Religion, Diaspora and Transnational Networks: The Case of Sri Sathya Sai Baba Movement

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Ajaya Kumar Sahoo

Department of Sociology
School of Social Sciences
University of Hyderabad
Hyderabad-500046
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis titled "**Religion, Diaspora and Transnational Networks: The Case of Sri Sathya Sai Baba Movement**" has been carried out by me and supervised by Professor Chandrashekhar Bhat in the Department of Sociology, University of Hyderabad. This work has not been submitted for a degree or diploma at any other University.

Date: Ajaya Kumar Sahoo

Place: Hyderabad

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "**Religion, Diaspora and Transnational Networks: The Case of Sri Sathya Sai Baba Movement**", submitted by Mr. Ajaya Kumar Sahoo for the award of the *Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology,* is a record of bonafide work carried out by him under my supervision and guidance.

This thesis has not been submitted either in part or full to any other university or institution of learning for the award of any other degree.

<div align="right">

Prof. Chandrashekhar Bhat
Supervisor
Department of Sociology

</div>

Head
Department of Sociology
University of Hyderabad

Dean
School of Social Sciences
University of Hyderabad

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CHAPTER-I

Introduction

> For some, religion is primarily a matter of belief, or faith; for others, it is ritual
> or ethical conduct; and for yet others, it is feeling, sensation, or experience.
> Although all of these aspects are present in all religions, their salience varies
> from one to another.
>
> [Wilson 1978:12]

The growth of new religious ideas, philosophies, groups, and organisations during the 1960s in Europe and North America in general, and in India in particular, have led to the emergence of a number of new religious/spiritual movements. These religious and spiritual movements fall outside the realm of mainstream or traditional religions, as they transcend the geographical boundaries of one or more nation-states. While saying this, one cannot deny the fact that the traditional religions have not transcended the geographical boundaries, as there have been instances wherein religious or spiritual communities were involved in cross-border activities through charity and proselytizing activities since the dawn of antiquity. These new religious/spiritual movements also in most cases trace their roots from the traditional established religions.[1]

However, these groups often referred as "new," in the sense that, although they have already in their structures, differ considerably from the conventional forms of movements, such as they are "structured and more committed than groups that were formed spontaneously" (Tigges 1998). The other key elements of these new religious/spiritual movements are their "diasporic presence," and "transnational networks." That apart, information and communication technologies have

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[1] Darroll Bryant for instance, while studying the New Religions in the North American context, argues that "…many of the 'new religions' were not really 'new' but just new to North America. For example, the Hare Krishna movement is often regarded as a 'new religion'/'cult,' but it was in fact only 'new' in North America. It is a community of long standing in India and has its origins in the life and work of the 15th century Hindu reformer, Caitanya. It has been a continuous presence in India since that time, but only came to North America in the 1960s. The same is the case for a number of other new religious movements that have their origins in Eastern Hindu, Buddhist, and Sikh traditions" (http://www.neuereligion.de/ENG/ReligiousNature/03.htm).

facilitated these transborder networks. Gordon Melton (1999), in his paper "The Rise of the Study of New Religions," has summarised some of the important features of these new religious movements. According to him:

> New Religions come in all varieties. They choose their basic perspective from one of the various existing religions, they create a conscious synthesis of two or more traditions, or, on very rare occasions, they propose an original religious myth. New Religions adopt a variety of different organizational models from the dictatorial to the loosely democratic, and all shade in between. They will often change through the first generation as the group grows, and theology matures, and as the transition to the second generation begins (www.cesnur.org/testi/bryn/br_melton.htm).

The Context

India has witnessed large scale international migration of her people during the 19th and early part of the 20th century to work in the plantations of British, French, Dutch and Portuguese colonies. The inhospitable conditions in the plantations and the apartheid behaviour of colonial masters hardly gave them a chance to progress socially and economically. Despite having several socio-economic and political problems, Indians, being hardworking people, made progress in many fields in the course of time.

Although there have been a number of linkages between India and the Indian diaspora, today films, music, religious teachers have contributed a great deal in constructing the new "diasporic" links between the two. One of the linkages established between India and the Indian diaspora in recent time is the "spiritual linkage" as a result of the growth of spiritual leaders. These spiritual leaders have actively sought to construct and maintain cultural and sentimental ties among the dispersed population originating in "India," the cultural motherland. In the field of

migration and diaspora studies, these groups in recent time have attracted the scholars because of their role in engaging diasporic communities to their homeland through transnational networks.

The concept "transnational network" is wider in scope, as it involves immigrants' socio-economic, cultural, political and religious activities spanning across the national boundaries. Transnational religious network constitutes only one aspect of activities through which the immigrants engage with their motherland and with other diasporic communities. Although earlier studies on religion covered several aspects of relation between religion and society such as role of religion in cultural creativity, social transformation and institution building (Beckford 1989; Hamilton 1994; McGuire 1987; Wilson 1982), less attention has been paid toward transnational religious networks and the emergence of new religious/spiritual movements in the diaspora.

Studies on new religious movements are significant from diasporic perspective for two important reasons. Firstly, religious movements have become a part of the process of globalisation and transnationalism in which flows of people, images, ideas, objects and money circulate with growing speed, intensity and volume. Added to this, inexpensive transportation, new communication technologies (Internet, satellite TV, cellular telephones), mass media (film, television, video and audio cassettes) and print media (books, magazines, newspapers etc.) have transformed the practice, method and means of organising and strengthening religious movements. Secondly, the tremendous increase in the magnitude of international migration during the past two decades has made significant impact on the rise of new religious networks connecting the local with the global.

During the last four decades India has witnessed an increasing number of religious or spiritual groups emerging out of Hinduism, often based on charismatic preachers, stressing on Vedantic ideology with philanthropic and anti-materialist way of life. Some of the important leaders who enjoyed mass

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followers are for instance, Sathya Sai Baba, Sri Ganapati Sachidananda Swami, Mata Amritanandamayi, Pandit Ravi Sankar, Rajneesh (OSHO) and so on who have emerged as significant transnational actors connecting Indians across the world through their teachings of Vedantic spirituality and philanthropic acts. The present work deals with one of such spiritual movements of India called the "Sathya Sai Baba Movement" which has spread across the world. The movement has become so popular that it has not only attracted Indians of the diaspora, but also other ethnic groups into the movement. The movement now claims to have over 12 million devotees hailing from different caste, class, ethnic, religious and regional backgrounds with over 20,000 centres around the world devoted to the promulgation of his spiritual message.

Objectives of the Study

"Diaspora" is a newly emerging field of sociological enquiry. The present study proposes to examine the role of new religious/spiritual movements in the promotion of linkages between India and the Indian diaspora. Keeping in mind the enormous magnitude of the field, the objectives explored in this study include:

- To examine the emergence of Sathya Sai Baba movement from a sociological perspective;
- To examine how the movement has spread into the Indian diaspora. To analyse how the members of Sri Sathya Sai Baba perpetuate their religious and cultural identity in the diaspora;
- To map out the transnational networks of Sathya Sai Baba movement from social network analysis perspective; and
- To identify the mechanisms through which these groups maintain their networks with the motherland, on the one hand, and, with other members settled in different countries around the world, on the other.

Analytical Framework

A theory enables the researchers to conduct empirical studies in an organised and logical manner. There exists a considerable body of social science theory that provides insight into the emergence, growth and development of new religious movements. Most of the studies on social movements base their theoretical perspective on structural-functional approach. Such studies focus mainly on social solidarity, cohesion, functional unity, equilibrium, and on the imitative process of change and mobility. Some scholars also emphasise the importance of the reference group and its relative deprivation conditions. Such studies were mostly carried out during the 1970s when much attention was paid to religious movements and cults in the United States. One of the important analytical frameworks providing insight into the phenomenon of new religious movements is the work of Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge (1996), *A Theory of Religion*.

The present study has been pursued from the perspective of social network theory, as the main features of these new socio-religious movements today lie in their "network." Some of the works of J. A. Barnes (1972), Barry Wellman (1988; 1992), and Stanley Wasserman and Katherine Faust (1994), are found useful in the analysis of Sathya Sai Baba movement.

Methodology and Research Design

A research design is a way of choosing and interrelating a set of experimental variables and of selecting and assigning participants to experimental and control conditions. As Cronbach (1982: 231) points out, "…there is no single best plan for an evaluation, not even for an enquiry into a particular problem, with a particular budget." Research design is a function of many factors. Accordingly, the design of this study involves both the use of qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative method consists of in-depth interviews, observations and

case studies, and the quantitative method involves the collection of data through questionnaires. Before describing these, it is essential to explain the universe of the study and the sampling procedures followed.

The universe of this study includes both the new spiritual movement of Sri Sathya Sai Baba based at Puttaparthi (Andhra Pradesh State, India) and its followers among the Indian diaspora. The target population for the study has been selected only from among those who have access to resources of Sathya Sai Baba and paid at least a visit to Puttaparthi, the headquarter of the sect. Studies of transnational religious movements must focus on how religious/spiritual movement spread to the countries of the diaspora.

Religious and cultural identity of diasporic individuals is a phenomenon that is largely lived and understood in the rituals of daily life, and in the interaction with social and cultural structures, which could be achieved through in-depth interviewing. As Miles and Huberman (1984: 15) point out:

> Qualitative data are attractive. They are a source of well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes occurring in logical contexts. With qualitative data one can preserve chronological flow, assess local causality, and derive fruitful explanations. Then too, qualitative data are more likely to lead to serendipitous findings and to new theoretical integrations; they help researchers go beyond initial preconceptions and frameworks…Words, especially when they are organised into incidents or stories have a concrete, vivid, meaningful flavour that often proves far more convincing to a reader - another researcher, a policy maker, or a practitioner - than pages of numbers.

Added to this type of data, information has also been collected from a number of Indian diasporic devotees - who have the sense of Indianness through their

involvement in the Sathya Sai Baba spiritual communities - to know their history and cultural activities at both the sites besides their influences, contributions and transnational networks. This was made possible through the use of quantitative survey methods. As Babbie (1992: 262) points out:

> Survey research is probably the best method available to the social scientist interested in collecting original data for describing a population too large to observe directly. Careful probability sampling provides a group of respondents whose characteristics may be taken to reflect those of the larger population and carefully constructed standardized questionnaires provide data in the same form from all respondents.

Selecting the Sample: The Initial Stage

Selecting the sample for this kind of study is a bit difficult task, as it is a study of diasporic religion from a distance. However, a different technique was used to select the target population from the field available at home i.e., Puttaparthi, where the global Indian Sathya Sai Baba community meets every now and then, during special occasions and during holidays/vacations. Sathya Sai Baba devotees visit in large numbers to Puttaparthi during the festival times such as Deepavali, Durga Puja and Sivaratri and also during the major festival time which is Sathya Sai Baba's Birthday. Getting close to these devotees was not easy. So the major worry at the beginning was how to reach these target groups on the eve of a particular event. The first problem surfaced when the Sathya Sai Baba International Office bearers hesitated to provide the list of overseas visitors' saying that it was highly confidential though it was readily available with them. However, the information provided by the resource people, later helped in selecting the respondents. The major criterion to distinguish the overseas Indian devotees at Puttaparthi in comparison to Indian counterparts is their "way of dressing." As per the rules of respective Sathya Sai Baba centre outside India, all

members (including children) should wear a prescribed dress, and if not they have to tag on their neck a kerchief - in which their country symbol along with Sathya Sai Baba Organisation's Logo imprinted. Some of the devotees extended full cooperation sharing their views. Data were collected from the respondents through an interview schedule.

In-depth Interviews

The qualitative component of the research is gathered through in-depth interviews with selected members of the Sathya Sai Baba diasporic community for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of Sathya Sai Baba movement in the diaspora. The main focus of the interview was to discern devotees' experience of religion in the context of diaspora in different countries. The enquiries were conducted in the manner of life-history interviews where each participant was asked to elaborate upon the experiences of Sathya Sai Baba spiritualism in their respective locations.

A variety of interview techniques have been suggested by qualitative researchers, all of which are based on a "…express commitment to viewing events, action, norms, values etc., from the perspective of the people who are being studied" (Bryman 1988: 61). This approach reflects a departure from the traditional method of considering interviewees as merely "subjects" from whom data is to be collected. Instead, the interviewee is considered here as a "co-researcher" who is a partner in the research process (Nelson 1989). Patton (1982) has identified three basic approaches to collect the qualitative data through open-ended interviews: a) the informal conversational interview; b) the general interview guide approach; and c) the standardised open-ended interview. The fundamental principle of these three approaches is to "…provide a framework within which respondents can express their own understandings in their own term" (1982: 166).

The actual interviews were conducted using the interview guide approach as suggested by Patton. The advantage of this approach is that, it allows the

researcher to develop a general list of topics to be covered, without specifying any particular order or sequence. The "co-researchers" in this case are encouraged to give full expression of their experiences, as they emerge unfettered by any artificial boundaries that might be imposed by the formality of a standardised structure. The co-researchers have an equal share in guiding the discussion, and in providing spontaneous insights into whatever aspects they feel relevant to the topic being discussed. Flexibility and situational sensitivity are the defining features of this approach.

Interview Sample

The primary criterion for selecting the participants for the interview was through a purposive sampling. According to Patton, purposive sampling enables the researcher to select "information-rich" cases for in-depth study. Information-rich cases are those "…from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purposes of the research" (1990: 169).

Following Patton's guidelines, both "typical case" and "maximum variation" sampling procedures are followed in selecting the interview participants for this study. In the "typical case" sampling, key informants are requested to suggest the names of people who might be able to provide illustrative descriptions of the phenomenon being studied. The purpose here is not to make generalisations regarding a particular population, but to identify some typical aspects of experience that may be held in common by many members of the population. These typical cases are selected because they are not "…in any major way atypical, extreme, deviant, or intensely unusual" (Patton 1990: 173). Thus, this study focuses more on the experience of devotees among the people of Indian origin who were actively involved in the programmes of their organisations and have much in common with the majority members of the group than the devotees who display only a cursory or marginal interest in this area.

In the "maximum variation" sampling, one normally selects a small sample that is heterogeneous according to some pre-determined criterion. In this study, the criterion used is age. With the view to ascertain the differences, if any, data on the experiences of devotees from both the Old Indian diaspora including second/third and fourth generations who were born and brought up in the diaspora, and also from the New Indian diaspora constituted those who left India since 1950s. The experiences of these two types of Indian diasporic devotees are envisaged to be different and information from these two types of respondents is expected to yield better insights into the phenomenon being studied.

Survey Questionnaires

The technique of the survey employed in this study is through administering questionnaires to gather quantitative data from a large number of respondents. A survey usually involves the analysis of quantitative data that is gathered systematically from a given population or sample through "…some objective random, data-gathering device" (Hsia 1988: 111).

Survey carries the advantage of simplicity and speed of execution, flexibility of design and wide coverage. As an addition to the data generated through the qualitative in-depth interviews, surveys can be used as a tool to fill some gaps in the "…knowledge of a community, group, organisation, or whatever, because the gaps cannot be readily filled by reliance on participant observation, or unstructured interviewing alone" (Bryman 1988: 137).

The emphasis on the techniques of survey questionnaires has provided sufficient scope to gather quantitative data from a large number of respondents regarding the Sri Sathya Sai Baba tradition and practices that they follow in the diaspora and the use of information and communication technologies for networking.

Survey Samples

Any study of this nature, ideally, needs a detailed study of respondents drawn from multiple field sites located in different countries where Indian devotees of Sai Baba are found besides the place of origin of the spiritual/religious movement of Sai Baba, namely "Puttaparthi" of Andhra Pradesh. Since it was not possible to visit different countries for collecting information due to lack of time and resources, the survey samples had to be selected only at Puttaparthi, during their visit to "Prasanthi Nilayam." In the absence of any official statistical information regarding overseas devotees visiting Puttaparthi, such information had to be collected personally during the fieldwork before identifying the respondents and administering the questionnaire. Instead, contacting few respondents at the initial stage, and through personal observations, a random sampling at the fieldwork site has been conducted.

The survey was conducted administering a nine-page questionnaire (see Annexure-1), consisting of mostly open-ended questions. Some partial close-ended questions were also used. The questionnaire elicited information on respondents' personal background, initiation as a Sai Baba devotee, daily religious practices, adaptation of new religious norms in the host society, and participation in the Sathya Sai Baba religious movement including transnational networks.

During the fieldwork, 400 questionnaires were circulated among the respondents. Nearly 300 respondents were supplied copies of questionnaire personally, the rest were handed over to the heads of the respective country's Sathya Sai Centres to secure larger number of responses. A total of 95 (23.75%) questionnaires were returned during November 2003 - December 2004. Similarly questionnaires were also sent through emails to respondents who were located in the diaspora but had the experience of visiting Puttaparthi. This selection of respondents was prepared through collecting individual e-mail IDs from different web directories available

at the Internet site. To check the validity of respondents' views regarding their personal experience at Puttaparthi, a short description of a few questions was kept at the beginning of the main questionnaire. When the respondent appropriately selects those questions, the main questionnaire would be available to them to fill up. Out of the 200 questionnaires sent, only 15 respondents replied, a response rate of 7.5 per cent. Therefore, a sum total of 110 (18.33%) respondents were selected for the analysis of this study. Besides these 110 respondents, the study interviewed around 20 members from the Puttaparthi Ashram, regarding the Sathya Sai Organisation and its management. A more detailed analysis of the nature of samples is provided in Chapter-VI on "Sathya Sai Baba and the Indian Diaspora."

Literary Sources

Apart from the above primary sources of information collected during the fieldwork, the study also has taken inputs from literature already existing on the growth and development of Sathya Sai Baba movement, theoretical understanding of social movements, diaspora and transnational networks. The secondary sources of information for this research are divided into three kinds: a) theoretical approaches to study social movements; b) concepts of religion, diaspora, and transnational network; and c) Sathya Sai Baba's life and preaching.

Importance of the Study

In the contemporary spiritual world of Gurus, Sathya Sai Baba is one of the key actors who have attracted millions of followers across class, caste, religious and ethnic backgrounds all over the world. The question arises what makes people closer to Baba? This is a question of uncertainty, as people may say his words and his materialisation of Vibhuti has healing effect unlike the touch of Mata Amritanandamayi. But, the answer will not end there, as thousands of stories have been written on him by his devotees. Most of the scholars interpreted him as the

manifestation of god. Not to exaggerate, the movement has a social effect in transforming the society by taking major issues into its agenda.

The Sathya Sai Baba organisation, for instance, has not only undertaken the massive water supply project to provide water to the drought-stricken areas of Andhra Pradesh but also has taken initiative through its service organisation in solving the contemporary problems like AIDS awareness programme, Old Age Care, establishment of multi-speciality hospitals and free educational institutions. The devotees, on the other hand, have created massive "Centres" across the world to worship him unlike in the Swaminarayan Movement where the "temple" is the main attraction.

Sathya Sai Baba is one of the spiritual leaders of India to whom People of Indian Origins (PIOs) and Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), and from within India, leading politicians such as Presidents and Prime Ministers obliged him and even take appointment to meet him. It is a matter of considerable interest to know how the Indian devotees outside India (in the diasporas) increase in number day-by-day; how the members pay their visit every year to Puttaparthi; how they send their contribution in the form of philanthropy to run the organisation; and above all, how the Centres are fast spreading to the other parts of the world and networking transnationally. The study attempts to answer these questions in detail in the chapters ahead.

From the academic point of view, the purpose of this research is to develop a systematic approach to the study of sociology of religion from transnational perspective. The main objective is to identify the mechanisms through which the religious/spiritual groups form the complex network between global and Indian communities. The study, therefore, contributes to the development of the field of sociology of religion, social movements, as well as adding to the literature on Indian diaspora.

Chapterization

The thesis is divided into seven chapters besides references and annexures. The first chapter deals with the introduction, objectives of study, methodology and procedures of data collection. The second chapter deals with the literature on social movements, religion and transnational networks. This includes the definitions, theoretical background, and a prelude to the study of new socio-religious movements. This chapter also captures various concepts that have been used in the present study. The third chapter deals with a description of the emergence and growth of the Sathya Sai Baba movement and the organisational structure of the Sathya Sai Baba Organisation. The fourth chapter deals with the structure of Sathya Sai Baba theology. The fifth chapter deals with the interpretation of Sathya Sai Baba movement employing Social Network Analysis. The sixth chapter deals with the method of analysis and interpretation of the fieldwork data. The seventh chapter deals with the conclusion, analysis and future prospects of the study.

The following chapter will discuss the importance of the study of new social movements with special reference to the Indian diaspora. Besides examining various concepts used in the study, the chapter presents a review of literature.

CHAPTER-II

Social Movements, Diaspora and Transnational Networks: Conceptual Background

Social movement constitutes an important part of social change/social transformation, as it generally emerges out of social issues and demands in any society. The sociological definitions of movement generally stress on qualities like collective and innovative behaviour, extra-institutionality, their network character and multicenteredness, the shifting and fluid boundaries of movement membership, and the willingness of members to disrupt order and so on (Gerlach and Hine 1970).

The concept of social movement refers to collective mobilisation by a group of people who have certain common ideology to achieve certain goals. It may aim at reform in one or another aspect of social life, or oriented at bringing about changes in superordinate and subordinate relationships (Rao 2000: 3). T.K. Oommen (1990: 146) defines the concept as a "…conscious collective action informed of an ideology, aided by an organisational weapon and initiated by a core person/group to bring change in any direction (past/future) using any means (violent/non-violent)." Hence, social movements are deliberately initiated and guided collective mobilizations to and bring about relatively rapid social transformation.

Defining Social Movements

There is no precise definition of the concept "social movement," as different scholars interpret it in different contexts. Some scholars use the term to mean a historical trend or tendency such as renaissance, analytic movement, empiricist movement etc., whereas others use the term interchangeably with organisation or union. Although the term was employed during the early nineteenth century in

Europe, it was only after 1950s that scholars have attempted to provide thoroughgoing definition of the term. Rocher (1972: 441) defines social movement as "…clearly structured and identifiable organisation, which has explicit goals of grouping members with a view to the defence or promotion of certain precise objectives, generally with a social connotation."

Goodwin and Jasper (2003) define social movement as a "…collective, organized, and noninstitutional challenge to authorities, powerholders or cultural beliefs and practices." According to Paul Wilkinson (1971: 27):

1. Social movements are clearly different from *historical* movements, tendencies and trends. Such tendencies and trends, and the influence of the unconscious or irrational factors in human behaviour, is of crucial importance in illuminating the problems of interpreting and explaining social movement.
2. A social movement must evince a minimal degree of organisation, though this may range from a loose, informal or partial level of organisation to the highly institutionalised and bureaucratised movement and the corporate group.
3. Social movement's commitment to change and the raison d'etre of its organisation are founded upon the conscious, volition, and normative commitment to the movement's followers or members.

For Wilson (1973) social movement is a "…conscious, collective, organised attempt to bring about or resist large-scale change in the social order by non-institutionalised means." Social movements are held together by "…shared beliefs and solidarity among their members. A shared set of beliefs and a sense of belonging is necessary to be considered as a social movement; this is what creates new collective identities and value systems, and what holds up the movement even when activity is low" (Della Porta and Diani 1999: 14-15). Examples of social movements can be environmental movement, peace movement, nationalist

movement, workers movement, women's movement, human rights movement, religious movement and racist/fascist movement.

Characteristics of Social Movement

All social movements have certain common features. For instance, all social movements are goal oriented. In order to reach the goal it needs collective action, a social mobilisation. For social mobilisation, social movement needs to depend on some kind of organisation to provide leadership and direction. For this, the leadership needs some kind of ideology to explain a situation convincingly which he wants to change through mobilisation. With the help of ideology, the leadership justifies the existence and continuity of the movement. In a nutshell, it can be said that, a social movement could not be possible without some goals, social mobilisation, organisation, leadership and ideology. These are the foundations on which the edifice of the movement stands; the stronger the foundation, the stronger the movement and its impact on society and history. Out of the characteristics discussed above, M.S.A. Rao (2000: viii) has emphasised on *ideology,* which according to him constitute the most "…important component of social movement, as it distinguishes from the general category of movements involving collective mobilisation and orientation towards change." According to Alain Touraine (1981: 98) a movement produces an ideology, i.e., a representation of its social relations; it also produces a utopia, by means of which it becomes identified with the stakes of the struggle and with historicity itself.

The important components of any given social movement according to Shah (2002: 17) are: objectives, ideologies, programmes, leaderships and organisation. They are interdependent and influence each other. The objectives of a social movement, according to Shah, may change from narrow particular social issues to broad aims for social transformation. Sometimes there is also possibility of a movement that starts with broad objectives, may cut down to one or two specific issues in due course. Ideology also undergoes change in the process. It provides

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direction for evolving strategies and programmes; and also keeps the participants together by developing "we-feeling." Leadership, that initiates or emerges in the course of the growth of the movement, plays crucial role in articulating ideology and objectives, evolving strategies and programmes and maintaining the spirit of the participants. However Shah argues that neither of these components are priori and static. They evolve; they get changed in the course of the movement. They are in a rudimentary form in some movements and fairly well developed in others.

New Social Movements

New social movement as a perspective in social sciences emerged in Europe to challenge the limits of Marxian approach, which stressed economic or class-based movements as important, than other movements. In contrast, the new social movements, instead of focussing on the old social movements based on "classes," examine collective action based on other identities such as gender, sexuality, religion, and ethnicity. Some examples of such movements are environmental movement, feminist movement, civil rights movement, labour/democratic movements, religious movements, ethnic or nationalist movements, gay and lesbian rights movements and so on.

These movements are called "new" in the sense that they have new characteristic features. Claus Offe (1987: 12) lists the following features:
- critical towards ideology of modernism and progress;
- decentralised and participatory organisational structures;
- interpersonal solidarity vs. traditional bureaucracy;
- fighting for autonomous space vs. material advantage;
- open, fluid organisation;
- inclusive and non-ideological participation, and
- "social" more important than "economic".

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Offe explains this rise of new movements within the context of the crisis of legimation resulting from the new relationship between state and society in late capitalist societies.

According to Luke (1989) one of the characteristics of new social movements today is that, "…it takes place in, and is triggered by, the rapid technological, organisational, political, cultural and transnational changes, which characterised the late 20th century." In other words, it can be said that "transnational" is one of the characteristics of the new social movements following the recent revolution in transportation and communication technology.

Cohen and Rai (2000: 8) claim that social movements have changed significantly since the 1960s. The mobilisation of capital on a global scale has forced social movements to start confrontation on the global platform rather than on local or national level. The new social movements along with the interactive computer technology offers two analytical perspectives in the discussion of social movement practice: 1) the deterministic influence of objective structural relationships in society (functionalism and structuralism); and 2) the primacy of individual subjective societal interpretation (phenomenology and much of existential theory). This approach largely based on the "West-Europe-centric" as pointed out by different scholars.

The contributions of the classical and the neo-classical traditions to the development of the new social movement studies cannot be ignored. Jean Cohen (1985: 671-72) while summing up the classical and the neo-classical traditions identifies six general characteristic assumptions - mainly Smelserian functionalist assumptions - preparing the ground for contemporary studies on new social movements.

