



IN HIS SERVICE

JUNE / 2009

A NEWSLETTER FROM MEHERABAD

Old Sassoon Hospital to be Torn Down; Memorial Room Planned

ON 25TH FEBRUARY 1894, little Merwan Sheriar Irani, “Merog” to His parents, was born in the maternity ward at David Sassoon General Hospital, one of the leading medical facilities close to the main Poona railway station about two kilometers from what is now known as Baba House in Poona’s Camp District.

Meher Baba dropped His body seventy-four years later; and since that time, this beautifully crafted building of finely dressed grey stone with Gothic-arched windows and doors has, along with Babajan’s tree, Pumpkin House, Saint Vincent’s High School, Deccan College, and a few other localities, established itself as one of the handful of sites that the world associates with the God-Man’s childhood and youth. The room where the Avatar was born used to constitute a featured stop on the tour that Baba’s brother Jal, surely one of the era’s most entertaining tour guides, would take Baba’s lovers on when they sought him out in Poona in the 1970s and 80s in the course of their pilgrimage to His Samadhi.

Baba’s messages for the 1968 centenary. Baba Himself participated in the memorializing of this place. For when the hospital’s hundredth anniversary was to be celebrated in 1968, Baba sent the message, “I give my blessings to the administrative, worker, and medical staff of this hospital in which I, the Deliverer of the world, was delivered to the world.”

Baba’s disciple Dr. Ram Ginde read out a telegram from Baba at the anniversary function that 1st December:

“To you who have gathered in the auditorium of the B. J. Medical College during the centenary celebration of the Sassoon General Hospital, Poona, to

hear my ancient message of Love and Truth, I give my love-blessings to realize your true selves so that you will know what is Real Knowledge, what is Real Power, and what is Real Love.”

And in a separate function on 8th December 1968, a marble plaque was unveiled with the following inscription, in English and Marathi:

AVATAR MEHER BABA WAS BORN
IN SASSOON GENERAL HOSPITAL
ON 25TH FEBRUARY 1894

Baba sent a 1000 rupee donation to the hospital which was presented on this occasion, and His secretary Adi gave a talk.

Planned Demolition of the Old Building. As recent visitors to this country will know, India has undergone enormous economic development over the last fifteen years, and Pune, once a sleepy hill station, has been transformed into a thriving, dynamic hub. Sassoon General Hospital itself, one of the city’s important government medical facilities with a sprawling campus and many different centers, ministers to a growing patient population and needs more space. Accordingly, it has formulated plans for a new multi-floor hospital building; and the old structures, that include the maternity ward, have to be torn down.

While this constitutes a blow for the Baba world, to be sure, some solace can be derived from the fact that,

almost certainly, the actual room where Baba was born ceased to exist long ago.

For the two buildings involved in this history have placards giving the years 1902 and 1924 as their dates of origination. We do not know whether the original structures were renovated or simply replaced. Either way, what Baba’s lovers have been visiting all these years is the site of His birth, not the original physical room and structure.

PHOTO BY KITTY MUIR

Memorial event in March 2009. In any case, just after Baba’s birthday this year, His lovers took the opportunity to come together and bid this old, historic building its final, fond farewell.

On 7th March four buses and other private vehicles departed from Meherabad and Ahmednagar city carrying 200 pilgrims and residents for a memorial function in Pune. There they were joined by several hundred others from Pune, Mumbai, Aurangabad, and other places in a three-hour program that featured bhajan singing and talks in Marathi, Hindi, and English by Mehernath Kalchuri and Prashant Ahir.

A colorful pandal had been set up in a patio area between buildings. The occasion was a festive one; while the singing and talks progressed, a line of visitors paid their homage to the historic sites in the old building.

At the conclusion of the program the gathering shifted venues to the Poona Centre a few miles away, where all enjoyed a hearty lunch of rice and dal, vegetable and puris. The buses brought pilgrims back to Meherabad by nightfall.



Adi K. Irani showing the plaque at Sassoon Hospital on a tour of Poona during the 1969 Darshan.

Plans for a memorial room.

The story does not end here, though, for this cloud has a silver lining. Several of the Trust’s trustees and workers have been meeting with Sassoon Hospital administrators, who are concerned to respect the feelings of Baba’s lovers and His world-wide community.

