CHAPTER VI

Sathya Sai Baba and the Indian Diaspora

Introduction

Western scholars such as Max Weber, Bryan Wilson and Peter Berger have pointed out that the significance of religion in the modern society has declined its value as a result of growth of rationalisation of human thinking along with the urbanisation, technological advances, communication and the growth of capitalist economy (Hunt 2002:15). But the reality today is that increasing rationalisation and popularisation of secular ideas in the world certainly did not diminish the values that entrenched within the religious traditions per se. There have been several new religious/spiritual movements in the contemporary world to meet the emerging needs and aspirations of masses. While talking about the resurgence of new religions in the post-modern era Paul Heelas (1996) said that, the disintegration of the certainties of modernity has left a situation in which post-modern religion - particularly, mystical or New Age spirituality and “elf-religions” has emerged to fill a spiritual vacuum and satisfy the need for meaning.

The present study examines the spread of Sathya Sai Baba’s religious and spiritual preaching into diaspora; how the Sai Baba devotees construct their religious identity in the diaspora under different socio-economic, cultural and political conditions; and how they network with other devotees all over the world, including those in India.

Chapter III of the thesis presented the history and growth of the Sathya Sai Baba, from the early childhood days of “Sathya” through his charismatic nature and potential for miracles to the divine avatars of Vishnu and reincarnation of Shirdi Sai Baba.
This study was conducted in two phases of fieldwork at Puttaparthi among the devotees of Sai Baba hailing from the Indian diaspora. The first phase was undertaken during October and November 2003 in which interviews were conducted among 25 respondents comprising of second, third and fourth generation overseas Indians. The purpose of this field study was to gain a general understanding of the Sathya Sai Baba movement in the diaspora. The study included formal and informal interviews with informants besides securing data through observation of spiritual and religious activities inside the ashram and administration of questionnaires.

In the second phase of fieldwork - from November 2003 to December 2004 - questionnaires were handed over to the respondents hailing from different countries at Puttaparthi. In-depth interviews were conducted at Puttaparthi among the second, third and fourth generation Indians. The informants at Puttaparthi are selected with the help of a snowball sampling. Data collected through interviews and questionnaires from respondents forms the basis on which the analyses and interpretations of this dissertation rests. References to the first phase are included to supplement the discussion of the data collected from the field in the second phase. Wherever applicable, extracts from interviews are used to provide additional insight into the actual experience of the people being discussed. In addition, percentages generated from the data collected through the questionnaire are used in Tables and Graphs to provide visually comprehensible summaries complementing the text.

**Profile of the Respondents**

The age of the respondents in this study varied from 18 to 80 years. Care is taken to secure adequate gender representation, as women play an important role in the Sathya Sai Baba movement. All the participants in this study are fluent in speaking English, although many of them could not write. Graph-1 presents the
gender distribution of the respondents. The sample studied included 82 percent of male respondents and 18 percent of female respondents.

Graph-1

![Gender Distribution Graph](attachment:image1.png)

Graph-2

![Age Distribution Pie Chart](attachment:image2.png)

Graph-2 presents the age profile of the respondents interviewed during the field study. Out of the total, 14 percent of respondents belonged to the age group of 20 to 30. Sathya Sai Baba organisation designated this group as “Youth” and
expected them to play an important role in the Sathya Sai Baba organisation. A majority among the youth (75%) are college or university students actively promoting the youth wing in their respective countries. There are a few respondents (25%) from the youth wing who are pursuing professional careers. Since they are unmarried, they are listed under this group. The students who are members in the Sathya Sai Centres in their countries but did not participate regularly in the Centre’s activity are excluded in this study. The majority of respondents i.e., 59 percent belonged to the age group of 30 to 50. They are considered to be the most active members of the organisation. 15 percent of respondents belonged to the age group of 50 to 60, many of whom represent as heads of the Sathya Sai Baba Centres or as the influential members in these Centres. The last categories of age group constituting 12 percent belonged to the age group of 60 and above [in most cases interviews were conducted with them with the help of an interview schedule].

Graph-3

Country profile

* Other country respondents include New Zealand (3.33%), Uganda (2.22%), Kenya (2.22%), Japan (2.22%), West Indies (1.11%), UAE (1.11%), and Indonesia (1.11%).
Graph-3 presents the respondent’s country of origin. Out of the 110, majority of the respondents belonged to South Africa constituting 21 per cent, as South Africa is one of the oldest diasporic countries where Sathya Sai Baba movement has made tremendous impact. Among the new diasporic countries, UK represents the second largest in this study constituting 18 per cent of the sample. There are equal number of respondents from Mauritius, Singapore and Malaysia (i.e., 11 percent). Next to these countries, Canadians constituted seven percent while USA and Trinidad had four percent each. 13 percent of the respondents belong to other countries, which include New Zealand, Uganda, Kenya, Japan, West Indies, UAE, and Indonesia.

Graph-4

Graph-4 shows the marital status of the respondents. A majority of respondents, i.e., 73 percent are married and are living with their families. Most of their spouses had citizenship in their respective countries. 24 percent of respondents belonged to unmarried category i.e., students and professionals. Only two percent of the respondents are divorced.

Graph-5 shows the mother tongue of the respondents, an important indicator in order to know the coverage of the movement beyond the regional boundaries.
Started as a regional movement during the early 1940s from the state of Andhra Pradesh, Sathya Sai Baba movement has grown beyond the regional and linguistic boundaries, though a large number of followers come from the state of Andhra Pradesh whose mother tongue is Telugu. Similar instances could be found in the diasporas. The study shows that fifty eight percent of the respondent’s ancestors hailed from the Telugu land. 17 percent of respondents belonged to the Gujarati community. 13 percent of respondents had Tamil as their mother tongue, while seven percent viewed Hindi as their mother tongue. These seven percent of respondents belonged to the state of Uttar Pradesh and other Hindi speaking areas in India. Only four percent of respondents belonged to the other language category such as Bhojpuris, Kannadigas and Malayalees.

Graph-5

![Graph-5](image)

Graph-6 shows the religious background of the respondents. Out of the total sample, 82 percent of respondents were belonged to the Hindu religion, while 10 percent of respondents were Christians and nine percent of respondents were belonged to Muslim category. Apart from these participants, we have also interviewed devotees from different countries and spoke with them about the topic. However, we have only taken their views to justify the case but not for data analysis or generalisation. All the devotees interviewed were from different castes
and class backgrounds. To define caste in the diasporic context is very difficult and therefore caste is not included as a variable in the questionnaire.

![Graph-6]

**The Indian Diaspora**

Indian emigration is by no means a modern phenomenon, as the literature shows, the spread of Indic cultures across South East Asia dates back to the fifth century CE, but little had known about the dispersion of these early settlements (Sekar 2001: 60). However, a more precise definition of the concept “Indians” in the diasporic context has not been fashioned until the migration of indentured and other forms of labourers, which took place to British, French and Dutch colonies successively during the 19th and early part of the 20th century. These early immigrants carried with them the identity of their original homeland their ‘immortal possessions’ i.e., gods and their habits of worship, different clan, the village, the caste and in larger context the nation or country (Morris 1968: 54).

There are two essential factors that need to be considered here: a) colonisation, and b) large scale economic change, that provided impetus for migration of Indians to other parts of the world. There were four broad patterns of overseas
emigration observed from the literatures on Indian diaspora: a) pre-colonial migration; b) colonial migration that began in the 1830s to the British, French and Dutch colonies; c) post-colonial migration to the industrially developed countries; and d) recent migration to West Asia.

