far out to the mountains covered with perpetual snow. The sun was shining on the snowcaps, and the ice glistened in the sunlight. It was very beautiful.

"Yes, it is very nice," Baba said, "but come on now, let's eat." With Baba it was always a hurry. So we spread our rug, and Baba sat down. The cold air and our ride and climb up the mountain had made us really hungry, and we started a delicious lunch of sandwiches and other tasty things. As we were eating we saw a man coming down a slope far away with a huge load on his back. When he came closer we could see that his load was an enormous block of ice. Between his back and the ice there was a little padding, and he was harnessed to it like a horse. People like this man are so poor and work so hard. He must have cut the ice from a glacier to bring down the mountain for the British to use in their ice boxes. We had now cooled down after our climb and were feeling the cold, so we could imagine how this poor man must be feeling with ice dripping freezing water through his clothes.

"Now that's all," Baba said. "You've seen what there is to see. We're going down." So down we went to our horses. Horses always like to go home, and mine was eager to gallop, and so was I. As the slope was gradual, I gave him his head. I love galloping and there I had the cool breeze on my face.

"Wait, Mehera," Mani called from behind. "Stop, wait for us." But I knew that Baba would not mind, and I had a nice gallop. The groom was a little startled, too. He did not know that I could ride, and he ran after me to try and catch me!

Baba, Chanji and Kaka Baria came down very slowly, darling Baba looking so sweet on His pony. Then we returned by car to our hotel. Mani was fine that night. She ate well and rested well, but the next morning she again had a fever and the kitchen was told "soup and toast"!

We had a very happy time in Srinagar, and Mani did recover from the malaria. From Srinagar we returned to Lahore.

Returning to Meherabad

Our life with Baba was by no means all treats. As I have told you, our everyday

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life was spent cooking, sewing, and washing, and when Baba was with us, attending to Him. But that does not make a story. This next story, however, is about a treat that was not a treat at all.

In November 1943 we left Lahore to return to Meherabad. Most of the girls and elder women had gone straight back to Ahmednager by train. Mani, myself, Meheru and Kitty travelled separately with Baba, and on our way back we stopped at a number of places. Baba first took us to Amritsar to see the Golden Temple, and then we went to Udaipur.

Udaipur is a very beautiful place surrounded by high, bare mountains, with a lovely lake in the middle of which are two historic palaces. The men mandali travelling with Baba found a cheap Parsi hotel in the town, but Baba took us girls to a rather grand hotel with beautiful gardens and a lovely view of the lake. Everything about it was expensive and up-to-date. It was on the shore of the lake and was the guesthouse of the Maharana of Udaipur who at that time, I believe, still lived in his palace on an island in the lake. ("Rana" means raja or king and in Udaipur the king is called the maharana instead of maharaja.)

We arrived at the hotel in the morning and were feeling very hungry after travelling on empty stomachs. With us we carried a tin of biscuits, and we were about to nibble some of these when Baba told us, "Don't eat any biscuits. Don't spoil your appetites. I want you to enjoy your lunch."

Lunch time finally came, and off we went to the very elegant dining room in the hotel. There were many tables set with shining silver, and to give more privacy, screens had been placed in strategic spots around the room. This hotel had a set menu, and we were wondering what delicious dish would be placed before us when the waiter arrived with the first course.

Fish patties in white sauce! Poor Mani looked at her plate. She was famished, but she had an order from Baba not to eat fish and milk together. And though Baba ate it, this was not a dish He was fond of.

Kitty was then sent to find out what was to follow. Just cheese and biscuits and some dessert, she returned to tell us. After lunch we all left the dining room feeling rather disappointed, and still quite hungry. We had been expecting a lovely lunch from such a fine hotel. "Oh, no," Kitty consoled us, "the British have a light lunch, but supper is always good." And Baba said, "Be sure not to spoil your appetites by eating those biscuits!"

In the evening we again went to the dining room with good appetites. Our table was in the far corner of the room with one of the screens next to it, and a fireplace

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on another side. We sat down and waited to see what treat was in store for us. We could not believe our eyes. The waiter brought fish cakes and white sauce! Baba was now completely "out of mood" as we say. He stood up to leave the room, and we quickly got up with Him.

At that point Meheru slipped on the floor near the fireplace. As she began to lose her balance she reached out to hold on to the table cloth to save herself, but Mani quickly whispered to her, "No, you'll pull all the dishes on the floor." So Meheru lost her balance and fell down. There was a very English couple in the dining room, and rather than stand up with them looking on, Meheru decided to crawl on her hands and knees around the table until she was behind the screen where she could stand up unnoticed and leave the room. She was still very young, and so she got the giggles. I scolded her a little, because Baba was upset and this was no time for giggling, but now it does seem very funny to us, too.

We quickly followed Baba out of the dining room. Baba sent Kitty to tell the staff how poor the food was and how disappointed we were in the hotel. Back came word that the Maharana was having a celebration, perhaps a wedding, in his palace on the lake, and that he had taken all the cooks and servants there to serve his guests!

Later, when one of the mandali came from their cheap Parsi hotel, Baba inquired, "What did you eat?" "Such delicious food," he replied, "dhansak and kebab, as much as we could eat." This is a Parsi specialty which we all love. Here were the mandali paying so little in a cheap hotel and eating so well, and here were we with Baba paying so much and starving!

"Pack immediately," Baba told us. "The mandali can move, and I'll take you there!" So we moved to this little hotel and enjoyed ourselves so much. It was not at all grand, but we were comfortable and the food was just to our taste. Baba was happy with the place, and so we were happy, too.

I believe Baba contacted a mast while we were there. Wherever Baba went, it was always for His work, our travels were never just for pleasure. And if Baba took us sightseeing, at the same time He would send the men mandali out to look for masts for Him to contact. With Baba, work and pleasure went hand in hand.

I think we stayed in Udaipur about eight days. From Udaipur we returned to Meherabad, arriving at the end of November, and we spent the remainder of the year there.

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First Stay at Meherazad; Aurangabad, Raipur and Kashmir 1944

Aurangabad

On returning from Lahore we resumed life in the East Room on Meherabad Hill for a couple of months, and then in early 1944 Baba moved to Aurangabad. From the women's side Baba took Mani, myself, Meheru and Margaret. We stayed in Aurangabad for about two months at this time, and we returned later that same year for another six weeks or so.

A very nice Muslim family owned the house that Baba rented there. The house was quite small and built in Muslim style around a courtyard. This same family owned a number of houses on our road: We girls lived in one, the family lived nearby in another, and the men mandali stayed in a cottage. I remember that this family so kindly sent us a lovely dish of pulao when we first arrived. They realised that we would be tired after travelling and not organized to cook. After that, too, they occasionally sent us a special treat.

In Aurangabad Mani started to cook. Up till then, Naja or Katie or Kitty had been with us on our travels, but now Baba told Mani that she was to do the cooking. I was in the kitchen to help her. I cleaned vegetables, and Mani was at the fireplace. She asked me how to make this or that dish and how much spice to use, and she wrote it all down. We had a lot of fun together. Margaret at that time could not have salt, so everything we ate was cooked without salt.

One day Baba was sitting on the verandah with us girls when suddenly I felt someone watching us. I looked around and saw a little girl peeping at Baba. Baba so seldom had any privacy that I was a little upset about this intrusion. The girl ran away, but she came back from time to time. And we realised that she had been sent by her grandmother, our landlord's mother. This family hadn't been told Who Baba was, but the grandmother especially was very curious about Him. Before we left Aurangabad Baba gave a darshan programme there, and the family then found out Who He was. When we came to stay again later that year in another of their houses, the whole family wanted to be with Baba. Baba even invited them to my birthday that same year, 1944, which was celebrated at Meherabad. The entire family came and stayed at Meherabad and the old grandmother kept apologizing to us for having sent her granddaughter to peep at us!

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When Baba was not on a mast tour, He sometimes took us for walks or sightseeing, which is how we saw the Ellora Caves and Daulatabad.

One day during our first stay in Aurangabad Baba had an idea. "Would you like to go swimming here?" He asked me. Baba had seen a big empty pond facing the men mandali's cottage. It must have been used by the women of some past Nawab's household. This pool was very close to our house, but as we could not go there without Baba, we had not seen it. Baba had the men mandali leave their cottage, and He took us there. It was a huge empty pond, littered with dust and dry leaves.

"There's no tap here, Baba. Where would the water come from?" I asked Him. "Never mind about that," Baba replied. "Just tell me if you'd like to swim." Mani said yes, and so did I. Now that I could swim a little, I enjoyed it. And, as Baba had suggested it, He must have wanted me to swim. So I told Baba, "Yes, Baba, we'd love to swim if it's easy for You to arrange."

"Yes, it's easy," Baba said, but Baba went to a great deal of trouble for us. First He had the pond cleared of the leaves and dust, and then swept until it was beautifully clean. Then trucks began to arrive carrying huge barrels of water. From our house we could see the trucks turning to go to the pond, and for days they came and emptied their barrels into it. Then Baba took us again to see our new swimming pond.

"Is that enough water?" He asked us.

"Oh, yes, Baba," I told Him. "It's beautiful, Baba. It's very sweet of You. We would so like to swim."

"You can come here every day at three o'clock and swim until four-thirty or five," Baba told us.

So at three o'clock the next day we got ready to swim and went to the pond that Baba had prepared for us with so much love. Of course the mandali had to leave their cottage when we went there, and we were very private. The four of us swam happily and played in the water until Margaret reminded us, "Now be serious everyone and practice your sidestroke." She had us practice our other strokes, too: breaststroke and backstroke and underwater swimming. Baba had us learn many strokes.

We were not the only ones to enjoy the pond that Baba had so lovingly prepared for us. Within a few days a huge number of frogs arrived and a layer of green algae

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appeared. We had not seen any tadpoles and we were amazed that so many frogs could come from nowhere overnight. So before we went swimming we took a sheet and skimmed off the algae and chased the frogs, who hopped straight back into our pond when we had finished there for the day.

After some days Baba said, "Now we will call the girls from Meherabad and let them also swim and have a change." So Katie, Naja, Rano, Kitty, Khorshed and Soona Masi, Mansari and some others all came in a bus to Aurangabad. Baba moved the men mandali out of that cottage, and the Meherabad girls stayed there. Katie especially loved to swim, but her ears were sensitive to water. So she filled them with cotton wool, cut the top off a stocking, and pulled that over her hair like a swimming cap. Then she would be ready to swim.

The days were warm, and everybody was so happy to be swimming in the water that Baba had brought for us with so much love.

In April 1944 Baba took us - Mani, myself, Meheru and Margaret - to stay at Meherazad for the very first time.

Meherazad - Baba's Home

To tell how Meherazad was founded and how we first stayed there, I have to go back some months to when Baba returned with us from Lahore at the end of 1943. Baba wanted to be in seclusion in a quiet place with an atmosphere different from Meherabad Hill. There were many women staying on the Hill at that time, both Easterners and Westerners, and Baba must have needed a more secluded place for His work.

Baba later told us what had happened. At that time He had asked the men mandali to find Him a quiet place with a nice atmosphere, and the men, even Sarosh and Adi who were from Ahmednagar, searched for such a place all around the Ahmednagar district, but they could find nothing suitable.

Then one day Vishnu Master was cycling along the Aurangabad Road when he saw a quiet road leading off it. He had heard that a lake built by the British in the early 1920's to supply Ahmednagar with water was in that direction, and he felt certain that some accommodation must have also been built to house the engineers who supervised the making of the lake. So he cycled down this quiet road and soon found what was to become Meherazad. Vishnu felt that it was just what Baba would like.

Baba went there. He saw it, and He liked it, and for a short time Baba stayed there in a room in seclusion, but I do not know the details of that.

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When Baba returned to Meherabad He told Mani and me: "The day after tomorrow put on saris and we'll go for an outing to see this place. You'll like it, it's near a lake."

I thought, "How lovely, a house on a lake. It must be very nice." We were happy and excited to have an outing with Baba, and when the day arrived Mani and I went with Baba to Meherazad.

Baba took us to this lovely place full of trees. It was not on the lake, but not far from it. Meherabad was so barren, and this place was so shaded with neems and tamarinds and gulmohurs. I love trees, so I liked it very much.

Baba asked me, "It's nice, isn't it? Do you like it?"

"Oh, yes, Baba," I said. "I like it very much. It's a beautiful place. The trees have already grown here, and it's so cool and shady."

"I also like it very much," Baba told me. "Later we'll have a house built."

At that time there was just part of the women's cottage there, only the rooms that Meheru and Arnavaz stay in now, but some of the roof was missing. There was another separate room where Baba had done that short seclusion, and also the foundation of an old building. On what is now the men's side, I think two rooms were there: Falu's room and the kitchen. The present row of rooms on the men's side was not there, and Mandali Hall, which was first a garage and then a stable for Sheba, had not been built.

During our first stay in Aurangabad Baba had the roof to the cottage repaired, and a small house built on that old foundation where our house now stands.

From Aurangabad we came to Meherabad, collected our things, and with Baba in April 1944 we came to stay at Meherazad for the first time. There was just Mani, myself, Meheru and, out of all the Westerners, only Margaret.

Baba stayed in the little cottage where Meheru and Arnavaz now live. It had just two rooms then. (Two rooms have since been added - Katie's and Rano's - and the verandah has been broadened.) Baba only needed the cottage at night as He was with the mandali all day. We girls stayed in the newly-built house which was very small. Mani, myself and Meheru shared one room, and Margaret had the other, which was long and very tiny. We were rather crowded, but we did not mind any inconvenience as long as Baba was with us. There was a little pantry, too, and after a month Baba called Naja to stay with us. She cooked in this pantry as there was no proper kitchen. Then Valu joined us. There was an old foundation left of the previous building where our present kitchen now is. Valu carried stones, made cement from mud and water, and with her own hands built a small kitchen there.

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We had our meals on the narrow verandah in front of our house, sitting on little stools with our plates in our laps. Baba sat in the middle. Our rice and dal was lovely and hot since our pots came straight from the fire out to the verandah. Those were very happy days when we lived simply and quietly, just a few of us and Baba.

Two more inmates joined us. One was a little wire-haired terrier given to Baba by Sarosh. Shortly after her arrival we had a huge storm, so we called her Typhoon. The other was a beautiful Siamese cat whom Baba gave into Margaret's care. At first Geisha, as we called the cat, lived in the huge three-roomed cage in which she had arrived. The cage almost filled Margaret's tiny room, and Geisha was reluctant to leave it, but finally, Margaret did persuade her to roam around like a normal cat.

Baba also gave Margaret the duty of keeping watch over our well, because the villagers were used to taking water from it. They would tie a rope to a pail, drop it in the well, and draw the water up. Baba did not like them doing this, because this was now our drinking water, and they could easily contaminate it. There was no way of knowing how clean the villagers' pails and ropes were. So Baba arranged for Margaret to have a clean pail and rope, and she would make sure that the villagers used this when they wanted water from the well.

It was now mid-summer, and Margaret would be outside in the very, very hot sun. She wore a solar topi, but still she felt hot. We were afraid that she would get sun stroke, so we suggested an old Indian remedy: she was to carry an onion in her pocket; somehow this prevents sunstroke. So Margaret kept an onion in her pocket. And later, whenever we saw her, we would remind her about it, and she would laugh and agree that that onion had saved her life.

Margaret taught us exercises, not ballet, just ordinary exercises to keep us healthy. Baba was always very particular that we should see to our health, and even now I do these exercises every morning.

I have always loved nature. I love trees and flowers and birds and animals. Everything natural, I love; I am not at all fond of machines.

Baba must have known that I had the urge to garden, because at Meherazad He told me to start a garden. I began by making some small flower beds. Sometimes in the evenings Baba would take us for walks around the nearby countryside, and on these walks we collected pretty rocks. These I put around my little flower beds. But some years later, when in 1948 the main house was built, the mason collected all these rocks and put them in the foundation.

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During these years I had little opportunity to take proper care of the garden. We were only at Meherazad for a month or two, and then we would go travelling with Baba and not see Meherazad again for many months. It was also very difficult to garden with hardly any water and no good topsoil. We had to carry good soil in from the lake. And the sun is so hot and the wind often strong so at that time it seemed all the elements were against having a garden.

Later when we were living at Meherazad and the garden was established, Baba admired it and told me how beautiful the colours of the flowers were. "Baba," I said, "it's very difficult to garden here. We don't have good soil, and there's hardly any water."

"That is why I appreciate it," Baba replied, "because you put so much work into it, and you do it with love. I appreciate that and that is why I love it. That pleases Me."

Our small house proved to be too inconvenient. We had been away in Aurangabad when it was built, and somehow it had been constructed in such a way that the floor inside was lower than the ground level. We were very worried about flooding in the monsoon. The builder had also made the ceiling of cloth and, as we were seldom there, rats began to live in the ceiling. But most of all it was too small, and there was no place for Baba to stay. During those first years at Meherazad, when we came to stay for only a month or two now and then, Baba stayed mostly in a farmhouse belonging to a Parsi called Ghyara, situated about half a mile from Meherazad. Later on Baba asked me how I would like the house to be. I explained to Baba what I would like, and He had built what is now the main house at Meherazad.

Raipur

We were at Meherazad for only three months that first stay, and then in July 1944 Mani, myself, Meheru and Dr. Goher left with Baba for Raipur. Goher had just finished her doctor's degree in Bombay, and Baba had called her to join us. She stayed in Raipur with us for a month, and then returned to Bombay for further medical studies.

On our way to Raipur we stopped at Meherabad for a couple of days, and Margaret with Geisha stayed on there. Typhoon, the wire-haired terrier, came with us.

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When we arrived at Raipur railway station we found a very big crowd of people gathered there, all waiting to greet Baba. This was our first experience of walking through a throng of people who were eagerly awaiting Baba's darshan, and we wondered how we would manage. "Just walk," Baba told us. So Mani, Goher and Meheru clustered around me, and somehow we got through that crowd.

We were in Raipur for one month, staying in a very large bungalow that Magistrate Jal Kerawala had arranged for Baba. He had also arranged for and sent in all our food supplies. It was such a big bungalow that we did not use all the rooms.

Baba, as always, went to look for masts. We did our usual household work, and Goher sat on the verandah keeping watch and studying her medical books. In Aurangabad Baba had told Mani to do the cooking, but she still had a lot to learn, and she often came to me for advice. Sometimes the results were very funny. One day Mani wanted to make a dessert. She had something that comes in a packet, and she mixed it up. She did not know how long to cook it, so she put it on the fire and boiled and boiled it. It became like stone! And there were guests that day, but still we could not waste it. Mani proudly carried it to the table, but, when she tried to serve it, she had to battle with the knife and spoon. I reassured our guests that it was very tasty, and everyone felt so encouraged to eat it that we did not waste any of it.

After Raipur we were to travel with Baba to Kashmir. Since Goher was planning to return to Bombay at that time, Baba called for Rano to come from Meherabad to accompany us. She had a very amusing story from Meherabad to tell us.

One of Baba's disciples named Kaikobad Dastur had a wife and three daughters whom we had never met. While we were in Raipur all four of them came to stay in the ashram on Meherabad Hill. Before their arrival everyone at Meherabad was a little apprehensive, because they had heard that these new people were Bombay socialites. After years of living on the Hill and travelling with Baba nobody looked their best, and their everyday clothes were very patched and worn.

"When they come, we'll wear our best clothes during the day," they decided, "and we'll sleep in our old clothes. Baba would want us to give them a good impression."

The Dastur girls arrived in the late evening, and everyone, dressed in their best clothes, was there to greet them. They were to share the upstairs room of the

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Retreat, now the Study Hall, with Margaret, Geisha the cat and the others, so they made their way upstairs and got settled for the night.

