

# An Annotated Bibliography for Research on Sathya Sai Baba (in Three Parts)

Brian Steel December 2007

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## General Introduction to the Bibliographies

### 1. On the terms “Sai Baba” and “the Sai Baba Movement”

If you Google the name “Sai Baba”, of the 1,240,000 references instantly computed, the vast majority refer to (Sathya) Sai Baba. If, however, you type the URLs ‘[www.saibaba.org](http://www.saibaba.org)’ or ‘[www.saibaba.com](http://www.saibaba.com)’ into your Internet browser, you will be referred to two sites belonging to devotees of Sai Baba of **Shirdi** (or Shirdi Sai Baba / Shirdi Sai). This original bearer of the name Sai Baba was a Muslim /Hindu holy man who died in 1918 and has a widespread Indian and international (but mainly ethnic Indian) Organisation. In India his followers are most numerous in the northern half, down to the latitude of Mumbai. His dual Muslim-Hindu characteristics are reflected in his name: ‘Sai’, from a Persian word for ‘saint’ and ‘Baba’, a common respectful Indian term for ‘father’.

The first item on the Google search list for Sai Baba is [www.sathyasai.org](http://www.sathyasai.org). It is followed by Shirdi Sai Baba’s [www.saibaba.org](http://www.saibaba.org). Not far below comes another major Sathya Sai website, [www.srisathyasai.org.in](http://www.srisathyasai.org.in). This ‘Sathya Sai’ is in fact Sathya Sai Baba, said to have been born in 1926 as Sathya Narayana Raju in or near the remote southern Indian village of Puttaparthi in the state of Andhra Pradesh. According to his official biography, in 1940, following a traumatic seizure or illness, Sathya Narayana declared himself to be the reincarnation of [Shirdi] Sai Baba and rapidly became famous locally for his healing, exorcisms, and other miracles. Charismatic Sathya went on to claim full avatarhood and divine powers and, eventually, to become the most famous living Indian guru in the world. In the past quarter of a century the fame of Sathya, vigorously promoted by his transnational charitable Organisation and his millions of devotees, is far better known internationally (though *not* throughout the whole of India) than the original bearer of the Sai Baba title. This explains why he is identified by most “Westerners” and the Google machines (whose logarithms operate on the basis of quantity of references or links) as “Sai Baba”. His Organisation and devotees also refer to him simply as ‘Sai’ (which he has always told them means ‘Divine Mother’, oblivious to the consequences of his etymological inaccuracy). (Nevertheless, it would be a courtesy to Shirdi Sai Baba devotees to refer, as often as possible, to the ‘junior’ ‘Sai Baba’ as Sathya Sai Baba, or Sathya Sai.

While the theologically dual nature of Shirdi Sai (Baba) as Muslim fakir and Hindu miracle-making saint has attracted both hagiographical and academic interest, the indisputably charismatic Sathya Sai (Baba) has attracted a massive amount of hagiographical writing and some critical attention but, until very recently, scant *scholarly* interest (a gap partly explained by his strident claims of Divinity and his enigmatic and flamboyant reputation). A further factor in the story of the *two* Sai Babas is that, after sixty years of self-promotion and unparalleled adoration and worship as God on Earth by millions of followers,

the relatively faint background murmurs of doubt and denial of Sathya's Divine claims have been growing in volume and substance, particularly since major new Internet postings in 2000. With the current series of media and Internet allegations, revelations and often emotional controversy, the time is surely ripe for a more independent analysis and description of Sathya Sai Baba's extraordinary Mission. As for the term 'Sai Baba Movement', it is ambiguous, or misleading, depending on the context in which it is used since the *two* Sai Baba Organisations, regardless of the innuendo of the Sathya Sai Organisation (and the trusting belief of SSB devotees), have always been *completely separate*, one based in the state of Marathi-speaking Maharashtra, the other further south in the Telugu homeland of Andhra Pradesh.

## 2. The Bibliography

This 3-part annotated Bibliography on Sathya Sai Baba (SSB in some subsequent acronymic references) covers different viewpoints, genres and fields. It is offered principally as a general research tool on SSB and the Sathya Sai Organisation (or SSO), in particular for the rapidly increasing numbers of students and academics who are making New Religious Movements (NRMs) their field of study (in departments as diverse as those of philosophy, comparative religion and theology, parapsychology, anthropology, ethnography, sociology, politics and, most recently, terrorism). It is also offered for those who may find **Part 2** and **Part 3** interesting or useful for their critical or apologetic insights.

The 140-page Bibliography, divided into three complementary parts, attempts to identify most of the huge amount of material currently available for research on Sathya Sai Baba. The three Parts, when considered in their totality, not only show how SSB has been diversely characterised in acres of print but also indicate how much work is still to be done to discover the full story about Sathya Sai Baba, his associates, his devotees and his critics.

**Part 1** offers major sources of public information, including items of a scholarly or academic nature or provenance, with an **Appendix** on entries in works of reference, surveys and textbooks and an Index of authors' names. (The current document)

The main aspects studied by academic writers over the past 35 years or more have been: belief in Sathya Sai Baba and forms of worship; Sathya Sai Baba's charismatic effect on devotees (devotees' beliefs and attitudes to SSB); the relationship of SSB and the Sathya Sai Baba Movement to traditional Hinduism; the functioning of the Sathya Sai Organisation, its dynamic international growth and transnational characteristics; the functioning and growth of the SSO in specific countries outside India, especially in relation to both globalisation and specific local circumstances.

**Note:** The work of academics and scholars whose main or total contribution to information on Sathya Sai Baba and the Sathya Sai Organisation is of a proselytising or hagiographical nature (e.g. N. Kasturi, V.Gokak, A. Kumar and S. Sandweiss), is listed in Part 3, rather than in Part 1).

**Part 2** presents work critical of the official portrayal of SSB and his Mission by non-devotees (including, in particular, ex-devotees).

These items deal principally with alleged or perceived discrepancies and anomalies in the official Sathya Sai Baba image and Mission as propagated by SSB, his Organisation, spokespersons, writers and devotees.

**Part 3** offers a Selected Bibliography of works and information about Sathya Sai Baba by SSB himself, the SSO and his devotees.

This is a selection of the prodigious accumulation of hagiographical and promotional writing on Sathya Sai Baba: The SSB story as projected over the 60 years of his extraordinary Mission by SSB himself, his Organisation, associates, spokespersons (official and unofficial), writers and devotees in several hundred (often self-published) books and booklets. In recent years, this vast literature has been complemented by numerous official and unofficial websites promoting and extolling Sathya Sai Baba. This Part also considers the very special role of spokespersons, and other forms of communication apart from books, in promoting SSB in India and abroad.

This final Part of the bibliography is also the appropriate place for a presentation of recent important developments in the presentation of SSB to the world, a consideration of new sources of information, particularly on the Internet, and a short essay on a limited number of recent public responses by Sathya Sai Baba, Sathya Sai Organisation officeholders and devotees to the increasing volume of criticism and allegations against the charismatic guru. Of potential interest is the fact that, to date, the main official attitude to criticism has been one of automatic denial and blanket dismissal (often with gratuitous denigration and innuendo about the unnamed critics).

#### **Notes:**

1. For greater clarity in a very mixed bag of offerings on this world-famous guru, items by scholars, academics and ex-academics which may be classed either as essentially hagiographical or as outrightly critical of the official Sathya Sai Baba story are presented in Parts 3 and 2, respectively. This applies particularly to (retired) Indian academics (dutifully fulfilling their Hindu *vanaprastha* obligations of old age in a very congenial and stimulating ashram) who are, or were, associates of Sathya Sai Baba.

2. For those wishing to cross-check with official Sathya Sai Organisation websites – for example to access any of (the edited translations) of Sathya Sai Baba’s Discourses referred to – before reading Part 3, the following three official sites offer constantly updated official information on SSB, as well as links to an ever-expanding labyrinth of unofficial websites (the contemporary electronic supplement to printed hagiographical books and articles) set up by Sathya Sai Baba devotees and overseas Sathya Sai Organisation Centres:

The International Sathya Sai Organisation: [www.sathyasai.org](http://www.sathyasai.org);

The Sathya Sai Baba Charitable Trust: [www.srisathyasai.org.in](http://www.srisathyasai.org.in);

The Sri Sathya Sai Books and Publications Trust: [www.sssbpt.org](http://www.sssbpt.org).

(A reminder: for information on Shirdi Sai Baba’s worldwide Organisation, see: [www.saibaba.org](http://www.saibaba.org))

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### **3. Declaration of personal interest**

Readers will already have observed that this bibliography contains a degree of personal agenda. Since 2001 I have made several detailed personal statements on this topic on my Sathya Sai Baba web page, <http://bdsteel.tripod.com/More>.) A brief résumé is therefore also offered here.

For many years I not only considered myself a devotee of Sathya Sai Baba and an unquestioning believer in his Divinity but, as an eager chronicler and hagiographer, I researched a few hundred books and articles which enthusiastically described his Divinity and Divine powers, his teachings and the development of his Mission. The result was two

eulogistic books. These books (written in 1995 and 1998) are listed in Part 3 of this study. The research for both books entailed reading most of the voluminous Sathya Sai Baba literature in English, mainly written by devotees (many self-published) and not available in mainstream bookshops. In late 1998, for a proposed third book on Sathya Sai Baba, I decided to switch my focus away from the massive devotee literature to the 27 volumes of Sathya Sai Baba's own Discourses (translated, edited and published by his Organisation in many languages and widely read and keenly studied by devotees). There are currently 36 such volumes in a series titled *Sathya Sai Speaks*.

