



# IN HIS SERVICE

JUNE / 2011

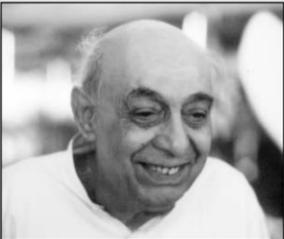
A NEWSLETTER FROM MEHERABAD

## Childrens' Day at Meherazad

After Baba dropped His body in 1969, His lifelong

disciple Pendu felt prompted to organize a special program for the school children of Pimpalgaon-Malvi, the village neighboring Meherazad to the north. Among the mandali,

Pendu was the one with a long history of helping the people of this poor village, just as Padri had done with the villagers of Arangaon at Meherabad. When a farmer needed advice or a loan, or a family faced some crises, more often than not it was Pendu they turned to. Feeling as he did for these simple rural folk, Pendu initiated



laddoos in a makeshift kitchen set up in the room that served for the rest of the year as the garage housing Baba's DeSoto car.

On the grand day itself Pendu would station himself on a stool just outside the doors of Mandali Hall, and from there he would supervise Meherabad-Meherazad residents and pilgrims helping in the distribution of prasad. As each child filed out of the room after darshan, he or she would be given a huge, savory laddoo—a ball of sweetened and spiced chickpea flour—in each hand.

**CHILDREN'S DAY REINAUGURATED.** After Pendu died the programs stopped, as none of the remaining mandali had time to organize such a

big event. But on 7th March 2011, that wonderful old tradition was reinstated with a few modern twists. This time six hundred school children from the nearby Pimpalagaon-Malvi school, standards four through eight, visited Meherazad for Baba's darshan and prasad. (The fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds of standards nine and ten could not attend because of exams.)

The animated swarm of lucky children poured into the compound in front of the building that used to be the Meher Free Dispensary, now transformed into a pilgrim facility. There, a pandal had been erected to shade the gathering from the blazing sun

rays of early March—the beginning of the hot season in Maharashtra—with a few benches and chairs set out for the teachers and mandali. A large photograph of Baba graced the occasion. One likes to imagine that He too was enjoying the festivities and the sight of His beloved children gathered at His longtime residence.

As they are taught to do in India, the children sat in perfect rows, and many seemed to listen intently as Meherwan Jessawala told stories of Meherazad and Baba's connection with this place. After Meherwan's introduction one of the teachers

## Golden Anniversary: East-West Gathering

Between 1st and 4th November 2012, the Trust will host a major commemoration of the East-West Gathering, which Meher Baba held in Guruprasad, Poona fifty years earlier.

Baba's lovers from throughout the world are invited to participate. Baba lovers who attended the East-West Gathering are specially invited to share their experiences, either at the anniversary commemoration itself, or, if they are unable to attend, through written accounts.

Baba centers around the world are encouraged to bring to the event presentations or performances on the theme of the East-West Gathering. Potential participants can send emails to [hill.library@ambppct.org](mailto:hill.library@ambppct.org) or write to the Trust at its usual mailing address.

spoke further about the significance of Meherazad and the children's good fortune in having been invited there.

The entertainment as such was launched by the group of bhajan singers from Arangaon. After setting up and tuning their tablas, the men and women took turns in singing beautiful Marathi devotional songs.

Next, the Trust's resident magician took to the stage, dazzling the youngsters with tricks and wonders. He would select children from the front rows to help him with his magic displays; and these "magician's assistants" occasioned much fun and laughter among their friends watching from the crowd.

But now the tables were turned as the Pimpalgaon children took over the show, regaling their Meherazad hosts and the greater audience with three folk dances and several songs. The outdoor portion of the program concluded with arti.

As in Pendu's time, the program climaxed with darshan and prasad. Sorting themselves into two long lines, the boys and girls filed into Mandali Hall and bowed down at Baba's chair. Though it is no longer practical to cook the sweetmeats at Meherazad, each child nonetheless received three laddoos and a packet of farsan (a savory snack food made from chickpea flour) to carry back home.