When bedtime came Margaret decided to keep the cat in bed with her. Geisha was still a newcomer to Meherabad and Margaret wanted her to feel safe in this strange place, so she put her on her bed and very nicely tucked in the mosquito net.

After everyone had fallen asleep, suddenly the most terrible howling split the air. Lanterns were lit, and everyone jumped out of bed to see what was causing this terrifying noise. In Margaret's bed they saw a most ferocious cat fight! What had happened was this: Another cat that lived at Meherabad had scented Geisha's presence, had come through the open window, and attacked poor Geisha on Margaret's bed through the mosquito net. Somehow a stop was put to the fight, but not before Margaret's mosquito net was torn to pieces. And not before the new arrivals had a good look at the Meherabad girls in their old patched clothes! Everyone had wanted to give the new girls a nice welcome, but instead they were greeted by a cat fight! And later, when we got to know the Dasturs, we found that they were not sophisticated, society girls at all, but very naive and shy girls.

After Baba's darshan programme in Raipur, Goher left for Bombay and it was now time for us to leave Raipur with Baba to go to Kashmir. We planned to take two days to drive by car to Badnera where we would catch a train that would start us on our journey to Kashmir. This was a car journey full of mishaps.

We set off in a car and a station wagon hired by Magistrate Jal Kerauwa who was to be one of the drivers. Baba and the other driver were in the front seat of the car, with Mani, myself, Meheru and Typhoon in the back. As usual a curtain separated us from the front seat. In the station wagon were Jal Kerauwa, who was driving, a "perfect boy", Rano and the men mandali. This was during the period when Baba was looking for the "perfect boy", and one of the mandali had found a boy whom he had assured Baba He would like. The boy's family had given permission for him to travel with Baba.

At lunch time we stopped at a dak bungalow. We were carrying our lunch with us, and Baba said that He would like some rice and dal. We also were looking forward to a nice lunch, but it was not to be. The lid simply would not come off the dal container, and though everyone tried to get it off, it would not budge. The dal must have been too hot when packed, and a vacuum had been created inside the container holding the lid on tight. So we all ended up having just rice for lunch.

Off we set again after lunch. We were to spend that night in another dak

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bungalow arranged for Baba by Jal Kerawala. And we were due to arrive there in the early evening, but the car broke down! We all, including Baba, got out and pushed, but we did not arrive at our destination until after midnight.

Very early the next morning, after just a couple of hours of sleep, we left. Of course, we did not complain. We were not there to have fun; this was Baba's work.

After travelling a short distance Baba decided to change the seating arrangements in the vehicles. Now in the front seat of the car sat Baba on the left, the perfect boy in the middle, and Jal Kerawala in the driver's seat. In the back were Mani, myself, Meheru and Typhoon. We began our journey again, but suddenly the horn of the car stopped working. In India drivers constantly use their horns to warn the other cars, bicycles, goats, bullock carts, tongas, trucks, motor bikes and people on the road. This was during the forties, and cars then were equipped with a backup horn. This horn was mounted on the inside of the car near the driver, and it looked a little like a trumpet with a rubber ball attached to it. To make it sound one squeezed the rubber ball, but this rubber ball had perished, and the horn did not make a sound. Everything went wrong with this vehicle! Baba turned to the magistrate and gestured, "What sort of car have you arranged for Me?"

It is quite dangerous to drive in India without a horn, so Jal Kerawala unhooked this trumpet-like horn and removed the perished rubber ball. He then gave the horn to the boy beside him, and told him to blow through it like a trumpet when necessary.

How happy this boy was! Very loudly and slowly he would "ho-oot, ho-oot" this horn, not just at approaching cars, but at anything that moved up to a mile away. Baba and we all became quite deaf with the noise. "No, don't do that," the magistrate told him. "Wait until we are close, and then go 'toot-toot' quickly and stop."

It was a very funny journey, but finally, we arrived at the dak bungalow in Badnera, and Baba had the boy returned to his family. We were to catch the train that night to start for Kashmir, and as we had had little sleep the previous night, we were looking forward to a rest and a bath before our journey. We were very relieved that we would not have to open our trunks, put on our saris, and then have the trouble later of folding them up and packing them again. We were just about to rest when Baba came to our room.

"Quickly, put on your good saris. We'll have a treat and go to the cinema!"

"Yes, Baba," we said. How could we say, "Oh, no, Baba." So we opened our trunks very quickly and put on our saris and went to the car.

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The servants from the dak bungalow came to see us off and the driver got in. We were ready to leave, but the car would not start! The driver tried and tried to start it, but it just would not go. After a few more tries Baba said, "It's too late now. Everybody get out!"

Baba got out of the front seat of the car, but we found that our door was completely stuck. Baba tried to open it, and so did everybody else, but it would not budge. Meanwhile, the servants from the dak bungalow were all staring at us. Then Rano told Baba, "Baba, stand aside. I'm going to kick the door." So Rano gave the door a good kick, and finally it opened. We went back inside the dak bungalow, and while we had not had the enjoyment of seeing a film, we were still left with the trouble of carefully folding and repacking our saris!

So that is the story of the car that caused us so much trouble.

We had just a little sleep, then later that night we went to the railway station to catch the train for Rawalpindi. We had to change trains in Nagpur.

"When the train pulls in, you girls quickly get into the ladies compartment," Baba told us. The station was very crowded, and the train stopped for only a few minutes. Somehow Mani, Meheru and Rano took me through the crowds, and when the train came Rano found our compartment. On looking inside, Rano saw that there were only two women in it, but the door to the compartment was locked, and the two occupants were fast asleep!

Rano rattled and banged on the door, but with no effect. She could not wake them. By now she was getting desperate as Baba would be very angry if the train left with us still standing on the platform. Finally, Rano managed to open a window. She reached in through the window and gave one of the women, a total stranger, some good firm pats on her hip to wake her up. What else could she do?

The door was opened, and in we went just in time. We found that our fellow passengers were Parsis.

"Where are you from," they asked us. "Oh, we're from Poona, but we're now staying in Ahmednagar," we replied. "And this is our friend who is visiting us from America," and we introduced Rano. They were very happy to meet her.

We chatted and dozed until we reached Nagpur, where we were to change trains. Baba had told us to meet Him at a certain place on the Nagpur station, and that we were to leave the train quickly. Mani and Meheru had to be with me, which left Rano to cope with all our luggage. "Quickly, Rano, get my suitcase, don't forget my overnight bag. Hurry, Rano," we told her as she scrambled to get everything off in time.

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As we left the compartment I turned around and caught a glimpse of the Parsi women's faces. They looked so shocked and startled. We had introduced this American woman as our guest, and now we were ordering her around and leaving her alone to handle all our luggage. What kind of people could we be!

We travelled to Kashmir via Rawalpindi where we changed from train to bus.

Kashmir

In mid-August 1944 we arrived with Typhoon in Srinagar and stayed there for about six weeks in a lovely, big rented bungalow outside Srinagar. Baba had arranged for Chanji, Baba's secretary, to meet up with Him in Kashmir. Chanji, who was travelling from Bombay, became ill and, because he was travelling, could not take proper care of his health. In Srinagar he was examined by a doctor and was found to have typhoid. He was hospitalized, and twice a day Baba went to see him.

Because Baba was so often at the hospital, He told us, "You girls can go out to the lake or to see a film, whatever you like." In the morning Baba liked us to go out for a walk or a boat ride, as He did not want us sitting in the house in this lovely place. So Mani, myself, Meheru and Rano took a tonga to Dal Lake, and I remember that it was thick with pink water lilies which clustered around little channels that the boats passed through. We had some lovely boat rides there. We visited Shalimar Gardens, too.

After some days Chanji died and he was buried in Kashmir. Baba had granted his wish. Many years before, in 1933, Chanji had accompanied Baba to Kashmir with the very first group of Baba's Western disciples to come to India. Chanji found Kashmir very, very beautiful. He must have loved the mountains and the lake as he told Baba, "I would like to live and die here, and be buried here." So he did return to Kashmir for some days, and he died and was buried there just as he had wished.

Chanji was such a fine person, and he is much remembered. He had great love for Baba, and he did much work for Him, serving Baba diligently till the very end.

Sometimes Baba took us sightseeing. At one place He pointed to some mountains in the distance. "Can you see the middle of that mountain?" He asked us. "Jesus' body is buried there."

Nobody goes up there, it is a difficult climb, but once Baba was in seclusion near Jesus' tomb for a few hours. The mandali waited for Him down the mountain, and Baba was alone there. It was very touching.

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From Kashmir we returned to Aurangabad with one of the stops on the way being at Agra. Baba's party arrived there in the middle of the night, and we went in several tongas to our accommodation. I was in a tonga with Baba, and we had not gone far when I noticed that the horse was behaving strangely. "Quickly, Baba, there's something wrong with this horse. We must get out," I told Him. Baba and I jumped out just in time before the horse started to rear and lunge.

What had happened was this: The tonga driver was quite drunk and had not noticed that one rein of the horse's harness was under the horse's belly, running between its legs. This naturally was disturbing the poor horse who could only rear and lunge to let the tonga driver know that something was amiss.

While we were in Agra, Baba took us again to see the Taj Mahal and, as always, He contacted masts.

On returning to Aurangabad we stayed in another house in the same location owned by the same Muslim landlord. We were there for about six weeks, from early October to late November, when we returned with Baba to Meherazad for the remainder of the year.

Following Baba's instructions, on 21 December 1944 Nariman and Arnavaz Dadachanji were married in Ahmednagar, and on 28 December 1944 Mehera's birthday was again celebrated on a grand scale at Meherabad. Baba and the women staying at Meherazad came to Meherabad on 23 December 1944 for this occasion.

As at Mehera's 1942 birthday celebration only women were present on Meherabad Hill. Mehera was dressed in a pink sari embroidered with a broad silver border and around her neck she wore a gold necklace from which hung the letters BABA'S LOVE. Both the sari and the necklace had been presented to Mehera, with Baba's permission, by a close Baba-lover.

When the guests were gathered, Baba and Mehera came out and Baba said to everyone, "Doesn't Mehera look beautiful!"

Meherazad to Hyderabad; Pasarani to Meherabad

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We began 1945 at Meherazad with Baba, and His mast work continued there. At the end of January, Baba took us to Rusipop's (Goher and Katie's father) house in Ahmednagar where we stayed for just over a month. During that time

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we heard that there was an outbreak of bubonic plague in Ahmednagar. India was then still under British rule, and they insisted that all the inhabitants of Ahmednagar be inoculated against this disease. But Baba said, "No inoculation for you," so we felt quite safe. Although the British were very thorough in their campaign to inoculate everyone, not one of us had the injections.

In early March we set off to Hyderabad with Baba.

Hyderabad

From the women's side Baba took Mani, myself, Naja, Meheru, Valu, Rano, Kitty and Margaret to Hyderabad. Of course, when we set off we did not know how long we would be there. We did not ask Baba questions like that. But we were in Hyderabad for about six months, and during that time we lived in two different houses in the area known as Jubilee Hills.

Hyderabad itself is situated on a plain, but outside Hyderabad are some lovely hills with unusual rock formations. Many, many years ago these hills were just a wilderness, without any houses, where gypsies would camp. The British were the first to realize how beautiful this location was, and they built big bungalows there that were far apart with lovely gardens. Once a few houses had been built in these hills, the wealthy Hyderabad Muslims also moved there.

The first house we stayed in was quite small and was plagued by snakes. We were there for only a short time, but an amusing incident did happen with Naja who, like Kitty, often made us laugh with the way she expressed herself.

Naja was sharing a room with Rano and Margaret, and Naja was a very light sleeper. Any little noise disturbed her, and in this house she often heard noises near her bed at night. Naja would get up and shine her torch first here and then there where Rano and Margaret were sleeping and this would wake them up. One night this became too much for Margaret. "Naja, what are you doing?" she inquired.

"I'm torching," Naja replied.

"You're not torching," said Margaret, "you're torturing us with that light in our eyes. We can't sleep. We don't mind the racket, even if the noise disturbing you is snakes or whatever it is, just please don't shine that light in our eyes."

We all laughed the next morning when we heard this story.

Now Baba told Donkin to find another house for us. He did not tell us this, but Baba

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must have had it in mind to call the women living at Meherabad to be with us for a change, so He needed a larger house. And being God, He knew that just the right house was waiting for us.

Not far from our first house was a big, very lovely new house that was not quite finished. It still needed the final touches, such as some more painting, door handles and so on.

Donkin approached the owner who was a Muslim and asked, "Would you rent this house to us for a short time?"

Naturally, the owner replied, "But I built it for my wife and children."

"We wouldn't need it for long," Donkin told him, and he spoke very charmingly with the man.

The owner did agree to rent this house to Donkin. It is really unbelievable. It was a brand new house that the owner and his family were looking forward to moving into, and yet he was willing to rent it to Donkin.

"Please give me time to finish it," the owner asked of Donkin. But because Donkin knew that Baba was in a great hurry to move in, he, Rano and Kitty kept rushing the owner to finish the house quickly. In a very few days, when all but the lampshades and a few other items were finished, Donkin told the owner, "It's fine now. There's light and water. Don't worry about the lamp-shades. We'll move in now."

The owner did not know Baba, and he must have been very puzzled by the behaviour of these Westerners who did not seem to care what state the house was in.

Of course, the house was not yet furnished, and the owner was told that we would bring our own furniture. He was there when our furniture arrived, and he must have received such a shock. Instead of the beautiful furniture the British usually had, in came these old, dilapidated beds and chairs and tables that had been rented locally. The owner looked around and saw his lovely new house being filled with broken-down furniture. What a kind man he must have been!

And that was not all. He had pointed out to Rano which were the bedrooms, which was the drawing room, which the dining room and so on. Although it was a big house, there were eight of us, and Baba and Rano knew that we would need more space for the bedrooms. So the dining room had to become a bedroom, and Rano directed the servants to put our beds there.

"Oh my," said the owner, "that's not a bedroom, that's the dining room." But a bedroom it became.

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It was a very nice room, too. In one wall was set an aquarium filled with small fish, and through the glass of the aquarium one could see into a swimming pool outside. It was a medium-sized pool which adjoined the house, and very lovely it was. Muslims are fond of beautiful and decorative things, and the tiles on the bottom of this pool were light blue, with a white star pattern scattered here and there. It was as if the sky were reflected in the water.

We were very, very comfortable in that house. From the front porch there was a hallway covered with a red carpet that ran straight through to a big back verandah, and there were several bedrooms, a morning room, a drawing room, and so on. Everything about this house was beautifully done.

When they had begun to build the house the owner also had the garden planted, so by the time we came the garden was already established. And in the garden was a lovely guest house.

After some days Baba called the rest of the women in separate groups from Meherabad so they could also swim and enjoy themselves, and they stayed in the lovely guest house in the garden. I do not know where the men mandali stayed, perhaps in the house we had moved from.

Because this was a Muslim house, the swimming pool was secluded so that the women in the household could swim in privacy. Baba had it cleaned, and He told us to leave the big taps in the pool on all night to fill it up. "You can swim in the morning at ten, and then in the evening from three to five. Be sure to shower before you go into the pool," Baba told us.

We were so happy. Mani and myself and Meheru decided we would swim at three o'clock. It was here that Margaret taught us to dive. While Mani and Kitty did not care for it, I learned how to dive. In Hyderabad we completed our swimming training, and we now knew our overarm and sidestroke, breaststroke, underwater swimming, treading water and diving. Sometimes we stayed in the pool for a long time, and Margaret would tell us, "Come out, you'll catch a cold," but we would reply that we felt fine and continue with our swimming and paddling.

Margaret had a very beautiful way of teaching and she gave us such confidence. "Don't be discouraged," she would tell us. "There you are, you can do it better. Now do it again." She was so gentle with us.

So, by Baba's grace, I learned how to swim and dive.

When Baba was with us we would sit around Him in the evening while Margaret read aloud an Agatha Christie detective story. However, Baba was away

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for long stretches on mast work. Once when Baba returned, He did not come into the house, but sat in the car on the road near our gate and sent word that I, Mani, and Meheru were to put on saris and come out to Him. And we were still swimming in the water! When Baba's call came we rushed to our rooms, quickly changed into nice saris, and went to Baba. We were so happy that He had called us. He took the three of us to the cinema, and we saw *Frenchman's Creek!*

It was in Hyderabad that Typhoon, the wire-haired terrier who had joined us when we first stayed at Meherabad in 1944, died. She suddenly seemed to be in pain. She would not eat, and she began to run a high fever. We could not understand what was wrong with her.

Then word came that someone had seen her fall off a very high parapet while chasing a stray cat. She must have had internal injuries, and we could not save her. What a fortunate dog she was to have been in Beloved Baba's household and to have travelled with Him and been patted and caressed by Baba.

In early September 1945 Baba moved to Pasarani, a village near Wai at the foot of the Mahabaleshwar ghats. On drives to Panchgani in the past they had seen from the road this huge castle-like building enclosed with high walls belonging to a Nawab. Baba now rented this building and maintained His household there until mid-December. Shortly after arriving in Pasarani, Baba, accompanied by many of His men mandali, left for His work and He was away for a long time. Not only did Baba contact many masts and poor people in places as far away as Calcutta, He also did a very intense seclusion.

Pasarani

From Hyderabad Baba moved us to Pasarani, where we stayed in a Nawab's castle. Baba called all the women who lived at Meherabad to stay at Pasarani with us, so we were many there. Mani, myself, Meheru, Naja, Katie, Khorshed, Valu, Soltoon, Daula, Mansari, Kaikobad's family, Margaret, Kitty, Rano and Irene Billo; those I remember. Much of this time Baba was away doing His mast work, and also a seclusion.

Poor Daula, Baidul's daughter, was not at all well. While still in Meherabad she had developed some large, dreadful blisters which would just appear anywhere on her body, and then turn into sores. These blisters continued to appear while she was in Pasarani. This was before antibiotics had been discovered and there was great danger of these sores becoming septic. Baba had Dr. Nilu dress them

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everyday with antiseptic ointment, and He had Mansari take care of Daula. Baba even employed a woman especially to stay with her and do everything she asked. So kind and thoughtful Baba was. He took care of us so beautifully and saw to every little detail when we were not well. This disease was incurable, but Baba's love and compassion did cure Daula who later got married and now is a grandmother.

