CHAPTER-IV

The Structure of Sathya Sai Baba Theology

God is above and beyond the limits of time and space. He is beyond all human characteristics and qualities. As the stories of god and his qualities superimposed on the career of Sathya Sai Baba, his parents were given the names “Dharma” and “Bhakti,” and the images of them are now found in the temples wherever the movement has spread. His devotees gradually began to believe that Sathya Sai Baba is an incarnation of the most revered Hindu gods such as Shiva, Parvati, Vishnu, Krishna, Rama, and Ganesh etc., worshipped in different temples. However, most of the devotees consider Sathya Sai Baba as the divine incarnation of Vishnu. This belief has been underlined in the writings of scholars like N. Kasturi, M.N. Rao and many others.

Besides the literature describing Sathya Sai Baba as manifestation of God, interviews with members of the Sathya Sai Baba group at Prasanthi Nilayam as well as with the devotees outside it reveals that most of the followers consider him as the single and complete manifestation of Vishnu. According to some followers, Sathya Sai Baba is the complete manifestation of the “god” of all religions. Those who come to see Sathya Sai Baba at Prasanthi Nilayam started believing in his divine powers, whether through personal experiences of the paranormal kind or through hearsay, literature, videos and so on. Although many of them convinced that Sathya Sai Baba is an incarnation of God in human form in this century, others see him as a highly “self-realized” soul.

Sathya Sai Baba as Avatar

An avatar is the incarnation (bodily manifestation) of a god. The term is primarily used in Hindu mythology to refer to the incarnations of the god Vishnu. It has also been used to refer to the incarnations of god in other religions such as in
Christianity and Islam. Avatar is of two kinds: a) *Amsaavatar*, b) *Poornaavtar*. *Amsaavatar* means partial incarnation of the divine whereas *Poornaavtar* means the incarnation of God on earth. The difference between the two exists in degrees of how individuals perceive the world of god. All human beings are generally *Amsaavatar* i.e., partial incarnation of the divine. It is mentioned in the literatures that these partial incarnations caught up in Maya (illusion), develop egoism and possessiveness and lead worldly life. The *Poornaavatars* however, subduing and transcending Maya, manifest the full divinity to the world in one’s own live. The instances can be found in the Hindu epics. For instance, in the Treta Yuga, Rama came as the very embodiment of Sathya (Truth) and Dharma (Righteousness), in the Dwapara Yuga, he incarnated as Krishna, the embodiment of Santhi (Peace) and Prema (Love). Rama and Krishna are adored as the manifestations of the supreme god Vishnu by all Hindus. Of course, Rama and Krishna are by no means the only divine avatars recognised by Hindus, there are other numerous gods and goddesses assumed similar significance. Hindus believe that, the divine being has taken human form on earth many times, as the examples can be seen in the ten avatars of Vishnu. Devotees of Sathya Sai Baba consider him as the embodiment of all the four manifestations Sathya, Dharma, Santhi and Prema (Gokak 1983).

**Sathya Sai Baba as Mahatma**

Thousands of followers both in India and abroad have deified Sathya Sai Baba as the supreme reality i.e., Mahatma or the reincarnation of god on earth. Thus, they find his way of life and works as divine. “Mahatman” is often referred to a person or more specifically to a saint who attains the supreme experience. According to Sathya Sai Baba, god even in human form is completely divine and without all human instincts. To add further, he gives the example of an ordinary human being and of a divine manifestation:
When god manifests himself on earth in human form and rides a horse, ordinary men think that the horse supports him, but in reality he is the support for the horse. The devotees who see this have come to true knowledge.

_Sathya Sai Speaks_

In Hindu mythologies and in major religious texts, one can find the human beings with distinctive characteristics. Such characteristics are such as anger, passion, affection, valour, hunger, partiality and so on. The devotees of Sathya Sai Baba believe that he is unaffected by any of these emotions and feelings. Thus they adore him as the incarnation of god in human form who manifests all human virtues in his purity and perfection; shows power, wisdom and knowledge beyond the comprehension of humans. Hegel’s philosophy can best be suggested in this context. Hegel viewed that “…God is a fantasised being upon whom man has projected his own highest power and faculties, who thus is seen as perfect and all-powerful, and in contrast to whom man himself appears as limited and imperfect” (Giddens 1992: 1-4). Marx while taking the philosophy of Feuerbach states that, “…in religion men participate vicariously in an unreal, fantasy world of harmony, beauty and contentment while living in a practical everyday world of pain and misery” (ibid.: 5). Thus the similarities can be found in the movement where the attributes of god put together into the life of Sathya Sai Baba by his devotees in order to build the positive source of inspiration to realise the potential of Sathya Sai Baba’s charisma.

_Sathya Sai Baba as the Avatar of Krishna_

The devotees worship Sathya Sai Baba in the forms of their chosen deities. Majority of them experience him as one form of Krishna. John Hislop for instance, described him through his personal experiences, which he had during his visits to Puttaparthi. In his book _My Baba and I_, he argues that, he has seen the divine qualities of Sathya Sai Baba as similar with those of Sri Krishna. Later on
Sai Baba also recognised his description as Sri Krishna, which Hislop mentioned in his works. The image that Hislop describes following the *darshan* of Sai Baba is as follows:

What transfixed my movement and stopped my breathing now, was his face…The Baba I knew was not there! Instead, there was a face of the most extraordinary beauty - quite different in shape and cast from the features of our beloved Sai. The charm was so great, so poignant, that my heart seemed to twist, almost as through it were in pain. Never in my life, not in photos, nor in paintings by great artists have I seen a face of such exquisite beauty. It was beyond imagination and concept, totally beyond experience. And his colour was blue. Not just blue, not the blue with which artists paint Sri Krishna, but a blue like the velvet blue that sometimes can be seen in a dark sky, like a blue that I have at times seen from the deck of a ship thousands of miles from shore on the Pacific Ocean. I do not know how else to describe it (Hislop 2003: 58).

Besides Hislop, many other devotees, who have personally experienced Sathya Sai Baba, too find him as the manifestation of Krishna. Such a view has been supported by the photo of “Sathya Sai Baba as Sai Krishna,” taken by an Australian devotee during her interview with Sathya Sai Baba at Puttaparthi. She claimed that, “…it was only on her return to Australia when the film was developed that, the Sai Krishna image was seen.”¹ The instances of super imposition of devotees’ personal gurus/teachers as god can be seen in various sects in Hinduism, for instance, the Swaminarayan religion.²

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¹ Sathya Sai Baba claims that, he is the Supreme Being i.e., Sri Krishna and preaches therefore Vaishnavism.
² Swaminarayan is being regarded as the Supreme Being and considered by his followers as the avatar of Krishna by several reasons (see Williams 2001).
It is a common practice in India for ardent followers to project their icon as avatar, and generate myths and legends in support of such claim. Hindus believe in the words of Krishna mentioned in the Gita: “Yada Yadi hi Darmasya, Glanir Bhavatu Bharataha…” meaning “whenever there is a decline in dharma, I manifest upon this earth. I manifest in all yugas to provide succour to holy men, eliminate evil and establish dharma.” The devotees of Sathya Sai Baba too believe that, as the dharma had declined in today’s world, God himself manifested on this earth in the form of Sathya Sai Baba to establish “dharma.” However, only very few devotees believe that Sathya Sai Baba is divine incarnation of Sri Krishna. His early devotees for instance, hold him as the “miracle man.” The neo-vedantins or advaitins or vaishnavas in India consider Sathya Sai Baba as one of the great saints of India today.

