Meher Baba's Blue Bus Tours

By Susan M. McKendree

An Avatar Meher Baba Trust eBook

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MEHER BABA'S BLUE BUS TOURS

SPIRITUAL JOURNEYS IN INDIA WITH THE AVATAR OF THE AGE

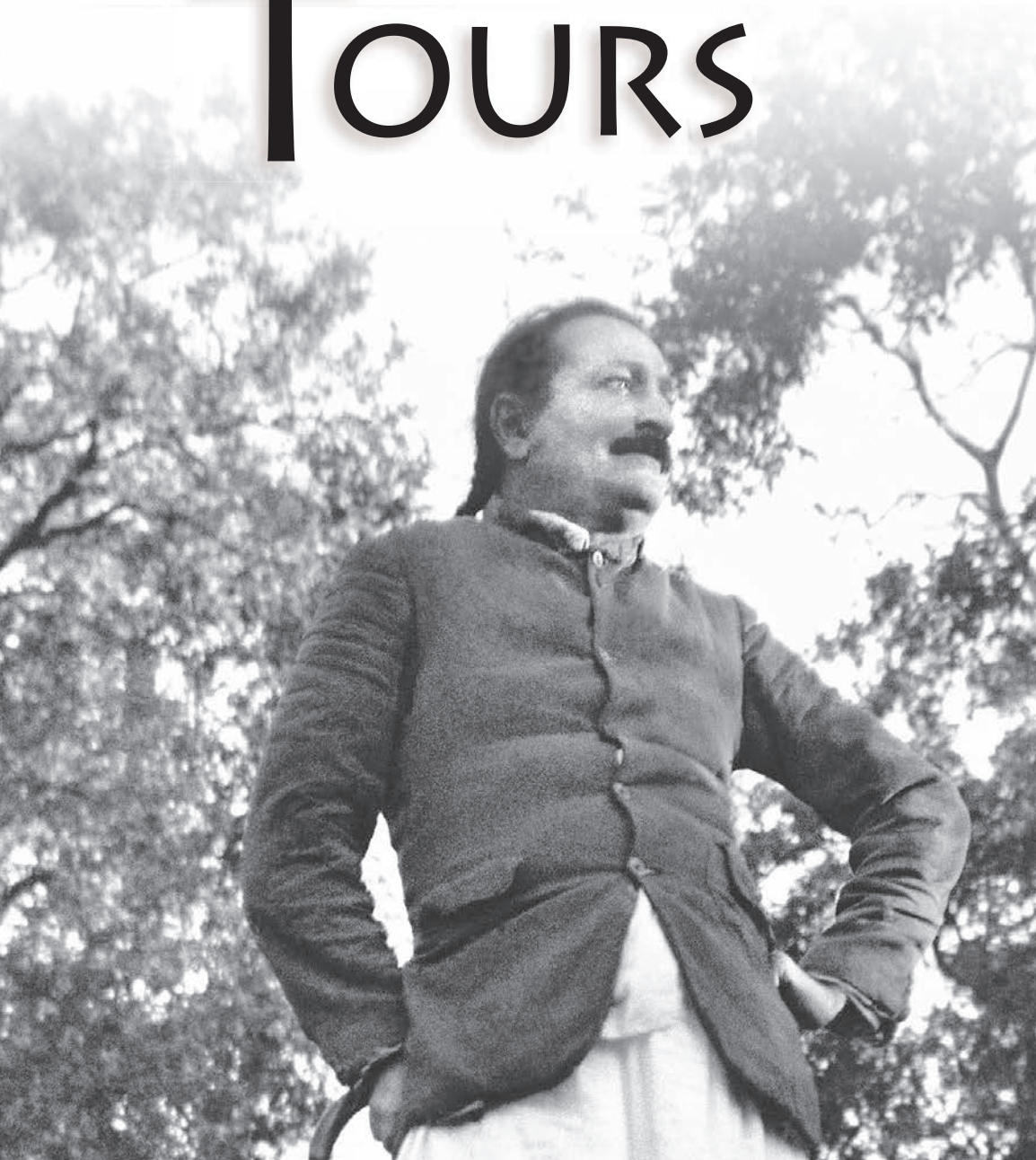
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Meher Baba's
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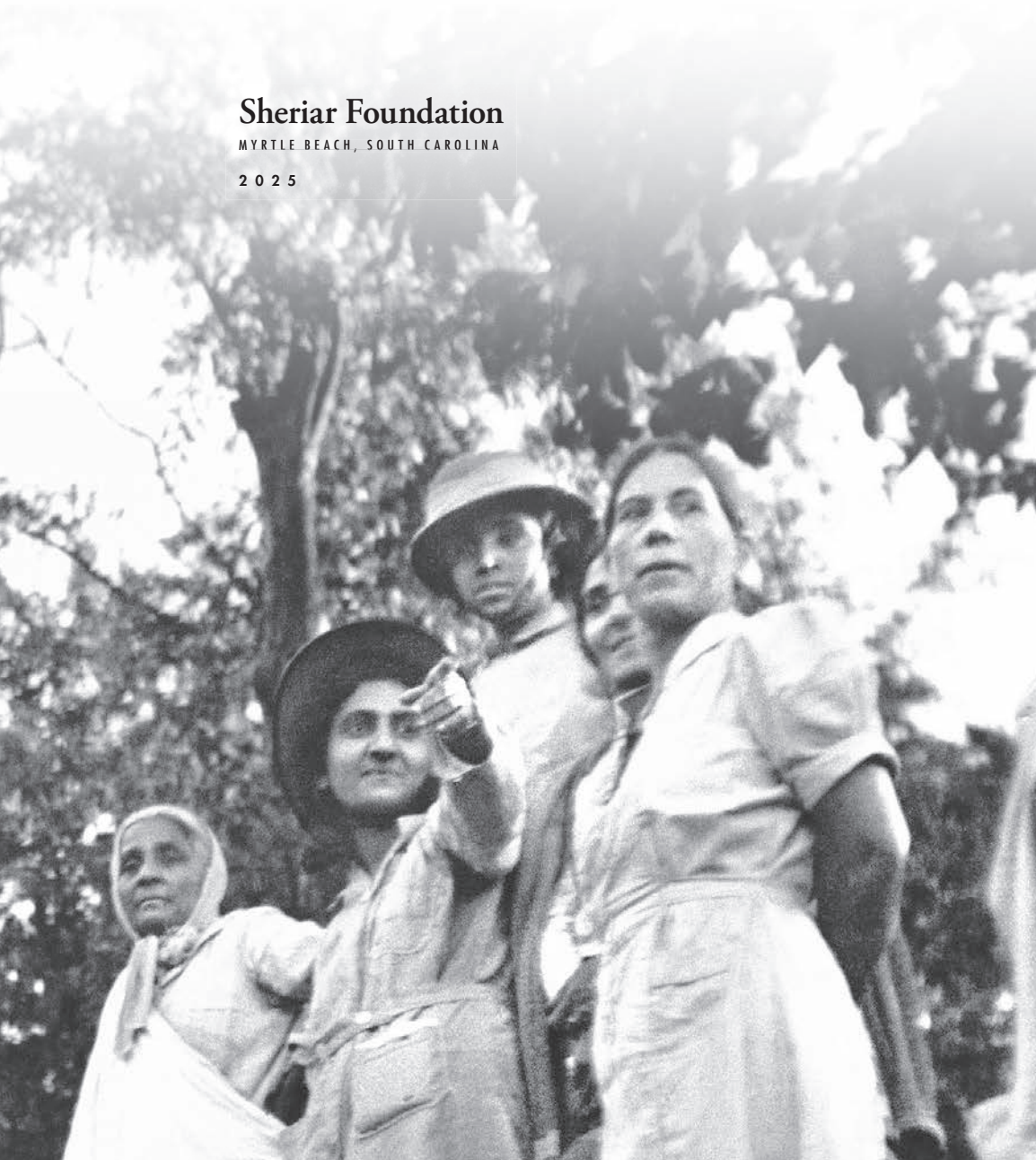
BLUE BUS TOURS



SPIRITUAL JOURNEYS IN INDIA WITH THE AVATAR OF THE AGE

SUSAN M. MCKENDREE

Sheriar Foundation
MYRTLE BEACH, SOUTH CAROLINA
2025



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Dedicated to Meher Baba,

Divine, Beloved Avatar of the Age,

Whose story is the only one worth telling

Meherwan Byramshaw Jessawala

(November 22, 1930–July 16, 2016)

Who was the last repository of

the Blue Bus Tours stories

To try and relate something of an unusual journey taken in these recent times with a modern Guru through the spiritual centres of India, it can at best be but a limited telling, as His unlimited realms of spiritual working are beyond human apprehension, and, even on the material plane, no one disciple can take part in all the Master's manifold activities. His journeyings sow the seeds of spirituality. Time conceals much of what a Master does, but reveals in a true light what a Master is, for His very being makes every act, however seemingly commonplace at the moment, an abiding reality beyond time and place…. *Truth is ever new.*

~ Elizabeth Patterson,
"Spiritual Journey with a Modern Guru,"
Meher Baba Journal, May 1939

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Author's Preface

Enchantment is the willingness
to live in a bungalow of stories
rather than a warehouse of facts.

THOMAS MOORE[1]

Mehera once asked, "What can I tell you about the Blue Bus Tours?"[2]

I began asking myself that question eight years ago.

In the autumn of 2012 I was inspired to learn more about the tours because they were a phase of Baba's work that I had heard mentioned many times but knew little about. I'd done some (the operative word) reading here and there, in *Lord Meher* and *Mehera–Meher*, of course, but also in the memoirs of some of the women who had participated in the tours, as well as in journal articles and other sundry places.

I learned that while this was a story hidden in plain sight, it was one that no one had yet taken the time to explore thoroughly and methodically. I only intended to make a presentation at a Sunday afternoon Baba meeting; but one talk led to four, and at the end, my small but loyal audience wanted more: a book, to be specific.

A few months passed, during which my heart said "Yes!" and my mind answered "Are you crazy?" A nudge from Baba in the form of a request to help with another project pushed me over the edge; before my mind had time to assert itself, my heart leapt into the breach: "I'm so sorry, but I can't. I'm writing a book."

Immutable Rule Number One of the Universe that I inhabit is that once I've said aloud something as momentous as this, I have to do it. And so I have, but I learned very quickly that the stories I had pieced together were only a tiny fragment of what Mani would call the "True Story" of the Blue Bus Tours.[3] The task turned out to be more formidable than I could have imagined, and there were many days when I felt as if I was assembling a very large jigsaw puzzle with no picture to guide me and no way even to know if pieces might be missing.

Naja Irani once told the women a story about preparing meals for the Prem Ashram boys during the 1920s. "Baba came into the kitchen to inspect the rice," Kitty recorded. "Baba found the rice not too well cooked, each grain not separate as it should be and He had new rice freshly cooked. As Naja explained to us, it was not that Baba was concerned that the boys should have perfectly cooked rice, but He wanted to bring home a lesson to all: that all work, whether done for Him directly or indirectly, from the cooking of a simple dish to the *writing of a book*, must not be carelessly done."[4] I sometimes wondered whether I was up to the task, and the past eight years have afforded me a seemingly endless succession of lessons in trust and surrender, patience and equipoise. Baba's close ones have assured us that all we have to do is say "yes" to whatever He asks, and He will help us, and it is true. Baba was always there to remind me that *He is always here*.

I came to Baba in 2006, at the age of 56, and for a long time I believed that this book was my gift to Him, to make up for the lost years before I found Him. Over time I've come to see that there are no "lost years," and that my whole life has served as preparation to undertake this task He clearly set me. Now I understand that this book is also Baba's gift to me, for having persevered until that unexpected moment of surrender born of grace, and for having said "yes" at what Elizabeth might have called "the exact moment" appointed by Him.[5]

I have made every effort to weave the myriad tales of the Blue Bus Tours into a comprehensive, continuous narrative. Some had

to be left out, simply because the book would have been too long. However, as careful as I have aspired to be, I am sure there are sources I have overlooked. Recognizing that I am bound to have neglected someone or something, or to have made some unintended error in fact or interpretation somewhere in these pages, I offer this imperfect work to Meher Baba in the knowledge that I did my best and must now leave the rest to Him.

Please consider this book a dak bungalow of stories for and about the Divine, Beloved Avatar of the Age.

Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai!

April 29, 2020 Susan M. McKendree

Acknowledgments

I offer my profound gratitude to the people without whom this book would not have come about: first, to Sheriar Foundation and its Board of Directors, to the anonymous person who reviewed my manuscript with great enthusiasm for them, and to Andy Lesnik and Sheila Krynski for their ongoing support and encouragement.

I offer endless appreciation to the unnamed Baba lover who generously paid my airfare to fly to India in 2014 to conduct research; to Meredith Klein, Meg DeLoe, and the staff at the Avatar Meher Baba Trust Archives at Meherabad, who kindly accommodated me and made a treasure trove of archival materials available, including documents from the AKI Collection, as well as Mani Irani's *Red Letter Book*, *Blue Bus Tours Diary*, and *Baba's Dictation to the Women Mandali*.

A thousand thanks go to Meherwan Jessawala, who graciously recounted his Blue Bus memories in Mandali Hall for the thousandth time so that I could hear them from him firsthand; and to his niece, Mehera Arjani, for giving me the closing line for the last chapter when I'd only written the first half of the story.

My gratitude goes to Saroja Library at the Meher Spiritual Center, where I had access to Norina Matchabelli's bound volumes of the *Meher Baba Journal*, as well as documents from its collection; and to Ellen Kimball, who stayed late

my last afternoon so that I could finish my work; to Diana Le Page, for the use of Apple Pie (her Mac laptop) when my laptop died; and to Barbara Plews and Laura Smith for assistance with permissions from the Meher Spiritual Center and Sheriar Foundation.

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I offer gratitude to all the people who responded so patiently to my endless questions: Peter and Debbie Nordeen, David Fenster, Heather Nadel, Wendy and Buz Connor, Charles Haynes, Carl Ernst, Naosherwan Anzar, David McNeely, Bob Mossman, Sarah McNeill, and Cathy Riley; to Freny Foreman, for her translations of Hindi and Urdu words in Mani's diaries; and to all the people who graciously loaned me books and periodicals from their collections.

I am indebted to Wendy and Buz Connor for giving complete access to the amazing photographs by Elizabeth Patterson in the ECP Photo Archive; to Martin and Christine Cook for their invaluable help researching and providing the best versions of most of the images used in this book; to David Fenster and Pat Sumner for providing images from their respective photo collections, Meher Nazar Publications, and MSI Photographic Collection; to Gusi Carpenter and David Bowling and the Avatar's Abode Archive for finding a rare image of the Blue Bus and making it available; to Naosherwan Anzar and the Beloved Archives Photo Collection; and to Meredith Klein for being on the lookout for materials in the Avatar Meher Baba Trust Archives to help illustrate the story of the Blue Bus Tours, and for helping make them available.

I am deeply grateful to Leah Florence, my indefatigable editor, who further shaped my manuscript with the objectivity that I did not have; to

Sheila Krynski for applying her extraordinary design skills to transform that manuscript into this beautiful book; and to Sheila Gambill, David Fenster, and Larry Nessly for taking on the gargantuan tasks of proofreading, fact-checking, and creating an index.

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I am forever beholden to my esteemed readers, Barb and Ken Richstad, Irma Sheppard, and Corinne Merrill, who offered invaluable feedback and encouragement, chapter by chapter; and to Toni Atmore, who proofread all the early versions of the manuscript and also offered feedback.

Last of all, I am so grateful to the Baba lovers from the WNC Baba Community—you all know who you are—who came to my Blue Bus Tour meetings, listened to my talks, encouraged me to consider them stepping-stones to a book, and refused to take "no" for an answer.

Sources, Memories, and Occasional Irreconcilable Differences

So much kept happening. Someone who came to Baba for a few days remembered every detail clearly, because they went away. Our time with Baba just rolled from wave to wave. It is very difficult to remember everything!

MANI IRANI[1]

Among the primary sources documenting the history of the Blue Bus Tours are Mani Irani's *Red Letter Book*, *Blue Bus Tours Diary*, and *Baba's Dictation to the Women Mandali*; the diaries of Framroze (Chanji) H. Dadachanji and William Donkin; and the *Meher Baba Journal*. The AKI (Adi K. Irani) Collection in the Avatar Meher Baba Trust Archives preserves more than six hundred documents (fronts and backs) that span the Blue Bus era. Memoirs include Mehera Irani's *Mehera*, Kitty Davy's *Love Alone Prevails*, Rano Gayley's *Because of Love*, Margaret Craske's *The Dance of Love* and *Still Dancing with Love*, Khorshed Irani's *Fortunate to Love Him*, and Meherwan Jessawala's *My Life with Meher Baba, the Avatar of the Age*. Some of Elizabeth Patterson, Norina Matchabelli, and Nadine Tolstoy's impressions can be found in articles they composed for the *Meher Baba Journal*. Katie Irani incorporated many of her memories into *Cooking with Katie*.

Recordings of talks about the tours are available at mandalihall.org and at other websites. Transcriptions of some of these talks have been published in

periodicals like *The Awakener*, *Glow International*, and *Love Street Lamp Post*. These sources preserve the stories of the Blue Bus Tours as they were told by the women who were on the bus.

Secondary sources include Bhau Kalchuri's *Lord Meher*, David Fenster's *Mehera–Meher*, and Heather Nadel's *The Joyous Path*, all of which draw from many of the primary sources listed above. In addition, *Mehera–Meher* and *The Joyous Path* are invaluable repositories of stories as they were told by Mehera, Mani, and some of the other women.

Many voices make for a rich and complex narrative, but they often disagree with one another regarding even the most basic of facts, such as dates, times, and the manner in which the simplest events transpired. Although the multiple perspectives these voices bring to the story enrich it immeasurably, they also make it much more challenging to tell.

Whenever possible I deferred to primary sources. However, there were occasions when I had no alternative but to embrace the inconsistencies. I tried to address some of the most significant of them in the text, a footnote, or an accompanying sidebar, simply noting smaller ones when they occurred (although I'm sure there are many I've missed). It would be helpful to know beyond a shadow of a doubt exactly how many seats there were in the bus, but is it really that important ? No, it's not, and the multiple perspectives from which the narrative in this book is woven give the story its depth and texture.

Mani addressed this very issue in her introduction to *God-Brother*, when she advised her readers to "look only into the heart of a story, and not get distracted by questions of times and places … 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.… All I can say is that telling a story off the cuff and writing it down are very different things."[2]

This brings us to the challenge of transcribing interviews and talks. Again, I defer to Mani, who said: "I request that when any of the transcribed material [from my recorded talks and videos] 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."[3] This I have done up to a point, but I have also tried to retain the uniqueness and idiosyncrasies of each speaker's voice: When you read a passage from one of Mani's talks or Meherwan's interviews, I want you to be transported to Mandali Hall.

I have not, however, reformatted or corrected any diary entries, correspondence, or other archival materials quoted in the text except in very limited instances. Archaic spelling, peculiar syntax, and odd punctuation (or lack thereof) all add to the charm of these wonderful gifts left to us by the mandali, who had no idea how interested we would be to read them in years to come.

I'll end with a disclaimer: *Lord Meher* is available online at www.lordmeher.org,* and *Mehera–Meher* is available for purchase in pdf form, which means that both are now updated periodically as new (or corrected) information becomes available. Over time, it is likely that some of the information that was incorporated into this book, as well as the endnotes accompanying it, will no longer match the sources: an occupational hazard of historical research that cannot be helped.

* All *Lord Meher* page number references in the text refer to the online edition.

Prologue

The Blue Bus Tours constitute a unique phase of Avatar Meher Baba's work. They began in December 1938 and ended in November 1941, during which time Meher Baba traversed "the length and breadth of India" accompanied by His closest Eastern and Western female disciples.[1] Altogether, Baba and the women made four journeys in a small, specially built omnibus that was painted blue, hence the name "Blue Bus Tours."

The first tour began on December 8, 1938, with halts in Hyderabad, Jabalpur, Benares, and Agra, before reaching its northernmost destination, Delhi. From there, it followed a meandering route south, with stops in Ajmer, Jaipur, Bhopal, Jabalpur, and Khuldabad, before returning to Meherabad on May 25, 1939.

During the second tour, which departed Meherabad on August 2, 1939, Baba and His entourage journeyed to Bangalore in South India for an eight-month sojourn. On April 1, 1940, they reboarded the bus for a tour of Goa, halting in Karwar and Panjim before continuing home to Meherabad, where they arrived on May 3, 1940.

The third journey was by far the longest and most ambitious, running from November 1, 1940, until July 18, 1941. Because of the size of Baba's party by then, parts of this tour were made by rail, with the Blue Bus traveling ahead or following behind, loaded down with excess luggage. It began on the tropical

island of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), off the tip of the Indian subcontinent. Baba and the women then returned to mainland India for halts in Calicut, Jaipur, Agra, Delhi, Amritsar, and Quetta, their farthermost destination, near the border with Afghanistan. From Quetta they backtracked to Dehradun, continuing south for a halt in Ajmer before returning home.

The destination of the fourth, final, and shortest tour, from September 23 until November 28, 1941, was again Karwar.

Baba's intentions for the tours were fourfold:•

The ceaseless river of Meher Baba's energy [during the Blue Bus Tours] had four main estuaries: *mast* work; internal work; establishment of a spiritual center in India; and running the ashram. By far the greatest amount of Baba's time went toward His *masts*, either working with them in the ashram, wherever that might be, or searching them out on incredible tours which took Him the length and breadth of India. Eruch [said], "If we thought we had a good *mast* there was not one instance where Baba spared Himself. He did not care for money, food, distance or sleep until He contacted that *mast*. Compared with *mast* work, Baba's other activities were secondary."

About Meher Baba's internal work, we could have no idea. Since Baba was spiritually perfect, the fasts and seclusions He undertook were not for His own benefit, but for the spiritual awakening of humanity, for Baba said, "I have come not to teach but to awaken."

The Blue Bus Tours coincided with World War II and there can be no doubt that Baba guided that war. However, apart from the very few utterances

• The God-intoxicated *masts* with whom Meher Baba accomplished some of His most unfathomable work were advanced souls who had moved beyond the gross plane into the planes of higher consciousness. Many were so engrossed in bliss that they were completely dissociated from their physical surroundings, unable to advance further until Baba gave them what He termed a "push."

During the latter half of the First Blue Bus Tours Baba began to actively seek out these advanced souls in what would come to be known as *mast* tours. He also began to offer shelter in His ashrams to the *masts* who were most deeply connected to Him. He conducted this phase of work between 1939 and 1946, traveling seventy-five thousand miles throughout India to contact as many as twenty thousand of these extraordinary men and women, many of whom He utilized in His seclusions and His inner and Universal work, perhaps most intensively as He directed the course of World War II, which was a vital aspect of His focus during the tours.

Baba called His *mast* work "a game of consciousness, directing the spiritual consciousness of the God-intoxicated [*masts*] toward material consciousness by My physical service to them, and uplifting the material consciousness of others to God-consciousness by My spiritual guidance to them." (*The Wayfarers*, 161; *Lord Meher*, 1746)

> (by alphabet board) Baba has made concerning His work, we stand myopic on the shore, seeing only the breaking wave, but nothing beneath it.
>
> The third direction for Baba's energy in that period was the establishment of a spiritual center in India. The center was to have six departments: spiritual academy, house of advanced souls, abode of the saints, *mast* department, solitary quarters for meditation, resting place for the afflicted….
>
> The fourth aspect of Baba's activities, the ashram, was run very closely. Each was given specific duties and Baba expected these duties to be carried out.[2]

In addition to focusing on the achievement of these four goals, Meher Baba also carried on with all the other aspects of His work: attending to the spiritual training of His mandali, offering *darshan*, attracting new followers, and spending extended periods of time fasting and in partial or complete seclusion conducting His inner work. These kinds of activities continued intermittently no matter where Baba was or in what phase of work He might then be engaged.

Beyond observing the visible scaffolding of Meher Baba's work at the gross level—even with unrestricted access to the vast body of information available to us, and with the added wisdom of hindsight—it is not possible for us to fathom the depths of the inner and Universal work that He accomplished continuously, on behalf of all creation. On the other hand, we have the advantage of seeing the continuum of His life from beginning to end, so patterns emerge that were not visible to those close ones who were immersed in the day-to-day challenges of carrying out His orders and whose only focus was serving Him. Viewed from this perspective, the phases of Baba's work become both clearer, and at the same time less distinct, when seen in the context of what came before and after.

The Blue Bus Tours are a case in point. For simplicity's sake, we describe this phase of work as having begun at 9:00 AM on December 8, 1938, when the bus first left Meherabad. But if we follow the threads of events—the trails of *prasad*, if you will—leading up to that thoroughly documented moment of departure, they carry us unerringly back to the beginning of Baba's work with the passengers: the women He invited to accompany Him on that first tour.

Without these women, there would have been no Blue Bus and no Blue Bus Tours. Baba simply would have made four more of His many journeys across the Indian subcontinent to contact *masts* and carry out His work, documented in renderings of fact recorded by the mandali. But thousands of women throughout India and the West became devotees of Meher Baba during the 1920s and 1930s. Why then, were these few women afforded the privilege of traveling throughout India with the Avatar of the Age? What qualities did they possess, and what spiritual training did He provide, that uniquely prepared them to rise to the challenges of these journeys? Many of the answers are found in the recordings and memoirs of the extraordinary experiences of these amazing women. Without them there would be no story of the Blue Bus Tours, and the purpose of this book is to tell that story.

A TRUE STORY

There was a bus, so blue was she,
No sky or hill could 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 by letter.

She'd glide o'er valleys so green to the sight,
Or through the black jungles up to nearly midnight.
Sometimes the 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.

When one couldn't help admiring 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 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 whatever you wished, you could have heard
Such laughter and songs inside that made yer
Think she was a traveling 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 bhagulas 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 endeavor to say much more.
For dear memories are never dead,
And things understood are better unsaid.

—*Mani*[3]

CHAPTER 1

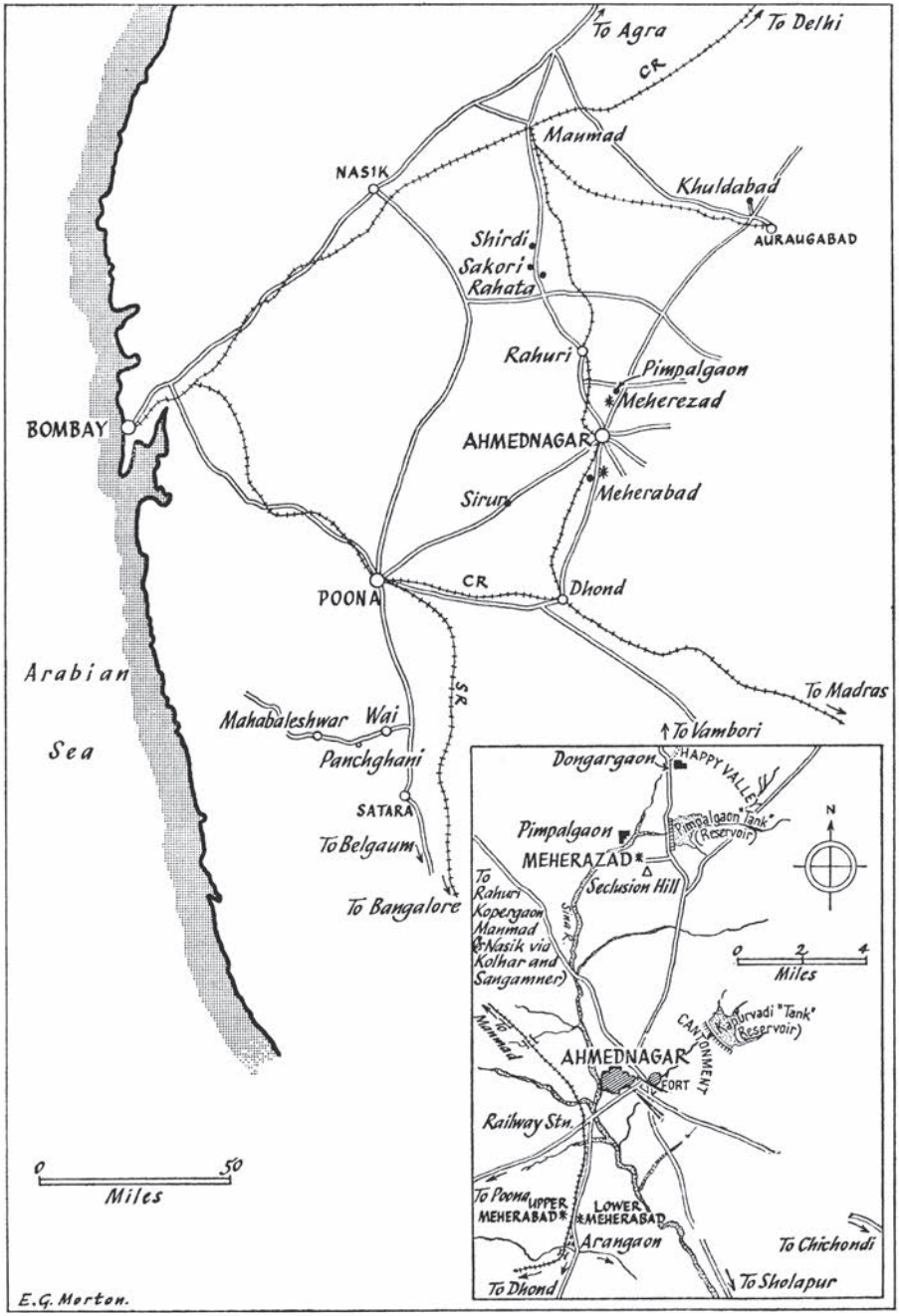
The Passenger List:

Meher Baba's Work with the Women

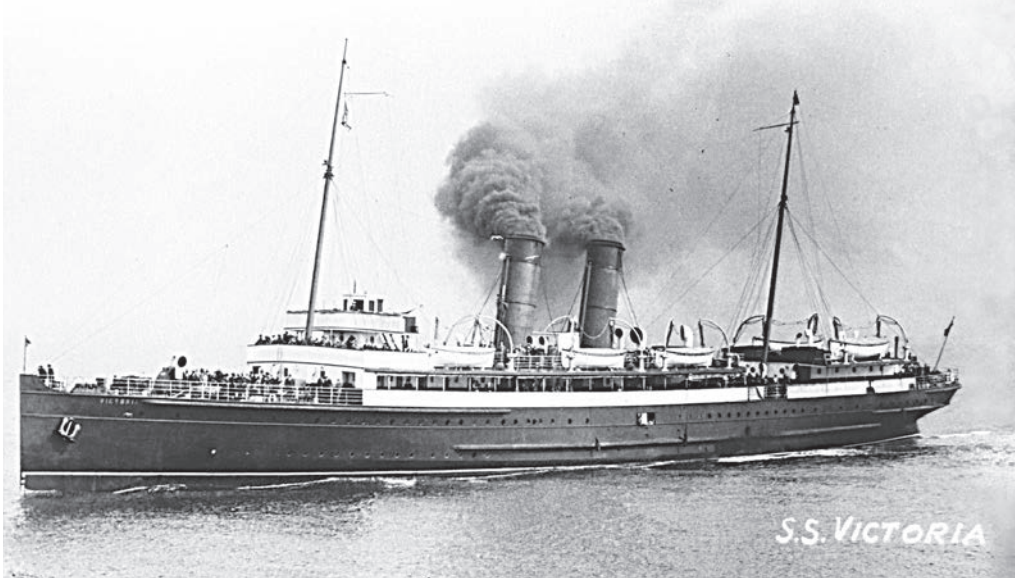
April 7, 1933–September 15, 1938

The world wants a "sweetheart" and would
love to have one who is real and true; they are very
rare and not easily traced. And when such a one is found,
millions run after the Sweet Beloved—all come in touch and
contact with Him. But few—very, very few—find a place
in the Beloved's heart and come in close contact
with Him. And even out of these, there are
fewer still who are closest to His heart
and are able to find that real
thing which the world
thirsts for—
love.

~ F. H. Dadachanji, October 1932, Nasik, in a letter to the Western women[1]



Meher Baba Country: a Diagrammatic Map, by E.G. Morton, originally published in *The God-Man* by Charles Purdom



FIRST IMPRESSIONS

ON MARCH 28, 1933, eleven Westerners set sail from Genoa, Italy, on the S.S. *Victoria*. Ten days later, on April 7, they disembarked in Bombay, India. Among the ten women were Kitty Davy, Margaret Craske, Elizabeth Patterson, and Norina Matchabelli.* They were escorted by Quentin Tod, at Baba's request.† They had been invited by Spiritual Master Meher Baba for a six-month visit, to travel with Him throughout India before continuing on via China and Japan to California where, Baba said, He would break His self-imposed eight-year silence in the Hollywood Bowl. The women arrived laden with suitcases and trunks full of the latest fashions, including formal gowns to wear for the momentous event in Hollywood.

Two years earlier, in 1931, Baba had embarked on a new phase of work when He traveled to Europe and America to gather disciples from the West. Among His earliest contacts were five spiritual seekers destined to accompany Him on what came to be known as the Blue Bus Tours: Kitty Davy, Margaret Craske, Elizabeth Patterson, Norina Matchabelli, and Nadine Tolstoy.

* The other women included Mabel Ryan, Audrey Williams, Minta Toledano, Delia DeLeon, Christine McNaughton, and Vivienne Giesen, but Baba would not call them to join the tours.

† Quentin escorted the women aboard ship but once in India he stayed with the other men, as his presence would compromise Mehera's seclusion. However, he did accompany the Western women to Kashmir.

Kitty and Margaret hailed from London, England. Kitty (age forty) was a pianist and music teacher who met Baba quite literally the moment He stepped off the train at Victoria Station on September 12, 1931. Margaret (thirty-nine) ran a thriving ballet studio. She met Baba less than an hour after His arrival at Kitty's parents' home. Neither had married.

Elizabeth, Norina, and Nadine met Baba in November 1931 at Harmon-on-Hudson, New York, at a spiritual retreat for His new American devotees. Elizabeth (thirty-five) was a successful businesswoman from a wealthy New York family. Among her astonishing accomplishments were participation in a scientific expedition to the North Pole and driving ambulances for the American Red Cross and Women's Motor Corps during World War I.

Born in Florence, Italy, Princess Norina Matchabelli (fifty-one) was an accomplished stage and film actress, best known for her role as the Madonna in the pantomime play *The Miracle*, written by her first husband, Karl Vollmöller. She immigrated to New York City in 1923 with her second husband, Georgian Prince Georges V. Matchabelli, from whom she acquired her title.

Russian Countess Nadine Tolstoy (forty-seven) also immigrated to the United States, where she married Count Ilya Tolstoy. Ilya was the son of Count Leo Tolstoy, author of *War and Peace*. Nadine and Ilya settled in New York City.

Baba visited Europe and America three more times in 1931 and 1932. In December 1932 He traveled for the first time to Zurich, Switzerland, where He contacted two more women whom He would invite to join the tours: Hedi Mertens (thirty-eight) and Helen Dahm (fifty-four). Hedi was a painter, and her husband, Walter, was an architect. They had four children. Helen was a painter as well. She was not married.

It was during this visit that Baba proposed bringing a small group of Western women to India the following year. An important aspect of Meher Baba's Universal work during this Avataric Advent

was to balance the materialism of the West with the spirituality of the East. One way He would accomplish this balance was to bring some of the Western women into contact with the women in His ashram, most especially His chief female disciple, Mehera Irani, whom He called "the purest soul in the universe."[2] Mehera had her first glimpse of Meher Baba in October 1922, when she was fifteen years old. She and her mother Daulat were among the first women Baba called to live in His new ashram at Meherabad, in May 1924. He also called to the ashram two of Mehera's dearest friends: Khorshed Irani (age fourteen), who, like Mehera, had met Baba in 1922, and Naja Irani (sixteen), Baba's cousin.

"We were the first to stay day and night," Mehera later recalled. "We girls … didn't care about anything—no marriage. We just wanted to serve Baba and stay with him…. When I was 17 with Baba, I thought I was going to be 17 forever."[3] Baba would invite all three of these young women to participate in the Blue Bus Tours. Over the next several years three more Easterners were invited to the ashram who also would join the tours: Saraswati Deorukhkar, whom Baba called Kaku (Aunt), and who had met Baba in 1919; Soona Irani (known affectionately as Soonamasi [Soona Auntie]), who was Khorshed's mother; and Walu (sometimes spelled Valu) Pawar, a wealthy young widow from nearby Arangaon Village who came to Baba for protection after the death of her husband in the early to mid-1920s. Near the end of 1932 Baba invited His sister Mani to join Him. Just shy of her fourteenth birthday, she was the youngest of the women in the ashram. Mehera took Mani under her wing to acquaint her with the ways of ashram life.

Mehera, Khorshed, Naja, Kaku, Soonamasi, Walu, and Mani formed the nucleus of the women's ashram. In an understatement of Avataric proportions, Baba called them, simply, "the lucky ones."[4] He also said, "No other pursuit is worthwhile, when you have met the Beloved."[5] The spiritual training that He provided them included a series of orders that gradually limited their contact with the world while increasing their focus on Him. His first directives marked the beginning of a steadily

deepening seclusion for Mehera, whose contact with all other men was to become absolutely restricted for nearly forty-five years.

When Baba returned to India He began to arrange for the Westerners' visit. He wanted the Easterners to make a proper impression by looking their absolute best for the meeting. But they had relinquished all their worldly possessions when they came to live in the ashram. Now dressed in sandals, simple cotton *saris*, and plain, long-sleeve tops, they no longer owned any suitable clothing from which to choose, but Mehera's sister Freiny came to the rescue with new silk saris, stockings, high-heeled shoes, and makeup. Baba also instructed them to discard their *mathu banu*—the traditional Zoroastrian white muslin scarves that He had ordered them to wrap around their heads to conceal their hair.

Since there were no accommodations for the Westerners at Meherabad, Baba's secretary, Framroze H. Dadachanji,* known to all as Chanji, had reserved rooms for them at the luxurious Majestic Hotel in Bombay. Some of Baba's devotees from the city met the group when they arrived and escorted them to the Majestic to rest, bathe, and prepare for their meeting that afternoon. Chanji had also secured a spacious bungalow in the north Bombay suburb of Kandivli for Baba and the Easterners. Baba had spoken with the Westerners about the austerities of ashram life, but their first impressions of their accommodations and those of the Eastern women would serve to shatter many of their preconceptions regarding His life and work in the East.

Mehera, Mani, Naja, Khorshed, and Soonamasi were among the female disciples waiting to greet the Westerners when they arrived at the Kandivli bungalow. There, Baba embraced them and formally introduced them to the Easterners. Kitty later recalled her first impression: "I almost fell down when we went in. The first person I re-

* Framroze H. Dadachanji (November 23, 1892–August 25, 1944) was one of Meher Baba's earliest disciples and a lifelong member of the mandali. As Baba's secretary, Chanji kept an invaluable series of diaries documenting Baba's work and travels. Many of his entries found their way into his monthly columns in the *Meher Baba Journal*. He also managed the ashram correspondence. Baba made Chanji responsible for many of the travel arrangements for the Blue Bus Tours and for locating suitable accommodations for Himself and the women as they moved about India.



member seeing was Mehera. She had long hair down her back in a plait [braid]. She was so young. She was so beautiful, so absolutely pure-looking. She had wonderful skin. She was happiness personified. She was so graceful; you felt she was the purest of the pure."[6]

Mehera was young—twenty-six at the time—but when one of the Westerners asked her age, Baba mischievously said that she was only twenty-one. Mehera later observed:

> We felt shy, but I think Baba was being naughty and testing the Western lovers. He had told them that the ashram girls had left everything, and then all of a sudden, we appeared like this. They must have thought we were very simple and wore plain clothes, and here Baba was going to show them how nice we looked, to test them, to see what their impression about Baba was. The Westerners were expecting ascetic nuns, and they found lovely, attractive, well-dressed young women in make-up.
>
> Baba wanted to give them a shock. Baba did so many things to test their preconceived ideas.[7]

Kitty observed how happy Baba was to see the women intermingling. Mani, however, described their initial interactions as "circumspect and subdued," recalling that there were few embraces. "They had Baba, and we had Baba," she said, pointing out that, as new devotees, the Westerners had a very different relationship with Baba.[8] They had no experience of life with a Spiritual Master and Baba had to bring them around slowly and gently as they came to understand what was expected of them. The Easterners, who had been born into a culture in which a life of obeisance to a Spiritual Master was accepted without question and who had been with Baba for nearly a decade, were capable

of a much deeper level of surrender and devotion. Baba asked more of the Easterners than the Westerners—for the time being.

Originally, Baba had planned to invite both groups of women to accompany Him on a tour of northern India, but He changed His mind at the last minute and decided to bring only the Westerners. The two groups would have required separate compartments, and because even Baba could only be in one place at one time, "it would be too much of a headache for Baba to attend to both parties," one of the mandali observed, and the Easterners would get "huffy" if He didn't stay with them![9]

On April 9 Baba accompanied the Easterners back to Meherabad before continuing on to the village of Bhandardara, where Chanji had arranged lodgings for the eleven Westerners. There they spent three days, taking long walks and sailing on the lake before departing by rail to journey northward, accompanied by nine of the men mandali. When the train stopped in Nasik, hundreds of lovers were waiting on the platform—weeping, cheering, and surging forward for Baba's touch, giving the Westerners a glimpse of the profound depth of devotion shown by His Eastern devotees.

The group's first destination was Agra, where they had been booked into Laurie's Empress Hotel. There, they viewed the Taj Mahal by the light of the full moon. Afterward, when Baba asked Norina what she thought of its magnificent architecture, she replied, "Since I have seen You, no other beauty can satisfy or affect me!" Baba gestured, "And still you have not seen My real beauty and splendor!"[10]

But the Westerners received a shock the following day, when Baba informed them that after visiting Kashmir they would have to return to the West. They were dumbfounded since He had sent them back to Bombay on the day of their arrival to obtain visas for entering China. There was to be no breaking of His silence in America. This abrupt change of plan was the first in a series of tests designed to break down their attachment to worldly experiences and deepen their capacity to surrender to His will.

Baba and the women departed Agra by rail on the evening of Friday, April 14, arriving at Rawalpindi the following afternoon. Three of the men had traveled ahead and met them with cars to drive on to Murree. There they spent two nights at the Chambers Hotel and a nearby chalet before continuing on to Srinagar in Kashmir. From this point forward Baba retreated behind a pair of sunglasses and tucked His hair into a beret, traveling incognito as He would throughout the Blue Bus phase of His work. In the train and at their accommodations, however, He removed the beret and let down His hair again.

That evening, Baba gave the women a short discourse that ended with the directive, "Love Me, follow Me and serve Me!"[11] It was their dearest wish to serve Him, but Kitty's most especially. During His first morning in London in September 1931, He had spelled out to her on His alphabet board, "Is there anything you want?" "Without time to think or consider I said, 'Yes, Baba, only two things have I always desired: an increased capacity to love and increased opportunities for service.' I added as an afterthought, 'And, yes, spontaneous goodness.' Baba said only, 'You will have all in a few days.'"[12] Now, when one of them asked how best to serve Him, He replied, "Love Me and do as I say. Pure love makes one understand."[13]

The following day was Easter Sunday, and Baba took the women to visit a Christian chapel. There He told them, "All worship returns to Me. The sigh within the prayer is the same in the heart of the Christian, the Mohammedan, or the Jew. They are all indivisibly longing for the same God."[14] That evening Baba had the first of many conversations with Elizabeth and Norina about the work He planned to accomplish in the West.

On Tuesday morning Baba and the women departed Murree by taxi, while the men traveled by bus. Kitty called it a drive "of indescribable beauty."[15] When they arrived in Srinagar that afternoon, the women settled into four rented houseboats on Dal Lake.

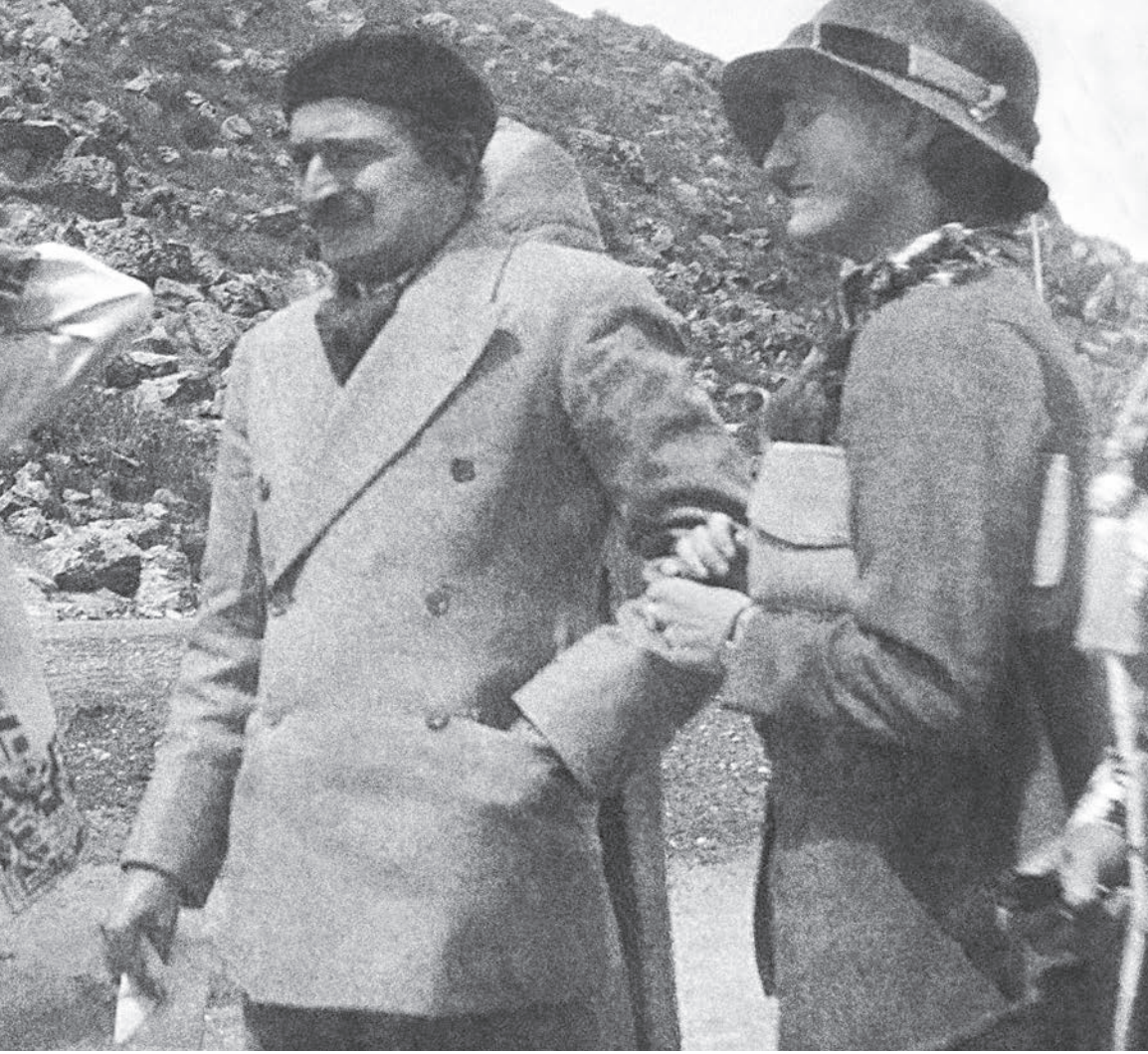


Baba with Delia, Minta, Margaret, and Mabel, April 20, 1933, during their visit to Harvan village in Kashmir. Even here the women are all wearing their fashionable cloche hats.

In the days to come Baba escorted them to the gardens of Chashme Shahi, Shalimar, and Nishat. He hired a small bus to take them out for a picnic at Mansabal Lake. He also arranged for rides on Dal Lake in *shikaras*, brightly painted, canopied Kashmiri boats. The women spent the evenings listening to Baba's discourses and recordings of Eastern and Western sacred music.

Baba also took them to visit Harvan Village, near the place where, He explained, Jesus was buried.* "An indescribable peace hung about

* "Baba had stated that Jesus did not die on the cross but came to India, where he spent many years wandering from place to place doing his Universal work until he dropped his body in Kashmir. Pointing to a hill, Baba revealed, 'There is the place where two of Christ's apostles, Bartholomew and Thaddeus, buried his body; they had accompanied him from Palestine.'" (*Lord Meher*, 1513)



Harvan," Kitty recalled. "One felt like speaking only in whispers. Why had Baba made a point of taking us to this spot? It was here on the slope of the mountain that He had once been in seclusion and on fast for several months—the very same mountain where, Baba told us, Christ's body was buried." "Although there is a tradition that [Christ] was buried at Harvan," Elizabeth recorded in her journal, "no one knows the exact spot except Baba. [Eventually] the body was brought there by two of Christ's disciples, Bartholomew and Thaddeus, after crucifixion. Christ appeared to these disciples, after death, in His fourth or heavenly body."[16]

The women's visits to the Taj Mahal and Harvan heralded the kinds of excursions that Baba would arrange for those who were later

to participate in the Blue Bus Tours: so-called pleasure trips to monuments, museums, zoos, and other public places—frequently hurried and almost always accompanied by reminders of the illusory nature of such experiences—interspersed with lingering visits to temples, churches, mosques, tomb-shrines, and other places of pilgrimage, many of which were associated with His previous Avataric Advents.

On April 24 Baba's party left Srinagar by car and rail for Bombay. Instead of the six-month visit He had promised, the Westerners departed India after just seventeen days. They had to retrieve their trunks from Colombo, Ceylon, where they had shipped their excess baggage in anticipation of sailing to China. As they prepared to board the S.S. *Britannica* Baba bade them farewell disguised behind a pair of yellow sunglasses. Kitty observed, "Outwardly, this first trip to India appeared to be a pleasure trip, but later we realized that this was not so. Baba repeatedly told us He did nothing just for our pleasure. It was always for the work that He called us."[17] This sojourn with Baba required a new level of surrender from the women, and the Westerners' brief experience of having traveled to India to meet the Easterners was the first step in preparing them to live, work, and travel together in the future.

NO SUGGEST! NO DISCUSS! JUST OBEY!

Over the next three years, Meher Baba made five more trips to the West, and while in London, on October 18, 1933, He called two more of the women whose names would be on the Blue Bus Tours "Passenger List": Estelle Gayley (age fifty-eight) and her daughter Madeleine (thirty-one).* Nonny (as Estelle now called herself) was the wealthy widow of a prominent New York City attorney. She and Rano (Madeleine) were accustomed to a life of great comfort while moving in the highest echelons of New York society. Rano was an artist, another of the many

* Estelle was a student of numerology, and by the time she had heard about Baba she had changed her name to Nonny and Madeleine's to Rano.

who would be invited into Baba's circle. Nonny's recognition of Baba was immediate, and from that moment forward she had no desire other than to be near Him. Rano was also enchanted.

Near the end of 1933 Baba began to speak of inviting a larger group of Westerners—men and women—for a one- to five-year visit to India, but three years passed before He set that plan in motion. Fifteen Westerners received invitations, and among them were Kitty, Margaret, Norina, Elizabeth, Nadine, Nonny, and Rano.* Because there still were no accommodations for them at Meherabad, Baba decided to bring them to Nasik, where He planned to establish a new ashram called Meher Retreat. He had already shifted His ashram there for a period of four years, between November 16, 1929, and November 30, 1933, before returning to Meherabad. He deemed it an "ideal property … situated amidst beautiful surroundings with splendid scenery all around."[18] In a letter to the Westerners dated July 1936, which began with the lovely salutation "Beloved Selves," Baba explained: "The centre [in Nasik] will have nothing in common with the accepted notions concerning ashrams or spiritual retreats or the strict, dry, rigid discipline usually governing them. Its special feature lies in its having My personal living guidance, the same as Jesus gave his disciples…. All possible arrangements have been made to make the physical life easy for you, and though it will not be a crown of thorns, it will not be a bed of roses either!"[19]

These arrangements included the construction of a large dormitory-style bungalow where most of the Westerners would stay. It would be built on the twenty-two–acre property belonging to Freiny and Rustom Irani,† where Baba had brought the Easterners during His

* Baba also called Ruano Bogislav, Garrett Fort, Malcolm Schloss, and Malcolm's then-wife Jean Adriel from the United States, as well as Will and Mary Backett, Delia DeLeon, and Tom Sharpley from England. Hedi and Helen were not called: Hedi had a family to look after and Helen could not speak English, only Swiss German.

† Freiny Jehangir Irani (November 14, 1903–March 16, 1979) was Mehera's older sister. She married Rustom Kaikhushru Irani (July 4, 1899–c. 1940), whose brother Adi K. was one of Baba's mandali.

previous four-year shift to Nasik. Baba's intention was to give the Westerners the opportunity to observe Him as He engaged in three phases of work to be carried out simultaneously at three different ashrams: "the modern—Nasik," where the Westerners would be living; "the primitive—Rahuri; and the simple—Meherabad," where the Easterners resided.[20] Rahuri, located about midway between Nasik and Meherabad, was the site of a new ashram where Baba accommodated the growing numbers of mad and spiritually intoxicated, advanced souls called *masts* that He had begun to gather around Him. *Lord Meher* describes Rahuri as "a small rural town … located near the banks of a tributary of the Godavari River, and plentiful rain made it abound with greenery. The ashram was built in a grove of orange and mango trees, making it a pleasant atmosphere for such work."[21] Baba deemed it the ideal location for His *mast* work while the Westerners were at Meher Retreat.

Baba left off His *mast* work at Rahuri near the end of October 1936 for a four-week trip to Europe, flying, for the first time, from Karachi to Baghdad, and continuing on from there by rail. He spent three days in London, concentrating on previously established contacts rather than making new ones. He had requested that the Americans travel there to meet with Him and remain until their departure for India, a mere two weeks away.

Norina, Elizabeth, Margaret, and Kitty accompanied Baba to Zurich for a two-day visit, where He again met with Hedi Mertens and Helen Dahm. At one gathering He looked around and observed, "Someone I was expecting has not come. Now, I'll have to come back again."[22] He was referring to twenty-year-old Irene Billo, who would be the last of the Westerners invited to participate in the tours. Baba left Zurich for Paris with the women who had come with Him. There they spent two days before departing for Marseilles on November 10 so that He could return to Bombay by ship, after which the four women went back to London. Baba reached India on November 23, and two weeks later, on December 8, Norina, Elizabeth, Nonny, and Rano arrived, along with

Elizabeth's beloved Boston terrier Kippy, as well as her white V-8 Ford automobile and a trailer, which would prove to be valuable assets during the tours.

Per Baba's orders, Rustom met the ship and drove them to the Majestic Hotel to check in, but before they could unpack he whisked them off to the American Consulate to attend to paperwork. Since the new accommodations at Nasik were still under construction, the following morning Rustom delivered them to a bungalow in Igatpuri, a hill station located southwest of Nasik. Baba came to meet with them wearing His beloved *kamli* coat—a departure from the Western suits in which they were accustomed to seeing Him dressed.* He called the coat His "post office" as he pulled out handfuls of letters, telegrams, and other pieces of mail that bulged from His pockets.[23]

Two days later the Westerners moved to a more comfortable bungalow in Bhandardara, the same village some of the group had visited in 1933. Baba stayed with them from the fourteenth until the nineteenth, giving short discourses and assigning them the practice of emptying their minds. When someone complained that the effort was proving difficult, Baba gave them an explanation about the mind and concentration, and then smiled, concluding, "After all, I did not bring you all the way to India to show you the sights!" His words of assurance before departing for Nasik were "Don't worry. And don't hurry!"[24]

In the coming days, other invitees arrived, including Nadine.† On December 22 Baba took them all to Nasik to tour the ashram site as well as to see Sarzat, the new bungalow where many of them would be staying. He had instructed the Westerners to provide their own bed linens and blankets, and, expecting austere conditions, many of them

* Kamli is a heavy, roughly woven wool fabric often used for blankets. Kamli also means "crazy or mad for one's beloved" in Hindi, Punjabi, and Urdu. Baba stated, "This [coat] is the most sacred of my possessions. What it has in it will be revealed after I drop my body. Then, thousands and thousands of men and women will come to worship it." (*Lord Meher*, 3570)

† Also invited was Norina's friend, Russian aristocrat Duchess Marie, but the Duchess questioned Baba's motives. Fearing that He intended to use her social status for His own agenda, she left after four days and never came into contact with Him again.

had also brought sleeping bags, but they were pleasantly surprised to find twelve comfortably furnished bedrooms with Western mattresses and box springs on the beds and six Western-style shared baths.

The adjacent original bungalow, called *Manzil* (abode), had a large double bedroom and bath that Baba assigned to Elizabeth and Norina, as well as two smaller bedrooms and a second bath for Nonny and Rano. The spacious sitting and dining rooms had been furnished with such amenities as a radio, piano, gramophone, books, fans, even an electric toaster. Kitty later called it "All this and heaven too!"[25] "We were just floored," Rano reminisced, "because everything was just done so perfectly—according to Western standards and convenience…. Later on when we were there, Baba said to us one day, 'I've given you now all the luxury, this is the luxury ashram. And later, one by one, I'm going to take all these things away from you.'"[26]

On another occasion Baba further explained, "I would so like you all to live a simple life in India, then resume your habitual life in the West and not be affected by either one. I do not make you sleep on the floor now. Why do I arrange all these comforts for you? Because it would affect the body and react on the mind and make it difficult for Me to impart truth through the mind. Drastic changes would have a reaction on the mind and the body."[27] Once more He was challenging the Westerners' preconceptions about ashram life.

"Every one of you has to help in My work according to your individual capacity; and the extent to which you will remain in the world will be determined by the kind of work which you are destined to perform. I will teach you how to move in the world, yet be at all times in inward communion with Me as the Infinite Being. As part of your training you will have to experience both the comforts of Nasik and the discomforts of Rahuri and Meherabad, and be detached from each."[28]

Kitty and Margaret reached Bombay on Christmas Eve and Chanji drove them to Nasik the following morning. That evening the Westerners gathered around Baba, who was seated in the center of

one side of the long dining table. They presented Him with gifts that He redistributed among them before enjoying a festive vegetarian dinner, followed by cake. For Kitty, it was "the most blessed of all Christmases."[29]

Dinner was followed by a short speech from Kaka Baria,* who was not renowned for His English-language skills. But he had spent enough time around Westerners to have recognized their proclivity for questioning everything they were told, and the speech was rendered memorable by his closing exhortations: "NO SUGGEST! NO DISCUSS! JUST OBEY!"[30]

Much to their dismay, the Westerners soon learned that they would be seeing Baba for only a few days each week. They had been accustomed to and had, perhaps, become a little spoiled by having had His undivided attention during His visits to the West. Here in India, however, just as He had warned, He divided His time between Nasik, Meherabad, and Rahuri, and they were obliged to share Him with the Easterners and the *masts*. However, Baba did want to impress upon them the significance of His *mast* work, so He invited Elizabeth and Norina to Rahuri to observe Him in this new environment. Elizabeth later wrote:

> Baba led us … into the property where the mad men were congregating under a spreading mango tree. From among a number of mad men brought to Him, Baba selected a few whom He terms 'God-mad' [*masts*]….
>
> One man smiled whenever Baba drew near, and when Baba moved away, tears would inevitably come to his eyes. Still another man never uttered a word but would be lost in a world of his own, except in response to Baba.

* Ardeshir Shapurji Baria (February 23, 1891–February 27, 1969) was a spiritual seeker who had met three of the five Perfect Masters: Tajuddin Baba, Hazrat Babajan, and Upasni Maharaj. Ardeshir first met Baba in Toka, in 1928, at the order of Upasni, and Baba called him two years later. He was affectionately known as Kaka (Uncle).

> We saw Baba bathe the 'God-mad' with His own hands. Before bathing, He 'talked' to each. One had been rather violent and had to be tied down, but as soon as Baba arrived all were peaceful….
>
> To see Baba playful and gay with these mad men, who recognized only Him and to all other people and things in life were lethargic, was to us a revealing sight. Baba was indeed Master with all types of souls.[31]

On the afternoon of New Year's Eve, Baba took the whole group into Nasik for a tour of the city and a visit to the Gangapur River and a nearby waterfall, practices He would carry on throughout the Blue Bus Tours. On January 5 He escorted everyone to Rahuri, and then on to Meherabad, where the women had the opportunity to see the Easterners on the Hill, as well as Baba's mother Shireenmai,* who was visiting.

Also near the beginning of January, Baba embarked on a forty-day fast leading up to His birthday, and He assigned each of the Westerners specific days during which they would fast with Him. This was the first time many of them had been asked to fast and, unsurprisingly, they found it difficult; Rano suffered from excruciating headaches during her turns. In Nasik, they also experienced how it felt to adhere to a strict schedule, getting up at 6:30 AM, meditating for an hour, breakfasting at 8:00, lunching at noon, gathering for dinner at 7:00 PM, and retiring by 9:30. They were confined to the grounds of the compound (Baba went so far as to restrict their time in the sun to before 10:00 AM or after 4:00 PM) and they had to request permission for anything that fell outside the scope of His orders. Chanji called this period of spiritual training for the Westerners "Shri Meher Baba's school of life."[32]

* Shireenmai Dorab Irani (c. September 21, 1877–February 25, 1943) married Sheriar Moondegar Irani in 1892 at the age of fourteen. They had six children: Jamshed (the eldest), Merwan Jal, Beheram, Adi, and Mani. Shireenmai, whose name means "sweet," "gentle," or "pleasant," had a forceful personality, often challenging Baba's authority and creating discord by refusing to adhere to ashram rules, especially where food was involved. Her pet name for Baba was Merog; He called her Memo.

To keep them occupied during His frequent absences, Baba set out specific responsibilities for each one. He placed Norina in charge of the household, empowering her to respond to complaints—of which there would be many, and He made it clear that He expected everyone to live and work cooperatively. "Either you must live harmoniously together and help Me in My work or the ashram must be disbanded and I will have to do My work alone."[33]

Ashram duties were not to be taken lightly under any circumstances, and when Baba placed one person in charge of something as critical as domestic management, it was inevitable that that person would become a lightning rod for everyone's grievances. Problems arose on a regular basis, but Baba fiercely defended Norina's efforts. Nevertheless, she had to contend with a prevailing atmosphere of low-level mutiny. Kitty, Margaret, and Delia took great pleasure in tormenting her—so much so that they came to be known collectively as "the frivolous three." "You must remember," Delia recalled, "that Norina was a very different type of person from us [and] if there was anything in the world Norina wanted to be, it was a leader, and she thought her social position would cause us to follow her to Baba. I was there before she was! But she still went on with this business, trying to claim she was a leader, and we all behaved very badly."[34]

Elizabeth, who was above such frivolity, dutifully assisted Norina with the accounts and drove to the bazaar when necessary, while Nadine translated Baba's messages into Russian and also assisted Norina as needed. Nonny attended to typing projects and the transcription of Baba's discourses, which Kitty had taken down in shorthand. Rano began work on drawings and paintings illustrating spiritual themes that Baba described to her, including *The Ten Circles* painting that would eventually appear in *God Speaks*.

Kitty's schedule included meditation, writing daily reports on ashram activities, assisting with housekeeping tasks, taking Urdu lessons, and teaching English to Naja and Khorshed when she was visiting

them at Upper Meherabad. She also taught piano, set Margaret's choreographies to music, and played for the dancing lessons that Margaret gave. Other ashramites offered art or drama lessons, composed poetry, prepared lectures, worked on weaving or sewing projects, tended the garden, cared for pets and other animals, or else saw to various other household chores.

Despite the comforts that Baba had thoughtfully provided, the Westerners did not find ashram life easy. For one thing, they had no experience with controlling their moods. "If you felt moody, well, then you just became moody," Rano recalled, "and sometimes you'd do it maybe to get Baba's attention."[35] Now, living for the first time in such close quarters with so many restrictions, they were confronted with the seemingly infinite variety and magnitude of their shortcomings, compounded by the diversity of their personalities and temperaments. Rano observed that, in retrospect, most of the things over which they quarreled were not even worth arguing about once Baba had brought them to light. But Baba offered reassurances, saying, "Of yourself, you cannot make [them] go. But I shall do it for you. Nevertheless, you must try. You must make the effort…. Don't let little things disturb you. Rise above them. Be big. Be generous. Leave the rest to Me. And don't be concerned about it. I will do it. I *have* to for the sake of the work."[36]

On the other hand, Baba encouraged friction, also for the sake of the work. Sometimes He deliberately created clashes of temperament if things were going too smoothly. "Learning to do what Baba wanted instead of what we wanted was a painful process," Rano recalled. "We had to learn that every thought and every feeling should be centered on Baba. We would try, but naturally our little egos would get in the way." Rano employed the metaphor of "boiling jam" when describing this phase of Baba's work, observing that "when jam is boiling, there's a certain point when the froth comes to the surface and it has to be removed before the jam is pure and edible. Baba would point out this 'froth' to us, but we were the ones who had to remove it … and with His

infinite patience, we learned that our shortcomings must be faced and removed, no matter how painful the process. But it took a long time to boil that 'jam.'"[37]

Kitty called the process bringing to light one's "sore spots," and after one of her spiritual misdemeanors, she confessed to one of her correspondents, "I am in the thick of it."[38] Ultimately, she observed, all the Westerners "possessed pronounced egos, leaning slightly towards the intellectual and analytical attitude, rather than the emotional, and thus lacking in the balance Baba wanted to give us between head and heart."[39]

In mid-January, Baba began bringing the Western women to Meherabad every Friday to visit the women, whom Jean Adriel called "Baba's little nuns."[40] Mani, the littlest nun of all (she was eighteen at the time), later observed, "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 happy, too. We each did our part to make everything the best that we could."[41]

The Easterners were accustomed to early morning starts, but for the Westerners, these trips were quite literally an eye-opening experience. Kitty recalled, "To begin with, Baba's order was that we should leave Nasik by car at 2:00 in the morning so that we would reach Meherabad at about 7 a.m., to avoid traveling in the heat. To start at such an hour we had to get up at midnight, and to our amazement, all the servants would be up too, and a complete breakfast served at 1 a.m., with all the trimmings!"[42] Rano recalled her first impression of life at Upper Meherabad: "When we arrived we women were taken up the Hill … 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."[43] Kitty observed that "the meeting of Eastern and Western disciples on Meherabad Hill was to begin to alter completely the lives of a few of the Western group, myself included."[44]

Although Baba had taken special care to talk to the Western women about His relationship with Mehera, a few of them (although none who would be chosen to participate in the tours) became quite jealous of the attention He paid her. Elizabeth, who could not understand those feelings of rivalry, wisely observed, "I don't know of anyone ever in the whole world who could have done what Mehera did. Baba gave her the direct order to be cheerful at all times. No matter what, that smile, that cheerfulness was there. Who among us could have done such a thing as that? Her every thought, her every action, her whole life was all Baba. She never had a thought for herself. It was always, everything for Baba."[45]

Baba marked His forty-third birthday on February 17 and 18, 1937, with an unprecedented public celebration at Nasik that included a ten-hour mass darshan and feast for thousands of guests on the seventeenth. He gave out *ladoos*, as well as cloth bundles of grain that the women had made up. The seemingly endless queue of lovers afforded the Westerners an unforgettable experience as they watched. Kitty called the event the "Festival of Festivals" and recalled that in addition to the little sachets containing grain, the women also made "wonderful lanterns in the shapes of airplanes, animals, hearts, *tongas*, and even a world map. Most were Baba's ideas."[46]

Despite His exhaustion, Baba called the Westerners to Him that evening to talk about the importance of His work in a time of "terrible economic chaos," explaining how the simple act of giving out the bundles of food and cloth would result in increased "economic and material welfare" for the world.[47] He ended His forty-day fast with a cup of tea and toast. Neither He nor the Westerners went to bed until after 1:00 AM.

The following morning, the day on which His birthday fell, Baba rose at 5:00 AM, radiant after fewer than four hours of rest and resplendently attired in a silk *café au lait*–striped coat over an immaculate white *sadra*. He wore His hair loose and flowing. First, the Westerners helped Shireenmai bathe His feet in milk and honey, which were then given out as *prasad*. After Baba was garlanded He gave darshan to His

close ones, who were regaled with *bhajans* as they stood in line. His Muslim lovers draped Him in a *sehera*, the long veil of flowers traditionally worn by a bridegroom on his wedding day. The celebrations continued with singing, traditional dances, and testimonials, followed by a message from Baba on the subject of "Spiritual Birth" that was read out. It was 1:30 AM before the crowd began to disperse.

Both days' events included feasts, and the Westerners joined Baba's Eastern devotees by sitting on the ground, which had been covered with mats. Baba's "spiritual mother," Gulmai,* showed them how to squat properly on the mats while Baba's birth mother, Shireenmai, demonstrated eating with the fingers of one's right hand. Although Mehera and the other Easterners had made the crown that Baba wore for the two-day celebration, they remained in strict seclusion at Upper Meherabad. Years would pass before they had the opportunity to watch the newsreel that was made of the gathering.

After His birthday, Baba began to give the Westerners some independence, although they still were not allowed to leave the ashram without permission. He called it "freedom with clipped wings," and when some of them continued to request special privileges He called them "very hard nuts to crack!"[48] But He did take them out for excursions, including a day trip to Trimbak and the source of the Godavari River. He had asked Norina to put together provisions for a picnic, and, as usual, He woke everyone before daylight to dress and ready themselves for departure at 5:00 AM. As soon as they reached their destination Baba directed them to locate a spot for a pre-dawn *al fresco* breakfast. Afterward they ascended seven hundred carved stone steps sheltered beneath shady trees to the small spring where the river began. The stairs were so steep that Baba arranged for Nonny and several of the other older women to be carried in *dolees*.

* Gulmai Irani (July 18, 1882–August 10, 1962) was another of Baba's closest female disciples. He called her His "spiritual mother," which irked Shireenmai to no end. Her son Adi K. was among Baba's closest mandali. Baba would call Gulmai on numerous occasions to join the tours for periods of time.

But just minutes after arriving at the top of the hill Baba told them that it was time to return to their cars. This time, however, He made them descend along another path well beyond the shade of the trees. By now the sun was fully risen and the morning had become quite hot. And although no one was remotely hungry He insisted that they have a second breakfast before departing. By 10:00 AM they were in the cars, headed back to Nasik, their excursion over almost as soon as it had begun.

Baba escorted the women—Easterners and Westerners—on a picnic closer to home, in a mango grove near Arangaon, as well as on a shorter walk outside the walls of the compound. There He told the Westerners, "One day, there will be airplanes large enough to hold 300 to 400 people. My lovers will travel to India on such planes for My darshan. Many Americans will come and stay here. They will take over this place. Large colonies will be established."[49]

Such outings were few and far between, however, and the Westerners learned to make do in Baba's absence. They gathered together in the evenings to hear tales about Baba's life and work told by the mandali who served as watchmen. "Our idea of having a spree," Rano recalled, "was [that] somebody would buy some toffees or somebody would get some sweet drinks, and then we'd sit and hear stories about Baba."[50]

Late in April Rano became ill and the doctor who was called diagnosed her with typhoid fever. A number of others also came down with fever, although none so seriously as she. In fact, she was not expected to live. When her condition did not improve Baba called Dr. Nilu* to come from Rahuri to examine her, and he determined that she had been misdiagnosed and had scarlet fever instead. Baba personally began to see to her care and fed her orange juice by the teaspoonful. The fever abated, and by the beginning of May she was well on the way to recovery.

* Dr. Vinayak Nilkanth Godse (November 13, 1902–December 2, 1956) was a close friend of Vishnu Deorukhkar, another of Baba's earliest disciples. Nilu, as he was called, joined Baba permanently after earning his medical degree.

Khorshed's birthday fell at the beginning of May, and the women celebrated with ice cream. When Rano asked Baba if she also could have some, He said no, because it would hurt her throat. But after she protested He came back with a tiny bit of ice cream, which He fed to her from His little finger. "I was so pampered," she later recalled, "I didn't miss … being with the others. Perhaps Baba needed someone immobile for 21 days." Baba later explained to Rano, "I have saved you for My work. Had I not been here when you were sick, you would have died."[51] He also employed her brush with death as a lesson emphasizing the need to surrender all—even one's life—to the Master. He declared: "What is sickness, what is death but Maya's glimpses! Die before death and you will live forever!"[52]

In the meantime, near the end of April Baba had begun to spend more time at Nasik, sometimes returning unexpectedly to offer discourses or simply sit in silent communion with the Westerners. Kitty began to suspect that He was spending more time with them because He was preparing to close the ashram, and, indeed, in mid-May He called a meeting to announce that their stay in Nasik was coming to an end.

By now, the Westerners were becoming painfully familiar with the manner in which Baba accomplished His work. Kitty noted in a "farewell letter" published in the June 1937 issue of the *Meher Gazette*:*

> This sudden change of plan will astound the outside world, but not Meher Baba's close disciples who know His way of working. Just as soon as the work has been done in one particular spot—bang goes the hammer!—the building is dissolved. The work and planning of previous months all go to the wind and a fresh plan is started in fresh surroundings. Baba does not say this in so many words, but we in the midst of it feel it is so. It is all illusion anyway, so why become attached to it? What

* The *Meher Gazette* was a bimonthly journal for Baba's Eastern followers. It was published in Madras.

> does it all matter? What matters is the change it has worked on those participating in it while it lasted.
>
> … It is just this opportunity of living in such close contact with a Master like Meher Baba as we have been privileged to do these past months that has taught us so much.
>
> It was Baba's Love that brought us to India and it is His Love again that now sends us back to the West to make preparations for the next phase of His activity there. So it is "goodbye" to India for the present.[53]

Despite all the challenges, everyone who participated in the Nasik experience appreciated what a profound gift it was to have spent those six months with Baba. Kitty observed that, while being with Baba at Nasik was like being caught "safely in his 'net,'" the Westerners' time there was also "one of the most turbulent periods of our entire sojourn with Baba. To come face-to-face with the illusory ego-mind and the breaking down of it, proved to be a far more agonizing and disrupting process than the building-up which followed. Baba, with love and kindness and infinite patience, brought to the surface fears and phobias that had lain in the unexplored recesses of the mind since aeons."[54]

Kitty summed up their experience thus: "Our first visit to India in March of 1933 had been a dream of paradise … with Baba, our Friend and constant companion. The Nasik visit on the other hand, from beginning to end was a training in discipleship, a different period with Baba still our Friend but so much more—our spiritual guide and Master!"[55]

AN ASHRAM ON THE RIVIERA

Following the disbandment of Meher Retreat, none of the Westerners wanted to return home, so the idea was put forth to establish another ashram, perhaps in Portofino, Italy, where some of them had stayed with Baba during the summer of 1933. Instead, Baba

decided to shift to Cannes, on the French Riviera. He also spoke with the Eastern women about His plan to shift to Cannes, but although they sorely missed Him during His many visits to the West, they had no interest in accompanying Him. Now, He not only informed them of His plans to travel to France, He told them that they would be coming with Him. Naja summed up everyone's apprehensions when she recalled, "We were afraid…. We all said, 'Baba, we are happy here. You go and do your work. We will stay here.'" "No," Baba insisted. "I have to take you for my work. Don't you want to help me?" As there was no appropriate response to that question except "Yes, Baba, of course we do," the women resigned themselves to the prospect of leaving India for the first time in their lives. Mehera's somewhat elliptical conclusion was that "we were glad and happy about the trip with Baba, but we were not that eager or excited to go."[56] Clearly, this experience would entail a new level of spiritual training for the Easterners. When the Western women had come to India in 1933, the Easterners had had the advantage of meeting with them in their home environment. Now they would be the ones negotiating unfamiliar territory.

At the beginning of June Baba sent Nadine to Venice to carry out some unspecified work for Him in Italy. He ordered some of the remaining Westerners to return to London, promising to call them to Cannes when He arrived there. They sailed on the S.S. *Rawalpindi*, and Baba ordered Kitty to accompany them as far as Marseilles, where she would disembark to travel directly to Cannes to locate accommodations. Despite Baba's assurances that He was planning to call the group back together soon, the impending separation must have conjured the fear that He could change His mind at any moment: With Baba in charge of plans, nothing was a certainty. Kitty fretted that, in any case, they were all on probation for their inability to live harmoniously at Nasik and that the privilege of being with Him could be revoked at any time.

Baba departed Meherabad on Thursday, July 29, 1937, accompanied by Mehera, Mani, Naja, Khorshed, Soonamasi, and Walu

(Kaku stayed behind). Meeting them in Bombay were Elizabeth, Norina, Nonny, and Rano, as well as Kippy. Baba made arrangements for Elizabeth's Ford to be driven to Bombay to be taken onboard the ship as well. Baba's entourage embarked from Bombay on July 31 for a thirteen-day voyage on the S.S. *Strathnaver*.

Once on board, Baba ordered the Easterners to remain in strict seclusion and He went to great lengths to ensure their privacy. Chanji had booked their accommodations on the lowest level in the stern of the ship, directly above the engine and propellers, a location that virtually guaranteed their privacy but which was also the noisiest on the boat. Baba made Kitty responsible for meals and housekeeping arrangements. She requested that only stewardesses attend the women and asked for vegetarian meals to be served in their cabins.

To make matters worse, monsoon season had arrived, bringing driving rain and winds that tossed the ship in heavy seas. Mani noted succinctly in her diary• the day after leaving port: "Mehera seasick and miserable."[57] When Norina told Baba that Mehera was too nauseous to keep anything in her stomach, He ordered fresh orange juice to feed her by the teaspoon, but despite His tender care Mehera said afterward, "It was such an ordeal … I didn't know if it was day or night. It was terrible."[58]

• Among all the diaries preserved in the Archives at Meherabad, none shed more light on life with Baba than those maintained by His sister Mani, documenting the women's day-to-day lives and their travels, as well as Baba's discourses and informal talks with them over the course of many years. Mani's diaries served as an invaluable primary resource for *Lord Meher*, *Mehera–Meher*, and *The Joyous Path*.

In addition to Kitty's precautions, Baba ordered Rano and Norina to take turns sitting outside the door to Mehera's cabin to ensure that no stewards could accidentally enter. When Rano also became seasick and one of the stewardesses recommended a tablespoon full of Worcestershire Sauce to quell her nausea, Baba ordered her to "drink it down."[59] Rano, who had now been with Baba for more than three years, marked *this* order as the official beginning of her spiritual training. Fortunately, the stormy weather subsided as they entered the Red Sea and Suez Canal, their ship "gliding like a bird," Mani recorded, "on the strip of sky-blue water."[60]

Meanwhile, Japanese Imperialist troops had invaded China on July 7, 1937. The news became increasingly dire, and on August 10 Baba made a series of observations about what would soon transpire, banging His fists together in His gesture for discord. He declared that when Russia joined the fray: "There will be a great war again."[61] By now the ship had entered the Mediterranean and was just passing the island of Sicily, where Mussolini was expected to arrive, also by boat that same day, to review troops and assess Italy's military might. Baba further stated that this crossing of paths was no coincidence.

Baba's party disembarked at Marseilles on August 13 and boarded a train for Cannes. They went directly to their accommodations as soon as they arrived. The seaside resort of Cannes was renowned for its grand villas, and the property that Kitty had chosen for the women was called Shelley House.* Mani described it as "an ancient fairytale house full of mysterious echoes and antique furniture and a spacious garden."[62] Although the women were happy to remain where they were, Baba was not pleased with the property because it did not afford the Easterners enough privacy, so He asked Norina to locate more suitable housing. Mani described Baba's princess as having "a personality that could charm and melt a stone," and Norina used her social contacts in Cannes to quickly identify a property called Villa Caldana that Baba found much more pleasing.[63] The imposing three-story house was situated on a terraced hillside, surrounded by gardens and protected from prying eyes. It was elegant but sparsely furnished, with spacious rooms, a marble staircase, and a roof-top terrace that afforded breathtaking views of sunbathers strolling on the beach by day and the lights of Cannes by night. Elizabeth, Norina, Kitty, and Rano moved into Villa Caldana with the Easterners. The remaining Westerners moved into a second villa, called Capo di Monte. A third villa was rented for the men as well as those devotees who would be coming from the West for short visits.

* On page 199 of *Love Alone Prevails*, Kitty mistakenly called the property Capo di Monte.

Kitty also had been tasked with locating two maids and having them brought from England, but she was only able to identify one who was suitable. Baba cabled Hedi Mertens in Zurich to ask if her daughter Annakatharina might be available, but as Annakatharina had no housekeeping experience, Hedi suggested Irene Billo. It was Irene to whom Baba had referred during His visit to Zurich in 1936, when He remarked that someone He had been expecting had not come. Irene had no more housekeeping experience than Annakatharina, but it was she who was meant to be joining Him.

Irene found her entry into ashram life daunting. Now at twenty-one years of age, she was the youngest Westerner, and it would be some time before she learned the requisite lessons that would ensure the other women's respect. Because Baba had brought her to Cannes on the pretext of working as a maid, some of the older women (including, surprisingly, Elizabeth) treated her as if she were simply a servant, but Baba began to draw her closer immediately, assigning her the enviable task of cleaning and tidying His room. After she had been in Cannes for a period of time, she wondered aloud one day if she might be invited to come to India. Her wish would come true when she became the ninth Western woman to be invited to join the First Blue Bus Tour.

Despite the holiday surroundings, Baba's sojourn in Cannes was no vacation. In his column for the first issue of the *Meher Baba Journal*, published in November 1938, Chanji observed, "A remarkable peculiarity of Baba's free method to work is the fact that wherever He moves, He takes with Him His spiritual 'baggage' which does not consist of possessions but of disciples—those working elements who are trained to live everywhere, in all situations, as impersonal mediums of His directing will."[64]

When it came to unpacking the spiritual baggage of His devotees, Baba was relentless. By bringing the Easterners with Him He ensured that they would be continually challenged by their new surroundings. When the women assembled for their first meal in the dining room, the

first Westerner to pick up her fork was left-handed, so the Easterners followed suit—including those who were right-handed. Making matters worse, they were served Western food—unseasoned boiled cauliflower and other blandly prepared vegetables. When confronted with a dish of spaghetti, Soonamasi carefully pulled a single strand from the serving dish because she had no clue as to how she was supposed to eat it. Mani later quipped, "We were practically starved in Cannes because of this." On the other hand, Walu, who usually did not take well to change of any kind, "adjusted beautifully."[65]

The Westerners faced their own challenges. Learning that Rano was spending what He deemed too much time with her mother at the Westerners' villa, Baba told her she could only spend twenty minutes there each day. "Poor Nonny," Rano later recalled, "she had to make a list of all the things she had to say to me, so she could get it all in within 20 minutes," and when Nonny protested the short visits, Rano replied with one word: "Orders."[66] Baba also began having Rano awakened from sound sleep several times each night to come to His room so that He could ask her to do something that easily could have waited until morning. Far from being annoyed, Rano found it amusing; only later did she realize that He was testing and preparing her for a time when she would serve as His night watchperson.

As in Nasik, the women were assigned duties. In addition to her housekeeping responsibilities, Kitty gave Mehera piano lessons and taught Mani to type and take shorthand. Irene, who was an accomplished seamstress, offered dressmaking classes for the Easterners. Rano continued her work on *The Ten Circles*. But despite their preoccupation with the tasks Baba had assigned them, some of the women still found opportunity for discord. Baba had to admonish the Westerners, reminding them: "Harmony is the basis of life, living in a group, working for and living with Me and helping in My work. By following your personal feelings of likes and dislikes, the atmosphere essential for My work is disturbed."[67]



On September 19 Baba departed Cannes in Elizabeth's Ford, accompanied by Mehera, Mani, Khorshed, Naja, and Kitty. Elizabeth drove. They were bound for Paris, where they would spend two days sightseeing. (Soonamasi and Walu also came but traveled by rail.) The Easterners brought their best saris to wear when they visited the Eiffel Tower. They also went boating on the Seine and made a hurried visit to the International Exposition of Art and Technology in Modern Life that had drawn international interest, thus affording Baba the opportunity to accomplish some Universal work with the crowds of people who had flocked to the city for the exposition. They left Paris on the twenty-second, reaching Cannes the next day.

Cannes was the destination of choice for affluent international travelers during the 1937 season as they enjoyed what might well be one of their last flings before the outbreak of war; in keeping with its cosmopolitan atmosphere, Baba called devotees from all over Europe and America to have His darshan. Margaret Craske arrived from London



Baba, seated in a chaise lounge (the Western equivalent of a *gaadi*), surrounded by His gopis, Cannes, 1937

on August 26 for a short stay, and she would come back again in October. Helen Dahm came from Zurich, joining the others on the twenty-seventh. Also called were Hedi, Walter, and Annakatharina Mertens. They drove to Cannes in their automobile, which Baba would requisition for the women's sightseeing excursions.

In addition to her other responsibilities, Kitty corresponded with many of Baba's English lovers as they awaited their call to Cannes. Among them was William Donkin, a young English medical student who had first met Baba in 1933. Prior to Donkin's visit to Cannes, Kitty wrote to him, asking, "What are you thinking about it all? Are not Baba's ways strange? I have never felt Him work so intensely as He is doing now. Sometimes I wonder if I can stand it; but of course one can, as Baba never gives you more than you can stand." When Kitty sent him the long-awaited invitation, Donkin replied to Baba, "1,000 thanks—You're a peach, to say the least of it. How I am longing to see Your … beautiful smile again. If You the man are so marvellous, how much more unbelievable must the Infinite

You be?"[68] Donkin would serve as one of the drivers of the Blue Bus during the second and third tours.

Although Baba had originally planned to stay in Cannes for a year, He decided in late October to close down the ashram and return to India. This came as a great shock, not the least because several of the mandali had just brought Mohammed,• one of Baba's *masts*, from Meherabad at great effort and expense. Chanji noted in his dairy, "B. [Baba] prepares the group for the separation that is approaching," and the following day he added, "B. announces to the group of His departure on 3rd Nov.—It's a bolt out of the blue for all, for nobody expected so soon a departure."[69]

Baba spent His last days in Cannes working in seclusion with Mohammed. Alluding to the intensifying relationship between His work with the *mast* and His management of the impending conflict in Europe, Baba explained, "My work is uppermost. Mohammed represents Germany, so you can imagine the significance of his coming here to France and the importance of My work with him at this point in time." Less than a year later, on September 30, 1938, British Prime Minister Lord Neville Chamberlain* would sign the Munich Agreement in an effort to placate Hitler and Mussolini, a decision that Baba would roundly condemn to failure. Baba went on to say that Germany was experiencing a "mass psychosis" as Hitler seized more and more power, adding that the likelihood of war was becoming greater with each passing day.[70]

Baba began to feel unwell at this time, as did several of the women, their illnesses perhaps precipitated by the amplification of His

• Tukaram Chawan was a Hindu potter whose spiritual yearning led him to abandon his home and work. He traveled to Bombay where he came to be called Mohammed by the Muslims who recognized him to be a saintly soul. The mandali discovered Mohammed in 1936, wandering the streets of the city, and they brought him to the *mast* ashram at Rahuri. Baba said he was trapped between the third and fourth spiritual planes and He pushed Mohammed from the third to the fifth plane. Of all the God-intoxicated souls with whom Baba worked, Mohammed had the longest contact with His beloved "Dada." He resided at Meherabad until his death on June 17, 2003; he is buried adjacent to the mandali in the men's cemetery at Lower Meherabad. *The Wayfarers* documents Mohammed as having been the first of Baba's five favorite *masts*.

* Lord Neville Chamberlain served as British Prime Minister from May 1937 until May 1940. He was a member of the Conservative Party, and his policy of appeasement was very popular with the British public, whose memories of WWI were still painfully vivid and who had no wish to go to war with Germany again.

work as the world was poised on the brink of war. "A Perfect Master who has to take upon himself the burdens of the world, to absorb them," He explained, "must necessarily have physical reactions and consequently must suffer physically like an ordinary human being."[71]

As He prepared for the closure of the Cannes ashram, Baba invited Kitty and Norina to return to Meherabad with Him. Kitty later wrote, "Sincerely looking back, I just don't know how I ever passed the tests sufficiently during these four months in Cannes to be asked by Baba to return to India with Him."[72]

After keeping Rano in suspense until the last moment, Baba asked her to accompany Him to India as well. Rano recalled her first visits to Meherabad during her stay at Nasik: "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 was impossible. A few days after that visit, back at Nasik, Baba called us individually to ask how we liked Meherabad. When he asked me, I replied, 'Oh, Baba, it is very nice, but not for me.'" Now, however, when Baba asked her if she would like to come with Him to live at Meherabad, she fervently replied, "Would I!" A few days passed before she realized the implications of her response: "I —who had been brought up in New York City and who loved to travel— had signed on to live a life of utmost simplicity, cloistered on a semi-desert hill six miles from an Indian town on the Deccan Plateau." Thinking back to her first visit to Meherabad, she wondered, "What ever happened to 'not for me?'"[73]

Before leaving Cannes, Baba sent Nonny and Elizabeth home to America for four months but promised to call them to Meherabad in the spring. He sent Irene back to Switzerland, also with a promise to call her. Nadine was sent to Switzerland as well, before returning to America. On November 2, He departed for the port of Marseilles to sail for Bombay accompanied by the six Easterners, three of the men, and the three Westerners. Nonny and Elizabeth traveled with them as far as the docks.

This time Chanji booked the best accommodations the ship had to offer, on a private top deck far from the grinding engines. It was the maiden voyage of the S.S. *Circassia*, whose name appears on a lifesaver in the background of a photograph of Baba taken on board the ship. Nattily dressed in a white, double-breasted Western suit and French beret, He looked for all the world like a seasoned European vacationer returning home from the casinos—disregarding the fact that He was sailing in the opposite direction.

Once on board the Easterners continued their seclusion, and, as if to give the Westerners a taste of what was to come, Baba ordered them to adhere to a strict schedule as well: "out of bed at 6 a.m., breakfast at 7:30, lunch at 11:30, tea at 3 p.m., dinner at 6 p.m. and bed at 9 p.m."[74] But they were well fed: Rano recalled that their meal trays were so laden with food that the Westerners had to help the stewardesses deliver them to everyone's cabins.

Baba also permitted Norina to arrange an early Christmas treat: a festive non-veg feast of roast turkey with all the trimmings, followed by baked Alaska and a traditional king cake into which she had asked the pastry chef to bake a gold ring for Baba. Baba ordered a fast the following day. "The poor stewardess was quite frantic," Rano recalled. "She wanted to feed us fruit juice. She wanted to give us little tidbits. 'Are you sure you'll be able to be all right? You'll last the day?' We kept saying we didn't want anything except tea twice a day and nothing else … but she was really most upset."[75] Rano would later observe that life with the Master was either feast or famine, nothing in between.

POVERTY, PURITY, OBEDIENCE, AND SURRENDER

The S.S. *Circassia* docked at Bombay on November 20, 1937. Taken off the ship were seventy-five pieces of luggage and Elizabeth's Ford. Mehera, Mani, Naja, and Khorshed returned to Meherabad with Baba. Kitty,

Norina, and Rano traveled to Poona with Padri* (one of Baba's mandali), accompanied by Soonamasi and Walu. There they visited with Shireenmai and were taken to see Pumpkin House, where Baba spent His childhood, as well as other sites important to His life and work. By the time the women reached Meherabad late that evening they found Baba impatiently waiting to escort them to their new quarters in the west room of the Water Tank Building on the Hill, displeased that they had taken so long to arrive.

"Oil lantern in hand," Rano recalled, "I walked into the west room of the converted military water tank on the Hill. The room was about 40 feet long and 15 feet wide with a very high ceiling…. When I went to the far corner of the west room that first night, I found a spring bed [and] a wooden bench. This was home. As Baba had promised, all the luxuries of the Nasik ashram were now gone."[76] Rano went on to observe, however, "By [this] time we didn't care whether we had all those things or didn't have them."[77] Also missing were the lavish appointments of a grand villa on the French Riviera, but Kitty experienced a deep sense of wonder and gratitude, recalling, "Baba pointed to the table nearby. On it was a mirror, the only one in the room! I noticed that it had a slight crack in it, but what of it! Above all, I noticed with what love Baba pointed it out to me. A 'something extra' and it was in my corner. I never forgot this special touch on the first evening of a new period in our life in Baba's ashram."[78] Before leaving Cannes Baba had warned the three Westerners that their lives were about to become more challenging than anything they had previously experienced. "Baba told us no more kisses…. Every day when we were with Baba in the West, He'd have us stand in a 'round ring' and He'd come around and kiss each one of us on the cheek. Baba made it clear that it wouldn't happen anymore once we were on the Hill."[79]

* Faredoon Naoroji Driver (November 29, 1903–March 18, 1982) was Mehera's cousin. He had first met Baba in 1922. Because he was tall and thin and had a solemn demeanor, he reminded Baba of a priest or *padre*, and Baba nicknamed him Padri.

In Meherabad, at the beating heart of Meher Baba's work, a new depth of surrender was called for. The women awoke at 5:00 AM for tea that was served half an hour later. Rano, a late sleeper, wandered bleary-eyed into the kitchen the first morning. Baba gestured sweetly to her, "Listen to the kettle sing!"[80] Rano thought to herself, "What is this? I've been called to listen to a kettle boil?" Reading her exasperated expression, Baba spelled out on the alphabet board, "It is not the fact of the kettle's singing that is of importance, but that I thought of you—that I thought to call you."[81]

Feeling "very small and very contrite," Rano realized that she had such "grand ideas about being on Meherabad Hill with Baba … where perfection lay," and how she had believed that "nothing would go amiss, there would be no angry words, no misunderstandings in an atmosphere like that with Baba." Although she said that she had hardly ever cried before coming to Baba, she ran to Him in tears one day and cast herself into His arms, sobbing, "'Oh, Baba, everything's spoiled, everything's spoiled!' He calmed me down, and I soon realized that the Hill was a miniature of the world and these things had to happen, even as they did out in the world. I couldn't expect that it was just going to be beautiful and wonderful…. Baba didn't have to say anything to me, but if I did something that disappointed Him, all He had to do was give me one look. That look so annihilated me that I would weep for hours." With the wisdom of hindsight Rano later observed, "This incident had to happen at the beginning of my life at Meherabad or I would have just gone on in a rosy haze, oblivious to the opportunities to change the very core of my life."[82]

Kitty also had many lessons in store. Baba wanted both groups, Eastern and Western, to work together in the household. Baba assigned her kitchen duty under Naja's tutelage: Kitty taught Naja the basics of English, and Naja taught Kitty the basics of Indian cooking.* One day, after

* Kitty was no novice in an Indian kitchen. She recalled how, "in the 1930s, after she'd met Baba … she felt drawn to learn Indian cooking. She went to an Indian restaurant in Piccadilly and asked the family who ran it to teach her. They agreed," and later, "they moved the lessons to their home, and after each session, they'd eat all the results together." (*Dilruba Days*, 124)

long hours spent learning how to make what Naja deemed a proper *chapati*, Kitty thought to herself, "I haven't come to India for this! I can do such work at home. I've come to be with Baba, but I hardly see Him." That evening after dinner, Baba suddenly remarked, "Whatever work I ask you to do is My work, and she who does it according to My wish is performing the greatest penance! Compared to it, meditation, seclusion, fasts and austerities are nothing!"[83] Although all the women were present, Kitty felt as if He had been speaking directly to her.

Rano continued her work on *The Ten Circles* and other materials illustrating Baba's teachings and explanations. Baba assigned Norina various writing projects. "It was Baba who decided what our work or study should be," Kitty observed, "for He always had a purpose behind what He asked us to do. Knowledge and experience possessed by one must be contributed for the benefit of the community, a true communal life in which all shared. Whatever your work, Baba never ceased to impress upon you that all work was His work, whether done personally for Him or for the benefit of all."[84]

The Westerners' experience of life on Meherabad Hill was but a taste of that to which the Easterners had long been accustomed. At the same time that He had been establishing and strengthening His contacts with the Westerners, Baba also continued to direct the spiritual training of the women residing in His ashram. Before moving to Nasik in 1929, the women had lived at Lower Meherabad, where they had daily, albeit limited, contact with the men mandali. But when they returned to Meherabad at the end of 1933 and Baba accommodated them on the Hill, His orders of restriction became much more rigorous. Mani enumerated the conditions of their lives with stark clarity: "poverty, purity, obedience, and surrender." She described the following three and a half years the women spent sequestered on the Hill as "absolute, cloistered life."[85]

Beginning in 1933, many of Baba's orders centered on Mehera and her safekeeping. She was completely sheltered from any contact with men other than Himself, and no direct references to men were

to be made in her presence. Mani was ordered to accompany her at all times. Mehera was not allowed to write or read (although Baba did make an exception for Mani's comic books). "Baba kept the women mandali completely secluded, most of all for Mehera's sake. It was necessary to keep Mehera secluded for Baba's inner work with creation. Mehera was the Queen of the Garden and her example of service to the Beloved nourished the other [flowers] in the Garden."[86]

Behind Baba's invitation to the first Westerners to join Mehera on the Hill was the intention for them to come into direct, daily contact with her pure energy, but the three women were astonished at the level of obedience they observed in all their Eastern sisters. As Kitty later recalled, "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."[87]

Kitty, Norina, and Rano were now subject to many of the same orders to which Mehera had been adhering for years: *no* letter writing (other than that ordered by Baba), *no* reading, *no* leaving the compound, *no* contacts with anyone except for Baba and the other women—nothing to distract them from what Kitty called "the One Source—Him."[88] Additionally, Baba now ordered the three Westerners never to mention any of the other women in their infrequent conversations with the men: Even the Easterners' names were in seclusion. But seclusion did not equate in any way with loneliness. "We were rarely alone," Kitty added, "and for Westerners who had lived independent lives—well—it was something new!"[89]

Kitty later observed, "In the West, Baba accepted our love and work for Him without pointing out defects of selfishness and other egotistical traits. Now we were to learn to express our love as Baba wanted, in selfless, unattached service done for the sake of love….

No one can realize how much we did have of Baba's personal supervision, interest and care in the early years of training in [the] Meherabad ashram. Surely He was day by day giving us the example by which we were to remold our own lives: an example of Love in daily action."[90]

Kitty also recalled with special fondness the many celebrations the women shared with Baba:

> Every year brought its special treasure of festivals and feast days: Zoroaster's birthday, Krishna's birthday, Christmas, the Parsi New Year, and Divali. All were celebrated according to custom—each with its particular 'dainty' to be made and eaten—sweets made of coconut, condensed milk and crushed wheat with nutmeg, cardamom and cloves being used lavishly….
>
> Baba shared with us in all these joyous occasions and would sometimes sit with us while we made preparations. We made most of the decorations ourselves—crackers, lanterns and such—keeping our minds on Baba throughout, our real treasure and attachment to the work being done to please Him.[91]

Interspersed with these celebrations were the everyday diversions that Baba provided. One day He escorted the women to Happy Valley for a picnic near the location of what would later become His compound at Meherazad, where they enjoyed a packed lunch and a walk in the hills.* Baba, Mehera, and a few of the other women rode in Elizabeth's Ford, chauffeured by Mehera's sister Freiny, who was visiting at the time. Driving a second automobile was seventeen-year-old Katie Irani, whose

* "On 30 April 1923, Baba took a long hike with the mandali to a place called Happy Valley, situated fourteen miles to the north of Ahmednagar. Once a forest area, legend has it that during Lord Ram's wanderings in exile, he, Sita and Laxman had stayed at Happy Valley for some time. The legend says that Sita was either thirsty or wanted to bathe but there was no water nearby, so Ram shot an arrow into the rocks and a stream of water began to pour out." (*Lord Meher*, 410)

family was devoted to Baba. Katie had first met Baba when she was a child, but now, she said, "This was my first experience of spending time with Baba since childhood, and from then on I longed to stay permanently with the women mandali."[92] Her wish would be granted when Baba later invited her to join the First Blue Bus Tour in Hyderabad.

Baba balanced the time He spent with the women with His work at Lower Meherabad, which included caring for the inmates of the *mast* ashram. He even arranged for the women to observe Him at His labors. "In early March," Kitty recalled, "Baba took us down the Hill to see His way of working with the madmen. First He cleaned the latrines—carrying the refuse Himself outside the compound. Then, donning a barber's apron, each day Baba would shave and cut the hair of one man and then bathe six men from head to foot. All this apart from their daily cooking, feeding and humoring—and in the intense heat. We saw Mohammed again; how fond Baba was of him!"[93] These continuing opportunities for the women to witness Baba engaging with the *masts* laid the foundation for what was to come, when this aspect of His work would take Him away from them for hours and days on end throughout the Blue Bus Tours.

Baba also made short but frequent journeys to offer darshan to His lovers in other parts of India. In December 1937 He embarked on a nine-day trip to Talegaon, Bombay, Navsari, and Nagpur, accompanied by Norina and three of the men.* During this tour Baba cemented previous contacts with seven other Eastern devotees who would participate in the Blue Bus Tours. The first was Mani Desai of Navsari. She was so determined to be His that she traveled by rail from Navsari to see Baba twice, pleading to be allowed to join the women's ashram. And although Baba sent her back home both times He said he would call her, but she had to promise to come immediately when He did.

* Norina chronicled the journey in a six-part series of articles entitled "Shri Meher Baba's Tour of Nine Days through Central India" in the *Meher Baba Journal* 1 (nos. 1–6).

The other six devotees were the Jessawala family of Nagpur—father Byramshaw (affectionately called Pappa), mother Gaimai, and their four children: Eruch, Mani, Meheru (young adults), and Meherwan (age seven). They had first met Baba at Christmastime in 1925, and He had been a guest in their home many times. The four women would be the last Easterners to be called to Meherabad. Eruch would help drive the bus, Meherwan would join the first tour just three weeks after it began, and Pappa would assist Baba in His search for *masts*.

On February 15, 1938, Elizabeth arrived from America, accompanied by Kippy. Two days after she landed, Nonny arrived from New York. It was the first time she had sailed on her own, and when Rano asked if she had had a good voyage, Nonny quipped, "I found out you've been crimping my style!"[94] Adi K.* (another of the mandali) and Chanji delivered them to Meherabad just in time for Baba's forty-fourth birthday, which fell on Sunday, February 20, 1938, according to the Zoroastrian calendar. Baba wore a silk robe beneath the white coat that Irene had hand-tailored for Him, as well as the crown Mehera had made for Him the previous year. Over five hundred lovers from all over India attended the three-day observance, and Baba arranged for one hundred of the women to stay at Upper Meherabad during the celebration. Mehera decorated the area outside Baba's Tin Cabin with *rangoli* (patterns made with colored chalk). Only twenty-five women could be accommodated inside the dormitories. Among those invited were Gaimai, Mani, and Meheru Jessawala. Also staying at Upper Meherabad at Baba's invitation were two sisters with close connections to Him: Arnavaz and Nargis Dadachanji.† After this visit, Baba began to invite them to come and

* Ardeshir Kaikhushru Irani (September 4, 1903–March 4, 1980) came to Baba through Upasni Maharaj. Known as Adi K. or Adi Sr. to distinguish him from Baba's younger brother of the same name, he served as Baba's secretary following Chanji's death in 1944. The papers he collected now comprise the AKI (Adi K. Irani) Collection preserved in the Avatar Meher Baba Trust Archives Document Collection in Meherabad, India.

† Arnavaz Dadachanji (March 15, 1918–February 18, 2009) and her younger sister Nargis were the daughters of Naoroji Dadachanji, brother of Baba's secretary Chanji. Like Katie, Arnavaz hoped to join Mehera and the other women permanently, but Baba had a different destiny in mind for her—marriage—and it would be many years before her wish was fulfilled.

stay in the women's ashram during their school holidays, and Arnavaz would be called intermittently throughout the tours.

The celebration began on Sunday, February 20, with the washing of Baba's feet in saffron-infused milk, followed by speeches, *qawaali* singing, and a darshan program. Baba provided a feast for five thousand villagers the following day and distributed five thousand ladoos as His prasad. Speeches notwithstanding, Chanji described the celebration as "characteristic for its cosmopolitan atmosphere and observance devoid of ceremonial formalities, but spontaneous and rare in expression of true Love between the Master and His devotees, forming a bond so close, one can only qualify it as that of a beloved father with his children."[95] On Monday, Baba was feted with a "Love feast" by the women on the Hill.[96]

In late February Baba initiated a series of construction projects at Upper Meherabad. They included the addition of a dome on the crypt that would become His tomb, as well as a new structure that would function as a free hospital and ten-bed maternity ward to serve the impoverished Arangaon villagers. Baba also expanded accommodations for the women by adding a second story to the Water Tank building. The projects, which brought with them many construction workers and much noise, made it impossible for the women to remain properly secluded. So, on March 14, He shifted the women to the hill station of Panchgani, located in a scenic region of lush evergreen forests about 130 miles southwest of Meherabad. At an altitude of five thousand feet, Panchgani promised "cool and bracing" temperatures as the days became warmer, Chanji observed, adding, "The tropical heat of 'Meherabad' during summer would have been unbearable for the Westerners and might have created physical complications, detrimental to the spiritual progress which is the main objective of their coming to India to live with Baba."[97]

Accompanying Baba to Panchgani were Mehera, Mani, Naja, Khorshed, Walu, Soonamasi, Shireenmai, Gulmai, Kitty, Norina, Rano, Nonny, Elizabeth, and Kippy. Also traveling with Him were several of the men, who were escorting Mohammed. They settled into four

bungalows on a hill overlooking Tiger Valley, not far from the cave where Baba had previously spent six days in seclusion in 1930. "The older members are in one," Kitty recalled, "the girls and Western group are in another, Baba is in another, and the boys are across the road."[98] The women's bungalow was called *Dilkhusha* (Heart's Happiness) and its glass-enclosed verandah overlooked the Krishna River valley. After assigning bedrooms to the women—a practice He would insist upon throughout the Blue Bus Tours—Baba settled into a tiny storeroom adjacent to the kitchen.

Baba instructed the women to meditate for a specified period of time each day while He sat in seclusion, worked with Mohammed, or gave darshan for His local lovers. Kitty captured the quiet rhythm of the women's days in Panchgani: "Each has her morning filled up with special work: Rano painting, I cooking, Nonny typing, and Elizabeth and Norina writing. Afternoons we rest till 2:30 p.m. when Baba calls us all for thirty minutes. Then tea at 3:00 and after that we do what we like till Baba returns at 5:30 p.m. for a walk."[99] The women found the air "fresh, cool and invigorating"—a far cry from sweaty days and sweltering nights at Meherabad, but the weather was unseasonably stormy: Kitty soon observed, "Weather, wherever Baba is, behaves strangely."[100]

When Naja contracted hepatitis it fell to Kitty to prepare all the meals for the group. Not yet accustomed to feeding so many people, she sometimes cooked too much food. Baba had instructed Naja and Kitty never to waste anything that was left at the end of a meal, but there was no refrigeration for leftovers. If Kitty inadvertently prepared more food than could be consumed at one sitting, she would drink the leftover *dal* and eat the rice and vegetables herself because she had been ordered not to throw them away.* It was at this time that Baba ceased to accommodate the Westerners' tastes in food so that they might

* In 1943 Mehera observed Kitty finishing an uneaten batch of *bhujias*: "For heaven's sake, Kitty, what are you doing? You will die." "I will die, but die obeying," Kitty replied. When Mehera told Baba what Kitty was doing He found it amusing, but He also told her not to eat the leftovers any more. (*Lord Meher*, 2364–65)

become accustomed to eating the spicier dishes that the Easterners enjoyed—"might" being the operative word in this case. Some of the women would never adjust, and although they appreciated the skill and loving attention that went into the preparation of their meals, their digestive systems would continue to balk at the searing spices, with the unfortunate attendant results.

Despite His preoccupation with work, Baba took many opportunities to offer discourses on the need for obedience and harmony, although it might be more accurate to observe that the women obliged Him—albeit inadvertently—with ample opportunity for such instruction. On Easter Sunday Kitty incurred yet another unforgettable lesson about obedience when she went off to attend the service at a nearby Christian church without asking permission, provoking a scorching lecture from Baba that left her in tears.

While in Panchgani, Norina and Elizabeth initiated discussions with Baba about the possibility of establishing a Universal Spiritual Center in India, in a central location from which He could spread His message and where both Eastern and Western devotees representing all castes and creeds could come to study. The women made it clear that they were thinking of those who would come in the future. Baba acknowledged their selflessness, saying, "Yes, I know. You are not thinking of yourselves…. You do not like the show and regular routine of ceremonies, et cetera, as in other ashrams, and only wish to be near and with Me."[101] But their selflessness did not extend to the conflicting visions the two women had for the center. Norina, as might be predicted, desired a grand facade, while Elizabeth wanted something on a more realistic scale. When their disagreement came to Baba's attention He suggested that Norina slow down a bit and that Elizabeth speed up so that they might find common ground.

It was also at this time that Baba renewed His contact with the Dewan (Governor) of the Princely State of Mysore, Sir Mirza

Ismail,* whom He had first met in 1936. On April 17 He sent Chanji and Pendu,† another of the mandali, to Mysore City, where Chanji spoke with Sir Mirza about the possibility of establishing a spiritual center near Bangalore. Sir Mirza responded so favorably to Baba's inquiry that he identified several locations for the center, and Baba decided to travel to Bangalore to see them for Himself.

Baba left Panchgani on April 23 accompanied by Norina, Chanji, and Pendu, and although He did not meet with Sir Mirza, He sent Norina and Chanji to speak with him. Baba intimated that He hoped to establish His center in Mysore and left the Dewan with the impression that He would be returning there as soon as March of the following year. Just days after returning to Panchgani, however, Baba sent Chanji back to Mysore for a third time, to inform the Dewan in person that He would not be coming there until March 1939. In actuality, it would not be until August of that year, at the beginning of the Second Blue Bus Tour, that He would fulfill that promise.

Just before leaving Bangalore, Baba had cabled Eruch Jessawala to meet Him in Panchgani. When Eruch arrived from Nagpur on April 29, Baba asked him to bring his parents, sisters, and brother from Nagpur to join Him permanently on August 1. Baba sealed Eruch's promise by asking him to spend one night alone in the Tiger Valley cave. Intrepid Elizabeth asked Baba if she might also spend a night there. He consented to her extraordinary request, locking her in on the evening of May 6. He gave her the key and directed her to stay awake for twelve hours, thinking of Him. He placed His hand on her head and then departed, leaving what she described as a profound stillness in His wake. Near midnight, Elizabeth recalled:

* Dewan Amin-ul-Mulq Sir Mirza Muhammad Ismail (1883–1959) was educated with the Maharaja of Mysore, and the two men later worked closely in governing. Sir Mirza served as Dewan from 1926 until 1940, and his support and assistance would prove invaluable during Baba's eight-month sojourn in Bangalore during the Second Blue Bus Tour.

† Aspandiar R. Irani (August 5, 1903–November 7, 1986) was Baba's cousin and Naja's brother, and he was one of the first men to become devoted to Baba. Baba named him Pendu, for his habit of rocking back and forth like a pendulum when he was sitting in meditation.

> Unexpectedly, a shock-like electricity passed through my body from head to foot, particularly along the spine. It continued in waves of varying currents, and became so strong two or three times that it seemed to lift me, as would a rush of wind. Soon I felt myself swinging into space, the bedding unevenly swaying beneath me. I felt that if only I could remain on it, as on a magic carpet, I would be carried safely. But it rocked so much that I remembered to call out Baba's name, and immediately the "troubled waters" were stilled. Coming out of a daze, I found my arms folded across me, as they cross the arms of the dead. They were so numb that it took a while before I could move them.[102]

Meanwhile, Baba continued to draw Irene closer by having Kitty correspond with her on His behalf. Irene had returned to Zurich from Cannes the previous November, and in April Kitty wrote to extend Baba's official invitation for her to come to India and be prepared to stay for as long as two years. By the end of May Irene had confirmed that she would be coming. Because this was her first trip to India, Kitty suggested the kind of wardrobe she should pack: "Now, about clothes, bring all you have"—risky advice to offer a young woman barely out of her teens! "But cotton dresses will be most useful," she continued, "especially white. Washing is no difficulty. The servants wash every day for us. Early mornings and evenings you may need maybe a warm sweater. But the rest of the day is very warm. Climate is cooler in Bangalore and Mysore, but for eight months, we shall be in Meherabad and wear the simplest of clothes all day. Only on Baba's birthday do we wear anything more elaborate, or in the evening, so don't buy anything special."[103]

Baba and the women departed Panchgani on June 15, but He had to house them temporarily in the Public Works Department

(P.W.D.) bungalow in Ahmednagar since the construction on Meherabad Hill was not yet complete. Mani Desai arrived that same day. Baba named her Mansari—a contraction of her first name and Navsari, the city from which she had come, in order to distinguish her from His sister Mani. Because Naja was still sick, and it was too much to expect Kitty to prepare the increasing numbers of meals by herself, Baba placed Mansari in charge of food preparation for the Easterners, while Kitty saw to the Westerners and Mehera continued to cook His meals. He assigned Rano the task of caring for Naja until she recovered, foreshadowing one of the jobs He would assign her at the beginning of the First Blue Bus Tour.

Nadine, Hedi, Helen, and Irene arrived on June 28, the last of the Westerners who would be invited to join the first tour. They traveled by rail to Venice, where they boarded the S.S. *Conte Verde* for Bombay.• Irene called it "the greatest adventure of our lives, but it was no holiday cruise in the Mediterranean."[104] "We had been asked to come for two years to India," Hedi later recalled. "We were told how simple the life would be and we would be well taken care of…. Helen Dahm had already started complaining on the trip over. We had to laugh…. Irene (Billo) and I were seasick; Nadia (Nadine Tolstoy) and Helen Dahm treated us contemptuously. It was because they felt that spiritual people shouldn't get seasick. That's what Helen Dahm said. But then in India, [Helen] found it wasn't so simple."[105*]

• The *Conte Verde* was a luxurious ten-deck, 2,400-passenger transatlantic liner launched from Genoa, Italy, in 1923. In 1932 she began service between Trieste, Italy, and Shanghai, via Bombay, Colombo, Singapore, and Hong Kong. Baba booked passage on the ship twice, in 1932 and 1933. Nadine, Hedi, Helen, Irene, Norina, Rano, Nonny, Elizabeth, and Kippy also sailed on her. In 1938 the *Conte Verde* began to transport Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria to Shanghai, until Italy allied with Germany in June 1940. She was later seized and put into service by Imperial Japanese forces, bombed, sunk, and raised in 1944, after which she served as a Japanese troopship until she was bombed again in July 1945. Although she was scrapped four years later, the *Conte Verde* was a true veteran of the war.

* Helen had been suffering from depression since the early 1930s and was still grieving the "separation from her life partner of twenty years, art historian Else Strantz." ("Sacred Ground," Avatar Meher Baba Trust, October 1, 2015). Hedi was referring to the bout with colitis to which Helen would succumb near the end of the First Blue Bus Tour.

Further compounding Hedi's seasickness was the fact that she was gravely ill and "wanted to either die or be cured" by traveling to India to be with Baba.[106] "Everybody said, 'How could she travel that way,'" Irene later recalled, "but I think she would have died if she had stayed at home, so if she came and died, it wouldn't have mattered anyhow. She was really ill, she had these colic attacks and most of the time she was in bed."[107]

Helen may not have suffered from seasickness but she had other difficulties to contend with: She was unable to communicate in any language other than Swiss German, and, in any case, the odd, boxy homemade clothes she wore gave the impression that she was a communist and the other passengers would have nothing to do with her.

Irene's experience was unpleasant as well. Curious and outgoing, she quickly made friends with Indian passengers on the lower decks, for which Nadine admonished her to "behave like a European!"[108] Young and attractive, she drew the attention of the first-class officers, who invited her to a dance, and the Italian waiters brought her extra helpings of food at no charge, further antagonizing Helen. "Imagine how Helen felt," Irene recalled, "who had suffered so much—and here is this stupid spoiled girl…. What right has she to come to the Master, there's not this much of spirituality in this girl, she eats double portions, the waiters do everything to please her!" But Irene's empathy had its limits. "Of course I enjoyed it," she added. "I liked it, it was just given to me, I didn't ask for it. She could have asked for a second helping if she wanted it, but they [wouldn't] bring it to her free!" Irene summed up her memory of the voyage in five words: "Whatever I did was wrong."[109]

The older women's continual criticisms took their toll, and as the ship neared Bombay Irene began to have misgivings. She cabled Baba to say that she harbored grave doubts about being able to please Him and thought she should return home. When Norina greeted the women as they disembarked, she delivered Baba's response: "Irene, sorry to say Baba will pay for a first-class return ticket for you, He doesn't want

to see you, you can return on the first boat!"[110] Irene was devastated. Realizing her mistake, she implored Norina to cable Baba, explaining that she had come "only and solely to see Baba, with no expectations, nothing at all, not wanting God-realization … but just to see Baba."[111] He relented, and when Irene arrived at last at Meherabad, He welcomed her with the name Padma, or Padmini.*

Due to a recent wave of illness in the ashram, a few days after Irene's arrival Baba brought a bag of Anacin tablets to the bungalow and began handing out pills to the women, most of whom knew to accept them without question. As Mani observed:

> We didn't care what it was. It could have been poison. We just held out our hands to receive what Baba was giving. Baba was giving something and you put it in your mouth and swallowed it.
>
> When Irene's turn came, being new, she said, "Oh, no, Baba, I never take drugs. I never need them, so I never take them."
>
> Baba simply said, "Oh, you don't?" and went on to the next, as if nothing had happened.
>
> We almost stopped breathing. We were shocked. We gasped, knowing what she was in for.[112]

Irene contracted hepatitis almost immediately, and Baba ordered Rano to nurse her back to health. Many years later Mani spoke of the consequences of Irene's refusal of that seemingly innocuous little pill:

> I tell you, poor Irene had to have so many pills during her six [*sic*] years with Baba for some illness or another. She realized and admitted it later, "I must have had sackfulls of pills, because I told Baba I don't take pills."

* *Padma* means "lotus" in Hindi, and *Padmini* means "She Who Sits on the Lotus," a reference to the goddess Lakshmi and the name of a Rajput princess.

> 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 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 sackfulls of pills later on.[113]

The Westerners experienced their first Silence Day at Meherabad on July 10, 1938. But Silence Day did not preclude Baba from speaking in His accustomed manner via the alphabet board, when He dropped the first hint that change was in the offing, warning the women, "No more pampering after the 18th of October!"[114]

The next day Baba called a meeting with several of the men, to which He also invited Elizabeth, Norina, and Nonny. His intention was to revamp the old *Meher Gazette* into a new monthly publication. [See *News about the Master: A Brief History of the* Meher Baba Journal in Appendix.] He appointed Elizabeth to serve as managing editor, Norina literary editor, and Nonny secretary of the new magazine. The group met again on the fourteenth and decided on a name: the *Meher Baba Journal*. Baba agreed to compose the opening piece in each issue, and His articles would eventually be compiled in the book *Discourses*.[115] Chanji would chronicle Baba's activities in a monthly column, initially entitled, "News about the Master," later amended to "Notes from my Diary." Additional articles about spiritual practices, uplifting essays, poetry, and other contributions were to be solicited from Eastern and Western disciples. The new periodical would allow Baba to continue to communicate regularly with His lovers in the East and West, who would soon share vicariously in His travels throughout India during the tours.

On August 1, 1938, as promised, Eruch Jessawala brought his family to Ahmednagar to join Baba permanently. They were,

Meherwan later recalled, "ripe fruit ready for Baba to pluck."[116] Gaimai and her daughters, Mani and Meheru, joined the women's ashram; eight-year-old Meherwan stayed with Eruch at Lower Meherabad; and Pappa returned to Nagpur on Baba's order to continue his work as an industrial inspector. As the new term had already begun in June, Baba immediately enrolled Meherwan in school.

When Shireenmai came to visit in early September and learned that Baba had called the Jessawalas, she berated Him, asking, "Merog, do you have any sense? Why did you send for such a happy family? They are from a wealthy background. What will these poor dears' condition be here?" Baba replied, "Here they will learn what is happiness and what is sorrow!"[117] To distinguish Mani Jessawala from His sister Mani and from Mani Desai (now called Mansari), He changed her name to Manpur, but it was soon shortened to Manu. He assigned Manu and her sister Meheru the task of cleaning His room every day, a job He seems to have reserved for drawing the newer, younger members of the women's ashram closer to Him. He made Gaimai responsible for nursing Naja, as well as Walu, who also had fallen ill, removing some pressure from Rano so that she could focus on Irene's recovery from hepatitis.

On Thursday, August 25, after numerous construction problems on the Hill had been resolved and the work was complete, Baba moved the women to Upper Meherabad, with its new skyline and rededication of purpose. They arrived from Ahmednagar at precisely 8:00 AM, and keys in hand, Baba led the women up the Hill to let them inspect their new quarters and assign their sleeping arrangements. Only hours previously, at 4:30 AM, had the finishing touches been added. Nadine described the changes and additions to Upper Meherabad in an article she composed for the December 1938 issue of the *Meher Baba Journal:*

> In this ashram, the Meher Retreat of "Meherabad," we witness a microcosm in full function, individually and collectively. Here we see all expression of human nature,



The new upstairs dormitories, Meher Retreat, September 1938. The women hung their beds with shawls and saris for a semblance of privacy.

all needs, all inclinations, all varieties of works done. On the top of the Hill, overlooking the wide horizon, in the center of a vast circle of space, stands the new building, interesting in its symbolic simplicity of balance and unity—the Meher Retreat. The high, white tower in the center bears the insignia of all spirituality—"*Mastery in Servitude*." Being situated on a hill it gives a wonderful feeling of floating in vastness of pure sky and space; only the ethereal line of distant mountains on the horizon gently breaks the fascinating monotony of landscape.[118]

Mehera, Mani, Khorshed, Naja, Soonamasi, and Walu moved back into the east room on the ground floor of what had once been the Water Tank building, now called Meher Retreat. Gaimai settled into the west room with Manu and Meheru. Kaku continued to reside at Lower Meherabad near her son Vishnu.

The nine Westerners settled into their new dormitory on the upper floor. Joining them was Mansari, who had difficulty getting along with the other Easterners. Even with the addition of a large room the women had very little personal space. Only small tables separated one bed from another. Nonny was especially shy about dressing around the others, so Rano draped the mosquito frame around her bed with a sari to create some semblance of private space. The other women followed suit, using their growing collections of saris and shawls. "You could hear everything," Mani observed, "but at least you weren't seen."[119]

The Westerners had their own bathing area separate from the one used by the Easterners, which was in the room where Baba used to sleep. Although they had basins in the dormitory for washing their hands, they had to descend the steep, outdoor stone stairs to get to the toilets during the day—a challenge for Nonny, who declined to abandon her fashionable high-heeled pumps even in India, as well as for Elizabeth, who suffered from the lingering effects of an old back injury. The women used chamber pots at night, which had to be carried down the stairs in the morning by the toilet sweeper.

The strains of this new way of life on the Westerners were not lost on the Easterners who had been members of the ashram for many years and were well accustomed to its challenges. Everyone ate together beneath a new tin-roofed shed constructed on the back side of Meher Retreat, across from the kitchen, "out of doors in the wind, [with] dust and leaves blowing in their food," Mehera recalled.[120] The dust often contained sprinklings of dried cow dung from the floor of the shed, which Katie would later call "ashram seasoning."[121]

"Nonny was an elderly person," Mehera continued. "It was difficult for Elizabeth not to have privacy, after being used to her own room in the West. Norina was part of the cream of society, always dressed fashionably, like a princess, with a strand of pearls around her neck. Here in the ashram it was quite different."[122] However, as Hedi's husband Walter, whom Baba was planning to invite to Meherabad in

November, would wryly observe: "Even spoiled European women are happy to be allowed to live here."[123] Mani likened the Westerners and their new quarters to "schoolgirls in a dorm!"[124] She called Baba "the landlady who told her new lodger, after showing him his room, 'If there is anything else you want, just tell me, and I'll show you how to do without it.'"[125]

Ashram life was austere and its rules complex, and being the newest additions, the Jessawala women found it difficult to adjust. They were embarrassed by the lack of privacy and missed the comforts and amenities of their old life. "There were so many different orders—not [to do] this and not to do that," Manu later recalled. "It was an intimidating atmosphere, and we were always getting a whack from the cane."[126]

At 7:30 AM on August 29, after the women had had a few days to settle into their new accommodations, Baba called them together to outline His plans for a new phase of life on Meherabad Hill, entailing the establishment of four departments in which everyone would have assigned duties: gate-keeping, the kitchen and servants' staff, the *Meher Baba Journal*, and the new hospital.

Soonamasi, whom Baba called "the Gatekeeper to Heaven," resumed her old duty of keeping watch.[127] Another addition to the compound was a stone wall around the perimeter, and when a metal gate was installed Soonamasi took up her post there, assisted by Kaku, who came up the Hill to join her every morning. Gaimai managed the kitchen and assumed responsibility for placing orders for supplies from the bazaar, as well as overseeing all the cooking, assisted by Manu. Kitty was to let her know what the Westerners might require. Gaimai also saw to any special dietary needs in the event of illness for the Easterners, while Irene attended to the Westerners. Mehera prepared Baba's food separately in a small room adjacent to the main kitchen. Kitty supervised the seven servants as well as the sweeper, ensuring that all rooms and toilets were cleaned daily and that the maids carried out Baba's specific orders. Walu cleaned Baba's Tin Cabin.

The women planted a vegetable garden in which Mansari grew three varieties of spinach for Baba. Hedi's husband Walter would observe: "In a touching way [the] garden is being made, the women dig little trenches around every little plant: it is like in a little garden of a cloister in Umbria."[128] Mehera tended the flowers with the help of Mani and Khorshed.

As Baba had already established at the July meetings, Elizabeth, Norina, and Nonny were to focus on the new *Meher Baba Journal*, working in an office located in the new hospital building. Mansari was to assist by translating articles into Gujarati.

The newly-constructed ten-bed Free Hospital was arguably the most complex operation assigned to the women. Baba appointed Nadine chief matron, telling her, "There are thousands of hospitals in the world, I could have here thousands of nurses to work. If I have given this work in the hospital to you it is because I want you to learn serving in real spirit, selfless service."[129] Having nursed her husband Ilya on Baba's order during the two-year illness preceding his death in 1933 uniquely qualified Nadine to serve in such a capacity.

Rano served as the ashram nurse, attending to any of the women if they became ill. She was also designated house carpenter, responsible for minor repairs on the Hill. She called herself the ashram's "Jack of all trades."[130]

Baba tasked Helen with painting murals on the interior walls of what everyone had thought of as His "crypt-cabin" or "underground room." She had to paint the inside of the Dome while lying flat on her back on scaffolding, while Hedi assisted by mixing the paints.* When Baba showed Helen and Hedi the bamboo scaffolding, an exchange took place worthy of Laurel and Hardy, Baba's favorite comedians: "Helen said that if she would climb up it would collapse. Baba said this

* When Helen ran out of the paints that Hedi had brought from Switzerland, the mandali raided the supplies at Lower Meherabad and brought her several buckets of leftover blue and white paint. Manu recalled that some of the brushes Helen used were more than a meter long.

is an Indian scaffold and that it was safe [and] that the mandali had already been up on it. Helen said she would only go up if Baba went first. At that I said I would go up. I did and Helen followed me."[131]

Helen's adjustment to the communal atmosphere of the ashram was slow and difficult. Conversant in Swiss German, she could communicate only with Hedi, Nadine, and Irene. It was impossible for her to hold more than the simplest of conversations with the other women. "We just used sign language," Katie recalled, using gestures to make her point. "'Hello, Helen.' '*Ya! Ya! Ya! Ya! Ya!*' [Helen would reply]. So … I learned from Norina [and] I said, 'Helen, *hast Du gut geschlafen?*' 'Did you sleep well?' and she said, '*Ya! Ya! Ya! Ya! Ya!*'"[132] But Helen continued to feel isolated and lonely, and it was only after Baba assigned her the task of painting the inside of the tomb that she began to feel as if she were a part of the community of women on the Hill.

Still, Helen retained lingering doubts about her inclusion in the ashram and she asked to be sent home to Switzerland. As Irene recalled, Baba said to Helen, "'I show you the path, you have to follow it.' Helen throws herself at Baba's feet and says, 'I cannot, and therefore I have to go.' Baba says, 'You have come to India for the wrong reason. Instead of coming here in order to experience yourself, you should have come to experience Baba, to leave the ego which is always in the way. I will show you the path you must follow. I know that you have always been alone and isolated from people, but the path is through people. You must try and I will help you.'"[133*]

While Helen continued to struggle, Hedi began to thrive. She had been so sick when she arrived that she required a special diet, which Baba provided for her, and her health improved rapidly in the company of the Divine Physician. Recalling the time she spent working in the Dome with Helen, Hedi said, "That was the only time in India that we had fun…. We kidded a lot … and it was a break from the brutal

* No one mentions whether Hedi, Irene, or Nadine interpreted Helen's remarks for Baba.

seriousness of our everyday life in India. If you have to appear spiritual all day long, how terrible!"[134]

It was, in fact, virtually impossible for the Westerners to appear spiritual all day long. Sometimes they succumbed to moods or conflicts that suddenly lost their urgency when Baba asked what was wrong. One evening He admonished them for being like *piyaz* (onions) when they should strive instead to be like *Ayaz* (cool breeze or night breeze), a character in the story He had just told them, because every time He "handled" them, "He wept."[135]

Not a single detail was left to chance as Upper Meherabad became a hive of activity. Mani captured the bustle of a typical morning: "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."[136]

Baba addressed virtually every aspect of the women's day-to-day life. Because of the limited water supply He assigned them bathing days, specifying one bucket of hot water only, except when they washed their hair and could have an extra half-bucket. Always conscious of their health, He ordered them to use their mosquito nets. And *no one* was allowed to set anything on His ping-pong table.

In addition to overseeing activities on the Hill, Baba continued to see to the daily needs of the thirty-six *masts* and mad living at Lower Meherabad, where much of His attention centered on Mohammed. Walter Mertens would have the opportunity to observe Baba at work, about which he wrote:

> Visit to the Mad Ashram. Baba is hugged, He jokes, takes into His arms these ones who are separated from reality and know only God. Everyone begins to glow. His radiant Mahomet [*sic*] hugs even me, and another tries to kiss my feet. I hug these good brothers. Baba gets to work, cutting

> hair and beards, assisted by the Mandali, everything goes efficiently and snappy, by the numbers. Then the bath. Baba soaps each one all over, washes him, pours lots of bowls of water over him, and the next one is ready to go. Then the emptying of the chamber pots by Baba. Gloves, emptying the pots, carrying to the trench, cleaning, etc., at the end Himself washing His arms and legs. "This is what being God means … this continuous work," says Baba. Who would contradict Him![137]

Baba assigned the women a strict schedule dictated by His own timetable. They awoke to a bell that Kitty rang each morning at five o'clock, gathering around Baba in the kitchen or else under the tin shed at 6:30 or 6:45. After He asked how they had slept, they ate a simple breakfast of tea and chapatis. When He'd finished His own meal Baba headed down the Hill to attend to the *masts*, while the women took up their assigned tasks.

Baba returned to Upper Meherabad at 10:45 or 11:00 AM, heralded by Soonamasi or Kaku's bell so that the women could run and watch His approach. He lunched with Mehera, Mani, and perhaps a few of the other Easterners in the east room, where Mehera laid a tablecloth over her bed. The rest of the women gathered under the tin shed at 11:00 for their meal, and Baba usually joined them after He had finished eating. Food was served buffet-style, and the women sat on short Indian-style stools, or else the taller teakwood seats that Elizabeth had thoughtfully hired a carpenter to construct for them, balancing their plates on their laps.

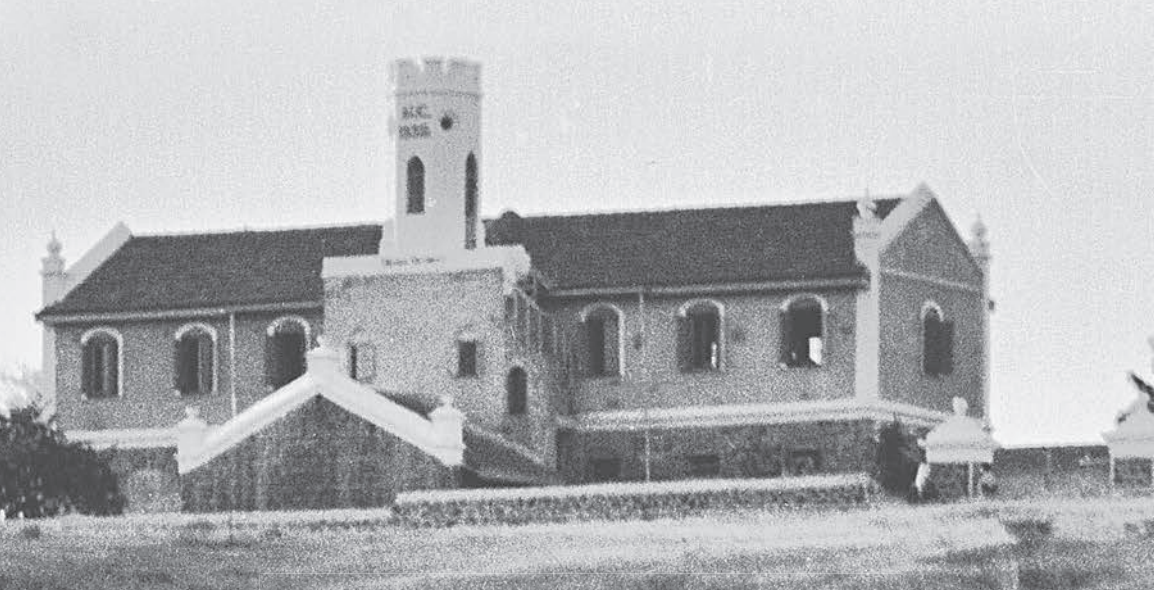
After Baba walked back down to Lower Meherabad to resume His work there, the women returned to their own duties, although sometimes He stayed with them into the early afternoon, sitting outside in the shade of Meher Retreat, near the Dome, or under a pipal tree. Everyone broke for tea at 2:30, after which the women bathed, washed their clothes, or attended to other personal chores. Napping was not allowed.

Baba returned to the Hill to join the women for their supper at about 6:00 PM, and the little discourses He often gave afterward served as their after-dinner sweets. Sometimes they went for pre-dusk walks, visiting with the animals, or looking at Helen's progress on the murals in the Dome. At other times they simply played games. Later they might listen to music or make their own under the starry night sky. Each evening ended with *arti*. Just before Kitty rang the bell at 9:00 PM to remind the women that it was time to retire to their dormitories, Baba would embrace each one, saying, "Sleep well, be happy."[138]

Nineteen women now resided in the ashram on Meherabad Hill. They had every reason to believe that Baba's newest phase of work, initiated in August 1938, would continue for quite some time. Little did they suspect that the time to board the Blue Bus was fast approaching.



Baba and the women walking on Meherabad Hill toward Meher Retreat, the site of their new dormitories over the Water Tank building



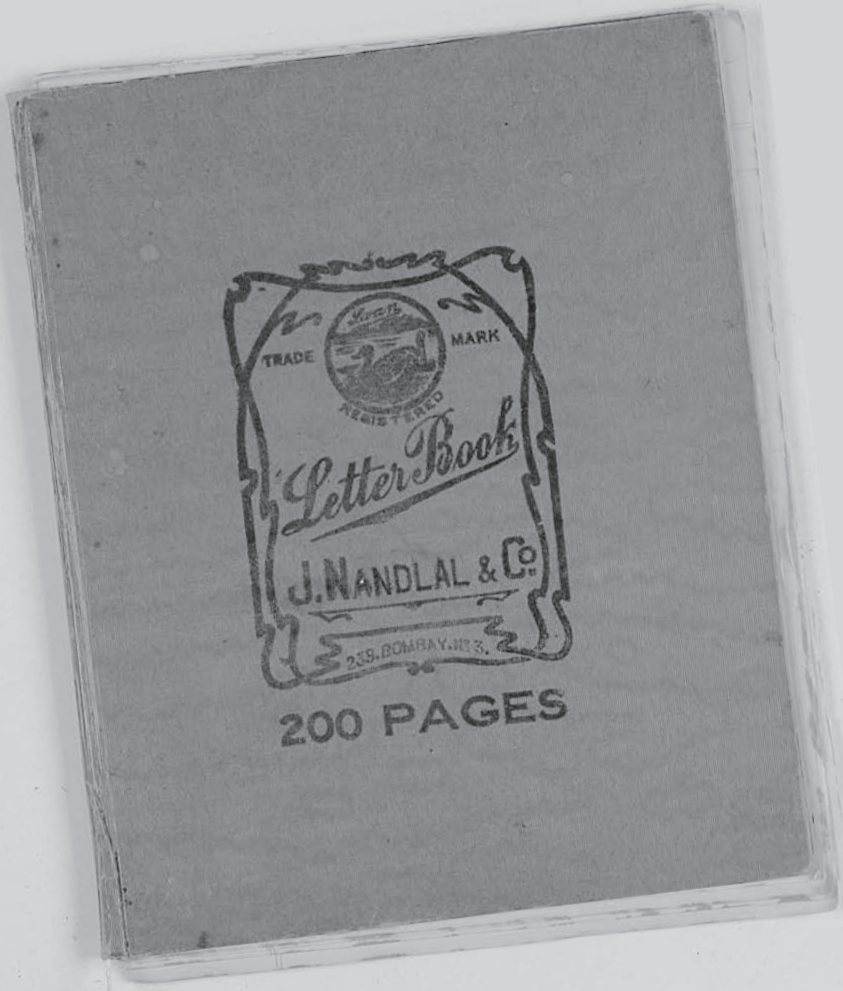
CHAPTER 2

A Big Surprise!

September 16–December 7, 1938

The Saints will come to Me!

MEHER BABA[1]



Mani's *Red Letter Book*, containing the first references to a tour with Baba, with two separate typed sets of notes dated from August 29 to October 18, 1938. It also documents Baba's orders to the women regarding their new life at Upper Meherabad.

GUESS THE SURPRISE!

FOUR DAYS AFTER THE WOMEN moved into their new quarters at Upper Meherabad in August 1938, Mani began recording notes from Baba's talks in a new diary called the *Red Letter Book*.• However, her first reference to a new phase of Baba's work comes from a different set of notes. The September 16 entry in this set of notes reads: "Extra News—Baba was in our room, from 3 to 4-35 … [and] 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!)"[2*]

That afternoon Baba returned to the topic of a caravan trip, telling the women, "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 [of the *Meher Baba Journal*] 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

• Mani Irani maintained at least five journals or sets of notes during the era of the Blue Bus Tours, the first of which was the *Red Letter Book*. Its two hundred lined pages were loose so that she could type up the handwritten notes that she or another of the women made when Baba spoke with them. The pages were then replaced and stored in the notebook. The journal contains two separate sets of typed notes overlapping the dates August 29 through October 18, 1938. The first sixteen pages outline Baba's orders to the women regarding their new life at Upper Meherabad. They also document His announcement of the first tour. A second set of notes, dated September 2 through October 18, consists of ten pages of typed transcriptions of Baba's talks with the women and other notes describing the day-to-day occurrences of life on the Hill. However, Mani also kept a third set of typed notes—dated from September 16 to October 7—that contain entries similar to some of those in the *Red Letter Book*, often with different dates. These were the notes that Heather Nadel used in her book *The Joyous Path*.

* Mani's addendum to Baba's September 16 comments indicates that she did not type the notes until a period of time had passed and the women had had time to think through His unexpected reference to a possible tour. She recorded an entry almost identical to this one in her October 1 notes in the *Red Letter Book*.

about this imaginary performance, as we knew Baba was joking)." Three days later, Baba again broached the subject of a journey, linking it for the first time with the coming chaos of war.• "Baba would change His routine when the war broke out; if after [His] birthday, as we are going round India the routine will be automatically be [*sic*] changed; if before, He would change it."[3] On September 23 Baba made His first reference to a coming revelation, telling the women, "Very soon I will give you a big surprise. You know I do things all of a sudden; this surprise will be sudden and soon."[4]

• The first time Meher Baba spoke of World War II was on July 9, 1925, the day before He began His silence. Leaning back against a pillar in the Post Office while seated with the women, He revealed that there would be another war, far more devastating than the First World War: "You all think the Five Years' War [as it was then called] was bad, that many died in it. But it was nothing compared to what will be in the future. There will be another war, which will be much worse." (*Mehera–Meher* 1:170)

On Sunday, September 25, the mad and *masts* at Lower Meherabad presented a play entitled *Raja Gopichand*, an extraordinary undertaking considering the volatility of the cast. The performance was so highly anticipated that devotees came from Nasik, Poona, and Bombay to see it. Two days later Baba sent half of the mad and *masts* back to their homes, so that only eighteen of them remained, His work with them accomplished.

Baba piqued the women's interest again two days later when He returned to the subject of war and the effect it might have on His plans to travel. He explained that the play and His decision to send the men home afterward were linked to approaching world chaos, adding: "'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 [the world] must be worried…. So wait for a very big surprise soon.'"[5*]

War was by now a recurring theme in Baba's talks with the women, and the following day Kitty took notes while Mani read from the alphabet board as He spelled out, "India will help—all states will help—Germany, Italy, France, Russia; many others will join. Everywhere people are worried. All imagine how it will be when bombs fall on top of them. My agents

* Baba would use the map to follow battles and troop movements as the war spread across three continents.

are now working—very busy—China, Japan both fighting. All speculating…. The time is near—the world is in chaos."[6]

Baba then segued to "the big surprise," adding, "When we tour India you will see many Saints and also the 5 Sadgurus. Many Saints will come when we tour India. In each place mostly a different type of Saint. We shall go to Benares and stop there for 4 days and the Saints will come to Me. This will be the public reception before I speak and will ~~come when~~ take place while the war is in full swing." He concluded by reminding them yet again, "Now be ready for a big surprise on October 7th!!!"[7]

The escalating conflict in Europe now dominated the news, and on September 29, British Prime Minister Lord Neville Chamberlain signed the Munich Agreement• in an effort to placate Hitler and Mussolini. But Chamberlain's efforts at appeasement were condemned to failure when Baba said, simply and forcefully, "It won't work. There will definitely be war."[8] He then digressed from talk of war to tell the women, "My miracle is you—the sky—the moon—the sun."[9] But He returned to the subject of world conditions immediately, again linking the impending conflict with the breaking of His silence: "So five months' preparation for war and for My manifestation. When war is in full progress I will speak in the middle of its climax. It will not last more than one year, so if it begins in February, then by July, I might speak."[10] As usual, "might" was the operative word in this declaration.

• As early as September 1932, Baba ordered Norina and another of His Western devotees, Quentin Tod, to travel to a number of European cities to spread His name, and one of the cities was Munich. Although she declined to include a name, Margaret later recorded that one of Baba's disciples had been there just days before the Munich Agreement was signed. She observed that while Baba never visited Germany during His European visits, "before World War II, Baba had already traveled to many countries and continents [which would be directly involved in the war], and He called these many contacts, both personal and geographical, 'laying cables.' Later, when necessary, He would re-contact these spots—perhaps by a seemingly accidental visit by a disciple, or perhaps giving a direct order that someone should go to a certain place. Even a letter or cable would sometimes do the job." (*Dance of Love*, 153)

Baba went on to explain: "There will now be talk of world peace. Spiritually, everything but God is zero. Therefore, spiritually war and peace are nothing. But externally war is the most dreadful thing. Unless war were absolutely necessary for the spiritual upheaval, I would never allow a war to be—never! But it is absolutely necessary for spiritual reasons…. But on October 7th I have a more important plan than war. This plan has indirectly to do with war and directly with you and Me. Guess the

surprise!!!"[11] Mani concluded her notes by adding, "(there all had to guess and say what they thought the surprise might be)."[12]

Somehow, Baba's continuing references to surprises and tours passed unremarked—and unlinked—other than being duly recorded in Mani's *Red Letter Book* and her other typed notes. The women were accustomed to His occasionally teasing manner of communication. "Sometimes jokingly, very casually, Baba said things which we took lightly," Mani observed, "in fun. We joined in, in the spirit of the fun."[13] Sometimes the women found Baba's presence so overpowering that they could not take in what He was saying. "Baba explained many subjects—love, sanskaras, et cetera," Irene recalled. "But many times, as I sat near Him, I did not hear what He said, because I felt so overwhelmed, so filled with Baba's love—a love that only gives and never takes. Surely, I thought, the others must be feeling this same way."[14] Or it may have been that the women were distracted by Baba's assurances that He would soon be breaking His silence. In any case, most of His references to travel and surprises were so effectively sandwiched between His comments about war that they simply did not register.

Although Baba continued to name October 7 as the day of His announcement, like a child bursting to share a secret, He seemed determined to give away the surprise. On October 2, Mani's notes returned to "Discussion on the Trip" when Baba told the men and women separately:

> 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 howmuch [*sic*] 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 Fbruary [*sic*]. So now, what about the 6000 rupees? And the petrol?

> The food expenses will be the same as here. I'll keep the Mad Ashrem [*sic*] 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.[15]

For someone who freely admitted that His one weakness was math, Baba then proceeded to toss out a series of cost estimates with apparent ease: "Now petrol. It will be atleast [*sic*] 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 four new ones with us; so monthly running costs 120 rupees."[16*]

"We will stay in Dak-bungalows," Baba continued, "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 [Elizabeth's] Ford with us. Now I will give 2,000 rupees. Who else!" Six of the women promised a total of four thousand rupees: Elizabeth and Nonny (one thousand each) and Mansari, Gaimai, Hedi, and Helen (five hundred each). Baba suggested that if eight people agreed to pay twenty rupees each per month, the total amount would more than cover the estimated costs of petrol and oil. He then named Himself, Elizabeth (whose pockets were bottomless where His work was concerned), Nonny, Rano, Mansari, Hedi, Helen, and Gaimai as the eight people. Hedi offered to give more if needed. "So now this is O.K.," Baba concluded.[17]

"This trip will be great propaganda for My teaching," Baba went on to explain, "to be able to teach many directly. All will be definitely

* By Baba's calculations, if the bus consumed ninety gallons of petrol every fifteen hundred miles, it would average 16.66 miles per gallon.

decided on October 7th." Later that day He again invited the women to guess what the surprise might be. Even then, Mani noted, "We tried, but got no enlightment [*sic*] on the matter whatsoever; (M's [Mehera's] guess was that He might take us somewhere)."[18] Mehera seems to have been the only one who made the connection, and her response was tentative.

True to His word, on Friday, October 7, Baba revealed "The Surprise," proposing a bus tour of India, which Mani meticulously recorded in the *Red Letter Book*.

"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 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.[19]

Baba invited all twenty women now living at Meherabad to accompany Him, and He set an initial departure date of December 15, just ten weeks away.*

There was to be no mistaking this tour for a holiday. *Lord Meher* asserts that Baba's plans for this tour had "unparalleled significance."[20] Chanji informed readers of the January 1940 issue of the *Meher Baba Journal*: "The *object* of this special tour, as of all other movements and activities of the Master, is purely *spiritual*. Incidentally, however, it is meant to give his closer group a glimpse of India principally of its spiritual and religious aspects, and generally of its mythological, cultural and historical side." Chanji concluded that all else remained a mystery at the time he composed the article, adding, "The itinerary of the tour is unknown to any member of the party, except a slight indication of the direction towards the south of India. Hence a blank page for all!"[21†]

Baba continued to maintain contact with many of His other Western lovers, especially those in England. On October 2 He dictated in a letter to Delia DeLeon: "The world is in a state of fear and perplexity. No one knows what is going to happen. But wait and see. I know all, the present and the future, and nothing can stop the work that I am here to do. Am I not the Avatar? The world will know it soon and accept me as such."[22] Indeed, Baba declared Himself so in the first issue of the *Meher Baba Journal*, in His eponymous article, "The Avatar." He also wrote to William Donkin: "Big plans lie ahead here. These I will write about shortly and keep you informed of my movements."[23]

Meanwhile, the women carried on with the duties Baba had assigned them at the end of August. On Tuesday, October 11, four days after Baba announced the upcoming tour, the Free Hospital admitted its first patient, a heavily pregnant, mentally challenged woman from Arangaon Village. At 4 a.m. the next morning she gave

* Baba later shifted the date of departure to December 8.

† Because of the length of time between submission deadlines and publication, the first news of Baba's tour did not reach readers until they received the January issue.

birth, and Baba was first to hear the infant cry and to hold and kiss her after she had been bathed. Soon the ten-bed hospital was filled to overflowing, prompting Baba to propose to Nadine that some patients sleep on mattresses or bedding rolls on the floor.

Irene, Mansari, and Meheru served as Nadine's assistants. Mansari did not enjoy her responsibilities, which included delivering trays from the kitchen. But Irene, who mixed medications, served night duty, and sewed nightgowns for the mothers and clothes for the babies, recalled, "We felt lucky to work for Baba's scheme," adding with the wisdom of hindsight, "As soon as we got used to this work—and most probably got attached to it—the hospital was closed," due to the impending departure of the Blue Bus.[24]

As always, the women's work was interspersed with festive occasions. To mark the Hindu celebration of Dassera,* beginning on October 4, the women bedecked Kippy and Baba's watchdog Chum in costumes and flowers. Irene also dressed her white rabbit in tiny handmade clothes. Helen contrived a bunny costume in which she hopped about the compound during the parade the women put on for Baba. Everyone was delighted with this departure from her usual taciturn nature.

Baba and the women celebrated Diwali on Saturday, October 22. Kitty, who especially loved the holiday, wrote: "Divali is perhaps the most beautiful of the Hindu festivals. It is the day when houses all over India are lighted by innumerable lamps to hail the New Year. Even the poorest dwellings have glimmering oil lamps, because it is believed that those who keep a dark house on Divali do not receive the gifts of the Goddess of Fortune."[25]

Baba invited Katie, her older sister Goher, and her parents, as well as Arnavaz and Nargis, to come to Meherabad and join in the Diwali celebrations. Katie burned her fingers while lighting fireworks. All four of the girls were assigned work for the duration of their stay and accompanied Baba on His hospital rounds in the evenings. It was during this visit

* Now called Dusshera, Dassera is a ten-day Hindu festival celebrating Ram's defeat of the ten-headed demon, Ravana, and the triumph of good over evil. It usually occurs in October, before Diwali.

that Katie's parents asked Baba if their daughter might accompany Him on the upcoming tour, and He said that He would consider their request.

Baba was adamant that nothing should interfere with His plans for departure. He insisted that the women take care of their health and entreated them to refrain from any unusual or dangerous activities, but on November 19 a serious incident occurred. "By Baba's cabin, there were a lot of dry grass and leaves, which no one had swept. A few weeks before leaving," Mehera recalled, "Walu decided to clean it up. She had the maids sweep it up, and she also helped. It was piled far from Baba's cabin, and Walu put a match to it. A strong wind was blowing. She turned around for something, and the breeze caught her sari on fire." Although she dropped to the ground to extinguish the flames, she suffered third-degree burns to her body from the chest down. More anguishing than the physical pain was the knowledge that she had disobeyed Baba's order not to do anything out of the ordinary. When Baba saw her, Walu explained what had transpired and begged His forgiveness. "Baba was not at all pleased," Mehera succinctly observed. "It was a mess."[26]

Padri, who practiced homeopathy, and Dr. Kalavker, the maternity hospital doctor, attended Walu's injuries. "Someone suggested applying Burn-All ointment to the burns," Rano recalled. "The ointment was put on and nothing else was done."[27] The ointment proved ineffective and Walu's burns quickly became infected. Dr. Kalavker advised Baba that it would not be safe for Walu to travel in such a condition, but Baba was resolute, declaring emphatically: "No, all of us must start together. Maya must not be allowed to put obstructions in My way!"[28]

Baba assigned Rano the responsibility of changing Walu's dressings. "It has always amazed me," Rano later wrote, "how Baba's tiniest order, something that appeared quite ordinary, could turn into a major test," and she singled out this task as one such order. Rano had neither training nor experience with burns or wound care. "Baba sent for me," she recalled, "and said, 'You will have to bathe and dress Valu's legs every day. Can you do it?'"

Whenever I saw blood I immediately became sick and faint and turned away because I knew I'd be useless. So after seeing Walu's legs from a distance and then hearing Baba ask me to nurse the burns, for a moment I didn't say anything. I just looked at Baba.

I must have turned green because Baba said, "Are you going to be sick?"

I looked at him steadily. "No, Baba, I am not going to be sick."

The remarkable thing is that from that moment on, I had no trouble in dressing Walu's legs….

Well, I thought, this is all Baba's doing. If I had said, "No, I can't do that, Baba; I'll be sick," I'd probably still feel unable to cope with that kind of situation. But because I made the effort, as Baba wanted me to, he helped me to the extent that such situations ceased to phase [*sic*] me.[29]

As the date for departure approached, Baba invited Walter Mertens to travel from Zurich to see his wife Hedi.• Of the nine Westerners residing on the Hill, Hedi was the only one who had left behind a husband and children, and it could be as long as two years before she was reunited with them. Arriving on November 26, Walter was relieved to see how Hedi's health had improved since coming to India, writing in his journal, "Hedi comes! Neat and thin, with beautiful expression, looking fragile but healthy."[30]

Baba welcomed Walter to His "little cabin," which had been "transformed into a beautiful 'saloon' [salon] (drawing, living, dining room all in one) for W.—who greets B…. and is surprised to find all these Western

• Walter Mertens was a Swiss architect who met Baba on His first visit to Zurich, on December 14, 1932. Baba spent just one night in Switzerland, at Walter and Hedi's home. Walter spent five weeks in India at Baba's invitation, from November 26, 1938, until January 3, 1939. He chronicled many of his experiences in a journal, excerpts from which were published in an article in *The Awakener* entitled "Letters from India, 1938–39." Walter was an engaging writer who captured the beauty and mystery of India at a time when few Westerners, other than British officials and their families, had the opportunity to travel there. He called Baba "the most real Reality." (*The Awakener* 21 [no. 2]: 23)

amenities in the East, even in a Master's Ashram."[31] The "little cabin" was the Rahuri Cabin• at Lower Meherabad, and it was a great privilege for Walter to stay there. Baba sent Walter and Hedi to Panchgani for a five-day stay accompanied by Pleader* (another of the mandali), where they visited Baba's Tiger Valley cave.

• Constructed in 1936, the Rahuri Cabin was the first *pukka* structure at Baba's *mast* ashram at Rahuri, and it was where Baba conducted much of His *mast* work during the Westerners' stay at Meher Retreat. The cabin was taken apart brick by brick and rebuilt at Lower Meherabad in 1937, after Baba ended His work at Rahuri.

COME WITH ME!

Meanwhile, on October 14 Baba spelled out His specifications for the new omnibus, which included dimensions of the body and the maximum amount He was willing to spend—reduced from six thousand to eighteen hundred rupees. He dictated the specifications to Adi K. and a week later Adi sent a telegram enumerating them to Sarosh Irani,† owner of Sarosh Motor Works in Ahmednagar. Sarosh placed an order for a six-wheel Chevrolet chassis with a 29.5-hp engine to be imported from the United States. The coachwork (body) was to be built in Bombay, where the vehicle would be assembled. The exterior was to be painted two shades of blue, hence the name "Blue Bus." The cost of the vehicle was exactly eighteen hundred rupees.

Inside the cab was a bench seat designed to accommodate a driver and one passenger. Separating the cab and passenger compartment was a custom wooden partition that screened the women riding in the back from the view of any of the men Baba might ask to drive the bus or ride in the cab. A sliding door in the partition allowed Baba to communicate with the driver via the alphabet board. Attached to the partition was a small basin where Baba could wash His hands and Mehera could rinse His drinking glass.

* Kaikhushru Jamshedji Pleader (1898–February 26, 1960) met Baba in 1928, after having visited Upasni Maharaj, Narayan Maharaj, and Babajan. His first assignment at Meherabad was to clean the latrines. Pleader came from a wealthy Zoroastrian family for whom sweeper's work was the lowliest imaginable. But determined to please Baba, he took on the unenviable job as his initiation into ashram life. He became a lifelong member of the mandali.

† Sarosh Irani was Adi K.'s cousin and Gulmai's nephew. He first learned of Baba in the early 1920s but did not feel drawn to Him until having His darshan in 1922. Sarosh was a prominent businessman with a Chevrolet dealership in Ahmednagar and he served as the city's mayor for a number of years.

The partition was painted blue, as were the wooden planks that lined the interior walls and floor of the passenger section. The roof was lined with heavy brown canvas. Hanging from small hooks in the windows were blue cotton curtains that could be drawn to shield Mehera from prying eyes, as well as to block the intense Indian sun. The women would enter and exit the bus through the rear door, using a metal step and handrail on the left for climbing in and out.*

According to *Mehera–Meher*, the passenger section contained two rows of five padded leather, two-person and one-person bench seats, facing forward, with an aisle down the middle, to accommodate a total of fifteen passengers.• Since Baba planned to sit by Himself in the seat on the right hand side, directly behind the driver, the available number of seats was reduced to fourteen for nineteen women (Elizabeth would be up front in the cab, driving), so seating was an issue even before the bus departed Meherabad on its first journey. Rano called Baba's Blue Bus entourage His "traveling ashram."[32]

The women busied themselves gathering personal items. Baba allowed each of them one bedding roll with sheets, blanket, pillow, towel, mosquito net, and a few traveling clothes rolled up inside. These were the items needed when only the bedrolls would be taken down from the roof. The women brought suitcases to hold additional clothing: woolen jackets and coats, warm double underwear, and summer clothes. For warmer weather Hedi also brought "a silken camisole … long thin cotton leggings," and a lightcotton coat.[33†] Seamstress Irene made small cloth bags for

• The number of passengers the bus is said to have accommodated varies from eleven to twenty, depending on the source. According to two sources, Baba said that it would have cushioned "seats for 18." (*Red Letter Book*, October 2, 1938; *The Joyous Path* 1:261) Page 1961 of *Lord Meher* states that there were "twenty-three persons—riding in a bus designed for half that many"—in other words, eleven or twelve passengers—while page 2197 says that it was built for fourteen.

Unfortunately, a copy of the cable that Adi Sr. sent to Sarosh with Baba's specifications for the bus has yet to be identified in the Avatar Meher Baba Trust Archives in Meherabad, India, and there seem to be no photographs of the interior of the bus to corroborate anyone's recollections. When restoration work was carried out in the early 1970s, no one documented the placement of the drilled holes where the seats were bolted to the floor or any other evidence of the arrangement of the seats in the original interior wooden planks before they were replaced. So the layout of the interior of the Blue Bus remains a mystery.

* The side door through which pilgrims now enter the bus was added after the end of the tours.

† Hedi Mertens' *Tagebuch Diary* is a recent addition to the Trust Archives. Bound with a black cover, the journal is handwritten in Swiss German.

carrying toothpaste, soap, toothbrushes, enamel cups, plates, and spoons. Mehera assembled Baba's toiletries in another small bag that she would carry along with her own. The women also brought bamboo poles for stringing up partitions and nets at their accommodations.