Before Baba left He told us that we were to go for daily walks and that we should not go alone, but in a group of at least four. In those days Pasarani was a very isolated place with wild animals still roaming about. Who went with whom changed from walk to walk. Sometimes Mani, myself, Katie and Meheru would go. Sometimes Katie and the three Dastur girls, Goolu, Jalu and Mehroo would go. One evening those last four came back very late from a walk, and this is what had happened to them:

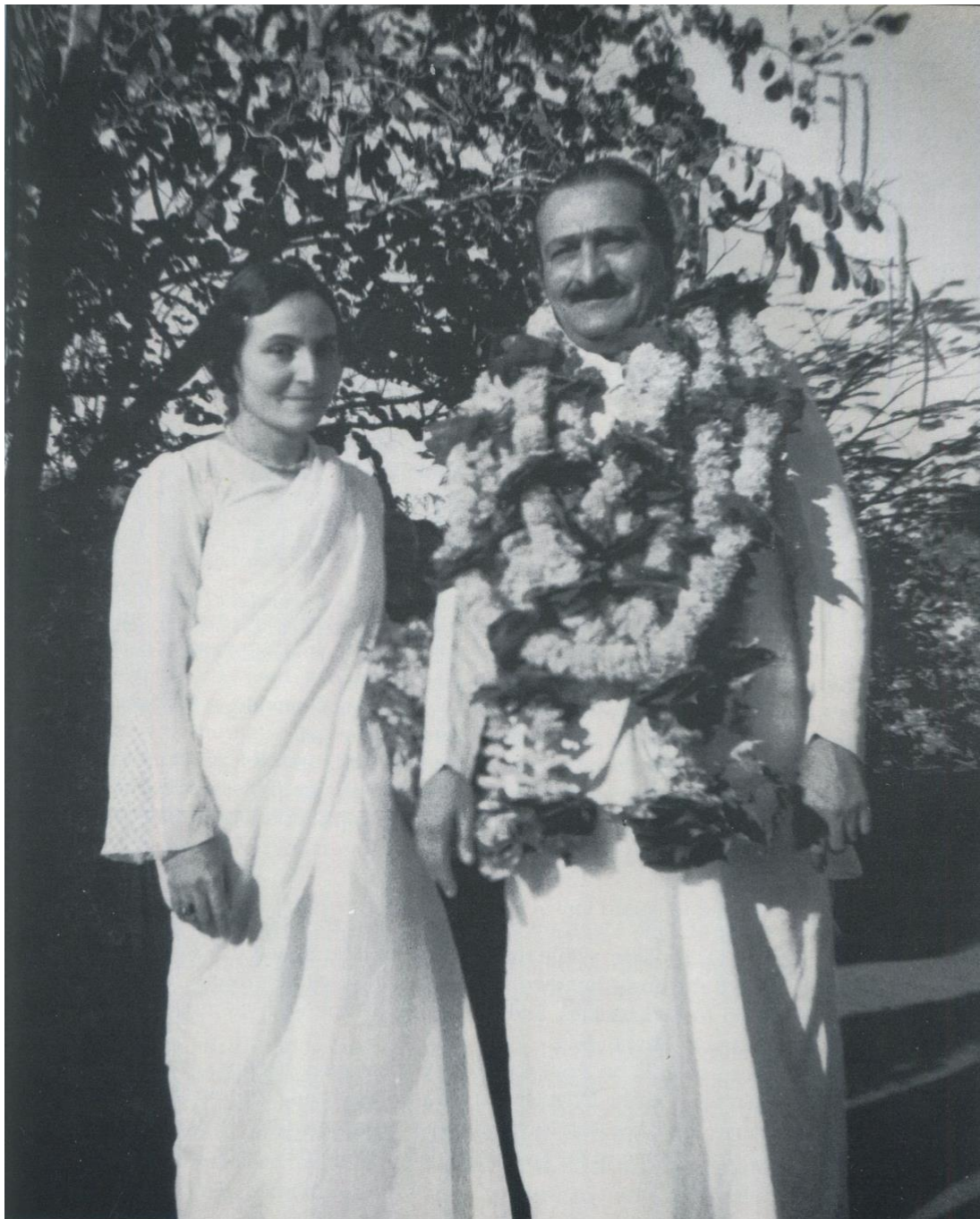
Katie and the three Dastur girls had set off in the evening along the main road up the ghats. While walking and talking they had lost track of the time, and suddenly found it was dusk. They felt so frightened because they were far from home, and Baba had told us to return before dark. Then along the ghat road came a big truck with a tarpaulin covering the back. It passed them by and disappeared around the corner.

"Be careful," Katie warned the girls, "we can't trust these people. They might put us in the truck and drive away with us!" The girls then turned the corner, and there was the truck standing still on the road! They were terrified. "Oh, Baba," Katie said, "the truck has stopped. They must be planning to kidnap us. They could easily hit us on the head with a spanner! We can't go there," she told the girls. "Just follow me and do exactly as I say."

They could see the castle's lights in the distance at the bottom of the ghat, but the only way home if they were to avoid that truck was down the mountainside, which was quite steep and covered with rocks and thorny bushes.

"How can we get down there?" the three girls cried. "Just roll," Katie told them. "Take Baba's Name and follow me!" So they struggled and scrambled down this mountainside and arrived back home tattered, scratched and exhausted.

When they told us their tale, we had to laugh at them. "What happened to all your boldness?" I asked Katie, who always boasted that she was fearless, and that if she ever met a tiger she would pinch his ears and ride on his back!



Mehera and Meher Baba on His birthday in the 1940's.

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When Baba returned to us from this seclusion He was exhausted. We felt so sad to see Him in that state, but what could we do? It was His work, and you can have no idea how much He worked for and suffered for humanity.

We left Pasarani in mid-December and spent the remainder of the year back in Meherabad.

From Dehra Dun to Mahabaleshwar

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In early February 1946 Baba, with a few of the women, left Meherabad Hill for a peaceful two-and-a-half month stay at Meherazad. Then, in mid-April of that same year Mehera, Mani and Meheru travelled with Baba to Dehra Dun via Delhi for a seven-and-a-half month stay. They were later joined by some of the women at Meherabad. During this time Baba was very involved in His mast work and, because He did not want to be disturbed, the whereabouts of His household was not generally known.

Baba's bungalow was located on Sahranpur Road, a main road just outside Dehra Dun, and one that served as the bus route from Delhi to Dehra Dun. The Delhi bus stopped in front of this bungalow, and this was very convenient for Baba as He often travelled by bus to Delhi to make train connections for His mast work throughout India.

While in Dehra Dun Baba was constantly going on mast tours, returning to Sahranpur Road for only a few days before He was off on mast tours once again.

In June Baba took a few of the women and men to Kulu Valley, and later to Simla. They also attended the Hardwar Mela. At the end of November 1946, just before the cold set in, Baba moved His ashram from Dehra Dun to Mahabaleshwar, where they stayed for the next six months.

At the beginning of 1946 Mani, myself and Meheru travelled with Baba from Ahmednagar to Dehra Dun, while the others who later joined us - Rano, Kitty, Margaret, Naja, Katie and Khorshed - came in two separate groups. Irene had already returned to Switzerland, and after a short time with us in Dehra Dun Margaret returned to England.

Our bungalow, though on a main road, was very quiet, for there was so little traffic in those days. Our bedrooms were on the upper floor, or first story as we call it, of the house, and Baba slept downstairs on the ground floor. When Baba was with us, those girls staying in the room over Baba's had to be very, very quiet so as not to disturb Him.

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The bungalow had electricity, but no running water, and this was rather inconvenient for us as our water had to be carried to the house from a well in the garden.

The garden was very big, especially the back garden, which had in it a guava orchard that sloped all the way down to the boundary at a dry river bed. While we were there the guavas were ready for harvesting, and these ripe fruits attracted many bats. To scare them away the servants would bang on tins making a terrific noise. And if Baba was home doing some seclusion work, this noise would disturb Him.

We called this bungalow "P.P.'s bungalow" after the gardener's wife. The landlord had employed a gardener to care for the compound and the guavas, and the gardener's wife helped us with carrying the water and so on. This woman had a most unusual voice; she talked through her nose more than anyone we had ever met. We nicknamed her "P.P.", and so the bungalow became known to us as P.P.'s bungalow.

One day we found out that although P.P. and the mali had two children, they had never been married. This is what had happened:

In India marriages are usually arranged by the parents. P.P.'s parents had married her to a man who must have mistreated her, so P.P. left this man and ran away with the mali. And all this time she had lived with him as his wife and had given him two children. They had never married, because amongst villagers one has to feed the whole village in order to be considered married. P.P.'s parents had already strained their meagre resources to the limit for her marriage, and they had then disowned her for running off with the mali. So poor P.P. could not afford another wedding.

When Baba heard they were not married He told them, "It is not at all good for you to live together like this. You must get married."

So P.P. got dressed up like a young bride and married her mali, while her two children looked on, and Baba paid for the wedding. P.P. was so happy to finally be married.

Katie and Kitty and Khorshed took turns with the cooking, each taking a week at a time, and Meheru and I helped to clean and chop the vegetables. In Dehra Dun a girl named Indu stayed with us, and she was a great help with the cooking, taking her weekly turn with the others. Baba had known Indu's father in the very early years when Baba had had a toddy shop in Poona. At that time this man had worked on a toddy palm plantation and Vishnu Master had very kindly kept him and his

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family at his house in Poona. Through Vishnu Master and his mother, Kaku, this family kept in touch with Baba over the years, so we knew Indu when she joined us. Indu was with us, I believe, until we went to Satara in late 1947, when she decided to return to Poona for her studies.

Those were very happy days in Dehra Dun. Baba allowed me to go for walks, to read library books and listen to the radio, and at night we saw fireflies in the garden. Sometimes we walked down to the end of the garden to that dry river bed, and one day we saw some real gypsies there, the kind that roam in the high mountains of Afghanistan. They were so proud looking and so colourfully dressed that we were fascinated by them.

And Keki Nalavala from Dehra Dun, who had just met and begun to follow Baba, gave Baba a radio. We listened to the BBC and heard a programme we called "Yes, No". It was a kind of contest. The quiz master tried to trick the contestants into saying yes or no in answer to his questions, and if the contestant managed to last for a certain time without answering "yes" or "no", he won. It is not so easy not to answer "yes" to questions such as, "Did you have breakfast?" and it was great fun to listen to it.

Walking in the garden when we felt like it, reading library books and listening to the radio might seem like small things, but to us at that time they were great luxuries.

There were other treats, too: a trip to Kulu Valley, a visit to the Hardwar Mela, and a short holiday in Simla, all with Baba.

Kulu Valley

We had been in Dehra Dun a little over a month when Baba took a few of us to Katrain in Kulu Valley. From the women's side there were Mani, myself, Meheru and Rano; and from the men I think only Dr. Donkin, Kaka Baria, who did the cooking, and Baidul. As we were always quite separate from the men mandali I never quite knew who was with Baba from the men's side.

On the journey to Kulu, Rano became very ill. One of the places at which we broke our trip was Mandi, where we stopped at a dak bungalow. Rano had completely lost her appetite, and Baba, who was usually very kind and loving when we were sick, told her to eat a huge plate of curry and rice. Poor Rano felt so awful. She was almost in tears, but she obeyed Baba and ate the food, and then immediately left the room and was sick. When we reached Katrain Dr. Donkin told her she had infectious hepatitis, so she could not stay with us. Nearby there was

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a cowshed with two little rooms over it, so Rano stayed there and had a beautiful view of Kulu Valley while she was recuperating.

Rano then remembered that as she, Margaret and Kitty were on the bus passing through Delhi on their way to Dehra Dun, each of them had ordered a sugar cane juice. A fellow passenger on the bus had warned Rano not to drink hers, but she had not listened to him. Sugar cane juice is a well-known source for hepatitis, and that must have been where she had picked up the infection.

Rano recovered very quickly, and Donkin told her that it was the lightest case of hepatitis he had seen. At that time there was no special treatment for hepatitis, and many people died from it. Baba then reminded Rano of the meal He had made her eat in Mandi, and told her that, because she had obeyed Him and eaten it, her illness had been lightened.

Kulu Valley is very beautiful and, because of its high, snow-capped mountains and pine forests, it is often compared to Switzerland. Baba liked it very much. We stayed in a cottage surrounded by huge pine trees on the mountainside above a village called Katrain. In those days Katrain was a very small village, and food had to be brought to us on horseback. There was no road for cars or bicycles, and to reach our cottage we had either to walk up the mountainside or ride on hired mountain ponies.

Baba was so sweet. He knew how I loved to ride, and as these mountain ponies were there for hire, Baba thought this would be a good opportunity for me to go riding. So He told Donkin to hire some ponies for us, and that they were to be at our cottage at 4 p.m. Well before four we were waiting with Baba for the ponies to come. The horsemen, however, were simple villagers with no sense of time. We waited and waited, and still they did not come. Baba was getting impatient, and He began sending messages to Dr. Donkin, "Why haven't the horses come? Did you give them the proper message? Be sure you scold them when they do come."

The horsemen, with their horses, finally arrived nearly an hour late. Dr. Donkin immediately began to scold them. I do not know exactly what Donkin said, but he did order them to take their horses and go. These horsemen were poor people, and the hire money meant so much to them. No matter what Dr. Donkin said they refused to leave, and they kept begging him to forgive them. They even placed their turbans on Donkin's feet as if to say, "We bow down to you, so please forgive us."

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Now Donkin himself got caught up in the dressing-down he was handing out, and instead of staying calm he started to feel quite angry. Suddenly Baba clapped, "Why are you getting so angry?" He asked Donkin. "What is the need for it? I told you to scold them, I didn't tell you to get angry!"

This was like dashing cold water in Dr. Donkin's face, and he realized his mistake. Baba had wanted him to act as if he were angry, but not to feel anger.

Of course, Baba took pity on these villagers. He hired their ponies after all. "Mehera, you pick the horse you like, then Mani can choose one for herself, and then Meheru," He told us. Baba was planning to walk while we rode, but how could we enjoy our ride with Baba on foot!

"Baba," I said, "we would like it so much if You would also ride."

So Baba agreed, and He picked the quietest pony for Himself, and off we went for our ride. Baba's horse went at a gentle walk and He was happy that I had a good horse and enjoyed my ride.

In the mornings we went for walks with Baba. We noticed that the women of this region were very good-looking, but when we looked at them more closely we saw that many of them had large swellings at the base of their necks. They had goiter and this was because their only source of water was from the melted snow and ice from the mountain peaks. This icy water came down the mountains in rivulets and from these little streams the villagers took water for their households. Goiter is caused by an iodine deficiency and there was no iodine in this water.

One day while we were walking with Baba a woman came towards Him. She showed Baba her goiter and asked Him for medicine. Baba gave her a bottle of iodine drops to help treat her condition.

Another morning while on our walk Baba saw a sadhu in ochre-coloured clothes walking quickly along the path ahead of us, but some distance away. Baba wanted to contact this sadhu, and He sent Mani to run after him to tell him, "My Brother wants to meet you." Baba then had us move out of sight so that He could contact the sadhu alone. He said that we must not look at their meeting. After Baba finished His work with this man He returned to us.

The next day on our walk when we came to this same place along the path we saw this same sadhu coming towards us. As soon as Baba saw the sadhu He had us quickly turn around and walk away so that Baba would not meet him. And the next time we went walking we again saw this sadhu, and again Baba had us turn

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and take another road so that he and Baba would not meet. We had to walk very quickly to avoid him; it was like hide and seek. Baba told us that the sadhu had recognised Him and Who He was, and he again wanted Baba's darshan and contact. However, Baba had finished His work with this sadhu, and no more contact was needed. Baba told us that this man was a genuine sadhu, and so He could work with him.

Just before we left, another funny incident happened. A local woman who said she was being badly treated by her husband was sent to our house by Baba. Baba felt pity for her, and He told us to give her some work, and to look after her for our few remaining days in Katrain. We were a little surprised by this woman. She was nice and plump, well-dressed and well-fed, and she smoked cigarettes all day long. To us, she did not look at all ill-treated, but Baba had His reasons for sending her to us. So we kept her with us, but she did not do any work, neither washing clothes, nor sweeping, nor any household work at all.

Baba also wanted this woman to share our lunch. Now lunch was brought up to us from the men mandali's quarters down below and, as it was carried up that steep mountainside with great difficulty, just enough to go around was sent. There was not enough to spare for the other servants, so at lunch time Baba would send Meheru to find this woman, and to serve her food quietly so that the other servants who had brought their lunch would not feel jealous of her. Baba had His reasons, too, for feeding her.

As we were leaving Kulu Valley, Baba took us to Manali, a village further up Kulu Valley than Katrain and deeper in the mountains. To get there, we went by a local bus along a road that followed the course of a lovely fast-flowing river. There was room for us on the bus, but Dr. Donkin had to be very firm with the bus driver who at first was reluctant to let us all on.

The scenery was very beautiful. From Manali we climbed on foot still further and higher up the valley to a small village which I believe is called Vashista. There were a few farmers' houses there, and a natural hot spring with a beautiful steaming pond in which people could bathe. Baba asked us to wait while He went to contact a mast nearby. That shows Baba knows everything. He knew there was a mast in Vashista, and that is why He brought us to Manali. As always, Baba did His work and sightseeing together. We then returned to Dehra Dun.

Hardwar

At one point in our stay in Dehra Dun the Hardwar Mela occurred. This is a huge gathering of sadhus and sanyasis that is held at Hardwar, every twelve years, and Baba wanted to be there for His work.

We stayed for a couple of days in a hotel in Hardwar. All the houses in Hardwar look a little like cages for people as they all have bars on the window, and the reason they have these bars is to keep the monkeys out. The worst kind of monkey is the big red-faced monkey. They are vicious and like to steal food from houses, and Hardwar was infested with them.

I remember that we ran out of boiled drinking water in Hardwar and, as Baba had told us not to drink tap water, we girls got very, very thirsty. Baba had gone out for His work and, of course, we could not just go out and buy something to drink or even order drinks. It was now bedtime, and we were wondering how we would sleep with such parched throats.

"Just gargle with the tap water and spit it out," Naja suggested. "That will feel like having a drink!" But at that moment Baba returned with drinks for all of us. Baba always saw to our every need, and when the drinks were most needed, He brought them for us.

Simla

When Baba took us to Simla from Dehra Dun it was Kitty's turn to accompany Baba. From the women's side went Mani, myself, Meheru and Kitty. "This is a holiday," Baba told us. We were there for about ten days, and it was very cold. In those days the British used Simla as a hill station in the summer, and it was very well kept with smart shops and houses.

We stayed in a small Hindu hotel. Of course, being Hindu, it served only vegetarian food. But Hindu food is quite different from our kind of vegetarian food, so we enjoyed the change of diet. But what we enjoyed most was having Baba with us. He took us for long walks around Simla, and He sometimes played cards with us.

And one day Baba very sweetly decided to give us a special treat, so He took us to see a play! The theatre was small, but very lovely with plush velvet seats, and I remember that we sat in the dress circle.

Now the point of this story is this: During the play I noticed on a table on stage a beautiful white alabaster vase. There was something about its shape and colour

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that appealed to me. When we got home I commented to the girls, "What a beautiful white alabaster vase that was on the stage."

"White vase?" said Mani. "There was no white vase. It was a lovely brass one."

"No, it was white," I told her. "I'm sure, because I admired it so much."

"So did I," Mani replied, "and it was definitely brass."

"No it wasn't. It was white alabaster," I insisted.

"No, I know it was brass!"

So we had a friendly squabble, and each of us was sure that she was right.

Now Kitty did not have our restrictions, and she was free to come and go in the town. The next day she disappeared for a short time, and on her return she told us that she had been to the theatre to inquire about the colour of the vase. Like that she was very kind and thoughtful.

"Who was right?" we eagerly asked.

"Well," Kitty told us, "the manager said that for one half of the play there had been a white vase on stage, and for the other half a brass one." So we were both right!

Talking of Kitty reminds me of her search for a Scotch terrier while we were in Simla. Mani wanted a dog of that particular breed, and so Baba sent Kitty *to* make inquiries amongst the British there about Scotty puppies. She was very good at introducing herself *to* strangers, and she could comfortably chat to her newly-made English friends about people their families knew, about dogs and so on, but she did not find a Scotty puppy. It was Baba who found one a little later after we had returned to P.P.'s bungalow in Dehra Dun. Baba found him when He was passing through Delhi for His mast work, and He gave the puppy to Mani. This was the puppy we called Cracker.

At the end of November 1946, before it got too cold, we left Dehra Dun with Baba, and He took us to Mahabaleshwar where we spent the next six months.

Mahabaleshwar, Satara and Meherazad

1947

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On coming from Dehra Dun at the end of 1946 Baba rented the Aga Khan's bungalow, which was known as Florence Hall, in Mahabaleshwar; we were to stay there with Baba a number of times.

Florence Hall was a large, rather dark two-story bungalow surrounded by forest and with a lovely view across the valleys and ranges of Mahabaleshwar. In



Mehera and Meher Baba holding Cracker on the verandah of Florence Hall in Mahabaleshwar, 1947..

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those days there were still tigers and panthers in the forest, and sometimes at night we heard them come very close to our house.

