

**THE
SATHYA SAI BABA
COMMUNITY
IN BRADFORD**

David Bowen

*Its Origin and Development, Religious Beliefs and
Practices*

MONOGRAPH SERIES

COMMUNITY RELIGIONS PROJECT

Department of Theology and Religious Studies
University of Leeds

1988

This is the third in a series of monographs produced by the Community Religions Project in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Leeds.

The Community Religions Project is a research group committed to working on contemporary issues related to religions in Britain, particularly those of relevance to ethnic minorities. In addition to the production of monographs, it publishes a series of research papers. A list of titles appears at the back of this volume.

First published in 1988
by the Community Religions Project,
University of Leeds.

First published online in 2016
by the Community Religions Project,
University of Leeds.

Note: Where possible all content has been rendered faithfully to the 1988 paper edition.

Online editor: Jo Henderson-Merrygold

© Community Religions Project
All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy of
transmission of this publication may be made
without written permission.

This monograph is based on a Ph.D. thesis submitted to the University of Leeds in 1985.

Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
Aims	1
Fieldwork and Methodology	2
Relation to the Discipline of Religious Studies	7
Title and Contents	11
CHAPTER 1. THE FELLOWSHIP: ITS ORIGIN, CONTEXT, MEMBERSHIP AND AFFILIATIONS	15
1.1 The Migration of Hindus to the United Kingdom	15
1.2 The Settlement of Gujarati Hindus in Bradford	18
1.3 The Evolution of Gujarati Hindu Organisations in Bradford	27
1.4 The Sathya Sai Baba Satsang in Bradford: its Membership and Affiliations'	45
CHAPTER 2. ACTIVITIES OF THE FELLOWSHIP	58
2.1 Bhajan Mandal	59
2.2 Festivals	66
2.3 Special Events	75
2.4 Group Activities	81

CHAPTER 3. THE TEMPLE AND THE ICONS	90
3.1 The Mandir and the Iconological Task	90
3.2 Icon 1: Shiva and Baba	95
3.3 Icon 2: Baba as Vishnu	114
CHAPTER 4. ICONS OF THE TWO SAI BABAS	123
4.1 Icon 3: Sai Baba of Shirdi	126
4.2 Icons 4-11: Sathya Sai Baba	139
4.3 An Exercise in Iconology	153
CHAPTER 5. MAHASHIVARATRI	161
5.1 Characteristics of Mahashivaratri	161
5.2 The Origin of Mahashivaratri	171
5.3 Mahashivaratri in Bradford	179
5.4 Mahashivaratri at Prashanti Nilayam	187
5.5 Vibhuti: Sacred Ash	191
5.6 Vibhuti and the Bradford Satsang	197
5.7 Vibhuti and Mahashivaratri	202
CHAPTER 6. THE BIRTHDAY OF SATHYA SAI BABA	210
6.1 The Cultural Context and Baba's Birth	210
6.2 Baba's Birthday and the Satsang	212
6.3 The Birthday, Pilgrimage and Mission	219
6.4 Pilgrimage to Wellingborough	223
6.5 Amrit: Ambrosia	232
6.6 Bharatisation: The Extension of Sacred Space	237

CHAPTER 7. PARANORMAL POWERS AND THE FELLOWSHIP	245
7.1 Siddhis: Paranormal Powers	245
7.2 The Siddhis of Sathya Sai Baba	250
7.3 Babafas Siddhis and the Bradford Satsang	263
7.4 The Role of Siddhis in the foundation of the Satsang	267
CHAPTER 8. THE GROWTH OF THE FELLOWSHIP	277
8.1 Siddhis as the Basis for the Growth of the Satsang	278
8.2 The Role of the Young in the Satsang	283
8.3 The Impact of a Young Leader	291
8.4 Pilgrimage to Prashanti Nilayam	303
8.5 Impetus Sustained: 1981-85	311
CONCLUSION	324
APPENDIX 1: The Life of Sathya Sai Baba: some significant Dates and Events	341
APPENDIX 2: The Teaching of Sathya Sai Baba	345
APPENDIX 3: Statistics of attendance at Thursday Bhajan Mandals: September 1977 - October 1985	348
APPENDIX 4: Attendance of the Young at the Thursday Bhajan Mandal	353
APPENDIX 5: Four representative Bhajans sung at the Sai Mandir on 17 January 1980	355

APPENDIX 6: Two representative films shown at the Sai Centre	357
APPENDIX 7: Special Activities of the Young People of the Satsang 1982-85	359
APPENDIX 8: Simplified. Glossary for the non-specialist Reader	361
NOTES	365
BIBLIOGRAPHY	383

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work could not have been written without the ready co-operation of Mr Gulabbhai and Mrs Savitaben Patel, whose faith and commitment have generated it. They could not have been more kind and welcoming, their home being generously open to me at all times. Gulabbhai, in particular, gave of his time without reserve, explaining his convictions in lengthy interviews. Each member of their family has also been helpful. Special mention should be made of their eldest son, Pranav, who not only accompanied me on some of my earliest visits to the homes of devotees, but also discussed in great detail many aspects of the faith of the community. Both he and his father have been models of patience, and have put up with what must have seemed like a persistent pursuit of barely relevant questions. I only hope that the strength of their devotion to Sathya Sai Baba may be matched by the rigour and the usefulness of this research.

Dr Ursula King, of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Leeds, gave her time unstintingly in discussing this work, phase by phase, as my supervisor. She threw light on problems - theoretical, academic and technical - in exchanges that were always both stimulating and supportive.

Dr Amrik Kalsi, a colleague at Bradford and Ilkley Community College, readily shared his expertise in Sanskrit and in modern South Asian languages with me. A mine of information on many otherwise obscure details, he spared himself no trouble and sustained my commitment to this research in every way that was open to him.

Mr R.M. Faithorn, Mr Don Hassall and Mr D.H.B. Andrews, together with Mr Peter Chambers and the members of the Staff Development Sub-committee at Bradford and Ilkley Community College, were generously helpful when I needed the endorsement of my superiors. Don Hassall gave unstinting professional support throughout the process of preparation for a C.N.A.A., revalidation of college courses in 1983, which otherwise would have had to dominate my commitments at a critical stage.

I am grateful to several other Bradford colleagues, and to fellow workers in the Community Religions Project at the University of Leeds, for specific help at particular times. Mr Ramindar Singh, Mr Seva Kalsi, Dr Kim Knott and Revd Stephen Barton, together with Dr Maureen Michaelson of the University of London, were kind enough to discuss with me matters relating to this research. My indebtedness to Dr Knott is now further increased, for she has undertaken the work of editing this series of monographs and therefore of preparing this thesis for publication. I wish to thank Mr R.P. Johar of the Hindu Cultural Society of Bradford, Mr M.B. Ladd of the Shree Prajapati Association, Mr K.J. Mistry of the Shri Jalaram Shakti Mandal, Mr J.M. Patel of **the** Patel Samaj, and Mr D.C. Chavda of the Kshatriya Sudharak Mandal, for their ready assistance in clarifying the history and the activities of the organisations to which they belong.

Mrs Susan Scottow was a most patient, painstaking and skilful typist for the original thesis. Her ready smile, even at the prospect of fresh burdens, was most encouraging and relieved me of embarrassment on many occasions. I am grateful now to Mrs Jill Killington for re-typing the work in modified form for publication. For the photographs, I am indebted to Mr Dennis Keeling and Mr Richard Adams, members of the technical staff at Bradford and Ilkley Community College.

Finally, in expressing my gratitude to all the members of the Sri Sathya Sai Community in Bradford for their openness, hospitality and kindness, I would like to say that I hope that nothing that I have written in the interests of 'science' will hurt them. I do know that their faith is so deep that they are conscious of having nothing to fear - only mis-representation.

Introduction

AIMS

This is a contribution to the Community Religions Project in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Leeds. Its aim is consonant with those of the project (Knott 1984: 4-6). However, being necessarily more specific, it crystallises the project's overall purpose in relation to one section of the Gujarati Hindu population in Bradford, West Yorkshire. The intention is to elucidate the origins of a distinctively Indian religious fellowship (a satsang) in the city, and to analyse the vicissitudes in its growth, while ~defining the beliefs and practices of its members and the functions they supply. The satsang is that of the devotees of Sathya Sai Baba b. 1926; see appendices 1 and 2 for details of Baba's life and teaching).

Should the aim of this thesis be fulfilled, certain subordinate objectives will also be achieved. For example, because most published assessments of Sathya Sai Baba's work and teaching are either uncritically euphoric or dedicated to iconoclasm, there is a need to provide a base for an objective assessment of the convictions and practices of his devotees. The growing number of adherents of this spiritual path, as Baba would define it, not only in India but world-wide, enhances the importance of the task.

Furthermore, there is a need to offer an objective detailed interpretation of the life of a growing religious community which is in danger of being misunderstood in the United Kingdom. This was exemplified in 1980, when two young men separately, the one of them an active participant in the satsang,

and the other a Hindu student from another northern town, brought me, unsolicited, two different press-cuttings. They were articles, one of them from a national newspaper, which they felt denigrated both Sathya Sai Baba and his votaries in the United Kingdom. The young Gujaratis deeply resented the published implication that they and their families were involved in a 'crackpot' cult which preyed upon 'the foolish and weak-willed' (cf. Evening News 1980). More recently, controversy over 'New Religious Movements' in general, and over some Hindu-related ones in particular, has further fuelled this concern. It was evinced by a BBC television news item on 23 October 1984, to which the National Council of Hindu Temples (UK) felt it had to respond with a circular letter of protest. Similarly, the articulated need of Gujarati Hindus for assistance in defending themselves against misrepresentation, misunderstanding and scurrilous defamatory attacks, gave additional point to this work.

FIELDWORK AND METHODOLOGY

Any merit inherent in this study must be rooted in the fieldwork on which it has been based. That has been carried out, persistently but discontinuously, over a period of ten years. The work, therefore, does not represent reflections on a short period of complete immersion in the affairs of the satsang, nor does it represent the findings of merely one or two years' intermittent association with its activities. It offers analysis of a decade of participant observation.

The prolonging of the inquiry means that the thesis presents a view of the life of the satsang which takes into account its vicissitudes over a period unusually protracted for such types of research. Children, once of Middle School age, have matured within the satsang to the point where they are young men and women in their early twenties. Some diffident teenagers of the late 1970s have disassociated themselves or have moved away; others have become ardent young leaders. Upper middle-aged mothers have become elderly matrons. Such a time-perspective is offered as a strength of the work. It has made possible the analysis of a decade in the life of a significant religious organism. Developments have been surveyed

chronologically: through phases of low morale and of buoyant success, as well as in less remarkable times.

The methodology adopted has been phenomenological, and is consistent with Barton's general discussion on phenomenology (1986: 6-8). The strategies used for the acquisition of data have been polymethodic (cf. Knott 1986: 2-5). The researcher has benefitted from the high level of reflection already attained by the Community Religions Project with regard to the opportunities afforded, and the problems presented, by participant observation (Barton 1986: 19-23; Knott 1986: 2-5). It would be invidious to survey the same ground here, but it is appropriate to acknowledge this debt of gratitude to my colleagues. Certain features, however, specific to this research, should be delineated.

Participant observation of the events sponsored by the satsang, and informal interviews with devotees, have been the main strategies used for acquiring data. Polymethodic diversity has been evident in other ways. For example, films and videos much loved by devotees have been viewed and subsequently discussed with members of the satsang. Bhajan mandals, devotional meetings, have been tape-recorded to allow detailed work on the text of the hymns sung. There has been correspondence with devotees living at a distance, and with authors and broadcasters who have referred to Sathya Sai Baba in their works and whose comments on particular topics might be pertinent.

The first visits to the mandir and to the families of members of the satsang were made in the spring of 1975. At that stage the inquiries were unstructured and informal. Formal note-making, following specific events at the temple, began in July 1975. Statistics of attendance at meetings of the satsang have been kept from September 1977 until October 1985. Record has been kept of personal attendance at 101 bhajan mandals of the fellowship, at 9 special but irregular community events, and at 10 festivals. The researcher went on a coach trip with members of the satsang to the celebration of a festival in another town. Sixty-seven interviews with devotees have taken place. There have been 12 interviews with the officers of other Hindu organisations in order to research the background for chapter 1. Visits to public events

organised by those societies also took place. Eight structured interviews, using an interview guide, were undertaken. Four visits have been made to the ashram of the Community of the Many Names of God, Llanpumsaint, Dyfed, Wales, in order to hold discussions with a young man who was once a member of the satsang. Visits to the homes of associates of the satsang have taken the researcher to Leeds, and on three occasions to a village near Harrogate.

My role as a researcher has been chiefly that of 'participant-as-observer'. It has been well described by Gold (1969: 35-6). When cast in any other role, it has been that of 'observer-as-participant' - as, for example, when pursuing inquiries in other organisations in a more formal way, in order to acquire a knowledge of the context in which the satsang's activities take place.

There are two exceptions to be made to the way in which Gold has outlined the role of participant-as-observer, in so far as that role has been explored in this research. They are highly significant and specific to this study. The first concerns Gold's account of the need for 'pretence' in the pursuit of one's fieldwork, and the second the encountering of 'uneasiness' on the part of informants.

There has been no need to act or pretend. The reasons for that are two-fold. In the first place, the views of members of the satsang, satsangis, on religious matters are openly eclectic. Their ideology is hospitable to the religious experience of all traditions and cultures, and does not perceive any of the major world-religions as rightly excluding the convictions and aspirations of adherents of the others. Baba teaches that what he offers is a spiritual path which any can follow: one does not need to turn one's back on the religion of one's up-bringing in order to pursue that path. Neither, therefore, does one have to pretend to be anything other than one is, if one is prepared to attend the acts of worship of the satsang simply out of genuine interest.

Since members of the satsang knew from the start that I had respect for the Hindu heritage, they were not uneasy about responding to questions. Far from

resenting inquiries, they appeared, rightly, to take it as a tribute to the significance of their convictions that someone not of their immediate circle was interested to know more about their beliefs and about the experiences on which they were based. The natural inclusiveness of the satsangis, however, encountering a persistent concern about their convictions and practices, led them on isolated occasions, to 'define' the 'field-worker ... as more of a colleague than he (felt) capable of being' (Gold 1969: 36). Such occurrences did not, as Gold suggests, create a context for pretence. There was trust and openness between the parties concerned. It was only necessary for me to clarify once again my seriousness of interest, while recalling also my distance from any specific personal commitment to Baba such as the satsangis themselves exemplified, to resolve any emergent misunderstanding. On thus clarifying my position, the unfailing response of leading satsangis was always to the effect that the community was not preoccupied with defining who was a devotee and who was not. Thus, in this research I have never encountered any of the problems arising out of an awareness of the resentment of intrusion, such as made Barton's task at times very difficult (1986: 6-7, 16-18).

Intra-cultural research, multi- or inter-faith encounter, and research into community relations, may generate subjective cross-cultural tensions. That is an inner problem: of the researcher and not of the researched, although it may communicate itself to the latter. The humanist, agnostic or Marxist may experience it in ways parallel to, although different from the Muslim, Christian or Buddhist. The dimensions, character and intensity of the experience must vary with all the variables. Perspectives on politics and economics, on feminism and the rights of children, colour the sharpness of the issues (cf. Knott 1986: 2). The phenomenological task is within. It is not outside, in the community, in the first place. It is subjective. The climate of western scepticism and rationalism, or the influence of Christian upbringing and cross-cultural attitudes, and the ethos of an imperial legacy: such matters compound the task of 'suspending judgments. It is of that quality that the 'difficulty' has sometimes been. It has a subtlety that can affect all researchers. Whether it has exercised a disabling

influence, or whether it has been overcome, the writer himself is hardly able to judge. The reader, and the devotee, in differing ways, may be better placed to do so.

Interviews with devotees have taken place in two modes. In the early stages of the research, a sheet of typed questions, an interview guide, was utilised in order to ensure that each inquiry covered certain ground (cf. Barton 1986: 22). This tool, helpful only at one stage, was discarded as the most basic data were accumulated. Thus, the majority of interviews have been unstructured, except in so far as there were always specific issues for clarification. Hand-written notes were normally made as interviews proceeded, using a form of personal short-hand. Such notes were typed up immediately following each interview in fuller form. The method used was thus similar to that employed by Siddiqi and Azam (1980: 14). It was the readiness of the devotees to communicate, and the degree of confidence obtaining between them and the researcher, that made it possible to make notes in the presence of informants. Use of a tape-recorder would have been more intrusive.

Opportunity was taken to test the researcher's skill in taking accurate notes while engaged in conversational interviewing. An account of such an interview with an eminent academic who had visited Sathya Sai Baba's college at Whitefield, Brindavanam, Bangalore, was sent soon afterwards to the interviewee. These detailed notes were found to be accurate, and only needed supplementing with additional information not originally given. Similarly, having made summaries of utterances of Sathya Sai while listening to his filmed discourses, there has sometimes been an opportunity to see the film again, when the accuracy and reliability of the notes has been verified. In any interview where the information or convictions covered have appeared to be patent of misunderstanding, open to exaggeration, or perhaps to have been misinterpreted by the interviewer, great care has been taken in securing further discussion of the matter from the respondent.

In the text of the thesis, where direct quoting of an interview has occurred, the date of the interview

has been noted in parentheses following the quotation. The dates of interviews are listed at the end (see 'Bibliographic and other Resources').

English has been the medium of the interviews, the majority of them being with devotees below the age of forty who speak it fluently. The president of the satsang, a major informant, speaks English well. On rare occasions, in interviewing an elderly person, the services of a younger satsangi were engaged in the capacity of interpreter. Amongst the non-Gujarati respondents, two of the most informative were Punjabis, thoroughly articulate in English. The rest were devotees or associates born in England.

Sathya Sai Baba is not a Gujarati and his discourses, normally in Telugu, are translated and published in English. His increasingly cosmopolitan renown has meant that internationally distributed resources have become profuse. Many Gujarati devotees are as familiar with the publications of Murphet and Sandweiss as they are with any other devotional literature. The films of Sathya Sai Baba's travels in India and of his addresses, which his Gujarati votaries watch avidly in Bradford, have English sound track, his filmed discourses being dubbed by one of his chief aides.

The bhajans (hymns) sung by the satsang conform to the simple style of shuns (tunes). They are not Gujarati poems. They consist of brief phrases and clauses in a commonly-accessible, Sanskrit-derived Indian religious lingua franca. Since 1981, new bhajans, as they are added to the repertoire in Bradford, tend to be hymns to Sathya Sai Baba written in English.

RELATION TO THE DISCIPLINE OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Methodologically an exercise in phenomenology, this is an essay in the history of religion for it examines a defined religious organism in a particular location during a specific period. I have attempted, despite the impossibility of idealistically fulfilling that objective, to share the phenomenal field (Morgan et al 1979: 531) of the Bradford devotees in the period 1975-85. I have sought to represent and explicate their perceptions in substantial sections of the text.

There is nothing in this study which offends the canons of the definitive statement on the nature of Religionswissenschaft signed by eminent scholars at Marburg in 1960 (Smart 1978a: 171). However, since that statement had a negative as well as a positive purpose, providing a 'rebuff' to those who espouse 'the dialogic method' (Dudley 1977: 22-23), I would like to acknowledge my respect for those who engage in that alternative, but different, task. Perhaps this work may contribute a preamble to dialogue undertaken not only between Christians and devotees of Sathya Sai, but between adherents of many faiths and those who participate in diverse ways in the revitalisation of Hindu religious culture in the late twentieth century. Dialogue has been stimulated in India by work like that of Klostermaier and Griffiths, but in spite of some notable initiatives (cf. King 1985) has been slow to develop them.

Thus, this essay in the history of religion may provide raw material for those who wish to engage in dialogue. What one writes about belief in a contemporary Indian avatar must inevitably, however unexpectedly, throw light upon Christian views of Jesus, Shiite perspectives on the prophet Muhammad, or attitudes towards Joseph Smith amongst the Latter Day Saints. Functions fulfilled by the discourses of Sathya Sai Baba can have implications for our understanding of the significance of the sermons of the Buddha, or of the utterances ascribed by tradition (hadith) to the seal of the Prophets in Islam. One cannot become acquainted with devotees' convictions about the astonishing accomplishments credited to Baba without returning to a consideration of the miracles attributed to Elijah or to Jesus. One is compelled to contemplate again the wonders ascribed to many a pir (spiritual teacher) in South Asian Muslim communities, seeing them in a new light.

For such reasons, this exercise has been undertaken fully recognising that it is only an essay in the history of religion, but acknowledging that it may be leading to something else. The subject matter disposes it to present raw material for an exercise in what we may call a reflective theology. Such a theology allows one tradition, however incongruous it might at first appear, to reflect - that is, to throw light upon and to be illuminated by - another. Such

a discipline would obviously have its pitfalls, and would have to be undertaken with consummate reticence. Nevertheless, it may itself represent a preamble to dialogue between quite diverse or disparate religious traditions. This may be what Pensa meant by arguing that 'historical-comparative reflection as well as phenomenological reflection' should be allowed to 'penetrate ever more into the study of Indian religions' (1972: 102). So long as the comparative dimension is not exalted above the phenomenological, this study may be taken as a preparation for that task.

The effect of becoming familiar with more than one religio-cultural resource is like that of looking in a mirror, albeit a distorting one. For example, one looks in the Bible to find evidence of the miracles attributed to Jesus. However strenuously one might like to exclude all other considerations, to be single-minded, the fact that one has at another time become familiar with even remotely parallel convictions, is reflected also in the corner of that biblical mirror, or in one of its distant reverberating images. The functions fulfilled by the least accurate parallel may sometimes illuminate the most directly addressed phenomenon. Even after allowing for all the contradictions of cultural dichotomies, one's understanding of the role of a Messiah may be affected by a sympathetic acquaintance with the reputation of a contemporary avatar. The functions they fulfil may overlap. One's awareness of the authority of the Bible in the Church can be illuminated by a knowledge of the roles fulfilled by the teaching of an Indian holy man for his devotees. To that extent, this thesis is one half or one part of an exercise in a reflective process (cf. King 1981: 569). It would be intriguing to pursue this preoccupation in greater depth in further research.

The approach in this thesis may be described as holistic. Firstly, it is concerned to address the 'ideas, beliefs, symbols and rites' of the devotees of Sathya Sai Baba in their socio-cultural - including their economic - context. They will not be de-contextualised. It is hoped that in no way, even in so modest a work, however, are the 'theological, spiritual and mystical dimensions of religion' neglected. Deliberately, also, the 'historical-developmental' dimension has been embraced. Thus, while anyone writing on aspects

of Indian religion has to pay tribute to the insight of Eliade in that field, I have also attempted to guard against the weaknesses which have been charged against his analyses (King 1981: 566; cf. Smart 1978: 182).

Secondly, the thesis is retroactively holistic. That is, it is not simply that the subject itself has been approached in that mode, but also that the writer has been engaged by the subject holistically. It is not merely one's interest in the history of religions that has been engaged, but one's concern about psychological issues and about the social functions supplied by religion.

The overall psychological perspective of this work is humanistic for it is fundamentally phenomenological in its approach and is not intended to be reductionist. It is not the intention to eliminate areas of concern which might be relevant, and which would be accessible in practice. The phenomenological approach does, however, of itself eliminate certain areas of interest not immediately accessible to the subjects of the study - such as would, for example, come to the fore in an approach built upon a psychoanalytic base. Insights from alternative analyses, compatible with a phenomenological methodology, have not been ideologically excluded, but are severely contained in their application because of the priority of the phenomenological task and its need for thorough-going execution. Upon this phenomenological base others may raise alternative interpretations. There are, for example, analyses of human behaviour written from post-Freudian perspectives, which employ or argue for a phenomenological sympathy (Erikson 1967: 152-54). In the study of Indian religion, O'Flaherty's hospitality to Freudian insights has been found stimulating and valuable, as have Zimmer's Jungian views. The extent to which Lannoy and Jyoti Sahi have offered constructive and illuminating analyses, having imbibed from both Freud and Jung, has been taken as significant indication of the resources available for a hermeneutic to which the initially phenomenological exploration might, conceivably, lead. It is with an awareness of the analysis that some of these discussions can suggest, that the phenomenological task has been undertaken. Like the

relationship of this task to 'reflective theology', however, the necessity for a thorough-going preliminary phenomenology is paramount., Hopefully, in this work, it has been allowed to remain so.

Behaviourist theories have illuminated the background of this work in a general way, and may be found to have informed some of the analysis through an awareness of the processes of conditioning. Functionalist perspectives represented, for example, in the work of Malinowski and Wilson have been found pertinent without violating phenomenological sensitivity. A general interest in existentialist thought has given the writer respect for the evidence of human experience, both in its absoluteness and in its relativity, so that he has not been unmoved, even after so long a time, by the insights of Nietzsche.

This is offered as a work in the history of religion, in which the phenomenological intention should eliminate subjective construction. The over-riding purpose is to construct, and to clarify, the experience of the satsang itself. It is also hoped that this study will be, amongst other things, a mirror in which members of the satsang can both recognise themselves and see themselves in a more concentrated light. The highest compliment that I can pay the satsangis is to say that their convictions and the practice of their religion have engaged my whole attention, discontinuously, over a period of more than ten years.

TITLE AND CONTENTS

The title of the thesis is self-explanatory, given that 'Sri' is an Indian honorific title and 'Sathya Sai' a reference to the religious leader in whose name the satsang gathers. The term 'community' is too vague for some uses and over-worked because of its imprecision, but it is used in the title in preference to the rendering of satsang as 'fellowship'. It suggests a broader context for consideration. The satsang meets as a fellowship for its puja and its devotional meetings, but when those meetings are over it still coheres as a community. The commitment of its members to each other as well as to Sathya Sai Baba provide it with a more complex

network of interactions. Another option would have been to use the term 'centre' in the title, which has its own usage amongst Baba's devotees (see below, 1.3). That, however, would have suggested a different focus: more on the location of the meetings than on the people who meet there and their reasons for doing so.

Soon after coming to live in inner Bradford in 1974, I discovered that there was a house in the next street where, according to my Hindu informant, 'Indian prayer meetings' were held. I had earlier undertaken post-graduate work at Princeton Theological Seminary, New Jersey, U.S.A., relating to religion in India. In 1968, I had visited India. From 1971 onwards I pursued academic interests relating to Sikhism, and to Islam in South Asia. In 1974, in Bradford, I was looking for a way of becoming familiar with the ways in which Hinduism is practised in the United Kingdom. The 'prayer meetings', therefore, sounded intriguing. Initially I assumed that I had been informed about meetings in the mainstream of the Indian bhakti tradition. I soon found that I had stumbled upon something even more fascinating. My first introduction to the family who live in that house, and my first attendance at a meeting of the satsang there, marked the beginning of the encounters which have provided the primary evidence for this thesis.

It became clear that it was important to understand the reasons why a fellowship like the satsang had been formed, and how it had developed over a period of fifteen years. It was evident that its beliefs and practices defined its place in a spectrum of religious phenomena. Adequate attention to them would be essential in order to understand the functions that the satsang supplied. Thus the research leading to this account began, and the specific foci in the title became determined.

The contents of the thesis are divided into eight chapters, followed by a conclusion. Notes, appendices and glossary, and a list of bibliographic and other resources complete the work. The first two chapters define the background and the activities characteristic

of the satsang. Following these the discussion focusses on the place where its worship is held, and on some of the implications of its refurbishment. Two annual festivals are then analysed and these are followed by an examination of the implications of the way in which the satsang has evolved.

The first chapter identifies the context in which the satsang has emerged, its predominantly ethnic character, and the cognate organisations to which it relates in Bradford, elsewhere in the United Kingdom and in India. Subsequently, part of that chapter (1.3) has been expanded elsewhere for publication in a symposium on the preservation of the Hindu religious tradition in the United Kingdom (Burghart, 1987). Chapter 2 examines the regular and the occasional activities of the satsang in Bradford.

In chapters 3 and 4, there is a preoccupation with the temple the mandir) of the satsang, which focusses on its most salient feature: the devotional pictures displayed there. Special attention is paid here to the task of iconology. Chapter 3 analyses the links between the most significant of the mandir's devotional pictures and the age-old heritage of Hindu mythology. Chapter 4 clarifies the theological implications of the pictures which have a more recent or a contemporary reference.

Two festivals are then discussed. Chapter 5 examines the significance of the observance of Mahashivaratri within the satsang, and its far-reaching implications. In chapter 6, the celebration of the birthday of Sathya Sai Baba is similarly analysed.

The last two chapters examine the evolution of the satsang. This forces one to address, in chapter 7, the issue of the relation between Baba's reputation for paranormal powers and the attraction of residents in Bradford to a belief in him. In chapter 8, the role and influence of young people in the growth of the satsang comes under consideration: a focus which introduces discussion of the most recent developments in the life of the community.

The conclusion provides an opportunity to complete the analysis of the implications of the evidence surveyed: dwelling on the social and religious

significance of the data, and relating it to a broader analysis of religious cultures. The conclusion also includes a recapitulation of the thesis and an indication of some of the areas which suggest themselves for further research.

The appendices supplement the thesis with ancillary resources, illuminating aspects of the main text but too detailed or peripheral to permit incorporation within it.

There has been no shortage of material to provide the substance for this thesis. On the contrary, substantial work has been done which it has not proved possible to include because of the need to curtail length. The raw material for a whole chapter on syncretism, and for a detailed theological and mythological analysis of the bhajans sung at a typical devotional evening, has had to be allowed only to illuminate the general discussion. Similarly, further detailed work on devotee's perceptions of the reputedly paranormal powers of Sathya Sai Baba has not been developed for inclusion in the final account.

The Fellowship: its Origin, Context, Membership and Affiliations

The focus of this study is one of the sub-groups within the Hindu population in the city of Bradford. It is a satsang, a religious fellowship whose practices and beliefs arise out of the Indian cultural heritage. The heads of families within the satsang, and their wives, migrated to the United Kingdom in the late 1960s or afterwards. They came either directly from India, or from Uganda and Tanzania, where substantial Indian settlements had been made in earlier decades. During the formative years of the satsang there have been only a few peripheral associates of the fellowship, and two integral members, who have not been of Indian ethnic origin. Therefore, to understand the evolution of the satsang and to define its social context, one has to be familiar with the process whereby the settlement of Hindu communities in Britain has taken place.

1.1 THE MIGRATION OF HINDUS TO THE UNITED KINGDOM

Migration to the United Kingdom by Hindus has occurred in five phases:

<u>Period</u>	<u>Motivation for migration</u>	<u>Numbers of Hindus involved</u>
Pre-1950	Opportunities for employment in Britain attracted a small number of professionally qualified Hindus. From 1941 onwards a significant number of Indian seamen were drawn from major ports to locations of munitions factories and other wartime	Numbers rose from a negligible figure to several hundreds only.

industries where labour was needed. Thus, small clusters of Hindus became residentially established in several British industrial centres. (Dahya 1974: 84).

1950-66 The post-war economic boom in Britain promised apparently well-paid work to males from South Asia. Firms, such as those engaged in the textile industry in West Yorkshire, sought to recruit essential labour overseas (cf. Fevre 1984:3). Readiness to serve in low-status unskilled employment was a pre-requisite. Thus, there was potential for supplementing the income of the extended family in India through remittances from relatives working in the United Kingdom. This was the stimulus for a process of chain migration, exclusively male at first, initiated by the seamen who had already settled here. By the late 1950s whole families were present in areas offering such opportunities. (Desai 1963: 8).

At least 8,000 resident in the United Kingdom in the early 1960s. (Desai 1963: 19).

For an increasing number of qualified migrants, the motivation was the prospect of professional employment in the United Kingdom.

1967-68 Government policies of Africanisation in Tanzania and Kenya were justifiably perceived by the communities of South Asian origin in

At least 12,400 from Kenya alone in this period. (Tinker 1977: 166, 169;

those lands as hostile towards them and boding ill for their future. Their right to British citizenship prompted a substantial majority to view Britain as the next, an unanticipated, stage in their migration. They came as families.

D.J. Smith 1976: 12; Michaelson 1979: 351).

Increasingly, in this period and afterwards, the wives and children of earlier male migrants came to join their husbands and fathers.

1969-73

Mounting tension in Uganda reached a climax with the expulsion of South Asians from that land in 1972-73. Again, whole families, wherever it was possible, fled together from an increasingly threatening situation.

Approximately 18,000 from Uganda in 1972-73 alone.

In sum, approximately 50,000 Hindus who had been born' in Kenya, Uganda or Tanzania, settled in Britain by the mid-1970s. (Tinker 1977: 155-166; D.J. Smith 1976: 12).

1974 onwards

The main phases of substantial migration being over, due to changes in legislation, there has followed a period of consolidation within the British Hindu communities. During these years some increase has been due to the settlement of dependent relatives joining members of their families here or in fulfilment of betrothal vows.

A total community of approximately 307,000 in 1977. (Knott and Toon 1982: 21).

With the exception of the first two phases of predominantly male migration, the natural increase in families has been a basic factor in the growth of Hindu communities in Britain.

Seventy percent of British Hindus are ethnically Gujarati (Knott 1985: 9). They derive originally from the province of Gujarat in western India, share its regional sub-culture and speak the Gujarati language as mother tongue. They distinguish themselves from a minority of British Muslims who are also of Gujarati origin. A further 15% of the British Hindu population is ethnically Punjabi. Originating in the Punjab of north-western India, they are united by its distinctive culture and speak Punjabi as mother tongue. They distinguish themselves, but sometimes not radically, from the great majority of Punjabis in Britain who are, in fact, Sikhs. The remaining 15% of Britain's Hindus are ethnically diverse. There is a significant - but sometimes widely scattered - representation of, for example, Bengalis, Tamils and Maharashtrians.

Thus, out of approximately 307,000 Hindus living in Britain in 1977, nearly 215,000 were Gujaratis. It is to this major section of the British Hindu population that this study relates most pertinently. The satsang in Bradford which has provided the focus for the thesis is composed almost entirely of Gujaratis. Certain individuals from amongst the city's Gujarati Hindus founded the satsang, provided it with an identifiable location in a family home, and have given it a structure, an ethos, and a cultural and theological orientation.

1.2 THE SETTLEMENT OF GUJARATI HINDUS IN BRADFORD

The first Gujaratis to settle in Bradford were amongst the South Asian seamen who moved to the city in the pioneering phase of settlement in the 1940s which later gave rise to a process of chain migration. The minute book of the Bhartiya Mandal, a (Gujarati) 'Indian Association' still functioning in Bradford, shows that Gujarati Hindus were present in sufficient numbers in 1957 to warrant the formation of an ethnic organisation. Gujarati Muslims, in contrast, appear to have formed a peripheral minority. The comparative numerical standing of the two sections of the community

is confirmed by accounts of inquiries made in the city in 1958-60 by Desai (1963: 8,90), and by further statistics compiled in 1964 by Dahya (1974: 87).

It is Desai's Indian Immigrants in Britain (1963) that provides the only evidence relating to the total number of Gujaratis living in Bradford that pre-dates the national census of 1961. He indicates that in 1958 or in the early months of 1959 there were 317, of whom 254 were adults and 63 children. Later, in February 1960, he found that the number of Gujarati adults in the city had risen to approximately 350. In 1964, Dahya found that there were only three houses in the city that were owned and occupied by Gujarati Muslims. Thus one may argue that in 1958-59 there must also have been a great preponderance of Gujarati Hindus to Muslims, in a ratio of at least 7:1. That suggests that there were no less than 277 Hindus in the total Gujarati population of 317. Allowance can then be made for that ratio, and for the presence of children - a little more than a year later - in the same proportion (4:1) as Desai found in 1958-59. This suggests that in February 1960 there were altogether 438 Gujaratis living in Bradford and that 383 of them were Hindus.

It is clear, in the statistics offered by Desai, that the Gujarati Hindu population of Bradford increased by more than one hundred in a period of little more than twelve months prior to February 1960. It appears very probable that there was at least a similar increase in the following year, for there is no reason to believe that the migration had diminished. Thus, at the time of the census in 1961, one would expect that there were at least 490 Gujarati Hindus resident in the city. The census classified the population according to place of birth. Thus it is known that, amongst 295,768 persons resident in Bradford at that time, there were 1,512 who had been born in India. The number of inhabitants who had originated in East Africa was negligible.

Unpublished information, made available by Ramindar Singh in 1977, after he had analysed the South Asian surnames in Bradford's Electoral Register in preparation for the publication of The Sikh Community in Bradford (1978), suggested that the proportion of

Gujarati to other Hindus in Bradford was in a ratio of approximately 4:1. The indications were that it had been so for some time. One can surmise, therefore, that the figure of 490 Gujarati Hindus resident in the city in 1961 represents about four-fifths of the total Hindu population at that time: a sum of 613 Hindus. That figure suggests that out of the total of 1,512 Indian-born inhabitants there were 899 non-Hindus living in Bradford in the year in question. Of those, according to proportions already justified, 61 were Gujarati Muslims. Thus there were 838 Indian-born residents in 1961 who were neither Hindu nor Gujarati. That figure includes the city's Sikh community. Central to the discussion from this point onwards is the question of the relative numerical strengths of the Hindu and Sikh populations in Bradford.

The figure of 838 Indian-born residents in Bradford in 1961 who were neither Hindu nor Gujarati, embraces several groups. It includes Indian Muslims from regions other than Gujarat, people born in India but ethnically not Indian, the small number of Indian Christians, and most significant of all, the Sikhs. This statistical exercise leaves no room for a Sikh community substantially greater in size than the total number of Hindus in Bradford at that time, since the marginal minorities might have accounted for up to 200 people. It appears, therefore, that the Hindus were present with the Sikhs in approximately equal strength. That is noteworthy, for in the country as a whole the Sikhs greatly outnumbered the Hindus in the early 1960s (Desai 1963: 19). Nationally, it was later that the balance was redressed, largely through the preponderance of Hindus amongst those who were expelled from East Africa (D.J. Smith 1976: 12; Michaelson 1979: 351). By 1977, these two religious communities were represented in Britain in comparable numbers (Knott and Toon 1982: 21).

It is now clear that in Bradford the approximately equal representation of Hindus and Sikhs has been a long-term feature of the situation, going back to 1961 or even earlier. The explanation is that from the commencement of substantial South Asian migration to this country, and in accord with patterns of chain migration universally, Bradford became one of the centres of Hindu in-flow. The original selection of

the city by individual Gujaratis had been fortuitous, but it became significant in terms of the distribution of population. The city has never manifested the characteristics of certain other centres of South Asian settlement in the United Kingdom - such, for example, as neighbouring Leeds - where the estimates of observers have shown consistently that there has been, and is, a much larger population of Sikhs than Hindus (Knott 1986: 22). Bradford became one of the centres for Hindu settlement, as Ashton-under-Lyne, Bolton, Preston, Coventry, Leicester and parts of London also eventually became. It is the numerical strength of the Gujaratis in the city which provides the key to the interpretation of the statistics which indicate that Bradford is a location where the Hindu population is at least approximately equal in size to the Sikh community.

Knowledge of the relative strengths of the several South Asian ethnic and religio-cultural groups in Bradford also facilitates the interpretation of the data supplied by Dahya regarding the situation in 1964. At that time there were 1,265 houses 'owned and occupied by Asian immigrants' (1974: 86). Dahya described 983 of them as 'Pakistani houses'. Curiously, he included within that category the houses owned by Gujarati Muslims and a substantial number of 'Bangladeshi houses'. This leads one to conclude that Dahya was classifying all these houses, somewhat broadly, according to the religious affiliation of their owners. That is, the 983 houses represent the sum total of the Pakistani and other South Asian Muslim households in Bradford in 1964. On that basis, his figures yield the information that there were 282 houses in Bradford that were owned by non-Muslim South Asians - that is, by Hindus and Sikhs and peripheral non-Muslim minorities of Indian ethnicity. For that period, a factor of six is appropriate for deriving an approximate figure for the size of the Hindu and Sikh populations in Bradford from basic information about house ownership. That is a slightly higher factor than is suggested by the evidence for comparable groups in the 1970s (D.J. Smith 1976: 204; Singh 1980:10, 11).

Dahya's evidence thus establishes that there were approximately 1,692 non-Muslim persons of Indian

ethnicity resident in Bradford in 1964. If one makes an allowance of almost one hundred to cover the presence of peripheral minorities, and divides the remainder equally between Hindus and Sikhs, as suggested by the earlier evidence, it is not implausible to suggest that in 1964 there were approximately 800 Hindus resident in Bradford. In accordance with the proportions already indicated, 640 of them would have been Gujaratis.

The growth of the Gujarati Hindu population in Bradford from 1941 to 1964 had thus been gradual but not spectacular. It was after 1965, and especially in the period of increasing tension in East Africa from February 1967 (Michaelson 1979: 351) that the Gujarati Hindu presence in the city increased most notably. Statistics, given below, relating to the owner-occupation of houses in Bradford by people of South Asian origin illustrate that point very clearly. They also suggest that a significant proportion of the South Asians in the city, coming from East Africa, did not wait for the fiercest opposition to the South Asians in Africa to arise in 1972, but came earlier in anticipation of it.

Year	Houses
1964	1,265
1963	1,398
1966	1,565
1970	4,250

Table 1.1 NUMBER OF HOUSES IN BRADFORD OWNED AND OCCUPIED BY SOUTH ASIANS: 1964-1970
(Dahya 1974: 86, 115)

In 1964, the proportion of the 1,265 houses cited above which were owned and occupied by Muslims, as distinct from Hindus, Sikhs and others, was in an approximate ratio of 10:3 (Dahya 1974: 87). If that is taken as the base for the analysis of the figure cited for 1970, then it would suggest that at that time there were approximately 980 houses in Bradford chiefly owned and occupied by Hindus and Sikhs but also by less numerous non-Muslim South Asian minorities. An allowance of approximately twenty households should be made for the last-named group. Equal division of

the remainder between Hindus and Sikhs, on the grounds already established, *suggests* that there were about 480 houses owned and occupied by Hindus in Bradford at that time. That indicates a Hindu population of approximately 2,880, with a Gujarati majority of about 2,224. On other grounds, a total Hindu population of nearly 3,000 in Bradford in 1970 can be shown to be not an implausible figure, since the total immigrant community from countries designated 'New Commonwealth' has been estimated to have numbered 21,000 in the city in the year in question (Dahya 1974: 90).1

After 1970, further increase in the population of South Asian derivation in Bradford took place. The threatening circumstances for South Asians in Uganda are reflected in the statistics given for immigrants resident in the city in 1971 (Dahya 1974: 115). There had been a growth of 42.85% from 21,000 to 30,000 in a single year. If the Hindu population itself had increased by 42.85%, that would allow for another 1,234 Hindus resident in Bradford, making a total of 4,114 in 1971. That figure would include 3,292 Gujaratis. However, because of the Ugandan emergency, the growth of the Hindu population in the city then may have exceeded that percentage. At least 62% of the South Asians who left East Africa to settle in the United Kingdom were Hindu, and it is possible that the proportion was much higher (D.J. Smith 1976: 12; Michaelson 1979: 351). Thus, in Bradford, only 15% of the Sikh community migrated from East Africa, whereas in one sub-section of the Gujarati Hindu population in the city 79% of the families came from that region (Chavda 1983). There were approximately 5,000 Sikh residents in Bradford by 1977 (Singh 1980: 5). So far as the Hindus are concerned, the growth of their numbers must have been less gradual and they may have reached a total of 5,000 several years earlier.

Bradford's Gujarati Hindus have affinity with the parallel community in Bolton, forty miles to the south-west. The two communities maintain strong links. Research in Bolton has established that in that town there was a continuing in-flow of about 800 South Asians per year from 1970 until 1976. A high proportion of those migrants were Gujarati Hindus (Hahlo 1980: 296, 304). Thus, there are indications that from a base of 4,114 in 1971, the Bradford Hindu

minority may have reached a size of approximately 5,000 already by 1973. As with the Sikhs, the peak of migration was then past Singh 1980: 5). The full process of migration, however, was still not over because dependent relatives came to settle later.

The census taken in 1981 indicates that in the enlarged Bradford Metropolitan District there were 6,379 residents who had been born in India, and 1,733 who had been born in East Africa (City of Bradford Metropolitan Council 1982: 2). The totals relate to a larger administrative area than that covered in the figures previously cited. That, however, does not invalidate their being called into consideration.

In 1977-78, the distribution of South Asian surnames in Bradford's Electoral Register was, as in the initial stages of the migration, strongly concentrated in specific wards (Singh 1980: 6). There was only a marginal number of South Asians living in outer suburbs. In 1981, it is apparent that there were still very few Hindu families resident in areas outside the old city boundary (Ram 1984: 1, 40-44). Any movement of Hindu families from the city to towns and villages nearby, by the time of the census, would be accommodated in a comparison between figures for the old city of Bradford in the earlier statistics and the 1981 figures for the enlarged area. The town of Keighley is included in the new Metropolitan District. There is a substantial South Asian Muslim presence there, but it is not paralleled by any corresponding Hindu community in that town or anywhere else in the enlarged administrative unit. There is also no evidence of any substantial increase in the South Asian population from outside the area in this period.

There was only a negligible number of people who were born in East Africa and who were not of South Asian derivation resident in Bradford in the period in question. Thus one can take the 1981 census figure for East African-born inhabitants of the city as constituted according to the proportions already established for the religious affiliations of South Asians coming from that region. The census may thus be taken to suggest that in 1981 there were at least 1,074 Hindus living in Bradford who had been born in East African territories.

It has already been shown that the proportion of Gujarati Hindus to Gujarati Muslims residing in Bradford in the period under consideration can be represented approximately in a ratio of 7:1, with a ratio of 4:1 representing the numerical strength of Gujarati Hindus as against Punjabi and other Hindus. Those proportions, combined with the approximate numerical parity between Hindus and Sikhs in the city, provide the base for a further calculation. They suggest that the Indian-born residents can be divided into sub-groups, the Sikhs and Hindus claiming approximately 45% of the total number each, still allowing adequately for non-Gujarat Indian Muslims and peripheral minorities. Such a calculation indicates that 2,871 Indian-born Hindus should be added to those from East Africa, making a total of 3,945. Further marginal accommodation has to be made for a small number of Hindu families drawn from other places of birth - for example, Singapore and Fiji - known to have been resident in Bradford in the late 1970s and afterwards. Thus a total of approximately 4,000 overseas-born Hindus resident in Bradford in 1981 emerges as a reliable estimate. That figure enables one to approach the final issue: the approximate number of Hindus of Gujarati ethnicity, irrespective of places of birth, living in Bradford in 1982.

One has first to estimate the proportion of British-born to foreign-born Hindus in Bradford in the census year, 1981. The latter were still in the majority, while the former made up an increasingly significant percentage of the community. Therefore, the figure of 4,000 overseas-born Hindu residents in 1981 suggests that the total population of Hindus in the city must have been less than double that number - a ceiling of approximately 7,500. Allowing for non-Gujaratis as a minority of one fifth amongst the Hindus, one then reaches an estimate of 6,000 for the maximum size of the Gujarati Hindu population in Bradford in 1981.

An eminent leader of the Gujaratis in the city declared in 1982 that there were at least 1,000 Gujarati Hindu households in Bradford. He was accustomed to multiply that figure by a factor of 5 to reach an approximate minimum number of individuals. That indicated a minimum of 5,000 Gujaratis in a Hindu population of at least 6,250. Thus one can argue that in 1982 the number of Hindus of

Gujarati ethnicity resident in Bradford lay between the upper limit of 6,000 (related to the census of 1981) and the lower limit of 5,000, suggested by a Gujarati leader. Avoiding the periphery in relation to both sets of estimates, one can therefore calculate that in a total Hindu population of at least 7,000 in Bradford in 1982, there were approximately 5,600 Gujaratis.²

Table 1.2 and figure 1.1 represent the growth in the Gujarati Hindu population in Bradford between 1958 and 1982. At the mid-point in that chronological development, the satsang of the devotees of Sathya Sai Baba in the city was born. All the statistics given in appendix 3 relating to fluctuation, and ultimately to growth, in attendance at the activities of the satsang relates to the period from 1977 onwards, when increase in the size of the community through primary migration has ceased.

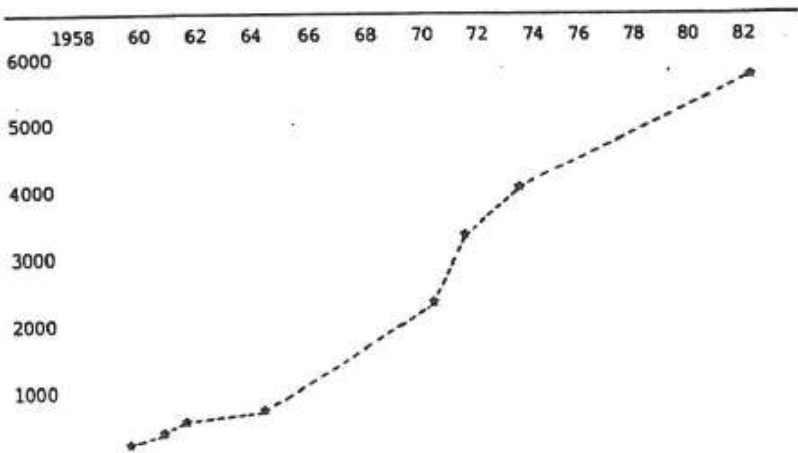


Figure 1.1: GROWTH OF THE GUJARATI HINDU POPULATION IN BRADFORD, 1958-82.

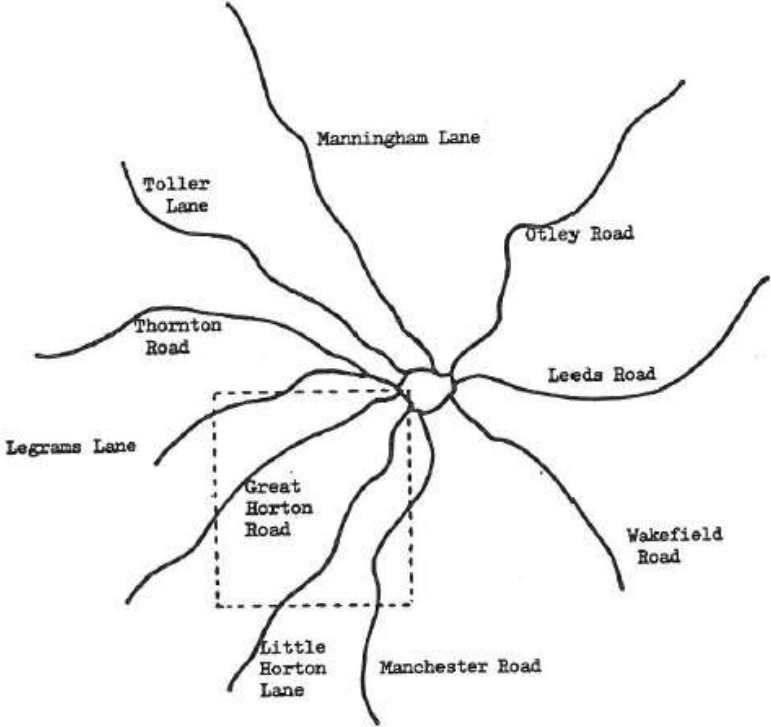
Date	Hindus	Gujarati Hindus
1958-59	-	277
February 1960	-	383
1961	562	490
1964	800	640
1970	2,880	2,224
1971	4,114	3,292
1973 or soon after	5,000	4,000
1982	7,000	5,600

Table 1.2: STATISTICS OF GROWTH OF THE HINDU AND GUJARATI HINDU POPULATIONS IN BRADFORD 1958-1982

1.3 THE EVOLUTION OF GUJARATI HINDU ORGANISATIONS IN BRADFORD3

There were fewer than 300 Gujarati Hindus living in Bradford when the first community organisation to serve their needs was founded on 15 August 1957. The minute book of the Bhartiya Mandal (Indian Association) reveals that its original constitution was framed at that meeting. It was revised and embellished on 9 November 1958. The formation of the organisation was initiated by members of several Gujarati castes. It is apparent, from a record of the names of the subscribing members for the year 1958-59, that the, society did not embrace Punjabis or other non-Gujaratis. The founding Hindus, however, were joined - at least in the early stages of the development of their organisation - by some Gujarati Muslims, constrained by the ties of ethnicity and regional loyalty. The deeds held by the secretary of the association establish that the premises currently owned by the society, 14 Sawrey Place, Bradford 5, were purchased from a George Katkov on 30 December 1959. Its location (map 1.2, no.1) is in an area which was once the centre of Polish, Ukrainian and Russian migration into Bradford. There the first

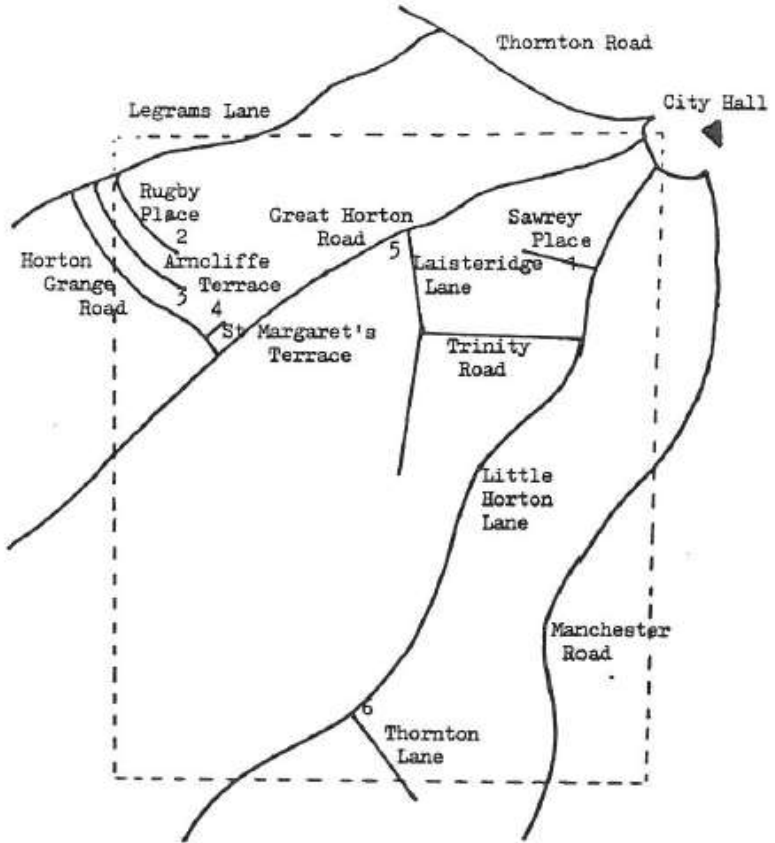
South Asian settlements were also made (Dahya 1974: 84). The period between August 1957 and December 1959 was therefore a time of formative community activity amongst Gujaratis in the city.



Map 1.1: CITY OF BRADFORD, GENERAL LAY-OUT

Great Horton Road has come to be the main axis of the Gujarati settlement.

The broken line corresponds to the identical demarcation on map 1.2, and indicates the location of map 3.1.



Map 1.2: BRADFORD, WEST AND SOUTH-WEST OF THE CITY CENTRE

(indicating the locations of temples and other premises in the order in which they are mentioned in 1.3)

- 1 The Bhartiya Mandal, 14 Sawrey Place
- 2 The Hindu Swyam Sevak Sangh, 52 Rugby Place
- 3 The Shri Jalaram Shakti Mandal, 148 Arncliffe Terrace

- 4 The first premises of the Hindu Cultural Society of Bradford, in St. Margaret's Terrace
- 5 The Sri Sathya Sai Centre, 10 Laisteridge Lane
- 6 The Shree Hindu Temple of the Shree Prajapati Association, Thornton Lane

The broken line indicates the location of map 3.1.

The stated objectives of the founders of the Bhartiya Mandal were that it should promote mutual co-operation within the Gujarati community, and provide encouragement, aid and support for Gujaratis in an alien context. It would organise social, cultural and religious events which would affirm the Indian identity and Hindu culture of its founders and their families. More specifically, it would endorse their Gujarati ethnicity. Hindu festivals were celebrated at its premises. Indian film-shows were sponsored, cinemas being hired for such occasions. Variety programmes were organised at the small theatre in Bradford's Central Library, adjacent to the area of settlement. Gujarati language classes for children were held at the house in Sawrey Place.

From the mid-1970s onwards, serious deterioration in the condition of adjoining properties in Sawrey Place marked the decline of the neighbourhood into decrepitude. The process was exacerbated by the City Council's indecision over whether the street was to be preserved or demolished. Their own premises were thus decreasingly used by the Bhartiya Mandal from the late 1970s onwards. In the summer of 1981 a decision was made that 14 Sawrey Place should no longer be used for Gujarati language classes, because it was felt to be too dangerous for children. Bi-monthly or quarterly business meetings were still held there, however. In November 1981 it was used for the celebration of Navaratri, a major festival. By 1983 the house was abandoned altogether as a place for meetings, as it underwent the process of repair.

In comparison with its original activities, the Bhartiya Mandal has become a shadow of its former self.

Yet it has not become totally defunct, and its officers are concerned that it should remain functional and intend to revive it as soon as the time is opportune. The state of its premises will be a major factor. From 1981, the Shree Prajapati Association - a later foundation - has taken over the Gujarati language classes for children that were once held in Sawrey Place. The intention is that the classes will be rehabilitated in their original location eventually.

Some of the above evidence runs counter to the testimony of Desai (1963: 88-91) regarding the origins of Gujarati community organisations in Bradford - most notably in respect of the date given for the foundation of the Bhartiya Mandal. Desai asserts that it was founded only in October 1959.⁴ The secretary of the Bhartiya Mandal, perusing for the first time in 1982 what Desai had written, stated that Desai must have been describing the spate of activity that preceded the purchase of the house in Sawrey Place in December 1959. He considered that R.K. Patel, one of the four original trustees who signed the deeds for the purchase of the Sawrey Place premises, could have been the anonymous grocer who became the association's first president in Desai's account. Since there appears to have been only one house purchased by Gujarati Hindus in Bradford for such purposes, it does appear that Desai corroborates the other evidence to a considerable extent and supplies additional detail. His tribute to the extensive development of a library scheme for lending Gujarati books, even to borrowers in other parts of the United Kingdom, confirms the cultural intentions manifested in the minute book of the Bhartiya Mandal. His testimony to the substantial use of the social facilities provided by the association's premises corroborates the intended supportive and associative role that is also foreshadowed there. Desai, therefore, provides further evidence of intensity of activity, directed towards community organisation, amongst Gujarati Hindus in Bradford in the late 1950s. In respect of the date of the foundation of the Bhartiya Mandal and of his ignoring all that happened prior to October 1959, however, Desai's account is misleading. There is no evidence that there was another organisation, similar to the Bhartiya Mandal, of which he might have been writing.

In 1966 a branch of the organisation known as the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, the Hindu Self-help Union, was formed in Bradford. It is an association particularly active amongst young people, often exclusively males. In India its activities sometimes have strong political overtones, but amongst Gujaratis in East Africa and in the United Kingdom the political significance is neutralised by the transmuted context. In Bradford in 1980, the Sangh was said to have approximately 350 members of all ages. Its activities are directed resolutely towards character training, especially in terms of self-reliance and team endeavour. Self-discipline is emphasised; yoga is taught. The leaders of the Swayamsevak Sangh see themselves as working to build good character in the young, and to impart moral attitudes and upright behaviour. They have fostered traditional Indian games amongst young people, and other sports activities which require a minimum of manufactured equipment. Religious practice is not central to the activities of the Sangh in Bradford, but it has clearly attempted to sustain the culture and values of a Hindu community in a form adapted to the conditions of migration. At first many of its activities were held in private homes, or in rented buildings, or in the halls of schools loaned by the local authority. It has acquired a substantial library of Indian books. On 8 August 1982, the Sangh's own premises, 52 Rugby Place, Bradford 7 (map 1.2, no.2) were officially opened. In August 1984, a major international Hindu event, a convention for 2,000 young men of Indian extraction from all over Europe, was held in the city. It was organised on behalf of the United Kingdom body to which it is affiliated by the local branch of the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh.

Thus the impetus towards the articulation of Hindu culture in Bradford did not focus initially on the foundation of a temple, but rather on a wider network of social and cultural concerns. In the formation of an Indian Association for Gujaratis in 1957, and the emergence of the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh in 1966, one can see that the celebration of festivals and other specifically religious occasions was embraced within the total web of community affairs.

There has been a tendency within the other substantial South Asian minorities in the city, the Muslims and the Sikhs, to move more directly and speedily towards the establishment of public places of worship. This different aspect of the Hindu response to the experience of migration arises from an age-old Indian emphasis on personal and familial devotion, with only limited use of temples for congregational gatherings for worship.

From the beginning of Indian settlement in Bradford, individual Hindus and Hindu households worshipped separately, and only more recently - in addition - in temples. As the settlement grew, groups of kin or neighbours, friends or workmates, associated together occasionally for worship. One such initially unstructured group identified itself more formally in July or August 1967. At that time, a householder of the Prajapati caste turned the cellar of his home in Arncliffe Terrace, Bradford 7 (map 1.2, no.3), into a semi-public shrine. He gathered around himself and his family a cluster of devotees of Jalaram Bapa (1799-1881), a renowned Gujarati holy man (Rajdev 1966). They met, and still meet, as a bhajan mandal - a devotional circle - to sing hymns and offer prayers every Saturday evening. Their community is identified as the Shri Jalaram Shakti Mandal, the Circle of Saint (or Lord) Jalaram and his Consort.

One year later, the Hindu Cultural Society of Bradford was formed. At its inception it could have competed with the Bhartiya Mandal for the overall allegiance of the Gujarati population of the city. Its first premises, a house in St. Margaret's Terrace, Bradford 7 (map 1.2, no.4) were within the area of the expanding Gujarati settlement. In 1974, however, it took new premises in Leeds Road, Bradford 3 (map 1.1). The society appears to have signified thereby that, although all-inclusive in its intention, it was providing primarily for the needs of the Punjabi and other non-Gujarati Hindus (Bowen 1981: 46). Leeds Road, on the opposite side of the city centre from the Gujarati settlement, is the arterial road around which the Punjabi Hindu and Sikh communities have settled. There, on 3 August 1974, images of Radha and Krishna were installed with due rites and ceremonies, signalling the establishment of a ritually

consecrated Hindu temple for the first time in the history of Bradford's Indian minorities.

By 1984, a substantial adjoining warehouse had also been purchased by the Hindu Cultural Society and was being converted to new uses. That initiative signalled that the society was poised to develop a commitment to social and welfare work not only for all Bradford's Hindus, but also for the diverse community resident in the Leeds Road area. Amongst others, the scattered Bengali Hindu population of West Yorkshire has come to make substantial use of its premises on special occasions - for example, for the festival of Durga Puja. Of the Gujarati Hindus, the Shri Jalaram Shakti Mandal has maintained close links with the society.

More than two years after the formation of the Shri Jalaram Shakti Mandal, a further development in the religious sub-culture of the Gujarati Hindu community in Bradford took place. On 26 February 1970, in a flat occupied by a family of Patels in Manchester Road, Bradford 5 (map 1.1), a regular weekly devotional meeting was commenced. As in the other case, this was a bhajan mandal: a semi-formal gathering for the singing of hymns, leading to the celebration of arati, a brief ritual act of worship much-loved in Hindu families and creative of social bonds. This particular weekly event marked the formation of a satsang of a very specific type: it was, and is, devoted to the worship of one who is known as Sri or Bhagavan (Lord) Sathya Sai Baba, a contemporary charismatic religious teacher. Baba is regarded by his devotees as an avatar, a 'descent' or manifestation of God. He teaches that he stands in succession from an earlier divine manifestation, Sai Baba of Shirdi (d. 1918), whose name he has taken, and that there is a third in the succession yet to come, Prema Sai Baba (Kasturi 1980a: 178). Sathya Sai Baba's ashram, Prashanti Nilayam ('abode of supreme peace'), is near Puttaparthi, Andhra Pradesh. Baba was born, in that south Indian village, to a Raju family. He was given the name Sathyanarayana ('Narayana the true': a dedication to Vishnu). Details of Baba's life and teaching are given in appendices 1 and 2.

The Patel family in whose flat the Sri Sathya Sai

satsang first constituted itself later moved to a house in Laisteridge Lane, Bradford 7 (map 1.2, no.5). The satsang transferred with them to the new house, now called 'the Sai Baba Mandir (Temple)', 'the Sri Sathya Sai Centre', 'the Sai Mandir' or 'the Sai Centre'. In this case, the term mandir should not be taken to suggest the status of a building that has been consecrated with Brahminical (priestly) ritual and invested with marble images acquired from India. When used of the Sai Mandir, the term is a title of respect not ritually but functionally and pragmatically acquired. It denotes the role which this house exercises for a sub-section of the Gujarati community in Bradford. The designation 'Sai Centre' is a term that has significance for devotees in the national and international associations to which they are affiliated, suggesting a unit of complex organisational structure (of. Taylor 1985 : 10).

The foundation of the Shri Jalaram Shakti Mandal in Bradford in 1967, and the later formation of the satsang of the devotees of Sathya Sai Baba, are significant in the history of the Gujarati Hindu population in the city. They marked the emergence within that ethnic community of structured alternatives to the religio-cultural performances organised at first by the Bhartiya Mandal and additionally, after 1968, by the Hindu Cultural Society. Their inception meant that there were religious events within the cultural life of Bradford's Gujarati Hindus that were neither sponsored by large associations acting on behalf of the community, nor organised by purely spontaneous groups for visits such as those of itinerant priests and teachers.

In the case of the Shri Jalaram Shakti Mandel, the religious activities offered were, and are, from the perspective of received Gujarati tradition, unremarkable. Reverence for Jalaram is a well-established element in the culture of Gujarat, and his effigy appears to be found in the homes of almost all Gujarati Hindus. His picture takes its place naturally in their communal religious observances. Jalaram himself was a Gujarati. Outside Gujarat and the Gujarati communities of the diaspora, he is hardly known. The same cannot be said of Sathya Sai Baba. Therefore in the alternative religio-cultural

activities offered by Baba's devotees, distinctive features set their functions apart.

Sathya Sai is not a Gujarati. In no way does he symbolise Gujarati ethnicity. His following is India-wide and increasingly international. His cult has a tangential, and not an integral, relationship to the mainstream of the regional cultural tradition of Gujarat. Devotion offered in his name attracts attention to itself because his effigy and his cult still appear exotic to many Gujaratis. Furthermore, Sathya Sai Baba is a contemporary guru. His activities, and his claims for himself, sometimes arouse controversy. Despite their attraction for an increasingly wide following, they elicit bitter opposition and cynical rejection from many. Therefore the affirmation of faith in him is sometimes vehemently made. Thus, in the formation of the satsang of Sathya Sai's devotees in Bradford in 1970, a group of Gujarati Hindus was signalling its commitment to a form of religious practice that, if not actually heterodox from the perspective of received Gujarati piety, was not totally homogeneous with it. The alternative religio-cultural performances that this sub-group was making available in the city were perceived by many Gujaratis as tangential to their ethnic tradition, even if integrally related to the wider Hindu heritage as a whole.

It is thus of interest that the Shri Jalaram Shakti Mandal has never achieved the same prominence in the cultural life of the Gujarati Hindu community in Bradford as has the Sri Sathya Sai Centre. This lack of prominence could, of course, be a function of the former's unremarkable articulation of received regional piety. It is also possible that an additional cause is the reluctance on the part of the leaders of the Shri Jalaram Shakti Mandal to become involved in the more secular aspects of Gujarati social life. That contrasts with the readiness of the leaders of the Sri Sathya Sai Centre to involve its members in aspects of the general cultural activities of the community. For example, the president of the centre was elected to the committee of the Bhartiya Mandal in 1978. Appointed for one year initially, he has remained an active member ever since. Young people of the Sri Sathya Sai Centre have also sometimes

played a leading part, as a folk-dance group, in large-scale public performances organised to commemorate Hindu festivals in a united way or to celebrate the city's multi-cultural heritage.

The emergence of these two satsangs indicates that already, early in the 1970s, the Gujarati Hindu population in Bradford had consolidated its socio-cultural base sufficiently to generate specific and institutionalised forms of sub-cultural fragmentation. Such particularisation presupposed an adequate numerical base to support variety in community life, and also the confidence and a sense of continuity, if not of permanency, which rendered the growth of a diversity of institutions feasible. Experience of hardship and insecurity, attendant upon migration to an alien setting, was another factor leading to the formation of these organisations.

Fragmentation in the Gujarati minority also took forms which followed the traditional caste divisions of Indian society. In 1968 the Kshatriya Sudharak Mandal was founded as a caste association of the Mochi families in Bradford. It has provided an efficient social structure for associative family gatherings, a cricket club, and basic caste functions. Its male members in particular have supported the activities of the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh.

The Mochi families are those whose traditional occupation was leather-working, yet not of the lowest order (that of the untouchable Chamar) because they worked only on prepared, dressed hide (Pocock 1972: 41). In Bradford, some of them now work in shoe-repairing, the sale of leather goods, hand-crafted products and gifts, but many others in a variety of retail trades and business enterprises (Chavda 1983). Some of their surnames, like Parmar, Gohil and Tailor, have become prominent in the city; others, less numerous, may not be so well known - like Chauhan, Chavda and Champaneria. A small number of them are called Patel, a name which is very prominent amongst the Gujaratis of Bradford. It is a surname which requires further explanation in the context of the development of caste associations.

The name 'Patel' originated as a term for a land-owning peasant, a small-holder who tills his own

ground. For some, it is associated with another name, 'Kanbi', suggesting an agriculturist, used throughout Gujarat and outside the state towards Bombay. For others, the name is associated with the prestigious designation 'Patidar' - meaning 'landholder' (Bharat' 1972: 34; Pocock 1972: 56; Tams-Lyche 1980: 32). 'Kanbi' is used within the Gujarati population in Bradford to distinguish one sub-section of the Patels who derive originally from the southern district of Surat (map 1.3) from all the others. Those from whom they demarcate themselves include the Patels of Charotar, an area roughly co-extensive with the administrative district of Kaira in central Gujarat (map 1.3), who claim the term 'Patidar' for themselves.

In Bradford there are also Mandhata Patels, whose honorific self-designation associates them with the name of a distinguished mythical king whose prowess is recorded in some of the Puranas, and who derive from an area of the Surat district, just south of Naysari. By others they are sometimes referred to as 'Kolis', a term widely used in western India for low-caste, unskilled agricultural workers. It tends to be non-specific, except in its suggestion of negative, unflattering stereotypes. It is so general in application that, of itself, it does not convey an adequate identity (Pocock 1972: 30, 53, 57, 62). Hence, in Bradford, the families concerned acknowledge this designation, but prefer to use the honorific, and more specific, 'Mandhata' to identify themselves.

There is, however, a variant significance in the surname Patel by which some of the families of that name in Bradford and elsewhere fall into none of the above categories. It can denote the headman of a village. Historically, it was bestowed - both before British influence, in the Moghul period, and later by the British - on officials of various castes who fulfilled an administrative, revenue-collecting role. They served, in the economic realm, as local headmen. Thus, not all Patels derive from farming stock, though the great majority of them do. It is assumed amongst Bradford's other Patels, that those few members of the Mochi caste whose surname is Patel, have arisen from this last, administrative group of Patels. Their families participate in the affairs of the Mochi caste organisation, the Kshatriya Sudharak



Map 1.3: GUJARAT

showing Surat, Naysari,
and the Kaira district;
and the location of
Gujarat in India.



Mandal. The current president of the mandal is such a Patel.

In 1973, the Patel Samaj was formed in Bradford. It is a society of the Patel families of the Charotar region, the Patidars, and has not sought to become a major social or cohesive force within the Gujarati community in the city - simply a caste association for its own constituency. Therefore its main function is to sustain the links necessary to maintain caste endogamy: the primary role of any caste society. For many years its committee has organised a single annual event in Bradford: the celebration of the Nine Nights Festival, Navaratri. Its members have given considerable support to the Bhartiya Mandal. The Patidars form a substantial group in the city. As a caste, their occupations have been diversified over many contexts (Tamsb-Lyche 1980: 35). Bradford is not uncharacteristic in this respect.

On 31 March 1975, the Bradford branch of the Shree Prajapati Association was founded. It serves families of a caste reputed originally to have been potters but who diversified long ago into carpentry, joinery and the building trade, and afterwards into a variety of occupations. In Bradford they nearly all have the surnames of Mistry and Lad. The growth of their association has been dynamic. In the spring of 1980, it acquired a substantial building, once a Congregational chapel, with considerable potential for community uses, at the junction of Thornton Lane and Little Horton Lane, Bradford 5 (map 1.2, No.6). These premises are adjacent to the main concentration of the Gujarati settlement. The Shree Prajapati Association has established a temple there: a commodious and attractive centre for religious gatherings, open to members of all castes and available to serve the needs of the wider Hindu community. Thus, while the association promotes the interests of the Prajapati families in Bradford and serves as their caste society, it is not exclusive in its provisions nor divisive in its intentions. Yet, because of the prior foundation of the Hindu Cultural Society of Bradford and the establishment of its centre in Leeds Road, largely catering for the non-Gujarati Hindus, the Shree Prajapati Association has not effectively made a bid for an all-Indian clientele for its functions.

It has, rather, given expression to the vitality of Gujarati Hindu cultural life on the southern side of the city centre and has enhanced and facilitated community activities close to the Gujarati's own main area of settlement (Bowen 1981: 53, 54).

The temporary shrine constructed by the Shree Prajapati Association within its premises at the time of their acquisition, has been replaced by a fully consecrated mandir, graced by marble murtis (statues) obtained from India. This spacious place of worship, fully renovated and refurbished by voluntary labour, was enthusiastically inaugurated with ceremonies lasting three days in August 1983. It is now known as the Shree Hindu Temple and ranks with the premises of the Hindu Cultural Society as one of the two most important centres of Hindu religious activity in Bradford. It must be one of the most impressive temples in the north of England.

Worship is not the only focus of the activities of the Shree Prajapati Association. Apart from the Gujarati language classes for children which it took over from the Bhartiya Mandal, it also caters for a wide range of social, cultural and sporting interests. Badminton and five-a-side football, cricket, table tennis, darts, chess and pool are played under its auspices - in some cases by well-established teams. Its membership of the corresponding national organisation, the Shree Prajapati Association (United Kingdom) - also a lively body and founded in 1975 - commits it to participation in several yearly national rallies which stimulate interest and activity. Thus, centrally organised, there is an annual ladies' conference, a sports day, and a variety show which embraces music, comedy, and both secular and sacred drama. The local associations send their delegations and participants. It is not without significance that the enthusiastic secretary of the national association is both chairman and president of its Bradford branch, secretary of the city's Bhartiya Mandal, and chairman of the more recently formed Bhartiya Associations of Bradford.

It has been shown that the emergence of the satsang of the devotees of Sathya Sai Baba within the general ethos of Gujarati cultural life was important as a

sign of religious, even sectarian, diversification in the Hindu community in Bradford. It is also significant that ten years after the inception of that satsang, a site for a major new temple for Gujaratis was purchased by the Shree Prajapati Association. The vigour that had been expressed in the foundation of that association in 1975, was thus co-ordinated in 1980 in affirmation of the allegiance of the Prajapatis to forms of religious practice that are firmly located in the mainstream of their received regional devotional life. In August 1982, a member of the committee of the Shree Prajapati Association articulated, with feeling, the disapproval entertained by many Gujarati Hindus in the city for the veneration of contemporary gurus, especially those regarded by their devotees as avatars. The majority regard such claims as an absurdity, he felt. Thus the only major Gujarati caste with a highly efficient, active and out-going organisation in Bradford affirmed the safely time-honoured forms of its heritage when the Shree Hindu Temple was consecrated in August 1983 in honour of seven traditional scriptural deities.⁵

There had been an initial unity and harmony in the first meeting of the Bhartiya Mandal (15 August 1957) which is reflected in the minutes of that occasion. Such an ethos is also apparent in Desal's glowing account of what he took to be the foundation of the first Gujarati cultural association in Bradford in October 1959 (1963: 88-91). Clearly, that harmony became less urgent and more difficult to maintain as soon as Gujaratis were present in sufficient strength to provide scope for caste and sectarian diversity to manifest themselves institutionally. A situation developed in which the functions fulfilled by the original homogeneous front would have to be assumed by an umbrella organisation, for it was clear in the second half of the 1970s that the Bhartiya Mandal had not remained active enough to fulfil its earlier unifying role. Thus, in 1980, the body known as the Bhartiya Associations of Bradford was formed. It was to have the specific function of providing a structure which could bring together for common action the seven different Gujarati Hindu cultural, caste and religious organisations that had emerged in the city. They are listed here in the order of their foundation.

<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Year of foundation</u>
Bhartiya Mandal	1957
Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh	1966
Shri Jalaram Shakti Mandal	1967
Kshatriya Sudharak Mandal	1968
Sri Sathya Sai Centre	1970
Patel Samaj	1973
Shree Prajapati Association	1975

Table 1.3: INITIAL MEMBER ORGANISATIONS OF THE BHARTIYA ASSOCIATIONS OF BRADFORD

On 28 July 1980, a company of Indian dancers on tour in the United Kingdom presented an evening of Indian classical dance in Bradford. It was the first public venture of the Bhartiya Associations of Bradford. M.B. Ladd, who had become the new organisation's first chairman, had provided the initiative which led to the formation of this wider structure for Gujarati Hindu organisations. Following the inaugural event, there was an impetus for further development of the newly-founded umbrella society.

In 1981 the Gujaratis initiated a move to make manifest the wider unity of all the Hindus, including even the Sikhs, in the city of Bradford. On 28 March, no fewer than nineteen Indian organisations were drawn together, in the name of the expanding Bhartiya Associations of Bradford, to mark the retirement of a respected Community Relations Officer. The same seven Gujarati societies as had participated in the first event were represented. The involvement of the Punjabi and other non-Gujarati Hindus was secured through the engagement of the Hindu Cultural Society. The two Sikh temples that were in existence at that time, and the Guru Nanak Trust, were also involved. Two additional groups that, in Bradford, are based within the Gujarati community, the Raja Yoga Centre, and a few families loosely connected with the Swaminarayan movement, were drawn in. Six other organisations of Indian expatriates, either emph-

atically non-sectarian in matters of religion or quite specifically secular, participated. They comprised: the Indian Women's Association, the Indian Student's Association, the cultural agency known as 'Oriental Arts', the Indian Workers' Association, the Indian Youth Association, and Indian United Sports.

It was an achievement to bring together nineteen organisations in March 1981, securing the tacit admission that there were tasks to be fulfilled which could only be completed if they functioned unitedly. The issue was not allowed to remain dormant. A second public event, for 1982, was planned. Originally it was to mark India's Independence Day, 15 August, but since sufficient progress with the preparations was not made at an early stage, it was transmuted into the celebration of a later festival.

Thus, from an initial undifferentiated and inevitably superficial unity within the Gujarati community in Bradford in the late 1950s, there at first emerged fissiparous tendencies which spawned various organisations within what was still a comparatively small community of less than 2,500 persons in the early 1970s. This potential for fission, typical of Indian social units in this country, in turn generated a movement on the part of some Gujaratis for a united front. Thus, in 1980, a unifying organisation for all the Gujarati Hindu socio-cultural associations in Bradford was formed. Within one year that organisation had itself seized upon the opportunity to promote united action not merely within the Gujarati Hindu community but within the total Hindu and Sikh population in the city. Meanwhile, the socio-cultural organisms that had been produced by the process of fission maintained their identities.

That is the historical and socio-cultural context in which one has to set the emergence of the satsang of Sathya Sai Baba's devotees in Bradford in 1970, and its evolution thereafter throughout the period of this research. For the greater part of this period, the membership has been solidly Gujarati. There is, however, a potential for wider recruitment of members of both Indian and non-Indian background which is inherent in the eclectic and syncretistic affirmations made by the satsang and by its spiritual head.

That potential has been realised only marginally and periodically during these years: most particularly at the beginning of the observation (1974-76) and in its final stages (from 1982 onwards). The membership has, therefore, almost exclusively been drawn from the Gujarati. Hindu population in Bradford. The potential for extra-Indian recruitment in the post-1982 period is, however, highly significant, as will become apparent.

1.4 THE SATHYA SAI BABA SATSANG IN BRADFORD: ITS MEMBERSHIP AND AFFILIATIONS

On 26 February 1970, the Sathya Sai Baba Satsang was formed in Bradford in the home of a family of Mandhata Patels. That family came to the United Kingdom from Uganda, where their interest in Sathya Sai Baba had been quickened into an embryonic faith which was to intensify through circumstances closely linked to the process of migration. A fuller account of that development is given below (see 7.4). - In some cases, it was this family's faith in Sathya Sai Baba that communicated itself to other Hindus and drew them into the satsang. In other cases, the devotees concerned had already made an act of commitment to Baba and joined the fellowship in consequence. In a survey of ten families integrally connected with the satsang in 1978 and 1979, it was found that eight were Patels, one family was of the Prajapati caste (a Mistry family), and one was a Punjabi family. Of the eight Patels, three were Mandhatas and the rest were Kanbis. Of the ten families, seven had come directly to the United Kingdom from India, two had come from Tanzania, and one (the founders of the satsang) from Uganda. The findings of that survey were shown by later acquaintance with the satsang to be representative in so far as they suggested a dominance of Gujaratis within the fellowship, a majority of Patels amongst the Gujaratis, and a substantial minority of families having experience of life in East Africa prior to their migration to the United Kingdom.

The founder of the satsang had been employed as an accountant in Uganda. In Bradford he worked first as a bus conductor, then as a storekeeper for an engineering firm, and then as a machinist in a plant manufacturing tractors. The majority of heads of families connected with the satsang during the

period of this research have been employed as unskilled or semi-skilled labourers, with a minority self-employed in business enterprise. Their wives have, in some cases, obtained employment in local light industry and in mail-order firms. From the mid-1970s onwards, the decline in Bradford's industries affected men and women of all ages, with unemployment a constant threat for all and a reality for many. The founder of the satsang became unemployed in 1982. Amongst the younger men of the fellowship, a significantly high proportion have obtained and are obtaining further and higher education in computing, mathematics, engineering, electronics and the applied sciences.

In June 1983, in the context of a significant increase in the number of young people active in the satsang from 1981 onwards, it was acknowledged within the fellowship that all of the participants under the age of thirty were Gujarati. In spite of evidence of successful advocacy of the claims of Sathya Sai Baba in the wider community, the nature of the Bradford satsang as an ethnic enclave was, even at that time, fundamentally unchanged.

It is perfectly clear, nevertheless, that the Sri .Sathya Sai Satsang in Bradford must not be seen in any simplistic way as an exclusively ethnic fellowship. Nor does it have a caste base. Devotees of any ethnicity can associate with it, and it is not caste-bound. It is a genuine bhakti (devotional) satsang. The adult membership of the community is drawn from both Kanbi Patels and Mandhata Patels, with very prominent participation by at least one family of Prajapatis, and open access to all. It has included Punjabis within its orbit: both a Sikh family (Dhirs) and a locally eminent Hindu (an Ahluwalia). In both those cases, the head of the Sikh family and the Punjabi Hindu became office-bearers within the satsang. The activities and the zeal of the young people have drawn young Gujaratis of a variety of castes into the fellowship. One of the current leaders amongst the young men, with prominence in the organisational structure, is from a Limbachia family, locally regarded as a caste of barbers. The fellowship has included ethnically English associates who have borne responsibilities in

the satsang. In a caste society such features could not be found.

There is no participation in the Sathya Sai Baba Satsang by Patels who consider themselves to be Patidar. It might be argued that jealousy of their superior status amongst the Patels could inhibit associations which might obscure the Patidars' claim. That point has not been proved. If it had been, it would only show that an exclusiveness on the part of the Patidars had been activated, but certainly not on the part of the Sai satsang. Such characteristics distinguish the satsang quite radically from bodies like the Patel Samaj, whose membership is strictly by caste affiliation, and from the Shree Prajapati Association, where the social facilities may be open to all, but committee membership and full participation are only possible for caste affines. Furthermore, the dynamic for expansion and all-inclusiveness are related to elements of syncretism, and to the specific claims of Sathya Sai Baba, that distinguish the fellowship from a conventional Gujarati satsang such as is represented by the Jalaram Shakti Mandal.

The Sathya Sai Baba Satsang in Bradford keeps no statistics of membership and maintains no lists of the names of adherents. That is characteristic of such devotional fellowships in general. Devotees of Baba are not compelled to associate with each other, although the majority of them feel constrained to do so. In Bradford, it is said that there are people resident in the city who have been to visit Sathya Sai's ashram in India, but they have never attended any events at the satsang's centre in Laisteridge Lane. They worship at home and have not identified themselves with the fellowship, in keeping with the individual nature and familial locus of traditional Hindu worship. It is a fact that is acknowledged and accepted within the centre.

On 2 July 1982, the founder of the satsang stated that there were members of twenty families attending bhajan mandal or other events on a regular basis. Many more households were represented through irregular participation. Statistics of attendance at the Thursday evening bhajan mandal during that period - allowance being made for the absence of a contingent on pilgrimage to India later that month

suggest that the president's statement was realistic. An estimate by his eldest son, in June 1983, that there were representatives of between thirty-five and fifty families regularly in attendance at the bhajan mandal suggests a maximum figure that could only be reached by taking the meaning of the term 'regularly' to be 'periodically'.

More precise indications of the actual numerical strength of the satsang, as it fluctuated over a period of eight years, are to be found in the statistics of attendance at the weekly bhajan mandal (appendix 3). There it can be seen that recorded attendances oscillated between the lowest 'point of seventeen in January 1980 and consistently high ratings in the seventies (and above) in 1982-85. Such figures are an index of periodical variation in the vitality of the satsang itself.