And so an old practice has been brought back to life, and children of the neighborhood once again enjoy the opportunity to imbibe the atmosphere and drink in the love of the God-Man at His Meherazad home.



the practice of bringing the villagers' children to Meherazad for the special Baba Birthday programs. This would draw them closer to Baba by giving them the opportunity of darshan at His chair in Mandali Hall. The children, for their part, could entertain the mandali through what is called "malakhamb," a type of gymnastics involving athletic feats with a pole.

Each year Pendu would hire "laddoo" makers from town, who would bring their giant cauldrons to Meherazad; and the day before the event, from dawn to dusk, they would prepare large mounds of

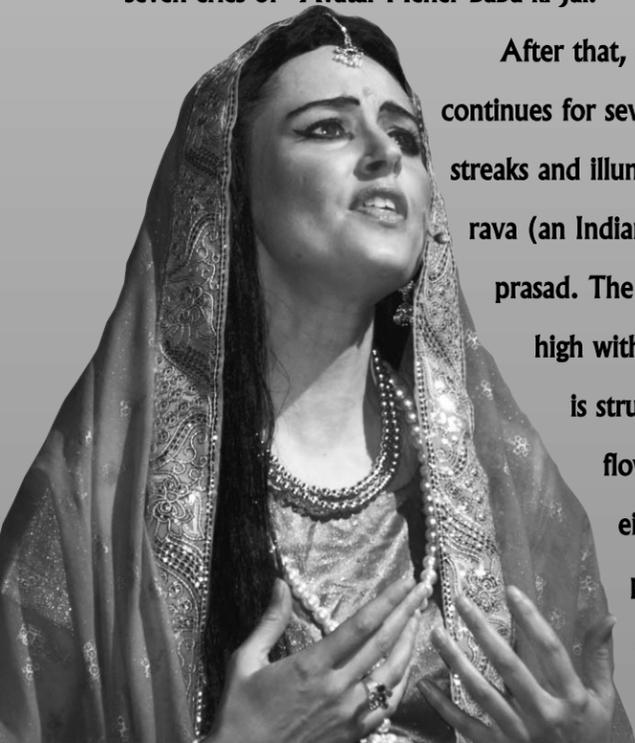


PHOTOGRAPHS: DAYANA BROWN

# Baba's Birthday Celebrations

On a typical night at the Avatar's Samadhi on Meherabad Hill, everything shuts down between eight p.m., when evening arti ends, and six a.m., when the day starts with tomb cleaning. Thrice in the annual calendar, however, this rule is lifted: on December 31, when pilgrims and residents welcome in the New Year with songs and celebration; over the three days of the Amartithi gathering; and on Baba's Birthday.

Early morning on 25th February is always a magical time. The crowd starts to gather in the chilly darkness from as early as three a.m., and soon, the space between the Samadhi and the Sabha Mandap swarms with people. Since the baby Merwan was born in Poona 117 years ago at five a.m., that moment climaxes the annual early-morning build-up, as a rousing "Meher Dhoon" (a singing of Meher Baba's name) culminates in seven cries of "Avatar Meher Baba ki Jai!"



After that, singing in the portico continues for several hours, as the light streaks and illuminates the sky. Tea and rava (an Indian sweet) are served as prasad. The Samadhi itself is heaped high with garlands, and the portico is strung with colored lights and flowers and ornaments. By eight a.m. most of the pilgrims have taken their darshan, and the crowd disperses for breakfast.

**THIS YEAR'S BIRTHDAY PLAY, "The Secret History of the Taj Mahal,"** dramatized a narrative that Eruch Jessawala had related to Baba during the New Life in Mahabaleshwar, probably in March of 1951. Emerging exhausted from His seclusion work, Baba wanted to be entertained. Eruch responded with a beautiful story, unknown to the historians and the chroniclers of the period, explaining how the inspiration for this great architectural masterpiece was achieved.

