

*The
Joyous
Path*

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VOLUME ONE

*The
Joyous
Path*

THE LIFE OF
AVATAR MEHER BABA'S
SISTER, MANI

HEATHER NADEL

2 0 1 5

SHERIAR FOUNDATION
MYRTLE BEACH, SOUTH CAROLINA



DEDICATION

To my Beloved, Avatar Meher Baba,

and to His darling sister Mani,

who was my inspiration,

my mentor,

and my friend.



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FOREWORD

Beloved Baba's little sister, Mani, was a perfect blend of His Love and practicality. She reflected Baba's love in so many ways that every Baba-lover felt it in a personal way. Whether it was playing finger games or shadow puppets with children, or sharing hugs, humorous stories, and Baba songs with His lovers, she brought Baba's light and love to everyone who was fortunate to meet her. Whether it was her attention to detail in doing Trust work or handling worldly situations with poise, she lived every moment as if Baba was physically present. And in her constant activity, she always took a light touch with everything.

Growing up in Baba's family, she was our Manifui ("Mani-aunty") and our constant connection to Baba. She handled all family communications with Baba. Even when our father, Behram, would go to Guruprasad to speak to Baba about some family matter, Mani would be there, too. Because she played such a close and central role in our family, we learned so many things from her example. Most importantly, she always thought about how to do things in a way that would please Baba. She gave us all a constant reminder of how to please Him. She would always say to us

what Baba said: “You either want what you want or you want what I want. You can’t want both.” There should be no backseat driving with Baba.

What can we say about our dear sister, Heather? She is the only one who could have written this book. She was Mani’s personal assistant and confidant for so many years. One time, when we both were sitting on the porch at Meherazad with Mani, Heather came walking toward us. Mani said, “Here comes my guardian angel.”

We are both totally sure that this book of stories—which Mani personally shared with Heather—is a labor of love that reflects Heather’s true service to Mani. It will bring Mani alive to those who knew her and those who never had the chance to meet her. The stories here shine with love for Beloved Baba.

Rustom and Sohrab Irani

January 2015

Poona, India

PREFACE

One day in the 1980s, shortly before New Year's Day, Mani brought out a handmade box from her treasure store. The inside was sectioned into fifty-three little squares, separated by cardboard strips. Each square held a small, rolled-up piece of paper. With the box came a pair of tweezers, for pulling out the little paper cylinders.

That New Year's Day, Mani put the box on Baba's chair in Mandali Hall at Meherazad and told its story to the pilgrims there. Delia DeLeon had made the box by hand in 1948. Each little paper had a Baba-quote typed on it. Delia gave the box to Baba and He took it, admired it, and put it on His lap, inviting the women to come up one by one and take a quote. Mehera was first, of course, and then Mani. The Baba-quote Mani picked thrilled her:

“When Love is present, the path to the Truth is joyous.”

Forty-plus years later, she invited the pilgrims to each pull out a quote from the little box on Baba's chair. One by one, the people came up, knelt in front of His chair, and pulled out a quote. It was very moving

for them to receive those messages, knowing that He had held that very box Himself.

When the session was over, everyone went out of the Hall except Mani and one of her helpers. With no one around, her helper urged Mani to pick a quote herself. Mani at first declined; she had already received hers years ago. But then, suddenly, she decided to do it. She went forward, knelt before the chair, took the little tweezers, selected a slot at random, and pulled out a quote.

You can guess what happened. Yes, out of fifty-three possibilities she got the same one she had pulled out when Baba held the box:

“When Love is present, the path to the Truth is joyous.”

Eruch used to say that when you follow Baba, the path follows you. And that was the path we saw following Mani, no matter what she went through: the joyous path. Because in her, Love was so present.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, my deepest gratitude to Baba's dear doctor, Goher Irani, who not only encouraged me to write this book, but also made it possible. She allowed me to copy Mani's original diaries, notebooks, and letters (now in the Trust Archives), as well as translated Gujerati, Marathi, and Hindi into English from Mani's diaries, including all their idioms and intentions. She also provided insights into the women mandali's lives with Baba. And thanks to dearest Goher for nagging, scolding, and urging me through all the ups and downs, and allowing me to use Mani's Meherazad office for writing this book.

My great appreciation to Meheru Irani and Katie Irani, for their constant support and, when needed, informative descriptions of life with Mani; and to Katie for also translating shorthand and other languages into English from the diaries. Also to others of the women and men mandali and some disciples from Baba's time: Eruch Jessawala, Manu Jessawala, Najoo Kotwal, Roda Mistry, Bal Natu, Aloba Shapurzaman, Bhau Kalchuri, Meherwan Jessawala, Arnavaz Dadachanji, Khorshed Irani, and others; I am honored by the time they gave answering my questions about Mani's life.

Sincerest gratitude to Baba's close family (present and past) for all

the contributions they made that came along with the family's unique love for Baba, Mehera, and Mani, which is part of Mani's story. And very special thanks to Baba's twin nephews, Rustom and Sohrab, for their continuous care in a thousand big and little ways, and for their touching Foreword.

Great thanks to my very observant, meticulous, and compassionate editors: Judy Ernst (who also prompted me to write this book) and Irene Holt. And to Fayre Makeig, who professionally copy-edited the book with great care in spite of her newborn baby (yay, Taj!); and to Nancy Wall, for her helpful overviews. Also to Leah Florence for her invaluable assistance in a number of areas.

A thousand thanks to Sheila Krynski, the extremely talented, considerate, generous, creative, and enthusiastic book designer and much more, with a special nod for all the fun times we had and for the beautifully designed book she produced. Many thanks to Andy Lesnik, who pulled this very big rabbit out of the hat of Sheriar Foundation, and to its Board of Directors. Thanks also to Sheila Gambill, Larry Nessly, and all the staff at Sheriar Press, and to the Mani-friends who helped make it possible.

To Kacy Cook, Janet Judson, Shelley Marrich, and Pat Sumner for their indescribable help on many levels throughout my sixteen years of writing this book; they also were among Mani's "helpers," as was Davana Brown, a very supportive companion for me in the world of writing about the mandali.

My deep appreciation to the following photo archives: MSI Collection, Meher Nazar Publications (MNP), the Elizabeth Chapin Patterson Photo Archive (ECPPA), and the Avatar Meher Baba Trust Archives, for their most generous contributions to this book.

Great thanks to those who found many of the photos from Baba's time to go along with this story: Meredith Klein, David Fenster, and Martin and Christine Cook, and thanks also to Martin and Chris for their amazing work at restoring some of these. I'm very grateful also to

the kind and generous photographers acknowledged in the List of Illustrative Materials. To Beth Ganz, Anne Giles, Sheila Krynski, and Adair Adams: your efforts to take beautiful photographs documenting selected places and objects in Meherazad and Meherabad are much appreciated. Thanks as well to Meher Baba Information for use of some of their audio recordings.

A special acknowledgement to Anne Giles, who in the beginning helped with tapes, Mani's ideas about transcripts, and memories of Mani, and served at the end as the meticulous indexer.

Thanks to Steve Klein, Gusi Carpenter, the late Wendell Brustman, Diana Bloise, and Ward Parks; and thanks especially to "Murghi" and Glenn Magrini for photos, memories, Mani doodles, Mani jokes, and inspirations.

To my loving, caring family: Trudi Dimples, Boots Ferguson, Amy Romanczuk, and Jimmy Nadel, and their spouses/partners Norman, Carolyn, Alan, and Liza, as well as my nephews Alex and Joby, and to my much-missed mother-in-law Ruthe Nadel, and dear dad Barlow Ferguson.

Last and most, my heart's gratitude to my husband, Erico Nadel, for his unconditional support, encouragement, help, and care in this effort and in each and every aspect of my life. He, along with beloved Mehera, was Baba's greatest gift to me.

INTRODUCTION

This book is not a biography of Mani S. Irani, although the chapters are chronological. Rather it's a story of Mani's life with Avatar Meher Baba as she herself saw it, often through her own words. And it's a story of how others saw her, to give the world a glimpse of the character and nature of a soul chosen by the Avatar of the Age to be His sister.

Mani lived with Baba in His ashram from the time she was thirteen years old, and served Him for twenty-seven more years after He dropped His body in 1969, until she herself passed away in 1996. For Baba's work she wrote numerous letters, diaries, and in later years, two books. She also spoke a lot about her life and views of Baba's methods to the resident Baba-lovers who were helpers in her work, as I was in various forms from 1976 until she left us. I wrote down many of her comments from her informal chats with us, and these notes supplement the main sources for this book—her written works and transcripts of her recorded talks—as do interviews with some of the mandali and many Baba-lovers who met Mani.

The most meaningful sources for a book about the Divine flavor of her life are Mani's talks with pilgrims who gathered in Meherazad Mandali Hall after Baba dropped His body. Mani's fabulous gift as a

storyteller is revealed in these talks, recorded by Baba-lovers on cassette tape and video. When I began writing this book, I was generously given transcripts of many of these recordings. Looking them over, I recalled Mani's strongly felt view on using such transcripts. In a formal letter to someone she permitted to keep transcripts of her stories, as recorded on tape and video, she wrote:

. . . Rano and I have often been dismayed to see a verbatim production of a good talk given by one of the mandali appear so poorly on paper. Hence my reservation about producing these Baba-stories in print.

. . .

In short, it can be said that tapes are for listening, videos are for viewing, and write-ups are for reading.

Of course, in future these stories relating to life with Beloved Avatar Meher Baba as told by me on tape and video will need to be shared in printed form also—with permission from the appropriate sources. However, I request that when any of the transcribed material is permitted to be used in print, it be made presentable before it is served to the readers. I mean, please have it edited by someone with a sensitive editing skill so that the arrangement of words makes the reading flow smoothly and keeps in sight the heart of these stories of our Beloved.

Knowing this, and having edited some of Mani's transcripts with her over the years, I have edited transcripts accordingly for this book (mostly just taking out "ohhs" and "ahems"). Anything Baba "said" (through His gestures, of course) in her stories, I have kept word for word as she recounted.

Being a brilliant raconteur, Mani told stories with great aplomb, and there are different versions of some of them. I've picked the version

most repeated or, in some cases, the earliest version. As Mani wrote in the introduction to her book *God-Brother*:

As I like to point out, if something happened in 1927 and I think it happened in 1928, it doesn't change the happening itself, does it?

I mention this because Baba books contradict each other in the matter of dates and things, and even the mandali do so when telling stories in Mandali Hall. You may notice that some dates and details given by me in this book differ from the ones I gave some time ago while recounting these same stories on tape or videotape.

All I can say is that telling a story off the cuff and writing it down with forethought are very different things. I remember my teacher telling the class (in her very nasal voice), "Now children, think before you ink."

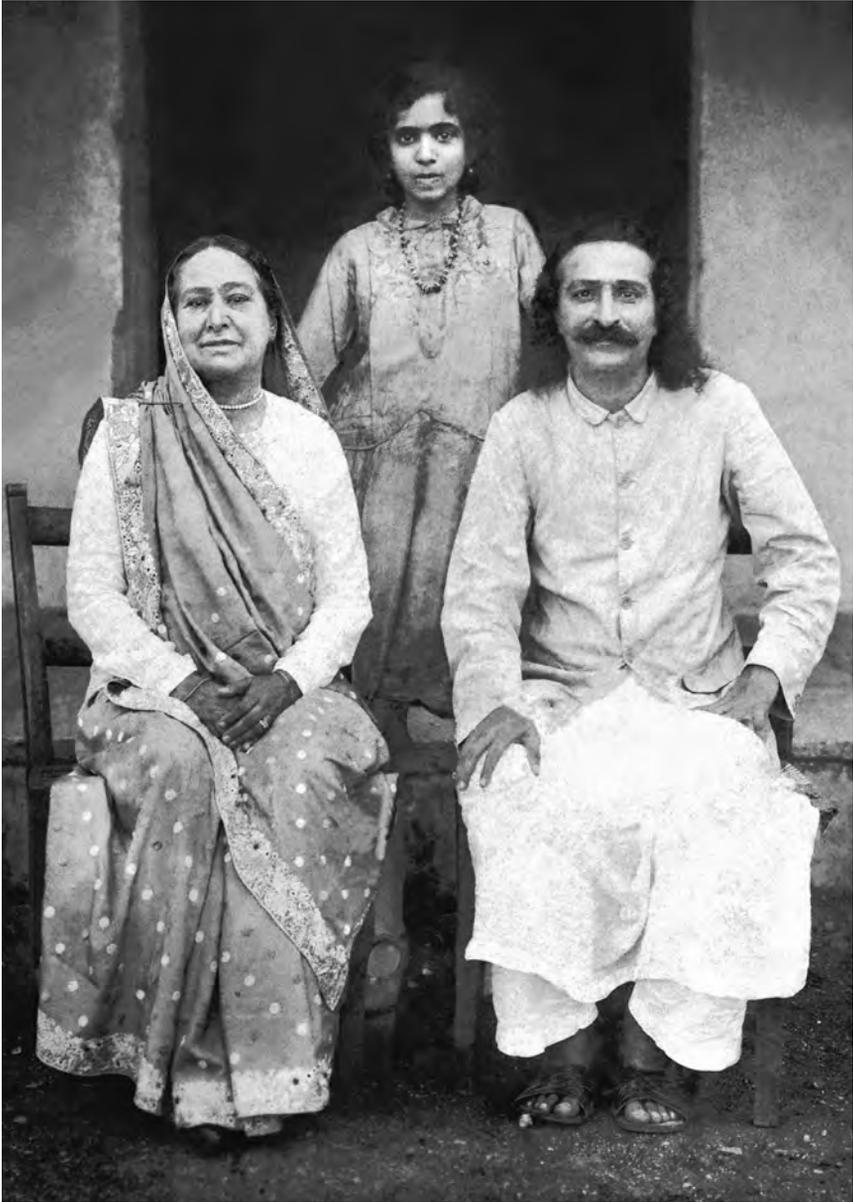
Mani then went on to write that she had done a lot of thinking and a good bit of research to write *God-Brother*, and I have done the same for this book. Another mandali member may have told a different version of the same episode, but this is a book about Mani and what she shared. In every story Mani conveys a vivid sense of Baba's work on His close ones, the effect of His presence among them, and His Love transforming them, in a way very few could.

The day Mani passed away, a helper commented spontaneously, "Every cell in her body belonged to Him. Everything else was something she clothed herself in for Him." This book is about Mani's world and about her relationship with the glorious God-Man, Avatar Meher Baba, who created such a sister for Himself.

P A R T I

God's Sister





Avatar Meher Baba with His mother, Shireenmai, and His sister, Mani.

PROLOGUE

THE NEW MOON

As was their habit, Sheriarji and Shireenmai were sitting together in the evening, and Sheriarji was reading aloud to his wife in Persian. The book was the *Shahnameh*, the Persian epic, and they had come up to the story about Princess Manija. They were sitting in their home, “Pumpkin House” (so called because of the pumpkin-shaped stone in front of it). The second of their five sons, Merwan, no longer lived with them but dropped by often, and another three boys were still at home. Shireenmai was pregnant, and very near her time.

As they were reading this particular evening, her pains began and she was rushed to David Sassoon Hospital, where all her other children had been born. After some time she gave birth to a baby girl. It was December 15, 1918, in Poona, India, and a new moon was in the sky. At first they thought of naming the baby Chandan (“moon”) after the new moon, but Shireenmai, who was very up-to-date, felt it was too old-fashioned a name, so they settled on Manija, after the princess in the *Shahnameh*.

Another child born into the world.

But this was a baby with an amazing difference: her older brother Merwan was God-Incarnate, Meher Baba, the Avatar of the Age.

What lifetimes of love, longing, and service and what divine grace destined a soul for such a place: sister to the God-Man. For there He



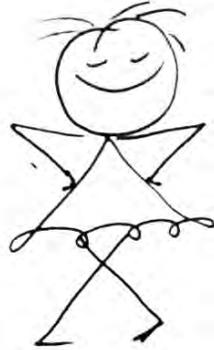
Merwan, 1917–1918.

was, twenty-four years old and God-Realized, standing right outside the hospital room door when the nurse came out to say, “It’s a girl.” He had just cycled over, and was the first one to hear the news. A Zoroastrian baby is never handled until washed, but Baba hurried to where Mani was, picked her up, and kissed and cuddled her, despite His mother’s protests: “No, no, Merog, don’t touch her! Put her down! She’s not been washed yet!” So from her first

moments, Mani was wholly Baba’s, and no one could ever interfere with their relationship. It was One on one. In later years, when people would tell her how they “came to Baba,” Mani would smile and say, “I didn’t come to Baba; Baba came to me!”

“That was the beginning, a continuation of many lives of longing,” Mani would say. “And I was born with just one ambition—to be with Baba.”

GOD'S SISTER



THE VOICE OF HIGHEST COMMAND

You could say that Mani's story truly begins with the Voice that spoke to her father, Sheriarji, many years before, when he was a seeker wandering in the desert searching for God. For without that Voice, Sheriarji most likely would never have become a father at all or established the family into which the God-Man (and His youngest sister) were destined to be born. He had dedicated his life to God since the age of ten, when he had left his home in Persia, his family, and all worldly ties, with one aim and only one: to find God.

I've heard Mani tell the story about her parents many times to Baba-pilgrims gathered in Meherazad Mandali Hall in the 1970s, '80s, and '90s. When she was a little girl, she told pilgrims, she would beg her father to tell her a "true story" and he sometimes would tell her how once, during his ten years wandering in India, he had nearly died from thirst. In his agony, he called out to God, and there suddenly appeared out of nowhere two men with hide waterbags slung over their shoulders—one old and one young. They approached Sheriarji.

As Mani told in the Hall:

My father struggled to his knees and held out his cupped hands to receive the precious water, but the old man poured in only a few drops, and neglecting the silent plea in my father's eyes, fixed up the end of the waterbag and turned away. My father fell again, exhausted, and after a while when he looked up, saw the men still standing there, and the young one proffering him a drink from his bag. Father held out his hands and drank his fill. At the end, when he looked up to thank his benefactor, there was no one in sight—both men had completely disappeared, and there was not a sign of them as far as the eye could see, which was a long distance in that bare stretch of desert. He then understood who he had to thank, and how God had heard and answered his call.

Mani often talked of how their father's search for God touched her Divine Brother, Meher Baba. Even in 1968, when Baba was deeply engrossed in the final phase of His Universal Work, He mentioned their father. Mani recalled, "We were in Guruprasad [Poona] and, seated in His room, just apropos of nothing, Baba turned and gestured, 'You know, My father: in the whole world there's no match for him. There's none like him. That is why I was born to him.'"

And once when Mani was traveling with Baba and Mehera and the other women mandali in the Blue Bus in the foothills of the Himalayas, Baba turned around to them and said, "You see all these mountains?"

"Yes, Baba," they said.

"See how difficult it is for us to go up them, even though we are sitting comfortably in a bus?" For the bus was straining to climb the steep slopes, and making all kinds of noise—*vroom vroom vroom*

(what Mani called “the bus’s labored breathing”)—and the women were listening to the *vroom vroom* and enjoying the adventure.

“You know My father?” Baba said, “He wandered all around here on foot looking for Me. In search of Me.”

Another time, she told pilgrims of how, when they were traveling in the bus along the edge of a desert in Gujarat with hot winds blowing up sand all around them, Baba turned around from His seat in front and said, “You see these hot winds and the sand here. Look at this expanse.” They all looked at the expanse of that enormous desert and nodded, “Yes, Baba. It’s so hot and sandy and dusty. Really a desert.”

“Ah,” Baba said, “But we’re going in a bus. My father, he went through a desert in the north on foot. Looking for Me, in search of Me.”

Mani said later, “I absorbed that very deeply, coming as it did from Baba.”

Throughout his early life, as Baba said, Sheriarji wandered, searching in the mountains, in the deserts, in all sorts of solitary places in northern India, determined to find God. Then one day, exhausted, at the limit of his strength, and nearing despair, he heard a Voice, what Mani called the Voice of Highest Command. It told him to go back into the world and wait; that what he longed for he would not attain, but his son would. So Sheriarji made his way down to Poona where by the Will of God his life changed completely.

SHIREENMAI

A Voice from God turned the path of the Avatar’s father. Just see how His mother was brought into the play. This was another story that little Mani loved to hear, the story of how her mother and father met, and how they happened to marry. Mani recalled in Mandali Hall that sometimes her mother, Shireenmai, “would tell it before my father, who

could be heard (or rather seen) silently chuckling at particular parts of the narrative. I would plead for certain bits to be repeated, while my mother would impatiently brush me off and continue.”

Naturally Mani herself learned the story well. And would tell it with great animation to pilgrims.

“My father was thirty when he ‘proposed’ to my mother, who was then five years old. It happened this way . . .”

When Sheriar came wandering out of north India toward the south, he stopped to see his sister Piroja in Poona. She was overjoyed. And determined that he should settle down and stay with her. She pleaded with him to get married, even promising to find him the right wife. “At this my father chuckled,” Mani said, “and just then saw a little girl of five, clutching her writing slate, pass by the entrance of the house. She was going for her morning lesson to a neighbour’s, and was dressed in a short frock and her favourite red *ijar* (the loose three-quarter-length trousers worn at that time) with a red ribbon at the end of her little pigtail. As my father saw the child, he pointed at her and said to his sister, ‘All right, if I marry, I marry her and no one else!’ He realised the absurdity of his proposition, but it had been intentional, meant to put an end to his sister’s coaxings and arguments. He was stunned therefore when his sister took him up on it.”

For Piroja, wily lady, knowing full well that Sheriarji would never go back on his word, rushed off to see her friend Golandoon, who was the mother of the child. She passionately begged Golandoon to save her brother by allowing her daughter to marry him. Golandoon’s heart melted and before long she found herself saying “yes,” she would give her five-year-old daughter Shireen in marriage to a thirty-year-old dervish! When Golandoon’s husband, Dorab, came home and found out about it, he raged and raved. Mani related in Mandali Hall, “There were daily scenes between the two, but my granny would not budge, simply saying she had given her consent to her good friend, and could not break her word! My grandfather

never got over it, and years later when Sheriar and Shireen were married, he did not attend the wedding.*

“Once my father knew that the matter was irrevocable, he adjusted himself to the new course his life had been guided towards—undoubtedly by God whose will reigned over all things—and he kept to his pledge not only in word but in spirit.”

They were engaged for nine years, then married, and at the age of fifteen Shireenmai had her first child, Jamshed. She was too young to feel a motherly bond for him and turned away from the baby. Her sister Dowlamasi and Dowlamasi's husband, Ferdoonmasa, who had no children, took care of him and then adopted him and loved him very deeply, so it turned out to be a good arrangement for everyone.

25TH FEBRUARY

At the age of sixteen, Shireen became pregnant with her second child. From the beginning this child was different for her; she awaited the baby's arrival with great love and happiness.

Mehera once named a play about Sheriarji, Shireenmai, and Baba's birth, “Sheriarji's Wish Is Granted.” It was a simple and charming title with a profound deeper meaning. For when baby Merwan was born to them, all Sheriarji's aspirations were fulfilled: his wish to find God was granted when he beheld this child.

Mani used to say, “My father knew who was to be born to them.” Two nights before the baby was born, Shireenmai had a dream. She was in David Sassoon Hospital in Poona, awaiting the delivery. As Mani told it to pilgrims:

My mother dreamt that she was standing at the
entrance of her home, and she had a baby in her arms.

* Many years later, however, Shireenmai's father became good friends with Sheriarji, recognizing what a fine man and good husband he was.

And in front of her she saw a river of people flowing by. All kinds of humanity: black people, white people, yellow, brown, old, young, going by like a broad river, which was my mother's illustration. It was as if the people of the whole world were going past her. As they went by, they didn't stop, but their heads turned towards her; they were all looking at the baby in her arms. The stream of people was endless, flowing on and on and on.

When in the morning she told the dream to her mother, who was a very beautiful lady from Persia and a very shrewd, clever, wise person, my grandmother said, "Oh, Shireen, this dream means that he'll be a great, great leader. Someone very great is to be born to you."

But when she told my father, he just looked at her and said, with great feeling and reverence, "Shireen, you do not know who this child is that is to be born to us!"

So my father knew, he always knew, even before Merwan was born, who his son was. And it is such a grace, such a blessing, for that recognition to have come to one of His parents. It took a long time for my mother, but my father always knew.

*"His birthday is Earth-day
When hearts in pain are born again
to hope and light and crystal joy
because of Shireen's baby boy"*

wrote Mani, in a song titled "25th February." For as the Baba-world knows, Avatar Meher Baba was born in Sassoon Hospital on February 25, 1894, and as we can all imagine, the heart of the world must have sighed with joy and relief, and the celestial realms must have exalted at the unfathomable generosity of God.

THE PERFECT BOY

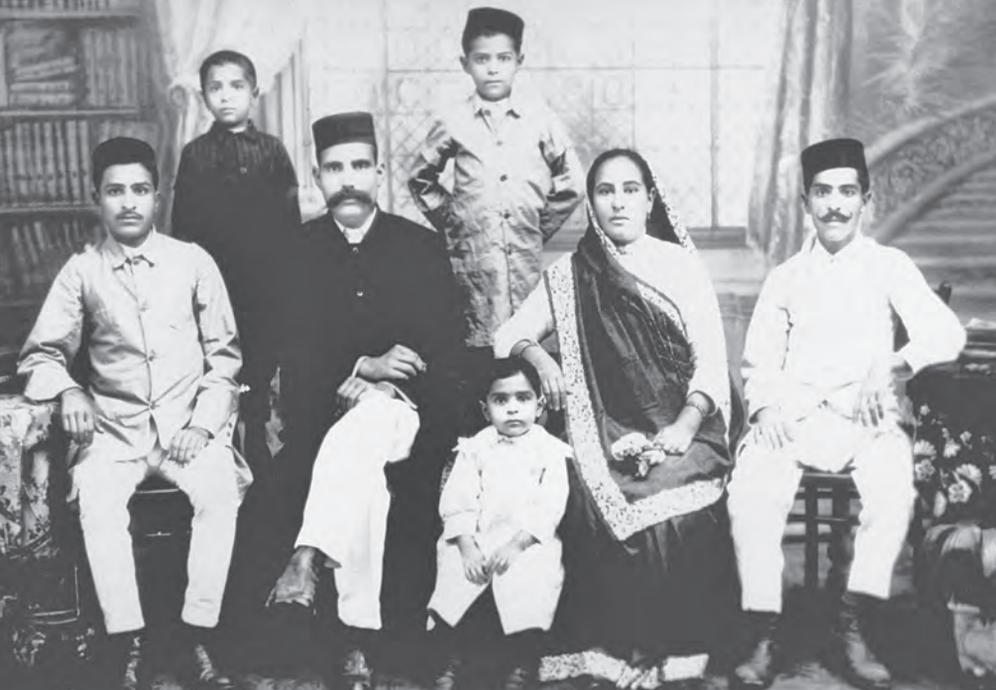
Shireenmai loved her second son passionately from the moment of His birth although she didn't understand or know of His status, despite her dream. Mani said that she always referred to Him as her "true first-born":

I often heard my mother say, "Merwan was my most beautiful child." He had the most lovely golden hair which she did not have the heart to cut, and therefore Merwan had curls down to His shoulders till He was nearly five—as was not too uncommon in those days. He was often taken by strangers for a European child. My mother had great dreams and ambitions for this son, and she was determined that when He grew up she would send Him abroad, to England and Europe, for future studies. And although later when I would tease her and say how her Merwan after all did go abroad and round the world many times, she would shake her head—it was not the same thing!



Merwan on the left, with sister Freni and brother Jamshed in Poona, when Merwan was about five.

As Mani would tell it, Merwan grew up in Poona surrounded by His parents and a host of relatives who adored Him. The baby's playing with a huge snake, His being protected by a water buffalo in the midst of a stampede, and other unusual incidents dot His childhood. But He



Baba's family. Seated from left: Merwan; a paternal cousin, Shayr; Adi Jr.; Shireenmai; and Jamshed. Standing: Beheram and Jal. Poona, 1915-1916.

grew to be a very normal boy, too, friendly, considerate, sensitive to the feelings of others, a natural leader, as well as bright and mischievous. He went to school, played with marbles, flew kites, and sang. The neighbors would remember long afterwards, "He had such a beautiful voice." He would sing in the lanes of the neighborhood early in the morning in Persian, and whenever He sang people would stop their work just to listen to Him.

Sheriarji knew who Merwan was. Shireenmai told Eruch's mother (who years later told Mani) that even from the time Baba was a boy in school, every time He would enter a room where Sheriarji was seated, Sheriarji would stop whatever he was doing, and just for a moment, stand up. He did it very unobtrusively, very naturally, so that it would not be noticed. When one's parents were so respected, as they were in Baba's family, it was unheard of for a father to stand for a son. But Sheriarji would always stand for Merwan, as if in respect, as if in acknowledgement of Merwan's greatness.

Shireenmai noticed it after a while, though she never let him know. As Mani said, "You couldn't put anything past Mother."

Into the story at this point begins to swarm a whole cast of characters, including Merwan's younger brothers Jal, Beheram, and Adi. He also had two little brothers who died very young, and a sister, Freny, who He was very attached to and who also died, of a childhood illness at the age of seven. And aunts, uncles, and cousins (most of them "characters" in another sense also) who lived nearby or often came to visit.

Theirs was a normal, happy, middle-class Irani family in the British India of the early 1900s. The children were educated in English schools: Merwan went to St. Vincent's—a school for boys preparing for college and perhaps further education abroad. They lived in a very cosmopolitan neighborhood, with many different kinds of people from different religious backgrounds. Shireenmai took care of the house and the children, and Sheriarji went to work at the tea and toddy shop. They had many friends from their own community, as well as their neighborhood, plus of course relatives dropping in all the time. Shireenmai's beauty was renowned in their Zoroastrian community, and Mani used to proudly recall that she was referred to as one of the "Three Belles of Poona."

Mani lovingly described Shireenmai to pilgrims:

She was the companion chosen by Baba for my father. She was a wonderful mother and a good wife, a very good housekeeper, highly intelligent, not educated in English but brilliant in other ways. She was a very good mimic. I've heard people tell my mother, "Shireenbai, you should have been a barrister," because of her repartee and her wit. She was very much respected for all these points. And she was very practical, very shrewd, and my father needed someone like that exactly.

Sheriarji first had a job as a gardener, working for a rich Parsi family, and Mani said that he was extraordinary at gardening. “Anything he touched just blossomed . . . And that is why I was never surprised



Baba's parents, Sheriarji and Shireenmai, in a formal portrait.

when, in Catholic school, I would see a picture of St. Joseph, Jesus' father, with a staff in his hand, a dry stick with flowering lilies on one end. That's as it would be with my father. He would only touch something and it would flourish.”

Sheriarji went on to have a tea shop, then a toddy

shop, and then several toddy shops. Mani remembered hearing that at one time they had forty-three employees who would be paid their salaries by Shireenmai. She handled the money because she could not trust her husband's soft-heartedness to save anything for the family!

Yet although he worked hard and supported his family, Mani told Baba-lovers, “My father was a living example of what Baba tells us to do, to be in the world but not of it. That didn't mean that he was detached from his duties and responsibilities. But he was unattached to results. For him, it was always: God's will, God's wish.”

UNVEILING

So we arrive at 1913, when Merwan was a young man of nineteen, going to Deccan College, and His family was getting along in the world like any other. Jal was ten, Beheram was four, Shireenmai was thirty-five and soon to be pregnant with Adi, Sheriarji was sixty.

That year, one day in May, an ancient woman sitting under a tree in the bazaar beckoned to the teenage boy cycling by, and set in motion the cataclysm that would turn the family upside down and change the history of the world.

She was Babajan, one of the five Perfect Masters of the time. From that moment of their meeting, Merwan was drawn to Babajan “like a magnet to steel,” as He later said, and He began to meet with Her every night, losing all interest in the world. There is a small family detail about the night of Baba’s first contact with Babajan that Mani would sometimes recall. When Merwan walked home dazed and unreachable, little Jal was sent out to search for Merwan’s bicycle, which had been left behind. He looked everywhere but couldn’t find it, and it was never found.

Then in January 1914, when Merwan was sitting with Her one evening, Babajan kissed Him on the forehead and revealed to Him His Real State of God Beyond.

The morning after Babajan’s kiss, Shireenmai found her beloved boy unconscious in His room. He stayed that way for three days. None



Hazrat Babajan, perhaps sitting in front of Her usual tree in Poona..

of the doctors called could diagnose His condition. It was no better when He woke, for instead of lively, gentle, fun-loving Merwan, their boy seemed an automaton, and everyone had to conclude that He had gone mad.

Undoubtedly Sheriarji had some inkling of the deeper meaning of the profound and unfathomable change that had come over Merwan; but for Shireenmai and the others, it was a tragedy that had befallen their precious boy and them all. A tragedy in the family, pure and simple.

Four years later, Mani was born.

THE L-SHAPED ROOM

Just across the lane from Pumpkin House was a house that Sheriarji also owned, called the “House-with-the-Well” because there was a well in the open compound at the center of the house. Behind this well, at the back of the compound, was an L-shaped room.

Merwan, dazed and roaming in the year after Babajan’s kiss, was drawn to visit Sakori, the seat of the Perfect Master Upasni Maharaj. As soon as He arrived there, Maharaj threw a stone that struck Merwan on the forehead and sent Him down through the inner planes back to the realms of normal consciousness. Returning from Sakori to Poona, Merwan spent the next nine months in agony. And as He was right under the eyes of the family, He often secluded Himself in the little L-shaped room in the House-with-the-Well.

In Mandali Hall at Meherazad, Mani recalled the time: “He chose that room to closet Himself in during those months of supreme agony when He was trying to retain ordinary consciousness . . . He would bang His head on a stone in the rough flooring of a corner of the room until it bled, and then He would tie a handkerchief around His forehead to hide the wound from Mother.”

At that time when Merwan was in such pain, Shireenmai had a frightening and prophetic dream of the well.

As Mani described it:

She saw herself standing by the well and Merwan as a baby was in her arms. Though He was now grown up and a young man, she dreamt He was a babe in her arms, and she was holding Him close to herself. Then out of the well came a number of little women, goddesses dressed in green saris and glass bangles, and they were all looking at Mother.

One of them came forward to Mother with her hands outstretched and gestured, "Give me the baby." Mother, frightened, clutched Merwan tighter than ever and refused. The goddess again put out her hands and took another step forward. Mother said, "No," and took a step backwards, realizing that they were trying to take her child away. She was fighting not to let go and clutched Him harder. A third time the goddess came to her and somehow gently, before she knew it, they had taken her Merwan away from her. All the goddesses were very happy and made joyous sounds, and they all went back into the well with baby Merwan and disappeared.

Then Mother woke up, and she was so frightened, so upset, and so agitated that she couldn't sleep; she just waited for morning to come. First thing in the morning she related the dream to Merwan. And Merwan gave a joyous laugh, such a happy laugh that it upset and hurt Mother.

She remonstrated, "Merwan, You can laugh at my pain? I was so pained and so frightened by that separation, and I'm telling You that. And instead of comforting me, You laugh? You laugh at my pain?"

And He said, “Mother, I laugh because I know what it means. You don’t know what it means.”

In the years that followed, this room where Baba had closeted Himself at that terrible time was always very precious to Sheriarji and Shireenmai. It was never occupied by anyone ever, even when that portion of the house was temporarily rented out to different families in the later years.

In 1962 in Guruprasad, Baba said of that room:

After, when as [a] drop I knew that I was the Ocean,
I did not want to come back to the ordinary consciousness
from that State where I and I alone was—but the five
Perfect Masters kept pulling me down. And to attain and
retain this ordinary consciousness I used to bang My head
on the stone in My room at home—and blood would flow.
For nine months it was agony, and then I could retain it.
That Stone is still in My Room. It is worshipped now, and in
future the whole world will worship it.

This quote hangs on a wall of the room today, in Mani’s handwriting, “from notes taken down by Mani at the time.”

GIVING HIM UP

Mani often talked with great compassion about her mother, and what she had to go through being the mother of the Avatar. Shireenmai, after all, loved Merwan the best of all her children, and losing Him was terribly painful for her. But she didn’t let Him go without a fight.

As Mani told pilgrims, “Mother had a strong personality, and she passionately loved her son. So when she began to realize that she was losing Him, she fought tooth and nail. She wasn’t going to take it lying down. She couldn’t understand what was happening to Him; and she

blamed this old Mohammedan lady in the Poona bazaar [Babajan] and that old Hindu man in Sakori [Upasni Maharaj].”

It was their fault that Merwan had changed so much, that He wouldn't marry or study abroad or do any of the things that would be best for Him in a mother's opinion, that He was beginning to belong to the world and not to her! So she fought them both.

Mani loved to tell this next part:

My mother would send *her* mother, Golandoon, an old Persian lady, to protest to Babajan. Why does her son spend so much time with Babajan? Here countless times Shireen-mai had cooked His favourite supper, waited for Him, even reheated the supper and still no Merwan. By the time He'd come, the supper would be stone cold. After a few episodes of this, she would tell Golandoon, “You go and give Her a piece of my mind. Why does She keep my son so long? Tell Her this won't do! Leave my son alone! Send Him home at the right time!”

So my grandmother Golandoon would say, “Yes, Shireen,” and go to Babajan. Now I loved hearing this part. When she would come up to Babajan's tree, it would seem like Babajan had been looking out for her. Babajan would welcome her very warmly and make her sit down. Then they would look into each other's eyes like old, old friends. And then Babajan would say something in Persian, and my grandmother would reply in Persian. Then Babajan would quote a Persian couplet and immediately my grandmother would return it with another. And Babajan would start singing a little song, and my granny would join in.

Before you know it, there would be a tear in Babajan's eye, and my granny's tears would be flowing down her cheeks. It would be like a reunion of two dear old cronies

meeting after a long time. Finally Babajan would look at the clock on the side of the neem tree and say, “Don’t you think it’s late? Don’t you think your daughter will be waiting for you?”

Suddenly my grandmother would come to and remember her mission. “Oh, Babajan,” she’d start, “There’s something I have to tell You . . .” And before she could get any further, Babajan would say, “I know. Tell her He’s not her son. He’s My son. He’s not just for her. He’s for the whole world.”

When Merwan went to stay at Sakori with Upasni Maharaj, Shireenmai went to Sakori to protest. At least when He was with Babajan, He’d come home some of the time, but with Maharaj, He didn’t come at all.

As Mani recalled, it was a very difficult journey: Shireenmai had to take a train to the Chitali station, and from there take a bullock cart or a *tonga* (a one-horse carriage) to reach Sakori:

Mother had a lot of dignity, and always observed all the courtesies and social graces of her time. She had learned that it was customary to garland someone of Maharaj’s status, so she carried along with her in the train a garland of fresh flowers for Maharaj. It so happened that on one journey the whole time she traveled in the train, holding the flowers in her lap, she really gave it to the Old Man in her mind. “Why can’t He get another boy? Why is He after my son? India’s full of boys, heaven knows,



Upasni Maharaj.

why couldn't He choose someone else? I'm going to tell Him, 'Hands off my son!'"

When she got there, observing the courtesies, she took out the flowers and garlanded Maharaj. He looked up at her and said, "HmMMM. Good. Good. Wonderful garland of sandals."

Now sandals can depict [represent] disdain, something dirty. If you slap someone with your sandal or slipper, it's a form of abuse.

So Mother was shocked to hear Him say this, and said, "Maharaj? Sandals? But these are beautiful flowers!"

"Ah, yes," He said. "How often did you whack Me with sandals on the way here?"

Mother had greater respect for Maharaj after that, seeing that He had known her thoughts.

But despite her new respect for Maharaj, Shireenmai was not to be stopped; she was going to say what she'd come for. When Mani told this story, she loved imitating her mother's tone:

When they sat down together, Maharaj asked, "Well, what do you want?"

"What do You mean, what do I want? I don't want anything from You. I've only come to take what's mine. I'm going to take my son with me."

"Oh, you're going to take your son with you. And what are you going to do with Him when you take Him?"

"What do You mean, what am I going to do? I will do what every mother does."

"Oh, I see," said Maharaj. "You're going to educate Him?"

"Yes, of course. I'm going to send Him to England for further studies."

"Ah, and then you'll get Him married?"

“Indeed I will. I already have a girl in mind.”

All the time, of course, Mother was conveying by her tone that this is none of Maharaj’s business.

“I see, and then He’ll go into business and earn.”

“Yes, of course.”

“I see,” said Maharaj, and clapped His hands for Merwan. Merwan came and stood before Maharaj with His hands folded.

“Merwan, look, Your mother is here. She’s come to take You away. And she wants to educate You. She wants You to marry, do business, cheat, lie, steal, and do all the things people do out in the world.” Turning to Shireenmai, Maharaj then said, “But Mother . . .”

Immediately Shireenmai flared up, “I’m not old enough to be Your mother! Why do You call me mother?”

“But Mother,” continued Maharaj, “when you find a girl for Merwan, won’t you find a girl for me too?”

And because He wasn’t taking her seriously, Shireenmai got into a huff and stomped off and sat under a tree. As Mani described it, Maharaj said to Durgamai, one of His close women disciples, “Go. Go and feed her something. She hasn’t eaten since morning. She’s eating her heart away, she’s suffered much. Calm her down and bring her here.”

So Durgamai soothed Shireenmai and coaxed her into eating, and eventually she came back to Maharaj. Mani continued:

They both looked at each other. And then Maharaj said, “All right. If I promise to send Merwan back home in three months, will you be satisfied?”

She looked Him straight in the eyes and knew He would do it. “Yes.”

And then she went. And I was told that whenever she

left, Maharaj would always come out and see her off in the tonga, standing there until the tonga was gone.

In her book *God-Brother*,¹ Mani tells a beautiful story about Shireenmai giving up her son at last. She describes how in their home there was a secret cupboard, a cupboard that was always locked. Naturally, Mani often wondered about it. One day, when she was about ten, Mani came home unexpectedly early from school, and when she entered the house, she sensed something different in the atmosphere. Walking silently from room to room, she came upon her mother sitting in front of the secret cupboard. The cupboard was open, and Shireenmai was holding on her lap a pile of clothes, Baba's clothes, and silent tears were falling onto the clothes. Mani had never seen her mother cry before. Then Shireenmai noticed her and got up with a start, quickly putting the clothes away.

The next day when Mani tiptoed in to look at the cupboard, she found it unlocked and empty. Shireenmai had given the clothes away to Baba's lovers to whom they were precious. Mani realized then that her Mother's tears were tears of goodbye, that she was giving up her son to the world.

In between bursts of wandering, Merwan would stay with the family in Poona from time to time. Mani would tell a wonderful story about how a few years after His Realization, He was persuaded by Shireenmai to work at the family's toddy shop.



Photo of Baba and Shireenmai taken in Nasik circa 1929-1931.

Sheriarji also worked there. Sometimes he had to work late and sleep overnight at the shop. Shireenmai would give him a blanket. Invariably he'd return home the next morning without it.

"Mother would look at him," said Mani, "and just raise her eyebrows and Father would begin, 'Oh Shireen, he was so cold.' Next time it was, 'But Shireen, she was so old.' And this would go on every time: 'he was poor', 'she was cold', 'he was old' . . . I know how often this must have happened because one day I heard my mother flare up. She couldn't contain it anymore. 'Shorog,' she said, 'if I had kept all those blankets that I've given you, which you never have returned—if I'd kept them all, I could have started a blanket shop and raised my children on that.'"

Anyway, his son Merwan was just the same. In the later years, Mani once met a taxi driver who remembered Merwan from that time.

"I hear you have seen Meher Baba," she said.

"Yes," said the driver, "I saw Him as Merwanji [a term of respect then used for Merwan]."

"Oh, where did you see Him?"

"At the toddy shop. I was a child, and all of us children would play around there. When Merwanji was in the toddy shop, I would stand outside and watch Him."

So Mani asked, "Where did Merwanji sit in the toddy shop?"

"Behind the cash box."

"Oh, behind the cash box."

"Yes," said the old man, "and in the afternoon all the fakirs [Muslim mendicants] would come and Merwanji would put His hand in the cash box and bring out fistfuls of those silver coins and fling them on the road and all the fakirs would run after them."

And Mani groaned to herself, "Oh my poor mother, having a dervish for a husband and God for a son—and having to raise a family!"

BY SPECIAL APPOINTMENT

The family Shireenmai was raising by 1918 included little Adi, then four years old. At the time she was expecting Mani, Merwan was still living with them at Pumpkin House, off and on. So when Shireenmai's time came to give birth to Mani, and she went to stay at the hospital awaiting the baby, Merwan was home with Sheriarji.

Mani said that every day that Shireenmai was in the hospital, Merwan and Sheriarji would make lunch for her and Merwan would take the lunch to the hospital on His bicycle. So He was caring for Mani even before she was born.

Mani would occasionally speculate to us: "I sometimes wonder if when I was in the womb I had a familiar feeling of Baba being in there before me. . . ."

Baby Manija was born at last, a girl after a long line of boys, and was a much-welcomed and much-loved child. As mentioned before, Sheriarji and Shireenmai had a girl, Freny, who died at the age of seven. Mani would say to pilgrims, "I met Baba by 'special appointment' as it were, for I am told that Baba had asked Upasni Maharaj to give Him a sister. My mother related to me later how overjoyed Merwan appeared to have a sister again."



Shireenmai outside Pumpkin House in Poona.

After baby Mani and Shireenmai came home from the hospital to Pumpkin House, Merwan lived with them for a little while longer. But soon afterwards He left their home for good. Shireenmai always saw a connection between the two events.

In those days, children even up to two or two-and-a-half slept in cradles that were like small wooden beds. As Mani wrote in *God-Brother*, the last thing Merwan did before leaving their house was to rock Mani's cradle, kiss her, and tell their parents, "She's so very fortunate." Later on, when Mani would beg to hear this story again and again from her mother, Shireenmai would say wistfully, "Yes, Mani, you really are very fortunate, but not for me—because after you came, my Merwan left."

OPPOSITION

It always touched Mani how, in this Advent, Baba's whole family eventually accepted and loved Him as the Avatar. From very early on, when Mani was very little, their brothers and even some of their older relatives began to accept His guidance and to regard Him as someone very special, worthy of reverence and obedience, and, shocking as it seemed, even Zoroaster-come-again. As Mani would point out to Baba-lovers in Mandali Hall, it was not easy to accept as God someone you had seen spanked, or playing ball in the alley. Yet such was the family's great fortune.

It was this same intimacy that was the foundation of the Zoroastrian community's opposition to Merwan, or Meher Baba as He was beginning to be known. Mani recalled that when she was a child, a neighbor asked her who had given her the toy she was playing with. "God," she replied. "God in heaven?" "No," Mani said, "God in Ahmednagar." Later remembering this, Mani mused:

I wonder how shocked the neighbors would have been
had they seriously realised I was referring to my brother,
Merwan, whom they had known as a child, seen grow up

before their eyes; who had been to school with their children and played marbles and kites with their sons—Merwan, the Avatar, same as Krishna, Christ, and the others! As the years went by and they did come to realise that Merwan was indeed being considered that, even though by a few, they were shocked indeed. The brunt of their shock and wrath fell on my mother, to whom it was as salt pressed into the fresh wound of the loss of her son.

Shireenmai, one of the “Three Belles” acclaimed for her beauty, intelligence, and wit, was gradually and systematically cut off by her own community for being Meher Baba’s mother. I once asked Mani if she herself had felt hurt by the opposition to Baba when she was a child. She said no, it didn’t rebound on her, but she saw and felt very deeply the terrible humiliations her mother had to go through.

Mani would say to pilgrims, “Being close to Him, being His parents, His disciples, His lovers, is no joke . . . It doesn’t mean that then you have it easy. On the contrary we’ve seen tremendous suffering, disillusionments, and disappointments among those who were close to Him.”

The “opposition group,” as the family came to call them, were not overtly malicious for the most part. They didn’t spit on Shireenmai in the street, or beat her or drive her away with sticks. Their ostracism was of another kind, an insidious, unrelenting barrier that wounded Shireenmai deeply. Oh, she would still be invited to all the social events, the weddings and occasions, but if she went, she would be ignored completely. No one would talk to her. So she would send Mani instead to social events with other family members. (“I’ve enjoyed so many weddings as a child,” Mani said in the Hall, “eaten so much and had such fun, watching the goldfish in the pond, standing right next to the band when they were playing the wedding march—great fun!”)

If Shireenmai entered a shop or bakery filled with people, the room might fall silent for just a moment, and then the talk would start up again. People would nod to her in the street, but stiffly, distantly, without warmth or invitation. They stopped coming by the house or socializing at the *agyari* (fire temple) and her beloved son was the subject of continuous slander by the outraged social establishment. And the result of this subtle malice was that Shireenmai lived with rejection day and night. For a woman of pride, beauty, and intelligence, it was a great suffering.

Shireenmai took her “exile” very hard, even though she did not show it. The family had a variety of neighbors, Christians, Madrasis, Mohammedans, lots of Parsis and Iranis. It was not just the Zoroastrians, but some of the others, too, joined in putting up what Mani called “a cold hostile wall” towards Shireenmai that she came up against wherever she went. The Iranis who felt warmly or sympathetic towards her were sometimes afraid of being ridiculed by the others if they showed it.

In those days you didn’t often move from one place to another as people do now. Where you settled was where you stayed. So Shireenmai just had to endure it. She wrote to Baba once, “I myself don’t know how long we have to suffer like this—I do not know where I should go or what I should do.”

Once in a while, the harassment took an uglier turn. When Mani was about five or six and her brothers were all with Baba in Meherabad, the “opposition group” sent a “messenger” in the middle of the night to tell them that Baba had been arrested in Ahmednagar and was about to be imprisoned. Sheriarji was ill and bedridden at the time. As Mani told this incident in the Hall, “I do not remember the details and at the time I understood little, but to this day I can revive the anguish and disturbance of the hour that followed—my father trying to quiet

Mother's fears and giving her courage and hope ('Don't get excited, Shireen. Nothing can happen to Him! No one can harm a hair of our son's head'), my mother pale and red-eyed from crying, hurriedly wrapping a sari round her with trembling fingers, to rush to catch the train to Ahmednagar and see for herself."

Mani remembered a tiny detail from that night: because Shireenmai's hands were trembling so much, the sari kept slipping through her fingers, so much so that she—usually so precise in everything—could hardly manage to pleat the folds.

She recalled that after Shireenmai left, "My father kept up, sitting on the bed throughout the night, a deeply concerned look on his face but his lips moving to the name of 'Yezdan' [a name of God] that I had come to know so familiarly throughout the years I had been with him. I remember I tried to sit up with him, but after a while when my efforts to keep awake were proving futile, he coaxed me to go to bed. Next day came a telegram from my mother that all was well."

It had been a cruel hoax.

In other ways too, they harassed her, like sending a drunk to her home to bang on the doors just as Shireenmai and Mani, alone in the house, were about to go to bed. As the opposition knew well, Shireenmai had a great fear of drunks and thieves, and Mani had to sneak out the back door to call her aunt. The aunt came at once, she who, Mani said, "feared neither thief nor devil," and was more than a match for a mere drunk.

In one of Shireenmai's 1927 letters to Baba translated from Gujarati, when a group of her former friends purposely left Shireenmai out of a trip to the sacred fire temple in Gujarat knowing she wanted to go, she wrote, "Son Merwan, the people here hate us very much." Then she added, "Never mind, leave everything to God." In the same letter: "Here these people are talking against you a lot"; and later, when she resolved to go on the trip alone, "It is better if there is

someone with me in the train in case my health worsens. . . . Never mind, I will put my trust in God and go alone.”

Shireenmai came up against this antipathy to herself as Baba’s mother even among strangers, even as late as 1935. In a short account of her family,² Mani wrote that after Sheriarji passed away, Shireenmai lived for a while with her son Beheram and his wife, Perinmai, in an apartment building in a Parsi colony in Bombay. The landlord found out too late that she was Baba’s mother, as one by one the other tenants took objection to her being allowed to stay in the building. They all threatened to leave unless she was evicted, and the landlord tried and tried to make her go, pleading, coaxing, finally threatening. But Shireenmai wouldn’t go. She had done nothing to violate her tenant’s agreement. All the residents signed a petition against her except one man, a bachelor, who had always been civil in his greetings. “A month after the protest sheet was signed,” Mani wrote, “the block [of apartments] was empty except for the flats in which my mother lived and in which the man lived who used to greet her cordially; every one who had put their names to the protest sheet . . . had had to move out for one reason or another.”

PAVLOVA

But don’t think that Shireenmai took all this animosity lying down. “She had too much character for that!” Mani said.

The Pavlova incident was a special triumph that Shireenmai delighted in recounting to the family, and that Mani would tell pilgrims in the Hall.

When Mani was four, word went around that Pavlova, the incomparable Russian ballerina, was coming to Bombay to give several performances. It was almost impossible to reserve a seat, and on top of that, seats cost 40 to 50 rupees each, a fabulous price in those days.

Of course the “opposition group” had made their plans to attend the concert, excluding Shireenmai. But that didn’t stop her. She went all by herself, buying a ticket at double the price for the same performance and arriving in Bombay very early (she was always early for everything, Mani said). The group trooped to Bombay by the fastest train from Poona. They had had their Bombay friends reserve seats for the performance for them at great cost.

When they all came into the theater, who did they find seated just above their empty row but Shireenmai in her best sari, “looking like a queen” as one secretly reported to the family later. They couldn’t believe it. Their faces fell. “Mother said it was worth all that money just to see their faces.”

Not only was that delicious, but Pavlova’s performance was unforgettable, especially a Krishna dance she did, something that Shireenmai remembered with joy for years afterwards.

Mani said, “Mother came back with a feather in her cap, very jaunty!”

And in the long run, the opposition, too, fell for Him.

One day, Mani told pilgrims, when someone brought up the subject of Zoroastrians and Baba, Baba said, “Yes, yes, all the Zoroastrians will come to Me.” Mani says He made a very cute, sweet face. And then He made a sign indicating two corners of the room, as if to say, “They’ll come out from every corner,” like mice coming out of holes.

In 1962, Mani wrote in her family account, “Today the children, grandchildren, friends and relatives of this ‘opposition group’ and indeed those of the old ‘gang’ who are living today—sing Baba’s praise, cry out His ‘JAI’, come for His *darshan*,^{*} garland Him and sit at His feet with reverence and love. It does my heart good to see them thus, and when I see them through the eyes of my mother as I remember her, it overflows with joy.”

* Darshan means “sight” and refers to the sight of a holy person or image of a deity, and the blessing derived from this sight.

RELATIVES

As we have seen, Baba's immediate family had the grace of their connection to Him, but also a greater grace, that of recognizing and loving Him. From Jamshed, the oldest, on down to Mani, the youngest, all His siblings lived under His direct orders, and stayed with Him in the ashram for some period of time.

This great fortune of recognizing Baba extended to some of His near relatives too, who lavished affection on Mani. They, too, suffered estrangement and ostracism and were a big part of Mani's childhood world.

DOWLAMASI AND FERDOONMASA

Dowlamasi^{*} was Shireenmai's elder sister and adopted Shireenmai's first son, Jamshed, because Shireenmai was disinterested in the baby. Mani described Dowlamasi as fearless and daring, and she must have been the one who defended Shireenmai and Mani from the drunk sent to them by the "opposition." According to Mani, she was a most wonderful cook, and she liked to see her friends and relatives relish her food. If you didn't do justice to the meal, she would remonstrate loudly until you took another helping, even if you were about to burst. My favorite picture of her is one Mani paints: there's Dowlamasi striding into a domestic or neighborhood battle, laying into the wife-beaters or troublemakers with a small whip! She was one of the first women mandali to stay in Meherabad with Baba, cooking of course.

Ferdoonmasa was her husband, and a very loving foster father to Baba's brother Jamshed. He, too, loved Baba and expressed great reverence for Him. Mani says that once in a reminiscent mood, Baba

^{*} In Gujarati, Zoroastrian aunts and uncles are endearingly called by specific titles, often attached as suffixes to their given names (for example, "Dowla-masi"). *Masi* indicates the mother's sister, and *masa* her husband; *mama* is the mother's brother, and *mami* is his wife. The father's brother is *kaka*, and *kaka's* wife is *kaki*; the father's sister is *fui*, and her husband is *fua*.

recalled how Ferdoonmasa with his long grayish beard, normally quiet and congenial, once got so annoyed at losing a game of cards with his friends that he ripped up the pack! Baba was most amused.

In the late 1970s and 1980s, whenever Mani would act particularly unsophisticated in the Trust Office, say, sipping her tea from her saucer, or squatting down on the floor to play with a puppy or a small child, Eruch would remonstrate, "Oh, you're just a Loni girl!"

Loni is a village about an hour or two from Poona, where Dowlamasi and Ferdoonmasa lived. When I say village, I mean a real Maharashtrian village, about as unlike Poona as you can imagine. In their later years, Dowlamasi and Ferdoonmasa took care of a rich Irani friend's plantation in Loni and lived in a bamboo hut, in conditions as primitive as those of the villagers around them.

When Mani was seven, she spent a holiday in Loni, as Baba was not in Meherabad at the time. Mani never forgot it, and told pilgrims, "The holiday I spent with Dowlamasi there was one of the nicest of my childhood memories. Dowlamasi kept chickens and goats and we slept on the floor, and bathed in the stream nearby, and drinking water was brought . . ." Mani used to reminisce about Loni, recalling with great pleasure its weekly market and all the simple little items that the village people would buy and sell. She became quite attached to the goats, too.

Even from that early age Mani had a great love for nature and for a simple life. As most of their life with Baba was spent in rural surroundings, this served her well.

Jamshed, her eldest brother, died in Loni at age thirty-three, when Mani was there. Jamshed had always loved children and didn't have any. When Mani was a baby, he used to carry her around, and strangers would take her to be his child. "This delighted him," Mani said, "and he would always say 'Yes, she is my baby.'"

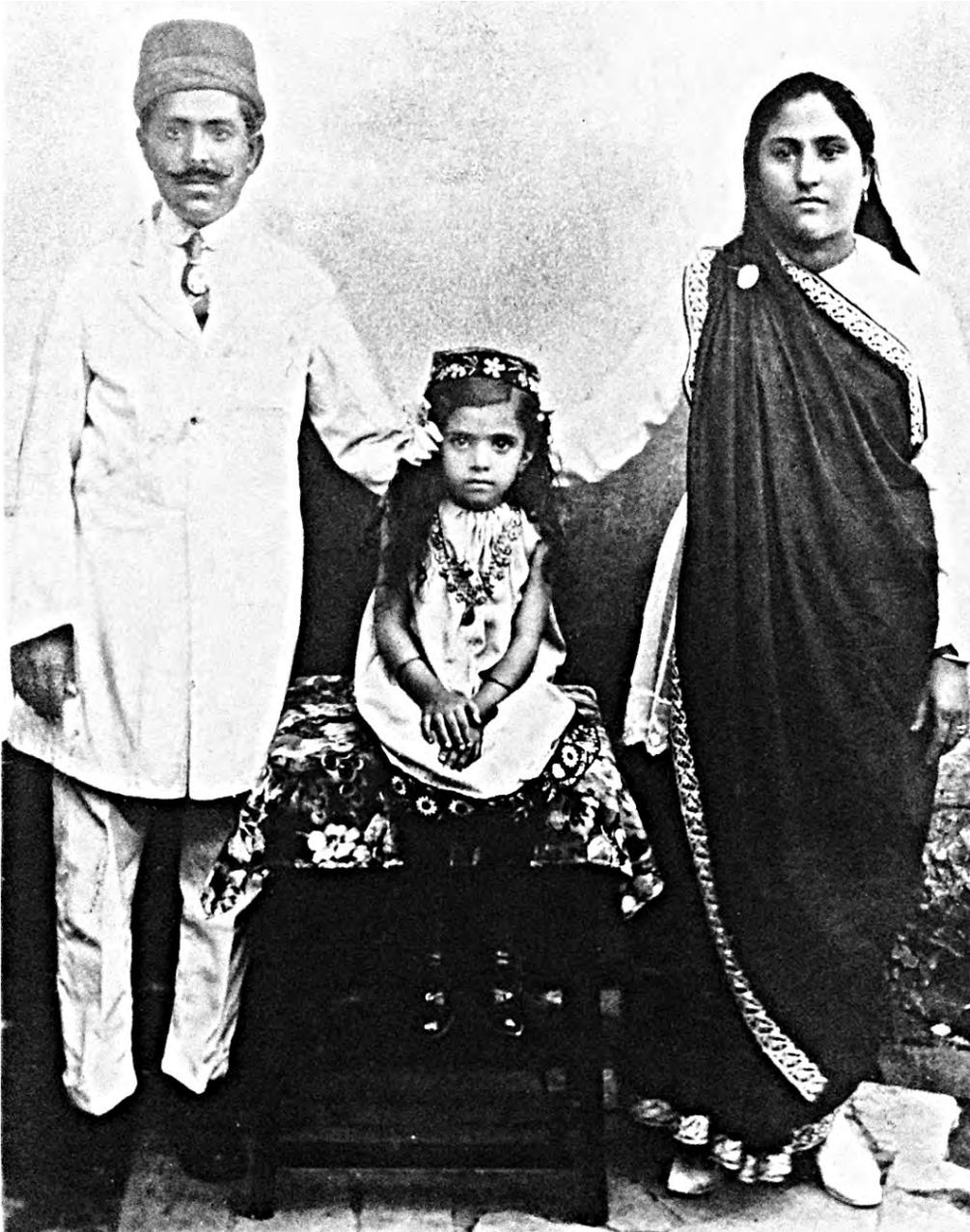
At that time Jamshed was visiting Dowlamasi and Ferdoonmasa. He had been sent there by Baba for a few days. As Mani told it in Mandali Hall:

He seemed quite all right, until suddenly one night he had a pain in the heart. It was in the mid of night, and my aunt made him a cup of coffee and his wife rubbed some unguent on his chest. He had an intuition of his approaching death, for he bowed down at the feet of my uncle and aunt and asked their forgiveness for any omissions and commissions. He told them never to forget that Baba is God, and told his wife never to leave Baba under any circumstances. Then he went back to bed. Just before morning he died, and with his last breath called out in a loud clear voice, three times: "BABA, BABA, BABA"!

Mani remembered walking to the village post office that night with Ferdoonmasa to send a telegram to Baba and to her parents, and how broken Ferdoonmasa was with sorrow, sobbing like a child as they sent the message. Mani had never seen any man cry and she was "sadly impressed."

Little Mani rode back to Poona in a taxi sitting in the back seat with Jamshed's body, holding his head on her lap, as they took him back for last rites. Mani said that her aunt and uncle were never the same after his death.

When Baba got the news, Mani related, He said how fortunate Jamshed was to die with His Name on his lips, and distributed sweets among the mandali in celebration of the occasion. Of course this was food for outrage among the Irani community in Poona: "Oh, so listen to what Meher Baba has done now! His brother dies and what does He do? He distributes sweets!" For them, this was the last thing one would do on such a sad occasion.



Mani dressed up for her fourth birthday, posing with her oldest brother, Jamshed, and his wife Khorshed.

Shireenmai was shocked when she heard about it; not only did she have to endure more humiliation from the community, but she was hurt. The next time she saw Baba, she told him so. “Merog, did you have to do that? At least you didn’t have to distribute sweets! Look what all the Iranis are saying about it! And after all he was your *brother!* And my son!”

Then Baba said, “Mother, if you could see Jamshed as I see him, you would not only distribute *penda* [small milk sweets], you would distribute *laddoos* [sweets that are much bigger]!”

PEELAMASI AND MASAJI

Then there was Peelamasi, Shireenmai’s sister, who died before Mani was born, a dear gentle aunt to Baba, with a sweet face and a special place in His heart. She was mother to Naja and Pendu, who became two of Baba’s most intimate disciples. Peelamasi was Merwan’s staunch ally in all His boyhood enterprises. It was at her place that young Merwan and His friends rehearsed their plays, which were not kindly looked upon by Shireenmai, or sat around in the evenings just talking or playing cards.

Masaji, Baba’s uncle and one of His closest disciples, was her husband, and father of Naja and Pendu (actually father and mother both, as Peelamasi died young). Mani remembers him from when she was four years old, and never knew him before or afterwards when he was not with Baba. Looking like a pirate, genial, big-hearted, robust, Mani says, “for all his rough exterior he was surprisingly sensitive, and his love for Baba was as strong as it was tender. I have known him to shed tears unashamedly during separation from Baba, on those longer absences such as His travels to the West.” He was Mani’s good friend on the men’s side at Meherabad, with his sense of humor and love of practical jokes. And he was, as she put it, “a thunderingly good cook.” Masaji died at seventy

with all his teeth intact and in perfect condition. His amazing set of teeth aroused a lot of teasing and admiration among the mandali, and he would oblige little Mani every once in a while by opening his mouth wide so she could gaze at them. In the drawing of Masaji in *God-Brother*, he has a very generous supply of teeth, which Mani made the artist draw in specially.

RUSTOMMAMA AND PIROJAMAMI

Rustommama, Shireenmai's brother, tall and handsome, was the manager and director in turn of the theater company Mani would visit as a child. Tender and sweet to Mani, he would roar at his actors, commanding discipline. Baba seemed to be the only one he ever showed "submission" to, and his love for Baba grew throughout his life. On his deathbed, he said to his wife Piroja, "I've always felt Baba is God—now I am convinced."

Mani, as a child of about nine or so, once spent a holiday with Pirojamami in Bombay, where Pirojamami kindly took her around to the places of interest and entertainment. Baba was away at the time so she could not go to Meherabad. Years later, when visiting Baba in Meherazad, Pirojamami asked the women to please ask Baba to give her *murti* like her husband, who had declared Baba to be God on his deathbed. Now *murti* means "idol," whereas *mukti* means "liberation." When the women asked her if she knew what it meant, she replied, "No, but I know it is something that Baba gives to His close ones, and after all I am His aunt. I know I am not good enough to deserve it—I do take snuff and sometimes I do swear, but I am sure He will overlook that, for after all I am His aunt." Baba was delighted when they related this request to Him.

KHODADADKAKA

On her father's side, Mani knew her uncle Khodadad, Sheriarji's older brother, who lived in Iran but seemed to be half the time in India. He loved and revered Baba very much and would always visit Baba when he came from Iran, sometimes stopping in Poona to see his brother Sheriarji. As he was very tight-fisted with money, Shireenmai would rib him, "Well, Khodadad, I thought you said you didn't have any money, you didn't have this, you didn't have that. So how is it that you can come to India so often?"

He'd reply, very seriously, "Ah, but Shireen, I've got to see Merog, I've got to see Merog."

Mani remembered that Khodadad had the eccentric habit of never using a vehicle to go where his legs could carry him. When he came to Meherabad to visit Baba, Baba would send a tonga to the Ahmednagar station to fetch him, but Khodadad would insist on trudging the six miles on foot alongside the empty tonga, at the most placing his bundle in it.

Mani wrote that although he was old when he would visit them in Poona, he could practically see in the dark. Kaka, as she called him, was particularly fond of Mani, and would always bring her a big bag of pistachios and her favorite *orso* (a very salty dried cheese ball made of goat's or camel's milk) from Iran.

"His visits to our home," Mani wrote in the family account, "occasioned the opening of the old wooden jar of liquor my father had spiced (and kept for friends) and it did my heart good to see these brothers sitting over a glass of it and talking of the old days and Iran."

GOLANDOON

Mani had one funny memory that she wrote down, of her grandmother Golandoon, who passed away very peacefully when Mani was seven.

The old lady still had traces of her youthful beauty; in her sweet voice, she would sing in Persian to the family. Mani remembers her having a little “night-cap” every night (on some health pretext or other) and she kept her brandy bottle in a cupboard. One night reaching in for the bottle, she felt something soft on it, and reaching in farther, felt a gentle bite on her palm. She realized she'd been massaging a big snake and the nip was a little message: “It's only me.” Granny slowly withdrew her hand, Mani recalled, and speculated that the snake was perhaps the one Baba had played with as a baby—Golandoon thought of it as the caretaker to the house and a family “friend.”

AUTHOR'S NOTE: It was in 1992 that Mani wrote a book about her childhood with Baba, called God-Brother. In it, she tells many stories of how, when she was very young, He lovingly began to bring her into discipleship. No one can tell these stories like Mani does in that book. But as any account of her life would be incomplete without them, I've woven many God-Brother stories into the following pages. All quotes are from God-Brother unless otherwise noted.

CHILDHOOD WITH BABA

Despite all the trouble and humiliation His being God was causing her, Shireenmai would often visit her son after He left Poona, taking Mani with her as an excuse, because, as Mani said, “she also longed to be with Him.” Sheriarji would usually be the one to stay behind, minding home and shop.

Mani's earliest memory of visiting Baba was at Manzil-e-Meem, His first ashram in Bombay. She had gone with Shireenmai shortly

before her fourth birthday, and one of her main objects was to ask Baba for a tricycle as a gift. Thus began what Mani called “a lesson-game” with Baba:

There were instances in my childhood when a stray longing for some exciting article beyond my reach would cloud my priority. Then Baba would show me, in His own dear way, that it is only His Love that really matters. Coming down to the level of a child He would make it a game and a lesson in one. A hard lesson, stamped indelibly on the fabric of my life. An intricate game, played only with the few He accepts as His disciples.

So this first time in Manzil-e-Meem, sitting on His lap, after Baba had kissed and cuddled her a while, Mani turned and asked Him for a tricycle. He said yes, He’d give her one, and Mani, suspicious but hopeful, made Him swear *kassam* (sort of like “cross your heart”) on, of all things, a hen. Baba swore on the hen and Mani went home happy.

Her birthday came, but no tricycle came from Baba. She couldn’t believe it.

The next time Shireenmai took Mani to Baba, Mani was as cold as ice to Him, despite all His cuddling. But finally Baba got it out of her—He had lied to her! He swore on a hen and He didn’t send the tricycle! He forgot, and worst of all, He didn’t love her. If you love someone, you don’t forget.

Baba got out of it in a very clever way. But what could He do? Baba explained. The hen He’d sworn on had died!

His answer satisfied Mani completely.

Mani said to pilgrims years and years later:

That’s how Baba satisfied each one at his or her own level, whether a child or an old person or a philosopher or a

villager or a dimwit or a talented person. There are many instances in my life when He satisfied me so perfectly, so beautifully, so wholly. Even when I think of it today, I'm still angry with that wretched hen because she went and died!

The lesson woven into this little game was a deep one for Mani: that Baba came first and nothing like an intense longing for a tricycle was allowed to come before Him. He came first and from the very beginning, He was not going to let her forget it.

MEETING MEHERA

Baba once told Mani that she and Mehera had been connected for ages, His beautiful hands making a gesture for "from way way back." For Mehera and Mani's first meeting, at the House-with-the-Well in Poona where Baba was visiting His parents, Baba gave Mehera a toy to give to "His little sister." Mani was then about five. Mani told Mehera years later that although she didn't remember the toy, she remembered her first sight of Mehera, as Mehera stood by the well at home, combing her hair, her long, full, wavy beautiful brown hair, a "vision of grace and beauty."

Whenever Mani had school holidays, she was able to go with her mother or family to Meherabad (or Toka or Nasik) to see Baba. She stayed in the women's ashram, and at the heart of their group was Mehera. Eleven years older, Mehera was very kind to Mani, and a lot of Mani's early memories tell of her kindness: Mehera combing and braiding Mani's hair; Mehera making Mani feel she was helping her as Mehera made a crown or embroidered a robe for Baba; Mehera defending Mani (for example in Nasik when Mani wanted to sit on a water buffalo's back and study); and again in Nasik, Mehera and Mani sitting in a tree house as Mehera recounted stories from the lives of saints or films or *Shakespeare for Children*.



Mehera just outside the door of the East Room at Upper Meherabad.

“Mehera was a darling,” Mani wrote in *God-Brother*. “Her gentle ways and her quick understanding of a child’s heart made me love her all the more.”

It was good preparation for the fifty-seven years of constant companionship they would share.

When she was in Poona, Mani would write to Mehera and the other women as well as to Baba. In one well-composed and slightly formal letter in what Mani called her “convent-school handwriting,” the wording and style show Mani’s affection and respect for Mehera. It was Mehera who encouraged Mani’s mother to send her to the convent school. Mani later remarked in the Hall that these early letters reflected the relationship that existed between them in those years.

Dastur Meher Road,
Poona
17 August, 1931

My dear Mehra [sic],

I have great pleasure in thanking you for your kind letter, and also for writing to me the song of Ramona. My heart wells up with pleasure in writing to you that my rank also during this exam has been first, and I obtained the highest marks in the class. But now, let me go on to something else. On the 29th August 4:00 p.m., the postman knocked at the door when I was having my tea. I ran to open the door. Can you guess what it was? It was to my greatest joy and surprise beloved Baba’s letter. Really my joy knew no bounds when I received it. I need not write what tidings the letter contained, for I am sending the letter for you to read. I have written the song which you have asked for on the preceding page, and please hand over the letter that is

in to sister Khorshed. With my best love and wishes to
you,

I remain,

Your naughty sister,

Mani Irani

Please do not mind if I have made any mistakes.

IN BABA'S WORLD

Mani as a child lived in three worlds: Baba's world (where she always wanted to be), the world of school (that she was always trying to get out of), and the world of home, parents, and neighborhood (where she was happy but would rather be with Baba).

She could go to Baba's world (Meherabad, Nasik, Toka, or wherever He was) only when He allowed it. One of her orders from Baba was that she could not run away to be with Him but was to come with her mother only on holidays from school. As she told pilgrims, "We learned obedience to Him from the time we were beginning to think and talk." But she wished that she had holidays twelve months a year.

Baba's world was, for Mani as a child, paradise. The main thing of course was that *He* was there, loving, kind, and everything she wanted. He was God, He was her brother, and He was also incredibly loving to her and made a wonderfully big deal of His "kid sister," as He called her, whenever she came to be with Him.

The words she used to describe His attributes at that time in *God-Brother* speak volumes about how vital and beautiful He was:

"His swift and graceful movements";

"His eyes flashing fire";

"His slim and beautiful fingers moving swiftly like
butterfly wings";

“the radiant glow on Baba’s face”;

“Baba walked so gracefully, as though the heavy sandals were no weight at all on His slim and beautiful feet. To me, He appeared to be walking on clouds.”

When Mani came to visit Baba, she had the privilege of staying with Mehera, cousin Naja, and the other women mandali wherever they were staying, and when something was happening with Baba on the men’s side, as a child she could be on the men’s side, too. She had the favor of the King and the run of the ashram.

Mani loved to tell pilgrims stories of her years with Baba as a “child mandali member.” When Mani was about five, Baba established His headquarters at Meherabad. Just getting to Meherabad from Poona was high drama. Shireenmai would usually take her, and occasionally Sheriarji or one of her brothers, and for days ahead of their departure, Mani would puzzle about what presents to take for Him and for Mehera and the other women. In *God-Brother* she describes all this: finding just the right presents (it took ages), then hiding them away from Shireenmai’s curious eyes in her secret trunk (and fiercely warning Shireenmai not to touch it, while Shireenmai swore she wouldn’t touch it with a broom), then getting on the train, racing along, her spirits soaring higher and higher as they neared Ahmednagar, and then—Oh joy—the sight of the Ahmednagar station sign (“I would not have been surprised if they had painted PARADISE instead”). Off the train, into the tonga, out to Meherabad down the long, lonely earthen road, and then racing to meet HIM (poor Shireenmai would be left in the dust) wherever He was, and basking in all the cuddling and hugging she got from Him at long last.

Once settled into the women’s side, Mani would unpack the gifts from her tin trunk. The ones she remembered years later were the “lucky ducks,” salt and pepper shakers in the shape of ducks that



Baba at Meherabad, 1926–1927. Mehera once commented that this was her favorite photo of Baba.

she had bought off a handcart peddler in Poona. When she gave them to Baba, “you would have thought, from the radiant glow on Baba’s face when He got that pair of ducks with holes in their heads, that this was the one thing He had been waiting for. He made me feel that although the whole universe belonged to Him, He had been waiting all these years for just that one pair of ducks. He told Mehera and Naja that every day when they prepared His food tray those two little ducks had to be by His plate, filled with salt and pepper.”

No wonder Mani loved to go to Meherabad. “These holidays with Baba were heavenly days for me.”

So was staying with Mehera and the women in the Post Office, where, in the dark under the stars, you could brush your teeth outside by the railway tracks: a train might rush by, sparks flying from the fire pit! At night, tucked up in her blanket on her mattress on the floor, Mani would hear the watchmen calling across the fields, “All’s well.” “Waking up in the dark and hearing these calls, I would snuggle into my blanket and go off to sleep again, feeling very safe and cared for in Baba’s Love. It was as if Baba was telling all the world, ‘Don’t worry. All is well.’”

The Post Office was where the women mandali lived for several years when Mani was a child. It had been literally a post office for the British army, the former occupants of Meherabad.

When Shireenmai wrote Baba in a letter, “I will send your sister Mani with someone who is going your way,” she added, “And tell the girls to take good care of her, washing, bathing, etc.” The “girls” were the women staying permanently with Baba at that time: Mehera, her mother Daulatmai, Khorshed, Naja, Khorshed’s mother Soonamasi, and Valu. When Mani would stay with them, she got right into the spirit of their life.

“Staying in the Post Office with Mehera and the other women mandali was happiness complete,” said Mani. “We were short on comfort and food, and there were no beds or furniture, but being at Meherabad with Baba was fullness overflowing.”

A girl in her convent school once taunted Mani that she was a favorite of the nuns because they thought she was going to become a Catholic nun.

“But I’m not going to become a Catholic nun,” said Mani.

“No?” said the girl. “Then what kind of nun are you going to become?”

Mani replied, “I’m going to be a real nun.” A real nun, like Mehera, Khorshed and Naja, whose life in the Post Office was so strict, so cloistered and disciplined and yet alive with the joy of God’s personal presence and love.

Not only did Mani long to live the life they were living, she wanted to do whatever they were doing, especially make things for Baba. In *God-Brother*, she wrote, “I don’t remember having said, ‘Anything you can do, I can do better’, but as a child I have been known to show off ‘Anything you can do for Baba, I can do it too.’”

Fifty years later, Mani would show around to Baba-lovers visiting Meherazad the miniature pair of sandals and a miniature crown she made for Baba back then, in imitation of the exquisite crowns, robes, and sandals she saw Mehera, Khorshed, and Naja make for Him from their own rich saris. Little Mani made them in Poona and brought them to Meherabad to give to Baba, as she recalled. When He was seated among the women, she pulled them out, “trying not to look excited.” Baba took them, held them in His hands, and showed them to Mehera and the others. In *God-Brother*, she remembered, “His face was alight with joy and wonderment at this incredible work of art I had presented to Him! He lifted that tiny crown and placed it

on His head. Then He put on the sandals, which could only fit on His littlest toes. There were gasps of admiration from everyone.” And there sat the King of kings on His divan, wearing a child-made crown and sandals.

His response was typical of His relationship with Mani. “He called me over and hugged me. Once again He made me feel great. He had accepted my gift in the way only He could. Only Baba’s universal heart could have accepted the imperfect gift of a child as totally and perfectly as He did!”

Mehera used to tell a funny story of Mani in the Post Office. It was when Mani was about six, and Mehera described her as “mischievous and full of fun.”³ Mani, too, remembered it and told how at that time, Baba had ordered Mehera’s mother, Daulatmai, to meditate, repeating God’s Name for one hour every day. So Daulatmai would sit on the carpet in their room in the Post Office and quietly repeat God’s Name.

One day Mani came upon her meditating, and seeing how serious Daulatmai looked, she couldn’t resist teasing her. Now Daulatmai loved to hear Persian spoken and although Mani couldn’t speak Persian, she was a wonderful mimic. She could imitate the Persian intonation so well that it sounded like the real thing. So Mani began to speak “pretend Persian” to Daulatmai. Of course Daulatmai was so fascinated she stopped meditating and turned around to listen to Mani.

Just at that moment Baba came in, saw what Mani was up to, and called her to Him. He seemed very upset. He took a cooking pot from the shelf and put it on Mani’s head, so that it came over her eyes and down to her ears.

“Now come and stand in this corner, and remember this punishment,” Baba told her. “Never again interrupt people’s prayers. Didn’t you know she was praying? Why did you interrupt her? Now turn your back.”

Baba left and Mani stood in the corner, feeling very ashamed of herself.

A little later Khorshed came in and seeing Mani, started to laugh. Again Baba walked in, catching Khorshed this time. "What are you laughing at?" He asked.

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

So Baba took another pot and put it on Khorshed's head and made them both stand in the corner. Mani said they looked so funny that all the others had to leave the room before they, too, started to laugh.

Of course, later, Baba embraced them and they were completely forgiven.

Sometimes Mani's chatter got to be too much for the women. Mani confessed this to pilgrims. "When I was a little girl, I talked rather a lot. Especially when I was at Meherabad with the women mandali during my holidays. I had so much to say to Mehera and the others that I couldn't stop."

Khorshed's father, Kaikhushru Masa, was one of the old mandali, a very saintly person who stayed in a hut not far from the women, and when the women were busy with their chores and needed a break from her talking, they would send Mani over to him. "I loved old people," Mani said years later when telling this story; "I always did. I still do." Kaikhushru Masa was an old person, and he was full of wonderful stories, stories about birds, colors, fairies, and of course about Baba.

And Mani would talk to him. "I was sitting next to him, and I suppose to keep me quiet for a while, he gave me these beads. He said, 'Now you sit here quietly, close your eyes, don't talk, just take some beads and repeat Baba's name.' I said, 'Fine' and I sat there repeating 'Baba, Baba, Baba.'"

That's when a little scorpion appeared from somewhere and came up and stung her. "AAARRGGHHH!" Mani began hollering and crying; she was very allergic to scorpion bites, but worse than that was the thought that she had been bitten while taking Baba's name! "I mean, you take Baba's name and even tigers run away from you! And here I was right in the midst of taking Baba's name, and He allowed this scorpion to come and bite me." (At this part whenever telling the story, Mani would imitate a child weeping violently.)

"Ahhh," said Kaikhushru Masa, "but don't you see? That was a special message Baba sent to you and you alone! Did He send it to Naja?"

Mani shook her head.

"Did he send it to Khorshed?"

"No."

"Did he even send it to Mehera?"

"No!"

So he managed to make Mani feel it was something special, just for her because she was remembering Baba so wholeheartedly. "And special means nice," Mani thought, "and it was from Baba, so that was all right."

Another friend of hers among the men mandali was her uncle Masaji, who cooked for Baba and lived with the men mandali in the Old Dharmshala. This is Masaji of the big stomach and masses of teeth, Mani's "good friend." "I was always complaining that he was being very tricky, and he complained that I was always bossing him."

Meherabad abounded with interesting and fun things for a child to do, like watching or participating in the games or contests that Baba would arrange. As she described in *God-Brother*, "As a child at Meherabad, I loved seeing Baba play games and hold races and little competitions. There were even singing contests, speeches, and skits." Standing beside Baba and watching the mandali racing each other



Baba's birthday at the Post Office, Lower Meherabad. Mani standing with the women at the far right; Mehera standing behind Shireenmai and Gulmai, with eyes towards Baba.

on donkeys was a favorite memory of hers: there were a number of catastrophes and “Baba enjoyed it so much!”

And there were incomparable treats, like the *falooda* (sweet rose syrup in milk); the drink was served from a vessel in which Baba had immersed His feet, and He could scoop it out easily for the men mandali. Not missing her chance, little Mani stood in the long line of men again and again, for another and another and another “glass of the falooda which had bathed His lotus feet.”

Mani said there were occasionally clouds in the sky of this heaven. One she long remembered was an argument between Shireenmai and Baba. You can gather that there were a number of those over the years, and Mani once explained that the quarrels between them arose from their “human relationship of mother and son.” She told pilgrims, “You see, when Mother would come with me to be with her son, it would seem as though she was coming because I wanted to be with Baba. But she herself wanted to be with Him very much. She had

been through so much because Baba was her son, so much harassment, humiliation, and hurt from the Zoroastrian community around her. So when she came to be with Baba, she wanted so much of Him. She wanted His love tangibly.”

Mani described this argument in *God-Brother*:

I don't remember what the occasion was, but I do remember Baba was seated before a gathering of His mandali and followers. I was so involved in just being there that I didn't observe what was happening around me.

Suddenly I realised that something had gone wrong. A spark had ignited. What had caused it I didn't know. But I saw that Baba's eyes were flashing fire, and Mother was looking hurt and proud. Everyone was silent. There was not a sound from anyone, not a whisper.

Shireenmai stood, straight and calm, and announced that “if that's the way it is, I leave!” and Baba told her to go right ahead. Then Shireenmai said she was taking her daughter with her and Baba said, “Take your daughter with you!”

Finished. Mani just couldn't believe it. “My whole world crumbled at my feet.” Within minutes, the two of them (Mani dragging her feet and complaining bitterly) were walking down the long, deserted, tree-lined dirt road away from Meherabad toward Ahmednagar.

But it turned out all right. After a while, Shireenmai couldn't take anymore of Mani's harassment (“What did you say? What did He say? Whatever it is, it couldn't be that bad. Let's go back. You know Baba will make it right. He always does”), and sent her back. And as she raced toward Meherabad, Mani saw Baba in the distance, “an ethereal vision in white, gliding towards me . . . Oh how beautiful He looked, His sadra and hair flowing with the rhythm of His walk.” Baba was coming alone,

“which was incredible because one of the mandali always accompanied Him wherever He went.”

“When I was a few feet away, Baba bent down, and I flung myself into His arms. Baba gathered me up, quieted my sobs, and said, ‘Why are you crying? Everything will be all right. Come, let’s go to Mother.’”

Baba’s making up with His mother was a silent and tender drama. Shireenmai was sitting far down the roadside, and then: “Baba walked up to Mother and put out both His hands. Mother looked up into His eyes and placed her hands in His. Baba helped her up and embraced her. Not a word was said. There was no need.”

Mani ended this story with a wonderful observation: “Many a time I have witnessed His oceanic love and forgiveness pour over a loved one like a huge wave that rolls onto the beach and washes the shore clean, wiping away all tracks and traces in the sand.”

About His forgiveness, Mani once said in Mandali Hall:

Baba could make everything right in a moment, in a way only He could do. Right through my life I’ve seen that—just that look that healed everything, that gesture that mended everything. And it’s still the same.

. . . His compassion overpowered everything. His gesture of forgiveness was a gesture from the heart, one of the gestures I’m most affected by. It was like an oceanic wave coming over everything. We cannot forgive like that. Even if we do forgive, there’s at least an impression left, a stain, a spot. But with Baba that gesture, which was the same as His gesture for love, came from the heart, from His Love, and was complete. The cause evaporated. When Baba would make an end of a thing, it never existed.

And Shireenmai? Well, she once wrote Baba, "If something is said in anger between mother and son, it is no great matter. I don't make it an issue of prestige . . . I do not hold back in pride. Because you have written a letter to console me, I have forgotten the whole episode and my mind is calm."

Mani had a clear childhood memory of seeing Baba go into the water tank on Meherabad Hill to sit in seclusion, long before the Prem Ashram boys (the students in Baba's early spiritual school on the Hill) or the women mandali (and Mani) lived there. Meherabad had formerly belonged to the British military, and the water tank on the Hill had served Upper and Lower Meherabad. Mani recalled going up the steps with some of His women to the little watch room that used to be on top of what is now the Library, and watching Baba climb through the top vent and down the inside rungs to the bottom of the tank. There was no door, and only vents for windows. At the bottom Baba looked up at them and said, "All of you go now." And He stayed there alone in seclusion, fasting.

Adi Sr. once told a story of Baba sitting in this water tank in seclusion. It must have been at the same time. Adi had brought Baba supplies or perhaps he was on watch. He was sitting with Baba inside the tank in the semi-dark, and he suddenly noticed that Baba was weeping. He had never seen Baba weep. After some time, Baba gestured to him, "I am weeping for the sorrows of the world."

MEHERABAD LESSONS

One of Mani's earliest memories was of Baba at Meherabad. As she wrote in *God-Brother*, He was standing on the wide open plain, with His long hair and white sadra, flying a kite with Padri. She was about five, and her mother had taken her to visit Him. Reaching Meherabad, Mani raced off to find Baba. Baba was talking still, and

when she reached Him, He looked down at her and asked if she wanted to fly the kite. “Oh, yes!” Mani said, who had never flown a kite before, and Baba handed her the string. “As I clung to it, I was swaying with the force of the wind and the incredible pull of the arched string. After a few moments, Baba took over again.” Mani was thrilled and showed off about it to everyone.

This, too, came to be a lesson-game, as years later Mani realized that Baba alone had been flying the kite, while making Mani believe she was doing it. “Behind my hands were His hands holding the string, unseen by me. While I seemed to be steering the kite as it moved this way and that, it was really Baba who was controlling it all the time.” “It continues to be like that,” Mani wrote. “One thinks, ‘I’m doing this. I’m in charge of that.’ But silently in the background, it is really Baba who is doing it. Baba alone is in charge—always.”

Mani’s lesson-games with Baba were not always so much fun. On another occasion when she was visiting Him with their mother, there was a special *qawwali* program of *ghazal* singing for Baba (program of devotional Sufi singing involving a strict poetic form about lover and beloved). The mandali, both men and women, and some of His Ahmednagar followers attended. As always, the men and women were in separate sections.

She had a thought just before the program started: “Hmmm. Wouldn’t it be nice if at the same time I had a candy in my mouth?” And rushing to her little trunk, she took out a “bull’s-eye” (a hard English peppermint candy), popped it into her mouth, and went in to Baba. He cuddled and petted her as usual, and then told her to sit down next to Him. Wow!

“Whenever lovely things like this happened to me,” Mani wrote, “I was keenly aware that everybody else was watching me and (so I imagined) feeling jealous of what I was receiving. I was receiving from Baba. They would no doubt be saying, ‘My,

look what Mani is getting! Wish we could be in her place.’”

Before long, Baba gently pushed Mani's head onto His lap, holding it down with one hand as He marked time to the music with the other (“Now I could imagine a gasp from the others. ‘This! Mani's getting this too!’”) And she of course was in heaven: Baba and candy.

And then came the lesson. Because the candy started melting in her mouth, and with her head being in Baba's lap and at an awkward angle, she couldn't swallow the sweet saliva. “It was horrible—worse than being at the dentist!”

She couldn't concentrate on Baba, she couldn't hear the singing, and she couldn't enjoy the candy (“Oh it's getting to be too much, . . . Oh dear, now it's much too much! I'll have to swallow but how? Help, Baba, please help!”) Even the gulping was painful.

And of course just as the candy was finished Baba raised His hand from her head, and she sat up. “He had such an incredibly innocent smile on His face. I had imbibed the silent lesson.”