Baba had to see that all the food that had been already stocked at Meherabad was divided, leaving some with the mandali who were staying behind. He made Kitty responsible for all the provisions for meals, as well as for snacks, which had to be accessible at all times inside the bus. Kitty was also designated to prepare all the meals, although this assignment would pass through many hands as the tours progressed. He insisted on traveling with as little cooking paraphernalia as possible, so Kitty was limited to three small portable stoves and two saucepans, and He didn't allow her to bring a single cooking spoon for stirring the food. She also needed several unglazed pottery *chattis* for carrying water and *bhagulas* for transporting rice and dal that had been prepared in advance. With these meager implements meals for as many as forty people would need to be prepared. The stoves and most of the provisions would be transported on the roof.

Baba ordered Rano to pack the interior of the bus with the remaining items, which included the fragile chattis and bhagulas as well as food baskets, metal pails that Baba would use for bathing *masts*, the women's cloth bags and other small personal items, and anything else that was either too small or breakable to pack on the roof. Over time bedding rolls, luggage, and other personal belongings would increase with the addition of new passengers until the bus may have been carrying as much as a ton of gear.[34] Kitty recalled that as the first tour progressed, however, "Bedding rolls … got filled with extra shoes and sundry other articles, not excluding books or plates…. Needless to say, Baba soon drastically cut down our individual baggage," both literal and spiritual![35]

"The responsible charge of *driving* the bus all the way is entrusted by the Master in the capable hands of an American lady disciple," Chanji noted, "who has been driving her own car for years."[36] The "American lady disciple" was, of course, Elizabeth, chosen in part for her experience

as an ambulance driver during World War I. In one of a series of *Meher Baba Journal* articles entitled "Those Who Follow the Master," Chanji wrote that in 1917, "The first Motor Corps Service for American women was formed, which [Elizabeth] qualified for and joined, thereafter doing ambulance motor work at the NY hospitals, docks and general emergencies during war times."[37] Despite the enormous responsibility, it was a great privilege to drive the Blue Bus: Baba is said to have stated that when He allowed someone to drive for Him, it ensured that they would not become "lost while traversing the Path through the Spiritual Planes."[38*]

"To keep the [bus] in perfect running order and also to help loading and unloading of the personal baggage of the party on top," Chanji continued, "two mechanical experts, specially chosen from the men disciples, [will] travel with the party, on the front seat."[39] Chanji was referring to Eruch and Kaka, the only men accompanying Baba. They would ride squeezed in next to Elizabeth in the cab, where they would be separated from the women in the passenger compartment. Eruch was also to assist Elizabeth with the driving.

But it was not until December 7, the day before departure, that Baba indicated that He wanted Eruch to come along.

> It was on the eve of the great tour of the Blue Bus, and Baba was at Meherabad Hall that night…. [T]he Blue Bus was on the Hill, and Baba had decided to leave the place in the early hours of the morning. So at eight o'clock in the night somebody comes running from the Hill, saying that Kaka, who was packing the luggage on top of the roof, fell down from it, because it was such a height, you see, that he had to have a ladder on top of the bus to [inaudible] the whole thing. So, he lost his balance and fell down unconscious.
>
> So Baba looked at us, you see, and just picked at me and said, "Why are you sitting here?"[40]

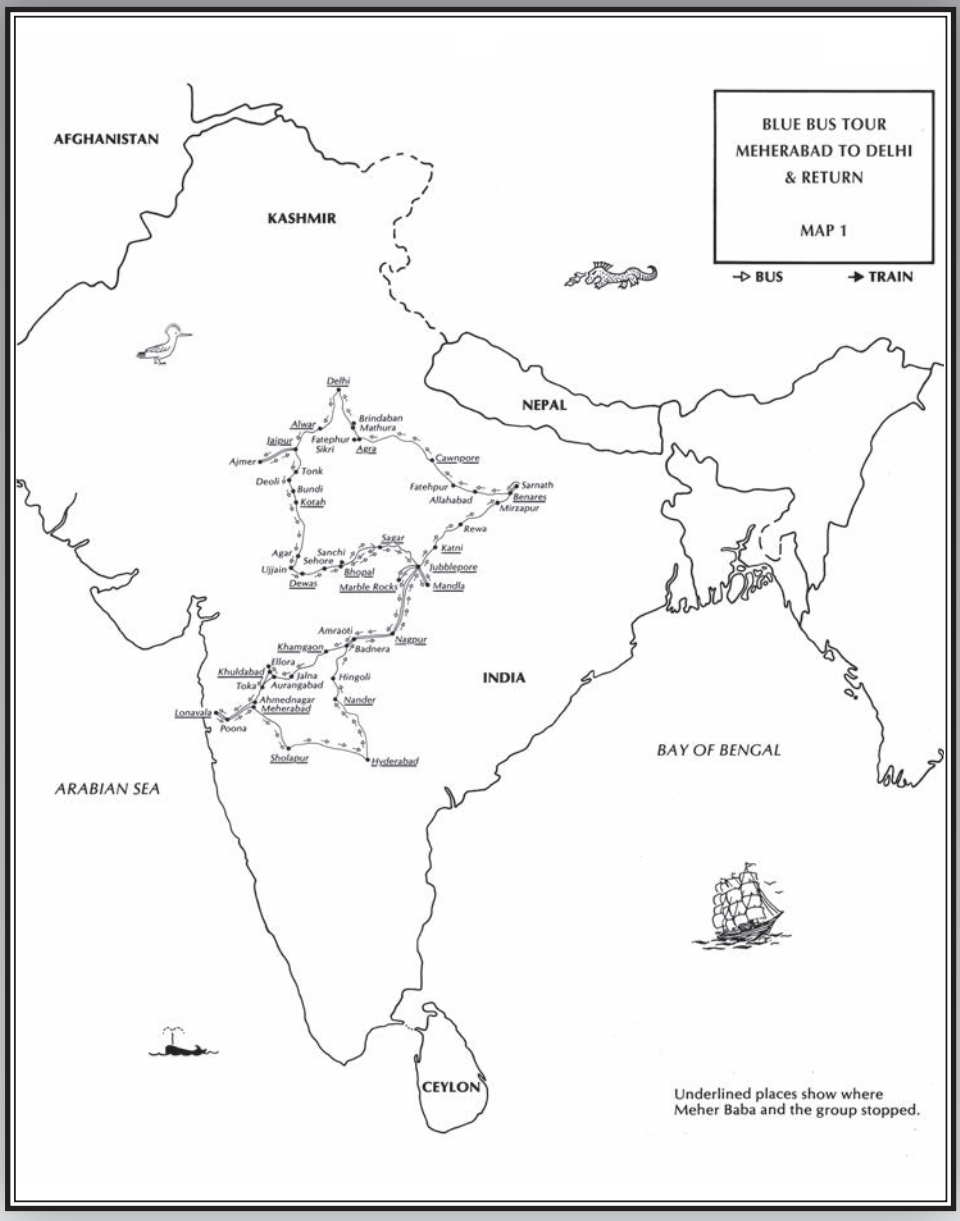
* Filis Frederick called Elizabeth "a modern, feminine Arjuna for her dear Krishna-Baba." (*The Awakener* 20 [no. 2]: 16)

Baba asked: "You haven't been helping Kaka? Aren't you going on the tour the next day?" When Eruch said, "Nobody told me about it," Baba replied: "Would you like to go on tour with me?" Eruch retorted, "Well … I am indifferent to it." It was not the response Baba wanted, explaining: "Your being indifferent is also being something." Eruch then realized that his proper answer should have been, "If you wish I would go there, I'll go."[41]

Eruch hurried up the Hill to finish the work that Kaka had begun. By the time he had finished roping everything into place on the roof and covering it with a canvas tarpaulin, the Blue Bus had taken on the appearance of a top-heavy gypsy caravan ready for its first journey. But, as Hedi observed: "If it is in His power to destroy the sun He will also be able to hold the bus together."[42]



Hedi took this photo the morning of departure. "Just imagine! … the mountain grows into the sky" covered, as if, by "a little tablecloth." (*Tagebuch Diary*, 2)



Modified version of map by Walter Overcarsh, originally published in *Because of Love* by Rano Gayley

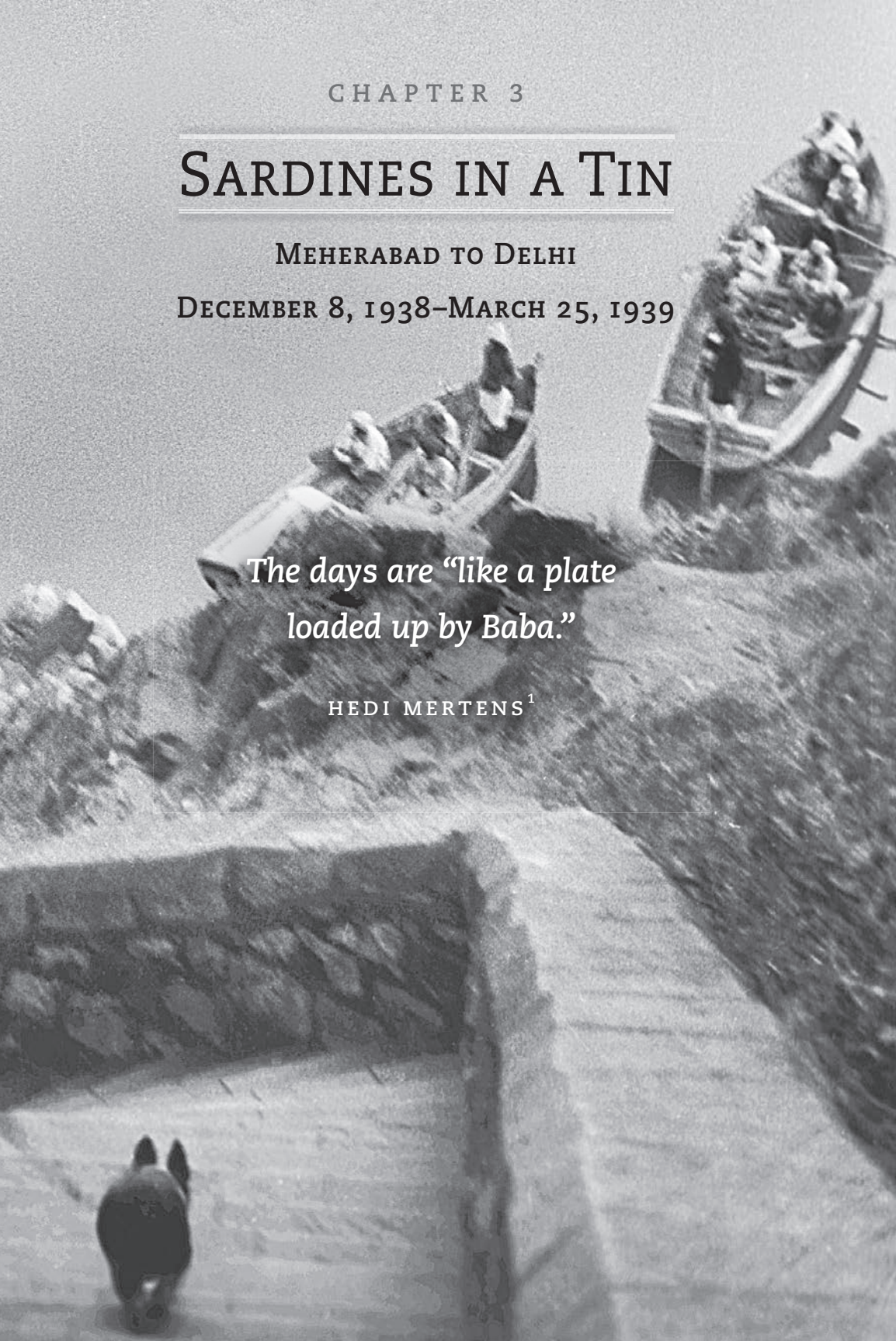
The First Blue Bus Tour

Meherabad to Delhi and Back

December 8, 1938–May 25, 1939



Nonny, in one of her many hats, and Elizabeth, with Kippy in tow, descending the steps with the rest of the women for their boat ride on the Narmada, Christmas Day 1938



CHAPTER 3

Sardines in a Tin

Meherabad to Delhi

December 8, 1938–March 25, 1939

The days are "like a plate loaded up by Baba."

HEDI MERTENS[1]



One of three rowboats carrying the women through the majestic Marble Rocks Gorge outside of Jabalpur, Christmas Day 1938

ALL ACCORDING TO HIS DESIGN

AT A FEW MINUTES BEFORE 9:00 AM on Thursday, December 8, 1938, Elizabeth Patterson climbed behind the wheel of the Blue Bus to await Baba's signal to start the engine.[2]

Baba had awakened the women at 3:00 AM to give them plenty of time to eat and assemble their last-minute belongings. Kitty prepared rice and dal so that they could eat as soon as they reached their first night's accommodations, while Rano packed the interior of the bus. Once loaded, the vehicle was so heavily laden that when Elizabeth drove it down the Hill, most of its passengers walked behind, fearing for its safe arrival at Lower Meherabad as it emitted its "secret groans."[3] "Anticipation holds sway," Elizabeth recalled, "as all crowd into the motor bus and depart exactly at the moment designated beforehand by Baba."[4]

Mani captured the momentous event in a small pocket notebook that she would carry throughout the tours. [See *Mani's Diaries* in the Appendix.][•] At the top of the first page she wrote:

• After moving His ashram back to Meherabad from Nasik in December 1933, Baba ordered Mani to maintain a series of diaries about Mehera's daily activities. He dropped this order at the beginning of the Blue Bus Tours in 1938, but Mani continued to keep a diary that she filled with meticulous accounts of the tours. Written in her own hand, the *Blue Bus Tours Diary* spans the period from December 8, 1938, when the bus departed Meherabad for the first time, through December 1941, after the bus returned to Meherabad for the last time. Preserved in the Avatar Meher Baba Trust Archives Document Collection in Meherabad, India, Mani's 154-page diary is the most complete primary source documenting the women's experiences during the Blue Bus era, its plain brown cardstock cover belying the treasures within.

When Katie Irani joined the first tour, she and Mani, who were the same age, became fast friends, and the two young women sat down together regularly to record the details of each day's adventures. We owe them a debt of gratitude for documenting itineraries, distances, dates, times, and events, as well as many remarks Baba made to the women.

BLUE BUS Tours
Our^tour with Baba.*

"Our tour with Baba" is written in Mani's distinctive cursive, which Heather Nadel calls her "convent school handwriting," but the notation "BLUE BUS Tours," printed above the title, was added later.*[5] After all, only Baba knew that there would be three more tours and that they would take on such importance that they would come to be recognized as a distinct phase of His work. Mani's first entry reads:

> December 1938: 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 & "*masts*" waving good-bye to their Baba.[6]

Baba had left Meherabad many times in the past for His travels, but always with a select group of men, and although a core group of Eastern women sometimes also accompanied Him, this was the first time He was traveling with a large number of female disciples and leaving most of the men behind. Elizabeth observed that the men who remained at Meherabad were marked as the ones "for whom other plans of work are to be carried out," and that they understood that Baba's "internal guidance [was] ever with them no matter the distance separating."[7]

Baba relayed instructions via the alphabet board to Eruch or Kaka, who could read them to Elizabeth, who had no map, nor even an itinerary of any kind to follow. Although Baba had intimated that they might travel as far north as the Himalayas, Elizabeth understood that the journey would be "all according to His spiritual design," adding, "Details and schedules are unimportant when we travel with a Master who is the center of the universe of our spirit."[8] "Nobody knew Baba's plan except Baba Himself," Meherwan Jessawala recalled.[9†]

* Mani used a caret "^" to signify that she had amended her original name for the diary.

† Meherwan would join his mother and sisters in Jabalpur, three weeks into the tour.

Mehera and Mani shared the seat opposite Baba, and Mehera, who would have liked to be next to the window, had to sit in the aisle seat to be nearest to Him. If the description of the interior of the bus in *Mehera–Meher* (1:450) is correct, twelve seats remained for the other seventeen women, so folding camp stools were set up in the aisle. Because her burns were still seeping, Walu was carried in and out of the bus. She would need to keep her heavily bandaged legs elevated at all times by either sitting on the stool in the aisle, turned to one side with her legs resting in the lap of the woman sitting next to her on a bench seat, or sitting on a bench seat with her legs propped up on the back of the seat in front of her.

Mani called the roads they encountered during their first day on the road "hopeless."[10] "Motoring in India can never be considered a pleasure," Kitty observed, "specially by bus on bumpy bullock-cart roads. Every time the bus jolted forward, one received either a jerk in the neck or an avalanche from the luggage racks falling on one's head."[11] Sitting at the very back of the bus next to Rano was an experience that would teach her to appreciate the relative ease of riding in the front. "The bus is really fairly comfortable," she would later concede, "with the exception of the last two seats and in these you bump up and down like a rubber ball."[12]

Not even her experiences driving Red Cross ambulances had prepared Elizabeth for the challenges she would encounter on India's rural *kutcha* roads.• As Rano colorfully observed:

> The country roads are for the most part 1½ lanes wide, with hard-packed dirt shoulders on either side. A good Indian driver never wants to waste his tires on stones and dirt so naturally when another vehicle approaches, he establishes

• Kutcha is Hindi for "makeshift" or "crude," and it is the term for narrow, unpaved, often unmarked roads and tracks found throughout rural India. Kutcha roads, as Elizabeth and the other Blue Bus drivers would learn to their exasperation, are difficult and dangerous to navigate in the best of times, but they become especially hazardous during monsoon flooding, when vehicles can be mired in mud, as well as during excessively dry conditions, when they can become stuck in sand. Pukka, by contrast, means "permanent" or "solid," and is the term for paved roads and highways that are much easier and safer to navigate.

> position by moving to the center of the road. If the other driver is experienced, the matter is not concluded until, by some means not discernable to a casual observer, one driver defers…. To maneuver an over-loaded bus around such obstacles requires a skill rare in the West.[13]

"The roads [are] a soft mass of dust," Hedi wrote. "The bus leaves deep ruts behind. We are enveloped in dust…. We are driving through dust, dust, dust."[14]

FEAST OR FAMINE, PALACE OR BUNGALOW

Baba stopped the bus at 10:30 for a picnic lunch in the shade of a tree near a well, where Kitty could draw water. Although they had only been traveling for an hour and a half, they had been awake for seven and a half hours and it had been a long time since breakfast. "Cookies from Switzerland are being distributed," Hedi recorded, " but once everyone has got one the pretty box is empty."[15]

Baba planned an overnight stop at Sholapur, which Mani recorded was 140 miles southeast of Meherabad, and once the women reboarded the bus He ordered Elizabeth and Eruch to drive the remaining miles without stopping.* The roads were so relentlessly poor that they did not reach Sholapur until 6:30 PM, putting their average speed at about fifteen mph.

Chanji was enlisted to secure accommodations for stopovers such as this first one, and he had booked a dak bungalow for one

* Sometimes Mani or Chanji noted the exact distances the bus covered on a given day, but frequently they did not. All other distances have been calculated using internet sources. It is important to remember, however, that current routes may be more direct than those taken by Baba and the women in 1938.

night.• It had been more than seven hours since their picnic, and every mouth was watering for Kitty's dal and rice, but their dinner had soured in the day's heat. The only other food at hand was some bread and a small piece of cheese. Baba ordered Kitty to divide the cheese between Eruch and Elizabeth, who had alternated driving the bus, but everyone else had to make do with dry bread and black tea. When Rano learned that Elizabeth and Eruch were to share the cheese, she complained to Kitty that she also had been up since 3:00 AM and she had worked just as hard as they had and she wanted something to eat!

> Kitty … went to Baba and said, "Rano's hungry." So I don't know what else she told Him. But by that time, having let off that steam, I was kind of cooling down and wished I hadn't.
>
> Kitty said, "Baba wants to see you."
>
> I said, "Kitty, what did you go to Baba for?"
>
> "I couldn't give you anything without asking Baba."
>
> So I went to Baba. So Baba looks at me and nods and says, "Ah, so I hear you're hungry."
>
> "Well, I did say something about being hungry to Kitty."
>
> "Too bad. All right. I've told Kitty to give you something to eat. And see that you eat it!"
>
> By that time, the thought of that food just choked me, and I just couldn't. Oh, Rano … you've gone and put your foot in it. That's because I was tired, and I was hot and I was hungry and I didn't have sense enough to keep my mouth shut. And … [the] expression on Baba's face—"Oh, so you're hungry," as if no one else was

• Dak bungalows were resthouses established by the Raj beginning in the late 1840s for the use of government officials who had to travel throughout widespread districts in the course of their work. "In the late 1930s and 1940s," Rano recalled, "the dak bungalows at which we often stayed were sparsely furnished.... They varied in size, commonly consisting of two or three small rooms with flagstone floors, tiled roof and fieldstone walls. There was a verandah in front and separate kitchen and latrines in the rear. [They] were often located in secluded scenic areas and the rates were reasonable." (*Because of Love*, 33) They were available for rent by private parties if not already occupied, but if a British officer arrived unexpectedly, they had to be vacated for his use. After the end of British rule India's Public Works Departments assumed their maintenance.

> hungry there excepting me. A little incident like that is sort of a notch on the way—something for you to remember when your mind was feeling calm and try to profit from that experience that you had.[16]

"One rarely found more than a few beds at a dak bungalow meant for only three or four persons," Kitty observed, "and when Baba's party arrived (a party of twenty to thirty), the accommodations were cramped, to say the least."[17] The Easterners occupied one of the two main rooms of the bungalow, the Westerners the other, and neither room had beds. The two groups had already spent enough time living in close proximity to recognize that their customs and routines were dissimilar: "Their ways," Mehera observed, "were different from ours."[18] Because He planned to wake the group at 4:00 AM, Baba did not want to unload the top of the bus and reload it in the morning, calling it a "headache."[19] When He asked the women if they could do without their bedrolls, Mehera recalled, "Of course we couldn't say no to Baba. Our backs were tired from sitting in the bus all day, shaking up and down…. We had to lie down that night on tables."[20] After the tables had been claimed, the rest of the women had to sleep on the hard flagstone floor or curled up in what few chairs were available.

Adding to their discomfort, they were cold. Because the doors and windows were not weatherproof, the bungalows could be downright freezing at night. Baba's earliest indications had been that the Blue Bus would be heading south, into tropical India, where the nights would be warmer, but such was not the case. Unlike the Easterners, who were accustomed to more moderate temperatures, the Westerners had anticipated chilly nights on the road and came better prepared. Nadine had circumvented Baba's packing orders by wearing her entire collection of shawls and capes, which she was happy to share.

Elizabeth chose to sleep outside on the cold verandah with Kippy, on a dirty remnant of carpet, astutely observing afterward that their first night's accommodations put the women on notice that the tour was not going to be a proverbial "bed of roses." Baba spent the night in the bus with Eruch and Kaka, who provided security since all their baggage was still roped to the top. But before they all went to sleep, Elizabeth recalled, "Baba look[ed] to everyone's feelings, moods and health, as the great Engineer of Life keeps ever the mechanics of living in order."[21]

FROG TAIL CURRY AND CURDLED MILK

Not only were the women cold and uncomfortable their first night on the road, their sleep may have been disturbed by the railroad station nearby. Although Baba woke them at 4:00 AM as promised, they did not board the bus until more than three hours later. The nearly two-hundred-mile drive due east to Hyderabad carried them through towns and villages, past ancient forts and temples, pastures, and crop-filled fields, beneath the sheltering limbs of colossal banyan trees that lined the roads. The ever-changing landscape captivated the women, for whom travel in the Blue Bus was still a novel experience.

After two hours on the road, Baba began to complain that He was hungry, prompting Him to entertain the women by telling them what He would like to have to eat: "Norina's nose, [water] buffalo, salad of a lock of Mansari's hair, curry of the tail of a frog, and soup of Gaimai's hand!"[22*] Afterward He challenged the women with riddles.

Then He wanted to know what they were going to have to eat. Because the bus was noisy and it was difficult to hold conversations, He asked one of the women to relay the question to Kitty, who was seated

* Mani recorded this litany of odd dishes in Marathi.

at the back. Her answer was conveyed back to Him in the front, and in this manner everyone was apprised of the day's menu. Baba ordered Elizabeth to stop the bus at 10:00 so that they could eat their lunch seated beneath a stone arch by a stream before starting the last leg of the days' drive. Elizabeth recalled:

> Baba who enlivens every situation makes us feel gay and responsive to nature around us, although the country is merely rocky land, and many were feeling the crampness from a crowded bus. Some differences in the scenery from the great [Deccan] plateau draw our attention along the way, and every now and then we see groves of toddy palms with vessels hanging to their cut barks, to catch the sweet juices, and occasionally some very large irrigated rice fields, with water buffalos drawing the cultivators in their slow though majestic pace. Approaching near to Hyderabad, the Mahomedan [*sic*] City dating back to the great Mogul times, it was in the rocks themselves, especially in the enormous rounded ones pinnacled on the adjacent hill-tops, that one could perceive the antiquity of the surroundings.[23]

SOAPY SOUP

In the meantime, Chanji was anxiously awaiting the arrival of the bus in Hyderabad.* This was his third trip to the city as he attempted to identify possible accommodations for Baba's entourage. He had first traveled there in early November, checking into the Royal Hotel, where he was met by one Major Coorlawalla and his wife, Lady Lily, who knew about Meher Baba. Chanji had several long talks with them

* Baba first visited Hyderabad in 1923. He visited or passed through the city again in 1924, 1930, 1936, 1941–42, 1945–47, 1949–51, and 1956.

about Baba, whom they seemed to equate with occult and mystical subjects. He took the opportunity to address "several misunderstandings" on their part, explaining that Baba was not coming to Hyderabad "to collect disciples," adding that He "never cared for Numbers but for Quality—rather avoids publicity & [illegible] remaining in seclusion for years…. Principles—belongs to No party or creed etc."[24] The Major and Lady Lily invited Chanji to stay with them during his two subsequent visits.

Baba insisted that Chanji keep him apprised of all developments and expected him to be in constant communication, so when the occasional letter went astray he soon heard about it. [See *The Adi K. Irani Collection* in Appendix.] Just days before departure Baba had written:

> Dear Chanji,
>
> I told you to write to me every day but no letter from you today.
>
> I intend to leave in the bus, with the women on the eight [*sic*] morning reaching Sholapur about 3 o'clock, to spend the night at Sholapur and leave Sholapur the morning of the ninth and reach Hyderabad the same day at about 3 in the afternoon, and Walter, and Gustadji* to leave by train on the 8th evening…. This is my present intention and I will write to you definitely when I have decided finally. This is just to inform you to arrange in readiness if I finally decide as above. Be writing to me. Give my love to your hosts.
>
> [signed] MSIrani.[25]

* Gustadji Hansotia (February 20, 1890–October 30, 1957) had already met Sai Baba, Babajan, and Upasni Maharaj when Upasni sent him to meet Meher Baba, still known then as Merwan. He went to work in Baba's father's toddy shop and became devoted to Baba. Gustadji practiced silence on Baba's order, beginning in 1927, for the remaining thirty years of his life.

Despite the shifting sands of Baba's indefinite orders Chanji had been meeting with Maharaja Sir Kishan Prasad, who had offered the use of his palace in Shadnagar, a town located about thirty miles from Hyderabad, where Baba had specifically expressed a wish to stay. Chanji went there to meet with Sir Kishan's secretary and view the property. He described it as "the ideal spot & the quarters too—ideally secluded & suited for ladies in seclusion with a big garden & compound wall around the 4 bungalows inside—a residential quarter … wonderfully peaceful."[26]

But following an outbreak of bubonic plague in which the Maharaja himself was stricken, neither he nor Chanji thought it wise for Baba to bring His party to Shadnagar. In any case, most of the local residents had already fled, so the town was virtually deserted. This was the first outbreak of plague in the history of the village, and Chanji called the situation "grievous news," marking it down to "Maya again!"[27] By now he realized that he had failed to leave sufficient time for last-minute complications, in this case, plague—a serious complication indeed.

When Chanji wrote to Baba explaining his difficulties he received a scathing response peppered with question marks. Calling Chanji's missive his "usual weeping letter," Baba asked, "Where is the time left to look for places and write to me, and for me to decide? I am leaving on the 8th morning, and do you realize the situation of bringing twenty uperna women (who don't see men) in a foreign state? With no place to settle in, for one month????"[28*]

But the outbreak of plague left Baba no choice but to alter His plans, and He cabled Chanji with new instructions:

---

* *Uperna* (sometimes spelled *ooperna*) was Baba's name for the women living at Upper Meherabad.

FRAMROZ [*sic*] DADACHANJI
CARE MAJOR COORLAWALLA
383 GUNFOUNDRY,
HYDERABAD (Deccan)

SEND PERMIT IMMEDIATELY STOP DEFINITELY
LEAVING MEHERABAD EIGHT MORNING VIA
SHOLAPUR RESTING NIGHT SHOLAPUR STOP
ARRIVING HYDERABAD NINTH EVENING
STOP AS SHADNAGAR INFESTED TRY FIND
IMMEDIATELY SECLUDED BUNGALOW IN OR
NEAR THE CITY STOP ALSO MAKE ALL OTHER
ARRANGEMENTS STOP IF NOTHING FOUND
MAKE ARRANGEMENTS DAK BUNGALOW FOR
FEW DAYS STOP IN THAT CASE WILL ALTER
PLANS AND PROCEED TOUR SOONER STOP LOVE
AND BLESSINGS MAJOR COORLAWALLA AND
THE LADY AND MEHERALI STOP WIRE
REPLY IMMEDIATELY

BABA[29]

The only other potential lodging that Chanji was able to identify was another palace belonging to the Maharaja. It was located in the village of Maula Ali, now a suburb of Hyderabad but which at that time was about six miles from the city. Its chief flaw was that it had no water supply. Chanji wired Baba about the property, and Baba replied on December 7, the day before departure, "Is the new accommodation kisanprasad's Maulali [*sic*] which sounds excellent Try if possible hotel meals for all Mandali arriving [illegible] morning love to all concerned wire."[30]

Yet despite Baba's tentative approval of the palace at Maula Ali, Chanji fretted that it might prove unsuitable upon inspection, so he

returned to Hyderabad to search for an alternative. On December 8, at what he called "the eleventh hour," Chanji at last identified another property, a palace called Zenan-Khana located in Lingampalli Gardens, about twenty miles outside of Hyderabad.[31] Zenan-Khana had water, but no heat or electricity.

At 8:05 on the morning of that same day, less than an hour before the bus was set to leave Meherabad, Baba sent another telegram, again expressing His disappointment in Chanji's efforts and reminding him of His imminent departure: "Written you so many times that our party leaves eighth morning." This was followed by yet another message sent from the road less than two hours later: "Just left for Sholapur arriving Hyderabad tomorrow evening wire Today Dakbungalow [*sic*] Sholapur–Meeting Place."[32]

One might well excuse Chanji for his weeping letters. The bizarre sequence of events leading up to the arrival of the Blue Bus reads like a litany of Job's woes: "The first [Maharaja], who had put a palace at our disposal, became seriously ill. Then the second [Maharaja] offered us his palace … whereupon his son-in-law died. Then he put a bungalow at our disposal, whereupon the black plague broke out there…. (Meanwhile the wife of the first [Maharaja] suffered a heart attack)." The list concludes with one last, macabre detail: the eleventh-hour property that Chanji at last secured "belonged to the dead brother of the Nizam [the hereditary ruler of Hyderabad State]."[33]

Baba and the women arrived at Maula Ali on the evening of December 9. "The big bus," Chanji observed, "with its extra-heavy burden of the party's baggage packed and tied to the top, presented a sight of a huge unwieldy monster moving along the road. All who saw it were scared and skeptical about its safe arrival in Hyderabad. 'It would certainly be a miracle if this bus reaches safe at Hyderabad,' some who knew about motor transport were heard to remark! But safely arrive it did." He called it "a huge mountain on wheels … an uncanny sight indeed."[34]

Chanji offered Baba the choice of Maula Ali, which had heat and electricity but no water, or Zenan-Khana, which had water but no heat or electricity. Baba chose the latter and the group continued on, arriving there at 7:30. Chanji recorded in his diary, "B. had deliberately timed His arrival after dark so as to step in with the party unseen & undisturbed."[35] He described Zenan-Khana as an ancient *gosha*, the quarters set aside for women in *purdah*.[36] But both *Lord Meher* and *Mehera–Meher* called it a *seraglio*, or harem's quarters.[37] It was "a very odd … walled-in stone bungalow built in the Moghal style with separate quarters for the women."[38]

Meanwhile, on the evening of December 8, Pleader, Gustadji, and Hedi's husband Walter had departed Ahmednagar for the overnight rail journey to Hyderabad. The men were escorting two servants, Lakshi and Bhami, and bringing Mohammed, a last-minute addition to the party. Following Baba's departure from Meherabad, Mohammed had been so bereft that he cried and refused to eat, so Baba arranged for him to travel with Pleader's party.

The men were also bringing Katie Irani. Katie's parents had told Baba that she wanted to come with Him and the women. "Baba said, 'Life with me is full of difficulties and hardships. Sarosh and Viloo are going on a trip to Delhi and Agra and they will be traveling in comfort. I am sure she'll be much happier there,'" Katie recalled. "I told my mother that I only wanted to be with Baba, that I didn't want to join anyone else. It was conveyed to Baba and He said: 'Well, I am very happy that Katie wants to come with Me. She can join Me in Hyderabad.'"[39]

Walter described the view from the window of his train compartment as "a fairy-tale-like, unreal primitive landscape, with giant hills and fields with boulders as high as a house, which are often balanced three and four on top of one another. The grayness lies still and heavy in the beige-yellow, dry fields, and little lakes with light-and dark-green grasses are as refreshing as a morning vision as they mirror the radiant sky."[40]

The party reached Hyderabad on the evening of the ninth, where they deboarded at Deccan Railway Station to join Baba and the women at Zenan-Khana. Katie's first impulse on seeing Baba was to bow down, but He stopped her, saying, "Nobody is to embrace or bow down to Me nor touch Me. You will also follow the same order."[41] He had stopped allowing the women to embrace Him after Mansari had leaned too hard against Him and clutched at Him too tightly, and His injunction was enforced throughout the entire tour.[42]

Baba's entourage had now swelled to thirty-one people (including Chanji). Pleader's party found the rest of Baba's group struggling to settle into their new accommodations. With no electricity, their only light was from the single kerosene lantern the women had brought with them on the bus. Zenan-Khana had not been occupied for some time and, in addition to being dark and cold, it was completely unfurnished. "Baba had given all to understand at first," Chanji recorded in his dairy, "that they were going to Shadnagar residential quarters of Mah [Maharaja] Sir Kisan [*sic*] Prasad & they had all expected to be ushered in, on arrival, to some splendid bungalow—ready for a hearty dinner & nice soft beds to rest during the night. What rude shock they all received when they found themselves in the 'Gosha' (Purdah ladies) quarters—open verandah with no furniture or anything except their own bedding, in the dark! But these are the lessons all had to learn—these surprises, shocks like these—to get over Maya!"[43]

Chanji further described the palace as having "plenty of space [with] two suites of rooms on its two flanks, absolutely vacant with nothing to lie on. Not a very welcome and inviting place!" Yet despite their deprivations, "The dear souls smilingly and cheerfully accepted what was offered," he continued. "Enlivened by the Master's good humour, everyone, though tired, became active and gay, and the long-deserted spot is animated with … unpacking, unloading, shifting, and arranging bedding rolls for the night's stay and rest here."[44]

Although appearing to be in good humor, Baba was not pleased with Zenan-Khana. Like Chanji, Elizabeth observed that the palace was "originally used for Mohammedan women observing *purdah*," and was part of a "country estate" surrounded by beautiful gardens. Recalling how Baba had told the women before setting out that He needed to conduct His work "near the centre of the city's humanity," she surmised that He found this property too isolated. They spent one night there, "made memorable by the eerie feeling one often senses in a dwelling of antiquity."[45] The fact that it may once have been a seraglio did not add to its trifling charms.

The following day, December 10, was Mani's birthday, which was celebrated with darshan and *jalebis*. But the festivities were overshadowed by Baba's dissatisfaction with the accommodations, and He told the women, "If [I] don't get suitable bung. [bungalow] we furnish and stay here."[46] Baba went out to look at other properties that morning, accompanied by Chanji and Lady Lily Coorlawalla, who showed them a more suitable—and comfortable—residence. Baba shifted everyone to their new accommodations that evening.•

Katie and *Mehera–Meher* both assert that Baba was so dissatisfied with Zenan-Khana that He insisted that the group move on the ninth, the evening of their arrival. Katie recalled that she immediately found a spot for her bedroll but before she even had time to close her eyes, she heard Baba's distinctive handclap to call the women together to tell them, "We don't stay here. Everybody pack up your beddings again. We are shifting." (*Glow International*, Summer 2009:24) *Mehera–Meher* (1:451) also states, "They were shifting to another bungalow," and Baba ordered Rano to repack the bus so that they could move on immediately. Neither source explains just how Baba was able to locate a more suitable accommodation so late at night. This is but one example of the many parallel storylines that emerge in narratives about the Blue Bus Tours. But as Elizabeth later wisely observed, "At the commencement of a journey … details stand out in one's mind, and, as time goes on, the sum total of conveniences and inconveniences"—in other words, experiences—"overcome their importance." (*Meher Baba Journal* 1, no. 7:43)

"The Shift to Begumpet—Another Big Surprise!" Chanji recorded in his diary. "After the disappointingly rude Surprise shock all had received last night, B. gave another Surprise Shock, but very pleasant this time! He worked one of the wonders of Aladen's [*sic*] lamp! Moved round the City, set all forces, internal as well as external, working to find the best place available."[47] Begum's Palace (Palace of a Muslim Woman of High Rank) was the property of the Nizam. It was located in a wealthy neighborhood of north Hyderabad called Begumpet. Elizabeth noted that it was near enough to "the heart of the

city" to accommodate Baba's work, but it also offered the "seclusion of a large garden" and "plenty of room for such a large party."[48]

"Like Aladdin's lamp working wonders," Chanji marveled,

> the entire scene is transformed, and the group find themselves, at the end of the day, ushered into a magnificent palace, with soft beds to lie on and everything around that a life of ease and comfort could desire. This was undreamt of and too good for a party like ours used to a life of simplicity, and satisfied with the bare necessities of life. But contrasts are at times essential and beneficial, and the Master of Wisdom deliberately offers and arranges these to give His disciples an idea and experience of the dual and ever-changing aspects of life; to train them to take all these changes and conditions alike, always accepting and welcoming willingly whatever is offered by the Divine Will—be it a rich morsel, be it a crumb.[49]

"When the Purdah 'ladies' were brought here," Chanji's diary entry continues, "it was indeed a pleasant surprise for them all! … W. [Walter] wouldn't believe his eyes and doubt[ed] if it was real or a Mere dream? But so far it was real, tho nobody knew how long this delightful reality in life would last!"[50]

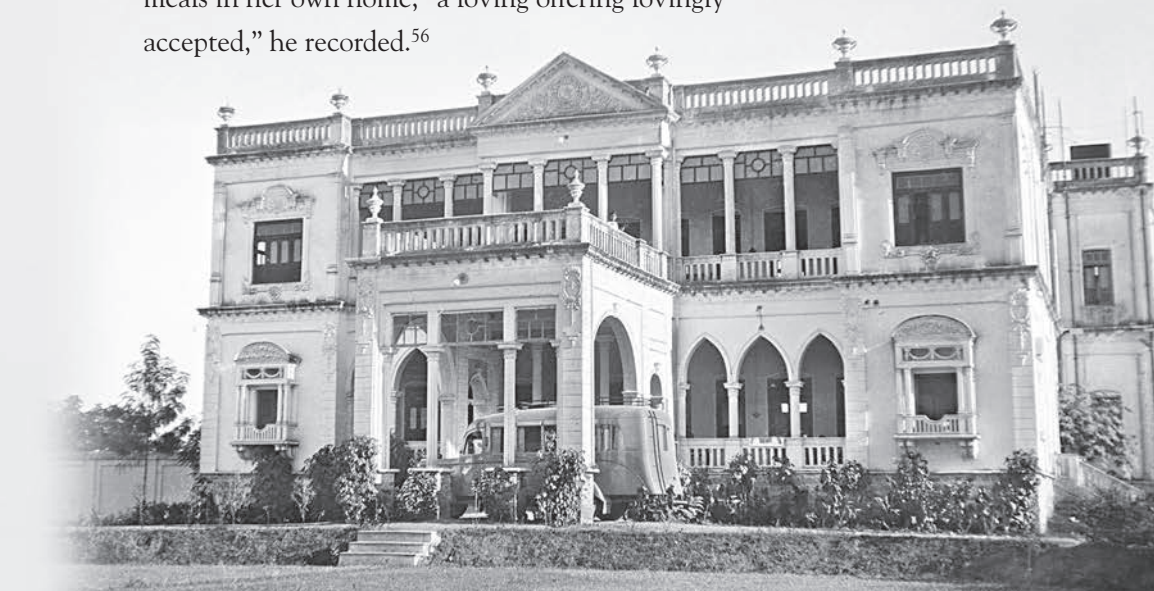
In addition to electricity and water, which augured well for hot baths, Begum's Palace also provided bearers—uniformed, turbaned butlers who assisted with luggage and other needs. But despite the impressive proportions of the palace, Baba confined the women to only a small part of it. Walter recorded in his journal that he and the other men were hosted by "Major C.," Major Coorlawalla, with whom Chanji had been staying.[51]

Since He was planning an extended halt in Hyderabad, Baba assigned sleeping arrangements for the women, paying particular attention to Mehera's needs and comfort. He would continue this practice for the duration of the tours. Meanwhile, Mehera's first order of business was to ensure

that all of Baba's toiletries and clothes were unpacked and available to Him. "With Baba," Eruch recalled, "the women always made a home for Him, wherever we were. On the men's side, we were just wanderers with Him."[52]

But Katie was still too new to the ashram to realize that she needed to wait for Baba's instructions and she later recalled, "I was feeling so tired roaming from room to room that when I saw an empty bed I just sprawled out on it. I just don't know what happened that night and Baba must have seen me there."[53] Baba told the other women not to wake her. He assigned Mehera, Mani, and Khorshed the same room, placing the others in beds in a few additional rooms. Mehera's recollection was that everyone was "quite cozy."[54] The following morning Katie realized her error in not waiting for Baba's order. She apologized, explaining to Him how tired she had been. "Well," she thought, "I have joined the ashram and I had to lead a life with Baba and be under His guidance and orders. I was all set for it and all prepared."[55] Or so she believed.

On their first morning in Begum's Palace, the women ate a meager breakfast with the expectation of a hot lunch that was to be delivered later. At this early stage of the tour Baba wanted to spare the women the household chores to which they had been accustomed at Meherabad. He had cabled Chanji just prior to departure, asking him to arrange hotel meals for the group. But before Chanji could make the arrangements, Lady Lily Coorlawalla offered to prepare all their meals in her own home, "a loving offering lovingly accepted," he recorded.[56]



Begum's Palace, with its much-appreciated running water, electricity, and turbaned bearers, where Baba's party shifted on their second evening in Hyderabad

The women's lunch was a long time arriving, and as fine as Katie's intentions might have been she had no experience with the rigors of ashram life. She was hungry and impatient to eat, and when their mid-day meal failed to arrive on time she lay down on the bed and "told Mehera peckishly, 'See if the bus has come yet.'"[57] Mehera decided to tease Katie, telling her three times that the food had come, and each time Katie became more and more exasperated. When at last their food arrived the women gathered around the table in the large dining room, only to find that their much-anticipated meal consisted of a few vegetables floating in a thin broth that Baba ladled into the same enamel mugs that they used for bathing. Elizabeth, who rarely complained, took one look at the contents of her cup and remarked, "How lovely … soapy soup!"[58] Katie's thoughts about the food were not recorded.

As her first meal demonstrated, Lady Lily was not a very good cook, but what her food lacked in quality was made up for in quantity. Despite her deficiency of kitchen skills she brought what Elizabeth described as "cauldrons of food."[59] "Each day," Mehera said, "we had this type of food. We were so hungry we didn't care. Anything would do, as long as we had plenty of bread to break in it. Baba made us appreciate even this, though it was not good."[60] The women's only consolation was that they did not have to prepare the food themselves, and in between their disappointing meals they were able to relax, read, and work on sewing projects they had brought along.

FOUR INTENTIONS

Once settled in Begum's Palace Baba enumerated His plans for the tour: "First: To contact *masts*. Second: To find a suitable place to establish a new ashram or center. Third: To give the women a chance to see the country and experience a different lifestyle than what they had been leading. Fourth: To visit the shrines and tombs of saints and Perfect Masters."[61]

Eruch stated unequivocally, "Compared with *mast* work, Baba's other activities were secondary," so it is fitting that Baba should place this aspect of His work above the others.[62] In the past Baba had chosen only a few of the men to observe and assist Him. Now, for the first time, He invited His women disciples to accompany Him as He set about accomplishing this work.

"Part of the reason for this present spiritual journey," Elizabeth wrote, "is for Him to personally encounter saints and evolved souls whom He already knew, but [whom He] wants personally to contact in this particular time." She went on to observe that Hyderabad was "rich in spiritual history," adding that there was "a street in Hyderabad City called the 'Street of the Saints.' Here the past spiritual lineage lies buried, and it is a constant place of pilgrimage by various religions." Nearby was "the rocky abode for visiting saints, pinnacled high against the blue sky." Baba took the women out in the bus to visit this abode, where, "seated humbly at the base was a man looking much like a pilgrim lost in contemplation of divinity, who, Baba said, was truly a spiritual soul, well advanced on the Path. The Master gave this man a glance which seemed to cause a light of rare happiness to pass across the countenance of the seated figure who visibly showed an expression of *recognition*."[63] Afterward Baba and the women ascended the steep stone stairs to the summit.

Baba told the women that there was a "true saint" living in Hyderabad, "a Woman Saint—thought impossible to find … living in the poorest and most crowded part of the city, in an obscure back court-yard." This near-naked, sixty-year-old, sixth-plane *mastani* existed in "a state of super-consciousness, rarely functioning on the gross plane."[64] With her unruly mop of thick silver hair she was said to bear a resemblance to Hazrat Babajan.* She was called Mastani Mai (Mother *Mast*).†

* Hazrat Babajan (d. September 21, 1931) was a Muslim saint from Baluchistan who eventually made her abode in Poona. She was the first of the five Perfect Masters of the age to awaken Meher Baba to His Godhood, by kissing Him on the forehead.

† *Mai* means mother in Hindi, and *Mastani Mai* was a generic name applied to female *masts*, six of whom are listed in the index of *The Wayfarers*.

Although He did not contact Mastani Mai directly, Baba sent Hedi and Walter out with Pleader to locate and photograph her. Their excursion turned out to be quite an adventure. "People think she is crazy," Walter observed.

> We find her in a narrow, very busy little street, where people offer their goods for sale through low openings in the houses. She is about 60 years old, large, with grey ruffled hair and her upper body naked, large mouth, half-covered eyes. Michelangelo could have painted her into his ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.
>
> We take photos as best we can in the direction of the dark compartment, where the old woman is sitting on the ground. Then she stands up, large, drags herself almost naked across the little street, where a ruckus ensues because of it. A policeman comes, she looks him in the eyes, we take photos within an inch of our lives and can just get out of there in time without further complications.[65]

"Upon seeing her photograph," Elizabeth later recalled, "I was struck by the expression of her eyes, like a female John the Baptist. Her stature was rigid, with hair matted, and she wore only a lion [*sic*] cloth. Her face inclined toward heaven, blazed with the fire of spiritual intensity."[66] Baba told the women that Mastani Mai was the spiritual chargeman of the city, declaring, "She holds the key to all of Hyderabad in her hands."[67*]

In addition to making new, albeit brief *mast* contacts, Baba set aside time every day to bathe, shave, and feed Mohammed. On the evening of December 15 He brought the bashful *mast* to stand just

* "Spiritual chargeman" was the designation Baba used for those advanced souls who were responsible for "the spiritual and material welfare" of their cities and who communicated with Him internally, often from great distances, to ascertain and carry out His will. (*The Wayfarers*, 37)

below the terrace where the women were waiting. He reached out to embrace Mohammed, lifting him six inches off the ground like a father playing with his delighted child. Mani observed that Mohammed said "sweet and amusing things and kissed 'Dada,'" his affectionate name for Baba.[68]

Baba's second intention for the tour was to identify a site for a new ashram. Norina and Elizabeth had spoken with Baba about the establishment of a spiritual center in India as early as March 31, 1938, in Panchgani. Baba had expressed reservations at the time:

> It is a good idea indeed, but by attaching to it great significance or giving it too much importance, it develops into a regular organization or system, and I do not wish to limit Myself or bind Myself with any such thing.
>
> I create things on a firm foundation and then pull them down. The more I make changes, the more changeless I am!
>
> Neither do I want an organization, nor any society. That is exactly what I am afraid could happen. If such centers are allowed to prosper, they form themselves into organizations or societies. For that reason, I build structures and then demolish them. The more changes I make, the more unchangeable I become! Organizations are like the foam which brings unwanted things up to the surface of the sea, letting the real substance lie beneath, submerged in the depths….
>
> Vagueness, building plans in the air, regular shifts from one place to another, and changes from one plan to another are the principal traits and characteristics of all the Avatars….
>
> I build on sand or in the air, planning schemes without at times a penny in My pocket or without any definite arrangement for future maintenance if started at all. And

> even when established, I break it up, or abandon it. Plans were laid for Meherabad, the school, ashram, hospital, the Nasik Retreat—all were well planned, but all were broken up and pulled down the instant the purpose was served, as I alone know.
>
> But people cannot grasp it and misunderstand. That is how the Avatar's work is always misunderstood and misjudged by the world.[69]

Baba had once considered establishing an ashram in Mysore State, but following His visit in 1936 He was so disappointed that He called Mysore an "eyesore."[70] He now turned His attention to Hyderabad State, because, Chanji observed, "this region … is highly spiritual, besides offering the advantage of proximity to 'Meherabad', Ahmednagar."[71] Almost immediately after His arrival in Hyderabad, Baba initiated conversations with local citizens about potential sites for the new center. In fact, Chanji noted, "Everyone was told of the Master's intention," and local devotees "took up the idea wholeheartedly and offered to do their best to bring it to fruition."[72] Baba met daily with state officials and also visited one of the properties, located about eleven miles from the city, "at a particular point between two lakes … quite wild land," which He deemed "rich in spiritual atmosphere."[73]

The land was purported to have been the seat of a saint who was a disciple of Jesus Christ. According to local tradition, just before he was crucified, Jesus had given the saint his shirt and the saint wore this precious garment until his own death, at which time one of his young disciples is said to have "buried the holy shirt deep in the ground beneath the seat where the Saint had sat for so many years." Although Baba did not refer directly to the legend He may have been alluding to it when He said that "the site which he had seen that day was spiritually prepared soil."[74]

On December 9 Baba asked Dr. Chakradhar Deshmukh to write a "prospectus for the new Spiritual Center Scheme, as desired by

the workers at Hydbd."[75*] He asked Hedi and Walter to apply their architectural and artistic skills to drawing up plans for the buildings. Walter wrote:

> Baba gives me a sketch which is drawn according to the format of my centre-plans and contains the designations of the various divisions…. I am supposed to have a beautiful plan made out of it by tomorrow morning! We look through the whole city for drawing paper, a primitive compass and a ruler. At seven in the evening I have the things and can begin after dinner. By about ten-thirty the black-white plan is done and on the following morning it is colored in, and given over to Baba at nine o'clock. Baba is satisfied with it and happy.[76]

When Baba showed the plans to local devotees who had been assisting in the search for suitable property, Chanji recorded, "They were wonderstruck to see the fine plan ('tho rough, drawn by Walter) and the ideas of different Ashrams it contained, and were very enthusiastic about it. It was amazing to watch B's secret subtle working, to wend, twist everything as He wants."[77]

Hyderabad was the richest princely state in India during the 1930s, and among Baba's generous Hyderabadi devotees who wanted to be a part of His scheme were Major Coorlawalla and Lady Lily, who owned a piece of property that they thought might make a good location for Baba's center, and Baba met with Lady Lily several times. He had no intention of building the center on their property, however, and He was so adamant that this crucial piece of information be kept from her until His departure that He dictated a rhyme for the women on the alphabet board, which

* Dr. Chakradhar Dharmanidhar Deshmukh (September 1, 1908-July 30, 1982) first met Baba in 1932, when he was studying for a doctorate in philosophy in London. He returned to India to become a professor at Morris College in Nagpur. Baba called on Dr. Deshmukh to present public lectures on His behalf on many occasions and enlisted his help to compile *Discourses*.

Mani recorded in her diary: "Lily or Rose must not know, must not know till we go," adding that Baba had the women repeat it in chorus.[78*]

Baba frequently diffused the intensity of these kinds of situations with an injection of divine humor. "Even when Baba was telling us something very seriously, something very important or significant, and we would all be sitting in rapt attention," Mani observed, "… suddenly Baba would change it, finish it up with something so light, or amusing. It wasn't heavy anymore. He would end it with laughter."[79] Walter, who also had ample opportunity to observe how Baba employed humor in the accomplishment of His work, recorded in his diary that "Major C." proclaimed himself to be a spiritual adept with the "ability to make a pearl out of a pea [and] to conjure up fresh California apples and other things out of the air. He played himself up to me as a master, one who wants to put one over on the naïve 'Westerner.' The whole 'Major' episode is a funny-interesting intermezzo showing Baba's work."[80]

Baba's work with—or perhaps more accurately, *on* the Major was, in fact, hilarious. Norina was instructed to "snob" the Major, presumably Walter's way of saying that Baba wanted her to turn on the charm for which she was renowned. "The next day," Walter continued,

> the Major and his wife go to Baba. He plays with the two of them like a boy with balls. He lets them puff themselves up … and lets them fall … The Major says one couldn't say anything bad about him. Baba answers, whether he wishes that one might only say good things about him? (In real existence pure deeds grow out of a state-of-balance of "good and evil.")
>
> The Major tells of his achievements. Do we both find it necessary, to talk about our achievements? answers Baba. In short, the game goes this way and that, Baba unveils His project of the "Centre," the Major would be His right hand (the little fool is very industrious). In the

* There was no one called Rose: Baba added the name to create the rhyme.

> end the Major declares to his wife, "This is the man who will wind the whole world around his finger" (What an enlightening image!?). He offers his true and loyal services.[81]

A few days later, however, Walter recorded that "the Major said to Norina, he intends to do everything for Baba under the condition that Baba give him 'realization.'"[82] After a number of false starts (all instigated by the Major) Baba told him that his services would not be required after all. Chanji observed that the Major had been "over-enthusiastic" and just a bit too "pleased with himself" for his role in Baba's scheme, adding, "But B. uses all—good & bad—wise or crack[ed], for His work where their services would be useful, even pampering & overlooking their weaknesses & mistakes."[83]

Baba also addressed His intention of showing the women the country and visiting the tombs of saints and Masters. He took them out sightseeing in Hyderabad City, with its "modern & ancient architecture, lakes, mosques [and] gardens," as well as for a drive "through village & rocky country [where we] passed tombs of saints," Mani noted in her diary.[84] They ended the day with a tour of Bagh-e-Aam (Public Garden or Garden for the Commoners).

The next afternoon Baba escorted the women to Golconda Fort. "The walls of the fort stretch away for miles," Walter wrote in his journal. "Between the walls are old temples, secret dungeons, underground passages, old city-quarters. Golconda was once larger than Hyderabad.… In the vicinity of Golconda are the huge mausoleums of the Kutub-Shas [*sic*], who ruled the region for centuries around the year 1000. In the middle of the empty rooms of the temples, which can only be entered without shoes, stand the sarcophagi hewn in stone, which are covered with writing. About two dozen such huge graves are spread out there in the gardens."[85] Afterward, Baba and Norina went inside a nearby mosque.

It had been Baba's plan to spend a month in Hyderabad, but on December 14, less than a week after arriving, He suddenly announced that He wanted to move on: "I have to proceed to Jabalpur on work, and

I am going there at once."[86] He told the women that they would depart on the seventeenth. In a letter to Adi K., Baba explained His decision: "In spite of all the best [arrangements]—they all tried to give us comfort in Hyderabad—there were so many complications that made our stay there rather uncomfortable, and even unsuitable for the work. I therefore decided to leave it abruptly, which gave them all a shock, literally."[87]

Chanji called Baba's decision yet another "Surprise—Shock" and further observed how, "through this play of cause and effect, staged on a complicated checker-board of a variety of changes and conditions, Baba seems [to be] stirring some internal effect and force; and the plan of His universal [*sic*] Spiritual Centre seems to be the main spring of all."[88] Plans for locating the center in Hyderabad were now placed on indefinite hold.

That afternoon Baba and the women visited Gandipet Dam, with its lake, gardens, and, Mani noted, its rabbits. The next morning they returned to the public gardens, which were a part of the three-hundred-acre Hyderabad Zoo, where Mani saw a tiger cub so adorable that she was compelled to mention it in her diary.•

The women spent the sixteenth packing and preparing to move on. "A change of plan was so frequent," Kitty observed, that the women were learning to live "in the eternal NOW."[89]

• "Baba would always go to the zoo wherever we traveled," Mani recalled. "We'd get down from the bus … and Baba would come smiling, bringing the good news. 'We're going out now, to the zoo.' And you hadn't unpacked, and you had to have a bath … But OK, to the zoo!" As with their visits to other public places, however, Baba hurried the women through, leaving little time to enjoy the experience.

> Baba as usual is going with speed … And then he turns around and says, "Hurry up, laggards! Come on! Come on! What's the matter?" So … we'd pass the word on to the ones talking behind you, over your shoulder, "Don't forget to look to the right. Margaret, look at the big hippopotamus there! Katie, look to the left, there's…!"
>
> So it wasn't for our enjoyment [that] Baba was giving of Himself. All … the animals were being blessed and through them all the animals in the world were being blessed. Baba would use a small dimension like an architect uses a model, which would then become universal. So through that Baba was reaching out to all, like through a few of us Baba would reach out to all. So these animals were special. Baba's visits to the zoo were special. (Mani Irani, "Baba Visits Mysore Zoo," August 1, 1987, Mandali Hall, Meherazad, India)

MANGO GROVES AND MARBLE ROCKS

On the morning of December 17 the Blue Bus departed Hyderabad for Jabalpur, about five hundred miles to the north. The drive would take three days, so Baba planned one-night stopovers in Nander and Nagpur. He sent Pleader on to Jabalpur by rail with Mohammed, Walter, and the two servants. Meanwhile, barely ten days into its first

tour the Blue Bus was already showing signs of wear and tear, and before leaving Hyderabad Walter expressed his concerns to Baba. "I hope Hedi survives the three-day drive," he fretted. "The vehicle has much too weak springs considering the overload; one feels every bump in the poor Indian roads. I say to Baba he should have double the springs put in [in] Jubbalpore."[90] Walter's suggestion was duly noted but nothing was done.

Now that Katie had joined the tour the women found themselves another seat short, so Katie joined Walu on the stools in the aisle. The bus was becoming so crowded that once everyone was inside there was no opportunity for anyone to change seats until the next stop. The women's only recourse was to perch on the backs of the seats in order to relieve their cramping legs or else stand on the seats. These were no mean feats considering the dearth of headspace in the little bus. And, as if there weren't enough bodies, Elizabeth's Kippy also was a passenger. She rode in the back, curled up on Norina's lap, since Elizabeth could not keep her in the cab. Mehera later recalled that "there was not an inch of space that wasn't occupied by someone or something! … But since we had Baba's company we didn't mind the discomforts."[91]

Even in the cramped quarters of the Blue Bus, Mehera held a space that none of the other women would even consider encroaching upon. Travel presented special challenges for her, as well as for the women charged with protecting her. At home on the Hill, Mani and Khorshed had been responsible for ensuring her seclusion, but now Baba made Kitty and Rano responsible as well.•

They had to assist all the "girls" (Kitty's name for the Easterners) onto the bus without bumping into any of the men who were accompanying Baba at any given time or even coming into their view, but Mehera required the closest attention. One morning not long after the

• Eruch recalled that the men had to protect Baba in the same way the women had to protect Mehera. When they traveled by rail, getting into and protecting their space in third-class compartments was difficult enough as it was. But for the mandali,

> This task was more serious than for others because we were not fighting for ourselves but to protect the physical form of the God-Man, Meher Baba. That is why we found it so nerve-wracking to travel by train with Baba, because there was the constant anxiety of whether we would be able to get Him safely on the train or not. For ourselves, we didn't care. We were young and strong and could make do with whatever we found. But for Baba's physical comfort, we needed to take care, and it used to be a kind of torture for us because we never knew whether we would be able to protect Baba adequately or not. (*That's How It Was*, 228)

beginning of the tour, Kitty neglected to close the curtain in the window next to Mani and Mehera's seat. Just as Baba entered the bus one of the men passed by and Mehera was momentarily exposed. Kitty did not record Baba's reaction, but she was sure never to repeat her mistake. "It is difficult not to let such an oversight spoil your mood for the day," she later observed, "but this Baba never allows and gives you no peace until you have thrown it off, outwardly at least, and are gay and cheerful. It is a good thing," she would eventually learn, "not to brood once the thing is forgiven and forgotten by Baba."[92]

Baba stopped the bus after just an hour for a picnic lunch eaten in the shade of a gigantic mango tree, where, Hedi wrote, everyone "disappear[ed] under it like little birds."[93] By 11:00 they were back on the road, continuing their drive past rice fields, lakes, and the occasional camel. The roads were poor and the vehicle was dangerously top-heavy, but Baba ordered Elizabeth to accelerate, and she did as asked until He suddenly told her to pull over, near where a *mast* stood beneath a tree. Baba got down from the bus to make contact at what appeared to have been a preappointed time and place.

Mani recorded that they reached their small dak bungalow in Nander just before five in the afternoon. Sunset was early, so it was too dark to unload the bedding rolls from the roof of the bus. The women spent the night catching what rest they could, again curled up in chairs or stretched out on tabletops or the floor. The cold bungalow was infested with bedbugs, and the women's discomfort was compounded by the sound of dogs barking all night long at a traveling circus. A few of the women tried sleeping in the bus, and although it was not ridden with vermin it was every bit as uncomfortable, noisy, and cold as the cramped bungalow.

They left Nander at 6:00 AM on Sunday the eighteenth. It was now mid-December, and as the tour progressed farther north the nights became colder and colder. "Getting up [so early] in the morning here is no joke," Kitty recalled, "the water being like ice, but in spite of this

I take a cold bath every morning."[94] Again, Baba ordered Elizabeth to drive at excessively high speeds. At 8:30 He directed her to stop at the bazaar at Hingoli to buy onions and bananas for the women's lunch, which they ate next to a bridge over a river.* December 19 was Gaimai's birthday, and in celebration Baba also bought jalebis for dessert.

The Blue Bus was back on the road at 11:30. They crossed the Badnera River and stopped in Amraoti for lemonade and tea, which, Mani impishly recorded, "brought a busful [*sic*] of nodding heads jerking up."[95] They reached Nagpur at 7:00 PM, having covered about three hundred miles in thirteen hours; the bus had averaged twenty-three miles per hour, which seemed to Chanji a remarkable rate of speed for the overburdened vehicle.† Baba and the women spent the night crowded into the small bungalow that Pappa Jessawala had rented for them. Baba had wired Pappa the previous day to let him know that the group would be arriving late Sunday evening before proceeding on to Jabalpur. He ended the cable with the two words every disciple longed to hear: "Calling you," adding, "Dont [*sic*] worry—All for best Will explain personally Love B."[96]

Pappa missed his family and was delighted to be reunited with them, and he feted Baba's entourage with a "warm welcome & hot meal."[97] That the day they arrived in Nagpur just happened to be Gaimai's birthday was a circumstance only Baba could have arranged and it was likely the explanation for His insistence on Elizabeth's driving so fast. As Chanji noted, "The sweet will of Baba had it so well-planned that even this small human incident was lovingly taken care of."[98]

Baba spent the following morning meeting with local lovers. Kitty recorded that His search for a suitable boy also resumed in Nagpur. Baba had been sending out various members of the mandali since

* The bananas and onions were such a singularly odd pairing that Rano still recalled them when she composed her memoir nearly forty-five years later.

† Baba first visited Nagpur in 1915. He also visited or passed through the city in 1919, 1921, 1930, 1933, 1937, 1939–42, 1944–45, 1949, and 1953.

1927 on a series of seemingly fruitless quests to locate a boy who could assist Him in His Universal work. Here, Kitty wrote, "at this place Baba saw the ideal one, but of course his mother could not be persuaded to part with him so suddenly…. The father was not very anxious, but after meeting Baba, the father said the boy could go … ; however, this time Baba said no. He is, as Baba puts it, already on the path and Baba wants one with the potentialities for the path but not already on the path. So the search continues."[99]

Baba and the women left Nagpur on the afternoon of the nineteenth and reached Jabalpur at 8:00 PM.* They settled into a government-owned bungalow located at 65 Marble Rocks Road for a twenty-two day halt. The spacious house was the residence of a close, long-time disciple, Jabalpur City Magistrate and Extra-Assistant Commissioner Jal Kerawalla. Jal was an accommodating host: He met Pleader and the others who had traveled by rail and he stayed with the men in the house that he had rented for them for the duration of Baba's visit, pleased to vacate his own home for Baba and the women's exclusive use.

Chanji recorded: "B's party are v. happy in Jal (Kerawala's [*sic*]) bungalow…. All arrangements made were splendid, and everyone felt quite at home."[100] But even in their well-furnished accommodations the women were uncomfortable. "It was very, very cold in Jabalpur," Mehera recalled. "It did not warm up even with the morning sun—11:00 A.M. was just as cold as 5:00 A.M."[101] "Beastly cold," Mani wrote, "but jolly."[102]

Just as He had in Hyderabad, Baba arranged for catered meals, and the women felt "so hungry; we just waited for the food to come," Mehera recalled. As soon as it was delivered, everyone rushed to the table on the cold verandah where Baba spooned enormous portions onto their enamel plates. He admonished them for their impatience, saying, "'All right, you're hungry. Now eat.' We had to finish every bite," Mehera concluded.[103]

* Baba's only other visit to Jabalpur was in 1949.

Katie also recalled the catered meals and the huge servings of food the women were expected to consume:

> My plate was rather small. Baba tells me, "Why do you have a small plate? How can I give you enough food?" Baba heaped up a pile of rice. I said, "Baba, how can I eat this?" He piled two more spoonfuls and said, "You have to finish everything." I wondered to myself how I would ever eat all the rice. But I was so hungry that I did not leave a grain on the plate.
>
> Baba always said that we should eat as much as we liked and never waste even a grain of food on our plates. So we always had that habit [and] the food would come in from outside and Baba would serve us. Looking at the vessels, we would think that the quantity of food never seemed to be enough. But somehow, whenever Baba served us, the food would be left over for another twenty people. So we would always smile and think to ourselves, because Baba is serving us He makes it go all the way around.[104]

Before Baba departed for the tour, He had settled eight-year-old Meherwan Jessawala at Akbar Press, the home of his uncle and maternal aunt, Jehangir and Shirinmai Damania, so that the boy might be enrolled in school in Ahmednagar.• But not long after Baba shifted to Jabalpur Gaimai received a letter from Jehangir about Meherwan. Jehangir complained that Meherwan was proving to be a nuisance and he insisted that Gaimai take responsibility for her son. Jehangir also wrote directly to Baba complaining about the boy's continuing presence in his home. In actuality, Meherwan was suffering from a bad reaction to a homeopathic treatment that had made

• Akbar Press in Ahmednagar was a cotton mill, as well as home of the Sathas, a large Zoroastrian family that came to Baba in the early to mid-1920s. The Satha siblings included five brothers—Nusserwan, Meherjee, Jemi, Homi, and Pilu, as well as four sisters, Gulu, Banu, Gai, and Shirin—all of whom became devoted to Baba. He was a frequent visitor to Akbar Press, and the Blue Bus made several stops there so that the women could be treated to much-appreciated home-cooked meals and, on one occasion, hot baths at the end of their long journey.

him break out in boils all over his body. Thinking his condition was contagious, Jehangir isolated the boy from his own children. Meherwan was lonely and miserable.

Baba was not pleased and He cabled Pendu at Meherabad, asking him to arrange for Meherwan to travel to Jabalpur to join the rest of his family. Pendu's father Masaji* needed to come to Jabalpur to deliver the baggage that had been left behind at Meherabad because there had been no room for it on the bus, and Meherwan could travel with him. Gaimai was distressed by all the trouble her family was causing Baba and worried that they were becoming a nuisance. When Baba saw that she was distracted He asked whether she loved Meherwan or Himself. She replied, "To dedicate my one Meherwan at Your feet is not enough; even were I to surrender a thousand sons it would be nothing." "As you have come to Me leaving everything behind, what trouble will it be to Me?" Baba replied. "You are not worthy of being Eruch's mother, but you are worthy of being My mother!"[105†]

Baba and the women celebrated their Christmas holiday with a visit to Marble Rocks, near the town of Bhedaghat on the Narmada (Giver of Pleasure) River, about thirteen miles away. They left the city on Christmas Eve morning, arriving at nine o'clock for an overnight stay in a dak bungalow overlooking Supatal Lake. Mani deemed the view from the verandah "a picture-postcard from every angle."[106] Chanji, Gustadji, and Walter traveled separately by tonga and stayed in a separate bungalow.

At three o'clock on the afternoon of their arrival Baba took the women out to visit Dhuandhar (Smoke) Falls and to Chausath Yogini Temple, with its sixty-four sculptures of *yoginis* (female

* Rustom Dorab Irani was married to Baba's Aunt Piroja, His mother's sister. They were the parents of two children, Naja and Pendu. Baba called Him Masaji (Beloved Uncle). Masaji had served as one of the cooks for the men's ashram since 1922, when Baba was at Manzil-e-Meem in Bombay. Later he served as the men's cook at Lower Meherabad, as well as preparing feasts for large groups of devotees and Arangaon villagers.

† Baba told Gaimai that she would be His mother during His next Advent. *(My Life with Meher Baba, the Avatar of the Age,* 63)

yogis). They ushered in Christmas morning with arti, the exchange of gifts, and a huge cake. Afterward they went out for a short boating excursion on the Narmada, through Marble Rocks Gorge. Chanji called Marble Rocks "a sight majestic in beauty. The ancient legend goes that it was the abode of the Monkey-God Hanuman. High above the hills is a temple dedicated to the God Vishnu, which is also a place of beauty."[107] Souvenirs were sold nearby and Khorshed recalled, "Baba gave each of us something. Baba gave me a white heart-shaped stone. He gave my mother a gray square stone."[108]

It was during this outing that Rano photographed Baba kneeling on the bank of the river with the water of the Narmada running through His fingers.• Baba remarked to Elizabeth, "It is very rare that a Master will put His hands or feet in the water, for then He nearly always has to work a miracle."[109] Gaimai said to Him in turn, "How long the Narmada has awaited you, Baba!"[110]

Rano called sightseeing with Baba "an uncommon affair."[111] He explained to the women His purpose in taking them out on these kinds of excursions:

> I am showing you beautiful sights, sailing with you and taking you here and there. All this is to free you from material bondage. Doing all this, all the while I am attentive to whose mind is where, and when I interrupt you in your reveries with a view to freeing you, you take it ill and your mood is upset.
>
> If I do not behave like this, of what use would it be your remaining with Me for years together? Remember to focus your attention always on Me, even while enjoying things. Don't remain drowned in material pleasures. Don't give rein to your desires.

• Mani, Rano, Elizabeth, and Hedi all carried cameras during the First Blue Bus Tour, and they captured many intimate moments with Baba. Mani carried her small Kodak Brownie, which she used to photograph many of the sites the group visited, but few of her pictures include Baba. He never wanted to draw attention to Himself in public places and was usually in such a hurry that He did not like to stop and pose. Additionally, Mani had to be available to read the alphabet board at any moment and could not risk being distracted by taking too many pictures. Elizabeth's camera was also a Kodak Brownie, but a much better model than Mani's, producing larger negatives. Hedi carried a 35-MM camera, but because Baba sent her back home to her family in Switzerland in April 1939, she was not able to document subsequent tours. Rano never mentioned the make of her camera. In any case, she started having problems with it partway through the first tour and ran out of film as well, and she was reluctant to ask Baba for the money for repairs and film.

> Only love Me! When you love Me only, then in the intoxication of that love, you will find all physical pleasures lifeless.

Baba ended this discourse by teasing the women that they were all of "such types that in spite of My telling you this, you are eagerly waiting for Me to finish so you can all go and eat!"[112] They returned to their bungalow just before 10:00 AM.

Although Baba celebrated Christmas in the company of the women, He marked the day with a sweet gesture to remind the men that they were not forgotten. Walter wrote in his journal that Baba sent them a small cake "upon which was written in sugar: 'Baba is love.'"[113] Everyone returned to Jabalpur that evening.

Meherwan and Masaji arrived the following day, December 26, but their journey had very nearly been a disaster. Masaji had gotten off at one of the stops to ensure that their baggage was still secure in the brake van at the end of the train, but before he could get back to where Meherwan was seated the train pulled out of the station. Distraught, he went to the stationmaster, who cabled ahead to arrange for Meherwan and the baggage to be left at the next stop so that Masaji could join the boy there. Meanwhile, Meherwan had seen what had happened: "I was looking out of the window, and I could see that he … couldn't get on and he missed the train. And I was all alone there in the compartment not knowing what to do…. The train kept going. I was totally helpless. I just kept sitting there." Meherwan didn't even have his ticket with him, adding, "I was just a sort of baggage for Masaji."[114]

It was approaching midnight when the train arrived at the next station. Three police officers boarded, found Meherwan, and told him to get off the train. Meanwhile, all their luggage had been taken off the brake van and piled onto the platform beneath a single gas light mounted on a pole. The policemen told Meherwan not to move until the next train pulled into the station and left him alone in near

darkness, seated atop the mound of baggage. When the next train finally arrived an hour later, Masaji ran to Meherwan and held him close as everything was loaded. Meherwan wryly concluded, "He had found the treasure of his life."[115]

When they reached Jabalpur several hours later than expected, Masaji fell at Baba's feet confessing all, begging Baba please not to tell Pappa Jessawala, who was nicknamed "the Pistol" for good reason. Baba saw that it was too much to expect Masaji to endure Pappa's wrath on top of the distress he already felt over the unfortunate incident and He mercifully agreed not to say any more about it.

Thus it was that Meherwan Jessawala joined the women's ashram, although he had little direct contact with the women, other than his mother and sisters. "I was small and shy," he later recalled, "and very withdrawn and I didn't mix much, but kept to myself. That's why probably I was allowed in [and] that was the first time that Baba allowed a male child … into the female ashram … the time when Baba broke that strict separation of the males from the women's side."[116]

On the morning of December 27 Baba ordered a taxi and escorted Hedi and Walter to Mandla, an important place of Hindu pilgrimage located about sixty miles south of Jabalpur. Baba explained that it was "inhabited in ancient times by great saints, yogis, ascetics, recluses, and *tapasvis* [ascetics] who performed great penances here. Its earth is soaked in spirituality."[117] Baba also took them to Madan Mahal (Moon Palace), an eleventh-century citadel located nearby. "This is an old palace of the Gond-Kings on a mountain," Walter wrote. "The whole landscape is filled everywhere with such round, giant rocks, in part balancing, as in Hyderabad. I photographed an unbelievable example. Monkeys are hopping and swinging on the rocks and trees…. One has a wide view across the surrounding landscape of stone, across the outer belt of green and right up to the far-off city of Jubbalpore, which is dominated by the hills with the English garrison."[118]

Mehera's birthday fell on December 29 according to the Zoroastrian calendar, so on December 28, Baba escorted the women to Mandla.* He stopped the bus along the way so that the women could see one of the sulfur hot springs for which Madhya Pradesh is known. At 10:30 they settled into a lodging called Circuit House, located on the banks of the Narmada.† Chanji, Gustadji, and Walter, who again traveled separately, were accommodated in a privately owned bungalow nearby.

"Think of our surprise," Kitty recalled, "when as we drove up to the dak bungalow we saw the table set with a white cloth, folded table napkins, glasses, silverware, etc. These we had not seen for ages! All loved the place. Had it not been for the influence of the Magistrate [Jal Kerawalla] we could never have had this dak bungalow. He is a very important person and loves Baba." And yet, she continued, "Here we were out all day, eating on the porch, needless to say, not at the table laid as above described. We brought out our sacks and used our enamel mugs, plates, etc., and felt 'at home', Baba again serving us."[119]

That afternoon Baba took the women out to visit Sahastradhara (Thousand Waterfalls), the source of the Narmada and location of the two-thousand-year-old temple of Perfect Master Shankaracharya,‡ which was another place of Hindu pilgrimage. The men had also come along, having taken a tonga. Chanji called the walk to the falls "one of the most inspiring incidences of the short stay at Mandla."[120] There, Baba dangled His feet in the icy current, observing, "The Avatar sanctifies the waters of any river when He puts His feet in it."[121] Walter captured Mandla's atmosphere in his journal:

* Baba had marked Mehera's birthdays sporadically in previous years, but now He began to observe them annually. He also marked the women's birthdays throughout the tours. "Baba would buy sweets or ice cream," Rano recalled, "and we would sing the arti and take Baba's darshan. Sometimes there would be a holiday mood and Baba would plan as a special treat a picnic or a trip to the zoo." (*Because of Love*, 38)

† Bigger and nicer than dak bungalows, Circuit Houses were usually located in more populated areas where they were available to rent from the government.

‡ Adi Shankaracharya (first half of the eighth century) was a philosopher and theologian who differentiated Hinduism, which declared that Atman—the Soul or the Self—existed, from Buddhism, which asserted that the Soul or Self did not exist. He traveled throughout India, establishing the tradition of monasteries for retreat and the study of scriptures.

> On the banks of the river are steps and terraces [*ghats*] with women who are fetching water or washing clothes. A man is leading horses to drink, on a rocky overhang of meadow monkeys are jumping around with their young, on the old ruins are sitting black and white vultures, and huge, old trees tower over the walls and towers.
>
> Next to a group of old temples is a hollow tree, which consists only of roots in the air, upon which a young plant has sprouted up. Sculptures and relief-figures are set up; whenever there are prayers a bell sounds so that God will be sure to be awake and listen. The old keeper at the temple of the river goddess Nurbudda [*sic*-Narmada] has a clear, happy face, and one is really taken by the harmony and unity—perceivable everywhere—of the river, temple, trees, animals, people and gods. Baba loves this place and says it is especially spiritual, for it is blessed by the three surrounding rivers.[122]

Baba celebrated Mehera's birthday early on the morning of the twenty-ninth with arti and darshan. After embracing her, He took the women out for a ferry boat ride to mark the occasion. They returned to Circuit House and at teatime that afternoon He cut her birthday cake and handed out slices, after which Mani and one of the other women presented a "'Santa Claus' entertainment."[123] Afterward the women enjoyed more birthday sweets and pulled crackers with Baba.*

Baba's continuing reminders to the women about maintaining harmony were put to the test the next morning, when a disturbance took place after He called them together for darshan. Meherwan was seated on his mother's lap at the back of the room where everyone had

* Crackers are a popular British party favor consisting of small cardboard cylinders wrapped in festive paper. When the paper is pulled from both ends at the same time the cylinder "cracks" open with a pop. Small trinkets and paper mottos fall out, as well as a paper (or plastic) crown.

gathered. Suddenly he heard the "tap-tap-tap of high heels" as a woman came running in and collapsed at Baba's feet, sobbing uncontrollably. Behind her came the "clunk-clunk-clunk" of heavier feet as a rather much larger woman followed her into the room and began pummeling her on the back with her fists, berating her in a language unlike anything Meherwan had ever heard.[124] "I was shaking all over just watching!"[125]

The two women were Nadine and Helen. Baba had assigned them to the same room, but they were reluctant roommates at best: reclusive Helen was continually aggravated by Nadine's restless and talkative nature. Clearly they were in the throes of some colossal misunderstanding. Meherwan did not know what to think as he watched Helen repeatedly pounding Nadine on the back as Baba serenely looked on. Finally, Helen ran out of energy and stopped. "Afterwards," Meherwan said, "there was pindrop silence throughout the room."[126] Baba asked Nadine to rise and He told the two women to embrace. This they did, and afterward it seemed to Meherwan as if the confrontation might never have taken place. Baba later explained that He had had no choice but to allow the dispute to run its natural course, because if interrupted it would have festered and arisen again at another time. Mani documented the event in her diary with two words: "Helen incident."[127]

On that evening of December 30, Baba was approached by a local attorney named Murlidhar D. Pathak, who through his friend, Jal Kerawalla, had learned of Baba's plans to establish a spiritual center. The attorney was known as Pathak Pleader in honor of his profession.* He drove up to the house where the men were staying, imploring them to allow him to speak with Baba. He knew of a possible location for Baba's center and wanted Baba to accompany him to see it. The men told him to come back at 8:30 the next morning, December 31. But Pathak arrived late and was informed that Baba would not meet him until 10:30. He waited, and when he was able to see Baba, he explained

* In British and Indian law, a "pleader" is an attorney who specializes in drafting pleas. Pathak Pleader is not to be confused with Baba's Pleader, who was one of the mandali.

that he wanted to offer Him a tract of land. Baba went to view the property and liked it so much that He asked Jal to find out how much Pathak was asking for one hundred acres.

That afternoon the Blue Bus departed Mandla, arriving back at the bungalow in Jabalpur just after three. As the men followed behind, Walter witnessed an extraordinary occurrence:

> We four [men] were driving at a terrific pace in order to catch up with the bus which had left with the others two hours earlier. Baba had gone in the first [*sic*] bus. Near to a small village in the jungle I saw in the distance a number of dark figures like small men in frock coats sitting by the road. It was about 20 lamb-eating vultures.… Two of the vultures were fighting on the road over a piece of meat; we came zooming along, a bump, and the one vulture was run over and killed, while the other slumped over hurt. When we arrived in Jubbalpore Baba told us that at that very moment the bus with the others, which was about 20 miles ahead of us, had met a two-wheeled wagon pulled by a buffalo on a bridge over a river. The buffalo had reared and fallen over with the driver and wagon into the river. Because we had at the same moment, twenty miles away, driven over the vultures, Baba said, thus the life of the driver had been saved, he had been able to work himself and the buffalo and wagon out of the river! Such related happenings occur very often in Baba's presence.[128]

As it happened, at the same time that Baba had embarked on the tour, Upasni Maharaj* also was visiting parts of India with a group of

* Upasni Maharaj (May 15, 1870–December 24, 1941) was a Hindu saint and one of the five Perfect Masters to awaken Merwan Irani to his Godhood. His ashram was located at Sakori, about fifty miles north of Meherabad. He brought Merwan back down to gross consciousness by throwing a stone that hit Him in the middle of His forehead.

disciples, and on January 2 he passed through Jabalpur. Although he and Baba did not meet, Upasni sent one of his devotees with these instructions: "Tell Merwan that this day I passed through His house."[129] Baba called His missing Upasni the game of "hide and seek of the Masters."[130]

Also on January 2, Baba wrote to Baidul,* who was overseeing operations at Meherabad in His absence, to inquire about the other mandali who had remained behind, as well as His "dear mad-children," and to send His love "to the sane and insane inmates of the Mad Ashram."[131]

On January 3 Pathak Pleader called on Baba again, this time in Jabalpur. He was accompanied by Mahendra Lal Chowdhary, one of his clients, who beseeched Baba to accept the gift of another parcel of land in Mandla, a thirty-seven-acre mango orchard adjacent to the Circuit House property where Baba and the women had stayed at Christmas. The site was known as Tapobhoomi (Abode of Penances of the Ancient Rishis). It was also called Lakh Ambe (Abode of One Hundred Thousand Mango Trees), which had been "planted by the *rishis* of old."[132] Three hundred trees still grew on the property.

Mr. Chowdhary had good reason to offer Baba the land: he had recently been acquitted of a murder charge and wished to express his gratitude in some way. But Baba hesitated to accept the gift. He told the men that He wanted love, rather than *dakshina* (gifts of monetary value), explaining, "The dakshina of pure love is the highest type of donation one can make."[133] But Pathak Pleader knew how to present his case, and after two more hours of entreaties he convinced Baba to accept the land. Chowdhary considered Baba's decision to be a great blessing. Baba asked Jal to proceed with the purchase of seventy-one acres of additional property adjacent to the thirty-seven acres that Chowdhary had donated to Him.

* Rustom B. ("Jafrabadi") Irani (March 3, 1894–January 23, 1970) was a Persian farmer who brought his family to India, where his family settled in Poona. He met Meher Baba in 1922 and became a lifelong disciple. His nickname was Baidul, and he displayed a special gift for locating *masts* for Baba to contact as Baba's *mast* work intensified.

Baba later dictated a letter to Kitty for some of His English lovers, in which He called the property "a beautiful situation and right in the center of India."

> Two important rivers meet in Mandla and our property is eight furlongs [one mile] from the river and with such a large number of trees that some may have to be cut. I was there again yesterday to make final arrangements and to have the deed signed. The climate is wonderful and suited to both Easterners and Westerners. The donor owns large properties in this neighbourhood—117 villages. He is a very spiritual man and very interested in the centre which will embrace every activity of mine. It is also a very spiritual part of India and suited in every way to my needs.[134]

In a letter to William Donkin Baba further explained: "Every activity of Mine will be represented there and there will be room to expand to any dimension. You will love the surroundings," adding, "This [tour] is not a holiday trip. It is full of significance and each has their part to play in it."[135]

The day before, Kitty had also composed a long letter to some of Baba's devotees in England—the first correspondence she had found time for since departing Meherabad. In it she mentioned that Baba had already spoken to the women about moving on, telling them how the "real tour" would begin in mid-January: "This is the month preceding the first tour, which does not begin before the 15th of January, and yet we have seen so much and traveled so far that I cannot see quite where the tour will be different from what we are at the moment doing. But Baba says it will be quite different so I must be wrong in my idea."[136]

Meanwhile, Baba had ordered Walter to return home to Switzerland. Walter was bereft at the thought of leaving Baba and Hedi, but Baba reassured him, promising, "I am coming with you, and will be with you in the work you will do for Me in Zurich."[137] On January 3 Walter left by rail

for Bombay, where he would board a ship for Europe. Approaching the end of his journey, he also neared the conclusion of his journal:

> Only five weeks with Baba and Hedi. Little for a trip to India, and much, a whole life, for inner development. I must learn to be satisfied….
>
> I am in the train. Have the feeling everything has come around full circle. Baba has given me clear directives for everything. And I have seen His universal power, His Love and wisdom. It is now up to me to do my part….
>
> There is a dining car on the train (17-hour trip). Hot soup, warm plates, 'real cooking,' beer, dessert, coffee, cigarettes! Damn, I'm getting civilized again.
>
> Feel like a tree, which outwardly has gotten new leaves, inwardly feels the sap of new life. Life with Baba was externally so spartan, but how strong the inner nourishment through the energy of His close proximity.[138]

Also on January 3, Baba escorted the women on another excursion, this one to the pilgrimage site of Gwarighat, as well as to the British gun carriage factory. The factory seems an odd place to take the women, but the outing might have had something to do with Baba's war work.

Baba had been in partial seclusion since His arrival, and although people soon learned of His presence in Jabalpur He would not see them when they asked for His darshan. As Chanji observed, "For the first ten days at Jubbulpore, Baba's sojourn was kept private and no interviews were given. But, as one of His devotees remarked, 'Wherever there is sun, there is bound to be light,' [and] the very presence of the august Being aroused the true aspirants and devotees who sensed and felt it…. The call of love could not be rejected, and whatever the reasons of keeping His visit strictly quiet, Baba did respond to the call of devotion."[139]

Chanji's metaphor for the manner in which Baba's devotees were drawn to Him was that just as "sugar attracts ants, Love (personified) attracts loving & devoted Souls wherever He is, and He has to respond. In such exceptional Cases, B. puts aside all restrictions and allows free access to love to express itself…. A large number of Parsi-s [*sic*], who had come here for picnic & boating expressed a desire to take this opportunity to see Him & have His 'darshana.' As if to respond to their call, B. arrived just in time … and allowed 'darshana,' which they had."[140]

Baba also agreed to host two public darshans at Jal's house. The first, which took place on January 8, was only for men, and Chanji read the message that Baba spelled out on the alphabet board. The following day, local musicians offered a program of qawaali music for Baba featuring a woman singer from Jabalpur. The second darshan, held on the tenth, was only for women. Baba had to offer a separate event for them because of Jabalpur's large Muslim community, for whom the mixing of men and women would have been objectionable. Because no other men could be present, Mani read out Baba's message. The women's darshan was followed by bhajans and entertainment from 7:00 to 10:00 PM that evening for the "tiny tots"—the children of darshan participants.[141] The darshan had begun at 7:30 AM and Baba fasted until the festivities concluded that night.

When they were in Hyderabad, Baba had told the women that He was going to Jabalpur to meet one particular man, and Elizabeth wondered if Pathak Pleader was the man to whom He had referred. She (and, indeed, the others as well) now assumed that Mandla would be the site of the Universal Spiritual Center. On January 11 Baba returned to Mandla with Pathak Pleader and Mahendra Lal Chowdhary. He spent half an hour seated beneath one of the mango trees, remarking to the men, "I am infinitely old and eternally young … This is my old, old spot. And here are my old, old friends."[142] While there He was approached by a group of prominent men from Mandla who believed that one day "a saintly Being" would visit that very spot. They had

heard about Meher Baba and were sure He was that being. They also implored Him to establish an ashram there and, as a reward for their efforts in seeking Him out, Baba gave the men a two-hour discourse on "Truth, the Path and Spirituality."[143] Baba also continued His work with Mohammed, and He called Chhagan,* another of the mandali, from Meherabad to look for *masts*. Chhagan brought the men back to Baba's bungalow when they would cooperate. One who agreed to come and see Baba was a young man from the nearby town of Seoni. Afterward he declared, "I see Meher Baba in everything and in every being."[144]

On occasion, Baba had to go out into the city or nearby towns to contact the *masts* in person. He was well aware of the effect His absences had on the women while He was engaged in His *mast* work, dictating in a letter to Delia in London, "Life is not easy for the group. They see very little of Me. But this is not a holiday trip. I have great work to do and they have much to learn. Life is a school wherever you are. I teach all whom I have chosen."[145]

On January 9 Baba ordered the mandali to have handbills printed on red paper to be distributed to local devotees announcing His departure on January 15. He was most adamant that the paper be red, mentioning it several times, but He never explained why.

Just as Baba was finalizing plans for departure, Gulmai arrived at His invitation, escorted by several more of the men. Baba sent Chhagan and Chanji ahead to prepare for the group's arrival in Benares, while Adi K. accompanied Gulmai, Mohammed, and the servants there by rail. He sent Gaimai, Manu, Meheru, and Meherwan home to Nagpur for Meherwan's spring school term but promised to call them again when He returned to Jabalpur in March of the following year, near the end of the tour.

* Chhagan Sitaram Deshmukh (December 1908–February 1, 1972) was a wealthy Brahmin devotee of Upasni Maharaj who resisted meeting Baba because He was a Zoroastrian. But in 1925, at the age of nineteen, Chhagan appealed to Baba after his family lost their fortune. Baba invited him to stay at Meherabad, where he became a teacher at the Hazrat Babajan School. Chhagan remained with Baba for the rest of his life.

KASHI, CITY OF LIGHT

The Blue Bus drove away from Jabalpur at 4:45 PM on Sunday, January 15, its destination Benares, also called Kashi, "City of Light." Baba had said early in January, when He learned that Upasni Maharaj had spent two weeks in Benares, that He would also visit there. After two hours on the road Baba and the women stopped in Katni, where they spent the night in the lovely home of Keki Bajan, a friend of Mansari's. Keki was a local magistrate and a Parsi devotee of Upasni Maharaj who had gone to Jabalpur to see Baba and had invited His entourage to stay with his family on their way to Benares. Keki kept a beautiful room set aside for Upasni to use when the Perfect Master visited Benares. No one but Baba was allowed to enter the room and He spent the night alone there.

Baba planned to leave for Benares at 6:00 AM the following day, with just over two hundred miles to go. Kitty recalled that it was the mornings that were difficult. "We usually went to bed at night before dark, but the mornings—oh dear! Baba would say, 'You must be packed and seated on the bus at 5:30 a.m., ready to start.' Breakfast had to be cooked, eaten and cleared, mosquito nets taken down, bedding rolled up and the bus packed—all in semi-darkness."[146] This morning, Kitty wrote, their departure was "not without the usual crisis."[147*] It was, in fact, an object lesson in utter miscommunication, also known as Maya.

> Invariably Rano or I get caught, either the evening before we start or on the actual morning, probably because one is a little on edge with the wish that all shall be ready on time. On this occasion I misunderstood Baba and thought [that] He said lunch would come as usual from the mandali's house before we started at 10:00 … that it meant vegetables, etc. It turned out that He meant

* Kitty mistakenly documents this departure as having taken place the previous morning, January 15. But based on Mani's diary, it had to have been the sixteenth. Kitty's rendering of the incident has been edited slightly for clarity and to bring it into alignment with her earlier statement that they departed at 6:00 AM, with which Mani concurs.

> that we would have an early [breakfast] before starting of cheese, bread and butter. This was already packed for the next journey. Rano and Kaka were called in and Kaka said he had made it clear that we were to eat cheese, and Baba said He had made it clear. Rano, who is very accurate, said nothing about cheese had been mentioned, and she too thought lunch meant vegetables, etc. On and on the discussion went, and I just said, "Well, Baba, one of us is lying, but as you are my Master, then it must of course be my fault, and I must have forgotten!" … Baba would not drop the subject. Rano usually gets quickly ruffled when contradicted, but she remained very calm, and just said again and again that she understood that food was … being sent in. Again, Baba said, "You both forgot what I said or did not pay attention," and again asked me if that was not so. I replied, "In the same way as Kalyan* said to his Master who said it was night, so, Baba, if you said you made it clear about cheese and bread, then it must be so and we misunderstood." At this point all laughed and Baba called Rano and me into another room, turned to Rano and said, "Congratulations, this is the first time you have not argued or been ruffled. I am very pleased." Just see how Baba works. Usually Baba says, "Why must you both always upset My mood, just as we are about to leave?"[148]

Miraculously, Baba and the women set out only thirty minutes late. Three and a half hours later He had Elizabeth pull over "near fields of dal" for their picnic lunch.[149] They stopped again at Mirzapur Station where they enjoyed a twenty-minute break for afternoon tea. They made good time for the last thirty-five miles on tar-coated pukka roads—so unusual an occurrence that Mani noted it in her diary. They

* Kalyan was a disciple of Emperor Janak during the Advent of Lord Ram. Janak was a Perfect Master and the father of Sita. Kalyan was renowned for his literal obedience to Emperor Janak.

crossed the Ganges, afterward passing herds of camels and elephants, troops of monkeys, and flocks of peacocks, all scattered across a landscape of red sand and green fields of wheat, rye, and other farm crops. The Blue Bus reached Benares at 5:00 PM on Monday, January 16, and Baba's party proceeded straight to the British Cantonment, where Chhagan had rented bungalows for the group.*

Kitty had prepared dinner before departing in the morning. But by the time the women climbed down from the bus hungry and weary from their long day on the road, their food had yet again spoiled during the drive. Kitty and Naja contrived a hasty meal from what was on hand: onions, potatoes, and a few wilted vegetables. The women drank it from their bathing mugs, prompting Elizabeth to observe, "This is wonderful, Baba dear. More soapy soup!"[150] Like many of the dak bungalows where they stayed, the cantonment property was "shabby and had no water, no furniture, and was very cold. Nevertheless we stayed here for a week. Water for washing was heated on [the] Primus stove and consisted of a little can for each," Kitty recorded in her diary. "Food was cooked … with two saucepans for thirty people…. We manage the best we can."[151]

Benares (now called Varanasi) is considered by nearly all Hindus to be the most auspicious place of pilgrimage in India. "Since ancient times," Baba explained, "the holy city of Benares has been the abode of saints, rishis and highly advanced souls. As such, it is imbued with a spiritual atmosphere, congenial, and helpful to any spiritual aspirant or seeker. As to the shrines and temples that abound here, it is not the walls of bricks and stones, but the atmosphere and environment here that *breathe* spirituality."[152]

"Since times of old," Chanji recorded, echoing Baba's own words,

> there have been Rishis and Tapaswis (ascetics) who have lived there for years, practiced penances, meditated and were in high states of *Samadhi* (spiritual trance)….

* Cantonments were areas in cities set aside for the use of the British military, as well as government officials and their families. Private bungalows were available for visitors or for rent to travelers.

> GREAT SOULS SUCH AS RAMA, KRISHNA, BUDDHA AND EVEN JESUS HAD BEEN HERE DURING CERTAIN PERIODS OF THEIR LIVES. It is due to these highly evolved souls and Masters of their age that the place is surcharged with spiritual atmosphere. True sanctity does not lie in the dead walls of brick and stone or even the waters, but it is in the great living beings who stayed here and filled the environment with the fire of their devotion, love and worship, and in the great spiritual forces released by the Masters during their stay here.[153]

This was Elizabeth's second visit to Benares, and she shared an extraordinary account of her first visit in 1926, observing how it had prepared her for returning there with Baba:

> To be with the Master under such circumstances is indeed to wonder at one's own privilege! India I have seen before, any traveler can see India, but few can feel it, still less can perceive its spiritual currents or anything of their trend for I believe India is the spiritual "barometer" for the world's religious currents. It was twelve years ago



Baba, rafting on the Ganges, Benares, January 18, 1939

> that I originally went to Benares…. It was a cross-section of life in its aspect of devotion—rogues wished to be absolved of their sins, and seekers wished to find God…. One incident remains most vividly in my memory. It was the look in the eyes of an old woman of over eighty years, when she first saw the holy Ganges. Her grandson, a young man, carried her on his back for four hundred miles—to fulfil her life's desire. That look of rapture, oblivious of all else save the sacred waters, was unforgettable. But was it the river itself, or perhaps had God entered her soul at that moment, who knows? Whatever it was which caused the sight of the Ganges to bring such extraordinary rapture to her ancient eyes, at the same time brought to my traveller's sense the knowledge that what I saw was only external—how much I was missing! I thought that if ever I did come to India again, it must be to see what to me was now unseen, yet to the earnest pilgrims was so tangible and real.
>
> My second visit to Benares just now with the Master was the fulfillment of that wish, and it has made me perceive that it is not the waters but the spiritual atmosphere of the locality.

Indeed, Baba explained: "What there is about Benares … is the atmosphere of great souls."[154]

Baba began a new practice of escorting the women out for excursions during their first few days at a destination before attending to His own work, which was becoming increasingly focused on making *mast* contacts. At seven o'clock on January 18, their second morning in the city, Baba took them for a boat ride on the Ganges. Kitty wrote: "We … rowed up and down, to see the ghats, i.e., steps to the river as they are called. One is where the clothes are washed, another is where the dead are brought, wrapped in a white robe, and are first placed on a

heap of faggots [firewood] and burned, and then thrown into the river. This same water all drink and think nothing of it."[155]

Baba told them, "Every Avatar has come to this city and touched his feet in this river's waters."[156] "There never was a time when this ancient place did not have true saints. Even though the priests of all castes may be there like vultures to take materially from the pilgrims, they cannot despoil the spiritual atmosphere." When one of the women asked if it was not better for aspirants to be disillusioned by the priests than to have no faith at all, Baba replied, "Any faith with the idea of Truth behind it is better than no faith at all. It is better to walk the wrong road and return to the right way, than not to walk at all."[157]

Hedi took photographs of Baba and Mehera in the boat. Mehera was dressed in a sweater that she had knitted herself, while Baba was bundled into Elizabeth's overcoat because the weather was so cold.• Elizabeth observed that Baba seemed distant, deeply engaged in His internal work as they floated down the river.

Baba also took the women out to view a large crowd of Hindu pilgrims and holy men who had come to bathe in the Ganges. There, Mani wrote, the women observed the "real Hindu India where thousands came to make ablutions in the sacred river." Afterward Baba led them on a meandering walk through one of the city's crowded *galis* to see the Vishwanath Golden Temple, where He told them, "You are seeing the temple of Viveshwar [Lord Shiva] in Viveshwar's company!"[158] Mani recorded that on the way back to the bungalow they passed a "line of endless pilgrims walking with their bundles to Kashi."[159] That afternoon, after lunch, Baba hired a tonga and went out with Adi K. and Chanji to ride through the city's busiest streets and densely populated galis to look for *masts*.

• In a letter to Kitty dated December 19, 1965, Mani wrote, "Baba indicated that His Elizabeth, when she leaves the body, will be with Him. She is very dear to Him, and He is equally as much in His Myrtle Beach Center as He is in Meherazad & Meherabad. He wishes ... that her ashes come to India (as yours will of course) to lie in Meherabad where dear Norina & others are. However, Baba wants some of her personal effects to be buried there, near Baba's House, and a memorial erected on it (with inscription Baba will give) to stand for all time at the Center which is born of her deep love for Baba." The coat that Baba wore during His boat ride on the Ganges is buried beneath Elizabeth's marker at the Meher Spiritual Center, just outside the fenced garden around Baba's House. (Mani Irani to Kitty Davy, December 19, 1965, © ECP Photo Archive, Myrtle Beach, SC. Passages are underlined as they were in the original letter.)

Following an afternoon and evening of rest, at 3:00 PM on January 19 they boarded the bus with Baba for an excursion to Sarnath, where Buddha gave his first teachings. Sarnath is one of the four most sacred Buddhist pilgrimage sites, all connected with Baba's Advent as Buddha. "Today there is remaining at Sarnath, eight miles back from the Ganges, interesting architectural and sculptural remains of the spiritual center which grew up around [Buddha's] abode," Elizabeth recorded. "A gigantic *stupa* looms up against the sky which contains, as all Buddhistic stupas contain, a relic of the Master…. This experience of visiting the holy place with the Master in this epoch made the scene very living and real. Baba remarked in passing: 'I remember every detail.'"[160]

Kitty was also deeply moved: "Both Rama and Krishna walked these same grounds. The whole beauty of the place is in its atmosphere. You felt it to be different, and walking on this very spot with Baba was



Crowds of pilgrims and bathers on one of the ghats along the Ganges, January 18, 1939

a wonderful experience. Baba said He remembered these spots when He was both Buddha and Krishna."[161]

The women's evening meal consisted of yet another pot of Elizabeth's favorite soup, which Kitty had to heat in one of the unglazed, earthenware chattis, which cracked over the direct heat of the fire. "What was meant to have been our dinner was now putting out the fire!" Mehera recalled. "You can imagine how everyone felt."[162] When the chatti cracked Baba remarked: "Take care of your pots [hearts]. If they get holes in them all your love will leak out!"[163] "Kitty took a pail we had with us," Mehera continued, "and emptied the half-cooked soup into it. Somehow she managed to bring it to a boil in that bucket. It was a thin, watery broth, with a few pieces of potato and onion lying in it, but we did not care how uncooked it was. We were so cold and hungry that we were happy to have something warm inside us."[164] The pail was one that Baba used to bathe *masts*, making it figuratively, if not literally, soapy soup yet again. Later in the evening Baba told the women that despite Kashi's rich spiritual heritage, the city was now teeming with false saints and priests—seven thousand to be exact, only seven of whom He deemed "His real 'soldiers.'"[165]

On January 21, during their last afternoon in Benares, Baba hired a tonga and invited Norina, Adi K., and Chanji to accompany Him as He contacted a saint. Norina called the extraordinary contact "Shri Meher Baba's divine work in Spark Reaction," and recorded her experience in a *Meher Baba Journal* article:

> Suddenly Baba steps in front of a man. That man, to us, appeared like any other man.... He orders one of us to give that man four annas. The alms were handed, but the real Giver remained unseen. Baba in His light manner explains, that the man had been promoted from the first to the second plane on the path. This significant interlude was short.

> A sudden change in rhythm of His pace makes it almost impossible for us to follow. When we reach the outer end of the river bank, Baba in His quick manner points to a boat. We see a sort of floating platform anchored near the shore…. A man, appearing gigantic in stature, was seated in an attitude of worship in the center of a barren place holding communication with God. A few younger men and also a woman were joining in the silent ritual…. "This man is revered as a saint by many," stated Baba.
>
> Baba … said further: "There is one of my agents stationed at either end of the river. Go to this one and mention to him my name." This order was given to one of the men disciples who accompany the Master on such occasions…. Three times the name that gave in vibration the strong impetus to realize deeper, higher, was uttered by the saint. He repeated, "Meher, Meher, Meher"—Baba's name.[166]

When someone later asked why it was necessary for Him to make personal contacts with such souls, Baba replied: "They already *know* me, but it is for my Work that it is needed." Again He called the *masts* "soldiers of God" and said that it was time for Him "to marshal" them—fitting metaphors reflecting the approach of war.[167]

At the same time that He was working with the *masts* and saints, Baba continued His work with the women, grinding down their egos and disabusing them of their attachments. Sometimes they had salad greens for their picnic lunches, which should have come as a welcome departure from the plain dal and soapy soup they routinely consumed, but according to Kitty, Irene seemed not to think so. "The salad, if not washed beforehand is washed in a stream near where we eat, by order of Baba, and handed to all by Baba Himself," Kitty wrote. "Irene invariably

refuses. Why? She pretends she does not want any. Baba says, 'You think it is not clean. If I give it to you, you must eat it.' She still keeps to her point, which makes Baba very annoyed."[168]

A few days after the boat ride on the river, one of the servants came to collect the women's dirty laundry, which Baba said would be washed in the Ganges. In a singular moment of disobedience, Elizabeth said that she did not want her clothes to be washed in the river, implying without saying that it was the same river in which raw sewage, ashes, and remains of dead bodies were routinely disposed. "It turned out that our clothes were not washed in the river but at a special place supervised by a government inspector and were returned more beautifully washed and ironed than had been the case since we have been in India. Elizabeth had to laugh, because all she sent was one towel. [Baba said] that since He had said it was all right, none should have questioned the hygiene of it…. Baba humors no one on this trip," Kitty concluded. "At times He is very severe, but always just and kind with it, and after the faultfinding is so forgiving."[169]

Never one to minimize her own shortcomings, she went on to confess, "I get it in the neck because I am so hasty and impatient. I fly up so easily and get cross and annoyed and angry, but, as Baba adds, it is quickly over. All agree that Baba has taught us to throw off everything much more quickly, which is a good lesson to have learned. Still, Rano and I have a long way to go. One thing we have learned. Never appear cold and indifferent toward Baba, however much He may tick you off. This Baba dislikes more than anything, and says it is a bad example to others."[170]

After a week in Benares Baba announced that it was time again to move on. As Norina observed, "Shri Meher Baba passes in and out of these cities escorted by his own people like a king. No one has to know that He is the king of life in Resurrection—that He is the furious strife of this world—that conscious[ly] creates the force, the show in opposition … He appears to us who follow Him everywhere, as the Dictator of Life in disguise as man of life," dictator being a curious choice of word, given what was happening in Nazi Germany.[171]

AGRA, CITY OF EMPERORS

Baba and company departed Benares early on January 23 in dense fog and mist, their destination Agra, nearly four hundred miles and a two-day drive to the northwest. Shortly after 9:00 AM they crossed the Naini Bridge over the Yamuna River into Allahabad. Baba had Elizabeth detour through the city, where they stopped in the bazaar for oranges, after which they bought petrol. They resumed their journey just after eleven, stopping for a picnic lunch just twenty minutes later, with the fresh oranges for dessert.

They reached Cawnpore at 4:00 PM to spend the night. Prior to their departure from Benares, Baba had asked Norina to write to the Executive Engineer of Cawnpore to request the use of the dak bungalow there. Norina's handwritten note read, "Dear Sir Will you please reserve for me and my party the dak bungalow at Cawnpore for twenty four hours, commencing six p.m. on the twenty=third [*sic*]. Our party will rest for the night en route from here to Agra. Thanking you. Yours sincerely Norina Matchabelli."[172]

Norina composed the note on her personal stationery, which was printed with the Matchabelli family crest, but her attempt to impress the engineer with her pedigree was of no avail. He replied that the bungalow, also called the Cawnpore Inspection House, was not available for rent by private parties, so Baba had Chanji make reservations at the Hindu-operated Kashmir Hotel instead.[173] Chanji called "the Kashmere [*sic*] Hotel rooms, 'tho not v. decent & inviting, habitable for a Night for our party."[174] Before checking into the hotel Baba took the women for a drive through the city and Cantonment. They also visited Sati Chaura (Massacre) Ghat, on the banks of the Yamuna. Later that afternoon Baba went back out into the town and contacted several beggars. Mani made note of a "curious incident" that took place early in the evening, when the entire city was plunged into darkness for two minutes, attributing it to "Baba's working."[175]

Kitty found the Kashmir Hotel to be both comfortable and reasonable, recalling, "Baba was in a jolly mood … full of laughter."[176] But the following morning was a different matter when they awoke to yet another "inevitable crisis" due to a "mixup" [*sic*] on Kitty's part:

> … all had packed their bedding rolls save Rano and me…. Baba came and there was a storm. Baba said we were cheating Him and why had we disobeyed when He said all bedding rolls were to be packed by 3 a.m.? He would never again trust us with the job; we were not trustworthy. I went on packing my roll, muttering under my breath that we did not care two straws whether we did the work or not, and that it would be better if Baba chose someone else to do it. Rano was terribly upset at being called a cheat, to which Baba said He did not mean it in the vulgar sense. Of course the mixup [*sic*] was really my fault … but I lost my temper as usual at being found fault with. Baba uses the same tactics. Can He not correct those whom He loves when they do wrong—must He always be silent and humor them? This we cannot stand, so He always wins. But why does He always catch us on these occasions? I do not know, but He always forgives and forgets.[177]

Although Baba had planned to depart Cawnpore at 5:00 AM, the group was not able to leave until 6:30, when the air had cleared from their early-morning dust-up. They continued on to Agra, stopping for an hour to picnic beneath a tree near a small well. Afterward they drove through many small villages and towns, including Firozabad, detouring through the bazaar so that the women could see the lavish and colorful displays of what Mani described as "millions of bangles." Back on the main road they passed troops of monkeys and fields of rice, dal, and



wheat, as well as mustard fields that Mani called "yellow carpets."[178] Flocks of birds glided overhead.

The Blue Bus reached Agra at 2:15 PM on Wednesday, January 24.* There the women found the temperatures to be much colder than they had experienced in Benares or Jabalpur. Mani's first impression of Agra was of the *gajhras*—garland-like ornaments woven from small flowers that the women wore in their hair. As usual, Chanji had traveled ahead to secure accommodations, using the Agra Hotel as his base. He had located two private houses from which Baba might choose, describing one as rather run-down and the other somewhat more pleasant. Baba wryly observed, "If Chanji called the one shabby then it must be truly awful. The awful one in Benares he called 'quite respectable.'"[179]

In less than an hour Baba and the women were settling into Anleigh Cottage, a secluded, privately owned bungalow at No. 1, Idgah Colony, in the British Cantonment. Chanji called it "v. appealing," and

Anleigh Cottage, the lovely bungalow where Baba and the women stayed in Agra

* Baba first visited Agra in 1923. He visited or passed through the city again in 1929–30, 1933 (with the eleven Westerners during their trip to Kashmir), 1941 (twice, during the Third Blue Bus Tour), 1943–44, 1948, and in 1950.



the landlord was so happy to have Baba as his tenant that he refused to accept payment and said that the group could stay for two weeks.[180] Anleigh Cottage was so recently constructed that it had not yet been lived in, and although it was wired for electricity, there was as yet no potable water supply. The men had to carry drinking and cooking water from the house next door, owned by a Westerner named Mrs. Brown. "They were such nice people and [we] soon became friends," Mani wrote in a letter to Mehera's niece, little Meheru Irani.[181*] Baba invited Mrs. Brown and her three daughters to tea.

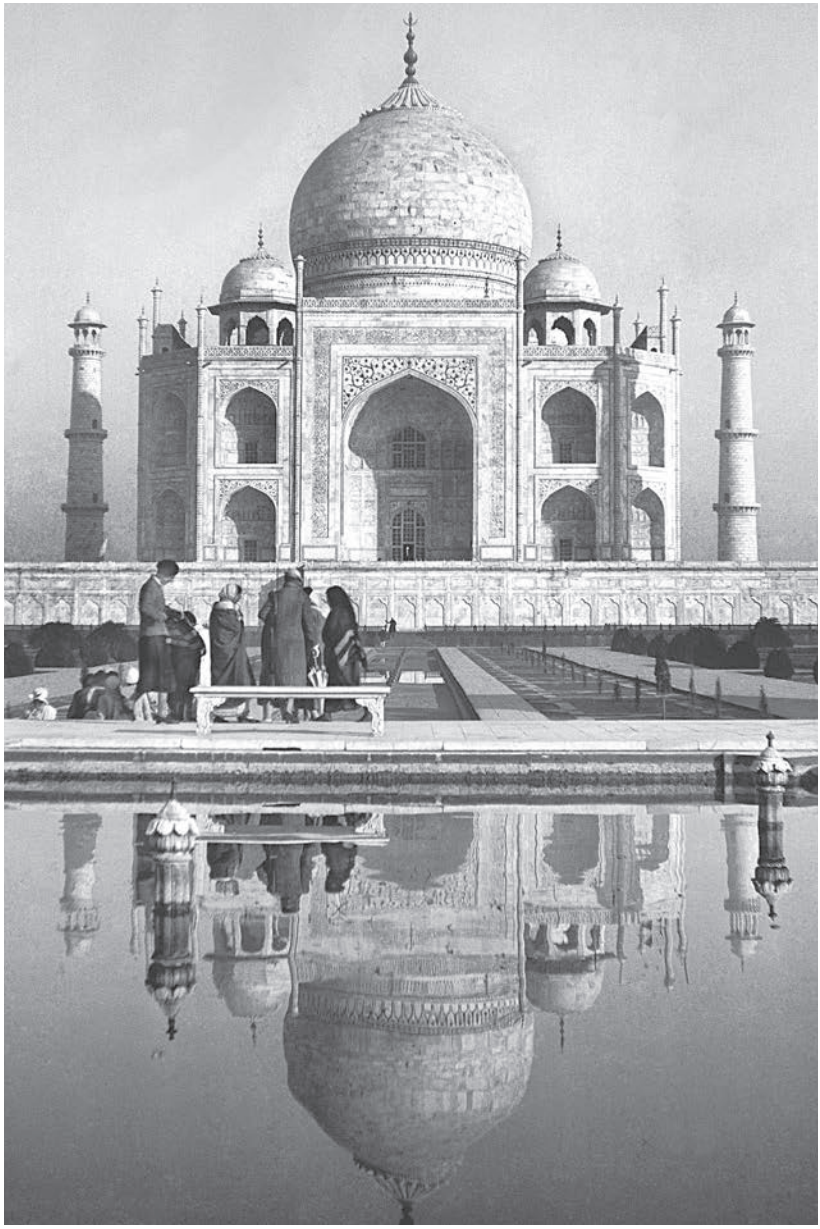
Anleigh Cottage had a roof-top terrace and was located "almost in the shadow of the Taj," Elizabeth recalled. "[We] could compare the tangible beauty inspired by human love against the background of Love Divine which is intangible but eternal."[182] On the morning of January 26 Baba took the women to see the Taj. Mrs. Brown accompanied them. Mani later noted in her diary: "Saw the imitation & real tombs of Mumtaz & Shah Jehan[†] [*sic*]. Exquisite carvings and beautifully inlaid with coloured stones—Kuran [*sic*] inlaid in black marble on entrance—the echo and arti sung by Nadine Tolstoy. Also climbed one of the minarets—narrow winding steps in complete darkness—caused heaps of amusement."[183] The women had to grope their way up, "some pushing, some laughing, some singing" as they stumbled their way to the top.[184] Mani called the Taj a "dream in marble."[185] Afterward they visited the Jumma Masjid,[‡] overlooking the Yamuna, before returning to their bungalow at 10:30. That afternoon Baba and the women again went out and spent two hours touring Agra Fort, entering from Amar

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* Meheru Rustom Irani (October 2, 1927–April 21, 2012) was too young to participate in the Blue Bus Tours on her own, but Baba called her during some of her school holidays. Later, when she joined the women's ashram, she was its youngest member. Baba chose her to be one of His four women Companions in the New Life. She was called "little Meheru" for a number of years in order to distinguish her from Meheru Jessawala. Mani sent her a series of "letter diaries" during the first tour, some of which are preserved in Beloved Archives in Hamilton, NJ.

† Shah Jahan (1592–1666) was the fifth Mughal emperor. He was the son of Akbar and father of Aurangzeb. Shah Jahan ruled from 1628–1658.

‡ Jumma Masjid is the name given to the largest mosque in a city.



Baba and the women, about to go into the Taj Mahal. Agra, January 26, 1939

Singh Gate to view its domed and ornately carved sandstone structures. Mani deemed the Shish Mahal (Mirror Palace) and Moti Mahal (Pearl Palace) "exquisite works of art."[186] "We all had to take our shoes off (even Baba took off his sandals!)," she wrote to little Meheru.[187] That

evening Baba reminded the women, "All this is a big zero—a dream! Only I am real. So don't forget, while looking at all these wonderful places to see Me in this zero."[188] Chanji observed how Baba seemed to work during such excursions:

> After summary glances at all these century-old monuments of history and works of art, when the presence of Baba would make one feel the transient aspect of things of matter, however great, grand or beautiful, Baba would just touch the point with His typical gesture and words: "It is all a big zero—a dream." These words, uttered at the right moment, would touch the tenderest chords of each heart, and everyone would realize the great difference of the life of matter from the life of spirit. All the feeling of appreciation of the greatness of the Emperors who flourished in their times would fade away, and a true feeling of appreciation of things of eternal value in life—the life of the spirit—would hold. And it is for this particular reason that a Spiritual Master like Baba takes His closest group of disciples even to these places of importance in history, splendour and glamour to give them a clear contrast between life of matter and life of the spirit.[189]

Baba then had the day's news read aloud and spoke of the approaching war: "England and France are weak. They are not firm enough. America is strong now. The Prime Minister [Lord Neville Chamberlain of Great Britain] made a broadcast. He is a thorough gentleman and noble, and no match for these rogues [Hitler and Mussolini]. The German head is mad! No one but a madman could have done what he did to the Jews. But it all had and has to happen. It is nobody's fault. It is all just right. It is like a game of chess; they are the figures and I play the game."[190]•

• Margaret Craske would later observe that while it was fine for Baba to call Hitler and Mussolini rogues, madmen, and much, much worse as the war progressed, He told the women that "when our tongues were making an outraged attack on Hitler and his cruelties that again we did not understand, but that when He, the Avatar, comes into incarnation He needs opposition in order to function fully." (*Dance of Love*, 154)



Baba's entourage with their guide, Mrs. Brown (in plaid coat), January 26, 1939

Early on January 27, Baba and the women left for Fatehpur Sikri (City of Victory). There they visited the Palace of Five Stories, Birbal's Palace, the palace of Rukya Begum, and the temple and palace of Jodhabai. Mani also noted: "We ascended the steps to Buland Darwaza & saw the mother-of-pearl [*sic*] tomb of Sheik Salim Chishti," a highly revered Sufi saint.[191]* Following their morning excursions Baba returned to Anleigh Cottage with the women. There He bathed and fed Mohammed, with whom He spent about two hours each afternoon. Only later would He go out and meet the *masts* and boys whom the mandali had located. That afternoon He visited a boys' school in search of His ideal boy, accompanied by Norina, as well as Mrs. Brown, who was able to observe some of Baba's special work.

The next day Baba escorted the women to three important sites associated with His Advent as Lord Krishna. They left Agra just after seven for the forty-five-mile drive to Brindaban (now called

* Sheik Salim Chishti (1478–1572) was a Sufi saint of the Chishti Order. His *dargah* is considered to be one of the best examples of Mughal architecture in India. The Chishti Order falls within the Sunni Order of Islam's mystical Sufi tradition, teaching love and tolerance. It is named for Chisht, the small town in Afghanistan where it originated c. 930.

Vrindavan), where Krishna spent some of his childhood. Elizabeth said of the town:

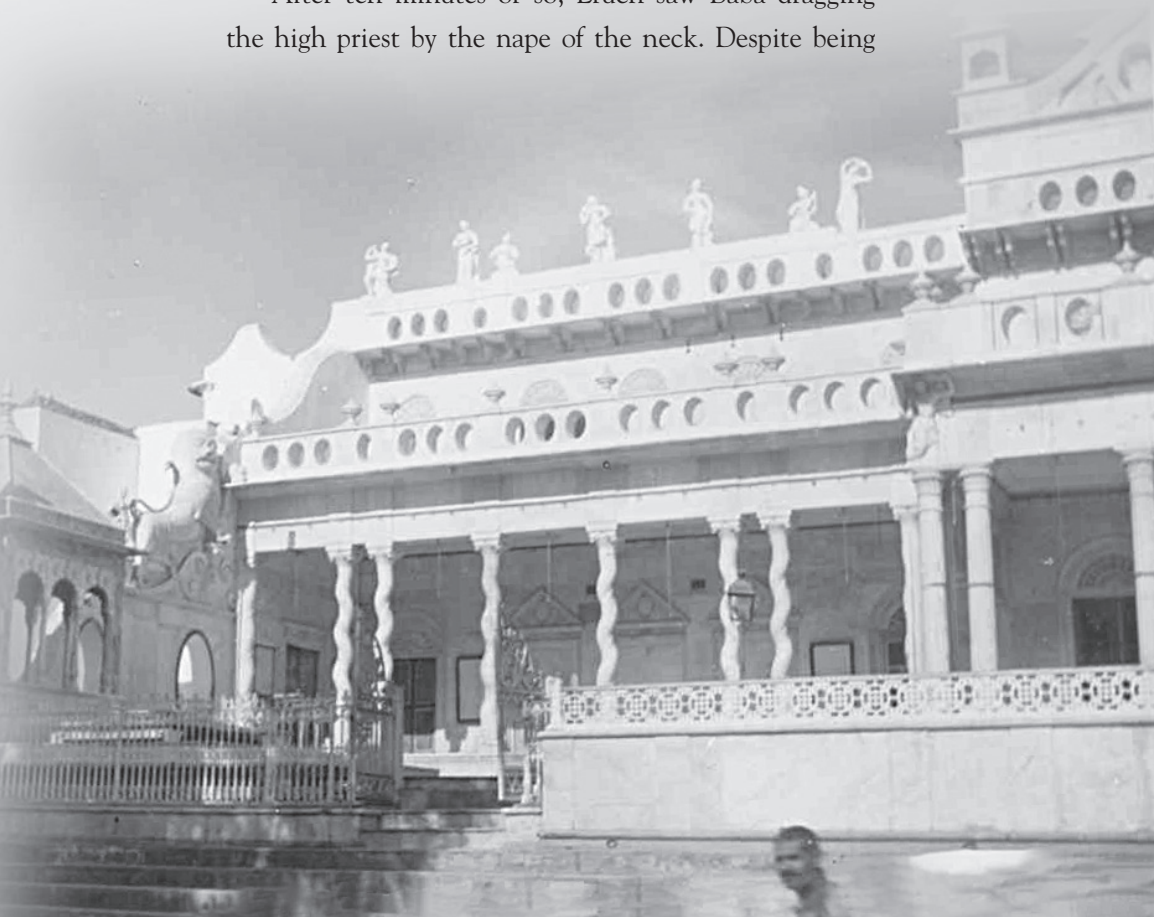
> Several thousand years before, the Shepherd Boy, nephew of the King, played with his cowherds, and it was he who later became the great Krishna of the Hindu religion [and] once a year the drama of Krishna's boyhood is re-enacted in its original setting. Although the various buildings are probably reconstructed several times over, during this great length of time, no doubt they are accurate reproductions which in themselves are very old. The quaint town of Brindaban seems in harmony with ancient pastoral times, and even today cowherds are plentiful, while the traditional monkeys roam the streets.[192]

Among the sites that Baba and the women visited were the temple dedicated to Krishna's parents and the palace by the river where Krishna killed the thousand-headed *naga* (serpent deity) called Shesh Nag (King of All Serpents). Inside the temple was a great idol depicting Krishna and Radha reclining on the body of the snake. They also walked through Kunj Gali (Narrow, Tree-Lined Lane), where Krishna stole milk and curds from the gopis, and they saw the tree where he hid after taking their clothing. Nearby, they saw many small shrines "with picturesque & gaudily dressed idols of Krishna, his family, & gopis." In her letter to little Meheru, Mani wrote, "We went inside each of these many places (the usual process of 'shoes off' every time) where they would make us squat and (also Baba would squat), ring a bell, open the curtain and show us the idols. But the most amusing part was when they would point out Krishna's idol and tell Baba, 'Yeh Bansiwalla hai' not knowing they were all the time talking to the Bansiwalla Himself."[193*]

* *Bansi* is the Hindi word for "flute," and Bansiwalla is another name for Krishna, the Flute Player.

In Bihari Gali they visited Banke Bihari Mandir (Supreme Enjoyer Temple), also dedicated to Lord Krishna. *Mehera–Meher* records an incident that occurred at the temple:

> To visit a beautiful, ancient temple dedicated to Lord Krishna, Baba instructed Eruch to make arrangements with the priests ahead of time to ensure that no grown male would be present, including any of the priests. Eruch talked with the high priest, who was reluctant but agreed when Eruch hinted he would be rewarded with an excellent tip. A child was deputed to guide them the following morning … when hardly anyone else would be around….
>
> Eruch saw the high priest and again warned him to keep his distance. Baba and the women climbed the steps to the temple, while Eruch waited near the bus.
>
> After ten minutes or so, Eruch saw Baba dragging the high priest by the nape of the neck. Despite being



One of the temples Baba and the women visited while in Vrindavan, January 28, 1939

> warned, the priest had been following them, and Baba threw him down the temple steps. The priest was not hurt; he came over & sat beside Eruch, who told him he should not have done what he did.[194*]

Baba also contacted a young *mast*. "As we approached the place along the river where Krishna had played with his gopis," Elizabeth wrote, "a youngish man wearing what resembled a fool's cap sat on the steps playing his flute. So sweetly he played that one was attracted to this ancient court jester, and the ancient 'Flute Song of Krishna' [is] one of the most beautiful in India which he was rendering. It is said that when Krishna played his flute, all left whatever they were doing and followed him, even the cowherds were drawn by his sweet music."[195]

When the young man saw Baba, he called out, "Here comes my Murlivale [Flute Player]. I have been waiting for you!"[196†] Mani recalled, that "at seeing Baba, he threw up his hands and jumped for joy."[197]Afterward he either trailed after Baba or mischievously dashed ahead of the group so that they might follow him, always playing his flute. "It was like a haunting melody," Elizabeth concluded.

> He didn't want money, he didn't want anything, and when he passed, several people smiled thinking him to be a "fool", with his dancing steps and flute. Toward the end he seemed to become almost ecstatic, and the attendant with us thinking he was annoying us tried to drive him away with a stick. Upon this Baba immediately protected the flute player and gave the attendant to understand that He liked it. Baba informed us that this was the man for whom he had come that day and that he

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* *Mehera–Meher* records this incident, as related by Eruch, to have occurred at Mathura, which according to page 15 of Mani's diary they did not visit until afternoon.

† "Murli Wale" is also the name of a bhajan for Krishna.

> was a very highly evolved soul. There are "fools of God" who often use this guise, so the world will pass them by, in order to accomplish freely their spiritual work. Just before returning to the bus, extraordinary greetings, or, how to describe it, signals went on between Baba and this mendicant…. The rapid movements of Baba's sensitive expressive hands speak—what they say, one can see, is perfectly understood by the mendicant through his flashing responses. As Baba drove away in the bus, we saw the ecstatic figure dancing on tiptop [*sic*], like the "Pied Piper of Hamlin", and waving his flute in the most rapturous manner. Some old stern-faced priests standing near the temple looked at him scornfully, and then the contagion of joy was so great, that even they too smiled. This man who recognized the Master, though with the name of his own traditional Savior, is now prepared and ready when the great "Flute Player" of this age calls.[198]

Baba called the boy one of His "real lovers."[199] He "patted him" and said that he was more advanced than Mohammed.[200] Mani was charmed by "the luster of Love in his eyes & his overwhelming love for Baba," but she added that he brought to mind the character Dopey from the movie *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. She described the very atmosphere of Brindaban as "adorable."[201]

"When I see these places," Baba further remarked, "I remember My old habitats; they are like My old, well-remembered haunts. Here was where I used to play with the gopis and steal milk and curds; here, I played My flute; and here, My Radha would come running to Me! Now, I have brought My new gopis with Me, and now, Mehera is My Radha."[202]

Departing Brindaban, Baba's party stopped off at a dak bungalow at 10:30 to eat lunch because the weather had become too cold for the outdoor picnics they had enjoyed farther south. Just before one they

reboarded the bus for the nine-mile drive to New Gokul and the lake where Krishna's adoptive mother, Yashoda, washed his clothes, as well as the place on the Yamuna River where he had been brought from Brindaban. "Baba fed *gram* to the monkeys that swarmed the river bank & also the turtles in the water," Mani recorded.[203] Soonamasi put the remaining gram in her sari. "The whole place was swarming with monkeys," Mani wrote to little Meheru, "but these monkeys were too clever for her. One of them jumped on her, tore a hole in her sari and … (you can imagine the rest)."[204]

Afterward they visited Old Gokul, where they saw many more idols, as well as Krishna's cradle and one of the gopis' butter churns displayed in "a really original place with stone columns."[205] They ended their day of sightseeing at Mathura six miles farther on, where they toured the prison where Krishna is said to have been born.

Late in the afternoon Baba playfully told the women, "Now we go to the last place where Krishna took his food." All but Mehera and Norina seemed confused, believing that they had already seen all the sites connected with Krishna, but Baba took them back to the dak bungalow where He had eaten lunch with them earlier in the day. At last they understood what He meant. "In wonder and surprise," Mani wrote, "we went on & the dak bungalow appeared. All shrieked with laughter at Baba's clever little joke."[206] There they had afternoon tea, departing for Agra at 5:00 PM, but not before discovering that monkeys had helped themselves to some of the provisions stored on the roof of the bus.

Mani made a brief reference to an extraordinary incident that occurred two days later, on January 30, when the women found an injured *hoopoe* (a colorful bird with a crown of feathers), which they tried to nurse back to health. It seemed to be getting better, but when they brought it to Baba a few days later it made a beeline for Him and died at His feet. Touching His forehead in His gesture for fortune or destiny,

Baba said to the women: "You people haven't the slightest idea how fortunate this bird is! … It will incarnate as a human being in its next birth, but not as an ordinary being."[207] Taking Baba's name, the women buried the hoopoe in the compound under a tree.

The women did not go out the evening of the twenty-ninth, but stayed in to gather around Baba, who gave them this good-humored discourse, which Mani relayed to little Meheru:

> About Delhi we have arranged thus. A little costly, but I want to do some particular work there, and not be bothered for once with bread and butter and water [small daily worries] and to give rest to Katherine Davy and to give opportunity to Norina Matchabelli to make Mrs. Patterson cry and to make Mrs. Gayley look on the old fighters with the eye of a referee…. There it is also secluded as only we will be on the second floor. Then N. will be free to take off her clothes when she likes to (to explain this sentence I must tell you that in Agra, four of the Westerners had a hall as their room and every one of us had to pass through their room all day and it was a job for them to change clothes). E. is so fed up with taking off her clothes that she goes about only on [*sic*] her slip. This is good training. You are all becoming yogees.[208]

On January 31, their last night in Agra, Baba and the women returned to the Taj Mahal to see it illumined by moonlight, when it is said to be most beautiful. "Seemed so unreal," Mani wrote, "that I expected it to disappear any moment."[209] Mrs. Brown cried when she had to say goodbye to Baba and the women.

DELHI: LESSONS IN OBEDIENCE FROM THE DIVINE TOUR GUIDE

On Wednesday, February 1, the Blue Bus departed for Delhi, 130 miles to the northwest.* Delhi would be Baba's northernmost stop on the tour and He had already sent Adi K. and Chanji there and Eruch to Ajmer to arrange for His upcoming visits. He and the women drove away from Agra at 12:30 PM. "Excellent roads all along," Mani noted, adding that they sometimes traveled at the astounding speed of fifty miles per hour.[210] The landscape was parched and bleak, but Baba broke the monotony of the journey by distributing *pedas*, a molded sweet similar to fudge.

Meanwhile, Chanji had had no luck finding a suitable bungalow, deeming one he looked at "too nice and too dear for us."[211] So when Baba and the women arrived they checked into the Regal Hotel on Shayama Prasad Mukherji Marg in Old Delhi, where Adi K. and Chanji had already been staying. The women found it "very comfortable and luxurious after [their] stay at Benares and Agra."[212] Prior to arrival, Baba had ordered the men to arrange for "twentyfive [*sic*] ordinary cots" to be rented for their rooms, as well as "one extra big … six foot cot" for Himself.[213] The women's rooms were on the second floor and opened onto deep balconies that provided ample seclusion despite the fact that the hotel was located on a main thoroughfare and overlooked the North Western Railway Station.

Mani recorded that February 1 was "'Id' day"—eid al-Adha, the Muslim Festival of Sacrifice marking Abraham's willingness to surrender his son and only child, Isaac, to God.† The celebration had begun the previous day, and the streets around the Jumma Masjid were thronged with worshippers, yet another opportunity for Baba to conduct His Universal work with crowds.

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* Baba first visited Delhi in 1929. He also visited or passed through the city in 1929–30, 1933 (with the eleven Western women), 1941 (twice during the Third Blue Bus Tour), 1943–44, 1948, and 1950.

† Mani would have been familiar with the festival, as it was traditionally celebrated with great fervor in Poona.



Qutub Minar, where Mansari accidentally climbed to the top. No wonder Baba and the women looked like ants to her on the ground! Delhi, February 2, 1939.

Baba took the women out the following morning for a drive through the sprawling city. The bus needed petrol and one of its tires was punctured on the way, causing an hour-long delay. Afterward, Mani wrote, they "passed through New Delhi (v. westernized) with its huge modern buildings, lovely parks & grand shops, and then through Old Delhi with its crowded bazars [*sic*] and narrow streets, gateways & ruined forts. Baba said, 'I like Old Delhi.' Returned home at 10:30 a.m."[214]

That afternoon Baba took the women to visit the iconic twelfth-century Qutub Minar, then the tallest structure in all of India. "Outside of Delhi today, about 15 miles distant," Elizabeth wrote, "there stands one of the most perfect of architectural columns, with five stories towering gracefully toward the heavens and is called Kutub Minar…. Feeling the atmosphere of the past, we gazed at the almost ethereal beauty of the Kutub Minar. Baba linked the column with the present existence by remarking that the Kutub Minar has importance today not only in the material world but in the subtle world as well."[215]

Baba ordered the women to stay with Him when they entered the minaret. He was adamant that they obey him unconditionally wherever they went—a

continuing challenge for Mansari. They began to ascend the four hundred stairs to the top, but Baba turned the women back at the 165th step (Mani was counting). Mansari did not see them and kept on climbing. She reached the top before realizing that she was alone. Meanwhile, Baba and the other women had reached the ground. When Baba looked up and saw her "He snapped His fingers, gesturing, 'Come down immediately!'" When she came down, He was so angry that He would not even speak directly to her, telling Mani, "Ask that mad person where she was!" He then said to Mansari, "You want to be with Me and say that you love Me. It is so difficult to be with Me. So difficult to love Me! The Qutub Minar has separated you from Me…. Never do it again!" He warned. Afterward, to "break up the mood," according to Mansari, Baba smiled and inquired, "And how does it look from the top?" He seemed pleased when she said that everyone looked like ants.[216]

Mani concluded her diary entry recording the incident with two words: "ha-ha!" They continued on to Delhi's Jumma Masjid, "where thousands were praying & a big fair near by [*sic*] was going on in full swing."[217] The fair was part of the celebration of eid al-Adha. They returned to the hotel at just after five.

The next morning, February 3, Baba took the women out to see the Delhi Gate at Lāl Qila (Red Fort), but it was closed so they continued on to the sixteenth-century Pandavas Fort and dargah of Mughal Emperor Humayan,* whom Baba called "a great soul." They then returned to Lāl Qila to visit the Rang Mahal (Palace of Colors), which Mani called exquisite, as well as the Hammam (Royal Bath), and the Navaratna Bath "with nine different perfumes from 9 flowers," the Moti Mosque, Diwan-i-Am and Diwan-e-khas (Halls of Public and Private Audiences), the boathouse of the Kashmir Palace, and the Seat of Justice, before returning to the bungalow for lunch.[218]

That evening Baba called everyone together to say, "Tonight you all go to your graves at 7:45 p.m. By 8 you must try to sleep, and if

* Humayun was the second emperor of the Mughal Empire, ruling from 1530–1540 and 1555–1556. He was the son of Babur and father of Akbar.

you don't succeed, stop trying and go to sleep." The next morning He asked, "Who is dead? No one dead?" before discussing their next shift.[219] He had originally laid out an ambitious itinerary for the tour. [See *Alternative Routes* in Appendix.] Up to this point He had been planning to continue northwest from Delhi to Amritsar and Lahore (now in Pakistan), northeast to Murree and Srinagar in Kashmir, and then south to Jaipur and Ajmer in Rajasthan. He abandoned this idea, which would have added more than fifteen hundred miles to His journey, after Chanji was unable to identify a safe route on pukka roads, and He did not want to incur the expense of rail travel.

"In Delhi," Chanji wrote, "the Master's specific object of this tour was more clearly understood when He explained that instead of going North … as intended—He had decided to go South to a place where He had important spiritual work, in fact the most important work of this period of His activities in which He also wanted to have some of the members participate. Any hopes which He had Himself created and engendered in the group accompanying of visiting Kashmir—the accredited 'Paradise on Earth'—was [*sic*] for the time abandoned."[220]

Baba announced His intention to travel directly to Ajmer, where He could focus on the search for *masts*. "Now today's conference is important. Listen carefully, seriously and obey willingly," He warned. "I have a very practical and peculiar work to do in this town. Here [in Delhi] I don't find circumstances fit for that work. Ajmer will definitely suit, but the following points will help Me in that work." He then enumerated a series of assignments for the women during their long halt, which Kitty took down in shorthand:

> Mandali must be free for that work, so Elizabeth and Mansari will have to see to 'spoiling shoes,'* washers, etc. Mansari can speak the language, though very slowly like

* "Spoiling shoes": "We always had to have our sandals repaired and when they were brought back from the shoemaker we would complain that they came back worse than when they went—and all complaints had to go to Baba."[221]

a mouse, and will manage. Mandali will be free to be with Baba. I, too, will be most of the time not with you—eat, wash, come and go, and I want you all to be a bit ascetic in Ajmer. Be ascetic—it will help you spiritually and also financially. So in Ajmer, we will get a house or bungalow, one that has lights and water taps—may be very good or ordinary, but the asceticism will come in food. Kitty, with Laksi [*sic*] and Bahmi [*sic*—the servants] will cook for us all. Every day lunch (rice and dal, curry and rice) and at night one vegetable for all. Salad will be brought but not side dishes—and mornings, tea, bread and butter…. All to be done by Kitty with the help of Laksi and Bahmi and Katie and Naja. Mehera will cook My food with the help of Khorshed.

Everyone carries own buckets for water for bath, or water for washing teeth. No servants, you can help each other. Rano helps Nonny. Norina helps Elizabeth to carry pails. No servants for this work. Shoes to be given to Elizabeth and post to Elizabeth. Everyone washes their own plates, buckets, etc., and own face! Rano can help Nonny in washing her pail but not her face! Elizabeth helps Norina if Norina has a cold and is dying! [Soona] Masi can wash Gulmai's pail and Gulmai washes Masi's pail! No servants. Laksi, Bahmi help Kitty for sweeping and bathrooms….

In Ajmer we stay thirteen days. The first three days we see all the sights and then for ten days stay quite quiet and I will be free for that work, and if Norina is not dead by then I have a special work—which I intended in Delhi and Karachi—for ten days…. Mandali buys from bazaar things like oil, vegetables, but every morning, once daily. Kitty gives chit for bazaar, very

> economical, so these two days eat well; we don't pay extra so eat quite a lot, like a camel that drinks for seven days and then not at all.

Baba assigned Irene the task of overseeing laundry while Valu was to wash dishes. He then told them more about His own upcoming work:

> For ten days in Ajmer I am going to be Lord, servant, devotee, Master, everything in one. Most peculiar but very particular work—worshipper, worshipped and everything. It's very important, especially seven days before the birthday, from the 11th to the 18th. The last two birthdays I bowed to the poor. This birthday will be quite different. I will bow and be bowed to by different beings, so I must be free from butter, bread and shoes.* I know your difficulties. On tour you can't go out and don't know the people and the language, and mandali, too, are not very free to do that; but dear Elizabeth and our very dear Mansari will do their best to get all done to everybody's dissatisfaction! Then Elizabeth will come from town in a broken tonga and Norina will say, 'This shoe is not mended well'—Elizabeth weeps … it will be real asceticism.

"Who likes all this—hands up! Who likes cleaning pails?" Baba asked, lifting the mood. "I can imagine Elizabeth carrying a pail in one hand and Kippy in the other." He then turned to Elizabeth, saying, "You will say I always mention you. Do you mind?" Of course she didn't, admitting that "it was both true and funny."[223]

"Elizabeth is brave—" Baba concluded, "she does not like that much to eat, but she must have a little with her tea! Now eat well.

* All details were supervised by Baba, but during this ten-day period He did not want to be bothered with these things.[222]

With Norina and Elizabeth there is a great war going on upstairs, so by lunch-time they will both be dead, and be rescued by rice and dal. 9:30 to 10:30, 'Gorilla' [*sic*] warfare.'"[224] That evening Baba took the women out for about an hour to view the lights of Old and New Delhi.

Katie's Aunt Pilamai* arrived from Karachi at Baba's invitation on Sunday, February 5. The following day He and the women went out to visit Laxmi Narayan (Vishnu) Temple. The new temple had been dedicated by Mahatma Gandhi on the day of Baba's arrival in Delhi, and unlike older, traditional temples that routinely excluded women and members of the lower castes, it was accessible to anyone, including *Dalits* (the so-called Untouchables). Chanji remarked on the synchronicity of Baba's presence in the city when the temple was inaugurated:

> Although not having any external connection with Baba, the … opening of such a unique temple at the exact time of the appearance of a Spiritual Master on the spot, whose gospel of teaching imbibes the same underlying principle of a brotherhood of humanity irrespective of caste, colour or creed, connotes, if anything, the subtle working and influence of the powers that mould the destinies of mankind in these times—example again of the timely and significant movements of Baba…. It seems thus to mark the advent of a new era of religious tolerance that breaks all the rigid barriers of caste and creed, admitting the right of every human being to enter the House of God.[225]

Baba also escorted the women to the dargah of Sufi Saint Hazrat Nizamuddin Chishti,† which was surrounded by disciples. One

* Pilamai Jehangir Irani was Katie's father's sister. Baba called her His "spiritual sister."

† Hazrat Nizamuddin Chishti (1238–April 3, 1325) was a Sunni Muslim and traditional Sufi scholar who taught that mysticism, prayer, and love comprised the path to God.

of the women with Baba, whom Chanji described anonymously as "an American lady who accompanied the party," recorded a narrative of their visit to the shrine: "A young man of studious appearance and fine features, who seemed to be the attendant in this holy place, showed us around. We noticed that his demeanor was not like the ordinary attendant, for he had such true feeling for the sanctity of this spiritual environment which conveyed a living quality instead of the reliquary of a dead saint."[226]

Close by the tomb was a group of ascetics begging for alms. Off to one side was another man, who appeared to have been relegated to a dark corner almost out of view. Baba glanced at the man. "When we came to the gateway on our way out," the "American lady" continued, "this lone man was standing a little distance away and rapture was in his eyes as he gazed at Baba; it was a spiritual understanding which needed no words. Baba, in gesture to one of the gate-keepers, inquired who this man was. And the reply came, 'He is only a mendicant' … I could not but feel that Baba perceived the soul of this man beneath his ragged exterior."[227]

But the women's most extraordinary experience was yet to come. The anonymous writer continued:

> Just as we were returning to the bus, the young attendant inquired of one of Baba's disciples who Baba was, as evidently he could feel that Baba was not like the many other visitors to the place. Although on this part of the trip, Baba's identity was not to be revealed to outsiders, the disciple was surprised to see the Master nodding to him in assent; so it was told that he was Hazrat Meher Baba. Soon the reason for this departure from the otherwise strict injunction, came to light. This young man was the son of a saint who is acknowledged by many, who lives a completely secluded life, and sees few. What was so extraordinary was that, due to Baba's presence, all twenty of us were permitted to see the saint in his

> cell-like chamber. He seldom eats or sleeps, and his only garment was a blanket.
>
> In the semi-darkness with light seeming to shine upon his face, we could see his noble features with grey beard and eyes that appeared to gaze transcendentally on paradise. To me who had come from the West his counterpart had been only seen in the inspired Russian icons and Italian paintings of the Prophets of old. Why should one believe, however, that such great souls lived only in the centuries past?
>
> The recollection came swiftly to my mind that Baba had foretold us, before starting, that we might meet a saint that day, but we had no idea when or where, and our driving around Delhi was rather extensive. Later Baba informed us that this evolved soul was on the fifth plane of consciousness and did great spiritual work in connection with Baba's own. I could not help but feel that the silent interchange that passed between the Master and the saint as we stood for a moment in the secluded stone-chamber, was one of the underlying reasons why Baba passed through Delhi.[228*]

Lord Meher identifies this saint as the high *mast* Kamal Posh. The women's experience at Hazrat Nizamuddin Chishti's dargah afforded them a rare opportunity to observe Baba's contact with such an advanced soul. They returned home two hours later. Baba told them, "Kamal Posh is on the fifth plane and My real lover. The splendor that surrounds his dirtiness, only I can see. The world thinks him mad, but the world is mad, and he is sane! Nothing makes Me so happy as the sight of these real heroes!"[229]

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* The writer was likely Nadine. Neither of these passages are found in Elizabeth's July *Meher Baba Journal* article, nor did Kitty or Rano mention the story in their books, and the style of writing is most definitely not Norina's.

Baba also contacted the spiritual chargeman of Delhi, a Muslim saint named Hafizji (One who Can Recite the Koran) Nabeena. Unclothed and completely blind, this highly revered great soul could still make his way unattended through the narrow, winding galis of Old Delhi.

Kitty recalled how it felt to be left behind when Baba went out to conduct His *mast* work, lamenting that it was "like being in a desert with a bottle of water close at hand and yet forbidden to drink it—a little worse than having no water in sight." She later added, "All the time we see less and less of Baba. I fear Baba is training us gradually for the time when we shall see Him less and less, and always with the crowds. He just gives you enough to make you discontent and to wish for more and more, and to make you realize, when it is too late, how lucky you were when you saw Him more often, yet at the same time were always complaining and comparing the present with the past."[230]

After just a week in Delhi it was time, yet again, to move on. "As much as I would like to write at each place we visit, it never materializes on paper," Kitty recalled.

> To travel with Baba is a rush all the time. We go to a place and Baba says we will stay at least a week or ten days. At the end of three or four days we are all called and told we leave in two days' time. By this time we all ought to know, especially as we nearly always spend the first three days in seeing all there is to see, so that writing is impossible, and you say to yourself, oh well, it does not matter. I can write afterward when Baba says we all remain for the last days at home. But the last days are spent in a rush packing because everywhere we go we leave before the appointed time. At any rate it can never be called dull, because there is constant change.[231]



I cannot rest unless I work.

When I work, that is My rest.

My work is in restlessness.

MEHER BABA[1]



CHAPTER 4

Meandering Home

Delhi to Meherabad
February 7–May 25, 1939

Visiting the Kailasa Temple at Ellora



Nonny and Hedi, seated in dolees, Taragarh Hill, February 18, 1939

DEPARTING DELHI

BABA WOKE THE WOMEN AT 4:30 AM on Tuesday, February 7, 1939, to prepare for the first leg of their meandering journey home. His next destination was Ajmer, with an overnight stop at Alwar. But they were delayed by yet another early-morning mix-up, again involving packing the bus for departure. The women now carried far more luggage than what they had brought with them from Meherabad because it also included the fifty-odd trunks, suitcases, and assorted other pieces of baggage that Masaji had brought to Jabalpur in December. Baba had ordered all the larger pieces to be sent by rail, attended by the men who were accompanying Mohammed and the servants to Ajmer. He did, however, make an exception for any suitcases or trunks that could not be locked, and two of the women saw this as an opportunity to avoid the rough handling their belongings would inevitably receive on the train. Baba ordered Rano to check each piece of luggage, and she discovered two to be unlocked. "The owners were called," Kitty later wrote. "The usual excuses, 'I tried, it would not lock' or 'I thought it was locked.' Keys were then produced and the bags locked in front of Baba and sent by train. No item of the trip escaped Baba's personal supervision."[2]

They were on the road by 8:30 AM, stopping for a picnic at 10:00. The route was not scenic: other than the flocks of sheep that they saw near



The iconic photograph of Baba holding a newborn kid goat, Alwar, February 7, 1939

Gurgaon, the desert landscape was arid, flat, and monotonous. Reaching Alwar, they rested and spent the night in a dak bungalow so new that it had hardly been occupied. There they found a newborn kid goat running loose nearby. Despite the cold, Baba picked it up and patiently held it in His arms while he was being photographed.

At 6:00 the following morning they set out for the remaining 170-mile drive. "The moon was still up," Mani wrote, "& heard us sing the 'Arti' as we sped through the lovely landscape of green fields & trees & hills with peacocks & deers [*sic*]."[3] Later Baba entertained the women by telling them who they had been and how they had been related in previous lives. "Norina was a [high] priestess in a past incarnation … Kitty and Rano were rival priestesses … Irene [who loved horses] was a stable boy … Gulmai was [Soona] Masi's husband [and] Elizabeth was Norina's wife who nagged her all day."[4] "Always a touch of humor about the parts we played," Kitty recorded.[5] Along the way Baba snacked on cucumbers, apples, oanges, and nuts, as well as raisins (which Kitty was quite sure He did not like), sharing with the women once in a while.

Soon the bus entered a hilly desert landscape of white sand that glittered like snow in the brilliant sunlight. On their way into Jaipur, Mani recorded, Baba stopped the bus at "a dream of a palace & fort on a hill. Walking at a distance on the hill was a naked man at whom Baba pointed & said, 'He is my agent—in charge of Jaipur.'"[6] The *mast* was Nanga (Naked, Penniless) Baba, and Baba called him a saint. Afterward, Kitty concluded, "Baba [was] now in quite a different mood than before, jolly and interested, for His work there had been done."[7]

Continuing on toward Ajmer, Baba stopped the bus again an hour later when He spied a suitable, albeit sandy spot for an hour-long picnic. He had been very clear with Kitty before setting out that she needed to keep back enough provisions from their last days in Delhi to

see them through their lunches during the two-day drive to Ajmer. As soon as they had pulled off the road, Kitty began rummaging through the food containers for the potato dish she had put aside, when, "Alas," she lamented,

> just as I was bringing them out of the bus and at the same time trying to shut the door, one tin of them fell into the dust at my feet and half were lost. I said nothing when I arrived at the spot chosen for the picnic, hoping by hook and by crook to make what we had suffice, by suggesting to a few that they should refuse to eat any of this specially prepared dish of Naja's. Baba, seeing the potato dish said, "Why, that is not enough for thirty people. Did I not tell you to keep enough for the second day?" The truth had to come out, but the ever-resourceful Naja set to work and with a few cut onions which we fried on the Primus, and the remaining potatoes and some water from our flask, dished up a soup that all declared was delicious.[8]

SOLITUDE WAS NOT OUR PART

The Blue Bus reached Ajmer at 2:00 PM.* Mani could not resist noting that they "passed a small place called 'Dudu'" along the way.[9] The women moved into a bungalow that Eruch had secured for them from a local banker, "a compact little house, with snowy white walls and flat roof … simple, clean, and cool."[10] The interior was airy and comfortable, with electricity, hot and cold running water, and Western-style flush toilets—modern conveniences that made all the difference for the women when they were settling in for an extended stay, but which they had learned not to take for granted. As comfortable as the bungalow was, however, it was a bit small for their number.

* Baba visited Ajmer at least seven more times—in 1935, as well as in 1941, 1942, 1946, 1947, 1948, and 1949—all in connection with His *mast* work.

Chanji described the challenges faced by the mandali when attempting to locate accommodations that were both suitable for the women and conducive to Baba's work, marveling at the manner in which Baba always turned the key to help them find exactly what He needed.

> Wherever Baba had just a short stay for His internal work, incidentally giving the group an opportunity of a little sight-seeing, difficulties of all sorts presented themselves during the preliminary search for residential quarters, and everywhere the party had to put up with some sort of inconvenience due to delays in making these arrangements. But where Baba wants to work on the gross plane, it is a mere question of the Divine Will. All the imminent difficulties seem to disappear, the person deputed on duty is internally directed to step into just the right place, it seems ideal, is easily available, the party concerned (owner or manager) is readily found, terms are favourable and all the arrangements are made, even coping with a thousand and one details of peculiar requirements of a party like ours, in a surprisingly short time. To put it in a nutshell, instead of ourselves trying to find things, things come to us automatically one after the other. It is one of the most wonderful experiences the Master's disciples have in working under His directions.[11]

Elizabeth recorded that the bungalow was located "on a quiet corner, nevertheless just off the main artery leading into the heart of the city."[12] She went on to observe how Baba chose locations that were private enough to ensure Mehera's seclusion yet were

> often in the central parts of the cities, as it seemed that Shri Baba did not want to be removed from the swarm of humanity. Outside our gates we were constantly

> aware of the sounds of passing feet, also bullock carts, donkeys, camels, and the swift rush of motor cars or lorries laden with passengers, and through all this one sensed that the Master was aware of the heartbeat of each of these striving, straining hurried souls who were unconscious of His presence but were none the less in His spiritual environment. The dumb creatures, too, did not escape the benediction of His holy presence.[13]

She also noted that "part of Shri Baba's training is to develop our 'peace within', though in the midst of active, pulsating life solitude was not our part during these [*sic*] six months journey. This is what outsiders sometimes have difficulty in understanding, as they seem to expect spiritual living to be a cloistered existence with inward contemplation. But Shri Baba leads us along the path in service of others." It seemed to Elizabeth as if "the journey itself was but a pause in the rhythm of our ashram life": Baba's work with the women was "continuous … only the setting changed."[14]

They settled in for what promised to be a twenty-two-day stay, taking up the tasks Baba had pre-assigned them in Delhi. He also asked some of them to record their impressions of the journey so far. Elizabeth, Norina, and Nadine all wrote about their experiences, and some of their musings became articles for the *Meher Baba Journal*. Helen made drawings in a sketchbook that she carried with her throughout the tour. Both Mehera and Mani recalled seeing her sitting on the terrace of the bungalow making sketches of water buffalo and the Indian women passing by.*

Kitty continued to be responsible for meals, assisted by Naja and Katie. Baba dined with the women some of the time and at others with the eight men who were also traveling with Him. The men came over to the women's house to eat (separately from the women, of course).

* When Mani found Helen's sketchbook in a cupboard at Meherazad many years after the end of the tours she sent it to a Swiss museum.

Kitty and Rano especially enjoyed being able to spend time with them, because when they were there, Baba was there as well. But, as Kitty soon learned, this arrangement came with its own challenges:

> We were living very simply, but one or two of the men would always ask for something that was not there—an onion or tomato, chutney or salad. One day, Baba told me to bring cheese and butter, so the next day I again brought cheese and butter. A few minutes later I was called. Baba, looking very annoyed, wanted to know what was the meaning of this and why had I given the boys what the rest of us were not allowed to have, and said that in the future they could only have what we had.
>
> Baba's orders had to be obeyed to the letter. Be assured that if you did anything contrary to what He said, He was sure to know about it and would call you to explain. No one who has not lived near Baba can ever believe how every detail of everybody's life throughout the day was His concern…. How He also did His spiritual or Universal work was a puzzle to me, but He said, "This must be so. I work all the time whether I am thinking of the butter, bread or milk. I do My Universal work simultaneously. I cannot rest unless I work. When I work, that is My rest. My work is in restlessness."[15]

I HAVE COME TO THE LORD

With the exception of His three-week sojourn in Jabalpur, Baba had spent a week or less at all of His previous destinations, and although He had made a few *mast* contacts in each city, He spent a significant amount of time sightseeing and visiting pilgrimage sites with the women. Now the focus would be on His *mast* work.

Baba went to great lengths to ensure that there would be as few interruptions as possible. "The importance of this particular work,"

Chanji wrote, "could be judged from the facts [*sic*] that Baba literally cut Himself off to the outside world during this period, keeping Himself entirely occupied with these *masts* to the exclusion of all else."[16] Baba ordered that all correspondence and cables be sent to and from Marwar Junction in care of the Station Master there, so that no one could trace Him to Ajmer. Not even the mandali at Meherabad knew exactly where He was. One of the men traveled eighty-five miles between Ajmer and Marwar every other day to send and collect the mail.

Just as Baba promised, the women witnessed an intensification of His work during the days leading up to His forty-fifth birthday. Baba expected to make so many contacts during this time that He even established a *mast* ashram for the duration of His halt. William Donkin later observed, "With the establishment of this ashram at Ajmer, Baba changed from the low gear of working with mad, to the higher ratio of working with God-intoxicated souls; and in this centre, albeit temporarily, He gathered a few such souls under His roof for the first time. There were, of course, a few *masts* in the Rahuri ashram, but Rahuri was, basically, a centre for mad people, and Ajmer was the first ashram confined to work with *masts* as a distinct class."[17]

Chanji also saw how, in Ajmer,

> our tour was altered and assumed a different aspect. The Master's mission in life, as He has himself repeatedly declared, is the spiritual upliftment of humanity. Hence all His work, movements, visits, etc. to different places under-taken with whatever external or apparent motives, have always a spiritual aim and background. Whatever opportunities His intimate group had in seeing places of interest during this tour since November [*sic*] last, they all knew that a different internal object was behind each of these moves in company with Baba….
>
> Baba has always said that He goes wherever there is the greatest *need*. The Master's selection for this particular

> nature of work that He wanted to do fell on Ajmer, the most important city in Rajputana and a place of historical importance….
>
> However, hardly any will have come to seek, amongst the poor, decrepit, spiritually-dazed souls, loitering in these surroundings … lovers of Divinity, who, through their intense love and longing for union with the Divine Beloved, are dazed by a flash of Divine Light and have lost themselves on the Path without a *Guru* [teacher] to guide them [and] are oblivious to the outer world and indifferent to their own bodily needs, and as such are taken for mad by a world ignorant of their true condition.
>
> One of Baba's special tasks seems to be the finding of these spiritually-advanced but dazed souls, and through His personal *sahavas* and touch, help them onward in the Path.[18]

This increase in the time and energy Baba devoted to His *mast* work afforded the women more opportunities to observe Him as He made new contacts. He told them that living in Ajmer were "six spiritually advanced souls … two on the sixth plane, two on the fifth, and two between the third and fourth or fifth and sixth," and that "when one dies, another takes their place so as to maintain the same number."[19] He would contact at least four of them. As Elizabeth observed, when the "*appointed hour* to meet the Master had come—no clockwork could be more precise, no fate more accurate."[20]

On the morning of February 10, just three days after arriving in Ajmer, Baba escorted the women to visit the dargah of Khwaja Saheb Moenuddin Chishti.* "Hundreds of thousands of Chishti's devotees and even others from all over India visit this place …" Chanji wrote. "The religious significance of the Khwaja's [tomb], especially for

* Khwaja Saheb Moenuddin Chishti (1141–1236) came to India from Persia near the end of the twelfth century. In addition to the teachings of the Chishti Order, he carried with him the Sufi traditions of ecstatic music and dance. He is reputed to have brought more than two hundred thousand converts during the Golden Age of Islam. Baba had visited Chishti's dargah in 1922 and 1935.

the Mohamedans [*sic*], is very great, as this revered Saint who lived here and lies buried here holds a very high distinction spiritually, and is venerated alike by Hindus, Mohamedans [*sic*] and even by other communities in India."[21] Baba called him the *Qutub-e-Irshad*, or head of the five Perfect Masters of his time.