1. There are two kinds of action: the institutional-conventional and non-institutional collective behaviour.

2. The non-institutional collective behaviour is the type of action that is not guided by the existing social norms, but if formed to meet undefined situations.

3. These undefined situations are understood in terms of social breakdown, either of the agencies of social control, or in the inadequacy of the normative integration of society due to structural changes.

4. The resulting social strains, discontent, frustration and aggression push the individual to resort to collective behaviour.

5. Non-institutional collective behaviour has a life cycle, open to causal analysis, which grows from spontaneous crowd action to the formation of public and social movements.

6. The birth and maturation of social movements, in this life cycle, pass through the processes of communication: contagion, rumour, circular-reaction, diffusion, etc.

An excellent approach on "new social movement" developed by Andre Gunder Frank and Marta Fuentes (1987: 1503) in their analysis of "Nine Theses on Social Movements." They are such as:

1. The new social movements are not new, even if they have some new features, and the "classical" ones are relatively new and perhaps temporary. They argue that the peasant, localist community, ethnic/nationalist, religious and even feminist/women's movements which are now commonly called "new" have existed for centuries and even millennia in many parts of the world. According to them only the ecological/green movement(s) and the peace movements more legitimately be termed "new," and that is because they respond to social needs which have been more recently generated by world development.

2. Social movements display much variety and changeability, but have in common individual mobilisation through a sense of morality and

(in)justice, and social power through social mobilisation against deprivation and for survival and identity.

3. The strength and importance of social movements is cyclical and related to long political, economic and (perhaps associated) ideological cycles. When the conditions that give rise to movements change (through the actions of the movements themselves and/or more usually due to changing circumstances), the movements tend to disappear.

4. It is important to distinguish the class composition of social movements, which is mostly middle class in the West, popular working class in the South, and some of both in the East.

5. There are different kinds of social movements. The majority seek more autonomy rather than state power, and those, which seek state power, tend to negate themselves as social movements.

6. Although most social movements are more defensive than offensive and tend to be temporary, they are important (today and tomorrow perhaps the most important) agents of social transformation.

7. Social movements appear as the agents and re-interpreters of "delinking" from contemporary capitalism and "transition to socialism."

8. Some social movements are likely to overlap in membership or be more compatible and permit coalition with others, and others are likely to conflict and compete with others. It may be useful to inquire into these relations.

9. Since social movements, like street theatre, write their own scripts as they go along, any prescription of agenda or strategies, let alone tactic, by outsiders – not to mention intellectuals – is likely to be irrelevant at best and counterproductive at worst.

Robin Cohen (1998) identifies seven elements, which are "new" in the contemporary social movements. They are:

1. A shift away from a primary concern with issues relating to inequalities in power, ownership and income between classes, towards a growing focus on the construction of cultural and personal identities.

2. Contemporary social movements are far less interested in gaining direct control over state power than previously. However, they seek to defend "culture and civil society against the technological state." They thereby hope to extend personal and citizen control over social life.

3. Non-material needs concerning the quality of life have moved to centre-stage, displacing the satisfaction of economic needs alone.

4. Increasingly informed citizens have endeavoured to open up to wholesale public scrutiny and democratisation the decision-making processes going on in economic, political, military and scientific institutions from which ordinary citizens were previously excluded. At the same time, individuals have assumed much greater responsibility for, and autonomy over, their personal lives.

5. Recent social movements consist of dispersed and diverse networks of individuals whose engagement in collective action "is nourished by the daily production of alternative frameworks of meaning." Because "the potential for resistance or opposition is sewn into the very fabric of daily life" the actions undertaken by the members of social movements take many forms in addition to obvious, outward signs of protest.

6. Demands for racial equality and against the exclusion of other social groups (whether these be women, the disabled, refugees, gay people or older citizens) have grown alongside movements based more purely on class categories, though these have not been superseded.

7. When social movements engage in mobilizing protests that require sustained activity they may utilize more democratic and participatory forms than those characteristic of earlier movements.

Alain Touraine (1981: 97) talks about the cultural perspectives of new social movements. According to him:

New social movements are those which, like all critical actions, struggle against crisis and seek to re-establish values. The cultural models of the past are left floating in our society, without ever finding direct social expression. They may be latched onto by nostalgic groups hoping to rediscover the core of a lost civilization, whether it be the idea of God or that of progress; these past cultural models are most often reinterpreted by the new social movements and particularly by critical actions desirous of rediscovering a principle to replace the void created by crisis.

Singh (2001: 216-17) points out that, new social movements takes the form of religious and sectarian fundamentalism, violent and chauvinistic ethnic subnationalism and tend to mark the retreat of the human to the darker phases of history. As mentioned earlier, religion constitutes the important part of social movements, so also it is important within the new social movements, which characterise "religion" as an important and emerging phenomenon in the debate over new religious movements.

Religion: *Old and New*

Religion in one form or another is found in all human societies. The archaeological evidence shows that even the earliest societies have religious symbols and ceremonies. Like other social institutions, religion constitutes an important part of the function of social system, as religion represents the social expression of attitudes, beliefs, and practices related to the supernatural. The origin of religion and religious ideas, traced back to the work of Emile Durkheim who maintains that, "…religion began at that point when man found he was able to picture a supernatural being, and the first supernatural being thus imagined was a spirit…to ward off the effect of their malevolence and ensure their protection, he seeks to propitiate them by means of offerings and sacrifices, and later by

prayers. It is in this way that the cult of spirits, the initial form of every religion was founded" (cited in Pickering 1975: 13-4).

Berger's theory of religion and of secularisation proposes that, with the emergence of the modern world religions, religion compelled to adapt to two new environmental realities. First, in its peculiarly modern form, religion has become a matter of choice; religious orientations no longer reflect the legitimating requirements of society so much as the preferences of individuals or of nuclear families. Religion has undergone "privatisation." In the modern world, as Berger remarks "…religion manifests itself as public rhetoric and private virtue. In other words, in so far as religion is common it lacks 'reality', and in so far as it is 'real' it lacks commonality." Second, religions must also cope with the new reality of "pluralism." In Berger's word religious institutions have become marketing agencies and the religious traditions become consumer commodities (Berger 1967: 133-138).

Defining Religion

The word "religion" derives from the Latin word *ligare*, meaning "to join," or "link," Thus religion is classically understood to mean the reconnection of human and divine. It is defined as a system of beliefs based on humanity's attempt to explain the universe and natural phenomena, often involving one or more deities or other supernatural forces. Two identifying features of most religions are: a) they all require faith, and b) they seek to organise and influence the thoughts and actions of their adherents. Sociological approach to the study of religion is redundant when it comes to provide a clear-cut definition of religion. As Max Weber in his pioneering work *The Sociology of Religion* (1965: 1) points out "…a definition of religion can be attempted, if at all, only at the conclusion of the study." Despite the fact that it is difficult to give clear-cut definitions, many scholars have addressed the issue of religion and offered various definitions.

Emile Durkheim gives one of the important definitions of religion that has been widely acclaimed in the social science discipline. In his book *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1965: 62), Durkheim defines religion as "…a unified set of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things…beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church all those who adhere to them."

Religion vs. Spirituality

There exist a rigid distinction between the mundane, earthly aspects of religion and the spiritual dimension as many people get these two ideas mixed up and often used interchangeably. Both are obviously related, except the one is more the "external aspect" (religion) and the other is "internal" (spiritual). Being spiritual is about experience; whereas, being religious is about abiding by rules. Religion is made more complicated by involving two or more people; usually a group - large or small - whereas, spirituality is a personal, involving essentially the individual. Spirituality is a loosely defined word today. Many scholars, especially Westerners, prefer to use the term spirituality rather than religion to describe their form of belief. In the East, however, spirituality is viewed as inseparable from religion. The Indic religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism have always had incorporated into their very framework, primary focuses on spirituality. Thus, spirituality for them is an expression of religion and religious ideas.

New Religious Movement

A new movement is based on new beliefs and ideologies that differ from the old and other earlier movements. The new religious movement (hereafter NRM) is an important aspect of New Social Movements that have emerged during 1950s and 1960s. As Barker points out, the term NRM is used to cover a disparate kinds of collective mobilisation, most of which have emerged in their present form since

the 1950s, and offer some answers to questions of religious, spiritual or philosophical nature (1989: 9). The term NRM is often attached to South Asian religious and spiritual groups that have emerged in the West since 1945, and have succeeded in attracting large number of Western audiences. The teachings and practices of such groups are generally perceived as innovative or unorthodox in some way.

While analysing the emergence of NRMs it is important to know the process through which the offshoots of world religions such as cults, sects or denominations are formed. Roy Wallis (1984) identifies three major forms of NRMs in terms of their relationship to the outside world. They are:

1. *World-rejecting movements*: this can be identified by a clearly defined concept of God, a morally ascribed set of often puritanical beliefs, a theology which is critical of and in conflict with the world that it actively seeks to change, millenarian outlooks, strict separation of members from the world, strong charismatic leadership, and sometimes a communal lifestyles.
2. *World-accommodating movements*: it neither totally embraces nor rejects the world. It might display some elitist attitudes and seek to restore the purity of a religious tradition.
3. *World-affirming movements*: it hardly constitute religions at all…by definition world-affirming NRMs tend to affirm the world as it is, are included to be congruent with the dominant values of Western society and are extremely liberal in their attitude towards other faiths… More often than not, adherents to world-affirming movements do not constitute a membership at all, but are customers who are buying a "service" such as healing or realizing personal potential.

The Concept: Cult

A proper definition of the term cult is difficult to provide, as the term is applied to a wide range of groups. A sociological definition will differ from a religious one, and a Christian definition will differ from the Islamic. The word *cult* is derived from the French term *culte*, and the Latin word *cultus*, meaning "care" and "adoration." The word was used in a sense to worship or give reverence to a deity. According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2004) the term "cult" has five important connotations, such as: 1) formal religious veneration; 2) a system of religious beliefs and rituals; 3) a religion regarded as unorthodox or spurious; 4) a system for the cure of disease based on dogma set forth by its promulgator; and 5) great devotion to a person, idea, object, movement, or work. Thus the term cult can be applied to any group of religious believers: Hindus, Christians or Muslims.

According to the definition of CIC (Cult Information Centre, UK, 1996), a cult is defined as a group having five of the following characteristics:

1. It uses psychological coercion to recruit, indoctrinate and retain its members;
2. It forms an elitist totalitarian society;
3. Its founder leader is self-appointed, dogmatic, messianic, not accountable and has charisma;
4. It believes "the end justifies the means" in order to solicit funds, recruit people;
5. Its wealth does not benefit its members or society.

Stark and Bainbridge (1987) have provided three general models from which cults emerge. They are such as: a) the Psychopathology Model, b) the Entrepreneur Model, and c) the Subcultural Evolution Model.

The psychopathology model

The authors state that novel religious ideas many times come about due to the "mental illness" of a leader, which they define as "the imputed condition of any human mind that repeatedly fails to conform to the propositions of the prevailing theory of human action." A New Religious Movement is said to arise during times of social crisis, when a prospective leader is experiencing personal and social turmoil, and may become preoccupied and withdraw from social life. This individual may also experience self-initiated sensory deprivation and/or supernatural visions, which can result in a new religious movement if his or her novel visions are shared with others.

The entrepreneurial model

The model suggests that cults are like businesses established by individuals with flair and talent. The authors state that cult leaders can be considered entrepreneurs who manufacture and sell their novel compensators and ideas. Often, the cult leaders may have had previous involvement in one or more cult. This provides him/her with the skills and knowledge needed to establish and continue a successful cult to which they may add elements of beliefs of their earlier cults. They may even tag on fresh teachings and thus create a totally new synthesis of doctrine.

The sub-culture / evolution model

This model draws on the sociological work on deviant sub-cultures. In this model the most important aspect is the role of the group in the development of a new religion. Stark and Bainbridge

emphasize the importance of rewards and compensators in group interaction and state that as this exchange becomes more intense, the group becomes socially encapsulated and experiences a social implosion, which "results in a cohesive, closed group broken away from the rest of society." Once this separation takes place, the group is free to evolve into a novel culture.

Distinctions are made between different types of cults. Enroth (1982: 22-25) offers the following classifications in order to categorise the term cults.

- Eastern Mystical: groups related to Hinduism, Buddhism and other pantheistic Eastern religions; examples in this category are Hare Krishnas and Self-Realization Fellowship.
- Aberrant Christian: groups that claim to be Bible-based but which deviate in practice or belief, such as The Way International, the Boston Church of Christ and the Shepherding Movement.
- Psychospiritual or Self-Improvement: groups offering seminars or workshops providing self- improvement or personal transformation (a growing cultic trend) includes Transcendental Meditation, Lifespring and The Forum.
- Eclectic/Syncretistic: a combination of several religious traditions includes the Unification Church ("Moonies") and the Church Universal and Triumphant.
- Psychic/Occult/Astral: these groups offer "secret wisdom" and "lost truths"; examples include UFO cults and Edgar Cayce's Association for Research and Enlightenment.
- Established Cults: Bible-based, cultic religious movements which have achieved mainstream status; this would include Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses and Christian Science.

- Extremist/Political/Social Movements: groups cultic in the psychological or social sense which include the Aryan Nation, White Aryan Resistance and the Ku Klux Klan.

The Concept: Sect

A sect is a small religious group that has branched off of a larger established religion. Sects have many beliefs and practices in common with the religion that they have broken off from, but are differentiated by a number of doctrinal differences. It is sometimes used instead of the term "cult" and is similarly ambiguous. The term has derived from the Latin word *sequi*, which means, "to follow," and is used of "way of life," or "class of persons." According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2004), a sect can be referred to: a) a religious denomination; b) a dissenting religious group, formed as the result of schism; c) a group adhering to a distinctive doctrine or leader; d) a dissenting or schismatic religious body; and e) a religious denomination.

Any discussions on the concept "sect" directly or indirectly take into consideration the work of Troeltsch (1931) who differentiated sect from churches on the basis of eight important characteristics.

- Sects are fairly small and well integrated in terms of membership.
- Rather than drawing members from all sections of society and being closely connected with the state, sects are associated with the lowest social strata.
- Sects reject the world and the values of mainstream society.
- Sect members are expected to withdraw from the outside world.
- Sect members are expected to be deeply committed to beliefs and demonstrate that commitment.
- Sect members join voluntarily as adults rather than being socialized into the sect.

- Sects believe that they have a monopoly of the truth.
- Sects have hierarchy of paid officials or priesthood.

The New Age Movement

The new religious movement is often referred to as an alternative term for the New Age Movement, but in reality, both the concepts are different. Within the new religious movement, there is distinction between "new religion" and "religious movements." Unlike most formal religions, the new age movement has no holy text, central organisation, membership, formal clergy, geographic centre, dogma, creed, etc. The New Age is in fact a free-flowing spiritual movement; a network of believers and practitioners who share somewhat similar beliefs and practices, which they add on to whichever formal religion they follow (Robinson 2002). It also refers to a wave of religious enthusiasm that emerged in the 1970s as a reaction to the failure of Christianity and the failure of secular Humanism to provide spiritual and ethical guidance for the future. Its roots are traceable to many sources: Astrology, Hinduism, Gnostic traditions, Spiritualism, Taoism, Theosophy, and other Neo-pagan traditions. The movement started in England in the 1960's where many of these elements were well established.

There are number of fundamental beliefs, which are held by many New Age followers. Robinson (2002) has summarised these as follows:

- *Monism*: according to these believers, all that exists is derived from a single source of divine energy.
- *Pantheism*: the belief that all that exists is God and God is all that exists. This leads naturally to the concept of the divinity of the individual. The believers do not seek God as revealed in a sacred text or as exists in a remote heaven; they seek God within the self and throughout the entire universe.

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- *Reincarnation*: according to this belief, after death, human beings are reborn and live another life as a human, and, this cycle repeats itself many times. This belief is similar to the concept of transmigration of the soul in Hinduism.

- *Karma*: according to this belief, the good and bad deed that we do adds and subtracts from our accumulated record, our karma. At the end of our life, we are rewarded or punished according to our karma by being reincarnated into either a painful or good new life. This belief is linked to that of reincarnation and is also derived from Hinduism.

Further, according to Robinson there are different *methods* that the New Agers followed in the respective movements. They are such as:

- *Meditation*: A process, which controls the mind to release oneself from conscious thinking. Repetitive chanting of a mantra, or focusing on an object often aids this.

- *Music*: A gentle, melodic, inspirational music form involving the human voice, harp, lute, flute, etc. the purpose of this music is to aid in healing, massage therapy and general relaxation.

- *Astrology*: The belief that the orientation of the planets at the time of one's birth, and the location of that birth predicts the individual's future and personality. Belief in astrology is common amongst New Agers.

- *Human Potential Movement*: This is a collection of therapeutic methods involving both individualized and group working, using both mental and physical techniques. The goal is to help individuals to advance spiritually. Examples are Esalen Growth Centre programs, EST, Gestalt Therapy, Primal Scream Therapy, Transactional Analysis, Transcendental Meditation and Yoga.

The above discussion of religion, cult, sect and New Age makes it evident that there is no straightforward way of defining which organisations and spiritual

movements fall within the category "NRM" and which do not. Therefore, a discussion of religion and new religious movements need to be discussed in a broader context.

Diaspora: The Concept

The etymological meaning of "diaspora" is made up of the fragments from the Greek words, "*dia*," means through, and "*speiro,*" means scatter. The word was specifically used to describe the experience of the Jews exile to Babylon after Nebuchadnezzer's conquest over Jerusalem in 587 BCE (http://www.science.co.il/Israel-history.asp). A typical example of diaspora is given by the New Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus of English language: "the dispersed Jews after the Babylonian captivity; their dispersion" (1993: 264).

For Khachig Tololyan, the editor of the journal *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies,* the concept refers to the entire "... semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugees, guest workers, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community" (1991: 4). In a critique of such far-reaching definition, William Safran has attempted a kind of "ideal type" representation of diaspora. According to him the concept diaspora refers to as "…expatriate minority communities, dispersed from an original 'center' to at least two 'peripheral' places. They maintain a memory or myth about their original homeland; they believe they are not, and perhaps cannot, be fully accepted by their host country; and they see the ancestral home as a place of eventual return and a place to maintain or restore." The collective identities of these diaspora communities are defined by this continuing relationship with the homeland (Safran 1991: 83). Docker (2001: vii) defines diaspora as "…a sense of belonging to more than one history, to more than one time and place, to more than one past and future."

The most classic definition of diaspora goes to the work of Razmik Panossian (1998: 150) who defines diaspora as "…forced dispersion of a clearly identified group of people from their homeland with a distinct collective minority and a "myth of return." The group maintains its collective identity by establishing and controlling boundaries around it, while maintaining communication with other similar communities and with the homeland." In stark contrast to this, Walker Connor (1986) defines diaspora as that segment of people living outside the homeland. These two definitions represent two contradictory meanings of the term diaspora. The first definition implies the historic cases of Jews, the Armenians, the Greeks and the Palestinians whereas the second definition extends beyond the first and covers all people living outside their land of origin.

The Encarta World English Dictionary (2000) provided two meanings of the word diaspora: a) Capitalised diaspora, and b) Non-Capitalised diaspora.
A capitalised diaspora is defined as:

- Exile of the Jews from Israel - The dispersion of the Jews from Palestine following the Babylonians conquest of the Judean Kingdom in the 6th century BC and again following the Romans' destruction of the Second Temple in AD 70.
- Jews living outside Israel - The Jewish communities living outside either the present-day state of Israel or the ancient Biblical kingdom of Israel.

A non-capitalised diaspora, on the other hand, is the scattering of language, culture and people that was formerly concentrated in one place. The first definition is exclusively used for Jewish exiles, scattered all around the world. The second definition used for people of any culture who have dispersed from a former concentration, with their own cultures and languages.

The High Level Committee on Indian Diaspora (2001), under the Chairmanship of Dr. L. M. Singhvi, M.P., employs this concept in a generic sense for

"…communities of migrants living or settled permanently in other countries, aware of its origins and identity and maintaining varying degrees of linkages with mother country."

Stuart Hall (1995: 10) observes:

> Diaspora refers to the scattering and dispersal of people who will never literally be able to return to the places from which they came; who have to make some difficult settlement with the new, often oppressive cultures with which they were forced into contact, and who have succeeded in remaking themselves and fashioning new kinds of cultural identity by, consciously or unconsciously, drawing on more than one cultural repertoire.

According to Steven Vertovec (1997: 277), the term diaspora "…used to describe practically any population that is considered 'deterritorialized' or 'transnational' that is, which has originated in a land other than that in which it currently resides, and whose social, economic and political networks cross the borders of nation states or indeed span the globe."

Diasporic communities emerged according to Tambiah (2000: 164) through two different but interrelated sources such as:

- Voluntary migration of people carrying with them a variety of occupational skills and cultural practices, leaving their locations of origin or present residences in search of better economic opportunities and life chances, and with a view to permanent or temporary settlement; and
- Involuntary displacement caused by political turmoil and civil war or by natural disasters (floods, earthquakes, and drought) of people who are referred to as refugees and asylum seekers and are relocated in camps and safe heavens or are accepted for resettlement by willing host countries.

For Cohen (1993: 2), the central idea behind diaspora is found in the forcible scattering of peoples denoted in the book of Deuteronomy. Subsequent definitions have related to the Jewish dispersion to "Babylon." This term has been taken up also by the African diaspora. Armenians and Greeks, along with Africans and Jews, form the traditional or classic diasporas. Cohen seeks to retain the objectivist definition found in the classical diaspora notion while showing openness to modern or global aspects arising from "…mass movements of population and the slow decline of the nation state" (1993: 14). In order to do this he lists seven criteria for allowing the term diaspora to be used by and for a group. These are: dispersal and scattering; collective trauma; cultural flowering; troubled relationship with the majority; a sense of community transcending national frontiers; promoting a return movement. He suggests that the old diasporic practice of sojourning has become a feature of the new global economy and that the static terms of migration theory with their emphasis on the binary process of "travel from" and "return to" are no longer particularly useful.

Cohen's typology constructs five different forms of diasporic community: victim; labour; trade; imperial; and cultural. He acknowledges that some take dual or multiple forms or change their characteristics over time. His examples are drawn from the experience of Jews as the proto-typical form; Africans and Armenians as *victim*; Indians as *Labour*; British as *imperial*; Chinese and Lebanese as *trading*; and Caribbean as *cultural* (Cohen 1999: 178).

Meanings and Characteristics of Diaspora

The term diaspora today is widely used in the field of media and journalism as a result of increased transnational movement and settlement of populations. Besides this the concept also is frequently used in the world politics. It is often conceptualised as being limited to powerless dispersed ethnic communities. However, the contemporary experience of several diasporas suggest otherwise.

The rapid expansion of telecommunication technologies on a mass scale and the arrival of the internet and the World Wide Web in the 1990s have created opportunities for developing new forms of transnational relationships and communications. Increasingly, the term transnational community is also used as a synonym of diaspora and the two terms frequently collapse into one. Hence, the term diaspora became the catchword for the condition, experiences and the communities that were caught up in this "web of transnational relations."

Robin Cohen (1999) points out that, neither "minority status" nor mere "physical dispersion" is the *ipso facto* for labelling a community as diaspora. Rather there has to be more, such as acute memory, image or contact with the homeland. For him, the individuals who have been dispersed to various lands whether voluntarily or not, one finds a continuum of attitudes and forms a vague expressive identification with the homeland and single-minded involvement with its affairs. This continuum is as follows:

- Vague family tradition of origin, eclipsed by full social, cultural and political integration into the host nation.
- An acute awareness of origins going no further than a sympathetic curiosity about them.
- A personal identity significantly affected by that awareness.
- An active interest in the general fate and in important specific events of the homeland.
- The perpetuation of significant aspects of the culture (e.g., language) of the homeland.
- Regular communication with kin in the homeland, including the sending of remittances to the homeland on a regular basis.
- Influencing a host land government to pursue policies favourable to the homeland.
- Voting in homeland election.
- Going off to fight for the homeland preparing to return to the homeland.

James Clifford (1994: 304-5) has listed five criteria for any given diaspora. They are such as: (1) a group is displaced from a "homeland" and has (2) not been assimilated into their host country. The group has (3) a collective identity which is influenced by their (4) support for the homeland, and (5) a wish to return there.

Cheran (2003) argues if diaspora can be mapped by looking at the conditions of leaving, it can identify the following as characteristics of a diaspora:

- *Forced migration*: members of the diaspora or their ancestors have been forced to leave their homelands to several countries/places.
- *Collective memory/memory loss*: members retain a collective memory- often a memory of pain, dispossession and trauma. From their collective memory they create/ articulate a vision of and for their homeland. These visions are not singular. Simultaneously, there is and will be memory loss down the generations. The generational and cultural tensions that can emerge in remembering and forgetting will be an important dimension in diasporic identities.
- *Alienation and insulation*: members believe that they cannot be fully absorbed /accepted by host countries and therefore feel partly alienated and partly insulated. This means that they can never be in a dominant position in the host country.
- *Deterritorialization / re-territorialization*: This alienation is also an alienation from their nation. This is mainly the result of de-territorialization. De-territorialization becomes a re/source of new imagination for diasporic nations. The concept of nation has long been linked to a singular state and territory. The formation of Diasporas has clearly challenged the mono-dimensional and territorially bound ideas of nation. De-territorialization and re-territorialization could create an exaggerated form of attachment and / or intensified sense of criticism.

- *Projects of investment*: Members believe that they should collectively be committed to the maintenance, preservation and / or restoration of their homelands.

- *Diasporic consciousness*: Members continue to relate personally to that homeland and maintain a unique ethno-national or ethno-cultural consciousness, which can be termed as diasporic consciousness. How this consciousness changes, transforms or mutates across generations, across genders, across caste is an important element in the study of diasporic identities, gender and class.

- *The concept of and desire to return*: Segments of the diasporic population sustain hope of returning to the homeland once peace returns.

Laguerre (1998: 9) has classified diasporas into three categories such as the *dominant,* the *dominated* and the *active* diaspora. According to him the existence of the British elite in the Hong Kong can be categorized under the heading of *dominant* diaspora, and the immigrants in the US under the *dominated* category. For Laguerre the *active diaspora* are those whose relations with the *homeland* are real and are not just symbolic in nature and content.

Emergence of Transnational Community

The term "transnational" generally implies migration of people across the borders of one or more nations. It also refers to the deterritorialization of population along with their material and non-material cultural commodities (Bhat and Sahoo 2003: 145). The term came into prominent use for the first time in the study of international relations in the context of international organisations, relations between non-governmental bodies in particular (cited in Vertovec 1999: xx). In fact, the terms "transnational communities," "transnational network," and "diaspora" are often used interchangeably in many of the contemporary studies. Transnational communities, according to Margaret Byron (1999) refer to "…migrant communities whose existence is based on a variety of sustained links

across international borders and whose members public identities are developed in relation to more than one nation state."