The new hospital building’s architect has drafted plans that include a memorial room, open to the public, exclusively dedicated to Avatar Meher Baba. What is more, when the old building is torn down, hospital administrators will allow Baba’s lovers to collect some of the materials—the stone floorings, arched windows—and use them in the construction of the memorial.

An historical question mark. To close on an ironic, and perhaps somewhat amusing, note: in the course of responding to the impending disappearance of an old site, the Baba sleuths among us have come to realize that there is some division of opinion as to exactly which room, after all, Baba was born in! For Jalbhai used to take pilgrims to one spot, while Baba’s sister Mani used to direct them to another.

Probably this can be explained through the hypothesis that Baba was born in a dedicated delivery chamber, while Shireen nursed Him through His first days on earth in a facility for that purpose in the maternity ward.

As it happens, the projected memorial room will not stand on the exact site of either, but in a location on the first floor close to both and easily accessible to the public. But if the influence of the Avatar of the Age can spread throughout the world, and indeed, the entire universe, we are confident that the influence from His precise point of birth can successfully wind its way up a story and across a radius of 60 feet!



PHOTO BY MARK TRICHKA

Sassoon Hospital, main building



The 115th anniversary of Meher Baba's birth at Sassoon Hospital in Poona, 5 a.m. on 25th February 1894, was commemorated at Meherabad in a celebration that began early and ran throughout the day.

At 3:30 in the morning, hours before the late-winter sunrise, pilgrims began to queue up outside Baba's Samadhi. After a rendering of "Meher dhoon," the hour of five was marked with seven animated shouts of "Avatar Meher Baba ki Jai!" Singing continued in the Samadhi

veranda—extravagantly decorated with flowers and colored ornaments—for two hours, when pilgrims left for breakfast.

For thirty-five years the staging of an original drama has constituted a highlight of the birthday celebration. Until now these plays have been written and directed by residents of the Meherabad-Meherazad community. 2009 marked a new departure, however, in that both the dramatic material and the directing of the play came from Baba lovers who hail from abroad.

Conceived and written by a married couple that runs a theatrical company and school of pantomime in London, "Across the Seven Seas" struck out in a new direction, by the standards of Meherabad, both in its manner and its content. Stylistically the play was an expression of corporeal mime, that makes extensive use of body movements to create mood and character and to forward the story. Several of the actors were trained professionals; the rest were Meherabad

pilgrim amateurs. The dance-like movements of the actors, the sets, and the images projected on the background screen created a mood of beauty quite distinctive to this unusual art form.

Essentially an allegory, "Across the Seven Seas" was described thus in the program notes:

