



A NEWSLETTER FROM MEHERABAD

Bhau's Andhra Visit



Bhau with Sita Devi Nori in Hyderabad

FIFTY YEARS AGO, on 9th February 1954, in a small hut that had been built for Him in the village of Maheva in the Hamirpur district, for the first time in this advent Meher Baba declared Himself publically to be the Avatar of the age. This episode came at the culmination of a period of mass darshans that had begun a year and a half earlier with the inauguration of the Fiery Free Life in November 1952. At that time, and then again in 1954, Baba toured Hamirpur in Uttar Pradesh in north India and Andhra in the south, giving darshan to crowds that sometimes approached a hundred thousand. While before this for the most part He had kept His name and identity "in seclusion," as it were, after 1954 this changed. Now is the time to tell the world, He would say, that He was God in human form.

Since Baba dropped His body, several among His mandali have toured parts of the world, recounting stories of His life and explaining His message to the Baba family and general public. Indeed, this function is adverted to in the Trust Deed, which calls for the encouragement of "talks, speeches, lectures, radio talks and television programmes" and the creation of facilities for visitors at "places touched or visited by Avatar Meher Baba during His lifetime." On this golden anniversary of Baba's declaration of Avatarhood, then, it seemed appropriate that Bhau Kalchuri, the Chairman of the Trust and one of Baba's intimate mandali, should have visited and paid his respects to the places in Andhra where Baba Himself had gone.

THE TOUR. Running from 17th March through 2nd April, the Bhau tour began and ended in Hyderabad, today a city of seven million, that in Baba's time was particularly rich in masts and that Baba had often visited in the course of His mast work. Hyderabad is also distinguished by the fact that Baba's Manonash

phase began there, in a small cave on a hill known as Khojaguda ("the place of eunuchs") some twenty kilometers outside the city. In Hyderabad Bhau gave a number of talks, some at the magnificent Baba center crowning the crest of a ridge in Jubilee Hills, others at the downtown centre in the Koti area and other places.

The main focus of Bhau's tour, however, was the eastern coastal region along the Bay of Bengal. Staying for a day or two in each place, Bhau visited and gave talks at the Baba centres in Guntur, Vijayawada, Eluru, Kovvur, Rajamundry, Tadepalligudem, Kakinada, and Vishakapatnam. While to many who have not visited these places these are merely vaguely familiar names (difficult to pronounce for most Westerners), they are rich in their connection with the Avatar. All of them have vital Baba groups, and many of them have an extraordinary legacy from the time of Baba's visits. Many stories have already entered into the legendry of Baba's advent and will doubtless be told and retold, dramatized and sung about, for centuries to come.

At each of these places Baba lovers and friends turned out in force for Bhau's talks. Late March is the beginning of the summer season, and this coastal region watered by the Krishna and Godavari rivers turns sultry through most of the day. Yet the centres and auditoriums provided for Bhau were packed, and the audiences lingered on, often into the evening. Bhau, for his part, was in fine fettle, explaining and expounding, story-telling and joking. At most places he recounted histories and anecdotes from Baba's own visits to Andhra—in what were sometimes first-hand accounts, since Bhau himself had accompanied Baba in the 1954 tour. Since the language of Andhra is Telugu (unrelated to Hindi and Marathi), Bhau spoke in English, and his remarks were translated by Mr. B. Ramakistiah, the host for the tour.

Throughout Bhau's travels the hospitality lavished upon him and his party by the various Baba centres was

Dr. Goher Joins Baba

Avatar Meher Baba took His precious Goher R. Irani into His warm embrace on June 30, 2004 at 12:40:15 p.m. in Meherazad. Goher passed away due to congestive heart failure; she was 87 years old. Cremation will be at Meherabad on July 1st at 10 a.m. By Baba's order, her ashes are to be interred on Meherabad Hill by the side of Baba's Samadhi.

"Goher" means "jewel", and the quality of Goher's unique service to her Beloved Master has been a shining inspiration to all who came to know her. Both disciple and doctor, she brought to life Baba's precept of "selfless service". As Baba's personal physician, she cared for Him with total dedication night and day, as well as tending to His beloved Mehera and the resident mandali. How fortunate she was to have lived with Baba and served Him until the very end.

In more recent times, Goher reached out with great love, kindness, warmth and compassion to all who came in her contact. This naturally included not only the Baba-family but also the local villagers, who she lovingly cared for through the Meherazad dispensary for over 30 years.

In dearest Goher's life of love and service, and in the countless number of hearts she touched, Beloved Baba has given His lovers a sublime example to cherish. His jewel will be sorely missed.