Transnational communities emerge on the basis of solidarity ties, which reach beyond narrow kinship systems. Transnational communities through reciprocity and solidarity achieve high degree of social cohesion and a "common repertoire of symbolic and collective representation" (Faist 1999: 9). According to Thomas Faist, transnational communities can emerge on two levels of aggregation. The most fundamental are village communities in emigration and immigration countries that connect through extensive forms of solidarity over longer periods of time. Transnational communities also consist of larger aggregates, primarily held together by symbolic ties of common ethnicity or even nationhood. According to Gustavo Lins Ribeiro (1994) there are six clusters of conditions that create the constraints through which transnationality exist. They are historical, economic, technological, ideological-symbolical, social and ritual conditions.

Robin Cohen (cited in Schnapper 1999) has examined some of the preconditions for the emergence of transnational communities that includes: 1) the number and activity of non-governmental organizations; 2) the action of international associations such as Amnesty International and Green Peace; and 3) membership in supra national organizations and the number of populations they are directly involved with.

Formation of transnational community according to Peggy Levitt (1999) is dependent on four broad factors such as:

1. Geographic- as a result of the technological revolution, the distances between the sending and receiving countries become closed. There is also the flow of remittances between the sending and receiving country.

2. Socio-economic- the high levels of social parity and income made it easier for members of a community to stay attached to one another and to sustain ties with the non-migrants.

3. The role of state- the government plays an important role in institutionalising the means to sustain dual involvement (right to vote, to run Govt. office etc.) and to extend those to the second generation.

4. Institutional- the political, religious and community organizations created transnational structures and conduct their activities transnationally, thereby encouraging members to participate in both settings.

Global computer network is one of the significant factors that created space for the emergence of transnational community as it facilitates distinct relationship through its own culture and space, which are frequently, but not exclusively, designated as cyber culture and cyberspace. Other factors, such as deterritorialization, fragmentation, the loss of effectiveness of forms of representing the relationship between territory and socio-political and cultural membership, are important consideration for the emergence of transnational community.

One of the important characteristics of transnational community today is their "networks" that span across borders. There are several factors, which contribute for the easy networks of transnational communities. The forces of globalisation, advancement in technologies of travel, transport and communication play key role in the formation of transnational networks. For instance, aero planes, telephones, televisions, electronic mail and the most versatile Internet with online interaction, compress space and time in a magnitude never ever anticipated, has brought a sense of sustained connectedness among the diasporic communities. Castells (1996) observes that new technologies are central to transnational networks and reinforce them.

Peggy Levitt (1999: 4) has examined the significance of several factors that lead to the emergence of the transnational networks. These include a) easy travel and communication; b) the increasing role immigrants play in the countries of their origin to legitimise themselves by providing service to migrants and their children; c) the increased importance of the receiving country states in the economic and political futures of sending countries; d) the society and political marginalisation of migrants in their host countries; and e) migration takes place within an ideological climate that favours pluralism over the melting pot.

According to Tambiah (2000: 170), any given diaspora under emergence participate in three kinds of networks of relationships and experience three forms of consciousness regarding their existential circumstances. The *vertical* networks concern the relations and negotiations through which immigrants attempt to secure their existence in host societies. On the other hand, the *lateral* networks focus on two kinds of linkages that the immigrant develops. The first is concerned with maintaining, reinforcing, and extending relationships with immigrant's communities of origin and the second type of lateral networks which Tambiah refers as "transnational global networks" that emerge due to dispersal of diaspora members to multiple locations and therefore "…transcends the borders of both the countries and states of origin and resettlement."

The networks that emerge between the members of a diasporic community spread across nations are essentially transnational. As a result, the attachment that the diasporic community lost in the initial years of its migration and settlement is now regained further. As Pal Kolsto (1999: 608) points out, there are two dimensions of attachment that a diasporic community maintains with the homeland. According to Kolsto:

> A member of a diaspora community may feel attached to his or her
> new-or old- homeland both culturally and politically. The cultural
> connection to a 'historical fatherland' may be held at the same time

as political allegiance is attached to one's present country of residence … cultural reorientations may represent a continuum of positions stretching from minimal change towards complete cultural re-identification with numerous intervening gradations and intermediate types. The political dimension, on the other hand, represents more of a discontinuous set of choices. While political loyalties may be vague and blurred, the individual may have to select one to which he desires to pledge his allegiance from among the political entities available to him.

Transnational networks are increasingly dense web of social contacts between places of origin and destinations spawned by migrant's spatial displacement that are sustained on the basis of social and kin relationship (Portes et al., 1999). These networks enable immigrants to maintain simultaneous connection with two or more nation-states. Further these networks are intensified as a result of globalisation, deterritorialisation, and continuous circulation of people, money, and information across the countries. Such intensified transnational networks constitute a single community with global spread.

Scholars on transnational migration today discuss and analyse various aspects of migrants' settlement in host society and their transnational networks - social, cultural, economic and political. Of the several cultural premises through which the diasporic community attach themselves with the homeland and the wider diasporic community, religion constitutes the significant one, which binds the diasporic community not only with the homeland but also helps in maintaining ethnic identity in the host society.

Diaspora and Transnationalism

Transnationalism is not a new phenomenon, but over the last two decades it has become an important topic for discussion in the disciplines of social science, and

defined with multidimensionality in the areas of economy, culture, religion etc. A number of scholars have addressed the concept of transnationalism. Green (1997) for instance, points out that, transnationalism is a process whereby "…transmigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that connect their societies of origin with the societies of settlement." Consequently, they build social fields that enable them to maintain multiple relationships; familial, economic, organisational, religious, and political that spans across borders. For Thomas Faist (1999: 2), transnationalism refers to "…sustained ties of persons, networks and organizations across the borders of multiple nation-states ranging from weakly to strongly institutionalised forms."

Portes et al., (1999: 4) makes three points in his analysis of transnationalism:

- That the emergence of transnational communities is tied to the logic of capitalism itself. They are brought to play by the interests and needs of investors and employers in the advanced countries.
- That these communities represent a distinct phenomenon at variance with traditional patterns of immigrant adaptation.
- That because the phenomenon is fuelled by the dynamics of globalisation itself, it has greater potential.

Scholars have differentiated between two types of transnationalism i.e., core transnationalism and expanded transnationalism (Portes et al. 1999; Guarnizo 2000). Core transnationalism as those activities that form an integral part of the individual's habitual life, are undertaken on a regular basis, and are patterned and therefore somewhat predictable on the other hand expanded transnationalism includes migrants who engage in occasional transnational practices, such as responses to political crises or natural disasters.

The conditions of diaspora or transnationalism has today creates new types of "imaginary coherence" and new kinds of identities. Moreover, a diaspora, be it a

family or a larger community held together or re-created through the mind, cultural artefacts and a shared imagination. Transnationalism not only presents with "new subjectivities in the global arena" (Ong and Nonini 1997) but also with new modes of cultural reproduction and the production of hybrid cultural phenomena manifesting "new ethnicities" (Hall 1991). There are two key dimensions that differentiate between transnationalism and diaspora.

1. All diasporas are transnational but *not* all transnationals are diasporas. In other words, if transnationalism is a condition of *living*, diaspora is about a condition of *leaving*. Diasporas are the result of forced migration whereas transnational communities are the result of voluntary migration.

2. There are communities that are simultaneously constructed as transnational and diasporic.

Braziel and Mannur (2003: 8) in their work *Theorizing Diaspora* make a distinction between the two terms that often used synonymously in cultural, ethnic and migration studies.

> Diaspora refers specifically to the movement - forced or voluntary – of people from one or more nation-states to another. Transnationalism speaks to larger, more impersonal forces – specifically, those of globalisation and global capitalism. Where diaspora addresses the migrations and displacements of subjects, transnationalism also includes the movements of information through cybernetics, as well as the traffic in goods, products, and capital across geopolitical terrains through multinational corporations. While diaspora may be regarded as concomitant with transnationalism, or even in some cases consequent of transnationalist forces, it may not be reduce to such macroeconomic and technological flows. It remains above all, a human phenomenon – lived and experienced.

Religion, Diaspora and Transnational Networks

What is the importance of studying religion in diasporic context? How do diaspora influence home and host-country religious life? Does religion create and perpetuate identity among the diasporic communities? Ninian Smart offers three basic reasons why it is important to study the connection between religion and diaspora. Firstly, the study of diasporas and their modes of adaptation can give us insights into general patterns of religious transformation. Secondly, diasporas may themselves affect the development of religion in the homeland: the wealth, education and exposure to foreign influences transferred from diaspora may have significant effects on organization, practice and even belief. Finally, because of the great incidence of diasporas in the modern world, "multiethnicity is now commonplace" (Smart 1999: 421).

Religion is not a fixed set of elements but a dynamic web of shared meanings used in different ways in different contexts (Levitt 2001). Most of the scholars identified "religion" as the single most factors that identify any diaspora to their homeland (Ramsoedh and Bloemberg 2001; Vertovec 2000). But Robin Cohen (1999:189) argues "…religion generally do not constitute diasporas in and of themselves. It is as a posing phenomenon 'cognate' to diasporas because religions usually span more than one ethnic group and, in the case of faiths that have come to be widely spread across the globe, religion normally do not seek to return to, or to recreate a homeland." Of course Cohen agreed that religion could be represented as additional cement to bind diasporic community by forming "diasporic consciousness." Other scholars who pointed out that religion and religious traditions exist outside of one's homeland but in a subjugated form are Smart (1999), and ter Hear (1998). For instance, John Hinnells (1997a: 686) defines diaspora religion as "…the religion of any people who have a sense of living away from the land of the religion, or away from 'the old country'; he even extends the term to cover situations in which a religion represents a minority

phenomenon." Gerrie ter Haar (1998) connects religion and diaspora through the assumption that migration means diaspora, migrants practice religion, and therefore diaspora implicates religion.

Vertovec (1997) argues that religious and other socio-cultural dynamics evolve differently when migrants are characterised by minority status, when they form part of diasporas, or when they engage in transnational practices. According to him diaspora is the imagined connection between voluntary and involuntary migrants, a place of origin, and people with similar cultural origins elsewhere. By transnationalism, he refers to the actual ongoing exchanges of information, money, or resources, as well as regular travel and communication that members of a diaspora may undertake with others in the homeland or elsewhere within the globalised ethnic community (Vertovec 2000: 12). Patterns of change occurring within the context of diasporas, according to Vertovec, include identity and community, ritual practices, and the reimagining of the social and cultural spaces in which actors are embedded. Patterns of change surrounding transnationalism focus primarily on the transformation of networks.

Transnational communities are the potential building blocks of diasporas. Transnationalism is not only means the networks and exchanges of goods, but it also takes transnational religious practices, which involve the transformation of identity, community, and ritual practices. Levitt (2001b) suggested some frameworks to study transnational religion.

> When the magnitude, duration, and impact of migration are
> sufficiently strong, transnational social fields or public spheres
> spanning the sending and receiving country emerge. Both the
> migrants and nonmigrants who live within transnational social
> fields are exposed to a set of social expectations, cultural values,
> and patterns of human interaction shaped by at least two, if not
> more, social, economic, and political systems. They have access to

social and institutional resources that imbue them with the potential to remain active in two worlds.

Further Levitt adds that:

> Movement is not a prerequisite for transnational activism. There are those who travel regularly to carry out their routine affairs, whom some researchers call transmigrants. There are also individuals whose lives are rooted primarily in a single sending or receiving-country setting, who move infrequently, but whose lives integrally involve resources, contacts, and people who are far away and who locate themselves within a topography that crosses borders. And there are those who do not move but who live their lives within a context that has become transnationalized. They may engage in few activities that actually span borders but they too imagine themselves and express an allegiance to a group that is constituted across space. In each case, the social field these individuals locate themselves within may be constituted by ties between a single sending and receiving-country site or by connections to coethnics in multiple locations, giving rise to a sense of belonging to a broader diasporic group. Those frequent travellers, periodic movers, and individuals that stay in one place who do participate in transnational practices do so in a variety of ways.

In her work on the brotherhoods formed by Peruvian migrants in the U.S., Spain, Argentina and Japan, Paerregaard (2001) makes a similar distinction between transnational and diasporic religion. She documents how migrants brought images of the saint with them to their new homes, raised funds for ritual celebrations, and conquered host-country public space by organising annual processions.

Transnational religion is not a new phenomenon as early Christianity and Hinduism spread through trade, conquerors, and colonial administrators. For instance, Hunt (2002: 46) while talking about the Western religions and its global spread pointed out that, the global spread of Western religion especially the activity of Christian Missionaries "…have taken their gospel message across the world for centuries and often followed military conquest, colonialism or the trade routes opened by the merchants." However, recent migration and globalisation generate new cultural contacts that have much in common with these earlier disseminations of religious life. New communication and transportation technologies permit further more frequent and intimate connections between those who move and those who remain behind. The airplane and the telephone make it easier and cheaper to remain in touch (Levitt 2002).

Ancient pilgrims travelling from one sacred landmark to another, and their contemporary counterparts, created an imaginary religious landscape bounded by these holy sites (Eickelman and Piscatori 1990). Transnational migrants also use religion to delineate an alternative cartography of belonging. Religious icons and sacred shrines, rather than national flags, proclaim these religious spaces. The moral and physical geographies that result may fall within national boundaries, transcend but coexist with them, or create an additional place that supersedes national borders.

Hunt (2002: 50) juxtapose the core globalisation issue i.e., "McDonaldization" with the religious spheres of Christian evangelical society of America and how it spreads its boundaries across the world with wide popularisation of consumer culture and consumer religion. McDonaldization, the term was first used by George Ritzer in 1996 in his influential work on the "McDonaldization of Society" to mean "…the global patterns of consumption and consumerism and is a process of rationalization exemplified by the American fast food company McDonald's." On a global scale, McDonald's is a major stakeholder in the burger and French fries market, and what is produced is a fairly standard package. The

McDonald's burger purchased in London is very likely to be the same bought in New York, Tokyo, or Moscow … it is the same all over the world – the same image and same product. Similarly, the Sathya Sai Baba and Swaminarayan religion can be compared with the McDonaldization and its spread as these religions "not only preach standard range of core doctrines" which are same through out the world wherever their devotees are, but also at the same time organise meetings and congregations to preach the gospel of their own tenets and also spread their messages through mass-produced publications and audio and visual tapes through the world-wide communication systems.

Levitt (2001) points out that, "…transnational religious life is constituted by a variety of elements. Most concrete are its institutional manifestations. They are not static, impermeable categories." Dispersing religious cadres, mounting missionary campaigns, operating schools, building pilgrimage shrines, and organising international encounters, the Church created a vast, interconnected network of activities throughout the world. Religious pilgrimages, processions, and rituals are one way that migrants express their continuing attachment to their home country.

Religious identification is an important aspect in forming transnational identity. For instance, Hinduism takes the function for maintaining and sustaining the identity of Hindus in the diaspora as well as in the homeland. The universalistic aspiration to the Hindu gods or aesthetic identification with the Hindu religion enables individuals to overcome social boundaries in the respective society. As Levitt (2001) points out, a religious minority is always affiliated with the construction of identity, the constitution of a unique form of otherness, which offers a means for dealing with social experience. Several movements associated with the religion such as Sathya Sai Baba, OSHO, Swaminarayan and others expands their boundaries across borders and creates such identity among the Indians. The following chapter will introduce the Sathya Sai Baba movement, its emergence and growth.

CHAPTER-III

The Emergence and Growth of Sathya Sai Baba Movement

> For modernity, the self is autonomous and God is dead. The death of God is "the inescapable 'fact' of modern life." For Hinduism, new gods jostle for place with old ones... the self is hierarchical, people differ widely, and almost everyone is subordinate to someone else; yet it is open to the Hindu to abandon the social self and become a spiritual self.
>
> David Smith in *Hinduism and Modernity* (2003: 5)

The above quotation of Smith reflects the general understanding of the growth of spiritualism in the world. The quotation also reflects the *faith* tradition of Hinduism - belief in God - and the role of charismatic leaders. The role of charisma and miracles has been entrenched together in the religious traditions of most of the faiths including Hindus in India for years. Several examples can be found in Hinduism that associated with the stories of miracles and influences of Gods/Goddesses in the lives of individuals. For instance, the "milk miracle" of September 21, 1995 which was an unusual religious event, cutting across the entire social strata - from common people to the professional groups like doctors, lawyers and engineers. Even Christians, Muslims, Sikhs and atheists shared the belief in having their offerings accepted by Lord Ganesh (Hinduism Today 1995).

Miracles in Hinduism

People often believe that miracles play a very significant role only in Hinduism, but in reality miracles are a part of all most all world religions, although some religions attach greater importance to miracles than others. Buddhists for instance, believe that miraculous healings occurred among the general population at the moment of Buddha's birth. The Jews have many miracles described in the Torah, especially Moses' parting the Red Sea as he led his people out of slavery in Egypt. Muslims believe that Allah can do miracles and popular Islam abounds in miracles both of the prophet Mohammed and of wonder-working saints.

Christianity also is firmly based upon miracles, specifically the resurrection of Jesus Christ after his crucifixion on the cross. Besides these world religions miracles are also well established in the tribal religions (Hinduism Today 1995). Anthropological studies by Margaret Mead shows the existence of "special supernatural powers" among the many tribes (Mead 1969). The performance of miracles can be found in popular Hindu epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata and also in the Bible.

The above instances show that miracles are part of all the great religions. As Kenneth L. Woodward (2000) points out, "…the miracle stories are part of all the great faith traditions, and without knowledge of them no religion can be fully appreciated or understood." It has become much easier to disseminate the near instantaneous experience of miracles around the globe today than in the past, owing to the development of modern communication technology.

Although most of the religions today have given up their belief in miracles, Hinduism "…being a theory of continuous research in God and of life by rebirths and reincarnations, has a moral and legal scope for the possibility of miracles" (Singh 1995: 2). An oft-repeated quotation can be found from the literature on Hinduism and miracles on the Internet, which says "…if miracles could occur and be proven, it would be possible only in Hinduism and like religions, which have limitless dimensions in spiritualism" (ibid.). In Hinduism, the "natural" and "supernatural" are fused in a way that is alien to Western thinking, where miracles are events that interrupt the normal flow of nature (Ostling 2000).

The present study deals with one of the spiritual movements of India which have attracted thousands of believers all over the world besides marking its presence within the tradition of Hinduism in India. Sathya Sai Baba, the supreme authority of the Sathya Sai Baba movement is now more popular by his acts of miracles in the West than in the homeland, and most importantly the followers from western

countries especially non-Indians are increasing in number day-by-day than Indians.

Sathya Sai Baba Movement

Several pictures of Sathya Sai Baba showing his red robe, copious hair, and shining smile are now to be found all over India, in temples and shrines, including homes. Not only that, the pictures can also be found in 123 countries around the world. The religious faith in the Sai Baba has appealed millions of people who have surrendered themselves to Sathya Sai Baba both emotionally, mentally, socially and even in material terms. Sathya Sai Baba, the founder of the living spiritual movement, now claims to have over 12 million devotees hailing from different caste, class, ethnic, religious and regional backgrounds with over 20,000 centres around the world devoted to the promulgation of his spiritual message. Obviously, it has attracted Indian Diaspora around the world in large numbers. For instance, in many major cities in North America and Western Europe there exit organised Sathya Sai Baba Centres and majority of members of these Centres are belong to Hindu families.[1]

The movement is largely based on urban-middle-class groups such as academicians, business people, scientists and professionals besides politicians. Although the movement came into light after 1940s, it gained momentum only recently, especially after the massive expansion in information and communication technology, which has transformed the world into what Marshal McLuhan (1989) called "global village."

Many scholars have described the life of Sathya Sai Baba in different languages. Hence, it is difficult to portray a biography out of these literatures. As most of these writings are legendary and are transmitted in the centres to portrait the

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[1] Sathya Sai Baba and his religion in the diaspora appeals particularly to "Westernised," middle-class Hindus (see Bowen 1988; Klass 1996), besides attracting a number of Europeans and North Americans.

divine character of Sathya Sai Baba from the childhood, emphasizing on demonstrating his miraculous power. Similarly, there are scores of publications associated with Sai Baba movement. Many of these publications contain records of the public and private talks and discourses given by Sai Baba. However, despite these works it is found that, there has not been any thorough academic study on Sathya Sai Baba movement. The present work deals with the transnational aspects of Sathya Sai Baba movement from diasporic perspective, focusing on networks in the global context. The earlier studies on Sathya Sai Baba are largely based on specific locations and events. Hence, a systematic study of transnational character of Sathya Sai Baba movement is needed to understand the movement in its totality.

Emergence and Growth

In consonance with Hindu scriptures, Sathya Sai Baba is called by different names to indicate different status and stages of life. His childhood given name was Sathyanarayana and his family name was Raju.[2] During his youth, his friends and villagers used to call him in different names. For instance, Kasturi (2003: 13), the much closer person to Sathya's family, described Sathyanarayana in his book *Sathyam Sivam Sundaram* as: "…He is Shiva, He is Sakthi; He must have both Vibhuthi and Kumkum (sacred ash and red ochre)." However, when Sathyanarayana declared himself in 1940s that he is the incarnation of former Shirdi Sai Baba, became to be known as Sathya Sai Baba. These stages - from childhood to youth - provide an outline for the life of Sathya Sai Baba. The process that began with the birth of "Sathyanarayana Raju" and culminated in the emergence of the "Sathya Sai Religion" is an interesting study of sociological significance.

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[2] In the coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh, the Rajus of this sub-caste were known to be as Telugu speaking minstrels or Telugu teachers (Rao 1985: 4). They were Kshatriyas of the ruling caste. They considered themselves scions of the Solar Dynasty, of Bharadvaja Gotra and Apastambha Sutra (Ganapati 1985: 16).

The stories of the movement goes back to early part of the 20th century when Sathya Sai Baba, born as Sathyanarayana Raju, from a Kshatriya family at Puttaparthi village of Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh, India on 23rd November 1926. His birth fell on the day, which according to the Telugu calendar was Akshya (year), Kartheeka (month), and Somavaramu (Monday).

Sathya's immediate family details are available, especially the Rathnakaram Kondama Raju, the grandfather (1840-1950) and his four sons. These family details are important because the family of the Sathya's ancestry provides religious histories for the growth of the movement (see for further detailed analysis of Sathya Sai Baba's family Chapter-V). The elder brother had two wives and a number of children by both. The younger had only five children. They were having joint family, though living separately. Kondamaraju was known for his talents for religious roles on the stage at the village operas.

Puttaparthi, where Sathya was born has some historical importance. The village was initially known as "Gollapalli," a name "…reminiscent of the leelas of Sri Krishna and redolent with music of His Flute" (Ganapati 1985: 16). A couple of miles to the south there exist another village called Brahmanapalli and in the north Bukkapatnam. The town Bukkapatnam was named after Bukkaraya who, along with Harihara founded the Vijayanagar Empire which was flourished from 1336 to 1635 A.D. The Golapalli and Brahmanapalli were the satellite villages during that time to Bukkapatnam (Rao 1985: 1-2).

Historically, in the more recent times of Vijayanagar Empire and during the heydays of the town of Bukkapatnam, Puttaparthi was situated on the banks of river Chitravathi.[3] The village was also known as *Agraharam* - a gift by the feudal lords to the Brahmin community. The story of the river Chitravathi depicts the story of Brahmin community to the land. Moreover, the story that stands

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[3] Currently and unfortunately the Chitravathi is the source of sand for all construction in Puttaparthi, as there is no water flowing on the river, except for few days during rainy seasons.

testimony to the village was that of the five satellite hamlets around Puttaparthi, which were clusters of specific non-Brahmin communities (Rao 1985: 3). The 1981 census reports found that, the areas like Kammavaripalle, Peddakammavaripalle, and Ravillavaripalle were inhabited mostly by the Kammas, whereas Karnatikanagapalle and Nagireddypalle by Reddies and Kapus; and Kavilaguttapalle by Balijas.[4] The Brahmin population at that time constituted of all the sub-sects: Vaishnavites, Madhwas, Niyogis and others. As the literature shows, for some reason or other, which was quite unknown, the Brahmin population slowly dwindled and migrated. The one important Brahmin family amongst the handful of leftovers was that of the "Karanam." Karanam was the hereditary revenue official - the liaison between the village community and the district collector at Anantapur. The district, which was once a backward district under the Madras presidency, now becomes one of the twenty-three districts of Andhra Pradesh with rich cultural heritage. New temples and the physical surroundings inhabited by elite people and new buildings have tremendously changed the landscape of Anantapur today.

In Andhra Pradesh, unlike in some other South Indian states, there is traditionally a family name attached to each person belonging to the Hindu community. The male progeny continues the same family name as the father's, whereas the female takes the family name of their husbands. Irrespective of their caste, the legendary origin of the Hindu families can be traced to Gothra, named after an ancient Rishi. For example, the Rathnakaram family, into which Sathya was born, had Rishi Bharadwaja as the patron saint and hence are members of Bharadwaja gothra. In the course of time, the family followed the principles - Suthras - laid down by one of the Bhardwaja's disciples, Apasthamba. Sathya in this sense would be referred in all religious ceremonies as belongs to Bharadwaja Gothra and Apasthamba Suthra (Rao 1985: 5).

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[4] Kammas, Reddies and Kapus are the upper caste groups in the Andhra Pradesh, whereas, Balijas are recognised as backward community.