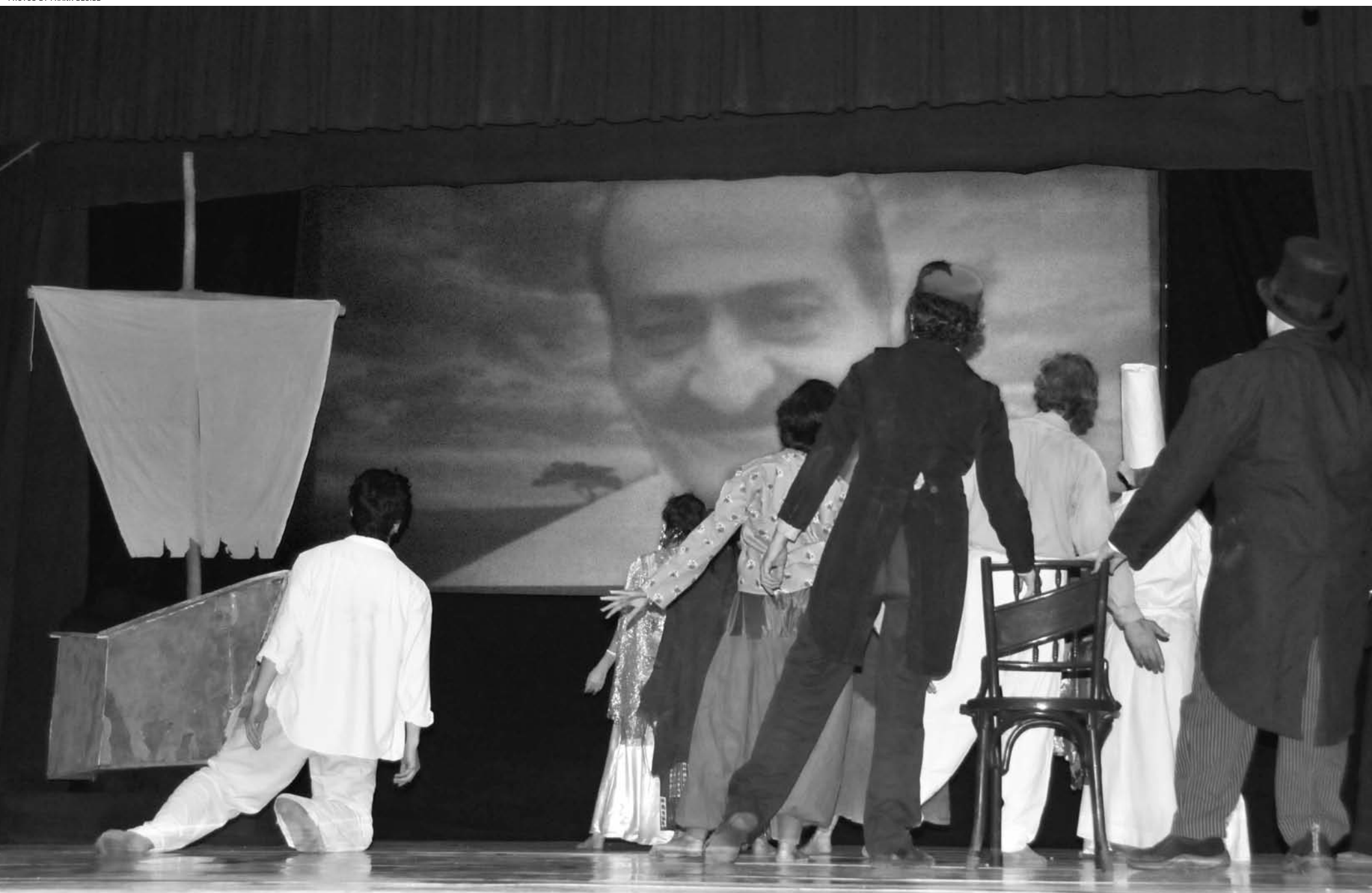
"The drama revolves around the journey of Mr.

Nobody (representing the seeker) as he passes through various scenes of the world in the aftermath of the various Avataric advents. In each age Mr. Nobody experiences the decline of religion as represented by its priests, who mislead the public and corrupt the true message of the religion's founder. Spearheading these forces of worldliness and ignorance are Dr. Ahriman, the play's arch-villain, who is accompanied by Max, his sidekick, and Maya, the eternal widow. Dr. Ahriman persecutes and tries to enslave Mr. Nobody, the seeker; but Nobody remains steadfast in his longing for his true Beloved against all odds. The ship that you will see on stage is the vehicle and symbol of Mr. Nobody's on-going quest, which actually occurs all within Nobody's mind, since the world is nothing but the mind's illusory projection. "The seven scenes of the play include a prologue, which introduces the characters; an 'age of Zoroaster,' in which Mr. Nobody begins his journey; an 'age of Ram,' which features a battle between the demons and Ram's army of monkeys; an 'age of Krishna,' in which gopis sing to their Beloved and Dr. Ahriman for a moment doubts himself; an 'age of Buddha,' in which Max and the priests quarrel about the Buddhist 'nothing'; an 'age of Jesus,' culminating in a Last Supper and Mr. Nobody's crucifixion; and an 'age of Muhammad,' in which crow-priests feed on Nobody's body. In the end, as you will see, Nobody proves victorious in his struggle and finds the One he has been searching for."



"Across the Seven Seas" on Meher Baba's Birthday

PHOTOS BY FRANK BLOISE



Demographics

Trends over recent years in the demography of the pilgrim population continued through the 2008–09 pilgrim season, with increasing numbers of pilgrims from India, and a growing internationalization and diversification of pilgrims from abroad.

At the Meher Pilgrim Retreat, the number of pilgrim visits came to 2893, up from 2743 last year. Of these, 1937 originated from within India, up from 1786 in 2007–08. The MPR foreign pilgrimage count of 956 matches last year's total (of 957) almost exactly. Taking additional foreign pilgrims into the reckoning, the total number of foreign registrees in 2008–09 came to 1119, as compared with 1067 in 2007–08.

