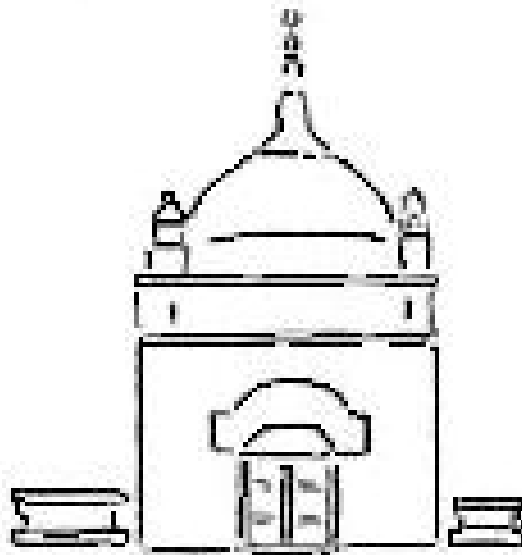


MEHERABAD



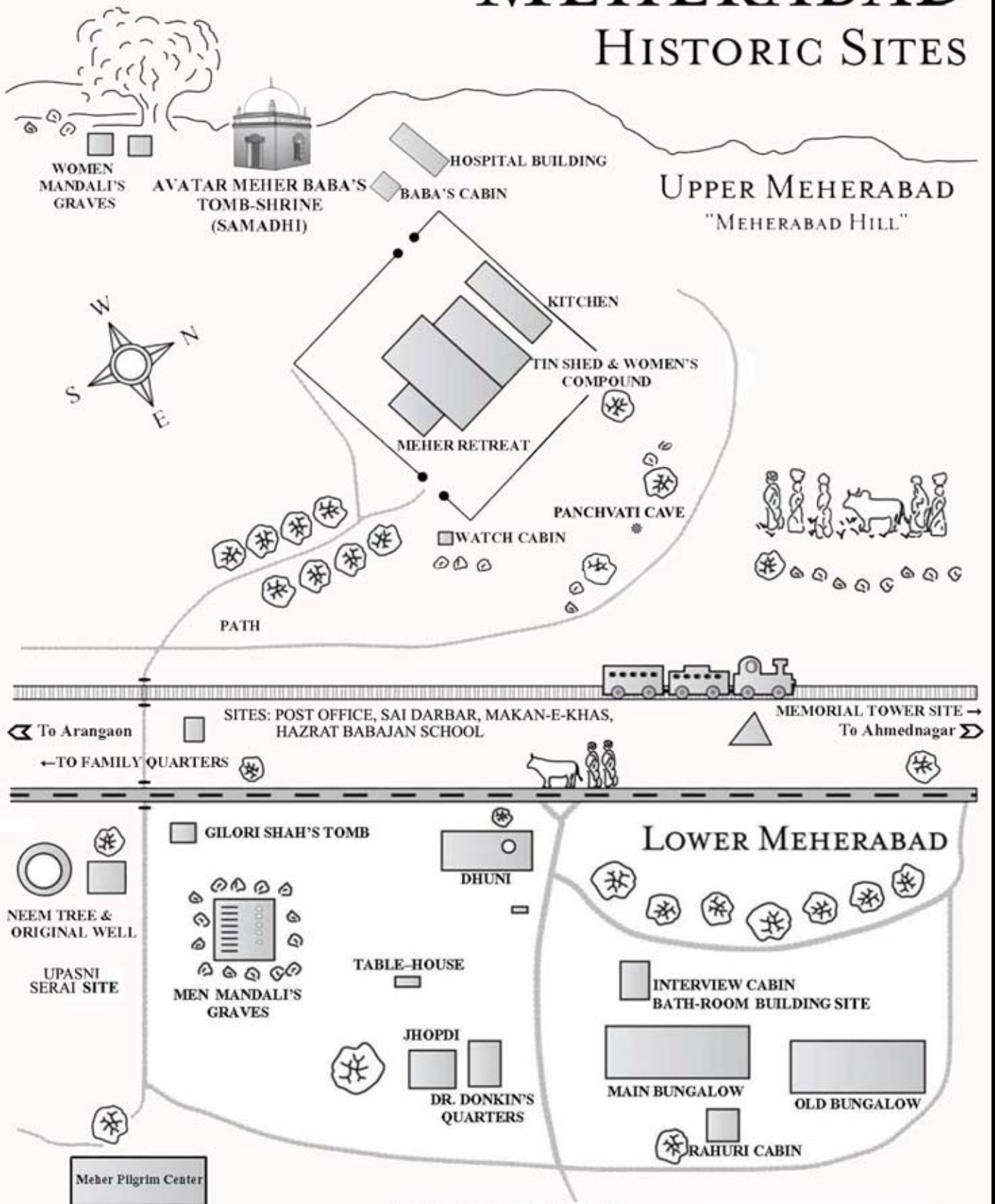
A Walking Tour of Lower and Upper Meherabad



A Publication of Archives, Museum and Research Committee (AMRC)
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MEHERABAD

HISTORIC SITES



MAP OF HISTORIC MEHERABAD
(Map not to scale. Newer buildings not shown.)

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(Tour is to be used on site at Meherabad
and is organized by location.)

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(Note to Reader: This tour is for usage on site at Meherabad, so 'here' becomes relative to the speaker, as if she/he is at the site being described. See map for locations.)

LOWER MEHERABAD

Where Meher Baba lived and worked



Arangaon

Arangaon (which means Forest Village) began as a walled town in the 16th century, but by the end of the 19th century most of the trees had been harvested for timber and fuel. By World War I, the area was dry and barren. Some of the old architecture is still standing, such as the shrine of the 17th-century Hindu yogi Buaji Bua. He is said to have entered his tomb, which is just outside the Vithoba temple, while he was still alive.

During World War I, the property that is now Meherabad was a British army camp, leased from an Arangaon farmer. There were only four structures left on the property from the army camp: a bungalow with earthen walls that was used as mess quarters, a brick bath-room building, a Post Office with a generous shaded verandah, and a large ground-level water tank on top of the hill across the railway line. By 1921, this property was acquired by Kaikhushru and Gulmai Irani, whose sons Rustom and Adi were among Meher Baba's mandali.