The main action of the play was set at the height of the Mughal era in the seventeenth century during the reign of the Shah Jahan. It centered on two love stories and two heartbreaks, one involving the Shah Jahan and his beloved queen Mumtaz who died in

## Amartithi 2011

The forty-second Amartithi, commemorated over the three days from 30th January through 1st February, drew a record crowd this year, with 17,261 pilgrims registered for overnight accommodation, about a thousand more than 2010. Despite the size, the event went smoothly, due in part to a large and seasoned volunteer staff and organizational systems and infrastructure that have been evolving for four decades.

For many Baba lovers around the world and especially throughout India, Amartithi provides the main opportunity for darshan at Meher Baba's Samadhi. About 16,000 pilgrims took darshan this year on Amartithi day itself; astonishingly, all pilgrims with tokens were able to complete their darshan by 11:30 at night, as has not been the case in recent years.



As always, the main event at Amartithi is the fifteen minutes of silence starting at noon, as the assembled crowd



commemorates that final quarter-hour culminating in the Avatar's dropping His body in 1969.

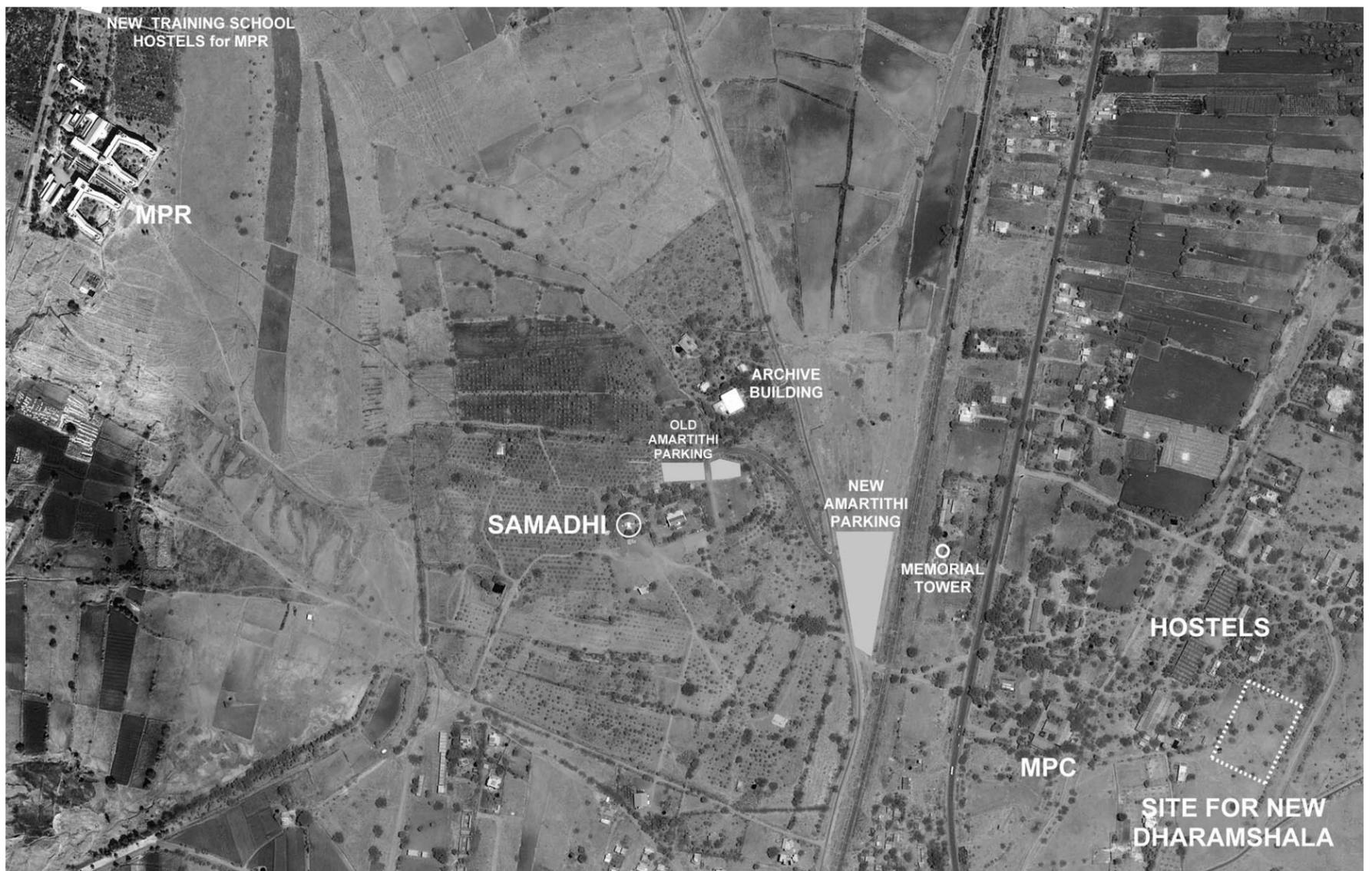
As in the past the program on the stage in the amphitheater featured a variety of live performances—bhajans and other songs, dances, and other entertainment—as well as film.