Overall, including pilgrims both domestic and foreign, the average MPR nightly occupancy of 79.5 during 2008–09 represents a significant increase over the average of 70 in 2007–08 and 65 in 2006–07, the MPR's maiden season. The old Pilgrim Centre, with its maximum capacity of 56, could not even begin to accommodate the streams of pilgrims visiting Meherabad today. As in the past, in 2008–09 pilgrim occupancy ran at comparatively low levels through the first half of the season but rose sharply during the peak months of December through early March. During February, average pilgrim occupancy hit a high of 173, in a facility whose maximum capacity is 200!

Meanwhile, the pilgrim facilities at Lower Meherabad were much more heavily trafficked in 2008–09 than ever before. If we exclude Amartithi, Hostel D hosted 6998 pilgrim visits, as compared with 6083 in 2007–08, a 15% increase. In addition, 175 pilgrimages were accommodated at the Dharmshala (versus 192 the previous year). As in the past, most Indian pilgrims—perhaps 70%—hailed from Andhra Pradesh. On the international front, the 2008–09 pilgrim rosters show that 45 countries were represented. After India, the leaders were: the United States (390), Iran (215), Australia (62), the United Kingdom (52), Canada (35), Russia (32), Argentina (22), France (20), Germany (20), New Zealand (12), and Serbia (10). Four pilgrims hailed from mainland China, a country where Baba's name is now beginning to spread.

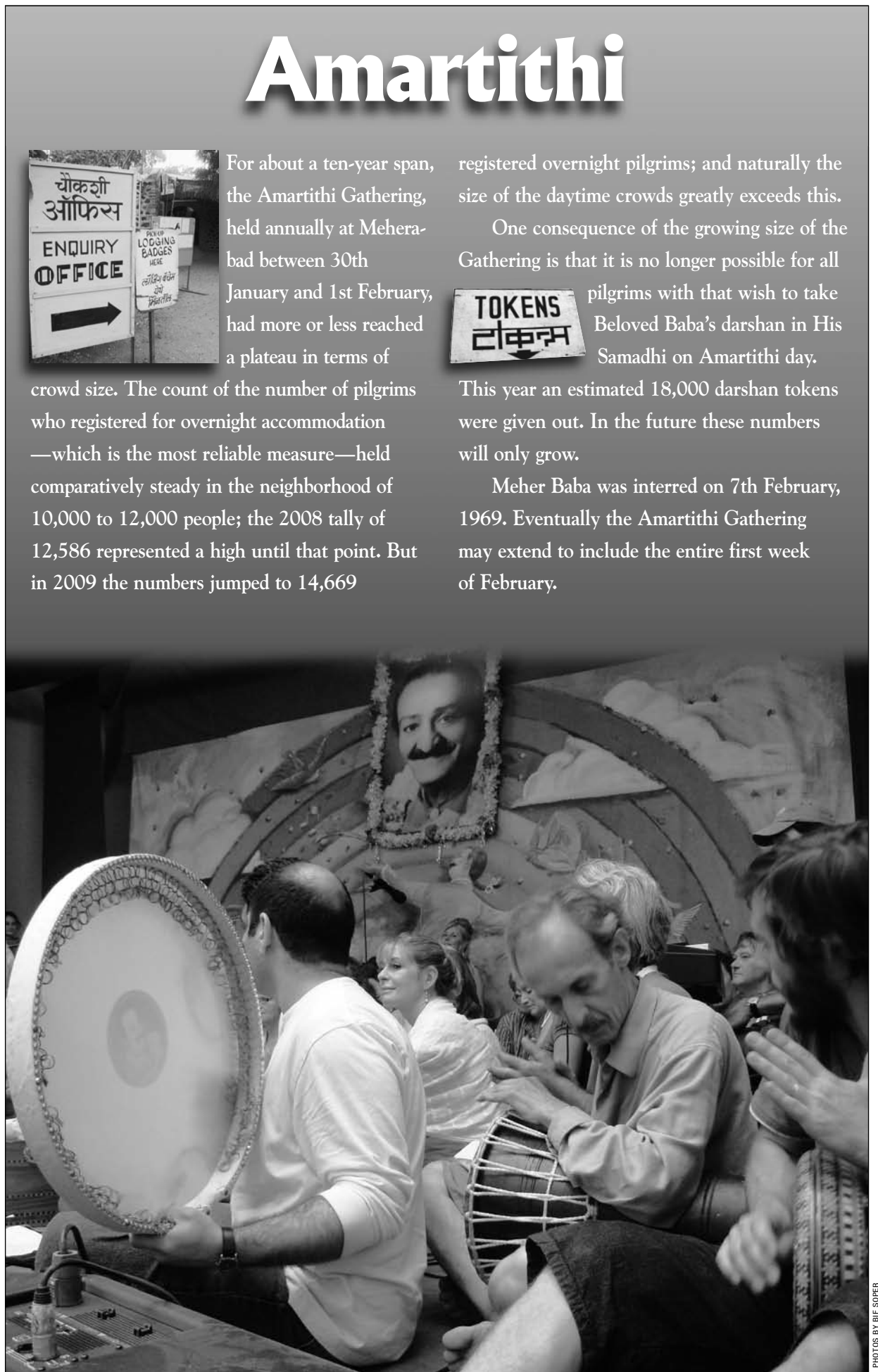
Early Messages to the West to be Released for Christmas