Sathya Sai Baba proclaims that, when Krishna lived on the Earth, few were aware of his divinity although he successfully accomplished his mission of ridding the earth of many evil powers. Shirdi Sai Baba, though regarded by some as the incarnation of God Shiva, most of his followers viewed him as one of the great saints. Only a few of his close devotees knew him as the [re]incarnation of Shiva. Thus Sathya Sai Baba wrote:

The Avatar takes the human form and behaves in a human way so that humanity can feel kinship with the divinity. At the same time he rises to godly heights so that mankind also can aspire to reach God. People could not stand the Lord in super-human form. ... If the Lord came in all His majesty people would afraid and would have no opportunity to know and love him….I come always for the restoration of Dharma (righteousness), for tending the virtuous and ensuring them conditions congenial for progress, and for educating the “blind” who miss the way and wander into the wilderness.

[www.cosmicharmony.com/Av/SatyaS2/SatyaS2.htm]
According to Hindu beliefs, Sri Krishna is thought to have taken many forms at
different periods of time for the benefit of mankind. The followers of Sathya Sai
Baba believe that there is hardly any difference between Sathya Sai Baba in his
exalted role as Sri Krishna, as he manifested himself as one form of Krishna at a
particular time for some devotees and in another form as Sathya Sai Baba for
others. In spite of such differences in their images of Sai Baba, as Vishnu,
Krishna or a saint, all followers believe in his leadership and his divinity.

**Sathya Sai Baba as Avatar of Rama**

The very name ‘Rama’ as described in the literatures, shows the embodiment of
love and compassion. Similar characteristics can be found in the case of Sathya
Sai Baba, whom devotees characterise as the embodiment of love and compassion
and therefore, endearingly called, Sai Rama. It will be a personal experience if
one would visit Puttaparthi or any Sathya Sai Baba Centres around the world to
have an experience of the name Rama with Sai i.e., “Sai Ram.” For instance,
inside the ashram at Puttaparthi, devotees greet each other chanting “Sai Ram,”
which is synonymous with Pranama or Namaskara.

Rama’s life-story is so well known that, Hindus sing his glory in every household
all over the world. Rama was known for his bravery and self-discipline.
Respectively, the devotees of Sathya Sai Baba adore him as the avatar of Rama
and worship along with other Hindu Gods and goddesses in temples and in home
shrines. Sathya Sai Baba strongly affirms the literal truth of scriptural “tales,”
which can be seen in the following conversation between John Hislop and Sathya
Sai Baba:

John Hislop: Sometimes Swami speaks of the Ramayana and the
Mahabharata as if they were historical, and sometimes as if they
were to be taken as representative of every individual's inner
conflicts, virtues, bad qualities etc. Are these events and people historical fact?
Sai Baba: Yes they are a record of historical people and incidents...
Rama was a real person and an Avathar. And Dasaratha was His father. Krishna was real and the events of His Avathara were real. Rama’s life, over the ages, has been altered and distorted somewhat, and Swami's story of Rama will be a classic through several Yugas.

John Hislop (2002) *Conversations with BSSSB*

**Avatarhood Predicted**

It is believed that, Sathya Sai Baba will come again as another avatar - in his next life - in the form of “Prema Sai Baba.” The juxtaposition of the power of each of the avatar to the divine qualities of god by devotees states that, the first Sai at Shirdi was the incarnation of Shiva; the second incarnation at Puttaparthi (present Sai) has in it the attributes of Shiva and Shakti; and the third form as Prema Sai - the incarnations of the power of Shakti - will be born in the Mandya district of Karnataka, India. The first mention of Prema Sai appears to be in Sathya Sai Baba’s discourse on *Shiva Shakti* (6th July 1963). In Sai literature for instance, S.P. Ruhela (1997) suggests “…Sathya Sai Baba disclosed this information to his close devotees from time to time. Sathya Sai Baba himself proclaims that, Prema Sai will be born in Karnataka about 8 years after he leaves his body.” This avataric declaration can also be found in the works of Western scholars, such as John Hislop, Howard Murphet, Samuel Sandweiss, Peggy Mason, Phyllis Krystal and so on. The printed document (*see the separate sheet*) described in great detail about the Avatarhood of Sathya Sai Baba and the descriptions by various devotees, even by Christians who found in him the qualities of Jesus Christ. The compilation was done by an Australian devotee Chiman Vasram and distributed during Sathya Sai Baba’s birthday celebration in November 2003 at Puttaparthi.
Mystery of the Avatar

The Western mind is capable of believing in Jesus, as the Son of God - at least on the part of some of the population - but seems unable or unwilling to grasp the concept of the avatar or an incarnation of God. In contrast, Indians firmly believe in the divine personalities - the doctrine of avatar and this can be found in the Eastern literatures that reveal the description of several avatars. Taking the Eastern Worldview and the perceptions of devotees as background, it is argued that, millions of people around the world accept Sathya Sai Baba as the avatar of modern age. However, from sociological point of view it is difficult to assume that Sathya Sai Baba is truly an avatar. Skepticism is thus natural and must be overcome by evidence and intuition as Sathya Sai Baba says:

No one can understand my Mystery. The best you can do is to get immersed in it…You must dive deep into the sea to get the pearls. What good is it to dabble among the waves near the shore, and swear that the sea has no pearls in it and that all tales about them are false…in truth you cannot understand the nature of My Reality, either today, or even after a thousand years of steady austerity or ardent inquiry, even if all mankind joins in that effort… do not allow doubt to distract you; if only you will install in the altar of your heart steady faith in My Divinity, you can win a vision of My Reality.

Sanathana Sarathi, August 1984

Skeptists and rationalist have long been questioned the authenticity of Sai Baba and his miracles.\(^3\) A twelve member Committee even was set up in 1976 by H.