Gilori Shah's Tomb, Neem Tree, and Original Well

Gilori Shah (also known as Maula Baba) was a saint in Ahmednagar who had been a cook in Queen Victoria's kitchen in England. Legend has it that when he decided to return to India, the Queen gave him a bag full of treasure. But somewhere along the way on his return journey to India, he threw the bag into a body of water. After settling in Ahmednagar, his followers referred to him as Maula Baba (meaning "Guide" or "Protector"). Gulmai and her family also

befriended the reclusive saint. Just after Kaikhushru obtained the property in a debt repayment deal, Gilori Shah requested Gulmai to give him a small plot of this land on which his **tomb** could be built, but Kaikhushru was reluctant. Gulmai also tried to discourage the saint, knowing what trouble it would bring her from their orthodox Zoroastrian community.

Then, one night early in 1923, Gulmai dreamt that Gilori Shah was a baby in her arms, pleading with her, "Mother, you still haven't given me my place to rest." The very next day, Gilori Shah came to Arangaon with some of his devotees and pointed to the spot where he wanted his tomb to be built. They questioned him about choosing such a desolate distant place when some of his wealthy Muslim followers had offered much nicer sites near the city. He replied, "You are like children. You know nothing! In a short time, this place will turn into a garden of pilgrimage. A great one will come here, and this land will one day belong to the people of the world! Only then will you understand why I am buried here" (*Lord Meher*, p. 482).

These experiences convinced Gulmai and Kaikhushru that they should give the saint what he wanted. Gilori Shah told them that Meher Baba would be coming soon, and he wanted his tomb to be ready by then. Meher Baba had begun to refer to Gulmai as His "spiritual mother." In February of 1923, she attended the birthday celebration for Baba at Manzil-e-Meem in Bombay. On the following day, the engagement of her son was finalized there; Rustom would marry Freny, the sister of Mehera, the young woman who would become Baba's dearest disciple. Afterwards, Baba mentioned to Gulmai that He was planning to leave Bombay for some quiet place, which would be more suitable for the ashram. She told Him about Gilori Shah and their property near Arangaon, and urged Him to stay there.

A few weeks before Rustom and Freny's wedding on May 9th 1923, Meher Baba came to Ahmednagar with some of His mandali. They stayed at Kaikhushru and Gulmai's family quarters, then known as Khushru Quarters. It is now the Trust Compound, known as "Meher Nazar."

As the number of guests arriving for Rustom and Freny's wedding increased, so did the tension and the criticism of Meher Baba behind His back. By the morning of May 4th, He'd had enough and abruptly walked away, with His mandali hurrying to catch up. Without explaining anything, He passed the railway station at the end of town and continued leading them towards the south.

There was a masonry parapet around this **neem tree** then. When they arrived here, Baba sat on it, facing east, and pointed out the ready but unoccupied tomb of Gilori Shah.

The long walk without breakfast on that summer morning left them hungry and thirsty, so Baba sent two of the mandali to the village to bring what they could. A carpenter named Gungaram Pawar supplied them with simple millet bread and a bucket to draw water from this, **the Original Well**. The old man would become Baba's first disciple from Arangaon, as well as His first Christian follower. Baba gave him the nickname Ajoba, which means "respected old man."

Baba's first stay at Meherabad lasted a few weeks. He returned in December of 1923 to do a secret seclusion in the Post Office for four weeks. Gilori Shah dropped his body in January 1924, and his tomb was completed by April of that year when Baba and the mandali returned to Meherabad.

During the mid-1920s, Mehera would wash Baba's clothes on these large, flat stones in the moat to the east of the Original Well. During that same period, Baba and the mandali would bathe boys of the Hazrat Babajan School on the flagstone-paved area to the south of the well. After Gulmai washed Baba's feet once during the early days of Meherabad, Baba had the wash water poured into the well and commented, "The water from this well will always be My prasad."

The large man-powered pump that is now near the dining hall of Meher Pilgrim Retreat was installed on these steel I-beams across the well during that time. The top three courses of stone on the well parapet were added under Padri's direction, after dogs chased two pigs into the well during the summer of 1981.

When the women's ashram was established on the Hill late in 1933, a water tank and pipeline were installed, supplying water from this well. Padri suggested to Baba that they should protect and secure the equipment with a building. Baba replied, "I will give you 101 rupees and the pick of Sarosh's scrap pile to build what you need." The original sheet metal structure that served as the engine room from 1934 can be seen. The extension to the east was done in 1956. The LISTER diesel engine inside was installed in 1938 when the ashram on the Hill was expanded.

Upasni Serai Site

In early 1925, a small temporary building referred to as the dharmshala (lodging quarters for pilgrims) was constructed north of the Original Well (near where the engine room is now located) to house pilgrims visiting Baba. In September 1925, a second building was constructed southeast of the Original Well. It was named Upasni Serai (inn) in honor of one of Baba's Masters, Upasni Maharaj. Poor pilgrims were provided with free lodging, food, and clothing in this rest house. Sometimes Baba even had the mandali help bathe the pilgrims. Thirty-five people per day could make use of the Upasni Serai. These temporary structures were also demolished by November 1926.

Men Mandali's Graves

Behind these hedges, which were planted at Mehera's request, are the graves of most of Meher Baba's men mandali and two of His favorite masts. Though He did not specify each location, Baba Himself indicated who should be interred here and gave each man the option of burial or cremation.



Jhopdi

During April of 1924, Baba ordered this hut to be built near one of the few trees away from the road. With the help of the old carpenter and his crew from Arangaon, and a mason from Ahmednagar, the mandali worked as laborers. Baba worked alongside the others, making sure the job was done according to His requirements, and the Jhopdi, which means “hut,” was completed within 10 days. It was also called Agra-kuti, which means, “first hut,” being the first new building Baba had constructed at Meherabad.

The Jhopdi was Baba’s personal quarters at that time. During the early seclusions, one of the men mandali would be stationed outside under one of the windows as a watchman, and Baba would communicate with him by knocking on the window and passing notes through it. During these seclusions, Baba would do everything inside the Jhopdi, including bathing and eating. Baba lived very simply here, keeping His bedding on the floor and sweeping the room Himself.