The Sai Centre in Bradford did not emerge as a totally isolated phenomenon in the evolution of the religious culture of Hindus in the United Kingdom. Its leaders, however, claim that it was the first centre for devotees of Sathya Sai Baba to be formed in Britain. The settling of the claim depends on the niceties of distinctions between what constitutes a satsang and what constitutes a centre. Amongst devotees, the latter term denotes a fully-functioning association which not only sustains regular devotional meetings (bhajan mandal) but also children's classes (Bal Vikas), social service activities (Seva Dal), women's groups (Mahila Vibhag) and study circles. The rival claim to that mounted by the Bradford fellowship is that of the satsang in Pinner, Middlesex - which, prior to the formation of groups of devotees in central London was known for several years as 'the London Centre'. The Pinner fellowship was formed on 27 March 1969, eleven months earlier than that in Bradford (Sitaram 1975: 3). The founder of the Pinner group became the first president of the national organisation of devotees of Sathya Sai Baba which emerged in 1975; and the founder of the Bradford satsang became its second president in 1976. Bradford's claim to have been the first Sai centre in Britain rests on the assertion that the association of devotees in Pinner remained nothing more than a devotional satsang at a time when the Bradford

fellowship had developed the attributes of a fully.: functioning centre. Years later, the veracity of that claim might still be disputed (cf. Taylor 1987b: 124).

In January 1975 the association known as 'The Sri Sathya Sai Service Organisations (United Kingdom)' was formed. There were seven fully-acknowledged centres at that time, with other associated groups and numerous individual devotional meetings. The seven centres were located in Bolton, Bradford, Cambridge, Leicester, London (Pinner), London (South) and Wolverhampton (S. Kaul 1975a: 4, 5). Numerous bhajan mandals existed in the orbit of these centres. In London alone, as many as sixteen addresses for such groups were published.

By July 1975, more new Sai centres had been formed, or the number of such fully-functioning units that had been identified had increased. Centres in Coventry, Hounslow, Llanpumsaint (Dyfed, Wales), Loughborough and Nottingham gained mention at that time (S. Kaul 1975b: 3). In 1976, the number of active centres included Birmingham, London (Central) and Wellingborough (P.K. Kaul 1977: 5). In November 1978 it was affirmed by Bradford devotees that there were at least twenty-four centres in the United Kingdom. Evidence suggests that a fellowship in Cardiff comprised one of them.

While some groups of Sai devotees were expanding, others contracted. Nothing further is heard of the centre in Cambridge which had been one of the first to emerge. The Ashram of the Community of the Many Names of God in Llanpumsaint, Dyfed, Wales, which counted for a period in the mid-1970s as a centre, came into disrepute with some leaders of the United Kingdom organisation and for that reason was deleted from the *lists*. It nevertheless went on to flourish as an ashram with its own distinctive characteristics. It is possible that the disenchantment was connected with ethnic estrangement between the numerically superior Indian (mostly Gujarati) membership of the United Kingdom organisation and the Sri Lankan guru of the ashram. Ethnic rivalry within the organisation has, however, normally been controlled by an intense and unifying devotion to Sathya Sai Baba (cf. Taylor 1987a: 112).

In July 1982, the president of the Bradford centre affirmed that his was the only Sai centre in Britain that was so predominantly Gujarati. At Pinner the majority of members are Tamil. In many centres the fellowship is divided almost equally between people of Indian extraction and white devotees. There is one London satsang, it is said, where the members are almost all Sri Lankan. In Wolverhampton evidence suggests that a racially mixed group has grown around a nucleus of Gujaratis. Some of the groups of more recent foundation consist predominantly of white devotees: the fellowship in Sheffield which emerged in 1981 being the nearest of those to Bradford. Members in Sheffield have kept in touch with the Bradford centre as a resource and for the authentic Indian ethos. It is clear, therefore, that the 1970s were a decade of dynamic growth for the burgeoning associations of the devotees of Sathya Sai Baba in England. Currently there is no evidence of the abating of that growth.

In July 1982, the president of the Sri Sathya Sai Centre in Bradford stated that there were at least forty-five centres in the United Kingdom. It could not be substantiated that all of them were fully-functioning. Some of them undoubtedly were not. A degree of ambivalence in the use of the term 'centre' has to be noted. Normally, however, it still denotes much more than a bhajan mandal: possibly an associated group of such fellowships, or a bhajan mandal with several other ancillary activities. Amongst the new 'centres', that in Sheffield was included, and also others in Manchester and Blackpool. Two satsangs have been identified in Leeds (Knott 1986: 32): one of these had emerged in the mid-1970s as a satellite bhajan mandal, of the Bradford fellowship.

By June 1983 more satsangs had been established in the north of England: at Ashton-under-Lyne, Huddersfield, Oldham and Preston. The Bradford Sai Centre, through the commitment and outreach of some of its young people, was providing a stimulus for the development of some of these groups from bhajan mandals with very limited functions to fully functioning centres. Other fellowships, in the West Midlands at Dudley and West Bromwich, had sprung up in this period and brought the total to 51 (see figure 1.2).

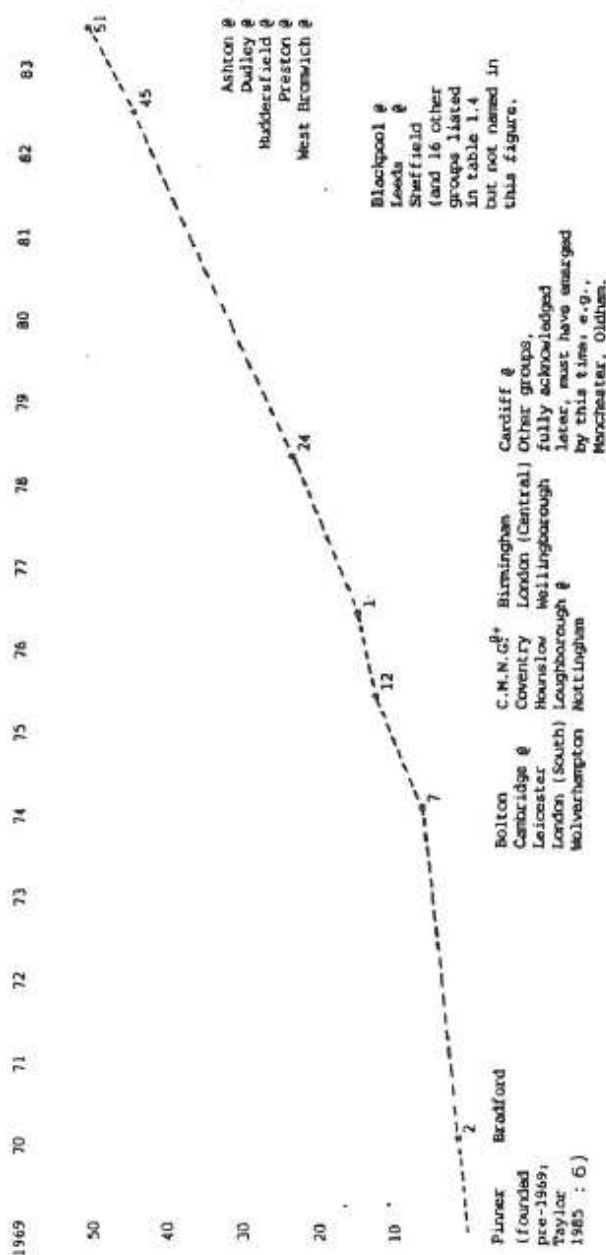


Figure 1.2: INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF SRI SATGURU SAI CENTRES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM, 1969-83

Some ambiguity in the use of the term 'centre' in this figure is acknowledged (arising out of a continuing popular ambiguity in the use of the term by devotees themselves).

† 'Centres' not listed in table 1.4. Although, in some cases they were once designated 'centres', they may be, officially, only hayan groups.

+ The Community of the Mary Names of God, Llanpau, Dyfed. Later not recognised as a Sai Centre.

The 'centres' named are only those identified by devotees in Bradford or in the magazine Yot once published by devotees.

Greater London

Brixton* Graveney*
Hounslow
London (Central)
London (East)*
London (South) and
Croydon
London (West)*
Pinner
Pinner (West End)
Southall* Thornton
Heath* Tooting*
Wembley* Wimbledon*

North of England

Bradford,
West Yorkshire
Bolton
Manchester
Oldham
Sheffield

South-east England

Hatfield, Hertfordshire*
Reading, Berkshire*
Tunbridge Wells, Kent*

English Midlands

Birmingham
Coventry
Coventry (Hillfields)
Leicester
Leicester (Central)
Nottingham
Wellingborough,
Northamptonshire
Wolverhampton

West of England

Gunnislake, Cornwall*
Penzance, Cornwall*
Salisbury, Wiltshire*

Scotland

Glasgow*

* Centres and groups not identified by name in
Figure 1.2

Table 1.4: LOCATIONS OF THE THIRTY-FOUR SAT CENTRES
AND GROUPS LISTED BY THE SATHYA SAI BABA
COUNCIL OF THE UNITED KINGDOM IN 1982 AS
HAVING APPLIED FOR ACCREDITATION

The original Sri Sathya Sai Service Organisations (United Kingdom) became known by the early 1980s as the Sathya Sai Baba Council of the United Kingdom. The president of the Bradford Sai Centre is a member of that body, known generally as 'The National Council'. In a document that did nothing to exaggerate the growth in the number of groups of devotees in what was a dynamic period, the National Council in 1982 published a list of thirty-four 'centres and groups' that had applied to it for recognition (see table 1.4). Even the earliest groups, in Bradford and Pinner, were listed with the others as applying for 'interim accreditation'. No group in Wales was mentioned. No record of any in Ireland has yet been found. Some, such as those in the west of England and in Scotland, to which no earlier reference has been discovered, were listed. The number of groups in Coventry and Leicester, as well as in London had obviously increased. The document also recorded names and addresses of thirty-five local office-bearers. - An analysis of the apparent ethnic origin of the surnames suggests that fourteen were Gujarati, twelve derived from other parts of India, and nine were non-Indian. In the membership of the National Council itself; however, the eleven individuals on the executive committee were more equally divided between those three categories, with seven Indian and as many as four non-Indian members.

Spontaneous growth in the number of devotees of Sathya Sai Baba in the United Kingdom sprang out of personal commitment on the part of individuals and advocacy of their convictions to others. That was a fundamental factor in Bradford. Nevertheless, the self-generating element has sometimes been compounded with a measure of direction from a higher authority. In Bradford, the founder of the satsang was directed to form a bhajan mandal in his home by an itinerant Hindu religious teacher, in a context in which it was already clear that the Bradford resident was devoted to Baba. In Pinner, the stimulus for the formation of the satsang came from guidance offered by an aide of Sathya Sai to a solicitor of Tamil origin, resident in Middlesex. Such a suggestion from Baba's own representative is not to be seen as some form of sinister intervention. It was a natural development well within the norms of interaction between an Indian guru or the

guru's aides and one of his disciples. It was little more than the recognition of a devotee's own motivation. Naturally it gave prestige and status to the future development of the satsang concerned - against claims to priority by other groups, such as that in Bradford.

The same emissary of Baba proposed in 1974 to the leading Pinner devotee that the association which became known as the Sri Sathya Sai Service Organisation (United Kingdom) should be formed. In rendering such advice he was acting in a role given to him by Baba - being in 'overall charge of directing the formation and working of Sri Sathya Sai Service Organisations throughout the world' (Sitaram 1975: 3).

The inception of a United Kingdom organisation of devotees has to be seen as part of an international development of such structures in various countries. There is a World Council for Sri Sathya Sai Service Organisations, and it has met on three occasions: in 1968, 1975 and 1980. The United Kingdom organisation was formed in time to send 150 representatives of all ages to Sathya Sai Baba's fiftieth birthday celebrations at Prashanti Nilayam in November 1975, some of whom were also delegates to the Second World Council which was held in conjunction with those celebrations. In October 1983, excitement was occasioned in the fellowship in Bradford by the fact that an international conference of devotees was being held in Italy, confirming that country's growing reputation as the home of an increasing number of adherents (cf. Mason 1983a: 11).

The number of devotees of British and other non-Indian ethnicity in the United Kingdom has steadily increased. The publication, from September 1983 onwards, of a quarterly magazine produced by and for such devotees, reflects this growth. From 1984 onwards, it has included a list of names and addresses of sponsors of new Sathya Sai Baba Study Groups, in each of its issues. Growth appears to be widely spread, and embraces areas of the country, such as Devon and Cornwall, where few devotees of South Asian origin are to be found. Attempts at summarising the extent of the growth do not always agree exactly, varying between 25-30 new groups in a period of two years to almost 40 in just over one year (cf. Mason

1985a: 1 and 1985b: 1). In either case, growth is sufficiently prolific for devotees of South Asian background in the United Kingdom to be able to relate now, if they desire it, to a more widely-scattered circle of interested 'western devotees' than was possible in and before the early 1970s. In 1983 it was even suggested that 'there are as many western devotees as Asian, perhaps even more, as they are growing all the time' (Mason 1983a: 1). The international nature of this development is suggested by the claim that 'there are fifty million devotees in sixty-four countries . . . from Iceland to Australia . . . including some of the Iron Curtain countries' (ibid., 2).

Amongst the problems encountered by non-Indian devotees in the United Kingdom, and addressed by their magazine, is their concern to be associated with Sathya Sai Baba's devotional and mystical way without having to become 'English Hindus' and to 'engage in ritualistic worship' (Mason 1983a: 1-2, cf. 24-31; 1983b: 4; 1985b: 1; cf. plate 1.1).

The paradigmatic model for national organisations of Baba's devotees is the Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Organisations, New Delhi. That association, stimulated by the direct interventions of Baba himself, has provided the spur for the development of a variety of activities, including social welfare and medical work of various kinds (Kasturi 1980a: 119; Mason and Laing 1982: 195-200; cf. Kasturi 1975a: 107-24). Educational work has received particular attention. Numerous establishments which intend to foster Baba's ideals in association with a curriculum of training in the arts and sciences, have sprung up in India (Kasturi 1975b: 45-64, 152, 296; Robinson and Ruhela 1976: 161-215; Mason and Laing 1982: 201-08). There, both in the educational institutions that devotees themselves have founded, and also in schools of the various state governments, a programme of moral and spiritual training known as Education in Human Values, initiated by Sathya Sai Baba, is said to be extensively influential. In 1982, V. Kanu, a Nigerian teacher in London and a devotee, founded the first Education in Human Values Society to be established in a British school (Mason 1983b: 4-5). By October 1985, there was evidence of increased efforts being made to set up similar societies in

Top: As normally found, except that the words dharma (order, righteousness), shanti (peace), prema (love), ahimsa (harmlessness), and sathya (truth) are often inscribed on the leaves between the five petals.



Bottom: As developed and published for a training camp for Bal Vikas teachers (see below, 2.4) at Prashanti Nilayam on 15 August 1983.



Plate 1.1: THE SAI EMBLEM

- symbolizing the international and syncretistic orientation the associations of devotees.

See Jagadeesan 1983: iii and also note 51, below.

other schools and in universities in the United Kingdom, including the University of Bradford. On 3 November 1985, a meeting was held to promote the establishment of such societies in schools in Bradford (cf. Laing 1985a: 13-17; Mason 1985b: 6-9; 1985c: 2).

In India, the homage paid to Sathya Sai Baba by devotees from all the continents stimulates cross-fertilising currents of encouragement and inspiration, of an international nature, which increase the motivation of devotees. There is a regular flow of pilgrims to Baba's ashram from the United Kingdom, the majority of them of South Asian origin, but with an increasing presence of devotees of other backgrounds. Delegations from Bradford travelled to Puttaparthi in 1975, 1982, 1983 and 1984 (see below 8.4). At other times, individuals and families have travelled separately. The prime object of the journey is to obtain Baba's darshan, a glimpse of his revered form - conceived in itself to be the blessing of a life-time. Conversely, a visit to Bradford by an Indian devotee such as the Director of Education for southern Gujarat, en route for Canada in 1981, became the occasion for an address in the mandir which afforded encouragement to all who were gathered there. Visits to London by Indulal H. Shah, Baba's own emissary to his devotees here, naturally arouse even more excitement (cf. Laing 1983a: 3-4).

Within the circle of the British fellowships of Baba's devotees, inter-group events and national functions organised to celebrate particular occasions provide endorsement of their mutual commitment. Every satsang and many small study circles strive to be represented. For that reason, and in the wider context already described, it is impossible adequately to perceive the Bradford satsang, as an isolated phenomenon. Nevertheless, it has its own ethos. A detailed examination of its activities will be undertaken in the next chapter to elucidate its particular characteristics as well as those it shares with others.

Activities of the Fellowship

The satsang of the devotees of Sathya Sai Baba in Bradford identifies itself in a variety of corporate activities. The location for most of these is the Sri Sathya Sai Centre, the mandir, at 10 Laisteridge Lane. A feature in all the events that are held there is the singing of bhajans (hymns of adoration). The most regular and basic of the meetings of the satsang consist almost entirely of such acts of devotion. The bhajan mandal held on Thursday evenings is the pivotal event in the satsang's week. A subsidiary bhajan mandal takes place on Sunday afternoons, and some irregular special occasions are marked by the holding of all-night sessions for the singing of bhajans. The activities of the satsang are not, however, confined to such meetings.

Three annual celebrations are unfailingly commemorated within the satsang: Mahashivaratri, Guru Purnima and Sathya Sai Baba's birthday. The first two are widely observed by many Hindus. Other Indian festivals are also sometimes marked by special events organised at the centre. Increasingly, note is being taken of Christmas as the major public celebration in the Christian year.

The satsang arranges film or video shows occasionally, always with a specific religious content. From time to time, special meetings are convened to mark the visit of a respected religious teacher on a tour from India or by invitation from another English city. One traditional ritual has become favoured with special usage as a means of revitalising the fellowship, and meetings are sometimes called for the purpose of observing it (see below, 2.3). There are occasions when the satsang, usually through its young people, initiates a conference or other special

event to achieve a particular end. Such occurrences often have an organic link with one of the subordinate group activities of the fellowship: the Child Development Class, the Social Service Group, or the Women's Section. A feature in all these activities, sometimes peripheral but often a major component, is the singing of bhajans.

2.1 BHAJAN MANDAL

For the purpose of bhajan singing, the gathered devotees sit cross-legged on the floor in the mandir. The women sit to the left of a clear path down the middle, facing the shrine; the men to the right. At the front of the female column sits a small group of various ages who help to lead the singing. Similarly placed on the male side is another group, characteristically youths in their late teens or early twenties, helped by an older man. They provide the instrumental accompaniment, and often make a powerful vocal contribution. The role of these young men is particularly significant. Their expertise with the instruments, capacity for rhythm and beat, and their talent for singing, contribute fundamentally to the appeal of any bhajan, as it rises to its consummation in a crescendo of sound and enthusiasm. It is for that reason that such sessions have been described as 'a kind of rock mass' (Patel 1976: 237). When led by experts, and when a congregation is manifestly moved by the occasion, such a description is apt.

The bhajans sung in the Sri Sathya Sai Centre in Bradford are brief verses, introduced in each case by a soloist. Male and female vocalists lead alternate bhajans. The congregation repeats every line after the leader. The tempo increases as the stanzas are reiterated, until the final rendition is articulated in a very fast and sometimes staccato style. The accompaniment, principally by tabla and dholak (drums), and by harmonium, becomes even more effective in the conclusion through the enhanced use of swiftly-moving manjira (tiny cymbals).

These verses are to be distinguished from the full-length classical bhajans noted by many writers (Venkateswaran 1971: 139-172; Singer 1976: 147). They also differ from the traditional forms used in the Shri Jalaram Shakti Mandal in Bradford. They

are properly dhuns (tunes, airs): simple verses, distinguished from all longer and more complex songs. Yet within the satsang they are designated bhajans. Such hymns consist sometimes of nothing more than a recital of the names of deities, corresponding closely to the traditional Hindu practice of reciting a namavali, a series of (divine) names. In some cases the latter are juxtaposed with geographical references, replete with mythological and scriptural associations. In the wording of some bhajans, the identification of Sathya Sai Baba with the deities so named, and with their accomplishments, is implicit. In others it is explicitly stated (see appendix 5).

The regular meeting of devotees of particular gurus or deities for bhajan singing of a specific character is a Hindu cultural performance of a traditional type. Such events frequently take place under private auspices in family homes, but are of a public or semi-public nature. They conform to the norms of bhakti (devotional) cults in India (Singer 1971: 90). They draw on ancient scriptural authority which identifies the practice of nama sankirtana (recitation of the names of deities) with the pursuit of moksha (liberation). This practice was given prominence by the ninth-century theologian Shankara (Venkateswaran 1971: 143, 225). Its theological basis was elucidated by Ramanuja more than eight hundred years ago (Carman 1974: 214). It has emerged with renewed prominence from time to time in Indian religious history, and has done so again in the twentieth century.

Commentators on the vitality of contemporary bhajan mandal are numerous and convincing (Gonda 1963a: 284; Srinivas 1973: 142; Ashby 1974: 73; Patel 1976: 237; Swallow 1976: 119-126). Sathya Sai Baba himself has emerged as a living focus for the current reinvigoration of this aspect of the bhakti tradition.

Sathya Sai Baba is widely known as a composer of bhajans. It is believed that he developed the skill and was fond of exercising it already at the age of eight. Two years later he is said to have organised a bhajan group, singing his own compositions. At the age of thirteen, when he first announced publicly that he was an avatar, he sang a bhajan that he had composed himself and which has naturally become very important for his followers (Kasturi 1980a: 18, 22, 32,

59, 93, 106; Gokak 1975: 5). That bhajan, 'Manasa bhajarel, is a regular opening feature of devotion at the Sai Centre in Bradford (see appendix 5). It comes second only to a hymn to the god Ganesha which tradition dictates should initiate devotional satsang.

Baba has also won a reputation amongst his devotees as a unique participant and a sublime performer in musical devotion (Kasturi 1980a: 28, 34; Narender 1977: 179; Gokak 1975a: 29; Sandweiss 1975: 135). Pictures depicting Baba accompanying bhajans with manjira, or rapturously encouraging the singing with delicate movements of the hands, are prominent in the homes of devotees and in the Bradford mandir. Records, tapes and cassettes of bhajans led by Baba circulate amongst his followers. To enjoy this ecstasy without the intervention of recording media is one of the attractions that motivates pilgrims to Baba's ashram at Prashanti Nilayam.

Baba's teaching extols the benefits that accrue from bhajan singing. He has declared that meditation, sacrifice or ritual worship may have been more efficacious in other ages. In this Kali yuga, however, the era of goddess Kali, grim fourth epoch of the Hindu cosmic chronology, the repetition of the divine name is the most appropriate mode of spiritual discipline. It is even acknowledged as a form of seva, practical social service. It offers access to extraordinary prema, the quality most prized by Baba's devotees: love. It is the antidote to all anxiety, for it can liberate one from birth and death, enabling one to cross safely the ocean of samsara, the cyclic process of existence (Sandweiss 1975: 132-134; Kasturi 1975b: 133; Kasturi 1980a: 105).

The conduct of bhajan mandal in the Sai Centre in Bradford has been governed by directions given in a booklet entitled Nama Mahima: Sadhana of Namasmaran (The Glory of the Name: the Discipline of Remembering the Name). That source has sometimes been casually referred to as 'The Regulations', a designation particularly applicable to the appendix of the volume which is headed 'Guide-lines for Conducting Bhajans'. Its contents have been compiled from Baba's own utterances, and it is there that one can find the specific direction that bhajans should be kept simple, and that they should consist largely of the names of

deities. Such repetition of divine names is acknowledged as the primary activity of the organisation of Baba's devotees (Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations 1974: 55). Consequently, coach trips organised for members of the Bradford centre to visit celebrations in other locations become travelling bhajan mandals of a spontaneous, informal kind. The singing of hymns is virtually constant. At the celebration of Sathya Sai Baba's birthday in Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, in November 1979, a paper, 'On Bhajans', by Baba, was distributed to all the devotees.

In Bradford there is a gadi (a ceremonial seat or throne) for Baba at the front of the mandir. It is a potent reminder of his unseen presence in every bhajan mandal. It provides additional motivation for the devout and gives a status to the bhajan mandal in the Sai Centre that goes beyond what can be offered by a purely individual or domestic act of adoration in the worshipper's own home.

Group bhajan singing with devotion to Sathya Sai Baba is the activity that outwardly defines the existence of a satsang of his devotees. In Orissa it was found to be the only practice which was compulsory for the faithful (Swallow 1976). In Bradford, the very existence of a Sai centre is itself the outcome of the impact on one family of a bhajan mandal in Uganda in 1967 (see below, 7.4).

The bhajan mandal which is central to the corporate life of the satsang of Baba's Bradford devotees is held every Thursday. Traditionally 'guru's day' in India, Thursday provides an auspicious occasion for such a gathering. The mandal commences at exactly 7.30 p.m. with the intoning of the sacred syllable Om (Varma 1956: 446; Parrinder 1975: 19, 44, 45). It proceeds through the singing of a series of bhajans until 9.00. Only the two opening bhajans and the final one are set pieces; the others are selected by the leaders for the evening.

At 9.00 the concluding rituals begin. They involve a threefold exhalation of the sacred syllable, the observance of total silence for two minutes, and an ancient prayer of supplication. A further single Omkar, exhalation of the Om, is followed by shanti

(peace) uttered three times (Parrinder 1975: 77). The arati ceremony follows, and again a single Om and a thrice-repeated shanti are articulated before the president of the satsang exclaims '"Jai" bolo Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba-ji ki! Jai!' (Say, 'Hail;' to all-powerful Lord Sathya Sai Baba! Hail!').

Announcements are then made. Afterwards, a customary prayer is sung while the gathering prepares to receive holy water in which vibhuti has been dissolved, or most recently, vibhuti in powder form. Then the worshippers receive prasad - a token share of the food that has been offered to Baba by the devotees, which he is now thought to be distributing to the faithful. The reception of prasad is the final act as the congregation leaves which is usually at about 9.20 p.m.

The Thursday bhajan mandal is emphatically the social pivot in the corporate life of the satsang. So much so that the statistics of attendance provide an index of the numerical strength of the fellowship, and of its capacity to attract commitment in any given period. A detailed account of those statistics between 1977 and 1985 is given in appendices 3 and 4. It can be seen that attendances fluctuated between a low average of thirty-one persons in both 1979 and 1980, and a high of ninety-four in 1982. The divergence represented by those two poles is intriguing, and an essay in analysis is offered in chapter 8.

There is another weekly bhajan mandal on Sunday afternoons. It begins at 1.30 and follows the same course as the Thursday mandal, but in a more informal mode. It reaches its conclusion at approximately 3.20. The fact that it is held on Sunday afternoon is not without its parallels in India and in East African Hindu communities, but in this case has also to be seen as an utilisation of the opportunities for leisure offered by the week-end in Britain.

The subordinate nature of the Sunday event is indicated by several of its features, which underline its role as a lesser replication of the mid-week bhajan mandal. It is not held at the mandir itself, but circulates on a regular basis between several other family homes. For that reason, its appeal is

to sub-groups within the satsang: area gatherings or, more pertinently, kin and friendship sub-groups. Such local house-meetings have been a stabilising factor in the satsang. They have aided continuity at times of poor morale within the wider fellowship evinced - for example - in a decline in attendance at the mid-week mandal.

There are other occasions when bhajan mandals are held, but in a different mode. These are the irregular, periodical events known as akhand (unbroken) bhajan mandal. The hymn-singing continues without interruption for either twelve or twenty-four hours. Normally it implies at least an all-night meeting from 6.00 p.m. to 6.00 a.m. Periodically this observance is commanded for his devotees by Sathya Sai Baba: certainly for those who are of Indian extraction and for whom it would be consonant with their religio-cultural heritage. The link between ethnic legacy and current practice was clear, for example, in the case of an akhand bhajan mandal held on 11 and 12 November 1979. On that occasion, in association with an annual Indian intercession for world peace, Baba directed his devotees to sustain akhand bhajan with that intention. The Bradford satsang, of course, responded.

It is natural that, at such events, attendance throughout the whole period is not entirely uniform. In the case of a twelve-hour session there is likely to be a nucleus of worshippers that is present for the whole time. There will be others who attend for part of the time: for the first three hours, or for the middle portion from the late evening into the small hours of the next day, or for the last three hours. Some attend at the beginning and the end but slip away to snatch a few hours' sleep in the middle. In publicising such an event, the leaders of the satsang try to engage the commitment of devotees, young men especially, who are willing to lead the bhajans, for successive periods of about two hours each, covering the whole span. If there is lethargy within the community, or if the date happens to be an inconvenient one - in the period of students' examinations, for example - then there is anxiety about how the smooth flow of well-led bhajans will be maintained. Even the most accomplished vocalists and instrumentalists tire after a few hours.

Until 1981, at akhand bhajan mandal, it was the satsang's practice to serve savoury rice, tea and coffee, in the mandir at appropriate times, to every one who could partake without interrupting the course of the singing. More recently, because they have accepted new restrictions on the serving of food in the mandir itself, the kitchen alone provides a place of respite and recovery for exhausted singers and musicians. Such occasions become social events in an incidental way - especially in the middle period. In that phase, some relaxation is needed on the part of those who have sustained the first three or four hours, and who know that they are going to be enlisted to maintain the devotion and the tempo again between 2.00 and 6.00 a.m. Akhand bhajan, therefore, does not conform - throughout the whole of its span - to the pattern at any normal Thursday evening bhajan mandal, where chatting or relaxed behaviour of any kind is virtually unknown.

In the case of a twenty-four hour bhajan mandal, the statistical pattern of attendance is likely to be unpredictable apart from two peak points - at the beginning and at the end. For such occasions it is even more important to secure offers of leadership for the bhajans for all the successive periods. On 11 and 12 November 1979 the akhand bhajan mandal secured peak attendances of approximately 50 persons for its commencement and for its conclusion, nearly one day later. There were lower attendances of 32 and 34 at around 10.00 p.m. and in the early hours of the morning. A lesser peak was achieved at approximately 11.00 p.m. when support for a new phase was at its maximum.

On some occasions the direction to hold an akhand bhajan mandal may derive from the Sathya Sai Baba Council of the United Kingdom. It may also come from the World Council of Sri Sathya Sai Organisations (P.K. Kaul 1977: 5). Such instructions would only be issued after consultation with Sathya Sai Baba himself, or at his direction. It is, however, not unknown for akhand bhajan mandal to be called on a purely local initiative, as on 10 July 1982. That was a response by the Bradford satsang to the prediction of an American astrologer that the world was going to come to an end on that date. The president and leaders of the satsang were convinced that dire

events might occur, and resort to akhand bhajan was taken as a suitable response to the extremities of a threatening situation.

2.2 FESTIVALS

For Gujarati Hindus in Bradford, as elsewhere, experience of their religious heritage develops most specifically through a sequence of annual festivals. There are the major pan-Indian celebrations of Holi, Mahashivaratri, Ram Navami, Janmashtami, Navaratri and Diwali. In Gujarat itself, as in other Indian states, there are also local and regional festivals and annual events that are confined to particular castes or religious sects. Amongst Hindus outside India, these are also sometimes commemorated.

In Bradford, in the Sri Sathya Sai Centre, three celebrations dominate the annual cycle. One is a major pan-Indian festival (Mahashivaratri); another, also India-wide in its observance, is, however, only commemorated by those who have a personal commitment to a guru (Guru Purnima). The third (the birthday of Sathya Sai Baba) is naturally celebrated only by his devotees. Occurring respectively in February or March, in July and in November, the three festivals provide a suitable sequential framework which to structure the life of a religious fellowship. The observance of Mahashivaratri and Sathya Sai Baba's birthday is discussed fully in chapters 5 and 6. Details of the celebration of Guru Purnima are given here, following general consideration of the commemoration of other festivals.

The major festivals of Hinduism (apart from Mahashivaratri) have sometimes received slight acknowledgement in the Sai Centre in Bradford. That is attributable to the intensity of focus on the three primary celebrations which are characteristic of the satsang. It is not to say that the major Hindu festivals are ignored; nor to say that they are all treated equally in any given year. Neither does it establish that the observance, or lack of it, of any of them, is consistent from year to year. The thoroughness of the commemoration of such festivals depends upon current inclinations and circumstances. Considerations such as the degree of enthusiasm evident within the satsang generally, and the extent

to which other Hindu associations in Bradford are giving prominence to a particular festival, influence the intensity with which an occasion is marked. A festival can also be selected as a rallying-point, when lethargy threatens the community in one way or another. It can provide cultural and spiritual resources from which to emerge at a higher level of commitment and zeal.

The least form of acknowledgement that a major Hindu festival is likely to receive in the Sai Centre in Bradford is the holding of a special bhajan mandal. Special accoutrements or features that are appropriate for the particular occasion will be included. The observance of Janmashtami - the celebration of the birth of Krishna - requires that a miniature cradle is installed within the shrine, so that it may be rocked in worship of the infant deity. For Divali, camphor lamps are placed in the entrance hall of the house, in the puja (worship) room and in the shrine itself. Generally, a major festival is marked by a bhajan mandal that is of longer duration than a normal one. Divali, for example, was commemorated in November 1977 with a twelve-hour akhand bhajan mandal. Such all-night celebrations are often, but not always, accommodated on Fridays or Saturdays. There is a pragmatic readiness to observe festivals, including the three primary ones of the satsang itself, on the nearest week-end to the correct calendar date, facilitating greater participation.

Each festival has its own rites. Sometimes the associations are so central to the observance that to commemorate the occasion without them would be insipid. Such a consideration appears to have brought about the end of the celebration of Holi in the Sai Centre in Bradford.

An integral feature of the keeping of Holi is its bonfire. Without the bonfire, there can be little hope of creating the right atmosphere. Holi was once enthusiastically celebrated in Bradford's Sai mandir. The fact that the carpets were set alight on that occasion brought the satsang's corporate celebration of Holi to a summary conclusion. They have never returned to it. That illustrates the difficulty of adapting fundamentally outdoor Indian rites to the restricted urban environment of Britain's

inner cities, especially in times of inclement weather. Nevertheless, the equivalent satsang in Leicester celebrates Holi every year. Its commemoration amongst the Gujarati Hindus in Coventry has also been noted (Jackson 1976). In Bradford, public bonfires are a feature of some annual celebrations of the Hindu Cultural Society, but hitherto only at the time of Diwali and not of Holi. However, there are indications that, in 1986, Holi may be unitedly observed with greater enthusiasm than ever before by the city's Hindu population.

Navaratri lasts nine nights, as its name indicates. It is in honour of the Mother Goddess, and in some parts of India its designation, 'Durga Puja', makes clear its dedication to the consort of Shiva. In Gujarat, however, goddess Amba is the most revered form of shakti (divine energy or power, female in manifestation). Adoration is therefore offered primarily to Amba-mata (Mother Amba) in Gujarati communities.

In Bradford, as elsewhere, the Gujarati Hindu population celebrates each of the nine nights of Navaratri with garba, traditional dancing. Such occasions comprise a series of social events of great significance for the Gujaratis of the city. The folk dances are often beautifully and movingly executed. Based in piety, but not always notably pious in their ethos, the major public celebrations of Navaratri are sometimes viewed askance by fastidious devotees of Sathya Sai Baba. Officially and formally, for some years, the Sai satsang stood aloof from some of the excited commemorations of this festival that have taken place in as many as nine different locations in the city each night. In October 1983, however, as on some previous occasions, young men of the satsang were conspicuously committed to devotional, musical and other leadership tasks in one of the halls hired for the celebrations.

At the Sri Sathya Sai Centre itself, Navaratri does not pass unobserved - the major daily events elsewhere notwithstanding. On the single Sunday in Navaratri (or on the second one when there are two) there is a special event in the mandir. It is the one day in the year on which the ancient fire ritual, Havan, is performed at the centre. A kund, a fire grate suitable

for indoor ceremonies, is used.

In its origins Havan was a temple ritual. It requires the ministrations of a priest, and is one of only two annual events when the satsang engages the services of a Brahmin religious specialist, the other being the celebration of Mahashivaratri. Havan was revived in the Punjab in the nineteenth century by the Arya Samaj, a Hindu reform movement, in the conviction that it represents a truly Vedic form of puja because it requires no adoration of murti, statues. The marking of Navaratri, otherwise so redolent with Gujarati associations, by the Bradford Sai satsang with the sole annual performance of what is characteristically a Punjabi ritual is thus worthy of note (Knott 1986: 116 -118 , 124-140) .

During Navaratri 1979, when the two priests who could have served the satsang in the Havan ceremony were both indisposed, the final Sunday of the festival did not pass unmarked in the Sai Centre. It was the occasion of a special three-hour bhajan mandal held, as the Havan would have been, in the afternoon - not to clash with the garba dancing at other locations in the evening.

Guru Purnima, falling in July, is a vibrant festival for Sathya Sai Baba's devotees. It is an anniversary of special significance for those Hindus whose love for the Divine is nurtured through the mediation of a guru. The fact that Baba is regarded as an avatar does not mean that his devotees overlook his role as guru: the latter is subsumed under the former. In many cases, the initial attraction of Baba is that of an eminent guru - an attraction only enhanced by his charismatic presence and his claim to be an avatar.

The term purnima indicates that the day which has been set aside by tradition for propitiating one's guru and seeking his blessing and grace, is a day of the full moon. The fact that the annual commemoration falls in the Indian month of Ashadha is connected by Baba's devotees with yet another ancient convention. It recalls for them the practice of applying oneself to the study of the Vedas and other scriptures in the monsoon season which follows Ashadha in parts of India. In accordance with that custom, many Gujarati Hindus - for example the members of the Shree Prajapati

Association in Bradford - use the month of August for the sequential reading and exposition of a selected scripture. Prior to Guru Purnima itself, in Sathya Sai Baba's own ashram, Prashanti Nilayam, crowds gather to await the guru's discourse on the auspicious day with eagerness. In 1975 the devotees of Sathya Sai Baba in Bradford produced and circulated an information sheet about the festival elaborating some of these points: an indication in itself of the importance of the day to the members of the satsang.

Guru Purnima is not celebrated in identical manner from year to year by the Sai satsang in Bradford. It is an instructive example of variation and adaptability in the practice of the community. Its observance is always structured to suit the current interests, the numerical strength and the dynamics of commitment in this responsive social organism.

In 1975, the Bradford centre mounted what was known as a 'state level' function for the commemoration of Guru Purnima. As was intended, it attracted devotees from many parts of England: in particular, large numbers from Manchester and the north-west, from the Midlands and from London. The prominence of the Bradford satsang at that time, and its willingness to undertake the weighty responsibility of organising the programme and offering hospitality to the visitors, was related to the eminence achieved by its founder. Gulabbhai Patel, president of the Sai Centre in Bradford, was then also president of the Sri Sathya Sai Organisation (U.K.). He was only the second person to hold that office. Thus, in a gesture of support for its own founder, the Bradford satsang hired the prestigious St. George's Hall to present a programme unique in the history to date of the observance of Guru Purnima in the city. The selection of this festival as the occasion on which to mount such a major commemoration indicates its importance for all the devotees of Sathya Sai Baba.

Approximately two thousand British devotees, the majority of whom were of Gujarati extraction, participated in the events of Saturday 19 July 1975, in St. George's Hall. The celebrations commenced with oblations to the guru: 'offering flowers at the Lotus Feet' as the programme suggested. All the participating

satsangs led, in turn, sessions of bhajan singing. Another such session was led by children from all the centres combined. There were two lectures by distinguished guests. There was an arati ceremony, and, to conclude, the distribution of vibhuti and prasad. The central feature of the occasion was, however, a dramatic performance presented by the children of the Bradford satsang, 'The Advent of the Avatar'.

The nature of the play presented by the young people, focussing on a particular incident in the life of Sathya Sai Baba, was significant. It indicated the extent to which the observance of Guru Purnima within this community surpasses the general conception of reverence for a guru. The theme of the drama related to the belief that Baba is able to take to himself the distress or sickness of selected followers, relieving or curing them (but not without pain to himself). It vividly recounted events reported to have taken place prior to and during the celebration of Guru Purnima, twelve years previously.

On 28 June 1963, at Prashanti Nilayam, Sathya Sai Baba had announced that he would grant no more interviews to devotees and visitors for a week. He gave no reason for this unexpected declaration, not even to close associates. Suddenly, on the morning of 29 June, he became unconscious. Regaining consciousness briefly on 1 July, Baba told the Assistant Director of Medical Services of Mysore State that his trouble would be over in five days' time. During that time, as also depicted dramatically on the stage of St. George's Hall, Bradford, by the young members of the city's Sai Centre in July 1975, Baba is said to have suffered four severe heart attacks. His left side was paralysed and the sight of his left eye and his speech were badly affected. At one point, Sathya Sai indicated to his attendants that a devotee living at a distance was in danger of death through a severe stroke and heart attacks. The truly devout knew, and know, how to interpret the assertion of this conjunction. Many, however, at the time had serious doubts about Baba's professions of divinity, if he could suffer so distressingly.

The tension on that remarkable occasion in 1963 had been heightened and made more disturbing by the

arrival of a flow of expectant worshippers at Prashanti Nilayam for Guru Purnima, which fell on 6 July that year. The outcome, puzzling and unanticipated, became clear on the evening of the festival itself.

Sathya Sai Baba arrived on the platform for the commemoration of Guru Purnima in an apparently hemiplegic, paralytic state, the toes of his left foot describing an arc as he dragged them across the ground. The crowd of approximately five thousand people was moved to pity as they contemplated the demise of their avatar. The occasion, however, came to an electrifying climax as, in an atmosphere charged with astonishment, Baba sprinkled water with his right hand over his left, effecting an apparent cure. He then gently massaged the left leg with both hands. In that way he is said to have completed his restoration to health. He rose and delivered himself of his Guru Purnima discourse for over an hour. The witnesses were ecstatic - not only on the original occasion, but also (in modified degree) at the spectacle of its dramatic representation by Gujarati young people at the major public event in Bradford in 1975 (Kasturi 1975a: 78-91; Murphet 1973: 128-129; S. Kaul 1975b: 4; cf. Osborne 1975: 46).

In other years, when Guru Purnima has not been marked by any outstanding event, its presence has been signalled by at least three modifications in the practice of the satsang. The mandir has been specially decorated, with ample use of garlands and other floral decorations, together (sometimes) with coloured ribbons. The length of the normal Thursday bhajan mandal has been extended to at least three hours; or a special bhajan mandal of due length has been convened on a day nearer to the actual date of the festival. Furthermore, the provision of prasad has been extra generous, even lavish, including the unusual offerings of strawberries and water melon. Capacity congregations are normally present.

On two occasions (in 1979 and 1980) the celebration of Guru Purnima was embellished with the showing of films about Sathya Sai Baba's life and work. On the second of those occasions, the auspicious day itself having fallen during the preceding week, a Sunday was set aside for commemoration of its significance. Not less

than one hundred people were gathered by 10.00 a.m. for the puja of the 108 divine names. The puja was performed by a devotee who offered petals of a chrysanthemum one by one to the godhead. Such an act of adoration accompanied each separate articulation of the 108 sacred epithets (Kasturi 1979). By no means exclusive to Guru Purnima, the ritual is commonly used within the satsang to mark the commencement of a highly festive occasion.

Following the puja, bhajans began and continued until noon, when a meal was served to all the worshippers in the puja-room. This was impressive - in that approximately one hundred people sat down to lunch together in what is no more than the through-lounge of a larger-than-average terraced house. The congregation merely changed its seating arrangement, with everyone accommodated in one of the four parallel straight lines, cross-legged on the floor at right angles to the shrine. Two pairs of lines thus faced each other across newspapers that had been symmetrically laid out on the carpet to make a table-cloth, upon which the plates of food were placed. It was a substantial meal. On what had now become an attractively social occasion, the large gathering was served without fuss in a very pleasant and intimate atmosphere. The context of the whole event as an act of worship was enhanced by the playing, in the background, of a cassette of bhajans recorded in Wellingborough by another satsang and incorporating some that were sung in English.

At 2.30 the afternoon programme began. The congregation had now increased, and included a large proportion of young people, especially young men in the 14-26 age-group. There were at least 120 people present - absolute capacity for the mandir. The programme consisted of three films about Sathya Sai Baba's life and work. One was an account of two of Baba's most noted miracles; the second consisted largely of a visual account of meetings he addressed, with renderings into English of his discourses. The third was a travelogue based on Baba's journey to northern India in 1975.

In Bradford's Sai Mandir that afternoon, it was evident that there was a high level of excitement and anticipation amongst the devotees. A university

student commented that he remembered well the first occasion on which he had seen a film of Baba. It had moved him very much. He was, once again, deeply impressed by Baba's filmed discourses. It became evident, too, that the films made their impact on many others of the young people attending, despite the difficulty of viewing from the back in such a tightly-packed room. The second film, however, was not such as to hold the attention of the young indefinitely, and that led to a certain amount of chatter amongst a group of the less reverent in the gathering, sitting at the rear. Elderly people appeared to be enthused by what they saw, even if the long and technical English translations dubbed over the speeches themselves were incomprehensible to them (cf. appendix 6).

A hitherto unique feature of the commemoration of Guru Purnima in the Bradford satsang in 1982 was the fact that at the end of June nine of the young men of the fellowship set out on pilgrimage to Prashanti Nilayam, specifically to be there in time for the festival. The impact of that journey, and the preparation for it, on the satsang, was considerable. In Bradford itself, on Guru Purnima day, with the absent pilgrims much in the minds of the congregation, an extended bhajan mandal was maintained for three hours.

Group pilgrimage to Prashanti Nilayam again marked the commemoration of Guru Purnima in 1983. The party on this occasion was larger in number (fourteen) and of mixed gender, but still predominantly young. In Bradford itself there was no major event, as the National Council had decided to hold a special programme for all the centres in London. The Bradford satsang supported that, many travelling to London to celebrate the occasion.

It is not Hindu festivals alone, however, that make an impact on the devotees of Sathya Sai Baba in Bradford. The location of the satsang in a British city means that there has been motivation for acknowledgement of the prime religious festival of the majority community. The desire to observe Christmas has been further sustained by the syncretic orientation of the teaching of Sathya Sai Baba. The young people of the satsang in particular, educated in British schools and subjected to western cultural pressures, have been

particularly committed to the desire to celebrate Christmas together. A special bhajan mandal has sometimes been arranged, or a normal one extended to mark the festive season. It has not been unknown for a party to be held. Christmas cards with greetings for Baba are received at the centre, which has sometimes been specially decorated for the occasion. The president of the satsang himself first sought to obtain pictures of Jesus and Mary to hang in the mandir on 27 December 1979: evidence of response by the leader of the fellowship to the impact of the Christian festival.

In 1983 plans were worked out in advance for the holding of a special five-day conference for teachers at the mandir over Christmas. It was to relate to Sathya Sai Baba's moral education programme. Later the idea was transmuted into the concept of a four-day general conference for all interested persons. The plans were so enthusiastically conceived at first that they were mentioned in a letter to Baba, seeking his blessing on all the intentions of the satsang for the Christmas season. Such aspirations were seen as expressing the sense of responsibility felt within the fellowship for initiating a wider interest in the work of Baba throughout the north of England. Both plans were dropped eventually, for lack of support, despite other notable achievements in that period (see 8.5). Nevertheless, there was a determination that the season should not pass unmarked. Thus, children of the satsang performed special Christmas items as a major contribution to the normal Thursday bhajan mandal on 22 December 1983.

2.3 SPECIAL EVENTS

The regular activities at the Sri Sathya Sai Centre in Bradford, and the periodical celebrations of major festivals, are supplemented from time to time by specially organised events. Such irregular but outstanding occasions notably include visits by guest speakers, the corporate performance of a particularly favoured ritual on selected Sunday mornings, and the holding of gatherings to which devotees from other areas are invited.

The role played by visiting speakers in the history of the satsang is noteworthy. It was a visit to

Bradford at the end of 1969 by a Brahmin priest on a tour of Hindu settlements in Britain, performing puja and holding teaching sessions, that provided the stimulus which later led to the foundation of the Sai Centre in the city. On at least one other occasion, another itinerant priest gave an address in the mandir in the context of a normal bhajan mandal. Such events, involving Brahmin priests, are, however, extremely rare. The Bradford satsang has drawn chiefly on lay sources for assistance and inspiration in the renewal of its devotional life. Pre-eminent among these lay persons have been Dr. Ghurye, a medical practitioner from Leicester, and a young man from Wolverhampton, both of whom developed significant teaching roles on visits to the Sai Centre in Bradford (see below, 8.3).

Dr. Ghurye, now retired, has had personal acquaintance with Sathya Sai Baba since the days when he was a medical student in India. As a young man he went to Prashanti Nilayam, in the first instance as an interested sceptic. He was so impressed by Baba, his charisma, feats and teaching, that he went back there every year to spend his long vacation in Baba's ashram. Dr. Ghurye's piety and his skill as an expositor of religious themes have made a deep impression on the Bradford satsang.

Dr. Ghurye first came to give addresses in the Bradford mandir in the autumn of 1980. In January 1981 he came again. He had won for himself a real place in the affections of the community - and not only amongst those of mature age. Young people enthused over the uniqueness of the doctor's talent for communicating and justifying the convictions of the community. He was felt to be friendly and approachable, and very different from other speakers of whom the adults had had great expectations, but whom the young people had found to be disappointing and boring. In February 1981 one twenty-year old man recollected that his faith had been low and that he had become very sceptical about Sathya Sai Baba prior to Dr. Ghurye's first visit. He vouchsafed, however, that the doctor had explained and discussed his concerns so well that he was able to see everything clearer than before. In consequence, his faith had been enormously strengthened. That young man went on to become most active in the life of the

satsang, the pivot around whom much future development took place.

Dr. Ghurye's reputation had not diminished at all when he came again to give addresses at the Sai Centre in Bradford in September 1981. The benefits expected of his visit were earnestly anticipated and commended in advance by a member of the satsang, an undergraduate in sciences at a northern university. When he came, the doctor spoke in English at a special meeting for the younger devotees on a Friday evening, and in Gujarati at several gatherings on the following day. In the young people's session Dr. Ghurye gave two addresses, speaking for more than two hours altogether. His topics included: the nature of Sathya Sai Baba's miraculous powers, to which he offered his own personal testimony; the relationships of children with their parents; the role of motherhood in religion and theology; the nature of the emblem adopted by the Sri Sathya Sai Centres; the inter-relationship of the religions of the world; and the need to find time for religious devotion. One of the most obviously effective elements in Dr. Ghurye's work that evening was the instruction he offered in the nature and art of Om-kara, the exhaling of the mystical monosyllable. That practice initiates and concludes virtually all Hindu worship. With this, he helped the congregation, especially the large number of young people, in a very practical way.

It is significant that the number attending that Friday evening was in excess of 90. The high figure is of interest because the addresses were given in English, and had been publicised in advance as specifically for young people. Of the 90 persons present, 60 were males and 40 of those were in the age-group 14-26 years. Sitting together in a solid phalanx, this group provided the congregation with a very substantial youthful male core. Their attentive presence in such numbers was not only testimony to the magnetism of Dr. Ghurye but also to the impact of meetings held the preceding week-end, at which the speaker had himself been a young man. The response to the teaching offered by these two visitors of contrasting ages signalled the fact that the devotion and the dynamism of the satsang were undergoing a process of renewal. Through the invited intervention of two speakers from

other centres, this process, already embryonic, had become a dialectic one. The visitors became agents in its development, enhancing and propagating it.

Dr. Ghurye visited the mandir again on 1 September 1983, to speak at the Thursday bhajan mandal. By then, it had become clear that the revival of commitment and the engagement of new interest apparent in the events of September 1981 had not represented merely a passing phase.

The introduction to the Bradford satsang of a ritual known as lakhsacharan, and its periodic practice in the mandir thereafter on selected Sunday mornings, had arisen directly out of a visit of Dr. Ghurye in 1980. The name of the ritual is interpreted by the Bradford devotees as suggesting a lakh (that is, 100,000 or, used inexactly, an exceedingly high number) of acts of obeisance at the feet (charana) of a deity.⁶ Because this form of puja requires at least three hours for its performance, it constitutes a corporate event in itself and is not easily accommodated within any other occasion. It was commended to the Bradford satsang by Dr. Ghurye as a means whereby new life and a more intense devotion could be stimulated within the fellowship. His commendation was based on the experience of the corresponding satsang in Leicester. In consequence, lakhsacharan was practised in Bradford for the first time in December 1980. Enthusiasm for the new experience was reflected in the fact that further occasions for its performances were speedily arranged in the first three months of 1981. It was carried out on at least four Sunday mornings in that period, and has been observed occasionally since.

One Sunday in March 1981, approximately fifty persons gathered for the lakhsacharan puja. Young people in the age-range 14-26 years were strongly represented. Because the ritual requires uninterrupted concentration, one age-group was missing: the very young children. Thus in some respects, the event was different from a bhajan mandal. At the latter, although there is steady concentration on the part of the congregation throughout the hymn-singing and the associated rituals, it is always possible for an individual to get up and slip out, returning later. One can also arrive late, and some people regularly do so, sacri-

ficing some of the punya, merit, and some of the spiritual benefit, that would otherwise accrue. The observance of lakhsacharan, however, is different. Invested with even greater sanctity, it is characteristic of this corporate ritual that all the participants should act together. Thus, when the puja is about to begin, the front doors are locked - a most unusual procedure in this mandir at the time of any gathering, except very late at night.

All participants in the ritual are equipped with several necessary perquisites: a dish full of grains of rice (uncooked), a plate, a serviette to cover the plate, and a devotional picture of their own choosing. The devotional aid is placed centrally upon the plate the furthest rim of which serves to raise the top of the picture). The worshippers sit in parallel lines, two rows facing each other, paired male with male and female with female. The rite itself consists in picking up the grains of rice one at a time, placing them reverently upon the plate, at first in the vicinity of the devotional picture, but afterwards - as the surrounding area becomes covered with grains - on the picture itself. Initially the outer edges of the picture are covered, but afterwards the centre, leaving the face or faces until last. Eventually the whole of the picture is covered. With the removal of each grain of rice from its original container, the worshipper repeats aloud the mantra: 'Om. Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Krishna e namah' ('Om. I pay homage to the all-powerful Lord Sathya Sai Krishna).⁷ The mantra is thus, with considerable zeal, chanted in unison by the whole gathering repetitively. The rate of repetition measures the speed with which the grains of rice are transferred from their original container to the plate and the devotional picture. The chanting acquires an infectious rhythm which dispels any tendency to tedium. On 8 March 1981, the ritual occupied three hours, while the satsang transferred 100,000 grains of rice to the selected devotional pictures, thereby repeating the mantra an equal number of times.

Lakhsacharan is impressive in its capacity to generate an experience of corporate devotion. It is a means of concentrating the mind. Its repetitiveness enables the participant to forget both circumstances and surroundings, and to focus on devotional meditation.

The devotee becomes mentally detached from the physical act of transferring the grains of rice and from the chanting of the mantra while fulfilling both requirements. Adoration of one's spiritual Lord is expressed and generated individually, but in unison.

It is the corporateness of lakhsacharan that is considered to have vital relevance to the effectiveness of the ritual. The intoning of the mantra is said to generate vibrations which impregnate the grains of rice over which the sacred words have been repeated. At the end of the puja, the rice that has been brought and used by each participant is mixed together. As the grains intermingle, they are thought to pool their vibrations. Thus, if fifty people have performed the puja, when the rice is mixed the vibrations that have been registered by the grains are increased by a factor of fifty. It is thus considered to have become, by ritual means, extremely powerful rice. That remains true of every portion that is then taken away.

The devotees take a share of the rice home with them. They keep it, so that when next they cook rice they can add a little of that which has been ritually-charged to the new rice. The grains that have been consecrated by lakhsacharan pass on their vibrations to the fresh rice. In that way, it is considered that the family that eats the meal will benefit on many occasions from the power of the vibrations generated in the mandir.

The effectiveness of lakhsacharan is also thought to benefit the corporate life of the fellowship. Thus, after significant recovery and renewal in the activities at the Sri Sathya Sai Centre in 1981, there was a period troubled by factionalism and disillusionment in the early months of the following year. Morale within the satsang fell again, temporarily, to a low ebb. In April 1982, reflecting on the diverse experiences of the preceding months, members of the satsang affirmed their belief that it was the lakhsacharan puja that had helped them to rise out of spiritual doldrums in 1981. Yet for some time they had discontinued the practice. During that month, therefore, they commenced its periodic observation once again, convinced of its effectiveness.

In 1982 and 1983 major events were planned by the satsang for which the Sai Centre itself could not offer adequate accommodation. In such circumstances it has become customary for the satsang to rent larger locations nearby in the University of Bradford. The 'Communal Building' of the university offers a very commodious, dignified venue in which to hold impressive public occasions. There, in November 1982, an assembly attended by approximately eight hundred persons was organised by the young people of the satsang. The same location has been used for other major public events. Some lesser occasions specifically for young people, also attracting an attendance from a wide area, have been held in the mandir itself.

The Bradford satsang sometimes arranges coach trips to temples and centres in other places. For example, visits to Hindu celebrations not directly connected with devotion to Sathya Sai Baba in Preston, Lancashire, and in Harrow, Middlesex, took place in 1978.

2.4 GROUP ACTIVITIES

The satsang sponsors two main group activities. The Bal Vikas (child development) class reflects the emphasis in the teaching of Sathya Sai Baba on the religious and moral education of the young. The Seva Dal (social service group) arises out of the focus on voluntary practical work in the wider community which is present in Baba's utterances. There is also a Mahila Vibhag (women's section) which has been convened from time to time to meet particular needs. It has provided support for all the satsang's large public events, where a significant number of domestic or catering tasks have been generated. It has functioned separately, as a temporary association of the teenage girls and young women in ancillary roles, in contexts in which the male-dominated Seva Dal has provided the drive and motivation for action. Unlike certain other centres, the Mahila Vibhag in Bradford has had no permanent independent existence of its own (Gokak 1975a: 8). In addition to these three organisations, a religious study circle which has a broad membership but which meets in the home of an English devotee in the neighbouring town of Keighley, maintains an association with the satsang.

Initially, in India, the work undertaken by Sathya

Sai Baba's devotees amongst children was conducted in Bal Vihar (children's play) groups. It was in 1971 that Sathya Sai Baba himself gave new impetus and direction to that activity and proposed a more exact appellation for it. He perceived untapped potential in the child for personal spiritual development and for the commendation of religious commitment to adults. Children were to be engaged in public speaking at an early age, and in creative writing and dramatic productions based on the Hindu scriptures (Kasturi 1975b: 294-295). In India and elsewhere this approach became linked in the centres with structured programmes of training in ethics and religion which were published by the organisations of devotees. They were designed for children and adolescents in three age groups: 6-10 years, 11-14, and post-14. The objectives of such programmes have sometimes been defined in terms of 'character building', or training in 'spiritual awareness', or the development of an 'integrated personality' (Central Office 1974: 1, 21; Gokak 1973: cover). They have sometimes been utilised in state schools in India. Such programmes have been subjected to apparently rigorous evaluation by some educational agencies acting for Baba's devotees (Kulkarni 1975). They have become the basis for ambitious and highly theoretical literature (Jagadeesan 1983).

In the Bradford Sai Centre there has been a consistent concern to maintain a full curriculum of Bal Vikas instruction for the children of the satsang. It has not always been possible to fulfil that intention, however, and there have been three phases in the development of the Bal Vikas work during the course of this research.

The first phase commenced prior to 1975 and continued until July 1977. It included the period of preparation for the large-scale celebration of Guru Purnima in 1975, in which the children played a significant role. There were also other lesser public performances (P.K. Kaul 1977: 6). During this phase one of the young married women of the community was running the Bal Vikas class, co-operating with an Englishman, a solicitor in his twenties who had become a devotee of Sathya Sai Baba while on a tour of India. A systematic effort was

made to teach the words of Indian bhajans to the children, and to help them to understand their meaning. Traditional mantras and prayers, including some drawn from the Christian tradition, featured in the devotions. The young people were made familiar with parables drawn from the Upanishads and from the teaching of Jesus. There was some tension between time-honoured Indian modes of instruction and liberal modern styles of working with children, represented in the persons of the two leaders. Both the untrained instructors experienced the difficulties involved in teaching lively groups of youngsters, yet it was felt that a measure of success was earned by their effort. Amongst the evidence of appreciation of the commitment shown was the pleasure that the children and adolescents took in the company of the young Englishman who had so identified himself with their community.

Activities with the children of the Bal Vikas were not confined to mere instruction on Saturday mornings. Outings to the countryside by bus were arranged. Occasionally some of the teenagers were taken to concerts of sacred music in the western classical tradition, to enlarge their aesthetic experience. Intermingled with the recounting of stories of Lord Krishna in their Bal Vikas class there were recordings of anthems from Handel's 'Messiah' and from Bach's cantatas, diversifying their religious awareness. In 1977, when the solicitor moved from Bradford, he left an indelible impression on the young people, a void in the life and affections of the satsang. A measure of the impact made by the work of the two teachers in that first phase, is the continued involvement of many who were once in their classes in the activities at the centre. Some of those former teenagers have played a leading role in more recent developments in the satsang.

From July 1977 onwards, the solicitor having moved from the district to follow his profession elsewhere, there was an attempt to continue the systematic Bal Vikas work without him. It encountered difficulties. At that time, therefore, the second phase began. It was a period of spasmodic activity, since there were no suitable teachers permanently available for the group. Leadership of the Bal Vikas is seen as a very responsible office which can not be entrusted by the president of the satsang to any casual volunteer.

Periodic efforts were made between 1977 and 1981 to hold the interest and to develop the understanding of the young people, but without conspicuous success. Adolescents complained that whereas, in India, Bal Vikas curricula would encompass the whole sphere of education, in Bradford the focus was exclusively on religion. In response to such criticism, the services of a group of Gujarati undergraduates at the university, attenders at the bhajan mandal during term times, were enlisted. They taught at least a modicum of physics, chemistry and mathematics to the older members of the class. Other devotees, given a more regular responsibility for instruction, devoted some of their efforts to Gujarati language teaching. Even in this period of difficulty in staffing, the satsang did not abandon its effort to maintain a Bal Vikas class.

The third phase in the development of the work with children began in 1981. Bal Vikas classes were energetically recommenced under the direction of the older adolescents themselves. This signalled a new commitment to the satsang, and to the cause of Sathya Sai Baba, that burgeoned amongst the young during that year. The overall aim of this activity was later described by the young man who led it as 'moulding (the children) to become good citizens'. He saw it as very closely related to Sathya Sai Baba's emphasis on 'education in human values' (14.2.84; cf. Gokak 1973; Jagadeesan 1983; Mason 1983b; 4).

The cultural heritage of the children of the satsang being Hindu, it is Hinduism that provides the focus for their religious instruction. It is the intention of their young teachers, however, to make increasing reference to other religions in the future. Even at present, other religions are not ignored. For exhibitions at major public events organised by the Seva Dal in 1982 and 1983, the Bal Vikas children assisted in producing a wide range of visual aids. These related not only to Hinduism and the teaching of Sathya Sai Baba, but also to Buddhism and Sikhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

It has not proved possible, even after 1981, to maintain permanently a full programme of Bal Vikas activity for the complete age-range. In February 1984, regular work was only being done with the

senior section, a class of fifteen 13 and 14-year-olds. In 1983 they organised, without assistance from any older members of the satsang, a visit to a hospital. In December of that year they planned their own contribution to the pre-Christmas bhajan mandal. That took the form of two plays which the children themselves wrote, produced and performed. The boys presented a modern version of the parable of the Good Samaritan; the girls a nativity play. They also sang carols. Early in 1984, some of the children turned their attention to the organising of sports activities. Of their own initiative, they arranged a football competition for boys from all the Sai centres in the north of England, encouraged by their leader.

The Bal Vikas activities in Bradford have not been rigidly separated from the work of the Seva Dal, which has nevertheless functioned primarily as an association for those who have outgrown the Bal Vikas classes. Wherever their younger age did not create problems, however, the energies of the children as well as those of adolescents and adults, have been harnessed in rendering practical service in society at large. Originally, eighteen was regarded as the formal age of entry to the Seva Dal, but by 1978 it was recognised locally as sixteen. In practice it has been more fluid. Since 1981, while adults have, as always, been supportive of the work of the Seva Dal, initiative and direction for its activities have been firmly lodged in the hands of a committed group of young people. At times of preparation for particular projects, meetings are held weekly on Wednesday evenings. At other times they are called according to inclination or need.

The structure of Seva Dal groups and the nature of the service they are encouraged to offer is specified by Sathya Sai Baba himself and discussed in the publications of the organisations of devotees. In India, there is emphasis on provision for the sick and needy, and on work which is supportive of secular agencies in local rural development, in medical services and in disaster relief. Elsewhere, any useful social or welfare work augmenting public provision is encouraged. Seva Dal groups also sponsor religious education and development amongst adults, supplementing the other activities of the centres

(Gokak 1975a: 8; Dharmakshetra Charitable Trust 1977; World Council of Sri Sathya Sai Organisations n.d.; Swallow 1976: 161, 163; Laing 1983b).

As with the Bal Vikas class, there have been three coinciding phases in the development of Seva Dal activity in the Bradford satsang. During the first phase, up to July 1977, there were visits to homes for handicapped children, homes for the elderly and blind, and to mental hospitals. The object was to bring both entertainment and a measure of religious comfort to the residents of the institutions visited. On such occasions, if circumstances allowed it, the Seva Dal presented a programme which included traditional Gujarati dance and song. They sang bhajans too, or at a suitable time, Christmas carols, and articulated a religious message. Such visits stimulated in the young people of the centre an awareness of the needs of others. In 1976, the Seva Dal mounted an exhibition of literature about Sathya Sai Baba in the Central Library in Bradford. They also represented the satsang in a municipal 'East comes West' exhibition, and in a vigil for world peace and racial harmony in Bradford Cathedral.

In the summer of 1977, Seva Dal work, like that of Bal Vikas in Bradford, was affected by the young solicitor's leaving the city. He had invested so much energy in their events that it was inevitable that **he** would be missed. The new phase was one of spasmodic and less intense activity. Quite long dormant periods were punctuated by special occasions, such as participation in the celebration of Seva Dal Day at Leicester in September 1979. One piece of social service, however, continued uninterrupted. It arose directly out of a concern of Sathya Sai Baba himself, and has been maintained in Bradford through all three phases of Seva Dal activity. Both by exhortation and by example, Baba encourages his followers to visit people in prison (V. Balu 1981). This was taken up in Bradford at an early stage in the development of the satsang by the man who first served as the convenor of the Seva Dal. He pays a monthly visit to a high security jail. This is allowed only to the individual holder of an official permit, so it is not a group activity. It is, nevertheless, one of the characteristic marks of a fellow-

ship of the devotees of Sathya Sai Baba.

In 1981 the third phase in the evolution of the Bradford Seva Dal commenced. In June, the young men of the satsang organised a sponsored fifty-mile walk in aid of the Lord Mayor's Appeal for the International Year of the Disabled. The youths concerned were notably those of sixth-form age, those studying at colleges and universities, and the unemployed. Highly animated about their plan, they carried it through with great enthusiasm.

Such initiative of the young, and its encouragement by the leaders of the fellowship, has proved to be characteristic of the third phase in the development of Seva Dal activities. A similar tolerant approach was later practised, mutatis mutandis, by the young member of the Seva Dal who was in charge of the Bal Vikas work in 1983, as suggested above. In 1981 in the Seva Dal, as afterwards in 1983 in the work with younger teenagers, youths themselves selected the forms of service in the community that they wished to take up. Even more significantly, they had begun to interpret for themselves the task of the satsang in representing the message of Sathya Sai Baba to the wider world.

It was in September 1981 that it became irrefutably clear that the Seva Dal had started to develop a new phase in its activities. In the preceding months young people from Bradford had participated, with other members of the satsang, in visits to the Sai centre in Wolverhampton. The interaction had proved to be particularly stimulating for the youths from Yorkshire. They organised a day of teaching meetings for young people in the Bradford centre on Saturday 19 September. The speaker was RP, a 19-year-old Gujarati from Wolverhampton. He had emerged as a dynamic leader in the Sai satsang in his home town.

Arrangements for this special event were in the hands of the young people themselves. The impact of the day was such as to ensure that the Seva Dal in Bradford became a singularly potent factor in the life of the satsang. One of its indirect consequences was the pilgrimage to Prashanti Nilayam made by nine of the young men of the fellowship in the summer of 1982. That journey further enhanced the

commitment of the group. Thus, in November 1982, the birthday of Sathya Sai Baba was celebrated in Bradford with a major public event, held in the premises of the university. The motivation for it was provided by the young people of the Seva Dal. It was carried out with great enthusiasm, precise organisation, and conspicuous success. The large assembly that came together that day was drawn not only from Bradford but from many parts of northern England and also from the Midlands.

In April 1983, the young people of the Seva Dal organised two separate youth conferences: one for boys and one for girls. Each one was residential, taking place over a week-end, and each one featured a long-distance sponsored walk for charity. Both events attracted participants from other towns and cities in the north. Both reflected an awareness of a mandate that had been given to the young people of the Bradford Seva Dal by the National Council, to the effect that they should be responsible for stimulating further developments in youth activities in the northern centres. Overnight accommodation for visitors was provided in the mandir and in other family homes.

In June 1983, the satsang - through the Seva Dal - organised a special conference for those who are known as 'English' (that is, white British) devotees. Guest speakers were invited. A young Englishman from Halifax who had become a member of the satsang was given a key role. The event was held in one of the lecture rooms of the university.

Again, in the summer of 1983, members of the Seva Dal, female as well as male, on this occasion, were among those who went on pilgrimage to Prashanti Nilayam. It was the Seva Dal that provided the leadership for this party - a larger group than had set out the previous year. While the pilgrims were away, those members of the Seva Dal who remained behind invested some of their efforts in organising a major public event in August. It was to mark the visit of a respected religious teacher, Swami Sachchidananda, and was held in the communal building of the university. Approximately five hundred people were present, including a substantial visiting party from the corresponding satsang in Wolverhampton.

In February 1984, young people of the Seva Dal travelled to Dursley, Gloucestershire, by invitation, to lead devotional singing at a conference at the Prema Project, Uley. It was a special event organised by English devotees in the south-west to provide an introduction to the life and teaching of Sathya Sai Baba for people in that region. It is significant that the reputation of the young members of the Bradford Seva Dal was being recognised in a location so far from their home base, and in a context which was one of expansion for Baba's devotees.

3

The Temple and the Icons

The Sri Sathya Sai satsang meets in a large Victorian terraced house half a mile from the centre of Bradford and from the first dwellings occupied by South Asians in the city. Adjacent is an area that would once have been regarded as the heart of Bradford's Gujarati quarter. The demolition of inner-city houses in a programme of urban renewal has, however, transformed the situation. Land formerly characterised by both residential and industrial use, has been acquired by the University of Bradford for its building programme. Houses in contiguous streets, a little more distant from the city centre, have gradually been acquired by Gujaratis. Thus, the Sri Sathya Sai Centre is now located on a boundary of the wider-spread Gujarati settlement. It faces towards the city centre, close to the university and to a quarter largely devoted to the provision of bed-sitter accommodation for students. Behind the mandir, on its southern and western sides, stretch rows of terraced stone-built houses. They provided a substantial refuge for the Poles, Ukrainians, and other eastern Europeans, who came to Bradford in considerable numbers after the Second World War. In the 1960s and 1970s, those houses were gradually acquired by Gujarati families.

3.1 THE MANDIR AND THE ICONOLOGICAL TASK

On entering the Sai Centre, one finds oneself in a domestic entrance hall equipped with wooden shelves constructed to receive the shoes of worshippers. Stairs lead upwards to the family accommodation. A passage-way leads back to the kitchen. At one time printed announcements were fastened to the wall in the hall; now a proper notice-board displays devotional posters and promotes forthcoming events. It is here, in this hall, that a new visitor is likely to hear the greeting, 'Jai Sai Ram!' (Hail Sai Rama!), for

the first time. It becomes simply 'Sai Ram!' (cf. Williams 1984: 138). This reciprocal greeting of devotees encountering each other in their temple or elsewhere affirms the divinity of Sathya Sai Baba through asserting his identity with Rama, a revered avatar of the god Vishnu. Doors to the mandir itself give way to the right: two, because a dividing wall between twin downstairs living-rooms was demolished to create an area large enough for semi-public gatherings. By whichever door one enters, the visitor immediately appreciates the wealth of colour on display. The devotional pictures in the mandir, both in the shrine itself and on the side walls of the room, comprise its dominant feature.

The shrine is a wooden painted structure at the south-western end of the room, furthest from the bay window and the road. It takes up the whole of that wall, hiding a window. Its central feature is designed in such a way - with balustrades and tiny fret-worked steps - as to *suggest* an Indian palace and therefore the regal nature of the divine. The symbolism is reinforced by the gadi, the throne-like chair for Baba, and the elaborate chatra (sunshade) which, since 1983, shelters it. They stand not in the shrine itself but in front of it, and to the right. During devotional meetings, a strip of ceremonial velvet is laid out in front of the shrine, immediately before a picture of Sathya Sai Baba's feet ('the lotus feet') to welcome and celebrate his presence in the gatherings of his devotees.

The shrine itself is replete with devotional pictures which adorn its walls and stand also on its larger steps. It is equipped with many of the appurtenances of Hindu worship: containers of kunkuma (red sandal paste) and coloured powders, rice and water, incense sticks and coconuts. Effigies of Hindu deities abound. A panchdhatu, a pot made of an alloy of five metals, with a hole in its base, hangs from the ceiling to the right of the shrine. It is suspended over a silver tray on which stands an elaborate linga-yoni, sacred representation of the male and female organs of generation, symbolic of divine creative power, and particularly associated with the god Shiva. Small lingas are placed around the tray on which that impressive linga-yoni rests, protected by a many-hooded naga, cobra.

In a corner of the shrine, to its left, stands a miniature bed. It represents the traditional Hindu concern to afford the deities due honour, ensuring that they get proper rest and that all their needs are met. That concern is also expressed by the fact that no meal is eaten in this household unless Sathya Sai Baba, represented pictorially and in his effigies in the shrine, has first been offered ritually his portion of the repast. It is then left a while for his partaking.

Symbolic representation in the mandir is manifold: in artefacts for puja and for simpler types of devotion, in tactile three-dimensional form, in plaques and in effigies. The clearest statements that the display makes, however, are articulated through devotional pictures. These oleographs, photographs and paintings, because they are located in a context of worship, may properly be called icons. They are actual or intended likenesses of deities and holy personages. They are placed to convey to the worshipper an awareness of the presence of those venerated figures. Such criteria, employed to distinguish between iconic symbolism and its opposite, abstract aniconic symbolism (Moore 1977), are met by these pictures.

In the case of Sathya Sai Baba himself and in support of the testimony of the icons, the gadi also represents the satsang's spiritual awareness of Baba's presence in the mandir (cf. Knott 1986: 165). Furthermore, it avowedly anticipates Baba's darshan, his physical presence at the centre, for which the devotees always hope, and which they confidently expect. In the interim, the pictures of Baba mediate to the devotees 'the impression that the reality is actually present' (cf. Moore 1977: 22).

The discipline of describing icons and indicating their cultural milieu may, like the artistic task of creating them, properly be designated iconography. It can be undertaken in such a way that it embraces all that may, if further distinctions be employed, be isolated and designated 'iconology'. Both terms, however, will be used here. Thus one can differentiate between iconography as a cultural-historical exercise, and the further task of analysing and interpreting the significance of the data that icono-

graphy brings to light in a specific location and for a contemporary community of worshippers. Such contextual analysis is properly distinguished as iconology. It is particularly important in situations of cultural interaction, and therefore of migration. The iconological task is to explore the significance, both recognised and articulated, and unrecognised and unarticulated, of the iconic data for the worshippers in question (Moore 1977: 19, 25, 27; King 1982: 147).

Prior to the iconographic and iconological tasks, however, a pre-iconographic survey is necessary. In the case of an analysis of the pictures in the Sri Sathya Sai Centre in Bradford, this exercise must necessarily include the identification of the Bradford mandir and the definition of its role and function in Bradford's social history. It necessitates reference to the settlement of Gujarati Hindus in the city. Such a survey describes the specific geographical, historical and social locus in which the icons have been found. It has, in this case, already been encompassed to an extent sufficient for the iconographic exercise to begin. The task then is to identify the theological frame of reference against which the icons are to be understood. Essential resources for this work are provided by a knowledge of the Hindu scriptures, Hindu mythology, the conventions of Indian lore and symbolism, and the history of Indian religion.

The next stage is the synthetic one. The significance of these particular icons in the specific context in which they have been found has to be interpreted. The iconographic identification of their intrinsic meaning has to be integrated with the findings of the pre-iconographic survey and the resulting synthesis analysed. The significance of this exercise can only be disclosed in embryo in this chapter and in chapter 4. It will become fully apparent in the work as a whole, for there is a sense in which the complete thesis is nothing more than an essay in iconology.

Iconology thus offers an approach to what has been termed 'visual theology', for theology does not find its expression only in written texts (Moore 1977: 292; King 1982: 146). Some significant statements of the ideology articulated by the devotees of

Sathya Sai Baba are not verbose treatises but images created in the visual arts. These 'documents' engender their own further significance in the mind of the worshipper. Images invite, but do not themselves articulate, explanation. Iconology thus involves the study of a hermeneutic process, analysis of the interpretation of one symbolic system by another. Superimposed upon the initial impact of the icons is the intervention of reflection, language, speech, the expression of ideas.

In the case of the analysis of the significance of the icons in the Sai Centre in Bradford, extensive resources are at hand for the hermeneutic task. The pan-Indian textual heritage of Hindu theology and mythology, interpreted in the antecedents of these devotional pictures in iconic art, are fundamental to the exercise. Furthermore, Sathya Sai Baba himself, the organisations of his devotees, and individuals acting on their own, have provided ample evidence of the nature of his teaching and of their reflections on it relevant to the understanding of the icons. It is thus possible to relate the ancient resources to the contemporary and specific hermeneutic offered by Sathya Sai Baba and to the published reflections of his devotees.

In addition, there is a fluid and elusive resource which is of definitive importance and which it is the task of a local iconological researcher to identify and analyse. That is the specific articulation, in a particular community, of the significance of the theology proposed by the selected icons. That relates not only to the oleographs, photographs and paintings individually, but to their juxtaposition and their corporate association and manipulation in contexts of puja. In the case of the devotion offered in the Sai Centre in Bradford, the content of the bhanans that are sung forms a major part of this iconological resource. Some of those bhajans are not known to devotees in published form. Formal interviews with devotees, together with their casual explanations, offer unpublished ideological statements to supplement and interpret the visual theology of icons, and the established ideology of texts. Such utterances could be unorthodox, and sometimes mutually inconsistent, but the task of the iconologist demands that all of

this be taken into account, accommodating every relevant dimension within the synthetic discipline. It is therefore in the nature of the task that no brief statement, but rather a complete thesis, could emerge as the eventual fulfilment of the iconological purpose.

3.2 ICON 1: SHIVA AND BABA

The wealth of colour and detail in the visual display in the Sri Sathya Centre in Bradford makes a confusing impact on the unprepared visitor. The variety of imagery places one in a situation where time is needed to acquire orientation. The ubiquitous pictures of Sathya Sai Baba register their dominating presence instantaneously, but they are set in a galaxy of representations of Hindu deities and illustrations of Indian mythology. The presence, since 1981, of pictures of Jesus and Mary, and the locating of a crucifix in a central position above the shrine from 1983 onwards, can cause further disorientation. The newcomer has to reflect on the ordering of the images, interpreting the significance of their positioning. Each element in the display has to be allowed to figure in the interpretation of the others.

A second male figure soon isolates itself to the eye of the visitor - distinguished from the other images not only because of the prominence and frequency of representation but also, like Sathya Sai Baba himself, because manifestly different. This patently human, venerably elderly figure, depicted with a realism which is at variance with some of the stylistic conventions of traditional oleographic art, attracts attention. These are the icons of Sai Baba of Shirdi (d. 1918), a Hindu-Muslim fakir of whom Sathya Sai Baba claims to be a reincarnation (below, 4.1).

With further accommodation to the finer points of the iconic display, the observer gradually realises that amongst all that has registered itself so far, one may still not have responded to the most significant of the icons. Gradually the perspicacious visitor perceives that one of the deities, with matted locks and entwined by a cobra, in some of the largest and most strategically placed of the traditional oleographs, is also recognised in a smaller icon centrally

placed in the shrine at the point where offerings and obeisance are made (icon 1, plate 3.1; figure 3.1). Such an awareness enables the observer to interpret some of the other artefacts, depending on one's familiarity with the prerequisites of Hindu devotion.

The strategic positioning of icon 1 is a sufficient key for the perceptive newcomer, since its impact is reinforced by larger icons depicting the same deity, Shiva, in different contexts. He is often to be recognised, as in icon 1, by his coiled hair with the crescent moon for diadem and the diminutive head of Ganga, divine personification of the Ganges, for crown. In the middle of his forehead is his third eye, enfolded within three horizontal stripes. He is always accompanied by his trident. All these are clearly visible in icon 1, whose key significance for the interpretation of the shrine is confirmed for the knowledgeable by the prominence of the panchdhatu (plate 3.2; figure 3.1).

Panchdhatus are widely used in the worship of Shiva. That the presence of one here is not fortuitous is confirmed by the positioning beneath it of the large black linga-yoni, embellished in silver and set on its silver stand in the silver tray. This is the Shivalinga, the aniconic representation of Shiva's generative power, associated with Shakti, the female manifestation of divine energy. Its accoutrements are themselves significant. Silver is the precious metal particularly associated with Shiva. Facing the linga, outside the tray, kneels a porcelain figure of Nandi, Shiva's traditional mount. Behind the linga is a figurine of Shiva himself, in yogic meditation. Around the periphery, Ganesha, Hanuman and the Mother Goddess pay divine homage to the emblem of sublime creativity. Conch-shells and fruit-offerings are purposefully positioned.

Taken together with the central placing of icon 1, the prominence of the panchdhatu and of the Shivalinga with its surrounding appurtenances, is clear evidence of a pervasive intention in the organisation of the mandir. Closer inspection of icon 1 confirms that it harmonises and integrates the whole spectrum of the display. For not only is it Shiva who is unmistakably seen there. It also depicts a Shivalinga in which is



Plate 3.1: SHIVA, WITH SATHYA SAI BABA IMAGED IN
THE LINGA

Icon 1.

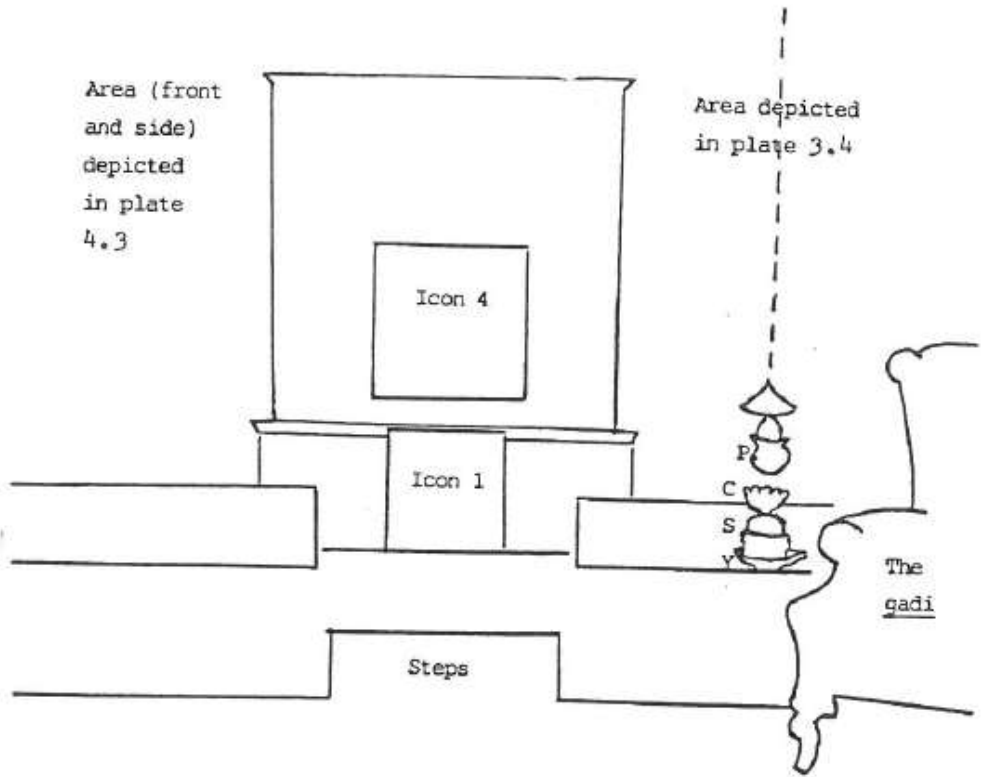


Figure 3.1: ICON 1, THE SHIVALINGA, THE PANCHDHATU AND THE GADI: THEIR RELATIVE POSITIONS

The positions normally occupied by Icons 1 - 4, and by the gadi, are illustrated above, as also the normal positions of:

the panchdhatu (P),
 the Shivalinga (S),
 the yoni (Y), and the
 five-headed cobra (C)
 which surmounts the Shivalinga.



Plate 3.2: THE SHIVALINGA WITH THE PANCHDHATU
SUSPENDE ABOVE

Icon 6 is seen in the background in its
post-1980 position.

clearly reflected the radiant figure of the one who is ubiquitously portrayed in the mandir, Sathya Sai Baba himself.

The central item in the shrine, then, affirms a connection between the ancient symbol of the linga, the deity who is symbolised by the linga, Shiva himself, and Sathya Sai Baba. The three are engaged in the same icon. This, of course, resolves itself into a simpler affirmation of intimate association, even identification, between the two venerated figures so connected.