\(^3\) In one of the letters from Hislop we can find the following lines: “…the materialization of objects is a very minor part of Baba’s work in the world, and he attributes no proof of divine wisdom to these manifestations, simply saying the ability is natural to him whereas it is acquired by yogis after long practice and even then is not stable and permanent. As you well know, there are yogis in Burma and in India who have developed yogic or siddhi powers and the materialization of objects is one of these powers” (Hislop 1998).
Narasimhaiah, the then Vice-Chancellor of Bangalore University, to investigate the rationally and scientificity of Sathya Sai Baba’s miracles and any other verifiable superstitions.\(^4\) Added to this, one of the English daily newspapers in Hyderabad - *The Deccan Chronicle* - brought out on its front-page pictures from a video recording of Sathya Sai Baba's "creation" of a gold necklace, in the presence of the then Prime Minister of India, P.V. Narasimha Rao on 23\(^{rd}\) November 1992. Besides these investigations against miracles of Sathya Sai Baba, there have also been numerous other allegations against him and the movement. These include accusations of sexual misconduct of Sathya Sai Baba and the discovery of cyanide, land mines and plastic explosives in Prasanthi Nilayam by the police. Disappointed by the allegations, many devotees have turned away from Sathya Sai Baba to the 35 year-old Palghat (Kerala) born “Bala Sai Baba.” Bala Sai claims to be the real Sai avatar - according to many of the former devotees.\(^5\)

Scholars argue that, the concept of “avatar” is an exclusively Hindu concept and contradicts with the universalism, which Sathya Sai Baba teaches. Sathya Sai Baba is believed and conceived by many of his devotees as the one and only supreme teacher. His teaching represents the truth of all religions. Sathya Sai Baba refers himself as “…the God of all Gods, the one whom all prayers to whichever deity must end up at - all gods rolled into one.” (Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol. 26) In other words, he suggests that, one should follow him, although while denying the fact that he should be worshiped. This contradicts with the Christian beliefs which suggests that, the only way to God is through Jesus Christ and that all others are misguided, even calling them “unredeemed,” “lost souls” and so on.

\(^4\) Dr. Narasimhaiah's committee exposed Sai Krishna, a 7 year old child-protégé of Sathya Sai Baba, by pulling out the packet of Vibhuti hidden in Sai Krishna's underclothes. As a result of this exposure, and fearing investigation, several sun dry Godmen immediately confessed that they did not have any miraculous powers, including the now famous Ganapathi Sachidananda Swami (Louis Hughes: http://www.dci.dk/en/mtrl/saibabaeng.html).

\(^5\) Bala Sai has set up an ashram in Kurnool district of Andhra Pradesh. He dresses like Sathya Sai Baba, performs the same kind of “miracles” and has been successful in attracting a large number of devotees including western devotees.
Skeptists have further described the Sathya Sai Baba movement as equivalent to the “personality cult,” while comparing the cults of Stalin, Hitler and Mao Tse Tung - which according to them were mostly, misguided the devotees and strive for evil ends. This negative popularity came into news further when it was circulated through the Internet by some of the former devotees across Western Europe - including David Bailey.\(^6\) The main cause for slowing down of this movement in the West are: a) the increasing attention shown by the media including the Internet to sensational and other allegations, and b) to a lesser extent the series of challenges to Sathya Sai Baba’s characteristically unique divine claims.

However, whatsoever the fact that might be, the devotees find it difficult to tolerate and raised voice against these accusations both in India and outside including those of the western devotees. The devotees not surprisingly reject all of the above, pointing out that, modern video technology can be used to produce “evidence” of almost any kind of faking or for that matter of “miracle working.” In any case, the point is made that, Sathya Sai Baba himself attaches little importance to his “miracles” and the important aspect of his mission is to call for the “spiritual way of living.” It is pointed out here that, despite these major criticisms by the rationalist and skeptists, Sathya Sai Baba received the royal welcome when he visited East Africa to meet his devotees who lived under inhospitable conditions due to ethnic/national problems. Although the visit of Sathya Sai Baba to East Africa was his first visit till today outside homeland, his impact is seen today in the transnational context too.

**Philosophy of Sathya Sai Baba**

Sathya Sai Baba, who is regarded as the incarnation of earlier Sai Baba of Shirdi, began his career as a Hindu reviveralist. His teachings during the early days largely

\(^6\) David Bailey is a Welsh concert pianist, considered to be Sathya Sai Baba's right-hand man, has focused unsavory publicity on Sai Baba (Ahmed 2001)
centred on the Hindu religious philosophy and interpretation of the ancient traditions. However, later he developed a new religious organisation or Sarva-Dharma based on voluntary membership of believer in social service - as clearly defined structure of the worldview. His teachings are now combining with several Hindu mythologies, Buddhist focus on transcending worldly-desire, the Christian idea of service and an evangelical emphasis on direct experience of the divine.\(^7\) His philosophy can best be visible if one visits his ashram, the “Prasanthi Nilayam.” Two giant architectural symbols can be found at the entrance - the arch at the entrance of the temple at Prasanthi Nilayam and the “Sarva Mathikya Stupa,” also known as the “Sarva Dharma Stupa.” The pillars of the arch have statuettes of the ten avatars of Vishnu, the tenth depicting the future Kalki avatar seated on a white horse. The second is an enormous pillar between the main temple and the Poornachandra auditorium designed to hold a lotus on its peak; its base is made up of five sides with five symbols - the OM of Hinduism, the Cross of Christianity, the Crescent of Islam, the Wheel of Buddhism, and the Sacred Fire of Zoroastrianism (Srinivas 2001). This symbolises that; Sathya Sai religion is one of the “unique religions” having its core of accommodating all the great religions of the world.\(^8\)

According to the *Ocean of Love*, a book published by Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust, “…there is no new path that Sathya Sai Baba is preaching, no new order that he has created, no new religion that he has come to add or a particular philosophy that he recommends ... his mission is unique and simple, which is love and compassion.” Devotees, however, experience his divineness through his teachings and project anything they like onto Sathya Sai Baba. They communicate with him by several ways: through personal communication by visiting him at Puttaparthi, by way of sending letters, through interviews, and the most accepted

\(^7\) Sathya Sai Baba narrates stories and parables extensively called from the Indian epics to illustrate the teachings quoted by him from the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and other scriptures that enshrine the lessons laid down by yogis and rishis for the good of all human beings of all countries at all times.

\(^8\) There was a controversy however, between other religions especially Sikhism, Judaism and Jainism that their religious symbol should include into the Sai Religion, as members of the following religions are part of the Sai Religion and as it regards a universal religion.
way to communicate with him through dreams and visions, which has become a part of the life of devotees all over the world.

To some, Sai Baba radiates love and whimsy, while to others he is stern and tricky, destroying their relationship or afflicting their bodies in the service of their spiritual advancement. A 61-year-old devotee from Mauritius mentioned: “…Swami's job isn’t to make you happy; it’s to liberate you. Sai Baba is the most powerful being that ever came to the planet.”