Such places of pilgrimage attracted not only the devout, but also saints and *masts* who made their abodes there. As Baba and the women approached the dargah, the *mujaver* tried to stop the Westerners from entering, but he became so entranced with Baba that he exclaimed, "May God bless you!"[22] When he asked Baba's name, Baba, who had given up writing many years before, inscribed the word "Merwan" in the dust. The caretaker had no idea that it was he who had received the blessing. Baba instructed the women to put flowers on the dargah and to bow down. He and Mehera held hands as they entered through the gateway arch and circled the silver-railed tomb once in *pradakshina* (circumambulation). They inclined their heads in respect but did not bow down. "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," Mani observed, "impressed me most."[23]

As they were leaving, Baba spelled out on the alphabet board a spontaneous poem that He dedicated to Chishti: "A Fakir once said, 'When I saw in my own heart the impression of divine beauty, the sight of God, Wherever I cast my gaze, I saw *Parvardigar* [Infinite God].'"[24] Mansari asked if He was the fakir. Baba gestured that He was and said of Chishti, "Sufis call him God. He <u>was</u> God."[25]

At another shrine nearby, Baba gave a rupee to a *mast* who called out: "O look, Shankara [Shiva] is here! Hurry and have Bhagwan's [God's] darshan!"[26*] After everyone had boarded the bus to leave the dargah, Baba made one last contact for the day. "An ascetic man with glowing eyes passed close to the window where Shri Baba sat," Elizabeth recalled. "Recognition passed between them."[27]

* Adi Shankara (788–820) was also the name of an Indian philosopher who brought together the disparate branches of Hinduism and merged them into the school of Vedanta. Bhagwan is another Hindu name for God.

Mani also recorded the strange occurrence in her diary: "[Baba] gave him a rupee which he took in an indifferent manner. Shabby though he looked, the radiance on his face could not be hidden. The lovely meeting over, we threaded our way through the overwhelming 'fakirs' shouting & clinging to the bus."[28]

Baba sent two of the mandali back to Chishti's dargah to locate the *mast*, where they found him unconscious, face-down in a gutter, drowning in bliss from his brief encounter with the Beloved. They enlisted the help of a local "tipsy" tonga driver named Fateh Kahn, who had heard of Baba's work and hoped to assist.[29] Fateh Kahn delivered the *mast*, along with his two escorts, to Baba, for the requisite shave, bath, new kafni, and meal.

The *mast's* name was Lakhan Shah, after Rama's brother Lakshmana. Baba had seen him in the bazaar during His first visit to Ajmer in 1922. He was a sixth-plane high *mast* whom Baba characterized as seventy-five percent *jamali* and twenty-five percent *jalali*.[30] Lakhan Shah recognized Baba immediately, exclaiming, "I have come to the Lord!"[31]

Elizabeth described Lakhan Shah as tall, thin, "of medium age [and] noble bearing … inwardly exalted," with a "burning" expression. "His artistic hands were constantly moving and gesticulating as if in conversation with unseen entities and sometimes as if he were leading an unheard heavenly choir. His speech, which was seldom, seemed disconnected to those of the men disciples who were in attendance, but Shri Baba told us that all what [*sic*] the man uttered had spiritual meaning. Sometimes even at night we would hear him singing in a deep, sonorous voice like the chant of a priest, so loudly, that the sound carried through the walls into our quarter."[32]

Lakhan Shah reminded Kitty of medieval paintings of St. Francis, and she recalled how he "would fiddle with his hands or with paper. Sometimes he would talk by the hour, then he would laugh aloud, and then suddenly become quiet. He remained the whole time with Baba and slept in Baba's room. Strange it was, but for this one

Baba came into the kitchen and fetched the food or tea and mixed it Himself."[33]

And although Mani did not name Lakhan Shah in her diary, she recorded that the women were given the opportunity to see "the '*mast*' with the beautiful eyes."[34] She went on to say that Baba told them he was the spiritual chargeman of Ajmer, while Elizabeth recorded that he was one of Baba's agents: the two terms were sometimes used interchangeably. "To this one," Kitty wrote, "Baba bowed down."[35] Lakhan Shah stayed with Baba for about a week. Baba's parting gift to him was a "beautiful blue shawl" of "fine, peacock blue wool."[36]

This was just one instance of Baba giving one of the women's shawls to a *mast*. Rano recalled another:

> Everything needed was taken from us by Baba, so that His *masts* would be well cared for. At one of our stops, Baba decided very early one morning to go with Kaka to contact a certain *mast*.
>
> I saw Baba sitting in the tonga, wearing a short coat and his thin sadra. I thought, "Oh, it's such a chilly morning, I must cover Baba with something." I got a lovely shawl which Nonny had brought back from Europe for me. I covered Baba with it and I was quite happy because Baba was nice and warm.
>
> Towards noon, Baba returned. Sitting in the tonga with Him was the *mast*, and draped around the *mast* was my shawl.
>
> When Baba came to me later, He said, "You know you're not going to get your shawl back."
>
> "Yes, Baba, I know."[37]

Meanwhile, Baba had assigned Eruch and Kaka the responsibility of locating new contacts, but the next *mast* came to Him, delivered to His door on February 12 by Fateh Khan. This sixth-plane *mast* was

called Brahamananda (Ultimate Bliss) Singh. Baba had first contacted him in 1922. The *mast* lived in squalor, subsisting on gutter water and all its foul components. Baba allowed Brahamananda Singh to sleep in His room and said that He wanted to bring the *mast* back to Meherabad, although as it turned out, He did not. He told the women that Brahamananda Singh was another of His agents.

Baba had also told the women about a rare God-realized *majzoob* living in the city. One of only a very few living seventh-plane *masts*, he was a *hafiz*, one who could recite the Quran by memory. On February 13, Baba sent Adi K. and Kaka out to contact him. The *mast* was called Chacha because of his love for *cha*, endless cups of which his attendants provided throughout the day. When his disciples kindly offered tea to Adi and Kaka, Chacha shouted repeatedly in his mad, childlike manner: "*Cha … Cha*!" (Tea … Tea!) imploring them to leave and entreating them to stay.[38] But four days passed before Chacha allowed them to help him into Fateh Kahn's tonga to convey him to Baba. When he arrived at the bungalow, Chacha refused to climb out until Baba took his hand and assisted him inside. He had sat for so long in his hovel that he could barely walk.

Meanwhile, Baba had conscripted two of the women to assist Him. It was an unprecedented opportunity, as it was the first time He had ever given any of the women—Eastern or Western—this kind of responsibility. "Two of the household were assigned the more strenuous tasks," Elizabeth wrote, "which was for one of them to prepare food for any number of strange souls who might come to Baba at any hour of the day, and the other was to prepare hot water over the charcoal burners in bucketsful, at any moment, for the Master's use…. What strange interweavings of fates, Shri Baba brings about! For example, here were two Western women, one from London, and the other from New York, serving the spiritually advanced souls of the East in such arduous fashion."[39]

The first of the two was Kitty, who had acquired much experience preparing Indian food, first, during her cooking lessons in London, and

then later, on the Hill as well as on the road. She was the group's only Londoner at this time. The other was Rano, who had grown up in New York City. And although Kitty did not speak or write of her experience, Rano vividly recalled the challenges of fulfilling her assigned role of *dhobiwala*—laundress—and hot-water bearer:

> My duty at the time was to wash the *mast's* clothes, consisting of long kafnis and *lungas* [*sic*, *lungis*, or sarongs], as well as the towels Baba used to dry the *masts* after bathing them. I was also responsible for bringing hot water whenever Baba needed it for them.
>
> Baba was then contacting Chacha, a seventh plane majzoob. Each day, Kaka would go out and try to bring Chacha to the house because Baba wanted to bathe and feed him. I had strict instructions that I must have plenty of hot water ready when Chacha came. But no one knew when Chacha was coming. Every day Kaka would go and every day Kaka would come back empty-handed.
>
> At the rear of the compound we had a very large *samovar* [to heat water] over a small fire of wood and coal to keep the water constantly hot. The samovar was equipped with a spigot. While I was keeping the water hot in case of Chacha's arrival, other people still wanted to take baths so I was allowing each one the bare minimum of hot water. I was sure that if everyone took all the water they wanted, the 'bumb' (as the samovar is called in India) would be emptied and at that moment Chacha would come.
>
> Days [went] by and Chacha didn't come and everyone was getting very irked with me because they couldn't get proper baths. At last I said to Helen Dahm, "All right, Helen, take your pail of water and I'll quickly fill the bumb again."

> She had just carried the pail of water to her bathroom when a cry went up, "Chacha has come! Chacha has come!"
>
> Before Helen could shut the door I rushed in, grabbed the pail and ran with it to Baba, leaving Helen gaping in astonishment.[40]

Chacha lived in a "squalid and verminous little hovel … and was in a state of filth almost beyond belief," his clothing and turban "encrusted with stale tea and sugar."[41] Baba said that the *mast* had not bathed for thirty years. For several hours Baba and Adi K. poured cups of warm water over Chacha in a fruitless effort to loosen his clothes—ten to twelve buckets worth, by Rano's count. Meheru stoked the fire and refilled the samovar as Rano hurried to Baba with more hot water and returned with an empty bucket. "I kept on running," Rano concluded, "until Kaka finally said, 'Now there's plenty.' I was able to relax and everyone else could have as much hot water as they pleased."[42]



Chacha, after his first bath in 30 years, Ajmer, February 17, 1939

In the end, Baba had to cut and peel Chacha's stiff, filthy clothes away from his skin. Beneath the fez cap that the *mast* had been wearing under his turban, his scalp was as tender as a raw wound. Adi K. patted his head with a towel as Baba gestured, "Gently, gently … Don't hurt him." Afterward Baba was said to be "in a glorious state."[43] Poor Adi was exhausted. Chacha immediately requested tea but when a pot was brought he poured it over his head, where it trickled down through his clean hair and beard, staining his new kafni. After feeding him, Baba ordered Fateh Kahn to return the *mast* to his seat. He visited Chacha on the street near his hovel at three o'clock every morning for a number of days, to avoid the intrusion of the *mast's* devotees.

Despite the back-breaking nature of the work Baba had given her, Rano later called it "a delightful experience." She whose good fortune it was to have assisted in Chacha's care later described to pilgrims at Meherabad an experience she had with him. She was in the midst of some task, thinking she was alone, but when she turned around Chacha was standing right behind her. She had no sense whatsoever of his presence—he was there, and yet he was not. He was no longer a gross-conscious being. Indeed, in every photograph taken of him, Chacha's expression is dazed and his eyes vacant: this world, for him, had ceased to exist.[44]

Hafiz called "the man of God … a treasure in a ruin," and *Lord Meher* concluded, "Chacha was truly a treasure discovered in a ruin! There are so few God-realized souls like him on earth…. He had only the consciousness of God—consciousness of himself as God, not as man. The *majzoob* saw Baba as God; he knew Meher Baba as God."[45] Baba called Chacha a "God-Merged soul … in the state of the final *fana* [God-realization]."[46] Chacha was one of the most extraordinary of all the spiritually intoxicated souls with whom Baba worked. *The Wayfarers* identifies him as one of Baba's "Five Favorites," calling him "incomparable."[47]

Baba also contacted a fifth-plane *mast* named Qabristanwala (Caretaker of the Graveyard), although his devotees called him Kullar Shah (Earthen Pot King). With characteristically colorful language, *The Wayfarers* called him "a short little fellow … naked to the waist, and below the equator was clad only in a tattered and filthy lungi. He drank water from gutters, and, *mirabile dictu*, seemed to thrive on this rich but noxious beverage."[48]

Elizabeth documented the story of this little *mast* who lived beneath a tombstone in a cemetery: "In the day time, this man wandered forth, and the disciples had to make several trips before he was at last found…. All in the locality regarded him as a saintly person, and it seemed that he had many devotees throughout Ajmer…. A trail of happiness seemed to be left behind him."[49] It proved impossible for the mandali to persuade the *mast* to accompany them from the

market where he was wandering, followed by a retinue of disciples. So Fateh Kahn enticed him into a teashop then brought him back out, hoisting him into the tonga where the mandali were waiting and driving off before anyone could stop them.

Baba's name for Qabristanwala was Socrates because of his resemblance to busts of the Greek philosopher. Like Lakhan Shah, Qabristanwala stayed with Baba in His room for a week, and when the time came for him to be returned to his seat in the cemetery he begged not to be sent away. Baba gave him a blanket and ordered Kaka to make special arrangements for a man to look after him and bring him two meals a day. He also arranged for food to be brought to Lakhan Shah.

A DRUNKARD, A DISCIPLE, AND A SIXTH-PLANE *MAST*

Like Kitty and Rano, Fateh Kahn, the perpetually inebriated tongawala, served as yet another instrument of Baba's work during this time. Elizabeth called him "a very honest old fellow of rather disreputable looks, wearing a coat and cap too large for him. In fact he was so honest that he told the mandali each day how much he had drunk the day before, but added that it was his only vice…. Such strange humans are often pieces in the picture-puzzle which in life fit in no place, but under the influence of a Master such as Shri Baba become the missing and important piece which completes the picture."[50]

Chanji said that Fateh Kahn seemed to the mandali as if he might have been a "half-*mast*" himself and that they "would have liked the Master to give him the bath, before all others!"[51] Fateh Khan claimed to be the oldest tongawala in Ajmer. He had an intimate knowledge of the city's ancient meandering galis and was able to assist the mandali in locating *masts* who might otherwise have been impossible to find.*

* Fateh Kahn fell ill in 1945, and when death was imminent he asked for his picture of Baba. He also asked his brother to be sure to take Baba's darshan whenever He returned to Ajmer, and then, "gazing lovingly at the portrait of Baba, he passed away." (*The Wayfarers*, 110)

As for the rest of the women, not only their shawls disappeared over time: blankets and towels also were conveniently requisitioned from their personal belongings, because other than new kafnis and provisions for meals Baba refused to purchase anything for the *masts*. "Baba has explained," Kitty observed, "that there is a spiritual power and blessing that goes with gifts from the Master, the gift being only the vehicle by which they are carried. After such contacts, Baba's mood is visibly gay and joyful."[52]

> It was a most wonderful sight to see Baba on the floor with four or five of the spiritually mad in front of Him. Baba was all smiles, full of fun and laughing with them, and at the same time talking with the mandali who were allowed to sit on the floor with them. Some of the *masts* never spoke, but just looked down at the ground. A few of them smoked all day. Think of Baba's room full of smoke and stale air. But He smiled and gave them the cigarettes Himself….
>
> How Baba conversed with them is beyond our understanding. But they all seemed to love Him and recognized Him as One apart and called Him God…. Baba loved these mad so much. He says He can do what He wants with them.

"They are never jealous or moody as we are," she wryly concluded, "we are tolerated for the work's sake."[53] In the end, nearly everyone in Baba's entourage had the opportunity to serve His cause. Even Mohammed was conscripted to assist when one of the other *masts* became uncooperative or would not eat, saying "Do this, Dada wants you to do it."[54]

It was a great privilege for the women to observe and assist Baba in His work with the *masts*. Elizabeth later wrote, "I witnessed in Ajmer men come to Shri Baba who had long given up the world for the life of the spirit … wracked and weary, soul-tortured, or dazed upon the Path. I have seen them leave the presence of the Master after the beneficial bath cleansed in body and spirit, and with the unmistakable expression

of *regeneration* upon their faces. It was like seeing a garden of humanity, purified and shining, after celestial rains."[55]

Baba marked His forty-fifth birthday on Wednesday, February 15. He had already made it clear that He had no grand plans, declaring emphatically, "No public or private celebration. I will not even wear new clothes.* No ceremony, no music, no singing."[56] "It was rather desired and decreed by Baba," Chanji noted, "to be a day of great work that He wished to do"—bathing, feeding, and clothing twenty *masts* that He had ordered the mandali to bring.[57]

Baba rose at 2:00 AM and went out with Kaka for three hours to make *mast* contacts. No one knew where He had gone until He returned at five, when the mandali began to bring the *masts*, as well as the mad and homeless poor to Him. One of them, Norina observed, was

> crippled … for having sat for years in the same position regardless to cold or heat or bodily discomfort. This one called out for food. While calling loud for the material need, he was beating his head against the stone wall, as if to do penance for his material want for which so many years in self-denial he had tried to *win in* with pure *longing for Truth*. Here he was, lying in front of the door of *mercy*. There stood the most merciful of all men—who exchanges free the impure desire; who says: Come to Me all who are in need—good or bad. In Me is life immune … Baba's gift to [him] was the bath of Compassion, and the *material food*, which handed by Him becomes symbol of Grace.[58]

Baba fasted until 2:00 PM, when His work with the *masts* was accomplished; it had been perhaps twenty hours since his supper the previous evening. He pronounced the unusual celebration "excellent" and indicated that it was something He could do every day.[59] Norina went on to record that Baba said of His birthday work, "I here in Ajmer

* It was the custom in India for a person celebrating their birthday to wear new clothes.

find more life to rescue for Me, to work with, than in any place we were. We here know what is life divine. It is in men in all phases. It is here, there and *non-anywhere* but there where *love has marched* in and in, and out in bare *suffering*. These people have been crucified for love…. So see the *saint*, the little hungry begging soul, it is *all-one-life* in martyrdom in life that had given to Me this *birthday gift*."[60]

Baba's contacts with Brahmananda Singh, Lakhan Shah, Chacha, Qabristanwala, and the men He bathed, dressed, and fed on His birthday, brought the most intense period of His *mast* work in Ajmer to a close. He did, however, make two more contacts during His remaining days. Mani noted in her diary that on the seventeenth, two days after His birthday, "Baba bathed a sixth-planer."[61] He also met with an old man whom He had already contacted and wished to see again before departing. Baba invited him to the bungalow, but the meeting did not proceed as planned. Kitty related the drama that accompanied the *mast's* arrival and followed his precipitous departure:

> When he saw all of us on the balcony staring (and Baba had so definitely told us not to be about, but that when sent for we could just look and then go straight away), he would not come in. After this we had a long lecture from Baba. Really it was most peculiar…. It was quite evident, for some reason, that Baba did not want the *mast* in the house that day and we were the excuse, because Baba was standing inside His room and could easily have sent word that we were all to go away, but He didn't; and there were Elizabeth and Hedi both with their cameras. Baba concluded His lecture: "You have no idea of his greatness. He sees one woman tall, one short, one fat, one thin—he thinks he is at the zoo! Elizabeth with her camera, he thinks wants to shoot him. Masi all bustling about, Rano and Kitty with tea trays … and then for the first time I saw Nonny and Helen outside, and when Helen began

making signs, it was too much! So tomorrow, don't any of you come out."[62]

Kitty recorded that Baba's lecture was an especially long one; Mani might even have called it "hot." Fortunately, the *mast* returned the following day, but this time he appeared at the men's bungalow so Baba was able to accomplish His work with him there. Kitty went on to observe that Baba was pleased with His sojourn in Ajmer for three reasons: First, He appreciated its spiritual atmosphere and found it conducive to His work. Second, it afforded Him many opportunities to make new *mast* contacts. Third, the women had prepared all the meals for themselves and the men while they were there, so there were fewer household expenses and Baba had more money to channel into the care of the *masts*.[63]

Elizabeth recalled how, in retrospect, "It would seem that Shri Baba's spiritual work of [this] tour had reached its highest pitch during our stay in Ajmer (Rajputana). There were so many sidelights to the great searchlight turned on by the Master there, that it was utterly impossible for an ordinary individual to follow all, but each disciple sensed it in his own way and felt its import and momentum, as at no other place on this journey in spiritual experience."[64]

"After Baba's birthday," Kitty observed, "the tension eased somewhat. Baba relaxed in some way, but even so the last few days in Ajmer were very hectic and we all felt completely worn out."[65] Some of the women—Kitty included—felt that their stay in Ajmer was the climax of the First Blue Bus Tour, as it marked the end of Baba's most intensive *mast* work until after their return to Meherabad.

"In my own way, I make love to these lovers of God!" Baba declared. "They have no consciousness of the world. They are blissful. They are indifferent to physical wants because they have no worldly consciousness. They have in them only love of God! Look at the world. It loves Maya, cries for Maya, begs for more Maya! The world is merged

in lust, anger, greed. But these are brave heroes who, by kicking off Maya, live only for Beloved God."[66]

SPIRITUAL SIGHTSEEING IN THE MECCA OF INDIA

Despite the demands of His *mast* work, Baba ensured that the women never felt neglected. He took them out to visit Ana Sagar, which had been constructed to supply potable water for the city. Baba said the place possessed a uniquely charming atmosphere of spirituality. Afterward they drove on to the nearby, temple-lined town of Pushkar, through pleasing upland scenery populated with black-faced monkeys, peacocks, and wandering camels. There Baba fed gram to the fish and fresh-water crocodiles swimming in the lake. On subsequent outings they toured the Hindu Lakshmi Temple, as well as a beautiful Jain temple. In the evenings He took them for walks through the fields adjacent to their bungalow.

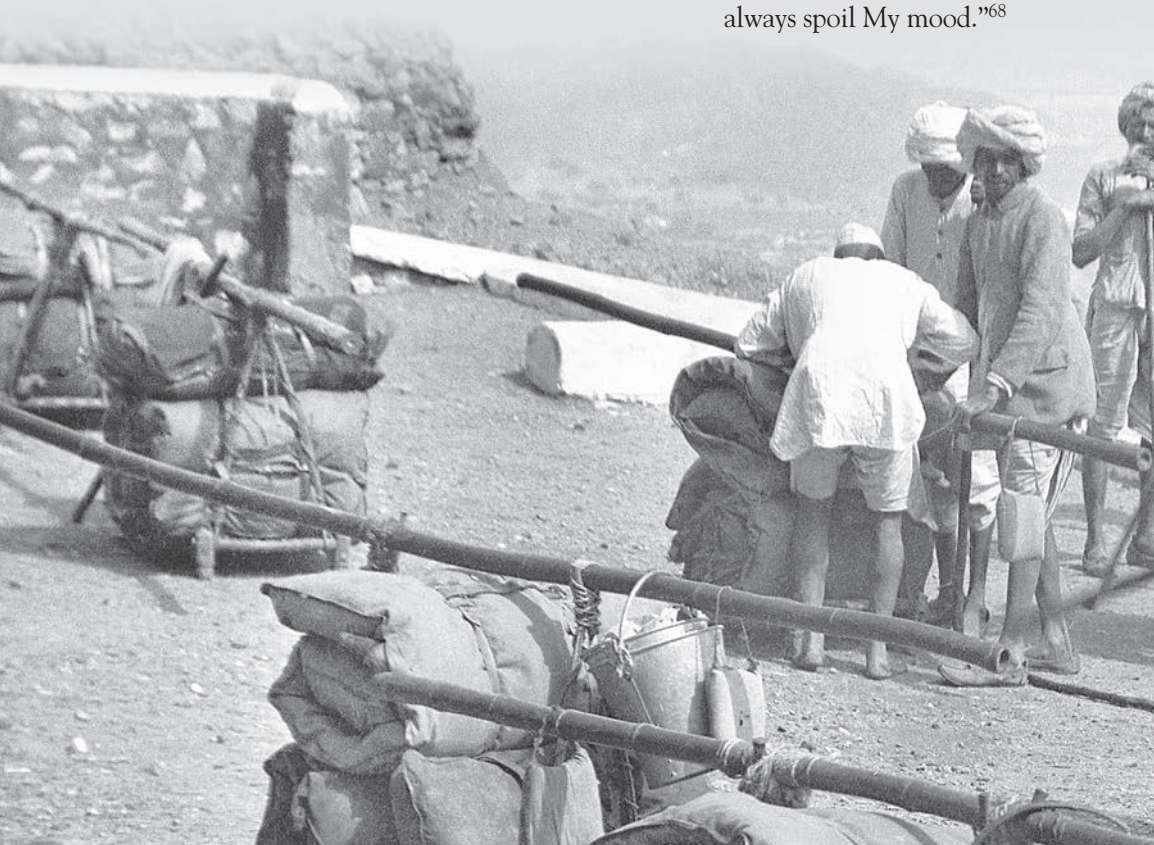
Baba had already spoken to the women about taking them for an overnight excursion to a Mughal fort at the top of Taragarh Hill, which was visible from the roof of their house. When He again mentioned the trip, however, He told them that He was concerned about the expense as well as the difficulty of the steep climb for even the youngest of the women, complaining that the whole idea (which had been His to begin with) was a headache. As Rano recalled:

> Baba kept emphasizing the fact that there was a great deal to do in preparing for the excursion. He would have to arrange for coolies to carry up our bedding. Food arrangements would have to be made. Lift chairs [palanquins] were needed for Elizabeth and Nonny who could not walk that distance uphill. Over and over, Baba kept telling us what a lot of trouble it was and what expense He was going to.

We thought, "Oh, dear, Baba is doing all this for us." So Kitty and I put our heads together and decided really it was all right if Baba didn't take us up. Indeed, why should Baba go to all this expense and trouble for us?

We went to Baba's room: "Baba, we appreciate so much all the trouble You're going through to take us up the hill to the shrine and for us to stay there but Baba, don't do it on our account. If we don't go, it's all right."[67]

Despite the fact that Kitty and Rano were simply mirroring the reservations Baba had already expressed, He became angry and asked, "Why are you so cold and disinterested over something I have planned for your enjoyment? Don't you want to see what is beautiful and lovely? I have spent time and thought of how it could all be arranged, and now you spoil it all by your indifference and coldness. Why call what I do an extravagance and waste? You two always spoil My mood."[68]

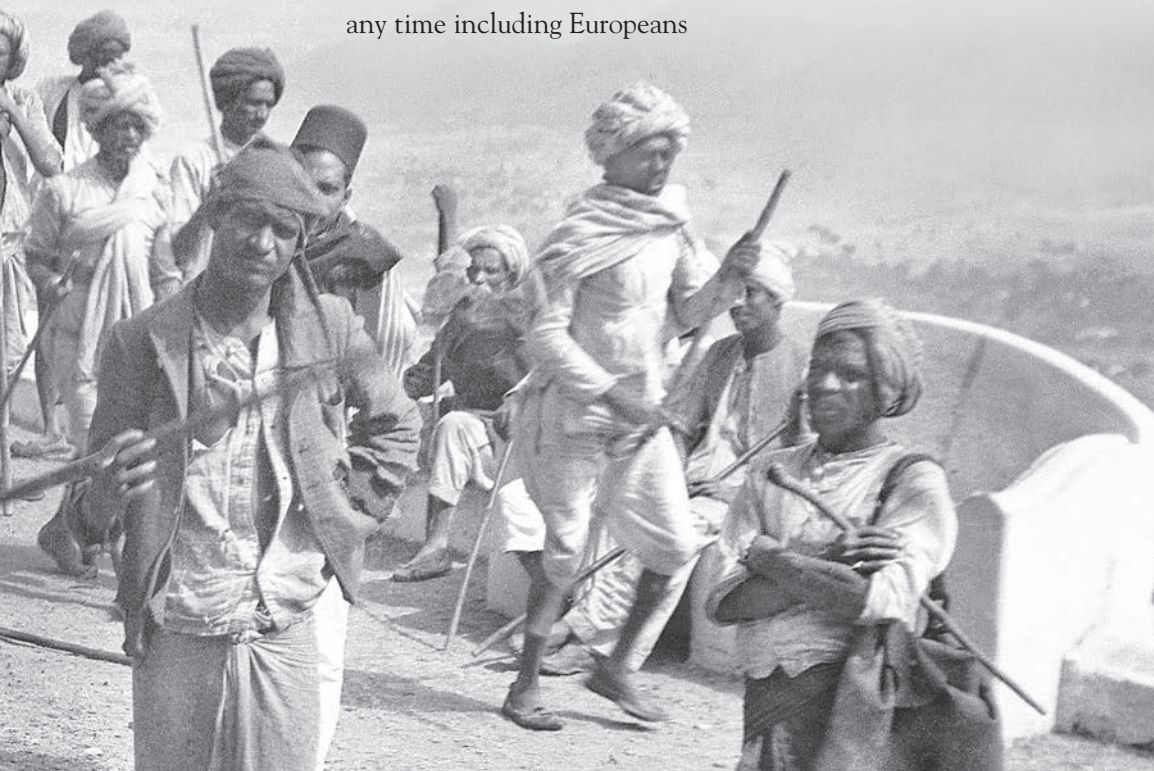


Doleewalas carrying the women's bedding rolls to the summit of Taragarh Hill, February 18, 1939

Rano broke down and began to cry. "Baba gave us one look," she continued, "and then He said, 'If you think I'm doing this for you, you are mistaken. My work comes first; you are only secondary.' We walked out of the room with our heads down," she concluded. "Baba had made it very clear that His work did come first, and it was something we had to experience."[69]

A handwritten list in the AKI Collection enumerates preparations for the women's excursion.

1. 18th morning to go on the hill
2. 19th evening to come back
3. We give him [the mujaver] Rs. 500/ to manage
   A. Two days Dak-bungalow
   B. 2–*Pakhal* to be brought up every day
   C. 4. Pakhal of water to wash
   D. To see to 500. Mujavers
   E. To carry up and bring down 25- bedding rolls
   F. 5–Dolees up and down
   G. To see that we are allowed in the Dargah at any time including Europeans



H. We take our own food and tea because of nature of food
I. We do not pay anything to anyone extra
J. He looks to the 500.Mujavers[70]

Baba visited the fourteenth-century Star Fort on Taragarh Hill on February 16 with several of the men to listen to a qawaali singer he especially liked, at the mosque located on the hill, Adhai din ki Zhopri (Jhopdi Built in Two and a Half Days),* which Chanji noted drew thousands of pilgrims. That evening the singer, Azeem Qawaal, came to the bungalow and entertained the women for over two hours. Two days later Baba took the women to Taragarh to spend one night in the dak bungalow at the summit. The climb was so steep that it took them more than an hour to reach the top. Baba explained His reason for bringing them there: "By My living presence, I clean the tangled atmosphere of the shrines of the dead saints and Sadgurus. This complicated atmosphere is of the thought world. Thought force is really very strong and powerful…. That is why I thin down the effect of this complicated thought atmosphere by visiting such places."[71]

Early the following morning they visited the dargah of Sufi saint Mir Hussain Sayd Khalil Sawar and picked wildflowers along the way. Just after noon they began the descent to where the bus was parked. Even walking downhill it took them nearly an hour, and Baba joked that they "went tap-dancing all the way" because the path was so steep and uneven.[72] They were back at their bungalow in Ajmer an hour later.

Baba and the women celebrated Katie's nineteenth birthday on February 23 with jalebis and entertainment: a qawaali singer brought by "the" tongawala, Mani noted—Fateh Kahn. That evening the women watched a polo game from the terrace of their bungalow.

* Constructed in 1199, Adhai din ki Zhopri was originally built as a Sanskrit monastery and school. Its name belies its impressive appearance, and it is the oldest standing monument in Ajmer.

JAIPUR: THE PINK CITY

On February 23 Baba ordered Eruch to travel ahead to Bhopal to secure accommodations for His visit there in March. Four days later the Blue Bus departed Ajmer, ending a three-week visit. Despite a persistent downpour, the bus was loaded and boarded by 7:15 AM and on its way to Jaipur, eighty miles east-northeast. The women's bedding rolls, which were roped to the roof of the bus, were soaked by the time they reached the city. They checked into the Jaipur New Hotel, where they would prepare their own meals with food they had brought with them for their two-night stay. As Baba had warned in Delhi, their meals would be simple: tea, bread, and butter for breakfast, dal or curry with rice for lunch and dinner, with the addition of one vegetable or salad with their evening meal.

Mani called Jaipur the "finest city in India," with its "quaint 'eastern' houses … so doll-like & picturesque." Baba called it "a unique city in India," and He took the women out for several sightseeing excursions during their brief visit.[73] His tentative schedule, handwritten on the back of a sheet of Udaipur Hotel letterhead, reads:

27th Feb 1939 From 2 *P.M.* TO 6 *P.M.*
amber palace
the old city
and the tombs of
the Maharajas

28th Feb 1939 From 8 am to 11 am–
city palace
the statistaleles [?]
Baggi Khan
Ram Nivas Gardens

28th Feb 1939 From 2 p.m.
Gulta.to 6 pm.
[illegible][74]

Mani recorded in her diary that during their first afternoon in Jaipur, Baba and the women went out to visit "Hawaii" Palace. She was referring to Hawa Mahal (Palace of the Winds). From there they continued on to Amber Mahal (Jaipur Palace), which was "once the abode of ancient purdah queens with exquisite work in mirrors & coloured mica & lovely detailed paintings of all holy India, Hindu holy places on the wall."[75] They then went on to Dilaram Bagh (Heart's Ease Garden), Mohan Bagh (Delightful Garden), Jai Mandir (Hall of Victory), and Chandra Mahal (Illustrious Palace), also called the Jaipur City Palace.

Their next stop was the Jaipur Zoo—the oldest in India, with dancing peacocks and a ferocious Bengal tiger captured nearby that snarled and startled the women. The zoo was located in Ram Niwas Bagh (Garden of Ram's Residence). Mani found the drive through the grounds "heavenly," adding, "All around us were nothing but flowers, flowers & flowers, of all kinds & colours so beautifully & artistically laid out—like a paradise on earth."[76] They passed Jal Mahal (Water Palace) along the way and returned to the hotel just in time for Kitty to prepare their supper.

The following morning they returned to the Jaipur City Palace complex to see Chandra Mahal (Moon Palace), but despite the fact that they already had passes, they were denied entry for thirty minutes. While they were waiting they visited the Maharaja's astronomical observatory, Jantar-Mantar (Instrument to Calculate); Mani spelled it "Jantra-Mantra."[77]

Irene recalled a strange occurrence during their visit, involving the briefcase Baba had given Khorshed to carry: "In that observatory nothing was allowed to be carried inside. So Baba—you know how quick He is in His movements—just snatched that case from Khorshed and put it in my hand, and I walked through the whole observatory and nobody ever saw it. But why? Why didn't Baba make it invisible in Khorshed's hand, why did He have to snatch it from her and give it to me? Was it because I was rather big and obvious and Western? … I was so taken aback I just took hold of it and marched around as if I had nothing in my hand."[78]

When at last Baba and the women obtained permission to enter the grounds, it was through the back gate. They walked through the

palace and gardens, where they saw the state elephants that were brought out for processions and other ceremonies, and returned to the hotel for lunch and a short rest before going out again. That afternoon they toured the Arts of the Different Nations Museum, which Rano called small but "exquisite … everything in each room was perfection."[79] She was entranced, adding that "the museum was not overwhelming as so many are in the West. Here the artworks were displayed with the utmost attention … allowing the viewer to grasp the beauty of each in a perfect setting. But Baba didn't allow us time to stop and admire. He made the rounds, surveying each room with hardly more than a glance here and there, and then quickly walked on."[80]

The women scurried along behind Baba as He strode through in His usual swift manner—so quickly, in fact, that a museum guard had to run after Him calling out "Sahib!" "Sir!" to catch His attention and give Him the walking stick He had left behind.[81] "I still remember walking backwards," Rano recalled, "trying to catch a last glimpse."[82]

That evening Rano was subjected to yet another of Baba's tests when she hoped to take a long, relaxing bath at the end of the long day of sightseeing:

> I was exceptionally tired and grimy and especially happy to discover that the hotel had a European style bathtub. I made up my mind to be last, so I could soak luxuriously in the hot water without the others becoming impatient. I thought I would relax a bit.
>
> Everyone else finally finished, and I made the hot water ready. No sooner was I settled than there was a loud rapping at the door: "Baba wants you!"
>
> I let out my breath slowly, stepped out of the tub, pulled the plug, got dressed and hurried downstairs to see what Baba wanted.
>
> Baba smiled and gestured, "sit outside until Kaka comes; then you can go."[83]

In addition to the spiritual chargeman Nanga Baba, Irene recalled that they witnessed Baba make one other *mast* contact in Jaipur: "We were driving in the bus on a little lane, going up a mountain…. From a distance, I saw a tall, dark man, with just a little loincloth. His age was around 30. When the bus passed him it suddenly slowed down. (I don't know, perhaps Baba had knocked to signal the driver to slow down.) I saw Baba's eyes flashing. The man turned his head. It was as if you could see an electric current go by. Just for a few seconds. Later Baba explained that this was another one of His agents in the area."[84]

BHOPAL: WHERE THE BODY'S PAIN IS THE BELOVED'S BLESSING

The Blue Bus departed for Bhopal on the morning of March 1.* Baba planned a detour to Ujjain that added more than one hundred miles to the 350-mile journey.† He would make two overnight halts along the way, in Kota and Indore. Everyone set out at 8:20 AM, stopping for lunch two hours later. They also made a short rest stop in the city of Bundi to view a temple and lake where Mani took Baba's picture. They continued on to the city of Kota, where Baba had arranged for the women to spend the night in a dak bungalow. When they arrived they found that half the house was already occupied so they had to make do with the other half. It was a Muslim holy day and the women were kept awake for much of the night by the drumming and singing that accompanied the processions of *taboots* being carried through the streets.[85]

They left Kota at 5:00 AM, passing through orange groves fragrant with blossoms. They enjoyed an hour-long picnic near a well before continuing on to Ujjain for a three-and-a-half hour stop, having

* Baba first visited Bhopal in 1924. He also visited or passed through the city in 1929, 1930, 1933, 1942, 1943, 1945, and 1950.

† Baba also visited Ujjain in 1924. He sent three disciples there in 1946 to contact "150 sincere sadhus." (*Lord Meher*, 2524)

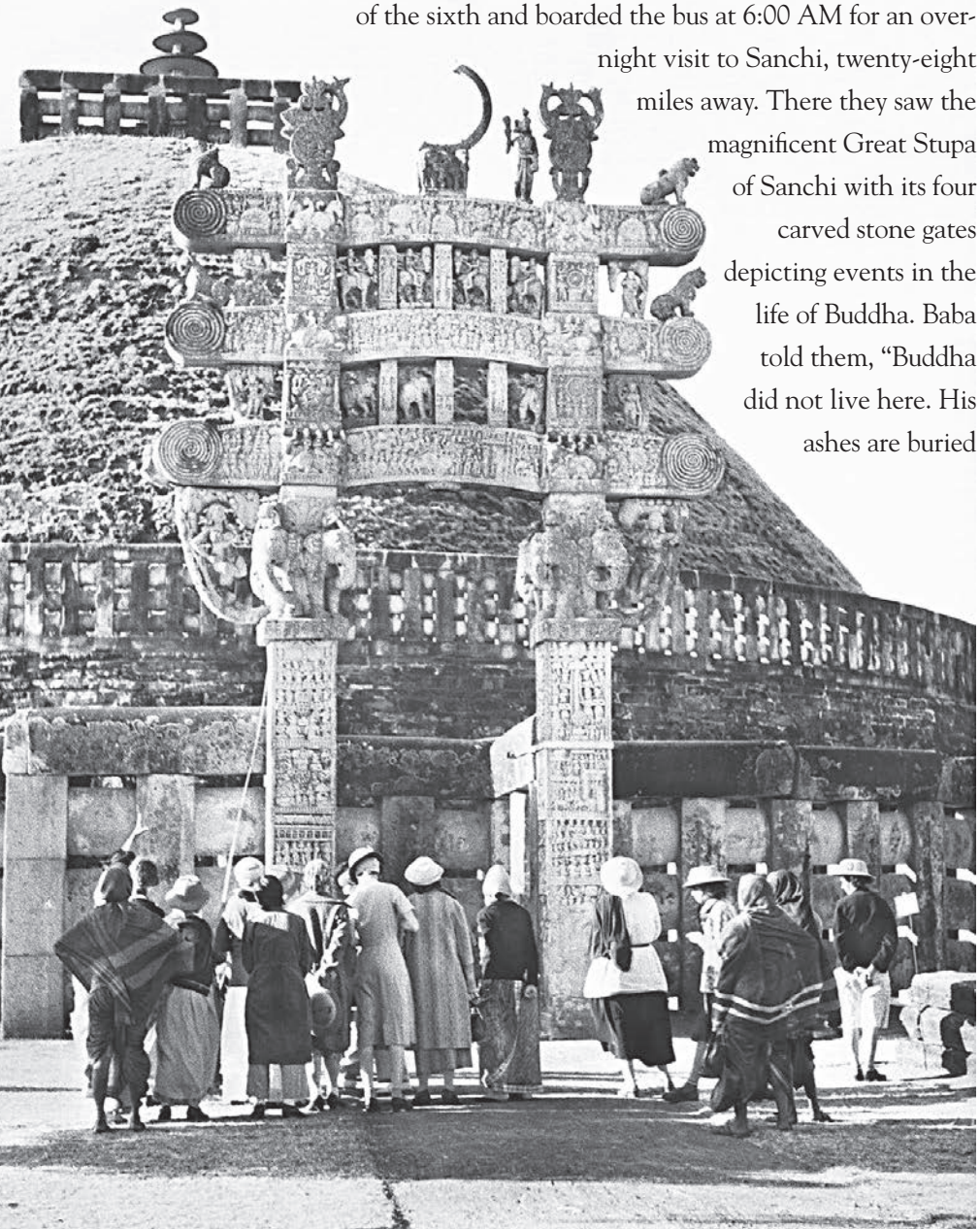
crossed over from Rajasthan into Madhya Pradesh. They had a difficult time finding the bungalow where they planned to stop and rest, but once there Kitty made tea. Baba took the women out again to visit Maha Kali (Temple of the Great Mother Kali) and also took them with Him in the bus as He searched for a *mast* in the crowded bazaar. Kitty observed that Baba seemed "very far away. I could see Him looking out of the window of the bus all the time and I knew He was expecting to see one of His agents or a *mast*. Up and down the streets of the busy bazaar we went. The streets were so narrow, it was no joke for our big bus to keep on turning the sharp corners."[86] Kaka got out to walk alongside the bus until he spotted a beggar tearing up rags and paper into a three-foot-deep pile. When Kaka gave the *mast* a rupee, he glanced up from his strange activity and looked directly into Baba's eyes. Afterward Baba told the women that the man was an advanced sixth-plane *mast* and He declared His work in Ujjain complete.

They continued on their way just before 5:00 PM, stopping in Dewas for the night. Their lodging was another cramped dak bungalow where some of the women slept on wobbly tables and chairs, while others took down the dusty curtains from the windows to wrap up in for warmth and provide a bit of cushioning on the drafty flagstone floor. The Blue Bus drove on from Dewas on Friday morning. Scattered across the scenic landscape were lakes, palm trees, and flocks of sheep. The women celebrated Norina's birthday with chocolates and other sweets that Baba distributed during the four-hour drive. But the bus sustained a puncture in one of its inner rear tires and crept the last few miles into Bhopal. Everyone checked into the Parsi-run Ruby Hotel, where they enjoyed a meal of *dhansak* in the dining room—a delicious treat after their regular fare of plain rice and homemade dal or curry.•

• Dhansak is a complex Parsi dish made from lentils, mutton, and vegetables, seasoned with dhansak *masala* (a blend of fifteen spices), and eaten with rice that has been cooked in caramel water. It is traditionally served during Parsi New Year's celebrations, which take place in August, although now it is also eaten on Sundays, as well as on the fourth day after the death of a loved one. Dhansak was often served as a festive welcome for Baba and the women when they arrived at Meherabad or another destination during the tours. *Cooking with Katie* includes a three-and-a-half-page recipe for dhansak and a separate recipe for dhansak rice. Katie observed, "Baba liked this dal, which was cooked for Him in the ashram days without meat." (*Cooking with Katie*, 78)

On Saturday morning the women breakfasted early in order to be ready to go out sightseeing with Baba. Bhopal is renowned for its beautiful lakes, and Baba's itinerary included a visit to one of them. Afterward they went to see Bhopal's Moti and Jumma Mosques, the palace of the local Nawab, and a waterfall He called Kulsumba, or Curry and Rice Falls. They returned to the hotel for supper.

The women rose for another predawn breakfast on the morning of the sixth and boarded the bus at 6:00 AM for an overnight visit to Sanchi, twenty-eight miles away. There they saw the magnificent Great Stupa of Sanchi with its four carved stone gates depicting events in the life of Buddha. Baba told them, "Buddha did not live here. His ashes are buried



One of the four ornately carved gates of the Great Stupa, with scenes from Buddha's life. Sanchi, March 6, 1939

in thousands of places, this being one of them. Later, his disciples came here, meditated, etc. died & were buried here. But Sarnath was the real place of Buddha."[87] They also toured the museum there. Mani noted that the entrance fee was one rupee per person and that they spent forty rupees altogether. Mani did not record where they spent the night. Khorshed recalled that Helen began to feel ill while at Sanchi.

In Bhopal, as in Ajmer, Baba wanted to keep His whereabouts a secret, concentrating His energy on seclusion and *mast* work. This time He arranged for His mail to be diverted to the Station Master at Itarsi, a junction on the G.I.P. (Great Indian Peninsula) Railway about fifty miles away.

Baba had picked up with His *mast* work the afternoon of His arrival, contacting four men as well as several boys whom He fed and bathed. "We soon shall have no belongings left because each of the mad goes off with something," Kitty lamented in a diary entry written in Bhopal, adding,

> Rano and I are both minus a blanket and one is minus a watch. What they want Baba will give, be it His own or someone else's. Another very necessary item in one's equipment when out with Baba was plenty of small change; you never knew when He would ask for it for some poor person along the road. Yet we were not allowed to give indiscriminately to beggars. Baba told us regarding beggars, "Never give money unless the beggar really needs your money, and then give very little. Because in giving you may do temporary physical good but spiritual harm, the reason being that one gives away sanskaras to the beggar." With Baba, giving material items or alms seemed to be a point of spiritual contact.[88]

On March 6 Baba spoke of India's continuing political unrest, declaring, "All miscreants will be wiped out. Everything will be set

right." Several days later a curious incident occurred while Baba was walking down a street in the city. He passed a group of people who were discussing the impending war when a *mast* who overheard the conversation looked up and pointed to Baba, saying, "He will uproot all these troublemakers and set everything right."[89]

The following day Baba dictated to Kitty a letter for the Backetts in England, conveying another of His explanations of His work with *masts*, saints, and others: "This was a tour not for sightseeing only but for spiritual work. This contacting personally certain saints and agents had to be before I speak and manifest. Every day brings the great spiritual upheaval nearer and with it the terrible suffering that must precede the 'Awakening of the soul' … You who have seen and known Me before this happens will suffer in a different way [from] the rest of humanity."[90]

While Baba was so intensely engaged with the *masts*, He was plagued by a fever and severe diarrhea, and a number of the women were stricken with illnesses as well. The most adversely affected was Helen, who had begun to feel ill at Sanchi. She was diagnosed with colitis and had to be admitted to the Civil Hospital on March 8. Because Helen spoke only Swiss German, Baba ordered Irene and Norina to take turns staying with her, facilitating communication with the doctors, nursing her, and preparing her meals, which are not customarily provided in Indian hospitals. Nadine also spoke Swiss German and could have taken a turn, but Baba did not ask her to help, perhaps because she and Helen got on so poorly and her presence would not have promoted Helen's recovery. "Helen had a difficult temperament to begin with," Irene recalled, "and colitis is a disease that causes depression, so it was hard for her."[91] Irene stayed overnight but she was not Helen's only nocturnal companion: cockroaches, frogs, and mice invaded the room at dusk.

At around the same time, Mani also became ill and Katie had to keep her supplied with fresh orange juice, which Baba ordered her to bring at precisely 3:00 PM every day. When Katie was five minutes late one afternoon Baba reprimanded her: "Because of your delay in

following the order, everything I was trying to do for Mani and My work has become ineffective. There may be good reasons for lateness in all other things, but in obedience it is an unfortunate tragedy!"[92]

On March 10 Baba sent Adi K. and Gulmai to Nasik. He took the remaining women out for a walk along the lake early that evening and had them driven up to a scenic spot where they could look down on the city. Then they dropped by the hospital to visit with Helen and Irene before returning to the hotel. Mani added a note in her last entry for their visit to Bhopal, squeezed in between two other lines and written in the tiniest script imaginable: "The proprietress was very nice & loved Baba."[93] She was referring to the Parsi owner of the Ruby Hotel, which they would soon be vacating.

When the Blue Bus left on Sunday, two passengers stayed behind, because Irene had to stay with Helen until she recovered. The roads were dusty but the scenery was pleasant and green, and the group picnicked along the way. They settled into a dak bungalow in Sagarand; after tea, they went out to visit manmade Lake Banjara, as well as Chakra and Aspatal Ghats, both located on the banks of the lake. Baba had a special connection to Sagar, because it was there that Perfect Master Tajuddin Baba had received God-Realization from Hazrat Daood Chishti, the Muslim Qutub, the Sufi Muslim name for the head of the spiritual hierarchy in the absence of an Avatar.

The following morning after breakfast Baba hired a tonga and went out to look for *masts*. He brought back a man with dry, scaly, alligator-like skin, the consequence of poor nutrition, exposure to the weather, or perhaps some undiagnosed disorder. *The Wayfarers* succinctly describes him as "a very good *mast*, in a majzoob-like state, thirty-five to fortyish, fat, tall, silent, and completely naked."[94] Baba called him Magar Shah, or "Crocodile King." He bathed the *mast* and massaged oil into his rough skin.

MARBLE ROCKS REVISITED

Baba's retinue departed for Jabalpur on March 13; they had already spent three weeks there in the latter half of December 1938 and early January 1939. They got in at 6:15 that same evening. Despite the poor condition of the roads they had traveled 116 miles in a little over four hours, averaging a respectable twenty-four miles per hour. The women moved into what Mani called "a new bungalow (big, with a lovely garden)," which Jal Kerawalla had rented for them.[95] The men settled into a house nearby. Both the men's and women's accommodations were located in the Cantonment.

The shift from Ajmer to Jabalpur was accomplished with a minimum of fuss: three days on the road broken by one day and night in Sagar, with no early morning confusion, no punctures—nothing to mar the journey. Elizabeth recalled the apparent ease of this shift:

> One of the exceptional parts of our tour was that a few hours after arrival at any of the places selected by Shri Baba for our stay, we were ensconced in the new abode almost as if we had not left the former place. With a party of about thirty persons, both Eastern and Western, our number augmented at times by certain other persons assigned on various duties joining the Master for a few days, all being shifted, including luggage and necessities for cooking, was indeed rather a feat to work so smoothly. Naturally the good management and ease in the rapid adjustment to new conditions was due to the Master's inspiration which touched always the smallest details of our lives and acted like oil in the otherwise complicated machinery of our migratory existence.[96]

Kitty resumed her task of maintaining regular correspondence with Helen and Irene: "We have a lovely house, lofty, airy, and quiet. I know you'll both love it. There is also a large garden and

lovely walks. We may stay here for some time, because it is ideal for Baba's work…. Baba sends His special love and a kiss and says that He knows how much you love Him and long to be near Him." The following day she continued, "You will both be so happy in this lovely house and garden; there are so many, many flowers, shrubs, trees, and also a vegetable patch. There are plenty of water taps, electric lights, etc. The air is so fresh, and the climate clear…. [Mehera, Mani and Khorshed] have a nice little suite, with room for four, across from the kitchen, and another room for Naja and Walu, plus a verandah, quite private, and all next to Baba, so they are really very happy."[97]

Baba sent Eruch to escort Gaimai, Manu, Meheru, and Meherwan to Jabalpur so that they might re-join the tour, and they arrived on the nineteenth. As soon as Manu was settled Baba ordered her to join Katie in assuming responsibility for all the ashram cooking. Katie later recalled that she felt intimidated by Baba's order and hoped that Manu would know more about cooking than she did. However,

> Manu was also scared. She said, "Oh, thank God Katie's there!" We'd both help each other, and we'd do something.
>
> Next morning we go to the kitchen—we had simple meals, dal and rice or some curry and rice, and in the evening, one vegetable and chapatis, nothing else, so it wasn't anything elaborate. We were complete vegetarians. So Manu and I go there, the sack of rice is there, the sack of dal is there, we don't have fancy … fireplaces or anything, no gas, no electricity, nothing. We had to light the fire with the wood and damp cow dung cakes, you know? All stored for us, but damp, and … your eyes become red and they start watering and the fire won't light soon and the fire is at this height, you know? And you stand on a stool and cook because I got red in the face all the time from standing to see what was cooking inside a vessel of this size [Katie gestures to show the size of a large cooking pot].

> So it was a hard way—a hard way we started, but I went to Naja—you know, Baba's cousin, who was always cooking for the Prem Ashram boys. She knew—she could cook for two hundred people, three hundred people…. So I'd take my measures, and I'd take the vessels, and I'd go to Naja, I said, "Naja, how much cups of rice do I need for thirty-five people? How much water should I put in? How long does it cook? How long should it boil? How much …?" And she would tell me, you know.
>
> One day, two days, three days—one day too puddingy, the next day not cooked properly, and the less water I put it became raw, and everybody [inaudible], then puddingy, then the old people [inaudible] said we won't have to chew it, just swallow it nicely.
>
> Then Baba called me, "How could you cook it better, Katie?"
>
> I said, "Yes, Baba. I was trying my very best, Baba."
>
> "Too raw … too puddingy … " Baba said, "Try your best."
>
> I said, "Yes, Baba, I'm trying my very best!"
>
> So see? Now I'm still in the kitchen! … But now … I can say I can cook![98]

Despite the women's sense that the bulk of Baba's *mast* work had been accomplished in Ajmer, His work in Jabalpur promised to be every bit as intense. In anticipation of His absences, Kitty recorded, He imposed exacting orders upon the women:

> During our stay, Baba was in seclusion and away part of the time, so we did not see much of Him. We were all under strict rules. We got up at 5:30 a.m., ate once a day only, meditated and sang bhajans; and because of the tigers, had to go to bed and lock the doors at 7 p.m. Baba,

> anticipating perhaps what might happen during His absence, gave us another order before He left that all should try to be in a good mood, happy, without tears, cross words, or unkind thoughts, and to this order all had to put their signature. We tried very hard to keep our word and what helped was that the other party was always making the same, if not greater effort, so that each met the other with a smile. Thus, Baba said, we were helping Him most during His absence.[99]

Baba gave them an hour to write each morning. Kitty continued to correspond with Irene and Helen, describing the women's days and relaying reassuring messages from Baba as well as reiterating His determination that Helen should remain in the hospital until fully recovered. She also read out all of Helen and Irene's letters to the rest of the women, who were anxious to hear how they were. Irene's loquacious nature served her well: Kitty said she wrote "so fully and clearly each detail" that Baba and the women could just "picture" how she and Helen were doing.[100]

On March 17, Kitty wrote that Baba sent "His best love and blessings," and that He wanted to remind Helen to "do your best to feel well and happy and help the doctor all you can by not worrying! You will get well and stronger than you have been for some time. I will help you. I am always helping you, and I am always with you. I am so happy that you both talk of Me and love Me as you do. I know that when you are feeling weak and ill, you cannot consciously think of Me, but that does not matter. Unconsciously, you are still thinking of Me and can never be far away from Me, for are we not all one and only separated for the purpose of My work for the upliftment of humanity?"[101]

When Kitty wrote to friends in London to catch them up on news about the tour, she spoke of the on-going challenges of life in a traveling ashram, further echoing Elizabeth's observation that solitude was not to be the women's experience. "We are not traveling but life is hectic in a different way. It is a definite strain to live at the high tension

one does, living close to a Perfect Master. Again it is very difficult to live in a group life with continual noise around and with an ever-constantly-changing routine. It is not easy to adapt oneself, and domestically it is anything but peaceful. This Baba warned us the very day we arrived, and it has been more destructive than I imagined. Life with Baba cannot be easy at any time."[102]

Once Baba had established ground rules for the women He resumed the search for spiritually advanced souls. As Chanji recorded in his diary: "A number of *masts*, observed and marked out by Baba en route and also searched out from different parts of the country surrounding here, were ordered to be brought [to Jabalpur]. Emissaries of the Master's group are sent out in different directions on this hazardous task. In the scorching heat of the summer season, they move about in the places and directions indicated by Baba, and a number of these *masts* are gathered and kept in special quarters rented for them in a quiet locality."[103]

The special quarters quickly evolved into another small *mast* ashram—the second of the seven documented in *The Wayfarers*—to accommodate Mohammed and the new contacts Baba would make during His two-month stay. Donkin would later lament the lack of detailed information specific to this ashram, blaming "the intractability of the memory … for the only thing that everyone agrees on who saw it was that it was situated in quite a good bungalow, that stood in a pleasant garden…. The daily routine was like that of all Baba's special centres for *masts*. New-comers would have tousled heads and bearded faces cropped close with clippers, and after a bath, a new kafni would be slipped over their heads. Then they would be fed by Baba's own hands, and finally He would sit with them in silent conference."[104] Most of the *masts* would stay for only a few days; Mohammed was the only long-term resident.

"Baba has a lovely room with his own bathroom and another room adjoining," Kitty recorded in one of her letters to Helen and Irene. "All separate and complete. This is ideal for Baba's work with Mohammed and the mad. In His bathroom, He bathes the mad, and in the

extra room, He feeds them. Also, the mandali eat there too. Tomorrow six mad come. Mohammed comes daily for his food here and bath. His special treatment for the moment seems to be six big tomatoes, which he cuts with a knife. Of course, Baba feeds him Himself."[105]

"At such times," Chanji clarified, "when Baba feeds these *masts*, no one else is allowed to remain in the room. He does it all alone. He is, through this food that He puts into their mouths, feeding them with the Divine nectar, filling their souls with the Divinity that the Master radiates! … Like a patient in a delicate condition [each one] is tenderly nourished and rekindled."[106]

In the meantime, Mehera's sister Freiny had stopped eating because Baba had not invited her to join the tour. Freiny called her refusal to take nourishment "a fast unto death," a threat Baba could not ignore. By mid-March Freiny had been fasting for eighteen days, the last ten without water, and Chanji described her condition as "reduced to a living skeleton, unable to even lift the hand, the whole body … entirely stiff and rigid, like a solid piece of lifeless framework."[107] On March 19, less than a week after His arrival in Jabalpur, Baba departed by rail for Nasik to attend to Freiny personally, though not without remarking, "Jesus was crucified once. But I am crucified every day—every hour!" Traveling with Him were Kaka, Chanji, and Gustadji. Mohammed cried when he learned that Baba was leaving, asking plaintively, "Dada, how will I live without You for so many days?"[108] Baba embraced him before departing. Arriving in Nasik the following day, Baba fed Freiny milk to break her fast and promised to allow her to join the tour when she regained her strength, although this would never come to pass. Adi K., who had returned to Ahmednagar, drove to Nasik in Elizabeth's Ford so that he could deliver Baba to Meherabad for a three-day visit to tend to business and meet with the mandali who had remained behind.

While in Meherabad, Baba arranged for some of the men to bring the animals and cages of birds to Jabalpur for the women to care for. They would be transported in the trailer that Elizabeth had shipped

to Bombay along with her car. Padri drove, accompanied by Tukaram* (another of the mandali) and three more servants. Baba also took the opportunity to visit with Shireenmai, as well as other family members and devotees in Poona whom He hadn't seen since setting out in December. Adi K. then drove Baba on to Bombay to meet with disciples and lovers there, after which Baba returned by rail to Jabalpur on March 25 to resume His *mast* work.

Meanwhile, many of the women continued to experience health problems, as Kitty went on to explain at length in another letter to Helen and Irene. She followed their litany of woes with a lovely explanation of how Baba's work affected those around Him:

> Today, Norina has a temperature of 100, but all along has had no diarrhea. I think with her it has been overfatigue and reaction, coupled with a chill. Hedi looks well, but has that peculiar pain in the back of her head. Naja is a little rundown and spent yesterday in bed. Nonny still has much pain in her hands and feet. Nadine is not so grand. I think it is nothing but reaction to the tension of being with Baba when He was working so hard. Is it not natural that we all should feel it, and when the work is over, we naturally release and are no longer keyed up.
>
> Tell Helen that it is my experience during the eight years of being with Baba that after each visit of eight or ten days, or eight or ten weeks, I have felt completely used up and exhausted. And then after resting, I have again felt better than ever before. Baba takes for His work our energy. When the work is over, He returns our energy revitalized, and we feel more energetic than before.

* Tukaram Kamble (born c. 1914) was one of the Prem Ashram boys. He was named for the seventeenth-century Hindu poet, saint, and Perfect Master, Tukaram. He became one of the ashram chauffeurs and drove the Blue Bus several times during the tours. Tukaram remained with Baba for his entire life. Baba established the Prem (Love) Ashram at Meherabad in December 1927 for a select group of spiritually inclined boys from the Meher Ashram School.

In her next letter to Irene Kitty went on to write, "All still not well. Norina has a little fever and is again in bed. Naja is tired, Mani okay, Hedi fair, Nadine fair. Nonny a little better, so tell Helen she is not the only one on the sick list."[109] Helen was released from the hospital on March 23, when she and Irene traveled to Jabalpur to rejoin the other women.

When Baba returned from Meherabad on March 25 He gave the women some much-appreciated attention—morning and evening walks in the garden and music in the evenings, but He also resumed what Mani called His "war-talks."[110] In a letter to her fellow Londoners Kitty observed, "Sometimes [Baba] calls us all and He discusses the world situation and we read from the newspapers. He often refers to the 'Umbrella Man' [British Prime Minister Lord Neville Chamberlain]. Sometimes He says England has been weak and again He will say that Chamberlain has done well! … Certain it is that we are on the brink of great events. You see it in Baba."[111]

Just a few days after Baba returned to Jabalpur, Gulmai and Masaji came to join Him at His invitation, as well as Savak Kotwal and Gulamasi (another of Gaimai's sisters). Shireenmai was set to arrive the following day. She and Gulmai had a difficult relationship under the best of circumstances. Baba therefore asked Gulmai to try her best to avert the usual disagreements that Shireenmai could be counted upon to provoke, but with the addition of Shireenmai's forceful personality to the ashram, compounded by her resentment of Gulmai's special relationship with her beloved Merog, sparks were bound to fly.

Shireenmai arrived on schedule and settled in with the other women. When she heard that Gaimai's sister, Banumasi Kerawala, was coming from Poona in a few days with her sons Dadi and Sam, she asked Gaimai to have Banumasi bring some fresh pomfret.* Baba had assigned Gaimai the task of looking after His mother, so she had no choice but

* Pomfret is a saltwater fish that was available in Bombay. It is said to be one of the best fish in India.

to obey. "You see, when my mother joined the ashram," Meherwan recalled, "Baba's mother Shireenmai caught a great fancy for my mother so she was the most favorite in the ashram for Shireenmai. Immediately she grabbed upon my mother [and] she said, 'Merog, I want this one to attend upon [me] all the while … so you allot her to me.' So Baba ordered my mother to always obey Shireenmai and do whatever she said. My mother was most happy at this situation, and she said, 'Yes, Baba, with all of my heart.'"[112]

Gaimai was well aware that fish was not on the ashram menu, but because Baba had ordered her to defer to Shireenmai's every wish she dutifully asked Banumasi to bring the pomfret so that she could prepare and serve it, which she did. But before Shireenmai could take the first bite, two black cats suddenly materialized out of thin air, leaping up onto Shireenmai's shoulders. "She never liked cats," Meherwan recalled, "especially black-colored cats like these, and she screamed loudly and threw the fish off to distract the cats. The cats took the fish and disappeared, never to be seen again!"[113]

Appearing in the next instant was Baba, asking, "What's that strong smell of fish?" Gaimai knew better than to prevaricate and told Him the truth, but when He began to chastise her Shireenmai stepped in and said, "Don't you dare scold her, Merog! I ordered the fish."[114]

"Mother, you can have fish in Poona, not here! No one can eat meat or fish in my ashram!"

"Who are you to stop me?"

"I am God!"[115]

That would have signaled the end of an argument with anyone else, but not Shireenmai. She accused Baba of deliberately harassing her by making the cats appear out of nowhere. Baba explained, "It was I who came in the form of the cats to save you from violating My order. Now do you believe that I am God?"[116] Never one to relinquish an opportunity to have the last word, Shireenmai replied, "Maybe for others, but to me you will always be my naughty Merog!" before peevishly adding, "You never allow me to enjoy anything!"[117]

THE SUBTLE QUINTESSENCE OF LOVE

On Sunday, April 9, with Baba's permission, a local *dastur* (priest) performed the *navjote*, the Zoroastrian coming-of-age sacred thread ceremony for Meherwan and his cousin Sam. Pappa Jessawala came to Jabalpur for the occasion, and afterward two hundred guests partook of a feast prepared by Masaji. All the women attended except for those who were in strict seclusion. The six who stayed behind had what Mani deemed "a grand time at home."[118]

Although Meherwan's navjote was the highlight of his stay in Jabalpur, he had other memorable experiences with Baba—"the Universal playmate."[119] One was getting a marble-shooting lesson on the verandah of their bungalow. "He [Baba] had an unerring aim and was showing me how to place my fingers and hit the marble accurately. 'See how I do it?' He gestured. He was just like a little kid jumping from place to place in order to shoot the marbles. With Baba, He was on all levels at all times. With a child He was like a child, and with a philosopher He was also that. He is perfect man as well as perfect God."[120] But Meherwan also recalled how frightened he was of Rano, who "shouted" at him for being too rambunctious while she was trying to wash the Blue Bus.[121]

During this time Baba was working intensely with several *masts* the men brought to Him. One was sixth-plane Gulabsha (Rose King) from Ellichpur, who arrived on April 17. He was also called Gulab Baba and was estimated to be between thirty-five and forty years old. The high *mast* was surrounded by a group of devotees when Kaka and Baba's brother Jalbhai found him, but he was hesitant to come with them, saying, "There is One who wants to paint me with the colors of divinity, but I don't want that."[122] When Kaka whispered Baba's name, Gulabsha called out, "He has caught me, but I don't want to go; he wants to send me to the great homeland [God] but I don't want to go there."*

* Baba characterized the transition from the sixth to the seventh plane as "an impossibly deep valley" separating the aspirant "from the splendor of God beyond, and he does not know how to cross this great rift. It is here that he needs the help of a spiritually perfect soul to take him across this last colossal obstacle, which is greater than the sum of all his previous obstacles on the path." (*The Wayfarers*, 115)

Gulabsha's state of spiritual advancement was such that he had predicted Kaka and Jalbhai's arrival to his followers the previous day, but now that they had come and he understood that Baba meant to give him one last great spiritual push, he was hesitant to accept it. However, when Kaka again murmured Baba's name the *mast* rose meekly and went with him. Their journey back to Jabalpur was a classic example of the lengths—both figurative and literal—to which the mandali had to go to bring a specific contact to Baba as ordered: it required two buses and a train, with a layover during which the *mast* frightened the other travelers by swearing at a wall in the station, addressing it as if it were God. Kaka and Jalbhai excused the *mast's* behavior to curious onlookers by calling him a madman.

When they finally reached Jabalpur, Gulabsha looked around the *mast* ashram and observed, "This is His hospital," but he would not sleep on the mattress Baba provided for him, believing himself unworthy. When at last he saw Baba, he cried out, "He is God Himself" but refused to approach Him, saying, "I am not fit to sit beside Him. How could I sit before the Emperor?"[123] Gulabsha also accused Kaka of tricking him into coming. Baba bathed, dressed, and fed the reluctant *mast* and then immediately sent him back home to Ellichpur, two buses and one train ride away.

At about this same time Baba had sent Chhagan on a journey of over three hundred miles to Ujjain and back to bring Him the so-called beggar He had contacted while driving through the bazaar. When Chhagan returned to Jabalpur with the *mast*, Baba admitted him to the ashram for a ten-day stay. The name of the near-naked, sixth-plane high *mast* went unrecorded.

Among Baba's other contacts was an elderly majzoob-like sixth-plane *mast* called Dada Maharaj from Amraoti, who was so weak that the men had to take turns carrying him on their backs, along with his bundle and hat, which he called his parents. Although Dada Maharaj had many followers he also had numerous detractors, some of whom

complained of what they deemed his excessive use of cannabis. Others thought that he exerted some kind of mental control over the police and justice system in his region. Dada Maharaj spent only a few hours in Baba's presence; because he had recognized Baba to be God before meeting Him, there was little work left for Baba to do.[124]

Another new contact was a high *mastani* from Seoni, an old woman called Khala Masi (literally Auntie Aunt). As soon as she saw Baba she pressed her temples with her hands, a woman's gesture for those she loved, and she went to embrace Him. After being bathed, clothed, and fed, sitting alone with Baba, Khala Masi pleaded, "You are the Ocean, give me a few drops from it to drink." Baba also re-established contact with Magar Shah and continued to bathe him and massage oil into his skin until he was completely healed, "no longer reminiscent of [a] ferocious reptile."[125]

Baba's ongoing engagement with the *masts* continued to affect the women. "Baba is very little with us these days," Kitty lamented in a letter to the Londoners. "We are not allowed to touch Him nor does He appear to see us, if you can express it so. He is far away in thought and work of another kind."[126] Rano observed the immense toll that *mast*-hunting took on Him: "Only those who actually traveled with Baba have any idea of the hardships of those tours. We would only catch a glimpse of Baba on His return: worn, tired, barely recognizable…. Washing and bathing these *masts*, seeing to their food and daily needs, having the mandali see to their slightest fancy, Meher Baba showed in day by day fashion that truly He is the slave of the love of His lovers."[127]

Expressing His love and respect for the *masts*, Baba said:

> They feel so happy with Me, because they see Baba and know who Baba truly is—a thing which you, with your gross eyes, cannot see. They see Me with quite a different eye, and this special inner eye sees My divine form.

> With your gross eyes, you can only see the playthings of Maya—this table, chair, et cetera. But the internal eye, which these *masts* have, sees through all these and in them sees God alone.
>
> I love these lovers of God. They care for nothing of the world. They are so blissfully indifferent, even about their bodily needs—all for love of God, while the whole world only craves and cries for things of Maya, and rushes at each other's throats for its gratification! These *masts* are true soldiers of God![128]

"It is unfortunate," Donkin would later write, "that scant justice has been done to the general atmosphere of this ashram."[129]

BIRTHDAYS, BRELLIES, AND BOATING ON THE NARMADA

In the midst of His *mast* work Baba reserved time to be with the women. Late in the afternoon of April 17 He took them out to visit a twelfth-century fort called Madan Mahal (Palace of the God of Love), "the ancient palace of the Gond Kings," Mani noted, "built only from one huge rock (the only one of its kind in India)."[130] Baba had taken Walter and Hedi there the previous December during the group's first visit to Jabalpur.

That evening Helen and Hedi departed for Switzerland by Baba's order. Helen had suffered a relapse in Jabalpur, and Hedi longed to return home to her family. Chanji delivered them to Bombay, where they boarded a ship bound for the West on the twentieth. It was one of the last boats to sail from India before civilian travel became too dangerous and schedules were suspended for the duration of the war. Before she departed, Hedi said to Chanji, "Tell Baba that physically I am going, but in spirit I will always be with Him. There is none like Baba in the world."[131]

As the weather became increasingly hot Baba began waking the women earlier and earlier so that they could complete their morning jaunts before temperatures became uncomfortable. He also began to hand out fresh fruit and cooling beverages in the afternoons as they sat inside the bungalow with shades hung on the doors and windows. Night-time temperatures were also becoming increasingly uncomfortable. "We couldn't sleep at night," Mehera recalled. "Nonny, Norina, and Nadine sent for *kus-kus*," *coir* matting made from compressed coconut-husk fibers, "[hanging] it over the windows, and [splashing] it with buckets of water. The doors had to be kept shut. Each one took turns sprinkling water on the kus-kus. They put sheets on the floor to lie down. There were no fans."[132]

On Friday, April 21, while engaged in His *mast* work, Baba embarked on a fast, declaring to the women, "Many big events will take place all over the world."[133] His sustenance consisted of one cup of black tea in the morning and a glass of orange juice at night. Mani recorded that He told the women, "I will be working in *mast* ashram. If I feel I might break fast on 12th day or continue indefinitely. This news is not to be put in [the Meher Baba] Journal & no fuss to be made."[134] He maintained the fast for eleven days.

In late April and early May Chanji brought his nieces, Arnavaz and Nargis, as well as Katie's sister Goher, to Jabalpur. The three young women were on their summer holidays. He also brought Rustom and Freiny's daughters, Meheru and Naggu, as well as their year-old brother Jangoo. Despite Baba's visit in March, Freiny's condition had worsened and she was no longer able to care for her children. Baba first made Soonamasi responsible for Jangoo, but she was so busy with the work He had already assigned her that He asked Naja to care for him, but she was busy too, and when she felt unwell Khorshed was next in line, and when she was too busy Baba would take him on walks so that she could get her work done. Despite everyone's attention the toddler contracted diphtheria.

Meanwhile, on April 27, one week after beginning His fast, Baba had asked Mani to produce a pantomime to be presented in six days' time, featuring Chamberlain, Hitler, and Mussolini as the main characters. Mani, who served as the ashram's de facto playwright, was always delighted to oblige: Delia DeLeon called her "a theater in herself," and Norina, who had years of stage experience, observed that with her talent Mani might have been a Hollywood star.[135]

Mani cast "plump and round-faced" Katie as Mussolini, while "tall and thin" Rano played British Prime Minister Lord Chamberlain, carrying his ubiquitous British brelly. Meheru and Naggu were given supporting parts as other world leaders. Mani herself assumed the role of Hitler, with one dark curl "plastered to her forehead," although no mention is made of Hitler's unmistakable moustache.[136] The play was enacted in perfect silence on May 3, the occasion of Manu's twentieth birthday. And although Baba found it highly entertaining, it became clear, when Great Britain declared war on Germany exactly four months later, that He had used the performance to facilitate world events.

Baba and the women celebrated Kippy's fourth birthday on May 5 by dressing her in a flower-bedecked bonnet, accompanied by cold drinks and a round of "Happy Birthday." Several days later Baba would rescue two puppies of indeterminate breed and give them to Elizabeth to care for. He named them Bingo and Jingo.

Baba also marked Kippy's birthday by taking the women back to Marble Rocks for a long evening outing and moonlight boat ride on the Narmada. In fact, Arnavaz recalled two excursions on the river. "Baba first took us there during the day, and the rocks shone like diamonds in the sunlight," she wrote. "Another time He surprised us with an evening boat ride. As we floated down the river, the rocks, chalk-white in the moonlight, provided a silent backdrop for Baba's majestic beauty. I can still see every detail—the narrow river, the rocks on both sides, and Baba sitting serenely in the boat. But while my memory of the scene is detailed and vivid, the feeling Baba gave me is beyond description."[137]

Gaimai's experience was equally memorable. She was riding in one boat and in the other she saw Baba and Mehera silhouetted by the moonlight, reminding her of the *Ramayana* and Ram and Sita's boat ride across the Ganges. Afterward, when Baba asked her, "Did you like the boat ride?" she replied that she had. When He asked if she had "any special memory of it" she told Him, "I felt that we were reliving that scene that took place thousands of years ago." Meherwan recalled years later: "Baba was very pleased with that."[138]

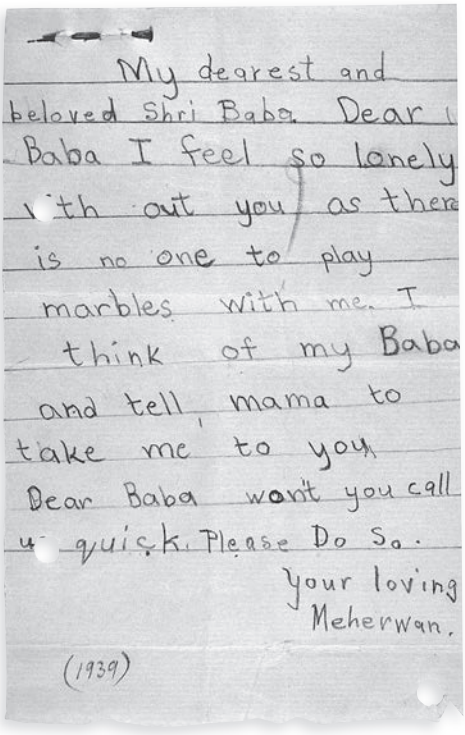
Baba used the boat ride as an opportunity for a discourse:

> Do you know, do you have any idea of how fortunate you are? I am sitting here with you, playing with you, talking with you, giving you My company, while elsewhere there are many who cannot die, because they want to see Me! They thirst for My darshan but still I do not meet them.
>
> There is one recluse in the mountains whose eyelashes touch the ground. He is living for My darshan, but I do not go and see him. There is another who is 700 years old, whose hair has grown so long it touches the ground, as if rooted there. He neither eats nor drinks, but only longs for Me. And yet I do not see him either, though he craves to see Me.
>
> Why do I call you all here to me and allow you My company? It is because, for births on end, you underwent privations by performing austere penances of which you have no idea. That is why you are here with Me now.[139]

Work also continued on plans for the Universal Spiritual Center in Mandla. Baba had scheduled a trip there on April 10 but then cancelled it. Instead, He arranged for private talks to be given by several of the men mandali and Western women to local leaders to apprise them of His intentions. He also arranged for a public presentation there in May. The lineup of speakers was impressive and sure to draw crowds: a

princess (Norina), a countess (Nadine), and an "M.A., Ph.D. Lecturer in Philosophy at the Morris College, Nagpur."[140] Chanji called Norina and Nadine "personalities in the international world," and Baba would dispatch them to speak on His behalf on many occasions. The M.A., Ph.D. Lecturer was Dr. Deshmukh.

HOMEWARD BOUND


My dearest and beloved Shri Baba. Dear Baba I feel so lonely with out you as there is no one to play marbles with me. I think of my Baba and tell mama to take me to you. Dear Baba wont you call u quick. Please Do So.
Your loving
Meherwan.
(1939)

Meherwan's letter to his marbles companion, Baba

In mid-May of 1939, a little more than five months after setting out for Delhi, Meher Baba decided that it was time to return home. He sent some of the men back by rail with Mohammed and the servants. Baba also ordered Gaimai, Manu, Meheru, and Meherwan, as well as Banumasi, Dadi, and Sam, to stay behind in Jabalpur. Jangoo, who was still critically ill, was left in the care of Jal Kerawalla.

By now summer was doing its worst, and instead of freezing, as they had during their first halt in Jabalpur in December, the women now suffered from temperatures that reached well over one hundred degrees Fahrenheit. In order to avoid the worst of the day's heat Baba woke everyone at 1:30 AM on Monday, May 15, to prepare for departure. Much of Rano's time between waking and departure was taken up with reloading the interior of the bus, and because space was limited, she had to identify a specific storage spot for each item. She stowed all the women's cloth bags beneath the bench seats or else in the narrow overhead luggage racks, where they were battered without mercy by the jolting of the bus. The spaces between the seats were quite narrow, and it was hard for her to reach beneath to store and retrieve the bags.

Compounding her difficulties, she was expected to pack the bus in the predawn darkness without the aid of the interior lights because they would drain the battery. "So I was like a blind man," she recalled.[141]

> I memorized where all the luggage had to go—I've got to leave that space for Elizabeth's bag 'cause it's always the last one to come, and here are these bags—these two come here, one goes just like this, and I knew exactly where everybody's bags fitted…. And then of course my temper would fly when I'd see somebody come along and put a bundle in the nice space that I'd kept for Elizabeth or something over here where it would be in the way of somebody's feet, because I tried to think of people's comfort as well as getting the luggage packed….
>
> [W]hen I saw people just put things indiscriminately, without thinking, it used to get me so wired, you know. And those were always the times when Baba would come along, you know, and just catch me … and then I'd think, "Oh gosh, why did I do that when Baba came along? I should have thought not to have acted like that. Why should I be in such a cross mood?" and then I'd be so annoyed with myself. And I'd say, "Now next time this is not going to happen. I've got to mind my Ps and Qs with Baba in this Blue Bus." And the next time it'd be something different! So again I'd be caught out. Baba would always get you when you were tired and out of sorts.[142]

In addition to the women's personal belongings, Rano also had to find a place for the metal buckets that Baba brought for bathing *masts*. He sometimes liked to keep them in front of His seat so that He could turn them upside down to serve as footrests during the long drives, but otherwise they had to be stored in the back of the bus, along with the water chattis and empty bhagulas.

The women breakfasted at 3:00 AM and were on the road an hour later. These earlier starts affected Elizabeth more than any of the other women. "It took her a long time to wake up properly and when she awoke she did everything very, very slowly," Mehera recalled. "Baba would sometimes come to the corner where she was sleeping on the floor, and snap His fingers to get her up. Elizabeth would slowly open her eyes and say, 'Yes, darling Baba, I'm getting up.' But it was hard for her to rise. Baba would tell her, 'Don't hurry, Elizabeth, but be sure you're ready to leave on time!'"[143] Baba often teased Elizabeth about her inability to wake early. One day He observed, "When I tell Eliz. in the early morning to brush her teeth, after saying 'what, why, how, when, where' she goes back to sleep," Mani recorded.[144] The women burst into laughter. On another occasion He suggested that they all give her their cups of coffee to help her wake up more quickly.

But it was to no avail. Finally, Elizabeth asked Baba if she could have a thermos to fill with coffee that she could drink later, once on the road. Baba thought that was a very good idea, so a nice thermos was purchased for her. But the very first time she stopped the car to pour herself some coffee, the thermos rolled out the door onto the ground and broke. Baba bought her another thermos and the same thing happened. Eruch said that he couldn't remember how many thermos bottles were broken before Elizabeth told Baba that she thought she could do without the extra coffee.

From this point forward Elizabeth would drive her Ford automobile, chauffeuring Baba, Mehera, and Mani, as well as Naja and/or Khorshed, while Eruch drove the bus. Now that He was being chauffeured by Elizabeth, Baba would make it His habit to slam the back door of the bus after everyone was inside and accounted for, "bang[ing] the door on the last person," Meherwan recalled, signaling the driver that the vehicle was ready to go.[145] Mani remembered looking out the window early that morning as they began the long drive home. "It always intrigued me," she mused, "when we passed people in the car,

who turned their heads and saw Baba … 'They don't know what they've received,' I would think."[146]

On any given morning, Kitty recorded, the passing show outside their windows might include "any number of monkeys, a few elephants, a few storks and camels to vary the scenery." But the Westerners had become accustomed to the views of the Indian countryside. The panorama had become so familiar that many of the women preferred trying to sleep rather than looking out their windows. "It matters not how many of these creatures you have seen en route," however, Kitty continued, "someone in the bus will call out and wake you from a peaceful slumber to see the animal. Unfortunately, before you have time to see it by lifting your nodding head, the animal has disappeared and is out of sight. A kindness well meant, of course."[147]

Watching the other passengers was a much more engaging pastime. "Norina wrapped up to the nines as she feels the cold and draughts," Kitty observed from her customary seat at the rear of the bus. "Masi and one or two others nearly always nodding their heads, fast asleep. Nonny, quite erect, but usually eyes closed. She is not well at the moment, with arthritis in both hands. Irene is perched up high in the very back seat, so she can watch Baba and see His reflection through the [side-view] mirror. Katie, dear girl, is sitting where she gets knocked about on all sides, and being only eighteen she does not like to complain. Nadine is sitting on one side of her and is usually awake with a fixed, sweet expression on her face."[148] Mansari always tried to sit directly behind Baba, content to stare at His braid and the back of His head.

Baba's entourage crossed over from Madhya Pradesh into Maharashtra, passing beautiful lakes covered with lotus blossoms. Partway through the drive Eruch lost sight of the Ford, which reached Nagpur first at nine o'clock. Elizabeth had trouble finding their dak bungalow because they didn't know what it was called. It took them twenty minutes to locate, but their troubles were not over. Mani described the

ensuing confusion in a letter she later composed for Gaimai, Manu, and Meheru, who had stayed behind at Jabalpur on Baba's order:

> At first it [the bungalow] was most delightful in every way! The lake breeze, the view … We had quite a time looking for at least one of the cars (the small car with the food—Baba was hungry—or the bus), straining our necks and eyes while the lovely breeze got warmer and less lovely every minute. The situation grew more annoying every second but no car was to be seen. Then at last at 11 both the cars [*sic*–car and bus] arrived together. The mystery was that the little car had missed us somehow and had been waiting for us 20 miles away from Nagpur!! I was at my wits and [*sic*] whether to laugh outright or do it later in the bathroom … The lunch arrived which as we had expected was simply delicious and then the cold drinks which we needed very badly. Do you want to know if it was hot ? ! ? * ! * I thought we had stepped into the *dhobi's bhatti* [the laundryman's water boiler]."[149]

Arnavaz recalled the intense heat in Nagpur. "Summer in most parts of India is terribly hot, and the temperature reached 52 degrees centigrade (124 degrees farenheit [*sic*])." Baba told the women that they would have to "make do" with the clothes they had been wearing all day since He didn't want to unload the bus: "We were soaked with sweat and covered with dust. Fortunately, the rest house had a bathroom with running water. One by one we washed our clothes and then passed them on to someone outside so they would dry while we bathed. The heat was so intense that I would have been happy to put my clothes back on wet, and I was almost disappointed when my dress was brought back to me, absolutely dry, after half an hour."[150]

Even when they tried dampening the clothes they were wearing in a desperate effort to refresh themselves, the moisture evaporated in a matter of minutes. Mehera recalled that the bungalow was "beautiful, [with] a long verandah overlooking a lovely lake [but] we felt too hot to enjoy the view or even to feel hungry."[151] In the evening, however, Baba and the women enjoyed a picnic supper by the lake, where it was a bit cooler.

Baba followed more or less the same schedule the following day, although he didn't wake the women until 2:00 AM because there was less packing to do, and they departed Nagpur at four with a fifteen-hour day ahead of them. They stopped at 8:00 AM to picnic at Badnera, where they had originally planned to spend the night, but they arrived so early that Baba changed His mind and decided that they would continue on after the temperature began to drop. They left Badnera after an eight-hour respite, but it was still so hot that the women draped damp handkerchiefs over their heads to cool down. They reached Khamgaon at seven, to spend the night at a circuit house built on a small rise, making it cooler and more pleasant than the bungalow in Nagpur. Mani wrote in one of her letters to the Jessawalas that most of the women slept outside on the verandah that night, but when Baba woke them up, "little meheru [*sic*] (who was probably half asleep), walked down from the verandah onto imaginary steps, into space, and fell (luckily for her) on to a spring cot that was down below, which was a few moments before … occupied by Masi. But Masi (who I am sure would not have liked the idea of something dropping from heaven, right on her, at 3 o'clock in the morning) had just left the bed. The poor kid was more scared than hurt and after three medicine trunks were unpacked from the bus, some iodine was applied to the scratches."[152]

Rising at the same time the following morning, Baba and the women continued on to Khuldabad, and Mani recorded a breathless account of the events that followed: Almost immediately after setting out Elizabeth realized that she had left her wristwatch behind and

she "hooted like mad" on the horn but Eruch drove past in the bus, oblivious to her plight. Elizabeth turned the Ford around and drove back to the bungalow but her watch was nowhere to be found. By the time she was back on the road she had lost the bus. Then she took a wrong road and had to turn around and catch up with the bus—twice.

> Now we had lost the bus and the way and ofcourse [*sic*] the watch; but after asking passersby till we were hoarse and circling around till we were dizzy, we found the bus (or I wonder if the bus found us). At about 6.30 we splashed into a pool of water and a little further up Baba told us to stop for the bus. When after waiting for 10 minutes the bus did not come, Baba told Elizabeth to stop near a milestone and when we did, we found we were on the wrong road. So we turned back and after/going at an unusual speed caught up with the bus in time to tell them one of the bedding rolls was nearly rolling off the top.[153]

Back on the road Elizabeth soon left the bus behind, and after a quick detour to the post office in Jalna, she and her passengers reached Khuldabad at 10:00 AM. Although Mani described the day's adventures in such rich detail and to such comical effect in her letter, she condensed them to a mere twenty words and four brief lines in her diary: "Little Meheru's amusing accident & Elizabeth's watch-incident. Lost way & bus—took wrong road, turned around & found bus."[154]

It was an hour later before the rest of the women reached their accommodation. As soon as the bus arrived Baba called everyone to the verandah to remind them that Sai Baba of Shirdi had grown up in Khuldabad and had become God-realized in a cave not far away.*

Mani called their lodging a "luxurious guesthouse on hill overlooking grand scenery—with a wild breeze & pleasant, cool weather."[155]

* Sai Baba of Shirdi (d. October 15, 1918) was a Hindu saint and one of the five Perfect Masters during Baba's Advent. He called Merwan *Parvardigar* (Almighty God) when they first met in December 1915.

It was the lavish bungalow of the Nizam of Hyderabad, and there Baba and the women spent three very comfortable nights. The women had not had the opportunity to bathe properly for three days, and when they arrived they were so dusty and dirty that they were reluctant to walk on the beautiful carpets that covered the floors. Nearly overwhelmed by the contrast between this new accommodation and the dak bungalows where they had been staying, the women sat down to what Arnavaz called "sumptuous meals served by waiters in an elegant dining room."[156] "We didn't have to cook there," Mani further recorded in her letter, "but had marvellous Mogal food and such praiseworthy chapaties [*sic*]."[157]

The following morning Baba took the women out to visit the Ellora Caves.[158] They left early, toured sixteen caves, went back to the guesthouse for lunch and a rest at 10:15, and then returned to Ellora at 2:45, where they hired a guide whom Baba deemed "excellent."[159]

Among the caves they went into was number ten, the Vishvakarma or Carpenter's Cave, with its exquisite fifteen-foot sculpture of a seated Buddha. When they entered the cave the women began to chant Baba's name loudly, and Khorshed recalled that "the echo of 'Baba' filled the entire cave."[160] Mani then had an extraordinary experience:

> It was a jostle and crowded for the whole lot of us to get inside the caves. Baba usually carried the [alphabet] board under His arm. I would be nearby in case He wanted to say anything. In [cave number ten], He took out the board and dictated, "I am Buddha."
>
> It was as if those three words were the only thing in the cave, as if the whole place were empty, except for "I AM BUDDHA … I AM BUDDHA." It kept reverberating. It filled the place so much that there was nothing but waves of *I am Buddha*. The cave was empty but for those words, as if time and space were suspended for a moment. Then the feeling left. Baba walked with us around the cave and then out.[161]

Arnavaz recalled her own experience of that moment, writing, "As Baba and the rest of us were gazing at the statue, a man in a corner was playing a drum and chanting Vedic words which echoed about us. We surrounded Baba, who turned to Shireenmai, His mother, and gestured, 'I am Buddha.' This poignant and profound memory is still in front of me; two Avatars, Buddha and Baba, the living God, surcharged the atmosphere in the cave, touching my heart deeply."[162] Baba and the women boarded the bus at 6:00 PM to return to the guesthouse, stopping at Echo Point, where they "shouted Baba's name & the echo very clearly replied 'Baba.'"[163]

Baba and Kaka traveled to Aurangabad on May 19 to contact a high *mast* called Mabood (Worshipped or Adored) who, when Baba gently touched his back, cried out, "There is intense burning! … You have set me on fire! … I'm on fire!" Baba brought Mabood back to Khuldabad to bathe and feed him, sending him home that evening in the Ford. Just before departing, the *mast* told Kaka, "I have come to Allah's *darbar* [God's court] and have eaten my food at His palace."[164*] Chanji called these declarations of love and cries of longing the "Mystical Murmurs of the *Masts*."[165]

Baba had instructed the women to rest and pack while He was away for the day, and He made them surrender their bedding at 7:00 PM so that it could be loaded back onto the roof of the bus in time for another pre-dawn departure. He took them out for a walk in the evening but it was too windy for His liking and they soon returned to the bungalow to sleep on the flagstone floor or verandah. He woke the women at 2:00 AM on May 20 and they left at 4:30. The bus soon lost sight of the car in the early-morning darkness, and another "merry-go-round chase ensued," Mani noted, until the Blue Bus and Ford were happily reunited. Baba stopped in Toka at 7:15 so that He could show the Westerners the site where the Prem Ashram had been located.[166]

* Mabood garnered two stars in his entry in *The Wayfarers*, earning a designation of "must-read" *mast*.

Earlier that morning Baba had promised the women "a very adventurous journey," which came to pass when, after negotiating what Mani described as "an acute hair-pin curve," the bus became mired in mud while attempting to ford the Toka River.[167] The women got out and waded across to the far bank holding hands. "Imagine the picture we made," Rano recalled, "a ragtag line of women of every description—Parsi, Hindu, Irani, English, Italian, Russian, Swiss and American; some tall and thin; others short and stout; each dressed according to her own fashion, all sporting an occasional patch."[168] Dripping hems and muddy shoes notwithstanding, the women waited patiently on the far side of the river until the bus and cars could be towed through the water by teams of water buffalo. Mani called it "a fascinating picture," although none of the photographers had their cameras at hand to record it.[169]

By 8:00 the women had reboarded the bus and piled back into the Ford and were on their way to Lonavala, a refreshing hill station located between Bombay and Poona. But the car and bus again became separated. Elizabeth pulled off the road, where Baba ate His lunch while He waited impatiently for the others to catch up. Shireenmai took the opportunity to buy mangos for everyone. An hour and a half passed before the bus appeared: it had been delayed by another flat tire. Its passengers were treated to Shireenmai's mangos before they continued on to a dak bungalow in Ghodnadi, where they arrived at noon just in time to be served their lunch by Baba. They rested until three, when Baba surprised them with *pan* and jalebis to accompany their tea, telling them, "Ghodnedi [*sic*] tea & jilebis [*sic*] are best in India & world."[170] By 3:30 everyone was back on the road, passing through Poona before reaching their private bungalow at about 8:00 PM.

The following morning, after the women had bathed and unpacked, Baba took them to Valvan Lake. The next day they visited Elphinstone Point and another scenic spot called the Duke's Nose. That evening Baba took them out again for a jaunt to Indravan Lake to show them the place called Rye where He had come as a schoolboy on holiday

to fly kites and play marbles. The women sat on the bank trying to picture Him as a youngster. Baba ended their day with a real treat: ice cream cones, which Mani abbreviated to "ice-scones."[171]

During the next two days Baba traveled to Talegaon with Chanji to visit with lovers there, returning to offer darshan to devotees from Poona and Bombay the first evening and during the following day. On the evening of the twenty-third He and the women were entertained by a pair of musicians who played for four hours. The women packed and rested the next day. Mani took the opportunity to compose a letter to Gaimai, Manu, and Meheru, apologizing for having taken so long before writing. She regaled them with all the women's adventures since saying goodbye on the fifteenth.

The Blue Bus left Lonavala at 5:30 AM on Thursday, May 25. After less than an hour Baba and the women made one last stop for tea, a very early lunch of dal and rice, and music at the home of Amina and Abdulla Jaffer in Talegaon. They were back on the road by eight o'clock, passed through Poona at nine, and reached Meherabad at 11:30 AM, completing their circuitous journey to Delhi and back in a little less than six months. They were welcomed home with a festive lunch of dhansak and mangos prepared by the men.

Kitty captured their delight when she wrote, "Although we visited many spiritual places on these tours, we always felt an inexpressible joy when we were in the atmosphere of Meherabad, which radiated Baba's divine love and peace."[172]

As Mani concluded in her last diary entry for the First Blue Bus Tour: "All v. happy to be home sweet home again."[173]

CHAPTER 5

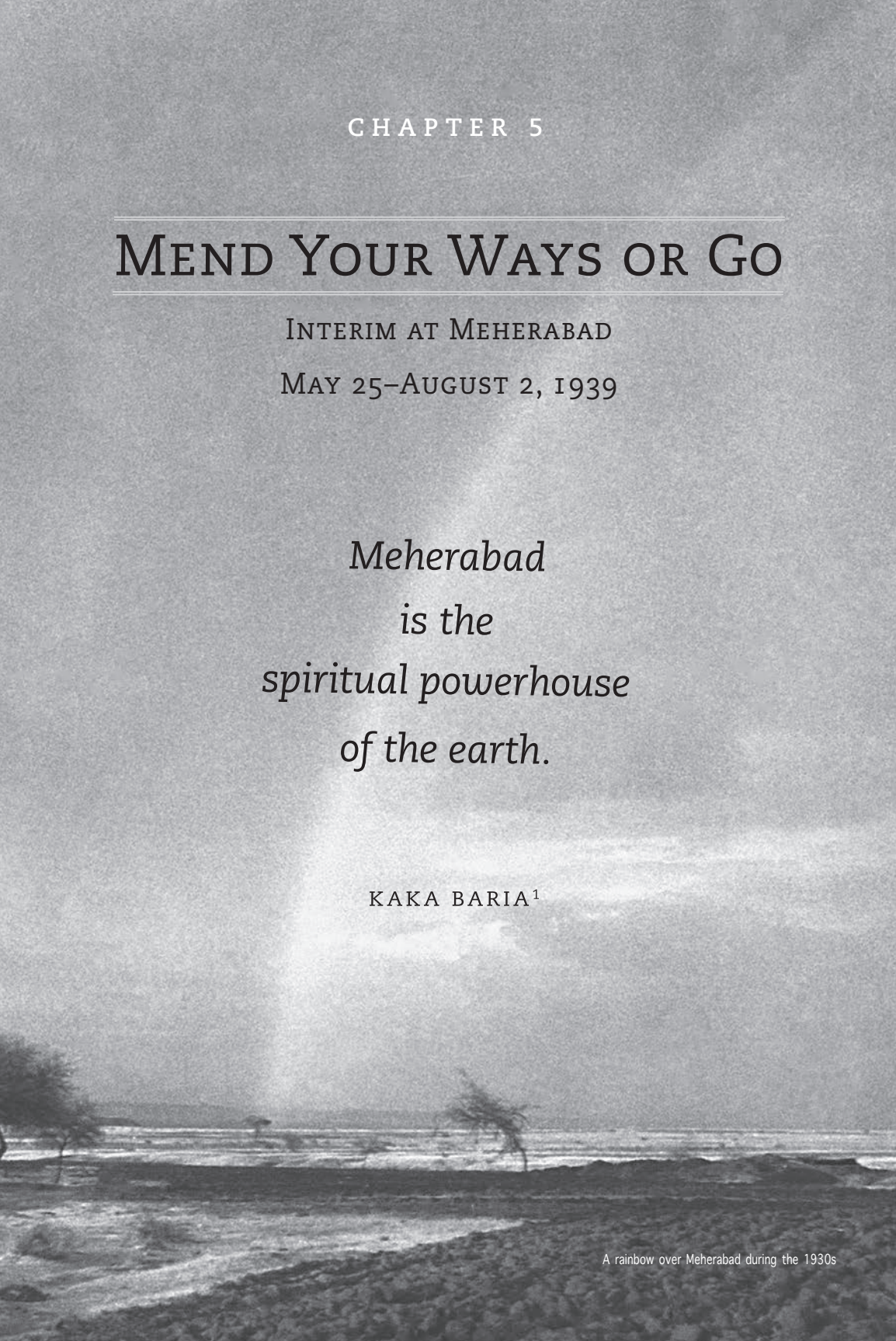
Mend Your Ways or Go

Interim at Meherabad

May 25–August 2, 1939

Meherabad
is the
spiritual powerhouse
of the earth.

KAKA BARIA[1]



A rainbow over Meherabad during the 1930s



Looking up the Hill from Lower Meherabad, 1938

THE MOST PRACTICAL OF MASTERS

KATIE IRANI CALLED MEHERABAD "Baba's holding place" during the Blue Bus Tours, and it was the place to which He always returned to continue His work, no matter what plans He might otherwise have considered.[2] Chanji called Baba "the most practical of Masters," observing, "He would not be Himself without work, nor would He allow anyone under Him to be idle and without work—'inner' or 'outer' work…. An Avatar is said to be at once the Lord and Servant of humanity. Baba prefers to be more of a 'Servant' of humanity rather than its Lord."[3]

The needs of humanity are unrelenting, and only the Blue Bus was given a reprieve during its two-month halt at Meherabad. Much of the work in which Baba had engaged during the first tour went on without interruption. For the women, life with the Master continued with all its intensity of purpose.

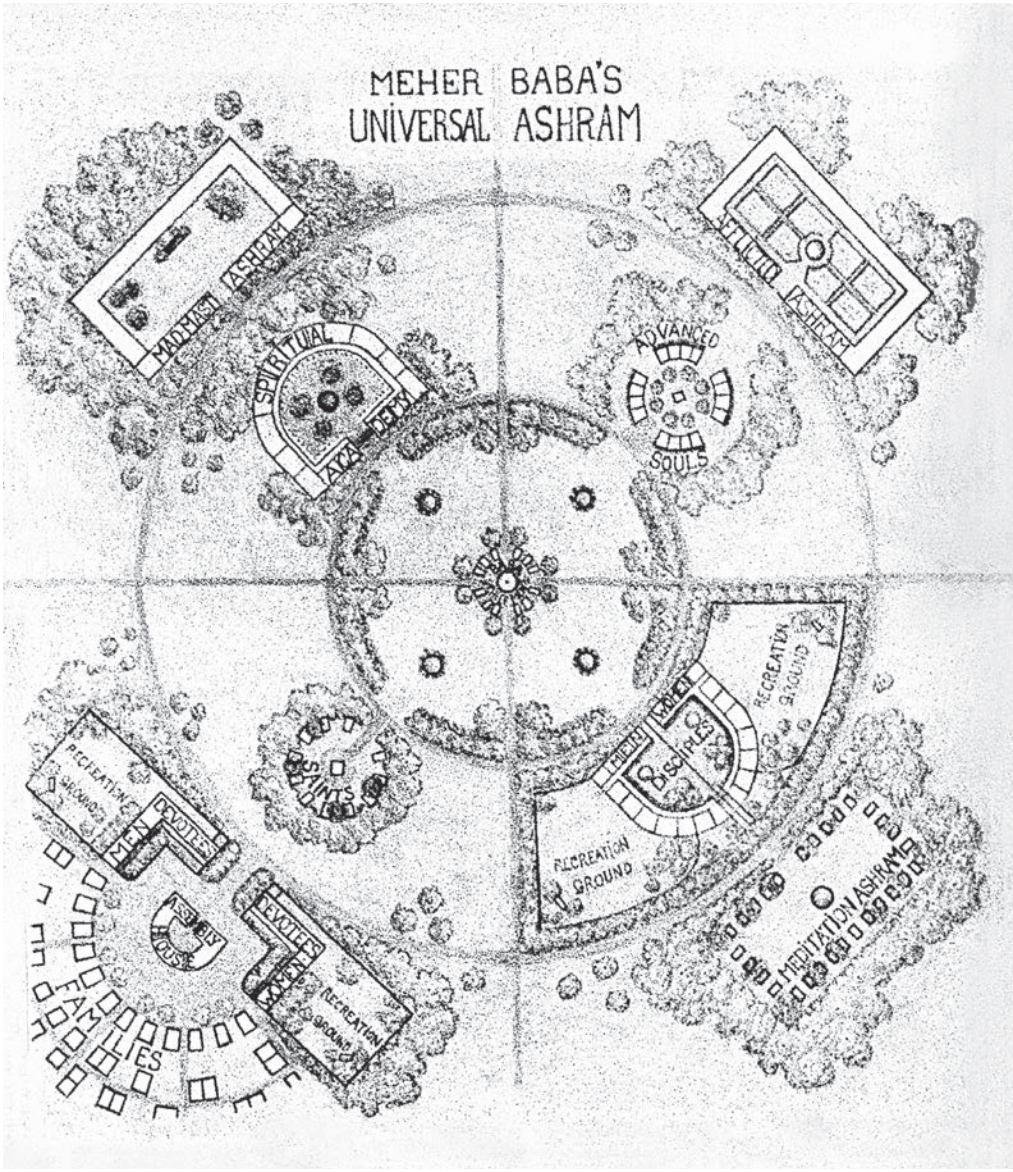
Local disciples had been anxiously awaiting Baba's arrival, and while He did set aside time to meet with them, the Meherabad ashram required His immediate attention. With the addition of the Blue Bus passengers, its residents now exceeded the capacity of the mandali to attend to their daily needs, and help would have to be hired. Furthermore, people were constantly arriving or leaving, making it difficult to anticipate, much less meet the requirements of its ever-shifting population. This situation would require ongoing attention.

Baba's first specific order of business was to discuss the proposed Universal Spiritual Center and decide whether to locate it in Jabalpur or Mandla, on the hundred-acre mango orchard property that He had accepted in January. "The time now seems to be ripe," Chanji wrote, adding,

> Many other centres of [this] type may be established in different parts of the world, both in the East as well as in the West, at their proper times, according to the needs and developments at different places as seen by the Master. These institutions are meant to be the unique "Schools of Life" for young and old alike, of all classes, creeds and nationalities and of all denominations in life. The qualifications for an entrance to this Ashram will be a thirst or longing for the life spiritual; and the Master alone who sees through the depth of the soul of each individual approaching Him will be the supreme judge. Earnest seekers, eager to join the Master, have already been anxiously awaiting a call from the Master. They will come, hundreds even from the West, and many are already on the waiting list.[4]

When Baba asked the women which site appealed more to them they chose Mandla, so Baba assigned Norina the task of planning for the establishment of a center there. When news of His decision reached Mandla, it generated such interest that greedy landowners immediately placed their properties on the market at inflated prices, and the cost of building materials sky-rocketed.

But the property did not meet all the criteria for Baba's plans. Located about sixty miles from Jabalpur and the nearest major railway station, Mandla lacked facilities to support all of His work. Although He had given every appearance of being wholeheartedly committed to Mandla, He decided to establish the new ashram in Jabalpur instead. Since His presence was required in order for the work to commence, He ordered everyone to prepare for a shift to Jabalpur at the end of July.



Walter and Hedi's plan for the Universal Spiritual Center

"Although the prospect of Baba going too far away from this section [Meherabad]—where He has loved and contacted thousands of persons for years—was startling to all of His group of disciples and devotees on this side," Chanji observed, "the changed conditions and the wider scope of His activities that necessitated the establishment of a

center were more important than any other considerations of a personal nature, and the mandali welcomed this proposal."[5]

But it made no difference to Baba's local lovers whether He settled in Mandla or Jabalpur, which were equally too distant in their minds—nearly six hundred miles away. They were much relieved to learn that Baba would continue to maintain the ashram at Meherabad.

Despite His busy schedule, Baba took time out to celebrate Nonny's sixty-fourth birthday on May 28. "We had such fun," Mani wrote to little Meheru, who had returned to school at the end of the tour, "when Baba told us all to write four-line poems (a very amusing game) and then in the evening we had music."[6]

Meanwhile, malicious and unfounded stories about Baba continued to circulate—stories that had originated in 1926 with Mehera's uncle, Colonel Merwan Sohrab Irani. Baba ordered His most articulate emissaries to Bombay, Poona, and Nasik to speak on His behalf. Norina, Nadine, and Dr. Deshmukh had already worked together, presenting talks in Mandla and Jabalpur about the Universal Spiritual Center just two months previously. Now they offered a new series of public lectures entitled "The Present Spiritual Crisis and the Need of an Awakener," to present an accurate and more nuanced perspective on the nature of Meher Baba's work. They also used the presentations as an opportunity to promote the center.

JAI, JAI GURURAYA

Meanwhile, Baba continued His work with Mohammed, as well as overseeing the care of the other seventeen *masts* residing in the old Mess Quarters at Lower Meherabad. "The joy of seeing the Master once again amongst them," Chanji wrote, "was clearly visible on the faces and expressions of even these mentally-unbalanced, and in their ecstatic outburst, they danced in glee."[7] William Donkin called Baba's visits to the

masts during the summer of 1939 "bursts of spring sunshine after the winter of His long absence."[8] As usual, Baba's daily round of duties included bathing, shaving, dressing, and feeding the *masts*, as well as cutting their hair when needed. He also spent hours secluded with them individually, engaged in inner work. The world was now little more than three months away from the outbreak of war, and Baba's *mast* work grew ever more intense as that momentous event approached.

The amplification of Baba's work seems not to have taken a toll on the *masts*; rather, it had quite the opposite effect. One evening Baba and the men went to see the *masts* with the intention of surprising them, but it was they who were astonished when the *masts* greeted them with a spontaneous bhajan, singing "*Jai, Jai Gururaya, Meher Baba*"—"Hail, hail Beloved Lord, Meher Baba!"—as they banged out a "mysterious rhythm" on their metal plates and tin cans.[9] The celebration, Chanji recorded, "continued for minutes with perfect rhythm of music, drum, singing and dancing all around the hall with perfect timing and steps, which made one quite forget that these were the mad inmates of a *Mast* Ashram who were performing this bhajan. It was a sight to witness these *masts* dance with ecstatic expressions on their faces, and enjoy it all in their childlike glee. Two of these became leaders, while the others followed in perfect harmony!"[10]

Near the end of May Baba sent Kaka back to Ajmer by rail to bring Lakhan Shah to Meherabad so that He could continue His work with the sixth-plane *mast*. Assisted once more by tipsy tongawala Fateh Kahn, Kaka located the *mast* and delivered him to Meherabad on June 2 for what Chanji called a joyful reunion with Baba.

> He wore that same *kafni* (robe) which was given to him by Baba in Ajmer, in February last. He had grown a beard that changed his features so considerably that he couldn't be really recognized. But that typically ecstatic smile of his was always there!



Sixth-plane Lakhan Shah from Ajmer, seated in the Rahuri Cabin at Lower Meherabad, June 1939

> When brought face to face with Baba, Lakhan Shah stared at Him fixedly for minutes, then smiled and murmured something in his language which was not audible. Baba gave him a loving embrace, and held him in His arms, while Lakhan Shah kept looking at the Master with that typical expression of his which is a joy to behold! … A personal touch and spiritual push was fulfilled.[11]

Baba bathed him and afterward dressed him in a new kafni before feeding him. He installed Lakhan Shah in a room in the Mess Quarters and secluded Himself there daily for several weeks until His work with this extraordinary *mast* was accomplished. Lakhan Shah was returned

home to Ajmer. "What benefit he derived and what inner push he was given during his stay here," Chanji concluded, "is a matter best known to the Master."[12]

After Lakhan Shah's departure Baba began to work more closely with His disciple Baidul, who was about to become more intimately involved in the ongoing search for new *mast* contacts. Baba gave Baidul the leftover food from His own plate, and He gave him nightwatch duty by His side at Upper Meherabad for a month. Baba's work with Baidul was a gift that Baba said elevated him to Sardar (Chief) of the *masts*. Baidul later said that he was able to find the *masts* because he could sense what he described as "their fragrance of bliss."[13]

MEND YOUR WAYS OR GO

While Baba immersed Himself in His work at Lower Meherabad, the women settled back into their routines from the previous autumn. "Back at Meherabad," Mehera recalled,

> Baba was busy with His work, but he took His meals with us, and in the evening played badminton, and took a round of all the animals we had in our compound. Baba's bedroom now was always that little [Tin] Cabin near the Samadhi that Padri had built earlier.
>
> During the day Baba would often call us, too. He would come to the room I shared with Mani, Khorshed, Naja, Soona Masi and Valu, and sit on my bed with a big pillow behind His back.
>
> "Call everyone!" Baba would tell us. And the word would go out, "Baba wants everybody. Baba wants everybody." And everyone would drop whatever they were doing, cooking in the kitchen, grinding spices, washing clothes, writing letters or reading upstairs, and come rushing to my room to be with Baba.

> Now that there were so many of us we no longer had our meals in Baba's kitchen, but instead we sat together under the newly-built tin shed. Long benches were made for us as tables, and each one had their own little stool [the ones Elizabeth had provided] with her name on it….
>
> At 11 a.m. sharp the lunch bell rang, and everyone dropped whatever they were doing and quickly came for their food. Baba wanted everyone to be very prompt.[14]

Baba remained intimately involved in the details of the women's day-to-day lives, right down to preparing the lists of provisions to be purchased from the bazaar in Ahmednagar, a deceptively simple daily task that required its own chain of command. "In the ashram, whatever was needed, whatever was wanted, had to go through Baba," Mani recalled. "Always. We never did anything directly. We never just ordered things. Not only did we not go out shopping, we did not call for things through anyone but Baba."[15]

Kitty was responsible for maintaining the list, which she then gave to Baba, who made any necessary changes or deletions. Baba passed the amended list on to Vishnu, or else to Soonamasi, who had taken up her old post as gatekeeper at the top of the Hill, so that she could give it to Vishnu herself. Then either Vishnu or his assistant, Jangle Master,* would visit the bazaar to purchase only the items that Baba had approved, which were delivered to Soonamasi at the gate, past which none of the men were allowed to venture.

Woe betide anyone who tried to circumvent this regimented process. Kitty became concerned that Irene, who at the age of twenty-two still appeared to her to be "a growing child,"

* Laxman Gangadhar Jangle (June 15, 1915–December 26, 2006) came to work at Meherabad in June 1939, when Baba hired him to assist Vishnu with the shopping in the bazaar. Jangle Master, as he was known, was 28 at the time, and his family moved to Arangaon Village to be near him. "Master" was a name given to marketing *walas*.

wasn't getting sufficient protein from the ashram's vegetarian fare, so she requested "something more substantial," Horlicks Powder (a malted protein mix), to supplement Irene's diet.• Baba nixed her request. In the meantime, however, Mani, who was younger than Irene, wanted to know why Irene deserved a nutritional boost, wondering, "If Irene is a growing child, what am I?" Kitty seized her opportunity and wheedled Mani into believing that she also required more nourishment. Kitty approached Mani and said, "You need to take Horlicks."

"I do?" asked Mani gullibly.

"Yes, you're doing so much writing, you must keep up your strength."

So Mani agreed, and under the excuse that it was "for Mani," Kitty was able to order the Horlicks and give some to Irene also. Baba found out about it. "Who is taking Horlicks?" he asked one day. Mani said that she was.

"How many times did you take it?"

"Only twice," Mani replied.

"Then where did the whole jar go?"

There was silence, until Irene blurted out, "I took it, Baba." He was not pleased.[16]

The women continued to experience outbursts of frustration and anger, frequently brought on by the most seemingly mundane differences of habit, such as Norina's profligate use of the shoe polish that she was meant to share with Nadine. Nothing was beneath Baba's notice, and there was no place to hide. "If you kept things to yourself and didn't bring them out," Katie recalled, "Baba assembled everybody and probed and probed until the whole thing came out. It would burst like a volcano. Whatever differences people had between them, Baba

• Horlicks Powder is a fortified, high-protein concentrate made to be diluted in hot milk. It was first patented in the United States as "Horlick's Infant & Invalids Food." It came to Great Britain in 1908, and the British Army brought it to India during World War I. British soldiers served the beverage to their Indian counterparts, who introduced it to their families at the end of the war. By the early 1940s Horlicks had become *the* beverage of choice to serve children in status-conscious Indian families, but being English, Kitty already would have known of it. Today, India consumes more Horlicks than any other nation, and a plant in Andhra Pradesh manufactures its own version of the product with buffalo rather than cow's milk. (http://www.horlicks.co.uk/story/)

nullified everything and asked them to embrace each other. Baba didn't want anything smoldering inside."[17]

> Baba became so frustrated with the women one day that He asked,
>
> "What's the sense in you all being here with me? Why do you stick around, when you can't even follow, for a few days, my order—which I stressed, which I explained, was crucial … ?"
>
> Afterwards, Nadine leaned over and whispered something to Mani, which Mani did not catch. Baba gestured, "What are you saying, Nadine?"
>
> She replied, "How nice it would be, Baba, if we never got angry."
>
> "Nice?" Baba asked. "I don't want stones around me. If you never get angry, that doesn't help my work. But if you get angry and *control* it—that helps me in my work."[18]

Mani likened Baba's work to sweeping: A room may appear quite clean until someone takes a broom and disturbs the dust that has settled invisibly on the floor. The Westerners marveled at the intensity of their negative thoughts and feelings after coming to Baba, but it was His work to stir up their internal dust so that it could be swept away.

Nor did the Easterners escape Baba's divine housecleaning. Gulmai was already distraught that she had not been invited to live at Upper Meherabad because of friction with Shireenmai, and when Baba told her that she would not be joining Him when He shifted to Jabalpur she felt like killing herself. "Suffering is necessary when you are on this spiritual path," Baba lovingly explained.[19] He reminded her of the unique role she played in His life, but it was bitter medicine. Her only consolations were the memory of having been invited to join her beloved spiritual son from time to time during the first

tour and the faint glimmer of hope that He might have a change of heart. Indeed, He did, and Gulmai would be one of the passengers in the Blue Bus when it departed Meherabad at the beginning of August.

Another of the Easterners who required Baba's attention was Mehera's sister Freiny, who continued to suffer from the profound disappointment of not having been invited to participate in the first tour. She and Rustom traveled from Nasik to see Baba at Meherabad, where He offered her what comfort she was capable of understanding and then sent her home again. Afterward, Baba explained:

> The Avatar has to incur upon himself the infinite burden of "worries" of the entire suffering world, while working in the world for the spiritual upliftment of humanity. This suffering of people, steeped in the darkness of ignorance, becomes the Avatar's suffering. This is His crucifixion. The Avatar is crucified every moment of His life on earth.
>
> But, with this infinite suffering which He has to take upon Himself, He also has the infinite bliss of the Perfect State, which He eternally experiences. Otherwise, it would be utterly impossible, and He would be literally crushed under the burden of such suffering from all sides. If an ordinary man, however great, were to [feel] even a thousandth part of the Avatar's suffering, he would go mad! The Avatar has to bear this burden to lighten the load of the suffering of the world.

He further observed that while Freiny loved Him deeply she was incapable of the level of obedience required to live with Him, tempering His explanation with a more comforting conclusion: "But all this I bear, and all this infinite suffering is not even a drop in My Ocean [of divinity]."[20]

With the notable exceptions of Mehera, Mani, and Nonny, none of the other women seemed capable of the level of obedience He demanded, and He was compelled to reiterate His expectations: "Mend your ways or go."[21]

> You leave your home, your family, to dedicate all to Me, yet live a life of binding. You have no freedom to go out to cinemas or theaters. In every way, you sacrifice for love. You all love Me, take Me to be God—and I really am God—but the one thing that is a shortcoming in you all is this complete lack of control! If you had control, you would be jewels as disciples! But control in all of you is so disastrously lacking that it makes it very difficult for Me to adjust all your other good points. This one lack makes the whole thing a farce!
>
> Here, only twelve of you, and yet no harmony. You all do not love each other. You cannot tolerate each other. The slightest provocation demonstrates your weaknesses to the highest. Norina and Nadine tell the world, "We live with the greatest Master of the age!" But you do not say, "We stay with Him and fight like dogs and cats!" I warn you all very seriously, East and West—Control [yourselves]!
>
> Very seriously, whenever you get excited, or feel others are unjust, or you feel they pass remarks, or you feel you are in the right and they in the wrong—the very moment you feel all this,



remember Me and get control. Pinch yourself, go aside. You must take practical steps. The moment you feel excited, make a fuss, remember Me and begin singing or dancing—very practical solution.

You will at once turn it into laughter. If you cannot get control, then take this practical step; if not, you are lost. The slightest advantage given to the ego, with the help of the mind [emotion], bursts with all fury….

Rano makes Norina mad, Kitty is daily getting moods. In short, you twelve raise hell every day because of trifles, for things not worthwhile. I might have given you all silence, but you would have crushed each other!



Elizabeth's new light gray Buick sedan, which she gave to Baba

He ended with a query: "On the tour, will there be any squabbles?"[22] No one dared reply.*

On July 20, in anticipation of her forty-third birthday on the twenty-sixth, Sarosh delivered a brand new Buick automobile to Elizabeth, which she had purchased as a gift for Baba. The light gray sedan had an automatic transmission with the gear shift on the steering column, as well as "a sun-light top that roll[ed] back with one hand … and tires mounted on either side of the car, leaving the trunk space free for luggage."[23] Elizabeth celebrated her birthday by taking Baba out for a drive.

Sarosh returned to Meherabad the following day with his wife Viloo, who had been expressing doubts about Baba's work with the women. "Baba," Sarosh said, "Viloo says that instead of freeing the women mandali from Maya, You are merging them deeper in it! … She also points out that You take them here and there, sightseeing and to the movies, and she doubts whether such activities are bringing the women to God." Baba replied, "I use Maya to pull them out of Maya. But I use it in such a way that it cannot touch them!"[24]

Meherabad's population increased by one more permanent resident not long after Elizabeth's birthday and the Blue Bus acquired another driver when Dr. William Donkin arrived in India.• Donkin had met Baba on multiple occasions during the 1930s, and Baba had invited the young medical student to join Him after he received his degree. The twenty-six-year-old, newly qualified physician arrived just in time for Baba's upcoming move. Donkin quickly became assimilated into the mandali and was soon known to all as "Don."

• William Donkin disembarked in India on July 27, 1939 and arrived in Meherabad on the twenty-ninth. Donkin kept a series of four diaries during his first six years in India, beginning on July 31, 1939, and his entries add a new and unique voice to the cast of Blue Bus characters. Like Mani's *Blue Bus Tours Diary*, they are preserved in the Avatar Meher Baba Trust Archives Document Collection and are an important primary source of documentation about the tours.

* Although twenty-one women had participated in the first tour, Baba was only speaking to twelve of them. Missing from the original twenty-one at this time were Gaimai, Manu, and Meheru, who had stayed behind in Jabalpur, Helen Dahm and Hedi Mertens had returned home to Switzerland, and Kaku continued to reside at Lower Meherabad. This still left *fifteen* women in the group: Mehera, Mani, Katie, Naja, Khorshed, Soonamasi, Valu, Mansari, Kitty, Elizabeth, Norina, Nadine, Nonny, Rano, and Irene. Perhaps Mehera, Mani, and Nonny were excused.

One of Donkin's first orders from Baba after the start of the Second Blue Bus Tour was to assist Nilu in cleaning the mud-encrusted bus. It was an opportunity for him to get to know the other ashram physician, with whom he would be sharing responsibilities for the care of the women during the upcoming shift and in the new ashram.

THE MEHERABAD MENAGERIE

"Have you ever slept with baby pigs in a pen in your bedroom?" Donkin asked, following his first tour of Upper Meherabad, which had included the Westerners' dormitory. "Well there are two up there—very clean of course, cleaned twice a day; and as well there are 3 monkeys, 3 dogs and some birds! All Elizabeth's pets … Baba says she likes looking after them; she may soon have a baby camel!"[25]

Although Elizabeth never got her baby camel, Baba would continue to accumulate animals until the menagerie at Upper Meherabad constituted a small zoo. By June 1939 the animals included Baba's watchdog Chum, Bingo and Jingo, the dogs from Jabalpur, as well as Bundy and Dundy the red monkeys, Gopia the cat, Snowy the rabbit, Mary the lamb, and two cows and a goat whose names have been forgotten, as well as parrots, blackbirds, ducks, hens, and assorted other injured wild birds and small creatures in need of care. There were even a few snakes, although admittedly they were not among the women's favorites. Irene was given charge of the two cows that gave milk for the kitchen, while the hens and ducks provided Kitty with fresh eggs to replace the rotten ones from the bazaar.

The Meherabad zoo took in at least five more residents during June and July of 1939: a gazelle, a lamb, two piglets, and a monkey. On June 2 Sarosh brought a pair of young English pigs that Baba had asked for, which He called Nutty and Gutty, or "Nati" and "Gati," according



Elizabeth handfeeding Lily, the ashram's pet *chinkara*, or Indian gazelle, at Lower Meherabad

to Arnavaz.[26] The piglets were another of Baba's gifts to Elizabeth. As Donkin noted, Nutty and Gutty were kept in a large cage in a corner of the dormitory, and although all the women adored them Katie later quipped, "I thought I was sleeping in a zoo!"[27] In addition to her responsibilities for preparing the women's meals, Katie also had to cook for Nutty and Gutty, as well as all the other animals, in large vessels that would accommodate all the scraps and leftovers. But the women indulged the piglets with additional treats—fresh vegetables pillaged from the garden and oats and grains pilfered from the dry provisions. The piglets became so "pink and plump" that they outgrew their indoor cage and had to be moved to a larger pen outside.[28]

On June 11 Dr. Nilu brought the ashram a beautiful gazelle. Baba named her Lily,* and Mani called her "as gentle and tame" as her namesake.[29] Mary was joined soon after by another lamb, called Meher.

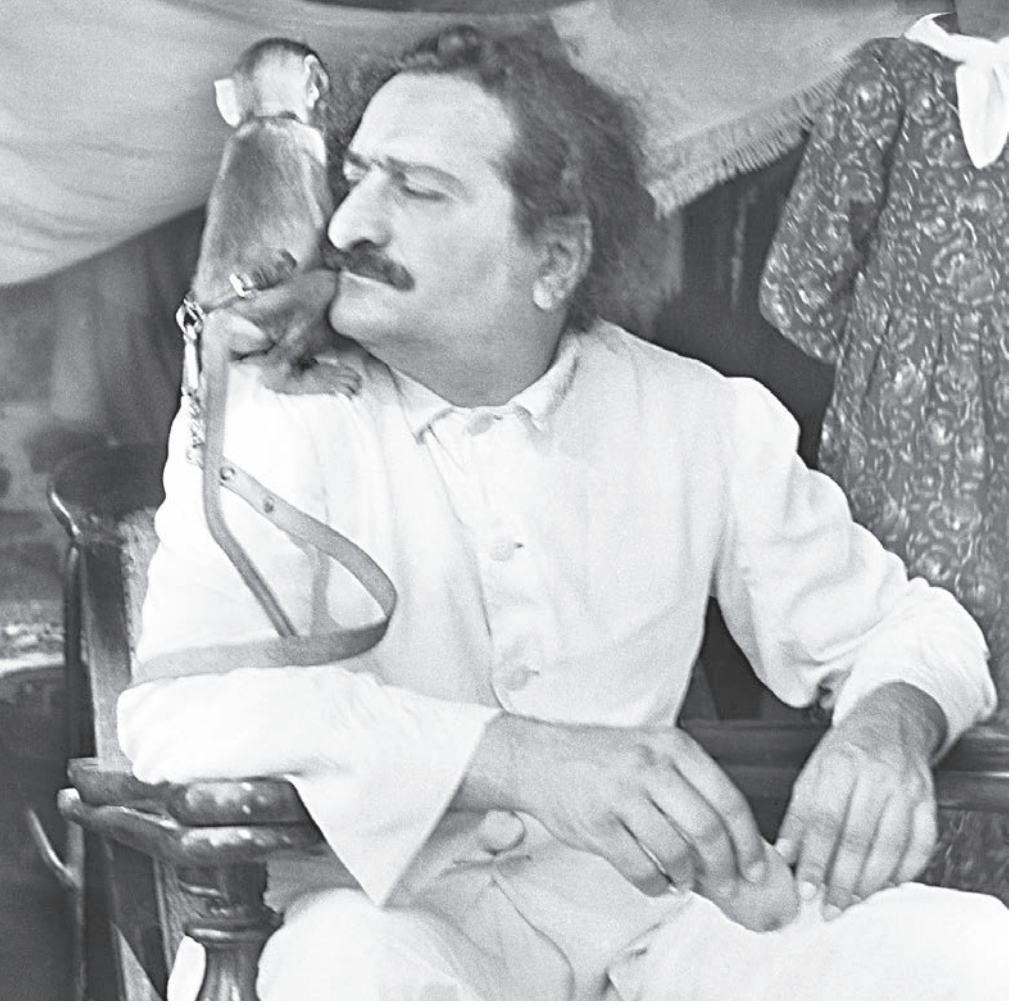
* Lily was a chinkara, or Indian gazelle, the smallest species of Asiatic antelope, native to the grasslands and deserts of India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran. In grave danger of extinction, chinkaras are now a protected species.

Not to be forgotten was Elizabeth's peaceable Kippy, but Chum was so ferocious that Elizabeth had to keep her inside whenever she was working in order to ensure the little dog's safety. Mehera later observed, rather alarmingly, "Chum could have easily made a meal of Kippy in one bite," and Kippy spent so much time secluded in the Westerners' upstairs dormitory that she earned the nickname "Princess in the Tower."[30]

Not surprisingly, Elizabeth bore the cost of all of the animals' feed as well as their enclosures, which Rano, as house carpenter, constructed by hand. Rano said that Baba had once ordered her to build an animal hospital. Mani wrote to little Meheru that "our good old Ashram carpenter is almost brown from the sun, building pens and dens for hens and chickens, ducks and deers [*sic*]."[31]

Although Elizabeth was considered to be the animals' official keeper, her other responsibilities often precluded her from giving them the attention they required. Irene, therefore, acted as assistant keeper, and everyone helped out in one way or another. But a few of the animals required care that surely exceeded the women's call of duty: Irene once had to administer a salt-water enema to the goat after it became constipated from too rich a diet. However, when Lily wandered into the kitchen to beg for *pakoras* (slices or chunks of battered and deep-fried vegetables), Baba obligingly fed them to her by hand, and her digestive tract remained utterly unaffected.

Lord Meher mischievously records that Baba's zoo required so much time and attention that the women became its "game-wardens."[32] Over time the wardens began to observe sanskaras in the making —jealousies and disagreements being acted out by the animals that prompted Kitty to bewail, "It isn't our fault. It has come down from our ancestors!"[33] Baba, of course, saw all this and frequently assigned the care of a particular animal to the person who would be challenged by its most intractable qualities. Lucky the monkey is a case in point.



Baba, lovingly listening to Lucky the monkey as he poured out his tales of woe

It seems that Baba was now engaged in the search for a suitable primate as well as a suitable boy. According to *Lord Meher*, "Baba had sent word to a few scattered disciples that he wished to keep a pet monkey that 'would respond to him.'"[34] Devotees in Bombay found Lucky in the Crawford Market and sent him to Meherabad. The little monkey was no bigger than a baby squirrel when he was delivered to Baba. None of the previous monkeys had exhibited any special attraction to Baba; however, this tiny but wise creature scampered straight to Him when released from confinement. Meherwan recalled that the monkey "just went and perched on Baba's shoulder and started saying all sorts of things, as if he was trying to repeat all the hardships that he had known before, and Baba was lending an ear to

what he was saying and nodding His head. They said it was a very beautiful scene to watch."[35] Baba named the little monkey "Lucky" because it was his good fortune to join the Meherabad zoo.[36] He doted on Lucky, who in turn adored Him, grooming His master's moustache and picking through His hair.

Norina had expressed an interest in having a pet monkey, telling Baba that they were "so cute and … quite smart," so Baba made her responsible for Lucky's care.[37] On the surface, an odder couple could hardly be imagined, but Norina, with her intellectual nature, was a perfect match for this living lesson in Buddhist "monkey mind." Lucky was so small, even when fully grown, that Katie called him a "pocket monkey," but what he lacked in stature he more than made up for with the astonishing degree of chaos he generated. The only way Norina could control him was to keep him sequestered inside her mosquito net, where he distracted her from the composition of articles for the *Meher Baba Journal*. Norina, who prided herself on her ability to express the most complex and transcendent spiritual concepts, found herself continually thwarted by Lucky's interruptions, unable to think, much less write.

Lucky also served as a mirror for Norina's cavalier use of items that the other women strove to make last as long as possible. He acquired a taste for toothpaste, squeezing and biting the tube until he frothed at the mouth as he smeared the sticky paste everywhere he could reach. The other women didn't know whether to laugh or cry as Norina charged after him in her high heels, crying, "Naughty monkey. Mustn't do that. Come here you naughty monkey!"[38] Toothpaste was a precious commodity: "When we saw what Lucky was doing," Mani lamented, "we almost felt like catching the paste from the tube."[39] Fortunately, Lucky never discovered the women's supply of shoe polish. He did, however, empty a bottle of ink down one of Nonny's pants legs, staining an expensive pair of woolen trousers. In a desperate attempt to save the pants, Nonny tried soaking the stain in hot

water, which caused the damaged leg to shrink, ruining them completely.

Over time the women observed that Baba treated the animals in much the same manner as He did the *masts*, denying them nothing, while the human ashramites were expected to conserve even the most basic necessities and forgo altogether any approximation of luxury. Lucky loved peanuts, so Baba approved their inclusion on the bazaar list and Kitty began ordering them on a regular basis. But the tins mysteriously began to empty more and more quickly, and when Kitty discovered that everyone had been helping themselves when they thought no one was looking, she just kept ordering more. Baba seemed not to notice, so Norina asked her to add raisins to the list as well. When Baba wanted to know who—or what—they were for, Norina said that she fed them to the cat. One can only imagine His reaction to that.

Baba worked with the animal kingdom through the creatures in the Meherabad zoo, and His love, Kitty observed, extended to all His creatures—great and small:

> Baba had a great feeling for all life. Life must not be treated lightly. Not a worm or an ant must be trodden on consciously. If unconscious it was excusable. If a mouse or a rat was caught on the Hill or fell into a well, it had to be rescued and taken in a trap a mile from the compound and given its freedom; or again, if a lizard was seen on the wall, it was caught in a towel or shooed through the door. Sick birds, little hares, lame dogs—all found a haven near Baba and were given into the care of Naja who had a healing touch. When any of our pets died, Baba would always see that they were properly buried,

> supervising the operations Himself, but He did not want us to be emotionally upset. Had they not been touched, cared for and loved by Baba? Thus, death to them meant progression in evolution.[40]

Baba was equally as engaged with His four-legged and feathered devotees as He was His two-legged lovers, and "the last thing he did was not to say good-night to the women," who already would have received their due share of attention, Mani observed; it was "to visit the animals, go to each one's cage, to each animal & pet, before sleeping."[41]

ANOTHER SHIFT

Baba had returned to Meherabad for what He intended to be a brief halt in the midst of His travels, and by late July He had shifted His attention from *mast* work back to the establishment of the Universal Spiritual Center in Jabalpur, a plan that had now been in place for three months. Nonetheless, when He began to speak of His coming move, "the news of Baba going to a distant place for starting a Centre and His absence from Meherabad for a long time caused no small concern to His disciples and devotees on this side [Meherabad, Poona, and Bombay], who had been accustomed to come over to Him, especially in times of need," Chanji observed. "As the date for His leaving drew nearer, they came in numbers to see the Master and have His darshana, advice and blessings before He left."[42]

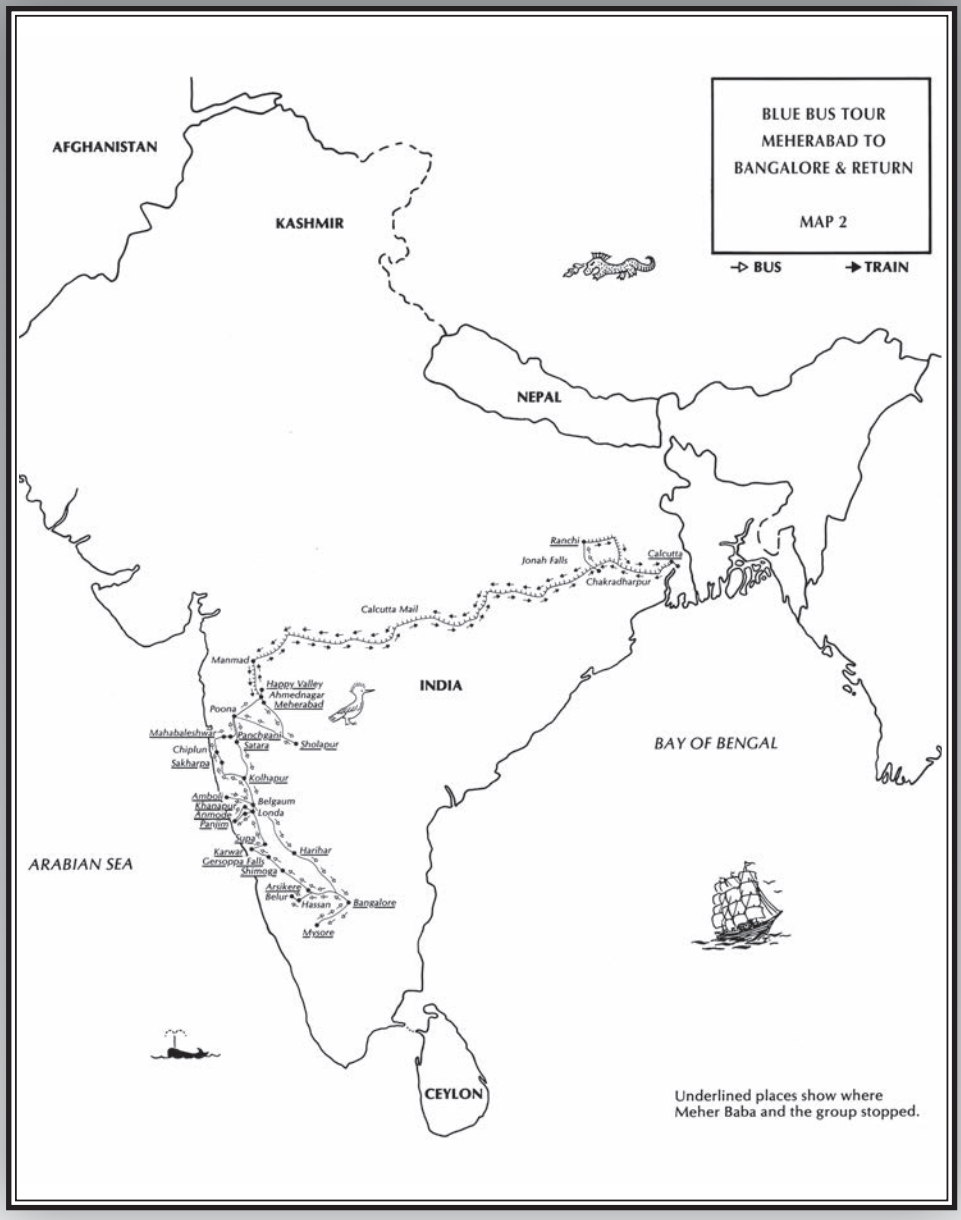
The formation of Baba's plans also necessitated many meetings with the mandali. Donkin noted that during Baba's last weeks in Meherabad, "There was a manifest profusion of telegrams, and members of the mandali moved daily in and out of Baba's hut with mask-like countenances, portending the incubation of new activities."[43]

Assuming responsibility for securing accommodations in Jabalpur was Jal Kerawalla. Because Baba anticipated this shift to be permanent, it would not be feasible for His entourage to stay in Jal's bungalow, as they had during their three-week visit in December and January. Nonetheless, Chanji observed, "an atmosphere of uncertainty prevailed," and doubts were confirmed when "a certain event on the 30th of July suddenly changed the situation, and gave the mandali one of those typical surprises of a 'change in plans' with which the Master's group and even the outside world now seem to be well acquainted and familiar."[44] Without warning, Jal's work required him to leave Jabalpur immediately, so Baba decided to shift to Mysore in South India instead. He sent Eruch and Pappa to Jabalpur and Mandla to assuage the disappointment of His lovers there and ordered Chanji and Kalemama* (another of the mandali) to travel to Mysore to locate accommodations.

Donkin neatly summarized the situation when he observed, "The Jubblepore plan is off."[45] Thus was Baba's newest disciple initiated into the unpredictable ways of the Master. But even the seasoned mandali were bewildered at this abrupt change of plan. In January 1936 Baba had taken the women for a four-month visit to the city of Mysore. He was in partial seclusion, but during the breaks in His work He took them out to many of the sites they would visit again in 1939. He even considered bringing the Westerners there later that year. But He was disappointed with the city, deploring its prevailing atmosphere of religious orthodoxy and complaining that He could not do anything without His every move being observed. "It's all Mysorian Maya," He had complained, "working with all its might, creating complications on all sides."[46] No one thought He would ever wish to return there.

* Ramchandra Bapu Kale (1876–August 16, 1954), affectionately known as Kalemama, or Kale Uncle, had the opportunity to meet three of the Perfect Masters, Sai Baba, Upasni Maharaj, and Narayan Maharaj, on a number of occasions. A civil engineer by profession, he became devoted to Baba in 1926 and was one of the early mandali.

Baba's last-minute decision left everyone reeling. Chanji felt compelled to apologize to his readership for having to cut short his monthly "Notes from my Diary" column in the August issue of the *Meher Baba Journal* because there was no time to finish composing it. Donkin wryly called their last day at Meherabad "a bit of a rush."[47] But, as Baba explained, "In all this chaos and confusion my work is done…. It was my key that turned things this way."[48]



Modified version of map by Walter Overcarsh, originally published in *Because of Love* by Rano Gayley

The Second Blue Bus Tour



Bangalore and Goa

August 2, 1939–May 3, 1940

I create things on a firm
foundation and then pull them down.
The more I make changes,
the more changeless I am!

MEHER BABA[1]



Rented furniture being moved into one of the bungalows occupied during the Blue Bus Tours

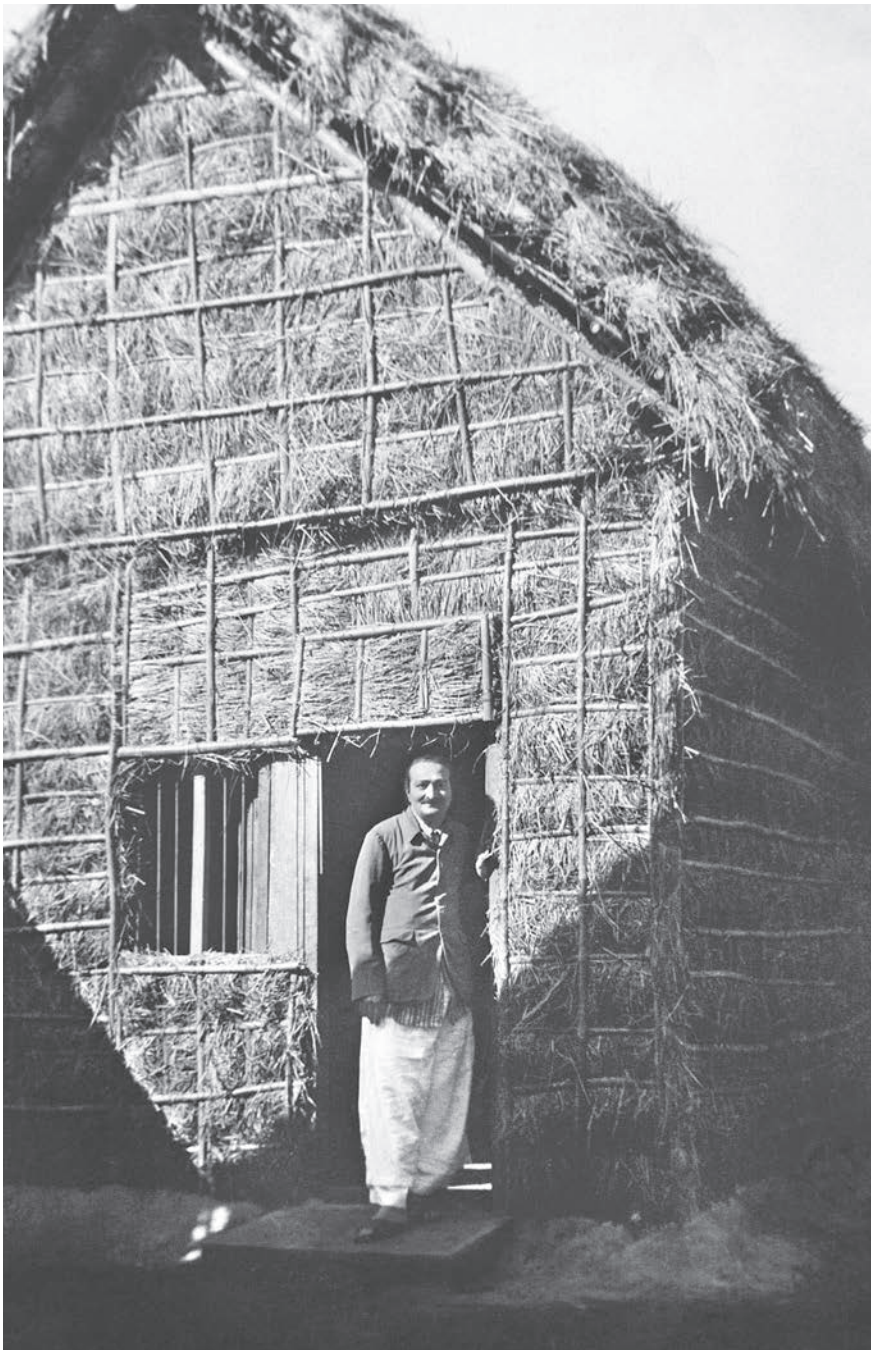
CHAPTER 6

It is All My Game

Meherabad to Bangalore

August 2, 1939–March 31, 1940





Baba's thatched jhopdi, specially constructed for His seclusions in the *mast* ashram
behind the Links bungalow, Bangalore, August 1939

ON THE ROAD TO SOUTH INDIA

BY 6:00 AM ON WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 2, 1939, following a ten-week break from travel, the Blue Bus was bound for Mysore. Baba traveled in style in Elizabeth's new Buick sedan, with her at the wheel. Accompanying Him were Mehera, Mani, Naja, and Khorshed, whom Donkin called "the four special invisible ladies."[2] It was an expression he picked up from the other men, who had christened this select group of Easterners "the invisibles" for good reason: they never saw them.[3]

Mehera sat in the front seat, between Baba and Elizabeth. She called riding in the new automobile "such comfort after having ridden in that bumpy bus."[4] Donkin recorded that Nonny also was riding with Baba. The pain from her arthritis was worsening and although no one except Baba was yet aware, her health was beginning to fail. Also traveling in the Buick were Lucky—dubbed "Baba's special monkey" by Donkin—as well as Kippy, who lay curled up in Mehera's lap or else on the seat squeezed in between her and Elizabeth.[5]

Elizabeth had outfitted the windows with curtains that could be drawn to ensure Mehera's seclusion, but for now the women left them open so that they could see out. However, because Baba preferred not to be exposed to the wind, they could not open the windows. "I loved fresh

air, but because the windows were closed, I got no air. Anyway," Mehera concluded, "it was okay, as long as Baba was sitting next to me."[6]

Following behind the Buick was the Blue Bus with Adi K. behind the wheel and Kaka sitting next to him. Joining the usual passengers were Baidul's wife, Soltoon, and their daughters, Dowla and Sarvar. The female servants were to travel by rail with Vishnu, Baidul, Gustadji, and a few of the other men, along with the luggage that could not be transported on the roof of the bus and a few of the animals from the ashram zoo. They were departing Meherabad later and would not arrive until October 6.

Nadine tried to circumvent Baba's orders yet again, this time by bringing extra overcoats. Although the bus was not filled to capacity and there was adequate seating for all the women, Baba made her sit on a camp stool in the aisle with one coat folded beneath her like a cushion and another in her lap. Irene, who occupied the bench seat next to Nadine, was coming down with tonsillitis, and she was so ill that she had to lean on Nadine for support. Freiny's toddler Jangoo rode on his grandmother's lap. "Gulmai," Irene recalled, "would open one of the windows at the front and tell Jangoo to pee out. Those of us in the back got sprayed, if we were sitting by a window."[7] Mani called it "being baptized."[8]

Many of the women suffered from motion sickness. "The ones who had aisle seats would have liked to be by the window," Mehera observed, "but they couldn't as the sick ones, who didn't care about scenery, had to sit there. So the ones who loved to look out, couldn't; and the ones who didn't care about the view had to sit by the window, as they got carsick—especially when you had the winding roads going up the steep inclines. We didn't stop for them."[9]

Monsoon rains created difficulties for the drivers. Many roads and bridges had been washed out by heavy flooding, and Baba's party was headed into South India, which typically receives more precipitation than other parts of the country. Chanji, who was well versed

in the challenges of moving such a large group of people from one place to another, observed: "To travel with a party of over 50, including men and women both Eastern and Western, by road, in a car and a big bus, with dangerous crossings of a number of rivers and innumerable *nallas* (streamlets) without bridges, in these rainy days, involves a risk of being helplessly held up or swept away in treacherous currents of rivers. It is a task undertaken unconcernedly only by Masters and their groups who are utterly indifferent to the hardships of travel under such trying conditions."[10]

"Of course, there were the countless tire punctures, engine problems and wrong directions," Rano later recalled, and three hours into the drive "the bus became mired in a riverbed. What to do? The bus could not be pushed out and where to find a tow truck? There were no cities nearby. Finally local farmers hitched up 20 bullocks and managed to free the bus."[11*] While they were waiting, those in the Buick went ahead and ate lunch. It was only 9:00 AM, but this was their second meal since departing Meherabad, because they had already been the guests of Shirinmai, who gave them breakfast at Akbar Press on their way through Ahmednagar. After a two-hour delay, Baba became impatient and ordered Elizabeth to drive on with the other passengers in the Buick, while the women riding in the bus stayed behind until the vehicle could get back on the road.

Baba's first halting place was Sholapur, 150 miles southeast of Meherabad. The Buick arrived at 3:00 PM, but the Blue Bus did not appear until three hours later, having sustained a puncture. When Baba and the women moved into their dak bungalow they were greeted with a delicious hot meal provided by local disciples. Nine hours had passed since they had last eaten. Despite a nice kitchen and lovely garden, the bungalow, like many of its counterparts, was too small for Baba's entourage. Baba assigned one of the few beds to Irene because she was ill.

* Fully packed, loaded, and filled with passengers, the Blue Bus is estimated to have weighed about five tons.

He gave the remaining beds to some of the older women and consigned the rest to tables and chairs. The men stayed in an adjacent house.

Because of His last-minute decision to shift to Mysore instead of Jabalpur, Baba planned to remain in Sholapur for as long as it took Chanji to identify suitable lodgings at the new destination. But the property around the bungalow was so infested with mosquitoes that He decided to shift to nearby Hippergaon on August 4. It was there that Donkin and Nilu caught up with the group. They and Ramjoo had traveled separately in Sarosh's old Chevrolet in order to make an overnight detour to Nasik so that Donkin could visit the site of Meher Retreat Ashram, as well as the site of Baba's now-defunct *mast* ashram at Rahuri and the resort town of Bhandardara. Monsoon storm clouds threatened to burst throughout the drive. Ramjoo delivered Donkin and Nilu to Bombay so that the pair could continue on by rail to join Baba.

The dak bungalow in Hippergaon was adjacent to Ekruk Tank, "a lake some 4 or 5 miles across, with flat hills surrounding it, and an artificial dam at its western end," Donkin recorded. "Baba and the ladies are in the Dak Bungalow and most of us 'boys' are in a tin hut under the dam. We bathe in the lake and canals, lie under the trees, and go up to Baba's room for meals, so we see a lot of Him."[12] The residents of the bungalow may have escaped the mosquitoes when they shifted from Sholapur, but the men had to contend with rats in the tin hut: Donkin complained of holes being chewed in his clothes and toilet kit.

Local devotees continued to supply the group's meals throughout Baba's halt in Hippergaon. August 6 was Papeti, the orthodox Zoroastrian New Year's celebration, and at breakfast the women accidentally celebrated early by eating the *sev*, a crunchy deep-fried chickpea snack seasoned with turmeric and red pepper, which was meant to have been saved for later. That evening they sang the arti, after which Baba distributed sweets and they listened to records on the gramophone.

Meanwhile, Chanji's search for accommodations in Mysore precipitated the usual bombardment of communications: at least ten

telegrams over a period of five days, as well as several letters. Immediately upon arrival in Sholapur, Baba had requested an update on Chanji's progress: "On receiving your wire we will leave for Mysore arrange bungalows soon and wire kaka baria [*sic*] care station master Sholapur = Baba = ." Handwritten on the back is Chanji's reply, sent the following day: "seen many bungalows but [illegible] none ideally secluded available so far am trying to find others and wiring again tomorrow afternoon."[13] Succeeding cables document increasing pressure on Chanji to secure accommodations that would meet Baba's standards.

Within twenty-four hours of posting a letter describing a "most ideally suitable residence," the long-suffering Chanji cabled Baba to say, "residence referred in my yesterday's letter Unfortunately Unavailable immediately - May get later Meanwhile have some good ones in view Trying for others best available."[14] After four days of bad news, Baba altered His plans and decided to settle in Bangalore, cabling Chanji, "DEFINITELY RENT BEST AVAILABLE BUNGALOWS EVEN IF NOT IDEAL" and "ARRANGE OUR STAY BANGALORE TWELTH [*sic*] NOON TO THIRTEENTH NOON GUEST HOUSE OR SOME HOUSE" in the interim.[15] Per Baba's request, Chanji booked rooms for the group in two Bangalore hotels.

In the meantime, Tukaram arrived in Sholapur with the Chevrolet. He and Donkin would take turns driving the bus for the remainder of the journey. Donkin had been practicing maneuvering the vehicle and he was behind the wheel for the first time with a "full complement of ladies" when the group departed Hippergaon for Bangalore at 9:30 AM on Wednesday, August 9.[16] Leading the caravan was the Buick, with Baba guiding the way. The other men followed behind the bus in the Chevrolet. Baba planned three overnight stops during the four-day drive, in Satara, Kolhapur, and Harihar. The direct route due south from Sholapur to Bangalore was a journey of just under four hundred miles, but Satara was due west of Sholapur and the ensuing roundabout itinerary added over two hundred miles to the drive.

Baba and the women passed by the Vithoba Temple in Pandharpur during their first morning on the road. Although Baba did not stop the bus there, He did give the women a mid-morning break so they could stretch their legs with a ramble through the fields. While they were walking, Baba collected His mail in a nearby town, after which He and the women ate lunch. Two hours later, at 1:00 PM, Donkin had to pull the bus off the road to change yet another flat tire, necessitating an hour-long delay. It was an occurrence that was becoming frustratingly more frequent as the bus clocked additional miles on its odometer as well as its tires. Baba and the women took another break at 3:00, stopping to pick *jambuls*—small, purple, plum-like fruits sometimes called Indian blackberries—from trees along the roadside.

Baba's entourage reached Satara at 6:30, and there He and the women settled into another dak bungalow for the night.* Donkin found the location lovely. But when it came time for dinner the women discovered that their dal and milk had soured during the drive, so they had to make do with weak black tea and hastily prepared spicy *chana* (chickpea) dal. But for their roadside snack of jambuls, this was their first opportunity to eat since ten o'clock that morning. The men fared no better: As soon as they had been fortified with black tea and bread and butter sandwiches, Baba ordered Donkin, Nilu, and Kaka to drive the bus to the train station. The railway junction, Donkin wrote, was "12 miles off, [via a] filthy bad road and me v. tired already: we got back at midnight, slept fitfully on the stone floor till 5.0 am, and off at 6.30 again."[17]

Fortunately the distance from Satara to Kolhapur was only about eighty miles. Donkin called the roads "fearfully bad: the back of the bus packed with people—poor devils, and the roof piled up with luggage so that we must watch continually for low branches when driving."[18] Baba stopped the caravan at 10:15 to have the men purchase lunchtime provisions from a hotel (a common name for an Indian restaurant).

* Baba either visited or passed through Satara more than one hundred times on His way to and from Poona.

The Blue Bus caravan reached Kolhapur during the evening of August 10. After a futile search for the maharaja's guest house in which they had been invited to stay, Mani recorded that Baba gave up and located a vacant "traveller's bung." where they could spend the night. It was Mansari's thirtieth birthday, and Baba and the women celebrated with arti and sweets. August 10 was just ten days after the first anniversary of Mansari's coming to join the women's ashram.

Donkin had had only five hours of sleep the previous night and was still yet more fatigued by the end of his second day on the road, but he was a quick study, recognizing that this was simply the beginning of his spiritual training. "There is no doubt," he wrote that night, "that Baba likes to make one exasperated and tired in order to work on one [and] when tired it is not easy to control emotions, and He will make me, He says, mentally and spiritually strong."[19]

Baba's convoy left Kolhapur at 6:30 the next morning, bound for Harihar, about two hundred miles to the southeast. Mani recorded that the drive was "cool and pleasant" and the "landscape green & glorious." Baba made a quick detour into the Belgaum bazaar to buy onions and salad and stopped the bus again at what Mani called an "empty, isolated little house."[20] There the group ate an indoor lunch since the morning had become overcast and it was starting to drizzle. They were back on the road within an hour.

In the meantime, the drizzle had turned to rain. The roads were slick and Donkin's nerves were tried when the bus skidded into a muddy ditch just before 3:00 and had to be pulled back onto the road, causing another delay. Meanwhile, the passengers in the Buick drove on, not realizing that they had left the bus behind mired in the ditch. However, as soon as Baba saw that the bus was no longer following them He ordered Elizabeth to turn around to see what had happened. After driving several miles the Buick passed the bus coming from the other direction, and Elizabeth had to drive quite some distance before she could turn around and catch up with it, precipitating another wild-goose chase.

Donkin observed that "Baba was peeved about this, though it was no doubt His wish that it should happen."[21] Baba's entourage reached its dak bungalow in Harihar at 5:00 PM on August 11.

The Buick, Blue Bus, and Chevrolet departed at 6:30 the following morning for the last leg of its journey—the 175-mile drive to Bangalore, stopping two hours later in Chitaldroog to purchase petrol and allow Baba to send a cable to Chanji. Baba stopped again at 9:30 to give the women an hour-long roadside lunch break. By now they had passed from Maharashtra into South India and the princely state of Mysore, and they picnicked by a canal in the shade of tropical palms. Baba halted once more at 1:00 PM so that the women could uncramp their legs with an easy climb to the top of a small rise overlooking a lake and the Nilgiris, the Blue Hills of the Western Ghats, in the distance.