The compound was quite big, with a number of buildings in it; there was the main bungalow where Baba and we girls stayed, a separate place for the mandali, and some old stables a distance from our house where Baba set up His mast ashram. Baba's bedroom was upstairs in the main bungalow, with an outside staircase leading to it. This made it very convenient for the comings and goings of the mandali on night watch for Baba.

As I have said, Florence Hall was a rather dark place, and we would have liked a brighter, cosier bungalow. We did look at some houses while we were there, but we did not move as this one suited Baba's budget. Since this compound included three buildings, it was like renting three places for one rent. If Baba had had to rent three separate places, it would have been too expensive.

There were quite a few of us on our side: Mani, myself, Meheru, Goher, Katie, Naja, Khorshed, Soona Masi, Rano and Kitty. Indu was still with us, and Katie, Khorshed and Indu continued to take weekly turns with the cooking as in Dehra Dun.

The mast ashram was kept for the first couple of months we were in Mahabaleshwar, and Baba was very busy with His masts, working with them, bathing them, seeing to their food, and so on. One day Baba had the men mandali leave and He took us across the compound to see the masts.

Baba, too, sometimes played badminton with us, and He allowed us to continue playing when He was away for His mast work or darshan tours. Baba also told us to play volley ball, and we went for lots of walks, both with Baba and by ourselves, when Baba was away. We explored many of the quiet roads around Mahabaleshwar, and went to the famous lookouts like Arthur's Seat. So Baba saw to it that we had plenty of exercise.

As anyone who has been to Mahabaleshwar knows, there are many, many grey monkeys there. We discovered that they loved to steal things from our house, so we had to be constantly alert to chase them away. Cracker was a very enthusiastic monkey-chaser and a very big help with this.

In Mahabaleshwar I began a vegetable garden, and with Meheru's help I grew lettuce, radishes and tomatoes for salads. The monkeys enjoyed eating the tomatoes, so we had to move the plants closer to the house to keep a better watch over them and the monkeys!

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Satara

Towards the end of May 1947 Baba moved all of us from Mahabaleshwar to Satara. Baba never stayed in Mahabaleshwar beyond May as in June the rains come and Mahabaleshwar has more than three hundred inches of rain a year. During that season the bungalows have to be protected with an extra covering of tin sheets or bamboo matting. Everything gets covered with mildew, and all the houses have to light fires to dry them out. Only those who live there and are used to this can stand all that mist and rain.

Satara is at the foot of the mountain range on which Mahabaleshwar stands, and we were there this time for about three months. We stayed in a new bungalow called "Mutha's Bungalow", which we later returned to once during the New Life.

Again, this was a two-story house, and Baba's bedroom was upstairs. Baba took another bungalow nearby for the mast ashram that He kept during June and part of July, and one or two other cottages for the mandali.

We liked Satara very much. The climate is lovely, not too hot and not too cold, with a good rainfall, and in those days it was very quiet.

Baba was happy working with His masts, and sometimes He took us for walks. As always, I took care of Baba's room and His things, and with Meheru's help I started another vegetable garden. There were no monkeys in Satara!

In July 1947 Elizabeth and Norina arrived in Satara from America to be with us for the next two years. Norina's health was not good, so Baba arranged for a separate cottage for both of them. Dr. Goher joined us permanently here, and Baba had her stay in the cottage to look after Norina. I remember, too, that on Elizabeth's birthday Mani put on a concert for her.

Elizabeth brought with her, as a gift for Baba, two lovely De Soto cars. They were more like station wagons than cars, one was green, the other blue. One day Baba took a few of us girls to Belgaum for a visit, and we travelled in one of these cars.

By the end of July Baba had disbanded the mast ashram and was again gone on His mast tours with the men. In late August 1947 we all returned to Meherabad with Baba for about ten days, then Mani, myself, Meheru, Goher, Naja, Elizabeth and Norina went with Baba to stay at Meherazad.

Back to Meherazad

We had been away from Meherazad for nearly one-and-a-half years. Our living quarters were still quite cramped as the main bungalow had not yet been built, so

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Baba once again had to stay at Ghysara's farmhouse. Mani, myself, Meheru, Goher and Naja stayed in the small house which was later rebuilt into the main bungalow, and Norina and Elizabeth stayed in the cottage.

Since our very first stay at Meherazad in 1944 Baba had taken us girls for long walks in the surrounding countryside. Baba was always happy when walking and climbing, for He loved it so. Sometimes Baba called the girls at Meherabad to join our excursions for the day. One time Baba took all of us on a climb up that big hill behind Pimpalgaon Lake. We all gathered at the foot of the hill and watched as Baba began to climb. Then we, too, climbed up, and what a lovely sight it was to see so many of us following Baba up that hill. At the top we had a bird's eye view of the lake and the countryside, and we found not only a spring but the most extraordinary thing up there - the ruins of an ancient building. This hill must have once been inhabited.

On another day we had a lovely outing visiting a tomb on a nearby hill where it is said a Perfect Master is buried, and Baba has also taken us to Khandoba Hill, the hill with a Hindu temple on it that is very close to Meherazad. I am not good at heights, and in one place on that hill I felt very giddy. Baba turned around and gave me His hand. "Don't be afraid, come on, hold tight," Baba told me. And He so sweetly guided me in such a way that my giddiness went. Baba did not go into the temple itself, but stayed on the outside. However, Baba has blessed that place with His Presence, and how fortunate the villagers are who worship there and make a pilgrimage there at one time of the year.

Baba was still often away on his tours, so we sewed and gardened and did our work. Then, at the end of 1947, Baba did His first seclusion on Seclusion Hill. Padri had built two cabins on top of the Hill, one on the very top and one on the lower level, and one day Baba took us girls up the Hill to see them. Norina and Elizabeth came, too, and because of their health we climbed up very, very slowly.

Just before reaching Baba's cabin there is a spot where it is very steep and narrow. As I have said, I cannot stand heights, and I began to feel quite giddy. Just as I put out my hands to steady myself, Baba turned around and found me on all fours! "What's the matter?" Baba asked. "Baba, I'm feeling very frightened," I told Him. And Baba held out His hand to me, "Mehera, catch, catch," and with a strong pull Baba pulled me up past that part of the hill. Baba asked me, "Feeling nice and safe?" "Yes, Baba," I replied.

Then Baba took us to look inside His cabin. There was a chair inside, space enough for both a bed that was later brought up, and for Baba to be able to sit on

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the floor when He was working (Baba usually did His seclusion work seated on the floor), and there were two little windows. Norina had a small camera, and she took a photo of Baba and the cabin on Seclusion Hill.

For this seclusion which lasted, I think, twelve days, Baba stayed in the upper cabin, and He had a mast from Meherabad stay in the other lower one. During this seclusion, once or twice Baba allowed Mani and me to go up to see Him.

In 1947, too, Baba started taking us to Bombay to stay at Arnavaz and Nariman's apartment, "Ashiana". Baba told Arnavaz that He wanted us to enjoy ourselves, and for her to take us for picnics, sightseeing, to films, and so on. We sometimes wore her good saris, and so we had a lot of fun dressing up. In those days Bombay was a very fine city and not very crowded at all.

I especially remember one Independence Day celebration that we saw there. This was one January, but I do not recall which year. Arnavaz took us to see the decorations in the city. All the important buildings were covered with little lights, which looked very lovely, and there were big crowds that day.

Meherazad, Rusipop's, Ahmednagar and Meherazad Housewarming 1948

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We began the year at Meherazad but in February we all shifted to Rusipop's house in Ahmednagar where we remained while the small house originally built on the old foundation was being rebuilt into what is now the main bungalow. Baba had told me to design the alterations and additions wanted, and we all put much thought into it.

We added an upper floor in order that Baba would have His own rooms, with an outside staircase so the mandali on watch could freely come and go. As I have said, up to now when we were at Meherazad, Baba stayed mostly at Ghyara's farmhouse. For Baba's comfort one of the aspects we gave much attention to was air circulation in the house. It is so hot here in the summer months, but because of careful planning we can draw the cooler breezes through the house on hot summer nights. Of course, during the heat of the day we keep the doors and windows closed to shut the night air in and the heat of the sun out.



Meher Baba and Mehera at Meherazad in the late forties.

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Rusipop's bungalow in those days was very spacious and pleasant. Rusipop and those of his family that were with him had moved out for Baba and were staying with friends in Ahmednagar. Mani, myself, Goher and Meheru were joined by Norina and Elizabeth, and sometimes by others. The mandali stayed somewhere nearby in an old ice factory. Baba was away much of the time on His mast tours and work with the poor. So much Baba travelled that year, from Girnar in the west to Calcutta in the east, from the Himalayas in the north to Madras in the south, never sparing Himself. And He did not travel in comfortable taxis, but in third-class trains and crowded buses.

At this time Baba gave His lovers all over the world the chance of keeping one of several orders such as keeping silence, having only one meal a day, and certain other things, for nearly a month. Baba had told us that we were to have only one meal a day, so we had less cooking to do at Rusipop's. Once we got used to having just an afternoon meal we found that we liked to have the extra free time in the evening that we would have spent cooking and eating.

While we were there Mani was busy typing Dr. Donkin's book, *The Wayfaers*. Donkin had beautifully drawn a big map of India showing the places where Baba had contacted masts. Donkin was a meticulous person, and when the printer made some printing mistakes on the map, Baba gave them to us to correct. There must have been a thousand of these maps, and we very carefully corrected each one.

Talking of Donkin reminds me of a little bird we found one day when Baba was with us. He was back from His mast work for a short time. This day there was a strong wind blowing, and it was shaking the branches on the trees in our compound. Suddenly, a little bird fell from its nest on a very slender branch. We could not reach the nest to put it back, so we decided to keep it. At that point Dr. Donkin came to another room in the house to talk to Mani about *The Wayfarers*, so I called Mani and told her to ask Dr. Donkin what we should feed this bird, which was a baby golden oriole. "Just a worm or two," Donkin told Mani. We were very pleased to hear that it would be so easy to feed.

The long and the short of it is that a worm or two was not enough at all! We dug up buckets of worms for this bird and had our sweeper dig them up, too. We had brought up many birds before, but never one that could eat so many worms. And Baba would feed it with His own hands. So as soon as He stepped into the room, even when we had just fed it, this bird would cry louder than ever for food!

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"Why aren't you feeding it? Why have you let it get so hungry?" Baba would ask us. "But we just fed it, Baba," we would explain. "Then it's not enough," Baba said, and He would feed it Himself. This baby bird was very fortunate to be fed with Baba's own hand.

It grew up to be a lovely golden oriole. And when it was completely grown and had practiced flying around inside the house, Baba said, "Now we must set it free in the garden so it can fly in the open air."

One afternoon we carefully checked to see that there were no crows about, and we brought this bird outside. Baba took it in His hands, and then let it go. Up into the trees it flew, while Baba watched with a smile. Baba was so happy to see this bird happy and free. How much Baba loved birds. He loved animals, too, but most of all He loved humanity. Someone, perhaps it was a reporter in the early days when Baba visited England, asked Baba whether He had ever been in love. "Yes," Baba replied, "I am always in love with humanity."

And talking of animals reminds me that we had many dogs at Rusipop's. There was Cracker, Mani's Scotty; Banjo, a little dachshund that Sarosh had given to Baba; Elizabeth's Foundy; Daney, a great Dane Baba had given to Elizabeth; and a couple of dogs that belonged to Rusipop's family and lived in the bungalow. And Baba now found yet another dog to join His family.

It was while we were at Rusipop's that Baba went again to find masts in the Himalayas. One day up in the mountains a fluffy little puppy began to follow Baba. As Baba went along a very narrow mountain path with a steep precipice on one side, this little puppy, who was playing around, slipped and nearly fell to her death. But she was brave and clever, and she held on to the rocks with her two front paws. As she clung on for her life she cried out, and Baba rushed back and pulled her up to safety.

She was such a courageous and intelligent little puppy that Baba made inquiries about her and found the owner, who gave her to Baba. So Baba brought this little puppy back to Rusipop's and showed her to us, and He gave her to Kaka Baria to bring up. Baba, knowing the future, knew that Kaka would be alone at Meherazad for a long time, and that this little puppy would become a fine watchdog and good companion for Kaka.

She was a Tibetan mastiff, and she grew into a very beautiful dog: jet black, with white and brown markings on her feet as if she were wearing boots. Baba had

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nicknamed her Golgol, which means "round round", because she had been such a fat puppy, and we now called her Bhooty, because of the markings on her feet. And Bhooty later gave birth to Mastan, Baba's most-loved pet.

Now to return to our stay at Rusipop's. Those of you who have been to Meherazad might have noticed a mango tree near Eruch's room. One day Baba came back to Rusipop's from Bombay with some mango seeds. The mangoes had been given to Him by masts in Bombay, and He had eaten the mango fruit and saved the seeds. Baba loved the masts very dearly, and they loved Him, and He never threw anything away that they gave Him.

"How lovely it would be if we could grow trees from the mangoes that were given to Baba with so much love," I thought. So we got some flower pots and asked Baba to plant them Himself.

Baba so sweetly planted seven seeds in seven pots, and they all germinated. When we moved back to Meherazad we took these little saplings with us, and I planted them there. But barely a year later we left for the New Life, and while we were away one died. Then, in 1965, there was a very severe drought, and there was no water to spare at all, so five more died. Now there is one left, and every year it gives us the sweetest mangoes which are Baba's prasad, because He had eaten the mango that gave the seed for the tree. And Baba had planted the seed with His own beautiful hands.

Sometime in July 1948 Delia DeLeon and Jean Adriel came from the West to be with Baba again after ten years. They stayed for some time at Meherabad, and then joined us at Rusipop's.

At the end of August, just seven months after we had left, our new house at Meherazad was ready, and Baba had invitations sent to His lovers at Meherabad, Ahmednagar, Poona and Bombay for a housewarming. During the housewarming the men all stayed on the men's side, and we women sat in the garden where a lunch of wadas, potato wafers and rava was served on leaf plates. On the front door of the new house was a big silver lock with a silver key, and after lunch Baba turned the key and opened the lock. He then opened the door, and we all followed Him inside.

So we moved into our new house at Meherazad. Baba's room was upstairs.

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Mani and myself, Meheru, Goher and Naja were in the new house, and Norina, Elizabeth, Delia and Jean were in the cottage. Baba was there with us for a couple of months before He left Meherazad for His work, and in the evenings we sat around Him in our new drawing room. As I have said, Baba loved humour and jokes, and every evening He said to the Westerners, "Now tell Me a joke!"

It is not at all funny to have to tell a joke to Baba like that. Before long Norina, Elizabeth, Delia and Jean were running out of stories, and they began to get a little desperate. Somehow Delia managed to get a book of jokes and this book gave the jokes in alphabetical order. One of the four girls took from A to E, another from F to K, and so on. Everyday they would memorize a joke from their section of the book and be ready for Baba to call on them in the evening. It all went very smoothly until Delia got a cold and could not be with us for several days.

When she again joined us Baba called on her to tell a joke. "Oh, yes, Baba," she happily said, and told Him the joke in her section that she had just memorized. Baba did not look amused and told her, "I've heard that joke!" "Oh dear, Baba," Delia said, "I'm so sorry."

The next evening the same thing happened. Delia told the next joke in her section, and it seemed that Baba had heard this one also. Delia was very puzzled, "Baba, I just can't understand it," she told Him. But when it happened for the third evening Delia suddenly realised what had gone on in her absence. "Baba, someone has been stealing my jokes!" We all knew who had been telling Delia's jokes, and Baba looked at Norina.

Now Norina had the section in the book which included "T", and nearly all the "T" jokes were about a little boy called Tommy. "But, Baba darling," Norina told Baba when He looked at her, "what could I do? I was so tired of Tommy!"

One Tommy joke I still remember because Baba enjoyed it so much was this: A teacher asked her students, "Does anyone know where God is?" Everyone except Tommy looked very blank, but Tommy's arm shot up. "Yes, Tommy, do you know?" "Yes, miss," Tommy replied, "He's in our bathroom." "How can you say that?" the teacher said, very surprised by his answer. "Well, miss, every morning my father knocks on the bathroom door and says, "Oh Lord, are you still in there?"

Baba was with us, and so these days in our new house were very happy ones. In October Delia and Jean left India, and a little later Baba left for His mast work. But He was with us again at Meherazad by the end of the year.

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Meherazad and Mt. Abu, Meherazad 1949

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In 1949 Baba gave us all a big surprise. For many it was a great shock, because this is the year that Baba began the New Life, but at the beginning of the year we knew nothing of that.

We were just comfortably settled into our new house at Meherazad when in early 1949 Baba took us to stay in Mt. Abu for three months.

Vengurla

I believe that on leaving Meherazad for Mt. Abu, Baba first took us for a short visit to the seaside. (Or perhaps it was after our return from Mr. Abu - as I have said, I never kept a diary.) Earlier in 1947, the mandali had found a very beautiful government rest house at Vengurla, a small seaport on the west coast of India, south of Bombay, and Baba had taken a few of us there with Him at that time. This time Baba took Mani, myself, Meheru, Goher, Katie and Manu and one or two of the men mandali, for a short stay.

The dak bungalow was perched on a rocky cliff jutting into the ocean, and day and night we could hear the ocean crashing against the rocks. Even the path up to the rest house was hewn from the rock itself. From our perch on the cliff we watched the fishermen come and go in their boats, the sun set into the ocean, and the moonlight play on the waves. It was so beautiful there.

The manager of the rest house was a Muslim and a fine cook. Baba allowed us to eat everything while we were there, and the fish and shellfish and curry and cutlets that this man made for us were so delicious that we did not know what to eat first.

It was not possible to swim near the guest house. There was no beach there, just cliffs and rocks. But a little distance away was a very beautiful beach, long and golden, with coconut palms silhouetted against the sky, and some low bushes back from the beach. And there was never a soul there, just Baba and us, with Eruch and perhaps Donkin, too, some distance away.

How we enjoyed swimming there but Baba did not swim with us, and one day I said to Him, "Why don't You go in a little way, Baba? It is so lovely. The saltwater is very good for Your legs." And Baba did agree to go into the water, but He told

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us that we must not look at Him. We turned away and Baba went up the beach to where Eruch was waiting, and Eruch must have taken Baba out into the ocean for a short time.

Mt. Abu - March, April, May 1949

Baba took only Mani, myself, Goher, and Meheru on to Mt. Abu. Mt. Abu is a very beautiful hill station in Rajasthan and, while it is quite close to Ahmedabad where it gets very hot, Mt. Abu is situated inland at an altitude of nearly 4,000 feet, so it can get very cold.

Baidul had chosen the house that was rented for us, and we thought his choice a little strange as it had roads passing it on all sides. We were like a little island in the middle of a sea of roads. Fortunately, there was hardly any traffic on them and, as the house had a wall around the garden, we were quite secluded and private. The house itself was old, and our furniture was also old and rickety. But we cleaned and dusted everything, so we were quite comfortable there. And somehow the atmosphere in Mt. Abu was very beautiful.

Baba told us that while we were there we would not have to cook; our food was to be sent to us, so we had very little work to do. Of course, I had Baba's things to take care of, but, as always, during this mast phase of Baba's work He was often away on mast tours. Baba had told us that we could take long walks and read books from the local library.

Mani had much typing to do, but in March, when we arrived there, it was so cold in the mornings that Mani's fingers were too stiff to type! "Never mind," she said, "I'll wait till one o'clock when it warms up." But at one o'clock it had not warmed up at all, it was as cold as it had been in the morning! Mt. Abu has that kind of climate.

Before Baba left for His mast work He took us on walks to show us the roads and the routes to take when we were alone. While Mt. Abu is hilly, the slopes are gradual, and the roads were tarred. We saw very few people on the roads, just one or two passing by, as the season for hill stations had not yet begun. So while Baba was away, we had some lovely walks, and the cold air and exercise gave us very good appetites. But as we were not cooking, we had no food in the house at all, and we would be very hungry until our food arrived.