An important aspect of Sathya Sai Baba’s preaching today is the social service. “Love God and Serve God” and “Service to Mankind is Service to God” are the main motto of his spiritualism. With this principle in mind, all the devotees show their love toward Sathya Sai Baba through involvement in various humanitarian activities, from relief work during natural calamities to volunteer service in villages. The devotees involved in social welfare activities as lay down by the principle of Sathya Sai Baba Charter. One of the important service activities of the Sathya Sai Baba movement today is the “Grama Seva,” which Sathya Sai Baba inaugurated in one of his Dasahara Discourses. According to Sathya Sai Baba, “Grama Seva is Rama Seva,” means if one do service to villages - which is the backbone of India - he/she will attain god, who is Rama. According to Sathya Sai Baba: “…of all the methods of seva, service to the long neglected rural population is the best.” Thus, he encourages the young generations: “…dedicate your skills to the betterment of the brothers and sisters dwelling in villages.”

During the time of Gram Seva, the members visit interior villages to distribute clothes to the poor and help them in several other activities. During this time the devotees experience the miracles of Sathya Sai Baba. We can find the same from the narration of Seva Dals who had experienced Sathya Sai Baba’s miracles and godhood at the time of doing gram seva. In one of the stories described by Anil

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9 The activities include creation of water tanks such as bore well and cleaning of local ponds and water tanks. Besides this the members also do Bhajans and Nagarsankirtan on different days. They also entertain village students and aged through organizing games and conducting bhajans.
Kumar Satsang at Prasanthi Nilayam, the following lines are quoted from his speech:

There is a very small village close to Khammam district in Andhra Pradesh by the name Chilukuru. The Sai Seva Dals went there and started doing some service. They noticed a Hanuman temple there, which was dilapidated and neglected. There was no priest, no daily worship, nothing whatsoever. So, the seva dals cleaned the whole premises; they whitewashed the whole temple. While they were there, they kept Baba’s picture. From Bhagavan’s picture, vibhuthi started flowing continuously. Those seva dals were immensely happy for the kindness of Bhagavan, approving and accepting their service to Hanuman. In doing this, Swami was establishing that He and Hanuman are one and the same. The seva dals also did bhajans there in the temple premises. They saw Baba’s face in the photo, full red in colour. Normally, Hanuman’s face is smeared with the red colour (vermilion) they noticed the same thing on Baba’s face (Anil Kumar Satsang, November 2004).

The Gram Seva programme has three-fold functions. Firstly, the poor and rural people benefit immensely from the help rendered at such diverse levels. Secondly, students receive the opportunity to exercise theoretical knowledge when participating in the curriculum of love all, serve all and help ever, hurt never principle of Baba’s institution. And finally, volunteers of the independent Sai organisations, like Baba’s students, learn to put into practice what it means to believe in the Fatherhood of God, and the Brotherhood of Man.

Besides this noble activity of Grama Seva, the devotees often engage with other social welfare activities as being part of their seva rituals. They engages in visiting hospitals, nursing homes, old age homes, mental hospitals and so on to assist the poor, needy and destitute etc. They play an important role during the
time of famine, flood, earthquake and other natural calamities. They do actively participate in service activities by helping the affected people in various ways. The earthquake of January 2001 in Gujarat was one of the important events that engaged all most all Sai Centres to involve. The devotees mobilised resources from different sources as laid down by Sathya Sai Baba in his Charter. The recent tsunami disaster is another example in which the devotees of Sathya Sai Baba have involved whole-heartedly.

Some of the close devotees trained particularly as “preachers” or “teachers” to visit the villages and outside the country to spread the philosophy of Sathya Sai Baba. The devotees of this category belong to various strata such as poets and singers; philosophers or writers. With this inspiration of doing service, the devotees make a sacred world called “spiritualization of the Hindu dharma.”

Sathya Sai Baba also emphasises the doctrine of non-violence, which shares with the Buddhist religion as the symbol of peace. All the devotees follow strictly the principles by becoming vegetarian and avoid killing or harming living creatures and so on. It is interesting to note that many devotees - especially from rural areas - were inspired with Sathya Sai Baba’s principle and quit eating non-vegetarian foods at homes and outside (discussion with devotees inside ashram). According to one devotee from Mauritius, it is Sathya Sai Baba’s philosophy of “love all and serve all” that inspires and motivates many devotees who come and engage in his mission’s activity.

Sathya Sai Baba condemned animal sacrifices and taught that, they were not part of true Vedic religion, therefore performed public rituals of bloodless sacrifice in his place (at Prasanthi Nilayam). The most important is being the “Veda Purusha Jnana Yajna,” which according to Sathya Sai Baba, is the revival and restoration of Vedas and its importance. The performance is a seven-day ritual at Prasanthi

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10 These organized preaching tours according to me are responsible for the rapid growth of this movement.
Nilayam and its significance according to Sathya Sai Baba is that “…one should secure twofold well-being *sreyas* and the awareness of the divine *Jnana*.” The number of days that the Yajna continues “seven” is also significant according to the ritual. The scriptures mentioned that, the number seven has a special esoteric significance in relation to the creation. For instance, there are said to be the Seven Worlds, the Seven Sages, the Seven Seas, the Seven Sacred Mountains, the Seven Swaras, and the Seven Colours of the Sun’s ray etc. According to Hindu beliefs, if these are worshipped as symbols of the divine, awareness of the divine arises. While performing the Yajna\(^1\) for seven days, according to Vedic injunctions, man can acquire the ability to get rid of the seven veils of ignorance, ascend the seven stages of spiritual knowledge, and achieve liberation i.e., “Moksha.” Picture 1 to 4 shows how the devotees of Sathya Sai Baba perform the rituals in one of the Yajnas in Mauritius.

Whatever one may think of Sathya Sai Baba, and may judge his actions to be for good or ill, there is a moral basic in his teaching, which is full of high ideals and good intentions as one can find in other established religions or mass spiritual movements.\(^2\) Sathya Sai Baba has clearly pointed out in his discourses that, “…his teachings are not new, they are the ancient *Sanathana Dharma* (Perennial Philosophy).” His chief aim, often stated quite poignantly is to see the [re]establishment of ancient Indian values, which he insists include moral conscience, unselfish service to others and the community, non-violence in all walks of life, due respect and care for all living beings and nature, and non-discrimination against race, colour, and faith. Critiques have further questioned about Sai Baba’s command by suggesting that his teachings have perfect prescription for blind belief, unquestioning acceptance of anything he says or does and complete self-brainwashing (Spiritual Impressions 1998: 37).

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\(^1\) Yajna is the means for securing awareness of the Divine. Yajna is governed by mantras, sacrifice and divinity.