In the Indian context, emigration has been a continuous process since pre-colonial times when it was for the purposes of trade and the propagation of religion. As far as historical and archival data is concerned, Indian emigration goes back to the first century AD when Indian princes, priests, poets and artisans migrated to Southeast Asian countries. Among the distinguished names of this period Angkor Wat, Lara Djongrang and Borobudur stands testimony. The early emigration from India owed its origins to the Buddhist missionaries, when the Hindu kingdoms of medieval Southeast Asia attract labor and craftsmen from India during the 16th century CE. The trade contacts slowly developed and thereby small colonies established themselves in East Africa and Southeast Asia. It is observed that merchants from Gujarat, Bengal and Tamil Nadu settled down in the great port cities of Southeast Asia like Malacca, Acheh, Ternate and Tidor during this period. They gradually assimilated with the local people (Suryanarayan 2003).

It was only in the 19th and 20th century that further conditions for emigration of large numbers of Indians to different parts of the world were created, in the wake of European imperialist expansion. New plantations, and industrial and commercial ventures in European colonies created the need for large supplies of labour, and, with the abolition of slavery in the British, French and Dutch colonies respectively in 1834, 1846 and 1873, there were severe shortages of labour to work in the sugar, tea, coffee, cocoa and rubber plantations in the colonies. Looking for alternative sources of labour, aside from the African ex-slaves and European immigrants, the colonial government imported Indians under the designation of “indentured labour.” The emigration of indentured labor started during the late 18th century and continued up to the early 20th century. As Mohan
Gautam (1999: 125) points out, during the 19th century almost one million indentured Indian labourers were imported from India into the European colonies in the West Indies (Trinidad, Guyana, Surinam, Jamaica, St. Lucia, Guadeloupe etc.), East and South Africa, the India Ocean islands of Mauritius and Reunion, Ceylon, Singapore, Malaysia, and Fiji in the Pacific. Calcutta and Madras were the chief points of embarkment and the major districts for recruiting labor included parts of Madras Presidency with Tamil and Telugu populations and the districts of Bhojpuri region of Eastern U.P. and Northern Bihar (Daniels 1989; Dubey 2003; Mayer 1973; Motwani et al., 1993; Laxmi Narayan 2005).

Approximately 1.3 million Indians crossed the oceans under contracts of indenture. Various factors pushed Indian migrants into seeking employment under indenture. The first was the poor condition that prevailed at that time in India because of the killing of the Indian village and cottage industry resulting in extreme poverty and unemployment. The West, on the other hand, was getting affluent because of industrial development. Second, all colonial masters found Indians skillful, hard working and useful, as a result of which the British, the French, the Dutch, and the Portuguese all took Indian skilled labour for development of plantations and agricultural economies of their territories. Upon their arrival in the colonies, the immigrants were assigned to plantations to which they were “bound” for five or more years. They lived there in isolated and insulated conditions. Although they were promised fair wages and a return voyage to India in exchange for a predetermined number of years spent working in the colonies, poverty and the desire to build a new life ensured that very few of these indentured laborers ever returned to India (Bhat 2002).

Emigration to Sri Lanka, Burma and Malaya presents a marked difference in contrast to the African and Caribbean countries. All the emigrants to Sri Lanka and Malaya were from the Southern parts of India and the immigrants were recruited by the headman known as the “Kangani” (Jain 1993). The Indians worked on the tea, coffee and rubber plantations. During the period 1852 and
1937, 1.5 million Indians went to Ceylon, 2 million to Malaya, and 2.5 million to Burma. After 1920 the Kangani emigration (totaling around 6 million) gradually gave way to individual or un-recruited, free migration due to fall in demand for Indian labour.

The post WW II scenario has changed the whole international migration process by affecting each and every migrant country, and India was not far behind in this process. During this period migration was directed towards developed countries, and the migrants were mostly constituted talented professionals, skilled labourers, entrepreneurs from the peripheral, colonial and under-developed countries besides Anglo-Indians. This post-war migration was totally different from the earlier migration of indentured, kangani and other forms of labour migration. Large-scale migration of Indians took place during this period to the developed countries like UK, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Apart from India, Indians from other parts of the world especially from the former colonies [especially from East Africa (see Bhachu 1985) and Caribbean (see Gosine 1990)] also started coming to these countries. There are two instances: a) Africanization policies; and b) Ethnic violence in which Indians from former colonies express their interest to immigrate to these new lands.

a) In 1972, Uganda’s dictator Idi Amin ordered 75 000 Ugandan Asians out of the nation. Most of these people were of Indian origin and were successful traders, bankers and administrators or laborers. Around 27 000 emigrated to the United Kingdom, while another 6100 went to Canada. Some even emigrated to India despite never having lived there previously.

b) A second example is the case of Fiji (see Lal 1992). By the 1970s, native Fijians had lost their majority to people of Indian origin—mostly descendants of farm workers brought in by the British as indentured labor. In 1987 the first Indian-backed coalition was elected to government, raising tension between the ethnic Indian and ethnic
Fijian populations. Subsequent events have ensured ethnic Fijian political dominance. Many Indo-Fijians have left the country of their birth; some came to India, others to New Zealand and Australia.

In contrast to the ex-indentured populations, Indian immigrants in the industrially developed countries today have been able to maintain extensive ties with India because of their comparative affluence. Marriage arrangements, kinship networks, religious affiliations keep many immigrants well linked to their places of origin, since a large number of Indians are still first generation migrants. Another factor, which has enabled overseas Indians to maintain ties with their homeland, is the flow of their remittances and investments. I will discuss this part in detail with an illustration of a diasporic community in the third section of this paper.

Recent migration of Indians to the West Asian countries is basically oriented to labor and servicing occupations on a contract basis. The year 1973 experienced the beginning of the rapidly increasing demand for expatriate labour in oil exporting countries of the Gulf and North Africa such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar and Libya. These countries adopted a development strategy centering around the building up of infrastructure and, in turn, created demand for labour in unskilled manual work, especially in the construction sector. At the termination of the first phase of infrastructural projects and with the new emphasis on industrialization in the Middle East, there has been a significant change in the structure of labour demand. Between 1975 and 1980 one million skilled workers had imported to manage and operate this new infrastructure.

Indians have migrated to different parts of the world at different periods of time. They migrated to British, French and Dutch colonies during 19th and early 20th centuries as *indentured* and *kangani* labourers and today they constitute the *Old Diaspora*. They also migrated to industrially developed countries of Europe and North America during the post-colonial era as skilled workers and professionals
and constitute the *New Diaspora*. Between these two forms of immigrants the later - the *New Diaspora* - continue to have close contact with the families and relatives back home. Indians today have made successful in forming their local, international, formal, and informal networks by contacting with their kith and kin around the globe (see Bhat 2003; Jain 2004). Their networks are channelised through various mechanisms such as regular communications over telephone, visits and correspondence, remittances, the Internet, sending and receiving videos on family events and other celebrations.

The selection of informants for this study was based on their experience of migration, directly or through the memories of their ancestors, and familiarity with the Sathya Sai Baba spiritualism. The study took several notes and recordings with a view to gather qualitative data rather than fixed responses. Each interview took about an hour to hour and half. Apart from interviews, data was collected principally through a structured, open-ended questionnaire for which the respondents took a couple of days to return. Apart from these data, the study also includes informal interviews with the members of the Sathya Sai Baba Trust at Prasanthi Nilayam, especially on the Sathya Sai Organisation and its management. They constitute an elected body of representatives and their functions largely determined through the guidelines provided by Sathya Sai Baba. Their functions include: to organise various functions, policies for the trust, daily decisions regarding Sathya Sai Baba’s move inside or outside the ashram, and to take responsibility for the general maintenance and upkeep of the premises. In many ways, they represent the “authority” of the ashram and therefore it was decided that they too should be interviewed. Wherever necessary their comments and observations are included in this chapter. The data presented here in this chapter therefore is a combination of interviews - with participants such as from devotees of Indian diaspora, committee members, and other knowledgeable or prominent persons at Puttaparthi - questionnaires and lastly personal observations and experiences.
Religious Practices

The role of religion in the life of Indian communities abroad cannot be overemphasised. The study too suggests that Indians seem to attach much significance to religion. While approximately 90 percent of the respondents in this study considered religion to be very important in their life, a much lower percentage i.e., 10 percent considered that it is not so.