The greatest significance of this building is that Meher Baba began His long silence here. Baba had sometimes observed silence for short periods during His seclusions here in the Jhopdi. But in June 1925, He informed His followers that He was planning to keep silence for one year, or until His work was completed. A teacher of the Hazrat Babajan School named Pandoba was disturbed by Baba’s intention to keep silence for a long period. So he asked Baba, “But Master, how will you teach us?” Baba replied, “I have come not to teach, but to awaken”. You will find this very significant quote etched on the marble of His Tomb-Shrine.

After giving detailed instructions to all of the many residents of Meherabad, and reminding them to fulfill their duties with absolute attentiveness, Baba entered the hut, speaking for the last time on the evening of July 9th. (His silence, however, continued for 43 years until He dropped His body on January 31st, 1969).

On the morning of July 10th, Baba came out of the Jhopdi and, after having His bath, made His usual inquiries to the mandali through writing. As time went by, the mandali were surprised that Baba was able to maintain silence, since He had used His beautiful voice to sing and speak to them so often. In the beginning, Baba used pencil and paper or a slate with chalk to communicate. On January 2nd, 1927, Baba gave up writing except for His signature, and began using an English alphabet board. He also gave that up on October 7th, 1954, and began to communicate thereafter through His own unique system of hand gestures and expressions. On July 13th, 1925, only

three days after beginning His Silence, Meher Baba began writing what has become known as “The Book” in the Jhopdi.

This little building and its premises were also used for darshan programs during the 1920s and early 1930s, and occasionally throughout the years as mandali quarters, the homeopathic dispensary, and for special purposes during meetings.

Gate to the Jhopdi Garden

After the construction of the Jhopdi was completed in 1924, Baba had the mandali plant chameli and other shrubs around it. An orchard was planted to the south, and the whole area was enclosed by a wire fence with teakwood posts to protect it from livestock. Though this is not the original gate, it is in the exact location of the original.

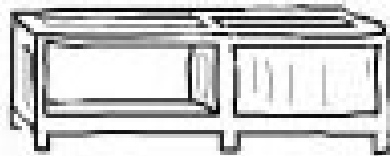
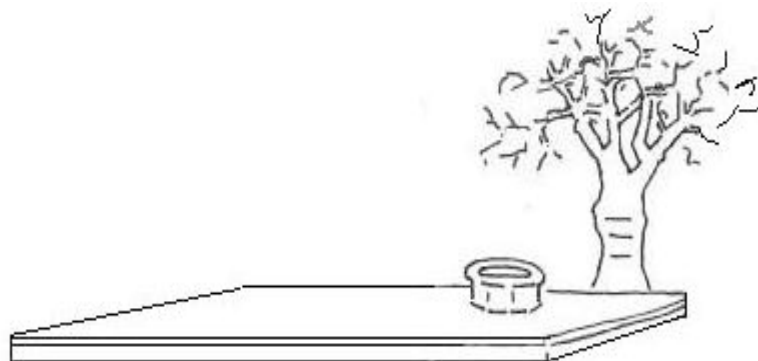


Table-House

A few weeks after Baba began His silence in the Jhopdi, He directed Ajoba to build the Table-House near the Post Office, according to His specifications. The small room inside is 5½ feet wide, 7½ feet long, and just over 3 feet high. On October 11th, 1925, Baba began to sleep in the Table-House, which was placed east of the neem tree near the road outside the Jhopdi gate. Baba also continued to write the Book inside the Table-House, usually during the mornings. From November 17th, the shade of the Table-House verandah also became Baba’s “seat” for greeting crowds. But to maintain peace and quiet for His writing work from that time, He ordered that no one was to come near the neem tree from 8 a.m. until 12 noon.



Dhuni

In 1925, the monsoon season had failed. On November 10th, in response to villagers’ pleas to save them from the extreme drought, Baba ordered that a dhuni fire should be lit. Some of the mandali dug a pit north of the Table-House while others collected firewood and prepared materials. The fire was lit

at 11 p.m. After some devotional music, Baba asked the villagers to depart quickly, but by the time they reached their homes they were drenched by torrential rain. The heavy rains fell for fifteen hours and all the wells were filled. On that anniversary one year later, the Dhuni was lit again at 7 p.m. and again it rained. The Dhuni was also lit on the second anniversary, and this time it rained for two and a half days, causing severe flooding. The villagers came to Baba again, begging Him to stop the rain.

On December 12th, 1941, Baba was staying in seclusion in the Tomb up the Hill. He came down the Hill, but remaining in seclusion, He had the Dhuni curtained off. Besides Gustadji, who lit the Dhuni, only Padri, Pendu, and Pleader were allowed to be present. Baba indicated that this time the Dhuni was being lit as part of His internal work, not in order to bring rain. Exactly one month later, Baba allowed five of the mandali to be present. He had Papa Jessawala light the Dhuni in honor of Upasni Maharaj, who had recently dropped his body. From that day onwards, Baba ordered that the Dhuni be lit on the 12th of every month at Meherabad. The current platform around the pit was built in 1948. Baba Himself lit the Dhuni on September 26th, 1954, during the Three Incredible Weeks. Meher Baba last attended the lighting of the Dhuni on November 12th, 1955, during the sahasvas program. At that time He asked all attending to sacrifice some desire or shortcoming to the Dhuni. This custom has been followed since then.



Dr. Donkin's Quarters

This two-roomed building was originally built in 1944 for Vishnu and his mother, Kakubai. On the eve of the New Life, the companions had their last supper here before leaving Meherabad. In the 1950s–60s, Dr. William Donkin used this building for his personal quarters. During the 1970s, it was used for pilgrims to sleep in during permitted four-day stays at Meherabad. The buildings behind it were built at that time as a dining room and kitchen for pilgrims.

Bath-Room Building Site

This is the approximate location of the original Bath-Room building, the bath-house of the army camp. The Bath-Room building consisted of two large rooms where Baba's early women mandali were housed during their first stay at Meherabad in 1924, and again during the Meher Ashram period of 1927–28. There was a small privacy enclosure of woven bamboo (tata) made around the west end, as well as a large compound off the east end with toilets and kitchen facilities where the women did their cooking work. When Hazrat Babajan came to Meherabad to see Baba on April 1st, 1928, the women peeked through the tata and watched the silent meeting near the railway tracks. This building was demolished after 1928.