Baba's party reached Bangalore on August 12. The Westerners stayed in an English hotel, while the Easterners checked into the Parsi accommodations that Chanji had found for them. Mani called the prospect of their arrival "nirvana," with its promise of "a good bath and a hot meal … heaven in a different shape."[22] "Baba told us we could have a bath as soon as we arrived," Mehera recalled. "It was a homey place. There was only one bathing room. Baba said He would time each one. Only 15 minutes each! I usually take an hour to bathe. Everyone had to have a bath, and then we had to go eat. Baba took a watch and began timing each one. Everyone bathed fast, fast."[23] Mani said that they were only allowed five minutes, adding, "Of course after *three* minutes the others would start banging on the door to hurry you up."[24]

After bathing, everyone gathered for dinner in the Parsi dining room. But their meal was interrupted by a startling occurrence. Baba had ordered the women not to use His name when they were out in any public place. "During travels, Baba would not let Himself be known," Mani recalled. "When He was among people, among the crowds, going all over India, He traveled incognito. In the Blue Bus, wherever we landed, we were not to address Him as Baba, in case that might give someone the

idea that it was Meher Baba. We [the Eastern women] said nothing, but Norina called Him Babooli and Nadine said Babushka [a Russian diminutive term of endearment]. So, while Baba was doing His work, He was keeping His Name too in seclusion."[25]

Mani recounted the incident many years afterward in Mandali Hall:

> We were in the big dining room with the big dining table, and this very motherly, homey, Parsi lady was serving. It was really like at home. She had cooked the things with care and she was there to see that everybody had a good share…. So there we were all seated, Baba and all the women, Elizabeth, Norina, Kitty, Nadine, Margaret, Irene, all of us, and all the Indians—Eastern ones. So we were sitting and really enjoying the food, and Elizabeth and the others were using their forks, and we were eating with the hands. Ah, this was delicious! A hot meal, and our favorite kind of spiced dal. Now that dal always is accompanied by a *pattis*, you know, a pattis or a meat pattis. Even a single patty is called a pattis….
>
> While we were engrossed in eating, suddenly we hear the motherly lady who was the proprietress, and she said, "Would you like another pattis, Baba?"
>
> *How did she know?* I still remember the fork held like that by Elizabeth and Norina [gesturing]. It was a tableau. The movement stopped … some had a glass of water. Some had a fork here and everybody [was] wide-eyed. Who gave that name away? Because it was very strict. We were not to say "Baba."[26]

As it turned out, Baidul and Soltoon's nine-year-old daughter Sarvar was recovering from typhoid fever. Her hair had been cut short because it was believed at the time that hair sapped the body's strength

and hindered recovery, as well as retaining heat from a fever, so the proprietress had mistaken her for a boy. "All she was doing was asking the little boy—baby—baba—brother—father—youngster—always baba," Mani concluded. "She was simply innocently asking, 'Will you have another pattis, baba?' And we of course thought it was this Baba [gesturing toward a photo or painting of Baba in Mandali Hall]. I tell you there was an 'aaahhh'—a sigh of relief."[27]

Baba capped off the women's first evening in Bangalore with an hour-and-a-half tour of the city in the bus. Along the way they passed a fountain so perfectly illuminated by colored lights that it seemed to Mani as if the water itself had been tinted.

BANGALORE, THE PARIS OF INDIA

The city of Bangalore, Donkin observed, "is a kind of garden city with parks and vistas, long avenues shaded by decorative trees, spacious houses, a cantonment scattered with barracks and sounding with bugles and the rumble of military lorries, and a commercial city with busy lanes bordered by small, white houses hugging each other in the sunlight."[28] Bangalore's avenues and parks had earned the city the sobriquet "Paris of India."[29]

Kitty described Bangalore's location as "one of the most beautiful areas in India," calling the climate ideal for the Westerners.[30] Meherwan's recollection also was that the city and surrounds had a "very English climate as they call it, so when the Westerners were all there with Baba, they said, 'Baba, this is an ideal place to settle down,' and Baba went along with them. Baba said, 'Yes, I like this place very much so let's make this our headquarters now for all time.'"[31] Baba had already been in contact with the Dewan of Mysore State, Sir Mirza Ismail. Sir Mirza was a devotee and "a deeply spiritual person," Meherwan recalled, "so much so that he would bow down to Baba's mother. [He] had great respect for the one who had given birth to such a divine being."[32]

When Baba traveled to Mysore in 1936, He gave Sir Mirza the impression that He would be establishing His Universal Spiritual Center in Bangalore and that He would shift His ashram there as well. In the intervening year and a half since that visit, Sir Mirza had identified several properties that he hoped might prove suitable for Baba's new scheme, and he requested a meeting on the morning of August 13, Baba's first day in the city. Accompanying Baba were Elizabeth, Norina, Nadine, Rano, Nilu, Donkin, and Chanji, all of whom, Donkin recorded, donned their "glad rags" for the occasion.[33] Hoping to make a good impression, Baba intended for all seven to squeeze into Elizabeth's shiny new Buick with Him. But moments before departure the Buick broke down, so Norina, Nadine, and Chanji left in the battered old Chevrolet while Baba remained behind with the others. He was thoroughly exasperated, calling the situation an inauspicious beginning to His morning.

Meanwhile, Donkin set about diagnosing the problem with the Buick's engine. Sand had gotten into the carburetor, and as soon as he was able to clean it out, he, Elizabeth, Rano, Nilu, and Baba set out to catch up with the others. But the delay had cost them an hour, and by the time they arrived at the Dewan's residence Sir Mirza had already departed with Norina, Nadine, and Chanji to view the properties. Baba ordered Elizabeth to find them. It was "an awful show," Donkin wrote, "racing down the avenues of Bangalore at 50 to 60 m.p.h. Eventually after a series of misdirections and directions, we see a black car ahead. Baba says 'follow it.' In it is the Diwan [*sic*] with Norina, Nadia [Nadine], and Chanji and they all hop out and come to see Baba, Diwan as well, and Chanji most impressed that Diwan gets out of his car to come to Baba, and not vice-versa; will create a terrific impression says Chanji in Bangalore, as the Diwan is 'God-Almighty here.'"[34]

Sir Mirza showed Baba an imposing, five-thousand-square-foot bungalow called the Links, overlooking the British officers' golf course—hence its name. The Links belonged to his brother, who also had met Baba and conveyed his gratitude "to have such an honored



The Links Bungalow, where Meherwan waited at the bottom of the stairs to bow down to Baba

personage as his tenant."[35] The property was located at #4 Sankey Road, High Ground, far removed from the hustle and bustle of the city center. Baba was pleased and rented the house immediately for Rs. 275, and He shifted the women there at nine o'clock the next morning, after two nights in their hotels.

Donkin called the Links "a large, square, white house, that stood in a large, square garden," with a deep verandah, second porch, and portico entrance.[36] Mehera described it as "spacious, but not on the posh side." Upstairs were two large bedrooms, separated by a ballroom with a wooden dance floor where the women would later enact their skits for Baba. "Mani and I used the bedroom upstairs at the back. Our room had a window from the floor to the ceiling, with an alcove, but it was still dark. A dressing room was attached."[37] The rest of the Easterners shared the other bedroom. Baba slept in a room on the ground floor at the front of the house, near the Westerners' accommodations. Also staying on the ground floor were the Jessawala women and Meherwan, and Baba had to pass through their room in order to get to His.

As soon as Baba had reached Bangalore, Meherwan recalled, "He sent a telegram, 'Leave all and come to Me, and join Me in Bangalore.' So we … packed up and joined Him."[38] The Jessawalas arrived at the Links on August 14, a little more than a year since they had joined Baba permanently. Pappa, who had recently retired from his career as a

government industrial inspector, would be residing in Baba's ashram for the first time. He had driven his wife and children to Bangalore in the family automobile, which would be a welcome addition to Baba's fleet of vehicles in the Blue Bus convoy. Meherwan stayed with his mother and sisters on the ground floor of the Links in the room next to Baba's.[39] Baba also called two of Gaimai's sisters, Gulamasi and Banumasi, and Banumasi's sons, Dadi and Sam, who arrived by train.* Gulamasi and Banumasi also moved into the Links, bringing the total number of women and girls in the house to twenty-five. Joining them soon after were Chhagan's wife Shanta and daughter Shakuntala.†

Baba rented a second house at No. 4 Palace Road, also belonging to Sir Mirza's brother, for the men. Masaji, Pendu, Dr. Ghani,‡ Jangle, and all the servants from Meherabad would join Baba's party on October 6, bringing by rail all remaining furniture as well as the supplies from the medical dispensary and the last residents of the Meherabad zoo. Baba's entourage was about to double since departing Meherabad: More than forty-five ashramites resided in the Links and the men's bungalow, and the remaining mandali would travel by car, bringing the total to around fifty. At the same time that the Blue Bus passengers, the men mandali and their families, and all of Baba's additional invitees were still settling in and adjusting to their new accommodations, Baba carried on with His work. He was determined not to waste a single moment of precious time. After a few days had passed, the "Divan," as Donkin now referred to Sir Mirza, came to see how Baba was settling in and was invited into Baba's room—an honor not accorded many guests. "Baba was

* Meherwan did not mention where the other boys stayed.

† The other nineteen women included Mehera, Mani, Khorshed, Naja, Soonamasi, Mansari, Gulmai, Walu, Kaku, Soltoon and her two daughters, Kitty, Elizabeth, Norina, Nadine, Rano, Nonny, and Irene. The men's group included Vishnu, Baidul, Gustadji, Kaka, Adi K., Nilu, and Donkin, as well as Kalemama and his son Murli, Ramjoo, Chhagan, Jalbhai, Pappa, and Eruch.

‡ Abdul Ghani Munsiff (1894–August 7, 1951) was one of Merwan Irani's childhood friends. His family were devout Muslims. Dr. Ghani had a thriving homeopathic practice, and he later became a magistrate, which earned him the title of "Munsiff." He gave up his practice at Baba's suggestion and became a lifelong devotee.

the only one in old clothes," Donkin recorded, "the others being dressed up for the occasion, and B's room being all done in what He called Persian style, with cushions on the floor, and a bowl of fruit at Baba's feet."[40]

THREE CHANNELS

"In Bangalore," Donkin observed in *The Wayfarers*, "the torrent of Baba's energy was conducted along three principal external channels. The most conspicuous was the planning of the [universal] spiritual centre at Byramangala."[41] Baba lost no time pursuing His work. During His first morning in Bangalore He viewed another property, this one in the village of Byramangala, about twenty miles southwest of the city. It belonged to the Dewan, who hoped Baba might want to locate His Universal Spiritual Center there, and Baba had been so pleased that He immediately accepted the Dewan's offer to arrange for the purchase of the land. "It is really a beautiful position," Donkin wrote, "with expansive views of hills, and well covered in trees and bushes. Mysore State is really very beautiful indeed, and very healthy too, compared to most places. Near the site it is a little reminiscent of Scotland in fine weather, and the skies are now very fine, with scattered showers. Like a Turner picture."[42*]

Baba now owned two pieces of property designated for the site of the Universal Spiritual Center, one in Mandla and the other in Byramangala. It took Donkin's eagle eye to observe that "the folder describing the universal ashram makes no mention of where it is! No-one had noticed this before; Baba says He turned the key so that the magistrate was transferred [from Jabalpur] thus enabling him to back out of a situation which would have been unsatisfactory, without hurting anyone's feelings." In other words, Byramangala had supplanted Mandla and Jabalpur as Baba's chosen location. In addition to the Dewan's

* J. M. W. Turner (c. 1775–1851) was an English Romanticist painter. Donkin was an accomplished watercolorist who would naturally have seen the India countryside through the eyes of an artist.

property, the proposed site included about forty privately held farms as well as several tracts owned by the government. Donkin went on to describe the land as "lovely … with granite outcrops, and a green valley with trees between. The projected lake is to the east, over the shoulder of a small hill which is on the site, and which will be completed in 2 years."[43]

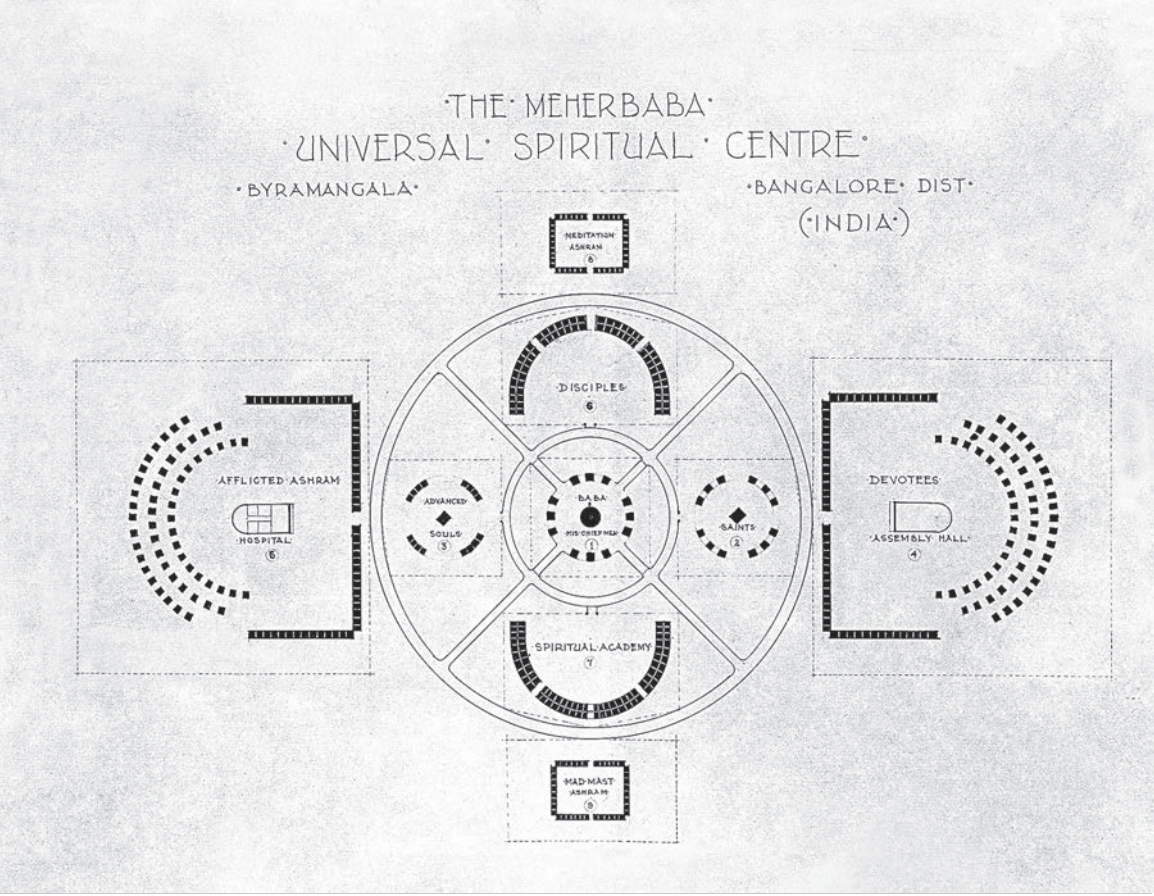
On September 10, Baba sent Norina, Donkin, and Chanji to Sir Mirza's residence to present him with a check for twenty-five thousand rupees, the first in a series of payments for the government-owned property, the purchase of which the Dewan was facilitating. He appointed Adi K., Ramjoo,* Chanji, Pappa, and Jalbhai† to oversee planning, land transactions, and finances. He included Norina and Elizabeth as well, since they had been the first to put forth the idea for such an institution.

"Baba wanted this Centre to accommodate two thousand people of all religions," Kitty recorded, "and it was to have six departments: The Spiritual Academy with the aim of preparation for international harmony, the House of Advanced Souls for practical mysticism, the Abode of the Saints for those who would teach the Reality of God, the *Mast* Institute for the God-intoxicated, the Solitary Quarters for Meditation for those who wished to meditate under guidance, and the Resting Place for the Afflicted for the care and alleviation of suffering of all kinds. All of these departments would be under Baba's direct supervision."[44]

Chanji observed that its creation marked a new phase of Baba's work. "The Spiritual Centre is to be the nucleus of all Meher Baba's external activities. It is for the first time, Baba's external activities, uptil [*sic*] now quiet, seem to have assumed a public aspect."[45] Thus Baba placed great emphasis on the naming and appearance of the new center. The name proposed initially was The Shri Meher

* Abdulla Karim Jaffer (April 18, 1898–January 11, 1967) was a cloth merchant and strict Muslim who met Baba in 1922 and quickly became devoted. Although Ramjoo had had only one year of education, Baba entrusted him with many of His legal affairs. Baba ordered Ramjoo to maintain a series of journals about His work with him that have been published as *Ramjoo's Diaries*, 1922–1929, Walnut Creek, CA (Sufism Reoriented, 1979).

† Jal Sheriar Irani (September 15, 1902–February 21, 1982) was the second son of Sheriar and Shireenmai. Jalbhai (Brother Jal), as he was affectionately known, served Baba throughout his life.



Plan for the Universal Spiritual Center to be established in Byramangala, near Bangalore

Baba Universal Spiritual Ashram. There were concerns, however, over the use of Hindi names for an institution meant to serve people of all creeds, so the word "Shri" was eliminated and "Ashram" replaced with "Center." Following the decision to change the name to The Meher Baba Universal Spiritual Center, Baba joked that perhaps now "He might be called 'The Meher Baba'—He likes His bit of fun, does Baba," Donkin quipped.[46]

Baba foresaw an extensive complex laid out on more than 560 acres, with nine buildings containing 350 rooms. He envisioned a cluster of what He described as "symbolic structures" built to precise scales. The exteriors were to incorporate Gothic as well as traditional Indian motifs reminiscent of the Indo-Saracenic style so popular in British India. "The design must be universal," Baba emphasized, "without conforming to any particular religion."[47] He called contractor Naoroji Dadachanji from Bombay to begin work on new plans because

the designs that Walter Mertens and Helen Dahm had drawn up for the Mandla site no longer met His requirements.

On August 19 the Dewan returned to the Links hoping to speak with Baba at greater length about the new center. Baba told him, "You are the power here materially; I am the power spiritually, everywhere, in My own way. So we won't talk of 'powers.' Taking you as one of My own, I want to talk with you quite frankly. I want to make the centre unique."[48]

Because Baba had given Norina a role in helping to establish the center, He called her from her work to meet the Dewan again. She had no idea why Baba wished to see her but she dutifully appeared, wearing a soiled, threadbare work dress and toting the bucket and broom she had been using to clean up after another of Lucky's escapades. She bore no resemblance to the immaculately attired woman the Dewan recalled from previous meetings. Baba gestured, "Meet Princess Norina Matchabelli." Norina was mortified to be seen in such a state of disarray and disconcerted that Baba had given her no opportunity to change her clothes. The Dewan was astonished, and exclaimed to Baba, "Your love is wonderful! An educated Western woman from a wealthy background doing this sort of work? Marvelous! She could engage dozens of servants, but it is Your love that makes her sweep her own quarters. It is her luck to wield a broom in Your court!"[49] Norina wept when she understood why Baba had called her.

Chanji apprised devotees throughout India and the West of Baba's plans in his November 1939 *Meher Baba Journal* column:

> For a great and unique centre as Meher Baba has wanted long since to start for His Universal work, the site selected must have, besides unique distinctions in all practical ways, certain definite special qualities and atmosphere which aid in creating a response in the people when they find and feel the presence and power of august and divine personalities of Saints and Masters. Such rare

> qualities seem to have been found in the recently selected site in the Mysore State, where the Master has decided to establish his Universal Spiritual Center.[50]

Meanwhile, the monsoon rains that had been so plentiful when Baba shifted to South India had diminished and Mysore State was in danger of facing a severe drought. Chanji called Baba's presence at such a time an "august blessing," observing, "A grave anxiety was felt all over, and many who came in contact with the Master naturally asked Him to bless this side with sufficient rains to avoid failure of crops. In His usual indifferent and light manner, Baba had graciously granted their request. True to His word, when in a very short time it started raining with a force and it poured down practically throughout the month of October bringing the average to more than normal. That was a good omen for the Master's special activities here, His very Advent proving so auspicious."[51]

Chanji observed that while the creation of a Universal Spiritual Center was the external, visible aspect of Baba's activities, *mast* work represented the internal, unseen aspect of His work. And, as Donkin noted, the other channels of Baba's energy in Bangalore were the continuation of His search for new *mast* contacts and the establishment of an ashram where He could see to their care, as well as that of the *masts* who were to be brought from Meherabad, and where He could carry on His Universal work with them in seclusion.

The Links proved an ideal location for these endeavors. The bungalow was typical of large Indian houses in that its servant quarters were situated in separate structures on the property. Here, the outbuildings were constructed at the end of the garden, along the boundary wall far behind the house, where they would suit Baba's needs perfectly. As an addition to existing structures, Baba ordered the construction of a *jhopdi*—a small stone-floored hut with a thatched roof and walls "through which the wind puffed and sighed," Donkin lyrically observed. "Such huts, when new, as Baba's was, are cool and have a fragrant

odour," providing sweet relief from the intensity of the seclusion work that Baba was planning.[52]

Near the end of August Baba sent Pappa out on his first assignment. With considerable reluctance, Pappa agreed to assist Adi K. and Kaka in locating a particular *mast* with whom Baba wished to work: Chaddarwala, the sixth-plane spiritual chargeman of Bangalore. Chaddarwala was so revered throughout the city that one of his seats was the front verandah of the Dewan's office, located in the Cantonment. Chaddarwala, or Chaddar Baba, as he was called in *The Wayfarers*, "was a fine old man, with a head of short cropped white hair, a small white beard and tattered clothes, and he always carried a sheet (*chaddar*) wherever he went. This sheet would be flung carelessly over one shoulder or held in the hand by one corner, so that most of it trailed through the dust."[53]

The men had no trouble locating Chaddarwala, but two days passed before they were able to coax him into a taxi. Once in the car, however, the *mast* became abusive, slapping and swearing at Pappa. When they arrived back at the Links Pappa complained to Baba, "Here is Your *mast*! We were only able to bring him after the greatest trouble, so that You could do Your work with him!"[54] Meanwhile, Chaddarwala got out of the taxi and walked unerringly to Baba's room, where he picked up Baba's alphabet board and one of His shawls, held them in his hands for a moment, put them down, and enigmatically declared, "Now my account is closed."[55] He refused to be bathed or fed, shouting, "You have brought me to Allah's abode! I am on fire! Let me go from here!"[56] Arnavaz recalled that his impassioned entreaties carried all the way from the *mast* compound to the women secluded in the main house.

When Baba gestured for Kaka to take Chaddarwala back to his seat, Pappa demanded an explanation. "Why did You allow him to return without working with him? Do You have any idea how much trouble we were put to bring him here? We followed him about the whole day without even drinking a drop of water, and after such labors You are sending him back without working with him?! What is this?"[57]

Thoroughly amused by Pappa's frustration, Baba explained that it was impossible for Him to accomplish His work without a *mast's* cooperation. Fewer than three weeks later, on the evening of September 11, Chaddarwala collapsed in front of Victoria Hospital, expressing his dying desire for "a comfortable place on the pavement for him to lie down, as he now wished to go to Paradise."[58] Afterward Baba explained that despite his refusal to cooperate, He had given the *mast* a "final push," and that the timing of Chaddarwala's death was in accordance with His work.[59] The beloved *mast* was interred in the Cantonment where a shrine was established in his memory, his account now eternally closed.

The new *mast* ashram became fully operational on Tuesday, September 19, when the *masts* and mad arrived from Meherabad and were brought to the servant quarters and the additional grass huts constructed for their use. A thirty-by-thirty-foot compound enclosed by *tatta* screens of woven bamboo shielded them from prying eyes. Baba headed off any possible misunderstandings by sending Norina to speak with one of their neighbors, to assure her that nothing untoward was happening next door. He renewed His practice of bathing, shaving, dressing, and hand-feeding the men, while Kitty resumed the task of preparing their food: either rice, chutney, and chapatis, or else dal and one spicy vegetable. Rano, and later, Margaret, also helped prepare their meals.

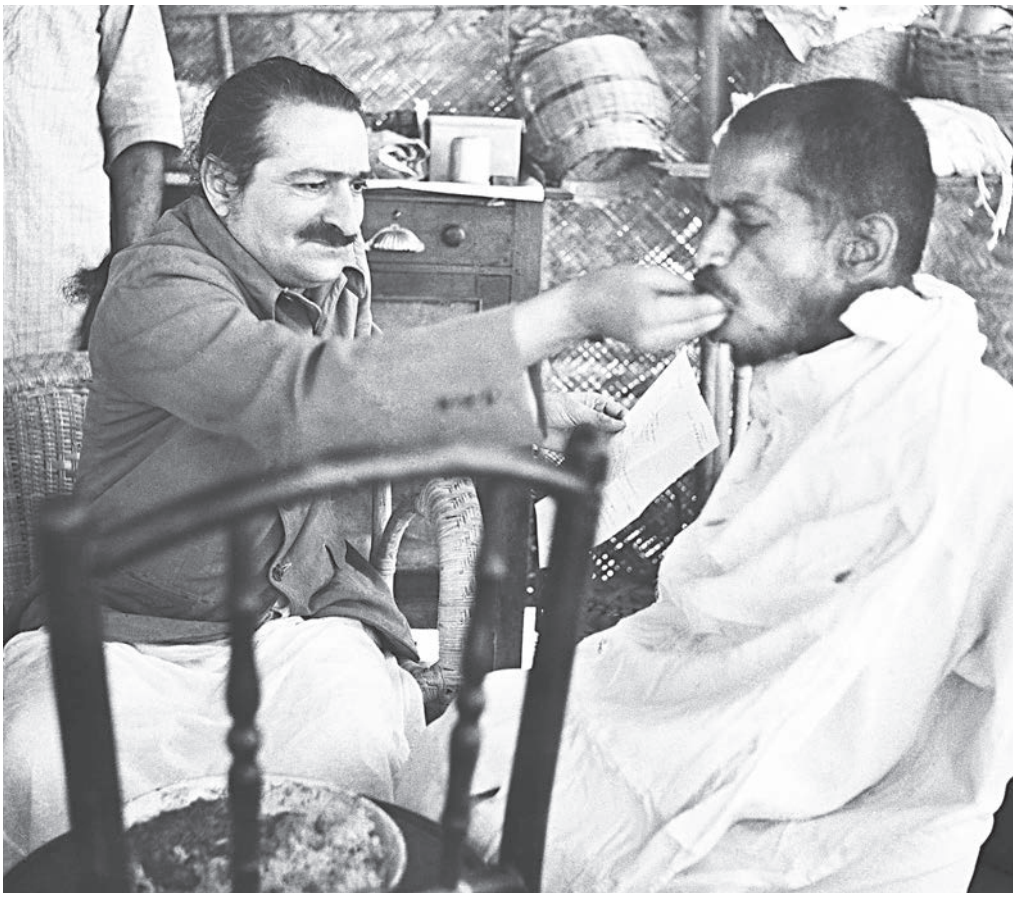
On September 21 Baba entered a thirty-day seclusion and began a partial fast of a single meal a day, working with the *masts* in His jhopdi from 6:00 to 8:00 AM and again from 11:30 until 1:00 PM. He covered the windows of the hut with green paper so that there was no possibility of anyone looking in at Him while He was working. Meherwan recalled that when Baba was inside, "He would ask [us] not even to look in the direction of that hut."[60] He also demanded complete silence. Mani called the seclusion "Baba's special work," and it was so successful that He ended it early, on October 11, and began taking two meals a day.[61]

Elizabeth met with Baba daily at the men's bungalow, reporting back to the other women on the astonishing range of projects He

was managing, as well as His unwavering attention to detail in the administration of each one. Kitty likened Baba's direction of the ashram to the workings of "a miniature office."[62]

IT IS ALL AN ENIGMA

Meanwhile, the threat of conflict in Europe was a treacherous undercurrent drawing the world inexorably toward war. Donkin did not identify Baba's focus on the escalating tensions as one of the channels of His energy after the shift to Bangalore, perhaps because, unlike His *mast* work and the creation of the new center, this aspect of His work was by



Baba hand-feeding Mohammed in the *mast* ashram located behind the Links bungalow

its very nature invisible but for the manner in which it was mirrored in world events.

Baba had been commenting on the approaching war since His arrival in Sholapur at the beginning of the tour.* His remarks were a continuation of the kinds of statements He had been making for many years, but now they became increasingly frequent, dire, and perplexing. "Baba is quite enigmatic over the political situation," Donkin observed on August 4, "though to-day when on reading the paper re Poland and Germany I said it looked as if another crisis and perhaps war was on the way he gave me a quick wink, which I think meant no war yet. He says however that Chamberlain is a bit weak, but that Eden† is good, and that Hitler's present policy of threat and snatch will lead to war in the end: Baba says in any case it is all 'chalked out.'"[63]

Baba was growing more and more frustrated with Britain's refusal to engage with Germany, observing that talk of negotiations made Him feel ill. The intensification of His *mast* work in Bangalore coincided with the outbreak of World War II, and the toll of His internal work leading up to the events of early September was such that on August 29 Donkin wrote that He was "v. unwell with cold in the head and throat, and fever: international situation probably."[64]

Three days later, on September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland, smashing the terms of the Munich Agreement and precipitating a chain of catastrophic events that would ultimately draw sixty-one nations into a six-year conflict that would cost the lives of as many as seventy million military personnel and civilians. September 1 was also Nadine's fifty-fifth birthday, and she was pleased to hear Baba say that Russia held the key to the successful progress of the war. Irene was not so pleased when Baba teasingly told her that she represented Germany. Donkin observed that Baba went out of His way to incite arguments

* Baba had been making daily statements about the coming war every day since the beginning of the first tour in December 1938. However, not all of His comments seem to have been recorded.

† Sir Anthony Eden served as Great Britain's Foreign Secretary from 1935 until his resignation in 1939 over Chamberlain's policy of appeasement. He was succeeded by Winston Churchill.

among the Westerners at this time, getting everyone "all hotted up" by alternately praising and criticizing England and the United States in turn.[65] Such provocation may have been an aspect of His war work: By aggravating His close ones He might in fact have been goading the United States and Great Britain into action.

As soon as news of the invasion of Poland reached Baba, He ordered Adi K., Elizabeth, Donkin, and Jalbhai to take turns listening to the radio in a shop in Bangalore and report back to Him. The following day Adi rented a radio for the Links, which was placed in Baba's room. Baba, the men, and the Westerners gathered around the wireless, crackling with static, on Sunday, September 3, 1939, as Lord Neville Chamberlain announced that Great Britain was officially at war with Germany.* Ironically, it was he who had brokered the Munich Agreement on behalf of Great Britain less than a year before.•

• As of January 1939 the BBC's overseas Empire Service was broadcasting regular news bulletins around the world in six languages in addition to English. In an article entitled "London Calls the World," the *BBC Handbook 1940* states, "With the help of the Empire news bulletins, people in every quarter of the globe could keep abreast of the latest news of the international situation as it came fresh from the tape-machines; and when at last the blow fell, listeners in the remotest parts of the world could hear Mr. Chamberlain's fateful words as soon as their relatives in London." Lord Neville Chamberlain's September 3, 1939, speech was broadcast live by the BBC Empire Service at 11:00 AM GMT. ("London Calls the World," *BBC Handbook 1940*, British Broadcasting Company, 1940, 47)

Baba was so pleased with the news that He made His own declaration, saying, "That blessed old man's speech has satisfied Me. I am happy war is declared—England at last kept her word; Chamberlain, though old and slow, is firm; he won't rest until Hitler is crushed…. Of all countries to-day, I love England most."[66]

Baba also predicted a long war, calling Hitler "mad" and Mussolini "mean," and He assumed responsibility for all that was to ensue:

> It is all My game. You see Me sitting here quietly, but how can you know what I am doing quietly in this corner? Now all the world is excited. You cannot imagine what the condition of the people, especially in Europe, is at the moment—no rest, no sleep—a state of continued anxiety and tension.

* Chamberlain's declaration of war came exactly four months after the women had enacted Mani's play in Jabalpur, in which Chamberlain had played a starring role.

> This war is not like the last war, which was fought on land and water. Now it will be all in the air….
>
> My blessings to England. Had it failed this time, it would have been the end. It is impossible now for Hitler to withdraw at this stage. Even if he says "Stop!" the other countries won't, for they are determined to destroy Nazism.
>
> Let us hope America will help now, with money and supplies, if not men. That will help a lot.

Later that evening, after listening to a 9:30 update, Baba further commented:

> When the last Munich pact was signed for peace, I had told you definitely there would be a war. It came, and I am glad it has begun—not because I said it would, but because it was inevitable, essential, as a prelude to the great upheaval in the world.
>
> If the war runs its full course, the world will witness a devastation and destruction it has never known. It will spread everywhere and be full of surprises. The devastation and destruction it will bring will change the entire history and map of the world. It will affect even countries far removed from the war zone like India, Persia and Afghanistan.
>
> One thing I know for certain, if this war is carried on with full force, it won't end soon….
>
> My plans were dependent on the declaration of war. They will now be adjusted accordingly.
>
> I may leave all and go into seclusion or I may lock myself up in a room, or begin fasting. Now that you [Europeans] cannot go back to England, you will have to stay wherever and however I keep you. This will all happen before I speak.[67]

Four days after Great Britain entered the war, President Roosevelt declared a position of neutrality for the United States. Baba was not happy with America's stance, observing, "Chamberlain ought to prod that fat chinned full bellied fellow in the stomach with his umbrella."[68]

The Easterners were kept in so strict a seclusion that they were not allowed to listen to the radio, but Baba did have articles about the war read aloud to them in His presence. Rano kept up a subscription to *Time* magazine that she would maintain throughout the war, and Baba sometimes had her read from the most recent issue, while Kitty was assigned the task of reading from the English language newspapers. Both had to remember, when Mehera was present, to substitute "Mrs. Hitler" for Hitler, "Mrs. Mussolini" for Mussolini, and so on, alterations that might have sounded comical had the circumstances not been so alarming.

As a British subject, Donkin was required to register for military duty. Baba told him that it was His preference that His newest recruit remain in India with the ashram. His second choice was for Donkin to carry out his duty in Europe, ironically, where he would be in the greatest danger, but if that did not come to pass, for him to be posted in India. Donkin registered on September 4, but he would not have to report for duty until March 1941.

In mid-September Baba began to impose a series of restrictions on the ashramites, ordering all the furnishings in the Links and the men's bungalow to be removed. He replaced the beds with *charpoys* (rope beds). Some of the women recognized that these changes mirrored the kinds of deprivations people in Europe would soon suffer. On September 21, Elizabeth told Donkin that Baba had said He was assuming immediate "personal charge of the war," calling Hitler "stupid" and Stalin "cunning" and blasting the United States for its continuing refusal to come to Great Britain's aid.[69]

One might observe that Baba listened to the news *religiously*—sometimes every hour on the hour—and He continued to comment on the escalating situation, frequently cutting through predictions for the inevitable devastation and suffering to its ultimate conclusion:

"You cannot imagine what this war is going to bring to all … Everything will change…. It will be a long war and it will cause unparalleled catastrophe all over the world…. In the end there will be no victor, no vanquished. All will be crushed and exhausted. But it will usher in a new order in the world."[70]

As time passed and hostilities escalated, Baba began linking the progress of the war to the breaking of His silence. On October 7 He said: "It is all an enigma, a series of complications that will drive all crazy. No one will know what to do and how to come out of it all. To the eager desire and cry of the world, I will respond—and speak!" The following day He added, "By the 21st, I will decide definitely whether it will be a long war. If so, it will be the greatest war in history. If not, then global revolutions will occur."[71]

Baba said that Italy might soon join the allies, and that despite the supreme reality that England and Germany were "spiritually … all one," in the realm of maya, Hitler and his Nazi regime were no more than "gangsters" who would have to be deposed. He also predicted that England, France, and Italy would eventually triumph, "if America doesn't come in with peace overtures and spoil it all."[72] Baba also predicted that Stalin would support Hitler with weapons, money, and soldiers, and that in exchange he would demand Hitler's acquiescence; but, He added, Stalin would be defeated by the allies, reaffirming that "all dictators must go." At around this same time Baba acquired a new coat that Donkin observed to look very much like the one Stalin was seen wearing in photographs.[73] Baba called His mood at this time "volcanic." Further disrupting His frame of mind was the state of His health, which had begun to deteriorate again in early October and which Donkin attributed to the probability that the war was about to "take a turn for the worse."[74] When peace was not achieved by October 21, Baba embarked upon a fast, taking two cups of tea daily, and one of the men joined Him each day. Two days later He reiterated, "The whole world will be involved in the war."[75]

ONLY WHEN YOU LOVE 100 PERCENT

While Baba immersed Himself in the direction of the war, *mast* work, and creation of the Universal Spiritual Center, the women settled into life in the Links bungalow. Baba had handed out work assignments just after they moved in. He placed Katie and Manu in charge of the kitchen. As always, Mehera prepared Baba's meals: "I had the furniture removed [from the upstairs dressing room] and converted it into a small kitchen, where I cooked for Baba on a Criterion and a Primus stove. I had a maid, who brought burning coals upstairs for the *seegri* [charcoal stove]. I put Baba's rice to steam on it, so it wouldn't burn."[76] The women cleaned their own quarters. Meheru was responsible for Baba's laundry; she and Walu tidied His room and made the bed. Meheru and Manu were responsible for heating His bath water every morning.

Meherwan recalled an incident illustrating the manner in which Baba rooted out any ill feelings or jealousies the women might be harboring toward one another:

> My sister Meheru was given the duty of attending to Baba's personal work, like washing His clothes, cleaning His room, and all such personal items. So Manu says that one day Baba suddenly came up from behind and held her and she was a little nervous, and Baba says, "Do you feel anything that I have given all my personal work to your sister Meheru, and you have to do this kitchen work?"
>
> So Manu … said, "No, Baba, this is your order, and I feel that what I do here will please you most and I am very happy about it. I didn't even have any thought about not being given any personal work." And Baba seemed to be extremely pleased with the answer, because there were some in the ashram who would be a little cross if they didn't do Baba's personal work. So Baba wanted to

> know—of course He knew everybody's mind and always wanted us to speak it out.[77]

Meanwhile, Rano set up a studio in a small cottage near the main bungalow and began a standing portrait of Baba wearing a turban and scarf. Later, when the *mast* ashram outgrew its compound, Baba would requisition the cottage for the *masts* and she would have to move to a new location.*

The population of the Bangalore ashram rose and fell with the addition and subtraction of individuals as well as entire families from all over India whom Baba called for short or extended visits. Chief among them was His mother Shireenmai, who arrived on the first of September. Baba had been warning the women that a bomb was soon to drop on Bangalore, and when Shireenmai arrived, He said that it had fallen. As might be predicted, the bomb landed on the kitchen; Shireenmai's dietary requests were a never-ending source of frustration for the cooks, and she again pushed the ashram menu to its limits.

Baba had told Katie and Manu that they could accommodate His mother's wishes up to a point, because, He explained, "She is the Avatar's mother, so if she gets upset, even I will not be able to calm her down."[78] As Meherwan later recalled:

> At that time the regimen of food was extremely strict, very strict vegetarian food. And there were no spices—only salt and pepper … very bland food…. And Baba's mother had a taste for good food…. So … one day she tells my sister Manu … "Look, I am sick of this food every day. I would like to have some nice spicy pathia."† Pathia is a sort of vegetable sauce, you know, which the Parsees

* Although she never mentioned them, Rano must have toted her paints, easel, and canvases (including *The Ten Circles* painting that she worked on intermittently) rolled or stretched throughout the tours: more items that she had to find room for inside the bus.

† *Pathia* is a traditional Persian curry loved by Parsis. Its seasonings consist of chilis (spicy), lime and tamarind (sour), and *jaggery* (sweet).

prepare, mainly with dal and rice. It's a nice combination—sour, sweet, with spices and vegetables, and it's a thoroughly enjoyable dish….

So Manu … was able to get the little additional spices that were required and prepared a nice, tasty pathia, and then at lunchtime, she brought a tray with the dish prepared…. And she [Shireenmai] says, "Yes, I smell something good! … Today I'll have a nice feast!"

So [Manu] places it on the table and Mother very impatiently opens the lid and she is very into it! And as she's taking the first morsel, … there enters Baba. And at that time, although Baba was silent, He would utter this sound of "Ooh! Ooh!" like that. So from the distance He says, "Ooh!" And everybody turned, and there was Baba in the doorway, and He says, "I smell something unusual! What's cooking?"

So Manu says, "Baba, Mother asked me to prepare pathia for her."

"What? Pathia? [On] whose orders did you do that?"

"Baba, Mother asked."

"Don't you know My mother is not well—that you shouldn't do such things? Let Me see what you've done," and He had a little taste of it. "You've prepared this spicy thing for My mother? You have no sense in your head?" He catches hold of her from the collar of her shirt [and] Shireenmai … started shouting, "Merog! Leave that girl alone! It's I who ordered her to get that pathia for me. I was sick of this food daily!"

And Baba says, "Mother, you are not well! Doctors advised you not to eat such things, and it's My order besides that no spices—how has this happened?" And then He was just going on like this [to Manu], "You are

> the one who is killing My mother! You have no care for My mother! You don't know what you are doing!" And Manu was very scared, but then He goes back and says, "Let me see how it is," and then He took one morsel after the other and finished it all. And then Baba's mother says, "Merog, I know You like pathia. I know Your taste. If You had told me I'd have asked her to prepare extra for You! Must You come and eat mine?"[79]

Donkin observed that "Baba seems to find His mother rather a nuisance: She always complains about her body; she says she doesn't sleep, but she snores all night."[80] Baba and the women celebrated her sixty-first birthday on September 25. Missing from the menu were pomfret, eggplant, and pathia.

Other new ashramites came for visits of varying periods of time. These included Nargis and Arnavaz Dadachanji; Dr. Ghani's family; Kharmen Masi* and her three sons, Homi, Sarosh, and Merwan; Katie's older sister Goher;† Sarosh and Viloo, accompanied by their young son, Merwan; and Freiny's girls, little Meheru and Naggu, who joined their little brother Jangoo. Baba also called His aunt, Piroja Mami. Many of the men also continued to come and go, including Baba's brothers Jalbhai and Adi Jr., as well as Adi K., Pendu, and Drs. Deshmukh and Ghani.

The ashram now counted three children among its permanent residents—Jangoo, Meherwan, and Sarvar, and Baba had to make arrangements for the older children's continued education. He enrolled Meherwan in St. Joseph's High School, and Sarvar in Good Shepherd school for girls. Both were run by Catholic missions

* Kharmen Masi and her three sons were among Baba's earliest devotees from Bombay, and all three boys attended Meher Ashram School. Baba told her that she had been Buddha's mother, and that in seven hundred years she would be the next Avatar's father.

† Goher Rusi Irani (August 3, 1916–June 30, 2004) had just entered medical school in 1938 when Katie joined the First Blue Bus Tour. She completed her studies, and in 1947 Baba called her permanently. She joined Drs. Donkin and Nilu in caring for Baba and the ashramites, and Baba chose her as one His four women Companions during the New Life.

and lessons were conducted in English, so there was an additional learning curve. It was often Elizabeth's responsibility to deliver Meherwan and Sarvar to and from school in her Buick, which, to Sarvar, felt like riding in a Rolls Royce. "Elizabeth had her own car," Meherwan recalled, "and I remember it had a horn which had a musical tone to it and we would just press it when she would not be there and enjoy ourselves."[81]

Meherwan made the most of his youthful status and took advantage of having the room next to Baba: "I would get up in the morning beforehand and would bow down to His feet as He was going [up] to Mehera's room. He would then embrace me and go up. That was my privilege as a child living in the ashram with Baba."[82] After school he had the run of the compound, except for the area set aside for the *masts* and Baba's seclusion work.

But Sarvar's experience of Baba was different from Meherwan's. To her, Baba was like the "head of a family"—albeit a very large one—and it would be many years before she experienced Him as God.[83] Sometimes she misbehaved; once Baba had to give her a few whacks after she pressed a button that controlled all the power in the bungalow and the Links suddenly went dark. When Baba asked her why she had turned off all the lights she innocently protested, "I didn't! I only pressed this button!"[84]

As always, Baba attended to the finest details of the women's lives. On October 14 He handed out what Mani delicately referred to as "toilet provisions," meant to last six months.[85] So many women were living in such close quarters in the Links that He ordered them to pay close attention to their health. Drs. Nilu and Donkin had brought all of the medical supplies from Meherabad to set up a small dispensary with the intention of opening it to those in need of free care in Bangalore, but in the end their only patients were ashramites.

Four of the women—Norina, Nonny, Irene, and one unnamed Easterner—had contracted malaria in late August from bites they had

gotten at the mosquito-infested dak bungalow in Sholapur. Donkin treated them with quinine and plasmoquine, a quinine derivative that relieves pain and inflammation. Poor Irene seemed to careen from one illness to another, having barely recovered from her bout with tonsillitis before being diagnosed with malaria. She was well enough, however, to join in her twenty-third birthday celebration on September 22.

All the restrictions regarding contact between the men and women that had been enforced at Meherabad continued to be observed in Bangalore. However, because they could not interact directly with most of the women, Nilu and Donkin could not treat them when they were ill, so Baba made Rano and Mansari responsible for communicating any health issues to them. Compounding Baba's restrictions were language barriers among the Easterners. "When Dowla [Baidul's older daughter] fell ill," *Lord Meher* records, "the residents formed a language-chain, for Dowla was only fluent in the Persian dialect Dari. Dowla explained her indisposition to Soonamasi in Dari; Soonamasi retold it to Mansari in Gujarati; Mansari recounted it to Nilu in Marathi; and Nilu would explain it to Don [Donkin] in English!"[86] A diagnosis and instructions were then communicated back to the patient along this multilingual medical brigade.

Near the end of October the women experienced such a serious outbreak of diarrhea that Donkin called the Bangalore Health Officer to come and examine the drains in the Links. When the weather turned cold sooner than expected, Baba, as well as seven of the women and two of the men, fell ill with fevers, and He began insisting that everyone wear coats when going outside—even if only for a few minutes. However Baba did not allow His own 102-degree temperature to interfere with His work.

Spreading germs were the least of their problems. The proximity of so many women living in the Links meant that tempers and misunderstandings erupted fairly regularly, and moods also continued to be an issue. Rano recalled once when Kitty succumbed to one of her sulks and went off to be alone without telling anyone where she was going:

> We looked high and low in the compound, in all the rooms in all the houses and nowhere could Kitty be found. And we knew that Kitty wouldn't go off the property…. So at last somebody had the idea to look in this little grass hut which had been built for Baba … and sure enough, there was Kitty in there, very moody and sulking, so she was coaxed to come back and Baba, of course, wooed her out of her bad mood and she was all right….
>
> We all went through that sometime or another. Sometimes it used to be just because one had such an overwhelming feeling for Baba that somehow you couldn't always express [it]. Take myself, for instance. If I felt something very much, and I would want to give vent to it, or show it, my only way of hiding it was to be abrupt and gruff with other people. Everybody used to think that I was a sort of nasty-tempered individual, but really, underneath it all, I wasn't, but it was a surface thing to hide what I was feeling underneath, because I really didn't like to express what I really felt about things….
>
> Sometimes you would do something that would cause displeasure in Baba's face—oh, terrible! … Oh, the hours that I wept over something that I felt I'd disappointed Baba about.[87]

On one occasion Baba became so angry with Rano that He told her, "I never want to see your face again!" He was so emphatic that Rano believed Him. "Oh God!" she thought. "Baba's going to send me off tomorrow."[88] She observed in hindsight:

> So many in the ashram have said that it is either a feast or a famine with Baba. If so, then traveling with Baba was the famine and the halts were the feasts. "The Links" bungalow at Bangalore … attested to the fact that Baba

> settled on a large scale. Seemingly, then, we would have all the comforts we missed on the road. But with Baba comforts could become nuisances and hardships, blessings. In the ashram, doing for Baba meant that the "I" no longer mattered. Daily life, either on the road or during the halts, was not our own. It was Baba's. Having come to Baba meant that both the happy times and the hardships were His. For those in the ashram, there was only this: obey Baba implicitly, and be cheerful.[89]

Fortunately, Baba ensured that the women played as well as worked. "At the moment," Kitty recalled, "He is very keen that we should take exercise and we have to be out playing, walking, cycling or occupied in some outdoor pursuit between 6:30–7:30 a.m. and 4:30–6:00 p.m. Baba is with us sometimes in the afternoon. We Westerners really enjoy the new order."[90]

A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF THE BANGALORE ZOO

In addition to their other assignments, the women were responsible for the day-to-day care of the animals that had been brought from Meherabad. While Lucky and Kippy had traveled with Baba and the women, "a disciple was specially delegated by Baba to bring the other animals in the train," Elizabeth wrote in a letter to a friend dated October 8, 1939, "namely, Lily, the pet gazelle; Bingo and Jingo, the two dogs which we have had since puppies at Jubblepore; Nutty and Gutty, the pigs which I brought up at Meherabad since they were ten days old and are now most tame and run to me from any part of the garden here; [and] Bundy and Dundy, a pair of reddish monkeys that are quite tame but always escape and create excitement."[91] She went on to describe the charms of several additions made after the group settled in Bangalore:

> Snowie, the white rabbit, was really the first pet which Baba brought one day in a small bag and no one could guess what it really was, moving inside, until He took out this little ball of fur, so soft and tender. She would rather any time be petted than eat. In fact all these animals which come under Baba's roof have a unique loving quality. Now Silkie, the black and white cat, has been added to the 'zoo' since our arrival here. She is the size of a kitten but they say she is three years old and a Hyderabad cat, which remains small. Kippy and she sleep in my room and have become great friends, if Silkie does not come up on my bed when Kippy is sleeping at the foot! Also the two 'traveled birds' of mine are hung up high in the bathroom and hold their concerts when the water runs, which has the sound of music to them. So now you see a "bird's-eye" picture of my life in India.[92]

Elizabeth continued to serve as head zookeeper, assisted by Irene. When the zoo acquired a white rooster, Irene recalled, "I asked Baba if I could sleep on the balcony [with the rooster], as the others wouldn't want the cock in the room. Baba said if I slept on the balcony I would get ill, which I did. But He let me."[93] Baba also gave Irene a half-fox-cub, half-wire-haired-terrier puppy that He named Gracie, but Mani misunderstood Irene's thick accent and thought its name was Crazy, perhaps a reference to its peculiar parentage.

Elizabeth also tended a brood of hens, but one day one of them fell into the water after a heavy rain and drowned. Elizabeth brought it to Baba. She was so upset that Baba pretended it was still alive but then died after His having held it. He reassured her by explaining that the hen would "take an advanced form in her next birth [and] the fortunate fowl's burial was performed before Baba with a proper ceremony."[94]

Elizabeth lost her hen but she acquired a peacock after she drove through the bazaar one day and spotted a beautiful specimen strutting

majestically in the street. Baba permitted her to bring the peacock back to the ashram zoo, and He called the bird Moti (Pearl). Mehera recalled that Moti loved being the object of everyone's attention—most especially having his neck scratched, and that "his performances were really unforgettable, especially when witnessed against a backdrop of impending sunset or sunrise."[95] Mani called his tail "a curtain … a cascade, a waterfall, a rainbow of color."[96]

Of all the animals in the zoo, Lucky remained Baba's favorite; the first photographs of Him holding the tiny monkey were taken by Rano in Bangalore. Norina was still responsible for Lucky's day-to-day supervision, although the Jessawala sisters were assigned the not-so-lucky chore of cleaning his cage. When the women knew Baba was coming to see the animals they would take Lucky from his cage and tie him to a tree. "He was very naughty when he was free," Mehera observed.[97] Sarvar recalled taking the monkey for walks—presumably on a leash—and sharing snacks of dates with him.

Meanwhile, Bundy and Dundy the red monkeys broke out of their wire mesh cage and escaped, which turned out to be a relief as they did not like to be confined and were beginning to breed. Nutty and Gutty also bred, producing four piglets, one of which was eaten by a bird. Elizabeth was so concerned for the safety of the remaining three that she insisted upon keeping them in one of the upstairs bedrooms because there were rats on the ground floor. The women fed them milk from a bottle and, later, bread and milk on a plate. Eventually, however, Baba's Muslim landlord, the Dewan's brother, saw the pigs and complained, so Baba gave them to some local lovers as pets, but only after securing a promise that they would be allowed to live out their natural lives.

Baba always found time for the animals. "A little sidelight into Baba's less busy hours," Kitty wrote in a letter to the Backetts, "is the interest He takes in the zoo which grows from day to day. Baba personally supervises the animals and says what they are to eat and when they are to be free, as of course all cannot have full liberty at the same

moment…. It is lovely to watch Baba petting each in turn. Baba is very tender and considerate with the animal world as with the human and they can play and tease Baba as none of us is privileged to do."[98]

NONNY, BABA'S LOVER

One of the most extraordinary occurrences during Baba's sojourn in Bangalore was the death of Nonny Gayley, who at the age of sixty-four was the eldest of the women accompanying Baba. Although Nonny had been feeling poorly for a month, none of the women suspected that anything was amiss, so her decline felt sudden and unexpected.

Nonny suffered from arteriosclerosis—hardening of the arteries—and she had been growing increasingly weak since the beginning of the tour. No one but Baba understood just how seriously ill she was. Early in the second week of October He asked Rano how she would feel if she lost her mother. Through her tears she replied, "Whatever you decide, Baba."[99] At about the same time, Norina approached Baba to tell Him that they still required one more bed in addition to those that had been brought from Meherabad in order to accommodate new arrivals to the ashram. He told her it would not be needed.

"Nonny had been having quite a bout of arthritis in her hands and feet," Rano observed, "but she was always very stoical about it. She was taking a slight turn for the better as we began to pack to go down to Mysore with Baba [on October 19]. She was taking an interest in what I should pack for her when suddenly her health took a turn for the worse. One night she was mildly unwell and the next morning she was in an oxygen tent."[100]

Donkin also had noted that Nonny's arthritis seemed to be improving, but he and Dr. Nilu were called to her side at five o'clock on the morning of the fourteenth, where they found her "in heart distress, restless, pale, cold extremities, blue lips, and … pain in the abdomen. We gave heart stimulants. Later in the day we gave oxygen, but she got

steadily worse."[101] They told Rano that her mother would probably not live through the day.

Meanwhile, Baba had gone out to view the construction site for the Universal Spiritual Center at Byramangala. When the time came for Him to return to the Links it was raining heavily and the car became mired in mud on the way back. Everyone, including Baba, got out to push the automobile back onto the road, after which Baba began to ask Chanji the time every few minutes. At 6:40 PM, Baba gestured that Nonny had died. But Nonny was still alive, and when Baba entered the Links, Donkin and Nilu hurried to tell Him how she was. Norina called them to Nonny's room, where they found her taking her last breath. Baba gently closed her eyes. She sighed deeply and her head fell to one side. Baba had never before been physically present when any of His close ones died. Rano believed that her mother's sigh was a sign that she was just waiting for His touch, and then, "There was only a shell there; Nonny was with Baba."[102] Nonny's last words were "What beauty! What beauty!"[103]

Later that evening Donkin and Nilu "moved Nonny in her bed into a small room, where Kitty placed a lamp, and some burning sandalwood, with flowers, and a photo of Baba to be laid at her head by Baba's order." They also contacted the local health officer to arrange for her cremation the following day.

"Next morning," Donkin continued,

> Nilu and I dressed the body in a pink silk nightdress, and wrapped it in a sheet: Rano had asked for the head to be covered, which we did with a handkerchief. Then Norina and others covered the wrapped body in flowers—very beautiful to look at really. We then lifted the body on to the stretcher, and by Rano's wish, as the motor hearse had glass sides, covered the … body with an Indian coverlet.

> We then drove to the cremation ground about 4 miles, on the Mysore Road, in the country, with hills all round, v. beautiful. A special wood pyre had been made, just outside the Hindu cremation ground, and we all helped carry the stretcher to the pyre. About 30 of us came, women and men in the bus and other cars. We then put more flowers on the body, which was then covered with logs of wood.[104]

The fire was lit. "After the cremation had been going on for quite a while," Rano recalled, "I said I wanted to go back, so we left." When one of the other Westerners had the audacity to lecture her for wanting to leave while "Nonny was still there," Rano replied, "Nonny's not there…. Nonny's body is there."[105]

"Somehow," Donkin concluded, "death with Baba doesn't seem to matter. [Nonny] had a very easy death, and just seemed to creep out of her body ever so gently; no doubt Baba's work. Next morning Nilu, Chanji, Elizabeth and I went to collect the ashes; Adi has taken them in a box to Meherabad, where they are to be buried, near Baba's own future tomb."[106] On October 15, Mani noted Nonny's passing in her diary, writing, "Darling Nonny was taken home to Meherabad (to be placed by her Beloved's Dome in the beloved land of the glorious sunsets)."[107] Nonny's ashes were interred on Meherabad Hill in December 1939, in a tomb that Baba had Sarosh order for her, inscribed, simply, "Nonny, Baba's Lover."•

Baba said that at the moment of Nonny's death He had given her *mukti*—liberation. He had, in fact, promised it to her in a letter dated December 22, 1933, when He wrote, "You have grown very dear to me,

• Nonny's story has an extraordinary postscript: Her son Clifford was concerned that Nonny died because she had not received the kind of advanced medical attention she would have had access to in the West. Donkin wrote to him explaining that he and Dr. Nilu had done everything possible to see to her care and comfort, but Clifford was not satisfied and demanded that Nonny's ashes be brought to America. Rano was distraught at having to disturb her mother's remains but Baba told her not to worry. Nonny's tomb was opened and Rano brought the urn with her when she accompanied Baba to the West in 1952. The ashes of Estelle C. Gayley are now interred in the West Nottingham Cemetery in Cecil County, Maryland, next to the grave of her husband Henry. The huge tomb that Baba had built for her ashes is empty, a reflection of the gift of mukti He gave her when she died. (*Mehera–Meher* 3:29)

Nonny, and one day I will make you realize the Goal, the greatness and perfection of which you can never imagine."[108] Nonny's love for Baba was so deep that He called her Kemali (Great One).

Baba told Rano, "Nonny was one of My greatest lovers…. It is because of her great share of timely contributions, among others, that the center plan could be presently started. Funds will come, and come in plenty, but to the dear, departed soul goes the credit of starting My work that is to serve mankind's greatest need. I am happy her dear name will be connected and perpetuated with this unique institution."[109]

"Nonny's relationship with Baba was different from the relationships the rest of us had with him," Rano recalled. "Baba would needle us, pick holes in us, but never once did he do that with Nonny. Whatever was Baba's wish was her wish, and Baba never found fault with her," and, like Mehera, "Nonny had no need for the tests and trials."[110] "Nonny wanted to be pals with me," she observed on another occasion, "but also wanted me to respect her. She was the antithesis of me —feminine and delicate. Her relationship with Baba was always separate from the rest of ours. Baba never tested or teased her, perhaps because of her past births, or her short connection with Baba in this life [one week shy of five years]. Baba always handled her as something fragile that might break—but Baba's wish was her pleasure."[111]

Chanji's column in the November 1939 *Meher Baba Journal* included a stirring obituary:

> Widow of a distinguished American lawyer, [Nonny Gayley] was a model of American manners, integrity, courtesy and exactitude. Though over 60 when she joined the Master first and very delicate of constitution, she had an amazing endurance, and loved to work untiringly on her machine, typing all the private and important discourses and explanations of the Master, which she also took special care to note down.

For one who had lived all her life in the civilized West, and enjoyed all the modern amenities of life of a well-to-do family for over half a century, the readiness with which she accepted the simplicity of a life in an ashram under the Master entitled her to the dignity of a true disciple which she truly was….

The Master's last touch … was like a permit for her to the gateway of Eternity, and the great devotee and lover passed off in perfect peace to the eternal abode of Love and peace.[112]



Estelle Canda Gayley, Baba's Kemali

Nonny was fondly recalled long after her passing. "She wore a dustcoat on the Blue Bus Tours and was like a princess in disguise, a real lady," Mehera reminisced. "She sat with the dustcoat and a silk scarf around her, as if she were sitting in a Mercedes … looking so chic and elegant, as if from Paris, wearing high heels … and [she] had the most charming smile."[113] Mansari added a tribute as well, in the form of this disarming non-sequitur: "Nonny had so many different pairs of shoes and hats, but she never said no to anything Baba asked of her."[114]

Kitty observed that despite whatever grief the women might have been feeling following Nonny's death, "Baba will not have us sorrowful."[115]

MYSORE, CITY OF PALACES

Not long before Nonny's passing Baba had decided that a break from ashram life was in order. The women's only outings since arriving in Bangalore had been to Lal Bagh Botanical Gardens on the first and the sixth and a visit to a dairy farm on the third, where they ambled through the fields. But their next opportunity for sightseeing did not come until He

arranged for a three-night visit to the city of Mysore beginning Thursday, October 19. He wanted them to view the traditional procession that made its way through the city during the Hindu celebration of Dassera.

On October 10 Chanji had contacted the Assistant Engineer, No. 1 Sub-division, Mysore, regarding "amenities at Yelwal bungalow," where Baba intended to stay.[116] The palatial century-old home, which had once served as the official residence of the British governor, now belonged to the Dewan. Preparations for Baba's arrival included access to water, arrangements for Petromax (paraffin) lights, rental of sufficient cots for the large group, and cleaning in readiness for occupancy on the nineteenth. Chanji also ordered catered meals from the Carlton Hotel to be delivered twice daily.

The Dewan ensured that Baba and His party were well accommodated. "Executives on special duty during these festivities left nothing undone … for such a large group as ours," Chanji observed. The women's seclusion was of paramount importance. In a letter to the officials assisting with preparations for Baba's visit, Chanji wrote:

> I shall now thank you to arrange for our group to see the Dussara [*sic*] procession. As you are already informed, amongst the group of ladies, there are a few who have been observing strict 'seclusion' for years for spiritual reasons. The place selected must therefore be both private and quiet, giving a proper view of the procession. It is only on this special occasion that Shri Baba has allowed permission to the select few observing this strict discipline to see this special procession which is so highly spoken of all over and unique in its grandeur and beauty. We have already mentioned this to Sir Mirza and he has told us that he will instruct the authorities concerned….
>
> Shri Meher Baba greatly appreciates it and wishes me to convey His blessings to you both and your assistants who co-operated in making these arrangements.[117]

Baba's entourage departed Bangalore at 3:00 PM on the nineteenth. Elizabeth chauffeured Baba and some of the Easterners in the Buick, while Donkin transported the remaining women in the Blue Bus. Jalbhai and Eruch traveled in the Chevrolet; Pappa, Meherwan, and Gustadji traveled by rail the following day. Chanji and Pendu were already in the city, awaiting Baba's arrival.

Soon after they set out on the drive, Baba ordered Elizabeth to stop off at the road leading into the site for the new center so that Mehera could view it from a distance; it would be her only visit. Continuing on, they reached their lodgings in Mysore at 6:00 PM. The grand bungalow was situated on a secluded property located nearly ten miles outside the city, with a view of the Nilgiri Hills to the west. It was so large that the men were able to occupy one wing without compromising the seclusion of the women, who occupied the other.

"Mysore, 'the Garden City,' is always beautiful," Chanji observed,

> but during the Dasara [*sic*] festival, which is the year's greatest event, it assumes quite a different aspect. It is a veritable fairyland on earth. The panoramic view from the Chamuda [*sic*] Hills at sunset with its golden reflection of the palatial buildings and also the Raj's palace exquisitely illuminated at night are sights quite unforgettable and scarcely seen elsewhere in the East … when fully illuminated with myriads of colored lights playing upon the endless fountains. It is a veritable *Brindiban** [*sic*] brought on earth.[118]

Donkin called Mysore "a fine city, properly Indian," and Baba ensured the women enjoyed a proper visit, arranging through the Dewan to bring them to a number of sites when the fewest people would be present.[119] As with many first visits to a city, their first outing was to the Mysore Zoo on the morning of the next day. It was one of the

* "Forest of *Tulsi* plants in which Lord Krishna played his flute, which attracted the Gopis and even animals. It has thus a special and sacred significance and heavenly aspect."

biggest, most modern, and most beautiful zoos they had seen. As Meherwan recalled, "All the animals, including the big cats—the lions and tigers—were kept free with a deep moat between them and the visitors."[120] It was here that the Easterners had their first glimpse of giraffes. Mani recalled: "Just as we were entering the zoo we saw these looooooonnnng 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."[121]

But what Khorshed recalled of the visit was that she wore a pair of high heels instead of more practical shoes, and partway through the zoo one of the heels broke off:

> I must have been mad…. It must have been very funny to watch the crooked way I was walking, but I did not want Baba to know that I had broken my heel…. So I tried to hide by being the last person in the group.
>
> This went on for what seemed like a long time. I couldn't enjoy the zoo. All the time, my mind was on my heel and the way I was walking. Finally, Baba said to me, "Why are you staying last in line? Come up here with us. Why are you lagging behind?"
>
> At last I had to tell Baba, "My heel has come off and I can't walk properly."
>
> I had made a mistake … but Baba didn't scold me. He just asked, "Why did you wear those shoes?" That was all. But I had to suffer the whole time. I will never forget that day. Every time I see a zoo I remember.[122]

That evening Baba and the women ventured out for the ninety-mile drive to Krishna Sagar Lake and Brindaban Gardens to see the illuminated fountains that Mehera had so enjoyed during her previous visit. The garden was planted in terraces, and "at the very top

was a huge peacock made out of colored lights that would flash on and off," Meherwan recalled. "There were waterfalls with colored lights in the bottom, flowing down on one side of the gardens. All in all, it was an unforgettable sight. At night it looked like a paradise … a truly beautiful sight."[123]

The outing was made memorable for the men when Chanji got into an accident in which the front mudguard (fender) of the Auburn (the Jessawala's automobile) was dented. "Chanji nearly had a fight with the driver of the other car," Donkin noted, "and Baramshah *[sic*—Pappa] lost his temper with a harmless bicyclist whom he tried to push off his cycle: it was really rather funny to see."[124]

The following evening Baba and the women went out in the bus to visit the seven-story Sri Chamundeshwari Temple atop Chamundi Hill, which, He explained, represented the seven planes of consciousness.• They viewed the city lights from the summit. And as no visit to the city would be complete without seeing Mysore Palace, Baba took the women there that same evening. The palace was so brightly illuminated that Donkin described it as "fairly encrusted with bulbs."[125] From there Baba and the women drove through the streets to see the city lights once more.

• Sri Chamundeshwari Temple is located at the 3,489-foot summit of Chamundi Hill. Although the site can be reached by bus, many pilgrims ascend on foot via a staircase of more than a thousand steps. Baba brought the Easterners to see it during their 1936 visit.

Baba also took the women out to view an exhibition at the Mysore Museum. He had asked Norina to make special arrangements for a private tour using the influence of the Dewan, and once the date had been chosen, announcements were placed in newspapers to alert the public that the museum would be closed. But the day before the arranged visit, Baba decided that He wished to tour the museum immediately, and when He and the women arrived they found it was teeming with visitors.

"Follow me closely and don't lag behind!" Baba warned. "Look down and walk fast." Clapping His hands for them to follow,

He rushed them through the galleries without a glance. "Baba was striding through," Mani later recalled, "and every now and then, He turned around and said, 'Hurry up, you laggards. Come on!' In the end, we were practically trotting." The women who had been accompanying Him since the beginning of the First Blue Bus Tour knew by now that this was how He worked, but Shireenmai became exasperated. "Merog," she asked, "have you brought us here for sightseeing or racing? How can we see anything if we have to keep our eyes down and run after You?"[126]

According to *Lord Meher*, Baba replied:

> "To show you that all this is a dream and only I am the Truth!" …
>
> "If all is a dream," she said, "then why do You want to show it to us?"
>
> "Without first seeing it, how will you know it is a dream? I want to show it to you as a dream. But in spite of My telling you that it is a dream, you want to stick to the dream and get more entangled in it. That is why I prevent you from doing so."[127]

Mehera–Meher records that Baba chastised Shireenmai, saying that if she couldn't keep up, she should go sit in the bus!

The culmination of Dassera was a gala ceremonial parade through the city that took place during the afternoon of Sunday, October 22. Baba had planned His visit to Mysore to coincide with this event, in which a procession of state elephants is led by one that carries a statue of the goddess Chamundeshwari up the long ascent to the temple on Chamundi Hill. The women viewed the parade from the private, enclosed balcony of Unani Hospital, for which "suitable arrangements" had again been made with the assistance of the ever-accommodating Dewan.[128]



The festive Dassera procession, led by the Maharaja of Mysore, seated in a howda atop a state elephant

"It was gorgeous," Mehera recalled. "All the men on beautiful horses, four by four, all in colorful livery. The road was full of them. A chariot of silver came, drawn by a pair of matching snow-white oxen. It belonged to the Maharaja of Mysore. Next came an enormous, elaborately decorated elephant. There was a howdah on one elephant, fashioned partly out of gold, with the Maharaja himself sitting in it—all jeweled."[129] Donkin called it "lousy with gold and amazing colors."[130] The Maharaja of Mysore, HH Maharaja Sri Sir Nalwadi Krishna Raja Wadiyar IV, who sponsored the procession, was seated atop an official state elephant. Baba told the women, "The Maharaja of Mysore is very

lucky that I am watching his parade, but he will not live to see the next Dassera."[131] Indeed, the Maharaja died on August 3, 1940, fewer than ten months later.•

Spectators had come from all over Mysore State to witness the grand event. "This gave the Master the opportunity which He likes to work spiritually in the midst of vast crowds," Chanji noted, "and seems to be one of the principal reasons of His visit on this particular occasion."[132] Meherwan later observed, "Baba would want to be there. All this crowd was there. Most of His work, you see, would be with crowds." Baba's Universal work was accomplished either with large groups of people or else in strict seclusion: there was, Meherwan insisted, "no midway."[133]

Baba's entourage departed Mysore on Monday, October 23, and Baba treated the women to coconut water on the way back to Bangalore. They reached the Links at around 6:00 PM. This was the last extended outing the women would enjoy until January.

• Krishna Raja Wadiyar IV was so beloved that his reign came to be called Rama Rajya (Lord Ram's Kingdom). Gandhi called him Rajarishi (Saintly King). The British considered his kingdom to be "the best administered state in the world," the highest praise they were willing to offer. Krishna IV promoted rural development and was a patron of education and the arts, and although he sought the eradication of poverty, he was, at the time of his death, one of the wealthiest men in the world. His passing was marked in the August 1940 issue of the *Meher Baba Journal*:

> It is with profound regret, we take note of the passing away of H. H. the Maharaja Sri Krishnaraja Wadiyar Bahadur, G.C.S.I., G.B.E., of Mysore on 3rd August 1940. We wish to express our heartfelt sympathy to his dear ones and his beloved subjects in their sad bereavement and add to the already world-wide tributes paid to his revered memory by saying that
>
> *"They never die who have loved and lived for others."*

MARGARET, BABA'S DANCER

Nearly four months earlier, in a letter dated July 4, 1939, Baba had conveyed an order for Margaret Craske and Delia DeLeon to join Him in India if Great Britain declared war on Germany:

> Dearest Margaret and Delia,
>
> The following contents are according to Baba's instructions and orders:
>
> (1) If war breaks out involving England then you, Margaret and Delia, come immediately to Me here. You come any way that is best: *by air or by boa*t; via America

and Pacific; or by Africa or by boat from London, or from whatever port you can find the most suitable.

(2) Christina [McNaughton] and Minta [Toledano] can also come if they would like. Baba would love both of them to come. But for you and Delia there is no option.

Once again, if war should break out and England be brought into it, then you and Delia must come to Me in India immediately. This is My order.

All My love,
M. S. Irani[134*]

By July 1939 it had become patently clear that Hitler was ignoring the terms of the Munich Agreement. But England's posture of appeasement had become so deeply ingrained in the minds of the British that Margaret did not know what to think when she received Baba's letter. "At that time few people seemed to be convinced that war was inevitable," she later recalled. "Therefore when war did break out, the shock was tremendous. On the night that the announcement was made by Chamberlain on the wireless, the next speaker after the prime minister gave a list of 'may nots,' and among them was that no one was to leave England!"[135]

Baba reiterated His instructions to Margaret and Delia in a cable dated September 3, the day Great Britain declared war on Germany. When Delia went to the Home Office to request authorization to travel she was denied permission. But Margaret had been ordered to escort Rustom and Freiny's son Falu home from the English boarding school where he was enrolled and she knew that Falu offered the only hope she had of obeying Baba's order. "Every morning, feeling sick and terrible," she recalled, "I joined a queue, definitely about a mile long,

* Margaret later marveled at the fact that this letter was among the few of her possessions that survived the war.

and got into the passport office, only to be told that I could not leave the country. An occasional cable from Baba insinuating that I was not a good disciple did not help matters."[136]

But one morning, a "crack in the wall" appeared, when an official, who thought he recalled having met Margaret somewhere, passed her along to another person who might be able to help. Margaret called this second official "slightly stupid" and she used her status as Falu's guardian to acquire a travel permit by saying that the boy had to return home due to the war and could not possibly be allowed to travel alone.[137] She left the official with the distinct impression that Falu was the son of a maharaja.

Margaret secured two berths on a ship sailing from Liverpool. Falu was fourteen—taller than Margaret and perfectly capable of traveling on his own, and when he and Margaret approached an unpleasant customs official to show their passports the man demanded, "And where is the little boy? … That little boy could take himself to India." Margaret was now neatly trapped. "Two orders— (1) 'Don't tell lies' (2) 'Get to India'—met head on, and I lied. I looked terribly important, took a risk, and said 'I have special permission from the Home Office to take this child to India.'"[138] Her ruse was a success. Baba turned the key and Margaret and Falu were allowed to board the ship.

In the end, nothing about Margaret and Falu's journey to India could be characterized as smooth sailing: It took them four days just to get out of the Mersey River into open water, after which they had to sail without lights at night in order not to draw the attention of enemy warships and German U-boats. More alarming still, the ship was armed with a single anti-aircraft gun. But it soon joined a flotilla, escorted by French naval vessels and fighter planes, until it reached the Suez Canal.

Even greater than Margaret's worries that the ship might be torpedoed were her concerns about contacting Baba. She had had no opportunity to cable Him during the last hurried moments before departure and her funds were running out (although she had stashed a ten-pound note in each of her shoes). Not until October 17 did she learn where the

boat would dock, and she cabled from Port Said to say that she and Falu would be disembarking in Colombo, Ceylon, at the end of the month.

When at last Margaret and Falu landed in Colombo they were met by Swamiji, whom she described as "a charming old Indian disciple,"* who promptly appropriated what little money she had left for train fare to Bangalore. "So I went penniless to my Master," she concluded, "whose loving welcome wiped out everything that had happened in the effort to get to Him. It was seven years before I again left Him."[139†]

Only in retrospect did Margaret recognize Baba's foresight regarding the manner in which He had so deftly arranged her exit from England, when He had made her responsible for Falu two years before: "It turned out that this [Falu's guardianship] was not the important job, although the second and really important job [getting to India] could not have been carried out if the first one had not existed."[140]

Margaret and Falu reached Bangalore on Wednesday, November 1. Kitty observed that Margaret arrived "looking wonderfully well, happy and bright. She looks really blooming and I hope she will keep fit."[141] Margaret joined the rest of the women in the Links and began reestablishing relationships with those she had previously known or met. But the core assemblage of women had now been together for fourteen months—plenty of time for the evolution of a cohesive group that lived and worked together more or less peaceably and efficiently. "Since I was the last arrival at the ashram, all the jobs had been given out," Margaret recalled. "So at first I was just an outsider, hovering on the edges of an already integrated system of work."[142]

To help assimilate her into the ashram, Baba assigned Margaret the task of reading aloud from Bangalore's English-language paper,

* The "charming old Indian disciple" was C. V. Ramanujacharlu, a cousin of Sampath Aiyangar of Madras, who edited the *Meher Gazette* before it became the *Meher Baba Journal*. Ramanujacharlu met Baba in 1930 when he was 58, and joined Baba's ashram seven years later in May 1937. Baba nicknamed him Swamiji and immediately put him to work in the *mast* ashram.

† "[Margaret] said that by the end of her stay in India, she had one well-worn outfit, her mug was badly chipped, and her spoon had a broken handle, but they were the only things she could call her own." (*Dilruba Days*, 51)

but He ordered her to substitute "So and So" for the names of all the principal players in the war.[143] This made the articles more or less unintelligible, and the other Westerners became irritated, blaming her for creating confusion. When Baba saw what was happening, He allowed her to read the men's names as long as He was present, thus sparing her the ire of the other women.

Soon after, Margaret was added to the roster of official zookeepers. "[T]hey didn't think I was capable of looking after the human beings," she quipped.[144] Her first charges were "two pathetic small black puppies. Breed unknown, one male and one female…. They were quite darling, and once they had been fed, bathed, and their fleas removed, Sunny and Bunny, Baba's names for them, became part of the ashram animal family." Over time Baba made Margaret responsible for more of the animals, including Lily, "a beautiful and snobbish creature" who had enough respect for Baba and the women that "she never tried to butt anyone but the garden servants."[145]

In time Margaret became the ashram's physical education instructor, and her first student was Meherwan. "Early morning was exercise session for me," he recalled. "Margaret was my physical teacher, so she would lead me through the paces. I was a little weak in constitution, so Baba said to Margaret that I should be given proper exercise."[146] During the Fourth Blue Bus Tour Margaret would serve as the women's swimming coach, and later Baba would order her to teach them how to wield a *lathi* (a long stick of bamboo reinforced with iron) and practice self-defense.

THE BUSIEST OF ALL IS BABA

Not long after His arrival in Bangalore Baba had renewed the search for a suitable boy, enlisting His brother Jalbhai in the quest. Enjoying more success than most of his predecessors, Jalbhai managed to find five boys who suited Baba so well that He put them to work in the *mast*

ashram. Baba told fourteen-year-old Krishna K. Nair that he had a past connection with Him. He made Krishna one of His personal servants and would soon ask him to assist in the search for *masts*.

On October 1 the men had brought Baba a *mast* from Mangalore, located on the Arabian Sea. Ramshish (Ram's Sword) "gave the first impression of being nothing but hair from the neck up," Donkin wrote, "bushy black hair tied in a bunch on top of his head—bushy black beard and moustache—so that one could see only his nose, and two dazed, bright eyes peeping out between these tangled masses of hair."[147] Baba soon put him to rights with a bath, shampoo, haircut, and shave that revealed an acquiescent, sweetly smelling and smiling, moderate *mast* who possessed some ineffable quality that prompted Baba to keep him in the ashram.

On October 10 Pendu and Nilu brought a *mast* from Belgaum called Phulwala (Flower Man) because he adorned himself with fragrant garlands of gulab, *gulcheri* (tuberose), and *mogra* (jasmine). But despite his benign appearance Phulwala was a jalali *mast*, Donkin recorded, "a dramatic looking man with deep reddish-brown hair, bronze skin, and a look of almost intolerable ecstasy in his eyes, as if the ecstasy might shatter his body into a thousand fragments at any moment."[148]

It is appropriate that Donkin should employ such a simile because Phulwala was a ghous *mast* who could quite literally remove his limbs during the night and reattach them in the morning. Baba said that Phulwala was between the fifth and sixth planes, at a stage where such *masts*' experiences of bliss are so intense that their bodies literally come apart. "Look at Phulwala," Baba told the men, because, "with one slap, he could raise you in an instant to the sixth plane!"[149] Although small in stature the *mast* had an imperious manner and the alarming habit of walking up to people and pointing his index finger directly in their faces as he barked some one-word command. He also made a fairly disturbing practice of chewing slaked lime (calcium hydroxide) tempered with sugar—an addiction that would poison anyone else.[150]

"He never comes out of his room," Kitty observed. "He has an enormous appetite yet is very thin. He never takes exercise but is always well. He eats all day and drinks a lot of tea and smokes and chews tobacco…. Baba loves him very much and spends a lot of time with him."[151] Reclusive at first, Phulwala slowly adapted to life in the *mast* ashram and even became somewhat communicative, telling Eruch that he had suddenly become God-intoxicated one day while drinking a cup of coffee.

Then, on the evening of November 12, Baba sent Eruch and Kaka out on a ten-day reconnaissance mission to help him gather "a nucleus of advanced *masts*," citing Mohammed as His model. He allowed them two very quick tea breaks during the day and a single meal, eaten after sunset. Donkin recorded the kinds of instructions the men received before setting out on such assignments:

> They should, first of all, observe how the local people demonstrated their reverence, and then bear themselves in the same way; they must avoid any action that might upset him, and should ask any steward or disciple about the fads and fancies of the *mast*, and particularly any special thing he was known to enjoy. They should then go and buy something for him, sweetmeats, tea, cigarettes, or whatever might please him, and offer them to him; and finally, with all the arts they knew, they should set out to coax the *mast* to come away with them. There was, however, one injunction, and that was that they were to tell no one, not even the *mast* himself, that Meher Baba had sent them, nor that it was to Meher Baba that they were to bring him.[152]

Eruch and Kaka traveled by rail to Trichinopoly, two hundred miles deeper into South India. There they met a Muslim tongawala and automobile driver named Sardar Saheb, whose pastime it was to

seek out holy men, and who, by acting as their guide and interpreter, became yet another instrument of Baba's work. Sardar Saheb attempted to drive Eruch and Kaka to the town of Nagapattinam (now called Negapatam), but there had been so much rain that the roads were flooded and the fields on each side were completely submerged beneath what Donkin described as "melancholy, wind-wrinkled sheets of water."[153] They left the car in the nearest town and caught the last train before the rail line was washed away in the deluge.

The men eventually located three highly revered *masts* in Nagapattinam, including one called Moti Baba, whom Baba later deemed to be a sixth-plane high *mast*. "A little old man with bright eyes," Moti Baba was dressed in seven sodden coats and seven dripping pairs of trousers which he deftly removed "en bloc" leaving him in "an assortment of undergarments." He could not be persuaded to come with the men, saying that he had "now returned from a visit to the man who had sent them, and that there was, therefore, no need for him to go with them."[154]

There is no definitive mention of the second *mast*, but the third was a sixth-plane saint called Chatti Baba, a former Station Master whom Donkin called "a loveable old man of fresh and simple mien … dressed only in a lungi [and carrying] a small pitcher and a bundle of rags."[155] When the men invited him to accompany them to Bangalore he said he had too much work to do for "his children" and that he might come in a few days.[156] After that he disappeared. A few days became a week, and after eleven days of slogging through torrential rain and Biblical floods, Eruch and Kaka admitted defeat and returned to Bangalore, having traveled nearly six hundred miles with nothing to show for their hard work. Donkin put their experience down to "a spite of fortune that was to dog their footsteps"—in other words, Maya.[157]

By this time it had become impossible to separate the strands of Baba's fasting, seclusion, and work with the *masts* from His management of the war. On November 13, the day after Eruch and Kaka set off in

search of new contacts, He embarked on yet another fast, declaring two days later, "If, during the eleven days of my fast, war does not start in real earnest, or if peace is definitely not considered, and if the present lull continues, then I will continue the fast indefinitely. Otherwise I will stop the fast on the twelfth day," concluding, "The real war has started from November 11th."[158*]

Baba ordered small groups of the men and women to fast with Him each day and ensured that everyone's focus was on the war by having them make bandages. "Whether for use here or in the West we do not know," Kitty observed. "Suffice to say, no one is idle…. The busiest of all is Baba—the first to rise, often at 4:30 a.m., and the last to bed."[159]

Meanwhile, Adolph Hitler had become inarguably the most reviled man stalking the face of the earth, but on November 19 Baba made an extraordinary observation, calling him "a brave man, a great patriot [who] has done wonderful service to his country. But as a human being," He clarified, "he is no good—cruel—hopeless! His treatment of the Jews is most heartless."[160]

The increasing intensity of Baba's work took its toll. As a doctor, Donkin was acutely aware of Baba's physical suffering, but as a disciple, he was also able to capture His moods and the aura of His presence so that his medical observations were infused with his deep love for Baba. On November 3 Donkin had observed, "Baba's condition fluctuates a lot. Sometimes he looks very pale and tired, and at others radiant and gay." Five days later he noted, "Baba was giddy and liverish [flushed] all yesterday, but is better today. He was very beautiful both yesterday and today, quiet and mysterious." "Baba is looking very handsome these days," he wrote two weeks later, "with shining face and eyes."[161]

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* The juxtaposition of this date—the eleventh day of the eleventh month—with an eleven-day *mast* tour and an eleven-day fast suggests a synchronicity left unremarked and unexplained. It was in fact exactly twenty-one years to the day the Allies and Germany signed the Armistice marking the end of the Great War, at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month.

When Eruch and Kaka returned empty-handed from their *mast* tour on November 22, Baba decided to join in the hunt. Citing a need to either "start the war or make peace," He enlisted Gustadji, Eruch, Kaka, and Jalbhai to accompany Him to Negapatam on November 26 so that He might contact Chatti Baba Himself.•* His intention to jump start the war would be fulfilled four days later, when Russia invaded Finland by land and air on November 30. Donkin called Him "awfully pleased."[162] In addition to the four men, Baba also brought the boy Krishna Nair. They traveled by rail to Trichinopoly, proceeding on to Negapatam via taxi for an eleven-hour, nearly ninety-mile drive over flood-damaged roads and bridges. There, they settled into a *dharamshala*.

• It may seem curious that Baba employed the phrase "start the war," given that war had been declared on September 3. But after the dramatic invasion of Poland, which came to be called the Blitzkrieg, Hitler was so slow to act following Britain's declaration of war that the German public disparagingly referred to the following two and a half months as the Sitzkrieg, or "Sit-Down-War." Hitler asserted that the real war commenced on November 12, 1939, blaming his delays on the weather. Great Britain called Hitler's period of hesitation the "Phoney War," while Churchill referred to it as the "Twilight War." Near the end of November 1939 the Soviet Union invaded Finland, setting off the "Winter War."

Unsurprisingly, Baba succeeded where the mandali had failed, and He soon spotted Chatti Baba seated by the roadside. Although the *mast's* body was camouflaged by caked-on dirt and sand, the brilliance of his spiritual intoxication shone through the filth. Baba sent the men to contact Chatti Baba again, but the *mast* continued to prove intractable, and in the end three of the mandali were required to coax him to come and meet Baba. When they brought him into the courtyard of the dharamshala, Chatti Baba became so agitated that he began throwing dirt over himself. Baba gave him a fifty-bucket bath, which quieted him for the time being. He had to bathe the *mast* again in the third-class railway compartment on the way back to Bangalore. Baba would continue this practice of using as many as one hundred fifty to two hundred bucket baths for as long as Chatti Baba stayed with Him. Donkin called each bath "a prodigious performance," and Rano was called upon to resume her duties of heating and carrying the water.[163]

* The day before departure Baba completed and signed his Last Will and Testament, naming members of the mandali as the beneficiaries of His properties in Meherabad, Mandla, and Byramangala.



Baba, giving Chatti Baba one of his many daily bucket baths as Rano supplied more hot water

Baba later explained the origin of the *mast's* name to the women: "He used to eat out of one earthenware chatti, going daily to 20 different places, asking for food. People first took his darshan and then put food in his chatti. He put it all together and fed the stray dogs first. The dogs ate from it, and he ate with them. That's why he is called Chatti Baba."[164]

Baba was "pleased as Punch" with Chatti Baba, who, Donkin recorded, appeared to displace "poor Mohammed" as Baba's favorite—at least for now.[165] He had a small hut constructed in the *masts'* compound especially for Chatti Baba and spent two hours each day secluded with the *mast* in His jhopdi.

Despite the intensity of His *mast* work Baba continued to take meals with the women when He wasn't fasting, and He tried to spend an hour and a half with them in the evenings, from 7:00 to 8:30 PM. Otherwise He would brook no disturbances. Once, when Rano entered Baba's room to deliver a message while He was engaged in one of His partial fasts, He told her emphatically, "When I'm having My meal you're not to walk in on Me like this. I will not attend to anything when I'm having My food."[166] Rano apologized and left, but it did not escape her notice that when one of the men went in a few minutes later to tell Baba that a new *mast* had arrived, He immediately stopped eating and went to meet the *mast*.

Nothing was more essential to Baba's work than His attendance to the God-intoxicated. It was "lovely," Kitty wrote, when He was fasting and working with the *masts*, adding, "All these acts are of significance, we just cannot understand them."[167] Chanji called Baba's *mast* work in Bangalore "'a divine drama' enacted in a quiet corner of his abode" and the *mast* ashram that He established there a "nursing home [for] the rare souls who are … dazed and stranded somewhere in the higher planes"—a "unique spiritual laboratory" for Baba's Universal work.[168]

BYRAMANGALA: SPIRITUAL CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

Kitty observed that Baba "suffers much these days. He is happy for He experiences both eternal bliss and eternal suffering, but just now the latter is predominant, with the whole world staggering under the tension of what may lie in store. Yet all has to be as it is for the final good of all—that through trial and tribulation each individual and each nation may reach nearer its goal of true brotherhood, love and unselfish living."[169] The Universal Spiritual Center served as scaffolding for this work, so that the world might achieve that end.

In a letter to Delia, Baba spoke of the difficulty of His work at this critical time, but most especially of His role in the establishment of the center: "My work at present is heavy, apart from the Universal work for the upliftment of all, I have the work of the center, which entails much work and time. I supervise personally every detail, although allotting to each person that particular side of the work to which each is suited. The center is to be on a very large scale, consisting of many different sections, but all under My one guidance."[170]

Baba set December 17, 1939, as the date for the foundation-laying ceremony for the new center. On Thursday, November 2, Drs. Ghani and Deshmukh, along with Norina, presented a lecture in Mysore to promote Baba's plans and extend invitations to the event. Four days later Nadine joined them to offer another talk in the Byramangala Town Hall about the new center and its purpose. Earlier that day, however, Baba had confided to Deshmukh, "I won't let it be a total success. I'll make sure there is 50 percent opposition and 50 percent sympathy!"[171]

Baba's promise of conflict was fulfilled when a local attorney named Sampige Vekantapathaiya set about trying to turn local citizens against Baba and the center. As a public figure, Vekantapathaiya was in an ideal position to create strife—and to spread Baba's name. Early in December he issued an astoundingly negative statement that virtually guaranteed more attention for Baba and His work: "For all the hysterical tom-tom about Shri Meher Baba by his coterie of devotees, disciples, admirers and friends, who try bluff, bluster, bravado and browbeating, there is unimpeachable documentary evidence, of a most intimate character, which denounces him as a swindler, cheat and charlatan … [Meher Baba] stands condemned as a despicable wretch not fit for any decent-minded man or woman to associate with … He is a fraud on humanity … a dangerous devil!"[172]

The Dewan called Vekantapathaiya a "convict lawyer, who is trying to stage a comeback," but Baba dismissed the situation as "a

mere nothing."[173] He was altogether unfazed, observing, "This is only the beginning—mere child's play! I warned you some time ago to be prepared for opposition of a much more serious and larger scale than this." When Dr. Ghani wondered aloud why Baba didn't just "turn the key" to silence the opposition, Baba replied:

> This is My key…. This will bring pep into the work, and arouse your enthusiasm and interest. The game will be lively! The whole world is fighting for one thing or the other, and you, too, join in the game—to fight, not for selfish motives or gains, but for the Truth. Be afraid of nothing, not even the results….
>
> How can My work ever be affected by this lying campaign through the press and before the public? All this hue and cry against Me, all this propaganda, has not affected My work adversely in the least. On the contrary, it has brought My name and work into greater prominence, by arousing the idle curiosity of people with silly rumors and sensationalism. Those who come to ridicule Me, return penitent after seeing Me and gathering the true facts![174]

Meanwhile, Vekantapathaiya contacted Baba's old would-be nemesis, Col. M. S. Irani, and they held their own public meeting on December 10 in a further attempt to discredit Baba's work. Drs. Ghani and Deshmukh, again joined by Norina, used the gathering as an opportunity to distribute copies of a pamphlet entitled *Meher Baba's Raj* [Reign] *of Truth*, which they had composed and printed in order to address the accusations and counter their influence. Chanji called Vekantapathaiya's slanderous comments a "'red-rag' of publicity [that] came as a shock to some followers," adding that "Baba was a Modern Master for a modern age" who needed the publicity to spread His message and to work on an external as well as internal level. "A Master who has to work in this civilized age," he concluded, "when publicity forms one of the most

essential factors to bring into light any new project, must necessarily resort to means which bring Him and His work in the know of the public and help Him open the way to contact those who need Him."[175]

Early in December Baba added Donkin to the committee overseeing the planning of the center, which was to have a hospital that the young doctor would oversee. Afterward, Donkin mused, "I wonder how much of this scheme will come to fruition."[176]

The committee issued invitations to government officials and prominent citizens and placed newspaper announcements inviting the general public. The official invitation read:

Meher Baba's devotees and all
aspirants throughout India
are cordially invited to attend the
foundation laying ceremony of the
"UNIVERSAL SPIRITUAL CENTRE"
by the Master, at the newly acquired
site adjoining Byramangala Reservoir,
near Bidal Railway Station (Bangalore—
Mysore Route), on the afternoon of
17th December, 1939.
For details of the programme, etc.,
please write to
The MEHER BABA
UNIVERSAL SPIRITUAL CENTRE COMMITTEE,
4 Palace Road
BANGALORE[177]

Everyone in the ashram became caught up in the excitement of the event. Gaimai had given Shireenmai a beautiful sari that she was saving for a special occasion, and the ceremony seemed like a perfect opportunity to wear it. Unfortunately, Baba's mother had yet to learn how to pick her battles, which sometimes erupted at the worst possible moments. As Meherwan recounted:

So when this big event of the groundbreaking ceremony of Baba's Universal Spiritual Center was to take place, Shireenmai thought it fit to bring out that fine sari and put it on. So my mother had to dress her up, and she really looked very splendid and beautiful in that sari…. Meanwhile, Baba came along in a great hurry and says, "Mother, are you ready," and suddenly Baba sees her all dressed up. He says, "Mother, what is this?"

So Mother looked surprised. She said, "Yes, Merog, don't you like it? It is a sari of mine." Baba didn't look very pleased….

"Look, Mother. Look what I have on me. See this torn coat?" It was an extremely old, worn out coat … something like the kamli coat He had been wearing for years, and this one was also very tattered and all having patches. He says, "I am going in this coat, Mother, and will it look nice for you, being my mother, to be dressed up like this, like a queen? That won't look nice!"

"But then, Merog, why don't you put on a good coat?"

"No!" He says. "I am a fakir, so my mother should be dressed like a mother of a fakir. Get out from that sari!"

So Mother was very cross. "I know, Merog, you never want me to look very nice and well dressed." …

But Baba said, "No, Mother, you must get out of that sari and put on the plainest sari that you have." … She almost cried to do that, but Baba made her take off that sari. And my mother was very impressed about this, that Baba would not let her wear it…. Baba would get around [Shireenmai] in His own way, cajoling, coaxing, showing pleasure or displeasure, and somehow making her follow Baba's instructions or His wishes, and she would obey.[178*]

* Meherwan later observed, "There was friction between Baba and her from time to time so we had to be watchful and keep out of the way when we detected one of those episodes about to happen." (*My Life with Meher Baba, the Avatar of the Age*, 77)

The ceremony was to begin at 4:30 PM. Earlier that afternoon Elizabeth had driven Baba to Byramangala in her Buick, along with Kaka, Jalbhai, Norina, and Nadine. Donkin made fifty-mile round trips back and forth in the bus, until he had delivered the remaining men as well as the rest of the Westerners to the grounds.

At the ceremony site, chairs had been set up in a circle beneath *pandals*, canopies that would provide shade as well as shelter from possible rain. Baba was to be seated in the center on a brick dais. The dimensions for the central structure were chalked out on the ground around Baba's seat, and this area was shaded with a leaf-covered canopy supported by bamboo poles. Tents had also been erected.

Placed on the brick dais was a polished gray granite foundation seat that Pappa had designed for the occasion. The sides of the seat were inscribed, "Foundation Seat of the Meher Baba Universal Spiritual Centre 17/12/39," and the letters were painted gold. Unfortunately, the seat, which measured about two feet, six inches high and two feet, six inches square, was a little smaller than what everyone had expected, provoking displeasure from many of the male mandali the night before.

Arrangements had been made to transport attendees in hired buses from Bangalore and the Cantonment to the site, and, just as Baba had predicted, the negative press generated by Vekantapathaiya and the Colonel only served to drive the demand for invitations. The first run of five hundred tickets had been exhausted in three days and as many more added, so well over a thousand Bangaloreans were expected. At two o'clock on the afternoon of the ceremony, fifty buses began to load, departing the city half an hour later, accompanied by private cars carrying government officials. In addition to those arriving by bus and car, two thousand local villagers came on foot. In all, over four thousand people attended the ceremony, which Chanji called "a spiritual unity of brotherhood of humanity … a prelude to the immense activities and movements that place will have in future to witness."[179]

Donkin captured the festive atmosphere that pervaded the event: "All was very gay, with leaves, flags and flowers…. Baba [was] dressed in … a very old, very patched coat, that must once have been a sort of brick red; but it suits Him and looks good."[180] *Kirtan* was sung and a village band played in the background as Baba approached the dais. Pappa opened the event by garlanding Baba, resplendent as always despite the well-worn coat. After a poetry recitation and several speeches, Dr. Ghani took the stage to talk about the seven-metal spade, composed of silver, pewter (a copper and tin alloy), aluminum, zinc, copper, lead, and iron, which had been specially made for the ceremony by a local craftsman.

Pappa then led Baba to the foundation chair, where Baba seated Himself and used the spade to turn over a small amount of soil. When He withdrew the spade, devotees rushed forward to scoop up a handful of the dirt. He also drove a spike into the ground marking the location



Baba, at the foundation-laying ceremony of December 17. Pappa Jessawala holds the seven-metal spade.

of the central structure, which was to serve as His house once He moved the ashram there.

Next, Sampath Aiyangar of Madras read out the speech that Baba had composed for the occasion:

> The world is at war today. It has engulfed all departments of life—political, economic, social and religious.
>
> The instinct of self-preservation, enhanced by fear and uncertainty of the future, is aggressively active in the guise of various pseudonyms and catchwords. Exclusiveness is parading as nationalism; self-interest is known as economics; fanaticism is synonymous with religion; libertinism is looked upon as social and moral freedom; and exploitation is termed politics.
>
> This instinct of self-preservation is legitimate and natural in the lower order of life, in the lower scale of evolution. But, when it expresses itself through man, it makes of himself nothing more than a talking animal, and, as such, he is yet a long way from deserving the title, "The Best of Creation."
>
> Is it anybody's fault if one finds oneself on the right side of things or the wrong side of things?
>
> No! Every human being has come to serve and achieve a definite purpose, and by playing his part to perfection, he automatically works out his own salvation.
>
> There is this difference, however. In the divine scheme of things, individuals or a people who, when instead of progressing higher and onward, are about to lapse into bestiality, it is only suffering that rehabilitates them.
>
> Spiritual Masters achieve for humanity the same resurrection, much more easily and less painfully, not by preaching but by translating into fulfillment the too

familiar words, self-denial and brotherhood of man, whose very beginning and whose ultimate end is love.

The time for such a universal awakening is looming larger in the near future, to meet which, the scheme of a Universal Spiritual Center is founded today. Mysore [State] will surely realize, at no distant date in the future, its singular good fortune in possessing, among many progressive features, the spiritual capital of the world as well.

I bless every one of you, participants and non-participants, in the greatest scheme of spiritual regeneration, the foundation of which you have witnessed today.

This scheme of a Universal Spiritual Center symbolizes the character of My divine mission on earth. I bless you.[181]

Margaret also recalled the day's events, adding her distinctively witty voice to the more solemn accounts of the occasion:

[Baba] announced a grand opening of this place which had acquired two rather shabby-looking meditation huts and one or two other buildings, and invitations were sent out to some quite important persons, both political and social.

Among those who agreed to speak were the Prime Minister [Dewan] of Mysore and a most important lawyer from Madras [Aiyangar]. We were also told to make ourselves presentable for this occasion. Norina managed to look quite elegant, and accompanied by Nadine, acted as hostess and received the guests. Everyone sat at one end of this piece of land while the important guests made speeches regarding the great spiritual need of such a place being under the direct guidance of Meher Baba. They spoke most enthusiastically.[182]

At the same time that Baba's message was being read out, a rented red Morris automobile carrying attorney Sampige Vekantapathaiya, his driver, and one other passenger overturned in a ditch not far from Byramangala after rear-ending two bullock carts laden with firewood. Vekantapathaiya was on his way to disrupt the ceremony by distributing more pamphlets condemning Meher Baba's work; instead, the leaflets were distributed along the road and in a field. Padri, who just happened to be driving past at the time, photographed the scene. "It was a serious accident," Meherwan recalled, "and he naturally rushed to help the people…. Such were the ways of the Avatar: not only allowing the protest but also at the same time providing assistance to the protestors!"[183]



The Morris, stuck in a ditch on the way to Byramangala so that Vekantapathaiya could not disrupt the ceremony

In point of fact, the Morris had already been involved in four mishaps that day—each one increasingly dire, in which they had first struck one bullock cart, then another, then a lorry, and then an innocent pedestrian walking down the road—fleeing the scene without contacting the police. When the driver had suggested that the first accident might have been the result of Vekantapathaiya's opposition to Meher Baba, the attorney replied, "What rot," and ordered him to keep going. In the fifth and final incident, the Morris struck the two bullock carts at the same time, rolled down an embankment, and continued on for fifty more feet before coming to rest in a ravine. None of the three men was seriously injured, but the Morris was a "thorough wreck." Neither of the cart drivers was injured, although one bullock had to be pulled out from beneath the wreckage with a broken leg.[184] It was later determined that the steering mechanism had failed, causing the driver to lose control of the vehicle, sending it careening off the road.

In the meantime, the ceremony at Byramangala continued uninterrupted until, Donkin concluded, "Baba finally blessed some ladous [*sic*] (sweets) which Vishnu brought to Him and then were

distributed to the crowd of villagers. All of the invitees then went to the refreshments, and Baba drove off…. Fireworks ended the show as the sun set."[185]

Construction began two days after the ceremony, and Baba established a new committee comprised of Easterners and Westerners to oversee the work. Naoroji Dadachanji moved to Byramangala to head the committee, assisted by Padri and Pendu. The men returned to Bangalore every Sunday to meet with Baba and report on their progress.

ICE CREAM, CAKE, AND CHRISTMAS CHEER

Despite the intensity of attending to His *mast* and war work and the establishment of the new center, Baba began to invite the women to His room in the mornings and evenings to listen to the radio so that they could discuss the day's events.

Unless Baba was in strict seclusion, His work never precluded the spiritual training of the ashramites, but He tempered the intensity of that work with lighter moments, and celebrated a succession of birthdays throughout the latter months of 1939. Donkin turned twenty-eight on November 14, and Baba marked the occasion with cakes during tea. Meherwan's ninth birthday was celebrated on November 22, when he was feted with his favorite meal: plain dal, rice, and spinach.

> When my birthday was approaching, Baba asked my mother what I might like to eat for the special occasion….
>
> "Baba," she said. "he likes plain rice and *dal* and spinach."
>
> "Silly," Baba retorted. "you're spinning yarns. No child would like plain rice and dal and spinach as his best dish."
>
> "All right, Baba, you ask him."
>
> So Baba told Mani, "When Meherwan comes from school, see that he does not meet his mother. You catch him first and ask him what is his favorite dish."

> Mani caught hold of me as soon as I returned from school, so that my mother did not have a chance to see me and instruct me—Baba was sure that my mother was making up things just to please Him. Baba would feign ignorance in such instances. Not feign, really—He was all-ignorance at the same time He was all-knowing also, all poured together in some way that we can never fathom. But He functioned in that way—it was most natural, and that's why He was so approachable and so loveable. Because He was on our level, as totally ignorant as we were. He was actually that, and yet all-knowing. It was a heady combination that would spin anyone's intellect around if they tried to understand what it is all about. It is just unfathomable.
>
> So Mani caught hold of me, and upon her inquiry, I said that I liked plain rice and dal and spinach most. So she went to Baba with that information, and He said, "What an insipid kid he is!" So we had dal and rice and spinach for my birthday feast that year! … And, really when you come to get the taste of it, there is nothing like dal and rice.[186]

Margaret celebrated her forty-fifth birthday four days later. Mani, who turned twenty-one on December 10, recalled the practice of re-gifting that enabled the women to have something special to give one another:

> There were a lot of us—over 30 women. Each one's birthday was to be celebrated, so that there was a birthday celebrated practically every week.
>
> Each had to give a present to the birthday person. There was no freedom to shop. We couldn't go out shopping to buy presents, and besides, we never had money

> to use. We couldn't ask anyone to bring presents, either. But from whatever the Westerners had given, or we had made, we started giving out presents.
>
> When you got 30 presents on your birthday, you hoarded them, as you knew you had to give back to the others. It was a circulation and exchange. After a while, the delight was that you were getting back your own presents! Once, my scarf came back to me, for example. Then, I wouldn't remember that Elizabeth had given me something else, so her present would go back to her on her birthday.[187]

Mani hated the cheap, heavy Indian blankets that the Easterners used, so Elizabeth, the only woman who always seemed to have some money at hand, gave her a beautiful, lightweight blanket for her Bangalore birthday. "It was like a wish fulfilled," Mani said. "It was so precious that I had it covered in a sari." She also got to keep it, rather than having to pass it on—to the women or to the *masts*. "Elizabeth noticed things," Mani concluded, "like seeing someone's chipped cup, or a blanket that was too worn. Keeping that in mind, she gave that as a birthday present. Though we couldn't go out, unless Baba took us somewhere, Elizabeth could shop. [Her generosity was] never spoken of."[188]

Baba treated Mani and the other women to a special lunch, followed by ice cream, after which they went out in the bus for a half-hour visit to Lal Bagh Botanical Gardens. During the evening Katie, Margaret, Meheru, and Manu serenaded Mani in Gujarati.

Now that she had reached the age of majority, Mani was required to sign legal documents before a magistrate. Chanji drove her to the judge's office in Bangalore, accompanied by Shireenmai. It was a short journey that felt like a bona fide adventure after her seven-year seclusion. "It was a great event for me," she later recalled, "an outing. An impossible thing. You have no idea what it meant. In the car, all by myself? With Mother? Out?"[189] Shireenmai, who was finally coming to

terms with her son's status as God, even asked Baba's permission to treat Mani to cakes and tea during their day on the town. She also took her daughter shopping, and they purchased a length of wool tweed for a new coat.

Early in December Baba had asked the women to break into groups of five to prepare a series of five skits presented over five days, followed by another series for Christmas Day, to be performed in the upstairs ballroom. Padri somehow conjured footlights, which he set up at one end of the ballroom to suggest a stage, while the adjoining bedrooms served as wings and dressing rooms.

"Baba always asked us to do [these plays]," Rano observed, "because He said it lightened His mood sometimes when He might have been working rather seriously…. So we always tried to put on something for Baba that would be of a comic nature that would make Him laugh…. In fact there were some times that Baba would laugh so much that He'd have to hold His face, because naturally, not being able to express that laughter outwardly, His face would hurt, so then we'd try to soft-pedal what we were doing so Baba's face wouldn't hurt too much!"[190]

When the day of the performance arrived, so many had been given parts that only Baba, Mehera, and a handful of other women made up the audience. Meherwan recalled that when several skits were performed one after the other, the actors came out and joined the audience when their turn was over, and everyone wanted to be in the first skit because the audience was smaller and therefore less intimidating.

Their most elaborate production was a two-act play set in Africa, written and directed by Mani. Rano acted as set dresser and props manager, defoliating the compound of leaves, vines, grass, sticks, and palm fronds for jungle scenery. The cast of characters included an Englishman (Rano) and his wife (Irene) on safari, an African chieftain (Katie), the chieftain's daughter (Mani), and a tribal witchdoctor (Margaret). The

rest of the women were extras, dressing like natives and darkening their skin with oil and soot from the *tawas* (chapati griddle) in the kitchen.

In the first act, the thin and stringy Englishman and his meaty wife were set upon by the natives, who were revealed to be cannibals. Act two began with Rano draped in Baba's tiger skin rug, roaring and stalking the witchdoctor. In the denouement, the natives slew the tiger and the tasty English prisoners enacted a dramatic escape aided by the chieftain's sympathetic daughter. Afterward, the women's blackened skin was so impregnated with soot and oil that after trying unsuccessfully for two days to scrub away the stain, they gave up and had to let it to wear off naturally.

Norina staged a pageant recreating the crucifixion of Christ. She tried beguiling Mani into taking the lead role by telling her what an accomplished actor she was, but Mani, who had her own skit to prepare, turned the tables. "Oh, but Norina," she cajoled, "you're so tall and lovely. And you used to be a professional actress. You should take the part of Christ. You'd be perfect for it!"[191] It was true: having given over a thousand performances as the mother of Christ in the play *The Miracle*, Norina was well prepared to take on the role of the son. And in a perfect example of casting against type, Margaret played an angel.

Like most of the skits the women put on for Baba's amusement, Norina's didn't go as rehearsed. Dowla and Soltoon were so mesmerized by her performance that they forgot what to do, then jumped to their feet and, by Norina's reckoning, "galloped" off into the wings exclaiming in confused Persian and English, much to the playwright's consternation. When Baba told Norina that it had been His favorite part of the performance, she shook her finger at Him, saying, "Naughty, naughty."[192]

In her own skit, Mani cast herself as a wealthy Muslim and Meherwan as his butler. As Meherwan recalled:

> I said, "No, no, no, I can't do that. I'll get stage fright."
>
> And she said, "You won't have to do much. I tell you I've given you a very simple part to play." So she says, "Look, you have to be a sort of a small boy who has been

employed as a servant to a very rich Nawab, and all you have to do is … when I say, 'Boy! Get the tea,' then you have to get this tray of tea on the stage, put it before me, and do this salute—you know these Mohammedans—they do this respectful gesture, and then just leave the stage. That's all you have to do."

So I somehow reluctantly accepted. Of course, my going up on the first floor [of the Links] was very restricted … so I was given special permission to go up and perform one rehearsal…. It was just once and I couldn't follow properly, being a little kid. So then when the actual time came I was made to dress up like a bearer, [carrying] this tray full of tea, and I was so nervous that I remember the whole tray was shaking, and the cups were rattling, with all the tea in them….

And I come on stage, and Baba sees me dressed up and oh, He's laughing away, so I knew I was a spectacle. And then, you know, instead of putting the tray in front of Mani I … put it in front of Baba, so Mani says, "Boy! Uh—here!" … but Baba was very amused with my little mistake and then I dropped [the tray] and the cups got inverted and all the tea spilled….

And such mishaps used to please Baba more, and He would have a very good laugh, and when Baba really enjoyed something it was a sight to watch. Baba would be all shaking up and He would be red in the face and look very beautiful, because no sound escaped when He laughed, but we could see that He was enjoying it to the hilt…. Sometimes He would just pound His knees as it were, like a small child, to contain the joy He felt, … and that would bring out the best of all of us, to see Baba enjoying Himself.

> And everybody had to perform to the best of their ability, and so it was a sort of meditation as it were, because they were all so keen upon what they had to do, and nothing else would be on their minds, and they would be all preoccupied with the dramas that had to be performed—just to please Baba.[193]

Rano was cast as a Parsi priest in another of the skits, but instead of taking the trouble to learn her Marathi lines, she transformed her character into an elderly man rendered speechless by a stroke. "So naturally I was very shaky in my movements, being a doddering old man," she recalled, "and the scene opened with me reading a Parsi paper … and naturally being old, my hands would shake, so the part was complete with shaking hands, and the thing is that at the time nobody realized that the shaking was real, because I was so nervous at the fact of acting before Baba that the shaking of the hands was something that I could not control, but it was in keeping with the part, so everything worked out all right."[194] In the end, however, the trouble Rano sought to avoid came back to her in spades: Baba was so tickled by her old man's tremors that He asked her to act out the part again and again during years to come.

Kitty also suffered from stage fright and found the idea of performing in front of Baba utterly unnerving. "I was so frightened of it I used to lock myself up in the cupboard," she later confessed. "And I'd just locked myself in, but Baba said, 'Well, they're not all here yet. Where is Kitty?' And nobody knew where I was, and I was inside the cupboard. Baba did a lot with the acting of plays. He said: 'You can lose your ego there and you forget yourself.'"[195]

Christmas Day came to the Bangalore ashram, and to mark Donkin's first holiday in India, separated from friends and family back in England, Baba gave the young doctor a card, an iced cake, a bouquet of flowers, blessings, and an embrace. No one else received such an abundance of gifts.

But the festivities were interrupted at 9:25 AM when Baba experienced what He called a "heart cramp."[196] He called Drs. Nilu and Donkin to His room, where they observed a two-minute attack of angina.[197] Baba later explained the pain was directly linked to foreshocks preceding a devastating earthquake that struck eastern Turkey on December 27.*

Delia had sent Baba and the women a Christmas package containing small gifts, sweets, and phonograph records, one of which was the soundtrack from the movie *Snow White*, which the women had seen in Ahmednagar, and they listened to the records over and over. Despite having to remain behind in England, Delia's heart was with Baba. She and Margaret maintained a correspondence for as long as Margaret remained in India, and she sent care packages to Baba and the women as frequently as the unreliable wartime post allowed.•

Another recording that Baba and the women discovered at around this time was of Cole Porter's "Begin the Beguine."† Baba asked the women to learn the song by heart; He was leaving for His *mast* work, and when He returned He wanted them to sing it for Him. "After His departure," Margaret wrote,

> we got together every evening to try and work this out. It was not easy. To guide us

• Delia DeLeon was distraught that she had to remain behind in England, but Baba cabled her, saying, "Not to worry. You are where I want you to be." Delia understood His meaning when her mother's health began to fail and she needed to be close by to look after her. Baba also wrote to Delia to further ease her sadness at being left behind:

> Believe Me when I say that the real happiness which lies in store for you is well worth the present suffering and struggle. The greater the capacity to love, the greater the pangs of separation are felt, not only by those living physically apart from the Beloved, but equally by those living near. In fact, the feeling of separation is greatly intensified when living close physically, while not having the conscious experience of union and oneness. The curtain I purposely drew hides this experience to enable you to do My work. You know the work I do is all for My circle. But each of you, to play your part, must take it seriously, and to finish the work each came to do. Love, work, and obey Me.

Delia composed two articles for the *Meher Baba Journal*. Baba was pleased, writing, "Dearest Leyla [His diminutive for Delia], I was indeed happy to receive, on the same day, two letters from you and also your two articles for the magazine, which I know were written for Me and came straight from the heart…. I will never fail you and will never leave you…. All My love to dearest Leyla, M.S. Irani."

Mani prepared and sent a photo album for Delia, in which she pasted pictures of the women's travels during the tours. (*Lord Meher*, 2044, 2045; *The Ocean of Love, 136–137*)

* The seven-shock, 7.8-8 magnitude earthquake that struck Turkey on December 27, 1939, was one of the most powerful quakes in recent history. At least eight thousand people died during the first shocks and twenty thousand more by the end of the following day. Estimates of the final death toll range from thirty thousand to one hundred sixty thousand people.

† The recording Baba and the women listened to was released in April 1939 on the Regal Zonophone label and featured Chick Henderson, with Joe Loss and his orchestra. Henderson's rendition of "Begin the Beguine" was the only recording by a solo vocalist to sell over a million copies during the 1930s. He died on June 24, 1944, from shrapnel wounds sustained during World War II.

there was an extremely bad record of the song and an equally bad gramophone which together wailed through the song, parts of which required playing over and over again before we could even guess the words.

Every evening we hovered over this maddening machine writing down words as they became clear to us and learning the tune. Luckily, as with all popular songs, almost everyone knew the first verse.

Most of us had strong personal ideas as to how it should be sung—and not a good trained voice or even a sweet natural one in the crowd!

Kitty wished someone to act as conductor and with a baton keep everyone together. This made matters worse. No one was competent and arguments and crises came readily to the surface…. Baba returned. The troublesome squabbles ended, and aided by the world's worst gramophone, some mediocre voices, and many loving hearts, the sound of "Begin the Beguine" … filled the room with not too musical but certainly loving sounds, hoping to give pleasure to the Beloved Master.[198]

In addition to records, Delia also sent the women books that they could not otherwise easily obtain, and it was here in Bangalore that the tradition of reading aloud to Baba was established. Margaret was the first of the women assigned the task. "Every evening when we had nowhere to go … I would [read these stories]…. And every night … Baba would wait until there was a crisis, and you were going to turn the page over, and you were going to know 'who done it,' and everyone was excited, and I'd turn the page and He'd say, 'It's time to go to bed' … You put that book away, Margaret. You're not to look at it and nobody's to know.'"[199]

Baba and the women bade farewell to 1939 by celebrating Mehera's thirty-second birthday on December 31 and welcoming

in 1940 with ice cream, cake, arti, and a concert given by Mani, Rano, and Katie.

A NEW YEAR

On the second day of January, Elizabeth recalled, "The Master called His disciples together and stated that this year would become a time of unparalleled suffering and stress the world over, in which He too would share in its sufferings."[200] "1940 is going to be the worst year the world has ever seen since the creation!" Baba declared. "1941 will be 50–50—half good and half bad. 1942—the best the world has ever seen." He also made another reference to recent events in Turkey, explaining, "Even this disastrous earthquake … will be nothing in comparison with what is still to come."[201]

Baba's first order of business was to announce a *mast* tour. He left Bangalore by rail on Thursday, January 4, accompanied by Eruch, Kaka, Gustadji, Jalbhai, and Krishna. They were heading deeper into South India, but no one left behind in the ashram knew where they were going. During this tiring six-day journey Baba made a number of contacts, the most important of whom was a third-plane *mast* from Trivandrum called Chinnaswami, whom He brought back to Bangalore.

Chinna means "small" in Tamil, and "gold" or "treasure" in Kannada. A frail old man whose face reminded Donkin of a macaque monkey, Chinnaswami was a charming addition to the *mast* ashram, drooling red pan juice down his chin and extinguishing lit cigarettes in his mouth. He also loved to sing and often went out into the alley behind the property, where he wrapped his arms around a poorly insulated electrical pole and danced in apparent ecstasy.

On January 15 Baba left for a five-day *mast* tour, but this time He invited the women along. His destination was Hassan, a little over one hundred miles west of Bangalore. He said that there were several places upon which He wished to bestow a "spiritual push."[202] Elizabeth

observed that "when Baba suggests a seeming holiday, it is for the purpose of His Work as well. Experience with the Master in any of His travels has always proved this—some soul is waiting, ready for the divine contact, to be given a push on the spiritual path or there are 'seeds' to be sown that will eventually flower into spiritual growth in the territory visited. Usually it is both, plus His own unfathomable ways of working in the spiritual planes of consciousness, as yet unperceived by ordinary man. [And so] we journeyed forth … like a band of lighthearted adventurers in life, with their Beloved Guide."[203]

Baba's party left at 7:30 AM. Elizabeth, as usual, drove the Buick. Baba rode in the front passenger seat next to Elizabeth, while Mehera and Mani sat in the back with Khorshed sandwiched in the middle. Jalbhai transported a few of the Westerners in the Auburn, while Donkin drove the remaining women in the bus, accompanied by Eruch and Kaka. The journey was anything but a lighthearted adventure for the women in the back seat of the Buick. Baba would not let them open the windows, and the combined effects of bad roads, excessive heat, and an accumulation of gas fumes made Khorshed claustrophobic and she suffered from carsickness during the entire drive. Mehera called it "too awful."[204]

Khorshed later recalled how bad she felt: "Even though I got to ride with Baba, I could take no pleasure from it, because my mind was disgusted that I had thrown up in Baba's presence. From then on I sat next to the window rather than in the middle, so I would be less nauseous. And Baba agreed that this was a good idea."[205]

The women's only reprieve was a 10:30 AM roadside picnic. The three vehicles reached Hassan at around 12:30 PM, and the women settled into the bungalow that Gustadji and Jalbhai had rented for them. The men stayed at a traveler's hostel called Musafir Khana. It had been drizzling when they left Bangalore, but by the time they reached Hassan the clouds had dissolved and the sun was shining brightly.

Baba and the women spent the first few days sightseeing. On their first morning, they back-tracked thirty-five miles to the east to

visit Shravanabelagola, where they visited Gomateshwara (Sacred Place for Jains) and the colossus of the Jain saint Bahubali.• The short drive took an hour and forty-five minutes, and between the effects of dehydration from carsickness and the strain of toting Baba's briefcase up the long staircase to reach the base of the statue, Khorshed was feeling very ill indeed, but she stoically made the trek with the others. Like all pilgrims who visited the site, the women removed their shoes before ascending the stairs to the summit of the hill and the plinth upon which the statue stands.

• The fifty-seven-foot monolith known as Gomateshwara, sculpted from one solid, upright block of granite, depicts Prince Bahubali, the first teacher of the Jain faith. His nakedness signifies the life of renunciation, while the anthills at his feet denote detachment from worldly pleasure and pain. The monolith stands at the summit of a seven-hundred-stair walkway, and Mehera recalled that the women felt like ants standing in the shadow of the great figure. The festival to which Elizabeth referred was Mahamastakabhisheka, which takes place once every twelve years, when pilgrims from around the world anoint the colossus with holy water, turmeric and sandalwood paste, sugarcane juice, milk, ghee, coconut water, and honey, as well as shower it with poppy seeds, saffron, rice flour, gold dust, vermillion powder, and flowers.

"I do not believe," Elizabeth observed, "it was a coincidence that this visit was just prior to the time when [a] sacred ceremony was to be held, which occurs only once in a good many years, when the planets are in a particular conjunction, at which time no less than a half million seekers of God from every part of the continent, come for the anointing of the statue in memory of the great saint who did penances there."[206]

Baba contacted a holy man when they were returning to the vehicles. At the bottom of the stairs leading to the base of the monolith, "on an inconspicuous verandah," Elizabeth wrote, "exposed to sun or rain, sat a nude man (reminiscent of the ancient ascetic Jain) who feeling the presence of the Master looked out so that we chanced to see his face. The Master's eyes met his and the inner contact was made in that moment; to those who are spiritually advanced, how little time is needed! This man is recognised in the vicinity as the present guru of the Jains [but] Baba said that he was not a *mast* because he was conscious."[207]

They returned to Hassan, and the women rested for the remainder of the day. The following morning Baba escorted them to the ancient towns of Belur and Halebid. Elizabeth characterized Halebid as "a little village … situated in a cup-shaped valley where tigers and wild

boar are said to roam in freedom. It was also the seat of the 12th-century Hoysala Emperors and location of a temple to Vishnu."[208] Baba and the women toured several of the elaborately ornamented temples for which the towns are renowned.

Although He was suffering from diarrhea and feeling not at all well the next morning, Baba was determined to show the women the shrine at Baba Budan.• They left at 6:15, and the last part of the sixty-four-mile drive, up a steep and winding road to the 5,500-foot summit, was almost more than the beleaguered Blue Bus could handle, but Donkin managed to reach the top without incident. Donkin called it

> a lovely road climbing through dense wild jungle with occasional coffee plantations, and superb views high up over endless valleys of dense wild jungles full of elephant and tigers. Baba very perky and happy up there, cool fresh streams, and green mountain slopes. We had picnic at rest-house on top, and after lunch Baba took us down to see Baba Budhan's [*sic*] tomb—a low roofed cave: Baba kept on pushing our heads down to avoid our bumping our heads on the rocky ceiling.
>
> Baba Budhan apparently buried himself alive in this cave, while in Samadhi, and he was the first man to introduce coffee from Arabia into India. Apparently travelers in the jungle still sometimes see him when they are lost, though he is dead several hundred years ago.[209]

Mani recorded that Baba led the women into "the caves where the guru used to sit & told us some interesting facts about Baba Budan."[210] Baba explained, as He did on so many occasions, "I have come for My work, and you have no idea what duty I am fulfilling here.

• The cave-like shrine atop Bababudangiri commemorates the lives of three saints or deities venerated by Sufis and Hindus: eleventh-century Sufi saint Dada Hayath, seventeenth-century Sufi saint Baba Budan, and the Hindu deity Dattatreya. Baba first visited the shrine in May 1936, during his stay in Mysore. A steep and winding road leads to the summit, and the public bus in which Baba and the men traveled barely made it to the top. They spent one night in a dak bungalow, where Baba sat in seclusion for an hour during the afternoon, engaged in inner work. Baba also spent time in seclusion at Belur and Hassan on May 5 and 6, 1936.

These places have a spiritual atmosphere and My presence will give [them] a push."[211]

In between excursions, the children created their own diversions. At the dak bungalow where they were staying was a huge tamarind tree, and much of its fruit had ripened and fallen down. The children had been forbidden to eat the pulp from the tamarind pods. "You had to sneak tamarind," Heather Nadel observes in *The Joyous Path*. "It was a sour fruit that grown-ups forbid children to eat because it was considered bad for the throat—which made it irresistible."[212] The temptation proved too much for the young ones. As Meherwan recalled:

> No one was watching us supposedly. So Meheru, myself, Sarvar—we all had a good feast on those fallen tamarinds. They were very tasty, you know—sweet and sour is what children always like.
>
> Then we continued playing, but somehow we came to know that we were observed eating these fruits and that the report would be going to Baba. So we got scared…. So we all [decided] something should be said to Baba—we couldn't lie to Him…. We went and gargled and took out all the sour smell from our mouths, then so if Baba were to ask us, we would say, "We ate a little and spat it out" or some such … vague answer we were going to give.
>
> So then, of course, Baba had us called, and Baba was in a sort of stern mood, and we started to tremble…. Baba asked Sarvar, "Did you eat the fruit?"
>
> So instead of saying something she just said, "No, Baba."
>
> And then Meheru said, "Baba, we ate a little."
>
> I said, "Yes, Baba, I ate a little but I spat it out"—I had spat out the seed, you know.

> Baba nodded His head and He said, "Is there a stick somewhere here around?" So somebody handed Him an umbrella, and Baba gave a whack to Sarvar on the head. Then he said to Meheru, "Put your hand out," and Meheru got a whack, and I had to put out my hand and I got a whack. Then He said to Sarvar, "Did you eat?"
>
> "No, Baba."
>
> Another whack. "Tell the truth. Did you eat?" and eventually she had to say, "Yes, Baba." So I think that was the one time I had got a whack from Baba in my whole life with Him.[213]

Many years later Meherwan recognized in hindsight: "It was in truth not the whacks we got but that fact that we had displeased Baba that really hurt us the most."[214]

While the women rested and the children endeavored not to make too much mischief, Baba resumed His *mast* work. Eruch and Kaka brought Him what they deemed a good *mast* on January 18. Baba christened him Shariat Khan for his habit of repeating, "This is shariat, that is shariat. Everything is shariat!"* Shariat Khan in turn called Baba "King of the World."[215] Donkin called him "a young fellow [who] always wore a shoddy old fez cap crammed so far over his head that his ears were forced out sideways, like the handles of a trophy cup…. A strange, inane, non-stop babble of words and phrases … chased each other out of his mouth like the disordered flight of leaves on a windy autumn day [but] no one could make head or tail of what he said."[216]

In addition to being a jamali *mast*, Shariat Khan was also a *mahbubi*, described in *The Wayfarers* as "a moderately rare type [who] invariably wears some article of feminine attire, such as a few bangles, a ring on his finger, earrings, or an old *choli* (a kind of bodice). He is not effeminate, and does not wear a sari." Shariat Khan loved to sing

* *Shariat* is the Muslim term for canonical law, or the will of God.

and would burst into spontaneous dance at the slightest provocation, jingling the strings of bells he tied to his ankles and toes, "docile and affectionate," Donkin wryly concluded, "although not to everyone's taste."[217] Baba brought Shariat Kahn back to join the *mast* ashram; His entourage reached the Links compound at noon on January 20. This was the women's last outing in Bangalore, and afterward they settled back into their quiet day-to-day routine.

Rano resumed her work on *The Ten Circles* painting. She also completed her portrait of Baba, but she was not happy with it. Just as she was trying to identify what was wrong, Baba appeared in her studio, picked up one of her brushes, and added a tiny dab of paint to the left eye, warning her not to disturb it afterward. It was the perfect finishing touch.

RETURN TO THE THREE CHANNELS

On February 1, in keeping with His habit of fasting during the days preceding His birthday, Baba embarked on a new partial fast of one meal a day. At the same time, it was discovered that the company that held the construction contract for the Universal Spiritual Center was using substandard building materials. Baba terminated their contract and arranged for the mandali to complete the work, causing another two-month delay. He engaged landscape architect G.H. Krumbiegel* to design the gardens and grounds.

Meanwhile, Sampige Vekantapathaiya invited Col. Irani to Bangalore to further harass Baba as work on the center progressed. The Colonel delivered three public lectures entitled "My Experiences with Pseudo Saints," but the only saints to whom he directed his indignation

* German-born Gustav Hermann Krumbiegel (1865–1956) was architectural consultant to the Dewan of Mysore. He designed Lal Bagh Botanical Gardens and is credited with earning Bangalore (now called Bengaluru) its designation as "the Garden City." He also planned the gardens at Brindavan. He was incarcerated in an internment camp established for Germans in Bangalore during WWII. It was said of Krumbiegel that "whatever he touched, he adorned." (wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustav_Hermann_Krumbiegel)

were Upasni Maharaj, whose teachings he dismissed as an "irrelevant matter," and Meher Baba Himself.[218] Donkin called them "sarcastic and stupid, and really rather a flop."[219] Adding to the Colonel's embarrassment, Adi K., Dr. Ghani, Norina, Nadine, and Jalbhai attended the lectures and peppered him with questions he was unprepared to answer.

Dr. Ghani retaliated by publishing a pamphlet entitled *The Spiritual Hoax of Lt. Col. M. S. Irani*. The Colonel then goaded Vekantapathaiya into composing a booklet called *Meher Baba, The Greatest Hoax of the 20th Century, or How an Irani Youth Bloomed Into a World Teacher*. The attorney called Baba's teachings "nauseating, immoral and disgusting rubbish," concluding with the hope that Baba would "soon disappear into obscurity and cease to menace mankind!"[220]

Early in February Baba also began formulating new travel plans, including a temporary shift to Meherabad in June before returning to Byramangala in October when accommodations at the Universal Spiritual Center were set to be completed. Donkin surmised that "this is his way of starting the move: first bomb has burst."[221]

In the meantime, the women looked forward to celebrating Baba's forty-sixth birthday. "It will be quite quiet amongst ourselves," Kitty wrote, "and several are getting up different items for an entertainment. There are to be no presents of any kind…. All Baba likes is some lively entertainment. I am the only one not doing anything, as all decided I would never have time to rehearse! I would be called away at the most important point in any rehearsal! So I am left off!"[222]

Baba was entertained during the morning of the fifteenth by a band, as well as by a concert in the evening with songs and dancing. Nothing was planned for the following day, but on the evening of the seventeenth another concert took place, this one featuring music from *Call of the Wild*, very likely the soundtrack of the 1935 movie starring Clark Gable and Loretta Young. This was followed by arti during the morning of the eighteenth, as well as catered meals, ice cream, and another evening concert in the upstairs ballroom of the Links. There were no public festivities.

Up until His birthday Baba had been taking one meal a day, but He began a five-day milk fast on February 19 and announced a week-long seclusion between February 23 and March 1. Donkin recorded that Baba's appearance and moods varied from day to day, from "looking well and rather mysterious … his eyes like dark pools, beautiful to look at" at one time, to appearing "preoccupied" at another.[223]

And no wonder: as of February 20, nearly all of Baba's attention was focused on the war, and He saw that the women's was as well. "When Baba comes back to us at nighttime," Kitty wrote, "He is often so weary and tired and yet He will get us all to talk and tell Him all the war news that we have read in the daily paper and He will not let any side issues interrupt these daily discussions. If they do then He will bring the conversation back to the war until everything we have read about has been said. We talk only of the war, never of the conditions here. Baba says it will be very bad everywhere very shortly now when the spring offensive begins."[224]

Donkin recorded in *The Wayfarers* that on February 22, in the midst of His seclusion, war work, and fasting, Baba opened a small electrified teashop in the *mast* ashram,

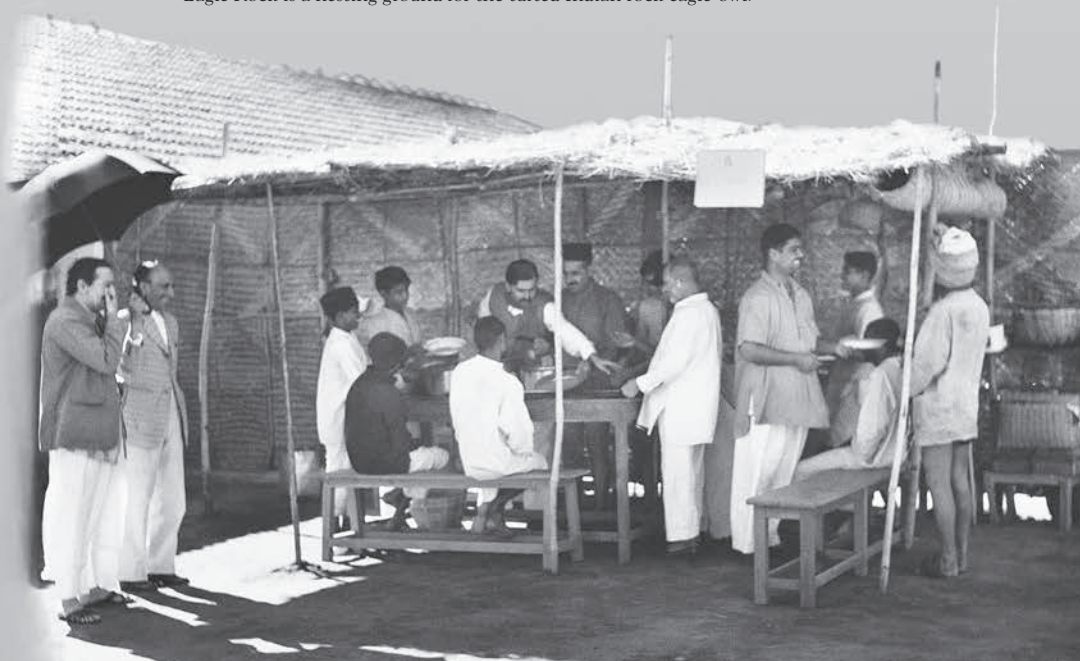
> designed and executed with elaborate carelessness, to conform to the preference of *masts* for derelict houses of refreshment … furnished with two or three claudicating tables, and three or four old benches. Tea, pan, tobacco, cigarettes, and beedies [*bidis*, Indian cigarettes] were at all times available free on demand to any of the *masts*. A lead from the nearest circuit supplied electric light, and a hand-painted notice upon an old board nailed over the front, advertised the establishment of "The *Mast* Hotel." The atmosphere was genuinely suggestive of the meaner sort of restaurant to be found by the score in the poorer parts of the teeming cities of India.[225]

Rano described the hotel as "a mock tea shop where everything was a little dusty and a little crooked," and where the *masts* could indulge their innocent vices.[226] The *masts* were delighted with a place where they could gather. No rupees changed hands, and Baba invited the men to join the *masts* for free cups of tea.

During the evening after the official opening of the *Mast* Hotel, just before He was to begin His one-week seclusion, Baba took the women out for another visit to Lal Bagh Botanical Gardens. He also had them driven out Nice Road to Eagle Rock.*

On February 23, the first day of the new seclusion, Baba laid out plans for His fast, during which He would take weak, black tea, as well as honey, water, and lemon juice. He issued a notice with instructions regarding changes to His schedule, as well as new work assignments and ashram rules. He also established a complex timetable for the men and gave them additional instructions regarding night watch, mail and telegrams, shopping, and the continuing publication of the *Meher Baba Journal*. Finally, He ordered that there be complete and utter silence during the thirty-minute period during which His work would be most intense. He would have no contact with the women. He then retreated to His jhopdi.

* Eagle Rock is a nesting ground for the tufted Indian rock eagle-owl.



Baba and the mandali mingling with the *masts* in their new hotel

Baba began each morning with half an hour of internal work, but His hut was so near the Links bungalow that in order for the women to maintain silence, they had to remain perfectly still, sitting on their mattresses, which they rolled out on the floor.[227] Mani recalled the challenges of adhering to Baba's orders and the need for cooperation in such a diverse and, in the case of the Westerners, strong-willed group of women:

> Once, something must have happened; a harsh word was spoken by one of us to another. Of course, Baba brought it all out, so that we could learn from it. Baba scolded us that we had given up the world for Him, yet we couldn't do this one little thing He asked of us.
>
> "What's the sense in your being with Me?" Baba asked. "Why do you stick around when you can't even follow, for a few days, My order—which I stressed, which I explained, was crucial to My seclusion work?"
>
> To have a fault and then to give it up for Him is something. It's not a giving up really. Nothing is a giving up, because we have it so strongly in us that it cannot be given up. It has to be worn down. It's a daily thing. And that's where the spiritual training, the grinding work, comes in.[228]

Baba stopped taking tea on February 28, but despite the rigors of fasting and the intensity of His internal work, He continued to feed and bathe the *masts*, as well as clean their latrines. He complained to Nilu and Donkin of neck, shoulder, back, and abdominal pain, gently teasing them for their reluctance to make the obvious diagnosis of exhaustion from overwork and lack of nourishment. "As a patient," Donkin observed, Baba was "hopeless!"[229] He was so hopeless that the following day, despite still yet more discomfort, He reduced His intake to water only, leaving Donkin hopeless and helpless to alleviate His suffering other than to administer hot packs to ease the pain in His back.

The doctors were, however, able to elicit a promise from Baba to alter His fast, and late in the afternoon of February 29 He spent several minutes with the women, explaining, "From tomorrow I continue fasting, but on orange juice and lettuce once a day for eleven days. By the 11th day, something sensational will happen."* Much to everyone's relief, Baba broke His five-day water fast at midnight that night. But His care for the *masts* went on without interruption, and when Mehera expressed concern that He was working too hard, Baba replied, "Fasting and working with the *masts* do not tire me, but I have been working internally very hard and have settled everything."[230]

Adding to Baba's workload were disputes among the mandali as well as the women, some of which were exacerbated by Baba Himself. One day He met with the center committee, deliberately precipitating disagreements among Chanji, Jalbhai, Norina, and Elizabeth by interrupting their discussions with irrelevant comments. Chanji became so disorderly that Baba had to throw His bell at him to restore calm. Donkin called it "a 1st class row."[231]

On the morning of March 1 Baba called all the women to the *mast* ashram, where He told them to wash their hands and take specific items from His jhopdi. A few days later He made a heart-breaking observation, telling them, "There are millions and millions of holes in My body because of the suffering of the world. But because of My Infinite Bliss and Power, I can withstand it."[232] He also officially announced that they would be departing Bangalore for Meherabad at the beginning of April, adding that they might enjoy some sightseeing along the way. Donkin hoped to be driving the bus when they set out.

In the midst of plans for departure, Baba called Katie's Aunt Pilamai and her cousin Silla from Karachi, and they arrived on March 8 to spend the last three weeks of the women's stay in Bangalore as

* The eleventh day of Baba's fast would fall on March 11.

members of the ashram.* Savak Kotwal,† his wife Nergiz, and their three children, Najoo, Hilloo, and Adi, arrived to join the ashram one week later.[233] "For the Kotwal family," Najoo later wrote, "15th March 1940 was our D-Day. Beloved Baba asked us to meet Him on that day at Links Bungalow, Bangalore."[234] "Everything in our lovely home was sold off, and all that we carried to Baba's ashram was [*sic*] four trunks, three bedding rolls and mummy's expensive Adler sewing machine. Mummy had requested from Baba to bring the sewing machine to sew the kafnis for Baba's *Mast* Ashram."[235] Unfortunately, Nergiz had fallen ill just prior to the family's arrival in Bangalore. She was suffering from a high fever, so Baba sent the family on to the Il Plazzo Hotel in Panchgani where she could rest and recover, as she was far too ill for the rigors of traveling in the bus.

Baba continued to refine His plans for the return trip to Meherabad. He had originally stated that they would be on the road for six weeks, with May 15 being the projected date for their arrival at Meherabad, but on March 9 He said that the journey would last one month and that they would make their way back via Goa and the west coast. Three days later He broke His fast, and hearkening back to remarks He had made on February 29, He told the women, "Between 11th & 20th something sensational will happen which will affect world and war & especially Britain. So I want all my disciples to fast on 20th in foll. way:- 2 cups tea in morn, also eve. & ice cream in the afternoon."[236]

On March 19, Baba again elaborated on previous statements, saying, "Something sudden and serious is going to happen in regards to the war. Mussolini and Hitler are coming together. That is a result of My working. The two of them are good-for-nothing fellows—whereas My mandali are 'good-for-everything!' I am working through [Mussolini

* Pilamai had been invited to join Baba mid-way into the first tour.

† Despite a strict Zoroastrian upbringing, Savak Kotwal became a spiritual seeker. In 1927 he set out to meet the four still-living Perfect Masters: Upasni Maharaj, Babajan, Tajuddin Baba, and Narayan Maharaj, who sent him to Baba. He eventually brought his entire family to Baba, who visited the Kotwal home on a number of occasions before calling them to join Him permanently.

and Hitler]. Either there will be a bloody war or peace, because due to the coalition of these two, all nations will feel themselves very insecure for their safety."[237]

In the meantime, news came of an armistice between Russia and Finland, but Baba stated uncategorically that this was not the event to which He had referred, and He made more ominous references to the German-Italian alliance He had mentioned on the nineteenth. He assured the mandali that despite how it might appear to them, He held "the key to the Universe and would use it now." Baba went on to call Hitler and Mussolini "2 goats … 2 good for nothing men," but He reiterated that they were mediums for His Universal work. He then made a curious reference to a "deep plot." He also spoke of an unlikely peace, the as-yet unaccomplished pact between Germany and Italy, trouble in Turkey, and American involvement, deeming it all "a mess and a muddle."[238*]

As if fasting, seclusion, attending to the *masts*, directing the war, overseeing construction of the Universal Spiritual Center, and planning for a new move were not enough, Baba also had to respond to the continuing disappointment of His lovers in Jabalpur and Mandla for having abandoned His plans to build the center there. He therefore ordered Pendu and Pappa to travel to Mandla to oversee the construction of a miniature replica of His Samadhi, a project that would take several months: "Mandla is my spiritual home of ages ago. I am having this small structure built there because of my link with it from the past."[239]

ON THE MOVE AGAIN

As soon as Baba began to speak of another shift, the men began to speculate about His long-term plans. A return to Meherabad for three or four months was in direct contradiction to Baba's original intention to settle permanently in Bangalore and it called into question much of His work there, including the establishment of the *mast* ashram and the

* The plot would come to light three months later, after Hitler and Mussolini met in Munich on June 18.

Universal Spiritual Center. Vishnu observed that Baba had invested so many resources in the center that it seemed as if He had no choice but to remain in Bangalore. Others cited Sampige Vekantapathaiya and Col. Irani's negative press and feared that a decision to leave Bangalore would compromise Baba's uncertain standing with the local populace, whom Donkin termed "a cool lot [who] don't seem to care about Him at all."[240] Eruch likened Baba's sudden shift in plans to "changing the scenery" on a stage: a new set for the same play.[241]

The women also were shocked and confused. Convinced at last that Baba had meant what He said about settling in Bangalore, the Westerners had arranged for the trunks containing their remaining possessions to be sent to them from Meherabad by rail in a large reserved bogie. "But before it had reached Bangalore," Meherwan later recalled,

> Baba suddenly said, "No, I think My work here is over and we need to move."
>
> But, "Baba darling," Norina suddenly said, "Baba, we just called our baggage."
>
> Baba said, "No, I think we must move from here. This place will not suit My work now, henceforth."
>
> So that's how it used to be. Baba would make them be subservient to His wishes. He would go along with them and get them involved in certain activities, and when He wanted them to dissociate from that, this is how He would cut it short so that there would be no involvement in any activity other than to just be with Baba and follow what He would want them to do.[242]

Everyone was astonished when Baba remained committed to a thousand-mile journey in the Blue Bus. But once they understood that He was serious they quickly reconciled themselves to the idea of a new tour. Baba invited the Jessawala women and Meherwan to accompany Him but ordered most of the men to remain in Bangalore.

He created three committees to carry on in His absence: a building committee to oversee construction [See *The Universal Spiritual Center* in the Appendix], an editorial committee to carry on with the publication of the *Meher Baba Journal*, and a publications committee to manage correspondence. Baba made Eruch and Baidul responsible for the care of the *masts* until the end of April, when they could be moved back to Meherabad. Pendu and Pappa were ordered to complete their project at Mandla. Work was to continue indefinitely at the construction site at Byramangala, as Baba's long-term plan was still to return there permanently, after the first two blocks of buildings had been completed.

The men began greasing engines and changing oil in the bus and cars in preparation for the long drive home. They also arranged for everything that had been shipped to Bangalore to be returned to Meherabad, including the women's trunks, which they never even had the opportunity to open. "You could imagine," Rano later recalled, "the state of the furniture after having been brought down once and then taken back, especially in Indian freight trains."[243]

The residents of the ashram zoo were moved to the men's compound for the time being. When the time came to return to Meherabad near the end of April, the men would travel in two bogies reserved for their exclusive use, and one wonders which passengers would be more difficult to manage: the animals or the *masts*. Donkin was granted his wish to drive the bus.

As always, Chanji observed, "every detail had to be finally confirmed by the Master Himself."[244] Baba detailed His plans for the new tour in a letter to Delia, dated March 14, two weeks before departure:

> We shall be … stopping at various places, the last being Panchgani where we spent the summer two years ago. We arrive back in Meherabad just before the monsoon breaks. Goa and Gersoppa Falls are the two best known places at which we shall stop for a few days respectively,

> but for the other stopping places they will be either at small villages or [else] by the sea or in the mountains. On this tour I am avoiding all cities….
>
> I will see you are kept informed of all our movements and do not have to complain that you hear no news for weeks on end! Margaret and Kitty are entirely to blame.[245]

However, when a recent addition to the Bangalore ashram asked Him His plan, He replied, "My plan is to have no plan, and that IS My plan!"[246]

Donkin captured the chaos that invariably accompanied the preparation for a move after an extended stay, as well as the relief to be back on the road, when the walls of the Links bungalow

> echoed with the clanking sounds of sacks being filled with pots and pans, and the uneven "bang, bang—hick" of boxes being nailed down by those unskilled in the use of a hammer. One knows, only too well, the kind of desolate disorder that reigns in an ashram on the two or three days before a move to a new home; floors littered with scraps of string and shreds of old newspaper, and the daily routine of working, eating, and sleeping, disrupted beyond recognition by the urgency of packing. One longs for the morning when the roof of the sleek blue bus will be piled with stratum upon stratum of impedimenta, the lower layers compressed almost beyond recognition by those that lie above them. When the first suffusion of the dawn pushes the lingering night back over the western hills, the house ejects its occupants for the last time, and everyone clambers thankfully into their accustomed place in the bus.[247]

CHAPTER 7

The Goa Tour

Bangalore to Meherabad

April 1–May 3, 1940



He wants us to get angry,
but to control it–

to hate but to transform
the hate to love,

to maintain poise always,
that is spirituality!

WILLIAM DONKIN[1]



Sarvar, Gulmai, and Elizabeth, holding Kippy, at a precipitous scenic overlook

ANYTHING FOR BABA

FOLLOWING AN EIGHT-MONTH HALT in Bangalore, the Blue Bus commenced a thousand-mile journey northwest to the Arabian Sea, across Mysore and Goa, before heading north toward home. Even though Baba had issued orders for many of the men to stay behind in Bangalore to continue His ongoing work there, more than thirty passengers still remained to be crowded into the bus and three cars.

Because there were so many women to be transported in the bus, Rano anticipated it to be a "troublesome return journey," so she and Kitty proposed an idea to Baba. When they learned that Baba had designated several of the men to return to Meherabad by rail,

> Kitty and I went through one of those strange things we did now and then. We suggested to Baba that we could go back by train if He liked. That would make more room for the others on the bus and we assured Him we really would not mind. If the two of us went, it would be all right; we would keep each other company.
>
> "Oh," said Baba. "You want to go by train. You do not want to travel with Me. You prefer going back by train."
>
> "No, Baba, that is not what we meant. We mean that everyone else would be more comfortable and we really do not mind going by train."

> "No," said Baba, "You prefer going by train instead of traveling with Me. That is how I understand it."
>
> This went on and on during a session with everyone present. When the meeting was over and we were dismissed, Kitty and I were still sticking to our point that we really meant it out of the goodness of our hearts to go by train.
>
> Then Baba called Kitty and me to His room. Again we went through the whole thing. Again we stuck to our point. Three days went by and the situation remained unchanged. Again Baba called us. Again an impasse and Baba dismissed us in disgust.
>
> Of course, we knew Baba would win in the end and we didn't have a chance against Him. Finally we wept and said, "Yes, Baba, of course we want to go with You; of course we don't want to go by train."

"Then," Rano concluded, "Baba was quite happy and He embraced us and the atmosphere was all clear again"—until the next time.[2]

More passengers meant more personal belongings, and Rano now had to avail herself of "any and every available space," Meherwan recalled, "so that the whole bus was jam-packed." The men were equally challenged to find places for the "huge mounds of luggage that had to be put on the top carrier."[3]

As well as having to accommodate the requisite bedding rolls, suitcases, trunks, toilet kits, art supplies, *mast*-bathing buckets, food provisions, and cooking paraphernalia, the overburdened vehicle now also served as a mobile library, because the books the women had accumulated during their sojourn in Bangalore were deemed too precious to leave behind. In addition to her other assignments, Margaret had become the ashram's de facto librarian and it was her responsibility to transport the books wrapped in her bedroll, a "cumbersome mess" that

needed to be unpacked and repacked at every stopover; on occasion she even slept on them, she confessed, "when I was too tired to take them out of my bedding roll."[4]

The Blue Bus set out from Bangalore on the morning of Monday, April 1, 1940, with Donkin at the wheel. Accompanying it were the Buick, transporting Baba and the invisibles, chauffeured by Elizabeth; the Opel,* in which Gustadji, Gulamasi, and Meherwan rode, driven by Tukaram; and the Auburn, carrying several of the Westerners, driven by Jalbhai.

Margaret recalled that the Westerners would take turns riding in the Auburn during this tour, "instead of sitting hot, squashed and uncomfortable" in the crowded bus:

> My turn came for this luxury, and I sat in front with the driver, Jal, who happened to be in a mischievous mood, giving me all kinds of peculiar and certainly not accurate information about things we passed or about any small towns we might pass through. We laughed a great deal and by the time we reached our destination, I had subconsciously registered that one must be careful about accepting Jal's statements.
>
> The bedding rolls were brought down from the top of the bus and placed in certain rooms for unpacking and stretching on the floor for the night.
>
> Just as I was getting near the end of my chores Jal appeared grinning in the doorway saying that Baba wished to see me. He then departed.
>
> I was stupid enough to accept this as the last joke of the day, and went on with my job.
>
> Soon someone else came along demanding to know why, when called, I had not gone at once to Baba.

* Sarosh Irani provided the ashram with the Opel.

> I then shamefacedly found myself explaining to Baba why I had not come in the first place.

Baba pardoned Margaret, and in a fond tribute to His brother, "lovingly explained that however Jal might tease and talk nonsense he would never dream of giving anyone a fictitious order from Baba."[5]

Meherwan and Sarvar's school break coincided with Baba's decision to leave Bangalore. "That was the first time I accompanied the party on the Blue Bus journey," Meherwan recalled, "and of course, I wasn't always on the Blue Bus. Mainly I would be in a car…. So myself and Gustadji were the occupants in the front seat [of the Opel]."[6]

Donkin called the remaining women who traveled in the bus "the big gang."[7] Kaka and Nilu rode in the front seat next to Donkin. Whenever the bus stopped, Baba ordered the men to get off and walk away until out of sight of the women, who only then could exit the vehicle via the rear door, which, in any case, faced in the opposite direction. This order applied to all stops: picnics, rest stops, sightseeing, and arrivals at destinations at the end of the day.

They reached their dak bungalow in the town of Arsikere in late morning. Baba had ordered that no one could have anything to drink except when He stopped the caravan to eat lunch and rest for the remainder of the day. "It was, of course, a terribly hot time to travel in April and May," Meherwan recalled. "It was blazing hot when we entered the dak bungalow, and only one glass of water had to be rationed out. My whole throat was parched, but my aunt [Gulamasi] was very careful not to let me drink any more than Baba's order."[8]

Although fewer than twelve hours had passed since the group's departure, someone provided Baba with the occasion for a lecture—perhaps over the rationing of water. "In the evening of that day, Baba had everybody called, and Baba was in a sort of serious mood, and the subject was 'limit,'" Meherwan recalled. "There was a limit to everything…. There were people who were crossing limits [and] it was a long, drawn discourse…. It was an extemporal thing [and] some lesson had to be

brought home."[9] Afterward, perhaps to lighten the mood, Baba took the women out for a short "walk & talk," after which they spent one stifling night in the bungalow.[10]

Baba's caravan was back on the road by 7:30 on Tuesday morning. Their next stop was Shimoga, sixty-five miles farther on, where they arrived just in time for their midday meal. As Kitty had resumed responsibility for ensuring the availability of food while the group was on the road, she immediately located the bread and butter from among their provisions and got down from the bus to prepare sandwiches for the women. Seeing Donkin standing off to one side, and, thinking he must have been as hungry as the women, she offered him a sandwich. Just then Baba suddenly appeared and told her to make a sandwich for Donkin.

"But I already have," Kitty replied. She, whose dearest wish was to serve, was so pleased to have foreseen Baba's order. But Baba was not at all pleased. "Who told you to give Don anything?" He angrily demanded. "Only I give things to people. Who do you think you are? Do you feel sorry for Don?"[11] Kitty was devastated, and afterward, whenever she saw Donkin, she looked the other way out of shame. Donkin made no mention of the incident in his diary, perhaps out of deference to Kitty's feelings.

Baba had been invited to Shimoga by "Mohammedan millionaire" brothers B. S. Amir Ahmed and B. Syed Mahmood, who had met Him in Bangalore.[12] Chanji called the brothers Zamindars,* "society figures" who issued

> a cordial invitation to the Master and His party to sanctify their place of residence with His august presence….
>
> True to the spirit of Indian hospitality, the family had made arrangements for the party, lavishly entertaining all for two days, at Shimoga on the 2nd and Gersoppa on

* The Persian word *zamindar* derives from *zamīn* (earth or land) and the suffix *dār* (holder). *Zamindars* were wealthy, aristocratic property owners who owed their fortunes to land holdings and tax collections from the peasants who worked that land. Their positions were hereditary and they were considered to be the equivalent of English lords or barons.

> the 3rd. They had entertained very distinguished guests for years, but it was a unique experience for them to entertain a Spiritual Master and His group of Eastern and Western disciples. It may be a rare privilege for the family since Baba has been nowhere during this eight months of stay in Bangalore and His present tour has also been strictly private.[13]

The wealthy brothers were known locally as the "tiger men." They hosted Baba and His entourage in what Donkin called "grand style; everything with flags out, coconut water with lemon … flowers and whatnot."[14] Meherwan recalled that their palatial home "was almost like a museum, you know, with the rich antiques—huge vases, and somebody said there was a prized possession of a very ancient [vessel] that if you poured water into it and gave it to a dying person, he would revive for some time."[15] That evening Baba and the men were entertained in Baba's tent by a qawaali singer and a small group of accompanists.

Baba wanted to leave Shimoga early the next morning, but the brothers had arranged for family members and friends to come for His darshan and they implored Him to stay. Although He was in seclusion Baba graciously received the group, for whom Donkin coined a new word in his diary: "darshanites," making them sound like a new sect of devotees.[16] Baba also posed for a group photograph and visited a gold mine owned by the brothers, pointing out to them the place where they should dig.

Baba planned to sit in seclusion for thirty minutes each day throughout this tour, and sometime during the morning He asked the women if they would do something for Him. He told them that He would require "absolute and total silence."[17] In the past He had allowed the women to carry on with their everyday tasks during the hours when He sat in seclusion. "All 30 [or so] women had to go about their

chores," Mani later recalled, "but without making a sound. It wasn't easy especially when you're working in the kitchen, there are so many interruptions, and things have got to be done at a particular time. No matter how careful everyone was, just at that time, something would drop from somewhere—some pan in the kitchen, or there was a noise while doing the washing, or someone threw a pebble at a crow that hit the roof and made a sound. There were always the domestic sounds with so many women together."[18]

This morning, however, in an effort to ensure complete silence, Baba ordered the women to stay seated on their mattresses. One of the clocks had stopped working, and Gulamasi, who was handy with mechanical repairs, offered to look at it while the women were sitting quietly. What could possibly go wrong? Gulamasi unscrewed and removed the back of the clock and "suddenly, like a fire alarm, the alarm went off! We were not even supposed to talk—not to make the slightest sound, even to whisper—and BRRRIIINNNGGG! We were so scared. Everyone was throwing their pillows over the clock. But it kept ringing, even through the pile of pillows." The women assumed that they were in for yet another scorching lecture, but Baba was not angry. He simply asked them to be more careful. "I think Masi must have felt guilty every time she looked at the clock after that," Mani concluded.[19]

DITCHES, DETOURS, AND FORGOTTEN DIRECTIVES

Short though it was, the drive to Goa would be fraught with difficult-to-locate bungalows, detours and missed turns, tires sunk up to the rims, over-heated engines, and punctures. They left Shimoga late in the afternoon of April 4, headed for Gersoppa Falls. Accompanying them were the two brothers, driving their own car. It was a sixty-three-mile drive that should have taken three hours at most; instead, it would be nearly midnight by the time they reached their destination.

Their troubles began when they drove into a small town where they encountered a wedding procession and found a number of elaborately decorated bamboo arches spanning the road. Eruch later recalled, "You've seen pictures, perhaps, of how we traveled in the Blue Bus, how overloaded the bus was. It used to be piled up so high that we had to be careful when driving under anything with a low clearance."[20] Meherwan said the bus "was like a little hillock moving along."[21]

Elizabeth drove the Buick through the first arch without any difficulty, but the bus was another matter entirely. Baba had ordered the drivers to adhere strictly to the route He had laid out for them, but Kaka forgot and suggested a detour around the arch that immediately resulted in Donkin's driving the front end of the bus into a hole by the side of the road. Not only was the vehicle stuck, but its back stairs broke off. "When the bus left the road," Meherwan recalled,

> it proceeded a few feet and just sank down and got stuck…. Howsoever much the driver tried to race the engine, the wheels would [just spin] and there would be no movement.
>
> So [there] they were all stuck. Then we followed [in the Opel]…. Baba's instructions were not to be too far behind His car. So now, here we were in a quandary…. There were some villagers staying nearby, so they came along and started seeing all this circus, you know, all the women inside. And there was this little brother of Meheru…. He was a small child then, and he was crying inside. It was all hot—stuffy. Kaka tells the women "All get down."
>
> So from behind the curtains the women said, "Baba's instructions not to get down from the bus until we reach destination."
>
> Kaka says, "But the bus is stuck! If you don't get down we can't move!"

So they replied, "That's your problem, not ours."

Kaka is starting to sweat now. He suddenly remembered that he had overlooked Baba's little instructions not to leave the road. So then he requests the villagers, "Somebody of you go and get some bullock carts and help us to drag the bus out."

So they obliged by getting a couple of bullock carts, and they had these big thick ropes tied to the bus, and then the bullocks were goaded on to pull the bus. They were making all the effort, the poor animals, but the bus would not budge. Eventually both the ropes snapped—thick ropes, but the bus would just come up and go back into the [hole]…. Here are the women stranded inside. Kaka … was probably just praying internally to Baba to help him now.[22]

When at last Baba turned to look back and realized that the bus was nowhere in sight, He instructed Elizabeth to stop and wait for it to catch up. Finally He gestured for her to turn around and go back. This resulted in her accidentally pulling down one of the arches with the Buick. By now an hour had passed since the bus had become stuck. When Baba arrived at the scene, Meherwan continued, He got out of the Buick and asked Kaka,

"What happened? What is this? How is the bus there? Didn't I tell you?"