After some time Baba sent for Valu to join us, and we were happy to see her. She would make us chapatis, and in the evening that was our luxury. Valu would not



Mehera at Mt. Abu during travels with Meher Baba in 1949.

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join us on our walks, but would lock herself in the house, do her work, and not let any servants in until we returned!

On our walks we passed many bungalows with lovely gardens full of geraniums and petria. As most of these were the summer retreats for well-to-do people they were still closed down, with just a gardener and his wife left behind as caretakers. Mani and Goher chatted with these people, and they would then happily show us around the garden and the house.

One bungalow belonged to the Raja of Bijapur, and here I first saw wisteria and jacaranda trees. I love blue flowers, and when we left Mt. Abu to return to Meherazad the gardener very kindly gave me some wisteria, petria, and geranium cuttings, and even some jacaranda saplings. It was too hot in Meherazad for the wisteria, and the geraniums had not bloomed by the time we left for the New Life. The petria vine also did not do well, so I sent it to Meher Nazar where there is more shelter, and it is still flourishing there. The jacaranda tree is still where I planted it at Meherazad, beside the door to Baba's bedroom. In this way, during our travels with Baba, I gathered plants from many different regions in India for the Meherazad garden.

One walk Baba had taken us on was past a well-known landmark called Nun's Rock. It is a natural rock formation that looks exactly like a nun in the habit, even down to the veil on her face. We were fascinated by this perfect nun's image and once, when Baba had gone on tour, we decided to have a closer look at it. This rock is situated on the mountainside behind the tennis courts of the Mt. Abu Gymkhana (Sports Club). We crossed the tennis court and came to a thick screen of trees. Through this we scrambled, tearing our clothes on the thorny undergrowth, until we were finally quite close to the nun. To our surprise, once we got close to the rock we found that we could no longer see the nun at all. We had gone through all that effort only to discover that the nun could only be seen from a distance!

One day on our walks when we tried a new route we passed a vegetable garden, and in this vegetable garden I saw a very big lettuce. The gardener who tended this vegetable garden was nearby, but I could not talk to him. So I told Mani, "Mani, we haven't had lettuce for a long time. Ask the gardener if he'll sell it to us!"

So into the garden we went. Mani spoke to the gardener, and he sold us this huge lettuce for very, very little.

Now, since I had asked for it, when we set off I was the one who carried it. But that lettuce was so heavy that quite soon I got very tired. One of the others took

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it, but they too quickly tired, so we passed it from one to the other. By now we had reached the town, and it looked very odd for people like us to be carrying a huge lettuce!

When we finally got it home I measured it, and it was so big that holding it in my arms my fingers would not meet. The leaves were huge, too. We washed it, and I gave everyone only two leaves each, but no one could finish even two leaves! So instead of finishing it when it was still fresh, we had to eat that lettuce for days and days!

One day, on still another walk on another new road, we came to a lovely secluded cottage with a pretty garden. Goher asked the caretaker to show it to us, and we liked it so much. "Why did Baidul choose our house?" we wondered. "It's surrounded by roads, and Baba likes to be secluded. This cottage is perfect!" And we decided to show it to Baba when He returned from His work.

So when Baba was with us again and it was time for a walk, we took Him in that direction. The caretaker let us in, and we showed Baba the cottage. Then Baba walked out into the front verandah and, before stepping into the sunny garden, He opened His umbrella which He used to shade Himself from the sun. But the point of Baba's umbrella struck a beehive in the ceiling which none of us had noticed. All the angry bees flew straight at Baba! We were so frightened. The others tried to protect Baba by waving their scarves and whatever they had at these bees. I had a beige felt hat with a broad trim, and I kept lightly tapping Baba's back with this to keep the bees away.

Baba went into the garden, and these bees followed us until we reached a fence which must have been their boundary, as at that point they turned back. Not a single bee had stung Baba, and we felt very happy that we had been able to shield and protect Him.

I then put my felt hat back on. But when I took it off later, what do you think happened? Two bees flew out. They had been in my hat all that time, and they had not even stung me!

Apart from our walks and, of course, sewing, we read quite a few books. As I have mentioned, Baba at this time told me that I could read, and we found a lending library from which we took out a number of books. We kept the ones we enjoyed most for Baba, and Mani would read to Him when He came back. Once, too, Baba took us to see a film at the Parsi Gymkhana near Nun's Rock. It was rather a silly film, and we did not go there again.

Always On the Move

Meherazad

From Mt. Abu we returned to Meherazad. For forty days, during part of June and the whole month of July, Baba was in very strict seclusion at Meherazad, and His lovers all over the world kept silence for the month of July 1949. While we were in Mt. Abu, Baba had had the old Blue Bus, now at Meherazad, enclosed with bamboo matting, and that was where He spent this seclusion. We, of course, all kept silence, too.

When Baba was doing His seclusion work the slightest noise would disturb Him, so Meheru had to very quietly persuade the birds in our trees to perch elsewhere during this time. And all our servants had to be very careful when they were washing pots and pans not to bang them in the sink.

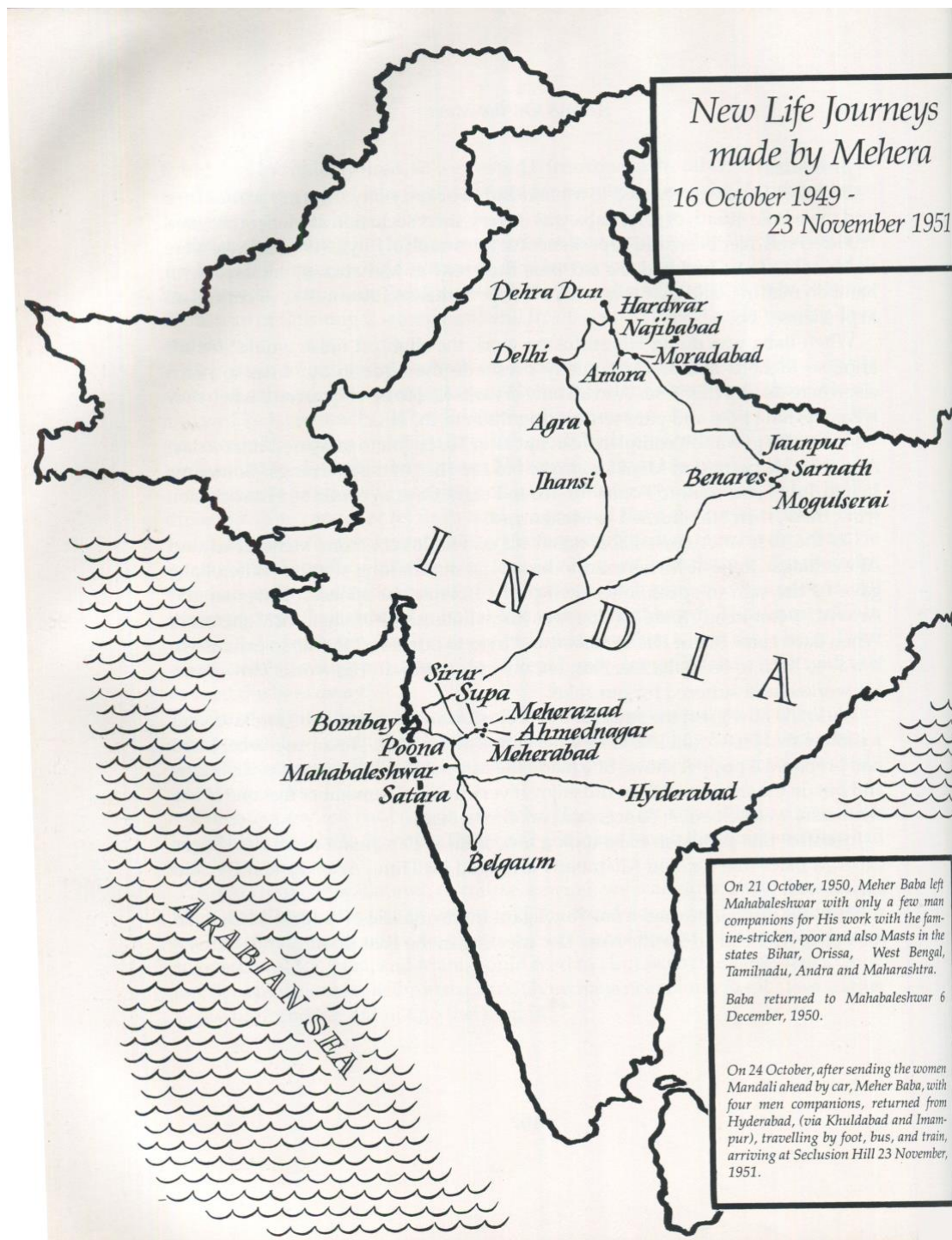
At first Baba was on complete fast, but later He began to take food once a day. And then He permitted Mani and myself to see Him in the mornings. Sometime in mid-July Baba went to Poona for around eight days to continue His seclusion work there, then He returned to Meherazad.

On the first of August Baba called all of His lovers from Meherabad and Ahmednagar to be at Meherazad to break the month-long silence. When Baba gave us the sign to speak, only then did we break our silence. Nariman and Arnavaz were already there, having spent the whole month of silence at Meherazad. When Baba came out of His seclusion and over to our side, He was so exhausted. It was so hard to see Baba like that, but only He could do His work. How much He worked and suffered for our sake.

We knew how great the strain of this seclusion and fast would be for Baba, and we knew that He would like to be entertained afterwards. To amuse Baba, Mani had prepared a puppet show. She made the puppets herself, wrote the dialogue, and put on the show, and Baba did enjoy it very much. I remember that one of her characters was a Spanish dancer, and another a bear.

Just after this seclusion Baba took a few of us to Panchgani to stay at "Silver Oaks", a place that Dr. Alu Khambatta arranged for Him. Arnavaz and Dr. Alu stayed with us.

Then, when we returned from Panchgani in the middle of August 1949, Baba took us to Meherabad for the New Life meeting in the East Room.



10

The New Life

16 October 1949 to April 1952



Our first intimation of the New Life came in August 1949 when Baba gathered us all together on Meherabad Hill for a special meeting with Him. From Meherazad with Baba came Mani, myself, Goher, Meheru, Naja and Valu; already staying at Meherabad were Kitty, Rano, Katie, Soona Masi, Khorshed, Mansari, the Kaikobad family and Soltoon and Daula. Norina and Elizabeth had just left for the U.S. with instructions for starting the Meher Spiritual Center.

The bell rang at Meherabad for "everybody", and we girls all gathered in the East Room. Baba was seated on my bed taking note of all the women entering the room. Baba smiled at us, yet we felt there was a seriousness in His expression. He told us all to be seated. Everyone came with their small stools and found room for themselves so they could see Baba. Baba told us on the alphabet board, with Mani reading out, what jewels we were, and how fortunate we were to have been in His ashram and in such close proximity to Him. Baba said that now, also, He expected obedience from us, and that each of us in turn was to come to Him and to give her answer whether or not she was prepared to obey Baba and do exactly as Baba desired. Baba told us that He might tell some to stay in Meherabad, others to go to Bombay or Poona or anywhere else, or even to get married. Baba Himself would leave Ahmednagar with a few men and women mandali.

Each in turn came up to Baba and was asked if she would obey Baba no matter

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what His decision. Some without hesitation said "yes", and others with a little thought also said "yes". The atmosphere was tense and solemn. After everyone had answered, "Yes, Baba," Baba said He was very happy with us all.

Baba then told us that the Meherabad Ashram, Upper and Lower, would be disbanded and, irrespective of where everyone was sent, the connection with Him would remain the same. So Baba made arrangements for everyone who was dependent on Him and everything was sold. Some of the women were to stay at Meherabad, some in Poona, and some in Bombay. Mani, myself, Goher and Meheru were to accompany Him on the New Life.

I have told you many of our stories of being with Beloved Baba at this time in *Tales From the New Life*; of how on 16 October 1949 Mani, myself, Goher and Meheru, from the women mandali, left Meherabad with Baba; met the men companions at the Ahmednagar railway crossing, and made our way on foot and by bus to Belgaum; and how we were there for about a month and, in mid-November 1949, left by train for Benares (now called Varanasi), in northern India.

After nearly a month in Benares and nearby Sarnath we began, on 12 December 1949, to walk towards Dehra Dun. What a sight we must have been as we left Sarnath! A white horse led our procession, followed by our camel cart, the bullock cart, a white cow, two calves, our little caravan drawn by two bullocks and two donkeys. After the animals and their attendants and drivers came the men companions, then Baba with Eruch. All were dressed in the white kafnis and green turbans of the New Life, and then came we four women dressed in blue cotton saris. Fortunately, Baba only had us wear these saris at the beginning of our walk. They were very uncomfortable and hindered our walking and, besides, it was icy cold. So we were relieved when Baba said we could wear slacks.

While Baba sometimes decided to travel by train, we walked much of our way from Sarnath to Dehra Dun, camping at night in orchards or staying in dak bungalows. The men mandali, joined sometimes by Baba, begged for our food. Baba had had me stitch in black tape on His ochre begging bag the Hindi words, "Premsay Bhiksha Dijye", which means "Give Alms With Love".

People of our type are never seen travelling on foot or begging, so we seldom had any privacy. How people stared at us on the road and when we camped. And somehow, without being told, they felt that Baba was someone great, and they would join their hands to Him and bow to Him very respectfully in greeting. They were so fortunate that they got the chance to see God even though they did not know it.

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It was now the depths of winter, and the region we were in is in the foothills of the Himalayas. In the distance we could see snow on the mountains. How very, very cold we were. Our hands were purple and blue, and we could never get warm. In this New Life Baba taught us to appreciate every little thing: hot spinach and millet flat bread given to us by a poor village woman for breakfast one freezing morning; hot tea and toast at a railway station after travelling by train in the dark, cold hours of early morning on empty stomachs; having a caravan to climb into for the night after walking all day, while Baba slept in a freezing tent and the mandali slept under the stars; having a bath and washing our hair and clothes after days of walking and nights of camping in orchards.

We reached Dehra Dun on 12 January 1950, exactly one month after leaving Sarnath, and we stayed in that area in several houses, including Manjri Mafi, now Meher Mafi, until June 1950 when we left by train for Satara.

On this visit to Satara another inmate joined our household. It was a trader's little pony whom we loved dearly and called Begum.

From Satara Baba took us to stay in Mahabaleshwar where, on 16 October 1950, exactly one year after the start of the New Life, Baba stepped out of the New Life for one day and held a meeting with His lovers. Baba then left for His work around Calcutta, (where there was a terrible famine) and for other places, too. On Baba's return I believe we visited Bombay, and then we went again to Mahabaleshwar for some months. Then, in May 1951 we set off for Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh, where we stayed until October 1951, when we girls returned by car to Meherazad. Baba, after being in seclusion in a cave outside Hyderabad, accompanied by four men mandali, returned to Seclusion Hill, Meherazad, travelling by foot, bus, truck and train. Baba arrived towards the end of November 1951 and at Meherazad He finished His Manonash work.

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I remember several stories that I did not tell in *Tales From the New Life*. One happened while we were in Belgaum at the beginning of the New Life. It was at that time that the "Song of the New Life" was written by Dr. Ghani with Baba's help. Baba gave the theme, Dr. Ghani put it into verse, and then Baba added some lines and took some out. Every day it was sung at the mandali's quarters. Adi sang the verses accompanying himself on the harmonium, Baba played the drum, and the mandali joined in the chorus. It is a very special song, and I still remember the

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beat of Baba's drum as He accompanied His mandali. This drum is now in the Museum at Meherabad.

Then, Baba in the evenings would come to our quarters for a while, and He sometimes asked us, "Have you got any songs to sing, any stories to tell, or anything amusing for Me to hear?" Now since Baba had told us, "No reading of any kind," we could not entertain Baba by reading to Him. (The men mandali helped us to obey this order by giving us old newspapers in foreign languages for wrapping things and starting fires, so that we would not inadvertently read.)

We racked our brains for something to do, just as we had so many years before at the Post Office. Then I had an idea: Mani could teach Dr. Goher a song, who could then sing it to Baba! I knew this would surprise and amuse Baba as Goher was very shy and she had never sung for Baba before. After much coaxing we persuaded Goher to learn this particular song, and one evening she sang it to Baba. It was a well-known song, and translated into English the song said:

Patience, patience, patience, be patient.
Your patience will be rewarded by God.
Patience is a divine attribute of God,
Be devoted and dedicated to patience.
Through patience your trials and tribulations will be dissolved.

Baba looked so surprised and happy that Goher was singing, and He had a lot of fun teasing Goher by twisting the words of the song around to change the meaning and then asking her, "Is that what you sang?" We all laughed as Baba changed the meaning very wittily. "No, no, Baba," Goher protested, "I didn't sing that!"

And so Baba would entertain us. In His beautiful way Baba made the atmosphere light and cheerful and instead of us amusing Him, He Himself would make us laugh!

While we were in Benares we stayed in a very big house. Our quarters were upstairs, and when we first arrived in the dark early hours of the morning we found that one of our rooms was crammed full of furniture. There were so many tables, chairs and sofas in that room that we could barely walk through it. Later we found out that it was a lecture hall.

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Baba had told us that we were not to use the furniture, and He had the mandali move everything out onto an upstairs verandah, except for one table for us to put our plates on and one chair on which to hang Baba's clothes.

One night, when Baba was with the mandali, I was in Baba's room chatting with Meheru. I was feeling rather tired, and then I noticed that somehow I had begun to feel quite comfortable. Meheru also noticed that I looked very comfortable. Suddenly, the same thing occurred to us both! "Quickly, Mehera," Meheru said, "get up. You're sitting on a chair!"

"Oh," I said. I was breaking Baba's order, and I could not get up quickly enough once I realised my mistake. I had quite forgotten about not sitting on chairs!

While travelling we always carried some drinking water with us in case Baba wanted a drink, but on one occasion during our walking days we did not take it as we had not used it for a while. Just on that day Baba asked for water, and we had none. How terrible we felt! During the New Life we were to help Baba keep His mood, not spoil it, and our carelessness was very serious.

Fortunately, there was a well nearby, and beside the well stood a man with a bucket. Baba sent Eruch to get water from that man, and when it was brought Baba bowed and touched Eruch's feet with His hands before He accepted the water. Baba then told Eruch to do likewise to the man. It was as if, through Eruch, Baba was touching the water-giver's feet. After this we never forgot the water!

Going towards Dehra Dun in the Himalaya region we mostly walked, but we did travel by train from Jaunpur to Moradabad, and later from Najibabad to Dehra Dun.

A number of little incidents happened to us in Moradabad. We arrived at Moradabad railway station around midnight; during the New Life we always seemed to arrive at our destination in the middle of the night. It was mid-winter and bitterly cold, and the ride to our accommodation in an open tonga seemed endless. Mani was not at all well, and we were looking forward to making her comfortable in a warm room. But when we finally arrived, we found a room with a newly washed, still-wet floor, no lights, no furniture, and twelve doors open to the freezing outside air. Mani sat huddled on the wet floor while we shut the twelve doors to keep out the cold, and at last, when some luggage arrived, we hurriedly opened a bedding roll for her.

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The next morning we could see our accommodation properly. It was a Hindu dharamshala used by sadhus and pilgrims. Our room had a narrow verandah all around it, and there was some open ground in the front where we could see the blackened stones from previous occupants' cooking fires.

Mani was feeling a little better, so together we went to the caravan which was parked nearby to get a few things that we needed. We also lit a little stove to heat some icy water for Baba. We were doing all of this outside the room in the open when suddenly a Brahmin appeared. He came up to us and said, "Who are you? Why are you all here?"

We replied, "We have permission to be here."