As she wrote, the episode with the tricycle and the one with the candy were two incidents with the same lesson: “One of the things I learned at a very early age is that you can't tightly hold onto Baba's *dacaman* [garment's hem] with one hand and just as tightly hold



Baba under the neem tree next to the Sai Darbar cabin, February 18, 1927, Baba's birthday celebration.

on to your desires with the other hand, both at the same time. My lesson was: with Baba you can't have it both ways." Not all this and heaven, too.

In later life, Baba was very strict with Mani. Although she rarely received that side of His training when she was young, she did get a taste of it. As she wrote in *God-Brother*, "When I spent my holidays with Baba, I got so much cuddling and hugging from Him that I took it as my natural right—until I had my first lesson that where courtesy and discipline were concerned, I was no exception."

Again it was at a gathering, this time of the men and women mandali (perhaps for a singing program? Mani doesn't remember). The men and women were strictly segregated as always, this time by a screen down the middle of the hall in which they were seated. Baba was seated on the *gaadi* (a wooden dais) at the hall's far end, and Mani came rushing in, "self-confident and happy," walking over all the sandals and slippers at the entrance, and going right up to Baba. Instead of a smile and a hug, He gave her a resounding slap on her cheek, His eyes flashing fire. "There was a stunned silence. No one could believe what had just happened! I didn't make a sound. I just stood before Him like a statue.

"Baba gestured fiercely, 'Look at everyone here. All of them have removed their sandals outside before coming in.' He pointed at my feet. 'And you, you still have your slippers on! Who do you think you are? Go! Go right out and remove them at once!'"

That was her one and only beating from Baba. Of course afterwards, she got "a double dose" of loving from Baba, and her world was rosy again, but she never forgot the lesson. It seemed to stretch all the way until her passing; her courtesy to other people, her genuine humility, and her infallible discipline in things relating to Baba were extraordinary.

There's a word used by Sufis to describe the courtesy, etiquette, and manners of the "royal court" of the Master: *adab*. In some of the



Lonavla, December 4, 1926. At a gathering of the men mandali and some local visitors, little Mani is standing on the left, in the back next to Padri on the verandah. Baba, garlanded, is in the center front.

pictures of Baba when He was older, you can see that His shoulders are slightly rounded. Mani had that same physical trait as she got older, too. Eruch once remarked about that trait in Baba, saying that surely His shoulders were slightly bent because He had spent so much of His young adult years slightly bowed in the presence of Upasni Maharaj, demonstrating the perfect adab, the appropriate reverence and humility before the Master. Mani had that slight bend and that innate adab, and the slap from Him surely must have reinforced it.



HOME

“I had a happy childhood,” Mani wrote in *God-Brother*, and proof of that was how much she enjoyed talking about it in Mandali Hall to people. She loved to tell her childhood stories and they tell a lot about her: her personality (revealed at an early age to be mischievous, lively, funny, talkative, direct, strong-willed, loyal, loving); her family background and great regard for her parents; and most of all, her total determination from a very young age to be Baba’s, to grow up and live with Him, to have His Love, to have His attention, to do whatever it took to be allowed to be with Him.

The well at Mani’s childhood home, the House-with-the-Well, was an old one that had been there long before the house was built. Zoroastrians, who worship water as well as fire, often say their prayers beside a well or a river. From the well’s earliest times, local Zoroastrians would make a wish at this well, silently promising to cover the well with a woven net of flowers if their wish came true. As a child, Mani remembers that once in a while there would be a knock at the door, and someone would ask if they might come in and place a net of flowers over the well. Shireenmai never questioned them; she knew it meant that a wish of theirs had been fulfilled. Baba’s family still do it on Baba-occasions, “just for love and joy” Mani said.



Mani at home, posing for the picture with their maidservant Chandri, and family: Adi Jr., Sheriarji, Shireenmai, and Jal. Photo by Beheram.

When Mani was a child, and even now, there were plants all around the well courtyard and in the house too, as Sheriarji had a green thumb and continued to love gardening. A *chikoo* (tropical fruit) tree that he planted still thrives in the courtyard, giving fruit.

Despite their estrangement from Zoroastrian society because of how Baba was regarded, Shireenmai's practical nature and Sheriarji's great detachment made their home life fairly normal and happy. Or so it seemed to Mani.

"Mother was really an excellent mother," she wrote. "She maintained and managed the house and the family with much care. . . . Mother was the practical one. I guess she had to be, with a husband who was too generous with his worldly goods, giving money and things away to anyone he felt was in need." Both her parents were wonderful cooks, and Sheriarji would cook for the family whenever Shireenmai was ill.



Shireenmai, Mani, Adi, Jal, and Sheriarji, with Chandri standing. Beheram is taking the photo. 1922–1923.

Baba’s parents (called “Memo” and “Bobo” by their children, “Shireenog” and “Shorog” by each other) also shared a great sense of humor, an Irani speciality, and despite their age difference they were very close. Sheriarji taught Shireenmai to read, write, and converse in Persian, and Shireenmai learned much of Hafiz by heart. Mani used to love to see them together in the evening, reading aloud from the *Shahnameh*, as they had the evening Shireenmai went to the hospital to deliver Mani. Their conversations at the end of the day, when Shireenmai would tell Sheriarji everything, were listened in on by little Mani as she played on the floor around them. Shireenmai always brought out the material side of a question, logical and practical, and Mani, listening, would think, “What Memo says is right, it’s so true”; and then Sheriarji would respond with the spiritual angle, the higher view, and Mani would think, “But of course Bobo is right. What he says

is so true!," and his angle, being the right one, would comfort and soothe his wife. In this way, Mani learned to see things from both angles, a trait of use to her later on, in her life with Baba and as chairman of the Avatar Meher Baba Trust. "And so as a child I learnt much from the daily interactions between my parents. It was like watching the two pans of a hand-scale going up and down, with an issue being weighed till balance was gained."

As Mani explained in the Hall, "My parents spoke with each other in the Irani vernacular, Dari, and the boys spoke with my father always in Irani and with my mother sometimes in Irani and sometimes in Gujerati,



Sheriarji, Baba's and Mani's father, in later years.

including Baba. I was the only one of the children Father spoke to in Gujerati, with an Irani accent, whereas I conversed in both languages with both my parents. I remember when I was not quite four years old . . . my mother was conversing with my brother in Gujerati when she suddenly switched to Irani, saying, 'Talk in Irani so the child won't understand.' I looked up from my playing and told them in Irani, 'But I understand it all!'"

Shireenmai couldn't get over it and later would tell the story to her friends.

Mani loved both her parents, but while she seemed to pester her mother pretty freely, she had a special respect for her father, whose most extreme form of scolding was to bless her. Mani would be harassing her mother for something, and if it went too far, Sheriarji would say rather loudly, "Mani, may God be good to you!" "I'd know that Father

really meant it, that it was making him unhappy, so I'd stop." And she would stop immediately. "I never overstepped Father's blessing."

Although Sheriarji was more like a grandfather to Mani, being quite old when she was born, they had a special relationship. When Mani was small, Sheriarji was in his late sixties, and they would go walking together through the Poona lanes, little Mani holding on to the little finger of his hand, as she would do with Baba, too. "What a sight we must have been, this stocky sixty-nine-year-old man with his baby girl out for a walk on a quiet street in Poona!" She would bring her father little presents ("the brown-sugar toffee was one of his favourites") and he would keep treats aside for Mani, like the water chestnut powder and sugar mix that Shireenmai made for him as a tonic. He saved it all for Mani. "We had secrets that Mother didn't share," she wrote in *God-Brother*.

She told pilgrims that Sheriarji would tell her stories and also things about the spiritual life that meant a lot to her later on. "The laws of God are finer than the hair of your head, child." And Mani would pull out one of her hairs and look at it, marveling that anything could be finer than *that*. Then he'd go on to say that God does not just rule by law, but by His grace, which rules over the law, which Mani came to understand and experience only when she got older.

Mani loved to sit on her father's low bed as he took the name of God: Yezdan. As she explained to pilgrims, "As regularly as the tick of a clock, I have known my father to take God's Name: Yezdan, Yezdan, Yezdan. Not audibly, not even visibly. But being little, when I sat next to him on his low bed, I would look up at him, and from that angle I could see the tip of his tongue moving, Yezdan, Yezdan, Yezdan, as he silently repeated the name of God. I wonder now if I had looked when he was asleep, would it have been moving?"

Sheriarji's incredible kindness and his quality of inner stillness drew many people to him, "just for the peace of mind we get," they would

say. His kindness extended even to the flowers. "When I was little," Mani said in the Hall, "and would reach to pluck a flower in the evening, my father would always stop me. 'No, the flowers are sleeping, child. You must never disturb them when they are sleeping. Pluck them in the morning if you like.'"

Mani told pilgrims a story of how, knowing intuitively that her father had a special relationship with God, she asked him to pray for her when she had to take exams in school. But she reflected that maybe it would be good for her to pray, too. So she thought, why not ask Bobo for a short prayer, a very short one, one minute at the longest. So she asked him, "Bobo, teach me a little prayer." "A little prayer?" replied her father. "Yes," said Mani, "only a one minute prayer, not more than one minute. Because, Bobo, then I can say my own prayer when I am studying for exams."

Her father looked at her and then said, "Why, I can teach you a prayer that will not even take a minute! I will teach you a prayer that will take no time at all." Mani couldn't understand what kind of prayer that could be, but Sheriarji went on, "Never wish ill of anybody. That is the prayer that reaches straight to God. It doesn't take any time, does it, child?"

This profound prayer made such an impression on Mani that she remembered it all her life. But as a child she didn't think much of it as a "prayer"; she wanted a *spoken* prayer, so one day Sheriarji taught her another one, a prayer from the *Zend-Avesta*, the ancient Zoroastrian holy book, which Zoroastrian children are taught when they are little. It was a prayer Mani already knew, but now repeating it after her father, and saying it the way he did, she found it very beautiful. That night she had a dream that a goldfish, a red goldfish, came flying into the hall in their home, and fluttered delicately in the air in front of her. Looking at this lovely fish, Mani could feel that she (the fish) was very thirsty, so she told Adi, her brother, who was just outside the room, to bring her a

bowl of water. Adi brought the water to the door in a bowl made of natural coral, and Mani took it and held it out to the fish. The fish bent down very gracefully, and drank the water all up. She then flew up very close to Mani, and gently holding Mani's face in her fins, kissed her on the forehead. Mani woke up with a blissful feeling from being kissed by her celestial friend the goldfish, and she felt that the dream somehow was connected to the beautiful way her father had said the prayer.

Many years later, in 1968, one day Baba asked Mani if she had had any dreams. She said, "I haven't now, Baba, but I had this dream when I was about nine or ten," and she told Him the goldfish dream. She was always happy afterwards that she had had the chance to tell Him. And this dream was one she wrote of in her book *Dreaming of The Beloved*.⁴

Mani knew even when she was very young that her father had left home as a boy to search for God, and so he had never gone to school or been educated. Yet people would come to the house and speak with him in other languages:

I would hear him converse in Hebrew with this beautiful old Jewish lady who would come to talk with him. I would see him helping a well-known professor, an Arab, with a book he was writing. And it was clear that my father knew scholarly Arabic, because he was correcting the man's manuscript, suggesting changes, "No, it is not like this, it should be like that." And then he taught my mother Persian, not just for conversation, but the Persian of Hafiz and the *Shahnameh*.

Mani explained that one day all this slowly dawned on her. "Wait a minute!" she said to herself as a child. "I have to struggle with my lessons in school, and how is it that Bobo, who never went to school, talks with this one in Hebrew, advises that one in Arabic, and teaches Memo Persian?"

So one day sitting next to him, I looked up and said, "Bobo, how come you know all these languages? You never went to school!"

He looked down at me and said, "Well, child, it all came to me suddenly, in a moment."

As a child, I accepted his answer. But years later, after I joined Baba, it bothered me. How can all that come in a moment? Yet I knew my father would never tell a lie. (Just the opposite of me. As a child I could lie at the drop of a pin.)

So I asked Baba how such a thing could be possible. And Baba asked me why I was so surprised. He explained, "Knowledge is all inside, hidden behind a curtain. And doesn't it take only a moment to push aside a curtain and reveal what is hidden behind it?"

"However," Baba added, "this pushing aside the curtain is a gift from God. It is given only to the very rare ones who have given up everything for Me, as My father did."

BETRAYAL

A sad story from her childhood was also told in Mandali Hall. In those days the family was not rich, but with Shireenmai's ability to pinch pennies, and in spite of Sheriarji's habit of giving things away to those who had less than he, they had enough to live on. But all that changed one day, when Sheriarji's young partner in the toddy business, Mulog, invited him for dinner. Sheriarji had taken on a partner because of his advancing age, and because the young man's father was a friend of his and a fellow Irani. The young man began attending the auctions for the toddy lots instead of Sheriarji, and all that Sheriarji had to do to complete the deal was to sign the papers. This evening at dinner the

table was laid with all Sheriarji's favorite Persian food and drink. The talk veered to the old days, and Sheriarji told anecdotes of his *dervishi* life, when he wandered searching for God, that Mulog never seemed to tire of hearing. At the end of the happy evening, Mulog put a sheet of paper before Sheriarji for his signature, saying it was another toddy-lot deal. The main portion was covered over, casually, with a piece of blotting paper. It was in English, which Sheriarji couldn't read, and unusually long, but such was Sheriarji's trust in people that he barely glanced at it and signed his name. It turned out that he had signed away the whole business to the young man.

Shireenmai, who had her children's interests supremely at heart, insisted that they take the matter to court and almost single-handedly saw to each detail of the legal side. Mani remembers returning home from school for lunch and finding her mother just coming back from a lawyer friend who was advising and helping them. Or she would walk out with her parasol in the morning, leaving Sheriarji's and Mani's lunch ready for them on the stove, and not return until tea time. All the brothers were with Baba, and there was no one to help her. As Shireenmai wrote to Baba, "I am a woman, and your father cannot go out [due to ill health] and does not know how to talk, so what is the way out of this?"

"There were sad scenes at home," Mani said. "I would hear Mother raging over the injustice caused to us by the treachery of 'that pup', and my father would try to make her understand the real side of it—which was the spiritual side." Sheriarji, whose very heart beat to the will of God, was resigned to their loss, yet for her sake he attended the court sessions. Mani described to pilgrims how Shireenmai helped Sheriarji, who was then seventy, into the tonga that would take him to the courthouse, all the while giving him last-minute instructions: he should tell the court how the young man lied, tell them what a bad character he was, and so on and so forth. (And that Sheriarji should not let any snuff smudge the

front of his good coat!) “Of course,” Sheriarji would assure her, all the while saying God’s Name, but he was not a person to say any of these things, and because he had indeed signed the paper, they lost the case.

Afterwards, Sheriarji sent a message to the young man, “I forgive you fully. Some day you might want to ask my forgiveness and not be able to do so, for I am an old man and would be dead by then. So remember you will not need my forgiveness, for I have forgiven you completely. It is now simply a matter between you and God.”

The family suffered a lot because of this treachery, losing the business plus paying all the court expenses, and it added insult to injury for Shireenmai to watch the cheat and his family rise in wealth and social position. They prospered and prospered and prospered, while Sheriarji’s family could hardly make ends meet. (One of the most poignant things I ever heard Mani say about the family’s suffering was that at the end of his life, Sheriarji, the father of the King of kings, had a wooden tea crate with a hole cut in the middle for his commode.)

Yet, Mani said, when Shireenmai would speak against this family, Sheriarji would always say, “Shireenog, you should feel sorry for them. They are the ones who will have to suffer in the end.” And she would reply, “But who’s going to see that! I will be dead, and if I see him suffering in the next life, I won’t know it’s Mulog! And what good does that do us! We’re the ones who are suffering now!”

Eventually, Mani said, Sheriarji was able to instill in her a sense of resignation about the matter. Shireenmai wrote in a letter to Baba, “All these calamities—this child’s [Beheram had tuberculosis] and that Mulog’s—have come simultaneously. Besides the amount of money spent. But whatever God does is for the best.”

Mani would talk about what eventually happened to this family. Years and years later, in 1960 when Baba was in Guruprasad, one day an old woman came to one of the darshan occasions. Baba noticed her

at the back of the line, as she was weeping. When she came for darshan and put her head on Baba's feet, she asked Baba to forgive her husband, Mulog, for what he had done to Baba's father, and release him from the suffering he was going through. He was ill and bedridden, and repeatedly asked for Baba's forgiveness so he could die in peace. Baba caressed the old woman's cheek and gestured that He had forgiven her husband, and Mulog died soon after.

PLAY

Mani didn't have many toys to play with at home. When she did get a toy, she might not be allowed to play with it. Speaking in Mandali Hall, she recalled being given a very fancy and beautiful celluloid doll, perhaps it was from Mehera's mother; but fastidious Shireenmai, who was a cleanliness fanatic, admired it so much that she put it away out of reach in a glass case so it wouldn't get dirty. So Mani made up other things to do for amusement. All her life she loved collecting match boxes, and she would make them into toy trains. As she did not have books, she practically memorized the Kabir-Vani (the collected poems of Kabir) in Gujerati that they had in the house. She developed a life-long love for Kabir at that time, and would often quote Him verbatim years and years later. She also avidly read *Schoolgirls' Weekly* magazine.

Of course there was always homework, which Shireenmai was keen on Mani doing, but which Mani held in contempt. As she wrote in *God-Brother*:

When other children came home from school, they'd sit at their desks and do their homework. I'd toss my books on the chair and run out to play.

My mother's voice would follow me. "Mani," she'd call out.

“What?” I’d shout.

“All the children are doing their homework.”

“All the children are crazy,” I’d reply. “Home’s not for studies. You send me to school to learn. That’s where I do my learning. Not at home.”

Luckily she was smart enough to pull this off until exam time and then—panic! rush to study! rush to Bobo to get him to pray for her to pass!

Mani had another occupation much nearer to her heart than studying, as she later told pilgrims. The women mandali in Meherabad at one point had the order to write out Baba’s name in tiny Gujerati handwriting for an hour every day, row upon row, page after page. They would then cut out each name in small strips, keeping the letters intact, and collect the little paper pieces to scatter in the ocean or a river later on. At home in Poona, Mani did this too, having done it along with Mehera and the others, and she would scatter her collected name-strips in the river at Bund Garden, hoping the fish would “swallow them and love Baba.”

When Mani was about five, a servant would sometimes take her in the evening to her uncle’s theater. Her uncle, Rustommama (Shireen-mai’s brother) was director and manager of one of the best theatrical companies in India. Imagine little Mani roaming among the actors offstage, gazing “in delight at the wigs and costumes in their dressing rooms.” She recalled, “Once when watching an early play, I fell asleep and was startled into awakening by a terrific report that shook the house. The floor of the stage had burst open, and from it emerged the ‘throne of Persia!’”

Another form of self-entertainment was the sitar, which she taught herself to play. She didn’t have one of her own, but when her brother

Beheram was away, she would climb up on a stool and take his sitar down from the high shelf on which he kept it, and practice secretly. She picked up the harmonium by ear, too, having a wonderful gift for music. Later on Baba made the most of this gift in the ashram.

LIFE IN THE MOHOLLA

There was always a lot going on outside the house. The family lived in a neighborhood that Mani remembered as “a mini-U.N.,” with people of many religions all mixed together: Christians, Zoroastrians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists. The children learned one another’s languages, and by the time she was ten, Mani could speak Gujerati, English, Marathi, Hindi, and a little Dari. Sheriarji and Shireenmai rented out portions of their house when their sons went to stay with Baba and they no longer needed so much room, and the renters too were from different backgrounds: Christians, a Jewish family, a Japanese family, Punjabis, a Zoroastrian family.

Their neighborhood was what is called a *moholla*. As Mani described it: “Hedged between busy streets, a moholla is a quieter locality housing middle-class and lower middle-class families. It has all kinds of interesting lanes and spaces where children play and housewives bargain. It is a sort of private neighbourhood that you can think of as your very own. . . . In a moholla anybody’s business is everybody’s business.” When the Baba-artist Wodin drew the moholla for Mani’s book *God-Brother*, she was delighted at how evocative it was of the neighborhood: there was a kite flying in the sky, a kid chasing a ball (certainly a cricket ball), a child peeking into someone else’s house. If there had been more room, he could have added the crushed ice vendor, a wedding or funeral procession going through the lane, a fight between a drunk and a friend, and a festival or two. It was a safe and enclosed little world for children.

Baba, too, would remember their moholla with fondness, in later years sometimes recalling the eccentricities of the characters who peopled it.

A good side to having everyone in the neighborhood know your business was that people would help you out. Shireenmai once wrote to Baba:

Our tenant, the Inspector who stays next door to us, drinks. But at the instigation of some Iranis, someone made him drink a lot of liquor and at night he came and fought a lot with me and your father. He opened the door and came inside to beat your father, using a lot of foul abuses. In the morning the other people in the lane scolded him so he was very repentant. With the mediation of Rustom Khodadad and some others he came to ask for forgiveness.

Of course there were drawbacks to everyone knowing your business. A typical one: one afternoon during the rest hour when everyone in the moholla was napping in their homes behind closed doors, Mani was running in the lane and she tripped and fell down. She quickly hopped up and dusted herself off, relieved that for once nobody had seen her fall, and there would be no fuss about it. No such luck. Her aunt had seen the whole thing from down the alley and up went the alarm: "Oh dear! Child has fallen! Child has fallen!" Telling this story in the Hall, Mani would do a great imitation of every window in the moholla flying open (*whap!*) and heads popping out of each one to stare down at her. Her humiliation was complete. So much for privacy. She would always laugh at that memory.

Everyone in the neighborhood got up very early, and even the servants would come for work before sunrise. Mani's father, like other Iranis who ran teashops and restaurants, would open his shop as early as 5:00 a.m., and he and Shireenmai rose at 4:00. As a child Mani hated to get

up early, and would sometimes sneak into another room and go on sleeping there, leaving her own bed empty so that Shireenmai would think she was up. Of course, Shireenmai was not that easy to fool, and she would invariably find her out and scold her.

But Mani loved to be awakened by the voice of the fakir who occasionally came for alms to their door. The fakir was blind, and he walked with his hand on the shoulder of a little girl, who would carry an old ship's lantern to help her see in the dark. The fakir would sing, "Mother, may your son live long! Give in the name of Allah!," and the little girl would respond, "Allah alone will give!" Mani, telling this story, would sing out the call and response in the two different voices, one low and rich, one high and squeaky, and the whole scene would come alive: she curled up in her bed in the dark, listening in the early morning hush to the melodious singing of the two wanderers. The most touching aspect of the story was that Shireenmai, who disliked beggars and rarely ever gave to them, would always rush out to put a coin in this fakir's begging bowl. Hearing the coins clink in the bowl, Mani would lie there and feel happy, knowing that Shireenmai gave in response to the words, "may your son live long." The son her mother wished the blessing for was Baba.

RELIGION

In India, of course, many religions provide a background for a child's life. Although you might be born Zoroastrian, as Mani was, you could go to a Catholic school, play in the grounds of a Jewish synagogue, and have Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist playmates and neighbors, which Mani did. When she was older, she used to remark how universal Baba's birth was: He was born in a hospital founded by a Jew, and delivered by Catholic nuns into a Persian family who lived in India.

Mani knew all the holidays of the major religions, as most of them

had been celebrated someplace in the moholla when she was young, with the children participating one way or another. The lane next to the House-with-the-Well was lavishly decorated by the Goanese Christians for Christmas and New Year's. The road closest to their house was called Taboot Street, after a Muslim observance. Their Hindu neighbors and servants cooked and shared special foods with them on Hindu festival days.

As she told some of us, one of Mani's favorite spots in their neighborhood as a child was the Hanuman temple a few streets away, where she would munch on chickpeas sold right outside and watch the devotees come and go. The neighborhood children (including Baba) used to walk and cycle and play in the grounds of the Poona synagogue.

So in her young life, Mani had God and she also had religion in many forms, principally Zoroastrianism at home and Christianity at school.

When she was seven, she was at an age to be confirmed, so to speak, into the Zoroastrian religion, by having her Navjote ("new light," known in English as a thread ceremony) performed. Shireenmai, good Zoroastrian that she was, had it all arranged. The ceremony was to be performed at the agyari, their local fire temple, by two priests, who would invest Mani with the white garment called a sadra and tie around her waist the symbolic thread called a kusti. Thus she would be officially ordained a Zoroastrian.

Mani didn't like the plan at all, and said so when Shireenmai brought it up to her on a visit to Meherabad. She wrote all about it in *God-Brother*:

"Whatever for?" I protested loudly, "Baba is God Himself. Why should a silly priest do my Navjote? Baba should do it."

Mother said, "Don't talk nonsense. Meroḡ may be God, but He's certainly not a priest. Only a priest can perform Navjote."

I went in tears to Baba and complained, but Baba said, “Mother is right, you know. I am God, but I’m not a priest. As she says, only a priest can perform Navjote.” I must have looked very crestfallen because then Baba added, “Do you think I will allow any old priest to perform your Navjote? Don’t you worry. Go along with Mother. It won’t be the priest; it will be Me. *I’ll* be performing your Navjote.”

With that reassurance, everything changed and Mani happily went along with her mother’s plans, and on the appointed day, donning her new lacy white dress, she went to the agyari with her mother and friends.

“To this day, all I remember of my Navjote is looking from one to the other of these two priests and wondering, ‘Which one is Baba? Can it be this one? Goodness, no, this one’s so ugly. Look at his eyes and that awful nose. Is it the other one? Oh no. Look at his beard going flap flap. No, it couldn’t be.’ I kept staring hard at them both, but neither looked at all like Baba.”

Hurt and disappointed, Mani had it out with Baba when she went next to Meherabad. “You promised me You were going to do my Navjote. You promised and You didn’t do it. You lied to me!”

Baba calmed her down, saying that indeed He had done her Navjote.

“But,” Mani protested, “You weren’t there! There were only the priests. I looked and looked, but I couldn’t see You.”

Baba replied, “Naturally you couldn’t see Me. How could you, when I had a mask on?”

Then it came to her, that that’s what they did in the convent school at Christmas time! Somebody’s uncle or father would always dress up as Santa Claus, and he would have a mask on. It was Mr. de Sousa or Mr. Pina, but you never knew.

“Ah,” Mani said, “everything fell into place and my doubts vanished.”

That wasn't her last visit to the agyari. In *God-Brother* Mani wrote, "Mother was very particular that her children attend the agyari on certain religious days to say prayers and offer the customary sandalwood, as any good Zoroastrian would do. And this applied very specially to birthdays."

Mani would remonstrate loudly, "My birthday should be my day. At least on my birthday I should be free to do what I want. I should get up late. If I don't want to have a bath, I shouldn't have a bath. If I want to play I should play."

No such luck. "From Mother's point of view, that just wasn't done. You could do what you liked when you grew up. Now you had to listen to Mother. She knew what was good for you."

So on the morning of her birthday, Mani would bathe, dress up, and march off to the agyari, clutching sticks of sandalwood to offer to the *dastoor* (priest) for the sacred fire. Mani says that she actually liked the agyari, with its great marble steps and very lovely atmosphere.

On her thirteenth birthday she had no chance to admire it. The minute she arrived in the compound with her sandalwood, she was spotted by the *dastoor's* geese, who had not been penned up yet. At the sight of an intruder, they started honking and coming right for her. Mani turned to make a dash for safety—but what to do with the sandalwood? She couldn't take it back to Shireenmai. Providentially, who should appear on the scene but the *dastoor*, a not-so-young, portly person with a big stomach. Mani wasted no time. She threw the sandalwood at him, calling, "Catch, *dastoorji!* Catch!" as she ran out of the compound.

Unprovidentially, the sandalwood hit him in the stomach. "I did not wait to see more, but I heard the sound of *ughh* that came from him when the sandalwood made contact with his venerable person.

"Then I ran for home, ran as fast as my legs could carry me, with the chorus of geese-honks following me."

At home, eating her wonderful birthday breakfast, she assured her mother that everything had gone fine, and of course she had given the sandalwood to the dastoorji. It turned out to be the last time she went to the agyari on her birthday. On her fourteenth birthday, she had no need for religion. She was in Nasik with God.

BABAJAN

Although Shireenmai in the early years was upset with Babajan and Upasni Maharaj, and with anything spiritual because of what had happened to Merwan, as time went by, she came to have a great respect for Baba's Masters. Mani said to pilgrims that when she was a child, her mother would take her to sit with Babajan in the evenings twice or even three times a week. They would invariably go every Thursday, the "day of the guru" in Hinduism. The mother of Padri, one of Baba's closest disciples, was called Frenimasi, and she was very close to Babajan. She helped Shireenmai feel free to come and spend time there. Frenimasi taught Mani the etiquette of Babajan's "court"—how they wouldn't say no to anything Babajan asked, for example, and other little hints on how to behave in Her presence. So Mani felt at ease with this ancient lady and Her mysterious ways. Mani said that you couldn't help loving Babajan; even to a child's eyes She was very beautiful.

Babajan sat under Her neem tree, on a mattress edged on all sides by a brass railing. Mani used to think of it as Babajan's cradle. On a nail on the neem tree there hung a small faded picture of Baba in a cheap frame. Mani described how, one day, Babajan suddenly glanced at her and called her over. Mani went up to the cradle and Babajan took her hand, looking at Mani very cryptically and saying something that Mani could not understand. Mani felt something, a communion with Her, that was very beautiful.

Because of Frenimasi's instructions, she was not too nervous, but

stood there quietly. Babajan kept looking at her, and then She turned and looked at the little picture of Baba on the neem tree, still holding Mani's hand. She leaned Her head on Baba's picture and started crying, almost sobbing, Her shoulders shaking as She cried. Mani was scared then, wondering what she had done to make Babajan cry! She looked around at Frenimasi, who with a finger to her lips, whispered, "Keep still, it's all right, it's all right." And after a while, Babajan let go of her hand.



Babajan.

Frenimasi later told her that although they couldn't understand it, still what had happened was something very good.

On another occasion when Shireenmai, Frenimasi, and Mani, along with others, were sitting with Babajan, someone placed a rupee in Babajan's hand. Babajan looked at the rupee and then called Mani to Her. As Mani went up and put out her hand and Babajan started to put the rupee into her palm—*whoosh*, all those women who had been sitting quietly around them leapt up and grabbed for the rupee, and someone took it from her. Mani recalled, "There were about twenty hands around my ears and head; it was like a football tackle! I didn't know where all those hands came from." She just stood there, her hair awry, in the middle of a wild melee. "Boy," said Mani, "I don't know how I got out alive from that. But that rupee just went!"

Frenimasi got angry and swore at the women, "You such and such, you so and so . . ." because she knew what it meant to receive

something from Babajan. So did the women. It was not the rupee they wanted, but the precious prasad from the Master's own hand.

Shireenmai once took Mani to see Narayan Maharaj. As she told pilgrims, He was sitting on His swing as they approached, and seeing Shireenmai, although He had never met her and had not been introduced, He called out, "Hello, Mother! You've come?"

Shireenmai was very touched and pleased by His greeting. He called Mani to Him and made her sit next to Him on the swing. "I have a sister, too!" He said, which made Mani so proud.

A little while later, someone brought a Marathi letter for Maharaj



Narayan Maharaj.

to hear, and He handed it to Mani to read out to Him. Fortunately, she could read the Marathi script and knew Marathi well from the servants and local people at home. He was very pleased with her reading. And she was very taken with Him.

Mani told us that she had remembered Narayan Maharaj with a special fondness all her life: His delicate beauty, His gentleness, and His regal presence, and later on she had

two very significant dreams of Him (both written about in *Dreaming of The Beloved*.) In one, He was the doorkeeper to Baba's room in Meherazad, and granted her entrance. In another, when she was in chains, struggling to be admitted to God's presence as He sat presiding over His royal court, Maharaj unfastened her fetters and set her free.

Shireenmai took Mani to see Upasni Maharaj, too. From “this old Mohammedan lady” and “that Hindu man,” they had become “Babajan” and “Maharaj” to Shireenmai, Mani recounted, Great Ones worthy of reverence.

THE VICTORIA

With a look of mystery and interest on her face, Mani would sometimes recall for pilgrims a strange encounter she had with “the victoria.” A victoria is an elegant, old-fashioned horse-drawn carriage, something like a phaeton, that can carry several passengers. It was a frequent mode of transport around the towns of India in the British days, and one saw a lot of them in Poona. They could be hired, like taxis, to take one from place to place, and had two headlamps for lighting roads and lanes in the dark.

At the time of this incident, “Big Khorshed,” the wife of Baba’s brother Jamshed, had come to visit the family. For Mani it was seventh heaven to have someone come from Baba and see them; it was the next best thing to having Baba Himself. Khorshed lived with the women mandali in those days and was full of news from Meherabad. In the evenings, she and Shireenmai, with Mani tagging along, would stroll through the quiet streets of Poona to visit Babajan. In fact, Mani said, the streets were so quiet you could walk right down the middle of the road, and any victoria coming up behind you would ring a bell, or a *tongawalla* (a tonga driver) would call out, and you would move to the side while the vehicles passed by.

So Shireenmai, Khorshed, and Mani went to sit with Babajan this evening, and on the way back they decided to buy some flowers. The streetlamps were lit as it was getting dark. Suddenly the three of them heard horses’ hooves behind them. The sound was that made by big

horses, so they knew it was a victoria (tongas were pulled by smaller horses).

They moved to the side for the carriage to pass, when suddenly they realized that there was no light shining on the road behind them from the victoria's lamps. They thought it odd: someone was riding in a victoria with no lamps.

As it passed them, Khorshed turned. Looking into the victoria, she suddenly called out, "Baba!" and started to run after it. In her hurry, she lost a slipper. Hearing Baba's name, Mani also turned, and saw the bottom of Baba's white loose pants, and His sandals. She says there was no mistaking it.

So Mani, too, started running after the victoria, and poor Shireenmai was left in the dark, complaining, "What is it? Nobody tells me. What is happening, why are you all running?"

They didn't pay any attention to her, just kept running, and they saw the victoria going right up to Babajan's seat where Babajan was sitting. Next to Her seat there was a narrow lane, very narrow for a victoria, but as they came closer they saw the victoria turning into this lane, which was very surprising. Just then Shireenmai caught up with them. "What is happening? Nobody's telling me!"

They went into the lane, and to their astonishment, there was no victoria. As it was a dead end, the carriage could not have gone out the other side. It had just vanished. Khorshed and Mani, feeling very foolish, went up and down the lane asking people if they had seen a victoria go by. Everyone looked at them very oddly, "A victoria, in this little lane?"

So they came back out, and started to explain to Shireenmai, "Memo, we saw Baba in a victoria, and we saw the victoria go into this lane, and now . . ."

But Baba's name was all Shireenmai heard. "Ah, so my son is in Poona. Of course the whole of Poona must know He's here except His mother. He hasn't told His mother, but everybody else. . . ."

“Memo, it’s not like that at all. Please let’s go home and find out.”

So they went home and sent a telegram to Baba. No one else, not Sadashiv Patil or any of the Poona mandali, seemed to know either. A return telegram came from Meherabad: Baba had been there all the time. He hadn’t left Meherabad or Ahmednagar at all.

Years after Babajan passed away, Mani had a dream of Her that revealed her great love for Babajan and for Poona. Although some areas of the city of her childhood changed beyond recognition over the years, the moholla, the neighborhood around the House-with-the-Well (known today as Baba-House), somehow has remained the same. It is as if here, Mani said, “Time stood still.” It is that timeless Poona that she dreamt of in this dream, recounted in *Dreaming of The Beloved*, and also told to pilgrims as follows:

I still remember a dream I had of Babajan before Baba had His accident when we were in Satara, long after Babajan had dropped Her body. It was the first and last time I cried in my sleep, so much that my pillow got wet. I’ve now and then laughed in my sleep and been woken up by my own “Ha, Ha, Ha!,” wondering “Oh my goodness, what’s happening?” But this was the first time I cried, and when I woke up, I was sobbing and the side of the pillow where my head was resting was sopping wet.

I dreamt I was there with Babajan, just like we used to visit so often, Mother and I, and sit at Babajan’s feet. So often, because it was not far from our house in Poona.

So in my dream I am in Poona at Babajan’s shrine. It is evening time, dusk, time for the lights to be put on. But there is still visibility. Babajan used to sit by the tree and

there was a railing around Her, which as a child I used to call “Babajan’s cradle.” In my dream Babajan is seated outside of the cradle, in the place we would sit when we would go for Her darshan. There is nobody there. She is squatting on the ground tying up a bundle in an off-white, old, used sheet. She obviously has things in it because she is tying it up. And I am squatting in front of Her.

And I know She is packing up to leave. I say, “Oh Babajan, Oh, don’t go! Please don’t go! Poona will be desolate without You!” I even become poetic and make a rhyme in Gujerati: *sunu* means “a desert, dry, desolate” and *Punu* is a word we would use for Poona. I say, “Punu will be sunu without you, Babajan. Oh, don’t go!” And I’m crying.

She says, “My child, what can I do? I am closing shop now because there is no one who can afford my wares. I get no customers. So I must close up. And I’m packing up.” Tugging at Her bundle, I say, “No, Babajan, no, Babajan!” and I wake up sobbing.

I told Baba that dream the next morning. He nodded but made no comment. Baba’s love for Babajan was so beautiful to see. Baba would speak of Her with such love.

BABA’S VOICE

Although Mani heard Baba talk up until she was seven years old, she only had a distinct memory of His voice in one incident. “In the House-with-the-Well, when I was very little, I heard Baba speaking,” Mani once recalled in Mandali Hall. “I remember it because it was something funny, which is the kind of thing one always remembers. But I don’t remember the sound of His voice, like Mehera does, because I was too young.”

It was during an occasion when Baba had come to their home in

Poona with a group of His men mandali. Among them was Shireenmai's brother visiting from Iran, who Baba called Jambumama ("Jambu uncle"). Jambumama loved Baba very much. As Mani remembered it, Jambumama was "jumbo" himself, an "enormous person," who on this occasion was dressed in a long, black buttoned-down coat and wearing a black cap. He was sitting with the others around Baba, and Baba was talking.

Occasionally one or another of the group would get up and go out for a minute for a drink of water or whatever, and come back inside. After a while, Baba said, "Every one of you can go out and come back, it doesn't matter. Only see that Jambumama doesn't leave the room."

At that, everyone became very serious, Mani said. Hmm, it seemed a very meaningful and significant order: Jambumama must not leave the room. "All right, yes, Baba," they all said.

"Do you know why?" Baba asked.

"No, Baba."

"Jambumama is all dressed in black. And while he is here, all the mosquitoes go for him. But if he leaves the room, all the mosquitoes will come to us! So you take care that Jambumama doesn't go out!"

"Baba would often do that," Mani said. "He would say something that we thought had such spiritual importance behind it. And then He'd give an explanation that was so light and so human, He'd make us laugh!"



SCHOOL

“My little sister is very clever,” Baba gestured once, tapping His finger to His head. Mani knew it, too: “By Baba’s grace, I was equipped with brains. I could read a poem once, from an open book in my hand on the way to school, and know it by heart . . . But I was lazy, I was playful, and I never studied much. Maybe Baba gave me that intelligence knowing I’d be lazy and playful!”



She wanted to be with Baba and not in school, but His order was that she could only come to be with Him on her school holidays.

So she was stuck.

She started out in a Gujarati preschool, as was common practice among Zoroastrians. Meanwhile, whenever Mani would visit Meherabad, Mehera would teach her the ABCs in English, and would often tell Shireenmai how clever Mani was. After Mani had been in the Gujarati school for a year, Mehera suggested to Shireenmai that Mani be sent to an English school, and so Mani entered the Convent of Jesus and Mary, a Catholic school for girls, run by nuns. Mehera herself had attended this same school a few years before.

Shireenmai and Sheriarji did not speak English, and so up until that time Mani spoke only Gujarati and a little Dari, some Marathi (which the local people spoke), and some Hindi. This put her at a great disadvantage when she first entered the convent. She couldn’t understand a word the teachers were saying. Fortunately, arithmetic is a universal language, and she was quite good at it, so she held her own in that one subject, and even tutored some of the other students. But in the other subjects, she came out last to start with, and then second to last (she remembered one poor girl, who was even more confused by it all, coming in behind her). That “last” didn’t last long, however. With her quick ear for

languages and her ability to remember just about everything she read or heard, Mani soon caught up, and eventually surpassed the others.

I overheard someone once remarking that Mani spoke English with an Irish lilt. That must have come from the nuns who taught in the convent; one of her favorites was Irish. As she told pilgrims, "I loved the nuns, the habits they wore, and their gracious ways. They were always busy with their work and their prayers, and I marveled at the time and care they devoted to the lilies in their garden. Whenever one of the nuns carried a long sheaf of pure white lilies into the church of the convent, I would feel touched. 'She's offering it to Jesus,' I'd say to myself, 'just like Mehera would offer it to Baba.'"

Mani took the usual classes, some taught by the nuns and some by lay teachers. She also took French. It's interesting that she studied the language again, much later in life, when the first wave of French Baba-lovers came to visit Meherabad and Meherazad. It was touching then to see Mani, who was so busy in those years, sit quietly in her free time at Meherazad, listening to a French lesson tape through her Walkman headphones, and with a lesson book in her lap. She was studying so that she could speak French with the Baba-pilgrims.

In the time of the British, there were a number of convent schools throughout India, with both Western and Indian students. These seem to have provided an excellent basic education, plus a good knowledge of the English language, including reading, writing, and English literature. All of this was very highly valued by Shireenmai and the middle- and upper-class Indian society of the time.

Mani was a day scholar. She would walk to school in the morning, walk home for a hot lunch made by Shireenmai, and then walk back to school. The girls wore uniforms and sang school songs and wrote poetry and played jump rope (more genteel than hockey or cricket). If you weren't a Christian, you didn't have to attend the religious classes, but you were required to take "moral lessons" with the nuns. Telling some

of us about those times, Mani remembered that the non-Christian children felt left out of the Catholic-oriented activities. Yet Mani learned a lot about Jesus, Christianity, and the Bible.

I always got the feeling that she enjoyed the convent school a lot, being both smart and intensely sociable. She studied there up until the time she joined Baba at age 13. It was her only schooling, except for a few months at a British boarding school in Deolali, located about 15 miles from Nasik, when Mani was in Baba's ashram. Mani's attendance at that school is memorable because Meheru, who was later to be one of the close women mandali, happened to be in the primary section of the same school. Meheru had been placed there at the age of four, very small and a little scared, and she wrote in one of her notebooks that she found great comfort when Mani would come to visit her from the secondary school:

As you all know what fun Mani can be—especially with children—and we loved being with her. Whenever I felt specially lonely—missing my home and parents—and I cried in class, the teacher sent word to ask that Mani should come. Just her presence and the few words she spoke with me in Gujerati—a language I could understand—would make a world of difference and cheer me up. I still remember those occasions and what it meant to me having her.

There was a chapel attached to the convent, and Mani loved the atmosphere there, the beautiful altar cloth, the lilies on the altar, the statues of the saints looking down from the walls. Mani would often go there with her best friend, Mary de Sousa, a Goanese Catholic, at recess time instead of playing. She described the scene to pilgrims: she and Mary would go inside, and then come out and sit on the wide church steps, and Mary would tell Mani stories of the saints, of Jesus, and of Mary. When they would go inside the church, Mary would go in first, walking

solemnly down the aisle. Mani would follow her, looking up at the saints' statues and smiling at them. Sometimes she'd touch their robes.

A crucifix depicted Christ dying on the cross. She said this was something she was used to in that Catholic environment: one seldom saw a picture of Jesus without the Cross, and so somehow one got used to that aspect of His infinite suffering. But, as she told pilgrims, once when she saw a picture of Jesus with a crown of thorns on His head and blood dripping down His forehead:

I still remember crying over it. I said, "How could they do that to Baba? How could they do that to Baba?" over and over. And do you know, Jesus' forehead looked so much like Baba's. So the picture of Jesus with the crown of thorns really made me suffer . . . I was very drawn to Jesus, because for me Jesus was real. He was here again. I loved Jesus even more than Mary could, because for me Jesus was not Jesus in another room, but Jesus right here. . . . To me, it was all alive.

I'd smile at St. Anne, smile at St. Francis, and I believed that they smiled back at me. Or nodded at me. There was something very personal between us, a friendship.

Mary's relationship with the church was more formal. Once when Mani put holy water on her eyes—it had been very sunny and hot outside—Mary happened to turn around and caught her in the act. Mary was horrified. "You can't do that!" she said. Mani said to herself, "Why does she say that? What makes her think that? Baba wouldn't mind!"

As quick as Mani was, she was in trouble at exam time. The pressure to come in first in the class was terrific. This is because when she was about ten, Mani decided she had had enough of parents and home and school. As she wrote of it in *God-Brother*, "I had a happy childhood. I loved my parents and my home. It is just that from the very first, my one ambition in life was to go and live with Baba for all

time.” So she let Him know. Baba agreed, and then added that all she had to do was to come first in her exams at the end of the year, and from the next year she could be with Him for good.

Now this was a problem for a girl who threw down her books the minute she came home and ran outside to play. As we’ve seen, Mani once asked her father to teach her a short prayer at exam time. But usually, when cramming time was very short and she had to study frantically for exams, she’d ask Bobo to pray for her himself. “Please, Bobo, pray for me. Pray that I come first in class.”

Her father would look at her and gently reply, “But child, it is you who should pray.”

“What! Me, pray?” Mani would say, “Where have I got the time to pray? Look, Bobo, you pray and I’ll study. And between us we’ll make it.”

Which they did, every time. (Mani said that she would be so happy that she would forget the part her father had played in it.)

When next she went to Baba, He would praise her, looking over the school report and her prizes. He’d look so proud and pleased. And then just before it was time for her to go home, He’d call her to Him. He’d ask her, “Do you love Me?” and when she would profess, yes, He’d ask, “More than Mother, more than Father?”

“Oh, yes!”

“And that means you’d do anything for Me?”

“Anything!”

“You mean,” Baba would say, looking incredibly amazed, “if I asked you to go back home and go to school for another year, you’d even do that?”

And what could Mani do but nod silently. In that way, the years went by, and she went on learning, until He invited her to be with Him for always.

In *God-Brother* Mani explained that the one thing she most admired about her friend Mary de Sousa was that Mary never lied:

I admired her so much for it because telling a lie was easy as pie for me. I found it most natural to do so as a child, because I lied in order to avoid a scolding at school or a spanking at home.

Even if I was caught red-handed doing something I wasn't supposed to do, I would look very innocent and firmly deny it, "No, I didn't do it."

But if Mary were asked by the teacher, "Mary de Sousa, did you do this?" she would promptly stand up and say, "Yes, Miss," even if it meant taking punishment for it.

I'd look up at Mary with melting eyes and wonder to myself, "How, oh how does she do it?"

As she said, Mani could lie at the drop of a hat. She used to love to tell pilgrims about the time she stole a mango from the kitchen at home. She squished it all up and sucked the juice out, smearing her mouth and face with thick mango pulp in the process. Shireenmai had been saving the mango for something and when she found it missing, of course she searched out Mani.

"Did you take that mango from the kitchen?"

"Mango?" said Mani, as the juice dripped slowly down onto her chin, "What mango? I never touched the mango!"

This was undoubtedly one of the occasions when Shireenmai brought out her small cane switch and went after her. She wouldn't spank Mani with her hand; she'd switch the back of her legs with the cane. Once when Mani had misbehaved, Shireenmai started for the switch. At the same moment, Mani started screaming at the top of her lungs—bloodcurdling screams that brought their neighbor running.

“No, no, Shireen!” panted the woman. “Stop! Enough! It’s too much for the child!”

Shireenmai had never even touched her.

But although lying was as easy as pie for Mani as a child, she never lied to Baba, ever. And she added this footnote in *God-Brother*: “It will be interesting for young readers, and surely a relief for their mothers, to know that when I grew older I didn’t lie any more—there was no need to.”

According to Mani, although she did not personally feel the effects of the vast and fierce opposition to Baba within her community, she had a taste of it, one that she remembered so clearly she could even recall what she was eating at the time. Mani was very fond of her friend Mary. Not only would they go to the chapel and talk about the saints and Jesus and the Holy Mother together, but they would exchange presents (Mary gave saints’ pictures, Mani gave balloons or silly toys), and enjoyed each other’s company. All that changed one day.

They were sitting on the chapel steps, and Mary was telling Mani a story. It was recess time, and Mani had used the occasion to rush out to the gate where the woman selling brown-sugar toffee sat, buy some toffee and some chickpeas with her pocket money, and come back to sit beside Mary. The sticky toffee was all over her mouth, Mani recalls.

Anyway, all of a sudden the thought rushed into Mani’s mind, “Here’s Mary and she’s my best friend. She loves Jesus so much. She’s so good. I know Jesus is right here on earth, and I haven’t told her. All this time I never told her. What kind of a friend am I?”

So Mani burst out, “Mary!”

“Yes,” answered Mary, sensing the urgency in Mani’s voice.

And Mani told her. “Do you know, my brother is Christ!”

Finished. There were none of the responses Mani had anticipated. Mary did not jump up for joy. She didn’t scold Mani for not telling her

before. Instead, she didn't say a word. "I could feel the icy coldness coming from her. It was as if the door of a Frigidaire had opened. For some reason, there is one little detail that I remember distinctly. Mary got up and brushed off the back of her skirt as she walked away."

Mary didn't talk to Mani for a month. And afterwards, it was never the same between them. Not too long after this, Mani came to Baba for good and had no more contact with Mary. But she couldn't help thinking to herself, "Well, Mani, you weren't good, but you got God. Mary was so good, she missed Him."

Mani reflected in Mandali Hall:

As Baba said, it's the connection that matters. It's not how good you are or bad you are that makes the difference with God. It is that He has taken you to Him; in some life you have linked yourself with Him; you've had the good fortune to know of Him and be drawn to Him—had some "God-luck" if you like to call it that—by the law of Grace. That is what is important. Even now I tell the young ones, "Don't sit and brood that you're not worthy of loving Baba. Don't think; just grab. You've got it, grab it!"

Sometimes I've wondered, "Why me?" But it is enough that He has brought us to His side. We can never be worthy of His Love, but what does it matter? We have Him.

Mani would say about the timing of awakening to Baba:

Baba would always point out that you need the connection to Him, and it has to be the right time; one's time had to come. I used to picture myself in different little dramas with an alarm clock in each one. One would ring at 4 o'clock, one would ring at 3 o'clock, one would ring at 11 o'clock. At that time, the perfect time, Baba's time, the heart would awaken.

You may not have been aware of Him before that, but

He has been aware of you. But, as Baba says, everything depends upon the time.



WRITING TO BABA

One of the great letter-writers of Baba's Advent, Mani is well known for her consummate writing skill. She started writing Baba letters as a young child, and as you can see in the following article in the journal *Meher Message*, one was published when she was only ten:

29th March. Miss Mani Sherheriar [sic] Irani is the little sister of His Divine Majesty Meher Baba. Though only nine [ten] years old, she fully understands the spiritual position of her Divine Brother. Her love for Him knows no bounds, and she ever and anon writes loving letters in English to Him. The letter which the Holy Master received from her today contained, among other things a small poem on Him. Of course the poem is not commendable in itself, but considering that she is only nine years old, full credit must be given to her for trying to give vent to her thoughts in it. In the letter she writes, 'My Dear Brother Baba, I received Your last loving letter, and I read it with great pleasure. I hope You are quite well. . . . I am always thinking of You with love. One day I had nothing to do, so I wrote a poem on You. I hope You will read it, and will forgive me if there are any mistakes in it. I can close my letter with love and kisses to you. Tatta Baba!'

The poem, which she composed, is as follows:

Shri Meher Baba.
 I love you, I love you, our Lord,
 You light a lantern in the sky,
 For you are Christ our Lord.
 You will put us in heaven when we will die
 And we will be near you our Lord.
 You give light to the sun to shine on us,
 And we will pick up our work to do.
 I love you, I love you, our Lord.⁵

In this way, when out of sight in Poona, Mani made sure she was well remembered by Baba in Meherabad by writing Him (and Mehera and the women) such letters, mostly in Gujerati when she was little. As she wrote in *God-Brother*:

How did I address Baba in these letters? Did I begin with “Dear Brother,” “Darling Brother,” or some such personal greeting? Oh no. When I was little I had to be very “grown-up” for Baba, to keep up with all the learned grown-ups around. I knew the formal way in which one addressed a high-up person in society, like a baronet or a barrister or suchlike. Would I do less for Baba? He who was the very topmost?

So, after formally heading my letter with “Shree Meher Baba” in red ink and flourishing strokes, I would usually begin my letter with “May it be known to Shree Meher Baba that I hope You are well. . . .”

Such a letter would also have a child’s embellishments (red ink), flourishes and decoration, a little news, and many demands: “Please turn the key and quickly call me to You”; “Definitely, definitely and definitely

forgive me” (when she’d been sick and couldn’t write); “Come daily in my dreams.”

The most outrageous had to be this one: “You promised me that I will be with You when You break Your Silence. I am most surprised to hear that You’re going to break Your Silence in two months when I am still at school. So, either You allow me to come and be with You when You break Your Silence, or You postpone the breaking of Your Silence.”

The P.S. was: “I can come right now.”

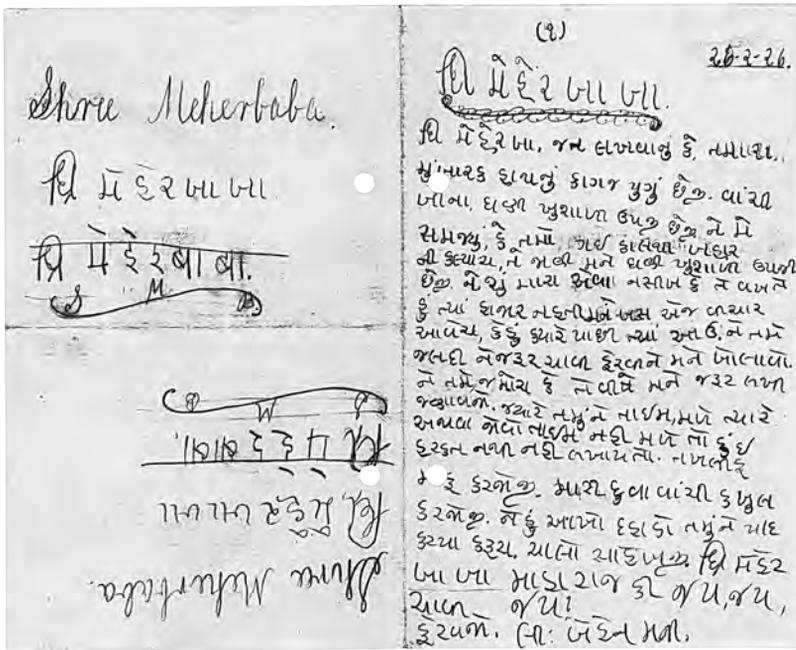
Mani noted, “This must have scared Baba because His reply came back very fast. ‘No, don’t come,’ He wrote. ‘I’ve decided to postpone the breaking of My Silence.’”

My personal favorite of Mani’s descriptions of her letters to Baba is this one in *God-Brother*:

I would also make sure that Baba didn’t ever forget me and I would use every little excuse to remind Him of me. Once it happened that I was being Mother’s scribe, writing down a letter to Baba which she dictated while she was cleaning the vegetables. She ended it with, “Your father, as well as Mani, send lots of regards to You.”

Ah! My name in that sentence was all I needed to draw Baba’s attention to me. I wrote my name clearer and bigger than the rest of the words in that letter, used red ink to highlight it, underlined it to make it stand out, and put it in quotes to be sure He didn’t miss it. It seemed to blink and beep out a clear message: “Hello Baba, this is me, remember? Me, MANI, your kid-sister—here I am, see?”

Here are three typical letters (translated from the original Gujerati) from Mani to Baba written when she was seven years old.



Mani's childhood letter to Baba.

26-2-26

Shree Meher Baba

Shree Meher Baba, Your letter written in Your beautiful hand has reached me. After reading its contents I felt a lot of joy. I heard that You have started to travel from yesterday and I felt very happy. And what luck that I was not present there at the time. I am constantly wondering when I can come there again, and You turn the key soon and surely, and call me there. Please write and let me know if You are eating. Whenever You have the time do write—but if You do not have the time and cannot write, no problem. Excuse the ramble. Accept my good wishes. I remember You the whole day. Okay bye. Shree Meher Baba Maharaj ki jai, jai, jai.

Sister Mani

Turn the key.

Shree Sadguru Meher Baba
Sal Mubarak! [Happy New Year]

I am writing to wish You Pateti Mubarak [Happy Irani New Year] and please pardon me for not having written a letter for so many days because on the day I returned to Poona, that same night I wrote You a card and on the next day, i.e., Monday morning, I posted it on my way to school. And it must have reached You on Tuesday and then I sat waiting for Your letter. Then when I did not get Your reply on Thursday evening, I sent Adi to get me a card and he could not get it because it was past five o'clock and the post office closes at four o'clock. On Friday, Adi returned from school at five or five-thirty and I sent him for a card but then too the shop had closed. On Saturday he returned from school at one in the afternoon, then too I sent him to get a card but Saturday it stays closed for half a day, so he could not get it and Sunday it is closed. So please forgive me and turn the key soon and call me.

Have written on the reverse also.

Take care of Your health

And I wish You Pateti greetings and if You are not here on Pateti day what is the sense of celebrating Pateti?

Okay Bye. Pateti Mubarak, Pateti Sal Mubarak

Please accept Sister Mani's good wishes which are for You alone

3-5-26

Shree Meher Baba

Dear Brother Shree Baba be informed that I am writing this letter from my friend's place. I am writing this letter to You to inform You that I have holidays and You should send anybody so he can take me to You. If You had sent brother Behram here for just one day, then Mother's anger would have cooled down and she would have sent me also. We had packed the clothes in the trunk thinking that perhaps Behram would come so I could go with him. Today my clothes were removed from the trunk and I cried a lot. I felt very hurt. Even now, if You can send Behram soon I will be very grateful otherwise these people will never send me with anybody. Please do not let Mother know about this letter. I am very anxious to come. Turn the key soon. Good bye.

Sister Mani

Shree Meher Baba, please turn the key, definitely and definitely.

As the above show, Mani constantly implored Baba in her letters to “turn the key,” which was a phrase Baba often used about His work in particular and in general. What did that mean? Mani explained in her book, “Well, when a key is turned, a door is unlocked. With Baba holding the key to all doors, He had only to turn it and open the way for me to be with Him again!” As you can see, this theme of “turn the key” pops up in every letter. But despite all Mani’s pleading, sometimes that darn key just



A letter from Mani to Baba.

didn't work right for her: "in all my letters, I am writing to You to turn the key, but You are turning the wrong key, so I am hoping that You will turn the right key and call me there soon."



GOD-BROTHER

Someone in the Hall once asked Mani, how did she come to feel that her brother was God? She replied:

As far as I remember, there was no development. I just knew. As naturally as a child knows "this is an orange, this is chocolate, this is a biscuit," I knew Baba was God. Nobody had to tell me. And nobody did (when I was very little, I mean). Of course He was my brother. But He happened to be God. God is the Creator, God is all, you bow down to God, you worship God, and I knew that my brother was God.

It was as if I was born with it. As if it was something that had been picked up from my last life, a carrying over, a fulfillment of a longing. That's how I see it now. But as a child it was very natural . . . I loved Baba more than anyone or anything. All I wanted to do since I was a child was to go and live with Him.

When Mani was seven, Shireenmai wrote to Baba: "Night and day, Mani remembers You."

This bore witness to the fact that even at home Baba was always the center of her life when she was little. (Merwan had begun to be called "Meher Baba" by His close disciples about the time Mani turned

one.) Running around the well at home shouting “Baba alone is Real!”, or walking through the convent church with Mary and thinking of Him as Jesus, all sorts of things reminded her of Baba. When she would hear her friends talking of their godmothers or godfathers, she would think to herself, “No one, but no one, has a *God-Brother*. I’m the only girl in the whole world who has a *God-Brother!*”

Even as she played with the neighborhood children, He was in the back of her mind. For example, once when she was very little, she and some of the other children were playing a game in the street, something like ring-around-the-rosy. In the game at one point, the boys lined up on one side and the girls on the other, and they formed an arch with their hands. The boy and girl at the end of each line walked under the arched hands and kissed at the end. The children were all very young, it was just in fun, but when Mani got to the end of the arch with her partner, she turned away from him, friendly as she was, and would not be kissed. It was not for her. Even then she had a sense of the different life that was destined for her.

She had a series of “little orders” from Baba when she was a child. She must do her lessons. She must write Baba once a week. She must listen to Mother, and of course she must not run away from home to be with Him, but come with Mother only during school holidays.

She wrote that by the time she was eleven, “I was old enough (and certainly proud enough) to receive ‘big orders’ from Baba. These ‘big orders’ were based on my leading a pure life at all times, in all circumstances.”

The seriousness with which she regarded these big orders showed up now and then. For instance, Mani had put a lot of work into carving Baba’s initials, “MB,” into the wooden border on the top of her study desk at home, something much more interesting to do than homework. One day a young man, a family friend who was obviously sweet on her, came by with a *Schoolgirls’ Weekly* magazine for her to read. Seeing the

initials on her desk, he suggested that they stood for her name (which started with an “M”) and his name (which started with a “B”). Mani was so incensed that he dare link her name with his, that she savagely scratched out the initials, ruining the desk (it was a Victorian piece with a tear-drop border—poor Shireenmai!). As Mani said, she was absolutely determined to obey Baba at all costs. And she could be quite ferocious about it.

When you think of her loving Him like that, you can imagine how hard it must have been for her each time to leave Meherabad, where He was so available, so vitally alive and active, to go back to school. This was that great period of Meherabad’s flourishing, when it was a colony of five hundred souls under Baba’s direction, humming with the activities of His work: the schools, the dispensary, the darshans, the games and occasions. Not to mention the heady perfume of life in the women’s ashram where she would stay with young Mehera, Naja, Khorshed, and the others who were all she aspired to be. With Mani’s deep connection to Baba, she must have imbibed the intoxicating flavor of that era like a sponge—and then to have to leave all that and go home to convent school!

Baba would give her extra love and tell her to be happy for His sake, as the time drew near for her to leave. She would try. But still she couldn’t help crying on the train home. Once this became too much for Shireenmai, sitting with her in their crowded third-class compartment. *God-Brother* records:

Mother put on a sweet smile and said to me in Dari (so that the passengers wouldn’t understand), “Stop it, Mani. All these people are not looking at you while you’re crying away, they are looking at me! They think maybe I’m your cruel stepmother, and they are wondering what I’ve done to you!”

I looked up and around. Sure enough, every one of the

passengers was glaring daggers at my poor mother. “What has she done to that dear child to make her cry so much?” they seemed to say.

I wiped away my tears and brought out a shaky smile. I don't remember, but I like to think that I was more considerate from that time on.

Shireenmai's letters to Baba written from 1926 to 1928 show Mani's longing to be with Baba:

“. . . daughter Mani came to know that Father had been to see You and not taken her along for darshan. So she is insisting that 'I must go for Baba's darshan.' She says that You do not even appear in her dreams at night. I feel miserable listening to her! So I will bring her on the night train on Tuesday 19th and will arrive at Nagar station in the morning at 8 o'clock. Kindly send someone to the station to fetch us.”

“Father, Adi and Mani have sent You many many good wishes.”

“All from here send their good wishes and regards. And daughter Mani is waiting for You to return to Nagar so she can come and see You.”

“Please write a couple of words to Mani—she is feeling sad inwardly. . . .”

“Son, at present I will not be able to come with Behram because if I come Mani too will want to come. Mani has been sick for the last several days . . . if I send her to You so sick, You will have unnecessary trouble.”

“Mani will get holidays from 29 April to 22 June and she is very anxious to come there, so I will send her for holidays with whosoever is going. . . . Mani has sent you lots, lots,

lots of good wishes and is anxiously awaiting Your return to Nasik. Accept my good wishes as well.”

Reflecting on the Divine connection she must have had to be born the sister of God, Mani would sometimes refer to the very powerful and meaningful dream—briefly mentioned before—that she once had about love for Him. She told pilgrims in the Hall about it:

In 1956, I had a dream which was so beautiful. It was a God dream. I've dreamt of God about three or four times in my life. Baba is God, but I mean I dreamt of Baba *just* as God. I was so full of this dream, so impressed with it, so vibrating with it, that in the middle of the night when I woke up, I took a pencil that was somewhere nearby and wrote it down on a piece of paper in the dark. The lines are scribbled one on top of the other, so you can barely see them. I came across this paper only recently and thought that I must decipher it. So I sat with a big magnifying glass and tried to make it as legible as possible.

The dream I jotted down in the dark, on awakening at midnight in Satara, 1956, was: I was in God's Court, where Court had assembled. Dim figures in white robes . . . were seated with footstools for their feet. Then I suddenly saw one figure in the center, who attracted me. I felt love, and I cried out, “You are God!” The figure was bluish and full of beauty, and did not look straight at me and did not speak, but just slightly nodded. I said, “You are beautiful. I love You. I have always loved You.” With my hands outstretched, I was straining to enter and be with Him, but my feet were shackled with heavy chains and a padlock.

Then I was outside the Court. And I was a *mast* [a

God-intoxicated person on the spiritual path], walking strangely to a street corner. Some people crowded around me. I was sitting on the ground like a mad person. Others came, and they were displeased with me and they walked away. I wanted to return to God. I found my way through the alley and came to the entrance. I saw a side door half open, and tried to slip in. But the keepers saw me and held onto my feet and tied me up. I struggled. I struggled to go in.

Then one young messenger, who looked like Narayan Maharaj, came, laughing, and unlocked and unfastened my fetters, saying, "All right, you can come in." I went into the same Court, and there was God. I was overcome with love again.

For Mani, her cry in that dream, "I have always loved You," was an indication of how long her soul had been longing for Him. As she used to say to us, "With Baba, it's never just a one-way street."

Mani had a wonderful dream about God, her first, when she was seven. "Although I knew my brother was God, I didn't really know what 'Avatar' meant. This dream helped me to understand."

She dreamt she was way up in the sky, sitting on the edge of a cloud, and seated before her was "this enormous Man, a tremendous Being" with no clothes on ("but He didn't seem naked in the way that a human would.") She knew He was God and she asked Him why He didn't have clothes on. Smiling, He pointed over the edge of the cloud to a clothesline stretched in space with tiny baby clothes pinned to it. Mani wondered how God, who was so terribly big, could fit into these tiny clothes. How uncomfortable it must be for Him to get into them! God nodded at her thought, and a clear Voice said, "Yes, I wear these clothes from time to time. I put them on when I come among you as man, in the guise of the smallest of the small."

MOTHER OF GOD

In contrast, according to Mani, it was a long struggle for Shireenmai to accept Baba as God. For one thing, she didn't want Him to be God; she wanted her beloved boy to be a normal, young Irani man who succeeded in the world and made her proud, preferably as an engineer. Her acceptance did not come easily or quickly: "Mother was not one to give up anything quietly or take something lying down," as Mani said.

And it was also hard for Shireenmai because she didn't have an inner conviction of His status, as Sheriarji did, or feel it naturally, as Mani and the other children did. First of all, as Mani would explain, there was no background for understanding God-Realization within the Zoroastrian religion, no understanding of things like Perfect Masters and the spiritual path. On the whole, she would say, Zoroastrians are a good, law-abiding people with a strong sense of community. You do your duty. You attend the fire temple. As one lady said to a Baba-lover, "Isn't Zoroaster enough?"

And behind it all was her memory of Merwan's suffering at that time when He was realized, banging His head on the stone in His room from the agony, being dazed for months, hardly eating or speaking. Although He recovered in the external sense, naturally this brought much suffering to His mother as well.

Shireenmai did come eventually to accept Baba wholly for who He is, Mani said, although she didn't often show it. In fact, Eruch's mother Gaimai, who was Shireenmai's closest friend, recalls Shireenmai saying to her, "Gai, you know, Merog shouldn't say, 'I am Zoroaster.' He should say, 'I'm *like* Zoroaster.' After all, for heaven's sake, Zoroaster died ten thousand years ago!"

Shireenmai even told Baba this, and Baba had a good laugh about it.

Mani recalled to pilgrims:

It wouldn't be characteristic of Mother to openly admit, "My son is God." Or say to Baba, "Merog, I know you are God." But there were many little incidents, so many ways that Mother admitted it without declaring it in words, ways so typical of Mother.

For instance, one day she told Baba, "Merog, I hear You've said that Bombay will be destroyed, and Poona also, and there will be a lot of devastation. But remember, if anything has to happen to Poona, which You know I love, remember it should not happen by fire. You know I don't



Shireenmai paying homage to her son by publicly washing His feet with milk and honey. Baba's birthday celebration, Nasik, February 18, 1937.

like burning. I wouldn't want it to be by fire. So if anything has to happen to Poona, let it be by water."

And Baba promised her, "All right Mother, I'll see to that. I'll remember. If anything has to happen to Poona it will be by water and not by fire."

Years later in 1962, when Baba was in Guruprasad, Poona, just before the East-West Gathering, there were floods in the city that killed many people. At that time Eruch's mother, Gaimai, remembered Baba's words and reminded Mani, "Do you remember Mani, what Mother asked of Baba, that it happen by water?" And then Mani remembered.



Shireenmai posing with Baba, who is dressed as Zoroaster at Shireenmai's request and photographed by Elizabeth Patterson in 1938.

What Mani thought of as one of the most heartwarming ways in which Shireenmai declared her acceptance of her son as God was during Baba's birthday celebration at Nasik in 1937. There is a film of that occasion, a newsreel, in which Baba is luminously beautiful, giving darshan, being garlanded with a huge net of flowers, sitting on the ground and eating among the Westerners, strolling past the camera with a stride so graceful He seems to be walking on air. There was a huge crowd, and there publicly, before that mass of people, Shireenmai washed Baba's feet with milk and honey mixed with water.

In ancient Hindu tradition, to wash someone's feet with milk and honey is an act of great devotion and homage, given only to a spiritual personage, a saint, or a Perfect Master. Yet at Nasik, Shireenmai washed

Baba's feet. In fact, she was the first one to do so on this occasion. On page 107 there's a photograph of this, and one also hangs in Baba's room in His house in Poona. As His mother washes His feet, Baba is looking down on her with a look of love and compassion.

There was a third incident showing Shireenmai's acceptance of Baba as God that had great significance for Mani. Elizabeth Patterson once told Mani that in 1938 Shireenmai had specially requested Baba to dress as Zoroaster and pose with her for a picture. Mani knew the picture, of course, but she was very touched to find out that Shireenmai had asked for it. Baba had had a costume of Zoroaster made specially and He had posed in it, standing next to Shireenmai in her best sari while Elizabeth took the picture.

"What else could it mean," said Mani to pilgrims, "except that she accepted Him wholly as Zoroaster. Mother was a good Zoroastrian, just like the orthodox Zoroastrians in their community. And here she asks her son to dress like Zoroaster and pose with her in a picture. It's like declaring to the world, my son is Zoroaster."

In another picture of the two of them, we see Shireenmai standing next to Baba dressed as Krishna.

But my favorite is a picture of Baba and Shireenmai (on page 2) now hanging in Baba's house at Meherazad, that was taken in the early 1930s. Both are sitting on chairs, side by side, facing the camera. Baba is at His ease; Shireenmai is sitting up very straight. In this picture she looks perfectly herself in all particulars, an older Irani lady with traces still of her former beauty, a practical, down-to-earth housewife and mother—and happy to be so—who somehow was conscripted into the role of mother of God.

Because Shireenmai had a rather acerbic tongue, a shrewd wit, and exerted a mother's privilege of nagging her son, it was not easy when she visited the ashram. She had a lot to say, and she said it. Her remarks could be very funny; she once wrote Baba, "It has been three or four days

since we wrote to Beheram and Jal, but not a single reply from either of them. . . . Are their hands hurting that they cannot write a letter?"

Mani wrote in her book, "One time when someone spoke unkindly about Mother, Baba turned to us and said sadly, 'This person doesn't know who My mother is—she is purest crystal!'"

Mani herself had no sure idea how much her mother respected and revered Baba until she came upon a file of letters among Adi's old records in the Trust Office in the early 1990s. She had sent someone to see if some of her own letters written to Baba as a child had been saved so that she could use them in *God-Brother*.

Of that discovery, Mani wrote:

And if you pull out a cheap office file from old forgotten records and open it to find precious childhood memories pressed between its yellowed pages, what would it be like?

It happened to me not long ago, and I can tell you what it's like. Finding that file was like finding a treasure chest which had lain buried deep in the wrinkles of time. And what were the "gems" in that old musty file? Letters, letters to Baba from His family. Among the most precious were letters from Mother to her beloved Son."

In them, Mani found touching evidence of Shireenmai's obedience to Baba as early as 1926, when He was just thirty-two years old. Writing in Gujerati, she addresses Baba as "You" in the very high form of Gujerati, not as a mother would address a son, but as one would address a revered elder. An English translation of one letter from Shireenmai:

Your welcome letter has reached me and I have read the contents. I have never said no to following Your orders. . . . When You wanted to take Beheram away to school, did I or did I not do [as you wished] immediately? . . . If I did

not wish to obey Your orders, then I would not have given up eating meat and fish for the last six years. You had ordered me to eat one egg, but that too I stopped when You told me to. And I do not miss repeating Your 101 names [the 101 Names of God] as you have said—I just missed one day.



Shireenmai behind Baba, joining in the darshan program, 1926.

About Adi, her youngest son, Shireenmai wrote to Baba:

“Now accordingly as You have written, I am sending him to You. Now You can do as You wish.”

And on other topics:

“We are all using Your oodi.”*

“I will not go to the hospital as You have written [not to], but will remember You at home. Now make my disease all right soon . . .”

“I am using Your oodi, so send me some more.”

“I have been going once in one or two years [to the sacred Fire Temple in Udwarda] to offer sandalwood, so I want to go. So what do You think? Do write to let me know whatever You think.”

“We had lost hopes for son Beheram [who was very ill]. But due to Your good wishes, God has blessed us.”

Sheriarji, too, lived under Baba’s orders. Shireenmai wrote to Baba that “Father did not bid at the auction, because he came to know You didn’t want it, and he wants You to know he just went to the auction to pass his time, but he did not participate.”

Shireenmai also wanted Baba to keep in touch with her all the time:

* *Oodi* is ash from a sacred fire, in this case, the fire at Meherabad referred to as the dhuni. Mani herself felt prompted to give out the oodi to those in “special suffering.” She suggested that having lightly dabbed one’s finger in the ash, one may gently pass it across the forehead and face of the Baba-lover in need. Mani described a touch of the oodi as a “caress” from Baba.

“Son, keep writing all the news to me like this so my mind is at peace.”

“And wherever You stop on Your travels, please write me good news.”

“Please write a letter to us from whichever town You visit so that we feel reassured about You. Secondly, write and tell me, are You eating or fasting?”

“Write and let me know if You are eating. . . . And son, in the same way, keep on writing to me every now and then.”

Sometimes that didn't happen:

I am writing to say that I have not received a single letter from You so far . . . I am glad you went to Nasik, but this time You did not inform me where You were going and coming. I heard from a very reliable person that You stayed in Nasik for 24 hours. So I am feeling very sad. So certainly write me a detailed and happy letter.

Mani often recalled to pilgrims a memorable incident from her childhood involving Shireenmai that revolved around Baba's silence:

My favourite memory of Baba and His silence was a little discourse He gave to Mother, one of those natural, casual, spontaneous sayings of Baba's that I call the “simple sermons.” It was after Toka,* at a time when Baba had been doing a long fast. While He was fasting, of course, He went on keeping silence as He had been doing for many years.

Now all this hurt Mother, who loved Him so much, and who knew what a beautiful voice He had. Why was He doing

* Toka is located at the confluence of two rivers, about forty-five miles from Ahmednagar on the way to Aurangabad. Baba moved His ashram there for five months in 1928.

all this? Why was He imprisoning His beautiful voice, why was He fasting and wearing out His beautiful body?

So she said to Him one day, “Merog, why should You fast for all these months? You have become so thin and frail. And why should You observe silence and lock up Your beautiful voice? You say there’s nothing for You to gain from it, and that You’re doing it for all these young chits around You. So why don’t You make THEM do it! If it’s for their sake, make them observe silence, make them fast! Why should You do it?”

That’s when Baba gave us a hint, a glimpse, of the difference when we do something and when He does it for us. An insight into the dimension of His silence, His fasting, or whatever He does out of His love for mankind.

He said, “Mother, if the whole world were to fast for the rest of their lives, it wouldn’t equal one day of My fasting. And if the whole world were to observe silence for the rest of their lives, it wouldn’t equal one hour of My silence.”

Mother never asked Him again after that.



TO BE WITH YOU ALWAYS

Mani went through a lot watching the suffering of her parents. She and Shireenmai had a lively relationship, but she loved both her mother and her father very much, and felt very deeply the hardships they faced on Baba’s account. She told many of the events years later to pilgrims at Meherazad.

Baba became God-Realized only four years before Mani was born. So she was a young child when the storm about His Godhood broke within their community. Mani was also a witness to Shireenmai's pain over the loss of her precious son, as well as her humiliation in being ostracized from society. While Mani was still at home, her brothers one by one all went to stay with Baba, ruining Shireenmai's hopes for them, too. Then Sheriarji's partner cheated him out of his business and the family had to struggle for a means to live, their savings and valuables gone to pay for the court costs. This was at a time when Sheriarji was old and ill, and it was not easy for them to pull on. Mani was, as she once said, "very sensitive to atmosphere," and she must have keenly felt the strains of these events.

Yet Mani's memories of her childhood were very happy, a tribute above all, I'd guess, to Baba's love, which completely absorbed and surrounded her. And also to the love, attention, and care of her parents. After all, as Baba said, Sheriarji was "matchless" in the world, and Shireenmai was "purest crystal." And Mani loved them, too. Their strength of character, humor, and courage, and Sheriarji's deeply spiritual perspective on life, anchored and inspired her early years.

Through it all, however, her ambition to stay with Baba continued to overrule everything else.

When Mani was nine and visiting Baba for her school holidays, Baba suddenly announced that He was moving the ashram to Toka. Mani moved with the women, rattling along to Toka in the packed bus. On this trip she had a young companion, the daughter of Sadashiv Patil, one of the early mandali, whose name was Myna. Myna was a few years older than Mani, and as soon as they arrived in Toka, as Mani wrote in *God-Brother*, she and Myna went to play in the courtyard, while Mehera and the women arranged things for serving Baba in their quarters. They were to stay in little huts made of bamboo matting, an adventure in itself.

There was a large tamarind tree in the courtyard where they went to play, and the girls were just about to sneak a few of the tamarind pods lying under the tree and eat them. You had to sneak tamarind: it was a sour fruit that grown-ups forbid children to eat because it was considered bad for the throat—which made it irresistible.

As they were reaching for the tamarind, they heard a loud clap behind them. “There was Baba, sitting on the bamboo ladder which the workmen had left standing against the hut. Baba was sitting on an upper rung of the ladder as naturally and gracefully as though He were in the most comfortable chair.”

Looking very beautiful in His white sadra, Baba called the girls to Him, and looked at them lovingly. “It was as if there was nobody else in the world except Baba and us.” Then He gestured, “Ask, ask for anything you want. Ask right now, and I will give it to you.”

Mani said she just looked at Him in absolute wonderment. “This was something out of the world. I’d read of fairy godmothers who come with a wand and say, ‘Make a wish. It’ll be granted.’ But this was no fairy godmother! This was God Himself. And He says, ‘Make a wish and I will grant it.’”

Myna, taken totally by surprise, asked for a very handsome husband and a very grand wedding, a natural request for a Hindu girl of her age with an arranged marriage in the offing. “Granted,” Baba said, smiling at her. Then He turned to Mani and gestured with His fingers, “Ask. What is it you want? Ask quick.” Mani said it was like Baba saying “Right now I’m in the mood to give. Ask, and I’ll give you whatever you want.”

Mani looked at Him and said, “I want to be with You, always.”

Looking very happy with her reply, Baba said, “Granted,” and hugged her.

Years later, Myna got her wish, a very handsome husband and a grand wedding personally attended by Baba. But a year later she died in childbirth along with her baby.

“And my wish was granted too,” Mani wrote. “I shall be for ever and ever thankful that I added the word ‘always’ at the end of my wish. . . . As you can see, you have to be a bit of a lawyer when asking God for a boon. You have to make sure that you don’t leave out any clause in your favour.”

Despite all her pleas for Baba to “turn the key and bring me to You,” Mani was still at home. At ten, she started to become desperate. This coming and going from Baba was becoming too much to bear. Her wish to be with Him was granted, now when was it going to HAPPEN? That was when she made it clear to Him (in case He didn’t know) that she wanted to come stay with Him permanently. And He made it clear to her that she could, but she just had to finish first in her class for one more year. Three more years of waiting (and of coming first in her class) went by.

GETTING FREE

In April of 1932, Sheriarji passed away in Bombay at the age of 79. When he had become very ill, he went to Bombay for treatment. Shireenmai and Mani were with him, of course, but toward the end of April, he insisted that he be admitted to a hospital, and he sent Mani and Shireenmai back to Poona. Beheram and Adi were both away with Baba in Switzerland, and Jal was with some of the other mandali in China at Baba’s orders.

Years later, Mani said to pilgrims that she had always felt Sheriarji knew his time was near, and that was why he had insisted on his going to the hospital and their going to Poona, so that Shireenmai and Mani would not have the distress of being with him at the end. She saw it as typical of his great selflessness that he would think of sparing Shireenmai at such a time. Almost immediately after they reached home, the news came that he had passed away.

Ramjoo Abdulla, one of Baba’s close men mandali, cabled the news to Baba, Beheram, and Adi in Switzerland, and Baba said in consolation

to His brothers, "Death is necessary and is like sleep. When a person awakes from sleep, he finds himself as he was. However, after death, a person finds himself in a different atmosphere and in a different body. Both death and birth are dreams. Where is the sense in being merry or miserable for the sake of a dream?"

"Bobo's death, however, is not sleep. He has gone beyond it and is awake forever! He is emancipated and has been given *mukti*—liberation."

And He cabled Shireenmai, "Father Sheriarji is near me. Don't worry. Mind your health. Should I send Adi immediately? Baba." Sheriarji's body was taken to the Tower of Silence in Bombay where Zoroastrian bodies were disposed of. His father in Iran had been a keeper of a Tower of Silence, and as a little boy Sheriarji would keep his father company there, as he did not go to school.

Soon after Baba's return from the West, Shireenmai and Mani came to Meherabad to meet Him and discuss what was to be done now that Sheriarji was gone. Naturally, all the family were deeply grieved to lose their dearly beloved Bobo, so kind, so loving, so wise, matchless in all the world.

Mani once shared her view in Mandali Hall of how it came about that she was able to leave home to go to Baba:

In a way, when I came to be with Baba, Baba gave Mother's sons Beheram and Jal back to her. At least, that's my way of seeing it; it was a kind of exchange. He sent Beheram back to marry and stay with Mother, and then Jal back to take care of Mother and Beheram.

Beheram married only because Baba wanted him to. Once later on, Baba gave the example of Beheram marrying at His order as an example of obedience to Him, and said how happy He was with Beheram's obedience.

As a result of Baba's order, Beheram was engaged in 1931 to little Perin, Sheriarji's grand-niece (her grandmother was Sheriarji's sister). Sheriarji himself had selected her out of several candidates, even though she was by far the poorest of all the girls they considered. He knew how badly she had been treated by her stepmother as a child, and in his kind-heartedness, wanted to help her. He also said that a poor girl would appreciate whatever few amenities they could give her.

As Mani explained, the engagement with Perin was arranged, with Baba's approval, and in January 1932, Baba Himself conducted the engagement ceremony in Bombay, putting



Perin, in an award-winning art photo taken by Beheram.

the rings on the couple's fingers with His own hands. Shireenmai and Mani stayed home in Poona to take care of Sheriarji, who was ill.

Soon after, Perin (with Beheram) came to Poona to meet Sheriarji, Shireenmai, and Mani for the first time. Lively, friendly Mani and lively, friendly Perin, only six months apart in age, became friends right away, and were to remain friends all their lives. Perin came to adore Baba and, with Beheram, lived under His direct orders always.

THE INVITATION

In August 1932, Mani received a letter from Baba, asking her to join His ashram. The catch was that she had to get "free" of their mother. This was going to be difficult.

In time, Baba gave her a hint. He told her, "Make Mother want you to go!" Loving her mother as she did, this was no joke, especially at such a time, because it meant that Mani had to be mean to Shireenmai. But determined to be with Baba, she started. Everything her mother said, she contradicted. Or gave a smart answer to. Or ignored. And then, Mani said, after being just impossibly mean to her mother, Mani would run into her room and cry. It was so hard. But she kept it up for days and weeks and months, until finally in desperation and exasperation, Shireenmai was fed up. "Go, go to Meroğ! I don't want you here! Go!" And Mani was free to go.

Baba helped in another way, too. Like any mother at that time (and even now), Shireenmai had in her mind that Mani would eventually marry a suitable young man. Sensing this, Mani quickly made it clear to her that she wasn't going to marry; she was going to be with Baba like Mehera, Naja, and the others. But something that helped Shireenmai accept this is that just about that time Mani started to develop a skin condition, a discoloration of the pigment that left small white spots visible through the darker skin. It was something that would discourage suitors.

Despite all the difficulties, Mani felt that, in the end, Shireenmai would not have denied Mani her one heart's desire. And, finally, Mani was able to join Baba with Shireenmai's blessings. Also, the prospect of a new daughter-in-law and two sons coming to be with her at home must have made it easier for Shireenmai to let Mani go.

The letter from Baba had been dictated and signed by Him on the R.M.S. *Ausonia*. Mani described it as "carried across the ocean by the waves of my good destiny." She carried the letter with her until she came to Baba, for always, at the end of 1932. Of all the thousands of letters she was to receive in her life, this was the one and only one that was truly important:

I would feel ~~most~~ pleased if you could stay with Mehera and Naya, leading the present pure life and obeying my usual orders. But mother might object and not let you stay away from her. But remember, once you are free from mother join Mehera and stay with her. But you must stay in a way that no big order is broken. you know how dear you are to me and how much I love my darling sisters. Be always thinking of me and remember my wishes and big orders.

M. S. Mani



(Above) Excerpts from letter dictated by Baba to Mani from across the ocean on the R.M.S. Ausonia (Right).



Darling Mani,

I would feel most pleased if you could stay with Mehera and Naja, leading the present pure life and obeying my usual orders.

But mother might object and not let you stay away from her.

But remember, once you are free from mother join Mehera and stay with her.

But you must stay in a way that no big order is broken.

You know how dear you are to me and how much I love my darling sister.

Be always thinking of me and remember my wishes and big orders.

M. S. Irani.



P A R T I I

**To Be With
You *Always***



INTO THE FIRE



SKIPPING ROPE

In November 1932, a month before her fourteenth birthday, the deepest longing and sole ambition of Mani's short life was about to be fulfilled. She was going to live with Baba. All that was left to do was pack.

Baba had told her to bring only clothes, so she packed her ankle-length loose pants and cotton tops, and left behind her dresses with the city sparkle, her stacks of *Schoolgirls' Weekly* magazines, the rare doll or two, and her match box collection.

There was just one little thing that Mani couldn't resist tucking into the trunk: her skipping rope. That went in way down deep under the clothes. As she wrote in *God-Brother*, "I felt it would miss me too much if I left it behind. Besides, it was such a small and trivial thing, I told myself. When Baba said not to bring anything besides the clothes, He surely did not mean this little skipping rope."



Mani, living with Baba at last.

She went to Nasik at long last to join Him permanently. She didn't mention the rope, and He didn't ask. But, as Mani later reflected, how beautifully He fished out her "little secret."

Soon after she arrived in Nasik, some children came on their holiday to visit Baba. He started asking them about their games at school, and they started to list them: hockey, cricket, swimming, badminton, as Mani felt more and more left out. Finally it was too much for her, as *God-Brother* shows.

"In the convent, we didn't have hockey or cricket," she interjected to Baba, "but we had plenty of skipping games. I was very good with my skipping rope, very good!"

Egged on by Baba's amazed and fascinated expression, she enlarged on all the kinds of skipping games they could do in school—a most impressive list including back-flips, crossovers, double twelves both ways, etc. Then, as Baba looked prouder and prouder of His clever sister, she blurted out, "I can show You!"

"But how can you?" Baba said, looking disappointed. "You haven't got a skipping rope."

"Yes I have," said Mani brightly, and then realised..... ohhhh she was caught in the trap. He had known all along.

Calling her to Him with the most loving look and gestures, He asked, "Do you love Me?"

"Yes, Baba."

"How much?"

"More than anything."

"And you'd do anything for Me?"

"Anything."

"Even if I told you to take that skipping rope and throw it away forever, you would do it?"

"Yes, of course!"

"All right," said Baba. "Do it."

And she did. She went to the farthest edge of the compound and flung it away with all her might.

Years later, reflecting to pilgrims on this incident, Mani remarked, “When Baba takes something we like away from us, it’s because He knows that it’s not what is going to help us on our way. It’s only those things that don’t help that He takes away. We may think something, some attachment, is such a little thing that it doesn’t matter. But nothing is too little with Baba.”

Her new life had begun with an essential lesson: “No order from Baba is insignificant, ever. Small or big, His orders are always important.”

And, “With Baba there can be no compromise. When you set out to surrender, you have to give all of your self to Him.”

INTO THE FIRE

“It was right into the fire,” Mani used to say about joining Baba permanently in Nasik. There was no transition time, no gradual adjustment. Of course she had spent a lot of time in the women’s ashram ever since she was little, and had lived as simply and austerely as the women mandali did when she was there, but in many ways she had remained a pet, a favorite, a child who came often but stayed only a short while. But all that changed when she joined the ashram. Mani said of Nasik:



Nasik, 1935. (L-R) Seated: Khorshed, Mehera; Standing: Masi, Naja, Valu, Gulmai, Freiny, Mani.

I realized right away that this was very different from the carefree holidays I had spent with Baba. It was a new kind of life, the beginning of my life of self-denial, a shedding of attachments. It was a life of doing what you don't like doing, and not doing whatever you like doing. And it began right away; I didn't wade in gently. It was a straight dive right in.

She added that the shedding of her attachments was conducted in such a masterly way by Baba that she wasn't even aware of it at the time:

You see, Baba would make use of our weaknesses, working on and with our weaknesses to turn them into strengths. He would strengthen you through your weaknesses. So weaknesses can be a blessing if you hand them over to Him.