Map of Puttaparthi
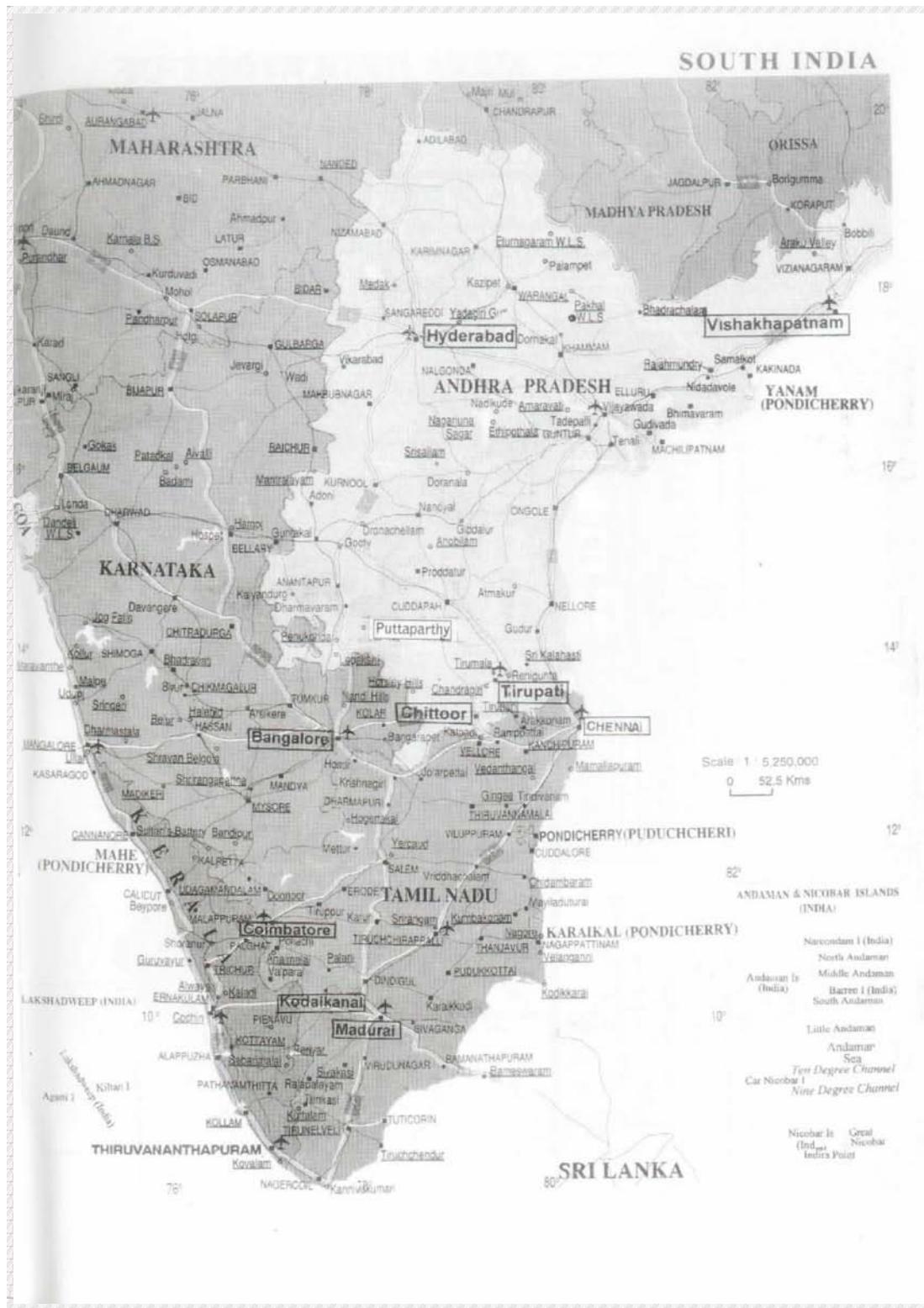
The childhood name of Sathya Sai Baba was especially appropriate because of several reasons. One of the stories describes the life of Pedda Venkama Raju (Sathya Sai Baba's father), the elder son of Kondama Raju who was married to Easwaramma, daughter of Sri Subba Raju of Kolimigundla of Kurnool district. Easwaramma gave birth to a son and two daughters, namely as Seshama Raju, Venkamma, and Parvathamma. Easwaramma was not satisfied with that, since she had a strong desire to have another son. She prayed to all the village gods and even performed Sathyanarayana Puja besides keeping number of vows, which were rigorous and needed vigil and abstention from food. This age-old Vartham[5] mentioned in the Hindu Puranas, is a religious vow undertaken by the Telugus of all castes seeking of Sathyanarayana's blessing.[6] After giving birth to the blessed child, the parent gave the name to the child as Sathyanarayana, because of the celestial relationship of the Puja to the God Sathyanarayana and the vow that Easwaramma had taken.

Soon after his birth, Sathya[7] became the pet of the entire village of Puttaparthi. As it was mentioned by Kasturi, "…even the ryots and cowherds vied with each other in fondling, feeding and playing with the lovely silken curls hair child" (2003: 12). Sathya during his childhood days has demonstrated exceptional qualities of wisdom, compassion, and generosity. The theoretical premises within the sociological tradition of studying different religions revealed that, a charismatic leader shows his character from his childhood just to proven that he is a blessed one and distinct from other simple human beings with divine power (Weber 1978). The following is the characteristic of Sathya's life, which he developed from his childhood, the quality of a cherished leader.

> Sathya has always kept away from places where pigs or sheep or
> cattle or fowl were killed or tortured, or where fish was trapped or

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[5] The word "Vartham" traditionally means the practice of performing fasting with a motive to get closer to god.

[6] Sathyanarayana is a form of the Hindu god "Vishnu."

caught; He avoided kitchens and vessels used for cooking flesh or
fowl (Kasturi 2003: 13).

By this divine nature of "love and sympathy" towards creation, he was called by his neighbours as "Brahmajnani." Besides this distinctive quality, Sathya was also a genius among his friends by learning more things and much quicker than others. According to Kasturi, Sathya even "…composed at the tender age of seven or eight, some heart touching songs for a cast, which were gladly accepted later for public presentation" (Kasturi 2003: 17). These are some of the qualities of Sathya. He followed celibacy similar to those of ascetics of any cult. He also believed in the separation of males and females in the discourse meetings.

According to Max Weber, the charismatic leader is "…accorded with special, possibly divine qualities, which endow him (occasionally her) with authority over his or her following. When the leader dies, the charisma dies also, leaving a gap, which is generally filled by institutional structures" (Chryssides 2001). In case of Sathya Sai Baba movement, the authority was passed on from one *avatar*[8] to another leaving behind the institutional structures. For instance, Sathya Sai Baba has alleged that he is the institutional inheritor of his previous birth - the Shirdi Sai Baba.[9] The Prasanthi Nilayam Publication Trust has mentioned the declaration of avatarhood of Sathya Sai Baba in all most all the publications.

One day Sathya has invited all the neighbours to his home. It was
Thursday 23rd May 1940. He celebrated the day by materialising

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[7] Sathya and Sathyanarayana have been used here and there in the thesis, all implies Sathya Sai Baba's early childhood name.

[8] The word "avatar" refers to the incarnation of a Hindu deity, especially Vishnu, in human or animal form.

[9] Shirdi Sai Baba (1856 -1918), a personification of spiritual perfection and an epitome of compassion, was believed to be the previous incarnation of Sathya Sai Baba who has lived in the little village of Shirdi in the state of Maharashtra (India) for sixty years. He was admired in his lifetime for his austere lifestyle and particularly for the miracles that were attributed to him. See more about Shirdi Sai Baba (Mani Sahukar. 1997. *Sai Baba: The Saint of Shirdi*. Somaiya Publications, Mumbai, p.121. Chakor Ajgaonkar. 1999. *The Foot Prints of Shirdi Sai*. Diamond Pocket Books, New Delhi, p. 212. Marianne Warren 1999. *Shirdi Sai Baba in the Light of Sufism*. Sterling Publications, New Delhi, p. 439).

and distributing delicious *prasadam* to them and declared that he was *Sai Baba.* All of them were astonished, as many had never even heard the name. When someone asked him for proof, he threw a handful of jasmine flowers on the floor. Lo and behold! To their utter surprise, the flowers on the floor rearranged themselves into four letters in Telugu to read *SA YI BA BA*! Sai Baba of Shirdi reborn!! (Rao 1985: 24).

A similar kind of story was described in Kasturi's work where he mentioned about the declaration of *avatarhood* of Sathya Sai Baba. When Sathya declared himself that he is the incarnation of earlier Shirdi Sai Baba; several people had doubt on his revelation and required proof for that. During his chat with the villagers, one devotee with doubt posed the question, "How can we believe that you are He?" The person was astonished by the demonstration of Sathya:

> The cynic was flabbergasted by the ocular proof that was vouchsafed to him. Baba, it seems, stretched out his palms in front of the critic, and asked him to look at the opened palms. And, lo, he could see on one palm, a resplendent portrait of Shirdi Sai Baba and on the other palm, an equally effulgent portrait of Sri Sathya Sai Baba himself! …Baba uses the same means even now to convince seekers that, he who had come then as Shirdi Baba has come now as Sathya Sai Baba (Kasturi 2003: 190).

By his charismatic, divine and miraculous power, Sathya Sai Baba has established today the Sathya Sai Baba Religious Movement.

Weber discusses the authority of charismatic leaders with two types of authority such as bureaucratic and traditional authority. According to him charismatic leadership certainly emanates from the leader's *charis,* or "gift of grace," and contrasts with "bureaucratic authority" or "traditional authority." Just as there is

no appointment to the office of charismatic leader, so there is no dismissal, career prospects, or promotion. Charismatic authority depends on its recognition by disciples or followers, who obviously believe they benefit in some way from such recognition. Disciples tend to live communally, often handing over their possessions voluntarily. Further, Weber argues, since authority generates obligations on the part of those who respect that authority, charismatic authority must generate new obligations, since it differs from legal-rational or traditional authority, the obligations of which already exist. Weber thus categorised charisma and defined it as follows:

> …charisma is a quality of an individual personality that is considered extraordinary, and followers may consider this quality to be endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or exceptional powers or qualities. Whether such powers actually exist or not is irrelevant – the fact that followers believe that such powers exist is what is important (Weber 1968: 215).

Unlike other Gurus or spiritual leaders, Sathya from childhood was not influenced by saints or sages of any kind; rather he himself developed such qualities of charismatic leader by his extraordinary visions. Some of the stories of childhood of Sathya can be illustrated here for understanding how his charismatic activities helped him to become popular worldwide. The legendary story of the childhood of Sathya has portrayed him as a perfect student (*brahmachari*). For instance, during his young age Sathya used to "…puzzle the demons, false teachers in the class, and the unbelievers with his great powers" (Kasturi 2003). However, the incident that brought him closer to his parents and villagers is as follows:

> It was Ramanavami (Lord Rama's Birthday) and late in the night the procession wended its way, round the village. A huge picture of Sri Rama was placed on a flower bedecked bullock cart but every body was surprised to see Sathya was sitting underneath the

picture. The little charming boy was even in that tender age became a "Guru" to the children of the village showed the sure sign of divinity (Kasturi 2003: 15).

The pictures of such garlanded child with so much devotion by the villagers can be seen today in the household of many devotees.

In another group of writings, it is mentioned that, Sathya was the embodiment of the attributes, powers and character of divinity and therefore was called by his followers as Guru.[10] In Hinduism the origin of guru can be traced back as far as the early Upanishads, where the conception of divine teacher on the earth first manifested from its early Brahmin associations. Even the word was continuously described in the Hindu traditions such as Vedanta, Yoga, Tantra and Bhakti sects. In more mystical Hindu circles, it was believed that the guru could awaken dormant spiritual knowledge within the pupil, known as *shaktipat*. Accordingly, the institution of guru has always been an essential feature of Hinduism since ancient times. Sathya Sai Baba in this sense claims to be both the avatar of *Shiva* and *Shakti*. In his book *Feet of Clay: A Study of Gurus*, Antony Storr (1996) applies the term "guru" to figures as diverse as Jesus, Muhammad, the Buddha, Jim Jones, David Koresh, Rajneesh, Steiner, Jung and Freud. While acknowledging that gurus display some differences from each other, Storr contends that in general they claim special spiritual insight, based on personal revelation, offering new ways of spiritual development and paths to salvation.

Sathya Sai Baba right from his early childhood has been deeply religious. He used to have leadership qualities and gather around him his cousins and friends to sing *bhajans* or religious songs in chorus (Rao 1985: 10). For instance, when Sathya was only ten years, he had formed a "Pandhari Bhajan Group" in Puttaparthi, on

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[10] The word *guru* means *teacher* in Sanskrit and other Sanskrit-derived languages like Hindi, Bengali and Gujarati. The word originated in a Hindu context and holds a special place in Hinduism, signifying the sacred place and imparter of knowledge. Literally, the word comes from the root "gu" meaning darkness and "ru" meaning act of removal (www.wikipedia.org).

the model of one that existed in the nearby village. The group consisted of about sixteen to eighteen boys, "…dressed uniformly in *gerua* clothes (or orange-coloured robe), holding each a flag in the hand and wearing jingle-bell-anklets" (Kasturi 2003: 23). It was the great attraction for villagers during that time as Sathya used to play leading roles in the group, performing simultaneously multiple roles such as organiser, treasurer, teacher, composer and singer. He did every role so wonderfully that the villagers believed that they could even imagine in their eyes "…the Mathura and Brindhavan reproduced, and 'Balagopala' with his flute enchanting the Gopis, the cows and calves, the trees and even the river Yamuna" (Kasturi 2003: 24).

Kakar in his study of the psychology of the relationship between the guru and his disciple, stresses the surrender of the disciple to the guru and also the intimacy that the disciple enjoys with the guru (1991: 52-60). This was the case of Sathya's life in the village Puttaparthi where he was to became the guru not only for his friends but also for the entire village soon after.

At the age of 14, Sathya left home - visited different places surrounding the village Puttaparthi - and claimed that he is the reincarnation of an Indian saint who had died in 1918 named Shirdi Sai Baba. In addition to making frequent public claims to be the reincarnation of the revered saint Shirdi Sai Baba, Sathya made special efforts to describe his affinities with Shirdi: teachings, types of miracles, and sayings, as well as exhibiting pictures of Shirdi in his ashram. He also made references (including allegedly omniscient ones) to Shirdi's life, especially to older devotees. All of these activities played an important role in spreading Sai Baba's fame far and wide that attracted large number of devotees, including a number of elderly aristocratic patrons. Sathya then proclaimed his mission, and began teaching on the basis of his newly announced divine status.

The incident, which took him to this greater glory, has been described in the literatures as the stepping-stone of his simple life to the world of legendary

figures. There was a great transformation in him when he was 14 years which his family considered as a "crisis" when he proclaimed that, he is the reincarnation of previous Shirdi Sai Baba, stating to have a precise mission:

> I am no longer your Sathya…I am Sai…I do not belong to you; Maya has gone, My *Bhakthas* are calling me, I have My Work, I cannot stay any longer. Give up all your efforts to "cure" me; I do not consider myself related to you.
>
> Sathya Sai Baba on 20th October 1940 (Kasturi 2003: 56)

Such spiritual vagrancy - leaving home for wondering truth - was not an uncommon practice, as there were other nineteenth century spiritual leaders who left home at early ages for travel and study. For instance, Rammohan Roy, the founder of the Brahmo Samaj, and Dayananda Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj. During his time of wandering as a child (when he was 14 years old) and performing miracles, many people believed Sathya as god's avatar and he was named as Sathya Sai Baba due to his uncommon power of performing miracles. Later he returned to his native place, Puttaparthi, where the devotees built a house for him in 1950 called "Prasanthi Nilayam" - the abode of peace.

After returning to his native village, Sathya started performing miracles in a more attractive manner than those he performed as a young boy attracting many visitors to Puttaparthi.[11] He then became even more popular due the character and integrity of those who told their own tales of spiritual experiences in print on their return from Puttaparthi. These descriptions attracted several early spiritual seekers from the West, such as John Hislop, Arnold Schulman, and psychiatrist Samuel Sandweiss from the USA, as well as Howard Murphet from Australia. These scholars decode Baba as a compassionate human being who delivers "…divine favour to all those who seek his blessings" (Hislop 2003). Further these

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[11] The "miracles" of Sathya Sai Baba include materializing sugar candy, flowers, vibhuti (sacred ash) and other presents for his devotees. It also includes healing the sick and knowing the thoughts of his disciples whatever be the distance between them.

revelations were published in more stylised form through books, magazines and pamphlets, which later inspired other spiritual seekers to visit and examine Sai Baba.

While describing Sathya Sai Baba religion as a "cult" Lawrence Babb (1995: 185) points out that:

> One of the remarkable features of Sathya Sai Baba's cult is that he has managed to preserve the imagery and atmosphere of a purely personal constituency, despite the fact that many of his devotees see him rarely, and then often only from a distance… Nonetheless, despite its size and complexity, the cult expresses, and is energized by, Sathya Sai Baba's personal charisma. The cult-in-the-world is a kind of devotional empire, far-flung but totally dependent on the authority of its sovereign.

As Steel (2002) points out, the major attributes that distinguishes Sathya Sai Baba from other contemporary spiritual gurus "…is his claim to be 'God on Earth,' an avatar endowed with divine attributes and powers." From the source of Sathya Sai Baba's official Discourses of 1953, it is revealed that, Sathya Sai Baba claimed himself to be the living incarnation of God and the divine powers of Omnipotence, Omniscience and Omnipresence. Another claim is that, he is the second incarnation in the series of three consecutive incarnation of God that began in the 1830s with Shirdi Sai Baba. A more anecdotal is the claim that a third incarnation, Prema Sai, will appear soon after his departure in the year 2022 (Karanjia 1994:18-19).

Sai Baba's claim to be the reincarnation of Shirdi Sai Baba deserves very special attention, both because it was pivotal to Sai Baba's early mission and because it reveals several less than convincing aspects (Steel 2002). As Hislop mentioned:

To me, as well as to many hundreds of thousands of people in North and South America, Europe, Africa, Australia, New Zealand and Asia, Sri Sathya Sai Baba is considered to be an Avatar, Divinity in human form. His wisdom, the love which is so strongly felt when one is in his presence, and his awesome power over the natural elements and human circumstances contribute to the extraordinary veneration in which he is held and to the almost irrestible attraction felt by people of all ages and races when they see him, or begin to give close attention to, his teachings and to his life (Hislop 2003: vi).

The personal characteristics of Sathya Sai Baba such as charisma and psychic power has engendered perhaps a million followers or more who believed that he is god himself. The simple definition of Sai Baba as avatar or god incarnates, relates to the deification of human nature, which makes man god to the same degree as god himself became man.

Babb (1983) argues that, it is the "miracle" that is the absolute axis of the movement since the teachings contain nothing unique or remarkable - they are typical of Hindu devotionalist (*bhakti*) movements in general. It is a fact that, as far as the West is concerned, it is the miracle that attracts many followers and transforms people into devotees. The miracles that Sathya Sai Baba performs initially create a quasi-contractual relationship between him and his devotees (Kent 2004: 48). The devotees in this sense forge a social bond while exchanging their compassion with the gifts*,* which Sai Baba materialises. This compassionateness of devotees ultimately turns into "charity" in the portrayal of *seva,* which is an integral part of Sai movement today. As Kent (2004: 48-50) points out, "…the gift exerts a grip upon its recipient, obliging him to receive and later to reciprocate." As a social actor, Sai Baba puts his devotees under contractual obligation, commanding their participation in the implementation of the mission, in exchange for his possible delivery of God's grace. In return the

devotees see Sai Baba and his teaching as unquestionable truth - the direct outpouring of universal divinity. Similar instances can be comparable with the Hindu tradition of *dana* or charity.

According to traditional Hindu beliefs, human being is not born with birth rights, but with birth duties (Klostermaier 2000); that is, every human being must endeavour to redeem throughout life duties towards *devata* (divine powers), *rishis* (sages), *pitrulokas* (ancestors), and *bhutas* (fellow-creatures other than human). The first duties can be performed through means of regular worship, the second through the reading and studying of sacred lore, while the third through commemorations and rituals. The fourth and fifth duties which are most important can be rendered through *charity*: providing food and shelter, as well as expressing in daily prayers one's gratitude to all those who make one's life and well-being possible.

Dana, gift giving or "charity," plays an important role in the Hindu traditions over the years. For instance, the *Rig Veda*, the oldest existing source of Hinduism, contains numerous references to gifts and donors; even one hymn was devoted to the praise of *dana*. According to Klostermaier:

> The gifts mentioned in the *Rig Veda* are usually very substantial:
> large numbers of cows, horses, land, and gold. It was the duty of
> princes to reward with generous gifts the Brahmins who officiated
> at the sacrifices. In turn, the Brahmins assured the princes that their
> gifts were not in vain but brought rich rewards in this life and the
> next. Making promises and not delivering the gift was considered a
> serious offence that deserved punishment (Klostermaier 2000).

The way, in which Sathya Sai Baba decided to represent the responsibility and authority among the devotees, and the members of his own family, has profound effect on the growth and development of the movement. The history of the

devotional groups of any Hindu sects (for instance, Arya Samaj) gives example of the way religious groups and sects are formed, the modes of administration employed by the leaders, and the types of administrative structure of the sect etc. There is a possibility of occurrence of conflict and contradictions in most of the religious movements when the leader became famous however, this conflicting situation hardly occurred in the growth of the Sathya Sai Baba movement so far. There has been hardly any mobilisation or literature contradicting his claims. When the movement increased in strength thereby wealth and activities, it was difficult for Sathya Sai Baba to handle. He assigned people those who were close to him to hold the administrative positions by forming the Sathya Sai Organisation.

Growth of Sathya Sai Organisation

Sathya Sai Baba's mission has always proclaimed a manifesto for charity, education in human values, worship and meditation (Kent 2004: 48). To execute this he has established the International Sathya Sai Organisation, which is devoted to the service of the people. The organisation, which was first started as a small charitable organisation in Puttaparthi during the mid-1960s, has now emerged to be a well-knit, purposeful and service-oriented global organisation. Apart from the spiritual efforts, the organisation's main objective includes social activities such as the training children, youths and adults in the human values, working in hospitals, prisons, old age homes and similar institutions, and taking responsibility of the family, neighbourhood, community and the state. The steady growth of Sai organisation all over the world has resulted in the formation of transnational networks of Sathya Sai Baba (see Annexure-2 for World Regions of Sai Organization).

There are hardly any resources available that enable us to know how the organisation started and gained momentum. As Robert Priddy (2002: 1) points out "…it neither presents any documentation of its origins nor its history as such. The

organisation does not make any of its internal or financial transactions public and reserves information about its real decision-making procedure to office-bearers on a rather strict need-to-know basis."

The members of the organisation have united with a common bond i.e., "love of God" and with a common goal of "spiritual growth."[12] Each organisation has certain unique activities which include: the study of the teachings of Sathya Sai Baba and the sacred literature of all religions, group devotional singing, spiritual meditation, and selfless service to the community, society, the world, and the environment. The fundamental objective of the Organisation as laid down by Sathya Sai Baba is to "awaken in man the divinity inherent in him" by propagating, through practice and examples of the basic principles of Love (Prema), Truth (Sathya), Right Action (Dharma), Peace (Shanti), and Non-violence (Ahimsa). Membership to the organisation is open to people from all walks of life. Regarding the code of conduct, it is pointed out that all those who participate in the activities of Sathya Sai Baba movement must undertake *Sadhana* (spiritual discipline), which is as an integral part of Sathya Sai Baba's daily life.[13]

Sathya Sai Baba organisation operates on two levels - managerial organisation at the central level and seva organisation at the local level. At the managerial level, different trusts function at local, national and international level. It is important to mention here that all the Sathya Sai Baba Trusts in India promote education, health and rural development. The Central Trust situated at Prasanthi Nilayam

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[12] To become a member or hold any administrative charge one has to undergo several stages. His training as a religious specialist comes from his total devotion to the work and spread the message of Baba either through media or through public discourse. See appendix-1: for Sai Organisation Charter.

[13] The main Codes of Conducts of Sathya Sai Baba are as follows: a) daily meditation and prayer; b) devotional singing/prayer with members of his family once per week; c) participation in the educational programs conducted by the Organization for children; d) attendance at group devotional programs conducted by the Organization; e) participation in community service and other programs of the Organization; f) regular study of Sai literature; g) putting into practice the principle of "Ceiling on Desires" and utilities any savings thereby generated for the service of mankind; h) speaking softly and lovingly with everyone with whom he comes into contact; i) avoiding talking ill of others especially in their absence.

having eleven members is the national apex body and acts as a bridge between different trusts. The organisations in the overseas countries however vary from what is exists in India. In the USA for example, - where the Sathya Sai activities are getting more popular than other countries - there found to be two complementary agencies. One consists of Sathya Sai Baba Society of America, which runs the Sathya Sai Baba Books Centre at Tustin, California, while the other branch is Sathya Sai Council of America that provides guidelines for various American Sai Centres.

The organisation is well established on the grounds of "legal-rational authority" with a strict hierarchy of management. Taylor (1987: 124) in his study points out how this organisation has been responsible for the growth of Sathya Sai Movement. At the apex level, there is the *World Council of Sri Sathya Sai Organisation* which oversees the two sub-organisations, namely the *Council of Central Management* and *Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation*. The Council of Central Management looks after another important body called the *Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust*. The Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation is divided into three wings i.e., 1) *the Centres Wing*, 2) *the Women's wing*, 3) *the Service wing*. The service wing is divided further into several branches such as health, education, general public welfare etc. The Chart-1 shows the organisational management and networks of Sathya Sai Organisation.

Indian as well as Overseas devotees use different names for the organisation such as *Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations* and *Sathya Sai Organisation*. The organisation today has reached in a stage where the members are able to maintain transnational networks with their counterparts across the world through the establishment of centres/temples and educational institutions.

Chart-1

Organizational Management and Networks
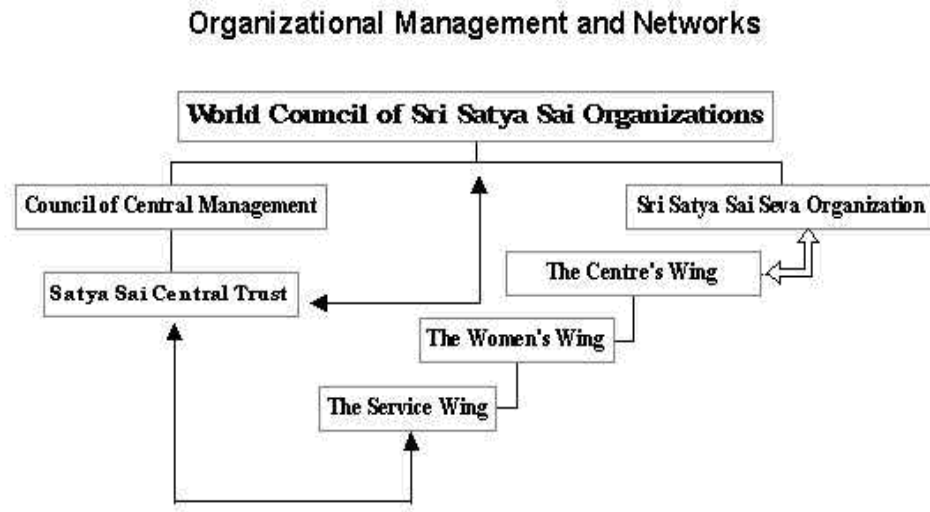
Sathya Sai Organisation and Social Service

Social service has always been given great importance in Sai organisations all over the world. The devotees show their love towards Sathya Sai Baba by serving their fellow beings. Service is defined in Sai discourse as "Love made manifest." Irrespective of gender, colour, caste and race, people from all backgrounds serve their fellow beings in one form or other, both in India and in the Indian diaspora. Sathya Sai Baba's message of social service to the wider society has been told and retold many times and published in many manuscripts, books and magazines.[14]

The Sathya Sai Organisation, which fulfils this purpose called as Sathya Sai Seva Dal Organisation. The structure of Sathya Sai Seva Dal Organisation consisted of a state president nominated by Sathya Sai Baba, who organises Seva Samithi work by nominating a District President and Seva Dal by appointing a State Convenor. It is the Seva Samithi, which first decides to have a Seva Dal in their respective area by appointing a Seva Dal Convenor for the Samithi. Thus, there

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[14] According to Sathya Sai Baba, "…human being should engage himself or herself in service activity… The ideal of service has the ability to remove the ego; it promotes love and affection; it takes one away from worldly attachments and puts one on the path of the Divine."

are three organisers at three different levels playing important role such as: a) Seva Dal Convenor for each Samithi, b) District Convenor for each district, and c) State Convenor for each state. Chart-2 shows the organisational structure of the Sathya Sai Seva Dal Organisation.