And I remember Kaka crying loudly and saying, "Baba, forgive me for forgetting your instructions." And he just laid himself on the floor [*sic*] and bowed to Baba—prostrated to Baba and said, "Forgive me, Baba, it was my mistake. I forgot the order of Yours."

So then Baba said, "Alright." Then Baba tells Elizabeth to hitch her car to the front fender of the bus, then

> there was a small cable she had, and of course He asked the women to get down, so they all got down. And then I could see just a little tug, and the bus just came up … and she just gave a little acceleration to the car and the bus was on the road.[23]

Meanwhile, Kaka had become so distraught that he was pinching his ears—the traditional Indian gesture of remorse, and doing *toba-toba*, slapping his face. "Baba save me!" he implored.[24] Meherwan concluded: "And then Baba said, 'Now remember, don't go off the road. Try to follow Me, to follow My car and don't delay on the road.' So Kaka said, 'Never, Baba—I'll never allow this to happen again. Forgive me.' So then … we all heaved a sigh of relief and started to proceed on the journey, little knowing what trouble was in store for us now because of this little violation of Baba's order."[25]

Not long after they had moved on, the entire convoy came to a halt when they found a smoldering log blocking the road. With what Mani called "frantic gymnastics," the men got out and somehow managed to roll it aside so that they could proceed. "Great fun," she called it, although perhaps not so much for the men.[26] Late in the afternoon Baba stopped the bus for a roadside picnic. Arnavaz recalled that for a treat, "Baba cut up a watermelon that someone had given Him and handed



The Blue Bus, parked for a shady roadside picnic or short walk for the women

each of us a piece. One watermelon divided among all of us didn't go very far, but even the bite we had was refreshing…. Although he was usually quite dignified, Dr. Donkin was finding the Indian summer excruciatingly hot, and in an attempt to lower his body temperature, he placed the empty watermelon rind on his head like a hat! This sort of silliness eased the difficulties of traveling in hot, cramped quarters for long periods."[27]

But not even Donkin's comic interlude could save the day. Just after sunset the Blue Bus convoy began its treacherous ascent of the Western Ghats.* The road, which passed through tiger-infested jungle, was constructed with numerous tight curves to mitigate the steep grade. Suddenly the headlights on the bus went out, and with no lights to guide him, Donkin drove off into a roadside ditch. Yet again they had to use Elizabeth's cable to pull the bus back out onto the road.

Meherwan, who was riding in the Opel, recalled, "There was no moon that evening so it was pitch black. We were in the middle of a forest with those breathtakingly steep drops and hairpin bends. The slightest mistake would have sent the bus hurtling several hundred feet down in no time…. You can imagine what a stressful situation it was!"[28]

It was imperative for Donkin to be able to see where he was going. Kaka asked for all of the small torches (flashlights) Baba had ordered the women to carry with them in their cloth bags, and they dutifully passed them to the front of the bus and handed them through the partition. Kaka and Nilu then climbed onto the front mudguards of the bus, and for the next five or ten miles, shone the feeble beams from the torches into the darkness so that Donkin could see to drive.

Meanwhile, the drivers of both the Auburn and the Opel had to stop to repair flat tires, and Elizabeth's horn got stuck when she used it and would not stop honking. Not even the tiger brothers were spared a share in the night's calamities: their fan belt broke and the car had to be abandoned in the jungle until the following day, and they now had to

* The Western Ghats are a thousand-mile range of mountains running north to south parallel to the west coast of India and the Arabian Sea. They and the Eastern Ghats, which run north to south along the east coast, cradle the Deccan Plateau.

squeeze into the Opel. Kaka fretted that the day's endless mishaps were his punishment for having forgotten Baba's instructions. He was right: Baba blamed everything on Kaka's failure to obey His original order.

By the time Donkin reached the summit the batteries in most of the torches had been exhausted, so he had no choice but to stop in the middle of the road and try to see what was wrong. "So," Meherwan recalled, "he goes under the bus, I remember, and there he sees this snapped wire. You see when the bus had entered that ditch, it had snapped the wire leading to the headlights from the battery. So he just connected the wire and on came bright lights, just when the most difficult part of the journey was over!"[29]

Despite the evening's trials Donkin recorded in his diary that there were "great high trees meeting over the road, real storybook jungle, scented, quiet, and yet full of the sounds of beast and bird, very impressive," adding, "Baba called it the real India."[30] Elizabeth, Tukaram, and Jalbhai all spied a tiger loping across the road in front of their cars, but before Elizabeth could call out to the drowsy invisibles to look, the cat had disappeared into the undergrowth. "It was a lovely forest," Mehera later recalled, "but we were too tired to enjoy it."[31]

Thanks to the delays it was 11:00 PM before the group reached the town of Gersoppa, and they still had to cross the Sheravathi River to reach Mysore Guest House, which the brothers had secured for them. Because it was so late, Baba feared that the river ferry would no longer be in service, so the group made inquiries and were directed, eventually, to a rest house called Bombay Bungli (Bungalow). Baba and the brothers had arranged a special treat for the women and Baba had them roll out a large carpet on the verandah of the bungalow where they could sit and watch the yet-to-be-revealed surprise. But the people awaiting the group at Mysore Guest House on the other side of the river saw the lights on in Bombay Bungli, and so they arranged for the ferry to transport the group across, despite the late hour.

Mani recalled, "right in the middle of the good old hustle-bustle," Baba learned that the ferry was still in operation and ordered everyone back into the vehicles to continue on to the river crossing.[32] Only Adi K.'s sister Dolly had the nerve to speak what may well have been on the tips of other tongues and "angrily said 'You fool! Don't you see that I am tired?' But Baba had a good laugh at this. Dolly was like a *mastani* and would uninhibitedly say anything to anybody—including Baba."[33] Tired or not, the women complied, including Dolly, and the convoy made its way to the river. "Ferry by night very beautiful," Donkin recalled, "bus just got on ferry, which was made of long boats 4 or 6, scooped from solid teak, with boards on top punted by men with paddles and long poles."[34]



Jog Falls, which, after monsoon season, is the second highest plunge waterfall in India

When Baba's party reached Mysore Guest House they found it to be comfortable, modern, and well worth the effort it had taken to reach it. But before the women could entertain the consoling thought of collapsing onto beds (or into chairs or onto tables and the floor), Baba ordered them to bring their torches—those that still had working batteries—and follow Him out into the darkness. The bungalow overlooked the spectacular Gersoppa, or Jog Falls, and the brothers had made special arrangements for Baba's party to view the falls by firelight.

As it turned out, this was the worst time of year to view the falls, which had subsided to "barely a trickle," Arnavaz recalled. It was just one more test at the end an extraordinarily testing day, because by this time, no one was in the mood for any kind of treat that did not entail lying down and going to sleep. "Bleary-eyed with exhaustion," Arnavaz continued, the women sank into chairs that had been set up for them by their hosts, who began to ignite bales of hay and roll them over the top of the falls, so that the flames lit up what remained of the cascade.[35] "That was the last thing we wanted to do, but we went," Mehera later reminisced. "It made a fascinating picture by the lights of the fire-balls, gliding down like parachutes. It was a lovely night, but we were too tired to enjoy it. We stayed for 15 minutes and almost fell asleep in our chairs."[36] According to Arnavaz, it was so dark and the women were so utterly exhausted that they were not even sure where the falls were. "One of us would say, 'Oh, there are the falls!' and another would then see them in a totally different place, while a third would spot them in yet another. The scene was hilarious. Baba made us all sit, exhausted, in the middle of the night, trying to see the falls which none of us could see."[37]

"Now you all go and rest," Baba told them afterward. But despite the fact that the women didn't get to bed until 1:30 AM, it was business as usual in the morning, and Baba woke them early so that they would be ready to leave by 7:00 AM.[38] They ferried to the other side of the river, where they had a second view of the falls. Donkin found them "very beautiful especially in morning, being in the midst of the jungle—a most impressive [and] a lovely and memorable place."[39] The previous day had been so replete with adventure that Mani required two pages to record its events in her diary. Arnavaz, however, had the last word: "When we finally did see the falls in the morning," she recalled nearly fifty years later, "they were in a completely different direction from where we thought we had seen them the previous night."[40]

Baba's motorcade continued on to Karwar, through "60 miles of jungle road," Donkin noted, "lovely and scented as always—huge

trees towering up close to each other, and a dense undergrowth." They stopped for petrol and a roadside picnic before boarding yet another ferry to cross the estuary of the Kali River. The bus was carried across first, and Donkin took the opportunity to go for a swim while waiting for the cars to follow, in the "lovely river, running as it does through jungle forests," concluding with the fairly frightening observation that there were "crocodiles in [the] water though, but none I think, where I bathed."[41]

The Blue Bus, Buick, Auburn, and Opel reached the small fishing port of Karwar at about 7:00 PM, after twelve hours on the road.* Baba, the women, and children checked into the Grand Hotel for a five-night stay, while the men were accommodated in a rest house not far away. The hotel was situated in "a divine place, jungle covered hills falling into the sea, sandy bays and rocky headlands, trees over the beach, islands out to sea…. Lots of bright coloured birds too—and beautifully coloured monkeys in the trees." But despite its impressive name, Donkin found it to be "not so grand, but old and dirty."[42]

Baba expressed His love for the area around Karwar, which overlooked the Arabian Sea to the west and the foothills of the Western Ghats to the east, and the setting inspired Him to recall "'piddling' for millions of years creating the sea, and 'shitting' for millions of years making the land."[43] Donkin took care to clarify in his diary that Baba said this only to the men. Baba also warned them to take care, as there had been several recent cases of plague, "not many cases, only two deaths a day," which, in the young doctor's estimation, was nothing to be concerned about.[44]

Breezes off the water kept Karwar's temperatures moderate and comfortable. Baba took the women out for a walk after breakfast during their first morning, "to the beach (an isolated & attractive part)," Mani recorded, "& [we] enjoyed a real holiday-morning by the sea, returning at 10. Also, we had a stroll by the sea (in front of the hotel), after supper."[45] The children also accompanied Baba on these walks. "Baba

* The hundred-mile route that they followed would today take well under three hours to drive, but the Blue Bus averaged fewer than eight miles per hour.

would stand on the edge of the waters, *lenghas* [loose cotton pants] drawn up, and the waters would rush up," Meherwan recalled. "Probably He would be blessing the ocean—what work we don't know."[46] Each day, in fact, Baba escorted the women and children to the seaside after breakfast or supper. On the morning of April 7 He allowed them to go swimming and paddling, although for the Easterners it was more of an opportunity to wade into the shallow waves close to the shore, as none of them knew how to swim—yet. Everyone ventured out again the following evening, and Baba built sandcastles on the beach. The Easterners again stayed close to the water's edge, at least two of them looking on with envy as the Westerners ventured out into the waves.

One evening Baba served the women toddy, distilled locally from the sap of the toddy palms that flourished in the heat and humidity of southern coastal India. They were also entertained by Vishnu's cousins Indu and Sushila, whom Baba had called to join the tour so that they could help prepare meals. This was their first chance to spend time with Him. The two women had lovely voices, and Baba asked them to sing every evening.

After two consecutive days of adventures and mishaps Donkin was especially in need of a respite. He went off several times for a swim but was careful to note that it was a different stretch of beach than the one the women visited. By the end of his respite in Karwar he would observe that he felt "a lot fitter here, sunburnt, and fresh."[47] Nothing, however, escaped Baba's notice, and one day He chastised Donkin for not having worn a hat when he was out on the water. "Baba told me that he would like to put a 12" x 6" stone round my neck and drown me—He also quoted the English song—'The mad dogs the [*sic*] Englishmen go out in the midday sun'"[48*]

In order to maintain His seclusion, Baba had ordered everyone to refer to Him as "Babooli" and Gustadji as "Kabuli," Baba's twin, because Gustadji also was practicing silence.[49] Meherwan, however,

* The correct lyrics are "Mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the midday sun." The line is from a song by Noel Coward. Baba first heard the song during one of His early visits to England.

accidentally revealed Baba's identity to one of the waiters in the hotel. "Baba was traveling incognito," he recalled,

> so whenever anyone had to talk to Baba, they decided to call Baba "Baboosi" … but nobody should know that it was Baba bring referred to. Baba wanted to be undisturbed…. And we were at this hotel and I was a young kid, so the waiters and all got interested.
>
> They would ask me, "Who is this gentleman you are traveling with?" And I just happened to blurt out, "He is God! His name is Meher Baba," when I was not supposed to say anything, and the next day that waiter came with his family for Baba's darshan, and Baba looked at us.
>
> "How did he come to know? Who revealed My identity?" And eventually I was caught, and Baba tweaked my ears and said, "Don't you know that nobody should know about this!" I was innocent at that time and inadvertently revealed His identity. But somehow, His personality always attracted people.[50]

Baba forgave Meherwan's innocent transgression.

BACK TO WORK

Mehera later recalled of her time in Karwar, "We were always in the [hotel]. We never went out, except with Baba for walks to the sea."[51] However, Baba did take the women by boat out to Anjidiv Island on the morning of the sixth. It was, Donkin observed, a "lovely tropical island, about a mile long and ? mile broad—with two springs of water … very picturesque, and lovely experience."[52] There the group toured Igreja de Nossa Senhora das Brotas (Church of Our Lady of Springs), one of the first Christian churches in India. The women found the two-century-old church "charming" but somewhat "dilapidated."[53] Baba had resumed His search for sites for spiritual centers, and He was so taken with the

atmosphere of the island that He told the women, "Of the three centers I want to build for my work in the world, I have to build one here!"[54]

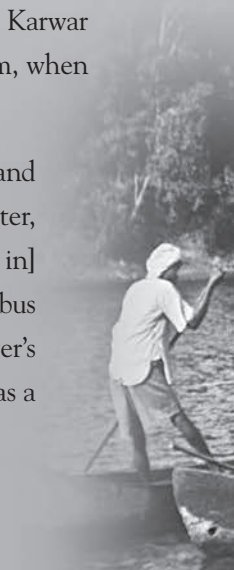
Later in April Baba sent Norina, Elizabeth, and Donkin to speak with the Portuguese Governor of Goa to inquire about establishing a center on the island. He joked that Donkin should hire a suit for the meeting, and that if the governor had a beard, Norina should flirt with him; if he had only a moustache, Elizabeth should rattle coins she was to carry in her pockets; but if he was young and ailing, Donkin should inquire about his health and offer him free surgery. Despite Baba's careful preparations, however, His delegation was unsuccessful because the island was closed to development. Norina also investigated the possible purchase of a hillside property in front of the Grand Hotel, but nothing seems to have come of her inquiry.

During their last day in Karwar Baba offered a discourse to the women on the necessity of maintaining poise, beginning and ending with the question, "What is spirituality? Poise, perfect poise. Make the most of every situation. He who upsets no one is a good man. He who is upset by no one is a God-Man!"[55]

That night Baba experienced pain so intense that it made Him groan aloud. The following day Germany invaded Denmark and the peaceable Kingdom of Norway, provoking Great Britain into a confrontation that came to be called the Norwegian Campaign.

Baba's caravan departed as planned on Tuesday, April 9, bound for Astoli, and the women's poise was soon put to the test. "We left Karwar at 4.45 am," Donkin wrote, "in order to get to the ferry at 5.0 am, when tide would be high and the bus [could] get across O.K."

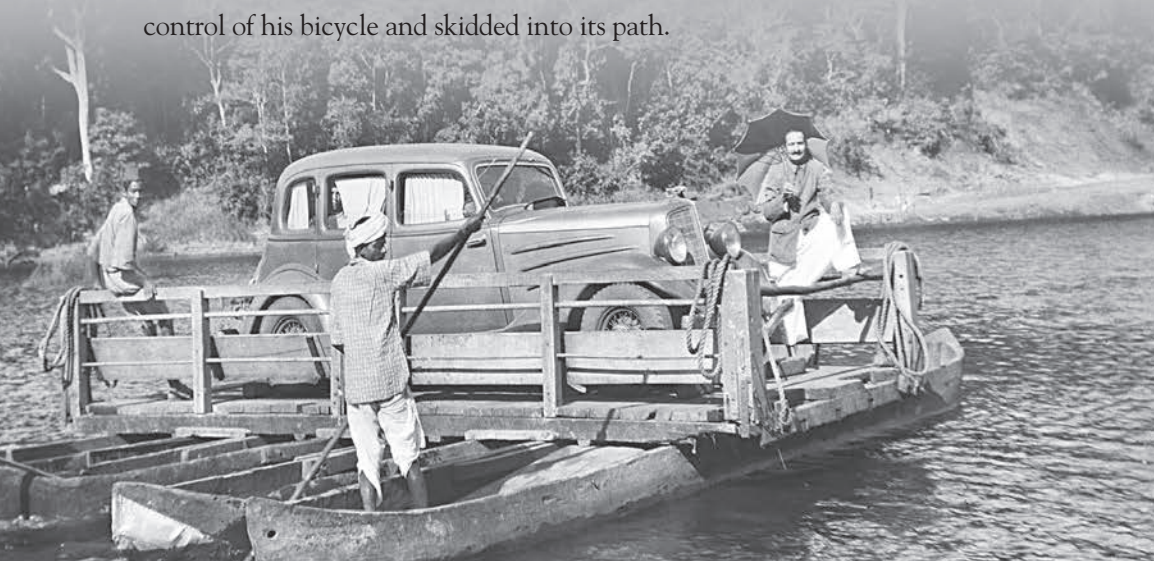
> But at 5.0 am, when we got there the ferry was not ready, and the tide almost fully low! The cars [which were much lighter, and could be transported before the tide had come back in] had to wait [at] the other end before getting off, and the bus made quite a risky crossing on the choppy water at the river's mouth; driving the bus off the ferry at the other end it was a



> matter of doing it quickly and hoping for the best—but Baba was watching us and I felt all would be O.K. [and] so it was, save a broken back lamp; it was an exciting moment, such a steep run down wet slippery boards swaying because of the ferry boat swaying on the waves; it was lucky the back step had been broken off a week before between Shimoga and Jog Falls, because this would certainly have hit coming off the ferry, and perhaps made us stick in the wet sand.[56]

Donkin's breathless run-on sentence mirrors what the women must have felt as the bus lurched off the ferry onto the opposite bank. "But as always with Baba," he wisely concluded, "all was O.K. in the end. It was nearly 10.0 am by the time all 4 [vehicles] were across—5 hours gone! We gave the ferryman a 'purgation'"—Donkin's medical term for the severe reprimand the man received from Baba for having deceived Him about the timing of the tides.[57]

Soon after they got on the road Baba stopped the caravan for a hot, uncomfortable picnic lunch in the steamy jungle. Afterward, the steep, winding climb over the ghats caused the radiators in the cars to overheat. Then one of the Buick's tires sustained a puncture when Elizabeth ran over "a big stone," Donkin noted, "which Jal afterwards ran over, rather stupidly," and the bus became stuck when trying to round a too-tight corner, "one trouble after another with each car."[58] Most frightening of all, the bus struck and nearly knocked over a cyclist who lost control of his bicycle and skidded into its path.



The cars and bus were carried across rivers on pontoon ferries supported by boats

Meanwhile, the clutch in the Auburn began slipping, and after its petrol line became clogged Jalbhai was forced to abandon it in the jungle for the night. The Westerners who had been riding with him had to squeeze into the bus and "Oppelle," which, Mani wrote, were now "packed full like tins of sardines."[59]

The Buick continued on, leaving the bus and Opel to catch up. By now it was so late in the day that Baba decided to make an unplanned stop at a beautifully situated dak bungalow in the town of Supa. There, Elizabeth and the invisibles took the opportunity to prepare a hot meal for those who were still on the road, but what provisions and cooking paraphernalia they used, Mani did not say. After nearly two hours had passed and there was still no sign of the other vehicles, Baba and the women got back into the Buick to try to locate the latecomers, who were discovered just a few miles from the town.

By the time the Blue Bus reached the dak bungalow it was 7:30 PM, but its odometer had accumulated only a pitiful fifty miles since the group's predawn departure. Baba explained later that evening that He had given the discourse on poise not only to prepare the women for the day's misadventures, but so that they might also "undergo a tiny bit of the suffering which I am now going through. I am now suffering tremendously internally."[60] He was referring to the pain He had experienced the previous night.

The following morning they continued on, with a brief stop at the town of Londa for petrol and provisions for their midday meal. Nilu stayed behind to make arrangements for towing the ailing Auburn to Belgaum for repairs. They reached Anmode at 11:00 AM, where they located a dak bungalow that was perfectly secluded in a forest and which was available for their use. There they enjoyed the fresh chapatis, cooked potatoes, and bananas that they had picked up in the bazaar in Londa. Donkin described Anmode as "a lovely place; a jungle stream ? mile off for bathing," while Mani called the village "picturesque [and] typically Indian."[61] That afternoon Baba took the women for a walk down to the

river, and the women returned there in the evening to bathe and wash their clothes.

Anmode is located on what was then the border between Goa and Mysore (now Karnataka). Baba's party left the morning of April 11, bound for Panjim, located about fifty miles due west, but they were held up for more than an hour while a customs officer at the border searched some of their belongings before allowing them to proceed. Despite the delay Baba said that "the man was good and within his rights asking to see some luggage from the top of the bus." Donkin added mischievously that Norina had "flattered" the agent, but in addition to attempting to speed up the process, she also may have distracted him from noticing Baba's briefcase,• which Khorshed was carrying.[62]

Donkin wrote: "Baba loves Goa, He says the atmosphere is spiritual here—it is pleasant and a change from British India."[63] By 10:30 AM Baba's party had reached Panjim, where they checked into the Hotel Republica, overlooking the harbor and public plaza. The women found the hotel comfortable, albeit somewhat shabby, but Donkin described it as "stinking and smelly," reeking potently of "a mixture of fish, urine, and phenyl disinfectant." The invisibles took their meals in the untainted fresh air of the terrace with Baba. He allowed everyone to try some of the curry dishes for which Goa is renowned, as well as fresh fish, which He also ate, explaining that it was for "spiritual reasons."[64] The hotel food was quite good, and one evening Mani made the mistake of spooning up the leftover syrup from everyone else's plates after they'd finished an especially luscious dessert. She promptly fell fast asleep, blissfully unaware that the syrup had been laced with wine.

Because of His seclusion Baba instructed everyone to continue calling Him "Babooli." He wished not to be shown any

• A number of photographs taken during the tours capture Khorshed carrying a small case. At the beginning of the first tour, Baba made her responsible for a briefcase containing what He called "important documents" that He would bring with Him throughout the Blue Bus Tours. He ordered her to keep the briefcase with her at all times, so she could never leave it behind at the group's lodgings, nor in the bus or car. Sometimes she slept with it under her head (hopefully with a pillow in between) at night.

Khorshed did not know what was in the briefcase and she never asked Baba what she was responsible for protecting. "Whatever Baba said, we did." (*Mehera–Meher* 2:36) However, Meherwan believed that the briefcase contained "The Book" that Baba had written in the early years. (*My Life with Meher Baba, the Avatar of the Age*, 95) Neither the briefcase nor "The Book" has ever been found.

Many years later Khorshed recalled that she had to focus so much of her attention on the briefcase that she had few memories of the sites they had visited.



special recognition, Donkin wrote, "no darshan, no standing, no special reverence to ensure that no-one gets to know who Baba is—He says He has much work to do."[65] On the day of His arrival in Panjim, before checking into the hotel, Baba had ordered Elizabeth to stop at the Church of St. Francis Xavier, ostensibly to ask when He could bring the women there to visit.• When she went into an adjacent restaurant to make her inquiry, she encountered a bearded, grey-haired gentleman wearing a tattered suit and solar topee. The old man looked to Donkin like "Moses in an old suit."[66] As he and

• Portuguese Jesuit priest and missionary St. Francis Xavier (April 7, 1506–December 2, 1552) landed in Goa in May 1542 and settled there to establish a mission. Goa eventually became a center for Jesuit priests who carried Catholicism throughout South India. English Baba lover Will Backett composed a three-part article entitled "St. Francis Xavier (A.D. 1506–1552) Mystic, Explorer, Evangelist and Traveller in Europe, Africa and Asia" for the August, September, and October 1940 issues of the *Meher Baba Journal.*



Unpacking the bus in front of the rambling Hotel Republica in Panjim. Rano is standing behind the open rear door. Elizabeth's Buick is visible on the right.

Elizabeth came out of the restaurant together, he told her that the church was always open. He and Baba exchanged a swift glance.

That same evening Baba took the women back out to visit the church and tomb. "The saint's body is kept in a glass case," Arnavaz recalled, "and every twelve [*sic*, ten] years it is opened and large crowds come to pay homage. Baba, who often visited the tombs of the holy, went into the church, imparting the atmosphere of His Divine Presence for the benefit of those who were to come there later."[67]

Just as Baba and the women were about to return to the hotel, they ran into the same old man they had seen earlier and Elizabeth became engaged in another conversation with him. He told her that

he was originally from Karachi. He professed to have written a number of as yet unperformed plays and spoke of his interest in modern drama and the work of the great Irish playwright, George Bernard Shaw. All the while he glanced repeatedly at Baba, who asked Jalbhai to inquire whether he needed anything, to which the man replied, "No, thanks very much," as he again looked directly at Baba. After returning to the hotel Baba chastised the women, telling them, "You are all blind. He is very spiritually advanced and a conscious agent. All his talk about writing plays had hidden meaning, meant for Me. I gave him certain instructions internally and tomorrow he will leave Goa."[68]

Indeed, when Elizabeth saw the man the following morning, April 12, he said to her, "I don't know why, but I feel all on fire! Although I intended to stay in Goa for some months, I have to leave at once for a cold country in the north." Elizabeth repeated his odd remarks to Baba, who explained that since she "had been the first to meet him, she must also be the last."[69] Later, while listening to the radio for news about the war, the men and women learned for the first time that Norway and Denmark had fallen to the Nazis.

Although He did not escort the women to the seaside during their visit to Panjim, Baba did take them to visit a Hindu Temple on the twelfth, and as an added treat He took them to see the movie

Group photo of Baba's entourage



Gopal Krishna that evening.* The following evening He served them toddy before taking them out for a drive "round a picturesque part of Goa."[70] Baba also served toddy to the men—one and a half glasses each, while He drank directly from the jug. He told them that He had served it for "spiritual reasons," and "now He had drunk toddy all the world would go mad," Donkin recorded. "Baba said this Norway move of Germany's would not benefit her at all—but harm her: it now looks as if the war is really starting: Baba says so too."[71]

Daytime temperatures were extremely hot, and one day Elizabeth asked Baba if she could provide a special treat for everyone, as she had heard that the local ice cream was especially delicious. Baba told her it was an excellent idea. He then turned to Dr. Nilu and asked him in Marathi (which Elizabeth did not speak) what would counteract the effects of ice cream and prevent everyone from getting sore throats from eating it. Nilu replied in Marathi that "garlic chutney would be a good prophylactic against any side effects."[72]

Baba ordered Katie and Manu, who knew nothing about the ice cream, to prepare a large quantity of garlic chutney. When Elizabeth returned with her treat Baba served it Himself—a scoop of ice cream, with a liberal helping of garlic chutney on the side in the same bowl—encouraging the women to eat all the ice cream they wanted so long as they remembered to take a bite of chutney after each spoonful. "You should have seen Elizabeth's face," Meherwan recalled, "because she detested garlic. And the garlic chutney had been brought and the ice cream had to be eaten. We couldn't back out now."[73]

The hot weather took an especially heavy toll on the cooks. One sticky morning at around this time, Margaret recalled, Gaimai kindly volunteered to prepare the group's midday meal to give Katie and Manu a much-appreciated break from the heat of the kitchen.

> A wave of horror passed through Norina and me. Gaimai was an excellent cook. The Easterners loved her food,

* The Poona-based Prabhat Film Company's 1938 Hindi and Marathi movie *Gopal Krishna* was a remake of their 1929 silent film, shot during the pre-independent India era when dissatisfaction with British rule was at its height. The movie portrays Krishna as a man, rather than a mythological figure. Bollywood released a color remake in 1979.

> which was probably the hottest and spiciest I have ever eaten. But both Norina and I had stomachs that refused to accept that kind of food. We got together, decided to eat outside near some bushes, and surreptitiously empty our plates behind them. It seemed better to go hungry for a few hours than to suffer the misery caused by that kind of food.
>
> At lunch time, feeling that our problem was solved, we stepped happily into the improvised dining room, only to find that it wasn't. Baba, looking radiant, had appeared and announced that He wished to serve the food to His disciples. And the rule was that any food served or given by the Master must be eaten. He seemed to think that I must be especially hungry and, with a loving smile, placed an extra spoonful on my plate.
>
> Norina and I did not look at each other. Our plan had failed. The results were to be expected.[74]

Many years later Kitty and Margaret reminisced about Gai-mai's cooking. When Margaret complained about the hot spices, Kitty reminded her: "Full of vitamin C and good for the heart according to Dr. Donkin." Never one to let Kitty have the last word Margaret quickly retorted, "Well, it destroys your stomach lining but it's good for your heart!"[75]

Baba continued His *mast* work in Panjim. On April 13 Donkin brought an unnamed *mast* described as being "a little bit on the path," and he assisted Baba in bathing him. Baba also contacted a fifteen-year-old orphan named Santana Fernandez. The boy, whom Donkin called "bright and intelligent," was a priest's servant. The people from his church were reluctant for the men to take him away and gathered to see him off when he left to meet Baba, who deemed him "very good" and a "spiritual type."[76]

The following day Baba sent Norina and Kaka out to locate yet another female *mast* called Mastani Mai, revered locally as a Christian

saint. Baba said that she was the spiritual chargeman who "held the key to the spiritual affairs of Goa."[77] She was modestly attired in Western clothes—a long pleated skirt and black chiffon blouse, but her bobbed hair and masculine manner were so imposing that Norina likened her to "an emancipated woman."[78]

Because Norina could not speak Portuguese she spoke to Mastani Mai in Italian, calling her Mammina (Mother). The *mastani* refused to get in the car in which Norina was riding but walked straight to the Hotel Republica, where Baba was standing out on His balcony watching her approach. They locked eyes for the briefest time and then she went on her way, His work accomplished.

Baba made another contact at around this time. "Baba suddenly asked the car to be halted," Meherwan recalled, "and an old man with a beard suddenly came and opened the door, and everybody was so shocked because Baba and the women were in strict seclusion. So somebody tried, I think, to intercede, to stop the man. But Baba just said not to, and they had some little sign or something and the man went away. Baba never mentioned anything but later on He said it was some agent with whom He had an appointment."[79]

When the Blue Bus convoy departed Panjim on April 15, Donkin observed that everyone seemed relieved to be vacating the foul-smelling hotel. The group's next halt would be Khanapur, another fifty miles to the northeast. They stopped for a picnic lunch at a rest house in Otoli after passing a traveling circus along the way. Later that afternoon, after settling into their dak bungalow, the women walked down to the river to bathe and cool off.

MANGOS AND THE MAHARANI

The following morning Baba's caravan continued north to Amboli, stopping for Baba to contact a *mast* seated in the shade of a roadside tree. He was, Chanji wrote, "a *mast* whom the average person might have mistaken for a beggar in rags. The *mast* asked the car to be stopped,

and when Baba came out of the car, the *mast* immediately prostrated himself before the Master whom he seemed to recognize as the One he had searched for for years, and said so."[80] The *mast's* name was Jampia, and Baba brought him along, squeezing him into the front seat of the Buick between Himself and Elizabeth before continuing on.

Amboli was a mountain retreat which Donkin described as "a jungle village on the very edge of the Ghats, a superb place, most lovely views of the Ghats dropping to the plains to the west and the rolling hills to the east. Baba [is] happy here."[81] The weather had become rainy, and everyone found the village cool and pleasant after the sweltering humidity of the coastal cities they had left behind. "It was a beautiful place—all forests and wild jasmine growing everywhere, so we had this beautiful aroma. All this seemed to have been indelibly impressed upon my mind. After all these years," fifty-four, to be exact, Meherwan marveled, "I still remember that."[82]

Chanji also praised Amboli, writing, "The difficulties of touring with a Master under most trying conditions stand in strange contrast with the charm and beauty of some of the spots visited," adding that, like all hill stations, Amboli served as a "summer resort for Indian royalties and officials of the State." He observed that this visit was "a refreshing halt to His group during the long summer tour," and noted that their host was a young Hindu devotee called Vishwanath Haldankar.[83]

Baba contacted one *mast* in Amboli, called Narain Bhat (Protector and Learned One), "a god-mad Brahmin" whom Donkin called an "entertaining conversationalist of a crazy sort, mixing English, which he knew quite well, with Sanskrit, Marathi and Hindi." Baba would take him along to Sakharpa, but the *mast* was sent home after Gustadji found him hiding high up in a tree in the middle of the night.[84]

Meherwan recalled Baba making another contact in Amboli, "a Christian boy named Anton. He was a nice-looking lad and Baba liked him, so he was asked to accompany the party. Somehow the parents

must have agreed to part with their boy, and he joined us for the rest of the journey. He was older than me. He was … so illiterate that he had never even seen a timepiece, so I remember I was teaching him how to read the clock. I had an old timepiece with me and I turned the hands and showed him how you read it … and Baba happened by and He liked me teaching the boy something." Meherwan concluded that Baba used fortunate boys such as this one to plant "seeds of love so that in future generations they would do His work."[85]

Several of the women developed fevers in Amboli, including Irene, Elizabeth, and Norina; Donkin diagnosed Irene with typhoid. Baba assigned Margaret the task of caring for her:

> My instructions were to give her some medicine at intervals and do what I thought about washing her and such.
>
> The strangest order came from Baba. He gave me a cake of Lifebuoy soap and told me that every hour I was to wash my hands with this disinfectant, and every now and then Baba, looking radiant, would appear on the other side of the compound and make the motions of hand washing.
>
> During the night, if Irene were sick, I had to take the used utensils into the forest and empty them. Here Norina showed me the greatest kindness. She would always come with me and carry the hurricane lamp…. In the end it turned out that Irene did not have typhoid. She was just sick. I wonder what Baba and Donkin were up to![86]

But Irene was very sick, and when her fever shot up to 105 degrees she had to be admitted to the hospital in Belgaum.

Baba and the rest of the women visited Mahadevagad, Parvati, and Temple Points, as well as Nutt Peak and Mahdev Fort during their three-day halt. He took them out on the bus, Donkin recorded, to "a saddle with a big precipice below, and superb views on either sides [*sic*] of the

jungle covered Ghat cliffs; 1000 or 2000 foot drop gorges, canyons, ridges, cliffs, and with dense jungle villages, and rice fields in the valleys."[87]

Margaret recalled that afternoon as well, "walking out along a high plateau."

> It was comfortably broad and jutted out from the main road. It had enormous drops on either side and we could see small villages far below. Since I have a very bad head for heights, I kept well in the center of this projection. It then narrowed to a rocky footpath leading to another plateau and I decided that I would not cross it. Baba, however, decided otherwise. From the other side of the foot path, a few yards in length, He stretched out loving hands to me. I went forward, keeping my eyes on Him, and my head behaved beautifully. When I reached the other side Baba took hold of my dress at the back of my neck and held my head out over the precipice. I caught a glimpse far below of a small village and then hurriedly closed my eyes. This did not please Baba. He pulled my head up and with the first and second fingers of each hand He opened His own eyes very wide, indicating that I should not close mine. Then once more He hung my head over the precipice. This time I managed to keep my eyes open.
>
> I have not since been in the same situation, so I do not know if a cure was effected.[88]

Baba also took the women out late in the cool of the evening, after the sun had set.

"Moonlight during these days," Chanji observed, "added much to the subtle charm of the typical scenery and a walk along the road on a moonlit night has a peculiar charm of its own." While in Amboli, Baba met with the Maharani of Savantwadi, a long-time devotee whose husband had given Him the Tiger Valley Cave property near Panchgani.

Chanji described her as a remarkable person who had visited the West and drove a car, with "modern tastes and habits … fond of sports and shooting," but who also was humble and devoted to "saintly persons."[89]

Baba called the women to "a kind of living room" in their bungalow to be "presented to a Rani who had a country house in the neighborhood," Margaret reminisced.[90] When the Maharani arrived to take Baba's darshan she brought a coconut to place at His feet—a traditional Hindu offering made to a deity or Master with the expectation of a blessing. Accompanying her were her three daughters, one of whom may have been suffering from depression. Although the Maharani did not express her concerns to Baba, He presented the coconut to the daughter about whom she was worried, saying, "Keep this with you always. Preserve it. Everything will be alright. You should not worry."[91]

The Maharani was so touched by Baba's gesture that she invited everyone to join her at her bungalow for a tea party two days later. "Clothes to take tea with a Rani were a difficulty," Margaret went on to observe. "They always came out of our bedding rolls crumpled and messy—and most of us had to spend the morning stroking out a dress with damp hands, the nearest we could get to ironing."[92] The Rani's so-called bungalow was more like a palace, and they all felt decidedly disheveled in such elegant surroundings after getting down from the bus. The bungalow was situated "on the edge of a cliff commanding beautiful scenery," Chanji wrote, and the Rani entertained her guests on a terrace with a stunning view of the Arabian Sea fifteen miles to the west.[93] "We arrived at her palace," Margaret continued. "She had her guards lined up on either side of the avenue. Baba looked wonderful, striding full of life, love and energy through these guards, who presented arms as He passed along. The Rani … took the trouble to speak to each of us separately."[94] Baba allowed the Rani to massage His feet—a great privilege bestowed in recognition of her devotion to Him.

The countryside around Amboli abounded in tigers and poisonous snakes. Donkin unwittingly walked into a tiger's lair, which had

been baited with a bullock to attract the animal into the Maharani's sights so that she could shoot it. He saw the tiger watching him, but by Baba's grace it did not attack. Margaret experienced a close encounter as well. "One night Nadine Tolstoy and I, who were sleeping on the verandah, noticed prowling around the compound what, in the semi-light, looked like an enormous dog. It was not clear to us what the animal was, but since there were many tigers in the neighboring forest, we lay still, thinking of Baba and scarcely breathing. After a time the creature went away, and when sufficient time had elapsed, Nadine sat up and said dramatically in her deep Russian voice, 'That was no dog.'"[95]

Margaret also recalled that it was a fairly common occurrence for deadly kraits to fall from trees onto unsuspecting passersby "who never knew it or anything else" afterward.[96] Because of this Baba admonished the women not to go out after dark without lanterns. One morning, after Nadine and Kitty had forgotten to take a lantern with them the night before, Baba asked them why they thought He had given them the order. "Do you think I am a fool?" He asked. Nadine replied no, but she went on to assert that if they had died it would have been in His presence, adding, "We would have merged in Your Ocean!" Baba responded vehemently, "Instead of drowning, you would have been carried to the shore! Merging in the Ocean is not for those who disobey. They are tossed up on the beach like an old piece of dried driftwood, and there they die! What gain is there in such a death? With Me, one has to live while dying, so that you can live eternally, after dying such a death. Do you follow?"[97]

Others also incurred Baba's displeasure. When He found Arnavaz, Nargis, Katie, and her cousin Silla out on the verandah enjoying a game of cards in view of people in the street, He reprimanded them severely, saying, "If people see you, they will say that Meher Baba's followers do nothing but play cards all day! We are in a new town, and just think for a moment what a bad impression your card playing would make on a casual observer. Don't you donkey-heads feel ashamed? Although I have no objection to it, I have to see to the minutest of

things so that unpleasant consequences do not follow." The young women put away their cards and went inside for their lunches, which they unthinkingly brought back outside to enjoy, but Baba returned to rebuke them yet again. "Here, in My ashram," He said, "you have to act according to My wish."[98]

On the morning of the twentieth Baba and the women celebrated Silla's birthday with morning arti, after which they all had homemade mango ice cream. The women had prepared it themselves with fresh local fruit, and the men conveniently provided the elbow grease to crank the churn.

A few hours later the group departed Amboli, but before they set out, they needed to purchase all the provisions they would need for the last days of their return journey. Their young host Vishwanath helped them assemble what was required. Seeing to Baba's needs during His visit to Amboli was Vishwanath's first opportunity to serve Baba directly, and in this manner, Chanji observed, "the first nail of the hard test was softly driven by Baba during this period. This seemed to be [Vishwanath's] initiation and instead of unnerving him, made him all the more alert, keen and careful to execute his task."[99]

Baba had originally planned to visit Ratnagiri, a port city on the Arabian Sea in southwestern Maharashtra. He said that it was located in "one of the most beautiful parts of India, with beautiful mountains and beaches … bigger than Karwar."[100] But because the coastal heat and humidity had become so oppressive He decided to proceed to Mahabaleshwar. Donkin drove Elizabeth's Buick because she had not yet recovered from her fever, and she rode in the front seat next to Baba—sweet consolation for her continuing distress. A screen (probably tatta) was installed between the front and back seats to ensure the privacy of the invisibles with a man at the wheel of their car for the first time.[101]

Midway through the three-hour drive Baba suddenly ordered Donkin to pull over and He signaled for the Opel and bus to do the same. "We stumbled out," Mani later recalled. "For a few seconds, Baba

pointed out the scene. 'Isn't it lovely?' he remarked. 'Beautiful.' He was trying our patience. One minute later, 'Get back in the bus! The bus has to start in one minute. *Chalo*, quick!'"[102]

The Maharani had offered Baba the use of one of her bungalows, which was located in a quiet village three miles outside of Belgaum. He and the women arrived there at 5:00 PM on April 20, and they enjoyed restful walks through the beautiful gardens later that evening. While in Belgaum Baba received the offer of yet another property for a center,* located about twelve miles north of town, which belonged to a devotee named Tofkane. During their first morning and evening Baba led the women on walks through the gardens, and on the second evening He had them driven out to visit the site for the center. They had ice cream afterward. Later that evening Baba was unwell, and Donkin heard Him groaning aloud. His rest was further disrupted when the *mast* Jampia broke his window and tried to pull the frame away from the wall in the middle of the night. Baba had been bathing, shaving, and feeding the *mast* daily, and while it made him "more presentable," Donkin observed, it also made him "rather sad."[103]And although Baba had called him pukka and said that he was only "mildly crazy," Donkin observed, "His behavior seemed more like that of a mischievous monkey than of a human being."[104]

As with most *masts*, "Baba said that it was not his fault," Donkin continued, "but was due to the difficulty of reconciling his physical consciousness with his spiritual state." Despite His tender ministrations, Baba had to send the unruly *mast* back to his village after just six days. "He was an impossible fellow," Donkin concluded, "more funny in retrospect than he was at the time, since he nearly drove everyone crazy [and] he was really too much to manage."[105]

* Under a sub-heading entitled "New Sites for Centres" Chanji noted in one of his *Meher Baba Journal* columns that Baba intended to establish a total of twelve new centers "before He speaks." These would include the six already established or else under construction: Meherabad, Toka, Nasik, Mysore, Byramangala, and Mandla. Chanji also noted that Baba had expressed a particular "liking for [locations in] Karwar and Belgaum." (*Meher Baba Journal* 2, no. 7: 443)

On April 23 they left Belgaum at 5:00 AM "sharp," Mani recorded, for an uncomfortable 130-mile drive to Sakharpa over poor roads, stopping to picnic in a shady spot during the morning.[106] There something occurred that triggered another lecture, as Baba had to reprimand the women yet again for someone's loss of temper. "He wants us to get angry," Donkin later wrote, "but to control it—to hate but to transform the hate to love, to maintain poise always, that is spirituality. The women, He says, make such a fuss over small things; they have no courage to control their moods."[107] It was a sad commentary on the women's behavior coming from their Beloved.

They arrived in Sakharpa at about 11:00 AM and settled into a dak bungalow so pleasantly situated that Mani could not resist waxing poetic, striking out her first description for another, more lyrical one: "The dak-bungalow," she wrote, "was situated amongst ~~hills & beautiful~~ a merry-go-round chain of hills."[108] Baba too was happy, "fit and radiant," Donkin observed, "pleased with people and things in general," having dismissed the morning's upset.[109] After the temperature dropped a bit that evening Baba took the women out for a walk, during which, Mani wrote, they "plucked '*kervendas*' [bush plums] from the trees & had great fun, & went to the river as well."[110]

Khorshed's birthday fell on April 24 and was celebrated with arti and what Mani called "iced" mango drinks. In the afternoon the women trooped back down to the river to wash their clothes. Katie slipped on the slick bank and Mani was so tickled that she noted in her diary: "poor Katie fell in & was drenched—ha ha!!"[111]

That same day, Baba sent Donkin, Norina, and Elizabeth (who by now had recovered) back to Belgaum to look at the property for the center. After spending another night at Tofkane's home, they went out early in the morning to view the land he wished to give to Baba. Although the road was "rotten," Donkin observed, it was "a lovely place, with a stream running through the land, very good water, and plenty of trees: about 36 acres in all, made up of several plots, but biggest plot 18 acres."[112] Baba's

emissaries rejoined Him in Sakharpa the afternoon of the twenty-fifth, and Norina would continue to be engaged with Baba's plans for another center throughout the remainder of the short tour.

Baba's entourage spent three days and nights in Sakharpa. The weather was becoming increasingly hot, and the women spent their last afternoon enjoying more iced mango drinks and resting up for another sticky and uncomfortable day on the road.

NO PLACE LIKE HOME

By 6:00 AM on April 26 the Blue Bus, Opel, and Buick were on their way north through the Western Ghats to Mahabaleshwar (the Auburn was still undergoing repairs).* They had a relatively long drive of 125 miles along what Donkin called "a twisting but beautiful route."[113]• They departed without having eaten breakfast, halting at the home of Brahmin devotees in Chiplun. There they feasted on *rava*, *bhajia*, and tea before continuing on their way. Mani observed that "the view of Amba Ghat which we crossed was heavenly."[114]

• Meherwan recalled riding in the front seat of the Buick next to Baba during one of these hair-raising drives through the ghats: "I was sitting by the side of Baba and He says, 'Are you worried about this?' because I was a little tense, you know—terrible heights we were on—sharp bends—this big bus worming itself around these sharp bends. A slight slip and we would be done. I think Eruch was driving. I said, 'Yes, Baba, I feel better now, don't worry.' Because Baba was at my side, but still I had a little anxious time." (Meherwan, June 21, 1994)

Later, dusty and exhausted from the rising midday heat, Baba and the women made another stop at a dak bungalow at Poladpur. There they enjoyed snacks, tea, and pan, and were on the road again by 2:00 PM. Poladpur is the gateway to a picturesque drive to Mahabaleshwar, but while the scenery was heavenly, the drive was anything but. Baba allowed the women to open the windows in the Buick, Mehera recalled, but it was only "hot wind … blowing in our faces." Baba's exhausted party reached the beautiful hill station at 6:00 PM hoping for cooler temperatures. "We arrived at Mahabaleshwar from the back side," Mehera continued. "Baba took us to a nice hotel [the Granville, on Race View

* There are over a hundred references to Baba's visits to Mahabaleshwar in *Lord Meher*, beginning in 1930.

Road] with rooms with adjoining bathrooms. He told us to wash quickly, as the food was coming. It was a nice Parsi hotel. We changed quickly and waited for the food. We were so hungry."[115]

Meanwhile, the bus and cars had an opportunity to recover from their laborious ascent of the ghats. In one of the most inspiring tributes ever offered to the Blue Bus, Donkin observed that even it became "very tired and almost petered out on the way up … 4400 ft. above sea; after all it's carrying 28 people now, and full luggage inside and out, and is only designed for 17 people! So it certainly deserves God-Realization; though it really felt as if it might give up, as I drove it up that last Ghat."[116]

Baba awakened the women for a six o'clock breakfast the following morning before escorting them out for a long walk to Wilson and Bombay Points before the day could grow uncomfortably warm. They returned at ten to rest and then went back out again at 3:30 PM, after a refreshing afternoon tea, to Arthur's Seat.* Donkin deemed it "1st class," with a "view of the Ghat cliffs about 4000 feet drop—very fine indeed."[117] It was, Mani observed, "simply gorgeous."[118]

The group departed Mahabaleshwar early on April 28 for the short drive to Panchgani, where they checked into the Buena Vista Hotel, known for its scenic panoramas and delicious meals.† It was here that Irene rejoined the group, having been released from the hospital. Later that afternoon Baba took the women out to Tiger Valley, where they sat together inside His cave for just a few minutes.

At 6:30 AM on Monday, April 29, the Blue Bus, Buick, and Opel set out for Meherabad and home. It would be a long, 142-mile drive, and Baba chastised Donkin for not being ready to go even though it was not yet time to depart. "I got a bit peeved with Baba,"

* Overlooking the Savitri River, Arthur's Seat was named for nineteenth-century British officer Sir Arthur Malet, who often came there to sit and grieve after his wife and children perished in a ferry accident far below on the river. Baba was photographed there during a visit to Mahabaleshwar in May 1954.

† There are nearly a hundred references to Baba's visits to Panchgani in *Lord Meher*, beginning in 1930.

Donkin confessed, "and later He ticked me off for having got ratty; Baba always tries to upset one in one's worst moments, which with me—like Elizabeth, is in the early morning!"[119] They reached Bund Gardens in Poona at 9:30 AM. There Baba showed the Westerners Babajan's neem tree, overlooking a place on the river where He went boating when He was a student at Deccan College in 1911.

Five miles outside of Poona Baba stopped for a picnic lunch beneath a shady tree, where He ensured that everyone was well fed. Afterward the group drove on to Ghodnadi with the intention of making a rest stop at the dak bungalow there, but finding it occupied they decided to drive straight through to Ahmednagar, surprising Shirinmai by arriving at Akbar Press at 1:00 PM—three hours earlier than expected. There the women washed away the morning's accumulation of dust, took tea, and later enjoyed what Mani pronounced an "excellent supper" before re-boarding the bus and piling back into the cars early that evening.[120]

Even though the Blue Bus was so close to home, Baba had a few more surprises up the sleeve of His sadra—the first, a detour to Happy Valley.* Despite their proximity to Meherabad, the women were quite happy to accompany Him there, where they spent four nights in a dak bungalow and enjoyed four sublime days of rest and what Mani called "topping rambles" through the forest.[121] Baba was in a fine mood, "radiant and restful," Donkin observed, and He joked with the men as they caught up on His correspondence.[122]

While the women rested, Donkin drove Baba to Meherabad to deliver most of the luggage so that it could be sorted out before the women's arrival, and they returned to Happy Valley later that same day. Although Baba declined to offer it God-realization for the time being, the poor bus must have sighed with relief to be rid of the worst of its burden.

Baba's visit to Happy Valley was marred by two events, the second one momentous. First, Norina was stung by a scorpion, after

* *Lord Meher* contains thirty-six references to Baba's visits to Happy Valley, the first one in 1923. He even brought the Prem Ashram boys there in 1929.

which she was terrified of the fearsome arachnids. Then, on May 1, Buasaheb, one of Baba's earliest mandali, was struck by a motorcycle in a freak accident in Poona and died instantly. It was the same day Hitler issued the order to invade France and the peaceful lowland countries of Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. Both events—Buasaheb's death and Hitler's assault on the West, were, as *Mehera–Meher* so acutely records, accomplished with "lightning speed, brutality, and mechanization."[123*]

Baba sent Sarosh, Chanji, and Baidul to Poona to attend Buasaheb's funeral. He told the mandali, "As one of My nearest and dearest disciples, he unconsciously when alive was One with Me, and now that he has left the body, he consciously enjoys that blessed union with Me!"[124] According to *Lord Meher* Baba "showed no emotion" when He was told of Buasaheb's untimely death.[125] But Arnavaz observed that He was visibly saddened. "Despite the fact that the God-Man is all knowing," she later wrote, "He also feels on a human level. Although Baba had planned to stay at Happy Valley for fifteen days, we all returned immediately to Meherabad, and in a few days I went home to Bombay."[126]

They departed Happy Valley on the morning of May 3, stopping off for lunch at Shirinmai's before continuing on to Sarosh Talkies for a special private showing of *The Wizard of Oz*,[†] a perfect antidote to the tragic news of the past two days.

One might be tempted to imagine that the women were by now desperate to return to Meherabad following their nine-month absence, but it was not so. These final days of the Goa Tour afforded them their last opportunities to have their Beloved all to themselves, before relinquishing Him to the inevitable demands of home.

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* *Mehera–Meher* goes on to observe, "After Nonny died in Bangalore, Baba had predicted that two more of His close mandali would die before the war ended; Buasaheb was the first." (*Mehera–Meher* 2:49)

† Like the women, Baba loved *The Wizard of Oz*, and He would sometimes imitate the Tinman, gesturing for the women to squirt oil into Naja's stiff knees. He did the same thing years later, after His second automobile accident, when He suffered so much pain from the injuries to His hip and leg. (*Mehera–Meher* 2:49)



Karim Baba, seated on the pavement in Calcutta, his ankles and feet tied with strips of rags

CHAPTER 8

War Work

Interim at Meherabad

May 3–October 31, 1940

Isn't this the best place of all?

MEHER BABA[1]



Hindu Perfect Master Upasni Maharaj at Sakori, wrapped in his gunny sack

HIS WATCHWORD IS ACTION

THE BLUE BUS RETURNED TO MEHERABAD following an absence of nine months, arriving promptly at noon on Friday, May 3, 1940. Home at last, Baba asked the women: "Isn't this the best place of all?" Ten of the men had already arrived by rail, escorting twenty-five mad and *masts*, including Chatti Baba, Ramshish, Phulwala, and Shariat Khan, all of whom had been contacted in Bangalore.

Also accompanying the mandali were the residents of the ashram zoo, and Lily's snorts, Moti's mews, Mary's bleats, Snowie's thumps, Bingo and Jingo's stereophonic barks, and the canaries' warbles must have announced their arrival long before they set hoof, paw, or wing on the sacred ground of Meherabad. Kippy, as usual, held pride of place with Baba and the invisibles in the Buick. (Lucky is likely to have travelled on the bus with Norina.)

Baba immediately immersed Himself in the day-to-day administration of the ashram. His mornings began at five, with the issuance of instructions and individual meetings with the mandali; then between 7:00 and 8:30, He attended to the five *masts* with whom he would be working during the coming months: Mohammed, Chatti Baba, Phulwala, Shariat Khan, and Ramshish. He moved them to new accommodations in the old maternity hospital on the Hill, inside a compound enclosed by tatta screens. He also created a smaller version of the *mast* hotel that He had

set up in Bangalore. He shifted the remaining twenty men, who with one possible exception were simply mad, to the Family Quarters, a bungalow on the outskirts of Arangaon Village that had been acquired in 1925.

Meherabad was parched during the summer of 1940 and the ashramites struggled to keep cool. Except for the relief of intermittent showers, it was "very hot," Mani noted in her diary.[2] Baba maintained a relentless schedule with which not even 110-degree temperatures could interfere, and His six-month interim at Meherabad between the Second and Third Blue Bus Tours would be the longest of His halts. He had already sent out a circular designating Wednesday, May 8, as a day "in memory of the deep spiritual connection of Buasaheb with Baba," announcing a tea fast to last until after sunset. He also planned to feed "100 poor on that day with His own hands."[3*]

After Baba's long absence, lovers from Poona and Bombay naturally wished to have His darshan, and He set aside the following Wednesday, May 15, to meet with a group of thirty-five lovers from Bombay. The ladies in the group had the additional privilege of taking tea with the women on the Hill.

Baba also met with the men as they returned to report on their assignments in Bangalore, Byramangala, Bombay, Nasik, Rahuri, and other locations. Chanji called these journeys "rush-and-run trips," adding, "Baba doesn't believe in idle boasts or inaction in spirituality. His watch-word is *action*."[4]

Donkin too thought of Meherabad as a place of action, "where the work and influence of Baba have breathed themselves into the very soil itself."[5] But he was only there for a few weeks before Baba sent him back to Bangalore to hone his surgical skills at the Bowring and Lady Curzon Hospital.

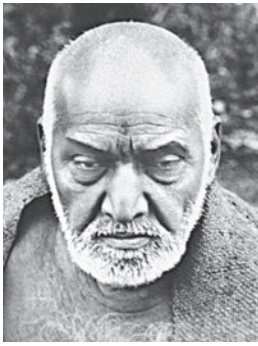
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* This was the first of many printed circulars by which Baba would communicate with His lovers in India and around the world, announcing seclusions, fasts, and availability for darshan, as well as special statements regarding His work and new orders that He wished them to observe. These kinds of information had previously been communicated via typed correspondence.

Baba also continued to monitor progress on the Universal Spiritual Center in Byramangala. He had declared upon arrival at Meherabad that it was now His intention to create a total of twelve centers before He broke His silence, including the six already established at Meherabad, Nasik, Toka, Madras, Mandla, and Byramangala. "For the remaining six," He added, "different places around India are still to be selected. That was one of the objects of My last tour."[6]

But without question, the most significant aspects of His activities were *mast* work and management of the war, which for all intents and purposes had merged into a single focus. Hitler was engaged in a relentless sweep across Europe, ravaging everything in his path. On May 10 German forces invaded France and the Low Countries.* On May 16 Baba announced plans to enter seclusion during June and July. "I am retiring into seclusion for My work for the world," He explained. "It is very important. I want to speed up situations and developments in the war. It will be a war of surprises and unexpected changes. It will change the map of the world. Disastrous results and unexpected consequences and developments will bring about a quick turn of events. Destruction is essential for reconstruction. All evil is to be eradicated for good to be established."[7]

That same day, devotees in Arangaon's Vithoba Temple began a *sapta*, a seven-day festival chanting Upasni Maharaj's name non-stop, culminating on his seventieth birthday with singing, dancing, and a *bhandara* (feast) that Baba ordered the men to prepare for the villagers.



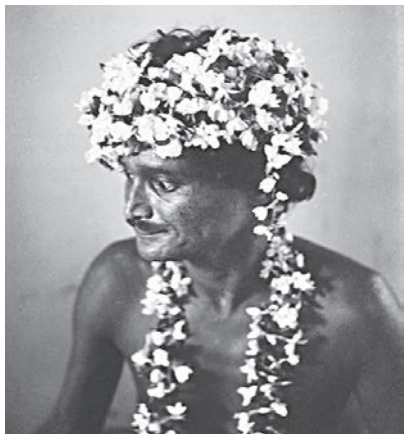
Upasni Maharaj, who would drop his body on December 24, 1941, at the age of 71

Another situation requiring Baba's attention at this time was a curious barrage of communications between Sakori and Meherabad. Upasni appeared to be negotiating with Baba to have Him purchase and assume responsibility for the running of the Sakori ashram. On May 17 Baba made an offer of half a million rupees, if Upasni would agree to abolish all Hindu ceremonies and rituals.

* In the ensuing days Baba told both the men and women that He would die on the twenty-seventh.

Although Upasni agreed to Baba's conditions, nothing appeared to result from these interchanges, and in any case, as *Lord Meher* records, "It was their divine humor to engage in such play."[8]

Before entering seclusion, Baba gave the women two tours of the *mast* ashram, the second on May 19. He drew their attention to Phulwala, with his garlands and turban of flowers, calling him His "peacock" and Chatti Baba His "dove."[9*] Soon after this visit Nadine composed an article for the *Meher Baba Journal* entitled "Meher Baba's Work with the God-Mad Men," in which she observed, "In this field of inner human being operates Meher Baba with supreme Mastery and absolute authority, with creative Power and Love. Here the disciple has nothing to say or wish; for his own happiness and wellbeing the only requirement is His full inner cooperation and complete surrender."[10]



Flower-adorned Phulwala, sixth-plane jalali *mast* from Belgaum

On May 27 Belgium fell to the Nazis.[†] "Today," He observed, "King Leopold of Belgium has surrendered to the German forces. He is a fool! Not only has he lost all his honor by giving in, but he has gotten nothing out of Germany for himself in exchange. The next two months will be critical for the Allies. Everyone will say the Allies will lose. In August, the tables will suddenly turn, and the allies will get the advantage. But it will be a close shave. In August, I may go to Russia via Persia."[11‡]

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* Mohammed also called himself a peacock, singing, "I am a peacock, how well I sing." (*Mehera–Meher* 2:69)

† This was the day on which Baba had said He would die. It was also at this time that Baba sent Eruch back to Bangalore to assist Adi K. with the organization of Chanji's notes, diaries, and correspondence.

‡ Baba's observation about a sudden turning of the tables to favor the Allies in August may have been a reference to the coming Battle of Britain, which would mark Hitler's first major defeat, and in the coming months He would make at least two other comments that were possible references to that event. His statement about traveling to Russia was the first of a series that He would make about visiting places to which the war would soon spread.

BABA WILL ASSUAGE THE SUFFERING OF THE WORLD

By May 31, all the ashram's non-residents were on their way home as Meherabad prepared for Baba's work. "Many guests leave (out of x we remain x)," read Mani's cryptic note. Baba told the women, "No one comes June [or] July."[12]

Baba entered seclusion in the new *mast* compound on Meherabad Hill at noon on June 1, sleeping in a small room in a shed adjacent to the old hospital building. His withdrawal from the routine management of the ashram allowed Him to engage with the *masts* at a new level of intensity; indeed, He said that His *mast* work received a push when accomplished in seclusion. His daily schedule reflected the grave nature of the work ahead:

5:00 AM	Rise and begin work with *masts* (bathing, shaving clothing, feeding, and sitting in seclusion)
7:00 AM	Take morning tea
7:30 AM	Meet with Vishnu and attend to correspondence
8:00 AM	Return to work with *masts*
12:00 PM	Eat lunch with the *masts*
12:30 PM	Continue work with *masts*
3:00 PM	Meet with Vishnu and attend to correspondence
4:00 PM	Take afternoon tea (no dinner)
4:30 PM	Return to work with *masts*, retiring late at night[13]

On June 3 Baba explained what He planned to accomplish during this extended period of seclusion:

> This two-month special seclusion is for My special Universal work, particularly to speed things up regarding the war.

After the stirring-up during the seclusion period, unusually startling changes will take place in the war situation. One after the other, 32 nations in all will eventually be involved, including Italy and America.

Situations will be so grave they will verge on breathlessness! All of a sudden, unexpected developments will take place which will be the turning points. Those who had the upper hand will be eventually subdued and thrown off, and others, who had been strangled and made to suffer in breathless suspense all these months, along with millions of others in the world, will breathe a sigh of relief![14]

Later that same day He issued a second message:

During these [first] ten days of My seclusion, I shall decide definitely the length of time this war will last, and exactly when it will end.*

Before I speak, and before peace reigns, there must be a real world war in which India will be involved 100 percent, and places under Mohammedan rule, such as Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey, Egypt, and so forth, will also be entrapped in it, while Italy, Russia and America will play very active parts.

If this war prolongs in this above-mentioned manner, I shall speak in August 1941. In which case, for a year—from August 1940 to August 1941—I shall, with certain of My male and female disciples, go to stay on the boundary of Russia and India, or on some island across the ocean. If the war does not prolong, then I shall decide whether to go to the border or somewhere else.

My speaking is largely connected with the world war and peace. Peace does not mean truce. A truce does not

* Mani recorded in her diary that this seclusion was to last fifteen days.

necessarily have to happen. A truce will not make Me speak.

Before the end of the war, when peace is just on the point of appearing, I shall speak.

I shall speak before permanent peace.[15]

Baba's statements were carried to the mandali in Bangalore, where, Donkin mused: "We all feel the … message of Baba's to be rather too vague and we don't believe the date He gives for speaking at all—so we'll see."[16] Chanji, on the other hand, found Baba's second message so compelling that he would observe in his August 1940 *Meher Baba Journal* column: "The breaking of [Baba's] 16 years *maun* (silence) was largely connected to the World Peace—a real peace that will usher in a new era and a New Order forming a brotherhood of humanity which will break all barriers of caste, creed and nationality."[17] Taking Baba at His word Chanji wrote in the past tense, as if the breaking of Baba's silence was a given, and by the time the column appeared in print the highly anticipated event already would have taken place. Because of printing deadlines, Chanji had to compose the column not long after Baba issued the message, but it would not be published until nearly two months later, at which point it would be patently clear that Baba had not broken His silence after all.

Just as Baba cautioned, a long road of suffering and destruction lay ahead before a new world could arise from the rubble and ash. He had been in seclusion for less than a week when Churchill pledged on behalf of the people of Great Britain: "We shall never surrender," provoking Hitler to declare "a war of annihilation against all his enemies."[18*] Baba told the women: "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."[19]

* The term "War of Annihilation" (*Vernichtungskrieg*) was first coined by German Social Democrats to condemn the colony of German South West Africa for its determination to exterminate the native Herero tribe. Hitler appropriated the term to describe the Nazi determination to achieve victory at any cost.

Consequently Baba redoubled His efforts, prompting Donkin to observe that "the routine of these first weeks in the *mast* ashram at Meherabad must have created a record."

> During the first few days Baba came to bathe the *masts* at 5-30 a.m.—which, for Baba, is quite a usual hour to set about His work—and it is true that He adhered to this schedule for about a week. Thereafter, however, without previous warning, He began to come earlier each day, and eventually settled down to a period of arriving at half past midnight to start the morning's work! …
>
> This forced tempo and shifting of routine produce a sense of stress, and demand a power of adaptability, not unlike that needed in war: one must be ready at any hour of the day or night to go into action at a word from Baba, or to change one's plans to meet a new situation.[20]

Baba's work with Chatti Baba grew especially intense at this time. It was for good reason that He called the *mast* "*Bal-unmat-pishach*—childish, mad, and dirty": After his daily baths, Chatti Baba would sit on the ground and pour more dirt over his head.[21] Baba encouraged this habit by ordering Krishna, who served as Chatti Baba's personal attendant, to bring fifteen baskets of dirt to the *mast's* room every day.

For some time now, Chatti Baba had been confiding to Krishna, "There will be much anguish and privation in the world, and many will die of starvation, but Baba will finally assuage the suffering of the world."[22] During the night following Hitler's declaration of a war of annihilation, Chatti Baba charged into Baba's room swinging a lantern and imploring Baba, "Wake up! Wake up!"[23] The following morning he cleaned his room (something he had never done), announcing that he needed to return home immediately. Baba humored him by having the men entice him into a car and bring him back to his room after a short excursion around the compound. But Chatti Baba became increasingly disturbed, until exclaiming to Baba on the ninth, "My

house has been utterly destroyed. It is on fire! I have come to You for shelter!"[24] Baba secluded Himself with the *mast* for several hours to calm him and kept him in His room that night.

The following day Baba explained: "Chatti Baba has a spiritual connection with France. He was overwrought with despair because of the cataclysm that is occurring in France these days."[25] Indeed, Italy declared war on France and Great Britain the following day, but Baba was pleased with this new development, telling the women, "Now Turkey has to join & then everything will go as I planned. So if Turkey joins, cook 'rava' to celebrate it. There never has been such a war & never will be. But when War is over there will 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 the war will take form again & enjoy this peace."[26]

Chatti Baba's despair deepened when, on the fourteenth of June, a curtain of darkness descended on the City of Light and Paris fell to German forces. Baba's promise of world war had come to pass.

MAST TOUR

On June 13, as if in anticipation of the fall of Paris, Baba departed Meherabad to embark on a new *mast* tour—destination unknown. Gustadji, Pendu, Kaka, and Savak Kotwal were to accompany Him, but not even they knew where He was going. Baba traveled by rail to Manmad, about ninety miles north of Ahmednagar, so it was assumed that He would continue on in that direction. Indeed, Mani noted in her diary: "Baba left for some distant place in ~~the~~ North India for 15 to 20 days."[27] But Manmad turned out to be an Avataric red herring, a diversionary tactic with which Baba would have been well acquainted, given His love of a good literary mystery. At Manmad, He and the four men boarded another train heading east to Calcutta, where they arrived on June 15 and checked into the Broadway Hotel.

During the following three days Baba made two significant contacts. Both were located by Kaka, with the assistance of a tongawala

familiar enough with the city to navigate its crowded streets and galis. One was a high *mastani* found seated on a path near a school. Although nearly blind, she bore a striking resemblance to Babajan. Baba bathed her feet and gave her a new sari in place of the kafni He would have given a *mast*, and He presented her with an umbrella as well.*

But Baba's most important contact was a majzoob-like high *mast* destined to be counted among His "Five Favorites."[28] The sixth-plane *mast*, whose name went unrecorded, was the spiritual chargeman of Calcutta, and Baba met with him on four or five occasions, feeding him, offering him cigarettes, and establishing a deep connection that would ensure the *mast's* help with His war work.

After three days in Calcutta Baba departed by rail for the hill station of Ranchi, 250 miles to the northwest. There He and the men spent one day in the Prince Victor bungalow while He arranged accommodations for the women, who would accompany Him when He returned to Ranchi in less than two weeks. Just before departing Baba cabled the women to prepare them for the journey: "BE READY LEAVE MEHERABAD 5 JULY."[29] He ordered Gustadji and Savak to remain in Ranchi for the interim.

NINE DAYS AT MEHERABAD

Baba reached Ahmednagar on June 22, but His seclusion was compromised when Sarosh failed to meet Him at the train station and He had to hire a tonga for the remaining few miles of the journey. He found Meherabad even drier than it had been before He left. The "topping rain at night [and] more hearty showers" that Mani noted in her diary, had abated.[30] The wells became so depleted that the women were limited to half a bucket every other day for bathing. A few of them used the shortage as an excuse to ask for the water in which Baba's clothes had been rinsed so that they might use it for their own laundry.

* Baba's symbol for British Prime Minister Lord Neville Chamberlain was an umbrella. The gift may or may not have had something to do with His war work, but, in any case, it was monsoon season: sometimes an umbrella is just an umbrella.

Baba resumed His seclusion with the *masts* on the Hill and began meeting more frequently with the women. On the evening of His return from Calcutta He spoke to them about plans for His ongoing seclusion, naming six far-flung locations: Burma,* Assam, Nepal, the Dutch Indies, Calcutta, Siam, or, if all else failed, Meherabad. He promised to make a decision in three days. Two days later He told them that He had narrowed His choices to three: Assam, in far northeastern India, in the foothills of the Himalayas; Burma, in Southeast Asia; and a new one: Eastern Bengal—now Bangladesh, although Meherabad remained His fallback. Mani further reduced the possibilities the following day when she recorded, "So we go for one month to Ranchi & might go from there to Assam (in which case luggage follows), or return to Meherabad (in which case we will stay in M'abad with Baba but see v. little of him)."[31]

Baba had to fit in the time He spent with the women around His other work, and there was no set schedule for their gatherings. Kitty had a small brass bell to ring whenever He wanted to summon them, and she would walk back and forth across the compound calling, "Everybody! Everybody!"[32] It was the signal for the women to drop whatever they were doing and come to Mehera's room or else the tin shed, where Baba was waiting. Mani recalled how Elizabeth would make her way down the stairs from the Westerners' dormitory, calling, "Come along, Kippy, take a run. Come on."[33]

Baba escorted the women around the compound for frequent "walks & talks" in the evenings after temperatures dropped. He also took them to Sarosh Talkies, waking them as early as 5:00 AM so that they could view the movies at private showings arranged by Sarosh. Two of the films they saw were *Pygmalion*, and four days later Laurel and Hardy's *A Chump at Oxford*, which the ashram's resident film critic—Mani—deemed "excellent" and "screaming!"[34]•

• Based on the George Bernard Shaw play, MGM's *Pygmalion* (1938) starred Leslie Howard and Wendy Hiller. Baba's agent in Karwar had spoken to Baba and the women about the plays of Shaw, in a conversation that Baba said held hidden meaning for Him. Hungarian producer Gabriel Pascal collaborated with Shaw to pen the adaptation of *Pygmalion*, which garnered an Oscar for Best Screenplay. Norina had introduced Pascal to Baba in Hollywood in 1934, when Baba initiated discussions about producing His own screenplay entitled *How It All Happened*, and Pascal became a life-long devotee. (*Mehera–Meher* 2:47)

* Japan invaded Burma on December 21, 1941, just six months after Baba proposed His trip to Southeast Asia. His exploration of a trip to Burma may have been one of His means of bringing the war to the Pacific Theater.

In between trips to the cinema the women entertained Baba by enacting yet another of Mani's plays. This time the characters portrayed playing cards come to life, and props and wardrobe manager Rano constructed their costumes out of sheets of cardboard painted with the four suits in a deck of cards. Mani composed the script in Urdu so the Westerners had to memorize their lines phonetically without having any idea of what they were saying. Irene contracted laryngitis three days before the grand performance and had to observe silence in the hope of regaining her voice.

Baba called Donkin, Chhagan, and Eruch from Bangalore to accompany Him when He returned to Ranchi with the women. Donkin recorded in his dairy that he had received a letter: "I think I am going on tour with Baba … anyhow I definitely hope so; it seems as if the women Mandali will be *parked* somewhere—not at Meherabad, while Baba and a few men mandali will go on tour perhaps to Persia or Northern India near Afghan and Russian frontier; but we'll see!"[35] A few days later, when Donkin received his official orders to return to Meherabad, he wrote, "My heart leapt right up."[36] When he arrived Baba cautioned him that "from August 1st for one year [he] would have to work very hard indeed at surgery in India, sewing up bombed people and whatnot!"[37]

Donkin was not the only one who referred to Baba's plans for bringing the women with Him as a matter of "parking" them somewhere: *Mehera–Meher* makes the rather startling observation that "to the men responsible for the booking and residential arrangements, the women were just so much extra baggage."[38] Mani recalled that the women were for the most part blissfully unaware of the challenges faced by the men who were assigned the sometimes unenviable task of finding accommodations that would meet Baba's stringent requirements for maintaining their seclusion: "We didn't see the men. We didn't know what they did. All the 'dirty work' had to be done on that end."[39]

But Chanji was accustomed to taking into account the women's special needs. When Baba asked him to make arrangements for the journey, he contacted the Chief Traffic Manager of the G.I.P. (Great Indian Peninsula) Railway in Bombay requesting special consideration: "Some of the members of the party have been observing certain strict disciplines of a spiritual seclusion, [and] the guard in charge of the train may be specially instructed to allow NONE to occupy [their] compartments … in order to enable the party to occupy the same absolutely undisturbed at Manmad." Chanji went on to request third-class compartments from Manmad to Chakradharpur Station, on the Bombay-Calcutta Mail via Nagpur, for "MEHER BABA & Party," guaranteeing the purchase of tickets for as many as thirty women and thirteen men.[40]

During the nine days Baba spent at Meherabad before returning to Ranchi He set in motion plans for an extraordinary new phase of war work, one which would entail the assistance of not only all His mandali, but also of devotees all over India and in the West. On June 21, on the train back to Meherabad, He had dictated a message to be sent out to 240 lovers in Ahmednagar, Nasik, Poona, Bombay, and other parts of India, as well as Europe and America, asking if they would be willing to assist Him in His war work by committing to a set of as-yet unspecified orders for the duration of one year, beginning on August 1, 1940. The message read:

> The present world chaos and the universal suffering are absolutely necessary for the eventual universal spiritual upliftment and for a new world, wherein peace, love and divine aspirations will reign supreme. None should therefore feel scared and dismayed, bearing in mind the certainty of this bright future. From the spiritual point of reality, the words nation and foreign, killed and killer, war and peace, success and defeat, have no meaning, because the world of forms and of duality have no existence and

are imaginary dreams, and the present universal chaos is just a universal nightmare, necessary for the real universal awakening.

Body forms and minds are innumerable and of infinite variety, but souls are all originally and eternally one.

In fact, only one infinite Reality exists, and that is God. So the present apparent world catastrophe is, by divine will, essential for a divine manifestation in the near future, of love and real peace, in which I have to play the greatest part, and in which I want My men and women disciples to play the corresponding parts of helping Me in this, My work.

Those of you who are absolutely willing and prepared to share My present universal burden and to help Me in My work have to obey my following order implicitly:

Things are happening and will happen, as they ought to happen, by the divine will, and so, whether war ends now or next year, or whether there is truce now or peace next year, having no thought in mind whatsoever of war or peace, you will have to stay here or go wheresoever I may send you, and do whatsoever I may tell you, at the cost of supreme self-sacrifice, from August 1, 1940 to July 31, 1941.

I definitely will speak on the 1st of August 1941. It will be the Divine Word that I shall utter first, which will resurrect the dead world.

This is My last war, peace and manifestation message to My disciples.[41]

Without exception all 240 lovers replied that they would participate.

It is no wonder that Baba undertook such an intense phase of work with His lovers at this time: News from the European front was

growing increasingly bleak, and Mani's diary entry from the twenty-fifth constituted a grim summary of Hitler's conquests to date:

> 25th Paris falls to the Germans.
>
> News of France accepting Germany's terms, after the fate of Poland, Chekoslovakia [sic], Finland, Austria, Holland, Denmark & Belgium.[42]

But Mani's diary entry is so abbreviated that it does not convey the complexity of the French situation: Paris had fallen to Germany forces on June 14, but negotiations for France's surrender to Germany were not completed until the twenty-second and only went into effect on the twenty-fifth, the day she made the entry.

On June 29 Baba told the women what they could expect during the period of time He had set aside for this special phase of work:

> From August 1st '40, Doomsday will start for the whole world. Not for one moment will [people] feel safe in any part of the world—for a year. All over the world there will be earthquakes, floods, famine and new diseases. Those killed in war will be nothing compared to those who will be killed by floods, famine, plague, etc. Famine like once in Persia where millions died in a single year. This famine ½ 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 [in the Mess Quarters], 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; 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 will be the most important month of My seclusion.[43*]

The following day Baba again discussed the impending orders. Mani recorded His comments in a brand new envelope diary called *Baba's Dictation to the Women Mandali*.• Baba gave the women one last chance to back out before He issued the orders: "Now anyone who says no, leave me for good; without arguing. I won't argue, but say, 'You leave me now.'"[44] No one did. But as if to defuse the severity of His warning, He took the women to Sarosh Talkies two days later to see the cartoon feature *Gulliver's Travels*.

31 ORDERS

Baba departed for Ranchi[†] at 1:40 PM on Wednesday, July 3, accompanied by Mohammed, Chatti Baba, and Shariat Khan, as well as Baidul, Kaka, Vishnu, Chanji, Nilu, Donkin, and two boys, Venkoba Rao[‡] and Krishna. Also accompanying Him were twenty-one women: Mehera, Mani, Naja, Khorshed, Soonamasi, Walu, Kaku, Banubai (Nergiz

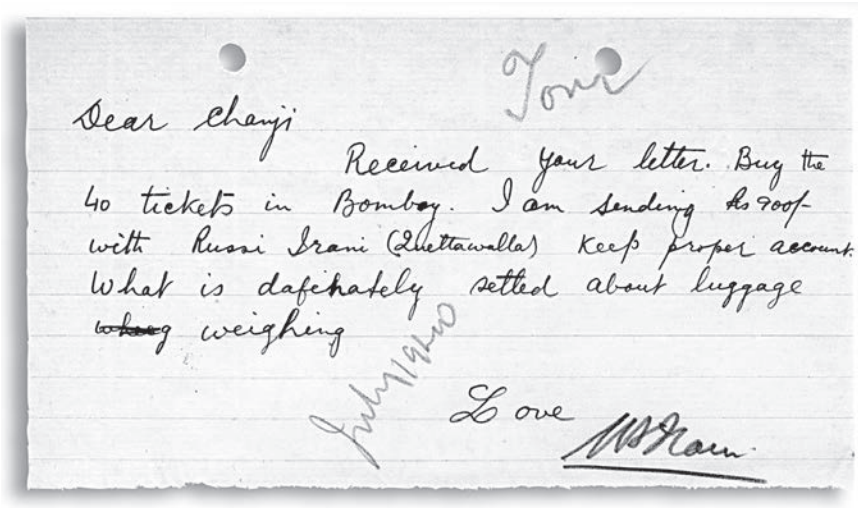
• *Baba's Dictation to the Women Mandali* is yet another journal that Mani maintained during the Blue Bus era. It opens with the words, "from Baba's Dictation on Alphabet board, during informal talks at gatherings of all Women mandali then staying with Baba."

The notes were recorded between June 29, 1940 (two months after the end of the Second Blue Bus Tour), and March 17, 1941 (four and a half months into the third tour). In addition to notes made while Baba and the women were on the road, it includes descriptions of Baba's *mast* work, His work with the German shepherd puppy Warrior, explanations of the *Seven Names of God*, and comments about the progress of World War II, as well as many discourses and notations about the women's daily lives. Some of Baba's discourses and remarks about the war are duplicated in Mani's *Blue Bus Tours Diary*, and many were edited for inclusion in *Lord Meher* and *Mehera–Meher*. The 355-page diary is in very good condition and is now preserved in the Avatar Meher Baba Trust Archives Document Collection at Meherabad, India. (*Baba's Dictation to the Women Mandali*, June 29, 1940)

* Mani did not record Baba's "doomsday" talk until the beginning of August in her *Blue Bus Tours Dairy*. *Baba's Dictation to the Women Mandali* (June 30, 1940), *Lord Meher*, and *Mehera–Meher* all contain versions of this declaration.

† Even though the Blue Bus remained parked at Meherabad when Baba and the women traveled to and from Ranchi by rail, Mehera refers to this trip as the Third Blue Bus Tour, and Rano included its route on her maps of the tours. Heather Nadel refers to this journey as a Blue Bus Tour as well. *The Wayfarers* designates it as one of Baba's "Special *Mast* Tours." Here it is considered as a rail trip between tours with Baba, but not a tour. (*The Wayfarers*, 168)

‡ Venkoba Rao was a young Bangalorean who had been hired to distribute flyers advertising the foundation laying ceremony at Byramangala. Baba invited him to Meherabad to work in the *mast* ashram.


Dear Chanji

Received your letter. Buy the 40 tickets in Bombay. I am sending Rs 900/- with Russi Irani (Chettawalla) Keep proper account. What is definately settled about luggage ~~weight~~ weighing

July 1940

Love

Note to Chanji, signed by Meher Baba, July 1940

Kotwal's paternal aunt), Katie, Mansari, Kharmen Masi, Soltoon, Dowla, Nergiz, Elizabeth, Norina, Nadine, Rano, Kitty, Margaret, and Irene, as well as the toddlers, Jangoo and Adi. In his grandmother's absence, Jangoo became Khorshed's responsibility. Baba also brought a few servants. The Blue Bus must have heaved a mighty sigh of relief when, Donkin recorded, public buses were hired to transport everyone to the station in Ahmednagar, "ladies separate naturally."[45] They enjoyed a tea break in the refreshments room before the time came to board.

The Khatara passenger train reached Manmad at 7:30 PM, where the women again took tea in the waiting room before boarding the Calcutta Mail at 10:30, bound east to Chakradharpur. The train was late pulling into the station, and the men were pelted with rain as they scrambled to transfer all the baggage to their new bogies. The women settled into another crowded compartment to sleep yet again like sardines. They awoke at 5:30 AM on July 4 at "some big station," the name of which Mani was too sleepy to recall, for a "ripping breakfast of rava & tea."[46] The weary entourage reached Chakradharpur at 2:45 AM on Friday, July 5, where they waited two hours to board the buses that would deliver them to Ranchi, another eighty miles to the north.

But not even public transportation was exempt from the mishaps that plagued Baba and the women throughout the tours: they had to stop for two punctures along the way and did not reach Ranchi until 8:00 AM, where they settled into the bungalow that Baba had secured for them.*

Donkin called the women's red brick bungalow "a bit faded and grandiose, though not big" and the men's quarters "not good but good enough…. We are all mucking in together … in the servants' quarters … but it's not comfortable."[47] Eleven men, including Baba, were "crowded into a block of [seven] diminutive little rooms in a corner of the garden."[48]

"Ranchi lies on a granite plateau," Donkin observed,

> about 2,000 feet above sea level and the emerald patchwork pattern of rice fields is broken by clumps of trees and occasional bosses [outcroppings] of granite. The house taken for Baba's stay although it belonged to a Rani, was one of those half-forgotten places that are neither in the open country nor in the town itself. Its front faced a road, and its back garden petered out into the rank weeds at the edge of a rice field. The only redeeming feature was a boss of clean granite about a hundred feet high, immediately to one side of the garden, which gave a sense of something unusual to an environment that was not particularly interesting.[49]

Mani was somewhat more pleased, calling the "situation of the bungalows [*sic*] most accommodating with topping view around…. Heaps of wild flowers & frogs & dew-drops &—er—snakes." But she also noted an "intense scarcity of water in spite of almost continuous rainfall."[50] The first morning after moving into the bungalow the women discovered that they had exhausted the rainwater in the well

* Although Mani's *Blue Bus Tours Diary* refers to the property as Golkothi, both *Mehera–Meher* and *Baba's Dictation to the Women Mandali* say that they stayed at the Prince Victor bungalow, which had once belonged to the Rani of Koochbihar. *Lord Meher* uses both names, so apparently the two properties were one and the same.

the night before when they had bathed. There was no underground source to replenish their supply, so the men had to transport water from a nearby working well.

Chanji wryly called these kinds of inconveniences "the rosy aspects of a trip to a hill station," adding, "It is nobody's fault—because we have come here at the wrong Season—when it rains heavily—the weather is chilly, roads muddy, sticky … so that even in such a health-resort our life is none too pleasant. The prospects of a long stay seem improbable."[51] Chanji's observation "at the wrong Season" would echo throughout the coming tour.

Baba discouraged the women from complaining about their conditions in Ranchi with a lengthy discourse reminding them to bear in mind the relative ease of their life when compared to the horrific circumstances many people were facing:

> Consider the pitiable plight and condition of the people in Europe where war is raging on. Consider especially the refugees, who have left their homes and were driven like cattle from place to place, to save their lives from the conquering hordes, who were following them like shadows of death. In their condition, even the necessities of life, like food and drink, were considered secondary. They are homeless, without a roof over their heads, thrown into open streets or fields, starving, with nothing to cover themselves except what they have on their person. Compared to them, people in India are far better off! In spite of the dreadful news of war every day, and the economic and general trade depression that the war has brought on all, and the consequent financial stringencies all over, people in India can move about at will and leisurely, even going out for recreation in the open gardens or seashore, and entertain themselves by going to the movies, or to music and dance halls.

> After August [of this year], conditions will worsen. Developments in the war will take a serious turn, become complicated, and the flames will spread far and wide until the war will embrace, not only the whole of the West but also the East. Besides, a time will come when people will even forget the war, and the terrible destruction it has caused in life and property, for there will be further disasters, more voracious in their destructive power—like plagues and pestilences, fire and famine, floods and earthquakes of immense magnitude and force—all of which will take more toll of life and property than machine guns and bombs. Then, too, civil wars will complicate the political situations among nations, and make things even more chaotic, until it will create a deadlock.
>
> Even millionaires will be starving for food! There will be chaos everywhere and all will be helpless.[52]

But when the women assured Baba that they were happy with their accommodations, He admitted to being somewhat less pleased. "This bungalow is very fine," He explained,

> with a lovely garden and other amenities, but the well is almost empty, and there are heaps of snakes! It is said there is a man-eating python on the hill near our compound. But no amount of snakes, mosquitoes and insects will make us move from here! Unless there is no more drinking water; then we might shift to another bungalow.
>
> I do not move from a place for nothing. Just consider how, with such a large party and such heavy baggage, I have been traveling, and think what it costs. We have to sit or stand, cramped in the train or bus like pieces of luggage….

> This tour has an objective, else I would not take you from place to place. In these journeys, you are harassed, and so am I; but for My work, I have to do it.[53]

Before leaving for Ranchi, Baba had advised the men to view the trip as a holiday and an opportunity to rest before they entered their year of new orders. But the splendid time Baba promised never materialized, and in any case, the men had been with Him long enough by now not to be misled by such beguiling words.

"The life with a Spiritual Master," Chanji observed, "even in the best places of the world, is a life of simplicity and self-denial where comforts become unnecessary and luxury superfluous. It is a life dedicated to the secret cause of a Perfect God-man whose work is universal and concerned only with the upliftment of mankind. It had therefore a constant demand on one's capability to stand all trials and sufferings."[54]

So it was in Ranchi. The rain hardly let up for three weeks, and because the rank weeds that Donkin complained of beyond the garden were indeed infested with poisonous snakes, everyone found their movements limited to the compound for the duration of their visit. The Eastern women were accustomed to living in close quarters, but the Westerners and men chafed at the restrictions. Chanji complained in his diary that the men's condition "was like state prisoners, or rather worse."[55] Thus, he lamented, did all "dreams of a holiday during the tour vanish into thin air."[56]

It was Baba's intention to keep everyone busy. The first item on His agenda was to dictate the lists of thirty-one orders to be sent out to the lovers whom He had contacted three weeks previously. All 240 copies of the list had to be typed individually, after which Baba dictated specific instructions for each person, enumerating the orders to which they should adhere and signing every copy.* Half a dozen of the group, Chanji wrote, "both ladies and men, were set to work on these

* A complete list of Baba's orders can be found in *Lord Meher*, pp. 2118–19.

for over ten days, working continuously for hours. With no table or chair to sit on, we worked squatting on the floor that was always wet and soiled with one or two stepping in and out of the room at almost every moment, while the wind played mischief & blew a number of papers away. It was very trying work. We had worked on the floor for years, but that was at our home in Meherabad. Here we had none of that feeling or atmosphere, nor any space to move about."[57]

The orders ranged from complex fasting instructions to giving up such everyday dietary items as meat, fish, or eggs, or indulgences like tobacco or alcohol. Some prohibitions—not attending theaters, operas, concerts, movies, circuses, or horse races—involved giving up activities that people might over time miss, but a few, such as observing silence, not reading, not handling money, or not writing (except to sign one's name), promised to be much more challenging.

The men's orders involved abstaining from various forms of contact with women, and the women's, vice versa. Some orders were of an overtly spiritual nature, such as instructions for the repetition of one of the names of God, prayer, meditation, begging, selfless service, or pilgrimage—or their opposite: refraining from any religious rituals and observances whatsoever. Others, like renouncing acts of violence, lying, and stealing, prompt one to wonder who would need to be told not to engage in these kinds of behaviors.

Chanji observed that Baba's orders set in motion "a veritable 'Love Parade' of the World's greatest disciplinarian in the personality of the Master—Meher Baba—with His spiritual band of true lovers, 'all attention,' to perform loving and selfless service—at whatever sacrifice to themselves, obeying implicitly His will and orders, in the greatest spiritual upheaval the world has ever seen."[58] He also noted that such injunctions were "very rarely imposed on a group of disciples, not only living in an ashram and away from the world but also living in the world with their families and faithfully doing their worldly duties in different occupations."[59]

Baba's orders were not for the faint of heart, but no one was expected to follow all of them. While most participants were assigned a specific set of orders, a select few were given the opportunity to choose those to which they would adhere. Everyone was cautioned that between August 1, 1940, and July 31, 1941, no one was to communicate with Baba except in cases of emergency, and then by telegram only. Donkin called Baba positively "chirpy" by the time the last copies of the orders had been signed, sealed, and sent on their way.[60]

THE *MAST* ASHRAM AT RANCHI

At the same time that Baba was preparing the instructions to accompany His orders, He was also working with the three *masts* He had brought from Meherabad: Chatti Baba, Shariat Khan, and Mohammed. Shifting *masts* from one location to another was always a challenge because it disturbed their states of consciousness, and in the chaos of settling into his new accommodations Chatti Baba behaved like an intransigent child who refused to go to bed, weeping and whining until exhausted and unable to maintain his resistance. He also seized the opportunity to attempt an escape, and Baba had to shift the men's room assignments in order to placate him. Baba had a tatta screen erected behind which He could seclude Himself with the agitated *mast*, but in the end it was Donkin who was able to settle him down, prompting Baba to observe that the two men shared a "deep connection."[61]

Baba later mentioned to the women His work with Chatti Baba and the *mast's* connection with "the English barber" (the name He used when referring to Donkin in Mehera's presence), saying, simply, "That too was my working."[62] "While we were talking of Chatti Baba," Mani noted in one of her diaries, "the chatti in Baba's kitchen burst 'plop' into bits, & the water streamed into the room amidst our laughter."[63]

While Baba was hard at work with Chatti Baba, Shariat Khan entertained himself by singing, but, Donkin recalled, "His refrain was a

bizarre repetition of one phrase, sung to one melody over and over again. To add to this cacophony Mohammed would ape Shariat Khan's singing, but he sang every note just out of tune, and this barbarous duet would perpetuate itself from wall to echoing wall of the small courtyard."[64]

Baba sent Kaka back to Calcutta to locate the high *mast* and spiritual chargeman He had contacted a few weeks before and bring him to Ranchi. The *mast* had not been seen to leave his abode for more than ten years, and Kaka later told Baba that it was only by repeating His name that he was able to convince the *mast* to come with him. Baba would later observe, "The work accomplished by Kaka in bringing this *mast* here is more than the work which will be accomplished by the 240 persons who have pledged to abide by the restrictions given them by Me for one year."[65]

Baba christened the sixth-plane *mast* Karim Baba for his resemblance to one of the early mandali, whose name had been Karim. Donkin recorded that Karim Baba's "eyes … shone like burnished swords."[66] Baba placed him in a small room in the men's bungalow, where He fed him and worked in seclusion. He did not, however, attempt to bathe the jalali *mast*, who was far too volatile to allow the men to remove his soiled, ragged clothes or the skeins of wire he wound around his neck, arms, wrists, ankles, and toes. Karim Baba was so ecstatic to be with Baba that at the end of four days he burst into a spontaneous song: "God can be found in the jungles and God can be found in the cities."[67] After a few more days with Baba the *mast* was heard to sing, "I am the *Raja* [King]. I am the *Khwaja* [Master]!"[68] Baba called Karim Baba's singing miraculous, and He was so pleased that He took the women to hear him.

Three sixth-plane *masts* now resided in the small ashram at Ranchi: Karim Baba, Chatti Baba, and Phulwala. The only other residents were fifth-plane Mohammed and high *mast* Shariat Khan. Of the seven *mast* ashrams that Baba established between February 1939 and July 1947, this one was the smallest and of the shortest duration. "It was not," Donkin observed in retrospect, "in truth, part of Baba's plan to establish any elaborate institution for *masts* [in Ranchi]. But it

seemed as if He had to visit that part of India, and to take certain *masts* with Him for His work."[69]

SEVEN NAMES OF GOD

On July 4, while en route to Ranchi, Baba had told the women, "Each time I move from some place, something happens," adding, "When we left Bangalore, it was France in a fix. Now this time it is England's turn."[70] Three days later He remarked, "England not yet invaded, so to speed matters up, I have one plan for 4 days from today." He then asked the women to guess what was in a bottle that He told Margaret to hold up. "Elizabeth guessed port wine, which proved to be right." Baba then told them that for the next four evenings He would give them one tablespoon each. "You will want to get drunk," He observed, but chided them to "be mild, & not wild," adding, "Wine enriches the blood. In 4 days things will speed up.'"[71] Mani abbreviated "port wine" to "p.w." in her *Blue Bus Tours Diary*, adding, "Himself served it to us."[72] "Even Jangoo had it," she mischievously added, "more than his share, & liked it very much."[73]

Baba then used the metaphor of intoxication to explain:

> All this is the play of the mind! The mind goes one way and it keeps on going. Hitler thinks that what he does is absolutely right—that he is doing justice for Germany. Mussolini thinks what he is now doing for Italy, compared to its former suffering, is quite good. With these thoughts, for their one right, they feel justified to commit millions of wrongs!
>
> The more the gains now, the more the intoxication for still more.
>
> Drunkards, when they get drunk, challenge, "Come one, come all!" It's not the drunkards who say it, but their intoxication! Thus, out of sheer hostility, the more wrongs done, the more the repentance….

> How does this all work? We are all nations. Each one of you represents a nation. Mansari is a small nation. Nonny was a big nation and so on. Each one, according to her greatness or smallness, her greed, her longing for power and possessions, tries diplomatically to get what she wants….
>
> Such a muddle! …
>
> Religion has to go, and God, Truth has to come. Definitely![74]

The following day, July 7, Baba used the war as a means of announcing two excursions He was planning for the women—the only ones they would enjoy in Ranchi: "Kill to defend without hate. France will hate England. Of what use is democracy if it cannot help? So neither it nor totalitarianism will remain. Both will go. To get Turkey in a mess before we leave Ranchi, there is only one solution. Tomorrow we go to the [Jonha] Falls, the day after to the circus, and then we get buried [in seclusion] in this house until we go! Tomorrow, seeing the Falls will make Turkey fall, and seeing the elephant ride the cycle [in the circus] will make Turkey ride wild horses!"[75*]

The falls were spectacular thanks to monsoon rains, but the women had to sit through the entire Karlekar's Circus performance as rain leaked through holes in the top of the tattered canvas tent. Kitty later described the evening's entertainment to the Backetts, writing, "Parrots rode miniature cycles, lions and goats ate from the same table and were extraordinarily tame. The acrobatics of the children were above anything you would see in the West. Baba sat with us all and we stayed to the end."[76]

On July 10 the women celebrated the fifteenth anniversary of Baba's silence with rava. Three days later Mani noted, "Had 'whs.' [whiskey]

---

* As a relatively new nation, Turkey endeavored to remain neutral, perceiving itself too weak to take sides and incur the danger of having to defend itself. It was not until February 1945 that Turkey would declare war on the Axis powers.

in evening with lots of fun." Baba told the women, "Tomorrow, half-bottle of brandy. Whiskey we keep to break it open [again] in 1941."[77]

Once more Baba spoke of intoxication, this time to explain Hitler's increasingly erratic behavior:

> What is now in the world will be done. And it's for that that all this suffering & misery this world has to go through, not for freedom of the world from these bindings. Unite all nations with love. Sinners of the worst type have become great saints due to such suffering. Sinners worse than Hitler. If a man like Hitler felt he really did that, & repented, he will be great in repenting. It's all mind's play…. Hitler thinks what he does is absolutely right & he is doing great justice to Germany, Italy, for the wrongs done before. He thinks he is right, & for this thought he feels justified to do millions of wrongs for this one right. The more he gets now, the more he will be intoxicated.[78]

Baba gathered the women together on July 12 to enlist their aid in initiating yet another new phase of work. "Tomorrow," He said, "all of you write down the seven names of God and learn them by heart after seven days. Then you have to sing from your heart, 'Hari, Paramatma, Allah, Ahuramazda, God, Yezdan, Hu.' So all must sing it from the heart…. From the 1st of August, you all sing with the harmonium."[79]•

Baba taught them the melody by beating out a rhythm as they sang the names at different pitches, pointing to the woman who came closest to the correct note. He also explained the etymologies of the names and the part the chant would play His work:

> Paramatman is Vedantic term. Hari—very common term for God (Hindoo, [*sic*] pronounced as "Hurry").

• Baba's first variation on the "Seven Names of God" chant dates to 1924: "Khuda, Paramatma, Allah, Ahuramazda, Ram, Yezdan, Hu," and He ordered the men to sing it during the *ghamela* (work) yoga phase of His early work at Meherabad. In June 1927, He composed the version He would later give the women for the Prem Ashram boys, who chanted it every morning and before meals. Baba was still having the women sing "Seven Names of God" as of 1942, and He asked the men, as well as all of His Indian lovers, to chant it during His *mast* tours early that same year.

> Param—atman: Supreme Soul. Allah—Mohammedan. Ahuramazd—Zoroastrian. God—English. Yezdan is the term used by Irani Zoroastrians or Moghuls. Hoo—Sufi term for God. So all sing it from the heart….
>
> Paramatma: it's two words, Param = Supreme–Atma = Soul. Alla[h]—Without whom nothing exists. La in Arabic means "No"—without. Al = The One. Ahur-Mazd = Ahur means greatest. A always means beyond, limitless! Hur means 'Great.' Mazd means Izad. Yezdan & Mazdan, they all come from the word Zad—One Who Creates. Ahur Mazd means The Greatest One Who Creates. God short for "good."
>
> Yezdan is the Iranian word very freely used even by Mohammedans of Persia. This word has made many Moghul Saints. It has not only meaning, but when repeated it creates such quiescence and feeling that one loses oneself in thought of God.
>
> Hu—Sufis repeat Hu in every breath.
>
> Om—is the point of creation, preservance [*sic*] & destruction—not name of God.[80]

Baba continued, "For one year you all eat once a day. Eat as much as you like at one sitting as long as you like, for ½ half hour. In Europe, people will starve after 6 months. They will eat horse, mouse, children, old people. Compared to people in Europe, you will be in heaven. Any way you will have to obey, even if you die. Twice tea. Coffee with milk, morning & afternoon tea. Anyone who likes coffee, tea, or milk. It will not be easy, just few days. If it is to be easy, what is the meaning of 1 year's life of sacrifice?"[81] He concluded with a jest: "Give Elizabeth your cups of coffee."[82]

Three days later Baba returned to the topic of the women's orders:

> These orders are very important. It is most difficult not to backbite. Still, the more you try, the more you help Me.

> It is very easy to say that she is bad. But when one is bad, then to feel she is not bad is most difficult! To take food once a day is easy, but to think well of others is real help.
>
> Even if just one of you does it, I shall be happy. Criticism is in everyone's blood, and it is real self-control not to indulge in it. Suppose you are having three slices of bread and butter and Nadia [Nadine] takes one slice and eats it. What would you say? You would think her mean. But if you offer her another slice sincerely and say she is nice, that is something great and uplifting.
>
> 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 wish to obey these orders. That is the long and short of it, and that is how I want it. From the moment you get up, until you go to sleep, be on guard. Remember the orders and do it.[83]

Baba went on to declare: "After August 11 we go round & round with hundreds of aeroplanes & wherever we go we land by parachutes."* In the midst of transcribing His wide-ranging comments, Mani wrote across the top of the page in her envelope diary, "BABA … BABA … BABA," above, before, and after the date printed at the top.[84] The following day Baba reminded the women of their visit to the circus when He observed, "England will have worse than defeat. Made helpless. It will be a good world later, when Germans, Indians, English will all eat out of one plate as we saw at the circus (lion, goat, cow eat[ing] together) & with no trainer, but with My help."[85]

He then added, "When we leave on the 19th you all will take your own lunch in your sacks. Eggs, potatoes, oranges, cheese, bread & butter. In hotel you westerners will get western food, Rano & Kitty will eat eastern. 5 days in Calcutta, eat, go round and sweat. The market is

* Baba may have been referring to the commencement of the Battle of Britain, when the Luftwaffe initiated a series of air raids to destroy RAF airfields; the attacks were particularly intense in mid-August. In any case both sides were sending spies into enemy territory by parachute.

the biggest in India. Shops very nice, but not buy anything. Plenty of Traffic."[86] That evening, Mani recorded, Baba took the women out for "a short walk in woods" where they saw "Baba's profile in [a] tree trunk," as well as for a moonlit stroll through the garden.[87]

Donkin called the group's "last few days in Ranchi … really very dull, even Baba admitted as much."[88] So it was with some relief that at 5:00 PM on Friday, July 19, Baba and the women left for a four-day visit to Calcutta, their cloth bags bulging with a veritable feast compared to many of their Blue Bus picnics. Accompanying them were Donkin, Chanji, and Kaka. They returned to Chakradharpur Station by bus and caught the first of two trains for an overnight journey. "The scenery was fascinating till Muri, where we changed trains at 7:30," Mani noted in her diary. "We snatched an appetising luncheon [*sic*, supper] in the jolting train which gave us the merry feeling of riding on horse-back. The full moon in the serene sky completed the enchanting picture. We left Moori at 8:30 & had a comfortable accommodation in the train for the night."[89]

Baba's party arrived at Howrah Junction in Calcutta early in the morning of Saturday, July 20, continued on into the city, and checked into the Majestic Hotel. The hotel was located on a main thoroughfare "with plenty of singing & dancing & rickshaws on the streets," Mani observed, "all like an eastern picture."[90] After giving the women an opportunity to bathe and rest, Baba took them out to visit the Botanical Gardens, "with the gigantic banyan tree (which sheltered 15,000 British tommies[*])." Then it was on to the zoo, where the women marveled at the rhinoceroses and were treated to cool drinks from the "zoo-bar."[91] Afterward they visited the Kali Temple of Ramakrishna[†] before returning to the Majestic at 7:00 PM. Their route back to the hotel took them through the city's grand market.

[*] A slang term for British soldiers that had become popular during World War I.

[†] Baba called Ramakrishna (February 1, 1836–August 16, 1886) Paramhansa, the Sadguru or Perfect Master of Calcutta. He first visited the temple on August 12, 1924. On November 4, 1950, during the New Life, He entered the temple and "sat for half an hour … wearing only his loincloth. After his inner work … was completed, Baba donned his white kafni and walked outside the courtyard of the temple, with his begging bowl in hand. This was the first time Baba begged." (*Lord Meher*, 2951)



Baba and the women exploring a city bazaar located on a narrow, winding gali

Sunday morning Baba escorted the women to Calcutta's Jain Temple, which Mani called "the finest in the world!"[92] Afterward they visited the pet bazaar in the city market. One animal, a tiny, golden-furred, foul smelling, tailless monkey that chirped like a bird and mewed like a kitten, stole Baba's heart by reaching out to grasp His sleeve as He passed by. "As soon as Baba walked away, the monkey started to jump

and cry, holding the bars of his cage and screeching wildly," Mehera recalled.[93] She implored Him to come back, and as soon as He approached the monkey the distraught creature stopped crying. Baba purchased him, naming him Jumpu for his energetic nature, and He assigned the monkey's care to Norina.

On the way back to the hotel Baba and the women toured the Marble Palace "wherein lay exquisite pieces of art and birds," Mani recorded, and they drove past Eden Gardens before arriving just in time for supper. A few hours later Baba escorted them to the Elite Theater where Elizabeth purchased everyone's tickets for *My Son, My Son!* Mani found the pessimistic film noir feature "not so very thrilling."[94]

"Today [July 26] is Elizabeth's birthday, so she bought animals and took us to the pictures, and I gave fruit to all," Baba told the women that evening, after serving them "splendid peaches & plums & apples." The following afternoon, during their last day in the city, Mani recorded that Baba took them back out "for a drive in a shower of rain…. Elizabeth stood us the most delicious ice-cream drinks at Firpo's* and later took us to the pictures at the Regal, "Typhoon"† in Technicolor—a good picture."[95]

HOME TO MEHERABAD

Baba's party left Calcutta on Tuesday afternoon, July 23, for a forty-hour return journey to Ahmednagar via Chakradharpur and Manmad. They arrived at the station early, so Mani took the opportunity to purchase *Murders at Oxford*, which Baba selected from a bookstall display. The women then settled into two compartments "and even had place to sleep without somebody's foot in your face."[96]

In the meantime, the women had to figure out a way to sneak Jumpu onto the train. Because the little monkey had lived in the bird

* Firpo's Restaurant was established in 1917 by Italian chef Angelo Firpo, who specialized in Western fare and catered for the Viceroy of India as well as several maharajas.

† Operation Typhoon would be the name Hitler used for his ultimately unsuccessful assault on Russia, beginning in October 1941.

market he could whistle and chirp like a bird. But, Mehera recalled, as neither monkeys nor birds were permitted on the train,

> a plan was devised so that someone would warn Norina when the ticket collector was about to approach so she could quickly hide Jumpu in his basket. Elizabeth had also brought a bird in a cage with her, and she, too, was determined not to get caught. As soon as Elizabeth heard the ticket collector was coming, she ran to the toilet with her bird and kept him there, while Norina quickly stuffed her hand into Jumpu's basket in order to keep him quiet. What a funny predicament—Norina … scratching Jumpu's back and ears to keep him content, and also trying to act totally innocent and at ease as the conductor came by for the tickets. Actually, Jumpu did make a sudden noise but everyone turned and looked out the window pretending to see a bird outside and the ticket collector was fooled. Baba really enjoyed hearing the tale of Norina and Elizabeth's close calls![97*]

When Baba and the women reached Chakradharpur at midnight, they were met by Donkin, Kaka, Baidul, and Savak, as well as the *masts*, who now included Karim Baba. Chatti Baba had been restless at Ranchi, so everyone assumed that he would be ecstatic to return to Meherabad, but when they arrived at the station with only twenty minutes to spare, he steadfastly refused to board, and the men had to stay behind until they could convince him to come with them.

The women's return to Meherabad entailed another two-night journey requiring several hurried chai stops along the way. "Much fun

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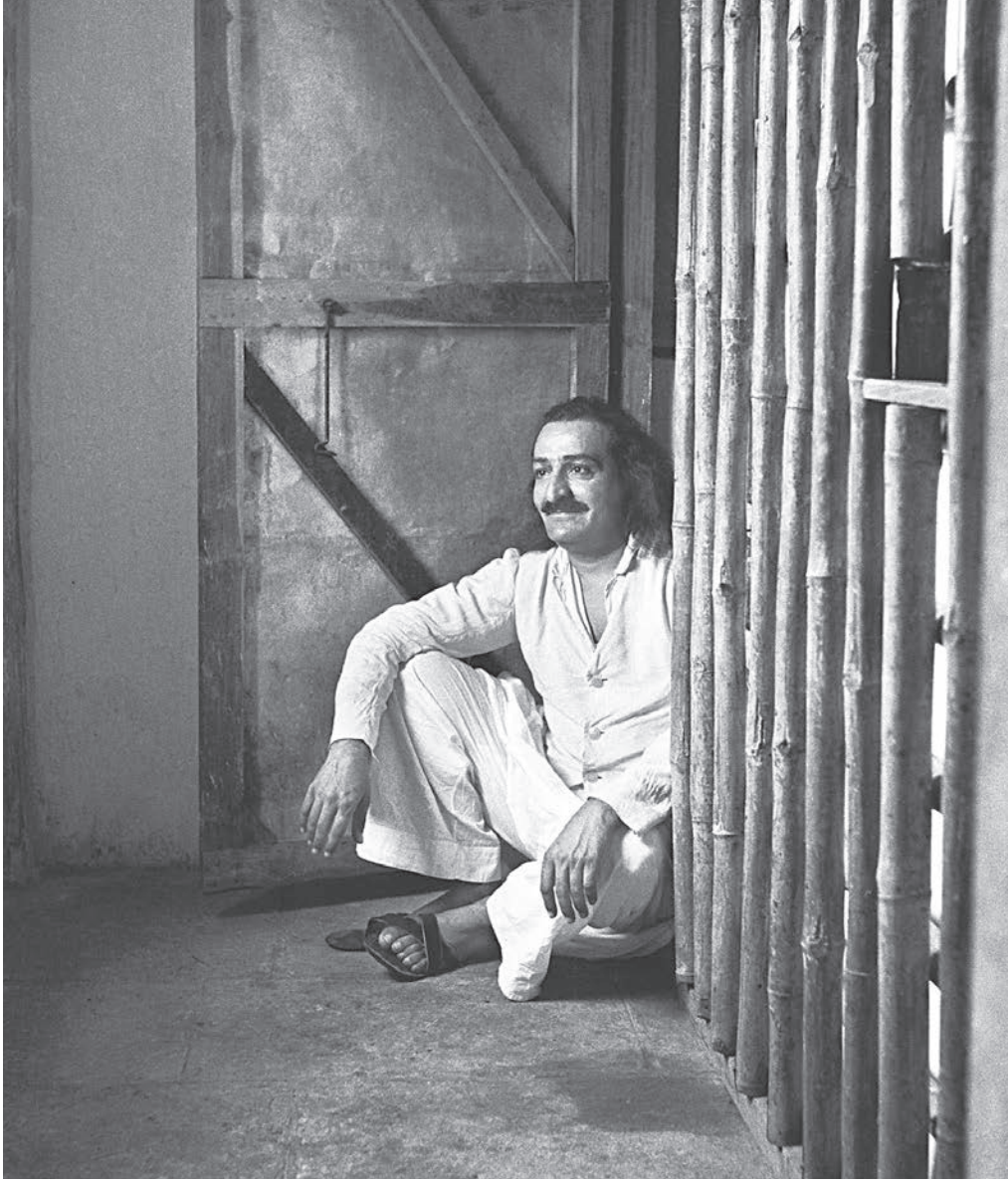
* According to *Mehera–Meher* 2:71, birds were allowed on the train, and just as the conductor came by Jumpu chirped. When the conductor asked Norina if she had a bird in her basket she smiled charmingly and said she did, and the conductor went on his way. But Mani recorded on page 90 of her diary that Elizabeth had brought several birds, which were *not* allowed, and she was caught out and had to pay a fine in order to keep them. She concluded with the sobering comment that the birds died before they reached Meherabad, so Elizabeth's efforts were all for naught.

over Kaity [*sic*], Rano & the 'chaiwallas,'" Mani observed, "who always ran out for 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, marvellous tea.' This time too we lunched at Nagpur, on bananas & jam & bread & butter." They did not have their next meal until 4:00 AM the following day, when they changed trains at Manmad "& took breakfast on another train where we had a compartment for 64."[98] Baba's weary party reached Ahmednagar at 9:30 AM on Thursday, July 25. Cars and drivers from the ashram waited to bear them home, where they were welcomed with "a delicious lunch of dhansak, cooked from down below," by the men who had stayed behind.[99]

A DIAMOND SOUL

Meanwhile, back in Chakradharpur, Chatti Baba proved so contrary that it was two days before the men could lure him onto another train for the return journey to Ahmednagar. "In the end," Donkin recorded with no little irony, "we had to resort to despicable devices … because it would have been feeble and unkind to have left this dear old man on a railway platform, at least 900 miles from his home…. The tattered party, faces grimy with sweat, dust, and unshaven stubble, reached the haven of Meherabad on the fourth day, and Chatti Baba, like all these *masts* who seem indifferent to sleep and food was by far the freshest of all."[100] The mandali would later complain to Baba that they had had one "hell of a time" with him.[101]

In preparation for Karim Baba's arrival, Baba had ordered Pendu to construct a bamboo lattice screen inside a small room in the *mast* ashram. The enclosed space came to be called the cage room, in which He could be secluded with the volatile jalali *mast*. Baba slept in the adjacent room that had once served as the office for the *Meher Baba Journal*, so that He could be available night and day to work with the *mast*.



Baba, seated in the doorway of the cage room during His seclusion there

Kitty described Karim Baba as "a big man with curly hair [and] beautiful features."[102] Donkin called him "a diamond soul," but the filthy, fiery, coin-swallowing, chain-smoking, rag-clad *mast* was also known as "tiger man"—and for good reason.[103] His nails, which Donkin called "ferocious-looking talons," were so long and dirty that Baba warned the men to be watchful while in his presence because he might scratch them, adding ominously, "He might even go for Me when I am alone working with him."[104]

Donkin recalled that "living at close quarters with a jalali *mast* is (to exaggerate the point a little) rather like living on the slopes of an active volcano," and he surmised that Karim Baba was a "potential physical menace" to the other *masts*, as well as to the mandali, which was why Baba confined him to the cage room.[105] In fact, the *mast* was so menacing that the men had taken no chances, escorting him up the Hill to His new quarters in heavy chains.

Donkin also observed that Karim Baba "was mostly silent, but from time to time he would utter some short phrase with the sudden vigour of a lid blowing off a boiling kettle. In spite of the rarity of the spoken word, he used often to laugh and sing when Baba sat with him, and one would sometimes wake up at an odd, unknown hour in the dead of the night, and hear him singing sweetly and gently to himself. It moved one strangely to hear so sweet a voice when one knew his external aspect to be so formidable, and one felt it to be a revelation of the radiance of his inner nature."[106]

Despite Karim Baba's alarming and unpredictable manner, Baba called him a "child *mast*" and observed, "When one is a real child, a kingly child, it means he is God-realized, as in Godhood there is pure childhood…. To such a child all the universe is as a toy. The whole infinite life is the garden where this child plays."[107] At the end of two weeks Baba announced that His work with Karim Baba was finished. He sent the *mast* back to his seat in Calcutta accompanied by Kaka, who ensured that he would be fed and otherwise looked after. Donkin declared Karim Baba to be "without exception, the most august and kingly of all the God-intoxicated souls brought closely to Baba's contact," further observing, "The memory of this great majzoob-like, jalali *mast* of the sixth plane will, perhaps, never leave the minds of those who saw him."[108*]

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* Baba would later confer the same status upon Pallukollah Baba, a sixth-to-seventh-plane *mast* from South India, calling him the "King of all *masts*." (*Lord Meher*, 2178)

Now that Karim Baba was gone, Baba began secluding Himself alone in the cage room, but He also returned to His work with the other *masts*, including one called Kabir, who was brought from the cremation grounds outside of Pandharpur. Said to live off of the partially incinerated remains of human bodies, Kabir had a "roar of laughter" that sounded like "the cry of some wild beast" and displayed a mouthful of prominent yellow teeth.[109] But as Donkin observed, "In spite of his forbidding appearance and raucous laugh, there was a sense of some inner luminosity to which his outer shell did the poorest justice … for never had one seen so strange an intermingling of an inner brilliance with so repellant and bestial a shell."[110] To everyone's great relief, Baba sent Kabir back to Pandharpur after only one day.

"What transpires" between Baba and the *masts* "no one knows," Chanji wrote in his June *Meher Baba Journal* column. "It seems to be a transmuting consciousness…. While thousands in the world outside … crave for just a momentary glance or even a darshana of the Master, while His own mandali residing with Him see very little of Baba at times for days, these truly deserving souls have been lucky enough to have the Master amongst them, to have their bath and food personally given by Him, besides having inner communication with Him all alone almost every day."[111]

"The Meherabad *Mast* Ashram was really a continuation of the Bangalore *Mast* Ashram," Donkin later recorded, "and the center at Ranchi … was, in fact, nothing more than the Meherabad Ashram transferred for a few weeks to this small hill station on the Bihar Plateau…. But it also marked something more than that, for the … next *mast* ashram was not established until Baba came to Mahabaleshwar in 1946, a giant's leap of six years. The Meherabad Ashram was, therefore, the last of the important early *mast* ashrams, and within a few months of its closing … Baba began the work of His great *mast* tours."[112]

TRYING MEANS THINKING OF ME

At the same time that Baba was finishing His seclusion with Karim Baba, He was also preparing the women for their part in His new phase of work. On July 25, the day they arrived back in Meherabad, He gathered them together in Mehera's room and promised to assign each of them their orders the following day, adding,

> I know you will follow all of them, except the one of not criticizing and speaking ill of others! That one you won't be able to obey. I have been observing it all for the past few days. I do not care if you do not obey, but if you do you will help Me. If you do not you are of no help. The only hope—which is only one percent—is that from August 1st you might try your best. Everybody fights and, as far as this order is concerned, all are hopeless! Try your best to overcome it. Your fighting is all childish and has no sense. If you try you will control, but trying means thinking of Me. I will be visiting once a week to see you for a few hours, and if later I go to a nearby mountain, still I will come once a week.
>
> The first hour [of my visits] I will spend with the girls [Mehera, Mani, Naja, Khorshed] … so that Mehera will also be satisfied by seeing Me. Then I will call you all and talk with you for a few hours. Each will have a duty and you must do it with all your heart….
>
> As My work is based on My own supreme sacrifice, it will make your sacrifices easy. If you fail once, do not give up but try again. If you succeed once, you will have helped Me a lot. If you fail nine times and win once, that too helps.[113]

Baba was especially adamant that no one should cause Mehera any kind of distress, saying, "If you give her a chance to become irritated, you have failed; and if she gets excited [angry], it is finished!"[114]

On July 26 Baba assigned each of the women orders and duties that would go into effect in less than a week, at which time their meals would be restricted to one a day. He placed Mansari, Kharmen Masi, Nadine, and Irene on silence, although He did give them permission to speak in His presence. They would continue to sing "Seven Names of God" with the others.

Even the children were expected to adhere to the restriction to one meal a day, although, as Sarvar recalled, Baba did adjust some of the others, assigning them five- to ten-minute periods of meditation rather than the much longer times the adults were expected to remain still and quiet. Sarvar was also told not to eat meat, and to tell no lies—a well-chosen order for a child, perhaps inspired by her refusal to admit she had eaten the tamarind pulp the previous January, during the trip to Belur.

Baba also divided twelve of the women into four groups of three, and each was allowed to communicate with only the two others in her group. He ordered them to divide the upstairs dormitory and hallway into four small cubicles using tatta screens, so that each group would be isolated from the others. Margaret called the partitioning off of the women's quarters a kind of seclusion. Baba also had the northeast corner of the west room closed off with a sari, creating an enclosure in which Rano could continue her work on *The Ten Circles* chart. And although servants would continue to sweep their rooms and wash their clothes, Baba told the women, "Dust your own corners."[115] Another of Baba's orders was that none of the Westerners except Margaret would be allowed to write. She assumed responsibility for corresponding with devotees in England, and her only instruction was not to write about the war. Kitty was redeployed to communicate messages that needed to be sent from one group to another.

For the four women who were practicing silence, Baba's restrictions were especially difficult, but everyone was challenged by the order. "You have no idea," Mani recalled. "You would have thought that it

was so difficult for them—a whole year—but what about us? It's very difficult to be with a few dumb people around, and you've got to look at them because while they're talking, they're talking with their hands, and you've got to look…. They were not doing Baba's fluid gestures. That was so natural, you don't have to be indoctrinated in that."[116]

Margaret concurred: "This definitely was also a discipline for the rest of us. There was the learning of the deaf and dumb alphabet, and having to be careful never to get trapped in a corner where the silent ones, once we were trapped, would usually feel inspired to tell the victim the story of their lives. When told letter by letter, lives seem endless. Even today a mention of Zurich brings up a picture of the best-laid sewer pipes in Europe! A source of great pride to Irene."[117]

"Nadine Tolstoy had an alphabet board of Baba's," Mani continued, "which had cracked in two and had been fixed at the back with sticky plaster tape," but over time she worked out a number of hand gestures to communicate with the other women.[118] Once, when she gestured to Baba that she and Norina had had a disagreement, He chastised her mildly, saying, "You must observe silence not only of the tongue but of desires—of hatred, of bitterness, of greed."[119] Eventually He made her give up even the gestures.

The women awoke at 4:45 AM and gathered in the kitchen to sing "Seven Names of God" from 5:00 until 5:30. The Westerners had to descend the steep stone steps from their upstairs dormitory in the predawn darkness, and Mehera recalled how the other women waited "in great suspense" until Elizabeth arrived safely at the bottom of the stairs.[120] Not surprisingly, it was she who found the schedule most difficult: "Elizabeth was so silent in her love for Baba," Mani observed. "She put on a dressing gown and came down the steps with a lantern, all the time with her eyes closed. She walked into the kitchen with her eyes still closed, sat on a bench by the door, and sang [and] I tell you, it was something to watch … and when it was finished, she'd get up and walk out in the same sleep-walking state as when she had come in."[121]

"There was no electricity in those days," Mani further recalled. "There were kerosene lanterns. I sat on a platform where the stove is now, with a harmonium. I would be singing, 'Hari, Paramatma, [Allah,] Ahuramazda, God, Yezdan, Hu.' I said it once, and then all joined in in unison. Nadine had a beautiful, operatic voice and sang it very forcefully."[122] After an hour's break the women breakfasted at 6:30. Baba ordered them all to maintain silence between 4:30 and 7:00 AM (except for the singing), 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM, and after 8:00 PM, a total of seventeen hours every day for as long as this directive stood. But He eased their morning schedule on the twenty-ninth, allowing them to rise fifteen minutes later, at 5:00 AM, and sing from 5:30 to 6:00, breakfasting at 7:00.

On July 27 Baba took the women to Sarosh Talkies for a private showing of the Alfred Hitchcock thriller *Rebecca*, which Mani called a "v. good picture." He escorted them to one more film before He entered seclusion—*Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet*, but afterward He declared: "I have never been so bored since science lectures at college."[123] Mani had no comment.

Baba also distributed a full year's worth of toilet supplies. "No bazaar chits from tomorrow," He warned, "except for shoe repairs, watches, torches, spectacles. I will come and see you every Thursday. I go into seclusion tomorrow." Despite having felt ill the previous day Baba added, "I shall fast on water tomorrow. Then, from the day after, like the rest of you, I will eat once a day. For the first few days, you will find it difficult to eat once a day. Then you will find it easy."[124] But He also instructed them: "When anybody is ill, their diet should consist of milk, tea, coffee, *sago* [pudding], and *govsabood* [herbal tea] at any time."[125] After speaking with the women Baba asked for the gramophone so that they could listen to some traditional Indian music.

When Baba's thirty-one orders took effect the following day, every resident of the Meherabad ashram would join devotes in the East and West in submitting to His new phase of work. *Mehera–Meher* likened them to "soldiers going into battle" for their "Commander-in Chief."[126]

NOTHING BUT GOD'S GAME

Meher Baba entered seclusion in the cage room at 4:00 PM on Thursday, August 1, 1940. "The old hospital had been beautifully prepared for Him," Margaret recalled.[127] Chanji called Baba's "retirement into seclusion … no period of rest, as the world would think it to be. Just as His silence is more eloquent than words and speeches, His seclusion is indicative of greater spiritual activity and of such hard, strenuous working as Masters alone can undertake…. Everything in the Master's work has been minutely calculated and planned according to the conditions and exigencies of the times for the enactment of this great spiritual awakening through which the world has to pass."[128]

"In times like these," Chanji further observed,

> when science and civilisation have led man to forget God and made him more of machine than a part and parcel of God and an instrument for Him to work through, those who have to bring man back to God have to bring about phenomenal changes on the physical plane for a universal spiritual awakening. This is a superhuman task for a God-man who alone can accomplish it with the supremest self-sacrifice that it demands. The Master has been working at it, quietly and in His own way, for years. His retiring in seclusion, literally cut-off from all external contacts, at this particular period and His call on His trained disciples and others to share in this—His great work of mercy, of awakening man to his Divine heritage—is therefore in consideration of the special exigencies of the time, which connotes the beginning of a New Era.[129]

For the coming three months, only three of the men would be allowed to see Baba: Vishnu, who would deliver mail and other communications; Krishna, whom Baba had chosen to serve as His personal

attendant; and a fortunate young servant named Kashya Kamble, who delivered the *Times of India* each morning so that Baba could keep apprised of the progress of the war.

Krishna was subject to a strict schedule determined by Baba's work:

5:00–6:00 AM	Prepare Baba's bath and toilet needs
7:00–7:05 AM	Bring Baba's tea and remove clothes for laundering
7:30–9:30 AM	Remove tea vessels and clean Baba's latrine; clean Chatti Baba's room, arrange for his bath and breakfast; bring fresh drinking water for Baba and clean Baba's room
2:00–2:05 PM	Deliver Baba's midday meal
4:00–5:00 PM	Arrange Baba's bedding and take away vessels from the midday meal; arrange for Chatti Baba's evening meal
6:00–6:10 PM	Bring Baba's evening tea and freshly laundered clothes
6:30–6:45 PM	Remove tea vessels and clean and light Baba's lantern[130]

Baba planned to meet with the women every Thursday from 1:30 to 8:00 PM, lifting their afternoon order of silence while He was there. In between these meetings the women remained occupied with sewing and other work. While their toiletries were meant to last a year, it would seem that their clothing was meant to last forever. "We are all busy dressmaking here," Margaret wrote to the Backetts, "making everything into something else! Irene even made a very handsome skirt out of a sheet. Probably next time you meet me I shall have turned all my dresses into coats, and all my blouses into trousers!"[131]

During their first gathering on August 8, Baba spoke about Karim Baba and then told them, "Now, when I come here every Thursday, we will talk of everything but the war. Soon it will spread to Bombay and Ahmednagar. All over the world people are so sad and mad, and soon it will be bad beyond conception. Therefore, you must follow the orders as you did this week, but more wholeheartedly than ever, willingly and happily. Do it not just because I order you but because you like to obey!"[132]

Also on August 8, Baba and the women celebrated Naga Panchami,* and the servants entertained Baba and the women with traditional songs, putting Him in an especially happy mood. A *jula* (swing) was hung outside of Mehera's room for occasions such as this, and Baba sat on it as the women gently pushed Him back and forth. Baba spent over six hours with the women that day. He told them that He was moving some of the *masts* who had been living in the Family Quarters to the *mast* ashram on the Hill and that the men were partitioning off a small room for Him where He could continue His seclusion close by. He also announced that in the coming month of September and every month thereafter He would be initiating new phases of work.

On this same day Mani inscribed in *Baba's Dictation to the Women Mandali*, "From here on in Mani's handwriting, from notes taken down by one [of the other women] while Mani read out the board."[133] Since the beginning of the tours, she had been carrying a small cardboard alphabet board for Baba to use on the bus. Kitty and Katie were usually responsible for taking down notes as Mani read the board aloud. Over time she became so skilled that she was able to read Baba's words and write them down at the same time. "Reading the board was very natural for me, even upside down," Mani recalled. "I did my own shorthand. Nadine was also taking notes. I helped fill them in." But Baba did not like the women to be distracted by note-taking and sometimes

* Naga Panchami is a holy day set aside for the worship of *nagas*, or snakes—especially cobras, which hold a high position in the pantheon of Hindu deities. The first nagas are said to have descended from Brahma and were Arjuna's cousins.

told them to just sit and listen. "Why do you need words? Just be with Me. Sit before Me. Absorb," He implored. "You're with Me. Make the most of My companionship." "Being with Him was the most important thing," Mani concluded. "Everything else was secondary."[134]

One of the most extraordinary aspects of Baba's seclusion during this time was His work with a pure black puppy born on April 20 to Piloo Satha's dog.* Piloo gave the puppy to Baba after His neice, Khorshed Damania, brought the dog to His attention. Baba named him Warrior, and on August 8 He requested that the women send the puppy to Him every afternoon at 2:00 PM for the coming week. It was Elizabeth's privilege to care for Warrior at all other times.†

When Baba returned to visit with the women on August 15, He covered a wide range of topics, including His *mast* work, observing, "The saints [*masts*] give us a gala every night. Ten of them singing loudly all night. Chatti Baba sings too, saying, 'Catch him, he is dead. God is dead.' All this has meaning…. The child-*mast* [Karim Baba] I am sending soon to the same place from where he came [Calcutta], and another will come in his place."[135] Baba called Karim Baba "a very rare type," adding, "The state he is in was longed for by Ramakrishna and Vivekananda."[136] He also told them that they should no longer send Warrior to Him, as He was shifting His focus to the mad and *masts*. Afterward He complained, "Today, I have talked much. I won't do it every time. I don't like it. In the *mast* ashram, I don't talk, I work!"[137]

The following Thursday, August 22, Baba joined Mehera and a few of the other Easterners in her room for the first hour of His visit. He then called the others, who gathered around Him with their wooden stools. After He inquired about their health one of the women commented on His especially beautiful appearance. He replied, "And yet, last night was a terrible night for Me."[138] Breaking the serious

* Piloo Satha was one of Gaimai's brothers.

† Warrior was a German shepherd, also sometimes known as Alsatian. Mehera made no mention of Warrior in *Baba Loved Us Too*, probably because he was neither a dog nor a pet, but rather a medium for Baba's work.

mood He then joked, "Soonamasi look[s] like the 'Laughing Buddha,' & Elizabeth [is] the 'Sleeping Buddha.'"[139]

He then asked most of the women to step out for a few minutes while He discussed financial issues with the closest ones, telling them, "If what I am planning to do in December works out, I will need lots of money. If I work it out as I am planning, you will have a real surprise, the surprise of your lives. The money, when it is for My work, automatically must come. The change will begin from the 15th of November."[140] Baba called back the rest of the women, instructing them, "When in the morning you say 7 names of God, and I say do it from [the heart] you must have the fixed idea in mind that all these names are One. The vibration helps. These names I have so selected and arranged that they vibrate, and help if done with feeling," adding that He intended for the *masts* to sing the words as well.[141]

Baba's war work ensured that world conditions were always on His mind. In addition to reading newspapers, He kept an atlas close at hand so that He could track the movement of troops across Europe, as well as in other parts of the world as the war progressed. On August 22 He broke His August 8 promise not to talk about the war, observing:

> Until four o'clock we talk of war. Churchill will be marked down in history as the greatest Prime Minister of England. America is slowly coming in. One thing is definite. India will suffer most of all internal—and external, both. We will be in the midst of war. Bombs will drop on Norina's foot!
>
> There are four stages of this war. The first is now over and the second will begin. It will be bad. The third will be very bad. The whole world will be aflame. The fourth will be termination.
>
> The three phases are within one year—four months each.

> The difference in good and bad is so subtle, good for one person is bad for others. Hitler really thinks he is doing good, but his "good" is "bad" for others!
>
> Don't think because I look so happy and well that it is all so easy. I feel very, very well, but very depressed. Last night was very bad.[142]

He also offered a lovely discourse that Mani entitled "All are One."[143]

One week later, on August 29, Baba and the women celebrated Janmashtami, Krishna's birthday. The holiday had fallen on the previous Sunday but the women waited to celebrate until Baba could join them. He had declared that there should be "no ceremony or arti or *puja*. Only fun allowed," and everyone gathered under the tin shed for the traditional observances, including the smashing of a yogurt-filled chatti.[144] Walu sang the birthday song associated with the holiday that Mani called Dahi-handi—the Maharashtrian name for the festivities.[145]

At the beginning of September Baba began to meet with the women twice a week, on Sundays as well as Thursdays. Villagers from Arangaon celebrated Pola on Sunday, September 1, and they led their festively garlanded and ornamented bullocks up Meherabad Hill for the women to see.* But Baba had a serious agenda for the afternoon. He began by meeting with only Mehera and Mani for the first hour, after which He called the others. "The 2nd phase of war begins—many surprises," He declared.[146] "This war will make such complications in the future that no one will know who is friend and who is foe…. It will be such a muddle and mess!"[147]

Baba also continued to express concerns about money and how the availability of funds would determine where He went next. He asked the women to estimate the cost of spending eight months in

* Pola is a rural Maharashtrian festival honoring India's quintessential beast of burden, the bullock. Bullocks and other farm animals are colorfully decorated with painted horns, garlands, tassels, bells, and other bobbles. Festivities include a parade of animals through the village, singing, dancing, and special foods.

California (fifteen thousand dollars—very expensive) versus eight months in Karwar (twenty thousand rupees—much more affordable), but He also warned them, "Don't build anything on what I am saying now. Perhaps we go neither to Karwar nor to California—but definitely, we won't stay in Meherabad."[148]

Baba had told the women that He would be altering His orders each month, and on September 5 He adjusted their daily schedules. He shifted the time for singing "Seven Names of God" from 5:30 to 6:00 in the morning, leaving it at 5:30 in the evening, so that they now sang it in His presence. The new schedule read:

4:30 AM	Rise
4:30 AM	First period of quiet until 7:00 AM
5:30 AM	Last time for women to rise "whether alive or dead"
6:30 AM	Morning tea
7:00 AM	Talking allowed until 9:00 AM
9:00 AM	Second period of quiet until 3:00 PM
12:00 PM	Midday meal at "12:00 sharp"
3:00 PM	Talking allowed until 8:00 PM
5:30 PM	Singing "Seven Names of God" for thirty minutes
6:30 PM	Evening tea
8:00 PM	Quiet until 7:00 AM

"For one month, do all this very strictly to help," He ordered, "and do not sleep while singing!"

> So for one month, things will be very bad, very important, very serious, and urgent for My work. I want you to obey orders so literally that you must put up with any kind of difficulty—and willingly, too—to help Me. And for that you must try your utmost not to get upset—or go to hell, if you don't want to help! …

> Also, sing [the names of God] with heart and soul. If you see how I make these mad sing—two of them start dancing—how they get into it wholeheartedly. For one month, keep quiet during My work hours. After a month, it will be easier. So try your utmost this month.[149]

When Rano brought to Baba's attention a recent situation in which Elizabeth had done something to upset Irene, who was on silence, He simply replied, "What a great opportunity to obey My order and not get upset." He also referred to Naja's ongoing health problems and said that if she died her grave would be next to Nonny's.[150*] Later that evening the women sang "Seven Names of God" in the East Room in Baba's presence, and He told them to continue to sing it there. He stayed for an additional fifteen minutes as they regaled Him with amusing stories.

When Baba came to the women on September 8 it was painfully apparent that His pleas for quiet had gone unheeded. The day before, Hitler had ordered an air raid over London, heralding a horrific ongoing assault that would come to be known as the Blitz.[†] That same day, Baba had been disturbed by one of the women talking in a loud voice, and when He spoke with them on the eighth, He exclaimed, "I was so angry that I wanted to come here, then and there, and beat everybody. Just when I had made even the canary stop singing, I heard your voices. So for a month you must keep quiet during My working hours." But Baba was never angry for long, and He immediately amended His orders to assure them, "In moments of excitement [only], you can shout—like the cat eating the rabbit, or Kippy eating the cat!"[151]

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* Naja, who had suffered from poor health in 1933, fell ill in Panchgani during the spring of 1937 and was still sick as of mid-June, when Baba assigned Rano the task of caring for her. In August, Gaimai took over that responsibility. She was again ill during the spring of 1939, near the end of the First Blue Bus Tour, and in February of 1940 in Bangalore. Baba later ordered that Naja's ashes were to be entombed adjacent to His Samadhi.

† The Blitz (Lightning) was Hitler's response to his ongoing losses in the Battle of Britain: a thirty-seven-week sustained siege of nightly air raids over civilian London and fifteen other cities. Between July 1940 and May 1941 the Luftwaffe dropped over one hundred tons of explosives. Between thirty-two and forty thousand civilians were killed and nearly ninety thousand more seriously injured. Two million homes were destroyed, more than half in London.

On September 12 Baba again revised the women's daily schedules, now requiring absolute silence from 6:30 AM until 2:00 PM, and from 8:00 PM until rising, beginning in two days. Mani noted, "[Baba] asked us if we liked singing 'Hari Paramatman' [*sic*] in morning or evening. Majority said morning so He told us henceforth to sing in the morning [in Mehera's room and] in the evening under the shed."[152]

Baba also asked the women to remember Delia, Will and Mary Backett, and other lovers who remained behind in London enduring Hitler's unrelenting air raids.• Three days later, on Sunday, September 15, Hitler attempted a further assault with a brazen daylight bombing raid, but the Royal Air Force drove back the German planes, destroying Hitler's hopes for invading the island nation. It was seen to be a turning point in the war, and Baba marked the momentous event by disbanding the Meherabad *mast* ashram and sending the men back to their homes with the exceptions of Mohammed, Chatti Baba, and Shariat Khan, as yet another phase of His work came to an end.

But Baba told the women that even if Great Britain were to be defeated, the war would continue. Including Himself with the women, He went on to observe: "So it all means we must try more and more to obey orders; fight and hurt others less; and sing Hari, Paramatma with more and more heart—and more and more open [awake] eyes. If they don't keep open, glue them up!"[153] He then warned the four "silencers"—Nadine, Irene, Mansari, and Kharmen Masi: "Even if a bomb drops at your feet, you should not say, 'Oh!' Not a word. Remember. Even if a bomb drops."[154] He also chastised Nadine for attempting to evade her order of silence by writing long and complicated communications on airmail stationery, but when the

• Of Meher Baba's close ones in the West, one who is documented to have died during the Blitz was Christine McNaughton, a quiet waitress from Scotland who met Baba in December 1932, when she delivered meals to His room at the Knightsbridge Hotel in London. She was one of the ten Western women invited to India in 1933, and she saw Baba again in 1937, in Cannes. Christine left Cannes on August 21, never to see her Master again: she was killed in 1941, during a German air raid over London. Baba said she was "a very spiritual-type person, a very good soul." (*Lord Meher*, 1499)

Delia DeLeon, who survived the Blitz, later observed: "It seems to teach us to live in the moment, nothing material seems to matter when everything you owned could be destroyed in a moment. In fact, Margaret lost most of her material possessions when a bomb destroyed the warehouse where they were being stored while she was in India. There was no point in worrying.... I felt Baba was with me, directing and teaching me all the time." (*The Ocean of Love*, 144)

women playfully accused Irene of breaking her order when she talked in her sleep, He reassured her that it was something she could not help.

Baba complimented the women on their efforts to keep silence, observing, "Even Elizabeth doesn't shout for the animals," after which everyone went out to tour the zoo before returning to Mehera's room. But He also complained, "No letters from the West! Not from Hedi," nor from any of His other Western lovers: Reliable international postal service was another casualty of war.[155]

When Baba returned on Thursday the nineteenth, He threatened to send Elizabeth to Piccadilly and Margaret to Broadway—in other words, the American to London and the Londoner to New York—if they continued to disturb Him by talking too loudly. He then gave everyone a new order to maintain absolute silence between 6:00 AM and 2:00 PM for a period of ten days, explaining, "I work for 15 minutes only, but it is at no fixed time. It may be any time between six and two. And just at that time when I work, you can't keep quiet!"[156] He then offered a long, mystifying discourse on the esoteric topic of music that Mani called the "7th shadow of God's voice."[157]

Sometimes Baba was in a lighthearted mood, as He was on September 22, when He played games with the women and then drew small portraits of Hitler, Mussolini, and Churchill to illustrate the illusory nature of world events. Mani copied His drawing into her envelope diary, accompanied by Baba's words: "If you have this deep-rooted in your mind, then you will understand that all this business is nothing but God's game."[158]

A few days previously Baba had asked the women: "What is love? If you love, it is very difficult to define that love, then just imagine how impossible it is to define Infinite Love!"[159] He now offered a beautiful reflection on the primacy of love over meditation: "By thinking continually, you become what you think of deeply. The mind makes one become what one thinks of deeply. When you meditate, you try to forget everything, yourself. In loving, you forget everything and self, but

you remember the Beloved! In meditation, the Beloved does not exist. That is why it is said that in meditation, the most you can achieve is *samadhi*—forgetting everything and deriving peace—but never God-realization. It is only attained by love."[160]

On September 26 Baba made yet another alteration to the women's and servants' orders, telling them to maintain silence between 8:00 AM and noon beginning the following morning. He encouraged them to meditate during the four-hour duration. He had already assigned them half an hour of meditation every day, to be done at any time—His time, that is, not theirs, so they never knew when the thirty minutes might begin. Margaret recalled gathering in one of the ground-floor rooms of the water tank building, sitting in a circle in which the women faced outwards, toward the walls, rather than each other, silently repeating the names of God, breathing in and out with each repetition.

Meanwhile, Baba's puppy Warrior was growing into a "large, beautiful dog … loveable, friendly, and quite the apple of Elizabeth's eye," Margaret wrote.[161] She recalled an incident that could have ended in disaster but instead left her with a comical memory of Elizabeth and the lengths to which she would go for one of her beloved animals:

> One day Elizabeth was walking with Warrior … when to her horror the dog left her and went over to investigate a huge coiled snake.
>
> Warrior, although a well-trained and obedient dog, refused at her call to leave his investigation of this new and unusual creature and gradually circled nearer and nearer to it. Neither Elizabeth's orders nor her screams affected him…. Elizabeth finally decided on a counter attraction. She lay down on her back, cycled with her arms and legs, at the same time making strange, calling sounds.
>
> She was successful.
>
> Warrior decided that the strange behavior of his mistress was more interesting than the unknown object and

ran hurriedly to her side. Before he could escape again she had him on his leash going back to the Meherabad gate.[162]

But in late September, Warrior was taken ill. Elizabeth asked Nilu to examine the ailing dog, but he had to tell her that Warrior could not be saved. "Poor Elizabeth," Margaret wrote,

> —whom I would often tease and say that she loved animals more than she did her fellow disciples—was heartbroken. She had the dog placed on her bed and sat miserably, stroking his head and watching the gradual failure of his breathing.
>
> After his death, I went out and to my surprise found Baba, whom no one was supposed to see during the seclusion period, walking across the compound. He signaled me to stop and then demanded to know what was wrong.
>
> Being in silence, I laboriously started to spell out the tragedy on my fingers in the deaf and dumb alphabet.
>
> This was completely wrong. I had chosen the wrong obedience. Baba stopped me by making furious signals that I was to use my voice to answer Him.
>
> Speed was of the essence.[163]

Warrior died at 10:00 AM on September 28 at little more than five months of age. Baba assisted with his burial in a spot He chose, adjacent to Nonny's tomb in a small area now known as the Pet Cemetery. Elizabeth was deeply distressed by Warrior's death, but Baba knew that when she better understood the dog's place in His work, her grief would lessen: "Elizabeth, listen carefully, and you will be proud of Warrior's share in My work. What I am telling you is the truth, and I am not saying it just to please you…. God's work is hidden work, the same as the Perfect Masters' secret work. But today I will give you an inkling of how their work is done from the case of Warrior."[164*]

* Like many of the discourses Baba gave at this time, this one was first recorded in *Baba's Dictation to the Women Mandali*.

Baba then gave a complex discourse on the divine number seven and the seven planes of consciousness, introducing the concept of "turns," which mark the transition from one level of consciousness to the next. He cited tulsi, or holy basil, as the turning from the vegetable to animal kingdom, and the dog as the turning from animal to human form.[165*] "Dog has intuition" Mani recorded in her notes for *Baba's Dictation to the Women Mandali*, "& also partially insights [*sic*], without being able to consciously use it…. And they (dogs) see things which ordinary humans cannot. Their company purifies thoughts & purifies atmosphere. That is why Zoroastrians have custom, ~~th~~ when someone is dead, they bring in a dog ~~before burial~~ to see the corpse before burial—a dog purifies sanskaras."[166]

"Dogs play an important part when used consciously by the Master," Baba continued. "Warrior, you all understood, was Baba's dog! Warrior was not actually a dog, but was temporarily brought down from the spirit world to do this work…. Eventually, I had him for the time I wanted him [and] when My work was over, I sent him back…. He played a part which none of you can ever grasp. He shared My work and now he is free…. Elizabeth, you are not God-realized. You naturally feel sad about Warrior's death, but knowing what I explained to you, you must be happy!"[167] Baba followed His explanation with an enigmatic warning: "Before November 2nd … one more tragic event (if you can call it tragic), will happen. Tragic from your point of view—not Mine…. October month for this world so bad! Such universal mess! Up to now it has been nothing compared to what it's going to be!"[168]

Baba ordered Rano to stop working on *The Ten Circles* chart and begin another painting—a portrait of Him. She was to use the plywood panel on which Helen Dahm had already executed a portrait of Baba, and which had been placed in His tomb. Rano was understandably reluctant to paint over Helen's work, but as it was His wish, she did. Called *The Avatar*, Rano's portrait captures Baba seated, wearing a

* Baba also cited the snake, crow, and rose as turns in *Mehera–Meher*. (2:85)

pristine white sadra, hair open and flowing to His shoulders, with a halo behind His head.

On Monday, October 7, Baba began a monthly observance of one day of complete fasting. He fasted all that day, but at 7:00 PM He began to experience what He later described as "the most terrible time of My present life."[169] Exhausted, He fell asleep at 11:30 PM, even though He had been planning to break His fast at midnight. When He related the experience to the women the following day, He called it "hell."[170] That same day—October 8—news reached India of Hitler's invasion of Romania on the seventh, and the women understood the significance of Baba's suffering the previous night.

On October 10 Mani recorded in her *Blue Bus Tours Diary*: "Occurrence of the great drama of 'seasickness' in the ashram."[171] Margaret called it a "strange health crisis" that took place that afternoon at Upper Meherabad, when all the women suddenly were taken ill and began to vomit. Between the excessive heat and loss of fluids, Margaret wrote,

> after an hour or two, nearly everyone lay weak and moaning on a bed or just stretched out on the ground at the point of attack.
>
> The two doctors in attendance on the ashram at that time, Donkin and Nilu, were sent for and they came up the Meherabad Hill looking white and frightened. They knew, but we did not, that cholera was rife in Ahmednagar.
>
> At this time, Baba was in seclusion in a room on the far side of the compound. He had left orders that He was on no account to be disturbed.
>
> On the other hand, the doctors had a permanent order to see that nothing untoward should happen to the women's group.
>
> Horrified at the situation, they disregarded the seclusion orders and without delay sent a message to Baba.

> He did not send a verbal answer, but almost immediately the vomiting eased down and finally stopped, although for a few days those who had been attacked were weak and listless.
>
> It seems that the doctors had made the right choice.[172]

Sometime around the beginning of October, Baba had given the women a new four-line song to sing each day, incorporating thirteen names of God:

> You are Formless, Parvardigar, Ahuramazda, Allah, Hu.
> You are Yezdan, You are God, Ahuramazda, Allah, Hu.
> You are Paramatma, Parabrahma; You are Almighty
> God, Ishwar.
> You are Parameshwar, Ezad, Ahuramazda, Allah, Hu.[173]

On the eleventh He explained the connections between the new song and His Universal work in a time of war:

> *Ezad* means the "One who is the First"—God the Omnipotent, Omniscient, and Omnipresent. There are millions of names of God, but those that have a sound effect are few. Every sound you make, every thought you think, good or bad, stays. But that sound that results in feeling has force behind it, which helps or hurts others.
>
> All this noise of guns, bombs, airplanes, et cetera, of war, will be utilized for the spiritual life of the world in the future. Yes, it all stays. It cannot go. Where can it go? It is like water, which evaporates, forms into clouds, and then comes down again as rain. But you all must sing the song of God's names together with rhythm and timing to produce an effect. When the name of God is sung with feeling and rhythm, it even has the effect of temporarily bringing down the majzoobs from their superconscious state.[174]

Baba had recently composed an article about science, war, and the development of radar and the atomic bomb. He asked one of the women to read it aloud to the group, but afterward, one of the others told Him that she found science to be an insufficiently spiritual topic. Baba explained:

> Science must arise, as it plays a great part in the present war. Science can be put to good use, and science can be put to bad use…. In war, science is used for destruction. But destruction ultimately means renewal and improvement.
>
> …. So, when the world is destroyed, a new and better world must spring from the ashes. There will be chaos and destruction all over the universe, but after that, there will be no war for 800 years [previously Baba had said 400 years].
>
> Therefore, isn't all this present misery worth that long period of happiness? Those who die in this war will be reborn to enjoy the new world and peace. Now they want power and possessions and hate each other. How can it all end? In only one way. They must get sick of it all—sick of wanting, sick of hating, sick of fighting! …
>
> And then what will the alternative be? To stop hating and to love; to stop wanting and to give, to stop fighting and be at peace. The world of the future will be very marvelous![175]

A few days later Baba brought another article he had dictated. This one was about the balancing of good and bad sanskaras, and He used the war to further explain, "Good and bad are mere terms. Hitler sincerely thinks he is doing good and the world thinks he is doing bad! What is good for him is bad for the world. Good and bad are just man-made expressions. Real freedom can only be obtained when you give up all desires. You have to renounce them all to obtain freedom."[176]

October 13 was the anniversary of the death of Baba's aunt, Dowla Masi, and October 14 was the first anniversary of Nonny Gayley's passing. Nonny had been on the women's minds as the date approached, because on October 2 Mani had recorded, "We went to Rano's room and distributed some things and clothes of Nonny's."[177*] Baba ordered that sweets be given to the villagers in the two women's memory. At 5:00 PM on October 13, women and children from Arangaon walked up the Hill to the gate at Upper Meherabad, where Soonamasi and Kaku waited to hand out the treats. Poor people from the village were fed the following evening, after which Rano handed out more sweets in memory of her mother, assisted by Kaku and several other women.

Meanwhile, monsoon precipitation had brought temporary relief in August and early to mid-September, ending Meherabad's summer drought, but the succeeding four weeks had been dry. The evenings of the thirteenth and fourteenth brought drenching downpours, prompting Baba to observe, "This will make the villagers even happier! They need rain more than sweets."[178]

Being in seclusion, Baba did not give darshan, but *Mehera–Meher* records that He did go out three times to watch the villagers from a distance. "We were sitting in the shed with Baba," Mani recorded, "singing and learning the new arti, while the rain played drums on the roof above us."[179] Although Kitty thought that Baba looked as "radiant and beautiful as ever," Donkin observed something more subtle, "a fusion of spiritual bliss and serenity and a sort of dragging sadness, which gives such dignity and grandeur to the face and really surpasses all scenery of nature, both in its amazing hold on the onlooker and its rapid changes."[180]

But both Kitty and Donkin thought that they recalled Baba coming out of seclusion. Donkin recorded that He called the sweets "a prasad for rain" and that He distributed them Himself.[181] Kitty vividly

* Rano, of course, did not have her own room, but shared the upstairs dormitory with the other Westerners.

described an atmosphere of festivity: "Crowds of men, women and children from Arangaon and devotees from Ahmednagar were seen ascending the Hill to the strains of a local band. Through Baba's gate they came, carrying their offerings of coconuts, sweets and garlands. Bhajans were sung, after which Baba gave to each a ladoo as prasad. When the ceremony was over and Baba got up, all shouted, 'Shri Meher Baba ki jai!' Then Baba, leading the way through the gate, descended the Hill followed by the crowd, a most impressive and touching sight."[182*]

The women continued to sing "Seven Names of God" throughout this time. The repetition of the words was hypnotic, and Baba's emphasis on pronouncing the names properly meant that it required an extraordinary degree of concentration. On October 16 Mani recorded in her diary, "Baba came this morning as I felt ill while singing."[183] Margaret described the incident in detail, observing that the singing "was tiring and had a very strange effect on the head. After a time this would cause a mild dizziness, and Mani, who accompanied this performance on a small harmonium and therefore was under even more strain than we were, fainted."[184] Donkin and Nilu were called to Upper Meherabad to make sure that nothing was seriously wrong. Less than a week had passed since the women's previous health crisis, and Donkin observed that they became so "windy" that Baba had to be called to settle them down but remained "in good humor" despite the interruption to His work.[185]

UH-OH, WHAT'S COMING NOW?

Baba issued more alterations to His fasting orders for the ashramites, so that beginning on October 28 they would be allowed two meals a day—breakfast and supper. Breakfasts were to be eaten between 6:00 and 8:00 AM and suppers between 6:00 and 8:00 PM, with a midday break for a "cupper" (tea or coffee) or a glass of buttermilk.[186] Baba warned the women, "Whether you like it or not, it is fixed."[187]

* Kitty qualified her recollection by introducing it with the words "If I remember correctly."

One who might not have liked it was Irene, who was observed to be sulking when the women gathered around Baba one afternoon. Baba scolded her and spoke of the need to control the mind. She would need her composure in the next few days, when she learned that her father had died back home in Switzerland. "At first I didn't know about it, they told me later," she recalled, "and long cables came from my fiancé. He wrote that my mother wanted me to come back. Baba said, 'What's this man want from you?' I said, 'Baba, he is my fiancé, he wants me to come back. Because of the occasion, now he can say that my mother needs my help, although other members of our family are there and there is no need.' Then Baba said, 'I don't want you to go back and I don't want you to marry that man' … So of course I said, 'I'm not going home—I'm staying with Baba.'"[188]

In due course, nearly all the women found themselves on the receiving end of Baba's disappointment. The experience became so familiar that when He began to praise them, calling them His "gems" and "jewels," Kitty and Rano immediately became suspicious, thinking, "Uh-oh, what's coming now?" Unsurprisingly, however, "Baba never found fault with either Mehera or Mani in public," Kitty observed. "If there were things between them, it was always settled in private."[189]

The women had many hours to fill between Baba's visits. In addition to their sewing projects they also had the Meherabad menagerie to look after. Margaret had resumed the responsibilities Baba had assigned her in Bangalore: "I had to pick enormous ticks out of the dogs' ears and to exercise them, to feed the five small monkeys who lovingly tore my clothes to pieces and to look after the deer [Lily]."[190] But her favorite job was feeding Moti.

New to the zoo was Jumpu, who now vied with Lucky for Baba's attention. But no quantity of sweetly scented soap and hot water could mask his foul odor, much less wash it away, and he became Kitty's responsibility because she was the only person who was immune to his smell. Needy and clinging, Jumpu constantly demanded to be held, and before long Kitty's clothes began to smell as bad as he did. Jumpu also

liked to rattle the metal mosquito bars over the women's beds at night, and Kitty was forced to build him a cage that she kept in the godown (storeroom) so that everyone could sleep—and breathe—easily. Jumpu did not appreciate being reincarcerated after having been released from his confinement in the pet market and he became so infuriated with Kitty that he would refuse to leave the cage when she opened the door to let him out in the morning.

But Jumpu was no competition for Lucky's increasingly devious shenanigans. Norina had torn a ligament in her right foot and was bedridden, so Lucky seized the opportunity to escape the confines of her mosquito net when she couldn't run after him. He had always been difficult to control but now he positively tormented Mansari, who was on silence and could not shout at him when he turned over her ink and absconded with her Gujarati translations for the *Meher Baba Journal*. Her frustration only afforded Baba another opportunity to drive home the need to overcome the lower self and the urge to become angry or to blame others for one's own shortcomings. But Baba clarified His meaning, playfully adding, "This does not mean that you should kiss each other when you are angry!"[191]

In addition to aggravating the women, however, Lucky began to compromise Baba's seclusion. Baba couldn't put him on silence, but He did finally lose His temper and beat the incorrigible creature with a stick one day after he again indulged his craving for toothpaste. Lucky was so alarmed by his beloved Baba's turn of mood that he lost control of his bowels. Baba called Lucky a rascal and Norina deemed him naughty, but Mehera thought that Nuisance might have been a more appropriate name for the rambunctious little beast.

Another resident of the ashram zoo who pushed the limits of the women's forbearance was Moti, who frequently presented himself in all his glory as "an extra guest for lunch under the tin shed," Mehera reminisced. "But the fun was this! As soon as Katie … rang the bell for food, Moti would jump on one of the benches, spread out his tail

and wings, and dance and prance and strut! He was very tame, and he loved to be the centre of attention."[192]

"'Moti, no,' I would admonish," Katie recalled, "but he wouldn't listen to me. I had to push him off the bench, and then he would turn around and give me a big squawk of disapproval."[193] He also sneaked into the kitchen behind Katie's back to peck at the fresh herbs and vegetables, and she could only distract him by making him his own plate, which she placed high up on the roof of the tin shed, well out of everyone's way. Eventually joining Moti were two peahens that Baba named Idi and Jingi, for Adi Kotwal and Jangoo, and they evoked piercing love calls from Moti as he sashayed past them with his magnificent tail fanned wide open. But Margaret had to be careful when she fed them; although small they were prone to aggression, and the women sometimes had to brandish sticks to fend them off.

Eventually the Meherabad menagerie outgrew the women's capacity to care for it, and by the next time the Blue Bus departed, all would have found new homes except for Baba's Lucky, Irene's Gracie, Margaret's Moti, Elizabeth's Bingo and Jingo, and, of course, her beloved Kippy.

THE SOONER WE SHIFT FROM HERE THE HAPPIER I SHALL BE

Back in June, hardly a month after returning to Meherabad, Baba had begun to consider a shift to Burma. He sent Pappa Jessawala there to identify accommodations, but when Pappa's search proved unsuccessful He abandoned that plan. He subsequently ordered Chanji to investigate the possibility of going to Ankai Mountain near Manmad but abandoned that idea as well. Baba also made several references to Java* at

* The Battle of Java was fought in the Java Sea on February 27, 1942, two months after the Japanese invasion of Burma and eight months after Baba expressed a wish to travel there. It was one of the first naval confrontations in Southeast Asia and resulted in a disastrous defeat for allied forces at the hands of the Imperial Japanese Navy. Baba's interest in Java seems to have been another aspect of His work in directing the war in the Pacific Theater.

around this time. In addition to suggesting that He might have to travel there to connect the link between Karim Baba and a *mast* who lived on the island, He told the women, "One day I will take you to the place where creation started."[194]* He hinted that it was an allusion to Java.