Because they are found in a context in which the likenesses of Sathya Sai Baba are raised to such pre-eminence, the panchdhatu and the Shivalinga reiterate the intimate connection between Shiva and Sathya Sai Baba articulated by icon 1. To the devotees of Sathya Sai, that picture does not appear in any way strange or unorthodox. Stories are current amongst them which reinforce its very message. It is not unknown for devotees to assert that they have been vouchsafed a vision of Baba, or his apparent reflection, in the shining surface of a linga (Gokak 1975a: 19). Baba is closely connected with the linga in the devotion of his followers, and is credited by the devout with the ability to produce such divine symbols miraculously from his body (Fanibunda 1978: 51). Such accounts, and the icon which is central to the shrine in the Bradford mandir, reiterate the dramatic claim of Sathya Sai Baba himself, first uttered publicly at Prashanti Nilayam in 1963, that he is to be identified with Shiva and with the manifestation of the power of that deity: "I am Shiva-Shakti" (Kasturi 1975a: 88).

Sathya Sai Baba's claim to be an avatar of Shiva has become an axiom of their faith for his devotees, but meets incredulity amongst hostile commentators on contemporary guru-cults in India. It is said that it is a contradiction in terms (Mangalwadi 1977: 162). Traditionally Shiva (unlike Vishnu) has no avatars (cf. Smart 1978b: 160). Others affirm that while it is in the Vaishnavite tradition that the concept of avatars is principally found, it is not unknown in Shaivite modes (Parrinder 1970: 59, 87-89; Babb 1975: 115; O'Flaherty 1978: 145, 193). For that reason, Sathya Sai Baba's assertion presents no insuperable

difficulty to those inclined to be his devotees. Baba has connected this claim with his other extension of customary Hindu thought, his affirmation that Sai Baba of Shirdi was an avatar of Shiva's consort - 'Shakti herself'. He further connects these declarations with his prophecy that 'Shiva alone' is yet to come 'as the third Sail (Kasturi 1975a: 89; cf. and ct. Ruhela 1976: 7). Taken together with his identification of himself with Sai Baba of Shirdi, this establishes the basis for the concept of the Sai yuga, the belief that this is 'the Era of Sathya Sai' (Kasturi 1980a: 50).

Baba's self-identification with Shiva needed to be given a base in the Hindu scriptural and mythological heritage if it was to be taken seriously. Otherwise his devotees, after that startling assertion in 1963, would have been embarrassed by a paucity of substantiating detail to counteract the inevitable accusations of egocentric megalomania levelled against him by hostile sceptics. Baba, accordingly, provided references to his lineage which effectively, for the devout, gave substance to his assertion.

In respect of caste hierarchy, the Rajus of Puttapparathi claim the chiefly status of Kshatriyas (Ruhela 1976: 4; Swallow 1976: 249, 266). A wrong attribution of priestly rank to the family *has*, notwithstanding, been made by some (H. Daniel Smith 1978: 55). As Sathyanarayana Raju, therefore, Baba's lineage was not of the ritually most exalted, the priestly, caste. Even if it had been, the identification of ancient mythological links would still have been an embellishment welcomed by devotees. In that case, its desirability would not, however, have been reinforced by the necessity of meeting the requirements of ritual rank.

Baba's own claim to the most exalted status circumvents the 'stigma attaching to gross or outrageous forms of self-authenticating familial up-casting by transferring the focus of the discussion to a chronologically non-specific mythological era. It is supported by professed revelations regarding the interaction of humans with divine beings, of such a nature as to be unverifiable. Such claims therefore constitute an invitation to faith in the claimant and not to the rigours of historical genealogical verification.

Thus, at the festival of Guru Purnima at Prashanti Nilayam in 1963 (ct. Ruhela 1976: 7), Sathya Sai Baba publicly proclaimed his own sublime nature. He did so not with a mere assertion of his identity with Shiva but by apparently unveiling the details that would serve to substantiate that affirmation:

I am Shiva-Shakti, born in the gotra (clan) of Bharadvaj, according to a boon won by that sage from Shiva and Shakti. Shakti herself was born in the gotra of that sage as Sai Baba of Shirdi; Shiva and Shakti have incarnated as myself in his gotra now; Shiva alone will incarnate as the third Sai in the same gotra in Mysore State. (Kasturi 1975a: 88-89).

Bharadvaj, one of the revered seven sages of Hindu mythology, is mentioned in the Rig-Veda, and the Mahabharata. He is said to have been one of the authors of the Vedic hymns. His son, Drona, was a hero of the Mahabharata. Two of his daughters became intimately related to Vedic gods, one of them being the wife of Indra. His own father, Brhaspati, was divine - supreme deity of intellectual powers, priest and teacher of the gods and Indra's counsellor. Without invoking Brhaspatils name no ritual sacrifice was complete (Danielou 1964: 135, 316-325; Bhattacharji 1970: 202; Pereira 1976: 44). By a single deft allusion, therefore, Sathya Sai Baba laid claim to a lineage for himself of the most exalted order.

Sathya Sai Baba's revelation of his descent from Bharadvaj was vouchsafed to his devotees on the occasion of his apparently miraculous recovery from the stroke which he claimed to have assimilated in order to save an afflicted devotee living at a distance (above 2.2). Bharadvaj himself, Baba revealed to that great Guru Purnima congregation, had in an earlier aeon suffered a stroke which had initiated a sharp interaction between Shiva and his, consort. Shiva became the agent of Bharadvaj's miraculous healing through the sprinkling of water. The parallels drawn by Baba were very specific. The references were of such an order as to suggest insight into details of the mythological heritage hitherto unknown. The subtle correspondence between the new story disclosed by Baba and traditional

stories of the gods and sages in the Puranas have excited analytical comment (Swallow 1976: 273-279). The themes invoked embrace the motif of an urgent embassy of the gods to Shiva, to secure action against evil and suffering. In Sathya Sai Baba's story, Bharadvaj the sage is exalted to an eminence equal to that of the deity, Agni, in the ancient myths. The point in Baba's story, however, is to establish another identity: that of Bharadvaj's eventual progeny (Sathya Sai himself) with another deity, the agent of his release and healing at Guru Purnima, the god Shiva.

Sathya Sai Baba's references to mythology were not merely abstruse allusions with little to commend them except to experts in Sanskritic origins. The story enlisted in support of his claim forged specific links between what his devotees had dramatically witnessed in the preceding days and the ancient resources of Hindu lore. The roles represented in mythology had been vividly and paradoxically telescoped into one. The abject sufferer was also the divine healer. People believed that they had seen it happen. Bharadvaj, the stroke-sufferer, whose human lineage Baba claimed to represent, had been healed by Baba's own hand, the hand of Shiva in the ancient myth. There could be no more vivid empirical presentation of the teaching that Sathya Sai wished to propound.

Iconographically and artistically Shiva is sometimes represented as androgynous in form. This concept was also built into the drama that Baba enacted at Guru Purnima 1963. It was Baba's left side that was afflicted by the stroke and his right hand that sprinkled the water to effect the cure. Androgynous Shiva is always depicted as male in respect of the right side, while the female (*shakti*) is the left. This feature of the story therefore related to the other dimension in Sathya Sai Baba's claim: that he represents not Shiva alone, but Shiva-Shakti. As such it goes beyond the explicit message of icon 1, but, as will be shown, it relates to the subtle and implicit significance of Baba's style of dress which is mirrored in the linga in that icon.

Sathya Sai Baba's biographer believes that there had been a much earlier claim by Baba to belong to the

gotra of Bharadvaj. The impact of that assertion, made, it is said, by Sathyanarayana Raju at the age of thirteen, was - of course - diminished by its precocity. Made in connection with his early self-identification with Sai Baba of Shirdi, it was apparently met with incredulity by the astonished adults amongst whom he lived, and ignored. It was the invoking of Sai Baba of Shirdi's authority that led to accusations that the youth was made: a charge which he is said to have refuted by demonstrations of his supernatural powers.

Sceptics are likely to suggest that it was appreciation of the significance of the Bharadvaj claim made in 1963 that occasioned its later association with the earlier assertion of identity with Shirdi Baba. One could expect that the mythological reference, with its implications for the ritual enhancement of the young man, and therefore of his family in the village society, would have occasioned opposition, if it had actually been made in those early days. It could, of course, have been ignored because of its obscure nature, and attention focussed on the claim to identity with Sai Baba of Shirdi. Even the family itself, it would appear, if Kasturi (1980a: 48-50) is right, ignored its opportunity for sanskritisation (cf. Ruhela 1976: 8).

The claim to identity with Shiva made by Sathya Sai Baba in 1963 proved to be seminal to his own interpretation of his role. From that point onwards, therefore, it became fundamental to the perceptions of his work entertained by his devotees. It even became the key to the interpretation of all earlier phenomena and incidents (Kasturi 1980a: 11, 12).

Thus, icon 1 in the Sai mandir in Bradford, small though it is, is crucial for the interpretation of the iconic display there. Its central placing establishes its basic role. Its message is reiterated by the positioning nearby of the most significant liturgical objects in the shrine and by the surrounding wealth of depiction of both Sathya Sai Baba and Shiva. Without that one icon, however, the identification would not be explicit.

Confirmation of the significance of icon 1 is found in the mula mantra (characteristic credal formula) which *is* used in the mandir in specific rituals and

at certain times. At the end of each quarter of the year, for example, shraddha (a memorial rite) is practised in a very simple way during the bhajan, mandal. That commemoration of the dead takes the form of the repetition 108 times of the mantra, 'Om namah Shivaya' - 'I pay homage to Lord Shiva'. That it is the sectarian confession of the devotees of Shiva which is used on such occasions, in preference to the formulae which would characterise worshippers of Vishnu or of the Mother Goddess, is significant.

There is ample precedent in Indian religious ideology and practice for setting devotion to Shiva and Vishnu in opposition to one another (Bhattacharji 1970: 306). The Bradford Sai satsang, however, does not use the Shaivite mantra with any intention of excluding the acknowledgement of any other deity. Nothing would be more abhorrent to Baba and his devotees (Sathya Sai Baba 1977). Thus, the significance of the mula mantra for the satsang approaches that of icon 1: it lies not in any negative intention, but in the positive affirmation of commitment to Shiva in the context of the worship of Sathya Sai Baba.

This interpretation of the significance of the iconic display is confirmed further by the importance of the festival of Mahashivaratri (the great night of Shiva) within the practice of the Bradford devotees and by the bhajans favoured within the satsang. The Shaivite orientation is rooted firmly in the original teaching of Sathya Sai Baba himself, later diversification into identification with all other deities notwithstanding (Kasturi 1980a: 12).

The Shaivite mula mantra was itself a constituent element in the words of the first bhajan composed by the young Sathyanarayana Raju and taught to his earliest disciples. That bhajan is fundamental in the devotional practice of the bhaktas of Sathya Sai Baba. It is one of the few fixed points in the routine of the bhajan mandal at the Bradford mandir. Other favourite hymns take up an identical theme. 'Bolo bolo sab mil bolo: Om namah Shivaya' is a characteristic and highly popular one. It exhorts: 'Say, say, say it together: "Om: I pay homage to (Lord) Shiva"'. Epithets for Shiva, such as 'Shankara' giver of joy) and 'Shambho' (abode of joy) abound in the bhajans.

The evidence of the hymnody of the Bradford satsang taken on its own, however, without the mula mantra and icon 1, reinforced by the presence of the panchdhatu and the Shivalinga, could be confusing. For on that basis, the significance of references in the hymns to a spectrum of divine personages, and the prominence of one of the names of Vishnu in the arati prayer, might be given misleading significance. Icon 1 and the refurbishments of the mandir, reinforced by the selected mula mantra, are fundamental keys to the phenomenal field of the satsang.

At a celebration of Sathya Sai Baba's birthday in Northamptonshire in 1979, the boys of the Bal Vikas of the Wellingborough Sai Centre commemorated the mythic tradition of Shiva Nataraja (Shiva in his cosmic creative power as Lord of the Dance). Their performance was introduced with the words: 'A dance asking Shiva to take our ignorance away'. That was, however, quickly followed by the singing of a bhajan in English which ran:

Ride on, ride on into joy;
Sathya Sai Baba-ji, ride on into my heart.
Shiva, Shiva, give me the fire,
Give me the fire of love.

As often in the Bradford mandir, indications of a basic identification between Shiva and Sathya Sai Baba were set in Wellingborough in a context of devotion to a multiplicity of divine figures. In India, such devotion focusses predominantly and in many cases exclusively, on figures from the Indian theogony. That is not always the case amongst non-Indian Sai devotees.

In Bradford, amongst the Indian expatriates of the satsang, the context in which the worship of Sathya Sai Baba and Shiva was set, prior to 1981, was almost exclusively informed by reference to the received pantheon of Hindu deities. However, from 1981 onwards, with the young people of the satsang taking new initiatives and exercising more control over the affairs of the mandir, some new bhajans were introduced, many of them in English, making frequent reference to Jesus. The iconic counterpart of this situation became manifest in the displaying of devotional pictures of Jesus and Mary in 1981, and later

in the prominent placing of a crucifix. The devotional context is broad and syncretic.

Early in 1984 the hope was expressed by a young and active devotee that within a few years the lay-out of the Bradford mandir would be radically altered. He envisaged substantial wall-space used for four separate displays of devotional aids deriving from at least four major world faiths. They would represent the syncretic nature of the message of Baba. Identification of Sathya Sai Baba with the Buddha, Jesus, Guru Nanak and other revered figures, would undoubtedly be implicit, if not explicit, within such a devotional display. To some extent, at least, Islam would be represented: the Islamic abhorrence of shirk, the association of other beings with the One who alone is God, notwithstanding. It was, however, envisaged that because of the uniform ethnic background of the great majority of the members of the Bradford satsang, the shrine itself and its iconic display would continue to be characteristically Hindu in a form consonant with Gujarati ethnicity. The affirmation of Sathya Sai Baba's identification with Shiva would not cease to be the central proclamation of the Bradford shrine.

Thus it can be seen that alongside the syncretic claims of Sathya Sai Baba, and the eclectic orientation of his devotees, ethnic perceptions are manifest and are in no way discouraged, so long as they are amenable to syncretic application or can be made so. Theologically exclusive perceptions cannot thrive in such a context. The urge to establish cultural identity and to mark ethnic boundaries, can. The worshipping community is able to select the syncretic identifications that it *wishes* to emphasise and to ignore others. Thus the character of the iconic display in the Bradford mandir defines itself as Gujarati by the presence of certain ancillary features and by the absence of others. In respect of the former, the effigies and devotional pictures of Jalaram Bapa and of the Mother Goddess in her Gujarati form of Ambamata, fulfil that function. They are of course severely subordinate to the focus on Sathya Sai Baba and to the identification of Baba with Shiva proposed by icon 1, but provide the underpinning of ethnic endorsement and identity. Studiously excluded in the Bradford

mandir is any satellite association of Subrahmanya with Shiva, in spite of a strong orientation on the part of many of Sathya Sai's devotees elsewhere towards such an identification. This establishes that certain prominent devout perceptions of Baba which are rooted in south Indian perceptions of Shiva (Dhavamony 1971: 108-112) have been filtered out of the iconic imagery with which the Gujarati devotees in Bradford have identified him. This is more a process of ethnic than of theological elimination. It eliminates the ethnically unfamiliar, that which is alien and possibly threatening. Unfamiliar associations might be possessed of unsought-for social implications. This evidence from absence might be nothing more than fortuitous were it not that the testimony of the icons is confirmed by the distinctive liturgical practices of the Bradford satsang in which the exclusion of Subrahmanya is anything but accidental.

By the eighth century of the Christian era, north Indian cultural influences had effectively penetrated southern India. Through the process of assimilating regional and local deities to the characteristic associations of more widely acknowledged figures, the south Indian deity Subrahmanya became identified with Skanda, second son of Shiva. Worship of Skanda, also known as Karttikeya, had become widespread in north India in the fourth century and afterwards. In the south he became further assimilated to the figure of another important regional deity, Murugan, so that their names and associations became inextricably linked and merged with the figure of Subrahmanya (Zvelebil 1973: 75). The latter thus represents a significant devotional and mythological dimension in some major culture tracts of southern India and Sri Lanka - notably, for example, amongst the Tamils. A regional and ethnic deity, Subrahmanya had acquired a wider cultic empire in south India and enhanced status through the extension of Sanskritic influence from the north (Bhattacharji 1970: 204; Dhavamony 1971: 108). Meanwhile, however, in northern India, and therefore in Gujarat, the corresponding cult of Skanda had died out in the centuries following the Gupta period, and it has, over a long period, been virtually unknown there.

In southern India it became necessary to manifest the identity of Shiva and Subrahmanya, if the former was to be regarded as truly supreme, for there was no such deity as Shiva in the early religious texts of peoples like the Tamils (Dhavamony 1971: 109, 112; Gonda 1970b: 16; Bhattacharji 1970: 356). Thus it represents theological continuity amongst Sathya Sai Baba's south Indian devotees when this regional and ethnic characteristic is preserved as a need to identify Baba with both Shiva and Subrahmanya, Baba being perceived as an all-embracing divine figure. This cultural trait is so strong that it has communicated itself, even if superficially, to many of Baba's north Indian devotees.

The definitive hymnbook of the bhaktas of Sathya Sai contains no reference to Skanda, Karttikeya or Murugan. It is, however, specific about the exalted status of Subrahmanya. He is said to personify 'the highest possible state to which the law of evolution leads' and offers access to 'the spiritual possibilities latent in man'. Regarding Subrahmanya's intimate relationship with Shiva, it states with unabashed cross-cultural plagiarism: 'Through the son, the Father is known' (Sri Sathya Sai Education and Publication Foundation, n.d.: 114).

It is well known amongst Sathya Sai Baba's devotees that at Baba's own ashram it is the unailing practice to conclude every bhajan mandal with the singing of a particular hymn which very clearly and explicitly identifies Shiva with Subrahmanya. Sathya Sai himself is known to favour that practice. The ritual was already well established by July 1963 when, in the dramatic circumstances of that Guru Purnima festival, it attracted to itself further vivid associations. At the point when, having appeared to be at death's door and having restored himself to vitality, Baba concluded his discourse by introducing that well-loved bhajan, many devotees were overcome with emotion. He is said to have led them in 'double quick tempo' in the lingual 'acrobatics' of what is, even in normal conditions, a demanding and tongue-twisting bhajan (Kasturi 1975a: 89). It signalled to the assembled devotees, after their exhausting vigil for Baba's recovery, that everything was back to normal.

At that time Sathya Sai was, and still is, especially renowned for his consummate skill as a singer of

bhajans. Most particularly has he been celebrated for his lucidity of articulation and his vocal agility in respect of the leading of that particularly testing and vigorous hymn;

Subrahmanyam Subrahmanyam Shanmukha Natha Subrahmanyam
Subrahmanyam Subrahmanyam Shanmukha Natha Subrahmanyam
Shiva Shiva Shiva Shiva Subrahmanyam
Hara Hara Hara Hara Subrahmanyam
Hara Hara Shiva Shiva Subrahmanyam
Shiva Shiva Hara Hara Subrahmanyam
Shiva Saravana Bhava Subrahmanyam
Guru Saravana Bhava Subrahmanyam
Shiva Shiva Hara Hara Subrahmanyam
Hara Hara Shiva Shiva Subrahmanyam8

The bhajan reiterates the names and epithets of Shiva and Subrahmanya. It celebrates both Shiva's role as the one who destroys only to recreate, and Subrahmanya's identity with the north Indian traditions of Skanda as Shiva's son.

The exciting associations of that hymn, hallowed by Sathya Sai Baba's own usage as the most suitable conclusions for any bhajan mandal, have not secured it a place as the final hymn in the devotions of the Bradford satsang. That requires explanation. It is not only that the bhajan has been denied a reserved place in the devotions; it is never sung in the mandir. Visitors familiar with the practice of Baba's satsangs elsewhere, do not fail to remark on its exclusion (see footnote 8).

Thus the evidence of the bhajans has to be seen as parallel to that of the icons. The fact that icon 1 makes no reference to Subrahmanya is not in itself strange. That there is no representation of Subrahmanya elsewhere in the mandir at all must be significant. The eloquent silence of the bhajans is supplementary and corroborative. It is justified by the president of the satsang on the grounds that the mandal always commences with a hymn to Ganesh who, as the first son of Shiva, sufficiently represents the collective identity of Shiva's offspring. In respect of the icons, representations of Ganesh, evident in the mandir, could fulfil the same collective function. Such a rationalisation might express all that needs to be said about the absence of a notable but alien

iconic association. Gujaratis do not need to focus on Subrahmanya and to associate him with Shiva and Sathya Sai Baba in the way that many south Indian ethnic groups do.

In this respect, the liturgical practice of the Bradford satsang, and the selection of items for display in the mandir, may relate to non-theological factors affecting relationships between certain groups of Baba's devotees in the United Kingdom. Keen rivalry for influence in the Sri Sathya Sai Service Organisations (U.K.) in the early years of its formation, between aspiring Tamil, Gujarati and Punjabi leaders was not unknown, and has affected the situation.

Tamils in Britain naturally and automatically continue to rehearse the association of Subrahmanya with Shiva for that constitutes an unselfconscious claim to the status bestowed by sanskritisation. Its function is to eradicate any suggestion of the cultural inferiority of Tamils amongst Indian expatriates. In the case of the Gujaratis in Britain, the virtual elimination of Skanda from their culture occurred so many hundreds of years ago that the identification of Subrahmanya with Skanda and therefore with Shiva is not a relevant one. It meets no perceived need for them. Furthermore, historically, there has been a reluctance of Shaivites to acknowledge Subrahmanya (Bhattacharji 1970: 181, 356).

Thus the exclusion of Subrahmanya from the hymnody of the Bradford satsang, and the absence of his image from the iconic display, is an expression of the natural and historically conditioned cultural orientation of the predominantly Gujarati Shaivite devotees. While the practice of devotion to Sathya Sai Baba elsewhere may customarily make manifest the historic sanskritisation of Subrahmanya, this is not represented in the worship nor in the iconic display in the Bradford mandir, because it strikes no chord in the religious heritage of the city's Sai satsangis. It would obscure the affirmation of ethnic identity that these Gujaratis must make in their interactions with Baba's other expatriate Indian devotees and in the social ethos of the United Kingdom. In an alien and pluralist society, markers of ethnic identity, and signs of its rejection or endorsement are very significant. Nevertheless, Baba's Gujarati devotees in Bradford

are in no way ignorant of the significant claims to identity with Subrahmanya that have been made for, and by, Sathya Sai Baba himself.

One of the most popular accounts of Baba's supra-normal powers, written in English but enthusiastically acclaimed by Gujarati devotees, has made the identification of Baba and Subrahmanya widely known. It tells of a lady in Mysore, suffering from cancer, whose apparently miraculous experience of healing was initiated by a dream in which Subrahmanya appeared as a cobra encircling her bed. The lady avowed that twenty years later, on the occasion of her first interview with Sathya Sai Baba, he identified himself with that cobra, and therefore with Subrahmanya, by apparently paranormal perception (Murphet 1973: 107-109).

A cobra features prominently in icon 1 in the Bradford mandir. It is not Subrahmanya, however, who is symbolised by that snake. It garlands the neck of Shiva. While cobras have been associated with Subrahmanya for centuries, even more pervasively have they been associated with Shiva. The Mahabharata (xiii: 17) confirms earlier evidence when it describes Shiva as having the form of a serpent. The moon, inseparably connected with Shiva, sometimes has a snake as its symbol. Thus, in icon 1, both the moon and a cobra are represented.

The Shivalinga, prominent in the Bradford shrine, provides the definitive key to the symbolic intention of the mandir. Upon the linga rests a chrysanthemum bloom, placed in an act of adoration. Above it, the panchdhatu fulfils its function and drips its fluid, milk or water or a mixture of the two, in obeisance of the linga. The Shivalinga receives the drops of liquid, but not immediately; first they filter through the petals of the flower. Even that is not their direct path. First they fall upon the heads of the five-headed, open-hooded cobra, its fangs wide, that not only entwines but actually surmounts the linga in a gesture of protection and adoration. The linga itself is incontrovertibly representative of Shiva, and corroborates, therefore, the statement of icon 1. The fact that the cobra is five-headed has historic links with ancient artefacts, thought to be of Dravidian origin, in which a five-headed cobra forms a canopy for the linga (Bhattacharji 1970:

15, 111, 149, 152; O'Flaherty 1978: 137, 149).

The positive, protective and divine associations of the serpent in Indian mythology are thus represented in icon 1. It is not that the evil and threatening associations of snakes in other traditions are unknown to Indian lore, but rather that their positive associations with immortality and fertility are dominant. The poison which a snake can emit is controlled, subdued and controverted to constructive ends by divine intervention in many Indian myths (Zimmer 1974: 87). The serpent thus became symbolic of a beneficent divine presence.

Such different figures as Krishna, the Buddha and Guru Nanak are all often represented in Indian iconography as protected by a many-headed cobra. Female deities are frequently symbolised by, or associated with, a serpent. The image of two snakes intertwined in sexual congress, frequently found at the entrance to Hindu temples in parts of India, clearly represents perceptions of the deity as transcending gender and related to such theological insights as that proposed by the Shiva-Shakti formula. It is not surprising, therefore, that amongst the devotees of Sathya Sai in India, a visit to house or garden by a cobra may be celebrated as an encounter with Baba himself (Ruhela 1976: 12).

Baba is said to have been visited in a rather alarming way by a cobra just after his birth. The name of the village where Sathyanarayana Raju was born is interpreted as meaning a place full of ant-hills, where a snake has taken up its residence. Uravakonda, the location to which he moved in his youth to live with his brother, is said to mean 'serpent hill', its upland site being dominated by a great rock, in the shape of a many-hooded serpent' (Kasturi 1980a: 1, 2, 10, 33). Such associations are vivid and highly significant for Sathya Sai's devotees. The cobra which garlands the neck of Shiva in icon 1 has, therefore, multiple significance. Like the black Shivalinga in the same icon, it promotes not only Shiva but also Sathya Sai Baba. In addition, it provides a significant link with icon 2 (plate 3.3).

3.3 ICON 2: BABA AS VISHNU

Icon 2 dominates a side wall of the mandir. It is different from all the other icons except one, for it is neither a mass-produced oleograph nor a photographic reproduction. It is an original oil-painting obtained by the president of the satsang in Prashanti Nilayam. It is the largest of the icons, measuring more than two feet by three (framed).

In this portrait, Sathya Sai Baba stands within a large lotus, placed upon the coils of an enormous green serpent, against a deep blue background. He clutches white garlands, but beckons with his right hand. A conch shell, a discus, another lotus and a mace, characteristic symbols of the attributes of the god Vishnu, feature in the scene. Baba's head is surmounted by a huge five-headed open-hooded cobra, fangs emergent. The background is featureless and ambiguous: Hindu mythology suggests that it might equally represent the sky or the ocean or a merging of both.

The fact that a cobra rears above the figure of Baba in icon 2 does not belie the testimony of the conch, disc, lotus and mace, that the picture is making a statement about Vishnu. Snakes are also closely associated with Vishnu (Zimmer 1974: 87-89). One serpent in particular is connected with him: Shesha. He is the thousand-headed gigantic reptile who floats on the unbounded ocean of the waters of causation. Shesha forms a couch on which Vishnu, resting from his creative work, can sleep.

Icon 2, therefore, portrays Sathya Sai Baba as an avatar of Vishnu. He is depicted with Vishnu's attributes, protected by the many-headed cobra which articulates divine presence. He stands on the coils of the serpent Shesha. This Vishnu is not resting. He is not using Shesha as a couch. He is active in Sathya Sai, beckoning to the inhabitants of earth.

The message of icon 2 is reiterated by others in the mandir. They portray the iconic motifs connected with Vishnu and his traditional avatars, especially Krishna and Rama, together with the visage of Sathya Sai Baba, and in some cases Sai Baba of Shirdi as well.



Plate 3.3 SATHYA SAT BABA AS VISHNU

Icon 2, garlanded, where it hung on a side wall to the left of the shrine until July 1980.

In July 1980 this Vaishnavite dimension in the display was strengthened by the addition of two icons placed on either side of a very large oleograph of Shiva which dominates the right of the shrine (plate 3.4). In one of these, to the left of Shiva's portrait, Rama is depicted with Sai Baba of Shirdi in front of him, and the head and shoulders of Sathya Sai Baba in the foreground. The dark green background and the highly coloured representations of Rama and Sathya Sai, set off by the white clothes and contrastingly ascetic figure of Shirdi Baba, make this a striking oleograph.

To the right of Shiva's portrait, another picture shows Krishna with his flute standing behind and above Sathya Sai Baba, both enfolded by the looming figure of a large white cow. The flamboyance of Baba is strongly projected by this icon. Krishna and the cow are contrastingly delineated in soft pastel shades, harmonising with the light background, and serving to emphasise dramatically the forceful figure of Sathya Sai. From the perspective of a devotee, sitting at worship in the bhajan mandal, although the details of the icon's portraiture might be obscured by distance, its theological message would be perfectly clear. The dominant impression would register the claim to ultimate significance of one who is able to remain so distinguished and dominating in the quietly pastoral presence of Krishna himself.

The theological message of these two icons, flanking a focal image of Shiva and immediately behind the panchdhatu and the Shivalinga, is that Baba is not merely to be identified with Shiva: he is also, like Rama and Krishna, an avatar of Vishnu.

Devotional pictures making the same point are to be found in domestic shrines in Bradford. Furthermore, the place of birth of Sathya Sai. Baba is associated by his devotees with the epic and puranic stories of Rama and of Krishna (Kasturi 1980a: 1, 2). Not only is Baba's dharma identified with that of Rama, but he is believed to be the epic prince returned to earth (Sathya Sai Baba 1977: ii). Amongst the faithful Baba is reputed to have exalted the feats that he can be expected to perform over the accomplishments of Krishna himself (Kasturi 1975a: 90). The title of



Plate 3.4: TO THE RIGHT OF THE SHRINE
 (after refurbishment in July 1980)

Icons noted in the text to be seen here are - Rama and the two Sai Babas; Shiva; Krishna and Sathya Sai Baba (top row, see preceding page); icon 10 (middle row, centre; see below, 4.3). For Jalaram Baba (bottom row, centre) see above, 1.3.

See also figure 3.1, page 98.

the monthly magazine published from Prashanti Nilayam perpetually reaffirms Baba's claimed identity with Krishna: Sanathana Sarathi, 'the Eternal Charioteer'. It is a reference to Krishna's classic role in the Bhagavad Gita. Kasturi and others avow that 'Baba is the Sanathana Sarathi' (Sathya Sai Baba 1980: i).

Baba sometimes sits on a sumptuously decorated jhooli (swing) to the delight of his bhaktas. A pilgrim from Bradford once affirmed: 'When Baba sits on the swinging chair the crowd goes into ecstasy' (4.2.83). The young man had been surprised at the excited response to such a simple act. He did not realise that the associations of the jhooli with the stories about Krishna and the gopis (the milk-maids), and especially about Radha and Krishna, would immediately spring to the minds of Indian devotees and could be expected to send them into ecstasy. Their feeling is captured in a poem which describes resplendent Baba relaxing on a flower-bedecked jhooli: 'Our Hallelujah is the swing' (Kasturi 1980b: ii).

In the Bradford mandir, such theological perceptions and devotional attitudes are evinced iconically in two small black and white photographs which are permanent features of the shrine. They represent modifications of a larger icon, a colour photograph of a shrine in India, in which a murti of Krishna is flanked by two full-length portraits - one of Sai Baba of Shirdi and the other of a very youthful Sathya Sai Baba. That larger icon is prominent in the shrine. The two small monochrome photographs are, however, significant, because in them the image of Krishna no longer stands between the two portraits. Instead there is a gadi, and upon it in confident possession there sits the now middle-aged Sathya Sai Baba. The Bradford mandir honours the original icon with its representation of Krishna, but in the small photographs it demonstrates its awareness that theology is not static.

Hindu theology traditionally attributes ten avatars to Vishnu. Kalki, the tenth, is yet to come. Baba has intimated to his disciples that they need wait no longer. Kalki has come (Kasturi 1980a: 65). Consonant with such perceptions, devotion to Sathya Sai is integrated with the Vaishnavite as well as

with the Shaivite mythological heritage. Thus, the literary resources of the devotees explicitly connect the alarming occurrence when a cobra was found beneath the bed-clothes of the infant Sathyanarayana Raju with the associations of the role of Vishnu. The infant's body is said to have been subjected to the undulating movements of the snake's form beneath. That particular cobra is held to have fulfilled the function of Shesha towards 'the Sheshasayi': he who lies recumbent on Shesha, Vishnu himself (Kasturi 1980a: 10). It is not surprising therefore that Sathya Sai Baba's disciples openly aver: 'Baba is Vishnu' (Shah 1978: 34). On even the most cautious of interpretations, that conviction is implicit in the words of the arati prayer repeated daily by the faithful and used in every act of public worship (cf. also appendix 5).

Icon 2 therefore articulates an identification between Sathya Sai Baba and Vishnu which is equally explicit in other icons in the mandir. It is conveyed in parallel ways in literary resources and in the hymns of the devotees. This identification is subordinate to an overall equation of Sathya Sai Baba with Shiva, and occurs within a broader context in which Baba is thought to represent every single authentic divine name and form (Kasturi 1980a: 145). It would be a mistake to see this particular identification as either innocuous or insignificant. It has been selected for emphasis in a context in which other perceptions could have been given prominence. For contrary to the general eclectic ethos of Hindu religion, rivalries exist not only among Hindus but are also thought to disturb relationships sometimes between the deities to whom they are devoted. A particular shrine, therefore, will make its affirmations of devotion, and will juxtapose its deities, in such a way as to resolve the tensions that are seen to be most pertinent, most demanding of resolution, and will ignore others.

The rivalry, indeed hostile antagonism, of Vishnu and Shiva is well-documented in the ancient sources of Indian religion and has sometimes had dire impact on the interaction of Hindu religious sects (Gonda 1970b: 89, 134; Bhattacharji 1970: 139, 306, 356; O'Flaherty 1978: 149). The relevance of this heritage for the people of Gujarat and its permeation of many of the tensions of Gujarati religious life has

given cause for detailed investigation (Pocock 1973: 3, 81-93). Thus, it would be an irrelevance for a Gujarati satsang to emphasise an identification of Shiva with any other Indian deity (say Subrahmanya) in the person of Sathya Sai Baba, while the deep-seated, cultural dichotomy between Shiva and Vishnu remained unresolved. Such theological tension is not to be seen as abstruse and purely ideological. The rivalry between the two deities is a rivalry between communities. It affects the interaction of Gujarati Shaivites with the adherents of such a Gujarati Vaishnavite cult as that of Swaminarayan, which flourishes in some centres of Gujarati settlement in the United Kingdom (Williams 1984: 187).

The resolution of the dichotomy between Vishnu and Shiva, the harmonising of their relationship, would appear to be culturally, socially and psychologically therapeutic for Gujaratis (as for many other Indians). Its effect could be paralleled by the historic resolution of the tension between Shiva and Subrahmanya in parts of southern India and Sri Lanka. As there has to be a ritual language for expressing such antinomy (Bhattacharji 1970: 356) so there can also be an iconic imagery and a liturgical vocabulary for overcoming it. Sathya Sai Baba himself has provided the conceptual content for attaining that end. The imagery in the Bradford mandir, and the liturgical vocabulary of the satsang, make manifest its implementation in respect of the characteristics of Vishnu and Shiva.

The exclusion of Subrahmanya from any iconic prominence in the Bradford mandir reflects but does not appear to be fully parallel to his even more obvious exclusion from liturgical prominence. The former is solely attributable to the purely fortuitous, innocuous manifestation of unselfconscious Gujarati cultural norms. The latter is not, although initially it was.

The decision to stand out against the ritual conclusion of every bhajan mandal with the renowned Subrahmanya bhajan was reached, and later confirmed, with careful deliberation. The Bradford satsang had, from the start, established its on practice of concluding each mandal with a hymn to Vishnu as Narayana, celebrating Sathya Sai's identity with that deity. Within two years of the foundation of

the satsang, however, the Tamil president of the Sai Centre in Pinner, Middlesex, and first chairman of the Sri Sathya Sai Service Organisations (U.K.), formally requested all centres in the United Kingdom to conclude every bhajan mandal with the hymn celebrating the identity of Subrahmanya and Shiva. This request did not meet with favour in Bradford, where the Gujarati devotees could see no reason to change what they had been doing from the beginning. 'Every other centre followed suit, but Bradford has not', commented the president of the satsang (21.9.79). It was in that context that he pointed out that Ganessa, as Shiva's other son, to whom the opening bhajan of every mandal in Bradford is sung, can be thought to include his brother. The point is not irrelevant, nor would it lack scholarly support (Bhattacharji 1970: 318).

The motivation to make such a stand in an association of fellowships where conformity is highly prized was rooted in the basic cultural orientation of Gujaratis. Its vehement affirmation was undoubtedly sustained by the need to affirm ethnic identity in a context of migration. In such a situation the assertion of Gujarati norms is a statement of self-esteem and cultural pride. Having taken the initial steps to establish the markers of Hindu religion in a contemporary form in Bradford, with particular relevance for Gujarati needs, it was not seen to be appropriate to compromise that affirmation with a veneer more suitable for devotees deriving from other parts of India.

There have been occasions when cultural tensions and ethnically-based tussles for influence have arisen within the Sri Sathya Sai Service Organisations (U.K.) and its succeeding National Council. Those struggles, in the days when there were few devotees of British ethnic origin to participate, took place in a three-cornered cultural arena. The tensions were between Tamil-speakers from Sri Lanka or Tamilnad and the groups of Punjabi or Gujarati devotees.

The Tamils appear to have been the first British South Asians to establish their religious identity as devotees of Sathya Sai Baba (Taylor 1985 : 6). The Gujaratis, however, came to preponderate in numbers. Thus, the national president whose dictat on the use of

the Subrahmanya bhajan was resisted adamantly by the Bradford devotees, a London Tamil, is a member of a largely Tamil- and Telugu-speaking Pinner satsang. The decision of the Bradford devotees, rooted in a natural inclination towards that which has precedent in their regional heritage, represented a defiant assertion of autonomy. It was not a bid for leadership, motivated by individual ambition or social empire-building, but it involved the rejection of an assertion of control by a leader and a satsang of different regional ethnicity. It was a declaration of cultural independence.

Bradford's stance was unique. That may have been because no other centre in the United Kingdom was so predominantly Gujarati. It is more likely, however, that other satsangs with a major participation by Gujaratis had already conformed to what is normal practice amongst the devotees of Sathya Sai, despite its non-Gujarati associations. They did not then feel that they were in a secure enough position to challenge orthodoxy on this point. In Bradford, however, the satsang chose not to comply with an insistence on theological affirmations that would have been ideologically irrelevant to the devotees. It was felt that compliance would have given endorsement to the subordination of Gujarati devotees and their own Hindu heritage to the authority of non-Gujaratis, both Punjabi and Tamil.

Thus, a liturgical detail confirms the evidence of the icons in the Sri Sathya Sai Centre in Bradford, that the affirmation which the satsang makes in its icons, and also in its worship, is amongst other things a manifestation of Indian self-esteem. In this case, even more particularly, it is an articulation of Gujarati cultural identity, but within a new devotional framework and in an alien context.

These icons can, therefore, be seen to be significant indicators not only of the satsang's religious convictions and its phenomenal field, but of dimensions in its ethnic identity. They are a rich resource. The mandir is so replete with icons that the analysis of the significance of the most important of them must continue to provide the focus for this study throughout another chapter.

Icons of the two Sai Babas

Iconic representation offers scope for articulating discernment of a relationship between that which is mundane and that which is heavenly. It is associated with propositions regarding the interaction of the human and the Absolute in concepts such as sainthood, holiness and manifestations of divinity.

Icons thus articulate conceptions of spiritual qualities in physical terms, delineating that which is perceived to be supremely worthy of both awe and emulation. Raw material for iconography is therefore often supplied by mythological formulations and by theological perceptions of the nature of divine incarnation. Indian icons, in fulfilling such functions, do not represent a perspective on spirituality or inward beauty that feels constrained to hide it in an ugliness of human form. On the contrary, the device whereby physical attractiveness denotes sublimity of character is prominent, as manifest textually in the descriptions of Rama and Sita in the Ramayana.

Icons sometimes isolate a particular feature of a holy personage. Characteristics are selected for emphasis or exaggeration, to express a perception or to make a theological statement. Icons can be a means of identification with a cultural tradition or with a particular interpretation of its values. They can be tools for apology or agents in mission.

Iconic representation can be made to serve ethnic interests in a religious dimension. It offers a mode of interpreting a tradition at a particular moment, with an eye to a certain crisis of values or intersection of influences. In such respects, it is clear that 'the potential effectiveness of icons is transposed into a more dynamic key than has been familiar to the historian of religion, when one is dealing with a

contemporary holy man whose disciples believe him to be an avatar. Here is a situation in which reality and iconography have a chance to relate to each other not only through the personal observations of pilgrims but even more widely through the intervention of photography and film.

Some mass-produced iconic representations of Sathya Sai Baba, not employing a photographic base, present exaggerations of certain of Baba's physical features. Exaggeration is one thing; invention would be another. The former, based as it must be on features that are actually present, possesses the dangers that caricature also affords, but it offers scope for the same acute perception. It may suggest in its own imprecise rendering of an empirical original, an exact insight into the impact that the actuality makes on some observers. The service of photography to iconography in the modern age is that it can prevent exaggeration from becoming sheer fantasy.

Much of the representation of Sathya Sai Baba in the Bradford mandir is photographic, and therefore based not on fantasy, nor on mythological surrealism in which creative license is given extensive play, but on empirical reality. Photography promotes a verisimilitude (even in icons that are not photographically based) which moderates other potentially distorting artistic modes. Thus, in the icons displayed in the mandir, there appears to be no fundamental conflict between the actuality and the image. It is not intended, however, in this study, to examine the precise relationship of the icons of Sathya Sai to the reality of his physical presence. It will be sufficient for them to suggest their own interpretation. Our current concern is not so much with the exactness or otherwise that they represent as with their total impact, elucidating their theological proclamation.

The iconic display stands in its own right as one half of the two-fold ideological statement of the Bradford mandir. It is the semi-permanent half, perpetually on view and easily open to inspection. The other half, less easily scrutinised but by no means concealed from the interested observer, is the theologically articulate content of the bhajan mandal.

In the case of the bhajans, it is broadly true that those used have been approved by Sathya Sai Baba himself. In the case of the icons, it is not clear that Baba is able to exert control over the producers of devotional aids. Given the vast output of such pictures in India, he may not be familiar with all the representations that are current. However, there is no evidence of his having issued disclaimers or having warned his followers about crude likenesses. For the objective inquirer, or the concerned devotee, genuine photographs and films provide the yard-stick of authenticity.

Iconic display is important as an indication of how worshippers perceive the object of their adoration, and of the way in which the leading proponents of a religious movement foster its image. In the publication of officially-approved portraits and oleographs, or through the tacit endorsement of those unofficially produced, the leaders of a cult indicate approval of the diverse elements in typical displays and of their implications. For example, icons, by their pictorial rather than verbal symbols, provide a valuable key to the way in which a movement regards the relationship of the spiritual and the material, the absolute and the temporal. In that respect most pertinently, they may offer a more reliable indication of things as they are, in the minds and in the lives of the devout, than erudite literary expositions of doctrine, or even popular cultic tracts.

In a Hindu context, devotees of holy personages often spend more time focussing on icons than reading religious literature, or hearing it read. Frequently, when scriptural texts are recited, concentration on icons takes place at the same time. The agenda of popular theology will thus be very largely proposed by a sect's icons, or by the display in a temple. More important than that, if a full account of a cult's effective theology is to emerge - its pragmatic attitudes towards worldly success, wealth, and human relationships, for example - then it has to be understood that these will be mirrored in its icons in a way that must be allowed to supplement the printed theology of its texts.

It has been demonstrated that icons 1 and 2 make statements about the interaction of the eternal with the

temporal - a function which, as icons, they are well able to fulfil. They propose that Sathya Sai Baba is only rightly perceived when he is understood to be a contemporary avatar of both Shiva and Vishnu, with all the implications for belief and practice which that entails. They represent convictions about the ultimate in the imagery of the mundane. Their significance can be elucidated further by an examination of icon 3 and subsequently of the other icons of Sathya Sai Baba in the mandir.

4.1 ICON 3: SAI BABA OF SHIRDI

As the icons were arranged prior to July 1980, it was possible for casual visitors entering the mandir to assume momentarily that they were intruding upon a temple dedicated to a white-haired, ascetic-looking, venerably elderly sadhu. Such was the impression made, before one registered the impact of the other icons, by icon 3 and a poster of Sai Baba of Shirdi, placed close to each other on the wall opposite, as one entered by the rear door (plate 4.1). The tranquil presence of the austere figure portrayed by those two pictures is a subsidiary but very important focus of the iconic display. It is outstanding, even amongst the thirty-two major colourful icons of Sathya Sai Baba.

Sathya Sai Baba claims to be a reincarnation of the Maharashtrian holy man whose name he has taken (Kasturi 1980a: 177-178, 181-182). The name has been interpreted by Sathya Sai as suggesting the combining of male and female characteristics in the divine creativity: 'Sa means "divine"; ay or ayi means "mother"; and Baba means "father"' (Sandweiss 1975: 194; cf. Kasturi 1980a: 205).

There are altogether seven prominent pictures of Sai Baba of Shirdi in the mandir together with five plaques. He is found amongst the appurtenances of puja in the shrine itself: a little figure in a rocking chair. Such evidence contrasts with the opinion of H. Daniel Smith (1978; 57) who remarked that it was rare for pictures of Shirdi Baba to be displayed 'as part of the paraphernalia presented with Sathya Sai Baba'. Even in the strikingly simple mandir of the devotees of Sathya Sai Baba in Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, there stands a single garlanded figurine



Plate 4.1: SAT BABA OF SHIRDI AND SATHYA SAT BABA

Icon 3 (garlanded, centre left); a poster for the film 'Sai Baba of Shirdi'; an icon of Sathya Sai Baba (right): on the right wall of the mandir prior to re-furbishment in 1980.

of Shirdi Sai, one of the very few devotional objects in the shrine (cf. Kasturi 1980a: 186).

The prominence of Shirdi Baba's representation in the Bradford mandir could be taken to underline the intention of the satsang to emphasise the identification of Shiva and Vishnu in Sathya Sai Baba. Shirdi Baba is believed by his Hindu devotees to have been an incarnation of Vishnu (Bhattacharya 1980: 460). Consciously or subconsciously such a perception must sometimes inform the thinking of devotees of Sathya Sai. It is not unknown, however, for bhaktas of the holy man of Shirdi to regard Shirdi Baba as Shiva incarnate (Osbourne 1975:74). This concept provides a link with the teaching of Sathya Sai Baba (Kasturi 1980a: 180) who associates Shiva and Shakti with a continuum of manifestations in Sai Baba of Shirdi, himself and the avatar of the next century, Prema Sai Baba. 'Shakti herself was born ... as Sai Baba of Shirdi' (Kasturi 1975a: 89).

Devotees of Sathya Sai Baba are aware that, when only ten years old, Sathyanarayana Raju introduced the bemused inhabitants of his native village to the name of a holy man of whom they had never heard. At thirteen years, he announced to his astonished family: 'I am Sai Baba' (Kasturi 1980a: 22, 49). Such an affirmation, so central to the self-identification of Sathya Sai Baba as to be incorporated in his name, naturally overshadows any other associations of the cult of Shirdi Baba for the devotees of Sathya Sai. Thus the theological continuum between the two Sai Babas and the one who is yet to come (as between Shakti, Shiva-Shakti and Shiva) is fluid, and to some extent ambivalent, both in the teaching of Sathya Sai and in the perceptions of his devotees. In puja 'no distinction is made or allowed to be made' between Sathya Sai Baba and his 'previous manifestation' (Kasturi 1980a: 185-186).

Sai Baba of Shirdi was born in the Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra (Narasimhaswami 1944; Sahukar 1973: v). He is known in his own right to students of the history of guru-cults in India in recent decades. Srinivas, looking for a cult 'built around (a saint), either alive or recently deceased', selects Shirdi Baba for his example. He notes that the Maharashtrian holy man secured a large following in South India and that

Shirdi, where his tomb is found, has become a favourite place of pilgrimage (1973: 132, 143). Brent observes that the same guru was in his time the most famous ascetic accessible to the population of Bombay (1972: 140). Needleman refers tangentially to his place in the recent religious history of India (1972: 81 ff). He is thought to have initiated a succession of gurus.

It is, of course, Sathya Sai Baba's claim to be a reincarnation of Shirdi Baba that occasions the prominence of pictures and images of the earlier saint in his mandirs. Ardent devotees of the holy man of Shirdi do not, however, acknowledge the validity of Sathya Sai's profession. The president of the Sri Sathya Sai satsang in Bradford recalls a visit that he paid to Shirdi, spending a night in the temple complex there. He remembers the great number of people visiting the shrine, and acknowledges its reputation for being 'the best administered temple in India'. It is, he avers, unique amongst Indian shrines for the fact that the crowds queue up in proper order to go forward to make an offering or utter a prayer. He is bemused by the fact that while the devotees of Sathya Sai revere Shirdi Baba, it is not the case that the devotees of the latter acknowledge the former with reverence (24.11.79). The same point is also made in a letter of a traveller who, in 1977, received assistance from two helpful bhaktas of Shirdi Baba at the Shirdi shrine. They were from Karnataka. They firmly declared Sathya Sai Baba to be a charlatan. 'Producing vibhuti (sacred ash) from thin air makes a man a magician, not a saint, they said' (Morgan 1979).

Similarly, Mani Sahukar, who combines loyalty to her Parsi heritage with devotion to Sai Baba of Shirdi, represents an orthodox view of the Shirdi lineage. At first she was reluctant to acknowledge any successors to the enigmatic fakir (Rao 1972: 23; Brent 1972: 148). More recently she has written only of Upasani Baba (1870-1941) and Godavari Mataji (b. 1914) as being in his succession (1973: 67-77). Her view is endorsed by B.V. Narasimhaswami, former president of the Indian national organisation of the devotees of Sai Baba of Shirdi, the All India Sai Samaj (ibid., v). Rao (1972: 28-30) and Needleman (1972: 81-82) observe that Meher Baba (1894-1969) is believed by some devotees of Shirdi Sai to be in his

spiritual lineage. Sai Baba of Shirdi once met Meher Baba. It is said that he acknowledged his divinity when he saw him. Sahukar, however, concedes nothing on Shirdi Sai's behalf. Sathya Sai makes no reference to any intervening succession between Sai Baba of Shirdi and himself (Kasturi 1980a: 192-193).

The representative view of devotees of Sathya Sai Baba is that, in the light of his revelations, all other claims to succession from Shirdi Baba are irrelevant. Such sentiments are reinforced by the conviction that it is Sathya Sai alone who has revealed otherwise unknown facts about the antecedents of Shirdi Baba. Sathya Sai's position in the succession is, therefore, held to be not only paramount but exclusive.

Shirdi Sai's ritual hierarchical position and the mythological ranking of his forebears have been established, ostensibly, by the disclosures of Sathya Sai. The latter has also supplied the lacunae in the knowledge of Shirdi Sai's early life, background and experience that (otherwise) have been remarked upon by many. While it is clear that the Maharashtrian saint came to Shirdi for the first time at the age of sixteen, his origins in Ahmednagar and the course of his life during his youth are shrouded in mystery. It is commonly observed that no-one knows who his parents were. Ignorance of Shirdi Sai's background and of the circumstances of his childhood does not, however, characterise the teaching of Sathya Sai Baba regarding the life of that holy man.

V.K. Gokak (1975a: 61-66) questioned Sathya Sai Baba about the reputed early association of Shirdi Baba with a guru named Venkusa. Sathya Sai supplied an account of Shirdi Sai's parentage. He spoke of his birth to a boatman's wife (Devagiramma) after the intervention of both Shiva and Parvati in her experience, and of his rescue by future foster-parents after being abandoned by his mother. He expatiated on Shirdi Sai's childhood siddhis, precocious religiosity and syncretism, and provided details of his guru-shishya relationship with Venkusa. The account is vivid and detailed (cf. Kasturi 1980a: 178-179). Mangalwadi, however, no devotee of Sathya Sai Baba nor of Shirdi Sai, comments sceptically with deliberate cynicism (but also with accuracy so far as the chronology is concerned)

on the disclosures which Sathya Sai offered. He points out that they were made almost thirty-five years after Sathyanarayana Raju's first claim to be a reincarnation of Shirdi Baba (1977: 148n). Nevertheless, even amongst those who are widely accepted by devotees of Shirdi Sai as in succession from their 'Master', there is no-one who has sealed that claim with such unverifiable 'evidence' of apparently extra-sensory or transcendent origin. For the votaries of Sathya Sai Baba, further elaboration of his claim is not needed.

Devotees of Sai Baba of Shirdi who are willing to acknowledge Sathya Sai Baba to any degree at all find that their recognition of the prestigious contemporary guru who is regarded as an avatar overshadows their earlier devotion. They are left in the position of Sathya Sai devotees with an intrinsic reverence for Shirdi Baba. The faith of the residue of Shirdi Sai bhaktas is therefore generally characterised by scepticism towards the claims of Sathya Sai. It is a kind of evolutionary process, a natural selection, which by definition tends to the production of two separate species: Shirdi Baba devotees bereft of any loyalty towards the guru of Puttaparthi, and Sathya Sai's followers who have an inherent regard for the Shirdi holy man whose name their own avatar has taken. There is, by this logic, no third group: devotees primarily dedicated to Shirdi Sai who profess great respect for Sathya Sai Baba too.

The young Sathyanarayana Raju, before ever he was known as Sathya Sai Baba, is said to have verified his claim to be the reincarnation of Shirdi Baba by recognising some devotees of the latter, revealing a familiarity with intimate details of their experience. Such confessional lore is well-established in the convictions of Sathya Sai bhaktas. That was demonstrated at the celebration of Sathya Sai Baba's birthday in Wellingborough in 1979. Pictures of the well-known incident, drawn by children of the Wellingborough Bat Vikas class, featured in the display of illustrative work by young people that was mounted as part of the celebration. It provides an example of the evolutionary process at work. If those devotees of Shirdi Baba were convinced by Sathyanarayana Raju's insight (which they were) then their future devotion to Sathya Sai was assured.

If not, they would have been incensed at the cheek of an invidious charlatan. If you are a Shirdi devotee, the claims of the contemporary guru repulse and incense you, or they beguile you into a new fold. Current evidence also suggests that no neutral position is found to be viable.

Icons of Sathya Sai Baba naturally provide the integrating focus in the Bradford mandir. Yet there is no way of escaping a visual encounter with the man who was once called a 'jewell on a dunghill' (Osborne 1975: 12), a slighting reference to the insignificance of his location in Shirdi. The largest of the pictures of Shirdi Sai (icon 3, plate 4.1) used to hang on the right-hand side wall. It is now located on the opposite wall, still prominent. A large oil-painting, no mere oleograph, it is an original work presented to the president of the satsang by an acquaintance in Loughborough. It is rigidly based on conventional iconic depiction of the saint, clothed in white and seated but not squatting, nor in a yogic position) on a pile of stones, with his right leg raised and folded over the left knee, and the left hand resting on the right foot. This position has become iconically his hall-mark.

Regarding the colour of Shirdi Baba's dress, it was once observed that he is 'always represented ... in the plain white clothes and white cap of a Muslim fakir' (Swallow 1976: 259). That is certainly not the case in Bradford. However, a researcher might inadvertently overlook pictures of an orange-clad Shirdi Sai amongst the myriad highly-coloured icons of Sathya Sai in the shrines of the latter's devotees. In such locations, on the other hand, representations of Shirdi Baba in white robes stand out in contrast to the blazing saffron and red of the contemporary guru. The display in the Bradford mandir abounds in images of an orange-robed as well as a white-clad Shirdi Baba. That is not merely a local idiosyncrasy.

Alongside icon 3, an advertising poster for Manoj Kumar's film, Shirdi ke Sai Baba (Sai Baba of Shirdi), was displayed from 1978-81. The film circulated Asian cinemas in Britain in 1977 and 1978. In that poster Shirdi Baba is dressed in orange. In other posters for the same film he is clothed in white. Both colours are rich in religious and symbolic

significance. Invariably, however, Shirdi Sai is shown as an old man - although it is clear that even as an adolescent he was respected if not revered. Generally, as in the film poster, his face is frank but kindly, with direct, searching gaze. It is that gaze which made a deep impression on Brent when he surveyed the iconography of this venerated figure (1972: 140). Consonant with most of the pictures of Sai Baba of Shirdi in the Bradford mandir, he comments:

He always wore a loose robe, a kufni, which would be in rags before he took another, and a ragged scarf around his head. That is the picture of him that is everywhere to be seen; seated, leaning a little sideways, looking out at us from time and certainty (sic); he has the appearance of someone very poor who has learned to be patient with his lot.

There are so many representations of Shirdi Baba in the Bradford mandir that one might assume that the Maharashtrian holy man has a following in the city in his own right. That is not the case. Yet he is renowned within the Hindu population in the United Kingdom wherever devotion to Sathya Sai Baba is practised.

It is not only pictorially that Shirdi Sai is commemorated in Bradford. For example, on 15 June 1978, at the conclusion of the satsang's bhajan mandal, two separate tissues were carried round to the members of the congregation. One contained vibhuti (below 5.5), Sathya Sai's sacred ash. The other was equally reverentially conveyed to the worshippers. An informant vouchsafed; 'This is not vibhuti. It's different. It's Shirdi Sai's udhi. Someone brought them both recently from India.' One of the most commonly known idiosyncracies of Sai Baba of Shirdi was that he kept a dhuni (sacred fire) permanently burning in his Hindu masjid (mosque). Udhi is the name given to the holy ash from that fire, reputed to have had (and still to have) healing properties (Osborne 1975: 41-49, 124; Swallow 1976: 257-58, 262-64). The name itself, unique to the cult of Shirdi Baba, may be a pun. It may be intended to suggest iddhi, supernatural power (cf. Gonda 1963b: 66, 765; Narasimhaswami 1944: 143, 166).

Films chosen for showing in the mandir have often featured coverage of a scene re-enacted annually at Prashanti Nilayam during Mahashivaratri, when Sathya Sai Baba reverentially performs a remarkable mahabhishekam (ritual bathing) of a murti of Shirdi Sai with an amazing flow of vibhuti. Such films also sometimes show Sathya Sai addressing large crowds of people (as at Simla, during a tour of northern India) from a platform or a dais dignified not only with a large portrait of himself but also with one of Sai Baba of Shirdi. Exhibitions illustrating their faith, mounted by devotees in the United Kingdom (like that in Wellingborough in 1979) always depict Shirdi Baba in association with Sathya Sai.

Individual household shrines of families belonging to the Bradford satsang provide ample evidence of the devotion offered to Sai Baba of Shirdi. For example, one family has made its own composite icon by cutting up orthodox Shaivite and Vishnavite oleographs, pasting portraits of Shirdi Baba onto them. The resulting amalgam depicts the latter in company with Shiva and Krishna, as well as Sathya Sai Baba. Another similar work shows him with Sathya Sai, Rama and Hanuman. In the same household, a commercially-produced plastic trinket, a model of a television set, is treasured. Its devotional pictures, brought into view in turn by manipulating a knob, suggest a television programme about Sathya Sai. Two of the sixteen pictures depict Sai Baba of Shirdi. In other households of the satsang devotion to Shirdi Baba is also amply in evidence. In one domestic display of twenty-five icons, four represent Sai Baba of Shirdi. Even when household shrines are much less elaborate, Shirdi Baba is still prominently represented.

The appurtenances of the Bradford mandir that relate to Shirdi Baba themselves proclaim some of the significant themes regarding his life. It is not only his manifest asceticism and his enigmatic, sometimes kindly, sometimes depressed, countenance that is apparent. On the mantel-piece against a rear wall stands a little plastic shrine. It is a stylized model of a simple mosque inside which the old man sits upon a pillar or a pile of stones in his inevitable stereotyped posture. His right leg is folded across the left knee, his left hand rests on the right ankle. The fact that the saint is seated

in a mosque in this simple devotional aid is significant (Narasimhaswami 1944: 2).

Sai Baba of Shirdi was about 16 years old when he first arrived in Shirdi in 1872, the son of unknown Hindu (possibly Brahmin) parents. He had left home to follow a Muslim fakir as a disciple, and, on his death, had attached himself again to a Hindu guru. His openness to Islamic influence had shown itself in his persistence in referring to god as 'Allah', and in his taking residence in a tiny mosque at Shirdi after being turned out of the temple there because of his Muslim appearance.

That Shirdi Baba was eccentric is well-attested, for it seems that he was sometimes of uncouth and violent behaviour. Nevertheless, he won a reputation for saintliness, and for an ability to perform miracles of healing and to bestow fertility, as well as for illuminating if cryptic teaching. He referred characteristically to his base at Shirdi as his 'Brahmin mosque' (Osborne 1975: 76; cf. 33). Having undoubtedly his own individual style, he was by no means unique in fusing such diverse elements. Ramdev (1404-58), for example, is the focus of a cult of considerable vitality. He is regarded both as an avatar and as a pir (Muslim holy man) by his devotees. 'Eincarnation of Krishna with 'powers so great that even Muslims worship him'. Ramdev synthesised Hindu-Muslim differences, yet without reconciling the two religions at a theological level (Binford 1976: 120, 136).

Sai Baba of Shirdi, however, claimed other celebrated spiritual antecedents. For example, according to tradition, he was once interrogated by a magistrate regarding the details of his personal life. In answer to the query, 'Creed or religion?' he is reputed to have replied enigmatically with one word: 'Kabir' (Osborne 1975: 33). That distinguished fifteenth century Hindu-Muslim mystic left a legacy of verse which has been honoured in the scriptures of the Sikhs. He is seen by many as a potent influence on the development of the life and work of Shirdi Baba (Swallow 1976: 260-61).

When the ritual recitation of 108 divine names takes

place in the Bradford mandir, the name of Sai Baba of Shirdi is included within the sequence (cf. Kasturi 1980a: 187). It is strange that he is so rarely specifically mentioned in bhajans. There is only one bhajan in the official hymnbook of the devotees that explicitly refers to Shirdi Baba:

Shirdi nivasa Sai Shankara,
Parthi nivasa Sai Shankara.
(Sri Sathya Sai Education and Publication
Foundation, n.d.: 83).

Shankara ('Giver Of peace') being an epithet for Shiva, the hymn affirms with total reciprocity that 'Shirdi is the abode of Sai-Shiva, (Putta) parthi is the abode of Sai-Shiva'.

The bhajans of the Bradford satsang are, however, replete with the term 'Sai', referring to Sathya Sai Baba. The perceived connection between the two 'Sais' is thus unambiguously expressed. The common usage of devotees in referring to their temple as 'the Sai mandir' corroborates the point. In all such references, however, the connotation and the characteristics of the work of Sai Baba of Shirdi are overwhelmed by the associations supplied by the new 'Sai'.

Sathya Sai has harnessed specific elements in the cult of Shirdi Baba, including the potency of sacred ash, but has refrained from pursuing the significance of certain others. Notable in the latter category is the strength of the Islamic reference in the teachings of, and traditions about, Shirdi Baba. Thus while there is acknowledgment of the syncretic appeal of the venerable old man, there is no thorough-going attempt to pick up the particular implications of his characteristic eclectic stance (cf. Swallow 1976: 25). This remains true despite superficial suggestions and accommodations (Fanibunda 1978: 55; Sreenivas 1979: 49), and in spite of the sterling work undertaken by some devotees to demonstrate the 'unity' of all religions which Baba's general teaching has inspired (Jagadeesan 1983). The reasons for this may be inherent in the nature of Islam itself. There is at Prashanti Nilayam, however, a small mosque that has been erected by devotees of Islamic background to make the connection with Shirdi Baba specific.

Sathya Sai's on eclectic teaching is thoroughly Hindu in its articulation. He makes hermeneutic accommodations to the religious background of non-Hindu inquirers or devotees (Fanibunda 1978: 44) and particularly to the Christian heritage, when circumstances make it appropriate, but has not taken on the mammoth implications of Shirdi Baba's Islamic-Hindu syncretic theme. Socio-political factors could also account for this neglect. The benefit accruing from a reappraisal of the interaction of Islam and Hinduism in India, however, if undertaken by an influential Hindu guru from a perspective dedicated to ideological rapprochement, would be of eminent pragmatic value to the Indian nation. Any baulking of an opportunity to develop such a reappraisal, the arduous conceptual and analytical conundrums notwithstanding, requires explanation. Such an approach would take seriously the vitality of what is sometimes called 'Hindoslam', to distinguish the Indian Muslim's heritage from more purely Arab forms of Islamic religion. It would attempt to assuage the bitterness of the legacy of earlier communal hostilities which the partition of the Indian sub-continent in 1947 did not altogether eliminate (Krishna 1982: 112-18). To dismiss such a concern because it would be theologically problematic for many Muslims and therefore unfruitful, would be to disregard some of the evidence of the history of Islam in India (Spear 1972: 467-68). The syncretism of Shirdi Baba was too simplistic to offer more than an exemplary initiative for such a task. It provides, however, a theological theme to be worked at greater depth and with pertinacity, a nettle to be grasped.

Outside India, initiatives are needed to reduce cultural cross-currents between communities which have originated in the sub-continent. The sometimes tense relationship between the South Asian minorities in Bradford and the majority population has had the effect of stimulating co-operation between the various sections of the former, but sometimes in a fragile mode. Any movement generated from within the differentiated religious minorities by internal ideological orientation rather than by external pressures, dedicated to a deeper appreciation of the religious convictions of the others, would contribute to a more stable unity between the sections of the South Asian-derived population in the city. In respect of Bradford's Gujarati

Hindus, such a development vis-a-vis the South Asian Islamic heritage would be invaluable, since most of them live interspersed amongst a substantial Muslim population largely of Mirpuri (Pakistani) derivation in Bradford 5 and Bradford 7. Theological factors indicate that this rapprochement could most easily begin from the Hindu rather than from the Muslim side. If the potential for this had been more thoroughly explored by Sathya Sai Baba in India, his devotees in Bradford would have responded to the stimulus. Pilgrims from the Bradford satsang have, nevertheless, taken pictures of the small mosque at Prashanti Nilayam: a sign of their awareness of the potency of that latent syncretic symbol.

The hymnody and the practice of Sathya Sai's devotees in Bradford suggests no significant exploration of the Hindu-Muslim interface, although the name 'Allah' is sometimes included in bhajans that are sung. The frequency of this occurrence has increased with the enhanced initiative of the young people in the affairs of the satsang. Nevertheless, the dominant syncretic focus of the satsang, evident again most clearly amongst its young participants, is towards the recognition of Jesus and of Christian terminology in the bhajans. The icons also make that clear. Christian motifs are manifestly present. While the concept of 'Muslim icons' would represent a contradiction in terms, the determined syncretist could find in Islamic calligraphy a tangible pictorial counterpart to the use of the name 'Allah' in bhajans. Trade calendars showing famous mosques or pictures of the Kaaba, such as one finds displayed in Muslim homes and in mosques in Bradford, would provide an accessible Islamic devotional aid if a counterpoint to Hindu oleographs was being sought. There is only a small effigy of Shirdi Baba's 'Hindu mosque' in the mandir. The accessories of the temple therefore make it apparent that there is no thorough-going orientation towards Hindu-Muslim rapprochement.

The iconographic evidence of the Bradford mandir thus sustains the view that the temple functions as an affirmation of Gujarati Hindu ethnicity in an adapted form in an alien context, and that this permeates its undoubted theological significance. The empirical evidence to date points towards one significant form of syncretic orientation, paralleled

in a corresponding preoccupation in respect of community relations. It is the perceived links with the religious heritage of the majority (broadly 'Christian') population that have come to be emphasised. The situation in this respect may prove to be fluid and dynamic. It is conceivable that the nature of the iconic display will change with the growing initiative and responsibility of the young.

4.2 ICONS 4-11: SATHYA SAT BABA

The icons of Sathya Sai Baba have not always been an initial attraction for those who have become devotees. In Bradford one western devotee acknowledged that before he met Baba he had been 'revolted by the dreadful crudity of pictures of Baba' seen in India (14.6.77). Even from the ranks of Baba's closest adherents a similar initial reaction has been acknowledged. Indra Devi confesses that she had no desire to meet the 'fat, fierce-looking man in a bright orange robe, with a thick mop of black hair' whose pictures she had seen in a friend's house. 'Why this wild hair-do?' was her first reaction (1979: 5, 8). When Devi went on to encounter Sathya Sai in person, her impressions and her feelings changed:

I could hardly believe my eyes at the sight of a small, slender figure. ... The handsome face with clean cut features had no resemblance whatsoever to the picture I had seen ... except for the hair forming a sort of black halo around his head.
(ibid.: 12)

The value of that observation and that of the western devotee in Bradford, is that they emphasise that there is no substitute for the darshan of Baba himself. For that experience, pilgrims from all over the world travel to Prashanti Nilayam. Thus, from the perspective of the devout, pictures sometimes do Sathya Sai a disservice. Icons can help to create the awareness that he is present, but they are not that presence. However, an academic from an English university, an eminent scholar in the field of Indian religion, did not find herself moved in the same way by her first glimpse of Sathya Sai Baba at a public darshan at his main educational campus, Whitefield, Bangalore in 1982:

Physically he is the strangest person I have ever seen. He doesn't conform to any of the normal Indian types ... His pictures in the book: are in fact better than the reality. Yes, they are much better. The head is so large, and the face is so broad, it seems totally out of proportion with this very short, small body... His appearance leaves a strange impression. (6.5.82)

Thus one can see that the task of interpreting the significance of icons, and especially those of a contemporary figure, could be full of the perils of intruding subjectivity. For that reason the most pertinent commentary on the icons of Sathya Sai Baba in the mandir is the total response of the satsang to his person. Yet there is a dialectic interaction between the icons and the response. The devotional pictures provide tangible evidence of Baba's impact. In turn, they affect and develop that impact. As with much dialectic progression, the process becomes self-propogating. A fuller examination of the icons themselves is therefore essential to the analysis of their significance for the satsang. Eight further pictures have been selected for specific comment out of the array in the mandir. They have been chosen because of their effectiveness in conveying impression of Baba, or because they typify common motifs in the variety of themes which are evident in his portrayal. Their setting in the iconic display, where significant is indicated in the text. The intention in registering the impact of the selected icons, is to acknowledge the significance of the display as a whole.

The major icons of Baba in the mandir show him in a variety of moods and postures, engaged in a range of activities, and against many different backgrounds. Each icon conveys impressions of his character and personality and of his attitude to his devotees. The overall impression is that Sathya Sai Baba is genial, kindly, accepting and welcoming. The pictures normally show him smiling, sometimes cheerfully beaming. In one, where he is serious of countenance, he certainly is not sombre. Occasionally he is shown as shy or reserved, with the mere glimmer of a smile playing over his lips. When his hand is not raised in greeting, it is placed in a teaching gesture.

Sometimes, with manjira, he keeps time for bhajans. Occasionally he appears to be inwardly lost in meditation. Otherwise he may be deep in conversation. Often he reclines in his colourful long kurta, his gown of saffron or orange, on sumptuously appointed divans, a shimmering silk-clad figure. His gaze in the popularly distributed icons often appears uncritical, indulgent. It is remarkable, although understandable, how seldom the pictures relate to Sathya Sai's propensity, reported by devotees, for reproving sternness.

Icon 4 (plate 4.2) takes seriously the nature of an avatar as a manifestation in the flesh, with the earthly realities of increasing weight and age that that involves. It is a head-and-shoulders photograph of Sathya Sai Baba, his afro-style shock of black hair flecked with strands of grey and white that, in oleographs, the tinters do not allow him to have. Wedged into its frame is a compact miniature black and white photograph of a much younger Sathya Sai, seated on a gadi between a full-length portrait of himself as a strikingly youthful teen-ager and a picture of an elderly Shirdi Baba. In icon 4, Sathya Sai's expression shows him to be lost in thought, preoccupied. He does not smile. He neither rejects nor accepts. His cheeks are full-fleshed. His neck is thick, with no double chin yet, but the potential for one. This is a central icon, always garlanded, for within this household it enjoys a precious status. Not only does Baba's signature appear on the picture, but even more important: it is the first portrait of Baba that this family ever possessed. It was given to the wife of the president of the satsang in 1965. In that way, vouchsafes the president, 'Baba was with us, his blessings were with us, even before we became devotees' (14.9.79).

Icon 5 is also a very natural picture (plate 4.3). Squatting out of doors on apparently sandy soil, Sathya Sai smiles gently. His hair, like a mane, is wafted to one side by a breeze. Its tousled mass, his seemingly unkempt clothing, and his casual posture make this an unusually informal icon. With his left hand, Baba indicates a somewhat crude but 'golden' effigy of Krishna playing his flute. The location appears to be the dried-up bed of a river. The sandy background,



Plate 4.2: ICON 4, GARLANDED



Plate 4.3: A CHILD LEARNS OBEISANCE IN THE MANDIR

Amongst the icons noted in the text to be seen here, are:

icon 5, fourth from left, middle row;
icon 7, First from left, middle row;
icon Ø third from left, middle row;
icon 1 fifth from left, bottom row.

Photo: Jan Siegieda

and the fact that Baba's sleeves are rolled up to the elbow - as so often for his materialising activities and as appropriate for digging in the sand - suggests that he has materialised the effigy out of the dry soil. Devotees, seeing such a picture, know well how to interpret it - for such occurrences are frequently described in the testimonies of the devout (Murphet 1973: 71-72). Materialising an image of Krishna, or of Rama, is characteristic of these reports (Mason and Laing 1982: 190). Kasturils poetry reveals how commonplace such events are regarded, when in Sathya Sai Baba's company. He provides a fitting commentary on the associations of this icon for devotees.⁹

Icon 6 (plate 3.2) is a large photograph. It shows Baba holding the linga which he is said to have disgorged miraculously at the celebration of Mahashivaratri in 1975, for all to see. His countenance exudes pride, confidence, and a sense of achievement. It appears to articulate a challenge: 'Now do you believe?' The silky sheen of his orange gown suggest luxury and sensuousness, further emphasised by the non-ascetic breadth and fullness of the face and the crown of hair.

Icon 7, an oleograph, is a creative work without any direct photographic base - the product of a poster artist with a disneyesque style (plate 4.3). Baba is shown, full-length, standing on a podium, his right hand raised in blessing, a large lotus emblem in the background. The smile with which Baba has been endowed is patronisingly avuncular, vacuous and stereotyped. The sky-blue back-drop, the enormous lotus symbol and the dais, inevitably resemble theatrical properties and give a gaudy surreal quality to this iconic creation.

Icon 8 draws upon the historic association of royalty with deity in the cultural heritage of India, by which temples were equated with palaces of the gods, and deities with kings and queens. This icon (not illustrated) affirms Baba's place in that theocratic tradition. In a palatial audience chamber, sumptuous with golden furnishings, seated upon a throne and beneath an ornate imperial parasol, Baba *sits*, crowned only by his globe of black hair.

Some new icons made their appearance in the mandir in July 1980, when it was redecorated and partly refurbished. The new icons had obviously been carefully selected, for it was likely that they would remain in position for several years. Two of them have been discussed above (3.3). Of the others, three of those presenting portraits of Sathya Sai Baba are highly significant and call for detailed comment.

Icon 9 (not shown) is notable because, amongst the pictures in the mandir, it comes closest to representing the testimony that Sathya Sai's countenance is sometimes stern, even forbidding. Here Baba does not reach that point, but it seems as if it might not be far away. He is unsmiling. His gaze is searching, penetrating. He may simply be attending, intensely, to the point of view a visitor is presenting to him. Alternatively, he might have committed himself to rigorous interrogation of the sincerity of a questioner.

Icon 10 (plates 3.4, 4.3) is a fascinating portrait, displayed prominently twice in the refurbished shrine. It is surrounded in its frame by glossy foil. Although that might be nothing more than a sign of respect or reverence, it enhances the impression of an appeal to self-gratification rather than self-discipline and restraint. Undoubtedly a photograph, Sathya Sai is depicted posing like a coy school-girl modelling for a magazine. Standing under palm fronds, in a manner reminiscent of many a movie starlet,¹⁰ he smiles with frank and open countenance, his right hand shyly behind his back. Baba's left hand grasps a frond that hangs from above, providing a rest for the inclined head, a frame for the impressive mass of jet black hair. The delicate, ambiguous, almost erotic image projected by the photographer is enhanced by the highly-coloured long silken kurta that Baba wears. His habitual garment, it is called by his biographer his 'long gown' (Kasturi 1975a: 132).

Icon 10 thus raises fundamental questions. One wonders whether the impression that has been given by the photographer's skill in any way reflects an intention of Baba himself. Wittingly or unwittingly the devotee who has provided the sheen of gold foil to surround this picture has confirmed that its impact is a fundamentally sensuous one. The icon is compatible

with an age-old convention of Indian religious art whereby the youthfulness of deities who never grow old is portrayed, the bodies of male gods appearing 'smoother, soft and rather effeminate' (Basham 1979: x). It is intriguing that the influence of this ancient convention is most evident in the mandir in icon 10, where it is not imaginative mythological illustration that is on display, but contemporary photographic art, projecting verisimilitude. Ideologically, icon 10 must be seen as an endorsement of Sathya Sai's own teaching: 'Shiva and Shakti have incarnated as myself ... now' (Kasturi 1975a: 89).

The mandir thus makes manifest more than a simple identification of Sathya Sai Baba with Shiva alone. The conceptual background for this is evident in Indian philosophy and mythology in diverse forms (Zimmer 1974: 25). Such an iconographic statement is consonant with a fundamental theological perspective: 'The union of Shiva with Shakti is their basic reality' (Danielou 1964: 203). That awareness informs the convictions of Baba's devotees in Bradford and provides a basis for their perception of him. It is grounded in his teaching. It is evident in icon 10. It is articulated in the writings of devout apologists such as Gokak.¹¹ It is not iconographic invention nor a mere exaggeration, embellishment, or distortion of an insignificant or otherwise unnoticeable facet of Sathya Sai Baba's character.

The testimony of one who was once a privileged and intimate devotee affirms that there have been times when real or ostensible male-female ambivalence has been exploited by Baba in the dramatisation of teaching roles or for the production of devotional pictures. That erstwhile devotee appears not to have understood, and certainly did not give weight to, the conceptual context which could have explained the exploitation for pedagogic or iconographic purposes of an ambivalence which he, as an American, was culturally conditioned to despise (Brooke 1976: 81). Indian devotees perceive such occurrences in a very different light, and accept them with joy: 'Those who had this unique good fortune say that (Sathya Sai Baba) actually appeared to them dressed in sari and blouse and resplendent with bangles, necklaces, nose studs, ear ornaments' (Kasturi 1980a: 116).

The Indian philosophical understanding of the integration of male and female in the deity, permeating the most popular as well as abstruse artistic forms and purveyed in the exhortations of swamis and sadhus, pervades the Indian cultural perspective on theism in general. Thus, the impact of a unified male-female perception of the person of Sathya Sai Baba on the interpretation of his role is not lost even on his least literate devotees. Many of Sathya Sai Baba's bhaktas perceive him, more than anything else, as their divine Mother. One, at least, always calls him 'Shiva, the Mother' (Kasturi 1980a: 89). The Bradford satsang expressed that perception in explanatory notes produced for circulation at its celebration of Guru Purnima in 1975: 'Lord Sri Sathya Sai Baba ... the manifestation of Shiva and Shakti together in human form is our Divine Mother, Father and Guru' (cf. Devdas 1977: 66). This perspective appears in the writing of other devotees as the rationale for the adoption of the ancient annual festival of the divine Mother (Dasehra, Navaratri) as 'the festival par excellence' at Prashanti Nilayam -

attracting thousands to Puttapparthi, where Sai Mata [Sai the Mother] is so beneficent and bountiful.

Baba is indeed the Supreme Mother, manifesting herself as Sarasvat, Lakshmi ... and even Kali ... His devotees feel that he is their Mother more than all, and so there is special appropriateness in Dasehra being the biggest festival at Puttapparthi. Many among his bhaktas have been blessed with visions of him as the Mother.

(Kasturi 1980a: 116, 88-89, cf. 112)

As an extension of such a perception, the lore of Baba's devotees also preserves a place for him as Thayumanavar - that is, as celestial midwife:

Shiva has an appellation in Tamil . . . meaning, 'He who became also the mother', for ... he once attended on a woman during the delivery of her child.

Baba has been Thayumanavar many times over; he has taken upon himself the pains in many instances; he has 'gone out' of his body to act as midwife during delivery.

(Kasturi 1980a: 115)

Icon 11 is a photographic technician's amalgam of a traditional picture of Vishnu and a touched-up photograph of Baba (plate 4.3). Vishnu stands in a large lotus holding his four symbolic attributes. He is envolved by Garuda, his mythological vahana (vehicle), goose-like and with distinctively hooked beak, who flutters in the background. In front of Vishnu, also within the lotus, stands Sathya Sai clad in a dizzily pink long kurta, gaudy, shining and radiant. No mere halo but a shimmering aura around his whole frame proclaims Baba's sanctity. The sun serves as a context for the three figures.

This icon may be compared with another discussed above (chapter 3.3) in which not Vishnu himself but Krishna appears, and not Garuda but a cow. The parallels are to be found in the protective attitudes towards Baba of the revered deities, the solicitous attention of Garuda and the cow, and in the mellow, softly-tinted tones in which the traditional mythological deities are presented. These features are used to set off sharply the contrasting figure of Sathya Sai, proposed with considerable impact in dramatic colours in each icon. The startlingly pink gown of Baba in icon 11 may be an innovation of the colourist. Even if it is, it is significant that a commercial artist has endowed Baba with such stridently voluptuous apparel and that it has been endorsed by devotees who have given it prominence in the mandir and also, in some cases, in domestic shrines.

Conventional western (possibly sexist) stereotypes may exert an influence on the perceptions of members of the Bradford satsang. It must be so in the case of the younger affiliates. Features of certain icons of Sathya Sai Baba - like the colour of his long kurta in icon 11 - will tend, sustained by common western norms, to reinforce the projection of an effeminate rather than a virile personality. Similarly, responding to the requirements of a humid climate, Baba is sometimes portrayed clutching a white handkerchief in a manner that does not conform to western images of manliness. The cut of his gown, and the glossy material from which it is made, reinforce the same impression. That this is not merely a distortion of the empirical reality is manifest in the accounts of devotees in India (Murphet 1973: 65). It is sustained in the observations of a non-devotee, a

visitor to Baba's educational centre at Whitefield, Bangalore:

His appearance leaves a strange impression. It's partly the way he dresses and moves. His gown - it's unique ... It's not the attire of a monk or swami, which would be a straightforward piece of material, simply wrapped-around. It's a gown. It gives a feminine impression. It's those slits at the sides which make it seem so feminine - and the way he moves his hips. That all makes a very odd impression.

His garment is bright orange, flowing down to his feet. He is moving or rather gliding in it as if he were wearing a sari.

(6.5.82)

Sathya Sai Baba's swift, dramatic movements, the flexibility of his body, and his apparent youthfulness - even when more than fifty years old - have been subject to comment by other academic observers (Swallow 1976: 246; H. Daniel Smith 1978: 55).

In traditional Hindu iconography deities are bejewelled and sumptuously dressed while endorsing the ascetic goals of duty and dharma. Even world-denying sannyasis are often depicted in gorgeous clothes and ornaments. The apparent sensuousness of an icon may thus conceal the message of restraint and self-control that ^{it} articulates to the devout. Accordingly, certain pictures of Sathya Sai Baba suggest to an outside observer a vanity and grandeur which appear to be in tension with a message of self-control and asceticism. In some, the rich colourfulness and glossiness of Baba's long kurtas, the glamour of clutched garlands and the poses that Baba sometimes strikes, suggest not only effeminacy but sensuousness as well. This flamboyance, compatible with the conventions of Indian iconic art, has of course been noted as a feature of Baba's icons in India too (Swallow 1976: 246, 259), and is evident in the films and video-recordings which are treasured by his devotees. Independent testimony nevertheless affirms that Baba's life-style is not characterised by undue opulence or luxury (ibid.).

For his birthday celebrations, Sathya Sai wears white (cf. Sandweiss 1975: 181; Fanibunda 1978: 26c). For

normal usage, however, as vouchsafed by the president of the Bradford satsang, Baba likes to wear either of two differing shades of orange - one being somewhat lighter than the other, both having claim to association with saffron. Saffron, as the proper pigmentation for the clothing of a person in pursuit of holiness, has the weight of age-old tradition behind it in India and east Asia. It is customarily used by Hindu swamis and Buddhist monks and suggests total dedication to the divine. Sometimes the tradition is interpreted in such a way that the apparel is of an unglamorous brownish hue and the material is often of a home-spun and very hardy type. A limited range of possibilities presents itself. Many a swami must depend on the gifts of cloth he has received from the pious supporters who make donations to him. In the case of Sathya Sai Baba such considerations do not apply. His preferred hues are widely known. Neither is akin to a dull, self-effacing brown. The glittering displays of pictures of Sathya Sai contrast markedly with the severely austere, monochromatic and sombre portraiture of the expressionless Jalaram Bapa. His black and white effigy is virtually ubiquitous in the homes of devout Gujarati Hindus in Bradford. It is also displayed in the Sai mandir.