The study found that among the different religious groups with different beliefs and practices present in the Sathya Sai Baba religion, Hindus are numerically at the top. A question was asked about the valuable time that the respondents devote to the religious practices. Majority of respondents said that they spent one to one and half-hour daily for religious activities - including rituals like Pujas and participating in Bhajan programmes. A few respondents mentioned that, they spent a few minutes for religious practice i.e., for prayer after taking bath or while going out at roadside temples. Those who practice daily one and half hour or more, their way of observing the religious rituals totally differed from those who spent their only a few minutes; the latter groups followed certain guidelines for observing these religious practices. Examples have been cited in the Chapter-IV about the devotee’s way of worshipping Sathya Sai Baba in their home alters and in the Centres/Temples.

Another question was also asked during the interview to those respondents who spent less time for religious practices, whether they have influenced by the local religious traditions or vice versa. Majority of respondents said that they kept their traditions alive and “it is neither the locals nor the new immigrants those who came from India recently influenced to change our practice,” as one interviewee from Malaysia added. Another interviewee from South Africa points out:

Neither the locals nor the new immigrants influence us to change our culture. Our practice of worship is orthodox and unchangeable.
However, the public participation and individual worship have of course changed over time due to the professional life, but within us the same blood is there and is carrying what our forefathers brought from India.

Religious practices of Indians in the diaspora which were passed on by the early immigrants to their descendents still have a strong hold in many of the old diaspora countries. Even the language, which is an important parameter of identity among the Indian immigrants, is still maintained by many of the second, third and fourth generation Indians in the diaspora. This was observed while interacting with the devotees at Puttaparthi, their fluency in speaking Telugu, Tamil and Hindi languages. Many of them were anxious to speak in their own languages.

*Cultural Practices*

As most of the respondents belong to Hindu religion, the observances of cultural festivals are common to each other though they are located in different countries. We may mention here that, the practice of Hinduism in India is altogether different from the practice, which takes place in the diasporas. In the diasporic context Hinduism as a “religious category” helps to build the identity of Indians. Although it takes new form in the newly cultural environment, the existing religions do not change the core values and ideas, because of the cultural continuity. As Williams (1998) points out “…specific legal decisions, economic opportunities and social forces that bring immigrants into the host society and formed groups but function differently.” Instead, he suggested that, the ‘immigrants’ are more religious when they enter into new land than what they are in the home because religions outside the home territory provide them important identity markers, which help to perpetuate and preserve individual self-awareness and cohesion in the group. Religion apart from the spiritual dimensions, act as a
major force in binding immigrants together and at the same time sacralises one’s

The present study shows that Indians have still retained their cultural roots which
are visible through their observation of cultural festivals; even Indian Muslims
and Christians have retained their cultural traditions. The major cultural festivals
that the Indians celebrate with much fanfare in the diaspora and as the
respondents mentioned in this study include: Dasahara, Deepavali, Holi,
Ramnavami, Hanuman Jayanti, Guru Purnima, Ganesh Chaturthi, Krishna
Jayanti, besides Sathya Sai Baba’s Birthday and Easwaramma day. One important
aspect of the Sathya Sai Baba religion is that, it binds individuals across religions.
The study found the information regarding the celebration of cross-religious
festivals together among devotees. Such festivals of importance are Id, Christmas,
Holi and Deepavali. As one respondent from Mauritius mentioned:

There is no separate festival for us; we celebrate each others
religious festivals together. We invite Muslims to our house during
Dasahara and Holi, and especially, if they are happen to be near,
during Sathya Sai Baba’s Birthday. In return they also invite us for
their common festivals. This is what the Sai religion taught us over
the years.

Indians generally celebrate these festivals in their respective Sathya Sai Baba
Centre/Temple where they used to visit for other spiritual purposes. Festivals and
rituals provide a person with opportunity to link meaning with experience. As one
interviewee from Canada mentioned:

Initially I used to go to Sai Centre at the insistence of my parents.
They wanted me to accompany them, and so I would go. I was not
particularly excited about it. But now I am getting a lot more out of
it. When I sit down for the initial prayer and meditation, I feel pretty good. It’s like I am knowing more about myself.

The instances at Prasanthi Nilayam is however different, as devotees from different corners of the world come together to celebrate festivals like Dasahara, Guru Purnima, Krishna Jayanti, Deepavali and Sivaratri besides Sathya Sai Baba’s birthday. The festive atmosphere during these times is mentioned in the Chapter-III on Sai Baba’s life.

Besides the Hindus, Muslims too celebrate certain common festivals along with other members of Sathya Sai Baba religion. The major festivals that the Muslims celebrate together with Sai devotees [Hindus, Christians and others] are Ramadan, Id-al-Fitr, and Id-al-Adha. During this time, people hug and greet each other and also eat together. At Puttaparthi, people from different parts of the world come to celebrate these festivals. The major attraction during these days at Prasanthi Nilayam is the celebration of festivals at the Sai Kulwant Hall or Poornachandra Auditorium by the Muslim devotees, where large numbers of devotees from different religious groups come to participate in the programme. Of course, Sathya Sai Baba too delivers special lectures during these days.

Among the Sathya Sai devotees, followers of Christianity form numerically the third largest group (in this study they are constituted as the second largest number). “Christmas with Sathya Sai Baba is one among the best-celebrated festivals at Prasanthi Nilayam,” as one respondent from USA mentioned. The evening of 24th of December is the starting point for Christmas celebrations at Prasanthi ashram where the overseas devotees conduct carol programme in the presence of Sathya Sai Baba at Sai Kulwant Hall. The songs in praise of the Lord and “his divine son” are the major attraction to start with. In the morning of 25th December, following the regular Suprabhatam, the overseas devotees join the special Nagarsankirtan - singing Carols while holding candles in their hands. Then the devotees wait at the door of Sathya Sai Baba’s residence with much
excitement, and when the door opens they experience Sai Baba’s darshan in a white robe. Later in the morning, Sathya Sai Baba grants regular darshan where the students of the Sathya Sai Primary School present cultural programmes for a short duration. They sing several traditional carols in the praise of Sathya Sai Baba. The carols end with the famous song “Dashing Through The Snow” during which a student dressed in “Santa Claus” takes Sai Baba’s blessings and goes around throwing chocolates to all. The afternoon programme starts with the presentation of the service activities carried out by Sathya Sai organisation of different countries and talks by members of the organisation. This is followed by talks of some elderly devotees. Later on, the Bal-Vikas Students from overseas present colourful plays at Poornachandra Auditorium, making the end of the annual Christmas celebration in Prasanthi Nilayam. This is the general description of Christmas celebrations at Puttatharthy every year. One of the Christian devotees from Australia, who had participated in the celebration of Christmas at Prasanthi Nilayam, makes the following observation:

I enjoyed Christmas at Prasanthi Nilayam because over the years Bhagwan has given a lot of insight into the teachings of Jesus. He has also spoken about the life of Christ, and what Christ stood for. One memorable Christmas evening, in which I was present, Bhagwan materialized a small Bible, which he said was compiled in Britain around 1530 A.D., containing all the information about Jesus gathered during the preceding centuries. It was really marvellous to see such rare occasions during Christmas.