\(^2\) He is versed in Indian scriptures, but very evidently not in any other major religious scriptures (see for example analysis of this made by Brian Steel).
Principles of Life

Sai Baba’s religion is not a monotheist religion, as Westerners believe, rather it embraces all the major teachings of world religions. It formulates guidelines that are combination of principles from different religions. Among the most important rules and regulations that a devotee follows in Sai religion, is to keep away from the habits of smoking, meat-eating and drinking liquor and emphasis always upon the Vedic and Sanskrit religious texts and social services. The devotees saw his teachings as an example of the embodiment of higher spiritual practice. Rules also made for devotees to keep strictly away from adultery. Although mixing with women has not been strictly mentioned in the philosophy, this strictness can be found as a part of the sacred world inside Prasanthi Nilayam. In the ashram for instance, men and women are kept separate especially during the darshan time and during the official meetings/lectures etc. This separation can also be observed in other places inside the ashram i.e., in public places such as during shopping,
eating and sharing work with seva dals. Many westerners criticised this disciplinary ashram culture although they love the spiritualism of Sathya Sai Baba. Among the major rules in the ashram that were criticised by the westerners are restrictions on behaviour to sit, walk, sex regulations, eating, drinking, and using light, clothing and so on. They also criticised the favouritism towards elite devotees in the Ashram as against other ordinary westerners [discussion with the western devotees].

Those devotees who strictly follow the guidelines of Sathya Sai Baba took ten principles to live spiritual life as laid down by him.

1. Treat as sacred the land in which you were born. Have patriotism to your nation - but do not criticise other nations or put others down. Not even in your thoughts or dreams should you think of bringing grief to your country.

2. Respect all religions equally.

3. Recognise humanity as one family - treat everyone as a family member - love all.

4. Keep always the house and surroundings clean - for this will promote hygiene and health.

5. Practice charity – but do not encourage beggars by giving money. Provide food, clothing, shelter and help them in other ways (do not encourage laziness).

6. Never give a bribe or take bribe – never get in to corruption.

7. Curb envy and jealousy, expand your vision and outlook, treat all equally regardless of caste or creed.

8. Try and do as much as possible by yourself – you may be wealthy and have servants – your servants can help – but service to society must be done personally.

9. Have and cultivate “Love for God and fear of sin” – have hatred for sin.

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13 See for a detail guidelines of Prasanthi Nilayam for devotees (Handbook of Prasanthi Nilayam).
10. Never go against the laws of the land, follow these diligently both in word and in spirit to become an exemplary citizen.

One important aspect of the movement is the experience of godhood and realisation of one’s own self. This is of course possible through Yoga or meditation - which is an important part of Sathya Sai Baba’s teaching - that helps one to attain the higher consciousness. The daily lecture in Prasanthi Nilayam is a part of orientation programme of the philosophy of Sathya Sai Baba for new comers and foreigners. It usually takes place at the first floor of North Indian Canteen. In one of the lectures, Jack Harry’s wife mentioned:

In one of my daily darshan to Baba at Kulwant Hall, one day I had a marvellous experience of the avatar of Baba, he was coming towards the centre of the Mandir, I was in a distance and was expecting, had I been gone to the front I would have got the close darshan, meanwhile I had a question in my mind and I asked to Bhagwan Baba “please show me god,” and then the situation can be unimaginable, Baba suddenly turn his head towards me and when I concentrated my mind to Baba, what a glimpse! I have seen from his face the universe is moving around and light, air and earth all in their motion.

It is also mentioned by scholars that, the devotees used to experience a stage of “oblivion” where they completely merge with Sathya Sai Baba by losing their consciousness and enjoyed the divine bliss by contacting him - whether during the daily darshan or during the meditation. There are hundreds of stories of persons, who have reached this oblivion state, especially during the early days of the movement experienced by some of the old but close devotees of Sathya Sai Baba. However, this type of experience is still observed among devotees, as many westerners now experiencing this oblivion state by contacting Sathya Sai Baba, as revealed from the case of Jack Harry’s wife. An important aspect of these stories
is that the men and women, who had such visions of Sathya Sai Baba, considered himself/herself as sacred and thought to be served by divine figures like Krishna or Rama.

**The Sacred World**

One of the functions of modern religious movement in Hinduism is the [re]building of the sacred world. The devotees conceptualise the place of Sathya Sai Baba as sacred. The highest abode is the Prasanthi Nilayam. Some of the followers believe that the earlier manifestations of god i.e., Krishna was playing at the same place where Sathya Sai Baba has performed his divine miracles. Puttaparthi, the area inhabited by the people is called as the sacred land and thereby the people considered themselves as sacred people. The area lies on the bank of River Chitravathi and surrounded by mountains and rocks. According to Sathya Sai Baba, if one comes to this sacred land and listens to his discourses will find it easier to have communion with the Supreme Being. However, as Sai Baba mentioned, it needs rigorous sadhana which is in the form of sacrifice and seva - the utmost motto of the Sathya Sai Baba spiritualism.

Sathya Sai Baba taught that, when God appears on the earth he assumes a physical body and human attributes and he uses those attributes, for the emancipation of his devotees. The devotees visit Prasanthi Nilayam keeping this philosophy in mind, to see the divine form of god. In the process they are prepared to receive Sathya Sai Baba’s grace facilitating them to overcome attachment to worldly life (maya) and relieving them from the cycle of rebirth (samsara).

**The Sacred Rituals**

The rituals inside Prasanthi Nilayam have their own uniqueness. One of the important rituals observed in the Prasanthi Nilayam is the seven-day Yajna as
mentioned earlier. During these seven days the devotees experience a kind of “spiritual feast.” The ritual is now a part of Prasanthi Nilayam every year and lots of devotees participate in this Yajna as they believe that it is sacred and relieves them of their sins leading to Moksha. The second important ritual inside Prasanthi Nilayam is the “satsang” and “darshan” of Sai Baba. The surroundings of the satsang and the discourse of Baba produce great effect upon the devotees for spiritual development. The spiritual concentration during satsang or chanting of Vedas is utmost important, which can be visualised in different Sai Baba centres all over the world. During the daily darshan Sathya Sai Baba receives letters from devotees and also calls a few devotees for personal interview. This happens especially in the case of international devotees who visit Prasanthi Nilayam for special purposes - to convey his message to their respective countries. Apart from these personal interviews, Sai Baba also materialises gifts and boons for devotees on this occasion.

The Sacred People

Sathya Sai Baba devotees, adhering to the principles laid down by Sathya Sai Baba in letter and spirit, besides being in contact with Sai Baba are treated as “sacred people” by the organisers and the members of the movement. Many devotees regard the ashramites, in this sense, as sacred people since they are constantly in contact with the Baba and follow his words of wisdom and spirituality with utmost religiosity.

Who is an ashramite? How does one get into the ashram? What is s/he expected to do at the ashram? How long does s/he stay at the ashram? In order to put such questions and elicit responses, one has to go through the rules of ashram life, which are formulated by Sathya Sai Baba. No one can be permanent ashramites, though there are no explicit rules to this effect. Ashramites at Prasanthi Nilayam are different from the population of transient visitors. They are mostly devotees, spending their lives around Sathya Sai Baba at Prasanthi Nilayam, a spiritual
home away from their homes. Although a few of the ashramites have been staying for two decades or more, the length of one’s stay depends on Sathya Sai Baba’s decision. The entire township of Puttaparthi is managed by the dedicated ashramites from different parts of India, with only a few paid ancillary staff to run canteen and stores; maintenance and security; hospital and buildings; accommodation and public relations; books and publications; accounts and auditing. It is really difficult for a visitor to know who is responsible for what, although it is widely known that they are devotees of Baba and are providing their services as a divine duty to the best of their abilities, irrespective of their background.