I'll give you one example. When I was at home, I was very fussy about food. I didn't care so much about clothes or my looks, but my food had to be just so. Now our family, Baba's family, weren't all that keen on vegetables, and Baba wasn't either. We liked meat, fish, eggs, and dal (lentils), but not vegetables. My mother was a good cook, as was my father, and she would make spinach into almost a delicacy. But we'd put up our noses at it and push the plate away. I was so fond of good food that even when she made *dhansak*, a kind of spicy dal, with meat in it, but not with the meat cutlets that traditionally go along with it, I'd push my plate away and say, "I'm not hungry."

My mother would start to explain, "Mani, today the butcher didn't . . ."

"It's not that, Memo. I'm just not hungry."

So then my mother would say, "Hmmm. You want to go and live with Merog [Baba]. So what are you going to do

there? There's no meat, no fish, no eggs with Him! What are you going to eat?"

And I'd say, "That's all right. I'll eat rice and dal, just like Mehera and Naja and Khorshed and the others do. I like dal."

Now at the time when I joined Baba and for many long years after that, the mandali were all on a vegetarian diet. Which of course means no meat, no fish, and no eggs. And food was my weakness. That was my attachment.

So see the subtle and beautiful way Baba dealt with it.

One of the first things Baba did when she joined Him was to send her to a doctor, with instructions that she had to follow the doctor's orders exactly. Mani's slight skin discoloration was about to become an ordeal. This doctor was quite sure that a special diet would help the case, so he prescribed a number of dietary restrictions. First of all, she wasn't supposed to eat dal at all. Dal was out. Rice was OK, wheat was OK, but no dal. And most important, plenty of boiled spinach. That was the main thing Mani was to eat.

Spinach as her mother used to cook it was, as Mani said, a delicacy. This diet spinach was something else. Mani would make a graphic expression of disgust whenever she would recall it: boiled plain without a trace of spice, tasteless clumps of vegetation swimming in a sea of green water. She would hold up the imaginary clumps, and you could almost see them, one step up from weeds, dripping thin yucky juice. And the precious dal, especially chickpea dal which she loved, the dal that was to make up for all the meat and eggs and fish she couldn't eat, was just a vision. The days turned to months.

Mehera told her later, "We used to feel so sorry for you!" When all the others would be savoring chickpea omelets, Naja would make Mani a similar concoction out of wheat. And Mani, being young and very hungry, would just gobble it up, tough and gluey as it was.

Mani figured she ate boiled spinach for a year. Finally, when she

had gotten so used to it that she resigned herself to eating it forever, she was rescued. As she told pilgrims, one day when Baba was serving out rice and dal to everyone, He noticed that Mani hesitated to take it. What, didn't she like rice and dal?

"I love it, but You told me to follow the doctor's orders. He told me not to eat dal."

"Doctor, what doctor?"

"The doctor You sent me to."

"That doctor," said Baba, "that doctor is a barber!"

How she appreciated dal after that! Baba turned simple rice and dal into ambrosia.

"That's the way Baba replaces our wants, which we think are needs," Mani said in Mandali Hall. "These old habits from so many lives have to be replaced with Baba's habits. I learned very early that you couldn't have it both ways; there's no compromise. It is either Baba or yourself. You can't have Baba and yourself both. It's whatever Baba wants, or whatever you want."

The freedom Mani was used to as a girl in Poona, running and playing in the moholla and at school, was cut off from the first. She was also cut off from her mother and family, and had no contact with any of them unless they came to see Baba and He permitted it. No letters either. And how difficult must have been the transition from being the only child at home to being the youngest in a large group of strong women all cooped up in confined quarters and restricted circumstances.

Mani often said, speaking of Nasik and all the years after, "Life with Baba was fun because Baba was there. But it was no joke. I learned that at Nasik; that was the beginning of my lessons.

"It was a very difficult life of binding, restriction, self-discipline, and self-denial. But we never felt deprived. You hear about what we gave and gave up, which was outward, because that's what we can talk

about. But what we received from Him was fantastic, and that you can never talk about.

“All we wanted was just to be with Him. All we prayed for was that He wouldn’t send us away. We didn’t come to Him for anything. We didn’t come for what He had, but for what He is.”

EARLY TRAINING

Right away she began to be trained for life with Baba. As Mani recalled to pilgrims (and was later quoted in *Mehera-Meher*):

When I first joined Baba, I was an intense, serious person. We were very earnest teenagers who had taken this on. You can see it in our pictures, none of us smiling; we were terribly earnest, serious, and solemn about it. Your training was like that in the beginning. Your every moment, your every thought, your every action was not yours but Baba’s. There was no room in any part of your life for yourself. It was as Baba wants, what He wants, when He wants, how He wants. Nothing was your own; no need, no want, no thought, no moment was your own. It was wholly Baba’s.

When we were with Baba, when Reality touches Illusion, we had nothing but our poverty, purity, obedience, and surrender—yet our life was full. I was a teenager, yet there was nothing else I wanted or even looked to. Our total



Mani, now a disciple, in Nasik.

focus, 24 hours, was on Baba. . . . We never felt a lack of something. We never felt doubts over what we had done. You can have nothing and be full. And in Illusion, you can have everything and feel empty.

. . . Of course, there were light moments—but they were also in Baba. The pleasure was when it was Baba’s pleasure. The work was when Baba wanted us to do it. Meditation was constantly in every act and thing that we did, because he wanted us to do that. It was His orders to do it. . . .

In life with Baba, “not-doing” was just as important as doing. There were so many orders, not to do this, not to do that. Not to get angry, not to eat this, not to go out when you feel like it. Not to be in the sun, even if it were just stepping outside for a moment. So many of the “nots” have been very much a part of our life with Baba. That which you cannot write about, or boast about.

It’s not an achievement; as a matter of fact, it is a non-achievement. An erasing rather than an adding—and Baba was very good at that. Life with Baba was simply not doing this and not doing that. Not doing what you want to do, and that is something.

Whatever it was [we had to obey Baba], no matter how little the things were that we had to do, not on the subtle side but on the practical side. For instance, at ten o’clock I had to take this particular tonic for myself; at 10:30 I had to take this vitamin pill; at 11 o’clock I had to remember to tell Mehera something; at two o’clock I had to take the bird here; at three minutes before that I had to do this. . . . All these little, little, tiny things. And if something happened at that time, you mustn’t forget. Nothing that, as I say, you can boast about; but just as important as any other

order of Baba's, which kept you absolutely occupied all the time.

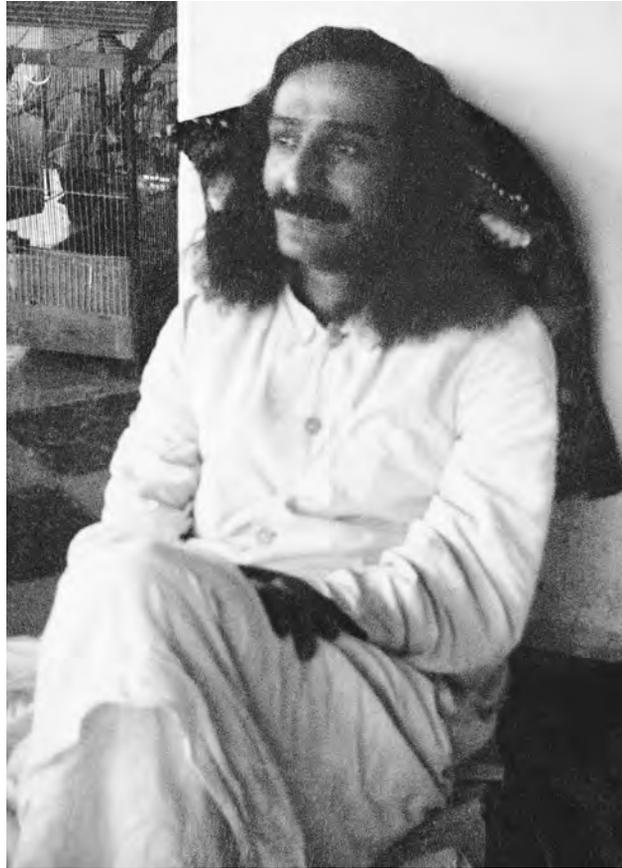
Your mind is occupied with Baba, because it is: "Baba wants me to do this . . . Baba will come now . . . I must remember to do such and such." All the time. It was a fantastic meditation that was continuous.

It was like walking a tightrope, you don't look to the right or left—just go straight. . . .

. . . Therefore, it was that intense earnestness. It wasn't an easy thing.

People ask me, what did you think about? What do you think when you are hanging from a cliff from the tips of your fingers? You don't think, you just hold on! That's the way to hang onto Him.

When we came to Baba, we were told not to read any spiritual books. Not even Baba's books. We were just empty—empty for whatever He wanted to fill us with, however He wanted, with no expectation or thought of anything except to be with Baba. It's no joke being with Baba, but it's the only thing worth your whole life.



Baba relaxing in Nasik; photo taken by Mani, 1935.

Mani concluded with this illustrative quote: Baba once asked those around Him, “Who would die for Me right now?” Several put up their hands. and Baba commented, “Dying is easy, for it is done in a moment. But living for Me is difficult, because it is dying every moment.”¹

MEHERA

In Nasik began what was to be the constant companionship of Mehera and Mani for the next fifty-seven years. So closely were they paired by Baba that Baba-lovers from His time still link their names, calling them “Mehera-Mani.”

After Baba, Mehera was the one who trained Mani in His ways. In Nasik, Mani stayed in the same room as Mehera, as she would all her life afterwards. And from Mehera she learned how to live that life moment to moment, completely focused on Baba.

Years later, Mehera said to pilgrims that she took Mani in hand right away in Nasik so she would learn from the first just how they did things for Baba. And Mani said years later that she could hardly believe that no sooner was she free from Shireenmai and her regime of extreme cleanliness than she fell right into the hands of Mehera, who was just as particular about things being clean and neat, if not more so!

In some ways they were very different. Mehera was shy, gentle, and quiet; Mani was outgoing, lively, and chatty. Mehera was creative in handiwork, design, and physical and visual things; Mani was creative in those ways also, but more on the mental, imaginative side. Mehera liked lots of fresh cool air and breezes blowing through the room; Mani caught colds from draughts and liked things shut up and warm.

Some have speculated that these two, Baba’s closest women disciples, represented two aspects of loving Him: Mehera representing the highest form of devotion, and Mani representing service.

Mani put these distinctions in a different perspective: “Mehera was everything, and I was the shadow. And I was happy to become that.”



Baba feeding a pet goat, also photo by Mani. Nasik, 1935.

PASTIMES

“There were light moments in our very difficult life too,” Mani said in Mandali Hall. “The lighter, innocent recreations have always been a part of the way Baba conducted our life. We would be asked to put up plays, skits, entertainments for Him. Or we would be kept busy while He was away, doing things for Him, such as embroidering a robe for Him to wear on His return.”

One of the hardest things about Nasik for the women mandali was that Baba was gone a lot of the time, traveling in India or to the West. In fact very soon after Mani arrived to stay with Him, Baba left for a two-month trip to Europe and America.

The women missed Him terribly. But they thought up things to do for Baba when He came back. For His return from His first visit to the West the women prepared a play based on an amusing Indian

movie that they had seen at the Circle Cinema. The Circle Cinema was a nearby movie theater run by the mandali; the ticket taker, the usher, and practically everyone involved, including the architect, were Baba-lovers. Baba had given the women permission to go there in His absence and see films.

Mehera and the others enjoyed this particular film so much that they decided to reproduce the entire story—songs, dances, and all—for Baba when He came back. “Big Khorshed,” Baba’s sister-in-law, went and saw the movie all over again to get the particulars. Mani, visiting on school holidays at the time, was put in charge, being, as Mehera put it, “a very good actress.”² Whenever their housework was done they would hold rehearsals, practicing their parts over and over.

They were helped in this venture by the huge trunk of costumes that



Mehera, Mani, and Freiny in costumes for a play for Baba. Nasik.

had been sent to them from the old theater of Baba’s uncle Rustommama. Digging deep, they came up with what Mehera said were lovely costumes—complete with false mustaches made with real hair!

On His return Baba enjoyed the play so much that He had them do it again the next day for the men mandali. He didn’t even recognize some of them, so well were they made up. For this second performance

before the men, Mehera felt shy to dance and asked Dina Talati to do her part, although Mehera did play a small part, well disguised as a boy.



Mani is wearing the glass necklace Baba gave her with the order to wear it all the time. Seated: Baba, Masi; Standing: Naja, Valu, Mani.

Baba had brought back two necklaces from the West; one He gave to Mehera and one to Mani, with the order that they should wear them all the time. You can see Mehera and Mani in these necklaces in many of the early Nasik and Meherabad pictures; they wore them for many years.



Baba wearing the embroidered silk robe and Krishna crown made by Mehera and women.

Another occupation for the women when Baba was gone was making things for Him to wear, usually under Mehera's direction and to her design. In Nasik, they made Baba a gorgeous cream silk robe, embroidered with gold thread and sequins in an exquisite pattern Mehera had made up. To go with it, they made a Krishna crown with fake jewels and pearls and a peacock feather, handmade silk and gold sandals, and a garland of silk flowers. Later Mani took a picture of Baba dressed up in all this finery, looking every inch the Lord of the Universe.

FULFILLMENT

One of the seemingly light moments Mani would recall from Nasik was Big Khorshed's "dying":

So many things happened with Baba that seemed to us at the moment to be lightly done or lightly said. But when we look back, we can see that they were the fulfillment of a longing. Such a thing happened with my sister-in-law Khorshed, Jamshed's wife. We called her "Big Khorshed" because there were two Khorsheds in the ashram when we were in Nasik, so they became "Small Khorshed" and "Big Khorshed."

A number of times in Nasik, Big Khorshed said to Baba, "Baba, when I die, I want to die at Your feet. I want to give my life at Your feet." Once when she said this, instead of just listening, Baba said, "All right, come on, do it right now.

Why wait until then? Do it right now!” And He made her pretend to fall at His feet and die. So Khorshed went down on her knees and then rolled over at His feet. There, she was dead! And we all laughed at this mock dying; it was one of those fun things with Baba.

But it was not really that. How He fulfills a longing is so complete; it’s perfect, just as His Love is perfect. He knew that when the time came for Big Khorshed to die, she would not be physically with Baba. So He fulfilled that longing of hers there and then.

His coming in Avataric form is a fulfillment itself: a fulfillment of His promises to His lovers, a fulfillment of His love for all of creation. And that’s why He takes human form time and time again: to fulfill all the promises and longings. He is so particular about His promises. Anything we long for or wish for with Baba has to come to pass. No matter how little your wish for Him may be, I tell you, He fulfills it. It can never fail; it is never in vain.

In seven hundred years, there’s so much to look forward to, because whatever you long for now is going to come true! So it all rests with us. His giving has no lack; the only lack is in our longing, in our asking. He has never told us not to ask Him for things. But what we ask for is too little. He wants to give us much more. So while He is with us, while we have Him, why not ask for the highest?

I’ll never forget how once when we heard of Baba promising something to someone, we were a little facetious, chuckling to ourselves, saying, “Oh well, Baba promised, but whether it’s going to happen or not . . .” In the back of our minds we felt that Baba is the maker and the breaker, and He has the right to make and break a promise.

But at that moment Baba turned around to us and said,
 “I am the only one who never breaks a promise! I am the
 only one who fulfills!”

A FAMILY WEDDING

Although Mani was separated from the family, still there were plenty of occasions for interaction with them. One of those was in Nasik, when the time came for Baba’s brother Beheram to marry Perin. Baba arranged such a splendid wedding for them there that Mani used to laugh about it, saying that the family didn’t have a dime but her brother Beheram had a wedding fit for a king.

When, decades later, I asked Perinmai about her wedding, she lit up. “Baba sat on the dais like this!” she said in Gujarati, and proceeded to do a fabulous imitation of Him, leaning back at His royal ease, His eyes sparkling, glancing here and there and everywhere. The wedding, said Perinmai, went on for four days. There were banquets of incredible food; there were splendid decorations (Minoo Kharas was put in charge, and Baba was so pleased with the results that He presented Minoo with an alphabet board); there were lights in the trees.

And the music. Ah, Perinmai became more and more animated as she started to talk about the music. Why, Jyotika Roy and Pyaru Qwaal sang at her wedding, she said. Jyotika Roy was India’s most famous singer of Mirabai *bhajans* at the time. Mehera had a collection of old 78 records of Jyotika Roy singing Mirabai that were played for Baba all the way into the 1960s. And Pyaru Qwaal, a master singer of the ghazal form that Baba enjoyed so much, well, Perinmai said, he was in fine form.

It was at this wedding that Mani first introduced her new sister-in-law to Mehera, warning Perin beforehand not to mention a man’s name in Mehera’s presence. Perin was smitten with “Mehera-Radha,” as she



Beheram and Perin, who had a grand wedding in Nasik, in a lovely formal portrait.

came to call Mehera, and always thereafter loved her best of anyone in the world after Baba. In this, she was naturally obeying Baba's orders, as He Himself later told her that she was to love Him first, then Mehera, then Mani, then Beheram and her children. Which is just what she did, as she would often tell us years later.

FIRST MEETING

There was one more episode during Mani's year in Nasik that stood out in her memory. This was when Baba took the Eastern women to Kandivli, near Bombay, to meet His Western women followers who He had called to India for a long stay. Baba told the Easterners that He wanted them to look their best, and before the Westerners arrived, He reminded them, "Be sure to wear your good saris and do your hair nicely." Mehera laughed about this:

Instead of our usual cotton saris we put on our best silk ones, and obeying Baba to the letter we wore lipstick and powder, too, something we had only done before for plays. Baba was very pleased, and He was very naughty, too! When in England Baba had told the Westerners about us; that we had left everything to be with Him; that we lived very simple lives; and that we were very spiritually-minded. And here He was introducing them to fashionable-looking young women in silk saris! Now we understand that He was testing the love of His Westerners for Him.³

When the Western women arrived at the house where Baba was staying, He was nowhere to be seen. He had hidden Himself, leaving behind the message, "I'm hiding, and I'll only embrace the one who finds Me—no one else!" The Westerners rushed off to find Him, and Delia DeLeon (an English disciple) was the lucky one. She got His embrace, but



The Eastern and Western women together for the first time, in Kandivli, near Bombay. Photo taken April 7, 1933. Baba is standing in the middle; the Western women are dressed up in saris.

then Baba relented and embraced all the others, too. After entertainment by the Westerners, Baba had Mani perform an Indian dance.

Thus did the “girls” meet some of the women from the West who were to be their companions on Meherabad Hill a few years down the road. Baba then took the Western group to Kashmir, and after just a fortnight packed them off back to the West.

With all its hardships, and particularly with Baba being gone so much, Mani’s year in Nasik was a true jumping into the fire. But she would say that Nasik remained a very dear memory to her, despite the difficulties, because it was the beginning of her being with Baba for always.





Baba in Kandivli, April 1933.

MEHERABAD

“Sometimes in the midst of our dizzily busy life nowadays, I think: if Baba had a motto, it would be ‘Have everything, enjoy nothing.’ And then I think of those early times with Him: we had nothing, and we enjoyed every little thing!”

In late November of 1933, a year after Mani had joined the ashram,



Upper Meherabad in the early 1930s, where Baba moved the women after Nasik.

Baba moved the women mandali from Nasik to Meherabad. The women had never stayed up on the Hill. “Small Khorshed” (simply “Khorshed” hereafter, as “Big Khorshed” did not come with them) remembered Baba taking them up to the East Room in the old water tank building to show them their new quarters. He stood outside the door, wearing a most delighted look on His face, and with a flourish, opened the door. To their great surprise, inside they saw six beds, neatly arranged, along with some very simple furnishings. Up until that time, they had always slept on the floor, and now to have beds was a luxury indeed.

Mani said of their early days on the Hill:

Life at Nasik seemed to me a preparation for the phase that was to come, when we moved to Meherabad Hill. The incredibly cloistered life that we lived on the Hill in the years before the Westerners came was a real experience.

That really was a different time, very very strict. And that made me happy, because I had always wanted to be a nun, Baba's nun.

We lived under Baba's absolute orders. There was no freedom of coming out of the room when we liked or doing what we liked or eating what we liked. Everything was as Baba wanted it, not as you wanted it.

There were just a few of us there—Mehera; myself; Naja; Khorshed; Khorshed's mother, Soonamasi; and Valu. Our quarters were the disused water tank that the military had



Baba with the few women living at Upper Meherabad: (at the top) Gulmai who was visiting, Baba, Mehera; (middle) Soonamasi, Mani; (below) Naja, Valu. (Khorshed probably taking the photo.)

constructed on the Hill during the First World War. It was about the only construction on the Hill at that time.

It was a very strong building. You see it now, thick strong walls and no windows, just small vents at the top of the walls near the roof. There were two rooms, or what we used as rooms: the East Room, where we girls stayed, and the West Room, which is now the Museum. [Rare guests stayed there.]

I remember as a child going along with Baba to see the Prem Ashram boys, who were living there [in the earliest years of the Meherabad ashram]. Baba took me through the room and I walked next to Him holding onto His little finger, with all the boys following Him like moths after a flame. They wore their khaki shorts and shirts, and had their little bedding rolls neatly folded next to their little trunks. I had no idea at that time that a day would come when I would be living there, just like they were, and the other girls with me.

The life the women lived on the Hill was so restricted that it's difficult to imagine. They rarely went out of their room except to the kitchen, which had been constructed nearby just before they came, or to the bathroom. To get to the kitchen they would not walk outside but through a covered bamboo-matting passageway that shut out the sight of the rest of the compound.

As Mani said, the East Room had no windows, just small ventilators high at the top. So secluded was their life that whenever it rained, Mani would stand on a bench in the room just to look out through the high vents at the falling rain.

As the old photographs show, they all dressed very modestly, with their blouses covering their wrists and their loose pants or saris or skirts covering their ankles. Holding an old photograph from those days, Mani once pointed out to us how even her neck was covered by a high cloth



Baba on Meherabad Hill.

collar. She says that they had an order from Baba to patch or mend even the slightest tear in their clothes, so that no part of their person was ever exposed. Mani used to laugh, remembering the lengths they had to go to patch something, as often there was no material to patch it with, and they would have to sew the best parts of two ragged garments into one.

They were real nuns in the deepest and truest sense of the word.

WITH MEHERA

Mani's life on Meherabad Hill was very closely tied with Mehera's life by Baba. To begin with, Mehera was never to be alone, and Mani, along with Khorshed (and later Mani with Kharmenmasi), had the order to



Mehera in the East Room, around 1938.

be with her at all times, or to be nearby when she was attending to personal necessities. Mehera never went anywhere within their compound without one or usually both of these companions. When Mehera would be bathing, for example, Mani would sit outside the bathing room under a nearby tree and practice the sitar. Mehera's name was not even written; in notes she was referred to as "M." or "she." And for a long time only Mani was permitted to touch Mehera, and then only for measuring her for a garment or some such thing.

As Margaret (one of Baba's women mandali) said about Mehera's life, everything was arranged to keep her mind all the time on Baba. All the women were to try to help her and please her, even Shireenmai, who Baba told to be good to Mehera.

At this time, Baba gave Mani an amazing order. She was to keep a diary of everything that Mehera did from the moment they woke to the moment they went to sleep at night, recording Mehera's activities and moods. So she had a unique meditation: watching Mehera and watching the clock at the same time. It was a simple record, with entries like: "10:23 to 10:45 embroidered brooch," "10:46 to 10:58 dusted Baba's picture," "10:59 to 11:03 combed hair."

Mani being Mani however, turned the diaries into little works of art, sewing the handwritten pages into books illustrated with cutouts from the *Illustrated Weekly of India* and drawings. The records were creatively arranged into small charts, with neat lines and printing, and each cover was a world in itself, with printed quotations or rhymes accompanying the pictures. Mani recalled that when Baba would ask to see the diaries, perhaps after a trip abroad, He would glance through the notations and then take special notice of Mani's creative touches, signaling His appreciation of the extra effort she made to not only carry out His order, but to please and amuse Him at the same time.

I never heard her speculate on the reason for this order, but it must

certainly have had the effect of concentrating her focus on Mehera in a unique way. And channeling her abundant energy into a demanding, absorbing task.

Mani spoke very beautifully of learning to serve Baba from Mehera:

I've loved Baba always, from the cradle. But there are many ways of loving. And I have learned how to love Him. I've seen Mehera prepare a glass of drinking water for Baba and I've been amazed. What's the big deal about preparing a glass of water and giving it to Baba? But it was a big deal for Mehera. I think if you spoke to her at that time, she wouldn't have heard you. The glass was washed, just so. It had to be washed with this particular thin soap. Then she had to wash her hand with that soap, and then she would bring out this pure white muslin cloth which she had kept folded in a particular cupboard, and she would dampen it and wrap it around the glass, so that the water would be the right temperature.

Once, long ago, Baba said to her, "What is this? The water smells of garlic." Mehera was shocked. She had given Baba a glass of water to drink with the smell of garlic in it. She stopped peeling garlic from that day on. Never by mistake should His water ever smell of garlic. She cooked, she did everything in the kitchen, but the garlic had to be peeled by someone else.

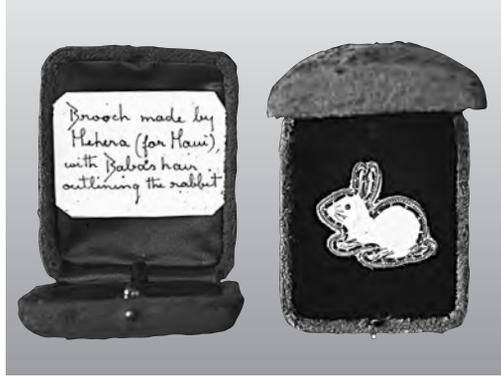
There are many levels of loving, there are many levels of serving.

Mehera's complete focus on Baba and her great reverence for anything of His set the tone. For example, when Mehera would save combings from Baba's hair, and they would make brooches and little hair clips from the hair strands:

Mehera made a hair clip for me, I made a brooch for her, we made them for others, and the total absorption Mehera and we had while doing this surpasses

any meditation

that you can think of. When Baba would be away in the West, perhaps gone to Canada or the United States, we would be in Meherabad in our cloistered life doing such things, and that complete absorption we had struck me more than anything else. It somehow rang out the true value, the true good fortune, the destiny we had, to be handling Baba's hair.



Brooch with Baba's hair made by Mehera for Mani.

About the preciousness of His hair, Mani would quote Kabir: "One hair of His body is worth a *million suns*." In Meherazad Mandali Hall in later years, Mani would often show the brooches made by Mehera, or ones she had made herself, Baba's hair and nails the jewels in each little setting.

At Meherabad they finished the embroidered robe, crown, and sandals they had started in Nasik and many more crowns and other items for Baba. Also some exquisite picture frames for Baba's photos designed by Mehera. Mani, too, braided silver thread to make a frame with handwork so intricate one can scarcely imagine the patience it must have taken to make it. But Mani said, "It was a joy to do anything for Baba."

RESTRICTIONS

In Nasik, Mani had occasionally seen the older men mandali as they kept watch outside the women's quarters. Meheru remembers Khorshed's father being there; sometimes Sheriarji would come to visit and the two elderly friends would have a grand time. Naja, Khorshed, and Mani could talk with them now and then, though not Mehera. Now on the Hill the women never saw men, never heard their voices or even mentioned their names, most particularly because of Mehera. This enforced their sense of seclusion even more:

Soonamasi, the oldest among us, would sit outside the gate all day in a little room under the water tank. She was the gatekeeper. If we needed anything like vegetables or other absolute necessities, we would write it on a little piece of paper, what we call a "chit," and that chit would be given to Baba. Nothing was done by ourselves. Nothing was independent of Baba. It would always go through Him. Baba would read the note and if it was all okay, He would give the note to Vishnu down the Hill, which is where the men mandali stayed.

Vishnu was the bazaar master, which means he would go to the bazaar and buy the groceries for us, but only what we had written down. He would give the groceries to Soonamasi outside the gate, and she would bring them into the kitchen.

Whenever Masi would see Vishnu or any one else coming up the hill, she would ring a big handbell. When we heard the bell, we would close the doors of the kitchen, which is where we usually were at that time, and go on with our work. After the negotiations between Masi and the man concerned were over and he had gone, Masi would ring the bell again, and hearing that second bell, the "all-clear" bell, we would open the door.

Now Mehera wasn't even to hear a man's voice. If the men mandali were attending to the work, they would keep silence and we would close the kitchen door and quietly attend to our duties. But hired labourers would talk. So sometimes when a hired workman had to come and attend to something like the plumbing, not only were bells rung and doors closed, but I would have to sit in the kitchen and play the sitar loud enough to drown out the sound of the man's voice should it come in from the outside. So I would play away while Mehera attended to Baba's things and the other women peeled potatoes and strung the french beans and cooked the rice for Him, until the bell rang to let us know that the man had gone away.

Once I remember a plumber took a long time, and for two hours I just went on playing and playing the same tunes over and over, repeating my repertoire again and again, waiting for that second bell which never seemed to ring! I kept saying to myself, "When will this person go?" First one finger, then another, and then another got callused and blistered, and still I went on playing for ages, all the while thinking, "Please, Baba, help!" until the bell *finally* rang.

Another restriction on Mehera was that she was not allowed to read. Mani was allowed to read the *Illustrated Weekly of India*, which Baba let come up the Hill, "a very innocuous, very innocent kind of magazine" in which Mani would find jokes to tell to Mehera, as well as some volumes of the *Book of Knowledge* ("which I never read except for the nonsensical poems like 'Tweedledum and Tweedledee'"):

But Mehera was told not to read *anything*. Not anything! Which meant she couldn't read even the label "Ovaltine" on a tin can innocently lying about that we kept the tea in. You

might think, “Oh it’s all right to read *that!*” But no. No reading meant no reading.

Now how can you escape reading the names on tins? We needed empty tins to store many things in the kitchen, sugar, tea, rice, whatever. So I would go around sticking labels on the empty tins to cover up the writing so that Mehera wouldn’t read anything by mistake. And because I couldn’t write “sugar” or “tea” or whatever on the labels, none of the tins had readable labels! It’s a great credit to Naja and the others who were cooking and making the tea and so on, because they had to go by the dent in the tin, or its shape or colour, to know what was in it.

You see, Baba showed us from the very first that nothing was too small where it concerns Him. Nothing is unimportant. It is not only the big orders that mattered, but the very littlest ones too. They were just as important, and we learned that from experience. When you’re doing something for Baba, it has to be done to the very limit. We cannot be careless with Baba’s wishes, or let the mind justify itself saying, “Oh but *this* doesn’t matter, Baba didn’t mean *that*. . . .”

Baba wanted full attention, full focus, from the ones He had around Him. There was to be no diversion, nothing but what He had served out for us. And over the years we became automatically sensitive to what He would want before He said it, because of that total focus.

RECREATIONS

“We had only what Baba gave us, but He would give us natural outlets too,” Mani said.

He would play badminton with us in the morning outside

where now you find the tin shed. There was no shed there at that time. Or we played other games with Him like Spellicans [Pick-up Sticks], which Baba was really good at. There wasn't much time really to think of games, even little games, except when Baba would start playing and have us join Him.

Sometimes He would cheat, knowingly, making us know He was cheating so we would try to catch Him at it. "All right, catch Me if you can!" He always got away with it.

Mani described their games of *gilli danda* when Baba would cheat. In *gilli danda* you propel a short stick with a long stick. At a certain point, you have to guess how far the little stick is from the goal in measures of the long stick. If the other team finds the guess reasonable, you've won the point; if not, you have to measure out the distance with the long stick and prove your point.

So one day, Baba's little stick landed here and the goal was over there. We said, "All right Baba, how much?" And Baba said, "Two, three, four . . . forty!" My goodness, you could see that it wasn't forty, it couldn't possibly be forty! It was obvious that it wasn't. So would we accept it? No! We said, "No, no! Forty? Impossible! You lost, it's not forty." Baba gestured, "I count?" "Yes, count!"

So Baba bent down and began to count, so agile, so graceful, so fast, with us running on both sides of Him and watching like hawks, as He quickly, quickly, quickly glided along, measuring and counting out the length. And sure enough, it was forty! Baba looked at us with a twinkle and said, "Do it again?" "Yes, do it again!" And again it came to forty. And He did it again, and again the same thing happened. He had put the stick a little to the side while measuring, but so fast and so gracefully that although our

eyes were glued to the stick, we couldn't catch it. Hard as we tried, we couldn't catch Him out. That was great fun.

You see, we would joke with Baba, we would play with Baba, but we could never fool with Baba. Sometimes when playing a game with Him we would become very human, familiar and at one with Him. And in the middle of the game He would stop and remind us, "Play with Me, but remember I am God."

Mani herself was given a most surprising recreation by Baba. "A strange duty" she called it, that none of them could fathom. It's hard to imagine Mani shooting an air rifle every day in the cloistered confines of the East Room while Mehera was sitting quietly sewing in a corner, but that's what she had to do. Baba gave her an air rifle and some BB pellets, and they hung an old jam tin can that Mani had found somewhere by a string from the big wooden ceiling beam:



Mani practicing shooting the air rifle.

And for fifteen minutes every day, whether I felt like it or not, at a particular time given by Baba I had to practice shooting. There again we never said, "Why?" We didn't even think "Why?" But one thing is for sure: I became quite a crack shot. I could even shoot that tin can when it was swinging! Dear Mehera or one of the others would give it a good fast swing as they passed by every now and then. And I would hit it every time.

Mani laughed that the constant ping of the pellet hitting the tin was

certainly a strange kind of music in the hallowed East Room, “where Baba held court with His women mandali many a time!”

CREATIVE OUTLETS

By the age of thirteen Mani was already famous in the ashram for her creative talents. What couldn't this kid do? Writing poetry, acting, singing, making up plays, dancing, making up comic routines, mimicry, drawing, storytelling, joke-telling, making little books and brooches, composing music, playing music. Years later the mandali still talked about how, when visiting Nasik at the age of ten, in a matter of minutes Mani put a memorable tune to a very beautiful *arti* for Baba written by Rustom K. Irani, called “Meher Raj” (“The kingdom/reign of Meher”). This *arti* became quite popular among Baba-lovers and was often sung before Baba.

And there in the ashram Baba developed her musical talent. Once, before a visit to the West, He gave Mani an old gramophone record of a classical sitar piece played by an Indian master of the sitar, and told her to learn the piece perfectly and play it to Him on His return. As you may remember, Mani had learned to play the sitar as a girl at home by listening to her brother Beheram (and then sneaking in and practicing on his sitar when he was out). And she had a natural ear. Still, it was a tall order. She spoke of how she carried it out:

I'd pick up one line and play it over and over until I had it perfectly, then another line, until I completed the whole record. I learned it by ear, like a parrot. When I played it for Baba on His return, He was very happy, gesturing to Mehera and the others as I played, “Very good!”

Naja and Mehera and the other women would say when I played the record that they didn't know whether it was the record or me!

But Mani would emphasize that her playing was always at Baba's order, in tune with His wish, never just for herself.

As a child, Mani had heard music all around her, pouring out from the neighboring temples and mosques in the moholla, sung by visitors and relatives (her granny loved to sing in Persian), poem-songs sung in Gujerati school, and English songs sung in the convent.

Having learned the harmonium by ear as a child, at age eleven she played so well that a Muslim lady, overhearing her, wanted to engage Mani as a harmonium teacher for her little girl. Needless to say, Shireen-mai must have thought that Mani wasn't ready for teaching at the ripe old age of eleven, so it never happened. Later on Baba often asked Mani to play the harmonium, sometimes to lead the women in singing.

Mani used to say, after struggling to illustrate a letter, "Oh, drawing's one thing I'm not very good at." So I was astonished when I was shown some of her drawings from the early Meherabad days: beautiful pencil portraits of Baba and Mehera, a series of intense and dramatic pencil drawings on symbolic subjects, some beautifully rendered designs in colored pencil, a set of silly cartoons, and other surprises. They carry a sense of the innocence, the beauty, the quietness, the humor, the intensity, and the fun of their lives.

In the East Room in Meherabad now, on the back wall is a drawing of Baba that Mehera and Mani did together in those early days of seclusion. There He stands, in a nature scene, facing the viewer with a clear and gentle look. For the imaginative, there hangs around that picture an aura of the time. Perhaps it comes from the pencil, or from the simple paper, or from the single figure. Or perhaps from the image it conjures up, of Mehera and Mani, young and wholehearted, sitting together at one of the small tables in that room on a remote hilltop, drawing His face. Was He there or was He away? Did He see it in progress or was it a surprise? What did He say when they finally presented it to Him?

Perhaps Mehera agreed to pose for the portrait Mani did of her. Although it is simple and not expert in technique, it is a wonderful



Drawing of Mehera by Mani.



Drawing of Baba by Mani.

drawing of Mehera, capturing some indefinable quality of hers—perhaps her extreme purity of heart or her inner absorption in Baba—that has eluded artists for generations after. Here is a glimpse of Mehera as she was in that time of tremendous seclusion, and a glimpse of Mani’s love for Mehera and her own purity that could draw such a portrait.

Inside the door to Mehera’s cupboard in the East Room, pinned to the wood with tacks, is another portrait of Baba signed by Mani. Baba is in a turban, facing the viewer. Mani must have given it to Mehera as a present, perhaps in the later ’30s, as it matches a photo of Him at that time.

“Freedom,” “Bon Voyage,” “Hope” are some of the titles Mani gave to another kind of drawing from the ’30s: her renderings of symbolic scenes in pencil. You can see the *Illustrated Weekly of India* giving inspiration here, as ocean liners, ships, eagles, and so on appear in minute detail. The drawings have a dramatic intensity that is surprisingly moving, especially in the context of Mani’s life.

Her cartoons, on the other hand, are just what you would expect



"Bon Voyage" by Mani.



"Freedom" by Mani.

from a kid sister: funny, quirky, with little dialogues inked in. You can just see Baba laughing at them. And how much He must have enjoyed her cartoons of a Blue Bus picnic, with each of the ashram characters on display! (And this girl thought she couldn't draw . . .)

One day during this time, someone, possibly Sarosh, sent Mani a small box camera, a Kodak Brownie, and with Baba's permission she began taking pictures on the Hill.

Lucky for us! Those early shots of Mehera in all her grace and gentle beauty, looking like a pure being from another sphere; of Baba and Mehera together, sitting, strolling, gardening; of Baba and Mehera with the others, and with the Hill pets; of the ashram women posing for a picture (covered in cloth almost head to toe); of the bamboo matting passages between their room and the kitchen; and of the jasmine bush that provided a natural screen in front of their door. We owe to Mani and her Brownie all these images that tell so much about that intimate world. Mani took some of the most beautiful photos of Baba ever taken: memorably, Baba

standing in front of a bamboo matting wall, looking up, the sun on His face, His long hair flowing down, His pose divinely relaxed and natural.

One outing immortalized by the Brownie is of Baba riding Champa. Champa was a stately snow-white donkey (“more like a pony,” insisted Mehera) who became one of their pets.

The women, as we know, would never go out of the compound without Baba’s taking them, so they looked forward to their walks with Him over the fields along the back of the Hill. Champa would come along for the exercise. And the Brownie would go along, too. Once Mehera expressed a wish that Baba ride Champa, and He agreed. The next day, Champa was saddled and bridled and Baba rode her for a short while. Mehera said it reminded them of Biblical times when Jesus, too, rode a donkey: “Now we were seeing our Beloved Baba, Christ come again, astride this same simple animal. What a blessing for dear Champa, and what a beautiful sight for our eyes to behold.”⁴

Mehera told us that for some days after that, Baba would ride Champa for short distances across the hillsides. She said Baba loved Champa very much and sometimes when He would hug Champa, He would hold the donkey’s face so close to Him that His head would touch hers.

Baba riding Champa and waving, Baba and Mehera with Champa, Baba astride and all the “girls” crowded around the donkey, Baba holding Champa close to Him—these images grant us glimpses of the world apart captured by Mani and the Brownie.

Arnavaz (a very close Eastern disciple from childhood) once remarked that Mani, being a very active, restless person, did not have much to do in those early years, and so her great creativity found expression. It always touched me how from the first Baba drew out all these talents from her; He encouraged her creativity, appreciated it, gave it scope and, of course, used it for His work.

FACING PAGE: Photo taken by Mani of Baba standing in front of bamboo matting wall on Meherabad Hill.





Baba riding Champa and Mehera walking with them.

SOUL FOR SALE

A funny story from those days that Mani would tell is about ordering items from the bazaar. As we've seen, the women had to write down their necessities on a note for Baba to review, and only if He approved would the chit go to Vishnu, who would bring the items from town.

They had no doctor on the Hill at that time, and dosed themselves with herb teas and home remedies whenever they were sick. Mani often had terrible cramps, and even those were treated with these old remedies. She also had trouble with her ears, and one day when her ear was aching, she remembered hearing that if you put a little bit of cotton wool in your ear, the ache would stop. She needed just a plain bit of cotton wool, but they didn't have any cotton wool, so she had to order it from the bazaar. That morning on the little chit for the bazaar, she wrote in Gujarati, "one anna cotton wool." An anna was a sixteenth of a rupee; at that time it was worth about one cent.

Mani described what happened next:

Now "cotton wool" in the Gujarati language is *roo*. And *rooh* with an *h* sound at the end is the word for "soul." So when I wrote on that note that I wanted *roo* for one anna, it tickled Baba no end! He said to the others, "Look at her! This crazy girl! Where are you going to get a soul for one anna?!" I've never seen Him so spontaneously amused, laughing with that silent chuckle He had over the one-anna soul.

PETS

In 1934 Baba began bringing the women small pets to take care of. As Mehera said, "Though we had much work to attend to during the day, it was always a special joy to care for and nurture these pets that Baba so lovingly would bring to us."⁵

Mani described how they would often arrive:

Baba would come airily walking up to us, and put His hand in His pocket with such a twinkle in His eye that we'd wonder what He was going to pull out. And out from His pocket would come a little bird that He'd found with a broken wing, or little squirrel babies for us to take care of. Once He really pulled rabbits out of His pocket, not out of His hat!

Every day Baba would come up the Hill at a quarter to eleven for lunch after being with the men mandali in the morning. One day, however, Baba arrived earlier than usual. Entering the East Room, He called Mehera to Him and pulled a surprise out from His pocket that He put into her hand. Looking down, Mehera was astonished to see a tiny, pink, scrawny baby parrot with no feathers at all. "Oh, Baba! It's so ugly!" she said. "It doesn't have a single feather!"

"Keep it!" Baba gestured. "It will grow into a beautiful bird." Then He called Mani, and pulled another tiny parrot out of His pocket for her, and then one for Khorshed.

Ugly is hardly the word for them. Mehera and Mani relished describing these parrot babies: they had no feathers, just pink plucked-looking flesh; they had very skinny legs, with big claws at the end; and to top it off, out from their scrawny heads poked huge red beaks and big, bulgy eyes.

What a time they had with those parrots. First Baba wanted the babies put in front of Him, and right away they started to squawk. Mehera recalled, "They looked so helpless and funny; all in a row with their mouths wide open like handbags!"

"Come on, we'll feed them," said Baba, and told the women to bring chickpea flour and ghee (clarified butter). Baba mixed the flour and ghee together into little pellets and started feeding the parrots. As soon as one swallowed its pellets, it would start squawking for more, and Baba

went on and on feeding them one after another. Mehera said Baba looked so happy as He fed those babies!

But then they began to groan because they had eaten too much. So Baba told the women, “Now we must give them a walk to help them digest their food. Otherwise they will get a stomachache.” Mani would describe this next part with great humor: picture the babies on the floor of the East Room, stomachs bulging, swaying on their skinny legs, and Baba nudging each one with His finger to get it started walking. Then Mehera, Mani, and Khorshed each nudged a bulging baby from behind as the parrots staggered down the length of the room in a little line. It was a big room, but that was not the end of it. When they reached the end, Baba turned them around, and they had to walk all the way back!

But they weren’t groaning anymore. “Now they will be all right,” said Baba.

Eventually of course, Baba’s words to Mehera came true, for after some weeks of feeding and exercising, the parrots’ bright green feathers grew and they were transformed into very beautiful birds. One day, Baba took them outside the room perched on His hand, and let them fly away.

The parrots were the tip of the iceberg. There was the Nepalese myna that Mehera taught to say “Baba darling,” and that died croaking “Baba” with his last breath; the pet snake Baba brought for them that went stiff as a stick when Mehera held it and was not popular at all (they begged Baba to take it away); more baby birds that Mehera and Mani inadvertently let loose when they cleaned the cage so carefully that they forgot to close the door; a baby mongoose; and on and on.

Mehera said that before one trip, “He gave us projects to occupy our minds and hands while He was away, besides two darling little white rabbits to keep us company.

“We were told by Baba to make a large frame that would hold

twelve photos of Him. . . . The two baby rabbits would play in the room while we would sit on the floor cutting out crepe paper roses and flowers for the frame's design. . . . We placed alfalfa grass, carrots, and water in the center of the room for the rabbits. They would eat, drink, and then hop and play between our trunks . . . the two little bunnies gave us good company while Baba was away."

Some of those animals that joined the ashram at Meherabad became Baba's special pets. One of the more memorable was Chum. Mehera would say that Chum's love for Baba was unique. From his puppyhood, Chum was Baba's dog, and, like the humans around Him, became intensely attached to Baba and more than a little possessive of Him.

In Baba's Cabin on the Hill near His tomb, one can see a photograph



Baba with Chum, in His cabin on the Hill.

of Chum standing with Baba inside the Cabin. Mind you, humans rarely got to be inside there with Him, but there was Chum right at His side.

In the 1990s, whenever Mani would go to the Cabin for darshan she would amuse listeners with a very funny story about Chum and the Cabin. In 1935, Baba went into seclusion in this Cabin, which He had had specially built for that purpose. In the evenings, the women mandali were allowed to see Him for a few moments, and would bring hot *bhakri* (millet flatbread) with them.

Baba Himself was on a strict fast at the time but He would feed the *bhakri* to Chum, who would be sitting outside the Cabin. One day after

Chum had been fed, a cow wandered by and Baba threw some bhakri to the cow. Wow, did Chum hate that! He jumped down and went after that cow. The cow ran around the Cabin with Chum in hot pursuit, once, twice, three times, round and round until, Mani said, you could not tell who was chasing whom. Baba hugely enjoyed the scene.

There was another episode with Chum that was not amusing. But Mehera and Mani would tell this story, too, because it shows the kind of attachment Baba's love could evoke in animals.

As Mehera told it, "Whenever Baba was seated [on the *gāadi*], Chum would go over to Baba and sit by His sandals. Sometimes he would even jump up on the *gādi* [sic] and sit down on Baba's lap. And Baba allowed this and lavished loving attention on him. At these times although Chum would not growl you knew it was best to avoid him."

Once when Baba was on the *gāadi* resting after lunch, Mani went over to straighten His sandals. Chum, disturbed from his sleep and protective as ever of Baba, jumped up and bit Mani on her face, and years later she could show you a small scar on her chin from that bite. Baba immediately picked up one of His sandals and beat Chum with it, hitting the dog again and again, so forcefully that His hand became red. As Mehera said, the safety of His loved ones was of paramount importance to Baba, and He wanted to teach Chum a lesson.

But the amazing thing, according to Mehera and Mani, was how Chum took it. Mehera recalled, "truly it was an unforgettable scene; not a single growl or whimper of protest escaped from Chum. That fierce lion was like a lamb; his submission to Baba's will was so complete. Chum bowed his head in absolute acceptance of his punishment, and in Chum's total submission, we girls witnessed how big that big dog's heart was when it came to Baba."

HOW FORTUNATE

Mani would often recall the great fortune they had, living those early years with Baba in Meherabad:

In the afternoons, we would sit out with Baba all by ourselves. There was a little shade put up at the back of the kitchen where we had put Baba's gaadi, and we would sit with Him there. You could see all the way to the horizon. It was very quiet, with a stillness that was a live stillness, in which you'd just hear the doves cooing or a bumblebee droning. It seemed as if there was no time and no space. Just Baba and us.

One day Baba said, as we sat there, "Make the most of this being with Me. Make the most of this time. It won't be like this afterwards. There will be so many. They will come from the West, from the East." And He gestured a circle that seemed to cover the whole Hill, and all the way to the horizon and beyond. It was such a remote, enduringly intimate world that we lived in with Baba, away from everything and everyone, that we couldn't imagine how it would be.

That's one thing Baba would tell us again and again, how fortunate we are. He wouldn't tell us anything about the planes or spirituality or where we were on the path or anything like that. Anyway, we didn't want to know that sort of thing. But He would look at us and say, "You have no idea how fortunate you are."

And we didn't. Baba would go on to describe yogis sitting on the highest peaks of a mountain for years and years together. He would use the most delightful gestures to describe them: their eyebrows had grown so long they were like a curtain, and their eyelashes came to here and their hair to

here—pointing to His knee—and their beards to the knee too, and their nails so long . . . Then Baba would say, “But they cannot get what you are having. So how fortunate you are.”

REMEMBRANCE

Mani would also share another aspect of their early Meherabad life:

Once a Hindu lady came and visited the ashram, and she was ecstatic about everything that she saw and felt. “Oh,” she said, “you all must be meditating for hours every day!”

“Not in hours,” I replied, “but we meditate all the time.” She was surprised. So I went on: “We don’t have to sit in one place to meditate. Baba tells us to do this or that, and so all the time you are thinking, ‘This needs to be done for Baba, that needs to be done for Him. All the time you’re thinking of Him.’”

. . . This is the real meditation, thinking of our Beloved, remembering Baba. You can be standing at a bus stand. You can be having breakfast, washing the dishes, doing anything. Sometimes you don’t even realise you’ve really been thinking of Baba, but a conversation stops and then you become conscious that in the background all the while you have been thinking of Him.

Mani used to say that the sole ingredient for such meditation is love from the heart, because when you love someone, you naturally and effortlessly think of that person all the time.

And Baba gave them ways and means to think of Him constantly. As we’ve seen, even for someone as lively and energetic as Mani, He filled up her time with ways to remember Him: she had to be with Mehera, she had to learn this tune on the sitar, write in the diary, take care of the parrots, and so on. So through all these various ways and

means, the early days on the Hill were a time of training in His constant remembrance, something that over time became as natural to them as breathing. The strict seclusion, the myriad don'ts, the little orders that were so important, even their games and diversions, reinforced their focus and their remembrance over and over. So important did this remembrance become to Mani, that she used to tell Baba-lovers in the later years:

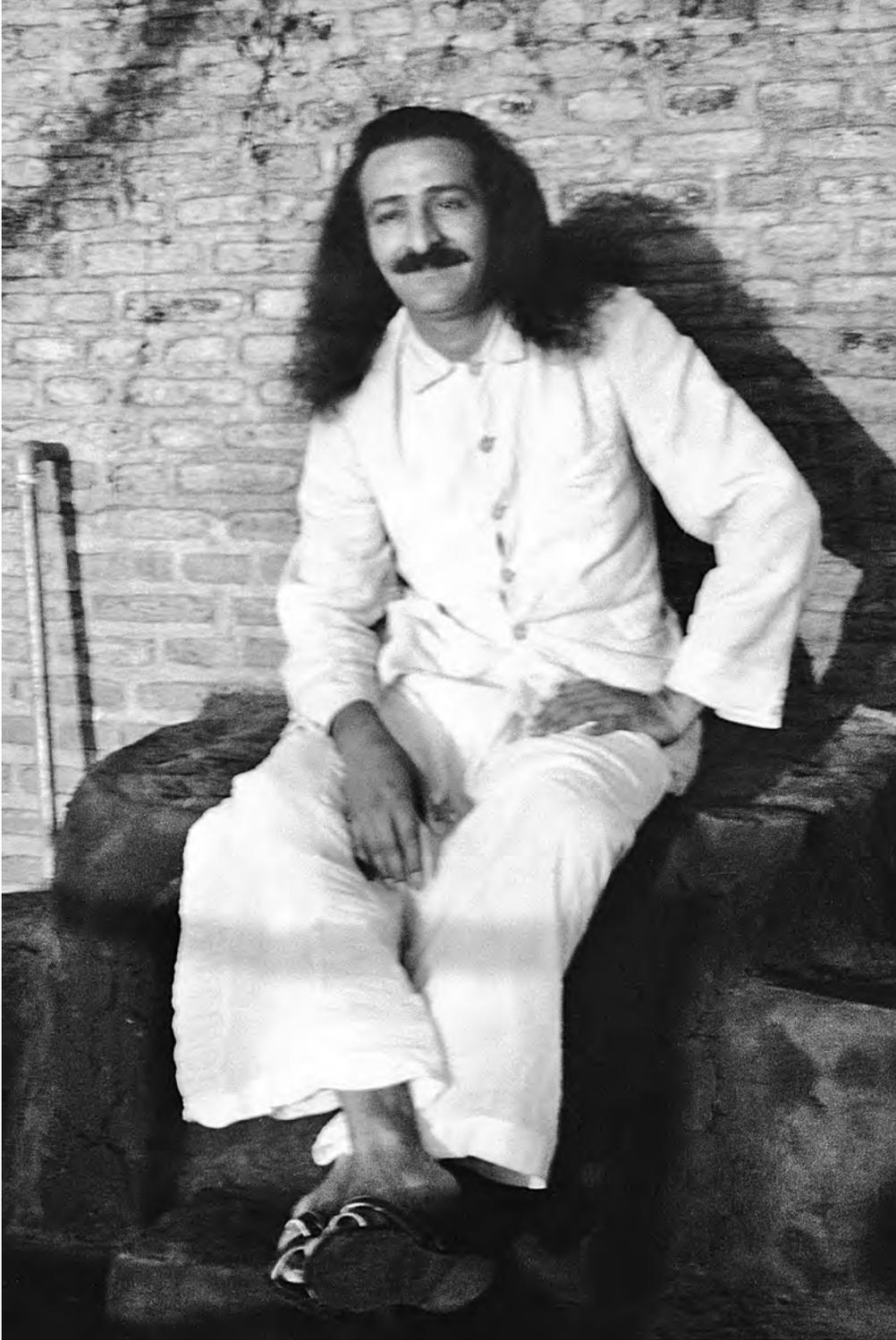
This is the springtide of creation when you should gather as much of His remembrance and His name as you can. As Kabir says in one of my favorite stanzas, God's name is here for the looting, there's so much of it.

It's like apple season, when the ground is covered with apples. You think then that they will always be there, but they won't. That season of plenty goes, and another season comes. This is the time, this is the season for gathering His remembrance, so we have to make the most of it.

We have to acquire the habit of remembering Him. That habit will stand us in good stead, even when we are born again. Baba has made it clear that in our next birth, we pick up from where we left off this last time. So it is for us to make our relationship with Him, our remembrance, our love, our obedience, our surrender to Him, as complete as we can, so that we can pick up from there next time.

L O R D M E H E R S H R E E

Among the treasures from the early Meherabad days kept in the archives on Meherabad Hill is a poem embroidered in cream silk thread on dark brown, velvet-like cloth. It is in Mani's convent-school handwriting. Framed in wood, under glass, it must have been a present to Baba, for His birthday, perhaps, or to welcome Him home from a trip.



Baba outside Meherabad kitchen. This was a time of training in His constant remembrance.

Here's what she so carefully stitched out for Him:

At The Lotus Feet of Lord Meher Baba
 I dedicate Myself at Thy feet,
 The dust beneath Thy feet let Me Meet!
 The livelong day My heart e'er cries for Thee
 How can I one be with My Lord Meher Shree?
 I love, My Lord, Thee Thee alone,
 For pure Beloved Thou art My own;
 How glorious it's to live in this era of Thee;
 Soon may I one be with My Lord Meher Shree.
 I know Thee, Lord, in this wise world around,
 Baba, My love for Thee knows no bound;
 May that day come near when I shall be one
 With Thee My Lord, Meher Shree and care for none!
 Thou art the ocean of Divine Love,
 And shining star, in the blue vault above;
 I see where is this paradise of mine,
 It's at the feet of Thee O Lord Divine.
 Some say in Madina where God stays,
 Or in Kashi God lives as others say;
 But I say "Here lives that Great God
 Holy Shree Meher Baba The Divine Lord"

Mani



JOURNEY TO MYSORE

Mani used to say, “Baba provides before the need arises.” Nothing could illustrate this more perfectly than Mani’s memorable adventure in Mysore in 1936.

Early that year, in the midst of their very cloistered life on Meherabad Hill, Baba suddenly announced to the women that they were going to Mysore, a city (and, at the time, a kingdom) in southern India. It was completely unexpected as they had not left Meherabad for years. Mehera said that they were very excited to be traveling. But their secluded life remained as strict as ever.

It was very well arranged. Mani often recounted a horribly embarrassing incident that happened at the Ahmednagar train station as they waited to depart:

Our journey to Mysore was like an Indian film we had once seen, where a prince was carried in his bed from a palace in one town to a palace in another by this deity, half-animal, half-man. The prince was asleep in his bed, and the deity carried the bed up through the clouds and put him down in the other palace.

Well, we were just sort of carried from Meherabad, still secluded and cloistered, across India to Mysore in the south, where a bungalow was ready with a secluded compound of *tatta*, bamboo matting, in place.

We couldn’t touch a man or talk with a man, but Mehera’s orders were very, very strict—all the more so. So when we needed to do something to help Mehera, we could see men. But Mehera couldn’t even see them. These dark glasses were brought and I was told to stick brown paper inside the lenses so that Mehera couldn’t see out at all. But people wouldn’t think that—it would look very odd—they

would just think here's a lady wearing dark glasses. But we walked arm in arm, so that I was supporting her because she couldn't see. It just looked friendly, these two ladies walking arm in arm on the Ahmednagar station platform.

Now just imagine me. We didn't have fashionable clothes, no up-to-date apparel, so I had on this very funny dress. Thinking back, it was my best at the time! It was much longer than was the fashion and the waist was not right, but still it was my best. And I had a solar topi on my head, that was my school hat, like something the Britishers wore in the Army. And I also had an air rifle under my arm.*

So Mehera and I were walking on the station platform, and she couldn't talk or see, and I mustn't talk, but I could see.

At one point, Baba told me, "Now you stay right here. I'll come back in a minute. Don't move!" I still cannot fathom why at that time it was just Mehera and myself at this particular spot.

We were right opposite a train that was standing still, and the compartments right in front of us were the first class. All the windows were closed, but we knew that Britishers always traveled in first class compartments. So we're standing there—this is a very serious thing, I'm doing my duty very earnestly, gun in one hand, Mehera on the other arm, solar topi on my head, staring at those closed windows.

Just at that moment, one window goes *futt* and a big, whiskered, British face looks out and says, "I say, can you tell me the time?" And I look at him like a frightened rabbit; I can't say a thing. Then I look down. He thought I hadn't heard, so he puts his head out a little more and says,

* This air rifle was the one Mani practiced with in the Meherabad ashram.

“Excuse me, could you tell me what time it is?” Again I look up at him, scared, not a word, and after a while look down. Now he gets angry, very red in the face, whiskers trembling, and says, “All I wanted to know was what the time was!” and bangs shut the window!

Now being out was a novel experience for us to begin with, and now I’m sweating and my knees are like jello! Just as the window goes down, along comes Baba, as natural as can be, and He gestures, “Come on, come on.” And we went along with Him to our compartment.

Eventually they reached Mysore and the house rented for them. The house had an enclosure around it made of palm leaves, which gave the women more room and privacy: people could not see them, nor could they see outside. They also could have the freedom to come out of the house in the evenings and play badminton or do some little household chores outside.

THE ULTRAVIOLET RAYS

When Mani was very young, Khorshed’s father read her palm. He had some skill in such things. In it, he saw a *gat*—a “break”—in her life. He told her, “If you get past this, you will cross the ocean twice,” and many other things that turned out to be true. We now come upon the *gat*.

One day after they had settled in at Mysore, Baba suddenly looked at Mani and said, “You need ultraviolet rays treatment.” Ultraviolet light was used as a kind of treatment for different medical conditions. (Baba prescribed a number of treatments for Mani’s skin condition over the years.) Everybody looked at



Baba in Mysore, 1936.

Mani and said, “Yes, she needs ultraviolet rays!” Mani recalled, “I didn’t know I needed it, but Baba said so, so I said, ‘Yes, Baba.’”

Baba then said, “You have to go to the hospital. Everything is arranged. A car will be here. You just sit in the car, go straight to the hospital, take the ultraviolet rays, and the car will bring you back.” And He told her she had to do it every day. “Yes, Baba.”

The appointed hospital was solely for women, run by women missionaries, both American and English. There were two lady doctors, one English (“very much like our Kitty,” said Mani), and the other a tall American. The nurses were women, too, and there were no ward boys, just more women. The only man in the place was an old gardener, who, Mani said, was so old that they wondered whether or not he could hold on to the hand-held garden hoe to weed the grass.

So I would go every day to the hospital in this rattler of a hired car, if you can call it a car. Rattle, rattle, rattle, and up I’d go, and back I’d come. And Baba would always ask, “Was it good? You had the light? Everything fine?” “Yes, Baba.”

One day He asked me, “Have you made friends with the nurses?” I said, “Yes, Baba.” That was very natural for me, I can’t just go there and sit. I would make jokes and be funny and so on. When I’d arrive, they’d say, “Here’s Mani!” and I knew them all by name. “Baba, one is named Rosie and one is named Prema and . . .”

“Good,” Baba said, “what about the doctors?”

“Doctors? I see them walking by, Baba, but I haven’t talked with them.”

“The matron? There is a foreign nurse there.”

“Yes, Baba.” I’d told Him about that. There was the matron and a sister [nurse], I think one was Norwegian and one was Swedish, and then there was the American doctor and the English doctor.

“Talk! Talk with them, get to know them.”

So I said fine. But that was a duty. The matron and the doctors were such busy people, and here I had to go and try and find them and be very natural and yet be friendly. It was a little difficult because you can't suddenly out of the blue start talking to a doctor. With the nurses it's a different thing. But I did it because Baba said, “Do it!” and there was no question of how or why. So I would go out of my way to greet them, and say things like, “What a lovely hospital you have here!” or “How nice everything is!” and so on, and somehow I managed to do it.

After a few days Baba told us that He was going to Ootacamand, which is a beautiful hill station, like a summer resort, for His mast work. And He said, “While I'm away, you mustn't go to the hospital. But what I want you to do is go there and tell the doctors and the matron and your nurse friends that you are going to Ootacamand, and that's why you will not be able to attend for four days. And ask the doctors and the European matron what they would like you to bring for them.”

At last I managed to catch hold of Dr. Gylaspy [the English doctor]. Oh no, she couldn't possibly think of anything for me to bring. It was very sweet of me, very kind, but . . . I said, “Oh you must, you must, please please, you must tell me something!” And I believe she asked for some sweets or something of that kind.

Then I went to the American doctor, and at last persuaded her to make a request. She asked for something salty.

Then I went to the matron, who is the head nurse, and what she asked for completely floored me! She wanted a pair of gloves. How on earth do you take measurements for gloves? But somehow even that we managed to get.

The moment I returned home, Baba said, “Did you ask?”

“Yes, Baba.”

“All three of them?”

“Yes, Baba.”

“So what is it that they want?”

Mani told Baba and He went to Ootacamand, and meticulously attended to the requests of the doctors and the matron. On His return Mani had to go back to the hospital and give each one her present and pretend that she had just come from this beautiful Ootacamand, a place she had never set foot in. “Of course,” she said, “in the old days, as a child, I used to love to tell lies” (although this was obeying Baba so she says she wouldn’t call it that, because it was under His orders and for His work). And anyway she was good at acting. But it was very difficult nevertheless:

When I went and gave them the presents, they were very touched and happy. And they said, “Oh, you must have loved Ootacamand!”

“It was absolutely lovely, Dr. Gylaspy.”

“And did you see such-and-such?”

Now I’d made up my mind that if they asked me whether I’d seen something, twice I’d say yes and once I’d say no. So I said, “Of course! Isn’t it wonderful!”

After another question, unfortunately one of them said, “Of course you must have seen the Mall.”

It was time for “no,” so I said, “No, I had no time.”

“What! You went to Ooty and didn’t see the Mall?”

Oops, I realised I had said no to the wrong thing. “Oh, you said the Mall, did you? Oh sure I went. How can you go to Ooty and not see the Mall, Dr. Gylaspy! I wouldn’t have missed the Mall for anything.”

So now everything was in place. They were staying near an excellent hospital for women only, with expert doctors on call, where

the doctors liked her, the matron liked her, and the nurses loved her. Everything was provided for before the need arose.

A MEMORABLE ADVENTURE

At the end of March, in the middle of the night Mani was awakened by a sudden “explosion” inside her ear. She said that that is the only word she could use to describe it. It was as if something burst inside, and then her ear began to bleed. She lay there in terrible pain while blood flowed out of her ear for hours and hours, soaking her bed. Not wanting to disturb Baba while He was resting—or any of the others, who would have sent a message to Him—she just lay where she was until morning. When she finally called the other women, they were very concerned and very, very scared, seeing her bed full of blood. A message was sent to Baba. He immediately wanted to know why she hadn’t let Him know sooner. “I didn’t want to disturb you, Baba,” was Mani’s reply.

It was a Sunday, and all the doctors and many of the nurses in hospitals were off for the day. You can’t easily get medical assistance on a Sunday. Anyway, Mani was tucked into the old rattler of a car they had and taken right away to the hospital, the same hospital that she had gone to for the ultraviolet light treatments. When the car pulled up, nobody on duty was much interested, it being an off day, and everyone just went on with their chores, except for one nurse who looked into the car to see who the new patient was. The minute she saw that it was Mani, everything changed.

“Oh, it’s Mani!”

“What?”

“Mani’s come! She’s not well!”

“Mani?”

“Mani, Mani, that funny girl we like so much who used to come here every day!”

Word flew around the hospital and everyone came running. “Before I knew it,” Mani recalled, “I had the key to the hospital!” Immediately

a beautiful private ward was opened up and prepared for her, and the doctors, when they heard of it, dropped all their day's plans and rushed over to attend to her.

After seeing her condition, they called in Dr. Robinson, a very experienced surgeon, who Mani remembered as a fine old man, tall and silver-haired, and very kind. He was the doctor to the Maharajah of Mysore. Mani was immediately taken into the operating room where Dr. Robinson performed an emergency operation on her mastoid. Mani said later that he saved her hearing to some extent. In those days, people who underwent that operation were often left completely deaf in the affected ear. As it was, she almost died from blood loss and infection, and the nurses prayed to Jesus to make her well and put a rosary under her pillow.

Mehera said, "Afterwards we realised that this must have been the reason Baba had taken us there [to Mysore]. It was a very serious mastoid operation, and at that time there were no proper facilities for such surgery in Ahmednagar." At the time Baba had asked Mehera, "Will you miss Mani very much if she goes?" Mehera replied, "Baba, Mani is Your sister; she can do so much work for You; she's so young." Baba nodded, "OK, OK." Interestingly, Mehera's father, Jehangir, died as a result of this very same type of mastoid operation.

Mani would later relate an odd experience she had throughout the operation. She felt that she was sitting on the ventilator window of the operating room, looking down on herself and the doctors as she was being operated on, removed and yet mildly interested.

"I've got a hole in my head from the operation that you can still see," Mani would laugh later on, "and maybe that accounts for a lot of things!"

RECUPERATION

Mani had to stay at the hospital for some time. Naja stayed with her while Mehera, Khorshed, and the others stayed in the house, taking care of the washing and food and so on.

Baba would come twice a day to the hospital, morning and afternoon, in the rattler. He would climb the stairs and come up to Mani's room and sit by her bed:

And He would feed me nourishing soup from a teaspoon, because at first my jaw was clamped shut and nothing would go through my teeth. So Baba would put just the tip of the teaspoon up to my mouth, pry the teeth apart a little, and pour drops of the soup or orange juice or whatever liquid I was to take, into my mouth. Later, as I got better, He would peel an apple, cut it into pieces and put the pieces into my mouth one by one until I had eaten it all. It was very difficult to chew and I made the effort only because Baba had given me the food. Naja couldn't persuade me.

Baba told us not to tell the doctors or the nurses about Him, not to give away who He was. "Don't tell them Who I am, don't tell My name, don't say anything." He was just my brother. But everyone was drawn to Him. And the doctors were puzzled by us. They knew here was something different, that we were not the ordinary run of patients. And yet we seemed poorer than anyone else having a private room. The food that came from Mehera and the others for Naja and me came in a tiffin carrier that had no catch and was fixed with a safety pin. The rug Naja slept on was full of patches. The handle on the cup was broken, the spoon was dented, and so on.

Yet the doctors felt like Baba was the Maharajah. Especially later when Baba said to spare no expense for the room or medicine or anything that was needed for me. They couldn't put it together. And they were very drawn to Baba, to me, and to Naja.

The nurses were specially drawn to Baba. They asked Naja,

“Who is He?” and she told them, “He’s the patient’s brother.”

“But why doesn’t He speak?”

“Oh,” said Naja, “He’s very shy.”

Every day, the moment Baba’s car would rattle up to the hospital, the nurses would all gather on the landing upstairs and lean over, straining to catch a glimpse of Baba coming up the stairs. They would pretend that they weren’t looking at Him, but they would watch Him come up. Then, as soon as Baba went into Mani’s room, one by one they would walk in with some excuse or another, even nurses Mani wouldn’t see for the rest of the day:

One would come in, looking at Baba but asking Naja, “Oh, is Nurse Rose here?” And Naja would say, “No, Nurse Rose is not here,” and then to us as an aside in that loud whisper of hers, “She knows darn well Nurse Rose never comes here at this time!” Meanwhile, the nurse would linger as long as she could, looking at Baba, and then go.

Then another would come in, with a question like, “Did I leave my thermometer here?” Naja would say, “No, you did not leave your thermometer here!” And then to us in the whisper: “How could she, when she never takes your temperature.” And then someone else, “Er, is Nurse Prema here?” “No, Nurse Prema is not here.” And again the whisper: “She knows very well Nurse Prema doesn’t do anything for you and never comes in here.” And so they would come in and out, all the time hovering around our room. They were extraordinary people, so dedicated, so willing, in their neat, bright white saris and bare feet, just ready to serve.

I felt very close to Nurse Rose; she was tiny and special. Nurse Rose was not our nurse at all; she was in charge of the children’s ward where the newborn babies were kept. It was a little distance from my room, down a broad verandah. And

she did the most extraordinary thing, which is the actual point of this story. Day after day, the moment she would see that Baba had come and was silently sitting next to me in my room, she would hurry across the verandah outside our room. We'd hear her feet go pitter-patter, pitter-patter down to the children's ward. After a few moments, pitter-patter, pitter-patter, she'd come back carrying a newborn child of that day. When she came back with a baby, she would go straight up to Baba and hold the baby out to Him. Not a word would be spoken. Baba would look up at her and smile, and silently take the baby and hold it on His lap. Then He would take the baby's little finger and shake it gently and look at the baby. Just as we would talk to a child, so would Baba silently gesture or with His facial expressions "say" things to it, or He'd put His finger on the little cheek. Then He would lift the child gently and give it back to Nurse Rose, who just as silently would take the child and pitter-patter down to the children's ward. A few moments later, another baby would be brought to Baba, then another child and then another; even a premature baby was brought a couple of times. The love and attention Baba would shower on those babies!

But one day it reached the limit. One after another, babies were brought to Baba. Naja and I were a bit exasperated, Naja was certainly, and we were just waiting for this to end so that we could get on with being with Baba.

So we started counting the number of babies brought to Him. We counted twelve! We couldn't believe it. Naja whispered to me, "This is going to go on all day," because by that time we were sure it was endless and would never stop.

But not once did Baba show impatience. Not once did He shower less love on a child, not once did He give less of

Himself. They could have brought fifty children and Baba would have given the same love to each one.

Telling this story, Mani would add, “So I tell the young ones who are coming now: Who knows? Some of you may be some of those babies that Baba handled with so much love.”

Mani said that later when she was much better, Baba started coming to the hospital only once a day. But the nurses would still wait for the car both times, and when it wouldn't come they would say, “Your Baba didn't come today.” Naja would reply, “No, His sister is much better now so Baba only comes in the afternoon.” And their faces would fall. “Oh,” they would say, “But we like Baba! We like that Baba comes every day.”

“We have seen this silent romance again and again with people who did not know Baba,” Mani said, “who are what we would call strangers to Him, recognising Him and being drawn to Him.”



Mani at eighteen, hamming as an “old woman” on the left and as a “stern matron” on the right. (Picture taken by Beheram in Bombay when she was there for a short time after her operation.)

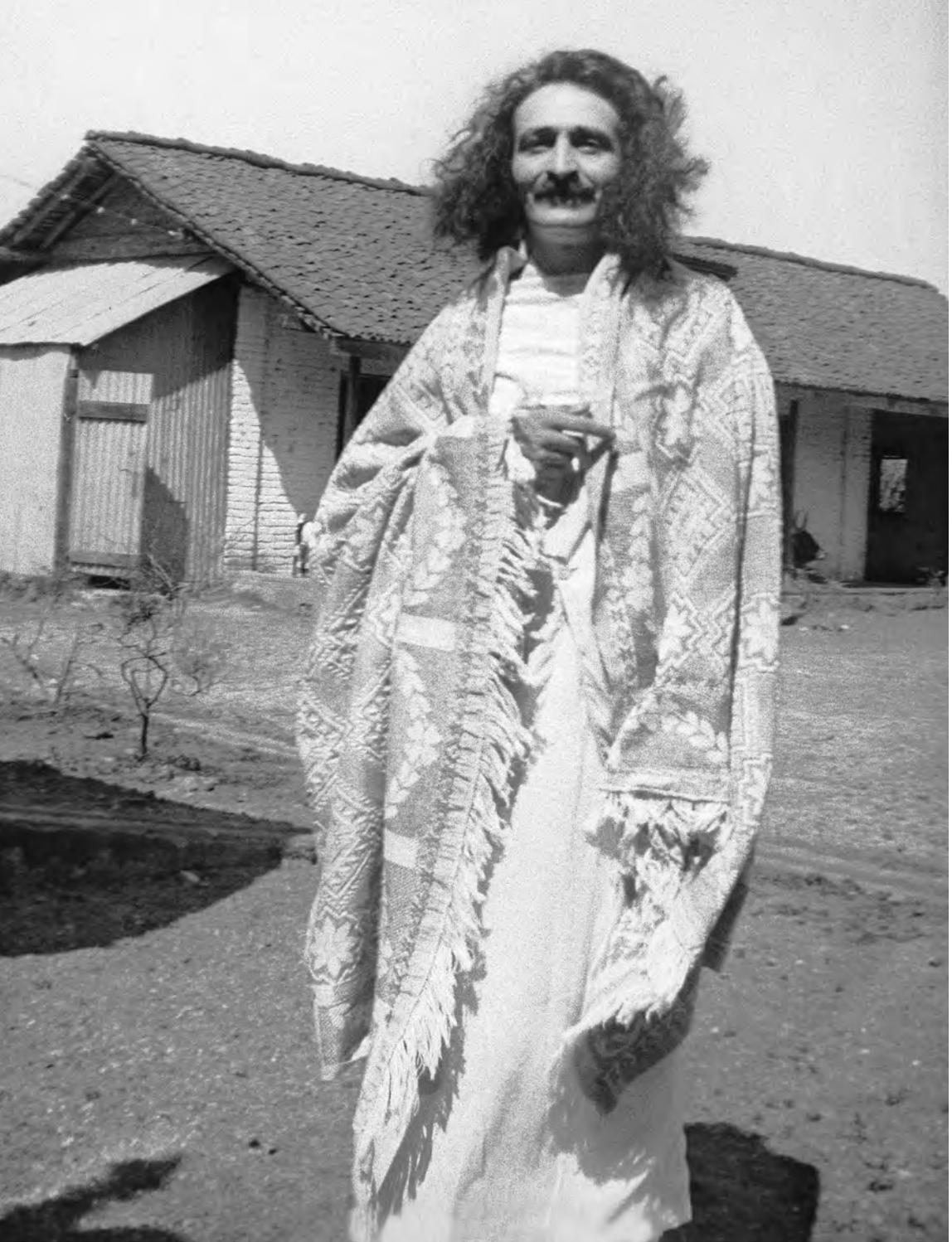
EAST-WEST



WESTERN SISTERS

In retrospect 1936 was quite a year for Mani. Besides almost dying, in 1936 she and the other women had their first taste of traveling with Baba, which a few years later was to be their daily fare. And at the end of that year, some of Baba's close Western followers came to stay in India, in Nasik. Eventually several of the Western women came to live on Meherabad Hill with Mehera, Mani, and the others, who formed life-long relationships with their "Western sisters," as Mani would call them.

In April of that year, after Mani's ear trouble and other complications, Baba quipped, "Mysore has become an eyesore," and by June the Mysore ashram was closed and the women mandali were back in their old quarters and secluded life on Meherabad Hill. Meanwhile, Baba had established a mast and mad ashram in Rahuri. By Christmas, the Westerners were ensconced in Nasik in a beautiful building known as Meher Retreat specially built for them by Baba.



Baba in 1936.

Before too long, Baba took the Westerners on a visit to Meherabad. Mani recalled it in Mandali Hall this way:

Life with Baba could be called a divine drama in which there are varied acts, different scenes, changed props. Of course, He's the producer, the director, the playwright. We don't know the script; we simply follow His directions, learning the hard way to be sensitive to every cue from Him.

The scene of our solitary life on Meherabad Hill changed when Baba established the ashram in Nasik for His Western disciples and our Western sisters came from Nasik to Meherabad to visit us. It was quite an exciting time for us, and Baba was so



Baba with the Western women staying at the Nasik ashram (and Freiny).

happy, too. We each did our part to make everything the best that we could. Naja and Khorshed even began taking lessons in English from me so that they could at least speak broken English with the Westerners. [Later on they both picked up a lot.]

The Westerners knew our cloistered rules and they were very careful not to mention men's names or talk about men when they conversed with Mehera and me and the others. One of the most delightful things that happened was when Delia, who knew Mehera loved horses, was talking to Mehera, and mentioned something about a cowboy. She was horrified when she heard herself, and clapped her hand over her mouth, saying, "Oh, oh, dear! I mean cowgirl!" Baba was so delighted. It was fun.

Rano (one of the women mandali) told us afterwards that after their first visit with us in Meherabad, when she had seen the way we lived, Baba asked her, “Well, how do you like it?”

“Oh, very nice, Baba,” said Rano, “very nice, but not for me.” She couldn’t see herself living that kind of life, and yet she became our lifelong companion in the end, because the only thing she wanted was to be with Baba.

Of this first visit from Nasik to Meherabad, Rano wrote:

We all had to be ready by 3:00 a.m. so we would be at Meherabad at 7:00 a.m. When we arrived we women were taken up the Hill to meet Baba’s close eastern women disciples, and as we walked up to a compound enclosed by a hedge, I wondered at how these women lived, at the utter simplicity of their daily lives.

Living strictly under Baba’s instructions, they could not leave their small compound except at certain times, and had seen no man except Baba for many years. Their home was a large rectangular stone water tank formerly used by the military and converted to living quarters. Despite the severe restrictions, these women conveyed for their master a spontaneous love that imbued the atmosphere with the purity of a beach swept smooth and clean by the ocean. Their love and vitality soon dissolved any impression that life on Meherabad Hill was not as exciting as in any European city. Yet, I knew I could not live at Meherabad. I had been out in the world and could not imagine living in seclusion with a group of women on a hilltop, never able to go out nor to do as I pleased. I thought it impossible.¹

Margaret, too, wrote about these visits to Meherabad:

Once a week the Western disciples were taken to Meherabad and the women were taken up the hill to be with Mehera, Mani, Khorshed and the other Eastern women. Up to this time the Eastern and Western groups of women had not been brought together, either for work or for training. This was a beginning, and on these visits we gradually began to learn and recognize each other's personalities, and to have a slight early recognition of the differences in the Eastern and Western approach to life. Later on, when the two groups lived and worked together, these initial meetings made reconciling the differences much easier.



Mehera and Mani in Meherabad.

These visits took place during the time that Baba had placed Mehera under a very severe discipline. Everything was arranged to keep her mind all the time on Baba. She and those living with her had to write Baba's name many times every day. With the exception of Baba, she never saw a man or heard a man's name.

We were warned severely not to allow a man's name to creep into our conversations with the girls. You can imagine how difficult this was. In ordinary social conversation the names Tom, Jack, etc., creep naturally into conversation. These are simply part of ordinary social life.

In talking with the girls, it was extremely difficult to be natural. Stilted, thought-out remarks about how dusty the roads had been on the drive over, how much hotter it was in

India than it was in the West, and a few more things of the same type, and then communication would fade away while one frantically tried to evolve a remark that held no danger.

One afternoon we were sitting in a circle around Baba when suddenly Norina's [Matchabelli] social skills took over and she started to be charming and natural. It was fatal. Just as all seemed to be going well, she was carried away and to everyone's horror, especially her own, she came out with "and Tom said," followed by a horrified silence in the room, a silence that could be heard.

Baba quietly turned to Mehera, put her head on His shoulder and assured her that it was quite all right, she was with Him and His Love washed out the hearing of the name.

He then turned forgivingly to Norina, who was tremendously upset by the occurrence.

One afternoon Baba called me aside and said accusingly, "I told the girls that you had a sense of humor and would be great fun, but since these visits started you have been practically silent."

His eyes had a twinkle. All I could say was that having to think so carefully before speaking, it was impossible to be natural.

Baba laughed.

After a few visits, however, everyone got used to the situation, and ease and friendship began to flower. Luckily there were no more misadventures.²

Delia recalled:

We were allowed to go on excursions which tended to start very early in the morning, especially our weekly visit



Ramjoo, Baba, and Norina at the Rahuri ashram.

to Meherabad when we set off at midnight in order to avoid the heat of the day. Mehera, Mani, and the women were at Meherabad and for Margaret, Kitty, and me who had met them in 1933, it was a particular joy to renew our acquaintance. We went several times to the house on Meherabad Hill and on one occasion they dressed us all in saris and we had photos taken with Baba. Mani would often arrange entertainments for us; this is the first time we became familiar with her considerable theatrical talents.³

A series of photos shows another of these occasions, recalled by Mani to pilgrims:

When the Westerners visited us at Meherabad, just the few of us who were there with Baba on the top of the Hill, we dressed Baba up as Krishna, complete with crown and flute. And all of us dressed as gopis, with Mehera symbolizing Radha. Oh, it was such fun.

It's interesting of course that the Western women were dressed as Krishna's gopis, the very term Baba often used to address them in correspondence.



Baba as Krishna with His gopis. Standing (from Left): Margaret, Baba; Middle: Mani, Khorshed; Seated: Kitty, Norina, Mehera, Delia.



CANNES

At the end of July 1937, Baba closed the Nasik ashram and took the Eastern women, some of the men mandali, and a number of the Westerners to Cannes, France, for an indefinite stay. They sailed on the *Strathnaver*, tourist class, to Marseilles. It was an unforgettable trip, as Mani would recount in Mandali Hall:

The same style of cloistered life, the foundation of our life with Baba, continued even when we went to Cannes in France in 1937. This was after our Western family had been in the Nasik ashram for a while, and now Baba had dissolved that phase because another was to be born.

So we six women—Mehera, myself, Naja, Khorshed, Soonamasi, and Valu—went with Baba to France by



In Villa Caldana, Cannes, where Mehera, Mani, and the Eastern women continued their cloistered life.

ship, much the best way. Because Baba wanted us to be secluded, Chanji took cabins for us way down in the ship, right above the engine, which meant we had a lot of vibration and, with tiny portholes for windows and a rough sea, a lot more seasickness than we might have had!

According to Rano (one of Baba's very close Western disciples, "As we departed, the monsoon was raging in the Arabian Sea and the high, choppy waves tossed the stern of the boat up out of the water, the propellers made that terrible grinding noise, and then the boat sank back again. To make matters worse, the portholes had to be kept closed because of the weather."

As Mani continued the story:

Mehera and I shared a cabin, as we always share a room wherever we stay or travel, and the other four stayed in two other cabins. We could only go from our cabin to the washroom (where there was both a bath and toilet) escorted by Rano or Norina. Mehera never came out, being the most affected by seasickness, but the rest of us had to have some exercise and Baba was always very considerate of all these kinds of things. So we would be taken to the upper deck for a walk about three o'clock in the morning, when no one else would be around. We had to go before the deckhands came to scrub the deck. It was all in the dark and in a hurry. I still remember once going up the steps to the deck on all fours because I had somehow gotten behind the others and I couldn't see what was happening because it was so dark.

So we would walk on the upper decks, sometimes stopping by the rail to watch the phosphorescent light in the water. It was all very adventurous and beautiful.

Norina was with us, and you know she had great personality, beauty, elegance, and charm, all of which she would use for Baba. She would do anything for Baba and His work. She would charm a stone for Him. So because she felt that the captain would be useful if she had to make a request for Baba's comfort or for our comforts, she charmed the captain and became friendly with him.

After about three days, Baba sent her to the captain, saying, "Go ask the captain, when will our ship land?" So Norina asked the captain and he replied in a very chatty, friendly way. But Baba wanted her to go again and ask in the afternoon, and the captain looked a bit surprised. But thinking maybe she didn't remember what he'd said, he repeated it again. When Baba sent her a third time the very same evening, he said, "But, Princess, I've already told you." "Oh yes, yes," said Norina, "yes, of course you told me, of course."

When this was repeated the next day, the captain started trying to avoid Norina. If he saw her at the other end of the deck, he would turn around and go in the opposite direction. But Norina had a mission! She had an order from Baba to go and ask this question to the captain! So she started pursuing him. Now how could the man escape unless he jumped overboard? I think he was probably considering that, when Baba finally stopped pestering him through Norina. Of course by then it was so embarrassing for Norina who had used her title of princess and her charm to make the contact!

Poor Norina was in for more embarrassing incidents. As the Eastern women continued to lead their secluded life, they still

could not talk with or touch men, and they also were to avoid even seeing men. To help with this, Mani said, when she would go out of the room to go down to the washroom she would wear a bath towel over her head:

As there were no toilets in the cabin, in the morning I would carry a chamber pot with me to the washroom. Only English people would know what I mean when I talk about a chamber pot. It's a sort of bowl made of crockery with floral designs all over and a handle on one side. Very pretty to look at, but terribly heavy. So I would pick that up and come out with a towel covering my head, but with just enough open space at the bottom so that I could see Norina's feet, those elegantly shod feet. I had to follow those feet. If I missed those feet, I was lost, because I couldn't talk to anyone. So there I was with a chamber pot in my hand, a towel over my head, peeking down at Norina's feet.

Now Norina was very embarrassed by this apparition following her because the captain and her new friends would notice it. So she would try to keep as much distance between herself and me as possible. She would walk faster and faster. But the faster she walked, the faster I followed.

On the third day, she couldn't stand it. It was all too much. She turned and said to me, indicating the chamber pot, "Child, must you hold it like a bouquet?" And I was too shy to tell her there's no other way to hold a chamber pot. I mean, how else can you hold it? But still I followed her.

A few notes from Mani's diary give a flavor of that trip:^{*}

JULY 31 - Left [Bombay] hotel 7.30 a.m. and after medical examination went to *Strathnaver* 8.30 a.m. Started sailing 1.20 p.m. - rough weather.

AUGUST 1 - On deck for an hour from 5.30 a.m. Mehera seasick and miserable.

AUGUST 2 - Rougher weather. All seasick.

AUGUST 4 - Better. Stopped at Aden 3.15 p.m. and were out on deck to see the fascinating colours of the lights playing on the rippling waters and noisy little piscie boats riding gaily on the waves . . . At night we entered the Red Sea.

AUGUST 5 - Went up First Class deck from 4.25 to 5.30 a.m., groping in the dark to climb the endless stairs but very lovely up there with the bracing wind - Red Sea was hot! Rough weather - portholes closed - played cards and other games in Cabin. Some of us sick.

AUGUST 6 - Went up on deck 4.10 a.m.

AUGUST 7 - Went up on deck 2.30 a.m. and slept there till 4.45. Every day Mehera not well in spite of pills and things Baba gave.

AUGUST 8 - Crossed the Suez Canal at 7.30 a.m. and so contrary to the hitherto unsteady sailing went gliding like a bird on the strip of sky-blue water - We watched from both decks - Arabia with its deserts and camels on one side, and Egypt on the other.

AUGUST 9 - Mehera ill all night.

AUGUST 10 - Weather much better.

^{*} Punctuation kept as in Mani's diary, quoted in *Ocean of Love*, 97-98. The diary quotes on the following pages are from the same book, pp. 101-02.

On August 11th they sighted Italy and a smoking volcano, on the 12th Corsica and on the 13th reached Marseilles. There they saw the zoo, had a splendid lunch, and went by second-class train to Cannes.

They spent two nights at Shelly House, which Mani described as “an ancient fairytale house full of mysterious echoes and antique furniture and a spacious garden,” where they experienced electric lights in a house for the first time. Then they left for Villa Caldana where Mani wrote in her diary, “Madame and her cat welcomed us—nice big house—lovely garden terrace.”

A few of the Western women stayed with them at Villa Caldana, while the others stayed at Capo di Monte, another gloomier villa a little ways away. It turned out that the Westerners in Villa Caldana were the ones Baba took back to India with Him a few months later. This was the first time that the Eastern and Western women had ever stayed together. It was a time of adjustments.

Kitty wrote of this:

Whilst Baba chose only a few of the Western group to live at Caldana, daily one or another was called by Him from Capo di Monte to spend the day with the Eastern group. Baba was most concerned with the happiness of the Eastern women and it was clear to us all that it was very pleasing to Baba if He saw us bridging the gulf between East and West. What made this easier than it might have been was our mutual love for Baba. We had not the discipline and control that we saw exemplified in their lives, most marked in their outward control of moods and feelings. I know we sometimes unconsciously were lacking in tact or understanding, but they never showed they were hurt in any way.⁴

A number of Baba's other Western lovers came to see Him during this visit. Mani briefly sketched out in her diary some of the variety of outings and games they had together:

AUGUST 23 - In morning went to the beach (secluded spot);

Westerners had a swim.

AUGUST 24 - . . . In the evening went to Palm Beach and saw heavenly fireworks. Left Him at 9 p.m., but had to wait there four hours before fireworks started (had a topping time with Baba) at 1:20 a.m. for 20 minutes. Reached home 2:20 a.m.

AUGUST 26 - Delia, Margaret, and Anita [de Caro] visit.



Baba and Mehera on a picnic in Cannes, 1937.

AUGUST 28 - Kitty's birthday. Had a grand dinner party up on terrace (Naja's foot in the steaming cauliflower accident)

AUGUST 29 - . . . walks.

AUGUST 31 - . . . - we played "darts".

