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## Baba and Birds

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**Mani S. Irani**

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18:35

**MANI:** But He had these beautiful big pockets on His coats. Which were always tucked with the letters or certain notes with some figure Baba will pull out Himself, piece of paper I mean. And He'd pat it and put it in this pocket and then bring it out and put it in this pocket. But then, quite a number of times, He pulled out from His pocket, a surprise that would be a bird, a bird that has fallen from the nest, a bird that was just lying there and He would bring it to us to look after it. Or an injured bird or a baby bird.

So when we were in Agra with Baba, which is near Delhi, long time ago, doing our Blue Bus tour. [clock chimes in the background]. I remember that there was a hoopoe. You know a hoopoe? It's a very regal-looking bird with a striped robe trailing behind it and a crown on its head. It's used in the Conference of the Birds.

And this was an injured hoopoe. Probably some boy had used a catapult and injured its leg or something. So it had fallen. So we brought it in. And usually whenever we found a, whenever we also found a bird that was injured or fallen into one of the water tanks. It used to be times, young bird just learning to fly that would help them to come from the nest, we would first take them to Baba. So that His touch and it would nestle in Baba's hand and the love that, it was almost like a communication between the bird and Baba. He would sort of nod His head sort of to say, "what is it?", watch it and kiss it and all and then we would treat it.

This bird in Agra, this hoopoe, all it seemed was that something was really wrong with its leg. So we put a splint of a matchstick and tied it up so that it would, and then, everyday Baba would, when He would come from the men's side, for lunch or for being there, He would say,

"How's the bird?"

"This is the bird."

"Look at the wings."

"How's the bird?"

And all we would say, "It's much better Baba."

And Baba always loved feeding, over-feeding his pets. You see, so we would bring, one day [dog barking] we knew that the bird was well enough, now we would give Baba a surprise.

Baba was sitting on his old bed, it must have been in the dak bungalow. And we brought this bird and we tested it, it could walk now. We put it there and Baba was here, so that it could walk as it had been doing a few days in practice. Walk like that in front of Baba. Parade. To show Baba how well I am.

And sure enough, while we were all smiling and looking at the bird, walked, hopped, hopped and then instead of going like this as it had, it turned course and came directly towards Baba, towards His feet and dropped dead at His feet.

We couldn't believe it, we couldn't imagine it. It was, it seemed all right and Baba said, "Oh, you all have no idea how fortunate this bird is, to drop dead at my feet like that. That how

many lives they jump, leap over until they're [inaudible]."

But as I was saying, He would love feeding and over-feeding the birds and all. So what would happen is, when we would feed the birds, whatever bird was at that time, as soon as Baba came in, they somehow knew. So they would get all cowl, aaiinn, look like, act, put on an act, believe me, as if they have been starving, they never had anything.

And Baba would look at us and sort of say, "What are you doing? Why look at this poor, poor bird?" And we couldn't help protesting, "But Baba, we just fed it, it ate a lot".

And Baba said, "How could you? If you had done so, would this poor bird do like this?"

Anyway, one day Baba brought three little birds. From He picked these up. And they were the ugliest little things that I've ever seen. Because they looked like just lumps of flesh. And the quills that were coming out was like the stubble on an unshaven chin. And it was a parrot. You know little baby parrots. Just fleshy and that big red nose with all that it could see. They couldn't keep their head up as if the nose was too big for it to lift its head up.

And we saw these little things and Baba said, "Look after them," said Baba. Oh my goodness, so we would feed it with gram flour which we knew that is the thing you make pills out of it with ghee in it and we did whatever we could.

But they would, moment Baba came they would go "quaain quaain". In a few days, their little tail had come up, a few feathers on the tail had come up, you see. And Baba again said, "Look at this, look at that, I see them quaain." Opening their beaks like

handbags. You know, they had a tremendous mouth. Anything could have gone through.

And we said, this was in Meherabad, when we were in the East Room, we were just very few women there at that time, four or five. We were very close to [inaudible].

So here we were looking after this. And you know the rooms. You know the two rooms. The East Room and the Museum Room. How looong it is. But it was all, it was not cluttered up. Now we've been using, mostly using it for storing things rather. It was all very open and just our little things around.

So, Baba would say, "Bring them over, you haven't fed them." So Baba would, Mehera would put the sheet on Baba's lap and the birds would be put there and Baba would feed and feed and feed.

Now, for their "quaain, quaain" because they were telling you that they are hungry. Now they were doing "quaain, quaain" because their stomach ache from eating. [pilgrims laugh] So Baba said, "What to do now? Give them a walk."

So here was the most ridiculous scene you can imagine [pilgrims laughing]. Three of us standing, in a row like that. And the three little, those ugly little things in front of each of us, one, one and one. Each in charge of one. And we are bending down and encouraging it with the push of the finger, "ah, come on, cha". And the bird would go, one, two, three, "quaain".

That bird is coming out and that, sitting on the long table and that red nose. I tell you, that was the most ridiculous thing you would have ever seen.

And “come on, come on, come on.” “quaain, quaain, qua quaaaain!”

In the end of the row, time to turn them back, they haven’t had enough walk. There the three of us, come on, come on come on and those birds.

Anyways, this is how they grew. And when they really, fully grew, they were the most beautiful birds you can ever imagine. They were sweet and elegant with a red band round their neck. And like you see in a Persian painting, where the princess is holding a bird on her finger, like that. And so elegant, so chic. I mean, we’ve never seen, even amongst parrots, such beautiful birds.

But then Baba and we go out of the room to give them their freedom. Baba wants them to be free now, now they have grown up, they can go.

So, there, Baba holding the birds on a finger, we go out. And Baba did this and they flew and they sat on the bamboo matting passage that used to be there in front of our room. But instead of going like this, they turned around, three of them sat facing Baba and I could swear they were just looking at Baba and they sat quiet.

And we all looked, and said, “Fine, they are not flying away. They like to be captives because they’ve been so long, what is it?” They just poised there, looking at Baba and then Baba just did [finger snapping]

**PILGRIM #1:** Hmm.

**MANI:** And as if it was a signal, [dog barking] the three of them rose together and flew away. It was the most lovely sight and they just streaked away, all three together and was one

direction till we just saw them as green specs and they were gone.

**PILGRIM #1:** Hmm.

**MANI:** And then there was the Nepali mynah, the mynah bird. The ordinary mynah bird you must have seen, but the mynah from Nepal are different.

They are something like the size of a crow, but they are beautiful. They are black, they’re black velvet almost shines in blue or black in the sunshine. They have a yellow beak and they have yellow flaps on the ear, as it were, you know, where its ears would be, yellow flaps. And they talk very easily.

And, so one day Adi’s brother Rustom had gotten this mynah, there again, this was before the Westerners came to Nasik and Meherabad. We knew they were going to be coming in a few months, all this was going to happen we were told.

So this bird was brought by Rustom and given to Baba. A talking Nepali mynah. And he had brought it from some old hakim, a herbalist, somewhere in Bombay or something, who spoke a different language from any we know. But, the bird had picked up the wheezing cough of the old herbalist, you see.

And we were told, Baba brought us a surprise. “Look, look, look, Mehera, look Mani, look at you. See this bird, it talks. Take great care of it.”

It had a very beautiful cage, you know that it wooden, and it didn’t feel like it had been like that in it for all these years. So we, this was the first time.

Now that time, my mother happened to come. Baba’s mother happened to come for a

visit and she must have heard that bird's voice, and it would cough that asthmatic cough. [sound of coughing, pilgrims laughing].

And mother said to Baba this morning, she said, "Merog, how do you look after your people? [pilgrims laughing] Somebody has such a terrible cough and asthma, you don't anything about it?"

And Baba said, "Cough? Congestion?"

"Somebody has bad chills. I couldn't believe what I heard."

And then, when she realises, we realise what mother had heard was the bird, it was the bird we were talking about. It was such a great time.

So then, as it was, it picked up, you see that mynah, Nepali mynah, not only can talk like any other, some other birds can talk. It imitates the human voice nearest to anything that I've ever heard. I'm not talking human voice, it will imitate, say, Alan's voice, it will imitate Glen's voice. Each person's differently.

So, but Mehera was determined to teach it. Teach the bird to say, "Baba". So we were told that you have to cover the cage in the night and early morning, open the cover a little bit, put your lips close to it and then say whatever you want the bird to say.

So every morning, there was Mehera saying, "Baaa Baaa". You know, trying to enunciate two words for it to understand. "Baba daaarling, Baba daaarling"

And of course some of us would come around and say, "Oh, that's the bird. Hello mynah, Jai Baba. Baba darling, Baba darling."

And Naja would say, "Baba darlinggg, Baba darlinggg."

And, Valu who was with us, she would say, she couldn't say in English. And she never could get the whole word. She would say, "Baba daa" and she couldn't remember what the rest of the word was [pilgrims laughing]. So her greeting was usually, "Baba daa".

Anyway, the Mehera was teaching the bird to say "Baba darling". At that time, we used to have a game of badminton with Baba. You see how beautifully Baba would do. We were solely occupied in doing whatever Baba had told us. Everything was Baba. Anything. Even the household duty was remembering Baba. This he had told us to do. This was to be done in time. And He also kept our minds occupied in innocent games, innocent fun. So He would play badminton with us in the garden. Only Baba could do that in that Masterly way, never have you seen anything like that.

So once we were playing badminton with Baba in the area where now is the Tin Shed. Outside, outside, up the Hill, outside the museum in the East Room, you know? That where the pillars are and the tin covering is. Which we now know as the Tin Shed. That wasn't there. That came later, after the Westerners came.

[inaudible] background and we were playing badminton. Now you see that the rooms don't have windows, they are only that little transom up there.

So suddenly while we were playing badminton, suddenly we heard someone calling, "Baba". And we stopped in mid-air because nobody was allowed to come up there.

How did any one get up the Hill enough to say "Baba". And our racquets just stopped like this, and suddenly we realised it was the bird we dropped our racquets and Baba and we all rushed to the room. With the bird talking, the bird said, "Baba, Baba darling, Baba darling."

Oh, this was great and Mehera did she like, how will Baba's Western, first Westerners come and how we should show them the bird.

But what happened one day and Baba would always ask after her and was she well. We were all taking such care of her.

And one day in the mornings, you see, we have so many orders, like we went from this room to go to the kitchen and back to the room. That's all. The kitchen is women's side now. That's it, ok. So we go to the kitchen and such and such a time, we came back. And we didn't go anywhere else.

So, we'd gone to the kitchen but because the bird would be still in the room, we had innovated contraction by which, with a pulley by which we could pull the bird's cage up [pilgrim laughs] so it could be nearer the transom, could see the leaves and could get fresh air.

We didn't have an upstairs then to the retreat on Meherabad Hill. It had a gable route like this, there were beams in between. So that's how we had left it.

We were in the kitchen when a terrific storm came. And we had, all we could do was to close the doors to the kitchen and the windows and the storm just lashed the place.

And we didn't at the time even remember that the bird was, it's a very delicate bird. Soon we realised that the bird will be catching a chill

with this cold wind blowing. We rushed in to pull it out but it was too late. It had a cold and its voice got hoarse just like a human voice would get, you know? As if it had a human capacity for talking.

So, what the bird would do, I think I forgot to tell you, now having learnt to talk, when, say, when I would approach her, she would say, "Baba, Baba darling." And when Naja would approach her, it would say, "Baba, Baba darlinggg". And then when Valu would approach her, it would say, "Baba da, Baba da".

You know, in each one's voice, almost. And those yellow flaps she had over the years, when I would play the sitar, she would pop on her perch from this side to this side, and every now and then toss her head, you know, like dancing or like a woman would do. Hop, hop, hop, dance. Hop, hop, hop, dance. As long as the music lasted.

Anyways, when we came and we put the cage down, again, and we found that she was ill and she had, not only a cold, she developed sort of bronchitis. What is a bird's bronchitis?

**PILGRIM #2:** [inaudible]

**MANI:** So we put this, warm, we put in, put her in warm flannels and anti-phlogiston on warm flannels and that against her and we gave her some heating and medicines.

We did everything, but that bird would not then survive. So, she could not sit on her perch anymore. So at the bottom of the cage. She was a shy bird. In the evening, we would roll a paper, like a roll of paper in her cage, she would go in and that's where she would sleep.

On the flannel she was lying and her voice was hoarse and she couldn't sit, she was sitting down on the flannel but she couldn't sit on the perch any more. She was there at the bottom of the cage. And she could now almost go on her side, but still, alright. So we were all gathered around her and we were just looking and her eyes were closed.

And the, Baba was I think down the Hill or gone out or so too, I don't remember but, in the meantime we all left our work to come and be with her as much as we could.

And Valu was washing Baba's clothes, so she washed her hands and everything and she came. Soon as she came, there was some new person has come, you see, among us, so the bird opens her eyes, she knows whose come. She sees Valu, and she says, "Baba". And died. There's a bird who said Baba in the last breath. [Mani laughs] Oh we had the, and Baba again said, "You have no idea, you cannot imagine the good fortune of this bird."

But we had mongoose too. Two mongoose. And they really put [inaudible] on their chest, when they were ill, so they were on their back. All the human things Baba would do. If the bird was [inaudible], Baba would say give her a laxative and we did, it worked.