Interview Cabin

This cabin was originally built for Kaikobad Dastur in 1944–45, near the site of the former Bath-Room building. During January 1946, Baba fasted in seclusion here. But after completing twenty of the planned forty days, He decided to finish that seclusion in Meherazad, due to the disturbance of road noise here. Later Baba used the Interview Cabin as a place to rest and give interviews during sahasras programs in the 1950s. It was also used for a place for three pilgrims to sleep during the 1970s and as staff quarters after that.



Main Bungalow

Since the mandali had tolerated poor living conditions at Meherabad for over twenty years, Baba consented to this new construction later in 1947. The opening celebration was filmed on the morning of July 23rd, 1948. This new bungalow provided a large meeting hall, as well as living quarters, a kitchen, and bathing rooms for the men mandali. Meher Baba's meetings with His men disciples preceding the New Life took place here. The Mandali Hall was also used for meetings during the sahasras programs in the 1950s. The photographs of Meher Baba and His parents on the wall above Baba's chair were placed there according to His instructions and His chair was used here by Him. The clock is also from Baba's time. The photographs on the walls depict certain stages of Baba's activities in the hall. The sayings above in different languages are from the 1958 Sahavas. Mohammed Mast lived in the hall for many years before being moved to the pantry room in the south end of the building. That room can be entered by going through Padri's kitchen on the south end of the east verandah. This kitchen was used by Padri and other men mandali staying at Meherabad through the years.

Facing the bungalow from the west, Padri's room can be seen just to the left of Mandali Hall. It is furnished much as it was when he was alive and gives an idea of how comparatively comfortable the mandali were allowed to live in the later years. This room also contained Padri's homeopathic dispensary from which he treated many patients until his death in 1982.



Rahuri Cabin

This building was originally constructed in 1936 in Rahuri, a town about 40 kilometers north of Meherabad, where Baba had a free dispensary and His first ashram for mad persons and a few masts. The cabin served as His

personal quarters for some months there. But due to trouble with the landlord, Baba shifted the ashram to Lower Meherabad in May of 1937. The dispensary was set up where the Main Bungalow is now, and the mad ashram was established just west of where the Meher Pilgrim Centre is located. Baba had Dr. Ghani dismantle the cabin and reconstruct it on this site, using most of the original materials. Baba used this cabin for seclusion work and interviews during the late 1930s and 1940s. The masts Lakhn Shah, Ali Shah, and Mohammed also stayed here at different times.



Old Bungalow / Dharmshala

This building was constructed in 1916 and served as the officers' mess hall for the British Army camp. During Baba's first stay at Meherabad in May of 1923, He and the mandali refurbished this building while staying in the Post Office. During the short summer stay in 1924, the white horse that Mehera gave to Baba was brought here. Baba named him Sufi and kept him on the northeast verandah of the building.

Through the years, this building was used for many purposes, but mainly as a residence for the mandali and a few of the masts. During the first long stayⁱ at Meherabad on March 21st, 1925, Baba opened the Meher Charitable Hospital and Dispensary here. It operated for 19 months. During that time, over 7,000 outpatients and 500 inpatients were treated here. Part of the northeast verandah was enclosed to make an operating room where cataract surgeries were performed. A leper asylum was established on the grounds to the east.

From the beginning of 1927, this building was used for classrooms for the Hazrat Babajan High School. Baba spent many hours grinding grain in the southwest corner of the building during the 1920s. Meetings and music programs would also take place in and around this building. Games such as tennis and volleyball were played on the ground just to the east. Baba referred to Padri, Pendu, Adi Sr., and Vishnu as the "four pillars of Meherabad" after the four wooden posts that held up the rickety roof structure of the old building.

In May of 1934, Baba dictated significant, detailed points on cosmology known as "The Divine Theme" while staying in the southeast room.

Since Baba dropped His body, most of the building has been used as a dharmshala. In 1982, the southern half of the building was demolished and rebuilt to provide extra space for pilgrim accommodations.

Memorial Tower Site

This spot was commemorated during one of the most eventful weeks in the lives of Meher Baba and His close ones. In December of 1944, Baba had decided to celebrate Mehera's birthday for the first time publicly. One of the old mandali, Baba's maternal uncle Masaji, had been working to prepare for that celebration when he died of heart failure in his room in the old bungalow on December 19th.ⁱⁱ Baba and the mandali carried his body from there in a coffin, which was buried at this specified site.

On December 21st, Arnavaz and Nariman Dadachanji were married in Ahmednagar. Their uncle, Framrose Dadachanji (Chanji), Baba's first secretary, had died four months earlier in Kashmir. On the 23rd, Baba called the wedding guests and all His local followers to meet at this spot at Meherabad. Baba had Chanji's bedding roll placed in a shallow pit, which was dug next to Masaji's grave. Adi Sr. then read a message that Baba had dictated for the occasion — the dedication of a future memorial tower commemorating the departed disciples of the master. As Adi read each name from the list of the departed ones, Baba dropped a rose petal into the foundation pit.

The next morning, Baba's brother Adi Jr.'s wife, Gulu, died soon after giving birth to their son, Dara. Nonetheless, on the following day, December 25th, Mehera's birthday was festively celebrated as planned.ⁱⁱⁱ

In September 1954, a large pandal for temporary quarters was erected in this area for the men's meeting when Baba gave His Final Declaration.

Sai Darbar Site

In 1925, during Meher Baba's first long stay at Meherabad, the number of people coming for His darshan gradually increased. By the end of the year, while Baba was spending most of His time in and around the Table-House near the Dhuni, several thousand people would show up on some occasions. It became apparent that a larger gathering place was necessary. On November 29th, Baba broke ground to build a large meeting hall, 66 feet wide by 96 feet long. Made of bamboo matting and corrugated steel sheets, it was completed by the New Year. It was named Sai Darbar, meaning "the court of Sai," in honor of Baba's master, Sai Baba of Shirdi. At the north end, a stage was constructed for performances. Just before His 32nd birthday was celebrated, Baba had Ajoba build a small wooden cabin upon the stage. From 9 a.m. until midnight on February 18th, 1926, Baba gave darshan there to an estimated 50,000 people who had come for the celebration. Never since have so many people been at Meherabad during one day. In March, Baba moved from the Table-House to the Sai Darbar cabin, and continued His work of writing the Book inside. In November 1926, Sai Darbar was demolished (except the paved platform and box cabin) along with the other temporary structures of that period.