SEPTEMBER 1 - Indian music and darts. Ruano and Nonny (Rano's mother) came for the evening.

SEPTEMBER 3 - Played with Baba - darts after lunch, and Spanish records and charades after supper.

SEPTEMBER 4 - Anita and Delia visit - in the evening played with Baba charades and grey ghost, followed by coffee and cakes (Irene Billo made them).

SEPTEMBER 5 - Played with Baba, darts, baguettes, and treasure hunt (heaps of fun).

And so on: bicycle rides in the garden, charades and music after supper, treasure hunt with Baba, "I had a tap lesson," "Mehera took piano lessons from Kitty," "cycling and walks. In the evening played charades and murder game by the fireside in the drawing room." For Ruano's birthday: a birthday supper by candlelight, music,

musical chairs, and a “little entertainment by Anita, Rano and self.”

Delia wrote, “And then there was Mani who was a theater in herself: She wrote her own sketches, peopling the stage with different characters, sometimes singing or dancing. Those were such lovely occasions.”



Another picnic with Baba in France, en route from Cannes on a visit to Paris.

At Caldana, Kitty taught Mani shorthand and typing, which Mani picked up very quickly; in time she became a whiz at both.

Kitty recalled: “One of the most outstanding events of this period was our visit to Paris to see the World’s Fair. Norina, being so international in her background, could always furnish a connection anywhere in Europe when required by Baba. She wrote her friend Consuelo Sides in Paris, and Consuelo and her husband Alfredo invited Baba and those with Him for two nights at their apartment on the Seine overlooking Notre Dame.”

They drove to Paris with Baba from Cannes. Two marvelous series of photos show Baba in France picnicking with Mehera, Mani, and the other women: one was taken in Cannes and the other was taken on this trip to Paris by car.

In Paris, Mani would laugh, they spent a lot of their time walking past the sights looking at the sidewalk, as they were supposed to avoid looking at men. If they happened to see a man, they had to look down immediately. Mehera often wore dark glasses with the sides covered, and had to be “steered” by Kitty and Rano.

When they got to the Eiffel Tower, Mani had a grand time. As she

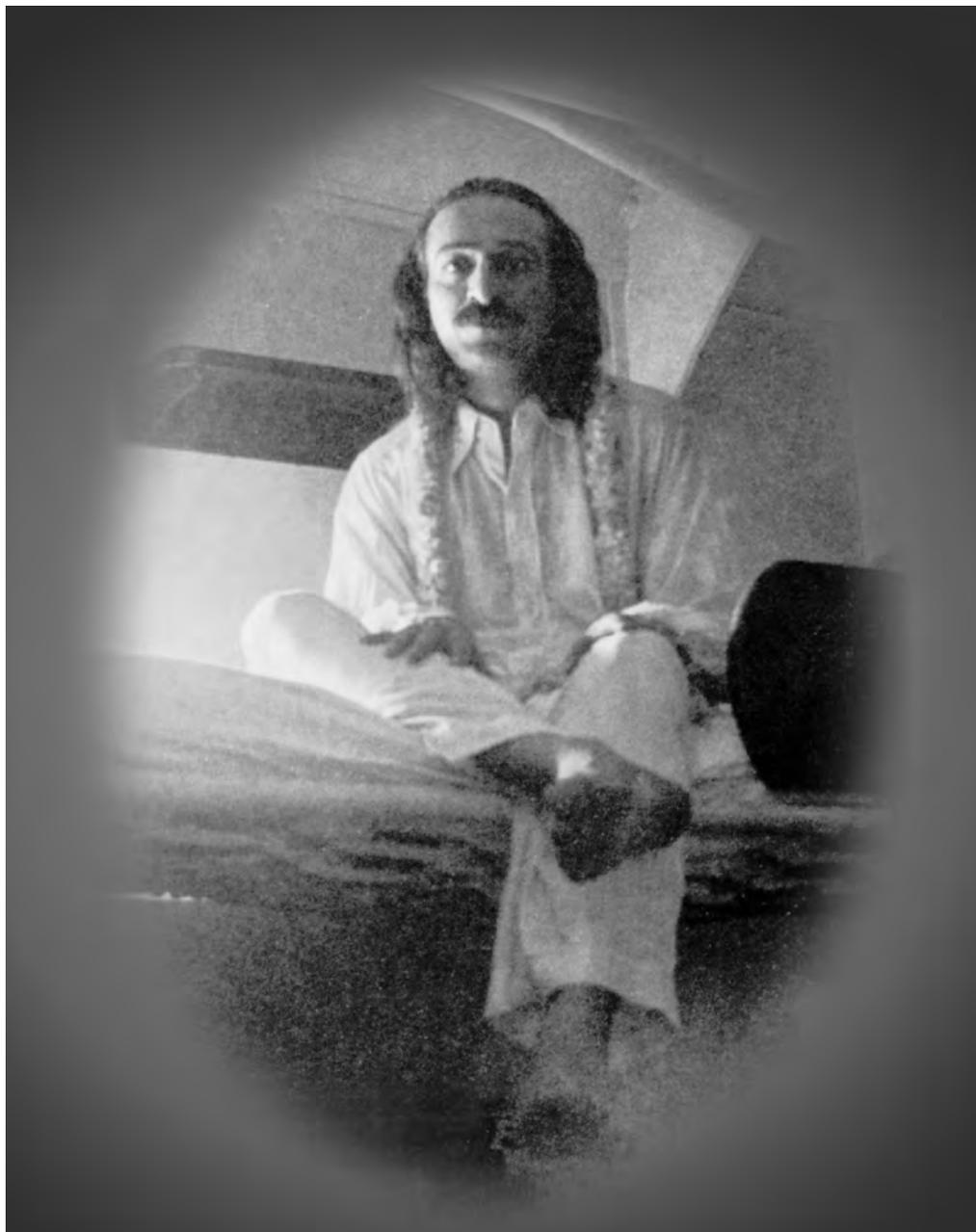
described it to pilgrims, it seemed that there was hardly anyone else there and she was on her own. Well, sort of:

It was such an adventure for me. I'd seen pictures of it, but this was *the* Eiffel Tower. It was really something, and to make the most of it I started going up and down the stairs. I knew my orders, my limits: I wasn't supposed to touch or talk with anyone. And I kept within them. But what I didn't know was that Baba had ordered Rano to stay with me and see that nobody accidentally touched me. Rano didn't tell me, and I didn't know what Baba had told her, so she still complains that I led her such a dance up and down that Eiffel Tower!

In November, Baba closed the Cannes ashram and returned with the Eastern women, Norina, Kitty, and Rano, and the men mandali to India. (Elizabeth, Margaret, and Nonny were to come to India a few months later.) Baba's party traveled on the maiden voyage of the TMS *Circassia*. After the misery of their ship journey over, the trip back was bliss. Mani recalled in Mandali Hall:

You see how with Baba there are feasts and there are fasts, always both sides. And He teaches you to be unaffected, or affected the same way by both. Coming back [from France] was quite a different thing from going over! We loved it. We had deck cabins which meant we could walk out of our cabins onto our own sort of deck and look at the view and yet have all the solitary seclusion we wanted. And if you liked, fruit juice in the morning for breakfast, which I love. And whatever you ordered to eat, even ice cream. There was a little lift operating all the time to bring us our food. Baba really gave us a feast.

But one day, suddenly Baba said, "Today you all fast."



Baba aboard ship in an earlier time.

Fast, mind you. Eat nothing at all! The ship's kitchen couldn't believe it. All the time they would be sending packets of fruit juice and ice cream and what-not up that little lift, and suddenly nothing. "What?" they cried to Norina. "Not eating at all? Not eating ANYTHING?" "No," said Norina, "we're not eating anything."

There was a fully equipped gymnasium on board, where Baba would take the women at specially arranged times when no one else was there. Years later, Mehera and Mani could still describe in detail all the new exercise contraptions in that gym they tried out with Baba.



EAST - WEST MEHERABAD

What a different Meherabad Mehera and Mani sailed home to from Cannes. Before there had been only six women on the Hill, who knew each other inside and out and—with the exception of Valu—were all from the same background and spoke the same language. After Cannes, these six grew to twenty-plus and sometimes up to forty Baba-lovers from America, Europe, and Iran, not to mention various places in India. Baba had called a number of Eastern and Western women to come and live on Meherabad Hill in an expanded ashram that would be the background of yet another phase of His work.

Although their intimate world with Baba was gone, Mani always said that Mehera and the close women's early cloistered life was the inner foundation for all the rest of their life with Him.

Mehera continued to lead her life of complete focus on Baba and



Mehera and Mami with Baba in the East Room at Upper Meherabad; Baba is dressed in a crown and robe made by the women, circa 1937–1938.

limited interaction with others, kept apart and aloof from the hue and cry. Katie (Goher's sister) was one of the rare visitors to the Hill in 1937, before the group enlarged, and when I asked her about this intimate time, she remembered Mehera being strictly secluded, even with guests. Mehera was also very shy by nature. In the expanded ashram, when guests would come more frequently from the outside world, Mehera would still only visit with a few. She was completely absorbed in Baba and His personal work, Katie recalled, and in those early days she wouldn't talk much. When they would all gather together around Baba, Mehera would sit all the time looking at Him.

Mani, though still cloistered to a large extent, was "very lively,"



Mani on a picnic with Baba.

Katie recalled, “chatting all the time with Mehera and the others.” Mani had a little more freedom, and Goher, who I also asked about that time, said Mani made the most of it when people came from outside, “as was her usual nature, teasing somebody or greeting someone, and going from place to place to see everybody.” Yet for the most part, she would not spend much time with guests, but would be with Mehera in their room, only coming out when Baba was there, always by Mehera’s side. Goher recalled, “Mani loved Mehera very much.”

Katie described Mani as being very welcoming to her when Katie came to live in the ashram along with other Easterners. “She always mixed

with everyone. She was so full of life, so witty, so jovial, always acting, full of fun.” And then, the ultimate compliment: “With Mani you could talk nonsense!” As Goher said, “She would see fun in anything and everything!”

Kitty wrote her impression of the Eastern women at the time she came to stay in November 1937:

Two things impressed me deeply when I came to live with the Eastern group on the Hill: (1) their implicit obedience to Baba in the tiniest details—thinking more of Him than of themselves, having Him as their constant companion and guide throughout the day in their thought, speech and action; (2) a sublime, child-like quality and attitude in their love for and faith in Baba, their Master. The words of Jesus seemed so exactly to fit: “Except ye become as a little child. . . .”

. . .

In addition to the new inmates, on Baba's birthday in 1938, for the first time a number of women guests were to come and sleep on the Hill (in their bedding rolls on the floor). There was a lot of preparation and the birthday was celebrated in a grand style, both up and down the Hill. Then all the women went to Panchgani for the hot summer months, as the Westerners were not used to the summer heat and Baba did not want them to get sick. After several months they went on to stay at the P.W.D. Bungalow in Ahmednagar with even more women, while a second story was added onto the water tank on the Hill to house all the new additions.



Celebrating Krishna's birthday at P.W.D. Bungalow, Ahmednagar, 1938. The women stayed there while a second story was added to the water tank at Meherabad.



Meherabad, 1938.

Compassionate Mani. She hardly mentioned the difficulty of suddenly having to share Baba with all these people. Instead, she spoke of her “Western sisters” and the tremendous adjustment they had to make to the rigorous life at Meherabad. It touched her very much, as she related to pilgrims:

After our return from Cannes, Baba called quite a number of His Eastern and Western women disciples to be in the ashram at Meherabad along with us. It was the first time that the East and the West lived together in the women’s ashram.

As I say about life in India, your foot always has to adjust to the shoe. The shoe never adjusts to your foot. So at first it’s tight, it’s squeaky, it hurts. Then your foot has to adjust. That’s how you have to adjust to life in India: you have to adjust to the shoe.

Whenever we think of our Western sisters living in the ashram with us, we take our hats off to them. We cannot say enough to give you a real idea of how we felt about it.

You see, even before they came to India, their lives were Baba’s, and they were there in the West because Baba told them to be. Whatever they were doing was in obedience to Him.

So when Baba gave them the call, “Leave everything and come,” they wound up everything and came to India, to Ahmednagar of all places, leaving their countries, their families, their homes, their pleasures, their comforts, their independence, their successful careers. Baba said come, and they came.

They lived in the two rooms upstairs, the Eastern

women in one room and the Westerners in the other. Their beds were close together, with just a little space in between, enough for a side table or something where you could put a picture of Baba or your little clock perhaps. It was like a school room dormitory. And among them was a princess, a countess, a business woman, an artist, a dancer, a pianist, a householder, young and old living all together like schoolgirls in a dorm!

They gave up their lives in exchange for a life of absolute obedience, austerities, discomforts, a life where they were accountable to Baba for every word and action and often for their thoughts. And yet they did it with joy.

Most challenging, of course, were the inner adjustments. As Rano wrote, “Learning to do what Baba wanted instead of what we wanted was a painful process. We had to learn that every thought and every feeling should be centered on Baba.”

Kitty said of the change from Cannes, “Baba used the . . . episode to warn the five Westerners returning with Him to the ashram on Meherabad Hill how very strict He was on the Hill. We would find all freedom curtailed; no more going back and forth outside the four walls, there could be no moods, and we had to obey His orders one hundred percent—no arguing or suggesting. Cannes was the final preparation for the strictness and discipline we would experience at Meherabad. Previous trips to India also had been stepping stones towards this final move.”

Mani, who had no privacy at all, who was never alone herself (being almost always with Mehera), and who lived a life in constant association with other people, had a sympathetic understanding of what it was for the Westerners to give up their personal privacy. As she told pilgrims:

One of the biggest things for the Westerners who were there with Baba was the absolute lack of privacy. You know the Study Hall in Meherabad? [This is in the top story of the Meher Retreat building on the Hill.] The Westerners were in one of those big rooms all together. The beds were very close together with just a little passageway in between, about the distance of a window, to move in and out. So when the beds are side by side in a row, how can you get privacy? Not only do you not have a separate room, you don't even have a separate corner!

So what some of them would do is, they would take cotton saris that Elizabeth would bring from the bazaar and wrap them around the mosquito poles on their beds, so that the bed became like a tent. Like an igloo. When you're in there, at least you can imagine that you're private. It doesn't keep out the sound of people talking or singing or quarreling or laughing, it doesn't keep anybody from talking to you or asking questions, but at least it gives a semblance of privacy. You could feel, "Ah, I'm in my room."

And to see that, the way they did that, how that batch of Baba's lovers, the Westerners, adjusted themselves that way, was a beautiful thing. Really, if I had five hats, I would take all of them off to them.

In the ashram then, there was no five-star treatment like you all have at the Pilgrim Centre.* No special diets, no special meals, no dining room, no dining tables and chairs. Dining tables and chairs were both rickety wooden

* At the time Mani was speaking, one of the pilgrim accommodation facilities at Meherabad was the Meher Pilgrim Centre. The building is now used for other purposes.

benches: you sat on rickety benches and you ate on other rickety benches.

Baba is like the landlady showing her new lodger around the lodgings, pointing to the creaky bed, the rickety table, the cracked jug, the window here and door there. She says, “Well, now, I’m sure you’ll be very cozy in here. And if there’s anything else you need, just let me know and I’ll show you how to do without it.”

Baba’s very good at showing us how to do without things!



Meher Retreat’s very high stairs, shown here, which some women had to climb to get to their rooms.

Apart from the question of privacy, the women upstairs also endured great inconveniences. One in particular: the very high stairs that they had to climb up to reach their room, stairs out in the open and without a railing. Upstairs there were no bathrooms (as Mani would say, “attached or even unattached”), so the women had to come down the stairs for every need, for meals, for baths, for the toilet, for the pets, for every little thing. As Mani recalled:

Elizabeth’s dog Kippy was a pet of the whole ashram, especially of Baba and Mehera. And Kippy stayed up there with Elizabeth. So Elizabeth would have to come down those high steps very often with Kippy. We would hear her saying, “Now come along, Kippy, take a run. Come on . . .” as they came together down the stairs, which were not easy for Elizabeth to begin with, having an old back injury.

Or sometimes when everyone would be upstairs, Baba would arrive up the Hill and call for them. So I’d go out and call up, “Baba wants everybody,” and everybody would rush down the stairs. Now Baba might call them for only two minutes. So then they would have to go right back up.

We got up at early hours in those days. In the very early mornings they would have to come down the stairs with lanterns. And there was no railing to those stairs then, and often a strong wind. You know how strong the wind can be at Meherabad. Nonny, the delicate lady who was Rano’s mother, would have to hug the wall so that she wouldn’t be blown away, all the while carrying a lantern and wearing high heels!



Baba and Mehera both holding Kippy on Kippy’s birthday.

One of the ones who lived upstairs was Norina. Another favorite Mani story for pilgrims:

While each one was working for Baba, Baba was working on them. Take Norina, for example. Norina was given certain writing work for Baba, articles for a book for Him. She was a beautiful person and she could write beautifully. She would sit in her bed upstairs, within the little “tent” that she had made, writing away on her articles, and of course she wouldn’t want to be disturbed.

Now we, Mehera and I and the others, were downstairs in the East Room, and one day Baba comes in and says, “Where’s Norina?”

“She must be upstairs, Baba.”

“Go and see if she’s upstairs.”

So I go. I’m young, so I just skip up the stairs and look inside their room. Sure enough, I see that Norina’s on her bed. She’s all covered up by the tent, but I know she’s there. So I skip downstairs.

“Yes, Baba, she is there.”

“What’s she doing?”

“Baba, she seems to be working.”

“OK, go back and tell her such and such.” (I forget the message, some small thing.)

So back I go up the stairs, and call out, “Norina?”

“Yes?”

“Baba says, have you done such and such?”

“Yes,” she says, very nicely, very gently. “Yes, of course, of course I have done it.”

So I go back to Baba. Baba says, “What did she say?” and I tell Him, and then He asks, “Was she irritated? Was she angry?”

“No, I don’t think so, Baba!”

And Baba says, “Go back and give her the same message.”

So I go back up the steps. I’m not traipsing over the steps like I did the first time; it’s the third time by now.

“Norina?”

“Yes!” The voice goes a little higher.

“Baba says . . .”

“But I told you! Yes, of course I’ve done it! You tell Baba so!”

So I said all right, and went down. I could feel through the curtains, the way she was adjusting her papers, that she was getting irritated.

So I tell Baba, and He asks what she said, and I tell Him. Then He says, “Was she irritated?”

“Well, her voice was higher, Baba. And she seemed . . .”

“Go back and tell her again!”

Now I’m trudging up those steps. This is too much. And by now, I’m not very happy about saying, “Norina?” because I know she’s going to blow her top this time. But I go in.

“Norina?”

“What? What is it! I cannot even write and I’m doing it for Baba! Why do you come and keep on interrupting me? Why?”

What can I say? “Norina, Baba sent me.”

“I know, I know, but I’ve told you so often that I’ve done it, and you . . .”

And I just run back down to Baba.

“Did you tell her?”

“Yes, Baba.”

“Was she irritated?”

“Oh yes, Baba.”

“Go and call her!”

So Norina comes down, and it ends up, as always, with an embrace.

But you see what I’m trying to say. She was doing Baba’s work, writing as only she could do. But Baba’s work was Norina. And while she was doing that work for Baba, Baba was getting her goat, doing His work on her.

And the next time, the same situation turned out differently.

Oh, yes, Baba could get a rise out of you. Especially when, as often happened with Rano and Kitty, you’re determined that it won’t happen. It’s like when someone comes onstage and says, “Well, I’m going to make you all laugh today. Everybody! Be ready!” And you say to



Irene Billo with servant in kitchen. The women would gather here at five in the morning and sing the names of God.

yourself, “Well, *I’m* not going to laugh. Let him do his best or his worst, but I’m not laughing.” And you end up laughing. I know this from my own experience.

So in the same way with Baba, you watch all this and you think, “Awww, that’s not going to happen to me. It happened to Norina, it happened to Kitty, but it’s not going to happen to me!” But I know now, you lose every time. And the masterly way Baba would do it.

But all this is because you are Baba’s. When you are Baba’s, then He makes use of these reactions. He works on them the way He works on you. So that even the things you are not very happy about in yourself, Baba makes use of. He makes use of them, and before you know it, you lose them.

He had so many ways of “working on you” according to Mani. There was the short way and the long way. Irene and pills was a case in point:

When it was raining or chilly suddenly, Baba would give us a tablet of Anacin with His own hands, just as He would serve the food or very often the tea. The apparent reason was that Anacin, like aspirin, is good for a cold.

One day after Irene Billo, a Swiss girl, had come to stay with us, Baba came and said, “Everybody put out your hands” and started giving us Anacin. Now whatever Baba put in your hand, you just took it! But Irene, who was new, said, “But Baba, I never take pills.” We all stood stock still, a tableau. We knew what the poor girl was letting herself in for. But she didn’t.

Baba stopped one second and then smiled, “Oh, you

don't, do you? Good." Then He gave it to some others, and inwardly we gasped.

I tell you, poor Irene had to have so many pills during her six years with Baba for some illness or another. She realised and admitted it later, "I must have had sackfuls of pills, because I told Baba I don't take pills."

You see, having that one pill from Baba would have annihilated the need for the sackfull of pills. This was not a punishment. Baba helps us to avoid the long way. He says, "No, don't go from here, go from there," because He knows what is ahead. He didn't make Irene ill so that she had to take a lot of pills. He offered her one pill, and by taking it, she need not have had all those sackfuls of pills later on.

BABA'S WAYS

So here they were, the Easterners and the Westerners, all together in Meherabad. As Mani related in Mandali Hall:

You see, Baba's ways of working are many. He uses everything, every means. He would pair up two people of very different natures: one very sloppy and careless, and one ridiculously neat. Or one who liked quiet and privacy would be paired with one who was garrulous and always wanting to talk. Or He would have you do something against your nature, against your likes and dislikes, which is very difficult.

She gave some examples:

Now one of the things that Elizabeth found very difficult to do was get up early in the morning, and we got up before five. She and all were so willing and trying so wholly to give Baba unquestioning obedience, so she never

talked about it, she never complained. But she couldn't focus on anything when she got up so early; she didn't know what she was doing. So despite wanting to do whatever Baba had told her to do, she was just helpless; getting up early made her helpless.

That was the one thing that Baba used as her weakness, to make into her strength, as He did in other ways with us.

One of the first things she had to do was gather with us all in the kitchen at five in the morning. This is the kitchen on Meherabad Hill, where we cooked for the whole ashram. Baba had us gather there every morning and from five o'clock for twenty minutes sing the names of God: "Hari, Paramatma, Allah, Ahuramazda, God, Yezdan, Hu." So everyone would bring their little wooden stools and we would all sit around the kitchen. I would sit on the kitchen

PHOTO BELOW: Baba and the Easterners and Westerners in Upper Meherabad.



platform with the harmonium before me, with everyone seated around, and I would sing and they would all sing again after me, this same refrain again and again.

And I tell you, it was something to watch Elizabeth come in. Believe me, I felt she was walking in her sleep. She'd come in, eyes still closed, lantern in her hand, dressing gown wrapped around her, and sit. See the obedience! And she would sing along with us, and when it was finished, she'd get up and walk out in the same sleep-walking state as when she had come in.

It was also His way to have each one totally immersed in whatever duties or work He had given them. But, Mani adds, not so involved in it that He couldn't pull you out. So sometimes Baba would call them just for two minutes:

Here is someone in the kitchen. Pots of vegetables are on the fire, and there's a lot of activity going on. And over here



somebody is washing clothes, and her hands are full of soapsuds. Someone else has gone for a bath, and another, Norina for instance, is furiously writing an article that Baba has said should be done. In short, each one is doing her part.

Then suddenly Baba comes up from down the Hill, and we call out, "Baba's here. Everybody, Baba wants you!" and they come down the stairs, or from the back or from here or there or wherever. The soapsuds are dripping off their hands, and the pots just banged down onto the platform off the fireplace, and the poor, unfortunate person caught in the bath has to just put on her clothes without even wiping off with a towel.

So then we all sit in front of Baba, ahhhh, and relax. Here is a moment of stillness in Baba's presence. And Baba says, "You all have been called because tomorrow instead of five minutes to five, you all will get up at ten minutes to five." (Or something like that.)

"Yes, Baba."

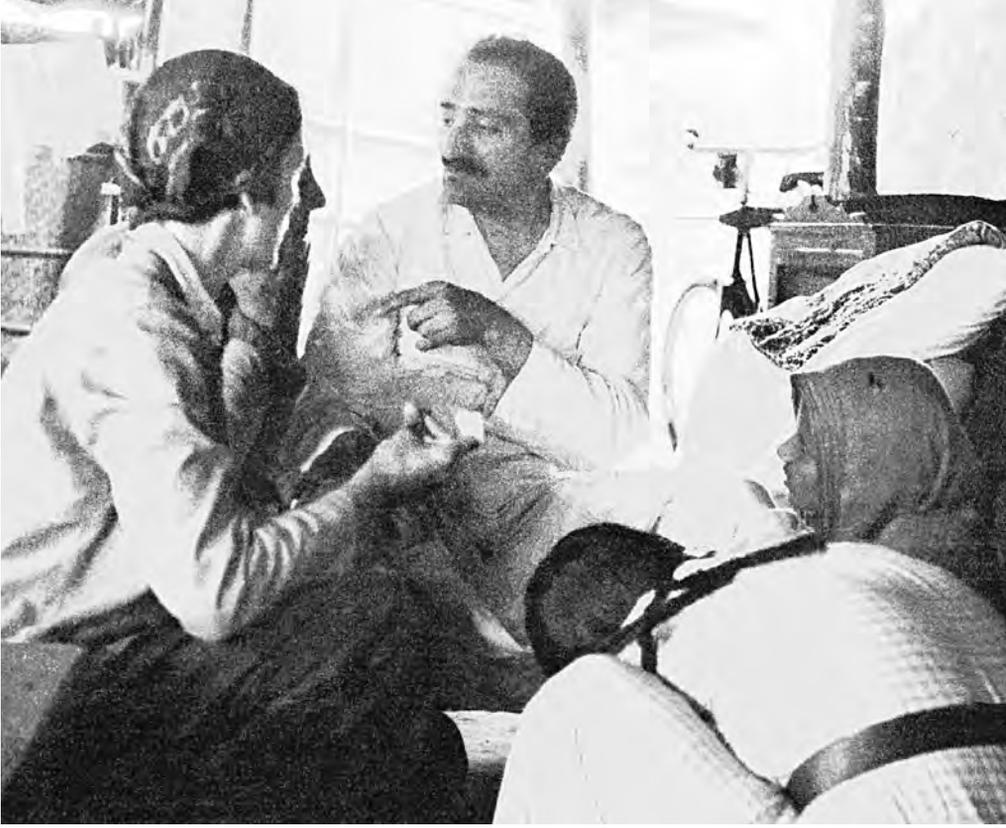
"Finished. You all can go."

Then to go and try to get back into what you've just brought to a halt, well, that's an amazing experience.

MEETING IN THE TIN SHED

When everyone settled into the new Meher Retreat building, Baba had a meeting in the Shed. Neatly typed in a lined notebook from 1938 are these notes from Mani, which show how completely He attended to each and every detail of their life:°

* Punctuation retained as Mani typed it.



Under the Tin Shed. Rano on left, then Mehera, Baba, Manu, and Meheru Jessawala, bending down.

On the 29th (Aug.) we had a meeting in the shed from
7:30 to 9:00 - 10:00 a.m., and Baba decided as follows —

Meherabad,
August, 1938.

BABA'S ORDERS

There are four departments here -

1. Kitchen.
 2. Servants.
 3. Hospital.
 4. Meher Baba Journal.
-
1. Kitchen Department - In charge of Gaimai. To order supplies and to look after food. Gaimai cooks for Eastern and Western Group. Manpur to help. Every day Kitty will tell Gaimai what to

cook for the Westerners. Tani and Bhami for the kitchen only. Sai is for Baba's kitchen.

2. Servants - Kitty in charge of 7 servants and the mehetrani [woman who cleans the toilet]. She is to see the servants come and go on time. All rooms to be swept and kept clean, and every servant to do the duty instructed by Baba. Rahi and one new one are to clean the bathrooms and do work in the garden. Chander, Laksi, Soni, Shanta, Sunder - these five to have the work divided; the washing and the household work, cleaning of grain, etc.
3. Hospital - There are to be ten patients. Nadin[e] as head matron. The arrival and departure of everyone must be registered. Each case to be reported in detail. Irene, Mansari and Meheru [Jessawala, Eruch's sister] to care for the patients, their food, bathing, clothing, etc. Mansari is to supervise cooking for the patients. One qualified experienced nurse to be on duty. Doctor will come everyday. Six separate servants for the hospital.
4. Meher Baba Journal. The M.B.J. is entrusted to Elizabeth, Norina, and Nonny.

Masi is the "Gate Keeper to Heaven." She is to awake Laksi at 5:00 a.m. Masi supervises Zora for the Eastern toilettes, and Kitty supervises Zora for the Western toilets. When food supplies arrive, Masi to notify Gaimai, and she calls Bhami to bring in the things. When heavy sacks of coal or grain etc. are brought, Masi is to ask Kitty for servants.

Very Important - Rano is to look after anyone who is ill among our Group. All medicines to be dispensed by her. If any Easterners fall ill, Gaimai is to look after their diet. For the Westerner's diet, Irene is in charge. Rano is also house carpenter.



Baba and the women out for a walk on Meherabad Hill.

GENERAL RULES

1. Concerning water - Here there is always a scarcity of rain. Every year the wells get low. There is only one well for the Mad Ashram, here, and the hospital. There must be no waste of water, so use water only as Baba orders.
2. Baths are to be taken every other day. Gaimai every day. Each person is allowed half pail of very hot water for bath - when washing hair, one and a half pails of very hot water. A schedule to be made and no change in schedule once settled.
3. No one is to go inside Baba's compound without Him or His permission - only Valu, (to care for Baba's zopdi [hut]). Helen goes to paint [in the Dome*], but not after 7 in the evening.
4. No one can go up to the tower without Baba.
5. No one is to go outside of the compound without Baba or His

* Initially, after a dome was added to the structure that would become Baba's future tomb, He referred to the building as the "Dome."

permission - compound means wall. Those working in the hospital and office [for the *Meher Baba Journal*] will be given permission.

6. All must have mosquito netting down when they sleep at night.
7. No one is to call a servant without asking Kitty.
8. Anyone taking medicine, tonic, milk, orange juice etc. at odd hours, must wash [her own cup, glass or spoon and replace where they belong].

On top of all their other restrictions, there were all these things that Mani wasn't allowed to eat: oil, peanuts, mustard seeds, eggplant, pickles, and so on. The ayurvedic doctors, brought in to consult about her skin condition, said all these were bad for her case. Because Mani couldn't eat these things, Katie remembered a later phase when Baba cancelled them for everyone else, too—still a vivid memory for Katie, one of the poor cooks who had to make the food for all of them without oil!

The strange treatments that Mani had to undergo for her skin



Note to Mani from Baba with a tonic.

condition went on. Goher remembered that whenever Baba went traveling, He would bring back a new remedy for Mani. “And sometimes very horrible things like huge capsules filled with some tar-like object that, poor thing, she used to swallow with a little milk in the morning.” At the same time Mani had terrible cramping on occasion, and one day was so weak that



Mani on Meherabad Hill, probably 1938-1939.

she fainted while playing the harmonium at their 5:00 a.m. singing session. And with Baba's order not to eat in the afternoon, to feel under the weather was no joke.

DAILY SCHEDULE

When asked about their daily schedule, Katie remembered that when the women were at Meherabad, the daily schedule was usually this:

5:00 a.m. - Kitty would ring the bell and everyone would have to get up. (At one period they had to get up earlier for the singing session in the kitchen.)

6:45 a.m. - Tea and chappatis under the Tin Shed. Baba would come over from His Cabin and Mehera and Mani would give Baba tea on His gaadi or in their room and sit with Him, as would Naja, Khorshed, and Soonamasi. The other women would sit on their small stools under the Shed a little away from Baba. But Baba would often take a round to see if everyone was eating, sometimes embracing them and asking, "Did you eat well? Have a good breakfast?"



Moti, in all his splendor.

After breakfast - The women did their household duties while Baba went down the Hill for His work with the mad and mast ashram. Mehera would cook for Baba in the small kitchen, accompanied by Mani and Khorshed. The others would be cooking for the ashram, taking care of the “zoo” full of pets that they had—Katie remembered Mehera and Mani lovingly feeding some of the animals, particularly the lamb and the deer—writing, rolling bandages for the maternity hospital on the Hill or working in it, or doing whatever chores they were given by Baba.

11:00 a.m. - Soonamasi would be on guard at the gate, and as soon as she saw Baba coming up the Hill, she would ring the bell and the women would run to the wall to watch Baba walk up.

11:30 a.m. - Lunch. Baba would sometimes eat in the East Room, but wherever He sat, Mehera, Mani, Khorshed, and Naja would sit with Him.

Occasionally at other times of the day Baba would come to Mehera’s room (the East Room) and call for “Everybody.” Mani would run and call them all (“Everybody, Baba wants everybody”), and all the women would rush to the East Room to be with Him.

After lunch - Everyone would attend to their personal chores. (Mehera, Mani, and some of the other women mandali had Baba’s order not to nap in the afternoon for a number of years.)

2:30 p.m. - The bell rang for tea.

After tea - Time for baths, washing clothes, etc.

6:00 p.m. - Supper.

Baba would come up the Hill in the early evenings for supper. Sometimes He would take a round to see the animals. Often He would

take the women out of the compound for long walks, He Himself opening the gate. Or He might take them to the Dome to see the progress of Helen Dahm's murals, or to the maternity hospital to see the new babies. Or He might join them in games like ping-pong. Rano and Kitty had brought over a ping-pong table by ship from Cannes and Mani learned to play. Baba was a terrific ping-pong player, and she became expert at returning His smashes.

Or they would play badminton, marbles, or even fly kites. There was a horseback-riding phase, when Baba encouraged Mehera to ride in a huge paddock at the back side of the Hill, and Irene and some of the others also rode.

Sometimes He would sit on the gaadi and chat with them. Or sometimes He would ask for music. He would take a big drum on His lap, and play it while Mani or Khorshed would play the harmonium and the other women would play Indian cymbals, or *chungs*, in rhythm with the song. They would sing devotional songs, such as Tukaram's bhajans, Baba giving the tempo and making them sing faster and faster as the song went along.

When the singing session was over, He would say, "Now, arti," and as He sat on the gaadi, all would stand around Him with folded hands and sing the arti. Then Baba would get up, go around and embrace each one, saying, "Sleep well, be happy."

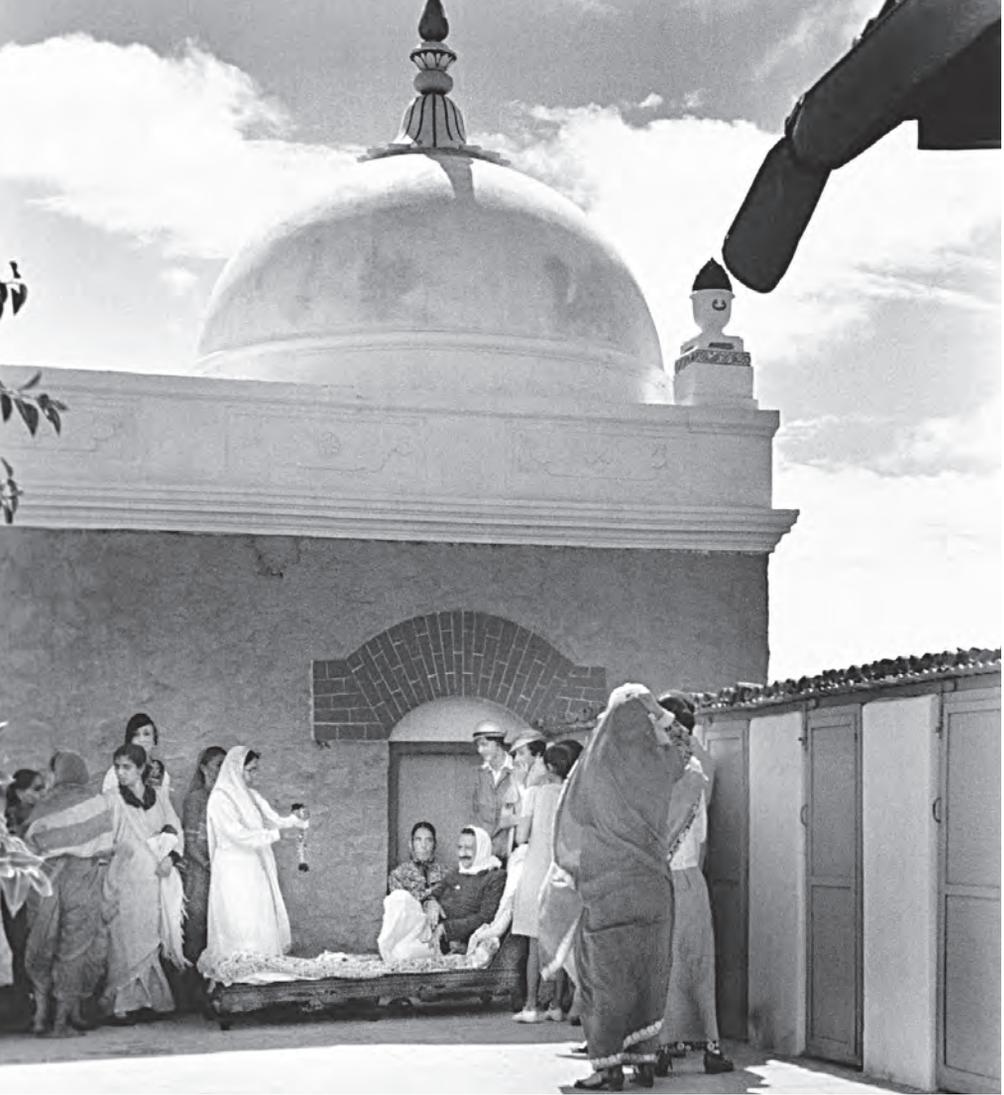
Then it would be time for bed for the women mandali. Baba would leave the compound and, later, rest at night in His Cabin with one of the men in attendance.

Mani, using her new typing skills, typed out notes detailing a few incidents with Baba at that time:

Meherabad. 2nd September, 1938.

Baba told us (in Gujarati) the story of Mohommad

Gaznavi King and his slave Ayaz. After that for an hour we

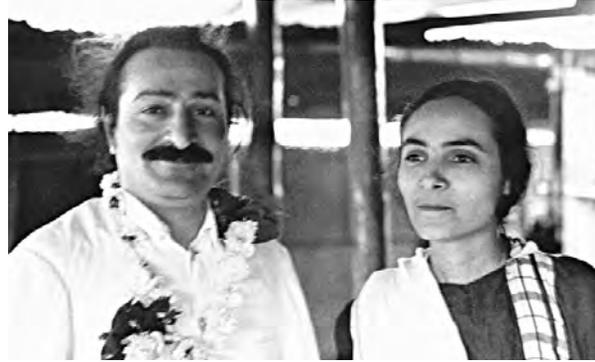


Baba on His gaadi by the Dome on August 28, 1938, to celebrate the opening of Meher Retreat.

were in the compound with Baba, and Baba and some of us were doing a little carpentry on the tatta that Valu had fixed today in front of the gate near Baba's room (we were sawing off the top of the three poles as they were too long - and my! what fun we had doing it, especially when the rope broke, and the pole fell on Zora, who was standing in what she thought was a safe place, and the next one fell nearly on Gaimai, and Meheru [Eruch's sister] tripped over the 'ghemaila' [iron pan]!) After supper Baba was out of the

gate (as the bell had rung) and we all were in the garden, waiting, talking, for half an hour. then Baba came and we went in the shed and sang the Arti at 8. Then Baba repeated the story of Raja Mohommad Gaznavi and Ayaz (in English) and said that if we wanted to be worthy of His love, we must become like Ayaz, and that now we were like 'piyaz' (onion) so that everytime He handled us, He wept. Baba left us at 8-50.

Extra News - In the morning we were in the garden with Baba watching the sunrise and the lovely colour in the sky and at the trees and plants in the garden, from 6-5 to 6-25. In the afternoon at teatime, Baba distributed Indian sweets to everybody. then at 4-30 Baba took us to the geese pen in the compound where Valu was constructing the geese bath, and we all helped by



Baba and Mehera under the Tin Shed.

bringing bricks over to Valu, from the back of the garage; (Mehera was in a sweet gay mood and thought of a very practical idea that instead of carrying the bricks in her hand which would have taken so long, she asked me to hurriedly find a box, and tied a rope to it and at the other end of the little rope she fixed a piece of bamboo which served as the handle and we dragged the cart filled with bricks. It was so easy and practical and amusing.)

9th September, 1938.

Work - In the morning she [Mehera] helped in the kitchen as usual.

Rest - In the afternoon she read and slept a little; and in the evening she was reading while lying on her bed, from 8-45 to 9-45.

Extra News - In the morning we went in the garden with Baba and watched the sunrise colours. When Baba came up in the afternoon, He brought two geese in a small tub, and after lunch at 12-30 Baba and we all went to the geese-pen, and left the geese inside.

We were with Baba from 2-30 to 3-55 (walking about, in the shed, room, etc.) At 5 we were all out, and the four geese that had been mailed from Nagpur arrived in a bullock cart. What a funny sight! as the cart came in the compound driven by two big bulls (Baba's) and Valu with a whip at the driver's seat, and the four geese craning their necks and honking their own welcome, among the shouts and laughter of all of us.

After supper Baba took us to the office and hospital (to show mother) and then took us near to His room and we watched the lovely sunset. Then we were all in the shed from 7-15. We applied Antiplogistine to Baba's foot (heel). At 7-55 we sang the Arti. Baba left us at 8-30. In the afternoon we played ping-pong with Baba for 15 minutes.

11th Khordad Sal - We dressed Baba in 'Zoroaster' dress. [See page 108.]

SHOE POLISH

As Mani described it to pilgrims, friction between people was always a part of life with Baba. When she joined the ashram, her intense focus

on Baba and His wishes, and His putting her together with Mehera, was hard on some of those who had come before her. Friction, jealousy, all the human weaknesses cropped up. Yet Mani always speaks of the underlying harmony among them at that time. I was amazed to hear Khorshed once say of those earlier days at Meherabad, "When there were only the six of us, we were so happy. No dispute, no complaining. Sometimes it was cold; we would drink tea without milk; and still we would feel happy. Those were very good times."

Now, as the ashram got bigger, the opportunity for rubbing up against one another increased, as Mani related in Mandali Hall:

We were so many women with Baba, each from a different way of life. Each very much a personality unto herself. Each very much a distinct, private person. There was Princess Norina and Countess Tolstoy and Elizabeth Patterson, Kitty, Rano, Margaret, all the Western group and then there were all of us Eastern women. All with different temperaments, different lifestyles, different likes and dislikes (strong likes and dislikes!). And to be together with all of that is not easy.

Living together, East and West, we were like various musical instruments in an orchestra. There was no uniformity, but there was unity. There was harmony in the sense that there was an underlying unity in Baba's love, because everything was for Baba. But we were, each one, very individually different; there were the cymbals, there were the flutes, there were the horns, the drums, the violins, the piano, and so on.

The aim is not that we should all be in the same pattern. Supposing everybody played the cello? Where



Collage by Mani depicting various personalities surrounding Baba on a picnic (including Kippy).

would the poor clarinet be? We have to be different. One is a cello, one is a violin, one is a piano. Each different, in harmony, in unity, but not in uniformity.

The unity comes when the Master Conductor conducts. When Baba conducted, He brought out the best in us and He brought out the worst in us. He conducted our lives very gently, and also very sternly, in turns, wearing away our egos in that masterly way that only He can do.

But as Mani would explain, although there was real love and harmony deep down among them, it was not the “loving” that one might think. As she said to pilgrims of the relationship among the women, “We loved, but we were not loving.”

That love, true love, and “loving” as we understand it are totally different things. This love did not mean that we

were “loving” each other. No, our concentration, our love, had to be only with Baba. Like spokes of an umbrella, the center, the goal, the object was Baba. Never each other. Never. What I mean is, we didn’t sit around together like women do here in India, somebody sitting with her head on another’s shoulder or combing another’s hair. No. We loved each other in the real way; we supported each other in our goal of pleasing Baba, obeying Baba, but there was not that kind of loving with us. It was only Baba, one hundred percent focus only for Baba.

And Mehera’s was all the more so, because everything else was weeded out from her flowerbed. There was just Baba, just Baba.

Mani would tell pilgrims of the sparks that flew between them all:

When you are all living together in a very restricted pattern, confined within rules, where you cannot be independent, where you cannot do things on your own, there is bound to be friction, moments of anger or whatever. Friction can only come when two objects are very close to each other. You rub against someone when you are close to them. Sparks cannot fly when two stones are apart. So the friction is a compliment, really; it is a good thing; it shows how close you are.

There would be quarrels; usually it was Westerners among themselves or Easterners among themselves. Actually, on the whole, the Westerners and Easterners didn’t have friction. It’s amazing. Between them and between us maybe. But it would just be a passing thing, of the surface. Inside, deep down, our purpose was one, our

heart was one. We were there only for Baba, and all we wanted was to be there with Him, nowhere else on earth, nowhere else in the universe, only there where we were, with Him.

Through these little things, Baba would work on each one of us. These were opportunities to control yourself, or to learn, or to give and take.

He also brought out parts of our natures that one wasn't really aware of. I still remember Margaret saying, "You know, I was a very mild person in the sense that I never got angry. Now why is this happening here?" Each one felt that.

They realized later, Mani said, that it was Baba's masterly technique of filling their minds with small problems because "the mind is a monster that always has to be fed. So if you don't want to feed it an elephant, fill it with mosquitoes." So they had these little, little problems, little mosquitoes, instead of big problems, the elephants, filling up the mind. "Supposing there was a squabble or an outburst, an explosion, it was over little things, which were big things for us then, mind you, because little things were given a semblance of big things!"

One of Mani's favorite examples of the trivial causes of their arguments was the story of Norina, Nadine, and the shoe polish:

Now see how Baba would play on feelings. We're not going to give you a picture that everything was hunky-dory. I'll give you an example of the time there was friction between the Princess and the Countess over . . . over what? A tin of shoe polish. Oh, don't underestimate shoe polish, not in the ashram life!

It was so strict and so limited at that time that we could ask for nothing on our own. It didn't matter if all you needed was a pen, it had to go through Baba. Nothing went from us to anybody else, everything was always through Baba. So even the bazaar list, what we would call the bazaar chit, would pass through Baba. If He passed it, then it would go through Soonamasi to Vishnu, the bazaar master.



Norina and Nadine with Baba.

And Baba had such a quick eye. Sometimes He'd bring up just the thing we thought would be covered up by all the rest of the items. Supposing we had shoe polish on the list. "Hmm," Baba would say. "Seven days later and another shoe polish? What do you do with it? You put shoe polish on your bread? Not jam? What's the matter with you!"

Of course we had to share things always, because of the way we lived. So Nadine and Norina had to share the shoe polish, a small tin covered with tinfoil. Nadine opens the tin and peels back the foil and takes a little bit of the shoe polish. It's her nature to take a little and also she's economizing for Baba. So she takes a very little and rubs it on her shoe, rubs and rubs and rubs, until it shines like a mirror. When she's finished, she carefully puts back the tinfoil, and closes the lid and that's that.

Now along comes Norina. It's amazing all of the things Norina did for Baba, really beautiful. But she had a different type of nature, as we all did, and she must have taken a big blob of shoe polish, put it on her shoes, then strode off to do something for Baba, and left the tinfoil open and the top of the shoe polish off, and the next time Nadine comes for the shoe polish, it's all dried up. And you can't write shoe polish on the bazaar chit again so soon.

So Nadine says to Norina, "You're always doing things like that!" and they had words about it. Afterwards they were determined not to let Baba know, determined that it would be private, just between them.

But Baba would always bring it out, so beautifully, so naturally, to remove and heal it, as surely as a craftsman with the finest instrument picks out a flaw.

In the mornings, when Baba came from Lower Meherabad and called everybody, each one would come with her little stool to the East Room and we would all sit before Baba. And this particular morning right before all of us, He brought it out, and there was this big deal about a tin of shoe polish.

And when it was done, Baba said, "Now forget it. It's finished. And now embrace." Norina and Nadine were both standing there, feeling they just couldn't. Of course the quarrel was all over, but it was very difficult to embrace. Now we're all watching, saying to ourselves, "Hmmm, I'm not going to get in this same situation, this is NOT going to happen to me." We're holding our breath. And Baba innocently looks around at us and says, "Look at them. I said embrace and they are both standing there."

At that, I still remember, Nadine lifted her hand. It was like it was made of lead, but she slowly raised it. The moment she did that, Norina flung out her arms and they both embraced. And when Baba does it, it is really finished, wiped out.

That is what Baba would do whenever He would bring something out between two people. Once it was brought out, aired, finished and dissolved, then Baba would say, "Forget it." "Forget it" means completely drop it from your mind, so that there is nothing left that you carry over.

Nadine said to me that evening while we were taking a walk in the compound, gazing at the stars, "If only it could have been a disagreement over something great, something spiritual or something for Baba. But shoe polish." And I said, "Nadine, nothing is too small for Baba." Even that little tin of shoe polish was a part of Baba's work.

Because, you see, surrender and obedience is not a package deal. It's a continual process; it's a constant flowing, a constant giving. It is something done day in and day out, moment to moment. And that Baba asked of the ones He chose to have close to Him.

And Baba kept us flexible. There was never room for complacency. He kept us always on our toes, never letting us get into a rut, or be proud of an achievement, or feel, "Look! I was able to do that!" No, He would keep changing like sparkling water, and keep us flexible.

THE MAHOUT

About all these difficulties, Mani once said in Mandali Hall:

There are some people who lived with Baba who had to leave. They left with all reverence and all love. Baba did not send them away. Well, He would, but only in order that they wouldn't feel they had left on their own. It was never because of Baba Himself; nobody would leave because of Him, but because of what came along with Him. You couldn't stay uninvolved in all that; you couldn't just be for Baba, in that sense.

You know, it's like the story of the elephant's mahout, the elephant keeper, who was invited by someone for lunch.

But the mahout answered, "I have my elephant; my elephant must come in with me!"

Well, the mahout can be happily accommodated in the hut, but not the elephant!

So Baba, yes, but then Baba has all this around Him, this "elephant" [of other people and circumstances] that comes with Him, which He Himself has created, which is not so easy to take; people would leave because of that.

WEAKNESSES

Through a fight, through exhaustion, through having hundreds of thousands of little problems, the women were brought face to face with their weaknesses:

It's extraordinary how Baba would use a weakness. Use it and turn it into a strength for us. So that it was not a useless thing. Weakness is useless if we use it. It's useless

for us. But when we give ourselves over to Baba, we're really most of all giving up our imperfections.

I mean, Baba Himself is perfection. He doesn't need perfection from us. He made us feel that it was not Perfect Masters that were wanted, but perfect slaves. We give importance to perfection, but Baba already has that. It's our weaknesses and imperfections that must be given to Him.

When you are His, all this works. Then your weaknesses are His, your so-called strengths are His, your good is His, your less-good is His—His to use.

And this was just one more of those things you couldn't boast about in the ashram. As the pilgrims learned from Mani, one more un-achievement that they could not explain:

When we Easterners and Westerners were all up on the Hill together, on certain occasions, Baba-lovers were allowed to visit. Sometimes when someone came, she would wonder what we did all day. What did we do? What did we gain? What did we have? You can't boast about what we didn't do and couldn't do. What can you say? Living with Baba, there was nothing like that to say. There was simply doing and feeling.

I still remember Katie's sister came one day and she gave Katie a bag full of balls of beautiful knitting wool, saying, "Here, Katie, you must have so much time. Will you knit me a cardigan?"

"Time?" said Katie, "Where have I got the time? I haven't time to hiccup!"

"Why Katie," said her sister, "whatever do you do all day? You're not married, you don't have children . . ."

So Katie started stuttering and stammering about all

the things she had to do. But really, what can you say? Baba uses all one's time and all one's energy, even when you're NOT doing anything. How often I've heard Kitty say, after coming away from being seated before Baba, "You know, I was only sitting doing nothing, but Baba used my energy."

Or Margaret. Margaret would say that when she would sit before Baba, her mind would be blank of anything else. And Baba would suddenly turn to her and gesture, "Hello, how's your health?" Or "Watch the time." I remember that once, "Watch the time," a simple gesture that Margaret surely knew. And Margaret looked absolutely blank.

And Baba, with a twinkle in His eye, turned to us and said, "Look at her. Dancer. So clever, fine. But such a simple gesture, 'Watch the time', and she goes . . . [and here Mani would imitate Baba's blank expression]."

Margaret laughed and said, "Baba, I just go blank when I'm sitting before You. My mind just goes blank."

"Good," Baba said. "That's good."

When somebody asked Margaret once what she did all day, she replied, "Oh, I do whatever my Master tells me. If He drops a stone and says, 'Pick it up,' I bend down and pick it up. If He says, 'Throw it down,' I throw it down. When He says, 'Pick it up,' I pick it up again . . ." And she went on with this same refrain until the other person walked off.

But she put it in a nutshell. That's what it was: we were ever ready, on our toes, to do what Baba wanted. So how can you then say what you did and didn't do?

GAMES

As Mani said, Baba would use everything for His work—even games. Both when they were only six women on the Hill and later in the expanded East-West ashram, for relaxation and diversion Baba would have the women play games with Him: ping-pong, badminton, cricket, seven tiles, gilli danda, and volleyball (especially in the later years). As Mani related:



Baba playing gilli danda.

But then, it would be when Baba wants the game. You tell a joke when Baba wants a joke, not when you feel like it, when you want it, when you're in the mood for it, when you have the time for it, no. You may be so busy right now, you want to finish this work which Baba Himself has given you to do, but no, suddenly Baba says, "Time for a game," so you drop it all and you play.

Now, you're not always in the mood for a game. In fact, you're not often in the mood for a game! But I've seen that when you have to do something that Baba wants, you grow within yourself. To begin with, you're either not feeling like it, or you're not well enough, or some such thing, but once you start doing it for Him, believe me, you begin to like it.

Baba wants you to play a game, all right. You put all of yourself into it, and really get involved. You start playing just to obey and please Him, but after a while, a game is really exactly what you wanted to be doing. By His grace, you really enjoy it, you're all in it.

Well, once we'd get into a game, boy, we were really wholehearted about it. And just when everyone is all

excited and absorbed and we're disputing over points or "our team did this and yours did that," and shouting, "You threw the ball to the right!"—"I did not!"—"I saw you!"—"No, I didn't; you ask so-and-so,"—"You cheated!"—"No, I didn't," and this cacophony of women's voices is rising to a crescendo, you hear a clap.

Baba's clap was beautifully different. His single clap would cut through any sound, anywhere, no matter how much commotion there was. We've seen that again and again. And it was like a curtain dropped. Absolute silence.

We would all stop and look at Baba, suddenly realizing that Baba was there and we were with Him. And Baba would say, "Finished! Game is over! Enough fuss. Throw it all down. Drop it."

So we would throw down not only the bat and ball, or the racquets or whatever we were playing with, but we'd drop the game from our minds. There was no continuation; the game was over. To stop and drop it was not easy, but that, too, you'd have to do.

And that is as it should be in our relationship with Baba. To do it for Him, and when it's no longer to be done, to drop it. We tend to carry things over, and that is why we are so burdened.

PUMICE STONE

One of the initial differences between the Easterners and the Westerners in the ashram revolved around material things. Mani and Katie used to have a good laugh remembering all the things the Westerners would throw away. For the Eastern women, who had lived in such simplicity

and material deprivation, it was amazing what treasures the Westerners would discard.

Or try to discard. Where did Katie get her swimming cap? From Elizabeth's old stocking. Where did she and Mani get their lovely sewing needles? From the ground underneath Norina's window. The princess, faced by necessity, had cheerfully learned to mend her own clothes, but when she was done, she would throw the perfectly good needles out the window. Imagine Mani and Katie's triumph when Norina finally ran out of needles and they generously offered her one from her own stock.

Margaret quickly caught on to these tricks. She felt that a person ought to have the right to throw something away if she wanted to. So when her pumice stone (used for scrubbing feet) was somewhat worn out, she knew better than to throw it into the trash basket. She went off a ways and hurled it as far as she could into a nearby field.

Later that morning, Baba suggested a walk. But rather than go their usual way, He set off in a different direction. As they walked along a dried-up creek bed, Mani, who had her eyes peeled for flowers and interesting stones, spotted this most interesting stone . . . hmmmm, not an ordinary stone . . . now wouldn't that make a good pumice stone for the feet . . . my heavens, it is a pumice stone!

Poor Margaret. Into the 1980s, Mani still had that pumice stone and would bring it out to show everyone when she would tell this story.

Her point, of course, was that when one has so little, everything becomes precious.

THE DOME

After the domed roof of Baba's future Tomb was completed in 1938, every now and then Baba would take Mehera and Mani and the other women to see the murals Helen Dahm was painting on the inside. Fifty-two years later, in 1990, when the murals were being restored under



The Dome, completed in 1938.

Mani's direction, she could still vividly recall those visits. Helen would be lying on a bamboo scaffolding up under the domed roof, painting, as Hedi Mertens would hand up long brushes of paint to her. Mani specially loved the impression of "eyes, eyes, eyes" in the faces of the figures, and the way Helen included the natural shapes of the rock

walls in her composition, so that a protrusion would become a shoulder or a hand or a cheek. She and Mehera specially loved the painting of Baba in the dome itself, and the softness and beauty in His expression and in His eyes.

VISITS FROM SHIREENMAI

Baba's mother would visit them now and then. Even though Poona was so close by, Mani had no connection with her family except through Baba. She wouldn't write, or even have extended chats with them when they came, unless He specifically permitted it. Despite this separation, Shireenmai and Mani loved each other very much, and Mani kept a photo of Shireenmai in her room.

Baba's mother was a force in the ashram. She would set foot where angels feared to tread. An example of Shireenmai's straightforward approach concerns a family of Baba-followers who He had allowed to live in the family quarters near Meherabad. This family, a husband and wife with grown-up children, used to sing for Baba, compose His



Adi, Mani, Baba, Shireenmai, Jal, and Beheram outside Baba's Cabin.

artis, and worship Him in their own way. And, Mani said, Baba for His own reasons would apparently pamper these people like anything.

As she told it in the Hall:

Baba's mandali, His lovers, all those who are drawn to Him are His work. So while He makes us do this or tells us to do that, during that time He works on us, molds us, shapes us. And the obstacles that come up are not by chance. I always think of the oyster: grit gets into the oyster shell, but it is the grit that forms the pearl.

Now Baba worked most of all on His resident mandali, those who stayed with Him day and night; all these obstacles would come up for them. The [outer] restrictions we took happily; we were doing it for Baba; we were there for Him, but what Baba does is work on the mind.

Now at the time of this story, those who were living with Baba had a very restricted diet. They didn't even have milk in their tea. Just plain rice and dal. And Baba was very strict about any extra thing that would be proposed: "How can one afford that? There is no money." So the

cooks would innovate, and create all kinds of economical ways of doing things. You couldn't even get a slice of onion with your rice and dal, and everything was cheap then. But no, Baba didn't want anything to be given other than dal and rice. No butter, no anything. And this was at a time when everyone was young and still growing, and that's when you need such things.

At that time the bazaar budget was in the hands of Gustadji. And Baba pampered this one particular family to such an extent that Gustadji was told to get them anything they asked for from the bazaar. They had *carte blanche*. And they asked for such outlandish things. Almonds and coconuts and tins of sugar and all the things that are luxuries even out in the world. There was money for those things, but no money for the poor mandali who had left everything to be with Him. Who were young and had no milk in their tea, no butter in their dal, couldn't have this and couldn't have that.

So Gustadji used to feel very frustrated. Baba would tell us, "Where is all this money coming from, how are all these people to be fed?" and then of course one starts thinking that if that is the case, where does the money come from for all those almonds and things that family was having?

Now what this family would do is, every now and then they would give a party for Baba. That's when we would see them. And for the party they would order so many coconuts—it's for the party of course—and so much sugar, and finely ground flour, and all sorts of things—almonds, my goodness, almonds! And currants and raisins and fruits.

Poor Gustadji, it blew his mind! And of course he couldn't say anything to Baba. Baba was the Master.

Absolute obedience.

But sometimes his frustration would boil over. And, knowing that the only one who would have the nerve to say anything to these people was Mother, Gustadji used to tell her what was happening.

Now Mother felt that her poor son was always being taken in by people. He was a bit gullible, she thought, and people would take Him in by pretending to be this and that. Others out in the world thought Meher Baba was taking in a lot of gullible people, but Mother thought her *Son* was being taken in by people. And she would get mad at this family. "This is nonsense. Here are these young ones who have given up everything to stay with Merog and they are being deprived of all these things. And here's that family . . ."

So off Mother would go to them. They would greet her very politely,

"Oh, Mother, do come in!" Mother would greet them nicely in turn, commenting, "Oh, Bachubai, I see you're very busy today."

"Mother, we're giving a party to Baba this afternoon and you must come, you must come, Mother! Everyone will be so happy that you're here!"

"Party?" Mother would say. "But why are you giving a party to Baba? And what are you going to make for the party?"

So Bachubai would list all the things they were going to make.

“Really?” said Mother, “Isn’t it strange, Bachubai, that it is Baba’s sugar and Baba’s almonds and Baba’s fruit and you are giving the party to Baba! Very interesting. What is this? Every now and then a party for Baba. But it’s not your things you’re giving the party with. You’re getting them from Baba and giving them to Baba. That’s very strange.”

The family would smile and say, “Oh Mother, of course you have every right to say whatever you wish. It’s so sweet, whatever you say is so sweet to our ears.”

But Gustadji would be so happy that Mother was giving it to these people.

But that was Baba’s working on the mandali, His testing of the mandali. Because the end result was what? Where is that family now? You all haven’t even heard of them. All they wanted from Baba was almonds and sugar and coconut. And they got it. They were there for a while, like a shining star, and then it was finished. Baba sent them away. They got what was in their share, in their lot, as Eruch says. Almonds and coconuts and sugar and raisins and such. Once they had that, they left. But the ones who were deprived of those things, who gave them up, didn’t want that from Him, they are the ones who stayed on, who got the real thing Baba was giving.

Poor Shireenmai didn’t get the treats she wanted either. Eruch’s sister Manu told a few of us that once when they were in Jabalpur on the Blue Bus tours, Shireenmai, who was visiting, asked Manu’s mother, Gaimai, for fish. Two pieces of nice fresh pomfret, Shireenmai’s favorite. Gaimai’s sister was coming from Bombay and could bring it.



Shireenmai with Mani on Meherabad Hill, February 1938.

Now in those days they didn't bring in anything without Baba's permission, and certainly not fish or meat, which they were not allowed to eat in the ashram. But Baba always wanted Gaimai to please and help Shireenmai, so, feeling cornered, Gaimai secretly ordered the fish. Her sister brought it, and Gaimai, who was a fabulous cook, cooked it and brought the nice, hot fish up to Shireenmai. Just as Gaimai put it down, drew the curtain, and went by the door, two cats, one black and one white, came flying in out of nowhere, jumped up

and snatched away the fish right under Shireenmai's eyes. Shireenmai went wild, trying to shoo them off, and at that moment, just when the cats had gotten clean away, Baba returned from the mast ashram and entered the room.

Full stop. Baba gestured, "What's that smell of fish?" And out came the whole story. Baba of course scolded all of them for bringing and cooking it without His permission. Then Shireenmai got upset, "What? Your permission? I have to ask your permission?" and there was a good tussle between them as Baba reminded her that she was staying in the ashram and so should have asked Him first.

Manu laughed, "Mother and I were standing at the doors. Where did those cats come from?"

Manu recalled another incident when Shireenmai asked her to make an eggplant and rice dish for her specially, Manu also being a very good cook. In those days, they were under Baba's order not to eat eggplant, but Manu managed to make it. But poor Shireenmai was again not destined to have any of that particular thing she wanted. Just



Shireenmai with Nadine Tolstoy, a countess!

as Manu was bringing the food up to Shireenmai, she met Baba on the stairs. Baba asked what she had cooked, and hearing what it was, snatched away the tray and ate it all Himself! Manu laughed, "He even wiped clean the *bhagula* [cooking vessel]."

Shireenmai actually cried when she and Baba had it out. She couldn't believe it. "You have never given me happiness since You were born"

“He didn’t give happiness to anyone,” Manu chuckled. And went on to say, “He doesn’t spare mother or father or anyone, because He’s God. Everything is the same to Him.”

Arnavaz recalled that although Shireenmai was fiery, in her own way she was also “very sweet, very gentle.”

And her wit was famous. Shortly after the Dome was built, Shireenmai visited Meherabad, and Gaimai asked her if she had seen Baba’s Dome yet.

In Gujarati and Dari, the word dome means one’s bottom. Shireenmai replied, “Thank you, but I saw quite enough of Merog’s dome when he was little!”

SKITS

Thirty, forty, fifty years later, the women mandali could still talk about the skits they did for Baba as if they had happened yesterday. The visual details, the humor, the creativity: you could see it all, listening to them—especially if they were in a group. “Remember the cards?” (the actors played the Kings, Queens, and Jacks of a card deck; the Kings had a duel). “How beautifully Mehera danced as a Christmas tree come alive . . .” “Then I played the butcher and Mani was the butcher’s wife . . .” “And then we did a cannibal scene for Baba in grass skirts . . .”

The audience, of course, was Baba, and often Mehera and others (if they weren’t participating). Although most of the ashramites were involved, the premier writer, director, producer, songwriter, and actress was Mani—a theater in herself.

Najoo Kotwal, who had the vivid perspective of a young girl at the time, recalled to me how the skits would happen:

Baba would often be exhausted when He would come back to Mehera’s room after doing His spiritual work. He would tell Mehera, “Today I worked very hard; I had a lot

of spiritual work.” And then He would tell Mani, “Mani, I’m very tired. Today I want to be entertained. I’ll come in the afternoon.” “Yes, Baba,” Mani would say. Despite all the other things she had to do, only “Yes, Baba,” would come out of her mouth. Mani’s love for Baba was so immense and so intense that she would use all her energies to compose something in that little time. And in two or three hours, she would have something ready.

Baba always wanted something funny; He didn’t like serious things because as it was He had just been doing serious work for the world, and then to add to that, if we started making long faces and putting on serious things, He wouldn’t like it. And Mani knew that. So she would make up funny things. In the ashram there were certain people who were experts in acting funny along with Mani.

I still remember a play they put on about Mirabai and the Rana, the King who was Mirabai’s husband. At that time Pilamai’s daughter Silla became Mira and my mother was the Rana. Now they had to sing a song to each other. My mother could sing on key, but she had a nasal twang to her voice and Mani knew that. So here was my mother singing in that nasal voice to Mira and Baba laughing away because of her funny voice. My mother was never embarrassed. If anything was for Baba, she did it, whether it was singing in her nasal twang or whatever.

Mehera would also assist Mani in composing things. I remember once they did Radha and Krishna. My little sister was a very pretty girl, like a little doll, and they made her into Radha. And Meheru’s sister Nagoo was Krishna because she was a little tan. So Mehera dressed them both

up. Oh, the costumes that Mehera would think up were perfect. And even though they were little kids, you could just think of them as Radha and Krishna, such perfection Mehera had in her imaginative way of dressing them up.

Of course, Baba was always working, and as Katie told us, “We were Baba’s miniature world. Whatever He made us do, He worked through us. It reflected in the world.” For instance, on their second visit to Jabalpur during the Blue Bus tours, Katie remembered Baba calling Mani. The war hadn’t started yet, but it was all in the papers. As Katie told pilgrims:

Baba told her, “I am going on a mast tour and when I come back I want you to make Me laugh. Do something which will lessen My burden.” He called Rano and me, and said to the three of us, “Mani, you become Hitler. Rano will become Chamberlain, and Katie will become Mussolini. So you three now make a skit.”

Now what to do? We did a pantomime; we didn’t speak. We all dressed up like the characters: I really looked like Mussolini. I was quite slim then, and I still don’t know how I became so fat with that Mussolini cap and tunic, stuffing myself with things. Rano was really Chamberlain, with the umbrella and that hat of his, and Mani looked a real Hitler, I tell you. It was so nice, all done without talking. Mani would gesture “Heil Hitler” and Mussolini kept coming and signing peace treaties and then Chamberlain walking in swinging that umbrella. It was very funny. Baba liked it, and He even brought the men mandali to see it, making them sit right at the back.

He had His own reasons for making us do that . . . Whatever He asked us to do, we did. No questions asked.

He said, “Do this” and we did it. No “Why Baba, what for?” We never even dreamt of asking Baba anything. We were there just to be with Him and love Him and serve Him. And just do what He said.

Mani would compose such funny songs to go along with the action. In Jabalpur she produced another story where I was the man-servant and she became an old Parsi lady who had called over the dastoorji to say some prayers in her house. Rano had to mumble fake Zoroastrian prayers and I had to sing this funny song and dance and wear a dhoti and be very silly. Mani would write all this, mind you.

Usually Rano, Mani, and myself were the main actors, and if Mani wanted more people she would take others. Baba and Mehera (if she wasn’t participating) as well as anyone who didn’t participate were the audience.

Oh, Mani was very brilliant! I was very shy by nature, but she made me do all that. And Mehera showed me how to do an Indian dance for Baba. I had never danced in my life. But Baba broke my shyness with my singing and dancing for Him. Otherwise I never could have done it.

Katie remembered that they laughed a lot in rehearsals, too. In these skits, “Mani would bring out all the funniest things in life.”

One of the unforgettables was the African skit, where they had a real fire and a grass hut onstage, with Katie as the cannibal chief, Mani as her daughter, others as members of the tribe, and all wearing grass skirts. As the chief roasted a pig—sculpted out of bread—over the fire, in stumbled Rano and Irene, two Britishers on safari. Bad luck! Of course they got tied up, as the chief’s mother-in-law, played by Kharmenmasi, stirred the cauldron they’d soon be boiled in.

What a creation it was: with soot from the bottom of the chappati pan mixed with oil for makeup, rods from their beds for spears, white radish pieces for ivory jewelry, a pineapple for the chief's headdress, and curtain rings for earrings.

Apparently Baba really enjoyed it. "I looked really ferocious!" recalled Katie with pride.

Not only were the play subjects diverse, but so were the styles. Comic skits, pantomimes, dances . . . A favorite memory was of the shadow play Mehera and Mani created, where all the action took place behind a white bedsheet lit from the back by a lantern. Nagoo and Meheru were Radha and Krishna, and the flickering light created the perfect setting for Mani's shadowy form to loom large and oh-so-evil as Krishna's wicked uncle Kans.

Of course, being a star had its price. Mani was much in demand when other people put on plays, and she would describe in hilarious detail the tremendous lengths to which she went to hide from Norina when she heard Norina was doing a pagent procession of Jesus carrying the Cross. Norina finally cornered her, but Mani got out of taking part because she had her own play to put on.

But the Jesus play was the one they all remembered. As she explained in the Hall, Soltoon, Baidul's wife, and their daughter Daula were to sit onstage and then get up and follow behind Jesus (Norina) as He passed by, gently tossing flowers where He had walked. It was meant to be very solemn and moving, as befitting the subject matter. However, in the excitement of the performance, Soltoon and Daula forgot their parts. At the last minute, long after Jesus had passed by, Daula suddenly called out, "Ma, Jesus has gone," and they sprang up and galloped after Him, spilling flowers right and left. "Galloping," gasped Norina in horror, "they were galloping."

“Norina,” Baba gestured at the end, giving her a brilliant smile, “it was beautiful! Just beautiful!”

Norina beamed. She had pleased Him.

“And,” said Baba, “you know what was My favorite part?”

“What, Baba?”

“Soltoon and Daula at the end.”

That was just like Him, said Mani. He loved the innocent mistakes in their plays the best. (They would laugh remembering how much Baba was amused when Naja’s fake moustache for one costume kept falling off. She kept picking it up and putting it back on, until she had tufts of cotton all over her face.)

When necessary, Mani could get creative in other people’s plays as well. Mansari did a rather serious story of Mother India (played by Mansari) having long dialogues with the Voice of God (played by Mani). When it came time for the performance, knowing that Baba wouldn’t want to listen to long speeches, Mani said the first line of every speech of God’s and then skipped to the last line, leaving out everything in the middle. As Mani had guessed, Mansari was concentrating on her part, and only noticed that the play went very quickly after all!

There were other smaller entertainments, too. As Katie described:

Picture that it’s evening time on Meherabad Hill. Baba has come to give His company to the women under the Tin Shed. He is sitting on the gaadi with His legs stretched out, Mehera and Mani to His right, Shireenmai or Gulmai, if either happened to be visiting, nearby and then everyone else on their stools gathered around Him. Perhaps some of the close ones from Bombay have been called for a few days, too.

Suddenly He turns to Mani and gestures, and Mani

scampers off. About ten minutes later she reappears in a South Indian *lungi*, with a shirt over it and a big belly, and when Baba gestures to start, begins to sing a ridiculous song (made up on the spur of the moment) in a South Indian accent.

“My name is Venkat Rao, the son of Subba Rao . . .” and with her mock Telegu language and the exaggerated costume and the funny song and the wobbly body, she is such a sight that Baba laughs and laughs.

Or she suddenly appears as an old Parsi lady in spectacles and typical Parsi ijar at home, chanting the prayers in the ancient Zoroastrian language (or what sounds like the ancient language), while simultaneously giving orders for the bazaar to an (invisible) servant out of the side of her mouth.

Najoo smiled as she said to me: “She was a master of everything: Baba put into her a bit of all the talents of the world. She was loving, she was giving, she was forgiving, she was humorous, she was very understanding, she was a composer, a poet and the greatest was: she was an actress. In acting, nobody could supercede her.”

As Arnavaz said, “In the world, she would have been a genius.”

This was a sentiment that Baba had expressed to the Western women before they had come to India: Delia wrote in her diary that Baba told them, “His own sister Mani was a genius, and often kept Him entertained with her dancing and sketches which she composed herself.”

All those plays she watched in her uncle Rustommama’s theater came back to inspire her. (Along with all those costumes from his old costume trunk.)

THE BLUE BUS



WAR AND THE BUILD-UP TO THE SURPRISE

In September of 1938, just as everyone began to get used to the new life on Meherabad Hill, Baba began hinting at a surprise ahead. At the same time, He started speaking of war, the storm-cloud gathering over the world.



In a collection of typed notes dating from September 16 to October 7, 1938, Mani captured Baba's tantalizing build-up to His announcement of this surprise, as well as His early talks with them about the coming war—events that would go on to change their lives. Here are a few excerpts:⁹

16th Sept. 1938

Extra News - Baba was in our room, from 3 to 4-35, explaining to us the meaning of a spiritual song [. . .] and then Baba asked us how the idea of a caravan trip around India appealed to us! (at first we thought it a huge joke, but later found that Baba meant it!)

We went outside from 4-30 (in the shed, playing pingpong, out in the compound, etc.) to 5-25. Out in the shed again (sitting) discussing our India tour, and Baba said we would start in March, in a bus that could hold twenty, with trailer, and to take tents and to camp at nights and travel daytime; to take office with us, leave hospital behind; to take a lady doctor along with us, and in case of shortage of funds, to put up a performance (we had such fun talking about this imaginary performance, as we knew Baba was joking).

19th September, 1938

All assembled in the room and Baba talked about the coming war, which would involve and affect the whole world, and that He would decide on the 26 (the day after the Mad-play ["Gopichand Raja," put on by the masts and mad at Lower Meherabad]) when the war is to break out, [. . .] and that Baba would change His routine when the war broke out; if after the birthday, as we are going round India the routine

⁹ In this chapter, punctuation and spelling in Mani's typed notes have been kept as per Mani's original.

will be automatically be [sic] changed; if before, He would change it. There would not be much shooting in this coming war, but mostly bombing; and then He would talk! (He said that only one person down the hill guessed that Baba had erected this Mad-play for the decision of the coming war). Baba also talked of physical and mental suffering (someone asked why there should be all this suffering) and of that eternal happiness which we had no idea of, and which was worth all the suffering in this world.

27th September, 1938

Baba explained how that when surrounded by the Group and questions and discussions took place, He at the same time worked Universally [. .]

“We will know there is war, when they ask us to evacuate from here. In case of war, what will be the best situation for camping?” Then followed a discussion on the different spots where we could go - islands in the Indian Ocean or Europe etc. The map was produced and places selected. Baba continued “How they all must be worried! Any-way for the present we go on with the magazine, the hospital and in February we go camping. And now - something else I had to say to you all. Tomorrow I am sending away half the mad people to economize for the hospital. There are now 36 in all plus one. So 18 remain - or rather 19. The drama of the play the other night was the climax. Gopichand goes, Master Jallaludin goes. Goofy was the first to come and will be the last to go. Everyone of the old 12 remain. The Director [Pleader] goes for another duty. It is all connected with the world condition. So wait for a very big surprise soon.”

30th September, 1938

“Spiritually everything but God is zero. So spiritually war and peace are nothing. But externally war is the most dreadful thing and unless it were absolutely necessary for the spiritual upheaval, I would never allow a war to be - never, but it is absolutely necessary for spiritual reasons.”

2nd October, 1938.

[. . .]“Discussion on the Trip”.

“Today I had one fine discussion with Indian experts on ‘Indian touring by car’. We can have one bus newly made - new body - new engine, with cushion seats for 18 and space for luggage above, for how much do you think? 6000 rupees. But this is too much. We must all contribute and prepare now. We must order now to be ready in February. So now what about the 6000 rupees? And the petrol?”

“The food expenses will be the same as here. I will keep the Mad Ashrem [Ashram] and hospital going; also the Magazine. I cannot pay for the petrol. But even so these activities are possible because Elizabeth pays monthly 150 dollars. Half of you do not pay, but her 150 makes all the other activities possible. [. . .]

“Now petrol. It will be at least 100 Rs. a month. Distance for each trip 200 miles. So i.e. 1,500 miles roughly. So we calculated 80 to 90 gallons per month; i.e. 100 rupees per month and oil 20 rupees. Regarding tyres - we will take 4 new ones with us; so monthly running cost - 120 rupees. We will stay in Dak-bungalows and whenever these do not exist we will camp out. You cannot expect in all places nice inns. You ought to know India by now.

“If we order the bus, then it remains ours. We keep it or sell it afterwards by auction. I know how much we can all contribute. If we are more than 18 we will take the Ford with us.

“Now I will give 2,000 rupees. Who else!”

After more discussion the following sums were promised

Elizabeth.....	1,000 Rs.
Mansari and Gaimai.....	1,000 Rs.
Nonnie.....	1,000 Rs.
Helen and Hedi.....	1,000 Rs.
Total.....	6,000 Rs.

“And now what about the cost of petrol and oil - 150 Rs. monthly?”

“Say 8 people pay 20 rupees per month. This makes 160 rupees monthly.

“The following will contribute this sum monthly. Baba - Elizabeth - Nonnie - Rano - Mansari - Hedi - Helen - Gaimai. So this is now O.K.” (Hedi thought she could possibly contribute more, and if so would be more than happy to do so).

Baba agreed to pay all surplus petrol expenses. “This trip will be a great propaganda for my teaching - to be able to teach many directly. All will be definitely decided on October 7th.”

[After a later discussion:] He then asked each of us to guess what His surprise on the 7th would be; we tried, but got no enlight[en]ment on the matter whatsoever; (M’s [Mehera’s] guess was that He might take us somewhere).

October 7 finally arrived, and in neat, double-spaced, carefully formatted type, Mani recorded the four-minute revelation of their great “surprise” from Baba:



The Blue Bus, fully packed, referred to by Baba as a “newly made omnibus” that Baba and the women would use for touring India.

“THE SURPRISE”

(7TH OCTOBER, 1938 - 5:35 to 5:39 p.m.)

“The surprise has four items. One surprise -
4 items and each item will take one minute.
The surprise is four minutes.

1st item - From October 15th to December 15th (2 months)
one day I stay up [Upper Meherabad] and one day
I stay down (i.e. the day I go down,
I return between 12:00 to 2:00 p.m.)

2nd item - December 15th we all leave Meherabad for another place - big city and stay for one month till Jan. 15 (and maybe if it is my work, this 1 month that we were out in a big city, we might put up in a palace - most ideal situation).

3rd item - From Jan. 1st we begin touring India. So we leave in the newly made omnibus on Dec. 15.

4th item - From Oct. 15 to Dec. 15 every evening at 7 I go to my room for work.”

(Here ends the talks leading to the great climax or Surprise).



In this way Baba told the women about the great adventure that would occupy the next three years of their lives: a trip by bus (a private omnibus painted blue), train, and boat over two-thirds of British India. It would be the phase of Baba's Advent known as "the Blue Bus tours."

Speaking generally, there were six tours, with interim periods almost always spent at Meherabad. On the first Blue Bus tour, which began on December 8, 1938, and ended on May 25, 1939, the women traveled with Baba south to Hyderabad, then east to Benares (now Varanasi), as far north as Delhi, Jaipur, Ajmer, and finally returning to Meherabad.

The second Blue Bus tour took the women to Bangalore, where they stayed for some months before returning to Meherabad via Goa. This trip lasted from August 2, 1939, until May 3, 1940.

On the third tour, a short one, the women traveled with Baba by

train to Calcutta. They were gone from July 3 until July 25, 1940, again returning to Meherabad.

The Blue Bus went back on the road for the fourth tour, the most extensive of all. It lasted from November 1, 1940, until July 18, 1941, and the women went with Baba to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), then up through India to the north and all the way over the high mountains to Quetta (now in Pakistan). From Quetta, after further traveling, they returned once more to Meherabad.

The last trip of the dear old Blue Bus was on the fifth tour. From September 3 to November 28, 1941, Baba and the women traveled to Panchgani and then on to Karwar on the southwest seaside, eventually ending up in Meherabad.

For the sixth and final “Blue Bus tour,” Baba took His travelers by train from Meherabad to Dehra Dun, and then back to Meherabad via Lonavla, a tour that began on February 2 and ended on December 22, 1942.

Kitty wrote of the Blue Bus tours: “These tours appeared to have a three-fold purpose: (1) mast work; (2) searching for prospective sites for Baba’s Universal Centers; and (3) visits to spots of beauty, places of historic interest and the shrines of saints and holy men. All the while Baba’s inner work and our training and discipline continued.”¹

Rano wrote much the same thing: “During the Blue Bus tours, the ceaseless river of Meher Baba’s energy had four main estuaries: mast work; internal work; establishment of a spiritual center in India; and running the ashram.” She concluded, “The real substance of those years traveling with Baba cannot be put into words, pictures or stories. Baba’s traveling ashram was unique because of his love and because of the obedience that love inspired.”²

BLUE BUS IMPRESSIONS

“So, Katie,” I asked Katie Irani one day, “the Blue Bus was built to hold about twenty people?”

“Sixteen or eighteen. Eighteen, I think.”

“And how many people ended up in there sometimes?”

“Thirty!”

“Thirty?”

“Oh, yes! You see, at school vacation time Baba would call all the children, like Meheru, Nagoo, Najoo, Hilla, Sarwar, and also others like Arnavaz, Nargis—oh, lots of people. All in the bus, my dear!”

Mehera remembered, “other close ones joined us, too, when they could. Baba would then arrange for extra cars to hold us all, but they often broke down. Then even more people than usual had to be squeezed into the bus.”³

“This bus was so packed with us women,” Mani told the pilgrims in Mandali Hall, “that we could have given a few tips to sardines!” Packed, too, with stools in the aisle, luggage and bedding and pails and baskets and sometimes even pets. Mehera recalled one trip when they had a parrot, a monkey, a dog, and even a fishbowl full of goldfish that Mani carried on her lap.

Mani wrote at the beginning of one of her Blue Bus diaries, “Dear God, Give us the ability to know a trifle when we see one, and to deal with it as such.”

Perhaps because she could do that and, of course, because Baba was with them, she related:

But we were a happy crowd; there was so much singing and laughter and arguments and pets and us and all in that Blue Bus . . . And when we would get down from the bus, we would be so dusty



Mani's diary.

that to look at us you'd think we'd gotten down from inside a flour mill. Katie would say, "Oh, Mani, look at you, what you look like!" And I'd say, "Hey, wait a minute, what do *you* look like?" because her eyelashes would be full of dust, no matter how many turbans she tied on her head to keep it away. Oh, we were a sight, but we were very happy.

Rano, too, painted a picture of the "sardine tin":

Traveling by bus with Baba meant frequent stops. In order for everyone to alight, all the stools and bedding [in the aisle] had to be removed. We stopped for a variety of reasons. Perhaps Baba wanted to show us an unusual banyan tree stretching itself to cover both sides of the road. Perhaps it was "lunch"—an onion and banana handed to each by Baba. Sometimes it was a beautiful view—a waterfall, a spectacular stretch of the Ghats. Minutes later Baba would signal and we would file back into the bus and re-establish our positions, and the journey resumed.

Of course, there were the countless tire punctures, engine problems and wrong directions. Sometimes the Buick [the car that accompanied the bus on some trips] would get well ahead of the bus and then double back to look for us. Sometimes we missed each other and then the bus would turn back in search of the car, reminding one of scenes from old movie comedies.

In the late 1930s and 1940s, the dak bungalows [which Mani would abbreviate in her diaries as "dak bung." or "d.b." or "d. bung."] at which we often stayed were sparsely furnished rest houses maintained by the British for travelers and officials. [Baba's group also occasionally stayed in hotels and, for longer stays, rented private bungalows.]

They [the dak bungalows] varied in size, commonly consisting of two or three small rooms with flagstone flooring, tiled roof and fieldstone walls. There was a verandah in front and separate kitchen and latrines in the rear. Dak bungalows were often located in secluded scenic areas and the rates were reasonable. When the bus was unloaded at the end of the day, all scattered—every woman for herself—to find sleeping space. One time three tried to share a bed, sleeping three across. I usually carried a thin mat, a sheet and a coat which, when doubled over, made a fine pillow. Often I and a few others slept on the verandah which, if one could stand the cold, afforded more space. Life on the road was a simple affair.⁴

Mehera recalled: “Sometimes when we stopped for the night, Baba would ask us, ‘Can you do without your bedding just for the night? We start early in the morning, and it will save the mandali tying it up then.’ ‘Yes, Baba,’ we would reply. And we would sleep on the floor on a dusty carpet, on chairs, on tables, on anything we could find.”⁵

As always, Mani stayed with Mehera, and on these trips, Mehera and Mani and the other early Eastern women still remained secluded. Keeping them so was one of Kitty’s problems: “Before we leave, one of my jobs is to get the girls safely into the bus without accidentally running into any of the men mandali [who would usually travel ahead to their stopping place by third-class railway]. Then I forget to pull the window curtains and one of the men passes by the window, and of course just at that moment, Baba enters the bus.”⁶

In the bus, Katie recalled, Baba would sit right behind the driver, who was usually Elizabeth, and Mehera would sit next to Him and then Mani. Kitty recalled some of Baba’s loving ways with them during traveling: how He would tease them about their past incarnations

(Norina was a priestess and Rano and Kitty were rival priestesses; Irene was the stable boy; Gulmai was Masi's husband; Elizabeth was Norina's wife who nagged her all day, etc.). And how when He ate snacks in the bus He would always pass little tidbits around—sometimes to all, sometimes just to those near Him.

So what did they do on these tours? Well, they moved around a lot (Mehera and Mani at first in the bus and later in a car with Baba driven by Elizabeth, while Eruch drove the bus).

The Brownie box camera used by Mani in the 1930s on the Hill



Baba on Taraḡarh Fort steps. Photo by Mani.

came into great play on the Blue Bus tours. There are a number of very small negatives of forts and landscape scenes with Baba standing on parapets or by unusual trees in Mani's snapshot collection from that time. Katie remembered Mani taking along that little camera just about everywhere, taking pictures of Baba, of the sights, and of the group as they traveled around.

At their halting place during the day, whoever had a journal usually wrote in it. Mani kept an extensive diary of the Blue Bus tours, and she must have written in it during these halts. Of course she also prepared skits for Baba, and would get the others to join in. Baba read to Himself in those days after He ate, remembered Katie, and when He finished a

book He would give it to Mani to read. Mehera was still not allowed to read, but others could.

Katie permanently joined Baba in Jabalpur during a Blue Bus tour. One of her favorite memories from that time was of Mani and her sleeping in two beds next to each other. It got very cold, and Baba gave them a big green quilt that they slept under “like parrots.”

MANI'S DIARY

Mani kept a diary for many years, including almost the entire Blue Bus period. The “Blue Bus Diary” is written in her convent-school handwriting in a lined, 3 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch rectangular notebook. Looking at this diary and all her many diaries that follow in later phases of her life, I’m struck by the cryptic entries and obscure references. It’s clear that Mani, who always focused on communicating clearly to the reader in her letters and writings, wrote the diaries as a record for herself, a way of recording their adventures that would help her remember them. They are obviously not written for an audience. Each notation is a brush stroke, just a couple of words, a tone, a color. All the rest of the painting is hidden within her memory.

I find the diaries fascinating; within the descriptions are throw-away lines about Baba that sketch out the whole scene: His mood, what tickled or angered Him, the reaction of all the rest of them to that. “Hot lecture from Baba,” she notes. You can just see it!

You can see, too, from her writing that she often wrote in a hurry. Her entries are full of abbreviations, dashes, dots, variations in spellings, etc. These have a charm of their own. I’ve excerpted from Mani’s Blue Bus diary (and also from the second diary she used towards the end of the Blue Bus tours) throughout this chapter to set the scene for her stories. All excerpts are reproduced as written, with just a few clarifying editorial comments in brackets and minimal corrections to punctuation.



A collection of diaries Mani wrote over the years. The diary for most of the Blue Bus period is in the middle row on the right.

THE FIRST BLUE BUS TOUR

The first Blue Bus tour lasted five months, from December 8, 1938, to May 25, 1939. It took them south to Hyderabad; then east to the Hindu pilgrimage destinations of Benares (now Varanasi) and Krishna's country; north to Delhi, Jaipur, Ajmer, and the world of maharajahs and Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti; and back to Meherabad via the Buddhist site of Sanchi, then to Jabalpur, Aurangabad—with its caves and mixture of Hindu, Muslim, and Buddhist influences—and, finally, Lonavla.

To give a picture of their day-to-day ups and downs, the following are Mani's accounts of the first days of this first tour, as recorded in her Blue Bus diary.

Our BLUE BUS Tours with Baba.

December 1938.