My original intention was simply to show the development of the 50 year Mission from the Divine guru's point of view. Unexpectedly, however, an intensive study and annotation of this mass of approximately two million words revealed unexpected anomalies and discrepancies and left so many unanswered questions (to add to other previously shelved queries left over from my other research) that, with the resulting database, it simply became impossible for me to continue with the projected book (on the development of the Mission as seen from Sathya Sai Baba's own words). I finally abandoned the original book project in 1999 but continued to follow up many leads and to look for necessary answers in a state of growing doubt about the Divine claims by Sathya Sai Baba, his Sathya Sai Organisation and devotee writers (including myself).

The sensational publication of *The Findings* by David and Faye Bailey (in early 2000) and a critical re-examination of the available material and my own files of discrepancies eventually brought about a reversal of my opinion of Sathya Sai Baba's claims of Divinity. I not only became an ex-devotee but, as an experienced researcher, I began to delve into my growing folders of unanswered questions and discrepancies as the basis of a *critical* re-examination of the vast Sathya Sai Baba literature – much of which I had previously accepted without question. Moreover, as a result of the Baileys' *Findings* and number of subsequent defections by alarmed devotees, there was a sudden wave of critical attention, revelations and allegations about Sathya Sai Baba. Coincidentally, *new* information began to appear from devotee sources as well. (See 'The Year 2000: Major New Evidence about Sathya Sai Baba from Four Sources: <http://bdsteel.tripod.com/More/2000evidence.htm>') The clues in my files of discrepancies were followed up and, reinforced by other recently available information and cross-checking of some of the devotee books on Sathya Sai Baba, they have grown into a substantial body of evidence which, in my opinion, modifies some facets of the hagiographically crafted image of Sathya Sai Baba inspired by his charismatic self-presentation.

My first critical writings were launched on the Internet in November 2001 and for four years my many other postings on Sathya Sai Baba continued to probe discrepancies between the observable facts and some of the major claims of Sathya Sai Baba, his Organisation and his unquestioning devotee chroniclers.

In spite of this radically changed personal stance (due to critical analysis of evidence not considered or not available previously), I hope and believe that my judgements and opinions expressed on my web page and in this annotated bibliography are basically fair.

## Sathya Sai Baba Bibliography. Part 1

*Sources of public information, including items of a scholarly or academic nature or provenance, with an **Appendix** on entries in works of reference, surveys and textbooks*

The bulk of academic work on Sathya Sai Baba over the past 25 years has been characterised by uncritical acceptance of the fervently devotee-promoted legend surrounding the guru's charisma, alleged miracles and sensational reputation. The work of a few pioneering exceptions and recent contributions to the Internet have been largely ignored.

Like devotees, most academics have revealed a critical blind spot for 50 years of Sathya Sai Baba's own recorded statements (translated from Telugu and heavily edited by his associates), his charismatic exploitation of the art of storytelling on several levels and the enigmatic power of his public and personal statements in his trademark basic English. For example, before accepting with such alacrity and intellectual excitement the hagiographical assertion of the *validity* of the sensational 1963 "Shiva-Shakti" claims about a promised triple incarnation of Shiva and his Consort to Sathya Sai Baba's alleged ancestor Bharadwaj, or accepting without demur SSB's 1972 Christmas Discourse statement that Jesus Christ on the Cross predicted SSB's Advent as Messiah, or the much-publicised SSB assertion that a Crucifix gift for his influential American spokesperson, John Hislop, was reassembled in the latter's presence from fragments of the True Cross, independent investigators would have been (and doubtless will be in the future) wiser to have taken note, from the abundantly available (but largely ignored) Discourse evidence, that Sathya Sai Baba is a spontaneous, compulsive and captivating *storyteller*. One of his early stories was his capricious definition of the etymology of "Sai" (as in the name of the Muslim/Hindu Sai Baba of Shirdi, whose incarnation he declared himself to be) as meaning "Divine Mother" instead of the linguistically endorsed "saint" (with Muslim and Persian connotations).

There have been three separate waves of (mainly 'Western') academic interest in Sathya Sai Baba and his Mission (or Movement), each increasing in size. After Professor White's 1972 article, there are waves of interest in the 1980s, the 1990s and, increasing exponentially year by year, from 2000 onward.

So far, the lengthy investigations by Babb (1986), Klass (1991), Kent (2004) and Palmer (2005) offer the best academic descriptions of Sathya Sai Baba and his devotees, their beliefs, daily activities and interaction. For a detailed critical (and much under-utilised) analysis of SSB's alleged paranormal abilities, see Beyerstein (1992 and 1996).

For the past thirty five years most academic research on Sathya Sai Baba has been guided more by caution and deference than open curiosity. Dazzled (or embarrassed) by the bold divine claims and the charisma (reported or witnessed) and puzzled or ill at ease with the alleged miracles and reported parapsychological phenomena, many researchers have based their findings on the reactions, reports and gossip of Sathya Sai Baba's unquestioning devotees, ever keen to proselytise. (A further weakness in SSB research may stem from the academic system of scholarly apprenticeship. In at least three cases (unnamed here but obvious from the evidence offered in Part 1 of the Bibliography), initial PhD research on a peripheral aspect of Sathya Sai Baba's career or teachings has offered ostensibly new and intriguing material for consideration. The resulting well-argued thesis or book has been accepted, repeated or followed up by other academics while the 'apprentices' themselves have moved on to build their successful careers on other more stimulating and academically fruitful topics.)

It is my opinion that although academic research has produced many useful essays and information about this unique guru-devotee relationship and the equally unique 60-year old Sathya Sai Baba Mission, so far, with few exceptions, the results have tended to be rather one-sided, mainly because of a self-imposed handicap which this *complementary* series of bibliographies, when used by future researchers, may help to reduce: over-reliance on hagiographical sources from the Organisation, spokespersons and devotees, as well as a relatively superficial attention to the enigmatic persona and charisma of Sathya Sai Baba himself and, *crucially*, an almost total neglect of his own (translated and edited) Discourses and other reported statements.

The simple, obvious fact is that, since 1955, Sathya Sai Baba has frequently given spontaneous Telugu Discourses, which have been officially printed in translated and edited versions. The volumes of *Sathya Sai Speaks* now number 36, amount to at least two and a half million words, and are on sale in the ashrams and in Sathya Sai Baba Centres around the world. These volumes of Discourses reveal much more than SSB's teachings; for example, they reveal (even in their translated edited form) his style and preaching techniques. Among the latter, possibly the most significant is his constant habit of extemporising *stories* (and variations on them) on many topics, including Puranic stories about Hindu scripture, stories about his own youth, his family, his early years as *avatar*, Shirdi Sai Baba, the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, as well a variety of personal claims. Usually, academic references to this huge body of 'writings' are restricted to a very small number of sensational quotations relating to his Divinity, commonly propagated by the SSO and in the Sathya Sai Baba literature. Careful analysis of the 50 years of Discourses (as I myself belatedly discovered nine years ago) reveals surprises and multiple discrepancies which demand further investigation.

Also demanding academic attention is an increasing amount of other important information about Sathya Sai Baba ripe for harvesting from two or three dozen of the major hagiographies and from other non-hagiographical books, articles and, more recently, a multiplicity of Internet postings. (All these provide the subject matter for Parts 2 and 3 of this Bibliography.) Depending on the research topic chosen, parts of this information, or reports on it, need to be considered, sifted and / or cited to *balance and improve* research on Sathya Sai Baba. For example, in connection with Sathya Sai Baba's sketchy biography for the years 1926-1950, there is much detailed new evidence (including vital photographic records) to supplement the much-quoted contents of (ex-academic) Kasturi's first simplistic volume of hagiography (1961). These new leads are to be found in the 600-page *Love is My Form*, Volume 1, published by a research team of devotees in 2000. (Unfortunately, but significantly, very advanced plans and research for five or six further volumes were abandoned following the publication (in Puttaparthi) of this first volume.) To my knowledge, this new material has not yet attracted the interest of academic writers, even though it has been discussed on the Internet.

Time after time, academic writers have failed to notice or mention the obvious fact that from the beginning of his Mission, Sathya Sai Baba created an atmosphere of great expectancy by flamboyantly accompanying his alleged healings and miracles with crystal-clear, charismatic and unique claims to be:

- the reincarnation of the revered Maharashtran saint Shirdi Sai Baba;
- (a few years later) not simply *an* Avatar (as many Indian gurus do) but *the* Avatar of the Age (God Incarnate) and (in 1968) the Christian God the Father, with full powers of omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence, on a world mission which cannot fail – with a third incarnation in reserve to assure world peace and happiness: Prema Sai Baba (promised as an Incarnation after Sathya Sai Baba's predicted passing around the year 2022. (According to some devotee commentators, Sathya Sai Baba is also the predicted eschatological Hindu



Kalki Avatar.)