Baba sent Chanji to Bombay to establish an office from which he could make inquiries about destinations that Baba subsequently considered for the next phase of His work: Kashmir, to the north; Iran, to the northwest; Java, Sumatra, and Bali in the Far East; and, farthest of all from India, Australia and New Zealand. So began a long exchange of communications between Chanji and Baba, with Vishnu writing on His behalf, and well as between Chanji and numerous government offices and commercial travel agencies, as the most dedicated of secretaries attempted to please the most exacting of Masters. In one letter to Baba Chanji expressed his humble confusion as to whether inquiries should be made "in my private capacity as a 'nobody' or in the official capacity [as Private Secretary to Shri Meher Baba]."[195]

On June 5 Chanji informed the Director of the Visitors' Bureau in Srinagar that "a big party of Easterners and Westerners—in a group—desire to come and stay somewhere on that side for a long time—throughout the year," and he requested information on seasons, climate, and the best places to stay that would not require a shift south during the winter.[196] He also inquired at the Persian Consulate about "aeroplane" and rail rates, schedules, and routes from Karachi to Tehran, but he expressed "utter disappointment" to Baba, calling their responses "too vague."[197] Few timetables were available and service for small groups of passengers was limited. Each time Baba and His party crossed a border they would be subject to new regulations, and special transit visas would be required. One official expressed astonishment at why, in such dangerous and unpredictable times, anyone would even consider undertaking such a tour.

* In 1891 archaeologists discovered the fossilized remains of 1.7-million-year-old *Homo erectus*, or "Java Man," believed to provide the missing link between the great apes and humans.

Chanji also contacted the New Book Company in Bombay requesting a publication entitled *Indian States*, but Baba found it useless, ordering Vishnu to thoroughly chastise Chanji. "It was NOT in the least satisfaction [*sic*] to our beloved Master," Vishnu wrote. "Baba says … what made you send this book, when you know that He always asks about the climate … interesting items … scenery & etc. whenever any topic regarding any tour is discussed in the Darbar [Baba's court]. He therefore asks you to do this thing—finding out a book—immediately and send a suitable book to me."[198]

Chanji next requested a copy of the *Indian State Railways Magazine*, explaining, "A group of Eastern and Western travellers, particularly interested in India's cultural and spiritual lore, desire this information and it is on their behalf I write this."[199] He also wrote to the Australian Bureau requesting travel information for a one-year visit. He was informed that sailings from Bombay were limited, and, in any case, would be "long, tedeous [*sic*] and costly … due to war conditions," and that only six-month restricted visas were available.[200]

On August 15 Baba hinted to the women that "in December, I might make drastic changes. Not in the orders—they remain the same for one year,—but changes in place [of residence]. I might have to cross the ocean. I will see. I will tell you next time," concluding that He might send Norina to South Africa or Margaret to Australia to await His arrival.[201] But on Thursday the twenty-ninth He announced that He had a new plan—this one for November. Once it became clear that overseas travel was going to be a problem for the foreseeable future, Baba began looking at destinations closer to home. Margaret recalled that one tentative plan was to depart for Panchgani on September 3, and despite its relative proximity to Meherabad she happily anticipated going "off on the long, long trail again."[202]

When on September 5 He told them that they might be going to Morocco in December, Norina joked, "Via California?" "Via anything," Baba retorted, "via airplane, cable, spirit, or soul!"[203] When Baba met

with the women again three days later, He repeated the intention to alter His phases of work from one month to the next as well as His plans to travel: "Twelve months, 12 phases of working. I am dividing work into 12 different divisions. And for 12 months, four places to work—three months in each place. Meherabad for three months, the next three perhaps Karwar, then maybe Jaipur. But the last three months, definitely across the ocean. It depends. If the money is there, I will go to Hollywood. If not, Burma or Indochina."[204] Mani recorded that when Baba asked whether they preferred Jaipur or Karwar, "Nadine, on silence, said in a strange voice, 'Karwar.'"[205] Baba later inquired, "If in Karwar we do not get a suitable bungalow by the sea, where then do we go?" But it was a rhetorical question because He continued without waiting for a response, "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. In winter, it is heaven."[206]

Baba then made an alarming segue that devolved quickly into humor, adding, "We will go to the center of all the trouble in the war. Uttar Pradesh will be the center of all troubles in India. We will go to the best places in India. There you will enjoy obeying orders—freedom for walks, et cetera. In Jaipur, we will ride horseback; Irene will teach everybody. We will begin with a pony and increase the stable. 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 [a city in Rajasthan], we will have nothing but ladoos."[207*]

On September 9, Chanji prepared a typed inventory, replete with typographical errors, of materials he had recently received, which included *The Handbook of India*, as well as information about specific destinations such as Jaipur, Udaipur, Jodhpur, and Ceylon. Another list included such evocative titles as *Happy Jaipur*, *City of Ten Thousand*

* Baba's remark about eating ladoos in Bundi is a play on the Hindi word *boondi*, the name of a kind of ladoo. Boondi means "droplets," and when the batter is ladled into hot oil, little droplet-shaped bumps form on the surface. They are made with chickpea flour, which is also sometimes called boondi.

Peacocks, and *Some Princes along the B.B. & C.I.* (Bombay, Baroda & Central Indian) *Railway*, as well as other illustrated guidebooks, pamphlets, and an inventory of pages torn from various journals and newspapers.

Pleasing Baba was no easy task under the best of circumstances, but during this time of upheaval even travel in India was becoming more costly and services were disrupted, making Chanji's job all the more difficult. He expressed frustration at Baba's "abrupt inquiries," explaining that "it takes time to write and get the desired information," as well as embarrassment for having to make repeated inquiries of the same agencies.[208] He also complained that he had already sent Baba some of these materials and insisted that the Westerners had copies of similar guidebooks and pamphlets that they would be happy to share with Him.

Donkin was still working at the hospital in Bangalore at Baba's order, but on September 12 he recorded in his diary that Baba had asked him if he would like to return to Meherabad. Donkin called the times "momentous" and anticipated the pleasure of accompanying Baba wherever He might go in order to conduct His work.[209]

By mid-September Baba was expressing a particular interest in Ceylon,• requesting passport requirements, entry permits, restrictions for lengths of visits, and information on bringing a mixed party of Indians and Westerners. He instructed Vishnu to tell Chanji, "If there is NO hitch or difficulty considering all the above points, then Baba is going to send you there [to Ceylon] in advance, to see and fix bungalow, etc. etc. Therefore begin inquiries immediately and write to me all the report daily."[210]

On September 19, Baba raised the "Question of Ceylon or Karwar!"[211]

• Baba first visited Ceylon in January 1933, when He spent three nights at the auspiciously named White Horse Hotel in the capital city of Colombo, accompanied by Kaka and Quentin Tod. They continued on to the center of the island, where Baba entered a twenty-four-hour seclusion at Villa Valencia. They then returned to Colombo, where Baba spent two more days in seclusion before returning to India on February 22, having spent three weeks on the island. Baba also disembarked at Colombo in July 1932, at the end of His first world tour, and again in mid-February 1935, at the end of His fourth trip to Europe, returning home to India immediately both times. His last visit was in August 1956, when His flight landed following His trip to Australia. He was held up there for one night during the unsuccessful invasion of Egypt by Western powers, which precipitated the Suez Canal crisis.

> In winter, Ceylon [Sri Lanka] is paradise. *Bander Villa*, Badulla is really very beautiful, but it is far away and expensive. Ceylon will play a very important part in the war. It is near the East and the West and will be a great mess soon. We would go there, but for two things: permit difficulties and the expense.
>
> Put your hands up, those who would like to go to Ceylon? [Almost all did.] Those who would like Karwar would like Ceylon even more! Nowhere in the world do they have toddy as in Ceylon….
>
> … The Ceylonese people are a most happy-looking race. Always smiling, singing, dancing like the people in Honolulu—and very clean.
>
> There are government washing taps [public faucets]. When we went walking, we saw them washing under the taps, and we heard that not one Ceylonese likes to miss his daily bath. If they are poor, they go to the government taps.
>
> Ceylon is *Lanka*, very famous for the history of Ram and Sita and the monkey god [*Hanuman*]. In Ceylon, you feel cheerful in spite of yourself, and you feel extra cheerful when you have had toddy—which in Ceylon is the best, as is their tea."[212]

But in the middle of this paean to Lanka, Baba inserted another caveat that might have been easy to miss if one's attention wandered: "If we go to Jaipur, we stay there three months and then travel to two other places—staying in each for three months. If Ceylon, we stay there seven months."[213] He also remarked, "Udaipur is one of the finest cities in India. It is called the Venice of the East—most beautiful—it is real, typical picturesque India."[214] With Meher Baba, it was always best to mark one's calendar in pencil.

Three days later, on September 22, Baba linked His upcoming travel plans to the progress of the war, observing, "India fears air raids, and Calcutta office hours are shortened. The Bombay government thinks of shifting to Poona. If Egypt falls, India is sure to be bombed. Therefore, we should go to one of the ports to stay. Ceylon or Ratnagiri, which is 50 miles from Sakharpa, and one of the most beautiful parts of India, with beautiful mountains and beaches. It is bigger than Karwar. We will go to one of these ports. I would like you all to be bombed!"[215]

On September 26 Baba returned to the comments He had made four days earlier, playfully inquiring, "Who is scared of bombs? I have always liked fireworks."[216] Mani recorded that He further observed, "From Bombay to Colombo—2 ½ days, 2nd class 105 Rs each … Kitty will make the stewards mad! & Norina will run about with pots! … Norina will chat with the Captain & make him seasick—to make him subscribe to the Journal—then the boat will be torpedoed. It will make an 'amazingly true' story for the Journal."[217] The women burst into laughter.

On October 1 Baba told the women, "On this tour, you will have lots of fun, like swimming, and many hardships—with plenty of trouble also, like bombs! … Just imagine Kharmen Masi [who was quite stout] walking ten miles an hour when we are evacuated and I order speed! There will be hardships and fun, both. Anyway, I promise heaps of excitement. We leave on the 1st of November. Next time, we will discuss the details…. In any case, on this tour, I promise you excitement with a capital E."[218]

At long last Baba's travel plans began to take shape, coalescing into another Blue Bus tour. His first destination would be Ceylon, and at the beginning of October He sent Kaka and Chanji there to look for suitable accommodations. Baba wanted a seaside villa, but the men were unsuccessful in locating one that met His expectations. Fortunately, however, Rustomji Ratansha Billimoria, an affluent Parsi who knew of Baba's work, offered the use of his own bungalow in Veyangoda, where Baba's party could stay until long-term accommodations could be

identified. Located about twenty-five miles to the northeast and inland from the capital city of Colombo, the bungalow was said to be both "ideally secluded" and "absolutely quiet."[219]

Baba accepted the offer and Chanji informed Ratansha of His decision. His letter is instructive of both Baba's requirements and the life He envisioned for His entourage:

> My dear brother Ratansha,
>
> I write this in strictest confidence. Please whisper not a word of this to anyone—not evento [*sic*] your family.
>
> It is about Baba Saheb's arrival in Ceylon…. As you know well, He has been in seclusion in the strictest since August 1st. for one year, and sees NONE, not even the group staying with Him in Meherabad…. Hence it is that He doesn't wish to have His visit to Ceylon known to anyone, except fo [*sic*] you for the confidence Hehas [*sic*] in you.
>
> I am instructed to make preliminary inquiries re: suitable sites and bungalow for the group…. Baba Saheb prefers sea-shore and seclusion in quiet, with proper supply of water (both for drinking and washing, cleaning, etc.) and about 30 *seers* of milk every day, as we all of the group have only ONE meal a day, and twice liquids, tea, coffee or milk…. The party will be about 35 to 40—both ladies and gents—Eastern and Western. But all live the same simple life without distinction and even 3 or 4 may be accommodated conveniently in a room. We must have at least two bungalow [*sic*], quite separately for ladies and gents … not too far off from each other, not too close to the town….
>
> But please NOT A WORD of this to any one - - especially not a soul (except you of course) should know

> of Baba Saheb's name, else everything would be spoiled, if His seclusion is disturbed. He has to work in seclusion, quite undisturbed, as He has been doing here in Meherabad … but the moment He is disturbed or His identity known to any, He won't stay for a day. Hence all these precautions for keeping it strictly in confidence, only toyou [*sic*] in the whole of Ceylon.
>
> It will be … your chance of rendering services to Him and His cause.
>
> More when we meet.
>
> Meanwhile, with blessings from Baba Saheb for you and yours, hoping to see you soon,
>
> Yours very sincerely,
> sd. F. H. Dadachanji[220]

Chanji also clarified that Baba intended to stay for fifteen to twenty days, thirty at most, only until suitable long-term accommodations could be located, adding, "It has made Baba Saheb very happy to know of your spontaneous offer which He has graciously accepted. Your home will be sanctified and blessed with His august presence, and this will [be] your opportunity to serve Him—the first person in Ceylon to enjoy this privilege."[221] Chanji also provided Ratansha with a list of everyone in Baba's party, but one very important name was inadvertently left off. On October 26 Vishnu sent a postcard to Chanji alerting him, "Elizabeth forgot to insert her Kippy's name (dog) in the list of the group. Please book it with owner."[222]

Because of the greatly increased number of people accompanying Baba and the quantity of luggage they would require, He and His party would, for the first time, embark upon a Blue Bus Tour by rail, with the bus following behind by road, carrying excess baggage. Chanji now also became responsible for making travel arrangements and he enlisted the assistance of Thos. Cook & Son, which had an office in

Bombay.* The company attended to such details as excess luggage, freight fees, and dietary requirements, as well as the placement of two reserved second-class bogies at the front of the train, ensuring that no passengers would pass through the women's carriages.

In addition to securing passports and visas, Baba and His entourage were required to show that they had been recently immunized. He had already broached the subject with the women on September 26, saying, "Concerning obtaining passports and visas for Ceylon, et cetera —all is easy and good, except for vaccinations for cholera and small-pox…. In Persia there are new rules for tourists. As soon as you get there, you are put in quarantine for seven days, and then they take you out and give you all sorts of injections."[223] Again the women broke into laughter.

At first Baba rejected the idea of immunizations altogether. Vishnu had written to Chanji on September 23: "You know Baba & few invisible ladies wont [*sic*] have vaccination! Then what to do? You must write to that Colomo [*sic*] Parsee to arrange NO inspection of the hands of these ones (Baba & invisibles)."[224] But Baba changed His mind, and although He still objected to the inoculations, He arranged for a female doctor to come to Upper Meherabad on October 16.

Margaret recalled the strange manner in which the immunizations were administered: "A local woman came up the Hill to vaccinate us. She did not inject the serum. She scrubbed the top of the arm, removed the skin, and rubbed the serum onto this place. The victim was then rushed outside onto the compound and there was seized by friends who with great vigor scrubbed the serum off again. In most cases nothing entered the bloodstream. Only one or two had slight reactions. Baba did not tell us why He seemingly objected to the injections."[225]

The men were vaccinated by a medical officer in Ahmednagar, but Baba avoided being immunized by the simple expedient of having

* Established in 1841, the British establishment Thos. Cook & Son was the premier travel agency for the latter half of the twentieth century and provided a standard of service to which modern competitors aspired until its closure in 2019.

Donkin pretend to administer the injection while the officer looked on. Baba deemed the pretense necessary, calling it "dishonestly honest."[226]

Baba also made some changes to the *mast* ashram. Rather than bringing Mohammed along on the proposed journey, He sent the *mast* to stay with Aloba,* one of the mandali currently living in Bombay. He sent Shariat Khan back to his village of Chikmagalur on October 26. Karim Baba had already been sent home before Baba departed Ranchi in July. Chatti Baba would be the only *mast* traveling with Him.

By October 17 Baba was focusing almost exclusively on the upcoming tour. "Great enjoyment and excitement, tragedy and comedy await us. It will begin from now on. There will be lots of trouble, but also lots of enjoyment in trouble. We will have lots of swimming in Ceylon. We will tie Kharmen Masi and Soonamasi [the two plumpest] together and push them into the sea, and then we will sit on them and row!"[227] "When you get down there, keep smiling—and look like 'ripe tomatoes,'" He teasingly warned, "or you will all be sent back to Meherabad. In Ceylon, you will have the fun of your life. Wait and see. We will go through all the war experiences. You won't miss anything that goes on in London [nightly air raids]."[228] On a more serious note, however, He promised "many surprises and also shocks," entreating everyone to "remember orders well."[229]

Baba continued to prepare the women for their visit, telling them, "Ceylon exports tea, rubber, rice, tobacco, coconut, and coffee. It has a population of nine million. Three-quarters of it is forest, and only a quarter is inhabited. There are two monsoons in Ceylon, from May through August; and then again in November, a stronger rain."[230] He also recalled His first visit to Ceylon in 1933, when He visited the town

* Ali Akbar Shapurzaman (July 12, 1916–August 13, 2002) met Baba in 1927, at the age of eleven. He was one of a group of Muslim boys Baba had brought from Bombay to attend the Hazrat Babajan School. At the end of ten months, however, his uncle came to take him home. Aloba met Baba again in Nasik in 1935 and joined the Meherabad ashram in June 1949.

of Bandarawela, said to have the most agreeable climate on the island. "Bandarawela is 5,000 feet high," He said. "It is cool and reminds one of Switzerland. Ceylon is very beautiful, especially in the north in places like Jaffna. We will go there."[231]

In the meantime, the women carried on with their assigned work, some of which they would miss once on the road. Margaret especially minded having to leave Moti behind. "Now, of course, just as I have wooed and won a small amount of friendship from him," she bewailed in a letter to devotees in London, "I have to go! No attachments!!"[232]

Beginning on October 24 Baba began visiting the women every day from 11:30 AM until 6:00 PM. He informed them that they would depart at 3:00 on the afternoon of November 1 and that they would be traveling in two second-class bogies, in compartments with five berths each. It would be the first time they had traveled by anything other than third class.

Late in the evening of October 27 Baba sent Elizabeth and Norina to Bombay to address ongoing problems with the acquisition of the Westerners' visas. They resolved the issue the following day, cabling Baba to confirm: "English passports alright.—wire reply Regent Hotel about railway arrangements and shall we return tonight Have sent both telegrams already [signed] Elinorina."[233] Besides being Baba's lovely contraction of their two names, "Elinorina" saved the expense of two additional words. Baba replied with an order for them to return to Meherabad immediately. The Easterners required updated travel documents as well and these also were requested. But being promised their papers was one thing; having them in hand at the time of departure was another thing altogether. Baba was so determined to leave on November 1 that He made contingency plans to park the bogies at one of the nearest stations to their entry into Ceylon if He still had not received the necessary documents.

On October 29 Chanji sent Baba a hastily typed two-page letter suggesting the stations at either Mandapam or Rameshwaram:

> Mandapam [was] especially recommended by the Cooks [*sic*] representative, and is also listed in the S.I. [South India] Railway Guide, under "Health Resorts." The following description also appealed to me to be the most appropriate place for us to stop, being on the sea-side, cool, above all quiet, besides having nice meal arrangements, through Spencer's, in the railway refreshment rooms. Here's the description ---
>
> Mandapam—This is a famour [*sic*] sea-side resort, 12 miles north of Rameshwaram. Thereare [*sic*] a railway rest-houses for both Westerners and Indians. These are fully furnished and cooks [Thos. Cook & Son] are in charge. There is a European refreshment room at the station. The climate is equiable [*sic*]—the temperature seldom rising over 85. The sea-bathing is good. Tourists can visit Rameshwaram from here…. I give you below the description of Rameshwaram as given in the railway guide ----
>
> Rameshwaram is visited by Hindu pilgrims from all parts of India. The temple, situated a mile from the railway station, is well worth a visit. There are many *chutturums* where Hindu pifgrims [*sic*] are fed, and accommodated free. Tourists can stay at Mandapam where there is a Rest-House for Europeans and take an excursion to this place from there. The … festival in July-August is attended by more than 20.000 pikgrims [*sic*] by rail.[234]

Despite Chanji's recommendation, Baba chose Rameshwaram. At least nine letters and cables passed back and forth between them during the three days prior to the group's departure on November 1. Another snag in Baba's plans involved Donkin's having been called up by the British army. Calling him a "poor chap," Baba sent Donkin

to Poona on the same day that Elizabeth and Norina departed for Bombay, so that he might request a special dispensation to travel to Ceylon.

Katie recalled the women's last-minute preparations for embarking on the tour. It was now her responsibility to gather together all the provisions and cooking paraphernalia, and she was in the midst of her work one day when Baba rang His bell and called the women together:

> Baba said that anyone who was free was permitted to come and be with Him in the East Room (Mehera and Mani's room). I was in the kitchen and still had quite a bit more packing to do. Everyone else had left with their stools to sit with Baba and enjoy His company, but I was left alone in the kitchen. I was miserable. I was thinking to myself, "Oh, this stupid kitchen, I'm stuck here and can't be with Baba." I was really longing to be with Him, when suddenly the kitchen doors swung open and Beloved Baba walked in! I can't tell you how wonderful I felt to see Him. I had so wanted to be with Him and so, He came to be with me. He had brought the entire group along as if He was going for a walk, and He asked me what I was doing. I told Him and He was pleased. He had heard my call.[235]

Meanwhile, Baba had some choice words for the Westerners when He called them together on the twenty-ninth: "You will all obey implicitly or go. This is a critical period. This [is] My last year of working, & I won't hesitate to send all away." He then returned to the topic of Ceylon, telling them that Kandy, located in the center of the island, had a "spiritual atmosphere," and that for the purposes of His work, He wanted to settle "either near [the] ocean or on a hill" in an "ideal bungalow … near the ocean."[236]

Bags were packed, bedding was rolled, and provisions had been acquired, but still Chanji had not been able to finalize suitable long-term accommodations in Colombo. Baba had stated that it was His will that Donkin should accompany Him to Ceylon, but because of office closures in Poona for the Diwali holidays, Donkin had to make calls to Delhi to request permission to travel with Him. Further, word still had not reached Meherabad that the women's passports would be ready in time for their arrival in Ceylon, nor had the government yet granted authorization for Baba's entourage to enter Ceylon.

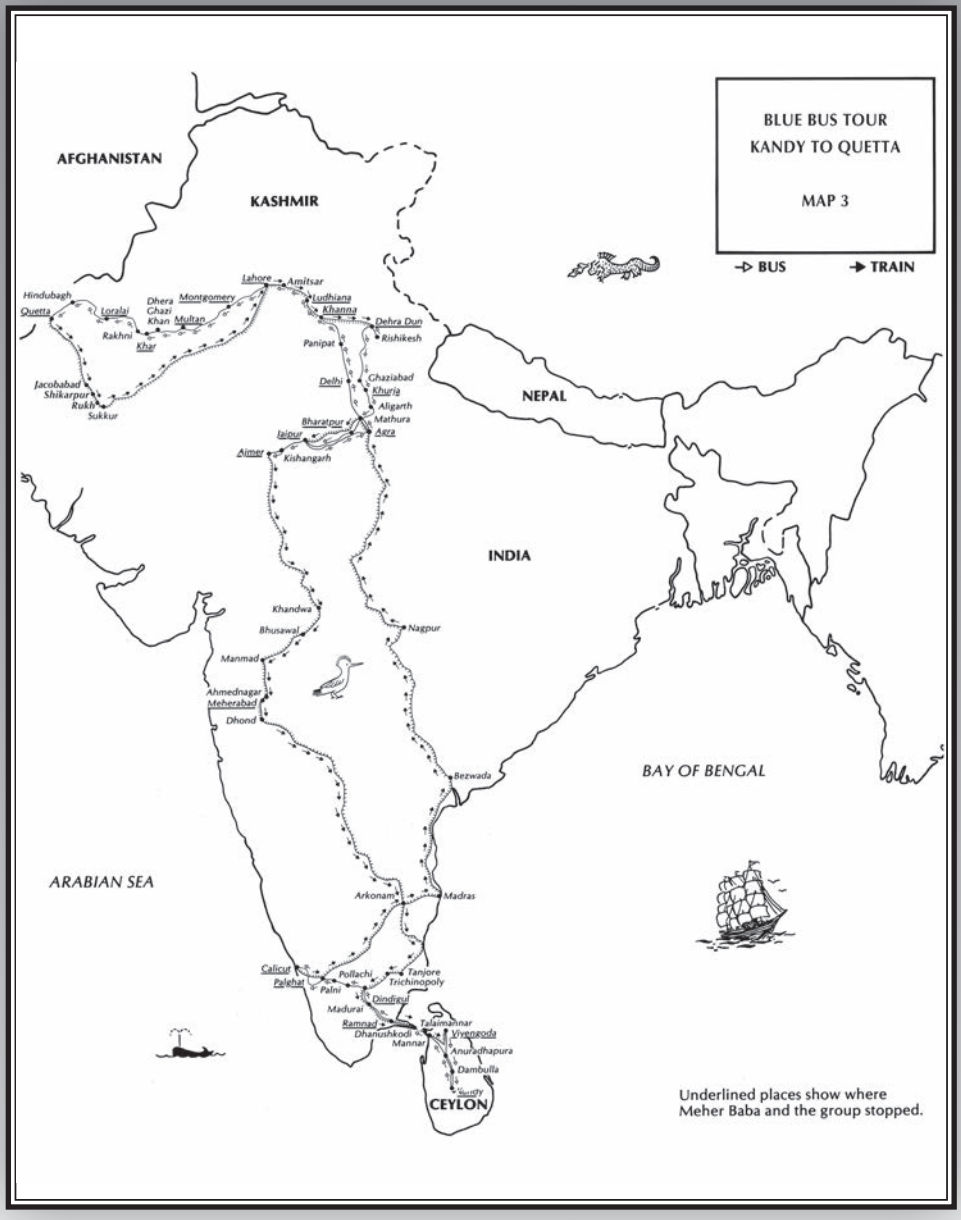
At 10:30 AM on October 31, the day before departure, Baba received a cable from Rustomji Ratansha Billimoria in Colombo, reiterating that Baba's party was welcome to use his bungalow for as long as necessary. On hearing the news, Baba remarked, "The sooner we shift from here the happier I shall be."[237] The time had come for Him to turn His key. Not long after He heard from Rustomji, Elizabeth received word promising that the passports would be waiting for them at Indian customs in Mandapam before noon the following day. Then a third telegram arrived informing Baba that Donkin had received permission to accompany Him through the end of January 1941. This was followed by a fourth cable confirming that the government of Ceylon had at last given permission for His party to enter the country.

Chanji observed that while Baba's shifts exerted great pressure on the mandali (not to mention enormous upheaval for the women), it was by His grace that they were able to carry out His plans:

> Once Baba makes a decision, things must move quickly, at times with lightning rapidity, one after the other, giving no time for the group to breathe. A number of unexpected complications arise and they have to be faced at all costs, and the programme must be strictly adhered to. But if one just remembers that Baba wants things done in His own way, within the time stipulated, and

> one sets out to carry out His instructions, all obstacles clear away amazingly and even what appeared to be impossible is achieved. This has been the experience of all who work under the Master, even under the most trying conditions….
>
> Despite all difficulties and complications the Master's Will and decision helped wonderfully so as to enable the party to leave on the days fixed and stick to the programme already chalked out by Him, without the least detention, as was expected, en route.[238]

Meanwhile, Baba marked the beginning of the Diwali holidays with what Donkin deemed two "solid" meals for the ashramites, along with afternoon tea.[239] During the evenings He and the women set off fireworks near His cabin. Holiday meals notwithstanding, Margaret observed in a letter to Delia in London: "Everyone is very thin and very exhausted with the fast, and I think, in spite of always packing and unpacking, they will all be happy and relieved to set off on a new adventure."[240]



Modified version of map by Walter Overcarsh, originally published in *Because of Love* by Rano Gayley

The Third Blue Bus Tour

Kandy to Jaipur and Jaipur to Meherabad

November 1, 1940–July 18, 1941



Baba and the women visiting
a Buddhist stupa in Ceylon

CHAPTER 9

Only Work Matters to Me

South to Ceylon & North to Jaipur

November 1, 1940–February 24, 1941

Hooray for Cooray … the Kandy man….
If no Kandy, we drink brandy—
and go to the town of Gandhi,
where it is sandy!
If Kandy, well then, dandy,
& WE Go.

MEHER BABA[1]



Gulmai, cleverly disguised as a British officer, baton in hand

BABA'S SOLDIERS ON THE MOVE

THE BLUE BUS CARAVAN DEPARTED Meherabad at 2:00 PM on Friday, November 1, 1940, accompanied by the current residents of the women's ashram. These included Mehera, Mani, Naja, Khorshed, Soonamasi, Walu, Kaku, Mansari, Katie, Nergiz, Kharmen Masi, Banubai, Kitty, Margaret, Elizabeth, Norina, Nadine, Rano, and Irene, as well as the two children, Jangoo and Adi. The men accompanying Baba included Baidul, Chanji, Nilu, Vishnu, Donkin, Krishna Nair, and Chatti Baba, the only *mast*.*

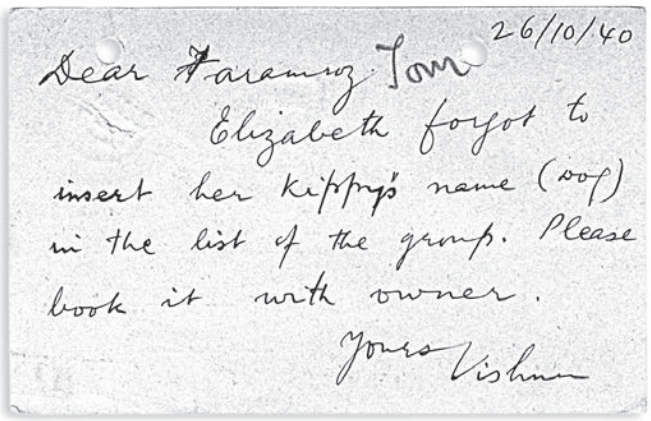
Baba designated Tukaram to drive the bus, transporting excess luggage as well as some of the servants.• Kippy was to travel with the women in their bogie. Also to be transported by rail was Elizabeth's Buick. No one recorded how Baba's entourage got from Meherabad to the station in Ahmednagar.

Chanji described Baba's party as a "large cosmopolitan group [with] peculiar requirements of strict spiritual discipline and seclusion." He went on to observe:

• No one can agree about who accompanied Baba on this trip: "33 *with* children" (Mani); "33 *in all—plus* some children" (*Lord Meher*); and "Baba and the women mandali with a few children, seven men, and Chatti Baba" (*Mehera–Meher*). Various archival documents cite "26 ladies including S.B. [Sri Baba]," as well as seven "gents" including Mohammed, three maidservants, three boys, two children, one more unnamed *mast* and his special attendant. Thankfully, no one is expected to remember all these numbers, and, in any case, to paraphrase Mehera, who would want to do this? (*Blue Bus Tours Diary*, 104, italics added; *Lord Meher*, 2164, italics added; *Mehera–Meher* 2:111; three handwritten lists, Copyright Avatar Meher Baba Trust Archives Document Collection)

* The list of women is probably incomplete. There were other men as well. The Jessawalas were still in Bangalore.

It is asked, and very naturally so, by all who come to know of Meher Baba, as to *why He moves about* with such a large group of disciples to places at long distances of thousands of miles, when He has declared that this is the year of His seclusion, when He will neither see any one, nor will He have any external connection with anyone…. The contact with individuals or groups in all these places, during this period of His seclusion, is established internally, so that the world outside, who has merely the mind or intellect as the only medium of judging things, has hardly any idea….


Dear Faramroz Jan 26/10/40
Elizabeth forgot to insert her Kippy's name (dog) in the list of the group. Please book it with owner.
Yours Vishnu

Vishnu's hastily written note adding Kippy to the list of ashramites traveling with Baba

The Master's object of taking His large group with Him during His movements and travels from place to place under extremely difficult and at times most trying conditions, is to give them thus the opportunity to be instrumental in His external working, which they all so anxiously seek and lovingly accept.

… This internal work which apparently has no external expression at the moment, may rightly be termed His spiritual work, which is the quickening of the spiritual consciousness of humanity.[2]

Baba's party entrained at Ahmednagar for a thirteen-hundred-mile journey, and by 4:30 PM they were headed south, passing through Meherabad thirty minutes later for one last goodbye. "At 5 p.m.," Mani recorded, "we cheered past the line of waving

Meherabadians, of Bhagu & Co. performing gymnastics with flags, sheets & trees."[3] Because Baba was in seclusion and had declined to offer a personal goodbye to the men who were staying behind, this opportunity for them to bid Him farewell, even from a distance, was especially poignant.

The women were looking forward to the luxury of the second-class carriages that Baba had arranged for them, in lieu of the dirty, cramped, third-class compartments to which they were accustomed. Baba divided them into groups of five, and each group was assigned one of six compartments.* Mani called it a "most comfy journey."[4]

Chanji had made special arrangements for the women's carriages to be transferred to the Bombay-Madras Mail Express at Dhond so that Baba and the women could maintain their seclusion. In fact, Baba had told the women, "The [ticket] collector knows Me, and arranged all this personally."[5] As soon as the train pulled out of Dhond Station at 8:00 PM, the women enjoyed a late supper of *bhajias* (deep-fried vegetable fritters) and *patrel* (deep-fried or steamed vegetable rolls) courtesy of "Shirinmai & Co.," which they had brought from Ahmednagar.[6]

Baba's party would have to make five more stops or transfers during their four-night journey through South India and into Ceylon, and none would be as uncomplicated as this first one. "[Railroads] were mostly doing military duty," Meherwan recalled, "hauling military cargo and hauling troops in place of passengers, so a very restricted number of trains were there for passenger use … so it was a great chore to travel in those days—very difficult…. There was panic … so the trains were jam-packed … with people, and even in those trains, several of the carriages were reserved for the military, which you couldn't enter."[7]

Rano called traveling by rail at this time "even more hectic than usual, as more British troops moved in and out and other Allied troops came to India for rest and rehabilitation," and the stations were teeming

* Here is yet another discrepancy in the number of women and children. Only twenty-one were named, so perhaps the men were included in the count for the six compartments.

with military personnel.[8] "I often thought we were like Baba's soldiers," Katie later observed. "There we were on the railroad platform, dressed in funny clothes, each with her own plate and mug in a small bag—and directly opposite would be real soldiers going somewhere [each carrying their own kit]. I often mused at this curious parallel."[9]

Negotiating public areas was always a challenge for Mehera and the women charged with protecting her, but now it was an issue for all the women. Number eight of Baba's thirty-one orders forbade them to touch any male over the age of six except under mitigating circumstances, which were clearly spelled out in eight subsequent conditions. "When we had to move [through] the stations," Irene recalled, "we too weren't to touch any man, even to brush against one. I found this very difficult. Baba said, 'You mustn't do it purposely, but if it happens by accident, then it's not your fault.'"[10]

Rano recalled a particularly trying experience during one wartime station halt:

> We arrived at a station at night, and if you've seen Indian stations you've seen this milling throng of men—you practically don't see any women … and this particular station [where] we arrived was … just thronged with people. And Baba said to me, "You go down to the mandali's compartment," which was a number of cars down, "and give them this message and come back with the answer. Come as quickly as possible, because the train will go."
>
> So I thought, "Oh, God. Look at this milling throng of men, and I'm not supposed to touch men. Now where am I?"
>
> And Baba says, "Go and give that message," and all you can say is, "Yes, Baba." So this was something I was going to have to figure out for myself….
>
> … I got on the platform, and … I tried to work my way … with my arms near my body so that I would not hit anybody myself. So all the way down to the mandali's

> compartment I kept saying to myself, "I'm not hitting anybody. I'm not touching anybody. If anybody's touching me it's not my fault, Baba!" and a few people did bump into me, but I wasn't doing it. They actually collided with me. I got myself down to the mandali's compartment and gave Baba's message, and I went through the same process … and got back and gave Baba the message.
>
> He never inquired how I managed or anything. He knew that I had to obey His order…. So I had to use my head to make the best of it and that's the only way I could figure it out and get there and back again like Baba wanted.
>
> If Baba gives you an order … and Baba wants that thing accomplished, you do your utmost and leave the rest to Baba, and the result is His, and if He wants it to work out right it will.[11]

The Bombay-Madras Mail Express steamed south through the night into Tamil Nadu, and on the morning of November 2 the women awoke "amidst the most delightful scenery surroundings of hills & lakes," Mani recorded in her diary, adding later: "At 4.45 alighted at Arakonam [*sic*] and appeased our ravenous appetites at the modern dining room there."[12] Chanji had made advance arrangements for the meal through the Bombay office of Thos. Cook & Son:

> Shri Meherbaba [*sic*] & Party – 43 Persons
>
> We are booking the above for travel from Ahmednagar to Ceylon in accordance with the attached itinerary. They will travel in two second class carriages which have been reserved for their exclusive use. They are strictly vegetarian and require a meal, consisting of vegetable curry and rice and vegetable cutlets, to be served in their carriages in the S.I.R. [South Indian Railway] platform at Arkonam [*sic*] on the evening of the 2nd

> November. Chillies [*sic*] are taboo and pepper only may be used for sauce.
>
> The members of the party are used to only one meal a day—in the evening—and therefore an adequate quantity of food should be prepared.
>
> We shall be pleased if you will arrange to supply the meal at Arkonam [*sic*] as required. Mr. F.H.Dadachanji [*sic*], Secretary of Meherbaba [*sic*] will settle direct with the Manager of the Refreshment Room, Arkonam [*sic*] for all charges.
>
> We should be obliged for an early confirmation that the necessary arrangements will be made.[13*]

At Arakkonam Station they transferred to the South India Railway Indo-Ceylon Express, where modern, private, "baby" compartments accommodating just two passengers each awaited, affording them what may well have been the most luxurious night they would ever spend on a train. When Mani awoke and looked out her window early on November 3, they were passing through Tanjore: they had entered tropical India. "Scenery kept getting more palmy, lakey and lovely," Mani wrote. "Adorable pathetic little beggars kept us company at every stop. All night long the frogs were chanting at the top of their low voices."[14] They pulled in to Trichinopoly Station at 7:00 AM, where the women had morning tea.

Twenty hours later, at 3:00 PM on Monday, November 4, they deboarded at Mandapam Station in order to obtain the travel documents that had been forwarded there to Indian customs and immigration officials. They also had to show their medical papers before continuing on to Ceylon. As *Mehera–Meher* records: "To examine so many persons of different nationalities (and a *mast*), especially during

* Chanji referred to the old order for one meal a day despite the change Baba had made to fasting orders, which was implemented on the same day he composed the letter. In any case, the women were accustomed to having to skip meals when they were on the road—or on the rails.

wartime, was a lengthy and tedious process."[15] Even so, they were finished in half an hour. It was a delay that Baba could have avoided had He not been traveling incognito, since the mere mention of His name would have ensured a speedier experience. But He did not want His name to be used, so He also was required to present His papers.

Chanji described the procedure as an "inspection parade"—a military term for soldiers presenting themselves in formation for scrutiny by their superior officer—a singularly appropriate metaphor for the times. He observed that Baba "meekly submitted Himself to all these various formalities and requisite inquiries by officials, like any ordinary passenger, when He refused seeing members of His own group…. His flexibility [was] necessary to respect the law. Masters working on the physical plane for the amelioration of mankind have also to abide by the finite laws although they themselves are above all laws and bindings."[16*]

Donkin recorded that the "passport business and medical inspection [were] wangled O.K…. Of course our party [of] 40 or so in all created a good deal of interest, what with Baba, Chatty [*sic*] Baba, Europeans, Indians and all."[17] Ironically, Donkin was refused entry into Ceylon because his military permit was not in order, but he would rejoin the group the following day, after the problem could be resolved.

At 3:30 PM they climbed back aboard and crossed the long railway bridge from the mainland over to Pamban Island, where they continued across the island to the town of Rameshwaram (One Who is Lord of Rama, or Shiva). From there they headed southeast toward the village of Dhanushkodi (End of the Bow, another reference to Rama) and the terminus of the rail line, twelve miles farther on. Dhanushkodi was located on what Mani called "an extreme point of land" at the end of a slender peninsula jutting out into Palk Strait, directly across from

* Refusing to see "members of His own group" is a reference to Baba's ongoing seclusion and His refusal to offer darshan to His lovers.

Ceylon.[18*] The views from the windows were stunning: The sandy spit beneath the tracks was so narrow that the women could see the water on both sides. They reached the terminus at 5:00 PM.

CEYLON, JEWEL OF THE EAST AND PEARL OF THE INDIAN OCEAN

Twenty minutes later Baba's party boarded the Boat Mail ferry for a two-hour, eighteen-mile crossing to the pier and rail terminus on Talaimannar Island in Ceylon. Wherever Baba traveled during the Blue Bus Tours bad weather was never far behind, and despite the "lovely clouds & calm waters" that accompanied Him on board the ferry, about half way through the crossing the skies opened and heavy rain began to fall.[19] Chanji recorded under the subheading "Nature's Welcome" in his December "Notes from my Diary" column that "Nature, in one of her capricious moods, hailed Him a hearty welcome on the shores of Ceylon with the heaviest showers of the season that literally drenched all … in transit from the ferry to the train."[20] Also drenched were the suitcases, bags, and bedding rolls that had accompanied them on the ferry—except for those seventy-nine pieces of luggage that had inadvertently been left behind on the pier. Nilu had to return to Dhanushkodi to claim them, and he would rejoin Baba the following day.

The sodden party boarded a Mannar Line train at 7:30 PM for the overnight journey south to Veyangoda, located north of the capital city of Colombo. After what Mani called a merely "interesting supper" in the restaurant car they passed their fourth night in transit—"a v. warm night" in "up-to-date, tiny compartments."[21] At 3:00 AM on Tuesday, November 5, they deboarded at Veyangoda, where the train made an unscheduled stop for them. Since leaving Meherabad at 2:00 PM on Friday, Baba's soldiers had been on the move for eighty-five hours.

* Today Dhanushkodi is a virtual ghost town: Both the town and its rail line were destroyed in the catastrophic Rameshwaram Cyclone of December 1964, with super cyclonic winds of 150 miles an hour. In 1940, it was quite literally the end of the line for Baba's entourage before leaving India, a distance of about 950 miles from Ahmednagar, their point of departure.



Possibly the women's bungalow on Hickgalla Estate, Veyangoda, Ceylon

From Veyangoda they traveled by taxis to Hickgalla Estate, where they were greeted by their wealthy Parsi host, Rustomji Ratanshah Billimoria. Accompanying him was his family, despite his having been admonished by Chanji not to tell even them of Baba's visit. Among the women's first orders of business were settling into the rooms Baba assigned them, unpacking, bathing, and sitting down to a breakfast of tea with milk, buttered bread, and jam. Afterward it was a day for everyone to rest and acclimate to their new surroundings. Margaret was immediately enchanted, recalling that they were "situated in a lovely cocoanut [*sic*] grove…. The trees were tall and shapely and waved high above us and the wandering paths were bright pink. It was like being under the sea and somehow made me think of the piece of music La Cathedrale engloutie."[22*]

Mani described the women's bungalow as being "situated amidst the most Oriental picture of cocoanut [*sic*] palm forests, and elephants, lovely birds and sunsets, '*gharpars*' [monitor lizards] and snakes & Ceylonese women servants."[23] Hickgalla Estate was a working coconut plantation, and everyone was lulled to sleep that night by the soft rustle of palm fronds rather than the rhythmic clatter of iron wheels on rails.

The following morning the women resumed their routine of meeting with Baba so that He could inquire about their health, appetites, and sleep. After breakfast Elizabeth drove Baba and Norina into Colombo so that they could attend to paperwork at the police station on behalf of the other Westerners. The remaining women stayed behind.

When Baba met with the women again on Thursday morning, something occurred that precipitated a mild lecture and which prompted Him to ask:

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* Sri Lanka is also called the "island of gems," and the pink stones that Margaret mentions were the Padparadscha (Lotus Flower) pink sapphire. "La Cathedrale engloutie," by Claude Debussy, was based on the Breton legend about a cathedral submerged beneath the sea, where chiming bells, chanting, and beautiful organ music could be heard drifting up from the depths.

"Why are you staying with Me?"
Rano replied, "To love You."
Elizabeth answered, "Because I love You. I don't know why but I do."
Baba smiled and spelled out on the alphabet board:

"But what a way of loving! Yes, you do love Me; otherwise, why should you leave all—your families, homes, comforts, et cetera—to be with Me.

This year of My working is very important. You all are so lucky to be with Me now. The universe is now in such chaos. That is why I gave the list of orders to My disciples.* If not, the reaction would have been such that even the closest of my lovers would have left Me.

But why do you 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 please both yourselves 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 would not stay with Me for a minute! I tell you not to fight, not to criticize, but you do what you want. So try your best to obey these orders during this important period of My work. For nine months, you all must stay with Me during My important working."[24]

Baba then recounted an incident that had occurred during His brief trip into Colombo with Elizabeth and Norina. As He sat waiting in the car, which Elizabeth had not thought to park in the shade, He was approached by an Englishman who asked if He was Meher Baba. Even

* Baba was referring to the thirty-one orders that took effect on August 1.

though He was in seclusion, Baba nodded that He was. The man then turned to several unsuspecting Ceylonese bystanders and exclaimed, "He is a great person, go bow down to Him!" Baba concluded, "He must have seen [My] face red from the sun & thought it to be spiritual glow."[25] The women broke into gales of laughter.

Lord Meher records how the women were "kept under the Master's grindstone" at this time, and that "their minds were continually being assailed, to crush their egos—a state not possible to describe." When on Friday morning Norina confessed to having had a nightmare that left her in an irritable mood, Baba told the others, "She is upset because of a dream. Fool! A dream may be good or bad, but in it sanskaras are spent. In the awake state when sanskaras are spent, new ones are accumulated. But when they are spent in a dream, new ones are not created."[26] He went on to chastise them all for their inability to follow His orders—citing specifically their continuous criticism of one another. He threatened yet again to send them away before concluding on a lighter note, "It is hopeless. Norina will go to Hollywood. You will all go. The symptoms point to it."[27]

But Baba offered Norina the opportunity to redeem herself the following day when He asked if she would rather be His hat or His *chappals* (sandals), to which she replied, "Your sandals, Baba Darling." When He asked why, she replied, "Because [a] sandal is your companion on good roads & bad roads, in rain [and in] mud. That's why [the Hindus] worship sandals of a guru, not a hat."[28*]

Before coming to Ceylon Baba had expressed the wish that He and the women would be bombed, much in the same manner that Great Britain was experiencing nightly bombing raids as the Blitz wore on. But the bombs to which He had referred seem to have been coconut bombs, which were falling from the trees in the plantation. In fact, He had warned everyone upon arrival, "No one, unless you want to die or go mad or become paralyzed, should stand under a coconut palm. It's now the

* *Lord Meher* attributes the last sentence of Norina's response to Baba.

season for coconuts falling. If one lands on you, you die without effort. One of the mandali saw four dropping, and one missed him narrowly."[29*]

Baba ensured that the women had the opportunity to enjoy coconuts freshly harvested from the plantation, but He used the treat as an opportunity to single out Rano for some special work. "Throughout the Blue Bus Tours," she recalled, "I continued to have to deal with my stubborn streak, and Baba continued to provoke it. In Ceylon, we had a special treat of cut up pieces of coconut sprinkled with sugar. Just as I was taking my first piece of coconut, Baba, who obviously had nothing to do at the moment, said, 'That's not good for your throat.' 'But Baba, I love coconut,' I protested. 'I've eaten a lot of coconut and nothing ever happened to my throat.'"[30] Frustrated with her characteristically obstinate response, Baba asked, "Why do you always argue? Why don't you listen to what I say?"[31] "It went on and on," Rano continued, "and I refused to give in. In the end, I had to; I knew Baba wasn't going to let up until I did. I said, 'Yes, Baba, you're quite right, it's not good for my throat.' So whenever I eat coconut now, I remember that it's not good for my throat."[32]

Before setting out from Meherabad, Baba had ordered Chanji to arrange for catered meals to be delivered to Hickgalla Estate, and Chanji had passed on Baba's instructions to their host:

> Baba Saheb does not want the ladies in our group to cook during our stay at Vyangoda [*sic*]. This could be done later after we shift to the new bungalow. Cooking arrangements for the whole group therefore to be done through any caterers undertaking themselves to do it at Vyangoda [*sic*] with their own men, or by engaging servants for a month by us and getting the work done as we want…. Due to change in the fast system from the 1st of

* British colonials called the coconut palm "the tree whose shade means death." Weighing in at about three pounds, mature coconuts, with their hard shells and pointed bottoms, can deliver a deadly blow when dropping unexpectedly from trees that approach one hundred feet in height. (*Voyages around the World*, 176)

November, The group will have the following schedule from date ------

Morning breakfast—between 6 and 8—
(Tea, milk, bread, butter, jam, cheese, etc.)

Afternoon—at 3 p.m.—Tea with milk, only.
Dinner—between 6 and 8 p.m.—
One dish of rice and curry, or dal, etc.
One " vegetables—fried—or cutlet
One " sweet after meal i.e. pudding or custard etc.[33]

Even now that they were allowed a light breakfast as well as supper, twelve hours was a long time between meals, and the women were famished by six o'clock, grateful for whatever the caterers provided. But one evening Baba served them a special meal of *khitchree* (a rice and red lentil dish that He especially enjoyed) and pathia—the spicy, sweet, and sour Parsi dish that had precipitated such a squabble between Baba and His mother in the Bangalore ashram. Mani declared it to be quite delicious. The women had fresh coconut water to drink and bread pudding for dessert.

ONLY WORK MATTERS TO ME

Although Baba was in strict seclusion, a newspaper article and editorial in *The Times of Ceylon* alerted local lovers to His presence. Some came for His darshan, but He did not meet with them; rather, He secluded Himself daily with Chatti Baba in a small hut on the estate, where He conducted His Universal work. When He arrived to bathe Chatti Baba on November 11 the mischievous *mast* turned the tables and insisted on giving Baba a bath instead. The following day Baba told the women: "Yesterday, on seeing me, he picked up the pail of water and poured it over me. Then he took some more from the tub and asked, 'Shall I pour more?' He was so happy about it and laughed. I let him do it. I knew it made him happy."[34]

Baba sent Kaka out to look for new contacts, sometimes accompanying him.* While Baba was secluded with Chatti Baba or out contacting *masts*, the women were on their own in the bungalow. With no meals to prepare and no animals to care for except Kippy they had little to do, and because Ceylon was in the midst of its second monsoon they were forced to remain inside the cramped bungalow, which was so small that some of the women had to sleep on the floor. Baba had warned them to expect rainy weather. "So, for a few days," He suggested, "think you are in a 'water-raid' shelter. Londoners experience worse in [air-raid] shelters."† He later joked, "Now I know why Ceylon has so many elephants. It doesn't rain cats and dogs—it rains elephants!"[35] "Thunderstorms were frequent and close," Margaret recalled. "I remember one day sitting on a mat in front of Baba listening to some instructions He was giving me. There was a terrific storm and suddenly a flash of lightning seemed to pass between us. Baba smiled at me. I did my best to return the smile but I am sure it was just a ghastly contortion. Anyway I made the effort."[36]

The women were not accustomed to Ceylon's oppressive tropical heat and humidity, and the wet, sticky weather began to take its toll on everyone's frame of mind. Donkin noted that Baba had caught a head cold, putting Him in such a bad humor that He became "rather peeved."[37] Baba blamed everyone's moods on Ravana, Rama's ancient foe, observing, "The former king of [Lanka] was Ravana—always bad tempered—that is why you all are now bad-tempered. This climate depresses one—hot, perspiring, humid."[38]

On the other hand, the women had more than ample experience with cobras, which, Margaret recalled, "danced menacingly along the

* Although the search for *masts* was Baba's main reason for traveling to Ceylon, little documentation seems to have been made of His work there, and in the Supplement to *The Wayfarers*, neither Veyangoda nor Colombo appears in the listing of cities in which Baba made *mast* contacts.

† Baba may have been referring to the Balham Tube disaster, which occurred in London on October 14, 1940, when a German semi-armor–piercing bomb fell directly over the station platform below, where civilians were huddled in what was thought to be the safest shelter available. The bomb left a crater 32 feet deep and almost immediately, a double-decker bus, driving without lights during the nightly blackout, drove into it, severing pipes and supply lines. Gas, water, and sewage poured into the station. Sixty-five people suffocated or drowned, and seventy more were injured.

pink paths," giving the women cause to stay inside even on days when the sun was shining. Margaret further observed:

> Enormous cobras lurked in unexpected places.
>
> I remember one day turning a corner and coming face to face with a very large, long snake. With no hesitation I turned and ran as I am sure I never had since my younger and more athletic days.
>
> At the end of the run, near the house, I met Baba who took my adventure seriously and sympathetically.
>
> Although the Ceylonese plantation was a place of great and unusual beauty, I think Baba decided that His disciples would be safer elsewhere.[39]

Adding to the women's unease, she continued, were "some most unpleasant insects about an inch long and shaped like a large domino, which had, I believe, a death-bringing sting [and] waltzed around the floor at night. Since we slept … on the ground, it was wise to tuck the mosquito nets most firmly around and under the bedding rolls."[40] The women also encountered one of the most fearsome scorpions they had ever seen, as well as a stately lizard, Mani recorded, "walking slowly & very gracefully across the marshes."[41] When Baba wasn't working (and weather permitting), He took the women out for walks into the surrounding lowland rainforest, which was carpeted with soft native grasses. On rainy evenings they listened to the wireless.

Although His host had "left nothing undone" in anticipating the group's needs, Baba was not pleased with the location of Hickgalla Estate.[42] Because He wished to conduct His work near the ocean or overlooking a body of water, He had ordered Kaka, Donkin, Vishnu, and Chanji to begin a search for a more suitable location almost immediately after arrival. He channeled His displeasure into an oblique warning to the women, telling them, "Be careful of the furniture, or when the hosts return, they will wonder what kind of

disciples you are! So the sooner we shift, the happier I shall be, or you might wreck this place beyond recognition!"[43] Chanji observed simply that despite "the best arrangements so lovingly made which all greatly appreciated, it was not the place meant for the Master's special work."[44]

On November 6 Elizabeth and Norina accompanied Baba to inquire about a bungalow on the coast, in nearby Colombo, but the owner was a devout Catholic who was unwilling to rent to Baba's group. In any case, when Baba learned that adjacent to the bungalow were a school and railway lines He decided that the clamor of children and clatter of trains would disturb His seclusion and that the location would not afford the women enough privacy. Furthermore, He was disappointed with the nearby beach, calling it "hopeless." By November 8 the men had identified four more potential seaside properties. Baba took Elizabeth, Kitty, Rano, Baidul, Chanji, and Donkin out to inspect and choose from among them, but none were deemed satisfactory. Afterward Baba told the women, "So [a shift to the seaside] is cancelled. Now I have sent my men to Kandy, to look for another bungalow there. In a way, it is better if we don't stay near the ocean, where it is hot and humid."[45] Baba told the women that the place had a spiritual atmosphere: "Kandy is to Buddhists what Mecca is to Mohammedans. Buddha's sacred tooth is there & every year there is a great pilgrimage."[46]

Their host Rustomji then recalled a government property in Kandy that might suit their needs, and Baba immediately set out for the city with some of the men to look at it. "The place was huge—a Swiss hotel that could accommodate 200 people," He later told the women, "very modern, lights, lifts [elevators], big gardens, with one garden on the roof … an ideal place for My work … a lovely lake, a nice view & charming situation." But the rent increased from two thousand to twenty-five hundred rupees when Baba expressed interest, far exceeding His budget of five hundred rupees.• But Baba was so pleased

• Meher Baba needed money to underwrite the costs of His work and He set firm budgets, refusing even the most ideal accommodation if its rent exceeded that which He wished to pay. And yet He often paid in advance to lease lodgings for extended periods of time and then declined a refund for the remaining portion when He decided to move on ahead of schedule, calling it His prasad.

Vishnu had an intriguing theory, observing that "this expensive trip to Ceylon [was] to spend a vast accumulation of cash at the bank. This means spending the sanskaras of those who gave the money to Baba. When He takes their money, He takes their sanskaras, and when He spends it He gets rid of those sanskaras." (*Donkin's Diaries*, 184)

with Kandy's accommodating climate that He pledged to relocate there as soon as possible. "Kandy is like Meherabad," He said. "Four months nice, cold, and dry." However, He also called Kandy "the center of troubles," without further explanation.[47]

At the same time, He sent a few of the men to look for accommodations in Hatton and Bandarawela, both located in the mountains near the center of the island. He told the women that at an altitude of five thousand feet, Bandarawela was cooler and less humid than the seacoast and that it reminded Him of Switzerland. Vishnu located a property in Bandarawela with a view reminiscent of Panchgani, but it lacked adequate accommodations. Baba expressed an initial interest, but because it would be necessary to construct huts for the men and for Chatti Baba, which would cost Him both time and money, nothing came of it.

Baba also sent Elizabeth and Norina to Bandarawela to inquire into the availability of a bungalow there called Viceroy House, which belonged to the owner and editor of the *Ceylon Observer*, to whom Baba had given an interview. But when they tried to get in touch with the man they learned that his mother had died and he could not be reached. The unproductive search for suitable accommodations took its toll on Chanji and Norina. When Chanji learned of the untimely demise of the woman whose son owned Viceroy House, he groaned to Baba, "Why must she die today?" After Baba met with Chanji on the eleventh, He told the women that His secretary "was looking like a million-year-old fossil," adding that both Chanji and Norina were "highly strung out by all this house-hunting business."[48]

The fruitless quest prompted Baba to complain, "I find this place here [Veyangoda] very depressing. You have no idea how hard it is to stand it. Not only mentally, but for My work, too. It makes Me very depressed." But, He declared, "It can't stop My work. I can work in another way. Only it wouldn't be as easy, or as pleasant. For example, suppose Elizabeth has to drive Me someplace. If there's nice weather

and good roads, the drive is easy and pleasant; if it is raining, there's fog and bad roads, the journey is not so pleasant—but she drives Me there all the same. Either way My work is done." On another occasion He complained, "This place [Veyangoda] has a peculiar atmosphere. It's depressing. Since the last few days, I have felt continuously giddy." But He also promised, "From December, we will feel bright and cheerful."[49]

On Monday, November 11, Norina asked Baba, "Why should everything apparently go wrong when You wish to work in Ceylon? The weather is awful, we cannot find a [long-term] place to stay, and the press interview You gave was not successful. And now some of the local Christians and Buddhists are stirring up things against You." Baba replied:

> I have come here for work, and only work matters to Me. What is praise or insult to Me? Opposition is a help, not a hindrance in My work. The sun shines daily, shedding light on all. It is not concerned with whether people praise it or speak ill of it. It sheds light equally on those who praise it and those who curse it.
>
> But when the clouds appear, the sun is hidden. Then people long for its light and warmth. When the clouds disperse and the sun shines with full splendor, only then do people know its true value. Were it not for the clouds, people would not appreciate the sun. Thus, opposition is like the clouds—to appreciate the value of the sun's light, clouds are necessary.[50*]

Later that same day Baba remarked to the women, "In Ceylon everything is hopeless, and everything hopeless is hopeful!" He went on to offer an equally elliptical discourse about God:

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* Baba said of the interview: "This reporter, poor boy, has a limited conception and is more interested in My throat not being impaired [by not speaking] than the value of Truth." There seems to be no further explanation of the Buddhists' and Christians' concerns about Baba. (*Lord Meher*, 2168)

> Always keep one thought in mind: that only God is real. Who is God? That which is One in existence. All things that exist are that One. If you say, "That exists," then that One is God. Everything else is automatically nothing. And if Nothing exists, then that Nothing, too, is that One God.
>
> Can you grasp this? All this is nothing. The only thought you must have in mind is that nothing exists —zero exists. This nothing, too, is God. One God exists; nothing else exists. When you say nothing else exists, you mean nothing too exists!
>
> What is Nothing? That, too, is the same One God! To call God "One" is not really right. God cannot be two. God is not One—it is all God—everything is God! Nothing is God![51]

Meanwhile, all the accommodations that the men had looked at in Kandy either had no water or electricity, or were not immediately available. At last, however, they located a bungalow that Mani called "Primrose Lane," which in fact was called Primrose Hill Tea Estate.[52] Baba immediately left for Kandy with Kitty, Rano, Donkin, Vishnu, Baidul, and Chanji so that they also might inspect the property, and all deemed it fine. After protracted negotiations with the owner, Baba decided to rent the bungalow for three months, at five hundred rupees per month, paid in advance. Mani reduced the quest for suitable accommodations into four short sentences: "Baba … 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."[53]

After His return to Veyangoda Baba told the women: "The house in Kandy is bright and nice, one and a half miles from town. So let's take it. It won't be as sticky as here. Not hot in Kandy, and from December most wonderful."[54] Although the bungalow was small but "accommodating,"

He described the the estate as "ideal in many ways, [with a] beautiful view of hills and river, just like Kashmir." He was so pleased that He told the women, "If no Kandy, we drink brandy & go to the town of Gandhi, where it is all sandy…. If Kandy—well then, dandy, & WE GO."[55]

Now that the end of His frustration was in sight Baba waxed poetic with more comical rhymes, telling the women, "The city of Kandy is marvelous. It's rightly called the 'Jewel of the East.' In Kandy, everything is handy—even brandy, fine and dandy. Five miles from Kandy are the Botanical Gardens, the best in Asia [and one of the Seven Wonders of the World]. No crocodiles, plenty of water, a lovely view, a cinema nearby. For 15 days after we get there, there will be rain—then it will be wonderful. It is decided then. Hooray for Cooray [their new proprietor]."[56]

Before departing Meherabad Baba had told the women that their "expedition" to Ceylon would last for six months, and Kitty recalled in her diary: "Everyone has dragged along practically all they possess: trunks, suitcases, bedding rolls for about forty people."[57] It was for this reason that Baba had sent Tukaram south driving the Blue Bus, as it would have been inconvenient to transfer the additional baggage from one train to another during their long journey. But Tukaram encountered problems loading the bus onto the South Indian Railway car in order to cross the strait because its chassis was so wide, so he was held up for a few days. There was even concern that he would not be allowed into Ceylon if the vehicle was deemed too heavy for the roads there. Because the bus was still en route, Baba had to rent two buses and another car (in addition to the Buick) to transport His entourage to Kandy, as well as a truck to accommodate their luggage.

TOO BEAUTIFUL FOR WORDS

The caravan left Hickgalla Estate early Saturday morning, November 16, but Baba stopped the vehicles for ten minutes on the way out of Veyangoda to make sure that Chatti Baba had been successfully persuaded to get into the rental car. While everyone was waiting, several

bystanders leaned into the open windows of the Buick, staring at Mehera and the other invisibles and laughing in their faces. Donkin was so disturbed by the incident that he later wrote, "I was rather rude to one or two of the crowd, which was stupid of me no doubt."[58]

Their route passed through "coconut plantations, fertile farmland (with an occasional working elephant), and mountain passes," which Mani called "heavenly scenery all along the way."[59] Baba's motorcade reached Kandy at 10:30 AM and delivered their passengers to Primrose Hill Tea Estate, located in a part of the city called Halloluwa.* Baba and the men moved into the bungalow at the summit of the hill where He could conduct His work, while the women occupied another house at the bottom. Baba's bungalow overlooked the Mahaweli Ganga River, as well as Kandy Lake, thus providing Baba with not one, but two requisite bodies of water.

"The estate commanded a most magnificent view of the valley at the foot of the hills," Chanji wrote in the *Meher Baba Journal*, "the ranges of mountains with their peaks of various shapes peeping out and forming a sky-line picturesque to look at. With the soft murmur of the stream flowing at the foot of the hills and the sweet and refreshing odour of the tea plantation on the estate, it was truly one of the most ideal places to stay in quiet and seclusion. Perched at the top of a hillock was a tiny cottage which the Master selected for His stay and work."[60]

Mani called the panorama from the top of the hill "too beautiful for words," and the view from the women's bungalow was equally lovely: "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 fairy land (tea plantations all around, in which picturesque Ceylonese women are seen at work)."[61] Fresh tea thus supplanted Veyangoda's coconut water, brewed with leaves harvested from the shrubs cultivated on the terraced hillsides of the plantation.[62]

* Primrose Hill Tea Estate was established in 1856, at the height of the Raj. As of the publication of this book, the bungalow was still available for rent as a guesthouse and still afforded the same stunning views that Baba and the women enjoyed in 1940.

Mehera found the scenery "lovely, green, and lush."[63] The setting reminded Kitty of Portofino and Lugano.

No sooner had the women moved into their new bungalow than a few of them asked permission to take a walk outside the boundaries of the estate to explore their beautiful surroundings. Baba joked, "Those over 50 can go down the river. Those between 40 and 50 go halfway, those between 30 and 40 just around the house, betweenst [sic] those who are 20 just on the steps, under 20, stay at home & I will take you one day to the river." After giving them a moment to digest these curious orders, He relented, adding, "Allright [sic], you can go everywhere, but not to the river."[64]

As usual, Baba assigned the women their sleeping arrangements. Margaret recalled that the room she shared was "every night … filled with fireflies. They made such enchanting colored light patterns that one did not want to sleep and lose sight of [them], whirling and twisting themselves into wonderful patterns of a strange moving beauty."[65]

The morning following their arrival they awoke to clouds, rain, and fog, and by the time Baba called them together He was in a thoroughly black mood, complaining about the weather and reprimanding them rather severely for having failed to come quickly when called.

> I was waiting for you. You should sit where I can see you. I want to see that your dead bodies are here! Why did you not obey Me when I told you to sit here? Kitty never comes quickly. She has gotten into that habit.
>
> Today, the weather is not nice. It's like the climate of the West, which I hate. They say that from December, it's like Switzerland here. You Westerners are like streptococcus—you like this chilly climate! I like it when it is cloudless, windless, sunny, and cold.
>
> This morning, everything seemed to be turning round and round. I feel giddy nowadays. The two doctors

> [Donkin and Nilu] advised Me not to eat rice or potatoes, as I work sitting most of the time and don't feel very well inside. They say to have fish.
>
> The doctors are so puzzled. In Meherabad, when they examined My urine, sometimes they found lots of sugar, and sometimes none at all. Here, they expected more sugar because of the altitude, but they find none. They can't understand it. But it's My work. It depends on the strain of My work. For ten days I will work hard. Then we will go sightseeing.[66]

"We told him what we thought," Donkin wryly observed in his diary, "but He'll never listen; as a patient He is really no good at all: but I suppose these Avatars can do as they please."[67]

Baba had called Ceylon a paradise in winter, but the persistently cool, damp weather continued to put everyone out of sorts. "I like [a] climate which doesn't exist in the world," He told the women. "Dry cold, no wind, no rain, and not hot, & no clouds." The weather was so unpleasant that He postponed the holiday visits that Najoo and Hilloo Kotwal and Meheru and Naggu Irani so looked forward to. Likewise, He delayed the Jessawalas' arrival. Adding to His aggravation was the owner of Primrose Hill, whom He found to be difficult, but Mani recorded that when the man finally met Him, he more or less "melted" and afterward became much more cooperative.[68] But despite the inclement weather that accompanied His arrival, Baba found Kandy's atmosphere perfect for His work.

Baba sent Baidul out with Kaka to look for *masts*, and although they located four, only one proved to be significant. He was a sixth-plane majzoob from Jaffna, a city about two hundred miles away, almost at the northernmost tip of the teardrop-shaped island. Neither Kaka nor Baidul could speak the local dialect, but Kaka must have managed to communicate that Baba wished to meet him, because the *mast* replied, "Too much work now. I will come someday." Baba described the *mast* as "very dirty looking" with "saliva running down his mouth. He appears

madlike, but miracles happen, which make people worship him."[69] Kaka and Baidul were able to bring just one of the other three *masts* to Baba, a Muslim who took nothing but tea and chanted the names of saints until Baba complained to the women, "So many names you get a headache."[70] He bathed and fed him and sent him back to his abode.

Baba continued His daily work with Chatti Baba, but within days the *mast* pitched his jamali disposition out the window along with three plates of food and insisted on using his bath water to make a mud puddle in the middle of the floor to sit in. On November 18 he locked everyone out of his room until Baba asked to come in. Seeing Baba restored the *mast* to his sweet temperament, but he still insisted on sitting in the mud. Baba later exclaimed, "I never saw the old *mast* so happy, all the time laughing and uttering, 'I am a child, I am old!' … Just think, he sits in mud and water for 24 hours, with the winds howling through the open windows, with practically nothing on, and he never catches a cold or suffers rheumatism."[71]

Chatti Baba's cheerful mood was contagious and Baba teased the women, telling them what they might be like as saints:

> Saints are real children, and God is their mother. And until you become a child, you cannot enter this kingdom.
>
> Picture Norina as a child—but mad! I can see Nadia [Nadine] as a child, but not quite as mad. If she were mad, she would start biting Norina's nose! And if Norina were mad, Elizabeth would catch the first boat to America! If Kharmen Masi were mad, she would throw [Nargis Kotwal's aunt] Banubai out the window; and Mansari would throw each and every one out the window! Kitty [whose command of Gujarati and Marathi was notoriously poor] would learn ten more languages to cook together in one pot! …
>
> Today I am happy. If I work like this for five more days, we take the bus and go round, seeing Kandy, the temples, lake, and gardens.[72]

Unpleasant weather continued to curtail Baba's activities with the women, but November 19 dawned sunny and clear. "If it could be like this every day, it would be lovely. It seems no two men here agree to a weather forecast," He complained. "Wherever we go it rains—London, Cannes, Ranchi, and now here." But Maya extracted yet another of its small victories. "Today would be a fine day to go to the Kandy Gardens," Baba concluded, "but the [Blue] Bus hasn't come yet."[73] The bad weather returned with a vengeance and it was so chilly and damp that Baba complained of having cold feet when He made the trek up the hill from the women's bungalow to work with Chatti Baba, and He told the women that His "every bone [was] aching."[74] Still, Kitty observed, "Baba was the same as ever, very loving and beautiful … always full of fun and mischief in His dealings with us."[75]

But on November 20 Chatti Baba again became uncooperative, refusing his own bath and insisting on bathing Baba instead, so that Baba found it increasingly difficult to accomplish His work with the *mast*. After just four days in Kandy, with its eminently suitable location for His work, Baba told the women, "We intended to stay in Ceylon three months, but I have planned to speed up my work. Since 2 days I worked v. hard. If I work like this for 15 days, it can be done. One day I'll stay with the *mast*, work & fast whole day on water, and one day I stay here, & if nice & sunny, we go sightseeing (if that never-coming bus ever comes)."[76]

As promised, in between the days when He was working with Chatti Baba, Baba met with the women, giving discourses on many topics. "Baba comes to see us quite a lot here," Margaret wrote in a letter to Delia, adding,

> He arrives about 2 p.m. and stays until 7 o'clock. Of course we don't see Him all that time, but He is in the house and sits with us for quite a time. Baba never wears His hair loose now, only in a plait. Baba is always giving us fresh definitions of love. The other day it was "self-control and spontaneous happiness for the Beloved."

> Another time He said "It is the same God playing different parts at one and the same time! He plays the part of the Universal God who is beyond everything that is conscious. He plays the part of being falsely conscious of being this body. He plays the part of the Creator. He plays the part of being Himself consciously in creation. Kabir has sung, "One God is the Avatar; One God is the Soul of every being; One God creates all; and One God is Everything."[77]

Lizards became a problem as monsoon rain drove them inside, affording Baba another opportunity to impart a lesson. All the food had to be kept securely covered to prevent them from urinating or defecating in it and poisoning everyone. Whenever Katie spied one in the kitchen she would knock it to the floor and Baidul's daughter Dowla would smack it with her sandal to kill it. When Baba learned that they had killed seven lizards in a period of fifteen minutes on their second day in Kandy, He admonished, "Don't kill lizards. Any animal that directly injures should be killed, but not lizards. Catch them and throw them outside. They eat flies and are useful. If you kill them, you will be a lizard in your next birth!"[78]

SECONDHAND STUFF

Baba had not given up on the possibility of seaside accommodations, and the women were hardly settled before He unsettled them with talk of moving on. On November 20 He told them, "The mandali will look for an ideal seacoast—which is what I wanted all the time—along the Malabar Coast in South India, at a place like Calicut or Cochin. These are large seaports where it is not hot or very cold, but pleasant, and there is no rain. Where you can swim—and get drowned!" He then clarified that He only needed this "ideal place" by July but warned them to be prepared to shift on December 10 nonetheless.[79*]

* According to contemporary sources, the coast of Malabar is one of the wettest regions of India.

Baba charged Chanji with identifying suitable accommodations in either Calicut or Cochin. Chanji, who called himself Baba's "emissary," departed on November 21.[80] At the end of the second day of his search he composed a handwritten missive, presumably to Baba, on the letterhead of the Beach Hotel, Beach Road, Calicut, recounting a wild-goose chase of the highest order:

> I arrived here yesterday evening, and immediately set out on search…. In the faint dusk, I walked for a mile—quietly looking for a board "to let"—or for any bungalow with a good compound as we want, vacant with no people inside. But almost all were lighted, had curtains or visible signs of inhabitation by someone, and a few that had their curtains closed had big brass or wooden boards with names of mercantile firms who owned or occupied these….
>
> After dinner, I saw the Manager of the hotel & the proprietor too—this morning, and gave them the correct impression of our requirements waiting to hear something hopeful. But both said the same thing—that it was difficult to get a big bungalow as we want here, on the Sea-coast….
>
> Then I personally set out on search—for three long hours—even beyond the area declared as impossible [illegible] by the driver of the tonga. He reluctantly drove on the rough road. I stretched my eyes as far as they could reach all over the coast for a possible site—but except for fisheries with huts & small cottages, nothing was viable. Yet I insisted on going further & with a chuckle on his face the driver whipped the horse with a vengeance—as if to spite a new-comer to this place like me to know more than he did, till we came to a curve, when I ejaculated with joy—"Look, there's a big bungalow —at last." New hopes sprang within, when I saw all the glass windows of

> the upper (first) floor closed. It was so quiet all around—no habitation—no huts even of the fishermen—ideal to suit us. "B___ help me!"[81]

But Chanji's hopes were dashed when he realized that he was looking at the back side of a building he had viewed earlier, which had turned out to be not a residence, but offices for the government fisheries. Other properties were deemed unsuitable either because of their distance from the beach or else proximity to rail lines, roads busy with bullock carts and other traffic, or a noisy coconut oil mill. By the end of his frantic, two-day, non-stop search Chanji had not identified a single property that was even remotely suitable and was left with nothing to show for his efforts but a five-page weeping letter written in an increasingly harried hand.

Meanwhile, on November 21 Baba told the women more about the two destinations that He was considering: "Calicut is bigger as a city, but Cochin is more beautiful. Boats going east and west touch there…. It's a famous seaport, almost the first European settlement in the East. It serves all our purposes." He warned them to expect "no excursions—only swim, swim, swim, and boating in the lagoon," a prospect more likely to delight than disappoint.[82] He also told them that they would be traveling in the bus.

When the women had first learned that they would be accompanying Baba on a new tour they had been, in Margaret's words, excited "first of all, to be with Baba, secondly to go to Ceylon, and thirdly not to be left on the Hill with nothing much to do, and consequently endless arguments and disagreements."[83] But no matter how far from home they traveled, their persistent questions, quarrels, and failures to abide by Baba's orders accompanied them like uninvited passengers on their journeys. When Norina questioned the amount of luggage the bus would need to accommodate in addition to all the women, Baba admonished her, saying: "Learn not to complain when anything is bad and don't be so pleased if it is good."[84]

By now, news of Baba's presence in Kandy had spread through the city. That same morning, November 21, four carloads of people arrived for His darshan, but He sent Norina out to greet them and explain that He was still in seclusion and could not see them. The day had dawned sunny and bright, and He wished instead to take the women out in groups of six in the Buick, beginning at 10:00 AM, to visit the Royal Botanical Garden. All earlier fuss was forgotten.

The following day Baba fasted on water and honey and met with the men, but on the twenty-third He escorted the women out for a tour of a spice plantation and a drive through the city and around Kandy Lake, located in its center. Mehera later recalled, "We saw spices like … nutmeg, and cardamom hanging from trees. It was a very beautiful garden, and the guide told us all about it. Baba took us to a black-pepper plantation too."[85]

The Blue Bus arrived that afternoon. Donkin had recorded that he was looking forward to its coming so that he might "take the ladies round Kandy on pleasure trips," and just as soon as all their luggage had been unloaded, Baba took the women out for another excursion.[86] This time, Mani wrote, they drove down to the river "to see the elephants bathing & performing delightful tricks."[87]

On November 24 Baba and the women were to depart Primrose Hill to drive to Dambulla and Anuradhapura for another sightseeing excursion. But the day began most unpromisingly, when Baba came to see them earlier in the morning. It was a "crisis," Kitty recalled, "for I as housekeeper had ordered special whole wheat bread. This turned out to be about three times as expensive as the other kind and the baker had much difficulty in supplying so large an amount. Baba heard of this indirectly and was much annoyed that I had not first consulted Him about it. I was so slow learning that all details, even of the household, had to go to Baba for His sanction"[88]

"Why did I pick you all? All secondhand stuff! Not one of you is quiet, healthy, or normal," Baba fumed. "Not mad [*mast*] and

not fit! Even Krishna had lame, blind, and hunchback people around him—all crippled disciples."[89] Donkin recorded that He called them "a second-hand lot, like chairs with three legs."[90] Relenting as always, however, He concluded, "Everybody eat well. Don't let this morning's incident make you hesitate to take more butter when you want it. Take as much food as you need. Eat well."[91] And then, having vented and forgiven, Baba chivvied the women onto the bus and into the Buick for the three-hour, fifty-two-mile drive to Dambulla. Mani recorded that the weather was lovely and the scenery lovelier still. They arrived at 10:30 AM to climb the stone stairway to the top of the hill to the Rock Temple, dating to the first century CE, a black-rock cave temple with a fifty-foot carved relief of a recumbent Buddha.

Continuing on to Anuradhapura they enjoyed a tea break at one of the hotels before meeting what Mani described as a "French-looking guide with curly hair & quaint accent," a "funny old man" who took them to see the famous Bodhi tree grown from a graft of the pipal tree in India under which Buddha attained enlightenment.[92] They also toured a mural-adorned temple and a huge Buddhist stupa. Mani was so fascinated with the Burmese diamond set in the pinnacle on the roof of the stupa that she made a small sketch of it in her diary. Nearby Baba encountered a man with the appearance of a beggar, but whom He recognized to be on the path. He asked Rano to give the man a one-anna coin.

Baba later told the women that despite Ceylon's predominantly Buddhist population, "Spiritually, Ceylon is dry. Inwardly, it is dry. Outwardly, it is wet. Ceylon is called the land of Ravana. It is like a rock that cannot store water; the water flows away when poured on it. These dogmatic Buddhists are so dry, without feeling or emotion."[93]

Baba's party reboarded the Blue Bus and Buick to return to Kandy. On the way back it began to rain heavily and just as they were entering the estate at around 2:30 the Buick became mired in mud and had to be pulled out by the bus using the cables that they continued to carry for just such emergencies. The situation was virtually

unprecedented: Usually it was the Buick that was rescuing the bus. They had spent at least six hours of their seven-hour day out riding in the bus and Buick.

During one of the women's outings, perhaps this same one, Nadine found herself occupying a public toilet for much longer than usual. Margaret recalled that one of the sources of disagreement that arose frequently among the women was the Westerners' use of toilet paper versus the Easterners' use of water. The divisive issue reared its head yet again in Ceylon, when Margaret said that she thought the Easterners were "dirty," precipitating a heated argument.[94] "Nadine Tolstoy," she continued, "who was not a quarrelsome person and I think did not care either way, said soothingly that as far as she could see the answer should be, 'Use both.'"

> A few days later … we stopped in a village where in the middle of the village square were two toilets. They looked like telephone booths, and sent forth a smell unimaginably horrid. All went well until Nadine took her turn and for what seemed a very long time did not reappear. Those waiting their turn were fussing and grumbling about this monopoly when along came Baba who listened to our opinion of Nadine's behavior. Baba looked extremely serious and on His board spelled out, "She is using both." Baba's fun broke the tension and no one was nasty to Nadine on her reappearance.[95]

On November 25 Baba paid a 5:30 AM visit to the women and asked them to resume singing "Seven Names of God" at eight o'clock every morning and "Tu Nirakar" ("You are Formless") at six every evening. These were virtually holiday hours—a far cry from their previous interim at Meherabad, when they had to arise as early as 4:45 in the morning to sing. Baba also spoke of the war, saying, "During this period half the world will die—perhaps even my mother," referring to a

cable He had received on November 17 informing Him that Shireenmai was not well.[96]

Baba stayed for an hour and a half, but He returned later in the day to introduce the subject of their next destination: Rajasthan, which He called by its ancient name, Rajputana. "Can you all stand the bus journey?" He asked. "Seven days, 8:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M., continuously. If we go to Rajputana [Rajasthan], we must go soon—from My work point of view. We must settle down some place for three months by the 15th of December…. Better, of course [than Ceylon], from all points—better in the sense of easier—would be Rajputana, but work can be done anywhere. So what do you all say? Honestly." Most of the women wanted to stay where they were. Given their past experience with cross-country journeys in the bus, they probably thought it more likely that their days would begin at 4:00 or 5:00 AM and end any time between early evening and midnight. Baba graciously acquiesced to their wishes, concluding, "So we stay here happily. If I were alone, I would 100 percent favor Rajputana, but [since I am] with you all it is different—a world of difference…. But the work will not suffer. I would not let anything come in the way of work. I would not even ask you. I would just say, 'Pack up. We're leaving.'"[97]

When asked their opinions, both Donkin and Nilu suggested proceeding to Rajasthan, telling Baba that if He stayed in rain-soaked Ceylon for much longer everyone would be suffering from rheumatism by the first of the year. But Kaka and Vishnu offered a compromise: travel to Calicut as planned, stay for fifteen days, and then head north. Their solution pleased everyone. Because Chanji had already been dispatched to the Malabar Coast to look for accommodations there, Baba tasked Donkin with arranging for the group's departure, and he had to make two trips to Colombo to make reservations and purchase tickets. Baba also altered the group's fasting orders, moving supper from six o'clock in the evening to four in the afternoon, which Donkin called "a great improvement."[98]

The weather continued to fluctuate unpredictably between pouring rain and tropical sun. During His meeting with the women on the twenty-seventh Baba told Rano to turn on the wireless for the weather report. He then remarked, "We know how it's going to be—we know we can't bear the sound of it—yet we can't resist [listening to] it. It's like the moth: The moth knows the candle will burn it, and still it flies near it." A little while later when they found themselves listening to "some awful sound," Baba exclaimed, "Send him [the radio announcer] to Veyangoda in the monsoon! Who invented the radio anyway? Let Marconi eat macaroni. Stop it. Shut it off!" He then returned to the topic of the upcoming move, warning the women, "We leave on the 5th. I want you all to have one point fixed in your mind. In Rajputana, I will leave you in place for three months. I will go and come. These three months will be full of troubles, excitement, and death. I will be going to the mountains mostly. You all must do what I leave with you to do—from the heart, which is hoping against hope."[99]

Baba continued His seclusion work with Chatti Baba, who was so distressed by world events that his outbursts were becoming increasingly violent. One night the *mast* began shouting, hurling his chairs and metal buckets at the wall, and ripping apart his bedding. Just down the hall, Baba slept through the entire tantrum. He had previously told the women, "Every action of such ones [*masts*] means something significant," and He later explained the reason for this most recent outburst: "After many years there will be a civil war in Ceylon. I have done this work through Chatti Baba. I have brought him to Ceylon for that purpose."* After Baba left Chatti Baba on the twenty-ninth the *mast* became so agitated that he plunged his fist through a glass pane in his door. Baba had earlier told the women, "For the past two days, England

* Civil war in Sri Lanka erupted in July 1982 when a liberation group called the Tamil Tigers staged an uprising in an attempt to topple the Sri Lankan government and create a new Tamil Eelam State in the northeastern part of the island. Between eighty and one hundred thousand people died and Sri Lanka's economy and environment were nearly devastated before the insurgents were finally defeated in 2006.

is having a very bad time—terrible air raids," and He attributed Chatti Baba's continuing anguish to the fighting in Europe.[100*]

Also on November 29 Baba announced plans for His birthday the following February by having Margaret read a statement out to the other women declaring, "This year … My birthday falling on 15th Feb. '41 will not be celebrated publicly or privately. I will spend 7 days from 12th to 18th Feb. in a place already selected, to doing a series of work one of which (with the help of 2 of the mandali, who alone will be with Me then) will be the rendering of personal service to a large number of worthy persons. For this I want My near disciples to contribute to, those who can give money."[101] Baba called this birthday "the most important one in spiritual history."[102]

The following day Baba and the women enjoyed their last outing in Ceylon, a trip to the capital city of Colombo and nearby Negombo. Mani called it a "beautiful excursion … no rain, no heat, good roads, beautiful scenery, happy trip!"[103]

Baba continued to offer explanations of His work, and on the first of December He told the women:

> For my work, I have to tour to make inner contacts. When I did that before, I went on walking tours with the [men] mandali—we were hungry, thirsty, tired, sleeping out of doors and putting up with all discomforts. But you women cannot do that. You want a house with tap water, toilets, lights, and so on. This makes a wrong impression on [certain] people. But I don't mind that. I only care about My work. Even with all these conveniences, half of you are sick.
>
> To be alone would be the greatest luxury for Me! Just work; to do as I want, and nothing else. But, for My work,

* During the night of November 29 the Luftwaffe bombed the port city of Liverpool, and during the ensuing three nights German bombers also targeted Southampton, Bristol, and Birmingham. Two weeks previously they had targeted munitions plants in the midlands city of Coventry.

> I have to keep you all with Me. You have not the slightest notion what work I have been doing through you….
>
> Actions and activities done in the world have no meaning for Me. Just external worldly activity—nursing the wounded, charity for the poor, et cetera. But this life you lead is meaningful. For one thing, as you are with Me, you are free of worldly actions of greed, lust, et cetera, that create attachment.
>
> Why don't you go to the movies? You don't have contact with men, don't touch money or men. Who would not like to go to the pictures? But this outer thing would leave an impression on you and you would be unknowingly affected by it. And you learn to have self-control! Don't do what you like, but carry out My wish. But you should do it wholeheartedly, cheerfully and sincerely. Otherwise, what's the good of it?[104]

Baba also told them, "Tomorrow host is coming with his family. His wife and daughter-in-law will come. Impress them well. Host is a very good man, & v. important for My future work. He wants his family to love & be devoted to Me as he himself is. So, impress them well."[105]

Baba was referring to His former host, Rustomji Ratansha Billimoria, the owner of Hickgalla Estate, where the group had first stayed. Rustomji's small party arrived as expected the following day. The women were invited to meet the Easterners and Westerners, who were listening to the radio. The song "Oh! Oh! What Do You Know about Love" happened to be playing, and fittingly, Baba offered them a short but lovely discourse on real love, asking, "What do you know of love? This love on the radio is Broadway love, but what do you know of real love?"[106]

He then told a story illustrating what He called "real" love: "There was a great saint named Zikaria. He would always do what pleased God. Once in a dream, God ordered him to sit under a certain tree. When

he awakened, he went and sat there and never moved for five years…. Hearing about this, the king of the place sent his men, ordering Zikaria to come to him, but the saint would not budge. The king then ordered his men to saw him in half if he did not obey, and Zikaria let himself be sawed without moving! This is an instance of great, real love."[107]

CALICUT, CITY OF SPICES

Baba's promised three-month sojourn at Primrose Hill lasted a mere three weeks. And although He had been speaking of His upcoming departure for ten days, Chanji characterized His decision to leave Ceylon as seemingly "sudden … practically unknown to all till the last moment and even to His seasoned disciples, it came as a mild surprise. The news of His having left the country so soon will therefore come to the Ceylonese as no small surprise. To those, who truly yearned to contact Him, it will indeed be heart-breaking. But Masters work internally, even through such heart-breaks."[108] Kitty recorded in her diary: "The house is taken for two [more] months but never mind, off we go."[109]

Rano and the mandali had their work cut out for them when it came time to pack the inside of the bus and load the roof: in addition to the seventy-nine-plus pieces of luggage that had been brought by rail, they also had to accommodate the busload of baggage that Tukaram had delivered from Meherabad. But manage they did, and at 7:00 AM on Thursday, December 5, they set out for their return to the mainland. From there they would continue west across South India for a five-day journey to Malabar on the west coast. This time all the women, including the invisibles, squeezed into the bus, driven by Donkin. Tukaram probably drove the Buick with Vishnu and Kaka as passengers. Baba had already sent the remaining men ahead by rail with Chatti Baba the previous day. He also rode in the bus with the women until they reached their ferry crossing, after which He joined the men in the Buick.

The bus was beset by calamities almost immediately, and the 160-mile drive took ten hours. First, Baba's party was delayed for an hour and a half after the bus broke down. The radiator packing had dropped out, "but with Baba's and Vishnu's personal help," Donkin later noted in his diary, "all was put right," adding that the Master Mechanic even lent a hand and "tightened up a nut or two."[110] At 4:00 PM Baba's party broke their journey at a dak bungalow in Mannar, which Mani described as a "nice place near sea," for an afternoon "cupper."[111] They also ate their simple packed supper of bread, cheese, bananas, and hard-boiled eggs before setting off for the ferry at Talaimannar pier an hour later.

But the roads were poor, as well as muddy and slick from recent rains. The bus slid off onto the shoulder, its wheels buried up to the hubs in wet sand, causing them to miss the evening ferry. Soon, it was "twilight—palms swaying in the cool sea-breeze [beneath] a haunting moon."[112] Mani's depiction is so evocative that one can almost hear the strains of "Begin the Beguine" in the background. The women took the opportunity to stretch their legs but had to pile back into the bus quickly when, just as the lyrics lament, clouds came along to disperse their joy, the skies opened, and rain began to fall. Everything on the roof got drenched as they drove on, across the long bridge and Mannar Island to the ferry slip, just five minutes away.

Meanwhile, Baba had sent Elizabeth ahead to purchase a special ticket for transporting the bus, which was so big that it would have to be hoisted onto the ferry. One of the Buick's tires was punctured on the way and the men had to change it in what was by then pitch dark and pouring rain. Before being taken aboard, the bus needed to be relieved of as much weight as possible; consequently the women had to hand-carry their sodden bedrolls and much of their luggage onto the ferry "looking more ridiculous than ever," Mani wrote, "tramping in the rain with our endless bundles."[113] "Baba as usual," Donkin concluded, "our King and Avatar—is the last to get on the ship at 11.30 pm carrying Elizabeth's bag for her, after 4 hours of waiting about seeing

to everyone and everything."[114] By the time they had all boarded the ferry, everyone and everything they were carrying was soaked.

Baba and the women settled into a cabin near the engine room for the night, where, Mani continued, "in spite of smell & continuous earthquaky sounds, [everyone] slept toppingly in wet clothes & on a hard bench."[115] Margaret recalled being among the fortunate few who escaped the fumes to sleep on the deck because the cabin was too small to accommodate everyone. "Chatti Baba and his attendant were also outside," she recalled, "and it was wonderful in the moonlight to watch his beaming face, as he stood on the deck just bathed in happiness, guarded and attended by the watchful Baidul."[116] Donkin and Vishnu slept in the bus, leaving Tukaram, Kaka, and Nilu to pass the night sitting up in the Buick.

The women awoke at 5:00 AM on the sixth to breakfast on the deck. They were up just in time to watch the bus being hoisted by crane onto the ferry like some ungainly beast in its canvas sling, silhouetted by the sunrise against a backdrop of palm trees. So much time was required to load the bus that the ferry departed an hour late. Mani recalled that there were many sailors and soldiers on board, and they very likely were not pleased with the delay. Out in the shallow strait the water became so turbulent that half the women were seasick during the crossing.

Baba's party got down at Dhanushkodi to board the train to Ramnad at 11:30 AM after what felt to Mani like "an endless tramp in the sand."[117] The seemingly short journey of forty-five miles took three and a half hours. From the station it was a five-minute drive to their dak bungalow, although it is not clear how everyone was transported there. The bus had required additional time to be hoisted off the ferry and then there was a problem loading it onto a bogie, delaying its delivery to Ramnad for twenty-four hours. There were also problems loading the Buick and it was delayed for two hours. Donkin retrieved the car and drove it to the dak bungalow when it arrived. He had to return to Dhanushkodi the following day to bring the bus, which had required "much ingenuity and cooly labor" to offload. He was accompanied by

Nilu, who would drive the Buick back to Ramnad. Both Donkin and Nilu encountered problems with customs officials. Donkin called them "foolish men," adding, "Station-master at Dhanash Kodi [*sic*] a 1st class horror. Nilu had a hell of a time with Indian Customs."[118]

Mani deemed the dak bungalow in Ramnad "a very charming place," but after their previous day of travel punctuated by one mishap after another, followed by a short night of broken rest next to the engine room on the ferry, a 5:00 AM breakfast, and ten more hours on the move, the women were too dirty, exhausted, and understandably cross to appreciate their lodgings.[119] Mitigating circumstances notwithstanding, Baba took them to task the following morning at seven o'clock. "Now listen carefully for five minutes," He cautioned. "It's 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 mandali the same thing in Kandy."[120]

By the time Baba was finished, Norina, who rarely wept, had burst into tears. Donkin, who must have witnessed but was not on the receiving end of the outburst, marked it down to Baba's "usual teasing," adding, "He is rather extra loveable at such times."[121] But Mani, who bore Baba's silent verbal assault full on, called it a "long, special, not too pleasant lecture."[122]



Well past a century in age, Pallukollah Baba was Meher Baba's "King of all *masts*"

Later, while the women rested, Baba traveled to the ancient coastal village of Kilakkarai in search of a venerable old Muslim saint named Pallukollah Baba, about whom He had spoken in Kandy. Pallukollah Baba was an astonishing 115 to 120 years of age. Baba had first sought the aged *mast* in January 1940, when He traveled more that 250 miles from Bangalore to Cape Comorin at the southernmost tip of the subcontinent, but He was not able to find him. Then, while still in Ceylon, He had sent Kaka back into South India to locate the elusive *mast*, who turned out to be

too frail to travel, and Kaka returned alone. This time Baba was able to locate Pallukollah Baba Himself and sat with him for thirty minutes. Baba deemed him to be between the sixth and seventh planes, calling him the "King of all *masts*."[123]

Sometime that same day, back at the dak bungalow, Katie fell while carrying a heavy kettle full of hot tea, sustaining a burn. Kaka, who was nearby, ran to her aid. Baba witnessed what happened and rebuked Kaka for forgetting the men's order not to touch women. "You think you have done a good deed, but you have no idea how much you have hurt Me. Even if Katie had died, you should not have touched her. Then I would have been proud of how obedient you were. But her fall has made you fall, in disregarding My order."[124] Fortunately, by evening Baba had recovered His good mood and told the women, "It was a special day, today," perhaps referring to His work with Pallukollah Baba.[125]

Baba's entourage left Ramnad at 7:00 AM on December 8 for the seventy-five-mile drive to Madura. But just five miles outside of Ramnad, Donkin recorded, "the road was breached by a small river, and we had to push the car and bus through the water—2 or 3 feet [deep]—with the help of 50 men or so. This spoilt the oil in the bus, which we had to change. It was a wonder we got through," later adding, "Baba and the ladies waded across."[126] All this, Mani noted, took "1½ hours only!"[127]

By 8:30 AM the Blue Bus and the Buick were again on their way. The roads were poor but the women were compensated, Mani wrote, with the sights of "dancing peacocks—monkeys—v. elegantly dressed women—ruins—temples with artistic statues of horses, horses & more horses—palms, lakes, blue hills [and] glimpses of sea now and then," before driving through "the picturesque town of Madura with its beautiful temples." Late in the morning they stopped for a thirty-minute break at the tea room of the Madura railway station before continuing on another forty miles to Dindigul. Mani called their dak bungalow pleasant, with "monkeys playing & fountain in the garden."[128] In the

evening the women read jokes to Baba before retiring at 8:30 for an early start the following day.

Baba's entourage was back on the road in the morning, bound for Pollachi, a distance of eighty miles. As they passed through the small town of Palni, Baba declared its Shiva temples, trees, and lake quite delightful. But eighteen miles before reaching their destination, the Buick broke down. Baba, Elizabeth, and the invisibles had to squeeze into the bus, which was already overflowing. Just as soon as they arrived at the dak bungalow in Pollachi Baba directed Donkin to return with the bus to tow the car into the town for repairs. It was noon, and the women prepared a lunch of dal while they waited for Donkin to return, but he did not arrive until 2:15. But just as Donkin had been served a plate of food, Baba announced that He was not pleased with the bungalow. He ordered everyone back into the bus to continue on for another twenty-five miles to Palghat. The dak bungalow there was already partly in use, but when its occupants learned that such a large party needed to be accommodated, they obligingly vacated it. Donkin declared it "a 1st class place."[129] That evening everyone watched the sunset and moonrise over the palm trees and mountains.

Although Mani did not record whose birthday it was, Baba and the women celebrated with cake for breakfast early the following morning, before setting back out at 6:30. They were bound for Calicut, a distance of eighty miles and the last leg of their five-day journey. They arrived at 11:00 AM on Tuesday, December 10, immediately driving to Eranhippalam, now a suburb of Calicut but which was then located about five miles outside the city. They quickly settled into Ceylon Lodge, the comfortable, secluded bungalow that Chanji had at last secured. Baba was pleased with his efforts. Baba served the women toddy to celebrate their arrival but told them afterward, "No more!"[130]

Fortunately, Ceylon Lodge was large and accommodating, because Baba invited many guests to join Him. He called Hilloo and Najoo to spend their remaining school holiday; He also called Eruch from Bangalore, along with Sarvar and the rest of the Jessawala family. Arriving soon

after were Meheru and Naggu. Accompanying the Jessawalas were the women's pet goldfish, which Baba had ordered Eruch to bring with him.

After everyone had settled in, Baba gave an explanation of the work He planned to accomplish in Calicut. "I worked differently at Meherabad, differently from Kandy, and here, for 20 days, I shall also work differently. The mandali will bring all the *masts*, and even the mad, here, and I will bathe, feed, and clothe them. After 20 days, we leave, and I will put you in a place called 'heaven,' where there is no rain and it is not hot, and I shall work there."[131]

Baba resumed His practice of meeting daily with the women, and on the twelfth He gave them a variant of His classic mosquito discourse, telling them: "Those of you who are unable to meditate should repeat My name without being bothered by thoughts. Thoughts are like mosquitoes, and My name is the mosquito net. When you are within the mosquito net, the mosquitoes may buzz around you, but they cannot bite you. Thus, by repeating My name, like the mosquito net, it will save you from the stings of the mosquito-thoughts that try to distract you, and you will be unmoved."[132]

As usual, news of Baba's presence spread quickly, and that same day, just two days after His arrival, curious crowds gathered outside the gates to the compound. But Baba called them *moplahs* (cutthroats), warning the women: "If you touch [harm] one of them, the whole town will raise a riot."[133]* They were residents of Calicut's Muslim community, which was called Moplah.

Baba had come to Calicut to continue His *mast* work, and He told the women that Elizabeth would be driving Him in her Buick as He sought new contacts. This was a great privilege, as she would be able to observe firsthand Baba's work as He made frequent forays into the

* Moplah, or Mappila, is the term for Muslims, Christians, and Jews who immigrated to the Malabar Coast of India beginning in the seventh century CE. Why Baba called them cutthroats is not explained, but He may have been referring to the Moplah Rebellion of 1921. The uprising was the culmination of decades of riots and attacks during which tens of thousands of Hindus were slaughtered, injured, forced to convert to Islam, or else driven from their homes.

countryside. Once again Baba had sent out Kaka and Baidul to locate new contacts and Kaka brought back a high *mast* said to "radiate God"; the unnamed *mast* stayed on with Baba in Ceylon Lodge.[134] Throughout their halt Baidul brought a number of men, many of whom were merely mad or else simply hungry. Baba patiently bathed and dressed them all in new kafnis and sent them home to their villages with full stomachs.

In the meantime, Baba resumed His work with Chatti Baba. Suddenly, one day he cried out, "This place is hopeless and I am burning badly!" Even after being drenched with two hundred buckets of water he was not relieved, but he refused to allow Baba to bathe him again and insisted upon pouring the water over himself instead, all the while complaining, "This is a place where there is neither food nor water!" On December 13, after working with Chatti Baba and the new *mast*, Baba told the women, "My [*mast*] work was most satisfactory today. I am very, very happy."[135] Despite having warned them not to expect any more toddy, He was so pleased that He served it again that evening, along with bhujia and *chiwada*.* "Had 'T,'" Mani noted in her diary, "and some fun!!!"[136] He also sent treats to the men.

Baba had sent Eruch and Kaka out to procure the toddy, telling them to find "the sweetest and the best," adding, "See that the pots you collect it in are the best and that the toddy is pure." "The next morning," Eruch recalled, "we went to fetch it. We got two big chattis of it. One broke, while we got down. The other chatti of toddy went inside [to the women]…. Because we had tried to impress the toddy man to give us the best toddy, unbeknownst to us, he had put some mixture in it to give it some extra kick. He thought we wanted it stronger, whereas we only wanted it absolutely pure. It was warm, so this was a cool drink—and the women took plenty each."† Even Meherwan was given "just a couple of sips," recalling, "I looked longingly at [Baba] hoping for more."[137]

* Bhujia is a spicy deep-fried snack of lentils, nuts, and other ingredients that vary from region to region. Chiwada, or chivda, is another deep-fried snack, made from *poha* (flattened grains of rice), coconut, other dried fruits, and spices. Also called Bombay mix, it is often served during Diwali.

† *Mehera–Meher* (2:135) surmises that the "extra kick" was probably provided by the addition of a datura pod, which contains belladonna—a mild hallucinogen.

Lord Meher paints a dreamy picture of that evening. A full moon was nothing to the radiance that the women saw in Baba's face, and on impulse they began to chant "Seven Names of God" as Margaret rose to dance. "They were like *mastanis* while gazing at the Beloved's beauty, and only Mani, Rano, and Norina managed to maintain their sense of decorum."[138]

As Meherwan recalled, Baba asked him

> to move away, which was just as well because in a short while … Mehera started to act strangely. She kept embracing Baba. Then another of the women uttered a strange noise and began to dance. One by one each of the women started acting strangely. Baba asked me to go sit in Soonamasi's place [at the gate to the compound] and keep watch in her place. My sister Meheru was affected in such a way that she went around slapping everyone quite hard, trying to get them to stop acting so strangely and to lie down. There was a lot of chaos and confusion … but eventually the [intoxicant] wore off, and everyone fell fast asleep for some time.[139]

Irene's account is a bit more prosaic. "When I was a little tipsy, I held Baba's feet," she later recalled. "Margaret pretended to be Baba's goldfish, because it dances for Baba. She draped an orange shawl around herself and acted like one."[140] Irene believed that as the women lost their inhibitions they became less self-conscious, giving Baba an opportunity to work through them. "No more toddy until we die!" Baba declared afterward, adding,

> It was strong, from a "special tree." Due to My work, I feel continuously giddy. Today, it is much worse, but I maintain infinite control.
>
> Still, I enjoyed it all. You all called out, "BABA, BABA!" from the heart. You were also so funny. Banubai was the funniest.

> This intoxication was superfluous, but it helped you to remember only Baba. In that Divine Intoxication, you forget everything, and there are no such physical reactions. It's a literal intoxication. Once you get it, you never come down!
>
> You forget the body, as you did today, and do things you never would otherwise. That's why *masts* act like this. The word *mast* actually means intoxicated. But that intoxication is delightful, wonderful. You don't care about the body or the world.[141]

Mani's twenty-second birthday, which fell on December 15, was the occasion for another celebration—this one toddy-free. Baba's gift was to officially announce that the destination for the next phase of His work would be Jaipur, in Rajasthan. Mani made no reference to her birthday in her diary. Her brief entry read, "To the other beach!"[142]

Chanji called Calicut "a halting station between two places of [Baba's] external activities where programmes and plans were chalked out" for a move to "the heart of the country."[143] Baba presented the women with a detailed plan for their upcoming shift: "3 months in Jaipur, you cook, wash your clothes, wash bhagulas, all help peel vegetables, clean rice, etc. [Here] you have no work, and as you don't all day think of Baba, it would be best for you to work. Even Mohammed washes his own backside now…. So you all manage all the work between yourselves."[144] He also promised "changes beyond recognition [and] great surprises to come."[145]

On December 16 Baba ordered Vishnu to cable Chanji where he was staying at Kaka's residence in Bombay, informing him of the order to locate suitable accommodations in Jaipur. Baba also had Vishnu cable Chanji directly, care of the Station Master of the G.I.P. Railway office at Victoria Terminus, where messages were sent and received. Vishnu told Chanji that Baba was ordering Pendu, who was residing in Meherabad, to assist in the search, and upon receipt of

Baba's order Chanji cabled Pendu to join him in Bombay so that they might travel north together. Vishnu also cabled Pendu on Baba's behalf, ordering him to join Chanji. All of these communications were sent within the same twenty-four-hour period, and Vishnu sent Chanji two more cables clarifying Baba's orders during the following two days. Chanji referred to himself and Pendu as Baba's "advance party."[146]

In the meantime, though, it was business as usual for the women. On December 17 they began a new regimen of singing and meditation between 8:45 and 10:00 AM. But Baba also set aside time for them to play: "From the 14th, go swimming every day—and the more of you who drown, the better."[147] When He was not engaged in *mast* work He escorted them to the beach, while they splashed and swam in the balmy Arabian Sea. Donkin drove them out several times in the bus as early as 6:00 AM, in order to avoid other bathers. But on the morning of the seventeenth the water was so choppy that some of the women were reluctant to venture in. Those who did were soon swept off their feet by the waves, but, Nadine recalled, "Baba said to swim, so in we must go!"[148] She dropped to her knees and gamely crawled into the water, followed by Gaimai, Manu, and Meheru. Baba watched from a safe distance on the sand, where He found their efforts most amusing. Mehera and Mani both declined to go into the water, wisely preferring to keep Baba company.

On December 18 Baba again spoke of their upcoming shift, offering the women a choice between traveling either "three days in a train … or 14 days in the bus."[149] He may as well have not bothered to ask, because the vote was unanimous to travel by rail. But He again reminded the women, "Try your utmost to obey orders with more zeal."[150] He then charged Chanji with making train reservations for the group from Agra to Jaipur. He ordered Donkin to reserve two train compartments for the forty-two people proceeding from Calicut to Agra with Him and to arrange for the Buick to be transported by rail. Baba then ordered Donkin and Nilu to drive the bus, loaded with the extra luggage

that Tukaram had delivered from Meherabad, all the way to Jaipur—a distance of eighteen hundred miles. They set out on the twenty-first.

That day Baba told the women:

> Till the 1st [of January 1941], we see Mathura, Agra, and so on. On the 1st we settle in Jaipur, Udaipur, or Bundi. I will be with you until 10 January. From then until 20 March, I will work very hard, go other places most of the time, and only be with you for a few days.
>
> You all work as I want you to. Wash your clothes, the dishes, cook, and meditate for half an hour every day with all your heart. Meditate as if your life depended on it and not as a duty or drill. Thoughts will come; you can't help that. If you can't meditate with concentration, then repeat My name continuously and with feeling. Thoughts are not in your hands, but feelings are. Also, sing Hari, Paramatma from the heart.
>
> These three months are the most important period of the year. So try your best and obey all orders. No moods. Help each other. Think of Me and obey all the orders as the last chance of obeying Me in this important period.[151]

As usual, Baba had paid the rent for their accommodations in advance and, as usual, He did not stay as long as He had originally planned. The landlord, who had since learned that his tenant was Meher Baba, offered to refund the unused portion of the money, but Baba told him to keep it as His prasad.

RETURN TO THE PINK CITY

Because Baba wished to set out for Jaipur during the Christmas holidays, the difficulty of securing rail reservations at that time only compounded the challenges of wartime travel restrictions. Consequently, Baba's itinerary turned out to be long and meandering. Instead of heading north

from Kerala, He had to travel east to Madras, on the opposite coast, before turning north to Bezwada and then veering north-northwest into Rajasthan.

Baba's party of forty-two included all the women, as well as Meheru and Naggu, Najoo and Hilloo, Jangoo, Adi, Meherwan, Chatti Baba, the men mandali, and Himself. They bade farewell to Ceylon Lodge on Monday, December 23 at 1:00 PM, departing for the Calicut Railway Station, western terminus for the Madras and Southern Mahratta Railway system. Two hours later they boarded the train to Madras, settling into a reserved compartment "with just enough place," Mani hurriedly noted.[152] Accompanying the women were the goldfish, transported in a glass bowl that Mani or one of the other women "nursed … in her lap."[153] It was Baidul's responsibility to carry the bowl when they were transferring from the bus to trains and vice versa.

The women awoke for tea at 5:30 AM on Christmas Eve to switch trains at the sprawling Madras Central Station with only fifteen minutes for the men to transfer their baggage. When they located what were supposed to have been reserved compartments they found them already full of passengers who were swiftly routed to other bogies. "We got in just in time," Mani wrote, "more comfy than the last compt. & had lunch of eggs, bread & butter, followed by 'chestnut tea'!"[154*] Margaret described the compartment as large, "where we could stretch out a bit," before adding somewhat alarmingly, "Some of us are becoming very adept at sleeping on the luggage rack! Not at all bad."[155]

During the night they proceeded north past Bezwada in Andhra Pradesh, awakening, Mani noted, to bracing temperatures on a "v. cold" Christmas morning for a breakfast of tea and a holiday treat: Christmas cake, instead of the usual buttered bread and jam.[156] "Baba was very sweet," Margaret recalled. "He woke us Westerners at some unearthly hour and gave us a huge piece of plum cake (to be eaten at once)! It was

* Chestnut tea is brewed from tea leaves that have been infused with the flavor of roasted chestnuts, which impart a nutty taste. It is usually made using black tea grown in Sri Lanka.

delicious but my stomach even now boggles at the thought of it at that hour. We also had oranges (a luxury in these days of fasting)."[157]

"The weather was cold and cloudy," Rano recalled, "as the train rattled across the gray, flat countryside at dawn, just south of Nagpur. We were all shivering and I was tired and dozing after a sleepless night."[158] The train stopped at Nagpur Junction Railway Station at 8:30 AM before continuing north, and the women spent the day watching the passing landscape of central India. Later Baba handed out sweets that the Backetts had sent from England and He ordered a special dinner to be delivered from the restaurant car in the evening. "So Christmas day was very pleasant," Margaret concluded, "and Baba was with us all day, nearly."[159]

Baba then suddenly expressed the wish that the women should not have to change trains for the final part of the journey. Because Donkin was en route north with the bus He cabled Chanji in Jaipur and ordered him to alter the arrangements. Chanji wryly marked it down to "the Master stirr[ing] something else up."

By now Baba and the mandali had developed a kind of private shorthand for their cable messages—the fewer the words, the less costly the communication. Some messages were so truncated that they are difficult to interpret, and the lack of punctuation combined with use of capital letters make them still harder to decipher.

All the reservation offices were closed for Christmas Day, and in desperation Chanji cabled the station at Achnera Junction for help. There, the Assistant Stationmaster arranged for a private third-class bogie in which Baba and the women could complete their journey, and this "worthy railroad official" booked Baba's party through from Mathura to Jaipur with no more transfers.[160]

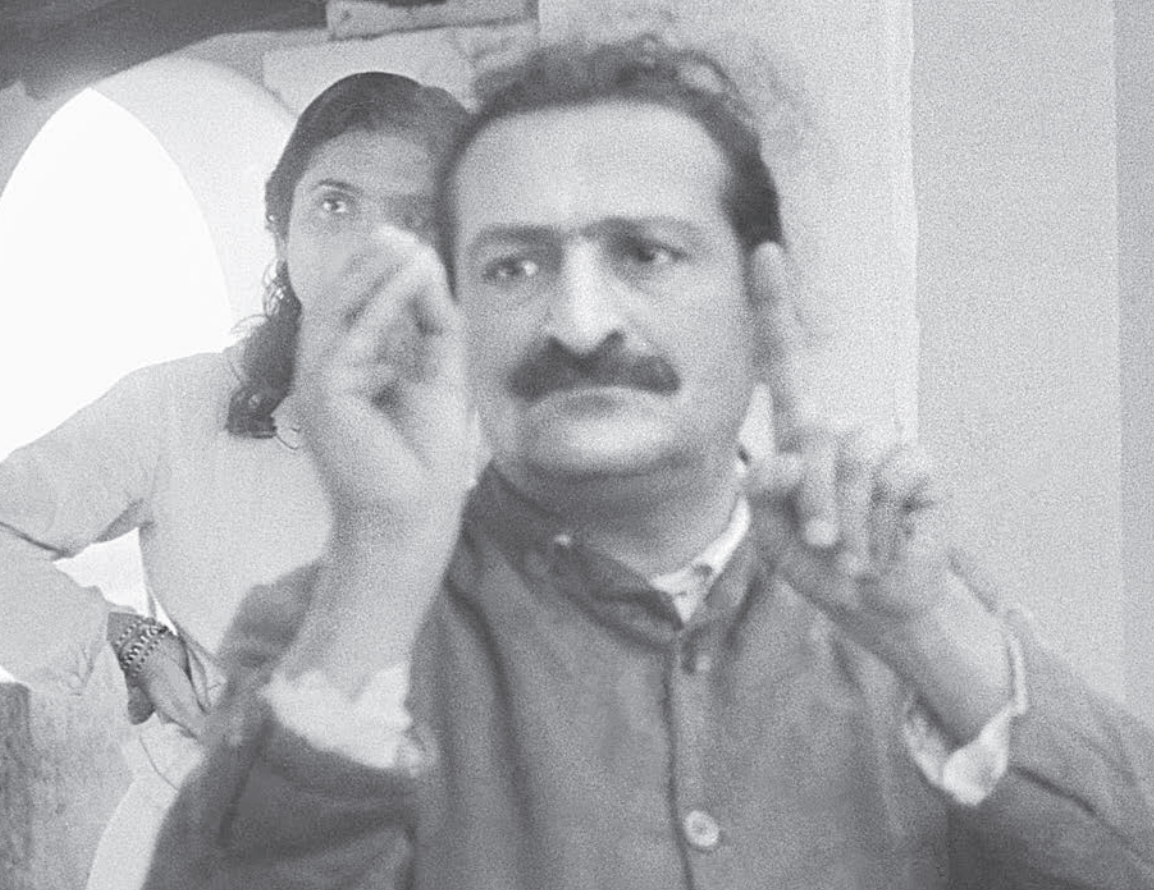
The women made the best of another short night of rest before waking at 3:00 AM on December 26 to get down at Mathura, in Uttar Pradesh, two and a half hours later. They spent the next ninety minutes in the tea room before boarding their new carriage at 7:00 AM. The

ADVISE EXACT DATE CAR IS REQUIRED AT CALICUT
TO DECIDE REGARDING ITS AVAILABILITY NO DAK
BUNGALOWS AT JAIPUR BUNDI OR AGRA SUGGEST EITHER
STOP DAK BUNGALOW KOTAH IF AVAILABLE ELIZABETH
BOOKING DIRECT AND WIRING ME JAIPUR OR BOOK CAR
IF APPROVED ONLY UPTO ITARSI OR BHOPAL AWAITING
ARRANGEMENTS FOR FURTHER JOURNEY ACCORDING
PRIVATE BUNGALOWS AVAILABLE BECAUSE JAIPURBUNDI
FAILING AND JODHPUR UDAIPUR ARRANGED FURTHER
ROUTE VIA BHOPAL UJJAIN NAGDA RATLAM STOP
ADVISED MADRAS COMMUNICATE DIRECT WITH ELIZABETH
TELEGRAPHIC ADDRESS COMMERCIAL MADRAS IF CAR
ALREADY BOOKED BY ANOTHER AND YOU WANT ONE
PLEASE ADVISE

ADVISE COUPON BOMBAY WHO WILL ENDEAVOUR ARRANGE
ALTERNATIVELY BOMBAY OR THROUGH DELHI LETTER
FOLLOWS MYSELF LEAVING TONIGHT PLEASE WIRE
MADRAS DECISION EARLY.

Text of the second and third pages of an unsigned, three-page, typed cable (page one is missing), dated December 18, 1940, sent from Baba, in Calicut, presumably to Chanji, in Jaipur, regarding arrangements for Baba's upcoming visit, as well as travel arrangements from Calicut to Madras

car was attached at the end of the train, and although rather small, it had a gallery at the end where the women could see, if not where they were going, then at least where they had been. "Great fun," Mani wrote, "biting cold, but jolly!"[161]



At Achnera Junction the women went into the station restaurant for bread, butter, and tea. They left Achnera without Elizabeth, who had to return to Mathura for the Buick, which Chanji had not arranged to be transferred to the new train.* Back on the train, they reached Bandikui at 1:00 PM, where they enjoyed a lunch of samosas and tea that Baba ordered to be brought to their bogie during a two-hour halt there.

Meanwhile, Chanji and Pendu had had no luck locating suitable accommodations in Jaipur, nor in Jodhpur, Udaipur, or Bundi. The men returned to Jaipur where at long last they identified a large house on the edge of the city, called Irani Kawasji Bagh. Located on Amber Road, it was the home of Rae Bahar Kawas Bala Bukshiji.

* Mani does not explain how Elizabeth got back to Mathura (presumably she had to return by train), nor does she mention the Buick again, so it is not clear what happened after Elizabeth retrieved it at Mathura. She may have driven on to Jaipur, since that was the group's next stop, but it was a fairly long distance of nearly one hundred fifty miles for her to safely travel alone.



Baba appearing to deliver a hot lecture as Khorshed and Mehera stand by

At 5:00 PM on Thursday, December 26—seventy-six hours after leaving Ceylon Lodge in Calicut—Baba and his weary companions deboarded at Jaipur. "What a rush on station!" Mani recorded. "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 an even hotter lecture."[162] She later recorded that although the incident that had provoked the lecture was seemingly trivial, "Baba was v. annoyed & we had a hot one coming." It put her in mind of another memorable occasion when He had declared, "You can all go to hell. I have a strong mind to send you all away."[163]

Baba's party arrived at the bungalow by moonlight, and as it was too late to assign rooms Baba instructed everyone to choose a place to roll out their bedding for the night. The exhausted women, who had been awake since 3:00 AM, "slipped under the blankets at first opportunity,"

Mani wrote.[164] But Margaret discovered a staircase leading up to a glassed-in room on the roof where she laid out her bedding and fell asleep. The following morning she recalled waking repeatedly through the night murmuring, "How wonderful to be alone," and she later observed: "I think that until that night I had no realization of what a discipline it was never to be alone."[165]

The following morning the women found themselves ensconced in a large bungalow inside a perfectly secluded, secure compound enclosed by high walls in a forested area where the city ended and the countryside began. But "large" was a relative term when it came to accommodating so many people. When Baba assigned the women their sleeping spaces He placed Margaret, Irene, and Nadine in a room so small that at night their unrolled bedding literally covered the floor from wall to wall. Irene and Nadine were practicing silence, but Margaret was not. Baba had told the women that they were responsible for cleaning their own rooms, and "it was arranged," Margaret recalled, "that we should take turns in sweeping the floor of our room and keeping it tidy. The first morning Irene did the chores, and afterward Nadine's fingers indignantly told me that Irene had finished by sweeping the dust under her, Nadine's, bedding roll. The next day Irene came to me and spelt out the same story about Nadine. The third day, knowing that there could be no hope for my reputation as a sweeper, I swept the dust under their bedding rolls and later saw them together, indignantly wagging their fingers about my sins."[166]

Donkin recorded in his diary that Baba had divulged to him that "all Avatars are rascals, including Himself!"[167] Consequently His orders sometimes created unexpected moments of humor, as when one of the young local girls hired as a maid mistook Irene's order of silence and use of gestures as a sign that she was either ill or mute. Irene, being on silence, could not offer an explanation. The girl was so distressed by Irene's inability to speak that she brought some special herbs and prepared a tea that she was convinced would restore Irene's voice and she was deeply disappointed when it failed to relieve Irene's apparent ailment.[168]

The abrupt change of climate, from the humid, tropical coast of Malabar to the cold, dry, winter landscape of Rajasthan, took its toll on the women, who had spent three days and nights in stuffy train compartments, and many of them came down with coughs and colds soon after arriving. Fasting—even on two meals a day— further compromised their health. "Everyone has gotten much thinner on the fast," Margaret observed in a letter. "Some of us look a bit haggard I think."[169] Kitty recorded that the women had grown so much thinner at Kandy that they were now "making tucks in their skirts."[170]

"So here we all are in Jaipur—a wonderful Rajput city," Donkin recorded in his diary on December 31, having just arrived in the Blue Bus. He and Nilu had been so plagued with punctures that he had repaired one of the tires by stuffing an old blanket into it because there was no money to replace it, and, in any case, he needed Baba's permission to do so. They had to maintain a creeping pace until they reached the next town and could have the tire patched. More alarming still, "100 miles from Indore," Donkin recorded, "both back wheels on one side came off on the road, and the car [*sic*] fell onto its brake drum on that side; luckily got wheels on O.K. again, and no serious damage done."[171]

But Chanji's account of the incident describes a much more trying experience than Donkin cared to admit:

> [Donkin and Nilu] felt the bus suddenly bump and tilt with its heavy load on a road between two hills. They were most fortunate to be able to stop the car [*sic*] instantaneously, and for a moment both looked aghast to find the double rear wheels on one side missing … with its heavy load resting on one axle. It was a passing pedestrian who pointed out the two different directions in which the two wheels had rolled off. How could these two joint-wheels roll off in two opposite directions and both on a higher level of the hillside, unless flung by some considerable force? There was then the question of fitting the

> wheels on, but how could that be possible without nuts or bolts, only one of which could be traced after a search of a distance of about half a mile? … In spite of the feeling of desperation with fatigue and day's hard and continued driving, with no food except a cup of tea since morning, and with no proper implements … the spirit of endurance and faith in the Master worked what can rightly be termed a miracle![172]

The miracle transpired when Donkin and Nilu were rescued by the arrival of a man who happened to be driving by. He stopped to loan them his jack and tools to secure the tires temporarily and then followed the bus as it crept the remaining hundred miles to Indore, where he took Donkin and Nilu to a garage. Afterward he invited them to stay at his home overnight while the vehicle was being repaired, and there his "worthy old mother" fed them a hot meal. Back on the road the next morning, the bus was plagued with one problem after another: The hood latch broke, two sparkplugs had to be replaced, the radiator sprang a leak, the dynamo (generator) expired, the fan belt broke, and the springs at last gave way. "And what a hard time they both had," Chanji recorded,

> on rough, dusty Indian roads with nine day's continuous driving, under most trying conditions! Both were on the list of those who had been observing fast during this year of the Master's seclusion, taking only one meal a day. But mostly during the journey, at the end of the day when they arrived for a night halt as previously timed, they hardly found food worth eating … filthy clothes, face and body all covered and besmeared with tons of dust, barred their entrance into any decent hotel or a dak bungalow, and they had at times to pass their nights in very uncomfortable places which were the only … ones they found available.[173]

On the same day that he arrived in Jaipur Donkin received his marching orders. Despite Baba's promise that he could accompany the group as far as Quetta, he was required to report for active duty in Poona on March 1. Donkin was stoic in the face of impending separation, writing, "Baba says I am to go this time; so at last this calling up business has borne fruit; Baba seems pleased about it. So for me a new phase will shortly be beginning—where it will lead I suppose only Baba knows."[174]

Baba had promised the women that He would be engaged with *mast* work in Jaipur, and Irani Kawasji Bagh bungalow would serve as base camp throughout His three-month halt. Mani recorded that He told them on the thirtieth of December, "E. [Elizabeth] will have to be busy driving the car to bring the *masts*," naming "2 good ones, Chuten Baba & Buddha Baba, and one on the mountain—naked—v. advanced," but adding, "Most advanced is our Chatti Baba…. Chatti Baba is superb! He sits on the stone, leaves the mattress aside! Today he is so happy, sings, laughs, talks English—correctly. When a peacock came, he said, 'All right sir, go away, you rascal!'"[175]

On January 3 Baba sent Pendu to look for new contacts in Jodhpur, about two hundred miles to the southwest. He returned two days later to report his findings, and on January 6, after a ten-day respite, Baba set out for Jodhpur accompanied by Eruch and Gustadji to spend three nights in a dak bungalow.

One of the *masts* Pendu had identified was under the protection of the military barracks where his seat was located, and when a sentry spied Baba working with the *mast* he became so agitated that Baba directed Eruch and Gustadji to tip (read: bribe) him liberally. Nanga Sadhu had the curious habit of hiding his face behind his hands and peering out from between his fingers, but he did look directly at Baba, who later explained, "When he [the *mast*] started on the Spiritual Path he did not want to see the world at all. So he covered his face with his hands. Now, from habit, he still does the same thing." Baba deemed

him "very advanced," contacting him at least three times and ordering Eruch and Gustadji to bow down during the first and last contacts.[176]

Baba also contacted yet another female *mast* called Mastani Mai and met with her on several occasions. This time He ordered Eruch and Gustadji to bow down at the end of each visit. Her seat was a government verandah, where she was fed daily by what was then the princely State of Jodhpur (now a part of Rajasthan). She was a very high *mastani* revered throughout Rajputana, but most especially by women who had been unable to bear children, and she could be found on her verandah surrounded by coins and other gifts that had been offered to her by women desperate to conceive a child. "She is not conscious of the body," Baba later observed, "covered with rags, mouth dirty, flies hovering, [a] wound on her leg which is swollen. Rich devotees come & give her food & clothes—she leaves it all by her side and gives it all to the poor."[177]

Baba returned to Jaipur at noon on the eighth. Mani said that when He met with the women He "gave a delightful imitation of the *mast* who peeped through his fingers."[178] He also spoke to them of a "tiger *mast*," said to live in the jungle cavorting with the great cats.[179]

"What chaos prevails in the whole world! Here we don't realize the misery," Baba continued. "When Margaret has a toothache she says, 'Damn the world and its quarrels. I have a toothache!' For her toothache, Margaret wishes the whole world to go to hell, but why not for Me? Create such an ache for Me that your ego is uprooted."[180] Baba then made an extraordinary declaration: "Before I speak, I have to contact 75 percent of the *masts* in the world. I have already contacted 70 percent; now only five percent remain."[181]

The following day, January 9, Baba dictated a message now known as "The Seven Realities of Meher Baba's Teaching." He ordered Donkin to record the message and write it out in "good English." Donkin called the communication a "propaganda push," adding that Baba had "about a million copies [printed] in all languages."[182] The mandali were instructed to distribute the message to priests, imams, and other religious

leaders, as well as to gurus and so-called spiritual masters. Copies were also sent to lovers in the West. The now-iconic message reads:

> Meher Baba's teaching gives no importance to creed, dogma, caste systems and the performance of religious ceremonies and rites, but to the UNDERSTANDING of the following seven Realities:
>
> 1. The only Real Existence is that of the One and only God, who is the Self in every (finite) self.
> 2 The only Real Love is the love for this Infinity (God), which arouses an intense longing to see, know and become one with its Truth (God).
> 3. The only Real Sacrifice is that in which, in pursuance of this love, all things, body, mind, position, welfare and even life itself, are sacrificed.
> 4. The only Real Renunciation is that which abandons, even in the midst of worldly duties, all selfish thoughts and desires.
> 5. The only Real Knowledge is the knowledge that God is the inner dweller in good people and so-called bad, in saint and so-called sinner. This knowledge requires you to help all equally as circumstances demand, without expectation of reward, and when compelled to take part in a dispute, to act without the slightest trace of enmity or hatred; to try to make others happy, with brotherly or sisterly feeling for each one; to harm no one in thought, word or deed, not even those who harm you.
> 6. The only Real Control is the discipline of the senses from indulgence in low desires, which alone ensures absolute purity of character.

7. The only Real Surrender is that in which the poise is undisturbed by any adverse circumstances, and the individual, amidst every kind of hardship, is resigned with perfect calm to the will of God.[183]

TIGERS AND MONKEYS AND FLIES, OH MY!

"It didn't take us any time at all to fall in love with Jaipur," Mani recorded in her diary. "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 … and above all its happy atmosphere." She ended this lovely narrative with the parenthetical query: "(& flies?)."[184]

This was Margaret's first visit to Jaipur. She observed that the Pink City was aptly named, full of "strange houses with tiny windows and grilles for the ladies in purdah to peep through—very, very attractive."[185] She was also mesmerized when, occasionally, "the weaving of a long piece of silky material having been completed and needing to be dried, would be floated along the street about shoulder height by runners holding the edges." Margaret also recorded an experience that she had at the women's bungalow: "On one side of the grounds surrounding the house was a tomb in which rested the bones of a sixth-plane Muslim saint. One day Baba took me over to look at this strange small erection and explained that a strong emanation of Love was still flowing from it. I, however, did not feel this, I think because in His presence, Baba's own emanation of Love was so strong that one could be aware of no other."[186]

One day in early January Baba told the women that there were "no snakes [in Rajputana], but plenty of tigers, camels, monkeys, peacocks, & flies!!"[187] They soon learned that He was dead serious, when on January 10 Mani recorded in her diary: "Tiger eats a man a mile away

from our house (this is the second time). Orders to lock in at 7 p.m."[188] Mehera also recalled that Baba's order was for all the women to be out of the grounds and on the verandah by seven, and settled for the night in their rooms by eight, as "it was very dangerous to be outside" any later than that.[189] Meanwhile, an old man who lived nearby regaled the men with gruesome tales of savage beasts, but when Chatti Baba heard about the attacks, he responded even more alarmingly: "Everyone will be butchered to pieces!"[190] After issuing the order Baba added, "I don't mind tigers—I mind fighting disciples!"[191]

Compounding the unwelcome presence of tigers was the aggravation of flies, which were a terrible nuisance. Dowla stood by to swat them away with a fan as Katie cooked on the verandah, and the lids had to be kept on the pots at all times, except when the contents were being stirred or someone was ladling food from them, because the heat from the cooking flames killed the flies, causing them to fall into the pots.

The bungalow had no dining room so the women took their meals on the verandah as well, plates balanced on their laps. The swarming flies provoked Elizabeth to wrap herself in her mosquito net. Margaret's solution was to dab honey onto one of her toes to distract them from her food. One day Baba found her lounging in a chair while reading a book, honey dripping from her big toe. When He asked what in the world she was doing she explained that the flies were so distracting that it was the only way she could concentrate. Baba found it amusing—but only up to a point, because He then ordered her to go wash off the honey. Mani later recalled that Margaret's calm disposition stood her well when Baba nixed her sweet solution for managing the flies.[192]

But the flies were a minor problem compared with the wild, black-faced monkeys that perched on the verandah railing, enticed by piles of freshly cut vegetables and the delectable aroma of Katie's cooking. Katie instructed the servants to distract them with stale chapatis, but this was only a temporary solution and they soon returned, as menacing and ravenous as before. Katie sometimes had to wave a stick at them to chase

them away. The monkeys were so bold that they would take food from the women's hands if they held it out to them. The leader of the troop was so tame that he let Mehera feed him channa from her upturned palm, but when he grabbed at her wrist she quickly stopped. Margaret wrote to the Backetts that she found the monkeys "rather sweet," but later recalled that "in spite of their wistful charm they were definitely tiresome."[193]

Jaipur is also called the "City of Ten Thousand Peacocks," and as if roaring tigers, howling monkeys, and buzzing flies did not provide enough entertainment, wild, dancing peacocks added their otherworldly cries to the cacophony that greeted the women every day. Equally entertaining were the trumpeting elephants and bellowing camels that "ambled along the road which passed the end of the garden," Margaret later wrote. More unpleasant than the dung left behind in the streets were the open sewers that ran through the city, "flowing peacefully and poisonously toward the place of [their] ultimate destruction." Donkin, who was horrified when he learned of their proximity to the bungalow, "demanded inoculations for the entire group," Margaret continued. "As soon, however, as Baba said that everything was in His hands, he accepted this and left the matter there."[194]

By mid-January the time had come for the young ones to return to school, so Baba sent the Jessawalas back to Bangalore, along with Sarvar and Gulamasi. Meheru, Najoo, and Hilloo also departed. Baba ordered Eruch to assist Dr. Ghani and Adi K. in the distribution of Baba's "Seven Realities" message there. They left together at 4:00 AM on January 14.

WHEN WILL YOU COME AGAIN, BABAJI?

Twelve hours later, Baba left for His second *mast* tour from Jaipur, His departure marked by a hail storm. His destination was the Girnar Mountains in Gujarat, about four hundred miles to the southwest. Gustadji and Savak accompanied Him, and they were later joined by Kaka.

The Islamic New Year was celebrated in the streets of Jaipur on January 19 according to the Muslim lunar calendar. Mani recorded

that the women were entertained in Baba's absence by the traditional procession that passed by their terrace, with its "taboots amidst the sea of coloured turbans." It was also "kite-playing day (when Prime Minister & other ranks of honour put aside their dignity and with coloured kites & happy smiles, become human)."[195] Margaret recalled "the wonderful sight," adding, "The sky when filled with flying beauty—all colors, shapes and sizes—was hypnotically pleasing."[196]

Baba returned on January 24, having toured twelve cities in ten days. He had bathed a total of seventeen *masts*, and among His contacts was the spiritual chargeman of Jamnagar, who lived alone in a cemetery. The *mast* was known as Coatwalla Baba for the layers of coats he never removed. Baba contacted him near the edge of a forest, where the tormented *mast* cried out, "*Junglemein khuda mil gaya*!"—"I have found God in the wilds."[197*] Baba also contacted a great *mast* called Bapu, who had been seated in the same place for forty years. He renamed him Makkhiwala Baba (the Fly Saint) for what Donkin described as the "millions of flies [*makkhi*]" that crawled over his face and naked body, to which he was completely oblivious.[198] Makkhiwala Baba was the only *mast* Baba ever contacted who exhibited a perfect balance of jalali and jamali qualities.

Throughout their journey Baba and the mandali traveled in filthy, overcrowded bogies with uncomfortable wooden benches on which they attempted to sleep. Baba told the women: "we spent every night in the train, and lived like the very poorest, eating baked chickpeas, apples and *ganthia* [a dry chickpea snack consumed by the poor in India]. We traveled by third class, and the compartment meant for 30 people contained 60. I thought that no one would recognize Me, but on alighting at the first station in Kathiawar, a Hindu came and took My darshan. So, [from there on] I had to keep My face covered at every stop." After describing the tour, Baba went on to comment on the war: "All are

* The *mast*'s exclamation is curiously similar to Karim Baba's song, "*Bhagavan ke jangalon mein paaya ja sakata hai aur Bhagavan shaharon mein paaya ja sakata hai*"—"God can be found in the jungles and God can be found in the cities." (*Love Alone Prevails*, 288)

killing one another now…. And God does this. Why? … Evil is so deep-rooted that unless drastic and worldwide remedies are applied, it cannot be uprooted. It has to be knocked from every side, and then [only] can it be exterminated. Then, real peace and happiness will be permanent. It will be automatically established. People will then learn to love one another, to help one another.… [How is it possible for] the greatest sinners to become saints? Because their penance is so drastic and complete. The transmutation is real and full. The world is miserable."[199]

Two days later, on Sunday, January 26, Baba asked the women to sign an agreement to obey their orders with more zeal:

> I am certain all the outside devotees will follow the orders, but I have not the slightest hope of you all—My inner circle. For the next 20 days, you must keep your mood at its best. Under any circumstances and conditions, you are not to get excited, not to have moods, but always to be happy and smiling. This is the greatest help to Me.
>
> People join the war, fight, get wounded and suffer untold hardships—but that is easy in comparison. To keep your best mood in every situation, never to be upset or sad, to speak gently and lovingly, never using a harsh word, not to get excited when someone steals your chapati, but to say from the bottom of your heart: "May Baba bless you!"—that is really difficult. To control the self is more difficult than walking on fire or glass. It is easy to win a war of nations, but most difficult to win your own self. It is the only real thing on this Path. To keep a calm head, tolerate and swallow everything.[200]

By 7:30 AM on January 27 Baba was on His way to the village of Alwar, again driven by Elizabeth. The hundred-mile drive took nearly three hours each way, but Baba returned to Jaipur in six hours, having contacted a forty-five-year-old *mast* named Yasin (the Arabic name

for the Prophet Mohammed). The women were in the midst of their meditation when He arrived, a pursuit they happily abandoned when the object of their contemplation appeared before them. Baba told them: "Today, my work was done in five minutes." He followed this statement with a long explanation of the different kinds of *masts* and the planes through which they pass. Baba said of His beloved *masts*: "They are all like children; they are mad and ghosts all in one [and] lie hidden, like a jewel in a pile of coal!"[201]

Baba returned to the area around Alwar the following day, accompanied by Chanji and Gustadji, again riding in the Buick. Baba told the men that the contacts He would be making had to be accomplished in absolutely privacy and that they would have to maintain a discreet distance from Him and look the other away. This time Baba contacted five *masts* who had been located by Savak. One cried out "Babaji! Babaji" when he saw Baba, and when the mandali handed him some money as directed by Baba, he implored, "What shall I do with money? When will you come again, Babaji?" When Baba departed, the plaintive *mast* called out: "Come back, Babaji!"[202] Another contact lived so far out in the desert that Baba had to walk four miles to find him.

When Baba's work had been accomplished there, He instructed Elizabeth to drive on to Ismailpur. He contacted a hundred-year-old, very high, sixth-plane jamali *mast* called Gokhale Baba (literally, Cow Eye, a Brahmin name), whose seat was a small temple at the edge of town, where he was surrounded by a pack of four-legged devotees—his dogs. Whenever anyone brought him food, he would feed the dogs first and then eat whatever they had left—from the same dish. His two-legged disciples also gathered round and often sang for him. The old *mast* had once been married and his family still resided in Ismailpur, so Baba left some money for their care.*

* Baba contacted Gokhale Baba three more times, in June, July, and October of 1941. During their last meeting the *mast* called out: "*Bhagwan a gaye*!"—"God has come!"

Back in the Pink City Baba contacted a high jalali *mast* named Chuttan Shah, who lived in filth in a part of the city frequented by prostitutes, many of whom were his devotees. The mandali brought the *mast* back to the bungalow, but not without some effort, as Donkin wryly noted: "Chuttan Shah was persuaded to get into [Elizabeth's] car only after a great deal of coaxing, and the car, which had not previously given any trouble, then refused to start. A crowd of vaguely hostile idlers who had been watching the scene suggested that (*post hoc ergo propter hoc*), the car had gone wrong because the *mast* was being taken away. It seems, however, that there was only a little grit in the carburettor which was quickly removed, and so Chuttan Shah was brought to Baba for shaving, feeding and contact."[203]

Later that same afternoon the Buick veered off onto the sandy shoulder of one of the roads, and while the men dug it out Baba walked two miles alone in the blazing sun to meet with yet another *mast* whose name was not recorded. Elizabeth later called their twelve-and-a-half-hour journey a miracle. Baba was pleased with what He had accomplished and He bathed, clothed, and fed Chuttan Shah that evening, but the *mast* was so volatile that one of the men had to be with him at all times.

Baba also again met with Nanga Baba, the spiritual chargeman of Jaipur, whom He had contacted during the first tour, almost exactly two years before. Eruch located the *mast* at his abode near a mountaintop temple, where he was making little mud balls that he called "fireballs," which he said he was casting at cities with his forked stick.[204] At first Nanga Baba refused to accompany Eruch to see Baba, but he appeared in Jaipur a few days later on his own.

Baba spoke to the women about Kaka Baria (called "Fatty" in their presence) and his ability to appease the devotees of the *masts*: "He lectured [the Mohammedans] on Islam & they all quieted down. If they were Hindus he lectures on Krishna. When people don't let him bring *masts*, he lectures and makes a mess which they don't understand, & they say 'bravo.' There is no *mast* he won't bring & now I have full confidence in him."[205]

Meanwhile, Donkin had traveled to Hyderabad on or about January 24 for his first interview as a new recruit and was ordered to report to Poona for active duty on March 1. He recorded in his diary: "It looks as if I might go to the Near East: so we shall see," but he later was informed that he would be stationed in Poona, Bangalore, or Secunderabad (the Cantonment of Hyderabad).[206] Donkin returned to Jaipur on the twenty-seventh, the same day Baba returned from His *mast* tour. Baba said that He thought it unlikely that Donkin would have to part from the group before they reached Quetta.

Despite remaining in seclusion, Baba wished to work with the destitute in the city. Donkin deemed them the "down and outs," while Chanji called them the "poorest of the poor."[207] Baba assigned the task of gathering a group of fifty such people to two local men—an attorney and a journalist, both of whom had expressed interest in Baba's work. They were to bring the group to Baba's bungalow on Sunday, February 2, where He bathed their feet, gave them new clothes, and distributed sweets. Despite the fact that Baba was surrounded by many devoted followers in Jaipur, these two men were the only ones to see Him while He was there.

On Sunday, February 5, Baba embarked on a punishing two-week *mast* tour, accompanied by Vishnu, Chanji, and Gustadji. They traveled by rail to Delhi, where Baba again contacted the spiritual chargeman of the city, Hafizji Nabeena, who was lying naked on the steps of the Jumma Masjid.*

Baba conducted searches in a number of other cities, including Lucknow, where a riot broke out during His visit, and Calcutta, where there was also civil unrest. He was then joined by Adi K., who arrived in his Vauxhall automobile to drive Baba deep into South India, back to Ramnad to meet again with Pallukollah Baba. Although He traveled over six hundred miles round trip, Baba spent only ten minutes with

* Baba eventually met with Hafizji Nabeena a total of five times. The *mast* was so highly venerated that when he died on July, 6, 1941, five months after having Baba's last contact, the Bombay newspaper *Times of India* reported his passing. Hafizji Nabeena's two-star entry in *The Wayfarers* is a designated a "must-read."

the old Muslim saint, fasting until after the meeting.[208] The day of His meeting with Pallukollah Baba was also Baba's forty-seventh birthday, and He could not have wished for a more auspicious manner of celebration. He later explained to Adi: "The *mast* at Ramnad is the most important in India. He is the king of all *masts*, and it is a very significant stage of My contact with *masts* to be contacting him again. You are lucky to be with Me on My birthday [the following day], driving Me on this important errand."[209]

Baba returned to Jaipur via Delhi, where He and the men had a short layover before boarding their train. It was just enough time for them to see the political satire *The Great Dictator*, starring Charlie Chaplin. Afterward Baba declared: "It is the only film I would have liked to see seven times"—high praise indeed.[210*] In a letter to Adi K., whom Baba had sent back to Bangalore, Vishnu wrote: "Baba is very much pleased over Charlie's acting as Hitler and Colonel Buckshot [Billy Gilbert] as [German Field Marshal] Goering."[211] Baba even went so far as to lift the ban on going to the cinema for those who had been given that order so that they also could watch the movie as many times as they wished, and He planned to take the women to see it in a few weeks' time.

By the time Baba arrived back in Jaipur early in the morning of the nineteenth, He had traveled nearly five thousand miles in two weeks. Donkin called the hardships Baba and the men had faced "every disease of travel."[212] And while the women were pleased to witness Baba's satisfaction with His work, they also were deeply distressed by its sheer intensity and the toll it took on His health.

Baba's next order of business was to send out a circular declaring that His current seclusion would continue until April 15. In it He stated:

> The 15th of February 1941, in Ramnad (the day I saw that old saint), was the day I decided:

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* British comedian Charlie Chaplin wrote, directed, produced, scored, and starred in *The Great Dictator*, in which his character bore a remarkable resemblance to Adolf Hitler. The movie, which was released before the United States entered the war, was considered controversial for its denunciation of Nazi Germany and provocative parody of the Fuehrer.

> First, that on the 1st of August 1941, My speaking operation would begin (speaking to Myself);
>
> And Second, that My world manifestation would come to full expression on the 15th of February 1942.
>
> My present seclusion system will continue until April 15. Throughout the time, beginning from April 15, 1941 until February 15, 1942, My seclusion will be absolute. (From August 1 to February 15, I will literally not be seen by anyone, even My closest disciples.) During this period, I shall lead the world affairs to the climax imperative before My manifestation in 1942, which will make [mark] the beginning of the general adjustment of the world, and bring out the subsequent unfoldment of spiritual revival.[213]

Baba also announced: "I have decided to send Norina Matchabelli, Nadine Tolstoy, and Elizabeth Patterson to the U.S.A., and Margaret Craske and Irene Billo to Europe, to spread My message there."[214*] Baba later added that the five women would have to return to India— "if alive"—before He broke His silence.[215] Last of all He gave a complex set of instructions for a new fast to be undertaken by a select group of devotees from January 1 through February 15, 1942, the six weeks preceding His next birthday, as well as His manifestation, or at least that is what He implied in the circular.

Meanwhile, because He was in seclusion Baba did not offer any kind of public darshan during His halt in Jaipur, but to appease His lovers He arranged for Norina to present three lectures. As Chanji observed: "The presence of Baba with the cosmopolitan party accompanying Him, in the gay city of Jaipur, coupled with the fact of their strict aloofness from the outside world, roused a good deal of interest and curiosity amongst the populace."[216] It was this interest that inspired Baba to arrange for the lectures.

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* Only Norina, Nadine, and Elizabeth would leave India.

The first, which took place on January 18, was to a group of attorneys, and the second, on February 12, was for anyone who wished to attend; on February 18, Norina spoke to philosophy students at Nagpur University. There, Chanji concluded, "By her over-flowing heart, inspired mind and her fluid tongue, Princess Norina commanded a pin-drop silence amongst the audience throughout the 45-minute lecture."[217] Mani recorded that Norina's talks generated a "warm response."[218]

Shireenmai arrived at noon on February 19 to again add her colorful character to the rainbow of personalities in the women's ashram. Three weeks earlier, Baba had told the women that Shireenmai was especially important to His work: "It is more difficult than walking on fire or glass, this control of self…. It is the only real thing on this Path…. My mother helps me the most now. She gives ample opportunities to others to control themselves. You have won the greatest war when you win yourself. When she comes, you will have more opportunities of controlling yourselves. For example, I feel like murdering her sometimes, yet I embrace her lovingly. You [should] do the same."[219]

Baba continued to make new *mast* contacts until near the end of February, when He declared His work finished. Donkin observed that He became "very chatty and gay"—"chatty" being a droll choice of words when one remembers that Baba was silent.[220]

KIDNAPPED, BURIED, OR BOMBED

Even when Baba settled down for an extended stay, the complex formulations of plans to move on were never far from His mind. On Friday, January 24, just three weeks into His halt in Jaipur, Baba had reintroduced the subject of travel and His next destination. "We don't go [to] America. We will now move toward real trouble," Mani recorded in her diary. "We will go to Quetta—extreme border of India near Baluchistan, Persia & Russia. I will take you amidst real trouble. And I will have to sacrifice a big thing. From March, more killing, floods, earthquakes, fires, diseases—God, nature and man destructing."[221]

"Whoever thought we would go back to Meherabad soon, forget it," Baba further cautioned.

> We won't go before July. In fact, from 21 February, we will actively seek real trouble—to bury a couple of you in the desert to begin with! The Sindh desert is famous for taking its toll of motorists.
>
> In short, I will go out twice for two days. Then 15 days [I'll be] away, while you pack. On the 20th, I will come back, and on the 23rd, we leave for God knows where. We will have rested here for two months—then we will be rest-less.
>
> All are killing each other now. From March, there will be more killings, floods, earthquakes, fires and diseases. Nature killing them, and people killing each other. And God working all that out.
>
> Why? It's all so deep-rooted that unless it is drastic and worldwide, it can't be uprooted. It has to be knocked from every side and uprooted. Then real peace and happiness will be automatic and permanent. People then will only think of loving one another and be giving.
>
> …. The world is miserable.[222]

Baba also warned the women: "On the way to Quetta, we will bury two of you. From Quetta to Persia, we will bury another two, and from Persia to Russia two more—six in all. We must take a spade and shovel to dig your graves! I am not joking. We will go where God takes us, and God knows very well where I want to go!"[223]

Two days later Baba told them: "On the way to Quetta, we will go sightseeing and see new places. But in Quetta, there will be no time for sightseeing. There, I will be in seclusion and fast, and do all the things an Avatar has to do. Do your packing and keep your bags ready by the 20th of February. Then, we leave Jaipur for the place where all of

you might get kidnapped, buried or bombed by the Russians!"[224] But He tempered His disturbing comments, adding: "Quetta is full of orchards. It has an English climate, without the fog and dampness. It's now like Switzerland there, covered with snow."[225]

Baba reassigned Kitty the responsibility for food during the upcoming journey. "On our next tour, Kitty will be our God and keep us well fed. God will see to it, not the God-Man. We will have chapatis, omelettes, and *naan* [Persian bread]. You will get plenty of naan in Quetta. It is the essential food among the strong Baluchis there."[226] Baba also announced that they would continue their journey in the Blue Bus and ordered Rano to resume responsibility for packing the interior. Afterward He teased the women, naming the six who would die: Soonamasi, Kaku, Kharmen Masi, Banubai, Norina, and Elizabeth.

Baba cabled Pendu, as well as Katie's father Rusi, in Ahmednagar, ordering them to travel to Quetta to look for suitable lodgings. Katie's family had resided in Quetta before Baba called them to join Him, so Rusi was familiar with the city. There followed the usual exchange of cables about patently unsuitable bungalows, somewhat suitable bungalows, or perfect bungalows that, alas, turned out to be unavailable. On February 4, three weeks before Baba's departure from Jaipur, Pendu and Rusi cabled to say that they had located a property in Quetta, stating simply: "Bungalow Engaged Starting Today."[227] But two weeks later they cabled Baba again to inform Him that the bungalow was not available after all and that they had begun another search.

Baba and His entourage prepared to depart Jaipur on February 25. Yet again Baba had cut short His halt, from three to two months. Because Donkin had received orders to report for duty at the beginning of March, Baba recalled Eruch from Bangalore to drive the bus, while Elizabeth would continue to chauffeur Baba and the invisibles in the Buick. They were embarking on a new journey that would make previous adventures pale by comparison.

CHAPTER 10

Into the Land of Baluchi Brigands

Jaipur to Quetta and Home to Meherabad
February 25–July 17, 1941

Where His work was concerned,
no thought of safety was considered.
Besides, where is the question of safety
for One who has the whole universe
in the palm of His hand?

LORD MEHER[1]



The forbidding mountains and rocky terrain of Baluchistan (now called Boluchistan)



The Laxmi Narayan Temple, which the women visited on February 28

BREAKDOWNS, BLOWOUTS, AND BALUCHI DACOITS

AFTER A TWO-MONTH HALT IN RAJASTHAN for Baba's *mast* work, the third tour recommenced at 6:00 AM on Tuesday, February 25, 1941, when Baba and the women departed the Pink City for Agra, the City of Emperors, about 150 miles due east of Jaipur. Baba rode in the Buick with the invisibles—Mehera, Mani, Naja, and Khorshed, chauffeured as usual by Elizabeth. Gulmai now also rode in the Buick when she was part of the group. Baba sent Shireenmai ahead by rail accompanied by Chanji and Jalbhai. Gustadji, Baidul, Krishna, Venkoba Rao, and Chatti Baba boarded another train, traveling directly to Quetta to await Baba's arrival in two weeks. The remaining women squeezed into the bus, driven by Eruch. Nilu sat next to him in the cab and later recalled their departure:

> It was early morning and the night was still lingering. The sky was starry and the wind was cold. At such an early hour on the 25th February 1941, we left Jaipur for Agra by our old Chevrolet bus and Buik [*sic*] car. Our Chevrolet was old and squeaky in joints. She was very much shaken and rattled on her previous journeys. She was mercilessly loaded on top with thirty heavy bed-rolls and other things and additional luggage inside the body. Twenty-eight persons of different dimensions

> were squeezed onto the seats meant for fourteen. We had two spare wheels, but their tyres were worn out. Under such conditions did we leave for Agra.[2*]

The road was good and the bus made good time. Even so, by the time Baba's party reached Agra at noon, the women were hungry and grateful to settle into two houses, a Public Works Department bungalow for the Easterners, and a dak bungalow for the Westerners. Mani called the Easterner's accommodations "v. comfy & cheerful," with "multitudes of parrots on the garden trees."[3]

Baba ordered Eruch and Nilu to unpack the bedding rolls and other necessities from the roof of the bus, and they would continue to be responsible for this task throughout the remainder of the tour. They also had to service the bus—a job that was required more and more frequently as this new journey took its toll on the well-traveled vehicle. As soon as the roof was unloaded, Baba sent Nilu and Jalbhai to the market for provisions and Eruch to locate *masts*. Meanwhile, the women lunched on fried potatoes à la Kitty, accompanied by chutney and the requisite bread and butter sandwiches that she had prepared before departing Jaipur.

Late that afternoon Baba took the women to see the Taj Mahal, which they had visited in 1933, as well as during the first tour. While there, Baba wished to contact a *mastani* who was revered as a saint and whose seat was said to be located somewhere on the grounds. One of the gardeners directed Him to an abandoned stable. As Baba came near He could hear what sounded like the roaring of a tiger: it was coming from the *mastani*, who was pacing back and forth like a caged beast. As soon as she saw Baba she became quiet and gestured for Him to come near. She had a striking appearance in spite of her age and looked as if she might well be as strong as a tiger, and she had covered her muscular arms with bangles. Baba called her Mastani Mai and said that she was a very high *mastani*.

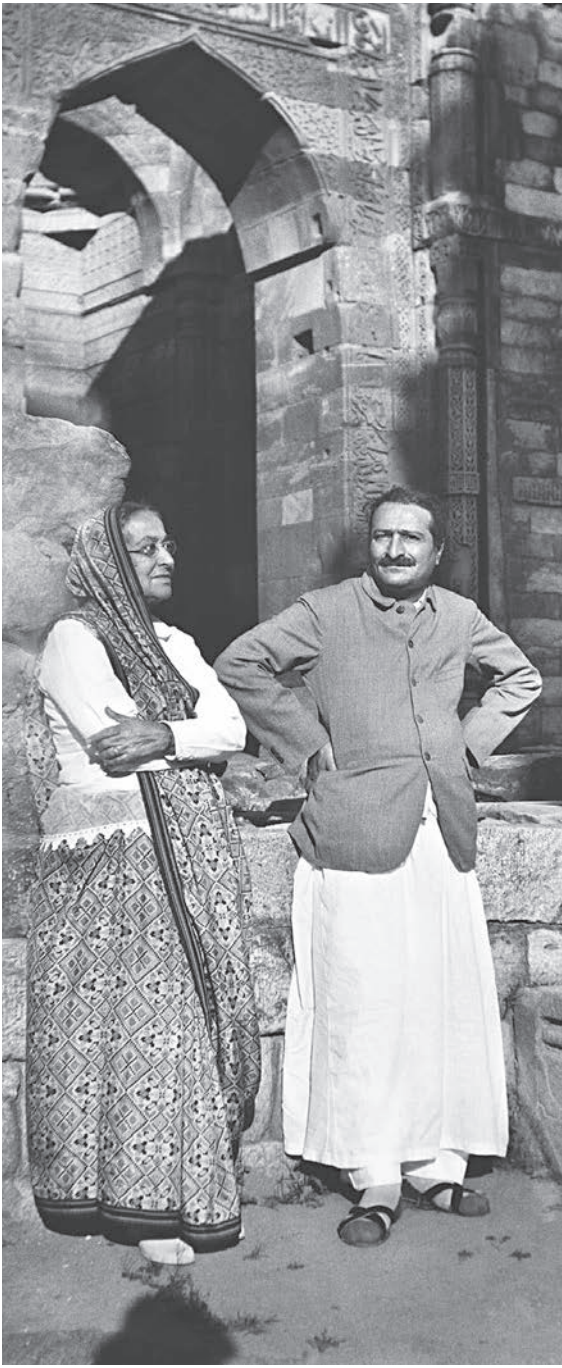
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* The "old" Chevrolet bus had only been on the road for twenty-six months.

Baba then took the women to see Agra Fort, which they also had visited during the first tour. They returned to their bungalows at 6:30 PM. There Baba bathed and clothed a *mast* brought to Him by Eruch.

Since they were going to spend two nights in Agra, the women enjoyed the luxury of not having to awaken the following morning for another predawn departure. They appreciated it all the more because they had been kept awake for most of the night by singing from a puja or celebration taking place nearby. After morning tea Baba took Margaret and Shireenmai out with the men to visit Fatehpur Sikri, the sixteenth-century "City of Victory" that He and the other women had visited two years previously. Everyone else stayed behind to rest, bathe, and prepare their next meal. That afternoon Chanji, Jalbhai, and Shireenmai left by rail for Delhi, Baba's next stop. Elizabeth drove them to the station in the Buick and then chauffeured Baba as He searched for more *masts*.

It was back to the spiritual grindstone when Baba woke the women at 3:30 the following morning, Thursday, February 27, to allow for ample time to reload the bus. It was so early that, as



Baba and Shireenmai, possibly at Agra, February 26, 1941

Nilu recalled, his and Eruch's "fingertips became benumbed by the cold" as they packed the roof by starlight. They left just before 6:00 AM for the 125-mile drive northwest to Delhi. "Very soon dawn was breaking," Nilu wrote, "and a patch of redness appeared in the East. Cool breezes were blowing, and later a beautiful sunrise cheered our hearts. The road was broad and smooth."[4]

Although the Buick and bus passed many slow-moving camel carts on their way, Mani called the roads "excellent all along" and they made good time. The villages were picturesque, and in the towns, "Those well-dressed and insistent beggar-girls were terribly amusing, making peculiar bubbling noises and gestures & Elizabeth driving us seasick jerking the car backwards and forwards to dodge them."[5]

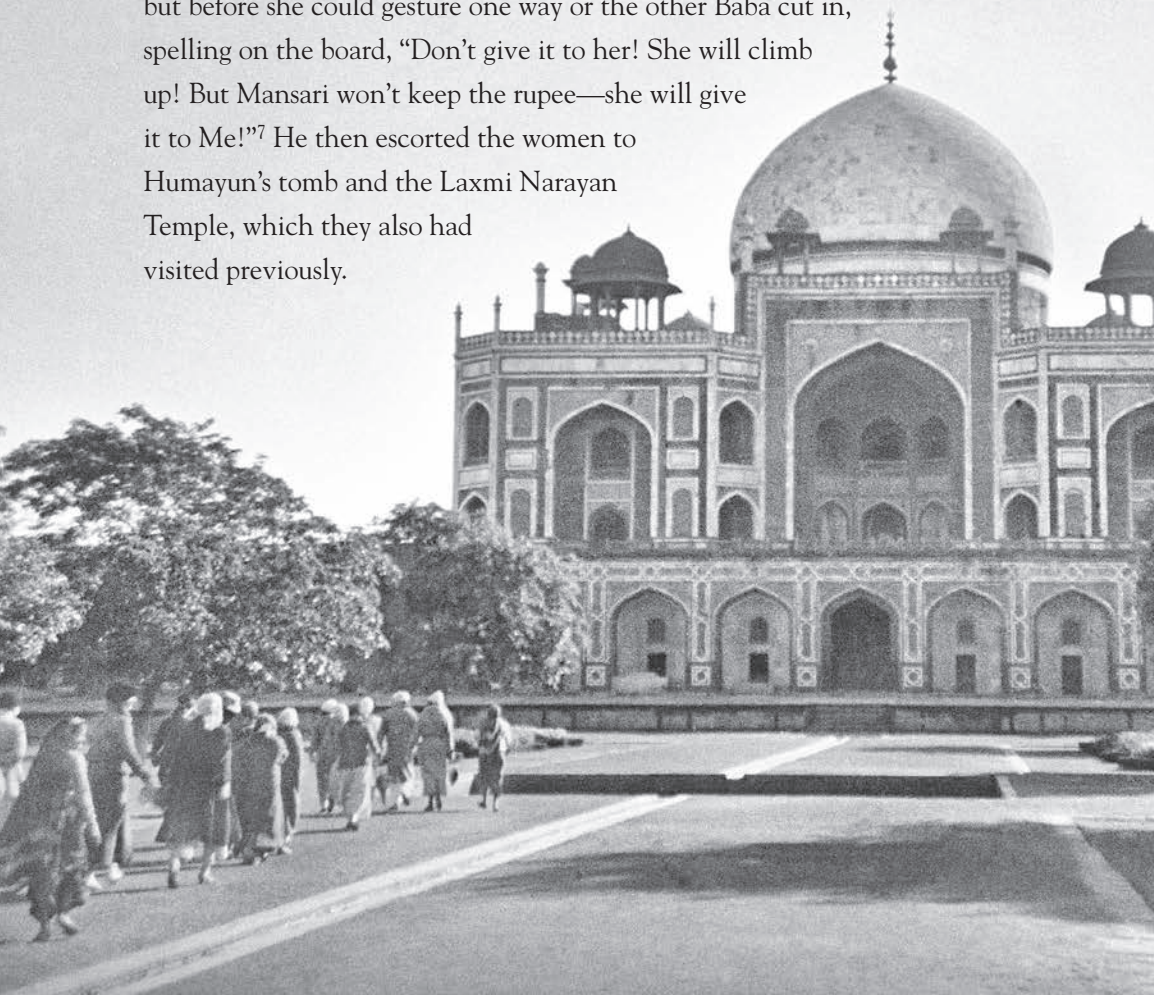
Despite the men's best efforts to keep the bus in good running order, its engine was showing unmistakable signs of wear. The vehicle's safe top speed under the best of circumstances was only about forty miles per hour, and Eruch soon lost sight of the Buick, which could easily manage sixty. Adding to his concerns were the worn tires that Baba resolutely refused to replace, and he had to stop three times for blowouts.

