
BABA'S FAVOURITE SINGERS

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MANI: And then when He would sit there and gesture. At one point I remember Begum Akhtar, you know she was a favourite in the whole of India. I mean a famous singer. The Qawwali. She was a queen of Thumri and Ghazals and all that. And Baba always liked her singing. Baba said, "Just as in English singing Jim Reeves' voice touches my heart, so in Indian singing, Begum Akhtar's voice touches my heart." So, can you imagine our joy when she loved Baba and she came to entertain Baba with her singing. She has been in Meherazad. She has been in Guruprasad. In Guruprasad Baba gave her a ring with His picture. Like He has given; He has given to others also. So, Baba gave her. She put it on and when at one time Begum Akhtar was sitting on one side of Him and she wanted a picture with Baba and Maharani Shanta Devi of Baroda - Guruprasad belonged to her. She offered it to Baba to use whenever He liked. In fact she wouldn't even let her family come as guests anytime of the year because she says, "I never know when Baba might want to come." This is now only for Him to come.

But one side of Baba sat Begum Akhtar and one side Maharani Shanta Devi. And just as the picture was being clicked. Because Baba said, "Alright take the picture. They want that [inaudible]" And at that time Begum Akhtar put out her hands and caught hold of Baba's feet. I have the picture. Now because she wanted that. She wanted the world to know I, I. And the Mohammedan, she's a Muslim. She was a Muslim and Mohammedans don't touch feet of a Master. Even when they're paying obeisance to their Saints, their Masters. It's always the kissing of the hands. But she had done it.

So, anyway when she was in Meherazad she had lunch with us and she was seated here, right here and Baba's on the chair there. And we were here. Because we couldn't be with the men so we were seated here and the curtain was closed but just enough so that Mehera could have a peek and see Baba on the chair. We could peek up you know we were; we women could just see Baba there. And Begum Akhtar was singing. And so, she said, "Baba I want to sing a song to you which I have composed myself for you." So Baba said, "Sing." So, she sang the song. As she was singing to Baba tears were running down her cheeks. And Baba would praise. And to just be. To share that moment was so precious. And at any time when there was a programme like that; to share moments like that with Baba giving up Himself to a gathering was very beautiful. So, Baba used to have a box of kerchiefs on that little table there. And how often He's given kerchiefs. So He took one kerchief and said to Eruch, "You give it to her. To wipe her tears."

So then Begum Akhtar took the kerchief, she wiped and Baba said, "Keep it." She said, "I will always keep it." So, to see her come here and sing for Baba was such a joy. And Jim Reeves, of course we've played many, many. All of his records that we could to Baba. And Baba loved it. Ah, but one thing I forgot. I've been talking too much now. But when Begum Akhtar was singing, that's what I wanted to say about the gesture. That when she was singing then she sang one Ghazal in which the lover often complains to the Beloved you know. Complains about the Beloved's indifference you know. And so then after all, in one it said, "You are the Beloved undoubtedly but then don't forget I'm a lover. And if there were no lovers, where would you be?" [pilgrims laughing] I think that's enough.

Something like that you know. Anyway the one that Begum Akhtar was singing was: "Now I am alone." No. "Who would listen to my woes of my heart of separation? Who will see to my, who will listen to me, who will do this for me and who?" You know it's in the fire of separation from the Beloved all this, who will do this and that. And each time when she would say, "Who?" Baba would say, "I. I will listen. I will see to it. I will do this." It was beautiful. And [inaudible n'er?] I have to forget that.