Therefore, to state or imply, as Sathya Sai Organisation spokespersons and many academics do, that “his devotees believe him to be an Avatar” (or God) is a disingenuous or misleading *half-truth*. The suppressed half of that truth is that this widespread belief was inspired and fostered by the combination of Sathya Sai Baba’s charismatic effect on people, his undefined psychic powers, plus the strong repeated claims of divinity and the magnifying hype of endless unquestioning devotee hagiography (published in hundreds of volumes).

The need for more *independent* background study of the national and transnational Sathya Sai Baba phenomenon is nowhere more evident than in the confusing ambivalence of the official Sathya Sai Organisation in its public claims about the guru. On the one hand, Sathya Sai Baba is proclaimed as the Avatar of the Age (i.e. God Incarnate) – see the official websites and public lectures to devotees by spokespersons. However, for the purposes of introductory leaflets for the general overseas public and notably in recent international publicity campaigns, Sathya Sai Baba is portrayed as a world spiritual leader with an inclusivist ecumenical message who generously fosters very deserving charitable causes.

In spite of the acres of pages of existing information on SSB, there is a very real need for researchers who can sift through all the evidence, including the crucial and hitherto untapped Telugu sources of information, for example, official village documents and fresh interviews with people who have known or worked with SSB or his associates. New literal translations of the original audio and video recordings of the Telugu Discourses could also illuminate opaque facets of this long, involved but still far from complete story. The scope for studies by Indian academics is wide.

In the following annotations, I have taken the liberty of pointing out those cases where my own research indicates that a consideration of some of this neglected information might have made a significant difference to an article or book. I base these didactic remarks on a body of research available on the website where this revised Bibliography will appear ([www.bdsteel.tripod.com/More](http://www.bdsteel.tripod.com/More)). The materials discussed and referred to there are available for checking and criticism by researchers and others. Other equally important references relevant to an eventual “full disclosure” of the Sathya Sai Baba story are offered throughout Part 2 of this Bibliography. The inclusion of my own research agenda in this Bibliography does not invalidate it. Apart from my subjective assessments of the works examined, what has been assembled here (*in all three complementary parts of the Bibliography*) is the fullest set of references to Sathya Sai Baba available to date. As stated earlier, it is my sincere hope that others will use the references for their own independent research so that the full Sathya Sai Baba story can be revealed. The results cannot deny Sathya Sai Baba’s special contribution to the spiritual and personal benefit of many of his devotees but they may reduce it to a more realistic and earthy level once the divine hype is dealt with.

Whether the history of research on Sathya Sai Baba has wider implications for academic research and publications on NRMs, for example a closer examination of the possibility of conscious or unconscious bias and excessive deference towards institutional and devotee evidence and a less welcoming attitude to that provided in other material, including the testimony of ex-devotees and the studies of independent researchers, is an open question which I happily delegate to the interested reader.

Note to researchers and other readers who only have a peripheral interest in Sathya Sai Baba.

The following entries may be of particular interest:

**Babb; Beyerstein; Haraldsson, Kent, Klass, Lane, Lee, Mangalwadi, Nagel, Palmer, Shepherd, Srinivas (Smriti), Srinivas (Tulasi), Swallow, Taylor and White (plus a perusal of the substantial Appendix to Part 1).**

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**Arora, Kamla**, *A Philosophical Study of Sri Sathya Sai Baba in the Context of Religio-Philosophical Milieu*, PhD Thesis, University of Delhi, 1990.

Not traced. Listed by S. P. Ruhela, *Sai Baba and His Message* (Rev. ed. 1995). Unlike Shirdi Sai Baba, with his Muslim-Hindu ambiguities and his *sufi* connections, until relatively recently Sathya Sai Baba has attracted little PhD activity.

**Arweck, Elisabeth and Clarke, Peter B.**, *New Religious Movements in Western Europe. An Annotated Bibliography*, Westport, Connecticut, & London, Greenwood Press, 1997.

Although ten years old and in urgent need of an update to include the enormous amount of new articles and books written in the past ten years, this is still an extremely valuable reference bibliography on NRMs, especially for its annotations on older and difficult to obtain material. The Bibliography contains almost 2,000 items accompanied by short annotations.

**Arya, Rohit**, 'Sai Baba – the Miraculous Mystic of Shirdi':

[www.indiayogi.com/content/indsaints/saibaba.asp](http://www.indiayogi.com/content/indsaints/saibaba.asp)

This balanced informative summary by Indian writer Rohit Arya is recommended as a starting point for information on Shirdi. As a sample, I offer the first and last paragraphs of his short Internet essay. (The corresponding essay on Sathya Sai Baba by another writer on the same website is not recommended.)

“The mystic Sai Baba (1838 - 1918) is one of those peculiar Indian phenomena that so exasperate all those who want rational thinking and an ordered sequence to biographies. For while it is indubitable that Sai Baba lived in the public eye for over fifty years, it is also only too true that his life has almost no connection with normality as it is generally understood.” ...

...

“Shirdi is a spot of unusually strong spiritual power and it can hit people almost physically if they are so attuned. That a spiritual giant had once lived and meditated there is only too evident. A great many people still have significant spiritual experiences there. Even one of Indiayogi's Panelists, Justice Dudhat, met a spiritual teacher there who significantly shifted his life. The kitsch that is making Shirdi into a spiritual supermarket is a looming danger for the future. As it stands today however it is a monument to the sheer magnificent power of one man's attainments in living the life spiritual.”]

**Babb, Lawrence A.**: [The doyen of academic study of Sathya Sai Baba]

1983: 'Sathya Sai Baba's Magic', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 56, 116-123.

Professor Babb's research was conducted in Delhi in 1978-1979. He was initially surprised and intrigued by the way sophisticated Indian devotees were so influenced by alleged miracles. His article develops a very interesting perspective of the Sathya Sai Baba phenomenon – as the journal Abstract reproduced below will make clear. Professor Babb's main conclusion is still a valid departure point for further research: that SSB's real 'magic' is in inspiring in each devotee a special personal feeling of relationship which somehow enables them to feel more than they thought they were and facilitates and makes natural the belief in SSB's miracles and Divinity. The material in this article was greatly expanded in two chapters of Babb's important 1986 book.

Abstract from *Anthropological Quarterly*:

“This paper is an excursion in the anthropology of credibility. Regarded as a living deity by his many followers, Sathya Sai Baba is one of India's more important religious figures. The paper explores the role of the miraculous in his cult. Miracles attributed to the deity-saint are



shown to be vehicles for establishing and maintaining relationships between him and his followers utilizing a transactional framework of general importance in the Hindu world. The indeterminacy of the miracles, far from being viewed as a disconfirmation of their author's claims, is understood to exemplify an unaccountability that is a necessary feature of divinity. Their ultimate plausibility and persuasive energy derive from a link, established within the symbolic world of the cult, between a devotee's belief in their divine authorship and his or her commitment to a transformed sense of identity. To the degree that the new sense of self is valued, the miracles must be accepted as genuine.”

**Note**

The phrase “Regarded as a living deity by his many followers” was an incomplete and misleading statement even 20 years ago; it is still repeated today. The simple verifiable truth is that Sathya Sai Baba was (and is) thus regarded by his devotees, and others, because in his Discourses he made frequent, unique and unequivocal divine claims in the early years of his mission and these claims have been propagated by his Organisation, his devotees and some writers.

1986a: *Redemptive Encounters. Three Modern Styles in the Hindu Tradition*, Berkeley, University of California.

(See especially Part 3, pp.157-201, ‘Sathya Sai Baba and the Lesson of Trust’: Ch. 7, ‘Sathya Sai Baba’s Miracles’ and Ch. 8, ‘The Reenchantment of the World’; and also the Conclusion, pp. 203-225.)

This book presents a comparative study and discussion of three aspects of contemporary Hinduism: the Radhasoami faith, the Brahma Kumaris, and Sathya Sai Baba and his devotees.

For Sathya Sai Baba researchers: The SSB section is a very valuable pioneering expansion on his 1983 article and is the starting point for many subsequent academic studies on SSB. Babb reports perceptively on his field studies in SSB Centres and interviews with Hindu devotees in North India. He is intrigued by the guru’s success and by his powers of persuasion as well as his paranormal aspects. He sees the miracles as being of paramount importance and interest to devotees – over and above the teachings (p. 173) – and also observes, acutely, that ‘cult’ apologists promoting Sathya Sai Baba in the ‘West’ prefer to downplay this aspect (p. 178). He offers a sceptical but sympathetic portrait of the guru, noting the vast hagiographic literature he has inspired.

**Q:**

“From what, exactly, do these miracles derive their convincingness, a convincingness so great that it seems to pull people into convictions ostensibly at odds with what their own subculture deems to be commonsense and considered judgement?”

“What is the source of the energy of Sathya Sai Baba’s ‘magic’, an energy that is apparently strong enough to have life-transforming effects on his devotees? Does it arise from cunning theatrics? Or is its true source something else?” (p. 175)

**A.**

Professor Babb admires Sathya Sai Baba and sees him as a good force for India.