In the context of the veneration of Sathya Sai Baba, the ascetic connotation of saffron or orange is transposed into a different key. Its eye-catching nature is by no means diminished into drabness in the interests of self-effacement, but rather enhanced with a quite opposite intention - and reputedly at the instigation of devotees (Kasturi 1975b: 132). The flaunting of this brightness is pointed. It is pre-figured in a Telugu poem that Baba is said to have written before he was twenty years old:

We shall go
To holy Puttaparthi now. It seems
He wears a lovely robe of orange silk,
His is heavenly glory; he's the Lord himself.
(Kasturi 1980b: i)

The association of the colour of Baba's long kurta with the radiant light of the sun is deliberate. The sun, invested not unnaturally with associations of splendour and power, has been a magnetic force in traditional Indian puja, and its Saiutation (Surya

namaskar) is not neglected amongst the devotees of Sathya Sai Baba (Devi 1979: 140). Thus the orange of Baba's gown suggests the sun's magnetism. It not only rivets attention: in this cultural context it also invites abasement. The sheer dominance of Baba's flaming icons in the mandir proclaims that response to Baba's magnetism is the theme. Salute this sun, the message appears to run, and he will lead you to growth and to enlightenment. In Prashanti Nilayam, where this sun is most at home, all other bodies have to be clothed in white.¹²

That the respective colours of the clothing of Sathya Sai and of his devotees at Prashanti Nilayam are understood by the devout to have significance, is reinforced in a different mode by the evidence of references ostensibly establishing Baba's status vis-a-vis the Christian tradition. Typed papers, headed 'Prophecies of the coming of the Avatar'¹³ were circulated in the Bradford mandir in October 1983. They describe Baba's robes as 'blood red', identifying them by a certain extension of prophetic licence, with the 'vesture dipped in blood' of the one who is called 'the Word of God' in the Apocalypse (Rev. 19: 13). Similarly the fact that his followers are said to be 'clothed in fine linen, white and clean' (19: 14) is understood to be more than merely analogous (cf. Brooke 1976: 110f., 127f.).

The final clause in the quotation from Baba's Telugu poem ('he's the Lord himself') makes explicit what is implicit in the imagery of the sun. It contains a phrase redolent with suggestions of royalty and divinity. In the poem's open exegesis of the outward image of Sathya Sai, the exalted associations of the phrase are related to another feature of Baba's long kurtas: the fact that they are made of mukhmal, silk. In India's traditional ritual hierarchy of purity and pollution, silk suggests the former. It remains ritually pure for one week, whereas the purity of cotton lasts only one day (Harper 1964; cf. Kasturi 1975a: 35-36). In addition, from a secular or a western perspective, silk's shimmering, glossy aura is redolent of royalty and luxury. That this feature of Baba's attire is anticipated in such an early poem establishes it as no accident of dress. As the colour of the sun in Baba's clothing suggests divinity, enlightenment and growth, so the material

itself is intended to project an image of purity, royalty and prosperity. As before the sun, so before royalty, self-effacing salutation by lesser beings is appropriate. Thus, again, abasement before the divinely regal source of light and life, fountain-head of success and fulfilment, is solicited by the flamboyant icons of Sathya Sai Baba in the mandir.

Another feature of Sathya Sai Baba's person which is prominent in all the icons and significant in the perceptions of his devotees is his hair. In some of the more cheaply produced devotional pictures, Baba's massive 'globe' of Afro-style hair appears to have been exaggerated. However, in the most authentic photography it is also a phenomenon to excite attention. It is not equated with that Indian tradition, represented for example by the Sikhs, which sees uncut hair as a sign of piety and devotion, although it is believed by devotees in Bradford that Baba never has his hair cut. It is clear that he has no qualms about shaving his beard. Nor is his hair neglected and matted like a self-forgetful Hindu rishi or in the mode of Shiva. Indian tonsorial symbolism extends also to the shaven head, taken as a manifestation of dedication and self-denial. Baba's 'black halo', however, appears to be antithetic to the shaven heads, and different from the matted locks of the yogis (cf. K. Singh 1975: x; Devi 1979: 12).

It is commonplace to see in Baba's hairstyle corroboration of the royal and sublime imagery of the icons. He is 'crowned with a mass of black hair' (Swallow 1976: 246; cf. Kasturi 1975a: 203-4, 210). The very shape of his hair is sometimes said to be in the form of the pranava, OM, a halo shining 'like the crown of Lord Krishna' (Dixit 1975: 162). A related perception is found in the document circulated in the Bradford mandir in 1983, referred to above. Citing the same passage about the one called the Word of God, on whose head were 'many crowns' (Rev. 19: 12), it is asserted that this could be a reference to 'the crinkly hair' of Sathya Sai. A similar parallel with the New Testament, and a link with the perceived divine royalty of Sathya Sai was intended in 1978, with the foundation of an organisation for alumni of Baba's higher educational institutions in India, known as 'The Kingdom of Sathya Sai'.

The luxuriant, royal image of Baba is reinforced by

by the highly colourful, sumptuous divans, furnished with impressive cushions and Covers, on which he is often pictured as reclining. This posture contrasts significantly with the asceticism of Buddhist monks, whose discipline explicitly forbids them to lie on comfortable beds. It is consonant, however, with depictions of deity in Indian art. That is also true of pictures showing Baba sitting on a gadi, his foot resting, like Shiva's does in many oleographs, on the skin of a tiger.

In the icons, Baba is shown to have a full, fleshy, sometimes chubby face. Official photographs confirm the impression of a well-fleshed countenance (Kasturi 1980b: frontispiece). Unfortunately in some cheap devotional pictures the exaggeration of Baba's features becomes grotesque.

4.3 AN EXERCISE IN ICONOLOGY

There is a small icon of Sai Baba of Shirdi in the Bradford mandir in which, uncharacteristically standing erect, he wears a brightly coloured, full-flowing orange kurta in perfect condition. It is strikingly similar to the gown Sathya Sai normally wears. There, Shirdi Baba looks very different from the raggedly-clothed fakir seated in tumble-down surroundings, which is his usual image, authenticated by rare photographs (Sandweiss 1975: 96).

In another icon, introduced to the mandir in 1980, Shirdi Baba is shown in a subordinate role to the flamboyant Sathya Sai. Bent forward with age, his venerable figure is clad in an ostentatiously attractive yellow gown. Superficially interpreted, the fakir in that icon appears to be posthumously denied his genuinely ascetic role. The uninitiated might accuse the picture's manufacturer of making Shirdi Baba subserve the pre-eminence of glamour, forcing him to conform to alien expectations and alternative values. Basham's observations on the Indian tradition of deliberate unrealism in the iconographic portrayal of ascetic personality have to be kept in mind, however (1979: x).

That being the convention, intriguing questions must similarly be raised in the case of Sathya Sai Baba, concerning the relationship of the outward appearance

to the inner reality. If he is a living icon, an avatar, to his votaries, it is not the appearance, but the transmutation of the appearance in the perceptions of the devotees, that has to be allowed to represent the reality. Ascetic holiness may thus, paradoxically, be presented and perceived in what, in another culture, would be incongruous garb.

It is only when viewed from a perspective which ignores Indian cultural norms that the voluptuousness of the icons of Sathya Sai can be taken to provide a simple key to the perceptions entertained by devotees. The indulgent image conceals an ascetic reality. Representing detached asceticism empirically rather than posthumously could be problematic for a contemporary avatar, a living icon. One option, at least, is that of paradoxical ambiguity.

Baba projects himself and is perceived as a focus of worship. He does not, therefore, have to conform to the ascetic image of a mere rishi or a sadhu. He is projected and perceived as an avatar. Thus, the glamorous presentation of his person must not be taken as making a simple statement about the ethical goals of his devotees. In itself it is a theological statement. With regard to morality, it is the teaching of Sathya Sai Baba regarding the pursuit of ascetic holiness, and his focus on the ascetic associations of Shiva and his shakti, that must be allowed to illuminate the independent analysis of his most flamboyant icons - as it would the perceptions of his Indian devotess.

All-pervasive amongst the concepts which must inform the interpretation of the iconic image of Sathya Sai Baba is that of maya, illusion (cf. Smart 1969b: 68; 1978b: 169; Parrinder 1970; Stevenson 1971: 375). Fundamental to the advaita (non-dualist) view of existence and of experience which is basic to Sathya Sai Baba's hermeneutic discussions of the Hindu world-view, maya is a recurrent theme in his discourses. He often uses the term to suggest 'delusion', 'ignorance'. Maya 'plays many tricks' on bewildered humanity (Kasturi n.d.; 298). It is, however, the maya of the Lord. It is 'his lila, his sport' - divine play-acting. Maya is God's 'creature', and he alone can save men from its 'machinations' (Kasturi n.d.: 298, 300). Such a theme makes manifest the 'artfulness' 'of God (Hejmadi 1980a: 127, 241; cf. 1980b: 3).

Drawing on the Indian view whereby maya disguises Brahman, the Absolute, in order that the Absolute may be revealed (Zimmer 1974: 151), Sathya Sai Baba quotes Arjuna saying: 'Lord! Your maya is difficult to overcome!' (Kasturi n.d.: 300). It is a mist which can only be dispersed through austerities willingly borne or by the supervening grace of God; it is a veil that needs rending.

The concept of maya has become meaningful to the young men who have exercised a leadership role in the Sai satsang in Bradford since 1981. One of them in a brief hortatory address at the end of the bhajan mandal on 14 April 1983, spoke of the need to be detached from the unsatisfying and illusory pleasures of a life-style dominated by maya. The examples he gave included the watching of television programmes, the reading of magazines and newspapers. The text, which he was expounding was the Upanishadic prayer, 'From the unreal lead us to the real', sung at every bhajan mandal in the Bradford mandir (cf. Smart 1978b: 169). The young man declared: 'It is so easy and so tragic to mistake what is maya for the real'.

More than a year later, almost identical points were made in a letter to the satsang from a nineteen-year-old male pilgrim from Bradford, visiting Baba's ashram at Prashanti Nilayam. The letter was read out at the end of the bhajan mandal on 20 September 1984. It reiterated, as Baba's own teaching, an exhortation that devotees should not read newspapers or watch television programmes and films which arouse desires, the satisfaction of which leads on to further unhelpful ambitions. Such admonitions from a youthful devotee to his friends living in the hedonistic atmosphere of a British urban society in the 1980s, make it clear that subtle perspectives have to be kept in mind if a too simple view of the significance of Baba's icons is to be avoided. The unambiguous message of his ethical teaching is seen as addressed to the inculcation of rigorous self-control and firm moral discipline.

The tension between worldly achievement and the ideology of detachment, focussed in the images whereby Sathya Sai Baba is iconically represented, is paralleled in his reputation for seemingly supernatural accomplishments. Often used for apparently trivial ends, the

production of baubles, rings and sweetmeats, Baba's widely renowned siddhis (paranormal powers) are considered to embody a spiritual message. In Indian mythology, Siddhi is personified as the wife of Ganesha, the lord of good fortune and auspiciousness. Her name means 'Success'.

Success is not what the founders of the Bradford satsang felt they had achieved in 1970 when the mandir was first established - certainly not success recognisable in terms of wealth, respect, or recognition of one's values and culture. Migration to Britain had been undertaken with the highest hopes of professional and social fulfilment in the new land, and of acceptance by the indigenous community. However, the bleakness of their experiences created a yearning for 'success' which was a hope against hope.

Thus, the sublime aura of Baba's icons, and their projection of a potential for world-wide or even worldly acknowledgement, proved a strong attraction for some in the early days of the Gujarati Hindu settlement in Bradford. Baba's renown for impressive materialisations out of thin air, increasingly widely reported, reinforced the initial attraction and gave it further appealing substance. In the process of iconic contemplation, such associations amalgamated with the concentration on rigorous asceticism in the teaching of Sathya Sai. The Hindu heritage's age-old exaltation of self-discipline, informed by its awareness of the subtle seductiveness of maya, was engaged with contemporary relevance by these factors. Thus, at a time when austerity was inevitable for the majority of the Gujarati settlers in this country, the combination of associations and circumstances was, for some, such as to make devotion to Baba not only an attractive option, but a compelling one.

The inter-related but contrasting foci of asceticism and success have become particularly pertinent for Bradford's Gujaratis again. Parallelling the bitter experiences that many encountered in the 1960s, from 1978 onwards the blight of widespread unemployment has made 'success' more elusive than ever for members of the satsang. Their anxiety has been exacerbated in an unmitigating struggle for recognition in a British society whose overall perspectives were moulded in an era dominated by imperialism.

The bleak dimension in the British economic and social situation in 1981 made a deep impression on a returning migrant, a Punjabi, who had lived in Bradford for a period in the early 1970s. When he had resided in the city he had become a devotee of Sathya Sai Baba through the witness of members of the satsang. He had migrated a second time in 1976 to Canada.

In April 1981, that devotee visited Bradford, en route to India for three months to seek Baba's further blessings and to offer thanks for prosperity against adversity and for guidance given. In the Bradford mandir, now a sacred spot for him, this man confessed how appalled he was to discover the depressed state of British society, the level of unemployment, and the hopeless prospects for the young. 'I believe that Baba - by his grace - will do something for you all soon', he remarked (9.4.81).

Such a comment is consonant with the testimony of the icons in the mandir that here is the one in whose hand is the gift of success. Even if material prosperity should remain elusive, there are tangible ancillary benefits: communal cohesion, brotherhood, the valuable assertion of a sense of identity and cultural pride. Participation in satsang inculcates such experiences. There is hope that its efficacy will not be limited to such gifts alone. 'Baba, help me pass my exams', was the informal but nonetheless heartfelt prayer of a devout eighteen-year-old (13.9.79).

The anticipation of eventual prosperity that once buoyed-up the aspirations of Bradford's Gujarati population has been blighted by the economic situation, despite the notable achievements of certain family-based commercial enterprises and the conspicuous success of some young people in high-level academic courses. In the overall gloomy context, some worshippers in the mandir imaginatively transpose the glamorous persona of Sathya Sai Baba, into that of a bestower of job opportunities in a world where the laying-off of textile workers and despair at the Job Centre are only too real facts of life. The devout visitor from Canada, cited above, was not alone in his perceptions.

Personal experience of the bitterness of racial prejudice has also been characteristic of the context in which the icons of Sathya Sai Baba have been

perceived by the devout. In Bradford, in the late 1970s and in the 1980s, there have been acts of violence against South Asian bus crews, and incidents in which children of Hindu, Sikh and Muslim families have been victims of racial harassment even while at school. Small businesses owned by Gujaratis on council estates have been subjected to serious vandalism, and their walls scrawled with offensive graffiti. Certain violent attacks on individuals have been motivated by racism. There has been a strong feeling amongst some in Bradford that the police have at times failed to take action against the perpetrators of illegal acts against South Asians in the city, because of racism in the police force.¹⁴ The encountering of such problems by devotees of Sathya Sai enhanced the attractiveness of Baba's icons and of his siddhis. They offered the hope of inter-ventional solutions.

Inevitably, if individuals perceive Baba as an avatar they recall his frequent reference to a quotation from the Bhagavad Gita in which Vishnu, through Krishna, affirms: 'For the protection of the virtuous, for the destruction of evil-doers and for the establishing of righteousness ... I incarnate from age to age' (cf. Sathya Sai Baba 1979c: 3). Baba's frequent recourse to that quotation has been emphasised in the Bradford satsang through the occasional showing of a popular film in which the utterance is prominent. It is not fanciful therefore, to suggest that pictures of Baba have been perceived by devotees in the city as icons of the one power able both to revive the economy and to vanquish racist thugs. The associations of the avataric doctrine have practical, not only theoretical, significance. Icons which focus one's attention on a figure who so prominently manifests siddhis, whether thought of as 'supernatural powers' or as 'success', serve to contextualise, as well as to assuage, pressing contemporary anxieties.

The icons in the mandir could be said to be politically innocuous: they attempt to make no direct political statement. They seem to confirm Basham's comment that 'the gods are far above the normal sufferings of human beings' (1979: x). That is not altogether true. Common oleographs, as well as fine classical miniatures, sometimes portray the gods embroiled in the earthly struggle of good against evil, life

against death - sharing the sufferings of human beings. The political and social relevance of depicting the circumstances of Krishna's birth while his parents are confined by a power-hungry ruler is a case in point (cf. Vitsaxis 1979: 39). Exactly such an icon is displayed in the Bradford mandir. A sceptic, however, might object that this motif is lost within the fulsome flamboyance of the rest of the imagery in the shrine.

The satsang has not yet reached a stage where it feels the need, or is able, to produce its own icons having an immediate relevance to economic, political and social conditions in Bradford in the late twentieth century. If it had, it would make the task easier if there were oleographs in circulation that were more obviously relevant to the realities of the contemporary world, even though exclusively Indian in context. The devotional pictures are highly romanticised. The background against which the advent of the avatar is iconically portrayed is far removed from the social conditions and the economic struggle in which the anxieties of the devotees in Britain are experienced.

Photographs of Sathya Sai Baba distributing food to the desperately poor and visiting prisons and hospitals, can be found in the literature published by devotees (World Council of Sri Sathya Sai Organisations n.d.). Members of the Bradford satsang recall their own witnessing of occasions on which food was distributed by Baba on a massive scale. The commitment to educational and health work by Baba and his devotees in India is substantial. Service to the poor and sick, and fresh initiatives in education, are prominent themes in the films about Baba. The votaries therefore know what practical associations to supply to the icons which might be said otherwise to be vacuous of social content.

The argument that the icons in the Sai centre are irrelevant to the social needs of the devotees, that they are an expression of pure escapism, finds Baba's supporters contending that the escapism is more apparent than real. Party politics, however, are far removed from the preoccupations of Sathya Sai and of the Bradford satsang, in spite of occasional references in Baba's discourses to political or

international affairs (Kasturi 1975a: 68-69, 160, 173). Baba and his devotees would thus be charged by some with undervaluing the structures of worldly power and ignoring the agencies of material change. Nevertheless, it is evident, both in the teaching of Baba and in the practice of many of his devotees, that the human casualties of cruel or unjust circumstances are not ignored. The moksha for which the bhaktas strive is one which, far from being co-extensive with obliviousness to social and political ills, relates closely to the distress and poverty of others. Devotion before the icons may numb one to the pain of one's own situation, but it does not render one insensitive to the needs of others. The contrary appears to be the case.

The concept of maya, it can be argued, is selectively applied by the devotees of Sathya Sai Baba in Bradford. It is applied virulently, for example, to those physical or material attractions, manifest to the young people as seductive films, glossy magazines, salacious 'newspapers' or television programmes. Recourse to the concept of maya is seen as a means of dispelling the power of those media when they are experienced as temptation. Maya is also applied, systematically, to the individual's, or the group's experience of material hardship or of social and cultural rejection. Yet it is not applied to those temporal, political and economic factors that cause suffering to others, whether the others are victims of natural disasters, the physically handicapped, sufferers from cancer, or political refugees. Thus, paradoxically, contrarily it might seem, the flamboyantly sensuous icons of Sathya Sai are understood by his devotees to propose a revolution in priorities for human beings living in an unjust world.

The full interpretation of the significance of the icons of Baba requires an even more detailed analysis of the associations of their imagery. That will become apparent in an examination of two festivals which clarify the meaning of the pictures for the devotees. Thus, the male-female ambivalence of the icons and their sensuous nature, will be discussed further in chapter 5.

5

Mahashivaratri

The meaning of an oleograph, a murti or the Shivalinga, is made manifest in the puja which is performed before it, or over it. Iconology is illuminated by liturgy. The significance of the icons in the Sai mandir in Bradford can, therefore, be clarified further by analysis of what transpires in their presence.

Icon 1 has been shown to identify Shiva and Sathya Sai Baba. Its central positioning establishes that worship connected with the festivals of those two revered figures must be important in the mandir. The nature of Mahashivaratri, the Great Night of Shiva, and its form and meaning for the Sai satsang in Bradford, has therefore to be analysed. Afterwards, the significance of Baba's birthday for Sai devotees generally, and for those in Bradford in particular, must also be examined.

5.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF MAHASHIVARATRI

In Indian tradition there is a Shivaratri, 'night of Shiva', every month. It falls on the fourteenth lunar day of the dark half of each mong: kali chaturdasi, kali chaudas, the 'black fourteenth'. During that fortnight the moon is waning. Once a year on that occasion, Shiva's annual festival, Mahashivaratri - his 'great night' - occurs. It falls in the month of Magha or Phalgun, 15 normally in February according to the western calendar, otherwise in March. Amongst all Shaivites the festival has at least three features: vigil, fasting and puja.

In the Sai Centre in Bradford, Mahashivaratri is one of three major annual celebrations. There is no other location in the city where it is communally observed.

The commemoration of Mahashivaratri lasts all night. Shiva himself is thought to keep eternal vigil. Therefore 'all living beings ... are on call ... to achieve control of the mind and the elimination of the Ego by spiritual discipline' on the occasion of his special festival (Shri Hindu Mandir 1977a: 2). Accordingly, an all-night vigil marks the commemoration in the Sai satsang in Bradford.

Bhajans and puja commence in the mandir at 7.30 in the evening and continue into the early hours of the next day. The event is different, however, from akhand bhajan manual. It is divided into separate periods, incorporating specific puja sessions, each concluding with the arati ceremony. It requires the offices of a Brahmin priest, and provides occasion for the chanting of Sanskrit slokas (verses) and mantras by the priest in addition to the singing of bhajans by the congregation. The extent to which it fosters meditation, depends on how adept one is at meditating in the context of a busy liturgy.

Shiva is the mahayogi, exemplar par excellence of yogic practice. He is the divine instructor in, and initiator of, the skills and arts of ascetic yogic discipline. Fasting, therefore, is permanently associated with devotion to him, even apart from the occasion of his annual major commemoration.

A Shaivite may observe a fast on the monthly Shivaratri over a period of fourteen years in order to fulfil a specific vow (S. Bhattacharyya 1953: 165). The prominence of such ascetic practices at the annual Shivaratri is such that it is sometimes considered inaccurate to describe it as a festival. According to that view it is a vrata, a devotional vow, obligatory on all worshippers of Shiva (Long 1972: 17). The fulfilment of such an obligation marks one out as a Shaivite.

In some parts of India women fast for sixteen successive Mondays in fulfilment of their vows to Shiva, the day of the moon being specifically associated with him. Each day of the fast concludes with his worship. In certain areas, it is virtually only the women who fast in Shiva's honour (Babb 1975: 110). Such a practice generally does not mean total refusal of food. It more normally implies the avoidance of substantial, highly spiced or tasty nourishment, and reliance only

on small quantities of bland foods such as milk or bananas.

In Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh fasting is practised, along with Puja of the Shivalinga, by single girls who pray for husbands to their liking, modelled on Rama, 'by the mercy of Shiva' (Srivastava 1974: 169, 195). In Bradford, too, unmarried Gujarati girls of the Sai satsang follow a similar procedure if they 'want to marry and hope for a nice husband' (14.2.80, cf. O'Flaherty 1978: 140-41). When such young ladies come to the Sai mandir to offer their puja worshipping the Shivalinga, it is expected that they will also read about Mahadeva (the Great God, Shiva) in a book which is kept for that purpose in the temple. In Bradford, however, fasting at Mahashivaratri is certainly not confined to the womenfolk of the satsang. The making of vows and fulfilment of the fast provide a framework of personal discipline to mark Shiva's Great Night for all Sai devotees, male and female, in the city.

The vow to fast until midnight, and its fulfilment, are thus basic to the observance of Mahashivaratri. Thomas, recording customs in India, noted that feasting and merry-making would occur on the day following the fast. He, like others, also associates that day with ribaldry and a certain amount of licence (1973: 99; 1975: 129; cf. Babb 1975: 168). In Bradford, delectable food is prepared on the fourteenth and offered to Shiva, while the devout are fasting in his honour. Those offerings are shared as prasad when the vigil is over, by the participating families and by their guests.

Mahashivaratri is endowed, amongst many Shaivites in India, the vrata notwithstanding, with the accepted traits of a full festival: song, dance and drama (Long 1972: 16). Accounts written by devotees of Sathya Sai Baba also show that it is both vow and festival amongst Baba's bhaktas there. This is because Mahashivaratri has acquired for itself special associations amongst Sai devotees, which transcend the essence of a vrata. For the Bradford satsang those factors are also prominent. The fact that, for them, it is an act of corporate religious observance in a minority ethnic group's celebration of its heritage, further endows the occasion with the ethos.

of a festival. The identity which it marks has dimensions over and above those of personal religious commitment or sectarian affiliation. Nevertheless, it does not lose its fundamental nature as the occasion for a vow with the deepest personal devotional significance.

The puja appropriate for Mahashivaratri is offered in obeisance of the linga.¹⁶ Bilva leaves, otherwise known as leaves of the bel or wood-apple tree,¹⁷ are necessary for its performance. They are brought back from India each year by travellers to the homeland; otherwise they are requested in letters to relatives and forwarded through the mail. They are gently placed on the Shivalinga, or reverentially dropped over it, in acts of adoration integral to the worship, while Shiva's 1,008 names are recited (Daniélou 1964: 191; Gonda 1970a: 67-68; Swallow 1976: 298). With each succeeding epithet, a leaf together with, or otherwise substituted by, a petal of a marigold or jasmine flower, is applied to the Shivalinga in veneration.

In Bradford, the petals of a yellow chrysanthemum often serve as a substitute when the supply of bilva leaves has been exhausted. The names used are often those in the abbreviated list of 108 (cf. Mahabharata xiii: 17). In the homes of Sai devotees in the city, leaves that have been used in the Mahashivaratri puja are sometimes preserved between the pages of holy books. Trifoliate leaves with exactly such hallowed associations can be seen in domestic shrines, in frames behind glass, like treasured photographs. They become objects of veneration whose sanctity has been acquired from a most exalted source and from sacred usage.

Another essential concomitant of the puja at Mahashivaratri in the bathing of the linga with cooling fluids.¹⁸ The antiquity of this practice is evinced in the Puranas (O'Flaherty 1978: 147). In some parts of India the juice of freshly-picked coconuts is favoured for the rite, since it is cooler than any other available liquid. Babb has suggested that the ritual bathing of the linga may be connected with Mahashivaratri's falling at the hottest time of the year in certain Indian regions (1975: 168). In Bradford, in February, such a factor is hardly

applicable. However, climatic change is notoriously inconsequential as affecting the transmission of ritual elements in cultural practice during periods of migration. Residence in the United Kingdom on its own, therefore, is not sufficient to render Babb's observation unworthy of consideration. More significant is the fact that the rite itself is widespread across climatic zones in India, with scant respect for the season of the year. It is a perpetual practice, intensified for Shivaratri or at the time of the annual commemoration.¹⁹

In Bradford, each morning (cf. Stevenson 1971: 376) the panchdhatu in the Sai mandir is filled with a cooling mixture of milk and water which drips slowly on the Shivalinga beneath. In the afternoon, and at the time of the regular evening arati, the pot is filled again, but simply with water. Visiting families coming to offer devotion corporately, and individuals calling to perform puja privately, from time to time fill the pot with various cooling fluids. Its incessant drip is maintained perpetually. Such practices sustain the interpretation of the significance of this rite as independent of the season of the year.

For 'the Great Night of Shiva' residents in Bradford's Sai mandir fill the panchdhatu with panchamruta, a 'nectar' made of five ingredients - milk, water, honey, yoghurt and sugar. For this special worship of the Shivalinga tap-water is not appropriate: it should be from the river. Ganges. For that reason the family keeps a bottle of Ganges water in the house, from which a small supply is added to a quantity obtained from the tap. They are then able to regard the panchdhatu as containing the appropriate fluids.

The linga itself represents an agent of causation and generation, the male procreative organ. It symbolises a power which cannot be divorced from sexuality and is associated with the yoni, its female counterpart. The linga is essential to life, but it cannot be allowed unfettered rein. A balance between energetic activity and self-restraint has to be kept. Thus the obeisance of the Shivalinga with cooling fluids has to be understood in terms of the tension between the erotic and the ascetic in the ascribed

character of Shiva, the twin poles in the discharge of his energy and power. He represents, on the one hand, sexual vitality and prowess, and on the other, masterful self-restraint. Such a tension is potent in the imagery of the worship of Shiva at all times, but even more so at Mahashivaratri. Nevertheless, the ancient sexual associations of the Shivalinga remain unarticulated for the most part within the Hindu community. Some individuals may be unaware of them. Others, aware, may be unwilling to acknowledge them, choosing to focus on alternative interpretations of the significance of the linga (cf. Pocock 1973: 88; Chaudhuri 1979: 230; Jackson 1981: 68).

A linga is, etymologically, a sign. It became the sign of That which, or the One who, is virtually beyond signification, the sign of the signless. It images that which cannot be imaged. In the Shiva Purana the linga is 'pure consciousness'. In the Linga Purana it is 'unmanifest nature'. An ancient epithet for Shiva is the term Akasalinga: 'totally formless', unsignifiable (Danielou 1964: 222, 228, 230; cf. Subrahmanyam 1970: 26).

In the Manu Smṛti (1.9), Brahman, the ultimate principle and first cause, was said to be in the likeness of a curve, surrounding the universe and forming the cosmic egg. The universe itself is also, in ancient Indian sources, spoken of as a linga, a sign through which the Creator is known. Thus it is said that in the puja of the linga, the Hindu is by no means deifying an anatomical feature. He is simply acknowledging 'the divine, eternal form manifest in the microcosm' (Bhattacharji 1970: 178-79).

Thus, in India, divine creativity and causation are often represented in abstract or geometric, as well as anthropomorphic mode. Ovoid artefacts lend themselves to cerebral, philosophical interpretation. The word linga is then used, as also the term Shivalinga, for egg-shaped objects dedicated to liturgical use. The terminology is to that extent ambiguous. Elliptical pebbles, naturally rounded, from the beds of India's sacred rivers, commonly supply the need for such appurtenances of puja. They are called banalingas (Bhattacharji 1970: 206; Moore 1977: 128). In them the explicit sexual association

of the anatomic linga is neutralised. The connotation of divine generative power is untrammelled by the associations of an overtly anthropoid morphology. The linga's full significance thus embraces some of the mythological and philosophical potency of the idea of a cosmic egg.

Because of the divergent, nonetheless related, symbolism of the linga, debate about its origin and prior connotation flourishes. Popularly, Hindus affirm the abstractness of the original (Moffitt 1973: 114). The roots of the tension lie in the contrasting cultures of Aryans and Dravidians. The worship of the phallus is traced back to the pre-Vedic communities of the Indus valley, while to the Aryans it was an alien practice. The amalgam of the Aryan and Dravidian cultures had to come to terms with their singular features. Thus, it is in the later and not the earlier recensions of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana that the myths directed at explaining the origin of the worship of the linga occur. They became widely disseminated, indicating a need to justify this non-Vedic aspect of the god' (O'Flaherty 1978: 137).

Modern ambivalence in the interpretation of the linga exemplifies ancient but persisting theological and social tensions which became evident even in the Puranas. On the one hand, Puranas with a Vaishnavite perspective, and those with a pre-eminent devotion to Brahma, represent the adoration of the linga as the outcome of a curse. On the other, the Shaivite Puranic tradition describes how the Pine Forest Sages were taught by Brahma himself to propitiate Shiva, and were then instructed by Shiva in the worship of the linga. Mediating between the two extremes are those myths where Shiva terrorises the gods into venerating the linga (O'Flaherty 1978: 149, 55, 141, 137).

Myths representing the worship of a linga as the result of a curse, provide ancient evidence of the embarrassment of sections of society in India over explicitly sexual symbolism in the cult of Shiva (O'Flaherty 1976: 302-4). The appeal to an abstract significance for the linga was endorsed in the teaching of the Arya Samaj, an association of those committed to social and religious reform, in the nineteenth century. That perspective has become pervasive (Bharati 1972: 188).

Thus, in a philosophical and theological discussion it is generally the abstractness of the linga that is in mind when the term is employed. Those who appreciate safely cerebral connotations for the earthy realism of India's mythological tales, seize upon the immaterial symbolism of the ovoid linga. They barely refer to the anatomical explicitude of the linga of Shiva. Nevertheless, because of its indelible association with the Great God, the linga, be it egg-shaped or otherwise, is bound to be a Shivalinga and possess, in a more or less immediate, more or less abstract way, the connotations of the phallus (Zimmer 1974: 137; Griffiths 1966: 20).

The devotees of Sathya Sai Baba focus almost exclusively on the ellipsoid and therefore the abstract mode of perceiving and discussing the linga. Murphet's account is representative but at least notes the existence of another interpretation (1973: 44). Fanibunda expresses the abstract view in a most exclusive, uncompromising form.²⁰

Sathya Sai himself often speaks of the linga in a particularly cerebral way. He is said to have explained that the linga symbolises 'the merging of the Particular in the Universal', the dissolution of the individual soul in an awareness of the Ultimate Soul. The linga is 'the beginningless endless Ocean of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss'. The linga symbolises not only creation, but also 'the goal of life' (Kasturi 1975a: 73; 1977: 112). Baba has declared that the linga is 'the fittest symbol of the Omnipotent, Omniscient and Omnipresent Lord. Everything starts from it and everything is subsumed in it' (Fanibunda 1978: 55).

Sathya Sai Baba nevertheless appears to have recognised the anatomical significance of the linga. He is reported to have said of an ellipsoid linga in 1974 that it had 'the dimensions of dashangula (ten inches)' Baba continued:

"When the circumference of this linga is added and put together, it will be dashangula. Only such a linga as this one, can be said to contain the important number ten and contain all the manifestations of divinity."
(Fanibunda 1978: 53).

Baba's comment in that instant draws on the tradition reflected in the Purusha Sukta where the phallus is spoken of as divinity 'projecting (from the body) by the breadth of ten fingers'. Ideally, there, the extent of the linga outside the yoni was said to be 'ten fingerbreadths' (Danielou 1964: 227, 230). Thus Baba recognises that however one may focus on the abstract symbolism of the linga, the other element in its history and morphology is so evident that an exclusive interpretation is impossible to maintain. To ignore duality in the significance of the linga would be to present only half the picture.

Celebrations of Mahashivaratri generally take place in contexts in which ascetic ethics are the norm. They nevertheless represent a coded recognition of the largely unarticulated but sometimes acknowledged power of the full associations of the Shivalinga. One cannot expect that every aspect of the significance of the puja of the linga should always be publicly acknowledged, even when they are all known. The focus of comments offered, and of stories cited in illustration, is, however, instructive. Such discussion often draws on innocuous explanations of the feverishness of Shiva. As in the references to the supposed influence of climatic conditions, the pre-occupation is still necessarily with the polarity of hot and cold exemplified in the following account.

There is a young lady who sometimes acts as a spokeswoman for the Bradford Sai satsang, in receiving visiting parties at the mandir. She lays no claim to sophisticated theological insight, but fulfils her role with charm and much skill in communication. On one occasion, in a semi-formal context, answering questions raised by members of a visiting school party, she explained spontaneously:

We put water or milk in the pot to drip down on the symbol of God that is below - the symbol of 'God as Formless'. It is meant to keep it cool.

There's an old story that there was a pot with nectar in it - you know, the drink of the gods that's so delicious it's not allowed for us! And there was another pot with poison in it. The demons swapped the two pots. Shiva drank the poison, which caused fever. We sprinkle

the symbol in order to keep the god cool. That is why he has a snake around his neck. A snake makes you cool too. Shiva did that out of kindness.

(26.3.80)

The theme simply represented in that explanation is built around a motif of venerably ancient authenticity (cf. Danielou 1964: 77-78). Comparable accounts have been published by other Hindus in Britain (Community of the Many Names of God 1980a: 9). Even in such muted forms, the preoccupation of the rites of the festival of the Great God remains the same. The motif of hot and cold is very much in evidence. It is, of course, a theme to which the truly philosophical interpretation of the linga does not address itself. Hence, in the above account, the abstract interpretation is amalgamated with adapted elements from the mythological heritage, such as would disturb no-one's puritanical sensibilities.

Explanations such as that of the young lady in the Bradford mandir throw light on the perceptions of Shiva entertained by his devotees: his reputation for graciousness and self-sacrificing benevolence. They fail to address, however, the fundamental issue which is brought to the fore by the rites of Mahashivaratri. They do not integrate the character of the ritual itself with the hermeneutic process. They represent an unselfconscious exercise in a 'cosmetic' hermeneutic. The Great God has drunk poison. The cooling of this subsequent fever could have been otherwise symbolised than by the bathing of a linga. To be convincing, the explanation of the puja needs to engage the meaning of the Shivalinga itself.

A full hermeneutic of the obeisance of the linga must connect the heat of Shiva with that psychic energy which, in Indian conceptions, accrues not from the discharging of passion but from its ascetic restraint (cf. Sabi. 1980: 54-55). Tapas or tapasya suggests outwardly, 'glowing', and inwardly, 'fervour' or 'ardour' (Zimmer 1974: 116). The Shivalinga embodies tapasya in both its connotations: 'heat' and 'asceticism'. The ritual of Mahashivaratri, mirrored in less intense ways in the year-long adoration of the linga, sustains Shiva's creative heat by constantly cooling it, and not through discharge. Thus, paradoxically, the

obeisance of the linga is thought to maintain its generative power, while its message remains one of the most intense asceticism (cf. Lannoy 1974: 382, 406). The pressures that the ascetic is under are not ignored or denied at Mahashivaratri, nor is the creative tension that he or she sustains.

The significance of the veneration of the Shivalinga is thus a delicate and complex issue, regarding which a reverent silence about certain controversial mysteries of tradition is often maintained. Amongst some Hindu young people in the United Kingdom, ignorance may simply be evidence of the reticence of parents to broach a sensitive subject. In addition, there are both real, but once contrived, and freshly contrived mutations of tradition, providing a plausible hermetic.

In mythology, the linga of Shiva is undoubtedly his phallus. The puja of Mahashivaratri, however, testifies that the worship of the Shivalinga does not signify the opening of a door to libertinism and licence. The linga's abstract connotation, married to adaptations of acceptably innocuous mythological tales, provides a public rationale for the puja, bypassing contentious issues. If inwardly the full significance is perceived, then the rite reinforces the disciplines of restraint, containment and sublimation. When the full symbolism of the linga is not acknowledged, Hindus - some devotees of Sathya Sai Baba amongst them - reach the same conclusion by a contrived route and without coherent explanations of how they got there.

Thus, not so much in spite of, but because of his potential, Shiva remains the ascetic par excellence. It is that which is perceived - as clearly by the worshippers in the mandir in Bradford at Mahashivaratri, as by an eminent Sai devotee in India. He believes that one can 'achieve complete victory over the mind during this night' (Fanibunda 1978: 52).

5.2 THE ORIGIN OF MAHASHIVARATRI

Mahashivaratri is said by some to mark the 'birthnight' of Shiva (Padfield 1975: 147; ct. Stevenson 1971: 276). Amongst the devotees of Sathya Sai Baba, some appear to espouse such a view, presumably prior to realising

that Baba himself has refuted it (cf. Fanibunda 1978: 52 and Kasturi 1977: 110). Baba has acknowledged that Hindu tradition supplies many and varied accounts which purport to explain the origin of the annual commemoration (Kasturi 1977: 110).

In parts of Madhya Pradesh, Mahashivaratri is associated with the celebration of Shiva's marriage to Parvati (Babb 1975: 167). It is also widely understood to have special significance for married women, being the occasion of prayers for the good health and long life of their husbands. The strong association of Shiva with the responsibilities and privileges of marriage is generally emphasised (Chaudhuri 1979: 230). The hope of a fruitful womb is connected by tradition with many of the prayers that are offered.

More common than the linking of Mahashivaratri with either the birth or the marriage of Shiva is an aetiology of the festival focussing on either the creation of the universe or on interactions between the major deities in India's mythological pre-history. Thus, Stevenson was informed that Mahashivaratri originated in a dispute between Brahma and Vishnu in which Shiva intervened. The contending deities were arguing as to which of them was the greater. To resolve the issue, Shiva directed them to try to find the end of his linga - 'an impossible task, since his linga has neither beginning nor end' (1971: 276; cf. 374). Brahma was driven by the frustration of the fruitless search to resort to deceit, pretending that he had found the linga's extremity. Vishnu, also unsuccessful, was virtuously honest. According to this interpretation, Mahashivaratri commemorates annually the occasion of the contest. Like several other proffered explanations, it makes no attempt to integrate the details of the supposed aetiology with the characteristics of the commemorative ritual which it is said to have initiated. It has, however, the merit of giving pride of place to the remarkable properties of the linga of Shiva.

The story of the descent of the Ganges from heaven into the coiled locks of Shiva, conflated with the creation myth of the churning of the cosmic ocean, has been pressed into service to explain the origins of Mahashivaratri by some Yorkshire Hindus (Shri Hindu

Mendir 1977a: 1). Such an account suggests that the descent of the Ganges and the placing of the crescent moon in Shiva's hair, were antidotes to the over-heating occasioned by his absorption of the poison that emerged from the sea of milk. This contrasts with the reasons given for the descent of the river Ganges in the *Ramāna* (I: 38-44) and the *Mahābhārata* (Vanaparvan 108-9, and in several of the *Puranas*, and is inconsistent with them (cf. Sivaramamurti 1969: 20-24; Thomas 1973: 107; Zimmer 1974: 112-15; Long 1976: 177-82; O'Flaherty 1976: 296). There is evidence, therefore, of a freedom popularly exercised in conflating myths which exist separately in a multiplicity of forms, extending their application to aetiological purposes different from any functions that they originally supplied.

Sathya Sai Baba himself, in one account, endorses the fusion of the myths of the churning of the ocean and the descent of the Ganges. He extends the conflation further, including also a theme from the story of Shiva Nataraja (Kasturi 1977: 110; cf. S. Balu 1981: 129). On another occasion he accounts for Mahashivaratri exclusively in terms of the last story: Shiva, as Lord of the Dance, creates or re-creates the universe. Baba claims unspecified Puranic authority for associating the intensity of the Great God's behaviour at that time with the aetiology of Mahashivaratri (Sathya Sai Baba 1980: 159-60). Shiva's dance was so frenetic that it generated a great combustion, fire emanating from the body of the ecstatic deity. He had to be cooled and comforted. Thus Parvati, his consort, placed Ganga - the Ganges personified as a goddess - in the coils of Shiva's hair. Parvati also settled the crescent moon in his melted locks and took other measures to cool his frenzied heat. She wound cold-blooded snakes around Shiva's joints. Baba himself, therefore, engages the aetiology of Mahashivaratri with the hot-cold polarity which is expressed in the ritual bathing of the linga, but relates it predominantly to a creation myth such as would offend no puritanical sensibilities.

Stories which propose an aetiology for Mahashivaratri in terms of the creation myths of the churning of the cosmic ocean or of Shiva Nataraja, again do not address themselves directly to the full significance of the fact that it is the linga of Shiva which is worshipped

at that festival. In focussing on the consumption of poison, or on sheer physical exhaustion occasioned by the ecstasy of dance, as the cause of the fever-heat in Shiva's body, they insist on taking the linga as if it were nothing more than an abstract symbol of Shiva, an anicon (cf. Moore 1977: 115, 128). It would be perfectly compatible with such aetiologies, if the linga were regarded as having no more intrinsic significance than any other part of Shiva's anatomy: his hand or a foot, a finger or a toe. Such actual or potential explanations do not acknowledge the particular and specific nature of the symbol. Shiva is represented by the linga only because he is renowned for his sexual prowess, his dangerously embullient creativity.

The myths of Shiva extol 'the omnipotence of ascetic will-power'. Heat brought to such a tension, such concentrated energy, 'is like a high-power electric charge threatening to discharge itself' (Zimmer 1974: 115-16). Manifested pre-eminently in sexual containment, tapas is the aim of the oldest forms of yogic practice. In those who become fully adept, it is associated with the attainment of supranormal powers.

Sathya Sai Baba's discussion of the myth of Shiva Nataraja goes on to reveal that he is aware of the more exact mythological context in which the obeisance of the linga has to be set. Although the necessity for explicit reference to the relevant myths is ignored, Baba assumes that his audience in Bangalore knows the underlying significance of the rites: 'The mind with all its vagaries and waywardness' has to be conquered by spiritual discipline; the senses have to be divested of 'the pleasures they crave for' (Sathya Sai Baba 1980: 157). Such a message is not derived from the story of the Lord of the Dance. It is however, the meaning of the obeisance of the linga as an anatomical symbol. Baba uses such observations to support his own preoccupation at Mahashivaratri with the ethical uplift believed to be effected by its devotional vigil and by the discipline of the fast.

Inquiries within the Sai satsang in Bradford have revealed no familiarity with traditions connecting Mahashivaratri with the birth of Shiva, nor with his marriage to Parvati, nor with the myth of Shiva Nataraja. Testimony linking the origin of the festival with Shiva's consumption of toxic substances has,

however, been found, and is cited above.

The president of the Bradford satsang suggested that the aetiology of Mahashivaratri is to be found in a story in the Shiva Purana which describes the first occasion on which Brahma and Vishnu became involved in the worship of Shiva. That led to Shiva's instructing the other two deities to call its anniversary thereafter, 'the Great Night of Shiva'. The president searched in the Shiva Purana to locate the account, but could not find it. He appears to have had in mind the myth of the self-castration of Shiva, recorded in the Shiva Purana (O'Flaherty 1978: 137-41). That story has some features in common with the different tale narrated to Stevenson by her informants in Gujarat. Such stories make manifest the obeisance of the linga as a major controversial theme which Indians found it necessary to explain in a variety of ways (O'Flaherty 1976: 303; 1978: 141-154).

In the explanation offered by the president of the satsang one can see a process at work whereby Puranic stories accounting for the origin of the worship of the linga became, in popular understanding, accounts of the institution of Mahashivaratri. In any comprehensive synopsis of the various stories relating to these two matters, a logical priority would have to be given to accounts that provide an aetiology of linga worship. Such stories do not in themselves, however, account directly for the particular rites of the festival.

There is a secondary rank of Puranic stories which ostensibly (and with popular acceptance) account for the specific rites and practices of Mahashivaratri. They are logically contingent upon the aetiology of linga worship, because they assume its efficaciousness. These secondary stories are found in a variety of forms: in the Puranas themselves (Garuda Purana I. 124; Skanda Purana I. 1.33), and in other stories popularly related and claiming ancient textual authority which defies substantiation (Long 1972: 25). They also occur in simplified, varied and conflated forms which clearly relate to the Puranic originals and are repeated by devout Hindus without claiming exact knowledge of their source or sources. All such stories appear to have one significant feature in common.

Some also share less important motifs.

The universally significant feature in the aetiological stories of the second rank is that they relate to occasions when an individual fulfilled the essentials of the observance of Shivaratri, fast, vigil and ritual obeisance of the linga, at the right time, but inadvertently. The person concerned thereby acquired unwittingly the favour of the Great God. In all such stories, the context is a solitary hunting expedition. In some, the tale is given a moral orientation, for the hunter eventually eschews the killing of animals, thus endorsing the vegetarian and manifestly ascetic orientation of Shaivite devotion. Ultimately, in such stories, and unintentionally, a linga is washed - with the hunter's tears, for example, or with water swilled from his mouth. The practitioner does not even realise that it is a linga that he has made wet. Wood-apple leaves are also inadvertently applied to it in certain instances out of sheer boredom. The free and unmerited grace of Shiva towards the recipients of his favour is thus emphasised. In some stories, the uncouthness of the hunter and his low ritual ranking (for example, as a woodsman), underline the popular perception of Mahashivaratri as a rite in which access to the mercy and forgiveness of God is open to all: whatever their earlier demerits and however low their caste.²¹

It follows that a prominent theme of Mahashivaratri is an assurance of pardon. Many believe that those who make obeisance to Shiva that night are forgiven all sins committed during the preceding year (Long 1972: 21). Sathya Sai Baba confirmed this theme authoritatively before a large gathering in Brindavanam, Bangalore, in 1978:

'I have this day, the holy day of Shivaratri, granted pardon for all the errors you have fallen into knowingly or unknowingly up to this time.'
(Sathya Sai Baba 1980: 162)

One story exemplifying the aetiological accounts of Mahashivaratri of the secondary rank, is that of Lubdhaka (cf. S. Bhattacharyya 1953: 191; Thomas 1973: 98, 99). Lubdhaka, an impious hunter, hid in a wood-apple tree, watching for game, shortly after he had

suffered confinement in a temple by creditors who had arrested him for debt. The chanting of the name of Shiva which he heard in the temple meant nothing to the lusty, uncouth hunter. Nevertheless, it made an impression on his consciousness, so that he repeated the auspicious name while unwittingly dropping wood-apple leaves on an inconspicuous Shivalinga situated in the shadow of his tree. This meritorious act was rendered even more beneficial because it occurred on the evening of the monthly Shivaratri and coincided with other acts of unconscious devotion. Having no food, Lubdhaka had embarked on an enforced fast; watching for game, he was involved in vigil. Thus, accumulating undeserved merit, he became a transformed character: a convert to the cult of Shiva and a dedicated lover of animals, vowing not to hunt for game.

Similar stories are repeated in truncated forms to fulfil the same aetiological purpose. In the Garuda Purana, and in some simplified versions, the proto-practitioner of the rites of Mahashivaratri is not a poor man but a king. A teen-age devotee in the Bradford mandir once volunteered his own aetiology, later endorsed by the president of the satsang, in a condensed form with exactly that feature:

There was once a king who went hunting and found it was getting late. He had to rest and needed to make a shelter in a tree to sleep. He climbed a bel tree. Underneath was a Shivalinga but he did not know that. He accidentally dropped leaves of the bel tree on it. I suppose he must have torn off 108 leaves because he was granted a darshan of Lord Shiva. (11.4.80).

An interesting detail in that account is the precision of the informant in respect of the number of leaves involved, and the reason for it. Thomas (1973: 98) refers vaguely to 'some leavest, and S. Bhattacharyya (1953: 191) writes, 'As luck would have it, a leaf fell ...¹ The young man in Bradford, however, has often been entrusted with the ritual application of 108 leaves to the Shivalinga during the puja of Mahashivaratri, while the 108 names of Shiva are intoned. His knowledge of the rites of the festival leaves him in no doubt about the aetiological relation-

ship of the tale, as recollected, to the ritual. The corollary follows logically: any lacunae in his knowledge of the story are made good out of familiarity with the rite.

There is a noteworthy tension between the universal feature of the aetiological narratives of the second rank and some of the comments of Sathya Sai Baba on the observance of the festival. At first sight, Baba appears to disparage the focus in those narratives on an unwitting, inadvertent performance of the rites. He seems to take issue with that motif:

Can a person rolling in bed because he does not get sleep claim that he is observing a vow of vigil? ... Can a person who refuses to eat his lunch because he has had a tiff with his wife claim that he is observing a fast?

(1980: 160)

In context however, Baba is not protesting against anyone's innocent, unwitting fulfilment of the rites of the season, but against wilful distortion of the significance of the vow by those who only ostensibly observe the vigil, while deliberately staying up through the night to watch films or play cards (cf. Kasturi 1977: 112).

Baba's teaching about Mahashivaratri focusses on the significance of the vigil and the fast for moral uplift, 'spiritual progress'. 'Recollect only good, do, think or plan only good, speak only good, and act only good... This is the message of Shivaratri' (Kasturi 1980c: 158-59). It is a message of self-discipline, without reference to the importance in mythology of the veneration of the linga. The reason for this is more than a reluctance to broach delicate subjects. It is because Baba teaches that the goal of all the asceticism epitomised in the veneration of the linga is to 'approximate God, the Source of all good' or to 'visualise ... the very Divine Principle' encapsulated in the nature of Shiva himself (ibid.: 159, 162).

There is nothing new or remarkable in Baba's teaching about Mahashivaratri as such. That is startling is Baba's message that the source of all good, that very

Divine Principle, tis before you here and now'. His preoccupation is not backward looking. To that extent he cannot be said to be obsessed with the minutiae of mythological aetiological detail nor with the precise significance of the ritual. Both in the Puranas and in popular perception, the diligent observance of the vows and rites of Mahashivaratri, ensures for the devout the darshan of the Lord. The devotees of Baba should 'realise the good fortune (they) are endowed with' (ibid.: 162). None other than the Lord stands before them. That is the theme articulated by Sathya Sai.

5.3 MAHASHIVARATRI IN BRADFORD

In Bradford's Sai Centre, a temporary shrine is laid out for Mahashivaratri. Its appurtenances are assembled on a small platform, raised only slightly above the floor, towards the front of the mandir and on the right, where the male musicians sit during bhajan mandal. This low platform is covered with a white cloth. The puja characteristic of the occasion requires a shrine easily accessible from three sides. From one side, its left, the priest has access; from the front and the other side, the worshippers. A tiny table, on which flowers and fruit are placed, stands behind the platform and forms the rear boundary of this temporary puja area.

The shrine is flanked, on its right, by offerings of two kinds brought by participating families: bottles of milk that the ritual will consume and parcels of fruit to be distributed as prasad. These accessories form that side of the square shrine opposite which the specially invited priest sits. The square's forefront is occupied by the out-laid utensils and materials for the puja. The worshippers sit before the shrine. When space at the front is too limited, they also sit to the left of the others, opposite the priest.

Icon 1, manifestly appropriate, is central to the temporary shrine. The ornate silver tray, normally located immediately beneath the panchdhatu in the permanent shrine, is placed directly in front of icon 1 for Mahashivaratri. It supports, as usual, the large black linga-yoni, surmounted by the protective five-headed cobra. The Shivalinga is thus, together with the icon, the focus of the temporary puja area,

easily accessible to all who come to offer obeisance.

The panchdhatu hangs undisturbed in its accustomed place in the main shrine. Its multiple chain, descending from the ceiling, is beautifully garlanded from top to bottom with floral blooms, for the occasion. The panchdhatu, thus festooned with a petalled canopy, overhangs another Shivalinga protected by a cobra, standing in a different silver tray, temporarily replacing the linga, which has become centre-piece for the puja. Some of the larger icons of Sathya Sai Baba are garlanded for the festival, occasionally with ribbons instead of flowers. Since it is not consistent with the changed and temporary layout of the mandir, the long strip of carpet which normally, for bhajan mandal, extends in front of the icon at Baba's lotus feet, is somewhat unceremoniously tucked up at the front of the mandir.

Mahashivaratri is one of those two uncharacteristic occasions in the annual cycle of devotion in the satsang, when the services of a priest are employed. On the night of 14 February 1980, the Gujarati Brahmin serving the community in this way was an elderly man, reverent in his manner, courteous and displaying an air of efficiency. This was his first visit to the satsang, the officiant at earlier celebrations having died during the preceding year. The young people had developed a rapport with his predecessor, finding him to be friendly and his articulation of traditional prayers and mantras comparatively easy to follow. Ready communication and ease of comprehension stand high in the priorities of the young, in their evaluation of a priest's fulfilment of his role in the festival. In 1980, they laid stress on the benefit that would accrue for them from an explaining of the significance of the various actions that are performed in the puja in advance of being invited by the priest to follow his lead. In those terms, the new officiant had yet to win the whole-hearted appreciation of the young.

For Mahashivaratri, the priest is saffron-clad in traditional fashion, as one would expect. He is likely to wear the customary saffron scarf over his shoulder, embroidered with the sacred monosyllable, OM.' While bhajans are sung he recites Sanskrit slokas (verses) and mantras on his own, and sometimes thumbs

the pages of his manuals. During puja, he chants slokas fluently, without reference to any texts.

One necessity for the puja, a special thread (see below) is brought by the priest himself. Everything else is provided by the worshippers, each family bringing its own tray (or trays) with the appropriate leaves, flowers, powders, rice and milk.

The night's vigil is divided into three equal periods, each part constituting in itself a complete act of worship, with opening rituals, bhajans, puja, and finally arati. The vigil is thus quite different from an akhand bhajan mandal.

The arati prayer used at Mahashivaratri is a hymn to Shiva, not the standard Sai arati prayer. That in itself marks the celebration of the festival as a unique occasion in the satsang's year. Some worshippers have pressed for the offering of two aratis, one for Shiva and one for Sathya Sai. There have been occasions when that has been done, but at Mahashivaratri 1981, the president of the satsang affirmed with perspicacity: 'If you sing the two, then you are separating the two, Shiva and Baba. They are both the same. Just sing the one' (4.3.81).

Worshippers come forward in groups for the puja, generally in family parties of four or more, always at least in pairs. The arrangement is relaxed but never totally haphazard. Collusion is required of families or close friends in order to secure the right number of partnerships to occupy the limited seating space in the puja-area. There is friendly, good-humoured jostling. In every group each pair needs a tray of accessories. They sit around the shrine on the two available sides, focussing their attention on the Shivalinga. Eight people, ten at the most, are able to perform puja simultaneously.

As the groups take their places for the ritual, the priest attends briefly to their requirements, if any. Sometimes, between the puja-sessions, someone washes the linga-yoni with clear water, as distinct from performing puja to it. Then the priest bathes the Shivalinga with clarified butter before proceeding further. He indicates his readiness to start and begins to intone in Sanskrit.

Directed by the priest, or otherwise following the order with which they are already familiar, people perform worship of the deity represented by the linga which now becomes the centre of all activity. In pairs, the couples begin by sprinkling the Shivalinga, and inevitably the heads of the cobra, with petals plucked from chrysanthemums, taken together with grains of rice. While the priest continues his chanting of sacred texts, the congregation sings bhajans.

The puja maintains its progress, the participants using a sequence of means. Bel leaves are dropped on the Shivalinga; rice, kunkuma and other coloured powders used in puja are sprinkled over it. It is bathed with milk, poured from a jug or bottle by one participant in each pair. The other partner touches the pouring hand, or its arm or sleeve, so that the merit of the action is shared and does not merely accrue to the individual agent. Kunkuma powder in a red paste is used to touch all the heads of the cobra following which the paired participant similarly marks the Shivalinga itself.

Towards the conclusion of the puja, the priest gives each pair of worshippers a single piece of thread from that which he himself has brought. It has been soaked in ghee, clarified butter. The recipient then proceeds to unravel the thread to make two, one of which is given to the partner. One worshipper then winds a thread around the heads of the cobra, while the other does the same to the linga. The material so used comes from the plant that supplies the sacred-thread for the janeu ceremony, the traditional ritual initiation of males of the superior castes. 'When we do that, we are clothing Shiva', explained the president of the satsang (4.3.81).

After completing the puja, worshippers gently mark the forehead of the priest with kunkuma paste as a sign of respect. He reciprocates, but with a more active intent. 'When he puts it on us, it is for our good benefit', one of the devotees has declared (14.2.80). Finally, offerings of money are made to the priest, on behalf of families or groups.

The offerings made to the priest at Mahashivaratri are, of course, to defray his expenses and to provide a

small reward for his services. That is done without fuss, ceremony or embarrassment. It is not unknown for someone, prior to their puja, to ask the priest to change a £5 note so that they may have something appropriate for their offering. He readily complies.

The fact that money changes hands in the mandir at Mahashivaratri is uncharacteristic of the satsang. At other times there is literal conformity to the teaching of Sathya Sai, who has forbidden his devotees from allowing their meetings to be used for the collecting of money. It is virtually taboo in the mandir, except for philanthropic collections for disaster relief or sponsored charity fund-raising by the young. In other temples in Bradford, as elsewhere, offerings of cash are placed in collecting boxes in front of the shrines when people arrive for worship. In those temples, arati trays, brought to the congregation during the final prayer, are used not only for devotional purposes but also to receive gifts of money. Neither of those practices is followed in this satsang. There is no regular collection of money at all. Cash is never solicited for the upkeep or the expenses of the mandir or for any internal purposes.

Within the Bradford satsang, there is some uncertainty about the reason for the performance of the Mahashivaratri puja in pairs. In the later stages of the celebration, with numbers depleted in the early hours of the morning and a greater informality prevailing, the pairings and groups are not always identical with those that one has observed in the first phase of the puja. In the first stage there is a stronger tendency for whole households to act together, offering their oblation unitedly. It is believed that for husband and wife to perform puja together brings greater merit than to do so separately. Pairing, however, is not believed to be specially meritorious for any other participants.

Such explanations of pairing as are given within the satsang, relate it to the constraints of time. The shortage of floor space, and the consequent benefit of sharing a tray where there would be no room for two, is another pragmatic explanation. The tendency to act as family units remains broadly characteristic of the whole event - with visitors or the unattached easily adopted by families. A wife, however, whose

first puja is with her husband and children, may later perform the ritual, in a quieter period of the night, with her sons alone, and then again later with her husband simply as a couple. For a final puja it is likely that the family will unite again. Within the constraints of the ritual structure, fluidity and adaptability characterise the event.

At the conclusion of each of the three phases of the night's vigil, and while still ministering to a group offering puja, the priest motions with his hands to all sitting on the periphery of the assembly to gather round as a matter of urgency. The inner group is bathing the Shivalinga with liquids. Since it is the final puja of the phase, it is regarded as particularly important (cf. Long 1972: 33). Those who gather immediately behind the inner group kneel, while those whom the priest beckons from the extremities of the room stand behind them. Each person touches the shoulder or the arm of the person in front, so that the benefit of the meritorious puja can be conducted in some cases through a four- or five-deep chain of grace. More fluid than ever is poured over the Shivalinga, while the priest intones his prayers and mantras. The ritual has affect: it is moving, social and binding. Everyone present senses that they are participating in a vibrant, living culture. Even the most intelligent and committed teenagers in the satsang were not, however, in 1980, able to explain the ritual's symbolic significance. The affective impact, nevertheless, remained. From 1981 onwards, the young people developed their own way of educating themselves in Hindu lore and ritual.

Each year, the celebration of Mahashivaratri commences in the Bradford mandir at 7.30 p.m. It continues until after 6.00 the next morning. On 14 February 1980, the congregation at 10.30 p.m. consisted of people of all ages, including several young children. The gathering at that time was 60% female. Later, after midnight, the composition by gender was more equally divided. A peak attendance of approximately 100 persons had already been attained at about 9.00, and was maintained until about 11.30, when the puja reached the conclusion of the first phase. At that point, an exodus reduced the attendance to about 50 persons. The number then remained stable until

nearly 1.00 a.m. Between 1.00 and 2.00 there were 35 persons participating. Afterwards the attendance dropped to its lowest point of 25. A further 10 persons joined the devotions after 4.00 and stayed until their conclusion at approximately 6.15. During the whole of that time puja and bhajan-singing were either simultaneously or separately maintained.

Peripheral activities, some planned and some spontaneous, take place during the later and less formal stages of the Mahashivaratri celebrations. For example, after midnight, a young lady of the satsang brings a small steel dish round to the members of the congregation. It contains a slightly cloudy liquid which she spoons frugally into the cupped right palms of the worshippers. It is not simply water in which vibhuti (sacred ash) has been dissolved, as distributed at the conclusion of a bhajan mandal. Its tincture is more exciting to the taste, being prepared from grapes and Indian herbs. 'We only have it at Mahashivaratri. Shiva likes its, confided the young lady who brought it round in February 1980. It is bhang. In the quantities supplied, it has none of the intoxicating impact that Babb (1975: 242) attributes to a drink of the same name distributed at Mahashivaratri in Chhattisgarh. It is certainly not what was given to McKim Marriott during Holi at 'Kishan Garhil (1971: 203-4; cf. Long 1972: 29). In Bradford it is memorable simply because it is delicious.

A range of activities occur, many simultaneously, as Mahashivaratri is commemorated in the Bradford mandir. Bhajans are sung to a strong and lively accompaniment, the regular rhythm reinforced by the punctual clapping of hands. The priest intones his mantras while puja pursues its liturgical cycle. Cups of hot, sweet, flavoured milk are brought round to revive flagging participants. Lead-singers go to the kitchen for the much-needed glass of water. The priest retires for a few minutes. The sleeping child is turned to a more comfortable position. Teenage boys and girls engage in light-hearted banter in a subdued and gentle manner. Even more informal activities take place after 11.30, when the numbers drop. Some, at least, feel the need to move about and then have the space to do so. A group of younger women and girls, keenly involved at an earlier stage, may engage in relaxed conversation at the back. In 1980, in the early hours

of the morning, two youths finished their 'O' and 'A' level Chemistry homework, their books and notes spread round them as they squatted on the floor. An older youth and a new-comer, a computer engineer recently come to the area, exchanged tips about musical styles and practised fresh techniques with their drums and the harmonium. Whatever happens, however, there is never a lull in the pursuit of devotional activity, bhajans or puja, by one group or another. A vigil is still a vigil.

During the celebration of Mahashivaratri in 1980, at 1.30 a.m., the younger daughter of the temple household was seated on the floor at the back of the mandir absorbed in a delicate, artistic task. With consummate skill, she created attractive, intricate patterns in kunkuma and other coloured powders on three arati trays. She worked with a small brush, preparing for the final arati. She found it a welcome and relaxing pursuit:

It is a way of worshipping God. At school I used to like drawing. I prepare the trays for ordinary Thursdays too, but then I have to be satisfied with a simple OM design. It takes too long on an ordinary working day to make a complicated pattern.

(15.2.80)

A very desirable atmosphere prevails during the commemoration of Mahashivaratri in the Bradford satsang: devotional and reverent, but relaxed. A deeply spiritual event, with many participants intent on the solemnity of what they are doing, it nevertheless always offers possibilities for exchanging friendly greetings. Devotees take a break while standing in the hall, observing from there, or transferring to the kitchen. In the later stages there is room to move around in the mandir itself. One can participate in the puja and in the bhajan-singing alternately. One can drop out temporarily, remaining in the devotional setting, socialising with friends.

Thus a calm, pleasant awareness of community pervades the observance of Mahashivaratri in the mandir. Worshippers unselfconsciously convey the impression that they are gentle, unboisterous people with a lively, sustaining culture. Those under the age of

thirty participate in the event as much as their elders, or more so. In addition to members of local families, small groups of students from the university, away from their homes, are often present for at least part of the proceedings.

Unlike arati, in which the inquiring mind may be moved yet dulled by familiarity, the puja of Mahashivaratri evokes a less customary heritage of symbolism and ritual to excite awe, curiosity and inquiry, especially amongst the young. Adolescents in particular, on this occasion more than any other, raise questions of meaning. At the same time its impact is not merely cerebral. Not an abstract or impersonal event, it is a celebration of community, and of the perceived divine basis for community.

5.4 MAHASHIVARATRI AT PRASHANTI NILAYAM

Mahashivaratri draws great crowds to Sathya Sai Baba's ashram. The celebration embraces all the expected features, but offers others in addition which have given the commemoration there a peculiar renown.

Firstly, accounts by Baba's devotees, and films they have made, provide evidence of the remarkable mahabhishekam (great ritual bathing) that takes place each Mahashivaratri²² when Baba is present at Prashanti Nilayam. It parallels the ritual bathing of the linga occurring throughout India at that time, but it involves neither water nor milk, nor any other fluid, and not the Shivalinga either. It is the occasion when Sathya Sai, assisted by his distinguished disciple, the retired academic Kasturi, bathes a large silver figure of Sai Baba of Shirdi in a stream of vibhuti, sacred ash.²³

There would be little remarkable about the Mahabhishekam, were it not for the constantly reiterated testimony that the urn Kasturi holds above the effigy of Shirdi Baba appears to be incapable of containing anything like the quantity of vibhuti that pours out of it in response to the churning motion of Baba's hand. To underline the incredible nature of the occurrence, witnesses agree that Baba sometimes stops churning; at which point, his hand withdrawn, the downpour of vibhuti ceases. As soon as he recommences his action, the unique mahabhishekam continues. Eventually the

figure of Shirdi Baba is 'buried in a great mound of ash - much more than the vessel could possibly have held' (Murphet 1973: 43).

Secondly, Sathya Sai Baba's devotees avow that every year from 1940, the first declaration of his identity with Shiva-Shakti, until 1971, and intermittently afterwards until 1977, Shivalingas materialised inside Baba and were disgorged publicly at Mahashivaratri (Kasturi 1975a: 24, 161; 1980a: 73; Mason 1984d: 3; cf. Brooke 1976: 89). These extraordinary occurrences took place in evening bhajan sessions when Baba gave darshan during the celebration of the festival at Prashanti Nilayam. His exhortatory address has been dramatically disrupted on each occasion by acute spasms of stomach pain. Witnesses testify that it has been a common experience to observe the location of the pain moving upwards to the higher regions of the chest and then to the neck, accompanied by signs of paroxysm. 'All of a sudden, to the joyous wonder of all, lingas fall from his mouth' (Kasturi 1980a: 111, 117).

There have been times when it has been only one linga that has been disgorged; nine is the highest total claimed. The ovoid lingas, mostly about an inch and a half in height, but varying in exact size and composition, have become objects of worship for the delighted devotees. They are reported to be of 'quartz crystal', translucent stone or precious metals, even gold or silver (Mason and Laing 1982: 269). They are marked, in some cases, with the three horizontal lines that signify Shaivite devotion. They may even be accompanied, according to some accounts, by a base, a pedestal.²⁴ Books of Baba's teachings, and those written by his devotees, are sometimes embellished with photographs of such Shivalingas (Kasturi 1980c: frontispiece; Fanibunda 1978: 54; S. Balu 1981: 344). No pictures, however, have been found showing a disgorged base as well.

Lingodbhava ('birth of the linga') is the name given to this reputed miracle of the Mahashivaratri celebrations at Prashanti Nilayam.²⁵ Devotees in Bradford believe that this remarkable practice was discontinued because Sathya Sai Baba's role as avatar entered a new stage in 1978. After that, lila, divine sport or play, was put aside for more serious preoccupations.

The inaccessible, concealed nature of the divine, its enigmatic quality for mankind, is symbolised by an egg-shaped linga and therefore by those that Sathya Sai has disgorged (Kasturi 1975a: 161). Baba himself, in keeping with that particular usage whereby a linga is seen to represent a cosmic egg, has described it as illustrating the inscrutable, self-contained divine principle. The linga that emerges from his body sustains the belief of devotees, that the otherwise remote or inaccessible divine nature has appeared in the world and is manifest at Puttaparthi. The disgorged linga symbolises for them the unfathomable attributes which they believe they have encountered in the person of Sathya Sai. Baba teaches that those divine qualities, in him, have mounted an assault on 'greed, hatred, cruelty, violence and irreverence' (Kasturi 1975b: 293-94; cf. Fanibunda 1978: 55).

Witnessing the spectacle of the lingodbhava has been formative of the perceptions of Sathya Sai Baba, entertained by many devotees. Howard Murphet,²⁶ Australian journalist and public relations officer, regards himself as a hardened realist, toughened by military experience in the Second World War. His initial incredulity about Baba was overcome in Prashanti Nilayam at Mahashivaratri, 1966. That year, on the evening of 18 February, while in the middle of his address to the great gathering, Baba's voice first broke, then failed altogether, before he went into prolonged public contortions of agony. Murphet avers that he himself maintained the scepticism of a rationally-trained man, while the crowd supported Baba with bhajans. Their singing was characterised by fervent sympathy for their labouring avatar and a crescendo of excitement anticipating the miraculous appearance of the divine symbol. The drama had lasted approximately twenty minutes, when an emerald green translucent linga was painfully disgorged from Baba's mouth.

Murphet records that the linga was 'certainly much bigger than any ordinary man could bring up through his throat' (1973: 48). The next day, he was allowed, with a select band of others, to inspect it. He quotes approvingly Kasturi's testimony that it was three inches long. At the time of this close inspection, the linga stood on a pedestal five inches in width. Murphet makes no claim to have seen the pedestal emerge from Baba's mouth, but he acknowledges Kasturi's claim

that it did. It is not surprising, therefore, that witnesses testify that lingodbhava was always accompanied not only by extremes of agony on Baba's part, but also by bleeding.

The following year, another western observer who has become a prominent devotee of Sathya Sai attended the celebration of Mahashivaratri at Prashanti Nilayam. Indra Devi is a Russian-born American citizen who established her first school of yoga in India in 1939 but now normally resides in Mexico. Like Murphet's, her writings circulate amongst Gujarati and other devotees in India, the United Kingdom and elsewhere. The style of Devils writing is journalistic and popular. Her account of Mahashivaratri 1967 captures the ethos of devotion and expectation that the lingodbhava aroused in a crowd of approximately 30,000 present on that occasion. Two lingas were 'born' that night: both were like 'translucent amethyst' in substance, and one was 'the size and shape of a large egg' (Devi 1979: 27). Devils account is embellished further with details of an occasion, two years later, when she claims to have seen a Shivalinga 'walking' downstairs while she had a private interview with Sathya Sai Baba.

There have been years when Baba has preferred to celebrate Mahashivaratri quietly, with a select group of devotees or a small number of promising students. To secure that privacy he has had to leave Prashanti Nilayam prior to the festival. In 1973, with such a gathering at Bandipur, he is reported to have transformed a couple of twigs casually plucked from a bush into a crucifix for Dr. John Hislop, an American devotee. Baba claimed that the wood of the crucifix was in fact 'from the actual cross on which Christ was crucified'. Fanibunda has endorsed that account (1978: 46).

E.B. Fanibunda is an oral surgeon in Bombay and a prominent Parsi bhakta of Sathya Sai. He has documented the events of Mahashivaratri 1974. He was present for the festival at Prashanti Nilayam, somewhat uncertain what to expect because he knew that for two years there had been no occurrence of lingodbhava. There was no announcement in advance to sustain the devotees in their hopes. The Zoroastrian surgeon was doubtful that anything unusual would happen. On the

very evening, however, Baba was in the process of explaining the meaning of the vibhuti abhishekam which, according to his regular practice, he had performed that morning, when a couple of coughs suggested that a linga might be rising within him. He stopped his discourse abruptly and started to sing a bhajan.

Later, during the singing, he coughed a few times, drank some water and sat down ... The bhajan singers carried on with extra gusto ... The frequency of retching had increased ... The whole atmosphere was charged ... After repeated attempts at delivery ... the linga was finally ejaculated from His mouth.

Fanibunda, an internationally renowned amateur photographer, attempted to record the effect of the three-pronged gyot (light, flame) which he observed in the object disgorged by Baba;

This ... unique crystal linga ... contained within itself an orange, cup-shaped flame in the form of a trishul (trident). The colour of this trishul changed every ten minutes ... The author felt very happy, for he had actually seen a small aspect of the Inner Fire of Ahura Mazda. 27

(1978: 53; cf. 54)

The linga to which Sathya Sai is said to have given birth the following year, 1975, is that which is portrayed in an icon in the Bradford mandir. Two years after that, in 1977, the lingodbhava occurred for the last time. In Bradford, devotees recall with pride that the wife and one of the daughters of the president of the satsang were present in Prashanti Nilayam for Mahashivaratri that year and witnessed the remarkable event.

5.5 VIBHUTI: SACRED ASH

The commemoration of Mahashivaratri has thus been enhanced beyond its traditional associations by Sathya Sai Baba. His embellishment of the occasion for his devotees is rooted in the manifestation of two of the most spectacular of his reputed siddhis, his supra-normal powers. While the lingodbhava took place within a defined period of years with indelible

significance for Baba's bhaktas, the Mahabhishekam has not been discontinued. Thus, the meaning of the festival for Sai devotees cannot be articulated merely in terms of the associations of its traditional rites.

The extent to which the heritage of the received connotations of Mahashivaratri has been extended and qualified by Sathya Sai calls for examination. Such a consideration turns in the first place on the significance of the material medium of the mahabhishekam. The importance of vibhuti for devotees cannot be over-estimated. Secondly, the relationship of the linga, focus of the puja of Mahashivaratri, and of the lingodbhava, to the mahabhishekam, and their full significance for devotees, has to be examined.

The term vibhu is used in the Rig Veda to suggest the concept of 'far-extending or all-pervading might, sovereignty and effectiveness' (Gonda 1963b: 194). In the Mundaka Upanishad the term is applied to the source of all being. In the Mahabharata, Vibhu has become a personal name for Vishnu, 'the one whose might and sovereignty extend far and pervade all'. There, also, the substantive vibhuti refers to Vishnu's divine dignity and universal power (Gonda 1970b: 15). Elsewhere in Hindu lore, Vishnu is provided with nine attendants, eight of whom are the vibhutis, 'eight superhuman powers experienced by the yogis' (Danielou 1964: 163). The manifestation of divine or supernatural power is thus dominant in the ancient associations of the term vibhuti. The tenth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita entitled Vibhuti Yoga, regards vibhuti as the articulation of divine glory. Part III of Patanjali's Yoga Sutra, written circa A.D. 300, is entitled Vibhuti-pada, the vibhuti path, where the supranormal siddhic powers to which yogis can aspire are definitively discussed.²⁸

The full connotation of the term vibhuti is illustrated further by Aurobindo (1872-1950) in his Essays on the Gita, where he linked its significance with the concept of an avatar. In Aurobindo's perception, a vibhuti is a lesser being than an avatar but embodies divine power and is enabled 'to act with great force in the world'. Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita, Aurobindo believed, represented the highest type of human person, a vibhuti. He was called upon to rise even higher in

the scale of being, to become an avatar, a 'descent of God ... to which we mortal creatures must climb'.²⁹ Hindu perceptions thus accommodate the concept of a 'human vibhuti', a courageous spiritual hero 'who leads the masses towards divine achievement' (Pandey 1979: 85). The association with the exalted concept of an avatar is highly significant. That is why the pregnant term vibhuti is itself sometimes understood to suggest a personal divine 'manifestation' or an Entfaltung, an unfolding, a display (Gonda 1963a; Parrinder 1970: 39).

The various elements in the connotation of the term vibhuti thus suggest a focus on the empirical articulation of divine glory and power. It has particular links with traditions about Vishnu. The connections with Shiva, developed later, have also become well established. The Shiva-Gita, ostensibly but perhaps not authentically a part of the Padma Purana, and a compendium of Shaivite theology, enumerates the vibhutis of Shiva. In the Linga Purana, the vibhutis are the very faculties of Shiva, his sublime powers: the gods themselves, no less, who are subject to Shiva and execute the cosmic processes (Gonda 1970b: 41, 140).

The cult of Shiva and the concept of vibhuti coalesced historically with such effect that the prime association of the term in much popular Hindu thought is overwhelmingly with Shiva rather than Vishnu. This point has taken on special significance for the devotees of Sathya Sai because of his predominant identification with Shiva, and because, even in ancient times, vibhuti was one of the words used in India for 'ash'.

In Hindu mythology, Shiva is reported 'to have burned the universe and all the gods . . . and to have rubbed their ashes (vibhuti) on his body' (Danielou 1964: 218). Because of that, three horizontal strips of sacred ash are renewed every morning on the foreheads of his devotees throughout southern India. Yogis, dedicated to the Mahayogi, Shiva, the greatest teacher of them all, smear themselves with ashes from their ritual fires. Amongst the Virashaiva (Lingayat) devotees of Shiva, 'vibhuti is holy ash prepared by a man of virtue and learning' (Ramanujan 1973: 33).

Since Shiva, in his destructive role, is thought of as a god who walks in the cremation grounds, the utter renunciate chooses the ashes of the funeral pyre to adorn his body. Thus, because of its association with cremation and destruction, and therefore with the meeting of the temporal and the transcendent, ash, in India, has highly charged associations.³⁰ Sathya Sai Baba himself has said: 'Ash is the ultimate condition of things ... Ash is forever and ever' (Sandweiss 1976: 173).

The death of the body, and its consequent destruction, is linked symbolically, in Indian ethics and spirituality, with the death of desire, of material and illusory attachment. In a civilization which holds the discipline of the sannyasi in high regard, the ascetic-yogic connotation of vibhuti is thus significant. Sacred ash is linked with detachment from worldly ties and therefore with release. It is linked with forgiveness for all one's sins, and therefore with immortality. Shiva, in the Brahmanda Purana affirms: 'Those who delight in my ashes have their sins burnt away ... By means of ashes one is released from all sins' (O'Flaherty 1978: 146, 148).

The prominence which Baba has given to the concept and to the substance of vibhuti thus draws on age-old resources. There is also a more recent point of reference. Sai Baba of Shirdi kept a hearth-fire his dhuni permanently burning at his 'Hindu mosque', from which he took ash which he called udhi. In line with tradition,³¹ that ash was sometimes accredited with healing powers (Osborne 1975: 41-49, 124). Sathya Sai Baba has not merely emulated but enhanced and dramatised the heritage which he has espoused. His dhuni, however, is his own hand (Kasturi 1975a: 180).

Both continuity with Shirdi Baba, and early anticipation of enhancement of the manifestation which the 'former body' represented, are apparent in a poem that Sathya Sai reportedly sang when he was only nineteen years old:

It seems He was at Shirdi last,
And is here, for our sake, again ...

Soon as He wills, 'tis said, His palm is full
Of vibhuti which He gives at once
To those who struggle, suffer, stray.

(Kasturi 1980b: ii-iii)

The reference to the miraculous provision of vibhuti for those who suffer, explicitly maintains the connection between the reportedly miraculous healing powers of the udhi of Shirdi Baba and Sathya Sai's remarkable ash.

Sathya Sai Baba has sometimes used the term vibhuti with its abstract connotations. He defines it as an 'attribute of the Lord? (Sathya Sai Baba 1979a: 164; cf. Kasturi 1975a: 184-85). Following the Bhagavad Gita, however, he designated light (jyoti), prosperity (aishwarya), courage (dhairya) and bliss (ananda) as specific vibhutis. Thus he gives the concept practical, and above all moral and ethical, significance. Nevertheless, to a large extent in his own usage, and overwhelmingly in the perceptions of his devotees, vibhuti neither indicates abstract concepts nor ethical pre-occupations. Rather, it denotes that grey, white or slightly tinted powder, with the appearance of very fine ash,³² which Baba appears to materialise miraculously in the mahabhishekam of Mahashivaratri, and on innumerable other occasions too.

When virtually everything else about Sathya Sai Baba is unknown, his association with the miraculous materialisation of seemingly limitless supplies of vibhuti, provides him with a reputation that has surprised unsuspecting travellers. It is the most renowned aspect of his activities.³³ Writers of travelogues (Simon 1979), and journalists seriously interested in Indian religion (Eyre 1979: 49-50), have been intrigued at the apparent evidence for it.

In November 1979, a correspondent, a student of religion who had visited the temple complex at Shirdi³⁴ recalled an encounter with a devotee of Sathya Sai. The devotee claimed to have witnessed many miracles by Baba, 'including a "long-term" miracle. In an obscure temple once visited by Sathya Sai Baba, there's a basin which is continually full with vibhuti'. The reputation of Sathya Sai is replete with such accounts.³⁵

Witnessing the 'materialisation' of vibhuti has been instrumental in precipitating the decision which has led many to become devotees (cf. Kasturi 1975a: 185). Fanibunda is not untypical. As an award holder of the International Brotherhood of Magicians (U.S.A.), he suspected 'sleight of hand'. In 1970, however, his

reluctance to commit himself was overcome. He felt that he had found 'a Person who created matter, by His will' (1978: 6).

Murphet typifies the testimony of Baba's devotees when he refers to 'the vibhuti he always produces' (1973: 37). The mahabhishekam at Mahashivaratri therefore has to be seen as the only outstanding annual example of a species of siddhis manifested by Sathya Sai regularly, in which the constant characteristic is the production of powder with the appearance of ash in ways unaccountable by normal processes. Baba's hand is said to go 'round and round' and vibhuti appears 'from nowhere' (Fanibunda 1978: 6).

Frequently, vibhuti is said to manifest itself on photographs and devotional aids depicting Baba, sometimes thousands of miles removed from his physical presence. Pictures of such phenomena have been published (Fanibunda 1978: 5; S. Balu 1981: 341). It is not unknown for votaries to testify that vibhuti has come in such quantities on their icons that they have requested Baba to stop it happening. The 'unscientific phenomenon, of paper turning out ash' (Kasturi 1975a: 189) has been said, in some instances, to happen only on certain days - for example, on Thursdays or at a specific festival. Not only vibhuti, but oil (from oil lamps depicted in a picture), butter (on an icon of Krishna being scolded for stealing it), kunkuma powder, turmeric, and salted water, are said to have materialised in this way by Babals agency (ibid.: 181-89; S. Balu 1981: 57). Amrit (nectar) is, after vibhuti, the most common alternative product in phenomena of this kind (see 6.4 below).

Sceptics are naturally wary of such reports. Some wish to explain them by the proclivity of paper products to develop mould or fungus in tropical or sub-tropical climates, especially where they have been handled or have become soiled. That is not capable, however, of explaining all the reported cases (see 7.1 below).

One bhakta affirms that there are times when Baba's 'entire physical frame' is 'suffused with vibhuti'. On such occasions, it is said, thousands of devotees have witnessed the sacred ash 'falling from His eyelids, cheeks or forehead' (Ramachandran pre-1971: 10).

In view of the association of vibhuti with the concept of an avatar, such perceptions of phenomena must seem highly significant to all Baba's devotees.

5.6 VIBHUTI AND THE BRADFORD SATSANG

The reputation of Sathya Sai Baba for the miraculous creation of vibhuti has made its impact on the satsang in Bradford. A youth of seventeen, recollecting a film of the mahabhishekam of Mahashivaratri shown in the mandir, recounted how he saw Baba producing sacred ash:

His sleeves were half rolled up. There was no chance for trickery. It was produced by movements of the hand and came out in large quantities - caskets and jugs of vibhuti, far more than the container could hold even if it were pressed down inside.

(19.2.78)

A middle-aged man claimed that in 1971 he was standing 'right next to Baba - within one yard - when he produced vibhuti (25.5.78). Another middle-aged male reported that in 1978 at Bangalore, he saw Baba 'produce vibhuti out of thin air' (6.7.78).

The statements of those three Bradford Gujaratis were paralleled by the testimony of two men in their twenties, professionally trained and widely travelled, of English ethnicity. One of them, affirming that he had witnessed 'the miraculous appearance of vibhuti', added: 'Baba rolls up his sleeve ... if there are westerners nearby' (14.6.77). The other vouchsafed:

Vibhuti was materialised for me, with a group of five or six friends, when we had a farewell audience with Baba at Prashanti Nilayam. Earlier I had witnessed it during darshan, with great crowds present, from a distance. Now I saw and received it - materialised near at hand.

(17.6.77)

A further English witness supplied an embellishment with his account: 'Baba produced vibhuti out of thin air, a great big mound ... You'd have thought it would have dropped out of his hand, but it didn't. Baba turned his hand over, but the vibhuti didn't fall off' (5.9.80).

In March 1981, the number of devotees in the satsang claiming to have seen Baba manifesting vibhuti in such circumstances that they were convinced it was a miracle, exceeded twelve. The number has increased greatly since then, especially through the organising of three extended pilgrimages, mostly of young people, to Prashanti Nilayam in 1981-84.