Chart-2

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  SATHYA SAI SEVA DAL ORGANISATION        │
│           State President                 │
└─────────────────────────────────────────┘
                    │
                    ▼
        ┌───────────────────────────┐
        │  State Convenor for Seva Dal │
        │          (Group)            │
        └───────────────────────────┘
                    │
                    ▼
        ┌───────────────────────────────┐
        │      District Convenors        │
        │ *In district where Seva Samithis function* │
        └───────────────────────────────┘
                    │
         ┌──────────┴──────────────────┐
         ▼                             ▼
┌──────────────────────┐   ┌──────────────────────┐
│ *Seva Dal Convenor for each Seva* │   │ *Conducts training and* │
│ *Samithi in the district* │   │ *examination at district level* │
└──────────────────────┘   └──────────────────────┘
         │                             │
   ┌─────┴──────┬────────────┐         │
   ▼            ▼            ▼         ▼
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| *enrols members for Seva Dal for training* | *conducts various activities* | *gives certificate and badge* |
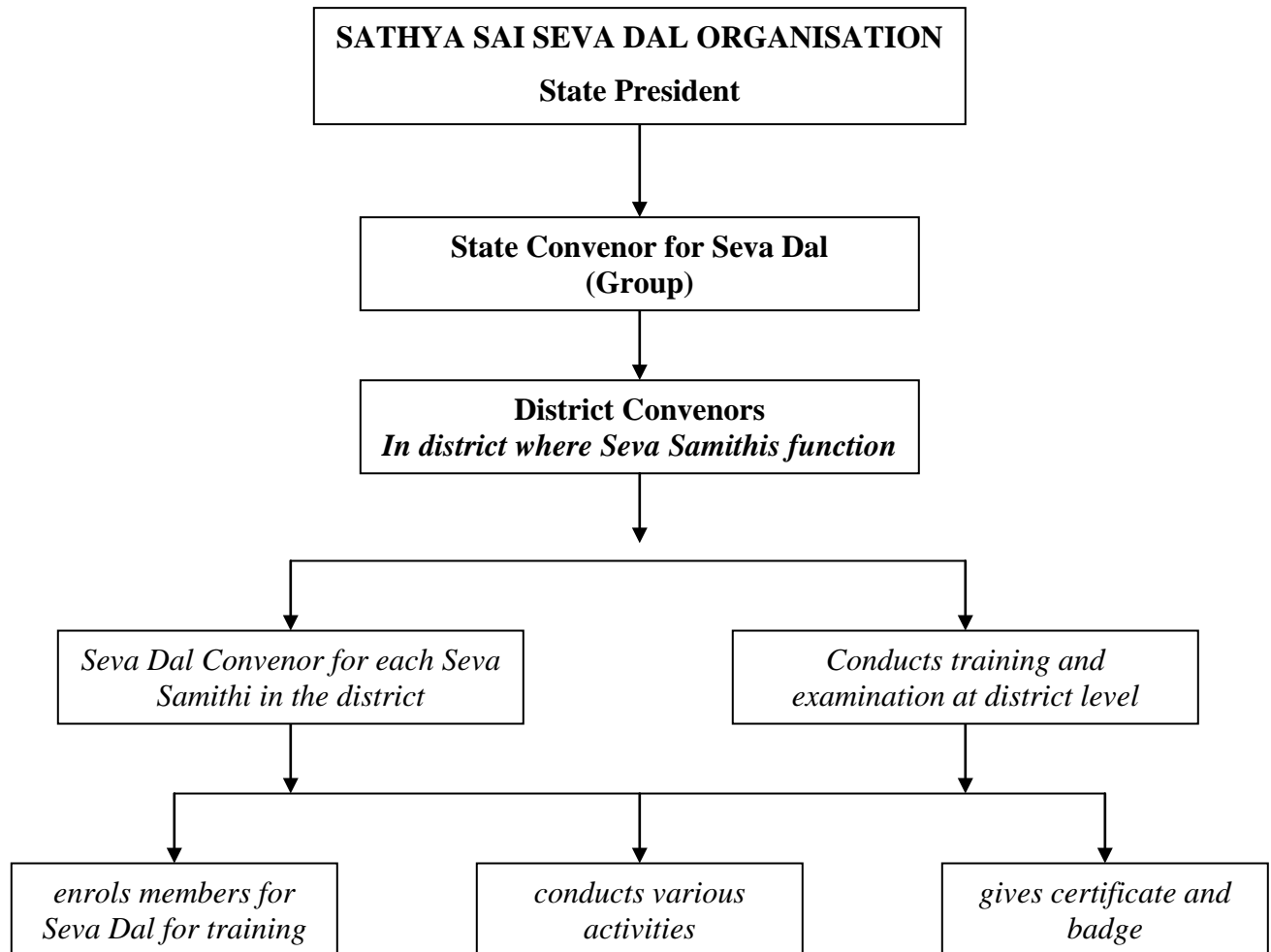
In this context, it is worthwhile to mention here some of the important landmarks in the contribution of Sathya Sai Baba Movement to the larger society. First, the educational programme, which is organise through establishing schools and colleges in various regions. For instance, Sri Sathya Sai Arts, Science and Commerce College for men and women at Anantapur, Bhopal, Jaipur, Hyderabad

and Bangalore. These colleges are affiliated to the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, Puttaparthi, which has been accorded Deemed University status in India (Taylor 1987: 129). The second important field is the health programme, which is organised through establishing healthcare institutions and hospitals with the following purposes: 1) medicine for all, 2) medical care free from the stigma of commercialisation, and 3) human values in medical care. Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences at Puttaparthi and Bangalore, and Sathya Sai Baba Super Specialty Hospital at Puttaparthi are established to promote the above ideals. The third major initiative taken by Sathya Sai Organisation is Sri Sathya Sai Drinking Water Supply Project, to the people in the drought-prone rural areas of Anantapur, Medak, and Mehaboobnagar districts of Andhra Pradesh.

International Sathya Sai Organisation

The International Sri Sathya Sai Organisation consists of Sathya Sai Centres and Groups in countries outside India. Today, Sathya Sai Centres are found in all most all countries around the world.[15] For administrative purposes, countries outside of India have been divided into ten geographical regions of the globe (http://www.sathyasai.org/organize/content.htm). In the Indian diaspora one could observe the number of centres increasing especially in the old diasporic countries like Fiji, Trinidad and South Africa. There are more than 20 centres in Fiji and 50 centres in Trinidad. In short, the worldwide spiritual movement of Sathya Sai Baba appears to be growing in geometric progression for the last few years. Each region is headed by one or more Central Coordinators to guide and assist for the smooth functioning of the Centres. The activities of the Sri Sathya Sai International Organisation fall into three categories: *Devotional/Spiritual, Educational* and *Service*. Chart-3 shows the organisational structure of Sathya Sai Organisation.

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[15]. The first Sai Baba centre outside India was established in 1967 at Sri Lanka. In the USA and UK centres started during 1969. Establishment of centres in South Africa (1973), Italy (1974), Mauritius and Australia (1978), West Indies (1983) followed.

Chart-3

Structure of the Sathya Sai Organisation

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┌──────────────────────────────────────────┐
│           International Chairman           │
│     Central Office (Prasanthi Nilayam)     │
└──────────────────────────────────────────┘
                      │
                      ▼
┌──────────────────────────────────────────┐
│             Central Coordinator            │
│  One for each of the 10 regions of Overseas Centres │
│        (Nominated by the Central Office)   │
└──────────────────────────────────────────┘
                      │
                      ▼
┌──────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ Reg 1   Reg 2   Reg 3   Reg 4   Reg 5   Reg 6   Reg 7   Reg 8   Reg 9   Reg 10 │
└──────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                      │
                      ▼
              ┌─────────────────┐
              │  Central Council │
              └─────────────────┘
                      │
                      ▼
              ┌──────────────────────┐
              │ Coordinating Committee │
              └──────────────────────┘
                      │
                      ▼
              ┌──────────────────┐
              │ Sathya Sai Centre │
              └──────────────────┘
          ┌───────────┼───────────┐
          ▼           ▼           ▼
┌───────────────┐ ┌───────────────┐ ┌───────────────┐
│ Spiritual wing │ │ Educational wing │ │  Service wing  │
└───────────────┘ └───────────────┘ └───────────────┘
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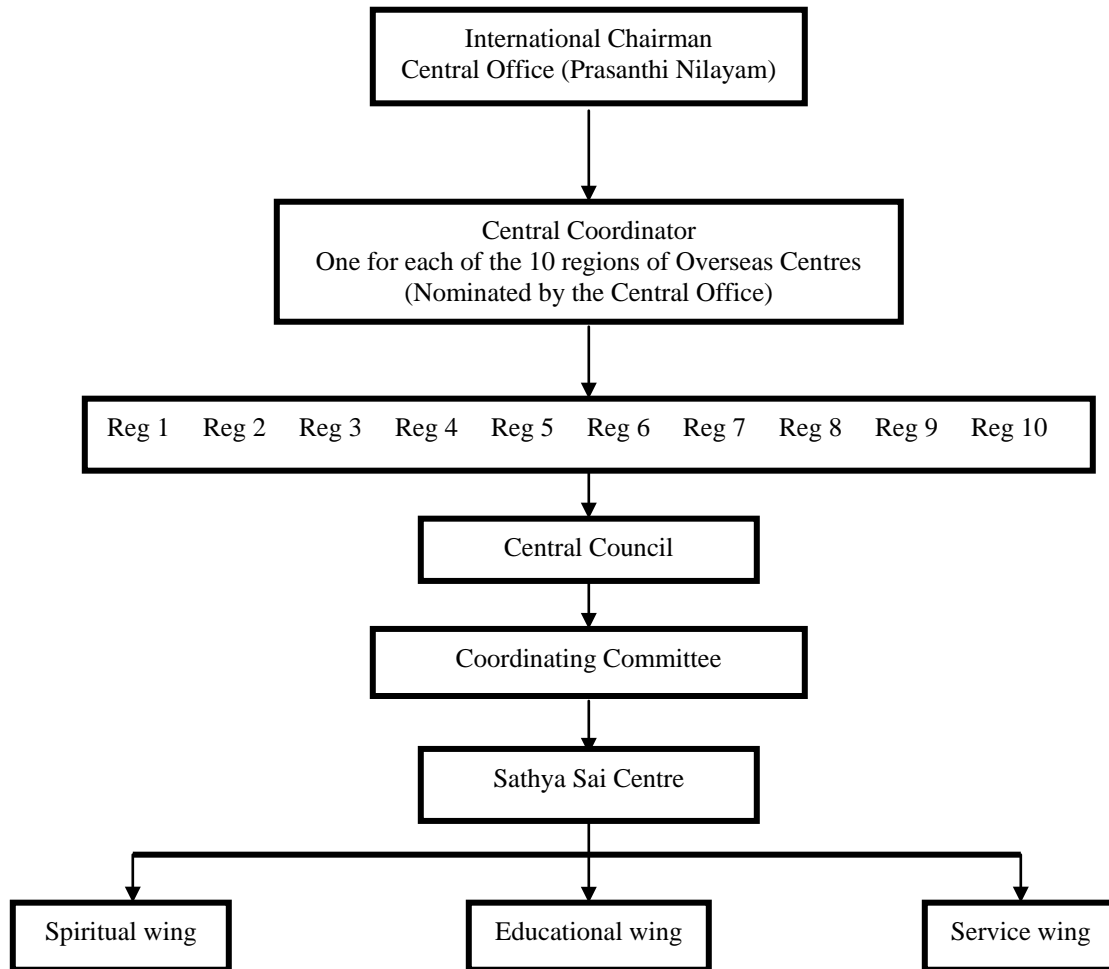
Although it is suggested that the Sathya Sai Baba organisation is not a proselytising organisation, scholars have described the miracles of Sai Baba as "proselytizing miracles" that cause the potential devotee to accept Sai Baba as father God and integral avatar (see Hummel 1985) thus in similar way the members to the organisation recruits on the basis of a strict criteria. The organisation led mostly by Hindus however, exceptions are there in countries in which foreigners become the head of the organisation.[16] The organisation made all effort to incorporate Hindu spiritual teachings and discard other beliefs and

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[16] This is the case of most of the European countries where the Indian population is meagre.

persons of different spiritual inclination. As Robert Priddy (2002) observes, in the organisational character there is an attempt to

> …universalise the Sathya Sai Baba teaching, the groups soon gravitate towards an exclusive membership, of which the first requirement is belief in Sathya Sai Baba and at least the basics of his teaching. Non-members are tolerated, but room is never made for them within the heavily Hindu-oriented doctrine that prevails in both the Charter, in the nature of all central conferences and festivities and in devotional gatherings … however much one tries to involve other faiths. There is also an inbuilt inertia towards Indian rituals rather than those of any other faith. This is not an inclusive practice, though it is highly natural and probably unavoidable in any culture… one sticks mainly to one's own timeworn symbols and behaviour. The only persons of other faiths who interact with the Sai organisation are those who also accept or tolerate silently the claim that Sathya Sai Baba is nothing short of the Divinity Itself. One does not have to be much of a deep thinker to see what limitations this sets upon the spread of the doctrine preached by Sathya Sai Baba, though faith also can have great power in clouding sensible judgements… and such beliefs can and do often stultify human moral conscience.

Sathya Sai Baba organisation plays important role in popularising Sai Baba's mission world over through organising seminars, workshops, conferences on religion and spirituality and the contemporary needs of gullible people. These public activities sometimes act as practical alternative to spirituality as a result of the overseas tours by Sathya Sai Baba (only to East Africa), if not by his close disciples or associates. Since 1943 Sathya Sai Baba mission has been prospering without needing general public meetings in overseas countries. Nowadays, the close associates of Sathya Sai Baba - persons like Anil Kumar, Indulal Shah and

others - travel across the world to spread Sai Baba's message, his philosophy and teaching. This prominent persons travel every year to different countries with the invitation of the respective countries' Sai Centres. The organisation for the last few decades has initiated conducting international conferences and workshops on spirituality and religion in different countries around the world.[17] The spontaneous overflow of Centres outside India is the best example of this effort.

The organisation has divided the responsibilities (such as environment, health, education, women, Bhajan group etc.) into different departments and the administrative committee looks after all this with the help of its co-members. Administrative committees have been established in each country where there is a Centre. These committees are registered or incorporated according to the laws of the countries where they have located, but in each case Sathya Sai Baba is the president of the committee.

There are now committees in East Africa, South Africa, Caribbean, Mauritius, UK, USA, Australia, and Canada. The activities of each committee in all the countries are coordinated through a central committee which is in India. The effective administrative structure combined with a centralised authority formed by the intellectuals to make decisions is one of the major factors leading to the growth and success of the Sathya Sai Baba movement in the last few years.

To sum up, Sathya Sai Baba movement today has achieved transnational character as a result of its global networking through the establishment of Centres all over the world. The chapter examines how the movement gained momentum specially focusing on the *charisma* and *charity* which is the ultimate aim of the movement. Further, the chapter shows the organisational structure of the movement and its charitable activities. The following chapter will deal with the structure of Sathya Sai Baba theology.

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[17] For instance, the first world conference was held at Dharmakshethra, Bombay in June 1968, and the second in 1975. The third in 1980, the fourth in 1985 and the fifth in 1990 were held at Prasanthi Nilayam during Sathya Sai Baba's birthday.

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 reversed 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 mils 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.

<div align="right">John Hislop (2002) Conversations with BSSSB</div>

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.
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> *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.

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[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 23rd 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.

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[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 revivalist. His teachings during the early days largely

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[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

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[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, Bhagvad 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.[9] 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 *bhajan*s 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

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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.[10] 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[11] 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.[12] 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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[11] Yajna is the means for securing awareness of the Divine. Yajna is governed by mantras, sacrifice and divinity.

[12] 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).

Picture-1

Picture-2
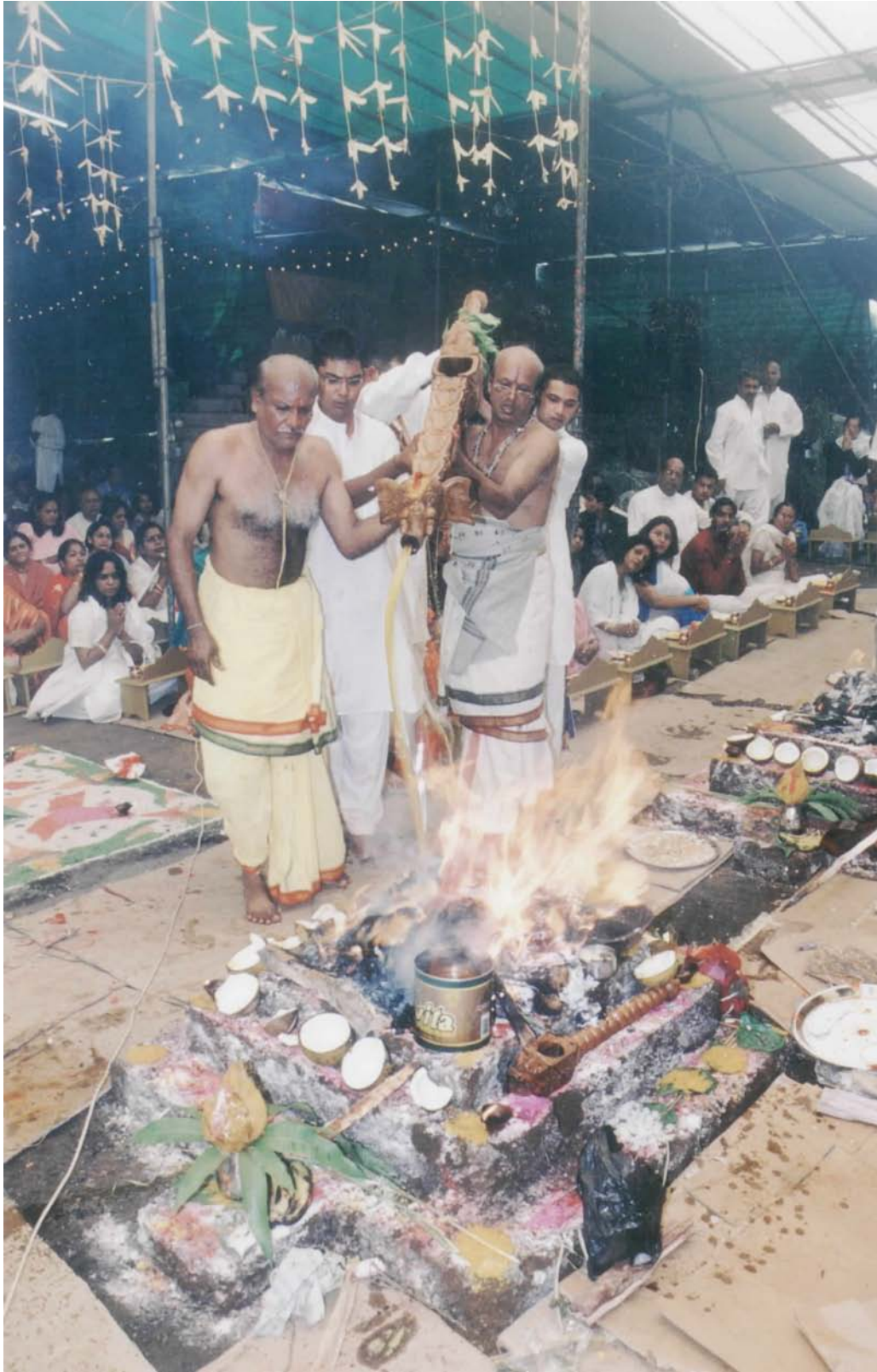
Picture-3

Picture-4

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.[13] 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 owns 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.

mythologies 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.[15] 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.[16] 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.[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 *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.

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

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[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, Bhagvata 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.

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.

CHAPTER-V

Transnational Networks of Sathya Sai Baba Movement

Introduction

Social network analysis is one of the most influential theories in social science today especially applicable to the analysis of local social groups to the entire global system. The disciplines that find social network analysis include anthropology, sociology, psychology, management and health studies. Social network approach in social sciences initially began in the field of sociometry, attempting to quantify social relationships. Although Mark Granovetter (1973) extended the use of social networks to understand many different relations in the social sciences, it was J. A. Barnes (1972) who first applied social network analysis to the analysis of social relations. The social relationships of Sathya Sai Baba with his family and kin, childhood friends and neighbourhoods including villagers and in larger context the million devotees across the world are key to understand the social dynamics of this transnational movement.

Any social network consists of a set of people connected by a set of social relationships such as friendship, family relatives and others (Knoke and Kuklinski 1982). Social network analysis has concentrated mostly on patterns of relations among people, organisations, states etc. (Berkowitz 1982; Wellman 1988; Wasserman & Faust 1994). In the social network analysis, emphasis is given to two types of relations (i.e., center and periphery or egos and alters or object and objects), examining how these networks work within this environment.

Social network analysis uses variety of techniques to understand the dynamics of these networks. Barnes (1972) points out that while studying social network of two-person ties (dyadic network), one has to interpret their functioning in the light of the two persons' relation with other network members (ego-centered and

multiplex networks). Thus it analyses human networks based on the terms such as *egos* and *alters* and their internal dynamics such as direct and indirect networks between alters (i.e., friend of a friend) which leads the networks into larger social systems. This social network approach facilitates the study of how information flows through direct and indirect network relations. The network analysis can also be used to determine the social capital of individual actors. These concepts are often displayed in a social network diagram where nodes are the points and ties are the lines (see Diagram -1).

Diagram-1

Individual
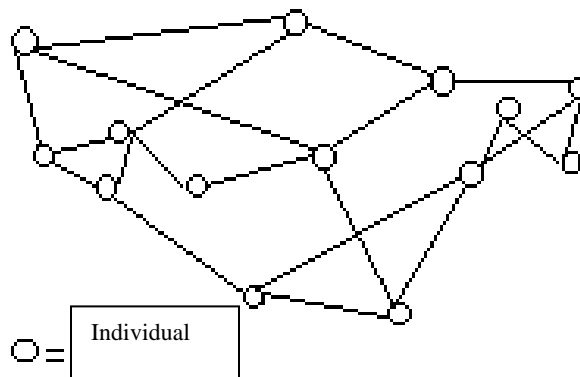
Units of Analysis

The concepts used in social network analysis vary from study to study based on the scope and nature, and from one discipline to another. However, the important concepts that may be employed in the network analysis of religious/spiritual movement of Sathya Sai Baba are briefly given below with illustrations.

Relations: Relations (sometimes called *strands*) are characterised by content, direction and strength. The content of a relation refers to the resource that is exchanged. A relation can be directed or undirected. For example, the actor 'A' may give social support to the actor 'B.' Thus it shows that there are two relations: giving support and receiving support. Alternately, actors may share an

undirected friendship relation i.e., they both maintain the relationship and there is no specific direction to it. However, while they both share friendship, the relationship may be unbalanced: one actor may claim a close friendship and the other a weaker friendship, or the communication may be initiated more frequently by one actor than the other. Thus, while the relationship is shared, its expression may be asymmetrical. Relations also differ in strength. Such strength can be operationalised in a number of ways (Marsden & Campbell 1984; Wellman & Wortley 1990).

Ties: Although a tie connects a pair of actors by one or more relations, it is possible that, pairs may maintain a tie based on one relation only. Thus ties also vary in content, direction and strength. Ties are often referred to as weak or strong (Marsden & Campbell 1984). Ties that are weak are generally infrequently maintained and are non-intimate connections, whereas strong ties include combinations of intimacy, self-disclosure, provision of reciprocal services, frequent contact, and kinship, as between close friends or colleagues.

Multiplexity: The more number of relations in a tie, the more multiplex (or multistranded) the tie becomes. Social network scholars have found that multiplex ties are more intimate, voluntary, supportive and also durable (Wellman & Wortley 1990; Wellman 1992).

Types of Networks

There are essentially two major types of social networks, viz., ego-centred and whole networks, as enumerated by social scientists. These two types form the most basic variety on which all other sub-types are developed. A brief note on these two types of social networks, which are found useful in the analysis of Sathya Sai Baba movement, is given below.

Ego-Centered Networks: The simplest kind of network beyond the dyad is the ego-centered network. In the ego-centered type of network one can consider all the objects or nodes that have a direct relationship with the object. Social network analysts build a picture of the network by counting the number of relations; the diversity of relations and the links between alters named in the network. The ego-centered approach is particularly useful when the population is large, or the boundaries of the population are hard to define. When all the persons (actors) connected or related directly to a given person (actor) it is called the "interpersonal environment." In graph theory this is called "neighbourhood." These persons in the neighbourhood also have their own interpersonal environment and so on. The immediate environment is called the "first order zone"; those who constitute the environment of persons in the first order zone are called the "second order zone." It is also important to note here that, in graph theory there is a minimal path distance of 1 (one) to every person in the first order zone, a minimal path distance of 2 (two) to every person in the second order zone (Garton et al., 1999).

Whole Networks: The second type of network is called "whole network" which is based on some specific criterion of population boundaries such as formal organisations, departments, and clubs or kinship groups. This approach considers both the occurrence and non-occurrence of relations among all members of a population. A whole network describes the ties that all members of a population maintain with all others in that group. Ideally, the approach requires responses from all members on their relations with all others in the same environment. The number of possible ties here is equal to the size of the population (n) multiplied by (n-1) and divided by 2 if the tie is undirected i.e., for a population of size 20, there are 380 links for each specific relation (Garton et al., 1999).

An attempt is made here to analyse the Sathya Sai Baba movement from the social network perspective, focusing on the relationship between actor (Sathya Sai Baba) and actors (his devotees). It will also examine how the devotees (actors)

make their connection with Sathya Sai Baba and influence the persons in contact to become devotees of Sai Baba.