In 1942, the stage platform was rebuilt and this site was again used for two important meetings during that period. The last time this site was used was September 30th, 1954 when Baba gave His final declaration here.

Hazrat Babajan School

From His first days at Meherabad, the local children were attracted to Meher Baba. He encouraged them to visit Him daily, usually in the shade of the neem tree near the road on the path to the Post Office. He would talk and sing songs with them and give them something good to eat. After Baba returned to Meherabad for the first long stay, the number of children coming every day increased. In response to the need of these mostly very poor children, Baba opened a free boarding school here on March 25th, 1925. It was named in honor of His first master, Hazrat Babajan. All children were welcome regardless of caste, creed, or religion, which was a radical idea at that time. At first, it was a simple structure of bamboo matting, but within a few months a larger building of corrugated steel sheets was constructed. This school for boys was expanded again the following year and had an enrollment of over 200. Classes for the smaller Hazrat Babajan Girls' School were held at the Post Office and at a few locations in Arangaon at different times. The schools provided free tuition, food, and clothing, and emphasized education, nutrition, cleanliness, discipline, and physical education. This building was also dismantled by November 1926, at the end of Baba's first long stay at Meherabad. Within a few months, the Hazrat Babajan High School was reopened in the Old Bungalow where the hospital had been.

Makan-e-Khas

Makan-e-Khas, meaning "House of the Chosen," was the name Baba gave to the men mandali's residence during the first long stay at Meherabad. The improved building of bamboo matting and a roof of corrugated steel sheets was completed on September 4th, 1925. With the doorway in the center of the front wall of the square 30-foot structure, bedding rolls were laid in rows on each side, with a seat for Baba in the middle.

On the night before beginning His silence (July 9th, 1925), Baba retired to the Jhopdi after giving final instructions to the mandali. In these detailed instructions, Baba had reminded the men always to carry lanterns at night since He would protect them from anything except snake bites! A few minutes after Baba went to the Jhopdi, Padri went out to relieve himself and encountered a cobra. He shouted, "Snake!" and the other men came with staffs to kill the snake. Baba came back from the Jhopdi to see what the disturbance was about, and was pleased that Padri had obeyed the order to carry a lantern. Padri handed Baba a staff and He crushed the head of the cobra. Baba then went to the Post Office where the women were staying. He told them that they were fortunate that the incident with the snake had taken place, because it gave them one more chance to hear Him speak. They did not know, as He did, that they would not hear Baba speak again.

This building was dismantled in November 1926, and another makan was built north of the Original Well, a few months later during the second long stay at Meherabad.

Post Office

This is the site of a stonewall structure that was built by the British for use as a Post Office for the army camp. From the very beginning, whenever Baba and the mandali stayed at Meherabad, from May 1923 to late 1924, they resided in this building. Then Baba's first women mandali stayed here until the end of 1926. The 18- by 30-foot building had three windows in the south wall and a single door in the north wall. The large verandah to the east and south was used for gatherings and sometimes for classes of both the boys' and girls' schools. At that time a large compound was created to the north, out of bamboo matting, to provide privacy. This compound contained toilets and a kitchen where the women would do their cooking for the colony, which often numbered in the hundreds then.

During the second long stay at Meherabad,^{iv} the Post Office was used as quarters for family groups, and later Baba kept His disciple Pleader here, fasting in seclusion for many months.

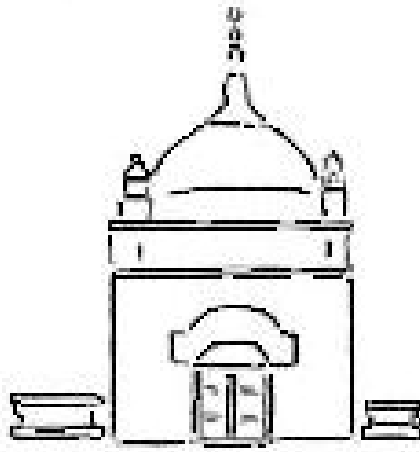
The Post Office was special and significant to Mehera. Here, on May 19th, 1923, she first bowed down to Baba and He told her family not to force her to marry. It was also here that Baba revealed to Mehera her role as His beloved.

It was in this location that Babajan and Meher Baba had their meeting of silent communion. When Babajan came to Meherabad on April 1st, 1928, she stood on the path near the Post Office and Baba came down the Hill and stood on the west side of the railroad tracks.

In 1933, the British government ordered the Post Office to be demolished. But at the same time, some new construction was commencing up on the Hill to accommodate the new women's ashram that Baba was planning to shift back to Meherabad from Nasik. Therefore, the Post Office building was partially demolished and the materials were used to build the foundations for the kitchen, a water tank, and later, Baba's cabin on the Hill. In 1938, the remainder of the Post Office building was demolished and the stones were used in the major reconstruction of the ashram up the Hill, specifically for the foundations of buildings and most notably for Baba's rebuilt Tomb-Shrine.

Family Quarters

From 1925, different families also became part of the Meherabad colony. During the long stays in the 1920s, the area south of the Post Office was the site of a few structures for family quarters of the same simple temporary style of that period. But what was usually referred to as the family quarters were a few structures in Arangaon located in the compound of what is now Meher Health Centre. These earthen-wall buildings were also used at different times for the Hazrat Babajan Boys' and Girls' Schools and for the beginning of Meher Ashram. But they were mostly used as residences for a number of mandali families throughout the years. The majority of the family quarters buildings were demolished in the 1970s so that the Meher Health Centre and new staff quarters could be constructed.