*Introducing Sathya Sai Baba in the Diaspora*

One of the significant objectives of this study is to analyse in detail the emergence of Sathya Sai Baba movement in the diaspora. With the view to secure necessary data on this process, the respondents were asked to provide information on how and when did they first come to know about Sathya Sai Baba. About 86 percent of
respondents could explain the events or persons that facilitated their initiation into the circle of his devotees (see Table-1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Would you recall how and when did you first come to know about Sri Sathya Sai Baba?</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N=95</td>
<td>86.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>N=9</td>
<td>8.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>N=6</td>
<td>5.45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only eight percent of respondents did not recall the source, and five percent could not answer the question. Responses received from the 86 percent of the respondents are very interesting as they gave varied explanations on how they come to know about Sathya Sai Baba. Some of the qualitative answers are mentioned below as they throw some light on how the new devotees are attracted to participate in the spiritual discourses of Sai Baba. One of the respondents from UK offers the following explanation on how he first came to know about Sathya Sai Baba:

Before I came to UK in 1980, I heard about Sai Baba of both Shirdi and Puttaparthi. But I did not have the inner urge to know detail about the present Sai Baba. But Baba’s grace to me is really significant. Just before a few days of my departure to UK, a colleague of mine told me to accompany him to Puttaparargh to have Sai Baba’s darshan. I accompanied him without any hesitation as I was on leave. I was surprised to find a very huge crowd during my very first visit to Prasanthi Nilayam as it was a day of Deepavali celebration. I had the darshan and brought with me a photograph of Sai Baba to UK with a few books. When I reached UK I got busy with my job but a few months later one of the office staff mentioned to me about Sai Bhajan at his house. Then on onwards we (myself and my wife) used to regularly attend the bhajan.
programmes. It was in 1988 that the devotees built a Sai Centre to organise various programmes including bhajans. Now my son is studying in Baba’s institution. The incident that brought me closer to Baba was our health problem. It was during early 1990s that our son was in Puttaparthi and both of us suffered severe health problems. We asked our son to have Baba’s darshan and asked him for Vibhuti. Our son did what we instructed. It was miracle that Baba personally called him from prayer line and gave him Vibhuti and told that, “it was meant for your parents and send this as soon as possible.” Once we got this Vibhuti, we were cured in a few days.

Interview with the older devotees is another experience at Puttaparthi. One of the interviewee from South Africa responded to the question in the following manner:

I am a second generation Indian, born in South Africa. I came to know about Sai Baba when we (including my wife) were invited to attend a Christmas programme, which was conducted by Sai devotees in 1985. Thereafter we attended all bhajan programmes and service activities carried out at the Sai Centre and became its active member. I used to be an office bearer of the Centre and coordinated some of its activities. The incident that brought me closer is when my wife was suffering from heart problem. She used to worship Sathya Sai Baba and installed his photo in our home. When the disease was severe, one day she prayed to Swami and from his photograph we saw the manifestation of Vibhuti. From that day, we devoted our heart and soul to Swami.

Table-2 shows the sources of information from where the devotees came to know about Sathya Sai Baba.
Table-2

Source of information regarding Sathya Sai Baba in the diaspora

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person/media who was/were instrumental in helping to become Sri Sathya Baba’s devotee.</th>
<th>Frequency (N=110)</th>
<th>Percentage %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>N=70</td>
<td>63.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatives</td>
<td>N=18</td>
<td>16.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends/Colleagues</td>
<td>N=12</td>
<td>10.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print Media</td>
<td>N=6</td>
<td>5.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All of the above</td>
<td>N=4</td>
<td>3.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

About 64 percent of respondents got to know about Sathya Sai Baba’s spirituality from their parents. 16 percent of respondents mentioned that they came to know about Sai Baba from their relatives while 11 percent heard about Baba from friends and colleagues. Five percent of respondents came to know about Sathya Sai Baba through literatures. Some of the responses that the interviewees gave are briefly listed here:

a. It was twenty years back, when I was invited by my neighbour to attend a Bhajan session at the Sai Centre where I first come to know about Sathya Sai Baba and since then I read many books written on Sathya Sai Baba especially those are available at our Centre in Mauritius.

b. When I was studying in class 8th, one day my maternal aunt’s husband visited our home. He had just then returned from Puttaparthi. He gave us prasad, Baba’s photograph and his life history, my father later kept that photo in our puja room. Since then, I had developed the habit of performing puja every Thursday and reading Baba’s life story whenever time permits.

c. One day an American came to Malaysia to deliver a lecture on spirituality. Before that I had a troublesome time. I was divorced; my sister died and I had an accident too. I thought of
how to change my life. I decided to attend the lecture but all the tickets were sold out by the time I reached there. However, fortunately I got a chance and as there were a few places free. During this meeting I heard for the first time about Sathya Sai Baba the holy man of India and later I developed a desire to visit him in India.

d. It was from my husband who is a devotee of Shirdi Sai Baba that I first came to know about Puttaparthy Baba soon after my marriage. Since then I keep visiting Puttaparthy every year.

e. I came to know about Sathya Sai Baba from my friend who brought Vibhuti for me from Puttaparthy. Later on I visited his home and saw a photo of Baba and obtained further details about him.

Apart from these, some of the respondents viewed that they have come to know about Sathya Sai Baba simultaneously from different sources such as parents, relatives, friends and colleagues. They have also read about him in newspapers, books and magazines besides the Internet.

The subsequent question asked was whether the respondents recall the events or instances that brought them closer to Sathya Sai Baba.

| Table-3 |
| Events that brought Indians close to Sathya Sai Baba |
| Could you recall the events that brought you closer to Sri Sathya Sai Baba? | Frequency (N=110) | Percentage % |
| Yes | N=48 | 43.63 |
| No | N=56 | 50.90 |
| No Response | N=6 | 5.45 |
As Table-3 shows, more than fifty percent respondents said that they could not recall the particular event that brought them closer to Sathya Sai Baba, while five percent of respondents could not give any answer to the question. However, the remaining 44 percent of the respondents could recall the incidents that brought them closer to Sathya Sai Baba. One of the respondents from South Africa shares the following:

I was born in a Sai Family in 1973. My parents became Sai devotee in 1972 just a year before my birth. My mother passed away when I was 4 years old. I always pray Swami as my lord. It was in 1995 when the Sathya Sai Institute in Puttaparthi offered computer course and two of South African girls applied for the course along with me. I wrote a letter and send my bio-data to Swami to scrutinize. But it so happened that I could not got the chance to study in India although I had dreams. I was so disappointed and prayed Swami; how the other two girls could secure the admission when I am your devotee. One day he came to my dream as a 21-year boy with his childhood curly hair. He was sitting in the chair and I was on the floor. He said to me “it is his wish not to study in India. There is a purpose why I could not give you chance… Be loyal to your country where you are born and do seva to that government”. Since that year I have been visiting Swami except the last year. My parents and relatives are also devotees of Sai Baba but they have not been able to visit Puttaparthiso far. I am so lucky that it was swami’s grace and blessing that have brought me to Puttaparthi.

The same interviewee told one incident that brought him closer to Sathya Sai Baba:
I am staying at Johannesburg, which is really a violent area. When I visited India I bought a book on “Tantra” on the advise of Swami. I always used to carry the book with me wherever I went out. As I am an auditor in a bank, my job is to visit to several banks for auditing. I used to carry my laptop, cell-phone etc., as part of job requirement. My friend used to ask me why I am carrying that “Tantra” book, whose place is in the home altar to worship. One day when I was walking in a public place at Johannesburg, two persons came from behind and held me demanding to give them all my valuable possessions. I gave my laptop, watch, dress, wallet and cell-phone. They pushed me down and left me alone. I was crying and at the same time praying Swami to save me. It was Swami’s grace that saved my life. They did not harm me. Had they wanted, they could have shot me or stabbed me as they had weapons. It was a miraculous escape. My book “Tantra” saved me. Though it had fallen from the bag and they did not take it. And from that day I pray to Swami and in return Swami says “I am here for you; I will protect you from any danger. Be happy what ever happened.”

Another interviewee from Trinidad mentioned about his experiences, which brought him and his family closer to Sathya Sai Baba as they had witnessed miracles during one of their family visits to Puttaparthi:

I was born and brought up in Trinidad. My grand father came to Trinidad as an indentured labour to work in the sugar plantations. My father had two children of which I am the younger one. My elder sister got married. My father used to worship Shirdi Sai Baba in our home. I found the name of Swami when my father mentioned me about the incarnation of Shirdi Sai Baba in the form of Sathya Sai Baba. He also visited Puttaparthi twice during 1976
and 1982. I was fortunate because I am blessed personally by Baba during Holi festivals at Puttaparthi. Baba put colour on us (all Trinidadian devotees) and specially blesses me for my future. That day onwards I am an ardent devotee of Swami and I had two darshans with Swami by his grace and love. My father was so happy, but could not enjoy, as he is bed ridden. Baba says to me that “your father is my great devotee take care of him and I will take care you,” in my dream. I do all activities in Trinidad at the Centre being an active member of that Centre.