childbirth, and the other involving the Persian architect Shirazi and the Rajput princess Rehana.

These romantic plots were interwoven with the history of the Mughal wars of conquest against the Hindu kingdoms of Mewar and Ahmednagar. Two of Jahan's sons, Dara and Aurengzeb, personified the conflict between religious puritanism and transcendent mysticism, themes which were brought into relation with the central romantic drama. By the end of the story Shirazi and Rehana, the play's two protagonists, transcend the "idolatry" of human love and awaken to the love of God.



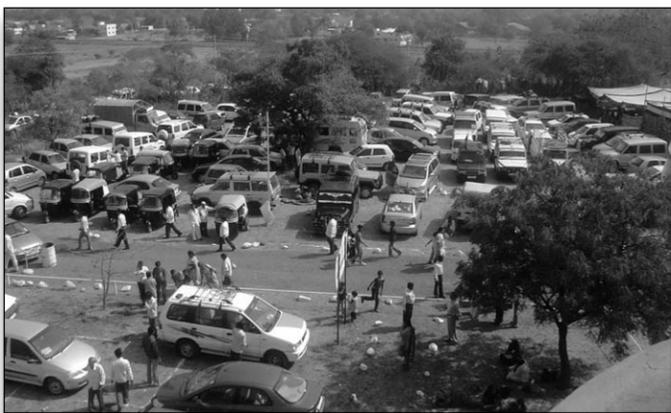


MAP COURTESY OF GOOGLE

## New Parking Lot Alleviates Congestion

TRAFFIC CONGESTION ON MEHERABAD HILL at Amartithi was greatly reduced this year through the creation of a new parking lot at the base of the Hill between the Kedgaon road and the railway track, just north of the railway crossing.

With tens of thousands of pilgrims pouring into Meherabad over a three-day period, vehicular traffic has become a growing nuisance in recent years. For most of the last decade the empty field behind Meher Retreat on the Hill served as the main parking area. Since this is located just across the road from the makeshift pandal restaurants catering to much of the Amartithi audience watching stage performances or to pilgrims waiting their turn in queue, the crowds and cars have interfered with each other, and public areas have been much congested at peak times. What is more, the constant movement of vehicles parking on the unpaved field raised dust and created noise in the immediate vicinity of the Amartithi program. The opening of the new parking facility has freed the Hill of cars (except for service vehicles) during the gathering and thus removed a significant distraction from the main event. The Trust's Master Plan has designated several other parking zones at various points of the compass around the Hill. Gradually these will be developed and put into use as the size of the Amartithi crowd grows.



## Reversing the Flow at Baba's Samadhi

A SMALL BUT STRIKING CHANGE during the 2010-11 season involved Meher Baba's Samadhi and the very process of taking darshan there.

For more than four decades pilgrims have approached the door to the Samadhi from the right-hand side and after darshan exited to the left. But midway through this season directions reversed: now pilgrims approach from the left and leave to the right. What used to be a counter-clockwise pilgrim darshan flow, in other words, has become clockwise.

