

Chacha at Satara. July 1947

Chacha

(Nûr Alî Shah Pathân)

*"Thou, whose exterior semblance doth belie
Thy soul's immensity."*

W. Wordsworth (a.d. 1770 to 1850)

MEHER BABA has explained that, besides qutubs, there are in all India* three men of the seventh plane—two majzoobs and one jivanmukta†—and Châchâ is one of these great majzoobs. It is certainly an irony that one drowned in God should have to remain essentially a puzzle to us; but, as one tries to understand this old Pathan, one's thoughts are stirred by the vision of a quest to capture the Grail of limitless bliss, buried in the depths of Châchâ's soiled and battered body. One's intellect may revolt, but the whisper of an intuition echoes along the corridors of one's mind that Châchâ is, in very truth, treading the splendid heights, while we continue to grope along the misty valleys of our rigid habits of thought. To one familiar with Sufi or Vedantic lore, and to a few Christian mystics, the existence of such souls is taken almost for granted; but to one not versed in these teachings the problem bristles with difficulties. To such, I can only suggest that he should read again Baba's exposition in Chapter One, which makes it clear why a soul such as Châchâ, merged in God, is utterly indifferent to his worldly environment.

The following notes of Châchâ's history are related by Baidul, who gathered them from various people in Ajmer. Châchâ, a Pathan, whose real name is Nûr Alî Shah, came to Ajmer¹ from his home near Peshawar² many years ago. His wife and son are still alive, and from time to time this son comes from Peshawar to visit his aged father. Châchâ was a *hâfiz*, one who knew the Koran by heart, and he came to Ajmer to teach Arabic. Soon after he arrived he went to the famous shrine of Khwaja Moeinuddin Chishti, and he seems to have felt irresistibly drawn to stay there. For

* Now India and Pakistan.

† The other majzoob is Baba Shahabuddin of Bhat, and the jivanmukta is Ishwar Dâs Swâmî of Yadgiri; see supplement.

¹ Map Reference D/5.

² Map Reference B/2.

twelve years he remained in the "*solah khamba*" graveyard in Khwaja Saheb's shrine, and something seems to have happened to him there, for he became thenceforth a majzoob. At the end of twelve years he emerged from the shrine, and for six years sat in one place. Thereafter, for a year, he went to Taragarh, the great fort on the mountain behind Ajmer.

From Taragarh he made his way to Indore¹, about 300 miles to the south, and there is a strange and hardly credible story that he died there, and was buried. At Indore, he had been known as Ganja Baba (ganja means bald). A year or so after he was supposed to have died some people came from Indore to Ajmer, at the time of the yearly festival at Khwaja Saheb's shrine and, to their astonishment, they discovered Châchâ, their Ganja Baba of Indore, alive, and sitting by a water tap near the shrine. It is said that they called others from Indore who had both known Ganja Baba, and had witnessed his death and burial, and they too confirmed his identity. This strange tale of resurrection then began to be disseminated abroad, and the fame of Châchâ grew in stature. Whether this story is the purest fiction or not, I do not know, and the reader will, no doubt, accept or reject it according to his inclination. At least, it is an example of the kind of strange legend that may grow up around a personality such as Châchâ. After sitting for some years by the water tap, Châchâ eventually moved into a tiny hovel of a room, in which he has lived for the last sixteen to eighteen years.

The contacts between Baba and Châchâ began in February 1939. In December 1938, Baba set out on a motor tour with a group of eastern and western disciples. From Meherabad, they went first to Hyderabad², set in a crescent of granite hills in the heart of the Deccan, and thence they sped north, through Jubbulpore³ and the forests of the Central Provinces, to Benares⁴, Agra⁵, Muttra⁶, and Delhi⁷. After seeing these magnificent cities, whose walls have been battered by the arrows and guns of countless armies, they turned westwards across the sandy plains of Rajputana, to Ajmer. Ajmer, the abode of Khwaja Moeinuddin Chishti, whose shrine is illustrious throughout India and the Muslim world, lies cradled in the dry Aravalli Hills.

A few days after they arrived, Baba began contacting many masts, and a small mast ashram was established. This ashram is described elsewhere,¹ Map Reference D/7.

¹ Map Reference D/7

² Map Reference E/9.

³ Map Reference F/6.

⁴ Map Reference G/6.

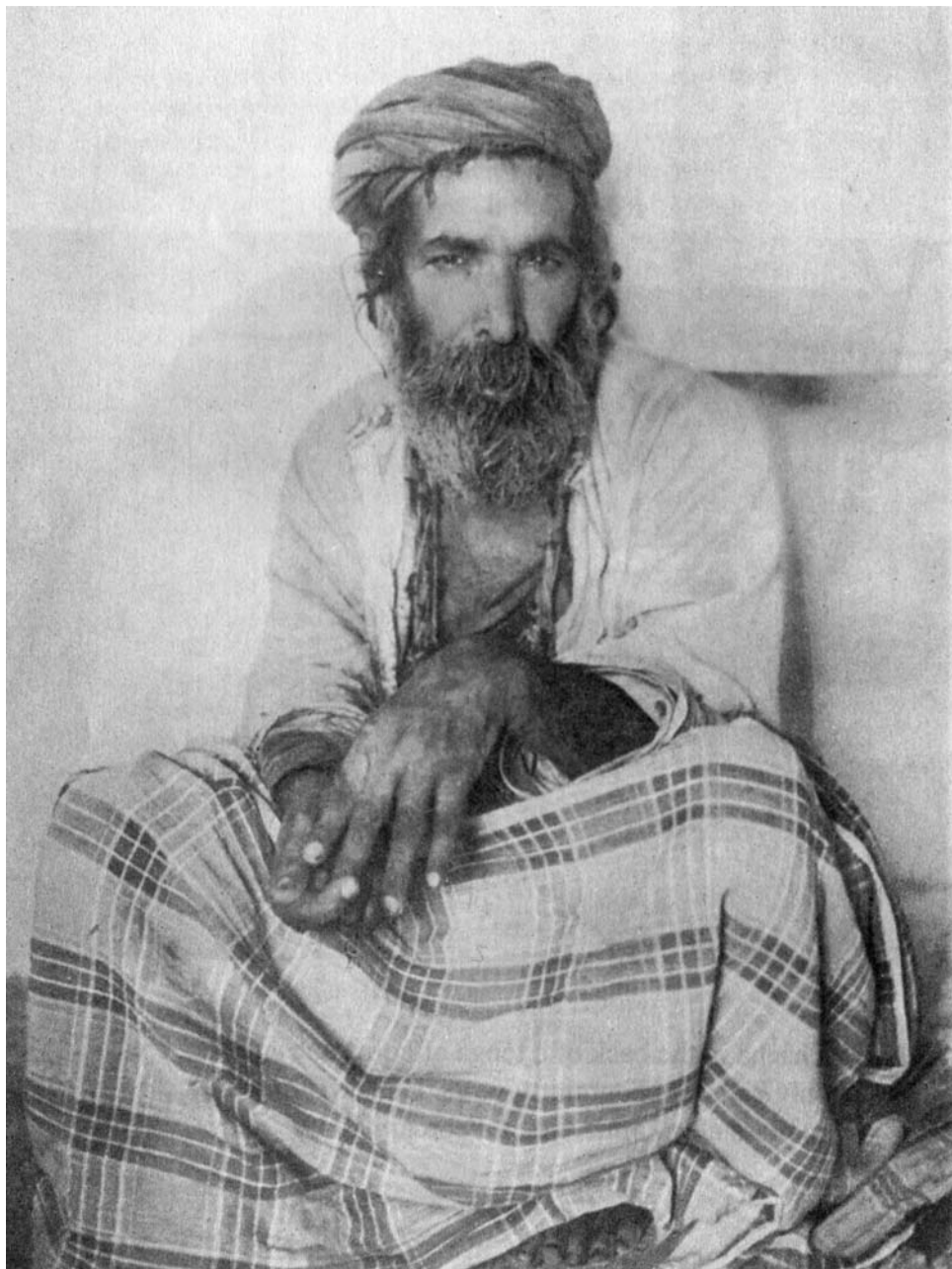
⁵ Map Reference E/5

⁶ Map Reference E/5.

⁷ Map Reference E/4.



Chacha in the back of a tonga after his one and only bath for about thirty years. He is wearing a spotless new kafni. Ajmer, February 1939



Chacha at Satara. July 1947

and I will, therefore, confine the following paragraphs to Baba's work with Châchâ.

At that time, Châchâ was living in the squalid and verminious little hovel near Khwaja Saheb's shrine, and was never known to move from it. An attendant (*mujâwar*) saw to his needs, and Châchâ himself was in a state of filth almost beyond belief. He was dressed in an old hat and unwholesome clothes that were stained and impregnated with stale tea, and the remnants of decaying food. The name Châchâ was given him because, in his fondness for tea (*cha*), he used to call out "*Cha, cha*", (tea, tea), whenever he wanted it. A great deal of tea, instead of being swallowed, would spill over his clothes, and also—heaven knows how—over his hat, and the latter was encrusted with stale tea and sugar, and stuck irremovably to his scalp.

Kaka was sent to bring Châchâ to Baba, and perhaps, as in the case of Karîm Baba, he was given the inner key that opened the door to Châchâ's consciousness. At any rate, Kaka astounded the local people by bringing Châchâ to Baba's house, thus doing something that no one had achieved before, for Châchâ had never been known to move anywhere at anyone's behest since the day he had set foot in Ajmer so many years before.

As soon as Châchâ arrived at the house, Baba and the mandali set about giving him a bath, but before this could be done, his hat and his clothes had to be cut away with scissors, for, as we had already learnt, they were so stiffened and adherent with tea, food, and filth, that neither his raiment nor his cap could be removed in any other way.

On that day Châchâ underwent the unique experience of having his first bath for about thirty years; and it became, in fact, his last bath also, for even during his stay in Satara in 1947 he steadfastly refused a bath, and is not believed to have been bathed by anyone, before or since. After this bath he was clad in a new kafni and he then asked Baba for a special vegetable and some *jawâr* (millet) bread. These were brought, and Baba fed him with his own hands. After the meal Châchâ demanded a tonga, and when one had been called he climbed into it, and telling Baba to sit beside him, the two set off together, Châchâ giving a brief order to the tonga driver to take them to Taragarh. Baba, however, did not seem inclined to go with Châchâ all the way to this ancient fortress, and took Châchâ as far as his hovel, and left him there.

For about two weeks after this initial contact, Baba rose nightly at 3.30 a.m., and travelled through the dark, empty streets to Châchâ's hovel,

and sat alone with Châchâ for about an hour each night. These nocturnal visits were necessary, because, by day, the crowds were too great to allow privacy of contact.

Between these first meetings in February 1939 and the visit of Châchâ to Satara in 1947, Baba went many times to see Châchâ, and sit alone with him, and for the dates of these various conferences the reader is referred to Ajmer in the supplement.

The critically minded reader may perhaps have wondered why Baba did not arrange to have Châchâ's execrable hovel cleaned out, or have him moved to a more healthy environment. Baba, in fact, gave orders on several occasions to his mandali to have the place swept and garnished, but Châchâ rebutted all such efforts, and ordered the men to go away. The same attitude of apparently being attached to his filthy clothes was conspicuous when Châchâ was in Satara in 1947—he actually opposed attempts to have them removed—and Baba explained, at that time, that the clothes and odds and ends that a mast kept by him, or on his person, had some inner significance; and it was for this reason that they clung so obstinately to them.

In July 1942, when Baba visited Ajmer to contact Châchâ and one of two other masts, an elaborate arrangement was made for keeping Châchâ amply supplied with tea. As usual, Baba went to sit with Châchâ late in the night, when the streets were empty of the crowds that hustled past his hovel by day. A large samovar containing a hundred cups of tea—with a tap to draw the tea, and glowing charcoal to keep it piping hot—was placed in the corner of his room. The idea of having this samovar near at hand was that, should Châchâ call for tea (which he usually did every few minutes), Baba would be able to fill a cup at once, without leaving the room, and that, as a consequence of the immediate response to his imperative demands for tea, Châchâ's mood would be kept at its best. In the account of Mohammed earlier in this chapter, I have already mentioned that Baba has stressed that he must fulfil the slightest whim of a mast, and that, if he fails to do this, the rapport is vitiated by an irritability on the part of the mast, who feels his wish to have been frustrated. In this way masts, like children, have the most inconsequent fancies, and become upset if these are thwarted.

On this occasion, however, as if to spite the conspicuous presence of the tea urn standing in the corner of the room, Châchâ upset all prognostications and, throughout the two hours of contact, he asked for tea only twice or thrice. Thus, after Baba emerged from his silent work, he gave orders for

the ninety-seven or ninety-eight cups of tea that were left to be given free to the few late pilgrims who were still passing in and out of the shrine of Khwaja Moeinuddin Chishti.

On another visit to Ajmer, Baba and his men went alone to Châchâ's hovel an hour or two before dawn. This hovel was a tiny room about five feet high, and above it there was another small room, with a few steps in the wall so that a man could clamber up and down to the upper room without much difficulty. In this upper room lived a man who had become a kind of attendant (*mujâwar*) to Châchâ. He used to feed him and generally see to his scanty needs, and would be given tips by those who revered Châchâ. Baba, whenever he went there, used to tip this man five rupees, so that he came to anticipate Baba's visits with much pleasure. On this particular morning, the *mujawar* was fast asleep in this tiny upper room, but some reflex, that connected the awareness of his ears with the happy memories of past tips, caused him to awaken suddenly in response to the voices of Baba's men below. In his anxiety to come quickly down to Baba, he forgot, in his half-awakened state, that about five feet separated the level of his room from the level of the street below, and he tossed himself out of the door, and fell headlong into the street. Fortunately, he came to no harm, and Baba and his men laughed very merrily at his expense. He got his five rupees!

In July 1946 Baba again visited Ajmer, and Kaka tells how jovial a mood Châchâ then exhibited. Baba entered his room with cup and saucer in one hand, and a kettle full of hot tea in the other. Châchâ, however, declined the tea, and asked for mutton and a chapatti (Châchâ is a Pathan by caste, and Pathans are great mutton eaters). This was brought and given him, and he called three times for more. Baba then sat with him for about one and a half hours, and Châchâ could be heard laughing all the time.

In the pleasant hours between supper and bedtime, when Baba's mandali sit about and talk of the day's happenings, or of anything in general, the topic often turns to the subject of Baba and his mast work. At such times, it is generally conceded that Kaka's outstanding achievement was that of bringing Karîm Baba of Calcutta to Baba in 1940. The consummation of Baidul's work was, without a doubt, the almost miraculous accomplishment of bringing Châchâ all the way from Ajmer to Satara in June 1947.

It is, perhaps, not possible to give an idea of the waywardness, the obduracy, or if you like to call a spade a spade, of the out and out obstinacy of a *majzoob* such as Châchâ. In their relationships with the world and its

workaday folk, such men take not the slightest notice of anyone. They appear either to harbour a kind of spiritual disdain for mankind, or are merely as utterly indifferent to it as a new-born child; and it is only when they feel the pull of a greater spiritual force such as Baba, that they occasionally comply with the requests of Baba's mandali. In this way, Gulâb Baba of Ellichpur, whom Kaka brought to the Jubbulpore Ashram in 1939, was interesting, for the remarks of Gulâb Baba showed that he felt Baba drawing him, fought against it, but was compelled to come to him, in spite of a part of his nature that struggled against it.

At the end of May 1947, Baba and his group moved from Mahableshwar¹ to Satara². Plans were made for a mast ashram as soon as Baba arrived, and Baidul was despatched to Ajmer with orders to try to bring Châchâ to Satara.