AVATAR MEHER BABA ki JAI,

Meheru, Katie, Arnavaaz and Meherazad family
Meherazad, 30 June 2004



Bhau inaugurating the Library and Reading Room at Jubilee Hills Centre in Hyderabad.

extraordinary. All comforts and facilities were provided—including elaborate arrangements relating to Bhau's various medical conditions.

In Andhra the golden jubilee commemoration of Baba's 1954 visit still continues, as it will through most of the year. As we look back to this time in Baba's life over the gap of a half-century, many places and moments stand out. Yet among these, Mehersthan in Kovvur, located on the banks of the Godavari River where Baba stayed overnight in 1954 in a house boat, has the distinction of having occasioned one of Baba's truly immortal messages. The Ancient One, the Avatar, stands eternally beyond the rites, rituals, and ceremonies of religion; and religion appears to have been a particular focus of Baba's Manonash work in 1951-52. A decade after His visit to Kovvur and Rajamundry, in response to certain disputes that had arisen, Baba gave eight short statements on the role of ceremony in worship. As per Baba's wish, these messages were inscribed on the walls of Mehersthan, where they remain today. Let us give Baba the last word.

Crowd listening to Bhau talk at the Jubilee Hills Centre, Hyderabad.

PILGRIM LIFE

As usual, the 2003-2004 pilgrim season came to its climax over the two-month period between the end of December and the end of February. The ninety-seventh anniversary of Mehera's birthday on 22nd December was commemorated quietly at a morning Arti at the Samadhi. Three days later Christmas was celebrated in the grand style under a pandal on the women's side at Meherazad.

AMARTITHI. While Amarthi attendance grew steadily through most of the 1990s, for the last several years it has leveled off. The number of registered overnight visitors this year stood at 10,425, about the same as the year before. Of course, at noon on Amarthi day the attendance swelled to several times that.

As usual, much of the Amarthi work was done by a corps—or rather, a small army—of volunteers, more than 700 of them, who came several days before the program began and lingered on after it was finished. More than a hundred volunteers came forward specifically to take on the unpleasant duty of cleaning the latrines at Lower Meherabad and New Pilgrim Site; in this they followed Baba's own example, who did the same thing Himself in the early days of the Meherabad ashram. "Now the young ones from the East and West are coming forward to serve the cause of the Beloved," Bhau recently wrote, commenting on the episode. "We are thinking, why not start the New Life at Meherabad? The wave of Beloved Baba's love is spreading all over, and we find the young are prepared to make any sacrifice for His love and service. I saw them working at the latrines, and I was really amazed."

Another noteworthy development event at this year's Amarthi was that, for the first time, the Meher Pilgrim Retreat came into use. While in past years pilgrims staying at the Pilgrim Centre moved during Amarthi week to the Hospital, Isolation Ward, and Staff Quarters, this year, since the pilgrim accommodation quarters on the women's side of the Retreat were basically finished, pilgrims got to experience the wide sky and airy quietude on the west side of the Meherabad estate. Pilgrims walked to and from the Samadhi along a footpath on the ridge of Meherabad Hill. From the upper terrace of the Retreat one could enjoy a wide, panoramic view, with Ahmednagar and the hills beyond to the north, the Samadhi to the east, and across a small valley to the south, the neighboring hill where the Dharamshala and Amarthi site will be.

The Trust's web site had been launched in the previous November; and for several days at the end of January it hosted live—or "virtually live"—webcasts of major Amarthi events, such as the morning Dhuni or silence at noon. These webcasts are still in a primitive stage; but in the future the Trust hopes to provide more and better coverage of its major events this way.

BABA'S BIRTHDAY. Four o'clock on 25th February pilgrims and residents were rising from bed and filing through the chilly darkness up Meherabad Hill. Five o'clock—the hour of Baba's birth in Sassoon Hospital in Pune 110 years ago—was greeted with seven hearty cries of "Avatar Meher Baba ki Jai!" For the next three hours pilgrims regaled their Beloved with song.

Meanwhile, at Meherazad, the men and women continued to do as they had done since Baba's time, the men gathering in Mandali Hall and the women in

Baba's bedroom. At five o'clock each said Baba's "Jai!" and recited the prayers. At this juncture the men visited Baba's bedroom and the women Mandali Hall, greeting one another as they passed.