8th We started from Meherabad in our magnificent touring bus (with the uncanny pile of luggage on top) at 9 a.m., passing the long line of disciples and "masts" waving goodbye to their Baba. The roads were hopeless and in a shady spot near a well, we stopped for lunch 10-30. After 140 mls. [miles] we reached (& welcomed) Sholapur dak-bungalow at 6.30 p.m. The beddings didn't come down - we slept on floor, chairs, tables - anything we could find.

9th Left Sh. 7-20 a.m. At 10 a.m. passed gigantic old fort, temples & huge banyan trees & lunched under a stone arch by running water. In bus Baba kept saying He was hungry & asked G. for most amusing dishes: [translated from Gujerati: "Norina's nose, buffalo from Jafrabad, *kuchumber* from Mansari's braid, frog's tail *patia*, Gaimai's 'haji' soup"] - & many more. Then we came to riddles and Baba made up funny ones. Nearing Hyd. [Hyderabad] roads



Baba in one of the Pandu Lena caves near Nasik.

were nice and land not so barren. 180 mls. over, we entered Hyd. 7 p.m. Entered "Zenana-Khana" (Owing to plague & other complications arrangement of residence difficult) & waited in long vacant room till luggage & food was brought. Spent night there.

10th Baba said, "If don't get suitable bung. [bungalow] we furnish & stay here." My birthday [by the Parsi calendar] - darshan & *jelebis* [an Indian sweet]. Palatial residence arranged (10 mls. from Z.K.) for which we left at 10 p.m. Lily showed us around - big place - furnished, ex. [excellent] lights & water facilities - lovely terrace - secluded - mls. situation.

12th Sightseeing 3.10 p.m. through city with modern & ancient architecture, lakes, mosques, gardens, through village & rocky country, passed tombs of saints & lastly through Bag-e-am gardens.

13th Sightseeing 3.50 p.m. - climbed famous Golconda Fort. On way home stopped near tomb of a king & Baba & N. [most

likely Norina] went inside mosque. Happened to lose way home in spite of simp. [simple] directions - B. annoyed.

14th After tea Baba said, "I still decide to make 1st stop long



Women on a halt in Jabalpur, 1939.

- 30 days. For reasons, Hyd. not suitable - so we go Jubblepore. But none must yet know" (& in His ever-humorous way - said) "Lily or Rose must not know - must not know till we go" - we repeated in chorus. Sightseeing at 3-40 p.m. Saw Gandipet Dam with lovely garden, rabbits & big lake. 6-35 Got home.

15th Sightseeing 7-50 to 8-40 a.m. Walk - Bage-am gardens (cute tiger-cub). Evening Baba brought Mohommed [one of His masts] over to our bung [bungalow]. Md. said sweet amusing things & kisses "Dada" [Baba]. Baba said, "Md. was left at M'abad, but wouldn't eat sleep & cried all time for Dada - so I had to send for him."

16th Packing . . .

17th Left Hyd. at 8-20 a.m. - at 9.45 a.m. stopped near lake under big mango tree for lunch, to 11 (many monkeys there, jumping over the mile-stones). Roads v. bad, but we sped faster - passed many lakes, rice-fields & some camels. Reached

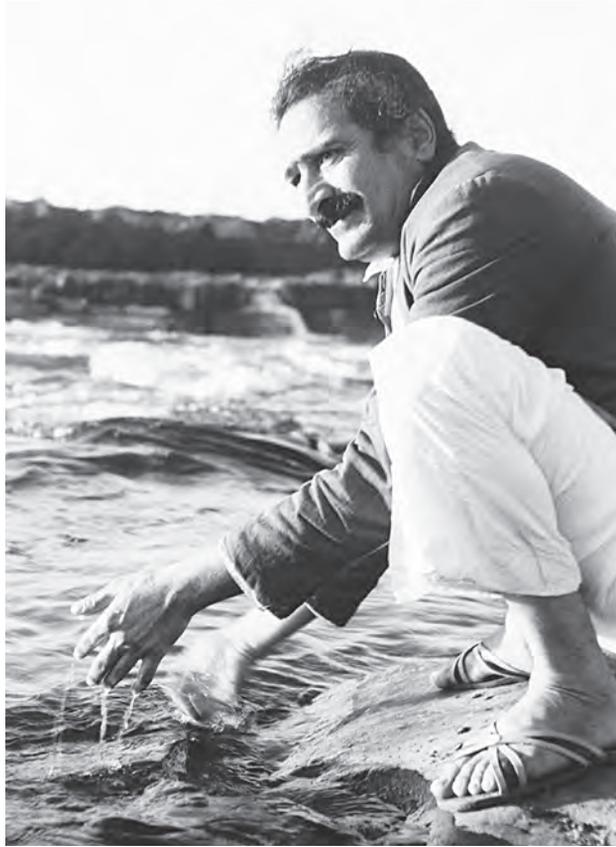
Nanded (small d.b.) at 4.50 p.m. after 160 mls. Slept on chairs (with bed-bugs), table & some in bus. It was cold & dogs barked all night through, for circus had come to town—.

On Christmas Baba and the women mandali were at the famous Marble Rocks near Jabalpur. The diary records: “After Arti & presents, we went boating at 9:00 a.m. over the waters between the Marble Rocks - v. beautiful. Baba put His hands in the water and Gai [Gaimai, Eruch’s mother] said, ‘How long the Narbudda [Narmada River] has awaited you.’”

Baba celebrated Mehera’s birthday on December 29 with arti, darshan, and ferry boating on the Narmada: “most lovely view - saw old fort - home 10:30 a.m. At tea Baba cut birthday cake & distributed. We (K. M. & self) gave ‘Santa Claus’ entertainment. Later we had sweets & crackers. (Baba pulled a cracker with each of us - fun).”

This was followed on December 31 by a “Hot lecture from Baba.”

Aside from pithy descriptions like the above, Mani could call up a scene in the diary with just a few choice words. She describes the Ganges: “Went boating on Ganges 7:00 a.m. various ghats & temples along the banks - saw real Hindu India where thousands came to make



Baba at the Narmada River, Christmas 1938.



Khorshed, Mehera, Baba, and Mani on the Narmada River, Mandla, December 1938.

ablutions in the sacred river. On way home walked through one of the crowded alleys & saw the Vishesver golden temple - met line of endless pilgrims walking with their bundles to Kashi [a very ancient site of Hindu pilgrimage].” And a few days later, Sarnath: “went to Sarnath. 7 mls from Benares (where Buddha first initiated his disciples) & saw ancient relics & monuments of Buddha, & walked over the ruins with Baba. After supper (soup cooked in leaking earthenware jar & served in pail) Baba told us about Benares - its priests & false saints (7000), his real ‘soldiers’ (7), the Ganges & sacred atmosphere (because all great Souls had been there).”

They saw tourist sights, too, such as the Taj Mahal at Agra (“the dream in marble”), and the Agra Fort (“Baba liked the Fort better than Taj. He said, ‘It is perfect in its variety, yet all in harmony.’”)

Later, in January, they went to Krishna’s haunts: Mathura, Gokul, and Brindaban. After describing these sites, Mani wrote (on January 28, 1939):

The atmosphere in Brindaban was adorable. One beautiful incident occurred in Brindaban. We met - as Baba later said, one of Baba's real lovers; who though to all seemed just mad, was a very advanced soul. The lustre of love in his eyes & his overwhelming joy at seeing Baba & his sweet quotations in verse - (while playing his flute) - were all so fascinating. He was very sweet and looked so much like "Dopey" [perhaps this refers to a mast nicknamed "Dopey" by Baba]. From Mathura we started at 3.45 p.m. & Baba said, "Now we go to the place where Krishna last took his food." In wonder & surprise we went on & when the dak-bungalow [where they were staying] appeared, all shrieked with laughter at Baba's clever little joke.

And then, on January 31, "At 8.10 p.m. went to see Taj Mahal by moonlight (seemed so unreal that I expected it to disappear any moment)."

In February in Ajmer, they went to the tomb of Khwaja Saheb Moinuddin Chisti, where Baba said, "Sufis call him God. He was God." Mani continued in the diary, "Baba had told us to place flowers on the tomb + bow, which we did - & circled round the silver carved railing of the tomb. The numerous 'fakirs', the beautiful tomb, the drums playing & the flower-sellers by the huge entrance, the perfume of incense & the huge cauldrons to cook food for the poor, impressed me most."

She added:

The Westerners weren't allowed in. An amusing incident - when the 'mujavar' [the tomb's caretaker] not knowing Baba, said to Him 'May God bless you' & asked name to which Baba wrote on floor with His finger 'Merwan.' When in car Baba



Baba with the women by Pushkar Lake, Ajmer.

pointed out to us a ‘mast’ & gave him a rupee which he took in a v. [very] indifferent manner. Shabby though he looked, the radiance on his face could not be hidden. The loving meeting over, we threaded our way through the overwhelming ‘fakirs’ shouting & clinging to the bus.

They had many more adventures on that tour, including a visit to Buddhist Sanchi, and returned to Meherabad on May 25, 1939, “All v. happy to be home sweet home again.”

ELIZABETH’S EARLY MORNING TORTURE

When they first started out on the tour, Elizabeth drove the bus and



Elizabeth in the Blue Bus.

Baba sat in the front of the passenger section with Mehera and Mani. Later, she drove Baba, Mehera, and Mani (and whoever else Baba chose, often Naja and Khorshed) in a Buick car while Eruch drove the other women in the bus.

Poor Elizabeth! It was very hard for her to get up in the morning. Just imagine her having to get up at three, four, or five a.m. to drive the bus or car carrying Baba Himself and His dear ones.

Mani told pilgrims in Mandali Hall a story of Baba and Elizabeth from that time, which she filled with the flavor of the Blue Bus days:

Poor Elizabeth—one of the things she just could not do was concentrate on anything if she got up early. She walked about like a zombie.

And on the Blue Bus tours, it particularly upset her because she had to drive the Blue Bus, so she had to concentrate. There was Baba, and she was entrusted to drive Him, His precious person, and all of us in the bus. It was a responsibility. And her brain just wouldn’t work at

that time. Of course, she never complained. Whatever Baba wanted, she said, “Yes, Baba dear. Yes, Baba dear.”

So I’m giving you an instance of what happened one morning, when during our Blue Bus tour we had stopped at one of the small places we would usually stop at, what we call “dak bungalows,” which are government rest houses. They just have rooms with sometimes a spring bed or very little furniture. You stop over at night or for a couple of nights, and then you move on. At that time Elizabeth was driving the car with Baba, Mehera, myself, and I think Nonny.

Rano was in charge of packing and unpacking the bus. Kitty was in charge of the kitchen, seeing to the food, the tea, and everything.

Supposing our stay was for a night or just two nights, then we didn’t want to unpack. So we would just make do with curtains from the windows [for bedding], or sleep on chairs or easy chairs. If it was for more than a day or two, then we’d open up our beddings.

We had to get up early in the morning, say about three o’clock, because it took time to pack and get ready, and then pack the bus, or the bus and the car. So at that unearthly hour—long, long before morning in any form seemed to be appearing—beddings were wrapped up and tied with rough string and people rushed in and out, each intent on doing their own thing, carrying boxes, packing, doing this and doing that. At the end of it, people would sit on their little bedding rolls, just before Rano would have the luggage taken out, and Kitty would make the tea and pass each one a cup of tea, specially certain people who needed it to wake up.

In between all this activity, which was a joyous, fun thing with everybody very lively, Baba would suddenly come through. It would be like a sun ray had come into the doorway; suddenly you'd feel all brightened up and you'd look up and find Baba just passing by, like quicksilver, with an alphabet board giving a word here or a question there.

On this particular morning I'm speaking of, Elizabeth was sitting on a bedding roll with a cup of tea in her hand which Kitty had just brought over and given to her. Poor Elizabeth. I looked at her, and it looked like she didn't know where she was or what she was doing, sitting there with that teacup in her hand. And in the sheer helplessness of her situation, with her inability to do what had to be done, drive Baba in the car when she couldn't wake up inside, she was weeping as she had the cup of tea. Tears were going down her cheeks and dropping into the cup, mixing with the tea.

Just then, Baba came through and saw Elizabeth.

He went up to her and gestured, "What is it?"

"It's all right, Baba dear. It's quite all right, Baba dear," she said.

"What is it?"

"I'm not crying . . ."

Baba didn't ask anymore. He just stood beside her, and embraced her so that her head was on His chest. After, He looked at her and spelled out to me on the board, so that I read it out, "You know, Elizabeth, don't worry. Those I love, I take everything from them."

And then, as He would, He suddenly made a very serious thing into a light thing. "And I give them in return



Mani snapping a photo with her Brownie box camera during the Blue Bus tours.

blood pressure, headaches, heartaches . . .” and went on with this long list of horrible things! And Elizabeth laughed and He silently laughed, and I laughed . . .

Hearing Mani tell this, Eruch, who was also in the Hall, would then describe to pilgrims what happened next over on the men’s side. That same morning, he remembered, Baba called him and told him that when they reached the next city, Eruch was to go to one of the shops and purchase a thermos flask. Eruch didn’t know why, but of course he said yes, and then Baba said, “Remember that every morning when we start for our journey, see that the flask is in Elizabeth’s car, by her side, filled with tea or coffee, whatever is given by Kitty. It is your duty to see that it’s kept there.”

So when they reached the city, Eruch went out and bought a thermos and contacted Kitty, and gave her the flask and Baba’s instructions. In the meantime, Elizabeth came out, and Baba told her, “Remember, it’s My order now, Elizabeth. Remember from tomorrow, Eruch will put the flask full of tea or coffee, whatever it be, by your side. And it’s My order that whenever you feel like having a sip or a cup of tea, you are free to stop the car on the way. Just stop the car, have a sip, cup of tea or whatever you want, and then you again start on the journey. It’s My order. Remember that.”

So the next day, it was all done and Elizabeth was given the flask to keep in the car, and she started driving the car with Eruch driving the bus behind her. And after an hour or so, she stopped the car, and opened the door to have a sip from the thermos. And the thermos fell out and broke. She didn't even get a sip.

At the next halt, Baba told Eruch to buy another flask, which he did. But a similar thing happened. Eruch recalls he must have bought three flasks. But she never had a sip of tea or coffee from them. They all broke.

Eruch added that Baba had that concern for her, but it was in her fate that she should continue to have that one cup of tea from Kitty in the resting place and then go without. To which Mani piped in, that it was Baba's way of working, too. He didn't say, "No, no, no, you shouldn't have tea and coffee. Just keep awake." He said, "No, no, no, you must have tea or coffee." And then the flasks shattered. So in the end it was Elizabeth herself who said, "No, Baba dear. I don't think it's necessary to have the flask. I feel quite awake and I'll manage."

"Oh, is that so, really? Oh well, that's good then. That's perfect."

After Elizabeth was sent back from India for Baba's work in the United States, Baba stopped asking them to get up so early. Mani laughed, "Once Elizabeth was not with us, there was no more getting up at these extremely early hours of the morning. So it was just for her. Oh yes, we used to laugh about it."

ELLORA

In May 1939, just before the end of the first Blue Bus tour, Baba and the women stopped in Aurangabad on their way back to Meherabad. In her diary, Mani noted that they visited the Ellora Caves:

18th [May 1939] Started for Ellora Caves 7 a.m. Saw 16 caves till 10.15 a.m. & went home to return at 2.45 to see



Baba in the Ellora Caves, May 1939.

more caves, & saw such exquisite carvings of Buddha & the ancient Indian Gods & goddesses, etc. Baba said, “I am Buddha.”

Mani would always preface the following story by telling pilgrims that Baba never encouraged people to seek “experiences,” or knowledge of their past lives, or anything of a phenomenal or occult nature. Baba would say, “These are toys. How long will you go on playing with toys? They’re all right for children. But how long?”

Mani would then continue:

But there is one time when something happened to me which can be called an experience. When it happened, it went right by me. I didn’t even know it and I didn’t think about it. Because for us, there is no greater experience than being with Baba, just having His love and just being in the present with Him, even now. So I didn’t recognise this as an

experience; it just went by. I didn't say, "Hello experience! How are you? I haven't had you ever, you know. Good to meet you." No.

But I recalled it when one of our young people, one of the first lot that came here after Baba dropped His body, asked me, "What did Baba say about Lord Buddha?" Baba's Advent as Lord Buddha is so heartening, so warmly appealing, especially in this age of violence and hatred and greed. But I used to be quite nervous about questions like that, so I said, "Don't ask me. Ask Eruch or Adi." I used to push people with questions like that onto them.

Then suddenly, something came back to me, a memory from the past that came at great speed and stood before me, so to speak. And I said, "Wait a minute! I've heard Baba say only one thing about Lord Buddha, and I can tell you about it."



Buddha in Ellora Caves.

Because I remembered it clearly. Years ago during the Blue Bus tour, we went to the Ellora Caves with Baba. We were in what is known as the Buddha cave [Cave #10, the Carpenter's Cave]. We were a lot of women all walking around Baba, and because we were so many, when we were sightseeing we didn't see much! You turn this way, you see others of your sisters, turn that way, and there are more of them. So you just see people everywhere you turn.

In that cave is a beautifully carved statue of the Buddha. Baba and we all walked around the statue and then Baba stopped. So we all stopped and stood facing the statue. Then Baba flipped out the alphabet board that He always

carried under His arm, and spelled out something on the board and I read out from the board for Him.

All Baba said when He stopped in the middle of the cave was, "I am Buddha." And when I read that aloud, "I am Buddha," suddenly I felt there was no one in the cave. It was empty. There was just that voice, welling up, echoing and reverberating in waves throughout the cave: "I am Buddha," "I am Buddha," "I am Buddha . . ." It was so beautiful, so timeless. For a split second there was nothing but the words, "I am Buddha."

Then it was gone. And again there were people, and Baba was saying something, and we were moving, hurrying along. It took many years for me to recall that.

Margaret recalled another touching incident in Ellora with Baba:

One day Baba took us to the famous Ellora Caves [. . .]
An old thin man acted as our guide through one of the caves where there were statues and reliefs of the Hindu incarnations and gods.

This man loved his gods so much that at moments there were tears in his eyes as he explained them to us.

After he had taken us round the cave, Baba signed to Mani to tell him that He, Baba, was one of the incarnations. Mani did so and the man took one look at Baba, accepted Him as such, fell on his knees and sobbed as if all his dreams of the great gods were being fulfilled, which of course they were [. . .] So much sudden love did Baba sometimes release when someone was ready for this experience.⁷

BABA'S AGENT

Another Blue Bus incident that Mani wove into an illustrative story in the Hall was about the agent in charge of Jaipur. She had briefly recorded the episode in her diary:

8th [February 1939] [. . .] 9.30 a.m. came to Jaipur, - finest city in India & stopped before a dream of a palace & fort on a hill with soldiers in red & blue marching up to band-music. Walking at a distance on the hill was a naked man, at whom Baba pointed & said, "He is my agent - in charge of Jaipur."

When Mani expanded on that day, she told pilgrims:

Now, on the Blue Bus, as I've said, everyone was crammed in like sardines. And it was very difficult to fit yourself inside. Rano had to pack luggage even in the aisle, so by the time you sat down in there, you were really ensconced. Set like Jello!



The Blue Bus halts for a brief stop.

But at a given point on the road, Baba would give the signal to stop the car. The car, driven by Elizabeth with Baba and us inside, was ahead of the bus, so when the car would stop, the bus would stop, too. And then everybody was supposed to get out. Well, you could tumble out, that part was easy. Then Baba would show everyone something, perhaps some beautiful scenery, and gesture, "Look, isn't this beautiful scenery?" And we'd say, "Yeah." And then Baba would say, "All right, get back on the bus! And hurry up! I don't want you lagging behind!" And then to climb in and squeeze back into your place all over again, well, that was something.

One day, we were near Jaipur and Baba stopped the car, and so the bus also stopped. We came out of the car with Baba and saw the bus disgorging all those women, a river of them. They came stumbling out, bumping out onto the parapet on the road. And Baba stood there facing out across this gentle valley and a little hill. Beautiful scenery, beautiful. Baba stood there looking out, and so everyone else came, too, and Baba said, "Look, look, look at this!" and we all gathered around and looked at it.

On the top of the hill was a palace, a beautiful little palace. And down the hill was a retinue, a band, going up to the palace to receive the maharajah. It was a real, top-class English band, dressed in red and blue and gold with epaulettes and all, going up with such pomp. It was a glorious scene. Baba said, "See? Isn't that good?" And we said, "Yes!" and all our eyes were on the band and on the palace.

Elizabeth was next to Baba, I remember, and He pulled out the alphabet board and said, "You all think he is in charge, don't you," pointing to the palace and meaning the maharajah. And we all said yes. And Baba said, "No, *he* is in charge," pointing to the side of the hill. Well, there was no he; who's he?—the side of the hill?

And then, because Baba had pointed and because we were looking for it, we saw a figure coming down. The color of his skin merged with the earth. A slim, graceful figure with curly short hair, and just a little covering on his hips. And he was coming down the hill gently, silently, wasn't even looking, a part of the earth. And Baba said, "*He* is in charge!"

So you see, it's like that. The flashy, colourful kerchiefs

distract or attract us. Whereas the real work is silent, like that silent figure coming down the hill.

In the Hall Eruch added that later on that man was brought to Baba, there in Jaipur.

Mani also recalled for pilgrims a time when Baba took them to the ghats at Benares where a congregation of sadhus had gathered, along with a mass of humanity. Elizabeth was next to Him, and Baba spelled out on the board, “Do you know, there are 8,000 sadhus here today?” And then He said, “And of them, only eight are real.”

Then Mani went on:

And they all looked the same. How can you tell who is real? I was pained to hear the other day that everybody thought a necklace I wear sometimes was real gold. Whereas it was worth something like three rupees. But how could you tell?

Only the jeweler can tell. Only the one who knows. That’s why He warns us to stay away from such people. Because you can’t tell who is real, only the Master Jeweler can. Probably to some eyes, the eight real ones of that congregation looked false. Perhaps they were wearing tennis shoes instead of bare feet. Or something like that. You can’t tell. Only Baba can.

THE SECOND TOUR – MEHERABAD TO BANGALORE

On the second Blue Bus tour, August 2, 1939, to May 3, 1940, Baba moved the whole ashram to Bangalore, where they stayed for eight months.

They traveled from Meherabad by bus and car and after a long journey arrived in the city, hungry and tired. They first stayed at a Parsi hotel (with the Westerners at an English one a few blocks away).

Mani later explained to pilgrims that Baba would often keep His name “in seclusion” when they were traveling. When they stopped at a hotel

or a dak bungalow for the night, He would not want them to tell anyone that He was Meher Baba, or even call out “Baba,” in case someone would connect the name with Meher Baba. In her diary of this tour she mentions, “We were to call Baba ‘Babuli.’”

And in this Parsi hotel, they had a scare. As Mani recounted in Mandali Hall:



Mani and Ramo in Agra, 1939.

At one hotel we stayed in on our trip to Bangalore, we had a private place where we would eat with Baba. As even there waiters or a stranger might come in and out, we weren't supposed to say “Baba” while in that room. Norina would call Baba “Babuli,” and Nadine would say “Babuska,” and the rest of us just didn't say anything until we were back in our own room again.

Now you should know that the word “Baba” is very universal, and in India it has several different meanings. “Baba” means brother, “Baba” means father, “Baba” means friend, and “Baba” also means a young boy. (Even beggars will call you “Baba,” meaning “friend” or “father,” when they are begging from you!) So although the name “Meher Baba” was taken by Baba many years after His birth, actually when He was a child His mother would call Him “Baba,” in the same way other mothers would call their little boys “Baba.” For instance, she would tell the ayah, the maidservant, “Take Merwan Baba to the gardens.” It was a very common way of referring to a young boy.

Along with us on our Blue Bus trip to Bangalore was Baidul,

the great mast hunter, with his wife and his two daughters. His younger daughter had had typhoid just before she came on this trip, so her hair was cropped very close to her head like a crew cut and she could be easily mistaken for a young boy. She could be a little “Baba,” you see.

On that ride down to Bangalore, I remember we were so crowded that our legs cramped up, and the only way you could relieve the cramps was to stand on the bench or perch on the back seat. Not a comfortable trip.

After our long journey, we were so hot and tired and cramped and dusty that “nirvana” meant a good bath and a hot meal. That was heaven in a different shape. Now with Baba there would be fasts, but there would be feasts also, and after this hard trip we were able to have baths and a feast. First the baths. Everybody was given five minutes to take a bath. After five minutes, out! (Of course after *three* minutes the others would start banging on the door to hurry you up.) Anyway, after the baths came the feast.

The landlady at our lodging was such a motherly Parsi lady that I couldn’t call her place a hotel. She looked upon all of us as her children, and she was so happy to be able to cook a big hot meal for us. At last we were seated around the huge, beautiful dining table, having a happy time and a great lunch. She had cooked us a Parsi meal with beautiful flaky rice and our favourite dhansak, which is a spicy dal. And it was hot, hot, piping hot!

So there we were in our private dining room, when in comes our motherly landlady with a big platter of patties in her hands. Now in India, you call even one patty a “pattis.” So we’re sitting there gobbling down the food as fast as we can,

Norina, Elizabeth, Kitty, and all the Westerners using spoons and forks and the rest of us eating with our hands as we do in India, eating away in complete stillness because we're all too busy eating to talk.

Into that quiet, comes our landlady's voice, "Will you have another pattis, Baba?"

Everyone just stopped dead still. I tell you, it was an absolute tableau, we were so shocked. How did she find out Baba's name? Who gave Him away? Elizabeth's fork was mid-air, somebody's glass of water was held to her lips, no movement from anyone, no sound. Then suddenly we realized that the landlady was looking at Baidul's little daughter, who she thought was a boy. Naturally, she would call him Baba. "Will you have another pattis, Baba?" What a sigh of relief went up from us all!

BANGALORE

After a few days at this hotel, on August 14, they shifted to "The Links." According to the diary, it was "a spacious bungalow with garden & playground, lights etc. (275 rent)." Mehera described "The Links" as a very large and lovely house on the edge of the Bangalore Golf Course. There Baba had a large mast ashram plus a large household (a number of additional women joined the ashram in Bangalore) and the whole Meherabad zoo of animals. It was also the venue for many of Mani's most memorable skits as well as "concerts" put on by the women for Baba.

During their eight-month stay at "The Links," another element entered their life. By October the long-dreaded war began in earnest, and the radio was turned on several times a day for Baba to hear the latest war news. Mani wrote in her diary:

3rd [Sept. 1939] Nadine's birthday. England & France declare War.

8th [Oct.] Baba said, "By 21st I will decide definitely whether long War. If yes, greatest war in history: if not, revolutions etc."

12th [Oct.] About War Baba said, "Many more surprises coming - tragic & comic - strangest war."

On October 14, Rano's mother, Nonny, passed away in Baba's presence, and on the 15th, Mani wrote, "Darling Nonny was taken home to Meherabad (to be placed by her Beloved's Dome in her beloved land of the glorious sunsets.)"



Nonny and Baba, with pets Canute and Kippy.

This long stay in Bangalore was a memorable time for many reasons: Baba's talks about the war, the beautiful Links bungalow and grounds, the large mast ashram, the ashram zoo, the ground-breaking for a Universal Spiritual Centre Baba decided to establish at Byramangala, the many skits and dances and concerts the women presented for Baba, the charades they played with Him, and the visit to Mysore for the great Dassera procession. It was also memorable in another way for Mani because here Shireenmai, who was visiting, asked for and received permission from Baba to take Mani out for lunch, when she gave her daughter a coat—also with Baba's permission. And it was in Bangalore that the women first heard the song "Begin the Beguine," which Margaret recalled Baba had them all learn. It had just come out and was very popular; it later became Baba's favorite English song.

AT THE ZOO

They visited the Mysore zoo, as Mani noted in her diary (“20th [Oct.] 8:00 a.m. went to the zoo”). Years later in the Hall she reflected on this visit and the significance of the women mandali’s many trips with Baba to zoos:

The first time we ever saw a giraffe was in the Mysore zoo, where we went with Baba. Just as we were entering the zoo, we saw these loooooonnnng necks with little heads at the top, so beautiful and picturesque that we thought they were statues! Baba turned to us and said, “No, they’re real!” and Mehera and I squealed, we just couldn’t believe it.

Baba would always go to the zoo wherever we traveled. We knew whenever we arrived at some new place, one of our delights would be a visit to the zoo. We’d get down from the bus and that little car, and Baba would come smiling, bringing the good news. “We’re going out now, to the zoo.” And you hadn’t unpacked, and you still had to have a bath, and . . . But, OK, to the zoo! In almost all the places we’ve visited, Baba has been to the zoo.

Now, we thought that Baba was taking us for an outing because we liked animals, one of those innocent outings that He would give us to keep us occupied.

But after a while we realized that, no, Baba was not only doing it for us. Anything He did had a combination of purposes. Not like we do things, one at a time. And even when we realized that, we could only see one or two purposes, not all of them. But we did come to realize that when Baba went to the zoo, say, and passed by these animals, by these birds, that all the animals and all the birds everywhere would be benefited. Every action of His would

appear so natural, so normal, but He was giving His presence, His blessing, to the animal kingdom as well. He was not here just for the humans.

Anything done by Baba is through someone. That person represents all the others who receive what He is giving, not just that person alone. Like an architect uses a little model to represent what he is building, so Baba used us also to represent others. Anything He did through us or with us was not just for us, but far-reaching, a reaching out not just to the world, but to the universe. Because Baba is universal, anything He did is also universal, and had a universal effect. He Himself said, “Even a slight movement of My finger, a casual movement, a casual act that I do, is so far-reaching.” We could not see it. All we could see was the moving of His finger. But that reached out universally.

Sometimes we could not understand why Baba did this or asked that. We would only limit it to the circumstances that we were involved in, that we could visualize, that we were in and could see. But it was much, much more.

As we have seen, Shireenmai had the privilege of telling Baba



Baba with Shireenmai on a tour.

things that others would never think of saying, many of which were quite witty. Throughout the Blue Bus tours she would join Baba and the women occasionally for a few days, wherever they happened to be. Once, when Shireenmai was with them, Baba took the women to another zoo. Mani explained to pilgrims:

While Baba took us along the hard road of obedience and daily self-denials, He also meticulously cared for our well-being and

recreation. He played games with us, He joked with us, He took us on long walks, He took us on picnics, took us to the zoo, to the circus, to the cinema, to the museum. It doesn't matter if He hurried us through everything! Still, He took us.

I'll never forget the time Mother was with us, and Baba took us to this marvelous zoo. With that easy, beautiful stride of His, He quickly walked way ahead of us, and we couldn't stop a second to admire the peacock or the giraffe or anything because we had to try and keep up with Him. As usual in our life, our focus was on Baba.

But still we tried to steal glances at the animals as we rushed by. (We'd always try to steal enjoyment whenever and however we could.) But then Baba from far ahead turned around and said, "What's this? Hurry up! Hurry up!" So we started trotting, telling each other as we ran along, "Look to the left"; someone else called out, "Katie, look to the right, there's a lovely peacock"; Katie said, "Quick, Margaret, that hippopotamus is beautiful"; and so on.

Afterwards when we got home, Mother said to Baba, "Merog, I didn't know You were taking us for a horse race. I thought we were going to the zoo! But You made us gallop through the whole thing!"

BANGALORE TO MEHERABAD

On April 1, 1940, after eight months in Bangalore, Baba had everyone and everything packed up and sent back to Meherabad. Rano elaborated on their Bangalore stay and their journey home:

[. . .] on a troublesome return journey from Bangalore, there were 43 of us to be transported, so the caravan included three

cars as well as the Blue Bus. That trip back to Meherabad from Bangalore was quite an affair. All the furniture from Meherabad had been sent down to Bangalore because Baba had said this was now to be our permanent headquarters. At Bangalore we stayed at a huge place called “The Links,” which overlooked a golf course. In the rear, Baba had a separate compound constructed as an ashram for the masts. It was



Baba with mast Phulkwala.

made quite lively by the presence of Chatti Baba, Phulwala, Chinnaswami, Shariat Khan, Chaddar Baba, Ramshish and other masts. Most of Baba’s time was taken up with caring for these God-intoxicated souls. He bathed, shaved, fed and clothed them and also cleaned their latrines. And the mandali had to see to the masts’ every wish and whim. There was even a mast hotel—a mock tea shop where everything was a little

dusty and a little crooked and where the masts could purchase cha (tea), beedies and pan.

[. . .] Besides those in the ashram and the masts, we had also acquired some animals which would have to be transported. Some of the luggage and animals and people were to return by train and some on the Blue Bus.⁸

On their way back from Bangalore, Baba took the women up the western coast of India to Jog Falls and Goa. The diary entries for these visits are amusing and telling:

3rd [April] Left Shimoga at 4 p.m. for Gersoppa Falls [also called “Jog Falls” and located in Karnataka]. (63 miles). Had two punctures, the bus got stuck in a hole trying to avoid a festival arch (we met many such arches further on & we

pulled down one big one while waiting for bus), & also had great fun removing a burning (smoking) tree from the middle of the road, after frantic gymnastics. We could not find the rest-house but finally, after repeated inquiries on the way, reached “Bombay Bungli” at 11 p.m., but it happened to be the wrong one, & when on the point of busily settling down - right in the middle of the good old hustle-bustle - had to dash off to another rest-house, to reach which, we had to cross a river (with bus, cars & all) by ferry. The rest-house was very up-to-date & overlooking the Jog Falls. At 12 p.m. [midnight] we were standing out (nice & cool) to watch the Jog Falls - which made a fascinating picture by the light of the fire-balls gliding down like parachutes. We went to bed at 1.30 p.m. [a.m.] [Not clear what these “fire-balls” were, but perhaps to entertain the visitors, burning objects, maybe bundles of hay, were pushed over the edge of the falls.]

11th We reached Panjim (Goa), Hotel Republica at 10.30 a.m. (hotel overlooking harbour & piazza). (We were to call



Unloading the Blue Bus in front of Hotel Republica, Panjim, Goa.

Baba “Babuli”). In the evening we went to see the church & tomb of St. Francis X’aviour [Xavier], where we met an unusual individual (an old bearded man, an agent of Baba’s) whom we had met there in the morning. Baba said, “He came here yesterday & leaves tomorrow morning. He came especially for me. I gave him message.”

12th At 4 we drove to a Hindu Temple & after supper to the pictures to see “Gopal Krishna.” Norina went to the Governor’s about the island at Karwar [for a spiritual center for Baba] which isn’t buyable by law - are now trying to get hill in front of Karwar Hotel.

13th Baba bathed a mast. In the evening we drove round a picturesque part of Goa. After supper Baba served us Toddy.

14th Norina went to get the old woman Christian Saint.



Baba and the women at a stop in Goa.

MEHERABAD — WAR TALK

By the time they returned to Meherabad in May 1940, the war had intensified. Baba's seclusion and His comments on the war fill the diary, mixed in with descriptions of walks, cinema outings, festival celebrations, and other day-to-day affairs.

1st June Baba in seclusion in Mast Ashram from today (for 15 days) - change of general diet. During seclusion, war activities intense. Paris bombed etc . . . On 7th Baba sent message:- about World War, Peace, truce, His Speaking and one of the 5 places He mentioned He would take us to for one year.

10th 3.45 p.m. Baba came to us (5 days earlier).

Baba said, "If Italy joins war, there will be a world war. There will be utter destruction + chaos just as I want + then people will feel the hollowness, the emptiness of it all & turn to God. As I am in India, India will suffer most too."

Italy joined Germany on 11th. Baba said "Now Turkey has to join & then everything will go as I planned. So if Turkey joins, cook "ravo" [rava, a sweet dish made of cream-of-wheat with nuts and raisins, traditionally prepared on birthdays, weddings and other special occasions by some Indian cultures] to celebrate it. There has never been such a war & never will be. But when War is over, there will

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(for 15 days) - change of general diet.
During seclusion war activities
intense. Paris bombed etc.
A few good showers of rain.
On 7th Baba sent message:
about World War, Peace, truce, His Speaking
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²⁰ chat. Baba in seclusion.
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Italy joined Germany on 11th.
Baba said "Now Turkey has to
join & then everything will go
as I planned. So if Turkey
joins, cook "ravo" to celebrate it.
There never has been such a war
& never will be. But when
War is over, there will reign
Peace for 100 years. From this
mass destruction I will build
life anew. Quite different from
now - much happier, nicer - and
all who die in this war will
take form again & enjoy this peace."
After discussing what place
we might go to for a year,
Baba said, "Be ready in 25 days
to leave Meherabad."

Mani's diary, pages 78 and 79.

reign Peace for 400 years. From this mass destruction I will build life anew. Quite different from now - much happier, nicer - and all who die in this war will take form again & enjoy this peace.”

After discussing what place we might go to for a year, Baba said, “Be ready in 25 days to leave Meherabad.”

15th [Baba had left for North India] read news of “Paris taken”.

25th Paris falls to the Germans. News of France accepting Germany’s terms, after the fate of Poland, Chekoslovakia [sic], Austria, Holland, Denmark & Belgium & Finland.

26th Baba decided Meherabad or Assam. So we go one month to Ranchi & might go from there to Assam (in which case luggage follows) or return to Meherabad (in which case we all stay in M’abad with Baba but see v. little of him).

*THE THIRD TOUR—
MEHERABAD TO RANCHI TO CALCUTTA
AND BACK TO MEHERABAD*

On July 3, 1940, the women set out by train with Baba to stay in Ranchi, in northeast India, and then visit Calcutta for a few days of sightseeing. Baba and the men mandali were very involved in mast work in both places, and the women saw little of Him. This is referred to as the third Blue Bus tour, although the women travelled almost the whole way by train. Mani continued her usual diary.

It was a short trip and there was almost continual rainfall, even in Calcutta, which was also hot. The women had a few outings with Baba in Ranchi. They saw the Jonah Falls and lovely views, and also many of the famous sites in Calcutta: the botanical gardens and its gigantic

banyan tree (which once sheltered “15,000 British tommies”), the Marble Palace, the Kali temple frequented by Ramakrishna, the Jain temple, the market, where Baba purchased some birds and a tail-less monkey, and of course the zoo, among other places.

On July 23 they left by train for Ahmednagar. As Mani described the train trip:

At 5.20 p.m. we got in the train (2 compartments enjoined together though not officially reserved) and even had place to sleep without somebody’s foot in your face. Had some trouble with the monkey which was pushed in a basket for fear of detection, and had to pay for the birds which finally died. On the whole it was a very pleasant journey.

One of my all-time favorite diary entries is here, her sketch of an early morning scene on the train station platform:

Much fun over Kaity [Katie], Rano + the ‘chaiwallas’ [tea-sellers] who always ran out of tea and you perched yourself on the edge of a trunk, calmly trying to sip the beverage amidst flying cups, & knocks & shouts & digs & strong demands for empty cups, & closed your eyes & said, ‘Um, marvelous tea.’



MANI'S NOTEBOOK

One of the most fascinating views of the women mandali's life with Baba at this time is in a notebook Mani kept from June 1940 until mid-March 1941. It is an eye-opener for all those who wonder what happened in the evening when Baba came to visit the women. What did they talk about? Thanks to Mani, we have a record. Starting June end, 1940, when they were in Meherabad, she and Katie arranged to write down Baba's talks as Mani read out His spelling on the alphabet board. (Later on, Mani



Mani's notebook.

herself wrote down the talks in the notebook from notes taken by someone else.) They did this for about a year. Mani described the entries as, "from Baba's dictation on Alphabet board, during informal talks at gatherings of all women mandali then staying with Baba."

She started this notebook just at the time when Paris fell to the Germans and France accepted Germany's terms. Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Holland, Denmark, Belgium, and Finland were all occupied by Germany. War was an almost daily topic, as were discourses on spirituality. Many of Baba's comments in Mani's notebook on war and almost all of those on spirituality have been printed in *Lord Meher*, and excerpts from Baba's talks written in the notebook have appeared in other books.

The following excerpts from Mani's notebook, most of Baba Himself speaking verbatim, are reproduced not for information, but because the scoldings, musings, items of interest, and other spontaneous remarks that Baba wove in and out of their gatherings vividly convey His humor, His wit, His mastery, and other subtle flavorings of His marvelous personality.^o

^o A note on the transcription of these "Baba talks": The notebook entries are indented. Baba's comments are put inside quotation marks. Editorial comments are made within brackets. Spellings and punctuation have been regularized, and names written out in full where applicable.

ORDERS

Baba gave them very strict orders for a year, among which were orders to eat only once a day and not to criticize or backbite anyone. (About this year He said, "It's all very thrilling, exciting and difficult.") He spoke to them often about the importance of obeying these orders.

[12th July, 1940, Ranchi] "[. . .] orders that I will give to each will have to be obeyed 100%. Try your utmost, you will have helped me by trying your best. If you obey fully you have helped me fully. If you obey ordinarily you help ordinarily. Have this very clear [. . .] Let this one year of your life be just for obeying orders. It won't help me a bit if you don't obey and then repent or feel sorry. If I say don't talk ill of each other, it means under every circumstance; if you talk ill of anyone once, and then feel sorry, that won't mean anything, so every moment be on guard. Your Yoga for one year is to obey orders with all your heart. Supreme sacrifice for some of you, and for Mehera it will be not seeing much of me; but to obey me in the orders I will give you, will be helping me.

"For one year, you all eat once a day. Eat as much as you like at one sitting as long as you like, for half hour or one hour. In Europe people will starve after 6 months. They will eat horse, mouse, children, old people. Compared with people in Europe, you will be in heaven. Anyway you all will have to obey, even if you die. Twice tea, coffee with milk, morning and noon tea. Anyone who likes coffee, tea or milk. It will not be easy, first few days. If it's to be easy, what is the meaning of one year's life of sacrifice. Even I will have to give the supreme sacrifice in my own way."

[15th July, Ranchi] “The orders for one year if you obey with all your heart, trying your best, then you have helped, if not you have wasted time one year’s. And these orders are very important. Not to backbite, very difficult, all the more you try you help. Easiest thing is to say she is bad, but most difficult is to feel one is not bad when one is bad. Try your utmost. It’s easy to eat once a day, but to talk good and think good of others is real help. Even one of you does it I shall be happy. It’s so in the blood of everybody (criticism) that not to do it will be self control. You are eating here 3 slices of bread and butter, Nadya [Nadine] takes one of yours and eats it. What would you say. You would think she was mean but if you gave another slice and said she is nice with real feeling! It means in short, every moment of this one year except the hours you are asleep, you have to be on guard if you honestly have to obey these orders. That’s the long and short of it, and that’s how I want it. The moment you get up till you go to sleep, be on guard. Remember orders and do it. Anything that you say that hurts you must not say and not to talk at the back of one at all.”

[25th July, Ranchi] “Tomorrow I give you your orders. Other orders you all follow even eating once a day, but that order of not criticising and not talking ill of others you all will not obey. I saw it all in last few days. I don’t care if you don’t obey, but if you do you will help me, if not you don’t help me. The only hope which is 1%, that from August 1st you might try your best. Everybody fights and as far as this order is concerned all is hopeless. Try your best to overcome all this. It’s all childish and has no sense. If you try you will control, but trying means thinking of me. I will be coming once a week for some hours,

and if later I go on a nearby mountain, then too once a week. First hour I will spend with Girls [Mehera, Mani, Naja, etc.], in this house, so that Mehera will also be satisfied in seeing me, then I call you all and talk with you for a few hours. Each will have a duty and you must do it with your heart. If you don't get angry you are stone, if you get angry and can't control it you are an animal, if you get angry and can control it, you are an angel, a saint. It's going against one's nature and habit that helps. Not getting angry won't help. You must not express it I hope. Impotence is not help [. . .] If you give her a chance to irritate you have failed, and if she gets excited it's finished, and if you criticise Me to my face, then . . . !

“So you see this order which I want, most important and is difficult and is easy. Very easy if you think of Me [. . .] One who gets hurt quick, you say she gets most opportunity to control. Any remark, any criticism that does not hurt is good. You should make fun, joke, humour, but not hurt and not talk back. Try utmost to help Me. You sacrifice the sweet habit of hurting. So control lust, anger, greed, by fighting, means by sacrificing. Control means not doing what you used to do, and as my work will be based on My own Supreme Sacrifice these sacrifices of yours will make it easy. If you fail once don't give up, try. If you succeed once you have helped me a lot. If you fail 9 times and succeed once that too helps. It's when one feels hot, feverish, hungry, sick, that one gets excitedest. If you have tooth-ache you feel more about something than otherwise. In spirituality there is no compromise. It's 100% this or that.”

In the back of one section of the diary, Mani wrote in Gujerati what must be a quote from somewhere. Its translation: “The act of talking

behind one's back ('ninda') is like a vicious snake that goes from house to house and stings (bites) everyone. One who gives up 'ninda', that one swims across the Ocean of Love."

Baba again spoke about those orders (written in the notebook):

[15th Aug., Meherabad] "For you here in the Ashram it is not so difficult to obey the orders as it is for those outside. They work, have business, families, etc.—yet amidst all that they must obey. Vilu's 'sister' (Sarosh [actually her husband]) has to see to Motor Works, and cinemas, and is training army—is a captain, and family etc.—so difficult—yet obeys. On the other hand it is also difficult for you in a way, for you have no distractions of any kind—cinemas, music etc."

Along with the one meal a day and orders not to criticize, the women were to sing the seven Names of God every morning at 5:00 a.m. (later Baba changed the time to 5:30 a.m.).

[12th July, Ranchi] "Tomorrow all of you write down the seven names of God and learn by heart after 7 days. Then you have to sing it from your heart; Hari, Paramatman, Allah, Ahuramazd, God, Yazdan, Hu."

[5th Sept., Meherabad] When Rano said that Elizabeth had upset Ir. [Irene?] at breakfast table, Baba said, "What great opportunity to obey my order and not get upset.

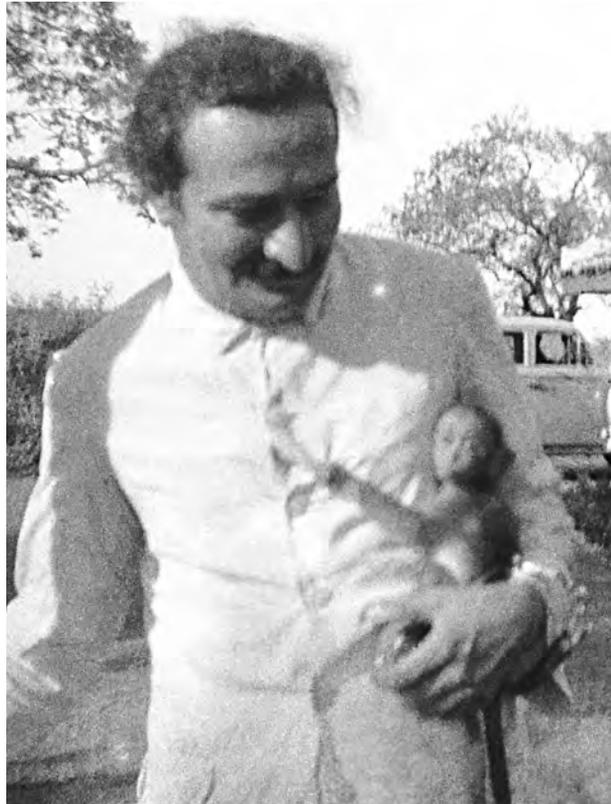
"So for one month, very bad; very important, serious and urgent for work. I want you to obey orders so literally that you must put up with every kind of difficulties, and willingly too—to help me; and for that, try utmost not to get upset—or go to hell—if you don't want to help. (At 5.30 a.m. all must get up in the morning whether alive or dead.): And unless you are very heartless and careless you will do it with

all your heart [. . .] Also sing with heart & soul. If you see how I make these mad sing—two of them start dancing—how they get into it with the whole heart.”

That old friction that Mani spoke about kept cropping up to spoil the women’s efforts to obey. No wonder, as she said, when so many strong personalities and strong opinions were all packed together under difficult circumstances and with no outlets whatsoever!

But Baba would not let them off the hook:

[5th Sept., Meherabad] Then there was a long talk about Lucky [the monkey] getting loose everyday and giving trouble to all, and Mansari being very upset about it. Baba said, “Mansari gets excited and can’t control because she is not so strong. And you all can’t help her because you are weak too. I want you to help each other. I don’t want breaking of my orders for a monkey. The more I ask you to obey better, you all obey less—helpless, helpless. Unless you all keep strict watch over yourselves you cannot obey the orders—it is not possible. So try.



Baba with the Lucky monkey.

“Hafiz says he was asked what spirituality meant and he answered in one ode, ‘Unless you go against your lower self you cannot unite with your higher Self.’ Now, what is lower self? That which makes you think you [are] small, that which makes you feel you are not satisfied, not happy, that which makes others see you small. So to go against lower self means, you must transform this in [to] the opposite, so to be that which makes you see yourself big, makes others see you big, makes you happy and satisfied. When you are not happy, or upset and moody it is your lower self asserting itself.

“People always put the blame for dissatisfaction and suffering on others. But when one suffers, it is his own fault. Mansari got excited, angry, suffered and she lays it on Elizabeth and Norina and Lucky. But if she had gone beyond the lower self she would have taken it calmly, swallowed it, and taken it off. If you are firm nothing can upset you. If you try you will surely have it. I don’t want any repression, but transformation. I never for one moment say that you must not get angry. Don’t be confused. You must get angry when occasion arises. But at once you must get it out of your head. If you are not hungry, fast has no meaning. [. . .] Neither of the extremes are good: Those who don’t get excited and those who very quickly lose temper. But those who get excited but control their temper, those are big people!”

On September 15, when talking about the war and the one-year orders, Baba said:

“If now, in a few days, 2000 aeroplanes go for England, as well as ships etc., what then? But even if England is defeated, it will not end the war. So it all means we try more and more to obey orders, fight and hurt less and less, sing

‘God’ with more and more heart and more and more open eyes—if they don’t keep open, glue them up!”

On November 7, Baba again spoke of His list of orders to the women:

[7th Nov., Ceylon] Baba looked a bit disappointed as he called everyone after breakfast, and said, “Why are you staying with me?” Rano said “To love you.” Elizabeth said, “Because I love you. I don’t know why but I do.” Baba nodded, “But what a way of loving! Yes, you do love me, otherwise why would you leave all, family, comforts etc. to be with me. And it is also because I love you that I keep you near me. This year of my working is very important and you all are so lucky to be with me now! The universe is now in such chaos! That’s why I gave this list of orders to my disciples, or the reaction would have been such that even the nearest of my disciples would have left me. But why do you all always want to do what you want? You must do what I want. You must either do only what you want or only what I want; but what is this in-between thing to try to please both self and me—that’s impossible. If you love me, you must be happy in my happiness. But I try to make it easier for you too, for I also let you do what you want! If I asked you to do only what I want you all wouldn’t stay with me for a minute! I tell you don’t fight, don’t criticise, etc. but you all do what you want. So try your best to obey these orders during this important period of my work. For 9 months you all must stay with me, during my important working.”

From time to time, He let them know how great was the challenge He had given them:

[26th Jan. 1941] We signed the “order” and Baba said, “I am sure all the outside devotees will do it but I have not the

slightest hope of you all—my inner circle. For these 20 days you must keep your mood at its best—do not be excited—no moods—always smiling and happy—under any circumstances and conditions. It is the greatest help to me. People join war, get wounded and suffer hardships—but that is easy. But to keep your best mood in every circumstance and not to be upset or sad, speak gently and lovingly never using a hard word, not to get excited when someone steals your chappati but say from the bottom of your heart ‘May Baba bless you’, that is really difficult. It is more difficult than walking on fire or glass, this control of self. It is easy to win wars of nations, but most difficult to win your own self. It is the only real thing on the Path. To keep a calm head, and tolerate and ‘swallow’.”

THE MISCHIEVOUS CLOCK

Mani would tell pilgrims the following story to show how little orders of Baba’s are so difficult to carry out. “The big orders,” she said, “you accept as a challenge: ‘Why, for Baba nothing is too big!’ But it’s His little orders that are very difficult.”

We were stationed somewhere during the Blue Bus tours, and were to be there quite a number of days. Among us was Eruch’s family: his mother, his aunt Gulamasi, his sisters, and his baby brother Meherwan.

Now Soonamasi, Khorshed’s mother, who had been with us on Meherabad Hill in the early 1930s, was with us too, and on the tour it was her duty to keep watch at the gate wherever we were stationed. As she had to keep watch, she had to keep track of time, so her constant companion was a kitchen alarm clock. It was very important for her.

One day during that time, Baba said, "I'm going to be in seclusion every morning for two hours. And it's very important work, very critical. And I want you all to help." We thought, "Of course. What wouldn't we do to help Baba in His Universal Work!"

Then Baba said, "The only way you can help is to be absolutely quiet. No talking, and not making the least sound or noise. Of course, go on doing your work. But slowly, slowly! Do it, but not a sound."

His seclusion was to be during the morning hours, when our domestic life was in full swing: the cooking, washing of clothes, cleaning and filling of pails with water, washing of dishes, and all that. Of course we all agreed. And Baba said that when He clapped at the end of the work, He'd come out and then we could all resume talking and so on.

For this big bunch of women to actively engage in domestic work in the early mornings without making noise was no joke! But we were determined. Baba's seclusion started, and everybody tried. But you wouldn't believe the unexpected things that would happen. A ladle would fly out of your hand in the kitchen and clatter on the floor. And when it's so quiet, any sound just magnifies! A window would bang, then a door somehow would bang, which everyone was sure they'd latched properly. A bucketful of water would just topple over. Or somebody would forget and call out to somebody.

Baba said we were hopeless! We couldn't do such a little thing for Him? We all just sat there. What could we say? Then Baba said, "All right, there's only one solution. You all

must sit together in one place, in one room, and not move, and not do any work. And that way, it's bound to be quiet.”

So the next morning—just picture this—in this big room, were all these women sitting on their own little beddings, the very thin mattresses inside bedding rolls used for traveling purposes. No furniture and no thick mattresses: that was the way life was in the Blue Bus time. We all sat on our beddings. Just sat and did nothing.

And what can you look at? Each other! So then after a while, we started talking, not with sounds, but with gestures or with eyebrows (you can talk a lot with eyebrows). And it worked for a day and everyone was very happy.

A little side diversion: Soonamasi's kitchen alarm clock at this time was giving her trouble. She took such care of it that she even put an old woolen sock over it every night so it wouldn't get cold and become erratic. But in spite of that, the clock broke down. Masi tried everything, and she was getting desperate.

Now Eruch's aunt Gulamasi was a very sensible person, very composed, someone who always had good advice for any difficulties, and who was handy with all kinds of little jobs. One morning Soonamasi asked Gulamasi to please look at the clock, and Gulamasi said, “Yes, yes, in a little while . . .” but other things had come up all that day.

So the time comes to be quiet, and we're all sitting on our bedding rolls, and Soonamasi looks at Gulamasi and gestures, “What about the clock?” Gulamasi replies silently, “Good. Why don't you pass it around to me. Nothing to do, I'll just have a look at it.” So from mattress to mattress and

person to person the kitchen clock is passed until it comes to Gulamasi. Gulamasi looks at it like a doctor would a patient, turning it this way and that. Then she fiddles with it a bit. Then she wants to remove some of the screws, so she takes a hairpin out from her bun and removes some of the screws.

Now everybody's watching; there's nothing else to do, there's nothing else to see. Everybody's watching every movement she makes. And having removed some screws, she starts fiddling inside the clock.

Well, I don't know what she touched, but before you knew it, what sounded like a fire alarm went off. It was the clock alarm, going off loud and strong and lusty, and here we were not supposed to make the slightest sound or noise. Everybody was shocked; stunned; terrified; Gulamasi most of all. We looked at each other: "What are we to do?"

Gulamasi took her pillow and put it on the clock to muffle it, and everybody else started flinging their pillows until there was a big pile of pillows on that thing. Then Gulamasi collected the clock and all the pillows and ran out with the sound still following her. But it didn't make the least difference.

We all were thinking, "Now what's going to happen? We're done for now! This is the limit, Baba's going to get real angry!"

We couldn't believe it but when Baba came and heard what happened, He laughed! He really enjoyed it, and we were so happy that the whole thing was over.

But you see, just that little order, "Don't make a sound, don't let there be any noise," and we couldn't do it. We would laugh



The women mandali around the Beautiful Stranger.

among ourselves and wonder why Baba chose such a bunch of specimens when He could have had His pick from the whole world. Why us, who He would sometimes refer to as “broken-down furniture”? He’d say, “I don’t know why I’ve surrounded Myself with the lot of you, broken furniture!”

THE BEAUTIFUL STRANGER

On the Blue Bus tours, the women were out in the hustle and bustle of train stations, ports, roadsides, and so on (although still very much secluded from men). But there they witnessed how Baba, even incognito, irresistibly drew the attention of passersby. Francis Brabazon once called Him “the Beautiful Stranger” and Mani loved that description. She said that even to them, who knew Him as Man so well, He would sometimes appear to be just that: the beautiful stranger.

You see, as God-Man, it’s quite a job for Him to disguise Himself. Actually, as He would say, it was difficult for Him not to reveal Himself. And the biggest disguise He used was pain and suffering, His human suffering. Yet even through that, His Godhood would shine.

One of the most touching aspects of His Advent that we have witnessed is that utter strangers who did not even know His name would recognize something about Him, about who He is, would see through His disguise, would see something in Him without knowing what it was or why they saw it. On our travels we were silent witnesses to this, sometimes in a little hotel or dak bungalow, sometimes by the roadside, or on a station platform.

Imagine an Indian train station platform, with crowds of people rushing to board the train and get a place in a compartment, a mini-tidal wave of people rushing to find a place on the train. Baba and we all would be walking in the opposite direction against the current of humanity, to a compartment that was on the train's other side.

Yet even in that rush, we have seen people stop and stand stock-still to watch Baba. And Baba, as you know, would not seem to be walking fast or hastening, but He would be so swift that suddenly He was here and then suddenly He was there. Yet they would stand with their eyes on Him until He went by. Then the tableau would be broken, and the screaming and rushing, the grabbing of children, picking up of luggage, calling to the coolies, would start up again.

It wasn't that Baba dressed so differently, for in India you really can dress in any variety of clothing and nobody notices. Baba would even take pains not to stand out from others as far as His outward appearance and dress were concerned. It was just the fact of who He really is, the God-Man, that they were fortunate to notice for that moment.



*MEHERABAD—
AUGUST, SEPTEMBER, OCTOBER 1940*

Back at home in Meherabad after the Ranchi tour, the women settled into their Meherabad routine. Or rather their ever-changing routine, as they had new orders, schedules, and so on to follow. On August 1, 1940, Baba went into strict seclusion in what was then the mast ashram, formerly the hospital quarters, on the Hill.

Mehera recalled that they were all in a period of stricter discipline as well. Some were given silence, many were not to write, and they had only one meal a day, at noon. At this time also the women were divided into three groups, and were not to talk to anyone outside of their group except through Kitty.

In August 1940, Mani wrote in her diary:

On June 29, Baba told us, “From August 1st ’40, Doomsday will start for the whole world. Not for one moment will they feel safe in any part of the world - for a year. All over the world there will be earthquakes, floods and famine and new diseases. Those killed in War will be nothing compared to the ones who will be killed by floods, famine, plague, etc. There will be terrible famine like once in Persia — this famine half the world will have. People will forget war, victory, defeat. I remember it was 17 years ago when I was having tea with the ‘mandali’ at the bungalow which is now the Mast Ashram, I told them all about this war, when & how it would happen . . . etc. This war will bring complete destruction. America won’t suffer less. Her backbone will snap. This year (from 1st Aug. ’40 to July 31st ’41) will be a hard test for the 240 who have signed to obey me implicitly,* according to their ability;

* The 240 people Baba refers to are those who received and agreed to obey instructions sent by Baba for one year beginning August 1, 1940.

for some, even the supreme test. I too shall suffer a lot, - physically. It will be a hideous suffering. I will literally die physically. December '40 will be the most important month of my seclusion.”

1st August 1940 - Baba left us at 4 p.m. for seclusion in the Mast Ashram. He fasted on water the whole day. Our 'fast' begins.

3rd Received a note from Baba saying how on the 1st Aug., Japan and Russia declared?

8th [. . .] Talking of our new orders & routine, Baba said, “All over the world people are so sad and mad and soon it will be bad beyond conception! So you must follow the orders as you did this week, but more wholeheartedly than ever, willingly, happily. Do not do it just because I order you to, but because you like to obey.”

As is clear from the diary, Baba was working intensely with the masts at this time. And also putting a great emphasis on obedience to His orders.

15th [Aug.] Baba came 1.30 to 8 p.m. Talked mostly of masts, 'majzubs', and orders.

22nd Baba came 1.30 to 8 p.m. Baba gave us a beautiful explanation of “All are One,” (Hitler, Churchill, etc.). Talked of masts and war, “There are 4 stages of this war. First is over, second bad, third v. bad - all world will be aflame. 4th is termination - so obey implicitly.”

5th [Sept.] We are to be quiet 4.30 to 7 a.m. 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. & from 8 p.m. onward (Baba's working hours). We sing “Hari Parmatman” in evening.

11th [Oct.] Baba gave us a beautiful explanation of the suffering of war + mankind, and of the new world ahead with peace for 700 years.

LOVE AND MEDITATION

Baba often spoke to the women on spiritual topics: the nature of God, Divine Sound, the God-Man, etc. As mentioned, His talks on these subjects, as recorded in Mani's notebook, have been printed at length in other books. But the following excerpts highlight His natural, conversational way of making the most sublime subjects simple and understandable.

[22nd Sept. 1940, Meherabad] "Who was it who said, 'Unless you lose yourself, you cannot find yourself?'" Elizabeth said, "Christ." Baba asked us, "What does it mean?" Some said, "conquer desires," "annihilate lower self," Elizabeth said, "To quote the words of the saint, 'Let not my will be done—but Thine.'"

Baba nodded and said it was nearest. He said, "It means three things in one. 1) Love God so much that you forget yourself. 2) Sacrifice your carnal for the Soul. 3) Complete resignation to God's Will.

"And when you love too much, you do forget yourself. Now how to do that practically? To make it practical—Love for other things comes of its own—woman, man, car, dog, everything—it is no gift, it is nature. To love God is done by practice, by process to a certain point. But loving God most—is a gift. To love Baba you need to think of Baba. If you think of Baba you do not think of yourself. The more you think of Baba the less you think of yourself. So loving God so much that you forget yourself, means, that you think of God so much that you can't think of yourself. By thinking continuously you become what you think deeply—mind makes one what one thinks deeply. If you think of Baba all the time, you can't think of yourself. If you don't think,

there is no feeling. Only when Rano thinks of Nonny, she feels. When she does not think there is no feeling—
 In Poona, one more meditation class opened—called the ‘Mothers Lodge’. These meditation classes do not give love. Meditation gives peace, not love. Thinking gives love when done continually and deeply. In meditation, you try to stop thinking—when stopped, gives peace; but to love you must think of Beloved. If your mind becomes still, your Beloved does not exist any more, and how can love exist when Beloved does not exist? It’s most important point—this differentiation. When you meditate, you try to forget everything and yourself. In loving, you forget everything and self, but you remember Beloved. In meditation (if it’s real and perfect which is rare), you forget body, yourself and everything else. In loving, also you forget self, body and everything but you remember the Beloved.

“In meditation, Beloved does not exist. That’s why it is said, in meditation the most you can get is samadhi: forgetting everything and getting peace. But God-realization, never! It is only attained by love!”

[8th Sept. 1940, Meherabad] “Those who can do so, meditate. Those who can’t, repeat my name for ½ hour. Must meditate everyday. The day I come, it does not matter if you don’t.

“Meditation: Some are suited for it, others not; and few can enjoy it. It means to go within you, right inside of you and those who can love—it leads to the same. In some Ashrams like Madura and Pondicherry they have actual meditation classes. But meditation has never yet made one One with God. Hafiz says to the Sufis (? in Persian which means): ‘If you have any whim in your head to achieve union with

God, then you must become dust of the feet of one who has become united with God.’ And so meditation gives peace, some inner revelation to some fortunate ones. Arbindo [Aurobindo] wrote in his books, ‘I am trying to attain to that state through meditation,’ but even illumination if got through meditation is no little thing! Meditation means going into one’s self—it is self hypnotism in the divine way. To lose yourself is forgetting self by not thinking of anything but the Self. Arbindo is on 6th plane—not by Vali state but by meditation. Chatti Baba never meditated—he sees God all day and night. And though both are on 6th plane, great difference. Love gives permanence. Meditation gives—samadhi. After union with God, complete permanency, whether you come down or not. If you come down, you bring God with you. Arbindo writes beautifully about the deep valley between seeing God, and God Himself. He says, ‘We on this side cry, “Oh God, we see you but can’t come to You, so You at least come.” God says, “I always come as Krishna, Buddha, etc.”’

“Sufis don’t give ‘hell’ for meditation. They love!”

“Meditation good! If you love and then also meditate, no harm. If you love and don’t meditate, no harm.” Gave example of singer. “Don’t meditate like taking quinine powder—like something to somehow or the other get over with. If you are interested in meditation then you ought to do it with joy. If you don’t like meditation, then you have to take my name, and if you love me, taking my name ought to give you joy. Do it when and where you like. About noise, even in Himalayas you can’t have complete silence. But after September you can meditate near Dome. Samadhi is that state where you can’t hear gun fired at close range. This is the drawback to meditation—noise disturbs. But love has none of this. If the

lover thinks of the Beloved he is not meditating, he is loving.
He does not hear nor mind anything.”

[17th Oct. 1940, Meherabad; at the end of a discussion on the war, Baba said:] “Love! All this mess is just mess. Only one thing true and matters, Love.”

NAJOO REMEMBERS

In early 1940, Savak Kotwal and his wife and three children came to stay with Baba. Najoo was the oldest child, then came her sister Hilla, nicknamed Hillu, who was five, and brother Adi, who was very small.

When I asked her about it, Najoo remembered how lovingly Mani welcomed the children to the ashram at Meherabad:

We were little children then. What a beautiful girl Mani was, young and sprightly and a bundle of energy and laughter. I remember the first thing she did when we met her was she took Adi in her arms and said, “Oh, my sweetheart, are you a girl or a boy?” because Adi was very delicate. After that she spoke to Hilla. Hilla was always very attracted to good-looking people, so when she saw Mani she was thrilled.

Mani said to her, “You’re Hillu?”

Hilla said, “Yes,” and Mani said, “Now you’re going to be living with us and we’re going to have a lovely time together.”

So Hillu was very happy, and said, “Yes, and you will take me round here and there and we’ll go in the garden”—she loves gardens, my sister—“and you’ll tell me about the flowers and the trees.”

“Yes,” said Mani, “I’ll introduce them to you.”

Mani was always a child with a child and an adult with an



Najoo is the child on the far right in this picture, with her mother Nargis behind her. Mehera and Mani are on Baba's left, and left of Mehera is Kharmenmasi.

adult. I think Baba had given some part of that trait of His to her, maybe a millionth part (of course we don't even have that much!) She was very loving to us.

Then she said, "Najoo? You are Najoo." I said, "Yes," and as I was on the older side she said to me, "What are your favourite things in life?"

So I replied, "I like to read, I like to write poetry, I like to write books."

"Oh, you like to write? Well, every time you write something you show me, will you? I would also enjoy it!"

What did Mani do with herself in those days? When I wondered about that, Najoo recalled from a child's perspective:

What was she doing? Being with Mehera or typing. She was always typing. Typing meant Mani and Mani meant typing. Of course the greatest assignment given to her by Baba was to be with Mehera all the time. Wherever Mehera went, Mani would be there like her shadow. It was the

greatest joy of Mani's heart. She loved Mehera with all her heart and all her soul. It was more of a love, too, because she knew who Mehera was: the beloved of the Beloved.

In every way Mani gave so much love to Mehera. I would just admire it. She would look after Mehera much more than she would look after her own self. When Mehera went to take a bath, Mani would sit near the bathroom and play the sitar. That was the only time she had for her own entertainment, and she used to love playing the sitar. She played it beautifully. She also had a very sweet, melodious voice—the sweetness of that voice!—and she was very fond of singing bhajans or ghazals.

As little children we would sit far away on the ground and listen; we felt like we were in heaven with the fairies when she would play the sitar. And to us, the greatest fairies were Mehera and Mani; such was our imagination! Here was the Queen and here was the Princess, or here was one fairy and here was another. That's how Hilla and I always talked about them, as fairies or as the Queen and the Princess.

Later on when Najoo and Hilla were sent away to school, they would write to Baba, and Mani would answer them, writing long letters in her own hand, giving news of Baba and of them: "Any correspondence that would come from us, she would read out to Baba. Then she would read Him her replies to us, and He might say add this or add that. Even in the sixties, she would write us. Till the last she wrote. At the very end of her life, when she couldn't write anymore, she would call us on the phone. She knew we loved her very dearly."

*WHERE TO GO,
HOW TO GO, AND WHERE TO STAY*

Baba's conversation often turned upon the places, cities, or countries they were staying in, or on their next destination, or how they were going to get there. He involved the women in some of the decisions:

[1st Sept. 1940, Meherabad, when Baba visited the women in the upper rooms of Meher Retreat] Baba said, "What a lovely view you have from upstairs. I like Meherabad in winter. In the West, I liked the climate of California—Hollywood. Is it always like that?" Baba asked Elizabeth: "You, who have travelled more than others, which climate of which place do you like best?" Elizabeth replied that none could be perfect all the year round. Norina said that the island of Madiera [Madeira] has the most even climate in the whole world. Elizabeth said she liked Mexico. Baba said, "Well, in winter we go to Mexico." Nadine mentioned Salta [Malta] and Caucasus. "We go in December to Salta," said Baba, "and also to Cicily [Sicily]," which Norina said was ideal. "Also to Bali, but not now," and [Baba] ended by saying, "We go to all these places. Honolulu—I like it very much—and Karwar!

"In the beginning of December I leave Meherabad—definitely. If Kitty's father dies, or Elizabeth gets money from the sky, or this new explorer does something about it, we all go together. Otherwise I go alone.

"[. . .] In December—automatically it happens what I will do, just according to how I have planned it" he said, with the ever-humorous twinkle in His eyes.

"If that inspector who wanted an interview had come to see me, I would have had to leave Meherabad immediately—for it would have meant 'seclusion interrupted'. So, I managed

to avoid. Maya brought, but I managed to avoid it. I told mandali, ‘Do what you can, he must not come. I must not leave Meherabad before 15th November, and in December I must not stay here.’ And it is good, and God’s key, that the inspector is a nice man, or he might have insisted on coming to see me. He is very interested in the orders, made personal inquiries, etc . . . It was very serious — you’ve no idea! The matter was trifle, but his coming to see me would have upset plans very much.”

[15th Sept., Meherabad] “If in Karwar we do not get suitable bungalow near the sea, where then do we go? Of course we go where I like, but I am just asking. Goa in winter is very nice. Benares too. Jaipur is the finest city in India. And in winter it is heaven. We will go where it is the centre of all trouble in war. U.P. [Uttar Pradesh, a state in north India] will be the centre of all troubles in India. We will go to the best places in India. There you will enjoy obeying orders—freedom for walks etc. In Jaipur we will ride horse-back. Irene will teach everybody. We will begin with a pony and increase the stables. If it is Karwar, you will have to eat only fish and nothing but fish. If it is Jaipur, only eggs. If Goa, only pigs. If Bundi, we will have nothing but luddos (famous bundi luddos) [an Indian sweet]. In Karwar, swimming. In Jaipur, horseriding.

“[. . .] And then too, on tour I will be with you more than here. Half day with you, half day working.” Kitty said “Yes, half day with us and half day meditating.” Laughter from everybody.

Baba said, “Yes, meditating on you all, Hitler, Muso [Mussolini], Norina’s foot [which was hurt], universe, but not on God.”

Replying to someone’s remark about foot, Baba said, “I

meditate on the universe. Well Norina's foot is not out of the universe!" Laughter.

[5th Oct., Meherabad, speaking of Baba's plan for the fourth Blue Bus tour to Ceylon] Baba called all at 2:00 p.m. and we talked of the tour. Baba said, "I have sent Chimpi [Chanji] to get-find a house in one of the four places I have selected in Ceylon. Half of you at least, have to be vaccinated. So as soon as we get wire from Ceylon, half of you get vaccinated. On this tour you will have lots of fun, swimming and many hardships with plenty of trouble (bombs etc.). We might be asked to evacuate from one place to another! Just picture Kharmenmasi [who was older and quite stout] walking 10 miles an hour! When we are asked to evacuate and I order speed! There will be hardships and fun, both. Anyway I promise heaps of excitement. We leave on the 1st November. Next time we will discuss the details.

"Now in the West, in Europe nobody is living a normal life, and later in the whole world.

"In any case, on this tour I promise you excitement with a capital E."

Excitement started right away, with delays in getting the visas for Ceylon.

[27th Oct., Meherabad] [. . .] Then the question of visas delay came up. Baba said, "All other arrangements about the trip etc. have been done exceptionally well, and everything fine, the cars already gone, and no visas! American firm too slow." Elizabeth went twice to telephone, and finally at 9 p.m. Norina and Elizabeth went to Bombay to see about it, as only one day more to do it, the other 3 days being Divali holidays.

Baba said, "There have been 2 hitches so far. 1) the

English doctor [Dr. Donkin] has been 'called up' for war— poor chap, he is so sad! I have sent him to Poona to see about it, and ask if he can go to Ceylon for 3 months. I'll be happy if they say yes, for at least 3 months. 2) this visa business.”



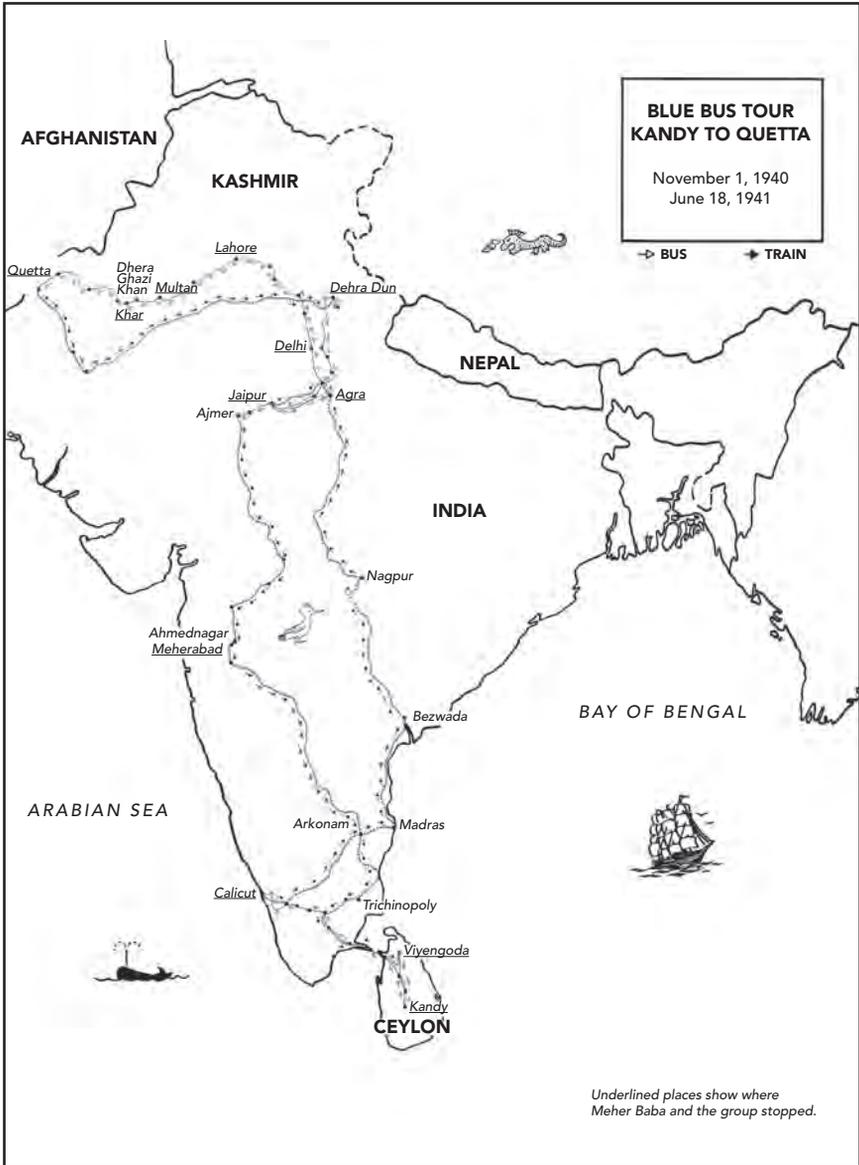
THE FOURTH TOUR—
MEHERABAD TO CEYLON TO QUETTA

In Rano's book *Because of Love*, there is a map of the fourth Blue Bus tour. The extent of the route is startling: in seven and a half months, between November 1940 and June 1941, the women journeyed from Meherabad to the southern-most point of India and on to Ceylon, and then up to almost the top (Lahore, which is now in Pakistan), mostly by train, occasionally by bus, and even by boat.

Mani wrote about this trip in her diary with particular descriptive flair.

After a trip by train and boat (across the strait to Ceylon), and then train again, they arrived in Veyangoda, Ceylon, on November 5, 1940. The diary records:

5th Got up at 3. got to Viyengoda [Veyangoda] (where train stopped for us) and drove to the host's (Parsi devotee) bungalow situated amidst the most Oriental picture of cocoon palm forests and elephants, lovely birds and sunsets, "ghorpars" [the Marathi term for monitor lizards] and snakes and Cenhalese women servants. We stayed in that nice bung. till the 15th - but for reasons of his own, Baba was not at all pleased with Viyengoda and kept the mandali on frantic chase for a bung. near ocean - chase turned out to be a wild-goose one. Another chase was started for a bungalow on a hill. At last procured perfect bungalow in beautiful Kandy.



Based on the map of the fourth Blue Bus tour, from November 1, 1940, to June 18, 1941, in Rano Gayley's book, *Because of Love*. The tour took the women all over India and Ceylon by bus, train, and boat.

THE BUNGALOW CHASE

Baba described this chase for a suitable bungalow to the women blow-by-blow in a series of ongoing reports that clearly show how He spared no effort (and didn't spare His mandali either!) to find the right circumstances for His work. A number of Baba's remarks to the women about this search were pithy and amusing.

When they were in Veyangoda:

“Be careful of the furniture, or when the hostesses return they will wonder what kind of disciples you are! So the sooner we shift from here the happier I shall be or you might wreck this place beyond recognition (laughter).”

[Then Baba added] “Always ego comes out most near a Master. Like a disease erupting when medicine is taken. Master knows the cure but you can't stand the medicine.”



Baba on an earlier visit to Ceylon.

After they found another bungalow:

[11th Nov., Viyengoda] After breakfast Baba called all, and said, “This morning early, Masi told me Chimpi [Chanji] has come, and wondering I went out to see him looking like a million year old fossil. He and Norina are highly strung by all this business. When I asked him what was the matter he said, ‘Why must she die today?’ The mother of the proprietor of that bungalow (Viceroy's house) is dead and naturally Norina cannot get an interview. (He [Chanji] is very sincere, but has become nervous by all this—yesterday he was looking all over the house for his spectacles when all the time he had them on!) A little while ago

Norina came to me with the same story, that why should everything apparently go wrong when Baba wishes to actively work in Ceylon—the Newspaper interview not a success, etc, we can't get a suitable bungalow, and many other things.”

Baba explained, “I have come here to work and only work matters. What is praise or insult to me? Opposition is a help and not a hindrance. The sun—it shines and gives



Norina, Baba, and Chanji (under umbrella) in discussion with others.

light every day whether people speak ill of it or good. When there are clouds hiding the sun, we long for the sun, so that when the clouds disperse and the sun shines

we know its true value. If the clouds were not there, we wouldn't appreciate the value of sun when it appears to shine with full splendour after the clouds disappear.

“God's work! Can you see how God works? Yet, whether an atheist believes God doesn't exist, or whether others worship him (God), God keeps on working in His own way. He is not affected by praise or insult.

“[. . .] It's nobody's fault, it all has to be. This reporter, poor boy, has a limited conception and is more interested in my throat not being impaired, than the value of Truth. Chimpi said it was all a bad sign, and I said on the contrary it is a good sign. Now it is definite I shall stay here for my work, for opposition helps work.

[. . .] “So if by tomorrow Viceroy house not available then we take this Kandy bungalow (Primrose).

“In Ceylon everything hopeful is hopeless and everything hopeless is hopeful—remember! [. . .] The house is bright and nice and 1 ½ miles from Kandy. So let’s take it. It won’t be as sticky as here [. . .] And the house has no ghost, it isn’t out of use, no snakes or thick plantation there—no crocodiles—plenty of water, view lovely, cinema near by . . . As city Kandy is marvellous. It’s rightly called ‘Jewel of the East’. In Kandy—everything handy—even brandy—(fine and dandy!)”

[. . .] Baba chose his little house on a hill. He said, “It’s decided. Hooray for Cooray (the proprietor). That is, if he doesn’t change his mind at the last moment.”

Thus they left unsuitable Veyangoda for the new house in Kandy. In the diary description of Primrose Hill Estate, Mani writes, “Our house stood amidst the most enchanting surroundings of blue & green hills, winding river in the valley, trees, wild flowers & birds & all the treasures of fairyland (tea plantations all around, in which picturesque Ceylonese women are seen at work).”

After all that, on November 20 Baba remarked, “We intended to stay in Ceylon three months, but I have planned to speed up my work.” On December 5 the whole group decamped again and headed for the docks to cross to India. There was a sudden shower on the way and Mani wrote in her diary:

[. . .] we crossed the long bridge, looking more ridiculous than ever, tramping in the rain with our endless bundles - got on the boat in a smelly cabin - in spite of smell + continuous earthquaky sounds, slept toppingly in wet clothes & on a hard bench - Baba came later with E. [Elizabeth] who had a car puncture a mile off, & had to walk.



Baba in southern India.

After a long journey north by train, Mani wrote, on December 26:

We reached Jaipur 5 p.m. - what rush on station! Got in buses and drove through the beautiful pink city to one of those fascinating Jaipurian houses (outside the city) (with a beautiful tomb of a saint, in the compound). Had hot 'dhansak' followed by a hotter lecture & slipped under the blankets at first opportunity . . . It didn't take us any time at all to fall in love with Jaipur - Jaipur of the dancing peacocks & black-faced monkeys, - its picturesque gates & stately camels and elephants - its forts & ruins & fascinating houses - its pretty women with their artistic colourful costumes, - its night time prowlers and howlers, the tigers & foxes - its bracing winter & polite people - (our sweet little friends Kali & Guti & Nandeo) - and above all its happy atmosphere . . . (+ flies?)



A WILD AND WOOLY RIDE

Roughly half a century later, the women mandali often talked to pilgrims about the next leg of their fourth Blue Bus tour: the wild and wooly ride through the fierce mountains of northwest India.

Throughout this section of her diary, Mani wrote fully and descriptively, and you can see that the adventure, the scenery, and the drama of this mountain trip caught her fancy and her imagination.

It all started out peacefully enough. They drove from Jaipur to Agra, and saw the Taj Mahal and the Agra Fort with Shireenmai. Then they went on to Delhi (“passed camel carts and quaint villages on high land”), and reached there after three punctures on the way. Leaving Delhi, they headed north via Lahore and Multan over the mountains for Quetta. From Multan, their adventure began. Mani’s diary description of this part of the trip is so vivid that I’m including it here in full:

7th [March 1941] Left Multan at about 7 a.m. passed Shersha - camels - people riding bullocks - rainy + misty (“unusual,” they said) - salty desert - were delayed at the railway-traffic bridge for half hour (near us were waiting bullock-carts with the drivers sleeping on the grain-sacks under the pelting rain . . . Punjabi men in the little hut sitting by a dying fire, smoking “hookas” + talking . . .) The roads here were good + once we had some snatches of sunshine that set the fields on fire . . . At 9 a.m. Elizabeth’s car complained of an engine-attack + was soon put right . . . Soon we met a road with a “Kutchra [unpaved/rough] roads” signpost. The



Photo of Mani taking a picture in Delhi.

8 miles of road across the Indus seemed hopelessly difficult but most delightful . . . the roads were very skiddy, rain was pouring, + driving was difficult . . . we went over five narrow, wooden bridges (made up of rows of little boats) that groaned + rattled under our weight . . . The last of these bridges was longer (where we paid toll + they said they would not be responsible for our bus of 5 tons going across - as only 2½ tons were permitted) + seemed to be slightly swaying in the full stream, rattling its teeth in fury as the loaded bus went across with shouts of “Baba’s jai” from the insiders - Steady rain was pelting down and every drop crashing on the windowpanes of the car kept singing, “thrill - thrill - thrilling” . . . further we skidded across a couple of miles of slippery road again; and the hour of 10.30 found us at the quiet + cold town of Dehra Ghazzi Khan which looked flooded by this “very unusual” + “unexpected” rain. Here the cars had a long drink at a petrol pump; + telling the bus to wait there we left in the car to look for a post-office which we would never have suspected to be one, had not a Baluchi pointed it out after we’d been round that town in endless dizzy circles. When crossing the deserted, flooded road near the post-office, the car got stuck in knee-deep water . . . In an instant we had a crowd of Baluchis with their happy little children; but all efforts at the car seemed hopeless, till one man came up + fetched his private car to tow us out . . . We left Dehra Ghazzi Khan (the land of camouflage houses + big men) at 12 p.m. At 12.35 we stopped - there was a bridge off + the side-crossing we made was awfully bumpy - 20 minutes later we stopped again - there was a big crack on one side of the road, + geometrically speaking, the bus “just made it.” The landscape all along here was deserty +

desolate (a sort of No man's land) + we sometimes met signs of "Diversion." At 2 we came to Sakhi Sarwar intending to stop at the dak-bungalow which we found occupied by military men who recommended the Khar d.b. further on . . . On the way E's car had a nervous attack every now + then but she kept it going . . . The roads were bad but dry - Here the view was lovely - mountain formation in endless ranges of subtle colours in many shades (like the tints in the "mother-of-pearl") - sunshine at last - flocks of sheep on the barren hills . . .

Khar (the place of bandits) is 5,600 ft. high. We started climbing the ghats at 2.30. At 3 stopped for engine trouble - Baba gave us a sweet banana + a boiled egg each (were we hungry!) We got to Khar dak-bungalow at the top of the mountain (with no human habitation for 12 miles around), at 5 p.m. (1 mile off Fort Munro). The view up there was simply splendid with a picture all around of mountains & lake & blossom trees; and in the cold refreshing mountain air, our appetites grew as huge as the mountains surrounding us . . . our beddings were all wet from the rain on the way & we slept on what we could . . . The keepers of the dak bungalow were Baluchis - of the towering figures & striking features . . .

Sth [. . .] We were told it was dangerous to go out of boundary - the postmaster was surprised at us, & said that even military cars had escorts . . . No habitation 15 miles around + no-er-meheter [toilet cleaner] . . . The weather was sunny + cold + we put out our beddings . . . We lunched on "naan" [flat bread] + dal. In the evening we sat with Baba round the wood-fire that Kitty made in the room, & talked of convoys + Quetta and many amusing things ("icecream" + perfume etc).

9th Packed + rested.

10th Left Khar at 7.20 a.m. + got to the little dak bung. of Rakhni, at 8.30 (we in bus). There we saw the wonderful horse-race of the natives - Baba gave the winner 5 Rs. We left Rakhni at 11.30 with a splendid-looking guard in each car and a convoy following us - a busload of sturdy Baluchi escorts squatting gun-in-hand on top of the bus in the hot sun . . . We felt thrilled + excited as we dashed through the land of bandits, expecting a hold-up any moment. After an hour our convoy was left behind . . . we went on . . . bad roads . . . slow driving . . . at 12 we had those delicious naans with boiled eggs + onions, without interrupting the drive . . . at 3.30 we got down at a dak bungalow of some place (I don't know the name) for 5 minutes. At 4 E's car stuck twice in succession in water + sand. An hour later the bus got stuck in a dry river-bed + after they dug away the pebbles again + again, we were on the way in 20 minutes . . . at 6.45 we reached Loralai [. . .] it was jolly cold . . .

11th Left Lorellai [Loralai] (sans guards) at 7.45 a.m. At 12 we got to Hindu Bagh military station (2nd barrier) - they took our names etc. - + took petrol from a man in red + white-striped pyjamas . . . At 2.30 we got down in a barren place for lunch. Although the sun looked v. hot there was an icy wind blowing . . . Hardly had we begun eating when the rain came down + snatching the long naans + boiled potatoes we ran to the car + ate inside . . . We reached Quetta by 5. Quetta with most of its beauty wiped off by the earthquake. Surrounded by mountains that were covered with snow in the winter . . . Although the cold of Quetta was intense (in spite of winter having passed), it was delightfully nice + refreshing . . . Only, the water was full of sulphur + we had such fun!

25th The “mast” who would not come saying “My boat will be drowned in that Ocean.” Baba saw other masts too!

26th There was an unusual hail-storm that killed many cattle, did great damage to the orchards + crops + injured 2 men. The hailstones were big + there hadn’t been such a storm for 40 years. It brought the plaster down from the ceiling in many places + for 3 days the hailstones stayed in the flowerbeds like ice-slabs . . .

QUETTA PEACH

There in freezing Quetta Baba went on a fruit fast. As Mani would tell it, Quetta has beautiful, luscious fruit, but who wants to eat fruit when it’s cold? And Mani said that Baba was not at all fond of fruit to begin with. He just didn’t care for fruit or raw vegetables or anything of that sort—in fact, Mani confessed, nobody in the family was very fond of fruit! And there in freezing cold Quetta, when you would be dying for a nice hot spicy curry or hot dal and rice in the afternoon, Baba was having one peach for His afternoon meal. And the women were eating the dal and curry, as well as the delicious naan with onions, but Mani said, “It didn’t taste like anything; we only ate it, we didn’t enjoy it, because we knew Baba was fasting.”

To make matters worse, although the peach was luscious, being from Quetta, it, too, was cold. So cold, Mani said, that there would be a thin sheet of ice, like frost, over the skin—little frost dewdrops clinging to the peach, making it shine like a jewel! Mehera would hold the peach in her hands over a coal fire just to warm the outside a little before peeling, cutting, and giving it to Baba.

“The number of fasts Baba kept!” Mani would say. “He really used His form very, very hard. We have seen how He drove His body

for His work. And His work was for what? For us. Never, never for Himself. And that is why His work always came first. He would put His work above everything.”

ANOTHER KIND OF SILENCE

Even when traveling around India on the Blue Bus tours, or perhaps especially when traveling on the Blue Bus tours, life with a bunch of strong characters could be exasperating. Mani told a couple of stories about that, too.