"No, you can't stay here!" he told us. "You will all have to get out!" This man kept arguing with us, and I had to ask Goher to run to Baba and ask Him to send the mandali. The mandali all came quickly and explained to this Brahmin that we had special permission to use this place. They showed him a pass that the authorities had signed, and he finally believed them and walked away.

In Moradabad, Baba's tent was pitched on the verandah of our room, and one afternoon Baba came back to the tent for a short rest. Baba must have been in Moradabad all morning, perhaps working with a mast. "Be very quiet," He told us.

So we stayed quietly in our room. All of a sudden a sadhu - a rather plump one, with a bald head - appeared on our doorstep. "Give me bhiksha," he bellowed. Goher quickly went to him, but he kept shouting, "Bhiksha! Flour!"

We had nothing in our room as we were not doing the cooking. "Please forgive me, but we don't have anything," Goher told him. "And please speak quietly, someone is resting."

"What! No flour!" he shouted. He looked at her very oddly as, in India, flour is always kept with the women.

"No," Goher said. "Please inquire from the men."

"Men?" bellowed the sadhu. "Why would the men have flour?"

"Shhhh," said Goher. Eventually, she did manage to persuade that sadhu to leave, and somehow Baba was not disturbed. Baba later told us that this person was a genuine seeker.

It was not always easy to be with Baba. I do not mean just during the New Life,

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but always. Sometimes we missed obeying Baba. We were not perfect, but we always tried. And most of the time we did obey Him. It was difficult, very difficult at certain times, but Baba never puts more weight on us than we can carry.

Looking back we feel that Baba was content and happy in the New Life, walking with His mandali following Him, and so we were happy, too. There were discomforts and difficulties, but Baba was with us. We were going through it for Baba, and with Baba - and that was all we wanted.

11

Visiting The West

1952



While Baba continued the New Life with other phases such as the Fiery Free Life tours at the end of 1952, the Manonash phase of Baba's work was now over.

By early 1952 Elizabeth Patterson, with Princess Norina Matchabelli, had set up, under Baba's instructions, the Meher Spiritual Center at Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, and Elizabeth requested Baba to visit the United States of America to officially open the Center. Baba and His party left India in April 1952 and returned in August 1952.

Following the New Life, Mehera began to mingle more freely with other close women. Previously, she had been very quiet, hardly speaking with others; now she began to mix a little more. Slowly Baba prepared Mehera for the time when she would be meeting many of His lovers.

Elizabeth invited Baba to come to America to open the Center in Myrtle Beach that she and Norina had founded for Him. Naturally, she wanted Baba to be the first to stay there, to "housewarm" the Center and bless it with His beautiful Presence before opening it to His lovers. So she arranged for the air tickets, and from the women Baba took Mani, myself, Goher, Meheru, Rano and Kitty. We had visited France with Baba in 1937, and now Baba was taking us to the United States, England and Switzerland.

While we went in the biggest, fastest plane at that time, it still took us two days and two nights to reach New York. This was our very first time in an aeroplane,

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and everything was new and interesting to us. The plane held fifty passengers, and it seemed to us very big! The seats were arranged in pairs, with an aisle down the centre, and I sat with Baba.

To our surprise, every few hours an air hostess brought us a tray of food and, as Baba had told us that while we were on the plane our usual orders and restrictions about food were lifted, we were able to enjoy everything. At first I thought, "How lovely," but as we were just sitting and getting no exercise I quickly lost my appetite. Still, when the next tray arrived, it would look so tempting that I would sample that, too. Poor Meheru and Kitty were quite air-sick, and they could not eat at all.

Baba had just finished His Manonash work, and so He was very tired. He often rested on the plane with a sheet pulled over Him, but whether He was covered or not, people somehow felt His Divinity and were drawn to Him.

One was a little European girl who was sitting with her mother some distance from us. When the first morning came she played in the aisle and looked at each passenger as she passed them. Then she saw Baba! The little girl came quickly up to Him, put her hand on His knee, and smiled up at Him. Although going to a European would have been more natural for her, she came straight to Baba. She was so attracted to Him. Baba put His arm around her and patted her and caressed her hair, and she was very happy. Then her mother, seeing her with Baba, called out, "Come back to your seat, you musn't disturb the gentleman." The little girl had to go back to her mother, but as soon as her mother became distracted in conversation with another passenger, the little girl stole quickly back to Baba again. And again Baba caressed her. She was very drawn to Baba, and she seemed to feel so much love for Him. She was such a fortunate child!

Another child, a little boy, came to Baba's seat and put out his hand and touched Baba even when He was covered with the blanket. Then there was the man who marched down the aisle past Baba very quickly as if he were going somewhere. When he turned around, however, he walked very, very slowly back to his seat, all the time looking at Baba. Then again he came striding down the aisle, turned, dawdled back to his seat, still looking at Baba for as long as possible. This he did many times, as though he could not get his fill of the sight of Baba's beautiful face.

Elizabeth met us in New York and escorted us to the Center in Myrtle Beach that she and Norina had set up for Baba. They had done everything perfectly down to the last detail with such love that Baba was very touched and very happy. Baba stayed at what is called Baba House, and we girls stayed in the Guest House, a

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special cottage that Elizabeth had built for us girls to use. We stayed mostly inside our house during our visit, and Baba came to rest there in the afternoons. Our meals were sent to the Guest House where we ate in the little dining room there.

One day we saw a tray of chicken go by us. "Who is having chicken?" we wondered. "Oh, that's for the cooks," we were told. We were so surprised. Chicken was a rare treat for us, and after enjoying no restrictions on the plane, we were again on our usual vegetarian fare, so we could not have it.

One day Kitty told us that we were to have a treat of black-eyed peas, which she explained was a specialty of the South. Kitty described this dish so temptingly that our mouths were watering with the thought of something new and delicious; then lunch arrived. We could not believe our eyes. The specialty of the South was a bowl of some very familiar beans we call "chora", which we have very often at Meherazad!

Then we heard that the cooks drove to work in their own cars. This was another surprise to us as we had never heard of employees owning cars. In India a car is a great luxury! "America is a different kind of country," we said to each other. "Here we are eating boiled vegetables, and the employees are having chicken and driving their own cars!"

After staying some days at the Center we set off with Baba to drive across America to Meher Mount in California. Many years before this, Baba had told the mandali that His blood would be spilled on American soil. We had forgotten this, but when it happened on this car journey we remembered Baba's words.

We had been travelling, I believe, a couple of days, and were in Oklahoma in the middle of the United States. Elizabeth was driving our car. Baba was seated in the front with her, and Mani, Meheru and myself were in the back. In a station wagon following us were Sarosh, who was driving, and Goher, Rano, Kitty and Delia.

Baba, all of a sudden, told Elizabeth to drive fast, so Elizabeth drove faster. Then, after three or four minutes Baba again told Elizabeth, "Go faster, still faster," and Elizabeth went faster. Yet again after five minutes Baba gestured, "Faster!" "Baba," Elizabeth said, "I'm hitting 90 miles an hour," but she obeyed Baba and drove even faster. Baba knew what He wanted.

Now I can say that the accident happened, but Baba's grace was such that I did not see how it happened. I must have been unconscious, and I have been told that I was thrown out of the car onto the road. Baba was also thrown out. But I remem-

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ber one thing. What I experienced at the moment that we were hit is this: I saw Baba seated in the front. He turned around and asked me, "Are you hurt, Mehera? Are you hurt much?" "No, Baba," I said. "I am not hurt. It's not serious at all. It's nothing to worry about." And I put my hand over my forehead to hide the spot where I was injured so that Baba should not worry. That is what I saw, yet somehow Baba and I were both thrown out onto the road and I was unconscious.

I did not regain consciousness for some time - I do not know how many days - and I did not know that Baba was seriously hurt. I have been told that when the second car with Goher and the others arrived, Baba was lying on the road very seriously injured and in great pain. His leg was completely fractured, and His arm, where it joins the shoulder, was fractured, too. Baba's nose was broken, the inside of His mouth was hurt, and His face was all covered with blood. Baba was in great pain and in great need of help, and He was looking up at the sky and not uttering a single sound to let people know how much pain He was in or how badly He was hurt. He was in such pain, yet He did not even groan.

When an ambulance arrived with a stretcher, Baba would not let them help Him. He pointed towards me and gestured, "Help her first." So they first took me, and when the second stretcher came Baba was helped. Even though Baba was in very great pain and in need of help Himself, He thought of another at that time. How beautiful He was with His love to think of another person at such a time when He Himself needed help.

We were taken to Prague Hospital where a very fine doctor, Dr. Burleson, took care of us. Again Baba had them see to me first. I feel very bad about that, but I could not do anything about it, because I was unconscious.

I was attended to and Baba's leg was set in a cast. Baba was in one ward, and Elizabeth and I were in another. Elizabeth had been behind the steering wheel, and both her arms, as well as many ribs, had been broken. And when, after maybe two days I was conscious, Baba sent word with Goher to say that I should not worry, and that everything would be all right. He said that if I could walk, He wanted me to come to His ward to see Him; so I went there. Baba's legs were under the covers, so I did not see that He was seriously hurt. I could not open my eyes properly, because my forehead was injured, and the nerves for smell, eyes, and teeth were damaged. My front teeth were numb, and my eyes were just tiny slits, and I had to tilt my head back to see Baba and to see where I was going. Baba told me to go and rest, and later He sent me a lovely note which Goher read to me. Even then I could not hear properly, and later I read it again.

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Our doctor, Dr. Burleson, was astounded by Baba. When Baba was brought in, he could see that Baba was in great pain, with His leg completely broken and many cuts and bruises and a broken nose. "Who is this person?" he asked. "He's not groaning or complaining or making a sound, but He must be in great pain. How is it that He can bear the pain like that without saying a word?" Dr. Burleson was told about Baba, and he later became a Baba-lover and had great faith in Him. His wife, too, was a very fine person.

When we were a little better we were moved to Elizabeth's private house, Youpon Dunes, at Myrtle Beach. Baba and I were not allowed to travel sitting up, and so we had to be taken by ambulance. Baba had already been carried by stretcher into the ambulance that was going to take us to Myrtle Beach, but I did not know this. When Goher and a nurse came in to get me, I started to walk to the ambulance. "No, no, you have to lie on this stretcher," they told me. "But I can walk, why lie on the stretcher?" I asked. But they insisted and, of course, I did what they told me. And they put my stretcher next to Baba's in the ambulance, so we were side by side.

Goher sat with us to look after Baba, and to be there to answer any questions He might have. Two very, very young people were driving the ambulance, but they turned out to be good drivers.

Baba, as we went along, would tell me, "Look outside, is it a town?" So I would stretch my back until I could see out. "Yes, Baba, it is a town." After a long drive, at last we came to the town where we spent the night in a motel. Goher helped me to our room, and Baba was helped to His by the mandali.

The next day we reached Myrtle Beach and Elizabeth's private house, Youpon Dunes, where Baba had a special bedroom that had belonged to Elizabeth's mother. It was very nice and facing the sea, but still Baba was very uncomfortable. It was June, and the weather was quite warm and humid just like Bombay's. Baba was perspiring from the heat, and this made His leg feel very itchy inside the cast. Baba told Rano to do something to help this, so she brought a fine pencil and a tiny knitting needle so Baba could try to scratch inside the cast. We were doing our best to make Baba comfortable, but Baba was in a sorry state.

When Elizabeth realized that it was getting too warm for Baba, she had an air conditioner put in His room, and He was much more comfortable. We girls were feeling the heat, too, and we all wanted Baba to call us into that cool air-conditioned room.

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We stayed at Elizabeth's for over a month. I did not go into the garden; I was always inside the house or on the terrace and Margaret would come to my room to massage my hands and feet. I did not go out except for a visit to Duke Hospital in Durham, North Carolina, where Baba's cast was changed, and I had X-rays taken. We also needed their advice about when we would be fit to travel back to India. In those days the journey took two days and two nights, and we were told we must still rest a little longer.

Baba darling was so sweet. He knew we were feeling cooped up with not leaving the house, so one day He called us to His room and told Rano to look in the newspaper to see if there was any entertainment in Myrtle Beach besides the cinema. Baba knew that there was something happening that I loved, and Rano found it. It was a horse show!

We wondered how we were to get Baba downstairs in His cast so He could come with us, and then Elizabeth sent word for us to turn a brass handle on a door in a corner of His room. We had not noticed this before, but now we saw that it was the handle of the door to an elevator that had been installed for Elizabeth's elderly mother. And it was very convenient for Baba.

We went to the horse show, and how beautiful it was. Baba was so sweet. He took so much interest in the horses, pointing out this one, asking what we thought about that one, so that we should feel more interested and enjoy it more. It was a three-day show, and we went for the first and second days.

Baba wanted a change. He had been resting in Youpon Dunes now for over a month, and He wanted to go to New York. Hotels in New York are very expensive, so Baba asked His lovers to find a place where He and we women could stay. Filis Frederick was the one who had a friend, a Mrs. Ferris, who lived in Scarsdale. Mrs. Ferris had never met Baba, but she had heard about Him through Jean Adriel, and she was very happy to have Baba stay in her house. She knew many eminent people who were outstanding in their fields of dance, music and so on, and she had their photos in her house. Of course, she now wanted Baba's photo, too. She was a very nice woman. While we were there, Ivy Duce requested Baba to visit her place to give darshan to many who were waiting to meet Him, which He did.

Baba and His party returned to India from Scarsdale via England, where they spent six days at the Hotel Reubens in London. While there, Delia DeLeon took the women mandali

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sightseeing. They visited Madam Tussaud's Wax Museum, the Tower of London and Kew Gardens, among other places, and one day they were driven to Stratford-on-Avon.

From England Baba, with His group, travelled to Switzerland, where they stayed at Heidi Merten's house in Lugarno for two weeks. From Lugarno they returned to Bombay, after changing planes in Paris and Karachi. They arrived back at Meherazad in August 1952.

Kitty Davy, by Baba's order, did not return to India with Him, but instead stayed on at Meher Spiritual Center, Myrtle Beach, to serve Baba there.

There are two stories that I especially recall that happened on our way back to India. One is a humorous incident that happened to Rano; I think it must have been in Switzerland when she was getting our air tickets.

It was Rano's job to help with arrangements and tickets for Baba's party, and at this particular place an official of some kind asked her for the names of the people in her party. So Rano said, "Merwan Sheriar Irani" and the official wrote this down.

"And where is He from?" he asked.

"Ahmednagar," Rano replied, and he wrote that down, too.

"Married?" he asked.

"Not married," Rano replied, and the official noted that.

"Who else?" he asked.

"Mehera J. Irani."

"From where?" he asked.

"Ahmednagar," Rano replied.

"Married?" he asked.

"Not married," Rano replied.

"Next."

"Mani S. Irani."

"From where?"

"Ahmednagar ."

"Married?"

"No."

"Who else?"

"Goher R. Irani." He wrote down Goher's name.

"Where is she from?"

"Ahmednagar."

Visiting The West

"Married?" he again asked.

"No," Rano again replied.

"Another not married! Is there anyone else?"

"Yes, Meheru R. Irani."

"From Ahmednagar?" he asked.

"Yes," Rano replied.

"Not married?" he asked.

"Not married," Rano replied.

"What! All these Iranis from Ahmednagar and not one is married?"

This official was very surprised about all the unmarried Iranis in Ahmednagar! Rano told Baba and us all about this incident, and Baba was very amused by it.

On our return home we had to go from Geneva to Paris, where we changed planes to fly to Karachi. We were waiting at the aerodrome outside Paris for our plane, and Baba was in a wheelchair, because His leg had not yet completely mended.

Baba had been sitting in this chair for quite a long time waiting and waiting to board the plane, and we girls were gathered around Him. Then Baba told Rano, "Go and ask when we are to board the plane." Rano returned to say, "It will be a half hour more," but after only ten minutes Baba sent her to ask again. This happened a number of times until an official told Rano to stop worrying.

At last we were told we could board the plane, and Baba's chair was wheeled to the gangway. There were some French airline officials there and a few Frenchmen standing around. Baba turned around and said, "I can't climb up," and He told Rano, who spoke French, "Tell them I can't climb up. What's to be done?"

So Rano explained in French that Baba's leg was seriously hurt, and that He could not walk up the steps to the plane. At that moment a tall, very strong-looking Frenchman came to the front and said, "I'll carry that man." And this man was so fortunate, he did carry Baba. He was very strong, and he lifted Baba from the chair as gently as if Baba were a little child. Baba put His arm around this man's neck to hold on, and then very, very slowly he carried Baba up the gangway. "Oh, Baba, Baba," we said with our hearts in our mouths, afraid that the man might stumble, but he placed Baba safely in the seat that was His, and Baba patted him.

This Frenchman was so fortunate to be the one to carry Baba in his arms when Baba needed help, yet he does not know Who it was that he carried and how lucky he was. And we were so impressed and so happy that Baba had been safely carried to His seat. I still remember how sweet Baba looked holding onto that man!

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From Switzerland we flew via Paris to Pakistan, and from Pakistan we flew to India, arriving in Bombay in the evening. By the time we finished greeting all the ones who had come to meet us at the airport it was late, and we drove from Bombay to Poona and Poona to Meherazad in the dark. It had been raining, so the air was damp, but very pleasant. We stopped on the way and served Baba food in the car, and when we arrived at Meherazad safe and sound, we were very sleepy.

One day a few weeks later, Baba was walking in the garden at Meherazad, and we were on the verandah. He asked us, "Am I walking properly?" And we said, "Yes, Baba. You're not limping at all. You're walking naturally." So Baba walked a bit faster, and every day from that day Baba walked further. He loved to walk. After this accident Baba's leg healed very beautifully, and we were so happy. As soon as it mended Baba knew He must make up for lost time. He at once began to give darshan in Hamirpur and Andhra for the very first time and how those people, with so much love, welcomed Baba. It was in Hamirpur district on a later visit there in February 1954 that Baba, for the first time, said that He was the Avatar.

Some time after we returned to India Dr. Burleson's wife wrote to Mani asking how I was and inquiring whether I was getting bad headaches from my injury. Mani wrote back to say, "No, Mehera never gets headaches. It is I, Mani, who has bad headaches!" And by Baba's grace, I never had headaches, but I have completely lost my sense of smell. I cannot smell anything, not food, nor roses, not anything at all.

And for the first time in many, many years Colonel M.S. Irani, my mother's brother who had loved us so dearly when I was young and who had later written articles against Baba, wrote to Baba. Somehow he had heard about the accident, and he wanted to see me. We did not meet, but it shows that my uncle was still thinking of us and missing us.

Later Baba said of my uncle, "He will come to Me." I was very happy, thinking Baba meant that Colonel Irani and perhaps then the other Zoroastrians would become Baba-lovers, but Colonel Irani died that same year. Baba must have meant that my uncle would come to know Who Baba was in his next birth, and now the children from many Zoroastrian families who were against Baba in the early years are beginning to accept Baba as the Avatar.

12

Dehra Dun, Mahabaleshwar, Satara

1953 to 1956



In February 1953 Baba moved His headquarters from Meherazad to Dehra Dun. There two new inmates joined the family: one was a beautiful little filly named Sheba that Baba put in Mehera's care, and the other was a cocker spaniel puppy called Peter who had been acquired when Baba and the women visited nearby Mussoorie.

At the end of 1953 Baba moved everyone, including Sheba and Peter, from Dehra Dun to Florence Hall, Mahabaleshwar, and in June 1954 they moved again to Grafton in Satara. This then became Baba's headquarters until His second accident in December 1956.

During these years Baba and the women mandali came only to stay at Meherazad, which was left in the care of Kaka Baria and Baba's Tibetan mastiff, Bhooty, when Baba was holding a Sahavas programme at Meherabad as during the "Three Incredible Weeks" in September 1954, and the Sahavas programme of November 1955. In July 1956 Baba made a brief trip to the West visiting Switzerland, England, U.S.A. and Australia, but the women did not accompany Him.