His devotees seem enviably content:

“...it is clear that many of his devotees are more serene persons as a result of their relationships with Baba.” (p. 194)

“The world for Sai Baba’s devotees is like an enchanted garden where anything can happen. Small incidents can seem meaningful when it is believed He creates them.” (p. 199)

“They inhabit a world in which signs and evidence of his love and grace are pervasive. Any trouble vanquished or illness cured is by his grace.” (p. 199)

Whereas Babb still finds no evidence of fake miracles, he is at least a little worried by devotees' intellectual surrender after the first impact, and (on p. 171) he does make a brief but very important mention of SSB's frequent habit of offering *ad hoc* and often false etymologies in his Discourses (an apparent eccentricity which, when carefully studied in SSB's Discourses, yields significant new information about the *storytelling techniques* of this guru).

In hindsight, the following critical observations may be added:

In spite of Babb's perceptive and reasoned comments on many aspects of Sathya Sai Baba worship, he misinterprets some of the evidence. Firstly, his judgements stem from observations at meetings at a Sathya Sai Organisation Centre or Centres in Delhi, as well as interviews with devotees and reading some of the hagiographies as well as the articles by White and Swallow. From these experiences he concluded that most of Sathya Sai Baba's [Indian] devotees are "urban sophisticates", while at the same time admitting, significantly, that most of Indian urban sophisticates are not only *not* devotees of SSB but are sceptical about him (p. 200). Attendance at SSB's ashram by Babb might have produced a different estimate about the devotee demographic as well as other valuable supplementary impressions. Most academics have happily accepted and repeated this unproven constituency claim and extrapolated much from it.

Secondly, as far as I am aware, Babb never met Sathya Sai Baba or experienced his charisma face to face. Neither did he pay much attention to the most easily accessible part of SSB's persona: the numerous translated and edited Discourses. Instead, he preferred to study a few selected (and unreferenced) quotations from Kasturi's standard hagiography. He even suggests (astonishingly) that the Discourses, because they represent for the devotee a secondary form of worship, are more or less irrelevant for academic study: (pp. 183-4): "... the actual content of his discourses is, while important, not the fundamental thing ... Devotees do not attend such lectures as one might go, let us say, to a lecture at a university, but as an act of worship." This impression about the devotees is quite correct but his attitude to the Discourses themselves (which many devotees – especially those unable to attend the ashrams – *read* and study minutely) is fundamentally flawed (and may have contributed to the neglect of these key documents by other academics) because it is in these mesmeric, turgid, unscripted stream of consciousness speeches (in a foreign language for most listeners, and highly edited by Sathya Sai Baba's official translators) that the self-glorificatory presentation, the disjointed style and the not infrequent factual errors of this allegedly divine persona are most easily observable to those not lost in total adoration and denial. If Babb had carefully read a few of the early volumes of *Sathya Sai Speaks* (which he lists in his References, under Kasturi, as [translator and] compiler), he would not have been so puzzled about why it was that *this* Sathya Sai Baba, of all the possible (contemporary jargon would say 'wannabe') Sathya Sai Babas in India, came out on top as the number one popular Indian guru of the age. Equally importantly, a careful reading of the first few volumes of *Sathya Sai Speaks* would have prevented Kasturi (and so many others) from making the leap from the first (Sathya Sai Baba) Declaration of "1940" (a now disputed official date) to the second avataric Declaration of June 1963 (over 20 years later), when in fact SSB's Discourses for the 1950s and early 1960s record frequent and clearcut divine and avataric claims.

1986b: 'The Puzzle of Religious Modernity', in *India: 2000. The Next Fifteen Years*, ed. James R. Roach, Riverdale, Maryland, [n.p.], and New Delhi, Allied Publishers, pp. 55-79.

Babb notes Sathya Sai Baba's worldwide success ("Hinduism's most significant jet-age holy man"), offers a synopsis of his teachings and a list of the types of SSB miracles (p. 72). Babb's presentation is sympathetic, but he remarks that it "has generated a vast

hagiographic literature” and that devotees have to learn to cope with SSB’s unpredictability and *leelas*.

1987: ‘Sathya Sai Baba’s Sainly Play’, in Hawley, John S. (ed.) *Saints and Virtues*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1987, 168-186. [Not seen]

1992: ‘Sathya Sai Baba’s Miracles’, in *Religion In India*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. T.N. Madan, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, pp. 277-292.

This is a reprint of Chapter 7 of Babb 1986a, pp. 159-174.

**Babb, Lawrence A. and Wadley, Susan S. (eds)**, *Media and the Transformation of Religion in South Asia*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995.

On the growing importance of contemporary technology (posters, photos, videos and audiotapes) as new elements in Hinduism and its diffusion. There are only two fleeting references to Sathya Sai Baba – who has certainly benefitted from the existence and sale of such mementos, recently promoted on radio (Radio Sai), the Internet, to which the SSO has taken in a big way (in spite of SSB’s expressed disapproval of the medium), and DVDs.

**Bashiruddin, Zeba**, *Sai Baba and the Muslim Mind*, Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, 1998. (Also at [www.vinnica.ua/~sss/sb\\_mm.htm](http://www.vinnica.ua/~sss/sb_mm.htm) and listed on <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/saibabaleelas/links>)

Profesor Bashiruddin is a devotee of Sathya Sai Baba and teaches at one of his Colleges. See Part 3.

**Bassuk, Daniel E.**

1987a: *Incarnation in Hinduism and Christianity. The Myth of the God-Man*, Basingstoke, Macmillan Press, 1987.

This work includes an extended comparative analysis of the Avatar phenomenon in both of the named major world religions. In Chapter 2, ‘Modern Avatars of India’, Dr. Bassuk includes Sathya Sai Baba as one of six selected modern Avatars of India. (The others chosen are Chaitanya, Ramakrishna, Aurobindo, The Mother of Pondicherry and Meher Baba.)

In the revealingly titled sixth essay, *Satya Sai Baba (1926-2022) – The Miracle-Working Sai-Co-Therapeutic Avatar* (pp. 86-94), Bassuk spends several pages presenting the standard official picture of SSB prevailing in the 1980s: a multi-miracle-making, healing, Christ-like spiritual leader (including a sprinkling of descriptive flaws and factual errors common at that time. The author also repeats the misleading claim by SSB and his devotees that ‘Sai’ means (Divine) Mother (rather than [Persian] ‘saint’).

Like many Indian commentators, the author gives undue weight to the official Sathya Sai Baba story and in particular to the prolonged scientific scrutiny of “skeptical Western scientists”. He quotes at length the carefully-worded findings of Haraldsson and Osis in their paper on ‘The Appearance and Disappearance of Objects ...’ (see below). Bassuk also seems to accept unquestioningly some of the least plausible of the miracles (like the alleged resurrection of Walter Cowan in 1971, which Haraldsson himself disproved in his ‘favourable’ book), and unsupported devotee rumours like the one about Sathya Sai Baba turning into Christ for the benefit of devotees. Bassuk also retells the ludicrous devotee rumour that a telegram was received from the Vatican asking SSB to grant an interview to the Pope. Finally, in the last paragraph of this long chapter, when summing up Sathya Sai Baba’s unique claim to be (unlike the other five chosen Avatars) not just *like* Christ but the actual reincarnation of Christ’s Father, Bassuk raises both eyebrows, concluding: “Is this really a comparable miraculous phenomenon?”

1987b: 'Six Modern Indian Avatars and the Ways they Understand their Divinity', *Dialogue and Alliance*, 1, 73-92.

[Not seen]

### **Beyerstein, Dale,**

1992: *Sai Baba's Miracles. An Overview*, Vancouver, privately published (c125 pages).

1992-3: Published in instalments in *Indian Skeptic*, Vol 5, No 7 (November 1992) - Vol 6, No. 3 (July 1993).

1994: Printed in India, Podanur (Reviewed by Margaret Bhatti in *Indian Skeptic*, Vol.7, No.6 (October 1994), pp. 24-26).

c1 995/6: Published on the Internet: originally on <http://psg.com/~ted/bcskeptics/sbmir/>. [link broken]; republished anonymously on the website of the British Columbia Skeptics (Canada): <http://seercom.com/bcs/> [link broken].

2007: Currently to be found on the following page of the same organisation's website with the simple title 'sai baba: godman?': <http://www.bcskeptics.info/resources/papers/saibaba>

This is a detailed and extremely important **early** critical study by a Canadian philosopher who investigated major paranormal characteristics attributed to Sathya Sai Baba. It offers the *first* substantial body of clear *evidence* to refute some of the strident claims made for SSB's psychic and paranormal powers. Unlike many academic studies of SSB, it is based on a close examination of a sizeable body of written evidence: the translated and edited Discourses of Sathya Sai Baba.

Like some other academics, Professor Beyerstein is not professionally interested in the dogma of SSB's religious teaching, but his research into the paranormal claims and his subsequent findings constitute the basis of his rebuttal of SSB's major claims of Divine powers. In the chapters of his book, the sceptical professor presents multiple factual examples to disprove Sathya Sai Baba's Omniscience and Omnipotence, as claimed by him and his Organisation and as accepted unquestioningly and propagated by his devotees. A major part of the proof offered is taken from what Sathya Sai Baba is recorded as having said in public (according to the edited translations published by the Sathya Sai Organisation).