Irene Billo from Switzerland was on the Blue Bus tour when they went to Quetta. She was a very lively lady and very talkative, and when she was one of the four women that Baba put on silence for one year at that time, everyone was relieved. However, silence didn't stop Irene; it didn't even slow her down. As Mani told it to pilgrims, Irene evolved a series of hand gestures that Mani was able to read very well—unfortunately:

Irene was a dear person. We Indians felt very much at home with Irene. You never had to cross your t's or dot your i's in what you had to say to her. Our relationship was always good with her.

Now when we heard that she was to be on silence, we said, “Fine!” because Irene did talk a lot. She herself admitted it. So how was she ever going to observe silence?

She did it. However, we soon wished that she was speaking again, because when someone talks to you in sign language, you have to watch them; you can't just listen and do something else at the same time!

So we found ourselves avoiding these people who were on silence (Irene, Nadine, Kharmenmasi, and Mansari). If they wanted us for something, we'd pretend we hadn't seen

them and go in another direction, because they couldn't call out to you and get you back.

One day in Quetta, I was washing my hands or maybe it was my face, under the tap outside in the grounds, in that ice-cold Quetta water. I happened to look over to the house and saw Mehera standing with Irene Billo. As I said, Irene was a very good-natured person, but very talkative even on silence. She had interesting things to say, but it took a lot of time, which we often didn't have.

So as I watched them, I thought to myself, "Let me just pretend I don't see them. I don't want to get involved. I'll pretend I'm very busy." And I started to go. But just then Mehera turned around towards me and said very sweetly, "Oh, Mani!"

"Yes, Mehera?"

"You know, you can understand Irene's gestures much better than I can. So will you come here?"

So I went. And found that Irene was describing her whole family tree to Mehera, this aunt and that uncle, and all these other aunts. My eyes were going this way and that trying to read her gestures, but I was doing my best: there was Ferdinand and George or was it Georgina, I forget the names, maybe it was Alfonso! Anyway, I would have loved it at some other time, but not at the moment, and it was all in gestures!

Well before I knew it, I realized that I was all alone with Irene. Mehera had disappeared. So at the end of it, Irene tells me with that bubbling, contagious enthusiasm of hers, "Now will you tell Mehera everything I said? You tell Mehera everything." And I said, "Sure, sure I'll tell Mehera," and I



Irene Billo.

said to myself, “You don’t know what I’m going to tell Mehera when I see her!”

So I went into Mehera’s and my room (we always shared a room wherever we went), and what do you think I see? Mehera on her bedding in the corner of the room, covered up with blankets, cozily reading a book! I went and stood there and said, “Mehera!” And she looked up at me guiltily and burst out laughing! Then of course I burst out laughing, so that was that.

Once during that time, Irene and Nadine got into an argument. But it wasn’t a talking argument because they both couldn’t talk! Nadine used to “talk” during her silence by using an old alphabet board of Baba’s that had split in two (Baba had probably banged it on someone’s elbow or threw it at someone). It was stuck together with sticky tape. And Irene used gestures. So in the argument when Nadine was pointing out letters furiously on the board at Irene, Irene looked away. And when Irene was gesturing back at Nadine, Nadine looked away. Mind you, the fight was over a very trivial thing! It always was. Nothing big, just temporary and trivial.

They were sharing a room with Margaret who they involved as a go-between because they were getting nowhere. Now, Margaret was the most happy-go-lucky person you could ever meet. She wouldn’t let such things worry her. She was leaning against the wall reading, probably an Agatha Christie mystery or Wodehouse. It was nighttime and the lights were on.

Irene and Nadine came up, and Nadine started spelling out words and Margaret interpreted them. Then Irene

gestured and Margaret interpreted that. And so on. After a while, Margaret thought, “This is too much! How do I get out of this?” She put up her hand, flipped off the light switch, the light went out and that was that. When people don’t talk, and you can’t see, it’s over. I thought that was a masterpiece! Really, what a brainwave!

At the end of the year, Baba gathered all the four on silence before Him and said, “Now, talk!” Just imagine how we felt when Irene gestured to Him that she would like to continue the silence! For Baba, of course, but still. We were all up in arms! “Baba, if they continue their silence, then we’ll all go on silence!”

Baba scolded her, “You should not even have asked. Your silence was accepted because it was from Me. I gave you that silence. You should not ask for it, not ever again.” And everyone looked very solemn after that.

THE FOURTH TOUR (CONTINUED)
—QUETTA TO MEHERABAD

In April 1941, Baba and the group set out by train from Quetta to Dehra Dun, and Mani duly recorded this trip in her diary. Once in Dehra Dun, she later wrote an evocative description of their day trip to Rishikesh:

12th [May 1941] At 4 a.m. left for Rishikesh by bus + car over 35 miles of the bumpiest roads we’ve been across . . . it was also foggy + drizzly . . . We got there at 6. We walked through the narrow bazar, amidst the cows + monkeys + the enchanting music of bells from the temples + ashrams; Baba fed the yellow-striped fish[. . .] in the river where crowds of pilgrims were bathing; we walked by the countless ashrams

with the lovely names, sadhus meditating + in caves, lovely mountains + sunset [sunrise] behind the Ganga river, some real saints in remote huts who conveyed recognition of Baba's greatness by simple gestures, (one standing in sun for days), lines of pilgrims young + old with sticks and little bundles, climbing up to Badri (18,000 ft high - after 10,000 ft. there is permanent snow, + a lake up there - it takes a pilgrim three months to go + come) where Krishna left His body. At nine we went to see Lukshman Zula + the river where Baba washed his feet. Lunched at the dak-bung. + rested. Some v. nice women pilgrims came to see us + the girls sang lovely songs of Krishna—We started for Dehra Dun at 7 p.m. + reached home at 9.30. Very bad roads half the way. Baba said, "You have seen spiritual India with a Spiritual Master."!

And a picturesque scene from Ajmer on that same tour:

[15th July 1941] In Ajmere, the reflection of the sunset colours in the lake were a joy to look at. In the daytime the dhobis [washermen], horses, children, camels and buffaloes at the lake were great fun to watch; every evening there would ring forth from the hill-temples, the most delightful peal of bells, followed by the old man's prayer from the little mosque near by.

MANI GETS THE POWERS

One day in Dehra Dun on this fourth tour, Baba called Mani to Him privately and taught her a trick He had learned from Dr. Donkin. Mani remembered it for pilgrims this way:

"See, now when I do this, you say this. When I do this, you say that . . ."

Baba's hands were so beautiful, His gestures so natural and

graceful that He did it all very easily. I can't repeat it, but if He was doing this [in gestures], I was to say that, and so on. It was a lot to remember, but I grasped it and memorized it.

"Now go," Baba said; He didn't want me seen with Him.

Then He came into the room [where the women would sit with Him] and out went the call, "Everybody! Baba wants everybody!" and everybody gathered.

Baba was seated before us and looked very serious, very solemn. He said to the others, "Today I have decided to give Mani all the powers."

And would you believe it, Eruch's mother, Gaimai, told me afterwards that she felt so happy! She thought, "Well, none of us got it, but at least our Mani has! So that's good, I'm so happy for her!"

They all gawked.

"Yes," continued Baba, "she can now read your thoughts, your minds. I've given it all to her. You'll see now. All right, anybody has questions?"

I forget the trick now, but I think they had to write some question on a slip of paper and give the paper to Baba. Baba would read it and I would answer. I was away from Him, but I would answer. I forget now how it was done, but it was something very extraordinary. Anyway, I just said to myself, "Please, Baba, may I do it right," and I just said what Baba had told me to say beforehand. I parroted it all.



Mani with the powers.

They were amazed: the answers were exactly right! Mani has it, the thought-reading, the mental powers!

Even when Baba let it out that it was a trick, they looked even more dazed. Then, finally, they caught the twinkle in Baba's eye and we all started laughing.

It wasn't until 1969 that Mani suddenly realized, "Wait a minute! Baba gave me the answers beforehand; He knew the questions before they were even asked!"

So from the northwest frontier, through Dehra Dun, the foothills of the Himalayas, and the Sufi city of Ajmer, the fourth Blue Bus tour wound down to "dear old Meherabad."

HOT LECTURES

When Mani, Goher, and Rano talked with the men mandali, after Baba had dropped His body, they were all tickled to find out that Baba would praise the women and say that the men were hopeless, and with the women, Baba would praise the men and say that the women were hopeless.

As Mani noted in the diary, He would occasionally stir them up with a "hot lecture". Some of the stirring she records in the notebook:

[24th Nov., Ceylon] "Why did I pick you all up? All second-hand stuff—not one of you is quite healthy, or normal, or not mad, or fit, etc. Even Krishna had all lame, blind, hunchback, all crooked ones."

[. . .]

"Here is such a tragi-comic wire from someone in Bombay. He says he is following instructions and asks for speedy God-Realization. Hafiz says, 'When I became lover I thought I already had the pearl in my hand, but I did not know how

deep the ocean was and how rough the waves were’”
 (when diving for the pearl in the shell under the ocean.)
 [Then Baba quotes Kabir—written in the notebook in
 Gujarati script—the gist of which is: do whatever the
 Master says; have the courage not to do what you want,
 but what He says.]

[29th Nov., Ceylon] “I find not one cheerful face — All look
 like second-hand stuff. I like someone who has continually
 happy, cheerful attitude, never upset never cross, always
 understanding and helpful with good mood—but not a
 forced one. All second-hand stuff—always needing repair!”

[1st Dec., Ceylon] “Now for my work, I have to tour—to make
 inner contacts, etc. When I did that before, I went on walking
 tour with the mandli [sic], hungry, thirsty, tired, sleeping out
 of doors and all discomforts. But you can’t do it. You want
 home, toilets, taps, water, lights, etc—It makes a wrong
 impression on people. But I don’t mind, I only see to work.
 Even with all these conveniences, half of you are sick. To be
 alone would be the greatest luxury for me—just work, do as I
 want, and nothing else. So in Rajputana I will put you in one
 place, and I will go out few days and come back few days . . .

“Christ chose the right disciples—all were fishermen—not
 too ardent, not too dull, and later Christ did so much work
 through them. It can affect work of a Master, as people often
 judge from impression left by disciples.”

After giving a little stir:

“Action, activity done as it is in the world, has no
 meaning for me—just external worldly activity, nursing the
 wounded, charity for poor etc. But this life you lead—for

one thing you are with me and then you don't have the worldly actions of greed, lust, etc. that create attachment.

“Why don't you go to cinema? You don't have contact with men, don't touch money, men, etc. Who wouldn't like to go to cinema!—but this outer thing leaves impression on you which unknowingly affects you. And you learn self-control. You don't do what you like, but what I wish. Yes, but you must do it wholeheartedly and cheerfully and sincerely what I wish. Otherwise what's the good of it?”

In Baba's talk the next day, as recorded in the notebook, after telling a story of a man who obeyed God's instructions given in a dream at the cost of his life, Baba said:

“This is great real love, obeying God's order in a dream; and here you have God in person who asks you to do such little things and you can't do it!”

[8th Dec., Ramnad] Baba found some of us looking moody and not happy and arguing, and was annoyed at our not being able to obey the order of being happy, and not arguing etc.—and called everybody and said, “Now listen carefully for five minutes! It's for the last time. I have been planning for some time to send you all away—after my birthday in February—if it goes on like this, I definitely will do so. I told the same thing to the mandali in Kandy.”

But Baba didn't send them away.



THE MASTS

As Kitty and Rano wrote, Baba worked very intensively with masts during the Blue Bus time, in the mast ashrams He established, in various places they traveled to, and on His mast tours. Five of Baba's seven major mast ashrams were set up during the Blue Bus tour period—in Ajmer, Jabalpur, Bangalore, Meherabad, and Ranchi—and occasionally He would take the women to see the masts there. About the great, realized masts Baba explained to the women (as recorded by Mani in the notebook):

“[. . .] in Godhood there is pure childhood. That's why Jesus said, 'Lest you become like a child you shall not enter the kingdom of God.'”

“To this child all the universe is toys; and the whole Infinite life is the garden where this child plays. — One who is united with God, if retains body, then the Infinite Power, Bliss and Knowledge of God automatically expresses through the body. Such a one then appears to be stark mad because of the Infinite Power expressed through the body. He is continuously free from all bindings and whatever he does—no law—as he is beyond all understanding, common intelligence. Ordinary people can't understand his ways and acts and think it extreme madness.”

Baba often told the women stories about the masts and the mandali who “hunted” them. These give a close-up glimpse of the parallel world the men mandali inhabited at this time. Mani wrote down some of these mast stories in the notebook, often quoting Baba verbatim:

ON VARIOUS MASTS AND MAST HUNTERS

[Quoting Baba on 9th July 1940, in Ranchi, the hill town near Calcutta where Baba had a mast ashram:] “Today I am

very happy. Two very advanced souls, who controlled the whole of Calcutta: one woman, old like Babajan and one man who has been brought by X. I saw these two last. This one for ten years in one place sitting and people bring him food, as many believe in him, he eats it all. Does not bathe, all rags. All said he never moves and nothing will make him move. I then sent for him here by Fatty [Baba's nickname for Kaka Baria when talking to the women]. How he managed he alone knows, but when he was put in tonga at least 500 followed in procession. He is here. Tomorrow I will show you all. When we were in Calcutta and saw him, it was raining so hard and he was lying there. He does not speak one word."

The male mast Baba refers to was Karim Baba from Calcutta, who stayed in the Ranchi mast ashram and then in the cage room at Meherabad for a brief time.



Karim Baba.

[8th Aug., Meherabad] When talking in the room Baba told us about his masts. The new one from Calcutta:

"This is a rare type. The state he is in was longed for by Ramkrishna [Ramakrishna] & Vivekananda. There is a beautiful verse about it in the Gita. Saints of this type remain in this state for three days and then leave body or remain for years in this blessed state. If they come back to normal again, then they are Sadgurus, Perfect Masters. In the Vedanta, they describe this state as 'Balunmat Pishach Vrat.' Bal=child, Unmat=mad, Pishach=ghoul (ghoul=something infinitely unclean), so they are child, mad & ghoulish all in one. He (mast from Calcutta) (Karim Baba)

never asks for anything, not even water. Only whatever you put there for him he eats. He eats (swallows) copper pice [tiny Indian coin] and when he passes it in toilet, takes it out again and cleans it and eats it. We put about two hundred cigarettes before him and he smokes them all four at a time and swallows the ends. It is phenomenal. And then he goes to sleep again. He either sits or sleeps. When for my working reasons, I want to keep him awake, we put cigarettes before him which he smokes continuously and then goes to sleep again (sleep to him is not ordinary sleep, but superconsciousness). When we put fifty 'pan' [betel leaf with spices inside] before him he took the whole lot and munched it. He doesn't enjoy it. It is all the same to him. He hasn't the slightest consciousness of the body. After three months one day I will take you over to see him. In Calcutta he lived in vicinity of mostly Christians and Jews who before going to work paid him their salutations. Many people would bring him food and he would eat—however much was brought to him. When they offered him money he even ate that up.

“When I left him in Ranchi he was sleeping for three whole days and nights continually. When they bring him food etc. he wakes up, eats and goes back to sleep then and there except when there are cigarettes which he smokes continuously and when over goes back to sleep. He is now in a 'cage' (caged room) ('the cage-room in 'hospital Quarters' at Meherabad, where later Baba stayed in strict Seclusion) and I keep him locked. Can you guess why?

“When this child gets into a temper, he is beyond anyone's control (that is the case with this type), not even a hundred people can control him then. And when I find him approaching that temper even a little, I go and calm him. A child is a child, a

mad is a mad, and a g̃houl is a g̃houl. But this type is all three in one. When they act like that there is a reason too.

“The changes and works of the world and humanity are played through the great souls (masts) and worked by Perfect Masters. The ‘King’ (Flower mast) I have sent to Belgaum and brought this mast in his place. They keep so healthy, never a cold or cough or indigestion in spite of their being so regardless.”

(Elizabeth said, “And yet Ramakrishna had cancer . . .” and Baba said): “All Perfect Masters and Avatar had some deep wound. I have it in my cheek. It is a hole [. . .] It is called Nasur. Sometimes better sometimes worse. Chatti Baba [a mast] is quite a different type. All the four are quite different from each other. Chatti Baba never sleeps. Seldom he nods while sitting down. Nowadays he doesn’t want to come for his bath. So Mohommed [a mast] goes to his door and calls loudly, ‘Bava, avo, angul karo’ [‘Bava, come, take bath.’] ‘Baba pavun pay khaday hai, pavun drekhtay, chalo bava, chalo.’ [‘Baba is looking, and waiting, come along mister, come along.’] And then Chatti Baba comes. I bathe him twice daily. About fifty pails of water each time. After his bath he puts earth all over himself.”

The question arises, how did the mandali ever get the masts away from their home places to Baba, and back home again? Among the mandali were three great “mast-catchers”: Kaka Baria (“Fatty”), Baidul, and Eruch. Baba described Fatty’s “techniques” to the women:

[29th Aug., Meherabad] “Fatty is the only one for this job of bringing masts. He went all alone with the last mast to Calcutta and he had such a time with passengers and police etc. At one station the mast turned ‘g̃houl’, and

wanted to get out of the train, when at Calcutta station he would not get out. At last poor Fatty has left him in his original place. It is not an easy job to bring masts. There are so many complications and difficulties. The Mohommedans who know the saint get very excited when Fatty tries to take away the mast and rise to beat him. But he says, 'I am doing it for my master, you may beat me if you will, but let us see if the saint is willing.' And the saint said, 'Yes, I am quite willing,' and walked with Fatty. Sometimes the police intervene, and there are so many other complications. But he has wonderful patience and tolerance. Happily he has a gift of God, to know a 'mast' from a 'madman'. Their appearances are similar and it is so difficult to tell, but he can know a mast. There are 2000 mad roaming around in Bombay yet from them all he brings the 'mast'. When he first goes to a mast he talks with them, massages their feet, offers cigarettes, coaxes them with such patience and love for hours till they come. At first sometimes they (masts) beat him, but he bows his head and accepts the beating. Then they calm down. If he is accompanied by the others, they get fed up of it all, but he enjoys his job! And only he can do this job. There are three in Bombay. One is Tipu [Tippu] Bava who is very well-known and has a large



Chacha in tonga escorted by Kaka Baria.

following. Second is the sanyasi saint and the third is the mast who is coming tonight. Tippu Bava is much more advanced. It wasn't very difficult to bring this mast from Bombay, because people there know me. But in Calcutta and the other places it's very difficult."

[3rd Jan. 1941, Jaipur] "Gaimai's 'wife' [Eruch] performs the duty of bringing masts, Fatty's disciple—but no one can beat Fatty (he comes next month for the big job). If Zoo-man [Baidul?] were to go bring the masts he would have fights, quarrels, bloodshed and be in prison. When Fatty went to bring the Tanjore mast, a hundred Mohommedan butchers got excited at Fatty, but Fatty lectured to them on Islam and they all quietened down. If they are Hindus he lectures on Krishna. When people don't let him bring masts, he lectures and makes a mess which they don't understand—and they say 'bravo'. There is no mast he won't bring and now I have full confidence in him."

Sometimes, even "Fatty" was stumped by a mast:

[18th Nov. 1940, Ceylon] "Baldy [?] has good news. Poor fellow, drowning in the rain looking for 'mast'. He got trace of four masts in whole of Ceylon. One Mohommedan—two hindoos and one Christian. But of these four, one mast (Hindoo) is very advanced—he is in Jaffna—north . . . Many educated people worship him—judge, advocate, all go to him. But he does not go to anyone. They beg of him—but he does not accept. Very dirty looking, dirty clothes, saliva running down—mad like—but miracles happened which make people worship him. So Fatty goes to Jaffna. They all say he won't come—he does not go to anyone even in Jaffna. But I said to try. Fatty has brought two impossible

cases before. He will try—if fails, then these other three . . . Christian one too, seems very good—people believe in him—near Colombo—sleeps in churches—does not touch money—eats what people give. If the Jaffna one can come—wonderful. Then I'll work with Chatti Bava and him. Fatty knows how to find masts. He is the only one who can do it. He talks to them, coaxes them, gives cigarettes and tea, massages their legs, talks with such patience when the mast gets angry—Wonderful patience! But this time it will be very difficult, because of the language difficulty. He doesn't know the language and that's a great handicap."

[19th Nov., Ceylon] "Fatty wired from Jaffna. Impossible to get this mast—it's because of the language—he can't speak it—the mast said, 'Too much work now, will come some day.' He is Tipu [Tippu] Bava type—majzub—on 6th plane. Fatty must have tried his best."



Chatti Baba in Bangalore mast ashram.

Chatti Baba, the great mast from Negapatnam, South India, features very prominently in the notebook conversations, as he was with Baba at His mast ashrams in Bangalore, Meherabad, and Ranchi, and on all the tours after that (including down to Ceylon and up to Quetta) until September 1941, when Baba sent him back to his home from Panchgani on the fifth Blue Bus tour. He was one of Baba's five favorite masts, and, as Baba

explained, was connected with His work for the war. (Mani spelled Chatti Baba's name in different ways in the notebook to match several possible phonetic variations: Chatti Bava, Chatty Baba, Chattibaba, and so on. In the following passages, for ease of reading, it's kept as "Chatti Baba").

[6th July 1940, Ranchi] Baba told us about Chatti Baba and how he wouldn't go over to the Mast Ashram and how when He sent the English barber [Dr. Donkin] to touch him on the arm and say, 'come', he came. "That too is my working," Baba said. While we were talking of Chatti Baba (who was so called 'cause he always carried with him an earthenware chatty [clay water pot]), the chatty in Baba's kitchen burst 'plop' into bits and the water streamed into the room amidst our laughter . . .

[15th Aug., Meherabad] (Baba came from 1.30 p.m. to 8 p.m. He told us about His masts):

"The Saints give us every night a 'gala' night—they (2 of them) sing loudly all night—Chatti Baba sings too, saying 'Catch him—he is dead—God is dead' etc. All this has meaning."

[17 Nov. Ceylon] "Today for the first time Chatti Baba got angry, and sent his food with dishes and all, flying out of the window. He kept on saying, 'I am hungry, I am child.' So they gave him food three times and every time he threw it away. He loves the cold. Sits all the time on the stone floor, with the windows open, yet never catches a cold or anything. That's because he is indifferent to the body."

"[. . .] Chatti Baba is in a new mood. He asked for two pails of water, poured it in his room, and sits in the midst of the puddle. Every action of such ones means something significant—he looks beautiful—big baby—calls everyone Swami (means Sir) and calls me Anna, means big brother in Tamil."

[18th Nov., Ceylon] “Chatti Baba would not eat—has shut himself in the room and won’t open the door.”

He came at 3 p.m. from the other bungalow.

“Today I worked very well—most satisfactorily—but I was so hot—changed my clothes twice. The old man—Chatti Baba—I never saw him so happy as today—all the time laughing—saying ‘I am child—I am old.’ And had a big meal—mixed his rice, dal, water, all together. Today he asked the boy to bring in mud, spread it on the floor, and [he] sits in it. I have told boys to give him whatever he asks for—I too worked hard today! He is so happy sitting in the mud and water—Everytime I go by, I get splashed. Just think: 24 hours sitting in mud and water, with all windows open, and hardly anything on him, and never catches cold—rheumatism—even Sandow [a famous body-builder] couldn’t have done that. Divine Power helps these souls to be healthy, because they do not think of body. They say, ‘Let God bother’, and God has to bother! (Those up to 4th plane can get ill)—Does child ever bother about their health, body? Mother has to do that. Saints are real children, God is mother!—And until you become child you cannot enter this kingdom. Picture Norina as child—mad [. . .] I can see Nadine as child, but not as mad. If she would be mad, she would begin to bite Norina’s nose. And if Norina were mad, Elizabeth would catch the first boat to America. If Kharmenmasi were mad, she would throw Banoobai out of the window. Mansari would throw each and everyone out of the window. Kitty would learn 10 more languages (to cook in a bhagula [a cooking vessel]). . .” [This funny reference to Kitty touches upon her learning Marathi in order to cook while in Maharashtra. She then used Marathi in every other state, too!]

[20th Nov., Ceylon] “Last night I did not sleep because of work, —Chatti Baba banging the door all night and shouting ‘Who is there’—It is something new—he never did that before; rats as big as cats up on the ceiling, racing across the ceiling all night.

“So I have planned one thing. To make it all come to what I wanted, I think of speeding up my work—to do work of 3 months in 15 days. Since 2 days I worked hard—if I work like this 15 days it can be done. One day I will stay over there, work, and fast whole day on water and honey— And one day I stay here, no fasting, and if nice and sunny, we go in bus to see round Kandy, Colombo, gardens etc. We don’t spend money on long excursions, to make up for the 500 of Kooray [high rent charged by the house’s proprietor, Cooray]. Meanwhile mandali look for ideal seacoast which I wanted all the time [. . .]”

[29th Nov., Ceylon] “Today, after I came, Chatti Baba got so excited—never before like that—and broke the door panes with his fists—When the boy came to clear away the bits of glass, he said, ‘No, leave it as it is.’ Therefore they sent for me. I sent instructions. When I came this afternoon, he was quite happy—laughing.”

[30th Nov., Ceylon] “London terribly bombed (that’s why Chatti Baba smashed door panes.)”

[3rd Jan. 1941, Jaipur] “Chatti Baba is superb! He sits on the stone, leaves the mattress aside! Today he is so happy, sings, laughs and talks English—correct. When a peacock came, he said, ‘All right sir, go away you rascal!’ He was station-master [in the railways] when young, and it’s 40 years since on the path. He must be 70 years now.”

In Mandali Hall Mani often told a funny incident involving Chatti Baba, from when they were in Bangalore:

One day Baba came to the women's side and said, "Chatti Baba bathed Me today. I've bathed Chatti Baba so often. Today he just took a pail of water and poured it all over Me. And then asked, 'Shall I pour another pail?'" Baba went on, "He looked so happy doing it, I said yes."

Then she would go on:

That's why Baba would always be so happy whenever He was with a mast. You see, we're always thinking of benefit, something that He will give us. Whereas our minds should be occupied with what shall we give. It is the constant giving that is the lover's business, not the receiving, not the wanting, but just the wanting to give, trying, making an effort. Not even a lifetime, not even many lifetimes are enough to give to Him. And when you give, when you try, He helps.

The masts delighted Baba in other ways, too. Mani remembered one morning in Quetta it was so cold that the water in the taps was freezing cold, and the water in the pail that they used for washing their faces had a film of ice over it. Anyway, that morning Baba called the women and said, "Come on, come on, you want to see? Come with Me!" So they quickly buttoned up their coats and went with Baba into the courtyard. And what He was pointing out was Chatti Baba, sitting laughing and looking up at Baba, and pouring that ice cold water from a pail over his head! He was all wet, and his beard and hair had icicles on them! Mani said they felt frozen just looking at him.

"Baba was so happy with His masts," Mani told the pilgrims. "They were His real children."

Chatti Baba was one of Baba's favorite masts; another was Mohammed, who was with Baba from 1937. Mohammed was almost always with Baba

during the tours, and Baba spoke of him often to the women as recorded in the notebook. (Mohammed's name was spelt several ways by Mani, and here is kept as "Mohammed," the spelling she used most often.)

[17th July 1940, Ranchi] "For hours Mohammed sang today. 'I am peacock, how well I sing.' He calls the others and asks, 'How do I sing' they say, 'Very nice.'"

[22nd Aug., Meherabad] "You should hear Mohammed! He



Baba embracing Mohammed Mast.

asks every day when his wife will come and we tell him every day 'ten days more,' as we have been telling him for 2 years! (laughter). He asks the 'singer' [a mast who sang 24 hours a day, even in his sleep] if he will look after his children and the singer assures him confidentially [sic] he will,—Yes, yes, wash them, feed them etc . . . "

[29th Aug., Meherabad] "Mohammed's imaginary wife was to have come tomorrow. When he asked if she was coming tomorrow we said 'Yes, but she

fasted for a month and is very weak and ill; if you want, we can bring her on a stretcher.' And he said, 'No, no, keep her and feed her well on ghee and when she is well and fat, bring her.' So again it is prolonged." [Mani notes that laughter followed this!]

[22nd Sept., Meherabad] Baba told us about the funny incident of Mohammed—

"Day before yesterday Mohammed wept and said, 'Dada [his name for Baba], I never expected you to lie to me—you

said my wife comes, and where is she?’ And he wept not because the wife did not come, but because I lied to him. Then we arranged for an old woman to come with a child in her arms and bandage over her eyes and taught her to say to him ‘I will come when I am well, as you see I am now ill.’ She was taken there and M. said, ‘You have grown old,’ and she said her part.

“So I kept my word and Mohommed is happy. He advised her to put surma [a powder good for eyes] in her bandaged eye and then forgot about her completely. Then and there he started picking up stones. [He had a habit of picking up stones from the ground.] (Now he is satisfied that I did not lie to him.) He is just like a child. ‘Unless you become a child you cannot enter the path.’”



Mohammed picking up stones in Lower Meherabad.

[17th Oct., Meherabad] Baba called all before 3 p.m. Baba came at 2.15 p.m.

“Great news today; Mohommed said, ‘I don’t want my wife. She is always sick, there is always something wrong with her. Give me instead, a peacock. I am your peacock, and where is my peacock?’ And then he starts making sound of a peacock.”

ON MAST TOURS

Baba would often describe His mast tours to the women when He came back. From the notebook:

[28th Jan. 1941, Jaipur] Baba went in Elizabeth’s car

and returned late at 8 p.m., because of accident, bad roads, and many other adventures (the optimistic guide and the boy). Elizabeth and others termed it a ‘miracle’ that they returned home that night. Saw 5 masts and touched 4 of them. One of them very well-known, 50 years in one place. Because car got stuck, Baba had to walk two miles in sun to see him. Another mast, further away from Alwar, (he is looked after by the States—and very well-known) when he saw Baba, he got up and cried, “Babaji, Babaji.” Baba told the mandali to give him some money. The mast took it and said, “What shall I do with money? When will you come again Babaji?” When Baba was leaving he called “Come back Babaji.” Another mast called Kokla Mast—on a bridge—he is so old that he has become small. While Baba was going to see this mast [. . .] the car got stuck and it was desert, very few people about and it looked very hopeless. Baba said, “What I enjoyed most was that everybody was

talking at the same time and none understood the other.”

[5th Feb., Jaipur] Baba left Jaipur for Delhi, Benares, Calcutta, Puri, Waltair, Madras, Ramnad, Chanda, Nagpur, Delhi and returned Jaipur on 19th morning. Baba spent literally every night in train. When Baba entered Lucknow there was a riot —also Calcutta and other places. Ramnad, Madras, etc. very hot —Nights in crowded 3rd class compartment—daytime looking for and contacting masts. “From Madras



Baba bowing down to poor woman.

we went by car to Ramnad for mast, and a person from Bangalore was driving. It was a record drive. We left Madras in the morning, drove all day and night. At last at 3 a.m. stopped and rested in car for two hours—resumed journey at 5 a.m. Reached Ramnad 8 a.m. Started back at 9 a.m. and reached Madras 12 a.m.!”



BABA'S WONDERFUL HUMOR

Woven into Baba's talks to the women, as recorded by Mani in her notebook, is a lot of teasing and humor. You can just see Baba making the following comments with what Mani called that “ever-present twinkle in His eyes”—and Mani delightedly writing them all down!

Kitty, who had kitchen duties, had daily altercations with the milkman over the quantity and quality of milk delivered. As Mani recorded in the notebook:

[1st Jan. 1941, Jaipur] When we were sitting in the hall in the eve, Baba said, “We are going to publish new book on—the milk, and Kitty's adventures with the milkman . . . everyday the cows don't give milk and the mandali and Kitty and the milkman all go crazy arguing about time, measure, etc. Then the milkman turns to Baba, and says, ‘You are the only good man here.’” [Because Baba didn't speak!]

[8th Jan., Jaipur] Then Baba asked Kitty about milk, milkman, “The milkman has got so deep into our nerves—not on our nerves but in; so that we simply can't get rid of him.



Kitty with Baba in Agra.

They all like him too—there must be some deep connection between him and Kitty, in the past.”

([In that same talk:] Talking of tigers, Baba said, “I do not mind tigers, I mind fighting disciples.”)

A beautiful explanation of the God-Man led into more teasing of Kitty:

“If someone asked you Who is Baba, what would you say?” Nadine said, “God.” Norina said, “God-man.” Baba said, “Not God, but God-man—God-man is more than God. God is absolute. One who manifests the absolute is God-man. The man who is one with God is God-man. It is wrong to say God [. . .]

“This ten-day train journey we had very poor food, ‘chana’ [dried chickpeas] and ‘sev’ [sweet vermicelli with nuts and raisins] cooked in inferior oil etc. . . . On our next tour Kitty will be our God and keep us well-fed. God will see to it, not the God-man.”

In 1940, when the women mandali were back in Meherabad, Baba explained that He had sent an expedition to the mountains consisting of Eruch's father—who Baba called "Pistol" when with the women—and three of the mandali. Eruch's father was a notorious disciplinarian, and the men were told to obey his orders as if they were from Baba:

[8th Aug. 1940, Meherabad] (Baba told us about the 4 he had sent to the mountains—four men mandali:) "I have sent them to the mountain of Ankai near Manmad— (I showed you from the train). Theirs is a hard test. Three of them observe silence and the one who is allowed to speak is the 'Pistol' [Pappa Jessawala, Eruch's father]. He does everything and makes so much of a row and drives them crazy. Gets up at 4 a.m. and wakes them up too to keep him company. Every week things have to be brought from Manmad. There are no wells or proper shelter there. In their weekly reports the 3 said, 'We will keep silence till eternity and fast to death only if the "Pistol" is not here.' I replied, 'Stay with Pistol and keep silence only for one year.'" (Laughter).

[22nd Aug., Meherabad] "Those on the mountain (the mountain of Ankai) are having a good time—fog, chilly, but spiritual atmosphere. This mountain is a Hindu place of pilgrimage, and this is the month of pilgrimage. Thousands go there. There is the tomb of a well-known Hindu Saint Agast Muni. The 4 of the mandali are right there in a cave. They walk about on plateau. Out of those 4, the only one who speaks is the 'pistol', and you can picture him telling them all to 'go to hell' when he cannot understand their signs. At seven in the morning he gets all the food cooked ready. He wakes them up at 4—if they don't, he makes such a lot of noise that they have to get up. Even when he was here, he used to get up at 2.30

and wake up the boys. In a way it's good—discipline—it's his nature. Before he goes anywhere he packs his luggage ready, seven days beforehand." N. [Norina or Nadine] remarked that he is somewhat stingy. Baba said, "Well, let us not criticise"!!! and significantly smiled (referring to orders).

Humorous remarks are scattered throughout the notebook:

[31st July 1940, Meherabad, after they had seen a movie] "When I was in college the one thing that bored me was lectures on science and today I was in college when I saw this picture, 'Dr. Earlich's [Ehrlich's] Magic Bullet' and when I saw Norina thrilled over it and in tears I thought that was the limit."

[29th Aug., Meherabad, on a Krishna festival day] At 4 p.m. we were given recreation fifteen minutes. After recreation we were all sitting out in the shed with Baba and the servants, sang songs, rocked the cradle with songs of Krishna and had great fun over breaking the curd chatti [done all over India in memory of Krishna's mischievous childhood habit of climbing up with his friends and breaking earthenware vessels full of yogurt that had been hung up out of the children's reach] [. . .] Baba said, "No ceremony or arti-puja. Only fun will be allowed."

[5th Sept., Meherabad] Baba then told us about Piper's telegram [someone associated with Baba but unclear as to who it is], "This Piper will land us all in trouble. He wired, 'All my resources, strength exhausted, you must intervene.' It sounds like a spy message. If he continues that, complications must follow. I replied, 'Join all who are leading spiritual life: Do not expect material help but spiritual help!'"

[26th Sept., Meherabad] As we sat in the shed, Baba said,

“[. . .] Ceylon will be in the midst of trouble—more than Udaipur, so where would you like to go, Ceylon or Udaipur? Who is scared of bombs? I’ve always liked fireworks.

“[. . .] From Bombay to Columbo—2 ½ days—2nd class 105 Rs. each. Kitty will make the stewards mad! and Norina will run about with pots! All that included in trip. Norina will chat with the Captain and make him seasick—to make him subscribe for the Journal [*Meher Baba Journal*] . . . then the boat will [be] torpedoed. It will make an ‘amazingly true’ story for the Journal.”

[29th Sept., Meherabad] “The days I come we talk of tour, health—not of God or War. So—make me laugh by talking of how you kept silence yesterday.”

[17th Nov., Ceylon] When asked if we could have walks in the hills, Baba said in his humourous way, “Those over 50 can go down to the river. Those between 40 and 50 go halfway—between 30 and 40 just around the house—those who are 20 just on the steps—under 20 stay at home.

“I will take you one day to the river. All right, you can go everywhere, but not to the river.”

[20th Nov., Ceylon] “The two barbers [doctors] brought weather reports, which I told you about. I sent one to the meterological [sic] office to get detailed report which says that November, January and February it rains equally hard. And the two doctors discussed amongst themselves and found out that by January half of us will have rheumatism of the 1st degree.”

[12th Dec., Calicut] “From 14th we go swimming everyday and the more you get drowned the better.”

They also had problems with the radio:

[24th Nov., Ceylon] The radio makes plenty of grunting and air-raid sounds every day, and Baba said, “We get so sick of this radio, yet we always play it.” [Then Baba quoted a famous Indian saying, which Mani writes in Gujarati. Translated, it says, “It’s like a wooden laddu [sic]: If you eat it, you’re sorry (because it’s wood), and if you don’t eat it, you’re also sorry (because you think it’s real and you are tempted to taste it!)”]

[27th Nov., Ceylon] When asking Rano to put on the radio, Baba said, “We know how it’s going to be. We know we can’t bear the sound of it, yet we can’t resist it. It’s like the moth. Moth knows candle will burn it, and still it goes [to the flame]”

[. . .] Listening to some awful sound in the radio, Baba remarked, “Send him to Viyengoda [a place Baba didn’t like] in the monsoon—Who invented the radio?” [Reply: “Marconi.”] “Let Marconi eat macaroni—Stop it—Shut it off.”

And in Quetta, they were treated to a poem!

[15th March, 1941] Baba said,
 “Today it’s nice and sunny,
 And it may sound very funny
 But I hear from men sober
 That from April to October
 It will be sweeter here than honey.”



BABA'S SECLUSION – AUGUST 1941

Back at Meherabad after that long fourth tour, Baba went into an intense and difficult seclusion in the hospital quarters on Meherabad Hill. The noise from the wind on the tin roof was terrible, and Baba said, “These 6 days of working with that noise were torture—of course I did My work but it was simply torture.”

He began sitting in the “Dome” but there, too, as Mani wrote, “The wind + noise in the ‘Dome’ terrible, + working most difficult. Baba arranges working in ‘cabin’ + relaxing from 4:00 to 8:00 p.m.”

*THE FIFTH TOUR—
MEHERABAD TO PANCHGANI-KARWAR
AND BACK TO MEHERABAD*

Soon after, on September 2, 1941, Baba and the women embarked on the fifth Blue Bus tour, headed for Panchgani and further south to Karwar on the western Indian coast. This was the second to last of the Blue Bus tours, and the last trip of the good old blue bus.

Chatti Baba came along as usual and in Panchgani there was a lot of trouble with him, as there had been in Meherabad. Mani had started a second diary by this time and describes this trouble in both:

Fri. 5 [Sept.] [from second diary:] We hear it rained v. much in Ahmednagar at last! Chatti Baba very angry + sullen. does not eat etc. Slapped Soltun's w. [“Soltun's wife”, which is how Baba referred to Baidul, one of the men mandali, in front of Mehera and the women. Baidul's wife, who stayed with the women, was named Soltun] + beat boy. Baba looks unhappy about it + says, “He has never been angry in this manner before.” Baba told us of Chatti Baba's state [. . .] Chatti Baba has same knowledge bliss as B. but does not use it, nor body.



6th [from first diary:] Splendid weather. Chatti Baba most happy. asks boy to tell Baba if he could go “home.” Baba said, “His time is up. If he asks again, I will send him - but all my plans will be changed.”

[. . .]

Mon. 15 – [. . .] Chatti Baba walked away. 2 followed up to Vai - brought back in car. B. said “I must see him once before he goes” - in spite of fast + feeling v. weak walked down to see him. Chatti Baba cried (1st time!). Baba came up to our bung. v. weak + drawn + tired. (heart!) Talked of Chatti Baba etc. “You’ve no idea how I feel about it” B. said.

On October 17, Baba met Upasni Maharaj after nineteen years. As Mani wrote:

Sat 18. Baba told us of the meeting: - “We went to this Hut in a secluded place, leaving the others a furlong away. Driver + Gulmai brought Meharaj [Upasni Maharaj] + he too left them away + walked a furlong. I took his darshan (Avtar or no, he was master) + he held me + wept like a child. We sat down + he talked for half hour, about war, my speaking etc. Then I said I must be going + he said, ‘Wait 5 minutes. We will not meet again. You have all the great Satpurush [in this instance, God-Realized Being] work + powers + I leave everything to you.’ + so saying he joined his hands in reverence, + I felt v. moved. Then we walked back together the furlong, + when I clapped the other 5 waiting came out, + garlanded both + took pictures. It was a v. dear picture to see us walking together.” - Baba said “I will speak any day from Feb. 15th 1942 to Feb. 15, 1943, unannounced. It will be when all the world has

gone to the dogs, + Meharaj will at the same time leave body. It will all automatically be so. But I shall speak unannounced - you won't know even a day or hour ahead. In future, there will be infinite suffering for me - physically too!"

TEN STROKES

Leaving Panchgani, continuing the fifth tour they went on to Karwar, where there was a lovely bay. Mani recounted in Mandali Hall that one day when walking along the Karwar beach with Baba, Katie and Mani started whispering to each other how nice it would be to go swimming. Baba heard them whispering, and asked what they were talking about. When they told Him, He said, "Swim? You want to learn how?" "Yes, Baba. How lovely it is here. The sea is not at all rough. This is the perfect place to learn."

So Baba replied, "If Mehera says yes, if she wants to learn how to swim, then you can too, otherwise, no." Poor Mehera was in the middle with Katie and Mani begging her to say yes, so she agreed.

So Margaret started teaching them to swim. They first practiced swim strokes lying on the floor on pillows (Mehera said it was such a funny sight!), and then tried it out in the sea itself with Margaret holding them up.

After a few days Baba said that the next day He would be coming to see how well they had learned. "You are all to do ten strokes each, and then, after that, no more swimming."

The day came; Baba stood on the shore, and one by one Margaret took them out into the water. First Mehera. "Baba clapped one, and I took my first stroke. Two—the water came up to my chin; three—up to my nose; four up to my eyes; five, and I was completely under water. By the time I had done ten strokes I was on the bottom of the sea and they had to pull me out!"

“Very good,” Baba said. “Very good, I’m happy. Now come out.”

Katie went next and the same thing happened: by the count of five she was at the bottom. “Good,” Baba said. “Good, now come out.”

But poor Mani! On her turn, Baba clapped one and she was down! She couldn’t even do the first stroke. When Baba asked why, Margaret explained that Mani’s long legs unbalanced her. But Baba said she had to learn to do a few strokes at least, so Mani had a couple more days with Rano, Margaret and Kitty in the water all trying to teach her. Alas, nothing quite worked. It wasn’t until much later that she finally learned to swim in pools in various places, particularly in Jubilee Hills in Hyderabad. She and the others all became quite good swimmers in the end!

As no bungalows were found in other places for their stay in December, they headed back to Meherabad, and there said goodbye to the dear old bus at last.



*THE LAST TOUR—
MEHERABAD TO DEHRA DUN
AND RISHIKESH TO MEHERABAD
TO LONAVLA AND BACK*

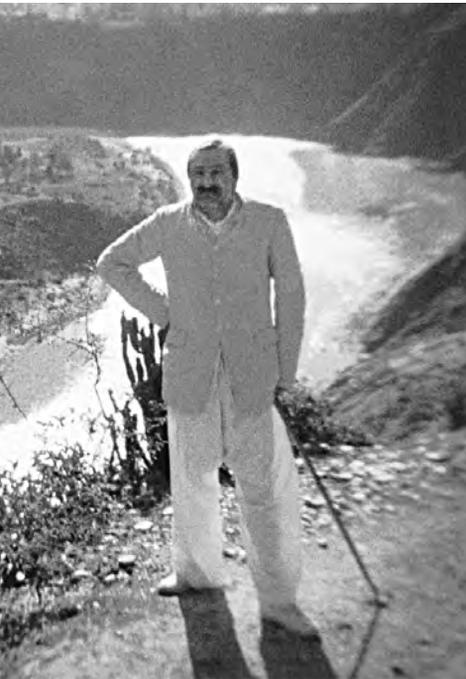
The last tours recounted in Mani’s diaries of the Blue Bus period were by train: one to Dehra Dun and Rishikesh, which lasted almost the whole of 1942, and one to Lahore in 1943.

On the first of January 1942, Mani wrote, “Many soldiers camp in M’abad [Meherabad].” In February they were in Dehra Dun, where there was snow on the mountains, and again everybody was cold. Baba did a series of “adventurous mast-trips” deep into the Himalayas, and

the women took many walks in the mountain air. Baba said in March, “Life will be like whirlwinds in a few months” and two weeks later Mani wrote, “Day seemed like one of the promised ‘whirlwinds’”!

The war, now being fought in the Far East as well as Europe, was a major presence in their life. In March 1942, Baba said, “If Japs [Japanese soldiers] come - under circs. [circumstances] use knife, on you or them - you will find yourselves among hundreds. I’ll bring refugees, you serve them. It will be a universal chance for selfless service.” In May, Mani noted, “Read in newspaper Assam + Bengal bombed.”

Mehera remembered Baba telling them in Dehra Dun, “Now you all have to learn self-defense. If India were to be invaded . . . you are not



Baba in Himalayan region.

to fall into the invader’s hands.” So He had Margaret teach them self-defense every evening at six, and He gave the women wooden sticks to defend themselves with. Margaret, said Mehera, “was a very good teacher and gave us many useful tips, but we soon had to give up practicing with the wooden sticks. Soltoon and her daughter, Daula, who were also with us, would get so excited during our lessons that we could not trust them not to hit us hard with these sticks!”⁹ So they resorted to using rolled-up newspapers during their lessons.

Margaret recalled that one day Baba called her to Him; Donkin was also present. “I was told that since at any time the Japanese might invade the northern part of India, I must train everyone in the art of self-defense. But more important than anything else, some system was to be devised for the protection of Mehera.” She described the arrangements for Mehera’s safety: “She herself

would go onto the roof. The narrow stairway leading to the roof was to be guarded by allotted lathi-armed persons [a *lathi* is a lead-weighted, strong, long stick]. Others would go to the doors and repel the invaders. Since there were not enough lathis to go round, these were to carry jars of pepper with which, hopefully, they would manage to blind the enemy! . . . Baba was very strict and insisted that all this should be practiced seriously.”¹⁰

Baba in May 1942 told them (as noted in the diary), “Today it is 21 years since I started my work apparently - 1st 7 years with men. You don’t know how much I enjoyed it. Next 7 yrs. with boys - suffered, + enjoyed, both. The 7 yrs. with women + you don’t know how sick + fed up I am of it. But thank God this phase is also coming to its end. From June, in Rishikesh I will be quite diff. [different]. You will have to do exactly as I say, or go to hell. I will only be waiting for the slightest excuse to send you all away. From June my work will be much greater. I will suffer physically, mentally + spiritually. I will be indifferent to all + everything. There is nothing worse than indifference.”

After a stay in Rishikesh, in September 1942 they returned to Ahmednagar by train, and went on to Lonavla.

Mani told pilgrims that their Lonavla stay was particularly memorable because of a ghost in their bungalow who harassed the women a lot, even Mehera. Mani was awakened one night by a sharp slap on the behind and was furious with Kitty for slapping her. Poor Kitty was innocent; it was the ghost!

Before long, Baba came to know about it, and told the women that they would not be disturbed again. Later He revealed that the ghost was the spirit of a laundry man who long ago had committed suicide near the well of that place. (Baba had previously told the women not to go near the well.) The spirit had pestered the women in order to get Baba’s attention, and it worked. Baba said that He had released the poor spirit.



Mani dressed up in Lonavla.

Here, too, in Lonavla, their friend and companion Arnavaz was engaged to Nariman; Meheru joined the mandali permanently; and Shireenmai came to stay with them.

They returned to Meherabad in time to celebrate Mehera's birthday on December 28, 1942, with "songs, guests, etc."

Then followed further stays in Mahabaleshwar, Panchgani, and Meherabad, among other places.



SHIREENMAI PASSES AWAY

Mani's connection with her mother and family continued to be only through Baba. Shireenmai had visited Him and Mani at different times and places during their travels, and spent time with them in Lonavla in the fall of 1942. She came to visit Baba and the women again in Meherabad for a short time in January 1943 before returning to Poona.

In February of 1943, when Baba was in Mahabaleshwar, news came that Shireenmai had fallen and suffered a brain hemorrhage, and after a short stay in the hospital, on Baba's Birthday, February 25, 1943, she passed away at home.

Years later Mani wrote about it in reply to a question from the editor of *Lord Meher* about Shireenmai's passing; her response was then printed in the book:



Shireenmai.

I know very little about my Mother's last illness and death and cannot even confirm the details mentioned in the account sent. From the time I left home to stay permanently with Baba, my only contact with the family was through Him. So, although I loved Mother dearly and grieved privately when she died, I did not ask to accompany Baba when he drove down to Poona after the news came, nor did Baba recount the event to me on his return.

Personally, there are facts about my Mother's passing away which will shine forever in the firmament of my heart. Firstly, that she died on *25th February*, the same date that she gave birth to her beloved son forty-nine years before.

Secondly, the *vision* had by Eruch's mother, Gaimai, who was living at the time in Poona. As Gaimai later related to Baba and us, while she was standing beside Mother at the last, to her utter amazement she clearly saw a stream of little golden hands issuing from Shireenmai's nostrils and fluttering above her like butterflies, lastly followed by a full-size pair. These golden hands all circled over Mother for a while, before they slowly spiraled up and away out of sight.

There is another little incident of interest that I recall, which occurred at Panchgani a day before we received the news of Mother's illness. We were out enjoying a long walk with Baba over leafy paths and under groves of trees, when we came across a thick branch that had fallen down. Baba had Nargis Kotwal and Mansari carry the heavy branch on their shoulders all the rest of the way home. Later, in the light of Mother's passing away soon after, we saw this incident as symbolic of a body being carried on a bier. It did not surprise us to thus see a spiritual aspect of his work being expressed outwardly in material form, familiar as we were with Baba's ways of working.¹¹

Such was the strictness of Mani's secluded life, that she didn't even attend her mother's funeral, although they were only four hours away (in Mahabaleshwar) at the time.

In *Lord Meher*, you find that Baba consoled His brothers and the family in Poona, telling them,

Memo [Shireenmai] has come to Me and is now fully in bliss. She helped Me so much in My work, and after playing her part she has come to Me. She was an exceedingly adventurous woman and extremely fearless.

When Bobo [Sheriarji] died, she was all alone here in Poona, as you three [Jal, Beheram and Adi Jr.] were with Me in the West. Because of her courage, I was able to take the three of you with Me. Now, Memo is quite happy and free of all worldly ties.¹²

Mani heard later that when Baba went to see their mother after she had passed away, He touched her. "When He touched Mother, they said there was a perceptible 'Ahhhh . . .', a sigh, as if she had been waiting for His touch."

Her body was taken to the Tower of Silence in Poona, but in June

Baba had a memorial built for Sheriarji and Shireenmai near the Dome on Meherabad Hill. With His own hands, He put a personal article from each of them into the memorial and had engraved on the marble top:

IN ETERNAL MEMORY
OF MEHER BABA'S BLESSED PARENTS,
SHERIARJI AND SHIREENMAI,
WHO ARE NOW MERGED IN BABA'S INFINITY

How happy Mani must have been to know that Shireenmai was drowned in bliss at last.

There is a telling story that Manu (Manu Jessawala, Eruch's sister) would tell people about Shireenmai's memorial on the Hill. On the day of its completion, when Baba was ready to place Sheriarji and Shireenmai's personal things into the memorial, He suddenly turned to Gaimai and Manu and asked them to run and find a particular black sari among their things that Shireenmai had liked. This sari was Gaimai's, and was a very beautiful one, a *ghara*, which is an old-fashioned style of sari with exquisite embroidery, worn on very special occasions. Gaimai and Shireenmai were close friends, and so when it came time for the opening of the Byramangala Universal Centre (near Bangalore), Shireenmai, who was to accompany Baba to the opening ceremony, dressed herself in this sari. When she came before Baba, He remonstrated with her fiercely, saying what would people think of Him and His simple life if His mother came along wearing such an expensive and fancy sari? He insisted that she change it for a simpler one immediately. Poor Shireenmai was very upset.

It was that sari that Baba wanted to put in her memorial.

Unfortunately, it couldn't be found in that hurry, and Baba interred a blouse, petticoat, and some spectacles of Shireenmai's instead. Later on, when the sari was found, Gaimai gave it to Beheram's wife, Perinmai, at Baba's order. After some time Baba also distributed Shireenmai's personal things to her sons, and said to Perinmai, "You are the mother of the house."

When Shireenmai would cause difficulty for Him, Baba would say in exasperation, "Why doesn't Mother understand?" or "Why did Mother do this?" or "Why does Mother think like this?" But as noted before, once when someone criticized her, Baba turned to Mehera and Mani and said, "This person doesn't know who My mother is—she is purest crystal."

Mani told pilgrims about the difficult side of Shireenmai's nature: "That was the role. She must have had a tremendous connection to Him. And from His angle, she was the one worthy of being in the role of His mother . . . You see, the whole thing is a play. The play is already planned, and Baba puts you in a role. Who shall be this? Who shall be that? Whether you shall be here or whether you shall be there, it all doesn't matter. You just do your part in the play.

"Baba's mother's part was: she saw Him as her son. And she loved Him as her son. And she couldn't understand why all the rest of it was happening to her."

In the years after Baba dropped His body, Mani had a fresh flower garland placed on Shireenmai and Sheriarji's memorial every year on His birthday (and it still is done), honoring these blessed parents of the God-Man.



A POEM TO THE BLUE BUS

By July 1943, Baba and the women left for Lahore, a city in what was then British India. The old bus had been left behind, and just as the women reached Lahore, Mani ended her "Blue Bus Diary." But she gave it a lovely farewell, which follows.

A TRUE STORY

By Mani

There was a bus, so blue was she,
No sky or hill can bluer be.
Oh, that time we met her first,
With joy my heart did nearly burst.

She travelled north, she travelled south,
East and west and round about.
Many a place she's wandered to;
She was a gypsy through and through.

Once she started, nothing could stop her.
She raced from Bangalore right to Gersoppa.
While that trip from Dehradun to Quetta,
Was too thrilling to express by word or letter.

She'd glide o'er valleys so green to the sight,
Or through the black jungles up to nearly midnight.
Sometimes over roads as smooth as glass,
You'd think they were really too good to pass.

Next moment such shocking roads would meet-
With rage the bus would rattle her teeth.
While the poor occupants cramped in her belly
Would shake like the finest Mc'Horton jelly.

What one couldn't help admiring was her Herculean will
Once she made up her mechanical mind to stand still.
She'd stop on a mountain or a ditch of water
Or any old place that her fancy caught her.

Or when she was tired (just a pain in the head)
She would stop to rest in a soft river bed;
And twenty bullocks with humps and all
Could but hardly make her move at all.

Sometimes on the journey I've heard her groan,
And squeak and clatter in every bone;
But the winters she put up with, no doubt,
May have given her a formal touch of gout.

In spite of that she was a cheerful bird;
For whenever you wished, you could have heard
Such laughter and songs inside that'd make yer
Think she was a travelling radio.

Sometimes arguments and Oh, such fuss;
I wonder what the dear old bus thought of us.
She must have been tickled quite a good bit,
For often we've heard her tyre-sides split.

What beats me is the way she always grew bigger.
Not that it made any difference to her figure.
But with bhāgulas and pails for ever increasing
And fainting and freezing, potatoes and sneezing;
Laughing, singing, shouting and snuff,
One would have thought she had had enough!

But not once did she let her dignity fall;
She'd "swallow it down" with a gulp of petrol.
And however ridiculous our number may be,
She'd remark with a smile that's cheerful to see.
"Get in my dears, and don't mind me."

But those were the days when she was younger;
And now she rests in peaceful slumber.
Soothing her shattered iron nerves,
Digesting a rest she truly deserves.

Ah! Separation has made my heart quite sore!
But I shall not endeavour to say much more.
For dear memories are never dead,
And things understood are better unsaid.

— Mani



TRAVELING



LAHORE, 1943

Lahore marked the beginning of a new phase, from the time the women arrived there with Baba in July 1943. There in the intense heat of burning, blazing Lahore, Mehera, Mani, Meheru, Valu, Margaret, Rano, and Kitty all stayed in one house with Baba, and the rest of the women stayed in another, cut off from Baba completely—they were not allowed to see Him or communicate with Him, or even look toward the bungalow where He was staying. (They *were* allowed some contact with the other women, but only when Baba was away, and then they were not allowed to talk about Him.)

As we have seen, Mani was always included with Mehera in the closest proximity to Baba, sitting in the front of the Blue Bus with Him or in the car with Him that preceded the bus, sharing a room with Mehera, being with Baba and Mehera away from the others during His meals, being allowed to see Baba when the others were not. And in this torturous new time when the women were divided, of course she was with Mehera in the house where He was. So you would think that she felt sure of her place with Him and, when the signs of a new phase were clearly written upon the wall, sure that she would be allowed to stay.

But, no, it was not so. She once told pilgrims that she always felt, as they all did, that Baba might send her away at any time. “When He would call us and tell us we were pearls and jewels and praise us to the skies, we would worry: now He’s going to send us away. Oh, He could do it so beautifully. He had a million ways of sending you away. With me I was always afraid that He would send me back to take care of Mother, like He had sent my brothers.”

But from this time on, He seemed to draw Mani closer than ever. She, along with Mehera and Meheru, went with Baba to each of His new “base camps” all over India, most often accompanied by one of the Western women, either Margaret, Rano, or Kitty.

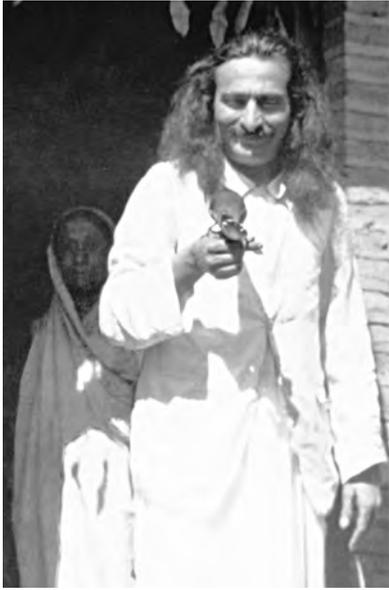
Mehera’s and Mani’s recollections of Lahore often center on the intense heat, the sandstorms, sleeping on the roof, and the eagerness with which they looked forward to swimming. Baba had again arranged for them to have swimming lessons, this time at a local pool. Mani used to laugh about how one day the person holding her up in the water became distracted and let go of her suit, and Mani sank—as usual—to the bottom like a stone. Someone noticed her missing, luckily, and hauled her up from the depths in time. “It was these long legs of mine,” she used to explain in Mandali Hall; “they dragged me down!”

In Lahore, as Mani recalled with amusement, they learned how beautifully detached Margaret could be about her clothes. Someone from the West had sent them all new dresses to wear. The women got their pick, and Mani remembered Margaret’s being quite attractive on her. Now, with them in Lahore was their pet parrot, Mittu, who lived on intimate terms with the women, staying with them in the house, roaming around freely, and quite often chewing



Mani and Mittu.

up things. The bright-colored glass tops of Mani’s sewing-pins were some of Mittu’s favorite chewables.



Baba and Mittu.

Mittu loved to “go for walks,” as Mani would say, sitting on someone’s shoulder. Keeping her out of their hair was a full-time occupation, so one day, to be helpful, Margaret offered to take Mittu for a walk around the garden. Mittu was also quite a chirper, chatting incessantly, and so Margaret was amazed that on their entire walk, Mittu didn’t make a sound. When they returned and Mani came to take Mittu from Margaret’s shoulder, Mani saw to her horror that Mittu had chewed a huge hole in Margaret’s new dress. A new and—even more rare—a *well-fitting* garment was a precious item for the ashramites. Mani immediately offered to patch the ghastly hole. She had great skill with her fingers and would have made it practically invisible.

“Oh, don’t worry about it for a minute,” was the gist of Margaret’s response, and she went off to sew it up herself. Just a couple of big stitches across the hole, drawn tightly into a bunch, and voila!—the dress was fixed enough for Margaret. Mani marveled at that.

In Lahore, nearly everyone but Baba and Mehera got malaria. Mani had it, too, and when Baba wanted to take a few of them to Kashmir, Mani insisted that she was fine, she could travel with the fever. So off they went to Kashmir.

Mani used to laugh, remembering how confused they made the cook at their hotel in Srinagar. Malaria is a disease in which you have fever and

chills only on alternating days, so that one day you're fine and the next you're sick. On the days Mani was sick, Baba had Kaka Baria tell the cook to make her soup and toast, and the next day, when she'd be feeling fine and quite hungry, down from one waiter to another would go the order for *food* for the lady, not soup and toast! So the kitchen would make her food, and the next day would come the order for more soup and toast. Well, one day, the kitchen sent up the awful tinned soup and toast—which Mani didn't like to begin with—when she was feeling well and hungry, and the women heard Kaka shouting at the cook, "Why are you sending memsahib soup? She is not sick!" as if she'd never ordered soup in her life.

UDAIPUR PALACE

On the way back to Meherabad from Lahore, Baba took Mehera, Mani, Meheru, and Kitty to Udaipur.

Mani wove a ghastly story in Mandali Hall about that stay:

There are so many phases of our life with Baba. We've lived in palaces, we've lived in huts, we've lived under trees. We've traveled first class, we've traveled in broken-down vans and crowded trains. (The trains were crowded with ourselves, not the public. We were so many that I still remember a time when you couldn't even stretch your legs out, and so I sat up on the top edge of the seat, just so my feet could have more room.) And we've been to the best of hotels, we've been to hovels. But wherever it was, it was with Baba, and therefore, wherever it was, it was a palace.

Which reminds me of the time we went to a palace hotel. No matter where we were, our inner thing with Baba never changed. So just because we went to a palace doesn't mean that we enjoyed the palace, or that we were allowed to enjoy feasts there or anything. No. I'll give you an instance.

It happened in Udaipur. Have you ever been to Udaipur? It's a beautiful place. There's a hotel by the lake called the Palace Hotel, and we went there with Baba.

It was Mehera, Meheru, myself, and Kitty, and Baba. And of course the men mandali, but we never knew any details about the men; we just knew they were there. Baba had arranged for us women to stay at this Palace Hotel. Everything of ours was third class, mind you—our clothes, our beddings tied with rough rope, and so on—but the Palace Hotel was first class.

We went there, got out of our carriage, were shown to our rooms, and then Baba left us. Once we were in the rooms, Mehera began being concerned about the furniture. It was also top class, you know, maharajah furniture. So she said, "No, no, no, don't put that old thing on the table. Be careful of the table, because it's such beautiful furniture." And so it went on: "Now don't put this like that and don't do this, because these people will think we've never seen such good things, and never stayed in posh hotels," things like that. We got settled finally.

Among our tins and packages and satchels and old stuff was a tin box with a few biscuits in it. Meheru and I were very hungry, and we knew that we were not supposed to eat because we were supposed to have lunch with Baba. But we thought, what are a few biscuits? So we opened the tin and Meheru handed me two and she had two.

And of course Baba knew. He was wild at us. Eyes flashing, He said, "You people! You have no appreciation, no idea! I'm taking you to the best, most posh hotel in Udaipur, a palatial hotel where you're going to have a bumper lunch, and you go and spoil your appetite by eating these two little

biscuits!” We were ever so sorry we ever had those biscuits; those biscuits got us in that fix, so they must have gone to hell, not to heaven certainly. We were so repentant that Baba forgave us.

When at last we had washed up and looked as presentable as we could, we went to the dining room. It was really something: chandeliers, a table with a beautiful tablecloth laid out with silver cutlery, cut-glass crockery [crystal], and so on, everything so elegant. We took our places around the table. Right in the centre was a small cup-like dish with just a little butter in it and a cut-glass holder with tiny cheese biscuits around it. We eyed those biscuits, but Meheru and I looked at each other and said, “No!” No biscuits, don’t look at biscuits, fed up with biscuits, no matter how ravenous we were.

And Baba kept telling us silently, “Don’t spoil your appetite! Food is coming. Don’t have these little things.”

The only other people in the dining room were an old English couple who lived in Udaipur and would come to this hotel every day for their meals. They were at a table not very far away from where we were and there was an ornate carved wooden screen next to them so we could see them but we were also private.

By now Baba was getting impatient and He snapped His fingers. Next to our table were two big fat waiters in the livery of the Palace Hotel. One of them brought something very small on a small plate and put it on the table. We thought it was just an hors d’oeuvre, something to whet your appetite. Even with this small hors d’oeuvre there Baba was making signs with His eyebrows, telling us, “Don’t!” And we were ravenous! famishing! But nothing else came.

Finally Baba told Kitty, “Go to the kitchen and find out!” You see, we couldn’t talk to men, so it had to be Kitty. So Kitty went. Now Kitty only knew Marathi, which she knew well. She took to Marathi like a duck to water, but her Hindi wasn’t anything to write home about. She kept saying to the kitchen staff, “*Bara, bara, bara . . .*” which means “all right” in Marathi, but “big” in Hindi.

When I saw that Baba was really getting impatient and cross, I went over and stood at a distance to hear what the staff were saying in Hindi. What they were saying was, “Sorry, what can we do, the staff and the cook are all gone because the maharajah’s family had a wedding and the staff was called away to cook for the wedding.”

In the meantime, Baba had not minded our partaking of that one little dish that had come. At that time I had an order that I shouldn’t eat anything that combined fish with milk. Fish with milk was taboo for me. This one dish was all mashed up and looked like a cutlet but I knew that it was fish and milk. However, I pretended to myself that it couldn’t be: “It’s not fish and milk, no, of course not . . .” I took some and put it in my mouth. Immediately Baba turned to me and said, “You!” He caught me out, red-handed. Again I was sorry, and tried to spit it out, and so on.

Anyway, that also was not good for the mood. It certainly wasn’t a happy atmosphere, and we were so hungry. So when Baba heard that the staff had gone to a wedding and that there would be no more food forthcoming, He just got up from the table, said, “Come on!” and left. Mehera, sitting next to Him, followed, and I got up from my chair and so did Meheru.

But poor Meheru was so caved in that she tripped over

herself from sheer hunger. She caught hold of the table to steady herself, but her feet shot up out from under her and she fell down with a *thud*. As she fell, she caught onto the tablecloth, and I could see this whole tablecloth and all that expensive cut-glass crystal and cutlery going down with her.

The English couple, sitting there by themselves eating, of course turned around to see what was happening. But Meheru foresaw that; she knew they would turn around and see that she was the one who had fallen, so she crawled out of the room behind the wooden screen. And I was the one left standing there, so they probably thought it was me. Oh, it was such fun. I teased Meheru about it afterwards. To top everything off, we had to pay for all that broken glass.

Mani continued:

After that Baba was not going to stay in this hotel one second longer. Two of the mandali, I think Eruch and Sarosh, had innocently come to report to Baba and ask Him if there was anything He had for them to do. So Baba asked Eruch, “How’s your accommodation?” The men had found accommodation in a homelike lodging belonging to a Parsi lady—you know the type of place, very comfortable furniture, like a modest home.

“Oh,” said Baba. “Did you eat?”

“Oh, yes, Baba, fully.”

“Was the food good?”

“Excellent, Baba. It was dhansak and rice,” which is one of Baba’s and our favourite dishes—rice with a spiced dal.

“Is that so?” said Baba. “Immediately you all move out of that place, and the girls move in!”

I don’t know where the men went, but we got into a

beautiful carriage (maybe it was the maharajah's carriage for the hotel guests), still so hungry and now in a very heavy mood, and *plop, plop, plop*, we went to the Parsi place.

We ended up very happily settled there; there was an old double bed that we could sit on and play cards or read, and there were some old books—that's where I read Count Tolstoy's "What Men Live By," a wonderful short story. So it all ended happily.

But as you can see, the "hut" turned out to be much nicer than the palace.



FINDING MEHERAZAD



Mehera and Mani, enjoying early Meherazad with Baba.

Finding Meherazad—what a future is summed up in those two words. I try to picture it: Mehera and Mani, perhaps sitting in the East Room on the Hill, listening with enthusiasm and interest (to match His enthusiasm and interest) as Baba described to them a new property that had been found by one of the men mandali. "The day after tomorrow," Baba said, according to Mani, "put on

saris and we'll go for an outing to see this place. You'll like it, it's near a lake."

So, all excited, they went with Him for the first time to what became His and their beloved home of so many years: Meherazad.

They liked it on sight. It was far out in the country, which appealed to them, and the place was full of trees, which Mehera loved, so it was very cool and shady. There was also water for a garden, unlike at Meherabad, where the struggle for garden water was a daily (and quite heated) affair. The lake was actually a reservoir, and there was already a small cottage with two rooms on the property, where the engineer had stayed while the reservoir was being built. The cottage is still at Meherazad, in front of Baba's house, with two rooms that were added later.

Eruch recalled that it was purchased at auction for just 500 rupees, with 200 rupees thrown in for the cottage.

Mani spoke to pilgrims of that momentous discovery:

Baba makes everything appear natural and not phenomenal. He uses the common and most material means for the greatest things. They are not called "miracles" because they are hidden, but they are that. Meherazad didn't just "happen," but it was found in a very natural way.

What happened was that for quite some time Baba had talked about moving His headquarters from Meherabad and setting up a home apart from His Meherabad home with just a few of us. He would keep Meherabad, but move to another place.

So He told His followers, the men mandali in Ahmednagar and Poona, like Sarosh and others, to keep an eye out for a new property. He gave them clues: He said He wanted a little hill next to it, He wanted water nearby, He wanted this and He wanted that. It was like a treasure hunt, where you hide a

treasure, give people clues, and then tell them, “Now go find it.”

The men looked around, and picked out some places and locations, but each time Baba said no.

Then one day, I think maybe Vishnu Master was having a cup of tea with a chemist friend in Ahmednagar. There was a Marathi newspaper lying around, and as he was a Marathi speaker he picked it up and started reading it. One of the news items was about the disposal of a place near a newly completed reservoir. It described the place, and the clues seemed to fit. He went to Sarosh with the article and Sarosh agreed with him that it seemed like the right place, and took the article to show to Baba. Baba said, “Good! Let’s go see.”

There was a room on the property (in which Baba sat and worked in seclusion soon after), and a small hill nearby, and the reservoir not far away. It was just right.

At first the new property was called Pimpalgaon (or “Pippalgaon” as Mani would sometimes call it), after the village nearby. Later Baba named it Meherazad, which means “Meher free,” and it was His home longer than anywhere else on earth.

Eruch recalled that Baba once used the analogy of His two eyes to describe the two main sites of His spiritual work, Meherabad and Meherazad. He gestured to those around Him that while the two were independent of each other, together they formed one image—Himself.

But on that first visit, accustomed as they were to Baba’s rapid-fire change of plan and place, Mehera and Mani probably could not even guess what they were looking at. But they liked it.

A NEW TIME

In February of 1944, Baba took Mehera, Mani, Meheru, and Margaret with Him (and two or three of the men mandali) to stay in Aurangabad.

“We had a very happy time in Aurangabad,” Meheru once recollected to a few of us. “We were staying on our own with Baba for the first time. Before we always had some of the elders with us, arranging things. But now we did everything for Him ourselves. Mani had to learn to cook, because she was the one who was supposed to cook for us and she didn’t know how!”

What a new and free flavor flowed into the next phase of their life. No elders, no ashram full of women—except on occasion—and, at first, no cooks. If you look over the years that came after, that Aurangabad stay was the beginning of a whole new world for Mehera and Mani and Meheru. Through the early Meherazad years, the moves of the late 1940s, the New Life, the early ’50s, and those twelve final years at Meherazad, it was those three women (and later Goher, and then Naja and Rano) who stayed with Him.

For the other women, of course, it was a different story. Kitty wrote: “The year 1944 marked still bigger changes, which to those who could read the sign on the wall seemed to be the beginning of the end of ashram life with Baba.”¹

And, acute as ever, Margaret wrote to the Backetts in August of 1944 (from Meherabad): “I feel Baba is never going to settle here with us again. Just as Nasik ended when the work was done, so this place is slowing down and its present phase is ending.” As it turned out, of course, she was right.

So there they were in Aurangabad: Mehera, Mani, Meheru, and Margaret, keeping house for Baba. They stayed in a place, called Prem Basera, that overlooked the river and the Bibi ka Maqbara, also known as the mini Taj Mahal.

The first few days the landlord did the cooking, before Baba appointed Mani to be the cook. Since she didn't know the first thing about cooking, she had to keep running to Mehera for help. She would take out, say, a small pile of cumin and go show it to Mehera: "Mehera, will this be enough?" Mehera would eye it carefully and tell her to add a pinch or take half away and Mani would go back into the kitchen. In another few minutes, she would be out again, with another spice and the same question. Finally, Mehera told her to bring them all at once, for heaven's sake.

She would study recipes, too, and in this way she learned. Meheru said that in the end she became a wonderful cook. Perhaps it was in her genes. (Her sister-in-law Perinmai reports that Shireenmai knew—and taught Perinmai—*fifteen different ways* to make chappatis.)

As for chappatis in Aurangabad, the women made them for Baba, themselves, and for the men mandali too (Mehera would help with the dough but would not cook the men's chappatis herself.)

At one point, Baba asked Mehera if she wanted to go swimming. Fresh from Lahore and its pools and sensing that Baba wanted it, she said yes, so Baba had a big tank that was behind the house cleaned and filled. The men would be sent off (their quarters were nearby the tank) and the women would swim every day at a certain time. Baba sent for the women from Meherabad to join them for a week. After some time a number of frogs also started using the pool, and it went from clear to green as algae grew in the water. So the swimming gradually was left off.

Margaret reported, "Baba's uncle [Masaji], a dear old man who cried whenever he looked at Baba, guarded the gate on the outside."

Meheru remembered that they had a lot of fun in this place. And some fifty years later, she went with a few of us back to Aurangabad to look for Prem Basera. With all the new development, the old house must have been torn down; anyway, it could not be found. But on a

visit to nearby Khuldabad, she remembered how Baba took them to that beautiful “Valley of the Saints.” Here, amid the tombs of several hundred Sufi and Muslim saints and a few Perfect Ones, they stayed with Baba in a dak bungalow for about a week. Khuldabad is actually more a mountain plateau than a valley, with a wonderful view and a unique spiritual atmosphere. It is a place Baba often went with the men, to work at the shrines of the great ones and seclude Himself.

Meheru recalled that one day during their stay, Mehera took Baba and the girls to a spot Mehera remembered from a visit there when she was a little girl. In the courtyard of a saint’s tomb, there is a stone that turns silver when rubbed. It seems that actual silver leaches up from somewhere in the ground. The silver is clearly visible for some time and then gradually subsides, leaving what look like silver-edged leaf etchings in the stone. Baba and the women were fascinated, and you can still see silver emerge when you rub that stone now.

On this visit, Meheru also remembered a great festival that was celebrated when they were there—the Urs of the great Perfect Master Zar-Zari-Zar Bakhsh, which is an occasion like Amartithi at Meherabad. Hundreds of people came to the mountain for the auspicious day, along with hundreds of carts loaded with items for sale. Meheru recalled a fortune-telling parrot in one of the sideshows. A traveling circus run by Christians also arrived, with performing lions, camels, a bull, ladder-climbing dogs, acrobats, bad lighting, and even an elephant.

As Margaret recalled in her book, *The Dance of Love*, Baba sat and beamed through the whole performance, lovingly encouraging the players. And she recounted a most touching incident: as they walked away at the end of the circus, behind the tents they saw the elephant going through his act all alone in the moonlight. Baba was delighted and amused, and stayed watching him until his act was over.

Brother Jal was there too, with the few men mandali, and he went around finding things that would amuse the women. Mani recalled a

magical slide-show-in-a-box (you looked under the curtain through a peephole and saw the sights of Delhi) that he brought for them to see, and a slightly run-down merry-go-round that he found for them to ride on. Meheru said Baba was very happy with Jal for arranging these treats.

I like to imagine Mani in this scene, with Baba up on that sacred plateau with its great spiritual feeling and atmosphere, and a circus and sideshows to boot—it sounds like *just* her cup of tea.

They were treated to a qawwali program, too. Meheru recalled that afterwards Mehera and Mani would often sing lines from the ghazals they heard there. Two favorites were:

“For His happiness give your life.”

“If you bow at His feet, that is not the real bowing down.

True bowing down is to put His wishes before your own.”

MOVING FROM PLACE TO PLACE

Just to give a sense of how much Mehera, Mani, and Meheru (and others, on occasion) moved around with Baba in the six years after the Blue Bus tours, let's look at where they stayed in 1943 and 1944 alone:

1943:

Meherabad – one month

Mahabaleshwar – two months

Panchgani – two months

Meherabad – one month

Lahore – five months

Meherabad – two months (into 1944)

1944:

Aurangabad – two months

Meherazad – three months

Raipur – one month

Kashmir – one month

Aurangabad – two months

Meherazad - two months (into 1945)

Whew!

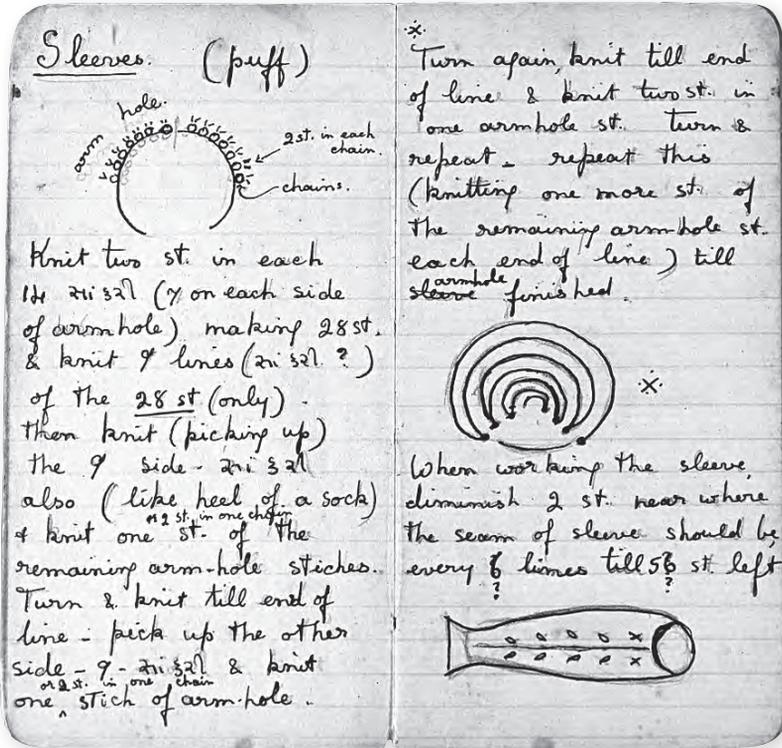
In 1945 and 1946, add Hyderabad, Pasarni, Mahabaleshwar, Satara, and Bombay, with Meherabad stays here and there. At this time the women also stayed a long time with Baba in Dehra Dun, in the foothills of the Himalayas, visiting Simla and the mountain valley of Kulu.

Looking at that list, you just can't help but think of the packing. When you never stay anywhere for long and never know when you are ever going to stay put, what do you take with you?

I imagine Mani packing: her clothes and personal items, of course, and the typewriter, I suppose, and then paper and pens and pencils. Then the sewing kit, because she sewed all her own clothes by hand, every article from top to bottom, as they all did. (Meheru says Mani was a very good seamstress, and they all helped



Mani by a car at Meherazad.



Intricate notes in Mani's knitting notebook.

each other sew.) They also knit their own sweaters (Irene Billo taught Mehera and Mani and others to knit). So maybe she packed some wool and knitting needles, too. Then whatever was needed for Typhoon (a wire-haired terrier), or Mittu (the parrot), or Cracker (the Scottish terrier puppy Baba gave them in Dehra Dun) or any current pet. And before Goher came, probably the medicines Mani was taking at the time for her skin condition.

I once asked Goher about Mani's medicines both before and after Goher came to stay permanently with Baba in 1947. She remembered that in those years when Baba went traveling on mast tours, He often would come back with a new treatment for Mani.

[Goher:] It was Baba only who prescribed everything for her. He would find remedies in places and bring them back.

She was given arsenic injections, gold injections; the most toxic things were given to her.

Did she ever have reactions?

No, nothing.

But sometimes she had these severe courses of treatments?

Yes, very severe. And also pills, horrible pills. Baba would inquire whether she was taking them or not. He would see that I gave the treatment to her. In those days, whatever pills Baba prescribed I would give personally.

And what about her cramps?

I used to give her some pain medicine but it didn't help. She used to get horrible nausea and wasn't able to eat much. . . . On the Blue Bus tour it must have been terrible.

I remember Mani once describing how in early Meherabad, where they were not allowed to lie down during the day, at rest time during these painful attacks she would sit up on her bed (to obey Baba's order) but lean as much as possible against the nearest mosquito pole, trying for some relief.



Meheru, Naḡoo, Mani, and Mehera, working in a garden.

Once again, proof of what she would say: "Life with Baba was fun, but it was no joke."

The mid- and late '40s meant more, more, and lots more traveling for Mehera, Mani, and Meheru as they accompanied Baba to His base camps around India. They were almost always, as we've seen, joined by one of the Westerners (Margaret, Rano, or Kitty), with short visits from some of those who stayed at Meherabad.

Mani, as ever, would describe those times and places to pilgrims through stories, often amusing.

RAIPUR: THE PUDDING

Raipur was one of the places they stopped on their way to Kashmir. Mehera and Mani both vividly remembered Mani's Raipur pudding.

As Mehera recalls it, "In Aurangabad Baba had told Mani to do the cooking, but she still had a lot to learn, and she often came to me for advice. Sometimes the results were very funny. One day [in Raipur] Mani wanted to make a dessert. She had something that comes in a packet, and she mixed it up. She did not know how long to cook it, so she put it on the fire and boiled and boiled it. It became like stone! And there were guests that day, but still we could not waste it. Mani proudly carried it to the table, but, when she tried to serve it, she had to battle with the knife and spoon. I reassured our guests that it was very tasty, and everyone felt so encouraged to eat it that we did not waste any of it."²

Mani's version of the story, told to pilgrims, is that Mehera gave such a glowing description of the pudding, and insisted that it be served in such attractive bowls, that everyone at the table did indeed eat it. Mani, too, gamely dug in, making encouraging noises as she swallowed the rock-like substance. It wasn't until the end that she noticed that while Mehera had talked them all into eating it, she herself hadn't taken any of it—not even a bite.

SRINAGAR, KASHMIR: SHOPPING

The women loved Kashmir (they had been there in 1943 also): the natural beauty of the mountains, Dal Lake with its lotuses, the exquisite gardens to walk in. They stayed in a beautiful bungalow outside the town. Baba took them sightseeing and pointed out to them the area where Lord Jesus was buried in the mountains. And they rode horses and went boating on the lake.

One day when they were walking along the street with Baba, He suddenly said, “Do some shopping. You have to do some shopping.” He particularly wanted Mehera to buy something for herself. As Mani said, to suddenly go shopping was itself a surprise for them (and added, “how natural it is for a woman to go shopping”), so they started going into shops. They remembered the incident because of something that tickled Baba so much. As they were walking down the street they suddenly saw a huge signboard giving the name of the shop beneath it. The improbable name? “Suffering Moses.”

Of course they had to go in and buy some of the handicrafts offered.

*KULU VALLEY, HIMALAYAS:
THE FORTUNATE GOAT*

One day in the Hall, Mani said, “It’s been my habit for years to sleep throughout the night, but lately I’ve been having a very novel experience because I’ve been ill—one that I don’t care for, mind you. And that is: I wake up during the night. And during my waking moments, I’ve been haunted. Haunted by a goat.”

Eruch, surprised, interjected in the Hall, “A goat?”

Mani replied:

A goat, a goat. From it has come a very profound question: “Why?” It’s the kind of question we had when Baba was physically with us; not questions about God-Realization, the planes, past lives, and all that stuff, but questions about some soul’s good fortune, their good luck, “God Luck” as I call it, to meet Him at times when it would seem to be by chance. Like when Baba was resting on His bed in the afternoon, beautiful even in that perfect stillness, and a fly would come round and sit on His

person. Immediately, the big question for me would be, “Why this fly? Among all the billions of flies, why this one?”

So, recently I’ve been haunted by this goat. You see, Baba took four of us—Mehera, Meheru, Rano, and myself—to Kulu Valley, a beautiful, beautiful place way up in the north, in the mountains. On such journeys, Baba would send His men mandali ahead to prepare a place for us. For this trip He sent Donkin. Eruch was usually with Baba, but sometimes, often, he would be sent ahead to make the preparations.

Anyway, on our way we stopped for the night at a rest house in the foothills, in a beautiful place called Mandi. As soon as we got there, first of all we prepared things Baba would need, such as the soap He would need to wash His face, which Mehera kept in a separate box. Now, that soap Baba would handle all the time because He would rub it on His face Himself. I loved the way Baba would do it, rub the soap on His face, then put the soap by and with His eyes closed gesture for the mug of water which He would pour out onto His hands to wash the soap off His face.

Anyway, in the morning after all our ablutions and breakfast were done, we would go out for a walk. So this one morning we had gone for a walk, and when we came back, we found a goat outside the house. We’d seen it the evening before, and early in the morning, too. Baba was quickly walking in so we were following Him, but the moment the goat saw us, it started making strange faces.

“Look at that goat!” I said. I mean, goats are funny anyway, but this goat looked as if she had something in her mouth and couldn’t get it out. Suddenly I said, “My God, is

something wrong with that goat? Meheru, it's foaming at the mouth!" And she saw it, too. So we tried to help the goat, but the more we ran after her the more she ran away.

In the meantime Baba had gone in, so we went in, too. Then Meheru found that His soap was missing from the soap dish. Then it clicked: that goat had gotten a hold of the soap bar that had rubbed against Baba's cheek and been in Baba's hands. I mean, that goat may be realized by now for all I know. Anyway, she had run out with the soap, but she couldn't take it in and she couldn't throw it out. All the soap froth kept coming out of her mouth, but she was determined to keep it, despite the foaming.

Then Meheru and I started chasing her again, in earnest, because this soap for Baba was a very special kind and you couldn't just get it at the bazaar. So we went round and round after her. Even while she was running, she was munching hard on the soap, trying to finish it all up. We never got any of that soap back. But in the evening when we told Baba, He and we all had such a good laugh.

Afterwards we asked each other, "Now why *this* goat?"

DONKIN AND THE GHORAWALLA

Mani continued, in the Hall:

Talking of our time in the mountains reminds me of another story. From Mandi we went up to Kulu Valley, which is on a hill in the mountains, again a beautiful, beautiful place. The town is down in the valley, so you have to fetch everything you need from down below. Kaka was with us, our little hobbit—"Bilbo", as Baba used to call him, and he would do the cooking and such.

Baba arranged through Dr. Donkin to have a pony hired to come up the mountain from town every morning to where we were staying, so that we could have a little ride. We would take turns riding; even Baba sat on that little horse. In such ways Baba occupied us when we were not fully occupied in work, with these innocent diversions, these little things like games and riding. Not that we always had the time or were in the mood for them. But whenever Baba arranged them, we would get into them.

So this pony would be brought up in the morning. Now a horse is called *ghora* in our Hindi language, and a *ghorawalla* is the man who brings the horse, the horseman. Baba always wanted everything prompt. Baba Himself was more than prompt, more prompt than any one you've ever seen. Even when somebody asked, begged, to be allowed to see Baba, and Baba would give a time, "All right, come at ten. I will see you," Baba would be here in the chair [in Mandali Hall] by half past nine or quarter to ten at the latest. And that person might come at quarter past ten.

The ghorawalla would come from the village with the horse, and Baba had said, "He must be here at 10 a.m. sharp!" But the man would never come on time. And of course, if he had to come at ten, at quarter to ten Baba would tell Rano, "Go ask Dr. Donkin, why hasn't the ghorawalla come?" The answer of course would be [and here Mani would put on her English accent, imitating Donkin], "But Baba, it's not time now; he's supposed to come at ten o'clock." And by ten o'clock he still wouldn't have come.

Remember, we were always separate from the men, so Baba would be the one commuting between the two sides.

Every day the horseman was coming later and later. So one day Baba sent a message to Don, "When that ghorawalla comes up this morning give it to him, Don! Give it to him, really! Really scold him, admonish him."

For an Englishman, Don was an amazingly good linguist, and he had learned Hindi and Urdu. But still, to talk or converse is different than to give the "works" to somebody. Don would say, "You know, it's very, very difficult to get angry in a foreign language." But he started preparing himself, working himself up to be even a little angry, so that he could really give it to that horseman.

At last the ghorawalla comes. He comes with a turban on his head. He comes with a hangdog look, a pitiable expression on his face, his head already filled with a hundred excuses: "If this one doesn't work, I'll hand him this one. If 'My aunt died' doesn't work, then I'll say my grandfather fell off the cliff; if that doesn't work, I'll say my child has measles; if that doesn't work, my house burned down. . . ."

So he comes and Don stands there, completely the English sahib, you know. My dear, this is during the British rule, before Indian Independence. And Baba's standing there, too, very gently and silently at a distance. The ghorawalla comes, immediately takes off his turban, and lays it on Don's feet.

And Don says, "What is this? You're late again!" all in Hindi, mind you. And "How many times have I told you, and again and again . . ."

"Ah, Sahib, but what can I do, my child has been dying with measles, and . . ."

"This is not true! You're . . ."

"My aunt . . ."

And then at last the ghorawalla swore, "Never again!" But Don went on and on till he found himself really getting angry. Of course when he got angry, he was really able to do it very well.

Just when he was at his peak, he felt a gentle tap on his shoulder, and that gentle tap at that moment felt like a hammer. He stopped and turned around. There was Baba. And Baba, looking at him with surprise, said, "What are you getting angry for?"