A similar account is given by one of the respondents from Malaysia:

I had read so much about Baba's miracles that I believed in them totally, but I never anticipated that such a thing would ever happen to me (I just thought that I wasn't “that sort of person”). In January 1998, however, five days before our departure to India on February 1st, my friend Ann came round for our regular Reiki healing evening and asked whether I had a Sathya Sai Baba book to lend her. Since Cynthia holds our group’s library, I replied that all I had was Volumes II and III of the “Sayings and Discourses.” The Volume I was stolen along with my briefcase on a train in London the previous June. I then put my hand up to take a book that was lying horizontally on top of the others on my shelf and what was it, but Volume I to my utter surprise. I remembered reading it on that train before the briefcase was stolen. I wondered at first whether I had gone mad and started doubting whether it was actually Volume II or III that I was lost. So I looked further on the shelf and found that the other two volumes were there as well. I interpreted this miracle gratefully as Swami’s acknowledgement of my forthcoming visit.
There are many such accounts of miracles that the devotees experience with Sathya Sai Baba. One respondent from South Africa mentioned the following:

It was the mysterious appearance of Vibhuti on the pictures of Hindu deities and other occurrences that drew the devotees and the curious neighbours to the home of my relative in Loop Street, Pietermaritzburg in the early seventies. During a visit there I was given a picture of Sri Sathya Sai Baba, which I framed and hung in my lounge. On my wife’s birthday (4 July 1973) Vibhuti appeared from nowhere on her dead mother’s photograph and the holy pictures in our prayer room for the first time. Subsequently small heaps of sugar, kumkum and yellow turmeric powder were found on the altar, at the base of the holy pictures, from time to time. In July 1973 Swami appeared in my wife’s dream and beckoned to her. This promised her to go with a group, by ship, to India. On the first day of her arrival at Baba’s ashram in Puttaparthi she received Swami’s darshan.

Another respondent from Singapore who is a housewife had this experience to relate concerning her child’s illness:

I have three daughters, of whom my eldest daughter was very weak. She was a “wheezer” from the age of two years. We had tried all types of medicines and tablets but nothing helped. She lives with my mother. One early Monday morning I received a telephone call to say that she had an attack of wheezing. I was so worried that I asked my husband to take time off from work and fetch her from mother’s place. In the meantime I had a bath and went to my prayer room where I have a picture of Swami next to my sacred lamp. I wept and prayed to swami to help my child, as I knew that no tablets would help her. I then took a walk to the
nearby temple and made a vow, “if my child gets better, I will come to the temple every year.” By the time I reached home my husband had brought her and gone back to work. I went to my prayer room, and to my amazement I saw a beautiful spray of Vibhuti across Swami’s picture. I was so shocked that I could not believe my eyes. I had to look two or three times to make it certain that it was Vibhuti, and my eyes were not deceiving me. When my husband returned home that evening he was also very shocked to see the Vibhuti on the picture. Since that day she has not faced any attack. She is now doing well at school. Although my husband and I have been ardent devotees of Swami, I do not think that this is enough to thank Swami for curing my daughter. My husband and I are active members of our Sathya Sai Baba Centre, and our children attend the Bal Vikas Class there.

Construction of Sai Baba Centre/Temple in the Diaspora

Hindu social life revolves largely around temples and more so outside India, as it gives them a symbolic space on the foreign land. The Hindus often keep their tradition alive through the construction of Temples/Centres. In Malaysia for instance, as Ramanathan mentioned, “…the Hindu temples serve as an important symbol of religious identity of the Hindu diaspora.” (2001: 82) Coward and Botting (2001) point out that the “…Hindus do not perform their rites and rituals either marriage or death ceremony without a temple.” This attitude of Hindus drew diverse groups to construct large centres, and buildings dedicated for religious needs. There are several instances wherein Hindus have their huge architecturally temples built all over the world. For instance, the Vishva Hindu Parishad of Vancouver established the first multi-use Hindu temple with generalised programme of worship in Canada during 1974 (Coward and Botting 2001: 40). The Hindus of United States built the Venkateswar Temple in Pittsburgh in 1976 (Rayaprol 1997).
The history of the growth of the Sathya Sai Baba Centre/Temple in countries outside India provides the clue on the magnitude of this spiritual movement. One can observe today a large number of Sathya Sai Baba Centres around the world whose purpose is to foster and support the spiritual activities of its members. The Centre is the focal point for devotees to learn and practice Sathya Sai Baba’s teachings and to lead a disciplined spiritual life. In order to find the extent of their participation in centre’s/temple activities the respondents were asked whether they have Sathya Sai Baba Centre/Temple in their locality or nearby. Majority of the respondents i.e., 85 percent replied that they have Sathya Sai Baba Centre in their locality (see Table-4). Eight percent of respondents said that they do not have any Centre at their locality to celebrate or conduct daily bhajan programme. They often visit the centres located up to 20 to 50 km away from their residence, “which is possible only during holidays and festivals times,” as one respondent from Uganda mentioned.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table-4</th>
<th>Information about Sathya Sai Baba Centre/Mandir</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you have Sri Sathya Sai Baba Centre/Mandir in your locality or nearby?</td>
<td>Frequency (N=110)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N=94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>N=9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>N=7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table-5</th>
<th>Membership of the Centre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are you an active member/participant in your Centre?</td>
<td>Frequency (N=94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N=63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>N=31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of the respondents appeared to be active members of the Sathya Sai Baba Centres of their respective localities. 67 percent of respondents said that they are active members of their Centre where they are living (see Table-5). Though 33 percent of respondents are not active members of their Centre, they are the
devotee of Sathya Sai Baba. There are several devotees who worship Sathya Sai Baba at their homes and participate in all social service activities that the Centre organises. They also participate in all the festivals celebrated by the Centres.

Some respondents mentioned the reasons for not being the active members. Some of the responses are given below:

a. In U.S, I couldn’t go to the Sai Centre very often because it was really far and the bhajan timings clashed with my schedule. I was upset about this. Then I was introduced to another organization, Hindu Students’ Council (HSC), which is located within the campus of my university. At the university, weekly sessions are organised to discuss topics in spirituality including the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita. This way I am still able to continue my activities.

b. There are two points, first, the strict rules and duties of the centres and secondly, the busy schedule of my job. But during holidays I used to go to attain the seva activities as a voluntary member of the Centre.

c. The membership or active membership does not count in Sai Spiritual Programme; anybody can be a participant who can afford some time for social service activities and group spiritual programmes such as Bhajans or prayers. It is the active members who control the office jobs in order to run the Centre.

*Popularising Sai Baba in the Diaspora*

Over the years it is observed that Sathya Sai Baba movement is growing in its popularity. Respondents were asked whether they have introduced any of their
relatives or friends to the Sathya Sai Baba faith to know their role in its popularisation. 65 percent of respondents gave their answers as negative (see Table-6).

**Table-6**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you introduced any of your relatives/friends to Sri Sathya Sai Baba faith?</th>
<th>Frequency (N=110)</th>
<th>Percentage %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N=27</td>
<td>24.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>N=71</td>
<td>64.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>N=12</td>
<td>10.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It may be mentioned here that, it is the self-curiosity of the devotees that bring them closer to the Sathya Sai Baba while observing other devotees’ ways of worship and living in the Ashram. About 25 percent of respondents mentioned that they have influenced their relatives and family members (especially their children) to become devotees of Sathya Sai Baba faith. One respondent from South Africa mentioned

“…I feel that Swami is the magnet and I would say that people are inspired in my company.”