Graph-2
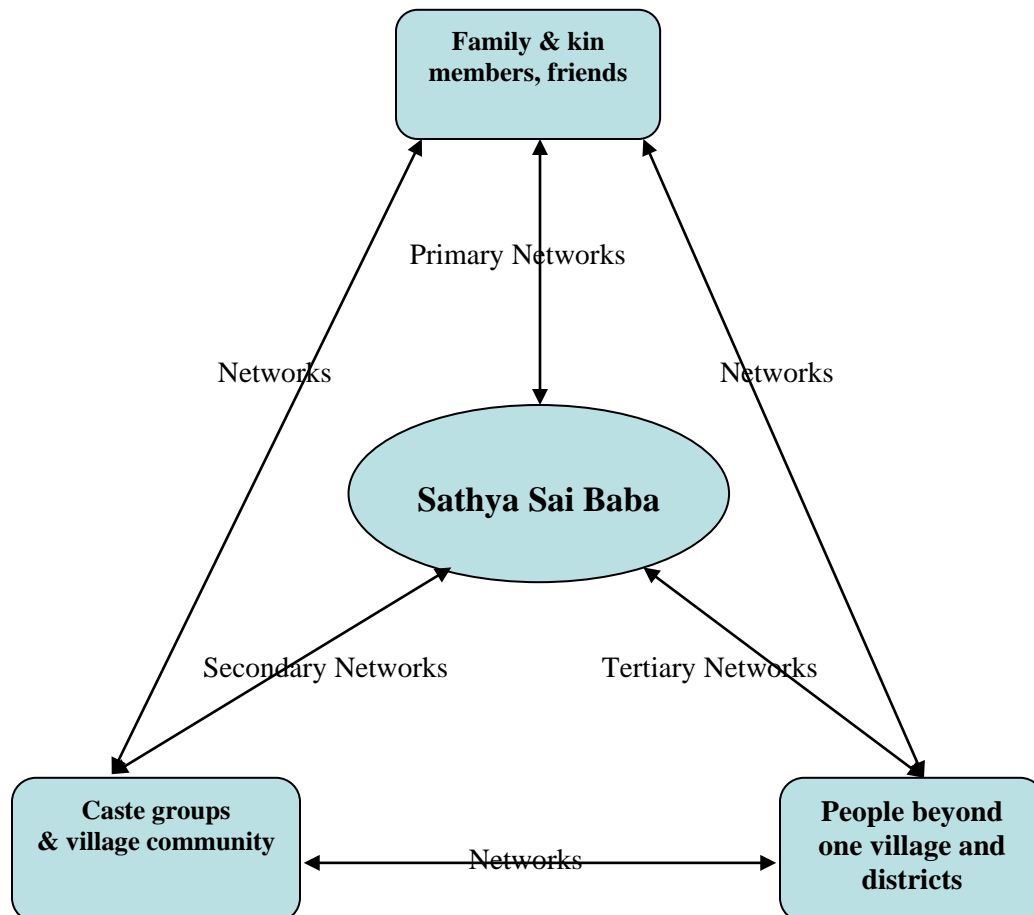
Social Networks Analysis of Sathya Sai Baba Movement

The charismatic power of Sathya Sai Baba can be seen through his ability to attract his community sympathisers beyond the boundaries of his close relatives and friends. The growth of the movement shows that, there were three concentric circles developed around his primarily charismatic personality. First, a small group consisting of Sathya Sai Baba's family members and his own caste groups in his village – primary charismatics. Second, a wider circle of community

supporters beyond his village to neighbouring districts without whose support any charismatic movement would not have been possible – secondary charismatics. Thirdly, people as a whole, namely, those people who listened to Sathya Sai Baba and were attracted to him through his miraculous power of healing – tertiary charismatics.[1]

Sathya Sai Baba Movement is very similar to the network model of ego-centered network especially in the context of his early popularity within the village "Puttaparthi." The primary charismatic corresponds to Ego, whereas the secondary charismatics, tertiary charismatics, and the people as a whole roughly correspond to ego's intimate network, effective network, and extended network. This correlation is analysed further in detail in the following discussion.

Sathya Sai Baba's childhood is described in literatures in great detail, underlying his charismatic attributes at home and outside it. Most of his charisma during the childhood was seen in his village and its surroundings such as the bank of river Chitravathi with admirers mainly from around that village. Sathya Sai Baba also moved beyond this geographic boundary to other villages, districts and so on to demonstrate his charismatic personality during his teens. These exceptional qualities of Sathya Sai Baba and the locations where he moved were carefully written in the Sathya Sai Baba's biography written by scholars such as Kasturi, M.N. Rao and other close devotees who had first hand experience of miracles during that time. In the social network analysis it is important to note that, the networks do not give importance to a particular context rather it takes multiple context into consideration. For instance, in addition to Sai Baba's everyday charisma (at home and at schools) one has to look at his network with the kin and friends in the villages and surrounding regions.

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[1] The idea of Network Analysis of Sathya Sai Baba Movement here in this chapter is drawn from the work of Dennis C. Duling (1999; 2000). I sincerely acknowledge the author and the original works from where I borrowed the ideas and interpreted in this chapter.

From the perspective of network analysis, Sathya Sai Baba can be considered as an intimate alter to another ego's social network i.e., Shirdi Sai Baba. According to the literatures, Sathya Sai Baba attracted and accepted devotees of both men and women from rich and poor classes. These devotees were basically from the nearby villages who had spent much time with Sathya Sai Baba while discussing in his native language. For the initial years, especially between the year 1940 and 1950, when he was between the age 14 and 24 years, as early devotees have recorded in their account, Sathya Sai Baba gave few talks but discussed mostly with his devotees in his native language.

> Baba used to take the devotees out almost daily to the sands of the
> Chitravathi River, and prayers were held there under the stars with
> the hills as venerable listeners and the river murmuring response.
> ... Sitting on the sands, Sai Baba teaches the devotees new songs in
> Telugu. He has composed for their elevation and edification, and
> he encourages people to ask him any questions regarding spiritual
> matters, for which he gives satisfying answers (Kasturi 2003: 108).

In the ego-centered network, the secondary charismatics, the followers of Sathya Sai Baba are alters, in ego's intimate network and form as ego's first order zone. They represent at least two "activity fields," family and outside the family in schools and villages - include his close friends. These alters have the most frequent and lasting interaction with ego, thus they form the greatest "adjacency" and "reachability." They have more centrality and prestige than other members in the network. These three alters have the strongest ties with ego and form a "cluster"; they are also focal persons and form third-party links.

In any network, a major problem is that as the network expands, ego spends increasing time and resources holding it together in the face of competition from other focal members. Thus, rivalry develops in what is already an unstable alliance in most of the religious and spiritual movements. In case of Sathya Sai

Baba, these rivalries did exist during the early days of his popularity, especially during his declaration of avatar of earlier Sai Baba of Shirdi. The challenges that Sathya Sai Baba had to encounter in opposition to his claim, that he is the re-incarnation of Shirdi Sai Baba are extensively debated in a number of works (one can refer the following works for an understanding of the conflicting situation (Haraldsson 1987; Gokak 1975; Babb 1983).

Despite the divided opinion of people on whether or not Sathya Sai Baba is an avatar and that too an avatar of Shirdi Sai Baba and certain negative popularity, Sathya Sai Baba's early devotees in the villages did not abandon their belief in him; they remained active throughout, providing all their support to Sathya Sai Baba wherever he went to preach and surprise his audience through his miracles. They also helped him to effectively negate the adverse propaganda from his critics. To a large extent Sathya Sai Baba succeeded in advocating his message of salvation and liberation, and the act of healing; in return the villagers offered food and shelter and "moral support" to Sai Baba and his devotees.

In the network analysis, tertiary charismatics generally correspond to ego's effective network in the second order zone. They are "friends of friends," usually known to ego, but less adjacent. They are outside the intimate network. The content of the exchange between them is spiritual, political and material besides hope and hospitality. In so far as they are initially unknown to ego, they could be imagined as overlapping ego's extended network. According to the literary sources, there was a third group, "the people as a whole" in other words the blind followers, who include physically challenged and diseased people who were blessed through the healing touch of Sri Sathya Sai Baba's miraculous power. In the network analysis such largely anonymous persons would normally form ego's extended network, or third order zone. They are "friends of friends of friends," unknown to ego, but helpful at a distance. It is argues that, all the members of Sathya Sai Baba spiritual movement believed in his divinity and charisma. The

following section will attempt to develop a rather extensive network of Sathya Sai Baba through the analysis of "Spatial Networks" and "Specific Networks."

Spatial Networks

In modern archaeology, "regionalism" or "settlement archaeology" can be defined as an archaeological/anthropological method that excavates a number of sites, alternating with field surveys in a larger geographical region. Its aim is to shed light on surviving literary evidences about that region, and thus the history (Duling 1999; 2000). There are two important locations where Sathya Sai Baba's charisma was brought into light. The first of course, is the Puttaparthi village on the bank of the river Chitravathi. In comparison to this, the other sites where Sathya Sai Baba revealed his charisma were in the neighbouring states of Karnataka, Tamilnadu and Maharashtra - especially during and after 1940s.

Graph theorists argue that there are physical and natural points where one location emerges and that has the ability to control the flow of goods, services, and information in exchange networks. Some urbanologists maintain that villages and cities form an "urban system" in which goods and services flow from the periphery to the centre and with corresponding social-structural stratification and its attendant unequal distribution of goods and services. Although the authors of the above theories discussed in relation to business or trade networks between places, it is argued that Sathya Sai Baba's network with other villages form a kind of transaction, which is exchanged through spiritual or charismatic knowledge.

It is well known that rural places mentioned in the literature of Sathya Sai Baba are vague. However, the scholars argue that the villages had a wider network and contained networks of "village clusters," that is specific population centres (Kasturi 2003). As the river Chitravathi of Puttaparthi village flows and connects to other important villages in the neighbouring states, it is argued here that, there could be possible linkages between people of Puttaparthi village with other

villagers for the transactions of spiritual/charismatic knowledge. M.S. Leela's book *Lokantha Sai* contains some of the exceptional and exquisite divine miracles of Sathya Sai Baba that she personally witnessed in company of her parents during her childhood.

A few of them are mentioned here:

> An old widow - from a distant land - whose husband had expired in 1924 came to Sathya Sai Baba and requested him for her husband's photograph which she wanted to worship. Sai Baba produced the same from the sands of Chitravathi River, despite the fact he was never photographed throughout his life, while Sai Baba had incarnated in 1926 (http://sathya-sai0.tripod.com/bala/ lokanatha-1.htm).

M.S. Leela has also witnessed Sathya Sai Baba's transforming of tamarind tree into Kalapavruksha - from whose tips of branches, apples, oranges, plums, dates, guavas and lockets were seen hanging. As she wrote in her book:

> We all rushed to the tree and plucked whatever we wanted. With Baba's permission I took a branch with two apples hanging, to show it to my classmates and professors at Presidency College, Madras when I was doing my post-graduation in Botany in 1949 (available at: http://sathya-sai0.tripod.com/bala/lokanatha-1.htm).

Puttaparthi is described many times by scholars in almost all the literature, because it is the birthplace of Sathya Sai Baba. It is an agricultural village situated on a hillside of Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh. The population estimated during the initial days of Sathya Sai Baba's popularity was 1200 to 2000. Sathya Sai Baba always projected Puttaparthi as the centre of his activity, apparently because of his kin base. Not much attention has been paid to write on the relatives

of Sathya Sai Baba in Puttaparthi and the neighbouring villages, on whom he could depend. Sathya Sai Baba's network has gone beyond the Puttaparthi village to Bukkapatnam, Kamalapuram and Uravakonda in Cuddapah district of Andhra Pradesh. During the early 1950s, he attracted a large number of devotees from Madras and Bangalore. As the devotees increased in number, invitations requesting Sathya Sai Baba to visit then cities and towns in the neighbouring states started. Accordingly, Sathya Sai Baba began travelling to places such as Bangalore, Mysore, Madras and Madurai.

Specific Networks

While the spatial networks of Sathya Sai Baba gave the historical knowledge about the urbanology and settlement archaeology, the specific networks will provide the kinship networks of Sathya Sai Baba. Such an analysis of networks based on social proximity is underlined in "homophily theory" (McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook 2001). Homophily refers to the tendency of people to interact more with their own kind - whether by preference or induced by opportunity constraints - as defined by such individual characteristics as race, gender, educational class, organisational unit and so on (McPherson & Smith-Lovin 1987). The most visible cluster in the intimate networks of Sathya Sai Baba consisted of Kondama Raju (grandfather), Pedda Venkama Raju (father), and Karnam family (neighbour) especially Subbamma (Karnam's first wife).

The Kondama Raju Family

Kondama Raju's family has consisted of six members including Lakshamma - the grandmother of Sathya Sai Baba and wife of Kondama Raju - and four sons: Pedda Venkama Raju, Chinna Venkama Raju, Venkatarama Raju and Venkata Subba Raju

Kondama Raju, the grandfather of Sathya Sai Baba, plays an important role for the spiritual development of the movement. He was a religious person in the sense that he believed in Hindu scriptures. Important among them was the Ramayana. He used to act the role of Lakshmana in the Ramayana plays that were enacted at Puttaparthi and other villages of the Taluk during his time. Added to this, he also followed strict vegetarianism and observed all holy festivals of Hindu calendar with great devotion. He was very fond of his grandson Sathyanarayana especially because of his early orientation towards asceticism. Sathyanarayana inherited all the qualities of his grandfather such as vegetarianism, religiousness and humanitarianism including the art of good cooking.

While most of the family members had their doubts on Sathyanarayan's unique power for miracles, Kondama Raju admired young Sathya's capabilities and encouraged him. When Sathya was in Uravakonda with his elder brother for his schooling, his grandfather was always anxiously waiting at Puttaparthi for Sathya's visit. And when Sathya returned to Puttaparthi his grand father appreciated him for his deeds of miracle. He supported Sathya for his "divine quality" and told to Sathya's father Venkama Raju that, "…let Him do whatever He wants, do not raise any objection. He is immersed in divine consciousness. Let him stay with me for some time" (http://www.eaisai.com/baba/docs/ d031123.html). This shows that, the early spiritual awakening of Sathya Sai Baba was greatly encouraged by his close circles of relatives who assume a very important role in the extension of social network beyond the primary group.

Sathya's grandmother Lakshamma too also has influence on him through her religious beliefs and practices. She was a highly religious lady, more than her husband Kondama Raju, whose life was entirely regulated by the religious calendar, with its rotation of holy fasts, vows and vigils. She observed these festivals very scrupulously. Her role as "grandmother" was greatly appreciated by Sathya Sai Baba in later days. However, there is hardly any description referring to his grandmother's role in this spiritual movement in any of the writings on Sai

Baba. The social network analysis also deals with such characters which are unknown to ego's extended network but have played important roles in the network.

The Pedda Venkama Raju Family

Pedda Venkama Raju, the father and Easwaramma, the mother of Sathya Sai Baba had three sons and two daughters: in the order of their birth, Seshama Raju (son), Jaanakiraamayya (son), Venkamma (daughter), Parvathamma (daughter) and Sathyanarayana (son). In Hindu scriptures it is mentioned that, the individual child's life is greatly influenced by the qualities of his parents. The instances could be found in the life of Jijabai who made Shivaji a great warrior; Rama's divinity blossomed because of the noble qualities of his mother Kausalya; the twins Lava and Kusha became powerful and famous due to their noble and virtuous mother Sita; Gandhi became Mahatma because of his pious mother Putlibai etc. (www.sssct.org/Discourses/2003/PDF/birthday.pdf). These instances are recalled in the case of Sathya's birth, as he was regarded the avatar of god in the Raju family. In Puttaparthi, as elsewhere in India, it has been a common practice among Hindu women to perform the sacred ritual "Sathyanarayana Vrata" (a vow to the lord Sathyanarayana) on every full moon day. Easwaramma used to regularly perform Sathyanarayana Vrata in the company of her neighbour Karanam Subbamma.

The incidents described in the Sai Baba theology depict the stories similar to the birth of any of the avatars in Hindu scriptures, which the ardent devotees loved. In the same way, the birth of the child "Sathya" became a miracle of god's incarnation on earth. It may be of interest to explain a few incidents that took place in Puttaparthi before and after Sathya's birth to explain the social network perspective. Prior to the birth of Sathya, a significant incident took place in his home, especially with his mother Easwaramma.

One day Easwaramma was fetching water from the well. All of a sudden she saw a white luminous light emerging like lightning from the sky entering her womb. There was a sudden gust of wind. Subbamma (neighbor) who came out of her house at that time saw the light entering the womb of Easwaramma (www.saibaba. ws/avatar/adventsathyasai.htm).

The incident of this kind – involving unusual experiences – brought distant groups called "friends of friends" in network analysis to Easwaramma to know more about gods and his miracles. Later on, these groups form a "clique" in the social network of Sathya Sai Baba movement.

The Karnam Family

Karnam, the village headman, was the neighbour of Venkama Raju. He had two wives, Subbamma and Kamalamma. Subbamma, the first wife, who had implicit faith on Sathya's early miracles, plays an important role in his social network, especially in promoting his "extended networks." Although elderly in age, Subbamma was childless; she used to invite the village children and provide them food as a token of love and affection.

Subbamma was closely associated with Sathya's mother even before his birth as a close friend. Although she was an orthodox Brahmin lady, she was very much influenced with Sathya's family, especially by pious nature of Easwaramma. She supported Easwaramma and gave her company in performing Sathyanarayana Vrata in order to have a child who will enhance the prestige of their family. It was mentioned that, during the seventh month of Easwaramma's pregnancy, Subbamma told her "…the child in your womb is safe only due to the grace of Lord Sathyanarayana." She took the promise from Easwaramma that the child would be named "Sathyanarayana."

Sathya from childhood, especially when he started performing miracles, used to stay at the house of Subbamma, because of her special treatment. Being the close follower, Subbamma had experienced the miracles of his childhood such as "early experience of smiling of Sathya while pinching to cry" and "seeing the entire universe in Sathya's mouth while feeding." In course of time Subbamma even provided some land for the construction of a temple for Sathya when his fame spread far and wide and the number of visitors increased. This small temple provided the initial base for the Sathya Sai Baba movement during its early phase. It was also mentioned that, from Subbamma's house to small temple, Sathya started teaching and revealing important miracles and this divine quality took him to different places.

Karnam, on the other hand - the husband of Subbamma and an actor in the extended network of ego's second order zone - by virtue of being childless went to attend the Pandaripur shrine of Sri Vittal and made offerings there for obtaining a son. Upon his return to Puttaparthi, he started bhajans in praising the Lord of Pandaripur. Sathya also joined that group with enthusiasm and was instrumental in dyeing of clothes for orange uniforms, headbands, sticks, red cloth to be used for performing Pandari Bhajans. He also asked villagers to keep oil lamps during the Pandari Bhajans. These qualities of Sathya brought Karnam closer to Sathya and his family. The social network takes these small groups (circles of families or friends) as an important factor for the culmination of the large-scale movement. As Jacobson points out "…the small group has its place in the majority of religions, the master and the disciples the band of brothers and the family" (Jacobson 1992). The following section will deal with the three important zones that created as a result of the growth of the Sathya Sai Baba movement.

First Order Zone: Dyadic Networks

During the childhood, Sathya Sai Baba performed various miracles, which attracted his childhood friends. The network that was created between Sathya Sai

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Baba and his friends was simple during his childhood, as it was a two-way reciprocal network that the friends liked him and his miracles, and on the other hand he entertained them through miracles. In network theory, the sharing of an attribute leads to the stronger relationships; the sharing of attributes of Sathya Sai Baba especially his miracles through which he gave different kinds of gifts to his friends and in return received their attention and reverence. This simple two-way network between Sathya Sai Baba and his friends constitutes what the social network theorists call "ego-centered network." The friends, relatives and village neighbours are connected directly to Sathya Sai Baba. This is what in network theory refers to "interpersonal environment" and "neighbourhood" in graph theory. These persons in the neighbourhood have also their own interpersonal environment, which includes friends, kin, and members of the village or any organisation.

In the social network theory, the first order zone consist of two types of relationships between kin groups such as mother, father, children, aunts, uncles and cousins, and the second order zone consists of friends, neighbours, acquaintance or co-workers. The first order zone of social networks developed by Sathya Sai Baba's family, which later projected the charismatic leadership to the outside world, is examined below.

In the analysis of social network of Sathya Sai Baba, two major types of "social system" and its offshoots "culture" are found which are interlinked with each other. The first kind of system appears to be "formal system" which can be compared and contrasted with the "informal system." Network theorist calls this as non-prescribed or non-instituted reactions. Although these informal or non-instituted or non-prescribed relations are sidelined from the formal/prescribed relations which always the case of "taken for granted," there is internal and logical dynamics correlates between the two. In the Sathya Sai Baba movement, the formal consists of the complex kinship systems that are embedded within the

structured social relations. This embeddedness appears to be the 'cause' for the emergence of social networks.

Second Order Zone: Ego-Centered Networks

As Sathya's fame regarding miracles spreads far and wide, people from other villages, towns and cities started visiting Puttaparthi. Even persons possessed by evil spirits were brought to Sathya, by believing that he could drive away the evil spirits. Similarly, mentally retarded persons were also brought to Sathya. True to their faith, Sathya Sai Baba's miracles could succeed in driving away the evil spirits and curing the patients suffering from mental ailments. This was the quality of Sathya, which made the villagers to believe him as a divine being. These groups from different villages occupy an important place in the ego-centered network of Sathya Sai Baba and falls under the category of homophily. These early networks of villagers had a lasting effect in expanding further the ego-centered networks to extended or multiplex networks.

Initially Sathya Sai Baba's network was confined to Puttaparthi village and its adjacent villages along the bank of river Chitravathi. The people associated with Sathya's miracles were very much associated with the river Chitravathi. The early followers built local temples to worship Sathya Sai Baba as an icon of their preferred god along with other Hindu gods in their temples. The town now is surrounded by several temples - both small and large - with imposing images of Sathya Sai Baba. His followers built a Shiva temple at Sathya Sai Baba's birthplace, to signify his divine origin.

Similarly, Sathya Sai Baba's childhood friends constitute important as being "alter" in ego's second order zone. Sathya Sai Baba performed several miracles while he was with his childhood friends. His friends became close to him and considered him as their "Guru" recognising his extraordinary qualities. The legendary stories of the childhood portrayed Sathya Sai Baba as a perfect student.

The ego-centered network constitutes the core of social network analysis as mentioned earlier in this chapter. The networks between Sathya Sai Baba, his parents and kin groups, neighbours and friends formed the key to understand the emergence of Sathya Sai Baba from an ordinary person "Sathya." Beyond this ego-centered network, Sathya Sai Baba's relations extended to multiplex network, with key actors being the believers of Hinduism, Indians in other parts of the world and the non-Indians forming the "third-order zone."

Third Order Zone: Multiplex Networks

The number of Sathya Sai Baba devotees has been constantly growing; initially his devotees were drawn from within India and later on Indians in other countries, Europeans, Americans, and others from all over the world. These wider networks were possible as a result of the "miracles" which Sathya Sai Baba has been performing right from his childhood and continues to do it even today, especially the materialisation of "lingam" being most important during the Sivaratri festival. Publication of Sathya Sai Baba's teachings through print media has further extended his fame and spirituality. The devotees, who initially visited Puttaparthi in large numbers especially from Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and Orissa, were basically the devotees of former Sai Baba of Shirdi. However, these devotees after experiencing Sathya Sai Baba's Darshan and miracles publicised him as an avatar of god. His fame attracted especially overseas Indians, who started visiting Puttaparthi. The "diasporic Indians," as they are called in a generic term, have shown greater interest in becoming Sathya Sai Baba's devotees than the native Indians. It is important to note here that, Sathya Sai Baba's visit to Indian diaspora (East Africa) during 1968 became a milestone in the history of the movement in the Indian diaspora. The Indians who came in contact with Sathya Sai Baba basically belonged to the different class, caste and religious backgrounds in their respective countries. An alternative to the harsh treatment of the colonial host societies during the early 20th century, Indians were looking for a kind of leader who could give them the spiritual satisfaction -

the memories of their homeland. The emergence of Sathya Sai Baba movement later filled this spiritual gap between India and Indian diaspora.

Publication of books and other works on Sathya Sai Baba by his devotees further helped the movement to popularise Sai Baba's spirituality and teachings in the diaspora. The information revolution - the use of Internet, besides newspapers, magazines, and radio and TV channels - has further extended the popularity of Sathya Sai Baba and his teachings since the 1980s across the world.

An important concept in the Sathya Sai Baba movement is the "social service," called in other words "seva." This activity of serving people cutting across race, class, creed and religion is an important factor that attracts large number of Indian diasporic groups to Sathya Sai Baba. The third order zone also covers networks beyond the circles of one's religion or nation to other nations. In other words it spans outside one's own linguistic and national boundaries. The number of devotees from other countries often called "foreigners" in Sathya Sai Baba's ashram, increased over the years as a result of Sathya Sai Baba's popularity in their respective countries.

One of the reasons for this increasing number of foreigners being attracted to Sathya Sai Baba spiritualism is the publication of Sai Baba discourses and biography that underlined his miracles and spiritual healing. For instance, Peter Phipps's *Greater Than You Know: Sathya Sai Baba, Jesus Christ and Christianity*, influenced many Christians to become the follower of Sathya Sai Baba. In this book the author has illustrated the similarities between Jesus Christ and Sathya Sai Baba. For instance, Phipps mentions:

> I have found that in studying Sathya Sai Baba one come closer to
> understand the nature and mission of Jesus Christ. More than by
> reading the Bible and imagining oneself in New Testament times,
> by observing the works and studying the teachings of Sathya Sai

Baba, one may understand better the works and teaching of Jesus,

for they are very much the same (1997: 41).

Many foreigners thus came to Prasanthi Nilayam in order to have a glimpse of Sathya Sai Baba and experience his miracles and turned to be ardent devotee. Personal accounts of such experiences of Western devotees, who became close to Sathya Sai Baba and his paranormal powers are important in understanding the process of networking beyond India and Hindus.

The first Australian devotee who met Sathya Sai Baba in India was Howard Murphet. He was probably one of the earliest "foreigners" to witness the materialisation of Lingam - *Lingodbhava through a miracle* - during Sivaratri days. While Howard Murphet had discovered Sathya Sai Baba in person, an American by name Charles Penn discovered him in spirit. Charles Penn had also witnessed the *leelas* (miracles) of Sathya Sai Baba. After Charles Penn came John Hislop from USA. His experiences were a virtual store of spiritual knowledge for Sai devotees. His writings were highly illuminating that attracted many devotees from distant places, especially from English speaking countries. One of his experiences with Sathya Sai Baba that attracted maximum number of western audiences was the story of "Weeping Saris" (2003: 22-24). Hislop had also witnessed a resurrection - the resurrection of Walter Cowan - that he has described at great length in his book *My Baba and I* (2003: 28-31). Samuel Sandweiss, a Jewish psychiatrist from the USA, is another well-recognised devotee of Sathya Sai Baba. His book *Sai Baba - The Holy Man and Psychiatrist* (1972) is one of the important introductory sources for Westerners on the early life and miracles of Sathya Sai Baba. Few other important "foreigners" having personal experiences with Sathya Sai Baba and had extensive influence on Western devotees through their writings are: Erlandur Haraldsson and Karlis Osis from Iceland, Lowenbrg from Africa, Peggey Mason and Ron Laing from UK, Jagadeesan from Kuala Lumpur and so on.

To sum up, this chapter analysed the social network of Sathya Sai Baba from his early childhood to that of his present day transnational popularity. It is important to note that the spatial networks of Sathya Sai Baba, which the network analysts suggest, form the core of analysis of any such movement where historical, archaeological and urban geography plays crucial role as much similar to specific linkages play through kinship and neighbourhood networks.

The following chapter will examine the growth and development, construction of new religious/spiritual identity, and transnational networks of Sathya Sai Baba with special reference to Indians in the diaspora. The chapter also explores the process of networking of Sathya Sai Baba in the global context.