Don couldn't believe it. He felt like a pail of cold water had been thrown over him. And he said to himself, "What am I getting angry for? You told me to!"

But Baba meant, do it without getting angry, play a part. Whereas Don was playing his part so well, he really got angry. Then Baba turned to the ghorawalla, went up to him, and caressed his cheek, gave him a pat on the shoulder, and said [gestured], "Never again!"

"No, sahib," came the reply, "never again, even if they kill me, never again!"

And then all Baba did was tweak the lobe of his ear, "Remember now, never late!" And with that, He blew a kiss at him. Nothing to Don; just "What are you getting angry for?"

SIMLA IN THE FOOTHILLS: VASES

Mehera and Mani, who were always together, naturally would have what Mehera called "friendly squabbles". One such squabble arose after Baba took them to a play. They were in Simla, a lovely hill station with views of the mountains to admire and forests to walk in and cool air, all of which they enjoyed on their long walks with Baba. The play was a very special treat for them; they even sat in the dress circle, a luxury

seating area in the theater. When they came home, Mehera commented to the others about a beautiful white alabaster vase she had noticed on the stage.

“What white vase?” said Mani. “The vase was green. I was admiring it, too.”

Well, Mehera had admired it, too, and she was sure it was white, and Mani was quite definite that it was green, and so it went on. It so happened that Kitty was with them on this visit, and having the freedom to walk around on her own, she disappeared the next day for a while. When she came back, she happily informed Mehera and Mani that, surprise, they both had been right. She had gone to the theater and asked about the vases and there was a white vase and a green vase, one for the first part of the play and the other for the second.

For some reason, Mehera and Mani both recalled this squabble with relish.

DONKEY COAT

Mani would also tell pilgrims a story from that time that illustrated Baba's love for Mehera in a very simple way. In Simla, they enjoyed a lot of Baba's company; He took them for long walks and sometimes played cards with them:

Once Baba lost a game of cards, the only time I've seen Him lose a game. Of course Baba would play naturally, and He would also cheat. But Baba would cheat knowing that you knew He was cheating. It was a sort of challenge to us: “All right, catch me out.” And we couldn't. We were like hawks watching Him, His every move, all ready to catch Him at it, but we couldn't. He was that good.

Once when we were in Simla, we were playing a game of cards, a simple little children's game where if you lose, they

say you “get a coat.” Not literally, of course, but it’s just how the children play. And if you lose doubly, you are supposed to get a “donkey coat.”

Baba and myself were on one team and Mehera and Meheru were on the other. And Baba and I lost. So they started teasing us, and Mehera said to me, “Oh, you got a donkey coat!”

Of course I said back, “No, I didn’t! Now I’ll give you one!” and so on.

But then I realised that maybe it was because Mehera was playing on the other side from Him that Baba lost that game, so that she could win. It was just for her.

SWIMMING IN JUBILEE HILLS

After stays in Aurangabad, Meherazad, and Ahmednagar (when by Baba’s order they all did not get injections for the bubonic plague that was sweeping the area), Mehera, Mani, Meheru, and Margaret went with Baba to Hyderabad/Secunderabad where they ended up at a newly built house in the Jubilee Hills area.

Margaret wrote to the Backetts (on October 3, 1945): “We then moved to a really lovely house . . . that was modern, streamlined and decorated with delicate colors. There was a delicious garden *and* a swimming pool. After all our adventures with Baba it seemed like a fairyland to us. Baba seemed delighted with the place . . .”³

Mehera described the pool thus: “In one wall was set an aquarium filled with small fish, and through the glass of the aquarium one could see into a swimming pool outside. It was a medium-sized pool which adjoined the house, and very lovely it was. . . . The tiles on the bottom of this pool were light blue, with a white star pattern scattered here and there. It was as if the sky were reflected in the water.”⁴

Baba told them they could swim in the morning at ten, and then in the evening from three to five. Margaret taught them to dive. “Margaret had a very beautiful way of teaching,” said Mehera, “and she gave us such confidence.” They all learned to swim well, and Baba also called the women at Meherabad to come for a while to enjoy His company and the pool.



EARLY MEHERAZAD

“Meherazad is the breath of Meherabad,” Mani once told someone. Free as breath, light as the air under all those trees, so quiet, so secluded: what a different world Mehera, Mani, Meheru, and Margaret stepped into with Baba as they arrived in April 1944 for a stay. Not only was it beautiful, but it was His own property. And theirs to do with as they wished (well, as *He* wished).

April to July 1944 was the first of many long stays at Meherazad for “the girls.” Mani afterwards talked of those times as “early Meherazad,” before the big house and other structures went up. They stayed in a small house that Baba had had constructed while they were in Aurangabad, and Baba stayed in the original cottage nearby. In retrospect, they realized that their stay in Aurangabad was His way of preparing them for the new life of Meherazad, when they would again be keeping house for Baba.

As Mani recalled to pilgrims at Meherazad many years later, “Had



Baba with pet dog by early Meherazad gates.

we been told in the past what Meherazad would be like in the present, we wouldn't have believed it. It was so quiet in those days. We were so alone with Baba. It was as if the whole world had been emptied out just so that Baba and we alone would remain."

It's hard to believe that after all her adventures, when they moved to Meherazad Mani was just twenty-five years old.

When I think of early Meherazad, I think of Mehera just starting her garden (at Baba's prompting), and Mani and all of them helping her. And of Mani sitting out in the evenings by the old gate behind Mehera's and her room, playing her sitar. She would reminisce about it, and about the trees she would sit under—two tamarinds, a gulmohr, certain neems—that she came to call her "old friends." Years later, sitting in the garden, Mani said: "Now when the trees rustle their leaves, it's easy to imagine they're talking of their past, their hour of glory, when Baba, God, walked under them as Man."

When He played games with the women there, Baba would get the players very excited. As Mani continued, "And they [the trees] could see us very earnest during our games, ready to catch Him at any cheating we thought He was doing. And never catching Him. That, too, was part of the game."

Valu was with them when they first came, as well as two of their old-time servants. Naja came and went as Baba directed. On occasion Rano or Kitty was called to stay, and Goher (studying to be a doctor in Bombay) visited from time to time.

Kitty wrote:

Life at upper Meherabad was never the same for us after Baba moved to Meherazad. How could it be? It was both a trial and a test for those remaining there. To have Baba comparatively near and yet not be able to see Him for months on end was not easy.

As I have noted, Baba would frequently tell you the worst news first and then lighten your heart later on. He watched your reactions to see if you had learned to be a “rock,” unmoved by all exterior events, good or bad. Thus, to our surprise and joy, a few months after Baba had shifted to Pimpalgaon, He began calling those still in Meherabad to spend time with Him at Meherazad. . . . You can imagine the joy and happiness we felt when called to Meherazad by Baba for these short periods. Baba was not unmindful of how we felt at being separated from Him, and if we could appear with happy faces, then we knew Baba was pleased.⁵

In those days, the women would often go on early morning walks with Baba down the approach road and beyond, climbing the surrounding hills. As Mani would say, walking with Baba was an experience. “You’ve seen it in films, that easy stride that Baba had. If for a moment you stopped to look around, you had to run after Him. You had to run to keep up with Him.” Then she’d laugh, “We’re still doing it; we’re still running after Baba!”

“When we first came to live here in Meherazad,” Mani told pilgrims, “we would go on nice long walks with Baba. Not only walks, but we climbed many of the hills surrounding Meherazad. There’s a hill not far from here that we climbed with Baba, and Goher rolled down part of it. She slipped on the rubble, but she was so relaxed that she just kept



View of Seclusion (“Tembi”) Hill from Meherasad quarters before 1946. The Blue Bus and a car are in the foreground.

rolling down. She didn’t hurt herself at all. It was the funniest thing afterwards.”

In the early evenings they would often climb Seclusion Hill (then called “Tembi Hill”) behind Meherasad, helped up over the steepest parts by Baba. “When Baba would sit or stand up there on the top looking out, it was like the Lord viewing His creation. It was a beautiful feeling.” They climbed the adjoining Khandoba Hill and visited the Khandoba temple on top. There is a temple fair there once a year, and the women would watch the procession of people climbing the hill for the fair, which Mani described as “full of religious gaiety and village fun.”

At the end of 1947, Baba sat in seclusion at the top of Seclusion Hill for twelve days. Padri had built two cabins up there, on the upper and lower slopes of the hilltop, and Baba took the women, including Elizabeth and Norina, to see them. At the steepest part, when Mehera was feeling giddy (and climbing up on all fours), Baba took her hand and lovingly helped her to the top. Mehera and Mani were allowed to go up and see Him there once or twice during the seclusion itself.



Photo seems to be of Mani on top of Seclusion/Tembi Hill, facing the reservoir.

STONES

They'd often walk in the *nullahs* (dry ravines) that run between the hills, and are only filled with water during the monsoon season. Colorful small stones and rocks would wash down into the nullahs with the rains.

In the Hall Mani describes how those walks soon turned into something else:

We would walk through one nullah with Baba that ended in sort of a niche-like cave, where we would sit and rest for a while. And pick up stones.

Baba would pick one up, then Mehera would pick one up, "Oh look at this stone," then Naja, and me, and so on. Baba would show off His stones, "Look at Mine!," and we each would show off our stones, "Look, look at mine," and we would be so excited we couldn't leave them behind.

So we'd bring them back. We had gone out lighthearted and empty-handed and come back with our hearts filled with joy and our hands loaded. We'd put the stones in a big basin of water and brush all the dust off and they'd sparkle all the more.

That went on for a couple of days and then we got

greedier. We began picking up the end of our skirts to loop them into sort of a sachel and putting the stones in there, and we came back happy but burdened. Well, day by day, we were bent more and more double, carrying those skirt-fulls of rocks. Big ones, small ones, every color, every size, like gems, more and more treasure. Then of course we needed bigger basins to wash them in, then we needed pails, then we had to have bigger brushes to brush them with, and . . .

Well, eventually, skirt-fulls were not enough. So we began taking a wheelbarrow. Now we'd seen the garden boys using the wheelbarrow, and pushing it seemed as easy as pushing a hoop. But when we tried it, it wasn't so easy. At first we'd fight over our turn: "I'll do it, I'll push the wheelbarrow," "No, no, you're tired, I'll push it," "No, I'm not tired, let me do it."

Well after a few days of pushing that wheelbarrow full of stones through those rough nullahs, it became, "Would you like your turn to push? Here, let me give you the chance."

Almost every stone was touched and admired by Baba, and we decided we would use them to border the flowerbeds in the garden that Mehera wanted to make for Him. We would all help her do it. So that's what happened to the stones.

But the stones didn't stay in the garden forever. A few years later, in 1948, Baba decided to expand the small house they were living in, and He invited Mehera to make up a plan for a bigger house (the house you see in Meherazad today). When they started construction, Baba and the women mandali moved temporarily to Goher's parents' house in Ahmednagar:

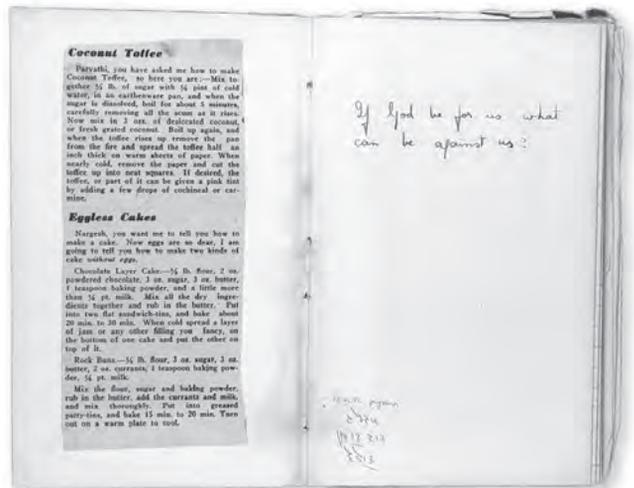
When the new house was ready, we came back to Meherazad. But one of the first things Mehera and we all missed were the stones. Each one of us on our own was thinking to ourselves, "What happened to those stones, the

beautiful stones we used to bring with Baba?" You see, every stone was touched by Baba, even the ones we picked up, because we passed them on to Him and He admired them. We held the ones He picked and He held the ones we picked. So they were all blessed by Baba's touch. And they were beautiful as well. But where were they?

Our first days there were very busy, but after a while, we started voicing our surprise at finding all the stones gone. Then we found out that the workmen building the house's foundation had found all these stones lying around handy and so they had put them into the foundation.

Hearing this, at first we were mad. All those lovely stones touched by Baba had disappeared into the ground. But afterwards we recognized, as we usually do with these "blessings in disguise," that it was a wonderful thing that the very foundation was made of stones blessed by Baba. It's like it was the "house that Baba built."

When I asked Meheru who cooked for them then, she replied enthusiastically, "Mani cooked." In a little mud-and-rock kitchen that Valu built for them in back of their small house. Meheru recalled it was all very basic. There was one small room with beds and "room for little else" where Mehera and Mani stayed, and two tiny



Mani's collection of recipes to help her cook.

narrow rooms: a pantry and a room where Margaret and later Naja also lived. “Of course we were happy with just a corner to stay in, and a bed was a luxury.”

Baba stayed in a separate cottage. Their house had a small verandah where He would come and eat with them, Baba on His gaadi and they on small individual mats around Him.

“We loved those days,” Meheru recalled. “We felt we were in a world of our own, a haven. I look back on that time with such nostalgia.”

In Meherazad, Baba wanted Mehera to feel free to garden, and she and Mani and Meheru would go out with pickaxes and seeds and scratch up the little topsoil they had to make beds. Meanwhile Margaret would sit under a tree to guard their drinking water well. Goher remembered Mani in the garden, “Everything would entertain her. Sometimes, these bougainvillea flowers would float down and she would say, ‘Oh, look at that. That looks like a bird!’”

The women’s first real pet dog came to them in early Meherazad. Mehera remembered Baba one day walking briskly through the garden toward them carrying a “little ball of wriggling fluff in His arms.” It was a puppy, and as there was a huge storm following the puppy’s arrival, Baba named her Typhoon. The women learned a lot about dog-training from Typhoon, both what to do and what not. As Mehera was busy with His personal work, Baba put the puppy in Mani’s care. Typhoon had a sweet nature, and Mehera and Mani taught her tricks. (Unfortunately, she lived only a year, and they were very sad when she died following a fall.)

So, Mani was occupied with being with Mehera, cooking, dog-training, sitar-playing, occasional correspondence (as and when Baba would instruct), gardening with Mehera, and of course being with Baba when He called.

Baba used to read books Himself in those days for recreation, as well as the newspaper. Then Mani began reading aloud to Him and the

women when they would all sit together. She read Edgar Wallace (Baba particularly enjoyed *The Murder Book of Mr. J. G. Reeder*, *Chick*, and *The Duke in the Suburbs*, especially *Chick*), E. Phillips Oppenheim, and Agatha Christie, among others. If the Christie mystery involved Poirot, then Baba insisted that Mani read it out—He loved her Poirot voice. If it was Miss Marple, then Rano could read it. Kitty and some of the others would also read aloud to Him on occasion.

Kitty recalled:

Work permitting, Baba would sometimes sit with us all for a short while after supper and the time would be spent listening to recordings of the beautiful spiritual songs composed to words from the poems of Hafiz, Kabir or Shams-e-Tabriz (Master of Rumi). Baba would translate for the benefit of the Westerners the Urdu or Persian meaning of each couplet into English. Another time, Baba would ask one of the group to read aloud passages from the lives of St. Francis of Assisi, St. Teresa or Meister Eckhart—Baba interrupting from time to time to make some point clearer to us all. The memory of these evenings will ever remain an unforgettable joy.⁶

OFF TO THE MOVIES

“I still have a note,” Mani said one day in the Hall, “with Adi’s signature on it, that was sent out to all concerned saying that ‘Baba says such-and-such film will start at Sarosh Cinema at five in the morning and all should be ready.’”

“That was another phase,” added Eruch, “and that phase was that Baba would take the women to a cinema house in Ahmednagar, owned by one of His disciples, Sarosh. All the cinema houses in Ahmednagar, including the military one, belonged to him. And Baba wanted the



Baba reading a newspaper in Ajmer.

women to see the different films that were exhibited there. It would be a private showing, absolutely private. Who is going to have a public show at five o'clock in the morning?"

This "early morning movie phase" began when the women were all at Meherabad, and continued when Mehera and Mani with others were living in Meherazad. Baba would call both groups, the Meherazad and the Meherabad women, for the movie. The two parties of women would meet up, yawning surely, before the crack of dawn at the theater, which was midway between the two places.

Mani gave pilgrims further, somewhat gruesome, details:

To be ready there at five in the morning, you, of course, had to get up much earlier to prepare things for when you came back; you know, lunch, household things, kitchen things, your own things. So much had to be done before you could be ready to go.

Then we would dress up. That's the one time we would put on our good clothes, whatever they were. We used to put our good clothes by for occasions like this. Even though there was nobody to see us except ourselves, it was an occasion.

I still remember one time I had severe stomach cramps on a morning we were to go to the cinema. And the last thing in the world I wanted to do was to go to a movie. But it was not when you wanted to or felt like going to a movie that you went, it was when Baba wanted it. So I said to myself, "Never mind," got up, and walked like an old, old woman, all bent over. I got dressed. I don't know how I got ready, I had such a pain in my stomach, but I did. I was really looking like a crock.

So we went, and when we got there we had to climb up stairs because our seats were in the gallery [balcony].

Everybody was very sympathetic; they knew poor Mani got these cramps once in a while. Upstairs there was a sofa and once we were up, I got onto that sofa, pulled my legs up, and thought, “That’s fine, now I’ll be all right. Now I can relax.”

But I tell you, it was the worst picture I’d ever seen. It was called, “Wake Up and Dream.” At first we all got into it, but it was a nightmare, it wasn’t a dream. I couldn’t believe it. It was all about a boat, a wooden boat with wheels, that for some reason they were towing along the streets. I said to myself, “This is impossible; it’s just too much. I’ll close my eyes.” So I just closed my eyes, but then it was worse, because there were a lot of sounds, and I kept imagining horrible things happening to that boat. So I’d open my eyes and the nightmare would still be there: the boat would still be rolling along those roads. It’s something I can see to this day.

But sometimes the films were very good. Baba always liked a good drama, a good story. Sometimes there would be two films. Baba would say, “Let’s have another one!” “Oh, fine!” we’d say, and we’d have another film. We were remembering the other day that at one point Baba even had a third one started, because there was still time before the theatre opened to the public, but it was hopeless, and we were so tired, and by then we really *didn’t* want to see another film; it was like eating too many chocolates—you don’t want even one more.

We have also been to regular movie houses with Baba when we were traveling, and we always noticed that Baba picked really good films, ones we knew He would enjoy.

Although He didn’t explain it in this context, Baba told us another time about His collective working. There is the

individual work He did, and there is collective work, which was on a big scale. That was when people were gathered together all concentrating on a particular object, like a cricket match, or a film, or at any big gathering when crowds were collected and their focus was one-pointed. For instance, we might be driving by and see a large crowd collected outside of a cricket ground watching a match. Or some other gathering. And Baba would just stop the car on the road, and even though He would not participate as a part of the audience in whatever was going on, He would stop the car and just be there, at times His fingers moving—so we knew He was working.

So it would happen with films. Usually we women would just watch the film. But one time I happened to turn around for some reason and looked at Baba. Baba didn't like you to do that; He wanted you to be natural and allow Him to be natural. But I happened to look at Him. His fingers were going very fast while the film was going on.

When it was a good film, obviously everyone's focus was right on the film, and then His work probably got done sooner, because we rarely ever saw the end of it. Naturally everybody was concentrating on the film; all eyes were there. So whatever was Baba's work could be done very quickly. So sometimes before a good picture would end, Baba would say, "Let's go home."

He would snap His fingers, you would feel someone pushing you, and then hear the whispers, "What's happened?," "Baba's leaving! He's going," "Oh, my goodness," and there we would be all in the dark, couldn't even see, scrubbing our feet along the ground to feel our way out, getting up so suddenly that you usually dropped

your favorite scarf in the rush, or anything that you had on your lap. How often we'd come home and say, "Oh, that lovely scarf." "Oh dear, my purse." Oh, this, or oh, that. Lost.

And then the shuffling out. Now knowing that Baba would just walk out, I would always try and be the last to go. And the others would prefer it, because I would follow the story as I went out, as it would be a critical scene. Even when I was leaving through the dark curtain at the exit, my head would still be inside for a last peek: Is Pauline still hanging over the cliff or has she gone down? Has the train come yet, and is he going to . . . ?" As soon as I'd get in the car, the others would say, "What happened?" And I'd say, "She's still hanging."

But if it was a bad film, and everyone wasn't focused one-pointedly on the picture, but was distracted—I don't know, the work took a different turn, whatever it was. Then Baba would have us sit through that film to the bitter end. Like "Wake Up and Dream."

But not always. Baba really has given us so much enjoyment. On the one side, everything was so strict and so hard, but then on the other, He would give us so much. There would be the fasts; there would be the feasts. There would be the outings to the zoo, or a good picture; there'd be games with Him, and there'd be the pets.

And then there would be that life with Baba, living with Baba, close to the Sun. It's no picnic, no joke. But you didn't want to do anything else on earth.

So when was the time they *least* wanted to go to a movie? A good bet would be the time they were on their way to Kashmir. The car taking

them part of the way broke down continually (“Everything went wrong with this vehicle,” said Mehera) but finally they reached a dak bungalow to rest in before they took the train onwards. All they wanted was rest and a bath (the train left that night), when Baba came in and announced a treat: they were to put on saris and go to the cinema!

As they could not say, “Oh, no, Baba”—which is what they were thinking—down came the trunks from the car, out and on went the saris, and into the car went the ladies. They sat and waited to go. And waited some more, because the car wouldn’t start. And wouldn’t start. And wouldn’t start. Eventually Baba said, “It’s too late now. Everybody get out!”

Mani’s favorite part came next, as she enjoyed describing in the Hall. They couldn’t open their door to get out. Everyone tried to open it, including Baba. Finally Rano stepped up, requested Baba to stand to the side, and kicked the darn thing. It opened, the women clambered out (to the great amusement of the bungalow servants), dragged themselves back to the room, and now had to change all over again, for the train.

So, it’s a good bet that the film they never saw was the worst.

A POEM FROM THE EARLY 1940s

“To His Disciples

BABA SAYS..... ..”

by Baba’s sister Mani

Do what I tell you, with love and zest:
 Leave to me the entire rest.
 Even failure does not mean a thing
 When you have tried your very best.

Live in the world and play your part;
Renounce the world within your heart.
And in the life that comes and ends,
Strive for the end that has no start.

Fast when you're hungry, eat when you're not.
Keep cool as a cucumber when you're boiling hot.
No matter what soup or fix you're put in,
Don't ever forget to prove a sport.

Have your feelings, but know them untrue.
Look sunbeams and smiles when feeling all blue.
Whatever the path I've chalked out for you,
Keep going; why stop to argue?

I shall give you what you wish, and more,
But not when you wish to get it, be sure.
To wait and wait, and just to wait
Is what you must learn to endure.

Don't grumble and cry at your share and lot.
Don't think I've forgotten and love you not.
Remember, what you get from the ocean of love,
Depends on the size of the vessel you've got.

When doubts and grief knock at heart's door,
Tell them you don't live there any more,
But slowly climbing blade-like steps,
Shifting to the seventh floor.



FLORENCE HALL

There is a striking photo of Mani taken in the winter of 1946-47, holding Cracker, her Scottish terrier. Mani looks so young that it's hard to believe she had been living in the ashram for fourteen years. And yet some deep intensity of experience seems captured in her expression. She is squatting next to Cracker on the grounds of Florence Hall, in Mahabaleshwar. It was one of the mansions they lived in with Baba, as opposed to one of the huts. They would return there with Baba in later years.



Mani posing with Cracker.

Just before their move to Mahabaleshwar, Baba had taken Mehera, Mani, Meheru, and Kitty to Vengurla. "I have been away with Him and three others of the group to the sea coast on the Southwest not far from Goa," wrote Kitty to Mary and Will Backett in March '47. "The whole setting reminded me of our time at East Challacombe with Baba. He would sit in the morning and watch us swim in the ocean and in the late afternoon we would walk along the beach looking out for attractive shells. We see so little of Baba these days that it was a real treat."⁷

In what must have seemed a rerun of the old days, in Mahabaleshwar (and in Satara three months later) Baba called many of the men and women mandali from Meherabad and other places to come stay with Him. There beside Florence Hall He also established a mast ashram. One of the mandali said He was never so happy as when working with a good mast.

About Baba's love for masts, Mani told pilgrims:

[If you had] just a tiny glimpse [of Him as He really is],
you wouldn't be able to do your duty, you'd be overwhelmed.

So Baba Himself would say that “If I give a little more, then My work wouldn’t be done,” because we would not be capable of sustaining it and at the same time carrying on the work He wanted us to do. And that glimpse is why the masts are overwhelmed. It’s actually an “overwhelm-ment”; it’s as if they are intoxicated, drunk. Now, in contrast, the seeker knows what he’s *seeking*; he is seeking, in fact, and has to pay a tremendous price for that. But Baba would always be touched by the masts. Not so much by the seekers, although the seeker has his place. But the masts want nothing, they are just drowned in His love. That’s not the same thing.

Mani didn’t have to cook in Florence Hall, since Katie, Khorshed, and others were there. She must have missed her friend Margaret (whose sense of humor she loved), who Baba had just sent back to the West, as He had Irene, and many of the Eastern women to their homes in India.

On a visit to Florence Hall decades later (when it was almost in ruins), Meheru pointed out the various rooms they stayed in. You could still see how beautiful it must have been, with its two stories of spacious rooms and halls, and its elegant verandahs. She also showed the place where in the evenings they would play badminton and volleyball in the garden with Baba. Also some of the roads and paths they had walked with Him and by themselves; He encouraged them to take long walks around the area. In Mahabaleshwar, Mehera said, “Baba saw to it that we had plenty of exercise.” Kitty remembered they had some lovely picnics with Baba there, and often played cricket, joined by servants and children and sometimes even Baba for a little while.

Mani had her camera handy, and she snapped Cracker with Baba and Mehera, and Baba feeding Cracker; in this set of pictures His love for that dog is written all over His beaming face.



Baba with Cracker, Mahabaleshwar, December 1946. Photo by Mani.

SATARA

Satara is where Dr. Goher Irani joined the women's ashram permanently, in 1947. She of course had been with them many times before, but from this time on, there were four women with Baba wherever He lived: Mehera, Mani, Meheru, and Goher.

Goher, shy of any attention, was a perfect foil for Mani's teasing, and they became great pals (of course in that unattached way the women mandali would be with one another, serving together but with a focus only on Baba.) In Satara also were Norina and Elizabeth, who

had returned from the West to stay for two more years with Baba, at first living in a separate house with Goher, who looked after them.

In Satara, they visited forts associated with Shivaji (the Maratha warrior king whom Baba said was one of His minor Advents as Avatar). At one point Baba worked in seclusion for twenty-one days, and in the midst sent Mani the following note:

“Dearest sister Mani,

You all work in the garden, play badminton, laugh, talk, walk as usual and Mani can play with Cracker up to the tatta as usual, and Cracker can occasionally bark if he likes, because all this won’t interfere in My work. When you go for walks either take Cracker with you or tie him in the back or in the hall so that he does not continually bark for one hour as he did this morning. Read this to beloved M. [Mehera] and reply. I won’t be writing to you again till the end of My seclusion.”

They left Satara after three months, little realizing that one day they would spend three very happy years living there—and there endure one of the greatest blows of their lives: Baba’s second accident, in 1956.

HENS AND DUCKS

“Right here where we are sitting,” Mani said to pilgrims in Meherazad garden with her in the 1980s, “was the pen for hens. And near it was a pen for ducks. And that over there was the duck pond. And who do you think was in charge of looking after the hens and the ducks? Dr. Goher Irani.”

“Oh, yes,” Goher recalled, “ducks and chicks. The chicks were Rhode Island Reds, very nice chickens.”



Duck doodle by Mani.

September 1947, and they had come again to stay in Meherazad, this time with Goher. It was their first long stay there.

Mani continued:

This is something that always touches me: when she first came to serve Baba, Goher's sole intention was to be with Baba and serve Him in her capacity as a doctor. She became a doctor for Him. It was right for her nature, because by nature she's a very conscientious, hard-working, selfless, gentle person. Her love for Baba made her want to be a doctor and come and serve Him and His mandali and be with Him.

So Baba of course encouraged her, "Soon as it's [your study] finished, come and see to My health. Lot of work, you have a lot of work." So she was full of enthusiasm. And she also had the natural pride of being able to serve Baba in her capacity as a doctor, to be personal physician to the Avatar. So when she came in 1947 and joined Baba for good, she was just champing at the bit to start the race.

And Baba arranged things in such a way that He made her forget she was a doctor. He gave her fantastically opposite jobs to do.

Immediately Baba gave her a test of obedience. The first work He gave her was not as a doctor but as a duck-tor. Her first duty was to look after ducks and hens. And when you're looking after Baba's pets, they are royalty, those pets. You have to put every bit of yourself in it. It's not like looking after anybody else's pets. You couldn't be breezy or careless about it. Baba was very, very particular about His pets. Say, if He gave a whole beautiful cage full of little birds [for someone to take care of], and one of them flew out, He would be angry. He would have the whole lot freed and a new batch brought.

Little indications like that would make us realize He was working with animals for all the animals, with His birds for all the birds, with fish for all the fishes. He's here for all.

Anyway, so when she first came to Meherazad, poor Goher—instead of doing her medical work, instead of going through medical books—was sending for magazines about ducks and hens. And Baba was very particular, asking her the details: How were the ducks? What's their diet? Baba would always be particular that His pets were well fed, sometimes too well fed. So Goher didn't have to just mix the bran for their meal and put it in front of the ducks, no sir. She had to measure out so many carbohydrates, so much charcoal, so much protein, and so on. I'd be walking by and suddenly stop at the sight of Goher, very serious, very intense, with a pair of jeweler's scales in her hand, looking like she was measuring out gems; but no, it was so much hydrocarbon, put that in, so much whatever else, mixing up the perfect diet for the ducks.

And she did it with such meticulous care, with such earnestness. That same earnestness she would have used in her work as a doctor. I tell you, she was going through tomes, not medical books, but books on ducks and hens.

The important thing is not the doctoring or writing or this or that. The important thing is obeying Baba, allowing Him to work on you. It was the way He would start on your ego. And no matter how small an order or a thing is, it is never trivial. It is never too small. He wants you to give all of yourself to it as earnestly and as seriously as if it were a very big, important thing. It is not for you to judge the size or the importance of what He tells you. That is for Him. You have to give yourself fully to Him with whatever it is that He asks

of you. So here was Goher, the doctor, who I think was even dreaming of ducks and hens.

As always, everything that was asked for from the bazaar had to go through Baba. We asked for nothing on our own. So Goher used to do that. But one day she forgot to tell Baba in advance that she needed more bran for the ducks, and she was so upset. Suddenly she looked in the box and found the bran was finished. Now this, this was a tragedy. This was a catastrophe. This was Baba's order, "Let me know beforehand." And now it was too late.

So she rushed over to the men's side, "Where is Baba, where is Baba?"

At that moment, Baba happened to be in one of the men's rooms, the one where Kaka Baria lived, which was later made into a dispensary. Baba was sitting there and He had graciously allowed someone to come and see Him. And that someone was a philosopher, according to Eruch. The philosopher was asking questions, you know that's what philosophers are for, and Baba was graciously giving him answers on the alphabet board.

Just then Goher came up to the door. All she saw was Baba. Somehow that man was hidden to the side, so she didn't see him. She gave one look at Baba and said desperately, "Baba, the bran for the ducks is finished."

Baba looked at her and smiled and turned to the man, "Look what I have to do?" Baba was obviously explaining something about the seventh plane to him, and He went on, "From the seventh plane to duck's bran."

We laughed ourselves sick when we heard about it. Poor Goher.

In short, you have to make sure to forget. It has not to

be your own, on your own, or for your own. When she forgot completely that she was a doctor, then it was for Him.

And of course Kitty with the hens was marvelous. Kitty wanted to make a feather cushion for Mehera. Now she had used feather cushions herself but she had no idea—none of us did—how many feathers or down go into making a feather cushion. Unbelievable! I think it was in the millions, like dollars in the American government treasury. Not small figures. But she didn't know that.

So early in the morning she would go around picking up the soft down that had fallen off the hens. Then she would try and take the down fresh off the hen as soon as it dropped. You sometimes felt she was standing at the door of the pen waiting for a feather to fall so she could rush in and grab it. And sometimes she would grab the hen itself, if she thought there was one feather loose, and try to pull it out.

In the end she collected enough feathers to make a cushion, although it turned out to be a little cushion like this, just big enough for Mehera to put behind her head when we were riding in the car.

Anyway, one day we saw Kitty standing by the pen door wagging her head as she stood examining the hens for loose feathers. Two hens had started fighting. [Here Mani imitated the fighting hens.] Wiggling her head and looking profound, Kitty remarked, "Well! No wonder we fight, if our ancestors did that!"

ASHIANA

In the following year, 1948, Baba took Mehera, Mani, Meheru, and Goher for the first time to another place that was to become a "home away from home": Ashiana (which means "nest"), the elegant apartment in Bombay

where Arnavaz and Nariman Dadachanji lived. Arnavaz and Nariman had married by Baba's order and were deeply devoted to His service. In a real sense they were "in the world but not of it," and kept themselves available for whatever He wanted. Their home was a perfect nest within the chaos of Bombay for Baba, and for the ladies. Baba told Arnavaz He wanted "the girls" to enjoy themselves in Bombay, and she would always show them a good time when they came. Mehera was being exposed to more of the world in the 1940s; she could read books, hear a man's name, and see men passing by when traveling. Arnavaz took them to movies, she took them shopping, she showed them sights, she took them on picnics and to lunch in good restaurants; they even dressed up for fun in her good saris. It was a totally different side of life.

VISITORS

There's a picture of Baba standing in front of the old Meherazad cottage with Mehera, Mani, Meheru, and Goher all wearing scarves wrapped in exotic fashions. They were presents from Ivy and Charmian Duce. Ivy, who is with them in the photo, had come in January 1948 to see if Meher Baba was a true Master who could take over the Sufi order of which she was murshida.* Her daughter, Charmian, had come along to "protect" her mother from "some swami." The moment Ivy Duce saw Baba, she was instantly convinced that He was the God-Man, "the most beautiful being that was ever on the earth." In their first meeting, Charmian, at a penetrating gaze from



(From left, standing): Meheru, Ivy Duce, Mehera, Baba, Goher; (sitting): Mani.

* A term adopted from traditional Sufism meaning "teacher" or "guide."

Baba, also suddenly felt overwhelming Love, and she, too, fell for Baba completely.

They stayed at Meherazad for a brief week and both warmed to the women mandali. Of course, Mani met Ivy for the first time during this visit, and it was the beginning of a long association. Dr. Abdul Ghani Munsiff,^{*} immersed in Sufi history, was in touch with Ivy about Sufism; after Dr. Ghani's death, it was Mani who corresponded with Ivy, conveying Baba's messages and instructions about Sufism Reoriented (established in 1952) and particularly the publication of His major book *God Speaks*.

CORRESPONDENCE IN THE 1940s

"Typing meant Mani and Mani meant typing," said Najoo about Mani. Which makes you wonder, what was she typing?

Mani recalled in the Hall:

In the very beginning when Baba started me on secretarial work, I began to correspond with a very few Baba-lovers in the West. I don't mean just the close ones [like Elizabeth, etc.], but Baba-lovers.

There were about three of them with whom I was in constant correspondence. This was a new experience for me, you know. I was such a greenhorn, I would answer every question in great detail. If it was some spiritual question that I didn't know a thing about, I'd do research on it. I mean, I really put myself out. (I know better now.)

So there was a letter once from this lady out in California, a Baba-lover who had not yet met Baba. She was very effusive and rather overwhelming. And she would

^{*} Dr. Ghani was close mandali and Baba's childhood friend.

say [Mani imitated a broad, nasal American accent], “Oh, I have meetings at my place every Thursday. You know, some of the people who come in are wonderful people, and one of them particularly, Mr. So-and-so. I’m sure he’s on the third plane! And Such-and-such, my dear, he’s had illumination long ago.”

Well, I was stunned. What do I know about these things? And then she wrote, “And you, dear Mani, surely you must be either on the fifth or sixth plane. Please, do do tell me what plane you’re on.” And I said to myself, “Now what do I do?”

So what I did was—I was very honest with her—I wrote, “You know, Violet dear, I don’t know anything about planes because I still haven’t even been on an airplane. So I couldn’t tell you anything about planes.”

And then about illumination—she wondered when I had been illuminated—I said, “Look, we don’t even have electric lights here. All we use are kerosene lanterns, so I don’t know anything about illumination either.”

MEHER CENTER ON-THE-LAKES

“‘Myrtle Beach may become one of the leading spiritual centers of the United States,’ is the prediction of interested friends who foresee it as the future spiritual Mecca of America.” This quote is from the lead article of the *Myrtle Beach News* on Thursday, March 21, 1946. It went on: “A great friend of humanity, Meher Baba, the Perfect Master, is expected in this country this year. A Center for him and his disciples, coming from India, Switzerland and England, is being prepared nine miles north of this city in a beautiful section of virgin land facing the ocean and including two fresh water lakes.”

The Center being described is, of course, Meher Spiritual Center, then called “Meher Center On-the-Lakes,” that spiritual oasis Baba called His “Home in the West.” When Elizabeth and Norina came to stay with Baba in Satara and then Meherazad, they were full of news about this place He had sent them back to America to create.

There must be easily half a trunk of correspondence between Baba and Elizabeth and Norina (and later Kitty) about the Center. In the beginning years, from 1944, Rano was the one who wrote the letters conveying Baba’s instructions and wishes to Elizabeth and Norina. After 1954, it was Mani who wrote to them and to Kitty, who had joined them in the United States by that time. So in the 1950s, much of Mani’s “typing, typing, typing” was about the Center.

THE WAYFARERS

Dr. Donkin, whom Baba and everyone called “Don,” wrote a book about Baba’s work with the masts at His order, titled *The Wayfarers*. Somehow, at Baba’s order or with His approval, Mani ended up typing up Don’s drafts. So when the women mandali came to Meherazad in September 1947 for their first long stay there, Mani was typing Don’s book.

Sometimes Mani would tell a story in the Hall about this work with Don to illustrate how extremely strict Baba was with them about contact between the men and women mandali. One day they were going over a draft together that Mani was to type. Don sat on one side of the table and Mani on the other. In between them, Mani recalled, was a pencil. As Don made a point, she reached out for the pencil at the same moment that he did and by accident their fingertips touched ever so slightly. “He actually jumped,” Mani recalled, snatching away his hand (as she did hers) as if he had received an electric shock.

THE NEW HOUSE

During their 1947 Meherazad stay, Mehera, with help from Mani and the others, began planning the design of a bigger house. Baba wanted the small place they were staying in to be expanded, to have an upper story with two rooms, and a bigger dining room and a sitting room. By February 1948, they were ready to begin construction, which would take about six months.

“In the meantime,” said Mani in Mandali Hall, “we had to move from Meherazad. So we went to Ahmednagar and stayed in the home of Dr. Goher and Katie’s parents. They had a rented house in a remote area. And of course, the condition from Baba was, ‘I come in, but you go out!’ As usual. So the family vacated the house, and it was at Baba’s disposal and our disposal.” Delia and Jean Adriel were there, too, having been called by Baba to stay with Him after a short period at Meherabad.

Goher’s father was nicknamed Rusipop and they called the place “Rusipop’s.” It was a huge bungalow in the old British style so familiar to them, with verandahs on both sides and big rooms. At Rusipop’s Mani continued typing Donkin’s book *The Wayfarers*. There were some small errors in the maps printed for the same book, which Mehera and the other women corrected. Cracker had a multitude of other dogs there to play or fight with, and Baba brought back from one of His mast tours a lively Tibetan mastiff puppy named Bhooti, which He gave to Kaka at Meherazad to be trained as a watchdog. Bhooti in time was to become the mother of Mastan, Baba’s favorite pet of all.

In August 1948, the new house at Meherazad was ready. There was a big housewarming ceremony full of Baba-lovers, and Baba turned a silver key in the front door lock, opening up their new home and a new phase in their Meherazad life.

Meherjee gave a Persian carpet for the sitting room in the new house. The carpet was an example Mani would give of how Baba would



Baba and Mehera in front of the new house, August 27, 1948, the day of the housewarming party.

observe His own rules: “To keep the carpet clean, none of us would walk on it with our sandals on, and Baba would also remove His sandals before stepping on the carpet, even years later when He was walking with support. Mehera would gently remonstrate with Him, saying that it wasn’t necessary for Him to remove His sandals, but Baba continued to do so every time.”



Front of the Meherazad new house, Meheru standing outside.

Once talking of how difficult a simple order could become, in Mandali Hall Mani recalled an example from their first days in the new house:

Delia and Jean were here in Meherazad with us, and of course Elizabeth and Norina and sometimes Kitty or Rano. [Baba was upstairs in the new house; Mehera, Mani, Meheru, Goher, and Naja were on the ground floor; and Norina, Elizabeth, Delia, and Jean were in the nearby cottage.] In the evenings we would sit before Baba in the little sitting room, as we call it. Baba would sit on His *gaadi*, and we would sit on chairs and sofas around Him.

As I've said, the simplest little thing can become big when you're doing it for Baba. Well, believe me, a joke is no

joke when Baba asks you to tell one when you're not feeling like it. When Baba tells you, "Tell Me a joke!"—you go blank. As I said, it's no joke.

In the evenings when we were sitting around Baba, He often would suddenly ask, "Tell a joke!" Joke, joke. Inside yourself you'd start wringing your hands. You'd start biting your nails. Joke. Joke. So after a while, Delia, Jean, Norina and Elizabeth, who were the ones having to tell the jokes, thought, "Something has got to be done." So Norina and Elizabeth sent an SOS to friends in the States, "Send us a book of jokes."

By airmail came this dictionary of jokes. The four of them divided it up, So-and-so has A to F. From G to whatever is So-and-so's. They all had a section of jokes accordingly.

And poor Norina had a portion that was all jokes about "little Tommy." Always bright little Tommy. Now you didn't read out a joke to Baba; you had to learn it by heart beforehand and then come and tell it to Him. So when Norina would tell the Tommy jokes, she would also imitate the voice of little Tommy.

As we sat with Him, Baba would say, "All right now, jokes!" And Delia would tell her joke, and Norina would tell a joke, and Elizabeth, and Jean Adriel [Mani imitated Jean Adriel's monotone voice]. She had a way of talking that made everything sound the same, but she could really tell a good joke. They were all good in their own way.

One day Delia wasn't well; she had a cold or something. Baba said she shouldn't come over to the bungalow, but should stay in her room for two or three days until her cold was all right.

In the meantime, Norina, Elizabeth, and Jean filled in

for her in the joke department. Two days later, when she was better, Delia came and sat in the sitting room along with the others in the evening. When it was her turn to tell a joke, she started out in a very dramatic way. But Baba looked at her and said, "What's the matter with you? I've heard that before." "Oh, Baba! [Mani imitated Delia's distinctive English accent and uneasy laugh], I can't understand how you could have heard that one! I-I haven't, oh, but, well, I have another one, Baba" [uneasy laugh again]. So she told another one. Again Baba interrupted, "This is too much! I've heard that one, too!"

In the meantime, none of us realised, but Baba was looking at Norina sitting in the corner. And Norina was trying to slide down into her chair as far as she could. Suddenly Baba turned round to her and said, "Norina, why did you do it? Why did you swipe Delia's jokes?"

"Oh!" said Delia.

Norina looked positively guilty.

So Baba said, "Why? Why, Norina?"

And Norina said, "Darling, I was sick of Tommy! I was so sick of Tommy!"

But that reminds me that there was one Tommy joke that Baba really enjoyed. In the joke, the teacher asked her class of children, "Can any of you tell me where God is?" The children all looked at each other. They didn't know where God was; what could they say? But of course, Tommy, Norina's Tommy, the bright guy, he put his hand up. He knew all the answers.

The teacher was very pleased. "All right, Tommy, that's good. Now, can you tell everybody where God is?"

And Tommy said, "God is in our bathroom at home."

“What? God is in your bathroom at home? Tommy, whatever made you say that?”

Tommy replied, “Well, Daddy goes up to the bathroom door every morning and knocks and says, ‘Oh Lord, are you still in there?’”

Baba was so pleased with that joke.

ENTERTAINMENTS

Meheru recalled that in the later 1940s, Baba didn’t call for as many skits as before. But on occasion Mani would be asked to come up with “entertainments.” As Mani remembered, “We did a lot of entertainments for Baba, and I’m so happy that I was blessed with a kind of nonsense that enabled me to give Baba a smile, to amuse Him, delight Him. He loved it.”

She had her repertory company assembled, including the redoubtable Kitty. And she had new prey in her quest for amusing actors: the shy and serious Goher, whose acting she described to much laughter in the Hall:

Do you all know that at one time Baba’s Western women disciples made or had made Realization dresses? Because Baba said that He would break His silence in the Hollywood Bowl, they had dresses made for the occasion. We saw some of those dresses in Kandivli near Bombay in 1932, when we met a batch of Baba’s Western



Meheru and Mani posing in costume for a skit.

women for the first time. Minta [Toledano, Delia's sister], had on some striped thing, and Elizabeth had a beautiful cream-colored one.

But I didn't know what Kitty had till years later. Kitty was always ready for anything you wanted to do for Baba. She would cooperate, give all her help; she had a very selfless nature as you all know. So she would never, like me, say she was too busy to get involved—not that it did me any good, saying I was too busy.

And she was always having bright ideas. Her job was helping Naja or Katie in the kitchen. After all the vegetables were cleaned and cut, she'd chop, chop, chop up the leftovers for the ducks and hens. And in between all that, she would call you over because she'd had a bright idea. You would try to push it off, "It's all right, Kitty, but not now, no, no, I don't think so, yes, later Kitty, I'm being called, Kitty . . ." But Kitty was always ready.

One time we put on a skit with Kitty and Goher. Poor Goher. She would remind us all the time, "I'm serious, I'm very serious. I can't do these funny things." And I would say, "But that's the whole reason why it entertains Baba!"

I had an idea for something that would make Him laugh, and I explained it to Kitty. When I asked her if she would take part in it, she immediately said, "Oh! Oh! Yes! Oh! Yes! I'll be ready!" She quickly washed the kitchen vegetables off



Goher dressed as a chicken for a Christmas play.

her hands and went to her room. Now you would think she would want to rest a little or change. Nothing of the kind. She started delving into her trunks to get out a dress, because I had asked her to be an operatic prima donna. The idea was we would dress her up and then put a pillow here and a bit of a pillow there to make her curvy. Of course I'd play the gramophone at the back, and there would be all this beautiful operatic singing from behind, and all she had to do were the prima donna gestures. And she agreed to do it.

That was when I saw her Realization dress, a beautiful satiny-velvet material in an orange-tomato color. "Well, it's sort of like your wedding dress," I said. "Once the occasion is over you don't know when to put it on again!"

So she was to wear that dress. Then came Goher's part. She had to be the mad, temperamental pianist accompanying Kitty. So I made a piano out of a bench that I put a white sheet on, with a lot of black paper cut out to make the notes.

I demonstrated to Goher what she had to do. [Here Mani would act out a very flamboyant, over-expressive pianist, bending down her head to the keyboard, then dramatically lifting it up and looking into the air, then down again, while her hands swept up and down the keys.]

Goher looked at me; she couldn't believe it. "I have to do that??!!"

"What's wrong? This is just playing the piano. I mean, really, you can do this much!"

"Do it again," she said. I did it again.

"Do it again."

"Look! I'll have a broken neck! What do you mean, do it again? It's so simple, you've seen it about ten times! At least

try! At least do something. Now, let's have a rehearsal. Let me see what you can do."

So Goher sat very seriously, very solemnly with the piano before her [Mani would demonstrate Goher woodenly putting her head down on the piano, then up, stiffly plopping hands down onto the keys, then up].

"Goher!" I said. "What are you doing? Taking darshan?"

"Isn't that what you did?"

"I did *that*? Goher, this is playing the piano. At least play it!" And so on and on it went.

But of course on the day itself, Goher really did it well, and it amused Baba all the more because it was Goher doing it. And Kitty. Kitty did her part very well too, trembling a little in the front with the pillow going up and down, singing [Mani gives out a few trills] . . . It just was wonderful.

Goher recalled when I asked her about it: "When Mani was training me to act for Baba, she had to have lots of patience to deal with me. I gave her so much trouble. I would make her repeat what I had to do, and you know, she would act back more than me!"

I asked, "She never got upset with you?"

"No, in fact, she would see the funny side of it. She would tease me. And she would tell Baba and Mehera how I acted and all that."

"She also had that humourous nature."

"A great sense of humour, yes. And she was very witty and very clever also. She would write all these plays for Baba and get Kitty to act, to please Baba."

"And He would encourage her?"

"Yes!"

Speaking of Kitty, Mani continued:

As I said, Kitty would go to any length. Once we were



Kitty in her duck costume.

doing a costume show of some kind, and we all—Rano, Goher, Kitty, and others—were to wear papier-mâché heads. I forget now what we were supposed to be. Kitty was going to be a duck, and she was determined to have real feathers on the duck’s head. We had many ducks in our duck pen as well as hens in the hen pen, and Kitty was always collecting the hens’ down for the cushion for Mehera and the ducks’ down for her duck head. Whenever you saw her, she had feathers in her hair; like Ophelia, she was sprouting feathers everywhere. There were bags of feathers in her room, so there were always feathers flying around in there, especially when it was swept.

She had to stick the feathers on the duck head, feather by feather, using a kind of glue. We always did everything very economically in the ashram, making use of every little scrap. It’s amazing the amount of things you can do and the innovations you can come up with that way.

Kitty made the glue out of rice. We call it *lambee* here. You mix water with powdered rice and boil it; then it’s ready to be used. But you can’t use it for long, as it starts smelling and turning green after a few days. Poor Kitty would dip each feather quill into the glue and stick it on the head, but she had no idea how many feathers are required to make a duck’s head. She should have counted the feathers on a real duck first.

Before you knew it, Kitty was in a mess, because the glue and the feathers were all getting stuck together. Rano was just watching. She knew in the end that it would come to her to fix. When Kitty finally said, “We will do it,” Rano replied, “By *we*, you mean *me!*” Poor Kitty didn’t actually, she had really been determined to do it all. But we didn’t have the heart to let her. She started looking green

herself, coming out of her room after a session with the feathers. So in the end we did it.

As I say, we really take our hats off to our Western sisters in the ashram; even if I had six hats, I would take them all off to them. Of course they said the same of their Eastern sisters.

A few years later, Mani & Co. put on another entertainment in Meherazad that was Kitty's last skit for Baba. It was in the New Life, just after Baba's seclusion, before they all went to the West. Mani and all wanted to lighten His burden and help Him relax after the strain of His work.

So there in the new house they recreated a train station scene. Kitty and Rano were a Parsi couple (speaking their lines in Gujerati, to the amazement of all), Naja and Mani were a Muslim couple. Naja as the wife was covered head to toe by a burka and sat spitting into a spittoon while Mani, her husband, protected her from the crowds, and particularly from Meheru, a fiery Irani man with Goher as the Irani wife. Kitty was singing on the train platform to her departing beloved, "I miss you . . ." and so on and on, just another sample of Mani's "nonsense" that amused Baba and Mehera so much.

At Baba's behest, they reenacted the whole thing for the men mandali. Later, Mani recalled, Dr. Nilu, one of Baba's mandali, came over to Rano and said, "Rano, I didn't know you spoke Gujerati so well." Rano replied, "You'd be surprised."

MT. ABU

Early the next year, 1949, Mehera, Mani, Goher, and Meheru had another change; they went with Baba to the one hill station in Rajasthan, 4,000 feet up. As Mani described it:



Kitty and Rano dressed as a Parsi couple, Mr. and Mrs. Dhunjishah.

Just before the New Life, so it was 1949, Baba took a few of us girls to Mt. Abu. Now, Mt. Abu is a beautiful hill station near Ahmedabad.

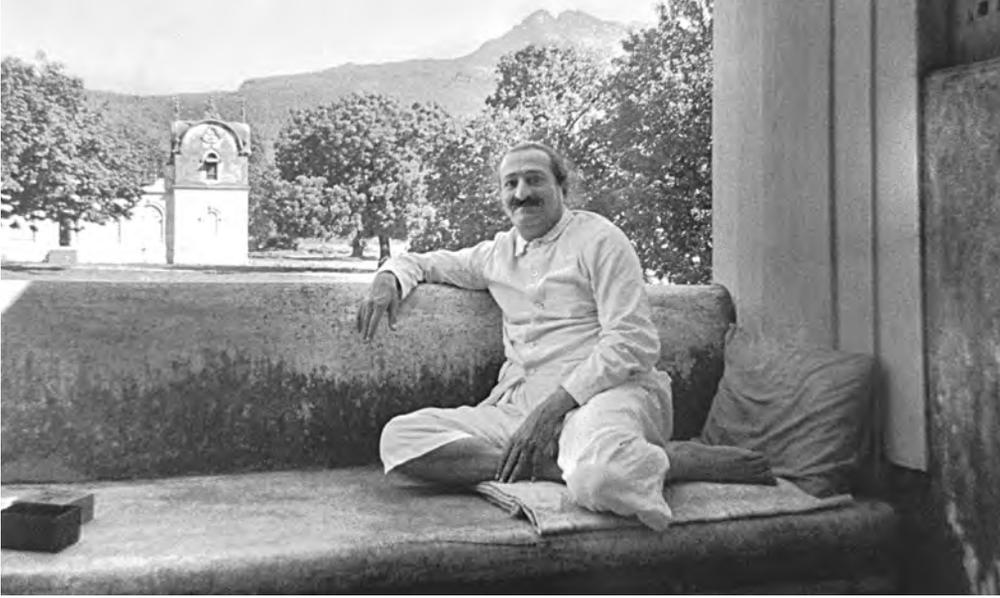
Baba sent Baidul and His brother Jal ahead to make arrangements for the accommodation. As I say, we women never knew that side of it, ever. It was always the men to whom Baba entrusted that particular job. Also remember that the men always had to rough it where accommodation was concerned, much more so than we women. The men mandali had to really rough it quite a lot.

Some of His men were very witty. Now when I think of Baba's humour, what delighted Him most, and delighted us most to see, was humour that was impromptu. It wasn't a joke that I would read aloud, for instance, but something that just happened unexpectedly, suddenly, casually. And that humour would be sparkling, bright, shiny.

Baba had these particularly witty disciples who would amuse Him with that kind of humour: brother Jal was one of them and so was Dr. Ghani. Sometimes, when His burden of work was heavy, He would especially call these disciples who had the knack of laughing, the gift of laughter to give Him.

Anyway, on this occasion Jal and Baidul were sent ahead to Mt. Abu to rent a house and make sure everything was arranged for Baba's stay. There would always be a separate bungalow for the women, and then something quite some distance away for the men, but within walking distance, so that Baba could walk over.

When we arrived by train at Ahmedabad, Jal and Baidul came to take Baba and the party up the hill to Mt. Abu. There was a dividing sheet in front of the conveyance so that the women would not see the men.



Baba in Mt. Abu.

So Baba said, “Jal, what happened? You’ve got good accommodation?”

“Wonderful, Baba, wonderful. Never will you find anything like it!”

“So how’s the accommodation for the women?”

Jal said, “Perfect.”

“How big is it? What has it got?”

“Bedroom, dining room, sitting room, dressing room, bathroom, cooking room . . .” and on and on.

“Good!” said Baba. “I am pleased. And what about the men’s accommodation?”

“Standing room.”

The way Baba chuckled at that was something.

While they were in Mt. Abu, Baba was often gone on intensive mast tours, and He encouraged the women to take long walks around the hill station. There was a lending library there, and Mani found a number of books to read out to Baba, and for them to read, too (Mehera was allowed to read by that time). They didn’t have to cook there, as food came from outside, but after some time Valu joined them, and she would make them tasty hot chappatis. “In the evening, that was our luxury,” recalled



Baba and Mehera in Mt. Abu.

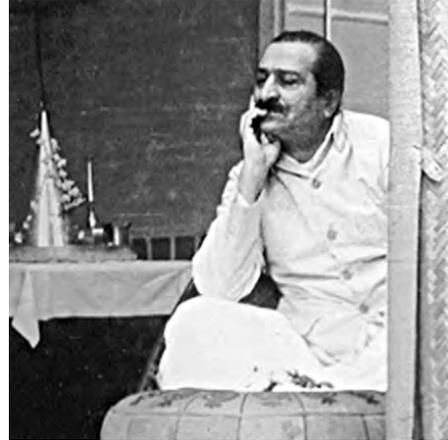
Mehera. No doubt, as it was so cold up in the hills. Mehera said that Mani had trouble typing in the morning, her fingers were so stiff with cold. But it would be just as cold at one in the afternoon, and just as hard to type. Mehera remembered Mt. Abu, too, for its atmosphere, which they found to be very beautiful.

And five months later, when they began the New Life, they remembered Mt. Abu for the long walks they took, which in retrospect were a kind of preparation for their New Life journeys on foot.

THE GREAT SECLUSION – 1949

Three weeks after Baba returned from Mt. Abu, He began what came to be called His “Great Seclusion” in Meherazad. The cabin of the old Blue Bus was surrounded by a bamboo matting enclosure, and on June 22, 1949, Baba seated Himself inside, and, attended only by Kaka Baria, began His seclusion of forty days. Not only the men and women mandali, but also Baba’s followers in India and the West were allowed to share His work by keeping silence for a month, while having only one meal a day (plus a single cup of tea and two slices of bread for breakfast).

The women at Meherazad not only had to keep silence but also absolute quiet so as not to disturb Baba’s working. Only Mehera and Mani from among the women were called to see Baba, and then only occasionally. On July 10, they were able to visit Him in His enclosure for half an hour, and Baba gave Mani instructions to be typed out for His lovers. Later, they were able to see Him some mornings.



Baba at meeting in Meherazad, June 21, 1949, before He went into His great seclusion. On left, Baba listening to Kalemama reading from the Gita.

On the final day of His seclusion, August 1, Baba called Mehera and Mani to see Him privately at 6:30 in the morning. At 7:00 a.m., He stepped out of seclusion and met the Meherazad mandali and other lovers from Meherabad and Ahmednagar who had been called to Meherazad to break their silence.

Kitty wrote: “Mehera and Mani, realizing the strain of this long seclusion and fast for Baba, had taken the opportunity to prepare a surprise for Him when this period ended. Amidst all her other work, this effort on Mani’s part was really her *chef-d’oeuvre*. It was a puppet show, with figures and dialogue all of her own creation. It was presented on August 1st and needless to say, Baba enjoyed it immensely.”⁸

Meheru and Goher also remember how much Baba enjoyed that show. Mani had created a count, “Muckai [corn] Bhutto,” and another character, “Puskie Fatakare” (meaning a firecracker that fizzles out). They performed it in the hall of the new house, and Baba and the audience came in through the verandah window and sat in the sitting room for the show.

Baba was so amused that He told them that they were to perform

it again a few days later at Meherabad for the others. He also said that this time Goher and Meheru should act the parts of the puppets. In the upstairs part of Meher Retreat at Meherabad, the puppet show was performed again; at its end, Mani took the puppets and presented them to Baba to touch. At His touch, they “came to life”—Goher as the Count and Meheru as Puskie.

As Kitty wrote: “Since we had no idea of what awaited us all, this performance with Baba in our midst was literally adding the ‘sweet to the bitter’—a very favorite device of Baba’s.”

What awaited them all that day, August 1, was Baba’s bombshell: His announcement that He was going to close all the ashrams, send the majority of those living with Him back into the world to live and work, and take a few disciples as close companions with Him on a New Life of helplessness and hopelessness, entirely dependent upon God. Elizabeth and Norina were sent back to the West to prepare for His visit to America, which He promised would be soon. The rest of the women mandali were asked if they would leave it entirely up to Baba to decide what they were to do, accepting His decision with full faith and on their own responsibility. Although a few hesitated, all ended up saying yes.

It is not hard to imagine Mani’s joy when Baba selected her—along with Mehera, Goher, and Meheru—to leave everything and go with Him on His mysterious New Life. She was thirty years old.



A NEW LIFE



Through a circular in October 1949, Baba informed His lovers: “Baba ends His old life of cherished hopes and multifarious activities and, with a few companions, begins His new life of complete renunciation and absolute helplessness from 16th October, 1949.”

Among all the difficulties for those who went with Baba, what would be the greatest hardship of the New Life? Baba described it to them from the very beginning:

It is not merely a question of hardships and difficulties like those encountered on mast trips. The most difficult thing is now the need to control emotions and feelings and to have absolute readiness for split-second and on-the-spot obedience to whatever task you are told to do or not to do. I do not expect any one of you to be free from your respective reactions of good or bad impulses like that of anger, displeasures, likes and dislikes, but what I do expect of you is not to make the least show or give any direct or indirect expression to your feelings and reactions. I will be free in every way and you will be bound in every respect. I will live amongst you as one of you like a brother. But at all times and under all

circumstances you must continue to look upon Me as your Master and to obey Me implicitly.

THOSE WHO STAYED BEHIND

On October 16, 1949, Baba left Meherazad with four women and sixteen men companions, never to return (or so they thought). As they walked away from their old life, Mani said that she did not feel a bit sad. They were with Baba, which for them was everything. But she felt the pain of those who were left behind:

I should say I feel that while we have been asked about the New Life and have talked about the New Life, one aspect of it has not been brought out as it should be. That concerns those who did not accompany Baba in the New Life: those who had lived with Baba as we did, but were left to stay in places like Bombay or Poona or Meherabad or were sent to the West; and those who had lived away from Him but were constantly under His direction and visited Him whenever called or allowed. All those individuals, those warm hearts that loved Him so, had the biggest challenge because they had to face what they believed to be permanent separation. Baba had said, "You must believe it when I say that when I go into the New Life, I and the companions with Me, you will have no further contact or communication with us. You must not even attempt to do so. I will not come back and you will not see us again." . . .

It was a complete uprooting. We thought we would never see Meherazad again. . . . For those who let Baba go, believing they would never see Him again, it was very hard. But for us who travelled with Baba, no matter what we went through in the New Life, we had Baba with us.

Looking back, we could have all those difficulties a million times over and still choose again to accompany Baba in the New Life. But for those who patiently stayed behind, their part in the New Life was no less.¹

*THE DIARY BEGINS:
OCTOBER 16–NOVEMBER 15, 1949*

From the very beginning of the New Life, Mani again began keeping a diary or, as she later called it, “some little notes that had been written down during the New Life.” It was written in a mixture of English, Gujerati, and shorthand (and, rarely, Hindi and Marathi). In the following excerpts, thanks to Goher and Katie, the Gujerati, Hindi, Marathi, and shorthand have been freely translated into English (translations appear in italics). As the New Life was such an extraordinary period in Baba’s life, I’ve included large parts of Mani’s New Life diary here.

The first New Life entry, fittingly enough, is on October 16:

Sunday 16th 1949 [Oct.] Started on New Life – raining + thunder – start in car from P. [Pimpalgaon] + go straight to Supa (2nd day’s walking halt) + stop there 2 days instead – We rest + feel relaxed after a long time. Baba sleeps well + looks relaxed + relieved. Kaka cooks wonderful meal – nice d. [dak] bungalow - temple + river nearby + peaceful atmosphere. *The mandali draw water from the well, carrying it in tins suspended on a bamboo pole from their shoulders.*

The diary flows on, giving small glimpses of places, environs, weather, and events. Here the diary excerpts are interspersed with stories that Mani later told to pilgrims curious about His inexplicable New Life.

Baba's plan was: relaxation from October 16 to October 25, a period of training at Belgaum from October 25 to December 20, and a "vacuum period" from December 21 to 31. The New Life of hopelessness and helplessness would start in earnest from January 1, 1950.

[DIARY]

18. [Oct.] Start walking from Supa to Sirur (16-17 miles) – start 4:10 a.m. – nice starry morning + also moon – pleasant scenery all way - some village next to *Ghonegao* sat by bridge while mandali got excellent tea from person who owed B. [Baba] 4 rupees previously – rested by river for some 40 minutes for this tea – then walked on. incident of *lame cows* when we stopped 15 m. [minutes] for drink of water + big-head [B.H., Dr. Ghani]. Big-head dead exhausted. B. + others revive him then B. leads him by stick (B.H. eyes closed). *Goher's whistle fun*.

Mani would tell how Baba had nicknamed Dr. Ghani "Big Head" because he was very witty and brilliant. They were old school friends, and because of this Ghani enjoyed a kind of latitude with Baba that the others didn't have. Ghani was famous among the mandali for his physical laziness; it was rumored he had a servant boy who would brush his teeth for him while Ghani was still in bed. He was known to go to bed with his shoes on so as not to have to exert the energy to take them off. Imagine the mandali's amazement when Ghani said yes to going with Baba on the New Life! On this first day of walking, somewhere on the seventeen-mile journey Ghani became so exhausted that he found a way to propel himself forward: he gripped his walking stick in both hands behind his back and used it to push off the ground. Baba soon turned around and went back to Ghani, picked up one end of the stick, and pulled Ghani the rest of the way.

In a little pad of cartoons, Mani illustrated "Goher's whistle fun" to

complete the picture. When they all first started out walking, the men companions went ahead, with the women and Baba behind. After a while, the men got way ahead, and Baba told Goher to stop them because He wanted to say something to the mandali. She went ahead, couldn't catch them, called, they didn't hear, so she blew on the



Mani's cartoon of Goher and whistle.

whistle she was carrying. The women and Baba were watching all this. Suddenly they saw Goher whacking the whistle on the ground. Meheru recalled that the women were surprised and amused (“What’s come over Goher? Is she angry with the whistle for not blowing, or what?”). Baba started clapping His hands, and eventually the mandali heard. After that, Mani recalled, generally Baba would walk ahead with Eruch, then the women would come after Him, then the men some distance back.

Mani recalled this night, October 18, as recorded in *Tales from the New Life*:

I remember once when we had stopped for the night in a little cinema house, of all places. We women were to sleep on the stage, just behind the cinema screen. A light was on and I was throwing shadows on the screen with my fingers, making rabbits and so on. Baba was with the men, hidden from our view, but we could hear Eruch’s voice as he was interpreting what Baba was telling them.

One of the things we heard Baba tell was, “You have to be lords and masters of your faces during the New Life, no matter what happens,” which meant never letting one’s face

betray any unhappy emotion one might feel. But simply masking your face was not much of a solution either, because Baba could draw out the tiniest waver of emotion that might rise within you. He would detect it and bring it out.

[DIARY]

20. [Oct.] - Left before 2 [a.m.] – about 20 men filed out (were there since evening) to see B. They were given strict orders not to fold hands etc. Left in St. [State Transport] Service bus – nice spacious - but dreadful roads + so the bus sounded like a hundred tin skeletons rattling – awful tea at Poona station – Stopped at Kolapur for tea but all hotels closed owing to sugar strike – bus stopped in lane (*in front of the theatre academy room*). *They were drinking tea from a big kettle* while they looked over bus - B. gave us laddoo [round sweets] in bus - later also *chappati + bhajia* [a fried savory snack, often made of ground chickpeas] ate in bus . . . had excellent tea at Karad. (?) Reach Belgaum 3:30 – crossed nice gardens + green scenery - in Bl. very damp, + rainy + cloudy. house all wet – managed to dry little + make room for bedding – mandali quarters also very wet – Baba's room too damp + he sleeps in little room adjoining.

In Belgaum they began a training period:

[DIARY]

21. [Oct.] Clearer – *Everybody was busy settling down. Baba was working with the mandali. In the morning no hot water even for washing faces. The mandali fetched the water from the well and filled up the tubs (v. deep well). The rest are busy preparing a tent. Baba is also working with them. Tonight [Divali] the mandali set off firecrackers (Nagguwala*

[firecrackers from Nagoo]) *and we stood outside Baba's room and watched. The food comes from outside and will come for four days.*

22. *It was sunny in the daytime but rained all night. Made mud stoves for cooking and then D. [Donkin?] built a kitchen. whistle fun.*

23. *now rain, now shine, a repeated surprise – the bees stung three people. In the morning, Baba took the basket of tomatoes and onions on his head to the mandali. B. then gave each one a kamli [a rough, hand-woven shepherd's blanket]. In the early morning Goher wanted to dig a road [a path for walking]. M. [Mehera] made things in the kitchen.*

(Mani said that normally they would have found the kamli blanket horribly coarse, but it was so cold and a blanket so welcome that they couldn't think of anything lovelier to have!)

On the 22nd, Baba remarked to the men mandali, "These four women, by working cooperatively like menials in doing work they have never done before, are faithfully living the New Life. Even Mehera is working like a servant—sweeping floors, washing, dusting—doing things I have never before permitted her to do."

The next day He told them, "The women also could not sleep for the same reason [swarms of mosquitoes]. Mani has a rash all over her face and body that looks like measles. But, in spite of the damp rooms and mosquitoes, I was pleased to see the women in buoyant spirits, laughing and joking. They are busy building mud stoves; from the 1st of November they will start cooking."

Mani remembered, as recorded in *Tales from the New Life*:

From the first of November we women took over the cooking, and Baba helped us in the kitchen. I remember one

day we made a stew, putting all the vegetables we had into it, and then something went wrong! It was a dreadful mess and we didn't know what to do with it, and the men's share had to be sent over to them! I wrote in my diary: 'Baba saves it by directing all sorts of things to be put in it. It turned out to be most delicious'. . . . He could transform it with just that little twist, that touch, which made the whole difference. . . . As for potato patties—when Baba would make these they were simply superb. We'd never eaten anything like them before!

In her diary, she noted:

[NOVEMBER 1949]

3. *Dhansak rice and dal* but not eve. [evening] meal
- Every evening we sing the New Life song. Baba makes it clear he wants immediate obedience to his orders.

THE SONG OF THE NEW LIFE

At the end of October, Baba gave material for a song on the New Life that Ghani shaped into verse. Baba added and subtracted lines to make the final version, the "Song of the New Life." Mani said, as in the case of her stew, "That beautiful touch of His made it what it is." Translated freely into English the words are:

SONG OF THE NEW LIFE

Listen to the silent words of Meher Baba;
The life of all lovers of God is in these words.
You who are serious to follow the New Life
Will renounce your ephemeral existence.

We have taken to this life in which we rely only upon God;
Our will is strengthened by our oath.
We merrily sing the song of hopelessness;
We invite all calamities and difficulties.

We neither wail over lost hopes, nor complain about promises,
Or covet honour, or shun disgrace.
Back-biting is ended and we do not fear anyone;
This is the tenor of our New Life.

No confusion in the mind now, neither are any ties left;
Pride, anger, lust and greed are sloughed off.
No religion for any of us, nor care for physical and mental
 aims.
The Sheikh and the Brahmin are now in the same boat.

There is for us all no small or great.
Neither disciple, master nor Godhood exist.
Brotherliness is the link,
And our common enjoyment of suffering.

This world or the next, hell or heaven, we are no longer
 concerned with.
Shaktis and siddhis, occultism and miracles, we are no
 longer plagued with.
All false impressions have been purged from the mind;
Now we live in the active present.

Dear ones, take seriously the words of Baba.
“Although now I am on the same level with you,
Yet all orders from me, good, bad, or extraordinary,
You should carry out immediately, leaving the result to God.

“Even if the heavens fall,
 Do not let go the hand of Truth;
 Let despair and disappointment ravage and destroy the
 garden of your life;
 You beautify it by contentment and self-sufficiency.

“Even though your heart be cut to bits, let a smile be
 on your lips.
 Here I divulge to you a truth:
 Hidden in your empty hands is treasure untold;
 Your beggarly life is the envy of kings.

“God exists indeed, and true are the Prophets,
 Every cycle has an Avatar, and every moment a *wali*.
 For us, however, it is only hopelessness and helplessness,
 How else can I describe to you what our New Life is?”

Mani used to sing to herself all the time: ditties, Baba-songs, bhajans and ghazals in Urdu, Hindi, Marathi, songs she would make up, songs from ancient times. But in later years she would never sing the New Life song. Why not? She once explained in Mandali Hall:

I’ve never been too keen on talking about the New Life.
 I could not [bear to] sing the New Life song even now,
 perhaps because I have had a momentary glimpse of the
 depth, the awesome depth, of the New Life. How can I
 describe it to you? Well, say you are boating on a calm ocean,
 enjoying floating along, and suddenly you look over the edge
 of the boat and are granted a sight through the fathomless
 deep, right down to the ocean floor, and you exclaim, “Oh,
 my God, what depth!!” It was so tremendous. Since being in
 the New Life I’m always aware of its unfathomable depth.

During the New Life when we were so incredibly bound by its conditions, another feeling I had momentarily was the fabulous sense of freedom. It was not related to freedom from the Old Life, freedom from possessions and responsibilities—no, not that kind of freedom. This was a whiff of that real freedom, which made me exclaim, “If this is the Freedom that Baba talks about, one would do anything to attain it.”

Baba said the New Life will go on living, it is eternal. It will go on living by itself even if there is no one to live it. It is a force. It has already been lived, and will continue to live because it has been lived by the Avatar. Baba walked the New Life—we simply followed in His footprints. Because He lived the New Life it will go on forever. It is not only relating to the mandali, or to Baba-lovers, not only relating to this country or that one, it is relating to the whole world.

I can feel the New Life walking inexorably forward, soon to catch up with all humanity. No one will be able to escape it, any more than one can escape from an advancing flood. At the moment it may be at a distance but you can see it advancing in the hopelessness and helplessness around the world felt by individuals, groups, nations—it is catching up, Baba’s New Life is catching up.

But Baba has also told us of the time beyond, of the age to come when brotherhood will be a practical reality, when the lion and the lamb will eat together, when humanity will be one family.²

She noted in her diary:

5. [Nov.] B. gives mandali (especially Ghani) surprise lunch – + evening *tooriya potatoes + shrikund* [a delicious sweet yogurt dessert] especially for Nilu [who loved sweets].

B. always remembers to keep aside for Don. B. tells us plans of buying certain necessities before training ends, for nowadays v. cold at night, + in North all will be frozen for v. insufficient equipment.

6. Kaka cooks till 10th. excellent food - + chapaties + tea . . .

8. B. goes to mandali's kitchen + *putting Kaka to the side, made patties with the mandali's help. They were excellent. They tasted like mutton patties. Every evening we can hear Baba playing the dholak [drum] accompanying the mandali's singing* - the mandali say he plays as beautifully as before. [Baba played an Indian drum accompanying the harmonium on the chorus of the song of the New Life when the mandali sang it in the evening. This reminded the old-timers of when He would play and sing with them in Manzil-e-Meem.] *B. would even go and draw water from the well along with the water-carriers group [a caste of people who transport water].*

10. Hotel food was very hot, khitchree [dal and rice cooked together]. In the evenings we sit and talk to Baba. Newspaper plan. B. says Don will read the newspaper every day and nobody else should read it. If there is anything in it to do with the conditions, he will tell us. B. gave us oilcloth pieces.

In Belgaum Baba ordered the women not to read anything. Not anything meant not anything—not newspapers or signs on the roadside or a passing truck. They used newspapers often in the house, to wrap things in or to light the fire, so to help them obey Baba. Mani said, “Vishnu would get us old newspapers from some junk shop printed in foreign languages, extraordinary languages that we didn't even know were available in print in India! I think they were Bulgarian or Hungarian or Czechoslovakian or something like that.”²³

[DIARY]

11. [Nov.] *food from the hotel – sweet dal and dosa in the evening*. many flies – also many butterflies. cold at nights. Lovely + sunny daytime.

On November 12, Baba and the group left Belgaum, catching a series of trains for Benares in north India.

*BENARES,
NOVEMBER 15–DECEMBER 21, 1949*

In November 1949, Mani wrote in her diary:

15. *Benares* at 4:30 a.m. v cold. *waiting room* all women sleeping – the trembly-voiced *old lady of Faizpur* + the 2 fair sisters - went in taxis to house. rode in car on that cold morning in dark drab streets [Dr. Nath had met them at the station with his car, much to Baba's displeasure] – to the house of the Dr's friend [friend of Dr. Nath] – lovely surprise inside – nice garden + the 2 soldiers – palatial marble hall – we slept in small room on carpet + the 2 nabob [Muslim prince] pillows [Baba would not allow them to use chairs, sofas, or beds—and the pillows, seen in the morning light, turned out to be filthy!]. v. cold - + at well in front of house boys bathing in cold water – v. elaborate place – *toilets and bathrooms not suitable for it* - the mandali came + swept + dusted the big hall - got in + slept on pillows. in spite of cold boy bathing at well - we close the door.

Mani remembered that place:

In Benares we had a beautiful palace, a palatial house, where the verandahs were of stone with elephant heads holding the arches and so on. But no water facilities, no

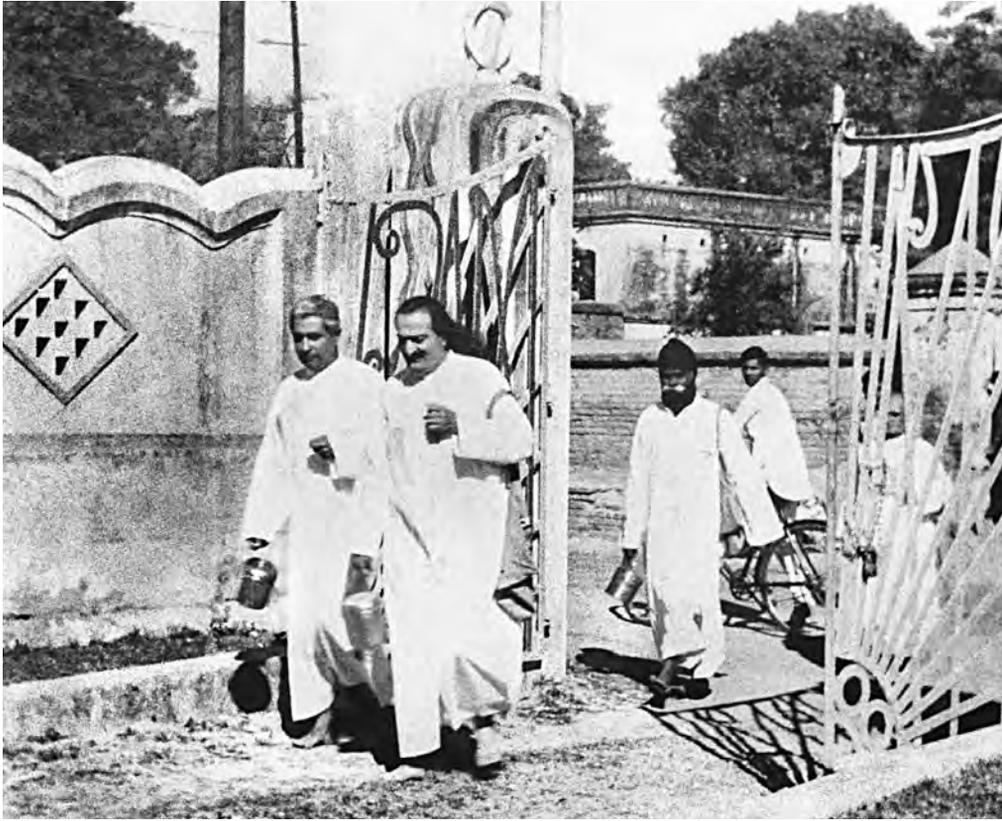
plumbing, no bathrooms! We brought the water up. The men mandali, with scarves tied around their heads, cleaned the whole place, and Baba told them to keep the chairs and furniture aside; we had to sleep on the ground, even sit on the ground, not on the chairs. One day while we were brushing our teeth, Mehera, seeing the stacked chairs, sat. It was so natural. We looked at her, and suddenly realised, “Oh! Look, you’re sitting on a chair!” Or maybe she remembered, I forget. Well, she started up as if she had been sitting on a hotplate! We laughed. She said afterwards, “I wondered why I was feeling so comfortable suddenly, why it was so nice to be sitting in a chair again!”

In Benares, where they stayed for almost a month, Baba accepted food and accommodation from two strangers, Dr. Nath and Dr. Khare. Although Baba was very strict with them (they couldn’t come and visit, etc.), the doctors continued to be eager to fulfill His wishes. Baba remarked later, “They are exceeding the limit in their love and devotion.” Mani said, “It was amazing the way they looked after us. And yet there were so many conditions: you’re not to see Baba, you’re not to do this, you’re not to do that. Everything was accepted. Even now when we look back, we say, ‘Amazing.’”

[DIARY]

16. [Nov.] wash clothes all day - electric shock + chatty [earthenware pot for drinking water] burst explosion – lots of pigeons – camels going by on road all time – v. dusty because of road near by. elephants’ heads + carved pillars on verandah – food comes from Dr. Nath’s every day.

17. Here we started making the puppets - + all of us

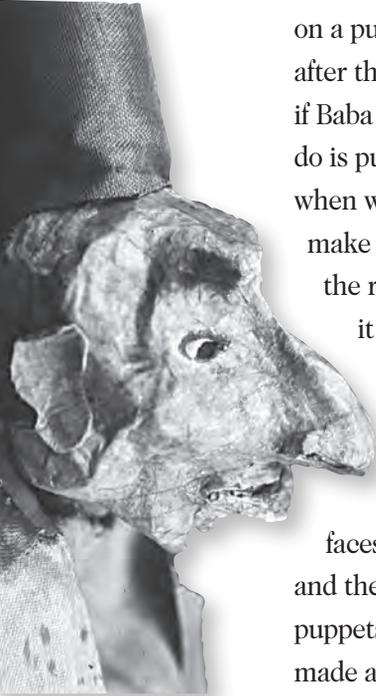


Baba with Adi and Babadas (in hat), all carrying begging bowls, as they enter gates to Dr. Nath's house in Benares.

worked on it. here we had the *warm kafnis*, + the quilt *waistcoat* + *hat*, the *warm* shawls, + the dyes, + the cloth for frock + turbans (one each of all).

They started making puppets? Yes, puppets, wonderful puppets, full of character and life, as you can see from the photos. Mani recalled making them:

. . .When we were in Benares, we had an unexpected order from Baba: make puppets! You see, I had made some puppets long ago when we were at Meherazad and had put



Puppet's head
made by Mami.

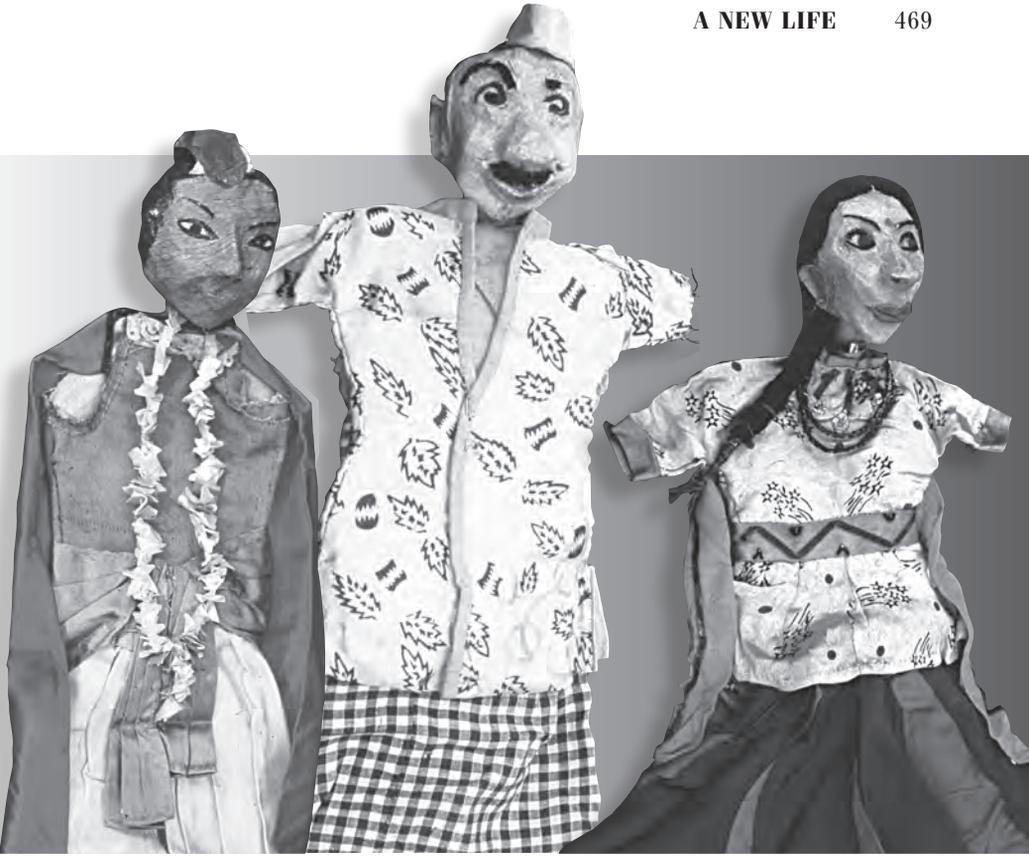
on a puppet show for Baba. I remember Norina saying after the show, “If sometime you need to get a job, Mani—if Baba tells you to go out and get a job, what you should do is puppets.” We had laughed over it at the time, but when we were in Benares . . . Baba said to us, “You will make puppets, because after we leave here and take to the road you have to begin to earn [money]. You can do it by giving puppet shows. Whenever we halt, people can come around and see it. They will like it and be pleased to pay their mite for the show. That too will be a form of bhiksha [alms].”

So we started making puppets. I made the faces and hands (out of paper and glue), while Mehera and the others made the clothes and jewelry. . . . Hand puppets. One little puppet was Lord Krishna, and Mehera made all the jewelry and the crown for Him and Meheru and Goher helped stitch the clothes. We did that much, and we were going to do much more when suddenly Baba dropped the idea. As you know, Baba proposes and Baba disposes.⁴

[DIARY]

22. [Nov.] Trains whistle like fog-horn. *In the evening all the poor people light fires + all sky full of smoke. The horses here are very nice — many ekkas [small horse-drawn carriages for one or two passengers] – the little ekkas have bells underneath. water v. tasteless. pan done up beautifully in size row [rows of leaves according to size]. camels go by.*

On November 24, Baba Himself initiated the New Life training period by begging for food, accompanied by Eruch, Donkin, and



Three of the hand puppets made by the women: Krishna, a tongawalla, and a dancer.

Babadas at Dr. Nath's home. As Mani mentioned in her diary, they wore long white robes called kafnis and went barefoot, with Baba carrying a brass begging bowl and an ochre-colored satchel—on which Mehera had embroidered in Hindi “Give alms with love.”

[DIARY]

25. [Nov.] Baba + 3 others went to ask bhiksha at the Dr's place.

26. Baba + 3 others went to take bhiksha from the Dr. + an old brahmin.

SARNATH

On December 1, Baba and the companions set out on foot for Sarnath, one of the most sacred sites of Buddhism. There Buddha gave His first sermon to His disciples after His enlightenment, and over time it became His seat and the center of much of His activity.

[DIARY]

1. [Dec. 1949] We go to Sarnath — walking — lovely trees + v. nice place — we stay at house of that dr. friend's [Dr. Nath had made arrangements for their accommodation in Sarnath] — nice grounds + v. nice *old gardener* — also . . . nice soft *earth* for washing dishes [in water-scarce village India, earth is used to scrub dishes] — many *tangerine* trees. *Met a mast on the road whom Baba took along with him (stopped by a flock of sheep passing by)*. nice well + the very *clean* *metrani* [toilet sweeper woman]. my cough is like “Anthea’s Guest”.

All her life Mani caught colds very frequently; she often said a cold was her “companion.” She explained in Mandali Hall one day when she had a cold: “I had read to Baba at one time a book entitled, *Anthea’s Guest*, a delightful story of a guest who simply would not leave. The whole book was around that. We’d enjoyed it a lot. And then the other day when I opened my New Life diary, at one point I read, ‘My cough is like Anthea’s Guest!’ And that’s exactly what’s happening now. My cold just won’t leave me!”

[DIARY]

2. [Dec.] *The gardener every day gives us radishes, coriander leaves, and tiny oranges. Every day from the doctor’s we get dal and rice in the afternoon and every evening one vegetable (usually potatoes). Over here they make cow dung cakes in a funny way.*

Mani recalled:

In Sarnath, the family that provided food for us was told simply to send us [for lunch] dal and rice, plain dal and rice. We said, “Whoopee, we love plain dal. Oh, how often we’ve said we could have dal every day now, that we’d never get tired of it!”

Well, when you have dal and rice day in and day out, every day—and “nothing with it,” said Baba, so there was no chutney, no green stuff, no coriander leaves (*kotmir*, as we call it), no lemon—it makes a big difference, believe me. By the end, when we would see the dal and rice, automatically my stomach would give a sort of funny little twist!

Yet in that place, one of the gardeners working there had about nine children and was very poor. Naturally we weren’t hungry enough to eat more than a little bit of the dal and rice, not as much as we would have eaten if we’d only had it once in a while. So a lot would be left over. And we’d give it to the gardener, who would come with outstretched hands to take it. It made us feel so ashamed; here was the dal and rice that we could not take in with much appreciation, and look, here was someone who was so thankful for it, a picture of poverty and gratitude. When you are really hungry, when you really have so many mouths to feed—well, rice and dal was a feast for him.

Baba always noticed these little claims that you could do this or that so easily. And in His own way, He would orchestrate things so that years later you would end up having to do it, and it would turn out to be much more difficult than you expected.

On the grounds of the same bungalow was an old man who was a sort of caretaker of the place, who lived in an out-building somewhere on the property. There was an orchard garden there, too, with little lime and tangerine trees. One day, he brought us some of the *santra*, the tangerines. They were so small. But you would have thought he was giving us the crown jewels! They were so precious, so welcome. So we started having a bit of those kinds of things, which Baba came to know about—little pinpoints of grace.

Do you know what that old man would do? It was so cold in Sarnath those days that in the morning we just couldn't get out of our homespun blankets. We just couldn't get out of them. And yet, at about four in the morning we'd hear, coming from the grounds outside, "Ram, Ram, Sita, Ram . . . Ram, Ram, Sita, Ram . . ."

And we knew it was coming from the old man, who was sleeping outside, not even in a room like we were. He had made a bed for himself out of a wooden structure, and put a bit of hay on it, and slept there. Later, when we didn't even want to wash our hands because it was still so cold, he had a bath outside, drawing cold water from the well. The well had a pulley for drawing the water up, and the pulley was squeaky. We'd be lying down for a while after lunch and we would hear the *squeak-squeak* [here Mani would imitate the squeaking], and we'd say, "Oh no. Oh no, he's having a bath."