It is also difficult to distinguish an ashramite from a non-ashramite within the Ashram surroundings, as there are no external insignia attached to them. How then is the ashramite different from others? One can perhaps observe the difference if one spends a couple of days in the ashram.

**The Sacred Monuments**

The small village Puttaparthi is now full of stories associated with sacred sites. For instance, a temple was built in 1945 at the place of Sathya Sai Baba’s birth by the devotees and later on in 1950 the new temple “Prasanthi Nilayam” which is the main attraction to the visitors today. Now over one million people visit the small village each year. Puttaparthi presently has several temples which are dedicated to various deities such as Shiva, Gopalaswami, Sathyabhama, and Hanuman temples besides Sathya Sai Baba. One can observe large photographs of Baba on the wall or kept along with other deities for worshipping. A temple was also dedicated to the parents of Sai Baba, located to the ashram and is called “samadhi.” Visitors are shown to other sacred locations which are associated with events from Sathya Sai Baba’s life.
A museum of the mission and message of Sathya Sai Baba avatar - Chaithanya Jyoti - was established to commemorate his 75th Birthday. The spiritual museum collected and preserved many artefacts, monuments and photos of the life and mission of Sathya Sai Baba. The architecture of the museum itself represents a fusion of different cultures and architectural forms like Chinese roof, Gothic arches and Moorish domes. Similar kind of museums or Centres/Temples now can be found in major cities in India and around the world such as New Delhi, Mumbai and Calcutta, Trinidad, South Africa, USA, UK, and Australia.

**Installation of Centres/Temples**

In Sathya Sai Baba movement, it is difficult to find a priest (Brahmin or otherwise) to perform any ritual or to install a photo of Baba in the Centres/Temples unlike other Hindu temples where it is a customary practice to have a Brahmin priest. The devotees have the right to perform the ritual of installation of the images in Sai Centres, which are built by devotees themselves for Sathya Sai Baba. However, it is important for the devotees to personally seek his blessings and approval before the start of any building work for the Centre in any parts of the world. Devotees’ experiences and events described in the literature leading to the establishment of the Sathya Sai Baba Centres are plenty and hence avoided here. It is recorded that, most of the Centres established under the inspiration of Sathya Sai Baba are largely due to one or the other miracles of Sathya Sai Baba, performed in favour of either the concerned person or the place itself.

**Iconographic Scheme**

The way a person sees the images in the Sathya Sai Baba Centre/Temple is determined by the way the image fits into the theanthropic, cosmological, and devotional schemes as outlined above. The iconographic scheme belongs to the same conceptual framework. The ceremony for the installation of the images in
the centres/temples will not come to the climax unless and until the supreme person (Sathya Sai Baba) or the manifestation of the supreme person (his miracles of omnipresence) takes place, as the devotees believe that it is only after the touch/materialisation of the images by Sathya Sai Baba that the “god” comes to reside in the temple or shrine. ¹⁴ One devotee from Malaysia mentioned that, “…the images that we installed in the Sathya Sai Baba Centres are actual manifestation of Sai Baba’s materialization of his photos or the photos and images of Shirdi Sai Baba.”

Inside the Centre/Temple where Sathya Sai Baba’s photos are kept for worship, the focus is always on Sathya Sai Baba, although the images of Krishna, Shiva and Rama present along with Shirdi Sai Baba. The photographs of Sathya Sai Baba are vital in the relationship with his devotees. When the devotees see his picture, it reminds them powerfully of their connection to Sathya Sai Baba and his path towards true salvation. It also stimulates their commitment to follow his ten principles. Thus it can be said that Sathya Sai Baba’s photographs indeed possess a timeless message for his devotees. Although thousands of astonishing photographs have taken over the years, some of the important photographs, which have taken during his young age between the year 1960s to 1970s are indelibly imprinted in devotee’s memories and can be found in most of Centres/Temples nowadays.

**The Holy Feet**

The acts of paying respect to the feet of holy men and to their footprints have been common in Indian religions from the period of Buddha. Even in Hindu

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¹⁴ It is strictly mentioned by Sai Baba that the images, which are going to be installed and worship by devotees, should be brought from Prasanthi Nilayam. And also it is mentioned in the Organization’s Chatter that the Centre’s name cannot be different without a particular prescription as mentioned in the book. Mentioned also how the priests are appointed in the Centre. Women devotees worship their respective gods in the Centre such as Durga, Amba, Gayatri, Laxmi and Parvati, Saraswati etc. without prior consultation of any body as Baba has categorically mentioned in the movement the importance of women in society.
The worship of feet - *pada puja* - is mentioned as the most important ritual to express true devotion. The instances can be found in the epic Ramayana, where Rama’s brother Bharatha worshipped Rama’s *Padukas* for fourteen years. Nammalwar was the first to worship the lord’s lotus feet and force all Vaishnavites to totally surrender at lord Narayana’s feet saying “Thiruvadigaley Charanam.” He thus revealed the truth that “…lord’s divine lotus feet are the only boat to make one cross the ocean of *Samsara*.” Hence Nammalwar is considered as the manifestation of Chatari itself. In Vaishnava temples “Chatari” is placed like a crown on the heads of devotees, because of the belief that lord’s feet are engraved on it. This symbolises the *Carangathi Tatwa* or total surrender to lord’s feet (M.S. Leela 1995: 180). The divine feet of all the deities and great spiritual masters thus are being adored and worshipped as the lord himself.

The “holy footprints” of Sathya Sai Baba can be seen today in the home altars and Centres/Temples all over the world wherever his devotees reside. The significance of holy feet in the Sathya Sai Baba movement is the extension of the practise from the earlier Shirdi Sai Baba who was defined by his devotees as:

> Shirdi Sai Baba was the repository of wisdom. He was the home of Vaishnava devotees, most liberal amongst liberals, the quintessence of all essences. He had no love for perishable things, and was always engrossed in self-realization, which was his sole concern. He felt no pleasure in the things of this world or of the world beyond... Though a Siddha, he acted like a Sadhaka. He was meek, humble and egoless, and pleased all.

It is this quality of Shirdi Sai Baba that the devotees later worshiped him as god, and thus after his death they started worshipping his footprints wherever he has visited. Even during his lifetime, devotees used to kiss his feet and take the dust (after walking on ground) of his foot prints to apply on their forehead. The lifeworld of Shirdi (especially the place where he lived) for his devotees became
another pilgrimage centre like Dwarka, Banaras and Rameshwar, Badrinath, Puri, Ujjain, or Mahabaleshwar.