Any visitor to Puttaparthi or Sai Baba Centres in foreign countries is sure to notice the increasing presence of non-Indians in the Sathya Sai Baba spiritual movement. How do they become devotees of Sathya Sai Baba? Who are motivating them to follow Sathya Sai Baba? The overseas Indian respondents were asked, if they have motivated any of their non-Indian friends / relatives / colleagues in their country to become members of Sathya Sai Baba spiritualism. 77 percent of respondents gave negative answer and pointed out that they had no occasion to influence any non-Indians into the Sathya Sai Baba movement (see Table-7). They think that it is the non-Indians’ curiosity that brought them to Sathya Sai Baba. About 15 percent of respondents did not give any response to the question.
Have you influenced members other than Indians to become the devotees of Sri Sathya Sai Baba?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency (N=110)</th>
<th>Percentage %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N=9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>N=85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>N=16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table-7
Popularity of Sathya Sai Baba among non-Indians

In the above context, the study carried out by Alexandra Kent (1999; 2000; 2000a; 2004) in Malaysia in initiating Chinese participating in the Sathya Sai Baba movement emphasises on the significant role of people of Indian origin. Her study revealed that majority of Chinese in the Sathya Sai Baba movement in Malaysia one way or the other are influenced by the Indian devotees.

Most of the overseas Indian devotees found active participation of non-Indians among the Sathya Sai Baba followers in their country’s Sai Centres, they were not in a position to mention the magnitude of such participation.

Devotional Training Programme

Sathya Sai Baba emphasises the path of devotion (bhakti) for health, happiness and peace in life. Devotional activities in the Sathya Sai Baba centres include study circle, devotional singing, prayer, meditation as well as observing festival promoted by Baba. Sai Centres offer as special courses for general devotees and others to get closer to the life and teaching of Sathya Sai Baba.¹ The most important and popular programme under special curses is the “Summer Spiritual Course” at Brindavan, Bangalore, for which devotees from different parts of the world come to participate. Centres outside India also offer similar programmes such as yoga and meditation classes wherever a sizeable number of Sai Baba devotees live.

¹ These courses are open to students from all over India as well as to others outsider India [for foreigners]. The courses contain Sathya Sai Baba’s all discourses, his philosophy and principle of life as mentioned in the Sathya Sai Baba Organisation Charter.
Sathya Sai Baba has initiated a series of Summer Courses on Indian Culture and Spirituality since the 1970s. A large number of devotees under-take above mentioned courses. 35 percent of respondents have not yet participated in these courses offered by the Sathya Sai Baba institutions (see Table-8). Whereas 62 percent of the respondents have participated in courses such as *Education in Human Values* and *Summer Courses on Spirituality* offered by the Sathya Sai Baba Institution. A few of them have also attended meditation classes organised by Sathya Sai Baba Centre in their respective countries. One of the respondents from Australia has been attending spiritual seminars and conferences which are not considered under training programme. Another respondent from Mauritius said “in our Sudha Mandir in 1984 I underwent Bal Vikas course that covers EHV programme, meditation etc., for a period of six months.” A few others have mentioned the following:

- During my first three years at the Centre as a Bal Vikas teacher, I have gone through the training programme for ‘parenting’, conducted by special members of the International Sathya Sai Baba Organisation.

- I have gone through Bal Vikas teacher training diploma course offered by the Sathya Sai Baba Centre in our country, besides attending yoga classes every week.

### Table-8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you gone through any training/meditation course offered by Sri Sathya Sai Baba Centres till today?</th>
<th>Frequency (N=110)</th>
<th>Percentage %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N=68</td>
<td>61.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>N=39</td>
<td>35.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>N=3</td>
<td>2.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Devotional Programme

_Bhajans_ or _Satsang_ play an important role in the Sathya Sai Baba movement, as it is a part of the Sai religious/spiritual programme. Sai Baba mentioned in several discourses about the importance of devotional singing which is also published in many of the official publications. Some of his major sayings on devotional singing are as follows:

Devotional singing is the process of singing that originates in the heart, not from the lips or the tongue. It is the expression of the joyous thrill that wells up from the heart when the Glory of God is remembered. It is the spontaneous manifestation of inner ecstasy. No attention is paid to the blame or praise that others may give. It does not seek the admiration or the appreciation of the listeners (Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol. X: 84).

Devotional singing is one of the processes by which one can train the mind to expand into eternal values. And the teachings of Baba have important implication on his devotees those who do regularly the activity. It induces in one’s mind the desire for experiencing the truth, to glimpse the beauty that is God, to taste the bliss that is the Self. It encourages man to dive into himself and be genuinely his real Self (Sathya Sai Baba, Vol. VII: 497-498).

_Bhajans_ or _Satsang_ - gathering to sing devotional hymns is a well established institution in the Indian diaspora. Organisation of Satsang is done either at the home of a devotee or a common place of worship such as a temple or a Centre established for religious activities. Sathya Sai Centres have initiated Satsangs both at the Centre and also at the residences of some of the devotees.

_Table-9_
Majority of respondents (i.e., 85 percent) mentioned that they organise satsangs every week either at their residence or another devotee’s residences where other members come to participate (see Table-9). “Usually when five to six families are there it is possible to organise Satsang at some one’s residence. If there are more families, we go the nearby Centre for satsang,” as one interviewee from South Africa pointed out. 11 percent of respondents organise satsangs once in every month. They also conduct workshops on different themes, if not possible every month, they organise it during Sathya Sai Baba’s birthday (the response rate in this case is four percent). One respondent from Malaysia notes:

Most Centres/Groups meet twice a week to sing bhajans and once a week for study circles where Baba’s speeches are analysed and discussed by the participants, for a deeper comprehension of his message.

All Sai devotees believe in bhajan programme and it has become an integral part of daily household rituals. As one respondent from Uganda said:

There is nothing greater than bhajan and it is this bhajan that binds us together cutting across caste, creed, race and religion. When one joins the bhajan group he/she suddenly starts vibrating to utter the name of god. And those who sing bhajans get what can be called a ‘double promotion’, for they derive joy and distribute joy.
The devotees are free to organise bhajans or devotional singing at their home as they wish, at least once a week. At Puttaparthi, bhajan groups sing the glory of Sathya Sai Baba in Telugu language, as most of the songs initially were written in Telugu and later on translated into different languages. In the diaspora, it is the devotional singing that plays significant role in binding Indians to the Sathya Sai Baba spiritual community.

The Satsangs or devotional singing programmes form an important part of religious life, carefully preserved by the diasporic Indians all over the world. One of the respondents from South Africa explained how it is transmitted from one generation to another:

The Venkateswar Rama Bhajan Group has contributed a lot in retaining our Telugu/Andhra Culture in South Africa by the performance of Rama Bhajan. The Rama Bhajan Prayer is a unique traditional Andhra-Telugu observance, which was handed down through successive generations by our forefathers through the oral tradition in South Africa. Various groups in South Africa undertake the performance of Rama Bhajan. The main reason for Telugus as well as other Hindus observing the Rama Bhajan Prayer in South Africa is because it serves as a form of thanksgiving to god almighty for the bountiful blessings that he has bestowed on us. The main feature of Rama Bhajan is that for entire evening we (male members of the group) dance around in a circular motion with various variations singing in praise of lord Rama, while others play cymbals as well as mrindhangam to accompany the dance and singing. All the Rama bhajans are sung in Telugu with a leading singer. Another important aspect of Rama Bhajan is the carrying of the Kola, that is two torches, which comprises of white calico cloth soaked in oil, camphor and dharba grass. When the Kola is lit, it
marks the beginning of the Rama Bhajan prayer and it remains burning for the entire duration of the prayer.