An abundance of testimony in Bradford reflects the conviction of members of the satsang that vibhuti appears miraculously on icons of Baba, or on artefacts associated with him. A middle-aged Punjabi male explained that in 1975 he went back to India twice, having recently become devoted to Baba. He visited his sister in Patiala, and was surprised to find that she had also become a devotee. 'Vibhuti had appeared miraculously on Baba's picture in her house, one thousand miles away from Prashanti Nilayam'. He recalled that later the same year, he went to Puttapparthi for the celebration of Sathya Sai's fiftieth birthday: 'I was in a group praying before a picture of Baba, about two furlongs away from himself, and vibhuti appeared on the picture' (10.1.78).

A Gujarati devotee, displaying a frame for photographs kept in his domestic shrine, pointed to a substance that looks like vibhuti between the glass and one of the small icons beneath it. He affirmed: 'I have this memento from the All India Sai Conference in 1972, since when it has manifested its own vibhuti' (8.1.80).

The efficaciousness of vibhuti is not doubted within the satsang either. Young devotees endorse the heritage that, through centuries, has associated it with healing. Many use vibhuti daily, making special application of it when they are unwell. Thus, a sixth-former reported: 'The family uses it every day. You dip a finger in it and put it on your tongue. Mother uses it when someone is ill' (11.7.78). An enthusiastic sixteen-year-old vouchsafed that he always uses vibhuti when he is 'in trouble': 'When I'm about to sit exams I place it on my forehead and temples; if my head aches, then on my forehead. When we've got colds, we place it on our chests' (25.5.78). In more desperate circumstances, a seventeen-year-old testified that, his aunty being in hospital seriously ill with cancer, her left side paralysed: 'My parents sent her vibhuti, and took some to her. She took it. Soon the paralysis

was gone' (15.6.78).

A somewhat sceptical, philosophically-minded member of the satsang acknowledged that he uses vibhuti 'sometimes': 'But its importance is psychological. It's effective because you believe it will be. It's all psychology. You need faith' (8.6.78). An older, middle-aged man also commented with caution: 'It's not just the vibhuti - you've got to have faith in it, in Baba. That's essential' (25.5.78).

Faith is a propensity that the devotees do not lack. A man of Sikh background, one-time participant in the satsang, now emigrated to Canada, recounted his testimony. His daughter, then eight-years-old, had once been very seriously ill: 'I encouraged her to visualise Baba. I rubbed vibhuti in her side, where the pain was. She was cured. It was a miracle of Baba's grace' (2.3.78).

Evidence from India suggests that vibhuti is regarded as effective against infertility (Swallow 1976: 283). The president of the Bradford satsang has confirmed that the same perspective is prevalent amongst devotees here. He cited a related instance:

There is a family in London. They had four or five girls, but no son. Someone told them about the Baba temple in Bradford. They took an oath before a picture of Baba in London, that if they would have a son, they would go to the temple in Bradford. They came and offered puja. Nearly once a year they used to come here. Even though there are now many Baba centres in London, still they come here.
(21.9.79)

Vibhuti is not mentioned in the above statement. It is unthinkable, however, that one would ever make a solemn vow before an icon of Baba without partaking of it. On much more casual occasions of personal devotion, one would be sure to inject a modicum of vibhuti. Thus, when the couple from London have presented themselves at the Sai mandir in Bradford, it goes without saying that they have taken a pinch of vibhuti from a small silver casket, not unlike a snuff box, proffered as an earnest of Baba's benediction, prior to departing. The same courtesy would be shown to any individual or

family visiting the mandir for private devotional purposes - to commemorate an anniversary or to offer special prayers. Dipping the tip of a finger in the vibhuti, the devout convey a tiny quantity to the tongue, consuming the blessing it is understood to bestow.

The effect of witnessing Sathya Sai Baba in action, as in the movements he makes when generating vibhuti, is described in the testimony of members of the satsang with two different metaphors. In the first place, Baba's action is said to create a sensation like that of an electric shock. Thus, a young male associate of the satsang, ethnically English, recalls being present in Prashanti Nilayam in a great gathering for Baba's darshan. As Baba 'made his gesture of blessing' towards his section of the crowd, he 'felt energy of some kind, like an electric shock, or vibrations, passing through (his) body' (14.6.77). Similarly, another ethnically English devotee described the effect of Sathya Sai's charisma by saying: 'Baba's impact is like an electrical charge' (17.6.77). One of the Gujarati ladies of the Bradford satsang affirms that when she held in her hand a medallion that had been 'created' for a devotee from Leicester, she felt 'an electric current' travelling up her arm (4.3.81; cf. Brent 1972: 233-34; Fanibunda 1978: 4).

The second metaphor, used in the satsang to describe the effect of witnessing Baba's 'taking' vibhuti 'from the air', is not unrelated to the first. Thus, a third young male associate of the satsang, ethnically English, approached Prashanti Nilayam with trepidation in 1980 because of his acute awareness of the cultural divide between himself and Baba, and because of his tragically poor health. Later, he extended the metaphor of the electric charge to embrace a more universal spiritual symbol:

Until then I wondered what on earth it was we had come to. After that day when the medallion appeared, I felt different. The second time, when he produced the vibhuti, something seemed to happen. It was as if someone had switched the light on. It was like a clearer vision.
(5.9.80)

The historical cycle, it could be said, had turned

full circle. For in the Bhagavad Gita, jyoti (light) is one of the several vibhutis (see above, 5.5).

The distribution of vibhuti dissolved in water was part of the regular prasad at bhajan mandals of the Sai satsang in Bradford until 1985. From a small dish, a single teaspoonful was ladled into the proffered right palm of each worshipper on leaving. The devotees reverently supped the tincture of vibhuti-water from their palms. They then ran their right hands over their heads so that all the precious liquid was utilized beneficially. The blessing attained was thus symbolically conveyed to the head, the controller of one's faculties.36

In India, even the impressive production of vibhuti at the mahabhishekam of Mahashivaratri and on other major occasions, must generate an infinitesimal quantity to supply its multifarious use by the large number of devotees world-wide. In the United Kingdom alone, considerable quantities are needed to service its regular personal, familial, and communal uses, and without the physical presence of Baba to exploit its creation. For that reason, supplies are brought to Britain by devotees returning from visits to India and by visiting relatives. It is also sent through the post.

The vibhuti thus acquired is not always or necessarily believed to have been materialised by Baba. People sometimes take him quantities of 'secular' ash, which he then blesses. Consequently, at major public or semi-public events organised by devotees in Bradford or elsewhere, vibhuti is often distributed to the departing congregation as prasad, in its original powder form. Sometimes it is in small cellophane packets on which the sacred monosyllable, OM, and the customary ritual greeting, Jai Sai Ram, are printed. Such packets have clearly been marketed by a commercial agency. They are labelled: 'SAI RAJ SCENTED VIBHUTI: 50 GRAMS'. They carry the wheel-symbol of the movement, the slogan 'Sathiyam Dharmam Santhi Premam' (sic) (Truth, Duty, Peace and Love) and bear the legend: Sai Raj Vibhuti Stores, Puttaparthi (cf. Mason 1984d: 3). To the glance of the uncommitted, the soft powder inside, grey in colour, might well appear to be unpalatable.

Fanibunda has called vibhuti and other manifestations of Baba's siddhic power, 'various silent messengers of grace' which help people to draw nearer to him (1978: 6). A Punjabi devotee in Bradford opined: 'Vibhuti strengthens one's belief' (10.1.78). Evidence suggests that in many cases, as in Fanibunda's own, it is an experience of Sathya Sai's apparently miraculous production of vibhuti that overcomes scepticism and generates personal commitment to him (Murphet 1973: 42-49; Sandweiss 1975: 45, 80). Thus, even though it is held by some in Bradford that the efficacy of vibhuti for healing and other purposes depends on one's faith, it is clear that the faith itself may have been initiated by the production of vibhuti. The same Punjabi devotee went on to assert that faith was not so much something that he brought to the vibhuti, as that which he derived from it.

The key to the significance of the mahabhishekam lies in the fact that it is not just any random substance that Baba provides as its medium - remarkable though that might be - but vibhuti. Of the various 'silent messengers of grace', vibhuti is paramount and has unique importance. It is also significant that it is at Mahashivaratri that the mahabhishekam takes place: at the celebration of the subordination of the mind to the spiritual and the transcendent. As with the received testimony to the efficaciousness of the exact observance of the vow and the rites of Mahashivaratri, vibhuti is said by devotees to be a purifying agent. Fanibunda declares that, like such proper observance, vibhuti is able to cure 'the root cause of most modern ailments, the human mind' (1978: 4).

5.7 VIBHUTI AND MAHASHIVARATRI

Hermeneutic of the multiplex imagery of Mahashivaratri and its associations, and of vibhuti, is seminal for an adequate understanding of the role that Sathya Sai creates for himself. In this task, the significance of vibhuti and of the Shivalinga have to be related to each other. Their manifold connotations for Baba's devotees coalesce in the associations of Mahashivaratri and produce a matrix pregnant with potential meanings. A full exploration of the connection of vibhuti with Shiva, and with the rites and symbolism of Mahashivaratri for the bhaktas of Sathya Sai, has therefore to be undertaken.

The comments of Baba's devotees in Bradford show that the very thought of vibhuti is the occasion of religious awe, wonder and immense joy. Its associations may thus invoke recollection of a striking story in the Shiva Purana, an account of the birth of Skanda, one of Shiva's sons. In the myth, the terrifyingly potent semen of Shiva creates 'as if by a miracle', 'supreme joy ... great jubilation' - even amongst the gods (O'Flaherty 1978: 168). Characteristic of that divine seed, however, was its fierce quality. It generated an unbearable burning sensation in whatever it encountered, so agonisingly potent that only Parvati, Shiva's consort, was able, without disaster, to contain and nurture it. Even the god of fire protested that he was being burnt by Shiva's inadvertently spilt seed when he, Agni, in the form of a bird, had swallowed it. It generated in him an insufferable fever (ibid.: 164-66). It is significant, therefore, that amongst the various attributes of the vibhuti that Baba materialises, it is recorded that 'sometimes it produces a burning sensation' (Fanibunda 1978: 4). The parallel is not fortuitous or inconsequential, for ash and semen are yoked together in indelible association in Indian lore.

The semen of the male who practices perfect chastity has been understood, in Hindu tradition, to be burnt up inside him. The divine paradigm for this is Shiva, who burned Kama the god of lust to ashes, and in commemoration smears himself with ash. Shiva is known as Bhrgu-pati, Lord of 'the cracks of fire', 'subtle centres' of the body which are thought to roast any semen that reaches their incinerating heat. In consequence, Shiva is considered to be the 'master of lust' and rides a bull - a beast symbolic, not only in Indian culture, of unruly sexual passions (Bhattacharji 1970: 147; Long 1971: 197-98). The ashes with which Shiva adorns himself connote 'the seed of life transfixed in death' (O'Flaherty 1978: 173; cf. Sahi 1980: 53-54). They represent 'the sublimated power of procreation' (Danielou 1964: 218-19).

As the mutated seminal fluid of a yogi, ash - complementing its other association with death and the transcendent (above, 5.5) - has become a most powerful cipher for asceticism. It signifies a detachment from society through a renunciation of sexual activity. It denotes the ascetic's triumph over both life and death.

Vibhuti, equated with ash, represents the antithesis of a libertarian ethic. It symbolises the conquest of attachment and desires: moksha, the ultimate release itself.

Appropriately, semen was known to the Tamil poet, Tirumular, thirteen centuries ago, as civanir, Shiva's fluid. It was, and *is*, believed that such vital emissions could be withheld, drawn up, and distributed throughout a man's physique, by the application of yogic techniques to prevent illness and physical afflictions. Urdhvaretas, seminal retention, is the fundamental rule of such a discipline. There are Sanskrit texts which repeatedly admonish: 'the semen must not be emitted' (Zvelebil 1973: 48, 130-31; cf. Pensa 1972: 113). Such retained and transmuted energy can be 'utilised for other ends' (Danielou 1964: 219), as described by Patanjali and later commentators on the harnessing of occult powers (Balasingham 1974: 48; cf. and ct. Brooke 1976: 170). Zimmer understands that these self-inflicted privations are thought to enable the yogi to accumulate 'immense psychic and physical energy ... Like a high-power electric charge threatening to discharge itself ... it cuts through and melts every resistance' (1974: 115).³⁷

This network of culturally-based perceptions relates to the concept of tapas which informs the ritual of the puja of the Shivalinga (above, 5.1). Shiva's generative energy is so great that it must constantly be contained, restrained, cooled. The matrix of perceptions illuminates not only the phenomenon of linga worship in general but also the significance of the puja of Mahashivaratri as practised in the Sai mandir in Bradford. In the final stage of each phase of the puja, the ritual is enhanced in a way which intensifies its relatedness to the Puranic tales. At that time, greatly increased quantities of fluids are poured over the Shivalinga, in a final mammoth rite of symbolic cooling.

At Mahashivaratri 1980, in Bradford, the officiating priest attracted attention to the importance of the final ritual before performing the consummating puja. The president of the satsang whispered, 'This is Shiva's special worship'. It was clear that it was vital for the whole congregation to be attentive. At that stage, like the Pine Forest Sages in the Brahmanda

Purana, the congregation 'bathed the great lord, the god, with great pots of water' while the priest 'sang various sweet-sounding secret spells' (O'Flaherty 1978: 147; cf. Long 1972: 33). In the Puranas, such conscientious bathing of the linga has nothing to do with climatic conditions or with the consumption of poison. It is, however, related vividly to stories which communicate the bi-polarity of the sexuality of Shiva: his potential for passion (O'Flaherty 1978: 154, 162) only surpassed by his capacity to restrain it.

Since Shiva represents both asceticism and potentially rampant sexuality, it has to be recognised that within the Hindu tradition these are not seen as mutually exclusive forces, but divergent and complementary registers of the same energy. In this context the symbol of the phallus becomes a sign of self-discipline and restraint; and the god who is in fact the ascetic par excellence, the supreme yogi, comes to signify the dependence of all living creatures on the fecundity of the universe.³⁸ Nevertheless, the linga-yoni may be thought an unnatural symbol, since the linga rests in the yoni with its head pointing away from it. If it were a straight-forward symbol of fertility, one would expect the head of the linga to be portrayed as poised for penetration, and not its opposite. Thus, Pensa has noted that 'the inversion of the linga is the only way to represent the urdhvaretas plastically' (1972: 113). Babb sees the linga as 'a symbol of restraint in the context of active and aroused sexuality' (1975: 232).

The Shivalinga is thus an ambiguous symbol. In the mythological stories, Shiva himself is a complex, eclectic character, whose diverging commitments land him in conflicting situations. His 'double nature' makes him a 'meeting ground of contradictory attributes' (Dhavamony 1971: 69). 'The object of meditation, he is ever lost in meditation ... Indifferent to worldly ties ... he ... is the only god with a really convincing family' (Bhattacharji 1970: 203).³⁹

The puja of Mahashivaratri has therefore to be observed with an awareness of the vitality of an ethical heritage which has been articulated in, and nourished by, tales of Shiva and Parvati's coitus reservatus (cf. O'Flaherty 1973: 268). The ascetic prerogative is, thus, not of

males alone. Firstly, there is the ambivalence of Shiva, his 'co-present masculinity and femininity', the linga resting 'invariably in the vulvic yonis' (Pocock 1973: 88; cf. Long 1971). That heritage stems from the Svetasvatara Upanishad, which designated Shiva bhagesa, 'lord of the female organ'. It results in the inseparability of linga and yonis. Secondly, Parvati's austerities are a source of immense strength for her too (Bhattacharji 1970: 178-79).

Such considerations provide the basis for the prominence and persistence of the mahabhishekam of Mahashivaratri at Prashanti Nilayam. The bathing of the effigy of Sai Baba of Shirdi has to be related to Sathya Sai's own teaching that his 'previous body' (Kasturi 1975a; 125) was a manifestation of Shakti, the divine yonis. The vibhuti of the ritual bath symbolises the semen of Shiva himself. Sathya Sai, the agent of the ritual, is also identified with its recipient, Shirdi Baba. The rite can therefore be seen as a coded proclamation of Sathya Sai's claim to be not simply an avatar of Shiva, but in fact of Shiva-Shakti (Swallow 1976: 283-84).

The versatility and ambivalence of Shiva is delicately, poignantly embodied in the Saura Purana's myth of the destruction of Kama and his revivification. After incinerating Kama (desire, lust) with the energy of his third eye, Shiva offers to grant Parvati any boon she desires. 'Great god', she replies, 'let Kama live and heat the world'. She wants nothing else. Shiva, without demur, responds by re-creating Kama 'without a body ... In that form he will be able to shake the world'. Significantly, throughout the myth, Kama has been called by one of his alternative names: Madana, 'the Seducer-of-the-Mind', the Maddener (O'Flaherty 1978: 159; cf. Danielou 1964: 219). That name captures the intensity of the natural inclinations that the cooling rituals of Mahashivaratri are intended to keep at bay, in Shiva and in Parvati, and in the worshippers themselves.

The ambivalence towards Kama articulated in the story of his incineration and revivification projects pragmatic realism in the context of a veneration of asceticism. It exemplifies the Hindu middle way, paralleled by the four ashramas, the stages in life, which include marriage and domesticity as one stage, as well as scope for sannyasa, renunciation.

That ambivalence is relevant for Hindus in Britain. Moved by the restraints in which they have been nurtured, they are also affected by the de-restriction which life in an urban, western context sustains. Kama has only too obviously *been* resuscitated. He is very much alive in the popular media and in the culture that affects the young most poignantly. It would be well to mark his limits. Being 'without a body', Kama is 'able to shake the world' - that is, to affect every body. The ritual cooling of the linga is directed at the demarcating and maintaining of specific limits for his influence. Orchestrating Shiva's archetypal qualities, puja of the linga thus symbolises the conversion of destructive into creative tensions. The linga represents 'the conflict men in the world have to undergo' (Swallow 1976: 271).

It would be unrealistic to suggest that all the devotees of Sathya Sai Baba in Bradford are aware of every detail of their complex mythological heritage, or able to articulate its significance in other than the broadest terms. They live, nevertheless, within the aegis of these coded symbols. For many, their phenomenal field is informed by the terminology, and their world-view is constructed of the imagery, of these symbolic meanings.

Thus, in a Hindu context, Shiva can emerge as the deity par excellence for the ambiguous world of modern man. Similarly, in distinct but parallel ways, he must have identified himself to the experience of many in archaic and historic India. Personifying both the strange attractiveness of ascetic emphases, and a full commitment to the worldly process, Shiva's versatility is a mirror of one's highest and most altruistic aspirations on the one hand, and a magnet of fulfilment on the other. He proves himself to be a dynamic focus for inner contemplation and for outward ritual, in modern Britain as in traditional India.

Devout Hindus in contemporary Britain stand between a heritage which prizes detached self-control as a cardinal virtue, and the permissiveness of western society. The latter presents itself as having lost confidence in its received moral resources, and sponsors the necessity of ethical experimentation to attain release from enculturation. In this context, replete with contrasting messages, the Hindu can find

Shiva's detachment, and also his fabled capacity for spectacular achievement, potent and meaningful religious symbols. The conflict and tension that Shiva represents is resolved for the worshipper at Mahashivaratri, perhaps more than vicariously, in acknowledging on the one hand the elemental drives, and on the other a corresponding pragmatic necessity to control and re-direct them.

Pluralist society in Britain today manifests a multiplicity of competing values which inevitably predispose towards secularity (Berger 1980: 11-31). A secular context which is not totalitarian appears to offer no norms apart from total relativity in matters of morality. That may be equated by some with ethical chaos. The attractiveness of Shiva, and the appeal of Mahashivaratri to Hindus in contemporary Britain, therefore, has to be interpreted against this background. It relates to the capacity of men and women in the midst of moral dilemmas and a diversity of values, to discover ritual and mythological resonances that sound the depths of their perplexity and sustain their hope for a creative resolution of their tension. Hindu culture has long been accustomed to acknowledging this predicament.

The community of those who worship Shiva in Sathya Sai Baba in Bradford today, is at least partly made up of individuals who are acutely aware that they are caught in a flux, if not a conflict, of values. Their puja expresses their prayer that they, and the familial, local, national and supra-national communities of which they are part, may continue to live with that stress without bringing disaster on themselves and on others. To that extent their action in puja may be seen as defensive, preventative - and therefore negative. Shiva's tapas, his asceticism, is, however, also his burning ardour, his fervour, and very positive. Thus, the prayer articulated symbolically by the rites of Mahashivaratri, is that that which is self-regarding and potentially destructive in unrestrained creativity, may be transmuted by restraint into that which is both outwardly and potently constructive.

Shiva is thus an ambiguous god. He is held to meet the needs of people living in an uncomfortably ambiguous world. He does that particularly appropriately, for those who acknowledge him as such,

in a twentieth-century avatar who represents and re-presents the ancient values, basically unchanged, in a modern guise.⁴⁰ In such a context, the reference of the Shivalinga is generalised from that of sexual control to the restraint and transmutation of all forms of self-indulgence. As a visiting devotee admonished and exhorted the Sai satsang in Bradford on 25 September 1981: 'Vibhuti is to remind us that we all become ashes. Let our selfishness become ashes'.

The Birthday of Sathya Sai Baba

In the Indian tradition, the anniversary of the birth of a spiritual leader is of great moment for his or her votaries. The birthdays of Rama and Krishna, most revered avatars of Vishnu, are naturally of the highest order, major festivals of the all-Indian cycle. On a lesser plane, and even in the United Kingdom, followers of contemporary gurus pay special attention to the anniversaries of their respective mentors. Every October, for example, at the ashram of the Community of the Many Names of God, Llanpumsaint, the birthday of the community's resident head, Guru Sri Subramaniam, is publicly and not just privately celebrated (Community of the Many Names of God 1980a: 7).

Hindus who hold that Sathya Sai Baba is not merely their guru but an avatar commemorate the day of his birth with fervour. In clarifying the religious beliefs and practices of the Sai devotees in Bradford, therefore, full consideration has to be given to the mode and significance of the celebration of that day. Such an exposition will complement the analysis of the icons of Sathya Sai in the mandir, and will elucidate the theological perceptions with which they are regarded.

6.1 THE CULTURAL CONTEXT AND BABA'S BIRTH

The all-Indian mythological heritage, birthright of every Hindu, is chronologically located in distant aeons. It co-exists with innumerable local traditions, related to it in the perceptions of the devout. These lesser manifestations of a diverse but ostensibly integrated religious culture, are its spatially proscribed embellishments. Locally understood to integrate with the more widely disseminated normative corpus, the lesser phenomena may elsewhere be seen as independent adjuncts of it.

It is also instructive to identify subordinate variants in developments which are specific in time, if not in space: temporally, if not geographically, local. Thus, the primordial or transcendent dimension in Indian lore is not identified merely in a once-for-all sacred history only tenuously connected to contemporary events. On the contrary, as Basham affirms, 'the Hindu mythological tradition ... will produce more gods in future to meet the needs of the times' (1979: x). This study is evidence of a case in point.

These periodic mutations of ancient mythological motifs are lesser phenomena since they are manifested in events subsequent to the scriptural age. They occur within the limitations of the secular-temporal calendar and not a primordial one, but they are understood to be related to the latter.⁴¹ Their hermeneutic is spelt out in its terms.

The dimensions of this culture are at least three-fold. There is the primordial-archaic or transcendental element, exemplified in the heritage of the Itihasas, the two great epics, and the Puranas. Finer gradations in that category could be made, suggesting the degrees or directness of impingement of this extensively mythological element on the secular-temporal, the empirical world. Secondly, one finds a fundamentally temporal dimension. It is exemplified when such unambiguously historical figures as Shankara, or more recently Mahatma Gandhi, are perceived as avatars. Thirdly, there is the current dimension, in which speculation takes place about the status of contemporary figures vis-a-vis the sacred primordial tradition. The later phases of this three-fold, or otherwise manifold, schema, are integrated with the earlier or earliest ones, and justified, by reference to the scriptural corpus.

According to Sathya Sai Baba's devotees, secular-temporal activity was intersected by that which is supra-mundane at Puttaparthi, Andhra Pradesh, on 23 November 1926 when Baba was born.⁴² The transcendent thus makes itself manifest in empirical signs offering specific links with the primordial realm. It does that in order to set at rights the historical cycle, where maya is said to prevail. It is ever possessed of the capacity to break into the secular-temporal or to intersect it, dispelling the mist of

illusion - for some at least. Such potential or actual occurrences offer, to those willing to perceive them, an awareness of the eternal in an otherwise fleeting existence.

Teaching such as that of the Bhagavad Gita (4:7) that Vishnu will incarnate 'from age to age' according to the dire moral need of the epoch, is pertinent to this process. Birth narratives associated with the Buddha, Vishnu's ninth avatar, for example, make reference to supernatural signs, proclaiming to those able to perceive it, the involvement in mundane matters of that which transcends them. When such an occurrence takes place, it necessarily happens at a specific time. The time can be now. For those who acknowledge such a perceived event, it marks a new intersection of that which is real and eternal with the realm in which ignorance and delusion predominate. Such a background informs the commemoration of the birth of Sathya Sai Baba amongst his votaries.

6.2 BABA'S BIRTHDAY AND THE SATSANG

In the year 1926, itself designated akshaya (never declining, ever full) by Indian astrologers, 23. November was expected to be auspicious for the adoration of Shiva. Piety avers that that day was identified in advance as exceptionally advantageous for his worship (Gokak 1975a: 301; Murphet 1973: 51). In Puttaparthi on the very date, a woman devoted to Vishnu gave birth to a son and called him after her god by one of his alternative names: Narayana. The infant, born to Eswaramma and her husband Pedda Venkappa Raju, was named 'Sathyanarayana' (Narayana the true). Devotees now believe it was significant that both Vishnu and Shiva were associated at the birth of the one who was to become known as Sathya Sai Baba.

The devout affirm that, prior to Baba's birth, musical instruments in the home of his family played in the dead of night without human agency: 'melodiously and rhythmically ... as though ... in expert hands' (Gokak 1975a: 301). The cobra which, as in traditions concerning Krishna, the Buddha and Guru Nanak, often symbolises divine protection and authority, also - it is said - did not remain aloof from the occasion: 'But the snake did not harm the child' (Murphet 1973: 51). Sai Baba of Shirdi, devotees recall, sometimes appeared to his followers in the guise of a cobra.'

The infant Sathyanarayana is reported to have produced, soon after his birth, the sign which later became characteristic of him. He would 'cover his face ... with vibhuti which appeared in his tiny hands mysteriously' (Ruhela 1976: 5). Such reputed wonders accord with birth narratives of others in Indian tradition, held by their devotees to have revealed 'transcendent doctrines' - like Vallabhacharya five centuries earlier (Barz 1976: 21).

Forty-nine years after the auspicious events in Puttaparthi, in November 1975, in accordance with Indian reckoning which includes a pre-natal year in the calculation, Sathya Sai Baba celebrated his fiftieth birthday. A preliminary festival, for devotees from all the British centres, was held in London on 8 November. Devotional singing, Indian classical music, and items by children of the various Bal Vikas groups, featured in the celebratory programme. Its early date enabled those who were to travel to India to be in Baba's presence for his birthday, to participate in the British event first. At Prashanti Nilayam the jubilee was followed immediately by the Second World Conference of Sri Sathya Sai Organisations.

Devotees from Bradford flew to India for the occasion, children as well as adults. The president of the satsang recalls that the total United Kingdom delegation exceeded one hundred and sixty persons (21.11.77)⁴³ A published account later described the euphoria of the pilgrims as they approached Puttaparthi, eagerly looking forward to 'transcend(ing) time and space to be at the lotus feet of the Beloved'. Such terms engage the concept of an intersection of the secular-temporal realm by supra-mundane reality. More than two hundred thousand devotees 'of all faiths and colours' are said to have gathered in Prashanti Nilayam for the celebration: 'Hindus and Muslims, Christians and Buddhists, Jews and Gentiles'. The number was so great that Baba flew over the whole area in a helicopter 'to give darshan and shower blessings on one and all' (S. Kaul 1976: 4-5).

In November 1976, the British devotees again arranged a national ('state-level') celebration of Baba's birthday in London. The president of the Bradford centre, then also president of the Sri Sathya Sai Service Organisations (United Kingdom), offered the

official speech of welcome to the delegates. He shared the platform with Guru Sri Subramaniam of the Community of the Many Names of God. The guru gave the only other discourse officially noted on the programme.⁴⁴ Music, devotional dance, namavali (the recitation of the names of deities), puja and arati, were features of the celebration.

On 23 November 1977, a Wednesday, there was a birthday gathering in the mandir in Bradford, with bhajan singing for at least three hours by a large congregation.⁴⁵ The next day, the normal weekly bhajan mandal naturally fell within the orbit of the festive occasion. It was notable that the congregation that night, in excess of fifty persons, consisted of a majority under the age of twenty-one. The following Sunday, forty-five members of the Bradford satsang travelled to Acton Town Hall, London, to participate in a retrospective celebration of Baba's birthday. It was estimated that one thousand devotees attended.

In 1978, the anniversary of Baba's birth fell on a Thursday. Bhajans, starting half an hour earlier than usual, continued also one hour longer. They were followed by arati, prasad and the normal concluding rituals. By 9.00 p.m., more than one hundred worshippers of all ages had found place in the puja-room. During the final hour, some sixteen teenagers stood in the entrance hall and sat on the staircase, obtaining a break from congestion and enjoying an opportunity to socialise in the festive atmosphere. The puja-room itself was, of course, specially decorated. The red-velvet carpet, normally laid out in front of the picture of the 'Lotus Feet' to welcome Baba symbolically to the satsang, had been replaced with a white lace cloth to serve the same purpose in a more ceremonial manner. Large candles, pigmented with strong colours - blue, red, yellow - were laid out along the front of the shrine and down the sides of the welcoming 'lace' carpet. There were birthday cards - not many, but very large ones - at the front of the shrine and in front of Baba's chair. The largest of these was inscribed: 'To Shri Sathya Sai Baba from your family'. Paper decorations, of the type used at Christmas, festooned the ceiling and the shrine. They were mostly streamers. They had also been used to garland pictures of Baba.

In 1979 Sathya Sai's birthday fell on a Friday. Members

of the family living in the Sai centre were up at 5.00 a.m., cleaning the house, preparing food, and decorating the mandir for the celebrations to be held that evening. During the day, family groups and sometimes individuals came to bring offerings and pay homage. Many brought cards and birthday presents for Baba. The telephone rang constantly, often with people inquiring about the arrangements. Throughout the morning, an iced birthday cake, about sixteen inches long by sixteen, embellished the front of the shrine. Portions were given to visitors who might not be able to return later, to take home as prasad. Apart from the cake, and that Baba's throne-like chair, his gadi, had been covered with a new and decorative cloth, the signs during the morning were suggestive of out-of-season spring-cleaning rather than of impending celebration. There was a ladder ready for the task of hanging the ceiling decorations.

At mid-day Baba was offered his lunch - ritually, in his symbolic presence in the icons and the effigies. Puri (fried pancake of plain flour), chappattis, peas, beans, mango pulp, savoury rice and sweet rice with yoghurt, were brought from the kitchen to the mandir and placed before the shrine. The accompanying ritual was performed with consummate delicacy, and the bhajans sung beautifully, by the elder daughter of the household.⁴⁶

At 1.00 p.m. the family's middle son was despatched to call some ladies from their homes in a neighbouring street. They were expecting to be summoned to help decorate the mandir.

That evening, the celebration started at 7.00, with thirty-two people present. At that stage the women out-numbered the men by three to one; before the end, the proportion of men had risen to nearly forty per cent. Already by 7.20 there were at least fifty people present. By the close, there were approximately 115 worshippers in the mandir.

Puja commenced with the initial exhalation of the pranava, OM, followed by the ritual chanting of 108 divine names - starting and finishing with that of Sathya Sai Baba. Shirdi Baba's name was included early in the recitation. With the chanting of each name, one of 108 floral petals was offered to Baba symbol-

ically by the young man entrusted with the task:
a floral rosary.

The singing of bhajans followed the repetition of the names and reached a crescendo very early: within fifteen minutes of starting. Talented young male musicians in the lead were assisted by a fervent middle-aged man. The initial impetus was so strong that by 10.00 the singing was flagging, in spite of strong support from a large group of girls and young women sitting at the back. Some of the teenage boys were not very attentive in the later stages. They were not gripped any longer by the beat of the bhajans nor by the initial excitement which had, by then, been dissipated. They were 'shushed', not in any severe way, by an elderly devotee sitting behind them. Their inattention, nothing worse than occasional chatter, would have been totally uncharacteristic of a normal bhajan mandal. Concentration and devotion are usually at a high, and sometimes intense, level.⁴⁷ The relaxed behaviour of those boys, only fitfully listening and occasionally clapping with the congregation, was due both to the length of the session and to their not being regular attenders.

Arati was, of course, performed at the conclusion of the bhajan mandal. The importance of the festival was signalled by the ritual waving not of one but of three arati trays by as many participants.

Prasad was distributed after each worshipper had received a grease-proof bag, a departure from the ordinary procedure in the satsang. Normally, torn-out sheets of mail-order catalogues, or sections of computer print-out, are supplied to contain the portions of food. Inevitably, there was delay because of the long process of cutting the birthday cakes and preparing portions for distribution. As the cake-cutting began, the congregation sang a couple of lines of 'Happy birthday to you', but did not pursue it further, momentarily confounded by its own mixing of cultures. The gathering, patient and good-humoured as ever, broke into spontaneous bhajan-singing. A few used the time to take photographs. A devotional but relaxed ethos was maintained to the end.

Special features of the mandir and of the puja in 1979 included a turquoise velvet cloth outspread before the lotus feet of Baba, replacing the usual

red one and the lace one of the previous year. Colourful candles, a majority in turquoise, performed the same functions as in 1978. In addition, those strongly-tinted candles decorated the mantelpiece at the rear of the mandir, where a figure of Sai Baba of Shirdi was prominent. The paper decorations were similar to the preceding year. In the shrine itself, the central icons of Baba and also one of Shirdi Sai were garlanded with outstandingly beautiful chrysanthemums, mauve and white alternately arranged.

There were twelve birthday cards for Sathya Sai Baba. One was enormous and dominated the rest. It was singularly unrelated to any of the themes one would have expected devotees to have in mind. It must be impossible to obtain such a large card, at least twenty-four inches by sixteen, with an appropriate message or motif for these circumstances. This card depicted a frivolously pink woolly rabbit in a large frilly pink bonnet. It added a disneyesque dimension to the display, but articulated only devotion towards Baba in its unconventional medium. There were two other boxed cards of normal proportions. One depicted a more traditional symbol of deep love, a dark red rose, very fitting in a context of bhakti. On the front was inscribed neatly, by hand, 'To whom we all adore'. Another card had '54' in large golden digits stuck to the front. The inscription in one of the others was open to view. It read: 'Happy Birthday, Dad - coops! - I mean "our Dad"'. Familiar and friendly, it mirrored one element in the perception of Baba by the young people of the satsang.

At the front of the mandir were three large and elaborate iced birthday cakes. One of them was two foot square and 31 inches high. It was inscribed with edible lettering expressing devotional sentiments. One was set on a stand next to Baba's chair. All three were untouched. They were additional to the cake that had been cut up during the morning. Each had been donated by a different family.

In 1980 the morale of the satsang was at a low ebb (cf. appendix 3). Celebration of Baba's birthday that year was on a modest scale. By November 1981, the satsang had experienced a significant revival in its life. That year, the commemoration of Baba's birth reflected the new enthusiasm of the fellowship and especially of its young members.

In 1982, the most outstanding celebration of Baba's birthday to date, in Bradford, took place: memorable because of its ambitious nature, and because it was totally different from earlier years. The day itself, a Tuesday, was marked by an extended bhajan mandal. On the preceding Sunday, however, the young people, acting in the name of the Seva Dal and the associated Mahila Vibhag, sponsored and created a major event on their own initiative, evincing a strong sense of corporate responsibility. Adolescents, students, male and female, some of them employed and some of them seeking jobs, formed themselves into a staunchly-committed organising work-force. They engaged the cooperation of the adult members and associates of the fellowship. They invited coach-loads of devotees and interested observers from all the Sai centres in the Midlands and the north of England to a birthday festival. It was held in the well-appointed Communal Building of the University of Bradford. Approximately nine hundred attended, a congregation about two-thirds female, drawn from many parts of England.

The festival lasted all day. It was a triumph of organisation and cooperation. The programme was built around congregational bhajan mandal led by groups of children and young people from many Sai centres, in turn. There were homilies and plays. Gujarati stick-dances were performed on stage by troupes of youthful dancers from several centres. Reverently these young performers made obeisance before the large icon of Baba that graced the stage, prior to their items and at their conclusion. Participants from visiting groups were supported by older members of their respective satsangs, the attractive modern setting of the spacious open-plan theatre providing a pleasant location for such a major gathering. To the minority of non-Indian guests and to any attending who were not devotees, the occasion offered clear witness to the convictions of the fellowships involved.

An extensive display of pictures illustrating the major world religions had been mounted for the birthday festival, many of them made in Bal Vikas and Seva Dal meetings by young Bradford devotees. They had also assembled a collection of artefacts, primarily representing the Indian religious heritage. Books about Baba, and volumes of his teachings, were on sale, together with photographs and posters for devotional use.

In 1983 and 1984, the celebration of Sathya Sai Baba's birthday at the Bradford centre has featured substantial participation by the young people. However, no major birthday event, such as that of 1982, *has yet* been organised again. There has to be a reasonable economy in the effort put in to such undertakings. Thus, in October and November 1984, without any direct connection with the birthday, the youths of the satsang organised other specific events, one of them a large convention, recruiting from a wide area (see 8.5). With such occasions only recently organised, the commemoration of the birthday during those years naturally had to be of a more domestic, if nonetheless fervent, nature.

6.3 THE BIRTHDAY, PILGRIMAGE AND MISSION

It is not unusual for Sathya Sai Baba's birthday to be marked in the United Kingdom by groups of devotees travelling to a specific location for a combined celebration. In 1979, the Bradford satsang responded to an invitation from the members of the Sai centre in Wellingborough, to celebrate the birthday in the Northamptonshire town with devotees from a wide area. In 1982, corresponding journeys - with Bradford as their destination - were made. The cultural context and the implications of such purposeful travel call for examination. The extent to which such journeys participate in the nature of yatra (pilgrimage) in Hindu religious practice has to be explored.⁴⁸ It is conceivable that their destinations may begin to possess or acquire something of the significance, however diluted, of traditional places of pilgrimage, in India.

Scholars interpret the motivation for Hindu yatra in terms of the pursuit of punya (merit) or in relation to the associated subjective and psychological benefits, such as peace of mind, that accrue from it (Bhardwaj 1973: 6, 50; Knott 1980; cf. Ashby 1974: 57). Others have taken into account in addition the ancillary gains of a secular nature, such as the acceptable distractions of travel to popular places, made with a religious motive, and even in a testing climate and conditions (Srinivas 1973: 130-31). All these considerations are pertinent for understanding the motivation for making long journeys in pursuit of religious goals amongst Hindus in Britain. Such journeys are a feature of life within the mainstream

of Hindu religious activity here, as well as amongst adherents of particular cults. Travel of that kind does not offer the consummate status and advantages of a pilgrimage to a holy place long-acknowledged by tradition in India. Yet in the Hinduism of the diaspora these journeys attract something of the aura, however diluted, and fulfil something of the function, however transmuted, of authentic pilgrimage in its traditional setting.

In its ancient homeland, Hinduism has been released to a certain extent, by the intervention of industrialisation, urbanisation and technology, from its traditional moorings in a caste-, family- and village-based society (ibid.: 118-25, 142). The circumstances of diaspora must, perforce, tend in the same direction. In respect of the heritage of yatra, it must therefore be possible to consider the eligibility of new locations - however much weaker, more recent and severely limited their sacred associations. To the Sanskritic purist, or even one with a less traditional perception, the claims of some sites to this kind of consideration might appear to be pathetic, if not blasphemous. Nevertheless, the transposition and transmutation of Hinduism to new locations and for a new age, makes it imperative that consideration be given to such an enlargement of received perceptions. Only in that way can current developments rightly be understood.

The Hindu community in the United Kingdom lives in a situation in which substitute pilgrimage is appropriate. Journeys which cannot match the original yatras to the ancient shrines of India nevertheless participate in some of their features and approximate towards the same genre. The alternative is the periodic visit to India: an attractive option for many British Hindus, but a very different proposition. The latter has also been taken up enthusiastically not only by the older devotees but also by the young in the Bradford Sai satsang (see below 8.4).

Marking one's devotion to a holy personage by undertaking a journey to a site associated with him or her, or in commemoration of an auspicious date, has long been acknowledged as a legitimate motivation for Hindu yatra. It is as fitting for residents in Britain as it is for those living in South Asia.

If in the former case not only the starting point but also the destination of the pilgrimage is located in the United Kingdom, this indicates the recognition of new sites for pilgrimage appropriate to the circumstances of diaspora. Novel, it still accords well with the accepted associations and significance of yatra and does not violate India's most ancient and sacred traditions.⁴⁹

Nevertheless, for Hindus there is inevitably a tension between their awareness of the sacredness of the cosmos (Danielou 1964: 376), and their perception of Bharat - the sacred space of the Indian sub-continent. Bharat is defined not by changeable and man-made political borders. It is defined by the topography of India's mythology. It is defined in the boundaries set by the amalgam of cultural, social and religious influences in human geography which Hinduism has made manifest in South Asia.

Sathya Sai Baba has himself reaffirmed traditional perspectives on Bharat's role and nature. He teaches that the gods themselves are anxious to be born in India, and that every great culture that has ever emerged in any other country 'originated at some time or other and in some form or other' in that land. Bharat is avowed to be the guru of mankind, a land whose ancient culture 'charged with eternal values', and the world now desperately needs. She has 'the most correct vision of the cosmos in the context of time ... As Delhi is the capital of India, India is the spiritual capital for all mankind'. Consequently, the mission of India to the rest of the world is graphically portrayed as that of an engine that 'pulls all the nations ... along the rails of love and light to the terminus of truth' (Sathya Sai Baba n.d.: 14, 47, 52, Foreword; cf. Kasturi 1975a: 237).

The concept of a mission of India to the rest of the world is by no means uniquely Baba's, nor did it originate with him. Most eminently associated with the teaching of Vivekananda (1863-1902), it has, following the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, been frequently echoed by others.⁵⁰ There is no doubt, however, that Sathya Sai Baba has found fresh and forceful, vivid and communicative ways of expressing this idea. The concept is, of course, articulated not merely in terms of India's venerable

religious heritage, but in modes which link that firmly with the associations of Baba's own role and the functions of his devotees. 'India is destined to be ... a huge Prashanti Nilayam, from which the message of prashanti will radiate over the whole world' (Sathya Sai Baba n.d.: 46).

The resolution of the tension between the latent sanctity of the cosmos and the actual holiness of India's heritage is achieved through a series of steps in the logic of Sathya Sai's teaching. He acknowledges, of course, that the concept, Bharat, focusses the mind on a heritage which depends for its empirical effect on the response of fallible, vacillating humans to their divinely ordained birthright. Bharat represents an ideal which can be ignored, a legacy which can be disowned. Thus Bharat ceases to be a geographical entity, and becomes a single symbol for a diverse religious heritage. Cartography is transmuted into an esoteric and ethereal discipline: 'The mother country is not ... an extent of soil...It is the mother...that ... teaches self-realisation (ibid.: 34, 47).

In line with this insight, neither the inhabitants of the Indian sub-continent, nor the citizens of the Republic of India, are any longer, as of right, the heirs of Bharat. The concept is spiritualised into the widest of connotations. Geographically, it is enlarged without bounds. The term's potential for pregnancy with cultural-spiritual significance rather than mere topographical reference is exploited to the full. With typical word-play and, one must assume, joking in his etymology, Baba has said: 'Bharat means the land where there is rathi (attachment) to Bha (Bhagavan or God)'. It is but a short step from that stage in the discussion to the point where Baba can enunciate unequivocally: 'The word Bharat simply means one who takes his pleasure in divinity' (ibid.: 29, 59, 110).

Spiritualisation of the concept of Bharat paves the way for the launching of a mission to mankind based in the Hindu heritage. It is also based on the teaching of one who claims to be a twentieth century avatar, dedicated to awakening the true self-understanding of all humanity. The mode of the mission is sometimes expressed in starkly simple terms, in fact in one word:

namasmarana, devotional repetition of the name or names of God. The public performance of such ritual recitation is called by Baba nagar sankirtan. He teaches that it purifies the minds not only of those participating in it but also of those hearing it. Namasmarana could thus be done 'all the time and in all places'. As a result, Sathya Sai Baba teaches, 'the atmosphere of the whole world' could 'become purified' (1974: 60). To that end, his disciples should make themselves 'into moving temples' (n.d.: 90). If the beneficial influence of the divine Name is spread in that way to every street and home, then the whole world can be transformed 'into Prashanti Mandiri, for ultimately it is the universe which is 'the body of God' (1974: 7; n.d.: 48).

6.4 PILGRIMAGE TO WELLINGBOROUGH

The celebration of Sathya Sai Baba's birthday by the Bradford satsang thus sometimes involves the making of long-distance coach trips to other centres. It was once the occasion of an invitation to the members of other fellowships to undertake a corresponding journey to Bradford. These journeys can only be fully understood in the cultural context of yatra in modern India (Srinivas 1973: 130), and in relation to Baba's teaching on Bharat as a concept that transcends topography and suggests the mission of India to the world. Such teaching has crystallised most clearly in Baba's perception of his own role, and that of his devotees.

In 1979, Sathya Sai Baba's birthday falling on a Friday, it was natural for any major celebration to be held on the Saturday. Notice had been received from Wellingborough that the devotees there would be holding an event on 24 November, to which they were hoping to attract members of other Sai fellowships and a significant number of interested indigenous people. It gradually became clear that the occasion was also going to have special significance for the members of the Bradford satsang in respect of their understanding of the mission of Bharat to the wider community. Their president vouchsafed: 'It's an event that's been specially arranged for the English devotees' (13.11.79).

The president's remark related to the fact that Wellingborough had distinguished itself within the

Sai community in the United Kingdom through its association with Peggy Mason. She had written an article about Baba in an English magazine which, it was said, had attracted two thousand enquiries to the Sai centre in that town (of. Mason and Laing 1982).

As the birthday approached, the journey to Wellingborough became more prominent in the thinking of the Bradford devotees. It became clear that the president regarded the developments that had taken place there with intense admiration. Wellingborough was seen as a real focus of the mission of Baba to the British people. It offered a clearer parallel to the potential of the Bradford situation than any other that the president knew. The fact that certain London centres had attracted members from the indigenous population did not figure so prominently in his thinking. London's metropolitan status and enormous size militated against the perception of parallels. Moreover, the leader of the Bradford satsang had been friendly with the president of the Wellingborough centre when they had both resided in East Africa. That personal identification and the fact that the Northamptonshire satsang was also a predominantly Gujarati fellowship, provided affective parallels for the Bradford leader. The sheer size of the reputed response to Peggy Mason's article had moved him greatly. His hopes that his own centre might become the spearhead of a fresh breakthrough in the mission to the United Kingdom, had been significantly boosted.

A group of twenty-nine devotees from the Bradford fellowship made the journey to Wellingborough on 24 November 1979. Most boarded the coach at the mandir, but a few associates who live in Leeds were picked up en route. More would have gone, if, initially, a bigger coach had been ordered. Other devotees travelled from Leeds by car.

The journey began with brief invocations of Sathya Sai Baba and of Jalaram Bapa. These terse devotions coincided with the starting of the coach's engine and were not fortuitous. They signalled spontaneously the purposeful nature of the outing, uttered by a couple of ladies sitting together acting unselfconsciously on behalf of the group. The company expressed their participation by joining in the final phrase or two. The same dual invocation of the two holy names initiated the return journey later that day.

The first full hour of the southward journey was totally occupied with fervent bhajan-singing. It also erupted spontaneously later from time to time. The whole return trip was occupied with the same activity: not everyone sang all the time, but all sang some of the time. Conversations did take place, but many must have occupied the complete homeward journey with devotional singing. The atmosphere throughout was that of a purposeful pilgrimage, relaxed, pleasant, serious-minded but friendly. There was never any of the raucous humour that can easily characterise a long coach outing by a group who know each other well.

On the way to Wellingborough the president' of the satsang mentioned pointedly that there could be people in Yorkshire, or further afield, who would be interested in Baba if only they knew about him and where they could go to obtain further information. Responding to a suggestion that a piece in the Yorkshire Post might supply the need, it became clear that he was not impressed. He was thinking of an article in a national magazine, such as Peggy Mason had written, but publicizing the activities of the Sai community in Bradford, and giving the address of the mandir.

The hopes of the organisers of the celebration in Wellingborough were modestly fulfilled. A gathering of approximately four hundred assembled for the event. Mostly they were devotees of Gujarati, Punjabi and Sri Lankan extraction, from the Midlands and from London, together with the delegation from Bradford and Leeds. The proportion of white people could have been as high as 10%; it was not above that. That was a significant number for a Baba convention outside the metropolis at that time. One family of African origin was present.

The fascination evident in the faces of at least some non-Indian participants must have given satisfaction to the devotees of Hindu background. The white contingent appeared to be divided equally between the sexes, a cross-section of all ages, allowing for the absence of very young children. The Mayor of Wellingborough, officially opening the proceedings, spoke as he had been requested to do about 'Love and Peace'. With sensitivity and no little evidence of insight into some finer points of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, he quoted the prophet Micah and the First

Epistle of John. He expressed appreciation of the tolerance of the movement initiated by Sathya Sai Baba, and deplored instances of violence undertaken in the name of religion. He spoke coherently about Mahatma Gandhi's interpretation of ahimsa (harmlessness, non-violence) as a positive social and political strategy.

The main events of the day took place in a school hall. On the stage a temporary shrine had been erected, dominated by a dignified gadi for Baba's symbolic presence and by three large photographic portraits of him. An enormous Sai wheel, symbol of the syncretistic claims of the cult,⁵¹ was prominent in the background. There were no other icons, not even a picture of Shirdi Baba. Two large plaques, however, flanked the portraits of Sathya Sai. Both were of Roman Catholic derivation. One was of Jesus ('the Sacred Heart') and another of Mary. They are also pictorially represented in the Sai mandir in Wellingborough, in the home of the president of the satsang. Thus it was not fortuitous that in December 1979 the suggestion was made for the first time by the president of the Bradford satsang that pictures of Jesus and Mary should feature in the Bradford mandir.⁵² One felt that visits like that to Wellingborough might have long-term repercussions in Bradford, in respect of the understanding of the mission of Baba's devotees to British society.

Jesus was not only pictorially represented in the celebrations of 24 November 1979. The occasion was used to convey a message from Peggy Mason, tape-recorded because *she* was not able to be present. She spoke about Baba and Christ. She expatiated on the interpretations of Jesus' life offered by Christian theologians. Regarding the latter she was most scathing, quoting Malcolm Muggeridge approvingly in so far as he once observed that God would never pass an examination in theology.

Jesus as 'the avatar of the Piscean Age' was Peggy Mason's theme. Knowing that some westerners feel that they are being disloyal to Jesus when they see in Baba the avatar of the new Aquarian Age, Peggy Mason suggested an antidote from the experience of a Catholic couple in America. They testified that while watching a film about Sathya Sai, they simultaneously saw Baba's

face transformed into that of Jesus and heard a voice reprimanding them for their lack of insight. To reinforce her point, Mason quoted St. Paul on realities that are unseen and referred to Baba's tributes to 'the beloved Jesus'. She had already equated the miracles attributed to Jesus with some that Baba is believed to have performed: controlling the elements, healing the sick, multiplying food for multitudes.

Peggy Mason stressed how little is known about Jesus, and how many gaps there are in what is known. Many of those gaps, she believes, were wilfully created by quarrelling theologians who erected dogmas, and fought over them. Peggy Mason declared that Sathya Sai is able to supply all the lacunae in mankind's knowledge of Jesus:

A film has been made about the hidden years of Jesus baspq on all the information Swami has revealed.⁵³

He knows what has been put in, and what has been taken out of the records ... One of the things which was taken out were these words spoken by Jesus to his disciples: 'The One who sent me will come again, and he will wear a red robe, and have a great crown of hair'.

(Mason 1979: 2; cf. above 4.2)

The mission to the West could not have become more direct, except in so far as its religious heritage may no longer be the soft under-belly of western society. It appears, however, that in Britain, it is amongst those who have at least a residual interest in Christianity that the devotees of Sathya Sai Baba expect to make an impact.

In the films about Baba shown in Wellingborough that day, the commentary was spoken with an American accent. It reinforced a point which Peggy Mason had emphasised in her recorded message: that in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and also in the non-English-speaking western world, there is a steadily growing number of Baba's non-Indian disciples. The films had been made by Richard Bock, from the United States. In one of them, the remarriage of Walter and Elsie Cowan was shown. The Cowans are elderly Americans who became famous amongst Baba's bhaktas because Sathya Sai is reputed to have brought Walter

back to life after he expired on Christmas Day 1971 (Sandweiss 1975: 101-3; Kasturi 1980b: 101).⁵⁴ Afterwards, Baba is said to have suggested the Cowan's remarriage because this was now Walter's second life. The film was lyrical and humorous.

A further film showed sequences shot at another wedding: that of a middle-aged American, said to be a film director from Hollywood, who went with his fiancée to Prashanti Nilayam to be married by Baba. The gathering at Wellingborough needed no further evidence that the one whom they worship as an avatar exercises a world-wide mission. It may have reminded some Gujarati parents from Bradford that their children have learned new but now favourite, and beautiful, Indian bhajans from recorded renderings by young Americans who have become Baba's devotees. Such recordings are treasured and circulated in Bradford, where the clear enunciation of the Indian words and the distinctive devotional quality of the rendering has been highly appreciated by some young British Gujaratis.

The greater part of the afternoon's programme at the birthday celebration was given over to the young people of the Wellingborough satsang. In speeches and testimonies, learned and now recited, the children of local Indian families spoke about the training they were receiving. The young lady presiding introduced them as boys and girls, young men and women, who could describe how being Bal Vikas students had changed their lives. Christians in the audience could not have failed to notice the parallel to an evangelical emphasis. It had already been evident in frequent references to the need to be born again through the grace of Baba. Peggy Mason, for example, had paraphrased Sathya Sai, expressing his interest not in his own birthday but in everyone else's: 'when you are born again, through the realisation ... that you are divine'. She had added: 'That is the birthday - the rebirthday - he wishes us to celebrate - our own!' (Mason 1979: 1; cf. Kasturi 1975a: 179).

The young British Gujaratis of the Wellingborough satsang outlined the work of their Bal Vikas groups. A youth of seventeen described the aim of Bal Vikas as moulding and educating young people to be 'ideal human beings'. A lad of approximately fourteen

declared: 'God is using Bal Vikas as a way of changing the world. God took birth years ago in Jesus. He has taken birth now in Sathya Sai Baba.'

The testimony of the young was, however, most eloquent in the singing of English bhajans. The tunes were not of Indian origin but were in the idiom of western pop music. The backing and the style of rendition, laced with the sentimentality which is endemic to the genre, presented a melodious, catchy medium, attractive for those who like the mode. Because the standard of performance was high, the *songs* afforded an effective means of communication to many young people **in** the audience. They appeared to exercise a considerable impact on the singers themselves. Some of the bhajans blended Hindu and Christian concepts. They addressed a message to the indigenous community:

Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ, you and I are one.
Krishna blue, I love you:
The fire, the fire, the fire of love -
My beautiful God is love.

OM, OM, Shanti,
God is love.

The programme closed with two young ladies in their late teens, singing a bhajan they had composed themselves. They had already sung it for Baba at Prashanti Nilayam and he had approved. It included the words:

Sai is the way
And Sai is the life.
Let this be the day
When God is born in you!

Events in the school hall completed and prasad distributed, it became clear that there was one intention that the Bradford devotees had still to accomplish. One felt a contagious excitement about this outstanding aspect of the day's aspirations, suggesting a high status for what was yet to be done. The aim of the journey, that which would make it a pilgrimage beyond any doubt, still lay ahead of the ardent travellers, it seemed, as they left the school grounds.

The coach made for the Wellingborough Sai Centre. The purposeful orientation of the votaries made it plain that there was something there that exercised a magnetic attraction. Responding to it would complete the day.

'Sai Shakti House' in Wellingborough is the home of a Gujarati family. The mandir is an upstairs room, originally a bedroom, measuring approximately fourteen feet by ten. It has been tastefully decorated. The icons and devotional aids are sparse. The shrine is dominated by a garlanded photograph, an icon of Baba, approximately five feet by four. There stood to the left of the shrine in November 1979, a large, almost life-size, unpainted plaster statue of Baba sitting in a gadi. The totally white figure contrasted with the gadi, whose throne-like aura was enhanced by colourful upholstery. Lifelike, impressive not only in its size, the statue had been made by a visitor from Gujarat while staying at the centre for some months. In spite of the uniqueness of this embellishment, it became clear that this was not why the Bradford pilgrims had addressed themselves there so purposefully.

The mandir in Wellingborough is restrained in its display of devotional aids. There are only six pictures gracing the walls and four in the shrine itself. The pictures on the walls are not oleographs, or similar to those favoured for trade calendars. Five are modern reproductions based on traditional Indian and western art, of high quality. One represents Jesus, head and shoulders only, crowned with thorns and carrying the cross, and the others are of Hindu deities. The sixth is a portrait of Sathya Sai Baba. In the shrine itself there are photographs of Sathya Sai and small effigies of Shirdi Baba, of Jesus and of Mary. Before the plaster statue of Sathya Sai there stands a figurine of Shirdi Baba.

Between the figures of Jesus and Mary stands a photograph of Sathya Sai Baba, about one foot square, head and shoulders only. As the pilgrims from Bradford entered and offered devotion, it became clear that the purposive focus of their visit was that particular photograph. An informant vouchsafed: 'There is nectar, honey, coming from the picture'.

Inspection revealed a moisture, a stickiness, on the

glass protecting the photograph. It appeared to be of a heavy, cloying consistency, not running freely. There were signs of moistness under the glass - on the photograph itself. The dampness could have been forming on the glass, then seeping beneath the frame to the picture. Otherwise it was forming on the photograph and seeping outwards to cloud the glass. Wellingborough devotees affirmed that the glass and the frame were cleaned every Thursday, but that the 'nectar' always persisted in reappearing on the outside of the icon (cf. Kasturi 1980b: 101). The pilgrims from Bradford offered devotions before the remarkable picture which had given additional substantial purpose to their journey.

One can confirm that there was, beyond doubt, a clinging moistness on the outside of the glass and that the photograph itself was affected by it. In the eyes of the devotees, the icon was miraculously exuding the substance. A member of the Bradford group again volunteered: 'Nectar, honey - from the picture'. On receiving the response, 'Is it amrit?', she agreed emphatically that it was. Having refrained from using the Indian term herself, thinking it would not be understood, her face lit up at the opportunity to acknowledge her belief in the presence of a substance with such sacred associations.

Amrit, and the reputed siddhic powers of Sathya Sai Baba exercised in producing it, and at such a distance, had drawn the members of the Bradford satsang to the mandir in Wellingborough. Its magnetic attraction had elevated the journey to a higher level of yatra in the contemporary mode than even the celebration of Baba's birthday could afford.

The pilgrimage thus became directed towards the witnessing of a miracle which itself verified the significance of the birthday festival held in Wellingborough that day. Such reputed wonders extend the boundaries of Bharat, flexibly conceived - as by Baba himself - to embrace, potentially at least, the whole of the cosmos. For some of the devout, it includes more than a few locations in the United Kingdom.

6.5 AMRIT: AMBROSIA

The term amrit denotes both a concept and a substance. As concept it means 'deathlessness'. As substance, it means ambrosia,⁵⁵ the elixir of the gods which bestows immortality as a gift. The myth of the churning of the ocean, seminal to much Indian symbolic theology, describes the emergence of that coveted nectar from the primeval sea in a motif which has imprinted itself deeply on Hindu lore (cf. Kjaerholm 1982: 51).

As substance, amrit was closely associated with soma, ritual offering, known to have been a potent drink. It was personified as Soma, one of the most powerful of the gods of the Rig Veda. In the Upanishads, soma was equated with semen, the seed of life. Considered as life's essence, it was sometimes accepted as an alternative to human sacrifice (Daniélou 1964: 51, 66). The equation of amrit, through soma, with semen, indicates a close correspondence in associations and significance between amrit and vibhuti (above 5.5). Amrit, as seed, suggests vibhuti, for Shiva in the Brahmanda Purana said 'I place my seed in ashes' (O'Flaherty 1978: 147). Their equivalence is evident in the teaching of Sathya Sai Baba, and in the perspectives of his votaries.

Amrit is as important to Baba's devotees as vibhuti, although not reputed to be so frequently materialised by him. In southern India, his bhaktas associate one particular annual festival with the miraculous creation of amrit. Vaikunta Ekadasi is traditionally the day when the gates of heaven are opened to receive those who have secured release from attachment to the world of illusion. It has become known to Baba's devotees as Amritodbhavam (birth of amrit) Day, 'when divine nectar emanates from his hand' (Kasturi 1975a: 70). Already in 1961 it was recorded that Sathya Sai had been performing this remarkable feat annually 'for many years'. It would happen during the bhajan singing for Vaikunta Ekadasi, or during Baba's homily to a congregation gathered for the festival on the seashore or on a dry river-bed. On 21 December 1958, for example, while Baba was touring Kerala, on a beach seven miles from Trivandrum:

Every one expected that Baba (would) distribute amrit 'taken' by him from nowhere ... and they were not disappointed; for, even as bhajan was going on, the fragrance of the nectar was clearly cognised, though no one knew from where! Baba's palms became sticky, as if saturated with syrup ... all knew that the fragrance was emanating from those palms; then, he held them together and pointed them at a silver vessel, when, lo, thick ambrosial 'honey' flowed into it from his hands

(Kasturi 1980a: 110-11; cf. 173)

Once, during the celebration of Vaikunta Ekadasi, Baba is said to have filled a tumbler with amrit from his mouth. Devotees also hold that partly-filled glasses of water, placed before Baba's icons, as might be done with the picture of any Hindu deity to slake symbolically the godhead's thirst, have become filled with extraordinary fluid. The liquid, a 'fragrant flavoured drink', is identified by the devout with amrit (Kasturi 1975a: 189-90).

Classical Hindu cosmology took amrit to be the source of the sense of smell (Danielou 1964: 51). Its association with fragrance is constant and invariable, whereas in the case of vibhuti the connection is occasional only. Amrit is said to be jasmine-scented.

Devotees affirm that amrit is exuded in astonishing quantities by specific items associated with Sathya Sai. It is recorded that, like vibhuti, it has been known to fall 'in showers' from his portraits (Kasturi 1980b: 1011 1975a: 181, cf. 186-87).⁵⁶ There is an account that in the home of one devotee an icon of Sathya Sai had been swinging from right to left rhythmically, in time with the singing during a bhajan mandal. The conclusion of the meeting was marked with an even more startling phenomenon: from Baba's mouth in the picture, amrit 'flowed in a gush' (Kasturi 1975a: 189-90). In one of the most recently published reports, an ethnically English devotee describes how she visited a temple dedicated to Baba in Mysore state. There she was shown two locketts, one depicting Shirdi Baba and the other Sathya Sai. 'From the back of these locketts flows amrit, a delicious, perfumed, clear honey-nectar which we were given to eat' (Mason 1984d: 3).

Amrit (as soma), and vibhuti, are identified⁵⁷ in concept and in substance in a highly significant discourse by Shiva in the Brahmanda Purana. Shiva is represented as referring to the capacity of ashes to illuminate brightly and to make fragrant. Seed and soma, vibhuti and amrit, are graphically linked there in the idea of a fragrance tangibly suggesting deathlessness. Pregnant concepts - illumination and forgiveness, detachment and release - are symbolised together by that metaphysical fragrance. Amrit and vibhuti thus come to represent 'the supreme purification of this entire universe'.⁵⁸

Amrit and vibhuti separately and together, can be seen to symbolise with combined Vedic and Puranic associations, India's most exalted ethical values and spiritual goals: self-mastery, illumination, detachment, release and immortality. They represent the culturally-perceived 'fragrance' of those sublime goals and the achievement of them.

The amrit which Sathya Sai Baba produces is said to possess a distinctive perfume, as also his vibhuti - the latter not so consistently. Such an attraction does not pass unremarked in Bradford, when devotees pay oral tribute to the effectuality of the products of their swami. At least one written testimony to the impact of that fragrance has also emanated from the satsang. In a letter written in 1978, an ethnically English member of the fellowship described what he believed to be the power of the scent of vibhuti. He was outlining the preparations made by another English devotee, a Londoner, for a visit to India in 1977. The second of these young men had been trying to interest his widowed mother, suffering from angina, in Baba's healing powers. The septuagenarian's interest was only quickened when, one day, she found her living room 'suffused with the most beautiful perfume ... coming from some vibhuti' which her son had left there. It was the aroma of that vibhuti, the young man vouchsafed, that persuaded his mother to accompany him to Prashanti Nilay.⁵⁹

Earlier amrit had figured significantly in the experience of the young man who had written that letter. He had come to have faith in Baba while travelling in India in 1975, although previously he had had no ardent interest in religion. He was

staying with friends in Delhi who exemplified an apparent contradiction: they were Muslim devotees of Baba. They pressed the English traveller to visit Sathya Sai's ashram. One of them spoke about vibhuti that had appeared on his picture of Baba - but the traveller had no opportunity to see it. Another of the Muslim friends showed the Englishman, according to his own testimony, a picture of Baba on which amrit had miraculously appeared. 'I saw it and felt it', he later acknowledged, 'as if someone had smeared honey on the picture' (14.6.77).

That encounter with amrit drew towards Baba a gifted young man who, following the advice of his friends, made his own acquaintance with Sathya Sai at Prashanti Nilayam. Soon afterwards he took up work as a solicitor in Leeds. Learning that there was a Sai centre in Bradford, he came to lodge with one of the devout families, and identified himself totally with the activities of the satsang.60

The testimony of that young man, while resident in Bradford, illustrates the kind of function that a perception of amrit can fulfil in the lives of Baba's votaries:

One time, when difficulties had arisen in the Sai organisation nationally, I went along to the home of a devotee whom I respect, to discuss the problem. I took volume seven of Swami's (Baba's) discourses, with me. It means a lot to me - that particular volume. At Prashanti Nilayam it became my Bible, and I found in it answers to all the intellectual and practical problems that arose.

I put the book down on the table at my friend's house, and when I picked it up, after it had only been left on the table for a minute or so, I found that it was sticky underneath. The stickiness was co-extensive with the book, precisely so. Was it amrit? I believe it was. The book is still to a certain extent sticky.

(14.6.77)

Early in 1981 amrit was believed to be materialising on an icon of goddess Amba in the Bradford mandir. At the conclusion of Mahashivaratri, 4 March 1981, groups of devotees gathered excitedly round the small picture

to gaze at the reputed amrit. A dampness there may have been, but it was not present to the touch: it lay beneath the glass protecting the icon. The most devout in the satsang were convinced that it was amrit. It was taken to be a sign of Baba's favour, his will to bless the endeavours of the satsang. It signified the auspiciousness of the location, the mandir. On an earlier occasion, in 1970, amrit had exercised an even more decisive influence on the devotion of the satsang (below 7.4).

Amrit and vibhuti as material substances have been shown to be inseparably related to abstract concepts designated by the same terms. They were, in the archaic world, identified with two divine personages, Soma and Vishnu. Later, and most clearly in the Puranas, certain significant roles of both deities were accommodated to those of Shiva. Both substances came to be identified with Shiva's creativity and his asceticism. The associations combine most closely in the concept of Shiva's dynamic heat, his tapas, which has to be cooled and thus sustained in order to issue in dramatic practical interventions. They are his siddhis, supranormal powers bestowed on those who 'nourish the path' that he has shown. The reputedly miraculous production of amrit and vibhuti by Sathya Sai Baba provides, in the view of his votaries, esoteric authentication of his person and what he claims for himself. The avowed manifestation of both substances on objects associated with Baba, creates - quite literally - landmarks in the perception of the world entertained by his devotees.⁶¹

Such landmarks provide orientation in a bewildering environment. They sustain one's adherence to dharma (form, responsibility, religion) in an apparently adharmic (formless, chaotic, secular) world. They may facilitate the perception of a cosmos in a bewildering chaos (cf. Malinowski 1954: 33-34, 69, 89-90). Such a perception can be crucially important for the recipients of a traditional world-view while undergoing the experience of migration and consequent cultural flux. It can be significant for the recipients of historic religious values in the face of scientific, technological and secularising change.

6.6 BHARATISATION: THE EXTENSION OF SACRED SPACE

The concepts 'cosmos' and 'chaos' have a long history of coherent use, representing polarisation in perspectives on the universe by subjects with a traditional conceptual schema. This polarisation may be activated when such observers perceive external forces which do not share their phenomenal field, or which by-pass their cultural heritage. In Indian ethics, the conflict between dharma and adharma exemplifies this tension precisely. It is implicit in the concept of the sanatana dharma, eternal order or responsibility, the ordained structure for lives and for the universe, challenged by that which would destroy the inter-relatedness of forms and functions.

An undisturbed traditional society tends to regard its own cultural heritage as coherent, orderly, self-contained and constructive. The world outside will be other: unruly, unstructured, immeasurable, divisive, destructive. Thus, the language, social mores, religion, cultural and ethical values, which define the identity of an Indian ethnic group, its dharma and its conceptual cosmos, may be understood to be threatened by a chaos of influences on migration to a foreign land. There is Bharat, and there is that which is conceptually a-Bharat (non-Bharat) or even anti-Bharat. Consequently, a world apparently hostile to norms derived from the sanatana dharma manifests a plurality of alien and contrary, if not demonic, values, to Gujaratis in Britain whose phenomenal field has been defined by that heritage. Such values appear to be outside the realm of coherence,⁶² for there are no discernible boundaries to structurelessness, adharma, chaos.

Historically, a caste-regarding, dharma-fulfilling, ritually superior Hindu had to submit to purificatory rites of a stringent kind on returning to his homeland, if he had dared to venture abroad. The existence of Bharat, like light revealing darkness, made manifest its own absence, the world outside. In Bharat, that on which life itself is contingent - the Ultimate, the Paramatman - had already manifested itself. It had offered the possibility of an experience of order and of the Transcendent. There, the sanatana dharma, like a pole-star, made a sound orientation possible, through life and across samsara.

Thus the Hindu community's perception of its own sacred space, and loyalty to its heritage of revelation and experience, have given it a specific view of the world outside India. That has to be taken into account in interpreting the religious functions of the Sai satsang in Bradford. In the modern world of population movements and cultural exchange, Hindu perspectives facilitate the perception of a divinely ordained mission for the sanatana dharma in the western world. In some cases, this broad perception has been reinforced by migration to alien lands in which Hindus have gone through prolonged phases of uncertainty about their welcome. Such unfortunate experiences have forced migrants to question the adequacy of the values inherent in the indigenous culture or cultures to which they have come.

In areas of the world where the traditional, local, religious and ethical values have appeared to be in a state of confusion, and their application seems to be neglected, the sanatana dharma appears to be particularly relevant to those whose fore-fathers were entrusted with it. It is not unnatural for them to believe that it must have a role in and for the new realm. Therefore, any flexibility in the concept of Bharat is enhanced when her inhabitants go abroad in substantial numbers. Its reference to culturally-transmitted perceptions and to a reputed sensitivity for spiritual insight, becomes elevated above merely geographical considerations. In such a context, Sathya Sai Baba's culturally organic, dynamic interpretation of the term can be expected to have magnetic appeal. Thus, his aides enthuse over their conviction that Baba has come 'to re-instate India as the guru of humanity' (Kasturi 1975b: 16). Correspondingly, for Sathya Sai's votaries in Britain, the new milieu cries out for orientation towards their ancient values, an enduring (sanatana) cosmos.

For Baba's devotees of Indian origin living in Britain, the process of settling the new territory involved a charting of the confusion of the unknown in the name of a reassuring heritage. Journeys that might otherwise have appeared to have no more than a casual importance, but whose characteristics approached those of yatra, partook of something of the significance of a rite of ¹'Bharatisation' or 'Idharmification'. IN

its elevating intention, such activity should not be seen as unrelated to the process of sanskritisation discussed by Srinivas and others. It is not unrelated either to the process of 'democratising' Hinduism, which some prefer to stigmatise as a 'vulgarising' of the heritage (Srinivas 1973: 132-33, 142). Its interpretation has also to be considered alongside Eliade's wider and pertinent discussion of cosmicisation (cf. 1961: 30-34). Particular allowance has to be made for this factor in interpreting the activities of those who have come to see themselves as a spearhead in the spiritual mission of Bharat in the wider world.

It appears, accordingly, that the Gujarati men and women who came to Bradford in the 1950s and 1960s entertained, to a significant degree, a traditional world-view. Even where it had been weakened by the processes of modernisation in India or in East Africa, it was well within recall and, if dormant, could easily be reinvoked. Their settlement in the United Kingdom in the second half of the twentieth century predisposed some Gujaratis towards re-activating their heritage. Britain must have appeared to them to be, in Sathya Sai Baba's terms, one of those lands ignorant of the riches of Bharat, where 'the wild growth of pride and greed, vice and sin' predominated (n.d.: 50). Some at least, influenced by his teaching, were moved to undertake activities which might have the effect of Bharatising the new world.

In Bradford, from the late 1960s until the mid-1970s, there was a burgeoning of cultural, caste and religious associations amongst Gujarati Hindus (above 1.3). These local societies had corresponding organisations in other parts of the United Kingdom. Amongst the religious associations, the number of Sai centres in Britain rose from seven to at least twenty-four between January 1975 and November 1978. The situation was ripe for journeys from centre to centre for the celebration of high and holy days. Thus, during the 1970s, the map of the United Kingdom began to be charted by Britain's Hindus in terms that had a relation to the cultural and religious heritage of India. Coach-loads of devotees, for example, came from Manchester, Bolton, the Midlands and London, to celebrate Guru Purnima in Bradford in 1975. Their journeys signalled an acknowledgement of Bradford's place in the process of Bharatisation.

In 1976, two coach-loads of devotees set out from Bradford to visit the ashram of the Community of the Many Names of God, at Llanpumsaint, Dyfed: totally new territory for the members of the satsang. They were aware that the community they were going to visit consisted largely of Baba devotees of English origin who had first established themselves in a temple in London. Seeking a fresh location, they had moved to Wales in 1973. In 1976, on the long journey from Yorkshire to southern Wales, the Bradford satsangis were accompanied by the first ethnically English person⁶³ to have identified completely with their own activities. It meant a great deal to them. After his visit to Llanpumsaint with the Bradford group, that young man longed to return, and in 1977 took up work in Cardiff in order to live nearer the ashram. His removal from Bradford was a great loss to the satsang. He had committed himself fully to its activities, had led bhajans sometimes on Thursday evenings, and was a lynch-pin of the Bal Vikas class, making his home with a local Gujarati family. In him, the interaction of two cultures found a focus that was not merely passive. He gave active encouragement to the devotees. In him, the enlarged and liberated concept of Bharat became manifest. Because of him, the concept of Bharatisation would not have been, if broached, merely an abstract idea. It was a human reality, empirically present.

Eventually, that young man took up residence at Llanpumsaint, a novice in the Community of the Many Names of God. Soon afterwards, he articulated graphically some of the perceptions that are embraced by the concept of Bharatisation of dharmification. In the narrow valley whose native Welsh place-names are ignored by the community, preferring to identify their ashram as 'Skanda Vale' (after Subrahmanya), the young man gazed up at the enfolding hillsides. He observed:

Even the hills around here looked dark and foreboding before Guru came and began to improve the place." There had been hostility to our buying this land - a big furore in fact in the Western Mail when we acquired the second farm. But it had been terribly neglected. I believe that as the local people are seeing what a good job ... Guru is doing, and how the place is improving, they are accepting us more. (25.10.79)

From 1975 onwards, members of the Sai satsang in Bradford have made a variety of communal journeys to attend special events in many locations. They have travelled to London, to the Midlands, in the north and to the south-west, criss-crossing the country in fulfilment of their devotion to Baba, a spontaneous process. That which was alien and threatening has receded as the new enlarged Bharat has been charted.⁶⁵ Its advocates have naturally sought recognition of its advent from representatives of the wider world. That is why the Mayor and Mayoress of Wellingborough were invited to open the proceedings at the celebration of Baba's birthday in November 1979. That was a gathering in which the process of Bharatisation, together with the deliberate mounting of a mission to the non-Indian community, made manifest, in this paradoxically sectarian but syncretic context, their essential unity.

Thus, any contemporary perspective on Hindu sacred space has to accommodate the phenomenon that where settlement has become long-term or permanent, it has created its own hiero-topography. Places of devotion and pilgrimage, during 'major fairs', become, as in India, 'visible centres for the diffusion of new ideas about religion' and for 'the spread of information about new cults' (Bhardwaj 1973: 215). That has been shown to be just as true of gatherings to celebrate 'major fairs' in the reinterpreted heritage of the dispersed population of Indian origin in the United Kingdom, as in its original homeland. The process is enhanced where the natural Bharatising motivation of substantial communities of Hindus in a diaspora, is further stimulated by 'new ideas about religion' which foster an attitude of mission to, and the consequent hope of a response from, the wider community.

The case of the middle-aged Sikh who once lived in Bradford (above 4.3) is instructive in this respect. He became a devotee of Sathya Sai in 1975, through the testimony of a member of the Bradford satsang, and through reading books that that person lent him. The Sikh was so convinced and enthusiastic that he soon became secretary and convenor of the Seva Dal group. In 1976 he emigrated again. He believed that it was Baba who had directed that he should live in Canada for some as yet unperceived mission. In 1978 he came back to Bradford on a holiday visit. The Sai mandir had become a unique spiritual home for him. He missed,

in Canada, the fellowship of believers that he had known in Yorkshire. He timed his return to Bradford to include the celebration of Mahashivaratri, always a major occasion for the satsang. His visit had, therefore, a clear religious purpose. It was a pilgrimage appropriate to the structure of Hinduism's new sacred space.

In Bradford again, that devotee spent as much time as possible at the mandir, absorbing the atmosphere and enjoying the fellowship. For him, it was a holy place: a hieros topos, a significant staging-post in the extension of Baba's influence from the sacred cosmos of India to the 'chaos' of Canada. Bradford's place in the charting of the map of the new Bharat, released from any geographical limitations, was, for him, assured.

It is places of pilgrimage that have, historically, defined Hindu sacred space. Prior to the twentieth century, India 'as a spatial entity' meant little to Hindus 'outside ... the framework of religion' (Bhardwaj 1973: 226). The footprints of pilgrims down the centuries gave geographical meaning to the concept of Bharat. There has been an 'Indianising' process whereby boundaries have been transcended, and local cultural and religious phenomena have become identified with 'a wider religious space' (ibid.: 173-74). The process is not merely geographically but conceptually dynamic, for Srinivas has observed that 'new agencies' have emerged, including the revitalised bhajan mandal and various guru-cults, to contribute to 'the evolution of a new structure' for 'reinterpreted Hinduism'. In describing that new framework, Srinivas selects the shrine of Sai Baba at Shirdi to exemplify his focus on the 'cult of saints'. He cites it as a 'favourite place for pilgrimage' in the late twentieth century (1973: 132, 142).

While the majority of the devotees of Shirdi Baba live in southern India, he has also become a significant focus of veneration for thousands of Hindus in Africa and in Britain. Devotion to him substantiates in the particular what Narsi Patel (1976: 236) has rightly observed in general: that bhakti cults exercise a mediating role between the all-Indian and the local traditions. In Britain, such cults also exercise a fluent function for the sacred space of

the Indian religious heritage. The proliferation of satsangs of the devotees of Sathya Sai Baba exemplifies this.

Novel scope for pilgrimage has thus signalled the advent and evolution of an unconventional sacred geography of the British Isles for Hindus. New agencies have responded to the redefinition of Bharat's notional space in such a way that room has to be made for the inclusion of such locations as Wellingborough, Bradford and Llanpumsaint, in any up-to-date hierotopography. Within the context of devotion to Sathya Sai Baba, it is not merely the revalorisation of bhajan mandal and its conforming to the 'cult of saints' that have provided the 'new agencies'. The focus on vibhuti and amrit, the significant 'supernatural' uses of the former and the reputedly miraculous appearances of the latter in Britain, have contributed markedly to the vitality of the concept of a new Bharat for Baba's devotees.

To his bhaktas, Sathya Sai Baba represents the sanatana dharma authentically in the modern world. He is perceived as embodying the capacity of that dharma to engage the tensions of the age through his person, his teaching, and the manifestation of his supranormal powers. The 'silent messengers' of his grace, the 'signals of (his) transcendence', are also invitations to pilgrimage. For those of Baba's bhaktas who have not seen them, but believe, they are mere 'rumours' of angels (cf. Berger 1973: 118; Hamnett 1973: 8, 10). Witnessing them, they endorse their status, identify with a community, and believe more strongly.

Such considerations had to be kept in mind in October 1982, when, in a bha,jan mandal, the young interim leader of the Seva Dal announced that there would be a coach trip for satsangis, on a forthcoming Saturday. The destinations were Coventry and Wolverhampton, 'where Baba has performed so many of his wonders recently'. The intention was to view amrit that had been appearing on sacred artefacts in those locations, and to visit the families reputedly blessed by Baba with remarkable interventions in their affairs. In such ways sacred space is currently enlarged and the Bharatisation of the United Kingdom by devotees of Sathya Sai takes place.

One cannot analyse the role of such factors in sufficient depth, without inquiring more deeply into the function of Baba's paranormal powers in the perceptions and practices of his devotees. That, therefore, provides the focus for the next stage in this study.

Paranormal Powers and the Fellowship

Individual responses to Sathya Sai Baba, negative or positive, are influenced by personal evaluations of the paranormal powers he is believed by many to possess. That is the case in Bradford. The account of the satsang so far given has drawn attention to the devotees' perceptions of Baba's reputed siddhis. It is now necessary to analyse the role played by such perceptions in the formation and development of the Sai satsang in the city.

The hall-mark of Baba's presence is his apparent power to 'take' quantities of vibhuti out of thin air. Even when he is physically far distant, vibhuti, or otherwise amrit, is said to appear unaccountably on icons or other objects associated with him in the homes of the devout. Those substances are, however, by no means the only material products that Baba is reported to create by siddhic power. Neither is materialisation the only mode in which Baba is reputed to exercise his siddhis. Furthermore, for at least two millennia prior to the advent of Sathya Sai, siddhis in a variety of forms have been acknowledged in India.

7.1 SIDDHIS: PARANORMAL POWERS

Patanjali, approximately sixteen hundred years ago, defined siddhis as 'perfections'. He taught that they are accessible to the adept practitioner of meditation whose discipline has led to a state of ecstasy and serenity (Yogasutras III, 37). He enumerated every legendary miraculous power known to Indian mythology and metaphysics. Prominent among them was the power of laghiman: the ability to be so light that the yogi could not only float in the air but actually, as in the Mahabharata (XII, 317), go wherever he would. Vacaspati Misra (c. 950 C.E.) and Bhoja Deva (1018-1060) systematically evaluated the techniques necessary for achieving

siddhis when they supplied commentaries to Patanjali's work. The eight mahasiddhis (great powers) isolated by Bhoja achieved prominence in the Indian yogic tradition. They are said to be authenticated in the heritage of siddha practice. They embrace such capacities as the ability to fetch far distant objects without apparent physical movement, to render one's body immaterial in order to penetrate other matter, and to exert sovereignty over the elements. The ability to assume any form whatsoever is encompassed, attaining anything that one desires. Powers to re-animate corpses and to recall previous incarnations are included in the elaborations on the original schema of Patanjali.

Affirmation of yogic siddhis in these astonishing forms is prominent in current manifestations of Hindu spirituality. They are still linked with the highest achievements in concentration of the mind and self-discipline. Given the eminence of Shiva as the supreme manifestation of the power attained by strenuous asceticism, it is natural that one should find an emphasis on siddhis in any cult in which a reverence for Shiva is all-pervasive (Eliade 1970b: 183; Zvelebil 1973: 60). The fact that goddess Siddhi, 'Realisation' or 'Success', is wife of Ganesha and therefore Shiva's daughter-in-law, corroborates this intense association.

Modern scholars have defined siddhis as 'magico-ecstatic powers' (Lannoy 1974:50) 'wonderful and supra-normal powers' (Gonda 1963b: 305). Reference is made to the suspension of the laws of nature and to the achievement of such an exalted state as can be equated with the 'complete attainment of ambitions and aspirations' (ibid.: 66). That might have appeared to be merely abstruse speculative theory has manifested itself empirically, according to widely reported eye-witness accounts. These reports are further sustained - although not necessarily corroborated - by the serious attention of sober scholars (Oman 1905: 63; Fuchs 1965: 212; Dhavamony 1971: 353; Binford 1976: 120-27; Swallow 1976: 233). Thus, what might otherwise have been dismissed as esoteric subjective delusion on the part of Patanjali and his contemporaries, has won apparent affirmation in the lives of an incalculable host of residents and travellers in South Asia after him. This aspect of the Indian heritage sometimes crystal-

uses in the conviction of the devout that this or that ascetic religious leader has achieved samadhi, a state thought to be beyond the point at which ability to manifest siddhis will have been realised: ultimate identification with the Eternal.