Having set himself as a person of divine origin from the youth, Sathya Sai Baba has now acquired the attention of million of devotees. People bow before him constantly, touch his feet, lie flat on the ground at his feet at the time of public darshan, etc. During the year 1943 to 1953, as M.S. Leela points out, almost every devotee used to wash the feet of Sathya Sai Baba “…with rose water, and take it home and preserve and use his charanamruth as Amruth cure for all diseases including bhavaroga” (Leela 1995: 185). There is no specific time for these pada pujas. It could be performed at any time whenever the devotee desires, from early morning to night.

The Home Shrines

The heart of every Indian home is its shrine - the sacred space delineated for honouring and worshiping the gods. Although going to a temple for religious purpose is similar as worshipping at home, the difference is that temple worship requires the intervention of a priest, while in the home contact is direct between devotee and his/her deity. Secondly, the pujas that take place in the home shrines are the foundation of all family actions and decisions. The size and description of this shrine is immaterial. It may be large and impressive, an entire

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15 A shrine is a holy or sacred place sometimes dedicated towards a certain god, goddess saint, or similar religious figure. As distinguished from a temple, a shrine is usually located because it houses a particular relic or cult image which is the object of worship or veneration, or because it is constructed on a site which is thought to be particularly holy, as opposed to being placed for the convenience of worshippers. As such, shrines are associated with the practice of pilgrimage. Roman Catholicism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Shinto are major religions that have places of worship that are frequently called shrines. The word is also used to designate a small altar in a home or place of business, or a room or item of furniture which is furnished with religious symbols and used for private worship.

16 Temples are normally dedicated to one primary god. Often they are elaborately decorated on the outside with stone or plaster carvings depicting religious stories, and their decoration is specific to the deity being worshiped. Mythological scenes are juxtaposed with scenes of everyday life and important political events, such as royal coronations, conquests, and celebrations, or with portraits of royal and secular patrons. These divine images and mythological scenes on the outer walls of the temple help worshipers recall the sacred stories they have heard or read.
room or a beautifully designed edifice, or it may be simply a tiny niche, or even just a row of religious prints pasted on the wall.\textsuperscript{17} The members of a family perform puja to the images of Sathya Sai Baba at home. They believe that by such worship, Sathya Sai Baba protects the family and engender a positive future. One or more family members may assume active role in such worship on behalf of the whole household. The \textit{puja} includes chanting of prayers invoking various gods and goddesses besides those in honour of Sathya Sai Baba. The later are composed by many of his devotees and Sathya Sai Baba himself [available in CDs, Cassettes and printed forms]. The picture/photo of Sathya Sai Baba is generally placed on a decorated chair on festive occasions, the image/photo may be clothed in new garments and embellished with ornaments and garlands made of flowers placed before it. The devotees then offer items of foods such as cooked rice, fruit, butter, and sugar. At the end, the members of the family bow before Sathya Sai Baba’s image/photo; sip the sacred water they had offered to him, and receive a portion of the blessed food.

\textbf{Literature on Sai Baba}

Sai Baba’s philosophy and teachings are presently published in many languages in different parts of the world. Most of the publications consist of collection of speeches delivered by Sathya Sai Baba on various occasions and the official communications of the organisation, including the hagiographical writings. One of the few ethnographic studies is the work of Lawrence Babb (1986). He argues that the cult has a largely urban or middle-class following which suffers from alienation, a certain biculturalism, and loss of meaning of traditional value.

\textsuperscript{17} However in the diasporic context Indians prefer brass shrine, and these are mostly small size (as one respondent mentioned during the interview). According to him, apart from one’s personal taste, brass plated shrines are practical (and therefore popular) in the sense that they are not a fire hazard and are easy to clean. The typical home shrine has a lamp or burner, an icon and an incense burner. In India devotees use ghee (clarified butter) as fuel for devotional burners. In the West Indians tend to use special candles besides using ghee lamp. Now as a result of information technology, one can able to get all these materials from the online devotional shop which are available especially from the Eastern Indian shop/market in the diaspora, close to any Indian habitation.
systems, creating an investment in the charisma of Baba. He focuses on miracles as central to the cult, which makes the world of the devotee somewhat “an enchanted garden.” The following section will briefly examine the literature dealing with the philosophy and teaching of Sathya Sai Baba.

Smriti Srinivas (2001: 305-6) has classified the literature by and on Baba into six broad categories such as: a) accounts of experiences of devotees; b) official publications of Sathya Sai Central Trust which includes the Sanathana Sarathi, a monthly magazine; c) accounts by devotees who have or had important roles to play in the organisation; d) analysis of researchers (who are also devotees) of Baba and his philosophies; e) biographies; and f) Baba’s own discourses and works, a vast list, which includes: volumes of discourses titled Sathya Sai Speaks; Summer Showers in Brindavan, which are discourses given to college students; a set of books called Prema Vahini, Dharma Vahini, Sandeha Vahini, and so on, which are discourses on specific themes; and works which are his exegeses of different scriptures - Upanishad Vahini, Geeta Vahini, Bhagyata Vahini, Ramakatha Rasavahini, and Sura Vahini.

Accounts of Experience of Devotees

Sathya Sai Baba’s miracle, life history as well as personal experiences are published by many scholars in India and abroad. Important scholars and their writings include:

- Samuel Sandweiss’s Sai Baba: The Holy Man and the Psychiatrist, has probably been one of the ten most influential books about Sathya Sai Baba. Unlike most other writers about Sathya Sai Baba, Sandweiss's endorsement of the Divine claims is very discreet.
- John Hislop’s Seeking Divinity, which is a compilation of some of his talks and question-and-answer sessions concerning Sathya Sai Baba and His message.
• S.D. Kulkarni’s *Sri Sathya Sai: The Yugavatara* is an analytical study of the Sathya Sai Baba phenomenon by the Historical Research Institute.

• Howard Leaven’s *Heart To Heart* deals with the personal narrative of life with Sai Baba.

• David Bailey’s *Journey to Love* presents the personal and illuminating account of author’s spiritual search for universal love and experience with Sathya Sai Baba.

• Joy Thomas’s *Life as Awareness* deals with the continuing spiritual journey and experiences of Joy and Ray Thomas with Sai Baba.

• P. Chap’s *Lord and His Devotee are One* deals with the personal account of the spiritual transformation of a Protestant woman from the West during her 8 years stay under the guidance of Sai Baba.

• Howard Murphy’s *Man of Miracles* depicts the journey of a journalist seeking the Truth and the discovery of his Guru, Sai Baba.

• Gassier D Melon’s *Our Sai Beyond Miracles*, deals with author’s individual and unique experiences and blessings bestowed by Sathya Sai Baba.

• R Moan Rae’s *Sathya Sai Avatar - Glimpses of Divinity* deals with the first hand experiences of Sathya Sai Baba.

• Judy Warner’s *Transformation of the Heart* deals with the personal and unique stories of people's lives transformed by the awareness of Sai Baba.