UPPER MEHERABAD ***“Meherabad Hill”***

*“The major portion of my universal work was done on this Hill.....
Meherabad will one day become the greatest place of pilgrimage on earth.”*
Meher Baba

AVATAR MEHER BABA’S TOMB-SHRINE (SAMADHI)

The most sacred place associated with Avatar Meher Baba is His Tomb-Shrine. Baba chose this site in May 1927 and had a small hut of bamboo matting and steel sheets built here. On June 30th, the new Meher Ashram for boys was transferred from the family quarters in Arangaon here to the Hill, and Baba spent that night in this new hut. Soon after, He ordered a pit to be dug on this spot. This pit was lined with stone masonry, and small steps were built leading down into the crypt, which was 80 inches long, 40 inches wide, and 70 inches deep. A platform was built extending from the east wall of the crypt so that Baba could greet visitors and gather with the schoolboys there. Another hut of wood and steel sheets was erected over the crypt, with a door to the south and a window opening to the east from which Baba would access the platform. In August 1927, this site became Baba’s “seat” at Meherabad. On November 10th He began a 5½ month period of seclusion and fasting. During this time a row of structures made of bamboo matting was constructed, extending to the north from the crypt room. This became the Sadak (seekers’) Ashram, and four men disciples fasted in seclusion inside these rooms for 2½ months beginning in December 1927. At the same time, Baba began to impart spiritual explanations to the boys, and many of them experienced great inner transformation through His personal contact. This was the beginning of the Prem Ashram. ^v

After the ashram group returned from Toka in 1929, the wooden walls of the crypt room were replaced with soft stone construction, and windows were

added to the north and west sides. Some beautiful photographs were taken of Baba and the ashram boys on this site during that period.

In 1938, the crypt was rebuilt into what is seen today with stones from the original Post Office building. Baba asked Naoroji Dadachanji to design the dome and to include the symbols of four world religions: the Zoroastrian flame, the Hindu temple, the Christian cross, and the Islamic mosque. Later that year, Baba asked the Swiss artist Helen Dahm, who was staying in the ashram, to paint murals on the interior surfaces. The platform to the east was rebuilt and five meditation cells were added to commemorate the Sadak Ashram.

The Italian Carrara marble slab over Baba's tomb was chosen and given by Rano Gayley and installed by Padri in late 1971. In the early 1970s Mehera asked Charles Morton to create a stained-glass work for the north window from a photograph of her choice. Since the medium required extensive work, Charlie thought it would be a good idea to make a painting of it first for approval by those supervising the work (Mehera, Mani, and Rano). In 1991, by Mani's decision, the painting itself was installed. The exterior colors of the Samadhi were chosen by Mani, and a complete restoration of the original building was done from 1990 to 1992.

During sahasras programs at Meherabad in the 1950s, Meher Baba impressed upon people how fortunate they were to bow down at His future tomb in His physical presence. In November 1955 He stated: "Sixty years after my body drops, people in the thousands will come here and will collect even the very dust of this Meherabad because I have trod on it."

In February 1958 He declared: "After I drop My body, the physical remains will rest here, and this Hill will become an important place of pilgrimage for the whole world. You all do not realize the importance of this day. After seventy years this place will be a place of great privilege and pilgrimage. A big town will grow up here. How fortunate you are that you are hearing about the importance of this place in the physical presence of Him to whose Samadhi will flock one day, from all over the world, all the lovers of God, philosophers and worshippers to pay their homage!"

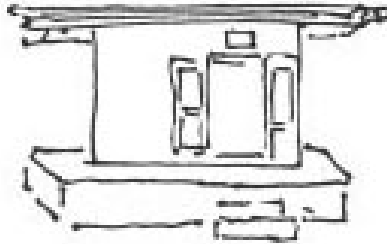
On January 31st, 1969, Avatar Meher Baba dropped His body at Meherabad, and His body was brought here to be buried. As the coffin and tomb were being prepared, Baba's body was kept inside His cabin on the stretcher that is still there. His body was then placed on the lid of the coffin and lowered into the crypt. It was kept surrounded by flowers and blocks of ice, and in keeping with hints previously given by him, Baba's body was uninterred for seven days so that His lovers from around the world might have one last chance to see His physical form. There was no sign of decomposition when the box of the coffin was placed over His body and buried on February 7th.

Women Mandali's Graves

The cemetery for many of Baba's close women disciples was established on the Hill. Beginning with Nonny Gayley's death in 1939, their graves were placed in the rows farther to the west, usually containing cremation ashes. The monument to Baba's parents contains some of their personal items; their bodies were interred in the tower of silence in Pune. The last time Baba ever

visited Meherabad was for the burial of Gulmai, His spiritual mother, on August 11th, 1962. The graves of some of Baba's pet dogs and His peacock are beneath the banyan tree.

When Baba established His Trust in 1959, He specified the order of the graves of the women mandali to each side of His tomb. In 1971 the platform and meditation cells to the east were demolished to make that area ready. In honor of Mehera's special status as Baba's dearest disciple, the other women there opted for cremation, leaving only her body to be buried as Baba's was.



Baba's Cabin

During another period of seclusion work in 1935, Baba asked Padri to build a cabin for Him on the Hill. It had to be easily accessible to both the women's ashram and the men mandali; the women's ashram was strictly sequestered from the outside world. So Baba chose this site east of the crypt platform just outside the ashram compound gate. Baba wanted something that would stand up to the severe weather and be insect-proof, so He gave Padri permission to take his time and build a solid stone structure. However, Baba was anxious to begin His seclusion work there and repeatedly shortened the time for completion. By the time the foundation was being completed (with stones salvaged from the Post Office), Baba said that the cabin should be ready in one week. So Padri and others worked intensively and constructed the cabin using teak wood with sheet metal siding. On the evening of July 15th, 1935, Baba went into seclusion in the cabin.

While Baba was in seclusion, one of the women mandali, Valu, would bring Baba food and tea that had been prepared by Mehera. It was strictly forbidden to look inside any place Baba was doing His seclusion work. However, one day Valu brought Baba's tray of food at the appointed time and found the cabin door closed. Believing that the wind had blown the door shut, Valu pushed it open and saw Baba inside, engrossed in His inner work. As Baba looked up, His powerful gaze overwhelmed Valu and her eyes became painfully bloodshot, and she was blinded for three days. This incident is an example of the power of Meher Baba's seclusion work.