A NEW BOOK OF MEHER BABA'S WORDS, prepared under the auspices of the Avatar Meher Baba Trust, will be published by Sheriar Foundation later this year.

Early Messages to the West collects between a single pair of covers a variety of materials that emerged from Meher Baba's first Western tours during 1931–35. Most of these messages, booklets, and dictations of Baba's have been published before. Yet some have long gone out of print, languishing in obscurity on the shelves of rare book collectors; others have been scattered through a range of periodicals published over the course of three or four decades; and a few have remained all these years in manuscript form.

Through their assemblage in a single book, Baba's lovers and the general public have an opportunity to witness how the Avatar chose to present Himself to an international audience when first He appeared on a world stage.

PRIMARY TEXTS. The primary text of the book has five parts. The first gathers the six major messages that Meher Baba gave out in His great global tour of 1932, that opened with the Paramount News Film in London in early April and came to its climax with Baba's



Amartithi



For about a ten-year span, the Amartithi Gathering, held annually at Meherabad between 30th January and 1st February, had more or less reached a plateau in terms of crowd size. The count of the number of pilgrims who registered for overnight accommodation—which is the most reliable measure—held comparatively steady in the neighborhood of 10,000 to 12,000 people; the 2008 tally of 12,586 represented a high until that point. But in 2009 the numbers jumped to 14,669

registered overnight pilgrims; and naturally the size of the daytime crowds greatly exceeds this.

One consequence of the growing size of the Gathering is that it is no longer possible for all pilgrims with that wish to take Beloved Baba's darshan in His Samadhi on Amartithi day.

This year an estimated 18,000 darshan tokens were given out. In the future these numbers will only grow.

Meher Baba was interred on 7th February, 1969. Eventually the Amartithi Gathering may extend to include the entire first week of February.

cancellation of His promised silence-breaking at the Hollywood Bowl that July.

During that tour, stories about the "New Messiah" flooded the major Western newspapers. Part two collects a handful of the most interesting of the interviews and articles from the period.

Parts three and four republish two early booklets, *Shri Meher Baba, the Perfect Master: Questions and Answers*, and *Sayings of Shri Meher Baba*, prepared by Baba's newly created Circle Editorial Committee and released in the second half of 1933.

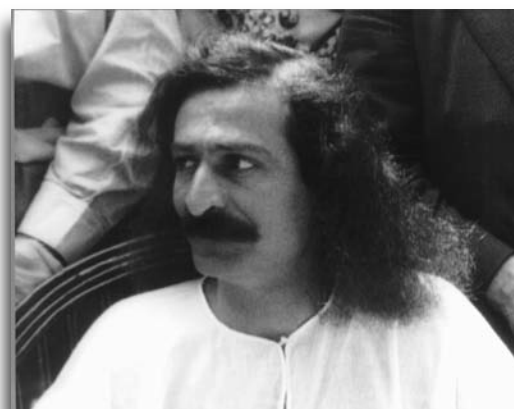
Part five publishes material connected with Baba's

work in the arena of moving pictures. The film scenario which Baba dictated to Margaret Mayo in December 1931, "A Touch of Maya," served as the centerpiece for subsequent efforts. But at Meherabad in May 1934 Baba dictated a significant mass of ancillary explanation and narrative in preparation for two of His

Western visits later that year, which were working trips ostensibly aimed at the creation of a film to be entitled "How It All Happened." Most of this material has not been published before.