• Rita Bruce’s *Vision of Sai* deals with the personal experiences with Sai Baba with quotes from discourses as proof of his identity. The second volume of the author deals with her experiences of life spent at Prasanthi studying with Sai Baba.

• Jack Shemesh’s *When God Walks the Earth* which is consist of two volumes, deals with the personal experiences of author’s 5 years stay with Sathya Sai Baba - covering spiritual growth and development.
Official Publications

The day-to-day activities of the ashram are dutifully glorified by the devotees of Sathya Sai Baba. The authors, giving incredible eulogies to Baba through their writings include N. Kasturi, John Hislop, Howard Murphet, Samuel Sandweiss, Peggy Mason, Phyllis Krystal, and Joy Thomas.

The monthly journal *Sanathana Sarathi*, published by Sathya Sai Books and Publication Trust, Prasanthi Nilayam has been one of the most important sources of description of Sai Baba’s teachings and personal life histories. N. Kasturi was the editor of the journal for many years then V.K. Narasimhan assumed the editorial responsibilities. The present editor is Anand. Initially the journal used to be publish in Telugu language but currently it is being published in almost all languages by the respective Sai centres in different countries besides 16 Indian languages.

The Vahini Series bring out Sathya Sai Baba’s own writings and there are more than 15 books published by the Sathya Sai Books and Publication Trust, Prasanthi Nilayam under this series. They include Bhagavatha Vahini, Dharma Vahini, Dhyana Vahini, Geetha Vahini, Jnana Vahini, Leela Vahini, Prasanthi Vahini, Prasnottara Vahini, Prema Vahini, Rama Katha Rasa Vahini (Part I & II), Sandeha Vahini, Sathya Sai Vahini, Sutra Vahini, Upanishad Vahini and Vidya Vahini. N. Kasturi, the official biographer of Sathya Sai Baba, is the editor of all the Vahini series. Some of the articles of Baba published in the Vahini series are also published in *Sanathana Sarathi* in Telugu.

Besides the Vahini series, important books on Sathya Sai Baba include: *Gems of Wisdom*, consisting of quotations from Sathya Sai Baba published by Sathya Sai Books and Publication Trust; *Faith in God*, a compilation of discourse of Sathya Sai Baba by Vijay C. Amin and Neal V. Amin published by Sai Shriram Printers, Chennai; *Sai Avatar*, a collection of quotation from the discourses of Sathya Sai
Baba, compiled by T. Krishna Murthy; and V.K. Narasimhan’s *Truth-What is Truth*, a collection of Baba’s quotations.

**Biographies**

N. Kasturi has the distinction of writing several biographical books on the life and history of Sathya Sai Baba. He also has the privilege of being the author of much acclaimed work *Sathyam Sivam Sundaram* in four volumes which records Sathya Sai Baba’s life history from birth until the year 1980. First volume traces Sathya Sai Baba’s life from his birth in 1926 to the year 1961 and provides background information about Sathya Sai Baba’s family and the village of Puttaparthi, narratives of many devotees and anecdotes from the past. The second volume, describing Baba’s life between the years 1962 to 1968, mostly refers to the greatness of Shirdi Sai Baba, revealing the similarity of his teachings with those of Sathya Sai Baba. The third volume, covering the period from 1968 to 1973, records details of Sathya Sai Baba’s journey to Africa - his only trip abroad as of now - and also contains references to Sathya Sai Baba’s statement about the nature and purpose of his miracles. The last volume deals with Sathya Sai Baba’s life up to the year 1980. It focuses on Sathya Sai Baba’s emphasis on education, as evidenced by the summer courses, establishment of schools and colleges etc. In this volume the author calls the experiences of many of the foreign devotees like John Hislop, Samuel Sandweiss and Charles Penn.

*Sathya Sai Baba’s own Discourses and Works*

Sathya Sai Baba’s own discourses and works are published by the official publication division, viz., “Sathya Sai Books and Publication Trust.” Important among these publications are the series *Sathya Sai Speaks* and *Summer Showers in Brindavan*. The series deal with the discourses delivered by Sathya Sai Baba during different periods of time starting from 1950s when he started his public lectures. Generally each series contains the discourse given during a particular
year with a few exceptions. For instance, the first volume covers the discourses delivered during the year 1953 to 1960. The second volume covers the preaching of Sathya Sai Baba from the year 1960 to 1961. Then the series continues as single volume per year from 1963 to 1970, constituting 10 volumes. From the year 1971 to 1982 there are five volumes published, each volume covering discourses spread over two years. The next volume in the series comprises of discourses from 1983-98. The 1999 volume is the 32nd in the series. Sathya Sai Books and Publication Trust also publish the discourses of Sathya Sai Baba on Indian culture and spirituality under the title Summer Showers in Brindavan. One common feature of all these series as Priddy (1999: 1) points out “…is the combination of subtlety and intricacy of events through which Sathya Sai Baba draws followers to him and eventually makes himself know to them.”

Critical Reviews

Erlendur Haraldsson’s Modern Miracles: An Investigative Report on Psychic Phenomena Associated with Sathya Sai Baba, approaches the alleged miracles of Sathya Sai Baba with a critical outlook. He demystifies several of Sathya Sai Baba’s miracles including the famous “Resurrection of Walter Cowan.” However, he points out that there have not been any confirmed reports of Sai Baba using sleight of hand tricks to produce Vibhuti or other religious artefacts. Haraldsson’s another book Miracles Are My Visiting Cards also deals with an investigative report on the psychic phenomenon associated with Sathya Sai Baba. Sathya Sai Baba’s ethical teachings and revelation of various secrets of Hindu mythology has largely been criticised by many scholars. For instance, the three small books by Maheshwaranand are classic examples of how the most unlikely stories attract those who are already deceived by the Sathya Sai Baba mythology. K.B. Chaturvedi’s Miracle Man - Sathya Sai Baba is an attempt to understand and analyse Sathya Sai Baba’s divine personality with plausible, scientific interpretations.
Sathya Sai Baba supports the general Hindu tradition by affirming that there have been many avatars, and he has demonstrated traditional Hindu tolerance by including Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism within his discourses on spirituality. He told his devotees to revere the gods of their own religions to which they belong to. Although he himself revealed that he is the manifestation of all gods of all religions, he places central importance to Hindu deities such as Rama and Krishna as the supreme manifestation and the avatar of human kind. However, many Hindus still do not believe Sathya Sai Baba to be the incarnation of Krishna or Rama, as there is no convincing evidence to show this link with the Hindu epics such as Mahabharata and Ramayana. The other reason could be the emergence of multiple Gurus/Spiritual leaders who claim themselves as the avatar of some or other Hindu gods by demonstrating some kind of miracles.

The following chapter will examine the Sathya Sai Baba religious/spiritual movement from social network analysis perspective. After a brief introduction to the network analysis, the chapter will discuss with a more detailed analysis of transnational social network of Sathya Sai Baba movement.