Although not very widely read or heeded at the time of publication in the early 1990s (preceding by just a few years the mass popularisation of the Internet), Professor Beyerstein's seminal Internet study has since attracted a wider general readership, especially since the recent controversies about Sathya Sai Baba arose in 2000. Regrettably, academics have hitherto more or less ignored this important study, possibly because it was never offered as an "academic" paper and is written from a vigorously sceptical viewpoint. Nevertheless, Beyerstein's evidence is strong and researchers currently interested in the psychic / paranormal aspects of Sathya Sai Baba and in his claims of Divinity and full avataric powers would be well advised to begin their research with a study of these detailed pioneering findings, which include his consultation of other experts, including magicians. [For the alleged materialisations, a shortcut is: [www.bcsskeptics.info/resources/papers/5mater.html](http://www.bcsskeptics.info/resources/papers/5mater.html)

The areas of study in this work are as follows:

1. Editor's Introduction

2: Omniscience and Omnipotence

3: Did Sai Baba Rescue Someone from the Dead?

(B. deals with the Radhakrishna and Cowan cases, quoting documentary evidence from Haralds son, Premanand and John Hislop.)

4: Does Sai Baba Have Complete Psychic Knowledge?

5: Materializations

[Note: This Chapter contains a six-page Section (86) on 'Magicians' Analysis of Supposed

Paranormal Phenomena of Indian ‘God-Man’ Sathya Sai Baba’ by Beyerstein and a team of magicians (Leon Mandrake, Lou Crockett, Lon Mandrake and Velvet Mandrake). Their provisional conclusion on the evidence reviewed, which contrasts with E. Haraldsson’s ‘wait and see’ findings, is that “Sai Baba’s extensive reliance on sleight of hand in the materialization phenomena is established beyond reasonable doubt.” Recent Internet video evidence lends support to this conclusion.]

6: Sundry Miracles

7: Healing and Rescues

8: Does Sai Baba’s Life Fulfil Ancient Promises?

Bibliography.

1996: ‘Sai Baba’, in Gordon Stein (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of the Paranormal*, New York, Prometheus Books, pp. 653-657.

Both the Foreword (by Carl Sagan) and the Introduction to this work set it apart as a product of sceptical academic analysis.

“Almost every entry represents an assessment by an expert with skeptical credentials.”

(Sagan, p. xii)

“This is the first scientifically based encyclopedia to deal with the paranormal. ... The word here means anything that is put forth as an explanation of the natural world using as a part of that explanation elements that appear to violate what has already been offered and accepted as a scientific explanation of the given phenomenon.” (Stein, xxi)

“To keep the tone of this book both scientific and balanced I have tried to use scientists as authors of most of the articles, including those who have publicly supported and discredited research on the paranormal. Other contributors have included science writers, historians, philosophers and theologians.” (xxii)

Beyerstein’s 3,000 word essay pulls no punches. After a very succinct biographical introduction of 150 words, in which he notes the claim of Sathya Narayana Raju to be the reincarnation of Shirdi Sai Baba and Jesus Christ “as well as other avatars (reincarnations of God)”, Beyerstein sums up Sathya Sai Baba’s ecumenical theology as a “unification of Hindu, Muslim and Christian faiths under his own religion.” Apart from the inadvertent exclusion of Judaism, this seems to be a reasonable description of SSB’s self-appointed Mission.

The author attributes a modest six million followers to Sathya Sai Baba, including many wealthy Indians and prominent politicians and many devotees in North America and Europe “who make annual pilgrimages to his headquarters in Puttaparthi, where Sai Baba runs a school, hospital and other facilities.” (p. 653)

The remaining 95% of the article offers a judicious and compelling selection of evidence taken from the virtually unimpeachable (but not widely disseminated) research presented in Beyerstein’s original 1992 study, *Sai Baba’s Miracles. An Overview*. The important subjects covered are:

Premanand’s criticisms, including his detailed investigation into the 1993 ashram killings; the evidence against the claims of resurrection of Ramakrishna and Cowan;

healings;

pseudo-omniscience;

materialisations and very interesting graphic evidence from videotapes [recently supplemented by several offerings on YouTube and [www.exbaba.com](http://www.exbaba.com)];

the long since discontinued ceremony of vibhuti abhishekam in homage to Shirdi Sai Baba;

the materialisation of fragments of the ‘real’ Cross for a crucifix for J. Hislop;

the materialisation of Shiva lingams.

The concluding paragraph of this summary includes an oblique comment on the research difficulties experienced by Professor Erlendur Haraldsson: “Sai Baba has nothing to gain by being tested under scientifically controlled conditions, and he has nothing to lose by refusing

such conditions, so long as the public's view remains that it is sacrilegious not only to perform such tests, but even to request them.”

[In spite of a number of serious critical observations made in Haraldsson's book, it has been loudly trumpeted by devotee writers and commentators as "scientific proof" of Sathya Sai Baba's omnipotent powers (which may explain the recent Wikipedia claim that Haraldsson is a Sathya Sai Baba follower). (See the entry under Haraldsson.)]

### **Bharati, Agehananda**

1970: 'The Hindu Renaissance and its Apologetic Patterns', *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 29, No 2, February 1970, pp. 267-287.

[Quoted by White, pp. 876-878, Swallow, pp. 123 and 131, fn 22, and Kent (2004), p. 11.]

A very erudite essay by this renowned Hindu scholar. In it he elaborates his strong personal disapproval of the effects of the Hindu Renaissance (from Vivekananda on). On page 273, he offers his much-quoted 'pizza-effect' analogy, which White summed up as "the reimportation into Hinduism of Hindu products which have been enhanced either by a certain acceptance or transformation in a journey abroad." For example, 'plain vanilla' Hinduism, as exported to America from the end of the nineteenth century onward, returns in a more elaborate (and much admired) form. Bharati sees this trend as responsible for the decline of traditional Hindu theology, scholarship and *rishis* and the rise and rise of the modern gurus (glorified "sadhus").

"It is the English-speaking sadhu, beyond all doubt, who must be singled out as the cynosure of the Renaissance, being the chief formulator of its apologetic" (p. 277). He also blames politicians for promoting and not daring to criticise popular gurus and "the educated devotee who "writes, talks, travels, and finances the visible and invisible institutions of the sadhu (280)." As for the gurus' pronouncements, Bharati calls them "pamphleteering literature" of a lecturing sort ("God is One. Worship him universally") with no references to the "primary religious literature". Having made several gently mocking references to Swami Sivananda, he chooses SSB as his example when he excoriates highly educated Indian professionals for being so gullible that they not only accept but repeat miracle cures and so on without question or hesitation (pp. 283-4). Bharati further suggests that less educated people will have no hope of resisting these seductive attractions. For him, all of this explains why "such occurrences are part of the continuing hagiography of the Hindu Renaissance. Reports about miracles as having been witnessed by contemporaries and by people with Western ideas, are part of the apologetic parlance" (p. 284).

Turning to the consequences that Bharati so deplors, he continues: "Antagonism toward scholastic, tradition and primary-source oriented Hinduism goes so far that non-Hindu religious idioms are frequently preferred to orthodox parlance. Simplistic statements about the love of Christ, the renunciation of Jesus, or *sufi*-Islamic mystics occur rather more frequently in Renaissance talk than references to the brahmin masters of the commentary" (p. 285). Also deplored is the successful infiltration of the Western idea of the value and integrity of the individual ("the individual approaches divinity, potentially to merge with It some day" – p. 287) and the adoption of the non-canonical *Bhagavadgita* as the main textual source for study and discussion.

Bharati is a major spokesman for traditional Hindu scholarship. The strong views expressed here explain the general observable tendency in erudite work on Hinduism not even to mention SSB (and other neo-Hindu teachers).

1981: *Hindu Views and Ways and the Hindu-Muslim Interface: An Anthropological Assessment*, New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal, pp. 87-88.

[Quoted in Babb 1986a]



**Bowen, David**, *The Sathya Sai Baba Community in Bradford: Its Origins and Development, Religious Beliefs and Practices*, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Leeds, 1988. pp.412.

Arweck and Clarke, p. 42, Item 216: “Based on a PhD thesis submitted to the University of Leeds in 1985. Based on a decade of participant observation of and informal interviews with the members of the Sai Baba community in Bradford. Defines the background and activities characteristic of the *satsang*. Discusses the place of worship and the implications of its refurbishment. Analyses two annual festivals and examines the way the community has evolved. The conclusion analyses the social and religious significance of the data compiled. ...”

**Brent, Peter**, *Godmen of India*, London, Allen Lane [Penguin hardback], 1972

At the time of the strong surge of ‘Western’ interest in Indian gurus in the 1960s, Brent visited many ashrams in different regions of India and produced a very helpful and original practical and theoretical study of this complex subject. This is a basic reference book on gurus for non-Indians and it covers the period of the beginning of SSB’s rise to fame. Although SSB’s flourishing ashram was not on his 1960s visiting list, Brent did visit Mrs Mani Sahukar to learn more about Shirdi Sai Baba and his disciple, Upasani Baba, as well as the latter’s female disciple, Godavari Mata (pp. 140-149). Neither Sahukar nor Brent mentioned the name of *Sathya Sai Baba*. However, elsewhere on his odyssey, Brent met an eloquent devotee (H.T.Davé) who made these lucid statements which are worth considering in connection with SSB’s repeated claims of Divinity: “The Guru is the disciple of God”. “He is not God himself but his disciple.” “The Guru is the symbolic form of God. God reveals himself through the true Guru.” “He is the one who carries within him the divine form of God ... But Guru is not God – he is the symbolic representative form of God.” (pp. 226-227). (See Mangalwadi for a complementary Indian (Christian) view of gurus.)