Elizabeth, Baba, and the invisibles continued on their way to Delhi, leaving the bus behind following the first mishap. Chanji had reserved rooms at the Regal Hotel, where they had stayed during the first tour. The Buick reached the Regal at 10:00 AM, but the bus was delayed for two and a half hours while Eruch and Nilu endeavored to mend the succession of burst tires. When the bus failed to appear by noon, Baba and Elizabeth backtracked in the Buick to see what had happened and they came upon Eruch repairing the third blowout. Eruch's complaints about the poor and dangerous condition of the tires fell on deaf ears, and Baba just ordered him to drive faster in future to keep up.

When the bus finally reached Delhi at 12:30 PM the remaining women checked into the hotel to bathe and rest while Baba set to work.

He sent Eruch to look for *masts*, leaving Nilu to service the bus alone. The only new *mast* that Eruch could locate was one whose seat was near the Jumma Masjid, and Baba went out that evening to make his contact. Baba also re-contacted Hafizji Nabeena, the spiritual chargeman of the city.

That evening Baba took the women for a driving tour of Old and New Delhi, with their "small trams—side streets [and] gardens," past the great mosque, and on to the cinema to see *The Great Dictato*r, which Mani called a "swell picture."[6] The following morning they visited the Qutub Minar, where Mansari had become separated from the group during their first visit. Baba asked Mani to recount the story to Margaret and Shireenmai, and afterward Shireenmai offered Mansari a rupee to climb back to the top. Mansari was still practicing silence, but before she could gesture one way or the other Baba cut in, spelling on the board, "Don't give it to her! She will climb up! But Mansari won't keep the rupee—she will give it to Me!"[7] He then escorted the women to Humayun's tomb and the Laxmi Narayan Temple, which they also had visited previously.



Baba and the women approaching Humayun's Tomb, on their earlier visit in 1939

Meanwhile, the time had come for Donkin to report for duty. On February 23 he had recorded in his diary: "I am at last called up, and go to Poona on March 1st, and so cannot drive the bus round to Quetta as planned…. On leaving, Baba told me He was 100% with me, and that I should not be harmed in the war, because I belonged to Him."[8]

The women spent the first day of March resting, packing, and preparing for another early wake-up call. On March 2, Chanji and Shireenmai returned to Bombay by rail, and everyone else was back on the road by 5:10 AM for the two-hundred-mile drive north to Jullundur, via Ambala, in the Himalayan foothills. It was another trying journey. They were just passing through a pastoral landscape of "beautiful green wheat fields," Nilu observed, stretching "for miles on both sides of the road [in the] mellow light of the morning sun" when "a sudden blowout and screeching of brakes brought us to a dead halt. With half an hour of acrobatics the wheel was replaced by a *stepney* [spare tire]. The Buick ripping along the road had to wait for us when Baba again goaded Eruch to drive faster."[9]

Before the Blue Bus departed Meherabad in December 1938, Mani quoted Baba as stating, "Regarding tyres—we will take 4 new ones with us."[10] These were in addition to the six with which the bus was equipped, making a total of ten. The spare that Eruch and Nilu used to replace this blowout was the last one, and from this point forward all they could do was attempt to repair the remaining six, which were running on their last treads. Farther on the bus had another blowout, as well as a puncture just before they reached Ambala, where they stopped for lunch at a dak bungalow. Both times Eruch and Nilu patched the tires as best they could. As soon as the bus got there, Baba sent Eruch out to locate *masts*, but none were to be found. He was not pleased.

When they departed Ambala at about 2:00 PM, Baba ordered Eruch to maintain a speed of forty-five miles per hour. Unsurprisingly, after traveling just twenty miles the bus had another flat (the

fourth that day). While Eruch and Nilu dealt with that, Baba directed Elizabeth to drive another eighty miles to the town of Sirinhabasi. There they made a four-mile detour at the Sirhind Railway Station to locate a *mast* whom Baba wished to contact, but because of delays with the bus the *mast* had already left and Baba was upset to have missed him. The Buick continued on to Ludhiana, where arrangements had been made for an afternoon tea break at 4:00 PM.

Meanwhile, Eruch and Nilu made a temporary repair to the tire and continued driving, passing the ancient city of Panipat. But before reaching Ludhiana, while Baba was still engaged in His unsuccessful search for the *mast*, they had another puncture. Eruch finally caught up with Baba at the dak bungalow that had been reserved for the group. While the women rested, Baba hired a tonga and took Eruch with Him to look for *masts*, contacting one whom, Mani recorded, "Baba touched," as well as a second one, whom He fed.[11] Nilu had been left behind to repair the damaged tire, and when Eruch returned to the bungalow with Baba, he was still hard at work.

The ladies found the bungalow quite nice and would have liked to stay for the night, but as they had neither an overnight reservation nor a permit, they had to continue fifty miles farther on to Jullundur as originally planned. Mani recorded that it was 7:30 PM before the exhausted men had successfully repaired the tire and they were back on the road. According to Chanji, however, Eruch and Nilu were not able to fix the tire themselves. Because the shops in Ludhiana were closed due to a strike, they could not have the tire professionally repaired and the bus had to proceed minus one tire. With only one wheel on one side of the rear axle where there should have been two, the top-heavy vehicle was unstable and Eruch could maneuver it only with great caution.

About thirty miles into their drive to Jullundur, Baba and the women reached the Sutlej (Red) River and made their first river crossing on a floating pontoon bridge, a kind with which Baba's

drivers would have become familiar by now.• When they reached the Jullundur dak bungalow at midnight they found that not only was it more expensive than the one in Ludhiana, but Mani called it "v. poor."[12] They were moving on in the morning, and it was already so late, so Baba ordered the bedding rolls to remain on the roof of the bus. The women were in for a short, miserable night and made themselves as comfortable as possible in chairs and on the floor. Some of them pulled down the curtains to sleep on, while others resigned themselves to "holey carpet."[13] "Baba & mandali [made] a little tent in the open. The night was very cold," Mani complained, "& we knew it."[14]

• India's pontoon (floating) bridges were constructed with long, narrow, teak boats placed side by side across a river from bank to bank, over which wooden planks were laid to form a surface on which to drive. Because the bridges were free-floating, they rose and fell according to the weight of the vehicles that were driven across and there were strictly enforced limits to the weight each bridge could safely bear. Guards stationed at either end of the bridge closely monitored the weight of approaching vehicles and directed them—one at a time—safely across to the opposite side. They also walked slowly across the bridges in front of vehicles to ensure that they maintained a safe speed.

Baba woke the women after fewer than five hours of sleep, and both vehicles left Jullundur at 5:30 AM for Lahore (named for Loh, one of the sons of Ram and Sita). It was a nearly ninety-mile journey, a far shorter distance than they had driven the previous day, but because of the missing tire the bus had to be driven even more slowly than usual. Eruch and Nilu begged Baba to allow them to purchase some new tires and inner tubes, but again He refused. Consequently, the bus had yet another puncture on a busy bridge. But the timing may have been no accident, because during the delay Baba contacted a "wonderful '*mast*' whom He touched," Mani observed. "As the car started to go, he bowed a little, raising his arm half way in a touching salute to Baba."[15]

Eruch and Nilu were by now running out of patience. The delays engendered by these emergency stops were not only an inconvenience to the men, they were a danger to the women, who had to get down from the bus to relieve it of weight when the men were working on the tires. They were exposed to passing traffic and pedestrians, and one imagines them forming a tight knot to protect themselves from curious gazes and prying eyes.

Nergiz recalled an incident that occurred at around this time, when "a wheel on the left side [of the bus] got stuck in a ditch in such a position that only a crane could have lifted the bus with all the weight it was carrying. Despite the fact that it was raining heavily and all the ladies would get completely drenched, Baba asked everyone to get off the bus. He then told Eruch to drive while He and Dr. Nilkanth [Nilu] pushed it. And with a push from Baba's hands, the wheel came out of the ditch."[16] Later in the morning they made a second river crossing, an easy one over the Beas, that passed without comment.

The Blue Bus suffered at least one more puncture before it crept into the city of Amritsar (Pool of the Nectar of Immortality), where Baba agreed to stop so that professional repairs could be made on the worst of the tires.* The layover cost Baba two hours of travel time but He used it well. He ordered Nilu to attend to the repairs while He once more commandeered Eruch to accompany Him in search of

* Baba either visited or passed through Amritsar in 1925, 1930, 1942 (twice), 1943 (three times), and 1946. All the visits in the 1940s were during *mast* tours.



The Blue Bus, on a pontoon river ferry. Donkin, the driver, is standing on the left.

masts. *The Wayfarers* records that He contacted one *mast* whose name was not recorded but who bore a striking resemblance to Chatti Baba. The *mast* was standing on a bridge, apparently waiting for Baba, who received what Donkin called "a prodigious grin" of recognition as He stepped from the Buick. His mujaver told Baba that the *mast* "had been expecting someone since morning, and had himself cleaned out his hut for his prospective visitor."*

From Amritsar they set out on a three-day drive, bound southwest for the town of Multan and the Indus. They stopped for a thirty-minute tea and bread-and-butter break at Amraoti Station and reached Lahore at 11:30 AM on Monday, March 3, where Baba's party checked into the Braganza Hotel for a two-night stay.†

Baba immediately sent Eruch out to look for *masts* and he quickly located a "very good *mastani*" whose seat was near the railway station.[17] "Over her head she wore a shawl that was quite stiff with mud and dust," Donkin recorded in *The Wayfarers*, "so ingrained with dirt that it looked almost like cardboard. One evening, Baba took Norina … to see her, and He lifted the shawl away from her face. She had a very dark countenance with strange, light-bluish eyes, and she looked up adoringly at Baba, put her hands together, and said, 'Allah.' She had a strange habit of burying any food given to her in the dust by her side, and she did this with a plate of food that Baba had brought for her."[18‡]

Meanwhile, the women very likely availed themselves of the opportunity to bathe properly for the first time since departing Delhi

* It is possible that this may have been the same *mast* that Mani mentioned earlier in her diary, whom Baba contacted on a bridge where they had to stop for a puncture, and that either Mani or Donkin might have mistaken the location of the contact. (*Blue Bus Tours Diary*, 122)

† In 1947, just six years after Baba and the women stayed there, the hotel was commandeered to serve as the headquarters for the Muslim League as its members worked with the British during Partition to define the new Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

‡ Baba either visited or passed through Lahore fifty-eight times, mostly in pursuit of *masts*. Between 1941 and 1946, He made fifty contacts in Lahore, ranging from "a tiny old *mast* of the jamali type, perhaps only four feet high, as thin as a rake, who is very fond of opium," to a few deemed to be adept, very high, or even majzoob-like. (*The Wayfarers*, 230–33 and 284–88)

three days earlier. Baba took them out for a tour of the city, driving through Arnakali (Pomegranate Blossom) bazaar and past a new mall with "colourful Punjabi women, cypress trees & stream of water all along—& the poor beggar child who fell into it," Mani wrote, adding, "The stream was our constant companion."[19] They stopped to stroll through Shah Jahan's seventeenth-century Shalimar Gardens before returning to their lodgings. The women spent the following day resting, while Baba made three more good *mast* contacts, the details of which went unrecorded.

Just before 8 AM on Wednesday, March 5, they began the hundred-mile drive to Montgomery. The bus was sporting one new tire with one new tube, Eruch and Nilu having at last made a successful case to Baba. But it still had the same old engine, which gave out after just forty miles on the road. Baba wished to contact a particular high *mast* in the city of Pakpattan (Holy Ferry Crossing), thirty miles farther on. This time He conscripted Nilu to accompany Him in the Buick, closing the curtain between the front and back seats to shield the invisibles. He left Eruch on his own to fix the engine and ordered him to drive on to Montgomery once the repair had been made. Back on the road, Eruch accelerated to seventy miles an hour at times in a desperate but doomed effort to catch up with the Buick.

The Buick reached Montgomery at 11:00 AM and Baba left for Pakpattan immediately after depositing the invisibles at the P.W.D. bungalow where they would spend the night. He was thus able to contact the unnamed high *mast* near the dargah of Perfect Master Baba Farid Shakkar Ganj.[20*] Meanwhile, the invisibles made themselves at home in the bungalow, where they were delighted to discover vases of fresh roses and sweet peas in all the bedrooms. When at last the bus arrived, Kitty began to prepare lunch. "Naja dropped the pepper with bag & all into the dal—ha! ha!" Mani wrote, but they fished out the bag and ate the

* The Perfect Master was also called Khwaja Fariduddin Masud Ganjshakar (1173–1266).

dal with "naan & greeneries."[21]• Baba went out again that evening to look for more *masts*, and this time, among His contacts was an eighteen-year-old *mastani* who had been living in a hovel since becoming God-intoxicated at the astonishing age of six.[22] *The Wayfarers* records that she was clothed in a ragged skirt and seated amidst a pile of rubbish and old bones on a river bank, yet "despite these external features of dirtiness, she had a lovely face with eyes so bright and fiery that they reminded those who saw her of the eyes of a tiger. [Baba] told each of the women … to go look at her. As each one bent down and looked at her under the awning, the *mastani* flung out one arm vigorously, and with flaming eyes exclaimed, "*Agay* [Forward]!"[23]

• Naan (Persian, bread) is a simple bread made with yeast, wheat flour, ghee, and water, yogurt, or milk. Although it is leavened it is sometimes called a flatbread because of its appearance. After rising, the dough is rolled or hand-stretched into a thin, elongated shape that is wider at one end than the other. Naan is baked at a very high temperature in a tandoor over a wood or charcoal fire built inside, rather than beneath the oven, so the bread is often charred on the bottom. Quetta naan, which the women enjoyed daily throughout their journey through Baluchistan, is stretched into a much longer shape than Indian naan. It can be torn and dipped into dal, used to pick up other food from a plate, rolled around a filling, or eaten as is, brushed with ghee and honey, as Baba encouraged the women to do.

By now Eruch and Nilu were thoroughly sick and tired of repairing punctures and blowouts, and later that night they implored Baba to allow them to purchase four more tires and tubes. His response: request denied.

Baba's party drove away from Montgomery at 6:00 AM on Thursday, March 6, bound for Multan. On the way out of town Baba pointed to His extraordinary contact from the previous evening, the "girl *mast* of the lovely eyes," Mani observed, "in rags, sitting under a poor shelter of cloth & tin near a big gutter."[24] Baba ordered Eruch to maintain a speed of forty-five miles an hour and to keep up with the Buick, but after having traveled exactly the same distance as the day before, they had to stop for yet another "tyre-explosion—abominable nuisance," Nilu complained.[25] Baba continued on to Multan in the Buick to make *mast* contacts, taking Nilu with Him while Eruch stayed behind to repair the blowout.

Baba was anxious to continue His *mast* work and ordered Elizabeth to drive faster and faster, until she was going seventy miles an hour at times on poor roads.[26] But they reached Multan safely at 11:00 AM, having averaged a much safer thirty-four miles per hour. Elizabeth had

to drive around the town several times before Baba and the invisibles realized that the tents that they had taken for a circus were part of their dak bungalow accommodations.

When the bus arrived later in the afternoon Baba sent out Eruch and Nilu, and although they found one *mast* and one *mastani*, no details were recorded. Baba also ordered Eruch to locate several boys and bring them to the bungalow. He brought back one whom Baba deemed suitable, but the boy's father would not allow him to go away with them. Another was soon found to take his place. The boy, whom Margaret deemed "fine looking," wanted to be a cinema operator, and he was willing to join the group when Baba offered to take him to Ahmednagar to be trained at Sarosh Talkies.[27] Here also Baba relented and permitted Eruch and Nilu to purchase two more tires and tubes.•

• The Blue Bus traveled approximately five hundred miles during its five-day drive from Delhi to Multan, suffering at least twelve punctures and flat tires along the way, or one about every forty miles. After Baba allowed the purchase of three new tires (one in Montgomery and two more in Multan), there were no more problems.

A pilgrim in Mandali Hall once asked Eruch why Baba was so reluctant to allow the men to purchase new tires for the bus and wondered if it was because there was no money. Eruch simply shrugged and observed, "We had two *millionaires* on board." (Story courtesy of Peter Nordeen)

Baba also took an opportunity to work on fashion-conscious Norina's ego. "As it happened," Margaret wrote,

> one of the only nice garments I managed to bring to India was a lavender blue woolen coat. The evening of our arrival [in Multan], Baba called us to tell us His plans for crossing the mountain pass leading to Quetta. As I came into the room, He looked at my coat and made signs of approval, then turned to Norina, whose clothes almost invariably came from the name dressmakers of the day—Worth, Chanel, etc.—and spelt on the board, "Why do you not dress as well as Margaret does?"
>
> There was quite a silence in the room. Everyone knew the difference between clothes off a peg and the other kind; in fact at intervals we had heard all this from Norina, who was shocked into silence by this subtle twisting of values.[28]

Najoo recalled how, "with Baba, things that would ordinarily bring pleasure sometimes turned out to be ways of doing penance. In Multan the women had to make do with camel's milk. It was extremely cold there, and the camel's milk made the tea stink, but the women all pinched their noses and drank it anyway, just to keep warm."[29]

The Blue Bus convoy drove off at seven the next morning, March 7. The damp, misty weather was unusual for the desert landscape through which they were driving, but the women were entertained along the way by roving camels—recollections of camel's milk tea notwithstanding—and men seated astride bullocks. About fifteen miles outside of Multan they were held up at a railroad crossing bridge, where the women contented themselves with watching the colorful scene playing itself out all around them: "bullock-carts with the drivers sleeping on the grain-sacks under the pelting rain [and] Punjabi men in the little hut sitting by a dying fire, smoking 'hookas' [*sic*] and talking."[30]

THRILL—THRILL—THRILLING!

Although they had no way of knowing, the students in Baba's traveling ashram were about to receive some of the most heart-stopping lessons in trust and surrender that Baba would impart during the tours. After a thirty-minute delay the Buick and bus were cleared to continue across the railway bridge, which was designed to accommodate no more than two to two-and-a-half tons of weight. The Blue Bus, with its cargo of women and luggage, was carrying at least double that. Further compounding the dire situation, the early morning mist had become driving rain.

Nilu recorded that the bridge "was so constructed that it had a sloping center with its sides spreading outwards. When our bus was passing over, it assumed a tilting position, and all wooden planks of the bridge were heaving and rattling in the air when the rear of the bus was crossing over them…. With a dead slow speed we crossed the bridge safely within 20 minutes."[31] This terrifying experience was but a harbinger of what was to come.

The roads improved on the far side of the crossing. Soon the sky began to clear, and Mani observed "patches of sunshine that made the fields of golden corn aflame with radiant glow," but at 9:00 AM, "E's car complained of an engine attack … soon put right." Afterward, however, Mani spotted a "Kutcha Road" sign warning them that they were leaving paved roads altogether, and it was at this point that the Blue Bus began the most perilous of all its journeys: "The [last] 8 miles of road across the Indus ~~were~~ 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 little boats) that groaned and rattled under our weight."[32] One of these bridges spanned the third tributary of the Indus that lay in their path, the Chenab. On the far side of the river they continued on to the town of Muzaffargarh (Muzaffar Fort). Their next stop would be Dehra (Encampment) Ghazi Kahn, about thirty-five miles to the west, but between the two towns flowed the mighty Indus.*

The last of the bridges they had to negotiate was also the longest—across the great river itself. It was a toll crossing, and the Buick continued onto the bridge after Elizabeth paid the charge. The bridge "seemed to be slightly swaying in the full stream," Mani recorded in her diary, "rattling its teeth in fury as the Buick crossed 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.'"[33] Riding next to Baba was the young boy from Multan. He had no knowledge of Baba, who was still in seclusion and traveling incognito, but when he heard the invisibles crying out, "Sadguru Meher Baba ki jai," he understood that Baba was someone of great spiritual significance.[34]

However, when Eruch stopped the bus to pay the toll, he was told that the five-ton vehicle would not be allowed to cross. Compounding the peril, the river was running in full spate due to unseasonable rains

* At 1,976 miles, the Indus is the longest river in Pakistan and one of the longest in Asia, and its valley is thought to be the "Cradle of Civilization." The Indus is thought to be a warrior river and it is the only one in India that is referred to as masculine.

that had been falling for days. But Baba had ordered the Blue Bus to follow the Buick across the bridge, so Eruch had no recourse other than to lie to the toll keeper in order to be cleared to proceed. Thinking quickly, he said that the bus was filled with officers' wives, insinuating that denying him permission to cross might lead to grave repercussions. The heavy overcoat that he was wearing resembled the kind an officer might wear and added to the gravity of his request. When Eruch was at last permitted to continue, the toll keeper walked ahead of the bus to keep its speed in check. Eruch was appalled to look in the side view mirror and see the wooden planks quite literally disintegrating in the bus's wake, splintering and splashing into the roiling water.

Many of the women retained vivid memories of the crossing, each one contributing a new detail. Katie recalled that the water beneath the bridge "was so turbulent that the river was like an ocean," and the women watched with trepidation as the Buick made its way across ahead of them, rising and falling with the waves. When Elizabeth reached the other side of the river Baba got out and gave Eruch a signal. "Eruch started the bus," Katie continued, "and we all let out such a prayer, I tell you, and we sang His arti as it was never sung before."[35]

As Rano remembered:

> Baba had gone ahead in Elizabeth's car, leaving Eruch in charge of the bus with instructions that the women were not to get down for any reason…. As we reached the toll-gate … the guard stopped us [and] Eruch argued that we must pass, as half our party had already proceeded. The guard grudgingly agreed, but only if the women would get down and walk.
>
> Eruch, under strict orders from Baba, could not yield to this demand. He argued so persistently and persuasively that the guard finally threw up his hands and agreed to lead us across by lantern.
>
> We started across the bridge. "C-r-r-rack, c-r-r-rack" went the planks as the wheels went over each section.

> The bridge swayed. It was raining and the Indus was flowing full only inches beneath the bridge. The bridge creaked and groaned and the bus rang with fervent shouts of "Meher Baba, ki jai!" Slowly we crossed to safety.[36]

Najoo recorded that her mother's memory was of Eruch signing a written statement that the crossing "was at their own risk and [they] were responsible for whatever happened…. Mummy said that she saw Baba turn in His seat [in the Buick] so that His gaze was on the Blue Bus the entire time they were crossing the bridge…. Eruch had never hesitated. He was absolutely lionhearted as he drove on, with 100 percent faith in Baba, who had told him to cross the river."[37]

Margaret also recalled the Buick crossed the bridge without incident, "but the bus… !"

> The [pontoon] boats rocked from side to side, and inside the bus all the older women got out their prayer beads, and the name of Baba rang through the bus. Halfway across, a rain and windstorm came down the river. Not too bad, but enough to add to the rocking of the bus. The worst of it was that we knew that if the bus rocked sideways into the water there was no hope for any of us. We could not get out. There were only small entrance doors which could not have been opened. It was the greatest relief to reach the other bank.[38*]

Eruch would later tell pilgrims in Mandali Hall that never before or after did he hear the women taking Baba's name with such passion, and that in spite of the cold, wet weather, everyone was perspiring from the stress of the harrowing experience.

But the conclusion of this exhilarating adventure was foregone. As Najoo observed: "Only Baba's *nazar* could take the Blue Bus across

* In point of fact, the women had access to only the door in the rear, as the wooden partition separating them from the cab prevented them from using the doors in the cab. As already mentioned, the side door that pilgrims now use to enter the bus was added later.

that bridge to safety…. When they finally arrived at the opposite shore, Baba told them their safe crossing was not a miracle, but rather the result of their faith in Him. Every person present, however—those in the Blue Bus, those in the car and even some onlookers—was convinced that the waters had beheld their creator's gaze and obeyed implicitly."[39] For the Avatar, it was all in a day's work.

WHEN WILL IT END?

Once both vehicles had made it safely across the Indus, Baba's party continued resolutely on its way through drenching rain that was both "very unusual" and "unexpected." They labored onward over unpaved roads slick with mud for a few more miles before reaching Dera Ghazi Khan, a cold, sleepy outpost in a region called Baluchistan.• Mani called it the "land of camouflage houses & big men."[40] Margaret recalled what a spectacle the Blue Bus made as Baba stopped both vehicles for petrol: "The villagers seemed to be amazed, and stood round staring and pressing their faces on the windows to get a look at the busload of women. I am sure that messages were sent straight off to their cousins, the brigands, about such strange travelers."[41]

• The 1901 *Census of India* called the Baluchi "essentially a robber and raider [tribe] (a trait which is common to all tribes)," and went on to observe that "the history of Baluchistan is nothing but a story of successful robberies, of lawless rapine and bloodshed, for which plunder and devastation were accounted a worthy and honorable return." Not much had changed between 1901 and 1941, when Baba and the women traveled through the region, and the bleak desert landscape and mountains remain largely uninhabited and forbidding to travelers. (*The Encyclopedia Britannica: A Dictionary of Arts, Science, and Literature*, Eleventh Edition, 1910–1911, Vols. 3 and 4, 294)

After the Buick had what Mani called "a long drink" at the petrol pump, Elizabeth and her passengers drove off through flooded streets in search of a post office where "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 sank knee-deep in water [and] in an instant we had a crowd of Baluchis with their happy little children; but all efforts with the car seemed hopeless, till one man came up & fetched his private car to tow us out."[42]

"No one at that time," Rano recalled, "traveled the Baluchistan roads because the native tribes were so fierce. Only the British troops

moved unmolested, and then only because the Viceroy paid a handsome royalty to the local chieftains."[43] For her own part, having grown up in Quetta, Katie knew that they had entered the land of "bandits and brigands, mind you, [and] we were all—except for Eruch, who was driving … a bus full of … women, which was really very dangerous … in those parts of the country."[44] But Baba headed out of town at noon, discounting the locals' warnings that there were so many dacoits along the way that not even British soldiers used this route unless absolutely necessary. Like repeated requests for new tires, the cautions were ignored.



No wonder it was so hard to find a post office. This was the one in Arangaon Village.

Half an hour later both vehicles were delayed when they found that the bridge they needed to cross—the seventh that day—had been washed out. They had to make a long detour on a badly rutted road where they came up on a deep crack along one side, "& geommetrically [*sic*] speaking," Mani observed with relief, "the bus 'just made it.'" She called the passing landscape "deserty & desolate (a sort of no man's land)," with many signs for "diversions" (detours) along the way.[45]

Twice more the Buick and bus became mired and had to stop. Even the women had to get out and help push to free them because the mountainous landscape was so uninhabited that there was no one to ask for help.[46] When they reached the town of Sakhi Sarwar (Companion of the Master of Joy and Delight) at 2:00 PM, they found that the dak bungalow in which they had planned to spend the night was already in use. Its unexpected occupants were military officers who were neither inclined nor obliged to vacate the premises, but they did recommend another bungalow at Khar, some thirty miles farther on.

The additional drive was an unplanned extension of an already trying day, and the Buick protested vehemently with what Mani deemed "nervous" attacks, but Elizabeth soldiered on with encouragement from Baba and the invisibles. They entered the ghats leading to Khar at 2:30 that afternoon, where the road became even more "narrow, torturous, now climbing the mountains, now descending the slopes with numerous narrow bends and breath-taking curves," Nilu recorded.[47] "At certain points," Mani recalled, "the bus just barely made the climbs. A loud and angry noise—UUMMM, UUMMM—was the sound of its effort, struggling up the hills and huge, steep valleys. When will it end, we were thinking?"[48]

The climb to 5,600 feet above sea level was too much for the bus and Eruch had to stop because of engine problems half an hour later. Baba handed out boiled eggs and bananas while everyone waited until the problem could be diagnosed, and "were we hungry!" Mani recorded.[49] They continued on after the repair had been made and found that although the roads were poor, they were relatively dry. Mani observed: "the view was lovely—mountain-formation[s] in endless ranges of subtle colours in many shades (like the tints in the 'mother-of-pearl')—sunshine at last—the flocks of sheep on the barren hills."[50] Mehera too remembered the drive: "The mountains were so awe-inspiring. The bus looked like a matchbox in

comparison. It was eerie also—no life, no trees, no people. It was very cold."[51*]

Baba's caravan reached the dak bungalow at Khar at 5:00 PM, having averaged barely ten miles an hour. They had been on the road for ten hours and had crossed six bridges[†]—two at great risk to life and limb. The Buick had gotten stuck at least three times, the bus at least twice, and both vehicles had developed engine trouble. Mani required five pages for her diary entry dated Friday, March 7, in order to adequately describe the day's thrilling events.

The desolate settlement of Khar (Fortress) was located about a mile from the British hill station of Fort Munro; otherwise there was no apparent human habitation nearby. Margaret recalled that the bus stopped "at a small building on the side of the road, which turned out to be a British Army outpost. A red-faced colonel came to look at the bus and, at the sight of its cargo of women, looked as if he might at any moment be seized with a fit of apoplexy."[52] Despite the British presence, the countryside was populated—albeit sparsely—by fierce local tribes not known for hospitality to outsiders, and the colonel warned Baba not to allow anyone in His party to wander outside the boundaries of the settlement. The views from Khar were "splendid, with a picture all around of the mountains & lake & blossom trees," and despite the fearsome reputation of the locals as highway robbers, their "towering figures & striking features" made a deep impression on Mani.[53]

"As our bus pulled up to the dak bungalow in Khar," Rano recalled, "we saw the caretaker—a huge, towering Baluchi … in his fanlike turban and a big mustache. We all stared as five-foot three-inch Kitty, undaunted and taking the situation as a matter of course, walked up to the giant and, in her Marathi (of which he could not understand a word), began explaining our requirements."[54] Mehera also recalled

* On one occasion, Mani recalled, "Baba turned around, and gesturing at the surrounding countryside, said to me, 'You see all these mountain ranges? Father walked all this on foot, looking for Me.' I'll never forget the expression on Baba's face as He said this." (*Mehera–Meher* 2:148)

† The seventh had been washed out.

the incident: "Baba told Kitty to take me up quickly to [the] bungalow. Mani was a little way behind us, so Kitty and I were the first to enter the house. In this very isolated place, a [Pashtun], very well-dressed and wearing a nicely ironed and folded snow white turban, came forward and spoke to Kitty in Urdu. I knew some Urdu, but I did not speak to men. Kitty spoke none at all, so she spoke to him in Marathi. So he was speaking Urdu to Kitty and she was speaking Marathi to him. And neither of them understood a single word that the other was saying!"[55]

That night's supper consisted of boiled dal with onions and naan, but the women were famished and grateful for its nourishing simplicity. Most of the dry provisions that were transported on the roof of the bus were soaked and had spoiled. The women's bedrolls were sodden as well and they had to spend their first night in Khar huddled in chairs or else stretched out on tabletops and the cold, drafty floor. Despite the discomfort they slept soundly after their grueling adventures.

The women awoke to frigid temperatures on the morning of the eighth, but the sun was bright, and as they were spending two more nights, they unrolled their bedding to dry outside. "The mountain air gave all of us huge appetites," Rano recalled, and they dined on more fresh, hot naan and dal.[56] Later they took a walk around the bungalow compound with Baba. But afterward, Margaret recalled,

> The weather changed to a kind of drizzle and there was nothing to occupy the time. I was sitting gloomily on the edge of a low wall when Baba came along and sat beside me. He sat there for a minute or two and then to my surprise, spelt out on His board, "If I asked you to, would you die for me?"
>
> This shook me up. After a pause I said, "I should like to answer that question truthfully and not just emotionally. Will you give me half an hour to settle it in my mind?"
>
> Baba went away and at the end of a half hour He returned, sat down and stretched out His hands questioningly. I was thankful to be able to say "yes" and to have no doubts in my mind.[57]

Baba was pleased with her response.

In the evening Baba and the women gathered around a wood fire that Kitty had made in the main room, talking of "convoys & Quetta and many amusing things ('icecream' [*sic*] & perfume, etc.)."[58] "We all sat near Baba," Rano later reminisced. "It is impossible for me to put into words the feeling of those quiet, intimate times."[59]

During His brief halt in Khar Baba dictated another circular with clarifications to the one He had sent out from Jaipur, addressing His on-going seclusion and plans to break His silence later in the year:

> I will speak on the 1st of August 1941 the Divine Word to Myself and in Myself, the word of the will of God that will begin the resurrection of the dead world and start the general adjustment of the world.
>
> This speaking-to-Myself operation will continue until the 15th of February 1942, the day that I will publicly and universally speak, the day that My world manifestation will come to full expression, the day that the six months self-speaking operation will bring out the unfoldment of the spiritual revival, and the day that the disciples of My circle will realize the Truth.
>
> My present seclusion will continue until April 15th, but from April 15, 1941, to February 15, 1942, My seclusion will be more absolute.[60]

Since Baba planned to move on the morning of the tenth, the women spent the ninth resting and packing. Because their food stores were running out and all they had left to eat were plain dal, onions, and naan, they had to move in order to restock their provisions.

Meanwhile, Baba's work necessitated another visit to the post office. When the postmaster learned of Baba's plans he expressed utter disbelief at His insistence on continuing upon such a dangerous route, warning Him that even military vehicles hired escorts to ensure safe

passage through the mountains. But continue He did, despite being told that a robbery had taken place the previous week: A band of dacoits had held up a party traveling without escort in a private automobile.

They left "precisely at 7:20," Mani recorded, on the morning of Monday, March 10.[61] Their destination was Loralai, more than 130 miles to the northwest, but a seemingly endless landscape of mountain passes through the most desolate part of their journey lay ahead. They made their first stop at Rakhni, just ten miles north of Khar. Margaret painted a bleak picture of life in an isolated village that "consisted of small huts, [in] which the women, with the lower part of their faces covered with a *yashmak*,* practically crawled to carry food to their menfolk, who were obviously their masters."[62]

There also, Mehera recalled, Baba arranged a special treat for the women:

> We stopped at some officers' building, maybe a customs house…. All the women were put in one room, while Baba and the mandali talked with the officials of the place.
>
> After some time, we were called to the verandah. There was going to be a horse race right in front on a semi-circular sort of track. It was being put on for us. The horses were both large and small, maybe the officers' horses.
>
> All stood in a row. The signal was given. It was lovely to see—everyone was excited. Baba gave a prize of five rupees to the winner. Those people were very happy Baba took so much interest in them.[63]

Margaret's memory of the morning was that as soon as Baba arrived, the villagers "crowded round Him telling Him that they would

* A yashmak is a veil or scarf wrapped around the face, worn by Muslim women in public.

like to show Him their treasured racehorses. Baba, absolutely shining with loving interest and acting as if it were the one thing He wished to do, had them bring the animals out and, urged on by His vitality and interest, they raced the horses along a length of railed-off ground. They were a pathetic set of animals, but the happiness that Baba gave these poor people, and the way they were drawn to Him was a kind of miracle. It was a contact with Divine Love. They felt it but did not know it."[64*]

Whether Baba arranged or simply encouraged the race, the result was the same, because unbeknownst to the women He had taken the Khar postmaster's concerns to heart. He needed the assistance of the Baluchi men who were in the race to serve as escorts, and they happily volunteered to conduct the Blue Bus and Buick through the hazardous passes that lay ahead. As Margaret further recalled, no sooner had Baba completed making arrangements with the Baluchi guards, "across the plain from out of the entrance to the mountain pass tore a car which turned out to be the British mail. On the roof, cross-legged, sat a soldier in a white tunic with a red fez on his head and with the longest rifle I had ever seen stretched across his knees. It turned out that on its return journey we were to join this outfit, and it would escort us through the danger zone."[65]

At 11:30 AM, Baba boarded the bus with the women, who now included Elizabeth and the invisibles. The boy from Multan rode in the front seat of the bus next to Eruch and either Nilu or Jalbhai drove the Buick. As a result of Baba's negotiations, Mani recorded in her diary, "We left Rakhni with a splendid-looking guard in each [vehicle] and a convoy following us—a bus load 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."[66]

* Although Margaret might have found them pathetic, the small but powerful Baluchi horses continue to be bred for their tolerance of heat and drought. They are highly sought after and traded during the traditional animal *mela*s (markets) that still take place throughout rural India and Pakistan.

"A small open jeep followed our bus. Men with rifles stood in it, a rear-guard in case any dacoits came," Mehera recalled. "We all felt very important with a military escort, but strange and excited wondering what might happen." "Baba pointed out places all along the way where terrible things had recently happened," Margaret observed, adding in her characteristically droll voice: "Really enjoying Himself."[67] The gripping experience was like a scene out of a silent Hollywood Western, reminding her of "something from the early cinema days, when incidents like this were usually accompanied by a gallop on the piano. I could almost hear it."[68]

"Cecil B. DeMille could not have staged anything more authentic for these 20th-century badlands," Rano later wrote. "The bus moved away from the village onto the open road behind Elizabeth's car, but the car was soon far ahead of us. In an effort to catch up, Eruch quickly lost the Baluchi rear-guard. Much to the disappointment of the more adventurous passengers on the Blue Bus, there was no holdup, nor was there even a sign of bandits."[69]

Mani recorded that "in the cold, refreshing morning air, our appetites grew as huge as the mountains surrounding us," but not wishing to take any chances, Baba and the women lunched inside the bus at noon, without stopping.[70] They feasted on hardboiled eggs and green onions, with "those delicious naans" which Rano had packed that morning and Kitty and Katie somehow managed to locate in the moving vehicle.[71] They couldn't have butter, which would have made too much of a mess. "So here we were, all hungry and chewing on dry naan and onions. We got blisters in our mouths from the hot onions and dry things," Mehera lamented.[72]

The two vehicles were now protected only by the men riding on the running boards and roof of the bus; as usual, both vehicles were beset with problems. The Buick became stuck in sand and water twice, and the bus had a similar crisis. "We got out [of the bus] to lighten the weight," Margaret recalled. "Our guard stood with his rifle ready

to fire at the first sign of any attackers. After a time some planks were brought and the bus was released to start again on its journey."[73] Then the wheels of the bus sank into a deep layer of pebbles lining the bottom of a dry riverbed. No matter how hard Eruch and Nilu dug, the pebbles kept sliding back into place around the tires. It took them twenty minutes to free the vehicle.

The bus and Buick continued on to Loralai, but it was nearly 7:00 PM before they reached the town. They were so late that the British sergeant who met them on arrival said that he had been considering sending out a search party. As soon as everyone had piled off the bus and into their dak bungalow Baba magically produced a packet of Frear's cream biscuits, which contained exactly enough cookies for the women to have one each, and the unexpected treat constituted their dinner. Kitty kindly offered to prepare the very last of their meager provisions for the boy from Multan, but as a devout Muslim in the midst of what he took to be a horde of infidels, he steadfastly refused, rudely declaring: "I will not be fed by whitefaced pigs."[74]

The women settled down for what Mani called a "jolly cold" night.[75] Nergiz recalled that Baba told the women to spread newspapers out on the floor upon which to sleep. "It was freezing cold that night," Najoo wrote, "and because Adi was still in poor health, Mummy wrapped him up in her woolen coat. Taking Baba's sweet name, she lay down on her newspaper covering the floor and fell fast asleep with just a cardigan sweater covering her. Mummy said that because Baba—her Sustainer on these long trips through India, Ceylon and what is now Pakistan—had His nazar on her, she did not even catch a cold."[76]

The two vehicles departed Loralai, unescorted, at 7:45 the following morning, but first Baba had to deal with the boy from Multan, whose suitability for His work was at last revealed: The boy's father was the leader of a notoriously brutal band of brigands. None of the other dacoits would have dared to attack Baba's party with such an important

passenger on prominent display in the front seats of the Buick or the bus. Baba sent the ungrateful boy packing, arranging for him to return home, as his services were no longer required.

Baba's party then set out for the remaining 134-mile drive to Quetta. Their first stop was at noon, at the Hindu Bagh military station, where they had to register their names with the guard. Afterward they purchased petrol from a man wearing what looked to Mani like red and white striped pajamas. The outpost was the second of three military barriers through which they had to pass on their way to the city. They reached the third barrier at 2:30 PM and took the opportunity to stop for a late lunch. "Although the sun looked v. hot," Mani observed, "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 [and bus] and ate inside."[77] The Blue Bus reached Quetta at 5:00 PM on Tuesday, March 11, after a grueling six-day journey from Lahore.*

QUETTA, THE FRUIT GARDEN OF PAKISTAN

Katie had spent the first thirteen years of her life in Quetta with her parents, Rusi and Khorshed, and elder sister Goher, and returning to the city might have felt like something of a homecoming had it not changed so dramatically since she had last been there.† "We did not recognize Quetta at all," Mehera recalled. "Since my first visit there with Baba in 1924, it had suffered a severe earthquake, and so many of the houses had been demolished and rebuilt. In those early days some of the buildings had been very smart, but the new buildings were made

* The 580-mile route between Lahore and Quetta can now be driven in twelve hours.

† During the latter part of the nineteenth century Quetta served as a British arsenal that grew into the largest British cantonment in India. The thriving city was known as "Little Paris," and Baba visited or passed through Quetta in 1923 and 1925 on the "Quetta Tours," in 1929 during the "All-India Tour," as well as in 1931, 1941–43, and 1946.

from mud bricks and were very simple. However, they were safer to be in during an earthquake, and were very comfortable and homey."[78]• "Quetta," Mani observed upon arrival, "with most of its beauty wiped off by the earthquake. Surrounded by mountains that are covered in snow in the winter [and] although the cold of Quetta was intense (in spite of winter having passed), it was delightfully nice & refreshing."[79]

Baba had called Rusi from Ahmednagar to look for suitable lodgings. The secluded bungalow that he found belonged to a man named Abdul Wahid and was located outside of the city, across the road from the Persian Consulate and a beautiful orchard.*Although a bit small for the group, it was surrounded by a walled compound that afforded additional security. Inside the wall was a courtyard with an outdoor well. Once settled, the women found themselves "utterly aloof from the outside world."[80]

Two days after His arrival, Baba sent Eruch back to Bangalore to join his mother and siblings, who had returned there in January, but He kept Baidul, Gustadji, Nilu, and Vishnu, as well as Krishna and Venkoba Rao, with Him to assist in His *mast* work.† Joining the women for one week was Katie's Aunt Pilamai, who arrived from Karachi eager to be of service to Baba while He was relatively close by.

Mani recalled that Quetta "was very cold—very, very cold," adding that it made the women think longingly of the blistering summers at Meherabad: "We promised ourselves we would never again

• Baba had visited Katie's family at their home in Quetta in June 1923, when Katie was three, again the following June, and also in May 1931 when she was eleven—old enough to begin to understand who He was. In between, however, in November 1926, Baba said to Katie's father: "What is left for you to do in Quetta now? Leave it permanently!" Rusi thought Baba was joking. During His 1931 visit Baba again warned Rusi to move his family: "It is not good for you to stay here any longer. The time has come." Again Rusi demurred, and as a consequence he suffered a severe business setback. The following year tremors shook Quetta and Rusi knew it was time to leave. *(Lord Meher*, 428, 1117, 1221-24)

The May 31, 1935, Baluchistan earthquake leveled the city. A report from the 1st Battalion of the Queen's Royal Regiment later stated: "[The city] was razed to the ground. Corpses were lying everywhere in the hot sun and every available vehicle in Quetta was being used for the transportation of injured." Initial reports indicated that twenty thousand people were buried beneath the rubble; later estimates range from thirty to sixty thousand deaths. By then Rusi and his family were safely settled in Ahmednagar. ("1st Queen's at Quetta—The Earthquake," Queen's Royal Surreys, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1935_Baluchistan_earthquake)

* This is not the Muslim master Abdul Wahid mentioned on page 387 in *Lord Meher.*

† Baidul, Gustadji, Vishnu, Krishna, and Venkoba Rao had traveled by rail from Delhi with Chatti Baba.

complain of Ahmednagar summers, no matter how hot … and so it was difficult in Quetta. We didn't have regular bathrooms for washing and bathing, nor for every little need…. So outside in the grounds there was a tap of water—a faucet, as you'd call it, so we would go each one with our toothbrushes and open the tap … and we'd brush our teeth … very fast, very fast, and we'd go."[81]

There were no servants, so the women had to draw their own water from the courtyard well, and on these frigid mornings they had to break the ice that formed overnight if they left a bucket of water outside. In any case, the well water was contaminated with sulfur and smelled like rotten eggs. "Kippy drank water from the well [and] was passing gas all the time. If you were sleeping on the floor," Irene recalled, "she came and sat near you. A terrible smell!"[82] Mani's only comment about the effects of the sulfurous water on the women's digestion was that "we had such fun!"[83]

Vishnu resumed his duties as bazaarwala, but because of the freezing weather, very little fresh food was available. Therefore Baba eased His restrictions and allowed the women to have naan with honey and butter at any time of day instead of only at breakfast because the cold temperatures made them so much hungrier than usual. "How delicious it was!" Mehera later recalled.[84]

Baba also continued to work on the women in a myriad of ways. One day when Kitty was bringing up water from the well, He hit her on the back as He passed by. Having become accustomed to His unfathomable ways, she made no response. Later, when Baba asked her about it, she said that she had given it no thought whatsoever. Baba then explained: "There are times when the work on other planes does not go quite right, and sometimes I pass on part of the burden by striking someone. One is extremely fortunate if I do occasionally throw My mood on them."[85]

Even when Baba was not openly working on the women, their day-to-day interactions provided ample challenge. Mani once described Irene as loquacious, and no doubt it was this quality that Baba had in

mind when He placed Irene on silence. Baba had ordered Irene, Nadine, and Mansari not to use what is now called American Sign Language unless absolutely necessary, so each one developed her own unique set of signs with which she attempted to communicate with the other women, sometimes to greatly annoying effect. One evening when she was outside at the well brushing her teeth, Mani later recalled,

> there on the verandah, I saw Mehera, and she was listening to Irene and … as she [Irene] herself said … she was inclined to talk and even without talking she could go on, and Mehera was standing before her … and I thought … I would slip away. I was sure Mehera hadn't seen me, but she had! So just as I was slipping around the corner she turned around and very sweetly called out to me, "Oh Mani!"
>
> "Yes, Mehera!"
>
> "Come. Come over. You know you can understand Irene's gestures so much better than I."
>
> "Yes, Mehera, that's true."
>
> "Well, could you interpret for me?"
>
> So I'm standing there…. Irene was telling Mehera all about her family tree … and before I knew it Mehera had disappeared and I was hearing about the Uncle Fredericks and the Aunt Georginas and all, and … when she came to the end, she said, "Please tell Mehera everything I told you," and I said, "Yes, Irene, yes, I will," and I thought "Yes, Irene, you just don't know what I'm going to tell her."
>
> So I go back to the room … we always shared a room, Mehera and myself. And we didn't have beds. We had to bring our own mattresses…. She was lying down … with a little thin blanket right up to here, a lantern by her side … reading a *Journal*…. I go up to the door, and I stand, that's all—no words was I saying. And she looked up at me … over the *Journal*, just with two eyes, but in

> those eyes, I could see, you know, the twinkle was there, and she didn't know how serious I was, what was going to happen, and we both burst out laughing![86]

Baba had no plans for excursions with the women during their halt in Quetta, but it was so cold that they were content to remain indoors. Even inside, however, they slept in their clothes because it was too uncomfortable to undress. Irene recalled that they looked like gypsies bundled in their layers of clothing. Kharmen Masi had neglected to bring enough warm clothes, so Baba asked someone to lend her a shawl, but not before teasing, "Kharmen Masi is so fat, she won't feel the cold."[87]

Baba continued His work with Chatti Baba, who was utterly unaffected by the icy cold, regardless of being clad in only his thin cotton dhoti, and he happily resumed his regimen of hundred-bucket ice-water baths. When Krishna wondered aloud how the *mast* could bear the cold water, Chatti Baba looked to Baba and declared: "This fire is burning me."[88] Nilu, who found the *mast's* behavior inscrutable under the best of circumstances, could not help but be astonished at Chatti Baba's immunity to the bitter temperatures when Nilu spent the nights huddled in his overcoat beneath four woolen blankets and was still cold.

When Baba escorted the women to see Chatti Baba, Norina exclaimed: "Oh my God! How can he do that?"[89] "It was so cold," Mehera recalled, "yet he had practically nothing on. He was sitting in the middle of some water on the ground. We were feeling so chilled." "You are feeling cold," Baba observed, "but look at him. You all wear socks and bundle up, but just see in what condition he lives."[90] He told the women that Chatti Baba's "warmth was coming from within."[91]

What Mani recalled most vividly from this incident was the happiness that exuded from Chatti Baba as well as from Baba Himself: "I tell you, when we say for ourselves that so and so is happy, how does one express it? You laugh, you do something, but I tell you it's the most washed-out, diluted aspect of happiness. Even the height of happiness

that you see on a human face is just a washed-out version of [what] you see on a *mast*, or when you see Baba enjoy something, you know, the simplest, littlest thing even maybe to please us, to share with us. So you see, [with] Chatti Baba, really, that happiness came through and he was so happy by himself in himself."[92]

The beloved *mast* also made a deep and lasting impression upon Elizabeth, who later wrote: "More than the physical warmth that he apparently was able to generate was his aspect of being always happy, contented [to have] nothing, and inwardly being alive to completeness. No wonder that a poet has said, 'the fragrance of saints is like the perfume of flowers.' It does affect us even when we don't realize from where it comes. How much more it is with a Perfect Master that even the saints are drawn to them like bees to honey."[93]

On March 15 Baba again began to speak of sending Norina, Elizabeth, and Nadine to the United States to establish a center for Him. He also talked about sending Margaret and Irene back to Europe to spread His message there. He reassured all five, however obliquely, by declaring: "You must come back from the West, if alive, before I speak. Spirituality says, 'Life and body are zero.' So if we 'spiritualists' do not die, then the materialists will never die. Yet, they are dying for their country. You all must die—or you ought to have died long ago. So you all must really die soon. Margaret and Irene will have plenty of opportunities to die, if they do as I instruct—but with no hesitation. So be ready to go—and be prepared to stay!"[94] At last Margaret understood why Baba had asked her if she would be willing to die for Him.

But Baba immediately lightened the mood by spelling out on the alphabet board:

Today is nice and sunny,
And it may sound very funny,
But I hear from men who are sober
That from April to October
It will be sweeter here than honey.[95]

On March 22 Chanji arrived in Quetta, having traveled seven hundred miles to bring to Baba's attention another onslaught of venomous articles, published recently in Gujarati newspapers and most likely originating with Col. Irani and Bangalore attorney Sampige Vekantapathaiya. Baba told Chanji not to bother responding to the articles, and instead ordered him to leave for Karachi that same day, six hundred miles farther on by rail, to make advance arrangements for a series of lectures that Baba wanted to have presented there. He was accompanied by Pilamai.

Meanwhile, the only *masts* the men identified refused to be brought to Baba, who therefore had to go out to bathe, clothe, and feed them where they lived. On the twenty-fifth Baidul located a *mast* called Nadir Ali Shah (literally Zenith Exalted King), the spiritual chargeman of Quetta, but he became agitated and refused to come, crying out, "I won't go! … My boat will be drowned in that Ocean."[96] Baidul took Baba to see the *mast*, who lived in a smoke-filled tent in which he kept a dhuni burning all the time. Although Baba did not contact the *mast* face to face, He had Elizabeth drive in a circle around his abode. *The Wayfarers* called it a "remote contact."[97] Later, Baba told the women about Nadir Ali Shah, and even after forty years Rano could recall the *mast's* anguished plea.

Baba frequently sent Elizabeth out to run errands, and He sent her to the railway station by herself on the morning of March 26. There, Mehera recalled, "a peculiar sight caught her attention. A very handsome dog, black in colour with thick fur, kept jumping on each train as it stopped at the station. The dog would rush into the compartments only to be pulled off by the train attendants. Again and again the same scene was enacted as a new train halted in the station."[98] The dog was a starving Newfoundland water spaniel, which, the Station Master explained, had belonged to a British officer who had been forced to abandon him when his regiment moved on. The miserable animal had been trying to board every train that came through the station to find his master.

"Elizabeth's love for animals could not take this," Margaret observed. "She enticed him into the car, took him to the place where we were living with Baba, and was given permission to [keep] him and take him back to Meherabad."[99]

Baba named the dog Foundy, a play on both his provenance—a foundling—and breed—Newfoundland. It later occurred to Elizabeth that Baba's so-called errand simply may have been a ploy for her to find the dog.* A few days later Baba even mentioned him in a lengthy discourse about the war:

> They do not know that no one will win, and no one will be defeated. It will be quite a new, third result. England will suffer very much. India will be a mess. Russia holds the key. It is very clever. Russia sides with all and none—and thus appears so aloof.
>
> Roosevelt's speech means war. America will play a very great part in the battle of humanity in the future.
>
> In one second, thousands died in the Quetta earthquake. So we have many seconds to work in. If, all of a sudden, Hitler dies, Mussolini is killed, Stalin has heart failure, & their followers are fed up—then it may not take so much time….
>
> At least, troops going abroad leave marvelous dogs behind, like Foundy.[100]

Baba also spoke of Donkin's deployment with the Indian Medical Service, assuring all that the young doctor would not have to leave India during his tour of duty.

* Foundy was brought to Meherabad in the Blue Bus, and he traveled to America with Elizabeth. When she later returned to India Baba gave her permission to bring him along, and she had a special carrier made for him by Abercrombie and Fitch. But Foundy was old and blind and was becoming too frail to travel, so Elizabeth returned home alone. One day not too long after, Baba stopped to pet Foundy, and the old dog breathed his last just a few minutes later.

Quetta is called "the Fruit Garden of Pakistan," and although spring was meant to be on its way and the trees in the orchard across from the compound were covered with hopeful buds, the weather remained unseasonably cold. "We rarely went places in the right season," Kitty recalled: "Quetta, for instance, is perfect in the late spring or summer, with fruits and flowers in abundance. We went in the early spring, and froze along with the frost-nipped blossoms…. We just weren't meant to be comfortable."[101]

Later on the day that Elizabeth had returned from the station with Foundy, temperatures plummeted and Quetta was hit with a horrific spring hailstorm that began that afternoon and continued through the night.* "People on the road got pelted, and some were injured," Mehera recalled. "They ran for cover with their hands on top of their heads, running & shouting…. Over the compound wall, you could see the trees of the orchard opposite the house, with apricot and cherry blossoms. The hailstorm destroyed all the blossoms."[102] The golf-ball–sized hailstones killed cattle pasturing in the fields.

"There hadn't been such a storm for 40 years," Mani recorded. "It brought the plaster down from the ceiling in many places…. We could see snow on the mountaintops."[103] The storm produced so much ice that the women were not able to open the doors of their bungalow to go outside to the well the morning after.

The great storm elicited a dire proclamation from Chatti Baba, upon whom the unprecedented cold had no effect whatsoever. From *The Wayfarers*: "On the night following the storm, Chatti Baba sat stripped to the waist [while sitting] on the hail, from four until seven in the morning. That same day he said: 'There will be so great a calamity in the worlds that no one can imagine it; even brother will kill brother,

* "Western Disturbance" is the meteorological term for erratic pre-monsoon and winter weather, which originates west of the Indian subcontinent in the Mediterranean or Atlantic. When moisture carried by westerly winds in the upper atmosphere comes into contact with the Himalayas, the result is rain, hail, or snow, depending on the season. This phenomenon (although one could call it Maya) was the source of the unseasonable weather that plagued Baba and His entourage from Multan onwards.

and there will be great tribulation. Then all the world will think of my big brother [Baba]; at that time, He will draw aside the veil, and all will pay obeisance to Him.'"[104]

Baba exercised His sense of humor by asking the women if they would like to go out for a drive, but the Buick had no working heater and the women politely turned down His mischievous offer. Mani added a brief notation at the end of her description of the storm: "Elizabeth gave me driving lessons" in the unheated Buick, presumably after the hailstones, which lingered in the flower beds for days, had melted.[105] Mani displayed a remarkable gift for driving in reverse but driving forward was another matter. "One day," Elizabeth chided, "you're going to have to go forward."[106]

The day before, as if in anticipation of the hailstorm to come, Baba had begun to speak of leaving Quetta as soon as possible, because the women were suffering so much from the cold. He had already sent Chanji to look for accommodations in Karachi, more than four hundred miles due south on the coast of the Arabian Sea, where the climate was more temperate. Baba asked Pilamai to assist Chanji in his search. Vishnu had written to Pilamai earlier, explaining, "The climate of Quetta is finding [*sic*] unsuitable for the members [of His party], some are falling ill, and Baba wants to be in strict seclusion from 15th April to February, that means for 10 months," adding that the bungalow "must be a pretty big one, having good many rooms, bathroom & latrines to accommodate our large party, with watertaps [*sic*], [and] electricity will be highly appreciated."[107] He directed her to find a smaller house nearby for the men as well.

Baba had also directed Chanji to make reservations for the group to travel by rail as far as Karachi. On March 28 Vishnu sent Chanji a note on Baba's behalf, chastising him for not having made suitable arrangements and telling him to purchase two third-class compartments, one containing thirty-five seats for thirty "ladies," in order not to have to share with other passengers and jeopardize the women's seclusion,

as well as fifteen seats for the twelve "gents." [108] He further instructed Chanji to reserve a tourist car on the N.W. (Northwestern) Railway.

On March 29 Vishnu sent Pilamai a complex list of preparations to be made in advance of Baba's arrival:

> Keep in the ladies [*sic*] bungalow:–
>
> 2 sacks charcoal
>
> 5 *maunds* [traditional Asian measure of weight] fire wood
>
> 1 tin of 4 gallons, kerosine [*sic*] oil
>
> ½ sack potatoes
>
> ½ sack onions
>
> 2 *matlas* [ceramic storage containers]
>
> Also keep the same quantity of the same things in the Mandali quarters. That means purchase double of the above. I will pay the bill on arrival there.
>
> Also we require daily (combined for ladies and mandali)
>
> 5 pounds table butter unsalted
>
> 10 seers milk in the morning and
>
> 10 seers in the evening (no question of fixed time)
>
> Engage one Mehetrani [toilet sweeper] if there are no flush toilets in the bungalow, she must attend the work daily from exact 6 in the morning until 6 in the evening (she will have 3 hours recess in the noon).
>
> Also engage one woman who can prepare chapatis of wheat daily. This about three hours work; therefore if she likes she could will be kept for the rest of time to do other household work.
>
> But for the first ¾ days till the ladies adjust & settle themselves in the bungalow, we require daily
>
> 30 bread (loaf of about one pound)
>
> So keep or ask supplier to bring the following things on the day we arrive
>
> 30 Bread (and for ¾ days more)
>
> 5 Pounds Table butter unsalted (then daily)
>
> 10 seers milk (in the evening only)
>
> (From next day milk both times 10 seers)

> As table butter is cheap at Quetta, we use it for cooking purposes also, instead of ghee. You know that ladies do NOT like readymade ghee of bazar [*sic*], we purchase butter (curds-butter is cheaper than table butter because table butter is prepared of raw cream and hence dearer than curdsbutter[)] and prepare ghee (out of curdsbutter) for cooking purposes, please order one pound more (i.e. six pounds daily), otherwise purchase one tin full (four-gallons tin) of curdsbutter and prepare ghee for our use.[109]

At the end of this daunting list, Vishnu added in closing, "Please get all these arrangements done by anyone you like; but do not exert yourself. Baba may not like."[110] He intended no irony, and in any case, these were the kinds of instructions that he was accustomed to dealing with all the time. The list also affords some insight into the sheer volume of food that was consumed by Baba's entourage, without even taking into account dry provisions such as pulses and rice, or perishables like eggs, fruits, and vegetables.

Meanwhile, there followed yet another exchange of letters and cables in which Chanji, failing to locate the perfect bungalow in Karachi, offered alternative solutions that Baba systematically rejected. On March 30 Vishnu sent Chanji a five-page letter reiterating Baba's orders and passing on His displeasure: "Baba says why is plain English ~~is~~ NOT understood by you? After long telegrams & letters were sent, saying that Baba does not want temporary bungalow and not shifting from one bungalow to another & asking for an ideal bungalow renting even up to 500, for His impending fast & seclusion and later for His complete solitude, you finally wire & ask if tolerable bungalows would do etc [*sic*] etc. Now listen carefully…. Now that the ideal bungalow cannot be found, give up the bungalow hunt."[111]

But on the following page, after telling Chanji to stop searching, Vishnu clarified what Baba meant by an "ideal" bungalow:

Ideal bungalow means:
Bungalow having at least 8 rooms
" " at least 4 bathrooms and tolerably secluded with
" " at least 3 flush latrines big compound
" " tapwater [*sic*] and electric lights
nice kitchen & garage

It was rather a lot to ask. Vishnu concluded: "If ideal bungalow cannot be found in 3 / 4 days, Baba will decide where to go…. (Dictated by Baba)."[112]

On March 31 Vishnu sent additional instructions to Pilamai, which included a preference for buffalo over cow's milk. In a separate, undated letter he requested that she arrange for a catered meal to be delivered the day after the group arrived: "Shri Baba asks you, NOT to prepare food for the party the day we arrive; but arrange to have food for the party (40 persons) for the next day only at 2 in the [after]noon exactly. The food should be Dhansak, one vegetable with masala and one vegetable boiled only. Baba also orders you NOT to cook yourself, but to arrange from outside. Butter should be used, you know, for cooking. The bill will be paid by us."[113]

On April 1, 1941, in the midst of all the upheaval associated with a shift in location, Baba embarked on a fruit fast—a fitting choice in the fruit basket city. Just a week previously, Vishnu had sent a handwritten note to Pilamai with a special request: "Shri Baba wants you to send fruits for Him from Karachi to arrive here on 30th. *Mosambis* [sweet limes], *Narangis* [variously called mandarins, tangerines, or Clementines], *Papais* [papayas], *Darams* [pomegranates] and any other kind of fruits except apples. Send them only once in a big basket and NOT every day. With love & blessings from Baba. Yours, Vishnu."[114] Vishnu asked Pilamai specifically not to send apples, not because Baba did not like them, but rather because they were the one fruit that could be purchased in the Quetta bazaar. So it was that

Pilamai, in her yearning to be of service, provided the sustenance that Baba would require during His partial fast.

Despite the abundance of fruit it was a curious choice for Baba to make. "Baba's not that fond of fruit," Mani recalled,

> but it's not in our flavors. I only acquired the taste, yes, mangos, bananas, Indian fruit, yes, but not fruit as such. So in Quetta we had this lovely fruit—peaches, pears, apples—all those English fruits, as we call it. Peaches were so big like that [gestures] with fuzz—almost frosted fuzz, you know, and so Baba would just have one peach in the afternoon. But we were so hungry, with the cold winter climate there, and we would get those Quetta naan—that bread, that long bread, and it was delicious … with butter. So we would be eating that, and Baba would eat this fruit, which He was not so fond of, anyway, but Mehera would warm [the fruit] over a coal stove, because it was so frosted from the cold, probably delicious if you had it off a plate of curry and rice, but that was Baba's food.[115]

Mehera baked Baba's apples over the fire, seasoning them with butter, sugar, and cloves. Not surprisingly, she found it difficult to take pleasure in the hot buttered naan and honey that Baba insisted the women eat to help ward off the cold while He subsisted on fruit. Baba planned to continue with this partial fast for two weeks, after which He would take three cups of tea per day for another week, and only water for the remaining seven days.

In the meantime, many of the women became sick, due in equal measure to the cold weather, their restricted diet, and overcrowding in the bungalow. Kitty recalled how one such illness transpired around this time:

> One afternoon in Quetta Baba sent for us all in a very pressing manner and spelled out on His board, "Tomorrow morning I need one of you to fall ill with jaundice or

> pneumonia. Take it bravely, for it is My work." Everyone left. We acknowledged the strange decree and tried to smile. The next morning Norina rushed out of her cabin [*sic*] to Baba, presenting herself with a yellow face. He smiled and said, "Don't worry." And He gave her directions on what to do to get well. It was His typical way to bring to an acute turning point some good or bad situation, personal or universal. These turnovers with Baba always meant a spiritual push in some dimension.[116]

Kitty, who always displayed such wisdom and insight when explaining Baba's work, went on to observe:

> Rarely did such things go wrong if we remembered to obey Baba. It was to avoid such dangers that Baba, knowing all, sought to protect us. He would often repeat, "Take care of your health and do not run unnecessary risks, because if one of you were to get ill or die, it would interfere with My work and give Me much extra trouble." If, in spite of obeying, one still had to suffer, then one knew it had to be. All was in Baba's hands. Obedience was the greatest help we could give Baba, because there was always purpose and reason behind anything and everything Baba asked us to do. But note carefully that it was an obedience which was the outcome of love.[117]

SHEEP IN A WAGON, THIRD-CLASS RAIL

On April 1, the same day that He embarked upon His fast, Baba told the women that He had changed His mind about staying in Karachi and that they would continue on to Dehradun instead. Pilamai was disheartened to learn that He had decided not to visit Karachi, but Baba assuaged her disappointment by cabling her that same day:

"START ALONE IMMEDIATELY FOR QUETTA FOR ONE DAY."[118] Vishnu sought to alleviate some of Chanji's frustration by writing: "This is just from me (NOT from B.) … Baba does NOT want to go to Karachi is my impression and therefore He created this confusion through you."[119]

Baba ordered Pappa and Savak, who were at Meherabad, to travel to Dehradun to look for suitable accommodations there. On April 4 Pappa sent Him a three-page cable consisting of one comprehensively informative, fifty-eight-word run-on message:

> one large bungalow with seven rooms attached baths watertaps [*sic*] two halls partly furnished good outhouses lights fitted but compound bricked walls only on three sides back side about fifty feet Tatta fencing necessary rest one hundred necessary nominal taxation extra nearest this another small bungalow for mandali rent seventy wire definite instructions if agreeable owner demands full amount.[120]

Baba ordered the women to prepare to travel by third-class rail as far as Lahore, and He had Chanji arrange to transport the Buick and the Blue Bus there by rail as well. Chanji replied in a handwritten note to Baba: "Tourist car arranged. Railway requested attach by Quetta Mail 7th and Lahore Mail," going on to assure Him that this was the "best arrangement" he was able to negotiate with the Station Master in Quetta.[121] There would be no need for a return journey in the bus through the desolate desert and mountain landscape through which they had come: Baba's work there had been accomplished.

Baba and the women departed Quetta six days later, on Monday, April 7, following a twenty-six-day visit. Their fifty-two-hour train route carried them past Sukkor to Lahore, about 750 miles. They would deboard at Lahore and complete the journey in the Blue Bus, retracing part of their previous route. Because the Buick and the bus had already been sent ahead by rail the women were taken to the train station in the

back of a truck. Mani recorded that they felt they were being transported like "sheep!" in a wagon.[122] The women had to negotiate a long walk down the crowded station platform to reach their bogie, past a regiment of Gurkhas (Nepali soldiers) waiting for another train.

Chanji had booked comfortable tourist-class compartments that came equipped with a kitchen, although the women would not have to prepare their own food. The evening air was cold, and from their windows the women could see the Sulaiman Mountains rising all around them in the moonlight. By midnight, however, they had entered the desert and spent a hot, uncomfortable night aboard the train. The women awoke the following morning just as they were passing through Jacobabad, and the train stopped soon after at Rukh, where they had tea in the station restaurant. Soon after, they crossed the suspension bridge over the Indus, no doubt grateful to be peering down at the river from a safe distance instead of being pitched about in the Blue Bus as Eruch negotiated its precarious pontoon bridge. From Sukkor they veered northeast, continuing on through the day and a second uncomfortable night.

Baba's party reached Lahore at 10:00 AM on Wednesday the ninth, where they were met by Pappa and Nilu, who were waiting with the Buick and the bus. Some of the remaining men stayed on the train with Chatti Baba to proceed directly to Dehradun. Baba directed the women into the bus and then got into the Buick (no mention is made of who drove or rode with Him). He immediately continued on, stopping in Amritsar to contact a *mast*.

When the bus set out from Amritsar, Pappa Jessawala was behind the wheel for the first time, and the 110-mile drive that lay ahead was an altogether trying journey for everyone. First, the bus broke down and they had to stop off in Ludhiana for repairs. Then they drove into a sandstorm. The women had to close their windows and Pappa could barely see to keep the vehicle on the road. Adding to their difficulties, he was a poor driver, so bad, in fact, that Nilu declared him to be "the worst I ever met."[123] Mani distracted herself by making a list of "amusing names of

stations" they passed: "Rakim Yar Khan, Reti, Adam Yahan, Raja Ram, etc."[124] Everyone breathed a sigh of relief when it started to rain, settling the dust and clearing the air. They stopped to eat lunch before going on to Khanna, where they caught up with Baba (who had made two more *mast* contacts) to spend the night in a dak bungalow. By the time they had tea at 6:00 PM, the temperature had begun to drop, and the women fell asleep at nine, cooled by a refreshing breeze.

The Buick and the Blue Bus set out together the following morning for the remaining 140-mile drive southeast to Dehradun; they arrived at 10:00 AM on Thursday, April 10. Mani called Dehradun "the land of gardens & birds," where, she wrote, they would spend "a mild summer there in the lovely bungalow from where we could see the first ranges of the Himalayas & the lights of Mussoorie on the mountain tops."[125] Located at No. 1 Laxmi Road, the bungalow was called Sushila Bhawan (Well-disposed Building). It was a clean and comfortable government resthouse surrounded by a lovely garden and a grove of guava trees. Chanji rented a second house for the men and for Baba's *mast* work.

Initially Baba stayed in the women's bungalow, immediately reentering seclusion and continuing His fruit fast until the fifteenth, after which He subsisted on tea only. A week later He switched to water and moved into the men's bungalow. This fast took a heavier toll on Baba's health than any previous one. By April 26 He was so weak that it was all He could manage to nod a weary "yes" or "no" when Norina and Deshmukh met with Him about their lecture tour.

Chanji, who also was present at the meeting, wrote: "It was indeed painful to see Him stand all this strain lovingly and suffer. Although His eyes and facial expression were both beaming with luster, and bespoke the joy that He inwardly felt in this suffering, His physique seemed unable to stand the strain and had become so weak that He had to make an effort for a nod in affirmation or negation of questions of importance asked for His advice. Yet the way He recouped later so surprisingly was baffling to the medical attendant."[126]

Chanji was somewhat more forthcoming in a letter he composed to Minoo Kharas* on April 30, employing language that *Journal* readers might have found troubling: "This time, [Baba] means 'business' and although surprises as such have lost all charm for us—His seasoned disciples—we would still be surprised for anything that may happen, any day, any moment, and would have a rude shock of our life. The trend of events world over and the strain of work (internal) which Baba is having on Himself portend drastic events in the near future. It seems everything has to be shaken from its very foundation, especially things that have stuck deep down and rigidly for years. And it will need no small shock to root it all out of its foundation. Let us wait and watch."[127]

Vishnu expressed his concerns in a letter to Adi K. at Bangalore: "Baba must be working internally very hard. I've never seen Him looking so run-down or feeling so weak during any of His previous fasts. This time His weakness must be due to His working very hard under the tremendous pressure of the war."• Now that Donkin had been called to duty with the Indian Medical Service, Nilu served as Baba's sole physician. "He never took notice of my constant and repeated protests against His hard work. I had to examine His heart very frequently every day, and owing to His tendency to high blood pressure, His heart could not stand even a slight strain during His fast. But He never listened to me, and went on with His work, keeping me worrying all the time."[128]

• By 1941, Germany's campaign to disrupt the shipping of food and weapons to Great Britain was crippling British defenses and endangering its civilian population. On April 4, 1941, half the ships in a US convoy were lost to German U-boats. In response, the United States occupied Greenland on April 10 with the intention of establishing naval and air bases there. April 10 also marked the first attack by a US naval destroyer on a U-boat, in retaliation for the sinking of a Dutch freighter, and the following day the US Navy initiated sea patrols in the North Atlantic. But six weeks later, on May 21, the US merchant ship SS *Robin Moor* was attacked and sunk by a U-boat, prompting President Roosevelt to declare an "unlimited national emergency," inching the United States closer to an all-out engagement—all according to Meher Baba's Divine plan.

Despite His frail state of health, Baba continued to bathe and feed Chatti Baba every day and to work with the *masts* brought to Him by Baidul as well as by Pappa, who had been invited to stay on in Dehradun.

* Minochar Nusserwan Kharas was from a Zoroastrian family in Karachi. Minoo, as he was called, first met Baba in Nasik in early 1932, where he was training to be a police officer. Minoo became a lifelong devotee.

On April 27 He also began visiting with the women for two hours a day, and His deteriorating condition was not lost on them. "He looks awfully tired and weak," Mani lamented, observing later that He appeared "drawn."[129] Baba broke His twenty-eight-day fast at midnight on April 28 by taking a cup of orange juice, but not until after feeding a teaspoonful to each of the mandali. He continued to limit His intake to juice until the thirtieth, when He drank some spinach soup. From that time forward He began to take rice and dal. Mehera converted a small dressing room in the women's bungalow into a kitchen where she could prepare Baba's food on her Primus stove, assisted by Mani or Khorshed. From a window in the room Mehera could see Baba walking toward her, so she was always ready to serve Him. Because He was such an early riser He lunched at around 10:30 AM. It was His only meal of the day.

Here in Dehradun the women's diet became even more limited. In the intense heat of summer it was difficult for Vishnu to procure fresh vegetables, and they were reduced to eating dried peas at one meal. Rano was so disgusted that she put some of the peas in a medicine bottle that she labeled "For stomachache, take one tablet every hour."[130] She gave the bottle to Vishnu the next day, just as he was leaving for the bazaar. Vishnu took Rano's ironic wit in good humor, and Baba found the exchange so hilarious that He ordered Vishnu to follow her instructions without fail, twenty-four hours a day, including all through the night until all the pea-pills were gone. While the women continued their restricted dietary regimen, Baba conferred special status upon Kippy and granted her a daily repast of fresh fried liver—her favorite treat. "We were strict vegetarians then," Mehera later lamented. "Our mouths were watering, but it was given to the dog."[131]

On April 29 an English woman named Irene Conybeare arrived in Dehradun, hoping to meet Meher Baba for the first time. She had traveled from London soon after learning of Him from Will Backett. And although Margaret called her both foolish and impulsive, one might more kindly describe her as an extraordinarily determined

woman, because despite the complications and dangers of civilian travel during a time of war, she managed to arrange passage to India.

Irene did not, however, request permission to see Baba. Just before her departure she cabled Him to say that she was on her way, and she missed His reply instructing her not to come. When her ship was diverted around the Cape of Good Hope she cabled from Cape Town to let Him know that her date of arrival had changed, but again she set sail before His reply arrived, again telling her not to come. When she reached India, she wrote to Adi Sr. about Baba's whereabouts, and despite the fact that Baba was in seclusion, Adi informed her that Baba was in Dehradun. Baba refused to see her, but He did send Norina and Elizabeth to meet with her and to invite her to join them when they sailed for America, to assist them in spreading His message in the West—all expenses paid. She was astonished, but when she expressed her confusion, Norina gently explained: "Baba does not have to see you to know you."[132] Irene stayed on in Dehradun with local devotees and after some thought consented to travel with Norina and Elizabeth, although she never saw Baba while there.

On May 3, just five days after ending His fast, and despite His frail condition, Baba embarked on a week-long *mast* tour, traveling to Ajmer, where the men had rented a bungalow for His work. There He again met with Chacha, the extraordinary seventh-plane majzoob whom He had contacted during the first tour, as well as with Lakhan Shah and Qabristanwala.

Interspersed with His work, Baba continued to meet with the women in Mehera's room, talking with them and offering discourses. One afternoon He asked them if they would obey Him. It was a question He asked frequently, and their reply was always the same—of course they would. "I want you to shut your eyes," He said. "Close your eyes tightly. No peeking; no looking through. Count to 20. When you reach 20, open your eyes." They did as asked. When Mani had counted out loud to 20, the women opened their eyes to see that Baba had stolen

silently out of the room. "Oh, He cheated! He tricked us!" they all cried out in good humored exasperation.[133]

On another occasion the women were treated to an impromptu qawaali session by three young brothers and their father who had come to the gate calling out: "Do you want music? Do you want songs?" Mehera asked Mani to ask Baba if they could invite the musicians in. In spite of His seclusion He had them come in and sit down directly in front of Him, where they sang a heartbreaking bhajan about Mirabai's love for Krishna. The song ended with the question, "Why are you not in front of me today?" "Pay them well," Baba told the women. "They played beautifully."[134] Mehera later observed that although Krishna had been sitting there all the time, the boys and their father could not see Him.

At 4:00 AM on May 12, Baba and the women left for a day-trip to Rishikesh.* He and the invisibles rode with the other women in the bus, while Baidul, Kaka, and Vishnu traveled in the Buick. It was a mere thirty-five-mile drive, but over "the bumpiest roads we've been across," Mani noted, through fog and drizzle—still yet more unusual weather for the time of year.[135] They reached Rishikesh two hours later—averaging little more than fifteen miles per hour.

One of the Westerners was so awestruck by the breathtaking beauty of the town and its incomparable spiritual atmosphere that she later wrote:

> Situated at the foot of the world's highest mountains—the Himalayas—and on the banks of the sacred river Ganges (a dip into which is considered as the washing off of all the life's sins), "Rishikesh" is truly the "abode of Rishis," as its name implies. Here we see all around *tapasvis* and *sanyasins*, *sadhus*, and *sants*, sitting in different

* Rishikesh (Lord of the Senses, an attribute of Vishnu) is one of the seven holy cities of Hindu India. Lord Ram came to Rishikesh to do penance for killing Demon King Ravana, and his younger brother Lakshmana crossed the Ganges on a rope bridge where the village of Lakshman Jhula (Lakshman's Bridge) is located just upstream.

> postures in huts and on the banks of the river, observing various penances and deeply absorbed in concentration; some standing in knee-deep waters of the river and some with only their heads above water absorbed in trance for hours at a stretch, with ecstatic expressions which bespeak the inner joy they feel in self-absorption….
>
> The gorgeous beauty of the Himalayas stretching miles across, the Ganges winding her way in beautiful curves, it is also a beuaty [*sic*] spot where even dame nature plays in glee…. In spite of the ingress and egress of thousands of pilgrims from all parts of India every day, the tranquility of the place is alluring, as if to lull one and all to sleep in eternal peace, undisturbed by the dust and din of the world outside….
>
> A Holy Shrine of Life, where men consecrate their lives to God, is Rishikesh, which I never shall forget! …. How thankful we ourselves were to have been brought to see the holiest of all the places of worship in India.[136]

Mani had a particular gift for capturing the spiritual vibrancy of the places that Baba and the women visited, bringing them to life on the pages of her diary, and her descriptions of Rishikesh are nearly two-pages long:

> We walked through the narrow bazar [*sic*] 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 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 & little bundles, climbing up to Badri (18,000 feet high—after 10,000 ft. there is permanent snow, & a lake up there. It takes a pilgrim 3 months to go and come) where Krishna left His body. At 9 we went to see Lakshman Zula [*sic*] & the river where Baba washed His feet.[137*]

"We were impressed with the suffering that [the sadhus] seemed to be undergoing," Rano later wrote, "and Katie remarked on it to Baba. Baba looked at her and said, 'You all don't know what you've been through.'"[138]

Mighty Mother Ganges dominates the landscape as she rushes down out of the Himalayan foothills, winding through the center of Lakshman Jhula, widening and subsiding as she flows on through Rishikesh, so it is not surprising that she should feature in all of the women's memories of their visit. "The river carried log rafts guided by wild-looking men who stood on these contraptions, using large paddles to steer them to towns and villages far down the river to the sea," Margaret later recalled. "The place was surrounded by hills which held the intense heat immobile, making it perhaps the hottest place we were ever in."[139] Baba had rented a dak bungalow overlooking the Ganges so the women could eat lunch and rest during the height of the midday heat. There they were entertained by a group of female pilgrims who sang songs about the life of Krishna.

They left Rishikesh at 7:00 PM for an uncomfortable return journey, which took even longer than it had in the morning. On the way back to Dehradun Baba declared: "You have seen spiritual India with a Spiritual Master! Of all the places of pilgrimage in India, I like Rishikesh the best, because, from all parts of India, visitors and

* Baba and the women fed the fish from the Lakshman Jhula bridge. In 1924, He and the men accompanying him made a "perilous" crossing of the original rope bridge that spanned the river, which was destroyed later that same year by floods. It was replaced by an iron suspension structure, built between 1927 and 1930, the first of its kind in the world for pedestrians. Baba crossed the bridge again many times during subsequent *mast* tours and the New Life. (*Lord Meher*, 546, 2280, 2286)

even residents are here only for meditating on God and renouncing the world. It is one of the best places in the world for its spiritual atmosphere."[140]•

• By 1962 Meher Baba had tempered His opinion of Rishikesh, calling it

> a regular bazaar of saints, mahatmas and sadhus with their "disciples" of various sects and factions, who fight among themselves to entice seekers from one sect to another. But true spirituality is never to be found in all this. In California, too, there are ashrams and maths [monasteries, temples, retreats] where lectures are given and yoga practices encouraged. But this is not true spirituality. It is something fundamentally different. Spirituality means dying to one's self and becoming absolutely insignificant as dust—dust at the feet of the Perfect Master. To become as dust means to become as nothing. It means to die while continuing to live! (*Lord Meher*, 4896)

OUT OF THE FRYING PAN AND INTO THE FIRE

The Blue Bus and the Buick left Dehradun for Ajmer at 5:00 AM on Thursday, May 15, following a five-week halt. Elizabeth drove the Buick, chauffeuring Baba, Kaka, and Vishnu; no mention is made of the invisibles, who must have ridden in the bus. Tukaram, who had just recently arrived, resumed driving the bus while Pappa was wisely sent back to Meherabad. The remaining men, who now included Savak, traveled by rail with Chatti Baba. Accompanying the women for the first time was Foundy, who, along with Kippy and the goldfish, constituted Baba's current traveling zoo, and the four-legged, feathered, and finned passengers traveling at various times with Baba and the women only increased the curiosity of onlookers when the Blue Bus rolled into town.

Ajmer lay a little over four hundred miles to the southwest. The Buick experienced engine problems that morning, but Elizabeth managed to keep the car going until they reached Ghaziabad, where they lunched in a dak bungalow at noon. At 2:00 PM Baba chivied the women back into the bus and on they drove, past cane fields and refineries, stopping in Khurja to spend the night. The afternoon was hot and they prepared tea to refresh themselves as soon as they arrived. While there Baba contacted one good *mast*.

Everyone was back on the road by 4:30 the next morning, hoping to avoid some of the midday heat. Elizabeth continued to have problems with the Buick, which stalled when they stopped for petrol, and even Baba got out to help push until she was able to restart the engine. When

they reached their dak bungalow at Bharatpur, the women settled in and tried to cool off for the remainder of the day while Baba made three more *mast* contacts. One was a *mastani*; the other two went unrecorded. They left at 5:00 AM after yet another sweltering night. Baba stopped the bus and the Buick an hour later so that the women could meet a blind old man who trapped monkeys and cared for them.

Afterward, they drove on past Dudu, the town whose name had so tickled Mani during the first tour. They arrived in Ajmer at 1:00 PM on Saturday, May 17, having suffered through two and a half days and nights of Rajasthani summer heat. The women settled into a bungalow auspiciously named Purfiza Mahal (Palace Full of Grace), a large, comfortable house situated high on a hill overlooking Ana Sagar, the manmade lake in the city center, as well as the Aravalli mountains—a perfect location for Baba's work. The men were housed as usual in smaller, less comfortable quarters nearby.

The traveling ashram lost several of its members not long after arrival, when the four schoolgirls—Meheru, Naggu, Najoo, and Hilloo—had to return to their studies. Sadly, the goldfish also departed, when they leapt out of their bowl during their first night and died. The women had changed the water in the bowl as soon as they arrived without realizing that it contained mica, which had leached from the soil into their well. The microscopic fragments of mica injured the fishes' delicate gills. "The fish actually committed suicide," Mehera sadly concluded.[141]

May and June temperatures in Ajmer can soar as high as 115 degrees F. "The heat is terrible," Nilu grumbled in his letter to the men at Meherabad. "It is like coming out from the frying pan into the fire."[142] Mehera, who had to grind the spices for Baba's masala, perspired so much that she broke out in prickly heat. Fresh green vegetables were in such short supply that the women were reduced to eating potatoes in their stead, and the weather was so hot that the fresh eggs that Baba allowed them to have as a treat rotted before they could be consumed. Reluctant to waste what was meant to be a special exception to their

monotonous diet, the women used them to wash their hair, except for Mehera, who could not tolerate the foul odor.

The mica that killed the fish presented other problems. "The taste is not at all nice," Mehera recalled, "and the water looks as if it has an oily film on it. Nearly everyone had upset stomachs from drinking it."[143] The mica made the water feel greasy, so that even bathing became an unpleasant experience. "The place where we were staying was beautiful, but there was always something, so that we didn't enjoy ourselves to the fullest—in this case, our thirst and the potato diet," Irene later observed.[144] Margaret remembered that the women's stay in Ajmer was "spoiled by large black whirling dust storms which at intervals rushed through the district. As soon as these sinister shapes were spotted a rush was made to close the windows and doors, leaving all the occupants dull and miserable and not altogether keeping out the dust which seemed to have a gift of penetration. Luckily, however, they did not last long."[145]

One might assume that now, while the women were settled in their bungalow rather than moving from place to place, Mani would be able to make longer and more detailed entries in her diary, but such was not the case. Nine days passed before she again picked up her pencil, when she recorded that on May 26 Baba had begun another orange juice fast. She was otherwise occupied, managing Baba's correspondence in Chanji's absence, as well as taking shorthand and typing lessons from Kitty and continuing her driving lessons with Elizabeth. Baba had assigned all the women tasks that would keep them busy and focused as He came and went during His *mast* tours. Naja and Katie prepared the women's meals, while Mehera and Khorshed cooked for Him when He wasn't traveling. Mansari continued to make Gujarati translations of articles for the *Meher Baba Journa*l.

Baba had been speaking for some time of sending Elizabeth, Norina, and Nadine back to America to carry on His work in the West, and the time for their departure was drawing near. "One of their special duties in the U.S.A.," Chanji observed, "will be to acquaint the

American public with the life and world-wide activities of Meher Baba toward the spiritual emancipation of mankind and prepare them for the great event of the breaking of His 16 years of silence and public speaking in February next."[146]

Baba called Irene Conybeare, who had stayed on in Dehradun, to join Him in Ajmer for just one day, Monday, May 26. She later recalled the experience of meeting Him at last:

> On being shown into a small room, bare of all furniture except for two chairs, I saw Baba, who was seated on one … I had the curious sense of having arrived at the end of my destination, my quest for Truth, and felt that I was in the presence of a great spiritual being.
>
> It was an indefinable sensation … I knew I was in the presence of no ordinary man.
>
> Baba spelled on the board, "I am happy to see you. Your spiritual connection with Me stretches back for lifetimes. Soon you will not only know, but be convinced. There is no need to tell Me anything. I know you very well.
>
> "I want you to go to America with Norina, Elizabeth and Nadine. Follow Norina's advice on spiritual matters. In other affairs you may use your own judgment."[147]

"She broke utterly after the interview," Margaret later recalled, "and when she came to be with us she was weeping and sobbing so bitterly that I do not think she knew we were there."[148]

On Tuesday, May 27, 1941, Elizabeth, Norina, and Nadine bade a bittersweet farewell to Meher Baba, as well as to the women who had been their travel companions for the past two and a half years. "The parting was very sad," Chanji wrote. "Only those who have known true Love can realize what it means to be thus parted from the Beloved of the World for whom they gave up all—mind, body, and world and everything they held dear in life—in whose company they lived and moved

for six long years."[149*] Accompanying them was Irene Conybeare, as well as Kippy and Foundy. The four women and their canine escorts departed in high style, in a convoy of tongas, waving a poignant goodbye to Baba, not knowing when, or indeed if they would ever see Him again. Just before departure, Baba lifted Nadine's order of silence.[†]

That evening, just hours after the four Westerners had departed for Bombay, Baba imposed a new order on the women. "Instead of English being the language of communication as before," Margaret recalled, "a turn was taken toward the East and Gujarati became the staple language used."

> This was all very well but the Westerners came off badly.
>
> Years before at Nasik we had had lessons in Hindustani. This language had never been much used by the Westerners, and the servants spoke only Marathi.
>
> And now, the only ones left of the Western women—Kitty, Rano, Irene, and I—were certainly not proficient in Gujarati and Baba now conducted everything in that language…. I decided that there was only one thing to do, and that was to learn Gujarati. But how? … I also came to the conclusion that without the script it was impossible to learn much of an Eastern language.
>
> One evening when we were sitting with Baba, I caused quite a commotion and a reproving bellow of "Margaret" from Rano, by saying, "Baba, would you lend me three rupees?" Even Baba looked surprised, and signaled for me to explain. I then said that I should like a book—such

* Chanji was referring to the span of time beginning in December 1936, when the women joined Baba at Meher Retreat Ashram in Nasik, after which only Elizabeth and Nadine were separated from Him for a short period of time at the end of their visit to Cannes. They actually had spent about five years and five months with Baba.

† While Elizabeth and Norina would later return to India, this was Nadine's last visit. She died fewer than five years later, on April 14, 1946, in New York City.

as Indian children might use—containing the script and words and sentences in elementary Gujarati.

Baba did not reply to this, but a few days later presented me with a very good book for this purpose.

Industriously I learned the script, and finally could read easy paragraphs in the newspapers.[150*]

Baba instituted other changes as well following Elizabeth's departure: He disbanded the Meherabad zoo (except for Moti the peacock) and later stopped subjecting the women to the predawn awakenings at Meherabad that had plagued Elizabeth throughout her sojourn in India.

Many years after the Blue Bus Tours ended, Mani provided a postscript to Elizabeth's woes: "Once Elizabeth was not with us," Mani observed, "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."[151]

Mani, who had resumed her driving lessons in Ajmer, applied for her license. The examiner asked her to back up between two trees, which she did with great skill: He was so impressed that he neglected to ask her to pull forward, and she passed the test. Her first excursion was to drive Kitty to purchase a small cottage (upright) piano. "Kitty came to hear of a European woman who was returning to England and who had a piano that she wanted to sell. Kitty knew that the piano was my favorite instrument, and that I had learned to play in my childhood," Mehera recalled. "Kitty asked Baba if we could buy the piano, as it was secondhand and not very expensive. She must have asked Baba very sweetly as Baba agreed."[152] It seems more likely, however, that He agreed because the piano was for Mehera, who would never have admitted to such special treatment.

The day before the four Westerners departed for Bombay, Baba had begun yet another fast, this time on fruit, orange juice, and water,

* Months later, Margaret decided to try out her new skill on the Easterners, who were most impressed when she pointed out to them, "'The parrot is hanging up there,' Very useful," Margaret concluded. (*Still Dancing with Love*, 57)

although He continued His *mast* work with no interruption. He continued this fast until June 1, taking only one cup of water for a single day before breaking the fast at midnight with a cup of tomato juice, then returning to His default diet of a single meal of dal and rice daily. Despite the rigors of this most recent fast, Margaret observed that He looked "radiant."[153]

Meanwhile, Elizabeth, Norina, Nadine, and Irene reached Bombay, where they checked into the Regal Hotel. They were set to sail for America on June 5, eager and honored to take up Baba's work in the West.* Norina took one last opportunity to write to Baba before leaving India, telling Him: "I put my head and heart at Your feet and go wherever You send me, with Your feet in my hands. I love You, love You, love You, love You."[154]

During this time Irene was able to get to know the other three women better—perhaps rather too much in one case. Baba had advised her to look to Norina for spiritual guidance, and Norina took her responsibility so much to heart that Irene became irritated to the point of vexation. "Emotional, colorful Italian" Norina effusively inquired of "reserved, British intellectual" Irene: "Don't you feel transformed, child? Didn't you feel any glowing illumination flowing into you from the Master?" Irene's honest response was, no. Finally Irene wrote to Baba begging for even "a speck of illumination"—anything she could report back to Norina that might remotely be construed as a spiritual experience.† Baba had said of Irene: "She will do beautiful work for Me in America."[155]

On June 3, Piroja left Ajmer with Meheru, Naggu, and the Kotwal girls, who had been spending a few weeks of their summer holidays there with Baba, as well as their traveling aunties, as Najoo called the women. Savak accompanied them. That same day Baba took the women to see a movie entitled *We Are Not Alone*. The movie turned out to be a pre-*mast* tour treat for the women, as Baba left on a four-day tour the following day. Mani called this tour a *mast-musafri*,

* Wartime travel complications would delay their departure until June 11.

† It was not until after the women sailed, however, that Irene received Baba's response: a profound sense of "inner radiance" that assured her of His divinity. (*Lord Meher*, 2216)

and despite all of Baba's previous *mast* work, this is the first time she employed this term.*

Baba instructed Baidul and Savak to accompany Him, since He had sent Kaka to Bombay. The tour began inauspiciously when they were compelled to walk to the taxi stand in Ajmer after the taxi they had ordered did not arrive as requested. This was deeply troublesome to Baba, who wished to travel incognito: When He had to rely exclusively on public transportation—taxis, trains, and buses—as He did during this tour, His desire to go unrecognized became especially challenging.

Among Baba's contacts were two good *masts*: one named Hafizji, an old man who carried a *lota* (a small brass pot) and wandered the countryside, sleeping in mosques at night, and another called Toliwala for the *tel* (oil) he poured over himself. Toliwala told Baba: "I am the king of Delhi, and my rule holds here."[156] Baba fed sweets to both men.

Baba also contacted a young *mast* called Narain (God) Baba, an *ittefaqi* type—one who became "suddenly, and accidentally, intoxicated by Divine Love."[157] Narain Baba was also called Qutub-e-Jangalwala (Jungle Man). Other contacts included an elderly *mastani* and a seventy-five-year-old *mast* named Khuda Bakhsh (Gift of Allah), a "living statue" who for a period of forty years had neither spoken nor moved, but who recently had begun moving about from his abode near a bakery.[158]

Baba's most important contact, however, was the naked, eighty-year-old, sixth-plane saint and high *mast* called Nuru (Light) Baba, whose attendants were a large pack of dogs he cared for. He was a rare *madar-zad*, one who was a *mast* from the moment of birth.† Nuru Baba also exhibited a rare balance of jalali and jamali characteristics, a kind of *mast* about whom Baba said perplexingly: "Today my condition is different. Tomorrow my clothes are different. Today my words are different. Tomorrow my behavior is different."[159]

* *Musafir* means "traveler" in Persian, Hindi, and Urdu, but it is unclear whether Mani's spelling is incorrect, or whether musafri is a variation of musafir.

† *Zhad* or *zad* means "born" in Hindi, while *madar* translates literally as "deaf," possibly meaning "deaf to the world." (*The Wayfarers*, 360)

When the men returned to Ajmer on the evening of June 11, unshaven, unbathed, and utterly exhausted, the women saw that their bedding had not been unrolled even once during their seventy-eight-hour, five-hundred-mile journey. But after just three days of rest Baba embarked on another four-day tour, accompanied by Baidul, Savak, and Gustadji. Among His contacts were Wali (Protector or Friend) Baba, a "perfect, majzoob-like jamali *mast* of the sixth plane"; a moderate *mast* named Qabristanwala* (Caretaker of the Graveyard); another moderate *mast* named Ruiwala (Cotton Man) for the cotton wool he carried, who had no abode; a good *mast* called Masanwala (Cremation Man), whose abode was the cremation grounds; a bald old man called Samshanwala (Cemetery or Ghat Man) Sadhu; and a good *mast* named Paniwala (Water Man) for his habit of offering water to everyone.[160]

As always, the men traveled third class, and it was virtually impossible for them to sleep in the crowded compartments after working tirelessly each day to make new contacts. Mani recorded in her diary that Baba made "one rotten part of journey in bullock-cart in rain & dark & bad roads."[161] It was the only form of transport available from the railway station to the remote village where Baba wished to again meet with Gokhale Baba, whom He had previously contacted in January. It was raining and the open cart afforded no shelter. Several times during the return trip the cart became mired in mud and the men had to get out and push it free. By the time they reached the train station their clothes were soaked, their feet covered in mud, and their bedrolls dripping with water.† Baba and the men reached Ajmer during the early morning of Monday, June 19, and the day after, Mani noted, He gave the women "a long explanation which was, in a nutshell, 'Die your death and live My life.'"[162]

On July 3, following a two-week break, Baba, Baidul, Gustadji, and Savak departed for an extensive nine-day *mast*-musafir broken by

* This Qabristanwala is not to be confused with Baba's "Socrates," the fifth-plane *mast* from Ajmer.

† The intensity of Baba's *mast* work at this time coincided with another escalation in the war, specifically Hitler's invasion of Russia and doomed march on Moscow. (*Lord Meher*, 2218)

three short respites in Ajmer. Among Baba's contacts were a highly advanced, pipe-smoking *mast* called Abba Jan (Dear Father) and a merely good one called Badshah Bapu (Emperor Father), whom Baba christened with the irresistible name "Tinpot Baba" for the tin pot the *mast* kept with him as he sat on the street. Baba returned to Ajmer on the twelfth, His *mast* work accomplished for the time being.

After returning to Ajmer from His final tour, Baba sent Kaka (whom he had called back from Bombay) with Savak and Pendu to look for accommodations for a new six-month seclusion He proposed to undertake. They traveled separately to Delhi, Lahore, Baroda, Agra, Indore, and Dehradun, but the search, Mani wrote, proved "fruitless," adding: "Cannot find ideal house & place where Baba can be in strict seclusion for 6 months, when nobody will see Him."[163] Baba immediately issued a circular announcing instead a two-and-a-half-month seclusion at Meherabad, to be followed by four more months at another location as yet to be determined. During this time He would receive no communications except for cables in cases of dire emergency. He concluded by declaring: "The last three months of My seclusion will be stricter than ever, in the sense of besides not being seen, I shall not even hear a human voice!"[164]

Meanwhile, Baba had ordered several of the men to transport the women's excess luggage back to Meherabad in the Blue Bus and the Buick, but on the fifteenth He received a cable from Tukaram informing Him that the bus had become stranded on a bridge that was partly washed out from heavy rains in Indore. Its arrival in Meherabad would be delayed accordingly.

On the evening of July 15 Mani recorded in her diary: "In Ajmere [*sic*], the reflection of the sunset colours in the lake were a joy to look at. In the daytime the *dhobis* [laundry workers], 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 nearby."[165] It

was the women's final evening in Ajmer, and their last opportunity to bask in its rich spiritual atmosphere with Baba.

RETURN TO DEAR OLD MEHERABAD

By 9:45 AM on the morning of July 16, Baba and the women were on the platform of Ajmer Railway Station on Jaipur Road. They were set to depart at ten o'clock but the train was held up for an hour because they had so much baggage to load, despite already having sent a bus and carload full of it ahead. They were bound, at long last, for home, following eight and a half months journeying quite literally from one end of India to the other. Chanji observed that Baba's decision to return to Meherabad "came as a great joy to the group."[166]

Baba ordered Kharmen Masi to assist Mani and Khorshed with Mehera's protection when they were on the move. His party boarded a reserved, third-class pilgrim car and departed at 11:00 AM for a thirty-seven-hour journey. Mani recalled passing the gigantic fort at Chittoor Station during the afternoon and Nimuch Military Station, where they saw a ragtag band of gypsy children who were probably availing themselves of the opportunity to beg from the platform whenever a train stopped there.

The women awoke at 4:00 AM just as they were crossing the Narmada. They switched trains at Khandura, boarding the mail train at 7:30 AM to settle into more comfortable tourist bogies—probably second class. Farther on at Bhusawal they enjoyed a hot lunch that had been ordered in advance, served with a special treat—lemonade.

The train reached Manmad just before 3:00 PM. There, Baba met briefly with Chanji while the women remained in their compartments for a layover of nearly six hours, entertained by passing military trains and a gypsy encampment visible from their windows. The train left at nine, and they pulled into Ahmednagar Station at midnight for a quiet homecoming. Baba had cabled ahead ordering His local lovers

not to greet Him, and, in any case, He stayed in His compartment until it was time for the group to depart for Meherabad. The only person He met with during that time was Sarosh. Those few devotees who had not received Baba's message thus had no opportunity to glimpse their Beloved, even from a distance. "They were," Chanji observed, "surprised and disappointed … but under Baba's specific instructions for none to be present there they obediently left the station with heavy hearts."[167]

The women were so tired that they had to be awakened to have tea and cakes in the station refreshments room before being driven on to Meherabad in rented buses and a car.* They arrived home on Friday, July 18, 1941, at around five o'clock in the morning, where an hour and a half later they could watch the sunrise from Mani's "dear old" Meherabad Hill.[168]

* The Blue Bus and the Buick arrived later with their cargos of luggage.



CHAPTER 11

Silence and Seclusion

Interim at Meherabad

July 8–September 3, 1941

The busiest of all is Baba.

KITTY DAVY[1]

Meher Baba, Upper Meherabad, July 30, 1941



Baba, using His alphabet board to communicate during his seclusion in the cage room
at Upper Meherabad, July 30, 1941

BE READY TO HEAR ME SPEAK

THE CIRCUITOUS THIRD BLUE BUS TOUR lasted nearly nine months and was one of Meher Baba's longest absences from any of His ashrams.* Following His pre-dawn arrival at Meherabad on July 18, He set to work immediately: "busy, seeing disciples," Mani succinctly noted.[2] He had much to accomplish before re-entering seclusion on August 1.• This time His precautions surpassed any He had taken in the past: He ordered Pendu and Kalemama to build four small cabins at the corners of the compound boundaries on the Hill, where the mandali or men hired from Arangaon Village could keep watch around the clock to ensure that nothing would disturb His work, day or night.

Baba intended to retreat to the bamboo cage room in the Maternity Hospital, in the space that had been partitioned off for the volatile sixth-plane jalali *mast* Karim Baba the previous July. Now Baba would use it for working with Chatti Baba, the only *mast* currently

* Baba's first world tour in 1932 had only lasted just a week shy of four months.

• August 1 was an auspicious date for Meher Baba's work: On August 1, 1924, He began an extensive tour of India. On August 1, 1932, He asked Herbert Davy to locate a cave at Assisi where He could sit in seclusion. He ordered the Jessawala family to join Him on August 1, 1938. On August 1, 1939, He began a one-year seclusion and implemented the thirty-one orders to His lovers. He entered a new seclusion on August 1, 1940. He promised to speak on August 1, 1941. He broke an eleven-day fast on August 1,1946. He ended a ten-hour seclusion on August 1, 1949, "a red-letter day in Meherazad." On August 1, 1957, He began seventy-five days of "Special Work." And just to show that He was not all work and no play, He declared: "From August 1 to the end of November [1953] I should have no headaches. I want to feel as if I am enjoying a good cricket match." (*Lord Meher*, 2371, 3371, 4194) These are but a few examples. There are many more references in *Lord Meher*.

living at Meherabad.* The inside of the screen was lined with canvas cloth, and He ordered Padri to cut a small opening through which He could fit His alphabet board when He needed to communicate with His watchman and be handed food and water. The small room adjacent to the cage room, originally the office for the *Meher Baba Journal*, had been vacant since Baba moved the *Journal* to Bangalore in 1939, where it continued to function.

On July 20 and 21 Baba met with the mandali and a small, select group of other men invited to join Him. "I might die during the next six months of seclusion," He warned. "So by calling you now, I am giving you all this last chance of seeing Me. If I die, all of you will die soon too, as there would be no point in your living then. If however I do not die, I will speak and manifest, and you should 'pass your examination' [carry out the orders they had been given]. My poor health has already begun. Yesterday, I had terrible heart pain. It was so bad that I couldn't move for half an hour or so. All the women were very frightened."[3]

The men also were alarmed, because although Baba had previously promised to break His silence on August 1, 1940, He was now lengthening His seclusion for another six months and putting off speaking as well. What were His lovers to make of this change of plans? More to the point, how would Baba's detractors use this extension to further their negative agendas? Baba allayed the mandali's concerns, explaining: "I take all who are not Realized as mad and pay no attention to what they do or say about Me or My work, favorably or otherwise. Even in the case of the worst of scandals or the foulest of abuses, I know that they are irresponsible, instigated as they are by interested parties, whose business it is to create mischief. If you correct them and point out their mistakes, you may do so, if occasion demands, with dignity, affection and grace."[4] He concluded His talk by assuring the men: "From February 1942 onward, I will start speaking to Myself and afterwards to the public. Be ready to hear Me speak."[5]

* Mohammed was still staying with Aloba in Bombay.

Meanwhile, the women settled back into their dormitories in Meher Retreat. Mani was so busy that there was a ten-day gap in her diary between July 18 and her next entry. During this time, Baba began to lift some of the restrictions He had placed on the women and He reestablished the practice of having Margaret read aloud to Him and the other women when they gathered around Him, seated on their teak-wood stools in the east room.

Baba also allowed Margaret to read poems to Mehera, who enjoyed poetry but was still restricted from most reading, except for selected articles from the *Meher Baba Journal*. He also promoted her to the status of personal trainer for Mehera and Mani and ordered her to teach them exercises. He had Kitty continue Mehera's music lessons, which were scheduled every four days, after their piano arrived from Ajmer. Mehera was concerned about her ability to play well enough to please Baba. As she later recalled:

> To start with Kitty taught me some children's tunes. It was a little difficult to begin with, but I soon got the knack of it again. One day I was alone in the East Room when Baba came in. He gestured towards the piano. I knew Baba would enjoy something with a lively tune, and I played "Do Ye Ken [Know] John Peel" for Him. Baba was very pleased with it.
>
> Then Kitty said, "You know, Mehera, I have a very nice idea. You'll like it very much." "What is it," I asked. And Kitty opened a music book and there was the "Blue Danube"! "I can hardly play the children's tunes, and you want me to play this?" I said. Sight reading music is very difficult. I remember at school how nervous I would get during sight-reading exams. "See how beautiful it sounds," Kitty replied and she played it for me. Again Kitty was encouraging and convinced me I could do it, and she did teach me a page of it.[6]

"She may not have wanted to do music," Kitty later observed, "but if Baba wanted it, she did it. It was very difficult for Mehera to throw herself into anything during this period—only Baba. Her concentration was only on Him. She worked at nothing for herself. One thing I felt Baba was doing to every one of us was to get consciousness away from self and onto Him—and whatever He was doing for us, He did two hundred-fold for Mehera. We could think of other things and did—men, books, whatever. But for Mehera, He wanted her to think of nothing but Him."[7]

Baba spoke to the women of His coming seclusion, and they understood that they would have little contact with Him for the foreseeable future. So they were delighted to be able to spend two lovely days in His company, enjoying treats that would soon be in short supply. On Monday, July 28, Baba escorted them to Sarosh Talkies, where they viewed a double feature: *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*[*] and *Dracula's Daughter*. They also took tea with Shirinmai at Akbar Press while the men bought petrol, and they later had ice cream at Sarosh and Viloo's. On Wednesday the thirty-first, the day before entering seclusion, Baba took them back to Ahmednagar to see two more films, *British Intelligence* and *This Thing Called Love*.[8] After returning to Meherabad they were treated to sweet and spicy Maharashtrian *amti* (tangy) dal, courtesy of one of Baba's local lovers.

Before entering seclusion, Baba instructed the women to resume working and socializing in the groups of three into which He had divided them the previous August when they undertook their new orders. He also reinstated His practice of ringing the bell to call them to meditation at two unspecified times during the day. He lifted His orders of silence for Irene, Mansari, and Kharmen Masi, calling them to a tree

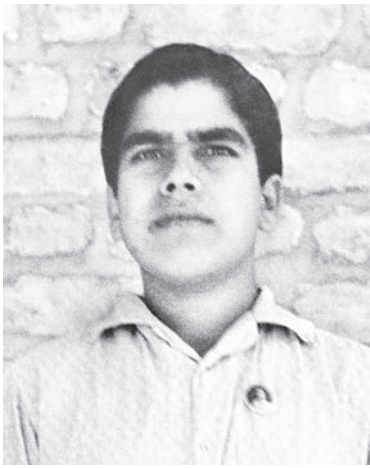
[*] *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (Warner Brothers, 1939) starred Edward G. Robinson, George Sanders, and Paul Lukas, as well as a host of German actors who had fled their homes following Hitler's rise to power. It was the first of many blatantly anti-Nazi films to come out of Hollywood during WWII.

near the Dome to say His name—the first word any of them had spoken since August 1 of the previous year. "When I spoke," Mansari later recalled, "it was like hearing my voice from the seventh layer of the earth. We were so used to using gestures that we continued doing it for a few days. We forgot we could talk."[9]

Loquacious Irene asked to continue her silence. "I did not want to give it up, as it saved so much energy. You control yourself more. You can control your thoughts more; you can hear them more clearly. When you talk, you aren't always aware of what you are thinking. One gets to know oneself better."[10] But Baba said no, not wanting her to become attached to the practice.

BEHOLD, THERE CAME A GREAT WIND*

Baba had already assigned specific tasks to each of the men, and when He reentered seclusion on Friday, August 1, 1941, Vishnu and Krishna Nair were the only two who were allowed near Him. Vishnu read Baba's messages and instructions from the alphabet board, thrust through the small opening Padri had cut in the canvas-lined bamboo lattice. The opening was so small that Baba Himself could not see the board, which in any case He had to hold sideways so that Vishnu could read it. He went so far as to cover His face with a handkerchief even though there was no chance of revealing anything other than His fingers dancing over the board. Vishnu was to meet with Baba every morning for a period of fifteen minutes. Krishna, who also attended to Chatti Baba and cleaned his room, was charged with cleaning the cage room while Baba moved to another space.



Krishna Nair, Chatti Baba and Meher Baba's young attendant

* The phrase is from the Book of Job 1:19.

Baba did not embark on a special fast at this time and planned to continue His daily repast of a small serving of rice and dal. As always, Mehera prepared His food, after which she would give it to another of the women to take to Vishnu, who would deliver it to Baba, passing it to Him through the opening in the partition.

The atmosphere on Meherabad Hill was unprecedented on the morning of August 1. "It was absolutely still. Pendu, Padri, Kalemama, Masaji, Chhagan, Vishnu and Baidul, while on watch, were most cautious and saw to it Baba was not in the least disturbed. They prevented the dogs from barking and shooed away any birds that happen[ed] to be chirping nearby. The women mandali on Meherabad Hill would also tread lightly and not let the slightest sound escape their lips. The graveyard silence made the Hill seem uninhabited!"[11]

Chanji's September 1941 column in the *Meher Baba Journal* afforded readers throughout India and the West a glimpse of Baba's current work: "He will remain all alone in His room or within the closed compound unseen by anyone, keeping Himself beyond even the sound of human beings…. Thus in the grim silence and serenity of Meherabad Hill where He lived with His first group and worked … He is now working under entirely different conditions … literally cut off from the world."[12]

As usual, Maya had its own agenda, and Baba's seclusion was compromised almost immediately. The weather, although still dry, was turning cloudy, and a roaring wind arose that whistled between the door and window frames and polluted the air with dust. From *Lord Meher*: "The mandali had never before witnessed such winds in August. For the watchmen to sit in the tiny cabins on the four corners of Meherabad Hill became impossible. The tin sheet roof of the *mast* ashram building rattled and created a nerve-racking uproar, disturbing Baba terribly. He sent word, confirming, 'Maya is working against Me.'"[13]

After only a few days, Baba was so weakened by the combined intensity of His work, the noise, and the minimal amount of sustenance He was taking, that He could not spell out more than a few words at a



Baba's Tin Cabin on the Hill, which rattled and shook in the wind

time on the alphabet board without stopping to rest. The wind was so relentless that by the end of that first week He was compelled to move into the Dome, ordering everyone away and covering His face as He walked across the compound. There He continued His work for five hours each day, from 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM.

But even in the Dome the sound of the wind was unbearable, and so, Mani wrote, "Baba arranges working in 'cabin' [the Tin Cabin] & relaxing 4 to 8 p.m." The wind was so fierce that it must have rattled the metal walls and roof of that building, but there was no place left on the Hill to which Baba could escape. Further disrupting His seclusion was Chatti Baba, who suddenly took it upon himself to vacate the room he had been given and move his meager possessions into the Tin Cabin uninvited. Because the *mast* now wished to sleep there, Baba was

forced to spend His nights in what Mani called "a more uncomfortable place," adding: "Chatti Baba has never done that before!"[14]

And, providing indisputable evidence that Maya never sleeps, the women had been awakened a few nights previously by the apparent sound of someone knocking on the door to their dormitories. A few days later the men killed a cobra that had been lurking in one of the cypress trees, further adding to their unease.

Baba met with the women after His work was accomplished each afternoon. Following His shift to the Dome He told them: "These 6 days of working with that noise were torture—of course I did My work but it was simply torture."[15] On another occasion He offered them a "lovely explanation," Mani wrote, "of soul & spirit & all are one like drops in the Ocean." On August 16 He came out to see them—clean-shaven for the first time since August 1—to promise a "breathtaking surprise between Nov. 15th & 26th, concerning all of you all, the world, and the war. You can never guess. It's something that has never happened before in the world."[16]

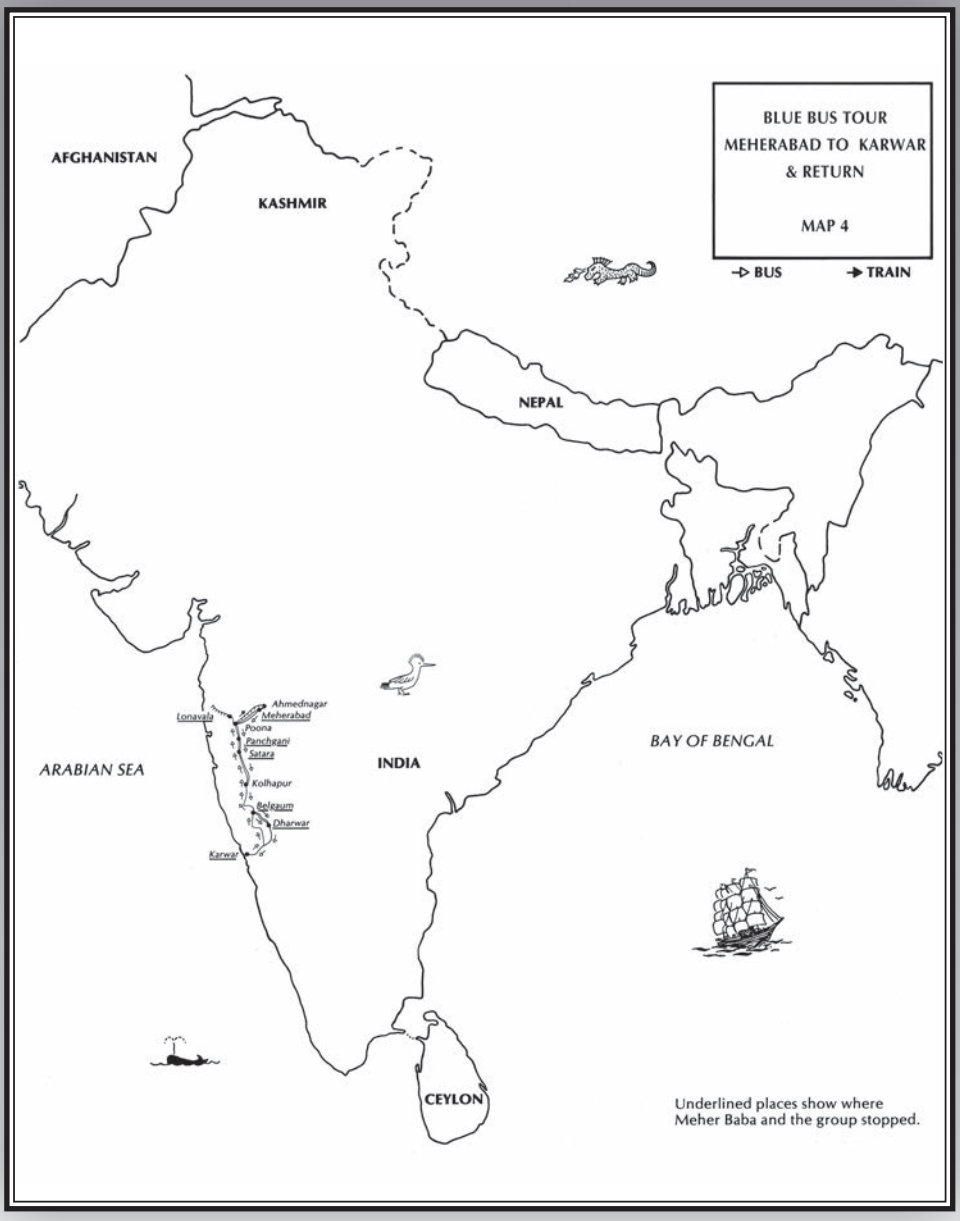
The women marked Kitty's fiftieth birthday on August 28 with pudding and cakes, but they celebrated with such abandon during the afternoon that their noise disturbed Baba's seclusion. And although He chastised them later He forgave them immediately because it was a special occasion.

After a month of endless interruptions, Baba had had enough. He had planned to remain at Meherabad until the beginning of October, but on August 31 He decided to relocate to Panchgani, accompanied by the women and a few of the men. The women had only twenty-four hours to pack, but by now they were such seasoned travelers that it was of little inconvenience (or surprise) to them. That same afternoon the rain that they so desperately needed finally began to fall—just in time to soak the bedding rolls tied to the roof of the bus.

The sudden rain turned out to be the storm before the calm. Only now, Chanji observed, did "all these elements of nature"

weaken and relax "in their opposition as the awful gusts of wind abated and slackened simultaneously with Baba's decision upon a shift to Panchgani and practically ceased at the time fixed for His leaving."[17] It was Maya's last laugh—for the time being.

And so, following a brief, six-and-a-half-week respite in Meherabad, Baba, the women, and several of the men departed for their shortest—and last—tour in the Blue Bus.



Modified version of map by Walter Overcarsh, originally published in *Because of Love* by Rano Gayley

The Fourth Blue Bus Tour

Panchgani and Karwar:

September–November 28, 1941



The coast of Karwar, looking out into the Arabian Sea

CHAPTER 12

A Mountain to Sea Tour

Panchgani and Karwar

September 3–November 28, 1941

I can bring down the stars.

MEHER BABA TO VISHNU[1]



Dilkhusha (Heart's Ease) bungalow in Panchgani, where the women had stayed in 1938

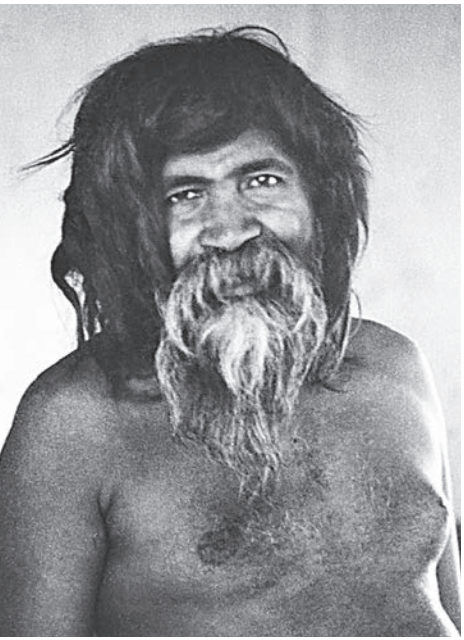
RUNAWAY *MAST*, OR HIS TIME IS UP

AT 7:00 AM ON WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 1941, the women embarked on a tour in the Blue Bus for the last time, with Tukaram at the wheel. Since Elizabeth had returned to America, Baba and the invisibles piled into the bus with the rest of the women. Also accompanying Baba were Chatti Baba, Baidul, Krishna, Kalemama, Nilu, and Vishnu.* They passed through Poona at 8:45 and reached the hill station of Panchgani, sixty-two miles farther on, two hours later. There the mandali had secured "three lovely bungalows behind the plateau," Mani recorded, with a "lovely view and climate."[2] One was reserved exclusively for Baba's use, and immediately upon arrival He retreated inside. The women occupied the second bungalow and the men the third.

Baba deepened His seclusion in Panchgani. "Baba has given us a strange discipline, which is also rather disagreeable," Margaret observed in a letter to Elizabeth, who had returned home to America in June. "Unless given permission we are not allowed to look at Him. If we see Him coming we drop our eyes or gaze vacantly at some imaginary horizon. This 'game' is luckily relaxed when we sit with Him in the evenings."[3]

* There is no explanation for how Chatti Baba and the other men traveled—presumably in another ashram automobile or else by rail.

Chatti Baba stayed in Baba's bungalow, where Baba resumed working with the *mast*. But on September 5, just two days later, Chatti Baba began to act out, alternating between fits of sullenness and outright bursts of anger. When he lashed out violently at Krishna, Baba told the women that the *mast* had never behaved in such an extreme manner before. The following day Chatti Baba appeared to revert to his cheerful demeanor, but he told Krishna to ask Baba if he could go home—to his old home, Nagapattinam, in Tamil Nadu.* "His time is up," Baba declared. "If he asks again I will send him, but all My plans will have to be changed."[4] Chatti Baba was so desperate that he took off down the steep road from the hill station into the valley, determined to make the nearly eight-hundred-mile journey in his bare feet. He had already walked several miles before he was missed, at which point the mandali drove out to catch up with him and bring him back in the car.



Baba's sweet-tempered "dove," Chatti Baba

On September 7 Baba spoke at length with the women, offering a "lovely explanation of 'Chattibaba's [*sic*] state' & about the '*mukta-s*' & '*bhumika-s*.'"[5] But five days later the old *mast* again became combative, leaving Baba with no choice but to send him home. Chatti Baba departed for South India by rail on the fifteenth, escorted by Baidul and Krishna. After two years with Baba, he was torn

* Baba said that in regard to His war work Chatti Baba represented France. Although there were no major developments for the French in September 1941, horrific events were occurring throughout Europe that may have contributed to the jamali *mast*'s uncharacteristic behavior. These included the execution of nearly fifty thousand Jews by the Nazis, the beginning of the nine-hundred-day Siege of Leningrad, and continuing U-boat attacks on Allied convoys that pushed the United States ever closer to the brink of declaring war on Germany. Baba also attributed his outbursts to circumstances in other parts of the world, such as the coming civil war in Sri Lanka.

between the ineffable yearning to remain with His Beloved and the intensity of a more immediate longing to return home, and he cried as the car left the bungalow. Baba too was distraught. "I have never seen such sadness in Baba's face," Margaret recalled, "as when Chatti Baba's car drove away."[6] Chanji called it "a scene too touching for words."[7]

Baba had begun a twelve-day fast on September 12 of freshly squeezed orange juice, tea, and water. But the monsoon rains that had begun falling on the hill station the previous day and an accompanying drop in temperatures were deemed unsuitable for such a diet. "Living on orange juice during such weather is inadvisable," Chanji observed.[8] Since oranges were the only fresh fruit available in the bazaar, Baba reduced His intake to tea and water for the first seven days. He gave up tea on the nineteenth but began to take some food on the twenty-first (two days earlier than planned), and He emerged from seclusion four days later. The rain ceased.

The women enacted several skits for Baba, one on the twenty-first. The dialogue was conducted in Marathi, and Katie was so worried about forgetting her lines that she pinned them up behind a prop on the improvised stage, where she was sure only she could see them. When she did, indeed, need prompting, Baba mischievously snapped His fingers and gestured for her to consult her so carefully concealed lines.

Baba began spending more time with the women. He had been meeting with them in the evenings, but now, taking advantage of the sunshine, He began to escort them out during the day. They visited a temple on the twenty-fourth, and during the next four days He took them out for several walks around the plateau, where they were enchanted by "lovely views, daisy carpets & water springs."[9]

In the evenings, the women (including the female servants) gathered around Baba for impromptu entertainment, telling jokes and stories, and reciting limericks and poetry. "This was all well for a very short time," Margaret later recalled, "but then came a bad period



Mehera and Baba, Panchgani, 1938

when, having no reference books, but only a couple of ancient *Reader's Digests*, and some overworked memories, things became very sticky." One evening when Margaret's turn came around again, she desperately racked her brain for something new. Finally she asked Baba, "Shall I tell you a story I wrote in my early years?"

> Everyone quite rightly looked pained, but Baba signed for me to do this, and out of His loving kindness seemed to enjoy it.
>
> However, I let myself in for something. Baba then said that every evening He would give me a title and that the next evening I should present Him with a plot made from the given title. "Yussuf, the Yellow One" is the only title I remember.
>
> My everyday job at this time was to sit under a shady tree, armed with a *lathi* (a stick with a lead-loaded head) and to allow no unauthorized person to enter the gate. Since no one ever came, there was plenty of time to work out a plot that hopefully would amuse my Master.[10]

The women had learned to be wary of lizards when they were in Ceylon, and one day when they were seated around Baba on the verandah, one of the detested creatures scampered down the wall. It gave the women such a shock that Margaret was inspired to compose a poem:

> Meher Baba, our Master,
> The great ego-blaster
> Was sitting out with His gopis one day;
> There down came a lizard,
> It was just like a blizzard,
> And frightened all the gopis away!

On a sadder note, the women received a telegram from Elizabeth on September 28 informing them that her dear Kippy had died.•

• Elizabeth sent Kippy's ashes to Meherabad, where they arrived on December 23, 1940. Mani marked the solemn occasion with an entry in her diary: "Kippy laid in M'abad near Warrior." (*Blue Bus Tours Diary*, 149) Baba had the ashes interred in pride of place in what is now known as the pet cemetery on Meherabad Hill. He ordered Pendu to place a marble marker over Kippy's grave in March 1947, at the same time that the marble memorial stone was to be placed over Nadine Tolstoy's grave.

Kippy was only six years old when she died. During the women's previous interim at Meherabad, following the death of the German shepherd puppy Warrior, Baba had reassured Elizabeth that Kippy would return as a yogi, but He declined to tell her more than that.

TOO HAGGARD FOR DESCRIPTION

After a week-long respite from fasting and intense inner work, Baba embarked on yet another *mast* tour, leaving on the last day of September. He traveled to fourteen towns and cities before returning to Panchgani for a badly needed three-day break. Among Baba's new contacts was Bashir Mastan (God-intoxicated One who Brings Good News), spiritual chargeman of Allahabad. He also reestablished links with fifth-plane Qabristanwala (Socrates), sixth-plane Lakhan Shah, and the seventh-plane majzoob, Chacha, all from Ajmer.

Baba returned to Panchgani on October 14, having traveled three thousand miles in two weeks, in a condition that Chanji called "too haggard for description."[11*] "The world is truly in a whirl. It has gone mad!" Baba observed, in a searing indictment of world conditions. "Law and life nowadays are all upset and in the throes of destruction. There is no regard, much less respect, for either. Laws are broken and lives destroyed, inconsiderately and ruthlessly. Words and codes of honor have no value. Solemn promises are sniffed at, and documents taken for scraps of paper, all for selfish ends and for the gratification of lust and greed. In short, now, law and life are as you take them."[12]

Before departing on His *mast* tour Baba had given the women permission to take walks and go out for picnics, specifically warning them not to eat any parts of wild plants they might find. Sixteen of the women went out for a walk near sunset on the thirteenth, the

* This tour coincided with Germany's ongoing assault on Russia.

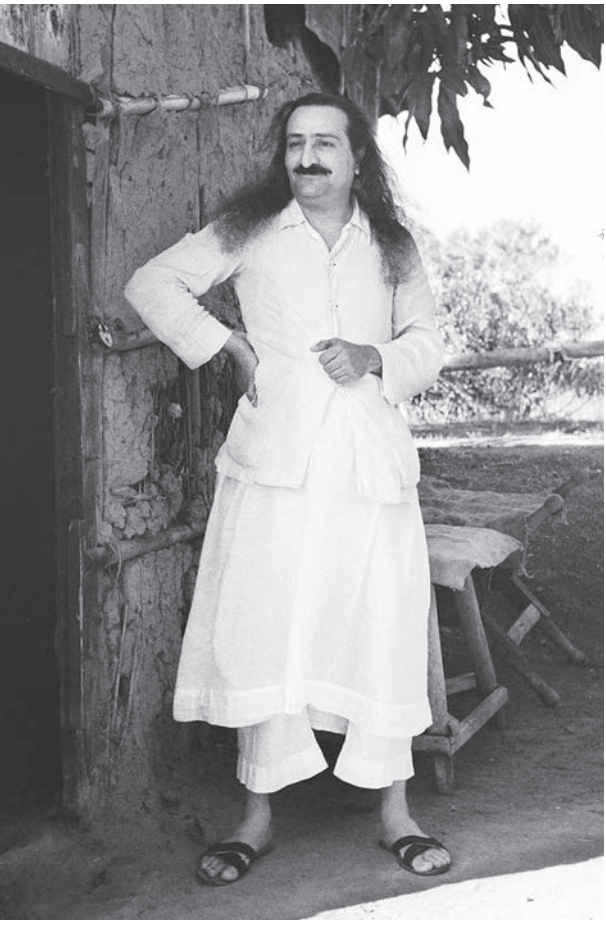
day before His return. They came to a place where the ground was covered with plants that looked like arrowroot, which has a harmless, starchy root used to make a thickening powder for cooking. Fortunately, most of the women retained what Margaret called "nebulous memories of childhood warnings against eating things we knew nothing about [that] kept even the idea of sampling the roots away from most of us."[13]

Forgetting Baba's order, however, Kharmen Masi pulled up a root and passed it around. "Another of the women," Kitty recalled, "put it experimentally in her mouth, then perhaps from intuition quickly spat it out. [Kharmen Masi] also ate some, a bit more perhaps than mere experimenting warranted."[14] A few hours later she developed a high fever. Her face became red and swollen and she began to suffer from severe stomach cramps. "It was a dreadful time," Margaret continued, "and the older Indian women brought out their prayer beads and continuously repeated Baba's name, [while] the rest kept their minds on Baba."[15]

By now darkness had fallen and it was too late to call for a doctor from the town, so the women sent their night watchman to bring Dr. Nilu from the men's bungalow. Nilu was unable to diagnose Kharmen Masi's condition and could only stand by helplessly as she thrashed about in a delirious state hovering between life and death. No one expected her to survive the night. When Baba returned the following day and heard what had transpired, He placed His hand on Kharmen Masi's forehead and said she would recover. Later the women learned that the root was used to euthanize water buffalo and other large animals when they had sustained life-threatening injuries or were terminally ill. Local farmers said that ingestion of the root "immediately cut the intestines into small pieces" that were then expelled from the body, "causing instant death."[16]

WE WILL NOT MEET AGAIN

On October 17 an extraordinary meeting took place between Meher Baba and Upasni Maharaj. The last time they had met face to face had been nineteen years earlier, on October 15, 1922, at Manzil-e-Meem, when Baba was twenty-eight years old. The date was propitious, falling as it did during the Hindu celebration of Dassera. But the night before the meeting Baba became so violently ill that no one thought He would be able to make the journey. By morning, however, He was so completely recovered from the mysterious ailment that His appearance was likened to a "beautiful blossoming rose."[17]



Baba, before His last meeting with Upasni Maharaj. Dahigaon, October 17, 1941

The meeting was to take place in the village of Dahigaon, more than two hundred miles to the north. Baba left Panchgani at 7:15 AM, driven by Sarosh, and He reached Dahigaon at 1:00 PM. Upasni arrived at 5:30 and entered the hut where Baba was waiting. Thirty minutes later Baba clapped His hands to signal that the meeting was over. Baba returned to Panchgani that night, arriving at 1:20 AM. He had been gone for eighteen hours, only half an hour of which He had spent with Upasni.

Afterward Baba explained that He had taken Upasni's darshan. In turn, the Perfect Master wept and embraced Baba for what would be the last time, saying: "We will not

meet again. Now Merwan, you have all the work and powers of the great Sat Purushs [the five Perfect Masters]. They are all focused in You. I leave everything to You."[18*]

Baba then segued to the war and His promised manifestation, concluding: "I will speak any day from February 15, 1942, to February 15, 1943, unannounced. It will be when all the world has gone to the dogs!… But I shall speak unannounced. You won't know even a day or an hour ahead. In the future, there will be infinite suffering for Me physically, too." A little later Baba told Vishnu: "I can bring down the stars. I now have full powers. Maharaj has handed over his side of things to Me."[19]

Baba fasted on October 19 and 20, but He celebrated Diwali with the women on the twentieth with traditional *fatakras* (firecrackers) and holiday sweets. It was Baba's practice to end some of His more serious discussions on a note of humor, but on this occasion, He turned the tables, tempering the festivities by declaring: "There will be floods and disease & much suffering. Then all the '*kachra*' [dirt] will come to India & explode. I will speak unannounced."[20]

LET GO NOW— BABA HAS CHANGED HIS PLAN

At around the same time that Baba had shifted to Panchgani, He directed Chanji to inquire about arrangements for a trip to Iran, where He wished to continue His seclusion, beginning at the end of November. Chanji contacted one of Baba's Irani devotees, Meherjee Karkaria,[†] regarding Baba's wish to spend one month in Bandar Abbas before relocating to the interior of the country for three additional months, and Meherjee began looking into arrangements for the group.

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[*] *Mehera–Meher* (2:167) records that this meeting may have been the "breathtaking surprise" Baba had promised on August 16. Upasni Maharaj dropped his body on December 12, 1941, just two months after this last meeting with Baba.

[†] Meherjee Ardeshir Karkaria (October 13, 1906–June 26, 1990) came from a devout Zoroastrian family. He was introduced to Baba by Arnavaz's mother, who was his relative, and he became a lifelong devotee and member of the mandali.

Chanji authorized Thos. Cook & Son to make "provisional second class reservations" for Baba's party to sail from Bombay to Bander Abbas in November.[21]

But just as Chanji had located suitable accommodations Baba changed His mind. Citing cold winter temperatures and a lack of potable water, He cancelled the trip. No matter how hard Chanji endeavored to please Baba he was frequently doomed to failure. Regarding Baba's ever-changing priorities, Vishnu counseled: "Let go now. Baba has changed His plan."[22]

At the same time that Chanji was making inquiries about traveling to Iran, Baba announced that He needed to travel to the West and He dictated several letters to Margaret, for Elizabeth, exploring various possibilities. But following His meeting with Upasni, and before any firm plans could be made, He dictated a cable, also for Elizabeth, declaring:

> MOMENTOUS SPIRITUAL DECISIONS NECESSITATE
> MY SPEAKING ANY DAY BETWEEN 15 FEBRUARY 1942
> AND 15 FEBRUARY 1943 AND ALSO CROSSING THE
> OCEAN IN THE MIDDLE OF DECEMBER 1941 LATEST.
> FUNDS INSUFFICIENT; MUST CANCEL AMERICA.
> THEREFORE, DEFINITELY PREFER HONOLULU,
> PHILIPPINES, OR ANY PLACE IN THE PACIFIC
> INCURRING LESS EXPENSIVE FARE.[23]

Chanji now began to gather information for a trip to Southeast Asia and contacted Thos. Cook & Son requesting passport, visa, and vaccination certificate requirements for entering Burma. He forwarded Cook's replies to Baba, for which he received a handwritten letter, probably from Vishnu, sent "by order of Baba," upbraiding him for failing to provide the exact information that Baba had requested: "This is another example of how you do things carelessly and then upset

everything.... Read this letter of Cook's and picture My mood. For heaven's sake be definite at least now!"[24]

Chanji then sent another inquiry, probably to Cook, asking: "Is it possible for a party of 14 (fourteen), consisting of (a) British Indians, (b) U.S. Americans, (c) Swiss subjects to go from here, India—to either HONOLULU, or to the PHILIPPINES, for a stay of about 6 months? ... Can you suggest any other places of the same types between here and America where our party could go and stay for six months, if the above-named are not possible?"[25]

In the end, Baba did not travel to Burma, or to Honolulu, or to the Philippines. But on December 7, 1941, two months after He cabled Elizabeth, Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, British Malaya, Guam, the Philippines, Shanghai, and Singapore, declaring war on the United States and Great Britain. It was only then that Margaret understood the significance of Baba's last message to Elizabeth, observing that "the places mentioned in the cable were seized by the Japanese."[26] Only then was it apparent that Baba's alleged intention to cross the Pacific, rather than the Atlantic, and to travel to Southeast Asia, was a ruse—scaffolding to provide the spiritual push needed to bring about the next phase of the war.*

Once Baba's push had been set in motion, He decided to return to Karwar, on the Arabian Sea. He ordered Adi K. to release a circular stating that He would remain in seclusion for four more months, until February 15, 1942, and that for the month of November He would carry out His work at an unspecified location on the coast of India. He explained that during His meeting with Upasni He had come to a new decision to speak sometime between February 15, 1942, and February 15, 1943, without any prior announcement or warning, thus prolonging His silence for as long as another year. This change in plan was troubling news, not just to His mandali and other devotees, but for the

* Likewise, Baba's initial plan to cross the Atlantic had coincided with an increase of German U-boat attacks on Allied vessels in those waters.

war-torn world as well. Because He had linked His speaking with the end of the war, this twelve-month extension carried with it the implication that the fighting could go on for another year.

Baba instructed His lovers to reread the pamphlet on meditation that He had sent out along with their orders in August 1940 and to repeat one of six names of God for thirty minutes each day "with utmost sincerity and interest." He also asked them to repeat His name for an additional five minutes. These new orders were to remain in effect until February 15, 1942, when Baba declared that He would come out of seclusion permanently, after which time, He said, there would be no more orders. Baba spoke with the men and women about their own meditation practices, telling them: "Don't meditate mechanically. Meditate in the form of a prayer, and get so much drowned that you lose yourselves."[27]

Meanwhile, the weather remained fine until October 24, when late monsoon rains returned. Baba insisted on continuing His walks with the women, who dutifully huddled beneath their umbrellas and followed Him all around the wet grounds like ducklings behind their mother.

Baba set His departure from Panchgani for October 28, and everyone prepared for another journey. He gave Chanji a respite and engaged Kalemama to make arrangements for their accommodations. He ordered Tukaram to drive the bus, with Nilu serving as assistant mechanic.* The servants were to travel in a second, hired bus, and then by rail. This time, Chanji noted, Baba's decision to shift was but "a mild surprise … when He disclosed to them His intention to take another memorable tour which would go in history unparalleled."[28†]

UNDER THE MOON AND STARS

Baba awoke the women in the wee hours of Tuesday, October 28, 1941, and at 5:00 AM He escorted them down into Tiger Valley to visit

* Baba had sent Eruch back to Bangalore in January.

† Chanji's assertion seems, in retrospect, somewhat overstated, given that this was the shortest journey Baba made with the women, but he was writing at the beginning of the tour, not the end.

His cave. It was so dark that they had to light their way with torches and kerosene lanterns. Even though the trek took over an hour, Baba stayed for only a few minutes before leading the women back to their bungalow, where they arrived before the sun had had time to rise.

Mani did not note the exact time the Buick and the Blue Bus rolled out of the hill station; in fact, at this point her diary entries became so brief that she condensed the coming month of travels into fewer than two pages of notes. Nilu, however, marked their time of departure in a letter to Adi K. at Bangalore, writing: "We left Panchgani on the 28th in the noon by our grand old bus. This time Baba and the Invisibles were in the bus, and Tuka [Tukaram] was driving."[29]

Nergiz was riding in the bus with her young son Adi seated in her lap, and she was not feeling well. She had only joined Baba in March of the previous year, and His orders, shifts, and constant work with the women were taking their toll. When the bus made a stop—perhaps for petrol—before passing through Mahabaleshwar, Nergiz was suddenly struck with a terrifying question: What would become of her children if she were to die? Baba was standing beneath the window next to her seat. Just as she had this disturbing thought, He looked up at her and gestured: "You will not die. I am with your children always, so don't worry. You will grow to be an old woman."*

Baba's entourage headed south for an ambitious two-hundred-mile drive. Much of their route was the same as the one they had followed on their way to Bangalore in August 1939, past Satara and on to Kolhapur. There the fields were so lovely that Baba stopped the bus so that the women might watch the sunset as they ate their picnic supper. Afterward, they continued south to Dharwar, now in Karnataka State. The roads were poor and it was nearly ten by the time they reached their dak bungalow. But the women did not seem to mind the long day: Mani called it a "nice drive under moon & stars," and she found the bungalow to be "surprisingly modern," well worth the long

* Nergiz died in 1998, at the age of 98.

drive.[30] They left for Karwar the following morning, stopping for tea at a hotel where Baba treated everyone to "memorable luddoos [*sic*]" before they continued on, passing through a green bamboo forest that brought to mind their visit to Ceylon.[31] They reached Karwar in the early afternoon of Wednesday the twenty-ninth.

This was the women's second visit. The first had taken place in April 1940, during the Goa Tour, when they spent five nights at the shabby Grand Hotel. This time they settled into a bungalow overlooking the Arabian Sea. Mehera recalled that it was located "on a quiet main road with no buses, cars or people, quiet and lovely. We could see the sea from our house. There was a large bay. We watched, as the fishing boats brought in huge quantities of fish."[32] She found the bungalow "very new [and] rather ordinary … but convenient."[33]

Margaret described the town as "a beautiful place by the sea, reminiscent of Portofino—but the climate!! Hot and humid…. Also cobras had a fascinating but disturbing habit of taking a shortcut through our Karwar garden."[34] She went on to observe that this did not bode well for a long halt. The weather was so uncomfortable that Baba became concerned that Karwar would not be suitable for His work. He was also worried that the bungalow might be too small and overcrowded for the large group, but the women told Him that they were fine and He decided to stay.

Baba called Kaku's nieces, Sushila and Indu, to oversee the group's meals. The sisters had cooked for the women during their first visit to Karwar. Baba also called Indu's husband and three children. They all resided in a house about two hundred yards from the women's bungalow. Indu and Sushila prepared the meals in their kitchen and another of the servants carried the hot containers to the women's bungalow, accompanied by the cooks, who wanted to make sure that the food arrived safely and that Baba and the women were satisfied with it. Some of the dishes they prepared included fish and seafood fresh from the harbor, an unexpected treat.

WHAT IF A CRAB BITES MY TOES?

Baba escorted the women to the seaside each morning as well as for evening walks. Mehera recalled their first outing to the beach:

> After perhaps half a mile we turned to the left and came across a cool, shady grove of lovely pine trees. They had very fine needles instead of leaves, and the ground was covered with these needles which were very soft to walk on. We followed Baba through the grove, and came to a beautiful beach. It was not a straight beach, but part of a lovely bay, so the waves broke gently on the shore.
>
> "How lovely it is," Baba said. He turned around, and Baba Himself looked so beautiful by the sea. We all gathered around Him to admire the view. He told us, "You can all do what you like … talk together and walk or whatever." Baba wanted to have a walk alone, which meant that we should not follow Him.[35]

The tranquil bay was a perfect place to learn to swim, and as they were leaving the beach Katie and Mani put their heads together and began to whisper and giggle. When Baba asked why they were whispering, they seized the moment. "Baba, the sea and beach are so lovely and quiet," they cajoled, "we would like to learn to swim. Could we, Baba?"[36]

"Swim?" Baba asked. "You want to learn how?"[37]

Baba gave their request a moment of thought and then told them that only if Mehera also wished to learn would He permit them to do so. Mehera found herself trapped: She had no desire to learn to swim but did not want to disappoint Mani and Katie. Further, she wanted, as always, to please Baba, but He was not telling her what *He* wanted her to do. When He asked her if *she* wanted to learn to swim, she was noncommittal, replying: "I really don't mind either way." But Katie and Mani persisted, pleading, "Mehera, say yes, say yes," until they had successfully wheedled her into agreeing, and so the lessons began.[38]

Baba appointed Margaret to be their swimming instructor, assisted by Irene, Kitty, and Rano. But the women's first order of business was to decide what to wear. No one brought a bathing suit along on the Blue Bus Tours, so they had to improvise. "What each one came out wearing, you can just imagine," Mehera reminisced. "It was too funny. Like a madhouse!"[39] Katie, who found that her ears were sensitive to water, plugged them with cotton wool and improvised a swimming cap by cutting off the foot of one of Elizabeth's old stockings, which she pulled over her hair to ensure that her earplugs stayed in place. Knowing how modest Mehera was, Irene offered her a pair of slacks to wear, which she altered to fit Mehera's more slender figure. According to Mani, Mehera's makeshift swimwear concealed all but her ankles.

The women went off the following day for their first thirty-minute lesson. The sheltered bay might have appeared inviting to Mani and Katie, but Mehera was reluctant, fretting aloud, "What if a crab bites my toes?"[40] She waded out alongside the two more adventurous girls as everyone else looked on from the shore. Margaret and Irene coaxed her in until the water was waist deep, but she refused to go any farther, and they struggled to keep her afloat as she flailed and clutched at them for support. Despite Margaret and Irene's attempts to bolster her confidence, Mehera later recalled that she must have looked like a sheep led to slaughter—a wet one: The pants that Irene had given her were knitted from wool, and they had become so sodden with seawater that even Margaret might not have been able to stay afloat in them.

When the women returned to the bungalow Margaret assigned them homework, explaining that it would be helpful for them to learn a few basic strokes before their next lesson. She instructed them to lie on their stomachs on the floor, supported by their pillows, and they tried to imitate her movements. "It was very, very hot, but Mani and I did practice in our room," Mehera continued. "When we got tired and too hot, we went to see how the others were doing. They were all there on their tummies on the floor, young and old, plump and

thin, practicing breaststroke. It was such a funny sight! We were so amused that we stood there and watched them for some time. So we practiced like this every day."[41] "If Baba were in a hurry," Margaret observed, "He expected you [would only have] to give them one lesson —and then they could swim to Australia! So I taught them the strokes over chairs, lying on pillows, et cetera."[42] In fact, Baba gave the women four mornings of practice before telling them that the following day He expected Mehera, Mani, and Katie to be able to swim ten strokes each.

When the appointed time came, He stood on the beach to watch, clapping His hands to mark the strokes while one of the women counted aloud. Mehera went in first—perhaps to get the traumatic experience over with as quickly as possible. "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."[43] "By the tenth stroke, I was on the bottom of the ocean. Margaret and Irene pulled me up. I looked like a wet rat."[44] Mehera struggled to her feet and looked back at Baba standing on the shore. "What is Baba saying? Is He satisfied? Did I pass the test?" she wondered. "'Very good, I'm happy. Now come out.' Oh, I was so happy. I had passed the test!"[45] Baba gave her five points.

Katie fared no better, disappearing below the surface long before Baba could count to ten. Mani, however, took the prize for the least number of strokes as she "sank like a stone" before Baba's second clap.[46] Margaret tried to excuse Mani's failure by observing that her legs were too long, an explanation that no one—least of all Baba—would fall for. Baba allowed Mani to have a few more lessons, but they were of no avail. "We swam well on our pillows, but in the water we had no balance," Mehera lamented years later. "We just sank to the bottom."[47]

No one drowned during the women's stay in Karwar, but Nergiz took a tumble, sustaining some scratches and minor cuts. "When Baba, who was passing by, noticed that she was injured, He sat down beside her and called for Rano to bring the first-aid kit," Najoo later

wrote. "Then Baba, with His own hands, lovingly cleaned and dressed Mummy's wounds, instructing Rano to change the dressings daily for three days until the cuts had healed."[48]

CRAWLING HOME TO MEHERABAD

While in Karwar it was Baba's intention to continue the seclusion He had begun on August 1 in Meherabad, and in the afternoons, while the women rested from their morning exertions, He focused on His inner work. As He planned only a ten-day halt, however, there was no time for *mast* contacts. The days passed quickly, and Mani summarized the women's sojourn in three short lines:

> swims in sea in mornings &
> walks in eve. lovely time—v.
> hot though. nice week.[49]

Temperatures dropped when the time came to leave, and Baba and the women awoke to a cool, rainy morning on Saturday, November 8. They were bound for Hindalga, a small village on the outskirts of Belgaum, where they arrived at noon for a four-day visit. Baba had again been invited to stay in a spacious bungalow belonging to the Maharani of Savantwadi, who had met with Him in Amboli during the Goa Tour. But there seems to have been some confusion surrounding the Maharani's kind offer. She owned so many bungalows that there was a question as to exactly which one Baba and the women were meant to use. Baba blamed Chanji, and the misunderstanding provoked yet another tirade. Perhaps attempting to minimize the damage, Vishnu consoled Chanji, writing: "You were not made known as to how many bungalows there were belonging to the Sawantvadi [*sic*]!"[50]

Two days after their arrival the women were joined by Gulmai, who had not seen Baba since October 17, when He met with

Upasni. Baba took them out to visit a place called Dharamshala—"Place of Sadhus"—twelve miles away. During free moments Mani and Katie continued their typing lessons with Kitty, begun in Ajmer during the previous tour.

Baba and the women left Hindalga late in the morning of November 12, for the return drive to Dharwar. Along the way they took a tea break at the same hotel where they had stopped on October 29. They reached Dharwar at about 2:00 PM, settling into a large bungalow in nearby Saptapur for a fifteen-day halt.* But the house had no electricity, and the women had to unpack their kerosene lamps. It also had no running water, so Krishna was ordered to carry water from a well close by—a formidable chore to provide cooking and bathing water for so many women.

Baba planned to use His time in Dharwar to contact *masts*, and Mani recorded that on November 14 He left for South India to see Chatti Baba, who had returned home to Tamil Nadu. He stopped off in Bangalore for one night before proceeding on to Nagapattinam. On the way there it began to rain, and the road was soon flooded. Baba had to wade through mud and water more than a foot deep to reach the beloved *mast*. And although He was still in seclusion, He returned to Bangalore on the seventeenth to spend several days with Donkin, as well as with several of the men He had ordered to stay behind in April 1940.

Baba's most intriguing new contact during the five-day tour was a twenty-two-year-old, very high, sixth-plane *mast* named Chota Mastan (Small One who Brings Good News). Chota Mastan had become God-intoxicated at the age of ten and was revered locally as a saint. Baba also sought out a *mast* called Shah Mastan (Gentleman who Brings Good News), who was at last located near dawn in a huge cemetery hidden deep within a dark forest, in his abode among the tombstones. When Baba returned to Dharwar on the nineteenth He

* Baba visited Dharwar many times during His South India Tour in 1930, and again in 1954 and 1956.

described the tour to the women, but Mani's diary entry noted, simply: "the funny *mast*-hunt in a graveyard."[51]

On November 25, just two days before leaving Dharwar, Baba ordered Chanji to arrange for lodgings in Satara. It would be His final halt during the tour, and the group departed on Thursday, November 27. Meanwhile, Baba had called Sarosh from Ahmednagar to meet Him in Satara to drive the bus home. Before departing Satara on the morning of the twenty-eighth Baba spelled out a message for Sarosh, telling him: "This is the last journey of the Blue Bus. You are very lucky to drive Myself and the mandali in this bus on its last trip. You were the one who had it built and now it is you who are taking it on its final journey…. I have done much work through it, and it is Sarosh's great good fortune to be driving God in person on its final run!"[52]

Kitty called the 122-mile journey

> the last episode of our tour before we [said] goodbye to our dear Blue Bus. Many were the times on the last stretch when we had to get out and sit by the dusty roadside while the tires were mended and shifted, [Sarosh] and Nilu disappearing under the bus, Baba patiently walking up and down. Each time we stopped, along would come the villagers who would look on, offer to help, fetch water, or bring bullocks to haul us out of a ditch. Baba was happy, for here were new contacts.[53]

The fourth and final Blue Bus Tour ended on Friday, November 28, 1941, when the bus rumbled up Meherabad Hill one last time. The drive from Satara was Meher Baba's last ride in the grand old bus: Mani called her "a gypsy through and through."[54]

CHAPTER 13

A New Life for the Old Bus

This Blue Bus is like
the chariot of Krishna,
and after My manifestation,
people will worship it!

MEHER BABA[1]





The Blue Bus installed at Meherazad, without its cab

IS YOUR TRIP NECESSARY?

THE JOURNEYS THAT MEHER BABA AND THE WOMEN made together in the Blue Bus ended on November 28, 1941, when the bus ascended the road to Upper Meherabad to deliver its travel-weary passengers to their Meher Retreat dormitories.

Baba did invite some of the women to accompany Him during subsequent *mast* tours, but none of those extended journeys were made in the Blue Bus. He ceased using the bus for several reasons. First, gasoline rationing went into effect after the tours began, and over time the price of fuel became prohibitive. Wartime posters and pamphlets exhorted would-be travelers to limit their journeys to only those that were absolutely essential. One such leaflet asked, "IS YOUR TRIP NECESSARY?" while advising that "NEEDLESS TRAVEL INTERFERES WITH THE WAR EFFORT!"[2] Furthermore, the limited availability of petrol made travel more and more challenging, not just in India, but virtually everywhere in the East and West. By the end of 1941 it was no longer feasible to continue traveling in the bus.



Harihar Dadaji of Khandwa, contacted on October 12, 1941

Baba's second reason for ending the Blue Bus Tours was the gradual shift in His work. As World War II intensified, He devoted more and more attention to *mast* tours and His Universal work with the God-intoxicated souls who lent Him assistance in guiding the war to its conclusion. His efforts to establish a Universal Spiritual Center had ended, and the escalation of His *mast* work precluded the visits to spiritual sites and sightseeing excursions with the women that were such an important aspect of the Blue Bus Tours.

Although the destinations of Baba's subsequent *mast* tours proved to be as far-flung as those of the Blue Bus days, these later journeys were made by rail.• But even this mode of transportation became so increasingly curtailed that He ceased to invite all the women to come with Him, bringing only Mehera, Mani, and Meheru Irani. Kitty, Rano, Irene, and Margaret took turns accompanying them to assist with travel arrangements and help maintain Mehera's seclusion, which, in any case, was gradually being eased in preparation for the New Life. The remaining women stayed behind at Meherabad.

• Mehera's eponymous memoir has a map of India entitled "Meher Baba's Headquarters, where Mehera stayed during Baba's 1940s *Mast* Tours between February 1942 and October 1949." These tours began with the trip to Dehradun (February–September 1942), listed there as a *mast* tour, and ended with Mt. Abu (March–May 1949). Mehera observed that during their travels with Baba subsequent to the Blue Bus Tours, "Our lives were secluded and made up of small things." *(Mehera,* 145–46)

Finally, the condition of the bus was such that no number of new tires could suffice to keep it on the road. Although it had been driven only intermittently during the three-year span of the tours, it had been driven hard, invariably burdened with more passengers and baggage than it had been built to carry, and its engine needed an extensive (and expensive) overhaul. Thus, like a wounded, war-scarred soldier no longer able to carry out orders, the old bus—veteran of untold thousands of miles of travel during its short tour of duty—was "retired from active service."[3]

When Baba spelled out His message to Sarosh before departing Satara, He impressed upon him the spiritual significance of the battered but beloved vehicle, declaring: "This Blue Bus is like the chariot of Krishna, and after my manifestation, people will worship it! This bus should be sold in a lottery among our close ones and the winner

should keep it on condition that he does not derive any commercial benefit from it, either by plying it on hire or by selling it. This bus has great importance, and to keep it is essential."[4]•

On November 27, during the final evening of the last tour, Baba dictated a circular to be sent to one hundred of His closest ones in India, announcing a raffle, the proceeds of which would support His programs to benefit the poor. The prize: the Blue Bus. The cost of a ticket was fifty rupees, and no one declined the opportunity to be the winner. Baba declared: "The bus will go to one outside the mandali, who resides at a great distance from Meherabad."[5]

The raffle took place at 5:00 PM on Sunday, December 28, 1941, in the *mast* ashram at Upper Meherabad. Baba drew the winning ticket, which belonged to Keki Desai, who resided in Delhi, thus fulfilling Baba's promise. When Keki learned that he had won the bus, he said: "What am I to do with it, it is Yours Baba."[6] Meherwan recalled that Baba replied: "It has come back on My chest!"[7] In any case Baba accepted the gift in the knowledge that it was Keki's devotion that prompted the loving gesture.

But, as Donkin observed in *The Wayfarers*: "Some things have an unpredictable destiny," and so it was for the Blue Bus, because Baba immediately bequeathed the vehicle to Sarosh, with whom it began its next tour of duty.[8] Despite His stipulation that it should not be plied for trade, Baba allowed Sarosh to add it to his small fleet of public buses. Sarosh overhauled the engine, removed the first seat on the right side of the passenger section to install a side door, and began using the vehicle to transport passengers around Ahmednagar.

"There came a day, however," Donkin lamented, "when her coachwork became too battered to carry on this drudgery and so the body

• The chariot is one of the most recognized and beloved symbols of Lord Krishna. The *Bhagavad Gita* is an allegory in which the chariot, which represents the body, carries one passenger (the soul). The chariot is pulled by five horses (the five senses), and it is the responsibility of the charioteer (intelligence) to use the reins (mind) to control the chariot as the soul makes its journey through its myriad lives. In the *Gita*, Krishna is the charioteer and Arjuna is the passenger, or soul, whom Krishna seeks to guide safely through battle in the cosmic war of good versus evil.