This change was motivated by the increasing number of Samadhi pilgrims throughout the year and the fact that pilgrims had to stand and queue up in the open space between the Samadhi portico and the Sabha Mandap. Trust management felt that it would be better to keep this space empty, so that pilgrims walking up the Hill path would have a clear view of the Samadhi. At the same time, under the new arrangement pilgrims waiting

their turn for darshan on the south side (in front of Mehera's grave) could be provided with shelter from the sun.

Since the Samadhi portico has become too small for



the numbers of pilgrims who attend morning and evening arti, some of the screened partition has been removed. During the summer months April and May the portico should be further expanded and opened up through new cloth covering overhead and new farsi (stone) flooring on what is now open ground.

## Construction of New Dharamshala to Begin Soon

DURING THE EIGHT YEARS between the formulation of the original Trust development plan in 1998 and the opening of the Meher Pilgrim Retreat in 2006, construction at Meherabad proceeded apace; but since then the rate of building activity has tapered off somewhat. But now this lull period is about to end. Sometime during the next year the Trust foresees groundbreaking for a major construction project: a new Dharamshala in outer Meherabad.

To be built in what is now a thinly wooded patch just on the far side (that is, to the east) of Hostels C

and D, the Dharamshala will constitute a pilgrim accommodation facility roughly on the same scale as the Meher Pilgrim Retreat.

If all goes according to plan, the design will be completed and approved by the end of this year. Construction will proceed according to the availability of funds. The final tab for the building of the MPR (1998-2006) came to about \$1.25 million (USD), with another quarter million for furnishings. Since the price of materials and labor has increased dramatically over the last decade, the Dharamshala will cost more.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TED JUDSON

## New Hostel for Trainees

In response to the growing number of full- and part-time resident volunteer workers, over the past year the Trust has been constructing new staff quarters along the hilltop about 100 meters to the north of the Meher Pilgrim Retreat.

Called a “trainees’ school hostel” (since it is intended as housing for spiritual trainees who have duties at the MPR), the new two-floor facility provides four pairs of rooms, each sharing a kitchen and toilet-bathroom. The two-room arrangement is especially suited for married couples, though other residents can stay there as well.

The building should be complete and available for occupancy by the opening of pilgrim season in June 2011.

## Young Adults Sahavas in June

The tenth annual Meherabad Young Adults Sahavas will be held at Meherabad from 20th through 27th June (Monday to Monday), 2011.

As it is described in a recent flier announcing the event, “100 young adults from all over the world between the ages of 18 and 35 will gather at Meherabad to spend seven days together in the company of the Ancient One. The keynote of the Sahavas is the celebration of Meher Baba’s love through sharing, creative expression (such as art, music and drama), and service at Meherabad.” This year’s special theme is Mastery in Servitude.

Applications are available over the internet at <http://ambppct.org/events/sahavas.php>.

## 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, email [suchapman@hotmail.com](mailto: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, email [TrustPlan@ambppct.org](mailto:TrustPlan@ambppct.org)). They will send you relevant information along with a list of eight Meher Baba tax-exempt organizations that have grants in place to support the Trust. These include a Trust Development Plan grant, an Operating Expense grant, and a grant for the construction of the Memorial Tower. 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.avatarmeherbabatrust.org](http://www.avatarmeherbabatrust.org).

# The Meherabad Pilgrim Population, 2010–11

PILGRIM DEMOGRAPHICS for the 2010–11 pilgrim season continued trends of the last four years, with a slightly increasing number of Indian pilgrims and a slightly decreasing number of pilgrims from abroad.

At present Meherabad pilgrims are accommodated in two areas. Constructed in the 1980s, Hostels C and D are located in Outer Meherabad not far from the eastern boundary of the Meherabad Estate; in the historic part of Meherabad nearby, the old Dharamshala accommodates overflow. Meanwhile, at the west end of the estate, the Meher Pilgrim Retreat (MPR) has been providing lodging and food to pilgrims since its opening in 2006. Baba’s Samadhi stands approximately midway between the Hostels and the Retreat, slightly more than half a kilometer from each.