Baba's birthday play, always the object of great anticipation and frantic preparation during the three-week period following the Amarthi cleanup, this year took as its subject the life of Upasni Maharaj, the great Perfect Master of Sakori. Maharaj's early life, up through the culmination of his discipleship with Sai Baba of Shirdi, was wracked with the agonies of his love for God, which drove him to the very verge of suicide. His realization of God transpired through a strange episode in which two giants broke open his head and filled it with light. The play went on to depict the first meeting with Meher Baba, in which Maharaj hit him on the forehead with a stone. Over the next seven years Baba resided much of the time in Maharaj's ashram in Sakori, gaining Dnyan or Knowledge from the great Sadguru. The play concluded with Maharaj's declaration of Meher Baba's Avatarhood and Baba's departure. The final song was an adaptation from an arti that Baba himself had written to Maharaj during these years:

*Emperor of yogis, Master Upasni
sends his salutations to you from afar;
Formless, non-dual, without attributes,
O Master, You are Avatar!*



Baba and Upasni in the birthday play

The Drought Continues

READERS OF THIS NEWSLETTER will be aware of the acute drought that has afflicted Ahmednagar district for the last three years. The year 2003 brought a mere 12.5 inches of rain to Meherabad—and 7.5 to Meherazad!

Under such conditions hardship is unavoidable. For many months Meherazad has been relying on water tankers for drinking water and all other purposes, and

Meherabad for its construction work. But it is fortunate indeed that the new water connection and pipeline described in previous issues of In His Service were put in place when they were. Without this water source, Meherabad could not have been kept open during this past pilgrim season.

During April-May, as summer moved into its climax, the Meherabad pipeline

connection supplied about 200,000-300,000 liters on most days. (Tankers brought an additional 60,000 daily). The village of Arangaon does not have an adequate water source of its own, and about 50,000 liters a day were carried off mostly by the women of the village in pots on their heads, from the water spigots at Lower Meherabad that the Trust makes available for this purpose.

PHOTO BY PHEBE JARMANE GARD

Drama Flourishing at Meherabad

THE AVATAR, it is said, has a dramatic flair. This certainly was true in Meher Baba's case, who could be, when He chose, a consummate actor. Theater was in Baba's family background: His maternal uncle Rustom had a career in theater, and Baba Himself was the manager of the Katoa Theatrical Company for a few months in 1916. In later years skits and small plays, often created by His sister Mani and staged by the women mandali, figured into the life of many of His ashrams. Many comic memories descend from those days—of Katie as a cannibal chief, Rano and Kitty as a Parsi husband and wife, and Dr. Goher as a temperamental maestro of the concert piano. In the Deed of Declaration of the Avatar Meher Baba Trust, the "writing and production of 'Plays' based upon the messages, discourses, and sayings of Avatar Meher Baba" is numbered among the objects and purposes.

During the 1970s and 80s, plays and skits were usually staged on special occasions—notably Mehera's and Baba's birthdays—under a pandal outside the men's veranda at Meherazad, or under the Tin Shed, on the Sabha Mandap, or later on the outdoor stage on Meherabad Hill. But in 1990 the construction of a full-scale Music and Arts Centre was completed in Outer Meherabad, and the building came into use for the first time. Since then, this facility has been the focal point of a flowering of a new vein of drama that grows specifically out of Baba's manifestation and aspires to give expression to His message through the imagery and color and voice and movement of the living stage. Over the past decade many of the original plays were created, staged, and enacted by the pilgrim-resident community of Meherabad itself, usually for the occasion of Baba's birthday. Often the subjects have been Perfect Masters or great saints—Rabia of Basra, St. Theresa of Avila, St. Francis of Assisi, Hafiz of Shiraz, Tukaram, Rumi, Hazrat Babajan, and most recently, Upasni Maharaj. Two of the plays, "This Man David" and "How It All Happened," were based on film scenarios that Baba Himself had dictated in the 1930s; and two others were derived from a play by Bhau Kalchuri. But in the last three-four years particularly, original plays have been brought to Meherabad by Baba groups from around the world for performance at various times in the pilgrim season. For these events Meherabad serves as a facilitator, providing the stage and technical support, while His lovers from other centres provide the vision and dramatic enactment. Two memorable such occasions were the Meherabad Drama Festival on New Life Weekend in 2000 and the seven-program festival of the arts put on by the Sufis in August 2002. More recently, during September of this past season Baba lovers from the States brought an original one-act play, "The Wanderer," with wonderful original music, that they staged at the Meherabad Music and Arts Centre as well as at Meherazad Mandali Hall. Several months later the group from Mumbai put on the

second in a series of plays on Baba's life. The part of Meher Baba was enacted remarkably well.