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
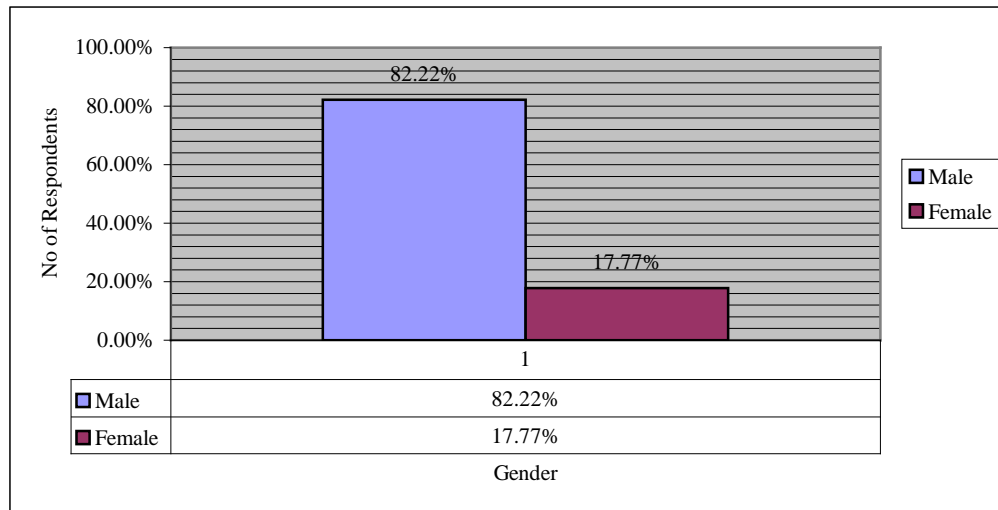
Graph-2
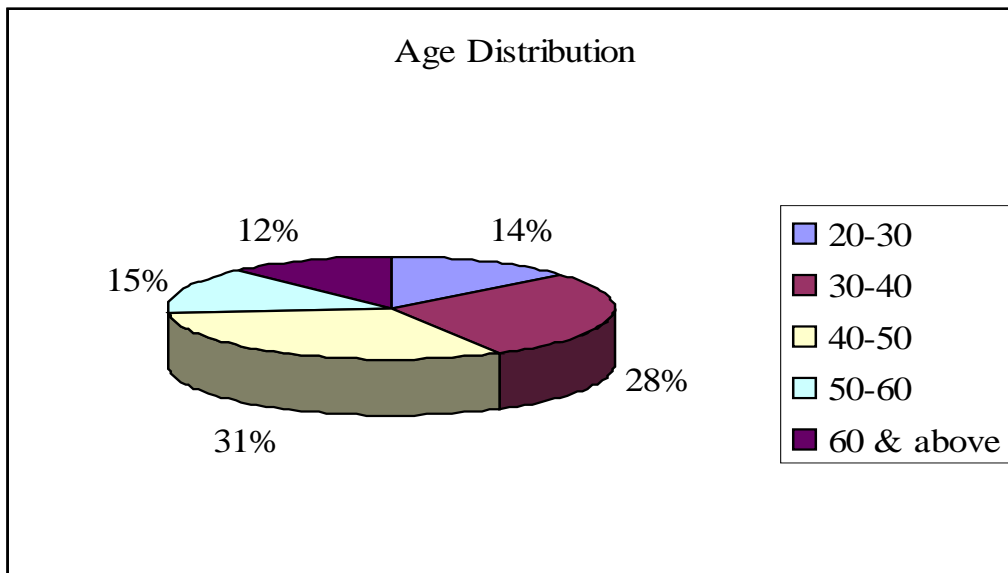
Graph-2 presents the age profile of the respondents interviewed during the field study. Out of the total, 14 percent of respondents belonged to the age group of 20 to 30. Sathya Sai Baba organisation designated this group as "Youth" and

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
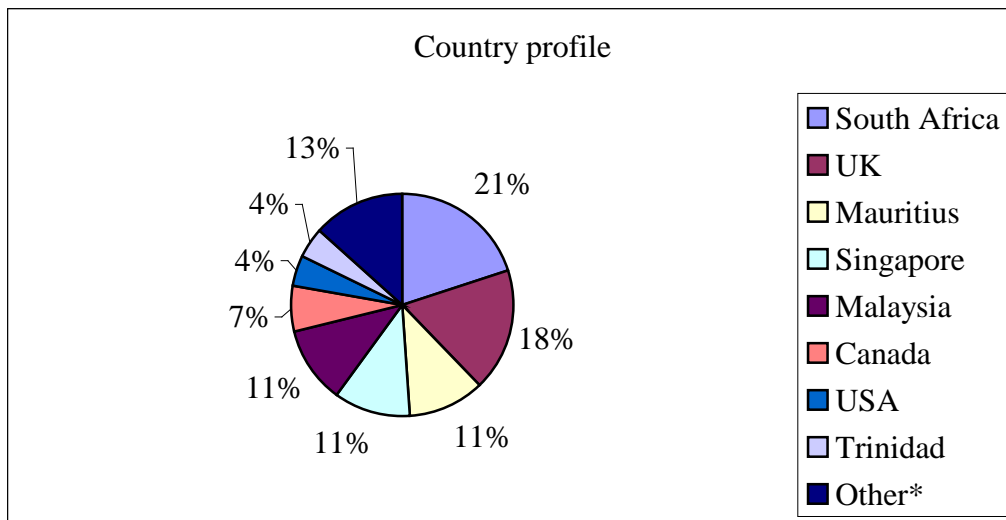
* Other country respondents include New Zealand (3.33%), Uganda (2.22%), Kenya (2.22%), Japan (2.22%), West Indies (1.11%), UAE (1.11%), and Indonesia (1.11%).

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
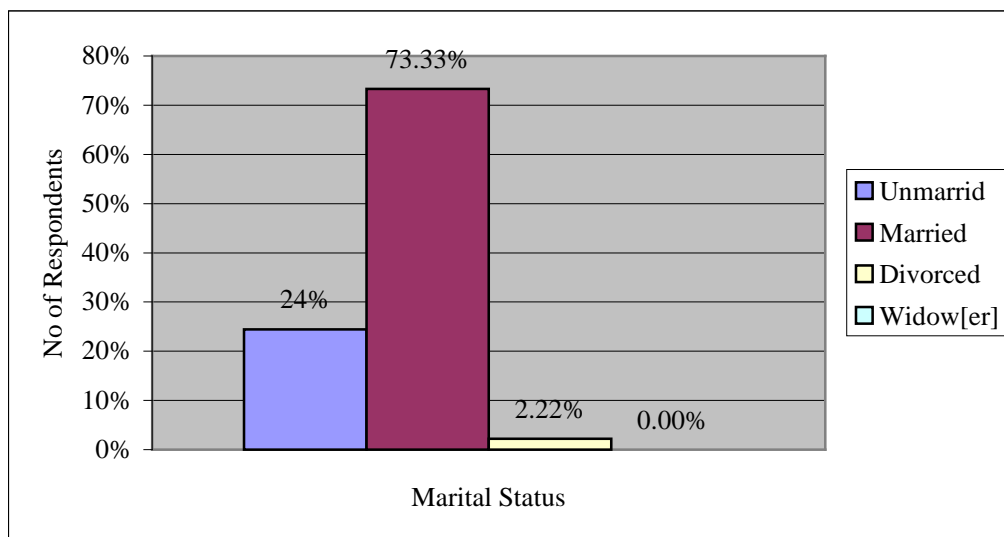
Graph-4 shows the marital status of the respondents. A majority of respondents, i.e., 73 percent are married and are living with their families. Most of their spouses had citizenship in their respective countries. 24 percent of respondents belonged to unmarried category i.e., students and professionals. 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
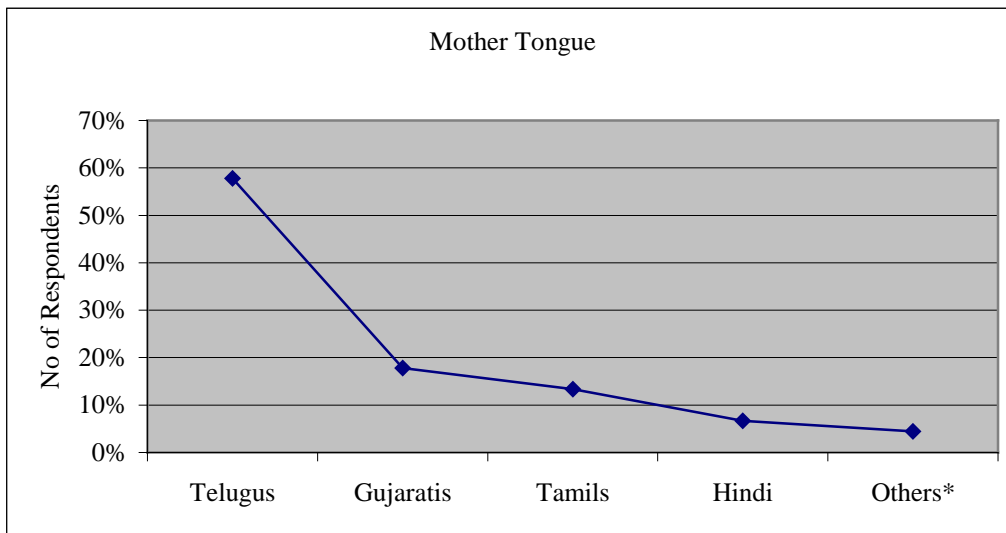
Graph-6 shows the religious background of the respondents. Out of the total sample, 82 percent of respondents were belonged to the Hindu religion, while 10 percent of respondents were Christians and nine percent of respondents were belonged to Muslim category. Apart from these participants, we have also 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
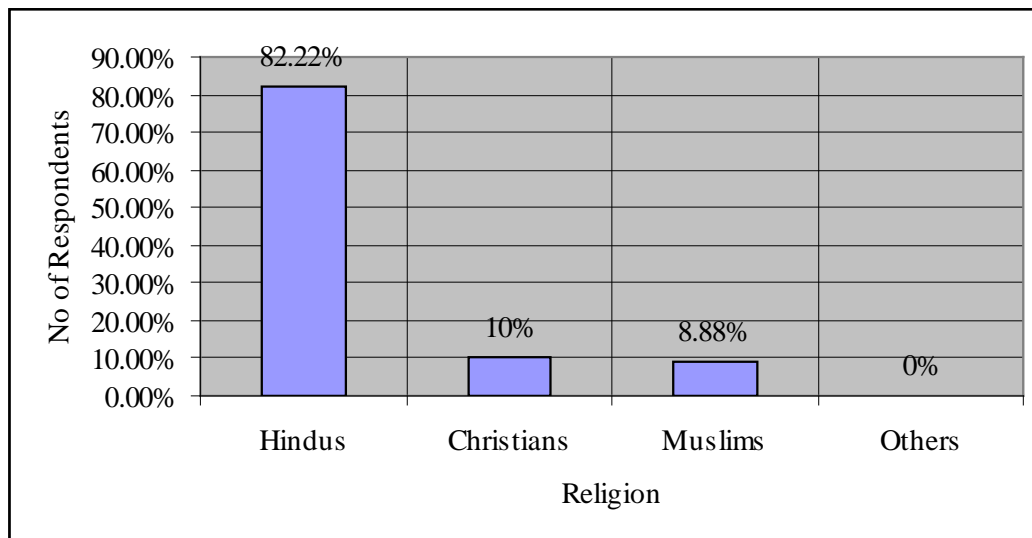
The Indian Diaspora

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 Djonggrang 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

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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

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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 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 self-identity (Williams 1998: 12).

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 Puttaparthi 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

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respondents could explain the events or persons that facilitated their initiation into the circle of his devotees (see Table-1).

Table-1
Information about Sathya Sai Baba

Would you recall how and when did you first come to know about Sri Sathya Sai Baba?	Frequency N=110	Percentage %
Yes	N=95	86.36
No	N=9	8.18
No Response	N=6	5.45

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 Puttaparthi 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

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

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 Puttaparthi Baba soon after my marriage. Since then I keep visiting Puttaparthi every year.

e. I came to know about Sathya Sai Baba from my friend who brought Vibhuti for me from Puttaparthi. 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 Puttaparthi so 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).

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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-4
Information about Sathya Sai Baba Centre/Mandir

Do you have Sri Sathya Sai Baba Centre/Mandir in your locality or nearby?	Frequency (N=110)	Percentage %
Yes	N=94	85.45
No	N=9	8.18
No Response	N=7	6.36

Table-5
Membership of the Centre

Are you an active member/participant in your Centre?	Frequency (N=94)	Percentage %
Yes	N=63	67.02
No	N=31	32.97

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 discus topics in spirituality including the teachings of the Bhagvad 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
Popularising Sathya Sai Baba in the diaspora

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

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.

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

Have you influenced members other than Indians to become the devotees of Sri Sathya Sai Baba?	Frequency (N=110)	Percentage %
Yes	N=9	8.18
No	N=85	77.77
No Response	N=16	14.54

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.

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[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.

Table-8
Training courses offered by Sathya Sai Baba Centre

Have you gone through any training/meditation course offered by Sri Sathya Sai Baba Centres till today?	Frequency (N=110)	Percentage %
Yes	N=68	61.81
No	N=39	35.45
No Response	N=3	2.72

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.

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

Organisation of Sathya Sai Baba Satsang

How often do you organize Sri Sathya Sai Baba satsang/gatherings at your Residence/Centre?	Frequency (N=110)	Percentage %
Once in a Week	N=93	84.54
Once in a Month	N=12	10.90
Once in a Year	N=5	4.54
Any other	*	*

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.

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For the majority of respondents the main purpose of their visit to Puttaparthi 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 Gurupoornima. All the devotees believe that a visit to Puttaparthi is a pilgrimage for religious merit and derive grave.

On the duration of their stay at Puttaparthi, 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 Puttaparthi 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 Puttaparthi 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 Puttaparthi. 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 Puttaparthi 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
Social Service activities of Sathya Sai Baba Trust

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

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

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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.

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-11
Personal experience of respondents with Sathya Sai Baba

Being a devotee of Sri Sathya Sai Baba, do you experience any special relationship with the motherland/country of origin?	Frequency (N=110)	Percentage %
Yes	N=59	53.63
No	N=37	33.63
No Response	N=14	12.72

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-12
Information regarding migration history

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

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 out side their current place of residence, because communication network become more

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crucial when there is a distance of geographical boundaries.[2] 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.

CHATER-VII

Conclusion

Research on new religious or spiritual movements today have come to occupy an important place in the field of sociology, anthropology, history and international migration. For the last two decades, significant studies have been conducted in many countries and even centres have been started to study this new and emerging field. The specific centres, for instance, that have established to study the new religious movements in the global context are such as: Centre for Studies on New Religions, Torino, Italy; Centre for New Religions, Kings College, London; Research Unit for New Religions and Churches, University of Birmingham, London; Centre for the Study of Religion, Ideas and Society, University of London; Centre for the Study of New Religious Movements at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California; Institution for the Study of American Religion at the University of California at Santa Barbara; Centre for Studies in Religion and Society, University of Victoria, Canada and so on.

A few scholarly journals have also been established as fora for theory and research on new religious movements. These include *Syzygy* in the United States, *Update* in Denmark, and the *Journal of Contemporary Religion* in England. A number of recent publications on new religious movements contain comprehensive information on scholarly issues, specific groups, and evaluations of organisation and practices. These include Gordon Melton's *Encyclopedia of American Religions* (Gale 1992); Bromley and Hadden's *The Handbook on Cults and Sects in America* (JAI 1994); Miller's *America's Alternative Religions* (SUNY Press 1995); Thomas Robbins's *Cults, Converts, and Charisma* (Sage 1988); and Mark Galanter's *Cults and New Religious Movements* (American Psychiatric Association 1989).

During the 1960s and 1970s when modernisation theory dominated the academic attention by pushing religion into private space, the last two decades saw religion again has come to occupy an important place following the economic development and advances in science and technology. Recently, several Western scholars such as Peter van der Veer, Raymond Williams, Steven Vertovec, Martin Baumann, Peggy Levitt, Paula Richman and others have drawn the academic attention to the contemporary religious processes in the context of diasporic and transnational experience of immigrant communities.

The present study examines one of the spiritual movements of India and its diasporic and transnational networks. It also examines how "diaspora" in recent time is emerging as a "transnational community" because of immigrants' networking within their communities and participation and networking in the transnational spiritual movements. Through the case study of Sri Sathya Sai Baba Movement, the thesis examines how the involvement of diasporic communities facilitated the movement in its emergence as a "transnational movement" whose network cuts across several national boundaries (see Chapter- V & VI).

Apart from exploring the above issue of general nature, the thesis also explores the following specific questions: how does the diasporic community come to know about Sathya Sai Baba? How do the members of the Sathya Sai Baba spiritualism in the diaspora perceive Sathya Sai Baba? How do the Indians perform their religious traditions - that include the rituals and festivals - and maintain their cultural identity in the diaspora? How do Sathya Sai Baba groups network transnationally and what are the main criteria that bring them to a common platform for networking?

The study was conducted at Puttaparthi with the help of interview schedules and questionnaires. Out of a total of 400 questionnaires circulated among the devotees of Sathya Sai Baba, survey response rates of 22 percent were obtained during the data collection period. In-depth interviews with the respondents, organisational

members of Sathya Sai Baba Centres in the diaspora as well as members of Prasanthi Nilayam Ashram were also conducted. The qualitative data collected from the field were analysed in Chapter-VI. Analyses of in-depth interviews were helpful in obtaining details on immigration history, socio-economic living conditions, cultural identity, transnational networks of Indians and the intricacy in constructing the Sai Baba Centres/Temples in the diaspora. The quantitative data were analysed from the perspective of collating information from a larger sample of respondents on issues of cultural identity and transnational networks as well as the popularisation of Sathya Sai Baba movement in the diaspora.

Interlinking Diaspora, Religion and Transnationalism

Very few studies have been carried out on the interaction between transnational religious/spiritual movements and diasporic communities. Most of the literature on religion and religious/spiritual movements of Indian origin focuses on continuity and changes besides their significance in promoting group solidarity. The literature addresses such aspects as the role of religion in community and identity formation within a host society, links with religious and political organisations in the homeland, and concerns for future generations or gender relations (Kurien 1998, 2001, 2004; Coward et al., 2000; Jacobsen and Kumar 2004; Tatla 1999; Vertovec 2000; Warner and Wittner 1998).

But, "Indian" religions are not just being practiced or adhered to by "Indians" alone, whether at home or in the diaspora. Like the Sathya Sai Baba Movement, Brahma Kumaris (Babb 1987; Hodgkinson 1999), ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) (Carey 1987; Knott 1986; Dasi 1999), Mata Amritanandamayi (Conway 1994; Tourreil 1994; Warrier 2001), and Meher Baba (Shepherd 1986), to mention a few, present themselves as "universal" or open to all regardless of national, religious or ethnic background. All have followers not only in India and among Indian immigrants but also among Europeans, Americans, Southeast Asians and others. These movements have generally

become multi-site phenomena, and are practiced somewhat differently in the West and in India (see Howell and Nelson 1997). Followers of these new religious movements world over have a strong organisational link to sacred places or persons in India and consider India a spiritual, if not literal homeland, even for the non-Indian adherents of these movements. It may be observed that, these religious/spiritual ties often translate into material and tangible ones with pilgrimage, tourism and support of social programmes in India. They also lead to acculturation in food, dress, music, ritual, and over all ways of life. For instance, at the Sathya Sai Baba centres in the diaspora, one can find special stalls used to install where white dresses along with the books, CDs and DVDs on Sai Baba are displayed for sale apart from a variety of ethnic foods, just as it is done at the Ashram in Prasanthi Nilayam on special occasions. This shows, to some degree, the "Indianizing" feature of the Sathya Sai Baba movement

The magnitude of participation of devotees and establishment of the number of overseas Sai Centres has increased over the years as a result of the easier and more efficient means of communication and transport technology in recent decades. Further the growth of the Sathya Sai Baba movement shows how religious affiliation, ritual practices and even cultural commodities (such as *white dresses, audio and video cassettes*) are extending transnational social and religious spaces beyond immigrant Indians, covering non-Indians, European and American devotees. Increasing international participation has taken Sathya Sai Baba religion and spiritualism to transnational space, irrespective of ethnic or even religious orientations.

Perhaps as Brubaker argues, "diaspora" should be seen less as a substantive bounded entity or ethno-cultural fact than as "an idiom, a stance, a claim … a way of formulating … identities and loyalties" (Brubaker 2005: 12-13). Overviews of the diverse range of current usages of the concept of "diaspora" show that the term eludes precise definition (Fludernik 2003) and is already being stretched to accommodate various "intellectual, cultural and political agendas" (Brubaker

2005: 1). In India, as Kapur demonstrates, the basis for definitions and concepts of "Indianness" and of who exactly constitute the Indian diaspora has changed historically, and also been applied inconsistently (Kapur 2004). The definition of "Indianness" is also being contested in political struggles between Hindu and Muslim Indian immigrants in the diaspora especially in the United States and U.K., as to whether India is, or should be, a Hindu state or a multi-religious and multi-cultural society (Kurien 2001).

The transnational Sathya Sai Baba movement today constitutes one of the most important new religious/spiritual movements of India which has a large number of followers both in India and in the Indian diaspora in comparison to other spiritual movements of India. The present thesis draws broadly the following conclusions:

I. The conventional notion of "diaspora" is being replaced with the term "transnational" because of immigrants networking as a result of developments in the field of transportation and communication technology.

II. Immigrants' religious expression and practice in the diaspora although conspicuously identical with their ancestral land/motherland but in a hybrid form.

III. Although the members of Indian diaspora, or any other diaspora by definition, scattered apart geographically, they are held together by factors such as a common ethnic identity and a collective relation toward the original homeland which is symbolised through their participation in the religious/spiritual movements of homeland.

IV. Participation in the spiritual movements of homeland is now one of the major religious mechanisms for the preservation of cultural identities of immigrants in the diaspora.

V. Spiritual pilgrimages to the land of origin often create new "sacred geographies" in the region.

These points are being analysed further in detail in the following paragraphs and provides at the end the possible future of this transnational spiritual movement.

I. *From being diaspora to become transnational*

A diaspora is a transnational community that has been dispersed from its homeland, whose members permanently resides in one or more "host" countries and possesses a collective, sometimes idealized, myth of the homeland and will to return (Safran 2005; Shuval 2000; Sheffer 1995; Baumann 2000; Schiller 2003; Levitt and Schiller 2004). "Diasporas," writes Khachig Tololyan, the editor of the journal *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, "are emblems of transnationalism because they embody the question of borders, which is at the heart of any adequate definition of the Others of the nation-state" (Tololyan 1991: 6). He argues, in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the contemporary phenomena of diasporans, one must focus on the practical and the intellectual conditions, which arise from existing at a distance from the (imagined) tranquility of home and national belonging.

One of the common features of diasporic communities today is their transnational presence and linkage or network with the motherland, imaginary or real. The past decade has witnessed a phenomenal dynamism among the diasporic communities, made possible by the recent advancement in technologies for travel, transport and communications. Not only did these developments bring the diasporic communities and their motherland closer but also has facilitated in bringing the members of their community dispersed around the world together. The emergence of such networking, cutting across several countries, is most appropriately described by the term "transnational."

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II. *Religious expression of immigrants in the diaspora*

The proliferation of religious/spiritual movements in the recent decades has produced new forms of identity, for instance, the participation of members from different ethnic groups in a particular spiritual movement or participation of a member in different spiritual movements. Such multiplicity is one of the many features of new spiritual movements today. This is one of the major consequences of the process of migration in today's world, which is described by scholars as "transnational migration" (see Schiller 2003; Levitt 1999; Levitt and Schiller 2004).

III. *Common ethnic identity of Indians and their participation in spiritual movements*

Indian diaspora that formed during 19th and early 20th centuries was marked by rootlessness and an excessive desire for belonging - as it was near impossible to integrate into and accept the cultural system of the host society. Thus, in many cases, Indians had to confront their cultural identity, values, religious beliefs and/or spiritual practices. However, today's religious/spiritual movements especially rooted in the homeland have made considerable impact in integrating Indian religious and cultural practices, thereby (re)constructing the identity of Indians in the diaspora.

The increasing linkages between Sathya Sai Baba movement and India have shown that there are mutual perceptions and identities involved in this transnational spiritual community. So far as Sai Baba movement is concerned, it is argued that, the movement has crossed the traditional ethnic, cultural and religious boundaries, and seen as a part of a "new" transnational religion.

IV.   *Spiritual movements and the reconstruction of religious and cultural identity*

It may be argued further that while diaspora's relationship to its "roots," the original homeland, is an ideological one, spiritual movements of recent time have transformed such ideological one into reality - may be virtually. Participation in the spiritual movements of homeland is now one of the major religious mechanisms for the preservation of cultural identity of immigrants in the diaspora.

The present study points out that the making of a diasporic community and thereby diasporic identity depends on several factors. Indian identity, for instance, in the diaspora always by nature is "fractured identity" (Verma and Sheshan 2003). It needs to be redefined from time to time because of new developments in socio-economic, religious/spiritual and political dimensions.

One of the major objectives of this study was to understand the process of (re)construction of religious and cultural identities by diasporic Indians while participating in the spiritual movement of Sathya Sai Baba. As most of the respondents mentioned, participation in the spiritual movement of Sathya Sai Baba has transformed their spiritual life by giving a different type of identity. It is argued that the diasporic Indians attach great significance to the spiritual movement of Sathya Sai Baba in order to become closer to their homeland and to re-imagining the identity, which was partly lost in the process of their settlement soon after their displacement and dislocation in the colonial world.

The study of Sathya Sai Baba movement reveals that religion and spirituality not only become a catalyst in the preservation of Indian identities abroad but also simultaneously provide space for immigrants to

maintain transnational networks with the homeland and with other diasporic communities settled in different parts of the world.

V.   *Spiritual pilgrimages and the creation of sacred geographies*

The creation of new sacred sites is often the defining feature of most of these new religious/spiritual movements in recent times. In the context of modernization and globalization, and, more recently, in the context of revolution in transportation and communication technology, there is transformation in the creation of sacred geography. For instance, in the Sathya Sai Baba movement, the birthplace of Sai Baba, "Puttaparthi," is the part of religious affiliations among the devotees – both in India and in the Indian diaspora – where the devotees converge for their annual pilgrimage. Puttaparthi has become a sacred site within the spiritual movement of Sathya Sai Baba.

"Puttaparthi," the sacred place of pilgrimage for devotees, can be compared with the sacred geography of "Shirdi," a place believed to have been created by the earlier incarnation of Sathya Sai Baba i.e., Shirdi Sai Baba, who had reportedly performed miracles and who, himself, used the place as a place for retreat and meditation. A large number of devotees from different backgrounds and from different countries pay a visit to Puttaparthi particularly to celebrate the birthday of Sathya Sai Baba every year. An important feature of this annual pilgrimage, and the broader religious movement into which it is situated, is that, it firmly links different ethnic groups into a single religion, for instance, drawing adherents from both sides – from India and the Indian diaspora and from different faith groups such as Muslims, Christians and among others – and contributing to the shaping of new sacred geographies in the region.