The total number of pilgrims—or, more precisely, “pilgrim visits”—at these facilities over the last four years, exclusive of Amartithi, is as follows:

	2007-8	2008-9	2009-10	2010-11
Meher Pilgrim Retreat	2751	2893	3176	3372
Hostel C, D & Dharamshala	6083	6998	4865	5529

In both areas the busiest season occurs in the winter between Christmas and Baba’s birthday. Another spike each year marks the Silence Day commemoration on July 10. August, September, and October leading up to Dasara and Divali are the quietest time.

The increase in the annual pilgrim-visit tallies at the MPR over the last four years is due to the growing influx of Indian pilgrims, who in 2010–11 comprised 74.5% of the total—an all-time high. But since most Indian pilgrims stay for short durations, the Indian proportion of total MPR bed occupancy came to only 34% (though this too was the highest proportion to date). Generally, over the nine-month pilgrim season, MPR has been slightly more than one-third full. The average MPR bed occupancy rate for this year stood at 34%—down from the high of 39% in 2008–9 but slightly up from the 32% rate last year.

The number of international pilgrims totaled 859 in 2010–11, as compared with 772 in 2006–7, 958 in 2007–8, 956 in 2008–9, and 914 in 2009–10. (Probably the decline over the last three years is due in part to the difficult economic conditions in much of the world.) The breakdown of MPR pilgrims by country in 2010–11 is as follows: India, 2513; United States, 307; Iran, 207; United Kingdom, 54; Australia, 52; Canada and Germany, 31 each; Russia, 27; Slovakia, 24; Argentina, 17; France, 12; New Zealand and Spain, 9 each; Japan, 8; Mexico, 7; Israel, 5; Italy, 4; Slovenia, Taiwan, and Turkey, 2 each; Switzerland, 1.

All these numbers are exclusive of Amartithi, the main event of the year, which draws tens of thousands to Meherabad at the end of January. The 17,261 pilgrims registered for overnight accommodation represent the highest total to date, as compared with 11,411 in 2007, 12,586 in 2008, 14,769 in 2009, and 16,270 in 2010.

## Meher English School: First Quarter-Century

Founded in 1986, the Meher English School completed its first quarter-century with the 2010–11 school year. Originally a single-classroom facility for boys and girls of the first standard, the school now encompasses all ten required standards of the pre-college Indian curriculum as well as lower and upper kindergarten.

Over just the last ten years the Meher English School has approximately doubled in the size of its student body, from about 420–450 to its present total of almost 900 students. About 80% of these boys and girls (between the ages of four and sixteen) come from poor villages within a distance of three or four kilometers of Meherabad: Baburdi,

Khandala, Burudgaon, Walki, Sonawadi, Kedgaon, Kinetic Chowk, Bhingaon, and Arangaon. The remaining 20% hail from Ahmednagar city.

This English medium school follows the standard curriculum established by the Maharashtra Education Department. With a total staff of about twenty-five, the school hopes to expand its building facilities in coming years; this will allow for expansion from one to two classes per standard, reducing class size.

The Meher English School occupies a site in the southeastern corner of the Trust Estate where forty acres have been set aside for educational purposes.

### 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, email [EAyers88@comcast.net](mailto:EAyers88@comcast.net)). To subscribe to Tavern Talk (the Trust’s electronic newsletter), send an e-mail to [Listserv@ambppct.org](mailto:Listserv@ambppct.org) and include in the text of your message the words: “subscribe tavern-talk.”

Pilgrims seeking accommodation at

Meherabad can address their emails to [pimco@avatarmeherbabatrust.org](mailto:pimco@avatarmeherbabatrust.org) (to stay at the Meher Pilgrim Retreat) or to [jaibaba@ambppct.org](mailto:jaibaba@ambppct.org) (for Hostel D). Other information can be found on the Avatar Meher Baba Trust’s web site at <http://www.avatarmeherbabatrust.org> (or <http://www.ambppct.org>).

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