SUPPLEMENT. *Early Messages* also contains a supplement that opens with an in-depth review of

the historical and textual backgrounds to the book's primary texts. The supplement reprints in facsimile a hefty selection of newspaper and magazine articles, some of them sensationalizing, some sober and accurate. Other supplemental materials include: major messages that Meher Baba gave in India



Baba in America during the period these early messages to the West were given.

during this same period; correspondence concerning the work of the Circle Editorial Committee; synopses of the story lines of two other films that Baba's followers were preparing at that time; and time-line summaries of Meher Baba's thirteen Western tours between 1931 and 1958.

Bal Natu's *Glimpses* in the Online Library

The six volumes of Bal Natu's *Glimpses of the God-Man, Meher Baba*, which recount the story of Meher Baba's life between the early 1940s and 1955, have recently been released on the Trust's internet library. The original digitization of the books was carried out by a Baba lover from California; the text was reflowed and reformatted by the Trust's web site team.

The online library now contains more than thirty volumes in the form of pdf files. These can be found in the Trust's web site at <http://www.ambppct.org/meherbaba/online.php>.

2009 Young Adults Sahavas Scheduled for June-July

Though for a time it appeared that the Meherabad Young Adult Sahavas would have to be canceled this year—indeed, a notice to this effect was sent out on Tavern Talk—a happy change of circumstances made it possible to put the event back on the 2009 calendar.

The sahavas is now scheduled for 29th June through 4th July. As usual, Hostel C at Meherabad will provide the main venue. All young adult Baba-lovers between the ages of 19 and 35 are most welcome to attend.

Further Sahavas details and information about how to apply are available on the Trust website at: <http://www.ambppct.org/events/sahavas.php>.

The original Meherabad Young Adult Sahavas was held in June–July 2001, two months before the passing away of Baba's great disciple Eruch.

How to Contribute

The Avatar Meher Baba Trust is supported entirely by love-gifts from Meher Baba's lovers around the world. In truth, it is Baba Himself who gives through your hands, and it is Baba Himself who brings these objects to completion, objects that He Himself laid down in the Trust Deed, when it pleases Him to do so.

For those who have not taken the opportunity to contribute, here is how. In the UK, please send your tax-deductible contribution to Avatar Meher Baba Association c/o of Sue Chapman, 3 Whin Hill, Craster NE663TP, UK tel 01 665 57 69 57, e-mail suchapman@hotmail.com. In the United States, persons who wish to make tax-deductible contributions or wish to name the Trust as a beneficiary in their will, 401K, IRA, or Insurance policy should contact Emory and Susan Ayers P. O. Box 398 Mystic, CT 06355 (tel. 860-535-0370, e-mail TrustPlan@ambppct.org); they will send you a list of eight Meher Baba tax-exempt organizations that have a grant in place to support the Trust Development Plan and other relevant information. Baba lovers from other parts of the world should send contributions directly to the AMBPPC Trust, Post Bag No. 31, King's Road, Ahmednagar 414001, Maharashtra State, India. Further information can be found in the Trust's web site at www.ambppct.org.

Arnavaz Dadachanji, 1919-2009

Just a week short of Baba's birthday, on 18th February 2009, Arnavaz N. Dadachanji breathed her last in her room at Meherazad. She was 90 years old. Surrounded by the Meherazad household—Katie, Meheru, Manu, Meherwan, Falu, her devoted caregivers, and the other Meherazad residents—Arnavaz finally took flight into the arms of her Eternal Beloved, to a chorus of those around her calling out His name.

Born on 15th March 1919, Arnavaz had the blessed good fortune of a lifetime in Baba's love and service that began in her early childhood. Brought into His contact through her uncle and Baba's great disciple Framroze Dadachanji, she was immediately and spontaneously drawn to Him. Eventually, her entire family became His ardent devotees.

Under Baba's direction, Arnavaz's path in life led through the world. As a young woman it had been her heart's longing to lead a life of renunciation, devoted solely to God. But at the Bangalore ashram in 1940 Baba called her for a private meeting and asked her, "Will you marry if I want you to? Will you marry the man I tell you to marry? Suppose I tell you to marry Nariman. Will you marry him?"