**Burghart, Richard** See under Taylor, Donald.

**Chari, C. T. K.:**

1969: ‘Some disputable phenomena allied to thoughtography’, *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, 63, 273-286. [Not seen]

1973: ‘Regurgitation, Mediumship and Yoga’, *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 41, No. 757, September, 156-172. [on SSB: pp. 165-167]

The author, a parapsychologist, after visits to the ashram, despairs of obtaining a controlled recording of SSB’s alleged annual lingam materialisations in public on Mahasivaratri Day. He also volunteers the interesting opinion that after two personal interviews with SSB and study of the available literature he formed the opinion that possession by the deceased Shirdi Sai Baba was “no less plausible, and no more credible” than being a reincarnation of Shirdi as SSB had claimed. As for the latter claim, Chari expresses his doubt (based on strong differences in personalities) that Sathya could be a reincarnation of Shirdi and, further, SSB’s coyness in later references to this basic early claim.

1978: ‘On the phenomena of Sai Baba’, *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, 72, 66-70. [sometimes misquoted as p. 69]

Chari’s letter regrets SSB’s lack of cooperation with Haraldsson. He finds the miracles often incredible, but he does not dispute SSB’s integrity or saintliness. His letter is followed by a friendly non-polemical reply from Haraldsson and Osis.

**Christopher, Milbourne**, *Search for the Soul*, New York, Thomas Y. Crowell, 1979, pp. 114-116 [and pp. 104-113].

In this fascinating attempt to distinguish between a century of credible and spurious evidence for the existence of a life after death, Christopher, a professional magician, devotes Chapter 11, 'Into the Brightness' (pp. 104-116), to the work of Dr Karlis Osis (1917-1997). After receiving his PhD from Munich University in 1950 ('The Hypothesis of Extrasensory Perception'), Osis devoted his parapsychological career, at first as a research associate at Duke University under the legendary Dr Rhine, and later as research director of the American Society for Psychical Research (funded by many research grants), to investigating evidence for the life after death hypothesis. (Christopher points out that since the age of fifteen, when Osis felt a euphoric experience on the death of his aunt, he had felt drawn to such phenomena.)

By 1973 he had undertaken two research trips to India with a junior colleague, Dr Erlendur Haraldsson. As is well documented in parapsychological annals, this association was to last several years and to culminate in a co-authored academic study *At the Hour of Death*, which became a best-selling textbook for nurses and doctors, as well as parapsychologists. The two joint trips to SSB's ashram actually came about as a *by-product* of the Indian part of their afterlife research as they tried, largely unsuccessfully, to subject the paranormal claims made about and by Dadaji, Sathya Sai Baba and another Indian guru to scientific examination. After two funded trips, with requests for scientific examination refused by SSB and without further research funds, Osis withdrew from the SSB part of the joint research. Haraldsson sporadically continued his observations in Sathya Sai Baba's ashram and in other parts of India for a few more years and eventually produced his best-selling study, which though of great interest and importance because of his thoroughness, is not counted by Haraldsson or his colleagues as a scientific parapsychological work.

Apart from that illuminating anecdotal background to the Haraldsson book, only two pages of Christopher's chapter (pp. 114-116) are devoted to the two Osis-Haraldsson trips to Puttaparthi and to Dadaji's ashram, but they are also important to SSB research. (Christopher calls him "Sai Baba".)

As a professional magician (and like several other magicians), Christopher is highly sceptical of the Haraldsson-Osis academic paper of 1977: "These and other feats described in the text have been exhibited by other "holy men" in India – and by conjurors!" The author goes on to dismiss as fake SSB's celebrated annual homage in the 1960s and 1970s to Shirdi Sai by producing quantities of vibhuti from an upended empty metal urn or canister, one of his most famous alleged miracles of the period. For Christopher, this is "a standard piece of magical apparatus. I could teach a six-year-old boy how to do this in a few minutes." As for SSB's sleight-of-hand with vibhuti, Christopher is more professionally impressed, because of the polished way in which it is carried out. "Of course intelligent laypeople are fooled; that is the purpose of magic. Anyone thoroughly familiar with the principles of legerdemain can follow move for move how the ash is produced. The parapsychologists should have been alerted when Sai Baba refused to allow them to test him, that is, to do the feats under controlled conditions. It is strange that experienced investigators of alleged phenomena would travel halfway around the world and suggest that such hanky-panky hocus-pocus was "paranormal", without having had an expert magician on the site as an observer" (p. 116).

This short chapter (as well as other evidence about Karlis Osis's life) is vital for a clear assessment of the role played by Professor Haraldsson's best-known book and his relevant academic papers in SSB's success in India and in the "West".

**Chryssides, George**, *Exploring New Religions*, London, Cassell, 1999, pp. 179-192.

This wide encyclopedic survey of a large number of New Religious Movements (NRMs) by an established British academic was clearly intended to be an Introductory textbook for the rapidly increasing numbers of university students of Religion and Spirituality in Departments of Religion, Comparative Religion, Sociology of Religion, Anthropology and Philosophy. The substantial 13-page ‘Sai Baba’ article in Chapter 5 (‘New Religions in the Hindu Tradition’) includes basic information on both gurus, but in the longer section on SSB, dealing in depth with his biography, his basically Hindu teachings and devotees, there are several factual errors and uncritical references to or paraphrases of the sort of official handout material issued by SSB Centres, repeated by devotees or found in the standard hagiographies of SSB. As for the membership of the Sathya Sai Organisation, Dr Chryssides offers the figure of 4,000 Sathya Sai Baba devotees in UK in 1999 from a ‘Sai Centre’ and the worldwide figure of 10 million from a University of Virginia website (p. 368 : the link is no longer valid).

Here are a few examples of incorrect or misleading statements in this article:

In offering some brief biographical background, Chryssides reproduces the official story but somehow misunderstands the trauma preceding his ‘Declaration of Mission’: “He became unconscious for two entire months.” The official versions are much more detailed – and still not entirely clear but they are available in many biographies of Sathya Sai Baba. Chryssides’s lack of background knowledge of SSB’s words is unfortunate as it sometimes results in an unwitting masking of SSB’s own responsibility for making grandiose claims, especially those relating to his alleged Divinity: “... it is clear that devotees regard him as God incarnate”. [Yes. He said so on many occasions.]

Similarly, statements like “Sai Baba is reckoned to be an incarnation of a previous holy man” (p. 180), although common in academic and reference works on SSB, show a basic lack of familiarity with SSB’s Discourses, since it was SSB himself who claimed this (and much more) at the beginning of his Mission, insistently and frequently; his unquestioning devotees merely parrot these claims.

“Sai Baba now gives little by way of teaching. He no longer gives discourses, his pronouncements being limited to occasional remarks he might make to devotees”. This is completely (and remarkably) untrue. SSB has given frequent impromptu Discourses between 1955 and 1999.

“Devotees claim that ‘Sai’ means ‘Universal Mother’”. As has been stated elsewhere in this bibliography, it is SSB himself who makes this audacious etymological claim (along with a lot of other far-fetched Sanskrit etymologies); scholars disagree, giving a plausible Muslim-oriented etymology as ‘saint’.

Similarly, Chryssides’s assertion that “Devotees sometimes regard Sai Baba’s life as falling into three stages ...” fails to acknowledge the fact that the origin of this belief comes from a well-publicised Discourse by SSB himself.

SSB did originally have four key principles (*dharma*, *sathya*, *prema* and *shanti*) but the fifth (*ahimsa* = non-violence) was added years ago and figures prominently in Discourses and devotee conversation.

The hierarchical order of the following assertions is more reminiscent of a later discreet official SSO viewpoint than of the real priority usually stated by devotees, or noted by observers: “... Sai Baba enlists devotion, providing the opportunity for present-day devotees to receive darshan of a living avatar. No doubt, too, there are devotees who are intrigued by the possibility of miracles, and who thus bite on Sai Baba’s ‘bait’.” (p. 203) This is a misleading downgrading of the widely acknowledged importance of miracles in devotees’ conversion to and worship of SSB.

Also, although Dr. Chryssides briefly acknowledges that SSB has been criticised by the Indian Rationalists as a “spurious miracle worker”, the following wording (“can”) seems to endorse the authenticity of one type of alleged miracle: “Sathya Sai Baba can materialize the sacred lingam from his mouth.” (p. 184)

Chryssides’s sparse Bibliography quotes a few hagiographies (including, in place of the usual Kasturi volumes, a very obscure local publication by a very prominent Wolverhampton devotee and proselytiser, Dr. Gadhia: *The Divine Grace of Lord Sri Sathya Sai Baba*, Wolverhampton, Sri Sathya Sai Baba Center, 1989). Readers (and students) are also denied the stimulation of well-known academic studies on SSB like those of White, Swallow or Babb or a reference to the existence of Canadian academic Beyerstein’s detailed critique of the paranormal claims of Sathya Sai Baba (1992).