Notable examples of the liveliness of this heritage are found amongst Hindus in England, and not only amongst those who are Sathya Sai Baba's devotees. The tradition earths itself with contemporary relevance amongst bhaktas of Swaminarayan (1781-1830) and Jalaram Bapa, amongst others. A young Gujarati, an applied scientist active in the Shri Jalaram Shakti Mandal in Bradford vouchsafed:

Jalaram performed many miracles. There was an occasion when he restored dead pigeons to life. On many occasions he fed up to five hundred people from very small quantities of food. Once he distributed clothing in a miraculous way. (20.7.1980)

Literature circulated locally amongst devotees of Jalaram corroborates not only such siddhis, but other reputed incidents in the life of the Gujarati holy man, including the curing of paralysis and restoring of sight to the blind. One volume records with emphasis how Jalaram came to acquire the power known as 'in-exhaustibility', whereby whatever vessel he touched became a never-ceasing source of food for mendicants (Rajdev 1966: 21). Correspondence between the miraculous powers so ascribed to Jalaram Bapa and scriptural narratives of the Judaeo-Christian tradition should not of itself, however, be taken as evidence of a co-extensive parallelism across the full spectrum of the Indian siddhic heritage. Parallel motifs are manifest in certain accounts.

Narratives from India's yogic tradition also offer unique paradigms of siddhic phenomena. An activity may be said to have attained paradigmatic status when it manifests itself not in idiosyncratic accounts, but in representative creative writing of a high order, reflecting acute perception of Indian life. Thus Banerji's modern novel, Pather Panchali, mirrors India's perpetual fascination for metapsychology and the religio-magical in at least one graphic example.

Amongst exciting tales of climbing mountains and exotic journeys, a much-travelled uncle reports his adventures to a young wide-eyed nephew. Once he met a remarkable fakir. When someone pleased him with a gift, the fakir would ask which was their favourite fruit:

When they mentioned ... the fruit he would say, 'If you will go to that tree over there you will find one.' When they got there they would see, say, a mango tree, but if they had mentioned pomegranates there would be pomegranates on it; or it might be a guava tree and if they had said bananas they would find a bunch of bananas hanging from it.
(1969: 115)

Banerji was not being unwarrantably inventive. The uncle's tale was not pure creative fantasy. In the siddhic reputation of Sathya Sai Baba one finds the same motif. It is current amongst his devotees in Bradford, present in the most enthusiastically acclaimed literature circulating amongst satsangis. There is, for example, the testimony of the Raja of Venkatagiri to the parallel experiences of members of his family, in which even the prowess of Banerji's fakir was exceeded by Sathya Sai. Thus, for a group which included a son of the Raja, it is said that Baba produced from a single most unpromising tree, a mango, an apple, an orange and a pear of outstanding flavour (Murphet 1973: 157). The narrative, presented as a testimony of indisputable veracity, is received as such by devotees.

The Indian religious tradition, emphatic popular affirmation notwithstanding, advises caution regarding the exploitation of siddhis. Merely exhibited, they are a peril to the soul. There inheres in all of them a danger incipient to the practitioner. Pantajali himself admonished that the highest of the powers are in fact impediments to the achievement of perfection (K.W. Morgan 1953: 336). That is consonant with the Hindu perception that every asset, however remarkable, needs to be renounced. Thus the adept ascetic can be 'rich in magical forces?', whereas, using them, he will remain 'a mere "magician"'. There has to be 'a victorious struggle against the temptation of magic' for the yogi to attain 'new spiritual enrichment' (Eliade 1970b: 5).

A devotee of Sathya Sai Baba endorses this tradition in acknowledging that yogis who are 'absorbed in miracles' go on to lose their power, and have to start all over again to build up their spiritual accomplishments (Balasingham 1974: 51). 'It is ... a far more useful ... attainment, if a yogi can rid himself of envy, pride, greed and malice', Baba has said (Kasturi 1975a: 211). He underlines the personal dangers inherent in the exercise of siddhis. He exempts himself, however, since he is no mere yogi or sadhaka (aspirant). Thus one should not make the mistake of 'equating the seeker and the Sought' (ibid.: 158).

Baba himself sometimes makes light of his siddhis. He teaches that the first sixteen years of his life were characterised by divine lila, the next sixteen by mahimas (glories, wonders). The remaining years are being given over to updesam (homilies, teaching). Baba also explains that none of the characteristic preoccupations of the separate phases in his work are totally exclusive of the others (Kasturi 1980a: 62). Since he began teaching while he was still a youth, and his wonders are believed to have been witnessed at every stage, including the third beginning in 1958, his comment on the fluidity of the phases rationalises the self-evident. However, devotees in Bradford observe that Baba is more reluctant now to perform miracles than ever before.

There is another strain in Sathya Sai Baba's teaching where he lays emphasis on the fact that his 'miraculous acts' are the 'foundations' on which he builds. He has even said that they constitute the 'task' for which he has come (Ramachandran pre-1971: 8; cf. Kasturi 1975a: 20, 229-30).

Reservations about siddhis are, of course, articulated by the sceptical in India on grounds quite other than concern regarding the disadvantageous personal consequences of an over-indulgence of paranormal powers (Chaudhuri 1979: 302; Ghurye 1964; Mangalwadi 1977: 161-167; cf. Bharati 1972: 185-188). An analysis of the accounts of impartial observers, with a view to verifying or rejecting the claims that are made for siddhis in general - as well as for those of Sathya Sai Baba in particular - would be of extraordinary interest. Empirical observation and objective analysis have to be pursued as far as they can take one. All interested parties stand, therefore, in debt to those

researchers 'of strong empirical leanings and with a hearty taste for concrete verifiable data' (Zvelebil 1973: 129) who have pursued inquiries amongst yogic practitioners. Some have sought for verification or refutation even on or in their own person. The testimony of certain eminently reputable authorities is that siddhic powers should be investigated carefully 'and with awesome attention' (ibid.; cf. Clothey 1978). Nevertheless, that cannot be the immediate and overriding preoccupation in this study. Rather, it is to analyse the significance of the convictions held in Bradford regarding Baba's apparently paranormal accomplishments. One is engaged here in being 'methodologically agnostic' (Smart 1978a: 182).66

7.2 THE SIDDHIS OF SATHYA SAI BABA

There is widespread interest in the claimed siddhic feats of Sathya Sai Baba in India, amongst Indians abroad, and worldwide amongst people of diverse ethnic backgrounds with an interest in paranormal phenomena. Such a focus characterises virtually all the literature about him, emphasising the affirmation of Baba's reputedly extraordinary accomplishments by an incalculable number of his devotees. However, it is not so much the impact of his siddhis upon the masses, the poor of India and the uneducated, that is highlighted in the books. To a greater extent it is their attraction for, and endorsement by, eminent leaders of society, the highly-born, well-educated, influential and wealthy, that is picked out (Kasturi 1975b: 139; Murphet 1973: 157; Fanibunda 1978: 99). Ratification and authentication of Sathya Sai Baba's powers by representatives of a scientific elite is also prominent (Kasturi 1975b: 134; Balasingham 1974: 47; Murphet 1973: 152-158; Narasappa 1980: 4; n.d.: iv). In some of the hagiographic literature this process of high-level accreditation has become a self-conscious and deliberate exercise. Baba's greatness is thought to be reflected, however imperfectly, in the eminence of those who respond to him.

Prominent amongst Sathya Sai Baba's aides are several retired academics whose fields of scholarship have lain in the humanities and in the physical sciences. N. Kasturi, Baba's biographer, is a historian and former principal of the University of Mysore. He regards himself as having built up, over a period of

thirty years, prior to his association with Baba, a reputation for humorous 'carping criticism ... of the antics of social and religious leaders' (1975a: 157). V.K. Gokak, a literary scholar, has been chairman of the All India Sathya Sai Educational Organisations. A distinguished advocate of Baba's teaching, he was once Vice-Chancellor of the University of Bangalore, and Director of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study. S. Bhagavantam won eminence as Professor of Physics in the University of Andhra Pradesh, and afterwards as Director of the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, and Scientific Adviser to the Ministry of Defence. He was President of the All India Science Congress in 1972: a highly respected devotee (but et. Taylor 1987b: 130).

Amongst the scientifically-trained interpreters of the significance of Sathya Sai to the outside world are two non-Hindus whose works are cited frequently in this study. F.B. Fanibunda is a consultant oral surgeon. S.H. Sandweiss is a medical doctor and practising psychiatrist. The former is a Parsi, the latter an American Jew. The tenor of their testimony is corroborated again by two Indian medical professors, whose experience is recounted in apologetic works translated by R. Narasappa (1980; n.d.).

Committed witnesses such as Bhagavantam, Fanibunda and Sandweiss, their eminence and background notwithstanding, offer only intensely personal and enigmatic testimony to the authenticity of Sathya Sai's siddhis. Due weight has to be given to the fact that these three scientifically trained men have been moved by a conviction engendered by observation and experience gained in Baba's presence. However, although their initial approach may have been sceptical, there appear to have been factors that predisposed towards endorsement. They very quickly lost sight of the need for verification under controlled conditions, if that had been one of their early preoccupations. They became engrossed with other concerns. Their readers may hope for some firmly scientific disclosures of incontrovertibly objective evidence, only to find that their testimony moves rapidly into the area of philosophical speculation and introspection. Their advocacy is impressive because it presents evidence of the subjective conviction of three eminent men regarding the empirical manifestation of Baba's reputed paranormal powers. However, the fact that Sathya Sai's activities

are not subjected to investigation in controlled conditions , means that there is inevitably a failure to evaluate at a level of objectivity which would meet the standards of scientific research. The evidence of Bhagavantam, Fanibunda, Sandweiss and others, is intriguing but not compelling. Nevertheless, at the very least, it confirms the enigmatic nature of the case and the value of further inquiry.

In their publications, Bhagavantam, Fanibunda and Sandweiss appear to have been so overwhelmingly convinced of the authenticity of Sathya Sai Baba's siddhic feats that they move speedily from graphic descriptions of the phenomena to interpreting their significance. They do not tarry to elucidate finer points, such as scientific investigation would require. Since they were not actually engaged in laboratorial inquiry, it may be churlish to pass comment on the lacunae. Nevertheless, it remains a failure that the student of such matters is bound to regret. The cases of Bhagavantam and Fanibunda, different in detail but similar in essential structure, are paradigmatic.

Bhagavantam's first encounter with Sathya Sai Baba began acrimoniously and ended enigmatically. He acknowledges that it took four years of patient observation and inquiry before he was convinced of the authenticity of Baba's claims to divine authority. Crucial to his growing conviction about Baba's sublime nature was his witnessing of many occasions on which Sathya Sai 'transcended' the laws of physics and chemistry. Significant in that developing experience was the time when he saw Baba materialise the knife, needle and bandage that were needed to perform an emergency surgical operation. Out of this and other experiences, Bhagavantam endorses the claims of Sathya Sai in terms not antithetical to his own scientific training but drawn from it. Thus, while Gokak avers that Baba 'defies the laws of physics and chemistry', Bhagavantam, in the interests of what he sees as scientific precision prefers to speak of Sathya Sai's 'transcending' those given restraints.

Experiences inexplicable by known laws constitute a new law, Bhagavantam affirms. He became convinced that Baba is not subject to the essential limitations of a human being and what has been known about the natural world. He therefore found himself constrained to

enunciate a new law: ¹Bhagavan (Baba) transcends the laws of science'. That became 'another law of science'. Bhagavantam acknowledges that he found this process of re-education bewildering. It represented an 'utter denunciation' of what he stood for. Of that occasion when he witnessed surgery performed by Baba in which the latter 'created' the instruments needed, he wrote: 'I was a fairly lost person at that time!' Eventually he became convinced that Baba is 'a phenomenon ... transcendental ... divine' (Kasturi 1975a: 247-248; 1975b: 134-136; cf. Murphet 1973: 178).

Bhagavantam attributes his ultimate commitment to belief in Sathya Sai's paranormal powers, to an incident - 'the final straw' - four years after his first encounter with Baba. Sathya Sai was visiting Bhagavantam's home:

He walked over to a large sheet of stamps lying on the table and slowly moved his hand across the surface ... As (Bhagavantam) looked on, each image on the sheet turned into that of Sai Baba. He knew that Baba hadn't produced this from his sleeve and was finally convinced that Sai Baba was beyond his comprehension. (Sandweiss 1975: 45-46)

The intensely personal, ultimately unverifiable and consequently cyclic nature of the discussion is thus perfectly exemplified (cf. Fanibunda 1978: 99).

In the absence of proof that Baba is a charlatan, the mystifying nature of such accounts remains their hallmark. Whether an individual is moved towards belief or incredulity, the quality of enigma in the occasion itself, in the narrative, and in the response of such a person as Bhagavantam, is abiding.

The mode in which Fanibunda became convinced of Sathya Sai Baba's siddhic powers parallels that of Bhagavantam, except in so far as it was not preceded by a prolonged period of intermittent observation. There was initial scepticism, as also in the case of Sandweiss (1975: 27). In interacting with Fanibunda, the very action by which Baba convinced him of his siddhis inhibited any verificatory scientific pursuit. By a 'mere wave' of the hand, Baba showed him the limitation of scientific thought processes, and the correct perspective in

which scientific achievements had to be viewed'. Something fundamental for his self-assessment dislodged Fanibunda's allegiance to objective controlled investigation from priority in his intentions at that point. Thus he comes to express disillusion about science and its inquiries, describing them as a sedative, inducing torpor: 'The author too was living in this scientific stupor, until Baba shook him out of this sleep of delusion'. Yet Fanibunda is anxious lest his line of thought be interpreted as anti-scientific prejudice or anti-intellectualism. It is, he suggests, more a matter of priorities: 'Research ... is not the primary purpose of one's human birth. The quest for God must take precedence.' The search for God, he feels, involves the pursuit of another factor. Until he met Baba, he had sought the image of his inner self amongst his fellow scientists: 'What Baba actually did was to present an inner view of the author to the author' (1978: 7).

Thus, typically, the preoccupation with objective verification which characterises the scientist, was assuaged, for Fanibunda, in a context of personal conviction in which the controlled conditions of a laboratory were not given any primacy. A deeply subjective experience was nurtured by the conviction, introspectively realised, that he had encountered the Ultimate. By its all-embracing nature and its evidently tranquilising impact, this experience rendered objective scientific verification of initially puzzling phenomena more and more irrelevant.

The potential significance of the systematic investigation of siddhis is enormous. Yet devotees like Bhagavantam, Fanibunda and Sandweiss, have not sought from Sathya Sai Baba that he operate within controlled conditions for the purpose of objective verification. Their convictions about Baba are based on intense personal experience and have grown out of close observation. They have all the merit that such intimacy can afford. Such convictions are, however, transferable only to those willing to jettison the need for detached inquiry under controlled conditions. To the concerned investigator these three eminent witnesses offer themselves as surrogate observers, subjectively committed to accepting the conditions that Baba himself elects. For many who are predisposed by psychological, cultural or social factors

to believe, that may be good enough. It was not good enough, however, for Osis and Haraldsson, the one a research fellow in psychical phenomena and the other a lecturer in psychology.

Osis and Haraldsson investigated reports of extraordinary powers manifested by Sathya Sai between 1973 and 1977 (1979: 159). Despite their willingness to acknowledge the authenticity of verified paranormal experiences in fully investigable circumstances, they failed to secure from Baba a readiness to exercise his claimed siddhic powers in controlled conditions. They acknowledged, therefore, that their inquiries could not provide the certainties of laboratory work

In default of full cooperation from Sathya Sai, Osis and Haraldsson were unable to subject his apparent ability to materialise vibhuti out of nothing, to rigorous scientific scrutiny. However, aware that icons and other articles associated with Baba are reported to exude vibhuti, sometimes in large quantities and far removed from his presence, they committed themselves to an investigation of that phenomenon. After eliminating naively credulous and obviously spurious accounts, they felt that the testimony to these occurrences was still impressive. In spite of the difficulties, they attempted a programme of controlled scientific verification or exposure. The mere examination of some of the icons in question did not and could not prove to them how the powder had got there - whether it had been generated by some natural process or paranormally or placed there surreptitiously and deceitfully. Furthermore, chemical analyses of specimens of the vibhuti revealed no remarkable qualities in the substance (cf. Kasturi 1975a: 182, 187).

Osis and Haraldsson began to find that their interviews with witnesses were more informative than their physical examination of the icons and their chemical analyses of the vibhuti had been. They pursued their inquiries with two 'highly qualified scientific researchers at the prestigious All India Institute of Science'. These two men, independently of each other, claimed to have actually seen vibhuti settling on their devotional pictures of Baba. There was also a dental surgeon and his wife who claimed to have witnessed ash forming in large quantities on icons in their domestic

shrine. However, ultimately Osis and Haraldsson's pursuit of objective proof of paranormal occurrences in controlled conditions was abortive:

Our efforts personally to observe either the ash in the process of settling on the pictures, or to find it appearing on our own pictures placed in sealed shrine rooms, were not successful. On one occasion Osis and Dr. Venkatesan were guarding the doors to Mr. Kupanna's shrine room where we had placed our own pictures of Baba. While the ash did not appear on our pictures, it ostensibly came to Mr. Kupanna, who remarked, 'As I think of God, the ash comes to me, but you both are talking science all the time'. Maybe our attitude was indeed counterproductive.
(1979: 162)

It is endemic in such a situation that a Hindu holy man who claims siddhic powers will exercise those reputed powers as a call to recognition and commitment. His reputation constitutes an invitation not to objective scientific assessment but to unquantifiable interpersonal response. Those who appear to exercise such powers, Sathya Sai Baba amongst them, understand the manifestation as the disclosure of a reality that is not normally empirically accessible. It is too ineffable to be subjected to the caustic scepticism of laboratorial analysis. In such a situation, there is a call for a response to a person which, by definition, has to remain within the realm of individual human interaction, an 'I' with a 'thou'. Furthermore, the context becomes charged with the qualities of the sublime, when a 'thou' is mystically perceived to be the 'Thou?'. There is allurement and dependence, charisma and mystery. Interpersonal attraction may evolve at a distance, like that between Bradford and Puttaparthi. The context is not predisposed, therefore, towards investigative, impersonal techniques of verification and analysis, in which not merely a preliminary concern but the overriding, pervasive factor has to be scepticism.

The nub of a crucial problem for those who apply themselves to theology lies in the fact that the gods, by definition, have not been such as to subject themselves to testing under controlled conditions. It is of their

essence. They should not succumb to investigative analysis by human beings in circumstances over which they do not exercise control. To be so subject to laboratorial testing is to be accessible, to be manipulable, to be no more than an extension, if not of man himself then of the physical world of which he is the steward. It would be to abdicate from the concept of deity as that on which all else is contingent. Certain mythological narratives notwithstanding, neither the semitic nor the Indian religions contemplate seriously such abdication. Sathya Sai Baba may, therefore, not be merely prevaricating when he refuses the request that he subject his reputedly paranormal powers to the systematic tests that scientific investigation would require. He may, on the contrary, quite legitimately be theologising: 'doing' theology.

Thus, the enigmatic nature of the phenomena addressed in this discussion of the reputation of Sathya Sai, will never be transcended in the absence of incontrovertible proof that the agent of these apparently paranormal experiences is a charlatan. Indisputable revelations of deceit would have to be produced to resolve the conceptual impasse. In default of that, in both belief and disbelief the quality of enigma has to remain. Sceptics might argue that the onus of proof must rest on the believers, since it is their claim that the observed laws of science are being transcended. The believers, however, will counter that there are factors involved which, by definition, are not amenable to such proving.

Bhagavantam, Fanibunda and Sandweiss offer many descriptions of Sathya Sai Baba's feats which they have witnessed, and photographs of items they believe him to have materialised (Sandweiss 1975: 177; Fanibunda 1978: 15). Such accounts are important, even if unverified in controlled conditions. The affinity of certain religious phenomena and particular forms of magic, offering potential for both the charismatic practitioner and for the charlatan, is characteristic of the situation (cf. Malinowski 1954: 88, 89). It is in this connection that the multi-faceted testimony of Fanibunda is of particular interest. His training in the use of hypnosis in medicine, skill with the camera, and status as an internationally known magician, conjurer and mind-reader

were engaged more than his scientific background, in investigating the authenticity of Baba's powers. He felt that he was well-equipped to detect whether the cunning of charlatanry was being employed to beguile the gullible in the service of a spurious spirituality. With inside knowledge, he was well qualified to discern the deftness of a performer's art.⁶⁷

Between 1973 and 1977, Osis and Haraldsson investigated allegations of fraud that had been levelled at Sathya Sai Baba. They acknowledged that their conclusions had to be 'very tentative'. They did not find any specific instance proved convincingly, concluding only that 'the ostensibly paranormal phenomena' effected by Baba, merited 'major research efforts' (1979: 163; cf. 1977: 33, 42).

In 1976, a working party appointed by the University of Bangalore to investigate superstitions and miracles, inquired into allegations of fraudulent practice against a reputed satellite of Sathya Sai, a seven-year-old boy popularly known as 'Sai Krishna'. The committee's verification of the accusations, stimulating a spate of scurrilous publicity, was extremely embarrassing for Baba's devotees, suggesting guilt by association or by apparent endorsement. Such a finding did not, of course, mitigate the need for a full examination of the claims of Sathya Sai Baba himself. The committee that had mounted that exposure of fraud could not, however, persuade Baba to allow them to investigate the authenticity of his own renowned paranormal effects (Mangalwadi 1977: 167-168).

Rigorous inquiry, systematically and objectively carried out, is capable of establishing charlatanry beyond doubt, when it is present. Yet even laboratorial analysis in controlled conditions offers no way of demonstrating authentic avatar-hood to determined sceptics. It is not of that order. Reference to human ignorance of as yet unperceived, or poorly understood, laws governing the natural world, would always offer the possibility of an indecisive conclusion (cf. and ct. Murphet 1973: 181). Even the most rigorous controlled investigation could only affirm the negative or like the more limited inquiries of Osis and Haraldsson, remain intriguing but inconclusive.

Zvelebil was involved in linguistic research on Tamil dialects when, in 1958, he stumbled by accident upon cittar texts - the writings of Tamil siddhas. He investigated further. In 1967-68 he met a practising Tamil siddha and on several occasions witnessed the manifestation of his powers, 'some of which were of very high achievement?. The man he encountered claimed to belong 'to the line of ... one of the two originators of the Tamil system of ... siddha medicine' and ran a practice 'as a siddha physician' in Madras (1973: 14). This experience led to Zvelebil's concern that researchers should pursue such inquiries further. Others may believe that the only relevant investigation would be addressed to an examination of the simplistic gullibility of the human race. That view, if dogmatically applied to the case of Sathya Sai Baba's siddhis, would be an unwarranted imposition upon such evidence as is yet available (cf. Osis and Haraldsson 1977: 42).

A significant group of detractors from Sathya Sai Baba's reputation for spiritual leadership have in different ways confirmed that he manifests paranormal phenomena. Their particular brands of antagonism do not render them unwilling to concede that Baba works the wonders attributed to him. Such witnesses have been moved by scepticism regarding the methods Sathya Sai employs or by disapproval of, or disenchantment with, the power they acknowledge him to demonstrate.

Khushwant Singh, eminent journalist and commentator on Indian life, has acknowledged the strange sensation occasioned by Baba's laying his hands on his head. Singh, agnostic in matters of theology and iconoclastic in spirit, has also vouchsafed that he saw Sathya Sai produce a Japanese-made watch inexplicably out of the air. In the same way, intriguingly, he avows that Baba materialised a bottle of whisky for him. Unable to explain how these effects were brought about, but having no doubt at all of their empirical reality, Singh described them dismissively as 'tricks?.⁶⁸

Striking too, is the conviction of an avowed antagonist of Sathya Sai, a disillusioned American devotee, who also does not doubt Baba's ability to manifest siddhic powers. Robert Talafierro ('Tal') Brooke believes that the supranormal force employed by Baba is not divine, nor merely human, but demonic. He was in a

privileged position between January 1970 and July.1971 to observe Baba at work. His subsequent polemical writing reflects no scepticism whatsoever about Sathya Sai's ability to obtain the effects with which he is credited.

Brooke offers detailed accounts of how, often as a member of a select band of privileged witnesses, he observed the apparently miraculous production not only of vibhuti but of many other substances on various occasions. These items included metal plates displaying coloured photographic likenesses of Baba; an Indian sweetmeat in a quantity the size of a baseball; a stone which Baba immediately transformed; and five plaited rings. Brooke also offers a first-hand account of Baba's seemingly paranormal transportation of objects from one place to another. He provides eye-witness testimony to the two well-known miracles of Mahashivaratri, the mahabhishekam of the effigy of Shirdi Baba and the lingodbhava, in 1970 (see above, 5.4). Brooke believed at the time that the linga that was disgorge was an opal or an emerald, but his companion that it was probably a moonstone. Brooke also refers to a sensation constantly experienced in Baba's presence but most apparent on those occasions when materialisation was about to take place. He was aware of a supranormal potency active in Baba, a 'strange force' filling the air, 'a surge of energy' permanently deriving from his person (1976: 58-59, 78, 81, 89, 99, 103-106).69

Much of the significance of Brooke's testimony lies in the fact that although he has become vituperatively antagonistic towards Sathya Sai, he still confirms Baba's capacity to achieve the reported results. 'There was no earthly way Baba could have done these things' (ibid.: 104, cf. 58). Brooke's subsequent conversion to an evangelical form of Christianity has not led him to denounce Baba as a mere charlatan. His disenchantment developed on the basis of disappointment over ethical matters. Convictions about morality, especially about what is permissible in sexual mores, were at the heart of it.⁷⁰ Not doubting the effectuality of Baba's paranormal powers, Brooke became convinced that they do not depend on trickery or illusion.⁷¹ He came to perceive their source as satanic: 'What resided within his shell was neither divine nor yet entirely human' (ibid.: 178, cf. 9, 115, 128).

The testimony of Brooke would be rejected by some as subjective, intuitive, simplistic and reductionist. Evangelical Christians are committed to a concept of the personified power of evil which is dynamic and pervasive. Therefore a Christian might affirm the presence of such a power on bases other than those provided by empirically verifiable facts. Yet the importance of Brooke's oblique and polemical testimony has to be acknowledged. Subjectively and tangentially, it corroborates the conviction of Zvelebil that siddhis in general, and of Osis and Haraldsson that the powers of Sathya Sai Baba in particular, merit scrupulous investigation and careful analysis. In an obverse mode, it underscores the witness of countless devotees that the shakti of Sathya Sai is a force to be accounted for. It suggests that the siddhis of Baba serve not only as a phenomenon which identifies his friends but also as a catalyst which defines his enemies.

Thus, response to the apparent charisma of Sathya Sai Baba, the empirical nature of many of the reputed products of his siddhis notwithstanding, remains enigmatic of analysis. Subjective factors, not easily amenable to systematic inquiry, are activated. This becomes apparent even in Zvelebil's appeal for the fastidious application of scientists to the phenomenon of yogic siddhis. He called for 'awesome' attention (1973: 129). That might be more than controlled conditions could supply. It suggests an unquantifiable dimension, characterising a subjective human response, not the sceptical automatic quality of objective laboratorial analysis. Thus, in making his appeal for detached dispassionate inquiry, Zvelebil's choice of words testified to the engagement of affective factors. His plea epitomises the dilemma of science confronted by apparently paranormal phenomena. Respect for the paramountcy of controlled conditions can be compromised by less easily investigable factors. Personal dispositions to acknowledge and accept or to reject and deride may be scientifically disabling, combative of objectivity. Zvelebil may thus be indicating with one word the apparent helplessness of investigative science in an enigmatic area.

Charisma is not amenable to analysis in controlled conditions. That is true, even apart from the un-

willingness of Sathya Sai Baba to subject himself to sceptical inquiry. The value of a thoroughly objective investigation, mounted with Baba's cooperation by researchers such as Osis and Haraldsson, would have been that elements of deceit might have been exposed. Thus, in the absence of any incontrovertible proof that he is a devious fraud or a gifted magician, Sathya Sai will and must remain an enigma. Both the authentic avatar, and the charismatic leader who merely lays claim to that most exalted position, have to share the same condition. So long as such claims are not shown to be palpably false, they continue to present an intriguing dilemma to all detached inquirers.

It would be no small matter to confirm that a person is manifesting siddhic power. The attendant difficulties approach the problems involved in establishing that a person is an avatar. Even after scrupulous examination in controlled conditions, the evaluation of positive confirmatory findings in an investigation of either siddhis or the character of an avatar would engage the subjective attitudes of the researchers involved or the assessors of the results.⁷² Those predisposed to scepticism would always be able to question the validity of positive indicators by querying the rigour of the exercise, prolonging what would be both a perpetual experiment and an inescapable dilemma. The only way out is to demonstrate charlatantry. If palpable falsehood can be proved beyond doubt in any specific instance, then the relevance of further speculation about that incident can be eliminated. In the absence of such a demonstration, the matter remains enigmatic.

Many issues and incidents pertinent to the substantiation or refutation of siddhic or avataric claims are undoubtedly open to investigation. It is well, however, to recognise the limitations of the undertaking. Apart from the clarification of issues, incidents, and perceptions, progress beyond enigma (conceptually) and dilemma (practically) can only be made by the elimination of data or personalia through the confirmation of charlatantry. No absolute verification of positive claims is, in the nature of the case, attainable.

7,3 BABA'S SIDDHIS AND THE BRADFORD SATSANG

Sceptical observers tend to regard most devotees of Sathya Sai Baba as gullible, if not ill-educated, people. That is a function of the inevitable prominence given by the devout to Baba's reputed paranormal powers. In Bradford, films of the mahabhishekam of Mahashivaratri at Prashanti Nilayam allow devotees to witness Baba's siddhis with a closeness greater than they would be likely to attain at the event itself. Watching a video can be the initiation of a commitment derived from observation.

Films, therefore, play a significant role amongst Sathya Sai's votaries. When Baba goes on one of his occasional tours of Indian provinces, his progress is always filmed. As at Prashanti Nilayam, a wide range of venerable academics, regional, national and sometimes military leaders, are often seen to grace the platforms from which Baba gives his discourses. Thus, there is the incontrovertible evidence of popular films to reinforce the testimony of articles and books that such figures as, for example, Dr. K.M. Munshi,⁷³ a doyen amongst the most revered of India's public figures, have been drawn to faith in Sathya Sai by direct experience of his siddhis. Even the least read amongst Baba's Bradford bhaktas know from what they have seen that the influential and highly-educated are prominent in Sathya Sai's entourage. Devotees, therefore, do not feel that they are being taken in. On the contrary, they know themselves to be in company with a select elite, members too of an increasingly international fellowship. The emphasis and evidence of the films is such that once a Punjabi devotee in Bradford felt it necessary to affirm: 'It's not just the clever that come to Baba, but people in every walk of life' (10.1.78).

One does not need to be an avid reader, therefore, to know that a prominent scientist regards Sathya Sai's activities as transcending the laws of nature. It becomes patent on the screen. The films show that Bhagavantam sustains his integrity in the face of personal experiences which flout known mundane limitations with a logic that he has evolved to encompass that originally unanticipated contingency. Eminent devotees communicate to the on-looking audiences their

conviction that if science is being transcended, it is not able to control its own transcending. Unfathomable forces are understood to be at work which extend the range of the possible into the hitherto inconceivable. The same logic, of intuition based on esoteric, eccentric or occult experience, has nourished the centuries-long respect for siddhis in the culture of India and sustained the growth of yogic 'science' from Patanjali onwards. This reluctance to enthrone human rationality above subjective perception has played a part in persuading a section of the Gujarati Hindu population in Bradford, and some of their associates in faith, to devote themselves to Sathya Sai Baba.

Amongst the Bradford devotees, the increasing sophistication of the young has to be taken into account. It is evident that the number of graduates in science and technology, and persons otherwise qualified in related disciplines, amongst the participants in the satsang, is growing. Such young people discipline their minds with the conviction that science has its limitations, its master. There is thus, within this devout population, a reticence, a humility, regarding the absolute claims often made for science. There is also a conviction that in Baba they have encountered the one who is able to transcend it all.

A science graduate in his early twenties, associated with the satsang and working in the production of computer systems, spoke informatively of his attitude towards the relationship between his training and his faith: 'Science and religion are two separate worlds', he said, 'but wherever science seems to contradict what Baba says or does, then science must be in error' (14.3.80). That was the local articulation of Bhagavantam's point about the one who 'transcends' natural laws. Fanibunda reached the same conclusion on the day he overcame his scepticism and decided to become a devotee (1978: 7).

The gulf between the accepted laws of science and the phenomena reputedly manifest in Baba's siddhis is not discerned by devotees in Bradford as a hindrance to faith, but rather as its ground. The same perception characterises the devotional literature about Sathya Sai, and demarcates it from detached discussion. Some exceptions are to be found in articles written by those

who are sympathetic towards an acceptance of paranormal phenomena in general. They often afford positive evaluation to the claims of Baba's devotees without endorsing them all, or without drawing all the implications from them that devotees draw.

Positive perception of Baba's siddhis as the ground of faith distinguishes devotees from the general public. The exceptions to this are again those who are committed to a sympathetic evaluation of occult phenomena in general.⁷⁴ Such limited attraction as the satsang in Bradford has been able to exercise for the wider community has been built upon a mutual recognition of Baba's siddhis. Any element of isolation that exists between the satsangis and the total Hindu community in the city is also a function of the recognition or otherwise of Baba's supranormal powers.

In Bradford, as elsewhere, some Hindus are prepared to pour scorn on what they see as the gullibility of Baba's disciples. There are those who remain agnostic. There are also Gujaratis whose families have been accustomed to acknowledge the reputed nineteenth century siddhis of Jalaram Bapa, some of whom now also pay tribute to the powers of Sathya Sai. The devotees of Jalaram, however, like those of Sai Baba of Shirdi, are not all ready to recognise the claimed siddhis of one who purports to be a contemporary avatar. Conversely, the bhaktas of Sathya Sai experience no difficulty in acknowledging the wonders said to have been worked by both those two earlier figures. It is relatively easy to extend one's faith backwards from an awareness of current manifestations of sublime power to previous instances whose authenticity is unverifiable now anyway. Having made the concession in principle in respect of a contemporary figure, it is not problematic to pay respect to the memory of deceased siddhas. With the chronology reversed, some committed devotees of Jalaram in Bradford find it as difficult to acknowledge a contemporary avatar, as do many of the bhaktas of Sai Baba of Shirdi in India (cf. above 4.1).

Tacit recognition of the siddhis of a contemporary avatar can compromise an individual's delicate socio-ideological alignments, not to mention those of their family or gnati (sub-caste). That is so within the

Gujarati social and cultural unit in Bradford. Acknowledgement might imply that the next step should be taken. One should then revere him whose avataric siddhis have been tacitly recognised, and whose claim to be the chosen vessel of divine revelation for this age appears to be so endorsed. Any current avatar must appear to have his own compelling precedence over all previous manifestations, temporarily at least. An inconsequential acknowledgement is practically impossible: it carries implications for commitment.

It is not surprising, therefore, that leaders within the Hindu population in Bradford, the communities for whom they are the spokesmen, and other individuals, sometimes show concern to distance themselves from actions which could imply endorsement of the particular convictions of the Sai satsang. That is the explanation of the tardiness of the representatives of both the Hindu Cultural Society and the Shree Prajapati Association to allow iconic representation of Sathya Sai in their mandirs. It also provides a background for understanding the comment of a Hindu leader in the city who affirmed, pointedly but not altogether accurately, that he and the members of his caste disapprove of any guru who claims to be God incarnate: 'Whoever he is, he still needs to worship God' (16.8.82). Theologically it was the feasibility of contemporary avatars in general that was being denied. Practically and locally, one particular claimant of divine authority was being disparaged, and a distance was being affirmed between the speaker and his associates on the one hand and the satsang of that claimant on the other. A prudent stance to assume, for all ideological positions have implications for social and community-political affairs. The statement correlates with the fact that if one remains agnostic about someone's siddhis, one can remain uncommitted about his satsang.

Thus, those in Bradford who wish to participate in the public affirmation of the Hindu religion in a general way, but who do not acknowledge the siddhic claims of Sathya Sai, associate with one of the other Hindu religious societies in the city. If they are of non-Gujarati background, they will join with the Hindu Cultural Society (Bowen 1981: 45-47; 51-52). If they are Gujaratis they will attend the Shree Hindu Temple or a sectarian satsang, like that of the

devotees of Jalaram Bapa (1.3 above). The latter's reputed siddhis do not normally evoke acrimonious disclaimers like those of a contemporary practitioner, for that would be to challenge a whole historic heritage in a context in which neither verification nor disproof is possible.

In Bradford, as elsewhere, some Hindus who are generally respectful in matters of religion, are not willing to be associated with Sathya Sai's siddhic claims because they are not at all interested in paranormal religious phenomena. They are only antagonised by affirmations of that sort.

Thus, negatively and positively, the siddhis themselves are constitutive of the community. Those who reject them do not belong to the satsang. Those who affirm them provide it with its raison d' être. It is acknowledgement of the siddhis that demarcates the satsang from the wider world. It has been formative of its faith and definitive of its theological perceptions.⁷⁵ The same factor was constitutive of the satsang at its inception. Any subsequent growth has been generated by a parallel acknowledgement.

7.4 THE ROLE OF SIDDHIS IN THE FOUNDATION OF THE SATSANG

Convictions regarding the authenticity of the paranormal powers of Sathya Sai Baba played a decisive role in the commitment of the president of the satsang and his wife to Baba's cause. Such convictions led them from indifference towards Baba to dynamic faith. It is around their commitment that the satsang in Bradford has been built from the beginning.

The wife of the president came first to an embryonic faith in Baba. She then played a part in quickening her husband's interest. However, they are not concerned about precedence one over the other. They acknowledge, rather, another precedent, affirming that it was Baba who was seeking them, whose blessings were with them - even before they began to seek him. This couple avows that there were three ways in which they had 'participated in Baba', while they still lived in Uganda, in advance of their own devotion to him. Peripherally, and vicariously, but from their own point of view significantly, they were touched by the

faith of others. In the husband's own words; 'Baba came to our house very early. Very early he was with us' (14.9.79).

The first way in which the president of the satsang and his wife understand themselves to have entered into Baba's sphere of influence and to have participated vicariously in his blessing, is through their receiving prasad in the home of friends. They were devotees of Sathya Sai. Food served in that house in Kampala had first been offered to Baba.

Secondly, in 1965 the president and his wife accepted the gift of a photograph of Sathya Sai, personally autographed, from an acquaintance who had invited them to chose a devotional aid from his collection of icons. That signed portrait, permanently garlanded, occupies a place of honour in the Bradford mandir.

In 1966, the husband attended a memorial puja, following the death of a close friend. The bereaved family had earlier become devotees of Sathya Sai. For the husband, that was the third mode of vicarious participation in Baba's blessing, the puja being performed in the setting of a bhajan mandal. It was the first occasion on which the husband recollects having sung bhajans to Baba.

In 1966 also, the wife read some Gujarati devotional books about Baba. She believed what she read, but had no personal experience to support her growing conviction. Neither she, nor her husband, was attending bhajan sessions at the time. Later in 1966, her husband also began to read about Sathya Sai. In February 1967, an event occurred which confirmed the wife's embryonic faith. It was the first of four occurrences, succeeding each other rapidly in as many months, which the couple came to recognise as 'miracles' of Baba. Taken together, those events established them as actual but quiescent votaries. Even when the family left Uganda in March 1967, the husband and wife had already come to a position in which they believed in Baba's siddhis, without regarding themselves as devotees. Nevertheless, their commitment was burgeoning.

The first of the four occurrences took place when the husband was still working as an accountant in Uganda.

He had borrowed an automatic adding machine from his employers and had brought it home. One day, while he was out, his children found it, interfered with it and broke it. All efforts to effect an instant repair were abortive. The distraught wife prayed, 'Baba, we've not done anything wrong. Please help us:' Her testimony is that immediately after that prayer the machine functioned again. This event occurred two weeks before the family's departure for England.

In March 1967, only two days prior to the family's migration, the second reputed miracle took place. Not having been able to save enough money to cover the cost of the journey to England, the husband had been anxious about his finances. He had, however, managed to arrange to borrow what he needed. They were to leave on a Saturday. On the Thursday immediately preceding, he received word from the person who had promised a substantial loan to the effect that he would not be able to make the cash available after all. The husband was frantic. Although his wife was entertaining visitors who had called to wish them well, and he himself had only just got home from work, he excused himself from the company. He knew that the family's situation was desperate. He recalls:

I went off to look for a friend who might have been able to help. He used to attend Sathya Sai Baba bhajans every Thursday evening, so I went to the house where the bhajans were held, and I waited outside in the hope of seeing him coming. Someone saw me and pressed me to go inside. It would have been very impolite to refuse. I went in, but kept my eyes sharply open in case my friend came.

The bhajans had started and I joined in singing some of them. After a while I felt great peace of mind at that meeting - from the bhajan singing and from the arati. In fact, they asked me to go to the front to perform the arati. Someone announced to the meeting that I was about to leave for England. The leader of the meeting gave me a coconut from the prasada, a sign of divine blessing. Therefore I knew that I would go with Baba's blessing. That meant a lot to me.

I felt great peace of mind - from the bhajans, and the arati, and the prasad. The peace of mind I got there was like one of Baba's miracles. I wasn't anxious any more about the money. I went home and told my wife that she shouldn't be worried either. If we were to go to England, the money would come. If not, we would stay in Uganda.

(14.9.79)

The acquaintance for whom the husband had searched never arrived at the bhajan mandal that had imparted such serenity to the intending migrant. Thus, knowing that his friend worked in a bank, the husband set off next morning to be there before it was open even for the employees. The bank opened, but the man had not arrived. He came half-an-hour later. The husband, more and more tense with uncertainty about what was going to happen to him now, explained his anxiety as quickly as he could. The bank employee regretfully replied that it was impossible for him to help personally. He gave the husband the name of a teacher whom he felt he should see. Taking a taxi to reach the teacher's school as quickly as possible, the husband found him unexpectedly waiting outside:

I was amazed that the man knew I was coming. Later on I asked my friend who worked in the bank whether he had phoned the teacher, but he hadn't.

I explained my trouble to the teacher. He said, 'Don't worry. Let's go home.'

Without asking me to sign anything, that man gave me 5,000 shillings! It would be like £5,000 now! And there was nothing at all in writing! It was a miracle!

(14.9.79)

The two other events occurred in quick succession, just after the family's arrival in England - occurrences which came to attract to themselves exceptional significance in the thinking of the husband and wife. A fifth took place nearly three years later, immediately subsequent to the couple's making their first public acknowledgement of their faith in Sathya Sai. It was understood by them to confirm the rightness of their commitment. The husband now refers to it as 'the main

miracle' (21.9.79). Later, this couple and their growing family encountered other instances of Baba's reputedly miraculous powers, while on visits to Prashanti Nilayam and also in Bradford. This participation in what were, and are, believed to have been supranormal events, has exercised a dominant influence on the subsequent life of the couple and their children.

Without the incident of the remarkable provision of the money there might have been no further development in the embryonic faith of the couple whose influence became seminal to the evolution of the Sai satsang in Bradford. The incident involving the adding machine had been most deeply significant for the wife. It had acquired importance for the husband only in retrospect. The astonishing solution of the family's urgent financial problem, following the emotive experience at the bhajan mandal, supplied the real stimulus for the husband's faith in Sathya Sai. It established fertile ground in which later interventionist interpretations of what might otherwise have been seen as only casual coincidences could be based, an experiential pivot around which the devotion of both the husband and the wife could orientate itself. Without it, this couple's embryonic faith in Baba might have lain dormant, and the fifth and final happening in the series, crucial for the early growth of the satsang, would never have taken place. The couple would not have been known for their commitment to Sathya Sai. The husband characterises their position before that second event in this way: 'We were interested in (Baba), but were not involved. We had a bit of faith. We were participating in Baba. From then on it grew.' (21.9.79).

In the husband's view, his moving experience in the bhajan mandal in Kampala, Uganda, and the subsequent provision of the money needed for the journey to the United Kingdom, established his conviction that Baba approached his family before they made any move towards him. There is a certainty of having been called. The husband has vouchsafed: 'It was Baba's willing for me to go there to see that teacher, the man who gave me the money' (21.9.79).

In April 1967, having arrived in Bradford, the couple learned that their children would be sent to an Immigrant Centre for schooling. The husband was not

pleased. He had particularly desired two things for his children: that they should be able to attend a normal school straightaway, and that the school should be within walking distance of their new home. He went to the Education Office to explain his views. Contrary to everyone's expectations, he was informed that his children would be allowed to attend a school which fitted his requirements. 'That was due to Baba's help', he acknowledged, delighted: 'It was another miracle!' (14.9.79).

The fourth event in the series took place a few weeks later. By then, the husband had become very worried about the difficulty in obtaining work. There was a job available that would have yielded a mere £11 per week, but that was nothing like what he would need to enable him to start to repay his debts and to provide for his wife and five children. Consumed with anxiety, he mentioned his plight to the man from whom he was renting his flat, who showed him where to go to inquire about work on the buses. On applying, he was surprised to be called for an interview without delay, and was astonished when he was selected. His appointment, however, had to be approved by a higher official. That inspector could hardly believe that he had been offered a job, since he had been in the country much less than the normal requirement. Puzzled, he contacted another office to check the matter. 'You are O.K.', he announced, on his return. Commenting, the future president of the Bradford Sai satsang avowed: It was only Baba's miracle! Otherwise I wouldn't have been selected!' (14.9.79)

Thus the third and fourth in this sequence of experiences occurred within six weeks of the family's arrival in Bradford, at a time when they were becoming aware of many disappointing features in their new environment. The two later events significantly confirmed the burgeoning convictions of the couple. To a detached inquirer they may seem simple coincidences, but they did not appear so to the couple concerned. Their interest was sustained. Their conviction regarding Sathya Sai, initiated by the previous 'miracles' which they now both equally affirmed, was endorsed. Yet their faith was nurtured privately, almost only within the family, for a long time.

Reflecting on the circumstances in which the satsang was founded, the husband recalls a visit to Bradford by a Hindu priest in December 1969, two years and nine months after he and his family settled in the city. Abaji, the priest, was making a tour of centres of Indian settlement in the United Kingdom. His visit to Bradford was sponsored by the newly-formed Hindu Cultural Society. He came for devotional, ritual and teaching purposes, and had a special interest in the Bhagavad Gita. The president recollects his visit vividly:

Abaji was going to read and preach on a series of days in the mandir in Sawrey Place. On the first evening a man sat next to me, leaned over and said: 'The priest is a devotee of Sathya Sai Baba'.

'Why hasn't he put Baba's picture there in the front, then?' I replied.

'We tried to get one and couldn't', he said.

'I'd have lent you mine', I added.

That man then went to the priest and offered that he could use my picture of Baba. 'Yes', said the priest.

'I'll get it', I said - and I set off straight-away to get the picture. I ran through the streets of Bradford in winter without shoes to fetch that picture.

The excitement and fervour of the occasion remain in the husband's memory. He recalls as if it were yesterday the haste and vigour with which he ran barefoot through the streets in mid-winter for about a mile to bring the portrait of his on swami to public honour and prominence. This proved to be the threshold of a new development:

The day after that, following a big function, the priest announced publicly: 'We'll sing Baba's arati.'

That was the first time that Baba's arati was sung publicly in Bradford!

Abaji also announced that there would be daily readings of the whole of the Ramayana, house by house, through forty-five houses; and that the people gathered there that evening should arrange the rota of the households.

One month later - in January 1970 - a month after Baba's arati was first sung publicly in Bradford, the priest said to the gathering: 'From now on Baba's bhajans will be sung every Thursday evening in G's house.'
(14.9.79)

That last announcement was made by the priest without any prior consultation with G, the husband, or his wife. It had occurred to them previously that if a bhajan mandal was going to be held anywhere in Bradford in devotion to Sathya Sai, they would attend it. They had never entertained the thought that it might be in their own home. That is how the regular mandal, and eventually the mandir, started.

The faith of this couple had been sponsored initially and vicariously, in their own perception, by the devotion of other Gujaratis in Uganda, and by the prevenient grace of Baba himself. It had evolved, according to their own convictions, by discernment of the intervention of Baba in their lives. Both in Uganda and in Bradford it has been significantly nurtured in the context of bhajan mandal, as will become clearer. That faith was, early in 1970, given public recognition for the first time. It was yet to be strengthened by a further experience of what seemed to the couple concerned to be siddhic power, in one of those two forms that are most characteristic of the experience of the devotees of Sathya Sai Baba.

The first of the regular bhajan mandals devoted to Sathya Sai, to be held in Bradford, took place on 26 February 1970 - as suggested by Abaji. That was effectively the inauguration of, the Sai mandir in the city. At that time the family in whose home it was established was living in a flat in Park Road, Bradford 5, not where they live now. The inception of the bhajan mandal was soon followed by another memorable occurrence in the experience of these devotees: the fifth reputed miracle.

In the spring of 1970, some members of the Gujarati community in Bradford started to make alarming accusations about Baba that were bitter and reprehensible to his devotees. Not wishing to elaborate on the details of these rumours, the husband recalled summarily their nature: 'They said that Baba is wrong. That what we read about Baba in the books is lies.' Undoubtedly, the accusations were more specific and more sensational than that (cf. Kasturi 1975a: 203-204; 1975b: 18-19). The newly-formed satsang was greatly disturbed by the negative impact of the smear campaign, the slanderous nature of the rumours, in the eyes of the devout, notwithstanding.

One Thursday evening, a lady arrived early for the bhajan mandal reporting that she wanted to inform the couple about something first. The discussion with her, and its sequel, is etched clearly in the memory of the husband:

She said: 'Have you heard the rubbish people are talking about Baba?'

I said, 'Don't worry. I'm very sorry for them if they say that; but there's only one thing we can do. We must pray to Baba to look after those people. We must leave it to him. We can't do anything more than that.'

At 7.30 the bhajans started. There was a reading from the Ramayana during the meeting. While it was being read, honey - we call it amrit - started to appear, running from Baba's right hand on the photograph which was at the centre of the little shrine set up in front of the worshippers. People could see it. Nobody could say anything because the Ramayana was being read. When the reading was over, my wife said to me: 'Can you see ...?'

'That is Baba's miracle!' I replied.

Afterwards it was given a lot of publicity - I mean, people talked about it a lot!

That was what I call 'the main miracle'.
(21.9.79)

This new experience was accepted by the devout couple as an act of divine intervention, a siddhic affirm-

ation of the rightness of their faith, occurring in their own home. It offered public vindication of their action in openly espousing the cause and avowing the divinity of one who is not without his detractors. For them, there could have been no more appropriate instance of vibhuti or amrit supplying the function of Baba's 'visiting cards'.

Eleven years later, in 1981, the same characteristic signal is held to have appeared in the mandir. It is believed by the couple in whose home the temple is situated, and by the satsangis, to have authenticated once again the role of the mandir. It reaffirmed for them that what takes place there has a remarkably sacred significance. At that time, what was avowed to be amrit appeared on an icon of goddess Amba. It demonstrated anew the reputation of Sathya Sai Baba for siddhic power, even at a distance from his physical presence and in response to the commitment of the devout. That reputation was shown to be as real and as effective in Bradford in the 1980s as it had been in the preceding decade.

Thus, the significance of the convictions about siddhis held by members of the satsang merits fuller examination in particular, attention has to be paid to the part Baba's reputation for paranormal feats plays in the extension of the satsang's influence. Its attraction or otherwise for young people of Gujarati Hindu families in Bradford requires clarification.

8

The Growth of the Fellowship

Personal affirmation of the authenticity of Sathya Sai's siddhic power served as catalyst for the commitment to Baba of the couple around whom the satsang in Bradford came to form itself. Individual and personal, then familial, acknowledgement, was the initial mode in which their conviction was manifest. It developed out of acquaintance with Baba's reputation derived from devotional literature circulating amongst Gujaratis in Uganda, and from information gleaned from friends. It grew into the deepest of convictions through intensely subjective interpretations of experiences which many detached persons would have regarded as mere coincidences. Of the four earliest perceived 'miracles' in the experience of this couple, only the remarkable provision of money for the migration to England contains enigmatic elements whose explanation cannot be effected in terms of a simple correlation of favourable circumstances. That incident exemplifies a characteristic genre amongst the various siddhic interventions of Baba affirmed by his devotees: those that cluster about the resolution of crises connected with travel. Such accounts are commonly found in literature published by bhaktas and in the experiences narrated by satsangis in Bradford.

It has been shown that there is a strong correlation between a positive response to Sathya Sai's reputed siddhis and the eventual evolution of the Sai satsang in Bradford. Before proceeding further, it will be wise to summarise systematically the characteristics of this correlation as implicit and explicit in what has already been established.

8.1 SIDDHIS AS THE BASIS FOR THE GROWTH OF THE SATSANG

The Sai satsang in Bradford sees itself as constituted by affirmations of Sathya Sai Baba's siddhis in much the same way as the existence of a pearl is constituted by the presence of extraneous matter within an oyster. The siddhis of Baba are perceived, from within the perspective of faith, as objective, external, empirical agents, around which - in this as in other cases - a particular fellowship has formed.

Furthermore, the perceptions of the intervening siddhis of Baba entertained by devotees, are not open to generalised interpretation as merely reflecting a commonplace belief in the active benevolence of a universal divine providence. They do not represent the application to particular incidents of a theological insight virtually coextensive with the major historic theological traditions. They have a distinctive quality. The intervention is not considered to be simply that undertaken by deity, generally or all-pervasively, remotely or impersonally, perceived. It embraces that, but goes beyond it and is more specific. These are understood to be the interventions of a contemporary figure, deity currently manifest in human flesh, who can be physically encountered, some of whose siddhic powers can be empirically experienced in his material presence.

Thus, convictions about the siddhis of Sathya Sai Baba moved a couple in Bradford to communicate their belief to a significant number of other individuals and families in the city, stimulating a parallel but derivative commitment in them. This was confirmed in a sample of seven families connected with the satsang taken in 1978, between May and July. At that time, six of the seven representative spokespersons vouchsafed that it was through the testimony of the president of the satsang and his wife that members of their *families* had come to a position of faith in Sathya Sai.

It has been shown that association with the satsang is not likely to occur where no enthusiastic affirmation of the authenticity of Sathya Sai Baba's siddhis has been made. There are only two satsang's in Bradford who have expressed agnosticism about the siddhic powers of Baba. They are both Gujaratis whose

association with the satsang is for ethnic and cultural reasons.

Outside the Gujarati community, the correlation between association with the satsang and a positive acknowledgment of Baba's siddhis is absolutely definitive. The Sikh and Punjabi Hindu families who have played a part in the satsang, and the ethnically English individuals and families, first developed an interest in Baba's siddhis, then cultivated personal experience of them, and in the course of this process associated themselves closely with the mandir and its community. Such individuals have gone on to express utter conviction about the authenticity of Sathya Sai's paranormal powers. Of the ethnically English devotees, one approached the matter initially with extreme scepticism and a debunking intention, while travelling in India. Personally confronted by the charisma of Sathya Sai in Prashanti Ntlayam and on attaining empirical acquaintance with the renowned siddhis, he succumbed. Not until nine years later did he retract his commitment. Another ethnically English person, although disposed towards faith in Baba on the strength of his reputation, was deeply intrigued and totally bewildered by the complexity of the siddhic culture and context. In 1980, through the good offices of the president of the Bradford Sai Centre, he visited Baba's ashram. On entering into personal interaction with Sathya Sai, and having first-hand experience of his reputed paranormal powers, his bewilderment began to be assuaged.

There have been, and are, some individuals and families who take responsibility in both the Sai mandir and also in one or another of the alternative Hindu religious organisations in Bradford. The factor which has persuaded them to this dual role is always a positive perception of Baba's siddhic reputation, based initially on the testimony of others, but later, avowedly, on personal observation or experience. There is one prominent case of a family participating enthusiastically in the devotional life of three religious societies: the Jalaram Shakti Mandir, the Shree Prajapati Association, and the Sai satsang. It is their conviction of the authenticity of Sathya Sai's siddhis that sustains their allegiance to his satsang, in the context of this multiple commitment.

Response to Sathya Sai's paranormal powers is not, however, always positive. His siddhis identify not only his friends but also his enemies. There are some who might otherwise have remained merely cool towards his teaching, or towards his personality and charisma, whose disinterest is turned into scepticism and then into antagonism by his reputed siddhis. The intensity of that response depends on the seriousness with which the claimed siddhis are regarded.

By phlegmatic opponents, siddhis are light-heartedly ridiculed as fraudulent trickery indulged to entice the gullible. Some such do not doubt that many of the alleged miracles have occurred, but, as in the case of Khushwant Singh (7.2 above) they question their authenticity as veritable wonders. Other observers, like Brooke and those whose testimony he found to be corroborative of his own, confirm the empirical evidence of the siddhis in a more intense way. Their scathing attacks are fiercely denunciatory. There is little humour in their treatment of them. They are convinced that Baba's siddhis manifest something not just weird or cleverly fraudulent but sinister. They affirm his paranormal powers excitedly and assert that they are undoubtedly verified. Neither of these groups assaults the veracity of the testimonies, the appeals to empirical evidence. The former group is convinced that there is deceit in the methods employed, and that those who are taken in by them are deluding themselves. The latter group remains convinced of the malevolence of the power that is so harnessed and exploited.

Exploration of the significance of the affirmation of the siddhis of Sathya Sai Baba by his devotees, and of their beliefs about the nature of his power, is inevitably central in any analysis of the origin and evolution of the Sai fellowship in Bradford. The satsang's propagative and educational activities have focussed strongly on Baba's paranormal powers. Films about Sathya Sai's teaching, his travels and his work, which have sometimes provided the main items in programmes for the celebration of Guru Purnima and Baba's birthday, have presented clear examples of this focus (see appendix 6). Such film-shows attract large numbers of young people from Bradford's Gujarati Hindu families, many more than normally attend bhajan mandal. Film commentators make it clear that Baba's

siddhis are expected to evoke a positive response. That is consonant with the evidence of teaching materials and the curriculum used in Bal Vikas work in Bradford and in other Sai centres in Britain. There has sometimes been a heavy concentration on eye-witness accounts and anecdotes relating to Baba's powers.

Thus, affirmation of the siddhis of Sathya Sai stimulated the foundation and growth of the Sai satsang in Bradford. There has been evolution and development, including a capacity to recover from periodic doldrums. Such phases of increase as there have been, have been based on the sustained, consistent commitment of a small nucleus of supporters, throughout a period of fifteen years. One such, a phase of explosive growth and of attraction to the young, commenced in 1981.

The effective communication to the young of the convictions of their elders, and the mode in which this has come about, supplies the dominant focus for the completion of this analysis. One has to make clear the extent to which the leaders of the satsang have been willing for responsibility to devolve upon its young people, and how, through the advocacy of youths to their peers, the satsang began to flourish significantly, more than ever before and despite early setbacks, from 1981 to the present time. This focus on the role of the young in this study, has not arisen from an initial preoccupation with the contribution of adolescents to religious life, nor from a fascination with the behaviour patterns of children of ethnic minority families. It has evolved spontaneously because of developments in the satsang itself. It would have been forced upon the attention of any observer by the satsang's structuring of its own affairs.

Growing up in a context in which there is a zeal on the part of adults to bear witness to Baba's siddhis, young people become concerned to understand the persona of Sathya Sai and to form their own estimation of his powers. They are motivated to obtain for themselves relevant empirical experience. Amongst those for whom that has not been possible, the testimony of peers who have visited Baba's ashram or acquired experience of his siddhis by other means, is

held in high regard. Such evidence provides for the young a form of control by which to measure, elucidate or corroborate the convictions of their elders.

Children of the Gujarati families connected with the Sai centre in Bradford are, like other young Britons of Indian extraction, experiencing life in at least two cultures. They search for conceptual structures whereby to interpret their own experience and make sense of their dual environment. They find themselves at a point of apparent dislocation between a secular, and in some cases a highly scientific, education, and a religious tradition which is transmitted on received authority. Young people in the families of Sai devotees are often aware that the spiritual mentor of their parents claims not to ignore but to interpret both the secular and the scientific. They know that Sathya Sai sometimes articulates his teaching in an apparently scientific guise. Many of them have been taught that Sathya Sai 'transcends' the laws of science, and they have seen on film the veneration with which Baba is regarded by such an eminent scientist as Bhagavantam, and by other erudite academics(ct. Taylor 1987b: 130).

Some, at least, of the young of the satsang are, therefore, inwardly constrained to take seriously, and if possible to view positively, the concepts and convictions that their familial heritage proposes to them. Thus, some young Gujaratis in Bradford respond to the experience of a confluence of values and cultures with a positive affirmation of their Indian heritage as interpreted by, and focussed in, Sathya Sai Baba. A significant proportion of them do so under no overt familial pressure whatsoever. Their response appears to be personal and self-directed. It has, however, undoubtedly been stimulated by the testimony of some of their peers, who may themselves have felt the constraints of familial attitudes and convictions more strongly. Important in this cultural organism is the testimony of the young to the young, and the perceived relevance of a familial heritage to a contemporary situation.

The importance of such considerations can be appreciated when it is seen that in a period of growth in attendance at the functions of the satsang

between 1981 and 1985, attendance by those of thirty years of age or over has shown little change. Growth, initially on a major scale, but then reaching a sustained plateau, has been confined to those younger than thirty, as shown in appendix 4. The ensuing account attempts to elucidate the manner in which this increase has taken place, and to analyse its significance.

8.2 THE ROLE OF THE YOUNG IN THE SATSANG

There have been two distinct phases in the commitment of the young to functions which serve the satsang: pre-1981 and post-1981. In the earlier phase, specific activities were characteristic of their contribution. Later, the same duties were undertaken by the young, but in a transformed context of overall responsibility and direction which they themselves exercised. In that second phase, the initiative of young members of the satsang amicably annexed functions that had once been supplied by others. Even more significantly, young participants developed occasional activities of new and enterprising kinds. It is important, therefore, in the first place, to outline the original contribution of the young to the activities of the satsang, and then to indicate the ways in which they developed new avenues for their spiritual endeavour.

Originally, there were three basic but important tasks which the young people fulfilled. It was from that base that they developed the initiative which first expressed itself in the organising of events with a specific and limited purpose, generally of a charitable nature. Later they embarked on more diverse enterprises, and assumed greater general responsibility within the satsang.

Most notable of the roles consistently supplied by the young in the mandir, both before and after 1981, is their musical leadership of the bhajan mandal. In contrast with the smaller Shri Jalarasn Shakti Mandal, where all attending are offered musical instruments and are invited to *assist* in accompanying the singing, it is a selected group of musicians who regularly lead bhajans at the Sai mandir. The group is large enough to take turns by weeks, and to vary the routine sometimes on a single evening. It is sufficiently flexible to absorb new talent or to acknowledge gifted helpers

who may turn up unexpectedly. The core of the team is a group of males aged between sixteen and twenty-five years. Some are extremely able for the task, and when the right combination of talents is available, or when, as often, they have been moved to give of their best, they offer a powerful instrumental lead to the congregation. This function, however, is not exclusively fulfilled by the young. There are older men who are ready (and some who are anxious) to play a part, and they get their turn.

Women and girls also lead the singing. They provide accompaniment, too, with lighter instruments, manjira (cymbals), while males provide the support of dholak, tabla (drums) and harmonium. Two leads are offered: the one vocal, the other instrumental. The team of young men is gifted in supplying both; the contribution of the women and girls is more limited since they do not play so many instruments.

The preparation and presentation of prasad is a task that has fallen almost totally to the young in both phases of their participation in the satsang. Being gifts of food offered by worshippers at the mandir, prasad normally consists of fruit or sweet substances. Apples, bananas, coconuts and oranges are commonly brought, together with crystal sugar, Indian sweetmeats or British boiled sweets. Quantities are usually moderate: for example, three or four apples. Such gifts are handed to a helper at the door, or taken to the kitchen, on arrival.

A group of helpers works in the kitchen while the hymn-singing proceeds, making ready a tray of offerings for Sathya Sai himself and cutting up other portions of the food that has been brought, separating it into its corresponding kinds. They are preparing the prasad, the gifts of divine grace now returned by grateful worshippers, which, after being presented symbolically to Baba, will be distributed to the congregation. Approximately twenty minutes before the singing of the final bhajan, the prepared tray is brought into the puja-room and ritually offered to Sathya Sai, represented by his icons. At the conclusion of the bhajan mandal, the remainder of the prasad is given out to all the worshippers.

There are thus several tasks regularly involved in rituals related to prasad: its reception, preparation,

and presentation to Baba; and its distribution, together with vibhuti-water, or more recently with vibhuti itself, to the departing congregation. Initially, the presentation and distribution of prasad was always undertaken by young women of the satsang. On 16 February 1978, however, there was a change in the procedures. That was the first occasion on which the young men distributed the prasad. Questioned about it, one of them volunteered that it was his idea:

The fellows were not fully involved. I thought a good way of getting them to participate more, would be if they would do this job that the girls always used to do - at least sometimes. I organised it.

Maybe there should be some special clothing that we ought to wear when we are going to do it: just as the girls are usually dressed in special saris when it's their turn.
(19.2.78)

Following that, the boys never regressed. There were always roles for them, at least shared roles, in the presentation and distribution of prasad. It was, however, only following a particular stimulus in 1981, that they began to wear special clothing for their tasks. At the same time, the procedure for the distribution of prasad was changed in a way which gave them even more prominence. To that extent at least, since February 1978, the public role of the young women has diminished and that of the young men has been enhanced. The latter development has been most conspicuous from September 1981 onwards, in circumstances which will become apparent. The role of the women, young and old, in the satsang, in public at least, is a subordinate one.

One task regularly performed by the second daughter of the president of the satsang, is that of preparing trays for use in the arati ceremony. It is a skilled, artistic, creative role, which, now in her early twenties, she has fulfilled for several years (see above 5.3). It is a time-consuming service undertaken with great application and devotion.

Several arati trays may be required at the same time on special occasions: after a wedding, for example, or at a festival, or when the satsang bids farewell to a

family removing from the district, or to students going away to college. Each person so honoured then performs the time-honoured function of ritually circulating an arati tray in worship of the deities and in blessing of the congregation.

Periodically, young people of the satsang have taken the initiative in fulfilling, corporately, socially responsible and charitable roles. Sometimes they have planned their project in the name of the Seva Dal, but at other times their action has been more spontaneous and 'unofficial'. Such activity has been characteristic of both phases of their involvement in the work of the satsang.

In one such instance, at the conclusion of the bhajan mandal on 15 December 1977, members of the congregation were approached by teenagers and children with sponsorship sheets. There had been a disastrous cyclone in Andhra Pradesh. The damage caused, and loss of life, had been vividly portrayed in the news media. The young people were moved to undertake constructive action. They were going to hold a sponsored bhajan mandal to raise money for the relief work, and to intercede for the homeless and the suffering. It was to be an akhand bhajan mandal, lasting from noon on the following Saturday until midnight. Devotees and associates promised to donate money according to the number of hours that the young people would be able to maintain the akhand bhajan.

That proposition was a self-generated challenge for the young. They could not be sure there would be sufficient of them with concentration and stamina enough to sustain unbroken leadership of the bhajans for twelve hours without adult assistance. The attendance of satsangis was solicited to support them and 'to help them keep it going'. In the event, it was carried off very successfully. Attendance was, of course, not uniform throughout the day, but at some stages more than fifty persons were present and there were periods of highly spirited singing. The occasion raised more than £400 for the cause.

In February 1978 there was further evidence of the enterprise of the young, this time in looking after their own interests and those of their peers. A

sixteen-year-old male began to organise two long-distance day trips, by coach to the seaside, which were to take place during the summer holidays. The daughters of the president of the satsang, then eighteen and twenty years of age, were to fulfil the roles of supervisors on these journeys. The children for whom they were to cater were aged twelve to sixteen years. The organiser's determination was impressive: 'These youngsters have got to get out more', he said. 'They watch too much television' (19.2.78). His assumption of responsibility, and the plan itself, threw unexpected light on the sometimes flexible attitudes of the parents of the satsang's adolescents.

In November 1979 young people were again active in raising money, this time through straight-forward donations, for relief of the plight of refugees in Kampuchea. The youth organising the collection explained that the effort was particularly worthwhile because the aid was directed not to an Indian or a British cause, but to a country with which the satsang had no direct connection. He felt that he was enlarging what he saw as the restricted perspective of the elders of his community.

On a later occasion, young people stimulated the satsang to assemble a massive quantity of blankets for the relief of distress in another non-Indian disaster area overseas. The response was outstanding. Rather than supply used blankets, many families bought new ones and delivered them to the mandir in support of the effort.

The commitment of the young to local causes has also been manifest. In the summer of 1981, youths of the satsang, employed and unemployed and some students, organised a sponsored walk over a distance of fifty miles in aid of the Lord Mayor of Bradford's appeal for the International Year of the Disabled. This constructive initiative was carried through with enormous enthusiasm and with strong support from the elders of the fellowship.

Elsewhere in England at that time serious riots broke out, expressing the frustration and resentment of young males living in the decaying centres of Britain's inner cities. Many of the participants in the violence

in Brixton, Liverpool and Leeds were Britons of ethnic minority background. In Bradford too, anger, frustration and fear were building up. While there was no major outbreak of rioting in the city, a minor disturbance occurred on 11 July 1981. Twelve youths of Muslim, Sikh and Gujarati Hindu background were subsequently arrested. On 1 August they were charged by the police with having constructed thirty-eight petrol bombs, conspiring 'to damage or destroy by fire or explosion, property belonging to others', and with being reckless of danger to the lives of others. The young men conceded that they were responsible for the construction of the devices, but protested vehemently that they were only intended for self-defence in case of harassment or violent attacks by gangs of racist youths. Such attacks were by no means unknown. The legal battle of 'The Bradford Twelve' aroused widespread controversy. Their case dragged on for more than ten months while they were kept in custody until eventually acquired by a jury at Leeds Crown Court on 16 June 1982.⁷ It is against that background that the preoccupations of the young satsangis in Bradford in that period have to be interpreted.

There is no simple connection between turbulence in certain major urban centres in England in the summer of 1981, and developments in the Sai satsang in Bradford in the same period. Such relationship as there is must lie at a deep level and require subtle exposition. Its context is the nationwide search of city-dwelling young people for control over their own affairs, and especially over their futures, in a seemingly hostile socio-economic climate. The crisis was, and is, particularly acute for those who have also sensed the denigration of their familial cultures, symbolised in the perception of the colour of their skin as a stigma, in a post-imperial culture. Young people have striven to find avenues in which to express their deep frustration at lack of personal control over their fate, and at the closing off, through unemployment, of the potential for individual achievement. Thus, with only a general and not necessarily acknowledged connection with the socio-economic and political background, but nevertheless with that undeniable context, the young men of the satsang assumed, and were allowed to assume, new roles and functions in September 1981. They took

responsibility for the organisation and oversight of bhajan mandal, and for the celebration of festivals and special occasions, virtually in their entirety, with the full blessing of their elders. This development certainly surpassed anything previously experienced at the Sai centre. A new phase had begun.

The young people's enterprise had impinged on the organisation of devotional meetings earlier, once in 1977, with their special sponsored akhand bhajan mandal. That was, however, an event unique at the time. In 1978, the teenage boys had secured a role for themselves in the preparation, presentation and distribution of prasad. In September 1981 much more far-reaching change and enterprise were in evidence. By the end of 1981, the young men of the satsang were entrusted with the organisation of meetings as a normal and continuous responsibility. They appeared to have been empowered with the authority to give orders publicly, even to the most senior members of the fellowship, in respect of devotional practices or behaviour in the mandir. Youths now stood at the front at the conclusion of each mandal making announcements and giving instructions, a role which had been carried out hitherto by the president of the satsang. Announcements, in this new regime, were now generally made twice: once in Gujarati by one of the young men, and then in English by another.

In the same period, the mode of distributing prasad was totally reorganised: changed from the former, somewhat relaxed method of distribution to the congregation, who remained seated to receive it as it was brought around. Now youths from the group of fifteen who constituted the leaders, lined up in the exit and in the passageway, each giving an item of prasad to every person as they left: the women of the congregation first, the men afterwards.⁷⁷ The young males now regulated the distribution of prasad with care and dignity, but in such a way that if someone made an attempt to go out of turn, however dignified and elderly they might be, they could be publicly reprimanded by one of the leaders and made to wait.⁷⁸

The effect of the revised arrangements was such as to underline the authority of the young male devotees in the satsang. For the exercise of such duties, they normally dressed altogether in white.

The above developments stemmed from a visit to the mandir in September 1981 of a nineteen year old British Gujarati who had recently become prominent in leadership of the Sai centre in Wolverhampton. On that occasion he suggested many changes. In consequence, the enhanced role of the young men became so all-pervasive that the lack of an equivalent prominence for the young women became particularly evident. The president justified this by referring to directions regarding the structure and organisation of the centre given by the young visitor from Wolverhampton, henceforward designated 'RP'. The president understood these changes to be in harmony with overall instructions laid down by Sathya Sai himself. The new arrangements were, however, rejected by the young women of the satsang, as the president later recalled:

At first, when everything was reorganised, the girls didn't like some of the instructions. They said, 'We don't like that. We aren't going to do that'. So they didn't. But the boys followed the directions. It all followed on from RP's visit.

After a while, the girls came to me and they said then that they were willing; they would like to follow the instructions and to take a lead. But then I said, 'No'.

Later on I will let them.
(2.7.82)

Thus, as a response to the visit of RP in 1981, there has emerged a new role for the adolescent males in the satsang, and the potential for a new role for the adolescent females too, if it is allowed to develop. What is evident is a form of benevolent despotism on the part of the president, with the young men given a free rein within tacitly understood limits. This was further substantiated when the president confirmed that it is the young men who are 'running' the satsang, while he retains overall responsibility. There is no committee to intervene or mediate. In response to an inquiry about how the system worked in practice, the president simply declared: 'It's my job to watch over them. It's simply my job to keep them in order.' (2.7.82).

8.3 THE IMPACT OF A YOUNG LEADER

In the autumn of 1981, an event occurred that had a far-reaching effect on the Sai satsang in Bradford. Prior to that, several visits had been paid by the president and his wife, and young people of their family, to the devotees of Sathya Sai in Wolverhampton. It was there that they made the acquaintance of RP and his brother, KP. Every member of the Bradford family was extremely impressed with these two young men, and especially with the leadership qualities of RP, very much in evidence in the Wolverhampton satsang. The outcome was that it was arranged for RP to come to Bradford to conduct teaching sessions in the mandir, directed towards the needs of the young members of the fellowship. The special programme for his visit was to extend from Thursday 17 September to Sunday 20 September 1981. It was to include two major sessions on the Saturday, in a programme which would start at 1.30 p.m. and extend until 10.00.

On the Saturday afternoon an exclusively young audience was present to hear the address delivered by RP. There were about 45 present: 30 young men not older than 25 years; and 15 young women who were all under the age of 21. The speaker addressed the audience in English, with only occasional asides and humorous remarks in Gujarati. The delivery lasted at least 90 minutes, without any break, during which time RP enjoyed the rapt attention of his audience. It was an astonishing feat. He pointed out that three years previously he would not have counted himself as 'religious'. At that time he was living a worldly life. Several events, however, produced a dramatic change in his life-style, represented by the fact that his father would now say 'Three years ago you talked of nothing but "Abba"79, now you speak of nothing but Baba'.

The transformation in the life of RP had begun with a visit to Sathya Sai Baba's ashram at Prashanti Nilayam. There he had had an interview with Baba, but the latter had not been at all impressed with him and said that he had 'dirty habits'. Angrily Baba had sent him out of his presence, with his friends, until they would get their hair cut. He said they were like 'London hippies'.

RP declared that Sathya Sai tweaked his ears and

slapped his face in rebuke. Whether he meant this statement metaphorically or literally was not made clear, and both are possible. Eventually Baba accepted him, signifying it by receiving an album of photographs of the revived Seva Dal and Bal Vikas work in Wolverhampton that RP had been anxious to give him. He actually signed it, 'With love from Sathya Sai Baba', and returned it to him. Later, when RP became leader of the Seva Dal in Wolverhampton, it was with the knowledge that Sathya Sai himself had approved his appointment.

The culmination of the transformation of RP, its completion and fulfilment, however, has to be connected, as was made clear in his address, with the fact that his brother, KP, had been blind from birth. The impact of the conviction that it was Baba who 'gave KP his eyes' was clearly far-reaching. It was tellingly affirmed in RP's discourses.⁸⁰

In his regime as leader of the Seva Dal in Wolverhampton, RP finds himself unexpectedly in a position of authority, even in his own family:

Although I instruct the children and young people about obeying their parents loyally, my own father - the president of the Wolverhampton satsang - takes orders from me and obeys. When he comes home late from work and the mandal has started, and there is no more room in the mandir itself, I have to say to him, 'Daddy, you go and join the other three who've already gone up, and sing the bhajans in the bathroom', and he goes!

Even young people who are older than me and are students in universities and polytechnics listen to me and take orders from me!

RP claimed that there had been a revival of activity in the Wolverhampton satsang as a whole. Whereas there used to be just a small group of devotees meeting regularly in his home to sing bhajans, and for that reason his family's house had become the mandir, he asserted that the number had risen to more than 260 devotees, including 95 young people. A hall was needed for their meetings. Young people of many racial groups were attending. Some were drawn from Chinese families. To illustrate the point, the

speaker sang in Chinese one of the bhajans they had composed.

The process of renewal in the Wolverhampton satsang had affected the young people there in a variety of ways:

The girls wear special saris as a uniform. The boys wear whites: an Indian-style shirt and white trousers. Uniform is important. People ask: 'Why are all these girls in the same saris?' Then the devotees have a chance to talk about Baba, to witness about him.

The young people used to be slovenly about turning up for bhajans. Now they come at least half-an-hour early, to be well-prepared. I've given instructions. I don't want young people turning up half-way through and disturbing the bhajans. Not even to bring in the prasad.

There is a group whose work it is to prepare the prasad. They have been told they are not to worry about singing the bhajans. It is their service to prepare the prasad. And they are not to bring it in during the bhajans and cause a disturbance. The congregation will queue up afterwards to collect their prasad.

That Saturday afternoon, the speaker provided ample evidence of what he considered it possible to achieve through Bal Vikas and Seva Dal work. He related it to the activities of the Wolverhampton satsang. He cited an astonishing instance of service to the community: remarkable because of the status accorded to vegetarianism in the Hindu community generally and amongst Baba's devotees in particular. RP described how his Seva Dal had organised a Christmas party for the handicapped:

The emphasis was on serving the needy; so much so that we made bacon sandwiches, ham sandwiches, and distributed them, because Baba feels that we should go all-out in love to such people. It doesn't matter, if its done in love.

We mustn't worry about making people bhaktas (devotees) of Baba. If Baba wants people to hear about him, that's his business. He must

do that. Our job is just to serve these people in love: that's what he wants us to do. We have been to geriatric hospitals and other places in the same way. We concentrate on giving everybody a really enjoyable time.

It became clear that the most specific objective of RP's visit to Bradford was the initiation of systematic Seva Dal work once again in the city. There was hope that this would also serve to revitalize the hitherto perfunctory Bal Vikas classes. Prior to the event, the sons of the president had explained that they were confidently expecting the Seva Dal and Bal Vikas groups to start again. They connected their remarks to the visits they were anticipating from both RP and Dr. Ghurye (see above, 2.3). The prime focus was on the regeneration of the Seva Dal. In connection with that RP spoke and acted with manifest authority.

Having been assured in advance that they were suitable appointments, RP named a leader for the young men in the new Seva Dal, and a leader for the young women. He did it with the air of one invested with authority to make substantial appointments. Evidence that the steps so taken took effect immediately, and were accepted within the satsang, was not slow in coming. The Seva Dal in the Bradford centre was re-born forthwith with immense energy and enthusiasm. Its verve has been sustained over a period of more than four years until the present.

A major feature in the evening programme on the Saturday of RP's visit, was the showing of a film, 'The Lost Years', made by Richard Bock, an American devotee of Sathya Sai. It endorses the view normally associated with the Ahmadiyya Muslim sect, that Jesus, whose 'lost years' provide the focus for the movie, ministered in India and died in Srinigar. It embraces substantial coverage of the debate surrounding the Turin shroud, and focusses on issues of interest to those fascinated by traditions of paranormality in both Indian and Judaeo-Christian religion. Ultimately the film makes the point that the person and work of Sathya Sai Baba are a fulfilment of all that Jesus taught and did. The preoccupation of the gospels and much Christian teaching with the

reputation of *Jesus* for paranormal manifestations, is portrayed as pointing to the extension of his ministry in one, engaged in remarkable work in India now, who is able to supply the hitherto unknown details of *Jesus*' 'lost years'. (See above 6.4, and appendix 6).

Immediately following the showing of the film, a devotee, shortly to become a student in applied sciences at a university in southern England, made a personal approach to ensure that a phenomenon that had appeared in the mandir three weeks previously was not overlooked. The ardent young man was anxious to draw attention to a Christian icon of the Virgin Mary, which stood on the mantel-piece at the rear of the room. Amrit, he said, for the third time on a picture in this mandir, had appeared on it.⁸¹ There were four or five droplets of what was taken to be amrit on the glass of the picture. They were observed just below Mary's eyes, as representing tears. The drops had solidified. The student volunteered that solidification had occurred because it was now three weeks since the amrit had first become manifest, at the end of the month of Shravan. During that month, in accordance with Hindu custom, special meetings had been held nightly for systematic reading through one of the Hindu scriptures. In one of those sessions, the young man said, some devotees had had a vision of Baba at the front of the mandir.

The context supplied by RP's discourses, especially his references to the curing of KP's blindness, and the emphasis in the film on paranormal phenomena, and on the imagined appeal of Sathya Sai for Christians, had deeply moved the young student. It had created in him a determination not to miss an opportunity of sharing with a western observer an insight into the empirical evidence for the effectuality of the siddhic tradition in which, it could be thought, both *Jesus* and Sathya Sai stood.

The conclusion of the film had ended the formal programme for the day. A thunderstorm had caused the cancellation of a break for fresh air in the afternoon, so the programme finished early. There was thus some uncertainty about whether everything was over, and the congregation moved around to mix socially.

That was when the ardent young student made his approach concerning the icon of the Virgin Mary. That conversation was interrupted when the president of the satsang brought the guest speaker to effect introductions. What happened then illustrates both the charisma of RP and also the new found role of another of the young people of the satsang.

RP started to talk quietly in that quite intimate discussion. A hush, however, fell over the room, and everyone watched with interest to see what might develop in that encounter, listening to every word. RP instantly converted what had begun as a tête-à-tête into a public address. The two individuals never actually conversed. The newly appointed leader of the young men of the Seva Dal quickly stepped forward, motioned authoritatively to everyone except RP to sit, as the nineteen year old from Wolverhampton launched into what became another major address. A semi-private encounter had been transmuted spontaneously into an address that lasted, without a break, for eighty-five minutes, with no apparent preparation and certainly without any notes. For RP it was undoubtedly extremely exhausting, undertaken at the end of a very strenuous programme. It made manifest the *gifts* of this young man. It also showed that the Seva Dal was re-established in the Bradford satsang, and that it had leaders who were already acknowledged.

The instant effect of RP's proposals, given the authority of edicts, was again easily seen in the arrangement that was adopted for the distribution of prasad that evening. Taking the younger members of the gathering by surprise, an instruction was given and they were ushered to form a queue to receive their prasad, instead of having it brought in and distributed. It was a procedure that had never been witnessed in the mandir before.

There appeared to be no bounds to RP's authority with regard to the structure of the satsang and the religious practices of the devotees. At the conclusion of the day's events, when friends were gathering informally together before parting, RP held a group of female teenagers spellbound in the hallway, some lining the staircase and leaning over the banisters. They hung upon his every word, while he delivered himself of instructions about the absolute

necessity of obeying parents. Enthralled to hear one so young unburden himself of such traditional wisdom in a contemporary and lively way, with immediate communication, they were then surprised to receive from him precise directions about how they should dress to come to the mandir. With humour lightening all his utterances, and apparently with acceptance on the part of his hearers, he declared:

Don't wear any elaborate saris to come to the satsang - no stars on the shoulders, no fashion or anything like that. Wear plain saris: the uniform for the Seva Dal.

Earlier, in similar practical vein RP had offered advice to counter excuses that students might make for not attending bhajan mandal:

Work in the college library with a picture of Baba in front of you to help you to concentrate. Work through your lunch-hour and through your breaks and free periods ... But don't feel that there's no pleasure in life: play squash or badminton for half-an-hour and then you can get down to work again afresh.

The speaker had immediate access to the preoccupations of his audience. His intriguing endorsement of traditional values included reference to the fact that, once a meat-eater, he had become a vegetarian. He did not divulge his reasons for that change publicly, but expressed a readiness to discuss the matter with any individual privately.

RP's engaging frankness led him to refer, in one discourse, to matters seldom touched upon even in private conversation. He spoke of the 'wild and malicious rumours which sometimes circulate about Baba, that he is in prison or that he has run away with a girl . . . Eh! imagine it!' One wondered whether his scorn for such scurrilous gossip veiled an implicit but covert reference to rumours of another kind regarding Sathya Sai that have appeared in print (see above, 7.2). A welcome frankness motivated him to mention such matters publicly. Overall, however, RP's uniqueness lay not so much in the newness of what he was offering the young satsangis, but in the skills of the communicator exercised in his presentation.

RP's engaging naturalness, directness and refusal to be hide-bound by conventions of formal address, resulted in an ease of identification with his audience. He held the young congregation spell-bound. His humour, including his banter with Baba, a monologue conducted with one or other of the icons, was quite fascinating. It exemplified the intimate, friendly, almost casual, yet reverential, submissive relationship that can obtain between a devotee and his swami.

Handsome and slim, RP presented himself rather like a film-star or a pop idol, but of course with the manner of one only learning the role. He was received by his audience, not surprisingly, like a star. They were awed that one so youthful, like themselves, could take this stand and offer such a lead.