Nariman Dadachani was Arnavaz's cousin, a brilliant man, skilled in business, and Baba's wholehearted lover and disciple. They were married in December 1944, and as Arnavaz later realized, Baba had blessed them "in giving us an opportunity to love and serve Him through marriage, in a way neither of us could have done separately." Her experience taught her that it is not the outward renunciation that brings one to His Feet, but rather our inner determination, under any and all circumstances, to remain resigned to His wish.

Baba used their marriage in many unexpected ways. Shortly after their wedding, He instructed the young couple to find their own separate apartment in Bombay—at a time of acute housing shortage at the end of the war. By a stroke of luck they located a suitable flat in a building named Ashiana—"nest"—opposite the American consulate. Over the years Baba often stayed in this apartment, and Arnavaz's attention centered around making her home as comfortable for Him as possible.

Though Nariman and Arnavaz never had children, on three occasions Baba told them, "I will give you a good son." But in 1963, Baba told Arnavaz, "You are My

mother, and you are also Mehera's mother." And several years after that, in Guruprasad, He told Nariman, "I am your son." It seems that Baba gave them the opportunity to provide for Him in a way that parents do for their child—with cars and petrol and drivers, with a home when He needed it, with material goods and food. In all things, His command was their pleasure.

A major aspect of their lives for which Nariman and Arnavaz will always be remembered is their connection with Meherazad. When Baba was breaking old ties and dissociating from old habitations at the outset of the



New Life in 1949, He had the title to Meherazad transferred to Nariman, one of the four New Life arrangementwallas. At the time Baba gave His Old Life lovers to understand that they would never see Him again. Nonetheless, Nariman and Arnavaz put their whole hearts into the maintenance of this property. And when the Meherazad household goods were being auctioned off, Arnavaz took it upon herself to buy back as much as she could, solely in

the hopes that, if one day Baba did choose to return to Meherazad, all this would be there to greet Him.

And return He did. Indeed, after the New Life ended, Meherazad became Baba's primary place of residence. Nariman, and later Arnavaz, retained the title to the property, until eventually she donated it to the Avatar Meher Baba Trust.

Meherazad provided the scene for many intimate moments in Baba's company. One evening in 1967, when Arnavaz was staying there, she and Mehera were alone with Baba in His room. Suddenly Mehera asked, "Baba, what is the meaning of Arnavaz?"

Baba gestured, "Gift of God."

The name suits, as those who knew her could attest. *Gift of God* became the title of her autobiography, which recounts the story of her life in His love and service.

Baba once told Arnavaz, "Be a mother to all." And for hundreds of the young Baba lovers who came to know her after He had dropped his body in 1969, she became that indeed. Her life experience allowed her to slip into the role He destined for her—listening without judgement to their problems and queries about life in the world, marriage, relationships, what Baba said about the occult, and in many other aspects, how to reconcile the ways of modernity with what Baba wanted from each of His lovers.

WHAT IS THE AVATAR MEHER BABA TRUST?

CREATED IN 1959 under Meher Baba's direction and bearing His signature on its Deed, the Avatar Meher Baba Trust had at its founding two purposes: to provide means of subsistence to certain named disciples of Meher Baba's, and to fulfill certain charitable objects. Today, the first of these functions is discharged under "Avatar Meher Baba Trust, Firstly," and the second under "Avatar Meher Baba Perpetual Public Charitable Trust."

The Trust Deed calls for maintenance of Avatar Meher Baba's Tomb and the creation of pilgrim facilities; for educational, medical, veterinary, and other charitable services; for estate development and procurement of sources of water; for the

promulgation of Avatar Meher Baba's love-message through melas, lectures, publication, and the arts; and for spiritual training. The Trust's current Development Plan focuses on the creation of new facilities for pilgrim accommodation at Meherabad and other goals.

Inquiries and contributions can be sent to: The Chairman, Avatar Meher Baba Trust, King's Road, Post Bag 31, Ahmednagar 414 001, M.S., India. Subscriptions to this newsletter can be sent to that address or to: Avatar Meher Baba Foundation, PO Box 398, Mystic, CT 06355-0398, USA (tel. 860-535-0370, e-mail TrustPlan@ambppct.org). To subscribe to *Tavern Talk* (the Trust's

electronic newsletter), send an e-mail to Listserv@ambppct.org and include in the text of your message the words: "subscribe tavern-talk." Further information about the Trust can be found on its web site at www.ambppct.org and www.avatarmeherbabatrust.org. Subscriptions to *In His Service* or *Tavern Talk* can be submitted through the web site in its "Events and News" section.

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