Another area that this study throws some light is "transplantation of cultures." It is an important facet in the study of diaspora, since culture is central to diasporic identity and continuity with the motherland/ancestral land. Hugh Tinker's study "The Banyan Tree" (1977) suggests the strong connections that often continue between overseas Indian cultures and their home culture. It also highlights the efforts overseas Indians make to replicate the parent tree with satellite trunks, even when they are in quite different host societies. The metaphor of "transplantation" suggests that roots are taken from the parent tree, transported to a considerable distance, and planted in new, often quite dissimilar soils. Conditions in the new locations have much to do with how the "roots" fare, and local growth can vary significantly from the original. How much of their cultures can and must be imported cannot be determined *a priori*. The process of transplantation always involves a selection that never results in a complete duplication of the old-country form. In this respect, Indians are no different from any other immigrants.

The present study particularly addresses and challenges the conventional assimilation perspective, whose main argument is based on the assumption that, "…in the process of assimilation, the immigrants should abandon his/her religion and culture and embrace the host society's practices" (cited in Aggad 2005: 2). However, the Indians in the diaspora have retained much of their cultural traditions alive, and the Sathya Sai Baba spiritual movement further strengthens these traditions through their participation in the spiritual movement originated from India.

The question of Sai Baba's *miracles* is much debated among his followers as well as detractors. While sceptics criticized and challenged Sai Baba's miracle power, devotees believing in his divine power are on an increase in India and in the Indian diaspora. Reinhart Hummel (2005), while studying Sathya Sai Baba, points out the critical aspects of miracle power. According to him "…miracle is faith's dearest child and so faith in Sai Baba produces an abundance of rarely verifiable

reports of miracles. The art of 'materializing' things with a wave of the hand is something trick artists also hold in their power" (http://www.dci.dk/?artikel=572 &emne=Sai %20Baba).

Indians in the diaspora associate themselves with Sathya Sai Baba following their immense faith in the materialization of Vibhuti in the residences of devotees in their own countries. They are also attracted by the social service activities of Sathya Sai Baba Organisation. For instance, Sathya Sai Baba visited East Africa in 1968, not so much to preach religious or spiritual ideology but to encourage social service to millions of PIOs (People of Indian Origins) who have immigrated to Africa. The social service activity of Indians in Africa attracted thousands of indigenous Africans to become the devotees of Sathya Sai Baba in order to participate in the social service. Further, the shrinking of time and space as a result of communication and transportation technology has made it possible for increasing number of immigrants to participate in the activities of Sathya Sai Baba spiritual and cultural organisations transnationally.

Discussing the Sathya Sai Baba movement from social network perspective, the thesis examines - through *ego-centered* and *whole networks* and through *spatial* and *specific networks* - how the devotees make their connection with Sathya Sai Baba and influence the persons in contact to become the devotees of Sai Baba, and how their networks further helps the movement to become one of the "transnational movements" in recent time. As discussed in Chapter-V, the social relationships of Sathya Sai Baba with his family and kin, childhood friends and neighbourhoods including villagers, and, in larger context, the million devotees across the world are key to understand the social dynamics of this transnational movement.

The growth of the movement shows that there were three concentric circles developed around Sathya Sai Baba's charismatic personality. First, a small group consisting of the members of Sathya Sai Baba's family and his own caste groups

in his village. Second, a wider circle of community supporters beyond his village to neighbouring districts without whose support any charismatic movement would not have been possible. Thirdly, people as a whole, namely, those people who listened to Sathya Sai Baba and were attracted to him through his miraculous power of healing. These three concentric groups have their own networks that help further the growth of the transnational networks among the devotees of Sathya Sai Baba in the larger context.

One respondent from Singapore whose grandfather migrated to East Africa during 1880s could not remember the exact date but share the following. Her opinions can be taken as an example of how transnational the movement is and how transnational the devotees are.

> I am a third generation person of Indian origin from South Africa, introduced to Sathya Sai Baba almost 20 years ago. I have relatives in South Africa who are also Swami's devotees. Last year I was invited to attend the Sathya Sai Spiritual Educational Workshop in South Africa organised by International Sathya Sai Organisation, where devotees from all over the world participated. I had also participated in Sai social service activities in UK, USA and Australia. I do not have any problem in visiting any country whenever and wherever Swami sends me to attend his programmes.

The Future of Transnational Spiritual Movements

The proliferation of movements of people during the last five decades has produced new forms of identity as a result of cross-cultural differences as mentioned in Chapter-VI. It has produced new subjects, for when the individual leaves the land of his origin, the conditions attached to him and reflecting his recognition by society, his belonging, what Edward Said (cited in Moreau 2004)

calls "affiliation" to something specific, are things that he leaves behind. Members of diasporic communities define themselves in terms of at least two identities as the devotees of Sathya Sai Baba maintain in the diaspora. For instance, a devotee may be a member of the Sathya Sai Baba religious/spiritual group originating from the homeland, but s/he at the same time is also a member of the host country.

Thus, the making of diasporic communities shows that culture is not a fixed set of features, behaviours and values; nor is it transmitted unchanged from one generation to the next. Rather, culture is dynamic, and more so, the diasporic cultures, which are continually formed and reformed through constant interaction and exchange with each other in the context of a globalized world. For instance, the people who migrated from the Indian sub-continent to the British, Dutch and French colonies as indentured and passage migrants from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century were dispersed in multiple ways. The experience of uprooting, deterritorialisation, deportation, transplantation, and enslavement caused deep ruptures in terms of cultural identity. Coming from different villages, from different parts of India, belonging to different cultural groups, speaking different languages, worshipping different gods, the common experience that they shared was "indenturedship" and "subjugation." This has resulted in a range of interrelated Indian cultures, for instance, "Indo-Caribbean," "Indian-Americans," and "East Indians." The cultures and identities they developed drew largely on their Indian "roots," and also from a shared experience of living in a "strange" environment. But, today, the spiritual movements of homeland have strengthened the affinities of immigrants with their homelands. In the Western countries, especially in the USA, one of the western devotees in the Sathya Sai Baba Ashram at Prasanthi Nilayam remarked how the Indians (focusing especially on Hindus) maintain their religious tradition and identity while participating in the Sathya Sai Baba spiritual programmes despite having many odds in the plural society.

In California, religious communities abound, from Christians to Jews and Muslims. These obvious beacons of religion may lead one to believe that California is a city made up of Christians, Jews and Muslims but many other religious communities also exist. One such community meets every Thursday in a residential apartment is the Sathya Sai Baba spiritual community. Sathya Sai Baba has a large following in New York. The residential space is devoted to the Sathya Sai Baba, popularly known as the "Swami Sai." Participants in this Thursday evening gathering refer to him as the "embodiment of love." Bhajans and Meditation are the two main parts of the gathering called "satsang." The chanting of Sai Baba's divine name opens the satsang at 7.00 PM. The satsang ends with silent meditation and the performance of *arati* to Sathya Sai Baba. The devotees receive *prashad* and everyone heads out of the door by 9.00 PM. This ritual repeats itself every Thursday evening.

In the following passage Lawrence A. Babb describes one of Sai Baba's satsangs. He writes about devotees of Sathya Sai Baba living in Delhi, but his description could apply equally to devotees in New York:

> Attendees tend to be well dressed and obviously affluent, and I suspect that in some circles these events carry a certain social cachet. The main event is the singing of devotional songs, most of which are overtly addressed to Sathya Sai Baba himself. A book containing suitable bhajans is owned by many devotees. The singing is followed by a period of silent meditation, and then arati is performed in the usual fashion before the altar. Devotees receive prashad as they leave (Babb 1986: 170).

This systematic form of ritual performance can be visible in many of the new diasporas that were formed during the last few decades especially after 1950s. Many theorists have written on ritual, some commending it and some condemning it. Durkheim's important discussion on cult at the end of *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, for instance, reintroduces ritual as the means by which collective beliefs and ideals are simultaneously generated, experienced, and affirmed as real by the community. Hence, ritual is the means by which individual perception and behaviour are socially appropriated or conditioned (Bell 1992: 20). Durkheim further elucidates how ritual is only meaningful to the community who practices it. Sathya Sai Baba's followers in the diaspora are not "generating" beliefs in satsang, but rather "affirming" them collectively, as mentioned in the Sathya Sai Baba theology "Satsang is not a method of teaching, but a language of devotion."

Scope for Further Research

During the last two decades, there are several Sathya Sai Baba Centres/temples established under the guidance of Sathya Sai Baba throughout India and around the world. Reviewing some of the works on religious/spiritual movements by the Indians and other gurus with world-wide following in the 21st century, the thesis observes how Sathya Sai Baba movement has sustained even after it was internationally discredited for quite some time by sceptics. The movement today has acquired a large amount of wealth and built up Centres across the world with organised membership and have a large number of followers in the diaspora who are also growing day-by-day. The movement even in European countries and North America - where majority of criticisms came - managed to retain substantial numbers of active participants. The movement survives today and will survive tomorrow, though it cannot be predicted how large the scope of the movement or how small in size and influence or how organised or institutionalised the movement will it be?

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UNIVERSITY OF HYDERABAD
Department of Sociology

INDIAN DIASPORA, RELIGION AND TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKS:

Questionnaire

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1.   PERSONAL INFORMATION

1.1.   Name & Address (optional):

1.2.   Age: ☐   Sex: Male ☐   Female ☐

1.3.   Country of Residence or Citizenship

        Place ☐   State ☐   Country ☐

1.4.   Marital Status: Unmarried ☐   Married ☐   Divorced ☐

        Widow[er] ☐

        If married specify *spouse's nationality and country of origin* ☐

1.5.   The family members residing with you in your present country:

Sl.No	Name (optional)	Age	Sex	Relationship

1.6.   What is your mother tongue? ☐

1.6.a. Which language do you speak at home?

        Hindi ☐   English ☐   Others ☐

2. RELIGION

2.2. Which religion do you belong to?

        Hindu ☐   Muslim ☐ Christian ☐ Buddhist ☐

        Any other (specify) ☐

2.3. How much time do you devote per day for religious practices? [ ] Hrs

2.4. Please mention the religious festivals that you celebrate in your present country of residence.

[ ]

2.5. Please mention the names of temples/community centers that you visit to participate in religious ceremonies.

[ ]

2.6. Since how long have you been a devotee of Sri Sathya Sai Baba? [ ]

2.7. Would you recall how and when did you first come to know about Sri Sathya Sai Baba?

Yes [ ] No [ ]

If yes, please give details:

[ ]

2.8. Would you recall the person/media who was/were instrumental in helping you to become the Sri Baba devotee? (Please mark more than one, if you think appropriate)

Parents [ ]   Office colleague [ ]   Friends [ ]   Relatives [ ]

Print Media [ ]   Internet [ ]   Any other (specify) [ ]

2.9. Could you recall the events that brought you closer to Sri Sathya Sai Baba?

Yes [ ] No [ ]

If yes, what was that event? When and where did it happen?

[ ]

2.10.   Did Sathya Sai Baba visit your country?

Yes [ ]   No [ ]

2.11.   If yes, did you meet Sri Sathya Sai Baba during his visit to your country?

Yes [ ]   No [ ]

If yes, when and
where?

2.12.   Do you have Sathya Sai Baba Centre/Mandir in your locality or nearby?
Yes [ ]   No [ ]

If yes, mention the Centre/Mandir's name,
address and its important activities.

2.13.   Are you an active member/participant of that Centre/Mandir?

Yes [ ]   No [ ]

2.14.   Have you introduced any of your relatives/friends to Sri Sathya Sai Baba faith?

Yes [ ]   No [ ]

If yes, give details of those people.

Name	Relationships/Friends

2.15.   Have you influenced members other than Indians to become the devotees of Sathya Sai Baba?

Yes [ ]   No [ ]

If yes please give details of those persons

2.16.   Could you tell approximately how many non-Indian* are there in your country? (*Non-Indians here refer to those devotees other than the People of Indian Origins (PIOs), such as Europeans, Chinese, Africans and North Americans and other ethnic groups)

Yes [ ]   No [ ]

If yes, how many (approximately) [ ]

2.17.   Could you tell how many non-Indians are there in the Sathya Sai Baba Centre where you are a member?

Yes ☐   No ☐

If yes, how many (approximately) ☐

2.18.   Have you gone through any training/meditation course offered by Sri Sathya Sai Baba Centers till today?

Yes ☐   No ☐

If yes, please give details. ☐

2.19.   Have you organized any Sri Sathya Sai Baba satsang/gatherings at your residence?

Yes ☐ No ☐   If yes, mention how often?

a)   Once a week ☐ b) Once in a month ☐ c) Once in a year ☐

d)   Once in 2 years ☐   e) Any other (specify) ☐

2.20.   Have you visited Puttaparthi earlier?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, how many times have you visited? ☐ What was/were the occasions? ☐

What is the usual duration of your stay? ☐

Are you involved in social service activity at Puttaparthi?   Yes ☐   No ☐

If yes, give a brief description: ☐

2.21.   Do you know some of the community services undertaken by Sri Sathya Sai Baba Centre/Trust/Organization in your current place of residence?

Yes ☐   No ☐

If yes, please give details

☐

2.22.   Do you know the activities undertaken by your Sathya Sai Baba Organization in dealing with the current problems of society such as childcare, old age care and others (including AIDS awareness) programs?

Yes [   ]   No [   ]   If yes, please list below

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2.23.   Are there women participants in the Sathya Sai Baba Centre of your locality?

Yes [   ] No [   ]

If yes, how many women members are there, and what roles do they perform being the devotee of Baba?

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2.24.   Being a devotee of Sri Sathya Sai Baba, do you experience any special relationship with the motherland/country of origin?

Yes [   ] No [   ]

If yes, please explain

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2.25.   Please explain the nature of cooperation and support if any among the devotees of Sri Sathya Sai Baba outside the religious programs?

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2.26.   Do you belong to any other religious/spiritual/denominational groups other than Sri Sathya Sai Baba?

Yes [   ]   No   [   ]   (If no, skip to Q. No 4.1)

3.21.a. If yes, do you think there is some distinctiveness in being the follower of Sri Sathya Sai Baba?

Yes [   ]   No [   ]

If yes, please explain

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3.22. Any other information regarding Sathya Sai Baba or His Centre in your locality or in India would you like to share?

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3. MIGRATION & TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKS

3.1. Year of arrival in the country of your domicile (to be answered by NRIs, holding Indian passport):

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3.2. When did your parents/ancestors leave India (to be answered by PIOs)?

Year [   ]   I don't know [   ]

3.3. Please list the reasons why you/your parents/ancestors leave the country?

Better educational opportunities [   ]   Better employment opportunities [   ]

Better trade/business opportunities [   ]   To overcome poverty/unemployment [   ]

Due to natural calamities [   ]   To Join husband/wife [   ]

To join other family members [   ]   Any other (specify) [   ]

3.4. Did you apply for citizenship (to be answered by NRIs)?   Yes [   ]   No [   ]

3.5. Did you face any difficulties during the initial days of your stay in the country of your present residence?

Yes [   ]   No [   ]   If yes, did you receive any help from any source? Give details

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3.6. Have you visited India earlier?

Yes ☐   No ☐

If yes, please indicate the reasons

Purpose of visit to India	
1) Business	
2) Marriage	
3) Religious	
5) Health care	
6) Birth/Death Ceremonies	
7) Any other purpose, specify	

3.7. What type of relationships do you maintain with India? Please rank them by ticking on a scale from 1 indicating the most significant one to the least?

Type of Relationship	Rank									
Kinship/Marriage	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Religious/Pilgrimage/Spiritual	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Economic Remittances/ Investments/ Deposits	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Business/Trade etc.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Politicians/Parties/	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Philanthropy/Charity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Any Other (Specify)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

3.8. Do you have relatives in other countries?

Yes ☐   No ☐   If yes, please list below

Country	Relationship	No of relatives

3.9. What are the modes of communication you use to maintain contact with your relatives? (Please mark more than one, if you use)

Modes of Communication					
	Yes	No		Yes	No
Telephone/Fax			Email, Internet		
Letter			Other means, indicate below		
Personal visits					

3.10.   Do you maintain contacts with the devotees of Sai Baba in other countries?

Yes ☐   No ☐

If yes, List the place and countries

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3.11.   What are the modes of communication you use to maintain contact with the devotees?

Modes of Communication					
	Yes	No		Yes	No
Telephone/Fax			Email, Internet		
Letter			Other means, indicate below		
Personal visits					

3.12.   How frequently do you communicate with them including personal visits?

Occasionally ☐   Once in a week ☐   Once in a month ☐   Once in a year ☐

On Festive Occasions ☐   Never communicate ☐

3.13.   What are the issues you generally discuss during these communications?

Only Spiritual matters ☐   Social Service activities ☐

Personal discussions ☐   Any other issues specify ☐

3.14.   Any other information would you like to share regarding migration and transnational networks of Sathya Sai Baba devotees?

THANK YOU VERY MUCH

Annexure-2

World Regions of the Sai Organization

Zone	Region	
		India
1	11	United States, Israel
1	12	West Indies: Bahamas, Trinidad & Tobago, Surinam, Guyana, Barbados & other Caribbean Islands
1	13	Canada
2		Central and South America and Puerto Rico
2	21	Belize, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, French Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Puerto Rico,
2	22	Columbia, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela
2	23	Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay
3		Australia & Papua New Guinea
3		New Zealand, Fiji, and Pacific Islands, Philippines, Nepal, Bhutan
3		Sri Lanka
4		Far East (South) Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam,
4		Far East (Middle) Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Laos, Myanmar (Burma), Pakistan
5		Far East (North) China PRC, Hong Kong, Japan, Japan (in English) Korea, Taiwan ROC
6	61	South Europe Croatia, France, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland.
6		South Europe Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovenia, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Macedonia, Romania, Spain, Serbia-Montenegro.
7		North Europe
7	71	Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Slovakia
7	72	Belgium, Denmark, Greenland, Iceland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden
7	73	Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland
8		East Europe Azerbaijan, Armenia, Byelorussia, Georgia, Kasakhstan, Kyrghyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tagzhikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Ukraine
9		UK, Ireland, Africa, Middle East
9	91	UK and Ireland
9	92	South Africa, Zimbabwe, Botswana
9	93	Central & North Africa and Mauritius: Cameroon, Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Malawi, Mauritius, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia

| 9 | 94 | Middle East and Gulf (except Israel): Abu Dhabi, Angola, Bahrain, Dubai, Iran, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey |

Source: Compile from the Website: http://www.sathyasai.org/organize/content.htm
[visited as on 12th April 2006]

SATHYA SAI ORGANIZATIONS
BY COUNTRY

Argentina

Australia & Papua New Guinea

Austria

Azerbaijan

Belgium

Bosnia-Herzegovina

Brazil

Bulgaria

Canada

Central & South America

Ceskª Republiky (Czech Republic)

Chile

Croatia (Hrvatske)

Danemark (Denmark)

Deutchland (Germany)

Dominican Republic

Eire (Ireland)

El Salvador

Estonia

France

Georgia

Greece

Greenland

Hellenic Republic (Greece)

Hong Kong

Hrvatski (Croatia)

Hungary (Magyar)

Iceland

India: Mumbai, Dharmakshetra

Ireland (Eire)

Israel

Italia (Italy)

Japan   (in English)

Kasakhstan

Kenya Sai Centre (Nairobi)

Latin America & Puerto Rico

Latvia

Lithuania

Luxembourg

Macedonia

Magyar (Hungary)

Mexico

Moldova

Netherlands

New Zealand

Nigeria

Norway

Paraguay

Philippines

Polska (Poland)

Republica Dominicana

Romania

Russia

Serbia-Montenegro

Singapore

Slovakia

Slovenija (Slovenia)

South Africa

South & Central America

Spain

Sri Lanka

Sverige (Sweden)

Switzerland

Taiwan

Thailand

UK (except London)

Ukraine

United States

West Indies

See details of Sathya Sai Baba Organization in each country:
http://www.sathyasai.org/organize/content.htm [visited as on 12th April 2006]

Annexure- 3

LETTER OF INVITATION TO DELEGATES TO ATTEND CEREMONY IN MAURITIUS

JAI SAI RAM

As we are holding this spiritual function of the SRI SATHYA SAI SAHASRA PAADUKA PRATISHTHA MAHAABHISHEKA MAHOTSAVA for 3 consecutive days, we have invited the whole of the Mauritian Sai devotees and the population at large for massive participation. We are expecting to receive on each day around 3500 to 5000 guests. Guests from India, Malaysia & England also will join.

- Huge tent of 21000 sq. feet is being erected.
- Stage of 80 feet by 25 feet for the installation of Swaami's aasanam, Bhajana Mandali, Cultural programme
- Giant & Huge Video Screen where Prashaanti events will be projected. Any VCD from Madurai will be most welcome.
- Seating arrangements for 1008 devotees who will sit & perform the PAADUKA POOJA, each with a bench (peetham), a lota, a thali and each with a divine blessed PAADUKA.
- Seating arrangements for VIPs, foreign devotees, ministers, members of Parliament, etc.
- Seating arrangements for all guests on the floor.
- There will be a corner for ANNADAANAM.
- Corner for First Aid
- Exhibition on Sai philosophy.
- Corner for JYOTI meditation, JAPAM & LIKHITA JAPAM
- Rest area for babies, children & aged persons.
- Corner for enquiry

DETAILS OF THE PROGRAMME

Reception & welcoming of guests arriving from abroad at the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport & necessary hospitality.

FRI 26TH NOV. '04

1545hrs   Arrival of guests.

1558hrs   Welcoming of guests

1600hrs   Arrival of blessed Divine PAADUKAS with auspicious NADASWARAM with MANTRA: conferring blessings on the august audience with SWASTI VACHANAM & PUNYAAH VACHANAM

1615hrs	Lighting of the auspicious big lamp tree from the SRI SATHYA SAI DIVYA AKHANDA AANANDA GYAANA CHAITANYA JYOTI GANTHA NAADAM
1630hrs	In procession for BHUUMI POOJA, MRUTSANGRAHANAM
1645hrs	ACHAARYA VARANAM, AASANA VIDHI & KALASHAARAADHANAM, PEETHA POOJA, SHANKHA POOJA, AATMA POOJA, MANDAPA POOJA, DWAARAPAALAKA POOJA
1650hrs	DHYAANAM, AACHAMANAM & SAI GANAPATHI POOJA
1700hrs	SAI SANKALPAM
1710hrs	KANKANA DHAARANAM
1720hrs	ASHTHA DIKPAALAKA & PANCHA PAALAKA POOJA
1730hrs	PITA MAHA PAADA POOJA & SHUDDHI of the compound
1740hrs	SRI SATHYA SAI AGNI PRATISHTHAAPANAM followed by 2 SAI BHAJANS
1755hrs	Worship of the DIVINE blessed PEETHAM pooja & ABHISHEKAM & beginning of continuous HARIDRA CHOORANAM & KUMKUMA (80 Kg)

ARCHANA: PAADUKA SAHASRAM

1815hrs	NAVA GRAHA POOJA
1835hrs	Distribution of 1008 pairs of SriSathyaSai Divine PAADUKAS + 2 SAI BHAJANS
1855hrs	PUSHPA ARCHANA & PAADUKA PRATISHTHAAPANA
1915hrs	INVOCATION: SHODASHA UPACHAARA POOJA + SRI SATHYA SAI ANGA POOJA
1930hrs	SRI SATHYA SAI ASHTOTTARA SHATA NAAMAAVALI, the 108 Divine names of Bhagavaan Baba
1945hrs	PRAVACHAN ON THE INNER SIGNIFICANCE OF RITUALS & THE WORSHIP OF PAADUKAS
2000hrs	MANGALAARATHI, VIBHUTHI & MAHA PRASAADAM

SAT 27TH Nov. '04

1630 hours	SWASTI VACHANAM, PUNYAAH VACHANAM, TIRTHAAVAHANAM GANAPATHI POOJA,
1700 hours	ABHISHEKAM starts on the 1008 pairs of Divine PAADUKAS perform by all Devotees coupled with VEDIC CHANTING: PANCHA SUKTAM, RUDRA NAMAKAM CHAMAKAM, CHANTING of ARANYA KAANDA of TULSIDAS RAMAYANA
1745 hours	NITYA AGNIHOTRAM: SRI SATHYA SAI SAHASRA NAAMAAVLI
1815 hours	BHAAGAVATAM: SUDAAMA & SRI KRISHNA Milan Lecture from the BIBLE in French "JESUS LAVE LES PIEDS DE SES DISCIPLES'
2030 hours	The Glories of Sri Sathya Sai Baba and the DIVINE UNIVERSAL PHILOSOPHY, an exposé by brother Sri Ramesh Mareeachalee
2100 hours	MAHAPRASAADAM
2100 to 0500 hours	AKHANDA BHAJANA by various devotional groups

SUN 28th Nov.

0500 hours	21 times OM KAAR, Sri Sathya Sai Suprabhaatam followed by Nagarsankirtan
0700 hours	cleaning, breakfast, preparation for PUSHPA ARCHANA
0900 hours	NITYA SRI SATHYA SAI AGNIHOTRAM
0930 hours	SRI SATHYA SAI PAADUKA POOJA + SRI SATHYA SAI PAADAM ASHTOTTARA SHATA NAAMAAVALI, PUSHPA ARCHANA with flowers and AKSHATA on the 1008 pairs of Divine Sri Sathya Sai PAADUKAS by devotees
1025 hours	3 SAI BHAJANS + SHAASTAANGA NAMASKAARAM CHUURNIKA shodasha MAVADHAARAYA: 1.) Rg Veda 2.) Yajur Veda 3.) Saama Veda 4.) Atharva Veda 5.) Dharma Shaastra 6.) Brahma Sutra 7.) Shabda Shaastra:TEVAARAM, TIRUMURAI, DIVYA PRABANDHAM 8.) Mangala Vaadyam 9.) Sangeetam 10.) Nrutyam 11.) Ramayanam 12.) Bhaarata 13) Bhaagavatam 14.) Bhagavad Geeta 15.) Sri Sathya Sai Sathyanarayana Vrata Kalpam 16.) Saishwara Gaayatri, Surya Gaayatri, Hiranyaarbha Gaayatri

1245 hours   PURNA AHUTI VIDHI with long traditional PURNA AHUTI SHRUVAM

1255 hours   NIRAAJANAM, MAHAA MANGALA HAARATHI. To each pair of PAADUKAS one agarbatti + ½ tablet camphor waving of light, conferring auspiciousness to one and all. ATMA PRADAKSHINA UDVAASANAM SUKHASAYANA PRAARTHANA TRUTIYA BINDUH SAI TU KRUSHNAAYATE MANGALAA SHAASHANAM TIRTHA GRAHANAM VIBHUTI + MAHAA PRASAADAM

1400 hours to 1530 hours   TRADITIONAL & CULTURAL PROGRAMME: SANMAANAM

Welcoming speech by President Sanjiva N. Appadoo

Speech of President Madurai Sri Sathya Sai Padugha Trust Sri P.S.A.S. Srinivasan Chettiar

Speech by President Petaling Jaya Sri Sathya Sai Centre, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Sri N.B. Ledchumanan

Speech by Sri Navaratna Ajodah Sai devotee from England

Cultural items: Bharata Natyam, Kuchipudi, Karnatic classical music and kritis. Bhajans, Om Tat Sath, Mangalaa Haarathi & Vibhuti

JAI SAI RAM