Throughout these years Baba continued His mast tours and work.

I have told you of our stays in Dehra Dun and Mussoorie in 1953, and late in Mahabaleshwar and Satara, in the stories of Sheba and Peter in my book, *Baba Loved Us Too*, so now I will just tell you about how we left Satara. It is very sad.

One day Baba commented, "How nice Satara is; how lovely the climate," and shortly afterwards we had to leave. We loved it there, and we thought we were



Mehera and Meher Baba with Sheba in Satara in the mid-50's.

going to live with Baba at our bungalow, Grafton, for the rest of our days. It was a very quiet place at that time, even though we lived on a road that led from a village to the main market in Satara. The villagers, on market day, came walking by laden with vegetables, and Naja would buy these very fresh vegetables for our kitchen. The rainfall and the soil were good, so I had a thriving garden. I liked to be very active, and I loved to dig in the soil and tend to the garden myself.

Every evening, for a certain period, Naja dressed up and did little one-person skits to entertain Baba. She became all sorts of different characters, and her costumes and makeup were really wonderful.

Then, one day in December 1956 Baba and the men mandali went to see a cricket match in Poona. It was getting late, and we had been expecting Baba back for some time. At about 6:30 p.m. we heard a car pull up. I was eagerly waiting to greet Baba when He came in, but Baba did not come in. And the car was not our car filled with mandali; it was a strange car carrying just Baba and Vishnu.

Vishnu told us that there had been an accident and we found that darling Baba was hurt. He was in great pain, and He could hardly move.

We girls were alone in the house, but we brought a chair, placed it beside the car, and helped Baba into it. It was very difficult for Baba, but somehow we helped Him into the chair and carried Him inside. Baba's tongue was very badly cut, and His chin and His eyelid, too. And His beautiful right shoulder was badly bruised. We learned that Dr. Nilu had been killed in the accident, and that Eruch and Pendu had been taken to the hospital. We also learned that the accident had happened between Poona and Satara, quite some distance from Satara.

Dr. Donkin came over from the men's quarters to examine Baba and he found that Baba could not stand. He took Baba to the Civil Hospital in Satara, and an X-ray taken there showed that Baba's right hip was fractured. The doctor at the Civil Hospital put Baba in a plaster, not only around His leg, but also around His stomach. Baba was already suffering so much and, with this cast on, He was very, very uncomfortable.

Dr. Donkin and Dr. Goher were not at all happy with Baba's treatment so Dr. Donkin went quickly to Poona, where he found another orthopaedic surgeon. Baba was taken by ambulance to this doctor's hospital, but this place was not suitable either. Dr. Donkin continued searching and finally he heard of a very good military doctor, a Dr. Chatterji, who knew what was to be done. Dr. Chatterji

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did all that he could, and he told Baba that He was to take rest for a whole month.

What had happened in the accident was this: Baba had placed His foot on the dashboard of the car, and in the accident the car had rolled over a bridge. The shock had pushed the head of Baba's femur into the cup of the joint so hard that the cup was broken in the middle. The fluid that lubricates the joint was destroyed, too, and, as this cannot be replaced, it was forever a bad injury.

We had come quickly to Poona to stay in a house called Silver Oaks that Meherjee Karkaria had arranged for us. Dr. Donkin got Baba a special bed, and Baba came to stay at Silver Oaks where we could look after Him. Meheru's sister Naggu, who is a doctor, came from Bombay, where she was then staying, to help us take care of Baba. She and Goher would confer with each other about the best treatment for Baba.

One evening when we were with Baba in His room He told us, "Now go to bed early tonight so you can have a good rest and feel refreshed in the morning."

Baba Himself was feeling restless, but He did not mention it to us then. We got ready for bed and were in bed by about 9 o'clock, but around midnight Goher came to our room. "Wake up, Baba wants us," she told us. I quickly got out of bed, combed my hair, put on something presentable, and went to Baba's room where we stood around His bed.

Baba said that He had forgotten to give us a prayer that He wanted us to say. Then He told us that He could not sleep, and that He was feeling restless and agitated both in mind and body. Baba knew now that He would not be able to walk as He had in the past. He loved to walk very quickly here and there, seeing to His work, but He had now given this up for our sakes, and facing this was a great suffering for Baba. Baba told us that it was a help to Him to have me and the others there with Him while He was passing through this. He was so restless that finally Goher and Naggu decided to give Him an injection. I remember Naggu swabbing Baba's arm with alcohol and holding His hand, while Goher gave the injection. We girls then stood by Baba's bed and said a prayer for Him to have a restful night.

From then on, for some time, Baba continued to have us awakened each night at midnight to be with Him for a while during the night.

For a number of days now Baba had been lying on His back, and I had not been able to brush or comb His hair. I always braided Baba's hair and tied the braid with a tiny ribbon. As Baba had fine, curly hair, the short hairs on His head would make lovely curls. I loved to see these little curls, but this part of His hair was

now very knotted. At last, after many days of lying flat, Baba was propped up on some pillows. "Do My hair," He told me. So I undid His braid, but I could not undo the knots in His fine hair quickly. I tried and tried until Baba, Who was feeling impatient because He was tired of being in bed, asked, "What are you doing?"

I explained to Him, "I can't get the knots out, Baba. It has to be done every day if the knots are to come out quickly. The only thing to do is to cut part of Your hair, if You'll let me," and Baba agreed. So that day I cut Baba's hair; I cut the curls that had become so matted.

The doctor came each day to check on Baba's progress. One day He told Baba, "You shouldn't stay in this small bedroom all day. Go out on the verandah and enjoy the trees, and go for an outing in the car every day. It's a good distraction from the pain of Your hip."

Baba liked the idea, and He began to go out for three-quarters of an hour for a drive with a few of the men mandali. When Baba left we rushed about His room, dusting everything, washing the floor, changing His sheets, and so on, so that when Baba returned everything was fresh and clean for Him.

After His drive Baba would lie down on His bed to rest, and He let us press His feet for a while. As we did this He would ask us to tell Him about our childhood. He took such a real interest in all the little details of these days in our lives. When I told him some story about a particular teacher at my school who had been kind to me, Baba Himself, the next day, brought up that teacher's name and asked me to tell Him more about her.

This accident was very serious. Just how serious and how much Baba was to suffer from it we did not then know. Gradually, with physiotherapy and exercises, Baba's health improved enough for us to be able to return to Meherazad for Baba's birthday in 1957.



Meher Baba and Mehera standing in front of the Meherazad main house in the late 50's.

13

Meherazad, Baba's Home

February 1957 to 31 January 1969



In February 1957 Baba came to Meherazad from Poona, and this was to be His home until He dropped His physical Form on 31 January 1969. Up to Baba's second accident, a major part of His work since the late thirties had been contacting His beloved children, the masts, and this had entailed travelling all over India. Now, apart from the summer months which were spent annually at Guruprasad in Poona (except for the summer of 1958 when Baba stayed in Mahabaleshwar at Shapoor Hall, occasional short visits to Bombay when He would stay at Ashiana with Nariman and Arnavaz, and Baba's brief trip to the U.S.A. and Australia in mid-1958) Baba stayed only at Meherazad. Because of His health, Baba was now more inaccessible to His lovers. But from time to time the door to the Beloved opened wide, as in 1962 for the East-West Gathering at Guruprasad, the 1965 Easterners' darshan at Guruprasad, and the intimate darshans that Baba usually permitted during His visits to Guruprasad. In 1968 Baba did intensive seclusion work both at Meherazad and Guruprasad, and in 1968 He declared, "My work is now finished 100% to My satisfaction."

Now that Baba had stopped travelling, Mehera and the women mandali at Meherazad - Mani, Dr. Goher, Meheru, Naja, Rano - were constantly with Him for the next twelve years.

So we came back with Baba to live at Meherazad. Meherabad means "Meher flourishing" and Meherazad means "Meher free". Meherazad is so blessed to have been Baba's home, the place where He stayed longer than anywhere

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else. Baba has walked so often in the garden here, done His seclusion work here, worked with His masts here, sat with His mandali here, met His Eastern and Western lovers here, taken His food here, and rested here for the last twelve years of His life; and many times before then. So much He has done here. And Baba left His physical Form here at Meherazad.

We arrived at Meherazad just in time for Baba's 63rd birthday, and when we asked Baba if He would like us to celebrate His birthday He said, "Yes, but only amongst ourselves, don't invite anyone else."

So we had a small cake made, and on Baba's birthday we decorated it with some little yellow flowers. We had been away from Meherazad for so long that there was no longer any real garden here. Kaka Baria had been taking care of Meherazad by himself for years, with just Bhooty, the Tibetan mastiff, for company, and there was no one to help him take care of the garden. We did find a lone rose bush with just a single rose on it, and this rose we picked and put on top of Baba's birthday cake. We put some little candles on it, too.

Darling Baba never recovered completely from the second accident, and these last twelve years were most difficult for Him. Always He had very lovely, strong legs, and He loved walking. Even after the first accident Baba could walk fast, and the mandali had to run after Him to keep up. But now Baba could not walk properly. So much Baba denied Himself for His love for each one of us; even for those who do not love Him. Baba loved to talk, and He could not talk. He loved to walk, and now He could not enjoy even that. He was helpless. Baba could not move as He would like to, and He could not even dress Himself. So this life now was very difficult for Him.

At first, after the accident, Baba stayed downstairs, but when we returned from the summer months in Poona in 1957 He returned to His old room upstairs. But from 1958 it was very hard for Baba to climb the stairs, so we asked Him to move to the room downstairs, which is now called Baba's bedroom, and which then was occupied by Goher, Naja and Meheru. Baba agreed, and before He could change His mind, we very quickly had His bed and furniture brought down. And it was fortunate that Baba did move, because as time went by we had to look after Him more and more.

Before I tell you how we passed our days with Baba at Meherazad I must introduce Mastan, the dog who was Baba's favourite pet, as he was a part of Baba's household during these years.

Meherazad, Baba's Home

Mastan was a three-month old puppy living at Meherazad with his mother, Bhooty, when we returned here. Baba's horse Sheba, and Peter, Mani's cocker spaniel, had already been sent to Meherazad from Satara. Sheba stayed at Meherazad for a little while. But our compound is too small and the surrounding countryside too rough for a horse to be able to get proper exercise safely, so she was given into the keeping of the Military Riding School in Ahmednagar. Several years later we watched her win a race in Poona.

Mastan's mother, Bhooty, was a very fine watchdog, but she was not used to us at all. Baba told us, "She doesn't know you, and if she is ever loose she might go for you." So every day Baba had her brought on a leash to see us. She would look at each one of us as if to say, "Do I know you? Who are you all?" It was a most extraordinary look. She was a very intelligent dog.

"Let her get your scent," Baba said. "Let her know that you belong here." And He had us break an egg into her plate, watch while she ate it, then hold out our hands for her to smell. Like this Baba made sure that Bhooty recognized us and made friends with us.

At this time Mastan was still a little puppy. He and Peter really loved each other, and they loved to play together. But gradually Mastan grew, so that by the time he was one year old, he was a big, hefty dog. Peter, of course, stayed the same size, and he would look at Mastan as if to say, "How did you get so big?" He could not believe his eyes! And although he was big, Mastan was still a young dog, and he still wanted to play with Peter. Now these games were too rough for Peter, who would get hurt in their romplings, but Peter was very clever. When he saw that Mastan was in a playful mood he would run to our doormat, lie down on it so he had a soft cushion underneath, and only then invite Mastan to play.

Mastan grew into a very fine-looking dog, but, although his father was an Alsatian, his ears did not stand up. I thought that perhaps he would look even more handsome with pointed ears. So one morning I held Mastan in the frame of one of our drawing room windows, while Meheru took a snapshot of us from outside. And for this photo I held Mastan's ears up! The film was developed, and Mastan looked very nice in this photo with his pointed ears and handsome muzzle. We showed this photo to Baba, and it was one that He especially liked.

In many ways Baba showed His love for Mastan. When we first came back to Meherazad Baba did not have His meals in the dining room; He had them in His bedroom. Naja cooked for Baba, then I took Him the tray and served Baba His food. While Baba ate, we sat with Him. And when Baba was finished He always



Mehera, holding Mastan's ears up and leaning out the west window of the main house sitting room, in the late 50's.

said, "Now bring Mastan," so I ran to free Mastan. I would tell him, "Go to Baba, Mastan, go to Baba," and he would go galloping to Baba's room and stand in front of Baba.

In the meantime, Rano and Mani had put a sheet folded in half on the foot of Baba's bed. When Mastan arrived Baba would pat the foot of the bed to signal to Mastan, and Mastan would jump up on the bed and lie at Baba's feet. Then he would look at Baba and look at us as if to say, "See where I am sitting!" Mastan looked so proud.

Meherazad, Baba's Home

"Bring Mastan's food," Baba would tell me. So we brought his food, and then Baba would feed Mastan with His own hands on His own bed. How fortunate Mastan was, and how happy he was to be fed by Baba. When the tasty bits were finished Baba would pat Mastan, and I would tell him, "Kiss Baba, Mastan, kiss Baba." We had taught Mastan to kiss Baba, which he did very sweetly. Baba would bend down to receive Mastan's kiss, while Mastan put up his nose as if to kiss Baba.

Baba loved animals, and out of all His many pets Baba loved Mastan the most. But Baba was also very strict with him. When Mastan was not in the house, he was never loose. Mastan was always tied up so that he could not go to the village to mix with the other dogs.

So that is Mastan. And now I can tell you how we spent our days at Meherazad. Around six in the morning and sometimes, in later years, later than that, after the mandali on nightwatch had left, Baba called us. Baba had a button by His bed that rang a battery-operated bell, and when He wanted to get up Baba pressed this button. We waited outside, and as soon as we heard the bell we quickly opened Baba's bedroom door.

I came in first and kissed Baba on His cheek good morning. "Did You rest well, Baba," I asked. Baba would gesture "yes" or "no" and He always asked how I had slept. Then I would ask, "Would You like to get up now, Baba?" When Baba said "yes," I gave Him His sadra and helped Him put it on, then held out His coat for Him.

I remember one cold morning when Baba was in a hurry to put on a warm coat. I held out the coat for Him, He put it on, and then He started buttoning it up Himself. But Baba buttoned it crookedly, so He undid all the buttons, and then pulled both bottom ends of the coat together to get it even. It was a very simple gesture, but Baba looked so sweet at that time sitting up in bed with His feet on the cushion, pulling His coat ends together, then buttoning His coat. He was like a child; so beautiful Baba was. And the cushion on which His feet rested is still on the floor by His bed.

Dr. Ginde, one of the doctors who treated Baba, had told Goher that, because of His injury, Baba must rest His feet on a cushion and not on the hard floor. We sent for some cotton wool, cleaned it of seeds and so on, and made this cushion ourselves. Dr. Ginde had also said that Baba must have a cushion under His right hand as well. We also made that, and it is still here on darling Baba's bed. So now

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when we bow down at Baba's bedside we kiss the cushion on the floor in memory of His beautiful lotus feet.

After Baba put His coat on He would sit on His bed for a little while and chat with us, then sometimes He lay down again for just fifteen or twenty minutes and had us massage His feet and legs.

Four of us - Mani, myself, Dr. Goher and Meheru - sat around Baba's bed. In cold weather, if the cover had fallen off Baba's back, I would pick it up and cover Him again, and see that Baba was comfortable. But, in the meantime, the other three girls would have started massaging Baba's feet, and there would be no place for me to sit. Then Baba would tell me, "Do My hand," and I would massage His hand and shoulder. Perhaps He did not need to be massaged there, but Baba asked me to do it so that I should not feel left out. Baba was very sweet like that. He was very considerate and very loving.

Then, holding my hand for support, Baba would slowly get up from the bed and slowly walk to the dining room. There He would gargle, and I would help Him wash His face at the table. Now that His hip joint was broken it was very painful for Baba to stand for long, and He even had to wash His hair sitting at the dining table. Baba could not stand up at the basin the way He used to.

Baba loved to listen to music, and while He was having His breakfast Goher would turn on a little transistor radio. She would search until she found some music that Baba liked. After breakfast I gave Baba His shaver. Baba shaved every day, and after shaving He always felt His face to see if He had missed anything. Then I brushed and combed Baba's hair while He listened to music on the radio.

Talking of Baba's shaving reminds me of how Baba teased us. One day Baba was sitting in His chair at the dining table, and I had given Him His shaver. Instead of shaving, Baba put the shaver down on the table, and looked at us standing around Him with a twinkle in His eyes. Of course, we were all girls and so quite free from having to shave.

"You know, the next time I come I will see that women have to shave and not men," He told us.

We were all so startled. "No, Baba, please don't do that! No, Baba!" we begged.

"Why not?" He asked.

"Baba," we replied, "we women have problems enough without shaving."

"All right then," Baba said. "Don't be afraid. Men will have to shave as now." Baba liked to have fun with us like that.

Meherazad, Baba's Home

When Baba finished His breakfast and shaving, it was time for Him to go to the men mandali in Mandali Hall, which is in a separate part of the compound from our house. Baba would be there by 7:30 a.m., but as His health failed He would sometimes be later.

Up until about 1965 Baba could still walk to Mandali Hall, although very, very slowly. When coming down the steps Baba had to put His hand gently on mine for support, and He then walked through the garden with Goher on one side and me on the other. When we reached the door to Mandali Hall Baba would stop and tell me to go back to our quarters, and after I had left, Francis and Eruch, who were waiting for Baba, would take Him into Mandali Hall.

Baba has walked through Meherazad garden so often. He loved bright colours, and He always admired flowers and beautiful plants. So beautiful was His Love for everything, for flowers and animals and birds. I remember that in January 1969 Baba asked me to tell Him the names of all the kinds of birds that came to our Meherazad garden. Baba loved everyone and everything. And He loves His lovers very dearly; that is why they come to Him. Baba said that His Love brings His lovers to Him. So His lovers are very, very fortunate, because their love for Baba shows how much Baba loves them. To God, only love is important. God only wants love.

After 1965 Baba could hardly walk. He had become very weak and, because of arthritis, His hip joint was getting worse. Baba managed to walk from His room to the dining room, but He had to be carried in a chair from our side to the Mandali Hall and back again.

Thinking of Baba being carried in His chair reminds me of a little incident that happened one morning as Baba was about to leave for Mandali Hall. Goher found a Pakistan station on the radio that was playing qawali songs. This was Baba's favourite kind of song, but it is seldom on the radio. Baba listened to one verse and then said, "Now I must go, I'll be late for the mandali." As Baba got up to go to the verandah I quickly told Goher, "Follow Baba with the transistor. Why should Baba miss His favourite singing?" I helped Baba to our porch, while Goher followed behind with the radio.

On the porch Goher, still holding the transistor, blew a whistle to call the gardeners to carry Baba in His chair to Mandali Hall. They came running and picked up Baba's chair and carried Him off.

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"Follow Baba," I told Goher. So she followed behind with the radio until they reached Mandali Hall, and Baba was able to hear the whole ghazal!

When Baba had left for Mandali Hall Meheru and I rushed to air His bedding in the sun, clean His room, wash His clothes, and make His bed up for His daytime rest. And if we had some fruit such as figs, which when in season Gaimai would send from Poona, I would peel them and send them with Goher in a little saucer to Baba in Mandali Hall.

It was very tiring for Baba to be in Mandali Hall just sitting in His chair in the corner and not being able to move about. The mandali read the mail to Him, but it was also very tiring for Baba to answer so many letters. He could not speak, and in 1954 Baba had given up using the alphabet board, so He had to have great patience to repeat again and again whatever He wanted to say. The mandali could not catch every gesture, and it was with great difficulty that Baba answered each letter.