By the end of May the Indian landscape is scorched and forbidding, and the dry soil seems to yearn for the drenching monsoon rains that come in June. As Baidul traversed this dreary landscape on his way to Ajmer, one imagines the kind of long thoughts of hope and doubt that came and went through his mind as he drew nearer and nearer to Châchâ's home. He reached Ajmer in the last week of May. The annual festival of Khwaja Saheb was in full swing, the weather was abominably hot, the water-supply deficient, and the place was seething with crowds come to visit the great shrine.

For three or four days Baidul made frequent visits to Châchâ, but all attempts to persuade him to come away were fruitless. On the evening of 31st May he went again, by now depressed by a conviction that his task was hopeless, and Châchâ asked him to bring rice, mutton and curds, and to feed him. This Baidul did, and Châchâ then asked for more. This request having been satisfied, he finally ordered, and was given, some iced water. Baidul was then inspired to gather the forces of his persuasion and throw them in a direct and final frontal attack on Châchâ's obduracy, and grasping Châchâ by the hand, he told him to come along with him. To Baidul's astonishment Châchâ got up at once, picking up a piece of dirty blanket from the floor, and followed him out into the street. The two climbed into a tonga and went at once to the station.

Unless one has seen a religious fair in India, it is barely possible to visualize the colourful crowds of pilgrims wandering here and there in a

¹ Map Reference C/9.

² Map Reference C/9.

mood of cheerful relaxation. If one is part of the crowd, busy with no special task, the sight of such honest folk is fascinating. Baidul, however, bent on the definite purpose of bringing Châchâ to Baba, found these crowds an additional obstacle across his path. The railway station, as the gateway through which most of the pilgrims to Ajmer must arrive and depart, was obstructed by a milling concourse of passengers, and it was at once obvious that it would be impossible to get Châchâ either into the station, or on to any train leaving for Bombay. Baidul, therefore, hired a taxi, and coaxing Châchâ into it, drove to Beawar¹, about thirty miles to the south-west

At Beawar, he managed to get Châchâ into a train, and with many changes at many junctions, he bore his precious charge closer and closer to Baba. Whenever he had to get Châchâ out of one train into another, he would call for the special chair that is kept on every important station for carrying invalids, and would have Châchâ lifted onto this chair, and transported to the next train. On 3rd June the two arrived in Satara, and Baba's daily contact with Châchâ began.

Imagine a small, rectangular room, with whitewashed walls, a cool floor of grey Shahabad stone, two windows, and a door opening directly on to a sunlit gravel space between the back of the house and the low kitchen buildings. In front of this room, a screen of tattya made a small enclosure about the size of the room itself, and created a kind of private compound, so that the room was secluded from those walking to and fro on the various tasks of the ashram.

In one corner of this unadorned room, upon an oblong strip of matting, Châchâ sat. Throughout the five weeks that he stayed in Satara he never moved from this room, and although most of the day he sat in his accustomed corner facing the doorway, he would occasionally spontaneously move a few yards, and sit in an opposite angle of the room.

Each day, Baba spent most of his time plying Châchâ with tea and food, or sitting with him in silent conference. During these weeks, after sitting for an hour or two with Alî Shah, and particularly with Châchâ, Baba would emerge with face pale and tired, and often with clothes drenched in perspiration. It seemed as if, in his silent conferences with these great masters, he had to focus the rays of his infinite power through the lens of his body—and his body felt the strain.

An amusing incident occurred one day, that illustrates the kind of reflex material life that Châchâ lives. One morning, Baba had been giving him tea,

¹ Map Reference C/5.

and Châchâ suddenly began calling for more tea, offering it to Baba. and telling him to drink it. This went on for about a dozen cups, and Baba then began to feel it difficult to drink more. He therefore took the cup and saucer out of the door each time that Châchâ told him to fetch more tea, and a few moments later re-entered the room, handing an empty cup and saucer carefully to Châchâ, as if it were brimful of tea. Châchâ would then go through the motions of pouring the tea from the cup into the saucer—a common way of drinking tea in India—and hand the saucer, which he evidently believed to be full of tea, to Baba. Baba would then go through the motions of drinking, and this farce was played about fifty times, with Châchâ apparently none the wiser.

In Satara he not only refused a bath, but it took weeks before he would allow his filthy, tattered clothes to be removed. It is indeed remarkable that this great majzoob, having sat almost without moving in an execrable and loathsome hovel for nearly twenty years, has remained in a state of robust health, in spite of having flouted the basic precepts of hygiene.

While at Satara Châchâ was not given much to talking, and sat most of the day with his legs either folded rather awkwardly, or with his knees drawn up half-way to his chest, and one or both elbows resting on thigh or knee. His head would usually be bent slightly forward, so that his bearded chin lay almost on his chest, and his head would nod a little up and down most of the time, like that of a man dozing in a train. His eyes were usually but half open, and had the faint, milky ring at the edge of the cornea, so often seen in old people. He had a long face and head crowning what, for a Pathan, was perhaps an unusually small body, and the expression on his face was like that of someone dreaming a strange and lovely dream—with eyes open. The large portrait shows something of this look, and something of its gentle simplicity. He had a laconic manner of speech, with a thickness and indistinctness of the syllables, like one talking in his sleep, and would seldom say much more than "*Ao, ao*" (come, come), "*Jao, jao*" (go away, go away), "*Cha, cha*" (tea, tea) or "*Nahm, nahin*" (no, no).

Of his dirtiness, of his refusal to have a bath, and of his reluctance to have either clean clothes or to allow his bedding and immediate vicinity to be kept clean, enough has already been said. He was, apparently, unaware of the functions of his body, and had thus the same sort of indifference as a new-born child; but unlike a child, he cared neither whether he was fed or not, nor whether he slept, nor whether his body was

hot or cold, dry or wet; and yet in spite of this he remained in perfect health.

At the end of the first week of July Baba explained that his work with Châchâ was completed, and on 10th July Baidul set forth with him to Ajmer.

Baidul has described how, as the train drew into Ajmer station, Châchâ became suddenly radiantly happy, got out of the compartment spontaneously, walked briskly down the platform and out of the station, and at once sat in a tonga. Baidul climbed in with him, glad to find his work so easy, and the two set off to Châchâ's hovel.

Now, however, Châchâ's mood seemed to change, and when they arrived at the hovel he sat in the back of the tonga, deaf to pleas that he should climb out of it. The tonga driver, after waiting patiently for about half an hour, complained that it was time for him to feed and water his pony, and he unharnessed the nag, and left the tonga with the shafts resting on the ground. Châchâ, however, remained perched awkwardly in the back seat, and Baidul thereupon took hold of the shafts, and raised them slowly and gently so that Châchâ, in compliance with the law of gravity, was tipped out of his seat.

The people of Ajmer were happy, indeed, to see their Châchâ amongst them again, for it was not generally known that he had been taken to Baba in Satara. Baidul was told of a certain goldsmith of Ajmer who loved and revered Châchâ, and that during Châchâ's absence, this man came every evening to his hovel, and sat there weeping.

And so this great majzoob is back in Ajmer, and one suspects that the link between him and Baba will be renewed from time to time, and that Baba will either call him again, or will visit him again, as he has done so often before, in that strange and dirty room near the shrine of Khwaja Saheb.

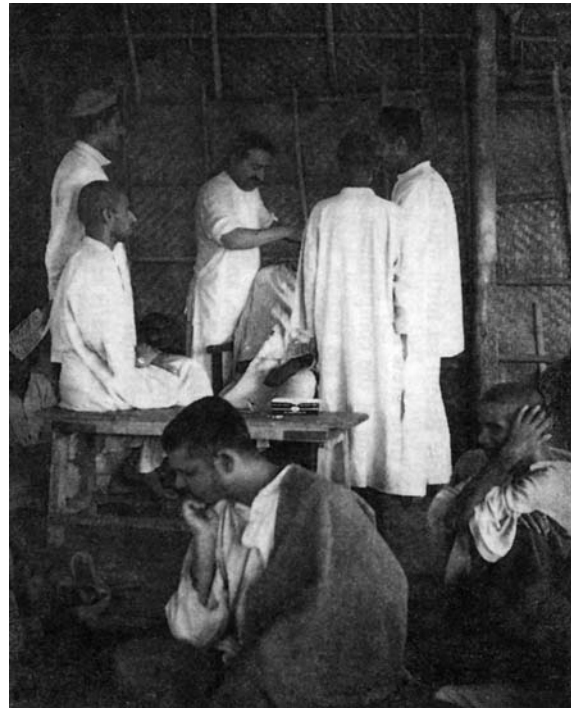
In conclusion, we may recall an extract from Shams-e-Tabriz, for though literally the words apply to masts, we may, I think, consider them appropriate to this great majzoob.

مرد خدا گنج بود در خراب

"The man of God is a treasure in a ruin."



A group at Rahuri



Baba at work at Rahuri. He is shaving the heads of the inmates. The bear-headed man in a kafni watching Baba at work, is Mohammed.

CHAPTER THREE

The Mad Ashram

August 1936 to September 1940

At Rahuri¹, Meher Baba struck the first notes of a new movement in the symphony of his life. After his vigorous achievements with the school at Meherabad, the early 1930s' were spent in forging the first links with the western world, and when this had been accomplished, he turned, in 1936, to this service of mad and God-mad men.

The Rahuri Ashram was principally for mad people, ordinary insane men from the towns and villages of the surrounding country. There were, as will be seen, a few genuine masts and a few God-mad, but the greater number were mere psychotics of one kind or another, with nothing spiritual about them. This ashram, although it stands apart from the later centres for masts, does, however, have one factor in common with them, and that is the nature of its external routine; and it is because of this similarity of the external work that Rahuri was, in a way, the starting point of the later work with masts.

The history of this mad ashram is complex because, although it began at Rahuri, where it occupied pride of place in Baba's activities, it later moved to Meherabad and Bangalore, and it was at Meherabad that the climax of its career was reached. It seemed as if this climax was the drama performed by the inmates in September 1938, for, immediately following this performance, about half the ashram was disbanded, and from that time forth Baba's energies were concentrated for the most part on other tasks, and the mad ashram passed, as a Victorian might say, into a slow decline, until its final decease in the autumn of 1940.

In this account of the mad ashram I propose first to describe Rahuri, and thereafter, to write a few lines about the more interesting inmates; and finally, I shall devote a few paragraphs to the various moves of the ashram.

¹ Map Reference D/8.

Rahuri lies about thirty miles north of Ahmadnagar, on the road that links Ahmadnagar with Nasik. and it was, therefore, of special convenience, because it lay between the permanent headquarters at Meherabad, and the Retreat at Nasik that was being prepared for the reception of the western group of disciples.

Rahuri is a compact country town on the banks of a tributary of the sacred Godavari, and is particularly gladdened by a profusion of trees. The ashram shared this benison, for it was built in a grove of orange trees, and there were a number of dense and wide-spreading mango trees of great height and age, which added to the agreeable atmosphere of the place.

It was in these unusually attractive surroundings that the temporary sheds of the ashram were erected, and a special one-roomed hut was built for Baba himself. A dispensary was also opened, which, within a week or two of its inception, became famous throughout the countryside. Every day hundreds of sick, many of them from widely scattered hamlets buried in the ultimate recesses of the wildest sort of country, flocked to this dispensary, and Nilu*, who was in charge, was busy from dawn to dusk attending to them.

In August 1936, as soon as the place was shipshape, various men were despatched to fetch mad and God-mad, and bring them to Rahuri. The management of the ashram was in the hands of Pleader and Baidul, the practical minutiae seen to principally by Baidul, since Pleader would go off from time to time to select and bring back those he thought suitable for Baba's work.

Baba's work—his visible and external work, was to shave, bathe, clothe, and feed each inmate, as soon as he arrived, and each day to scour the ashram latrine, and to bathe and sit in seclusion with a certain number of the old inmates. In this way he would throw every ounce of energy into doing every sort of menial task, and was, in very fact, Master of all, and servant of all.

The inmates were given every liberty, except that of stepping outside the extensive limits of the ashram garden. Whatever they asked for would be given them, and their paunches were better filled with wholesome and nourishing food than most of them had ever known before. There was, perhaps, nothing unusual in ministering faithfully to the physical needs of such people, but Baba's work did not stop there, and, indeed, that side of it was the least important of all. What Baba did was to give the human and the divine

* Dr. N. N. Godse.

touch to the most uninspiring chores. Like the fragrance of a garden by night, the essence of his selfless love permeated the darkness of these broken and distorted minds. The men came to feel this and, in their own queer ways, would reciprocate the love that Baba gave them, and many came to worship him as a Divine Incarnation.

These two factors of Baba's selfless service and superhuman love were sufficiently evident for a casual observer to sense their influence, but, in addition, there has always been an impression amongst Baba's disciples that the ultimate purpose of his work with masts, advanced souls, and the mad, is a spiritual one, whose application stretches far beyond the limits of his external and visible labours. It is, unfortunately, not possible to corroborate this hypothesis because, when Baba is approached for an explanation, he either remains silent, or his replies are so evasive that it is clear that he has no intention of divulging the arcana of what he really does. But this feeling *does* exist, and there is no doubt that the work that Baba has done with advanced masts since these early Rahuri days, has substantially added to the belief that the invisible issue of his efforts far outweighs their immediate and tangible results. All that Baba says about his work with the God-mad and masts is that he loves them and they love him; that he helps them and they help him. With this laconic statement we will, therefore, break away from further speculation, and turn to a description of the more important and entertaining inmates of the mad ashram.

Mohammed was brought to Rahuri soon after the ashram was opened. He was a real mast, and has been fully described in Chapter Two, as one of Baba's five favourites.

Besides Mohammed, there were four genuine masts in the mad ashram: Arjûn; Dagdû Buâ; Lâl Saheb; and one who was brought from Bombay for a few days only, and was the first mast ever to be bathed by Baba. Arjûn joined the ashram during its later phase at Meherabad, and he was easily picked out from the others because of his long, tousled, black hair and long finger-nails, neither of which he would allow to be cut short. He had a prodigious thirst, and every day drank two full-sized buckets full of water. He was a moderate mast.

Dagdû Buâ joined in Rahuri, and seemed to like it if you called him Bhâu, for he would then shrug his shoulders, hug his chest, and look happy. In the early days, he used to climb one or other of the great trees in the garden, and sit clinging to the slender and insecure uppermost branches for four or five hours every day.

When the ashram moved to Meherabad, he developed a habit of shifting piles of earth from one part of the compound to another, and for a time, he seemed to think that the main hall of the ashram was not as clean as it could, or should be, for he would bustle in five or six times a day and sweep it out with a broom. This meant that everyone sitting there was disturbed, for he seems to have been thorough in his work, and when obstructed by the reclining form of a fellow inmate, he would make him move out of the way. He was a moderate mast.

Lal Saheb joined in Rahuri. He used to fall at Baba's feet, embrace him with fervour, and call him God. He was a great friend of Pûnjia, a lovable halfwit whom I will shortly describe. He used to promise Pûnjia that he would bring him a goods wagon brimming with gold, jewels, and all kinds of treasure, and would marry him to a Raja's daughter. He would also fumble in his pocket, saying he had a crore (ten million) of rupees there, and would ask Pûnjia whether he should pull them out right away and give them to him, to which Pûnjia would always answer, "No, not yet". Lâl Saheb was a good mast, and when the ashram was closed in 1940, he was sent to Nasik. He is still in Nasik today, where he is widely revered.

The mast who was brought from Bombay for a few days had a habit of smearing his entire body with ashes and slaked lime, and he was the first real mast ever to be bathed by Baba.