He would pull out the water in a pail, pour it over himself, and then put the pail in again. By that time, you'd be getting frozen into an ice cube. [Imitates squeaking.] And this would go on!

Baba wanted to contact this caretaker and give him something. One day He sent Goher, saying, "Go ask the

man what is there that he might need. Find out. Ask him what would he like. I want to give it to him.” So Goher went to find out. Where he stayed was just a bare room with a little fireplace and nothing else, absolutely nothing. But he looked amazed by Goher’s question. He said, “There is nothing that I need. My Thakurji takes care of everything, looks after me, gives me so much.”

Goher looked around, and she couldn’t find anything, not even if she had had binoculars. So she came back and Mehera said, “Did you give Baba’s message to the man?” “Yes,” said Goher, “but, you know, he has a very good landlord, and the landlord provides everything.” “Yes?” said Mehera. “Yes, he said Thakurji provides everything.”

“Thakurji? That’s Lord Krishna’s name,” Mehera said. “That’s no landlord.”

So then when Baba asked Goher, she said, “Baba, he said ‘Thakurji provides everything, I don’t need anything.’”

Baba said, “Go back, go back, he must [ask for something].” You see, Baba wanted something to give for that contact, something He could give to him.

I think it was the third time when at last the old man said, “Yes, yes, yes, there is something. I’ve remembered there is something I would need.”

“What’s that?” Goher said, happy that at last her mission was successful and fruitful.

“A box of matches.”

Goher’s face fell. So she came back and said to Baba, “Baba, all I could get him to ask for was a box of matches.”

So Baba said, “Call him.” That was the thing to give, you see, because he had asked for it. I don’t remember the details, but I remember the man coming up the steps,

Baba standing there. And in His hands was a blanket, a coat, some things like that, plus the box of matches on top.

The man came up and he just looked at Baba. He just kept looking at Baba. And Baba said, “Take this.”

The man put out his hand. He never once looked at the things. He just kept looking at Baba. And then Baba said, “Now go.” And he just kept looking, and he went. That was one of the things I remember. It was more of a feeling; witnessing this, watching this was something so . . . [here Mani sighed.] Of course, we loved him already because he used to give us the tangerines that helped get down the rice and dal! But look what Baba gave him.

As Mehera remembered, speaking of the old man:

He said, “Oh, this is a gift from Bhagwan,” meaning, “God has given me this gift.” . . . He meant it was God’s grace that had given it to him, but he did not know that Baba was God Himself, standing in front of him. It was so beautiful. Then he bowed to Baba very respectfully and lovingly, and he was very happy when he left. At last he had received *prasad* from Baba. Baba wanted to give it to him. Here was a man who had no worldly possessions, yet he had everything because he had contentment and love for God.⁵

[DIARY]

5. [Dec.] go to Sarnath to see Stupa + temple etc. of Gautama Buddha—ruins of monasteries etc.—v. beautiful paintings in temple + beautiful temple – B. asked me to write on piece of paper names of the Avatars + put it in his pocket – walked in underground passage in ruins – the mast-like man on road whom Baba saw, + who ran after Baba but did not wait for food, for on our return he wasn’t

there – v. lovely walk, for huge mango trees on road.
 museum had lovely garden of Xmas trees.

Mani remembered that those beautiful temple paintings depicted the life of Buddha. Also, that on the paper Baba put in His pocket, He had asked her to write out all the known Avataric names: Zoroaster, Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed, and Meher Baba. She also recalled that the underground passages He then walked in were the same ones where He later sat with the men companions.

[DIARY]

6. [Dec.] *That Dr. gives Baba a camel, a camel cart, 2 cows with calves + 2 she-donkeys. In the end he even buys a white horse, a very calm, gentle horse, who then suddenly started kicking. Baba took the horse with him – he said he would sit on him some day - From Naḡar our caravan + a bullock-cart with 4 bullocks arrive.*

7. [. . .] *Baba and the mandali went to Sarnath and sat in an underground passage only in loincloths. B. said in New Life we must speak the truth, - + that when we start on our walking *fakiri* [renunciate life] we will meet both ridicule + respect but we must be indifferent to both.*

Mani later explained that while the men had white kafnis and green turbans from their time in Benares for this “walking fakiri,” the women didn’t. So Baba had them make light blue woolen kafnis for themselves and got them pieces of gray cotton material for turbans. Then He tied a turban around Mani’s head, to demonstrate how it should be tied. But He later dropped the idea, and the women never wore either the kafnis or the turbans on their travels. On the first day of walking, December 12, they wore light blue cotton saris, but the women changed into normal clothes soon after that.

After twelve days in Sarnath, on December 12, 1949, Baba set out with the companions on foot for Haridwar, a sacred site of Hindu pilgrimage on the edge of the river Ganges in north India. The Kumbh Mela* was to be held for the first time in thirty-two years at that site. Behind Baba and the women, with Eruch walking nearby, came the companions in procession, the white horse, the caravan pulled by the English bull, a camel cart, and finally a bullock cart, behind which came two cows, a calf, and two donkeys.

[DIARY]

12. [Dec.] 7:30 a.m. started on New Life. mad rush + hurry as ever. Dr. *Nath*, and *Khare* also, were standing outside. long procession of animals in order of: 1) horse 2) camel cart + (v. nice camel) 3) bullock cart, 4) 2 cows and 2 calves 5) caravan 6) 2 very stubborn donkeys. Baba and *mandali* in white kafnis and green turbans - we four this first day in blue saris. After five miles walking we stopped. Donkin went ahead. We rested under the trees. C.I.D. [the crime investigation department] officials came to inquire - Then they talked with E. [Eruch] and when they asked Baba's name and came to know who he was, they bowed + left at once - we reached Shivpur school grounds - nice tidy place - curious girls + children - lady with black teeth. walked 6 miles. reached 11.30 - *Kafla* [not clear who] came v. late 1 o'clock - ate food from the dr. - variety of dishes.

Mani recalled: "Later Padri told us it was indelibly imprinted on his mind, that unforgettable scene. He said, 'You could not have known it because you were in it, but it was really out of this world, a most

* The Kumbh Mela is a huge gathering of Hindu pilgrims, sadhus, and seekers that occurs in India every three years in four different places in rotation, each place being near a sacred river or rivers.

wondrous sight that greeted my eyes as I silently watched that long procession passing by while the dawn was still young.’”⁶

[DIARY]

13. [Dec.] 8 o'clock started out – walked 6 miles. We loaded the donkeys and made them walk. In the village, all the villagers asked where we were going - nice people, helpful + polite. reached Babadpur about 12. *Kafla* came at about 1. D. [Donkin] carried calf. *Bullocks* got scared on slope. nice place with huge trees. *Ghani* sat in the caravan and came there and then went and asked for *bhiksha* with *Bdas* [Babadas]. They got plenty of rice. Kaka cooked for all. At 4 o'clock rice from the *bhiksha* from Benares + squashed up potatoes were cooked – v. nice - although we have provisions with us for till end of Dec. some of the mandali will beg every day. passed *Harahua* - picked up sticks + pieces of wood [for the cooking fire].

Although occasionally they would travel by train, the companions ended up walking much of the way from Sarnath to the mountain town of Dehra Dun (in the Haridwar region), with the men mandali begging for food for all. It took them a month. At night they would camp in orchards, the women staying in the caravan, Baba in a tent, and the men out in the open, or they would spend the night on the floor in dak bungalows, the women always separate from the men.

Mani remembered:

Whenever we went some place, Baba would say to the men, “All right, you go out and ask for *bhiksha*.” They were to ask for food, never money; to go to the doors of the houses and say, “Give *bhiksha* with love.” Now one morning, Nilu and Kaka were sent out to ask for *bhiksha*.

They were both nice, sturdy people. They wore long robes only because Baba told them to, otherwise, what concern did they have with long robes or short robes? Obedience, what Baba wanted, so all right, they wore long robes.

This weather was mentioned so often in the circulars about the New Life because it really was a predominant thing in our life at that time with Baba, one of the foremost things. It used to be so cold and we had to get up very early in the morning, long, long before dawn. We women always stayed separately, but when we would get up, say at three o'clock, we could see the men at a distance under the trees, by kerosene lamps chopping up fodder for the animals that was carried on the camel cart. They would attend to the animals first, feeding the bullocks, cows, donkeys and the camel, and in the end when Baba would say, "Start", they very often hadn't even had time to make tea for themselves!

Because it was so cold, underneath their robes the men wore these dreadful cotton-wool quilted tops, and on top of that they would put their robes. So when Nilu and Kaka, who were well built to begin with, put on those cotton-wool garments and then the robe on top of everything, they really looked very healthy! So one morning they went out to ask for bhiksha. They had to go to a town where there were educated people, not to a village where people just give from the heart. When the door opened at one house they asked for bhiksha as usual. But the man who'd opened it said, "You look like wrestlers and you can't go and do a job of your own? You have to come and beg from other householders? You, who are such hefty, strong people? Why don't you go and work for your living!"

Now Dr. Nilu was not only a Brahmin, but from a top-class Brahmin family. So for Nilu such little things were quite humiliating. It was only because of Baba that he bore them. And this to Nilu was the absolute zenith of humiliation! I mean, to go to somebody's door and be told, "Get out of here, why don't you get a job?" I think Nilu suffered from that for days. He didn't say anything at the time, but . . . !

In the villages, it's different. Their education has not fogged their knowledge. They remember that from ancient times, it is written in their scriptures and in books of wise people that whenever somebody comes to your door and asks for food or help, never send them away without giving something, because who knows? One day, it will be God in human form, Ram, God in person, at your door. And even if you have to give for lifetimes, you go on trying, you go on giving. And when Baba sends one of His men, or one of us, or any of the disciples around Him to do something, it is like Baba doing it.

On December 14, the men were up at 3:30 a.m. seeing to the animals, and by 7:30 a.m. they all started walking. Mehera and the women had a ride with Baba in a caravan at one point, with halts under trees, and the night was spent under a big mango tree. The next day was much the same, only on one halt a bunch of children ran through their marching "drill exercises" for Baba. Eventually Baba and all reached the large town of Jaunpur. Mani remembered it well, as she told pilgrims:

I remember once at the end of a long trek, we at last reached a town. We had to go through it to get to the place where we could camp. And right through that big town we

went with all our paraphernalia, the camel cart, the cows, the bullock carts, all of it, the horse, the donkeys, and whatnot. And when, having crossed the town from one end to the other we reached the other side, we were told, “Oh no, that place is at the other end.” So we had to turn right round and go through the whole thing again.

As the exertion of dealing with the animals, walking long distances with poor food, and the intense cold was wearing everybody out, Baba decided on a new plan. They would sell some of the animals and go by train with the rest to Moradabad, and—as it was Mehera’s birthday time—spend the last ten days of December in a “vacuum period”: no begging, no men’s wearing of kafnis, no physical labor, and complete relaxation with good food!

[DIARY]

17. [Dec.] B. tells us of change of plans. we will go by train to Moradabad, stay there 1 month, then walk the 140 miles (14 days, at 10 m. a day) [on northwards to Najibabad]. *The camel cart, the camel and 2 cows were sold.*

18. *We wash, bathe, etc. windy + cold. The mandali are living outside in the open grounds and sleeping there also. We have enormous radishes for lunch. people here eat it raw, cooked, + pickled. Because of the cold, the poor people collect all the dry twigs from the trees and take them away [for lighting fires]. The jungle is very clean so G. [Goher] could not find any wood to burn.*

20. *Baba walked 4 miles and met with a mast (he said it was a v. good mast). [On the margin, near this phrase, Mani has written in shorthand what seems to be the word “liberation” – perhaps referring to something Baba said*

about the mast]. D. [Donkin] + 2 others leave with caravan + animals - (i.e., horse, 4 bullocks + *SukooTukoo* [the two donkeys]) we sleep in small tent, v. congested - v. cold here. Caravan is given out empty [perhaps driven out with no one inside] at 8 in morning.

21. v. cold + windy in morning. we leave at 11 – as taxi did not come we rode in ekka little way – met taxi + got into it [-] at station *into* waiting room *there some lady came into the bathroom and* [there was some] *fun with M* [Mehera or Meheru]. *We caught the train at one in the morning* – passed *Faizabad. 8 in the evening in Lucknow (I wasn't well)* – other stations we passed were:- [nothing mentioned]. [We sat] in small 1st class *compartment* – + B. + *mandali* in servant's compartment – reached Moradabad at 3 in the morning.

MORADABAD, DECEMBER 22–31, 1949

In December 1949, Mani wrote in her diary:

22. stopped in [railway] waiting-room till 6 (*two women there snoring*) – left in tongas in dark – v. bumpy roads – reached place (*dharmshala*) in dark – one room with 12 doors – room *was washed and the water was not yet dry* - + v. cold – even at 12 in the afternoon – big open ventilators were blocked with *tatta*. *Bathed – in the afternoon many flies came in – in front of us was a public garden with a small well from which we drew drinking water* (v. good water) –

Poor Mani, she of the every-other-minute cold, was alternately thrilled with and haunted by the twelve-door room in Moradabad. As

she recalled in Mandali Hall:

It so happened that we had stopped for a few days at Moradabad. The place that had been reserved for us was a nice biggish room, a long room, and it had been cleaned. I think it was a place for travellers to rest. There wasn't a single piece of furniture, not even a nail on the wall to hang your coat. But *space* meant a lot to us. When we arrived we were so tired. You have no idea what it was like in the New Life – we thought it was wonderful that there were even *walls* here, and something overhead, because usually we camped out under trees. And this was actually a *room* – for us that was better than a palace!

As I said, it had been cleaned for us. That meant the floor was still wet, with puddles of water on the uneven ground, and it was very cold. But, we were ecstatic because we had walls and a roof. For years and years and years I had suffered from monthly cramp pains, and it just happened to be at that time, so as soon as we arrived everybody said, "Get Mani into a corner and let her rest while we unpack." There was no bathroom, no toilet, but it was a room. So my little bedding, which was very meager in the New Life, was rolled out in a corner on the floor, and that was heaven for me, I could lie down.

Now the architecture in India in the older places and houses and bungalows is such that we can never keep nature out. We don't try. We've given up. Through the cracks under the windowsills you get rain coming in, draughts coming in, insects coming in, lizards, even a frog, although I don't know how it managed to come in. So all these things were in that room. And that lovely

long room had *twelve* doors, with draughts coming in from every door so it was very cold! [I lay down and the draughts came from under the doors; from this door, from that door, from all the *twelve* doors (and as I lay there, I counted all twelve of them!).] Of course I couldn't tell anybody because all were busy unpacking and settling in, and Baba would be coming soon.

Outside that place there was a path which the local people would use to walk to the village, and sometimes they would greet us with a few words. There were two eunuchs, hermaphrodites, who had deep voices and wore women's clothes. They were very nice to us and would always ask if we were comfortable.⁷

It was during the New Life that Mani picked up the habit, suggested by Mehera, of taking snuff to help keep her from catching colds. Baba OK'd it, and for many years after, you would often see her pull a little snuff box (she had a whole collection) out of her pocket, and take a pinch. She finally gave it up in the later years of her life.

[DIARY]

29. [Dec.] Moradabad town *went sightseeing on foot + returned by cycle-rikshaw* - nice lively + friendly place. (brass-work is *very famous*). no ekkas here – tongas. We buy 2 tongas + 1 *mare*. caravan cart etc. arrive

31. *white horse is being trained by a Muslim* trainer.

Baba decided that the innocuous-looking but terrible-tempered white horse had to be trained to pull a tonga. Thus began the “taming of the shrew.” Mani remembered:

. . . That majestic animal! The discipline it went through. A horse trainer was called in, and it took him

about five days to get that horse trained to accept the fact that it would be harnessed to a tonga and have to pull it with people in it. The horse trainer was a tiny little fellow, so ordinary-looking that if you saw him in a bus or passed him on the road you wouldn't give him a second glance. But . . . he was a master of horses! The way he trained that white horse! Mehera and I would sit out in the mornings and just watch. He did a beautiful job. Baba said, "You've got to do it. That horse has got to be harnessed to a tonga."

The horse expert tried all sorts of tricks on the horse and told us, "You wouldn't believe it, but I tell you this horse has once been harnessed to a tonga and he knows all the tricks. But he's such a clever fellow that he's trying to pretend to me that he doesn't know what I mean." The trainer would catch the horse unawares in certain things, and slowly he was able to tame him.

From that time the horse served us by pulling the tonga.⁸

Mani said when she and Mehera first saw the trainer, so tiny and slim, looking like a young boy, they laughed out loud. "We couldn't help it. We said to each other, 'Hah, he's going to handle that horse?'. . . Well, we acquired such tremendous respect for that man. Because anything that one can do to perfection sets one apart from the rest."

HAPPY NEW LIFE: JANUARY 1-12, 1950

Mani jotted down notes about New Year's in Moradabad:

1950

Moradabad

1. *In the morning Baba wished everyone a Happy New Life wish – then we had cake. At 2 in the afternoon we started from Moradabad to a place 4 miles away. Sukoo and Tukoo [the donkeys] troubled us a lot. Reached in the evening (house with a terrace - very cold) – caravan arrived very late. It could not enter the garden so it had to be kept on the road. We had potatoes and naan. It rained all night – Baba's tent was leaking – the mandali were sleeping outside and got drenched. The mare does not want to leave her town – but the horse [white stallion] walked nicely.*

“It remains very vividly with me,” Mani said of that 1950 New Year's morning when Baba came over from the men's side with a plate of little pieces of cake. “I can't imagine where they came from. He had handed one each to the men, and now He was doing the same thing with the women. He told me to say on His behalf 'Happy New Life!' and the recipient's name as He gave the cake to each one. Not 'Happy New Year!' but 'Happy New Life!' Then He gave me my piece and gestured that I should say the same for myself. So I said, 'Happy New Life, Mani.'”

Mani went on, “And it was happy. It is extraordinary when I look back now how happy the New Life was. In spite of all its bindings, there was still that effervescence and joy in just being with Him. Nothing else mattered to us.”

“It was a very different life,” said Goher. “We forgot the world existed.”

On January 2, they set off walking again. Mani noted in her diary, “*We made Sukoo and Tukoo run a lot.*”

Goher remembered, “I used to walk with Mehera, and Mani and Meheru would be with the donkeys. They would tell us all these funny stories of how they had to make the donkeys run.” For example, after a while they noticed that the animals would get up and go when a truck went by and honked. So whenever the donkeys were going too slowly, they would time a good yell just when a truck went honking by and the donkeys would take off, sometimes even running ahead of Baba.

[DIARY]

3. [Jan.] *We started at 8 a.m. Today there's nice sunny weather – we walked 6 miles - through Amroha. many sugar-cane fields + sugar factory. then sat 2 miles in caravan. stopped 1½ miles outside Amroha in a v. nice spot in a mango grove. v. nice moh. [Muslim] gardener. little girl named Muslima told story. The horse has a wound. B's legs hurt again. The mandali sat in the tonga and went to ask for bhiksha. In one hour they collected plenty.*

“Habits and customs in the north are very different from here,” Mani recalled. “For example, we never in our lives had spinach for breakfast. You know, breakfast meant hot tea with chappatis or bread and butter, that kind of thing, and you really would look forward to it. But when you're hungry, and you get spinach in the morning, spinach with peas or just spinach! Well, it used to be so strange.”

Yet a spinach breakfast was one of the women's fondest memories of the New Life. They would all talk about it. As recorded in *Tales from the New Life*, Mehera recalled one particular morning when they had walked for miles and it was finally nine o'clock:

. . . Not having had much breakfast and having walked so much, we were feeling empty and hungry. Baba was walking with the mandali. He was leading the way some distance ahead and we were at the back talking to each other. Baba halted and said something to Eruch. Then Baba turned towards us, came back and asked, “Are you feeling hungry?” We were so happy that Baba asked this question because we were really very hungry that morning. Baba said, “All right, let us see,” and he looked around and saw some huts in a field far away. There were nice green fields around them and smoke coming out as though someone were cooking. Baba called Eruch. “See that hut? Go and ask there for bhiksha.”

The woman who was cooking in the mud-and-thatch hut said, “Oh, yes, I’ve one bhakri (bread) ready and one is on the fire. I’ll quickly make it. I want to give you two bhakri.” This is millet bread, big, fat and circular. Eruch waited for two or three minutes and in that time she prepared the bread and put a lot of lovely freshly cooked spinach on it. . . .

Meheru remembered: “We were cold and hungry so that spinach and bread were very welcome. It was piping hot. Baba took a little piece, and the rest he said we must not eat, but put it in his brass bowl. ‘That is for the companions. I will give it as prasad to them.’ How thankful and appreciative we were to have that food. To this day, we still remember how good it tasted.”

To which Mehera added, “How fortunate was this woman who, cooking for her family, had happily given it in bhiksha and Baba had accepted it. She will never know how fortunate she was.”⁹

“Stopped again under a mango grove (found elephant dropping) . . .”
Mani wrote in her diary. She later recalled:

One of the most difficult things in the New Life for us women was the lack of privacy. We did not expect or have privacy—I mean the kind of privacy for going to the bathroom, because we could only go out in the fields. When we arrived at a camping place somehow word went round the town or village, and many were drawn to come and look at this weird caravan with people and animals “on pilgrimage” as they were told. The women townsfolk would gather around us four women, curious, friendly, and wishing to help in any way they could.

So how to get privacy or manage to get beyond the caravan? It was obvious we would have to go very far away, but where? To reconnoitre, three of us would go—one would stay with Baba, and one of us always had to be with Mehera. So Mehera, Meheru and I would go and find a place. Mehera and myself might come back, and Goher would stay at the caravan with Mehera, so then I would go again, and Meheru and myself would come back. That’s where the following incident happened. Mehera, Meheru and I went. Mehera and Meheru came back and I stayed. When I returned Meheru would then be able to go.

In the meantime I saw something which I felt the others had missed. It looked like a cannonball—it was an elephant’s dropping and it was perfect—symmetrically round and glossy, not a flaw in it, you could have put it in an exhibition! So I carefully carried it in my hand back to where the others were, quite some distance away, and wouldn’t you think they would appreciate it?

But unknown to me, while I was away there had been quite a little discussion between Mehera and Co. and some Brahmin women who had come over from the nearby

town, along with the crowd our party always attracted wherever we camped. They were suggesting ways of cleaning up the ground where we would be resting [and getting rid of the leaves and twigs that were still lying around]. However, it was our habit, whenever we arrived at such a camping place, that we all gathered plenty of twigs and leaves to make a fire to warm some water to wash Baba's feet, which were not only dusty but blistered. So Mehera said to these women, "Thank you, but we have seen to it that it is quite clean."

In the midst of this little controversy I make my entrance with an elephant dropping held in my hand, excitedly saying, "Look, Mehera, look what I've brought!" It was very embarrassing for Mehera, and the others were trying to shush me and push me behind them while I kept on entreating them to look at what I'd found!¹⁰

Years later, when the women went to the circus with Baba in Ahmednagar, and the elephant pooped during his act, they all teased Mani that she should go pick up the droppings.

In *Tales from the New Life*, Mani elaborated on the reason they attracted so much attention:

Wherever we stopped for the night, often on the outskirts of a village or small town, usually in a mango grove, or sometimes under a dilapidated shelter or even out in the open in the fields by a well, word would fly to the village about this peculiar party of pilgrims camping nearby. Then even before we could settle after our exhausting all-day trek, just about the whole village would turn out to see us. The women would gather around the site where we women were and the men would surround the men companions. They had never seen such a sight

before. Such an odd retinue of men, women and vehicles: a camel cart, different in shape from what is usually seen there; a bullock cart drawn by an English bull and an Indian bull; a caravan that looked like a bus but was drawn by bullocks; men and women who looked very different from the kind who normally make a pilgrimage on foot; and most of all, Baba. It was clear that he was the leader of the party and quite above the rest.

[DIARY]

6. [Jan.] *At 7.30 in the morning we started from Ratanfui – on way was rather wild (no shade etc.) we walked 6 miles by broken bridge, on road was our white-horse tonga, wheel broken – We walked one mile and stopped in another mango grove in village centre, . . . for sugarcane, plenty of flies, plenty of dust and plenty of monkeys (worst spot so far). The wheel was set at night (D. [Donkin] etc. came at 12 o'clock at night) It was very cold at night - Also in the morning. The monkey stole our bag of bhiksha flour and ran away.*

7. *From the 1st the mandali are to say the prayers in 4 languages every morning. We left at 8.25 a.m. I sat on Sukoo and Tukoo [Mani's knee was injured, and Mehera urged her to ride on the donkeys] + we walked 7 miles, and at Jator stopped in a very nice mango grove, + well + big space. Hazra broke awlas [a sour fruit that grows on trees] for us. Kakaji cooked dried chickpea balls for us. (K. [Kaka] cooks every day + Soltun's [meaning Soltun's husband, Baidul] makes chappati mixed with linseed). We are now 55 miles from Moradabad. We met some fishermen on the way - they were going to Gangun to catch fish – on the road a cartman gave us sugarcane.*



The New Life caravan, photographed at Meherasad in the 1950s. The Blue Bus is behind.

8. I sit in caravan - we do 13 miles today B. etc. walk 6 miles + then in caravan - begin to sight mountain ranges. stop under mango grove near Akbarabad. reach at 3 – (passed Husanabad) – *Here there was a constant crowd of visitors around the mandali and us too. (That lady thought we were foreigners and she looked like Kajjan [a famous Indian actress who Mehera was fond of]).*

9. I sit in carav. Again - We do 8 miles. passed Kotwali + reached Najibabad by 1 o'clock – in *municipal garden* -

mango-grove. v. nice place + round *platform* (corpse's hair about) [the platform must have been a cremation ground] – (nobody wants to buy *SukooTukoo*) - station is near by. v. cold.

Mani would tell a story to illustrate how easily they could trip over their egos. During this period, she kept sitting in the caravan because her knee was injured. But normally, the caravan was used only for the women to sleep in at night. One day a passing bullock cart driver, seeing Mani and Meheru walking, kindly offered them a ride in his empty cart. But they refused, knowing Baba wouldn't want it. They virtuously said, "Oh no, thank you very much, but we cannot accept the lift. You see, we're on a walking pilgrimage to Haridwar and we have to walk, so we can't take a bullock cart or anything. We have to walk on foot." Mani recalled that the man was impressed, and bowed reverently to them; they bowed back, and he drove on. Just five minutes later, Baba clapped and instructed that the women should get into the caravan. They were surprised and excited and sat inside, opening the curtains of the windows to put their heads out. "It was fun to see everything without having to walk!"

Of course, after a while the caravan passed . . . yes, the man in the bullock cart. Mani, seeing him, thought, "His face seems familiar," but the man's reproachful, very hurt look was of someone who had been deceived. They suddenly recognized him: it was their "well-wisher" who had just offered them a lift in his cart! "Too late, Meheru and I ducked our heads in," said Mani, "feeling quite ashamed. Well, Baba deflated our egos just like that." Of course only a few minutes later Baba sent word for the women to get out of the caravan and walk. "We walked," Mani said, "but we didn't show off anymore."

On January 12 they left by train for Dehra Dun. Kaka Baria had had a heart attack and was very ill. Reaching Dehra Dun, they went to "Mrs. Pratt's house."

DEHRA DUN, JANUARY 13–JUNE 14, 1950

From the diary, January 1950:

13. *The house is very nice. There is a major and his wife here too, v. nice couple - they are imm. drawn to 'Babaji'.* we relax + have a real rest. v. nice house + view. can see Massouri [Mussoorie] + other mnt. ranges. *With a lot of trouble* we get leave to stay 4 days. food comes from *Sakarkan* [Shatrughan Kumar] + *Subadhra* [Kumar's wife].

14. wash everything – + bask in sun on the lawn.

15. *Gaasribai* family *came from Aligarh to meet us.* the man is devoted to Baba, + brings his whole family to cook for us for 10 days.

This man, a complete stranger, had turned up at midnight one night at Keki Nalavala's house, bringing along a number of bullock carts full of food. He was from Aligarh (south of Delhi) and supplied cream to a huge butter-making firm. His name was Todi Singh.

As Keki described it to Baba, the man told him, "There is somebody heading towards this city [Dehra Dun] from the south, and I have seen in a vision very, very clearly that someone who is very great is coming here, begging all the way. I have been directed by the head of the party to come here with all the necessary foodstuffs." Keki put the man off because they were not supposed to divulge Baba's whereabouts to anyone, and the next morning asked Baba what to do. Baba asked about the food. As Eruch recalled, Keki replied:

. . . there was one cartload of just butter cans filled with fresh table butter. You know those military cans they have, sealed over the top? These cans can be put in the deep freeze. All this butter he had brought because it was his! . . . Another cartload was of dried fruits, almonds, pistachios, cashew nuts, and dried figs. In northern India

there are plenty of dried fruits. Just imagine the things that were there. In another cart there was some tinned stuff. Another cart was loaded with sacks of rice, pulses, all sorts of condiments and tins of clarified butter. Still another cart was loaded with potatoes, onions, garlic and fresh vegetables, all spread out.¹¹

Baba met the man and accepted the provisions on the condition that the man and his own family come and cook the food for them all on the spot, for not longer than a month. Such things would happen in those days. As Mani once said, “Baba said over and over that He was our companion now, but [we felt] during the New Life He was more God than ever!”

[DIARY]

16. [Jan.] We leave for Manjri-Mafi house [on property just outside of Dehra Dun] - big house but inconvenient + v. cold. *Gaasribai family* also come – + put up in the big kitchen, + cook for all. lovely view from terrace.

17. v. cold - + no sun.

18. colder!

Mani was much impressed by the ferocious weather they encountered in the north. As she recounted in Mandali Hall:

At breakfast this morning we were telling Arnavaz how cold it was during the New Life, up in the north. Terribly cold. For example, the 21st of March is the Irani New Year, the spring equinox, which is celebrated on a big scale in Iran and by Iranis in India. On that day as part of the celebration, you are supposed to put on new clothes. Well it was so cold that we didn't want to put on any other clothes than what we already had on. We just stayed as we were. It was that cold on 21st March, which is supposed to be summertime!

And another thing: in the north, it rains during winter,

which is something we have never experienced here on the Deccan [the Deccan Plateau, where Meherazad is located]. We love the rain here because it rains in the summer. When you've been feeling very hot and there's a good shower of rain, there's nothing like it. It's like a balm; you want to run out in the rain and smell the earth and all that.

But when you're shivering and you hear that *drip, drip, drip* on the tin roof, and then there's drizzle, drizzle, drizzle and no matter when you look out it's raining, it's quite a different thing. It was so cold you couldn't even button up your jacket; you couldn't catch hold of the button-hole and maneuver the button through it. And when you had a cold to begin with (I got a lot of bad colds then), and you got up in the middle of the night and heard *drip, drip, drip*, and then had to get up at four in the morning and go outside to get to the kitchen . . . well!

That's the time Baba permitted this family who had never seen Him before to come stay and cook for us. We thought this was grand. It meant we wouldn't have to go into the kitchen early in the morning when it was so cold.

They all came—the wife, the sister, the sister-in-law, and a little orphan boy—so happy to be able to serve Baba. They brought a lot of stuff with them, but none of it was for themselves. They barely had anything for themselves except a little bundle. But they brought sacks of utensils and cooking pots and spices and all the things they would need to cook for us. We wondered where to accommodate them. The kitchen in that first house in Dehra Dun was a big room. It was an old place, without good windows, and must have been very drafty. But the family decided they must live there in the kitchen and cook for us.

There was a low sink there that they would bathe in. They would get up very early in the morning, and because they

were cooking for the God-Man, they wanted to bathe and be clean first thing in the morning, and then start the cooking.

Now our bathroom had no door, so we had put up a sheet, which kept flapping in that cold, cold wind. The bathroom had a window with missing panes that we tried to stick newspaper on, and in short, we weren't very enthusiastic about taking baths. In fact, we didn't even bathe every day!

But the family thought that for spiritual reasons or whatever, we had a bath every day. And you see, we couldn't lie in the New Life. So since they bathed at three o'clock in the morning, they thought surely we must have bathed by two, because we never seemed to call for hot water for a bath. One day, one of them asked us, "You must be bathing so early in the mornings!" And I said, "Yes, it would be too early, wouldn't it?" We couldn't lie, but we couldn't say, "No, we didn't have a bath," so we left them with the impression that we did without saying it.

Mani described the food they made as a feast spread as if for a royal family, full of almonds, butter, pistachios, ghee, and so on:

Todi Singh would go out in a tonga, a horse carriage, every morning to the market and bring back vegetables. And on his return we could see that tonga full of vegetables from far away. The vegetables you get in Dehra Dun are quite different from what you get in Ahmednagar. The peas, oh, like marbles, and the carrots and turnips! You'd boil just one turnip and you'd have to cut it in pieces, and such flavor! The cauliflower! Mehera still remembers that big cauliflower, just as tasty as smaller ones; it wasn't less delicious because it was big. With all that greenery and good food we had a grand time for a few days. They were supposed to cook for us for a

month, but I bet Baba thought we were having it too good: in seven days He had them go back, saying, 'I'm very happy, My work is over.' They left very reluctantly, and we resumed cooking with the stores they left behind.

The epilogue to this episode is interesting. As Mani recalled about Todi Singh, the man who arranged all this for Baba:

If you asked Todi Singh anything, he'd say, "Baba *jaanay*, Baba *jaanay*," "Baba knows, Baba knows."

We'd say, "What time does your train leave?"

"Baba *jaanay*, Baba *jaanay*."

That same Todi Singh had an eating place that afterwards he kept open for anyone to come and eat in, in Baba's name. In fact the family became concerned that there would be nothing left of the business, the way he was doing it. So they "retired" him, and they took over.

I saw him again in Guruprasad in, I think, May 1965, when Baba was giving darshan there. I was in that little corner of the verandah office of Eruch's getting a telegraph form or something, and the men who had come for darshan were filing past. As they went by, Eruch said to me, "Remember that one?" I looked, but I couldn't remember him, because I hadn't seen him closely before. It was Todi Singh, the "butter man," as we used to call him among ourselves.

So we called him back. He came and stood there in a white shirt and white Indian-style pajama pants, so simply, so different from the dressed-up, affluent, influential man we'd seen before. Eruch said to me, "You want to see the one treasure that he has?" I said yes. He had a string around his neck that went into his pocket, like [the chain on] a "turnip watch" in the old days that you put in the pocket

of your waistcoat. He pulled something out of his pocket. It was a picture of Baba framed in plastic. He kissed it and put it back. That's all he had. Baba was very pleased with him.

Baba used Mani's typing skills even in the New Life, as one can see in her diary below. He drew up a series of plans, Plan I-A, I-B, I-C, Plan II, and Plan III, all with Fixed Conditions carefully typed out, and the men companions were to discuss and choose among these plans. As no one could agree on Plan I-A, it was dropped. Donkin alone chose Plan I-B, in which one would work and earn money for Baba and the companions.

[DIARY]

19. [Jan.] rains. Baba has his new plans (Plan I ABC + plan II + III etc.) typed [by Mani]. rained all night.

. . .

25. 4 of the Companions leave in accordance with Plan I C. raining cats + dogs. Rip Van [Baba's second nickname for the old-time mandali member Anna 104, this one used when with the women] takes Gustadji's bundle by mistake – + poor Gustadji *that very day was going to wash* [his clothes] *and bathe*. We cook from today for us 5.

27. D. [Donkin] – (chooses B. [Plan B]) - leaves for Bombay. will return with Naja in 10 days. Snow on the Mussouri + other ranges.

28. we are having awful weather. cloudy – + rain + sometimes hail – + y. cold. M. [Mehera] says '*In the month of January* [deepest winter] *we came running and running* [to the north where it's even colder].'

"It was so cold," Mani recalled, "that when Baba one day brought over a thin sheet of ice that had formed on a pail of water left outside and showed it to Mehera, all she said was, 'Brrrrr!' You know, we

hardly wanted to see a piece of ice in the morning when we were feeling so cold!”

[DIARY]

[FEBRUARY 1950]

8. *Both tongas + the horse were sold.* the bullocks Baba gives free to ‘Nanhi Dunya’ establishment [“Little World,” a school for deaf and dumb children in Dehra Dun]. Keeps *Raja* [the English bull], + caravan, + *bullock cart*.

. . .

12. Baba’s birthday. *Subadhra family, Alka*, + 10 women neighbours come to party . . . *Padam* cooks *rava*. sunny today.

28. We go to Donkin’s housewarming.

[MARCH 1950]

1. I am not sure of date – but one day Baba goes for bhiksha to Shatrughan’s, + Narawala etc. also come there to give Bhiksha.

3. Baba goes to Motichoor Hardwar for contacting sadhus etc, with most of the mandali.

21. Navroz [Irani New Year]. Dreadful weather – v. cold, + rainy + didn’t clear up at all – had *falooda* in aft.

22. B. left for Motichoor again. [Baba, with several of the men companions, periodically stayed in Motichur, which was near Haridwar and Rishikesh, in order to contact sadhus at the Kumbh Mela. The women and four of the men companions remained at Manjri Mafi, and Donkin stayed in Dehra Dun.] Most of March is rainy + v. cold + everybody feeling disgusted with weather. Also had a hailstorm. Planting roses + vegetables.

[APRIL 1950]

1. We fooled Goher on 'April fool' excuse by disguising as sadhu + frightening her.

Mani described this April fool's joke with relish:

One day Mehera, Meheru, and I decided that we'd play a little trick on Goher. This is when we were outside of Dehra Dun in Manjri Mafi, and we were talking a lot about sadhus and the congregation of them at Motichur, where Baba had gone. I dressed up as a sadhu, without her seeing me. I put ashes all over my hair, and put on a long robe of some kind, and I took the tongs we used for the fire, and generally anything I could find. Then I walked far out, away from our place, at dusk. Then it was time for Mehera and Meheru's part. They looked out and said, "Who's out there, Goher? Look, look who's out there."

Now Goher was ready to go to any length to defend us, and she went out to see what was happening. She used her second voice, as we call it; her first voice is when she talks gently and sweetly [here Mani imitates Goher], but when she wants your attention, she uses quite a different voice.

Well, I start chanting, "Om, Parabrahma . . ." [imitates chanting].

Goher says, "Go back, go back! Stop, stop!"

And I say, "Bhiksha . . ."

"There's nothing here," says Goher, "get out of here! You can't come in here!"

And I say, "Ommm . . ." and start to come a step nearer.

So she says, "Stop it! Stop it!" and she's shouting, but I am unshaken and keep coming.

In the end in the moonlight she saw something, I forget

what, to use as a weapon, and she lifted it up. She was really going to bash me with it! And Mehera and Meheru inside were watching and giggling!

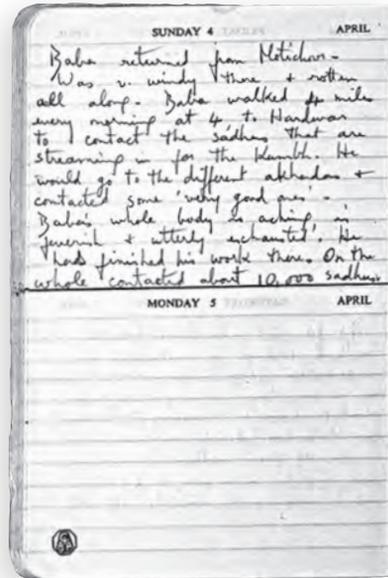
And me? I got scared. I mean, was she going to bash me? So I said, "Goher, Goher, Goher . . ." Then she saw it was me.

Oh, that evening we laughed and laughed about that!

[DIARY]

3. [Apr.] Baba finished his work with Sadhus today by contacting (+ *bending down and touching their feet with his hands*) 3000 in one day, (taking about 11 hours) + walking back to Motichoor dead exhausted. Some of the sadhus in *akhada** were *sad*, *naked sadhus*, *Nirmali*, *Tayagi*, *Mahatayagi*, *Banvasi* [names of different types of sadhus] etc etc

4. Baba returned [to Manjri Mafi] from Motichoor – Was v. windy there + rotten all along. Baba walked 4 miles every morning at 4 [from Motichur], to Hardwar to contact the sadhus that are streaming in for the Kumbh. He would go to the different akhadas + contacted some 'very good ones'. Baba's whole



Mani's diary page, April 4, 1950.

* *Akhada* is a Sanskrit word, in this case denoting a place of practice for certain sects of religious renunciates.

body is aching, is feverish + utterly exhausted. He has finished his work there. On the whole contacted about 10,000 sadhus.

6. [Apr.]. B. is unwell + has cold + cough too. I too have flu etc.

Mani remembered the Kumbh Mela:

The twelfth of April was the day of the great Kumbh Mela, and Baba took us all with Him to Haridwar to witness it. It's impossible to describe what we saw—the unbelievable mass of humanity, millions of devoted Hindus from all over India, congregated at the banks of the river Ganges, bathing in the sacred waters to wash away their sins, praying, ringing bells, chanting, singing.

We women watched with Baba from the terrace of a hotel—Goel's Hotel. The proprietor gave us the use of his terrace to watch from, but he was not allowed to see Baba. He was asked only to see that Baba and we might stay on the terrace and watch the occasion undisturbed. The river was just before us with all the people around it, an absolutely solid mass, and floating down the river were tiny leaf-boats carrying flowers and oil lamps. It was all very colorful and noisy, and yet very simple and exciting at the same time. We were disappointed, however, that we could see very little of the magnificent procession of sadhus and elephants and so on going by a short distance from where we were.

The poor men companions had a hard time below us amidst the crowds and were disgusted with it all. Baba sent down messages to them whenever anything needed to be attended to. Baba was displeased with some arrangement on the terrace which was not to his satisfaction. I don't

remember exactly what the cause was, but Baba was angry. He sent messages to tell Goel, the proprietor of the hotel, that he was displeased. This meant that something had happened which made the work He was doing at the time unsatisfactory. But in a short while, as usual, the whole matter evaporated and all was serene. Only Baba can do that. . . . the whole thing was over. But as we were leaving the place, Baba walking with us women, we saw the proprietor standing silently some distance away. Baba told me to go and tell him that Baba was greatly pleased with him and the service he had rendered, and that Baba asked his forgiveness for having been angry with him.

I went to give the message. To carry an apology from Baba is in itself difficult, to say the least, but when I looked at the proprietor's face it became tremendously more difficult. He stood there, hands joined, eager for Baba's message. I quickly started what I had to say, but when I came to the apology the poor man just bowed his head and did not look up. He could not. He was obviously so humble and ashamed I'm sure he could have wished for the earth to open and swallow him up.¹²

Mani later said that she found this to be one of the most difficult and embarrassing orders to carry out.

[DIARY]

25. [Apr.]. Warmer now so we don't use blankets at night – + warm clothes are at last being washed to be put away. Goher got her hand jammed in a tin box!

[MAY 1950]

1. Baba goes with all Illwalas [men companions in Plan III] (in *kafni* + *turban*) for *bhiksha* from *Narawala*, *Chacha* +

Mataji [that is, from Freiny Narawala, her close friend Shiroo Chacha, and “Mataji,” Shatrughan Kumar’s mother]. From today the *mandali* are all in B. Group New Plan. They have *sev* to celebrate + have their hair cut at last!

3. ? We go to see Don’s place – + then to New Forest – come away simply intoxicated by all the colourful masses of flowers – saw (for 1st time) larkspur, lilac, lavenia - + many other Eng. [English] flowers.

7. Sunday – B. gives *mandali* + us a party of good pastry, samusa etc. (had it as supper at 1 in the aft.!)

10. The B. mandali group go to Delhi (to Dhun’s house [house of Dhun and Keki Desai]) under Baba’s New Plan. + we go to Don’s house in Lytton Street. Had Mrs. Narawala + her 2 children (adorable Bakalyu who came to love B. so much), + Mrs. Chacha.

Little Naosherwan, who Mani called Bakalyu, which means “little one,” was only four at the time. She recalled:

He would come running over whenever he could, just to be with Baba. Any excuse. Baba was sleeping on the floor there as there were no beds or furniture. So His mattress and bedding were on the floor.

This drew the attention of the child. So he came over to Mehera and asked, “Why does Baba sleep on the ground?” What could we say? So Mehera gave a very clever answer, “You go ask Baba yourself.” So the child went over to where Baba was, and we forgot about it.

After some time, when Mehera saw the boy again, she said, “Did you ask Baba?”

“Oh, yes.”

“And what did Baba say?”

“Oh, He says ‘I like sleeping on the ground. I prefer it, much prefer it to a bed.’”

[In Mani’s diary she refers to Keki, Freiny, and Naosherwan’s surname as “Narawala”. Naosherwan later changed his to “Nalavala,” which is an earlier version of the family name.]

[DIARY]

22. [May] ? Baba went to Delhi for a week – to change plans for the poor mandali who are making ghee in boiling temperature + starvation-diet [referring to their meals of very basic food and not much of it]. During his absence we sew + make things to be sold in Delhi. (In end we got 200 Rs. profit for 2 months’ work).

Mani remembered: “During Baba’s absence we women sewed and made a number of things to sell as our part of earning and doing constructive work. We did applique work and lovely bedspreads. . . .The things we did turned out beautiful, but we had to sell them.”¹³

Goher remembered: “Baba said we had to earn something, because the mandali were making the ghee and trying to make money. So Mani started making little blankets or shawls for children and little toys, and Mehera helped her by designing. Both of them worked together and then Baba sent the things on to Arnavaz or someone to sell.”

[DIARY]

29. [May] Baba has treatment of silver-nitrate for tracoma [sic]. We have the most awful 7 days of our lives during this treatment, for poor Baba suffers so much.

Baba had caught a serious eye infection (trachoma, affecting the conjunctiva and cornea) when contacting sadhus in Haridwar and Rishikesh. His eyes became very red and painful, and the silver nitrate

medicine He was given made them worse. Meheru says you couldn't see Baba at this time without tears coming to your eyes. After great difficulty and suffering for Baba, He finally got well.

The Arrangementwalas, specific mandali chosen by Baba at the beginning of the New Life to help with practical arrangements, continued to be of service. In a letter dated May 25, 1950, to one of the Arrangementwalas, Baba conveyed: "Baba and four ladies with a group of eleven companions want to shift from Dehra Dun and Delhi towards Deccan, C.P. [Central Provinces] or Berar. Baba has to do his three phases [langoti (loin-cloth)-life, gypsy-life, and begging] and the companions to do labor [fourth phase]. To suit these four phases and at the same time to see to Baba's health, a place should be so selected that everything could fit in properly. . . . Now Baba gives first preference to Mahabaleshwar even though there are no electric lights and water-taps. It is just because Baba feels that his health could be kept better at Mahabaleshwar than any other place."

Because of the upcoming strong monsoon in Mahabaleshwar, the Arrangementwalas chose Satara, His second preference, and Baba and the mandali began to prepare for the move from Dehra Dun.

[DIARY]

[JUNE 1950]

9. I get ill [with a terrible case of food poisoning, which made Mani very sick] + Baba says this house is 'dalinder' [unlucky] - 1st Don, then Baba, + now I . . .

14. Left D.D. [Dehra Dun] by 8 p.m. train

Mehera remembered:

. . . just two days before we left Dehra Dun, Mani got very bad food poisoning. She nearly passed out it was so bad. Goher and all of us were up all night. Goher gave her

injections, and with a lot of nursing and taking great care of her we brought her around. Then Mrs. Nalavala [Freiny Narawala] told us of a very effective Indian medicine, a home remedy, and with it all Mani got well. Of course, it must have been by Baba's grace that Mani got well.

Baba delayed their departure from Dehra Dun to Satara until Mani was strong enough to travel.

*SATARA,
JUNE 16–OCTOBER 1, 1950*

Mani jotted notes about this move in her diary. Here are excerpts from the summer of 1950:

15. [June] Change trains at Delhi at 6 a.m. (I carried on chair) . . .

16. lunched at Nasik. Got down at Kalyan at 1.30 . . . started by bus at 3 – nice to hear Marathi again! v. nice tea at Khapoli – + bought jamburs [an astringent berry] from girls. . . . Rained a lot on way to Ghats [hill range]. Passed Khandala (some v. lovely cottages), + Lonavla. saw tiny baby piggies on way + one huge pet deer in house . . . Somewhere round 10 we reached Satara, Mutha's Bungalow . . .

8. [July] Kitty Rano come from B. [Bombay] for a month [to Satara].

9. Goher and N. [presume this is Dr. Nilu] takes Mehroo + myself to Miraj [for medical checkups]. Landscape is dry + awaits the rain.

12. B. starts afresh his N.L. [New Life] work. He works with mad + masts.

15. We return from Miraj – to find fields + places in floods. At Satara it has been raining incessantly for some days. The day we return Baba has been fasting on water all day.

25. Most eventful day of Baba's New Life. B. sends personal message + salutations to all disciples + devotees in East + west. He fasts on liquids all day. In morning there is programme of prayers + message, + reading from Eng. trans. of Bhagwad Gita, + song of New Life sung by Qavval [ghazal singer] from Bombay – In aft. Baba shaves + bathes mad + masts, then gives clothes + bedding gifts to them all.

The message from Baba that Mani referred to was read aloud by Dr. Donkin:

On this the most eventful day of My New Life, I send salutations to all My Old Life men and women disciples and devotees and to all My New Life companions. I ask the Most Merciful God to forgive us all our shortcomings, failures and weaknesses, to help the Old Life disciples and devotees to keep firm in their faith and their love and their understanding of God and His Divine Manifestation, to give courage and to give strength to the New Life Companions to abide by truth and the following of the New Life conditions honestly and faithfully.

From July 25, Baba intended to start living the three New Life phases: “langoti-life,” representing nakedness and helplessness; “begging,” a life of poverty and helplessness; and “gypsy-life,” a life of wandering and aimlessness, while His companions carried on the labor phase. At the same time, His suffering was very marked.

Continuing Mani's diary:

26. [July] At 9 a.m. Baba eats solid food, after begging it in bhiksha at house of Khansama [chief cook/caretaker] at Satara.

27. In the next few days B. twice begs bhiksha – once at Hindu's place (Indu's), once at Mohommedan's (Khatija's brother) -

29. Baba's eyes have gritty sensation all the time again – + stomach upset - He looks very run-down -

30. B. fasts for 48 hours on plain water.

1. [August] Baba follows diet + treatment from Goher Nilu. He is feeling very ill. Eye-specialist says actually Baba's eyes perfect. only this conjunctivitis – + gives treatment.

2. Poona and Bombay Arrangementw. looking feverishly for suitable bungalow [in Poona or Bombay] for a month's change for Baba which is imperative in his present state of health.

3. Still raining most of the time + seldom clears up for more than a few minutes – + terribly windy.

4. Baba is ill so does not go to mandali's (or work with masts) since a few days. From this morning mandali assemble near Baba in room upstairs of our house – for prayers programme, + singing of New Life song + other songs by the Qavval from 7 to 9 a.m.

Kitty, who was there with Baba for one month, visiting from Bombay, wrote about that time:

I remember that the companions used to assemble in Baba's room around 10:00 in the morning for the reading of extracts from the different scriptures: the Zend-Avesta, the Koran, the Bhagavad Gita, and the Bible. The women were

allowed to sit near the curtained doorway. We could hear the readings and occasional pauses when Baba, through the medium of His alphabet board with one of the companions interpreting, explained certain of the passages. There was something so intimate, so beautiful in these half-hour gatherings! During the New Life, no one was allowed to address Baba as Master, although we were to obey Him as such. Yet in its place you felt that wonderful relationship of true friendship. I can only explain it in the words from the Bible, “Ye are My friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.”¹⁴

On August 20, while they were in Satara, there was a terrible earthquake that affected Tibet and the far northeastern tip of India. Known as the Assam-Tibet earthquake, it rated 8.6 on the Richter scale and led to the breaking of natural dams and huge landslides that wiped out whole villages and killed 1,530 people. Mani described it in her diary: “map of terrain completely altered – utterly helpless people by the thousands.” At one point the Brahmaputra River inundated villages in a wave of seven meters (twenty-three feet). The earthquake is listed among the worst natural disasters of modern time.

BOMBAY, AUGUST 28–SEPTEMBER 14, 1950

On August 21, they left Satara for Poona. Baba wished to have a “holiday” after His strenuous work with the masts. The women accompanied Him, going for walks—to Empress Gardens, to see the Poona water supply, etc.—and drives with Baba to Kirkee, Hadapsar, and unnamed places. After a week, they went with Him to Bombay for a stay in a secluded, quiet area near the sea. As the New Life continued, the women went from seven months of many physical hardships in the north to a phase of a more outwardly “normal” life, yet both were filled with the great challenges of obeying the New Life conditions.

Meheru later recalled the serious, solemn, tense atmosphere of the earliest days of the New Life:

You felt the importance of it in Baba's expression, something very important. This feeling lasted during the journeying, throughout the walking phase.

Once the New Life began [January 1, 1950], Baba was more relaxed—but we were very careful. We not only had to obey Baba but to have control over ourselves not to do anything wrong to disturb Baba's mood. It was only later on, when we came back to Satara and Mahabaleshwar—old haunts, as it were—the atmosphere relaxed. It was less then.¹⁵

[DIARY]

28. [August] Leave Poona by car for Bombay – (125 miles?)- reach at 11.15 – to bungalow in Mahim – beautiful situation facing sea + lovely house – food to come from our Punch Cookie [Goher thought this was probably Pirojamsi, Dr. Alu's aunt, who cooked food as arranged by Arnavaz].

31. We go for walk to Hanging Gardens – also wali [saintly personage] with white beard + followers walks in garden. Baba had Jal ask about him.

They met with incessant rain in Bombay. In September, Mani wrote in her diary:

3. *Parsi papeti* [Parsi festival day] – we have *pullao*, *sev*, *chicken*, etc. but gloomy weather – raining all the time.

5. *Tuesday Morning* to Victoria zoo – see dancing elephant, lions, Assam squirrel (reddish), black leopard, macaw parrots, black swans, lion-tail monkey, baboon,

etc. etc. good weather – see endless processions of *throw water on Govinda* [men and boys forming a human pyramid by standing on one another's shoulders, as the boy Krishna did with his childhood friends] - climbing on each other to break *handi* [a little earthenware pot containing curds and honey], people pouring water from above, *eunuchs* + others dressed gorgeously + tableaux in bullock-carts – Evening go to Vesava beach (cross Bandra, Andheri, Vile parle, etc.)

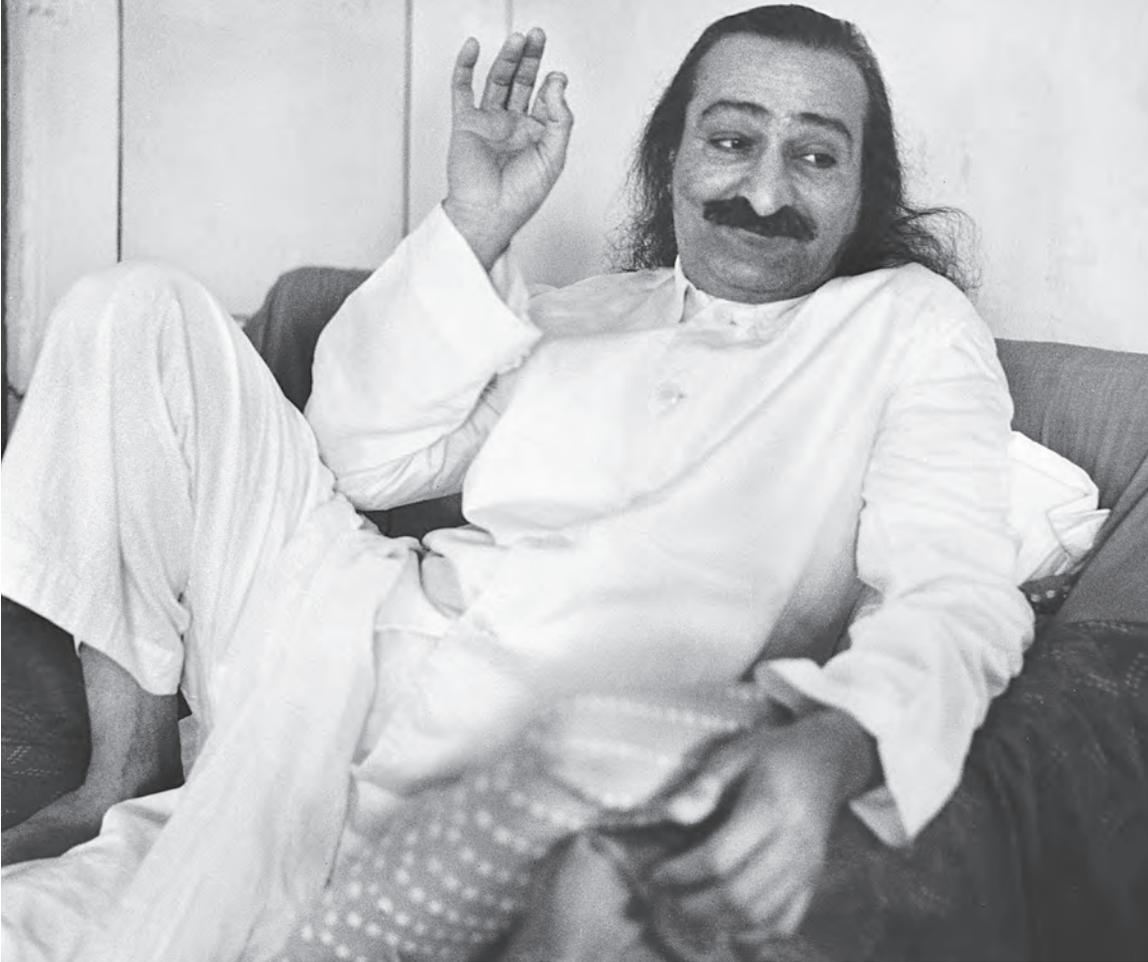
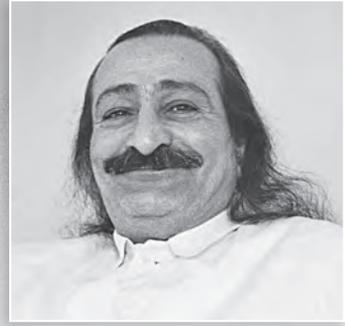
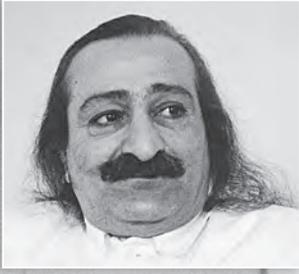
21. Assam earthquakes + floods repeat – + bandit terrorism. Starvation deaths in Bihar + Madras - In Lucknow Hyenas + wolves terror. Children eaten in day-time — Child devoured before father's eyes.

MAHABALESHWAR,
OCTOBER 1, 1950–MARCH 27, 1951

Many important things happened during Baba's first New Life stay at Mahabaleshwar, but nothing is written in Mani's diary during this period. On October 1, 1950, she wrote: "We left Satara in morning for M'war [Mahabaleshwar]," and the next entry is on March 27, 1951, when she writes: "Leave M'war by car 7:00 a.m."

In the interval was Baba's stepping into the Old Life for a day, on October 16, 1950, to meet with His Old Life disciples and to give His New Life companions another chance to choose whether or not to stay with Him as servants of the New Life. Soon after that meeting, He went on a mast tour, and upon His return began a momentous one hundred-day seclusion.

So their stay in Mahabaleshwar was against the background (or



Baba on October 16, 1950, in Mahabaleshwar, one year after the beginning of the New Life, when He "stepped back into His Old Life" for one day.

rather, the foreground) of these events. Kitty, who was called from Bombay to Mahabaleshwar with Rano to visit, wrote of this period of Baba's seclusion:

I recall Baba's weak physical condition and supreme state of helplessness throughout this seclusion. . . .

Our joy at being with Baba in Mahabaleshwar was one in which happiness and sadness intermingled, for at this time Baba endured much physical and mental suffering. His face often wore a faraway look tinged with suffering. The New Life period was, I think, my first awareness of seeing Baba so helpless and in such great physical pain; alas, but a forerunner of what was to come in later years.

Baba said of this one hundred-day seclusion, "Without the help of God, I could not have gone through this ordeal successfully. . . . It was as if God wanted to prove His help to Me by giving Me suffering, as well as the strength to endure it."¹⁶

During this time, Mehera and Mani were called to see Him every day.

Here in Mahabaleshwar Baba gave His timeless message on the New Life:

. . . this New Life is endless, and even after My physical death it will be kept alive by those who live the life of complete renunciation of falsehood, lies, hatred, anger, greed and lust; and who, to accomplish all this, do no lustful actions, do no harm to anyone, do no backbiting, do not seek material possessions or power, who accept no homage, neither covet honor nor shun disgrace, and fear no one and nothing; by those who rely wholly and solely on God, and who love God purely for the sake of loving; who believe in the lovers of God and in the reality of Manifestation, and yet do not expect any spiritual or material reward; who do



Baba on the verandah of Florence Hall.

not let go the hand of Truth, and who, without being upset by calamities, bravely and whole-heartedly face all hardships with one hundred percent cheerfulness, and give no importance to caste, creed and religious ceremonies.

This New Life will live by itself eternally, even if there is no one to live it.¹⁷

BEGUM

Yet they also had some happy times with Baba there. In Mahabaleshwar, they stayed at Florence Hall, the Aga Khan's huge bungalow where they had stayed before in the 1940s. It was a return to a familiar and comfortable home. They loved the forest and streams, the grand views, the quiet. With them was Begum, the small, pony-sized horse they had adopted in Satara and who was installed in one of the bathing/dressing rooms (the bathing rooms, like all the rooms in Florence Hall, were very big; Baba had His bath during the day on the bathing side, while Begum rested at night on the dressing room side!). Begum features in many of their stories of this time: Begum walking right into the living room and up to Baba to be petted, Begum walking with them and sometimes in between them like a big dog on their long walks through the woods, and best of all, Begum making Baba laugh as she took a carrot from His hand.

SCARING KITTY

The women were very fond of Kitty—and of teasing her—and at Florence Hall Mani pulled a prank that almost scared Kitty to death.

One day, Meheru caught hold of a snake going into the bathroom and, in her fearless fashion, grabbed its tail to pull it out. The tail broke off, and the rest of the snake got away. Well, from then on, Kitty—who was very afraid of snakes—was on the lookout for the other half. This was an irresistible temptation, and Mani bit. She made a big fat snake out of chappati dough, and dried it in the sun. Mehera, with her eye for the artistic touch, thought it needed a little paint to make it darker and more realistic. So it was painted with the natural kitchen “dyes” of turmeric, soot, red pepper, earth, and so on. It must have looked most realistic: when Goher first saw it drying out from the paint job, she tried to kill it with a stick, and they had to patch the pieces back together.



Baba with His little horse Beğum, inside Florence Hall, Mahabaleshwar. February 13, 1951.

Finally the big day came. Kitty was in the kitchen, and Mani sneaked the snake outside. Then Baba, Mehera, Mani, and Meheru all watched from the balcony upstairs. To get Kitty out, first Mehera and then Meheru threw rocks at the kitchen window. Kitty, curious as a cat, emerged to see what was happening. Her eyes fell on the snake. In terror, she ran and got a stick and bravely whacked away at it, shattering the thing to bits. It took some time for it to dawn on her that her snake was made of wheat flour. The audience was highly amused. And the women swear that from that time, Kitty's fear of snakes lessened.

CHRISTMAS

The Christmas of 1950, celebrated at Florence Hall in Mahabaleshwar, left Mani with fond memories. Years later she could describe in minute detail the “biscuit” house Rano made for their Christmas table. Here, Kitty set the scene:

How well I remember that Christmas! We went into the jungle that surrounded our villa and dug up a small evergreen tree to place on the living room table. Mehera and Mani, with Meheru assisting, made all its paper decorations. Mani insisted I make an angel for the top of the tree. Rano and Mani made a wonderful cottage out of cookies, icing and sugar. It was lit up by some quite simple contrivance from inside, for we could not buy materials. On the “snowy” lane to the little cookie house stood, I believe, a little deer. There in the midst of the jungle in India Baba had this wonderful surprise—a Christmas tree and wintry Christmas cottage! I can still see that sweet, gentle smile on Baba’s face as He stood by it on Christmas morning. It was these small things which brought forth Baba’s not-so-frequent smile during this period when His suffering was acute.

POONA, MARCH 27–APRIL 7, 1951

Guruprasad, the beautiful palace that became Baba’s summer home throughout the 1960s, came into the picture at this moment of the New Life. At the end of March 1951, Baba announced that He wanted to go to Poona to continue His seclusion work, and the women accompanied Him there.

Their first house, in the Wanowri section of Poona, was horrid:

unfurnished, too rambly, and worst of all, near a tannery that sent out stinking fumes. “Baba did not like it one bit,” remembers Mehera, and He and the men went out to find another place for them all to stay.

That was when they found Guruprasad, the palace of the Maharani of Baroda. After lunch Baba moved them all there, saying, “We’ve found a very good house.” As they approached, Mehera recalled, “We said, ‘My, we are coming towards a very posh locality. The house must be nice.’ How nice we did not know. Then our car turned in at an entrance with huge iron gates. . . . The broad driveway was bordered by alternating neem and gulmohr trees. We couldn’t believe our eyes. . . . A lawn, a big bungalow, Italian statues in the garden, a fountain. Our car turned into an enormous, beautifully maintained portico with flowerpots and arches. The broad marble steps were lined with palms.”¹⁸

As Baba had promised, it was a real surprise, one that delighted them. “Are we going to stay here?” they asked, and Baba told them to go in and unpack! Despite the loud beating of drums all that night, Baba rested well and they stayed on.

In Poona Baba sat in seven seclusion sites for His work. Mani’s diary lists a “cave near *Jangle Maharaj*, near *Chattersingh’s* temple, also near tomb there, near *Parsi cemetery*, + also near Christian cemetery.” Baba’s old room in His family home in Poona was His sixth seclusion site, and a place near the tomb-shrine of the great Maharashtrian Perfect Master Gyaneshwar (also often written Janeshwar), His seventh.

[DIARY]

6. [April] Went to Alendi in morn – saw Gyaneshwar samadhi [tomb], + the ‘Wall’, with the four, + Changdev. The 2 madmen + the guide woman.

The wall that Mani and the women saw with Baba was a feature of a famous story about Gyaneshwar. It seems that Gyaneshwar and His two brothers (one of whom was also a Perfect Master) and sister were casually sitting on a wall one day when Gyaneshwar received a challenge from Changdev, an arrogant yogi who doubted Gyaneshwar's spiritual status. With all four of them still sitting on the wall, Gyaneshwar smilingly made it rise into the air and fly over to meet Changdev. Poor Changdev had ridden to the meeting on a tiger to prove his own spiritual power, but when he saw Gyaneshwar's authority over even inanimate objects, he fell at His feet and became one of Gyaneshwar's most ardent followers.

MAHABALESHWAR, APRIL 7–MAY 25, 1951

Mani wrote in her diary:

7. [April] Leave morn. by car for M'war [Mahabaleshwar] – pick food up at Gai's [Eruch's mother's home] – on way lunch at Sitarani's bung. Panchgani - *Gudi Padwa day* [Hindu festival] – see groups of colourful *gudis* [round vessels tied upside down with cloth onto bamboo poles] on bamboos everywhere. At Sarul Baba stop[s] to see mast near *a woodshed*.

8. v. cool – felt earthquake tremor 2.30 night.

Back at Florence Hall, Baba continued His seclusion in a hut on the grounds. But He was in terrible pain from piles and a fissure. The doctors tried numerous treatments (including some dreamed up by several men mandali serving on a "Piles Committee" that Baba formed), but nothing helped.

[DIARY]

19. [April] cold + windy + cloudy. B. has pain.

20. B. had severe pain all night – it's dreadful. it's all cloudy, misty, cold + windy. rained all night

23. Clearer this morn + day – *from today Baba is getting poultice* treatment [a poultice of wheat flour was applied that eventually helped Him]. I saw new bird – black with white streak near eyes + tail continuously opening + closing like a pretty fan.

24. Saw a bird - size of bul-bul - flaming rust breast + under - + also near eyes - otherwise grey - + black longish beak.

28. *The piles dropped off.*

On the last day of Baba's one hundred-day seclusion, May 23, Baba said, "It is completed to my satisfaction by God's grace." There was heavy rain in the evening, the first that month, which Mani called an "*auspicious sign* after Baba's seclusion."

In early May, after a brief visit to Bombay, they packed for Hyderabad.

JOURNEY TO HYDERABAD

Mani's description of their journey to Hyderabad shows her characteristic interest in the things they saw out the window of the car on the way:

25. [May] 6 a.m. leave M'war – had rained all night so v. slippery roads – incident of fallen tree on road – lovely rain-washed view of trees + mountains – (noticed in Panchgani Somebody's folly – house shown by Dr. Khambatta) – quite cold on way – entering Poona were stopped for military

'surung' [dynamite] operations – picked food at Gaimai's (entering Poona first see Parvati, pass Pocha's, racecourse, Babajan's etc.). about 11.30 stop at Patas d.b. [dak bungalow], have lunch on verandah (as it was locked), nice view by lit. [little] lake – + then go on – On the way, after Bhigwan saw very narrow-gauge railway lines (private for sugar factory) passed many neem + babul trees. at 2.30 stop at Temburni (12 mls. from Kurduwadi) dak bung. for night – hot but nice (though no wara [toilets] or *potties*) - Baba likes it, said "I like real change like this". Baba did not sleep at all – hot at night.

26. Saturday: leave 6 a.m. – at 7.15 reach Sholapur – stop for petrol + at post office – leave 8 - at 9 stop for permit at barrier dividing line to state – v. hot – then 3 miles from there stop at Naldurg dak bung. for lunch + night – lovely ancient fort visible – bus-stand close by – shower in eve.

27. Leave Naldurg early morning. Very slippery + skiddy roads owing to rain passed Umerga – stopped for tea at Homanabad at 8.45. (striped beggar) countryside flat + uninteresting but cool + shady – + sometimes drizzly. 9.35 pass Zahirabad (v. small). Stop under tree (2 sadhus walking) – many houses in villages had *flagstone roofs* – 20 miles before H.bad [Hyderabad] concrete roads, + the precarious boulders – reach 11.30 – lovely lunch + lovely place.

Reaching Hyderabad, they put up in a palatial house in the Jubilee Hills area.

HYDERABAD, MAY 27–NOVEMBER 21, 1951

The second-to-last phase of the New Life was spent in Hyderabad. Baba began planning a meeting of disciples to announce the

“God-determined Step” He meant to put into effect on October 16, two years from the start of the New Life.

[DIARY]

28. [May] Enormous House with fans, + frigidaire + other conveniences – but hot! saw black bird (size of canary, might be a bull-finch [bull-finch]) black uptil [up till] where neck ends, then band of red, + yellowish underwear.

29. *The greatest number of cyclists in the world in Hyderabad.*

5. [June] We all liked Hyderabad.

7. Ranokitty leave for Bom - Baba's piles painful (*internal piles painful*). Baba not at all well – we all feel depressed. eve G.[Goher] + N. [presume this is Dr. Nilu] go hospital.

8. Go for a drive with Baba for his mast work . . .

10. Baba fasted from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., taking not even water – + it was so hot all afternoon – eve. at 7 *Baba gave us and all the mandali stout to drink* + then he broke fast.

The mandali arriving to help plan for the meeting found Baba “very pulled down and weak”.

[DIARY]

21. [June] The meeting-walas coming in.

23. Continuous drizzle + cloudy. – + cool – Many more meetingwalas coming Baba not looking at all well

The day before the meeting, Baba dictated the “God-determined Step” to Donkin (who took it down in English), Ghani (for translation into Hindi), and Dr. C. D. Deshmukh (for translation into Marathi). Mani typed out the English version. It was a secret to everyone else.

Mani described the following day in only one sentence:

28. [June] The important day of the Meeting

On June 28, at 7:50 a.m., gathering in the appointed bungalow in Hyderabad, seventy-five men were greeted and spoken to by Baba. Then the “Terms of the Declaration” were read out in the three languages. At the end of the reading of the Declaration, Baba stood, gesturing for the others to stand, and the following was then read (again in three languages):

In the presence of God, and bearing in my heart all the Perfect Ones of all times as witness, I declare that by the help and will of God, I will definitely take this step of Annihilation on October 16th of this year.

God helped me to do the seclusion work of 100 days to my entire satisfaction, and I feel absolutely confident that God will help me to attain to the Old Life Meher Baba state by 16 February 1952, and to manifest universally.

Thus were the meeting-walas introduced to Baba’s final New Life phase: Manonash or “annihilation of the mind.” During the Manonash period Baba would take a few servant-companions with Him wherever He went (eventually He chose Eruch, Gustadji, Baidul, and Pendu). He would leave the women behind with a few men mandali to see to their needs, with Goher, Kitty, and Rano as go-betweens.

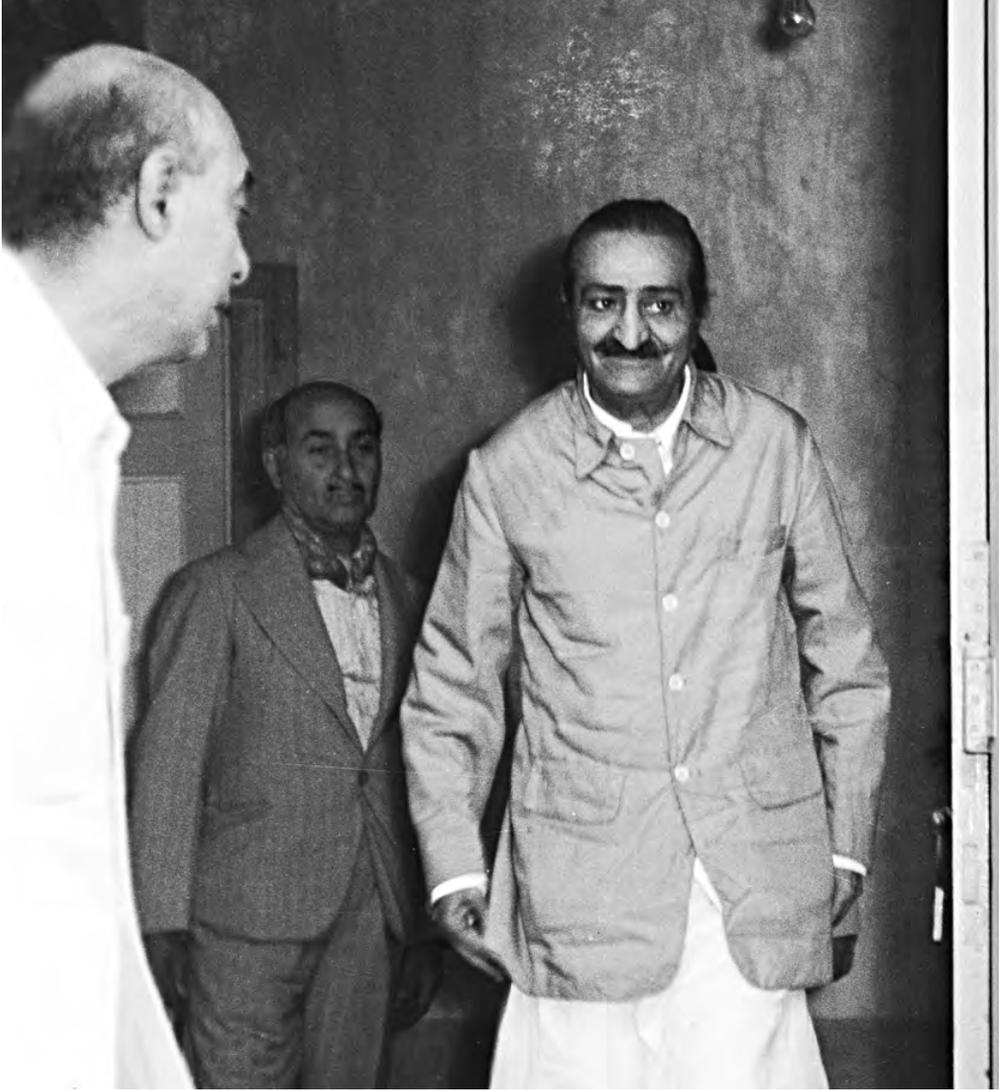
[DIARY]

30. [June]. The meeting-walas entertained Baba [with some humorous skits that amused Him very much].

After the meeting, still in Hyderabad, the women went to a number of movies (“All About Eve,” “Annie Get Your Gun,” “The Paradine Case,” “September Affair”), and horse races at Baba’s wish. Mani noted in her diary:

7. [July] Saw (at the Plaza) the mountaineering film “The White Tower”. (v. nice)

10. Baba’s 26th Silence anniversary. We all kept silence from 6 a.m. to next morning 6.



Baba meeting with the mandali, Mahabaleshwar.

- 12. It's v. hot + has been for days.
- 14. Saw (at Tivoli) "All about Eve." (Bette Davis, Anne Baxter, Celeste Holmes [Holm] + George Sanders) – excellent.
- 18. Races.
- 30. Rano Kitty came from Bombay.

O P E R A T I O N S

As the climax of the New Life neared, Mani and Meheru underwent operations in Hyderabad—first Meheru, then Mani—to cure long-standing problems.

Before they went to the hospital, Baba told Goher that she had to be extremely attentive to Mani, and attend to her all the time. Hearing this, Meheru suggested to Him that perhaps Mani should have her operation first, and then Meheru have hers. But Baba said no. In August Mani noted:

- 7. G. [Goher] M. [Meheru] + I went to hospital
- 16. Meheru's operation
- 17. My operation

Meheru's operation was a normal procedure, difficult but as planned. Mani's operation turned out to be both painful and perilous. The surgeon had decided to try a new method, and give her only local anesthesia, not general. So first off she was subjected to numerous painful injections. Goher, mindful of Baba's words, was watching Mani like a hawk. Suddenly both Mani's blood pressure and pulse soared dangerously high. Nobody noticed but Goher, who rushed the others into emergency measures. Because she was completely focused on Mani, they were able to bring Mani out of danger.

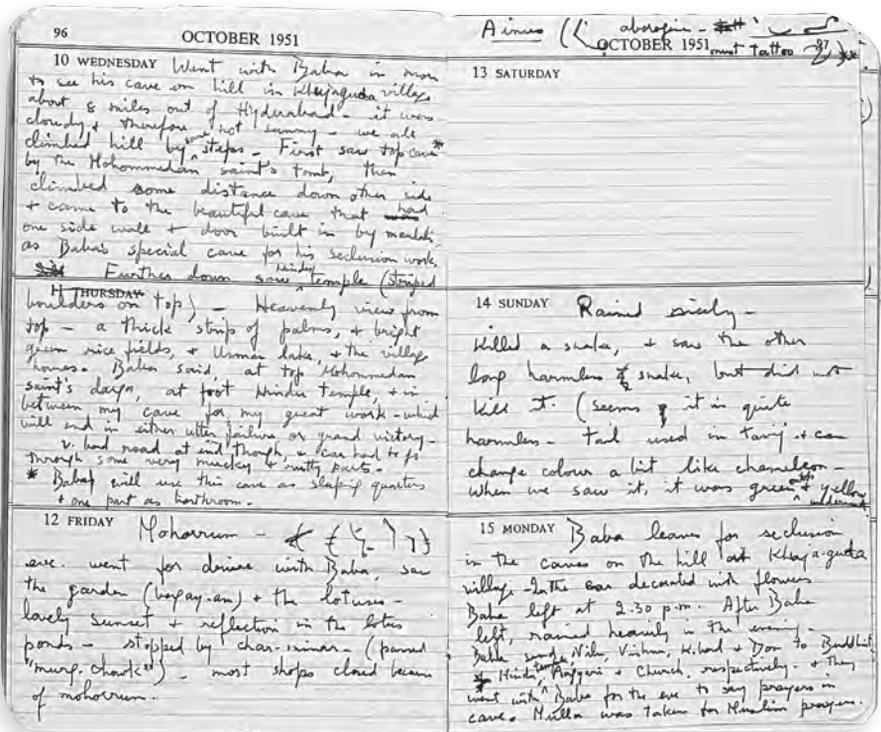
At that point the other doctors got nervous and wanted to postpone the operation. But poor Mani had already endured so many painful



Baba with group of men at the former residence of Nawab Ali Nawaz Jung in Hyderabad, June 1951.

injections that Goher made them continue. After waiting a while they went ahead. Because of this delay, Mani's anesthesia wore off before they finished sewing her up, so on both ends of the procedure she suffered a great deal of pain, despite her high tolerance for it.

Years later she would tell how much she had looked forward to being in the hospital. She had spent weeks dreaming about it. There—just imagine!—she would be able to spend days in bed! Waited on hand and foot! With nothing to do at all! It seemed like heaven on a platter.



Mani's New Life diary, recounting visits to Baba's cave near Hyderabad.

But soon after her surgery, she found herself longing to go back to Baba. So she left early:

25. Came home -

She would always remember how touched she was to see Baba and Mehara standing on the front steps of the house to welcome her home, with a special get-well present of a portable radio. Mani said that Baba was very pleased that she had eschewed extra days of hospital rest to come home to Him early. On August 27 she wrote:

27. Baba has surprises - One of them is radio - helped lot during convalescent period.

MANONASH

Baba planned to sit in seclusion from October 16 in a cave eight miles from Hyderabad to begin His Manonash phase. Then He and the four servant-companions would walk from Hyderabad to Aurangabad. At Khuldabad (near Aurangabad) He would contact masts. Finally He would finish His Manonash work on Tembi (Seclusion) Hill at Meherazad.

The women (Mehera, Mani, Goher, Meheru, Naja, Rano, and Kitty) would be driven from Hyderabad to Meherazad for the final stage. In October Mani noted:

5. Baba wanted to take us to see his cave, but roads to village there very mucky because of the recent rains, + therefore not possible.

9. *Dassera*. Baba took us over to the mandali's in the eve., to see the five models of religion, in the glass case. They were Buddhist + Hindu temples, Church, mosque, + the fire-symbol of Zoroastrians. He will have the models with him in his cave of seclusion.

10. Went with Baba in morn to see his cave on hill in Khujaguda village about 8 miles out of Hyderabad – it was cloudy + therefore not sunny – we all climbed hill by some steps - First saw top cave^o by the Mohommedan saint's tomb, then climbed some distance down other side + came to the beautiful cave that had one side wall + door built in by mandali, as Baba's special cave for his seclusion work. Further down saw Hindu temple (striped boulders on top) – Heavenly view from top – a thick strip of palms, + bright green rice fields, + Usman lake, + the village homes. Baba said, at top Mohommedan saint's darga [tomb-shrine], at foot Hindu temple, + in between my cave for my great work – which will end in either utter failure or grand victory.

v. bad road at end though, + car had to go through some very mucky + ruddy parts.

°Baba will use this cave as sleeping quarters + one part as bathroom.

...

15. Baba leaves for seclusion in the caves on the hill at Khuja-guda village – In the car decorated with flowers Baba left at 2.30 p.m. After Baba left, rained heavily in the evening. Baba send [sent] Nilu, Vishnu, K.bad [Kaikobad] + Don to Buddhist, Hindu temple, Aagyari [Zoroastrian fire-temple] + Church, respectively – + they went with Baba for the eve to say prayers in cave. Mulla [Muslim priest] was taken for Muslim prayers.

23. *All night long the drums of the Taboot* [Muslim procession during the time of Mohorrum, a religious observance] *were beating*.

24. Baba's luggage returned with message from Baba that he was well, his work in cave done 100% successfully + that he would start on the walking tour to Pippalgaon [Pimpalgaon], this evening. He takes the route via Aurangabad.

27. Saw the star + moon in the Mohommedan position [at this spot in the diary Mani drew a star with quarter moon horizontally curved underneath] in the morning. "Vagh baras" [a day celebrated during the Hindu festival of lights, Divali] – *lit lamps near Baba's photo*.

28. Heavy showers in the afternoon ("showers of charity" [a phrase for unexpected rains]) *Dhunteras* [another Divali festival day].

30. *Divali* – *made chalk designs, lit lamps – pooran puri, bhaja, amti, with milk* [all traditional Divali feast foods].

31. *New Year* (Hindu commercial). *had kanola and*

maam ni pooli [Divali sweets], *with high tea. We did all the appropriate preparations for the festival.*

In November, she wrote:

5. Started packing

7. [This entry is under October but must be 7 November] Baba has reached A'bad - (so his message later told us). - from 8th to 18th he will be at Khuldabad [the "Valley of the Saints" outside Aurangabad].

19. The luggage all packed in trucks to leave tomorrow. In eve. receive message from Baba that he will leave Aurangabad on 21st + reach P.gam [Pimpalgaon/Pippalgaon] on 23rd.

20. Trucks leave

21. We leave 7.15 a.m. [in two cars, driven by Adi and Vaman] + stop for lunch 21 miles before Naldurg under shady mango trees + chillie plants etc. lovely spot – had *akuri* [scrambled eggs with vegetables] – reach Sholapur D. bungalow at quarter to 2. passed many fields of young jawari [millet] . . . – also many chillies, dal + fields of Sugar-cane with violet heathery flowers on top. *beetel leaf fields* also. at some octroi [road tax] place took seeds of red starry flower – a lovely garden to the little place – a lovely evening at the d. bungalow.

PIMPALGAON

They arrived back in Pimpalgaon (Meherazad) after what seemed like ages, just in time to greet Baba.

22. [Nov.] Reach 12.30 Pimpalgaon – House is lovelier than ever – lots of vegetables planted in fields near well. Hens, chicks, kittens + the 2 dogs Bhootie + Tippu.

(Gol [one of the new dogs at Pimpalgaon] is a beauty but indifferent to us all). Rained soon after we came.

23. Baba comes walking. M. [Mehera] + I meet him half way up hill. He had just walked 10 miles. Looked v. tanned + face looked clear + young. B. said his health was O.K. during journey fr. Hyd. in spite of innumerable hardships. In all had walked 200 miles from Hyd. + rest by conveyance. Crossed Toka river (up to waist). Slept in masjid [the unused Imampur mosque near Meherazad] – once walked 20 miles, etc.

Mehera recalled the day they met Baba near the Hill, as recorded in *Tales from the New Life*:

. . . when Baba was coming here He sent a message to say that Mehera and Mani should come to see Him at the foot of the hill. Mani and I were so happy and excited, and both of us went and stood by the foot of Baba's Hill. We saw Baba approaching. Baba looked very beautiful in His white robes and the green turban. He had something in His hand, I think the jholi, the bag for bhiksha, a cotton bag. It is in the museum and written on it is "premsay bhiksha dijye"—"Give bhiksha with love."

Baba came towards us, greeted us and embraced me. He asked Mani how she was, how we all were, had the journey been easy, was it comfortable and so on. Then Baba told us what to send up to the hill—warm water for the morning and weak tea without milk, etcetera. Baba gave us instructions for all that He wanted and then He said goodbye to us and started to climb the hill. We watched Baba for a little while, then He turned towards us and held up His hand like this to say, all right, now you must return home. So Mani and I came away.

Later on the mandali followed Baba. They were not in sight when we were talking with Baba. Baba was all alone, walking up the hill. It was so beautiful, like Jesus. Very beautiful, Baba was. His hair was loose over His shoulders with the white robe. Baba looked very lovely.¹⁹

[DIARY]

24. [Nov.] In morn. M. [Mehera] + I go up [Tembi/ Seclusion Hill]. Baba is not satisfied with quarters arrangement up the hill (tent for mandali soaking wet) + comes down in eve at 4 to stay with us two days while carpenter puts up better adjustment of tent etc. Cloudy all day + rained last night + morning.

25. Baba with us. Rained a little - Cloudy.

26. Baba said his work of 40 days done most satisfactorily – + the next 80 days work most important.

27. Baba goes up the hill again.

29. We go to Meherabad for the day.

1. [December] Baba fasts entirely on water for four days. (Later he told us how he felt it v. badly + dizzy all the time)



Seclusion Hill

3. We go Meherabad again for the day. Had tea at Mansari's – She had made boot-polish + flit [as insecticide] etc at home – Told us many funny incidents – etc.

4. Jatra [pilgrimage procession] up the hill [here Mani means the Khandoba Hill, behind Meherazad and next to Tembi/Seclusion Hill]. All night - the men carrying water (brought from Toka – *Ganga* [the sacred Godavri River, also called the *dakshin ganga*, or “southern Ganges”]). procession picturesque – pouring some of the water on all the gods on the way. *They shouted Baba's “jai”*. Rano went to hospital.

5. Really cold this morning. Baba takes orange juice.

6. Baba comes down hill + stays here till 14th while the cabins on the hill are deported down below. He will finish his work here till 16th Feb. in complete seclusion. Mast (v. good) has arrived from Bombay – but does not eat. Baba is v. weak from the fast. Still fasting.

7. Afternoon 3 p.m. Baba takes a little dal + rice.

8. We play gramophone – all Baba's favourite records.

14th. Baba goes into seclusion in cabin + quarters built + adjusted down below [in the Meherazad compound, but separated from everyone but the four servant-companions] – all according to his complete satisfaction. Baba had the five ceremonies performed by his disciples -

24. Baba comes to us for 3 days. [Christmas] decorations are up. Before coming over he had ceremony – names of all the dead, those connected with Baba in past – of east and west – were called out, + Baba called as many poor + gave them money + took their darshan.

25. Christmas – We decorated the table with biscuit-house, + Chris. tree – + sang carol. Had a very lovely Christmas. Did concert in the evening.



Baba sitting in front of the Blue Bus, Meherazad, on His birthday celebration, February 12, 1952.

26. M's [Mehera's] birthday - lovely birthday cake + candles, etc. had pulau [a mixed rice dish] from outside, + high tea in the evening (*wafers and bhajias* etc.). + concert again in evening - mandali came over to see it. Had 2 very lovely days with Baba.

27. Baba leaves for his seclusion again – his next 40 days work will be most important.

Baba remained secluded in Meherazad for the final days of the Manonash period, lighting a dhuni on January 31, 1952. He tore up and burned in the fire a piece of paper on which was written,

“All rites, rituals and ceremonies of all religions of the world are hereby consumed in the flames.” On February 1, 1952, He ended His Manonash seclusion and began a new period unifying both the Old and New Life: “LIFE – life that is eternally old and new.”

. . . .

Looking back on the New Life, Mani said:

. . . I think there is nothing one can say about the New Life. You know, the New Life can't be talked about—it is to be lived. We can talk only about the outward things—the activities that took place—things that you can put down in a diary or in a notebook. But the New Life is limitless, a timeless thing. Baba said, “The New Life will go on living by itself even when there is nobody to live it.” So the New Life lives forever. That is because it was given life by Baba, by the God-Man Himself treading it, making a way for all in the timeless time to come.²⁰