It is worthwhile to mention here that a Sathya Sai Baba Akhanda Jyoti Puja, was organised by the Mauritius Sathya Sai Baba Organisation to commemorate the arrival of ‘SAI AKHANDA JYOTI’ at Mauritius, taken right from Puttaparthi with all the religious fervour (see programme details Annexure-3).

Visiting Puttaparthi

Visiting Puttaparthi is a sacred act to all Sathya Sai devotees world over. For the devotees among the Indian diaspora, visit to Puttaparthi is both religious and cultural linkage with the homeland. Majority of respondents (72%) mentioned that they have visited Puttaparthi several times. Some of them regularly attend Sathya Sai Baba’s celebration at Puttaparthi. A few respondents (28%) mentioned that it is their first visit to Puttaparthi. It is interesting to note that some of the respondents have been visiting Puttaparthi four to five times in a year, from such distant places as South Africa, Mauritius, UK, USA and Australia. Before a plan is being made to come to Puttaparthi some logistics have to be worked out by the respective Centres from where they arrive. As one young interviewee from UK explained how the Centre arranges trips for students to visit Puttaparthi to attend the Sathya Sai Baba birthday.

Once a date is fixed for trip, letters are sent to our parents six month before along with the estimates of expenditures, so that we can plan well in advance. Two members generally coordinate the group for the trip to Puttaparthi. Sathya Sai Baba classes resumed before one week. All the expenses are born by our parents excluding the stay at Puttaparthi.
For the majority of respondents the main purpose of their visit to Puttaparthis is to celebrate important festivals in the presence of Sathya Sai Baba. The important festivals they wish to participate include Sathya Sai Baba’s birthday followed by Easwaramma Day and Gurupurnima. All the devotees believe that a visit to Puttaparthis is a pilgrimage for religious merit and derive grave.

On the duration of their stay at Puttaparthis, most of the respondents said that they generally spend a week or participate in all the activities of the ashram. They use the opportunity of coming to Puttaparthis in order to visit their hometowns or other places of interest for various purposes. Some of the respondents spend up to one-month at the ashram, depending on the work and programmes they are assigned upon their arrival. For instance, if they wish to engage in social service activities, their stay may extend from one week to one month or more according to the wishes of Sathya Sai Baba.

It was observed that, although most of the devotees come to Puttaparthis for pilgrimage purposes, they spend their time voluntarily in doing many service activities as per the allotment done by Sathya Sai Baba Trust at Prasanthi Nilayam. These service activities start from services to various villages, organisation of medical camps and Seva Dal work at different locations in and around Puttaparthis. Some of the respondents share their expressions pertaining to service activities that they participated at Prasanthi Nilayam during their visit:

It was my first ever visit to Puttaparthis from Malaysia and I was involved in the Birthday celebration. There were about 50 people involved in this seva. Many times we had to skip breakfast and go straight for seva at 7.45 am after darshan. This required a lot of self-discipline as well as self-control. Many times I got so frustrated and asked myself why am I involved in this seva, but I realized that this is all for swami and I had the company of my
friends as well. Swami always emphasizes on self-control and self-discipline and this was a good way swami made it for me.

We have been placed three times at the North Indian Canteen along with our (15) seva dals from UK during Swami’s Birthday - generally for three days, and once at Chaithanya Jyoti too, but we cannot say next time if we get this opportunity or not. We pray Swami to give such opportunity to serve him at his ashram through this human service. We enjoyed the work, which assigned to us, talking to people and serving them is really exciting.

*Social Service in the Diaspora*

Most of the respondents are aware of the community services undertaken by the Sathya Sai Baba Centre/Trust/Organisation in their respective countries.

**Table-10**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you know some of the community services undertaken by Sri Sathya Sai Baba Centre/ in your current place of residence?</th>
<th>Frequency (N=110)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N=103</td>
<td>93.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>N=07</td>
<td>6.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table-10 shows, 94 percent of respondents indicated that they are aware of the activities which the Sathya Sai Baba Centre has undertaken in their locality and country. They are also aware about the activities of the Centre, which addresses some of the current problems of society through its programmes such as Childcare, Old Age Care, and the AIDS awareness campaign. Only six percent of respondents remained silent without giving any answer. Some of the respondents
explained their personal experiences of participating in seva after joining the Sathya Sai Baba Centre. Some of them have narrated the following experiences:

a. The Tampines Home seva takes place on the 1st Sunday of every month at 11 am. The patients there faced several disabilities. Some are mentally handicapped while others are physically. The first time I went there last year, I felt very disheartened upon entering the home. Seeing the condition of the patients there, it made me feel sad and also a little afraid because some of them are not able to communicate with us and sometimes they hold our hands and pull us along with them to wherever they want to go and we have no choice but to follow. That was the first and last time I ever went there. Then I started to think. These people are there for a reason. Whatever that reason may be, we should be grateful to God for he has not made us like that and we should try to make these people in the homes happy because if they are happy then God will also be happy with us. That is why recently, I have started going for this seva once again. It makes me happy to see them happy. They are always smiling and happy to see us enter the home. They actually look forward to our visits. When we go there, we sing for them and some of them, who can stand, dance to the songs we sing. When it is time to say goodbye, some of them are sad to see us go while some will smile and say goodbye. I will continue going for this seva just to see the smiles on their faces.

b. When I first went to moral home a few years back, I was afraid to even step in at first. I was thinking if this is a right place for me to go. I had done community service at the old folk's home but never at a moral home for children and had no idea of what
was going to happen. There is nothing unusual about the home. In fact, it is so fun that you wouldn’t even know how I spent one hour. Basically, we play simple games and sing songs, passing the parcel and so on. The children over there love to sing and do actions with it. No matter how down or depressed they are, when we sing song all of them get cheerful and are geared up for the following games. Many of them can sing and dance well. After 30-40 minutes of games, we usually serve them ice cream. Some have difficulty feeding them, so we feed the children. We even talk to them and comfort them if they are sad. Some of them have so many stories to tell and we have to patiently listen to them. They have so much of feelings and things that they want to share with outsiders. What I learned after my first visit to the home, I really thanked Swami for what he has given me and I am so grateful to him. The children in moral home live a very mundane life. Only once or twice a week people actually go and pay them a visit. They are so grateful to us when we visit them. This is one of the seva activities in Sai Centre Katong that I really look forward in every month.

c. The Woodbridge Home Seva takes place on the 3rd Sunday of every month. The main focus of the home is to care for people who are mentally disabled. A few years ago, when I went there for the first time, instead of feeling shocked or afraid, I actually felt happy to be there. This is because the moment the patients saw us there, their faces lit up and they came running towards us, shaking our hands vigorously and greeting us. In fact, I learnt that once you build a personal relationship with the people there, they do not forget you at all. That actually made
me wonder exactly how “disabled” these people is. We do many things once we’re there.

d. Sai Baba Centres have adopted Old Age Homes as one of the community service projects in our place. We visit these homes at least once a month. The able bodied devotees help to cut the grass, sweep the drain, scrub the floor, toilets, kitchen and sweep all the rubbish and burn them. DDT and anti-malarial oil is sprayed in the rooms and drains. While the men are doing the manual jobs, the female devotees clean the rooms of the old folks, tidy their beds and sweep the floors. Sometimes a fair amount of scrubbing, washing and mopping has to be done in the home depending on how dirty or neglected the home is. Devotees take turn to cook different dishes in their homes to provide variety in the meals. This is one rare moment when the devotees experience satisfaction since the food is received with total appreciation. Devotees feed those who were unable to help themselves. There are some old folks who prefer to cook their own food. For them assistance is given in the form of food parcels and help in the cooking. In some areas we do medical care while administering to the inmates by some medical person on a fortnightly basis. Although the inmates are generally healthy, some do need medical attention. Besides giving them medicine and pills, the devotees also give them spiritual food and listen to their problems. While this is a monthly feature of the service activities of most of the Centres, during special days, devotees collect through donors as well as well wishers food parcels, clothing and cash gifts and distribute these to the old folks.
Role of Women