Pûnjia was probably the most amiable and amusing of the mad. He was a goofy yokel with retarded mental development, but he was splendid company, and became the life and soul of the ashram. He was a native of Rahuri, and was the first one to be brought to the ashram. By nature he was blithe and sportive, and given to hilarious laughter at the slightest provocation. He loved rhythm of sound and body, and was seldom seen without a kerosene tin slung about his neck, which he would employ as a percussion instrument, and tap out a sequence of sounds to whose accompaniment he would fling himself into exotic dances. He so loved this improvised drum that any minor lapse on his part could be corrected by a threat to confiscate it.

After the ashram was disbanded, Pûnjia was sent back to Rahuri, and he always kept his tin with him, and would dance and shout Baba's name. He suffered a premature death in the great Rahuri flood. On 18th November 1946, a sudden ferocious storm caused the river to burst its banks, and more than half the town of Rahuri was utterly destroyed. After the flood subsided Pûnjia was found dead in a sitting position in the open market place,



Some faces at Meherabad. The second man from the left with the shaven head and deep set eyes, looking at the camera, is Lal Saheb. The smiling man centre back, with a blanket over his head, is Dagru Bua (Bhau). These two men were two of the genuine masts. The man on the extreme left with hand to cheek looking at the camera, is Ramzan.



More faces at Meherabad. The one with the tousled head of hair is Arjun, another of the genuine masts at Meherabad.



Sunlight and shadow at Rahuri; Baba, the enlightened, plays with Punjia. Note the kerosene tin on Punjia's lap.



Faquir Bua at Rahuri. Note for Westerners: The screen at the back is made of tatty.

closing his nostrils with his right hand. Perhaps he had been playing with the rising waters, and when the level touched his nose, he must have closed his nostrils to prevent the water going up his nose. He made, apparently, no attempt to save himself, but sat down with his back against a stone platform, so that, eventually, the water rose about fifteen feet over his head.

One of Baba's disciples who lives in Rahuri, and who, during the flood, spent three days marooned on the roof of his house with his entire family, told this tale of Pûnjiâ's end. He also described how a few days before the flood Pûnjiâ had a headache, for the relief of which he gave him some medicine and a cup of tea. He asked Pûnjiâ if he wanted to go to Baba. and he replied, "Yes, I am going to Baba soon".

Besides Pûnjiâ there were many others. Ghulâm Hussein frightened the life out of a young night watchman by coming up to him in the dark, pointing out Satan to him, and exclaiming how big he had grown. Faqîr Buâ, who had an old depressed fracture of the skull the size of a saucer, used to hit the other inmates from time to time. Once, having come up with a grin on his face to Baidul, he punched him in the nose. He then asked him why his nose was bleeding, and advised him to pour earth on his head to stop the bleeding.

There were a mort of others. Their eccentricities were not sufficiently interesting to need repeating here, and those who wish to get an idea of their odd ways should refer to Rahuri, in the supplement, where a brief description is given of most of the inmates.

At the end of April 1937, Baba decided, for various reasons, to move the ashram to Meherabad, and as soon as everything was in working order in the new quarters there, Baba set himself to his usual daily labours with the inmates. Mohammed was the pride of the ashram, and most of Baba's activities were focussed on him. This concentrated work in the ashram, with a marked emphasis on Mohammed, continued until Baba left for France in August, and a simple and consecutive account of the mad ashram from this time forth is almost impossible to achieve, because one's interest in it waxes and wanes depending on whether Baba was there or not.

In August 1937, then, Baba left India for France, and Mohammed—the Koh-i-noor in the crown of the Rahuri Ashram—followed him there in September. From this time, until the performance of the drama "Raja Gopichand" in the autumn of 1938, Baba gave only intermittent attention to the mad ashram.

I think we may best summarize the next fourteen months of the ashram's life in a few lines, showing whether Baba was there at the time or not.

August to November 1937	Baba in France; Mohammed taken to France; the ashram carries on under Pleader's direction at Meherabad.
November end 1937	Baba returns to Meherabad; a few brief weeks of concentrated work by Baba in the mad ashram.
December 1937	Baba goes on a nine-day tour in Gujarat; the mad ashram carries on as usual.
January to mid-March 1938	Baba at Meherabad again; he concentrates his energy on the mad ashram, and of course on Mohammed.
Mid-March to mid-June 1938	Baba at Panchgani, Mohammed with him there; the ashram carries on at Meherabad.
Mid-June 1938 to 25 th September 1938	Baba in Ahmednagar and at Meherabad again; the graph of his intimate attention rises steeply to its peak, the drama "Raja Gopichand", performed on the 25 th September.

One should not assume that, during these phases of Baba's absence, the mad ashram was in any way neglected, for the daily routine was carried out with scrupulous attention to all Baba's detailed instructions. There were, it is true, no new developments during these long months, but there was a full measure of honest and selfless service on the part of those working in the ashram.

The change came about when Baba planned the performance of the drama "Raja Gopichand" after his return from Panchgani in June, and during these few months there was a crescendo of activity, and a vivid renewal of Baba's intimate and loving contact, until the crucial day of the one performance on 25th September 1938.

The drama was the classical tale of Raja Gopichand, and the principal roles were played by the mad. The chief credit for instilling into these men's disorganized minds their parts, their cues, their gestures, their positions



The drama "Raja Gopichand" in progress. Meherabad, September 1938

on the stage, and so on, must be laid at the feet of Pleader, who coaxed and cudgelled each actor into shape with an exquisite patience. Costumes and scenery were hired from a theatrical company, and the final performance was witnessed by a considerable audience, for Baba invited many disciples from Ahmadnagar, Nasik, Poona, and even Bombay, to come to Meherabad for the occasion. Though not comparable with professional standards, the performance was an unqualified success.

This performance apparently marked the crossing of the watershed in Baba's work with these madmen, for, from that time forth, he began slowly to withdraw his intimate interest from them, and to descend the gentle slopes whence could be seen the peaks of new tasks that lay ahead. We are, however, not concerned in this chapter with the distant prospects, but will content ourselves to follow the gradient of the ashram's descent, to its final oblivion in the autumn of 1940.

To begin with, a few days after the performance of "Raja Gopichand", about half the inmates were sent back to their homes, so that about twenty remained. In December 1938, Baba left Meherabad on an extensive tour, and on this tour he began to contact genuine masts in different parts of India. Of the ashram inmates, Mohammed alone went with him. During this interregnum the ashram itself remained at Meherabad and, in Baba's absence, was looked after principally by Baidul. Baba did not return to Meherabad until the following May, when, for a brief spell of about a month, he gave an intermittent attention to the mad ashram, and his visits were like bursts of spring sunshine after the winter of his long absence. During these weeks there was a manifest profusion of telegrams, and members of the mandali moved daily in and out of Baba's hut with mask-like countenances, portending the incubation of new activities.

In short, Baba moved to Bangalore¹ at the end of July, and the mad ashram, which then had about twenty inmates, was brought there in September. The men were installed in some stables at the back of the mandali's house. Though allowed the freedom of the garden they seemed content to sit most of the day in the crepuscular dimness of the stables, or on the scraggy grass immediately outside their quarters. At first, Baba would come once every day, bathe one or two inmates, and imbrue the men with the wine of his enthusiasm by a loving embrace or an affectionate tweak on the lobe of the ear.

¹ Map Reference E/11

A few days after the ashram arrived, an elderly widow in the house next door, having been misinformed by the distorted and amplified voice of gossip that the ashram harboured maniacs of the most dangerous sort, sent round a note that she viewed with consternation the proximity of such dangerous people, and expressed alarm for her own safety and that of her servants. Norina, in reply, made a personal call on her, found her charming and sympathetic, and succeeded, apparently, in allaying her worst fears. Nevertheless, within a few days, a man was seen sticking pieces of broken glass on the wall that separated her garden from the ashram compound.

Not very long after Baba arrived in Bangalore, he opened a special mast ashram in a corner of the garden at the main house. This ashram is described in Chapter Four, but it bears a relationship to the mad ashram because, inevitably, Baba's interest was more and more concentrated on the few great masts in the smaller ashram, while the mad ashram—though it was not neglected—came to be a work of secondary importance. In the later months at Bangalore, when Baba's work with the masts reached its highest pitch, he would often not visit the mad ashram at all for many days, but Baidul would take Mohammed and five other mad across to the mast ashram every morning, where they would be bathed personally by Baba. At Bangalore, Mohammed was an inmate of neither ashram, but lived with the mandali in their bungalow, and spent most of the day hovering around the main hall. He was *persona grata* there, for, by the end of 1939, he had already become moderately cooperative, and no one felt his presence in the house an imposition.

At the beginning of April 1940 Baba left Bangalore, and returned to Meherabad by car. He followed a circuitous and fascinating route, threading an uneven path in and out of the warp and woof of the complex fabric of hill and dale that lies between the crests of the Western Ghats and the Konkan coast line.

The mast ashram, the mad ashram, and the majority of the mandali, came direct to Meherabad by train. In those days the Indian railways had a system by which large parties might hire a third class bogie completely to themselves. Some of these bogies had a kitchen at one end, so that the party could cook its own food, and be quite self-contained. Chanji, who was most astute in the handling of travel affairs, secured one of those large bogies for the party's return to Ahmadnagar. The journey was, by all accounts, an episode in itself, for so weird an assortment of oddities can seldom have graced the hard, slatted seats of such

a bogie—or indeed of any bogie—on this or any railway, either before or since.

The mandali, twenty odd madmen, five or six masts, a gazelle, a peacock, a sheep, a white rabbit, some geese, five dogs, three monkeys, and two pet birds, were all crammed into this one compartment, and sat cheek by jowl with tin trunks, packing cases, tables, chairs, and the inevitable medley of domestic and culinary equipment. The only absent friends were Nutty and Guppy, two pet pigs, who had been brought to Bangalore originally from Meherabad. Before leaving Bangalore they had been given to a farmer, on the express condition that he would neither slaughter them, nor dispose of them to anyone who might end their lives. As soon as the train started, Shariat Khân—one of the masts—tied bells round his ankles, and danced to a rhythm beaten out by Pûnjiâ on his kerosene tin. Pûnjiâ danced as he drummed, and made Eruch and Baidul join in. Once or twice stray strangers tried to get in, but changed their minds after one glance through the window.

In Meherabad once again, the mad ashram carried on much as it always had done, but was now almost utterly deprived of the refreshing leaven of Baba's personal contact. As soon as Baba reached Meherabad in May 1940, he went into seclusion on the hill, and although he gave daily personal contact to the masts who were close to him, he left the mad ashram to carry on without his external help. During these months the mad ashram was installed in what are now known as the "family quarters", a few huts and sheds on the outskirts of Arangaon village, about five minutes' walk from the mandali's quarters at Meherabad.

Towards the end of August, after Karîm Baba (the great sixth plane jalali mast) had been sent back to Calcutta, the remaining inmates of the mad ashram were again called closely into Baba's contact, and were installed in the mast ashram on the hill. For a few brief weeks these last lucky inmates enjoyed the daily and hourly stimulus of Baba's presence, but in September the mad ashram was finally closed for ever. Without previous warning, several of Baba's men were sent for, and were ordered to escort the inmates to their respective towns and villages.

This final dissolution of the mad ashram did not, in fact, cut deeply into the hearts of the mandali, and in the process of delving into the memories of those who took the most active parts in the running of the mad ashram, I found that there was considerable hesitation before the approximate date of its final closing was brought to mind. There is no doubt that the brilliance of

Baba's collateral and subsequent work with masts has dimmed the relatively humble glow of his contact with these mad people; but every great work starts from small beginnings, and I believe that the mad ashram at Rahuri and Meherabad bears just this relationship to Baba's later work.

In this description of the mad ashram I have deliberately dodged answering an unspoken query that will, I feel sure, arise in the minds of most readers. The question is, of course, did these mad folk improve at all, and become more normal, as a result of their contact with Baba; and if they did not, what then was the use of the ashram?

I think this question is a fair one, and the answer is, perhaps, not entirely satisfactory. In the first place, I do not believe that the primary reason for Baba's work with these men was to improve or heal their mental infirmities, and I am inclined to think that the few cases that did improve were merely in the natural course of things. Their improvement might, of course, be put down to the strongly integrating force of Baba's individual love for them. Love does work miracles, and Baba did give them more selfless love than any ordinary mortal could have given. My personal conception tallies, more or less, with the speculations of the majority of Baba's disciples, and I get the impression, which, at its best, is but an intuition, that Baba used these madmen as unconscious participants in the genesis of a spiritual reality whose ultimate value will far outweigh the transient external benefits of their sojourn with him. This assessment rests ultimately on intuition and on faith because, as I have already made clear so many times, Baba will not explain the real purposes of his activities, and one's speculations do not, therefore, have the asset of resting upon the authority of his statements. For that reason, since the matter must remain *sub judice* until Baba gives us an explanation of his own, it is undoubtedly better to forgo further speculation.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Seven Mast Ashrams

An Explanation

In the course of gathering the details of Baba's mast work in general, and of his mast ashrams in particular, an early discovery was that a hard and fast line could not be drawn between what constituted a mast ashram, and what did not. Baba has visited so many cities, great and small, all over India, where one or more masts have been brought to him, and have lived closely in his contact for a day, or a week, or a year, that it is, perhaps, not just and proper to make an arbitrary distinction and say that in this place, or in that place, he had an "ashram".

In this chapter an arbitrary line has, nevertheless, been drawn, and seven different centres have been classified as ashrams. It seemed that the amount of mast work, and the numbers of masts who stayed closely in contact with Baba in these seven centres, warranted their being placed above the salt and named ashrams, whereas the other possible candidates such as Bhopal, Jaipur, Lonavla and many others, did not quite qualify. But the line *is* an artificial one, and Baba has never himself drawn any such clear distinction, though he has, of course, checked the typescript of this chapter. The following pages also give emphasis to some ashrams, and describe others with a disappointing brevity, and it is chiefly the very early ashrams that suffer in this way, since much of the intimate detail of their daily routine has now been forgotten.

Unfortunately also, those things that matter most, such as the spiritual reality behind these centres for God-intoxicated souls; the ultimate reasons why Baba has done all this work; the invisible interplay between the utterly perfect being of the Master, and the subordinate spiritual capacities of the masts—all these things, although they can be felt intuitively, escape the power of words, and their explanation cannot, therefore, be found between the covers of this book.

But such secrets are, surely, Baba's affair and the masts' affair, and I suspect that, if Baba were to give an intellectual explanation of them, we

should be intrinsically none the wiser, for these arcana must be experienced in a way that transcends the intellect, before we can even begin to understand them. It is better, therefore, that we take a leaf from the book of a God-intoxicated soul, and seek to be overpowered by Divine Love, or like a God-absorbed soul, fly fast and straight across the measureless skies to the great homeland of the Infinite, rather than fritter away our intellectual and spiritual substance in profitless conceits.

1

Ajmer

February 1939

The following account of the mast ashram at Ajmer¹ suffers from a double handicap; the first, that I was not in India at the time of the ashram there; and the second, that those from whom the details of the ashram have been gleaned have now forgotten all but the most conspicuous events. It was, of course, a transient and simple institution, but in spite of that it has a singular importance in the history of Baba's work with masts. With the establishment of this ashram at Ajmer, Baba changed from the low gear of working with mad, to the higher ratio of working with God-intoxicated souls; and in this centre, albeit temporary, he gathered a few such souls under his roof for the first time. There were, of course, a few masts in the Rahuri ashram, but Rahuri was, basically, a centre for mad people, and Ajmer was the first ashram confined to work with masts as a distinct class.

In December 1938, Baba set out with a mixed group of disciples on a motor tour. They went first to Hyderabad, and thence north-east to Jubbulpore. After a few weeks in Jubbulpore they went to Benares, and from there sped up the flat, straight roads of the Gangetic plain to Muttra, Agra, and Delhi². From Delhi, they turned westwards across the sandy wastes of Rajputana, and, in the beginning of February 1939, reached Ajmer. Ajmer lies on the Aravalli Hills, and is a dusty, sun-steeped town, and although it has no particular commercial importance, it is renowned in India for the shrine of Khwaja Moeinuddin Chishti, the Saheb-e-Waqt of his age. The spiritual influence of this man is said to have made more converts to Islam in India than any forcible conversion at the point of the sword, and for this reason Ajmer is a spiritual centre, and a place of pilgrimage.