The above discrepancies are serious and need rectification in future editions. The following example of misinterpretation of background research material for this didactic article may shed further light on the shortcomings, until recently, of academic research on Sathya Sai Baba.

On p. 188, the author discusses predictions about Sathya Sai Baba’s Advent: “Sai Baba regards himself as having been predicted by faiths outside the Hindu tradition. For example, he sees references to himself in Christian scripture. Commenting on the Book of Revelation, Sai Baba provides the following by way of exegesis: ‘He who sent me among you will come again, [and he pointed to a lamb]. The Lamb is merely a symbol, a sign. It stands for the voice [the sound of bleating] Ba-ba; the announcement was of the advent of Baba, His name will be truth, Christ declared. Sathya means Truth. ‘He wears a robe of red, a blood red robe,’ Christ said. [Here, Sai Baba pointed to the robe he was wearing.] Christ said ‘He will be short, with a crown [of hair]. The lamb is the sign and symbol of love. Christ did not declare that he would come again. That ba ba is this Baba.’” (Gadhia, 1989, p. 42) [Square brackets added for official editorial comments on Sathya Sai Baba’s words.] It is noticeable that, for this key Discourse passage (one of the Sathya Sai Organisation’s four most publicised Discourses), Chryssides briefly quotes the book written by the local devotee, rather than Kasturi or the official edited text (available from the *Sathya Sai Speaks* series, on sale at any major SSO Centre or, nowadays, downloadable from [www.sssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume11/sss11-54.pdf](http://www.sssbpt.info/ssspeaks/volume11/sss11-54.pdf)).

In that very famous Discourse (for 24 December 1972), Sathya Sai Baba had, as on most Christmases *since* that year, given several paragraphs of his idiosyncratic version of Christ’s Birth, Life and Teachings. According to the official edited translation, he went on to give the alleged words of Jesus, *as if from the Cross*:

“There is one point that I cannot but bring to your special notice today. At the moment when Jesus was merging in the Supreme Principle of Divinity, He communicated some news to his followers, which has been interpreted in a variety of ways by commentators and those who relish the piling of writings on writings and meanings upon meanings, until it all swells up into a huge mess.”

“The statement itself has been manipulated and tangled into a conundrum. The statement of Christ is simple:”

This was followed by the same text quoted by Chryssides from Gadhia and was followed by the very important repetition: “He said, ‘He who made me will come again. That Ba-ba is this Baba and Sai, the short, curly-hair-crowned red-robed Baba, is come.’”

Therefore, to present this (unnecessarily third hand) material as SSB’s learned exegesis of the Book of Revelation is totally misleading – even though it is true that unconvincing references to the Book of Revelation have been postulated and propagated by devotee writers, accepted by devotees, and convincingly rebutted by Dr Dale Beyerstein. Closer analysis of SSB’s Discourses and his preaching style suggests that this is part of one

of the most remarkable of SSB's *imaginative* stories, but Dr Chryssides has unquestioningly accepted it verbatim from his devotee source and offered an interpretation without checking the easily available context.

(See also the **Appendix**, 1999, 2001 and 2006.)

**Clarke, Peter B. (ed.)**

1987: *The New Evangelists: Recruitment Methods and Aims of New Religious Movements*, London, Ethnografica, 1987.

Arweck and Clarke, p. 54, Item 290: "A collection of papers presented to a conference ... at King's College, London in 1986. The aims and methods of proselytizing of new religions are discussed, ranging from Exegesis, Sai Baba [*sic*], the Unification Church, to *est* and the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order. The editor's introductory paper examines whether new religions in the West have been in decline since the late 1970s. ..."

2006: *New Religions in Global Perspective. A Study of Religious Change in the Modern World*, London & New York, Routledge, 2006.

A few details on the growth of the Sathya Sai Organisation: p. 93 (UK) and pp. 247-8 (India and overseas)

**Conway, Timothy** See Part 2

**Dadlani, Sanjay**, 'Sai Baba: Shiva or Sadhaka?'

[www.saiguru.net/english/articles/48sbshivsadh.htm](http://www.saiguru.net/english/articles/48sbshivsadh.htm)

An interesting speculation on the 'missing months' of the 1944-1945 period in SSB's life. Also relevant to the need for revising the official chronology of SSB's Mission. See also Part 2.

**Ellison, Jerome**, 'Seven Days with an Avatar. Sri Sathya Sai Baba', *Journal of Religion and Psychical Research*, 1981, p. 51.

An indiscreet paean of praise for SSB, later strongly criticised by M. Thalbourne.

**Exon, Bob:**

1995: 'Self-accounting for Conversion by Western Devotees of Modern Hindu Religious Movements', in the Internet Journal of Religion, *Diskus*, 3, 2, 74-82.

See text at

<http://www.uni-marburg.de/religionswissenschaft/journal/diskus/exon.html>

A postgraduate research Report and methodological discussions based on interviews with SSB devotees in the English city of Bradford.

1997: 'Autonomous Agents and Divine Stage Managers: Models of (self-) determination amongst western devotees of two modern Hindu religious movements', in *The Scottish Journal of Religious Studies* (SJRS), Vol 18, No. 2, Autumn 1997.

See <http://www.religion.stir.ac.uk/sjrs/issues/abstracts/182Exo.html>.

[The two movements studied are those of SSB and the Hare Krishna Movement.

Abstract: "This paper examines in particular the ways in which they reconcile claims of identity and agency as 'autonomous' Western individuals with their location within certain Hindu worldviews. One metaphor employed is that of God as the 'stage-manager' of their lives, establishing the context (the 'stage' or setting) within which they engage particular circumstances as relatively free agents ('actors') in order to make spiritual progress. The life-stories of these 'Western Hindus' may offer a useful perspective into the changing parameters of Western religious self-identity, as well as broader changes (paradigm shifts) in contemporary religious consciousness."

**Eysenck, H. J.**, Review of Erlendur Haraldsson's *Miracles are My Visiting Cards*, in *Personality and Individual Differences*, 9 (3), 1988, p. 696.

Realising that Haraldsson's planned scientific experiment of alleged paranormal events was not permitted by Sathya Sai Baba, and trusting his junior colleague's account of the many observations he made over several years (as an onlooker), Professor Eysenck finds himself forced to agree with Haraldsson's own inconclusive verdict that the question of SSB's paranormal powers remains an unsolved puzzle.

In following Haraldsson's numerous field reports of materialisations reported by devotees over many years, Eysenck appears to overstate the case for the genuineness of the materialisations by being swayed by the hearsay evidence and by making unjustified assumptions like "there was no one to teach him [*magic*]". How can Professor Eysenck be sure of this? He is also visibly impressed that Sathya Sai Baba produces many 'amulets' *per day, every day*. Unless Eysenck is also including vibhuti (which has recently been shown in the critical literature to be easily 'palmable' and was already known to be so by magicians, including the Indian Rationalist, B. Premanand, whom Haraldsson did not interview), where is the proof that SSB's production of amulets is so high?

Eysenck is also favourably impressed that Sathya Sai Baba cannot hide objects about his person because of his flimsy clothing, but he fails to consider other possible 'props', like sofas, armchairs or cushions (as is suggested in Bailey's *The Findings*, and recently illustrated on YouTube). Lastly, Eysenck is impressed because "many" of the materialisations are "very treacly, sugary sweets". Again, how does Eysenck know that such objects are produced frequently? A study of the (vast) Sathya Sai Baba literature may well reveal that most of these 'sticky object' stories (and other food production) belong to the remote past (like other spectacular types of alleged miracles, including 'resurrections'), when there were few devotees. How often are they reported as materialisations *nowadays* (or during the past twenty years)?

The important point to retain is not that all these alleged materialisations are necessarily fake but that if a distinguished academic like Professor Eysenck (in a short 600-word review for colleagues) gives such a positive (and, as some might consider, injudicious) gloss on this 'puzzle', without actually pronouncing the miracles genuine, many of his academic readers (and others who thrive on such positive news) will tend to see this as further circumstantial evidence that, as is constantly alleged by devotees, SSB spends quite a lot of his time publicly performing psychokinetic feats, day after day. Tacit academic support of this kind bolsters myths.]

**Forsthoefel, Thomas A. and Humes, Cynthia Ann (eds.)**, *Gurus in America*, Albany, NY, SUNY, 2005. (See under Palmer)

**Gries, David** See Part 3

### **Haraldsson, Erlendur**

Having come across Sathya Sai Baba in the early 1970s while pursuing other more pressing parapsychological research in India with his senior colleague, Professor Karlis Osis, this Icelandic Professor of Psychology with a special interest in the paranormal made many research trips over several years trying to find out the truth about SSB but, from the very first visit, was denied permission to conduct scientific tests of the alleged materialisations. Haraldsson and a few colleagues managed to extract a handful of academic papers from visits to this guru and others in India. In 1987 he also published a more general book on SSB based on detailed notes. Because of its wide-ranging content and detail, this deserves a mention in



all three Parts of this Bibliography. For his basically independent viewpoint and his diligent attempts to gather facts through observation of SSB and many careful interviews with devotees (some of whom had known SSB in the 1940s and 1950s), Haraldsson's has become one of the most widely read and cited books on Sathya Sai Baba.