Another object named in the Trust Deed and currently flowering at Meherabad and Meherazad is film. Of course, for two decades Baba films have been shown on a weekly basis at Mandali Hall Meherazad (on Sunday mornings) and at the Pilgrim Centre (on Friday nights). But what is relatively new is the creation of original films on the Meherabad campus. The last Newsletter listed some of the films created in 2003; but since then, new work has come to fruition. "God in Human Form," a documentary introduction to Baba's life, in earlier versions with narratives in English and Hindi, now comes in a "Persian version" as well. "When Merwan Grew Up," a 35-minute documentary on Baba's childhood, created with the help of children from the Meher English School, premiered in March. And in the coming months a new 53-minute documentary on Meher Baba's Manonash phase will be made available through the Trust web site. The Manonash film is built around a narrative by Meherwan Jessawala and incorporates several of the magnificent messages that Baba gave during this period. Film affords wide scope for creative new approaches and interesting selections of subject matter in the presentation of Baba's life and message; and through the use of the internet, new Baba films created at Meherabad can now be disseminated throughout the world through the Trust web site.



Bus Parking Garage.

Meher Pilgrim Retreat PHOTO ALBUM



Top floor of the administrative wing.



Dining Hall roof with inset of steel-truss detail. Dining Hall will display murals by Diana Le Page.



Dining Hall Terrace and (top of photo) Music Room, a cabin like the Rahuri Cabin for musical rehearsals.



Bedroom wing veranda and steps into the courtyard.



Entry foyer to the dining hall. The corbel arches and domes (or semi-domes) are examples of highly skilled brickwork done by Arangaon craftsmen and a family of expert masons from Rajasthan. This family came to Meherabad five years ago to work on the Manzil-e-Meher (Archive Building) and have remained to work on the Retreat. The central panel above the door to the dining hall will display a painting by Charlie Mills.

PHOTOS BY TED JARSON



A panoramic view of the Meher Pilgrim Retreat.

An Old Connection

FIVE TIMES A YEAR the Trust sponsors a cataract camp at Meher Hospital in Meherabad, where approximately twenty poor villagers are given free cataract surgery. One of our Meherabad resident doctors has this touching story to tell from the camp that took place last season:

"This very frail old village woman is waiting to have her operation. She is almost blind from cataracts in both eyes. I stop by and tell her to relax and take Baba's name during the surgery.

"She is very deaf, and I have to shout this a few times. Finally, she hears me, and exclaims: 'I take Baba's name all the time. I was with Baba in Bangalore, Mysore, Delhi, and Dehra Dun!'

"I am stunned. All of these are places Baba visited during 1938-39!

Could it really be true?

"Further inquiries from Meherazad confirmed that this lady had indeed been a servant in the ashram for several years...sixty-five years ago! What an old connection! Now Baba has arranged for her to regain her sight through the free cataract surgeries performed in Meher Hospital.

"A few weeks later, we arranged for her to come to Meherazad. She recognized Katie and Meheru, but later she commented, amusingly, 'They have become old!'

"Very frequently among the patients coming for surgery we meet someone who has seen Baba, had His darshan. But nowadays very few of the servants of the ashram are still alive, and it was a pleasant surprise to discover this one."

Commemoration of 1954 Meherabad Sahavas

Another memorable event of half a century ago was the great Meherabad sahasvas of 1954, sometimes known as the "Three Incredible Weeks," which culminated in the delivery of one of Meher Baba's major messages, "The Final Declaration."

To commemorate the golden anniversary of this occasion, on 29th-30th September 2004 the Trust is organizing a two-day program with talks, skits, films, and other events. Persons who attended the original Meherabad sahasvas will share their reminiscences, and others will offer their reflections on this memorable episode in Baba's advent.

The Development Plan after Half a Decade

In its inaugural issue of December 1998, *In His Service* announced the Trust Estate Master Plan. While from the outset the Plan embraced various objects, it had at its centre a vision of Meherabad Hill as a park-like environment of forests and gardens around the central point of the Samadhi, and to the west and south-west, a new pilgrim accommodation area with a Pilgrim Centre and Dharamshala.

Over the intervening half-decade since the Plan was first formulated, the major thrust has been in the construction of the Meher Pilgrim Retreat on the back side of Meherabad Hill a kilometer to the west. Largely complete, the Retreat now commands the horizon line as one approaches Meherabad along the highway from Ahmednagar. Intended for the accommodation of 200 pilgrims, the Retreat came into use for the first time on a temporary basis this Amartithi, when more than 100 pilgrims were housed there. The opening is scheduled for 2006.