A compact little house, with snowy white walls and a flat roof—a house belonging to a local banker—was hired for Baba's stay. The western reader

¹ Map Reference D/5.

² The map references of these various places are given as footnotes in Chapter Two, where Châchâ is described, and also in the supplement.

should understand that there are countless small, private banking concerns in India, and that a banker is not necessarily anything more than a moderately prosperous business man. This banker's house in Ajmer was not, in fact, an elaborate mansion, but was simple, clean, and cool, and perhaps rather small for the group staying with Baba.

As soon as everyone was settled in this house, various disciples were despatched in the alleys and lanes of the city to find masts, and bring them to Baba. The greatest treasure was the incomparable Châchâ, the God-merged majzoob of the seventh plane, but since the account of this first contact in Ajmer has already been described in another chapter, there is no need to repeat it here.

Of the many other masts brought to Baba in Ajmer, there were two of unusual excellence; Lakhan Shah and Qabristânwâlâ. Lakhan Shah was a majzoob-like mast of the sixth plane, and his characteristics were principally those of a jamali mast, with a few traits of a jalali. Baba describes him, in brief, as seventy-five per cent jamali, and twenty-five per cent jalali. As far back as 1922 Baba visited Ajmer, and at that time he pointed out a tall mast in the bazaar, and Adi believes that this mast was probably Lakhan Shah. In 1939, Baba first pointed him out to his group of lady disciples outside the shrine of Khwaja Saheb. He was very shabbily dressed, but those who saw him then for the first time were struck by the radiance of his face as he gazed unblinkingly at Baba. Shortly after this encounter in the street, Kaka brought Lakhan Shah to Baba's house. He was a tall, slender man, with an oval face and dazed but striking eyes, was fond of singing, and sang with so melodious a voice, and with such a depth of feeling, that all who heard him felt strangely uplifted.

Baba shaved, bathed, and fed him, as soon as he arrived, and on the first night he lay down to sleep in the same room as Baba. Kaka was also in the room, and Baba ordered him to keep his weather eye open lest Lakhan Shah or Qabristânwâlâ (who was also there), should slip off under cover of darkness. Kaka, who sleeps like Ibn Saud of Arabia, and can wake to action at the slightest sound, was whipped out of his slumber by the noise of someone stealthily drawing back the bolts of the door. He seized his torch, and focussing it on the door, was startled to see Lakhan Shah, in *flagrante delicto*, making his way out of the room.

Kaka followed him out into the cool and brilliant night, asked him where he was going, and was nicely flummoxed when Lakhan Shah replied that he wished to respond to a call of nature. When he had done all that he



Lakhan Shah in Ajmer, February 1939

needed in this respect, he came reluctantly back to the house, and told Kaka, "Kaka, you are very thorough". It seemed, therefore, that Lakhan Shah had quite possibly planned to slip away. This attitude, in which half of a mast's being draws him to Baba, and half prompts him to show a clean pair of heels and be off down the road, has been experienced so often, that it is, obviously, a common reaction in the relationship between Master and God-intoxicated soul.

During the days that followed Lakhan Shah enjoyed Baba's constant attention, and once, when Baba pressed his feet, he told Baba, "Master, don't do that". Someone once asked him whom he had been brought to, and he said quite simply, "I have come to the Master".

He remained with Baba for about a week, and was then sent away, after being given a blanket and a fine, peacock-blue woollen shawl. On Baba's instructions, arrangements were also made with a local man to feed Lakhan Shah every day. In June the same year, after Baba had returned to Meherabad at the close of the motor tour, Lakhan Shah was brought there, and stayed for about fifteen days. The full face portrait of him, and the photo of Baba bathing him, were taken at that time. After this contact, Lakhan Shah was sent back to Ajmer, and since then he seems to have vanished, and has either died, or has left Ajmer for a place unknown.

Qabristânwâlâ* was a short little fellow—apparently in his early fifties—who lived in a tiny mausoleum (*qabar*). This mausoleum was a small shrine perhaps three feet high, built over a grave, with a low doorway at one side. Qabristânwâlâ was naked to the waist, and below the equator was clad only in a tattered and filthy lungi. He drank water from gutters, and, *mirabile dictu*, seemed to thrive on this rich but noxious beverage. He carried an old tin, and would ask passers-by for a coin or two; but if you gave him money without his asking, he would refuse to accept it. He would solicit sweets and tit-bits of food from shopkeepers and householders, and, because of the respect in which he was held, would almost always be given whatever he demanded. He was a cheerful little fellow, and had that most blessed of gifts, that he seemed always happy, and possessed the knack of making others happy too. Because of his rather comic face and short stature Baba nicknamed him Socrates, and explained that he was a very good mast of the fifth plane.

Kaka was the first to contact him, and he crawled through the dwarf

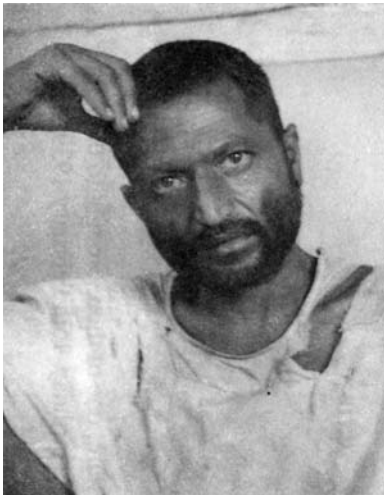
* In Ajmer itself Qabristânwâlâ is generally known as Kullar Shah (*Kullar* means an earthen pot).

doorway into the dark mausoleum, and squatting there within, he talked gently with Socrates, and tried to persuade him to come to Baba's house. In this way Kaka is most adroit in the art of wheedling his way through the gaps in the stockade of a mast's defence, but he found Socrates a trifle evasive to start with. He gave Kaka one *pie*, the smallest Indian coin, equal to the twelfth part of a penny, or the sixth part of a cent, and then clambered out of the tomb, and set off down the dusty city street. Eventually he was decoyed into a tonga, and brought, along with Lakhan Shah, to Baba's house. This sojourn at Ajmer was memorable, in the first place, for the mast work that Baba did there, but this work was greatly helped, and made infinitely amusing, by a certain *tongawala* (tonga driver) known as Fateh Khan. Fateh Khan was born a Hindu, but his parents died when he was a boy, and a Muslim adopted him, converted him to Islam, and brought him up in his own house. When he grew to manhood he was given a tonga, and earned a living plying his vehicle in Ajmer. As the years passed, flouting the laws of his faith, he developed a prodigious thirst for spirits, and became notorious as a great drunkard. Despite this, he was a great respecter of saints, and seems to have had three loves; his spirits, his tonga and pony, and the masts and saints of his dusty, but well beloved city of Ajmer.

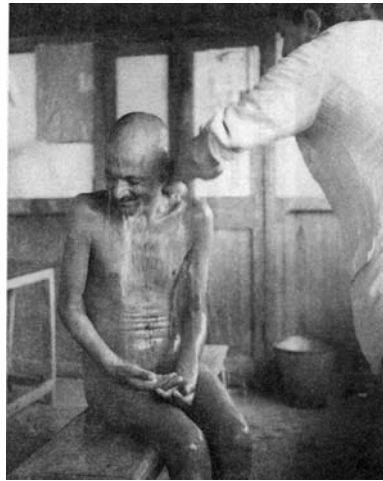
Fateh Khan was invaluable as a guide for finding masts, and when Baba went, night after night, to contact Chacha in his hovel near Khwaja Saheb's shrine, Fateh Khan would bring his tonga at two or three in the morning to carry Baba back and forth. He developed a deep reverence for Baba, and Baidul was told a touching story of his recent death in Ajmer. It appears that Fateh Khan fell desperately ill about two years ago (in 1945), and when about to die, he called for Baba's photo, which he always kept near at hand. He told his brother that he should always pay his respects to Baba whenever he came to Ajmer, and then, gazing lovingly at the portrait of Baba, he passed away.

It was in this tonga of Fateh Khan that Lakhan Shah and Qabristanwala were first brought together to Baba's house, and one visualizes with some relish the sight of a drunkard, a disciple, a fifth plane mast, and a sixth plane mast, all bundled into a tonga, trundling down a dusty lane on their way to Baba's house.

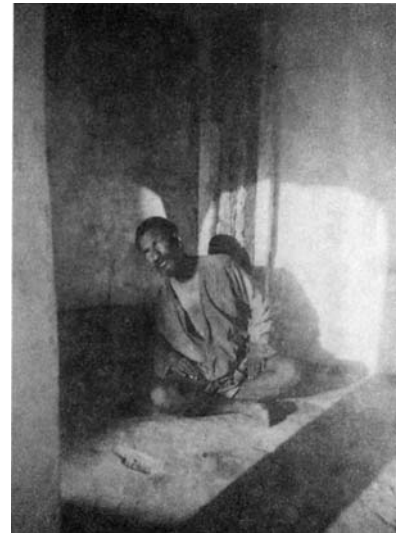
Qabristanwala stayed with Baba for about a week, and during these days Baba concentrated most of his energies on him; on Lakhan Shah, who was there at the same time; on Mohammed; and on Chacha, whom he visited every night for about ten days.



Lakhman Shah at Meherabad.
June 1939



Lakhman Shah being bathed by
Baba at Meherabad; note that
his head and chin have been
shaved by Baba before the bath.
June 1939



Qabristanwala. A photo taken in
October 1947. He is now
wearing only an old shirt. In this
photo Qabristanwala is sitting
on the floor of a small mosque
near his mausoleum; he now
apparently sleeps on the bare
floor.



Two men brought to the Ajmer Ashram on Baba's Birthday.
15th February 1939



Caught in a dramatic gesture; one of those brought to the Ajmer Ashram on
Baba's birthday. 15th February 1939

When the time came for Lakhan Shah and Socrates to be sent away arrangements were made for them to be fed regularly every day, but poor Socrates had by then become so devoted to Baba that he was most reluctant to go. He begged Baba to keep him with him, and it was evident that he deeply felt the impending separation. He was eventually persuaded to go back to his little tomb, and he also was given a blanket as a parting gift from Baba. Kaka made very thorough arrangements for him to be fed twice a day, and the necessary money for this was given to the man who agreed to look after him.

On Baba's birthday, which was celebrated on 15th February, about twenty men were gathered together at the house. A few were moderate masts, the majority mad, and a handful were destitute beggars who barely earned their daily pittance. Each one was bathed and fed by Baba, and Baba himself, and all those with him, fasted until the work was completed at two o'clock in the afternoon.

"Our" Mohammed was also brought to Ajmer, and throughout Baba's stay there, he enjoyed the daily contact of Baba, who would bathe and feed him with consummate patience and regularity. Other masts were brought from time to time to the ashram, but though bathed and fed by Baba, they were not of the same calibre as Châchâ, Lakhan Shah, and Qabristânwâlâ. In fact, so little is recalled about them that the supplement at the back of this volume does little more than mention the numbers who came and went.

It was evident that, when Baba had concluded his contacts with the three great masts, his work at Ajmer, for the time being at least, was complete. Reconnaissance parties were sent ahead, and plans finally crystallized into a decision to move south to Bhopal¹. At the end of February, the white walls of the banker's house echoed with the clanking sounds of sacks being filled with pots and pans, and the uneven "bang, bang—hick" of boxes being nailed down by those unskilled in the use of a hammer. One knows, only too well, the kind of desolate disorder that reigns in an ashram on the two or three days before a move to a new home; floors littered with scraps of string and shreds of old newspaper, and the daily routine of working, eating, and sleeping, disrupted beyond recognition by the urgency of packing. One longs for the morning when the roof of the sleek blue bus will be piled with stratum upon stratum of impedimenta, the lower layers compressed almost beyond recognition by those that lie above them. When the first suffusion of the dawn pushes the lingering night back over the western hills, the house

¹ Map Reference E/8.

ejects its occupants for the last time, and everyone clambers thankfully into their accustomed place in the bus.

And so it was when the party left Ajmer, wiser for the work they had done there, and for the lessons they had learnt, but with faces eager for the new phase that lay before them in a new environment, a few hundred miles along a dusty road of the timeless continent of India.

2

Jubbulpore

March and April 1939

After Baba left Ajmer in February 1939, he went with his large group by road to Bhopal, and after a few days there contacting masts, none of whom were particularly striking or important, he sped on to Jubbulpore¹. On this tour, that began in December 1938, Baba visited Jubbulpore in January 1939 on the way "up", and again in March on the way "down"; and it was during the second visit that the mast ashram was established. It began about half-way through March, and continued until the early part of May, though its most active period seems to have been in March and April.

Like the ashram at Ajmer, the attempt to describe this centre suffers from the defect that I did not witness it with my physical eyes, and have had to picture it in my mind's eye from the accounts of others. Memory plays absurd tricks, for sometimes a man will forget what were possibly consequential events, while an odd, trivial incident will stick in his mind perhaps for a lifetime. This intractability of the memory seems to have come into play in the recollection of the physical appearance of the Jubbulpore Mast Ashram, for the only thing that everyone agrees to who saw it was that it was situated in quite a good bungalow, that stood in a pleasant garden. So we will leave it at that, because the material framework within which Baba does his work, is, after all, of secondary importance.

The chief characteristic of the Jubbulpore Ashram, as distinct from most of the others, was that, except for Mohammed, who stayed for the entire period of Baba's sojourn in Jubbulpore, all the other masts, save two or three, were kept for a day or two only, and it is possibly this factor, more than any other, that has made the recollection of the chief events of this ashram difficult to recall.

The daily routine was like that of all Baba's special centres for masts. New-comers would have tousled heads and bearded faces cropped close with clippers, and after a bath, a new kafni would be slipped over their heads. They would then be fed by Baba's own hands, and finally he would sit with them in silent conference. Besides this treatment of new arrivals, those few

¹ Map Reference F/6.

masts who were resident in the ashram were bathed almost every day by Baba, and Mohammed, the old favourite, took up a great deal of his time every day.

Gulâb Baba of Ellichpur¹ was perhaps the most interesting of all the masts brought to this ashram; interesting not only because he was an important mast of the sixth plane, but also because he was another example of the way in which a great soul struggles like a wild steed against bit and bridle, when pressed into the king's service.

Gulâb Baba lived at Karanjgaon, about eight miles from Ellichpur, and when Kaka and Jalbhai (one of Baba's brothers) went to see him, he looked perhaps thirty-five to forty years old. When Jal and Kaka entered Gulâb Baba's house there were twenty-five or thirty people sitting about him, for he was greatly revered, and many people flocked to have the privilege of his darshan. Gulâb Baba at once said, "Did I not tell you yesterday that two men would come to me tomorrow, and see, they are here now," and he pointed to Baba's two men, thus making it clear whom he meant. Kaka and Jal then edged their way through the group of village people and sat close to Gulâb Baba, who then remarked, "He wants to paint me with the colours of Divinity, but I don't want that". Kaka interpreted these remarks as a reference to Baba, by whose contact Gulâb Baba would be given the final spiritual push. Kaka then pressed Gulâb Baba's feet, which is a gesture of great reverence, and uttered the words "Meher Baba", as he did so. Gulâb Baba then exclaimed, "He has caught me, but I don't want to go; he wants to send me to the great homeland (God), but I don't want to go there".