From the time it was completed, this cabin became Baba's personal quarters whenever He stayed on the Hill. It was here that He last spent a night at Meherabad, on December 31st, 1947, after celebrating Mehera's 41st birthday.



Hospital Building with Cage Room

This building was also built during the major reconstruction of 1938, near the site of the Meher Ashram dormitory of 1927–28. The foundation contains stones salvaged from the original Post Office building. For the first year it was used as a maternity hospital for local village women, with Nadine Tolstoy serving as matron. Many babies were born here, and Baba would come each day and cradle the newborns. During 1939, the room adjacent to the Cage Room was used by Elizabeth Patterson and Norina Matchabelli to publish the *Meher Baba Journal*. In April 1940, the Bangalore mast ashram was disbanded and some of the masts were brought here. An enclosure of bamboo was added, and this became the main area for the mast ashram at Upper Meherabad. As in the Bangalore ashram, Baba even provided a chai and a beedi shop for them. As World War II became more serious, from June 1st Baba began doing seclusion work here with the masts, most notably the mild-mannered Chatti Baba from South India. During July 1940, Baba had Pendu build the Cage Room to accommodate the “Tiger Mast,” Karim Baba from Calcutta. Besides Krishna and Vishnu, who had duties to serve Baba during His seclusion work here, only Mehera and Mani were allowed to greet Him occasionally at the south window of the Cage Room. An opening in that window can still be found that allowed messages and mail to be passed in.

When Baba was in seclusion here, Krishna Nair served as His personal attendant, spending most of his time on watch outside the gate. Above the gate there is a bell that was used to signal permission to enter — by Baba from the inside or by the attendant outside. Baba would hide Himself in the room before Krishna entered for any particular duty. One day Krishna heard the bell ring, but Baba had not rung it. When Krishna entered the compound, he “beheld Baba emitting the light of a 100 suns.” Krishna began to lose consciousness when Baba quickly grabbed his left bicep and forcefully tore the muscle, causing severe pain. The physical shock saved Krishna’s life, and the scar he bore for the rest of his life served as a reminder of this incident and the power of Meher Baba’s seclusion work.

During September 1940, the toilets and bathroom addition were constructed, and the compound of bamboo matting was replaced with the corrugated steel sheets that are still there. The mad ashram was also moved here for a short time before it was disbanded. In preparation for another special seclusion beginning August 1st, 1941, Padri cut the small opening in the cage room so that Baba could communicate with His attendant.

After this period the building was used as mandali quarters. Kaikobad Dastur’s wife and daughters lived here from the beginning of the New Life. After Baba dropped the body, Kaikobad lived the last seven years of his life here.



Meher Retreat

The lower story of this building was originally a water tank for the British army camp. Meher Baba stayed here periodically during the 1920s and secluded Himself in the west tank room during 1926, writing part of the Book. At that time there were no doors, so Baba, who was very agile, would climb up rungs on the side of the building and climb down a ladder into one of the two large tank rooms. Mehera and the other women would look up from the Post Office compound as Baba waved from the top before going down into the east tank room.

In mid-June of 1927, Baba had doorways made into these rooms for easier access. The growing Meher Ashram was then shifted from the family quarters in Arangaon to Upper Meherabad. Like the Hazrat Babajan School, the Meher Ashram was also a free boarding school for boys, but with greater emphasis on spiritual training. The Meher Ashram boys slept in the two tank rooms. The West Room was also used as an assembly hall during the day. During that time the South Room was used as the office and quarters of the Meher Ashram superintendent, Buasaheb. ^v

In June 1930, Baba and some of the mandali fasted in seclusion in all three rooms of this building.

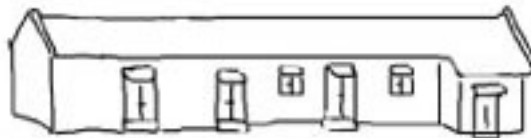
In November 1933, the East Room became home to Baba's close Eastern women mandali. Mehera, Mani, Khorshed, Naja, Soonamasi, and Valu were strictly sequestered, and lived a life of obedience, purity, and poverty. They would pass through a corridor of bamboo matting to the kitchen each day to do their work. There was also a corridor leading from the West Room to the main kitchen door. These barricades of bamboo matting created a compound in which the women were free to move and exercise. In addition to her standing order from Baba never to be touched by a man, during this time Mehera was not allowed to hear the sound of a man's voice or even hear a man's name. So if a workman had to be on the Hill, Mani would sometimes play the sitar for hours in order to drown out his voice.

In 1938 the upper story of Meher Retreat was built as extra living quarters primarily for Baba's Western women disciples who were joining the ashram. Pendu and the crew worked rigorously for many weeks to finish the job by Baba's deadline of August 25th, 1938. Baba was so pleased with their efforts to complete the construction on the Hill within this short period that He garlanded and praised Pendu, Kalemama, and Naoroji. Pendu kept His garland for many years as a symbol of the one time when he felt he was able to please Baba.

The tower atop the building was added at that time as a distinctive feature that could be seen at a distance. The room in the tower was meant as a place for Baba to do seclusion work, but the location proved to be too windy, so He only used it for one day.

Baba's Eastern and Western women disciples stayed in various groups arranged by Him in this building. Most of Baba's meetings with His women mandali preceding the New Life took place in the East Room, after which the ashram was disbanded for the most part, with only Mansari and the Kaikobad family remaining on the Hill.

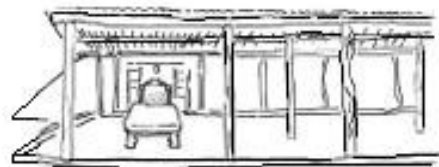
Later, the upper story and the West Room were used during the 1954 sahasvas program for the Western men, which came to be known as "three incredible weeks." The West Room is now a museum and the South Room has become a library. The upper story is now known as the Study Hall.



Kitchen

Most of this building was constructed in 1933, using some of the stones from the Post Office for its foundation, on the approximate site of the Meher Ashram dining hall. The largest room was used for some years as the main kitchen for the women's ashram. Before His cabin was constructed in 1935, Baba would rest in the small room west of the kitchen. After 1935, that room became the bathing room for the women mandali. The bathing rooms for Baba and Mehera on the east end were added during the construction phase of 1938. From that time, Baba's meals, which were prepared by Mehera, were served to Him in the small room east of the main kitchen.