Intriguing to the Bradford satsangis was RP's testimony to the success of the message elsewhere in the United Kingdom. They felt the impact of his eloquent-descriptions of the new-found dynamism in the Wolverhampton satsang. It was not simply that he spoke about his role as a travelling advocate for Sathya Sai, dashing, after a day's work, from the Midlands to Manchester, and the same day to Rochdale and to Bradford, 'for Baba'. He expatiated on the enterprise of a group of young men from his home town who, not satisfied with advocacy of their Swami in this country, went to Paris 'for Baba'. New vistas opened for the young satsangis regarding the potential scope of their discipleship. They were moved by RP's witness to the sublime nature of the support available for such a mission in life, for he testified to the, manifestations of Baba's siddhis which devotees profess to have witnessed in the Wolverhampton area.⁸²

Apart from his avowal that Sathya Sai Baba had 'given' his brother 'his eyes', RP made several references to miracles that he himself had witnessed. He described an occasion when he and a small group of associates were singing bhajans in a house in Wolverhampton, in a downstairs room. Suddenly, someone dashed from upstairs to say that vibhuti was forming on a picture of Baba there. The little group went straight upstairs to sing their bhajans in the vicinity of that icon. While doing that, another person came up to announce that vibhuti was now forming on a picture downstairs,

There was another occasion, he vouchsafed, when someone suggested jokingly that Jesus Christ was angry with him because he had not sung a bhajan to Jesus that particular day. Thereupon RP sang a bhajan to Jesus, in front of a picture of the Christ. While doing so, vibhuti was seen to be forming on that icon.⁸³

Such reputed miracles are manifestly trivial in their intrinsic nature. The significance of the testimony of devotees to them lies in their apparent implications.

RP's own life had been revolutionised by his conviction that Baba had worked a most substantial miracle, the very antithesis of triviality, in his family circle. He could not be accused of identifying the paranormal with the inconsequential. Yet, personal and familial transformation through the gift of sight to his brother notwithstanding, RP declared that none of these phenomena should be identified as Baba's 'greatest miracle'. That, for him, was 'the love of the Sai family'. 'Wherever I go to speak about Baba', he affirmed, 'I am received with such tremendous love. That is the real miracle.'

Those remarks were made in the impromptu session that followed immediately after the film. The audience was remarkable in its composition. There were only 52 persons present, but the session was for young people alone and the whole event was in English and not in Gujarati. Of the 52, 12 were teen-aged girls, and the remaining 40 were young men, of whom 32 were under the age of twenty-three. The average age of the gathering was approximately twenty years, for there were very few who were in their early teens. Their attention was rivetted by RP's discourse. If anyone had felt bored, there had been an easy opportunity to make an exit after the film. The composition of the gathering, however, remained stable.

The positive reception of RP's message by the young people was confirmed by later events. His sessions at the mandir were destined to have an influence on the satsang itself, and on the lives of many participating individuals, discernible several years later, and showing no sign of abating. Manifest at the time in the sustained presence of so many young people throughout the gatherings that RP addressed, it was also shown in their obvious commitment to the proceedings, in

plying him with questions and the degree of attention paid to the answers. Previously, many of the young men in particular, had been merely on the fringe of the satsang, not integral or active members. The immediate indications of a response were corroborated the following weekend, when Dr. Ghurye came from Leicester to conduct further teaching sessions.

Dr. Ghurye, described later by the president of the satsang as 'the first person to take Baba to Gujarat' (2.7.82), conducted meetings at the mandir on 25-26 September 1981. It was a planned follow-up to RP's visit. There was a three-hour session on the Friday evening, especially in English for the sake of the young. It was followed by meetings throughout the Saturday conducted in Gujarati. At the Friday session the congregation exceeded 90, two-thirds of whom were males. Of the males, 40 were aged between fourteen and twenty-six years. The majority had been present the previous weekend. The solid phalanx of young males who constituted the core of the gathering made it clear that the satsang was, at this juncture, experiencing thorough-going revitalisation and renewal. Further encouragement to the speaker and the congregation was provided by the fact that part-way through the first address, five white men from Sheffield, with an average age of about thirty-two years, arrived. They had come to take counsel and to benefit by experience, to sustain the burgeoning activities of the new Sai centre in that city, founded by and consisting largely of ethnically English devotees.

Prominent in the first of the two addresses delivered on the Friday to the young devotees, was discussion of the siddhic powers of Sathya Sai Baba. As a medical student in India, three decades earlier, Dr. Ghurye had spent his long holiday each year at Baba's ashram. When he first witnessed Sathya Sai's materialisation of objects, he assumed that he was 'just a juggler', and won for himself, in the ashram and in Baba's eyes, a reputation as a sceptic with regard to Sathya Sai's paranormal powers. Ghurye would waylay pilgrims who emerged from their audiences with Baba, accosting them in the expectation of learning something to Baba's disadvantage. Sathya Sai himself used to joke with him, suggesting rightly that Ghurye was spying on him. One day the medical student witnessed an encounter between Baba and a

man who suffered from diabetes. Baba materialised vibhuti for the diabetic, some of which the latter promptly placed on his tongue. Ghurye vouchsafed that that man never again needed to inject insulin.

As a consequence of his own encounter with that diabetic, Ghurye sent vibhuti to East Africa, where some of his family lived. A few weeks later, at the conclusion of an audience, Baba sent for him. This time he did not receive him in a jocular manner. 'At this moment', Baba said, 'your mother is undergoing a critical operation. No-one has any hope that she will live.' Ghurye immediately sent a telegram to his sister in Kampala, telling her to give his mother some of the vibhuti. 'That was the means of her cure,' acknowledged the doctor.

Thus, advocacy of Sathya Sai Baba's powers characterises the context in which the faith of the young Bradford satsangis is fostered. Sometimes there is testimony to the exercise of Baba's reputed siddhis in their grandest, non-trivial dimension. In respect of other common associations, Ghurye drew a distinction between magic and lila (divine sport, play). Magic he associated with miracles, disparaging and therefore offering a somewhat debased connotation for the latter English term. He placed miracles at the same level as a juggler's tricks. A lila, he suggested, is neither a piece of magic nor a trick. His awareness of the exalted theological connotation and mythological associations of the Indian term communicated itself to his young audience, even though the finer points in his distinctions may have been lost on them.

Objects produced by mere magic, by the miracle-power of jugglers' tricks will not last, Ghurye argued. However, he avowed that more than twenty years ago, Baba had materialised an item which he still has in his possession. Enigmatically, but giving full play to the theological dimension in the Indian concept, Ghurye affirmed: 'Baba's productions are no miracles but lilas.' So saying, he set the works of Sathya Sai in the sublime context of the manifestations of Krishna to the gopis. There could be no more impressive tribute to the transcendent nature of the persona of Sathya Sai and no more absolute acknowledgement of its call for totalitarian commitment and devotion.

New life in the Bradford satsang took its rise from the week-end of the visit of RP, the impact of which was consolidated further by Dr. Ghurye. This intense experience was soon tempered, however, for the most sensitive and committed, by abysmal disappointment. The signs of new life could not be sustained without vicissitudes and challenges, which became clear as serious difficulties beset the satsang within a few months.

By March 1982, the president of the satsang, his wife and family, were deeply distressed at the petty jealousies that had come to pervade the affairs of their community. They were astounded by what they saw as malicious assaults on the way the satsang was organised. Back-biting had become rife. They were convinced that some people were deliberately making life as difficult as possible for them. Either to signal their disgust and as a warning to the disaffected, or with greater seriousness, they placed a 'For Sale' notice in the window of their home, where all the regular meetings are held. They had pursued the same strategy once earlier, prior to 1975, when their experiences had also been bitter. Now again they took action 'to show people that we don't have to stay here and put up with it' (29.4.82). They were sad days for the committed satsangis. The notice of sale remained on display for at least three weeks, in March-April 1982. The fact that the satsang weathered that crisis of interaction and relationships bears eloquent and impressive testimony to the depth of the impact made by RP and Dr. Ghurye.

The summer of 1982 saw a considerable increase in commitment at the mandir. Such enhanced activity was directed to a conspicuous degree by young people. After the doldrums of early 1982, from April onwards there was an increase in the numbers attending the bhajan mandal, consonant with the period immediately following the visit of RP. Participation in all events rose dramatically again and has been substantially maintained for a period of above four years (appendices 3, 4 and 7). Even during the absence of groups of young people on pilgrimage to Prashanti Nilayam, there has been no remit. The summer pilgrimages of 1982 and 1983, and the enthusiasm with which they were undertaken, were themselves empirical evidence of the impact of the events of 19 September 1981 on the young of the Bradford satsang.

8.4 PILGRIMAGE TO PRASHANTI NILAYAM

Seven months after the visit of RP to the Bradford mandir, on 29 April 1982, more than seventy persons were present at the regular weekly bhajan mandal. The majority were either teenagers or in their twenties. An impressive number of young men undertook various responsibilities. There was a definite sense of purpose and direction in the atmosphere. Announcements were made by two youths: in Gujarati by one, and then in English by another. A young computer programmer, whose work had recently taken him to Australia, delivered (in Gujarati) a short account of his travels. It was of interest to the satsangis because he had broken his journey to visit Prashanti Nilayam.

Prasad was distributed in dignified, reverent manner, conforming to the directions given by RP. As the congregation sat, waiting to file to the hallway to receive prasad, tape-recorded bhajans played softly in the background, a new development, sustaining an atmosphere of reverence.

After the mandal, a young man who was increasingly to assume responsibilities of leadership in the satsang, the eldest son of the president, discussed its affairs with renewed, enhanced excitement. One month earlier, he had been demoralised because of the problems encountered in the winter. Now his enthusiasm had been quickened to the point of zeal. His face shone visibly, a consequence of the fasting which had recently slimmed his features, and of the strength of his inner motivation and animation. His manner and demeanour were transformed. In the throes of personal revitalisation, he spoke of his exhilaration that the satsang was emerging from despondency, and renewing itself once more through the practice, of lakhsacharan (above 2.3).

This twenty year old spoke of RP, but even more of his brother, the formerly blind KP, with great enthusiasm. Not only in his words, but in his attitude, his gestures, his manner, he displayed intense emotion. When younger he had been cool about his family's faith. In the preceding February, however, he had discussed a recent visit of Dr. Ghurye to the satsang, showing the first signs of a significant change in affect. Now, his commitment to the fellowship and what it stands for

had been transformed. He was more excited and intense than he had ever been.

The young man spoke of the back-biting and jealousy that had bedevilled the affairs of the satsang in the preceding months. He blamed no-one, but in touching on the subject felt he was incurring guilt. Several times, therefore, he raised his hand in respect and supplication to Baba's most prominent picture in the sitting-room of his family's home. With light-hearted confidence, smiling, he said almost frivolously: 'Excuse me, please, Swami' or 'Your pardon, Baba'. His action in so doing was precisely reminiscent of the mannerisms of RP, in the most relaxed passages of his discourses in the mandir in September 1981.

A youth from the satsang thus signalled that he had found a model for himself, a paradigm of leadership. He had discovered one young enough to identify with, without strain, devout beyond the satisfaction of the family's faith and his own place in it. Through emulation, such a model could offer self-esteem and public influence. Confidence was now needed: self-confidence whereby he could develop his own style of devotion and learn to lead through exercising it.

The same young man went on to show his natural excitement over a visit to India he was organising, to Sathya Sai Baba's ashram, with a group of youths. This spokesman would be their leader. Himself unemployed, the pilgrimage would take place in the students' long vacation, so that they could all travel together. There were difficulties, not least financial, for young people trying to make such a trip. Their purpose was to obtain Sathya Sai Baba's darshan, and to spend as long as possible in his ashram.

The pilgrims were planning to stay 10-12 weeks in India, and most of that time at Prashanti Nilayam. They would also visit Shirdi in Maharashtra, to offer obeisance at the shrine of Sathya Sai's 'former body'. Pilgrimage would then be made to other of India's sacred sites. Some would visit relatives in Gujarat, or Gujarati kin dispersed elsewhere: but that was not the object of their journey. Their spokesman, being unemployed, was thinking of staying even longer, long enough to be in Prashanti Nilayam again on 8 October, his birthday.

That would supply his pilgrimage with two significant poles: Guru Purnima to mark the arrival of the group, and his own birthday to mark his point of departure.

On Thursday 24 June 1982, the regular bhajan mandal was a most remarkable occasion. Attendance was of festival proportions. Approximately 105 persons were present, of whom more than 70 were under thirty years of age. It was the eve of the departure of the pilgrims. Several special features marked the occasion. Dr. Ghurye had come as an honoured guest. Creating time for him to give an address, the singing ceased at 8.25. He spoke for twenty-five minutes in Gujarati, holding the rapt attention of his audience. The event thus underlined the strength of the bi-cultural orientation of the young Gujaratis and their need to explore ways of relating the experience and culture of their families to their own current context.

During the hymns, a splendid tray of fruit had been brought in by one of the young women and placed at the front in homage to Sathya Sai. That was normal practice, but the quantity and variety of the offering befitted an occasion of special thanksgiving and intercession.

The focus of the evening became most clear at the time of the arati ceremony. Instead of one or two persons ritually circulating the trays of burning candles, seven young men took their places at the front. They performed the prescribed worship of the deities, in particular of one revered figure. They shared the blessing with the whole satsang, who intoned the arati prayer fervently with evident joy. The seven trays with all their candles generated an exceptional amount of light and some smoke, visibly suggesting an ethereal affirmation of the zeal of the satsang. It appeared to uplift the enthusiastic singing. Meanwhile, as only very rarely in this mandir, a conch shell was loudly and continuously blown for the duration of the chanted prayer. Audibly and empirically something notable was taking place.

Following the arati, the brief concluding prayers, OM-karas and rituals, the young man who was to lead the pilgrimage expressed appreciation of the presence of such a large gathering. He presented to the

congregation the youth (also about twenty years old) who would be 'in charge of the centre' while the pilgrims were away. This new spokesman made a brief appeal to the satsangis to pull together during the forthcoming months, to ensure that all functions were carried on successfully. The leader of the pilgrimage then announced that he was going to ask all who were going to India to speak briefly to the gathering. The manner of his doing this was reminiscent of the jocular, bantering style of RP.

The first to be called was a tall, well-built young man who had been present at many functions in the mandir in the preceding year, including the special events of September 1981. A college student, he spoke shyly and nervously, quietly but audibly. His natural, uninhibited manner communicated a manifest sincerity and genuine commitment. He confessed:

Last year when I told some of my friends that I was going to the mandir one evening, they were staggered and said to me, 'Why the hell are you going there?'

They knew me. They knew that we used to call anyone who went to the mandir 'Moonies'.⁸⁴ That's what we used to call them. We used to make fun of them.

That's twenty years of my life wasted - twenty years wasted - up till now. In the last year I've read a lot about Baba - everything I could lay my hands on.

The members of the satsang appreciated that it took courage for that young man to utter such a personal testimony publicly. His natural candour made its own impact, while his impressive physique, like that of a successful rugby-player, enhanced the effect of his remarks.

The next speaker also referred to his initial rejection of the satsang. In August 1981 a friend had asked him to sponsor his participation in a 50 mile walk in aid of the Lord Mayor of Bradford's appeal for the International Year of the Disabled, a walk which the youths of the satsari had organised. He had made fun of that friend. From that prior discounting of the activities of the satsangis, one month before the visit of RP,

this young man's interest had grown. When it was first mooted, the idea of going to India had seemed impossible to him: 'I couldn't even pay for a week in Blackpool' was his characteristically humorous comment. His mother had later agreed to help him financially. Now, that very day, his wage packet for a week-end job that normally yielded £30 every two weeks, had contained the sum of £134. He could not explain it. Such assistance was perceived as a sign of the miraculous, intervening grace of Baba. With transparent simplicity the youth kept on referring to that £134! it had made an indelible impression on him.

This young speaker went on to provide an example of the practice, common amongst devotees, of interpreting what others might see as fortunate coincidences while travelling (or connected with travelling) as acts of Baba's all-embracing grace. That morning, while obtaining travellers' cheques for the journey with his fellow-pilgrims in Bradford's city-centre, a bus had nearly knocked him down:

Phew: Just an inch away from me! But it missed me! You can see that Baba wants me to go to India. He didn't let the bus run me over.

The third speaker thought that by going to Prashanti Nilayam he would have an opportunity to put pressure on Baba to come to Britain. He had heard the proposal that Baba should 'have a house in Northern Ireland' and that he should visit that region. His own concern was that Baba should visit England.

The three subsequent speakers dwelt on the initially daunting prospect of raising money for the journey, and of the way in which the problem had been overcome. One, originally overwhelmed by the prospect of trying to manage that feat out of a student's grant, made known his conviction that the raising of the sum was a specific answer to his initially desperate prayer: 'Swami, you've got to help me if I'm going to be able to go. That's the only way.'

Several speakers underlined the strength of familial ties by expressing gratitude to relatives for invaluable help. More significantly, acknowledging a community wider than that of the extended family, all - without exception - opened their remarks with deferential politeness: 'Dear Sai Mothers and Fathers, Brothers

and Sisters' or 'Dear Sai Uncles and Aunties, Mothers and Fathers, Brothers and Sisters'. This articulation of the strength of community awareness was reinforced at the end of the proceedings, as the congregation was leaving. At that point, some of the young men bowed reverentially and touched the feet of members of the fellowship whom they particularly respected, with an accompanying request for their blessing on the venture (cf. Vandana 1978: 33-34). The spontaneous way in which this was done, the chosen persons varying from individual to individual, betokened its genuine nature. Some pilgrims accepted photographs from satsangis: pictures for them to take to Frashanti Nilayam, of family groups and of individuals on whom Baba's blessing was especially desired.

Another notable feature that evening was the introduction, following the speeches of the young men, of an elderly English woman from Leeds, attending the bhajan mandal for the first time. Invited to address the gathering she stated that she had heard that there was a group from Bradford going to Baba's ashram, and that this had led her to inquire whether she would be able to join the party. She had earlier read about Sathya Sai. Her husband had mocked her for believing what Murphet had written. 'I'm going to India in the hope that I can find proof, some photographs or something that I can bring back, to prove to my husband so that he will believe too', she declared. She also explained that another, younger English woman from Leeds would travel with them. That person would be accompanied by her son. Later, it was learned that the son is mentally handicapped, and that the mother was taking him in the hope that Baba would be willing and able to alleviate his condition.

The leader of the pilgrims spoke after all the others. He revealed his own preoccupation:

I'm not so much thinking of us going to Swami now, but of the centre. I'm worried about how things are going to go on while we are away.

You know how things have been here: not as they should have been. I'm talking about, say, the last six months. You know how it is: factions, jealousy. I'm hoping that Swami can teach me how to overcome all that, and that I'll be able

to teach others. I want to learn from Swami, so that I can teach all the Sai brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers.

But I also want to ask you for forgiveness, if any of us Sai brothers have been the cause of any ill-feeling.

That remarkable utterance, made with transparent seriousness, exemplified the constraints of spirituality exercised in community. It was significant in its candour and realism. It showed this young man's feeling after a role in leadership, but with a clearer and deeper awareness of its elusive nature than anything he had ever said before. His plea for forgiveness for himself and his 'Sai brothers', who in their zeal and immaturity may well have been abrasive and dismissive of others, was significant. His concern for a real, lasting harmony within the satsang, and his humble public acknowledgement that he did not know the solutions to the community's problems of backbiting and competitiveness, were appealing signs of maturing responsibility.

No less significantly, this young man had earlier made manifest his awareness that leadership is exercised through techniques of communication. The style of RP's discourses had made a great impression on him. He had taken the humorous, teasing approach as a model. One felt that he was yearning to be for Bradford what RP had become for the Wolverhampton satsang. He was testing out the extent of the authority that he might be allowed, aware that in the preceding months there had already been instances where he had gone too far. It was clear to him, and to all, that he had not come to RP's position of eminence yet. Equally, there was no doubt that he was learning. His role in this group now going on pilgrimage, and his encounters in Prashanti Nilayam, would help him to mature further. As yet unseen qualities of leadership and depth of character could be brought to light.

The young spokesman was experimenting with the techniques whereby the extent of charismatic authority may be proved and developed. Earlier he had revealed that he had deliberately gone back on his word to his fellow-pilgrims: he had 'deceived' them. He let it be known that originally he had told them what he was going to ask them to speak about. He went on, with a chuckle

evincing his patently humorous intent, to ask them to address their thoughts to another issue. They would have to discuss, impromptu, their innermost purpose in visiting Baba. Continuing in this bantering style, the young spokesman teased his colleagues over the question of the order in which he would call them. Glancing to left and right, right and left, he pretended that he had no idea of the sequence in which he would ask them to speak. Here, it seemed, his emulation of a playful, teasing *style*, should be referred not merely to his admiration for a contemporary young Gujarati, RP, but to a higher, indeed a most exalted source. It is not fanciful to suggest that Krishna's playful streak, his reputation for lila, sport, play, may subconsciously have formed a paradigm for action in the mind of the young man, through the influence of nurture at home and in the mandir. A knowledge of bal (child) Krishna's playful pranks, enhanced by the prestigious model of Sathya Sai's own reputation for teasing, had become manifest that evening. A self-conscious ploy, it was rendered somewhat ineffective and patronising by the nervousness of the speaker on a very emotional occasion. Nevertheless, that does not detract from the significance of the fact that it was attempted at all.

In the event, the impact on the congregation of the speeches of the youths was electrifying. Not one of the young men was accustomed to speaking in public. All of them were bashful and embarrassed. None of them seemed able to believe that at that time the next day, they would be on the plane to India en route to visit Baba. There was a most remarkable communal exhilaration as they came to the front one at a time and spoke modestly of their excited anticipation.

The impact on the satsang that evening was not merely ephemeral and unquantifiable. Its measure was manifest in the distribution of prasad which followed. For the congregation, consisting substantially of lively adolescent males, had been seated passively for nearly two-and-a-half hours when the queue for prasad was first formed. The distribution itself took at least twenty minutes. In those days, the women and girls used to receive their prasad first. Thus, the men and boys had a prolonged wait. In keeping with the sense of dedication of the whole evening, the males sat in absolute, unbroken silence while the women's queue slowly diminished. In normal circumstances,

quiet chatter would have been natural and permissible. Instead, at the end of a procedure which had lasted from 7.30 p.m. until 10.10, total reverence reigned.

Two days later, satsangis heard that telephone calls had established that the pilgrims had arrived safely in India. The following Friday, another male student, unable to leave with the others because of examinations, flew out to join them. In August, news was circulating with pride and excitement that the satsangis young ambassadors had been granted three audiences with Baba, privately as a group, during the five weeks they had been in India: a high privilege. Tears of joy, in the eyes of the excited sister of three of the pilgrims who volunteered that information, signified the extent to which the satsang was moved by the messages from Prashanti Nilayam. For the young pilgrims, the age-old siddhic heritage of India and the contemporary esoteric reputation of Sathya Sai had earthed themselves in a personal encounter and in individual experience. Baba had materialised an identical medallion for each one of them.

8.5 IMPETUS SUSTAINED: 1981-85

The enthusiasm attained by the satsang in September 1981 and again in the summer of 1982 has continued to manifest its effects. Four years after the visit of RP, those two phases of renewal can be seen as significant watersheds in the brief history of the fellowship. Attendances have been sustained at a higher level than previously (appendix 3). That increase in participation has been undertaken by the young (appendix 4), who have readily assumed greater responsibility than ever before (appendix 7).

The first major pilgrimage to Prashanti Nilayam by young satsangis from Bradford culminated in the public celebration of their return in the bhajan mandal of Thursday 16 September 1982. Anticipated with great excitement, the occasion was, however, frustrating for the expectant congregation, an anti-climax. The pilgrims, leaving their leader in India, had voluntarily and unanimously promised him not to report on their experiences until he himself arrived. They were under a solemn vow of silence. Pressured neither by the commitments of a student nor by the requirements of an employer, their leader was able to stay longer in Prashanti Nilayam. He was going to fulfil his

aspiration to celebrate his birthday in Baba's presence in October. In the mandir, on 16 September, a letter was read in which he explained the constraints under which he had placed his fellow pilgrims. The event was ambiguous, enigmatic, an outlet for emotion that could not fully be discharged. It could be seen as a mundane, human reflection of divine lila, consistent with aspects of the guru-shishya (mentor-disciple) heritage and with subordinate-superordinate roles in Indian spirituality.

The young travellers, therefore, the locus of so many hopes and prayers, sat at the back during the singing of the bhajans. They went to the front at the time of the arati, and retired upstairs immediately after the announcements, leaving other young males to distribute the prasad. No context for a formal report from the pilgrims or for social interaction between them and the congregation was provided. In all significant respects, they were to be recluses.

The leader of the pilgrims eventually arrived on 11 November, so exhilarated by the intensity of his experiences that, with Baba's consent, he had postponed his return five times. The session then held to allow the pilgrims to report on their impressions was an occasion of great excitement. By that time, the on-going impact of the pilgrimage was already manifest in the satsang's affairs.

The events of September 1981 established, and of the summer of 1982 consolidated, the responsible roles that the young, especially males, were permitted to fulfil in the satsang. Their prominence in exercising a generative and organising function under the oversight of the president, had been tacitly endorsed by Baba's own authority now, through the pilgrimage.

Visits to Prashanti Nilayam were again organised in 1983 and 1984. On 5 July 1983 twenty persons, male and female, including the leader of the 1982 journey, flew to visit Baba's ashram. Some stayed there until September. The significance of the journey was indicated by the organising of a coach-trip for other satsangis to bid the pilgrims farewell at Heathrow Airport. The following July, the same young leader was accompanied to Prashanti Nilayam by nine youths, for some of whom it was their second visit.

No pilgrimage was organised in 1985, because the year marked the attaining of Sathya Sai's sixtieth birthday, according to the Indian reckoning. The Bradford devotees were apprehensive: expecting that there would be so many visitors to Prashanti Nilayam that year that there would be few or no opportunities of intimate contact with Baba himself. It would be better to wait and go later, they felt.

Corporate pilgrimage to Baba's ashram has thus been influential in maintaining the enthusiasm of devotees in Bradford, particularly since 1982.⁸⁵ Commitment has, however, also been sustained by other practices, notably by a periodical return to the observance of lakhsacharan (see 2.3). This rite was practised regularly in the mandir during the time that the pilgrims were away in 1982, and for some time after their return. Contact with Dr. Ghurye, who had originally recommended that form of puja has been maintained. Contact with the devotees of the Wolverhampton centre, and therefore with RP and his brother, was an occasional feature of the activities of the fellowship for at least two years after 1981.

The period following the pilgrimage of 1982 has been characterised by recurrent enthusiasm within the satsang, spearheaded by the commitment of its young people. The innovative and often ambitious nature of the projects undertaken shows the quality and extent of this sustained vitality (appendix 7). Certain characteristics of these activities call for clarification.

Firstly, an index of the growing involvement of the young in the affairs of the satsang has been the increased use of English bhajans in worship. That was initially a response to the commitment of the young, and a reflection of it, rather than its cause. The visit to Wellingborough for the celebration of Sathya Sai's birthday in 1979 had given Bradford devotees an insight into the potential of English as a medium of worship in the mode of Indian bhakti. At that time, the role of the young in the Bradford satsang was not prominent. It took time for the seed sown then, nourished by the later acquisition of cassettes of bhajans recorded in English, produced in Wellingborough, to bear fruit. Visits, like those of family groups to Wolverhampton in 1981, where the

satsang was exploring the use of bhajans in non-Indian languages, also made an impact on the Bradford satsangis. The stimulus needed for these influences to mature in Bradford, was provided by RP's visit to the city in September 1981.

It was after RP's visit that a bhajan in English was sung for the first time in an ordinary bhajan mandal of the Bradford satsang. By August 1982, the occasional use of English bhajans was a regular feature of its practice. By February 1983, the status accorded to such hymns was definitely rising. By then, one was being sung immediately prior to the hymn to Vishnu which brought every bhajan mandal to its conclusion, which itself had a special prestige in the. mandir (see 3.2).

In April 1983, a prayer from the Upanishads, Asato maa sad gamaya (Smart 1978b:126), was sung for the first time in English at the Bradford Sai Centre, prior to its rendering in the original. That prayer has always been part of the concluding rituals of every devotional meeting at the mandir. Its use in English, prior to rendition in the original, has continued as a regular practice of the fellowship from April 1983 onwards.

By October 1983, the place of devotion in English was so well accepted within the satsang, that the response to a visit by a group of students and teachers of non-Indian background was to provide worship, consisting entirely of English bhajans, for a period of forty minutes within the mandal.

By May 1985, the hymn to Vishnu which had always signalled the conclusion of a bhajan mandal in the centre, had yielded its respected regular place to the following lines, sung in the mode of a dhun:

Rejoice in the Lord Sai always,
And again I say, 'Rejoice'.86

By 1985, therefore, English bhajans were not only occasionally inserted into the corpus of Indian hymns which had once comprised the sole content of the hymnody in the centre, but they were regularly interspersed amongst them and had even secured a prestigious placing in the regular worship. English had won acknowledgement as a proper medium for the rendering of devotion from the Upanishads. Furthermore, on appropriate

occasions, English bhajans could be allowed to comprise a major component in a bhajan mandal.

A second characteristic of the period following the visit of RP in 1981 has been the readiness of the satsang, in fulfilling initiatives of the young people, to address its testimony to the wider community. This orientation, initially explored with the hope of making an effective appeal to local people of non-Indian background, has not attained a high profile except in certain specific projects.

Thus, on 8 May 1982, the film 'The Lost Years' was shown in the mandir (appendix 6). Great hopes were pinned on its expected impact on a target audience of non-Indian ethnicity. Its outcome was, for the devotees, disappointing. From then onwards, some of the young people had an increasing understanding of the fact that more than a mere juxtaposing of Hindu and Christian assertions about paranormal experience is needed in order to convince the indigenous population of the soundness of the claims of Sathya Sai. Baba's self-authenticating references to the Bible or to the life and teaching of Jesus, and his embellishments of biblical narratives, convince his devotees, but Bradford's young satsangis are now less certain of their instant appeal to the wider population.

From 1982 onwards, young devotees contributed to the fellowship a clearer perception of both the greatness and the complexity of the gulf between the two ethnicities engaged in their social context, Gujarati and English. This increased awareness of points of disparity in the cultures enhanced their perception of the potential mission of the satsang to British society, while making them more sensitive to the difficulties involved in addressing their community's message to the wider population. Experience of the complexity and consequent difficulty of such a task came to temper their initial ecstatic enthusiasms and superficial perceptions. Their hopes of making an impact became more modest and more sharply defined.

Thus the increasing use of English bhajans in worship derived primarily from the needs of the young satsangis themselves. They were not initially deliberately used as a means of communication with the wider society. Singing in English manifested the young people's desire

that the language of their devotion should possess a coherence with their existential social context. It was an acknowledgement of their own bilingual existence.

A conference for actual and potential 'English devotees' was organised by the young satsangis on 18 June 1983. Held in the University of Bradford, it was chaired by a young Englishman who had associated more and more closely with the fellowship during the preceding year.⁸⁷ The conference embodied the satsang's increased confidence that they would now be able to convey the message of Baba, their awareness of his charisma, to the community at large. It was regarded as successful, drawing between twenty and thirty participants from the Yorkshire region to hear speakers who had come from London and the Midlands.

The young man who chaired the conference had himself attempted to start a group for devotees in Halifax. Eventually he had given that up, finding it too difficult to attract and maintain the interest of others. It was more satisfying to associate with the Bradford satsang. There was, however, one notable exception to his otherwise abortive efforts. One of his acquaintances had become fascinated by Baba's teaching and reputation. That man and his wife attended the bhajan meetings in Bradford with their friend throughout much of 1982. That year the married couple went to Prashanti Nilayam, to spend Christmas there. The husband became enthused by Baba's charisma. He gave up his job in Halifax and went, with his wife and children, to teach mathematics and English in a college founded by Baba in southern India. By December 1983, he was sufficiently well-established to be favoured with personal interviews with Baba. He acted as a go-between for the devotees in Bradford, taking messages from them to Sathya Sai.

There were increasing signs of the addressing of the message of the satsang to a wider constituency from 1982 onwards. Figures and icons of Jesus and Mary were displayed in the mandir and eventually a crucifix, acquired in India by a young pilgrim in 1983, was placed above the shrine.⁸⁸ Such developments indicated the satsang's increased confidence in the ecumenical and syncretic significance of their convictions. So

did the avowal of the leader of the young people that the mandir would be refurbished in the near future in a way which would demonstrate that it is not merely the temple of an Indian sect but embraces the teachings of all the major religions of the world.

A third characteristic of the period 1981-85 has been the increase in respect for, and in calls upon, the young spokesmen of the satsang in representing the Sai cause in a wider sphere. Thus, by February 1983, the leader of the young people, together with a youth from Oldham, was representing the north of England on the National Youth Committee sponsored by the National Council in the United Kingdom (above 1.4). This Bradford delegate was made responsible for stimulating fresh activity, extending the Sai cause, in the north.

Residential week-end conferences for young people were held in Bradford in April and May 1983, with accommodation provided in the mandir and in the homes of devotees. Young British Gujaratis came from several parts of Lancashire and Yorkshire. Later, it was claimed that these events resulted in the spontaneous commencement of Sai study circles and Seva Dal groups in new areas of Manchester and Bolton. Devotees in Bradford were confident that the limited activities initially undertaken would burgeon into more complex programmes in each of those locations.

In Bradford itself, a youth represented the fellowship on a committee set up by the Metropolitan District Council to organise a Multicultural Festival in the city in 1983. The children of the satsang were to perform Gujarati stick dances as part of the programme.

More significantly, in March 1983, two young men were invited to Scarborough College of Education to speak to students and staff of the Department of Religious Studies about Sathya Sai Baba. This was a consequence of earlier annual visits to the mandir by groups from the Scarborough college, similar to those organised regularly by the Department of Theology and Religious Studies in the University of Leeds, and by several courses at Bradford and Ilkley Community College. The authority and competence of the satsang's young spokespersons has been enhanced by the experience of communicating with such groups, even if informally. The invitation to travel to Scarborough to address the

students in 1983 was a recognition of the maturing of this competence. The two young men reported later that they had been very well received: 'Only one of the students was very awkward' (19.4.83).

The skills of the whole group of young satsangis were recognised in 1984 in a context even further removed from that of Bradford itself. A day conference was organised in Dursley, Gloucestershire, by devotees not of Indian background. Interested persons from a wide area of southern England attended the event. Amongst the distinguished guests, Sir George Trevelyan, founder President of the Wrekin Trust, was one of the speakers. By special invitation, the young people of the Bradford centre led the singing of bhajans during part of the day's programme.

The fourth characteristic of the activities of the satsang during this period makes evident a continuity and consistency in the convictions of its members. Originally, acknowledgement of the siddhis of Sathya Sai generated the faith of heads of families associated with the mandir. The fascination of Baba's seemingly paranormal feats has been much in evidence amongst the young people of the satsang also in the most recent phase. While their involvement and responsibility in the affairs of the fellowship have been increasing, their own convictions about siddhis and their desire to acquire personal experience of them, have governed much of their thinking. Thus, avowal of the supra-normal has nourished, sustained and enhanced its convictions in a period of dynamic growth in commitment amongst the young.

The two visiting speakers whose impact on young people was seminal to the renewal which characterised activities at the Bradford centre from 1981 onwards, had themselves been attracted to Baba by his siddhis. RP's life, and that of his family, had been transformed by the conviction that Sathya Sai had enabled his brother to see for the first time. Dr. Ghurye's conversion to faith from scepticism through experience of supranormal power at Baba's hands, and his consequent convictions about the properties of vibhuti and amrit, were rehearsed once again in an address in the bhajan mandal on 1 September 1983. By that time, a significant number of the youths of the fellowship had personally witnessed Baba's apparent ability to achieve the

miraculous. They had been raised to the heights of ecstasy in 1982 when they had experienced the effects of Baba's power for themselves. Their siblings, parents, friends and relatives in Bradford came to feel that they too had been recipients of the favour shown to the satsang's youthful ambassadors when Baba had, by all accounts, produced a medallion out of the air for each of them. Subsequently, the pilgrimages of 1983 and 1984 enhanced and embellished a reservoir of personal and collective experience of Baba's accomplishments.

Nevertheless, the medallions themselves may not have made the greatest impact on the youths from Bradford. There were other aspects of Sathya Sai's powers which impressed themselves indelibly on the mind of their leader. 'In the interviews with Baba', he recalled, 'the main thing that happens is that Swami tells you what's wrong with you' (8.11.82). 'He knew what I wanted', he acknowledged, 'he knows everything' (4.2.83). The same young man wrote, in a letter from Prashanti Nilayam in September 1984: 'Swami has told us much. Things very personal to us, known only to ourselves, he revealed. His emphasis now (is) on treading the path of God ... deep within.'

Thus, the personal encounters with Sathya Sai, not the automatic right of every pilgrim but granted to some by Baba's favour, had a great influence on the youths from Bradford in 1982. In the two following years, the satsang's pilgrims were again allowed intimate contact with the charismatic personality of Sathya Sai through small group meetings which sometimes offered an opportunity of one-to-one interaction. Such encounters took place in an atmosphere charged with expectation of the manifestation of siddhic power: an aspiration in which the pilgrims did not feel themselves to have been let down. In addition, alongside the intense ecstasy of those small group meetings, was the exhilaration of experiencing Baba's darshan amongst his devotees en masse. The young leader remarked:

I learned more from just observing, sitting in the front row of the crowds, than in the interviews. You can learn a lot by just sitting and drinking in the atmosphere.

It's wonderful, unspeakable, when you sit there and see him doing those miracles.

(8.11.82)

In such ways the devotees recall how Baba's astonishing accomplishments have had the effect of authenticating the aura projected by his intense and dynamic personality, just as at other times his remarkable persona effected the authentication of his astonishing accomplishments.

The inter-play of the impact of Sathya Sai Baba's personal charisma and the awe occasioned by his displays of siddhic power becomes apparent on occasions when those who participated in the pilgrimages show photographic transparencies of their visits to Prashanti Nilayam. Such pictures provide empirical evidence of the priorities of the pilgrims and of their response to their experiences.

Thus, on 4 February 1983, it was evident in the selection of slides made by the young leader of the 1982 pilgrimage, that the preoccupations of the pilgrims were three-fold. Paramount was the exhilarating awareness that they, young men from the Bradford satsang, were actually there with Baba himself. The intense excitement of this realisation is captured in a transparency, later enlarged into a framed group portrait proudly displayed in the centre, showing Sathya Sai standing with the pilgrims.

The second preoccupation of the young men manifest in their photographs, is with the persona of Baba. They took many pictures of him: several are striking portraits taken at very close range. Others show him standing on a dais, addressing an assembly, moving amongst a crowd or swinging in a highly decorated jooli (swing) to the adulation of his devotees. The quality of respect shown by the Bradford pilgrims themselves is differently represented in a photograph taken outside a barber's shed. Having arrived in Prashanti Nilayam sporting longer hair than was acceptable, and in one case a moustache, they paid a visit to the barber in speedy response to Sathya Sai's firm instructions. They preserved the memory on film.

A third group of transparencies, impressive in number, consists of photographs of persons or artefacts associated with Baba's siddhis. One shows Sathya Sai

pouring vibhuti into someone's hand; another the hand of a Bradford pilgrim holding a ring said to produce amrit miraculously. A small deposit of what appears to be amrit is evident in that photograph: more than a tincture empirically present in the pilgrim's palm.

Another picture in this category shows the young men standing beside a tree at Shirdi, close to the temple-compound associated with Shirdi Baba. From that tree, it is said, many different kinds of fruit were culled, in Sathya Sai's previous incarnation. Another transparency shows a white man and his wife, who explained to the youths that he was cook to Shirdi Baba in an earlier life and possesses Shirdi Baba's ring. A further picture shows the ring. The leader of the Bradford pilgrims claims that he witnessed Sathya Sai taking it from the man and breathing on its reverse side until his own image appeared there. After a while, Baba breathed on the ring again, making his likeness disappear. He returned it to its owner in its original state 'because he knew how precious Shirdi Baba's ring was to him' (4.2.83). Photographic evidence thus points to the continuing role of affirmations of Sathya Sai's siddhic powers in the convictions of the youths who have been so influential in the Bradford satsang since 1981.

In addition, many special and occasional activities sponsored by the satsang in the period 1981-85 make manifest the permanence and consistency of the fascination of the reputed siddhis of Sathya Sai for satsangis of all ages. For example, in October 1982 a coach trip was organised to visit families connected with the Sai centres in Wolverhampton and Coventry, 'because that is where Baba has done so many of his wonders recently'.⁸⁹

Considerable excitement was occasioned in 1983 as satsangis anticipated the visit of Sri Ganapathi Sachchidananda Swami, an itinerant holy man renowned for reputedly paranormal accomplishments. The young people made thorough and elaborate preparations for his visit, and, in the absence of several of their leaders in Prashanti Nilayam, carried through an ambitious devotional programme on 16 August with great dignity and effect, much to their credit. Their expectation of possible siddhic manifestations stimulated considerable interest locally, even if not, in

the actual event, publicly vindicated through demonstration.

In July 1985, the young satsangis organised a coach trip to the Cheddar Gorge in Somerset. The reputed appearance of Shivalingas in that area had intrigued them for several years. They wanted to observe the phenomenon themselves: evidence, they believed, of the paranormal manifestation of divine power in this country, the attraction and fascination of which had not at all been diminished by their experience of pilgrimage to Prashanti Nilayam. While such pilgrimage had not been unknown in the earlier years of the satsang, its renewal in the recent period has been highly significant, substantially strengthening the convictions of participants. The recent pilgrimages have in certain respects been more intense experiences than the earlier ones. The length of stay in Prashanti Nilayam has, for many, been considerably longer. The corporate nature of the united venture, not simply a family holiday with devotional interest but an extension of the activity of the satsang, has given it a greater significance for the group as a whole. Many of the pilgrims have made the journey while they are at a highly impressionable age. In addition, the journeys have become regular and more frequent. Most importantly, the close access to Baba allowed in the recent pilgrimages, in spite of the large numbers of devotees gathering at his ashram, has been truly remarkable. It is due to the fact that the Bradford satsang is now known and recognised even in Prashanti Nilayam.

This cumulative and corporate, personal or vicarious experience, has strengthened the satsang in two respects. The certainty of its members about the authenticity of the siddhic accomplishments of Sathya Sai is firmer than ever and all-pervading. Furthermore, the personal familiarity of more and more devotees with the charismatic personality of Baba, has served to heighten and enhance his reputation for dynamic spiritual leadership amongst the satsangis beyond their earlier convictions. There is a sense of intimacy with Baba which is now particularly apparent in the activities of the satsang: for example, in the wording chosen for announcements at a bhajan mandal, or at times when individuals testify to their personal religious experience. The minds of the devotees are

still exercised by a fascination for Baba's supranormal powers, but the siddhis are not themselves pre-eminent. It is the magnetism of the personality which manifests those powers, and what they indicate beyond a capacity for engendering astonishment, that is paramount.

Thus, reflecting on his experience of staying at Prashanti Nilayam from July - November 1982, the leader of the youths of the satsan vouchsafed:

I really know that Baba is God now. Experience at Prashanti has proved it.

When I was there, I was with thousands of people, but I felt always the deep love that Baba had for me. It was the same for everyone. You are one of a great crowd, but you sense the love that he has for you, just for you. But they all feel it. That's God. That's what makes me know that he is God. I don't have any hesitation or doubt any more. I know.

(4.2.83)

That observation compels recollection of the earlier comment made by RP that for him, in a family where a most notable healing had been experienced, 'the real miracle is the love of the Sai family' (19.9.81, see above, 8.4). Such testimony presents two disparate but connected characteristics of the religious identity of the members of the satsang: the experience of Baba's siddhis and the consequent generation of intense community life. Analysis of those disparate elements and of their inter-relationship, offering wider reference than to the cultural preferences of a British Gujarati satsang in the late twentieth century, is a task for the conclusion of this study.

Conclusion

It has been shown that the Sri Sathya Sai satsang in Bradford offered close social bonds to those who formed it in 1970, or who chose to participate in it afterwards. This was achieved predominantly by sustaining cultural continuity for Gujarati Hindus who came to the United Kingdom directly from their homeland or from East Africa, or for their British-born children. Paradoxically, this continuity has been offered in a form new, in its focus on Sathya Sai Baba, for many of the satsangts adherents. Such a religio-cultural and social development also attracted commitment from some non-Gujarati participants.

Increasingly, the satsang took cognisance of certain aspects of the religiously plural environment, and responded to the bi-cultural context in which its young people were growing up. It allowed an increasing amount of responsibility to devolve upon the young males in particular. Thus the intensity of the social bonds offered by the satsang exercised an appeal not confined to the elderly or to those with a purely nostalgic cultural orientation.

From its inception, it was evident that affirmation of the siddhis of Sathya Sai Baba would be characteristic of the convictions of the satsang because of the nature of the faith of its most committed founder-members. Thus, it is not a purely social experience or a non-specific religious orientation that has been offered to participants in the satsang's affairs. Its development has fostered, and has been fostered by, culturally-transmitted cognitive elements⁹⁰ articulated in a complex Indian heritage of mythology and popular religious practice, and currently embodied - for believers - in the person and work of Sathya Sai Baba. The social cohesion offered by the satsang has been

built on convictions which are rooted in an acknowledgement of Baba's siddhic powers. Those who have chosen to be agnostic about Sathya Sai's powers have remained outside or on the fringes of the fellowship. Those who have acclaimed what are avowed to be signs of Baba's avataric nature, have participated integrally in the social interaction. The eventual organic growth of the satsang, and the communication of some of its characteristic convictions to a younger generation, has arisen out of the experience of those reputed siddhis. The functions fulfilled by this sharply defined community in the Hindu population in Bradford, and in its wider social setting, will be analysed in what follows.

The resources of the Indian cultural heritage, from the civilisation of the Indus valley onwards, illuminate the motivation of the Hindus who formed the Sri Sathya Sai satsang in Bradford in 1970, and who sustained it thereafter. Thus the central role of Shiva in the worship offered in the Sai mandir is highly significant. So is Shiva's pivotal function in the theology expounded by Sathya Sai Baba, and in Baba's interpretations of Indian mythology.

In the earliest Indian traditions in which he is identifiable, Shiva is Pasupati, lord of the animals, an unkempt huntsman who rules the forest with his bow and arrows (Bhattacharji 1970: 115; Dhavamony 1971: 107). Originally Shiva was too uncouth to be admitted to the respectable society of the higher gods, a status which he only achieved after a considerable passage of time. Surviving major cultural transpositions, and elevated to the most exalted echelons of the pantheon, his worship is still characteristically non-élitist, democratic in spirit, eschewing hierarchical thresholds in respect of the admission of devotees.⁹¹ In consequence, the cult of Shiva has had a particular, but not exclusive, appeal to those of low birth, whose lack of caste status has excluded them from the ritual and social establishment.

Intriguing parallels to the role played by Shiva have been discerned in the culture of ancient Greece. More than two millennia ago, Shiva was identified by the Greeks with their own Dionysos (Bhattacharji 1970: 144-48; Zimmer 1974: 186). Like Dionysos, Shiva dispenses

his grace to all who are willing to receive it and who acknowledge him as Lord. He is still understood to do that, unlike his Greek counterpart.

Shiva and Dionysos have separately embodied alternatives to the hierarchical religious establishments of the Brahmins and of Olympus, where membership is restricted to the socially and religiously elite. All who have been possessed by a desire to serve Shiva with song or in dance, or by membership in the community of devotees, have been understood to attain - like the votaries of Dionysos - experience of divine grace (Long 1971: 207). Access for the ritually impure and the lowly-regarded, an untrammelled approach to the godhead which informs the aetiological tales surrounding the rites of Mahashivaratri (above, 5.2), still characterises the perception of Shiva's worship.

The functions supplied in ancient Greece by rites and social organisms parallel to those associated with Shiva were analysed by Nietzsche (1909). Such practices and social interactions, Nietzsche suggested, articulated one of two competing religious drives that had exercised, in Europe, a formative influence in the shaping of cultural history: Apollonianism and Dionysianism. The religion of Apollo made a virtue out of the social necessity for restraint, and to that end endorsed disciplines of asceticism, spirituality and duty, together with intellectual pursuits. Perfection and abstraction were its objectives. It appealed to the aristocratic elite. On the other hand, the religion of Dionysos, with an emphasis on spontaneity and release, offered ecstasy to a different section of the human family. It disturbed the status quo, creating fresh social bonds in personal relationships and mutual recognition. Exhilarating its own clientele, it rejected the individualism and the maintenance of established status which were upheld by the religion of Apollo.

Nietzsche's work represented a 'major advance in interpretative theory' (Said 1981: 140; cf. 1978: 131; Turner 1974: 17).⁹² His analysis of ancient Greece has, for example, been utilised by Gouldner (1967). His polarisation of religious preoccupations has been

applied by O'Flaherty to Indian thought and mythology (1978: 14). Long has addressed himself to the elucidation of Indian religious practice in tandem with the potentially universal paradigms of ancient Greece (1971: 207, cf. 1972: 25, 35). South Asia's heritage has been allowed to function as a universal paradigm, illuminating the cultures of European and other societies, as occurred embryonically in Nietzsche's own writings.⁹³

Thus, while the responses to contemporary experience of Indians living in the diaspora, as well as in the sub-continent, can be clarified from South Asia's cultural history, it has become apparent that those antecedents have broad parallels in the experience of, amongst others, the ancient Greeks. Shiva Pasupati, for example, one of India's most potent religious symbols as lord of the ritually and socially down-graded, illuminates - and may be illuminated by - the functions focussed for others in the role of Dionysos.

Certain aspects of the cult of Shiva, therefore, supply, in an Indian cultural context and even in circumstances of diaspora, functions also articulated elsewhere in humanity's social and religious experience. Urbanisation has made tribal categories of identity and traditional systems of mutual dependence less and less relevant. The process, with its attendant disruption of rural communities, has been understood by Gouldner as creating a situation in which 'Dionysianism' compensates for a 'sensed loss of communion with others, with nature and man alike'. Following Nietzsche, Gouldner has suggested that this form of religious practice generates an awareness of a mystical oneness in which a person rises 'above the prison of his individuality', forging anew 'the frayed bond between man and man' and 'losing himself in the common life of the whole'. Thus, the appeal of a Dionysian cult is to 'the lower-class strata, the dispossessed or marginal peasantry ... the poor', but also to 'the foreign-born or slaves in the polis.' Above all else, what the Dionysian is seeking is to avoid a sense of 'loneliness and separation from others' (1967: 116-22; cf. Nietzsche 1956: 56). The pertinence of such observations to the circumstances in which some members of the Sri Sathya Sai satsang in Bradford have found themselves, and to their response to those conditions, is readily apparent.

Because bhajan mandal is so important in the religious practice of the devotees of Sathya Sai Baba, it is again intriguing that Nietzsche devoted substantial attention to the role of music in religious cults. He noted that 'a new world of symbols is required' by the subjects of the Dionysian cults: 'other symbolic powers' to express 'the essence of nature' and the experience of 'oneness as genius of the race'. Such representational powers as 'those of music', he felt, 'in rhythmic, dynamics and harmony, suddenly become impetuous'. In order to comprehend this process, a person needs to have attained an advanced state of absorption in the object of his devotion, 'the very height of self-abnegation'. There is, Nietzsche believed, a characteristic element which is of the essence of Dionysian music and is undeniably 'un-Apollonian; namely, the thrilling power of the tone, the uniform stream ... the thoroughly incomparable world of harmony' (1909: 32).

Nietzsche would not have found cause to change his mind had he attended a bhajan mandal of the Bradford satsang, that 'kind of rock mass' (Patel 1976: 237) in its specific local embodiment. Furthermore, had he been able to examine the social status ascribed to members of the satsang in British society, he would have found material consonant with his analysis of the ancient Greek world.

Nietzsche pursued his theme further. He wrote of a 'revolt of the slaves' implicit in Dionysian cults. The revolt, he suggested, begins in 'the very principle of resentment becoming creative' - a resentment experienced by those who are 'forced to find their compensation in an imaginary revenge'.⁹⁴ This theory envisages situations in which Dionysian cults not only compensate the poor for their deprivations, but also provide a counter-ideology which rejects feelings of shame and inferiority.

Nietzsche's analysis illuminates the functions which may be supplied, in a Hindu context, by such pre-occupations as the revalorisation of religious dogma and the furnishing of contemporary references for the age-old mythological heritage. Belief in current revelations or in contemporary divine interventions, such as evinced by devotion to a contemporary avatar,

provide bases for religious ideologies and practices, one of whose functions may be to invert the social context conceptually. The economic and political order is placed on its head when one claims that the poor are in fact rich.

Bhajans sung by the devotees of Sathya Sai Baba may be taken to illustrate the pertinence of Nietzsche's observations.⁹⁵ In an official rendering of their arati hymn, Baba is avowed to be 'Sreekaraa', the one who performs 'all auspicious happiness-yielding acts' for his devotees (Shah 1978: 32). Thus, there have been times in Bradford when those who have been very much aware of the fundamental unhappiness of their situation, have benefitted subjectively from the positive assertion of their faith and their privileges. On the other hand, many who prosper and are at ease in positions of entrenched social and economic eminence, are understood, all unaware, to profit only in a world of illusions: in what Nietzsche would understand to be the realm of Apollo (Nietzsche 1956: 22). That is what Nietzsche₆ meant by the 'revenge' in which the 'slaves' indulge.⁹⁶

There thus arises the question of the extent to which such dramatic language as Nietzsche's 'revolt of the slaves' is warranted in respect of the Sai satsang in Bradford. It may appear, in such a case, to be an over-statement. Nietzsche has, however, used pertinent imagery. The revolt is, of course, a purely conceptual rebellion against the injustice, possibly the cruelty, of one's circumstances: a conceptualisation which has practical consequences. The cerebral strategy which is postulated is one which renders those circumstances tolerable. Material to any exhaustive assessment of the appropriateness of Nietzsche's imagery, would be a full survey of the circumstances of the early years of the settlement of Gujarati Hindus in Bradford. Factors such as the incidence of economic insecurity, anxieties about separated relatives, and the extent of the encounter with racist prejudice, would have to be investigated in any attempt to illuminate completely the context in which the satsang emerged. Such considerations suggest fruitful areas for further research. Even in the absence of extensive research amongst the Hindu population in Bradford, certain facts are apparent.

It has become evident in this limited inquiry that the first generation of Gujarati Hindu settlers in Bradford needed considerable inner resources to counter subjective disorientation due to cultural transition. They also needed strategies to combat the effects of poverty, and to sustain themselves against prejudice and racial discrimination (see above 4.3). Satsangis, even in cases where no attempt was made to elicit evidence of awareness of prejudice against them as Indian immigrants, expressed disappointment at the difficulty they or their acquaintances had experienced in obtaining jobs commensurate with their proven qualifications and prior experience. In some cases a depth of misery that one could not have guessed at came to light.

The president of the satsang, for example, had been led to have optimistic expectations of employment in Britain at the time of his migration from Uganda in 1967. On attempting to settle down socially and economically here, he found circumstances daunting:

I was very disappointed. Yes! For nearly three years we did not unpack our suitcases!

We had no social contact here. In Uganda we had been socially involved very much. My job in Uganda was a very nice one.

After we started the bhajan sessions here, things improved. Through the bhajan sessions we forgot our sorrows. It kept us very busy: there was a lot to do!

(21.9.79)

The easy mixing in that recollection of factors relating to employment, socialising and religious devotion, is not fortuitous or insignificant - nor is the depth of despair and disorientation that is manifest.⁹⁶ Three years had intervened between the arrival in this country of the family concerned and the commencement of the bhajan mandal in their home. The fact that the period could be recalled with such intensity of feeling evokes the subjective desolation occasioned by objective circumstances which they had experienced. Nietzsche would have recognised their situation as one ripe for Dionysian strategies, calling for the practices which would invert, conceptually, the social hierarchy, in a 'revolt of the slaves'.

Both Apollonians and Dionysians aspire after a higher state and the overcoming of imperfections. They do not accept humanity or the human situation as it is. They see individuals and society as capable of elevation: Apollonians through the exercise of reason and the pursuit of science, Dionysians through a capacity for mystical awareness of union with God, nature and each other. Thus devotees of both orientations struggle to avoid misery, but in differing ways. While the Dionysian tries 'to avoid loneliness and separation from others; the Apollonian ... lowness and the contempt of others' (Gouldner 1967: 122).

Apollo, in the Greek world, symbolised highly prized qualities: 'proportion and harmony' (Smart 1978b: 317), the 'majestic rejection of all licence' (Nietzsche 1956: 26). As god of the sun and of light, he sustained the development of reason, knowledge and science. All such activities take seriously the definitive nature of the empirical world. Thus, Apollo is the god of an external reality: objective achievements, rather than intuitive insight or mystical experience, make accessible the secrets of life to his devotees. One knows through cerebral application and by doing, rather than through self-abnegating identification with the divine or simply by being devout. In Indian practice this is paralleled in the tension between two of the traditional paths to liberation (jnana and karma) and the third (bhakti).

From a Dionysian perspective, Apollo emerges as the patron of an illusion, albeit a highly sophisticated, an 'enlightened' one. Apollo's divine image radiates all the positive, but for the Dionysian the illusory, qualities of a world-view closed to the insights of a mystical intuition of reality (cf. Nietzsche 1956: 22). In the terms of India's 'Dionysians', Apollo's devotees are mis-led by maya, and their knowledge has to be superseded by another, an esoteric one.

The Dionysian focus in the teaching of Sathya Sai Baba is readily apparent in, for example, his emphasis on the practice of nama simaran (above 2.1), and is related to the monism of his advaita theology (appendix 2). The Apollonian element, less fundamental, is also present. His claim to be of the lineage of Bhardwaj, asserting therefore the very highest Vedic origin and authority; would be parallel, in Greek terms, to

claiming Olympian status. Being numbered amongst the devotees of Sathya Sai therefore gives Baba's votaries access not only to mystical experience, but also to aspects of an Apollonian orientation. His most eminent aides are academics, intellectuals, and his most famous associates are highly-successful professional people. He is patronised by an elite in Indian society. Furthermore, while Baba's disparagement of western science is in line with a Dionysian orientation, the ostensibly scientific mode in which he presents aspects of his teaching is designed to attract something of the prestige that attaches to the empirical sciences in modern society. The light of Apollo illumines his court.

Sathya Sai's entourage represents the submission of the world of reason and of science to his charisma, its bewilderment before the exercise of his siddhis. Baba does not contravene but he 'transcends' the laws of science. Sceptical comments about the authenticity of his paranormal accomplishments are heeded, like assaults on his character, by few of his devotees, although they sometimes cause anxiety. Science is understood to have its limitations, as also must merely human perceptions of character. When one is regarded by one's devotees as transcending science, they may also perceive one as transcending ethics.

The Indian religio-cultural tradition has been provided, by Sathya Sai Baba, with a modern manifestation of its heritage in a form which is seen by his supporters as para-science. Baba is sufficiently confident of his position not merely to offer diatribes against the claims of modern science but also to articulate his own teaching in forms which take cognisance of scientific terminology and accomplishments (Kasturi 1975b: 238; 1980b: 190; V. Balu 1981: 204-22). Thus Baba acknowledges the Apollonian world of reason and empirical achievement without conceding to it the ground of fundamental validity. He wears its clothes and entices some of its high priests. He endows an ancient esoteric heritage, which draws upon a highly sophisticated philosophical tradition, with plausible references to an alien culture and a modern environment. He does not endorse rationalist perspectives, but offers a form of para-rationality. What Baba offers in India would in Greece have been paralleled by a form of Dionysianism with Apollonian embellishments.

The convictions and practices of Sathya Sai's Gujarati devotees in Bradford also manifest Apollonian dimensions in so far as they represent processes parallel to those identified by the term 'sanskritisation' for example, (Srinivas 1973). Their religious convictions have a horizon wider than a purely caste-restricted or regionally-defined culture. They embrace the all-Indian tradition through the person of one who demarcates them from devotees of Jalaram Bapa and Swaminarayan, freeing them from regional or caste-dominated articulations of tradition. For that reason, they are reluctant to succumb to the allurements of another regionally-specific manifestation of the Indian heritage by identifying Baba in their own devotion with Subrahmanya. That would make them subordinate to another sub-sanskritic culture. They do not reject their Gujarati ethos, but relate it to the all-Indian sanskritic heritage understood as embodied in, and re-interpreted by, Sathya Sai.

The affirmation of Indian ethnicity made by Baba's devotees in Bradford is thus patient of elucidation from more than one perspective. Ethnic defence motivations have been enlisted, positive and assertive manifestations of a group's self-concept energised. These represent a response to the under-valuing of a previously colonial culture by the majority population in a post-imperial age. Analysis of Dionysian and Apollonian religious practice supplies a further conceptual tool, illuminating the empirical phenomena.

The response of Baba's Gujarati devotees to the situation in Bradford presents itself as more than a straightforward valorisation of a regional culture. Not only is Baba not a Gujarati, but some who have become his votaries through the satsang are not Gujaratis either. The fellowship associates with non-Gujarati satsangs in the United Kingdom. The reputation of Sathya Sai is known by his Bradford devotees to be international and Baba's teaching to be openly syncretic. This is not merely sanskritisation, it is para-sanskritisation. The revolt of the slaves claims not only the insights of their natal religion, but those of the religious heritage of their economic masters, as its sanctioning authority.

Even when there has appeared to be little interest in the claims of Sathya Sai amongst non-Indians in

Bradford, the devotees have been well aware of the international advocacy of the authenticity of their swami represented in the work of such interpreters as Murphet, Sandweiss, Mason and Laing. This cosmopolitan testimony, endorsing the syncretism of Sathya Sai, has given the evolution of the Sai Centre in Bradford an aspect that cannot be analysed simply in terms of the process of sanskritisation. 'Para-sanskritisation? may offer a pertinent extension of the older concept, allied with, and partly arising out of, the conceptual tools provided by the spectrum of Dionysian and Apollonian responses. The relationship which has become apparent between the 'up-caste-ing' which theories of sanskritisation propose, and the 'revolt of the slaves' in Nietzsche's discussion of socio-religious phenomena, is one which further research might well illumine.

Nietzsche believed he had discovered situations in which Apollonianism and Dionysianism enriched each other through mutual congress. In combination, he felt, they were a source of great creativity.⁹⁸ Nietzsche's interpreters assert that he combined both Apollonian and Dionysian orientations in his own person (Clive 1965:xi). Even in ancient Greece, Dionysos 'tamed, and clothed and in his right mind' was not unknown (Cornford 1957: 195). He was 'Apollonised' (Gouldner 1967: 119). It is not strange, then, that we can affirm with Nietzsche:

We are now approaching the central concern of our inquiry ... an understanding of the Dionysiac-Apollonian spirit, or at least an intuitive comprehension of the mystery which made this conjunction possible.
(1956: 36)

The key to that 'mystery' in the experience of the devotees of Sathya Sai in Bradford, is to be found in the fact that Baba resolves, for them, the antagonism between Shiva and Vishnu. The intensely personal, seemingly world-renouncing discipline of the devotees of Shiva as Mahayogi, issuing nevertheless in social consequences as has been demonstrated, is balanced by a conspicuous commitment to practical service, education and action on behalf of the 'ideal karmayogin' (cf. King 1980: 46; 1981: 3, 13). Such eclecticism is projected in the icons in the mandir, sustaining the argument that this thesis should be seen as little

more than an extended essay in iconology (above 3.1).

Vishnu, as a solar deity, is associated with Apollo, while not corresponding to *his* Greek counterpart in every characteristic (Bhattacharji 1970: 303-4; cf. 232, 288; and Danielou 1964: 149, 188). Shiva is a lunar god. The reconciliation of Vishnu and Shiva has been effected by Sathya Sai Baba for his followers, not only in theoretical and in socio-communal terms (above 3.3) but also empirically in two substances with which they have connection. Thus, the significance of the two products most characteristically offered by Sathya Sai to his devotees has to be interpreted in terms of a Shiva-Vishnu harmony, but also against the background of a Dionysian-Apollonian dichotomy and subsequent amalgam. This is not to say that the Greek culture rather than the Indian represents the definitive paradigm. Nietzsche himself acknowledged his debt to the heritage of South Asia. The cultural paradigm is as much Indian as Greek.

Shiva, like Dionysos, was associated with intoxication and revelling. The inebriating drink of the Indian gods was soma (above 5.2, 6.5). It also had symbolic significance, suggesting reincarnation 'through the moon' - of which Shiva was the deity. The moon often symbolised immortality (Bhattacharji 1970: 156-57). Soma became identified, for mortals, with amrit, the nectar of deathlessness. Intoxication with the Dionysian potion thus became Apollonised, for humans, as the realisation of supreme bliss: immortality. Thus, production of amrit by the siddhic power of Sathya Sai Baba transmutes a Dionysiac element, soma, into Apollonian significance (cf. *ibid.*). Amongst the devotees of Sathya Sai, the associations of Shiva with intoxication and licence have become totally spiritualised.

Soma also represents semen (above 6.5). In yogic practice, in a context of rigorous self-restraint it suggests the conquest of desire, and therefore detachment, release, moksha.

Vibhuti, the other most characteristic product of Sathya Sai Baba's reputed facility for the materialisation of substances, is associated initially with Vishnu (above 5.4), and therefore by extension with Apollo. It suggests the empirical manifestation of

divine. majesty, and therefore paranormal powers. The term is also used for ash. Ash, associated with destruction and cremation, is linked conceptually with detachment, the death of desire - and therefore with liberation, moksha. Originally Vaishnavite in its associations, vibhuti long ago became connected with Shiva too. It also suggests semen: the power of desire burned to ash within the body of the detached yogi (above 5.7).

Thus, the main products of Baba's materialising prowess, each with Dionysian associations, are overwhelmingly - indeed exclusively - perceived in an Apollonian fashion. They symbolise the threatening forces of excess and indulgence, the disruptive power of licence and sexuality, which, needing to be contained by the constraints proposed by dharma, are converted into desirelessness and immortality. Those two goals, archaically represented by vibhuti and soma, have become signified in the contemporary world for Sai devotees by the ash and the amrit which issue, according to their convictions, from the hands of Sathya Sai or from artefacts associated with him. Those two goals, pinnacles of Apollonian accomplishment, are perceived in Bradford and striven after, in the context of the solace and reassurance of a Dionysian satsang. That fellowship asserts the viability of the culture of its members in an adapted, sanskritised and para-sanskritised modern guise. It supplies such a function through being the context in which a 'revolt of the slaves' takes place. Its members have sustained their sense of personal worth and identity, both as Gujaratis and as Indians, in a threatening situation, by affirming that they do not see the resources of their religio-cultural heritage as judged and arbitrary, but rather as arbiter and judge.

This process has become manifest during the fifteen years of the satsang's existence. For ten of those years, this research has been in progress. The account and analysis articulated above may be summarised as follows.

Significant aspects of the social context in which the Sai satsang emerged and developed within the Hindu population in Bradford were identified in chapter 1, where the nature of religious and cultural

societies cognate with the fellowship was also outlined. Chapter 2 described the activities of the satsang, identifying the religio-cultural preferences of its members. Those preferences represent a selection from the heritage of the bhakti tradition, the dimension in Indian religion most amenable for creating cohesion in contexts of social fragmentation such as those occasioned by migration. Thus, salient aspects of the situation in which a Dionysian orientation became attractive, and the mode in which that attraction manifested itself, were clarified in the first two chapters.

Chapter 3 demonstrated how the icons in the mandir make it evident that a venerably ancient tradition lies at the heart of the devotion of the satsang, but that the faith of this community is not a mere re-statement of an age-old heritage. A process of re-valorisation has taken place, in respect of the ancient dogmas. Mythology has been pressed into the service of a contemporary phenomenon. Attention was drawn to a Shaivite-Vaishnavite harmony which has to be related, in a wider hermeneutic, to a Dionysian-Apollonian eclecticism. The examination of the sensuousness of some of the icons, offered in chapter 4, focussed on a paradox inherent in this situation. The devotees of Sathya Sai Baba in Bradford are committed to ascetic values, but exemplify the traditional Indian propensity for representing advanced self-agnation iconically in a self-indulgent guise. In this case, that is based on the empirical evidence of Baba's physical presence, as witnessed by devotees and manifest in photographic likenesses which serve as icons.

Chapters 5 and 6 established the intensity of the communal experience that membership in the satsang offers: its effectiveness in achieving and sustaining a Dionysian social dynamism. Those chapters demonstrated how vibhuti and soma, archaic concepts with strong substantial associations and sometimes suggesting licence and intoxication, have been Apollonised. They have become purely suggestive of spiritual ecstasy, a cerebral transport in the mystery and presence of the godhead, devotional delight in a context of social cohesiveness. Chapter 5 suggested, however, that the religio-cultural preferences that commitment to Sathya Sai embodies for Gujarati devotees in Bradford are not purely ephemeral inner motivations. They may be induced by constraints of an external kind: notably by

life in a plural society manifesting a potential for alienation. Such preferences may also be seen as a form of sanskritisation. Chapter 6 focussed on the extension of India's sacred space. It demonstrated that devotion to Sathya Sai Baba, through explicit syncretism, admits Gujarati devotees to a further process, that of para-sanskritisation. Thus, in a Dionysian social context, Apollonian benefits are engaged.

In chapters 7 and 8 the role of siddhis in embodying and enhancing both Apollonian and Dionysian orientations has been indicated. Convictions about the perception of siddhis create an ecstasy which issues in social cohesion as soon as more than one person is committed to such a belief. Thus, chapter 7 demonstrated that aside from all questions of the authenticity of paranormal powers, the acknowledgment of siddhis reputedly manifested by Sathya Sai Baba has been a dynamic agent creating an intense experience of community. It has made manifest in Bradford the marks of a Dionysian cohesion. The Apollonian dimension in such convictions was also established: Baba's powers are perceived as transcending science. Dionysian ecstasy and Apollonian reverence for science and for empirical achievement, have combined to create a dynamic socio-religious unit. That fellowship is bonded not only by inner metaphysical preoccupations but by external constraints. The economic and political nature of some of the latter has been indicated in chapter 8, which focussed on the viability that some young British Gujaratis have found in traditional values and in the revalorisation of their familial heritage. Such a perspective engaged their convictions about the authenticity of the siddhic experience. Response to siddhis has been the foundation of their testimony. From 1981 onwards, more than ever before, the witness of the young to the young has been based on that. For them, as well as for their elders, the perception of siddhis has appeared to guarantee not only the validity of the 'revolt of the slaves' which Nietzsche described, but also its ultimate vindication.

The subject of this research thus holds diverse interest. Many issues commend themselves for further inquiry. For example, in respect of chapter 1, a detailed history of the growth of the network of Sai centres in the United Kingdom, and an analysis of their characteristics,

would be valuable. With reference to chapter 2, it would be instructive to analyse the theology of the bhajans sung by Baba's devotees, comparing and contrasting them with those sung by the worshippers of other revered figures, like Jalaram Baba. In relation to the focus of chapter 4, work on the opportunities presented by Sai Baba of Shirdi's earlier Muslim-Hindu rapprochement, could very usefully be done. It would explore the extent to which the apparent potential of that legacy has been developed, or otherwise neglected, while certain aspects of the Christian and western tradition have been directly addressed. Arising out of chapters 5 and 6, the perceived significance of the linga amongst Hindus in the United Kingdom suggests itself as a worthy subject for inquiry, as does the effect of migration on concepts of sacred space amongst Hindus. Explicit in chapters 7 and 8 is an awareness of the need to examine more systematically the distinctive nature of the Indian siddhic heritage, comparing and contrasting it with the testimonies to the experience of the paranormal in other cultures, and with the assumed lack of it in yet others, - a vast area for research.

Taken as a whole, this thesis underlines the need for a full analysis of the teaching of Sathya Sai Baba, and an examination of the significance of his lifestyle and example. Other matters which would be worthy of detailed investigation include: the implications of the syncretism represented by Sathya Sai's spiritual path; the evolution and current development in educational institutions in the United Kingdom of societies devoted to the programme of 'Education in Human Values' associated with Baba's teaching; and the reasons for the attraction of devotees of western ethnicity to a veneration for Sathya Sai. It can be seen, therefore, that there exists an extensive field of potential analytical endeavour to which this thesis, it is hoped, has made a contribution.

Appendix 1

The Life of Sathya Sai Baba: Some Significant Dates and Events

- 1926 23 November Sathanarayana Raju (later to identify himself as Sathya Sai Baba) born at Puttaparthi, Andhra Pradesh.
- 1940 8-9 March Sathanarayana suffered dire effects from scorpion sting, according to family at time - view now adamantly refuted by devotees. Baba's votaries maintain this was first instance of 'his ... going out with the subtle body to other places' (Kasturi 1980a: 39-40).
- 1940 23 May Sathanarayana's first claim to be Sai Baba of Shirdi and of Vedic lineage - that of Bhardwaj.
- 1940 20 October Sathanarayana left school suddenly to take up religious vocation; composed 'Manasa Bhajare' (see appendix 5), first bhajan by him about own role.
- 1940 November Sathanarayana assumed the style 'Sathya Sai Baba'; left elder brother's home in Uravakonda, where staying to attend school, returned to Puttaparthi. Bhajans now sung regularly in his presence at home village, first in room accommodating twelve persons, then in shed specially built and extended several times; later in tent. Puttaparthi gradually became place of pilgrimage.
- 1944 Building now known as 'Old Mandir' built in Puttaparthi for devotees.

- 1948 Construction of ashram, Prashanti Nilayam, a little outside Puttaparthi, commenced to accommodate needs of burgeoning Sai movement.
- 1949 November Sathya Sai claimed, in select gathering, 'All names (of God) are mine'.
- 1950 23 November Baba reported to have restored V. Radhakrishna to life (Murphet 1973: 133).
- 1957 Sathya Sai presided over Ninth All-India Divine Life Conference at Venkatagiri, a significant milestone in extension of his influence.
- 1957 14 July Baba commenced first tour of India.
- 1958 February First publication of magazine for the Sai movement, Sanathana Sarathi (The Eternal Charioteer).
- 1960 Work commenced on Sathya Sai's official biography, Sathyam Sivam Sundaram.
- 1961 Baba visited India's principal Shaivite and Vaishnavite shrines at Banares and Badrinath.
- 1963 July Baba's first major public claim to be Shiva-Shakti.
- 1963 November Academy for Vedic and Sanskrit Study inaugurated at Prashanti Nilayam by Sathya Sai.
- 1965 20 October Society for Vedic scholarship at highest level, Prashanti Vidwanmahasabha, inaugurated at Baba's ashram.
- 1967 Sai emblem (see plate 1.1) devised by Sathya Sai Baba.
- 1968 12 May Major Sai conference centre, 'Dharmakshetral, inaugurated and opened in Bombay, followed by

- First World Conference of Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations, held there. Baba made publicly his claim: 'All names (of God) are mine' (see entry for November 1949).
- 1968 30 June Baba left India on visit to East Africa.
- 1968 22 July College for girls established by Baba at Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh; officially inaugurated on 8 July 1971.
- 1968 Dasara Baba clarified his claim to be Krishna incarnate.
- 1969 9 June College for boys established at Bangalore by Baba.
- 1970-75 Variety of allegations made against Baba in this period: for example, law-suit for debts in 1973 (Mangalwadi 1977: 164, cf. 158; cf. Kasturi 1975a: 197-212).
- 1971 First Bal Vikas Gurus Central Training Camp, Prashanti Nilayam.
- 1971 25 December Baba reported to have restored W. Cowan to life (Sandweiss 1975: 101).
- 1975 July Second World Conference of Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations.
- 1979 22 November Statue of Shiva installed in newly-built temple on site of house where Baba had been born.
- 1979 Baba estimated to have 6,000,000 devotees in India (Osis and Haraldson 1979: 159).
- 1980 Third World Conference of Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations.

- 1983 Baba estimated to have 50,000,000 devotees in 64 countries from Iceland to Australia, from East to West, including some of the Iron Curtain countriesv (Mason 1983a: 4).
- 1983 August Bal Vikas Gurus Central Training Camp, Prashanti Nilayam: significant because programme and publications demonstrated increasing seriousness with which universal syncretic nature of teaching of Sathya Sai was taken.
- 1985 18 November Fourth World Conference of Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations began.
- 1985 23 November Sathya Sai Baba's sixtieth birthday (Indian traditional reckoning): occasion of major international gathering and celebration at Prashanti Nilayam. In Britain, rumours of an abortive attempt on Babats life by a visitor to Prashanti Nilayam circulated amongst devotees.

Appendix 2

The Teaching of Sathya Sai Baba

Information about the teaching of Sathya Sai Baba has been included in the thesis wherever appropriate. This appendix suggests resources which would be useful in a fuller and more systematic examination of this area of interest.

2.1 The theological context of Sathya Sai Baba's teaching

Baba's teaching is to be understood in the context of Hindu theologies of identity or non-difference, Advaita Vedanta. It is a form of non-dualism (advaita) arising out of the Upanishadic literature the Vedanta (culmination of the Vedas) - cf. Smart 1969a; Pereira 1976: 185-216.

See: Kasturi 1975a: 28-9, 51, 55, 75, 158-59
178, 200.
Kasturi 1975b: 29-33, 51, 70-71, 244-47
303-305.
Kasturi 1980a: 236, 261, 266

For criticism of Baba's advaitic views, see Mangalwadi 1977: 153, 163.

2.2 Extended presentations of the teaching of Sathya Sai

See: Sathya Sai Baba 1970, 1975b, 1975c, 1975d,
1975e, 1975f, 1975g,
1977, 1978, 1979a, 1980.

Bhagavantam n.d.

Kasturi, ed. 1977, 1980c, and n.d.

Kasturi 1980a: 219-239.

Hejmadi, ed. 1980a, 1980b.

2.3 Sathya Sai's method and style of teaching

For Baba's characteristic, and often memorable use of simile, metaphor, word-play and pun, and for his style of presentation,

see: Kasturi, ed. 1980c: 158;
Kasturi 1975a: 24, 76, 170-76, 196, 213-14,
244;
Kasturi 1980b: 91.
Sathya Sai Baba 1977: 7 (cf.ii)
Sandweiss 1975: 137;
Jyot 1, no.2, 7; 2, no.1, 3;
Mason 1984d: 3.

For an instance of an attempted onomatopoeic pun, attributed to Baba, mis-firing and becoming potentially offensive, see Fanibunda 1978: 48. Slade (1979: 168) offers a brief critique of Baba's style and method of teaching.

2.4 Teaching on topics of special interest

On defining the nature of God

See: Kasturi 1975b: 9, 12.

On the meaning of the name 'Sathya Sai Baba'

See: Sathya Sai Baba 1974: 28;
Kasturi 1975b: 300,

Sathya Sai defines his own task

See: Kasturi 1975a: 27-67.

On the future Avatar of the 21st century

Sathya Sai teaches that he will live until the age of 95 in 'this body', and that the third avatar in the Sai succession, Prema Sai Baba, will be born in A.D. 2021 in India.

See: Kasturi 1980a: 178;
Mason 1983a: 3.

On Jesus

See: Kasturi 1980c: 85-89, 236-240;
Kasturi 1980b: 65-66.

On social, political or economic issues

The status of women: Sathya Sai Baba 1980: 279-83.
Family Planning: Kasturi 1975a: 215.

Industrial relations: Sathya Sai Baba 1974: 44;
Kasturi 1975a: 76.
Socialism: Sathya Sai Baba n.d.: 72; Kasturi 1975b:
201.
British rule in India: Kasturi 1975a: 59.
Political or international issues: Kasturi 1975a:
68, 160, 173; 1975b: 60.

Appendix 3

Statistics of Attendance at Thursday Bhajan Mandals: September 1977—October 1985

3.1 Dates of Attendance, and Numbers of Devotees Attending

<u>Year</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>No. attending</u> (approx. minimum figure)	<u>Special factors to</u> <u>note</u>
1977	* September	60	* Date not recorded Bitterly cold weather
	* October	40	
	10 November	45	
	24 November	50	
	15 December	66	
	29 December	55	
1978	19 January	5 ⁰	Severe snow and ice
	16 February	50	Severe snow and ice
	2 March	75	Very wet weather
	16 March	45	
	7 April	60	
	14 April	35	Severe conditions, snow
	28 April	45	
	18 May	60	
	25 May	75	
	8 June	45	
	15 June	60	
	22 June	50	
	6 July	65	
	21 September	50	
5 October	42		
16 November	30	Extremely wet weather	
7 December	18	Extremely wet weather	
1979	8 March	25	
	22 March	25	
	29 March	30	
	5 April	38	
	26 April	40	
	7 June	43	
	28 June	38	

	12 July	42	
	6 September	43	
	13 September	29	
	20 September	26	
	27 September	29	
	15 November	35	Extremely wet weather
	13 December	25	
	20 December	25	
	27 December	34	
1980	3 January	17	
	27 March	34	
	10 April	39	
	19 June	3 ^B	
	26 June	28	
	10 July	42	
	13 November	23	
	11 December	27	
1981	12 February	40	
	26 February	40	
	9 April	42	
	11 June	46	
	2 July	42	
	29 October	60	
	3 December	62	
1982	29 April	70	
	24 June	105	Farewell to young pilgrims (see 8.4)
	16 September	114	Return of pilgrims (see 8.5)
	7 October	85	
1983	24 February	69	
	14 April	86	
	28 April	77	
	23 June	103	
	28 July	62	
	1 September	85	Dr. Ghurye gave address (see 8.5)
	20 October	60	
	22 December	73	
1984	2 February	36	
	3 May	68	
	14 June	74	
	19 July	76	
	20 September	67	
	18 October	5 ⁰	

1985	10 January	58
	21 March	70
	25 April	67
	30 May	82
	25 July	75
	10 October	70

All figures cited are based on personal observation. They represent the attendance at the conclusion of the bhajan mandal in each case.

The occasions recorded above do not include festivals, when one would expect abnormal attendance. Two occasions of special celebration peculiar to the satsang itself are, however, included in the statistics given for 1982, since these events were manifestations of the renewal of enthusiasm which stemmed from September 1981 (see above, 8.3).

Figures of attendance at festivals and special events are noted in the text of the thesis wherever it was of particular significance.

On 18 occasions statistics of attendance at the commencement of the bhajan mandal were kept, the majority being occasions other than those listed above. On 3 occasions statistics of attendance at Sunday afternoon bhajan mandals were kept (see above, 2.1).

3.2 Yearly Average Attendances at the Thursday Bhajan Mandal

Figures relate to dates recorded in appendix 3.1.

<u>Year</u>	<u>No.of occasions recorded</u>	<u>Average attendance</u>		
1977	6	52.66	=	53
1978	17	50.29	=	50
1979	15	31.40	=	31
1980	8	31.00	=	31
1981 *	7	47.42	=	47
1982	4	93.50	=	94
1983	8	76.87	=	77
1984	6	61.83	=	62
1985	6	70.33	=	70

* If 1981 is divided into two periods, before and after the event discussed above (8.3), statistics for that year yield the following figures:

Pre-September Occasions: 5 Average attendance: 42
 Post-September Occasions: 2 Average attendance: 61

3.3 Yearly Average Attendances at Commencement of the Thursday Bhajan Mandal

A record of attendance in the first twenty minutes of 18 bhajan mandals was kept. The results are summarised below. Because the keenness of members of the satsang is indicated sometimes by their readiness to come early to the meeting, these figures have their own significance. In September 1981, in a renewal of commitment in the satsang, emphasis was placed on the necessity of arriving early to prepare oneself to benefit fully from the mandal.

Year No. of occasions recorded Average attendance

1977	3	21.00 = 21
1980	8	18.12 = 18
1981@	1	22.00 = 22
1982	3	76.33 = 76
1983	4	65.75 = 66
1985	1	40.00 = 40

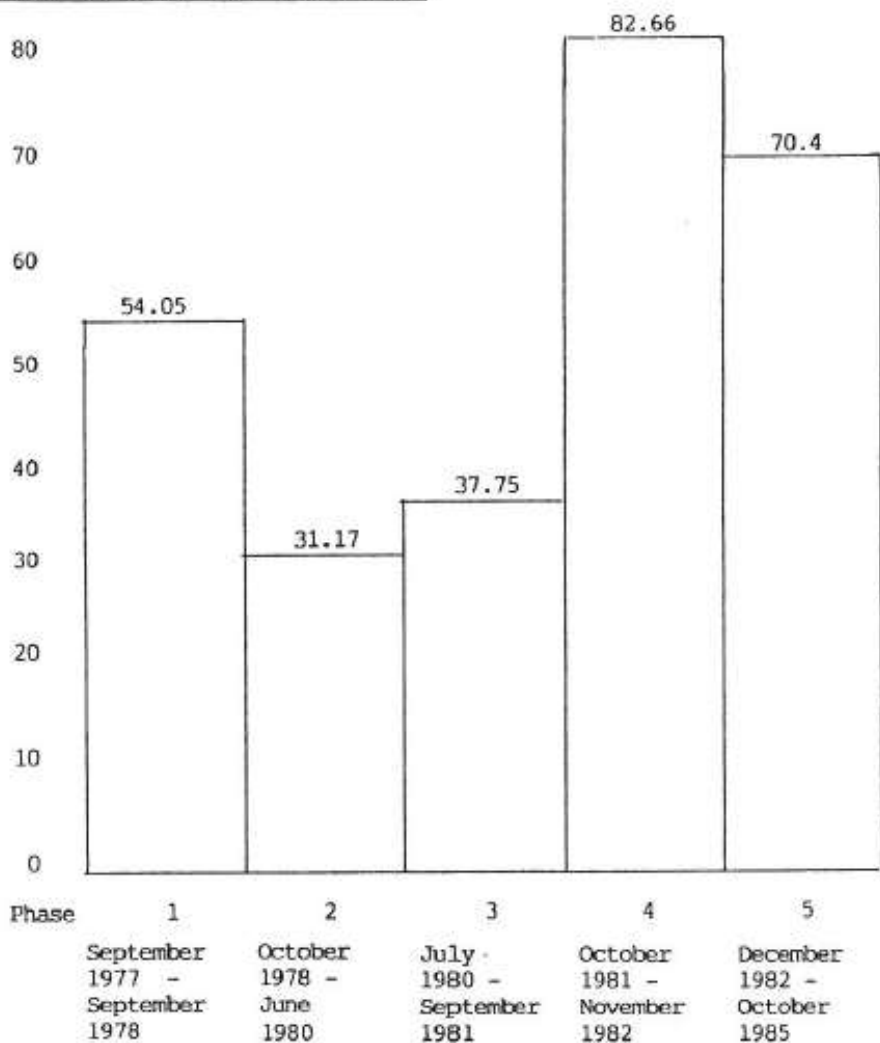
@ This was in May 1981 - that is, earlier than the events of September, referred to above.

3.4 Attendance at the Thursday Bhajan Mandal Analysed by Phases

This analysis is based on statistics found in 3.1 above, referring to attendance at the conclusion of the bhajan mandal, the maximum figure for each occasion. This should not be taken to imply that a significant number of devotees attend only at the end of the meeting. That is not the case. Not all devotees, however, are able to be present for the commencement of every mandal, so they come as soon as they can. Since it is not acceptable to leave early, before the distribution of prasad, attendance at the conclusion represents the peak on any normal occasion.

Attendance at the actual events of September 1981 which led to new commitment in the satsang is not included in these statistics. Those events occurred between phase 3 and phase 4.

Average attendance attained



Appendix 4

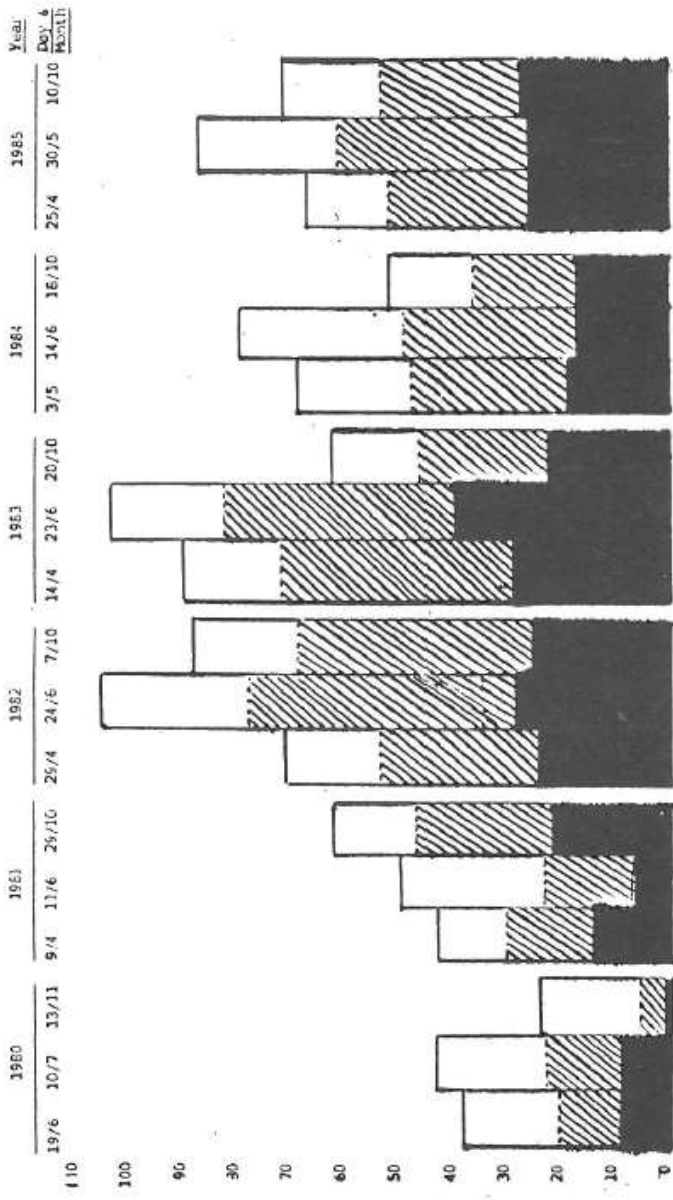
Attendance of the Young at the Thursday Bhajan Mandal

The proportion of young people attending the bhajan mandals of the satsang was at first only casually observed and noted. Gradually it became clear that it could be a highly significant indicator of the developments in the community. Deriving from those initially casual observations, the following table shows why it was decided in 1980 that a more systematic attempt should be made to record the composition of the congregation by age and gender:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number of occasions on which a high proportion of young people attending was recorded</u>		<u>Total number of occasions on which record was kept</u>
1977	1	out of	7
1978	3	out of	19
1979	5	out of	22
1980	5	out of	18
1981	5	out of	9
1982	4	out of	4

From June 1980 onwards, systematic recording of the numbers of satsangis of differing age-groups and of both genders was undertaken, in so far as this could be done without intruding on the sanctity and dignity of the occasions. Such recording was, therefore, approximate. A specimen of the findings is represented below. They show that any increase in attendance at the satsang's meetings between 1980 and 1985 was largely an increase in the attendance of the young: that is, those under 30 years of age.

Three dates in each of 6 years have been selected for this chart, in approximately corresponding periods of the year, but taking into account that systematic recording did not commence in 1980 until June.



The Proportion of Satsangis under the age of 30 Attending Bhajan Mandals on 18 Evenings in the Period June 1980 to October 1985

Shaded area: proportion of the congregation under the age of 30.

Black area: proportion of males under the age of 30 in the congregation.

Appendix 5

Four Representative Bhajans sung at the Sai Mandir on 17 January 1980

Bhajans are reproduced here, as in Bhajanavali, the basic hymn-book of many devotees, with a sequence of initial capitals, no punctuation.

- 5.1 Manasa Bhajare Guru Charanam
Dustara Bhava Sagara Taranam
Guru Maharaja Guru Jaya Jai
Sai Natha Sadguru Jaya Jai
Om Namashivaya Om Namashivaya
Om Namashivaya Shivaya Namah Om
Arunachala Shiva Arunachala Shiva
Arunachala Shiva Aruna Shiv Om
Om karam Baba Om karam Baba
Om karam Baba Om Namō Baba

O! Mind, worship the feet of Guru,
that help in crossing the ocean of birth and death.
Glory to the great Lord Sai who is the true teacher,
who removes ignorance.

I bow to Lord Shiva whose abode is in the Arunachal
mountain.

I bow to Baba who is the Lord of the primordial
sound, Om.

The words and the translation of this bhajan have
been reproduced verbatim from Sri Sathya Sai
Education and Publication Foundation, n.d., p.53.

See appendix 1, with reference to 20 October 1940.

- 5.2 Hey Shiva Shankara
Namami Shankara
Shiva Shankara Shambo
Hey Girijapati
Bhavani Shankara
Shiva Shankara Shambho

O beneficent Shiva! I bow to the beneficent one,
Shiva the bestower of that which is good!
O Girijapati (= Parvati, wife of Shiva),
the giver of life,
Shiva is beneficent, the giver of that which
is good!

See Shah, ed., 1978, p.24, for the text of this
bhajan. The translation is a free rendering.

5.3 Shyama Murari Ghanashyama Murari.

Giridhari Gopala Giridhari
Puttaparthi Ke Gopala Bihari
Sai Murari Sathya Sai Murari
Teri Mahima Tene Balihari
Shyama Murari Ghanashyama Murari

Dark-blue Krishna (Murari), as deep blue as
a rain-cloud!
Cow-herd Krishna (Gopala), holder of the mountains!
Krishna, who resides in Puttaparthi,
Sai Krishna, Sathya Sai Krishna:
Your goodness cannot be measured!

This bhajan, has not been found anywhere in print.
The singing of it was led on this occasion by a
middle-aged man, but the translation offered here
is that of a teen-ager who often leads the singing.

5.4 Gopala Gopala Nacho Gopala

Nacho Nacho Sai Nanda Lala
Ruma Jhuma Ruma Jhuma Nacho Gopala
Nacho Nacho Sai Nanda Lala

Dance, Gopala!
Dance, O dance, Sai, the son of Nanda!
Dance rhythmically,
Dance to the rhythm, Gopala!
Dance, O dance, Sai, the son of Nanda!

See: Sri Sathya Sai Education and Publication
Foundation, n.d., p. 21.

The translation is a free one. Ruma jhuma
literally means 'swayingly, undulatingly'. Nanda
was the grandfather of Krishna (cf. Bhattacharji
1970: 173, with Danielou 1964: 178).

Appendix 6

Two Representative Films shown at the Sai Centre

6.1 'Sri Sathya Sai Baba'

This film, shown in Bradford on 5 November 1979, was shot during Babals darshan at Prashanti Nilayam. Baba moved amongst the crowd, receiving letters from devotees with requests for his blessing. He spoke to individuals, occasionally blessed photographs, and addressed the gathering. In one scene, a great shower of vibhuti appeared to be materialised out of a jug too small to hold such a quantity. It was the mahabhishekam of the murti of Sai Baba of Shirdi which takes place annually at Mahashivaratri. Other scenes conveyed the impression of objects, a necklace and a glass medallion, being materialised out of nothing.

At the first point in the film at which Sathya Sai appeared, the audience gasped in awe, appreciating his darshan by proxy, through modern media. The response was repeated at those times when vibhuti and other substances appeared to be materialised.

6.2 'The Lost Years'

This film was shown in the mandir on 19 September 1981, and 8 May 1982, and on several other occasions; see pp. 294-95.

The title refers to the years in the life of Jesus about which nothing is known. The film is an elaborate commentary on the belief held by Ahmadiyya Muslims and some Hindu religious teachers that Jesus exercised a ministry ('six years') in India. He was said to have identified with the lowest castes and to have taught the oneness of God. 'Do not worship idols for they do not hear you', he is said to have taught. 'Do not humil-

late your neighbour', he exhorted. It is suggested that Jesus' work in India was a compliment, to return the visit of the three wise men who had set out from India at his birth. Sathya Sai Baba declares in the film that having earlier taught that he was the messenger of God, and then the Son of God, it was in the Himalayas that Jesus first revealed: 'I and my father are one'. The teachings of Jesus, the Buddha and the Vedas are declared to be identical.

Appendix 7

Special Activities of the Young People of the Satsang: 1982-1985

The following is a representative but not exhaustive list of activities, extra to the normal programme of weekly events, organised by, or involving, young people of the satsang during the three years following the return of the first group of young pilgrims to Prashanti Nilayam in September 1982 (above, 8.4).

1982 September and October: Revival of practice of lakhsacharan, cf. above, 2.3.

23 October: Coach outing to satsangs of Coventry and Wolverhampton.

21 November: Major celebration of Sathya Sai Baba's birthday.

1983 February: Young men from Bradford serve on a National Youth Committee for the Sai movement in the United Kingdom.

March: Two young men visit Scarborough College of Education by invitation to speak about Sathya Sai Baba.

23-24 April: Residential conference *in* Bradford for boys from other northern Sai centres.

30 April - 1 May: Parallel residential conference for girls.

15 May: Satsang supplies group of Gujarati folk-dancers to participate in Multicultural Festival organised by City of Bradford Metropolitan Council.

18 June: Special conference organised for 'English devotees'.

16 August: Special event, attended by more than 500 persons, to honour visit of Sri Sri Ganapathi Sachchidananda Swami Ji.

1 September: Address by Dr. Ghurye at special bhajan mandal for celebration of Krishna's birthday (Janmashtami).

22 December: Children of Bal Vikas group, having written their own plays for Christmas, produce, direct and present them, without adult assistance, in a bhajan mandal.

1984 5 February: Choir of young Bradford satsangis sing bhajans at special day conference for (mostly English) devotees in Dursley, Gloucestershire.

April: Football competition for boys from other northern Sai centres held in Bradford.

28 October: National Seva Dal Day Convention in Bradford, with free specialist medical attention offered to anyone with an eye complaint, especially children.

November: Consultation on 'Education for Human Values' at the mandir, with Victor Kanu, its founder in Britain, from London, as guest speaker.

1985 May: Special fund-raising for the Bradford City Football Club Fire Disaster Fund.

July/August: Coach trip organised to see Shivalingas said to have been found in the Cheddar Gorge; and another to attend a Hindu Sacred Concert in the Midlands.

3 November: Major effort to establish 'Education in Human Values Society' firmly in Bradford, with branches in schools.

Appendix 8

Simplified Glossary for the non-specialist Reader

Abhishekam: ritual bathing of revered statue or image.

Amrit: ambrosia, nectar.

Ananda: joy, bliss, grace.

Arati: waving of lighted lamp before statue or image of deity; worship in which lamps are so used.

Ashram: hermitage; residential religious community.

Avatar: 'descent' of the divine; manifestation of God in human or animal form.

Bal Vikas: amongst Sai devotees, classes of religious and moral education for children up to early teen years.

Bilva: bel or wood-apple tree, aegle marmelos.

Bhagavan: Lord.

Bhajan: hymn, devotional song.

Bhajan mandal: devotional meeting; hymn-singing circle.

Bhakta: devotee.

Bhakti: devotion; love to God.

Darshan: looking at, viewing; seeing a holy person; hence, such person's presenting self in public.

Dasara: major autumnal festival with focus on shakti (q.v.) worship.

Dharma: righteousness, religion, ordained law, divine order.

Dholak: drum.

Dhun: tune.

Fakir: Muslim ascetic holy-man.

Gadi: throne, ceremonial chair.

Ganga: the Ganges; goddess of the river.

Garba: folk-dance.

Gotra: exogamous group within caste; all said to be descended from same male ancestor; (broadly) lineage.

Guru-shishya (relationship): that of preceptor or mentor with disciple.

Jhooli (jooli): cradle; swinging cradle; hence, swinging seat or settee.

Jnana: knowing; knowledge of the Ultimate.

Karma: action, deeds; moral law of cause and effect.

Kshatriya: second rank in hierarchy of caste system - rulers, chiefs, the military; wielders of secular and political power.

Kurta: (long) shirt; gown.

Lila: play; sport.

Linga: emblem of Shiva; symbol of unfathomability of the divine; symbol of divine creativity, deriving from representation of male generative organ.

Mahabhishekam: major ritual bathing of revered statue or image.

Mahayogi: 'Great Yogi' (q.v.), Shiva as originator of yogic practice.

Mahila Vibhag: in Sai centres, group/organisation of female devotees.

Mandal: circle; hence, gathering.

Mandir: temple, shrine.

Manjira: small cymbals.

Mantra: formula used in meditation or ritual worship.

Mula mantra: characteristic credal formula (articulating particular religious orientation).

Murti: materialisation (for example, of divine personage); hence, statue.

Nagar sankirtan:)

Nama sankirtana:) Various devotional modes of

Name Simaran:) recital or repetition of the names of God.

Namsmaran:)

Namavali:)

Om: sacred monosyllable imbued with mystical meaning, suggesting the Supreme Being, the Ultimate.

Panchdhatu: pot made of five metals, one being copper, used ritually in worship of Shiva.

Pranava: sound or breath; name of sacred syllable, Om.

Prasad: divine grace, benevolence, serenity; hence food offered to deity in temple and later distributed to worshippers, symbolising generosity of the Divine.

Prashanti: sublime peace; as in 'Prashanti Nilayam', abode of sublime peace.

Prema: love.

Puja: (formal) worship; reverence.

Puranas: collections of mythological stories of deities.

Puranic: relating to Puranas.

Sadhana: spiritual discipline.

Samsara: cycle of life, death, re-birth - depicted as voyage across ocean.

Sanatana dharma: eternal dharma (q.v.). The Hindu religious culture.

Sannyasi: renouncer of the world; ascetic, wandering monk.

Satsang: (religious) fellowship.

Satsangi: member of (religious) fellowship.

Seva Dal: amongst Sai devotees, organisation of volunteers for social service to the community; groups of adolescents and adults meeting for study and service.

Shaivite: devotee of Shiva; pertaining to Shiva.

Shakti: power, divine energy; female aspect of divinity.

Shakti: peace.

Shivalinga: Shiva's linga (q.v.).

Shree (Shri): see Sri.

Siddha: one adept in practice of paranormal powers; art/skills of such practice.

Siddhic: pertaining to siddhis (q.v.).

Siddhis: paranormal powers.

Sri: glory, brilliance; title of respect for gods, holy personages.

Swami: member of religious order, renouncer of the world; (loosely) title of respect for religious teacher.

Tabla: drum.

Tapas, tapasya: fervour, ardour, glowing; hence, ascetic practice and its consequences.

Udi, Udhi: (sacred) ash associated with Sai Baba of Shirdi.

Vaishnavite: devotee of Vishnu; pertaining to Vishnu.

Vibhuti: (sacred) ash, particularly associated with Sathya Sai Baba.

Vrata: vow.

Yatra pilgrimage.

Yogi: practitioner, sometimes teacher, of yoga.

Yoni: emblem of Shakti (q.v.); symbol of divine creative energy as feminine, deriving from representation of female generative organ, and associated with linga (q.v.).

Notes

1. That overall figure would allow for an approximately equal number (3,000 each) in the Hindu, Sikh and Afro-Caribbean minorities. It would accommodate four times as many South Asian Muslims as Hindus. Observation suggests that such proportions have been broadly characteristic of the 'New Commonwealth' minorities in Bradford for at least fifteen years.
2. Following the recording of this calculation, S. Ram's analysis of the spatial distribution of Indians in Bradford has been published, reference to which is now included in the text. Ram's work **confirms** points outlined above: for example, the numerical comparability of Sikh and Hindu populations in Bradford, the Hindus maintaining a small majority; and the relative proportions of the Punjabi and Gujarati Hindu communities (1984: 40-45, 53, 57-58, 69, 79). The figure suggested by Ram for Hindus on the electoral register residing in the south-east of the metropolitan district in 1981, 3,072 (ibid. 66) is compatible with the suggestions made here, when family size and such lesser factors as under-registration (1983: 16) are taken into account. Singh (1986: 10) reaffirms the percentages suggested in Ram's analysis, and **confirms** independently the estimate given here of the size of the Hindu population in Bradford, and its relative strength vis-a-vis the Sikhs.
3. This section was read at a seminar in the School of Oriental and African Studies in the University of London in 1983, as one in a series of such papers. It has been expanded and adapted for publication with those other papers in Burghart 1987.

4. In addition to the difference in the date given, Desai spells the name of the society differently: Bharatiya Mandala. It is essentially the same name and represents merely an alternative spelling. At some points, Desai's evidence could be explained as referring to an occasion when fresh life was infused into a pre-existing structure. That cannot be true, however, of the innovative role attributed by Desai to a former teacher designated 'T'. On the evidence of the society's minute-book, T's contribution cannot have been as novel as Desai proposes.
5. Central in the shrine are murtis of Rama, Sita and Lakshman, flanked by Krishna and Radha on their right, and by Vishvakarman (the 'architect of the gods') on their left. Goddess Amba and the Shivalinga are the next most prominent foci of worship. Ganesha and Hanuman are represented.
6. Alternatively, in respect of so purposeful a ritual, one might link lakhsacharan with lakhs (a mark or target) and charan (behaviour and practice). That would lead to a rendering such as 'aiming at a goal'.
7. On the identification of Sathya Sai with Krishna and other deities see below, 3.3 and 6.4.
8. Sri Sathya Sai Education and Publication Foundation, n.d.; 88.

The name Subrahmanya has been spelt here in the form published and sung by Baba's devotees. This allows full appreciation of the tongue-twisting quality of the articulation required. Prominent amongst epithets that the hymn rehearses is Shiva's designation, Hara, the 'remover', death. Shanmukha Natha is a name for Subrahmanya, 'the six-faced Lord' (Skanda). Saravana, another name of Skanda, means 'Forest of arrows'. Bhava, 'existence', is a term applied to Shiva.

This bhajan has now been heard in the mandir for the first time (10 October 1985). That does not contradict the argument mounted in what follows, although it qualifies it. It shows that eventually conformity to the practice of Baba's other Indian devotees has won the day, due to the number of

young Bradford satsangis going to Prashanti Nilayam on pilgrimage from 1981 onwards, learning there the customary significance of the bhajan. The argument here retains its force, not now because of a total absence of reference to Subrahmanya but because of the long delay before any such reference was made.

9. 1980b: 11, 111 (cf. Mason 1985b: 4) -

On the Chithravathi sands ...
This Baba, they say, daily reveals
That he is God in human form ...
He digs his fingers in the heap of sand
With a chuckle on the lip
And a twinkle in the eye;
Wet balls of sand become laddus round!

Laddus (ladoos) are an Indian sweet.

10. Compare the words of Murphet, representing the initial reaction of M.S. Dixit, who as a youth had had the acquaintance of Sai Baba of Shirdi and who became, reluctantly at first, a devotee of Sathya Sai: 'How can this be the old saint of Shirdi? With his coloured silks, hair like a woman ... this man is more like a film star' (1973: 65).

11. 1975a: 20-21.

Baba is the combined manifestation of Shiva and Shakti (the psychological masculine and feminine, and not the biological) ... One associates grace with the feminine aspect of the Godhead. Grace comes through the feminine aspect.

Cf. Narasimhaswami 1944: 150.

12. This convention troubled a young would-be devotee of English ethnicity, from Yorkshire. He learned of it in advance of his pilgrimage to Puttaparthi, which, suffering from cerebral palsy, was part of his search for victory over his condition. His preoccupation was not at all with outward trappings or with details that seemed to be mere trivia. Therefore he found it very disturbing that devotees

arranging the pilgrimage laid great stress on the necessity for white clothing.

13. Derived from a published source which it has not been possible to identify.
14. Such issues and incidents have received prominence in Bradford's local press. For example: Telegraph and Argus 16 December 1983, 5 January 1984, 25 September 1984, 12 March 1985, 7 November 1985. (cf. Brown 1984: 247-63).
15. Alternative authorities refer to different calendars (cf. problems encountered by Williams 1984: 9, 118). Variation is found not only in the appellation of the month in which Mahashi-varatri occurs, but also in its allocation variously to the thirteenth or the fourteenth day of the month. The discrepancies show themselves more in variations of calendric definition than in diversity of timing. (Cf. Basak 1953: 97; Bhattacharyya 1953: 191; Stevenson 1971: 275; Long 1972: 20-21; Thomas 1975: 123, 129; Babb 1975: 167; Swallow 1976: 279; Kasturi 1980c: 157).
16. An account of the traditional rites can be found in Long 1972: 27-29, 32. In contemporary India, the puja of classical tradition is often simplified and abbreviated. This is also the case in the Hindu diaspora. In Bradford, the cow's urine and dung to which Long refers do not feature at all in the ritual!
17. Aegle marmelos, also known as the bel-pitra or vilva tree. For further details, see Basak 1953: 108; Long 1972: 22; Padfield 1975: 151; Srivastava 1974: 169. For allusions by Sai devotees, see Fanibunda 1978: 52, and Kasturi 1980a: 286.
18. Observations which illuminate potential interpretations of the rite other than those discussed in this chapter, arise in Dhavamony's work. The worship of Shiva with the outpouring of fluids could represent the 'liquefaction of the soul in God', the melting of the individual through bhakti into the being, the grace, of the divine (1971: 129-31; 353; 371). Dhavamony has also noted that in Indian idiom coolness in love is a positive, not a negative, feature. In the hot.

climate, he says, coolness *suggests* gladness and joy in love, and above all single-mindedness (ibid. 146-47; cf. Long 1971: 38).

19. For accounts of the rites of Mahashivaratri in differing Indian locations, compare the several works to which reference is made here, and in addition: Gonda 1963a; Pocock 1973: 82-3; Ramanujan 1973: 180.
20. 'The linga has the form of a mathematically perfect figure ... It has neither a front nor a back, and is without an end or a beginning. It has no protuberances or irregularities ... which might give it some character. Its form is based purely on a geometrical figure, the ellipsoid, and hence it cannot be identified with any other known physical form in the universe except another mathematically perfect ellipsoid, which is another linga'.
(1978: 51)
21. Characteristic of the cult of Shiva is the tradition that access is open to all. He is 'teacher of the low-born', revealer of the secrets of high knowledge 'to those who are unqualified for ritual practice' (Danielou 1964: 202). Whereas it has been held that symbols of Vishnu should not be touched by women and Shudras, the Shivalinga has been regarded as available to all (Bhattacharji 1970: 355). Any restrictions have operated the other way, with Shiva not to be worshipped by the three superior varnas, the 'twice-born' (cf. O'Flaherty 1973: 151-54; 1978: 154; Dhavamony 1971: 191; Long 1971: 207; 1972: 25, 35).
22. In addition to Murphet's account (1973: 43, cited in what follows) see Fanibunda 1978: 89; Devi 1979: 24; Kasturi 1980a: 156; and cf. appendix 6. S. Balu's attribution of this occurrence to the celebration of Dasara in October 1977, appears to be singular (1981: 124, cf. 351).
23. Swallow (1976: 284) suggests that the vibhuti mahabhishekam should be interpreted as a symbolic sexual act, spiritually conceived, the effigy of Shirdi Baba representing the female, shakti, function (cf. below 5.5 and 6.5 and n.57).

24. Compare the words of the Shiva Purana with reference to the yonis which holds the linga: 'The substance of the pedestal is the universal mother' (Danielou 1964: 230).
25. Cf. lingodbhava muhurtha, 'the auspicious moment for the exterior manifestation of the symbol of the all-pervasive Divine Principle' (Kasturi 1975a: 194; cf. 73). Kasturi suggests that the event has occurred every year since 1940. He appears to have written that in 1972, after which point continuity was not maintained.
26. Slade (1979: 166) testifies to Murphet's reliability as a witness. At the conclusion of the Second World War, Murphet is said to have been in charge of the British Press Section at the Nuremberg trials (Murphet 1973: publisher's cover).
27. Ahura Mazda is the one Supreme Being of the Zoroastrians. Fanibunda is convinced that he has succeeded in reconciling his Parsi heritage with his devotion to Sathya Sai Baba.
28. A consideration of Patanjali's schema while discussing the siddhis of Sathya Sai can be found in Balasingham 1974: 48.
29. Quotations from Aurobindo have been taken from authors citing different passages, Shanmuganayagam (197-: 53) and Pandey (1979: 84).
30. Focussed sharply by the term and concept vibhuti because of its exalted theological status. There is, nevertheless, a range of other terms defining specific properties or functions of sacred ash (cf. Crooke 1926: 342; Ramachandran pre-1971: 10). Sathya Sai Baba lists some alternatives:

It is named bhuthi or vibhuti since it endows one with prosperity; bhasma because it burns away all sins; bhasitam because it increases one's spiritual splendour; ksharam since it removes danger; and raksha for it is an armour against the machinations of evil spirits.

(Kasturi 1980a: 152)

The association of vibhuti with Shiva is underlined by Baba when he combines the term with the name of Shiva's mountain abode. Then he speaks of 'Kailash vibhuti' (ibid.).

It would be difficult to prove that Sathya Sai's preference for the term vibhuti leans deliberately upon the usage of the Virashaiva sect, widely known in south India, as suggested by Swallow (1976: 262 n. 2). Nevertheless, his usage emerged in a context in which the Virashaiva vocabulary was already current.

31. Curative, purifying and protective efficacy is attributed to ash in the Shiva Purana (Swallow 1976: 281; cf. Crooke 1926: 342, and Murphet 1973: 102).
32. On the variety of the colours and qualities of the vibhuti which Baba is said to materialise, see Kasturi 1975a: 186; 1980: 153. Fanibunda provides a similar account of vibhuti found on pictures of Baba (1978:4).
33. It is not, however, a siddhic power exclusively attributed to Sathya Sai (Singh 1975: xi). Despite this, Swallow argues that Sathya Sai Baba's 'materialisation' of vibhuti is a way of asserting his superiority over all other godmen, a strategy for a competitive situation. (1976: 281).
34. There, in keeping with Shirdi Baba's practice, he was given ash from the sacred fire. It was prepared from the remains of flowers brought as offerings (prasad) to the shrine.
35. Cf. Kasturi 1975a: 188. For an account of an apparently inexhaustible supply of vibhuti at a gathering in Denmark, see Mason 1985a: 3.
36. By March 1985, however, this practice had been dropped in favour of the distribution of vibhuti as powder at the conclusion of bhajan mandals. Vibhuti is now brought round by two young people, a male to the males and a female to the females, in small stainless steel dishes. Each participant dips a finger in the vibhuti and, after dabbing it

on the forehead, places any residue on the tongue. This practice may again be subject to further revision.

37. Compare Mahatma Gandhi's commitment to the transmutation of ascetic restraint into moral and political influence. He wrote, for example: 'Our anger controlled can be transmuted into a power which can move the world' (Kripalani and Meghani 1969: 55; cf. Freud 1949: 283).
38. Pensa observes that the ideology that Shiva 'chaste and ithyphallic at the same moment' represents, can only be understood when 'categories of ambivalence and bipolarity' are maintained 'within a unitarian context'. That is because Shiva is a 'pregnant and magnificent pan-Indian symbol of the fundamentally ambivalent character of cosmos and life' (1972: 111). Similarly, in Bharati's view, 'the ithyphallic linga truly represents the Lord of monks and ascetics'. (1972: 189).
39. That 'large joint family, presided over by ... Shiva and Uma (Parvati)', enjoying the 'distracting performances' of their children 'as in any normal home' attracts much Shaivite devotion (Iyer 1971: 82
40. Modernity as a medium of expression, and as a source of metaphor in teaching, is characteristic of Baba's discourses (cf. S. Balu 1981: 129). Whether it represents a real reassessment of the priorities of the Hindu heritage and a revaluation of its resources, or a veneer imposed on it, is a subject worthy of further research.
41. Compare the perspective of Eliade (e.g. 1970b: 88-113), the validity of whose conceptual framework for the interpretation of the history of religion is still intently debated. In respect of Indian religion, in which he was particularly expert, and when related to the cult of Sathya Sai Baba, his approach seems to illuminate specific issues. However, space does not permit the exploration of the question of the merits and demerits of Eliade's hermeneutic. It is not the intention to suggest that Eliade's perspectives are to be received uncritically (cf. Dudley 1977; Smart 1978a).

42. The annual commemoration of Baba's birthday on this date in the Gregorian calendar is only an approximation to the precise timing which could be reached by complex Indian calendric calculations. It has been adopted as normal practice by Baba and his devotees.
43. A lower approximate figure (one hundred and fifty) is given by S. Kaul (1976: 4).
44. Relationships between Guru Subramaniam and this nationwide organisation of Sai devotees were later to become strained, and from 1979 onwards there was no further contact between the Bradford satsang and the guru or his ashram.
45. It will be observed that, each year between 1975 and 1984, the celebrations in Bradford have been characterised by different events.
46. The younger daughter, like her father, was at work. Of the three school-age sons, two were at home. This was probably more because of the festival than because there were to be examinations the next week and they needed to prepare. Understandably, not much preparation could be done on 23 November.
47. This contrasts with observations made by Knott regarding the level of attention paid by males to the devotions at the Hindu temple in Leeds (1977: 11,34, 36).
48. Within present constraints, however, the matter can only be considered with a lesser rigour than that which has been devoted to the cultural context of the festival of Mahashivaratri.
49. Note, in support, Bhardwaj's observation that traditional places of pilgrimage in India during 'major fairs' become 'visible centres for the diffusion of new ideas about religion and the spread of information about new cults' (1973: 215).
50. For example, Swami Purnananda's Hindu catechism refers to the work of Pranavananda (1896-1941) as a 'God-inspired mission ... to raise Hinduism to its natural pre-eminence for the salvation of humanity' (n.d.: 5).

51. See plate 1.1. Devised by Baba himself, the symbol is based on a lotus flower. Each petal is marked with a symbol: the cross for Christianity, a crescent moon for Islam, a wheel for Buddhism, and the sacred fire of Zoroastrianism. 'Om' represents Hinduism. Central to the symbol is a light in a lamp designed as a lotus resting upon a pillar. That is now an architectural embellishment of the ashram complex. at Prashanti Nilayam: the 'pillar of concord'. (Cf. Kasturi 1975a: 231; 1975b: 61-62, 296; Kanu 1981: 48-49; Jagadeesan 1983: 3). The Community of the Many Names of God at Llanpumsaint adapted the symbol for its own use, replacing the central lamp with the vel (javelin) of Subrahmanya.
52. In response, reproduction prints of eminent works of art were acquired and offered: two of the Nativity by Italian masters and Rembrandt's 'Christ Healing the Man Born Blind'. However, it became clear that they were not what was required and they were never used. The cultures were engaging each other at a different level, as interestingly paralleled in Vandana 1978: 3 n. 6. Pictures of Jesus and Mary, representative of conventional popular Catholic piety, were placed in the mandir in 1982. A crucifix, obtained in India, was placed above the shrine in 1983.
53. See appendix 6.
54. Compare also Swallow 1976: 253.
Os and Haraldson (1979: 163; see below 7.2) came to the conclusion that the claims regarding Cowan were inconsequential because 'close associates of Baba' averred that 'the doctor in charge had said that Cowan was not really dead'. They provide also details of the testimony of witnesses to another reputed case of resuscitation (cf. Murphet 1973: 131-33; Kanu 1981: 55-56).
55. Etymologically, amrit is to be connected with the Greek ambrotos, ambrosia (Zimmer 1974: 60n).
56. The widespread reputation of this phenomenon is evinced also in accounts by serious-minded globe-

trotters like Ted Simon (BBC-TV, 'Light of Experience', 19 November 1979). Swallow may be under-stating the importance of amrit (1976: 284 n.2).

57. Soma as a deity is male and is identified in the Vedas with the Supreme Being (cf. Dowson 1972: 302). This maleness of Soma/soma, identified with amrit, sustains and strengthens its identity with vibhuti, also perceived as male (see 5.5). Swallow, however, sees amrit as female. There is justification for such a view in the Puranas, where Soma appears to be the wife of Agni (O'Flaherty 1978: 149). Vibhuti alone, and not amrit, is then understood to represent semen. This leads Swallow to understand the juxtaposing of vibhuti and amrit by Sathya Sai Baba as reflecting the inherent interplay of the Shiva-Shakti theme in his teaching (1976: 284). Such a view commits one to ignoring the male dimension in the connotation of amrit as Soma. Preference is therefore given here to a view that equates the symbolism of amrit with that of vibhuti.
58. Shiva declares that he is 'placing' his seed in ashes, thus suggesting tapasya as the sublimation of egotistical energy. 'By means of ashes ... one is released from all sins', he says. Then, in words which recall the fact that soma in the Vedas was a term for ritual offerings, he adds that those who sprinkle themselves with, or bathe in, such ashes, 'receive all sacrifices'. Indeed, they grasp 'the supreme ambrosia', deathlessness (O'Flaherty 1978: 147-49).
59. The letter relates that when the same lady was taken seriously ill in India, and unable to have recourse to her normal medicines because of the loss of a suitcase on the flight, she 'looked at death's door'. Then, 'with the aid of the vibhuti which all and sundry were bringing for her', she is said to have made a dramatic recovery.
60. Later he became a novice at the ashram of the Community of the Many Names of God in Wales, and eventually became a brother there. In 1983, however, he became disenchanted with Hindu and syncretic practice in general, and with the ashram

in Wales in particular. He left the ashram, renouncing the vows he had taken. He identified himself with the Christian faith of his upbringing in a form specifically hostile to any syncretic inclinations (cf. 2.4).

61. For example, devotees have been known to be anxious when moving house, lest vibhutl already manifest on their icons should become dislodged (Swallow 1976: 87).
62. Cf. Eliade: 'An unknown, foreign, and unoccupied territory (which often means "unoccupied by our people") still shares in the fluid and larval modality of chaos' (1961: 31, cf. 20ff).
63. The young man referred to in note 60.
64. Those hills, however, possess spiritual associations of a high order for anyone raised in the heritage of the Annibynwyr, the Welsh-speaking 'Independents' (Congregational Christians). The district has strong connections with Welsh hymnody. The birth-place of the poet-preacher, Elfed (Dr. Elvet Lewis 1860-1953) is only three miles away in an adjacent valley. The wider area has strong Welsh cultural and patriotic associations.
65. The arrival of a party from Southall, Middlesex, at a Hindu wedding in Bradford in the late 1970s, in a coach belonging to a company called 'New Bharat Coaches', may be seen as confirmation of this.
66. Smart argues that one 'should treat the objects of religious experience and beliefs as factors independently of whether they exist/are true' (1978a: 183).
67. Once an award-holder of the International Brotherhood of Magicians (U.S.A.), he has written on conjuring and mind-reading (Fanibunda 1978: 6).
68. BBC-Radio, 'The Long Search Continues', 22 September 1977.
The conventional hostility of Hindu spiritual leaders to the use of alcoholic stimulants makes the incident of the bottle of whisky doubly

- intriguing. The inconsistency is, however, no more striking than the materialising of trinkets and jewellery within a cult that espouses asceticism. Such instances accord with a siddhic tradition disposed to cater for the taste of the devotee.
69. 'Physically shaking from sitting beside Baba's chair, from which constant power flowed out ... The air began to hum There was a huge flash of power' (ibid. 99).
70. 1976: 79-80, 168-70; cf. also 81.
Mangalwadi (1977: 158-61) draws substantially on the testimony of Brooke. He bases much of his discussion on a letter written by Brooke on 8 September 1971 and circulated privately. Cf. also Christian Parapsychologist 2 (September 1978), 3 (June 1980 and September 1980) 235-36, 258. For Brooke's other critical observations on Sathya Sai Baba's character, see 1976: 115-16, 128-30, and 1986: 172
71. He met the tailor who makes Baba's kurtas, anxious to know if false-sleeves or any other such features were fitted. There is no suggestion of that. Baba needs a great number of kurtas because he often gives them away to prominent devotees after wearing them: thus again suggesting innocuous practice (Brooke 1976; ct. Mangalwadi 1977: 168).
72. This becomes particularly pertinent when the nature of the claimed siddhis predisposes independent investigators towards iconoclasm. In the case of Sathya Sai, reputedly paranormal power is often exercised in apparent miracles the results of which are trivial. Phenomena such as the materialisation of jewellery and insignia can lead inquirers to discount any claim to transcendent status, being seen in themselves as qualitatively disqualifying.
73. Founder of the Indian cultural agency, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan: 'veteran Gandhian ... scholarly statesman ... patriotic writer ... practical administrator ... septuagenarian savant' (Kasturi 1975b: 15-17).
74. In the United Kingdom, members of the Spiritualists' National Union, for example, are generally sympathetic, without necessarily endorsing all that

the devotees claim or sustaining all the implications that they draw.

75. Only two adherents of the satsang in Bradford are known to be agnostic about Baba's reputed powers. They associate with the satsang because it is a congenial spiritual fellowship consisting mostly of people of corresponding ethnic and religious background. They are not typical of the membership.
76. Thapar wrote of the feeling of rejection and the bitterness of these young men, and of the determination of 'the Asian community' to save them: 'The entire Asian second generation faces the same struggle as they do ... The Bradford 12 are an unrepresentative extreme minority. Yet they are a part of the second generation's fight to be both British and Asian' (1982: 10).
77. The precedence of the females was soon changed, because it led to the indignity of a substantial number of women having to spill out onto the street from the house, unescorted, for lack of room in the hallway, while waiting for the men to follow.
78. Thus on 29 April 1982, two elderly men stood up to join the queue for prasad earlier than directed by the two young men acting as stewards. They were impatient to leave, and perhaps resentful of the change from the old flexible system. One of the stewards remonstrated mildly, directing them to wait their turn. There was some interaction. Afterwards, the youth recalled the lead given by RP (See pages 290-91) and conversations with KP, RP's formerly blind brother: 'When someone causes trouble again, I shall have to do what KP said. He told us to be firm with people like that, to tell them straight that if they can't abide by the instructions, then it's better for them not to come.'
79. A highly-rated pop-music group.
80. The satsang's president later offered a fuller account of the reputed miracle. KP had been totally blind from birth, he affirmed. His

family had waited long for an operation on which they pinned great hopes. At last the surgeon summoned KP to London. The young man could hardly wait, but his mother insisted on consulting Baba first. Much against the surgeon's wishes, the family travelled to Puttaparthi. Baba agreed that KP should have the operation. Immediately afterwards, an acquaintance suggested to the parents that they ought to have asked him where the operation should take place: in India, America or England? The point troubled them, so they asked to see Baba again. On that occasion Sathya Sai remarked: 'Operation? No operation!' He sent the family out of the room, except for the blind son, whom he gave some vibhuti to eat. He touched his eyes. KP found it painful. Baba touched his side. 'Open your eyes', he said. 'I can't', KP replied, 'I have never been able to. I don't know what it means to open my eyes.' Then KP opened his eyes for the first time. He could see. He walked out of the room unaided. Outside, he saw his family.

The president added: 'Now he can see normally. He can even drive a car. I have only told you what he has told me' (2.7.82).

81. See above, 6.5 and 7.4.

On two occasions, 19 September 1981 and 10 October 1985, the researcher has been offered amrit at the mandir, delivered into the palm of the hand from a tiny glass phial by means of a tincture-dropper. The taste was sweet and pungent.

82. The president of the Bradford satsang later gave details of these avowed miracles. A young lady in Wolverhampton had seen a vision of Sathya Sai in her family's shrine room, while ritually offering Baba food. During the incident, murtis are said to have moved from one spot to another at Baba's command and to have become covered with vibhuti. Baba is said to have showered the young lady herself with vibhuti which then manifested itself 'everywhere in that house. Over everything there is vibhuti' (2.7.82).

The president also recounted the case of a school-

girl in Walsall, an outstanding pupil - top in her class. Suddenly, inexplicably, she became simple-minded and forgot everything. Her family, extremely worried, took her to see Baba, who restored her to her former alertness.

83. This claim was unmistakably and seriously made. Further elaborations appeared to be meant only jokingly. It was suggested that someone mentioned Subrahmanya and other Hindu deities, asserting that RP had angered them that day, with the same response from RP and the same result: an issue of vibhuti on an appropriate picture. RP's humorous, jocular style at this moment left one in doubt about the point at which banter and high spirits had taken over. The references to the multiplicity of deities may have been hypothetical, conjectural. The point about Jesus was, however, indubitably presented and received as a matter of fact.
84. Members of the Unification Church founded by Rev. Sun Myung Moon (b. 1920 in Korea), subjects of much adverse publicity at that time.
85. Few young satsangis had made such a visit prior to 1982. Of those who had, most could recall only the impressions made at a very tender age.
86. Obviously adapted from Philipians 4:4, although the satsang may not have been aware of this.
The selection and placing of English bhajans in the sequence at devotional meetings has now become very varied, but they always have a place.
87. That man, or a friend of his, also ethnically English, had first come to the satsang after reading an article by Peggy Mason. He had then written to her to inquire whether there was such a fellowship in West Yorkshire.
88. It was the dynamism of the young people that brought to fruition the earlier unfulfilled intentions of their elders in this respect (above 6.4). It was also they who addressed themselves to the issue of the language of the bhajans and to the wider syncretic significance of the con-

victions and experience of the satsang.

89. As announced at the bhajan mandal, 7 October 1982. Cf. note 82 above.
90. For example, such concepts as avatar, maya, moksha, lila and siddhis, discussed above.
91. As in the Isanasamhita: 'All persons, of whatever birth or station, may celebrate Shivaratri ... even those of low caste and women' (quoted, Long 1972: 25; cf. Danielou 1964: 188, and note 21, above).
92. Eliade (1969: 56, 64), with his insight into Indian religion, also pays tribute to Nietzsche. The latter acknowledged his own considerable debt to Schopenhauer (1788-1861).
93. He elucidates the responses of the ancient Greeks to their experience, referring to the 'annihilation of the veil of maya', to the monism of the advaitic tradition, and to Buddhism (1909: 32; cf. 22, 27).
94. Genealogy of Morals (1910), reproduced in Birnbaum and Lenzer 1969: 102-3.
95. In such bhajans, the empirical world is portrayed as an illusion, yet we are in bondage to it and there is a fear appropriate to that bondage. Life is a journey on a perilous ocean, but there is one who is able to deliver from danger and from the illusion of it all. He is the remover of distress, bestower of salvation. (Cf. Sri Sathya Sai Education and Publication Foundation n.d.: 61, 91; Shah 1978: 30-31).
96. As to its 'imaginary' nature (Nietzsche 1910, note 94 above) or otherwise, that judgement is esoteric beyond the scope of detached pragmatic analysis. Furthermore, such analysis would, by definition from the point-of-view of the devout, be subject to the conditions of illusion, self-enclosed and self-defeating.
97. The youngest member of the family, too young to have recollections of life in Uganda, sometimes

articulates less accurately but yet starkly, his own perception of the 'paradise lost' that Africa came to represent. 'Just when we were about to leave', he recounted, 'my father was offered a job as a bank manager; but still he came here.' (19.7.80).

98. 'Art owes its continuous evolution to the Apollonian-Dionysiac duality, even as the propagation of the species depends on the duality of the sexes' (1956: 19). Cf. Gouldner 1967: 119; and also Nietzsche's question: 'What if ... the Greeks became always more optimistic ... histrionic, also more ardent for logic ... - consequently at the same time more "cheerful" and more "scientific"?' (Clive 1965: 146).

Bibliography

1, BIBLIOGRAPHY; BOOKS, THESES, CONTRIBUTIONS TO PERIODICALS AND TO SEMINARS

- ASHBY, P.H. 1974 Modern Trends in Hinduism
Columbia University Press, New York.
- AZAM, F. and SIDDIQI, N. 1980 see Siddiqi, N.
- BABB, L.A. 1975 The Divine Hierarchy: Popular Hinduism in Central India
Columbia University Press, New York.
- BALASINGHAM, C. 1974 Sai Baba and the Hindu Theory of Evolution
Macmillan of India, Delhi.
- BALU, S. 1981 Living Divinity
Sawbridge Enterprises, London.
- BALU, V. 1981 The Glory of Puttaparthi
S.B. Publications, Bangalore.
- BANERJI, B. 1969 Pather Panchali: Song of the Road
George Allen and Unwin, London.
- BAROT, R. 1973 'A Swaminarayan Sect as a Community',
New Community, 2, no.1, 34-37.
- 1987 'Class, Caste and Sect in the
Swaminarayan Movement',
in Burghart, R., ed., q.v.
- BARTON, S. 1986 The Bengali Muslims of Bradford Community Religions Project, Department of
Theology and Religious Studies, University of
Leeds, Leeds.

- BARZ, R. 1976 The Bhakti Sect of Vallabhadharya
Thomson Press (India), Faridabad.
- BASAK, R. 1953 'The Hindu Concept of the Natural
World',
in Morgan, K.W., ed., q.v.
- BASHAM, A.L. 1979 'Foreword',
in Vitsaxis, V.G., q.v.
- BASHIRUDDIN, S. 1978 'The Sai Religion as I
experienced it',
Sanathana Sarathi, 20, no.11, 245-47.
- BERGER, P. 1973 A Rumour of Angels
Penguin, Harmondsworth.
- 1980 The Heretical Imperative
Collins, London.
- BHAGAVAN SRI SATHYA SAT SEVA ORGANISATIONS n.d.
Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai in Amritsar-Simla-
Delhi: March 30th - April 11th, 1975
Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations,
New Delhi.
- BHAGAVANTAM, S. n.d. Summer Showers in Brindavan 1977
Sri Sathya Sai Education and Publication
Foundation, Anantapur.
- n.d. Summer Showers in Brindavan 1978
Sri Sathya Sai Education and Publication
Foundation, Anantapur.
- BHARATI, A. 1972 The Asians in East Africa: Jayhind
and Uhuru
Nelson-Hall, Chicago.
- BHARDWAJ, S.M. 1973 Hindu Places of Pilgrimage in
India: A Study in Cultural Geography
University of California Press, London.
- BHATTACHARJI, S. 1970 The Indian Theogony: A
Comparative Study of Indian Mythology from the
Vedas to the Puranas
Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

- BHATTACHARYA, V. 1980 The Spirit of Indian Culture: Saints of India
Metropolitan Book Company, New Delhi.
- BHATTACHARYYA, B. 1956 'Festivals and Sacred Days',
in Bhattacharyya, B. ed., q.v.

ed. 1956 Cultural Heritage of India,
Vol. 4
Ramakrishna Mission, Institute of Culture,
Calcutta.
- BHATTACHARYYA, S. 1953 'Religious Practices of the
Hindus',
in Morgan, K.W., ed., q.v.
- BIANCHI, U. 1972 'The Definition of Religion (on the
Methodology of Historical-Comparative Research)',
in Bianchi, U., Bleeker C.J., and Bausani, A.,
eds., q.v.
- BIANCHI, U., SLEEKER, C.J., and BAUSANI, A., eds., 1972
Problems and Methods of the History of Religions E.J.
Brill, Leiden.
- BINFORD, M.R. 1976 'Mixing in the Colour of Ram of
Ranujal',
in Smith, B.L., ed., q.v.
- BIRNBAUM and LENZER 1969 Sociology and Religion: A
Book of Readings
Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.
- BOWEN, D.G. 1981 'The Hindu Community in Bradford',
in Bowen, D.G., ed., q.v.

ed. 1981 Hinduism in England
Faculty of Contemporary Studies, Bradford
College, Bradford.

1987 'The Evolution of Gujarati
Hindu Organizations in Bradford', in
Burghart, R., ed., q.v.
- BRENT, P. 1972 Godmen of India
Allen Lane, London.

- BROOKE, R.T. 1976 Lord of the Air Lion Books, Tring, Hertfordshire.
- 1986 Riders of the Cosmic Circuit
Lion Books, Tring, Hertfordshire.
- BROWN, C. 1984 Black and White Britain: The Third Policy Studies Institute Survey
Heinemann, London.
- BUDD, S. 1974 'Religion and Protest',
Religion, 4, no.2, 156-59.
- BURGHART, R., ed. 1987 Hinduism in Great Britain: The Perpetuation of a Religion in an Alien Cultural Milieu
Tavistock, London.
- CARMAN, J.B. 1974 The Theology of Ramanuia: An Essay in Inter-Religious Understanding
Yale University Press, New Haven.
- CENTRAL OFFICE 1974 Research on Bal Vikas Activity
Central Office, Prashanti Nilayam, Puttaparthi, Andhra Pradesh.
- CHAUDHURI, N.C. 1979 Hinduism: A Religion to Live by
Chatto and Windus, London.
- CHAVDA, D.C. 1983 Directory 1983
Kshatriya Sudharak Handal, Bradford.
- CHIDBHAVANANDA 1975 The Bhagavad Gita
Sri Ramakrishna Tapovanam, Tirupparaitturai.
- CITY OF BRADFORD METROPOLITAN COUNCIL 1982 Census 1981: Multicultural Bradford
City of Bradford Metropolitan Council, Bradford.
- CLIVE, G., ed. 1965 The Philosophy of Nietzsche
New American Library, New York.
- CLOTHEY, P.W. 1978 The Many Faces of Murukan
Mouton, The Hague.
- COHEN, A., ed. 1974 Urban Ethnicity
Tavistock, London.

- COMMUNITY OF THE MANY NAMES OF GOD 1979a-1984b
Newsletter
 Community of the Many Names of God, Llanpumsaint,
 Dyfed.
- CONVENOR, WORLD COUNCIL OF SRI SATHYA SAI SEVA ORGANIS-
 ATIONS n.d. Talks with Bal Vikas Students
 World Council of Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations,
 Bombay.
- CORNFORD, F.M. 1957 From Religion to Philosophy: A
Study in the Origins of Western Speculation
 Harper, New York.
- CROOKE, W.C. (1926) 1978 Religion and Folklore of
Northern India, 2 vols.
 Oxford University Press, London.
- DAHYA, B. 1974 'The Nature of Pakistani Ethnicity in
 Industrial Cities in Britain', in Cohen, A.,
 ed., q.v.
- DANDEKAR, R.N. 1953 'The Role of Man in Hinduism!',
 in Morgan, K.W., ed., q.v.
- DANIELOU, A. 1964 Hindu Polytheism
 Bollingen Foundation, New York.
- DESAI, R. 1963 Indian Immigrants in Britain
 Oxford University Press, London.
- DEVIDAS, K.P. 1977 'Into the Ocean of Sai's Love',
 in Sri Sathya Sai Hostel, q.v.
- DEVI, I. 1979 Sai Baba and Sai Yoga
 Macmillan of India, Delhi.
- DHARMAKSHETRA CHARITABLE TRUST 1977 Students' Guidance
Week for Career Courses
 Dharmakshetra Charitable Trust, Bombay.
- DHAVAMONY, M. 1971 Love of God according to Saiva
Siddhanta: A Study in the Mysticism and Theology
of Saivism
 Clarendon Press, Oxford.

- DIXIT, P. 1975 'Sai Avatar', in
Gokak, V.K. ed., 1975b, q.v.
- DOWSON, J. 1972 A Classical Dictionary of Hindu
Mythology and Religion, Geography, History and
Literature
Routledge and Megan Paul, London.
- DUDLEY, G. 1977 Religion on Trial: Mircea Eliade and
his Critics
Temple University Press, Philadelphia.
- ELIADE, M. 1961 The Sacred and the Profane: The
Nature of Religion
Harper and Row, New York.
- 1969 The Quest: History and Meaning in
Religion
University of Chicago Press, London.
- 1970a Myths, Dreams and Mysteries
Collins, London.
- 1970b Yoga: Immortality and Freedom
Bollingen, Princeton.
- ERIKSON, E.H. 1967 Identity and the Life Cycle
International Universities Press, New York.
- EYRE, R. 1979 Ronald Eyre on the Long Search
Collins, Glasgow.
- FANIBUNDA, E.B. 1978 Vision of the Divine
E.B. Fanibunda, Bombay.
- FARQUHAR, J.N. 1912 A Primer of Hinduism
Oxford University Press, London.
- FEVRE, R. 1984 Cheap Labour and Racial Discrimination
Gower, Aldershot.
- FREUD, S. 1949 Collected Papers, 8 vols., vol. IV
Hogarth Press, London.
- FUCHS, S. 1965 Rebellious Prophets: A Study of
Messianic Movements in Indian Religions
Asia Publishing House, Bombay.

- GARRISON, O. 1972 Tantra: The Yoga of Sex
Academy Editions, London.
- GHAI, D.P. and GHAI, Y. 1979 The Asian Minorities of East and Central Africa (up to 1971)
Minority Rights Group, London.
- GHURYE, G.S. 1962 Gods and Men
Popular Book Depot, Bombay.
- 1964 Indian Sadhus
Popular Prakashan, Bombay.
- GLASENAPP, H. von (1922) 1978 Der Hinduismus: Religion and Gesellschaft im Heutigen Indien
Georg Olms, Hildesheim.
- GOKAK, V.K., ed., 1973 A Value Orientation to our System of Education
M. Gulab Singh and Sons, New Delhi.
- 1975a Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba: The Man and the Avatar: An Intepretation
Abhinav Publications, New Delhi.
- ed., 1975b The Golden Book of Sri Sathya Sai Lyrics
Sri Sathya Sai Education and Publication Foundation, Kadugodi.
- 1979 In Defence of Jesus Christ and Other Avatars
M. Gulab Singh and Sons, New Delhi.
- GOLD, R.L. 1969 'Roles in Sociological Field Observations',
in McCall, G.J. and Simmons, J.L., eds., q.v.
- GONDA, J. 1963a Die Religionen Indiens 2 vols.. vol.II: Der Juengere Hinduismus
W. Kohlhammer Verlag, Stuttgart.
- 1963b The Vision of the Vedic Poets
Mouton, The Hague.
- 1970a Notes on Names and the Name of God
North Holland Publishing Company, The Hague.

- GONDA, J. 1970b Visnuism and Sivaism: A Comparison
University of London, London.
- GOULDNER, A.W. 1967 Enter Plato: Classical Greece
and the Origins of Social Theory
Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.
- GRIFFITHS, B. 1966 Christian Ashram
Darton, Longman and Todd, London.
- 1978 Return to the Centre
Collins, London.
- 1982 The Marriage of East and West
Collins, London.
- GUPTA, G.R., ed. 1976 Family and Social Change in
Modern India
Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi.
- HAHLO, K.G. 1980 'Profile of a Gujarati Community
in Bolton'
New Community 8, no.3, 295-307.
- HAMETT, I. 1973 'Sociology of Religion and Sociology
of Error'
Religion 3, no.1. 1-12.
- HARALDSSON, E. and OSIS, K. 1977 'The Appearance and
Disappearance of Objects in the Presence of Sri
Sathya Sai Baba'
Journal of the American Society for Psychical
Research 71, no.1, 33-43.
- HARDY, A. 1979 The Spiritual Nature of Man: A Study
of Contemporary Religious Experience
Clarendon, Oxford.
- HARPER, E.B., ed. 1964 Religion in South Asia
University of Washington Press, Seattle.
- HEELAS, P. 1985 'New Religious Movements in
Perspective'
Religion 15, no.1, 81-97.
- HEJMADI, D., ed. 1980a The Voice of the Avatar
2 vols., vol. 1
M. Gulab Singh and Sons, New Delhi.

- HEJMADT, D., ed. 1980b The Voice of the Avatar
2 vols., vol. 2
M. Gulab Singh and Sons, New Delhi.
- HISLOP, J.S. 1979 Conversations with Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba
Sri Sathya Sai Education and Publication
Foundation, Bangalore.
- HUGHES, J.A. 1976 Sociological Analysis: Methods of Discovery
Nelson, London.
- IYER, K.B. 1971 'Shiva the Benign'
in Lal, S., ed., q.v.
- JACKSON, R. 1976 'Holi in North India and in an English City: Some Adaptations and Anomalies'
New Community 5, no.3, 203-210.
- ed. 1978 Perspectives on World Religions
School of Oriental and African Studies, London.
- 1981 'The Shree Krishna Temple and the Gujarati Hindu Community in Coventry'
in Bowen, B.G., ed., q.v.
- JAGADEESAN, J. 1983 Unity of Faiths
J. Jagadeesan, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- JULY 11TH ACTION COMMITTEE 1982 Free the Bradford 12
July 11th Action Committee, Bradford.
- KANU, V. 1981 Sai Baba: God Incarnate
Sawbridge Enterprises, London.
- 1984 'Education for Human Values in the United Kingdom'
unpublished paper presented in the Sri Sathya Sai Centre, November 1984.
- KASTURI, N. 1975a Sathyam Sivam Sundaram: The Life of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba 4 vols., vol.2
Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Seva Samithi, New Delhi.

KASTURI, N. 1975b Sathyam Sivam Sundaram: The Life of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba vol.3
Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Seva Samithi, New Delhi.

ed. 1977 Sathya Sai Speaks 10 vols.,
vol. 1
Sri Sathya Sai Education and Publication
Foundation, Kadugodi.

1979a Garland of 108 Precious Gems: Ashtothara Sathanama Rathnamala
Sri Sathya Sai Education and Publication
Foundation, Bangalore.

1979b Sandeha Nivarini: Dissolving Doubts
Sri Sathya Sai Education and Publication
Foundation, Bangalore.

1980a Sathyam Sivam Sundaram: The Life of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba vol. 1
Sri Sathya Sai Books and Publications,
Prashanti Nilayam.

1980b Sathyam Sivam Sundaram: The Life of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba vol.4
Sri Sathya Sai Books and Publications,
Prashanti Nilayam.

ed. 1980c Sathya Sai Speaks vol.10
M. Gulab Singh and Sons, New Delhi.

ed. n.d. Sathya Sai Speaks vol.7
Sri Sathya Sai Education Foundation,
Bombay.

KAUL, P.K. 1977 'News Round-up for 1976'
Jyot 3, no. 1, 5-6
Sri Sathya Sai Service Organisations (U.K.),
London.

KAUL, S. 1975a 'Sri Sathya Sai Service Organisations:
United Kingdom'
Jyot 1, no.5-7
Sri Sathya Sai Service Organisations (U.K.),
London.

1975b 'Changes of Office Bearers: New
Bhajan Centres'
Jyot 1, no.2, 3
Sri Sathya Sai Service Organisations (U.K.),
London.

1976 'Pilgrimage to Prashanti Nilayam'
Jyot 2, no.1, 4-5
Sri Sathya Sai Service Organisations (U.K.),
London.

KING, U. 1980 'Who is the ideal karmayogin? The
Meaning of a Hindu religious symbol'
Religion 10, no.1, 41-59.

1981 'A hermeneutic circle of religious
ideas'
Religious Studies 17.

1982 'The Iconography of the Bhagavad Gita'
Journal of Dharma 7, no.2, 146-63.

1983 'Forschungsbericht ueber den Hinduismus
in England' Zeitschrift fuer Missionswissenschaft
and Religionswissenschaft
July 1983, 220-236.

1984 'Historical and Phenomenological
Approaches to the Study of Religion: Some
Major Developments and Issues under Debate
since 1950'
in Whaling F., ed., q.v.

1985 'Darshan - Seeing the Divine: The
Meeting of Hindu and Christian Experience',
published (1986) as Seeing the Divine in
Hinduism and Christianity, Pamphlet Library
no.11
Centre for the Study of Religion and Society,
University of Kent, Canterbury.

- KINGDOM OF SATHYA SAI 1979 Golden Age
Kingdom of Sathya Sai, Kadugodi.
- KINSLEY, D.R. 1982 Hinduism: A Cultural Perspective
Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.
- KITAGAWA, J.M., ELIADE, M. and LONG, C.H, 1974
The History of Religions
University of Chicago Press, London.
- KJAERHOLM, L. 1982 'Myth, Pilgrimage and Fascination in the Aiyappa Cult. A View from Field Work in Tamil Nadu'
South Asia Research 2, no.2, 25-52.
- KLOSTERMAIER, K. 1969 Hindu and Christian in Vrindaban
SCM Press, London.
- KNOTT, K. 1977 'A Study of Hinduism in Leeds: Evening Arti in the Mandir'
M.A. thesis, University of Leeds.
- 1980 'Pilgrimage in Hinduism'
Seminar paper at the University of Leeds.
- 1981 A Statistical Analysis of South Asians in the UK by Religion and Ethnicity
Community Religions Project Research Paper no. 8
Department of Theology and Religious Studies,
University of Leeds, Leeds.
- 1984 'Community Religions' at the
University of Leeds
Community Religions Project Research Paper
(New Series) no.1
Department of Theology and Religious Studies,
University of Leeds, Leeds.

KNOTT, K. 1986 Hinduism in Leeds: A Study of Religious Practice in the Indian Hindu Community and in Hindu-related Groups
Community Religions Project, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Leeds, Leeds.

1987 'Hindu Temple Rituals in Britain: the Reinterpretation of Tradition'
in Burghart, R., ed., q.v.

KNOTT, K. and TOON, R. 1980 Considering Religious Statistics: Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims in the UK of South Asian Ethnic Origin
Community Religions Project Research Paper, no.7
Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Leeds, Leeds.

1982 Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus in the UK: Problems in the Estimation of Religious Statistics
Religious Research Paper, no.6
Department of Sociology, University of Leeds, Leeds.

KRIPALANI, K. and MEGHANI, M. 1969 Readings from Gandhi
Lok-Milap Trust, Bhavnagar, India.

KRISHNA, G., ed. 1982 Contributions to South Asian Studies 2 vols., vol.2
Oxford University Press, Delhi;

KULKARNI, T.R. 1975 Psychological Evaluation of Sri Sathya Sai Bal Vikas Centres, Bombay
Sri'Sathya Sai Institute of Research, Bombay.

LAING, R. 1983a 'Mr Indulal Shah's Visit to London'
Sathya Sai Baba Magazine, no.2, 3-4.

- LAING, R. 1983b 'Seva Dal'
Sathya Sai Baba Magazine, no.2, 19-24.
- 1985a 'Steiner and Education in
 Human Values'
Sathya Sai Baba Magazine, no.7, 13-17.
- 1985b 'Celebration in London'
Sathya Sai Baba Magazine, no.7, 13-17
- LAING, R. and MASON, P. 1982
 see Mason, P. and Laing, R.
- LAL, S., ed. 1970 The Times of India Annual
 Times of India Press, Bombay.
- 1971 The Times of India Annual
 Times of India Press, Bombay.
- LANNOY, R. 1974 The Speaking Tree: A Study of
Indian Culture and Society
 Oxford University Press, London.
- LOMAS, G.B.G. 1973 Census 1971: Coloured
Population of Great Britain
 Runnymede Trust, London.
- LONG, J.B. 1971 'Siva and Dionysos: Visions of
 Terror and Bliss'
Numen 18. No.3, 180-209.
- 1972 'Festival of Repentance: A
 Study of Mahashivaratri'
Journal of the Oriental Institute 22, 15-38.
- 1976 'Life out of Death: A Structural
 Analysis of the Myth of the "Churning of
 the Ocean of Milk"
 in Smith, B.L., ed., q.v.

- MCCALL, G.J. and SIMMONS, J.L. 1969 Issues in Participant Observation: A Text and a Reader
Addison-Wesley, Reading, Massachusetts.
- MALINOWSKI, B. 1954 Magic, Science and Religion and other Essays
Doubleday Anchor, Garden City, New York.
- MALKANI, K.R. 1980 The RSS Story
Impex, New Delhi.
- MANGALWADI, V. 1977 The World of Gurus
Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi.
- MANSBRIDGE, J. 1985 'Small Beginnings'
Sathya Sai Baba Magazine, no.8, 9-11.
- MAAR, J. 1978 'Popular Hinduism in South India'
in Jackson, R., ed., q.v.
- MARRIOTT, M. 1971 'The Feast of Love'
in Singer, M., ed., q.v.
- MASON, P. 1979 'Recorded Talk for the Sathya Sai Baba Birthday Celebration in Wellingborough' (photocopied sheet)
Sri Sathya Sai Centre, Wellingborough.
- ed. 1983a-b Sathya Sai Baba Magazine, nos. 1,2.
- ed. 1984a-d Sathya Sai Baba Magazine, nos. 3,6.
- ed. 1985a-c Sathya Sai Baba Magazine, nos.7-9.

- MASON, P. and LAING, R. 1982 Sathya Sai Baba: The Embodiment of Love
Sawbridge Enterprises, London.
- MCKIM MARRIOTT 1971
see Marriott, M.
- MICHAELSON, M. 1979 'The Relevance of Caste among East African Gujaratis in Britain'
New Community 7, no.3, 350-60.
- MOFFITT, J. 1973 Journey to Gorakhpur
Sheldon, London.
- MOORE, A.C. 1977 Iconography of Religions: An Introduction
SCM, London.
- MORGAN, C.T., KING, R.A., and ROBINSON, N.M. 1979
Introduction to Psychology
McGraw Hill, New York.
- MORGAN, F. 1979 An unpublished article quoted in correspondence.
- MORGAN, K.W., ed., 1953 Religion of the Hindus
Ronald Press, New York.
- MURPHET, H. 1973 Sai Baba: Man of Miracles
Muller, London.
- 1978 Sai Baba Avatar: A New Journey into Power and Glory
Macmillan of India, Bombay.
- 1983 Sai Baba: Invitation to Glory
Sawbridge Enterprises, London.
- NARASAPPA, R. 1980 Temple of All Religions: 15th Chapter of Garuda Purana and Sai Teachings
T.A. Appaji Gowda, Talkad, Karnataka.

- NARASAPPA, R. n.d. Garuda Purana and Sai Teachings: Different Worlds and World Religions
T.A. Appaji Gowda, Talkad, Karnataka.
- NARASIMHASWAMI, B.V. 1944 Sri Sai Baba's Charters and Sayings
All India Sai Samaj, Mylapore, Madras.
- NARAYAN, R.K. 1972 The Ramayana: A Shortened Modern Prose Version of the Indian Epic
Viking Press, New York.
- NARENDER, D. 1977 'Bhajan in his Presence'
in Sri Sathya Sai Hostel, q.v.
- NEEDLEMAN, J. 1972 The New Religions
Penguin, Harmondsworth.
- NIETZSCHE, F. 1909 The Birth of Tragedy, or: Hellenism and Pessimism, trans. W.A. Haussmann
J.N. Foulis, Edinburgh.
- 1910 The Genealogy of Morals, trans.
W.A. Haussmann
J.N. Foulis, Edinburgh.
- 1956 The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals, trans. F. Golffing
Doubleday, Garden City, New York.
- ⁰FLAHERTY, W.D. 1973 Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Shiva
Oxford University Press, London.
- 1976 The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology
University of California Press, London.
- 1978 Hindu Myths
Penguin Books, Harmondsworth.
- OLSON, C. 1980 'The Saiva Mystic, Self-sacrifice, and Creativity'
Religion 10, no.1, 31-40.
- OMAN, J.C. 1905 The Mystics, Ascetics and Saints of India
T. Fisher Unwin, London.

- OSBORNE, A. 1975 The Incredible Sai Baba
Rider, London.
- OSIS, K. and HARALDSSON, E. 1977 At the Hour of Death
Avon, New York.
- 1979 'Parapsychological
Phenomena associated with Sri Sathya Sai Baba'
Christian Parapsychologist 3, no.5, 159-63.
- PADFIELD, J.E. (1908) 1975 The Hindu at Home
H.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi.
- PANDEY, R.K. 1979 The Concept of Avatars, with
Special Reference to the Gita
B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi.
- PANDIT, M.P. 1975 'Patanjali'
in Ragavan, V., ed., q.v.
- PARRINDER, G. 1970 Avatar and Incarnation
Faber and Faber, London.
- 1975 Wisdom of the Forest: Sages of
the Indian Upanishads
Sheldon, London.
- PATEL, N. 1976 'Hinduism outside India: Selective
Retention in Gujarati Families'
in Gupta, G.R., ed., q.v.
- PENSA, C. 1972 'Some Internal and Comparative
Problems in the Field of Indian Religions'
in Bianchi, U., Bleeker, C.J. and Bausani, A.,
eds., q.v.
- PEREIRA, J. 1976 Hindu Theology: A Reader
Doubleday, New York.
- PILLAY, V.K. n.d. Musings of a Surgeon on the
Sublime in Man
V.K. Pillay, Bangalore.
- POCOCK, D. 1972 Kanbi and Patidar
Oxford University Press, Oxford.

- POCOCK, D. 1973 Mind, Body and Wealth: A Study of Belief and Practice in an Indian Village
Blackwell, Oxford.
- 1976 'Preservation of the Religious Life: Hindu Immigrants in England'
Contributions to Indian Sociology (New Series) 10, no.2, 341-365.
- PRICE, L. 1980 'Letter'
Christian Parapsychologist 3, no.7, 235-36.
- PURNANANDA n.d. Aum Hindutvam: Vedic Prayer, Hindu Catechism
Purnananda, London.
- PUTHOFFi H.E. and TARG, R. 1976 'Physicists investigate Clairvoyance'
Bhavan's Journal 23, no.3, 49.
- RAGAVAN, V., ed. 1975 Founders of Philosophy
Ministry of Information and Broadcasting,
New Delhi.
- RAJDEV, S.M. 1966 Bhakta Shri Jalaram
S.M. Rajdev, Rajkot.
- RAJU, P.T. 1971 The Philosophical Traditions of India
George Allen and Unwin, London.
- RAM, S. 1983 A Geographical Analysis of Indians in Bradford: Methods used in Classifying Names on the Electoral Register
School of Geography, University of Leeds, Leeds.
- 1984 A Geographical Analysis of Indians in Bradford: Spatial Distribution and Temporal Trends, 1971-81
School of Geography, University of Leeds, Leeds.
- RAMACHANDRAN, C., ed. pre-1971 Sathya Sai Baba: All Faiths are Facets of the One Truth, All are Tributes to its Glory
Bhagavan Shri Sathya Sai Seva Samiti, U.S.A.
- RAMANUJAN, A.K. 1973 Speaking of Shiva
Penguin, Harmondsworth.

- RANGA, N.G. 1976 'Miracle of Sai Baba: 2'
Bhavan's Journal 23, no.3, 39-45.
- RAO, D.P.S. 1972 Five Contemporary Gurus in the
Shirdi (Sai Baba) Tradition
Christian Institute for the Study of Religion
and Society, Bangalore.
- RAO, P., ed. 1975 Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai in
Amritsar, Simla, Delhi
Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sad Seva Organisations,
New Delhi.
- ROBINSON, D. and RUHELA, S.P. 1976 Sai Baba and his
Message
Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi.
- RUHELA, S.P. 1976 'Sat Baba - A Biographical Sketch'
in Robinson, D. and Ruhela, S.P., q.v.
- SAHI, J. 1980 The Child and the Serpent
Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.
- SABLIKAR, M. 1973 Sai Baba: The Saint of Shirdi
Somaiya Publications, Bombay.
- SAID, E.W. 1981 Covering Islam: How the Media and
the Experts Determine how we See the Rest of
the World
Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.
- 1978 Orientalism
Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.
- SANDWETSS, S.H. 1975 Sai Baba: The Holy Man and the
Psychiatrist
M. Gulab Singh and Sons, New Delhi.
- SATHYA SAT BABA 1970 Bhagavatha Vahini
Sri Sathya Sai Education and Publication
Foundation, Bangalore.
- 1974 Nama Mahima: Sadhana of Namasmaran
Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations, Bombay.

SATHYA SAI BABA 1975a Commandments to Sai Workers
Sri Sathya Sai Education and Publication
Foundation, Bombay.

1975b Dharma Vahini
Sri Sathya Sai Education and Publication
Foundation, Bangalore.

1975c Dhyana Vahini
Sri Sathya Sai Education and Publication
Foundation, Bangalore.

1975d Jnana Vahini
Sri Sathya Sai Education and Publication
Foundation, Bangalore.

1975e Prashanti Vahini
Sri Sathya Sai Education and Publication
Foundation, Bangalore.

1975f Prema Vahini
Sri Sathya Sai Education and Publication
Foundation, Bangalore.

1975g Upanishad Vahini
Sri Sathya Sai Education and Publication
Foundation, Bangalore.

1977 Ramakatha Rasavahini: The Rama
Story
Sri Sathya Sai Education and Publication
Foundation, Bangalore.

1978 Chjnna Katha: Stories and Parables
Sri Sathya Sai Education and Publication
Foundation, Anantapur.

1979a Summer Showers in Brindavan 1979
Sri Sathya Sai Hostel, Bangalore.

1979b 'Why this College?'
Sanathana Sarathi 21, no.8, 228-232.

1979c 'Why I Incarnate'
Central Office, Prashanti Nilayam, Andhra Pradesh.

- SATHYA SAI BABA 1980 Geetha Vahini
Sri Sathya Sai Education and Publication
Foundation, Bangalore.
- n.d. Bha-ra-th: Our Heritage
World Council of Sri Sathya Sai Seva
Organisations, Bombay.
- SCHULMAN, A. 1971 Baba
Viking, New York.
- SHAH, S., ed. 1978 Primer for Sri Sathya Sai Bal
Vikas Students
Sri Sathya Sai Education and Publication
Foundation, Bombay.
- SHANMUCANAYAGAM, C. 197- 'Aurobindo and Avatar'
Dharmakshetra ... (further details unobtainable).
- SHREE PRAJAPATI ASSOCIATION 1980 Annual Report, 1977-78
Shree Prajapati Association (U.K.), Bradford.
- 1980 Annual Report, 1978-79
Shree Prajapati Association (U.K.), Bradford.
- 1980 Annual Report, 1979-80
Shree Prajapati Association (U.K.), Bradford
- SHRI HINDU MANDIR 1977a Temple News, no.1
Shri Hindu Mandir, 36 Alexandra Road, Leeds 6.
- 1977b Temple News, no.10
Shri Hindu Mandir, 36 Alexandra Road, Leeds 6.
- 1978a Temple News, no.16
Shri Hindu Mandir, 36 Alexandra Road, Leeds 6.
- 1978b Temple News, no.21
Shri Hindu Mandir, 36 Alexandra Road, Leeds 6.
- 1979 Temple News, no.2k
Shri Hindu Mandir, 36 Alexandra Road, Leeds 6.
- SIDDIQI, N. and AZAM, F. 1980 The Alien: The
Pakistani Child in Denmark
Mind, London.

- SIMON, T. 1979 Jupiter's Travels
Hamish Hamilton, London.
- SINGER, M. 1971 Krishna: Myths, Rites, Attitudes
East-West Center Press, Honolulu.
- ed. 1976 Traditional India
University of Texas Press, London.
- SINGH, K. 1975 Gurus, Godmen and Good People
Orient Longman, Bombay.
- SINGH, R. 1978 The Sikh Community in Bradford
(1st edition)
Faculty of Contemporary Studies, Bradford College,
Bradford.
- 1980 The Sikh Community in Bradford
(2nd edition)
Faculty of Contemporary Studies, Bradford College,
Bradford.
- ed. 1986 The Education of Sikh Children and
Youths in Bradford
Bradford Sikh Parents' Association, Bradford.
- SINGH, R. and RAM, S. 1986 Indians in Bradford: The
Development of a Community
Bradford and Ilkley Community College, Bradford.
- SITARAM, S. 1975 'From U.K. Headquarters'
Jyot 1, no.1, 3-4.
- SIVARAMAMURTI, C. 1969 Some Aspects of Indian Culture
National Museum, New Delhi.
- SLADE, H. 1979 'Sai Baba - Signs and Wonders'
Christian Psychologist 3, no.5, 165-171.
- SMART, N. 1969a Doctrine and Argument in Indian
Philosophy
Harvester, Hassocks, Sussex.
- 1969b World Religions: A Dialogue
Penguin, Harmondsworth.

- SMART, N. 1973 The Science of Religion and the Sociology of Knowledge
Princeton University Press, New Jersey.
- 1978a 'Beyond Eliade: The Future of Theory in Religion'
Numen 25, 171-83.
- 1978b The Religious Experience of Mankind
Collins, Glasgow.
- SMITH, B.L. ed. 1976 Hinduism: New Essays in the History of Religions
E.J. Brill, Leiden.
- SMITH, D.J. 1976 The Facts of Racial Disadvantage
Policy Studies Institute, London.
- SMITH, H. Daniel 1978 'Hindu Desika Figures: Some notes on a minor iconographic tradition'
Religion 8, no.1, 40-67.
- SPEAR, P. 1972 India: A Modern History
University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.
- SREENIVAS, C. 1979 'A Day with Divinity'
in Kingdom of Sathya Sai, q.v.
- SRINIVAS, M.N. 1952 Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India
Oxford University Press, London.
- 1973 Social Change in Modern India
University of California Press, Los Angeles.
- Sri Sathya Sai Bhajnavali n.d.
No publisher or place of publication stated.
- SRI SATHYA SAI EDUCATION AND PUBLICATION FOUNDATION
n.d.
Bhajanavali Sri Sathya Sai Education and
Publication Foundation, Prashanti Nilayam.
- SRI SATHYA SAI HOSTEL 1977 Hridaya Brindavan
Sri Sathya Sai College, Kadugodi.

SRI SATHYA SAI SEVA ORGANISATIONS 1974 'Guidelines for Conducting Bhajans'
in Sathya Sai Baba 1974, q.v.

1977 Students'
Guidance Week for Career Courses
Sri Sathya Sai Sava Organisations, Bombay.

Sri Sri Ganapathi Sachchidananda Swami Ji n.d.
No publisher named, Wolverhampton.

SRIVASTAVA, S.L. 1974 Folk Culture and Oral Tradition: A Comparative Study of Regions in Rajasthan and Eastern Uttar Pradesh
Abhinav, New Delhi.

STEVENSON, S. (1920) 1971 The Rites of the Twice-born
Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, New Delhi.

STUTLEY, J. and M. 1977 Dictionary of Hinduism: Its Mythology, Folk-lore and Development: 1500 B.C. - A.D. 1500
Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.

SUBRAHMANYAM, P. 1970 'The Nataraja Temple at Chidambaram'
in Lal, S. ed., q.v.

SWALLOW, D.A. 1976 'Living Saints and their Devotees: A Study of Guru Cults in Urban Orissa'
Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge.

TAMBS-LYCHE, H. 1980 London Patidars
Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.

TART, C.T. ed. 1975 Transpersonal Psychologies
Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.

TAYLOR, D. 1984 'The Sathya Sai Baba Movement and Multi-ethnic Education'
Religion To-day, October.

1985 'Sathya Sai Baba Movement in Britain: Aims aims and Methods'
an unpublished paper presented at the Centre for the Study of New Religious Movements, Kings College, London, 14 June.

- TAYLOR, D. 1987a 'The Community of the Many Names of God'
in Burghart, R. ed., q.v.
- 1987b 'Charismatic authority in the Sathya Sai Baba Movement', in Burghart, R., ed., q.v.
- THAKUR, S.C. 1976 Philosophy and Psychical Research
Allen and Unwin, London.
- THAPAR, K. 1982 'Asians in Britain: No Place like Home'
Times, 21 June, p.10.
- THINES, G. 1977 Phenomenology and the Science of Behaviour
George Allen and Unwin, London.
- THOMAS, P. 1973 Epics, Myths and Legends of India
D.B. Taraporevala Sons, Bombay.
- 1975 Hindu Religion, Customs and Manners
D.B. Taraporevala Sons, Bombay.
- TINKER, H. 1977 The Banyan Tree
Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- TURABIAN, K.L. 1983 A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses and Dissertations
Heinemann, London.
- TURNER, B.S. 1974 Weber and Islam
Routledge and Kagan Paul, London.
- UBAN, S.S. 1977 The Gurus of India
Fine Books (Oriental), London.
- VANDANA 1978 Gurus, Ashrams and Christians
Darton, Longman and Todd, London.
- VARMA, M. 1984 'Abode of Peace'
Sanathana Sarathi 27, no.7, 184.
- VARMA, S. 1956 'Rituals of Worship'
in Bhattacharyya, B. ed., q.v.

- VENKATESWARAN, T.K. 1971 'Radha-Krishna Bhajans of South India'
in Singer, M. ed., q.v.
- VITSAXIS, V.G. 1979 Hindu Epics, Myths and Legends in Popular Illustrations
Oxford University Press, Delhi.
- VITTODINI, A. 1985 'Love be My Name'
Sanathana Sarathi 28, no.4, 104-105.
- WALLIS, R. 1984 The Elementary Forms of the New Religious Life
Routledge and Kagan Paul, London.
- WHALING, F. 1984 Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Religion
2 vols., vol.1
Mouton, Berlin.
- WHITE, C.S.J. 1972 'The Sai Baba Movement: Approaches to the Study of Indian Saints'
Journal of Asian Studies 31, 863-878.
- WILLIAMS, R.B. 1984 A New Face of Hinduism: The Swaminarayan Religion
Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- WILSON, B.R. 1973 Magic and the Millenium: A Sociological Study of Religious Movements of Protest among Tribal and Third-World Peoples
Heinemann, London.
- WORLD COUNCIL OF SRI SATHYA SAI ORGANISATIONS n.d.
For Mankind
World Council of Sri Sathya Sai Organisations,
Bombay.
- ZIMMER, H. 1974 Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilisation
Bollingen, Princeton.
- ZVELEBIL, K.V. 1973 The Poets of the Powers
Rider, London.

2. BIBLIOGRAPHY: PERIODICALS TO WHICH REFERENCE HAS
BEEN MADE

Bhavan's Journal, Delhi

Christian Parapsychologist, London

Contributions to Indian Sociology (New Series), New
Delhi

Evening News, Bolton

Journal of Asian Studies, Ann Arbor, Michigan

Journal of Dharma, Bangalore

Journal of the American Oriental Society

Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research

Journal of the Oriental Institute, Baroda

Jyot, Sri Sathya Sai Service Organisations (U.K.),
London

New Community, London

Newsletter, Community of the Many Names of God,
Llanpumsaint, Dyfed

Numen, Amsterdam

Prajapati Sandesh, Shree Prajapati Association (U.K.)

Psychic News, London

Religion, London

Religion To-day, London

Religious Studies, Cambridge

Sanathana Sarathi, Sri Sathya Sai Books and Publications
Trust, Prashanti Nilayam, Andhra Pradesh

Sathya Sai Baba Magazine, Tunbridge Wells, Kent

South Asia Research, School of Oriental and African
University of London

Sri Sathya Sai Bal Vikas: A Monthly for Students,
Teachers and Parents, Sri Sathya Sai Bal Vikas
Trust, Bombay

Sri Sathya Sai Seva Dal: A Quarterly for Seva Dal
Volunteers, Sri Sathya Sai Books and Publications
Prashanti Nilayam, Andhra Pradesh

Telegraph and Argus, Bradford

Temple News, Hindu Charitable Trust, Hindu Temple, Leeds
The Times, London
The Times of India Annual, Bombay
Zeitschrift fuer Missionswissenschaft and Religiora-
wissenschaft, Muenster

3. OTHER RESOURCES: INTERVIEWS

Eight structured interviews, using an interview guide (see Introduction) took place in 1978 on the following dates:

8 May (two interviews)
9 May
25 May (two interviews)
8 June
6 July
11 July

Fifty-four major interviews, often lasting longer than one hour, took place on the following dates:

1977: 24 May (two interviews)
14 June
17 June
30 June
21 November
29 November
1978: 10 January
19 February
2 March
25 May
15 June
1979: 14 September
20 September
21 September
25 September
27 September
14 October
13 November
23 November
5 December
30 December

1980: 8 January (two interviews)
 10 January
 27 January
 27 February
 14 March
 26 March
 10 April
 11 April
 19 June
 11 July
 14 July
 19 July
 5 September

1981,: 12 February
 9 April
 10 June
 11 June
 16 July

1982: 29 April
 6 May
 2 July
 8 November

1983: 4 February
 19 April
 10 June
 16 June
 5 July

1984: 30 January
 2 February
 14 February
 3 May

All interviews listed above were with devotees of Sathya Sai Baba. Thirteen lesser interviews were also held: several of them in 1985.

Interviews with representatives of six other Hindu organisations in Bradford were held between 1979 and 1985.

Community Religions Project Research Papers
(New Series)

1. 'Community Religions' at the University of Leeds,
Kim Knott, 1984.
2. A Report on Hinduism in Britain,
Ursula King, 1984.
3. Religion and Identity, and the Study of Ethnic
Minority Religions in Britain,
Kim Knott, 1986.
4. A Report on Afro-Caribbean Christianity in
Britain,
Vanessa Howard, 1987.
5. The Role of the Polish Catholic Church in the
Polish Community of the U.K.: A Study in Ethnic
Identity and Religion,
Joanna Marzec, 1988.
6. The Greek Orthodox Community in Leeds,
Katherine Kotsoni, forthcoming.