In the wee hours of Sunday, February 25, 1894, Shireenmai Irani, great with child, awoke from a powerful dream: "I saw seated in a chariot a person as glorious as the sun.... [I] marveled at the luster of his face." In the moments following Baba's second automobile accident in Satara on December 2, 1956, Vishnu recalled: "Never in my life have I seen such utter radiance and luster as was on Baba's face then! He was like a king, a victorious king who had won a great battle ... Lord Krishna must have looked like that in his chariot on the victorious battlefield. The radiance was blinding!" (*Lord Meher*, 107, 4132)

was taken off and dumped in the garage yard, where its erstwhile brilliant blues became ever more bleached and desquamated by sun and rain." Sarosh disassembled the engine and sold off its parts. He removed the cab, tires, axles, and battered leather bench seats, as well anything else that could be salvaged for scrap rubber and metal, both of which were in great demand during and following the war. And just as Donkin observed, Sarosh abandoned the empty shell to peacefully rust away in a corner of the lot behind his garage. But although what remained may have had the appearance of "an old bus body," it was "the body of a very special bus," and its "season in the junkyard … a preparation for the final epoch."[9]

MEHER BABA'S GREAT SECLUSION

Before leaving on a *mast*-hunting trip to Mt. Abu on May 27, 1949, Baba ordered Sarosh to deliver the surviving shell of the Blue Bus to Meherazad.* He wanted to use it as a cabin for an upcoming seclusion that He planned to carry out there. This time He wished to be surrounded by the men and women residing with Him, rather than carrying out His work alone at a remote location. The twenty-by-thirty-foot site Baba selected for His seclusion was a shady area bounded on three sides by existing ashram buildings. At the front was Mandali Hall, on one side was Donkin's room, and at the back was another smaller room that was converted into a simple bathroom that Baba could access via the rear door of the bus.

Kaka had the body of the bus lifted up onto four stout forty-gallon oil barrels set deep into the ground. The barrels were filled with sand to provide additional stability. This base was then enclosed with a brick-and-mortar surround, with two steps up to the side door. Kaka also

* Both *Lord Meher* and *The Wayfarers* state that the body of the bus was loaded into a truck or lorry. According to Meherwan, Sarosh had to use a *thele* (a two-wheeled handcart) to transport it. The shell was roped onto the thele, which was pushed, pulled, and cajoled the entire eight-mile distance to Meherazad. (*Lord Meher*, 2711; *The Wayfarers*, Supplement, 8th June 1948 to 1st August 1949, 29; Meherwan Jessawala, unrecorded talk, Mandali Hall, November 2014)

repainted the rusting shell its original bright blue.* Although the neem tree growing adjacent to the site provided shade, Kaka constructed a tin shed roof over the bus to lessen the patter of falling rain and further shield Baba from the relentless heat of the Indian sun. Where the bus was exposed to view it was enclosed by tall tatta screens, creating a small compound that ensured Baba's privacy. Kaka placed Baba's cot inside the cabin, and he hung new blue curtains in the windows on the original hooks that had been installed for the tours. Work continued until June 19, just two days before Baba's seclusion was set to begin. Donkin called Kaka "that indefatigable taskmaster, [and] when Baba returned from Mt. Abu at the end of May, He found the battered and depressing relic of three months ago transmuted, by Kaka's alchemy, into the snuggest and gayest little cabin."[10] Thus transformed, the Blue Bus became the metaphorical vehicle for Baba's upcoming work.

* The bus had originally been painted two shades of blue, but Kaka used only one.



Baba, seated at the entrance to the Blue Bus compound

Baba had invited one hundred fifty men, including all twenty-eight of the mandali, for a special meeting, so that they could have His darshan one last time before He retreated into seclusion. "Meherazad was and still is a garden oasis in a semi-arid countryside, with tall spreading trees casting shade on the few cottages and buildings on the property," Bhau Kalchuri wrote in *Meher Baba's New Life*. "There are landscaped gardens with flowers and flowering shrubs and vines, designed and lovingly tended by the women mandali. It was in this peaceful setting that Baba and His close men gathered at 7:00 a.m. on June 21st." Kaka and Eruch had prepared the compound around the cabin for the men's inspection, draping the tatta screens with bunting and Baba's seven-hued flag, displaying a hand-tinted photograph of Baba, and hanging a gold-lettered sign that spelled out "MEHERAZAD."[11] The men's tours of the compound were a festive introduction to what would be a grave undertaking. Baba opened the meeting by declaring: "I have called you all here to take part in the purification ceremony to cleanse the atmosphere and keep it free from maleficent spirits and evil influences."[12] This statement was followed by

Mehera's garden at Meherazad delights pilgrims to this day



excerpts from holy scriptures and Baba's explanations of their meanings, read out by men He had chosen from the group. The meeting ended after Baba distributed prasad.

The following day, Wednesday, June 22, Baba inspected the cabin and pronounced it suitable for His work. That evening, at precisely 5:35 PM, He embarked upon a forty-day endeavor that would come to be known as the Great Seclusion. As soon as Baba entered His compound, "The Sun, who had been shining brightly in the hearts of His lovers, now hid His face, and what they thought was darkness engulfed them. But this darkness, or separation, served a useful purpose: the pain of His remembrance kept them awake throughout the night of separation, awaiting dawn's arrival!"[13]

Like all of Baba's previous seclusions, this one began according to a precise timetable spelled out down to the quarter hour. Baba's initial meal instructions called for three slices of bread at 7:45 AM, followed by three cups of tea and milk (carried separately), as well as drinking water. At 2:00 PM, following a three-hour period of "intense work and rest," Baba took one cup of coffee with milk (also delivered separately).[14] His only hot meal consisted of rice and dal, served three hours later. The schedule also included fixed times for the delivery of buckets of hot water in the mornings for bathing and lanterns for illumination at night.

Befitting a fortunate slave, Kaka was awarded the privilege of being the only person allowed to have direct contact with Baba for the duration of His seclusion to attend directly to His needs.• But the privilege came with responsibilities that would prove grueling: Kaka was at Baba's beck and call sixteen hours a day—from 5:00 AM to 9:00 PM, seven days a week, and he was expected to respond whenever Baba clapped or rang His bell, no matter the time. Baba instructed Kaka to knock on the side door of the bus and wait for Him to clap before entering. Kaka also functioned as Baba's "carpenter,

• The three couplets from which Hafiz's words were taken read:

> Befitting a fortunate slave, carry out every command of the Master, without any question of why and what.
> About what you hear from the Master, never say it is wrong, because my dear, the fault lies in your own incapacity to understand Him.
> I am the slave of the Master who has released me from ignorance; whatever my Master does is of the highest benefit to all concerned.

(*Lord Meher*, 4549)

mason, coolie, sweeper, orderly and engineer." As Baba's caretaker, he served as concierge, butler, footman, waiter, and man of all work. Despite the deep trust implicit in Baba's selection of him as His personal attendant, Kaka observed: "I am really not fit to be even a particle of the dust of the Master's feet, and it is His infinite kindness and love only that He gives me the opportunity to serve Him a little."[15]



Baba, seated in the Blue Bus compound with (L to R) Gustadji, Baidul, Pendu, and Eruch

Katie's sister Goher now resided at Meherazad and served as one of Baba's physicians, and although she was not allowed a glimpse of Baba, she had the good fortune to aid Kaka in some of his tasks. Jal Kerawalla, Nariman Dadachanji, and Meherjee Karkaria helped to keep watch. They also assisted Kaka, but like Goher, they had no contact with Baba and were ordered to keep silence when on duty. Three men from nearby Pimpalgaon Village were hired to act as day and night watchmen, and three servants were employed to assist Kaka. The women remained sequestered in their bungalow, cottage, and garden at the back of the compound.

Baba required absolute silence for His work. One of Kaka's responsibilities was to remove the berries that dropped from the neem tree onto the tin roof over Baba's cabin during the night, disturbing His work and what little rest He was able to take. After Baba called him to complain, Kaka knocked off the remaining berries with a long stick. He had to climb silently onto the roof of the shed to remove the fruit. Even the birds were expected to practice silence as Meheru quietly

shooed them away. "Baba was always very conscious of the least sound [and] there had to be absolute quiet…. The women in the adjoining compound, working in the kitchen, garden or elsewhere, were kept 'on the alert' throughout this period," Kitty recalled. "Yet, on more than one occasion word came from Baba that there was too much noise. Think how they felt—they started tiptoeing!"[16]

On Sunday, June 26, Baba washed the feet of twenty-one poor villagers and presented each of them with ten rupees. Two days later He bathed, fed, and worked with the *mast* Ali Shah, who had been brought from Meherabad for the day.* On the twenty-ninth, Baba ordered Baidul and two other men to bring Him five mad and two *masts*. Baidul, who was so conscientious in His search for *masts*, inadvertently brought a beggar he had mistaken for a mad man. Baba was displeased and said His work was compromised, but He proceeded to cut all seven men's hair and to bathe them, dressing them in new shirts and lungis and presenting them with little packages of sweets.



Fifth-plane Ali Shah from Meherabad

On Friday, July 1, 1949, the ninth day of His seclusion, Baba began the second phase of His work. He ordered all his close ones—the men and women at Meherazad and those remaining at Meherabad, as well as lovers in the East and West—to maintain silence for the next thirty-one days. The atmosphere at Meherazad in the wake of Baba's orders is described in *Lord Meher* as "surcharged with a silent joy."[17] But for those outside His close circle, carrying on with their everyday lives in the world, this order must have presented an extraordinary challenge.

* Ali Shah was a fifth-plane jamali *mast* who came to Ahmednagar in the early 1940s. Baba began working with him circa November 1945. *The Wayfarers* calls Ali Shah one of Baba's "Five Favorites."

Also on July 1, Baba reduced His intake of liquids to weak tea with or without milk, buttermilk, or plain water. One day His only sustenance consisted of black tea and two teaspoons each of honey and coconut water at 8:00 AM, noon, 2:00 PM, and 4:00 PM. But by eight o'clock that evening He had become nauseated, apparently unable to digest the rich honey. A few days later He complained of a burning pain in His abdomen. On the eighth He took a small amount of rose syrup stirred into buttermilk, as well as some black grape juice.

On top of persistent stomach upsets, Baba hit His head several times when exiting the doors of the cabin. On another occasion He received "a nasty bump" from the corner of the overhead luggage rack nearest the side door, after which Kaka wrapped the metal with cotton wool and cloth to soften any further blows. On yet another occasion Baba stood up and banged the top of His head so hard on the unforgiving steel ceiling of the cabin that He had to sit back down and wait for the pain to subside. Baba blamed His injuries on the bus, as if it were conspiring against His work: "Although the cabin hits Me in the head every day, today that part above the door hit Me so hard that I began to feel giddy."[18] He then added: "Do not give these knocks on the head against the low ceiling of the cabin any supernatural interpretation as our dear old blessed Chanji would have done out of his deep undying love for Me. These hard knocks on the skull show how brave the real yogis must be who live in dark, low-roofed caves in remote wild jungles."[19*]

Baba was also disturbed by strong winds that rattled the metal roof of the shed. His watchmen were alarmed by phantom footsteps in the night, strange hissing noises, the sound of heavy breathing coming from Baba's bathroom, and knocking that seemed to come from inside the cabin. They also heard Baba's own heavy breathing as He moved restlessly about. Once, Meherjee heard Him snoring during a rare, brief period of rest between 12:30 and 1:00 AM.

* Chanji had died of typhoid fever in Kashmir on August 25, 1944.

Baba dictated an extraordinary description of His seclusion experience to be recorded in the diary that Jal was keeping, saying: "The flow of My thoughts continues day and night, during sleep as well as when I am awake; for 24 hours it continues. Thoughts of God come, thoughts of Maya come; good thoughts come, bad thoughts come; desirable thoughts come, undesirable thoughts come; pure thoughts, impure thoughts; thoughts of My men and women mandali; thoughts of the world, thoughts of the entire universe."[20]

About this second phase of work Baba said: "Although infinite restlessness is My constant companion, I have never been so restless [as] from July 1st to 9th in My present seclusion. No one except Myself and God knows what I went through during those nine days."[21] And yet He immediately embarked on a third phase, allowing Himself a serving of rice and chutney before resuming His fast. During this time, Jal, Nariman, and Meherjee were permitted to break their silence by reading aloud to Him from Eastern scriptures, although from the compound only, as Baba listened from within the cabin, concealed behind the curtains in the windows.



Baba, seated outside Mandali Hall, during the special meeting on June 21, 1949

On Silence Day, July 10, Baba called Mehera and Mani to spend thirty minutes with Him. They were naturally concerned about His health—indeed, all the women were, and while they did not speak, Baba told them via His alphabet board to assure the others that "Baba is well and sends His love."[22] Baba also announced that for the last nine days of

His seclusion He would need to shift to another location, soon revealed as Poona. But He continued to feel restless and decided to depart Meherazad nearly a week ahead of His proposed schedule, on Saturday, July 16. The night before He left, "Thick clouds gathered and the sky shed tears at Baba's suffering."[23] It was still raining the following morning, and there was no one to wave Baba goodbye as He was driven away: all had retreated behind their own curtained windows and closed doors as He climbed into the car to go.

"Maya seemed to follow us with a vengeance," Kaka observed. "Continuous rain and unceasing strong wind … were ever-present. At times while Baba was in absolute seclusion … He would call me at odd hours of the night and inquire about the knocking at His door."[24] Baba relaxed His seclusion and fasting for part of the time He was in Poona, but He continued His *mast* work, making many contacts. He returned to His practices of fasting and intense seclusion for the last seven days, and returned to Meherazad on Sunday, July 24, disappearing again into the Blue Bus cabin. He renewed His work for this, His final week of seclusion, getting by on two to three hours of broken sleep each night. He drank two cups of Ovaltine on the thirty-first, one at 5:00 AM and the other at 6:00 PM. He ordered all the servants at Meherazad to observe silence for the final ten hours of His work.[25]

A few days previously Baba had issued instructions for His upcoming emergence. Everyone was to fast before gathering outside His compound by 7:00 AM on Monday, August 1, 1949. Included in this group were Mehera, Mani, Meheru, Goher, and Valu, all of whom now resided at Meherazad; Mansari, Kitty, and Rano, who had been living at Meherabad since the end of the Blue Bus Tours; and Elizabeth and Norina, whom Baba had called to India. Also visiting at this auspicious time were Arnavaz and Soonamasi, and the schoolgirls—Najoo, Hilloo, Naggu, and Sarvar; others included Sarosh and Viloo, Adi K., Adi Jr., and Gulmai. At least seventeen of the women and girls present had been passengers in the Blue Bus.

Before appearing before the large group, Baba met with Mehera and Mani. He called them to the room adjacent to the cabin where chairs had been set up, and there the two women broke their month-long silence. Mehera conversed with Baba, but Mani was only allowed to say His name, just one time. Baba ordered the remaining women to continue their silence until He could join them after the meeting.

Per Baba's orders, no one at the subsequent gathering made any demonstration of devotional greeting when at last He stepped from His compound to sit on a special dais set up for the occasion. Despite the rigors of His forty-day Great Seclusion and fast, He "looked the very image of freshness, radiance and health. It was as if … He had just returned from a holiday!"[26]

Harkening back to His comments about clearing the area around the cabin of evil spirits, Baba told those present: "Now prayers will be offered, and everyone should be still and quiet. If any of you make the slightest noise, a ghost will haunt you."[27] He had written the prayer, which was read out in English, Marathi, Gujarati, and Urdu, and afterward everyone ended their month-long silence with a single word: "Amen."[28]• This was followed with the singing of a ghazal that He also composed for the occasion. Baba then served rava as prasad. Slowly the crowd dispersed. Although Baba had made no promises, anyone who harbored any lingering hopes that He might break His silence went away disappointed.

"Can you imagine," Mehera asked, "to be shut in that bus, fasting. One would feel claustrophobic—not to speak, as well as to work, to fast, and to be shut up in that thing. After working, one would want to run out into the open. To fast, to be on silence, and to be in seclusion was very difficult for Baba. It told on His body and was a strain. But Baba's work always came first. He

• BABA'S PRAYER

May God whom the Muslims call Allah, whom the Zoroastrians call Ahuramazda, whom the Hindus call Ishwar or Paramatma and whom many others call by many other names,

May He whose union the lovers seek in self-annihilation, whom the seers see as the only Reality, and whom the knowers know as their own Real Self,

May this Supreme Conscious Being, this conscious Soul of souls who eternally manifests as the Avatar and Perfect Masters, may He through His all-merciful act bestow on us His grace.

And may He solve our difficulties by the end of this year, and may He decide everything for us by the end of this year, and may He, according to Baba's 1949 circular, finish everything by the end of this year, to enable Baba to break His silence in the beginning of the next year, to speak the one and the last word of all-embracing Divinity.

(Lord Meher, 2732–33)



Baba, garlanded and seated by the Blue Bus on June 21

did not see to His health."[29] "How much He worked and suffered for our sake," she later marveled.[30]

Baba Himself said of His seclusion: "Staying in the Blue Bus cabin was troublesome for me…. I have accomplished several heavy spiritual tasks at other places, such as Angiras Rishi Hill,* my tomb at Meherabad, the Panchvati Cave.† The burden of the work was always heavy—but the place of confinement was never as uncomfortable as the Blue Bus cabin."[31]

Mehera–Meher offers an intriguing perspective on Baba's use of the Blue Bus at this time: "In retrospect, it seems as if all that had gone before with the Blue Bus was but preparation for its apotheosis in what was to be called Baba's Blue Bus (or Great) Seclusion."[32] Indeed, Baba later declared: "The work

* Angiras Rishi Hill was the location of a seclusion Baba carried out in October 1945. According to *Lord Meher*, "this desolate area … was known as Tapovan, where four great saints—known as *Shringi Rishi*, *Angiras Rishi*, *Muchukunda Rishi*, and *Kunmag Rishi*—are said to have done penance and austerities centuries before." (*Lord Meher*, 2505)

† The Panchvati cave was dug in 1930 so that Baba could enter seclusion at Meherabad. It measured "eight feet deep and a Persian carpet was spread over the earthen floor. A canvas was hung across the entrance, and the ground opposite the cave was leveled for the mandali to gather during Baba's seclusion. Baba named it the Panchvati [Five Banyan Trees] Cave and secluded Himself in it on Saturday, 15 November 1930." (*Lord Meher*, 1204)

I have done in Meherazad, I have not done anywhere in the world."[33] Yet His emergence from seclusion marked not an ending, but another beginning, as He entered the next extraordinary phase of His work: the New Life.*

THE GRAND OLD BUS TODAY



* Between January 4 and 31, 1952, during the Manonash phase of the New Life, Baba secluded Himself intermittently in the Blue Bus cabin for more spiritual work, launching the Fiery Free Life. And although His work *in* the bus was complete, His work with it continued. He would later order a number of disciples to spend time inside the bus, in prayer, repeating His name, or simply sleeping; these included Don Stevens (1962) and Robert Dreyfuss (1965).

A decade passed, during which Meher Baba set in motion the New Life, visited Europe and America three more times and Australia twice, survived two horrific automobile accidents, and began to offer darshan at Guruprasad palace in Poona, as well as other locations throughout India, declaring Himself Avatar of the Age. But Meherazad was the home to which He now returned, and He imbued it with a love that would eventually draw thousands of pilgrims from around the world.

In 1960, poet and devotee Francis Brabazon suggested that future pilgrims would wish to see the Blue Bus, pointing out that it was "deteriorating in the harsh Indian climate" and "should be properly restored and preserved."[34] Baba and Mehera agreed, and Baba allotted one thousand rupees for the work. It became Francis's mission to accomplish the restoration of the vehicle and to see to its care. As time passed it became necessary to replace the wood that lined the ark-like interior walls. In September 1972, Dr. Goher conscripted two young pilgrims to do the work, telling them: "You boys are great carpenters."[35*]

Who could resist such high praise? They embarked on what they thought would be a three-week project, taking out the furniture that was currently on display in the bus and removing and replacing the rotted wood with new planks to be sanded and painted. Dr. Goher provided them with a motley assortment of Indian hand tools quite unlike the Western power tools to which they were accustomed. Neither had any real idea of the historic significance of the bus other than its use by Baba during His Great Seclusion.

Others who were asked to help preferred to listen to the mandali, who spoke daily in Mandali Hall. Although Baba's carpenters were for the most part happy to work on the bus, they were, understandably, a little resentful about not being able to join their fellow pilgrims in the Hall. They were nearly finished when they ran out of time and had to go home. On their last day, Goher said to them: "Mehera would like

* The pilgrims were Jeff Craddock and Richard Gerrish.

to see you."[36] Mehera was very gracious and said that she appreciated their work, and her regard was more than ample compensation for their having missed out on listening to tales by the mandali.

Thanks to Francis's foresight the Blue Bus endures, in its last, permanent home. It is among the first sights that pilgrims take in as they approach the verandah outside Mandali Hall. Today it functions as a mini-museum, and in it are the bed and mattress on which Baba dropped His body on January 31, 1969. Resting on a small table directly across from the door, in the place where Baba sat during the Blue Bus Tours, is a plaster copy of the bronze bust in His bedroom. Other small objects are also displayed.

Pilgrims are invited to step inside the bus and take a closer look, and anyone who has done so will know exactly what Donkin meant



The interior of the Blue Bus as of November 2014

when he called it snug.* It is nigh on impossible to conceive that the small vehicle, which was built to accommodate as many as eighteen passengers, in reality carried many, many more for much of the time it was in use during the Blue Bus Tours.

In order to protect the bus and the objects on display, as well as to maintain a quiet atmosphere for darshan, Meherazad's caretakers endeavor to limit the number of pilgrims inside. Someone is usually posted by the steps leading up into the bus to ensure that no more than three are allowed in at any given time, but on rare occasions when no one is watching the bus can fill with an alarming number of people.

This happened one Sunday morning in December 2014, after several busloads of lovers arrived at the same time. A line formed outside the bus as the first seven pilgrims piled inside. Mehera Arjani† happened to be close by and came to the rescue of the beleaguered vehicle—overloaded yet again. She politely but firmly asked the last four people who had entered the bus to please step out and wait until those inside had taken darshan, and in doing so she encapsulated the exalted position the Blue Bus holds in the grand scope of Meher Baba's work.

Only three pilgrims at a time, please.
Bus is very old.
Must last seven hundred years.[37‡]

* Pilgrims enter and exit the bus via the side door that was installed by Sarosh, not the original rear door, which is now blocked off.

† Mehera Arjani is the daughter of Sam and Roshan Kerawala. As Meherwan's niece she served as one of his caregivers. She was nearly always seated next to him on his bench adjacent to the Blue Bus, where he greeted pilgrims on Meherazad visiting days.

‡ Meher Baba stated on many occasions that His next Advent would occur in seven hundred years.

EPILOGUE

Sisterhood of the Blue Bus

A life of sacrifice based on love is never lost.
It is not only beautiful and fruitful in itself,
but also in the creative inspiration
which it leaves behind.

MEHER BABA[1]

The women were the custodians
of the Blue Bus stories.

ERUCH JESSAWALA[2]



SO MANY WOMEN TOGETHER

BEFORE THE BLUE BUS there were the residents of Meher Baba's women's ashram, and the story of the Blue Bus Tours begins and ends with them—those most fortunate passengers who became the caretakers of its memory.

Brought together over a period of fourteen years, this core group was comprised of Mehera Irani, Mani Irani, Naja Irani, Soonamasi Irani and her daughter Khorshed, Valu Pawar, Kaku Deorukhkar, Mansari Desai, Gaimai Jessawala and her daughters Manu and Meheru, Katie Irani, Kitty Davy, Elizabeth Patterson, Norina Matchabelli, Nadine Tolstoy, Nonny Gayley and her daughter Rano, Hedi Mertens, Helen Dahm, Irene Billo, and Margaret Craske. These twenty-two women welcomed and endured the rigors of the Blue Bus Tours with all the courage, grace, and good humor they could collectively muster, all for the privilege of traversing the length and breadth of India with the Divine Beloved in the service of His work.

In recalling his time of traveling with Baba and the women as a young boy, Meherwan observed: "One of the ways to identify the darbar of the Perfect Master or an Avatar is that you find all types of people around Him … they all are in His darbar, and only He—the mighty Ocean, can accommodate everything."[3]

FACING PAGE: Kitty, Mehera, Baba, Nadine, and Norina, Taragarh Hill, February 18, 1939

Katie said that the women Baba chose to accompany Him on the Blue Bus Tours were so diverse in caste, creed, cultural background, nationality, personality, and temperament that they were "like the whole world" gathered in one place.[4] Many challenges lay in store, not the least of which was the problem of language. Picture two groups of women—Eastern and Western—from six countries, whose native tongues included Hindi, Urdu, Marathi, Gujarati, Persian, and Dari, as well as Russian, Italian, Swiss German, and that increasingly common denominator of modern communication, English.

But even English posed problems. There was American English, as in Rano's exclamation of "Would I!" when Baba asked her if she wanted to live at Meherabad. There was British English, as evidenced in Mani's diary entries describing "topping rambles" followed by afternoon breaks for a "cupper." And then there was Indian English, a creative rendering of British English as it was filtered through Eastern culture, experience, and sensibilities.

When Baba first brought the women together in April 1933, the Easterners had been sequestered from the world so thoroughly that they had no point of reference other than what Baba had told them about their Western sisters, and they had much to learn. They were naturally shy, and Mani observed that it was "only in the latter years that we began coming out of ourselves much more."[5] The Westerners, on the other hand, arrived full of idealized notions about ashram life that Baba had to systematically deconstruct. Theirs was to be an unlearning experience.

Baba brought them to the edge of the cultural abyss separating East and West but He left it to them to build their own bridge. Most of the women met one another half way, and a few even managed to cross over. From the time she joined Baba, Mansari seemed to get along better with the Westerners than the Easterners, so much so that He placed her in the upstairs dormitory in Meher Retreat. Irene was more comfortable with the Easterners. She loved Indian food—the spicier, the better— "and ate the chili chutney like jam."[6] Nadine got on better

with the Easterners than with her Western sisters; she had no qualms about bathing with her enamel mug and a bucket of water (though preferably hot). By the end of the third tour Rano and Kitty had become so immersed in ashram life that Margaret called them "almost Easterners."[7]

However, every day seemed to present a new test. Filis Frederick once recalled: "Margaret told me that one doesn't know how 'Western' one really is until you live in the East. For example, she described some of the intense East-West battles in the kitchen over food and diet. One Eastern lady insisted rice was pure protein!"[8] Fortunately, the women were occasionally able to laugh about their differences. One of the Westerners, "an avid vegetarian, found a piece of pork in the canned beans, but the others showed their sense of humor—they took it out in the garden and buried it with great ceremony!"[9]

Among the Westerners there was such a multiplicity of dispositions that even the removal of customs and language barriers could not overcome. Katie observed in an essay entitled "Help in the Kitchen," from her cookbook:

> Sometimes Baba would ask the Western women to help me in the kitchen. We had no servants, and there was a lot of preparatory work that needed to be done for each meal. So Baba would send all those who were free to help me. Usually it was Nadine Tolstoy, Margaret Craske, Rano Gayley, Irene Billo, and also Mansari who would come. Often there were big baskets of spinach that needed to have the leaves plucked from the stalks and the bad parts sorted out, and then the leaves needed to be cleaned. So the five of them would have to do this all at one time. Invariably, squabbles would arise on whether to only use the leaves or to cook the stalks, too, and how to best chop the onions and the like.

> So, my task of supervising often turned into preventing arguments. I would have to take one person or another away from the group and give her a different task. The more women Baba sent, the more headache for me! No one agreed on anything. Ashram life was such that Baba once told us that it was harder for Him to run an ashram full of women than the World War![10]

Other disagreements among the Westerners are well documented: Nadine thought Irene was immature and insufficiently spiritual. Irene thought Nadine was self-righteous and sanctimonious. Helen, with her taciturn and reclusive nature, found Nadine too talkative and restless. Furthermore, Helen came across as odd, with her homespun, handmade clothes, and she seems to have made no effort to learn even rudimentary English. Kitty found Margaret's sense of humor impenetrable. Rano, with her highly volatile personality, was oil to Margaret's droll and devil-may-care water. Nearly everyone had problems with Norina at one time or another, finding her to be snobbish, with her lectures about the differences between off-the-rack dresses and haute couture; wasteful, with her profligate use of precious ashram commodities; and frequently overbearing, with her need to be in charge.

But no one seems to have found a single fault with Elizabeth, who transmuted what appears to have been her one weakness—her difficulty with the ungodly hours at which Baba woke the women—into her spiritual practice, accepting it as just one more occasion for obedience and surrender. Nonny was above reproach.

"We were all individuals," Mani recalled. "So many women together."[11]

AN UP-MEHERABAD-HILL BATTLE

It must have felt to the Easterners as if the whole world was descending on Meherabad with the arrival of their Western sisters. Khorshed was once heard to remark: "When there were only the six of us, we were so happy. No dispute, no complaining…. Those were very good times."[12] But there were conflicts: Khorshed also told a story of how Baba replied when asked in the early years of the ashram why He had so many different kinds of people surrounding Him who could not seem to get along with one another. Baba said: "I am the Cook. I need some salt, some chilies, some onions—they make a 'tasty' dish! I need all the different ingredients."[13]

"Baba had taken [the Easterners] to the spiritual heights," Margaret recalled,

> then He had to bring them, little by little, back to the material world. I noticed this right away when we first met: He was breaking down barriers between the East and West. We were the "outside world" at that time. He made them, really, like nuns [and] then He brought them back….
>
> At the beginning, it was very separate and distinct—East and West. In Nasik, during our stay, we came closer together with the Easterners and became friends. Then, Baba threw us all in a bag together and shook us up. Still, there were things brought out, which took time to clear up.[14]

"It wasn't as if we had Baba with us all the time," Margaret went on to observe. "He left us alone, quite frequently … all of us shut up together on the Hill."[15] In His absences the women came to understand that He expected them to work out their differences amongst themselves, "not as a matter of form," Rano said, "but … sincerely. We really had to forgive and forget and feel love for each other."[16]

Whether present or absent, "Baba was attentive to the minutest detail of the women's lives. Everyone's freedom was restricted within the limits prescribed by Him. It is difficult to have an idea of just how these women were living. In some respects the limitations imposed by Baba exceeded those put on prisoners! But the Beloved's restraints, instead of binding one further, were those which served to snap the chains of bondage, and open the inner doors to Freedom."[17]

Coming to terms with ashram life and the restrictions that came with it constituted an uphill battle for the Westerners. The gap between their limited understanding of what Baba expected of them and their ability to meet His expectations was wide and deep, and He was compelled to chastise them again and again for their constant failures to forgive, forget, and surrender to His will.

Irene called Baba "the greatest psychologist" for "putting all those women together. All those personalities … I mean, you couldn't escape, you had to face one another and see your bad points. At home, if there was difficulty, I could always get out of it—I could go for a walk, or ride my horse or go to my room and slam the door. But in Baba's ashram, you couldn't escape. You had to learn poise, to control your moods. You had to keep smiling."[18] Irene found herself continually tested, but over time she came to understand that perseverance was the key to pleasing Baba:

> When we were with Baba … we always felt we didn't obey Him, we disappointed Him, we didn't get onwards spiritually. Even if we don't ask for high things, we feel we fail, we're not humble enough, we don't do as He would like us to be, eh? So one day I asked Baba, "Baba, I don't know, I seem to be stuck, I'm not getting further." Baba first pointed on His alphabet board to talk about steps; then, with His fingers he made like this [gesture]: "You go up two steps and then you go one back; then again you go up two steps and go back one." Always two steps and one back…. We always think we're not advancing, but

> that's so we can really keep firm, so we will want to obey Baba's orders. Really, it's very important to know this, because, if one gets disappointed or disheartened, and thinks it doesn't go further, it *does* go further, if we are very earnest. But it goes, as I said, two steps up and one step back.[19]

Kitty observed, simply, "I learned the hard way."[20]

As the Divine Psychologist Baba employed what one might call a kind of spiritual aversion therapy to wear down the women's egos and teach them to live in harmony. Mani liked to talk about how Baba often placed Margaret and Rano together as roommates because they were so different in their personal habits: Rano was tidy and meticulous, with her "geometrically-folded" towels and sheets; Margaret was downright messy, with her shoes scattered across the floor and clothes flung over the back of a chair.[21] Her motto might well have been "a place for nothing and nothing in its place," and her personal habits were a constant source of irritation for Rano.

On one occasion, Baba became so exasperated with their altercations that He declared to Rano: "Once more if you two fight … I'll send you off to America!" One day soon after, Rano came running to Him in tears, imploring, "Send me to America! Send me to America!" Baba asked her why she would want Him to do that. He had only been joking, and, in any case, Rano had missed His unspoken point. He wanted her to understand that "removing the obstacle … was not the solution," Mani concluded. "The solution was [that] you adjusted within yourself."[22] Rano sought to remove the obstacle (Margaret) by running away, rather than adjusting that part in herself that was at fault. Baba did not mean for her to try to change Margaret, or to become like her, but rather to accept Margaret as she was.

Eventually the two of them made peace with one another, but not before an unfortunate incident involving a foot-long green lizard and the manner in which Rano took issue with the manner in which Margaret was attempting to remove it from their room, provoking

what Margaret called one last "storm."[23] But it had taken them five years to achieve some semblance of harmony.

Forgive, forget, and love one another: that was Baba's prescription. How simple He made it sound, and yet how very difficult it was to accomplish. "We loved each other but we didn't love each other all that [much]," Margaret observed fifty years after the tours began. "Do we still love each other, Kitty?" she asked. Kitty was silent for a moment. At last she replied—and it is anyone's guess as to whether she was being diplomatic or simply evasive: "Actions speak better than words." Margaret then turned to the audience and inquired rhetorically: "You see how kind we were to each other?"[24] The audience dissolved into laughter.

Mani went to great lengths to articulate the precise quality of the love that the women aspired to share in the ashram. "We loved," she said,

> 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…. 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 [other] 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 from her flowerbed. There was just Baba, just Baba.[25]

On another occasion Mani observed that the women "were as children together around Baba. Easterners and Westerners, young and old, Baba kept us like children in this respect and shaped that childlike quality of life which leads to purity of heart, involving self-forgetfulness and self-sacrifice of the highest order."[26]

Baba nurtured the women's self-forgetfulness by assigning them work that required their wholehearted attention, whether it was hand-stitching shirts for impoverished villagers, assembling bundles of prasad for His birthday celebrations, attending births in the Maternity Hospital, rolling chapatis, keeping watch at the gates of the compound, feeding the piglets, or cleaning baskets of spinach in the ashram kitchen.

Mani marveled at how, in the midst of what she called "the good old hustle-bustle" of ashram life, everything fell into place and every woman was engaged in the task that had been set for her: "Baba's sitting at the dining table and the plate is before Him, the food is served, now everybody's busy. I tell you, it's beautiful to watch a simple thing that can be done for Baba, it gives an opportunity to each one. There's one who cooks the food, one who serves it, one who sees to the plate … Goher has a different thing to offer, Naja is the one who cooks, Mehera sees to Baba's personal things—she ties the bib around Baba, she puts the plate just so, Meheru goes and gets the basin," and so on, until every woman was entirely occupied with the small but vital role Baba had assigned her.[27]

Rano used the metaphor of tools to describe how Baba employed the women in the accomplishment of His work: "We know that we are here to serve Baba and love Baba, and that we actually are Baba's tools, and tools don't say what they have to do. It's the Master of the tools that has the whole say, so that's how we feel about Baba, and that's why as far as we are concerned, we feel that that is why Baba has chosen us to be with Him."[28]

Irene Conybeare once remarked to Rano: "I don't understand with all the brilliant people out in the world, Baba has surrounded Himself with …" and then realized what she was about to say and stopped. But Rano finished for her: "people like us." "Well, yes," Irene admitted, perhaps grateful that Rano had prevented her from having to say it herself. "Why we are with Baba is not because of our greatness," Rano explained. "We are here because we are only His tools."[29]

Mani recalled how each of the women allowed herself to be Baba's metaphorical tool—citing an occasion during which Rano was applying gross-world tools to the task at hand. "One of the things about Rano," she said, "she was a Yankee, she was of a family who lived on Park Avenue, you know, born with a silver spoon in her mouth, and here you would see her opening crates and parcels and using hammers and chisels and whatever—packing the bus"—in other words, hard at work being Baba's tool.[30] "Baba uses what you've got," Rano further observed. "If He has you in the ashram and you have got brains, He uses your brains. If He has you in the ashram and you have brawn, He uses your brawn. He makes use of what we are able to give Him. And we can't all give Him the same thing, so He surrounds Himself with different people."[31]

Kitty stressed that the women took on responsibilities only at "Baba's orders and instigation," but she also observed: "Baba knew that nothing would set [you] off worse than taking something away that you did that you very much enjoyed doing for Baba."[32]

> Nobody was allowed to carry on with their jobs after Baba said to stop. Baba wasn't interested in the results of anything that you did, but He wanted you to share something…. It all had no value, apart from the fact that it was obeying Baba and doing what He wanted…. Everything was done for Baba, so that there was no adding to one's sanskaras whatsoever. The One in the many, having only one object. These women [the Easterners] did not do anything, unless it was for Baba…. Their every thought, word and deed was done only for Baba with love, throughout the day, probably into the night. They became one-pointed. The object—Baba, the One in the many.[33]

In fact, it never even occurred to the Easterners to question Baba's wishes. "He had His own reasons," Katie observed. "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 just there to be with Him and love Him and serve Him. And just do what He said."[34]

Although the Westerners, as Baba observed at Nasik, were "very hard nuts to crack," crack them open He did—figuratively, if not literally.[35] "When Baba was really angry," said Rano, "He would gesture by reaching down to His chappal, meaning, 'If you say that again, I'll hit you with My shoe.' Or He might cross one index finger over another, to gesture a crack, and point to His forehead to mean, 'I'll break your skull.'"[36] He never did, of course.

The wayward Westerners needed to be reminded again and again: "No question. No Suggest. Just obey."[37] Sometimes they must have felt as if, instead of being Baba's hammers, He wielded the hammer and they were His nails. Irene observed that they were slow to learn "the ways of ashram life, which was wonderful, and at the same time very hard, a constant test for twenty-four hours…. Whenever we thought we understood or got used to some things, or ways of living they were changed … There were tears behind the mosquito-curtain or under the blanket at nights, but in the morning we started anew, trying, learning, making mistakes."[38]•

In time, the Westerners came to realize that everything Baba did was for the sake of His work. It was also done for the sake of love, with love. As noted in *Mehera–Meher:* "Elizabeth once observed that the way to tell the difference between false and real Spiritual Masters was that when one went to a false Master, one

• "Once, Adi drove Baba up the Hill to see the women. Adi waited in the car for two hours, while Baba was with them. When Baba had left the car, He was in a cheerful mood; when He returned, His expression was sour. Although Adi dared not ask anything, he could guess that sparks had been flying."

The men also came in for their fair share of pyrotechnics. But Baba was a great one for playing both ends against the middle. Eruch related how Baba, who frequently reproached the women for their failure to love and obey Him properly, would sometimes chide the men about their lack of love and obedience, citing the women's behavior as an example the men should emulate!

> Over the years Meher Baba would, every now and then, needle the men mandali about their lack of love for Him. "You men don't know how to love Me as the women disciples do," He would tell us. Or … He might point out that [a] difficulty would not have occurred if we had the same love for Him that the women had.
>
> This was not a constant refrain of Baba's, but every so often, over the years, He would refer to our lack of love compared to that of the women disciples…. I finally became so exasperated that I blurted out, "Oh Baba, you talk of the love the women have for You, but if You really want to have a taste of love from men, then let there be an Advent where you are in female form and then You will see how we love You!"

(Mehera–Meher, 1:492; *That's How it Was,* 351–52)

left feeling smaller, whereas 'with real ones you always felt bigger. Baba made you feel special and loved.'"[39]

Mani might have added that He also made you laugh. He had a "God-sized sense of humor. To watch Baba, who knows everyone's weaknesses, everyone's strengths, who turns weaknesses into strengths, to watch Baba get a rise out of someone"—that was a sight to behold.[40] Kitty called Baba's application of humor to otherwise difficult situations "adding the sweet to the bitter."[41]

Ultimately, the women aspired to be what Mani called "perfect slaves" to Baba's will. She recalled that once, when someone asked Margaret 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 away,' I throw it down. If He says, 'Pick it up,' I pick it up again."[42] Margaret continued in this vein until the person gave up and went away.

HARMONY IN MULTIPLICITY

"Early in the morning of the 8th of December 1938," Elizabeth recorded in her diary, "we left the *ashram* at 'Meherabad' with the Master—twenty-two [*sic*] of us—in a motor bus specially designed for this extensive tour of India…. We are aware that our journey in reality is inward in Truth, although Baba gives it a symbol of outward expression."[43]

From the moment the women boarded the Blue Bus, nothing about their trip was a holiday in any sense of the word. "The Blue Bus journey was never comfortable at all, *ever*," Katie recalled.[44] On the surface Katie was acknowledging what Elizabeth called the "outward expression" of physical discomforts that the women experienced—squeezed into the chronically overloaded bus, being jolted over bumpy kutcha roads, having to get out in the pelting rain or blistering sun while the men repaired yet another puncture, or passing freezing nights on the drafty stone floors of dank dak bungalows. But Katie's observation also applies to what Elizabeth called the "inward expression" of

the experience—the intensity of the spiritual training that the women underwent throughout the tours. The passengers in the Blue Bus soon came to understand that the vehicle functioned as a classroom on wheels in which they were meant to learn patience and equipoise, no matter how cold, hot, wet, crowded, jostled, filthy, thirsty, famished, or exhausted they might feel.

At the same time Baba was wearing down the women's individual egos—teaching them patience and equipoise, obedience and surrender—He was also employing their differences to facilitate His work at the collective level: "Norina, the princess; Nadine, the countess; Elizabeth, the businesswoman; Nonny, elegant and dainty; Rano, the [finicky] artist; Kitty, equally strong-willed; Irene, Swiss, having her own ideas; Margaret, the dancer."[45] In this regard, Baba's work with the women served as yet another scaffolding for His Universal work. "We were Baba's miniature world," Katie observed. "Whatever He made us do, He worked through us. It reflected in the world."[46] Much of what the women experienced during the Blue Bus Tours—for better or for worse—mirrored what was taking place in the world at that time. And that world was at war.•

• On January 7, 1937, Baba was quoted in an article published in the Evening News of India: "For years I have predicted that a war is definite. It will be shorter but far more terrible than the last one.... The First World War was not enough to bring about a change of heart in man. The world, purged of its pride, will listen to reason only after an even more terrible purgatory. I repeat: A global holocaust will engulf the world."

When speaking of their experiences during the Blue Bus Tours and events associated with World War II, the women were referring only to the first two years and three months of the conflict. The war raged on for another three and a half years after the tours ended in November 1941, and as it did, the world's suffering increased exponentially, reaching a horrific crescendo with the Holocaust. (*Lord Meher*, 1759)

Irene said that the women's fasts and day-to-day rationing sometimes echoed those experienced by people in the war zones: "During the war often I found that if we didn't get something, then in Europe it was scarce too. For example, we were always getting butter. Suddenly, we didn't get any, and later it became scarce in Europe."[47] The displacement of millions of people as Hitler swept west across Europe and east into Russia also often coincided with the group's movements from place to place. Mani observed that the abrupt changes Baba made throughout the tours were sometimes reflected quite literally, when, "the next day in the newspaper, they read how the war had taken a sudden shift."[48]

Contributing to the women's unease, the Easterners harbored no little bitterness toward the British, whose country was still in control of theirs—a realization not lost on Kitty and Margaret. By the end of the fourth tour in November 1941 India was less than a decade away from independence, but her freedom would come at a great price: the creation of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Partitioning, and the resulting escalation of violence among Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, would result in the loss of millions of lives and the displacement of millions more.

As within, so without. The seemingly insignificant frictions that plagued the women during the best of times and the austerities of ashram life, compounded by the challenges of travel, became greatly amplified during the tours, mirroring the increasingly horrendous displays of animosity among peoples and nations of the world.•

Eruch recalled that during His Advent as Mohammed, Baba had said: "Harmony is the imprint of oneness upon multiplicity."[49] The most difficult order Baba gave the women—whether on tour or at home on the Hill—was for them to maintain harmony among themselves. And because harmony is such an important element of music, Mani called Baba a conductor and the women His instruments:

> Each of those around Baba was a very strong person … an individual in their own right, with their own personality. Baba was conducting the whole thing personally, that symphony of His, and we each played our own little tune, according to the rhythm He wanted.

• "The Nazis' fanatical hatred and persecution of the Jews" remains the most disturbing aspect of WWII history. When asked how to reconcile the Holocaust with "God … The Compassionate One," Eruch replied,

> It does seem strange that this nightmare took place with the Avatar on earth, when it is said that He conducted the war spiritually and especially when it is stated that He is infinitely compassionate…. If the Holocaust had not become part of recent history … the world would have gone on as before, providing the same material sufficiency for that so-called happiness which kept everyone complacent….
>
> ….Baba always told us that whenever His nazar or grace is on someone or on some area, suffering abounds there. Suffering is a sign of God's compassion, and through suffering and pain we are enabled to turn towards the Light, that is, towards Reality, towards Him. From this viewpoint, the Holocaust may be seen, despite strong protests of the mind, as an act of infinite compassion.

(Mehera–Meher 2:130; *Glow International*, Winter 2016: 3)

> But Baba wants unity, not uniformity. If He is the conductor, and we are the instruments, what would it be like if we were all cellos? When we used to live with Baba, there would be different temperaments, different ways of living and thinking. Loving Baba was the same, but otherwise we had our differences…. Only Baba could put us all together, roll us around and come up with one.[50]

Once, in the throes of yet another crisis, Baba wondered: "Would the East and West ever love one another?"[51] It was His constant refrain throughout the Blue Bus Tours. Mani concluded: "Baba worked so many years with the men mandali, so many years with the boys, so many years with the mad and *masts*, and then with the women. Oh, to have worked with women! Baba didn't say so, but he implied, 'Never again!'"[52]

EVERYTHING DEPENDS ON GRACE

To be an instrument of the Avatar was no easy thing. "We had to be bold," Eruch observed, "we were emissaries of the Emperor, after all … even though we may have felt in our heart of hearts that [His] order was impossible."[53] And how well the women understood Baba to be the Emperor of Emperors: Norina recorded that wherever the women traveled with Him throughout the Blue Bus Tours, He was "escorted … like a king"— the King of Kings they knew Him to be.[54]

"Great is the fortune to meet and to know One who is the embodiment of Truth and who has attained Perfection," Nadine said of the women's relationships with Baba. "Being perfect He is a living example for all…. Being free and pure, His love is pure—Divine. His Love is a free gift of compassion to the world."[55]

"How fortunate Mummy and Adi were to be able to travel all over India with Baba," Najoo reminisced, "east and west, north and south, as He carried out His spiritual work. His divine company was a feast to all those fortunate enough to be with Him on these tours, a nectar that intoxicated everyone to the extent that it made them forget all the hardships the journeys entailed."[56]

Although she only participated in the first tour, Helen later observed: "I was one year in India, the year just before the second World War. That was after a great despair in my life [the death of her partner]. Since then I have become a different human being, a new world [has] opened for me." Her motto became: "Everything depends on grace."[57]•

• Helen Dahm's friend Robert LeJeune wrote of her decision to obey Baba's call.

> The most important turn in her life was the trip to India, which she undertook in 1938. This trip seemed to be a rather adventurous undertaking, but in reality it was the result of a radical decision by the sixty year old woman. She wanted to change her life without compromises to reflect the Truth which she thought to have found. In this manner she expected to find salvation and redemption for her searching soul. She burned all her bridges and sold her little house, gave away all her belongings and started, full of expectations, a pilgrimage to the Orient. But the year in India turned out to be more fruitful for her as a human being and as an artist. It resulted in a maturing process of a very special kind. Because in India Helen Dahm gained clarification of herself and her path.

(LeJeune, quoted by Verlag, *Buch der Freunde*, 22)

Inherent in the many challenges the women faced was Baba's divine grace: "We did indeed learn much on these tours with Baba," Kitty later wrote. "In the many crises which Baba brought up, one is reminded of the definition of the Chinese word for crisis, which has two characters: the first character meaning danger, but the second, opportunity. If one could forget one's failures and see in one's situation, however unhappy it might be on the surface, the value and great opportunity it might contain, then Baba was pleased."[58]

Every woman who participated in the Blue Bus Tours came away with her own unique understanding of the effect the experience had on her life, although not all of them had the opportunity to share their observations. But we owe a debt of deep gratitude to all of those who were so articulate in conveying what it was like to be with Baba, to be His tools, to bask in the grace of His presence, and who help us

understand the Blue Bus Tours in the greater context of His life and work.•

Perhaps Rano spoke for every passenger in the Blue Bus when she wrote:

> 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.
>
> Many of the details preserved here are from every angle ordinary and probably quite similar to what any other party of travelers might encounter. Yet ashram life was different. Although the external activity might appear to be the same, doing for the Master is an entirely separate affair than doing the same thing on one's own. In love there is obedience, and often just the duty of a particular assignment given by Baba would be the one the disciple felt least qualified to cope with. The Master, for love's sake, knows just how to prune the ego. It is in this process that the relationship between the lover and the beloved has all its paradoxes, trials, impossibilities and glimpses of union.[59]

• Although he was writing about the *mast* ashram in Jabalpur, Donkin captured the abiding essence of Baba's work throughout the tours, which he called "that subtle quintessence of love."

> His physical presence and the brilliance of His leadership have that impossible quality of the philosopher's stone, that, by their magic touch, they transmute the base metal of the most commonplace routine into a treasure of loving service. This is perhaps an ornate way of describing something that is at once so real that one might think it easy to describe quite simply, and so transcendental that the spirit of it eludes the grasp of words. But this magic, this imponderable something, weaves itself like a golden thread into the fabric of everything that Baba does, and when the factual details of a phase of Baba's life are buried so deep in the ashes of one's mind to be almost forgotten, the memory of this splendid thing is there still.

(*The Wayfarers*, 118–19)

One has only to spend half an hour at Upper Meherabad to witness first-hand how important these women were to Baba's work, as evidenced by the proximity of their graves to His Samadhi. Of the twenty-one women who are buried, memorialized, or whose ashes are interred on the Hill, seventeen participated in the Blue Bus Tours. These include ten of the eleven women interred adjacent to the Samadhi: Kitty, Soonamasi, Naja, Rano, Mehera, Mani, Meheru, Katie, Khorshed, and Mansari. They also include Gulmai, Shireenmai, Elizabeth, Nadine,

Norina, Margaret, and Nonny, whose graves are located nearby in what is now called the Cemetery for Female Disciples. Not to be forgotten are Kippy, Foundy, and Moti, who also accompanied Baba on the tours; their remains are buried in the Pet Cemetery adjacent to the women.•

• When Baba called Elizabeth to India in July 1947, she asked if she could bring Foundy back with her. Baba said yes, so she had a special carrier built for the big dog by Abercrombie and Fitch. But Foundy was old and blind and his health was failing, and when Elizabeth later told Baba she feared that Foundy was dying He declared: "That dog will live longer than Mahatma Gandhi." Elizabeth was unable to extend her visa in May 1948 so she had to leave Foundy behind when she returned to America. Meheru recalled that one morning in June, "Baba came to the bedroom where Foundy was tied to see how he was. Baba petted him and offered him milk, which Foundy tried to take. Then, just as Baba was stepping out of the room, Foundy breathed his last. Foundy was so fortunate to have had this last touch from Baba." Meanwhile, Gandhi had been assassinated on January 30; true to Baba's word, Foundy outlived him by five months. (*Lord Meher*, 2615, 2647)

IT WAS FIRE

On December 23, 1944, three years after the end of the last tour in the Blue Bus, Meher Baba said: "While the world is feverishly occupied with the vanishing things of the moment, there always are those who gain a true perspective of life, through the grace of the Master. These lucky few are ever willing to make their whole life an ever-renewed and ceaseless dedication to the universal and ageless truth of the imperishable and undivided life divine…. A life of sacrifice based on love is never lost: it's not only beautiful and fruitful in itself, but also in the creative inspiration which it leaves behind itself."[60]

Baba was speaking of the departed disciples whose names were to appear on His Memorial Tower at Lower Meherabad, but He could have been describing the women who participated in the Blue Bus Tours, all of whom but for Nonny were still very much alive and actively engaged in His service in the East and West. These women left behind virtually everything—homes, possessions, vocations, friends and acquaintances, parents, marriages, and in one case, small children, to be with Baba. Their lives were and continue to be object lessons in how to love and serve God.

Love and service were the essence of these women's relationships with Meher Baba, who also said: "Service, offered under conditions of discomfort or inconvenience, is a test of the disciple's devotion. The

more trying such service becomes the more welcome it is for the disciple, and as he voluntarily accepts physical and mental suffering in his devoted service to the Master, he experiences the bliss of spiritual fulfillment."[61]

"None is so great," Chanji observed, "as the one who lives and dies for Love and Service."[62] But to live such a life of devoted service to the Master is to live a life that is "constantly on edge."[63] As Heather Nadel recalled: "Often Naja would meet pilgrims at Meherazad in the 1970s and very early 80s. She occasionally would tell simple stories, sometimes more deeply than you might expect. One day I heard her quietly sum up their [the women's] life with the Master: 'It was fire.'"[64]

The ember in the heart, the internal spark that gave the women the strength and courage to burn and burn and burn again, was love. On the occasion of the interment of Elizabeth's ashes at Upper Meherabad Mani said: "Love is Life, and today we stand before a life that shines for all times as a living message of Avatar Meher Baba, a life that reflects His Love from many hearts who have been privileged to be with Elizabeth, to receive of her love, wisdom and humility, the hallmark of a true disciple."[65] Like Baba, she could have been speaking of any of the women who participated in the tours.

Meher Baba once told Kitty: "You love Me for Love itself."[66] Those simple words might well serve as the distillation of His work with the women, not just during the Blue Bus Tours, but throughout their lives with Him. "Baba's great mission to each one of us," Kitty concluded, "has been to show us how to love. Our great privilege has been to live with the *One Who IS Love Itself*."[67]

ENDNOTES

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

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PROLOGUE

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40 Adriel, *Avatar*, 188.
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69 Dadachanji, *Chanji's Diary*, October 6, 1937. Avatar Meher Baba Trust Archives Document Collection.
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CHAPTER 2 / A BIG SURPRISE!

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154 Patterson, *Meher Baba Journal,* 1 (no. 8): 51–52.

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163 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 1981.

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193 Irani, *Blue Bus Tours Diary*, 14. Mani spells gali as "gulley."

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202 Fenster, *Mehera–Meher,* 1:470.

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206 Ibid., 16–17.

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214 Ibid.

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4 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 1985.
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6 Irani, *Blue Bus Tours Diary*, 21–22.
7 Davy, *Love Alone Prevails*, 274.
8 Ibid., 269.
9 Irani, *Blue Bus Tours Diary*, 22.
10 Donkin, *The Wayfarers*, 107–08.
11 Dadachanji, *Meher Baba Journal,* 1 (no. 6): 58.
12 Patterson, *Meher Baba Journal,* 1 (no. 10): 49.
13 Ibid., 48.
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22 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 1990.
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31 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 1989.
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33 Davy, *Love Alone Prevails*, 269–70.
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43 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 1988.
44 Gayley, Interview #2, 1972.
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46 Donkin, *The Wayfarers*, 21.
47 Ibid., 108, 85.
48 Ibid., 109.
49 Patterson, *Meher Baba Journal,* 1 (no. 10): 53.
50 Ibid., 57.
51 Dadachanji, *Meher Baba Journal,* 1 (no. 7): 56.
52 Davy, *The Awakener,* 3 (no. 3): 26.
53 Davy, *Love Alone Prevails*, 270.
54 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 1989.
55 Patterson, *Meher Baba Journal,* 1, (no. 10): 52.
56 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 1988.
57 Dadachanji, *Meher Baba Journal,* 1 (no. 6): 60–61.
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61 Irani, *Blue Bus Tours Diary*, 25.

62 Davy, *Love Alone Prevails*, 272–73.

63 Ibid., 271.

64 Patterson, *Meher Baba Journal,* 1 (no. 10): 49.

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66 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 1989.

67 Gayley, *Because of Love*, 39.

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69 Gayley, *Because of Love*, 39.

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71 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 1990–91.

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73 Irani, *Blue Bus Tours Diary*, 21–22, 29. This visit to Jaipur with the women was Baba's first. He visited the city again in 1940 and 1941, during the third tour.

74 Handwritten Itinerary, February 27–28, 1939. Avatar Meher Baba Trust Archives Document Collection.

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76 Ibid., 28.

77 Ibid., 29.

78 Billo, *The Awakener,* 19 (no. 2): 23–24.

79 Gayley, Interview #2, 1972.

80 Gayley, *Because of Love*, 38. *Lord Meher* records that this may have been the City Palace Museum.

81 Fenster, *Mehera–Meher,* 1:475.

82 Gayley, *Because of Love*, 38.

83 Ibid., 35.

84 Fenster, *Mehera–Meher,* 1:476.

85 Irani, *Blue Bus Tours Diary*, 30.

86 Davy, *Love Alone Prevails*, 274.

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89 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 1994.

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96 Patterson, *Meher Baba Journal,* 1 (no. 10): 48.

97 Fenster, *Mehera–Meher,* 1:477–78.

98 Irani, "Katie Learns to Cook," November 30, 1999.

99 Davy, *Love Alone Prevails*, 273–74.

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101 Ibid.

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103 Dadachanji, *Meher Baba Journal,* 1 (no. 7): 54.

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105 Fenster, *Mehera–Meher,* 1:477.

106 Dadachanji, *Meher Baba Journal,* 1 (no. 7): 58, 60.

107 Ibid., 63.

108 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 1996.

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112 Jessawala, "His Life with Baba," Interview #2, May 25, 1994.

113 Jessawala, *My Life with Meher Baba, the Avatar of the Age*, 63.

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115 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher,* 1999.

116 Fenster, *Mehera–Meher,* 1:486.

117 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher,* 1999; Fenster, *Mehera–Meher,* 1:486.

118 Irani, *Blue Bus Tours Diary*, 37.

119 Jessawala, "His Life with Baba," Interview #2, May 25, 1994.

120 Jessawala, quoted in *In His Service*, December 2014, Avatar Meher Baba Trust.

121 Fenster, *Mehera–Meher,* 1:485.

122 Donkin, *The Wayfarers*, 114.

123 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher,* 2004.

124 Ibid., 117.

125 Ibid., 117–18.

126 Davy, *Love Alone Prevails*, 276.

127 Gayley, *Because of Love*, 35–36.

128 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher,* 2004–5.

129 Donkin, *The Wayfarers*, 18.

130 Irani, *Blue Bus Tours Diary*, 38.

131 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher,* 2003.

132 Fenster, *Mehera–Meher,* 1:487.

133 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher,* 2004.

134 Irani, *Blue Bus Tours Diary* 37.

135 Nadel, *The Joyous Path,* 1:201.

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137 Dadachanji, *Gift of God*, 53.

138 Jessawala, "His Life with Baba," Interview #2, May 25, 1994.

139 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher,* 2006.

140 Dadachanji, *Meher Baba Journal,* 1 (no. 8): 57, 59–60.

141 Gayley, Interview #3, 1972.

142 Ibid.

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144 Irani, *Baba's Dictation to the Women Mandali*, July 6, 1940. Avatar Meher Baba Trust Archives Document Collection.

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148 Ibid.

149 Original letter from Mani S. Irani preserved at Beloved Archives, Hamilton, New Jersey.

150 Dadachanji, *Gift of God*, 55.

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153 Ibid.

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160 Irani, *Fortunate to Love Him*, 290.

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CHAPTER 4 / MEANDERING HOME CONTINUED

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171 Ibid.

172 Davy, *Love Alone Prevails*, 247.

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CHAPTER 5 / MEND YOUR WAYS OR GO

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3 Dadachanji, *Meher Baba Journal,* 1 (no. 9): 61.

4 Ibid., 60–61.

5 Ibid., 56.

6 Original letter from Mani S. Irani preserved at Beloved Archives, Hamilton, New Jersey.

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8 Donkin, *The Wayfarers*, 101.

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11 Ibid., 58.

12 Ibid.

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20 Ibid., 2020.

21 Ibid., 2021.

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24 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 2023.

25 Donkin, *Donkin's Diaries*, 5–6.

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27 Irani, "Animals of the Blue Bus Period," November 30, 1999.

28 Irani, *Baba Loved Us Too*, 70.

29 Original letter from Mani S. Irani preserved at Beloved Archives, Hamilton, New Jersey.

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32 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 2011.

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34 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 2011.

35 Jessawala, "His Life with Baba," Interview #1, June 1, 1994.

36 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 2011.

37 Irani, *Baba Loved Us Too*, 63.

38 Ibid., 65.

39 Fenster, *Mehera–Meher,* 1:493.

40 Davy, *Love Alone Prevails*, 295.

41 Fenster, *Mehera–Meher,* 1:494.

42 Dadachanji, *Meher Baba Journal,* 1 (no. 11): 59.

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44 Dadachanji, *Meher Baba Journal,* 1 (no. 11): 59.

45 Donkin, *Donkin's Diaries*, 3.

46 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 1708.

47 Donkin, *Donkin's Diaries*, 7.

48 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 2025.

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1 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 1908.

2 Donkin, *Donkin's Diaries*, 12.

3 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 2092.

4 Irani, *Baba Loved Us Too*, 71.

5 Donkin, *Donkin's Diaries*, 12.

6 Fenster, *Mehera–Meher,* 2:36.

7 Ibid., 2:11.

8 Irani, recorded talk in Mandali Hall, no date.

9 Fenster, *Mehera–Meher,* 2:36.

10 Dadachanji, *Meher Baba Journal,* 1 (no. 11): 59–60. Chanji's estimate of "a party of over 50" seems a bit high. The passengers in the Buick, Chevrolet, and bus totaled twenty-seven, not including Kippy and Lucky.

11 Gayley, *Because of Love*, 33.

12 Donkin, *Donkin's Diaries*, 9.

13 Indian Posts & Telegraphs Department (IP&TD) handwritten dictation for telegram sent from Sholapur to Framroze Dadachanji c/o Station Master, Mysore, August 3, 1939. Avatar Meher Baba Trust Archives Document Collection.

14 IP&TD Receipt for Inland telegram with handwritten dictation from Framroze Dadachanji to Kaka Baria, c/o Station Master, Sholapur, August 7, 1939. Avatar Meher Baba Trust Archives Document Collection.

15 IP&TD Inland telegram typed messages to Framroze Dadachanji, c/o Station Master, Mysore, dated August 5 and 6. Avatar Meher Baba Trust Archives Document Collection.

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17 Ibid., 11.

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20 Irani, *Blue Bus Tours Diary*, 49.

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27 Ibid.

28 Donkin, *The Wayfarers*, 121.

29 Irani, *Blue Bus Tours*, 50.

30 Davy, *Love Alone Prevails*, 283.

31 Jessawala, "His Life with Baba," Interview #2, June 1, 1994.

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39 Jessawala, "His Life with Baba," Interview #2, June 1, 1994.

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48 Ibid., 2028.

49 Ibid., 2027.

50 Dadachanji, *Meher Baba Journal*, 2 (no. 1): 60.

51 Ibid., 60–61.

52 Donkin, *The Wayfarers*, 121.

53 Ibid., 123.

54 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 2028.

55 Donkin, *The Wayfarers*, 123.

56 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 2028.

57 Ibid., 2029.

58 Donkin, *The Wayfarers*, 123.

59 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 2036.

60 Jessawala, "His Life with Baba," Interview #1, June 1, 1994.

61 Irani, *Blue Bus Tours Diary*, 52.

62 Davy, *Love Alone Prevails*, 280.

63 Donkin, *Donkin's Diaries*, 9–10.

64 Ibid., 16.

65 Ibid., 17.

66 Ibid., 18.

67 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 2033–34.

68 Donkin, *Donkin's Diaries*, 20.

69 Ibid., 23, 24.

70 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 2034–35.

71 Ibid., 2037–38.

72 Donkin, *Donkin's Diaries*, 30.

73 Ibid., 34.

74 Ibid., 21.

75 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 2038.

76 Fenster, *Mehera–Meher,* 2:13.

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78 Fenster, *Mehera–Meher,* 2:15.

79 Jessawala, "His Life with Baba," Interview #2, June 1, 1994.

80 Donkin, *Donkin's Diary*, 23.

81 Jessawala, "His Life with Baba," Interview #1, June 7, 1994.

82 Jessawala, *My Life with Meher Baba, the Avatar of the Age*, 69.

83 Taraporewala, recorded talk, September 2000.

84 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 2071.

85 Irani, *Blue Bus Tours Diary*, 51.

86 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 2079.

87 Gayley, Interview #3, 1972.

88 Ibid.

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90 Davy, *Love Alone Prevails*, 282.

91 Ibid., 279.

92 Ibid.

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94 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 2039.

95 Irani, *Baba Loved Us Too*, 72.

96 Fenster, *Mehera–Meher,* 2:81.

97 Ibid., 2:17.

98 Davy, *Love Alone Prevails*, 284.

99 Fenster, *Mehera–Meher,* 2:19.

100 Gayley, *Because of Love*, 39.

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107 Irani, *Blue Bus Tours Diary*, 53.

108 Handwritten letter signed M.S. Irani to Nonny Gayley, December 22, 1933. Avatar Meher Baba Trust Archives Document Collection.

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111 Fenster, *Mehera–Meher,* 2:20.

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116 Handwritten letter from No. 1 Sub-division Mysore for Asst. Engineer to Framroze Dadachanji, October 10, 1939. Avatar Meher Baba Trust Archives Document Collection.

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118 Ibid.

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120 Jessawala, My *Life with Meher Baba, the Avatar of the Age*, 73.

121 Nadel, *The Joyous Path,* 1:293.

122 Irani, *Fortunate to Love Him*, 292–93.

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124 Donkin, *Donkin's Diaries*, 36.

125 Ibid.

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128 Dadachanji, *Meher Baba Journal,* 2 (no. 1): 62.

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131 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 2043.

132 Dadachanji, *Meher Baba Journal,* 2 (no. 1): 62.

133 Jessawala, "His Life with Baba," Interview #2, June 7, 1994.

134 Craske, *The Dance of Love*, 67–68.

135 Ibid., 68.

136 Ibid., 69.

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138 Ibid., 71.

139 Ibid., 73.

140 Ibid., 67.

141 Davy, *Love Alone Prevails*, 280.

142 Craske, *The Dance of Love*, 74.

143 Ibid.

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145 Craske, *Still Dancing with Love*, 52.

146 Jessawala, "His Life with Baba," Interview #1, June 1, 1994.

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148 Ibid., 124.

149 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 2038.

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152 Donkin, *The Wayfarers*, 51–52.

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156 Ibid., 55.

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161 Donkin, *Donkin's Diaries*, 37, 40.

162 Ibid., 59.

163 Ibid., 60.

164 Fenster, *Mehera–Meher,* 2:134.

165 Donkin, *Donkin's Diaries*, 61–62.

166 Gayley, *Because of Love*, 36.

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109 Handwritten 3-page letter from Vishnu Deorukhkar, Quetta, to Pilamai Irani, Karachi, March 29, 1941. Avatar Meher Baba Trust Archives Document Collection.

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22 Handwritten letter from Vishnu Deorukhkar to F. H. Dadachanji, November 7, 1941. Avatar Meher Baba Trust Archives Document Collection.
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CHAPTER 13 / A NEW LIFE FOR THE OLD BUS

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36 Ibid.
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EPILOGUE

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3 Jessawala, "His Life with Baba," Interview #2, May 25, 1994.
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22 Irani and Jessawala, "Elizabeth, Norina, Kitty and Rano," July 24, 1988.
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28 Gayley, Interview #7, 1972.
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34 Nadel, *The Joyous Path,* 1:254.

35 Davy, *Love Alone Prevails*, 177.

36 Fenster, *Mehera–Meher,* 3:368.

37 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 175.

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40 Irani and Jessawala, "Baba Teases Rano," July 24, 1988.

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44 Irani and Jessawala, "Eruch and Katie Crossing the Pontoon Bridge," August 8, 1985.

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46 Nadel, *The Joyous Path,* 1:253.

47 Fenster, *Mehera–Meher,* 2:160.

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51 Davy, *The Awakener,* 3 (no. 3): 19.

52 Fenster, *Mehera–Meher,* 2:492.

53 Jessawala, *That's How it Was*, 78.

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56 Kotwal, *He Gives the Ocean*, 92–93.

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2 Ibid., 1:111.

3 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 567.

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7 Email correspondence from Dr. Anne Moreigne forwarded to the author by David McNeely.

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10 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 5371. A longer explanation of Walu's later years with Baba can be found in *Mehera–Meher,* 3:563–64.

11 Anne Moreigne, *Love Street Lamp Post*, Winter–Spring 1997:12.

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12 Conversation between with Meherwan Jessawala and the author, Meherazad, India, December 2014.

13 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 632.

14 Ibid., 1897.

15 Fenster, *Mehera–Meher,* 1:241.

16 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 480.

17 Ibid., 2426.

18 Dadachanji, *Meher Baba Journal,* 1 (no. 6): 56; Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 2426.

19 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 2427.

20 Dadachanji, *Gift of God*, 84.

21 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 814.

22 Ibid., 1822.

23 Ibid., 1918.

24 Ibid., 5385.

25 McNeely, *On Sacred Ground*, September 1, 2016. Avatar Meher Baba Trust.

26 Davy, *Love Alone Prevails*, 20.

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28 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 131.

29 Thought transmission document dated January 13, 1942, quoted by Ira Dietrich in "Rabia Martin and Norina Matchabelli," unpublished manuscript, 1986, p. 17. Avatar Meher Baba Trust Archives Document Collection.

30 Ina Jill Claris, *Glow International*, August 2007:21.

31 Frederick, *The Awakener,* 20 (no. 2): 16.

32 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 4186.

33 Frederick, *The Awakener,* 20 (no. 2): 32; Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 1318.

34 Dadachanji, *Meher Baba Journal,* 2 (no.7): 435

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36 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 1500.

37 Gayley, *Because of Love*, 1.

38 Nonny Gayley, *The Awakener,* 10 (no. 4): 27–28; *Meher Baba Journal,* 1 (no. 7): 30; as Kemali, *Meher Baba Journal,* 1 (no. 10): 23; and *Meher Baba Journal,* 1 (no. 5): 39–40.

39 Gayley, *Because of Love*, 2.

40 Fenster, *Mehera–Meher,* 1:394.

41 Gayley, *Because of Love*, 62.

42 www.initaly.com/regions/taa/merano.htm.

43 Gayley, *Glow International*, Summer 2010:7.

44 Correspondence from Mani Irani on the occasion of Rano Gayley's death on December 5, 1986. Avatar Meher Baba Trust Archives Document Collection.

45 Dugan, *Love Street Lamp Post*, October–December 2001:32.

46 Fenster, *Mehera–Meher,* 3:513.

47 Davy, *Love Alone Prevails*, 231.

48 Craske, *The Dance of Love*, 4.

49 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 1284.

50 Letter from Margaret Craske, London, to Meher Baba, February 27 (no year). Avatar Meher Baba Trust Archives Document Collection.

51 Mossman, *Slave of Love*, 18.

APPENDIX / MANI'S DIARIES

1 Irani, *Blue Bus Tours Diary*, 149.
2 Ibid., 150.
3 Ibid., 152.
4 Ibid., 154.
5 Irani, *Regal Notebook*, 1.
6 Ibid.

APPENDIX / THE AKI (ADI K. IRANI) COLLECTION

1 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 4475.

APPENDIX / ALTERNATE ROUTES

1 Handwritten list of cities proposed to be included in the First Blue Bus Tour. Avatar Meher Baba Trust Archives Document Collection. Some of the italicized cities were included in the third tour.
2 "Delhi–Hardwar–Rishikesh," Avatar Meher Baba Trust Archives Document Collection.
3 Secretary to Shri MEHER BABA [Framroze Dadachanji] to Messrs. Thos. Cook & Son Ltd., Bombay, October 10, 1938. Avatar Meher Baba Trust Archives Document Collection.
4 Thos. Cook & Son to The Secretary to Shri Meher Baba, October 13, 1938. Avatar Meher Baba Trust Archives Document Collection.
5 Craske, *The Dance of Love*, 159.

APPENDIX / THE *MEHER BABA JOURNAL*

1 The Meher Editorial Committee, *Meher Baba Journal*, 1 (no 1): 9–10.
2 Haynes, *Treasures from the Meher Baba Journals*, xii.
3 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 2015.
4 Ibid., 2013–14.
5 Ibid., 2338.
6 Ibid., 1956.
7 https://archive.org/stream/MeherBabaTheAwakener/TXT/00000103.txt, 103.
8 Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 2303.
9 Haynes, *Treasures of the Meher Baba Journal*, xv.
10 Ibid., xi, xiv.

APPENDIX / THE UNIVERSAL SPIRITUAL CENTER

1 "Scheme of Universal Ashram," *The Awakener,* 19 (no. 1): 18.
2 Dadachanji, *Meher Baba Journal,* 2 (no. 12): 763–64.
3 "A Brief History of Meher Baba's Universal Spiritual Centre at Byramangala," Beloved Archives, Hamilton, New Jersey.

Appendix

THE PASSENGERS ON THE BLUE BUS

THE EASTERNERS

MEHERA IRANI

Mehera Jehangir Irani was born in Sukkor, British India (now Pakistan), on January 7, 1907, to Jehangir Hormusji and Daulat Sohrab Irani. She was fifteen when she glimpsed Baba for the first time, at Sakori, the ashram of Upasni Maharaj, on October 15, 1922. According to *Mehera–Meher*: "The reason for Baba's visit to Sakori this time was to see Mehera—and to let her see Him—to confirm her as the one chosen to be the female counterpart of the Avatar. Such a woman holds the highest position in the Avatar's inner circle."[1]

In May 1923 Mehera made her first visit to Meherabad, and it was then that Baba declared that she should never marry. Mehera's mother Daulat was the first woman to ask to join Baba's ashram, and on April 21, 1924, she and Mehera received a telegram that read: "COME MEHERABAD SOON AS POSSIBLE. BRING CLOTHES FOR ONE YEAR AND A BEDDING ROLL." "We just locked the house and went to Him," Mehera later recalled.[2]

Mehera was thirty-one when the Blue Bus departed Meherabad for the first time on December 8, 1938. Following the end of the tours she continued to travel with Baba during His subsequent *mast* work, journeyed with Him to Europe and America, and she accompanied Him during the New Life. She sustained life-threatening injuries in the 1952 automobile accident.

Baba kept Mehera in strict seclusion until January 31, 1968, when He finally allowed the men mandali to see her, standing on the porch of the women's bungalow at Meherazad. Exactly one year later Baba dropped His body, and she spent the remaining twenty years of her life meeting with pilgrims on what came to be known as Mehera's porch, sharing stories that brimmed with her fathomless love for the Divine Beloved.

Mehera's recollections are preserved in a three-volume collection of books entitled *Mehera–Meher: A Divine Romance* by David Fenster. Mehera recorded some of those same stories of her life with Baba in a memoir entitled, simply, *Mehera*. She also shared many tales about the fortunate animals that came into direct contact with Baba in *Baba Loved Us Too: Stories of Meher Baba and His Pets*.

Baba called Mehera "the purest soul in the universe," and He once said to her: "As Krishna's love was for Radha, so is My love for you."[3] Mehera Jehangir Irani was diagnosed with a brain tumor in May 1989 and died at the age of eighty-two, on May 20, at Meherazad. Her body is entombed next to Baba, on the left side of the Samadhi on Meherabad Hill. Her grave marker reads: "Baba's Beloved."

MANI IRANI

Manija Sheriar Irani was born in Poona, India, on December 15, 1918, the sixth and last child and only surviving daughter of Sheriar Mundigar and Shireenmai Sheriar Irani. Baba, who was twenty-four at the time of her birth, called Mani His spiritual sister, and she was second only to Mehera among His inner circle of female devotees.

Mani recorded: "As far back as memory can go, I knew that Baba was God … Nobody had to tell me that. I knew it as naturally as a child knows candy."[4] After years of pleading with her mother to be allowed to live with the women in His ashram, Mani was invited to join Baba permanently in December 1932, just prior to her fourteenth birthday.

Mani was a week shy of her twentieth birthday when Baba embarked on the First Blue Bus Tour. Like Mehera, she also accompanied Him during His subsequent *mast* work and throughout the New Life and journeyed with Him to Europe and America. She was riding in the middle of the back seat of Baba's car when His first accident occurred and was the only passenger who was not seriously injured.

Afer Baba dropped His body, Mani met with pilgrims in Mandali Hall at Meherazad to share stories of life with her God-brother and instructing them in how to love and serve God. She also served as Chairman of the Avatar Meher Baba Perpetual Public Charitable Trust for more than twenty years.

Mani recorded some of her stories in a memoir entitled *God-Brother: Stories from My Childhood with Meher Baba*. She also penned *Dreaming of the Beloved*.* Her two-volume biography, written by Heather Nadel, is entitled *The Joyous Path: The Life of Avatar Meher Baba's Sister, Mani*. Mani also regularly wrote group letters to Baba's Western followers to apprise them of His health and work, and this correspondence has been published in *82 Family Letters*.†

In early 1995 Mani was diagnosed with NPH (normal pressure hydrocephalus), which causes the accumulation of fluid around the brain, but despite two operations to relieve the pressure her condition worsened. In June 1996 she was diagnosed with a malignant and inoperable stomach tumor.

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* *God-Brother: Stories from My Childhood with Meher Baba*, Myrtle Beach, SC (Sheriar Foundation, 1993); *Dreaming of the Beloved*, Myrtle Beach, SC (Sheriar Foundation, 1998).

† *82 Family Letters to the Western Family of Lovers and Followers of Meher Baba,* "Written by Mani," contains correspondence composed between December 5, 1956, and August 26, 1969, seven months after Baba dropped His body.

Manija Sheriar Irani died at Meherazad on August 19, 1996, at the age of seventy-seven. Her body was cremated at the cremation grounds at Lower Meherabad. The fire burned for three days, and afterward, fresh rosebuds were found to have survived the flames. Mani's ashes are interred to the right of Baba's Samadhi, the first in a row of six. The interior of her crypt is painted with flowers on a pink background. Her grave marker is inscribed "Baba's Sister."

NAJA IRANI

Naja Rustom Irani was born in Poona on October 10, 1908, the daughter of Rustom and Piroja Dorab Irani. Piroja and Baba's mother Shireenmai were sisters, making Naja Baba's cousin. Her father Rustom was known as Masaji, or "Beloved or Respected Uncle," and he was one of Baba's earliest mandali. Naja's older brother Aspandiar, known as Pendu, was also one of Baba's closest male disciples.

Naja met Mehera at the home of Baba's Aunt Dowla Masi in Poona and the girls became close friends. She was among the first six women to be invited to live at Meherabad in 1924 and she devoted her life to Baba, residing in His ashrams and frequently traveling with Him.* Naja was thirty when Baba invited her to join the First Blue Bus Tour, but her health was such that she was not able to accompany Him during the New Life. She went to live at Bindra House with the Jessawalas and afterward resided at Meherazad.

Naja cooked for Baba, His schools, and the members of His ashrams intermittently throughout her life. Baba said that she played the role of Martha in this Avataric Advent, referring to sisters Mary and Martha of Bethany, the first of whom offered Jesus her devotion and the second, her service. Baba frequently used Naja as His scapegoat in order to teach obedience and surrender.

* The six women included Mehera and her mother Daulat, Naja, Small Khorshed, Baba's Aunt Dowla, and His sister-in-law, Big Khorshed. (*Lord Meher*, 558)

Naja suffered from heart problems throughout her life and died of a heart attack on May 20, 1982, at the age of seventy-three. Her body was cremated at Lower Meherabad and her ashes are interred in the second grave to the left of the Samadhi, next to Mehera.

KHORSHED IRANI

Khorshed Kaikhushru Irani was born on May 7, 1910, in Bombay. Her parents, Kaikhushru Masa Beheram and Soona Irani, were devotees of Upasni Maharaj. Khorshed was eleven when she met Meher Baba and she quickly became friends with Mehera and Naja, whom she met at Baba's Aunt Dowla's home. She was so close to Mehera that when Baba began to refer to Mehera as His Radha, He called Khorshed Chandrika, the name of Radha's closest *sakhi*, or "friend."[5]

Khorshed left school at the age of thirteen to dedicate her life to Baba, and He named her Nulli, or "Small" Khorshed, to distinguish her from Big Khorshed, who was married to His brother Jamshed. She was twenty-eight at the beginning of the Blue Bus Tours.

In later years Khorshed lived with her mother at Khushru Quarters in Ahmednagar, and in Bombay, occasionally traveling to Guruprasad in Poona to assist with Baba's household, until He called her to live at Meherazad. Khorshed died at Khushru Quarters on August 4, 1999, at the age of eighty-nine. Her body was cremated at Lower Meherabad and her ashes are interred in the fifth grave to the right of Baba's Samadhi.

Fortunate to Love Him: Stories of My Life with Meher Baba was compiled from video and audio recordings of Khorshed during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.

SOONAMASI IRANI

Soona Irani was born on April 3, 1884. She married a wealthy jeweler named Kaikhushru Masa Beheram Irani. Khorshed was their only child. The family resided at No. 6 Irani Mansion in Bombay, where Baba was a frequent guest.

Soona came to live at Meherabad in the latter 1920s. The sister of Baba's "spiritual mother" Gulmai, she came to be called Soonamasi, or "Aunt Soona." She was so devoted to Baba that once, when He chided her about not going to see Kaikhushru when he was seriously ill, she replied: "So what? Everyone has to die sometime." When Baba wondered what her family thought of her attitude, she continued: "I don't care about what anyone thinks. What do I have to do with the world when I am at Your feet?"[6]

Because Soona had been married, Baba did not subject her to the same restrictions as He did the younger women, and she was allowed to see the men and talk with them when her duties required it. She was fifty-four when the First Blue Bus Tour departed, and later she resided at Khushru Quarters in Ahmednagar.

Soona Irani died on August 3, 1973, at the age of eighty-nine. Her body was cremated at Lower Meherabad and her ashes are interred in the fourth grave to the left of Baba's Samadhi. Her marker is inscribed "Masi."

WALU PAWAR

Born on February 8, 1900, Walu Pawar was a wealthy landowner from Arangaon Village. She was widowed at an early age, and when she began to receive unwelcome advances from men in the village who were only interested in her wealth, she approached the headman of the village, Maruti Patil, pleading with him: "Please put me in a place where men will leave me alone."[7] Maruti, who already was a devotee of Baba's, went to Him to see if Walu could join His ashram.

Baba invited Walu to Meherabad to join the women's ashram, and she became devoted to Him, offering up her gold, land, cattle, and other possessions for His use. Walu spent many nights at Meherabad, but because she was a widow Baba did not restrict her contact with men and allowed her to maintain her residence in the village. She sometimes stayed there at night, walking the short distance to and from the

ashram each morning and evening. Walu was the only woman from nearby Arangaon Village to become one of Baba's mandali.

Lord Meher records that although Walu was "the daughter of an upper-class village family … she had profound humility and did all types of lowly jobs wholeheartedly and was a wonderful example of selfless service."[8] Baba frequently assigned her such enviable tasks as laundering His clothes and cleaning His room. Mehera recalled that everything Walu did was "with such love and care."[9]

Walu was thirty-eight when the First Blue Bus Tour began. After the tours she returned to Meherabad, but in 1946 she was diagnosed with a severe case of malaria and never fully recovered. When Baba embarked on the New Life He sent her to stay at Bindra House in Poona, but she was so distressed at the possibility of never seeing Him again that she nearly suffered an emotional breakdown and returned to Meherabad. She was further troubled when Baba did not invite her to live at Meherazad.

The last reference to Walu Pawar in *Lord Meher* documents that she was living at Meherabad on Baba's order as of November 1968, when she was sixty-eight.[10] Walu died on January 9, 1973, at the age of seventy-three. Following her death, her body was cremated at Lower Meherabad.

KAKU DEORUKHKAR

Saraswati Deorukhkar and her fifteen-year-old son Vishnu lived across the street from Merwan Irani's toddy shop in Poona. Born in 1888, Saraswati met Merwan in 1919 and immediately recognized that He was special. She began to call him Deva, or "God," and He in turn called her Kaku, or "Paternal Aunt." Saraswati was a widow, and Merwan told Vishnu that He was now the boy's father.

By the end of 1926 Baba had invited Kaku and Vishnu to join Him permanently, and mother and son moved to Lower Meherabad. Like Soonamasi and Walu, Kaku had been married and so was not restricted from having contact with men.

Kaku was fifty-two at the time of the First Blue Bus Tour, and at the end of the tours she returned to live at Lower Meherabad for her remaining years. She was so distraught at being left behind as she watched Baba and her son Vishnu departing for the New Life that she made herself ill. Saraswati Deorukhkar, or Kaku, died on April 11, 1950, at the age of sixty-one or sixty-two, and her body was cremated at Lower Meherabad.

MANSARI DESAI

Mani Beheram Desai was born on August 17, 1909. Her father was Beheram Desai. Her mother, whose name is not recorded, died when Mani was nine, so the child went to live with an aunt in Bombay. She later moved to Navsari to live with her Uncle Sorabji, who was a follower of Meher Baba. In 1927 she traveled to Meherabad to meet Baba, and it was then that He gave her the dhuni ash that healed the disfiguring skin disease which had afflicted her since the age of five.

Mani was twenty-eight when she arrived at Meherabad on June 16, 1938, just six months prior to the departure of the First Blue Bus Tour, and Baba began to call her Mansari. She remained with Baba afterward, and when He embarked on the New Life in 1949, He allowed her to stay on Meherabad Hill on the condition that she spend the rest of her life there.

Mansari acted as the caretaker of the buildings on the Hill. After Baba dropped His body, she became responsible for cleaning the Samadhi every morning, first alone, and later, assisted by volunteers. It was she who began the practice of offering prayers and arti at the Samadhi at 7:30 every morning and evening. Although tiny in stature she was a powerful presence at Upper Meherabad, beloved by pilgrims.

Mansari began to experience health problems at the beginning of November 1996 and was diagnosed with a severe infection and cancer of the digestive tract that metastasized into liver cancer. By December 7 she was no longer able to leave her bed but continued

to see pilgrims even as her condition continued to deteriorate. On January 11 she was heard to murmur in her sleep: "He is so beautiful, so beautiful," as she drifted in and out of consciousness.[11] Mani (Mansari) Beheram Desai died early in the morning of January 12, 1997—Dhuni day—at the age of eighty-seven. Her body was cremated at Lower Meherabad, where her pyre was adorned with two thousand roses brought by pilgrims. Her ashes were interred on November 9, 1999, at the end of the row of graves to the right of Baba's Samadhi.

GAIMAI, MANU, AND MEHERU JESSAWALA

Gai Satha was born on December 18, 1899 or 1900, into a devout Zoroastrian family from Ahmednagar, and all nine of the Satha siblings became devoted to Baba during the 1920s: brothers Nusserwan, Meherjee, Jemi, Homi, and Pilu, and sisters Gai, Banu, Gula, and Shirin.* They had a stepbrother named Ardeshir who also came to Baba. They resided at Akbar Press, a cotton mill that also housed a large extended-family residence, and Baba visited and took many meals with the family there.

Gai's husband, Byramshaw Dorab Jessawala, whom everyone knew as Pappa, was an industrial inspector with the Indian government. He and Gai had four children: Eruch (born October 13, 1916), Mani (May 3, 1919), Meheru (August 7, 1920), and Meherwan (November 22, 1930). Gai means "cow" in Hindi, and Gai came to be called Gaimai, or "cow mother," a spiritually auspicious name.[12]

Gaimai, Eruch, Mani, and Meheru visited Gaimai's brother Nusserwan at Akbar Press at Christmas in 1925, and Nusserwan took them on a carriage drive to Meherabad to meet Baba for the first time. Baba told Gaimai's sister Gula that He was her "sixth brother," thus establishing a lifelong connection with the entire Satha family.[13]

Baba visited the Jessawalas at their home in Nagpur on numerous occasions, even offering darshan there. From *Lord Meher*: "The

* The four sisters came to be known as Gaimai, Banumasi, Gulamasi, and Shirinmai.

entire Jessawala family was drenched in Baba's love, and Gaimai longed to stay with Him permanently. The garments of their lives were soaked in the Beloved's Wine."[14] The entire family joined Baba permanently on August 1, 1938, although Pappa returned to Nagpur to work until his retirement. Baba called Gaimai, Manu, Meheru, and Meherwan intermittently throughout the Blue Bus Tours, settling them in between for extended periods of time in Nagpur, Bangalore, and Dehradun so that Meherwan could attend school. In 1943 they moved into Bindra House in Poona. In May 1945 Meheru married her cousin Savak Damania and the couple lived at Khushru Quarters. When Bindra House was sold in 1990, Gaimai, Manu, and Meherwan moved to Meherazad.

Meheru Byramshaw Damania died of pancreatic cancer on August 28, 1953, and her body was taken to the Tower of Silence. Gai Satha Jessawala died on June 22, 1992, and her body also was taken to the Tower of Silence. Manu's health gradually deteriorated and she died of heart failure on August 16, 2012, at the age of ninety-three, at Meherazad. Mani (Manu) Byramshaw Jessawala's body was cremated at Lower Meherabad and her ashes were scattered at Upper Meherabad.

The history of the Jessawala family's time with Meher Baba is chronicled in *My Life with Meher Baba, the Avatar of the Age*, written by Meherwan.

KATIE IRANI

Katie Rusi Irani was born in Quetta, British India, on February 27, 1920, the daughter of Rusi Jehangir and Khorshed Banoo Irani. Katie first met Baba when He visited her family's home in Quetta in June 1923, when Katie was three, again the following June, and also in May 1931 when she was eleven.

When Baba traveled to the West in 1932 He wished to take with Him a suitable Indian girl, "a chaste girl with love and devotion, who has a pure heart."[15] Katie was among those invited to Meherabad for an interview, but her parents did not wish for her to go with Him and she declined to come. Katie's family moved to Ahmednagar

the following year at Baba's urging and thus avoided being caught in the 1935 Baluchistan earthquake.

Katie joined the women's ashram permanently on December 9, 1938, in Hyderabad, during the second evening of the First Blue Bus Tour. She was eighteen. It was during the tours that Katie learned to cook. She stayed with Baba until the beginning of the New Life when He sent her to live in Bombay, where she worked at the Japanese Consulate, on His order, until she retired in 1978 and went to live at Meherazad. There Katie resumed cooking for the mandali as well as other residents until her heath began to fail. Katie recorded some of her memories of life with Baba, as well as many of her delicious recipes, in a cookbook entitled *Cooking with Katie*.

After Baba dropped His body Katie regaled pilgrims in Mandali Hall with stories—some of them quite hilarious—of her life with Him. Katie Rusi Irani died of heart failure on May 29, 2009, at Meherazad, at the age of eighty-nine. Her body was cremated at Lower Meherabad and her ashes are interred in the fourth grave to the right of Baba's Samadhi.

Katie was preceded in death by her older sister Goher, who was born in Quetta on August 3, 1916. Goher was an occasional passenger in the Blue Bus and served as Baba's personal physician for many years. She was riding in the second car when Baba's 1952 accident occurred. Goher died at Meherazad on June 30, 2004, at the age of eighty-seven. Her body was cremated at Lower Meherabad and her ashes are interred in the second grave to the right of the Samadhi.

CHANJI

Framroze Hormusji Dadachanji was born in Bombay on November 23, 1892, to Parsi parents. He spent one year in college studying typing and shorthand, after which he was employed by a cotton company, as a shipboard journalist during World War I, and as a salesman, accountant, and secretary, before becoming the soon-to-be embezzled co-owner of a movie theater in Bombay.

Over time Framroze was beset by a series of losses that culminated in 1920 when his wife of four years, whom he loved dearly, divorced him to be with his closest friend. In his despair Framroze went to Chowpatty Beach in Bombay to commit suicide, but Meher Baba was walking there that evening, and Framroze's life was saved. The following day Baba called him and said: "Leave everything and come to me."[16] Framroze brought his entire family to Baba: his parents, five siblings (one of whom, Naoroji, was the father of Arnavaz and Nergiz), and their families as well.

Framroze Dadachanji, whom Baba called Chanji, served as Baba's devoted secretary for twenty-four years, toting his portable typewriter wherever Baba ordered him to go. As well as making travel arrangements and managing Baba's correspondence, Chanji maintained a series of diaries that document much of Baba's work between July 10, 1926, and August 11, 1944. Like Naja, he often served as Baba's scapegoat, bearing responsibility for circumstances that were nearly always beyond his control. He once said to Baba: "Go on … You have the right to treat me like this … You are the Master, You have the authority."[17]

Chanji loved Kashmir, which he called a "Paradise on Earth," and he expressed the desire to die there, where it was "so lovely."[18] Framroze Hormusji Dadachanji's wish was granted when he died there of typhoid fever on August 25, 1944, at the age of fifty-one, taking his Beloved's name. Baba cabled his family: "CHANJI HAS COME TO ME FOREVER. HE HAS JOINED ME ETERNALLY, AND NO ONE SHOULD WORRY."[19] Baba later declared: "Chanji was not only My disciple, he was My friend."[20] Chanji was buried in Kashmir but his glasses and bedroll were interred at the site of the Memorial Tower for Baba's departed disciples at Lower Meherabad.

DR. NILU

Vinayak Nilkanth Godse was born in Poona, India, on November 13, 1902, to Hindu parents. Nilu, as he was called, learned of Baba through his friend Vishnu, and he attended Upasni Maharaj's birthday celebration at Meherabad in 1927. When he asked Baba about the "energy and

enthusiasm" he witnessed, Baba explained: "It comes from Me."[21] Nilu came to Meherabad in the late 1930s, at the end of his training, and he served as one of Baba's physicians for many years, as well as manning ashram clinics.

Nilu was as good at fixing punctured tires as he was mending bodies, and he served as Elizabeth, Eruch, and Donkin's navigator during the Blue Bus Tours. Nilu accompanied Baba as one of His companions during the New Life.

Vinayak Nilkanth Godse died on December 2, 1956, the only fatality in Baba's second automobile accident in Satara.

ERUCH JESSAWALA

Eruch Byramshaw Jessawala was born on October 13, 1916, the first child of Byramshaw Dorab and Gai Satha Jessawala. He was eight years old when he first met Baba, in December 1925 at Meherabad, when he fell out of the carriage in which his family was riding and injured his arm. Baba tended the wound.

Eruch applied to the University of Benares to study engineering, but when Baba called him to Nasik in April 1937 He asked: "Why don't you become my engineer instead?"[22] Baba called Eruch to Panchgani a year later and asked: "If I were to ask you to leave everything behind … and come and stay with me, what would your answer be?" Eruch replied: "By your grace, anything is possible."[23]

Eruch, along with his parents, sisters, and brother, joined Baba permanently on August 1, 1938, little more than four months prior to the departure of the First Blue Bus Tour. He was twenty-two. Eruch devoted his life to the service of his Master, and although Baba ordered him to wed in 1945, the marriage was never consummated. Eruch served as Baba's interpreter, reading the alphabet board and, later, His distinctive gestures. Eruch accompanied Baba wherever He traveled and assumed responsibility for much of His personal care.

In addition to assisting in Baba's search for *masts*, Eruch was one of Baba's companions during the New Life, and he was driving the car when

Baba's second automobile accident occurred in Satara, India, on December 2, 1956. Following Baba's dropping of the body Eruch became one of the most beloved of the men mandali, sharing his memories and wisdom with pilgrims for thirty-two years. Eruch penned three books: *That's How It Was: Stories of Life with Meher Baba*, *Determined to Be His*, and *Is That So?*[*] His life story will be told in a forthcoming biography written by Davana Brown, who served as Eruch's assistant for many years.

Baba once told His brother Adi: "Eruch is my Peter. Peter renounced Jesus, but Eruch will not renounce me."[†24] Eruch was eventually diagnosed with Myasthenia gravis but he continued to share his stories in Mandali Hall even as his body failed. Eruch Byramshaw Jessawala died at Meherazad on August 31, 2001, at the age of eighty-four. He is buried in the Men's Cemetery at Lower Meherabad.

MEHERWAN JESSAWALA

Meherwan Byramshaw Jessawala was born on November 22, 1930, the fourth child and second son of Byramshaw Dorab and Gai Satha Jessawala. He met Baba many times as a child at his family's home in Nagpur, but his first occasion for contact came when he was still in the womb, when Baba visited the family in August 1930.

Meherwan joined Baba with his family on August 1, 1938, at the age of seven. He became a passenger on the Blue Bus in December, traveling with his mother and sisters when he was not enrolled in school. After the end of the tours he went to live at Bindra House with his family. Meherwan pursued a career in insurance, and, later, at White Cloud Paper Mills, but he moved to Meherazad with his mother and sisters in 1990, at the age of sixty, where he resided for the remaining twenty-six years of his life.

Meherwan's life was an object lesson in being in the world but never of it. Someone once inquired of him: "In all your years with Baba, is there an experience that stands out as especially significant?"

[*] *That's How it Was,* Sheriar Foundation (Myrtle Beach, SC, 1995).

[†] Peter, the chief apostle of Christ, denied Jesus three times prior to the crucifixion. Baba referred to this story on numerous occasions.

Meherwan replied thoughtfully: "I just would never think like that. I am remembering Baba now, in this moment. I don't think of the past."[25] When someone asked Baba what a saint looked like, He drew their attention to Meherwan.

Meherwan was the last of Baba's closest circle as well as the last living passenger to retain vivid memories of the Blue Bus Tours. As the other mandali died, it fell to him to meet with pilgrims in Mandali Hall and share his own stories. Ever modest and soft-spoken, Meherwan projected an aura of sweetness and innocence that belied the deep wisdom he had accumulated during his life with Baba. Meherwan recorded the story of his family's connection to Meher Baba in a memoir entitled *My Life with Meher Baba, the Avatar of the Age*.

Like Eruch, Meherwan also suffered from Myasthenia gravis, but he continued to meet with pilgrims until early July 2016, when he fell and sustained hip and shoulder fractures. Meherwan Byramshaw Jessawala died of respiratory failure at the age of eighty-five, on July 15, 2016, in Poona. His body was cremated at Lower Meherabad and his ashes were scattered on Meherabad Hill.

THE WESTERNERS

KITTY DAVY

Katherine (Kitty) Laura Davy was born in London, England, on August 28, 1891, the daughter of John and Helena Davy. She was a music teacher and spiritual seeker who heard about Meher Baba in March 1931 from her brother Herbert. Kitty and Herbert assisted with preparations for Baba's first visit to the West in September of that year, and she was among those who greeted Baba when He arrived at London's Victoria Station on September 12. Baba and his party stayed at 32 Russell Road, the home of Kitty's parents.

Kitty later recalled, "I was conscious for the first time of a deep response to Baba's pure love. I had not felt that intense, great spiritual

love before…. I felt at that moment complete love for Baba and for the first time in my life experienced that ecstasy of divine love that the mystics experience."[26]

Kitty was forty-seven when the First Blue Bus Tour departed. After the tours ended she continued to reside at Meherabad, traveling with Baba during some of His later *mast* tours and living in Bombay during the New Life. She remained in India for a total of fifteen years.

Kitty accompanied Baba to the West in 1952 and was riding in the second automobile when the accident occurred at Prague, Oklahoma. Later Baba asked Kitty to stay on at Meher Spiritual Center in Myrtle Beach and assist its founders, Elizabeth Patterson and Norina Matchabelli. Kitty served as Treasurer of its Board of Directors from 1960, when the first officers were elected, until her death. She returned to India to attend the East-West Gathering in 1962. She also attended the 1969 Darshan after Baba dropped His body and made several other visits afterward.

Baba's name for Kitty was Saroja, meaning "Lotus." Kitty had more opportunities to be with Him than most of the other Westerners and she composed a memoir entitled *Love Alone Prevails: A Story of Life with Meher Baba*.

Katherine (Kitty) Laura Davy died on December 31, 1991, at the age of one hundred. Her body was cremated and her ashes were sent to India to be interred in the last of the five graves to the left of Baba's Samadhi.

ELIZABETH PATTERSON

Elizabeth Mattocks Chapin was born in Chicago, Illinois, on July 26, 1896, the daughter of Simeon Brooks and Elizabeth Mattocks Chapin, after whom she was named. The family moved to New York City when she was five, and she grew up there. Elizabeth was twenty-one when she joined the "first Motor Corps Service for American women … doing ambulance motor work at the NY hospitals, docks and general emergencies during war times."[27] She became an insurance broker by

profession. On November 9, 1927, Elizabeth married life-long friend Kenneth Askew Patterson, a New York stockbroker.

Elizabeth met Meher Baba during His first visit to America, on November 17, 1931, in Harmon-on-Hudson, New York. She later recalled: "Immediately my feeling was one of recognition. All the way to the far end of the room where He was seated, I tried to recall where I had seen Him before. The feeling was one of familiarity, like meeting a friend in a foreign land—a friend whom one has known well since childhood, only since that earlier period the appearance has changed."[28]

Elizabeth was forty-two in December 1938 when she departed Meherabad behind the wheel of the Blue Bus. In June 1941, near the end of the third tour, Baba sent her home to the United States to spread His message and to locate a site for a spiritual center that He wished to establish in the West. In June 1944 Elizabeth donated a five-hundred-acre parcel of land that her father had given her for the Meher Spiritual Center in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Elizabeth was instrumental in the creation and running of the center, co-founding and managing it with Norina Matchabelli. She served as President of its Board of Directors from its inception as a non-profit corporation in 1959 until her death.

Elizabeth returned to India in 1947, at Baba's invitation. Back in the United States she was driving the car in which Baba was riding at the time of His first automobile accident in 1952 and was seriously injured. Elizabeth traveled to India again in 1962 to attend the East-West-Gathering. She also attended the 1969 Darshan after Baba dropped His body.

Baba gave Elizabeth the nickname Dilruba, Persian for "One Who Ravishes the Heart." Elizabeth Chapin Patterson died on December 6, 1980, at the age of eighty-four. Her body was cremated and her ashes were sent to India to be interred in the Cemetery for Female Disciples on March 19, 1981. Her grave marker is inscribed with the words, "Disciple of Meher Baba."

NORINA MATCHABELLI

Norina Matchabelli was born Norina Gilli, in Florence, Italy, on March 3, 1880. In 1904 Norina married Karl Vollmöller, who penned the pantomime play *The Miracle*, in which she played the lead role of the Madonna. Norina and Karl divorced, and in 1917 she married Georgian prince, diplomat, and amateur chemist, Georges V. Matchabelli, from whom she acquired her title. Norina and Georges moved to the United States in 1923, where they co-founded the Prince Matchabelli perfume company in 1926. They divorced in 1933.

A friend of Elizabeth's, Norina met Meher Baba at Harmon-on-Hudson on November 9, 1931. She was fifty-eight in December 1938 and participated in the first three Blue Bus Tours, but she sailed with Elizabeth to the United States in June 1941. There, while living in New York, Norina gave a series of public talks that she described as "thought-transmission" messages from Meher Baba, attended by thousands of people. Norina became depressed when her work with thought transmissions ended. She also had been diagnosed with an enlarged heart, but ignoring her doctor's advice, she returned to India with Elizabeth in July 1947.

Norina also worked closely with Elizabeth to establish the Meher Spiritual Center. She resided at Youpon Dunes, Elizabeth's home in Myrtle Beach. Norina suffered a heart attack on May 10, 1952, during Baba's first visit to the center, and her health continued to decline.

Baba's name for Norina was Nurjehan, Persian for "Light of the World," after Empress Noor Jehan, wife of Mughal Emperor Jahangir. Baba said that she was the "Spiritual Mother of the Western Hemisphere."[29] Norina said: "I gave up everything to follow Him—my money, dramatic career and social occupations…. I live in the world and yet am not of it, since I am one with the beauty, love and serene order of the universe."[30] Norina told Filis Frederick that Baba had told her: "You have been My mother twice and My father once," as Jesus's father Joseph.[31]

Princess Norina Matchabelli died at Youpon Dunes on June 15, 1957, at the age of seventy-seven. Baba cabled Elizabeth: "Be happy My very dear Norina has come to live with Me forever."[32] Norina's body was cremated and her ashes were sent to India to be interred in the Cemetery for Female Disciples. Her grave marker reads: "Princess Norina was is and will ever remain Baba's."

NADINE TOLSTOY

Nadia Kucutulskaya was born in Odessa, Imperial Russia, on September 1, 1884. She immigrated to the United States with her second husband, Count Ilya Tolstoy, whom she married in September 1920. Ilya and Nadia were "white Russians" who left Imperial Russia following the Russian Revolution. They settled in Waterbury, Connecticut, eventually moving to New York City, where she learned of Meher Baba.

Nadia traveled to Harmon-on Hudson, where she met Baba on November 19, 1931, the same day as Elizabeth. She had been a student of Yogananda, but when she saw Baba for the first time, she said: "My search is over," calling Him "the Divine Enigma—the True One," her "life" and "resurrection."[33] Baba called her Nadine to distinguish her from His cousin Naja.

Count Ilya Tolstoy had but one interview with Baba, during which Baba told him: "You have to take Love into your heart." When Ilya died in 1933 his last words were: "Body, mind is all crumbled down—Love alone is unshakable."[34] After Ilya's death Nadine was free to be with Baba.

Nadine was fifty-four at the beginning of the First Blue Bus Tour. In June 1941 she accompanied Elizabeth and Norina to America, where she settled in New York City to spread Baba's message. Elizabeth paid all her living expenses.

Baba called Nadine, who had a beautiful sining voice, "His nightingale" and said that she had a "beautful soul."[35] Countess Nadia (Nadine) Tolstoy died of Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS, or

Lou Gehrig's Disease) on April 14, 1946, at Roosevelt Hospital in New York City. She was sixty-one. When Baba received the telegram from Norina informing Him of Nadine's death, He replied: "Tell Elizabeth Nadia lives in Me, with Me and for Me more than ever before."[36] Nadine's body was cremated and her ashes were sent to India to be interred in the Cemetery for Female Disciples. Her grave marker is inscribed: "Her happiness was Baba."

Nadine, Elizabeth Patterson, Norina Matchabelli, and Delia DeLeon are considered to have been the pillars of Meher Baba's work in the West.

HEDI MERTENS

Hedi Mertens was born in Gossau, Switzerland, in 1893. She was a painter by profession and taught at a school of fine arts in Zurich. Her husband Walter was a landscape architect, and he and Hedi had four children. Both Hedi and Walter were spiritual seekers: she was a student of Ramakrishna and he of Sufism.

Hedi and Walter met Meher Baba at a reception on His first visit to Zurich, hosted by their friend Otto Haas-Heye on December 15, 1932. This was during Baba's fourth trip to Europe and His second visit to Switzerland. The Mertens family became life-long devotees and served as Baba's hosts whenever Baba returned to the city.

Hedi was forty-four when the First Blue Bus Tour departed. Baba called Walter to India at the end of November to see Hedi and to join the first tour for a short time. She remained with the tour until April 18, 1939, when she departed with Helen Dahm to return home to Switzerland at Baba's order.

As of December 21, 1951, Walter was deceased, but Baba stayed with Hedi during His last visit to Switzerland while recuperating from His automobile accident in 1952. Hedi saw Him again at the Zurich Airport in July 1956, and in 1958, at the sahavas at the Meher Spiritual Center.

In the meantime, Hedi continued to paint. Her later work was characterized as abstract geometric pop art and her paintings continue to appear in art auctions.

By 1980 she had suffered a stroke and was no longer able to walk. Hedi Mertens died on May 18 or 19, 1982, in Carona, Switzerland, at the age of eighty-seven or eighty-eight.

HELEN DAHM

Helen Dahm was born in Egelshofen (now Kreuzlingen), Switzerland, on May 21, 1878, but her family later moved to Zurich. Helen was trained in arts and crafts and traveled throughout Europe studying with renowned artists, after which she settled in Zurich in 1913 as an expressionist painter.

Helen learned of Baba from friends and met him in Zurich at Otto Haas-Heye's reception on December 15, 1932. When Baba invited her to India in 1938 she sold all her paintings and possessions. She was sixty years of age when the first tour departed Meherabad, but in March 1939 she was diagnosed with colitis; afterward her health was so compromised that Baba sent her home with Hedi in April. She saw Baba one more time, at the Zurich Airport in July 1956.

When Helen returned to Switzerland she stayed with Walter and Hedi until a house could be found for her. Because she had no reliable source of livelihood, Baba arranged for Walter to provide her with a small stipend for the first few months after moving into her new home. Hedi provided her with art supplies so that she could resume painting.

Helen began to focus on religious themes, and her art became progressively more abstract. Her paintings were featured in her first and only retrospective exhibition when she was eighty-nine years old. Mehera recalled that for Helen's ninetieth birthday the artist was driven to church in a horse-drawn carriage and feted with dancing and music. Helen died three days later, on May 24, 1968.

Today her paintings are exhibited at the Helen Dahm Gesellschaft Museum at 8618 Oetwil am See in Zurich. She is considered to be one of the most important Swiss artists of the twentieth century.

NONNY GAYLEY

Estelle Canda Gayley was born in New York City in 1875. She married Henry Ball Gayley, a prominent attorney, and they resided in New York City. Henry and Estelle had two children, Henry Clifford (known as Clifford) and Madeleine Estelle. Henry died in 1920, leaving her a wealthy widow. During the late 1920s Estelle changed her name to Nonny and Madeleine's to Rano, using numerological calculations. She and Rano gave up their apartment in New York to travel during the fall of 1930.

Nonny and Rano first heard of Baba in 1933 through their friend Ruano Bogislav and Ruano's friend Quentin Tod. When Quentin showed Nonny a photograph of Baba, Nonny exclaimed: "Why, I've seen that man's face before," and she thought to herself: "Someday, I'm going to meet that man."[37]

Nonny composed several poems for Baba, including "Beloved," "Thy Breath," "The Master's Hand," and "Ecstasy."[38] The latter two were published under the name Kemali (Great One), one of Baba's names for her.

At age sixty-three, Nonny was the eldest of all the women invited to participate in the First Blue Bus Tour, but she suffered from arthritis and heart problems and her health was already beginning to fail. In September 1939, in Bangalore, during the second tour, Nonny became progressively weaker until she took to her bed on October 13. Estelle (Nonny) Canda Gayley died the following evening. She was sixty-four.

Baba gave Nonny mukti. After her body was cremated, her ashes were taken to Meherabad to be interred on Meherabad Hill in a tomb inscribed, simply: "Nonny, Baba's Lover," at Baba's order. Hers was the first tomb in what was to become the Cemetery for Female Disciples.

When Nonny's son Clifford later requested that his mother's ashes be given to the family, Rano carried the urn that contained them with her to America in 1952. Nonny's tomb may be empty, but it remains the most imposing of all those in the women's cemetery: Set apart, raised on a plinth, and protected by stanchions and chains, it is a most appropriate tribute to one who lived what can truly be called a sainted life.

RANO GAYLEY

Madeleine Estelle Gayley was born in New York City on July 6, 1902, the daughter of Henry Ball and Estelle Canda Gayley. In 1924, at the age of twenty-two, Madeleine enrolled in the New York School for Applied Design for Women. She went on to work as a rug designer and later studied oil painting.

It was at Madeleine's instigation that her mother changed their names: She was "sick of being called Maddy and Madeleine was too long to put on a painting."[39] Mani recalled that although Nonny and Rano were very different, they were also very close, adding: "Nonny always called Rano 'my baby.'"[40]

Rano was thirty-six in December 1938. She returned to Meherabad following the end of the tours, traveling intermittently with Baba as He continued to carry out His *mast* work. She shifted to Bombay along with Kitty after Baba closed down the ashram at the beginning of the New Life. At the end of that phase of work Baba invited her to live at Meherazad. She returned to America for Baba's 1952 visit to Myrtle Beach, and was riding in the second car when Baba's accident occurred.

Rano pursued her art throughout her life, completing many sketches, drawings, and oil portraits of Meher Baba, as well as numerous charts and book illustrations, including *The Ten Circles* painting for *God Speaks*, as well as the Mastery in Servitude emblem. She said of her work on *The Ten Circles*: "Art is an act of love."*[41]

* This is an allusion to a passage from *Stay with God* in which Francis Brabazon said: "Art is an act of love in likeness of itself—Spirit moulding matter into lovely form; God's compassion as Avatar unto men; and men's devotion to Avatar as God, but God—for devotion is by divine grace alone." (*Stay with God*, 91)

Like the rest of the mandali, Rano went on to share her memories with pilgrims in Mandali Hall for many years. The younger Westerners found her especially approachable, down-to-earth, and exceedingly honest about her weaknesses.

Baba's name for Rano was Merano. *Lord Meher* records that merano is the name of a flower, but Merano is the name of a city nestled in a valley in the Italian Alps that is known as the "City of Flowers."[42] Although it is not mentioned as a city that Baba visited, He may have heard of it during one of His sojourns in Italy. Merano was also a play on Rano's name. Rano said of Baba: "Sweetness. Love. Everything that was beautiful was there," and she recorded her stories in her memoir, *Because of Love: My Life and Art with Meher Baba*.[43]

Rano began to lose her memory, as well as her hearing, during her last years. Her health began to fail, and in late November or early December of 1986 pilgrims at Meherazad were told that she was not going to live much longer. Madeleine (Rano) Estelle Gayley died at Meherazad on December 5, 1986, at the age of eighty-four. In a family letter written days after Rano's passing, Mani called her "Beloved Baba's artist/disciple and our much-loved American sister-companion for 50 years."[44] Rano's body was cremated and her ashes are interred in the center of the row of five located to the left of Baba's Samadhi.

IRENE BILLO

Irene Billo was born in Heiden, Switzerland, on September 22, 1916, to Otto and Frieda Billo. Her health challenges began when she was a toddler, and after she nearly died from an early childhood illness her mother inscribed in her baby book: "I dedicate this child to God."*[45] Irene's introduction to Baba came in the form of a photograph that she found when she broke into her father's cabinet looking for the chocolates he hid there.

* Irene's mother met Baba during one of His visits to Zurich in the 1930s. (*Mehera–Meher* 3:95) Her photograph appears on p. 90 (vol. 3) in *Mehera–Meher.* It was taken by Irene at the Hotel Schweizerhaus, Maloja, Switzerland, on August 10, 1952, when Baba and the women were visiting Zurich. Irene took several photos of Baba and the women during that time.

Irene was twenty-two when the First Blue Bus Tour departed and she remained in India for eight years, traveling intermittently with Baba during the later *mast* tours. She continued to experience health issues throughout her stay, the most serious of which were bouts of catatonia, which she attributed to having contracted blackwater fever, a severe complication of malaria.

Irene saw Baba again in 1952, when he came to Zurich to recover from the accident in Prague. She also saw Him at the Zurich Airport in July 1956. Irene suffered from asthma—yet another consequence of having refused Baba's Anacin tablet in 1938—so she was unable to travel to India for the East-West Gathering or the 1969 Darshan, but she did return in 1983. She said that even after an absence of thirty-seven years it felt as if she had never left and that "Baba's presence was overwhelming."[46]

Baba's name for Irene was Padma, or Padmini, a reference to a Rajput princess. But padma also means "lotus" in Hindi, and Mehera once embroidered a brooch for her in the shape of a lotus flower that incorporated strands of Baba's hair and some of His nail clippings. Baba once said of Irene that "it was rare to find someone with so many noble traits of character."[47] Irene Billo died in Switzerland.

MARGARET CRASKE

Mary Margaret Craske was born in Suffolk, England, on November 26, 1892, to Edmund George and Hannah Bishop Craske. At the age of eighteen she began to take ballet classes, and between 1918 and 1923 she studied under Enrico Cecchetti, whose other illustrious pupils included Anna Pavlova and Vaslav Nijinsky.* But she injured her Achilles tendon in 1931 and was no longer able to perform, so she turned to teaching and choreography.

* Enrico Cecchetti (June 21, 1850–November 13, 1928) was an Italian ballet dancer and teacher of what came to be known as the Cecchetti Method. As of 1888 he was considered to be the greatest ballet virtuoso in the world. In a twist of circumstance only Baba could have arranged, His mother Shireenmai attended a ballet performance in which Pavlova danced, in Bombay, circa 1923. (*The Joyous Path* 1:30–31) Norina later tried to arrange for Nijinsky to come to Cannes to meet Baba, but he never did. (*Lord Meher*, 1860)

Margaret learned of Baba at Meredith Starr's meditation retreat in East Challacombe, Devonshire. She met Him at Kitty's parents' home on September 12, 1931. When she opened the door for Him to step inside, she recalled: "There at the bottom of the steps stood the most appealing figure that one could ever hope to see. No sign of power. Just a vision of gentleness, grace and love that touched the heart immeasurably."[48] Baba later told Margaret: "Your dancing is Mine" and He said that it was her love that had drawn Him to England.[49]

Margaret was forty-seven when she joined the Second Blue Bus Tour at the beginning of November 1939 and she traveled with the women for the duration of the tours. Afterward Baba invited her to Meherabad and Meherazad, where she spent eight years living in the women's ashram, traveling intermittently with Him during His later *mast* tours, and caring for Irene during her attacks of catatonia.

When Margaret returned to the West in May 1946 Baba directed her to move to New York City, where she served as ballet mistress and teacher for the American Ballet Theater and Manhattan Festival Ballet, as well as director of The Metropolitan Opera Ballet School. She also taught at The Julliard School. To her students she was, and remains, Miss Craske.

Margaret saw Baba during His visits to New York City and the Meher Spiritual Center in the 1950s and she brought many of her students to Him. She returned to India for the East-West Gathering in 1962, accompanied by a group of dancers. Although she was unable to attend the 1969 Darshan she came to India that December and made several other visits after Baba dropped His body.

Margaret also served as one of the directors of the Meher Spiritual Center for eleven years. Along with Kitty, Margaret had more opportunities to be with Baba than most of the other Westerners. She called Baba "Beloved Flower of All the World."[50] His name for her was Zuleka, Persian for "Fair and Beautiful." Margaret recorded her memories in two memoirs entitled *The Dance of Love* and *Still Dancing with Love*.

Margaret retired in 1986 at the astonishing age of ninety-four and moved to Myrtle Beach for the remaining years of her life. Mary Margaret Craske died at Grand Strand Hospital in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, on February 18, 1990, at the age of ninety-seven. Her body was cremated and her ashes were sent to Meherabad to be interred in the Cemetery for Female Disciples. Her grave marker is inscribed: "Baba's Dancer."

WILLIAM DONKIN

William Donkin was born in Wimbledon, England, on November 14, 1911, to Sidney Bryan and Phoebe Smiles Donkin. The family later moved to Surry, where he grew up. William possessed an adventurous spirit: He was an avid mountain climber, scaling peaks in the Alps and the Scandinavian Mountains in Norway. At the age of twenty he and a companion traveled to Africa and traversed seventeen hundred miles of the Sahara Desert on camels and horseback.

William learned about Meher Baba in the fall of 1933. He met Baba soon after in London, and Baba encouraged him to study surgery. By the end of the meeting William had experienced Baba as God, but it would be six years before his medical training was completed and he could travel to India. He graduated from London University with a degree in orthopedic surgery.

Donkin arrived in India at the end of July 1939, just in time to join the Second Blue Bus Tour as one of the drivers of the bus. On July 31 he made his first entry in what would be a series of diaries that chronicled his life with Baba. He soon came to be called Donkin, or, simply, Don. He served as one of Baba's personal physicians, along with Dr. Nilu and, later, Dr. Goher.

Donkin traveled with Baba until he was called up in March 1941 to serve in the Indian Medical Service until sometime after VE Day in May 1945. He returned to Meherabad, where he resumed his work as one of the ashram physicians. Donkin had the great privilege of

documenting Baba's *mast* work in a book entitled *The Wayfarers: Meher Baba's Work with the God-Intoxicated*. He was the only Westerner chosen to accompany Baba as one of His companions during the New Life.

Donkin once referred to Baba as a "peach." He signed some his correspondence to Baba "Your Will," which can, perhaps, be read as a confirmation of his unequivocal surrender to his Master's orders.[51] Baba's name for Donkin was "the English Barber," sometimes delivered in jest but at others out of sheer frustration.*

Donkin's surviving dairies can be read in *Donkin's Diaries: Travels in India with Meher Baba 1939–1945*. His biography, written by Bob Mossman, is entitled *Slave of Love: The Life of Dr. William Donkin with Meher Baba*.

William Donkin died in his room at Viloo Villa in Ahmednagar on August 9, 1969, little more than six months after Baba dropped His body. Some say he died of a broken heart. He is buried alongside the other mandali in the Men's Cemetery at Lower Meherabad.

* During medieval times barbers functioned as surgeons, especially on the battlefield. So-called physicians were academicians who observed and consulted, especially for the upper classes. To call a modern physician a barber was an insult, although Baba also used the term in humorous situations.

MANI'S DIARIES

Among the treasures in the Avatar Meher Baba Trust Archives Document Collection are four handwritten diaries and typed records kept by Mani Irani spanning the period of the Blue Bus Tours: the *Red Letter Book*, the *Blue Bus Tours Diary*, *Baba's Dictation to the Women Mandali*, and the *Regal Notebook*. They were found in her trunk and cupboard at Meherazad after her death, along with many other small notebooks that she had accumulated throughout her life. They were brought to the archive at Meherabad to be catalogued and preserved and will eventually be digitized and made available on the Avatar Meher Baba Trust website.

THE RED LETTER BOOK

The *Red Letter Book* is an 8 by 6½-inch bound notebook with a cardstock cover overlaid with imitation moiré-embossed red linen or paper, hence its name. The front cover features a circular logo with the image of a swan and the word "Swan" printed above it. Beneath the logo are the name and address of the manufacturer: J. Nandal & Company, 2039 Bombay No. 3. The logo and lettering are enclosed in a decorative border, and all are printed with gold ink. This notebook is in good condition, but the edges of the covers are frayed in places.

The original two hundred lined paper pages appear to have been removed so that Mani could type notes that were then replaced in the covers. The notebook incorporates two separate sets of notes overlapping the dates August 29 and October 18, 1938. The first sixteen pages document Baba's gradual announcement of the First Blue Bus Tour, starting with His orders to the women regarding their new life at Upper Meherabad, beginning on August 29 and ending on October 7, when at last He revealed the "Big Surprise." It concludes with the parenthetical statement: "Here ends [*sic*] the talks leading to the great climax or Surprise."

A second set of notes, dated from September 2 through October 18, consists of ten pages of typed entries documenting Baba's talks with the women and the day-to-day occurrences of the women's life on the Hill. Mani's habit of noting Mehera's activities was so ingrained that the beginning of the entry for September 9 reads:

> Work – In the morning she 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.

The last page consists of three short, hand-written notes documenting events in November, including the story of Walu's sari catching fire on the nineteenth.

THE BLUE BUS TOURS DIARY

Written in Mani's own hand, the 154-page *Blue Bus Tours Diary* is a pocket notebook measuring 5⅛ by 3½ inches. Its brown cardstock front cover bears the logo of a boy, printed in black ink. A hand-written label glued to the front cover reads "December 1938 to 1942 (also part notes on 1943)." The notebook is bound at the top with black cloth that has been glued over the top edges of the front and back covers. Its lined pages are

sewn into place with eight tacks (stitches). It is in very good condition, with no torn pages.

This diary, which Mani initially called "Our tour with Baba," spans the period of the Blue Bus Tours, beginning on December 8, 1938, when the Blue Bus first departed Meherabad, and concluding on November 30, 1941, when the bus returned to Meherabad at the end of the last tour.

But Mani continued to make sporadic entries in the diary. Among her notes for the month of December 1941 are references to the lighting of the dhuni on the twelfth, two more *mast* tours, and the poignant "Kippy laid in M'abad near Warrior," dated December 23.[1] Her first and only entry for January 1942, dated the first, reads: "The Many soldiers camp in Meherabad."[2] Between February 2 and May 31, 1942, she filled four pages with entries describing Baba's extended visits to Dehradun and Rishikesh for *mast* work, accompanied by the women, during which they traveled by rail. On April 4 she recorded: "Ceylon bombed."[3] Her last travel entry, a single page dated July 4, 1943, recounts another long rail journey the women made with Baba for His *mast* work to Bhopal, Agra, Mathura, Delhi, and on to Lahore, that concludes: "V. hot. Garden Town house v. nice."[4]

BABA'S DICTATION TO THE WOMEN MANDALI

Also written in Mani's hand, this 355-page "envelope diary" measures 6½ by 4 inches. Bound in light brown cardstock, it has an enclosure that folds over the front cover and snaps shut. Black printing on the front reads "The Bangalore Press Branch Depot, 'Krishna Buildings,' Avenue Road, Bangalore City" and "The Bangalore Press Pocket Diary 1940." An additional address reads "The Bangalore Printing & Publishing Co., Ltd., 'Lakeview,' Mysore Road, Bangalore City." On the spine is printed "Pocket Diary 1940." It is in good condition.

This diary opens with the note "from Baba's Dictation on Alphabet board, during informal talks at gatherings of all women mandali then staying

with Baba." The entries were made between June 29, 1940, at the end of the second tour, and March 17, 1941, during the third tour. The diary includes discourses, explanations of Baba's *mast* work, and His comments about the progress of World War II, as well as notations about the second and third tours and the interim at Meherabad in between.

THE REGAL NOTEBOOK

The Regal Notebook is a 65-page pocket diary measuring 6⅛ by 4 inches. Its cardstock covers are covered with glossy black embossed paper, printed in gold ink with the words "No. 606 Regal Notebook P 150." The edges of the pages are marbled with red and blue ink, an unexpected embellishment on an otherwise undistinguished little notebook.

Also written in Mani's hand, this notebook documents Baba's travels from the beginning of the Blue Bus Tours in December 1938 and ending in 1953. The entries are a mixture of English and shorthand. The notebook opens with two prayers on the first page. The first, "God lead us from falsehood to Truth, from darkness to Light, from death to Immortality," has been cut from a typed page and pasted in at the top.[5] The second, "Dear God, Give us the ability to know a trifle when we see one, and to deal with it as such," is written in Mani's hand.[6] Beneath it she has also written the prayer in Gujarati. In the middle of the page she has pasted the cutout image of a little black lamb. The following nine pages consist of entries documenting the itinerary of the four Blue Bus Tours. The shorthand notations have not been transcribed.

THE AKI (ADI K. IRANI) COLLECTION

The AKI (Adi K. Irani) Collection is a compilation of documents preserved in the Avatar Meher Baba Trust Archives Document Collection. It is also sometimes referred to as the Secretary's Collection. On Sunday, November 30, 1958, Baba asked Adi: "Do you keep all the office records in steel trunks or *almirahs* [metal cabinets and cupboards]? As a precaution against insects and fire, you must do this. The importance and significance of these records is such that you can hardly imagine it today."[1] As ashram secretary, Adi took Baba's instructions to heart, maintaining files for the office and carefully organizing them for future reference. He was assisted by Feram Workingboxwala.

The AKI Collection includes correspondence in the form of letters, notes, postcards, cables, and telegrams, as well as reports, lists, legal documents, and other miscellaneous papers spanning more than four decades. The earliest documents date from the late 1920s, when Framroze Dadachanji (Chanji) became Meher Baba's secretary. They continue through the years during which Adi held that position following Chanji's death in 1944. Most of the latest documents date to 1969, although a few are from the early 1970s.

Many documents consist of incoming correspondence addressed to Meher Baba, but some of the materials were directed to Chanji, Adi,

or other men in the ashram. When the mandali began to use typewriters and carbon paper they started keeping copies of outgoing correspondence as well.

The documents came into the Trust Archives Document Collection arranged according to sender's location and/or type of document. The collection follows a partially chronological order, although many documents are not precisely dated and cannot be organized that way. Some consist of a single page, while others are made up of multiple pages.

Based on archival measuring standards it is estimated that the AKI Collection contains several hundred thousand individual pieces of paper, of which more than sixty thousand (thirty thousand pages front and back) have been scanned as of the writing of this book. It will be many years before the processing and cataloguing can be completed.

More than six hundred pages of documents (including fronts and backs) spanning the period of the Blue Bus Tours have been scanned and catalogued to date. Constituting just one percent of the materials already processed, they consist of typed and handwritten letters, handwritten postcards, typed cables and handwritten dictation for cables, some of which are signed "MSIrani," as well as lists, notes, itineraries, travel-related documents, and other miscellaneous materials. Nearly all have the word "Tour" handwritten in red or blue pencil near the top of the first page, indicating the file location of the documents. It is possible that more material from the Blue Bus era will be discovered as the cataloguing process continues, adding yet more detail to an already fascinating story.

ALTERNATE ROUTES

THE FIRST TOUR

Meher Baba investigated several alternative itineraries for the First Blue Bus Tour. Papers in the AKI Collection in the Avatar Meher Baba Trust Archives Document Collection in Meherabad, India, all dated 1938, document that He considered a much longer itinerary for that tour than the one He finally settled upon. The first, entitled "Itinerary of the Tour," is a typed three-page list of destinations. The first page lists each of the cities proposed to be included in the tour, along with driving distances between each of the major stops. The second and third pages enumerate "The places en route and Night-halts."

Another document contains a list of cities that includes the same itinerary as the previous document. Although the first five rows of cities are written in Mani's hand in black ink, the bottom two lines were added in another script, in blue ink. Italics have been added to denote cites not included in the final tour:

Benares	-	Allahabad	- Cawnpore	
Lucknow	-	Agra-Jaipur-Ajmer-Delhi		
Mathura	-	*Ambala*	- *Ludhiana*	
Amritsar	-	*Lahore*	- *Karachi*	
Rawalpindi-Murree		*Kashmir*	- ~~Jaipur~~	
Jammu - *Lahore*	- Delhi	- Jaipur	- Ajmer	
Indore - *Dhulia*	- Nasik	- Nagar [1]		

The front page of the third document consists of notes entitled "Delhi – Hardwar – Rishikesh," written in Chanji's hand, describing such assets as a "good road," a "shorter route" versus a "longer loop," "another interesting route," and a "beauty spot in the Himalayas." The reverse side includes additional information relating to mileages for various routes.[2]

THE ANDAMAN ISLANDS

Correspondence from the Adi K. Irani Collection also documents that as early as September 1938 Baba had ordered Chanji to explore the possibility of traveling to the Andaman Islands, part of a five-hundred-island archipelago in the Bay of Bengal between India and Myanmar. He was thinking of establishing an ashram or spiritual center there.

Chanji was charged with collecting information about the capitol of Port Blair, located on South Andaman Island, as well as about Mt. Harriet, a British administrative center that was home to Baba lover Millicent Deakes. Chanji contacted the esteemed travel agencies of Thos. Cook & Son and The American Express Company to inquire about rates and schedules for steamer service, climatic conditions, and population. He also asked whether Port Blair was a "free port" or else had restrictions for visitors, as well as its "lines of communication [and] conditions of settlement, for establishment of a colony or a center, for spiritual training and guidance etc."[3] Neither agency knew of any printed information for travelers to the islands, which were only accessible via unreliable steamship service from Calcutta and Madras.

Thos. Cook & Son further noted: "The Andamans [*sic*] Islands are used as a convict settlement and it is therefore necessary to obtain permission from the government."[4] The Port Blair penal settlement was established by the British in the 1850s and was the location of the Cellular Jail, a prison built in 1908 to incarcerate Indian freedom fighters. Its annals are filled with horrific stories of chain gangs, solitary confinements, and torture.

Another thread of correspondence documents a series of inquiries Chanji made to Millicent Deakes. Because the islands served as a

British naval base and penal colony, she had to inform Chanji that it would not be possible for Baba to obtain permission to come there. It was just one more disappointment for Millicent, who had been hoping to meet Baba since 1931.

The islands would have made for a curious location for an ashram or spiritual center, though one in dire need of Meher Baba's nazar. And although Baba inquired yet again in November 1941 about traveling there, He never followed through on the idea. Today the Andaman Islands are a popular tropical tourist attraction, although visitors must still apply for permits to visit. The notorious prison is now the site of a national memorial.

Margaret Craske offered a poignant postscript to Millicent's coming-to-Baba narrative—as well as a droll indictment of the women's living conditions on the Hill—in her essay: "The Story of Millicent Deakes." When the Andaman Islands fell to Japanese forces in March of 1943, Millicent was captured, taken prisoner of war, and interred there in a concentration camp for nearly two and a half years before Japan surrendered in August 1945. Sometime not long after the end of the war, after Millicent had been released and had traveled to Bombay, Baba called her to come to Meherabad for His darshan. He invited her to stay with the women on the Hill. Margaret recalled:

> Since we never had visitors, the housekeeper—Katie, I think—was in a difficulty. Our enamel plates by this time had not much enamel; the mugs—also enamel—were stained with strong tea; and the knives and spoons were at about the same level. The compound where we ate was, in the evening when she came, lit by hurricane lamps, the globes of which were held together by sticking plaster and which at intervals gave out strange sounds….
>
> Millicent Deakes did not take much notice of us. She was crying and continued to do so. Her mind was completely on Baba and her interview with Him. We barely existed.

When we finally sat down to eat, she came back to the world, looked around at us and at the primitive arrangements, probably sensing a mild embarrassment on our part, then said, "Don't worry about me. I have just come from a concentration camp myself."

And just for one moment, we saw ourselves as the outside world might have seen us.[5]

NEWS ABOUT THE MASTER
A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE *MEHER BABA JOURNAL*

(A version of this essay first appeared in *Glow International*, Spring 2015)

Among the many channels that Meher Baba employed to spread His name, messages, and accounts of His on-going work was the eponymous *Meher Baba Journal*, published between December 1938 and October 1942. The publication of the first three volumes of the journal coincided with the Blue Bus Tours.

On July 11, 1938, Baba called a meeting with Adi K. (Irani), Ramjoo (Abdulla Karim Jaffer), Chanji (Framroze Dadachanji), and Dr. Ghani (Abdul G. Munsiff), as well as Norina Matchabelli, Elizabeth Patterson, and Nonny Gayley, at His Rahuri Cabin at Lower Meherabad. His intention was to revamp the old bi-monthly *Meher Gazette* to create a new monthly publication. He also invited Sampath Aiyangar, one of the editors of the *Gazette*. Aiyangar was advancing in years and would not be able to edit the publication indefinitely, but Baba wanted the work to continue in some form.•

• Meher Baba's "The Avatar" was the first of a series of articles that appeared at the beginning of each issue of the *Meher Baba Journal*. Each article was in essence a discourse dictated on the alphabet board by Baba, transcribed and edited by Dr. Chakradhar Deshmukh, and approved by Baba for publication. These messages were compiled into one volume at the end of each year and reprinted in the form of four small volumes entitled *Discourses*, and they became the foundation for the collection of teachings read today.

When Baba called everyone together on the eleventh and presented the idea of creating a new publication, they expressed concerns about the value of any insights and impressions they might be able to offer. They agreed to take on the work only on the condition that Baba also would contribute words of His own to each issue, and He consented.

Baba appointed Elizabeth as managing editor of the new magazine. Chanji would serve as news editor, Norina as literary editor, and Nonny as secretary. Baba assigned the role of clerk to Dattu Mehendarge, who worked for Adi Sr. He also asked Drs. Ghani and Deshmukh to contribute articles about Vedanta and Sufism. On July 14 the group met again to discuss what they should call the new publication. Chanji suggested *Meher Baba*, a name that garnered everyone's approval, but Baba later amended it to *Meher Baba Journal*. The staff office was to be located in the new maternity hospital on the Hill. On August 28 Baba called a meeting of all the women living at Upper Meherabad to assign duties, during which He officially announced Elizabeth, Norina, and Nonny's new roles.

Mohan Press in Ahmednagar, managed by Nusserwan Satha and R. B. Hiray, was contracted to print the new journal, and on September 13 Adi Sr. and Ghani visited the press to approve the bindings.

When the first issue was published in November 1938, its cover featured a drawing of a banyan tree done by Rano entitled "Dnyan–Vrishka—The Tree of Knowledge." This image continued to appear on the cover of every issue. The inside back cover listed the members of the editorial committee and their official capacities:

Elizabeth C. Patterson, Managing Editor and Publisher
for the "Meher Editorial Committee"
Meherabad, Ahmednagar, India

MEHER EDITORIAL COMMITTEE
C. V. Sampath Aiyangar
(Late of Madras Judicial Services)
Dr. Abdul Ghani Munsiff,
Princess Norina Matchabelli,
Adi K. Irani,
Elizabeth C. Patterson,
Estelle [Nonny] Gayley,
F. H. Dadachanji [Chanji],
Abdul Kareem Abdulla [Ramjoo]

The back cover also included submission guidelines as well as standard subscription, payment, and change-of-address instructions. Rates for a twelve-month subscription were noted as "*India* rupees 3; *England* sh. 8; *U. S. A.* $2 (including postage). Single copies 6 *annas*, *or* 1 shilling, *or* 25 cents."

The table of contents was located inside the front cover. Each issue included a message dictated by Baba and articles composed by His Eastern and Western disciples, as well as editorials, poems, interviews, sayings attributed to Baba, and on-going contributions from Chanji entitled "News about the Master" (later amended to "Notes from my Diary").

The Meher Editorial Committee noted in the inaugural issue:

> The *Meher Baba Journal* has come into existence through the earnest enquiries relating to Shri Meher Baba by seekers of spiritual truth and the desire of so many of His disciples throughout the East and West, to keep in closer touch with His activities….
>
> Eight men and women, Easterners and Westerners from varied walks of life, are dedicating themselves to this task of answering the call and Shri Meher Baba Himself has endowed the group with the name Meher

> Editorial Committee for the purpose of the publication of this Journal….
>
> It is our aim to publish facts tending to demonstrate the Master's Divine Knowledge and Love, His direct influence in the unfoldment of life on the Path, His guidance in the ordinary lives of people, His psychological healings and physical help and healings, besides His philosophy and teachings.[1]

Adi K. Irani would later observe that one of the functions of the journal was to offer "a vivid picture of the atmosphere existing during the years 1938 through 1942 as recorded by early Westerners … their personal experiences with the Master, and the process of training they were privileged to receive from Him."[2] Among the Westerners who contributed to the journal were the three women involved in its publication. Norina wrote of her previous work for Baba during a nine-day tour of central India in December 1937. Elizabeth's sweetly titled "Follow Love" appeared in February 1939. The following month, Nonny contributed several poems, one of which was called "Shri Meher Baba," published under the name Kemali, or "Beloved," one of Baba's names for her.

After Baba appointed Nadine Tolstoy chief matron of His new maternity hospital, she recorded her experiences in "Shri Meher Baba and Healing," published in the second issue. Other Western contributors included Will Backett (England), who composed a series of articles about St. Teresa of Spain; Jean Schloss (United States), who submitted an article entitled "I Believe in God"; and Walter Mertens (Switzerland), who wrote about an experience he had in Cannes. Several disciples, including Delia DeLeon (England), reminisced about their impressions of being with Baba. Malcolm Schloss (United States) contributed poetry. Many of Baba's Eastern lovers also submitted articles and poems for publication.

Baba sent Chanji to Bombay to ask Mahatma Gandhi if he would consider translating some of Baba's messages into Gujarati. Ignoring

Baba's instruction to provide Gandhi with a later issue, Chanji gave him a copy of the first one, containing Baba's discourse entitled "The Avatar." After Gandhi had looked over the journal he wrote:

> Brother Dadachanji,
>
> This morning I saw the monthly that you left yesterday. I read Baba's article. I just glanced through the other articles also. As I understand it, Baba's wish seems to be that if I approve of what He says in His article, I should myself translate it. But there are many Gujarati translators more proficient than I am.
>
> I cannot say "I approve of it" nor would I say "I do not," for either way it would be presumption. So, in other words, "I am just wondering what all this is." Send me the other issues also. I admit that my curiosity to understand Baba and His works has increased.[3]

Baba was unhappy with Chanji and conveyed His displeasure through a letter that He dictated to Dr. Ghani, asking: "Why have you offered to Mr. Gandhi the first article, 'The Avatar,' for translation? It is personal, and Mr. Gandhi is not likely to commit himself by translating that article. I had expressly told you to give him the article 'Selfishness.' Now that you have bungled, I don't think Mr. Gandhi would be interested in other articles even, thinking them to be of the same personal tone and caliber. Anyway, try once again and give him the article, 'Selfishness.'"[4] After more conversations with Gandhi, in which Chanji conveyed additional messages from Baba, Gandhi said that he would consider translating some of the articles, but he never did.

The opportunity to work on the journal also drew its editors and writers closer to Baba, who said of Dr. Deshmukh: "Here is a man who has both head and heart which is a very rare combination in any disciple. He writes My articles in the *Journal* from the points I dictate,

and writes them well, as you all know. But now in My presence he is so lost in love that he looks like a *mast*!"[5]

Although Baba delegated all administrative duties, He remained intimately involved with the journal. In addition to providing a new message every month, He also dictated points for other articles composed by Dr. Deshmukh and Adi K.[6]

But in December 1938 Meher Baba ceased His work at Upper Meherabad and departed on the Blue Bus for the first of four tours through India. He took with Him all twenty women living in the ashram on the Hill, and many journal articles chronicled Baba's work during the tours. Elizabeth's four-part series entitled "Spiritual Journey with a Modern Guru" documented many instances of Baba's work with the women who were traveling with Him.

Before entering seclusion in February 1940 at The Links bungalow in Bangalore during the second tour, Baba issued instructions to the men and women residing there, and He left Adi K., Dr. Ghani, Elizabeth, and Norina to oversee the "editing, printing, and distributing" of the journal (Nonny had died the previous October). While there, the Meher Editorial Committee issued the following description of the journal and its content:

> This monthly publication on spiritual subjects, has the outstanding and unique feature that it contains articles personally dictated by a living Perfect Master on important matters of Spiritual Knowledge.
>
> It is the aim of the *Meher Baba Journal* to publish facts tending to demonstrate the Master's Divine Love, His direct influence in the unfoldment of life on the Path, His guidance in the ordinary lives of people, His psychological help and physical healings, besides His philosophy and teaching.
>
> Also published are the past and present impressions and diaries of Meher Baba's followers in the East and

> West containing their experiences in contact with the Master….
>
> Furthermore are included the lives of past Saints written with a view to bringing out in bold relief, the modern application and parallel characteristics in the life, training and teaching of the Master of this age. It is affirmed that all great Spiritual Teachers had the same divine theme, though adopted to the needs of their times.
>
> Meher Baba will establish no new religion, yet His work will embrace all religions in their essence and spirit.[7]

When Baba left Bangalore in April 1940, He assigned Adi K. and Dr. Ghani the task of managing the publication, as Elizabeth and Norina were going to be touring Goa with Him and would not be available to carry out their duties. In June Dr. Ghani learned that he would be staying on in Bangalore for another year to manage the office that Baba had moved there from Upper Meherabad during His eight-month stay. As of July 1941, Baba had assigned Mansari Desai the task of translating articles into Gujarati.

The last issue of the *Meher Baba Journal* was dated October 1942. From *Lord Meher*: "Since Elizabeth and Norina had left for America the previous year, the journal was being edited by Ghani, Ramjoo and Adi Sr., first in Bangalore and from May 1942, in Ahmednagar. At first, it was suspended only temporarily, due to paper restrictions on account of war, and the irregular and uncertain dispatch of mail to foreign countries; but publication was never resumed."[8]

Beginning in 1971, the Meher Spiritual Center began to print facsimiles of the original issues of the *Meher Baba Journal*, and in 1980, Sheriar Press published *Treasures from the Meher Baba Journals*, compiled and edited by Jane Barry Haynes. The book opens with a foreword by Charles Haynes, followed by a preface by Adi K. Irani and an epigraph with Baba's quote:

Let these words be inscribed in your heart:

Nothing is real but God.
Nothing matters but love for God.[9]

Adi wrote in his preface: "The material appearing in this book is brought to the general public for the first time [as well as] the vast numbers of new followers … who have not had the opportunity to read the original *Meher Baba Journals*." Adi ended with what one can only call a benediction to all who felt drawn to learn more about Meher Baba's work during the time that the journal was in publication: "May His grace be upon you…. May His words flower in your mind, reaching your heart to awaken [*Bhagavad Gita* 15.1 and 10.26] within your own being."[10]

Although facsimile copies are no longer being printed, all four volumes of the journal have been scanned and can be viewed at the Avatar Meher Baba Trust Library website at www.ambppct.org/library.php. Bound copies of the original journals can be found in Saroja Library at the Meher Spiritual Center in Myrtle Beach, SC. Original and facsimile copies can also be found in many other Meher Baba archive and private collections.

MEHER BABA'S UNIVERSAL SPIRITUAL CENTER

SCHEME OF UNIVERSAL ASHRAM

This unique institution, to be established in the near future by Shri Meher Baba, will consist of the following six departments:

THE SPIRITUAL ACADEMY

This academy will prepare men and women who will authoritatively ask the world to be selfless and God-loving. They will use intellectual understanding as their medium for secular, social and international harmony.

THE HOUSE OF ADVANCED SOULS

This section will prepare real mystics of the practical type. These mystics will inspire others to live a life in which there will be complete detachment side by side with intense creative action. They will also help others to feel *divinity* in every phase of life.

THE ABODE OF THE SAINTS

This section will consist of saints who will bestow true knowledge on souls who are ignorant. They will teach through the medium of experience that the only real existence is God, and that all else is illusion.

THE MAD (*MAST*) INSTITUTE

This department will be devoted to the care of such God-intoxicated souls as have lost their balance while crossing the inner planes. These souls will be given further spiritual push or brought back to normality according to the requirements of the Universal Plan behind the working of the Universal Ashram.

THE SOLITARY QUARTERS FOR MEDITATION

Provision will be made for those who will most benefit through meditation with suitable quarters and such instructions as are necessary in particular cases.

THE RESTING PLACE FOR THE AFFLICTED

This section will devote attention to the removal of suffering and ailment in all its forms. It is meant to be the training ground for a group of selfless workers who will learn how to render real and effective service. The experience gathered through this department will be capable of universal application.

All these six departments will be under the direct supervision of Shri Meher Baba.[1]

Meher Baba's grand scheme captured the imaginations of many lovers from Mysore, and even as He prepared for the Goa Tour, He ensured that construction on the center would continue. Nine of the twelve inner stone rooms were completed, as well as the foundations for the next three circles. But while His focus on the Universal Spiritual Center was beginning to wane, many Baba lovers were expressing interest in establishing smaller centers in cities, towns, and villages across India.

By October 1940, six months after departing Bangalore, Baba had laid down guidelines for individual centers, many of which still flourish today.

Suggestions for the Lines of Work for the Meher Spiritual Centres

1. Each Centre to be called the MEHER SPIRITUAL CENTRE of that particular town.
2. All irrespective of caste, creed or other distinctions to be welcome at the functions of the Centre.
3. Each Centre to have all the books, literature, etc., about Meher Baba and these should be the basis of discussions and exchange of experiences by persons interested in spirituality.
4. Talks, discourses, speeches or lectures, of a purely spiritual character could be arranged under the auspices of the Centre: but each function is to end with the Arti or invocatory song to Meher Baba, in the language of the place or people.
5. Each Centre is to have at least one big photo of Meher Baba which after framing is to be in a prominent place.
6 There shall be no president for any functions of the Centre: Meher Baba's photo will be treated as being in that capacity.

7. The Secretary in charge of the Centre will give monthly reports of any special functions to the *Meher Baba Journa*l, Bangalore.

8. A branch of purely social service (upliftment work) may be associated with the Centre provided it is kept strictly free from any political bias or ideology.

9. The Centre shall not be sectarian and shall respect members of all religions.

10. A small subscription from permanent members may be gathered to meet expenses connected with the Centre and the Centre-account submitted to the person in charge of Centres, evey [*sic*] six months. *Meher Baba Journal* to be subscribed to from this amount.

11. General lines of conducting the Centre work is to be adjusted to special local conditions.

12. The Centre is to do its best in giving publicity to the Messages, the Teachings and other important activities of Meher Baba through local papers: and it is to work in full cooperation with other similar Centres and is to be ultimately subject to orders from Meher Baba.[2]

Work on the Byramangala site ended in mid-1942. When it became clear that India was threatened with attack by the Japanese, the British Army appropriated the property to create a military installation in South India, but when the war ended the land reverted to Baba. However, when the property was offered for sale, there were no buyers, so Venkoba Rao offered to become its caretaker. Baba entreated Rao to preserve the site where He had driven the spike in the ground-breaking ceremony. He even visited there in 1954, spending a day or so in one of the original stone rooms. A decade later Baba sold the property to a local village headman named Gowda, who held it in trust for twenty years.

In 1982, K.K. Ramakrishnan, the head of the Poona Baba Centre, visited Rao and was given a tour of the property, including the room where Baba had stayed twenty-eight years before:

> Inside this room, something happened to Mr. Ramakrishnan. He suddenly saw a vision projected on the wall of the room: an image of Meher Baba, wearing south Indian garb and a red coat. Though he had been with Meher Baba on many occasions, he had never seen Meher Baba wear such a costume. Nor had he ever seen a photo or image of Baba in such a costume. Yet the visual image was powerful, clear and strong. This vision of Meher Baba in south Indian clothes imprinted itself on Mr. Ramakrishnan's retina. It followed him wherever he went, even back to Poona. It stayed with him for months. *Later he learned that when Meher Baba dedicated the centre at Byramangala in 1939, he was dressed in south Indian clothes and a red coat—exactly as Mr. Ramakrishnan saw Him in his vision.*[3]

When Ramakrishnan learned that Mr. Gowda was willing to sell the property, he initiated a fundraising campaign to purchase the land, soliciting donations from Baba lovers throughout India. Despite his many other commitments, he assembled a committee to oversee the project. On the day papers were signed for the transfer of the property, Ramakrishnan's vision of Baba began to fade, but questions remained. Many people, including Eruch, felt that Baba's connection with the property had been severed when He abandoned the project, and for the next five years, Ramakrishnan prayed to Baba for guidance. Meanwhile, volunteers began cleaning up the property as well as bringing in electricity and water.

The volunteer committee planned a re-dedication for May 1987, but no one from the West expressed interest, only groups from India. However, Murshid James McKie of Sufism Reoriented had recently

brought several hundred pilgrims to Meherabad, and when they learned about the planned celebration, he decided to return to India in May with a smaller group of pilgrims to participate in the ceremony. The mandali donated to the new center the seven-metal spade Baba had used in the original ground-breaking in December 1939.

The center committee made an ambitious commitment to complete the twelve stone rooms and to construct an open-air domed structure over the spot where Baba had driven the first spike, extending out over the rooms in the form of lotus petals. They also designed display panels and undertook extensive landscaping.

On December 17, 1989, Baba lovers from all over India came to celebrate the Universal Spiritual Center's Golden Jubilee, marking the fiftieth anniversary of the original foundation-laying ceremony. In November 2006, a group of pilgrims led by Kalyan Meher made a twenty-two-mile *padayatra* (foot journey) to the center from Bangalore. In May 2009, more than seven hundred devotees descended on Byramangala to celebrate the completion of the new structure. The two-day event included arti and recitations of The Master's Prayer in Kannada, Telegu, Marathi, Hindi, and English, as well as speeches, music, and dance.

Devotees from around the world are invited to make the pilgrimage to Byramangala, and while Baba's scheme never came to fruition, the site for the Universal Spiritual Center retains the lingering blessing that His presence always leaves behind.

GLOSSARY

amba: (Sanskrit) Mango

arti: (Sanskrit) A Hindu ceremony that includes rituals, singing, and recitation of prayers

atma: (Sanskrit) Soul

Avatar: (Sanskrit *avatara* "to cross over" and *trayate* "to liberate") The first soul that became liberated, or crossed over from the rounds of death and rebirth to achieve God-realization, and who also crosses back over to the gross world as the God-man

baba: (Sanskrit) Father, grandfather, or wise old man; however it can also refer to a baby boy, little boy, or brother

bagh: (Persian) Garden or orchard; a chahar bagh was a traditional four-part garden representing a cosmic diagram of an earthy paradise

bai: (Hindi) Woman, or female servant

Bhagavan: (Sanskrit "deity") Another name for Krishna or God

bhajan: (Hindi) A devotional song in praise of God or the divine Beloved, usually performed during religious ceremonies and gatherings

bhajias: (Hindi) Deep-fried chickpea flour fritters made from thinly sliced, batter-coated vegetables; also called pakora. Katie noted in the introduction to her own recipe: "Baba loved to eat bhajia." (*Cooking with Katie*, 134)

bhagula: (Hindi) An unglazed pottery container for transporting prepared food, such as dal

bogie: (English "chassis") A train car

bungalow or **bungli**: (Hindi *bangla* "belonging to Bengal") 1 : A style of cottage built for the first European settlers, gradually evolving to a larger and more functional house, as in a dak bungalow 2 : a lavish residence, such as the Maharani of Savantwadi's palatial bungalow in Amboli

chana dal: (Hindi) Split chickpeas that can be ground into gram, spiced and deep-fried for a snack, or cooked to make a spicy dal to serve over rice

chatti: (Hindi) A pottery container for water or yogurt

dacoits: (Hindi "robbery by a gang") Roadside bandits

dak: (Urdu "post or messages delivered by relay") Bungalows that were located at stages along a road that first functioned as relay points and rest houses for messengers and the military and were later made available to civilian travelers

darbar or **durbar**: (Indo-Aryan and Persian) 1 : The court of a king or emperor, a place where he met with his advisers, as well as local and visiting nobility 2 : God's court

dargah: (Persian) Tomb-shrine of a Muslim or Sufi saint

darshan or **darshana**: (Sanskrit "sight" or "seeing") The opportunity for devotees to be in the company of a holy person or their Spiritual Master

dhansak: (Persian and Gujarati) A complex Parsi dish served at Parsi New Year celebrations or other special occasions, comprised of braised mutton, lentils, and vegetables seasoned with dhansak masala, a blend of fifteen spices, and served with rice cooked in water caramelized with melted cane sugar

dharamshala (Sanskrit *dharam* "virtue" and *shala* "sanctuary") A Hindu or Buddhist sanctuary or place of rest

dhuni: (Hindi) A sacred fire thought to represent the mouth of God

Diwali: Festival of Lights, the Hindu New Year's Celebration

dolee: (Hindi) A handmade palanquin made from sticks roped together to form a seat, with handles for carrying

fakir: A God-realized person who is devoid of all illusory bindings and attachments

gali: (Hindi) Old winding streets and alleyways in a large city

ghazal: a poetic form consisting of couplets and a refrain. The last word of each couplet rhymes, and all are in the same meter.

gopis: (Sanskrit "cow protector" "cowherder") Name given to the young women who were devotees of Lord Krishna

gram: (Hindi) 1 : Black chickpeas 2 : chickpea flour 3 : a crunchy snack made from dry-roasted black chickpeas

jai: (Sanskrit) Victory

jalali: (Arabic "king") A hot-tempered, abusive *mast*

jalebi: (Hindi) A crisp, deep-fried Indian sweet made by pouring the batter into hot oil to form a spiral or pretzel shape, then soaked in syrup

jamali: (Arabic "holy beauty") A sweet-tempered *mast*

jamma or **jumma masjid**: (Persian) Name for the largest mosque in a city

jhopdi or **jopri**: (Persian) Hut

kaka: (Marathi) Paternal uncle

kala or **khala**: (Urdu) Maternal aunt

kaki or **kaku**: (Urdu) A paternal uncle's wife

kutcha: (Hindi) Impermanent, makeshift, or poor quality

ladoo: (Hindi) A deep-fried Indian sweet made from various kinds of flour, ghee, sugar, and spices, often containing nuts or dried fruits, shaped in a ball; usually eaten on holidays or other special occasions and often used as prasad

lakh or **lakha**: (Sanskrit) One hundred thousand

maha: (Sanskrit *mahat*) Great

mai: (Hindi) Mother

majzoob: (Arabic "divinely overpowered soul") One who is conscious only of God

mama: (Marathi) Maternal uncle

mandali: (Sanskrit *mandala* "circle") The small group of disciples who are closest to a Spiritual Master

masi: (Marathi) Maternal aunt

mast or ***mastan*** (Arabic) One who is intoxicated with divine love

mastani: (Arabic) 1 : A female *mast* 2 : the name given to most female *masts*, Mastani Mai

Maya: (Sanskrit) The play of illusion

Mughal or **Mogul**: (Persian) Referring to Muslim rule in India

moti: (Hindi) Pearl

mujaver: (Sanskrit "worshipper") The caretaker, usually a pilgrim, who cares for a dargah

mukti: (Sanskrit "liberated") God-realization or liberation from the rounds of birth and death

musafir: (Persian, Hindi, Urdu) Traveler

nazar: (Sanskrit "eye") The gaze or watchful eye of the Beloved

naan: (Persian) Leavened flatbread made with wheat flour, ghee, and water, yogurt, or milk, rolled or stretched so the one end is wider than the other, baked at very high heat in a clay oven called a tandoor

pakhal: (Hindi) Leather bag for carrying water

pan: (Sanskrit "leaf") Preparation made from betel leaves rolled around a variety of fillings including dried and fresh areca nuts with *chunnum* (slaked lime paste) to bind the leaves; made to be chewed and either swallowed or spit out; used as a stimulant but can be addictive; some varieties contain a breath freshener

pathia: (Hindi) A spicy, sweet, and sour Parsi dish made with vegetables, spiced with dhansak or sambhar masala, garlic-ginger paste, and "drumsticks" (long green seedpods cut up and used for seasoning), served in a sauce made with peanut paste

prasad: (Sanskrit *prasada*) Sweets—usually ladoos, candy, or fruit—or other vegetarian foods blessed and distributed by a Spiritual Master, or else eaten after a Hindu or Sikh religious ceremony

qawaali: (Arabic) Muslim song of devotion

Qutub or **Qutb** (Arabic "axis") Sufi Muslim name for the head of the spiritual hierarchy in the absence of an Avatar

rava: (Hindi) A sweet Indian dessert made with semolina, sugar, cardamom, nutmeg, dark raisins, and almonds, often served on birthdays or other celebrations

rishi: (Sanskrit) A Vedic saint or sage

sadra: (Hindi) A white cotton garment, usually hanging below the knees, with long, loose sleeves and a small opening at the neck, often worn over loose cotton trousers

sahavas: (Vedanta) Close companionship, or in the company of

seer: A traditional Indian hour-glass–shaped measure for liquids, which has a round inverted-dome bottom and a flared rim; one seer equals 933 grams (slightly less than 1 quart)

stupa: (Sanskrit) A dome-shaped structure or mound of earth functioning as a shrine containing a relic from the body of Buddha or other Buddhist teachers

taboots: (Persian "comfort") Ceremonial caskets that are carried through the streets in processions during the Shia Muslim observance of the Day of Ashura (Remembrance), during Muharram, the first month of the Islamic New Year, named for the martyred grandson of Mohammed, as well as during other Islamic holy days

toddy: (Hindi) A mildly alcoholic beverage made from the toddy palm, sold in toddy shops like the one owned by Meher Baba's father, Sheriar

tonga: (Hindi) Two-wheeled horse-drawn farm cart or carriage

tongawala: (Hindi) Tonga driver

walla: (Hindi) Worker (also sometimes spelled wala, walah, and wallah)

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