Perhaps a few words about this apparent reluctance to be united with God are not out of place here, and Baba has used the following simile to describe the progress of an aspirant on the path. He likens the path to a house with three steps up to the front door, and these three steps are the first three planes. Thereafter, there is a fourth step up to the threshold at the front door. This threshold is the fourth plane, an awkward and dangerous place, where the pilgrim may lose his balance, and fall back down the first three steps if he is not careful. If, however, he crosses the threshold successfully, he enters the safe and level floor inside the house, which is the fifth plane. He walks along this until he reaches the other end of the house, where there is a closed door. When he reaches this door at the back of the house a centre of vision opens in his forehead, which is represented by the opening of this door; and he now sees God, and is on the sixth plane. But

¹ Map Reference E/7.

as well as seeing God, he sees also an impossibly deep valley that separates him in his present position from the splendour of God beyond, and he does not know how to cross this great rift. It is here that he needs the help of a spiritually perfect soul to take him across this last colossal obstacle, which is greater than the sum of all his previous obstacles on the path.

I do not know that one is justified in drawing a parallel between this description of the path and the remarks of Gulâb Baba, but Baba has explained that one on the sixth plane shrinks from crossing this great rift that separates him from God. It is not that he does not desire to be united with God, but he simply cannot take the final plunge. When he sees this great valley it is as if he said to himself, "Impossible".

To return, however, to the story of Gulâb Baba. Kaka again uttered the words, "Meher Baba", and grasped Gulâb Baba gently by both his hands. Gulâb Baba at once got up, and without demur followed Kaka and Jal out of his house, and was taken to the village bus stand.

The party then took the first bus for Itarsi¹, that lies about a hundred miles to the north, whence they would be able to board a train the same night for Jubbulpore. At some village or other, the bus halted for about half an hour (buses in India tarry in the oddest places, if the driver has friends there), and a Muslim, who knew and revered Gulâb Baba, begged him to come and take food at his house. Gulâb Baba, however, gave him a peremptory refusal, and showered him with abuse. Kaka then bought three *laddus**, and Gulâb Baba ate half of one of these and gave the rest to Jal and Kaka.

At Itarsi, the party had some hours to wait for the train, and on the station, Gulâb Baba did his best to persuade Jal and Kaka to go to sleep for an hour or two. Kaka, however, who is quick to scent the ruses by which a mast tries to escape being brought to Baba, suggested to Gulâb Baba that he, and not they, should go to sleep. Gulâb Baba then turned to an adjacent wall, and addressing the wall as if it were God, said, "Why do you send this man after me, he never lets me alone for a second?", and concluded this remark, still apparently addressing the wall as if it were God, with a spate of profanities. This episode attracted the attention of loiterers on the station, but probably none of them there knew Gulâb Baba, for Kaka and Jal were able to deflect their curiosity by saying he was a madman.

¹ Map Reference E/7.

* A laddu is a spherical, saffron-coloured sweet confection that may be of any size, from a golf ball to a small orange.

They reached Jubbulpore at three o'clock in the morning, and when he entered the door of the mast ashram, Gulâb Baba surveyed the room and exclaimed, "This is his hospital".

In the morning, Baba, before coming to see Gulâb Baba, sent him some sweetmeats in three colours, green, red, and yellow, and also a mattress. Gulâb Baba, however, refused to use the mattress, saying, "I can't sit on that, because he has given it with his own hands". He also pushed the sweets away, but Kaka managed to persuade him to eat a little of them.

A short while later Baba entered the room, and Gulâb Baba, addressing Kaka, and designating Baba, said, "He is God himself, and you have tricked me". Baba then sat on the mattress, and signed to Gulâb Baba to sit beside him, but he refused, saying, "I am not fit to sit beside him".

After some gentle and loving persuasion Gulâb Baba agreed to have his hair cut, and be bathed, clothed, and fed by Baba. He was fed in a room behind closed doors, and after a while the doors were flung open and Gulâb Baba rushed out of the room in a frenzy of agitation and cried out, "I can't see my way out, I am blind". Although he was so excited, Kaka, by dint of gentle persuasion, managed to bring him back, so that Baba was able to continue feeding him, and the meal was completed without further incident. Baba then gave orders to Kaka to send Gulâb Baba straight back to Ellichpur. On the way to the bus stand, Gulâb Baba asked Kaka to come with him and stay with him, but Kaka replied that he could not do so without Baba's permission.

The mast from Ujjain¹, whom Baba had contacted in Ujjain itself a few weeks before, was brought to Jubbulpore by Chhagan.

Although no one now remembers what he was called, he was an important and high mast of the sixth plane, and he made an indelible impression on those who first saw him in the crowded street in Ujjain. He was rather stout, about fifty years old, naked except for a loin-cloth, and he sat at the side of the street with a huge mound of rags and old bits of paper in front of him—a mound at least three feet high. He kept picking up pieces of rag from this mound, and tearing them to shreds. Baba stopped the car when he had just passed him by, pointed him out to the party as a highly advanced mast, and sent one of the mandali with a rupee coin to be given to him.

When Baba contacts a mast outside his ashram he usually does three things; three external things, for, of course, one is not privileged to see the inner and real side of his work. He gives him a metal coin, for the metal

¹ Map Reference D/6.

in some way serves as a medium of contact; he feeds him; and, if possible, he sits with him alone for a few minutes in the nearest convenient place. Since observing silence Baba has not touched money, except when he gives it to masts in this way. In this case, he gave the mast a coin by proxy only, but one presumes that some contact was achieved by this means.

This Ujjain mast was one of the few who stayed for about ten days in the Jubbulpore Ashram, and after Baba's work with him was complete, Chhagan took him back to Ujjain.

Khâlâ Mâsî was an old lady, and a highly advanced mastani. Chhagan brought her from Seoni¹, and she seems to have recognized Baba's spiritual greatness, for as soon as she saw him she arose and embraced Baba lovingly, and then pressed her temples with her hands, which is a gesture that a woman offers only to those she loves. She was bathed, clothed, and fed by Baba, and he sat with her alone for some time. She said to Baba, "You are the Ocean, give me a few drops from it to drink".

Dada Maharaj of Amraoti². was an aged, majzoob-like mast of the sixth plane, probably more than eighty years old, and so frail that he could not walk, and had to be carried pick-a-back. He was brought to the Jubbulpore Ashram by Chhagan for one day. He was held in very great esteem in Amraoti and the country round about, and used to carry a big bundle with a hat on top of it, and would refer to this bundle and hat as his parents. He was a great smoker of *Cannibis indica*, a habit that caused him to be criticised in some circles, and he would often hold a pack of playing cards in one hand.

There was a general belief that, by his spiritual influence, he controlled the justice in that part of the Central Provinces, and that the ultimate decision as to whom should be arrested by the police, and whom should be sentenced or acquitted by judge and jury, rested with him. As a result of this belief many miscreants would come to him in the reaction of remorse after having committed some crime or other and throw themselves on his mercy, and it was widely held that, if he forgave them, they would have nothing to fear from the forces of the law.

A belief such as this is probably best left without comment because it is the kind of thing about which one cannot remain impartial; one must either stand upon the rostrum of so-called sound common sense, and dismiss it as superstitious nonsense, or go to the other extreme, and identify one's

¹ Not on map; but lies about seventy-five miles south-west of Jubbulpore.

² Map Reference E/7.

conviction with that of the local village folk. Whatever one's opinion may be, this belief was very widely disseminated, and the account of Dâdâ Mahârâj would be incomplete if it were left out.

He was kept only a few hours in Jubbulpore because he recognized Baba, and, indeed, he greatly revered him. Professor Deshmukh, who would often bring Dâdâ Mahârâj to his house, tells how he would pay his respects to a photo of Baba that hung in a conspicuous place on the wall of Deshmukh's sitting room. Baba also once sent a message to Dâdâ Mahârâj through Deshmukh, saying, "You know me as I am".

Dâdâ Miân was another mast of Amraoti. Chhagan failed to bring him to Jubbulpore, for when he heard he was to be taken to Meher Baba, he declined to come, saying, "He (Baba) is the Emperor, how can I come?"

There was a mast in Saugor¹ whose real name no one now remembers, whom Baba christened with the sobriquet "Magar mast" (Crocodile mast). He was a very good mast in a majzoob-like state, thirty-five to fortyish, fat, tall, silent, and completely naked. Baba had first contacted him in Saugor early in March, and, shortly after reaching Jubbulpore, Baba himself went with Kaka to Saugor, and brought him to the Jubbulpore Ashram.

He was dubbed the "Magar mast" by Baba himself because, perhaps as a result of sitting naked in all weathers in the open, or because of inadequate food, or a combination of both his skin was covered with hard, rough, thick scales, that at once brought to mind the skin of a crocodile. At Jubbulpore Baba used to rub oil into his skin every day, and after a week of this treatment strangers would ask why he was called the crocodile mast, for his skin was no longer reminiscent of this ferocious reptile, but was supple and healthy as a result of Baba's daily care.

So much, then, for the most interesting personalities of this ashram, and the enthusiast for detail is referred to the supplement for cursory annotations of others who came and went.

It is unfortunate that scant justice has been done to the general atmosphere of this ashram, and to that subtle quintessence of love which pervades everything that Baba does. His physical presence and the brilliance of his leadership have that impossible quality of the philosopher's stone, that, by their magic touch, they transmute the base metal of the most commonplace routine into a treasure of loving service. This is perhaps an ornate way of describing something that is at once so real that one might think

¹ Map Reference E/6.

it easy to describe quite simply, and so transcendental that the spirit of it eludes the grasp of words. But this magic, this imponderable something, weaves itself like a golden thread into the fabric of everything that Baba does, and when the factual details of a phase of Baba's life are buried so deep in the ashes of one's mind to be almost forgotten, the memory of this splendid thing is there still.

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3

Bangalore

October 1939 to the end of March 1940

In Bangalore¹, the torrent of Baba's energy was conducted along three principal external channels. The most conspicuous was the planning of the spiritual centre at Byramangala², and the other two were the daily supervision of the mad ashram and the mast ashram; and of these three it seemed that the mast ashram was closest to Baba's heart.

Bangalore lies upon a granite plateau about 3,000 feet above sea level. It is the administrative capital of the large and progressive State of Mysore, and is a kind of garden city with parks and vistas, long avenues shaded by decorative trees, spacious houses, a cantonment scattered with barracks and sounding with bugles and the rumble of military lorries, and a commercial city with busy lanes bordered by small, white houses hugging each other in the sunlight.

A large, square, white house, that stood in a large, square garden, and overlooked the golf links, a house therefore known as "The Links", was taken for Baba and his group of lady disciples. Baba and his party reached Bangalore early in August 1939, and the mast ashram grew slowly, so that one cannot say that it was born on a precise date.

In the bigger houses in India the servants' quarters are usually separate from the main house, and are often built against the boundary wall of the back garden. This was the case at "The Links", and because it was a big house, it had various huts and sheds close to the back wall. Baba chose one corner of the garden where there were a few such sheds, and a space, perhaps thirty yards square, was walled off with screens of tattya, to make an enclosure that included these huts.

A tiny cottage was also built here for Baba's use, a compact little house with stone floor, and thatchwork walls and roof, through which the wind puffed and sighed. Such huts when new, as Baba's was, are cool and have a fragrant odour. This hut was built initially so that Baba might sit fasting in seclusion for a certain period, and it later became invaluable as the pivot of the mast ashram.

¹ Map Reference E/11.

² Not on map, but is about twenty miles south-west of Bangalore.

I have already mentioned that this ashram grew to maturity from a very inconspicuous beginning, and I will, therefore, skip over the unimportant details of its embryology, principally because no one now seems to remember much about them. The mature organism was so linked with the lives of the masts who lived therein, and with Baba's work, that it will perhaps be better first to describe the principal personalities of the ashram.

Before narrating the stories of those in the ashram itself, I feel obliged to describe a great sixth plane mast from Bangalore, who had, in fact, no connection with the ashram, but who was the first mast to be contacted by Baba in Bangalore. He was the spiritual chargeman of Bangalore, and was known as Chaddar Baba.

Chaddar means a sheet. A mast is usually called by a nickname that epitomizes some peculiarity of habit or dress. His real name is either not known, or fails to satisfy public imagination, and local genius sooner or later begets a sobriquet that sticks to the mast as long as he stays in a particular vicinity. Chaddar Baba was a fine old man, with a head of short cropped white hair, a small white beard and tattered clothes, and he always carried a sheet (*chaddar*) wherever he went. This sheet would be flung carelessly over one shoulder, or held in the hand by one corner, so that most of it trailed through the dust.

Like many famous masts, there were stories of miracles performed by Chaddar Baba, and one of the tales of his miracles concerned a taxi driver. One day, Chaddar Baba told this man to drive him to some village or other near Bangalore. The taxi driver protested that he had at that moment neither sufficient petrol in his tank, nor enough money in his pocket with which to buy even a gallon of petrol. Chaddar Baba thereupon gave him five annas and told him to go and buy a gallon. The driver pointed out that five annas was barely enough for a quarter gallon, but he was told to go to the pump and see what happened. He went to the pump, had a gallon of petrol run into his tank, put his hand in his pocket, and, to his astonishment, he found the coins in his palm to amount to just the sum needed for a gallon, no more and no less. That is the story, and whether one dubs it a fairy tale, or believes it to be the truth, is of no great importance. Baba's teaching is that advanced souls, particularly those on the fourth plane, can do miracles, but that miracles don't matter.

Baba first sent Kaka with instructions to bring Chaddar Baba to "The Links", and Kaka, through the medium of an enterprising taxi driver, succeeded in having Chaddar Baba brought as far as the front door. The

mast, however, flatly refused to get out of the car. The following day Adi and Kaka, after much trouble, managed to collect Chaddar Baba from the city bazaar, and this time he spontaneously got out of the car as soon as he reached "The Links", and made his way straight to Baba's room.

Baba was in the room at the time, and Chaddar Baba went to a chair where Baba's head shawls and alphabet board were lying, picked them up, turned them over in his hands, and looking at Baba, said suddenly, "Now my account is closed". He then walked through to the kitchen, and after looking around for a while, came back to Baba's room. Baba wanted to feed him, but he refused this, though he agreed to come the next day for a meal from Baba's hands. Baba thereupon gave instructions for him to be taken to the mandali's quarters, a big, rambling house, down a lane and round a corner, about a quarter of a mile away. He was taken there in the car, but declined to enter the house, and eventually, at his own request, was taken back to the city.

The next day, Kaka went to him in the bazaar and asked him to come to the house, but Chaddar Baba refused, hit Kaka, and spat on him. The same evening, Baba sent Kaka to him again, and told him to remind Chaddar Baba of his promise to come and be fed. This also was of no avail, and Chaddar Baba this time gave Kaka a gentle kick, abused him, and told him to come before him naked. There the matter was left, and Chaddar Baba never again came to see Baba. Baba, however, explained that Chaddar Baba was on the sixth plane, and had come to him for the final spiritual push, and that he would shortly die.

Eighteen days later Chaddar Baba walked from the cantonment to the city, and took a cup of tea from his favourite tea shop. Half an hour later, in the open street, he pushed his fingers to the back of his throat, vomited the tea, and told a boy who was with him to make a comfortable place on the pavement for him to lie down, as he now wished to go to Paradise. He then lay down and died.

The news of his passing spread like fire through city and cantonment, where he was greatly revered. He used, in fact, often to sit in the porch of the Prime Minister's office, and he was held in such esteem that no one dared dislodge him, and he went where he liked, and did what he liked, throughout Bangalore. It was natural, therefore, that one so revered should be claimed by both city and cantonment when his burial was discussed, and after much debate Chaddar Baba was buried within the boundaries of the cantonment, and a shrine erected in his memory.

The two most important masts in Baba's ashram in Bangalore were Chattî Baba and Phûlwâlâ. Chattî Baba has already been described in another chapter, and there is, therefore, no need to recapitulate the sterling qualities of this fine old sixth plane mast.