Women members play an important role in the Sai religion like their male counterparts. According to Sathya Sai Baba, a woman can be a religious specialist by her own right. She can worship in the temple, pray and offer pujas. They deliver lectures on religious and spiritual subjects at Prasanthi Nilayam especially during the Easwaramma day (which is observed as International Ladies Day). Most of the centres and groups in India as well as in the diasporas have Ladies Group that undertakes activities for women to increase their “self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-satisfaction.” Women members also participate in all the three wings of the organisation - spiritual, educational and service. All most all the Sai Centres had active women participants and a few respondents have also described the activities of women organisers in the respective Centres. The qualitative answers derived from this study tabulated below:

a. The Ladies group of our centre in South Africa holds special Bhajan sessions for women, and undertakes the study of the lives of the world's exemplary women to learn and implement dharmic principles of women in daily life. The Ladies Group also participates in various service activities, including cooking and serving meals to homeless people, visiting orphanages, handicap and old people’s homes, and hospitals. Periodic seminars and lectures by qualified specialists are organised on topics such as: vegetarian food and its importance; education for women, health care, including talks on various cancers, depression, etc., family values, marriage, parenting and so on. Ladies outdoor Sadhana camps are also organised periodically at places of spiritual importance, including shrines, temples, and other places.
b. Women devotees of our Centre in Malaysia started recently Mahila Satsangs not only for Bhajans and study of sacred texts and books, but for services of women. We used to visit the poor in the slums, select the helpless girls and try to provide them with some means of honourable livelihood.

*Relationship with the Homeland*

Indians in general and Sathya Sai Baba spiritual communities in the diaspora in particular have not only retained their religious and cultural traditions alive but also simultaneously maintained their personal relationships with the homeland.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table-11</th>
<th>Personal experience of respondents with Sathya Sai Baba</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being a devotee of Sri Sathya Sai Baba, do you experience any special relationship with the motherland/country of origin?</td>
<td>Frequency (N=110)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N=59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>N=37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>N=14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The respondents were asked whether being the devotees of Sri Sathya Sai Baba they have experienced any special relationship with their motherland/country of origin. 54 percent of respondents provided similar answers and most of them mentioned that “India is their spiritual homeland and the relationships are further strengthened when they turn to Sathya Sai Baba’s faith” (see Table-11). Some of the unique responses received are mentioned below:

- Now there is more than just blood relation to visit India, especially to Puttaparthi, which will remain forever. I wish I could live in India. However, I have a duty to perform in
South Africa. I pray swami to bless me to be born in India in my next birth.

- The feeling is not related to my attraction to Swami. Though I was not born there, I feel a kinship. Hope to be born in India in next life; as great souls lived in India for years, I hope to get peace, joy, happiness and closeness to god at Prasanthi.

- I am very patriotic and proud to be a Mauritian. I have a sense of belonging - I feel that this is my root - home and motherland.

34 percent of respondents are of the opinion that, they have not experienced any special relationship with the motherland after becoming the devotee of Sathya Sai Baba. 13 percent of respondents have not given any answer to this question.

Sai Baba devotees live as a community in their neighbourhood. Not only they visit each other or assemble at some one’s residence for religious purposes or bhajans but support each other on various occasions other than religion. They recall the teachings of Sathya Sai Baba that they are the “brothers and sisters of Sai family” and “help each other whenever there is a need.” Some of the respondents offered the following views:

- There is a mutual cooperation among the devotees and all are very friendly, just like a family “Vasudevam Kutumbakam.” I had a major operation and my family and I were fully taken care by the Sai families. It happens with others too. We support each other.

- There is strong mutual cooperation and support among the Sai devotees even out side the religious sphere whenever we meet for a
community work or any kind of group activities; we work together as a team.

One respondent from UK said:

- Some people are supportive whilst some are selfish. This can be found at the Central level when we organise something for a noble cause. Conflict over leadership is the main factor and hence to avoid the conflict our Centre has restricted memberships to few persons.

Migration and Transnational Networks

Most of the respondents in this study belong to second, third and fourth generation Indians. They are born and brought up in their respective countries and have no experience of migrating to other countries. They have some knowledge of their parents or ancestors’ migration history. Their responses on the history of migration could be categorised as given in the Table-12.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When did your parents/ancestors leave India?</th>
<th>Frequency (N=110)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1850-1900</td>
<td>N=35</td>
<td>31.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901-1950</td>
<td>N=19</td>
<td>17.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951-1980</td>
<td>N=22</td>
<td>20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981-2004</td>
<td>N=9</td>
<td>8.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can not say</td>
<td>N=25</td>
<td>22.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table-12 shows, 32 percent of respondents’ ancestors left India between the periods 1850-1900, whereas 17 percent of respondents mentioned that their parents or ancestors left India during 1901-1950. Thus, these two groups of respondents are belonging to the category of Old Diaspora. About 20 percent of
respondents mentioned that their parents left India during 1951-1980. They belong to the New Diaspora and majority of them are settled in the developed countries such as USA, UK, Australia and Canada. Only eight percent of respondents are recent migrants and thus fall under the category of Non-Resident Indians (NRIs). 23 percent of respondents pointed out that they could not remember any details of migration of their parents or ancestors.

Most of the respondents believed that their ancestors emigrated as indenture labour either for “better employment opportunity” or “to overcome poverty/unemployment.” Among the New Diaspora, majority have mentioned that they have migrated either to join other family members, for better educational opportunity or for better business/trade opportunities in the Western countries.

| Table-13 |
| Presence of relatives outside the country |
| Do you have relatives in other countries? | Frequency (N=110) | Percentage |
| Yes | N=88 | 80.00 |
| No | N=22 | 20.00 |

| Table-14 |
| Frequency of communication |
| How frequently do you communicate with them including personal visits? | Frequency (N=110) | Percentage |
| Occasionally | N=47 | 42.72 |
| Once in a week | N=15 | 13.63 |
| Once in a month | N=22 | 20.00 |
| Once in a year | N=26 | 23.63 |
| Never Communicate | * | * |

Indians, like any other ethnic communities abroad have their relatives outside their current place of residence, because communication network become more
crucial when there is a distance of geographical boundaries. As Table-13 shows, 80 percent of respondents are having relatives outside their current place of residence besides having kith and kin in the homeland. Regarding the frequency of networks, as Table-14 shows, 43 percent of respondents maintained that they network with their relatives on occasional basis such as during festivals times. 20 percent of respondents maintained that they network within a time span of one month, while 14 percent weekly once maintained network with their relatives. The respondents those who maintained network with their relatives once a year constituted 24 percent in the study.

The major mode of communication network among the devotees to exchange information on both sides is through email, sending letters, and through telephonic calls besides personal visits. The easy and cheaper air travel contributed a great deal in connecting Indians with their homeland. As the study shows, majority of respondents visit at least once a year to India. This shows the affordable economic conditions of Indians abroad for undertaking pilgrimages and visits to the places of their origin or for business. Most of the respondents mentioned that purpose of their visit to homeland is to spend leisure time during holidays. The other purposes of visit include participation in Sathya Sai Baba’s birthday celebration, conducting religious rituals, and attending life cycle ceremonies beside business activities.

Networks among the Devotees

The Sathya Sai Baba devotees have established extensive linkages and communication networks within their countries both at the institutional and individual levels. For instance, Mauritius has strong networks among the Sai devotees across the entire country. Similarly, the mode of communication among the devotees takes place through various means, such as telephone/fax, writing

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2 For the sake of reliability on respondents' network, the following question asked, as the devotees may have their relatives within the geographical periphery and might have frequent communication with them, which the study finds no importance in transnational networks.
letters, personal visits, email and Internet and so on. The frequency of communication among the members reaches to its peak during festive occasions and special days of Sathya Sai devotional activities, during which the devotees meet or talk to each other longer than the other times. Whenever they meet or communicate to each other, the major issues they discuss generally pertain to spiritual matters, social service; and, lastly, the personal matters.