

## Oral Testimonies on Sai Baba

As Gathered During a Field Research in Shirdi and Other Locales  
in October-November 1985

Antonio Rigopoulos

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# 15 **Bombay**

## Tuesday, October 29, 1985

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### Excerpts From My Diary

5 p.m. Tomorrow is departure day. I will leave Bombay by plane at 6:30 p.m. and reach Bangalore. On October 31 I plan to reach Puttaparthi by taxi. I think I have done all that I could possibly do here in Maharashtra. The help I had from the Agrawals was extraordinary and I can never thank them enough. Perhaps tomorrow I will try to go once more to *Chetana*, the bookstore not too far from the Gateway of India, and see if I can find some other useful books.<sup>1</sup> Though in order to get there one has to pass through a Chinese restaurant (!), it is a very fine bookstore, with lots of interesting stuff on Indian religions and philosophies. I would like to learn more about Dattatreya, also known as Datta, since his cult here in Maharashtra is extremely popular. Indeed, Sai Baba is regarded as an incarnation of Dattatreya by the majority of his Hindu *bhaktas*. I would also like to know more about the *Gurucaritra* (ca. 1550) which is the seminal text of the Dattasampradāya, the tradition of the followers of Datta.

10:15 p.m. This afternoon, as I had done on the first days of my sojourn here, I went to see the beautiful Babulnāth temple - in order to reach it one has to climb many steps - and then the adjacent bazaar which was crowded with people. While I was there I spotted an old Westerner and the thought

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<sup>1</sup> I had visited this bookstore already on October 9, before leaving for Khamgaon, and had bought several books on Sai Baba, Meher Baba, and other *gurus* such as Nisargadatta Maharaj as well as on Maharashtrian religion and culture (on Viṭṭhala and the poet-saints, on Dattatreya, on Khaṇḍobā, etcetera). I also found useful information on the little-known Basheer Baba and Sri Narayan Baba in a book of Balse, *Mystics and Men of Miracles in India*, 51, 58-64, 66-7, 72, 83-5.

crossed my mind that he might have lost himself years ago in this crowd, never to be able to find his way out of the bazaar! I wondered if something similar could ever happen to me and I found myself laughing at this thought, though admittedly it was quite a nervous laughter. I then went to visit the Prince of Wales Museum, which houses some wonderful sculptures of Hindu deities as well as some Buddhist and Mughal masterpieces, and later the Hanging Gardens and the awesome Jain temple nearby.

Before dinner, I had another interesting conversation with N.J. Agrawal. We talked about Rajneesh<sup>2</sup> and his being arrested by American authorities. In the past he went twice to visit his *ashram* in Pune and noted how ninety per cent of his followers were Westerners. He said there were lots of dances and songs going on there, interspersed with the *guru's* philosophical discourses. He emphasized how Rajneesh has always had a bad reputation in India since his teachings are contrary to the Hindu tradition.

I then asked N.J. Agrawal to tell me something about himself. I was struck when he told me that he knows the *Bhagavadgītā* and twelve or thirteen *Upaniṣads* by heart, and that he recites them in the original Sanskrit every week. In order to recite the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Upaniṣads* within each week, a devotional practice known as *saptāhapārayana*, he follows a strict schedule which keeps him busy for a few hours every day. He is a profoundly religious man and his knowledge of these sacred texts by heart is truly remarkable.<sup>3</sup>

With regard to his devotion for Bhagawan Shri Sathya Sai Baba, he told me that the *guru* once warned him that he had a brain tumor and that he should go as soon as possible to the hospital to have it removed. However, when he went to a hospital in Bombay and the doctors examined him with their sophisticated machines they could find no trace of the tumor and concluded that he was all right. So much relieved, he returned to Puttaparthi but Bhagawan Shri Sathya Sai Baba insisted saying that he had a brain tumor and that he should undergo a more thorough examination. The doctors in Bombay finally discovered that he indeed had a small brain tumor and were able to intervene right away and cure him, the tumor being at its initial stage of development. Thus, he told me, Bhagawan Shri Sathya Sai Baba saved his life. Besides this, he said that the *guru* 'materialized' for him several items, such as a beautiful ring with a green gemstone which he always wears and which he showed to me.

The entire Agrawal family is devoted to Bhagawan Shri Sathya Sai Baba and every year in December they go stay in his Prasanthi Nilayam *ashram* for two-three weeks. Every Thursday afternoon, along with many other *bhaktas*, they hold a *bhajan* session in his honor and they often go to Puttaparthi to have his *darshan*. The husband of H.J. Agrawal's daughter showed me a beautiful Śiva *liṅga* that Bhagawan Shri Sathya Sai Baba 'materialized' for his wife: within it one can discern the *guru's* own image! He told me that initially a dazzling light emanated from it which illumined their *pūjā* room. After some time, however, the light came to fade away. It is regularly worshipped and, as per the *guru's* instruction, its base is always kept soaked in

<sup>2</sup> Born a Jain, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (1931-1990) began his career as a teacher of philosophy but at age thirty-five became a self-appointed *guru*. His *ashram* in Pune attracted large crowds.

<sup>3</sup> Even his younger brother H.J. Agrawal was a very pious man. When I was in Khamgaon, he fasted every day on account of the Navarātri festival, which had begun on October 14.

water since he told them that they should drink this water daily. His assurance is that this holy water will alleviate all tensions and give them *sānti*, peace. I was also given the privilege of drinking it. The husband of H.J. Agrawal's daughter then showed me a diamond ring that the *guru* 'materialized' for him - said to avert evil forces - as well as a *japamālā*, that is, a rosary, that he 'materialized' for his wife. They also treasure one of Bhagawan Shri Sathya Sai Baba's orange robes, one that he actually wore: he recently gave it to their son, who is studying in one of the *guru*'s schools in Prasanthi Nilayam.