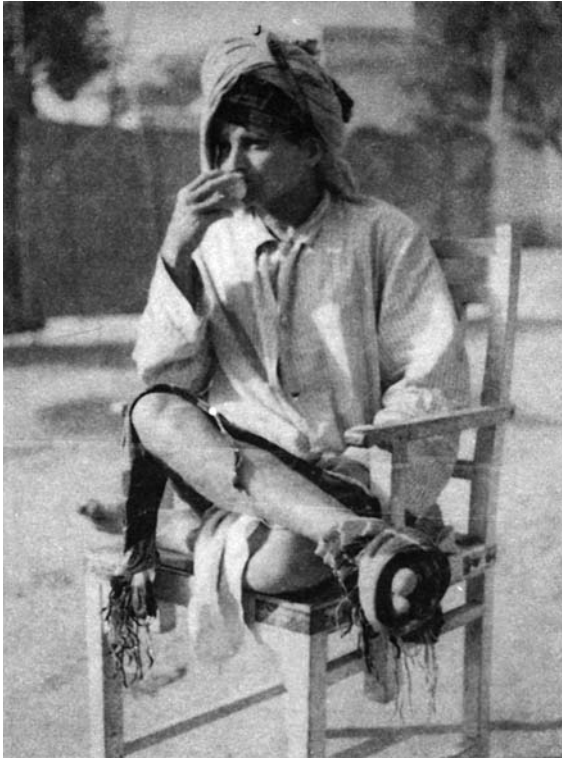
Phûlwâlâ (flower man) was discovered by Vishwanath at Belgaum¹, and he wrote to Baba about him. Pendu and Nilu then went to Belgaum on Baba's instructions, to bring Phûlwâlâ to Bangalore. A mast such as Phûlwâlâ was not the sort of man who could easily be persuaded into doing other men's bidding, and Baba's two men, with the help of Vishwanath, trepanned him in the best detective novel tradition. They decoyed him into a taxi, and as soon as he settled into the back seat, Nilu climbed in and sat on one side and Pendu on the other, the doors were slammed, the engine started, and the party hied post-haste to Bangalore.

Phûlwâlâ was a typical jalali mast of the sixth plane. Baba once said in admiration of him, "Look at Phûlwâlâ, with one slap he could raise you in an instant to the sixth plane". He was a dramatic-looking man with deep reddish-brown hair, bronze skin, and a look of almost intolerable ecstasy in his eyes, as if the ecstasy might shatter his body into a thousand fragments at any moment. He loved flowers (whence his name) and slaked lime, which he would chew by the mouthful. Each morning, fresh flowers would be brought for him, and he would wreath garlands of roses, jasmine, gulcheri and mogra* flowers about his turban. The lime he would mix with sugar, wrap in a twist of cloth, and chew for hours at a stretch. His manner and voice were formidable and compelling, and he gave orders with a regal command that seemed to brook no disobedience, and made people afraid of him. He had a frightening gesture of coming up level with a man and flinging out his arm with a sudden jerk, so that his index finger pointed menacingly but a few inches from the man's eyes, and he would then utter some word or phrase in a terse and commanding manner, or merely look in the most startling way with his brilliant eyes into the other man's face.

He tied bits of old rag round his legs, feet, toes, wrists and fingers, a habit that is common to many masts. At first he refused to be bathed by Baba, but eventually agreed, though he always remained standing for his bath. He also declined to be shaved, but one day he demanded a razor blade from Eruch. and shaved his own chin with the naked blade.

¹ Map Reference C/10.

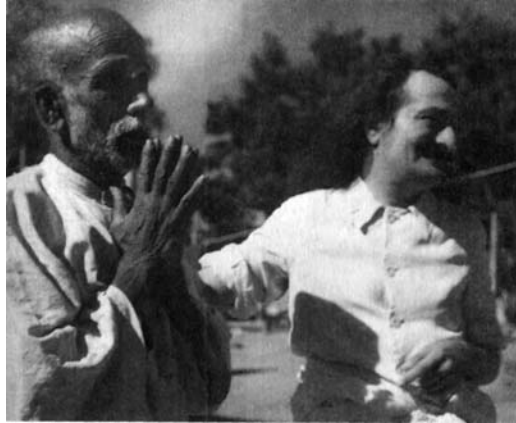
* *Note for westerners:* These are various fragrant flowers commonly used for making garlands.



Phulwala at the Bangalore Mast Ashram. He is chewing slaked lime wrapped in a piece of cloth; note the pieces of cloth round his right foot.



Phulwala wearing flowers; this photo was taken in poor light, but it shows something of Phulwala's ecstatic look.



Chinnaswami with Baba in the Bangalore
Mast Ashram



Baba with Shariat Khan in the Bangalore
Mast Ashram

Later he became more normal in behaviour, and used to enter into the spirit of the ashram, though his dictatorial manner remained. He used to tell how he had originally been a carpenter, and one day, when Eruch was repairing a broken bed. Phûlwâlâ demanded the tools and mended the bed in such a way that Eruch was convinced that he must once really have been a professional carpenter. He would occasionally recollect flashes of his early life, and would speak of a loving wife and children; and once, he seemed to relate how he became a mast. He was apparently sitting one day in a coffee shop when someone gave him a cup of coffee, and at the moment of sipping from that cup something must have happened, for, in his narration of the incident, he suddenly stopped and stared, as if he had been thenceforth lost to the world.

In April 1940, when the mast ashram moved at Meherabad, Phûlwâlâ was taken there, and was eventually sent back to Belgaum in June 1940.

Chinnaswâmî was a mast of the third plane, three-quarters jamali and one-quarter jalali, and he and Shariat Khan kept the ashram sparkling with fun. Baba first contacted Chinnaswâmî in Trivandrum¹ in January 1940, and liked him so much that he brought him back to the Bangalore Ashram. He was a thin old man with a face like a macaco monkey, a very dark skin, and he had a passion for chewing *pan*, so that his mouth was usually brimming with luscious, red saliva. He drank his tea hotter than anyone else could bear, and when he smoked, he would often put the burning end of his cigarette in his mouth, and having smoked a cigarette to a finish, he would extinguish it by masticating the burning stub.

In an alley behind one of the huts there was an electric transmission pole with defective insulation. Everyone else used to steer clear of this pole, which gave an unpleasant electric shock, but Chinnaswâmî would hug the pole with both hands and dance round it as if he were having no end of a time.

He was a great lover of music, and would often sing and dance. For the diversion of the masts, a singer used to entertain them for two or three hours each day, and at such times Chinnaswâmî would disport himself in wild and grotesque dances, and in the midst of dancing would sometimes soar into a spiritual ecstasy, and fall senseless to the ground. He had, therefore, to be watched, lest in falling he might break the fragile bones of his old body. At such times, Baba would remind the mandali of Khwaja Moeinuddin Chishti of Ajmer, who used also to plunge into ecstasy in the midst of a dance.

¹ Map Reference D/13.

Despite his age, Chinnaswâmî was as mischievous as a ten-year old boy, and one day he came a cropper while trying to jump over the garden wall, and split his lip so badly that it had to be stitched. Two or three sutures were put in, and he seemed literally indifferent to the searing pain of the needle as it pierced the margins of the wound. Chinnaswâmî was an entertaining and lovable man, but he could not compete with the sempiternal effervescence of Shariat Khân, a high mahbûbi mast, with traits of jamâli and jalâli.

Shariat Khân was first contacted in north-western Mysore, at Chikmugalur¹, a charming little town in which you raise your eyes from sunny streets to green, forest-clad hills that surge up behind the town. He was brought back to the Bangalore Ashram, and he and Chinnaswâmî between them kept the ashram as lively as a sparkling mountain brook. Shariat Khân was not to everyone's taste, for he never left off talking, singing or dancing, from the time he awoke, until he lay down to rest at night. He was a young fellow, short and neat of build, and always wore a shoddy old fez cap crammed so far over his head that his ears were forced out sideways, like the handles of a trophy cup. His favourite hobby was to talk, talk, and talk, a strange, inane, non-stop babble of words and phrases that chased each other out of his mouth like the disordered flight of leaves on a windy autumn day. He had one word that he kept repeating, and that was *Shariat* (hence his name), but he would mix this word in such a potpourri of other words and phrases, that no one could make head or tail of what he said. Thus, when he was first brought from Chikmugalur he was asked his name, to which he replied "Shariat", and later he explained that he had nine lakhs of wives and nine lakhs of children, and when asked where they all were, the answer again was, "In Shariat".

He would burst into song, though this is a euphemism for the constant repetition of one phrase, sung over and over again to one melody. He also loved to dance, and would tie bells on his ankles and whirl about singing and capering in a spirited way. He was docile and affectionate, and was almost perpetually in a good mood. Throughout the time he was at Bangalore, and later at Meherabad and Ranchi, Shariat Khân lost his mood only once or twice.

There were a few other inmates, but they were of duller and more sober texture, and those interested are referred to the supplement under Bangalore, for their description.

¹ Map Reference D/11.

The ashram itself had two focal centres, the thatched hut where the masts would gather round Baba once a day to listen to the songs of a professional singer, and the "mast hotel". This "hotel" was a refreshment booth where the masts would be served with tea, cigarettes, beedies, and *pan*, whenever they asked for them. It was constructed with diligent negligence, everything a trifle awry, with low roof, crooked pillars, and limping tables and benches, and was so planned and executed to make the masts feel themselves in the sort of mean and wretched tea shop that they normally liked to frequent. Such tea shops are common enough in most Indian cities, and the idea behind this "hotel" was to give the masts as much recompense as possible for the restriction of their freedom while in the ashram. Here, after all, Baba introduced a new rhythm into the lives of the masts, and in order to make their adaptation easier, Baba did all he could to gratify their idiosyncrasies, and the "mast hotel" was one of their chief sources of enjoyment.

We cannot tell, in the first place, what impulse has moved Baba to hunt down these God-intoxicated souls in every nook and cranny of India (now India and Pakistan), nor, in the second place, why Baba himself serves them with a deeper devotion than a father or mother, and more diligence than the most trusty servant. For the plain fact is that Baba sees to the slightest needs of every mast, shaves, bathes, feeds, and clothes them, doing every service with his own gentle and vivid hands, and he impregnates these domestic tasks with such a tincture of love and humour that the most impassive spectator is moved by the beauty of his utterly selfless service. The pity is that, in our spiritual blindness, we see only the outer shell of his work, and not its inner significance.

In Bangalore, then, Baba spent most of his day working with these special masts, and gave only secondary attention to the mad ashram. The daily routine of the ashram began long before the birds addressed the first green tinge of light in the eastern sky, and went on unabated until the masts went to bed at nine o'clock at night.

Those working with Baba felt it a privilege to be so close to him, and so close to these strange adventurers of the spiritual path; but one should not imagine their task to have been an easy one. It is not very difficult for a healthy man to do a day's work when there is some sort of routine about it, so that body and mind attune themselves to a daily rhythm. But Baba seldom allows a static routine, and no sooner is a programme fixed than it is revised again and again, so that the simplest task

becomes as difficult as the most intricate one. These factors make service in such an ashram a great test of character, and the masts—who must be given everything they ask, as soon as they ask for it—do not make the work any easier. Thus, those who work in such an ashram must compound in their personalities the strength of Hercules and the patience of Job, and, to remain human, they must lighten these two solid virtues with the leaven of an impregnable sense of humour; for without these three qualities they are likely to fight a losing battle against the sheer dead weight of their physical shortcomings, and particularly perhaps, against the cyclones of their emotional reactions.

In conclusion, there are three things to be remembered. Firstly, the greatest mast of the Bangalore Ashram was undoubtedly Chatti Baba. He has not been mentioned much in this chapter, because he has been so fully described in Chapter Two; but he *was* the greatest of the masts in Bangalore.

Secondly, besides the masts described in this chapter, there were a few others. These others, though they were good masts in their own ways, were not considered sufficiently important to warrant their inclusion in the foregoing pages. These masts are, however, described in the supplement under Bangalore.

Finally, this mast ashram, which closed at Bangalore at the beginning of April 1940, opened again at Meherabad when Baba arrived there in May, and the next section of this chapter deals briefly with this second phase.

*Meherabad**May to October 1940*

One thinks of Meherabad¹ in two senses; firstly as Meher Baba's headquarters, and secondly as "home". It is a place where the work and influence of Baba have breathed themselves into the very soil itself, and a place of historical interest in the story of Baba's life.

One may wander, near the railway, over the grass-covered plinths upon which the school buildings once stood, or may stand under the green tresses of the *neem** tree, beside the weather-bleached teak cage in which Baba wrote the account of his spiritual experiences—a book of wisdom that is still to be revealed to the world. Every corner has some story, so that, when one knows the place well, its very simplicity and bareness become illuminated by the undying flame of Baba's influence.

In reviewing the history of Baba's work with masts, that is to say with real masts as distinct from mad, it was, therefore, a surprising discovery how comparatively little work of this kind had been done at Meherabad. The fact is that Baba has stayed only for short periods in these headquarters near Ahmadnagar ever since the end of 1938, and the only phase at Meherabad that warrants the appellation of a mast ashram, is the one beginning in the first week of May 1940, and closing in the autumn of the same year.

Now this mast ashram at Meherabad is difficult to describe for three reasons. Firstly, it was in effect the Bangalore Mast Ashram transferred to Meherabad, and the Bangalore Mast Ashram has already been described in the previous section of this chapter; secondly, the Meherabad Mast Ashram moved for three weeks to Ranchi in July, which complicates its history, so that I have felt obliged to devote the next section of this chapter to an account of the Ranchi Ashram; and thirdly, there were no inmates of this ashram who have not been described elsewhere in this volume.

¹ Map Reference D/8.

* *Note for westerners:* The neem tree (margosa tree) (*Melia azadiracta*) is reminiscent of an ash tree; it has pinnate foliage rather like an ash, but its general effect is softer and lighter.

In this and other chapters I have already recounted how Baba left Bangalore at the beginning of April 1939, and came by car to Meherabad, a journey that took about one month.

The mast ashram left Bangalore soon after Baba set out on this tour, and arrived at Meherabad early in April. Thus, for two or three weeks, the inmates were installed in the quarters on the hill at Meherabad, and those in charge of them set about making the place suitable for Baba's work. Accommodation had to be made for Chattî Baba, Phûlwâlâ, Shariat Khân, Mohammed, and Râmshish, all of whom had been brought from Bangalore. All these masts have been described in Chapter Two, in the account of the Bangalore Ashram, or in the supplement, and I do not, therefore, propose to make more of them here.

On the hill at Meherabad, almost immediately behind the white domed building, there is a rectangular shed, about fifty feet by twenty, which was once used as a small maternity hospital. Its walls are built of sandy coloured country brick, its roof is of corrugated iron, and its doors open on to a courtyard where eddies of dust, stirred by the restless Deccan winds, scuttle hither and thither like children on a school playground. Along two of the remaining sides of this yard are a few small sheds of indeterminate character, and in one corner near the entrance there is a bathroom, an indispensable amenity when Baba works with God-intoxicated souls.

As soon as these five masts arrived from the Bangalore Ashram, they were settled in the various small rooms round this courtyard, and a new "mast hotel", similar to, but perhaps not quite so lively as that at Bangalore, was set up. A special room was prepared for Baba in the rectangular shed, for he had previously given orders to this effect, so that he might live closely in contact with these masts. Baba arrived in the first week of May, and after a few days' rest at Happy Valley, went almost at once into strict seclusion in the old hospital building on the hill. He worked daily with the masts, and only those mandali who were in the mast ashram, and one or two others, saw him each day.