On coming from Mandali Hall Baba usually rested a little, and at that time Mastan was free to come inside the house. Now Mastan liked to sleep right in the centre of our middle room where it is coolest, so he was in Baba's way as Baba walked to His bedroom. But Baba told us, "Don't disturb him. Let him sleep." And Baba would hold my hand and, with great difficulty, slowly limp around Mastan. So much love Baba had for animals that He did not want Mastan disturbed from his sleep. And how much more love He has for each human being.

Then Baba rested a little, and I sat with Him while Rano read to Him from *Time* magazine. The others came, too, if they were free, but Naja had the cooking to see to and Mani often had to attend to correspondence.

Now it's lunchtime! When we first returned to Meherazad, as I have told you, Baba had lunch in His bedroom, but later on He came to the dining room and ate there with us. We have a big, oblong dining table at Meherazad, and Baba sat at the head. He asked me to sit on His right and Mani on His left, and beside Mani sat Naja, and beside me Goher was seated. Facing Baba at the foot of the table were Rano and Meheru. Baba's dining chair is still here, and every morning I put fresh flowers at His place at the table. And every meal now we say Baba's "Jai" and ask Him, "Baba darling, come eat with us."

When Baba was seated He told me, as always, what to serve Him, and after

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serving Baba we would also eat with Him. Sometimes Baba saw something on my plate that He felt like having, a piece of cheese or a pattie or a bhajia. And when He did, He would stretch out His hand very gently and take a little. I was so happy, and I always said to Him, "Baba, have some more." And when Baba was served fish He often broke off a piece and gave it to me saying, "It's very tasty, you will like it."

After the second accident the doctors had told Baba that He needed to have a high protein diet, so we saw to it that Baba was always served mutton or, occasionally, fish for lunch. Baba did not like to eat chicken. He usually had curry or spicy dal with mutton and rice for His lunch, and what He did is this: Baba picked out the little mutton pieces and lined them up around His plate, putting two or three pieces on one side and the rest on the other. Then Baba ate a little of the curry and rice or dal and rice, and two or three mutton pieces, and then perhaps a little more rice. After that Baba said, "I'm finished now. I want to wash My hands."

Most of the mutton was still lined up around His plate. "Oh, no, Baba," we said, "You haven't finished eating. The mutton is still there."

"That is for Mastan," Baba said.

"But Baba," I told Him, "Mastan has his own food. The doctor has said that You must have a high protein diet, so eat Your share. You should care about Your health. Mastan has his own food, and there is meat in that."

"No," Baba replied, "I've had enough, and now this is for Mastan. I love to give it to him, and Mastan loves to eat it. So I am happy, and Mastan is happy. We're both happy, and that is how I like it."

So I would bring in Mastan, and he would sit by Baba's chair and look up at Baba. And Baba fed him His own mutton piece by piece.

Every day this would happen, and Baba was not eating enough protein. He had hardly any breakfast, and a very light supper, and He gave the best part of His lunch to Mastan. So we decided to be very clever and order more meat for Baba's lunch.

We sent to the market for extra meat. Naja cooked it. I served it. And now Baba had many pieces of mutton on His plate. Baba looked around at us as if surprised to see so much mutton on His plate, but He knew we were up to this trick. He just smiled at us, so we kept serving extra mutton after that. And, to please us, Baba did eat a little more mutton.

After lunch Baba went back to Mandali Hall to be with the men mandali, and

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in the evening He returned to our side. Again Baba came through the garden, and again He enjoyed the flowers there. As I have said, it is very difficult to grow flowers at Meherazad as we have very poor soil and a very low rainfall.

I remember one year that the monsoon had failed, and we badly needed rain. We complained to Baba, "Why isn't it raining?" And Baba told us, "Wait, it will rain one day, just have patience." Baba always wants us to have patience. He had told us that it would rain, and after a few days it did rain. While it was still raining Baba called me to watch the rain and He said, "See, aren't you happy?" "Yes, Baba," I replied. And then I asked Him, "It's raining well now, Baba, but once it stops will it rain again soon? Will it rain again in fifteen days?"

Baba told me, "It's raining now, so be happy about that. Don't think about what will happen in fifteen days!"

Baba had His supper in His bedroom, just a very simple supper of rice and dal, without any spices, except a little garlic, which helps digestion, sitting in the easy chair given to Him by Harry Kenmore, and eating at a card table that Joseph Harb had given Him.

The original chair in Baba's room was quite old and its springs were broken, but Baba did not allow us to send for anything from the market. Then, on one of his visits Harry Kenmore brought Baba a reclining chair from the United States with a pull-out footrest. Baba accepted it to make Harry happy, as Harry, out of love, had taken so much care for Baba's comfort.

Because Baba would not allow us to buy anything, Baba's first table in His room was homemade by Meheru, who used bamboo for the legs. Then when Joseph Harb was in Poona in the early sixties, he gave Baba a card table which is very light and conveniently folds up. The easy chair and the card table are still in Baba's room at Meherazad, just as everything else in His room is as it was when He used it.

Almost every evening Baba sat in the arm chair, while Mani read to Him. We girls would be seated around Baba, sometimes sewing, as we listened to Mani. Baba loved crime stories, and His favourite detective was Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe. He also enjoyed the books of Agatha Christie, especially the ones with Poirot, Edgar Wallace and P.G. Wodehouse. Mani read all these to Him, and Baba said that Mani's reading relaxed Him and "lightened the weight of My work on My head."

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While Mani was reading we opened up the card table, placed it in front of Baba, and I served Him His rice and dal. Baba ate very little and very lightly in the evening.

When Baba retired at night we left His room, and the men mandali came to be on watch for Baba throughout the night. From the very, very first Baba never rested alone at night. Even in Poona, in His little hut on Fergusson College Road, Baba had someone sit outside near the entrance at night to keep watch. So, also, here at Meherazad Baba always had someone with Him at night in His bedroom. The mandali took turn by turn, and they came and went, not through our quarters, of course, but by the door in Baba's room that opens into the garden.

The night watchman had to be very alert. He could not shut his eyes, because Baba could not call out to him, and he had to watch for Baba's signal. Baba did not sleep as we sleep. He would just rest for a short time, and then He would want the mandali to help Him get up. Because Baba's hip joint was broken, He could not get up by Himself, someone had to help Him. Baba then would ask for a drink of water or whatever He wanted. Of course, I was never in Baba's room when the men mandali were there, but in the morning Baba would tell us how He passed the night.

And that is how we passed our days with Baba in those last years.

In the summer months, each year we accompanied Baba to Guruprasad in Poona. And there, also, we would be with Him, to love and serve Him in the same way. The very first time we had stayed at Guruprasad was for a few days during the New Life, when we had come from Mahabaleshwar to Poona for a short visit.

We were always inside the house at Guruprasad. I did not even go outside to walk in the garden, except on special occasions, so sometimes Baba sent us for an outing to the cinema. Those last twelve years Baba had stopped going to the cinema, and He would not be with us.

We would put on our good saris, and just before we left Baba would send for me. Baba liked to see me dressed up in a nice sari, and sometimes I would wear a little lipstick. Baba would tell me, "Go and enjoy yourself. When you are happy, then I am happy," and then Baba would embrace me.

And the next morning at breakfast Baba would ask all about the details of the film we had seen.



Mehera, Katie, Meheru and Arnavaz in the Meherazad garden in the 1960's.

Baba gave many darshan programmes at Guruprasad, but we never attended these programmes. We were always "behind the scenes". So we only peeped at the East-West Gathering in 1962 and the other darshan programmes at Guruprasad from behind a curtain.

As I have said, Baba's health was not at all good, and yet His Love for His lovers was so beautiful that He gave darshan to please them and to make them happy, even when it caused Him much discomfort. He loved to see others happy, especially His lovers.

At one darshan programme it was very, very hot, and Baba's feet had swollen

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with the heat and from sitting in one place for so long without moving. Baba was perspiring, but He could not get up. His lovers were garlanding Him and bowing down to Him and embracing Him. And, although Baba was so uncomfortable, He gave love to each one. With words it is simple to convey your message, but Baba had to give love and a little special attention to each of the hundreds of people there without saying a word. Baba had to use so much energy to embrace them and show them His Love without speaking.

Very gradually, as the years passed, Baba's health gave way. We did our best to make Him comfortable, but we did not know what was going to happen. We would try to amuse Baba with interesting stories, and He would just smile a little.

In 1968, much of the time, Baba was doing His seclusion work. At Meherazad He would do it in Mandali Hall, and at Guruprasad in His bedroom. And this work told on Baba's physical body very much. When He went into seclusion Baba would gesture "no noise." And we all still went about our work, but very, very quietly. There was to be no banging of pails or talking or dogs barking or even birds calling, and we tried our best not to do anything to disturb Baba's work. In Guruprasad Baba did His work in a big chair in the middle of His bedroom, and none of us were allowed to touch it. Baba put much emphasis on this, and I had to be very careful not to brush against this chair when I did Baba's room. This chair is now in the Museum Room at Meherabad.

One day Baba said to us, "People will want to see Me, and they won't be able to see Me." At that time we did not understand what Baba meant. We thought that many will come to see Baba, but perhaps Baba will be inside having His food, and so they would not be able to see Him. So we did not take it seriously.

In October 1968, I think, all of a sudden Baba said, "I tell you that the time has come, and it is very near." We looked at each other and thought, "Ah, yes, Baba's Manifestation is near, and He will speak and give mass darshan." How could we have such an idea that Baba would drop His body? It never entered our heads. But on 31 January 1969 He did leave His beautiful physical Form.

As I have said, Baba suffered for each one of us, for His Love for each one of us. In many, many ways Baba suffered. Baba had so much work and put so much stress and strain on His body with His fasts; with His seclusions; with His mast work when He walked for miles and miles in the hot sun and travelled in third-class



Mehera and Meher Baba in Mehera's garden, Meherabad in the late 1960's.

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trains for days without rest; with His contacting the lepers; with His bowing down to the thousands of sadhus and poor people; and with His two accidents. And Baba had to constantly put up with the natures of those around Him, and with many other things. So much He has gone through. I cannot tell you of all the suffering that He took upon Himself. And He used to just keep quiet and not say a word. Baba had to swallow all the suffering and all the difficulties He had to go through. Such a strain it was never to be able to speak out. We cannot know how great that suffering was for Baba.

Keeping silence all those years was most difficult for Baba. Baba's nature was happy and cheerful. He loved to talk and to laugh and to sing, but after silence Baba could not say anything. He had to spell everything out on the alphabet board. Baba had a very fine sense of humour, but if He wanted to be funny or to tease someone He would have to point to the letters on the board. And by the time He had finished saying it, half the fun was lost. Then Baba gave up even the alphabet board, and with great patience He would have to repeat again and again, through gestures, what He wanted to convey. And Baba's nature was to do everything quickly.

Baba loved to laugh, but even that sound He denied Himself and held back. All those years Baba had to hold back and not say what He wanted to say. Every second of the day, every minute, every day, every month, every year for forty-four years Baba could not say what He wanted to say.

In 1941 Upasni Maharaj knew that He was soon going to give up His body, and He wanted to see Baba one more time. Baba agreed to meet Him alone, but not in Sakori. So it was arranged that they meet outside Sakori. They met, and with tears in His eyes Maharaj told Baba, "Give up Your silence. Now it is bringing too much suffering." And Baba replied, "No, I have come to suffer, and My work is most important. I must finish My work." And how much Baba suffered as time passed. He never told us He was suffering, but He was.

And for those last twelve years Baba could not even walk. Baba lived those twelve years with great difficulty, yet not the sound of a groan or a moan did He make. His health was such that He must have wanted to, but He did not complain. Baba quietly suffered to the very end.

Baba suffered for our sake, for each one, and for all humanity, and for all creation. Baba has given a great push to every soul in creation. He is the Creator, and it all belongs to Him.

And Baba is all-forgiving, and very, very loving. Sometimes we made mistakes,

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because it is not easy to live with the Avatar. He always tested one. And when that time came, we did sometimes forget and make mistakes. But Baba would at once forgive us and say, "Don't worry. Take it out of your head, forget it." And we did our best to serve Him and love Him to the best of our ability.

So Baba has suffered for each one of us, and now we should love Him because He loves us and went through all this suffering for each of us. Always hold on to Baba's daaman and love Him, that is the one real thing you can do in this life. Baba may seem to try to snatch His daaman from your hands, so be sure not to let go, be sure to hold on tightly. Be true to His love for you.

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He Is Always With Us

February 1969 Onwards



When Baba dropped His physical Form on 31 January 1969 Mehera's grief was so deep and so heart-breaking to see that the women mandali put aside their own pain to try to comfort and console her.

At the end of March 1969, still grief-stricken and in shock, Mehera, with the women mandali, went to stay at Guruprasad, Poona, to be present for the Great Darshan that Baba had promised His lovers. At the beginning of each gathering Mehera stood before the crowd of Baba's lovers and greeted them over a microphone with "Jai Baba".

In June 1969 Mehera, with the Meherazad mandali, returned to Meherazad, where she lives today. There, for all those who come to greet her at Baba's home, as Mani says, "The absolutely clear mirror of Mehera's pure, immaculate heart, that Baba took great pains to keep unclouded by the dust of the world, reflects Baba's image, the image of the Divine Beloved, as none other can."

When Baba dropped His body, Mastan did not know at first what had happened. Then, one day I saw him come into the dining room, which he had never before done without first being called. He looked at Baba's chair, and saw that Baba was not there. And very slowly he walked around and out of the dining room, and then lay down in the passageway with a very deep sigh. A few days later Mastan came to Baba's bedroom alone, which, again, he never did without being called. As I watched he stopped by the foot of Baba's bed,

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and then very slowly walked in a complete circle around Baba's bed. And then slowly left the room. He knew then what had happened, and he gradually gave up eating.

After that I had to hand feed Mastan his mutton, but unless I put it right down his throat he would spit it out. So Mastan got thinner and thinner.

It was now the end of March 1969, and it was time for us to leave for Poona for the 1969 Darshan at Guruprasad. Mastan was left at Meherazad in the charge of a servant who loved him. Before I got in the car to leave I went up to Mastan and patted his head. "Baba," I asked, "You will make it easy for him", and taking Baba's Name I said goodbye to Mastan.

That was the last time I saw him; in the middle of April Mastan died. He had been quite hearty before Baba dropped His body, but he missed Baba's love, and he gave up his life. That is how faithful to Baba Mastan was.

Baba had told us, "I will see that next birth Mastan takes a human form, and not just as an ordinary human being. He will be a very good soul who loves God." So by Baba's grace Mastan will skip all the in-between lives and will take birth as a God-loving person. Only Baba has the authority to do that. And that shows Baba's Love for Mastan.

So at the end of March 1969 we went to Poona and prepared to receive Baba's children. His lovers came from all over the world to take His sacred darshan at Guruprasad. And we greeted them with love, as Baba would wish, but we felt very sad without Him. Then, at the end of June we returned to Meherazad.

One day, it must have been in July 1969, I was standing at a window in the bedroom that I share with Mani at Meherazad, looking out at a little flower garden that Baba would also see from His bedroom. I had planted it for Him to enjoy, and I was missing darling Baba's physical presence and feeling very sad and lonely.

Very close to my window is a large tree of the wild fig family. We call it an umar. It had always been there, so I never really noticed it. But this morning I felt my eyes being drawn to that tree. I looked at its trunk, and I could not believe what I saw. On the trunk of the tree was exactly the image of Baba's face looking so very beautiful.

"Oh Baba," I said. I was so excited. How sad I had been feeling without Him, and there was His lovely face with a crown on His head on a tree in His garden.



Meher Baba's image on the umar tree as seen from Mehera's bedroom window in Meherazad.

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And He was looking in my bedroom window. I knew that Baba was showing me that He had not forgotten us; that He is always here with us; that He is in the tree, inside the house, in every heart; that He is God, and He is everywhere. Baba was giving us proof that He is with us all the time, and so I felt a little consoled and comforted.

I quickly called Mani to see Baba's lovely image, and Mani called all the girls. The next day the men mandali, too, were called. (And later the whole of nearby Pimpalgaon village came to see it, too.) Then we had the idea of taking a photo in case the bark which formed the image changed. Mani took the photos, and she sent them to the West for His lovers there to see.

Every morning I pick a marigold, a flower that I know Baba liked, kiss it, and put it in a little crack in the bark near His crown. And for many years I used to sweep around the tree, because the birds eat the wild figs growing on it and drop half-eaten ones on the ground around it. Now a gardener sweeps there, because bending to sweep with an Indian-style broom has become difficult for me. For seven years the image was very clear and very beautiful, but then the bark began to shed and it is no longer clear in the daytime. It has served its purpose. But now at night, after all the pilgrims have gone, the image of Baba's face is still very beautiful. Mani says that in the daytime Baba is in seclusion, and that at night He comes out of seclusion. And we bow to His image before going to bed.

And Baba let me know in other ways, too, that He was still here. Baba's room is cleaned everyday, and every evening His photos are dusted so that the sun should never rise and catch any dust on His beautiful image. One day in 1971, after doing Baba's room, I was standing in front of the plexiglass block containing Baba's hair which sits on a cabinet in His room. When I used to comb Baba's lovely hair I would save the strands that caught in the brush and comb, and also the curls that I so rarely cut. Harry Kenmore had some of these curls preserved in a block of clear plexiglass for all of His lovers to see.

This day the thought came to me to see if Baba's face could be found in the way the hair was arranged in the plexiglass. Somehow I felt that it must be there, and that I must find it. So I stood for a long time looking and looking at Baba's hair. Then, as if Baba peeked out to show me that His face was there, I saw it! It is so clear and beautiful, and now it is pointed out to all His lovers who come to His room at Meherazad. Again Baba was giving us a sign that He is everywhere, and, while we cannot see Him, He can see us.

Since 1969 we pass our days greeting His dear children who come from all over

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the world, and sharing with them stories of our life with Beloved Baba. Baba said, 'Whenever two or more talk of Me, I am amongst them,' and His dear ones feel His beautiful Love and Presence here. At first I was very shy of talking in front of people, and especially men, as my life with Baba has been very secluded. But when Baba had me first greet the men mandali on 31 January 1968 He told me, "Don't be nervous. I will be beside you holding your hand." And on 31 January 1969 He sent Mani to tell me, "Mehera, be brave." So I remember that, and it gives me courage .

When Jesus was asked, "How shall we know You when You come again," He replied, "Because I shall gather My elect from the four corners of the earth!" Now every year more and more of Baba's lovers come from all over the world to have His darshan at Meherazad, and at His Samadhi at Meherabad.

Now in the night at Meherazad, after we have sung Arti in Baba's room and Mani, Goher, Meheru, Arnavaz and Katie have gone to bed, I sit at the dining table next to Baba's chair, and I think of darling Baba and His Love for us all, and how He suffered for us. And I remember all the little details of His beautiful Form, and I think of all the little incidents with Him ... of my first glimpse of Him at Sakori ... of Baba dancing and singing in the dawn light on the Post Office verandah ...

Baba was very beautiful. In every way He was beautiful. To look at Baba was beautiful; His eyes were beautiful; His hands were so slim and expressive; His feet and toes were beautiful; His legs were so strong and slender. And His voice was beautiful; His hair was so soft and shining and beautiful; and His skin was so fair and beautiful. Everything about Baba was beautiful.

And His Love for us all was beautiful: His keeping silence, His undergoing all the austerities and ruining His health with fasts and accidents, His doing His universal work, His taking the burden of suffering on Himself for the sake of each one of us was beautiful.

And now it is time for us to return His Love. You must keep loving Baba more and more, and make Baba happy with your love by remembering Him always. Think of Him and say His Name, and He will always help you. You love Him because He loves you, so be happy in His Love. Know that Baba is with you, and know that He loves you. And so be happy. He is the God-Man, and to be loved by the God-Man is so beautiful. How very fortunate you are.

Beloved Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai!