



Sathyam Sivam Sundaram

Volume 1

**Life Story Of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba
1926-1961**

By

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Prasanthi Nilayam - 515 134

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www.saireflections.org

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First Edition: 16th April, 2014 (16/04/2014)

ISBN: 978-93-5069-170-0

Paperback ISBN: 978-81-7208-721-0

Published By

The Convener,

Sri Sathya Sai Sadhana Trust, Publications Division

Prasanthi Nilayam, India, Pin Code – 515134

STD : 08555 ISD: 91-8555 Phone: 287375 Fax: 287236

Distributed By Smashwords

www.smashwords.com



Publisher's Note

“Baba is Himself an open book, with no mystery or pomp or abstruseness about Him and every one can approach Him and secure His grace,” says Prof. N. Kasturi, author of this series, Sathyam Sivam Sundaram. In this series, which is divided into four parts, the author brings out the life history of the Divine Avatar from His birth in 1926 to 1979. Prof. Kasturi, who had the extreme fortune of being close to Baba, shares His *mahimas* and *leelas* with the readers. The first Part of this book was placed in the hands of the readers in 1961.

The need for the revised and enlarged edition was felt by the publisher for more comfortable reading, especially by the elderly readers. As a result, these Volumes are brought out in larger format, with computerised typesetting, using larger typeface, better line spacing, and with a number of photographs.

With these changes, it is hoped that all spiritual seekers will benefit and enjoy reading these series.

Convener,

Sri Sathya Sai Books & Publications Trust,

Prasanthi Nilayam,

June, 2001

This Book

I WAS born in an obscure village in North Travancore, when the nineteenth century had still two years and a few days to run. I had my schooling in the Cochin State, under a great Headmaster, who had met Swami Vivekananda and who lit in our little lamps the flame of prayer and contrition. I attended College at Trivandrum and after finishing my M.A. and B.L., I secured a job as Lecturer in History, in a College in Mysore.

The country boat, in which I and my wife and my mother journeyed along the canals and backwaters of the West Coast, on the first hop of the journey to catch the train at Ernakulam, was halted past midnight in the middle of a dark blue backwater by a Chowkidar, who shouted his orders from the shore. He called out from the black night, "Where are you going?" and waited for the answer! My boatman had a fine sense of humour. He shouted back, "We are going to Mysore!" The Chowkidar was in no mood to reprimand him for impertinence, for he, too, did not lack in humour. He laughed and said, "Why do you say Mysore? Don't you know of a place beyond Mysore?"

Little did we know then, that there was a place beyond even Mysore; a couple of hundred miles to the north of that city, a place called Puttaparthi, which was to provide us harbourage from the turbulent storms of the sea, where I was to get the Teacher I wanted, when my career as a University Teacher and Principal was about to come to a close. Yogi Sudhananda Bharathi, the famous mystic poet of Tamil Nadu, said in April, 1959, addressing an Adhyatmic Conference at Venkatagiri Town, over which Sri Sathya Sai Baba presided, "I have practised Yoga for over 50 years; I once observed the vow of silence continuously, for over 20 years; I have come in contact with Sri Shirdi Baba, Sri Ramana Maharishi, Sri Aurobindo, Sri Mehar Baba, and others; now, as a result of all this Sadhana, I have met Sri Sathya Sai Baba."... I served as the Secretary of the Sri Ramakrishna Mission at Mysore, for over seventeen years; I came in contact with Sri Siddarooda Swami, Sri Ramana Maharishi, Sri Mehar Baba, and Sri Narayana Guru; I was initiated into japam by mahapurushji, the direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and President of the Mission; and I am now convinced that as a result of all this, I sat at the Feet of Sri Sathya Sai Baba, in 1948.

After I retired from the service of the University of Mysore, I have rejoiced in Baba's Presence, except for a short period, when I worked with All India Radio as a Producer. I have had the good fortune of mingling with many devotees of Baba, who have longer and closer associations with Him; I have availed myself of every opportunity of witnessing His Mahima

(glory) and listening to His discourses.

This book has long been under preparation and I am happy that it is now placed in your hands. Baba always speaks of personal experience, not books, as the best way of knowing Him and this has been, in the main, responsible for the delay. But, however inadequate, this book might be useful in revealing to the reader the reasons for the extraordinarily intimate loyalty that binds me and others to Him. Baba is Himself an Open Book, with no mystery, or pomp, or abstruseness about Him and everyone can approach Him and secure His Grace.

Devotees of Baba might brush aside this book as superfluous, because they know most of it already and much more besides. Moreover, they might blame me for the rather cold tone of narration, which is inevitable when Baba is described in print. They might also notice that I have committed many understatements and omitted many mahimas, which, in their opinion, are more significant than the ones I have selected. I most humbly crave their indulgence.

Those, who are unaware of Baba, might, on the other hand, condemn me as a crank or even worse. I have very great sympathy for such, for I, too, demurred, doubted, and disbelieved, with all the sarcasm and satire found in the Kannada novels, dramas, and essays, which I wrote and published. For many years, I, too, in my stupid pride, did not make any effort to meet Him. I invite everyone, now, to come and share with me His Grace and karuna and stand witness, like me, to the Divine Power that He personifies. May this book be a signpost for all humanity to the New Life, merged in SATHYAM-SIVAM-SUNDARAM!

N. Kasturi

Birthday

23-11-1961



He, who understands the significance of My Divine Birth and My Divine deeds, will overcome the cycle of Births and Deaths and attain Me.

Gita iv-9

He is the sub-stratum, the substance; the separate and the sum—the Sat; the SATHYAM.

He is the awareness, the activity, the consciousness, the feeling; the willing and the doing—the Chit; the SHIVAM.

He is the light, the splendour; the harmony, the melody, the Ananda, the SUNDARAM.

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1.

In Human Form

The Lord in Vaikuntha heard the prayer of the mother; He decided on the place where He had to take a human form. He came!

THIS is the story of the Lord, come in human form. He incarnated at a quiet little village, Puttaparthi by name, thirty five years ago. Puttaparthi is a hamlet that has carved out a niche for itself in the hearts of the people of the area, by legends that sanctify the memory and a history that inspires the young. The name is derived from Putta, which means an ant-hill in which a snake has taken up its abode and 'Parthi', which is a modified form of *Vardhini* or multiplier. A thrilling legend endeavours to explain the origin of this place-name to the curious inquirer.

Long, long ago, the village was known as Gollapalli or Home of Cowherds, a designation reminiscent of the *leelas* of Sri Krishna and redolent with the music of His Flute. It was the abode of prosperous gopals and the cattle of this place were sleek and strong and beautiful to behold. The cows yielded copious milk, thick and sweet beyond compare; every home was rich in butter and ghee! One day, a cowherd noticed that his favourite cow had no milk in its udder when she returned from the grazing ground on the hills and, when he later secretly watched her movements, he was astonished at her behaviour. For, she slid out of the shed, leaving her tiny calf to nose about with her sisters and proceeded in a bee-line to an ant-hill on the outskirts of the village. He followed her to this rendezvous, only to witness an even more astounding spectacle! A cobra issued from the mound, raised itself on its tail and applying its lips gently to her teats drank the milk, in glee! Enraged at the loss to which he was subjected by this wily trick, the villager lifted a stone over his head and taking good aim, heaved it right on top of the cobra. Writhing in pain, the serpent threw an angry curse on all the gopals of the village and its last words foretold that the place will soon be full of ant-

hills, which will multiply endlessly. And, so it happened, soon! The cattle declined in numbers and health; they could not be raised successfully at Gollapalli any longer. Ant-hills spread all over the place and the name had soon to be changed to Valmikipura for *Valmika* in Sanskrit means an anthill or Puttaparthi in common parlance. Of course, this gave some satisfaction to the elders of the village, since Valmiki is no other than the immortal who sang the story of Sri Rama and showed mankind the Path to Perfection.

The villagers still show, as proof of this tragic legend, the very stone, thick and round, with a slight jam on one side, which the enraged cowherd aimed at the wonder-snake. The stone has a long reddish streak over it, which is pointed out as the mark of the cobra's blood. In fact, this stone is worshipped as Gopalaswami, the Lord as Cowherd, probably in an effort to avert the curse and help the cattle to prosper. There is a temple in the village built by the *pallegars* (landlords) of old, where the stone is installed, and generations of men and women have bowed reverentially before it.

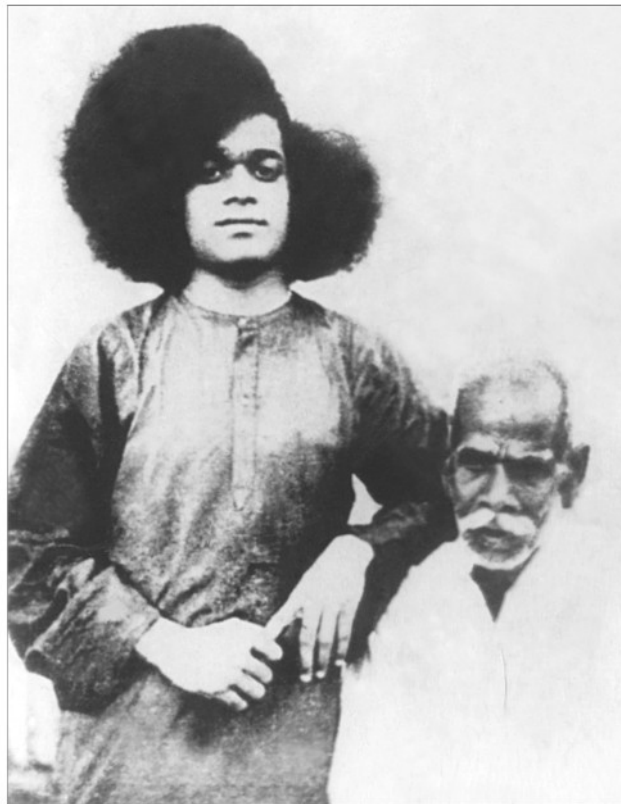
Strangely enough, that stone has acquired a feature, which was revealed by Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba some years ago! He directed some people to wash the stone and to smear sandal paste on the jammed side; when this was done, they could discern the clear outline of a picture of Sri Gopalaswami, with the world-captivating Flute at His lips, leaning on a cow. Some unsophisticated rustics swear, even on this day, that they can hear the melody of Krishna's Breath passing through the straight and hollow reed. From that day, the curse lost its evil power and cattle began to thrive at Puttaparthi!

The bastion at the old Fort which still raises its hoary head in the eastern part of the village is evidence on its mastery over the surrounding area and the power and the majesty of the Rajus of the place. "With the Chitravati descending the gorges and flowing as a moat on one side set like a green gem in a ring of hills, with temple bells pealing on all the eminences around, enriched by the tank built by Chikkaraya, adjacent to the town that bears the name to Bukka, the far-famed Emperor of Vijayanagara, Puttaparthi is the abode of both Lakshmi and Saraswati," ... such is the eulogy showered on this place, by an anonymous poet of the past.

In fact, Puttaparthi was the nursery of *Pundits* and scholars as well as heroes and donors. The Raju family itself was noted for its piety since the days of the renowned sage, Venkavadhoota. Not only did they build and endow the Gopalaswamy Temple, but even within living memory, the pious Sri Ratnakara Kondama Raju dedicated a temple to Sathyabhama the consort of Lord Krishna, a deity to whom this type of homage is seldom

offered in any part of India. He used to say in explanation of this unusual tribute to Sathyabhama that he was persuaded to erect the temple, by events that occurred during a strange dream!

Sri Kondama Raju lived to be a centenarian and the writer remembers how tears of joy ran down those wrinkled cheeks whenever he recollected that enthralling experience. In the dream, Kondama Raju saw "Sathyabhama, alone, expectant and forlorn, waiting anxiously for her Lord, who had gone on an errand to bring her the much-coveted Parijata flowers. The minutes increased to hours and the hours accumulated into days but still there was no sign of Krishna! So, Sathyabhama broke into tears. There ensued a huge storm accompanied by thunder, lightning and a heavy shower of rain. Luckily, her eyes fell on Kondama Raju who was passing across the place where she stood and she asked him to provide some shelter." This led to his determination to raise a sizeably large temple for the Consort of the Lord.



Sri Kondama Raju with Bhagawan Baba

Sri Kondama Raju with Bhagawan Baba

He was a pious soul who lived out his hundred and ten years of earthly existence in the unceasing contemplation of the Lord. He was a master of music and of the histrionic art. He knew by heart the entire *Ramayana*, in what is called the Lepakshi version, that is, a series of

songs composed by a poet from Lepakshi, depicting the incidents in dramatic imagery and artistic luxuriance. He played the role of Lakshmana in all the *Ramayana* plays enacted at Puttaparthi and other villages of the Taluk; in fact, his services to play this role were requisitioned even by far-off villages, for his depiction of the steadfast devotion and *sharanagati* (self-surrender) of Lakshmana touched the hearts of every one who witnessed it. He appeared hundreds of times in dozens of stages, until age incapacitated him from further repetition of the role.

He was a strict vegetarian, prone to observe all the holy vows of the Hindu calendar; he lived in a cottage, a little apart from his sons and grandchildren; his hut was a veritable *Ashram*, resonant with *Ramayana* songs. He took delight in gathering around his cot the children of his sons and relating to them the tales of Gods and God-men; the children too never left him, for he made every character and adventure live before their eyes, through the delight of song and drama!

We can be certain that among those children, it was Sathyanarayana who was the favourite of the grandfather, for the little boy could sing in a charming musical voice and he could give even the old man a lesson or two in the art of drama! There was another reason too, why Kondama Raju exhibited special affection for Sathyanarayana. The little boy hated non-vegetarian food and did not even stay in the neighbourhood when such dishes were being prepared. The boy, even at the age of six and seven was also a very good cook! He was so intelligent and resourceful that he produced the most tasty dishes from the meagre larder of the grandfather's cottage, and all this, most willingly, and very quickly too! Baba says that He could go into the kitchen of the old man and complete the cooking - rice, curries, chutney and all - in much less time than what was needed by the mother (with two daughters to help her) to finish her cooking assignment at her own place!



Lord Shiva Temple at the birthplace of Baba

Lord Shiva Temple at the birthplace of Baba

In his later days, Kondama Raju was visited by all the devotees who came to have the Blessings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba, and when he struggled to stand erect to accept their pranams, one could see a twinkle of joyful thankfulness that the Lord took birth in his family. He lived till 1950, and passed away peacefully singing to himself aloud the stanzas describing the consolation that Sri Rama gave to the dying *Vanara* (Monkey) King, Vali. Truly, a life worthy to be recorded in the annals of Saints!

His wife Sri Lakshamma had predeceased him by about twenty years. She was a very pious lady whose life was regulated by the religious calendar with its rotation of holy fasts, vows, and vigils. She observed these very scrupulously, despite the worry, expense, and inconvenience, with her eye only on the accumulation of the blessings of the Divine Forces, which the *Shastras* promised in return for the regimen.

Sri Kondama Raju had two sons, Pedda Venkapa Raju and Chinna Venkapa Raju, who were both named after the sage, Venkavadhoota. They too, inherited his musical, literary and dramatic capabilities, as well as his piety and simplicity. Of the two brothers, the younger was equipped with larger variety of skills, which cover the fields of literary composition, and the preparation of drugs and talismans with the aid of traditional formulae.



Renovated Sathyabhama Temple originally built by
Sri Ratnakaram Kondama Raju

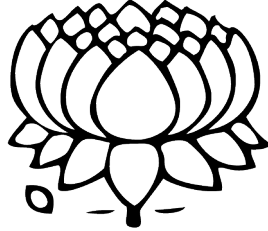
***Renovated Sathyabhama Temple, originally built by Sri Ratnakaram
Kondama Raju***

Pedda Venkapa Raju was taken once by his parents to a village Kolimigundla by name in the Koilkuntla Taluk of Kurnool District; the family had some lands there which had been given on long lease, extending to 20, 30 and even 40 years and the visit was primarily intended to acquaint him with the area and the tenants; but, Kondama Raju had also a different aim in view. There were some distant relatives living in that isolated place and he desired to bring them nearer to Puttaparthi itself. In fact, some miles away from Kolimigundla, they had intimation of the daily danger amidst which those relatives were eking out their livelihood. For, just when they were about to enter the Parlepalli Forest, some good men warned them to take stronger escort, since the forest had become a nest of dacoits and scarce two days prior to their journey they had murdered in cold blood a family of six which had innocently walked into their trap. So, Sri Subba Raju of Kolimigundla was persuaded to come to Karnatanagepalli village, on the other bank of the river Chitravati, right opposite Puttaparthi, though not without the offer of a substantial bribe which Kondama Raju held before his eyes! This was nothing less than the gift of Eshwaramma, the daughter of Sri Subba Raju, as the bride of his elder son, Pedda Venkapa Raju. And thus, came about the auspicious marriage of Pedda Venkapa Raju with Eshwaramma.

This happy couple were blessed with a son and two daughters in that order, Sheshama Raju, Venkamma and Parvatamma. Some years passed and Eshwaramma longed for another son. She prayed to the village Gods and observed Sathyanarayana *pooja* and kept a number of vows, which were rigorous and needed vigil and abstention from food.

(Sri Sathya Sai Baba once said to a person who requested Him to visit his place, "Certainly. Having come down from Vaikuntha so far, how can I say that I will not travel this short distance?")

The Lord in Vaikuntha heard the prayer of the mother; He decided on the place where He had to take a human form. He came!





2.

Balagopala

He is Shiva, He is Shakti; He must have both Vibhuti and Kumkum.

THE material sheath which the Lord once again willed to wear was formed; it grew from week to week. Mysterious intimations of the impending incarnation disturbed the even tenor of Pedda Venkama's family life! For example, there was the twang of the tambura! Since the brothers and the father were all very much interested in the village operas on *Puranic* incidents and since one play or other was always being rehearsed at home, there was a substantially big *tambura*, leaning against the wall and a *maddela* or drum on the floor beneath. These two were silent only when the inmates of the house retired for the night. But, as the birth of the son for whom Smt. Eshwaramma prayed, announced itself as imminent, the house was awakened at midnight, and sometimes even later, by the *tambura* twanging automatically and the *maddela*, beating rhythmically as if an expert Hand was handling it! Various theories were promulgated to explain this phenomenon by the wise men of the village, but, since they only added to the mystery, Pedda Venkapa Raju hurried to Bukkapatnam where there was a *Shastri* (learned brahmin), on whose interpretation he could place faith. The *Shastri* said that it was an auspicious occurrence; it meant the presence of a *Shakti*, a beneficent Power, conferring harmony, melody, order, symmetry, spiritual elevation and joy.

On the twenty-third day of November, 1926, the son was born. It was the time of sunrise; and the villagers were chanting the names of Shiva, remembering that the day was still *Kartika Somavara*, a Monday of the holy month of *Kartika*, devoted to the *pooja* and worship of Shiva. That day was made even more auspicious for Shiva worship, because the ascendant star was *Ardra* and on such rare occasions when the month, the day and the star coincided, special *poojas* were performed in the temples of the Lord. The year was *Akshaya*, "the never-

declining, the ever-full!"

The mother had also just finished, in some hurry of course, her Sathyanarayana *pooja* in accordance with her vows, for even while she was going through the final rituals, the pangs forewarned her. When Eshwamma announced the pangs, word was sent to the mother-in-law, Lakshamma, the pious old lady of the house; but, it became known that she had gone to the house of the priest to perform the *pooja* of Sathyanarayana; the messengers discovered her there and urged her to return; but she was so confident of the Grace of Sathyanarayana, so steadfast in her devotion, so disciplined in her religious adherence, that she refused to be hustled! She sent word that she would bring with her to Eshwamma the sacred offerings after the *pooja* and that on no account would she interrupt her prayers! She finished the entire ritual with full concentration, came home, gave her daughter-in-law the flowers and the sacred water; Eshwamma partook of the blessings of the Lord. Next moment, the Lord was born. And, the Sun rose above the horizon!



Baba has said that one special point to be noted about this Manifestation is that the

incarnation has not been transplanted away from the place where the body was born; for He has chosen that very place as the centre of His alleviatory Mission. So, Puttaparthi must have been doubly happy that November morn, for the *Avatar* had chosen that village for His Birth, as well as for His Habitation.

Indeed the village which bears the name, "Ant-hill Prosperity", gave the child an appropriate welcome! A snake was there in the lying-in room! The women did not notice it for long; but, when the baby, laid on a bed of clothes, was being moved up and down in a peculiar way by something underneath, they watched with bated breath and when at last they searched, they found a cobra below the bed! The snake was acting the role of Shesha to the Sheshashayi!

The baby was charming beyond description, and, no wonder! For, it had even in the cradle all the *yogic siddhis*, which Patanjali says come along with birth itself. Baba has declared that He knew even prior to His Birth where He would be born; He has said that He was born with all the miraculous powers, which He would, later, out of His own Will, be manifesting one by one as and when He feels each could be so announced. It must therefore follow that the baby had a halo of splendour around its head, that its smile had an other-worldly beauty and a heavenly power to captivate the heart.

Some years ago, Baba told me, "I do not sleep at night; I remember then the events of My past appearances; and, I laugh within Myself, as the memories pass across." It can therefore be surmised that the little lilies of laughter, and red rosebuds of joy, which lit up the cradle of the baby bloomed from the reminiscence of previous arrivals and adventures!

The baby was named Sathyanarayana, since the relationship between the *pooja* to that God and the realisation of her cherished desire seemed to the mother to be very important. When the *namakaranam* (naming ceremony) was performed and the name was whispered in the ear, it seems the baby smiled, for the suggestion to give that name must have emanated unobtrusively from Itself! How else can we explain the fact that the first requisite for spiritual advancement, now propounded by Baba, is Sathya Itself? The embodiment and exponent of Truth could not give Himself a more appropriate name.

The child became the pet of the entire village of Puttaparthi and the ryots and cowherds vied with each other in fondling it and feeding it and playing with its lovely silken curls. Its charming smile attracted every one. Pedda Venkapa Raju's house was always full of visitors, who came on some pretext or the other and stayed on, round the cradle, singing lullabies and showering caresses forgetting their humdrum lives.



Soon, the fragrance of the jasmine bud filled the air. Like a lighted lamp, Sathya moved about the house and laughter tinkled in the street when He lisped His sweet vocabulary of sounds. It was noticed by all with wonder that He delighted in having broad *vibhuti* markings on His forehead and that He insisted on the marks being renewed, as and when they wore off. He preferred also to have a circular *kumkum* dot in the centre of His broad forehead, though for fear of the "evil eye", the mother seldom satisfied this desire and so, He had to seek out the receptacle from the toilet box of His sisters and Himself dab the *kumkum* on!

He is Shiva, He is *Shakti*, He must have both *vibhuti* and *kumkum* (sacred ash and red ochre).

He kept away from places where pigs or sheep or cattle or fowl were killed or tortured, or where fish was trapped or caught; He avoided kitchens and vessels used for cooking flesh or fowl. When a bird was selected and talked about by someone in connection with dinner, Satyanarayana the little boy, would run towards it and clasp it to His bosom and fondle it as if the extra love He poured on it would induce the elders to relent and spare the fowl. He was called by the neighbours, "*Brahmagnyani*" on account of this type of aversion and this measure of love towards creation. At such times, the boy used to run to the Karnam's house, for they were Brahmins and vegetarians, and take the food offered by Subbamma, the aged

lady residing there.

He rarely retaliated when He was handled roughly by playmates; information of such ill-treatment came to the parents through other toddlers who witnessed the affair, never from Sathya, who seemed not in the least to suffer pain or discomfiture. He spoke out the truth always and never resorted to the usual subterfuges, with which fear-stricken children try to cover up their mistakes. So distinct was His behaviour that a wag once nick-named Him "the Brahmin child"! Yes, it was a fitting description. Little did that wag know that, while in the previous body, this child, so laughed at now, had declared at Shirdi, "This Brahmin can bring lakhs of men on to the White Path and take them to their destination!"

At the tender age of three and four, "this Brahmin" behaved as if He had a heart that melted at human suffering. Whenever a beggar appeared at the door and raised his cry, Sathya left off play and rushed in, to force His sisters to dole out grain or food. The adults were naturally irritated by the endless procession of outstretched hands; they easily lost temper; they sometimes shouted the beggar off, before Sathya could bring relief; this made the child weep so long and loud that only by bringing the dismissed beggar back could the elders stop the wailing. Sometimes, in order to put a stop to what the elders thought this expensive and misplaced charity, the mother caught hold of the child and with a finger raised in warning, she said, "Look here! You may give him food; but, mind You, You will have to starve." That did not daunt the child; He used to run inside and bring out food to the hungry man at the door; and stay away from dinner or lunch, Himself. Nothing and nobody could persuade Him to come to His plate, which was left untouched!

But the child had a mysterious visitor who was feeding it! For, when He refused food and persisted in the refusal for days, His movements and activity showed no sign of starvation. He would also declare that He had eaten, says Eshwaramma; He would say that a *Tata* (an old man), had fed Him sumptuously, doling out balls of milk-rice. The full stomach was proof of that. Besides, the child volunteered to give another indisputable evidence also. He held out His right hand for the mother to smell; and, lo, she inhaled from that tiny palm the fragrance of ghee, milk and curds, of a type she never enjoyed before. The wonder remained however. Who was this *Tata*, the unseen visitor, the strange nourisher of this little child?



When Sathya began running about in the street, He sought out the maimed, the blind, the decrepit and the diseased, and led them by the hand to the doorstep of the parents; the sisters had to discover from the store or the kitchen some grain or food and put it into the beggar's bowl while "the little master" looked on, gladly.

Sathyanarayana was held up before the children as the ideal, by every mother and father so often, that the children started referring to him as "*Guru!*" The parents and others came to know of this, under strange circumstances. It was *Ramanavami* (Lord Rama's Birthday) and late in the night, the procession wended its way round the village. A huge picture of Sri Rama was placed on a flower bedecked bullock cart and the priest sat upon it in order that the flower garlands offered by the householders could be placed on the picture and the camphor they presented be duly burnt and waved in front of the picture. The pipers and drummers awakened the sleeping villagers and thus, the cart proceeded along the uneven roads.

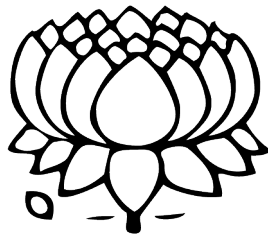
Suddenly, the two sisters discovered that little Sathya was not at home; a search was ordered; men ran about frantically, for it was already past midnight. But attention was distracted just then, by the arrival, outside the door, of the bullock cart, with Sri Rama! When the inmates of Pedda Venkapa Raju's house went to the doorstep they were surprised to see the five-year old Sathya sitting on the bullock cart, nicely dressed and with evident authority underneath the

picture! They asked the companions why He was seated there, on top, and not walking with them on the road. Prompt came the answer, "He is our *Guru*." Yes... He is the *Guru* of the children of all climes and of all ages!

There is a small primary school in the village of Puttaparthi and Sathya also used to go there with His contemporaries, for something nobler than learning to spell and scribe. The school had at that time an interesting scheme of punishment to ensure punctuality. The lucky child which first comes in and salutes the teacher, as well as the fellow who gets in second, are exempt from the punishment; but every chap, who for whatever reason, legitimate or other, arrives late, is given a taste of the cane, the number of cuts depending on his place in the list of late-comers, the later the larger. In order to escape from this torture, the children gathered under the eaves of the school-house, much before sunrise, in rain or in fog.

Sathya saw their plight and sympathised with His shivering playmates. He visited them under the eaves and, bringing shirts, towels and dhotis from His house, He covered the boys and made them comfortable. The elders at home discovered this and, since they could do nothing else, they locked inside their boxes all the clothes they could not afford to lose.

Sathyanarayana was a precious child, learning more things than anyone could teach Him and much quicker than most; He could sing all the songs and *stotras* that were rehearsed at home for the village operas, and even composed at the tender age of seven or eight, some touching songs for the cast, which were gladly accepted by them for public presentation!





3.

Natanamanohara

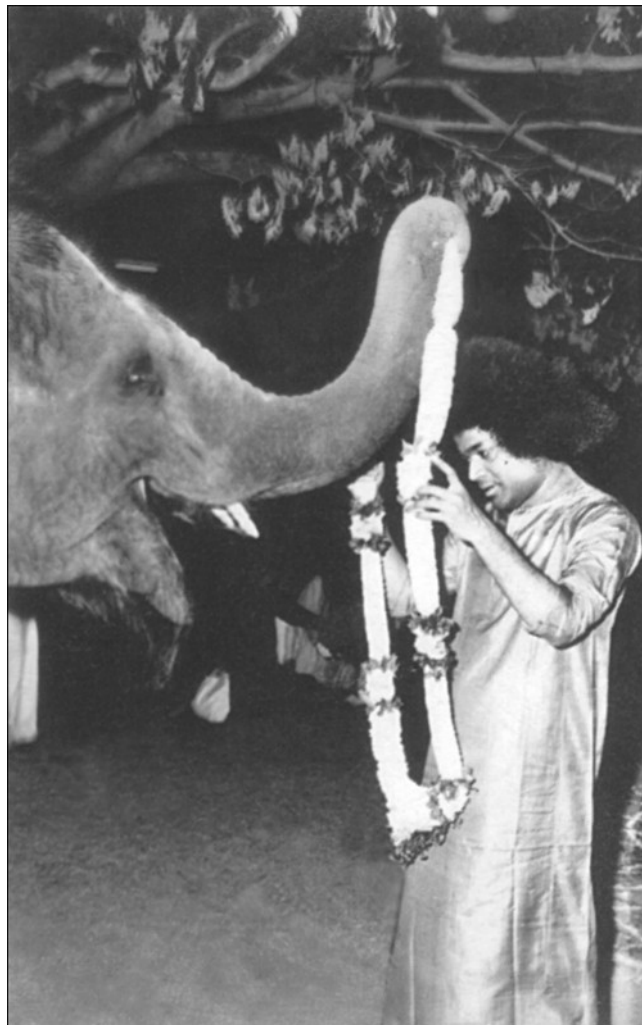
...there was a rhythm in His feet, a sense of time and tune, they had seldom seen; a liveness and a loveliness which made them feel, "He never touched the earth, He belonged to some ethereal region!"

AT the age of about eight, Sathya was declared fit to proceed to the Higher Elementary School at Bukkapatnam, about two and a half miles from Puttaparthi. He had to trudge the distance in sun or rain, over stony bunds or slushy fields, or wading through neck-deep water, with a bag of books, secured on the head, as the season dictated. He had to start early after a meal of cold rice and curds or cooked ragi-rice and *chutney* (delicacies which He still remembers). He carried in a bag the afternoon meal and, with his companions, trekked regularly to Bukkapatnam.

"He was my student in the VIII standard," says Sri B. Subbannachar, in a book published in 1944. "As a student, He was a simple, unostentatious, honest and well-behaved boy," he continues. "Unostentatious!" With what great self-control must Baba have suppressed His manifold Divine powers, in order that the world might become ready for the Announcement! Sri V. C. Kondappa, another teacher, who later revered the student as Divine *Avatar* (Incarnation), also says, in the same book, "He was very obedient and simple. He never spoke more than the minimum necessary. Coming a little early to school, He used to collect the children and install some image or picture and, with the flowers He had with Him, He conducted *pooja* and did arati and distributed *prasadam*. The boys gathered around Him for the things He 'took' out of His empty bag. When asked about it, He said that a certain "*Grama Shakti*" obeyed His will and gave Him whatever He wanted!"

One of His teachers was to experience the force of that *Grama Shakti* on one occasion. Baba was generally listless in class, engaged as He was mostly in what He later described as

composing *Bhajana* songs, *Ashtottara shatanamavalis*, and copying them out, for distribution among His classmates! One day, the teacher discovered that Sathya was not taking down the notes that he was dictating. "He is setting the whole class a bad example," thought he. So he shouted, "Stand up, all those who are not taking down notes!" Well. Sathya was the solitary culprit. He asked Him why He didn't. Sathya answered, in an innocent, straightforward tone, "Sir, why should I write down? I have understood what you dictate. Ask Me any question on it and I shall answer correctly." But, the teacher's pride was injured; and the boy must suffer for it, he thought. So, he ordered that Sathya should stand up on the bench and keep standing, until the last bell for the day. Sathya obeyed and the whole class hung its head in sorrow. No boy felt happy to sit on the benches that day, with their "*Guru*" poised uncomfortably upon a bench in the same room. The hour-bell rang and the teacher for the next hour came in.



He was Janab Mahbub Khan, who loved and respected the little boy, Sathya, beyond words. Baba even today extols this Mahbub Khan as a *Pavitra Atma*, a highly evolved soul! He taught English and his approach and method were so earnest and appealing that, it seems,

every boy knew every lesson through and through. He was an old bachelor and he treated Sathya with a unique affection, reminiscent of the *Fakir* who fondled the Shirdi Sai.

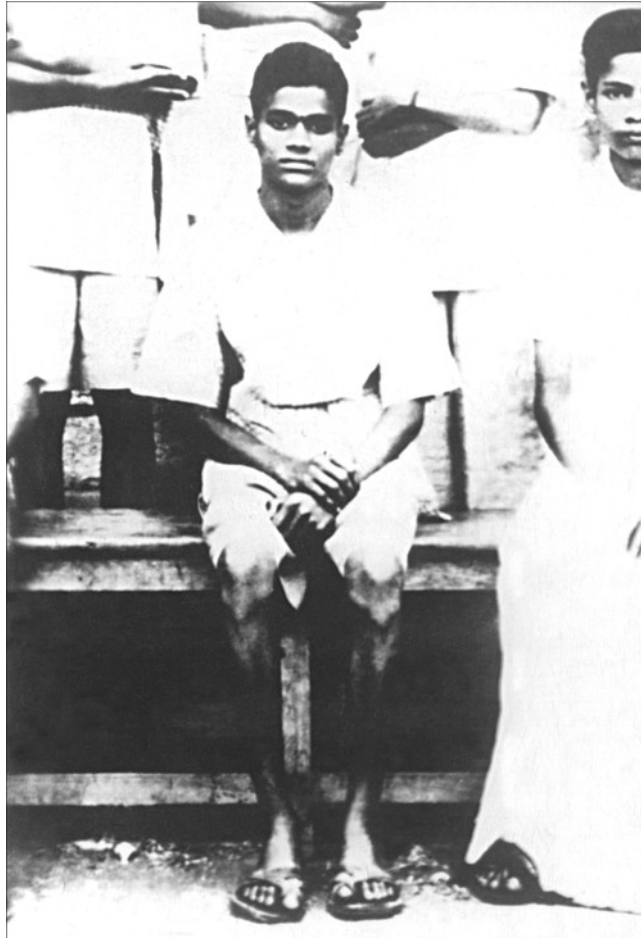
He would press sweets and savouries on the boy, persuading Him by means of a hundred artifices. He would say that his house was specially cleansed for the preparation of the dish, because he knew that Sathya will not eat anything having the remotest contact with non-vegetarian dishes. He would say that he himself had not taken food yet, for he wanted Sathya to partake of it first. He would sit silently for long, stroking Sathya's hair and whispering to himself, "Oh, Sathya! You are a wonderful boy. You will help thousands. You are a great power," or words to that effect.

When Mahbub Khan entered the room, he was shocked to find Sathyanarayana on the bench, the teacher still sitting on the chair. He asked him why he was not vacating the chair. He whispered that when he got up, the chair too rose up along with him; in fact, it had stuck to him, he knew not how or why? The whisper was caught by the boys who laughed at the teacher's plight and said it must be due to Sathya's 'magic' spell. He too suspected so and Mahbub Khan confirmed his suspicions. The boy was asked to come down and, immediately, the chair fell off and the teacher could move about unencumbered by any attached piece of furniture! Years later, while relating this story, Baba said that He willed it to be so; not so much out of anger against the teacher, for He had no anger in Him, but purely to demonstrate Himself and gradually prepare men's minds for the announcement of His Mission and Identity.

The little 'Prince Charming' was even in that tender age a "*Guru*" to the children of the village. True to the nickname, "*Brahmagyani*", which He had earned by His *Satwic* nature, He showed by precept and example that the little joys of this limited world are quite inferior to the Supreme Bliss that prayer and concentration can offer and renunciation and contentment can give. He delighted only in stories of saints who revelled in these.

Kondama Raju's sons and one of his daughters were all living together and so, Sathya grew in the midst of about eighteen to twenty children, like Krishna in Brindavan. It was necessary to be a clean and straight child in order to win Sathya's appreciation and to get the peppermints that He 'took out' from empty bags! Sathya was the example, Himself. Kondama Raju once told the present writer how, when the tailor was called in to stitch shirts for all the children out of various types of coloured cloth that had been brought from the Bukkapatnam shanty, Sathya would say, "Let everyone be given the cloth he selects; what remains is good enough

for Me."



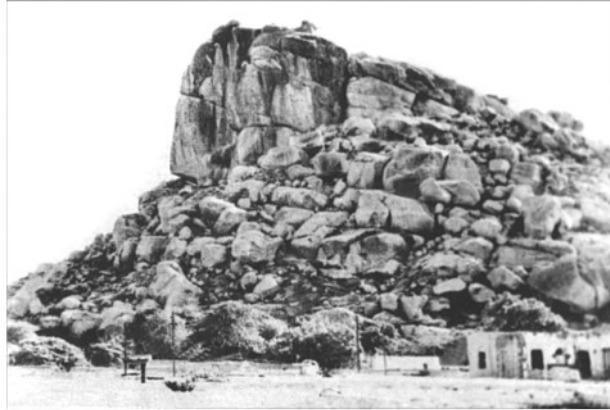
I am now reminded of a statement He made a few years ago at the Prasanthi Nilayam. "I have no lands to call my own and to grow my food; every bit is registered already in the name of someone else! So just as landless persons wait for the village tank to get dry so that they may scratch the bed with a plough and quickly grow something for themselves, I too grow My Food, namely, joy, in the dried tank-beds of afflicted hearts." Kondama Raju of course did not realise then the significance of Sathya's attitude of renunciation; he just felt proud!

Sathya was, even as a child, against all sports and games that caused cruelty or pain. He would not allow his companions to witness the bullock-cart race on the sands of the river-bed held annually on the festival, known as the Big *Ekadashi*, for He objected to the twisting of tails and the flaying with sticks, for the vicarious glory of the master. Years later, I remember, one night His calling back to the Prasanthi Nilayam a party of devotees, who had left in a bullock cart. They were proceeding across the river, to their cars which had been parked at Karnatanagepalli, on the other bank. Baba waved His Blessings and they got into the cart and it crept out of the main gate into the road beyond. Then, He sent someone running, to fetch

the *Bhaktas* back to Him. I heard Him order the *Bhaktas* thus: "Listen! When you reach the sands, you must all get down and walk across; the bullocks should not be forced to drag all that weight through the sands, do you understand?" Bear-baiting, cock fighting, and such other village entertainments, He condemned, as the "*Guru*" of his group.

When a touring talkie pitched its tent in those days at Bukkapatnam or Kothacheruvu, it caused a stir for miles around and village folk sacrificed their small earnings to meet the expense of seeing as many pictures as they could. Pedda Venkapa Raju tried often to take Sathya too along with the other children; but, He protested and refused. He spoke of the degraded ideals of the cinemas, how they vulgarised the Gods, and made of music, a muddle. He said they only exhibited the seamy side of family life, and praised cruelty, cunning and crime. Even this day, Baba is a relentless critic of the arts, especially literature and the film, which wilfully drag ideals down into the dust, in order to accumulate money.

When he was about ten years of age, Sathya formed in the village of Puttaparthi a "*Pandhari Bhajan*" group on the model of such as existed in some neighbouring villages. The group consisted of about sixteen to eighteen boys, dressed uniformly in *gerua* clothes, holding each a flag in the hand and wearing jingle-bell-anklets. They all danced to the tune of picturesque folk-songs and ballads, describing the yearning of pilgrims for Panduranga's *darshan*, the ordeals of the long pilgrimage, their anxiety to reach the shrine quickly, their joy at the sight of the pinnacle of the temple, etc., in simple touching poetry. Sathya taught the children these and other songs. He added some *Bhagavata* songs of His own in which the Gopis complain to Yashoda of the unceasing pranks of Krishna. Yashoda chides the boy for his thievery and mischief, and Krishna pleads innocence. With Yashoda and Krishna in the centre of the circle and with the Gopis dancing on the circumference, this was a great attraction in the village. Baba Himself played the role of either the mother or the child and His dance, dialogue and music added to the charm of the *Bhajan*.



Uravakonda - The serpent hill

Uravakonda – The Serpent Hill

It was also noticed that He mixed up with these traditional themes, songs on a pilgrimage to a new shrine of which no one had heard, and the majesty of a new deity of whom they had not even the faintest idea, Shirdi and Sai!

"Sai Baba? Sai Baba of Shirdi? Who could it be? How did this little boy get inspired by that Muslim, a Fakir?" The elders wondered, as the children danced in the streets.

The group collected a subscription of an *anna* a month from each house and spent the amount on oil for the lamp which they carried with them when they circumambulated the village, on parched rice which they gave every one as *prasadam* and on incense sticks, camphor and other sundries needed for *pooja*. On festival days or rather nights, they collected heavier amounts, say, two *annas* and proudly brought a petromax light all the way from Bukkapatnam. The children of Chinna Venkapa Raju and others provided the musical accompaniments.

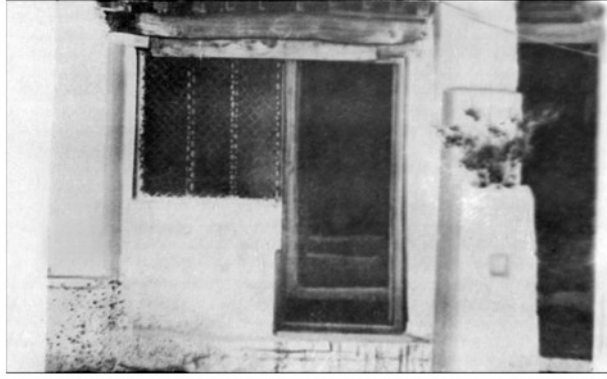
Sathya was, of course, the central figure of the group, as organiser, treasurer, teacher, composer and leading singer. He did every role so wonderfully that the village could see before their eyes, Mathura and Brindavan reproduced, and Balagopala with His flute enchanting the Gopis, the cows and calves, the trees and even the river Yamuna.

Once, while a song describing the prowess and achievements of Lord Narasimha of Kadiri, as related in the folklore of the area, was being sung, and the line, "From out the pillar of steel, the God as Lion jumped," was recited by the group of boys, Sathya suddenly leaped like the Lion-man Manifestation of the Lord and His face was transformed into such ferocity and indignation and benediction that the entire village was frightened, and no one, not even

experts in wrestling holds, could control the boy. At last, after a number of people had offered *pooja* and waved camphor and broken coconuts before the manifested Lord, Sathya became normal and resumed the song of Kadiri. Another intimation!

This incident spread the fame of the *Pandhari Bhajan* Group, for, when this group sings and dances, it was told, God actually manifests Himself, as the villagers of Puttaparthi witnessed! Moreover, it was noticed that when an infection of cholera swept like a poisonous simoom over the area and killed off entire families in the surrounding villages, Puttaparthi did not feel the blast of death; and wise men told one another that the Divine atmosphere generated by the *Bhajan* group was responsible. Therefore, the boys were invited to a large number of villages, in order to save them from the anger of the Gods! Very often, they sent their bullock carts to bring the group; but, sometimes, the little saviours had to walk ten or twelve miles, carrying their food with them, resting during the hottest part of the day in some tope (grove) on the way. These villagers, too, heard the strange names, Shirdi and Sai, wondered what and who they were, laid the wonder aside after a few days and plunged in their tasks again.

Then, there were the dramas, the open-air operas, where *puranic* themes were represented by dialogue, dance and costume; where *rakshasas*, *asuras* and the powers of evil were defeated by Gods, *avatars* and the forces of good. These were written, rehearsed, and produced in the household in which Sathya moved; Pedda Venkapa Raju himself had become a celebrity on the popular stage for the role of Banasura, and more, for his inimitable depiction of Yudhishtira, the *satwic* follower of Dharma and the never-wavering adherent of the Lord. A number of plays were produced at this period, in order to collect funds for famine relief. *Banasuram*, *Ushaparinayam*, *Draupadi Manasamrakshanam* and *Kamsa Vadha* were the plays most preferred. The eager young boy Sathya also took some roles, especially Krishna and Mohini, and the audiences applauded His acting, singing and, above all; His dance. For, there was a rhythm in His feet, a sense of time and tune, they had seldom seen; a litheness and a loveliness, which made them feel: 'He never touched the earth, He belonged to some ethereal region!'



The house in Uravakonda where the school going Sai lived

The house in Uravakonda, where the school going Sai lived

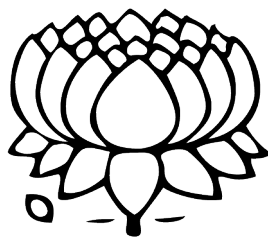
Within a matter of months, He began to take other roles too! Even after He went over to Kamalapur and Uravakonda for higher schooling, He played these roles, during the vacation, when He resided at Puttaparthi. In the popular story of *Kanaka-tara*, He acted the role of Tara so effectively, that one night, Eshwaramma who was sitting among the audience in the *pandal*, rushed upon the stage to prevent what she believed to be the 'execution' of Tara; she forgot that it was all make-believe! He took more than one role in the drama, *Krishna Leela* - He was Devaki, the boy Krishna, and also the danseuse regaling King Kamsa with her dance in the *Durbar* Hall! He also played the role of Draupadi and He even now describes, sometimes with a great deal of merriment, how He had to wear seven long saris one over the other and yet appear as if He wore only one!

Before long, a professional dramatic troupe visited the area and enacted some musical plays that attracted mammoth audiences. They put up their stage at Bukkapatnam and later, moved to Puttaparthi, Kothacheruvu, Enumalapalli and other big villages and their performances became the talk of the entire district. They had a girl dancer, with the stage name of Rishyendramani, who combined, in a series of dance items, both gymnastics and music. Her *piece de resistance* was a dance, in which, keeping track of the timing and the tune she danced with a bottle balanced on her head, bent low, sat, and laid herself on the floor with her back up, bit with her teeth a kerchief placed on a matchbox on the floor, and with the kerchief between her teeth sat back again, rose, and stood, with the bottle still balanced on the head! A pretty difficult assignment indeed! By long practice, she had trained herself for this tortuous feat. No wonder, she won the applause of the people wherever she did it.

Sathyanarayana went with others to witness the plays of these professionals and He too saw

this item. Later, after He came home, He tried to do it Himself and, to the surprise of all, He could do it without much ado! When the elders asked to be shown this new item in Sathya's repertory, He withdrew within Himself and hesitated. But, the news got abroad and some enterprising young men persuaded Him to agree to dance the famous feat, at Kothacheruvu, during the *Rathotsavam* and Cattle Fair. They had the temerity to announce that the famous Rishyendramani herself will appear in the play, for they felt so confident that Sathya will not disappoint them or the audience. The sisters dressed the brother as a girl, completed the hair-do and personal decoration and took Him to Kothacheruvu. Pedda Venkapa Raju who heard about the audacity became suddenly afraid of the consequences of the foolhardy adventure into which Sathya was inveigled. The curtain rose; Rishyendramani tripped her way into the *Durbar* Hall of Kamsa; the audience was too wild with excitement to note any difference; the famous dance piece began; Sathya had improved upon it and sustained a needle, in place of the kerchief; it was lifted by the eyelids! Yes; the Rishyendramani of that day did it!

But, not without dire consequences! The President insisted on pinning a medal on the dancer's person! The mother and others, who exulted over the encomia that were showered on Sathya, the invitations He received to repeat the feat at other places, and the silver cups and gold medals that were pressed into His hands, became afraid of the "evil eye" which the boy provoked. And the fears proved true. His eyes had some mysteriously dreadful affliction. They swelled, became red, and exuded tears profusely. His temperature also rose. One night, the mother heard a heavy footstep "wearing wooden sandals", she says, entering the house and proceeding straight to the place where Sathya was. She felt it all a mystery; so, she got up and went near the boy and placed her hand on His brow to find out the temperature; she found the fever gone! And the eyes? She brought a light and, lo, they too had improved beyond all expectations. Sathya was quite well the next day!





4.

Gana-Lola

Those who heard His sweet voice, spread the news that a 'fine musician' had come to town. 'Prayer Songs' at functions like public meetings became His monopoly thereafter.

SESHAMA RAJU, the elder brother of Sathyanarayana, married the daughter of Sri Pashupati Subba Raju of Kamalapur, in Cuddappah district and, since Sathya had to proceed somewhere outside Bukkapatnam for higher education, it was proposed that He might as well go over to Kamalapur. The brother was also with Him there for some time and so, this arrangement seemed satisfactory to the parents, who agreed. They planned to give Sathya a College education, so that He might become an officer! And, hence, they were prepared to part with Him and send Him to far off Kamalapur, provided His studies could be continued.

Sathya too attended school regularly; He was, in Kamalapur, as at Bukkapatnam, 'a quiet well-behaved boy', the favourite of His teachers. He sang the 'Prayer song', before the curtain went up, on the occasion of a drama in the town; and those, who heard His sweet voice, spread the news that a 'fine musician' had come to town. 'Prayer songs' at functions like public meetings became His monopoly thereafter.

Baba speaks even today of a Drill Instructor, who commanded the respect of the entire school by his unstinted love for children. He was also the scoutmaster and he was anxious to have Sathya in his troop. So, he started persuading the boy directly and through His friends. There were two boys, children of the Sheristedar, who sat at the same desk and who were very friendly with Sathya. They also pleaded with Him and even thrust a nice new pair of scout shirts and knickers into the desk of Sathya, so that He might join. They all knew that Sathya would be the life of the troop and, if He joined it, the elders of the town too would agree to sponsor it. Otherwise, they might mistake it to be 'a group of idlers and do-nothings intent

only on hikes and dinners'.

Sathya joined at last, just in time to proceed to the Fair and Cattle show at Pushpagiri, to which the Drill Master planned to take his troop. There was work enough for the boys at Pushpagiri with the huge crowds that gathered - restore the children that might get lost, supply of drinking water to the pilgrims, supervision of sanitation, and provide first-aid on the spot at the cattle fair. The camp fee was fixed at ten rupees per boy. Sathya did not have a pie!



He had to demonstrate that *Seva* was its own reward, that *Prema* would overpower everything else; He decided that the chance to teach and inspire His companions should not be lost; so He determined to walk to Pushpagiri, thus saving the bus fare. He told the drill master that His people were coming for the Fair and that they would look after Him. (Of course, the people who come for every *Jatra* are His people!) And thus, He avoided the camp mess and the charges He had to pay if He had joined it. He calculated that five rupees would be enough to see Him through at Pushpagiri; and, He says He gave the set of books of the

previous class which He had seldom read and which therefore were as good as new, to a needy boy and took from him, not the twelve rupees he offered, but just the five rupees He required. Then He walked the distance to Pushpagiri, reaching the place about 9 o'clock in the night, the day previous to the inauguration of the Fair.

He was physically very much tired and with the bag containing His clothes and the money, He slept on the sand of the river, along with the huge concourse that had already gathered there. The next morning, when He woke up, the purse had gone, along with the bag!

While describing these incidents, Baba often tells those around Him that He was not worried at all; but, that He moved about the place quiet, unconcerned and found, on a stone trough, an anna coin and a packet of beedies! He took the coin, it seems, and proceeded to the market place. There was a man there, who sat in front of a contraption, promising profit to men with luck! On a circle drawn on a piece of black cloth in white paint, he had some hieroglyphics; he had attached some monetary value to a few figures and no value at all to the rest! He had an iron rod, sticking up from the centre and a movable needle on its top. He asked his customers to place a coin beside him and give the needle a quick turn. If the needle stops on top of a section which has a figure like 2, 3, and 4, he gives the customer double or treble or four times the stake amount; otherwise, he appropriates it. Sathyanarayana went straight to this man and, turning the needle a number of times, and always with luck in His favour, collected twelve *annas*! He says that He could have secured more, but, He sympathised with the poor fellow whose earnings were not much!

Those twelve *annas* sufficed Him for a week! For, as already mentioned, He had a miraculous power not only of feeding Himself (in fact, the happiness of those around Him is His food, as He has so often said) but also proving that He had a square meal by extending His hand to be smelt. Even in these later years, He sometimes says, "I have taken lunch," and when people doubt it, He allows them to smell His palm and they will have to cast aside their doubts.

So, the Scoutmaster was led to believe that Sathyanarayana was being well fed by His relatives at the Fair! He did not make any distinction, therefore, in assigning work, between Sathya and the rest; Sathya entered enthusiastically upon His task of inspiring His classmates to do selfless social service. Even today this is the central theme of His teaching, service to others being, as He says; service to oneself, for the other is only oneself in another form and under another name!

Needless to say, Sathya quietly slipped out of the camp, when they proposed to take Him back by bus, for He had not paid His share of the bus fare. He walked back the whole distance, as a matter of principle.



Baba as a boy of 17 years

Baba as a boy of 17 years

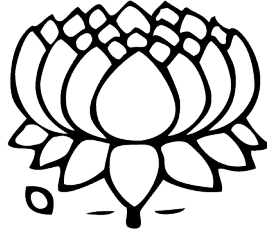
Sathya at Kamalapur was away from parents; even His brother had gone to undergo a training course and so, whenever He wanted some odd cash, He wrote, as He says, songs for the use of a merchant, Kote Subbanna by name! Subbanna had a shop, selling medicines, tonics, glassware, articles of fashionable wear, umbrellas, etc. and whenever he desired to push a new article into the market or boost the sales of some patent drug, he caught Sathya on the road leading to the school and gave Him the necessary technical or other information. By evening, Sathya was ready with an attractive Telugu song, praising the stuff in really good poetry, full of swerve and lilt, capable of catching the ear when sung in chorus by the band of urchins, whom Subbanna hired for the purpose. They used to march along the streets, with

name-boards in their hands, singing the slogan-filled song of Sathya and evidently enjoying their task! Even now, Baba regales His *Bhaktas*, now and then, by the recitation of these old time tunes!

Kote Subbanna gave Sathya, in return for these songs which soon danced on every tongue, the clothes, books and other things needed by Him!

There is a saying current among the older of the devotees of Sri Sathya Sai Baba; "He manifested Himself at Uravakonda, but spread His Glory from Kamalapur." This statement is a tribute to the quickness with which the people of Kamalapur responded later to the call without the cynicism of ignorant conceit, and the large number of public receptions and *poojas* they organised to "Bala Sai", after His return to Puttaparthi.

Meanwhile, we too must hurry towards Uravakonda, where the next chapter of this Divine *Saga* is to be enacted. Sheshama Raju completed the training prescribed to qualify him as a teacher of Telugu, and he was posted to the High School at Uravakonda. He welcomed this as a good omen, for, he could have Sathya with him and give personal and immediate attention to the progress of His higher studies.





5.

The Serpent Hill

I belong to Apasthamba Sutra; I am of the Bharadwaja Gotra; I am Sai Baba; I have come to ward off all your troubles; keep your houses clean and pure.

URAVAKONDA derives its name from the hill that dominates the place. At first the name was Uragakonda, 'uraga' meaning serpent and 'konda' meaning hill. The promontory on the hill, formed by a single bold boulder about 100 ft. high, is in the shape of a many-hooded serpent and so, the name is particularly appropriate.

Uravakonda was indeed lucky that Sathyanarayana Raju accompanied His brother, the new Telugu teacher, to the place and joined the High School, for it thereby became a candidate for immortality! The fame of the boy preceded Him to the town. Boys told each other that He was a fine writer in Telugu, a good musician, genius in dance, wiser than His teacher; able to peer into the past and peep into the future. Authentic stories for His achievements and Divine powers were on everybody's lips; for they were circulated by people who came into the town from Bukkapatnam, Penukonda, Dharmavaram and Kamalapur. It was related and heard with wonder that even as a toddler, He had a unique power of getting from nowhere and from nothing, fruits, flowers and sweets by a mere wave of His hand! "What a wonder?" they asked each other.

They gathered round the new Telugu *Pundit*, eager to have more stories of the boy's capabilities. Every teacher was anxious to be assigned some work in the section to which He was admitted; some out of curiosity, some out of veneration, and some out of a mischievous impulse to prove it all absurd.

Sathya soon became the pet of the entire school, the cynosure of all eyes in the town. He was the leader of the school Prayer Group. He ascended the dais every day, when the entire school

gathered for prayer before commencing work and it was His voice that sanctified the air and inspired both teachers and the taught to dedicate themselves to their allotted tasks. He was the life and soul of school dramatics, the pillar of the school athletic team, for He could run pretty fast, play *gudugudu* (a village game) exceedingly well and excel in the sack race and He was the best among school scouts.



A word may be said about Sathya and the dramatic activities of the school. Sri Tammi Raju, the teacher in charge, once asked Sathya to write and produce a play in Telugu and Sathya plunged into the work very enthusiastically. The drama was a great success, not only because the hero of the play was a little boy, a role enacted by Sathya Himself, but chiefly because it had as its theme the eternal sin of man, hypocrisy, not acting as he feels he should. "**Cheppinattu Chestara?**" was the title, "Do deeds follow words?" to put it in English.

The scene opens, revealing a lady, reading out the *Bhagavata* to a number of other women and explaining the meaning of the *shlokas*. She says that it is the duty of the housewife to give charity to the deserving, the defectives who cannot earn by the sweat of their brow, and not to the able bodied who lead idle parasitic lives. The women disperse sometime later, and

the lady is left alone with her little son, who has all along been an interested listener. Presently, a blind beggar comes and makes much fuss to attract attention but, he is rebuked and sent away. Then, there comes along a hefty mendicant with a pompous paunch and a polished copper vessel filled with grain and richly caparisoned *tambura*, and the mother respectfully welcomes him and offers him rice and coins, and falls at his feet, asking for his blessings. The son is nonplussed; he asks the mother why she did not follow what she had herself extolled a few minutes previously and he is dismissed with the curt answer, "*Cheppinattu Chestara?*" "(Can we act as we say?)" The mother is irritated by the impertinence of the son who dared question the ethics of adult behaviour; she drags the boy to the office room where the father, an Upper Division Clerk in some office, is busy with the files.

He gives the son a big lecture on the value of education and how pupils should study and get promoted from class to class, whatever the difficulties. Suddenly, a schoolboy pops in and asks for just a rupee to pay his fees, for otherwise his name will be struck off the rolls and he will fall short in attendance and he will not be promoted. The father says that he has no money with him and shows the boy his empty purse as proof. A few minutes later, a batch of young men, all clerks belonging to his office, thrust themselves in and hold out a subscription appeal calling for contributions for a Welcome Dinner in honour of an officer, taking charge of their office in a few days! The father is very jubilant at the idea, says that it must be done very aristocratically so that the new man may be pleased, offers to make a speech and pulling out the drawer of the table, he gives them the sum of twenty rupees!

The child looks aghast at this behaviour and asks the father why he went against his own words; why he uttered a lie to the schoolboy; the father turns angrily at the child, and says, "*Cheppinattu Chestara?*" "Should deeds follow words?" He roars at the child and commands him to go to school, without delay.

The scene now shifts to the school. Sathya, that is to say Krishna of the drama, enters school. The teacher is in a storm of great excitement, because the Inspector of Schools is to visit the school the next day. He coaches the children intensively for the Inspection. He tells them that the Inspector may ask, "How many lessons have been done?" and they were all to say not "23", the actual number, but "32". He says that he will do, when Inspector comes, lesson number 33, on "Harischandra"; so, he teaches them that lesson, so that the answers may come quick and fast the next day; he threatens them with severe punishment if any one so much as whispers that lesson 33 was already done in class. "It must all appear as if I am doing it for

the first time tomorrow," he says, and continues with the teaching of Harischandra's sacrifices for the sake of Truth. When the class is over, all other boys move out, but Krishna alone remains behind; he asks the teacher the question he has already asked twice that day, "Why do you not follow the advice you give?" and he gets the same rebuff, "*Cheppinattu Chestara?* Do you mean to say that the adviser should follow the advice?" Hypocrisy, hypocrisy, everywhere!



Bala Sai

Bala Sai

The scene is now changed to Krishna's home. It is next day, school time, but the boy refuses to go. He throws away his books, says that going to school is a waste of time, and sticks to his resolve not to study in school. The distracted parents send for the teacher, who comes rushing in. Then, Krishna says, "If all that you teach, as mother, father and *Guru* is only to be spoken and written, if all that is learnt is to be discarded when it comes to action, I do not understand why I should learn anything at all." This opens the eyes of all three and they praise the boy as their '*Guru*' and decide thence forward to speak the truth and act the truth.

This is the theme of the drama that Sathya wrote at the age of twelve! I have given it in some

detail so that the reader may have a clear idea of the farsighted intelligence and the educational enthusiasm of the young Sai.

Sathya was soon sought after by persons who had lost articles of value, for He had brought with Him to Uravakonda the reputation for an intuitive perception which revealed to Him the place where anything was! Baba says that in those days, He used to give His friends only the first and last letters of the names of the persons with whom the lost articles could be found. He left them with their own resources to recover the goods.

But one case in particular deserves some notice. A teacher lost a valuable pen and he persuaded Sathya to disclose the identity of the person who had 'taken it without his consent'. Sathya gave the name of a servant; but, the teacher dismissed the very idea, because he was very faithful and 'honest'. Besides, a search in the servant's room when he was away did not give any trace of his share in the loss of the pen. But, Sathya persisted in His statements; He said that the man had despatched it to his son, who was studying at Anantapur, and offered to prove the fact. So, Sathya got a letter written as if from the servant (he was illiterate and always indented on the services of a letter-writer for his correspondence) to his son, in which, after inquiries about health, etc., the father asked how the pen he sent was writing and advising the boy to be careful in using it, for it was costly and might easily be 'stolen'! There was also a self-addressed card for reply. Within four days came the reply into the teacher's hand! The pen was writing magnificently; it will be duly cared for, with all the vigilance due to its high price and its value as a present from a loving father. Thus, Sathya's miraculous power was vindicated; every one honoured Him.

Sathya won the respect of the common man in Uravakonda by another incident that reminds us of a similar one in the life of Shirdi Sai Baba. A Muslim of the place was frantically searching for his horse, which had strayed or got stolen, the Lord only knew where or by whom. That was his sole source of livelihood, for he had a *jutka* (horse drawn cart) and he used to earn a rupee or two per day, transporting men and things. Now, he was desperate, for he had searched the entire area; his friends had combed the whole place and wandered far and wide, but there was no trace of the animal. At last, someone told him about the boy Sathya, in the local High School. He came to Him and poured out his grief.

Sathyanarayana Raju immediately told him to go to a certain grove, a mile and a half away from the town, and, when he did so, the horse was quietly grazing, all alone, quite unconcerned at the furore it had caused. This made Sathya famous as a Wonder-boy among

the Muslim community and, many times, thereafter, *jutkas* stopped on seeing Him; the owners would insist on giving Sathya a lift to school or from school, so that some of His luck might get communicated to their vehicles, too.



Old Mandir

Old Mandir

Things were moving like this, with an occasional gleam of the wonder, a tiny glimpse of the might and majesty that lay in the frail body of the little boy of thirteen. On March 8th, 1940, the whole town was shocked to hear that a big black scorpion had stung Sathya. There is a belief current in Uravakonda and the surrounding country that no one will survive a snake-bite or scorpion sting in the place, because of the many-hooded serpent stone that has given the name to the place. The rock looks as if a serpent has raised its head to strike its poison fangs and hence, the dreaded superstition has gained currency. It was about seven o'clock, at dusk, and Sathya leaped with a shriek, holding the right toe!

No scorpion was discovered, however, and Sathya slept that night without any sign of pain! Everyone felt relieved, only to become anxious once again, when exactly at 7 p.m. the next day, Sathya fell unconscious and became stiff; He would not speak and breathing appeared faint.

If such a thing happens to Baba now, devotees will not feel shocked, since they are used to Baba leaving His body and going out with the *sukshma sharira* (subtle body) to other places. But, being as yet unaware of these journeys, Sheshama Raju, the brother and others got alarmed; they inferred that it must be the scorpion-poison that has taken 24 hours to affect the heart.

So, Sheshama Raju brought in a doctor, who gave an injection and left behind a mixture.

Sathya was unconscious as the saying goes, throughout the night. The doctor came again in the morning and declared that the boy was out of danger!

An incident happened in the night which showed that Sathya was not 'unconscious', but that He was even superconscious! Someone suggested that Mutyalamma, the *Devata* (goddess) near the Hill might be propitiated, because the condition of the boy might be due to some evil spirit that possessed Him. So, volunteers hurried to the temple, got down a ladder into the sanctum sanctorum, and offered worship, placing flowers and incense, and breaking a coconut. Just when they did it near the hill, Sathya, who was to all intents 'unconscious', said, "The coconut has broken into three pieces," and when the volunteers came home with the offerings, they had with them three pieces and not the regular two!

Sathya got up in a day or two and began to behave in an extraordinary way. This is sometimes explained as "a complete transformation of the personality," as the "occupation of Sathya's physical frame by Shirdi Sai Baba." Nothing can be farther from the truth. Baba has said that He Himself initiated the process of manifestation, for He could not wait any longer, playing about as a mere boy, with 'brother' and 'sister' and 'classmates' and other secular bonds. He wanted to demonstrate, as He said, that 'He was beyond both *visha* and *vishaya*', unaffected by poison or the objective world. There was no scorpion which could sting Him.

Meanwhile, Sheshama Raju had informed Puttaparthi about the state of things at Uravakonda. He had written that Sathya was not answering anyone who spoke to Him, that it was a herculean task to make Him accept food, that He was spending the time mostly in silence but, sometimes bursting into song and poetry, sometimes reciting long Sanskrit *shlokas*, sometimes talking the highest *Vedanta*. The parents took about a week to reach the place, because of unforeseen and inexplicable difficulties that caused delay and increased anxiety.



Kalpatharu (wish-fulfilling tree)

Kalpatharu (wish-fulfilling tree)

Sheshama Raju got nervous why the parents had not arrived; he got a man who agreed to travel to Anantapur on a bicycle and from thence, proceed to Bukkapatnam and Puttaparthi; when he was describing to the man the route he had to take to reach his parents, Sathya interposed and said, "Why, you need not send for them now. They will be here in half an hour," and, true to His word, they came in, exactly thirty minutes later.

The parents caught the infection of fear at the condition of Sathya; He sang and spoke and behaved in such a queer manner, they thought. He also became stiff, off and on, and appeared to leave the body and go elsewhere. It was all so mysterious.

One day, while Sathya was lying as usual without any awareness of His surroundings, He asked someone to bring in the *Shastri* of the neighbouring house! "He is reading the *Bhagavatam* all wrong; he is explaining it the wrong way. Go and bring him here," He commanded. Of course, the *Shastri* would not come. "What does that brat know about this

Sanskrit *Bhagavatam* and the right or wrong of the meaning which I gave now to these people here? How did he hear it, by the way? Tell him to mind his own business," the *Shastri* said and continued his exposition. But, Sathya persisted and so, the *Shastri* had to come, at least to satisfy the parents, who said, "Come and teach the boy a lesson in humility. That will be enough. He has become lately too uncontrollable."

When the *Shastri* arrived, Sathya asked him to repeat the exposition and pointed out to him where he had erred, and poured out in quick succession, a series of questions, like, "Who is the father of Vali? When was Ravana born? Who is Garuda's sister?" etc. that floored the scholar. Finally, the *Shastri* fell at the feet of Sathya and asked Him pardon for not obeying His summons immediately.

The District Medical Officer, Anantapur, who was camping at Uravakonda at the time, was approached by the doctor, who was treating Sathyanarayana; he pronounced judgement that the illness was allied to fits and was a variety of hysteria unconnected with the alleged scorpion, and in his wisdom, he advised a course of medication. This was strictly followed for full three days, but the symptoms of alternate laughing and weeping, eloquence and silence continued as before; He sang and spoke about God; He described places of pilgrimage to which no one there had gone before; He declared that life was all a drama! Astrologers said that it was a ghost that had possessed the boy, an old occupant of the house, in fact, its first tenant! They chided Sheshama Raju for not being more circumspect in the selection of a house to live in. Magicians ascribed it to a sudden fright, which must have set His nerves awry. Priests advised the brother to arrange for a *Rudrabhishekam* (the practice of pouring water on *Shivalinga*) in the temple. Wiser men shook their heads and whispered that the ways of God were inscrutable.

Sheshama was besieged by a large throng of sympathisers each of whom had his own specific cure for the affliction of his little brother. At last, he brought an exorciser into the house. On seeing him, Sathyanarayana challenged him and said to his face, "Come on! You have been worshipping Me every day and now that you have come, your business is to worship Me and clear out." The ghost-doctor heard the warning administered by his own *Ishtadevata* and so, he left in a hurry, forgetting to collect his fees! He advised the brother to treat the boy very reverentially, for He was 'in touch with God' and not afflicted by the Devil.



Bala Sai

Bala Sai

The parents were disheartened. They brought Sathya to Puttaparthi with them and watched His behaviour, with increasing fear! The boy Himself was heightening the effect by occasional bouts of quietude or music or discourse. He would suddenly ask the sister, "Here, do *Arati*, the gods are passing across the sky." He would say that His school studies have been disturbed and sing a song composed impromptu on the value of reading and writing and how the villagers are duped by the wily moneylender, if they are illiterate. Even while they were coming from Uravakonda, they took Sathya to a doctor at Bellary and to another at Dharmavaram. But, what can the poor practitioners diagnose? Their stethoscope cannot decipher the breathings of Godhead, nor can it reveal the beatings of a soul, much less a Divine Soul, determined to transcend the bounds of human convention. Sathya Himself once said, it seems, to the parents, "Why do you worry like this? There will be no doctor there when you go; even if he is there, he cannot cure Me."

At Puttaparthi too exorcists were called in, because the first reaction to any illness in any village was usually, that it was the result of someone's black magic or some evil spirit taking hold of the patient. When the man came and sat in the room and drew up a list of articles

necessary to invoke the spirit and to transfer the dire consequence to a lamb or fowl, Sathya laughingly reminded him of the items he had forgotten. He seemed determined to undergo all the travail resulting from their ignorance and superstition, taking it all as fun!

Otherwise, it is impossible to understand how the fourteen-year old boy could pass through the terrors of the treatment at Brahmanapalli, near Kadiri. This is a saga of fortitude which merits some detail. Someone gave information to the worried parents that there was a *Shakti* worshipper, before whom no evil spirit dared wag its poison tail! He would cure Sathya perfectly and make Him fit to go to school, they declared. So, the bullock-cart was got ready, but the bullocks refused to move! There were all kinds of difficulties on the way, sickness, fever, diarrhoea, etc. At last the place was reached and the 'case' handed over to the famous expert in devil-craft.

He was a gigantic figure, terrible to behold, with blood-red eyes and untamed manners. He tried all his craft, sacrificing first a fowl and then a lamb and making him sit in the centre of a circle of blood. He chanted all the incantations he knew. He did not allow the parents to take away the boy, for he assumed that it was a case entrusted to him and that it was a trial of strength between him and his *Shakti* feats and the little boy, smiling at his failures! He even attempted desperate techniques which he dared not experiment even with strong adult patients!

For example, he shaved the head of the boy and, with a sharp instrument scored three X marks on the scalp, from the top towards the forehead. Sathya sat through the pain without wilting. He asked later, "Even after seeing all that fortitude and that miracle of a little boy passing unscathed through all that terror, you are not now convinced that I am Baba; how then would you have reacted, if I just made the announcement, one fine day?" "I wanted to make known that I am Divine Stuff, impervious to human suffering, pain, or joy," He said.

With the scalp injured and bleeding with those markings, the witch-doctor poured on the open wound the juice of limes, garlic, and other acidic fruits. The parents who were watching the proceedings in utter despair were surprised, for there was not even a tear, or a gasp of pain from the boy! The *Shakti*-worshipper was, however, furious; he arranged that, every day for some days, early in the morning, 108 pots of cold water be poured on the markings. That too was done; his armoury was now almost empty. The evil spirit that possessed the boy had not admitted defeat and shouted that it would leave him and go elsewhere! He beat the boy on the joints with a heavy stick to drive out, what he called, 'stag fever' when He moved about

and 'rock-fever' when He was quiet!



So, he decided to use his strongest weapon, which the toughest spirit cannot withstand, the "*Kalikam*". This is a magic collyrium, a mixture of all the acidic *abracadabra* in the repertory of torture. He applied it to Sathya's eyes and the parents were aghast at the consequence. The head and face swelled beyond recognition; they became red and the burning sensation could be 'felt' even by those who went near. The eyes exuded tears and the entire body shook under the impact of pain. The master of devils was happy that success was in sight, that the spirit would soon take formal leave. Sathya never spoke a word or moved a finger. Those around, especially the parents and the elder sister felt guilty that they had become helpless onlookers of all this torment. They wept in uncontrollable anguish and tried to console Sathya, without the knowledge of the magician, who did not allow anyone to approach his patient. Sathya was making some signs to them, off and on, asking them to keep quiet. By means of gestures, He told them that He would get out of the room under some pretext and He asked them to be ready for Him outside. Then He told them to bring a remedy He knew; it was brought and

applied to the eyes; the two eyes which had been reduced to the size of thin slits opened wide and the swelling subsided!

The 'doctor' was put out by this interference with the normal course of his 'treatment'; he fretted and fumed like a wild animal balked of its prey. "I was within an inch of victory," he raved.

The parents wanted to save the boy from the jaws of that *Yama* (God of death) in human form; they had seen and suffered enough. They paid him full fees and also gave him some unasked gifts, and thanked him for all the 'learning' he had utilised; they cursed only their fate. They promised to build up the boy's stamina a little more, so that He may stand up to his wonderful course of exorcism and bring Him again, for the continuation of his attentions. Somehow, they won! The bullock-cart moved away from the horror-house. They reached Puttaparthi. But, Sathya was far from 'normal' yet. He seemed another 'personality' pretty frequently; He recited *stotras* (prayers) and poems far beyond the ken of any teenaged boy. Sometimes, He evinced the strength of ten; sometimes He was as weak as a lotus-stalk; He argued with adults on the correctness of their conduct and behaviour and put them to shame when He proved them wrong.

Some friend of the family advised that the boy could be taken to a village a few miles off, where a clever quack gave some green leaves as a drug to cure exactly such types of cases. The bullocks were brought; the cart was ready. Sathya was lifted on to it and the bells started jingling along the fair-weather track. About half an hour later, Sathya seemed to realise that He was being taken somewhere; He said, "I do not want to go anywhere; let us go back," and lo, the bullocks came to a halt and could not be persuaded, in spite of the most vigorous tail-twisting, to take a single step forward. The struggle went on for over an hour; they refused to budge! Then, their faces were turned homewards and the bells jingled merrily once again. Sri Krishnamachari, a *Vakil* (lawyer) friend from Penukonda, heard of these occurrences in the Raju household and came to the village to study the situation and offer whatever help he could. He had a good look; he pondered long, alone, on the river-bank; then he told Venkapa Raju, "It is really more serious than I thought; take him immediately to the Narasimha Temple at Ghatikachalam; that is the last chance." Sathyanarayana heard his words. Suddenly, He turned upon him and said, "Funny, is it not? I am already there at Ghatikachalam and you want to take Me to Me!" The *Vakil* had no inclination to cross-examine.

On the 23rd May, 1940, Sathya rose from bed as usual, but, after some time, He called the members of the household round Him and gave them sugar candy and flowers taken from 'nowhere'. At this, the neighbours too rushed in. He gave them a ball each of rice cooked in milk and also the flowers and sugar candy, concretised by a mere wave of the hand. Sathya seemed to be in a very jovial mood and so, Venkapa Raju was sent for, to come and see Sathya in the welcome role. He came rushing in, squeezing through the crowd; the people asked him to go and wash the feet and hands and face, before approaching the Giver of Boons. This incensed him still more; he was not impressed at all; he thought it was all a trick, hiding things somewhere and producing them by sleight of hand; at least, that was what he confessed to the present writer, recently. He wanted that this chapter must be closed, before it lengthened into a tragedy. So, he laughed a bitter laugh and accosted the boy within everyone's hearing. "This is getting too much; it must be stopped." Arming himself with a stick, he moved a step nearer and threatened to beat it out of Him. "Are you a God, or a ghost or a madcap? Tell me!" he shouted. Prompt came the answer, the announcement, that had been held back so long, "I am Sai Baba."



Further argument became impossible. Venkapa Raju was stunned into silence; the stick slid from his hands. He stood staring at Sathya, trying to grasp the implications of that

announcement, "I am Sai Baba." But, Sathya continued, "I belong to Apasthamba *Sutra*; I am of the Bharadwaja *Gotra*; I am Sai Baba; I have come to ward off all your troubles; keep your houses clean and pure." He repeated the names of the *Sutra* and the *Gotra* again that afternoon. The elder brother, Sheshama Raju went near him, and asked, "What do you mean by Sai Baba?" He did not reply, but only said this much: "Your Venkavadhoota prayed that I be born in your family; so, I came."

Who was this Venkavadhoota? When I asked Sheshamaraju who he was, he informed me that there was a tradition in the family of a great ancestral sage called Venkavadhoota, who was looked upon as a Guru by hundreds of villages around, who ended his days at Huseinpura in Mysore State.

The father felt that Sai Baba was a Muslim, speaking through the boy and so, he asked, "What are we to do with you?" Prompt came the answer: "Worship Me!" "When?" "Every Thursday! Keep your minds and houses pure."

The villagers heard the name, Sai Baba, with fear and amazement; when they made inquiries, they came to know that a certain government officer had come to Penukonda sometime ago, who was an ardent worshipper of a Fakir, named Sai Baba. So, they proposed that Sathya be taken to him, for he was reputed to be well-versed in the lore of Sai Baba. He must know what Sathya was suffering from; he would suggest a way out. He condescended to see the boy, but he was in no mood to examine the credentials. He pronounced it as a clear case of mental derangement and advised them to remove Him to an institution! Sathya interposed and said, "Yes, it is mental derangement, but whose? You are but a *poojari*, you cannot recognise the very Sai whom you are worshipping!" So saying, He took handfuls of *vibhuti* from nowhere and scattered it in all directions in the room where they were.

After their return, one Thursday, someone challenged Satyanarayana and asked Him, "If you are Sai Baba, show us some proof now!" in the same spirit that the rustics ask the priest of the village temple, when he dances in ecstasy while apparently possessed. Baba replied, "Yes. I shall," and everyone came nearer. "Place in My hands those jasmine flowers," He commanded. It was done. With a quick gesture, He threw them on the floor and said, "Look." They saw that the flowers had formed, while falling, the Telugu letters Sai Baba!

It will be seen that Sathyanarayana was preparing the people, step by step, for the new Era of Sathya Sai. His unconcerned coolness during all that torture at the hands of the magician made everyone feel that He was no ordinary boy, that He was some superior manifestation.

From occasional glimpses of His divinity through extraordinary precocity in song and dance, music and poetry, He had demonstrated His power of journeying outside His body, His freedom from pain and suffering and now, He had resolved to announce to the world His Reality.



Sheshama Raju still hugged his plan to push Satyanarayana willy-nilly, through the High School Course and make Him eligible for "Public Service," as the secondary School Leaving Certificate declares. So, he took Him back in June to Uravakonda and admitted Him to school. He attracted the attention of everyone now, for they had all heard of the madness and of the frantic efforts of the parents to 'cure' it; the boy was acclaimed as a mysterious prodigy, a tiny prophet, or watched as a rare curiosity. On Thursdays, the house was full of pilgrims till the small hours of the night from various villages around and they made Him sit and offered flowers and sweets. He used to point out Sheshama Raju to them and say, "Senseless man, he does not believe!" The Headmaster of the school bowed before the little pupil; Assistant Master Tammiraju and Shesha Iyengar saw through the veil and listened to His inspiring words.

Thursdays became big events at Uravakonda. Sathya surprised all when He 'took' pictures of Shirdi Sai Baba, pieces of *gerua* cloth that He said were from the *kafni* that Shirdi Baba wore,

date fruits that were the offerings at Shirdi as well as flowers, fruits, sugar candy, and *udi* (not as Shirdi Sai Baba took from the fireplace, but straight from nowhere). One day, the teachers of the High School came in a team, intent on testing Him, with a number of questions on *Vedanta, sadhana, etc.*, ready for the purpose. They cast them at Him from all angles, helter-skelter. After they had finished, He gave them the answers in the same order as they were put to Him, calling upon the particular teacher to listen carefully to the answer for his question that He was about to give! Apart from the aptness and correctness of the answers, it was remarkable even as an intellectual feat.

It was then that an invitation from some townsmen from Hospet gave an idea to Sheshama Raju. The Deputy Inspector of Schools, the Heath Officer, the Engineer, some Municipal Councillors and merchants wanted that Sathyanarayana be brought to their place. Hospet is a few miles away from the ruins of Hampi, the capital of the ancient Vijayanagara Empire. So, the brother caught at the chance of a picnic, which might improve the mental health of the boy. The *Dasara* holidays came in handy.

They alighted among the ruins. They trudged along the roads, once lined by jewellery shops and flower-stalls, trodden by men and women of all the nations of the East as well as travellers and traders from the Middle East and the Mediterranean-shore. They saw the elephant stables, the palace of the queens, the Vijayadashami Mound, and then went to the Vittalanathaswami Temple. They proceeded to the stone chariot, the monolithic Narasimha, and the gigantic Ganapati. Finally they came to the temple of Lord Virupaksha, the patron deity of the Vijayanagara emperors, who protected and cherished Hindu culture for well-nigh three centuries from 1336 A.D. to 1635 A.D.

It was noticed that throughout the morning, Sathya was moving among the ruins, unaware, as in a dream; a revered sage, sitting in front of one of the temples said of him, "This boy, believe me, is Divine." When the party went into the temple of Virupaksha, Sathya too went with them, but He was more interested in the height and majesty of the *Gopuram*, than in the worship at the sanctum. He stood outside and no one pressed Him to enter with the others. After a while, the priest waved the flame of camphor before the Lingam and asked the pilgrims to see the illuminated shrine, because the flame lit up the interior. There, inside the shrine, they saw to their utter amazement, Sathya! He was standing in place of the *Lingam*, smiling and erect, accepting their *pranams*. Everything about the boy was so thrilling and unexpected that Sheshama Raju wanted to verify whether He had not actually strayed into the shrine, evading everybody's notice. So, he hurried outside to find Sathya leaning on a wall,

staring at the horizon!



New Mandir Inaugurated on 23-11-1950

New Mandir inaugurated on 23-11-1950

The amazement of the members of the party can better be imagined than described. They did special *pooja* for Him that day, though it was not a Thursday, for their faith in Him as a Manifestation was confirmed. Hospet was on the toes of expectation and excitement. The story that He was seen as Virupaksha had spread to that town also, long before they reached it. The next day, Thursday, Sathya, as Sai Baba, cured a chronic tuberculosis patient by His touch and made him get up and walk a mile; He 'took' a variety of articles for the devotees and the enthusiasm of the people knew no bounds. *Bhajan* and *Namasankirtana* continued far into the night, for no one was in a mood to stop.

One could sense that Sathyanarayana was getting more and more reluctant to be bound by routine; He was tugging at the bonds, for History was whispering in His ear, to break away and reach out to the four quarters! The period of probation which Sai Baba had allotted to the people around Him was over; He saw that the moment had come to emerge, to be always Sai for everyone.

On the 20th day of October, 1940, the day after they all returned from Hampi by special bus, Sathyanarayana started for school as usual. The Excise Inspector of the place, Sri Anjaneyulu who was very much attached to the little Baba, accompanied Him, as far as the school gate and went home, rather reluctantly. He seemed to see a superb halo, round the face of Baba that day and he could not take his eyes away from that enchantment. Within a few minutes, Baba too turned back to the house. Standing on the outer doorstep, He cast aside the books He was carrying and called out, "I am no longer your Sathya." "I am Sai." The sister-in-law came from the kitchen and peeped out; she was almost blinded by the splendour of the halo,

which she saw around Baba's head! She closed her eyes and shrieked. Baba addressed her, "I am going; I don't belong to you; *Maya* has gone; My *Bhaktas* are calling Me; I have My work; I can't stay any longer." And, so saying, He turned back and left in spite of her pleadings. The brother hurried home on hearing all this; but, Baba only told him, "Give up all your efforts to 'cure' Me; I am Sai; I do not consider Myself related to you." Neighbour Sri Narayana Shastri heard the noise; he listened and realised that it was something serious; he ran in; he saw the splendour of the 'halo' and fell at Baba's feet. He too heard the Historic declaration, "*Maya* has left; I am going; My work is waiting." Sheshama Raju was nonplussed; he could scarce collect his wits to meet this new situation. A boy, just fourteen, talking of *Bhaktas*, Work, *Maya*, and the philosophy of belonging! He could think of only one plan; Sathya was entrusted to him by the parents and it was therefore his task to inform them; Sathya could leave the house, only after they came to Uravakonda.

But, Sathya would not step into that building again; He moved out into the garden of the Excise Inspector's bungalow, and sat on a rock, in the midst of the trees. People came into the garden from all directions bringing flowers and fruits; the tope resounded to the voices of hundreds, singing in chorus the lines that Sathya Sai taught them. The first prayer that He taught them that day was, as many still remember,

Maanasa bhajare gurucharanam

Dustara bhava saagara taranam

("Meditate in thy mind on the Feet of the *Guru* that can take you across the difficult sea of *Samsara*.")

His classmates wept when they heard that Sathya will no longer attend school, that He was much beyond their reach, that His company was hereafter only for those upon whom He showers His Grace. Many came to the garden with incense and camphor, to worship Him. Some came to sympathise with the family, some to congratulate them. Some came to learn and some, alas, even to laugh!

Three days passed thus in that garden; three days of *Bhajan* and *Namasankirtan*. A photographer came with a camera; he wanted Baba to remove a crude stone that was right in front of Him, but Baba did not pay heed to that prayer. He clicked nevertheless and lo! As can be seen from the picture of that photograph given in this book, the stone had become an image of Shirdi Sai Baba! But only in the photograph, not for all assembled there.



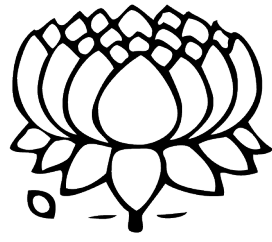
Rear View of Ashram (1950)

Rear View of Ashram (1950)

One evening, while in the midst of the *Bhajan*, Baba suddenly said, "O, *Maya* has come!" and pointed out to Eshwaramma, the mother, who had arrived just then in hot haste from Puttaparthi. When the parents pleaded with Him to come home, He retorted, "Who belongs to whom?" The mother wept and prayed, but she could not shake the resolve of the boy. He was constantly repeating the statement, "It is all *Maya*." At last, He asked the mother to serve Him food; when she served some dishes, He mixed them all up and made the whole lot into a few balls. She handed Him three of these and, swallowing them, He said, "Yes. Now, *Maya* has left. There is no need to worry," and re-entered the garden.

A few days later, Baba left Uravakonda. The parents were able to persuade Him to make His way to Puttaparthi, by assuring Him that they would henceforward abstain from teasing Him with importunities or disturbing His task of meeting devotees. Sri Anjaneyulu worshipped His feet. Sri Subbanna and Ramaraju of Kamalapur supervised all arrangements. The townsmen arranged a procession with music to the very boundary and *arati* was offered at many places *en route*.

Baba was welcomed at Puttaparthi first into the Karnam's (village officer) house by Subbamma. For some time, Baba remained in the house of Pedda Venkapa Raju, and later, He moved to the residence of Subbaraju, the brother of Eshwaramma. But, soon, He shifted to the house of Subbamma, who tended Him with love and affection and welcomed all the *Bhaktas* into her spacious house; she spared no effort to make their stay happy and profitable.





6.

Bala Sai

Baba Himself has said many times that in His Life, the first sixteen years will be marked mainly by Leelas, the next sixteen by Mahimas or Miracles and the subsequent years by Upadesham. He has assured of course, that Leela, Mahima and Upadesham will be the main notes, but that the other two will not be absent during every stage.

HAVING declared Himself as Sai Baba, of the Bharadwaja *Gotram* and the Apasthamba *Sutram*, Sathyanarayana Raju was thereafter commonly known either as Bala Sai or Sathya Sai Baba, an appellation which He Himself accepted. *Bhajan* was done in His presence not only on Thursday evenings, but gradually every day and sometimes even twice a day, for the pilgrims who began to arrive could not wait until the ensuing Thursday, to pay their homage to Him. At first, a small room, eight feet by eight, facing the road that led to the house of Pedda Venkapa Raju was utilised as the *Bhajan Mandir*, but it could accommodate only a dozen at the most, whereas the road too was being filled to overflow! A Recruiting Officer came in a jeep for Baba's *darshan* from Hindupur, giving the villagers their first contact with a self-propelled vehicle! Others too came in large numbers. So, the family of the Karnam put up a shed, which was lengthened as the months passed. Even a tent was rigged up and some devotees who came up from Bangalore and Anantapur brought and pitched their own tents. The spacious house of Karnam was also insufficient, because Baba insisted on feeding all those who came to see Him, and huge dining halls became necessary.

Very often, when the food cooked threatened to be too small in quantity, Baba was quietly informed and in the words of an old lady who was in the Karnam's house during those months, "He asked two coconuts to be brought; when they were given to Him, He struck one against the other and both broke exactly into halves; He then sprinkled the coconut water on

the little heaps of rice and the vessels containing the other items and gave us the signal to proceed with the task of serving all who have come or may come, until dusk!"

Baba has Himself spoken about the untiring devotion of Smt. Subbamma, the Karnam's wife, an old lady who looked after the comforts of the pilgrims and had Baba Himself in her house for some years, until the building now called "Old *Mandir*" was built, in 1944.

Baba composed a number of songs and *stotras* to be used for these *Bhajans*, for Sai Baba was unknown in these areas and the songs referred to *Dwarakamayi*, *Buti Mandiram*, *Udi* and the *Margosa* tree and other details, which were strange to the devotees who assembled at Puttaparthi! Many of them are sung even today, at Prasanthi Nilayam.



Baba sitting in the prayer hall during Bhajan time (1958)

Baba sitting in the prayer hall during Bhajan time (1958)

He used to complain off and on of the 'householder atmosphere' in the places where He stayed and, little boy that He was, He used to disappear during day or night, into the mountains that surround the village. Whenever He was found absent, Subbamma and others used to search every hill and dale within walking distance, and they generally found Him sitting quietly on some rock overlooking the valley, or in some cave-like hollow or crevice, or on the sands of the river, or in some grove, on the other bank of the river. These absences and wanderings gave the persons who were attending on Him a great deal of anxiety, for they were ignorant of the true significance of the absences. Some of them were afraid He would go away to the Himalayas, or that He would waste Himself in asceticism, for they did not understand the nature of the Incarnation or the purpose for which It had come. Even today, these people continue talking of the *Yogic* practices (!) of the young boy on the hills, not knowing that He has come to 'bear the *yogakshema* of us all'!

One day, when a party of devotees was accompanying Baba in a caravan of bullock carts to Uravakonda, He got down from His cart and went into the hills and disappeared. The entire area was searched, but there was no trace of Him. Everyone was in great distress until Baba appeared at about 6 p.m., fresh and smiling, and restored everyone's drooping heart.

Speaking of bullock carts and the journey to Uravakonda, one is tempted to relate an incident, which is described by Baba with a twinkle of merriment, even now. In spite of occasional moods of solitude which took Baba away from *Bhaktas* into the hills and dales, Baba was always a sprightly joyous Boy, full of practical jokes and fun. Once, when about twenty devotees were proceeding along the road to Dharmavaram, Baba and a group of young men were walking behind the bullock carts in the moonlight. Suddenly, He moved a few yards away, unnoticed by the rest, and hastened to the cart that was leading the rest. There, He appeared as a girl of sixteen; she appealed to the persons inside the cart for a lift, because her husband had been admitted to the hospital. He acted the part with so many sighs and rubbing of eyes and even tears that the ladies in that cart took pity on the unfortunate 'girl' and took her in. After about a mile or so, news came from the tail end of the line that Baba was missing and all the carts were brought to a halt; each of the occupants got down and joined the search.

They found Him at last, just a few yards ahead of the foremost cart itself, and some of the older men even dared chide Baba for playing hide-and-seek, in strange places at dead of night! The journey was resumed; but another person was now found missing! Where was the 'girl', whose husband was an in-patient at the Dharmavaram Hospital? Where could 'she' have gone? Perhaps, in her anxiety to be by the bedside of her husband, she might have run on, when the carts stopped to search for Bala Sai. So, some fleet-footed young men ran forward, only to bring back the report that the road was empty for at least two miles ahead! Finally, they asked Baba Himself, for they knew that He would certainly know the whereabouts of every missing person. And, of course, He knew! The 'girl' was there, before them, in the form of Baba Himself, the Great Actor.

Venkamma, the sister was pestering Baba for a picture of Shirdi Sai Baba, about whom so many songs were composed for the *Bhajan* by Baba, and it seems, He told her that He would be giving it by a certain Thursday. But, Baba went off to Uravakonda on the day previous to the Thursday indicated, and she too had forgotten all about it, for she was sure she would get it someday and was not very particular when. Night fell and all were asleep at Puttaparthi; someone called out, "Ammayi, Ammayi," outside the front door, but the sister did not go and

open the door, since the call did not persist. She argued it must be someone calling the neighbour. When she laid herself down after the sitting up, she heard a grating sound, behind one of the bags of jowar in the same room; she imagined it to be a rat or a snake; it was distinct and loud; so, she lit a lamp and searched and lo, something was sticking out behind the bag, white, sharp, a piece of rolled paper, a picture of Shirdi Sai Baba, mysteriously presented to her by Baba, who was at Uravakonda at the time! She has the picture still!



Life size oil paintings of Shirdi Sai Baba and Parthi Sai Baba
adorning the prayer hall (1960)

***Life size oil paintings of Shirdi Sai Baba and Parthi Sai Baba adorning
the prayer hall (1960)***

During those days, Baba generally went every evening to the sands of the river with the devotees and *Bhajan* was done mostly there, because there was no big shed or hall where all could be accommodated. Baba Himself has said many times that in His Life, the first sixteen years will be marked mainly by *Leelas*, the next sixteen by *Mahimas* or Miracles and the subsequent years by *Upadesham*. He has assured of course, that *Leela*, *Mahima* and *Upadesham* will be the main notes, but that the other two will not be absent during every stage. True to this statement, Baba vouchsafed to the devotees who attended these evening *Bhajans* various miracles. It was then that the tamarind tree that grows solitarily at the crest of the hill on the left bank of the Chitravati, near where the road meets it, got the reputation of being a *kalpataru*, though the name *sankalpataru* is more appropriate, because Baba used to take the devotees to that height and pluck from that tree many varieties of fruits, apple from one branch, mango from another, orange from a third, pears and figs from a fourth and a fifth! Of course, as Baba says, He can make any tree any time a *kalpataru*, for He is Himself that *Kalpataru* (wish-fulfilling tree)!

He got up the rocks quick and fast, to the surprise of everyone; indeed, sometimes He did not

climb at all; still, He would be talking to the devotees on the sands one moment, and hail them from near the tamarind tree, the next. He usually helped up the older and fatter among the *Bhaktas* and when they held His Hand, He pulled them up as if they had no weight at all.

There are some very fortunate devotees of those days who cannot contain themselves with joy, when they describe the miracles they were privileged to witness. He would ask them, in clear commanding voice from the top of the hill, standing by the side of the *Kalpataru* aforesaid, "Look up and see," and lo, they saw a wheel of circling Light, with Baba's head in the centre, or a blinding jet of *jyoti* emanating from His forehead, "From Shiva's Third Eye," they say. Instances are related of a few devotees falling down in a swoon at the sight of these strange phenomena. Some have seen, looking up from the sands, a huge Shirdi Sai Baba, illuminated by a mysterious effulgence, some have seen Sathya Sai Baba's face inside the Full-circled moon, and miracles like a pillar of fire, etc.

A college student who was present one evening when Baba ascended the hill, on which the Tamarind tree can still be seen, writes, "The next day, Baba took us again to the sands. In fact, He was going out every day, sometimes to a tope near Saheb-cheruvu, a tank on the other bank of the river, where He delighted in swimming and diving, or sometimes to the sands. After some little conversation, He challenged a few young men of His physical age, that is to say some teenagers, to run a race with Him up the rocky path from the sands to the Tamarind tree. Off they went, but before one could just close one's eyes and open them, Baba was calling us in great glee, from the very top! He asked the others to stop where they were and He called out to everyone, 'Be watching me; I am giving you the *darshan* of *Jyoti*.' Suddenly, there was a great big ball of fire, like the Sun, piercing that New Moon dusk. It was impossible to open the eye and keep looking. About three or four of the devotees fainted and fell. The time was a little past seven."

While mentioning the tope near Saheb-cheruvu, another incident too might be recorded. One day, Baba had tied a swing to the overhanging branch of a tree there and sitting on the contraption, He was swinging fast, up and down, in great joy, to the delight of all. Suddenly, He said, "Look," to the devotees sitting on the ground. They looked up and saw the charming Cowherd Boy of Brindavan, sitting on a magnificently decorated, flower-bedecked *Jhoola!* Then too, some lost consciousness and had to be revived by Baba scattering on them the *akshata* grains that He secured by a 'wave' of the Hand. While they woke up dazed and weeping with joy, Baba told them, "Calm yourselves! Do not get excited! This is why I do not grant you any of these Visions."



Mandir

Mandir

Similarly, the *purohit* of a family, whose Guest Baba was at Mysore, was granted, quiet unexpectedly, a vision of Narasimha, and the Srivaishnava Brahmin swooned and did not recover consciousness for several hours. A retired Health Inspector, to whom Baba showed the *jyoti* emanating from His forehead, while talking about God and Godhead, was so overcome with the strange splendour of the experience that he could not regain consciousness for full seventy hours and his children began chiding Baba for taking him so near the door of death!

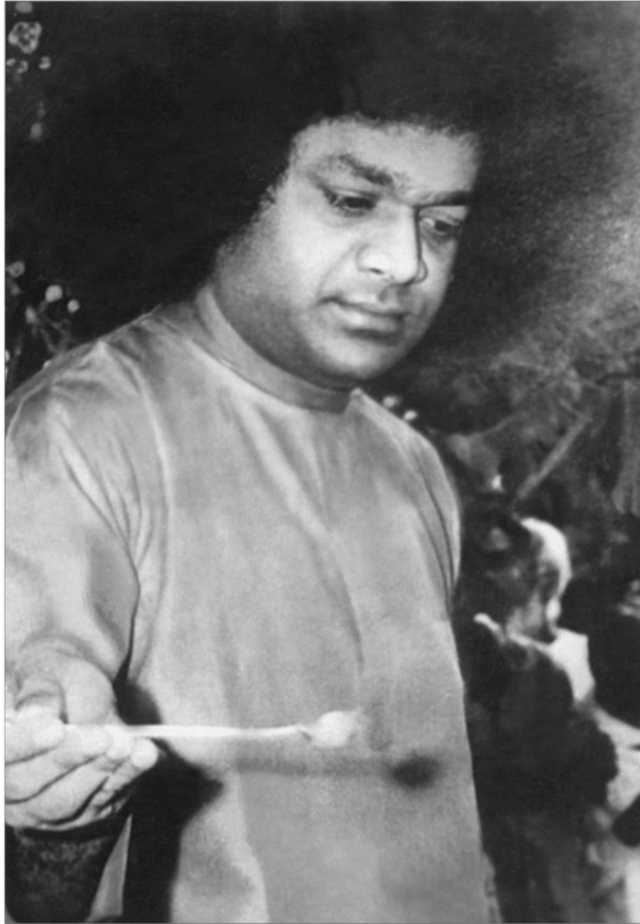
A devotee from Kamalapuram was asking Baba to show him some miracle and, one day, Baba called him and the members of his family, his mother and the rest, and offered to show them the *Dashavataras*, the Ten Incarnations of Vishnu! *Matsya*, *Kurma* and *Varaha* passed off without any incident, but, when the terrible form of Narasimha appeared, they shrieked and yelled with fright, fearing that the house might collapse on their heads. They clamoured, "Enough! Enough," and Baba calmed down after *Mangalarati* was performed, by persons, who, though they were there, did not see the Forms, because the miracle was not intended for them! The *Dashavatara* Forms were vouchsafed to another gentleman, now deceased, a relative of the Karnam family. As a matter of fact, he passed away, because his physical frame was too weak to contain the joy of the Vision. Baba took him to the river and asked him to watch the reflection, His own reflection, on the water. The man announced later that he saw at first Sathya Sai Baba Himself, then only the halo of hair that surrounds His head, and then all the ten *avatars* in the order in which they are mentioned in the *Puranas*; the *Kalki avatar* on horseback had the form of Baba Himself!

One can well appreciate the hesitation of Baba to vouchsafe these visions, when one

remembers the case of Krishnamurty, a clerk at the Mysore Secretariat. Of course, Baba will bless only those who have reached that stage in which they deserve the Vision that He grants; He is the Judge of the time, the recipient, and the nature of the Vision, and, if the person so blessed is so overwhelmed with Joy that he cannot survive in this physical frame-work, which is too weak a container for that type of Bliss, one has only to be thankful for the glory and the blessedness of such a death.

Baba was then at Bangalore, ostensibly a little boy of seventeen; He used to wear then a white half-arm shirt and a dhoti round His waist. The aforesaid Krishnamurty was a frequent visitor and an enthusiastic member of the *Bhajan* group that sang the *stotras*. He was closely watching Baba and following Him for a few days. Then, one day, at about 8 a.m. he confronted Baba and said rather excitedly, "I know You are God; show me Your real Form!" Baba tried to avoid him but couldn't. Then, He gave him a picture of Shirdi Sai Baba, which He 'took' on the spot, and directed him to meditate on that, keeping it against the wall. "Be looking at that picture," He commanded and left the house, to give *darshan* to some *Bhaktas* in their own homes.

Baba returned when the clock struck twelve. Just when He crossed the threshold, Krishnamurty raised a huge cry of joy and fainted in the inner room! When he came to his senses, he was shivering and shaking and breathing heavily; he kept his eyes tightly closed and he was pursuing Baba from room to room asking sometimes plaintively, sometimes authoritatively, "Give me Your *Pada* (Feet)! Let me touch Your Feet!" He seemed to know exactly where Baba was, by the sense of smell, for he was sniffing his way towards Him! But, Baba pushed him gently off or hid Himself or kept His feet firmly under Him while He sat and never acceded to his importunities.



Swami distributing ambrosial 'honey'

Swami distributing ambrosial 'honey'

When Krishnamurty was asked to open his eyes, he refused saying that he did not desire to cast his eyes on anything else, he wanted only to touch and see Baba's feet. His excitement and joy continued unabated for days and Baba said that if he touched His feet while in that ecstatic mood, he would pass away. So, Baba quietly persuaded him to go home, saying He would give him His *darshan* there, and Himself shifted to a house in the Civil Station. But, Krishnamurty could not contain himself; with his eyes still closed, he somehow sniffed his way; he boarded a *jutka* (horse-drawn cart), and directed the driver to the house where Baba was staying! He slid down from the *jutka* and ran into the compound. He roamed round the building, and began to bang at the very window of the room where Baba was at the time! Baba still spoke of the danger to his life, because of the overpowering joy of his experience. The man was dragged back home by his relations, who came behind him. He was still keeping his eyes closed and praying for Baba's feet.

He was taken to the hospital by some people, for he became weak through fasting and he

would not even drink water. Baba sent him at the hospital a little *Padatirtham*, that is to say, water with which His Feet had been washed and when he drank it, he became fit enough to be taken home. At home, he asked everyone to do *Bhajan*, himself lying on a cot in the same room. When the *Bhajan* was over, they found he did not rise. He had touched the Feet of the Lord; the River had found the Sea. What a highly evolved soul it must have been, to deserve that unspeakable Bliss!

In later years too, Baba has granted Visions of *Ishtadevatas* and of His own manifold Forms to many. These devotees cherish the memory of that moment of Bliss.

Baba has Himself said often that the Lord has to come in human form, in order to be understood by men, in order to speak to them in their own language, just as a person desirous of saving a drowning man has, perforce, to jump into the very same tank or well. No one can benefit from an *Avatar* if the Lord comes down, as He is, with His effulgence unimpaired.

On another occasion, He asked some persons who had come from Kamalapur, whether they would like to hear the *Muraligana* of Sri Krishna, and... who would say "No?" He asked them to lay their heads on His chest and lo, they could hear the enchanting melody of the Flute of Krishna that brought even the Yamuna to a standstill. Eshwaramma speaks of another thrilling experience, when Baba said, "Listen, Shirdi Sairam is here," she and everyone in the room could hear steps advancing towards them, heavy, wooden-sandaled steps; the steps ceased when they reached where Baba was sitting! It seemed when first the sound was heard, the mother asked with a little anger, "Who comes in with sandals on?" So real was the sensation, so true was the Vision!

While this is the experience of the 'mother', the 'father', Pedda Venkapa Raju had another incident to narrate. It seems one evening, some people came from Penukonda to Puttaparthi; among them was the old family friend, Sri Krishnamachari, who, though a native of Puttaparthi, had long ago settled down at Penukonda as a lawyer. He and others came to the karnam's house and Smt. Subbamma gave them coffee, etc. The talk naturally turned on the latest phenomenon of Sathyanarayana Raju and they asked Pedda Venkapa Raju, who happened to be there, what it all was and how true it was. He replied that it was all a mystery to him and that he too was equally in the dark. Then, it seems the lawyer called Venkapa Raju a 'cheat' and charged him with misleading innocent village folk with tall stories. This upset him so much that he went to where Baba was at the time and challenged Him to convince the doubters about His Divinity, so that they might not attack him as the lawyer did. Baba coolly

asked him to bring everyone who had any doubt, direct to Him.

At this, Smt. Subbamma and the Penukonda party were taken to Pedda Venkapa Raju's house, where Baba was at the time. Baba asked Subbamma if she would like to see the Shirdi *samadhi*, and on her saying "Yes," He took her inside the house to an inner room and said, "Look," and lo, there she could see the *samadhi* with all the flowers, incense stick with smoke and fragrance complete, and an attendant sitting in one corner, murmuring some *mantra* to himself! Baba told her, "This side, see the Anjaneya temple, and in the far distance, see that Margosa Tree," and it appeared to her as if she was in some vast open space looking at the scene in Shirdi, the entire landscape spreading out before her for miles to the horizon in the distance.



**Swami showing the Siva Lingam
materialised within His body on
Sivarathri**

***Swami showing the Shiva Lingam materialised within His body on
Shivaratri***

When she was brought out after this thrilling experience, she persuaded Sri Krishnamachari to follow Baba to the same inner room. Baba took them all in one by one and vouchsafed to each the same vision, a panoramic view of the *samadhi* at Shirdi and its locale. Pedda Venkapa Raju says that he was taken inside after all the rest and when he came out, he was a

changed man; his own doubts had vanished. The friends from Penukonda apologised for their slighting remarks and said that with a Divine Phenomenon like Baba, the sanest remark for anyone would be that it was "un-understandably mysterious." They and Subbamma and Pedda Venkapa Raju were convinced that day that the little boy of sixteen was really an incarnation of Baba. Pedda Venkapa Raju says that he instructed his family to consider Baba as Divine and not bother Him with any more littleness, neglect or temper.

Baba was engaged even during those early days in *upadesh*; in fact, His life is one continuous *upadesh*. A clear example of this is the *upadesham* He gave to Digambara Swami, when he came to Puttaparthi, in 1941. The town of Bukkapatnam was all agog with the visit of this ascetic, an aged man, who had lost the use of both his legs, who had discarded dress, and therefore was looked upon by the masses as a triple example of sagehood. His admirers were eager to watch the reactions of Baba, when pitted against a veteran of many hardships. The Digambara Swami had taken also a vow of silence and so, the curiosity of the people became greater. The sweet little Divine child met the Hefty Hero, who was carried to the village and deposited in front of the Karnam's house. Baba gave the unclothed sage a big towel (!) and some advice, the like of which he would not have got anywhere else.

"If you have cut off relationship with society, as your nakedness indicates you have, then why do you not go to a cave in a forest away from human society? Why are you afraid? On the other hand, if you have a craving for disciples, for name and the food available in cities and towns, why do you allow yourself to be mistaken for a man with no attachment?" These were the words that fell from the young Baba. They struck every one with wonder and admiration.

The Digambara Swami looked crestfallen, for he was evidently not sincere enough to act up to his 'nakedness' and his '*mounam*'! But, Baba was not sarcastic; no, far from it; He was ready to help, to assure, to guarantee! He said, patting the cripple on the back, "I know your difficulty. You are afraid you may not get food and shelter if you retire from the company of men, isn't it? Well, I assure you, any one taking the name of the Lord, wherever he may be, will get his food. I shall see to that. You may be in the deepest Himalayas or the thickest Dandakaranya, I shall give you food regularly there! But, if you have not that faith and that courage: you can meditate on Him here itself; then, don't wander about naked and give all this bother to these people to carry you about from place to place."

What a grand teaching that! If only people would grasp its meaning! That was the Authentic Voice; only an *Avatar* could give that assurance!

While on this point, it is best to mention here that this assurance is being given even today by Baba to all *sadhakas*. Three years ago, when Swami Satchidananda met Him, Baba told him to cultivate his *yogic* proficiency and not fritter it away in the manifold activities of an Organising Secretaryship, and He added, patting the seventy-year old *sanyasin* on the back, "Your *Yogic* attainments will themselves penetrate the rock of the cave where you sit and bring auspiciousness to the world; go to some Himalayan solitude; I shall provide you food and shelter wherever you are!"



The same authentic Voice, the Voice of the *Avatar*, comes to guide and guard all *sadhakas*, whatever the religion, the race, the clime!

With the arrival of devotees from all around at the news of the manifestation of Sai Baba at Puttaparthi, Baba was busy with the cure of their physical and mental ills. He says that even this forms part of His Mission, for no one can have the urge for spiritual discipline when pestered by physical and mental ills. So, many cases of chronic illness, lunacy, hysteria, possession by evil spirits and ghosts, etc., were brought to the presence of the Great Healer. Persons who were worshipping Shirdi Baba also came, out of curiosity, to examine the new Manifestation of their Lord. Many persuaded Baba to move to their places and thus Baba went to Bangalore and visited a few houses, which had contacts with Mirzapur, Kolapuram, Pithapuram, Sandur, Madras, and other places. Some devotees came also from the Ursu

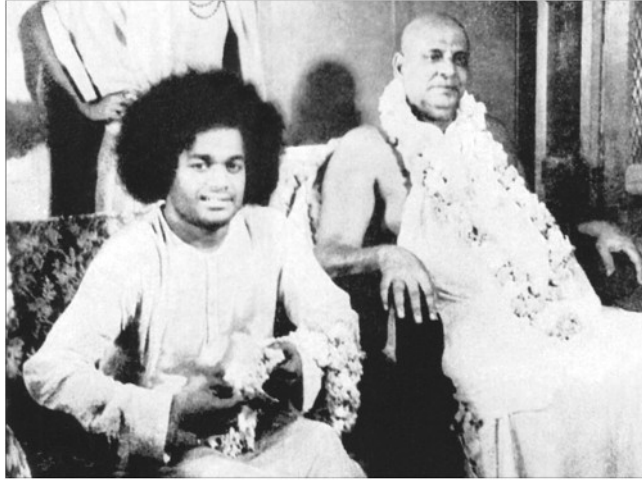
families connected with the royal line of Mysore. At Bangalore, Baba operated a long-standing case of duodenal ulcer and the patient got complete relief; the 'instruments' were all 'materialised' mysteriously and so, the stream of pilgrims increased considerably.

All these highlighted the need for a bigger *mandir* where Baba could reside and where the devotees could be accommodated. This was how the Old *Mandir* got planned by Tirumala Rao of Bangalore and others in 1945. The place selected was a little away from the village, between the Sathyamma and the Gopalakrishna temples, the very site on which sheds and *pandals* were put up since years, during festivals, by the *Karnam* family and other devotees.

When the servant, Gooni Venkata (that is, Venkata with the hump) dug at the spot indicated by Baba, so that the consecrated stones may be laid as foundation, a large number of stone *peethams*, bases of *lingams*, turned up! But, strangely enough, dozens of *peethams*, but not even a single *lingam*! People gathered round Baba and sought the answer. Baba told them cryptically, pointing a finger at His stomach, "The *Lingams* are all here." Those who have witnessed the emanation of *lingams* from Baba's mouth on the night of every *Mahashivaratri* might be convinced of the correctness of the answer; others will have to be satisfied with the consolation that the ways of the Lord are beyond the categories with which we measure and weigh and infer and judge.

After the completion of the building, Baba came over from the *Karnam*'s house and began residing in the room to the left of the front veranda, a small room, about 8 feet long and 6 feet wide.

Meanwhile, Baba had gone to Madras and given *darshan* to thousands there. He also went as far as Masulipatnam. Wherever He went, He granted people peace of mind and spiritual advice, and assured them all that He would guide and guard them. One day, while on the sands of the seashore near Masulipatnam, Baba walked straight into the sea! The devotees took some time to realise the situation. Then they heard a voice and turned towards the waves, then lo, they saw a vision of Sheshashayee, the Lord on the Serpent Shesha, reclining on the waves! Within a moment, Baba was by their side. They were struck by the fact that His clothes were not wet at all.



Swami Sivananda with Bhagawan Baba

Swami Sivananda with Bhagawan Baba

Another day, He walked towards the sea up to the very edge of the water and threw a silver cup, far into the waves. Everyone wondered why; but, in an instant the cup came back and deposited near them. Baba lifted it up along with the 'salt water' it contained; He poured the water on to the palms of the *Bhaktas*, a few drops for each, to be swallowed religiously; and lo, each one found it fragrant and sweet beyond compare! The sea had offered Him *Amrita*, just as, years later, it placed round His feet a garland of pearls.

Persons, who witnessed these *leelas* and partook of the Nectar, are now at Prasanthi Nilayam, ardent devotees of Bhagawan.

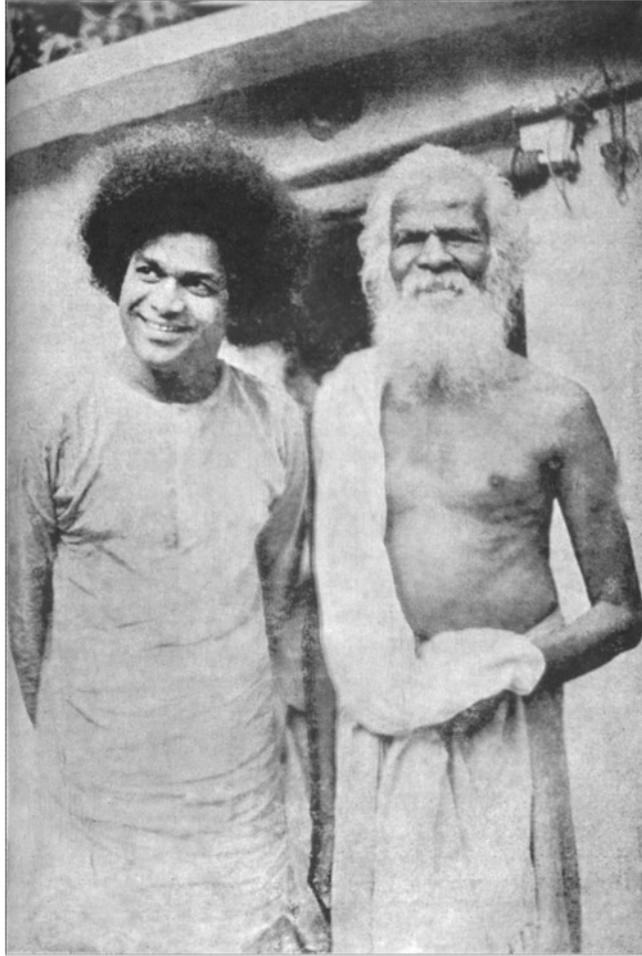
It would be a mistake to infer from these incidents that Baba was attempting to impress the people around Him by the manifestation of His Divinity. Being miraculous is of the very nature of the Lord; His actions are beyond our arithmetic and physics and chemistry. Plato called the inquiry into the nature of the relationship between the "here and now" and the "Hereafter and Ever" as meta-physics, or 'after-physics'. Baba's actions are all meta! He vouchsafes the miracles, because He is He, not because of any desire or purpose or want, for what can He ever want or wish?

Whenever any person came into the Presence, even in those days, Baba immediately took him in Hand and; by advice, suggestion, satire, sarcasm, or even downright reprimand, He slowly shaped him into a humble, silent, pious, but, withal, efficient enthusiastic limb of society. That is the alchemy of His Touch. Even when He addressed groups of devotees He harped on the need for the inner transformation. He told everyone to have courage and said that, courage can come only by faith in the infinite power, the infinite mercy of the Lord. Of

course, anyone inclined to doubt need only approach Him and taste His infinite power and His infinite mercy.

Talking of His *karuna*, an incident that happened at Bangalore, while He was yet in His teens, occurs to mind. A cobbler plying his trade in a corner of a road in the Civil Station saw Baba in a bungalow opposite the place where he sat; many cars were moving into the house and coming out; flowers and fruits were being taken in and the faces of those that came out on the road were bright with joy and contentment; they were talking of an *avatar*, of Sri Krishna, of Bhagawan, of Baba, etc. So, he too ventured to enter the gate and peep nervously into the hall, where Baba was seated on a special chair, with men on one side and women on the other; his eyes fell on Baba, just when He too looked at him. Baba rose up immediately and came forward to the very door where he stood; He approached him, took the little dried-up garland that the cobbler held in his hand, even before the man offered it and He asked him in Tamil, what he wanted from Him!

The temerity to formulate his wish and express it in so many words must have been granted to that aged cobbler by Baba Himself, for how else can we explain the astounding request that he dared to make? He said, quite confidently and without hesitation, to the surprise of everyone who heard him, "Please come to my house also and accept something!" Baba patted his back lovingly and said, "All right, I shall come," and resumed His seat at the other end of the hall.



Swami Purushothamananda with Bhagawan

Swami Purushothamananda with Bhagawan

The cobbler waited long, because he wanted to tell Baba where his house was and he wanted to know when Baba would visit it, so that he might clean it and be ready to receive Him; but, he had to hurry back to his corner to keep watch over his bag of leather pieces and old shoes; he was pushed and jostled by the rush of visitors; no one listened to him when he said that Baba had promised to pay a visit to his hut and he wanted them to find out from Him when He would be coming. Some laughed at him and his audacity; some said he was drunk or mad. Days passed. Baba spent His days with other *Bhaktas* and did not visit the bungalow opposite the cobbler's corner. He gave up all hope of meeting Baba again.

Suddenly, one day, a swell car pulled up right in front of the aged fellow. He was taken aback; he was afraid it might be the police van or some Corporation officer intent on prosecuting him. But, it was Baba! He invited the cobbler to get into the car; the man was too confused even to open his mouth to direct the driver to his hut; but, Baba seemed to know! Stopping the car on the side of the road, He got down and hastened over the cobble-stones in

the side-lane to the exact hut, in the midst of a number of slum dwellings! The cobbler ran forward to warn his family; Baba 'took' some sweets and fruits and gave them as *prasad* to the members of the cobbler's family, and sat on a plank near the wall. He blessed the aged man, who was shedding tears of joy, partook of a few plantains that he brought from a shop nearby and left the hut, which he had made by His visit a place of pilgrimage for the entire neighbourhood! Such was Baba's *prema*.

But, some in their foolishness attempted even to poison Baba! Since the incident reveals more than one fact of Baba's Divinity, it is best to relate it in some detail. Even today, Baba will not allow the attempt to be called an 'attempt to kill'; and, since His Words are Truth, we shall repeat that it was just an attempt to test whether He could survive the eating of poison; it was more the result of scepticism, than of wickedness.

It was a festival day and Baba visited a few houses in His native village with two devotees. In each house, He partook of something or the other and when He entered the house where the fatal food was ready, He showed extra enthusiasm, and demanded more of the stuff and saw to it that His companions did not consume the deadly mixture. When he returned to the Karnam's house, He confided to some persons the secret of the special invitation from the particular house and talked about the utter futility and foolishness of it all and He had a hearty laugh over the incident. After some time, He vomited the whole stuff; persons near Him secretly tested whether it was poisonous to living beings or not. It was!

In fact, Baba takes delight in doing just what we mortals dread to do. For example, the night of the snake-bite! This incident is described in the chapter on "The Wave of the Hand!" That night, after the recovery of Baba with the applications of the talisman produced miraculously through His Grace, everyone in the village pleaded with Him not to have any supper, for food might aggravate the poison; but, He audaciously ate a little more than usual; they warned Him against sleep, not knowing that His sleep was similar to the *Nidramudra* that is devoted to the vigilant protection of the world, but He slept longer than usual. Next morning, He was asked by the elders to avoid cold water, but He purposely dived into a well and swam, about, just to spite human nervousness and human precautions! In spite of these constant reminders of His Divinity, we drag the Height to our own depths and circumscribe the Supreme Illogical into our cramped, but symmetric syllogisms!



An incessant flow of Vibhuti from an empty vessel

An incessant flow of Vibhuti from an empty vessel

Subbamma was the person most anxious about His "health" and most worried about the hundreds of pilgrims who gathered at Puttaparthi. Baba even now says that the grinding stone in her house was always busy, preparing *chutney* out of the heaps of coconuts that the pilgrims offered. Subbamma was grinding and grinding and grinding, almost eight hours of the day! She had immense love and devotion to the Lord and Baba had said that He would satisfy her one desire... to have the *darshan* of Baba in her last moments. It is indeed a thrilling story, the story of those moments and that *darshan*.

Subbamma fell ill; she was taken to Bukkapatnam; but in spite of her illness, she came over one day in a bullock cart to see the Prasanthi Nilayam, which was then under construction; she was soon bed-ridden; she could not move; her condition worsened; and Baba was away, at Bangalore! Subbamma, in her delirium, talked about Baba and the vision of Shirdi Sai Baba which she had been privileged to see, of the manifold *leelas* of the Krishna she had witnessed, and, when she came to her senses, her talk was about the same incidents and the same Person. She was in the midst of relatives who did not have much sympathy with these

sentiments, for they felt that her love for the strange, little, miraculous boy had taken her away from attachment to her kith and kin and so, they told her that her Baba was a hundred miles away, and therefore, it would be better for her to concentrate her failing attention on men and matters, nearer and closer. But, her faith did not falter.

Meanwhile, Baba left Bangalore for Tirupati, where He spent some time with the devotees of His own concretised and consecrated image. Of course, Baba knew that Subbamma's soul was struggling to free itself from the mortal coil, and that she was rolling in her death-bed at Bukkapatnam. The people around her announced that she had breathed her last. But, some peculiar glow on her face made them nervous to take the body to the cremation ground. A few wiser persons shook their heads when it was suggested that she had died. They advised patience and admonished the relatives; "The bird has not flown yet," they said. How could that bird fly, even though the door of the cage was lying open? She must have the *darshan* and she must wait until Baba comes. And Baba too was hurrying towards her bedside. He left Tirupati by car and arriving at Puttaparthi, proceeded to Bukkapatnam, three full days after the first announcement of Subbamma's end! Her eyes had lost the glint, she was placed on the floor and people were evincing an uneasy impatience. Baba sat by her side and in a low voice, called out, "Subbamma, Subbamma," just twice and no more! Then, to the wonderment of everyone crowding around, Subbamma opened her eyes; her hand extended towards Baba and grasped His palm firmly and began to stroke it lovingly; Baba put His fingers to her lips; her mouth opened a little, as if she knew that Baba was giving her something to slake the thirst of the soul. From the fingers of Baba, there poured into her mouth the Immortal Ganga and Subbamma joined the ranks of the Released!

About this time, Baba was approached by some Muslims of the neighbouring village on a matter of some importance for them. Their ranks were reduced by a fell disease. The worship of what are called *Pirs* is traditional in these parts during the month of Mohurram. The installation, the worship, the ceremonial procession and the immersion, all being celebrated by the Hindu as well as the Muslim communities. *Pirs* are the hand-shaped objects made of brass, etc., which are held sacred as mementoes of the sacrifice of Hassan and Hussein on the memorable battlefield of Karbala. Baba told the Muslims who came to Him that *Pirs* were being installed in their village since hundreds of years, but lately, the ceremony had stopped. He asked them to continue the worship and revealed to them that if they could dig at a certain place which He pointed out, they would get the very *Pirs* which their forefathers consecrated. They dug at the place and the *Pirs* were exposed to view! Everyone was so surprised at

Baba's omniscience and the sudden appearance of the sacred objects that none had the courage to descend and pull them into the open. So, Baba Himself got down the pit and took the *Pirs* out. There were four of them at the place! For many years thereafter, these were kept at the *Mandir* itself, rolled up in a mat and packed neatly. They were issued to those villagers for the Mohurram celebrations only, and they were duly returned after the functions were over.

One curious circumstance that was witnessed by the present writer may be added here. When the Muslims were once proceeding from the *Mandir*, after accepting the *Pirs* from Baba's hands, the person who carried them began to act as if he was 'possessed' and all began to gather around him, to watch the holy man in that elevated mood. He danced a few steps, ran round in circles, muttered a few verses of the Holy Quran to himself, and walked back to where Baba was! Then Baba said, "Go, go and come back, after the festival," and quietly, the 'possessed' man sped forward with the *Pirs* in the same tense condition of prayerful joy. Only those who have had the privilege of experiencing such moments can grasp an iota of the Mystery that is Baba.



Origin of man – Tiny model of monkey created by Baba

Many devotees came to Puttaparthi during those days from far and near. Each one was drawn from his place by some inexplicable circumstance and kept loyal by some glimpse of Baba's Omniscience, or Omnipresence, or Omnipotence. A gentleman from Udumalpet who first refused to join the party of pilgrims, but was later persuaded to join, offered a flower garland to Baba, as soon as Puttaparthi was reached, as everyone else did; but Baba did not accept his offering. He said, "You had no mind to come!" and that remark bound Him closer to the unbeliever.

Another gentleman from Madurai came, because his sister at Vellore accepted to have an operation performed on her, only if and when Baba agreed it was essential. He came to

Puttaparthi, but Baba did not speak to him for some days; and, when at last He spoke, He only asked him to go back to Vellore by the next available bus. The Doctor at Vellore was getting more and more furious, because the silly patient was endangering her own life, waiting for a *hukum* from a Boy, who, she said, was her Guru and God! The brother came at last; another examination was made; and wonder of wonders, there was no need for an operation! Is it the same 'she'? The doctor rubbed his eyes.

It would make very inspiring reading, if a book is composed of the answers from devotees to the question, "How did you first come to Puttaparthi and why?" If such a volume is ever produced, the story of the coming of Smt. Sakamma, the famous Coffee Planter and philanthropist of Coorg, the lady who was honoured with the title of *Dharmaparayani* by the Maharaja of Mysore will be an interesting chapter. Not that she was rich and famous in the field of business and industry. Oh, no. Baba does not mind a person being rich, nor being poor. He cares for the richness of character, the wealth of *sadhana*, the treasures of the spirit, whatever the bank balance!

The late Smt. Sakamma used to tell this strange story that she experienced. One day, at her own bungalow in Somawarpet, Coorg, when she was engaged in worship, a servant disturbed her and announced that a car had come into the compound and that the person inside insisted on seeing her immediately. She was rather upset, but nevertheless went out to find who could take so much liberty with her timetable. She found in the car a tall, fair, old man with a very reverend beard, sitting on a deerskin, his whole body bathed in ash. And she was struck by the age of the car too, for it matched the age of the owner or occupant. The car was driven by a weak little boy in his teens and Smt. Sakamma wondered how he could have managed to secure a licence or whether he had one at all. The car had a name plate, on top, in front, "THE KAILASH COMMITTEE!" She invited the old man inside; did *pranam*; placed a newly plucked rose at his feet; and offered him some fruits. He said that he would not eat the fruits there; he said he did not cater to the tongue at all times and all places. *Jihvachapalya* was the word he used; he wanted her to contribute to the Kailash Committee and become a Member, by giving the donation of a thousand rupees. She signed a paper in which the sum and her name was already written! When she proffered the amount, the old man said, "Keep this also with you. I shall come and take it later." With those words, he kept on the table the signed sheet and, getting into the car, he left the place! The teenaged driver did his work remarkably well, for the car was out of sight in a moment.

Years later, when she saw Baba in a house to which she had gone, He appeared to her at one

moment like the driver of that mysterious car and the next, like the hoary occupant who took so much pains to make her contribute to the "Kailash Committee", and then, asked her to wait with the cash in her own keeping! And then, Baba surprised her by telling her, "Come on, give the Rs.1000/ you promised that day!" and describing in her presence the entire story, correct to the minutest detail.

Baba went to Mysore City during the Deepavali festival once and stayed with an Ursu devotee. While there, He granted the devotees at Puttaparthi the vision of a *Naga*, a phenomenon not unknown to the devotees of Shirdi *rupa* (Form) also, as the citizens of Coimbatore and of many other places can confirm. The interesting fact about this vision is that, at the same time, or rather, for the entire period that it lasted, Baba was 'outside' His Physical frame, which was at Mysore. The *Bhajan* at the 'Old *Mandir*' was done during the absence of Baba, before a temporary shrine on the steps leading up to the front door, where a photo was kept decorated, with a pair of lamps which burnt both day and night. Deepavali night passed off and in the early dawn some devotees at Puttaparthi saw the lights of a car coming up the curve of the hill beyond Karnatanagepalli. But, that was later found to be just an impression of a few. When the persons who saw the light and ran forward to the river bank returned to the *Mandir*, they were surprised to hear that a Cobra had coiled round the portrait of Baba, in the temporary shrine. It was seen by hundreds of villagers and others, until 3 p.m. They offered *pooja* to it, sang the regular *bhajan* at noon, and broke coconuts to propitiate it, but it did not stir out of its place. Emboldened by this, some women threw *kumkum* and saffron powder on it, pronouncing the name of the Lord and calling upon Baba; they placed milk in bowls before it; it only swayed its raised hood from side to side. One venerable woman of the village, when the two halves of a coconut were given back to her after the ceremonial offering, protested loudly, saying that the nut she handed in was definitely bigger in size and that she would be a loser if she quietly accepted the halves of a smaller nut; at this, the Cobra, as if it was keenly watching the proceedings, turned sharply in her direction and hissed loudly! Everyone had a hearty laugh at her fright! At 3 p.m., the Cobra slid down and within a yard or two became invisible. And Baba at Mysore brought joy to all, getting up.



Chincholi Palace tonga used by Shirdi Sai Baba (now kept in Chaitanya Jyothi Museum at Prasanthi Nilayam)

Chincholi Palace tonga used by Shirdi Sai Baba (now kept in Chaitanya Jyothi Museum at Prasanthi Nilayam)

Just as Baba went to Mysore, He visited also Hyderabad and since He recognised a number of places as those which He had once seen, the Rani of Chincholi got convinced that He was the *Avatar* of Shirdi Baba Himself. Baba also went to Kuppam and from thence to Karur, and Trichinopoly. Everywhere, He was welcomed with great enthusiasm by the devotees and citizens. At Trichinopoly, the procession was led by a richly caparisoned elephant, followed by parties reciting *Vedic mantras* and carrying in silver pots consecrated water as an offering of homage. Everywhere He advised the people, "From now onwards, purify your hearts and make them fit tabernacles for the Lord. Do not fall deeper and deeper into evil, yielding to temptations. Take courage. Believe in the Lord who is within you; He is your thickest and nearest kith and kin."

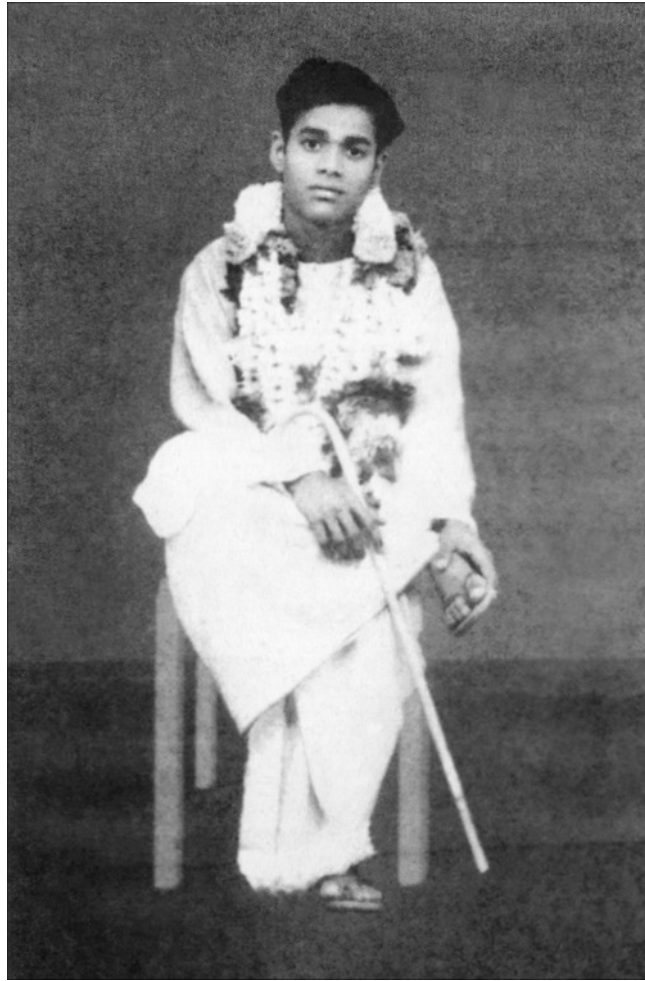
While the cars of Baba's party were going along the streets of Trichinopoly, one of the vehicles ran over a little boy and he was badly injured; a crowd collected around the boy, who was laid bleeding and hurt on the veranda of a house nearby and the police popped up to investigate; but meanwhile, Baba had come and touched the boy; so, when the police came, they had nothing to report, for the boy who was hurt, was running about telling everyone how one touch had made him whole. Long after Baba left, that boy was fondled and fed by an admiring crowd, who envied him for his miraculous experience.

There was another boy too, who was similarly honoured by an admiring crowd, and who perhaps even today is thankful to the Lord for intervention in his career. At a public meeting near Trichinopoly, held to honour Baba, someone doubted the Divinity of Baba and, sensing

this from the platform, Baba immediately called up a deaf and dumb lad, who was standing near the aforesaid person, and making him stand in front of the mike, He asked him, "What is your name?" Immediately, the boy spoke into the mike for all the thousands to hear, "Venkatanarayanan!" The doubter swallowed his tongue and hung his head in shame, but there was another consequence too. Baba often talks about this incident with laughter. For, when morning dawned, the entire length of the street where He was residing was packed with the dumb and deaf! It had become a silent lane of pain! No one knew till then that Trichinopoly has such a large population of that particular brand of handicapped. Baba had to move out of the bungalow through a side exit, in order to avoid the clamour of their relatives.

The devotees at Karur and Trichinopoly vied with each other in decorating their houses and streets and in the magnificence of reception arrangements. But, Baba was unaffected by all the pageantry. He moved freely among the people, both rich and poor, sometimes more among the poor than among His hosts, for He cares more for the prayerful heart and the heart filled with remorse than those puffed with pride and contaminated by greed. The *mandapams*, bedecked with flowers of variegated hue which were erected for seating Him and offering worship to Him, were gems of artistry. But, Baba told the people times without number that He attached value only to the unsullied blossom of a pure heart and the fruit-offerings of good deeds, the *hridaya-pushpa* and the *karmaphala*, as He says.

Once at Mysore, seated on one such *mandapam*, Baba was receiving the *pooja* of an Ursu devotee, when a cobra appeared from nowhere and crept on to the heap of flowers at His feet; presently, it was accompanied by another and the two took up positions on both sides of the *mandapam*. Baba assured the members of the Ursu family that there was nothing to be afraid of and, after a while, the cobras disappeared into the nowhere from which they emerged!



Baba is not content merely by instilling faith in His devotees through these miracles; He is a hard taskmaster, who will be satisfied with nothing less than cent per cent integrity and a sincere striving for the spiritual discipline. This explains why, of the very large number of men and women who are drawn to Him by the stories of His miracles and who get their first impressions of His Divinity confirmed by many subsequent miracles, fall away from Him, unable to cope with the demands He makes, in character reform, renunciation, *sadhana*, *japam* and *dhyana*. Baba reiterated even those early days that He wards off physical calamities, cures bodily ills, heals, consoles, and gives solace, only as a first step towards *sadhana* which must automatically follow His *darshan*. Many a *Sadhu* and *Maharishi* have fallen into the mire, because of their anxiety to keep themselves in the good books of rich and influential patrons, but Baba, who has come to illumine the paths of *sadhus* and *Maharishis*, has never minced matters, when it comes to correcting the faults of those around Him; in fact, His Grace is so overpowering that it disregards the obstacles of age, scholarship, or length of association; He blesses everyone with His correction and evaluation. Complete resignation to His Will alone can make each one full and free.

Dasara soon became the festival par excellence at Puttaparthi, for while Baba might be away at Madras or at Trichinopoly or Masulipatnam for other festivals, He was invariably at the *Mandiram* for *Dasara*. Srimati Sakamma and other devotees were privileged for many years to make arrangements for this festival of the Mother. Baba is indeed the Supreme Mother, manifesting Herself as Saraswati, Lakshmi, Sharada, Annapurna, and even Kali. Baba has said that *Sanathana Dharma* is the Divine Mother of Humanity; with His Message of *Sathya*, *Dharma*, *Shanti* and *Prema*, the four cardinal principles of that *Dharma*, He is Himself the Mother, the *Sanathana Sarati*. His devotees feel that He is their Mother more than all and so, there is a special appropriateness in *Dasara* being the biggest festival at Puttaparthi. Many among His *Bhaktas* have been blessed with visions of Him as the Mother. In fact, one of them insists on addressing Him as *Shivatayi*, Shiva and Mother.

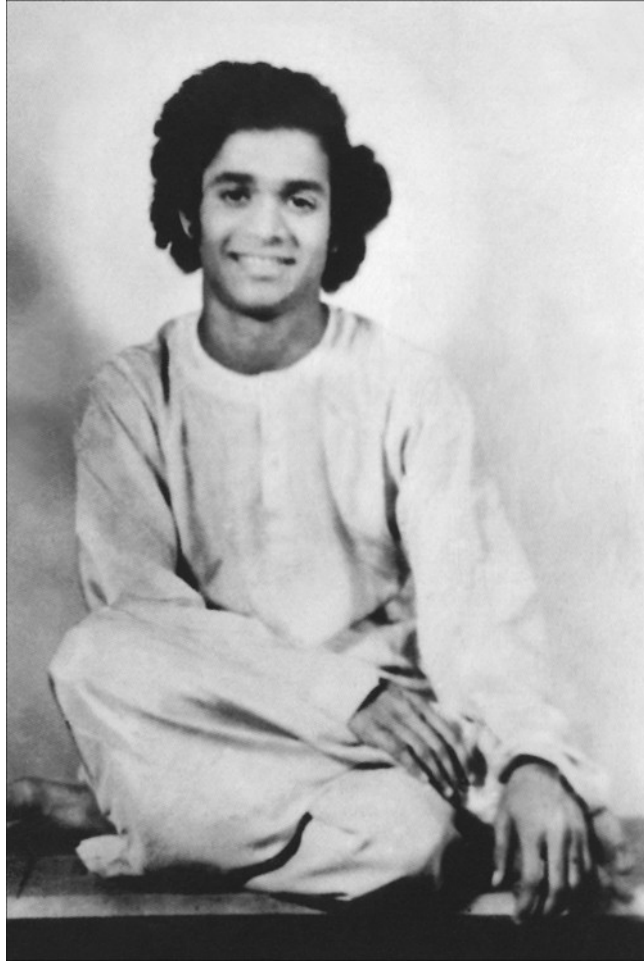
He likes the company of children and even the most recalcitrant is brought round by Him, through an inexhaustible repertoire of tricks, games, ventriloquial achievements, shadow figures and even presents of sweets, materialised by a wave of the hand. He twists and turns His fingers and lo, when the shadow falls on the bare wall opposite, the children are astonished to find snakes, eagles, horses, stags, dogs, peacocks, crows, cats and buffaloes jumping about in high glee. He offers the child a ball of sand; it reluctantly extends its tiny hand to receive the *Laddu* as He calls it; the sand actually becomes sweet fragrant *laddu* the moment it reaches the palm of the child. He says that children are indeed lucky, since they have the good fortune of Baba's *darshan* much earlier than adults, and they are privileged to have Baba as their Teacher, Protector, Guide and Guardian, for many decades to come. When Baba agrees to name the children of His devotees, the names He gives them are redolent of His Grace and His Mercy. He also initiates the little ones in *Akshara*; that is, He holds their tiny fingers in His hand and scribbles along with them in honey or milk or rice, the letters of the alphabet.

But, *akshara* means also the imperishable, the eternal; and Baba, when He inaugurates the *aksharabhyasa*, initiates them also into the Imperishable. For, He makes the child pronounce the *mahamantra*. 'Om *Namo Narayana*', or 'Om *Namashivaya*', or 'Om *Srinivasaya*' or anyone of such, suited to the traditions of the family of the child, thus giving the child the key to ultimate spiritual destiny. There is a Tamil song on Baba, which refers to Him as the *Sayimata*, the Mother who suckles her children on the milk of *Gnyana*, and the *aksharabhyasa* is the occasion on which the fortunate child gets the chance.

Baba shines forth as the Patron of Music and Letters, and as the Giver of Food and

Sustenance, during *Dasara*, and so, it is a memorable festival, from the very beginning of this Manifestation. The devotees delight in discourses, musical performances, dramas and sumptuous feasts. Every evening, during those years, there was a procession too, along the narrow roads of the village, Baba on a palanquin decorated differently on each day, and carried on the shoulders by eager relays of *Bhaktas*. During the progress of the procession, the present writer has himself seen Baba plucking from the garlands around Him odd flowers and, with a palm full of petals, scattering them among the crowd. And lo, it all fell with a jingle, for each petal had become a small medallion with Baba's portrait on one side and Shirdi Sai Baba's portrait on the other! Or, it often happened that the petals were turned into peppermints, which rained among the crowds around the palanquin! While on the palanquin, Baba's Forehead will often be covered by *vibhuti* that emanated from within and *Bhaktas* could see this, as well as *kumkum* dots!

Soon, the *Mandir* was found to be too small for the gatherings of devotees. Many worshippers of Shirdi Sai Baba, on hearing that He had incarnated in human form in the village of Puttaparthi hurried thither. Many, who went on pilgrimage to Shirdi as usual, were 'directed' there to go to Puttaparthi instead. Others got to know the Baba of Shirdi through Sathya Sai Baba Himself. "*Aarto jignyasurararthi gnyani cha*," says Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*. "Flock to the Lord," that is to say. The afflicted, the inquiring, the seekers of comfortable life and the wise-these four types approach the Lord with their varied motives, but the Lord welcomes all and satisfies all. The afflicted, He relieves. His *vibhuti* acts as a charm to drive away evil spirits and the effects of black magic from hundreds of unfortunates. The critical, the inquisitive, the doubting, the sceptical, the agnostic, He satisfies and attracts and attaches to Himself. The persons eager to get a comfortable life, He blesses, provided they are educated enough to use the peace of mind they get for cultivating the spirit and contemplating on the ultimate goal of Life itself. The *gnyani* is dearest to Him, for He reveals Himself in all His Glory to his vision, purified and clarified by steadfast discipline. Persons belonging to all these groups came to Puttaparthi, the first and the third groups naturally in much larger numbers. He revolutionised the lives of all, who came to Him.



The transformation of a gang of thieves into quiet God-fearing agriculturists is worth noting. When Baba one night was on the hill on the other bank of the Chitravati, He came upon a group of dacoits, who were engaged in the rather ticklish task of dividing their spoils. But, when they saw Him and accepted from His hand the Divine *vibhuti*, they knew they were face to face with the Eternal Witness. Baba spoke to the seventeen black hearts and, by His alchemy, He brought them over to the village of Puttaparthi. They all took up ways of peaceful living and Baba used to present one of them as an example, a sturdy man of middle age, whom He had appointed as a night watch-man!

A long shed had to be put up within a few years in front of the *mandir*, along its whole length, with a corrugated sheet roofing to accommodate the gatherings of devotees. But, even that proved too small. A separate block, with one living room and bath room was put up for Baba, behind the *Mandir*. It was in this room that Baba operated on Dr. Padmanabhan's brother for hernia! It was in that shed, behind the screen in front of the shrine that Baba operated on Appiah of Puttaparthi for appendicitis.

It was while sleeping in the open space between the *Mandir* and the block behind, that Baba,

one night, announced that one of His *Bhaktas* had lost a talisman that He had given him, for it had come back into His possession! He said that He must go to Madras immediately to tie it to the wrist of the patient, but all around Him prayed that He should not undertake the 'journey' at that hour, going out of His body and coming back into it. He agreed to send it with someone proceeding to Madras and gave the talisman into the custody of Sri Sheshagiri Rao, an old devotee, with the warning, "Keep it tight; tie it in a towel and wind it round your waist." He obeyed the command implicitly and slept with the talisman, wound round his middle.

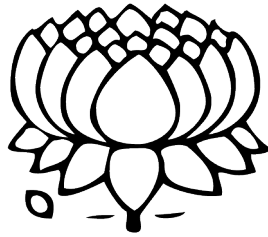
About two hours later, all of us were awakened by the loud laughter of Baba, who had sat up in bed. We gathered round Him and wanted that He should permit us to join in the joke. Sheshagiri Rao was still unaware of what was going on. Baba woke him up and asked for the talisman. He unwound the towel, unrolled it, and lo, it had disappeared! Baba chided him for fun and said that He had 'gone' and tied it round the wrist of the person who had to be continuously guarded by it! Yes! He had gone to Madras and returned!

Bhaktas will never forget the Old *Mandiram*, for Baba was always moving right in the midst of the people there. He composed a large number of *bhajan* songs on Krishna which He taught them, while there. He trained them and corrected them on the spot, and with great love and attention. Since the number of devotees who were present was not very large, Baba used to go out more frequently to the sands on the riverbed, or the hills around or the gardens across the river and while they were engaged in cooking the feast, they saw many 'miracles', or signs of His Divinity.

I first had *darshan* of Baba at the Old *Mandiram* and that very evening, He proceeded to the sands! There, I heard Him admonish some *Bhaktas* for getting agitated in mind for all kinds of minor troubles. He told them that they must concentrate on *japam*, as the best means of earning *shanti* and then, He suddenly turned upon a lady devotee with the question, "Don't you do *japam*?" She said something in reply, but Baba did not wait to hear it. "Oh, you have lost your *Japamala*, haven't you?" He asked. Then, thrusting His hand into the sand, He took out a rosary and said, "Here, come and take this." The lady rose reverentially and came forward with folded hands to receive. Baba signed to her to halt and told her with a smile illuminating His face, "Wait. First tell me which rosary this is?" She looked at it and gasped, "Mine, Swami! Or rather, my mother's." She was so happy she had got back her *Japamala*, the one given to her by her dying mother. Baba told us all about her mother's piety, her brother's rigorous *tapas*, and her own *sadhana* and asked her when she had lost the precious

Japamala. She struck us all dumb by declaring she had misplaced it four years previously, at Bangalore! What an astounding miracle to witness, on one's very first evening at Puttaparthi!

The gathering of *Bhaktas* increased in number from month to month. The Old *Mandiram* was found inadequate; it was not possible to meet every day on the sands. The *Bhaktas* felt that Baba's room was too cramped and low. He was being forced to live in the very midst of noise and dust and confusion. On festival occasions, the area around the *Mandir* was too small to accommodate the persons who came; and so, some devotees prayed to Baba to agree to the construction of the spacious building, which Baba has named "Prasanthi Nilayam".





7.

Prasanthi Nilayam

The Prasanthi Nilayam was inaugurated on 23rd November, 1950, the 25th Birthday of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. It took about two years to build. Baba can be said to be the architect and engineer, who directed the entire work of construction.

WHAT a fine name for the dwelling of the Lord! What cool breezes and quiet solitudes does that name invoke! The mountains that stand in a ring round the Nilayam look like hoary sages lost in contemplation. The broad sky inspires vast boundless musings; the rocks on top of the hills invite the *sadhaka* for meditation. Baba has planted a *Tapovana* on the side of the hill, behind the Nilayam and in that *vana* there grows a banyan tree which is bound to become the holiest of such trees, at least so far as the seekers of spiritual uplift are concerned.

The banyan tree, known as *Nyagrodha* and *Vatavriksha* is famous in Indian sacred literature and history. Mahavishnu is said to sleep on a *Vatapatra*, or a banyan leaf, when *Pralaya* overpowers the world and the flood waters pervade the entire Earth. Dakshinamurti, or Lord Shiva in the Form of the *Guru* is described as sitting under a Banyan Tree, expounding by His very Silence, all knowledge to His disciples, just as Mahavishnu, by His *Yoganidra*, is vigilantly guarding the three worlds! This tree may be said to symbolise *Sanathana Dharma*, for its branches reach out in all directions and draw sustenance from every type of faith and every spiritual striving. It is also called *Bahupada* in Sanskrit, for the series of roots that its branches send down towards the earth, strike the ground and seek food therein and make the branches independent even of the parent trunk. The tree is therefore immortal and there are in India, banyan trees that have been worshipped for over thousands of years, like the one at Triveni at Prayag (Allahabad) or the one called *Akshayavata* at Gaya.

The *Vata* that is growing in the *Tapovanam* has a peculiar sanctity of its own. In April, 1959,

while talking one evening on the sands of the Chitravati River to a gathering of devotees, Baba spoke of Buddha and the Bodhi Tree and of *sadhakas* seeking some specially favourable spots for their *tapas*. Even as He was speaking thus, He 'took' out from the sands a thick copper plate, about 15 inches by 10 inches, containing mystic markings and letters of many known and unknown alphabets! He said that, such *shasanas* are planted under the trees where *sadhakas* do *tapas*, so that they may be helped to develop concentration of mind and control of the sense. He announced that He would be placing that *shasana* under a Banyan tree that He proposed to plant in the *Tapovanam*; this was actually done on 29th June and Baba declared that *yogis*, who have reached a certain stage of *tapas*, will automatically come to know of this Tree and this *shasana* and they will be drawn by a mysterious force towards the *Tapovanam*, which will then be fully justifying its name!

The Prasanthi Nilayam was inaugurated on 23rd November, 1950, the 25th Birthday of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. It took about two years to build. Baba can be said to be the architect and engineer, who directed the entire work of construction. His suggestions had to be accepted by the engineers, for they found them much better than even theirs; they found Baba had a greater sense of perspective, a nicer aesthetic point of view than they had. Baba was a hard taskmaster, but with immeasurable *Karuna*, too. And His Grace overcame the most insurmountable obstacles! For example, huge heavy girders for the central prayer-hall came from near Trichinopoly by train to Penukonda all right, but how on earth could they be brought over the District Board road, sixteen miles long, with a sandy stream on the seventh mile? How can any lorry with those long bars sticking out negotiate the acute angled corners of the village of Locherla, on the ninth mile? And, after Bukkapatnam is reached, there were three miles of a track that can be referred to, only by courtesy, as a road, and then, the broad expanse of sand which the Chitravati River spreads across a distance of three furlongs, between Puttaparthi and Karnatanagepalli! There were the dilapidated culverts to be gone over; the slushes to be dragged through; and, if and when the girders arrive at the spot, the task of hoisting them on top of the high walls! The engineers gave up all hope of bringing the girders to the village and asked Baba for some alternative proposals for roofing the Prayer Hall.



Baba taken in procession at Surandai

Baba taken in procession at Surandai

But, one night, in the smaller hours, the engineer was awakened by a loud noise in front of his house at Anantapur. He peered into the darkness and was surprised to find a crane, from the Tungabhadra Dam works, put out of action and unable to move! He ran up to Puttaparthi and told Baba that if only it could be made all right, the owners could be persuaded to travel up to Penukonda and bring the girders along. Baba concretised and gave a little quantity of *vibhuti* to the Engineer, which he piously scattered over the engine of the crane and he asked the driver to make efforts to set it going. And with a grunt or two, the engine started, the wheels turned, and the crane moved... towards the girders! Lifting the girders with its giant arm, it somehow passed over all the culverts, turned round the Locherla corners, lurched over the Vankaperu slush, and puffed up the Karnatanagepalli hill! There, the Engineers said its strength was well-nigh exhausted. It could not possibly draw all that weight through the

sands. So, Baba Himself sat near the driver and handled the wheel and the crane unloaded the girders near the work spot.

The grumbling of the engineers did not stop with this achievement. In fact, it became even exasperating, for, they asked, of what use is all this trouble when it is humanly impossible to hoist them on the walls? Humanly, yes. But, where there is the Will, there is a Way! Labourers were brought from the Tungabhadra Dam, ropes were fastened, pulleys were rigged up, and in order to make the girders lighter, each girder was pulled up amidst shouts of, "Jai Sai Ram!" from the throats of hundreds of devotees in the presence of Baba. The girders were set in place and all went well!

The central Prayer Hall with a platform ensconced on either side is the main part of the Nilayam. On the western platform is the shrine, where two life size oil portraits are placed leaning against the wall, one of Shirdi Sai Baba and the other of Sri Sathya Sai Baba. There is also a silver figure of Shirdi Sai Baba in the centre and a small portrait of Sathya Sai Baba under it. These are kept as aids for meditation and *japam*, for, except *Bhajan* twice a day, once in the morning and a second time in the early hours of the night, there is no regular worship, as is generally done in places where an idol is installed and consecrated. There is no rule that even the figure of Shirdi Sai Baba should be there. The Hall is a Prayer Hall, no more, no less, with the portraits of all the various Manifestations of Godhead and of all the great *sadhakas* and *Mahapurushas*, like Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Ramanuja, Madhwacharya, Shankaracharya, Buddha and Jesus Christ, Surdas, Meera, Tukaram etc., placed on the walls.

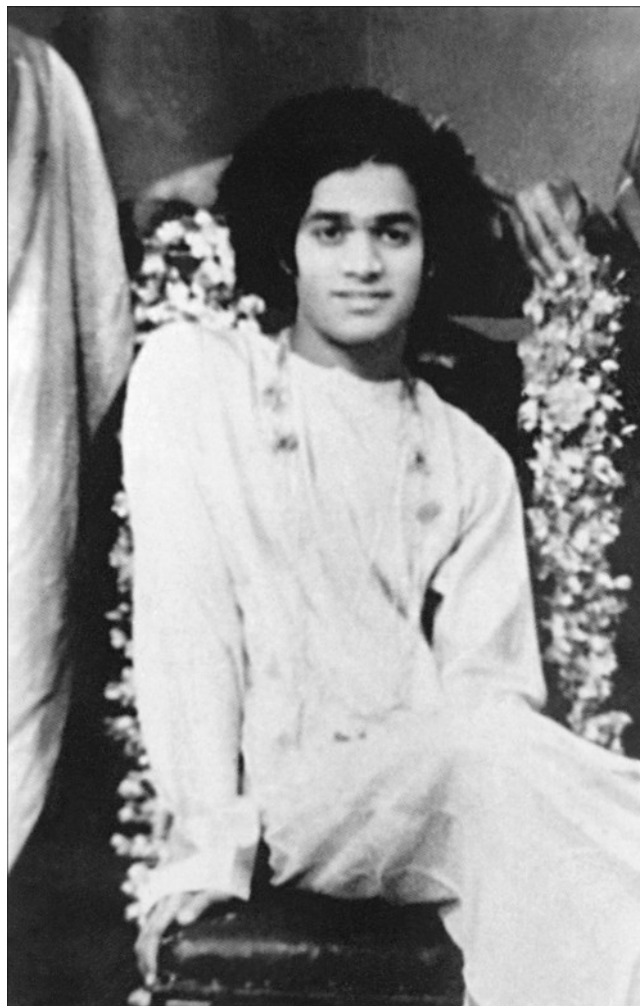
The rooms on the ground floor are mainly used for storing articles, or vessels, etc., besides two rooms set apart for Private Interviews granted by Baba to devotees, who come to have His *darshan*. The rooms on the first floor are the living rooms for Baba. There is a big-sized portico, to which Baba comes along the first floor and from where He gives *darshan* to the devotees thronging below, from where He speaks on occasions like the *Patakotsavam*, at the inauguration of the *Navaratri* festivities or *Shivaratri* or His own Birthday festival. A charming marble image of Sri Krishna, playing the flute, is placed right in the centre of the top floor in the portico and so, everyone has his attention drawn towards its beauty and charm. There is a flight of steps which lead to the top terrace, at the centre of which, facing the approach road, is a bust of Baba, kept on a pedestal in front of the flag pole. Baba gives *darshan* from near this Bust, on days on which the Flag is hoisted and He blesses the huge assembly down below with His *abhayahasta*. The Flag carries on it the representation of the

Symbol, which Baba has concretised in the Circle, right in front of the Building on the ground.

There, in the very centre of a series of concentric circles, is a pillar which represents *Yoga*, with a number of rings to indicate the stages of *Yogic Sadhana*. This *yoga* leads to the unfolding of the Lotus of the Heart, whose petals are borne on top of the pillar. The next stage of this consummation of *Bhakti* and the blossoming of the Heart is the Flame of *Gnyana*, the Illumination, the *Jyoti*, which is symbolised as the finale of the *sthambha*. The concentric circles and the intervening spaces, the first one, bare and sandy, the second one, planted with a bushy type of plant that grows in thick clusters that have to be occasionally clipped short, are explained by Baba to represent the qualities of *Kama* and *Krodha* that have to be overcome, in order to reach the *Yogic* Stage. The First round, the sandy one, is the desert, desire, the waste-land, the purposeless striving after evanescent things; the Second, the one with the cluster plant, is *Krodha* or Anger, which is difficult to destroy, for as soon as it is clipped, it sprouts again; then, there are two steps, red in colour, one low, the other a little higher, symbolising *Dweshha* or Hatred, which too a *Sadhaka* has to overcome. One type of hatred is caused when one is thwarted in the effort to achieve the desired object and another type, when pain is caused to one by the actions of another. After these three are overcome, the circular space filled with green grass, cool to the eye, reminiscent of contentment and prosperity, representing *Prema* is attained; this is the stage when the mind of man is filled with *Anandam*, due to the absence of *Kama*, *Krodha* and *Dweshha*, and the attitude of *Sarvasamaanabhava*, that is the very basis of *Prema*. Soon, the *Sadhaka* moves on to the open space of *Prasanthi*, where he can sit at will and enjoy the fruits of the discipline he has gone through. The *Yoga* fructifies and takes him on from one height to another, until the Lotus of the Heart blooms and the Effulgence of Illumination is vouchsafed at last. Round the circumference of the circle, there are eight painted pots with flower plants, which Baba explains as symbolising the *Ashtasiddhis* which guard the *Yogi* and which have to be kept at a safe distance, on the outer fringe only.

On the occasion of the ceremonial hoisting of the *Prasanthi Pataka* or flag, Baba generally dilates on this inner significance of this 'Lotus Circle' in front of the Nilayam and explains why He has got it on the flag also. He advises and commands the devotees to hoist the flag in their own minds and keep it flying aloft there, ruminating all the time on the lessons that it is intended to teach. Baba also speaks of the deeper meaning of the three gates to the Prayer Hall. The first, the outermost one that leads one into the compound, the one with the arch,

bearing the inscription of the name of the Nilayam, is the *Tamoguna* gate. A person who crosses it, leaves *Tamoguna* behind. He has nourished the holy thought of coming to the Presence and so, *Tamas*, or the spirit of Darkness and Ignorance has fallen behind him; those who are immersed in *Tamas* will not have even the curiosity to enter! Then, there is a second gate, just where the garden around the 'Lotus Circle' begins. There one is attracted by the magnificence of the building, the electric tube lights, the coloured candelabras, the hanging flower pots, that is to say, aspects which appeal to *Rajasic* individuals. Now, they come to the very door of the Prayer Hall, the *Satwic* gate, leading to the Abode of Peace.



Baba in His younger days

The garden in front of the Nilayam is itself a tribute to the devotion of the *Bhaktas*, for it is watered by long lines of devotees who pass the pots from one hand to another and thus, bring joy to the plants from the well behind the Nilayam or far in front of the building. Baba has made it a genuine botanical garden, for it contains fruit and flower trees of different parts of the country, and trees that do not ordinarily thrive in this particular climatic belt, like the

eucalyptus, the silver oak, orange and coffee.

The day begins at the Prasanthi Nilayam with the ringing of the Prayer Hall bell, at 4.30 a.m., announcing the *Brahma Muhurtam*, when devotees have to get ready for *Dhyana* and *Japam*. At 4.45 a.m., the uttering of the *Pranava* begins in the Hall and it continues for about half an hour, followed by silent *Namasmarana* or *Japam* by devotees, until six in the morning.

The syllable 'Om' is extolled in the *Upanishads* as the best and most effective symbol of Brahman. "Om *ityanenaivaksharena param purusham abhidhyayati (Prashnopanishad)*." It contains three *matras*. A U M as well as *amatra*, the *asabda* or soundless stage, where the sound of the Om rings without loudness, and makes the *sadhaka* feel communion with the Brahman. As the consummation of the *upasana* of the *Pranava* is the attainment of Pure Consciousness, the letters must be taken by the *upasaka* to symbolise the states of consciousness. *Jagrat* is the waking state, in which the soul of the grade *Vishwa* is dominated by *Thamas* and is engaged with the *Sthula sharira* - the letter 'A' indicates these. The *Swapna* or dreaming state, in which the soul of the grade *Taijasa* is dominated by *Rajas* and is engrossed with the *Sukshma Sharira* - the letter 'U' represents these; 'U' is also taken to indicate *ubhayatwa*, or *intermediateness*. *Sushupti* or the state of deep sleep finds the soul of the grade of *Praagnya*, dominated by *Satwa* and it becomes the point of mergence. The waking and dreaming states merge in sleep; 'A' or Brahma and 'U' or Vishnu merge in 'M' or Rudra. The *Tamoguna* and *Rajoguna* merge into the *Satwa*. The *Turiya* or the fourth state of the soundless *amatra* is the state of the Self *per se*. The Om also represents other triads, like Masculine, Feminine, Neuter, the Past, Present and Future.

The significance of Om is often explained in public speeches and private conversations by Baba. It is also repeated before and after each *Bhajan* session, since it is the one great all-inclusive representative of Brahman, non-sectarian and universally accepted.

Baba also constantly emphasises the need for *Dhyana* with *japam*, as an essential discipline for everyone, to be taken up as early in life as possible. He gives detailed instructions and guidance to everyone at the Nilayam as well as elsewhere, eager to practise them. So, there are at Prasanthi Nilayam many devotees, who do *Namasmarana*, *Dhyanam*, or *Japam*, for many hours a day. Baba while at Prasanthi Nilayam, is engaged all the time in the task of blessing the devotees, by giving them the rare chances of *darshan*, *Sparshan (Namaskar)*, and *Sambhashan*. He eats the simple food of the poorest of the land, food cooked and brought with devotion by the *Bhaktas* at the Nilayam; He sleeps on a bed spread on the floor! He sits

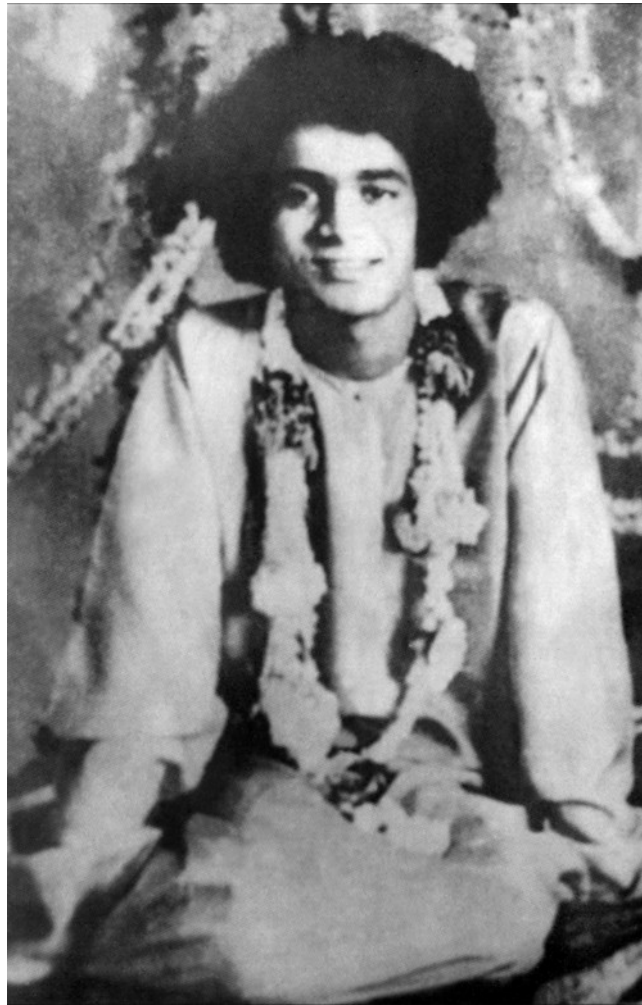
on a chair placed generally on a platform in the North-west of the Hall, during *Bhajan*, and gives *darshan* to all in the Hall. He allows them to touch His Feet, whenever He comes down during *Bhajan*.

The morning hours resound with the *Vedic mantras* that are repeated in the Prayer Hall, during *Abhishekam* and *Sahasranampooja* for the Shivalingam that was "taken" for this purpose, in November '58, out of the sands of the river Chitravati. In the evening during most of the month of the year, the *Bhagavata*, *Ramayana*, or some such great religious text is expounded for about two hours by learned *pundits*.

Many who come to the Nilayam have the supreme advantage of earning an interview with Baba in His private room, before departure from Puttaparthi, individually if they have come alone or as a family if they have come as members of a family. Perhaps, no other *Avatar* poured out grace in such profusion! Then, Baba is the Divine Physician, diagnosing the ills which the supplicant is ailing from and laying bare the innermost blemishes of character or conduct with the utmost kindness and applying the soothing balm of His Grace to the prescription of appropriate remedies. The Interview Room at Puttaparthi has been the scene of countless transformations of character, revolutions of belief, confirmations of faith, curing of disease, calming of temper, discarding of hatred, salvaging of souls, and reunion of hearts. Seldom does a person come out after the interview with a dry eye. Baba gives to every one hope and courage, contentment and faith, assurance and solace, because He says, "Why fear when I am here? Put all your faith in Me; I shall guide you and guard you."

The *Bhajan* sessions in the Prayer Hall are highly elevating experiences, for the atmosphere is one of serene reverence. Baba Himself is generally present in the hall and on some rare occasions, when He feels like, He sits along with the devotees and teaches in His entrancing way, a few *namavalis* and songs. "The father might be a Ph.D., but when he puts his son through the alphabet, he has to take up the slate and write on it the letters ABC and D; but, do not infer from that behaviour that he is learning the alphabet himself," says Baba. The *namavalis* and songs are not all about Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba or His previous *shariram*, Shirdi Sai Baba. They cover the widest possible range from the *Sathyam Gnyanam Anantam Brahmam*, through all the *Avatars* of Vishnu, Shiva, Ganesha, Vittala, Venkatesa, and other forms of Godhead, and they are sung in Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Hindi, and Sanskrit. Emphasis is on the meaning and the 'emotion of surrender', and in all singing together in unison and to the correct marking of time. Baba has often dilated on the value of the loud singing of the Lord's name, in unison, as an act of service to others; He has

compared the loud clapping of the hands while at *Bhajan* to the clapping of the hands under a crow-infested tree, in order to frighten the birds away! "The noisy crows of *gunas* and desires and hatreds flocking to your minds can be driven out by the loud clapping of hands, as an accompaniment to the ecstatic repetition of the Lord's name," says Baba. Baba exhorts everyone to engage himself in the repetition of the Name of the Lord, any name that appeals to the individual being in His eye as good and effective as any other.



Baba in His younger days

He has Himself composed a number of *bhajan* songs for the edification of the devotees. Many of these summarise in simple Telugu or Kannada or Tamil the spiritual disciplines that every mortal must adopt, so that the purpose of this human episode may be realised. For example, there is one which asks all to plod through the pilgrimage of life with *Sathya*, *Dharma*, *Shanti*, and *Prema* as the inseparable companions and guides. "Effort and endeavour is the duty of Man; success or failure depends on the Lord's Grace. Engage yourselves in your allotted task every day, with the consciousness of the living presence of

the Lord, always by your side. Do not yearn for the eight *siddhis*; the devotee will be landed by them in mere delusion. In this thick jungle of life, hold fast to His name, that is enough. Cultivate well the heart, which is your farm; the mind is the plough; the *gunas* are the bullocks; take up the whip of discrimination and start the ploughing of your heart! Courage is the best of all manures; the seeds that you sow must be the seeds of *Prema*; *Bhakti* is the rain; emotions are the weeds; the harvest is *Brahmananda* itself!" The *Bhajan* at Prasanthi Nilayam is a *Satsang*, which purifies by instruction and strengthens by inspiration.

Formerly, Baba used to take the devotees out, almost daily, to the sands of the Chitravati and *Bhajan* was being held there, under the stars, with the hills as hoary listeners and the river murmuring response. Now too, He does so, occasionally. Sitting on the sands, Baba teaches the devotees songs He has composed for their elevation and edification, and He encourages people to ask Him any doubts regarding spiritual matters, for which He gives satisfying answers. Perhaps, the reader might get a clear picture of the scene and the importance of the occasion, if I describe an evening on the sands that I had the privilege to attend.

It was November, 1949. I reached Puttaparthi one morning about 9-30 a.m. and I found an atmosphere of exaltation pervading the *Mandir*. Prasanthi Nilayam was then half way through towards completion and everyone was talking about Baba going to the "river" that evening. Some friends congratulated me on my good luck, for the visit to the river or rather the sands had already become rather rare. About 5.30 p.m., Baba came out of His room and walked briskly at the head of a big throng of *Bhaktas*, scattering joy all around Him, with many a quip and joke or pleasantry or inquiry.

Stepping across the tiny trickle to which the river had been reduced, He trudged along the sands seeking a place clean and dry for the party to sit; and at last, after proceeding for about a hundred or two hundred yards, He decided on a site and we all sat around Him, the men on one side, the women on the other, as we do always at *Bhajan* at the *Mandir*. Baba waited graciously, until the oldest and the weakest of the *Bhaktas* reached the spot were comfortably seated.

Then, in reply to a question from one devotee whether *Karma* has to be given up to attain *Moksha*, He gave a sweet simple exposition on the sublimation of all *Karma* by the attitude of *Samarpana* to the Lord and how that *Arpana* will take away the craving for the fruits of *Karma*, and how when that happens, *Karma* will lose its power to tighten the bonds of attachment, which produce sorrow and re-birth. *Bhakti*, devoid of *Karma*, is like a basement

without a wall: *Karma* without *Bhakti* is like a wall without a basement! I was struck by the universality of His Mission and Message, for He said, during His discourse, "I am the servant of every one." "You can call Me by any Name, I will respond; for all names are Mine. Or, rather, I have no particular name at all." "Even if I am discarded by you, I shall be behind you." "In My view, there are no *nastikas* at all; all are existing by and for the Lord. Denying the Sun does not make him disappear." In fact, being with Him stilled all questioning and illumined all shadows.

After this discourse, Baba taught us a few songs, and then another question from someone turned the proceedings into another discourse, this time about Shirdi and Sai Baba, the "previous body," as He said. He described the features of Sai Baba and derided all types of pictures now being circulated as incorrect caricatures and, even while talking so, He dug His fingers into the sands and lo, there was a fine picture in His hand, which He showed to everyone present as the authentic portrait representing Sai Baba as He really looked! He gave it to one of the devotees present for *pooja*. Conversation naturally moved on to Baba being a Manifestation of Dattatreya and again Baba's fingers went into the sands, and lo, there came to His hand a charming metal image of Dattatreya, the symbol of the Unity of the Trinity, in Hindu mythology. In their excitement, all had now come much closer to Baba and He felt that each of them must receive something from Him and return happy, instead of only the two gentlemen who got the picture and the image. He therefore 'took' out from the sands a thick flat block of sugar candy, which He Himself broke into bits and distributed to every man, woman and child, (for, He said, if anyone else did the distribution, it would not be enough for giving a piece for each!) He then took a handful of sand and while pouring it on to a plate, it became *vibhuti*! This He gave to all who were present.

Baba is so fond of these open-air sessions of *Bhajan* and discourse that He takes devotees to the riverbed or seashore, wherever one is within reach. Baba has held prayer sessions and discussion groups of this nature on the sands of Godavari, the Kaivalya, the Swarnamukhi, the Vaigai, and other rivers as well as on the banks of the Ganga, the Jhelum, and the Yamuna; He has also sat with the devotees on the seashore at Madras, Tranquebar, Masulipatnam, Cape Comorin and Kovalam, and performed miracles of turning the sand into pictures, images, *vibhuti*, or whatever He wanted it to become!

Generally, Baba takes the devotees to the sands on festivals days, which do not attract mammoth crowds, but for which there assemble only a manageable throng of devotees. On Gokulashtami day, or perhaps the day previous, He very often visits the sands and sometimes

'takes' from the sand an image of Krishna, which is kept in the hall on the Birthday of Lord Sri Krishna and afterwards given to some *bhakta*, for being worshipped in his domestic shrine. So also, on Ramanavami day, or perhaps the day previous, Baba takes from the seashore or riverbed, depending upon where He is at the time, images of Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, and Anjaneya, or of Rama only, and gives them to be worshipped. Near Kalahasti, from the Swarnamukhi, He 'took' images of more than usual size, and they are now kept at Venkatagiri and worship is offered regularly to them. Again, on Vaikuntha Ekadashi day in the evening, He has been for many years regularly 'taking' for distribution among the devotees, while in the midst of *Bhajan* or discourse on the riverbed or seashore, Divine Nectar!



On the Vaikuntha Ekadashi, 1958, for example, which fell on the 21st of December, in the midst of Baba's Kerala tour, Baba went to the Kovalam beach, seven miles away from Trivandrum, accompanied by many devotees. At a quiet spot on the seashore, a mile away from the bathing area, Baba sat with the *Bhaktas* around Him. Baba sang a few songs and there was *Bhajan* afterwards. During the *Bhajan*, Baba 'took' from the sands a bewitching

sandalwood image of Krishna playing the Flute, and after a few minutes, a gold ring with the Radha - Krishna motif embossed on it! Everyone expected that Baba would distribute *amrita* 'taken' by Him from nowhere, as He generally does on Vaikuntha Ekadashi Day, and they were not disappointed; for, even as *Bhajan* was going on, the fragrance of the Nectar was clearly cognised, no one knew from where! Baba's Palms became sticky, as if saturated with syrup even as He was 'marking time' for the songs; all knew that the fragrance was emanating from those Palms; then He held them together and pointed them at a silver vessel, when lo, thick ambrosial 'honey' flowed into it from His Hand! He then distributed it Himself to all present, including some fisher folk who had joined the group! The sweetness and scent of the Nectar were outside the experience of everyone; they were incomparably strange.

On the Telugu New Year Day, Baba generally distributes the traditional mixture of bitter-sweet margosa-sugar; on the Pongal Day, the cattle of the Nilayam are decorated and taken in procession; the villagers come up to the *Mandir* for *pooja* when the cane-crushing season starts and the extractors are to be operated. The *Bhaktas* too delight when they are granted the chance of celebrating *upanayanams*, Marriages, *Shashtiabdapurti Shantis*, *Kanakabhishekams*, *Namakaranams*, and other *samskaras* in the immediate Presence of Baba and in the Nilayam itself. The platform on the Eastern end of the Prayer Hall is generally used for such religious functions.

On Deepavali day, too, Baba takes delight in illumination and the firing of crackers, and He distributes strings of crackers and coloured matches to the children of the devotees at Prasanthi Nilayam as well as the children of the village. He sends New Year messages, messages of assurance and admonition, on January 1st, to the devotees who have earned that blessing and on His Birthday, too, He very often sends Birthday blessings to the fortunate.

Three festivals are celebrated every year at Puttaparthi and they are attracting increasingly larger and larger throngs, from wider and wider areas. They are. (1) The Dasara (2) Mahashivaratri and (3) The Birthday of Baba, which is celebrated every year on the 23rd November, for the convenience of many of the devotees, who will find it difficult to calculate the date according to the Hindu calendar.

The Dasara is being celebrated from the very announcement of the Manifestation. In the early days, *Bhajan* and *pooja* were done every day and Baba Himself was decked in ornaments, rings, necklaces, crown and all, and taken in procession in palanquins, decorated in different styles, each day, the climax being reached on Vijayadashami , when *Shami Pooja* and

Seemollanghana were also celebrated. But, within a few years, Baba emphasised the religious and spiritual significance of the worship of God as Mother, and the character of the celebrations took on a new phase. The worship by all women devotees, twice a day, with the offering of kumkum, the *abhishekam* of the image of Shirdi Sai Baba with the quantity of *kumkum* thus offered during all the nine days; music, poetry, drama, etc., all gained a place in the worship of the Mother.

Some idea of the Festivities can be gained by going through the programme, printed and sent to the devotees. Let us take the programme for 1958 *Dasara*, for example. The celebrations begin with the Flag hoisting ceremony, on the morning of the first day. The devotees gather in solemn silence around the Lotus circle and to the sound of bells and gongs and the strains of music and prayer, Baba unfurls the flag.

On many occasions, He has explained the inner meaning of the symbol of the Lotus that is found in front of the Nilayam as well as on the flag. Daily *pooja*, especially, the *kumkumarchana* by all women devotees begin at noon and are performed twice, all the ten days.

The second day is set apart for social work by the devotees, repair of the approach road, cleaning of the place where the poor are to be fed on a subsequent day, etc., being some of the items of work. In the evening, the devotees hear discourses about the proper attitude for social workers and the need for doing *Karma* suffused with and nourished by *bhakti*, from Baba and a few experienced social workers.

The third day is the children's day with sports and fancy dress, drama and recitations by the children of the devotees, as well as of the schools of the surrounding villages. Baba makes every child happy and at ease, persuading it to proceed when it breaks down and caressing it into confidence. Prizes are given by Baba to every child participant, prizes that become the pride of the family for years.



On the fourth day, the poets' assembly is held in the immediate presence of Baba and poets from far and near read and expounded their pieces, in Telugu, Tamil, Sanskrit, Kannada or English. They, too, are the proud recipients of presents, which are highly valued, because they are conferred with so much kindness and by a person, who is Himself the *Kavi*. Baba Himself blesses the devotees with His Discourse, on two or three days, during *Dasara*; thus giving the thousands, who come, something to live by, some capital to carry home and invest in daily life.

Two evenings - the sixth and the eighth —are devoted to *Bhajans*, one to Meera *Bhajan* and the other to Brindavan *Bhajan*. On the seventh day, the poor are fed and clothes are distributed to the maimed and the destitute. Someone once asked Baba why this mammoth function, in which about 4 to 5 thousand people are fed sumptuously and about a thousand persons are given clothes or saris, did not appear in any newspaper. Baba replied, "I wonder why it should! When your relatives come to you and you feed them, do you invite the Press and crave publicity?"

Baba appears happiest that day of all days during *Dasara*, and it can be said to be His busiest. He examines the cooking and the items prepared; He supervises the seating arrangements; He

Himself serves the sweet *laddu* to almost every one, stooping before every leaf and putting on the leaf as much as each can eat.

He walks along the lane of misery and selects those to whom clothes have to be given; a ticket is issued to such and their names are later called out, so that they may walk up to Baba and receive from His hands the coveted present. It is an inspiring sight and a very educative experience to watch Baba give the clothes. He has a kind word to every one; He treats the blind, the maimed, the very old and faltering with special consideration, asking the volunteers to hold them and guide them; He advises them to be careful and cautious in the dark; He makes kind enquiries about them and He makes the moment a precious memory to each and every one.

Some years ago, the present writer remembers how the rains melted away the brightness of the festoons in front of the Nilayam during the first three of four days of *Dasara*; so, Baba wanted that they be renewed in time for the day of the feeding of the poor; because He said, "They are our most distinguished guests and the *Mandir* should appear bright and cheerful when they come." That is the attitude which He teaches every one of the devotees to adopt.

The rest of the days are given over to music recitals-vocal, instrumental or orchestral. A large number of musicians compete for dates, because Baba Himself is the great musician, who sings in a captivating style, and they are eager to win His Blessings. On Vijayadashami day, *abhishekam* is done to the image of Shirdi Baba and Baba generally 'takes' a *lingam* and places it on the head of the image, prior to the *abhishekam*.

Shiva has an appellation in Tamil, *Tayumanavar*, meaning "He who became also the Mother," for as the story goes, He once attended on a woman during the delivery of her child, since the actual mother who was hastening to attend on her could not reach the place on account of the floods in the Cauvery river, which she could not cross. Therefore, Shiva assumed the form of the mother and reached the place in time and served her as a midwife.

Baba has been *Tayumanavar* many times over, He has taken upon Himself the pains, in many instances; He has gone out of His Body to act as midwife during delivery in many instances; women in far off places have felt His hand and He has said about it at Puttaparthi, and explained that He had set right the posture of the infant before the delivery itself, so that the event might pass off in comfort. The present writer knows of one incident where the lady was in hospital, the baby had died on the sixth day, because among other reasons, the umbilical cord was cut shabbily and the wound had become septic beyond repair; the mother was

despaired of, because the placenta had not been removed and could not be, on account of septic conditions, and people were calmly expecting the worst. Baba at Puttaparthi "went out" of His body one morning; He was away for an hour and, 250 miles away. At the Hospital the placenta fell, the temperature decreased, and the mother was placed on the road to recovery and joy dawned again on the faces around the bed. Baba, when He returned to the body, said that He had been to the hospital and that He had manifested the Vision of His Hand to the patient, and on the third day, a letter came from the party, describing the vision and the cure!

On a certain Varamahalakshmi *vratham* day, about ten years ago, He accepted *pooja* as Varamahalakshmi and received the offerings made by women, who had fulfilled the vows of that *vratham*. Those, who had this unique good fortune, say that He actually appeared to them dressed in sari and blouse and resplendent with bangles, necklace, nose-stud, ear ornaments, etc.! No wonder *Navaratri*, when *Devi* is worshipped as Durga, Lakshmi, Saraswati, Annapurna, Tripurasundari, Lalita, and other forms, is attracting thousands to Puttaparthi, where Sai Mata is so beneficent and bountiful.

Mahashivaratri is also an equally important festival, for the devotees perform all-night vigil with *Bhajan*, in the immediate presence of an *Avatar* which every moment reminds them of Shiva Himself, what with the profuseness of *vibhuti* that emanates from hands, forehead, toe and face, and what with the liberality with which He grants His Blessings to all types of erring humanity.

For the last ten or twelve years, Shivaratri is being celebrated at Puttaparthi itself but, even earlier, every year since the Declaration of the Manifestation, Shivalingams have materialised within His Body. Baba said almost every time that He finds it very difficult to postpone or prevent the formation of the Lingams, which concretise within Him. In the evening, Baba gives a discourse; very often, He is interrupted half-way by what appear to be spasmodic struggles in the stomach area, but He continues with the speech, until the region of the struggle changes to the upper part of the chest and the neck, when He seems to be undergoing some kind of even physical tension, and, all of a sudden, to the joyous wonder of all, *Lingams* fall from His Mouth! They are then generally placed on the image of Shirdi Baba and, after the Celebrations are over, they are given by Baba to some *bhakta* or the other, to be worshipped as per instructions. Such *Lingams* have been worshipped now for over sixteen years by some devotees!

The *Lingams* that emanate on successive Shivaratri days differ in number, size, and

composition. Sometimes only one *Lingam* is formed, the material being apparently *sphatika* or gold or silver; often times it is more in number, three, five, seven or nine (!), each perhaps about an inch and half in height and all complete with the *Pitham*, the basement and the *Lingam*, marked with the three horizontal lines, to symbolise the *Vibhuti*. This *Lingodbhavam* is indeed a unique and mysterious Manifestation of the Divine Will.

Of course, when we dilate so enthusiastically upon the manifestations of the Will, we should not fail to pay due homage to the Personification of that Will, Baba Himself. He is the Prasanthi Nilayam, wherever He is and wherever He is worshipped or remembered, or called upon with devotion. When some *bhakta* called upon the members of an assembly, which Baba had just addressed at the Gokhale Hall, Madras, to "go to Puttaparthi and join the wonderful *Bhajan* at Prasanthi Nilayam," Baba immediately corrected him and said, "No, no. You can be where you are, I shall come to you; do not put yourself to expenses that you may not be able to afford. If you call upon Me, I shall be by your side." A medieval Kannada poet has sung that the distance between us and Shiva is just the distance that our call will reach; believe in Him and call on Him; He will answer, "I am here." And, you can call on Him by any one of His names, too.

In October 1957, a Hospital, with six beds for female patients and six beds for males, and the full complement of equipment for surgery and maternity, with even an X-ray unit, was inaugurated, on the hill, behind the Nilayam. It commands a magnificent panorama of hoary mountains, with scraps and cliffs sweeping down to the very banks of the Chitravati. Baba chose the site, in spite of the murmurings of engineers, because as He said the patients will be inspired by the awe-inspiring Handiwork of the Lord opening out before their eyes. He got a bulldozer; cut and levelled three terraces, where there was once the rocky flank of a hill, and planned the Hospital on the topmost terrace. Speaking on the occasion of the Foundation-laying ceremony, He said that there were no unbelievers or *nastikas*; there were only some who did not know or had no opportunity to experience the Lord. Everyone-rich or poor, educated or uneducated, pious or not pious-was subject to disease and so, as an example of *Manava seva* which Madhava Himself does in order to make man do likewise and earn the Grace of the Lord, He said, He had planned the Hospital at Puttaparthi, for there were no good Hospitals for miles around. He also said that those, who came to the Hospital for their physical ills, will naturally turn to Prasanthi Nilayam for the treatment and cure of their spiritual ills.

The Hospital was built in the inspiring Presence of Baba, who supervised every bit of the

work of construction and equipment; the *Bhaktas* standing in long queues all along the slope of the hill, passed from hand to hand, metal, stones, bricks, water, mud or red earth, mortar, in fact, everything needed for raising the structure that dominates the landscape today! On the first Annual Day of the Hospital, when the Medical officer in charge spoke of many miraculous recoveries that had happened through the Blessings of Baba, Baba said that it was more due to the spirit of love and service, with which every stone and brick of the building was saturated. Baba Himself visits the Hospital, going round the wards, persuading the villagers to swallow the medicines or undergo the prick or cut, and, by the sweetness of His words and the healing influence of His Looks, hastening recovery. Baba also has often many things to teach the doctors in charge, for He is Himself the Great Physician and the Great Surgeon. He also gives practical advice on the maintenance of mental equanimity and physical wholesomeness by means of *japam* and *dhyanam*, which keep the entire personality in good trim.

The case reports being published in *Sanathana Sarati* off and on are invaluable for medical practitioners, for they reveal how long-standing and desperate illnesses are cured by the healing influence of the Divine Grace that presides over this Hospital. While ardent devotees of Baba are content to leave the welfare of their physical frames to His will, there are some, who, on His advice, take as a curative the *vibhuti* that He gives, or the medical treatment that He recommends; for as Baba says, He does not have the same prescription for all; just as a doctor might recommend four different types of treatment for four different patients suffering from stomach ache - salts for the ache due to constipation, mixture for the ache due to gastric disorder, an ointment or poultice for another, and an immediate operation for the pain caused by appendicitis - so, Baba too recommends different remedies for different patients. He is the Greatest Physician of all.

To the right and left of the Nilayam, beyond the garden and at the back of the building, there are a number of tenements, single roomed and double roomed, where *Bhaktas* have taken residence. When those to whom the tenements are assigned are away, they can be made use of by others, who come to Puttaparthi. But, Baba directs and guides every item of work at the Nilayam. His Command is awaited with eagerness by all, for it is best that it is so.

Baba is naturally an expert gardener, as is evidenced by the personal interest He takes in the plants and trees of the garden of the Nilayam. While travelling by car and seeking some place to take breakfast or lunch, He spots out locations which are gems of beauty, among the eucalyptic slopes of Nilgiri or Kodaikanal Hills, the pine corridors of Kashmir, the arid plains

of Bellary, the green carpet of Srirangapatnam, the coastal palm gardens of Kerala, the Palmyra avenues of Tinnevely, the canal bank near Samalkot or the igneous fields of Raichur. He will draw the attention of those around Him to a beautiful sunset, or sunrise, the captivating panorama of a clouded sky, or a ring round the moon. "*Andame Anandam*," is a statement often on His Lips, meaning, "Beauty is Bliss."

He is also a great lover of cattle, the cowshed at Prasanthi Nilayam being a model for the ryots of the surrounding villages. He spends many hours with the cows, feeding and nursing them; He decorates them on Pongal day and He has a scintillating stock of ornamental pieces for the purpose. He had a horse also for some time, as well as stags and deer and peacocks and rabbits, which were blessed to receive His Loving Touch and Tenderness.

He also had a number of dogs as His pets. The story of these dogs will itself, make an interesting episode of the Lord's Care and Mercy. Jack and Jill, two Pomeranians from Ootacamund, were the earliest of these canine pets. Baba says that they used to fast every Thursday, by some holy *samskara* of the past birth! And they never could be induced to consume flesh! Jack used to sleep at the head of Baba's bed and Jill at the feet. After three years of this *Samipya*, Jack breathed his last, lying on Baba's lap.

His end too was worthy of his life. The previous night, Jack had followed the chauffeur of a car, which was parked across the river at Karnatanagepalli; he lay quietly under the car, all unknown to the occupants, for Jack had a way of volunteering to keep watch over the cars, which in those days had to be parked so far away from the *mandir*. His tiny bark used to keep-off the village urchins. But that morning, when the car moved off, Jack was nearly killed; he had sufficient strength, says Baba, to drag himself along the riverbed back to the *mandir*, he mustered some strength and pulled himself on to the lap of Baba; with his eyes glued on Baba's face and tail shaking feebly in joy, Jack concluded his brief but blessed earthly career. Jill could not live alone; she followed him, in a few weeks. Both of them are buried in the centre of the quadrangle behind the "Old Mandir," and a *Brindavan*, or *Tulsi Structure* has been built over their mortal remains.

Chitty and Bitty, Lilly and Billy were two other Pomeranian couples that followed. Then there were the Cocker Spaniels, Minnie and Mickie as well as Honey and Goldie. Baba fondled these for some years and later, gave them over to devotees, but He inquires even now after their welfare. Baba has had some Alsatians too, like Rover and Rita, and after them, for some time, Tommy and Henry. These animal *Bhaktas* have received the tenderness and love

of Baba, in great measure. We to whom the animal world is both different and dumb have to learn just this one lesson while observing His affection for them; never to harm any animal brother for the sake of sustenance or pleasure and always to look upon all created things as belonging to one family.

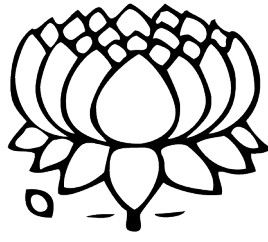
Baba always speaks of the element of Destiny or *Prapti* as He calls it, and says that if some animal or man earns His Grace, it is due to *Prapti*, or Destiny. But, He always adds that His grace can be earned by *sadhana*, or disciplined life, self-control, self-less service of all as symbolising Narayana Himself. Just as an examiner adjudges the answer papers of candidates, the Lord too values our achievements, but, if the answers reveal earnest study and an active interest in the subject as well as a grasp of the methodology of the science involved, the examiner will forgive even a poor performance, so far as the actual answer material is concerned. It has been the experience of many that sometimes in spite of the tremendous efforts they may make, they are not able to go to Puttaparthi, but, most often, as soon as they plan a visit, everything becomes available quickly and all the obstacles get automatically removed. Baba says that without His will, no one can start, or starting, reach the place where He is.

His Omniscience and Omnipresence are revealed to everyone, who meets Him in the interview room. He tells him what he said, or did, or felt; whom he spoke to and on what; what he feared and plotted; what he suffered and lost. If you want to consult Him on ten points, He will, even before you open your mouth, have answered twelve, or fifteen! He would reveal what you even dreamt during sleep, and repeat even the very words, which in the dream you had heard Him say. He will lay bare your history, down to the minutest detail and where there was sorrow and weakness, He will fill Joy and Strength.

"He is tireless in His Ministry of Compassion," says Principal H.S. Rao, "Baba's Words do not merely soothe, but open up new levels of consciousness and reveal the hidden strength and goodness of one's nature. The *bhakta* is enabled by His Grace to know himself, to realise more keenly his duties, responsibilities, and even shortcomings. All this He does in the most natural way, patting you affectionately on the back, His eyes lit up with a merry twinkle, and speaking words that you can understand. Yet, there is such power in what He utters, such depth of conviction, that you are left speechless at the Omniscience of Baba and His miraculous perception of your individual problems and needs."

Thus does Prasanthi Nilayam rebuild mankind; thus does the Presence of Baba urge mankind

onward.





8.

From Cape To Kilanmarg

Baba encourages everyone to appreciate the beauties of nature; He directs attention to the charm of a flower, the colourful magnificence of a sunrise or sunset, the grim grandeur of an overcast sky, the timorous twinkling of the stars in the midnight sky or the moving jasmine-garland of cranes in flight.

THE ninth All-India Divine Life Convention held at Venkatagiri in 1957 was a landmark in the *Dharmic* campaign of Bhagawan, for He presided over the deliberations and sounded the clarion call of *sadhana* and spiritual regeneration. Swami Satchidananda, the Organising Secretary of the Branches of the Divine Life Society, later confessed that, when the news that Baba was to preside reached him at Tiruvannamalai, he was taken aback, for on enquiry there, he learnt that He was versed only in magic (!) and that He was a poor speaker, at best. "But," said Swami Satchidananda, "I discovered soon that my informant was profoundly ignorant."

On the opening day of the Convention, the town was filled to overflow with delegates, visitors, and devotees, including a large number of *sanyasis* from far away Rishikesh and places like Rajahmundry, Kalahasti, and Madras. A gorgeous flower-bedecked palanquin was placed at the main gate of the Venkatagiri Palace, for Baba to proceed to the Theatre where the Inaugural Session was to be held. But, when He came out and saw that symbol of pomp, He refused the honour in spite of the entreaties of the Raja, because He said, "There are so many *sanyasis* here and I would like to walk with them." It was indeed a distinguished galaxy of monks, like Sadananda, Satchidananda, Atmaswarupananda, and Srinivasananda.

Swami Satchidananda hoisted the flag of the Divine Life Society and Swami Sadananda, author of "Sanmarga Deepam," "Maha Shakti" and books like a commentary on Patanjali's

Yoga Darshana, inaugurated the Convention. Some misguided individuals had earlier distributed leaflets, in which they had charged Baba with partiality to the rich and the aristocratic, little realising that even while they were thrusting this scandal down the pockets of the townsmen, Baba had refused the pageantry of a procession and was walking the very road, upon which they were spreading their nefarious falsehood! In fact, Swami Sadananda referred to this leaflet and made plain how absurd it was, in view of what happened in the morning. He congratulated the delegates and organizers on their good luck in securing Baba to guide them on the path of Divine Life.

In His Presidential Speech, Baba said that Divine Life was the inspiration, the motive force, the be-all and end-all of everything in Creation, from the microcosm to the macrocosm—from the *Anu* to the *Brihat*. Divine Life is the rain that falls from the clouds of *Sathya*, *Prema*, and *Ahimsa*. It comprises all acts done in pursuit of the Reality, to attain the Reality behind this illusive variety. "Divinity," He said, "is inherent and immanent in every individual as butter in milk. Just as we churn milk to separate the butter, man must churn his mind with good deeds and good company." Between the eternal spirit and the evanescent world, the mind of man oscillates and so, it is the duty of societies like the Divine Life Society to fill the minds of its members with holiness and help in removing the dross of passion and lust. For this transformation, everyone is a worthy candidate, and the taste of that Bliss is the same for all. "The Society," Baba said, "should endeavour to further this process of equal love for all. It should strive to wipe out the root causes of anxiety, sorrow and ignorance."

The next morning, when the Convention met at the Theatre, Baba said, "Hindu religion could survive the series of onslaughts and cultural upheavals and foreign invasions only through the efforts of her spiritual leaders, who stood watch over the treasures of Hinduism and re-established the creative principles of *Sanathana Dharma* again and again in the hearts of the people." He said that He wanted to light the lamp of *Prema* in every heart and He advised everyone to preserve an atmosphere of reverence and love. Speaking on the three *Gunas*, Baba illustrated the nature of all three by a simple simile, which clarified the whole issue. He said, pointing to a kerosene lamp, that the glass chimney was the *Satwa guna*, the soot inside, the *Tamo guna*, and the dust outside, *Rajo guna*.

The next day at the special gathering of delegates, Baba appealed to them to cultivate single-minded devotion to their *Guru*, and to demonstrate in their lives the Divine Life to which they had dedicated their lives. When the meeting was later converted to a public session by the admission of an eager throng of visitors, Baba spoke for over an hour, exhorting all to

lead lives of devotion and surrender. "What would you like to be in the hands of the Lord?" He asked and He Himself suggested the answer, "The Flute." He wanted everyone to be straight without any crookedness, hollow without any pride or individuality or will or idea of self; to inhale only the breath of God; to transmute that breath into melodious music that confers on every fleeting moment the Joy of Eternity.

Swami Sadananda spoke on "Communion with God", or rather, he communed with Baba and spoke what the communion prompted him to say, for he confessed he was only saying what Baba was making him speak! After him rose a great *pundit*, famed throughout Andhra Pradesh for the many *Vedantic* books that he had written and the translation into Telugu of the *Upanishads*, the *Brahma Sutras*, and the *Bhagavad Gita*. He spoke on the abstrusest problem in Indian Philosophy, "Who am I?" Critics say that the *Advaitic* attitude makes men other-worldly and unpoetic, but this scholar was poet enough to appreciate Baba's picturisation of the Flute on Krishna's lips, for he dilated with pleasure on the ideal which Baba held out and quoted a few Sanskrit *shlokas* on the *Murali*. He began his discourses with a personal statement. He said, "I came to Venkatagiri for this conference primarily to meet Sri Sathya Sai Baba, for I had heard all kinds of versions of His greatness and I jumped eagerly at the chance to test all those versions. In short, I came to defy! And I am going back, deified! I am happy to confess this before you and I apologize to Baba for my error." This is just another instance of the fog of misunderstanding disappearing before the warmth of Bhagawan's presence.

Baba moved freely among the *sadhus* and scholars and gave each one of them long interviews, before He departed from Venkatagiri. Swami Satchidananda told the present writer, "I was called in second. As soon as I went in, Baba embraced me and said He was happy to see me. He then spoke of a rare *yogic* vision that I had the good fortune to experience thirty seven years ago and congratulated me on the steady pursuit of *yogic sadhana* which culminated in that vision. But, He turned round on me immediately, and chided me for squandering my time and energy on efforts to establish *Ashrams*, to collect funds, meet people, and discuss plans and programmes. When I attempted to justify my present activities as contributing ultimately to the welfare of the world, He laughed and asked, 'Have you not heard that good thoughts and waves of *yogic* wisdom have a way of emanating from a great soul and, overcoming all obstacles, shaping and changing the thought currents of others?' He advised me to retire into solitude and resume my *yogic sadhanas* and He assured me He would provide me succour and sustenance, wherever I chose to be! This

point of view was never before placed before me, in such clear and authentic words, and I was very much touched by His Love and His Mercy. I was surprised that He knew of an intimate secret experience of mine, which dated some years previous to His Coming, and I made bold to put Him a question on that. He answered me with another question: 'Am I born and do I die?'"

It was indeed a unique experience for all; the interview, the diagnosis of their deepest doubts, the prescription of appropriate remedies, the assurance of continued Grace, the weighing of achievement in the balance of progress, and the revelation of Omniscience and Omnipresence. When Baba returned to Puttaparthi, He was joined by Swami Sadananda and Swami Satchidananda. They were all eager to spend some more time in the Divine Presence.

I remember an evening, when Baba took Swami Sadananda for a natural spring, among the hills that lie behind the Nilayam, for I was also one of the party. Sitting beside the spring, Baba spoke of the existence of *Chaitanya* in a man, beast, vegetable and stone and Swami Sadananda was quoting passage from the *Upanishads* to show that the same ideas were to be found in our ancient texts. Suddenly, Baba assumed an authoritative tone and declared, "You call them ancient, I know them all; I am beyond space and time." The discourse then drifted to *Shaivism* and the *Linga* and the significance of the symbol, for Sadananda had written a thesis 'The Origin and Early History of South Indian Shaivism' while at the Madras University. It was Tamil New Year's Day and Baba gave every one a *poli*, a sweet preparation which every Tamil housewife needs prepare on that auspicious day. He got them by a mere wave of the Hand! When Baba went within a few days for a short stay at Kodaikanal, Swami Sadananda and Swami Satchidananda also joined the party. The six weeks on the hills provided a large number of opportunities to the *sanyasis* to receive Baba's Grace in ample measure. They were able to catch a glimpse of Baba's unique Divinity.

Swami Satchidananda spoke about this at a meeting at Puttaparthi, on the occasion of the inauguration of the *Tapovana*, on the 29th of June, 1957. He said that, whatever others may take Baba to be, he was convinced from personal experience that He was "*Chidghanamurti*," "*Sarvagnya*," "*Sarvaantaryamin*," and "*Sarvabhootantaratma*."

He then described how he got so convinced. He was in Baba's room one afternoon in the bungalow on Kodaikanal. Baba was reclining on His bed. Suddenly, He stood up and shouted, "Don't shoot!" in Telugu and fell upon the bed, in what is called a 'trance', but is best described as "going on a trans-corporeal journey."

His body became stiff and remained in that condition for about an hour. When He returned and took charge of His physical frame, He looked at those around Him and wanted a telegram sent urgently to an address at Bhopal! He dictated the message and the address. It ran, "Don't worry; the revolver is with Me, Baba." Swami Satchidananda expressed a doubt whether the postal authorities would accept the message for transmission, for it spoke of revolvers, which came under the Arms Act. Others too supported him and there was some argument, pro and con. Baba wanted that it should go quickly to Bhopal and alternative words to bypass the rules were discussed. Swami Satchidananda suggested the word, 'instrument', for 'revolver' and Baba agreed that it would convey the meaning intended, so far as the recipient was concerned. The wire went quick, and fast, to Bhopal, a thousand miles away! Everyone was anxious to know what the nature of the averted tragedy was, but Baba parried all attempts to draw the information from Him. But, on the fourth day, a letter arrived from Bhopal, which was read out to all, a letter revealing that Baba was indeed the Lord, who had saved Gajendra and Prahlada and come to the rescue of Draupadi!

The writer of the letter had served in the Second World War and was high in Government service. He was very much upset by the administrative rearrangements following the Reorganisation of States, for persons far junior in service were hoisted on top of him. He had no one nearby to assuage or comfort or even to listen to his tale of woe. His wife was away at her parents' village. Distracted by the unlucky turn in his career, he decided to end his humiliation by means of a revolver. There was one handy; he tried one shot, just to see whether his hand would be steady for the fatal second; but before he could shoot next. .. Baba had shouted, "Don't shoot!" And ... there was a loud bang at the door! Baba had come! Not as Baba, of course, but as an old college-mate accompanied (!) by his wife and a *chaprasi*, with a trunk and a hold-all, to make the picture complete in every detail! The officer ran into the bedroom, placed the revolver on the bed, threw a sheet over it, hurried back into the front hall, adjusted his lineaments to the new situation, and opened the door!

There, lo and behold, were the three Forms of Bhagawan, ready to play their part. The college chum was very boisterous and demonstrative; Baba had become by instantaneous materialization a friend, who had just the qualities that would remove melancholy and could give the officer the tonic that would cure him of despair. He responded to the treatment and became quite normal, very soon. He even smiled and laughed at the jokes of his old friend, and as the conversation proceeded, all thoughts of suicide melted away. The lady too joined in the talk, but when they discovered that the mistress of the house was away, the visitor put

on an air of profound disappointment and said that he would prefer to stay with another friend. In spite of the appeals of the person whom he had saved, the friend departed, forty five minutes after he materialized, with the lady, the *chaprasi*, the trunk and the hold-all, thus drawing down the curtain on the excellent dramatic performance!

After seeing them off, the officer hurried into the bedroom; he was struck to find that the revolver was not there. No, nor anywhere in the house! Who could have removed it? He had gone to Puttaparthi once and his wife was an ardent devotee. Could it be ... Baba? Ah! It must be He! Then, could it be that those visitors were also He? He locked his house and ran in hot haste to the address to which the college-mate said he would be going.

He got his doubt confirmed; there was no one there; the three visitors had melted into thin air, with the trunk and the hold-all! Back home, he was turning over in his memory the stunning events that had happened that day, when he was startled by another knock at the door! It was the telegraph messenger! The wire from Kodaikanal: "Don't worry; the instrument is with me. Baba."

Swami Satchidananda said that this incident is much stranger than the *Parakayapravesham*, extolled in *Puranas*. *Parakayapravesham* is the entering into an existing body, of something disembodied, but this is *Kayasrishti*, the creation, at the very moment of willing, of three *kayas* or bodies and making the bodies act their roles, i.e., the impersonation of existing individuals, correct to the minutest detail of voice and accent, gait and gesture, idiom and idiosyncrasy, and the recitation of incidents and anecdotes relating to decades past, when they were both students of the same college! "This," said Swami Satchidananda, "is possible only for an *Avatar* of the Lord."

No wonder that he and Swami Sadananda wrote to their *Guru*, Swami Shivananda Saraswati at Rishikesh, about Baba and His Divine Attributes. The two Swamis also accompanied Baba to Cape Comorin, when He proceeded to that place from Kodaikanal. They had a glimpse of Baba's Universal Message, when they saw Him 'taking' a rosary with the Holy Cross and the Figure of Jesus Christ, in order to bless a *Padre*. When Baba walked along the sands of the seashore at Kanyakumari, *sphatika* beads formed themselves at each step; these were collected by the devotees and kept in a sandalwood receptacle; there were 84 of them; but, Baba said there must be 108 in all; and, when they were counted again, there were 108. A rosary was made out of these miraculously formed *sphatikamanis* and Baba gave it to Swami Sadananda himself.

After visiting the Periyar Dam and the Wild Life Sanctuary there, Baba proceeded to Madurai and Mayuram and returned to Puttaparthi, via Salem, the place where Swami Satchidananda was staying for some years. And thus, it came about that Baba had soon to reply to a letter of invitation from Swami Shivananda Saraswati, President of the Divine Life Society, Rishikesh. This was vigorously followed up by many reminders and telegrams in quick succession and Baba agreed, at last, to proceed to North India.

Of course, Baba is not enamoured of tours to see places or admire Nature, nor has He the urge to go on pilgrimages, for He is Himself the Goal of all pilgrimages! When a mother once complained to Him that her son would not accompany her to Puttaparthi but left for Tirupati instead, He said, "That too is coming to Me, for I am not different from He who is on that Hill." By mere willing, Baba can be at the farthest corner of the world, for He is beyond Space and Time. Baba said, "I am not moved by the craving for a change, or for recreation or for travel. But, where there is desire for mental tranquillity, I hurry to grant tranquillity, where there is no mutual trust, I hasten to raise the drooping heart; where there is no mutual trust, I rush to restore trust; I am ever on the move to fulfil the Mission, for which I have come."

Swami Satchidananda wanted to leave earlier for Rishikesh, because, as he told the present writer, "Silly stories about Baba have to be scotched and my brother *sanyasis* have to be apprised of the Divinity of Baba."

Baba started from Puttaparthi by car on 14th June, 1957. He halted at Medkurti 37 miles away from Madanapalle, in order to unveil the silver image of Shirdi Sai Baba at the Ayodhya Ashram. A huge concourse of village folk was waiting there since noon and Baba addressed the assembly for more than an hour. He said that any work, like the building of the *Ashram*, carried out in a spirit of devotion, without conceit and with no desire for any other profit except the work well done, is "*tapas*", in the real sense of the word. Baba condemned the studied neglect of the body as a means of realising God. "It is the tabernacle of the Lord; it is the boat with which one has to cross the Ocean of Birth and Death, with the twin oars of *Viveka* and *Vairagya*, and so, it has to be kept in perfect trim." Turning to the women who had assembled, He spoke of the need to infuse *Bhakti*, courage, self-respect, and the habit of truth in children. "No one need go anywhere in search of *ananda*," He said, "It is in you as a spark; it has only to be fanned into a big flame and fire." He declared that though He could transform the earth into sky and the sky into earth, people who came to Him get only what they ask and choose. He said that *Viveka* and *Vairagya* could come about by, what He called,

the *Vicharana* of every *Vichara*, that is to say, by the relentless examination of every thought, on the touchstone of rightness and truth. "The true devotee must conquer the emotions; the true recluse must cultivate intellectual sharpness; the true *Sevaka* must develop strength of mind," He said.

The party reached Madras on 15th July and after a stay of four days there, Baba and the devotees, whom He had chosen for the tour, emplaned for Delhi on the 20th. He was very much amused when He found His name entered on the ticket as Mr. S. S. Baba! He had a hearty laugh over the Mr! Baba moved about inside the plane, rationing His neighbourhood for all the passengers so that everyone could have the privilege. He even granted an "interview" in the upper air over the Vindhya to a passenger, who prayed for the chance, because he had by then, 'discovered' Him! The man was quite surprised, when Baba advised him to marry the school teacher, whom he loved, for no one, he thought, knew of this chapter of his life! Baba promised to make his parents agree to the match, giving up their unrelenting opposition!

The plane landed at Palam at 4-20 p.m. Within an hour of His arrival at the Sundarnagar bungalow which had been fixed for His stay, Baba had a 'call' from a devotee at Bangalore and He 'left' the body and hastened to relieve the person from, what He afterwards described as, a dangerous paralytic stroke! The *Bhajan*, twice a day, attracted the devotees of Delhi, as well as the friends and relatives to whom the devotees were all along describing the glory of their *Guru*. Baba also granted "interviews" to a very large number of people, during which, as usual, He diagnosed their troubles and vouchsafed His Grace.

On 22nd July, Baba left New Delhi by car for Rishikesh. Swami Shivananda's *sanyasi* disciples escorted Baba from Haridwar itself and when He reached Shivanandanagar at 6-30 p.m., Swami Shivananda called a special gathering of the inmates of the *Ashram* and offered Baba a hearty welcome. While Shivananda greeted Baba with folded hands, as is his wont, Baba acknowledged the greeting with the *Abhayahasta*, a *Mudra* that has conferred *Shanti* on thousands of troubled souls.

Shivanandanagar nestles on the lap of evergreen mountains, fondled lovingly by the kindly right arm of Mother Ganga. The left bank of the river, when it comes into view occasionally as the curtain of mist is wafted away by a passing wind, is resplendent with a line of temples, *mutts*, and edifices housing the Gita Bhavan, the Swargashram, the Paramartha Niketan, etc. But, more impressive than these reminders of Man's inborn home-sickness are the forest-clad

mountains on every side, that seem like superhuman sages lost in silent contemplation of the Infinite. They have averted their eyes inward and are blissfully unaware of history!

There is also Ganga, daughter of Earth and Sky, let into *Bharatavarsha* by the penance of a Prince who, in the effort to propitiate his ancestors, succeeded also in ensuring prosperity and salvation to his children and children's children forever and forever; Ganga, famed in lore and legend; sought after in every Hindu home since thousands of years to sanctify every ritual, to purify every rite, to exorcise every evil, to cleanse every sin; immortalised in poetry, symbolised in art, embedded in architecture, idealised in sculpture, humanised in painting, extolled in music; revered as a vehicle of Bliss; whose scintillating story is related by a million mothers every nightfall to the toddlers on their laps. Ganga rolls majestically by, reminding everyone of India's Message, and India's grandeur.

When the *ashramites* arranged a *Satsang* the next day, and requested Baba to give them a *sandesh*, He referred to the Ganga comparing it to a *Sanyasi* speeding to the sea. He said that every river knew in its heart of hearts that it has come from the sea and is prompted by that knowledge to hurry towards the sea, irrespective of all the obstacles of the earthly terrain. He commended the quietness of Shivanandanagar and said that it was a good place to acquire spiritual quiet too. He said that, "*Bha*" meant Creation, "*Ga*" meant Protection, and "*Va*" meant Change or Transformation; "Bhagawan is capable of all three," He declared. "That is My secret," He announced.

Speaking of the things He is accustomed to 'take' and 'give', He discounted all spurious explanations and said that His *Sankalpa* was immediately fulfilled. He materialised them in order to give joy to His devotees, just like a father gives sweets to his little ones, not to advertise his generosity or his parenthood. He gave them in order to save people from worry or anxiety, to ensure their peace of mind, to help develop spiritual concentration and in many cases to keep up His own 'contact' with the careers of the recipients. They were not intended to attract anyone; they were the products neither of *mantra*, nor of *tantra*. They were produced in just the same way that all articles were produced; only, much quicker, nay, instantaneously. They lasted as long as all material objects lasted. "My best Gift is *Prema*; devotees should strive to acquire that, as well as *Viveka* and *Vairagya*, which only the *Guru* can give," said Baba.

Baba then materialised by mere wave of His hand a magnificent *Rudraksha* Garland of 108 beads, of exquisite workmanship, each bead encased in gold and all the beads strung in gold

with a five-faced king-bead in the centre. He presented it to Swami Shivananda Saraswati. He also 'took' a large quantity of *vibhuti* and applied it Himself to the forehead of the sage.

In the evening, when Swami entered the *satsang* hall wearing the unique garland, everyone was struck by its lustre and workmanship, as well as the miracle which brought it forth. Swami Shivananda spoke of Bhagawan and His message. He dilated on the efficacy of *Namasmarana* and appealed as a medical practitioner, for a daily dose of *Vairagya* to be taken by every person, along with the regular diet of the Lord's name. The Ganga figured in the talk that Baba gave that evening also. He began by saying that *Naram* meant 'water'; the Ganga, rolling majestically along, was Narayana Himself. Indeed, the hills and dales, the sky overhead, the forests, the rocks, all things everywhere were but manifestations of the One. He Willed, "*Ekoham Bahusyam*," and He became all this. The one Sun is reflected in a thousand pots, if only the pots contain water, the water of *Bhakti*, *Bhakti* itself leads one to *Gnyana*, for the *bhakta* quickly and easily realises that the Lord is immanent in everything, and that He is the One and Only.

Baba's speeches and conversation were so full of rare and deep wisdom that the next day, a number of senior monks and *brahmacharis* came to the residence of Baba and plied Him with questions designed to clarify their doubts. They ranged over a variety of topics, like the place of *Prakritidharma*, *Paramarthadharma*, and *Kartavyadharm*a in the scheme of the life, the nature of *Shoonyam* and *Poornam*, the efficacy and limits of *vigraha-aradhana*, the existence of spirits, the *modus operandi* of *Bhagavatsankalpa*, etc. Swami Shivananda too had hour-long discussions with Baba every evening throughout His stay, when they were closeted together. Baba gave the Swami fruits and *vibhuti*, 'materialised' especially for improving his health, and it was noticed that, day by day, the Swami was getting better and better. Baba one day took Ganges water in His hand and lo, it became sweet and fragrant nectar and He gave it to the Swami to be taken as drug. It came as a pleasant surprise to many in the *Ashram* when they saw, on the day Baba left, Swami Shivananda enthusiastically showing Him around the various sections of the *Ashram* and even climbing steps and getting down stairs, for on the day Baba reached the *Ashram* and for some days after, the Swami was being taken round in a wheeled chair!

The twenty sixth of July was full of pleasant memories for devotees as well as the inmates of the Shivanandashram, for Baba that day boarded a bus and proceeded along the bank of the Ganges to a place of the Rani of Garhwal for a quiet morning.

The scenery all along was indeed very elevating. Here and there among the mountains, one could discern a lonely hut with a *gerua* flat (indicating someone struggling with the spirit) or a patch of cultivated land (indicating someone battling with the elements). Suddenly, the road turned upon itself and the bus snorted to a halt in front of an artistic little bungalow, set like a gem in the centre of a well-kept garden by the side of the Ganges itself. Baba saw a *jambu* tree full of fruits and like saint Avvayar's Muruga, He plucked the fruits and distributed them among the members of the party. He sat under a tree on the banks of the Ganges and some people asked Him the questions that were troubling them. There were questions about the nature of *Upanishadic* teachings and their value in modern times. He said they were like sign posts, indicating the road; the road has to be traversed in order to experience the joy of reaching the goal. There was one question on *Swarga* and *Naraka*, which Baba said did exist in this world itself. *Sanyasin* inquirers asked about *atmasakshatkara* and the melting away of *maya*, at the point of Realisation.

On the way back, Baba stopped the bus at a place, where a thin little iron rod carried a half-distinct name-plate, "Vashishtha Guha". He proceeded to descend the rather precipitous incline to the river bank, as if He had been there often before and as if He became aware of an engagement with the occupant of the cave. The Ganga takes a wide curve near the cave; nearby a small rivulet pours her offerings into the Ganges and so, the scenery is doubly attractive. The Vashishtha Guha bears a hallowed name; it has been sanctified by the austerities performed therein by many great recluses and monks in the past. Swami Purushotamananda, a disciple of Swami Brahmananda of the Ramakrishna order, initiated into *sanyas* by Mahapurushji, another direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, who had been in the cave since 30 years, welcomed Baba as if he too was expecting Him! He was more than seventy years old and he had spent the major part of his life in asceticism of a most rigorous kind and in the study of scriptures. His face had the genuine glow of spiritual joy and the slightest mention of the glory of Godhead sent him to *samadhi*. When he was a young man of 27, Brahmanandaji had read his palm at Kanyakumari and predicted that he enter a cave and go on meditating and meditating!

Baba reminded him of the travails he endured when he first came into the cave, his encounter with leopards and cobras and the three-day trek to Rishikesh and the desperate struggle for salt and matchboxes! He spoke of the succour that came to him through sheer Divine intervention! Baba repeated the visit the next evening also, in spite of a rumbling sky and the grumbling of some persons who accompanied Him. But, the rumbling ceased and the

grumblers were humbled; by Baba's Grace, the sky became clear and the rain held back. Baba Himself sang a number of songs that day in the Vashishtha Guha and when one of the Swamis attending on Swami Purushotamananda requested Him to sing a song of Tyagaraja, He very graciously asked him which of Tyagaraja's *kritis* he most liked to hear. Swami Kalikananda said that he was longing to hear "*Sri Raghuvara Sugunlaya!*" Baba sang it, just to make him happy. No one had heard Him sing that song before and so, it was an unexpected piece of good luck for which we thanked Swami Kalikananda. Hearing that Swami was suffering from chronic stomach-ache since many years, He took some 'candy' from nowhere and gave it to him, with instruction about diet, etc. He also gave Purushotamananda a *Japamala* of shining *sphatika* beads, which 'manifested' itself in His hand.

But, more mysterious and significant was the Vision that He granted to Swami Purushotamananda that evening. As early as 1918, Purushotamananda had written to his *Guru*, "All is false and I cannot rest satisfied, until and unless I come face to face with Truth!" After sending everyone outside the cave, Baba and the sage went into the inner room. Sri Subbaramaiah, President of the Divine Life Society, Venkatagiri, describes what he was able to see from outside the cave, thus: "Even now that picture is imprinted in my memory. I was standing near the entrance of the cave. I could see what was happening. Baba placed His head on the lap of Swami Purushotamananda and laid Himself down! Suddenly, His entire body was bathed in divine brilliance. His head and face appeared to me to have increased very much in size. Rays of splendour emanated from His face. I was overwhelmed with a strange, inexplicable joy. The time was about 10 p.m." When pressed later to divulge the Vision, Baba informed us that it was a vision of Jyotir-Padmanabha! What supreme *karuna!* What immeasurable good fortune! Swami Purushotamananda passed away on Shivaratri night, 1961, during the *lingodbhava muhurtam*.

While returning from the cave, Baba 'left' the body for a short while! When asked later, He condescended to tell where He had been. He had gone to save a great *yogi* from a watery grave. This aroused the curiosity of everyone around Him and they gathered closer to hear further details. But, He brushed their questions aside and said that Subrahmanyam will be able to say who it was! So, some persons went in search of Subrahmanyam (a member of the party) and he was discovered and brought into the picture. Baba asked him what he had seen that evening while at the Vashishtha Guha. He begged pardon for not informing Baba immediately about it, for he had seen a corpse floating down the Ganges, but, being a thing of evil omen, he refrained from mentioning it in the holy atmosphere of the cave. Baba laughed

and said that it was not a corpse at all, though the *yogi*, who was floating down the flood, was so dead to all external occurrences that he did not even cognise his plight. He was being swept down by the torrent. It seems he was seated on a rock by the side of the river, lost in *dhyana*. The current, meanwhile, was fast eating into the mud underneath the rock and the rock tilted over, throwing him into the flood. "It was all like a dream for him at first," said Baba. Later, when he found that he was being carried away by the Ganga, he began to pray to the Lord. Baba heard his call; He slowly led the floating "corpse" to the bank, a few miles above Shivanandanagar, where there was a homestead available to give him warmth and comfort!

A devotee who was then at Rishikesh writes, "We heard Him narrating the incident. During the 'trance' He had His palms one over the other, as if enclosing something. It was to protect the *sanyasi's* heart that Baba had kept His palms closed. The *sadhu* was saved after a thirty mile float! If this does not mean *shishtarakshana*, preservation, what else does?"

But, then, one or more of the following three conditions must be fulfilled before the S.O.S. of the person draws Baba's attention. He must either have something from Baba in the form of a *raksha* for protection, or he should call on the Lord, heart and soul, whenever danger threatens him. In case the person in distress fails to qualify himself in either of these two ways, he should at least be a man of truth and sincerity. It does not matter if he is no 'devotee'. And, in calling upon Bhagawan, no particular Name is essential, Rama, Krishna, Jesus, Allah, Sai, be it any. All names and all forms being His and His alone. He is only too ready to answer the cry of the one in distress and to avert it. The *sadhu* was no devotee of Baba, nor had he ever seen Him. At the same, wasn't his life saved? This incident of the unknown *yogi* was a great revelation to many, of Baba's universal love and presence.

Baba's cottage at Rishikesh was busy throughout His stay, with the inmates of the *Ashram* and the students of the Academy gathering there and plying Him with questions on *sadhana*, *japa*, and *dhyana*, and the unceasing train of pilgrims who discovered that Rishikesh had acquired another focus of Holiness.

The reputed scholar-saint Sri Shad-darshanacharya Swami came twice with his disciples and students. Swamis Sadananda and Satchidananda found themselves surrounded by eager inquirers wanting more and more information regarding Baba, His Life, His Glory, and His Prasanthi Nilayam at Puttaparthi. The present writer heard Swami Sadananda reply to a young *Brahmachari* that, "Baba can roam at will through *Atmaloka*, *Pranaloka* and *Jivaloka*,

and so He can reveal whatever happens anywhere at any time. He is *Sarvashakta*." He had himself seen, the Swami said, "Baba converting a grain of rice into a grain of ivory and transforming that grain of ivory into a hundred and eight elephant figurines, each one, finely carved, and clearly recognisable by means of magnifying glass!"

Baba took leave of Swami Shivananda on 28th July and left for New Delhi. On the 30th, He proceeded by car to Mathura-Brindavan, the scene of His *leela* in the past, and the devotees were eagerly looking forward to the opportunity of seeing Him in that background, and of being with Him in that atmosphere charged with the fragrance of the *Maha-Bhagavata*. The devotees left New Delhi in a bus, which made a detour via Aligarh and broke down near a small hamlet some 20 miles beyond Aligarh! A spare bus had to be requisitioned and by the time it arrived and Mathura was reached, it was nearly 3.30 p.m. The party was exhausted, hungry, and depressed; but, Baba, kinder than any mother, welcomed and consoled and looked after them so tenderly and so lovingly that to many among the party, the breakdown seemed positively worthwhile! He comforted them with His own characteristically sweet words of solace. "Come nearer to the fan," "Stretch yourselves a little," "Do not stand up when I come," "Here! I have prepared this cool drink especially for you," "Take this, you are awfully tired," He said while tending to them; and in a trice, they were restored to their former energy.

Baba led them all to the bank of the Yamuna, as if He knew every inch of the place, and pointed out the hallowed localities. Who can say what reminiscences were activating the Consciousness of Baba as He showed the places where the serpent was humbled, the Gopis were chided, the cart was overturned, the twin trees were uprooted! Every little wave of the Yamuna seemed to dance to the music of His voice; every cow that was seen seemed to be seeking the warm touch of His Divine hand!

While returning towards Mathura, Baba casually walked into a Radha-Shyam Temple! Arrangements were being made in front of that temple for *Rasaleela* show. When Baba went and stood in front of the shrine, suddenly, the lights went off; everyone wondered why! Baba then said, "Don't worry; we shall take this Radha-Shyam to Delhi and you can do *Bhajan* there!" He waved His hand across the door of the shrine, where one could see the lovely marble image of Radha-Shyam in the dim religious light and lo, there materialised in His Palm an idol, an exact replica of the Radha-Shyam installed inside!

On the second day of August, 1957, Baba left for Srinagar by plane and reached the Kashmir

Valley at 12 noon. From the air, one could see the complicated network of canals that feed the Punjab plains, the Golden Temple of Amritsar, and the rugged approaches to the Banihal Pass and the Kashmir Valley. Once the Pass is crossed, the enchanting loveliness of the valley that had aroused the covetousness of monarchs from as far as Macedonia and Mongolia spreads itself before the eye. The gurgling waters, the long rows of pine trees, the luscious greenness of the grass, and the signs of quiet toil filled the mind with joy. Though the Head of the Shankaracharya *Mutt* of Srinagar pressed Baba to accept his hospitality and take up residence at the *Mutt*, Baba preferred to stay in a houseboat with His party occupying two neighbouring boats. Alexandra palace was the name of the boat which He occupied; the others stayed in the Prince of Kashmir and the King's Roses.

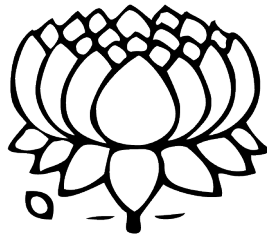
Baba encourages everyone to appreciate the beauties of nature; He directs attention to the charm of a flower, the colourful magnificence of a sunrise or sunset, the grim grandeur of an overcast sky, the timorous twinkling of the stars in the midnight sky or the moving jasmine-garland of cranes in flight. So, He took the party to the Shalimar and Nishat Bagh Gardens in the evening, but, as He remarked while returning to the houseboat, the snow-capped Himalayas in the far distance was a far lovelier *Bagh*, designed by the Lord to draw men's eyes away from the valleys in which they wallowed.

On 3rd August, Baba left for Gulmarg and Kilanmarg, to show His party, which consisted of merchants and businessmen, lawyers and professors, writers and poets and musicians, administrators and agriculturists, the snows of the Himalayan ranges. Horses were engaged at Tanmarg and during the long and rather arduous climb of over twelve miles to about 14,000 feet above sea level, Baba kept the party lively by His quips and jokes and occasional gifts of *prasadam* or *vibhuti*. He rode His horse, the tallest and the most impressive of the lot, called Raja, with ease and dexterity, as if He was to the saddle born. Never once did He get down to rest. The winding road over the hills was full of pebbles, broken cobble stones, and the tangle of pine tree roots, but the horses cleverly picked their way along, until the snow line was reached.

There, like Kumaraswami on the slopes of Kailasha, Baba played bare-foot on the snow, rolling snowballs and throwing them at members of the party, laughing at the frightened faces of those who slid down the snow in the make-shift toboggans, and chiding those who complained of the chillness of the wind. Everyone was tired and complained of aches and burns, but Baba was fresh as a rose, when the houseboats were reached about 10.30 p.m. that day.

The Alexandra Palace became very soon a replica of Prasanthi Nilayam, for many from Srinagar came to pay homage to Him and receive His Blessings. There was an old lady, who said she had been directed to go to that very boat by some Messenger, in a dream she had the previous night. Baba also accepted the invitation of a few families in Srinagar to visit their houses. At one such home, He put a cardamom garland round the neck of a baby, saying "He will become a great *Yogi!*" Strange to say, the grandfather of the child declared, "Swami! That was exactly what the astrologer, who prepared the horoscope of this child, predicted when he was born!" But, he said so only after Baba asked him, "You have already been told so, isn't it?" That was the house of the Secretary of the Tourist Agency, which had made arrangements for Baba's tour of Kashmir. Baba gave him a ring, set with gemstones, which He 'materialised' on the spot. During the conversation, when someone asked Him at what age He had "given up hearth and home" (!), He said, "How can I, whose home is this *Jagat*, give up hearth and home?"

His answers illumined the Divinity of His Being, to all who heard them. The stream of pilgrims to Alexandra Palace continued unabated for two full days. Leave-taking was naturally a prolonged and painful affair for the large throng of *Bhaktas*, who had come to the aerodrome on 6th August. The plane took off at last for Delhi. From Delhi, Baba flew to Madras and after a short stay there, He reached Puttaparthi on 14th August.





9.

The Wave Of The Hand

His hands confer the boons the devotees deserve. That hand has the healing touch; it can wipe out disease, ward off evil, exorcise the Devil, and rewrite Destiny!

EVEN as a child, Baba had the miraculous power of getting things from nowhere. He used to surprise his playmates by taking peppermints and sweets from empty bags. In spite of His requests to keep this as a secret, the news spread among the elders, and when they enquired about the way in which He got them, Baba kept silent for long. Later when He was pressed by His own friends, He said that a certain village deity, a *Grama Shakti*, obeyed His slightest wish. This was, of course, to ward off further queries, because the villagers could be parried easily only by such an answer. They began to admire Him as a boy, specially blessed, to be watched with care and treated with respect. Even at school, Baba helped many classmates with a piece of eraser or pencil, which He 'materialised' by a wave of the hand. When any of them complained of any illness or pain, Baba 'got' green leaves from the 'Himalayas', as He told the boys, and made them chew and swallow the juice. Some elders called it 'magic' and even characterised it as 'black' and warned the children that they should not have any track with Sathyanarayana, but who could suppress God?

It was only after the Announcement of His mission that Baba regularly 'took' *vibhuti* or *sacred ash*, and began giving it for a variety of purposes to all, who came to Him. Baba has often spoken of the significance of this *vibhuti*. Since it materialises out of nothing and since the ash is specifically associated with Shiva, it is reverentially called by devotees as *Kailasha vibhuti*. It is named *bhuti* or *vibhuti* since it endows one with prosperity; *Bhasma* because it burns away all sins; *Bhasitam* because it increases one's spiritual splendour; *Ksharam* since it removes danger; and *Raksha*, for it is an armour against the machinations of evil spirits. This

is how the *Vibhuti* is praised in the *Brihad Jabala Upanishad*. Baba says it is also a constant reminder of the evanescence of the body, for, ultimately, it is reduced, by cremation, to a potful of ash!

From the day of Annunciation till this day, thousands of devotees and visitors have witnessed this miracle of the creation of *vibhuti*, which Baba does.

It is indeed an inexplicable, ultra-scientific wonder! It is done so casually, so informally, so gracefully, so quietly, and so naturally that you might well miss the significance of the blessing. The right palm held directly down or at a slight angle, a wave or two scarcely noticeable, the fingers close to arrest the fall of the *vibhuti* which has already materialised and the wonder-product is handed on to you and applied to the forehead. At an average rate of a minimum of one pound per day, the quantity of *vibhuti* thus produced "out of elements" by His Will must now have reached the astounding figure of full four tons!

Every idea, it is said, has an inherent tendency to manifest itself in physical form; what anybody thinks has some tendency to come about in fact. It all depends on the will, whether it is your will or mine or the will of a Divine Being. Baba wills; it is done! The *vibhuti* that He gives to everyone as token of His blessings is preserved carefully and worn on the forehead. It is placed on the tongue or mixed with water and drunk as a specific against illness. It is carried as a talisman.

A devotee from South America had written that every night, she sat for *Dhyana* with the packet of *vibhuti* held in her palm and, invariably, she had a vision that her palms were resting at the feet of Lord Krishna. In fact, it is difficult to enumerate all the curative and alleviatory purposes to which recipients put the *vibhuti*, which Baba takes by a 'wave' of the hand!

The *vibhuti* He gives is also of a hundred different kinds, suited perhaps to the purposes for which He creates them. It is sometimes in the shape of a hard cube, or often as powder, fine or grainy, or flaky. It may be fragrant, or pungent-smelling; saltish in taste or sweet or tasteless; white or blackish, or of any of the intermediate shades. And, sometimes, when He waves the hand, it might emerge container and all! When a person left for England for higher studies, Baba gave him the *vibhuti* in a silver container with the additional blessing, "The *vibhuti* in this will never get exhausted!" For, His will can hold sway thousands of miles away, on a silver container, which He replenishes by a predated expression of His desire. Sometimes when the *vibhuti* is to be taken as medicine for a long period, as during

pregnancy, Baba asks the party to bring an empty receptacle and, by a light little tap on the outer surface, the vessel becomes full of *vibhuti*. When He gathers His devotees on the sands at Chitravati or the riverbed of Kaivalya at Venkatagiri, or on the beach at Kovalam in Kerala, or Kanyakumari in Tamil Nadu, or on the Godavari, He digs into the sand playfully with His fingers and lo, there is a huge cube of *vibhuti* there, which He rescues and it is powdered and distributed to all present; or, He may take the sand itself in both His hands and pour it on to a plate, when lo, the thing that falls on the plate is not sand, but fine, fragrant *vibhuti*!

It may be said here that Baba's entire physical frame seems to be suffused with *vibhuti*, for when He goes in procession on Vijayadashami and other days, thousands have clearly seen fine *vibhuti* powder falling on His eyelids and cheeks from His forehead. Sometimes, when He leaves the body and goes out to give *darshan* to devotees, *vibhuti* has emanated from His face, mouth, thumb, toe, or forehead; often, when He wants to apply *vibhuti* to a devotee's forehead, He merely raises His thumb and makes a mark; and lo, the *vibhuti* is there for all to see. Why, there have been cases in which devotees have dreamt that Baba came to them and applied *vibhuti* on their brows, only to find on awakening that the *vibhuti* was actually there! They dream that Baba put *vibhuti* on their tongues and when they awake, they find *vibhuti* in their mouths! Baba signifies His presence at the residence of His devotees by scattering the tell-tale *vibhuti* on the floor of the shrine room before the place where His picture is kept, or by a solitary packet of the sacred ash left lying on the floor. When Baba vouchsafes a vision of Himself to save someone from some impending calamity, He invariably uses *vibhuti* to effect a cure.

During *Dasara* three years ago, a certain visitor from Telengana received an urgent wire from home, informing him that his father-in-law had a stroke and that his condition created anxiety. Baba asked him not to worry, but a similar wire came the next day too and so, Baba agreed to his going alone, leaving his wife to watch the festivities even though she was the daughter of the stricken man and so, most needed at his bedside.

When the son-in-law left, He gave him *vibhuti* to apply to the forehead of the patient. Of course, He had materialised it by a wave of the hand. The next day, however, about 8 o'clock in the evening, Baba was discussing the timings of the trains by which the son-in-law was proceeding to the sick bed; quite suddenly, He sat up and said, "You were all wrong. The train won't take him so fast. He will not reach the place before 9 p.m. Oh! What a pity!" and within a wink of the eye, He had left the body and 'gone'. He was 'away' for about half an

hour and when He 'returned', He felt so happy that He could apply the *vibhuti* Himself to the sick man in Telengana. "Did You use the same *vibhuti* that the son-in-law was carrying with him?" He was asked. "Yes," He said, "You will know that when he returns. Ask him and he will say that the packet was empty, when he went to the sick man." And, so it was. On return, he related the story of his discomfiture, how he was blamed for being careless, how they rubbed their fingers over the folder paper in order to collect at least the tracings of the holy *vibhuti*, and how they failed even in that desperate endeavour!

Baba sometimes performs *abhisheka* (ceremonial bath) for the silver figure of His 'previous body', which is kept at the *mandir*. A small wooden pot, artistically carved and painted, is filled with *vibhuti* for this purpose and keeping it overturned over the image, Baba puts His hand into the vessel and twirls it in order to ensure an even flow of sacred ash. But, by contact with His hand, the flow of *vibhuti* continues long after the quantity originally filled is exhausted; twirl after twirl brings down fresh showers of *vibhuti* from the receptacle, until the image is sunk in the fragrant powder and the pile of 'Ash' mounts to unexpected heights, and Baba keeps the wooden pot away, out of sheer physical exhaustion, so to say!

Talking of *vibhuti*, another incident occurs to the mind though it is not exactly an illustration of the wave of the hand. Whenever a sincere devotee passes away, Baba gives His *darshan* at the last moment and enables the person to enjoy eternal peace. On such occasions, symbolic of death, destruction and the end of the temporary and the evanescent, there issues from the mouth of the body that Baba leaves behind, in order to proceed to the death-bed, sacred *vibhuti*! One such incident stands vividly before the mind of the present writer. It was a Saturday and the date was the 15th of November, 1958. Baba was reading out a letter to some persons around Him, at about 5.20 p.m. Suddenly, with a responding shout, "Ha," He fell on the floor and was practically lifeless. After the lapse of exactly ten minutes, Baba moved a little and He could be heard to cough, three times. But, they were not coughs at all; they were three puffs which emanated from His mouth, bringing out quantities of *vibhuti* to a distance of more than a foot and a half! Five minutes later, at 5.35 p.m. Baba got up and without any sign of exhaustion, or confusion, resumed the conversation from where He left off. When He was importuned to reveal where He had been during the previous quarter of an hour, He condescended to reply. He said, "I had been to Dehra Dun. You might know the mother of Dr. K., who comes to this place frequently. She passed away, at 5.30 p.m. Dr. K. was there at the bedside; in fact, she had her fingers at the pulse and she announced to all, this is her last breath. They were singing *Bhajan* songs in that room. She had a peaceful death. I gave her

darshan at her last moment."

The next day was a Sunday and on Tuesday, 18th November, when the postman came to Prasanthi Nilayam, he had with him a letter from Dr. K. to Baba, which said, "My mother drew her last breath on Saturday, at 5.30 p.m. We were doing *Bhajan*, during her last hours, as per her wish. She was remembering you constantly!" What a miracle this, Baba anticipating the moment of death, answering the prayers of a panting soul, describing the happenings in a Dehra Dun room within minutes and the emanation of *vibhuti*, symbolic of the destruction of the evanescent material of the physical body, when the soul is freed from bondage!

The *vibhuti* is but the continuation, in this *avatar*, of the *Udi* or ash which Shirdi Sai Baba was giving as His Boon to those, who went to Him. Shirdi Sai Baba used to take the ash from the hearth that was always by His side, fed perpetually with fuel, "so that He can have live cinders for the chillum," says Baba. Baba 'materialises' whatever He Wills, by a wave of His hand. He says they are all ready in 'Sai stores' and that His 'workmen' are so quick, they manufacture in the fraction of a moment even the most complicated artistry that He thinks of and deliver them into His hand!

The writer remembers a peculiarly thrilling experience. Baba 'took' a Gold Medal, a fair sized one, to be given to a reputed violinist, whose recital was just concluding. He showed the medal to those around Him and even as they were admiring its size and beauty and shine, He said, "Oh, the name has to be inscribed," and He closed His palm. Opening it immediately, He showed the medal to all. They were struck dumb at the miracle; the inscription, "Presented by Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba to Vidwan T. Chowdiah", was deeply engraved thereon, in English, complete with date and the name of the day! Showing the Medal to us, Baba said, "See how quick My workmen are!"

Baba blesses artists, who perform at Prasanthi Nilayam during festivals, etc., with gifts taken by a wave of the Hand, rings, necklaces, medals, brooches, and the like. And, there will be a special appropriateness in the gifts too. A *Nadaswaram Vidwan* was given a ring with an inset picture of Shiva; on enquiry, it was found that he was, since many generations, the temple musician of Tiruvengadu, that his family had certain *Inam* lands in return for the hereditary service it had to perform, and that the form of the Lord worshipped in that temple was Aghoreshwara, Shiva 'the Un-terrible'; and so, the Shiva on the ring was a replica of the icon in his ancestral village!

A *mangalyam* 'taken' and given for a *Vaishya* bride had on it the figurine of Parameshwari; another given to a *Nadar* bride had Venkataramana, instead! It seems that the bride and groom were to go to Tirupati after the function here! "I shall give you a Ganesha; take it home and worship it," He told a visitor. It was the image of Ganesha in the standing posture! "This is the Ganesha that you have in your *pooja* room, is not it?" Baba asked, as He put it into his hand.

A person to whom He had given an image of Krishna was told by a priest that it was necessary for him to arrange a *Rudrabhishekham*, to ward off some impending calamity. He got it done, on strictly *Shastraic* lines. A month later, he came to Prasanthi Nilayam and when he was called for interview, Baba said, "I received the *pooja* you did." The *Bhakta* did not recollect what *pooja* he had done to Baba and he blinked in doubt. Then Baba told him, "The *pooja* you got done through the priest," and with a wave of the hand, He materialised a *Linga*. While giving it, He said, quietly and without any anger, "The Krishna I gave you has come back to Me! Do not worry."

It is not proper for the recipients to weigh or evaluate the gifts, for they are not of the Earth at all. Once a musician, who got a necklace studded with precious stones, started on his way home to discuss its value and deride its worth; it was lost mysteriously; it simply was not round his neck! Chastened by the experience, he returned immediately to Prasanthi Nilayam and Baba, chiding him gently, 'took' before his eyes the self-same necklace and presented it again to him.

Things that Baba gives can never be lost, either. A devotee, while returning to Hyderabad from Puttaparthi, discovered that her trunk had been stolen at night, somewhere near Mahbubnagar; she reported to the Railway Police. Two days later, she was called upon to identify and verify her things, for the thief had been apprehended and the box recovered! Imagine her surprise when she found every article intact, except the *Japamala* that Baba had 'materialised' and given her! She sent a message to Baba by wire and Baba replied that the *Japamala* had come to His Possession, for no thief can steal it! Who can describe her joy at getting the same *Japamala* a second time from Baba's hands?

A devotee, C.N.P. writes, "It was twelve years ago. That evening, Baba took all those who were at the old *mandir* to the sands of the river. After *Bhajan*, He called me and, while talking to me consolingly about my personal problems, He 'took' a talisman or *Raksha* and handed it to me. He had already given me one and I had kept it in a silver box in the shrine, in

my house. When He gave me another, I was alarmed that my situation had worsened, since He felt that I needed additional protection. So, I asked Him, 'Why, Swami, why a second *Raksha* for me?' Then He said, 'This is the one I gave you last! You left it at home in that silver box; it has been stolen yesterday. Here keep this *Raksha* safe!' And, it was true. When I went home, I found the house broken into and the silver box gone, along with some other silverware!"

Or, take the instance of the diamond ring. Srimati Sakamma some fifteen years ago hurried to Puttaparthi for *Dasara* and, in the confusion of packing, misplaced a seven-stone-studded diamond ring. She discovered its absence too late for anything and she informed Baba about it. Baba simply made fun of the whole affair and cracked a joke or two and heartily laughed at her loss. Months later, Baba was visiting her factory and sipping coffee, sitting in the kitchen of an out-house behind it. Suddenly, He said, "O, Sakamma, you want that diamond ring, isn't it? Well here it is!" With those words, He patted the wall and lo, the ring was there in that Hand! That Hand is certainly Divine!

If that Hand is dipped in water, the water becomes petrol, on which a car can be driven for miles, just like the authentic stuff. Once, while proceeding to Bangalore, the can became empty, somewhere near Chickballapur and He actually sent someone to a tank by the side of the road. He brought water, mere H₂O! Baba dipped His Hand, or rather His finger into the can and stirred it a bit. It was then emptied into the petrol tank and the car went merrily along mile after mile, the engine not recognising any difference at all. On another occasion, when diesel oil supply ran short for the dynamo, which produces electric power for illumination during festivals, and when it was too late to send anyone to fetch it from Penukonda or Dharmavaram, both twenty miles away, the Hand was dipped in water and lo, diesel oil of the correct chemical specification was ready!

Of the same nature is another miracle witnessed by the writer. It was at Horsley Hills, where a small party of devotees had the privilege of spending a few days in His august company. Every morning, Baba used to move out into the jungle towards a flat-topped boulder, upon which He sat and discoursed to the *Bhaktas*, who were with Him. One day, as He was walking to the place, He took up in His hand a piece of rock of a peculiar geological formation; it looked more like a closely packed bundle of dry macaroni. He kept the stone in front of Him while the discourse was going on; then, when it concluded, He said, "I shall sweeten your tongues a bit," and took the stone in His hand. Lo, it had become a lump of sugar-candy. It was as if every molecule of that stone had been transformed by His will into a

molecule of sugar. No one has seen sugar crystalline in long thread-like bits! But, this was not chemistry! This was Divine "Alchemy"!!

Srimati Sakamma broke her eyeglasses once at Puttaparthi and was having great difficulty. So, Baba 'took' a pair of the same focal length (!) and gave it to her!

Sri Krishna's Birthday, it was. Since Baba was also with them at the time, the festival was considered especially auspicious. The devotees at Madras made elaborate preparations. The Hall was decorated, invitations were sent to the *Bhaktas* available nearby. Baba came and sat on the special seat near the shrine, temporarily erected at one end of the Hall, during the *pooja*; then, just before *arati*, He got up and everyone rose with Him. He lifted both His Hands well above His Head and the expectant throng of devotees was watching the Hands, for they had not seen Him in that pose, during any festival before. It appeared rather strange; but before they could even wonder, He held in His Hands, a huge glass bowl shimmering in the electric light, beautifully designed, with a bird spreading its wings executed at both ends. The bowl seemed rather heavy and Baba placed it on the platform, where the shrine was. "Special *Prasadam* from Brindavan," He announced! There were in that bowl forty-three different varieties of sweets (!), all strange to the South Indian tongue.

One day, Baba took two jeeps full of devotees across the river and beyond, into the reserve forest and when even the jeeps failed to negotiate the track, He walked for about six miles along the upper reaches of the river Chitravati and at last, the party came to a beauty spot, right in the midst of the forest, steep rocky banks on three sides, a huge big flat slab of rock to sit upon, and the river gurgling talkatively along. All partook of the eatables that were carried thither and drank the tea that was prepared there itself by some enterprising young men. Baba 'took' a big piece of sugar-candy to sweeten the mouths; then He waved His Hand and all eyes opened wide to the miracle. He 'got' a packet of photographs of Himself and He proceeded to give one each to everyone present. There were exactly 16 photos and 16 men there that day! There are occasions when He has taken bigger packets when there were bigger parties, but always the number will tally!

Another incident that illustrates the Divine *Shakti* of Bhagawan happened at Kanyakumari, in 1958. Sitting on the beach with the small group of devotees, Baba asked a person, who had earlier in the day purchased and perused a book on the pilgrim centre, what the book said about the temple. He related the story of the diamond which adorned, once upon a time, the nose-stud of the Goddess, which shone so brightly that pirates could see it from the sea. He

described how it aroused the greed of the pirates and how they carried it off, during a raid. Baba asked the people around Him, "Do you want to see it? It is just a matter of minutes and I can send it back, before its absence is noticed." So saying, He patted the sand in front of Him, and lo, there was a huge big diamond in His Hand. It was shown to everyone present and then, it just disappeared from the hand to which it came! It is all so easy, every *leela* of His, done so unostentatiously, with a smile of surprise lighting up His own face, as the wanted thing materialises!

A devotee had a rupee note which he kept apart from the rest, because it contained the autograph of a friend, but it so happened that one day, through sheer carelessness, he mixed it up with the rest and did shopping with the whole lot. The discovery led to moroseness and sadness and a long face, and bewailing. When Baba came to know of this, a week later, He said, "Don't worry; it has now reached Bombay. I can see where it lies; I shall get it for you." The hand waved; the rupee note, the identical one, was handed over at Puttaparthi to the young man, who took the loss so disproportionately to heart!

To resume the list of various things that Baba materialises in His hand, mention must be made of the *Rudraksha* Rosary that He presented to Swami Shivananda Saraswati. He has given others too, *Japamalas*, either *Rudraksha* or *Tulsi* beads, for daily *Nama* recitation (Nama Sankirtan). For daily *Parayanam*, He has materialised copies of the *Gita* and given them to the devotees. When He 'took' a copy for an old and short-sighted devotee, He said, "See, it is printed specially for your sake in big bold letter," and, strange to say, it was! Giving a D.Sc. a copy of the *Gita* 'from the sands', He said, "You do not know the *Devanagari* script and so, it is in Telugu script. Take it." He has given for daily *pooja*, *Lingams* and images of Sri Krishna in various poses, of Mahishasuramardini, of Dattatreya, of Rama, and of other forms usually worshipped in Hindu homes, Crucifixes, Veils, *Shaligrams*, *Rudrakshas*, plates with *Chakras*, all iconologically and artistically perfect and all taken by a wave of the hand! He gave a devotee a pair of silver sandals which 'materialised' miraculously on His feet!

He gives photographs too of Himself, alone, or incorporated with Shirdi Sai Baba in various ways, or of the *Ishtadevatas* of His devotees. Some of these photographs are unique, because the pose is unprecedented. For example, there once materialised a photograph of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, with the form of Shirdi Sai Baba in the region of the heart and Sri Sathya Sai Baba in the centre of that form.

Baba takes delight giving as a boon to people their own *ishtam*, or the Name and Form of the Lord which most appeals to them. He has come not to supplant or destroy, but to implement and fulfil. So, when one evening on the sands a visitor was seen wearing a badge containing a representation of a saintly couple, He gave the *Bhaktas* a short account of the life of Kusuma and Haranath, who were represented thereon and said that they spread the message of *Namasankirtan*, Haranath being an incarnation of Gauranga. Even as He was speaking, He 'took' from out of the sands a lovely silver icon, Kusuma and Haranath standing on a coiled serpent, under its spread hood! There was also a dot of *kumkum* on the brow of Kusuma, the wife! On another occasion, He gave a *bhakta* who worshipped Him as Shivasayi, Sayi and Shiva, a big coloured shell with the word Shivasayi carved on it! Encouraging everyone to march bravely on along the path he has chosen for himself, that is the way in which Baba expresses His *Prema* and Wisdom.

Sandalwood images, silver icons, silver *padukas*, ivory figures, idols in *Panchaloha*, *sphatika lingams*, *lingams* in blood-red stone, or soap-stone, green or blue topaz, or sapphire have all been taken and given. He has also given gem-set rings, or lockets of a hundred different varieties, as the need or mood of the moment dictates. Very often, when He sees a devotee wearing a gem-set ring, He chides him for the vanity and taking that ring into His hand, He strokes it with His palm and lo, the gem is gone, leaving in its place a portrait of Shirdi Baba, or Sri Sathya Sai Baba or both, or of Sri Rama or Sri Krishna, or any of the other forms of God.

At Venkatagiri, there was a sheet of postage stamps which underwent this miraculous transformation, many years ago. Seeing the sheet with the picture of the earthly emperor, Baba said in fun, "Why do you have a set of such things?" Even as He was making the remark, His hand gently passed over the paper and as He lifted it, it was found that every figure had miraculously changed; the denomination and the price had vanished; the picture of Baba was imprinted on every stamp and the inscription was 'Sri Sathya Sai'. If He gets the idea of initiating some aspirant with a sacred *mantra*, He just rolls any piece of paper that comes handy at the moment into a sharp pointed needle-like thing and, in a second, it is transformed into silver or ivory, with the added decoration of the image of the *Adhistanadevata* of the *mantra* on top. He then proceeds to write on the tongue of the aspirant the mystic syllables and even presents the instrument to be kept as a reminder of the grace of the Guru!

His Hands have another miraculous power, too, to increase and multiply by mere contact

whatever He wants. Therefore, Baba takes up the distribution of anything, not of sufficient quantity for the people present. He wills; He contacts; it is done. The vessel becomes full. One such scene witnessed by the present writer may be described here. It was Vijayadashami day, 1950. Some devotees from Anantapur had brought with them two baskets of freshly plucked *Tulsi* leaves and they were squatting round the baskets, making long thick garlands for decorating the place. Baba happened to pass that way, when their work was almost over and the containers were almost empty. He asked the party, half in fun and half in earnest, "Exhausted? Are you ready for another two baskets of *Tulsi*!?" and when they jumped at the idea, He placed His hands, one at the bottom of each basket and rose. When He stood erect as before, the baskets were filled to overflow, with fresh green *Tulsi* leaves! Now, it becomes clear why Baba Himself serves sweets, etc., to the poor, on those occasions on which they are fed at Prasanthi Nilayam. He pours them out in plenty to the thousands who come, and there is always enough and to spare!

In fact, plenty is the hall-mark of that Hand. During the Vijayadashami and Shivaratri processions, Baba seated on the flower-bedecked palanquin or jeep takes in His Hand the petals of the flowers from the garlands offered to Him and throws the petals over the heads of the throng of devotees; and, what do you think falls on the ground below? Peppermints, once; coins, another time; portraits of Shirdi Baba or Sathya Sai Baba or both, another time; we cannot predict what or when! Such is the mystery of that Hand. A number of devotees still have with them the articles they collected in this manner on 23rd November, 1950, during the procession from the Old Mandir to Prasanthi Nilayam, which was inaugurated that day. They can keep them unsullied and bright for generations, since they are as substantial as any other material object!

It might be of some interest to mention here the experience of Swami Amritananda, (a Nambudri Brahmin by birth, who was given *Sanyas* by His Holiness Narasimha Bharati Swami, Shankaracharya of Sharada Peetham, Sringeri) as related by him to the writer. He was suffering from chronic asthma, an illness which Baba diagnosed as produced and aggravated by incorrect practice of *Hatha Yoga* at Tiruvannamalai. During the months that he remained at Puttaparthi, the drugs that Baba gave him kept away the spasms and the Swami left practically free from the dread affliction. About these drugs, Swami Amritananda said, "The first two days, He gave me the *vibhuti* that He 'took' by a wave of the hand; on the third day, there came into it a golden-coloured heavy powder, which He put Himself into my mouth. Then, He turned to the four quarters and with each wave of the Hand, He got

quantities of copper coloured powder, which He applied to my back and chest. Afterwards, He 'took' *vibhuti* also and gave it into my hand, asking me to swallow a little when the spasm came on. Another day, He 'took' the tender soft hairy roots of some plant and asked me to chew and swallow them. On other days, He gave me a tiny midget-version of hill-plantain, which I had never before seen in India, Ceylon, Malaya, or the Himalayas. He gave me a *Kharjura* fruit, without seed; He 'got' a handful of leaves, which He squeezed before me and, collecting the juice in a vessel that materialised, He commanded me to drink it."

"Another day, He waved His Hand and there, I could see a bundle of small greenish leaves. He asked me to eat the whole lot, about 3 to 4 oz. in weight, and passed the stuff on to me, with a twinkle in His eye. I was shocked to find that the leaves had underneath them, small sharp thorns and, when I looked at Him imploringly, saying, 'Do You really want me to eat all this thorns included?' He melted a little and stretched out His hand, with the words, 'Give it back to me.' I placed it in His hand; He gave it back to me; and lo, there was not a single thorn! No, not even a vestige or indication that the plant was of such species; so, I ate it all in glee. A few days afterwards, He called me into His room and 'took' a sizeable quantity of green leaves. 'A very good specific,' He said, 'coming straight from the Himalayas.' Keeping half of it in reserve with Him, He placed the rest in my hand and said, 'Come on! Chew and swallow.' It was terribly bitter in taste and I had to draw upon all my *tapas*, to perform the task allotted to me. Oh, how I prayed in my heart that He should stop with that and not force me to eat the horrible half portion He had kept in reserve!"

"But, no. He would not show any kindness that day; giving me the rest of the leaves, He commanded, 'Finish this also.' Reinforcing myself with all the courage I could collect, I put into my mouth the second instalment, but (would you believe it?) by longer contact with His Divine Hand, that half had become inexpressibly sweet, sweeter than sugarcane, or honey! He laughed at my joy and relief and I came to know that the ways of the Lord are truly inscrutable." This genuine report from an aged *Sanyasi*, who was for long with Ramana Maharshi and who was learned in *Veda* and *Vedanta*, is enough to instil faith in even the most hardened cynic.

Whenever Baba feels like giving some curative drug, He waves His hand and procures pills, or bottles of mixtures, or *lehyams*, or oils, or fruits. He blesses devotees, who importune for progeny, by materialising a fruit and asking them to eat the fruit, half for the wife and half for the husband. Sometimes out of sheer fun, He might throw one fruit towards one and when the happy recipient actually catches the gift, another type of fruit might rest in his hand! Or He

might make a gesture of throwing without anything actually in His hand, but the person to whom the throw is directed must be wary, for a fruit might be on the way! When a person was seized with a sneezing bout, He once called him to His side and 'took' a slice of sweets and gave it to him to swallow. When another was suffering from fever for quite a long time, Baba one day neared the bedside and by a wave of the hand took something which He deliberately placed in the hand of the patient, who had sat up reverentially to receive the panacea; and, what do you think it was? It was a fairly big-sized bumble bee, which flew away!

When a devotee asked for permission to leave Puttaparthi early so that he might attend a convocation where he was to receive a Diploma, Baba said, "I shall give it to you now here!" and waved His hand. A miniature Diploma, exactly reproducing all the details of the actual one made already for him at Madras (Chennai), was in His hand!

A Mysore devotee had arranged for *pooja* of Baba at Puttaparthi, on the day of the festival of Gowri. He searched the villages, as well as Bukkapatnam, for all the auspicious articles that Gowri *pooja* required; and he was able to equip himself with everything, except black beads. These are considered very auspicious for wearing by married women, but the family had to go without. Baba came to their quarters for *pooja* and the overjoyed couple were so immersed in the worship that they did not notice a big black ant that ran over the heap of flowers round His feet; but, He saw it. He lifted it up gently and held it between His fingers. "What! Are you offering *pooja* with ants, in addition to flowers?" He asked in fun. He handed over the ant to the mistress of the family; she held out her palm to receive it; but, what she got was not a big black ant; no, not at all; she received instead through His Grace, from that hand, two black beads!

Speaking of that Hand, I cannot desist from giving an astounding example of the Divinity, immanent in its every movement. One evening, some six months ago, Baba casually went up a half opened window of His room, and seeing an electric table lamp that was on the sill, He got an idea whose exact nature no one present knew. They only saw Him wave His hand and when they rushed near to see what was emanating, He showed them His palm, where rested a colour-film portrait of Himself. Evidently, He willed for something transparent to paste on that lamp shade. He held it up to the light and some around Him remarked that the background of the picture could have been little more prominent; some said that the hair was a little awry; one collected enough courage to remark that the face was not freshly shaven! But, He silenced all such comments by declaring, "My dear fellows, you just see, it is photo,

just as I am now, with this dress, this background, this half opened window, this door, this door curtain, this switch." And as we watched, the wonder grew! Yes! It was as if in the millionth of a second, someone had come with a camera, focussed and snapped, and taken a colour film photograph, and developed it and washed it and dried and delivered it into the hands of Baba! That hand is indeed marvellous, Divine!

One evening at Prasanthi Nilayam, while talking about the kinship theories of the origin of man, Baba said that the human animal is more related to the tree-dwelling ape than to the ground-dwelling varieties. He spoke of a tail-less, hair-less, tree dwelling Simian and, when the interested listener, who was a Professor of Anthropology could not quite grasp the type, He waved His hand and lo, there was a tiny little model of the monkey He was referring to. The miniature, a gem of art and scientific accuracy, is now with him, "a thing of beauty and a joy forever".

Sometimes on Vijayadashami day, *abhishekham* is done to the silver image of Shirdi Baba; Baba 'takes' a *Linga* and places it on the head before the *vibhuti* is poured over it. This is sometimes done on Shivaratri day also. In fact, Baba has often taken various types of *Lingams* by the "wave of the hand" and given them for worship. I remember one such dramatic moment. The scene was Thippegonadanahalli, near Bangalore. Some devotees, who desired to have a quiet morning with Baba, whisked Him away to that place (after first getting His gracious consent, of course). There, after a discussion on *karma*, rebirth, and the nature of the soul, Baba 'took' a small silver *kooja* full of *Amrita* and distributed it to the eight or ten people, who were present. He then gave the container to a person, who was shortly to leave for England, with his wife; when He noticed the disappointment on the faces of the couple, at getting only an empty vessel, He got back the *kooja* and gave it back, without even the wave of the hand! And the *kooja* was again full of the precious nectar!

Afterwards, the party went to the reservoir, which supplies water to the city of Bangalore. While the Engineer was describing the history of the project and pointing out the original beds of the two rivers, which joined at the spot and the pinnacle of the temple of Sangameshwara, which had been flooded by the tank created by the dam, Baba was listening, standing with His feet on the water's edge. Suddenly, He dipped His hand in the tank and held up His palm with a little water, towards a *Veerashaiva* member of the party. Everyone then saw to his surprise that Baba's palm held a *sphatika* Lingam, shining in the sun, with sandal paste and *bilva* leaf, as if He had lifted it straight from a shrine when *pooja* was being offered to it! He told him, "Take this and do *pooja* to this every day. You worship Kudala

Sangameshwara, is it not?" And, indeed he was!

When Baba blesses His devotees and agrees to their arranging the marriage of their children at the Prasanthi Nilayam, in His immediate presence, He sometimes 'takes' the *mangalyam* and gives it to the bridegroom to be tied auspiciously round the neck of the fortunate bride. A wave of the hand and the *tali* or *bottu*, complete with saffron-coloured string, is there in a moment. Sometimes, when the ear-piercing ceremony is performed, Baba materialises a sharp pointed contraption, with which the ear-lobe is pierced and which itself is bent and served as an ear-ring for the child. It is impossible to enumerate all the capabilities of the wave of that hand! When Baba decides upon resorting to surgery Himself, to cure some person of his illness or defect, He just waves His hand and the instruments needed are there in His palm. When He desires to express His love and affection, the hand brings forth sweets, even out of sand or the atmosphere.

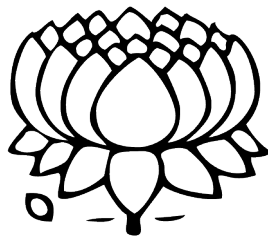
Every chapter must have an end, so, this too has now to be concluded perforce, I believe, with the narration of another incident, to show how the wave of the hand can transmit this miraculous Divine *Shakti* to another hand too! It happened some sixteen years ago, when Baba was, as the saying goes, in His teens. Baba and a large number of devotees had gone across the river to a garden near Saheb Tank; food was cooked and eaten there itself; and the party was returning to the village when darkness was fast on river banks. Suddenly, while they were passing a bush, Baba foremost, the others at a respectful distance behind, something sizzled across and coiled itself round Baba's right foot! "A snake, a snake," rose the cry. The serpent stung the right toe, uncoiled itself in an instant, and sped like an arrow along the sands. Baba said, "Let it go," but people, who were angry at the cobra, pursued it and wanted to catch and kill it; so, Baba shouted, "Go," in a commanding tone and the snake fled into the dark and was seen no more. Meanwhile, the effects of the bite were becoming apparent; Baba appeared to faint and fall; some men ran to the village to inform Peddavenkapa Raju; a volunteer, who knew the address of a magician residing a mile away, ran in that direction.

Baba, however, made some gestures to one of the two devotees, who were trying to render first aid, bandaging, etc., to wave his hand likewise, as He did so, and lo! He felt, "A piston-like thrust inside my palm," as he said to me; and there emerged a talisman. Baba signed to him to apply it, along with the froth from His lips to the wound. He did as ordered and lo, within a matter of seconds, Baba got up, to the intense relief of everyone; in fact, everyone came to life, when Baba began to talk as if nothing had happened to break the bliss of that

happy day.

Just then, the parents and others came running in with a huge armoury of drugs, magic rites, roots, broken gramophone records, bottles of specifics sold in village fairs and last, but not the least, the celebrated magician, who lived a mile away. Baba greeted them by walking towards them and cracking jokes at their expense. Later, Baba explained that He could have Himself 'taken' the talisman, but since He never uses for His own benefit anything that He 'takes' out of His own hand, He had to convey His Grace to another hand.

Hemadpant has said about Shirdi Sai Baba, "While the devotees took leave, Baba gave *udi* as *prasad*, besmeared some of it on the foreheads of the *Bhaktas*, and placed His boon-conferring hand on their heads." Sri Sathya Sai Baba also does the same. His hands confer the boons the devotees deserve. That hand has the healing touch; it can wipe out disease, ward off evil, exorcise the devil, and rewrite destiny!





10.

The Same Baba

Baba has often said that controversy over the point whether it is the same Baba is meaningless and unnecessary, for, as He says, when there are two pieces of 'barfi', one square, another circular, one yellow and the other purple in colour, unless one has eaten and realised the taste of both pieces, one cannot believe that both are the same. Tasting, experiencing, that is the crucial thing, to know the identity.

IT IS significant that Sathyanarayana was giving clues about His kinship, nay, identity, with the Saint of Shirdi, even from His childhood. When He taught His companions songs on a *Babaji* whom no one had seen or heard about, and a place of pilgrimage to which no one who heard the songs, had gone, people wondered! Where is this Shirdi, they asked each other. Who was this Muslim Fakir? Little did they realise that the child in their midst, singing and dancing so captivatingly, was, in a few years, to make their village another Shirdi, to which hundreds and thousands seeking the same Baba will be coming!

When finally the formal announcement was made by Sathyanarayana that He was Sai Baba, of Bharadwaja *gotram*, Apasthamba *sutram*, and of Shirdi, He was asked, "If you are Sai Baba, show us some miracle, now!" And the boy said, "Bring Me some jasmine flowers." When they were placed in His hands, He threw the flowers on the ground and lo, they fell in the form of the Telugu letters, Sai Baba, flower behind flower, as if arranged with meticulous skill, all the curves and convolutions of the Telugu letter perfectly reproduced! The elder brother, Sheshama Raju, who had learnt by long practice to live with the miracle boy, was himself surprised at the emphasis of the revelation. "Of course, I gave them the name of the *avatar* that had just preceded Mine," said Baba, when questioned about these incidents. It only meant that He, who came as Sai Baba, has now come again as Sathya Sai Baba!

Moreover, the Sais come in a series. "After this *Avatar*, there will be another, Prema Sai, who will take birth in the Mysore region," He added.

In spite of all this, the parents and the brother gave ear to men, who shook their heads and warned them of the Muslim ghost that seemed to have possessed the boy. So, they took Him eighteen miles off, to Penukonda, where at that time there was a very devout individual, attracting large crowds every Thursday by his *pooja* of Sai Baba. He looked at Sathya and said that he was doubtful of his sanity! The boy rose up in disgust, calling that worshipper himself mad, and throwing large quantities of *vibhuti* at him from His empty hands, advised him to be more sincere and earnest in his *pooja*. "You are only a seeker, a servant. I am the Person you seek, the Master," He declared.

About this time, two teachers, who had known Sathya as their student at Bukkapatnam, visited Puttaparthi. Fortunately for us, they have recorded in print what happened. Sri B. Subbannachar, one of the two says, "My first impression about him was that he was a great devotee like Prahlada. I saw him doing miraculous deeds. I was convinced that he was not an ordinary human being, but a boy, endowed with supernatural powers. Quite to our wonderment, this mad boy of Puttaparthi revealed to us that He was "none other" than Sai Baba of Shirdi! He also asked us to stay there for the night, when He would narrate His life-history! We wanted to hear about His life history, as the available books on Sai Baba do not give us any information about His infancy and boyhood up to 16 years. He granted us this boon even before our asking! Our joy knew no bounds. Night came. We heard His life-history. We saw Sri Sai Himself with our physical eyes in human form!" What unique happiness! What boundless grace! The other teacher Sri V.C. Kondappa has narrated the story of Shirdi Baba's birth and childhood as given by Sathya Sai Baba, in 102 Telugu *shlokas*, in the book, 'Sree Sayeeshuni Charitra', published in 1944.

This story will certainly be of immense interest to all devotees. "In the village Pathri, on the banks of the Godavari, there lived a pious, charitable, and orthodox Brahmin named Gangabhava; his wife, Devagiramma was a virtuous woman engaged daily in the worship of Gowri, the consort of Shiva. They had no children and that was perhaps the only sorrow they ever felt; for, they were always immersed in the service of either the Lord or, the guests whom the Lord sent to their door. One day, a guest arrived, a person of striking mien, with a tinge of halo round his head! When retiring for the night, he made the astounding request for female company! Poor Devagiramma was so shocked that she could scarce speak; Gangabhava too was burning with indignation, but of what avail was indignation against a

guest, who was demanding hospitality? Devagiramma went into the shrine-room and wept before the image of Gowri, seeking her intervention and her advice. Suddenly, a knock was heard at the front door and when it was opened, a female with all the artificiality of a public woman, entered the house. "It seems you sent for me; where is the guest? Take me to him," demanded the new comer. For, it was no other than Gowri, come to meet the guest who was no other than Shiva!"

"Once in the same room, Shiva and Gowri had a hearty laugh together. They spoke to each other, praising the devotion of the couple and their adherence to *dharma*. They decided to give the two their *darshan* as well as a boon. Needless to say, Gangabhava and Devagiramma were delighted at the *darshan* and, when pressed to express their wish, they asked for a son to repay the debt due to the ancestors, and a daughter to be given away, *Kanyadan* being according to the *Shastras* the most effective *Dan* that a householder can give. The boons were granted. Then, Shiva, out of his own grace gave the couple a boon, unasked. He told them that he himself will assume human form and be born as their third child."

"It all happened as the Lord said. Devagiramma conceived the third time; but, the husband got by that time so immersed in *Tapas* that he started for the forest; the wife too insisted on accompanying her master; the child was delivered under a tree, with birds cooing welcome and the clouds building an arch of seven colours to celebrate the occasion. So full of the spirit of renunciation were the parents that they left the new-born babe to the protection of the angels of the forest. Very soon, there passed along that solitary track a Fakir and his wife, a childless couple, who heard the baby's cry and hurried to the spot; they took it home and brought it up."

"They called it simply Baba, for they knew not its ancestry or affiliations. The child was fair and intelligent and full of wiles and pranks. One day, when He was about 12 years old, while playing with some companions, He won all the marbles belonging to the *Sahukar's* child. Baba challenged the *Sahukar's* son to bring more marbles, if he had got them and offer them as stake. The boy ran into the house and brought out the round *Lingam*, kept in the shrine room. Baba won that too, and when it was duly handed over, He just swallowed it whole! This created a sensation among the children, and the *Sahukar's* wife was informed that the *Lingam* had gone into the stomach of the Fakir's son. She ran forward and threatened Baba with a stick; Baba opened His mouth and lo, she saw therein all the *avatars* of Vishnu! She folded her arms and fell at the feet of the Fakir's boy, in the open street!"

"It became the talk of the town. The boy was in the habit of taking out the *Lingam* that He had swallowed, and He used to worship it, sitting in the mosque. This enraged the Muslims of the place and they excommunicated even the Fakir who had brought up the child. When the boy went into a temple to worship that *Lingam*, the Hindus drove Him away, since they feared He was a Muslim by birth. Finally, the Fakir most unwillingly asked Baba to quit the house; and the boy wandered about, doing *pooja* to the *Lingam*, placing before it a lamp with water instead of oil, but which nevertheless burned like an oil lamp!"

"He was moving along the banks of the Godavari River, when He was accosted by a *Nawab*, who asked Him if He had seen his horse, which had strayed away. The *Nawab* had searched for it over all the surrounding area and had lost all hope. Baba, by His Divine insight, saw the horse and He told the *Nawab* that it would come towards the place where they stood, and even while they were talking, the horse trotted in, to the extreme joy of the owner. The *Nawab* became His disciple and addressed Him as Sayi or Master. Later, Baba came to Shirdi village and established Himself in a ruined *mandap* there."

Sathya Sai Baba invariably refers to "My previous body," when He speaks about Shirdi Sai Baba; He often describes to His devotees how He, "in His previous body", dealt with people and situations, what illustrations He gave to amplify a certain point, what questions were asked, etc. He quotes what He told Das Ganu or Mahalaspatti 'in the last birth'. While telling people about Shirdi Baba, He may be heard saying, "Just as you have seen Me do now," or, "Just as I do while in trance," to make the point clear. When someone asks Him a question today, He starts His reply sometimes with the remark, "The same doubt was raised by a man, who had come to Shirdi," and He will continue the conversation with the reply He gave that other man long ago, in Maharashtra! He recognises all devotees of Shirdi Baba as His own; in fact, He tells them, "I have known you since ten years," or "Though this is the first time you see this *shariram*, I have seen you twenty years ago, when you came to Shirdi," and the person will find that he had been to Shirdi, exactly twenty years previously! He has encouraged many to go to Shirdi, giving them detailed descriptions of the route, the place, the methods of well-irrigation prevalent there, and even the pictures kept round the *samadhi*! It would appear to a listener that He has long been a resident of the area.

When some devotees went once to Shirdi, Sathya Sai Baba told them, "Go and sleep in Dwarakamayi. I shall come in your dream," and He fulfilled the promise! There are cases of people who had been to Shirdi and who, while returning, heard near Guntakal or somewhere, that there is an *avatar* of Sai Baba at Puttaparthi and they have come to this place. As soon as

He sees such, Baba asks them about the Shirdi pilgrimage. He answers during the interview that He invariably gives to everyone before he leaves, the questions which they took to Shirdi! This has been the experience of not a few.

The *Raja* of Chincholi was a very ardent devotee of Shirdi Baba. He used to spend a few months every year at Shirdi, Akalkot, and other holy places in the company of *siddhas* and *sadhakas*. After the passing away of the *Raja*, the *Rani* was pleasantly surprised to hear of the incarnation of the Lord as Sri Sathya Sai Baba at Puttaparthi and she visited the place. She also persuaded Baba, who was just fifteen years of age at that time, to accompany her to Chincholi and Hyderabad. What a surprise it was for her, when Baba asked her about a margosa tree later uprooted, a well that had been filled up, and a line of shops that had been newly built. Baba told her that He had seen the places years ago, while in His previous body! Sathya Sai Baba asked her about a small stone image of Anjaneya, which had been given to the *Raja* while in the previous body; the *Rani* did not know that it existed; Baba Himself discovered it for her! He also said that there must also be found a picture of Sai Baba and that too was later discovered in the house.

Three years ago, the *Rani* was rummaging the huge store room at Chincholi for old brass, bronze, or copper, which she could sell off and save space. She came upon a *kamandalu* of brass, a drinking vessel used by *sadhus*, whose shape was quaint and artistic. The water had to be poured through a slit in the handle and the spout end in the cow's-head figurine! Someone suggested that it could be polished and displayed as a decorative article in the drawing room of her Hyderabad House. The mystery of the *kamandalu* deepened next day, when they found a cobra coiled round it! "Baba alone can solve the secret," she said to herself, while propitiating the cobra with the traditional *pooja*.

She arrived at Puttaparthi on the first day of *Dasara*, and as soon as she entered the premises, Baba sent word, asking her to come up, "with My drinking vessel!" No sooner was the *kamandalu* in His hands than He showed, to the *Bhaktas* nearby, the letters inscribed on the vessel in *Devanagari* characters, SAA followed by a pair of short vertical lines, BAA with the two lines again. SAA indicating Sai and BAA for Baba! Surely, the ways of the Lord are mysterious! Baba has since said that He would get like this the *Jole* or alms-bag of Shirdi Sai Baba also, in a few years, from wherever it is.

Readers may wonder how the saint of Shirdi who according to all accounts, never left Shirdi for years and years, could have gone to Chincholi and Hyderabad, and left a *kamandalu* with

the *Raja*. In fact, it is the honest belief of the *Rani* as well as some old servants of the palace that Sai Baba stayed a few days every time He came and that He used to ride in a *tonga* drawn by bullocks far out of the town, in order to have talks with the *Raja*, who accompanied Him. This *tonga* too is now at Puttaparthi. But, devotees, who have seen and experienced the *avatar* of Sri Sathya Sai Baba, will have no difficulty on this score, for they know how Baba can be at Madras (Chennai) and yet, "take tea with a family at Bangalore as happened once, in a bungalow at the Civil Station!" He can hold conversation with a man at Bhopal or be seen at the stall in an Exhibition, in Delhi, or speak on the phone to Menon in Madras (Chennai), all the while being at some other place.

To take just one instance out of many. There was a family at Hospet, well known to Baba since childhood. The eldest sister was a teacher at a school, the brothers were His classmates and playmates at Bukkapatnam. They had heard about the manifestation and had seen Him also at Puttaparthi. It was a year afterwards, in 1941, that one evening, a bullock *bandy* (cart) brought Sathya Sai Baba outside their door. Their joy knew no bounds. The whole night was spent in talk, Baba lying down with one of the boys on each side of Him, laughing and jeering at all the jokes with which they enlivened the conversation. The mother made preparations for an oil bath, for Baba the next day and a feast, but can her disappointment be described when she found in the morning the bed empty and Baba gone! On enquiry, she found that Baba had never left Puttaparthi, a hundred miles away! *Avatars* are not bound like us, by limitations of time and space. They are a law unto Themselves!

When He addressed a meeting at the All-India Sai Samaj at Mylapore, Madras, last year, Baba's opening words were, "Though this is the first time this *sairam* has come here, I have all along been here, in this *Mandir*!" This identity and unbroken continuity are emphasised by Him in a hundred different ways, on all conceivable occasions. Only the other day, at Coorg, He recognised at sight an ardent devotee of Shirdi Sai Baba, and even noticed with pleasure that He was Life Member of Sai Baba Trust.

He has vouchsafed to His devotees lockets and talismans with pictures of Shirdi Baba, or of Shirdi Baba with His own portrait incorporated, or His picture with the portrait of Shirdi Baba in the region of the heart. As a matter of fact, no distinction is made or allowed to be made, in worship or *pooja* between Himself and the previous manifestation. In fact, there are in the Prasanthi Nilayam Prayer Hall two pictures, which demonstrate this continuity. They are both captivatingly charming and the artist seems to have caught the moment, when Sai Baba was taking over the mission again. The grandeur and the historicity of the moment are

very attractively brought out in these pictures.

Besides, it has to be noted that a silver figure of Shirdi Baba is the central point towards which all the prayer at Prasanthi Nilayam is directed, Baba Himself supervising the performance of *abhishekam* to the 'Previous Body' on such holy days as Vijayadashami or Mahashivaratri. Baba establishes His identity and continuity by means of a series of significant acts. For example, the image of Shirdi Baba is decorated with garlands that have been offered to Him, and no difference is ever made between what may be called these "used" garlands and other fresh ones; both are used for decorating the image. During the nine days of Navaratri, women at the Nilayam offer *kumkum pooja* and all the *kumkum* thus offered is collected and kept, for use on Vijayadashami day, when it is all poured ceremoniously on the silver figure of Shirdi Sai Baba! It is as if Baba Himself has accepted it and done *abhishekam* with it for Himself.

He is Shirdi Baba Himself and it is He that is worshipped. He has told many people, "You need not wait, until you are able to meet and ask Me; you ask the Old Man down below," meaning Shirdi Baba. On the raised platform at the Prayer Hall, facing the assembled devotees, are two life-size oil paintings, one of Shirdi Baba and the other of Baba, both standing and both crossing one hand over the other, Shirdi Baba holding His right hand with His left and Parthi Baba holding His left hand with the right. The knot of the cloth round Shirdi Baba's head, usually brought to the left, is here found on the right of the head! This is rather intriguing to some people, for they do not know that when the artist who painted the two portraits wanted pictures to copy and enlarge, Baba waved His hand and there were two small pictures ready therein! The picture of Shirdi Sai Baba that He materialised had the two hands in the new posture and cloth knot to the right! And so the painter, who had that picture as his model, put the knot towards the right!

Songs and *stotras* sung daily at the Nilayam make no difference between the two Babas; in fact, they refer to the identity and the continuity in unmistakable terms. In the *Ashtottarashatanamavali* or list of 108 names with which Baba is worshipped, either in person or through some pictorial representation, names specifically attributable to Shirdi Baba are included. Sathya Sai Baba is addressed as, "He who was born in the village of Parthi," "He who was living in the village of Shirdi," etc. Baba is also praised as "He who is the undifferentiated incarnation of Shirdi Sai Shakti," "He who is the embodiment of Shirdi Sai," etc. The silver image of Shirdi Sai is there only as the representative of Puttaparthi Baba, for, as need arises for accommodating the latter on the raised dais, the image is

removed to the right or to the left of the *Peetham* on which Baba sits, or placed down below the floor; or removed altogether from the hall! Once, when Baba felt that there should be a procession into the village, He said, "The Old Man shall go today," and sent the image in the decorated palanquin. Another time, while He sat inside the chariot, He placed the silver figure in front and armed it with a whip, thus making Shirdi Baba the charioteer!

Baba was a young boy when He made the declaration of His identity; so, many a doubter posed the question, "How can we believe that you are He?" A person, who had such doubts, was quietened by a novel demonstration by the young Baba of Puttaparthi. The cynic was flabbergasted by the ocular proof that was vouchsafed to him. Baba, it seems, stretched out His palms in front of the critic and asked him to look at the opened palms. And lo, he could see on one palm, a resplendent portrait of Shirdi Sai Baba and on the other palm, an equally effulgent portrait of Sri Sathya Sai Baba Himself.

When the person, who had this vision of the two palms eighteen years ago, told me of this incident, a similar miracle which Baba showed a devotee at New Delhi came to my mind. It shows that Baba uses the same means even now to convince seekers that, He who had come then as Shirdi Baba has come now as Sathya Sai Baba.

The Delhi devotee wrote: "One evening, I was bicycling along a deserted road between Old Delhi and New Delhi, cogitating in my mind on my own financial worries. I had returned from Puttaparthi some weeks ago and, though I was drawn much to Baba, I had not yet been convinced that He was Shirdi Baba again or an *avatar*. Years ago, I was advised by someone to do *pooja* to Shirdi Baba and I had fallen in with this new Baba of Puttaparthi. I revolved these doubts in my mind and pedalled along. Suddenly, a question, 'Finished the work for the day?' was thrown at me from behind by a hefty individual, who was struggling to catch up by means of quicker pedalling. When I turned, I saw a fascinating smile lighting up that face; he was looking at me half-pityingly and half-affectionately.

I earn my livelihood in the capital city, teaching music to children and occasionally playing the violin at musical concerts. So, I thought that old man must have seen me at some concert or in some house and noticed me trudging on my Hercules along the roads of Delhi. I replied, 'Yes; I am going home now,' in Tamil, my mother-tongue and the language in which the stranger had, most unexpectedly, addressed me at first. Then, the old man pleaded, 'Can you come along with me to that old tomb, yonder? I will not keep you long.'

We both rode abreast for about a furlong to the ruin he indicated and, leaning our cycles

against the wall, sat in the shadow on the eastern side. He asked me to sit opposite him and he drew out from me my problems, one by one, by clever questionings. He said that the *Guru* I had providentially acquired was Bhagawan Himself. Then, suddenly rising up, He said, 'Why do you doubt it? He is Shirdi Baba Himself. See!' and then, he extended his palms towards me and lo, I could see clearly, as if painted in Technicolor, the portrait of Shirdi Baba resplendent on one palm and on the other, the shining face of Puttaparthi Baba.

I can never forget those twin faces, lighting up the palms of that revered old man. It came as an answer to all my doubts; it gave an anchor to the drifting soul; it provided me a new lease of life. Whenever I sit for meditation now, that scene of twin splendour comes before the eye and thrills me with a mysterious joy.

The old man then rose and we both rode back to the road, on reaching which, he turned in the direction from which we had come! This was rather unexpected, for, surely, he could not have come so far just to bless me with that vision. He admonished me once again not to waver in my allegiance and lose a treasure so easily come by; and I watched him pedal away, admiring his agility and cycling skill. But, imagine my wonder and consternation the next moment! For, he suddenly melted into thin air!"

Thus, Baba gave him positive proof of the identity of the two Babas, the proof called in Sanskrit Logic, as *Karatalamalaka*, the visual experience, the ocular demonstration, the indisputable fact of the berry in the palm! This is a point to be noted in Baba's wonderful life: He speaks the same words of consolation and courage, He shows the same *abhaya* gesture, under similar conditions, now as He did eighteen or twenty years ago as a little boy, thus showing us doubting mortals that He is an *avatar*, born with the divine mission to uplift and guide. The same vision is vouchsafed to solve the same doubt, whether the doubter is present physically before Baba, or whether he is far away in Delhi, cycling on a deserted road!

He has given *darshan* to a large number of people, wherever they are and given the lucky devotees clear indications that He and Shirdi Baba are one. Here is a case that comes to mind. When a devotee was waiting at the Bangalore City Railway Station platform for the train to Mysore, so that she could enter the Mission Hospital for an operation, Sathya Sai Baba manifested Himself before her as a tall, hefty, old man, wearing a long *kafni* and a cloth wound round the head, carrying a heavy stick and a bundle of clothes. Seating himself on the same bench as the one on which the lady was sitting, the old man opened the conversation in Telugu and dissuaded her from the operation, saying that it has now become a fad with

doctors to cut the patient inside out at the slightest provocation! He told her that he was just back from Shirdi and he gave her date fruits, which he said were the offerings from that shrine! He said that the *prasadam* will cure her and they did! He also informed her that his "*ashram*" was near Viduraswatam (on the way to Puttaparthi, in fact), and that He would be ultimately taking all the inmates of His own *ashram* to Shirdi!

Thus, we see that Shirdi Sai Baba is inextricably intertwined in the experience of devotees with the present manifestation of the same Godhead. When *pooja* is done by any devotee of Shirdi Baba now, Sathya Sai Baba knows about it. Once a lady at Madras, desperate because her son was bodily ill, laid the child in front of Shirdi Baba's portrait. Years later, she came to know of Sathya Sai Baba and she came to Puttaparthi, with her son, then a tall muscular young man. As soon as Baba saw them, He asked the mother, "You had placed this boy under My care, fifteen years ago, isn't it?"

Every year, when the anniversary of the passing away of the mortal body of Shirdi Baba is celebrated at Shirdi, Baba "transcends" this body and after some time, when He comes back, He usually says, "I had been to Shirdi."

A few years ago, while Baba was at Madras, an incident happened which is inexplicable on any other theory, than the one which proclaims the identity of the two Babas. Baba casually announced to His devotees that a close attendant of Shirdi Baba would pass into eternity on a certain date, in the morning hours and that He will have to go to give him the coveted *darshan*, at the last moment of his mortal career. The *Bhaktas* were all apprehensive about what might happen that day; some of them were very much concerned; some were very expectant and indeed, even joyful, that they have an opportunity to see Baba blessing a disciple of His previous manifestation. For a few days, they talked of nothing else among themselves; they watched the calendar and then, the clock for the arrival of the historic moment!

At last, the day dawned and when the hour struck, Baba was, in spite of all the precautions of the devotees, in the bathroom! Seeing that He did not emerge for a long time, the *Bhaktas* looked through the window and, finding Him actually away from His body, they broke open the door and began to attend upon the body, and watching for signs of movement or activity of heart or pulse. They saw *vibhuti* emanating in large quantities from His right toe, and they could hear Him speak in Marathi and quote some Hindi stanzas. On coming back, Baba told the *Bhaktas* the story of the passing away of the disciple of the previous body and how He

had blessed him with a vision of Shirdi Baba and given him *Udi*, which his *Guru* always granted him.

Four years ago, when Baba was in Hyderabad city, He was invited to the *ashram* of Godavari Mata, the disciple of Upasini Baba and Shirdi Baba, resident at Sakori. Welcomed by the women disciples with *Vedic* Recitations and the traditional ceremonies of *Poorna-kumbham*, they offered *pooja*. He must have blessed them with a glimpse of His reality and His identity, for they expressed a keen desire to come over to Prasanthi Nilayam. But, Baba said that He was as present at Sakori as anywhere and that it was best they remained in Sakori itself. Those, who are conversant with the *leelas* of Shirdi Sai Baba and also the *leelas* of Sri Sathya Sai Baba, may note certain differences in style, language, and technique, but, as was mentioned by *Yogi Shuddhananda Bharatiar* of Madras, who had seen and who had been inspired by both Babas, "There is an unmistakable identity of Mission and Message." Sathya Sai Baba Himself says that He is not as hard or as angry now at ignorance, negligence, disobedience, or superciliousness, as He was in His previous manifestation. He explains this difference by means of a parable, "The Mother is usually hard when the children enter the kitchen and disturb the cooking; but, while serving the food, she is all smiles and patience. I am now distributing the dishes cooked then; wherever you may be, if you are hungry, and if you sit with a plate, I shall serve you the dishes and feed you to your heart's content!"

People, who have read the description of the elaborate procession to the *Chavadi* of Shirdi Baba, once every week, and are thrilled at the grandeur of the affair, with its chariot, its caparisoned horse, its decorated palanquin, and other paraphernalia, might feel sad that Sathya Sai Baba does not permit His devotees to lavish all that pageantry on Him! Those who have read the description of the precariously hung plank upon which Shirdi Baba used often to sleep, might say that Sathya Sai Baba does not adopt that type of austerity.

Speaking about the difficulties one naturally experiences in believing the identity of the two Babas, Sathya Sai Baba told a gathering at the All-India Sai Samaj at Madras, in January, 1959, "The *Avatars* of Sri Rama and Sri Krishna are so different in the various incidents of Their earthly careers; They also emphasised different aspects of ethical behaviour and philosophical belief; They differed in methods of teaching and uplifting; it is all a difference in emphasis, rather than in basic things. It is difficult to get convinced that Sri Rama is Sri Krishna, but few have any doubts on that score. So too, those, who can delve deep into My mysteries, can understand that the same Power has now assumed another human form."

Anyone with a running acquaintance of Shirdi Baba's *leelas*, His miracles, His omniscience and omnipresence, His teachings, His universal love etc., can, by merely spending a few days in the Holy presence of Sri Sathya Sai Baba, convince himself of the identity of the two *avatars*. Baba Himself constantly refers to the previous *avatar*, the songs sung and the *stotras* used at the Nilayam all proclaim it; there is an unmistakable similarity in speech, style, attitude, outlook, and teachings.

His Holiness Gayatri Swami (a disciple of H.H. Narasimhabharati Swami, Shankaracharya of Sringeri *Peetham*, and a comrade of Swami Amritananda to whom reference has been made in previous pages) had come recently to Prasanthi Nilayam. He was for one year with Shirdi Sai Baba in 1906 and used to go to Him frequently, thereafter. He told us of incidents that reminded us of the 'Don't Shoot' miracle, or the 'Jodi Adipalli Somappa' miracle, and gave us many anecdotes of the Shirdi *shariram* that could well be related to the present manifestation also! Even some of the jokes were duplicating! The night before he left Puttaparthi, it seems he had a Vision of the *Guru* (by which he means Shirdi Baba), in which He told him that He had left the *samadhi* after eight years therein and that He had brought away all His 'properties' fifteen years later! Gayatri Swami, next morning, was surprised to hear from us that Sathya Sai Baba was born in 1926, eight years after the *Mahasamadhi* of Shirdi Baba and that He had assumed the name 'Baba' and manifested all the powers associated with Shirdi Baba in His fifteenth year! "The name and the powers," Gayatri Swami said, "must be the things referred to by the *Guru* as 'properties'." So, he went away supremely happy that he had his centre-view and did not much bother about not having the interview! A simple childlike soul he was, reminding us all of Swami Amritananda.

Yogi Shuddhananda Bharatiar says that when he visited Shirdi along with Lokamanya Balagangadhar Tilak and Karandikar, Sai Baba told them that *swarajya* won by the *bandook* would be of no avail, for what is won by force will be lost to force; He advised that *swarajya* must be won by and for spiritual progress and *prema*. Sathya Sai Baba also places first emphasis on *prema* or love, love based in sympathy and understanding.

Already before the two great wars, a materialistic, pleasure-loving, go-getting, socially irresponsible civilisation was becoming a nightmare of fear and anxiety. "Between the two wars, the nightmare deepened; in revulsion from it, there was a widespread turning away from individualism and a yearning for a true community. This produced the movement for democratic socialism, but also, its perversion, totalitarianism. Both commercial individualism and the barbaric tribalism that sprang up in opposition to it were, in their different ways,

object lessons in the frightfulness of a world, disorientated from traditional values!" This is what Olaf Stapledon writes about Europe and the West. But, the malady has affected India and other parts of the world, too, for the World is fast becoming one.

There was another reason too for the *avatar* of Shirdi Baba; let Stapledon speak about the need. "Scientific enquiry itself seems to be producing important evidence, that the assumptions on which the modern wisdom has been based are false! There is strong evidence for telepathy and also for pre-cognition and post-cognition. It seems that future events can take effect on consciousness while they are still future, and in the orthodox view, non-existent! Similarly, with past events. All this makes nonsense of our familiar assumptions about time and about mind's temporal limitations. To cope with pre-cognition and post-cognition and even with simultaneous telepathy, the modern wisdom will have to be transformed. Shirdi Baba and now Sathya Sai Baba, both have been doing just this, to emphasise traditional values and transforming 'modern wisdom' by familiarising us all with the miracle of pre-cognition, simultaneous telepathy, multilocation, and many an unnamed one besides, to the utter confusion of the *pundits* of science, thus proving to Man that there is a God in him that is whispering mystery, all the time."

The purpose of both the Sai *avatars* is the same. Only, the need to transform the 'modern wisdom' has now become more imminent. Then, the emphasis was more on community; now, it is on the individual; then, it was more on *karma*, now it is mostly on *bhakti*; then, the message was given to comparatively few, now, all are welcome to it and it is even taken to the doors of the needy.

A person intimate with details of the *leelas* of Sri Sathya Sai Baba, if he reads, for example, the "Sai Satcharita," written in English, by Sri N.V.Gunaji, on the basis of the Marathi book by Hemadpant, will be reminded on every page of the continuity and identity of the present manifestation and the last. He will find in the book echoes of what he has often heard Baba Himself saying and seen Baba Himself doing; he will have to rub his eyes to find out whether the book in his hand is about Sathya Sai Baba or Shirdi Sai Baba!

The book will tell him that Shirdi Baba used to encourage and warn those who went to Him, saying, "Be wherever you like, do whatever you choose, remember this well, that all what you do is known to Me. I am the inner ruler of all. I am seated in your hearts." (p.8). "Though I am here bodily, still I know what you do beyond the seven seas. Go wherever you will, over the wide world, I am with you." (p.86). On innumerable occasions, Sathya Sai Baba has said

the same thing. While devotees were discussing at Prasanthi Nilayam where to stay at Courtallam, on the way from Trivandrum to Surandai, Baba said, "Wait; I shall tell you," and, the next moment, He began to give a detailed description of the Travancore House there, the number of rooms, the kinds of plants in the garden, the height of the compound wall, the location of the phone in the Hall, etc., etc. I began to write down the list and He dictated a few more items, including two bougainvillea bushes at each end of the porch! He had seen all that from the Nilayam itself! When we reached the Travancore House, the list was verified and found correct of course, down to the very minutest detail of a neglected rose tree near the garages!

He has proved to His devotees that He is with them always and that He knows every little thing they do or think or speak. When a devotee came some years ago to Puttaparthi, He told him that His ears were suffering pain, because of the *Bhajan* in his house! The reason, He said, was "a neighbour who came in and joined the chorus, though his voice was quite unmusical; he did not know how to adjust the tone and tempo of his voice to the tone and tempo of the rest." The references to the pain was of course a jest; but, how could He know of the grating voice, unless He actually heard it?

He astonishes people by telling them all about their innermost thoughts and their most private deeds. An Inspector General of Police who was standing in queue, outside His interview room, told his friend, a little challengingly, "Here, there is one incident in my life, which if He reveals to me, hats off to Him!" And, his turn came; the interview was over; he came out of the room, full of joy and satisfaction, announcing, "He knows everything from A to Z, official and unofficial."

He reads every one like an open book. When a devotee took to His Presence and offered articles purchased for the use of another, but later considered valuable enough to be taken to Puttaparthi, He immediately said, "No! No stolen articles, please!" and gracefully indicated His displeasure!

Very often, Sathya Sai Baba has told persons starting on a voyage or on a pilgrimage, "Purchase three tickets for the four who travel," meaning that He would join them as a ticketless passenger! While His physical body was at Puttaparthi, He once saved a pilot from suicide at Kashmir. This was twelve years ago, and the facts were verified by those who actually witnessed the trance. Baba was away from His body for about twelve hours, and He told those around Him that He not only dashed the fatal cup from the pilot's hand, but entered

the court-hall where the case against the pilot was being tried and made one of the military judges raise an objection, which virtually foiled the prosecution and forced the court to pronounce a verdict of "not guilty!" The pilot, Baba said, was a staunch devotee of Shirdi Baba and was unjustly charged with embezzlement of public funds!

Mr. Gunaji writes of Shirdi Baba, "Shirdi was His centre, but His field of action extended far wider, to Bombay and Calcutta, North India, Gujarat, Deccan, and South Kanara." The same is true of the Sathya Sai manifestation; devotees who have gone to England, France, Canada, Japan, and Germany have felt His protecting hand in those places. Mr. G.V. and Mrs. G.V., for example, proceeded to the Continent and planned from there to attend the Coronation Ceremonies of Queen Elizabeth II. They were shopping in Paris, when they discovered to their utter dismay that the bundle of travellers cheques they had, was lost! They could not locate it in spite of the most desperate search, even in the most unlikely places. They were overcome with sorrow when they contemplated the shame and disappointment that were in store for them, in a strange land. They turned to Baba, as they always did when in distress; and Baba heard their pathetic cry, though they were thousands of miles away! Next day, while dipping the fingers into the self-same purse for something else, they were amazed to find inside it the entire bundle, intact!

Two of Baba's classmates, while He was a little boy at school, joined the army and were caught in the flames of a fire that blew up a petrol tank. (Baba said that the accident took place somewhere in the North-East Frontier and this fact was verified some years later, when the boys arrived home, after the conclusion of hostilities.) Baba at Puttaparthi immediately left His body and proceeded to the spot and, as He said, prevented the fire from spreading to the tent where the boys were, though the flames encircled the area.

The *Sai Satcharita* says, "Goulabhava, aged 95, who made his way to Pandharpur, saw Shirdi Baba as Vithoba and exclaimed, 'This is Panduranga Vittal incarnate, the Merciful Lord of the poor and the helpless!'" Last year, a family of devotees went to Shirdi and from there they attempted to travel to Pandharpur also, but owing to heavy rain and floods and the consequent cancellation of trains, they could not proceed further. They came to Puttaparthi and as Baba was talking with them, before they left Him, He asked the aged father and mother of the group, "You could not see Panduranga, isn't it? You seem to be very sorry that your pilgrimage had to be cut halfway. Well, if you want to have a *darshan* of Panduranga, look at Me." They looked and danced with supreme joy, for Baba Himself had become Panduranga for their sake. Of Shirdi Sai Baba, it is said, that He was of the form of Rama, Krishna, Shiva,

and Maruti. The *satcharita* gives an instance of a doctor, who when he went to Shirdi Sai Baba, saw his beloved deity, Rama, on the seat before him. Sathya Sai Baba has, as devotees no doubt know, granted visions of Himself as Rama, Krishna, and Kamakshi to *Bhaktas*. Perhaps, the experience of Swami Amritananda at Puttaparthi might be a very valuable example of this aspect of the Divinity of Baba.

As soon as Swami Amritananda reached the Prasanthi Nilayam, Baba accosted him, "Amritam," and he was genuinely astonished at the familiarity and even affection with which that call was saturated, for he said, "Only Ramana Maharshi, with whom I spent 17 years, used to accost me thus and the voice and manner were exactly the voice and manner of the Maharshi!" This is a miracle, indeed, if ever there was one.

Later, Baba asked the 85 year old Swami about a *Ganapati Homam* that he had performed for 41 days in his seventh year! He told the Swami all the details of that *homam*, including the long, involved *mantra* with which the offerings were placed each time in the fire. The *mantra* as disclosed by Baba begins, "Om Sreem Hreem Kleem Gloum Gam." Baba told him that he had repeated this *mantra* a thousand times a day, for forty-one days and made as many coconut offerings in the fire of the sacred *Homa*. But, "What is the reward promised in the *Shastras*?" Baba asked the old ascetic. He said that the *Shastras* declared that, if the *Homa* was done with scrupulous regard for ritual, Ganapati Himself would appear in the *Homakunda* as the golden-coloured, effulgent, elephant-headed God and with His trunk, He would receive the final and concluding offerings and He would grant everlasting bliss by means of the *darshan*. Baba asked him whether he had the *darshan*. Amritananda replied that it was not so easy for a seven year old boy to get the *darshan* of the Lord, by the mere number and quantity of offerings and *mantras*. But, Baba interrupted him and said, "No, No. It is due to all that *japa* and all that *Homa* that you have come to Me now. You will today, after an interval of seventy eight years, get the reward mentioned in the *Shastras*." Then, He asked the Swami to look at Him and lo, Amritananda saw the golden coloured Elephant, the Ganapati as described in ancient texts. He was beside himself for about four days after this *darshan* and forsook food and drink and sleep, in the bliss which he derived therefrom.

It is mentioned by Hemadpant that, "Shirdi Baba, the famous doctor of doctors, cared not for His interests and always worked for the good and welfare of others, Himself suffering unbearable and terrible pain many a time in the process." This is true even in this manifestation of Shirdi Baba, for Sathya Sai Baba has taken upon Himself and suffered mumps, typhoid, fever, delivery pains, and the scalding burns of His devotees.

"My ear began to bleed profusely, all of a sudden, and it gave me pain. I suffered much for a day, but the pain and bleeding subsided miraculously," wrote a doctor from near Madurai. The letter reached me, just when Baba Himself was 'free' from a slightly bleeding ear and some ear-ache, which He had announced as having been 'taken over' by Him from a *bhakta*, who was suffering the agony.

It was on 21st June, 1959 that Baba's temperature suddenly shot up to 104.5°, at about 1.30 p.m., but the alarm of the devotees was considerably reduced when, five minutes later, the thermometer registered a fall and indicated 99 degrees! No one knew the reason for this sudden rise and this equally sudden fall, till about 9.30 p.m. that day. During dinner that night, seated on the terrace in the moonlight, Baba asked a young man from Madras, who was also dining with Him, "When you go to your mother tomorrow, tell her that she should be more careful about fire; assure her that Baba is always with her and that she would never come to harm." This naturally aroused the curiosity and the anxiety of all and, when Baba said that the lady's sari had caught fire that noon while she was praying, standing in the shrine-room of her house with a number of oil lamps on the floor, someone got the idea of putting through a trunk call. It was done; the lady came to the phone and gave further details of the accident. When Baba spoke to her, her first query was whether His hands were burnt in the process of putting out the flames; as she knew of such instances of His mercy. Baba answered, "Oh, no. I did not burn My hands. I had just an increase of temperature, for a short while!"

So, that was the cause of the sudden rise and the sudden fall, contact with flames in the shrine room of a house in Madras, 222 miles away! Shirdi Baba once had His arm scorched, while saving a child from fire. The accident happened miles away! Shirdi Sai Baba said, "The child slipped into the furnace and I saved the child. I do not mind My arm being burnt; but, I am glad that the life of the child is saved." The *leelas* are the same in both the manifestations.

The Satcharita gives many cases of illness, which were cured by Shirdi Baba by a mere command, like, "You should not purge anymore." "The vomiting must stop," "Your diarrhoea was stopped," "Do not climb up, O snake poison," etc. Here again, Sathya Sai Baba continues the same miracle and cures diseases however longstanding, by His *sankalpa* only. An old merchant from Kuppam given up as 'dead' was kept for 2 days, because Baba did not give word to proceed with the disposal of the body. On the third day, Baba ordered him to get up... and he obeyed! There was a young man from Salem, who was suffering from acute diarrhoea and Baba commanded him not to purge anymore and the purging stopped! Then, there is the

case of a young girl, whose eyesight was so bad that she had to walk about her house holding the wall with one hand. She could not bear the sunlight; it burnt her eyes and gave her agonising headache. She had to be indoors most of the day, in a darkened room. She had finished the round of all the renowned optical experts in Mysore, Madras, and Bombay. She spent her days at Puttaparthi in prayer and meditation. At last, one day, Baba said she could go to her house and that it would be all right with her eyes. If, however, there was any trouble, "Use this medicine, a few drops would do," He said, giving her a bottle of eye drops, which He 'materialised' by a wave of the hand. She went home, and... she could not believe it, her eyes were perfect in every way! He had commanded so, and the command was obeyed by her optical system! What the Sai Satcharita says of Shirdi Baba is true, word for word, in the case of the present Appearance also. "He became famous as *a Hakim*; without any juice or medicine being put in the eyes, some blind men got back their eyesight."

The Satcharitha says that Shirdi Baba used to say, "I am the Mother, the origin of all beings, the harmony of the three *Gunas*, the propeller of all scenes, the Creator, the Preserver, and the Destroyer." (p.13) "His firm conviction was that He was the Lord Vasudev." Many times, Baba has also announced that He has come down to save the World and that He is the Lord Himself. The present writer got the first glimpse of this profoundly true declaration, about nine years ago. Death had taken away the previous night the husband of Venkamma, the 'sister' of Baba; he was also the younger brother of Eshwaramma, the 'mother'; the death was sudden and the entire family, in fact, the entire village was sunk in grief.

I reached Puttaparthi, unaware of the calamity, a few hours after the burial. I found Baba seated on the low wall, at the northern side of the front portico, facing the road that leads into Prasanthi Nilayam. The bereaved 'sister' was wailing pathetically from inside one of the rooms. Her little son was with his grandmother. There was a semicircle of sorrow in front of Baba, the father, the mother, the sister, the brothers, and others, all plunged in inconsolable anguish. I walked up slowly towards Baba and tears gathered in my eyes as I saw the gloom. Baba greeted me with a smile and chiding me with a chuckle, said, "What? Kasturi! If there is no death and no birth, how can I spend My time?" I heard those words, the authentic words of an *avatar*. His way of spending time, His *leela*, the *Sutradhara*, the Creator, the Preserver, the Destroyer, the Lord Himself. I cannot afford to forget or ignore that declaration, that smile and that chuckle. "*Samshayatma vinasyati*," the Lord has warned us, long ago.

Shirdi Baba had control over the elements, too. Once there was an imminent fear of a terrible storm; the sky was overcast; the rains fell and the waters flooded the streets; the panic-

stricken villagers ran to Baba for help; and Baba told the storm, "Stop your fury and be calm." And, all was calm at Shirdi. This account is given in the Satcharita. He also once commanded a fire to step down and be calm, and it obeyed instantly.

Many such instances are stored in the memory of the devotees of Sathya Sai Baba, too, for this is but a continuation of the same Divine *leela*. "Take the instance of the downpour held back," writes Sri Challa Appa Rao. "It occurred when He was taken in procession on the night of Vijayadashami. He sat in a gaily decorated chariot. By the time the procession started, the sky was dark and heavy with storm clouds. There was deafening thunder and flashes of lightning. Truly a wonderful spectacle! It took more than three hours for the procession to return to the *Mandir*. Still, there was no rain. Baba descended from the chariot and went upstairs, and every one of us returned to our lodgings. Then, it started to rain. In fact, it poured and poured. Who else can it be, if not God Himself, that can hold back the downpour for so long?"

It was on a cloudy June evening that Baba was addressing an open air meeting at Mercara. The sky was overcast and gloomy rumblings of approaching rain could be heard, not far away. In fact, the rain poured on the hills on the horizon, stepped nearer and nearer, and came as far as Mahadevpet, half a mile away. Baba spoke quietly and calmly, holding the audience spell-bound, for over an hour and a half; at the end, He said, "Now, you can go home, for in about ten minutes, you will get the rain that ought to have drenched you by now." And, wonder of wonders, the rains came, as announced, ten minutes later, to the very second!

The Chitravati River at Puttaparthi is subject to sudden floods, for it rises in the Nandi Hills and heavy rains in that region, in Mysore State, will bring down the waters many feet deep all along the miles. The Prasanthi Nilayam was built on an eminence away from the village to avoid these periodical floods, which in some years invaded the old Mandir, entering the Prayer Shed, the kitchens, and all the surrounding area. On many such occasions, Baba has stood on the edge of the water and said, "Ganga! 'Tis enough, go back," and the waters have not risen more. Some years ago, during Navaratri, when the feeding of the poor was on, it rained all round the Nilayam, but not a drop fell in the precincts where people were being fed!

Two years ago, Baba was in the East Godavari district, having crossed over to Rajahmundry by the very last boat that was permitted by the police to brave the turbid torrents of the flooded river. It was wet and slushy everywhere, with a cold wind bringing down the drizzle

almost all the twenty-four hours. At Mirthipadu, about ten miles from Rajahmundry, Baba addressed a meeting of the villagers from the open terrace of a bungalow; one could see all around the broad sheets of water formed by the swelling Godavari and the curtain of rain, advancing from all directions towards Mirthipadu. But, the rain could not penetrate the unseen umbrella over the village and disturb the meeting, which went on unconcerned, well into the night! It was Baba again, who willed that the rain shall not advance.

Let us revert to the Sai Satcharita. "Baba cured Bhimaji Patel by means of two dreams." (p. 74) "He gave instructions to many persons in dreams. To one addicted to drink, He appeared in dream and, in the dream, He sat on his chest and pressed him, until he promised not to touch liquor again. To some, He explained *mantras* like *Guru-Brahma* in dreams." (p.104) In this body also, Baba has 'operated' on many suffering patients during their dreams. Tirumala Rao of Bangalore had such an experience and when he woke, the bed was soaked in blood and the pain had gone. What he dreamt had actually come to pass. Baba, the Surgeon, had blessed him. Dreams form a very important means of communication between Baba and His *Bhaktas*. Baba decides to warn, teach, instruct, treat, or 'operate', during a dream of the *bhakta* which He Himself designs and times; and His *Sankalpa* is realised.

Sathya Sai Baba has initiated a number of devotees with *mantra* during dreams, wherein He has granted His *darshan* and communicated the sacred formula to the deserving aspirant and later, when they have come to Puttaparthi, He has told them about the processes of *Japa* and the conditions for successful spiritual practice.

Just as Shirdi Baba sat on the chest of the drunkard and forced him to promise not to touch liquor again (in a dream-experience, of course), Baba too has beaten an intransigent son-in-law of one of His *Bhaktas*, while he was sleeping in a moving train, alone, in a First Class compartment! The man jumped out of the train, as soon as it halted at a wayside station and the crowd that collected could see the finger-mark on both the cheeks! An insane patient at the Hospital, Puttaparthi was also 'beaten' *in absentia* by Baba, and the doctors around his bed witnessed the fellow yelling at every blow and shouting that he would behave better and praying to Baba to stop beating him, all the while wondering at Baba's mysterious way of curing the patient of his foul vocabulary. After this treatment and the suffering of actual physical pain, the fellow gave up his 'rough behaviour' and sung always *bhajan* songs! So, here too, one can see the continuity, the identity.

On page 167 of the Satcharita is given the case of a Punjabi boy, who saw Baba in a dream

and heard Baba commanding him to come to Shirdi. He did not know who Baba was and where Shirdi was, but, luckily, he came across a picture of Baba in a shop and so, could, after many an adventure, arrive at Shirdi. Many instances of exactly the same nature come to mind, concerning this *avatar* also. The Principal of a college in South India was surprised when his son, afflicted with some dire heart trouble, said one day that he had dreamt of a place called Puttaparthi, where he would be cured! He made enquiries, consulted the Railway Time Tables of all the zones, got a copy of the Post Office Directory, and was surprised to find that Puttaparthi was a village that existed, for it contained a Post Office. Further enquiries gave him the precious news that Sri Sathya Sai Baba was there and that He could, by His mere Will, cure all afflictions!

How Baba called that great devotee of Sri Tyagarajaswami, Bangalore Nagarathnamma, to Himself is an interesting story. In 1951, the Raja of Venkatagiri was surprised to receive a letter from her. The letter ran as follows: "*Mahaprabhu!* My *Ishtadevata* Sri Tyagaraja gave me *Darshana Bhagyam* in a dream and commanded me to go to Venkatagiri, in order to be blessed by the *darshan* of Bhagawan, who has come to Bhuloka and who is soon reaching Venkatagiri, in His *Sancharam*. My Lord told me that Bhagawan has assumed the name of Sri Sathya Sai. I shall come to Venkatagiri as soon as I hear from you." It was the *Utsav* of Krishna Jayanti, when she met Baba in answer to this command; Baba gave her the chance to sing Tyagaraja *kritis* for full two hours, in His presence. He also blessed her with an image of Sri Rama, which He materialised for her; after the receipt of that image, she was in ecstatic unconsciousness for over 24 hours! She was happy that Baba granted her two boons, a peaceful end and remembrance of *Ramnam* till the very last moment of her life!

Hundreds of people come to Puttaparthi drawn by such mysterious intimations. For example, there is the case of Sukumara Menon, who was 'called' by phone by Baba's voice to meet Him, a call not noticed anywhere along the line, a call that rang in his room, when Baba was actually at Bangalore in the midst of a *Grihapravesham* function. Sukumara Menon wrote to me about the mysterious ring and the conversation he had with Baba. When this was mentioned to Baba He said, "You know this now, because he wrote about it. But, remember this is only a millionth part of My *leela!*"

In fact, what is mentioned on page 68 of Sai Satcharita can be taken as a correct account of what happens today, at Puttaparthi. "The devotees could never approach Him unless He meant to receive them. Nobody could go there of his own accord; nobody could stay there long if he so wished; they could stay there only so long as Baba wished them to stay; they

had to leave the place, when allowed to do so by Baba." Once, when a long line of bullock carts approached Puttaparthi from Bukkapatnam, bringing visitors from various places, Baba sang jubilantly, "*Aaya hai! Aaya hai! Babaji Ka Karavan.*" I said, "People, who come here, go and tell their neighbours and friends and relatives and so, the number increases." Baba turned towards me and remarked, "No! No one can come to Me without My calling him, even if a hundred people persuade or drag or push." Everyone, who comes to Puttaparthi, leaves with the prayer, "Help me to come again," "Kindly get me once again to this place," for they know that without His express Wish, no one can fulfil the pilgrimage. And, when He says, "Stay," they stay. Whether they have leave at the office or not; when He says, "Don't go," they don't; when He says, "Leave," they leave, however unwillingly, for, as the devotees at Shirdi experienced, when they do scrupulously follow Sai Baba's orders, some urgent work will be awaiting them when they reach their place!

It is not necessary to multiply such instances of identity of attitude, style, advice, behaviour, and *leela* between the two manifestations. Devotees of Sathya Sai Baba have heard Him assure them,

"Why fear when I am here?"

"You look to Me, and I look to you."

"All your sins are forgiven the moment you get My *darshan.*"

"I shall carry all your burdens."

"Take, take as much *Ananda* as you can from Me and leave with Me all your sorrows."

Assurances, which were given to many fortunate souls, in identical terms, by Shirdi Sai Baba, as contemporary records testify!

"I do not need any paraphernalia for worship, either eight fold, or sixteen fold; I rest there, where there is full devotion."

"My *Sircar's* Treasury is always full; it is overflowing; I say, 'Dig out and take this wealth in cartloads; this chance won't come again.'"

"Let there be no insistence on establishing one's own view; no attempt to refute other's opinions."

"Nothing will harm him, who turns his attention towards Me."

"Avoid the company of atheists, irreligious and wicked people, be meek and humble towards

all."

"See Me in all beings; all the insects, ants, the visible, movable and immovable world is My Body and Form."

"My treasury is full and I can give anyone what he wants, but I have to see whether he is qualified to receive what I give."

"Look at Me whole-heartedly and I in turn will look at you similarly."

"To get realization of the Self, *dhyana* is necessary; if you practise it continuously, the *vrittis* will be pacified."

"Give water to the thirsty, bread to the hungry, and your veranda to strangers for sitting and resting."

"If you are inclined to give, give; if you are not inclined to give, do not give. But, do not bark like a dog."

"I require no door to enter; I always live everywhere."

"Fondness for things or attachment ill-becomes an ochre garb."

"The quest for God should not be made on an empty belly."

"Leaving out your pride and egoism, surrender yourself to Me who am seated in your heart."

These expressions taken from the book, Sai Satcharita can be heard emanating from Sathya Sai Baba, every day, during His conversation with devotees. For, the Mission and the Master are the same!

Again, the Satcharita says that Shirdi Baba wanted someone to throw aside blind belief in horoscopes and predictions of astrologers and palmists, for it weakens man. Sathya Sai Baba also has advised similarly. In fact, there is the instance of a *Vaishya* gentleman from the old State of Hyderabad, who dreamt that Baba asked him to extend his palm and with a sharp pointed knife, Baba drew a line on his palm, the *bhagyarekha*, as he discovered next day, to his delight and dismay! For One who can draw a new line on the palm, of what concern is palmistry? For One who can change the courses of the stars, of what value is astrology? No wonder that, that Baba and this decry man's stupid faith in these absurdities to the exclusion of the maker of one's destiny, Baba Himself!

Other statements in the Satcharita, like -

"All people troubled Him with bringing costly, unnecessary, and useless articles; all the paraphernalia of Shirdi *Samasthan* was brought by various rich devotees at the instance or suggestion of some others."

"Baba never liked people to run into debt for taking His *darshan*, or celebrating any Holy Day or going on any pilgrimage."

"Baba anticipated and forestalled the calamities of His devotees and warded them off in time."

"Baba respected the feelings of His devotees and allowed them to worship Him as they liked."

"Baba was extremely forgiving, never irritable, straight, soft, tolerant, and content beyond comparison."

"Baba read and understood all the thoughts of His *Bhaktas*; He suppressed the evil thoughts and encouraged the good ones." - All these are applicable in full measure to Sri Sathya Sai Baba too.

The Sai Satcharita says, "Sai Baba knew well all *yogic* practices." Swami Amritananda, a companion of Bhagawan Ramana Maharshi during His austerities, acknowledged that Sathya Sai baba knew *yogic* science more than anyone he had come across, because He elaborated to the Swami the faults committed during their *yogic* exercises years before Baba took 'birth' at Puttaparthi, which resulted in both of them becoming afflicted with asthma of a chronic type. Recently, Baba gave some very practical lessons in *Yoga* to a young Frenchman, who had taken enthusiastically to the practice of *Hatha Yoga*, through a study of mere books. Many cases of misdirected practice of *yoga* come to Him every year, for treatment and correction.

The following sentence from the Sai Satcharita could as well have been written about the present *avatar*! "To Him all duties are alike; He knows neither honour nor dishonour." Sathya Sai Baba too attends to the smallest details of the lowliest task at Prasanthi Nilayam. He sits on the floor, sleeps on a mat, does not hesitate to walk in sun or rain, climbs the snow-clad Himalayas on bare feet, gets a sizeable crowd into His car in spite of the crush and the length of the journey, goes long distances without food or drink, and prefers the dishes of the poor, because as He says, "No one should be put to extra expense and trouble on My account!"

The book says of the previous *avatar* -

"Baba read his heart and spoke it out."

"Baba had already received a wireless message."

"Baba converted by His touch raisins with seeds into seedless raisins."

"Baba gave instructions to His devotees in both spiritual and temporal matters."

"Baba saw no difference between caste and caste, and even beings and beings."

"Baba always loved those, who studied *Brahma Vidya*, and He always encouraged them."

"Baba hated scandal mongering and spoke of it as equal to gorging dung."

"Baba insisted that remuneration for labour must be paid promptly and to the satisfaction of the worker." – Every one of these appear, to those who have met, heard, and followed Sathya Sai Baba, as His own statements and as representing His own advice and attitude.

In 1958, when He was examined on commission, Sathya Sai Baba referred to a similar incident in His previous birth and gave the self-same replies. When asked for His name, He said, He answered to any. He said that everything was His, that He lived everywhere and by these replies, He made the *pundits* of Law (*Shastras*) describe Him as inscrutable, though, for adepts in spiritual lore, it was clear as crystal that those were the unmistakable utterances of an *avatar*.

The truth of the matter is that it is the same Presence, come again! Sathya Sai Baba once said that this *shariram* was born in Parthi; while the previous one was born in Patri; in this birth also there was a Muslim, who loved Him and fondled Him as a child; in this birth too He drew people's attention to Himself, when a boy, by disclosing the whereabouts of a lost horse, at Uravakonda; and that many more resemblances are to follow. Everyone will find in the present *avatar* the same motherly solicitude, the same simplicity of exposition, the same profundity of wisdom, the same universality of outlook, the same all-conquering *Prema*, the same omnipresence, and the same omnipotence.

Sathya Sai Baba has said very often that He "had been to Shirdi", when He was in what may be called a 'trance'. On one *Pournami* day, some fifteen years ago, Baba was taking His noonday meals with a young man from Madras, at Puttaparthi. The person, who was serving the dishes, did not know that it was an auspicious day for Sai *Bhaktas*. Suddenly, Baba went on a 'journey' and, during the unconscious period, He ordered, "Serve him *chapatis*," "Serve him *kheer*," and mentioned strange names of other sweets and eatables. When He returned, the lady twitted Him and said, "If You ask me to serve this young man items that I have not prepared, that I have not even heard about, what can I do?" Baba sympathised with her plight

and said that He had been to Shirdi and the names He mentioned were of Marathi dishes! He, then, 'took' a *chapati* as well as some slices of Marathi sweets, and gave them to the young man.

When He came back to Puttaparthi, after the Declaration, that is to say, as a little boy of fifteen, He 'took' a fruit, which no one at Puttaparthi had seen or tasted before. Peddavenkapa Raju's sister says that she asked Baba what type of fruit it was and she got the reply that it came from Shirdi. Baba proposed to cut and distribute the pieces during the evening *Bhajan*, but she pleaded with Baba that each should get at least one full fruit, so that the gift may be relished; so, Baba asked her to give Him a big sized basket with a cover. He just tapped that basket once and the lady saw that the basket was full of them! In the evening, when *Bhajan* started, she saw about a hundred persons and so, she was again afraid she would not get a whole fruit, for the basket could not contain more than 30 or 40! She told Baba how nervous she was, but Baba gave from that basket one whole fruit to each of the hundred odd persons, after *Bhajan* that day; and the fruit was so strange and so sweet!

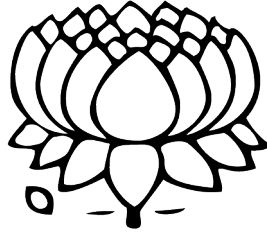
This same lady relates another miraculous incident. She was troubling Baba with a request to grant her some vision, to instil faith in her heart, for she did not want to dismiss the story of Sai *Avatar* as an invention, an attitude that many in the family found it easy to assume. Baba had a liking for this particular lady, because she was a simple soul, steeped in suffering; so, He told her, "I shall show you My previous Body, this evening!"

She confesses that she could not contain her joy and was praying for a shorter afternoon and a quicker sunset! As soon as dusk fell, Baba led her across a number of doorsills, into one of the innermost rooms of the house, and on reaching the farthest, He took off His palm which was all the while covering her eyes and asked her to look at a corner, which He pointed out with His finger. The lady looked! And there sat Shirdi Sai Baba, on the floor, in His characteristic pose, but, she says, with eyes closed and *vibhuti marks* on the forehead and arms. The incense sticks before Him were burning and the smoke was rising straight into the air! His Body was glowing with a strange effulgence and there was a beautiful fragrance around. After a minute or so, Baba asked her, "Have you seen?" and when she said, "Oh, how wonderful," He placed his palm once again firmly over her eyes and led her back into the outer room.

Perhaps, the vision vouchsafed to the two teachers, who have written that book, Messrs Kondappa and Subbannachar, was also of the same type. They do not specify which, in any

detail in their book.

Baba has often said that controversy over the point, whether it is the same Baba, is meaningless and unnecessary, for, as He says, when there are two pieces of *barfi*, one square, another circular, one yellow and the other purple in colour, unless one has eaten and realised the taste of both pieces, one cannot believe that both are the same. Tasting, experiencing, that is the crucial thing, to know the identity.





11.

The Rain Cloud

The effect of His discourse is always as if Baba has all the while spoken to you alone, for within a minute or two, He grips your attention so much that you forget you are one among thousands and you yield yourself to His diagnosis and His treatment...He is not an orator, or evangelist, or even a teacher. He is the Rain Cloud come to nourish the parched lives of everyone.

THOSE, who have had the good fortune of listening to a discourse by Baba at any public gathering, will cherish the thrill and the inspiration of the experience for many and many a year; nothing that they may listen to later will diminish the exhilaration of that occasion. Baba speaks generally in Telugu, though He converses with devotees in almost all languages, Tamil, Kannada, Hindi, Sindhi, English, etc. In fact, His omniscience finds expression in any medium. His diction and style are simple and direct, full of proverbs and parables and popular illustrations taken from the actual experience of the people in front of Him; and so, His words get engraved in the hearts of the listeners.

He refuses to name His discourses, speeches, for they are never prepared in advance or delivered over the heads of the people or directed to the 'masses'. He prefers the word, '*Sambhashan*', that is, conversation. His way of probing into personal problems and answering individual doubts make that appellation very apt. The effect of His discourse is always as if Baba has all the while spoken to you alone, for within a minute or two, He grips your attention so much that you forget you are one among thousands and you yield yourself to His diagnosis and His treatment. The face that enchants, the voice that endears, the smile that illumines, the gesture that clarifies, all become your personal possessions. His advice, His appeal are so intimate and imbued with love that your entire self is mortgaged to Him, by

the time He finishes. He is not an orator, or evangelist, or even a teacher. He is the Rain Cloud come to nourish the parched lives of everyone.

Baba used to declare when quite a boy that He will enter upon His task of *Upadesha* in His thirty second year. Until that age, He discoursed only occasionally, either at Prasanthi Nilayam itself during the Navaratri celebrations or Shivaratri, or sometimes on the sands of the Chitravati when devotees assembled around Him and sought His guidance, or rarely at the Sathya Sai Baba District Board High School, Bukkapatnam, where He presided over functions like the School Day.

At the Nilayam or on the sands, the discourse was usually started off by a question, posed by a *bhakta*, on some general problem affecting social conduct, or spiritual endeavour. The reply given by Baba sheds light not only on the main question, but also on all related topics. A chance question on Life after Death once brought forth from Baba a very illuminating discourse on *Salokya*, *Sameepya*, etc., on the *Garuda Purana* version of the journey of the disembodied soul, the inner significance of the funeral rites of the different communities, the existence of ghosts, the chances of communicating with the dead, and even the custom of naming the grandchild after the grandfather. The questioner or others around him are also prodded with further queries by Baba, in order to make His exposition clear. Such discussions arise in quite informal ways at almost all places and times, for Baba is ever gracious to impart the courage born of conviction. He is the educator, par excellence.

A few years ago, a few devotees had the chance of being with Baba at the Horsley Hills for about a week. Every day, both in the morning and in the evening, Baba sat in the midst of the *Bhaktas* and posed before them a new problem of *sadhana*. He asked everyone to lay bare before Him their spiritual practices, ideals and ideas; He asked them to reveal the name and form of the Godhead that appealed to each person; the scriptural text that had the greatest influence in shaping their lives; the picture that each one had formed of the Ultimate Reality; the goal of each one's *sadhana*. And, by means of sympathetic analysis, He set everyone on the path. He utilises every chance to pour light on the dark corners of our hearts.

This He has been doing, even while a child, for was He not named the 'little *guru*' even by Kondama Raju, who liked Him all the more for it? I remember the old man swelling with pride and joy, when he sat listening to a discourse given by Baba in 1950, a few days before his passing away.

Even as a child at school, He dissuaded His play-mates from smoking *beedies* and cigarettes;

He evinced disgust at *rajasic* and *tamasic* food generally; He warned His friends away from cinemas; He encouraged them all to sing songs in praise of God, to wear the holy *vibhuti*, and observe habits of personal cleanliness.

While at school at Kamalapuram, He composed some songs against the evil of drink, the dangerous consequences of illiteracy, on the abject condition of the untouchables, and on the degradation of village factions. Years ago, He wrote a social play named '*Kaalamarpu*' (the Changed Times). This is a play containing a large number of songs in folk-tunes, depicting the tricks to which the necessity to catch peoples' attention drives the seekers of power. It depicts the piteous plight of a great poet and seer whose warnings go unheeded; he is neglected by everyone, except the poor ryot; his children become destitute. Men of straw take vengeance upon them for the words of wisdom that their father dared utter. But, times change. The children win power and re-establish the Golden Age, when the immortal words of the poet are sung again and put into practice.

Even when quite a boy, Baba was entreated by actors in village plays to write out dialogues for their roles and, whenever He took a role, He composed songs and speeches for Himself. Invariably, those compositions breathed a high moral note and stood out above the rest of the drama, attracting attention by superior style, diction, and appeal. He has written also plays on "Parikshit" and on "Markandeya" - both revealing new facets of Truth.

This role of the Teacher is, of course, fundamental to the Sai *Avatar*. "I never utter a word of no significance, or do a deed of no beneficial consequence," He declared once. Even the most casual remark that He might make will be filled with *upadesh*. Addressing a lady, who was struggling to keep her child quiet, He said, "See. Sitting astride your hip, it cries, '*Amma, Amma,*' not realising that *Amma* herself is holding it in her clasp. This is what everyone here is doing. They do not know that the Lord is the mother, who is clasping them; they simply cry, '*Amma, Amma.*'" Seeing the item 'welcome speech', in the programme of a meeting He addressed, He said, "I am in you and so, you need not welcome Me. I shall not come, because you call, or go, because you deny." He is always and everywhere the *Sadguru*, the Friend, Philosopher, and Guide. He slowly and steadily moulds the character and outlook of everyone, who offers himself for His guidance, or whom He selects for such training.

When, at Prasanthi Nilayam or elsewhere, someone is reciting or explaining the *Gita* or the *Ramayana* or the *Bhagavata* or some *Upanishad*, He watches the audience for a while and taking His cue from a word or a phrase, explains to the delight of the learned and the

unlearned alike, the obscurity which worries them. In this way, He has unravelled many a mystery of the *Shastras* and sacred scriptures. The *bhakti* of the Gopis, the challenge of Vali, the abduction of Sita, the character of Ravana, the nature of Durvasa, the role of Narada, the manoeuvres of Krishna, the meaning of *avatar*, the significance of the *Sraddha* ceremony, and many such topics have been, as I know, illumined by Baba's omniscience.

In the Discourses that Baba gives at Prasanthi Nilayam during *Dasara* or on Shivaratri or on His Birthday, He often treats of highly philosophical subjects, for as He said once, "You are all no longer young; you must go from one lower class to the next higher one." But, by means of stories and parables, proverbs and metaphors, He makes even the toughest philosophical idea, like *Maya*, or *Karma*, or *Adhyasa*, or *Vasana*, or *Samskara*, or *Samsara*, or *Nirguna*, or *Saguna*, as plain as the berry in the palm. Once, He spoke on the *Katha*, *Kena*, and the *Mundaka Upanishads*, on three successive days, giving very lucid analysis of the dialectics of each. Of course, He ends up every talk, emphasising the practical steps of *Sadhana*, bringing the discourse down to the very brass tacks of daily routine and conduct. Another *Dasara*, He spoke on *Karmamarga*, *Gnyanamarga*, and *Bhaktimarga* on three successive days, ending the series on the note that *Karmamarga* leads to the intensification of *bhakti* and *Bhaktimarga* leads ultimately to *Gnyana*.

Or, He takes the theme on which someone has spoken already in His presence that evening and amplifies it, to the satisfaction of the thousands listening to Him. I remember one day, He took up the topic of *satsang* and described how it gradually leads man on to *nissanga*, that is to say, how the companionship of the good leads one on to the giving up of attachment itself. Another day, His subject was *Paropakara* and the way intelligent persons should do it, for someone had spoken earlier of Social Service. One evening, He spoke of the Trinity and the functions of Brahma, Vishnu, and Maheswara, for the reference that day was to Dattatreya.

On special occasions of festivals like Vijayadashami, Shivaratri, Uttarayanam, Gurupournami, etc., He gives discourses on the significance of those days and on the most profitable method of celebrating them. *Manas* is presided over by the Moon, and every month the Moon gets almost worn out on the 14th night after the Full Moon. So, the *sadhaka* whose ambition should be to destroy the *manas*, with all its whims, fancies and vagaries must strive his utmost on that night to maximize his *sadhana*, so that victory might be his. That night or *ratri* has to be dedicated to Shiva, so to say. Shivaratri comes every month and there is a Mahashivaratri once a year to remind man of the purpose of his existence. Vijayadashami is "the day of Victory of the forces of Goodness, of the pure self over the downward dragging

vasanas and impulses." *Uttarayanam* is the *Uttamayanam*, the dawn of the *Daiviyanam*, the divine half-year when the Sun, who presides over the *buddhi* or intellect of Man is Himself proceeding on the *daivimarga*. "Swim with the current," Baba says. "The Sun Himself is journeying northward, towards the Kailasha of Self-realisation. This is the best time for spiritual initiation and *sadhana*." Gurupournami for Baba is an occasion to remind His devotees and all aspirants to revere the *Gurus* and the wisdom they embody. He describes the essential characteristics of *Gurus* and gives everyone the tests by which he can distinguish the true from the false. Every discourse of Baba has a novelty of its own, a thrill and a joy which is its unique mark!

He calls His Discourses *mandubhojanam* (in Telugu), as opposed to the *vindubhojanam*, which others are supplying. That is to say, what He serves is 'medicinal food', not festival food. Therefore, He appeals to the listeners not to miss even a fragment of the meal or carelessly throwaway even a morsel of a word. He is the great physician come to heal and so, no two discourses are similar in tone or content. He says, "Mine is not a lecture; it is a mixture!" He has no one single prescription for all!

Speaking to High School students at Chittoor, He gave detailed instructions regarding preparation for the Examinations and the systematic way in which the question paper has to be tackled in the Hall. "Mark all the questions which you feel you can successfully answer; finish answering them; and then, tackle the rest; you will then be in a better and more confident mood," He said. He dealt on problems of the class-room and the football field, with an intimacy that was quite remarkable.

Presiding over the prize-giving ceremony of the District Sports at Penukonda, He spoke on the emphasis wrongly placed on competition and on winning, pitting school against school and boy against boy. He then pointed out that the spirit in which victory or defeat is taken is much more important than the actual result of the events.

At Madakasira, on a similar occasion, He punned upon the word *bahumati*, meaning both 'prize' and 'many-mindedness', and declared, "I always distribute single mindedness; never *bahumati* or many-mindedness!" He then asked the winners to thank the losers, for if only the losers had put in a little more effort, they might have won and deprived them of running away with the prizes!

Inaugurating the Girls High School at Venkatagiri town, He dilated on the good habits that students should develop. "Be ever careful about your books, for your parents have sacrificed

much to get them for you. Do not quarrel with your brothers and sisters and make the home a nest of discontent. Do not envy classmates, who are richer. Be content. Do not show off. Speak the truth always, for falsehood is the result of cowardice. Get up early in the morning at 5 a.m. and, after a wash, sit alone quietly, and meditate. Go to sleep at 9 p.m. and before lying down, pray to the Lord. Tell Him to accept all that you have done during the day, for they have been done truthfully and dutifully, and ask Him to give you strength to serve Him and His children, your brothers and sisters. In the morning, thank Him for the day dawning before you and ask that it may be given to you to spend it usefully, for yourself and for others."

Addressing the villagers of Mirtipadu, near Rajahmundry, Baba spoke to them on topics within their ken. "By the sweat of your brow, you transform dirt and dust into nourishing, relishing food for man and beast. What a holy task is this, which you daily perform! I am very happy to be in your midst today. You bear innumerable troubles and toils and place firm reliance on your own selves. You move about these green fields, wafted by the cool breeze, beneath the blue sky. How nice it would be if, when you walk along the edges of those fields, you sing the glory of the Lord, who is immanent in all this beauty, all this plenty, and all this grandeur! Do not contaminate the atmosphere by words of anger against one another; purify it by repeating the name of the Lord."

So, too, at Budili village, on the banks of the Chitravati, He spoke of the sweetness and purity of the ryot's life and of the village being the foundation of the culture of a country. There, He dilated on the need of gratitude for benefits received; the dangers of faction and the value of traditional religious rites like *bhajan* and temple worship. He said He had noticed that someone had dumped a broken *bandy* (cart) on the temple veranda, an act demonstrating disregard for the sacred precincts. He also exhorted the young men of the village to serve it with all their intelligence and devotion.

If it is a function connected with a hospital, Baba has valuable advice for the organisers as well as the gathering. At the Sathya Sai Hospital, He once deplored that the doctors should, in their report, write about the progress achieved, when actually the number of in-patients and out-patients had increased. He said that He would be happy only when there was full health for everyone. This could be achieved, mostly by the gaining of *Shanti*. "Worry, greed, needless agitation, and anxiety, these cause even bodily diseases. Mental weakness is the biggest cause of disease. Disease is want of ease; the contented mind is the best drug. The body must be well looked after, since it is the boat which helps us to cross the sea of *samsar*."

So, it should not be weakened either by bad habits which sap the strength, or by the overdoing of disciplines, like fasting, etc. Learning *yogic* practices from books and practising them, with the aid of leaflets and charts, is also a fertile source of illness, both physical and mental. Be good, be joyful, be bold, be honest, be temperate, be patient. These are all rules of health. *Suguna* is the most valuable source of health."

In many places, the *Bhaktas* conduct regular *Bhajans* on the pattern of the *Bhajan* at Prasanthi Nilayam and once a year on a selected day, they carry on the sessions for full twenty-four hours without interruption. On the conclusion of one such *akhanda bhajans* at Bangalore, Baba gave a discourse in which He pointed out that one's life must itself become an unbroken session of *Akhanda bhajans*.

Of course for devotees of Sathya Sai Baba, the practice of the constant presence of the Lord is a comparatively easy *sadhana*, for, by experience, they know that Baba is ever behind them, beside them, with them, and in them. Baba Himself accosts each one of them with question, concerning aspects of their behaviour or thinking, which they considered most secret, known only to themselves. Once, for example, when a student from Rajahmundry told Him that he had prepared single-mindedly for the examination, giving up all other activities, Baba turned on him with the question, "What? Did you not go one night to a dinner at the hostel and come home very late? Did you not go another day with some relatives, who had come from your village, to the bazaar to purchase some clothes for them?"

That day at the *Akhanda bhajan* function, Baba said that one should try to discover why, in spite of the multiplicity of *Sanghams*, *samajams*, and societies organising *Bhajan* and religious discourses, there is no corresponding increase in the moral standard of the people. "*Bhajan* has become a ritual, a routine, a rigmarole. What is spoken by the tongue is not practised by the hands. There is no *bhakti*, no *shraddha*, no faith."

By Faith, Baba does not mean blind faith; as a matter of fact, Baba insists on *viveka* as an essential requisite for spiritual progress. "Follow the *shastraic* discipline and test for yourself," He says. "Come and stay at Prasanthi Nilayam and move with Me and experience My company and conversation and listen to Me and watch Me and then, form your conclusions; get in and know the depth; eat and know the taste," is His advice.

"*Sadhana* is necessary to know God, patient, sincere *sadhana*; if the spark of faith must grow into a raging fire, build it up with grass blades, dry sticks, and faggots, slowly and carefully. Take refuge occasionally in the depths of your own mind, in silence and in loneliness."

At Trivandrum, Baba posed the question, "How is it that, in spite of the advance in education and literacy, the enthusiasm shown by parents, teachers, and children in imparting and acquiring learning, people have no peace of mind?" He then spoke on the *Manas*, as having the double nature of wind, the wind that gathers the rain clouds and scatters the clouds beyond the horizon. He detailed upon the means and methods of controlling the vagaries of the mind. He said, "I refuse to call anyone an atheist or an unbeliever, for all are creations of the Lord and repositories of His grace. In everyone's heart, there is a spring of love, a rock of truth. That Love is God. Divinity is there in the depths of everyone's inner being. By systematic and continuous boring, the uninterrupted dig, dig, dig of Ram-Ram-Ram, the spring can be touched and the waters of divinity made to gush forth."

At Nuzvid, Baba dwelt on the religious factions and partisanship rampant in the country. He said that the Lord is above and beyond all limits of caste and colour, of wealth and poverty; that it is foolish to believe that the Lord asks for a gift or is angry, when it is not offered. He warned His listeners against *sanyasins*, who go about with lists of donors and subscribers, *Gurus*, who have an eye on your purse, and *Mounis*, who keep the vow of silence by resorting to all other means of communication, except the easy, natural, and convenient way of talking! At Arkonam, when the secretary of the Divine Life Society read in his report that those, who paid an annual fee of four annas, could become members, Baba said that He would allow anyone, who had, not four annas, but four *gunas* (*Sathya, Dharma, Shanti, and Prema*), to become members of the Society of Divine Life!

At Madras, while speaking to the members of the Young Men's Indian Association, He pleaded with the elders present to become, for the young men of today, better examples of integrity and efficiency and self-less service. "Big personages claiming to be great, declaim about the *Vedas*, the *Shastras*, and the *atma*, freely quoting the similes and metaphors found in the sacred scriptures; but, by their conduct, their conceit, and their conflicts, they only diminish the lustre of those treasures," He said. "There is no co-ordination between the speaker, the subject, and subsequent conduct. Therefore, instead of *Amrita*, their words become *anrita*," He declared. At the Gokhale Hall, He said that man must seek answers to four fundamental questions - Who am I? Where have I come from? Whither am I going? How long will I stay? He said that the four *Vedas* are devoted to the discovery of the answers to these very queries. Then, He began to show how the answers can be realised through *gnyana* or *bhakthi* or *karma*, but He said that the Lord's grace, if won through *namasmarana*, will reveal them to the aspirant in a trice.

Analysing the causes for the present crisis in the moral life of the community, He pointed out that cynicism and the urge to satirise are two big diseases of the age and these lead to irreverence and the spread of disbelief. A life lived in the constant presence of God is the most secure and happy, for the shafts of social criticism will not penetrate it and cause it pain. Religion and belief in God are being challenged now from all quarters. It is therefore the duty of all *astikas* to meet this challenge by demonstrating to the critics how their lives have been sweeter by religion, how the realisation of the constant presence of the Lord has made them more efficient, more earnest, and more courageous for the task of living.

At the All-India Sai Samaj, He declared, "You take up the dictionary to find out the meaning of a certain word, but as you turn over the pages in order to spot it, other words attract your attention and you are drawn towards them and their meanings. So too, you might come to Me with someone immediate purpose, but, while doing so, you come to know that you can use Me to solve deeper dilemmas, assuage more poignant pains, and secure greater spiritual peace." He takes every opportunity to bring home to His listeners that their effort, their discrimination, their sacrifice, their *sadhana* alone can give them what they most need, namely, *Shanti*.

At the Shanti Kuteeram, Royapuram, He spoke once on Sri Krishna and another time on the *Bhagavad Gita*. He gave a number of incidents from the life of Sri Krishna that are not found in the books and made His Discourse most instructive and illuminating. He made a pun on the word *Gita*, which when read from the other end becomes the Telugu word *Tagi*, meaning 'drink' and said that unless the nectar of the *Gita* is drunk and assimilated, one cannot get any result. Mere punditry or pompous scholarship or mugging up the *Gita* with all its thousand and odd commentaries is all a waste of precious time.

"There are two paths," He once told an audience at Puttaparthi, "which everyone must tread – the *Dharmamarga* relating to the physical world, the social world, and the community to which one belongs, and the *Brahmamarga*, relating to oneself alone, the soul, and the disciplines connected with its fulfilment. Man must grasp God with the right hand and the world with the left. Gradually, the left will lose its hold; Do not worry about this; it has to be so; that is why it is called left! But, the right hand must not be allowed to loosen its grip, for it is right that it should grip tight; that is why it is called right!" Statements like these stick in the memory and listeners will long ponder over them, deriving sustenance and joy therefrom.

At Venkatagiri, inaugurating the *Adhyatmic* Lectures, He declared that the bane of Indian life

has been the absence of cordiality and brotherliness. At Nellore, keeping a monster meeting of fifty thousand listeners enthralled for over an hour, He spoke of Discrimination (*buddhibalam*) and the need for Faith based on inquiry and reason. At Gudur, He spoke of the magic influence of *prema* between all classes and grades of people, "*Prema* will bring about *Shanti*; it is based on Truth, it is the *Dharma* of all." "You won't be wrong, if you characterise Me as *Premaswarupa*," He declared.

At Peddapuram, He exhorted everyone to have muscles of iron and nerves of steel, to become heroes with no trace of weakness or cowardice or sense of inferiority. "Do not call yourselves the children of sin; there is no sin worse than that. You are *Amritaputras*, every one of you; you have the Lord presiding in your heart. He is the *Antaryamin* of everything in creation. How then can you be a child of sin?" He asked.

At Aukiripalli, in the Krishna district, where He addressed a gathering of *pundits* and Sanskrit scholars, He stated that Kali is the Age of *Tantra* and, paying tribute to Sir John Woodroffe for unravelling the science of *Tantra* in his books, Baba explained the role of *Tantra* in the worship of Shakti. He explained the role of *Mahashakti*, *Yogashakti*, and *Mayashakti* in the careers of *avatars*.

Often during His discourses, Baba illustrates His *Upadesh* by stories of Narada, Ambarisha, Shabari, Prahlada, Bhishma, Bharata, Guha, Anjaneya, Chaitanya, Meera, Purandaradas, Kabir, Pattinathar, Manikkavasagar, Surdas, Tulsidas, Bhadrachala-Ramadas, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, and others. Sometimes, He speaks in a reminiscent mood of the days spent in past ages in Ayodhya and Brindavan; He relates events and incidents not found in the *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata* or *Bhagavata*, but which have all the hallmarks of authenticity; He is conversant with the details of the lives of the saints of India and Western and Middle-east countries; for, He gives illustrative incidents from the lives of Christian, Muslim, and Parsi saints also. Hassan and Hussain, Moses, Jerome, and Paul are for Him as useful as Tyagaraja or Pavharibaba in exemplifying or amplifying a point He wishes to emphasise. For, Baba is, has been, and will be; He is the Eternal Witness.

Indeed, He reveals this aspect of His reality very often in His discourses, in more or less direct declarations. Like flashes of lightning, they bring to our consciousness, suddenly and with a thrill, the splendour of His personality.

"Do not try to measure Me, you will fail; try rather to discover your own measure. Then, you will succeed better in discovering My own measure."

"I engage in no *tapas*; I do no *dhyana* at all; I do not study; I am no *Yogi* or *Siddha* or *sadhaka*; I have come to guide and bless all *sadhakas*."

"I am neither man nor woman, old or young, I am all these."

"Do not praise Me; I like you to approach Me without fear, as of right. You do not extol your father. You ask for something from him, as of right, is it not?"

"I did not come uninvited to this world; *sadhus*, saints, sages, good men of all creeds and climes called out and entreated; so, I have come."

"You may be seeing Me today for the first time, but you are all old acquaintances for Me; I know you, through and through."

"I have neither *guna*, nor *karma*. How then can illusion affect Me?"

"If I had come down with *Shankha*, *Chakra*, *Gada*, and *Padma*, you would have run away or put Me into an exhibition; if I were just like anyone of you, you would not have cared at all. That is why I have taken up this human form and I show you now and then, these *mahimas*."

"My task is the spiritual regeneration of humanity through Truth and Love."

"I have come to show you both *Dharmamarga* and *Brahmamarga*."

"If you approach one step nearer to Me, I shall advance three steps towards you."

"I am happiest, when a person carrying a heavy load of misery comes to Me, for he is most in need of what I have."

"All are Mine, through the *atmic* relationship. So, those who worship Me are not nearer to Me than others who do not."

These are some of the illuminating flashes that Baba has vouchsafed in His discourses. "It is My Will that has brought every single one of you to this place to listen to Me," He said once. That is the measure of His Grace and Might.

These announcements heighten the innate value and appeal of the message that Baba brings to the distracted souls gathered before Him. He embraces everyone in His overwhelming *Prema* and when He announces to the gathering, "I do not discard anyone; I cannot, it is not My nature to do so, have no fear; I am Yours, You are Mine," an other-worldly intimacy is immediately established between Him and us. Therefore, His words sink deep into the consciousness and striking root, slowly grow into good conduct and *Daivic* character. He addresses the gathering as *Atmaswarupalaara!* or Embodied *Atmas!* His primary purpose is

to awaken man from the sleep of ignorance and point out to him his real nature - the imperishable, immortal, Divine Self. "You are the invincible *Atman*, unaffected by the ups and downs of life; the shadow which you cast while trudging along the road falls on dirt and dust, bush and briar, stone and sand, but you are not worried at all, for you walk unscathed; so too, as the *Atma* substance, you have no reason to be worried over the fate of its shadow, the body." Baba drives this point home by many an example and infuses unshakable courage.

"My mission is to grant you courage and joy, to drive away weakness and fear," He has said on many occasions. "Do not condemn yourselves as sinners; sin is a misnomer for what are really errors. I shall pardon all your errors, provided you repent sincerely and resolve not to follow evil again." "Pray to the Lord to give you the strength to overcome the habits, which had enticed you when you were ignorant." Thus, He kindles the flame of hope and health in every heart.

By His sweetness, His overpowering mercy, and His words of wisdom, He has corrected the steps of hundreds and turned them on towards the path of *Lokasangraha* and *Atmoddhara*. I remember a very touching incident that happened the morning after a discourse He gave at Nellore. A middle-aged person rushed into His room and fell at His feet, rolling on the ground and sobbing like a child. Baba knew the reason why, for there is no need in His case for question and answer. He turned to us and said, "Yesterday's story of Ramu," and asked us to leave the room. Baba had related the previous evening the story of a little boy, Ramu, who begged for food, from door to door; his mother was very ill; he called out in front of a house, enraging the master, who rushed towards him and hit him on the head, causing him to fall with the pot, which contained his earnings; the blow killed him and he died with the words, "Mother, who will give you food now?" on his lips. That story and the advice that Baba gave, namely, that everyone must be grateful first to the father and the mother, the parents, to whom he owes his very existence, had struck remorse in the heart of that listener, for he had, for some very silly reason, quarrelled with his mother and kept her apart.

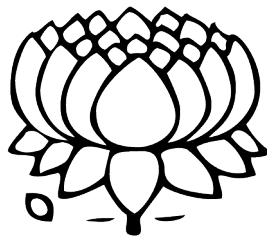
Now, he had come to crave Baba's pardon and rehabilitate himself under His auspices and with His Blessing. Baba knew all that without being told. He patted him lovingly on the back; the sobs continued. Baba said, "*Paschatapam* is itself the *Prayaschittam*. Come, come. Stop weeping. I shall be at your village; bring your mother there and you shall get *darshan* together. Go and fetch her there, before I arrive."

Mention can be made of many such dramatic incidents, consequent on the Grace-filled

discourses of Baba, of loans being repaid, of aged fathers being helped, of neglected wives being welcomed again, of deep-rooted habits of gambling or drink being given up for good. Baba's campaign of *upadesh* has only just begun and anyone, who has heard His message, can clearly visualise the significance of the Declaration He made on the opening page of the *Sanathana Sarati*, the monthly magazine which He inaugurated on Shivaratri Day, 1958, the 32nd year of His earthly Career. "This day, the Sanathana Sarati, the Eternal Charioteer, starts out on the campaign against Falsehood, Injustice, Wickedness, and Evil - the minions of the Spirit of Egoism. The *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, and the *Shastras* are the regiments of the army; the Victory to be won is the welfare of the entire world. When the triumphant drums are beaten in the joy of success, Humanity would have achieved happiness and Peace, *Sukha* and *Shanti*, *Kshema* and *Ananda*."

Already the outlines of that plan of campaign are clear on the horizon. The clarion call for the great task is Baba's four-fold programme of *Sathya*, *Dharma*, *Shanti*, and *Prema*. His plan is for all humanity, for He says, "It is not mentioned anywhere that the Grace of God is available only for certain classes or races or grades of people. From the smallest to the biggest, from the *anu* to the *ghana*, all are entitled to it. The Lord is everywhere, in everything. He can be realised by *sadhana*, the practice of *Sathya* and *Prema*. *Sathya* is the highest *Dharma* and *Prema* is the only road to *Shanti*."

Baba has also taken up the task of educating *sadhakas* and aspirants and correcting the teachers and guides, who are largely led astray by the greed for name and fame, for success in the competition for public support, and for the evanescent glory of 'international' fame, or newspaper renown. "Test everyone on the touchstone of sincerity; see how far each has renounced, not merely in words, but in actual deed; then, accept their advice and bring it into your daily conduct and behaviour. It is the practice that matters, not the punditry," He insists. The Era of Sathya Sai, which has dawned, is indeed bound to be the Golden Age of Humanity.





12.

Sai Sadguru

Baba has equal love towards all; similarly, He does not make any distinction between a village and a city; in fact, He responds perhaps even more readily when Bhaktas from remote villages require Him. He is quite at home in a Raj Bhavan or in a Parnasala.

DEVOTEES have succeeded in persuading Baba to vouchsafe to them the pleasure of welcoming and worshipping Him in their own towns and homes. On such occasions, it is but natural that they should desire more and more people to get the benefit of His *darshan* and His discourse. Baba had often agreed to these requests and so, at Chittoor, Trivandrum, Bombay, and other places, many had the chance of personally paying homage to Him. He had also addressed public meetings at many places, thus giving thousands the unique and unforgettable pleasure of listening to His captivating voice and strength-giving *upadesh*.

Baba has equal love towards all; similarly, He does not make any distinction between a village and a city; in fact, He responds perhaps even more readily when *Bhaktas* from remote villages require Him. He is quite at home in a Raj Bhavan or in a *Parnashala*. He takes with Him when He goes out to the homes of His *Bhaktas* barely a few persons, for He does not like to increase the burden on their attention, as well as on their purses. He is quite well able to look after Himself and so can dispense with the impediment of an entourage. As a matter of fact, His kindness and consideration towards the persons who accompany Him when He travels, make these latter feel themselves more a burden on His attention than a help to make His journey and stay comfortable!

Baba has so far travelled quite a number of times through Tamil Nadu, visiting Coimbatore, Trichinopoly, Tanjore, Salem, and rest of the towns, like Tinnevely, etc. He has been to Hyderabad many times, and travelled through the towns and villages of Telangana. He has

been to Ellora and Ajanta, in order to show them to His devotees, for He has no need to go to places, in order to see them! He can describe any place anywhere to the minutest detail, without actually being there physically. As related already, He has journeyed to Delhi, Rishikesh, Kashmir, Mathura, and Brindavan. Baba has paid also a flying visit to Bombay city. He has travelled many times along the East Coast road from Madras to the Krishna and Godavari deltas, halting at Nellore, Ongole, Guntur, Nuzvid, Chebrole, Rajahmundry, Peddapuram, Samalkot, and Masulipatnam and meeting devotees and others at every place. He has even gone into more distant moffusil places, like Bhadrachalam and Aukiripalli. In Karnataka, Baba has been to Bellary, Hospet, Mercara, Mysore, and Mandya, and He has spent many weeks off and on, at Madras, Kodaikanal, Ootacamund, and Nandanavanam in Whitefield, near Bangalore.

Baba has a keen eye for beauty spots, when He rides along in His car and pulls up at quiet shady corners where nature is loveliest, or by the side of running brooks gurgling among the rocks, or heights from where the panorama of hill and dale spreads out before the tired eye. He prefers to stroll on the seashore, or between the trees of the forest, or along the borders of plantations.

He uses every opportunity to clarify the doubts in the minds of the *Bhaktas*, for faith and steadfastness can grow only on the soil of conviction. Thus, Baba's journeys become moving schools for those, who have the chance to be of the party. When a devotee told Baba, "I heard that Your Kerala tour was most pleasant and wonderful. I am sad that I was not destined to join," Baba replied, "Have the confidence and hope that when next such an opportunity arises, you may be able to join. Meanwhile, listen to the account given by those who joined, and be happy."

A word about that adjective, 'wonderful': The devotee was referring to a very dramatic, indeed astounding miracle that happened at Kanyakumari. In the evening, when the sky had turned into a carnival of pink and purple, and the clouds had decorated themselves with golden fringes, Baba proceeded to the sea shore and with His *Bhaktas* around Him, played with the waves of the seas that mingle there. Each succeeding wave seemed to be more eager than the previous one to touch His lotus feet, and to offer Him its own special homage. Suddenly, as if aware of the yearning of the seas, Baba stood facing the waters and said to those beside Him, "See! The ocean is welcoming Me with a garland."

At the very moment, one could discern a stately wave a few yards away, advancing

majestically towards the shore and soon, it swept Baba's feet and receded. Imagine the wonder and amazement of everyone when they found, round Baba's feet, a bewitching pearl garland, swaying and swinging with every surge of the waters around them! One hundred and eight translucent pearls, each a priceless gem, strung on a thread of gold! O, how charming Baba looked! The *avatar* of the Lord receiving the homage of *Varuna* again!

Reverting now to the discussions that form the main items of the day's programme for Baba when at Prasanthi Nilayam or anywhere, it would be best to go through a list of the questions asked on the great day, on which the sea paid its homage to Baba.

"Is all this creation just *Maya*?"

"No. Taking it as creation is the *Maya*; ignorance of its real nature is *Maya*."

"Are epics like the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, true?"

"True? They only give some part of the truth; for example, when you speak about Me to others, you are not able to describe Me fully, is it not?"

"Why should God come down as Man to re-install *Dharma*? Is not mere *sankalpa* enough?"

"Of course, it can be done by mere will; but, how are you to get all this bliss, if God does not come in human form? When there is a small local disturbance, a constable is enough to put it down; when the trouble is threatening to develop into sizeable proportions a Sub-Inspector is sent; when it grows into a riot, the Superintendent of Police himself has to quell it; but, when as now, all mankind is threatened with moral ruin, the Inspector General comes down, the Lord with His army of saintly men, and *sadhakas*."

"Where does an *avatar* take place?"

"At the place where spiritual *sadhana* can best be undertaken."

"How can we know that You are Shirdi Sai Baba?"

"It is difficult for you; when I went the other day, as an old man to save Venkataraman's child on the road near Bagepalli, he did not recognise Me. He thanked Me profusely and held out a rupee coin towards Me. He believed that I was a villager named 'Jodi Adipalli Somappa', when I gave that name! Rama and Krishna are *avatars* of the same Lord, but their characteristics are different; so too, how can you realise the identity between this *shareeram* and the Shirdi *shareeram*? Those, who worship Shirdi Sai, have not understood Him and you too have not understood Me. It is only those, who have understood both, that can pronounce

judgement, is it not?"

This was the trend of the conversation on the beach, after the pearl garland offering!

The next day, too, when the party reached Courtallam on the way to Surandai and sat outside the Travancore House for *Bhajan* in the evening, Baba invited those around Him to ask Him questions. These are the answers:

"I am behind every *sadhaka*; they turn back to see Me, but how can they? I am still at their back! Sometimes in a flash, I give them My *darshan* out of My own *Sankalpa*..."

"God is *Anaadi* (beginningless), but now, people have started quarrelling, because they say, 'God is *naadi, naadi*, ('mine' in Telugu)!..."

"In *jivaloka*, there is both good and bad; in *pranaloka*, there is only the good; in *atmaloka*, both are equal; in *Paramatmaloka*, there is neither good nor bad..."

"There is no *nastika* or *dushta*; all will realise God sooner or later..."

"I shall pardon a hundred faults of yours. First, examine whether you have followed My advice and then, judge whether My words have come true..."

"There are tests, held every week and every month and there are quarterly and half-yearly examinations, in school. But, it is only after the final examinations are held and the papers are valued that the results are announced and you are declared, 'passed' or 'failed'. Do well in each test and earn the grace of the Examiner..."

"You can either destroy or develop *karma*; the *sadhana* you do can either burn it, or breed it. Indians have to learn much from Westerners. People of this country instil fear even in the minds of young children. 'You will fall; you will hurt yourself,' they are told. Children are not trained to climb trees or swim or to do a hundred other useful actions. They are warned about ghosts, thieves, and they grow up in mortal dread. Children must learn self-reliance, courage, and enthusiasm..."

"There are three stages of *sadhana* - when the *sadhaka* is a *sahajamanava*, when he becomes *sadhanamanava*, and when he attains the stage of *sarveshwaramanava*. First, there are three entities *Loka, Jiva, and Ishwara*. Then, they reduce themselves into two, *Jiva and Ishwara*. Finally, only *Ishwara remains* as all three..."

"All this Creation has been made possible with only these two -- *Jadam and Chaitanya, Prakriti and Purusha*. Vidwan Chowdiah, the violinist plays 400 ragas, not with a violin of

400 strings, but with a violin having 4 strings, is it not? Mud and water make a pot; Shiva and Shakti make this *Jagat*..."

"Here all are Brahmas; one Brahma asks, ten Brahmas listen; one Brahma answers and all Brahmas are satisfied..."

"When the rays of the sun are caught and concentrated on a point by a piece of glass, it produces fire; when the rays of the Lord's Grace are thus concentrated, it will light up *buddhi*, burn, and destroy the mind..."

"The Lord has ordained sorrow, for without sorrow, man will not cling to God; it is something like the dietary and other restrictions, which the Doctor prescribes in order to supplement the effect of his drug..."

"*Shraddha* will come only if you develop hunger for God; a man who does not feel hunger will not relish a feast..."

"For *Dhyanam* and *Japam*, there are certain steps and stages, which have to be followed; random pursuit of spiritual ideals is no good..."

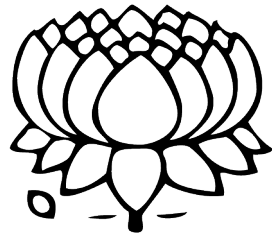
"If you ask Me which is more useful, *Japam* or *Dhyanam*, I will say, that which induces more *shraddha* in you. In *Japam*, the lips and the tongue should not move: *Japam* has to be mental."

"Radha is *Dhara*, the Earth, *Prakriti*, the counter-part of Purusha. RADHA is *bhakti*, the ADHAR; it must flow like a DHARA or unbroken stream..."

"If you adhere to the path of *Sathya*, failure will not appear a failure; misery will not appear miserable..."

These are some of the precious utterances of Baba, which make a *yatra* with Him a veritable *gnyanayatra*, for everyone.

Wherever Baba stays, He vouchsafes personal interviews as at Prasanthi Nilayam and confers the boon of consolation and courage and faith to all, who seek them. He also encourages the *Bhaktas* to arrange for *Bhajan* and the singing in chorus of the name of the Lord. Very often, He trains them in the singing of songs. Thus, Baba moves from place to place, making all hearts bloom in joy, showering His blessings on all who are afflicted and earnest, proving by miracles every moment that He has assumed the Human Form for you and me.





13.

"I Am Here"

.....He had 'gone' out of the body, bringing the consoling message, "I am Here," to some bhakta, in extreme distress!... "This is My Duty! Wherever I am, whatever I may be doing, when the bhaktas call, I have to go and give them succour."

ON THE eighth day of September 1958, in the evening, Baba was addressing a vast gathering of the people of Nuzvid and the surrounding villages in the spacious compound of the Elamarru Palace. He began by saying that men have missed the road and are traversing the devious by-lanes that take them away from the goal. But, man alone has the capacity to recognise the right road and retrace his steps and constantly correct himself. He must use this capacity of introspection and realise that it is only in the contemplation of the *Bhagavattatwa* that there is *Shanti* and *santosha*. He mentioned that sorrow and unrest can all be traced to want of mental courage.

And, the sentence was cut short, because He fell back into a corner of the chair in which He was sitting; He became stiff and motionless; He had 'gone' out of the body, bringing the consoling message, 'I am here,' to some *bhakta* in extreme distress! The time was 7.25! There was an eerie stillness in the air. The audience forgot even to breathe. The ticking of the time-piece on the table could be heard, in the silence that overcame everyone. At 7.30, He came back and, resuming the address, said, "This is My Duty! Wherever I am, whatever I may be doing, when the *Bhaktas* call, I have to go and give them succour," and then He continued for over an hour on the *GuruShishya* relationship, the body as the temple of the Lord, and the disciplines necessary to sublimate the passions of man!

On the 24th November 1958, there was *Uyyalotsavam* at Puttaparthi, as part of the Birthday celebrations of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. The swing at the eastern end of the Hall was

beautifully decorated with flowers and Baba seated Himself on it, at the earnest entreaty of His devotees. Prayer songs were sung; there was also music and some devotees addressed the assembly on religious subjects. Suddenly, Baba heard a "call", fell back on the pillows, and became 'unconscious' of the happenings at Puttaparthi. He had become aware of someone at Hyderabad city, as He said later, a devotee's father, a dropsy patient, suddenly afflicted with a heart attack, who was being lifted on to an ambulance. He gave him His *darshan* and *vibhuti* and came back to the Swing in the Hall. It was a matter of a bare two and half minutes. But, as He said at Nuzvid, 'He had to go', 'His Duty', as He called it, 'beckoned to Him'. Oh! How can one describe the infinite mercy of the Lord! Or, His Infinite Powers!

This Mercy has, during these years, been evinced in many forms, but the most dramatic is this 'extracorporeal journey', which He undertakes. Even as early as 1940, that is, when He was barely fourteen years old, He used to arouse the consternation of everyone by going 'out' without notice. On the very first occasion, it was mistaken to be the sting of a scorpion and consequent unconsciousness.

It is seldom that He discloses the place to which He had gone and mentions the person who received His Grace, but the cases where He has mentioned these details are themselves so many, that one can say confidently that these journeys have taken Him to the Assam Frontier, the Kashmir Front, the Swiss Valley, the Nallamalai Forest, the seashore of Bombay, besides a large number of other places in India and outside. Sometimes, the body of Baba can be seen making gestures and movements like dragging, pulling, lifting, bandaging, or extracting and later, He would explain them as gestures of His actual saving someone from being drowned, or burnt, or run over, or crushed, or jammed. He said once that He had been to Bolaram (when He was talking to a group of devotees at Muthukur, on the terrace of a house), because a jeep had overturned and a devotee was caught underneath. Baba ran up to him, with the message, "Why fear, when I am here," extricated him from under the vehicle, and as He said after He came back, remained by his side, until "a passenger bus came along and took the injured person to the hospital."

During the Razakar troubles and dacoities in Hyderabad, when the life of a *bhakta* was in imminent peril, Baba 'went' to his rescue; He actually beat some persons around Him on the terrace of the Nilayam, which He explained later was the treatment He administered to the dacoits with hundred-fold effect at Hyderabad; who, the Hyderabad *bhakta* said, ran helter-skelter in sudden panic!

A villager had quarrelled with his brother about a sharing of produce and he came over to Puttaparthi, hoping to remain there itself on the charity of the pilgrims. Baba chastised him for being a burden on others, when with a little more patience and love, he could be happy with his brother in his own village. He assured him that His grace will be on him, wherever he was and sent him away to his own place. He took this so sadly to heart, as if Baba had driven him out; and so, he laid himself across the rails on a dark night and hoped that the wheels of an advancing train would end his misery.

But, Baba's Grace is all-pervading. He hurried to him on the railway line and pushed him aside, just in time. Persons around Him at Puttaparthi could see Him pushing something heavy, for His gestures were of that type! And, Baba came to, with an exclamation against the villager, who had so foolishly interpreted His advice! The villager Bhimaiah, by name, felt, as he later explained to me, that Baba held his hand and dragged him down the slope of the bund, on which he lay. Tearful with repentance and sorrow, he returned immediately to Puttaparthi, before joining his brother and his village! Bhimaiah must have felt that the description of Dattatreya in the famous stotra - "*Dattatreya tatkshanaath sarvagami, Tyagi bhogi divya yogi dayaluh*" - was absolutely correct, so far as this Sathya Sai *avatar* of Dattatreya was concerned. Even now, when devotees ask Bhimaiah why he put Baba to the bother of a trans-corporeal journey by his foolhardiness, he hangs his head down in shame and pleads that we should not pursue a matter that is painful to him.

While on this point of the Dattatreya aspect of Baba, I am tempted to quote here the experience of a friend, Professor of Philosophy. He had contacts with a Dattatreya *upasaka*, disciple of Gondhawali Brahma Chaitanya Maharaj, and he was studying various texts under the old man. Once, the *upasaka* told him about Sri Sathya Sai Baba as the incarnation of Dattatreya and asked him to go to Puttaparthi and receive His blessings. "I cannot go because I am too old to undertake the journey. But, you should go and have His *darshan*," he insisted. He came to Puttaparthi and when he was called in by Baba for the interview, the very first words with which Baba began the conversation were, "Come on! Have your *Namaskaram*. This is the Dattatreya *peetham* for you!" Dattatreya is extolled in the *Puranas* as "He who goes to every place in the same instant," in answer to calls, prayers, supplications from all quarters for intercession and solace and strength and relief!

Baba 'leaves' the body and goes to the devotee's side, during the last moments of his earthly career, and gives him *darshan*. Baba, one evening, 'left' to give *darshan* to a person, whose name He announced after He came back into the body. When I told Him, "So, this event

happened at Muddanur," He contradicted me and said, "No, no, the death took place on account of heart failure; the person was being taken to some other place, the death was on the road." And, later, the letter from the bereaved husband revealed that, for want of an oxygen apparatus at the local hospital, the patient had to be taken in a taxi to a town about 20 miles away and she passed away in the taxi, with the words, "Sairam, Sairam," on her lips.

At Horsley Hills, while moving in the Dining Hall one night, He seemed on the verge of a 'Journey', but murmured to Himself, "There is still a little time," and walked forward to His table. And, midway during dinner, He left to vouchsafe *darshan* to the dying man! Some months ago, while He was on one of these journeys of mercy, He repeated, "Water, water," a number of times and so, those around Him at Puttaparthi brought a glass of water and held it to His lips. But, He did not notice it at all. When He came back and looked around, He saw the glass full of water and inquired who had brought it and kept it there, and why. When told that He Himself had asked for it, He smiled and said, "If I ask for water to be given to a dying man somewhere, water is brought here also."

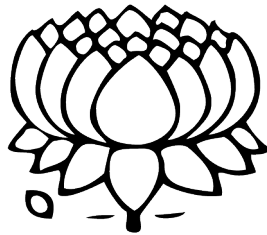
Strange are the ways of God. That is why perhaps, Baba says very often, "Do not waste your time and energy trying to find explanations for My deeds. Understand yourselves and your own nature, first. That will give the clue even to Me."

Baba need not 'transcend' the physical frame, in order to appear elsewhere or apply relief. Sometimes, He just sits tight or looks straight in a type of stare, comes to in a few seconds; meanwhile, the journey and the communication of Grace are over! One day, while in the midst of a story to illustrate a point, a story of one of the ministers of Manu *Chakaravarti*, Baba flicked away for about 10 seconds and coming back, resumed the story! Only a few of more attentive among the listeners noticed anything out of the ordinary. Just then, someone entered His room and Baba asked him, "Did you get the telegram?" It seemed he had got one! "What does it say? Prasad has high fever, is it?" asked Baba. He had not opened it yet. So, it was passed on to Baba and when He tore it open, it was found that 'Prasad' had fever and that the temperature was as high as 104 degrees. But, Baba said, "Don't worry at all; I had been there just now; the boy is out of danger." Prasad, we were told, was at the house of the man who had come in, 250 miles away!

Generally, we do not get even this slight intimation of Baba's mysterious mission of grace. He saves, guards, directs, and dictates, even while talking or singing or moving about. I remember one outstanding experience of the unique type; Baba was at Prasanthi Nilayam, in

His room. There were about a dozen of us there, busily engaged in scissoring the pairs of *dhoties* into singles and folding the singles, preliminary to their being distributed to the poor during Navaratri. Suddenly, Baba asked, "Parthasarati! You think I am here now with you, with this pair of scissors cutting this cloth, is it? Do you know, I had been to Madras just now, to see your Kusa? The little fellow developed Diphtheria and your brother had taken him to the Hospital. Don't worry My dear man; I have given him *darshan*, he will be all right soon." We were all astonished at the announcement and Parthasarati fell at Baba's feet, for he was overwhelmed by this evidence of Baba's Power and Grace.

With His characteristic sense of humour, Baba speaks of His *Mahimas* as 'My visiting card!' That is to say, He is announcing to us by these means that He is Lord Himself, the same Lord who came instantaneously to the rescue of many a *bhakta*, the same Lord who presented Himself before those who called out for Him. In His Grace, He condescends to present His 'visiting card', symbolic credentials of His divinity, to even fleeting visitors who peep in out of mere curiosity. It lies with us to snatch the chance and, seeking from Him the key to self-realisation, make the chance worthwhile.





14.

The Sarati

It is significant that Baba named the monthly magazine that was inaugurated at Prasanthi Nilayam in 1958 as 'Sanathana Sarati', for like Sri Krishna, He too has come down in order to rid us of grief and delusion, of pride and ignorance, and re-establish Dharma in the world. The word 'Sarati' is an assurance from Baba that He will guide us aright, if only we take the initial step of inviting Him to take up the reins of our lives.

LORD Krishna agreed in His mercy to be the charioteer, the *sarati* of Arjuna, for the duration of the Kurukshetra battle; Narayana became the *sarati* of Nara; God guided the actions of Man.

Arjuna was caught in the coils of *moha*, just when duty called him to action. "My limbs droop down; my tongue dries up. The bow slips from my hold; I am unable to stand; my brain is in a swirl," He wept. Sri Krishna rebuked him for being overcome by an unworthy weakness, an unbecoming unmanliness. Arjuna's discrimination was overpowered by grief and delusion, by pride and ignorance, by a sense of I and mine. Then, Krishna who is the *antaryamin*, removed the veil of *moha* and taught him the secret of successful living, the *yoga* of *Sharanagati*, of *Anashakti*.

It is significant that Baba named the monthly magazine that was inaugurated at the Prasanthi Nilayam in 1958 as 'Sanathana Sarati', for like Sri Krishna, He too has come down in order to rid us of grief and delusion, of pride and ignorance, and re-establish *Dharma* in the world. The word '*Sarati*' is an assurance from Baba that He will guide us aright, if only we take the initial step of inviting Him to take up the reins of our lives. The word '*Sanathana*' is a reminder that this has been the role of Baba since the dawn of Creation itself.

Baba has written five series of articles under the titles Prema Vahini, Dhyana Vahini,

Prasanthi Vahini, Gnyana Vahini, and Sandeha Nivarini. His is simple, direct, spoken Telugu and so, when one reads the articles, one can picture Baba Himself talking in His intimate and inspiring way to the reader. With many questions between the statements, He prods the reader into thinking for himself on the problems He tackles; with occasional endearments like, "*Nayina*," "*Baboo*," "*Abbayi*," "*Bangaroo*," He draws Himself closer to us, in order to instruct us in the art of Godward pilgrimage.

Baba has written, "How dejected will the ryot be, if the seeds he has sown do not sprout and grow and yield a harvest! So too, if the seeds, the 'Words of Truth' that I sow, do not sprout in your hearts and grow into fine saplings and trees yielding fruit, I am also not happy. That harvest of *ananda* is My sustenance, My *ahara* (food). This is the only *seva* you need do to Me. There is nothing higher than this. Without casting away these good words and truth written for your sake, if you put them into practice and experience joy therefrom, that joy is the food on which I sustain Myself. If you thus act according to My words, and put them into daily practice, I will gladly tell you more and more, for that is the reason why I have come."

Baba has often said that He demonstrates His Divinity through *Mahimas* and *Leelas* only to instil the faith necessary for men to listen to Him and follow His suggestions for their own spiritual realisation. He declares that it is everyone's right to know this Message from Him and so, anyone can approach Him without fear or hesitation. His anxiety to remove all doubts lurking in the minds of the people who seek guidance from Him, His readiness to grant them as many interviews as they desire to discuss specific personal problems of *sadhana* are evidence of His Grace and Mercy.

A perusal of the pages of the Sanathana Sarati will reveal the power, the wisdom, and the grace of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba to every reader. He warns us against neglecting the pennies in the search for the pounds.

"Be vigilant about the small things; the hundred little things that you indulge in every moment harden into habits and warp character and personality. They shape the intelligence, the outlook, and the ideals and aspirations of the individual. Challenge your evil propensities even before they enslave you. If you make a sincere effort, you will certainly succeed."

"If your faults are pointed out to you by anyone, do not argue and attempt to prove that he is mistaken, and do not develop a grudge against him for that. Reason out within yourself, examine your own conduct coolly, and thankfully proceed to correct yourself."

"When someone causes you mental pain, do not give room for anger; anger is enemy number

one, of *viveka* and *vichakshana*; do *namasmarana* for a while, sitting in a lonely place, or sing some *bhajan* songs in a raised voice, or, if you cannot do both, spread your bed and go to sleep."

"Your own experience is the best guarantee of truth for you. Do not be led by what others speak of their experiences, nothing can be as genuine as your own."

"Develop courage, confidence, hope, and enthusiasm. These will stand you in good stead in the secular as well as spiritual fields."

"Man is everywhere immersed in worry and trouble; is it right to increase the agony? Already the sea is rough; how can you have the mind to blow a typhoon over it? Learn rather to spread a smile from face to face. Why make the world sadder, by your lamentation and the tales of your own woe?"

"Adopt the course of *Japam* and *Dhyanam* to assuage your own grief; overcome your own sorrow and be an example to the rest."

These are some of the words of counsel that He has imparted to us, in His kindness.

The elimination of harmful tendencies, impulses, and habits and the building up of character are, however, only preliminary to the practice of *sadhana*. So, Baba has devoted a considerable part of His contributions to *Dhyanam*, *Japam*, *Namasmaranam*, and Prayer. For about thirteen months, His articles dwelt on *Dhyanam* and its *modus operandi*, what He calls, 'the planned routine'.

"Perform *Dhyanam* until your mind comes firmly under your control. When the mind starts running about, be careful; do not follow it into vagaries, seeking to discover it and punish it. Be still, do not pursue it. Then, it will return by itself when it is tired and exhausted, because it is neglected by you, The mind is like a little child; when the mother walks behind it and calls out its name and is showing an interest in its movements, the child gets the confidence to wander about a little further on; but, if the mother stands still and retraces her steps away from it, the child is seized with fright at this sign of neglect and it runs back to her arms. So, do not care for the vagaries of the mind; carry on the *smarana* and *dhyana* of the *Nama* and *Rupa* you like best, in the manner you feel most conducive. You will realise your heart's desire..."

Words of solace and encouragement like these abound in the articles written by this Dakshinamurti of our age. For, as He says, "In former ages, one particular group of persons

or one individual, who had the monopoly of the means of exploitation and enslavement and the power needed for them, was responsible for the decline of *Dharma*; and hence, *Dharma* could be re-installed by the previous *avatars*, by the destruction of that group or individual. But, now the *rakshasa* nature is a universal feature and hence, this *avatar* has to bring about a revolution in human character and attitude and behaviour, and people have to be taught certain disciplines."

"People have to be put on the road to unity, harmony, and peace. The realisation that everything in the universe is the manifestation of the Lord, who is the very basis, the entire content, the warp and the woof, the yarn and the cloth of all, this is the right of every person, whatever be the race or creed or class or caste. You of this generation are indeed lucky that you have the fortune of contact with the *avatar* of the Lord, and the chance to receive the guidance He has come to give."

Baba writes strongly against Teachers or *Gurus*, who compromise the ideal for the sake of name and fame; for, one purpose of His advent is to lead them back into rectitude. He condemns partisanship and faction in the sacred name of God. In fact, He will not admit that God can ever be angry or jealous. "Do not believe descriptions of the Lord in which He is pictured as greedy, or business-like, or angry, or jealous, or vengeful. He is above all pettiness and bargaining. He is *Prema*, *Karuna*, and *Shanti*. When a pot of nectar is hit by a stone, it leaks; but, does the nectar turn bitter? No, it can never change its sweetness." Baba's is the Message of Harmony. "When the all-pervasive, all-inclusive, pure Existence is described, the matter and method depend on the outlook of the speaker and the understanding of the listener. When it is described through attributes, it gets various names and forms; when the *sadhaka* realised that it is beyond all attributes that the mind can conceive, then it is referred to as Brahman. Therefore, all quarrel between sects is mere secular rivalry, indulged in for the vulgar pleasure it gives to inferior minds," says Baba.

Baba has also pointed out that *sanyasis* deserve respect only if they have given up all desires, even the desire to develop their *ashrams*. The bondage to the *ashramam* itself becomes for them a burden, a *shramam*; instead of giving up all ties, such *gurus* have yoked themselves more tightly to the plough of *samsar*, they have degraded themselves into beasts of burden. Baba says that people have lost faith in *Sanathana Dharma* and in the institution of *sanyas* itself on account of the activities of such men, who continuously exert pressure on society in order to earn name and fame. "*Gurus* such as these," Baba says, "train many disciples and so, they must make a special effort to help the trainees to acquire the right outlook and get fully

immersed in the contemplation of the Lord."

Baba has also pointed out the mistake of giving the *Guru* a status higher than what is due to him. "Respect the *guru* as the person who shows you the path, who looks after your progress, and who is interested in your welfare, that is all. Do not take him to be all-inclusive and all-powerful. The Lord alone can be treated and felt as the Universal."

Baba always emphasises moderation. He does not advocate asceticism for all. He speaks of the body as a God-given implement. "Understand it well; make it obey your will; never bow down to it and follow its whimsical demands; train it carefully to subserve your welfare."

"Be on the lookout for the first signs of damage or decay. Keep it in good trim, by disciplined activities, moderate food, moderate sleep, an attitude of *prema* towards all, an outlook to fortitude in the face of pain and anxiety, and in the face of success and good fortune. These are more important than drugs, to cure the illness of the body. Even a capacity to discriminate, if applied to one's physical condition, will help you to overcome disease." Baba writes often against the starving of the body by the over-enthusiastic *sadhaka* and the foolish epicures, who cater to the tongue that demands *rajasic* and *tamasic* food.

Far from condemning the householder's life, Baba calls that life the '*Guru*', for it is only through the toils and turmoil of the family that people get the urge towards the higher life of the spirit. He says that but for these troubles, many would not have come to Him at all; but, having come and known Him, they cling to the Godhead, whether their troubles are set right or not. They gradually come to feel that such troubles should not be given the importance they ascribed to them; they face them with greater courage and confidence and even understanding. He has written that the sugarcane should welcome the cutting, the hacking, and the crushing, the boiling and the straining to which it is subjected, because without these ordeals, the cane will dry up and it will make no tongue sweet. "So too, man must welcome trouble, for that alone brings out the sweetness of the spirit within. You desire an ornament and you go to a goldsmith and give him the requisite quantity of gold. But, do you spend sleepless nights pining for the heating and the beating, the tugging and the pulling, the cutting and the carving to which the goldsmith subjects your gold? Why then do you worry when the Lord, in order to make a lovely jewel out of you, heats and melts, cuts and carves, and removes dross in the crucible of suffering?"

Baba is the Great Healer, the Restorer of Drooping Spirits, the unique Reviver. He insists on Truth, because Falsehood has cowardice as its root and you hide the facts from a person, only

when you are afraid of him or you hate him. Truth is based on strength. It is, according to Baba, against the essential nature of man to plead weakness or want of strength. He does not permit anyone to say, "I am sin, born of sin, a sinful soul." When any devotee out of contrition piles abuse on himself, Baba immediately pulls him up. "When I have come for your sake, you should not feel so," He says.

Baba equates *Balam* with *Punyam*, and *Dourbalyam* with *Papam*; that is to say, "Weakness is sin; Strength is holy." Physical, mental and spiritual strength, all three are essential, but the biggest source of all three is Faith in oneself, in the *Paramatma* within. "Remember that and draw strength therefrom. My mission is to give you confidence in yourself, to give you the '*Balam*' that comes out of that." Despondency is, as Baba says, the prime cause of decline and so, everyone should cultivate the quality of joyfulness. For, the contented life is one long festival. "Envy eats into the vitals, spreads like poison all over the body politic. Dedicate all, both joy and sorrow, to the Lord; that is the secret of gaining contentment, the most valuable of all treasures."

Baba instils the spirit of *seva* among His devotees and during *Dasara*, a day is generally devoted to social service, its practical applications, and the attitude of worship in which one has to render it. He writes and speaks of *Paropakaram* as ultimately '*Upakaram* for oneself, and *Parahimsa* as ultimately '*Himsa* against oneself'. "When *Madhava* Himself comes down in human form, so that He may be of service to *manava*, how happy will He be if *manava* engages himself in that *seva*?" He asks. "Devote your time for the service of the world, irrespective of the results thereof." But, Baba is very particular about the vision, which must inspire the *sadhaka* who takes up the path of *seva*. "Though the service of humanity is holy, unless it is merged in the higher ideal of *Madhavaseva*, realising the Lord immanent in everyone, adoring the Lord in the form of this person and that, there is no profit at all. One should have full faith in the Divinity of Man and service should be offered in the uninterrupted contemplation of the Lord." "Use the power and knowledge and attainments the Lord has endowed you with for the greater glory of the Lord, with sincerity and without any malingering. That is the *seva* of the Lord, whatever be the field of activity or the region of duty, where you are called upon to render that *Seva*."

Very often, Baba devotes an entire discourse for the elucidation of the need for *Vichara*, or Inquiry as against blind, unreasoning Faith. "You can ask Me any question without hesitation. I am always ready to answer; only I want people who enquire earnestly, with a desire to know. Without analysis and reasoning, the real worth of things cannot be grasped and

renunciation will not be possible at all. Sometimes, you will have to inquire even into the process of your inquiry, for you might all the time be deceiving yourselves by arguing that your actions are all moral and pure, when an unprejudiced mind might condemn them outright." Like Sri Krishna, He also tells people, "Think of all the pros and cons; think also of your own experience; and then, come to your own judgement; do not be led away by what others might say, by what even I might say!" "At the gates of *moksha* or *sakshatkara*, there are three sentinels," says Baba, "who will admit you inside, only if you satisfy them of the validity of your credentials. They are *santosh*, *shanti*, and *vichara*. Even if one of the guards is satisfied, the others will not be very strict. So, cultivate *santosh*, or *shanti*, or *vichara*. Basically, they are all inter-related. *Vichara* brought into the realm of *anubhava* results in *shanti*, that is to say, undisturbed *santosh*, or *ananda*." "Ask Me about some *sadhana* that you are eager to engage yourself in or some *sandeha* that you can put into immediate action. Seek something worth your while," that is what Baba demands of us.

There is a sense of urgency in the commands that emanate from Baba, for, as He says, the time to start on the path of *sadhana* is 'now'.

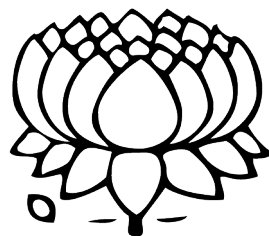
"Start today the *sadhana* that will have to be done tomorrow. Just as a child has to start the alphabet even at a tender age, so that it may be proficient in arts and science when it has to enter life at a later age, so too the spiritual child must start on the alphabet immediately and keep on with the studies; no one can cope with the alphabet in old age, or on the death-bed. Every second the span of life is being shortened; the moment that has gone is no longer yours, the moment that is coming may not be yours at all; so put all your efforts now, this very moment, to earn eternal joy."

Among the means to earn this eternal joy, Baba places *namasmarana* first, though He speaks and writes also of the three traditional *yogas* and the three traditional philosophical systems. Baba has come to end all factions and He emphasises the harmony of these schools and these systems. "I won't say that *Karma*, *Gnyana*, and *Bhakti* are separate, nor classify them as first, second, or third in that order, nor accept even a mixture of all three. *Karma* is *Bhakti*; *Bhakti* is *Gnyana*. A block of *halwa* has sweetness, shape, and weight, all three. So too, each individual deed of the God-ward man must have the sweetness of *Bhakti*, the shape of *Karma*, and the weight of *Gnyana*. *Gnyana* is the product of *Bhakti* and *Bhakti* is promoted by karma, the noblest *Karma* being *Namasmarana*, *Japam*, and *Dhyanam*. Intense and unconditional *Bhakti* takes one on from *Salokyamukti*, to *Samipyamukti* and from there on to *Sarupyamukti*. This is the final result of *Bhakti Shastra*. But, *Adwaita Siddhanta* will not

admit this to be the highest state. Simply because one has *Sarupya*, the same *Rupa* as the Lord, we cannot take it that he has the powers of *Srishti*, *Sthiti*, and *Laya* that the Lord has. It is only when all trace of difference disappears that unity is achieved; this is when *Sayujya* takes place. That can happen only by Divine Grace; it cannot be claimed as the reward of effort."

"The Lord can also vouchsafe *Brahmagnyana* to the *bhakta*. For, *Purushottama* and *Prakriti* are not two separate entities. He can remove the veil, which He Himself has cast." "A thing and its nature are the same, not two distinct things. Is it possible to see the nature apart from the thing, sweetness apart from sugar, light apart from the sun? So also, Bhagawan has two characteristics; when we speak of them as two, they are known as *Purusha* and *Prakriti*, but they are really one. *Prakriti* in the Bhagawan is unmanifested, inseparable, knowable only by experience, like sweetness in sugar. By mere willing, this *Prakriti* envelopes Bhagawan and the Cosmos is the result. That one existence is the basis or foundation for both the universal and the particular, the totality as well as the apparent parts. This manifested total cosmos or *Purna* arose out of the unmanifested indivisible Reality or *Purna*, but yet there is no diminution of the *Purna*."

Baba unravels the most tangled philosophical problems in easily understandable ways, and the listener or reader sees the solution in a flash of illumination, spread by a simile, or metaphor, or parable, or epigram summarising the elaboration of an hour. In short, His advent is for your sake and mine, for forging us all into disciplined *sadhakas*, for, as He says, "The world can achieve prosperity and peace only through such persons, whose hearts are pure and whose minds are free of prejudice and passion, jealousy and greed, anger and envy." May it be our lot to be blessed by His grace, so that we too may join the ranks of such disciplined souls.





15.

The Mission Begun

Baba spoke on three successive days about Himself and His Mission ... He declared that He had come again to proclaim the same doctrine of Karmasanyasa and Sharanagati. "Just as the clouds hide the glory of the Sun, the clouds of doubt and delusion hide My Glory from your understanding," He said.

THE thousands, who attended the *Dasara* celebrations of 1960, must be even now remembering the thrilling declarations that Baba made in His discourses, about Himself and His Mission. On the very first day, during the Hospital Day celebrations, Baba said that it is waste of time and energy to force incomprehensively abstruse *vedantic* doctrines down the throats of simple, unlearned folk; it is foolish to recommend to them exhausting fasts and vigils. Teachers and *gurus* must urge them slowly forward, from where they are, encouraging them to take one step at a time, to give up one evil habit after another, and to lengthen the period of *japam* and meditation.

Baba spoke on three successive days about Himself and His Mission, for the recitation and explanation of the Telugu poem, *Sri Sathya Sai Gita* by Vidwan Doopati Tirumalacharyulu on those days, provided Him with the necessary cue and background. He declared that He had come again to proclaim the same doctrine of *Karmasanyasa* and *Sharanagati*. "Just as the clouds hide the glory of the Sun, the clouds of doubt and delusion hide My glory from your understanding," He said. He wanted that like Arjuna, all men should now give up the *Moha* born out of *Agnyana* and get released from the shackles of 'I' and 'Mine'. "*Prema* is the seed, *bhakti* the sprout, Faith the manure, *Sathsanga* the rain, Surrender the flower, and merging with the Lord the Fruit," He declared.

"You are all more fortunate," He said, "than men of previous generations, for you have Me as

your guide and guardian, watching over you and warning you when your steps go wrong. Make the best use of the rare chance; do not leap about like frogs, ignoring the lotus that blooms by their side, but be like the bees that swarm from far and near to drink the nectar in plenty." Words such as these, resonant with the authority of the Lord, who called upon all to take refuge in Him, came plentifully from Baba in every discourse. "Faith is its own reward; it will reveal Truth. If you consider that Krishna was a cowherd, you reduce not only Krishna, but yourselves too to the level of the cowherd boy. Take Him to be the Lord residing in the shrine of your heart and He acts as your charioteer." "Do not deny or doubt, or hesitate to acknowledge the Lord, when He has made Himself available so easily to your prayers," He said.

"You cannot grasp the full significance of the *Avatar* or stand the full splendour without a period of preparedness and hence, I reveal to you only small instalments of the glory, like the creation of *Vibhuti*, etc.," He said one day. "No, it is not in My nature to scatter attractions to draw people towards Me; I shower joy, without any purpose; it is on account of this, that I revel in *mahimas*."

Lifting the screen that hides His Divinity from us, He declared another day, "Some ignorant people commenting on Me say that I have a double personality, *Daivatwam* (Divinity) most of the time, but *Manushyatwam* (humanity) the rest of the time. But, have faith in this, I am ever and always of the '*twam*', of the '*ity*' only. God does not change, or get transformed. I am telling you this, because there is a superior spiritual attachment between us, not the mere casual connection of visitor and visited."

Another day, He spoke in a more minatory tone. "I must warn you all against false teachers and deceitful *gurus*. There are many such, who go about performing imitation *samadhis*, pretending that they have fallen into divine ecstasy and promising to communicate that ecstasy to those around them. They lecture during the *samadhi* and dance and sing, in what they call *raasakreeda*. They deserve only severe castigation for all their pains. Keep away from these," He said. "I will soon take up the task of exposing these impostors and granting them the punishment they deserve," He announced.

On Guru Pournami day, 1961, at Mysore city, Baba called upon the devotees and followers to keep a strict watch over this class of *gurus* and warn them against the slightest tinge of greed, egoism, pride, envy, and hypocrisy. "The time has come to weed out the *gurus* who are setting bad examples to the *shishyas*, the *sanyasis* who compete in the accumulation of

comforts and the acquisition of fame," He said. "I shall soon enter upon this Task; it is one of the purposes, for which I have come," He announced. "*Sanyasis*, who have given up all ties with the world and decided to burn their boats, should not celebrate their birthdays; they should not pester the rich with their importunity for donations and funds; they should not cater to the egoism of their followers by granting them pompous titles, praising their spiritual attainments; once you start diluting the strict discipline prescribed for monks, you cannot arrest the inevitable fall. *Dharmasthapana* requires that the *Dharma* of the *sanyasi* should first be corrected, because it is he, who commands the respect of all and it is he, who holds forth the spiritual ideal. If he begins to compromise and slide down the path, then religion will become the laughing stock of all."

The same *Sankalpa* was ringing in the discourses that Baba gave during the Birthday Celebrations, in November. Addressing the vast gathering of the villagers of Puttaparthi, He said, "For more than twenty years now, you have been seeing only the light, not benefiting by the warmth, for you did not care to come near. But, I knew that this day would come and that you would all one day give up doubt and delusion, and recognise the way to peace and happiness. Believe Me, this Puttaparthi is soon to become a Tirupati. Thousands of *yogis*, *sadhus*, and aspirants will be coming here in future years and derive solace and salvation. The re-establishment of *Sanathana Dharma* will emanate from here."

On Mahashivaratri day, He emphasised the Universal Aspect of His Message and declared that it was for all humanity that He had come. "There is no one in this World, who does not belong to Me; all are Mine; they may not call out My name or any name; but, still they are Mine."

The meaning and significance of these profound utterances became evident only at Coimbatore, where Baba installed the marble image of the Previous *Shariram*, the former *Avatar* Shirdi Sai Baba, at the famous *Naga Sai Mandir*. Truly, it was a historic occasion, that function on the 26th day of February, 1961. The *Naga Sai Mandir* is so called, because Shirdi Sai Baba had given *darshan* to countless devotees there as a *naga* or cobra, which rose up from the heap of flowers, listened to the *Bhajan* for hours together, and even posed for a photograph, before finally disappearing. This miracle took place seventeen years ago and the *mandir* has since then served the spiritual needs of thousands from the city of Coimbatore and the surrounding areas. This was the first occasion, on which Baba was formally installing for daily worship an idol of His previous manifestation and so, devotees were eagerly expecting some important pronouncement from Baba that day.

Nor were they disappointed! Baba said, "It is really amusing, is it not, that I should install this idol of Myself in another manifestation. I am doing so for a very valid reason. This day deserves to be inscribed in letters of gold, for this function is the beginning of a new era, 'the Sathya Sai Era', when Saayi will become the *Hrudayasthayi*, the Inner Motive Force, of all. The only other instance of a similar kind, of an *Avatar* installing an idol of the Lord, is that of Rama installing the *Ishwaralinga* at Rameshwaram. That was done as a preliminary to the Destruction of Ravana and the *Rakshasas*, to the divine task of *Dushtanigraha*. Now, I am doing this as a preliminary to the other task of all *Avatars*, *Dharmasthapana*, the Establishment of *Dharma* in the world."

Epoch-making Declaration, indeed! Words ushering in the New Age of Love and Justice, of Peace and Unity! Clarion call for humanity to gather under the Sathya Sai banner!

No wonder the reception at Udumalpet, which Baba visited the next day after that momentous declaration, was magnificent; there too Baba called upon the people to partake in the great resurgence of *Dharma* that was imminent.

Baba has often said that the holiness of a place of pilgrimage is proportionate to the devotion, which the *bhaktas* bring with them and the sincerity of the prayers, which they pour forth before the shrine. But, when Baba Himself visits a temple or place of pilgrimage, the effect is more profound; it is like a rundown battery being charged from the very fountainhead of all holiness. Baba had declared that this is so, and that the purpose of His standing before certain shrines is to enhance their spiritual efficacy. It was therefore gladdening to hear that Baba planned a tour of Ayodhya and Benares after a short stay at Madras. On 23rd March, Baba addressed a mammoth gathering at the Railway Stadium, Perambur and the silent admiration, which the assembly evinced throughout the address made Dr. B. Ramakrishna Rao, the Governor of Uttar Pradesh, who was presiding declare, "I was all these days very sad that in spite of the marked progress in the economic and cultural fields after Independence, there was not much joy and contentment and peace and neighbourliness and love in the land, for want of the emphasis in people's daily lives on the moral tone and the spiritual discipline; but, today, I have regained hope. This vast gathering, the welcome you accorded to Baba, and the earnestness with which you have been listening to His words have told me that the moral progress of this nation is assured."

Dr. Ramakrishna Rao invited Baba to Lucknow and when He was there, he allowed the citizens of Lucknow to attend the *Bhajan* sessions at the Raj Bhavan, thus enabling many to

be blessed by Him and to get initiated by Him in the first steps towards the higher life. Some fortunate few were made aware of His Presence by some miraculous happenings, which brought more seekers to Him.

He also addressed a meeting at the Town Hall, under the auspices of the Andhra Association, the Tamil Sangha, the Kerala Association, and the Mysore Association, who felt that they should honour Him, presumably because Baba hailed from the South of India! But, as Baba said once, Dakshinamurti does not belong to Dakshinapatha! So, Baba advised those associations to give up compartmental loyalties and inaugurate, in place of various *sanghs*, one *satsangh*, an association of good people striving to become better, by systematic *Japam*, *Dhyanam*, and *Lokaseva*. Since the suggestion had the *Sankalpa* of Baba behind it, the *satsangh* was formed without delay and Baba Himself inaugurated the new chapter of harmony and unity and spiritual brotherhood in Lucknow.

From Lucknow, Baba proceeded to Ayodhya with a small group of devotees. He pointed out to them the various places associated with the *Ramayana* and the spots sanctified by Divine Events. He said that *bhakti* was still very deeply implanted in the hearts of the people in the area, for He could hear the unceasing *Ramanamajapam* emerging from their hearts. He visited the Rama temple and said that what is found in the *virat* is found undiminished and unalloyed in the limited *swarupa* also; only, the power has to be constantly nourished by the rituals prescribed, the sincerity of the prayers, the purity of the devotees that gather and of the priests and *archaks*, and the sanctity of the atmosphere. "People worship the Lord as existing in Ayodhya or Dwaraka and nowhere else; that is wrong; He is everywhere; limiting Him is to deny His glory. All this diminishes gradually the efficacy of the holy spot and it can be increased only by more and more sincerity among the devotees or by the Lord Himself, out of His grace."

Baba blessed the devotees on the bank of the Sarayu and later, took them to the temple of Hanuman, built in the territory that, according to legend, was given to him by Rama himself, given so that he might establish a kingdom resonant ever with the name of Rama. Baba distributed the *prasad* of the temple to the devotees, adding in the process, the *prasad*, as He said, of Sai Rama to that of Saketarama!

From Ayodhya, Baba reached Sarnath the same night by car and on the 21st day of April, Baba and His party visited the ancient temple of Viswanatha at Benaras, the temple immortalised in history and legend, in song and poetry, by epics and *puranas*, by bards and

saints, the great shrine of the Lord of the Universe. The *Lingam* in this temple has been bathed reverentially by millions of pilgrims for thousands of years, with the sacred waters of the Ganges; Benares itself is considered as holy land, every inch of it, and death there is supposed to lead to the end of all misery of birth and death.

To be with Baba inside the shrine was indeed a rare and elevating experience, for He is Balashiva Himself, as those who have had a glimpse of His Glory know. And, we all expected that Baba would do something, some miracle, to heighten the sanctity of the shrine, to offset the decline caused by egoism and doubt.

Baba watched the ceremonial pouring of Ganges water on the *Lingam* and the recitation of the traditional *mantras*. Then, as though impelled by a sudden decision, He moved forward and materialising the Kailasha *vibhuti* in His palm, He applied it in three broad lines to about three quarters of the rounded image, making it shine with a peculiar splendour. Another miracle was in store, for He 'created' some sandal paste, of an other-worldly perfume and consistency, and patting it into a round shape, He approached the *Lingam* again and applied it to the centre of the triple-lined *vibhuti*. The *archaks* and others stood aghast with wonder at all this, but we knew that Baba was performing a ritual with a significance profounder than that of any done hitherto. Then, by another wave of that Divine hand, Baba materialised a priceless jewel, which cast its captivating effulgence around the shrine. It was a gem-set *Pranava* symbol, rubies round the circumference, diamonds forming the three *vibhuti* lines, cornelian in the centre of the *vibhuti* to represent the sandal dot, emeralds artistically designed like *bilva* leaves forming a green border for the *Pranava*, and above all the *Pranava* itself, a blaze of diamond, on a curtain of gold. The devotees burst into song and the chorus of "*Om Shivaya*" echoed and re-echoed through the temple aisles. Baba placed the *Pranava* on the sandal paste He had already put on the face of the *Lingam*, and asked that *Arati* be performed. Those who observed this ceremony that morning, in the most historic of India's temples, can never forget it.

Baba then directed every member of His party to perform the *abhisheka* to Vishwanatha with Gangajala, to the chanting of sacred *mantras* like *Sri Rudram*. He also led them to the Annapoorna Temple and the Vishwanatha temple in the Benares University campus. The carvings and sculptures in the latter place were explained by Baba to the devotees, for He alone knew the unwritten details of the *Vedic* and *Puranic* incidents depicted therein.

On 3rd April, Baba was in Allahabad, blessing the holy Triveni Sangam by His presence and

showering with His own hand the sacred waters of the confluence on the pilgrims. He also visited the Saraswati Koopa, the Hanuman temple, and the original *Akshaya vata*, mentioned even by Hiuen Tsang, inside the fort, by the side of the wall facing the Yamuna. Baba returned to Puttaparthi on the 8th of April, halting at Tirupati for one day, to preside over the Tyagaraja *Utsava* celebrations there.

At Tirupati too, Baba spoke of idols and idol worship, for that was the refrain of His North Indian Tour. "The *sadhaka* should see, not the stone which is but the material stuff of the idol, but the *chaitanya* that is inherent in it, that is symbolised by it, the same *chaitanya* that is inherent in Himself and that pervades, moves, and transcends all creation. Then only is Idol worship and temple worship meaningful and beneficial..." "Many people laugh at those, who worship idols, and condemn it as blind superstition. But, reason is rendered dumb before the testimony of actual experience. All the arguments that logic can frame, all the tricks that dialectics can formulate, are powerless to nullify the effect of that inner evidence. The idol is not a mere external adjunct or apparatus or object. It is a part of the inner mechanism of relationship. If worship is carried out in the confidence that the idol is saturated with consciousness, it can bestow the highest bliss."

After only a week's stay at Puttaparthi, Baba left for the Nilgiris, where the people were long anxious to have the honour of welcoming and serving Him. The entire Nilgiris, from the smallest hamlet in the farthest corner to the biggest plantation, joined in the reverential homage. Baba condescended to visit the villages around and the sincerity and simplicity of the ryots were so touching that even long-standing devotees were moved into admiration. Baba Himself gave expression to this. He said at the public meeting at Ootacamund, "Here the people are full of *bhakti* and the *bhakti* has endowed them with *vinayam* and *shraddha*." At every village, Baba called upon the people to supplement the efforts they now make to earn physical sustenance, by making efforts to win spiritual sustenance also.

The Nilgiris, which Baba christened as Holy Hills, fell at Baba's feet and the spirit of surrender is well summarised in the song composed and sung by an aged ryot at Achanakal. He sang: "O Come my brothers, this is not our home, this leaky stuffy ramshackle shelter; our home is eternal, world-wide; it is there on the banks of the Chitravati; its name is Prasanthi Nilayam, the Abode of Peace." Or we can quote a Badaga song, in folk metre which the villagers of Ithalar sung with gusto: "He has come, the Lord, to bless us with a golden halo, like the sun. He is here among the hills, with a crown of silver moon. He drives along, adown, around the creeping climbing roads, to touch each stricken heart in city, town, and

hamlet, assuring, 'Do not fear.'"

Even while Baba was in the Nilgiris, He was arranging for a tour of the Himalayas and informing such of the devotees as were selected by Him to join the fortunate party. He returned to Puttaparthi, via Madras and Hyderabad, in the first week of May.

The visit to Badrinath was first mooted by Baba three years ago, at a *Bhajan* session held on the sands of the Chitravati. He said then, that He would take the *Bhaktas* to the place where He was doing *tapas* and we were wonderstruck, for that was the first time we had ever heard of *tapas*, associated with His earthly career. At least, I was a bit confused, for I was until then convinced that Baba indulged in no *tapas*, here or anywhere, corporeally or extra-corporeally! But, I did not pursue the matter and try to get an answer.

The visit became a certainty and plans were ready and the party fixed, before the end of May. Baba greeted them all with His *darshan* at the Ethiraja Kalyana Mantapam, Alwarpet, Madras on the 7th day of June, and sent them by train to Delhi, where He promised to bless them personally, since He proposed to fly to the Capital, the very next day.

The train reached Delhi about six hours late and when the hungry, tired, and distracted devotees arrived at last, they found Baba shedding cool comfort and consolation and strength by His smile and His motherly attention. The next day, at Haridwar, the Governor of Uttar Pradesh, Dr. B. Ramakrishna Rao, joined Baba, for he too had planned a visit to Badrinath.

On 11th June, Baba and His Excellency attended the evening *arati* to Gangamata at the Brahmakund; the vast assemblage of pilgrims got the *darshan* of Baba at that holy spot; Baba blessed the priests and *archaks* with the *vibhuti* that He materialised and He sprinkled the sacred waters of the Ganges on those around Him.

That night, Baba called together the devotees, who were to accompany Him to Badri, and reminded them of the rare privilege that they had won. "You have the good luck of proceeding with the manifested form to the Unmanifested Form, whereas usually, people pray to the Unmanifested Form, immanent in the idol, to manifest itself before their eye, so that they might win the fruit of their *sadhana*," He declared. We were thrilled with joy at the revelation. He then described in great detail the sacred shrine to which He was leading us, as if He knew every nook and corner of the holy area. When He disclosed that Narayana was there depicted as in *Tapomudra*, as doing penance, and explained that it was called Badarikashram on account of this, I began to see light and the doubt that assailed me on the Chitravati sands three years ago, about Sathya Sai Baba and *tapas*, melted away in a blaze of

joy. Baba spoke also of the subsidiary shrines in and around Badrinath and also of certain unknown aspects of its sacredness. For example, no guide book has published the information that Shankaracharya brought from Kailash five *Lingams* and that he installed one each at Badri, Puri, Sringeri, Dwaraka, and Chidambaram, but Baba revealed this fact that night. Baba planted in every heart the pilgrim mood of prayer, of brotherhood, and of loving service.

From Haridwar to Badrinath, a distance of nearly 182 miles, every inch of the road is saturated with penance and prayer, asceticism and aspiration. Myth and legend and history have woven round every spot stories of sages and saints, of sacrifice and *sadhana*, of renunciation and rigorous ordeals. The pilgrim is shown places where Shiva, Parvati, Rama, and other Gods did penance, where Parashurama performed expiatory rites, where Narasimha cooled His ferocity, where Arjuna won his weapons, and Karna his prowess, and Narada his veena, places where Kanva nurtured Sakunthala and Narada received the *Ashtakshari*. It is a narrow and tortuous road, cut on the face of the cliff, above the roaring waters of the Ganga or the Alakananda flowing in the ravine below. The party accompanied Baba, in full confidence and faith, regardless of the calamities that lurked round every curve of the road, and the landslides and landslips that happened, but could not delay their progress. Baba had announced that the rains would be held off, until the party returned to Rishikesh and the clouds obeyed. He willed and the party returned without a scratch or a prick for anyone!

The line of cars, jeeps, and buses coiled round the meandering road and reached Devaprayag, the confluence of the Bhagirathi and the Alakananda at about noon. One of the purposes of the tour that Baba had planned was to instil in the minds of His devotees and through them of all, faith in the scriptures that speak of the sanctity of certain places. He always emphasises *shastravishwasa* and *devavishwasa*, faith in the *Shastras* as equally important with faith in God. So, He directed everyone to have a dip in the sacred waters, before proceeding to Srinagar, the ancient capital of the Garhwal *Rajas*. There, the party halted for the night.

The people of Srinagar, who knew of the arrival of Baba in their midst, gathered in thousands to welcome Him and at night, they organised a programme of Pahadi and Tibetan dances, depicting the simple hilarity of the hardy mountaineers and hill men and tribes. Baba blessed them and gave each of them the unique chance of His *darshan*.

On the 13th, the vehicles moved towards Joshimath, where the motor road ends and from where the party had to walk 18 miles to Badrinath. That day too, Baba stopped at

Nandaprayag, the famed *Kanvashram*, and directed the devotees to bathe at the confluence of the Alakananda with the Mandakini. Joshimat is the place where Shankaracharya wrote his celebrated commentaries on the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and the *Brahmasutras*; it is also the winter headquarters of the *Mutt*, which he established at Badrinath to counteract Buddhist influences that threatened to percolate through the Mala pass of the Himalayas, just seven miles away from Badri. Who knows whether Baba's own trek to Badri was connected with the sinister danger to *Sanathana Dharma*, which is now threatening from the same direction through the same road?

On the 14th day of June, early in the morning, the mules and horses were loaded with luggage, the *dandis* for the aged were booked, and the party started off in high spirits behind Baba, who led them along that sacred road. Eighteen miles... miles of narrow congested road of rubble and stone, trodden into elusive smoothness by millions of pious feet; of gasping climbs and reeling inclines; of danger from falling stones announced prominently and frequently on boards *en route*; the rapture of snow-capped peaks ever on the horizon; the cheer of the cool torrent ever in the ear; broad glaciers descending foolhardily down the valleys into the Alakananda itself; snow lying across the pilgrim path; streams of pilgrims from all the quarters accosting each other in the language of brotherhood, though the words might fall a little strange; pilgrims resolutely pulling themselves along on foot, the old and even the decrepit with faith as their only stick, some sitting pathetic and forlorn in *dandis* carried by perspiring hill men, some swaying helplessly in *kandis* tied to the backs of men, some perched on ponies that trot on the perilous edge of the precipice, as if they are determined to commit disaster.

Baba walked the distance of eleven miles to Lam Bagar on the first day and halted the night there. On the 15th, the remaining distance was covered, before noon, in spite of the pretty stiff that it involved. The devotees persuaded Baba to ride a horse, but to their great disappointment, He dismounted very soon and resumed walking. Baba encouraged everyone along the arduous path, watching for signs of exhaustion; He directed some to enter *dandis*, some to mount ponies, some to put a brake on their overenthusiasm, some to sip a little water, and for some, He even materialised the unfailing specific, *vibhuti!* And, this, not merely for members of His Party. No, far from it. There were many, who sat exhausted on the roadside and Baba walked towards them and revived them by His sweet glance and words and His *Vibhuti*.

One picture will be ever green in my memory. A mile this side from Lam Bagar, Baba was

sitting on a rock, with the devotees all round Him listening to some *Puranic* story, with which He was freshening us for the climb ahead. Pilgrims were streaming along the road in front; many passed on, too engrossed with their own pains to recognise the Lord within sight. But, one woman came, saw, and was conquered. She turned aside and fell at the holy feet; she had the sixth sense to recognise that the feet were holy. She was an adventurous soul and she discovered that Baba was on His way to Badrinath. So, in spite of the exhaustion, to which she had been reduced by that long trek, she entreated that she might be taken as one of Baba's party! And, what do you think was Baba's reply? "You had your *darshan* here; I was waiting for you to give you *darshan*; what more do you hope to get there, when you come with Me? Go, be happy; take this *prasad* with you." Truly, no one can come near Him without His grace, without His *Sankalpa*.

The 15th and 16th days of June were rather quiet days, when Baba allowed the devotees to perform in the Badrinath temple the *poojas* they preferred, Himself busy with interviews to the many officers, civil and military, and the members of the Temple Committee, who had heard of His Divinity and come to have His *darshan*. On the 17th evening, Baba attended the *arati* at the Temple. He thence drove to the Badrinath Hospital, where He inaugurated the newly installed X-ray unit. The *Avatar* of the Lord, whose X-rays penetrate even the darkest recesses of our hearts, from whom nothing can be concealed, pressed a button to take the first photograph (of the physical interior of the Medical Officer in charge, who insisted that he must be the first patient).

The 17th was, in fact, the day of days, the day selected by Baba for re-infusing spiritual efficacy, for charging the run-down battery. During the morning *abhishekam* at the shrine, Baba, who was sitting facing the idol, materialised a beautiful four-armed Narayana idol, with *Shankha*, *Chakra*, *Gada*, and *Padma*, an idol of supreme craftsmanship, perhaps sublimating in that form, the Narayana *Tejas* or *Shakti* before Him. Then, in a trice, He created a Golden Lotus, a thousand petalled one, lovely beyond all imagination. We all wondered why the lotus appeared; but, before our wonder could find expression in a gasp, Baba waved His hand again. This time, there was a *Lingam* in His palm, evidently the same that Shankaracharya had installed inside the Badri shrine. This last He placed in the centre of the Lotus and with both lotus and idol placed on a silver plate, Baba came away to the *Dharmashala*, where we were all staying.

There, Baba directed *Bhajan* to be done and while the praise of Narayana was being sung, He rose from the floor, saying, "Now, we shall consecrate this *Lingam* again." He showed the

Lingam to everyone, bringing it Himself near each person and pointing out to all the translucence of the material, and the form of an Eye that was mysteriously incorporated inside it! He called it the *Netralingam* from Kailasha. Materialising a silver vessel full of holy water (from Gangothri itself as Baba announced), Baba Himself performed *abhisheka* to the Idol, the devotees reciting *Sri Rudram* and *Narayana Suktam* and *Purusha Suktam* all the while.

After *abhisheka*, Baba materialised for the *Pooja 108 bilva* leaves made of gold; they fell in a scintillating shower from His Divine Hand on to the silver plate beneath! Again, the hand was waved! This time, the shower consisted of a heap of 'tumme' flowers, with the dew still fresh upon them, tiny bits of fragrant fluff, plucked with care from a hundred little tropical plants! The *pooja* was performed, on behalf of all present, by Dr. B. Ramakrishna Rao, appropriate *mantras* being recited by the devotees. The *Netralingam* was sent back into the secret niche, where it was installed by Shankaracharya 1200 years ago, as Baba explained to us, when It suddenly disappeared, for the purpose, for which it was drawn out, had been fulfilled with the completion of the ritual aforesaid. It had been charged with immense potency and the temple consecrated anew by the manifested form Himself. In pursuance of His Mission of *Dharmasthapana*, of which promotion of faith in *Shastras* is an important item, Baba directed every one of His party to offer oblations to the dead at Brahmakapal that noon.

Baba always harps on the need to remember with gratitude the parents, who are responsible for one's very existence, for all the chance one has got for struggling upwards towards salvation, for all this joy of *sadhana* and *satsangh*. "Though the departed souls might not be actually in the *Lokas* you locate, or anxiously awaiting the offerings you make, it is your duty to honour them, to remember them whenever you are yourself happy or elevated, and offer them reverential homage," Baba has said often. So, when the devotees went to Brahmakapal, the holy spot where the *bhog* offering of Badri Narayana is itself offered to the manes, Baba Himself proceeded thither and blessed everyone while the ceremony was being performed!

There were some among the party, who were handicapped according to strict *Shastric* rules from offering oblations to the departed and Baba very graciously collected them together and took them to the river Alakananda for a ritual that He had framed for them. He took from the surging torrent a glass of water, but the Divine Alchemy of that Hand had produced inside that glass, even as it came up from the river, a big cube of *vibhuti*, with the mystic symbol 'Om' carved on one side. Baba tapped the side of the glass and lo, the water had many grains of *til* floating on it, *til* considered essential for all ceremonies connected with departed souls.

He called upon the handicapped ones individually, poured the Alakananda *teertha* on to the palm Himself, and asked each to offer it to the departed, in grateful reverential remembrance.

The Badrinath Temple Committee accorded welcome to Baba at a special meeting in the temple premises, that evening. His Excellency Dr. B. Ramakrishna Rao presided and translated Baba's discourse into Hindi. The audience of 3,000 mainly consisted of pilgrims as well as the merchants and citizens of Badrinath itself. Baba told them of the five *Lingas* brought by Shankaracharya and of the sacredness of Badri itself. He said that the Lord is *Premaswarupa* and can be realised only through the cultivation of *prema*; just as all parts of a sugar doll are uniformly sweet, all those who, according to the *Vedas*, originated from the face, arms, thighs, and feet of the thousand headed *Purusha*, are equally saturated with His presence and the *prema* that is His nature. Baba described the trials and tribulations of the pilgrims, the expense and the exhaustion of the pilgrimage, and He asked the citizens of Badrinath to learn from the continuous stream of men and women, something of their faith in Badrinarayana, which prompted them all to make all that sacrifice. He wanted that they should not fleece them or foist things upon them, but treat them with greater brotherliness and kindness.

In the night, Baba arranged for the feeding on a really lavish scale of all the mendicants around the temple. The scene reminded us of the feeding during *Dasara* at Prasanthi Nilayam, for Baba Himself served sweets to everyone squatting on the sides of the road, and distributed to each person, after food, a blanket or its equivalent in cash, for the stock of blankets in the Badrinath shops ran out pretty quick.

Thus, Baba became in the short period of three days the cynosure of all eyes, and when He left on the morning of the 18th, people reminded Him of the promise He had made the previous evening that He would be visiting the place frequently in the coming years, and accompanied Him and His Party for a long distance along the road to Hanuman Chatti. Reaching Joshi Math on the 19th, Baba returned by car to Haridwar on 21st, visiting the Andhra Ashram at Rishikesh, on the way.

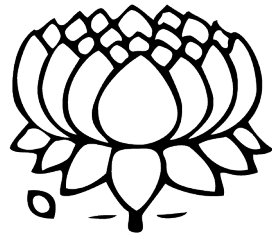
It must be mentioned here that the party of about a hundred devotees, mostly aged and not quite sturdy, could go through all that twisting and tossing in the buses, all that tramping and climbing among the Himalayan heights, amidst strange climes, taking unaccustomed food and come back hale and hearty, happy and contented, as per schedule, fresher than when they started, only through the ever-present, all-powerful grace of Baba.

From Haridwar, Baba went to Nainital where many people were awaiting His arrival. He granted them courage and consolation and spiritual guidance, during the interviews He granted. He also visited the *Gita Sathsang*, established by Swami Vidyanandji. An Address was presented to Him there in Hindi. He spoke to the *sadhakas* of Nainital on the value of concentration, quoting the *shloka* from the 18th chapter of the *Gita* where Krishna asks Arjuna, "*Kacchith ethach chrutham, Partha, thwaikaagrena chethasa?*" (Has this been heard by you, O Partha, with one-pointed mind?) From the same *shloka*, He drew the conclusion that the *Gita*, then as now, is intended for the removal of *moha*, the *agnyana sammoha*, the delusion born of ignorance, which makes man mistake the un-real as real, the false as true, the transitory as permanent, the source of sorrow as the source of joy.

Returning to Prasanthi Nilayam on 4th July, Baba Himself graciously described to the *Bhaktas* the ritual at Badri, as well as the incidents of the tour. He gave them, too, the Holy *Theertha* of Gangotri, which He materialised for their sake, a second time, at Puttaparthi. He wanted that those, who went on pilgrimage to holy places, must demonstrate in their daily conduct that the holiness has entered their hearts and transformed their words and deeds. "Shankaracharya," He said, "installed Narayana at Badri. Each one of you must now install Narayana in your hearts."

While at Badri, Baba had written a letter to the *bhaktas* at Prasanthi Nilayam: "Be always remembering the Lord; recite His name, writing it or uttering it, or meditating on it or turning over a rosary with it, or worshipping an idol or image with it; that constant dwelling with the name of God is itself all the holy places, all the sacred *theerthas*, all the famous shrines. When the mind has thus been sublimated, the full glory of Badri shines in it; the pilgrimage to Badri is a waste of time and energy, if the mind has not been duly tamed. So, do not worry that you are there and others are here. Narayana is beside you, with you; why then delude yourself with the pursuit of the unseen Narayana? Be steadfast, be full of enthusiasm, be ever joyful." In fact, Puttaparthi is itself Badrinath, for those who have the eyes to see and the knowledge to recognise.

Let us, therefore, install Him in our hearts, or rather let us realise that He is there already, directing as per His plan our every thought, word, and deed, and let us with the full consciousness of the good fortune, be full of quiet content.





16.

For You And Me

He has come, Dattatreya, Dakshinamurti, Dhanavantari, all in One, as loving as the Mother, as strong as the Father, as wise as the Guru, as All-seeing as God.

AND SO, we have come to the last pages of this book, dear reader, you and I together. I hope you become more interested in the pilgrimage that everyone has perforce to undertake to the seat of God. Baba has spent so far, only thirty five years in the human frame and He has assured us that He would inhabit it for over sixty years more. During *Dasara*, 1961, He said that He has just started the work for which He has come. Therefore, subsequent chapters of the Life of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba are bound to be even more inspiring and elevating. May an ever increasing number of brothers and sisters gather to draw that inspiration and practise that *Upadesh*.

The Golden Age of Human Redemption is here. The splendour of its dawn had already filled the clouds on the eastern horizon with Golden Glory. Mankind is awake. The Sun will circle the entire World. "I came," Baba says, "because the good men of the world, the saintly, the wise, the *sadhu* and the *sadhaka*, the *Guru* and godly, panted for Me." May the pure and the righteous rejoice!

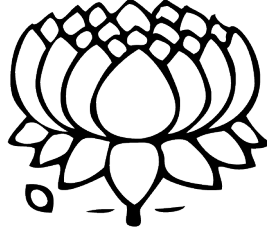
The wicked and the false, the cowardly and the cruel may also rejoice, for He, in His Mercy, will nurse them back into the holy path. Baba one day said, "If I close the door against the sinful, the fallen, and the renegade, where else can they go?"

You and I have no excuse now to be content with only maps and guide books, to consult the case histories of famous invalids, who cured themselves, or to pore over tomes that confound the brain. He has come, Dattatreya, Dakshinamurti, Dhanavantari, all in One, as loving as the Mother, as strong as the Father, as wise as the *Guru*, as All-seeing as God.

And, what does He ask of us? To start this very moment the discipline needed for the Good Life, the *sadhana* to sublimate the impulses and the instincts.

With what offering shall we approach Him. Not even the *Patram*, *Pushpam*, *Phalam*, and *Toyam*, hitherto prescribed as the minimum. No, offer *Sathya*, *Dharma*, *Shanti*, *Prema*, or at least the effort to attain these four, or any one of the four. Sincerity in the struggle to improve, that is enough. "Offer in *Patram* of the body, the *Manopushpam* fragrant with Humility, the *Hridayaphalam* ripe with *Tapas* and sweet with the *rasam* of *Daya*, *Danam*, and *Damam*, and the *Toyam* of tears welling out of *Ananda*. That is enough," says Baba.

May He, the Source, the Stream, and the Sea, the All-pervasive, All-inclusive, All-animating SATHYAMSIVAM-SUNDARAM vouchsafe to us all the strength and the steadfastness, to journey towards Him.



Thanks Giving

The author wishes to convey his respectful thanks to the members of the Rathnakaram Raju family at Puttaparthi, especially to Sri Pedda Venkappa Raju and Sri Seshama Raju for giving him many significant details of Baba's early years; he also owes much to the teachers of the Bukkapatnam and Uravakonda schools and to devotees from Kamalapuram and large number of devotees from Bangalore, Madras, and other places, who have readily responded to his request for information.

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On 1st January, 2009, Sri Sathya Sai Sadhana Trust (SSSST) commenced operations with four divisions; the Bhakta Sahayak divisions (one in Prasanthi Nilayam, Puttaparthi and another in Brindavan, Bangalore), the Publications division, and the Media division.

The Publications Division (SSSSTPD) caters to:

- 1) The publication and distribution of spiritual, religious, and educational Sai Literature and the production and distribution of audio and visual multimedia, photographs, calendars, and diaries, educational software, etc. for the benefit of visiting pilgrims and devotees all over the world. All the literature and publications are based on the teachings, philosophy, message, and values of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.
- 2) The publication and distribution of Bhagawan Baba's monthly spiritual journal - Sanathana Sarathi - in English and Telugu languages. Since 2011, e-versions of the magazine are also released simultaneously and are available in PDF and EPUB formats on www.sanathanasarathi.org.
- 3) Maintaining a reporting channel, which covers all the major activities taking place in Prasanthi Nilayam, and publishing an e-newsletter 'Sai Spiritual Showers'- for free distribution.
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