Those who work closely and constantly for Baba become quickly adapted to his starting the day's labours when common folk have several hours' sleep before them; but the routine of these first weeks in the mast ashram at Meherabad must have created a record. During the first few days Baba came to bathe the masts at 5-30 a.m.—which, for Baba, is quite a usual hour to set about his work—and it is true that he adhered to this schedule for about a week. Thereafter, however, without previous warning, he began

to come earlier each day, and eventually settled down to a period of arriving at half past midnight to start the morning's work! This was at the time that Chattî Baba was bathed with 150 to 200 buckets of water, and the ashram staff were ordered to have everything ready, so that Baba could start work the moment he arrived.

This forced tempo and shifting of routine produce a sense of stress, and demand a power of adaptability, not unlike that needed in war: one must be ready at any hour of the day or night to go into action at a word from Baba, or to change one's plans to meet a new situation. This characteristic of overturning and overruling established practice is, of course, one of the conspicuous qualities of every great world mover, and as the architect of a new way of life for countless future generations, Baba has, no doubt, first to demolish many old patterns of existence.

The first six weeks of this seclusion and work in the mast ashram coincided with one of the most dramatic chapters of the war, when Belgium capitulated, and France was knocked in the dust within a few terrible weeks. Those who then saw Baba reported that he was following the daily news with great care, and had an atlas which he studied side by side with the newspaper reports. It was during this period of the ashram at Meherabad that Chattî Baba had a sudden crisis on the night of 9th June, which, Baba explained, was a result of his spiritual connection with France. This episode is fully narrated in Chapter Two, in which Chattî Baba himself is described.

Early in June, a break occurred in the history of the ashram, for Phûlwâlâ was sent back to Belgaum, and Baba paid an unexpected visit to Calcutta, where he first met Karîm Baba, the great sixth plane jalali mast. He then returned to Meherabad for a few weeks, continuing his work in the mast ashram, and in July, he went to Ranchi¹ for three weeks. Except for Ramshish and, of course, for Phûlwâlâ, the masts of the Meherabad Ashram were taken there also, so that the Ranchi Ashram constituted, in effect, a phase of the Meherabad Ashram.

Now in Ranchi an important thing happened, for Karîm Baba, the great sixth plane jalâli mast, was brought to the ashram there, and so at the end of July, when Baba and the inmates of the Ranchi Ashram returned to Meherabad, this great mast came too. The mandali anticipated that Karîm Baba would be kept for several months, and were, therefore, surprised when he was sent back to Calcutta after a sojourn of only two weeks at Meherabad. Karîm Baba was a jalâli mast, and was perhaps a potential

¹ Map Reference H/6.

physical menace, and it was probably for this reason that he was placed in a special cage-like room. A feature that contributed to one's anxiety when in the presence of Karîm Baba, apart from the piercing brilliance of his eyes, was the length of his finger-nails, for one felt that he might have inflicted disastrous damage by a sudden jab with these ferocious-looking talons. On the evidence of Baba's own statement we have learned that a mast's moods have an important bearing on his usefulness for Baba's work, and one imagines a genuine jalâli type to be the most difficult of all in this respect. Living at close quarters with a jalâli mast is (to exaggerate the point a little), rather like living on the slopes of an active volcano.

By the middle of August, then, Karîm Baba was sent away, and Baba now had only Chattî Baba, Shariat Khân and Mohammed. Râmshish, who had been installed in the mast ashram in May, began to be difficult in sundry ways, and after about two weeks he had been transferred to the mad ashram. He was, in any case, a mast of no special merit, and was certainly not commensurate with the others. After Karîm Baba left, Arjûn, the long-haired, long-nailed mast from the mad ashram, one of the few real masts of this old ashram, was brought up the hill, and he stayed with Baba until the ashram was disbanded in October.

It was at this period, in the autumn of 1940, that the closing phases of the mad ashram and the mast ashram converged, and for a few short weeks the remaining inmates of the mad ashram were brought up the hill, and were housed with Chattî Baba, Shariat Khân, Mohammed, and Arjûn. This was a St. Martin's summer for them, an unexpected gift of the sunshine of Baba's daily presence, before they were finally sent back to their homes.

It is, unfortunately, not easy to give a vivid account of the work of the Meherabad Mast Ashram, because Baba was almost constantly in seclusion at that time. Very few saw what was going on, and there seems to have been no very memorable episode after Karîm Baba went away. The details of the closing of this ashram are not distinct in anyone's memory, perhaps because the inmates were sent home one by one at irregular intervals, until only Chattî Baba and Mohammed remained.

Baba's intimate interest was now concentrated almost exclusively on Chattî Baba, and it therefore became clear that this great sixth plane mast was the only one who mattered. This impression of the paramount value of Chattî Baba was confirmed when Baba moved to Ceylon at the beginning of November 1940, and, from that time forth, until September 1941, this great mast was constantly in Baba's intimate contact.

Apart from the refreshing tonic of the arrival of Karîm Baba, the Meherabad Mast Ashram was really a continuation of the Bangalore Mast Ashram; and the centre at Ranchi, which connected the two phases of the Meherabad Ashram like a hyphen, was, in fact, nothing more than the Meherabad Ashram transferred for a few weeks to this small hill station on the Bihar plateau. If we review this ashram in a still broader context, we find that its gradual dispersal in the autumn of 1940 marked the final phase of the special mast work that Baba began a year earlier, in Bangalore, in September 1939. But it also marked something more than that, for the reader will find that the next mast ashram was not established until Baba came to Mahabaleshwar in 1946, a giant's leap of six years. The Meherabad Ashram was, therefore, the last of the important early mast ashrams, and within a few months of its closing, as we shall see in a later chapter, Baba began the work of his great mast tours.

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*Ranchi**July 1940*

This small ashram is important in the history of Baba's mast work because Karîm Baba, the great jalâli mast from Calcutta, was brought here for the first time to live with Baba.

Ranchi¹ lies on a granite plateau, about 2,000 feet above sea level, and the emerald patchwork pattern of rice fields is broken by clumps of trees and occasional bosses of granite. The house taken for Baba's stay although it belonged to a Rani, was one of those half-forgotten places that are neither in the open country nor in the town itself. Its front faced a road, and its back garden petered out into the rank weeds at the edge of a rice field. The only redeeming feature was a boss of clean granite about a hundred feet high, immediately to one side of the garden, which gave a sense of something unusual to an environment that was otherwise not particularly interesting. The main house was of sombre red brick, and the mandali and the masts, for want of other space, were crowded into a block of diminutive little rooms in a corner of the garden.

There were only four masts in the Ranchi Ashram, and three of these were brought from Meherabad with the party. Firstly, there was the incomparable Chattî Baba, that jewel of an old mast, who has been fully described elsewhere. In addition, there were Shariat Khân and Mohammed. Shariat Khân was indubitably good company for one or two hours, but after that he began to tell on one's nerves. He chattered and nattered a babble of cheerful nonsense for most of the day, and, when tired of talking, he danced and sang; but his refrain was a bizarre repetition of one phrase, sung to one melody over and over again. To add to this cacophony Mohammed would ape Shariat Khân's singing, but he sang every note just out of tune, and this barbarous duet would perpetuate itself from wall to echoing wall of the small courtyard, about which were set the seven tiny rooms in which Baba, the mandali, the masts, and the servants, were all crowded together.

I have already explained that the dominant figure of the Ranchi Ashram was Karîm Baba. This superb jalâli mast has been described in Chapter Two,

¹ Map Reference H/6.

and it is enough here to say that he was, without exception, the most august and kingly of all the God-intoxicated souls brought closely in Baba's contact

I may, in this brief account, have appeared prejudiced against the Ranchi Mast Ashram, but perhaps in labelling it a mast ashram I have exaggerated Baba's own intentions. It was not, in truth, part of Baba's plan to establish any elaborate institution for masts there, but it seemed as if he had to visit that part of India, and take certain masts with him for his work. The sojourn in Ranchi lasted barely three weeks, and it was only natural that no very elaborate plans should have been made for the masts.

Its importance, as I have already stated, was because of Karîm Baba, and for this reason alone it deserves to stand side by side with other more elaborate and permanent establishments.

Mahabaleshwar

December 1946 and January 1947

In the late autumn of 1946, Baba put the final touches to his plans to emerge from the seclusion which had begun in April of the same year. A large house was taken in Mahabaleshwar¹, which lies 4,500 feet above sea level on the crest of the Western Ghats. The house, set in a clearing of a forest of squat myrobalan trees, with their sinuous, mossy trunks and glossy leaves, looked south across range after range of near and distant hills, to a blue horizon. Throughout the day, the woods echoed with the song of countless birds, dominated by the ever-changing melody of the scarlet-cheeked bulbul; at dusk, jackals slinked across bracken-covered clearings; and by night, the stealthy panther would be seen from time to time by the night watchman, creeping through the undergrowth, or loping his graceful body over the garden wall.

Amidst these fascinating woods, about a hundred yards from the house, was an old, square stable built about a courtyard, with a corrugated iron roof, and high stone walls smeared with a reddish brown colour wash. Access to the stable lay through a pair of great weather-stained teak doors that creaked and groaned as they moved on their hinges.

As soon as Baba and his party arrived, workmen were called to adapt this stable to the needs of a mast ashram. The place was thoroughly cleaned out, partitions and screens of tattya were run up, fire-places for water-heating were installed, and a small bathroom, with cement floor and tattya walls, was erected against the outer face of the stable wall. All those things that were needed to make the place suitable for Baba's work with masts—a hook here, a lamp there, a place for buckets, a sanitary annexe, a place to sit, a place to sleep, and much else—were installed from day to day by outside labourers and the mandali, working under Baba's guidance. Vishnu went almost daily to the bazaar to bring the necessary household furniture, such as dark brown blankets woven by the local peasantry. new kafnis, soap for baths and washing clothes, plates and cups for meals; and day by day, cell by cell, the daedal structure of the place took shape.

¹ Map Reference C/9.

A few weeks previously, Baba had sent instructions to certain disciples that each should go to some specified region, one to Gujarat, one to Central India, one to Bombay, and so forth, and should search for majzoob-like or salik-like masts of an advanced type, and bring, in all, nine of them to Maha-baleshwar by 20th December, the date fixed for the starting of the ashram.

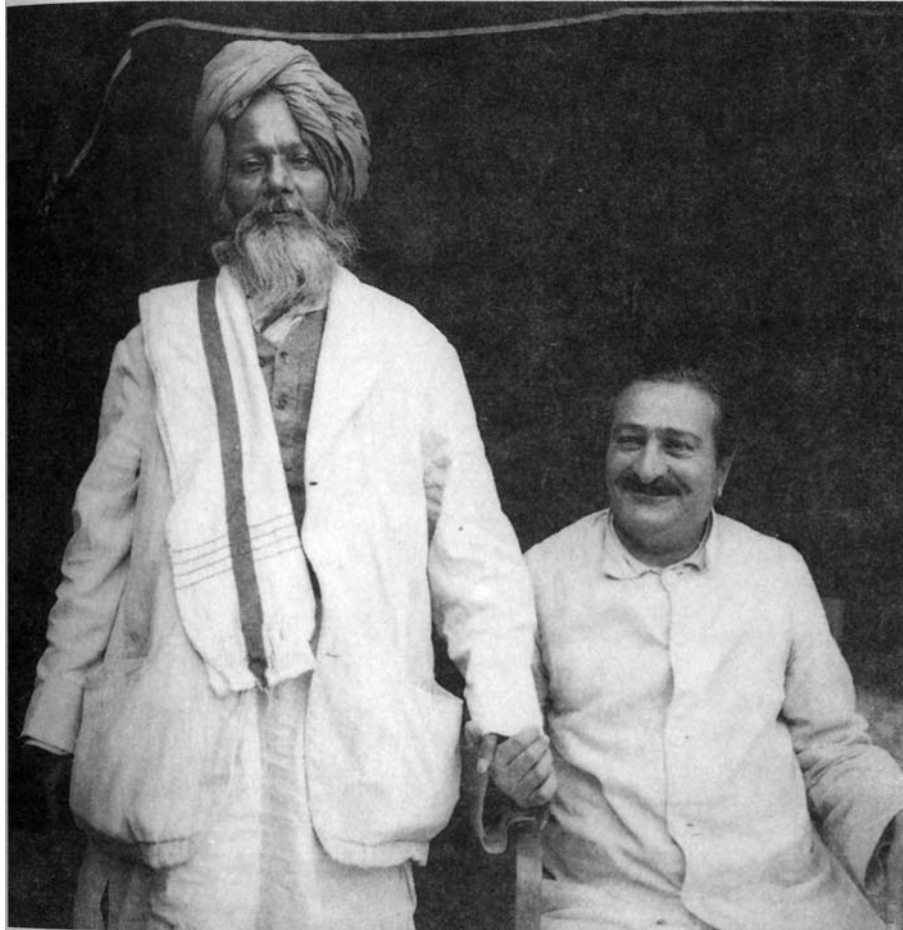
Whether the hand of maya lay heavily on Baba's plans, or whether the disciples sent to find masts were unusually unlucky, or more than ordinarily incompetent, one cannot say, but the labours of almost every one were barren. In spite of the mast ashram being ready by 20th December, the only man brought to it on that day was Bashir, a pathetic old Muslim with Parkinsonism, who had been mistaken for a mast. Not unnaturally, therefore, there was an atmosphere of depression about the place, and Baba called a conference to discuss the next step. As a result, the great mast Alî Shah was sent for from Ahmadnagar, and certain members of the mandali were again dispatched to bring masts, being told not to return without at least one each. Baba also decided to divide the ashram into three parts, one for masts, one for God-mad, and one for really destitute and disabled old men. He set a target of six of each type, and still others of Baba's men were sent to Poona and Ahmadnagar to search for God-mad and disabled and destitute old men.

This redoubling of effort on the part of Baba and those chosen to prosecute his plans produced the desired effect, and after a few days the ashram began to echo with the domestic sounds of human occupation. Alî Shah, who was soon brought from Ahmadnagar, sat most of the day in statuesque aloofness on his mattress, smoking packet after packet of cigarettes, and others were brought by ones and twos, a few to be kept, and those unsuitable to be sent away after a meal and a night's rest.

I do not propose to give a detailed list of all who came and went, but those who care to survey a list of the principal inmates should refer to the supplement at the back of the book. It would be tedious to give a list of names and dates, and I shall only attempt to sketch a general picture of the ashram and of a few of its more vivid personalities. First, then, the daily round.

Each morning, when the scurrying eddies of the dawn winds rustled the leaves overhanging the ashram roof, Baidul * would turn up the wick of his lamp and go round to each inmate, shaking him by the shoulder. Then would follow much stretching of arms, and one would hear the sighs and

* Baidul was in charge of the ashram for the first two weeks, and he was then sent out by Baba for other work. After Baidul went away, the ashram was under the combined management of Kaka and Behramshah Jessawala.



Baba with Ali Shah at the Mahabaleshwar Ashram, January 1947

yawns of the men as they reluctantly unswathed themselves from their blankets, and the emunctory sounds of those whose respiratory passages were unused to the sharp winter air. Then came the morning toilet of face and mouth, and finally at 6.30, each inmate was given a large mug of tea.

Baba's principal work began between eight and nine o'clock. Certain ones would be bathed, and new arrivals would have head and face shaven clean with clippers, and they would then be divested of their filthy clothes, bathed, dusted with insecticide powder (for many were infested with lice), and dressed in a clean kafni.

For an hour or so, Baba would then closet himself with Alî Shah, and from time to time with one or other mast. During these silent conferences the massive doors of the stable would be closed, while the ashram staff remained outside.

At about 11 a.m., one or two servants, beset by an odour of spices, with vessels of aluminium or hand-beaten copper balanced on their heads, would bring lunch to the door of the ashram. Baidul, or anyone there, would help array these vessels in a shady corner near the door of the ashram, and a pile of aluminium plates would be placed close by. Baba, emerging from his silent conference, would then sit on a low stool and distribute the food on to each plate.