Many other important objects have been carried out under the Plan. The Meher English School now has a new gymnasium/auditorium, new science labs, a sports field, and buses. The Meher Health Centre has been expanded. The Cultural Academy was brought to completion. The Amartithi site has been expanded. The infrastructure-involving water, electricity, roads, and afforestation was further developed. The Archive Building at Meherabad is being furnished and an archive building at Meherazad is under construction.

To date, over 2 million dollars have been lovingly gifted by over 900 families contributing at least once during this five-and-a-half year period. Over 400 contributions are received each year.

While much has been accomplished, much more needs to be done. Most immediately, in the next two years \$400,000 will be required for the completion of the Meher Pilgrim Retreat. Over the same term, \$180,000 will be needed for further infrastructure development and \$144,000 for Archive facilities.

Continued support from past contributors is greatly needed and appreciated. For those who have not availed themselves of 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, 410K, 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 on the Trust's web site at www.ambppct.org.

Mehera's Piano

Mehera and Baba in Cannes, 1930s



WHEN MEHERA WAS A YOUNG GIRL of eleven, she began to take piano lessons, as her older sister Piroja (whom Baba later named Freiny) had been doing for some time. To make it easier for them to practice, their mother Daulat bought them a piano. Since Mehera's father Jehangir had recently died, they were living with her mother's parents at the Royal Hotel in Pune. But not long thereafter Daulat bought her own house on Todiwala Road; and when she moved, the piano moved with them.

The piano was a small Wilhelm Spaethe upright, originally designed and manufactured in Germany, but specially built in Mumbai by S. Rose Company. It had 85 keys instead of the usual 88.

For some time Mehera took piano lessons from a teacher in her convent school. Later, in Cannes in 1937, and again in Ajmer in 1941, and still again in Meherazad in 1946, Mehera resumed practice, on a new piano Baba bought her for this purpose, taking lessons from Kitty Davy, a lifelong piano teacher.

Mehera's old childhood piano remained with her mother and sister, who took it with them to their residence in Nasik in the late 20s. Half a century later, when Meheru (Freiny's daughter and Mehera's niece) visited her mother in 1979, Freiny gave the piano to Meherabad, which made Mehera very

happy when she heard of it. This was perhaps Freiny's last gift, for she died suddenly the very next day.

RENOVATION. For the last twenty years Mehera's piano has found its abode in the dining room of the Meher Pilgrim Centre in Meherabad, where pilgrims play on it from time to time. But in the harsh conditions of Maharashtra, where dry and humid seasons fol-



Herman Lowe at work restoring Mehera's piano

low in quick succession, the piano had fallen into acute disrepair, to the point where it could hardly be played. Yet it is a precious thing, much loved by Mehera and linked to the history of the Advent.

Baba's world seems to offer an unusual diversity in the people that He has selected and the peculiar lines of work that they have pursued. One of His lovers, as it turns out, is a master in the fine art of piano repair; and since 2002 he has been spending five weeks a year—during the fiery hot summer months of April and May—turning the piano, literally, inside out.

To step into the Pilgrim Centre

Dining Room these summer days is to see the internal anatomy of an early twentieth-century upright in bold display. Almost every part of the instrument has required serious work. The pin block is cracked and its holes elongated, so that the strings can no longer keep their tune. The sound board—of vertical grain spruce, an excellent wood for this purpose—is warped and fissured in many places; the cracks all have to be shimmed. The bridge pins too are loose. In fact, a fully-strung piano creates about fifteen to twenty tons of pressure, necessitating the metal plate. This too will have to be reinserted at a later stage, before the restringing.

Meanwhile, the action of the keyboard has thoroughly to be overhauled, with new felts, hammers, and dampers, leveling of keys and regularizing of "key dip," and many other fine adjustments. The strings are being brought from the United States, many of them custom made to match the originals. In this way Mehera's piano, when restored, should have a tone almost exactly matching what it was when her mother first bought it.

The restoration work is still in mid-course and will take several more seasons. But when it is done, His lovers will be able to enjoy in a new way some of the "sweet music" of Baba's time.

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, publications, 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 or www.avatarmeherbabatrust.org. Subscriptions to *In His Service* or *Tavern Talk* can be submitted through the web site in its "Events and News" section.

"*In His Service*" is the newsletter of the Avatar Meher Baba Trust; all articles and other material are compiled under the direction of the Chairman. Issued biannually, it is designed and published by Sheriar Press, Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, USA. All articles are copyrighted © 2004 Avatar Meher Baba P.P.C. Trust, Ahmednagar, India.

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