From 1950 until she died in 1997, Mansari used the three original rooms as her living quarters and storeroom. The caretaker's room on the west side of the building and the small room on the southeast end were added in the early 1970s.



Tin Shed and Women's Compound

Before 1938, Baba would play badminton with the Eastern women in the private compound where the tin shed now stands. The shed was erected during the reconstruction phase of 1938 when the women's ashram was expanded. It served primarily as the dining area for the women. The grinding stone under the shed was used to grind grain during the ashram days. During the days, Baba would sometimes play Ping-Pong with them here. In the

evenings, Baba would often spend time with His women mandali while relaxing here on the simple chaise known as His *gaadi* (“throne”)

The current stone wall around the compound was erected in the mid-1980s, but part of the original wall built in 1938 can still be found at the north side. A fence was placed on top of the original wall around the compound with five rows of barbed wire. During World War II Baba would occasionally order another strand of barbed wire to be added until there were eight rows. In the southwest corner of the compound during the ashram days, there was a menagerie with a number of different types of animals and birds. In the northwest corner there was a garage that first housed Elizabeth’s car and later was used for horses and a pony. Just outside the north wall was a chicken coop and a large paddock where Mehera would ride.

Watch Cabin and Path

The small structure south of the main compound was built in 1938 to replace a separate small watch cabin and water tank platform that were constructed in 1933. For many years Soonamasi kept watch during the day from inside these cabins. Since there were no trees on the path in those days, she could see Baba as He crossed over the railroad tracks from Lower Meherabad. She would then walk down to meet Him. It was her duty and pleasure to escort Baba up and down the Hill. At night, a watchman would be on duty here.

On special occasions in 1927 and 1928, the Meher Ashram boys enjoyed pulling Baba up and down the Hill path seated in a hand-drawn rickshaw, which is now kept in the Museum. Whenever Baba’s birthday was celebrated at Meherabad He would ascend the Hill, usually accompanied by crowds of His lovers and a loud ceremonial band. During meetings and sahas programs, Baba would lead groups of His disciples walking up and down this path.

In order to provide Baba some shade in His walks up and down the Hill, Valu planted the banyan and neem trees along the path later in 1938. She would carry the ashram’s waste water by hand to nourish the saplings. The smaller trees were propagated by Mehera in the 1970s to be planted along the path to provide shade for Baba’s lovers walking up the Hill for darshan.

Panchvati Cave

In 1930, Baba asked His mandali to dig a cave on the east side of Meherabad Hill. He named it Panchvati Cave^{vi} and went into seclusion there on November 15th, 1930. However, during that time Baba allowed the British journalist Paul Brunton to interview Him here. But when Baba gave predictions of future cataclysms and encouraged Brunton to spread His name in the West, claiming He was the true Messiah of the age, Brunton was taken aback. He was dismissive about Meher Baba in his book *A Search in Secret India*. This served the purpose of discouraging many casual curiosity seekers from contacting Baba throughout the rest of his life, though some sincere seekers first heard the name of Meher Baba through Brunton’s writing.



"In the future Meherabad will be like Jerusalem. For my spiritual work it is the best place. It will always be the center of my work." ~ Meher Baba, 31 January 1930



Endnotes

ⁱ First long stay at Meherabad: Jan. 25, 1925 to Nov. 25, 1926.

ⁱⁱ *Lord Meher* states Masaji's death date as December 19th; the gravestone states December 18th. Hopefully, this will be resolved definitively in the future.

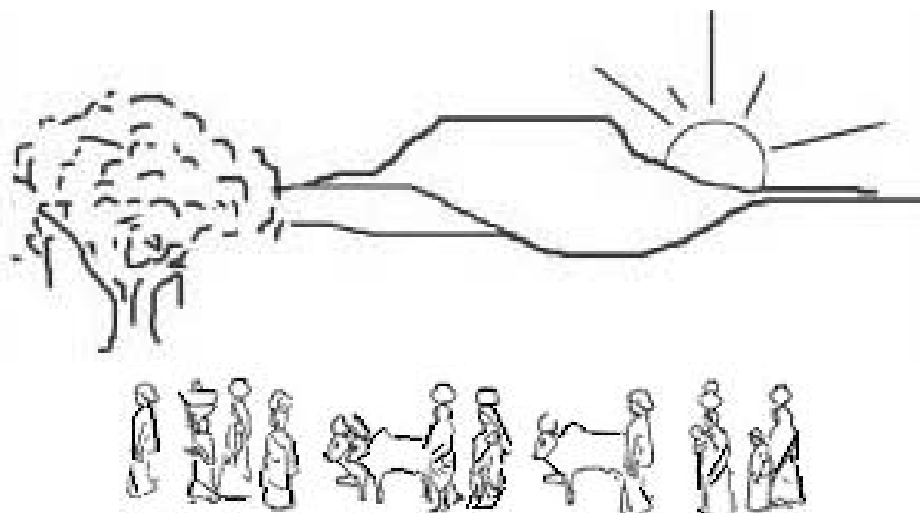
ⁱⁱⁱ Mehera was born on January 7, 1907, but this birth anniversary changed according to the Parsi calendar. In the later years Baba finally set December 22nd as the date for celebrating Mehera's birthday.

^{iv} Second long stay Meherabad: Dec. 25th, 1926 to June 3rd, 1928.

^v When Baba first came to Meherabad, He started interacting with the children who came wandering by, encouraging them. Then, as that crowd of children increased, Hazrat Babajan School was started. Later, during the second long stay at Meherabad, Meher Ashram was started, which was a school that incorporated spiritual teaching as well. Out of Meher Ashram a number of these boys were spiritually reconnected and advanced through Baba's direct contact and help, which came to be known as the Prem Ashram.

^{vi} Panchvati was an area in Nasik where Lord Ram stayed during his exile.

SOURCES: Tour information was cross-referenced with *Lord Meher* and *Let's Go to Meherabad* (authored by Bhau Kalchuri), and *The Combined Diaries, Chanji's Diaries*, and other sources from the Avatar Meher Baba Perpetual Public Charitable Trust.



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