Alî Shah was always fed individually by Baba about an hour earlier, and at the time of the general meal Baba would sometimes feed one or other special mast with his own hands. The God-mad and destitute normally looked after themselves at meals and squatted in a row in the stable courtyard, some silently eating, some uttering strange soliloquies, and some prating with their neighbours.

After lunch, a few of the old men would warm their wasted tissues in the winter sunlight, some would retire to their blankets for a siesta, and others sit about in any shady or sunny spot that took their fancy. The masts and God-mad would follow suit, sleeping, smoking or chatting, and until tea was served at 2 p.m. they were at leisure to follow the bent of their inclinations. Baba usually again came for sitting with one or other mast at about three in the afternoon, and would be busy seeing to their physical or spiritual needs for one or two hours.

After an early supper between five and six o'clock, which was also usually served by Baba himself, the inmates were again at liberty to please themselves, and they seemed happy enough to sit about doing anything or nothing, many

of them, particularly the God-mad and masts, smoking uninterruptedly, rapt in their thoughts.

It was demonstrably a simple daily round, with the comfort, cleanliness and nourishment of the inmates seen to by Baba and those in charge of the ashram. Of the far-reaching and innermost effects of these daily contacts one may perhaps say only this; that the outer help given and received served merely a scaffolding for some invisible edifice whose design was known only to Baba, the Master Builder.

Of the inmates, I have already explained that they were divided into three categories; masts, God-mad, and destitute aged, and that they came and went according to their suitability or depending on their willingness to stay. Some professional beggars were brought because they were old and decrepit, but with their restless, parasitic natures they were usually unwilling to stay, and were, indeed, also not suitable for Baba's work.

Among the destitute who stayed, there was one poor old man of Ahmadnagar who had been neglected by all his children except one blind son, and he and this blind son begged a pittance each day, to keep themselves from dying of hunger. Another was a frail old schoolmaster, difficult and eccentric because of phases of amnesia, who lived on the charity of his family. He was kept only a few days, because it was feared that the winter climate of Mahabaleshwar might add more strain to a decompensated heart.

The most striking of these aged men was one from Poona, tall, with white beard, and white hair falling to his shoulders, a complexion the colour of ripe wheat, fine blue eyes and a gracious smile, a man of Mosaic mien and stature. He was a seeker, sincerely devoted to spiritual pursuits, and he had a melodious voice and would often delight others with devotional songs.

Of the God-mad, there were really only two who were original in any way. One was a doltish buffoon and the delight of the ashram. He was known as "Pahlwan" (wrestler), and was found wandering about the back lanes of Ahmadnagar. He looked about twenty-five years old, was perhaps five feet six inches tall, and when stripped for a bath one saw why he was known as "Pahlwan", for he had a muscular and well-proportioned physique. In his occasional moments of solemnity his rather simian features and muscular body gave one a feeling that he might be a tough customer.

His nature, however, was really that of an affectionate child; partly, in the sense that he was undoubtedly of subnormal mental development, but also because he really loved to please others, help them, and make them happy. When told to do anything he would repeat the order word for word several

times, as if he wanted to make quite sure that *that* was what was really wanted. He had an irrepressible humorous outlook that made everything, even sitting down or standing up, seem fun to do. He loved anybody to come and pay attention to him, and was like a favourite mongrel that will do the silliest tricks to please his master. He must have developed his handsome physique by different exercises, for at the slightest suggestion he would stand before one and run through a few physical jerks, laughing as he did so.

He was helpful and kind to all the inmates of the ashram, would bring them cigarettes and beedies and light them for them, and would try to be useful in simple ways. If you asked him where God was, he would reply, "He is in the heart".

The second of this type was Vasudev Swamî, a tiny old yogi from Ale¹, a village that lies on the road between Poona and Nasik. He was one of the type whose spiritual practices have caused him to become God-mad. He was a pathetic, tiny creature with a fine and fair soft skin, closely cropped grey hair, a bent back, and a palsied left arm and leg. Both legs were bent up in some extraordinary way, and his knees were held fixed by a fibrous ankylosis. He had to be lifted by two or three people for his daily bath, and for various essential functions, and his knees were so painful that it was almost impossible to move him without causing him considerable pain.

He wore a saffron-coloured garment, and possessed many toys which he liked to have always before him. In Mahabaleshwar he had, for instance, a baby's rattle, two dolls, a white wooden dog with black spots that wagged its head, and three or four broken odds and ends of what had perhaps once been favourite toys. He had five rings, two of which were valuable, and he seemed to love these rings in the same way that he loved his toys. He spoke always in Marathi in a rather plaintive voice, and his topics would veer from his immediate physical needs to quotations from the Shastras.

His bedding, which was brought with him from Ale, was scrupulously clean and of good quality, and it was obvious that his own village folk loved and cared for him. He never lay down, but, when he slept, bent his curved back a little more still, and drooped forward onto a pillow in so awkward a way that one wondered how he slept at all. He was so small, so frail, and obviously suffered so much from the limitations of his damaged body, that no one of any sensibility could look at him without a feeling of compassion. He was kept only three or four days at Mahabaleshwar, because it was thought

¹ Map Reference C/8.

unwise to expose him to the winter climate there, when he obviously had so little physical stamina.

Of the masts, perhaps Dhôndî Buâ was the most interesting. He was brought from Wai, a charming country town of fair size on the banks of the Krishna river, at the foot of the eastern scarp of the Mahabaleshwar hills. He was about fifty years old, with grey hair clipped short, a fair, rather pink complexion, and deep set, kindly eyes that shone in the way that eyes shine when someone smiles, but though his eyes had the light of a smile in them, his face did not follow suit. His face had a rapt and slightly puzzled look. There were fine wrinkles over his forehead, across which would flit a frown from time to time like a flurry of wind over a lake, and there were delicate crow's-feet at the corners of his eyes. He wore an old *dhoti** and shirt, and a capacious cotton coat with sleeves so long that his hands were mostly hidden. The side pockets of his coat bulged with odds and ends, and he had two bundles of cloth tied and knotted in an elaborate way, which he rarely let out of his sight.

His voice was a soft whimper, almost like that of a dog who wants you to take him for a walk, and he spoke in the briefest, broken phrases with such a plaintive note, that one thought he might burst into tears at any moment. There was a small hoard of coins in one of his pockets, and he had a habit of giving a few annas to anyone who took his fancy.

He had the gestures of a jamâli mast, and would make odd signs with his hands. His most conspicuous habit was to touch the ground with one or both hands, bending down to do so, and thereafter, putting both hands together, he would touch his forehead. He would touch not only the ground in this way, but any object that happened to be in his way.

His usual gentleness was occasionally broken by fits of quite unexpected anger. He seemed particularly to dislike being told to do things by the boys working in the ashram, and once or twice threw stones at them, so that they began to be afraid of him. With adults and the mandali he would be difficult in a child-like way, but was never truculent to this extreme.

Baba explained that Dhôndî Buâ was on the fifth plane, and that he was on the verge of entering a majzoob-like state. He was not altogether happy at Mahableswhar, and kept asking to go back to Wai. He stayed about three weeks, and was then sent away to his home town. He seems to

* *Note for westerners:* A dhoti is one of the many traditional garments of India ; it is a length of cloth that is wound skilfully round the waist, and loosely round each leg, so that it forms a kind of improvised pair of trousers.

have spent most of his life in Wai, and was previously a *peon* (a commissionaire) in some Government department office there.

If Dhôndi Buâ, apart from his occasional outbursts of temper, was timid and apologetic, Kabîr was his antithesis. Kabîr was the sort of man one could never forget. He had the loudest and most raucous laugh one had ever heard. Twenty or thirty times a day his cacophonous cachinnation would echo through the woods, and must, one would have thought, have scared the birds and beasts for half a mile around.

He had originally been in Pandharpur¹, and Masa had brought him to Baba in Meherabad for one day in August 1940. In 1947, he was brought to Mahabaleshwar from Kurduvadi, not far from Pandharpur. When he first set foot in the ashram he inspired one with some misgivings, for he had a very swarthy skin, was almost naked, and his head was covered with a tousled thatch of thick, black hair. In addition, he kept opening his large mouth, showing two rows of ugly yellow teeth, throwing back his head, and uttering this terrible laugh. He used to live in the cremation ground in Pandharpur, and was said to eat the incinerated remains of corpses there; so the reader will understand that one could not look at him without a feeling that his outlook on life, to say the least, must differ from one's own.

A shave, a bath, and a kafni, made him look more conventional, but his laugh remained unchanged. Day after day, however, when one studied his expression at the time of laughing, one came to understand Baba's statement that his laugh was the result of some genuine inner happiness that boiled over like this. In spite of his forbidding appearance and raucous laugh, there was a sense of some inner luminosity to which his outer shell did the poorest justice.

At meals, he would crouch over his plate, making signs on the ground or in the air with one hand for a few minutes, and then, plunging his hand into the food, he would clutch a mammoth handful, and stuff it into his mouth. He would swallow this bolus after but one or two movements of his jaws, and then roar with laughter. Kabîr was a source of amazement to all, for never had one seen quite so strange an intermingling of an inner brilliance with so repellent and bestial a shell. He remained about ten days at the ashram, and was then sent back to Kurduvadi.

The third mast of interest was Jumâm, a mâdar-zâd type with some characteristics of a jamâli. As a mâdar-zâd, who had been a mast from birth. he was to the average man, therefore, indistinguishable from a madman. He

¹ Map Reference D/9.

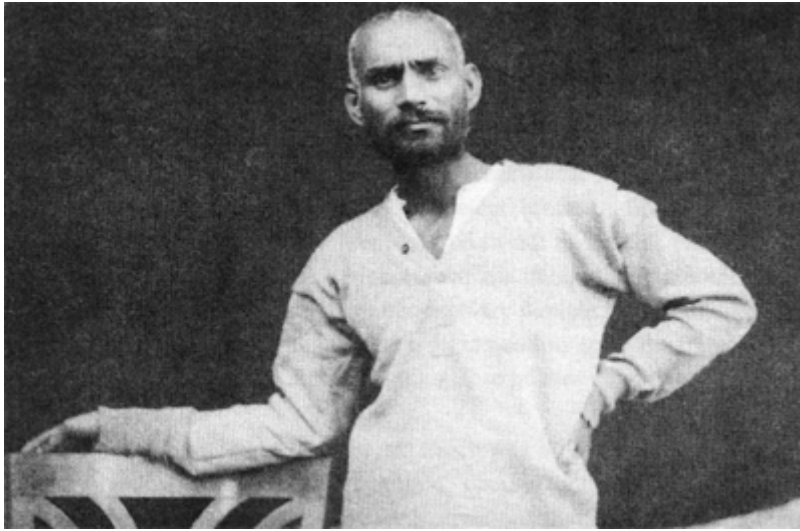
was still a young man, perhaps twenty-five years old, with a pale face slightly pitted with the scars of an old smallpox, dazed but splendid eyes, and a sm body of which he seemed to have the barest cognizance.

He was content to sit all day in any part of the ashram, and when led by the hand was docile and cooperative. The only restless trait was that of interminably moving his forearms, hands, and fingers, in grotesque, sinuous, and apparently purposeless ways. His arms, hands, and fingers were slim and long, and their joints so supple that their movements bore a resemblance to the writhings of a snake. Save for intermittent, softly uttered phrases that one could barely hear or understand, he was silent, utterly lost in his divine intoxication.

One day, Eruch brought a certain Bhôrwâlâ Baba, an adept pilgrim from Bhor¹, to see Baba in Mahabaleshwar. He was a thin, elderly Muslim, with an intelligent and kindly face. Before setting out for Mahabaleshwar, Eruch, in order not to divulge the name of Meher Baba, had told Bhôrwâlâ Baba that he was bringing him to meet his elder brother. Bhôrwâlâ Baba, however, at once rejoined that he was being taken not to Eruch's brother, but to Meher Baba. He then added, "Meher Baba has in him the whole universe, he is the Master of everyone, and he is within every disciple. He is this world, that which is above it, and below it; he is in me and in everyone. He is the saint of saints, he is Tajuddin Baba; in one glance he sees the whole continent of India".

As soon as he arrived at the ashram, Eruch told all these things to Baba, and Baba, because he had been recognized, decided not to meet Bhôrwâlâ Baba. He sent supper to him, and gave instructions that, after a night's rest and breakfast the following morning, he should be sent away. Such independent spiritual witnesses of Baba's greatness are met from time to time, they crop up in unexpected places, and because of their especial value and interest to devotees of Baba, I have collected them together in one short chapter elsewhere in this volume. Although Baba does not always avoid contact with such advanced souls who outwardly recognize him, he prefers, as a general rule, not to meet them, since in some way they are not accordant with the needs of his work. Chattî Baba and many others have also uttered striking encomiums of Baba's greatness, and the border-line between those who, though they recognize his status, are suitable for his work, and those who are not suitable, is obscure to all except to Baba himself.

¹ Not on map, but is about twenty-five miles north-east of Mahabaleshwar (as the crow flies).



Shah Saheb faces the camera, and seems a little puzzled.
Mahabaleshwar Ashram, January, 1947

Shah Saheb, the last I shall describe here, was a mast of no special merit, being of the eighth type, partly God-mad, and partly mast. He was interesting because he seemed to feel the importance of Baba, and was reluctant to leave. When the mast ashram was disbanded at the end of January, Shah Saheb was therefore kept on, and at the end of May he moved down to Satara with Baba and his group.

He was perhaps thirty-five years old, tall, with a strong physique, oval face, regular features, and deep set almond-shaped eyes. His eyes held a dazed expression as if something inside his mind, or in the outer world that he saw, puzzled him. He would murmur to himself a great deal, but one remembered him particularly for a strange, deep-voiced laugh that he would utter every few minutes, for no obvious reason. His real name was Abdul Siddîq, and although he was brought to Mahabaleshwar from Panchgani only a few miles away, he seemed to have come originally either from the north of India, or possibly from Africa. His talk was vague in the extreme, he would pronounce one or two words clearly, and the rest of the sentence would be a confused murmur that no one understood. Once or twice, when asked where he was born, he murmured some words that sounded like Africa and Somaliland, and it is possible that he had somehow made his way to Bombay, and thence to Panchgani.

In the early weeks of his stay at Mahabaleshwar, he spent a great part of the day either sitting in a corner of the ashram smoking, or lying buried under his blanket, from the depths of which he would murmur, and laugh, as if enjoying some sort of inner life. Later, he came to take an interest in the ashram life, and after the other inmates had left, began to look after himself with surprising competence. He used to enjoy sitting in a comfortable chair in any part of the ashram, but as soon as a member of the mandali appeared, he would at once get up and leave the chair for their use. He liked to turn over the pages of books and newspapers, and one would see him sometimes with a cigarette in his mouth, reclining at ease in an armchair, his nose buried in *The British Journal of Surgery*, or *The Times of India*. Like Ali Shah he was a prodigious smoker, and his clothes and body had that rank smell of a man who smokes to excess.

So much, then, for the Mahabaleshwar Ashram. The account is far from complete, for it falls short in countless details of the daily round, and gives an account only of the more interesting inmates. For brief descriptions of the other residents, the reader is referred to Mahabaleshwar in the supplement.

Above all, this account has one irremediable defect, that it shows nothing of the invisible spiritual interplay between the consciousness of the Master and the minds and souls of the inmates. For that, we are circumscribed by Baba's own statement that his relationship with masts is a matter between him and them. So, like an iceberg, we see only the eighth that stands above the surface of the ocean, and the submerged seven-eighths, the real mass of the thing, is hidden from our eyes.