Largely because Haraldsson did not detect any evidence of fraud in the materialisations he observed, his name is often used by devotees as a 'pro-Sathya Sai Baba' academic and, quite unjustifiably, as the scientific investigator who pronounced SSB's materialisations as genuine beyond any doubt. On the other hand, Haraldsson's work has been criticised by a number of Sathya Sai Baba's critics (notably B. Premanand and B. Gogineni) as being too favourable to the guru. These disparate reactions to his work stem, on the one hand, from his attempts to be non-judgemental in his reporting of the SSB story and in many personal interviews (later commendably repeated as a double check) with devotees who were eager to offer positive accounts of their experiences with SSB. On the other hand, Haraldsson's probing analyses also dredged up occasional evidence of discrepancies in the official SSB story (most significantly concerning the two most talked about alleged 'resurrections', which he disproved), indicating that, with hindsight, official re-examinations and revision of some of the accepted claims, legends and anecdotes about SSB are long overdue. (See, for confirmation, Arweck and Clarke, p. 103, Item 568: "...Although Sai Baba did not agree to take part in controlled experiments, a number of reported miracles have been debunked, such as the famous "resurrection of Walter Cowan". ...")

Haraldsson (whose main research with Sathya Sai Baba and his devotees was carried out in the 1970s and early 1980s, continued his long and successful academic career in other fields of paranormal study and co-authored a significant book with Osis (*At the Hour of Death*). His intriguing SSB research trips and the resulting book, although a peripheral part of his academic *oeuvre*, represent an important series of personal experiences and will probably be his best known legacy. Further proof of this strong attraction to the SSB story is his hasty 1993 return to India to conduct a scientific study of a controversy involving materialisation. (See the Haraldsson and Wiseman item below.) Otherwise, and in spite of a 1997 updated re-issue of his famous 'Miracles' book, he has not revised his original research conclusions or commented publicly on very significant research and controversy about Sathya Sai Baba which has been leaking out since 1993. His specifically academic papers on SSB and related topics, usually co-authored, are listed below after the bibliographical details for his popular and useful book, which has gone through several editions and many translations. The book is re-listed in Parts 2 and 3 for the reasons just given.

1987: *'Miracles Are My Visiting Cards'. An Investigative Report on the Psychic Phenomena Associated with Sathya Sai Baba*, London, Century Paperbacks. (Also marketed for sale in India only by Prasanthi Publications of New Delhi.)

1996: *Modern Miracles*, Norwalk, CT, Hastings House.

This is a slightly enlarged edition. The latter has the same content as the new Indian edition listed as the following item here (personal communication from Haraldsson).

(?1997): *'Miracles are my Visiting Cards.'* *An Investigative Report on the Psychic Phenomena Associated with Sathya Sai Baba*, New Delhi, Prashanti. [Wrongly dated 1987]

These later editions have two extra chapters, one of quotations on SSB's Teachings (in answer to complaints from readers and from SSB himself) and the other on the subject of the 1992 controversy (over a Doordashan TV videotape), also dealt with in the paper listed below: Haraldsson and Wiseman: 'Reactions to and an Assessment of a Videotape on Sathya Sai Baba', *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, April 1995, 60, pp. 203 - 213.

Research note on reactions to Haraldsson's Sathya Sai Baba book:

Several writers, academics and others, have recorded critical comments on the findings of Haraldsson (and Osis). Notable among these are academics David Lane, Dale Beyerstein and

Michael J. Spurr. See also, in Part 2, references to relevant comments by the magicians B. Premanand and Milbourne Christopher, Babu R. R. Gogineni, Randi, and Walter A. Carrithers. The major common criticism is that Haraldsson and Osis did not take a professional magician to assist them on the early trips. (Wiseman, who went on later visits, is also a qualified magician.) On balance, then, there seems to be more than sufficient evidence available, including recent Internet video clips and relevant evidence about the careers of Haraldsson and his senior colleague Osis, for a re-assessment of Haraldsson's conclusions on some of the alleged paranormal phenomena and his steadfast silence on recent evidence and opinion. (Gogineni's comments in Part 2 are scathing but deserve consideration. See <http://saibaba-invigilator.blogspot.com>)

1990: 'The Miraculous and the Sai Baba Movement' *Religion Today. A Journal of Contemporary Religions*, 6/1, 6-9.

Arweck and Clarke, p. 103, Item 569: "Explores the claims of miraculous phenomena which are associated with Sathya Sai Baba of Puttapuri [*sic*], India. States that the existing literature on the movement has so far not attempted to assess whether Sai Baba's purported miracles are genuine or fraudulent. Although the movement has spread to the West, Sai Baba has not, unlike other Indian swamis and gurus, visited Europe or America. The author carried out fieldwork to study Sai Baba's paranormal phenomena, such as intrusion into dreams, appearance and disappearance of objects, teleportations, and *vibuti* (sacramental ash) in distant places. Concludes that the enigma of Sai Baba remains unsolved as long as he refuses any proper investigation."

2004: 'Of Indian God-men and Miraclemakers: The Case of Sathya Sai Baba'. A paper given at the BPS Transpersonal Psychology Section Conference, September 2004.

According to the Abstract, this appears to be a repeat, for academic colleagues, of his somewhat dated summary of many years of intermittent research and writing on Sathya Sai Baba, whom he presents as an enigma about whom many paranormal things are claimed but who refuses to present himself for scientific study. Bland assertions like "He is venerated by most devotees as an avatar" and he "has been the subject of a nationwide controversy" seem to indicate an ongoing desire to avoid controversy, which was already visible in Haraldsson's book on SSB. (This paper may be a repeat of a previous paper or lecture at an unknown institution in 2003.)

**Haraldsson, Erlendur, and Osis, Karlis**, 'The Appearance and Disappearance of Objects in the Presence of Sri Sathya Sai Baba', *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, 71(1977), 33-43.

A guarded report on three field trips to study "claims suggestive of *psi* phenomena" in SSB's presence. The report is informal and draws no conclusions from their close observations because of the absence of scientific controls. This early 1977 report has been much quoted in academic papers. However, videotape evidence which has become available in the last 30 years suggests that it is time to look beyond the researchers' pessimistic conclusion that "without adequate experimental conditions the evidence will never be conclusive."

This 'classic' report has recently been reprinted in Richard Wiseman and Caroline Watt's anthology, *Parapsychology* (Ashgate, UK and Burlington, USA, 2005, pp. 173-184) as an example of what happens when parapsychologists attempt to test the claims of an alleged psychic "in a real world, and uncontrolled, situation". The editors also point out (on p. *xvi*) that other work has been done by other researchers on SSB's alleged abilities since 1977. They specifically mention Haraldsson and Wiseman (1995 [see the entry below this one]) and Beyerstein (1996).

**Haraldsson, Erlendur and Wiseman, Richard**, 'Reactions to and an Assessment of a Videotape on Sathya Sai Baba', *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 60, April 1995, pp. 203 -213.

After trying to enhance the quality of the taped material and after a meticulous frame by frame examination of a brief controversial 1992 Doordarshan TV videotape of a presentation ceremony involving SSB, the two investigators concluded that vociferous Indian media accusations of fraud were not substantiated by the evidence, but concede that the videotape was of poor quality. Another case of 'Not proven'. Since then other enhanced copies of the material have become available on the Internet (for example, on [www.exbaba.com](http://www.exbaba.com) and most recently on YouTube). See also V. K. Kodimela's article, listed in Part 2.

**Haraldsson, Erlendur and Houtkooper, Joop M.**, 'Report on an Indian Swami claiming to materialize objects: The Value and Limitations of field observations', *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, 8, pp. 381-397, 1994.

A successful scientific discrediting of materialisation claims by Swami Premananda. That paper was the result of a joint 1979 investigation. Another joint scientific investigation in 1995 of Swami Premananda's materialisations ["macro-PK ability"] by R. Wiseman and Haraldsson was reported as inconclusive but produced the following interesting comments:

"The only phenomena that occurred did so under informal conditions. Analysis of the videotaped demonstrations is consistent with SP's capitalizing on the investigators' lapse in attention to pick up small objects secretly from his lap and, after a short while, 'materialize' them in his hand. However, no direct evidence of fraud was obtained during the investigation." In spite of this, the researchers express their satisfaction with their methodology in preventing possible trickery and in gaining access to Swami Premananda. (See Richard Wiseman and Erlendur Haraldsson, 'Investigating Macro-PK in India: Swami Premananda', *Journal for the Society for Psychical Research*, Vol. 60, No. 839, April 1995, pp.1 93-202.)

**Harper, Marvin Henry**, *Gurus, Swamis, and Avatars. Spiritual Masters and Their American Disciples*, Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1972.

Mainly Chapter 5, 'The Divine Magician. The Miraculous life of Sathya Sai Baba', pp. 78-95, Chapter 2, 'The Fakir: Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi', pp. 16-34, and pp. 235-238, on early propagators of the SSB story in USA.

Somewhat like P. Brent, but from a more Christian apologetic viewpoint, Harper offers a survey of a number of neo-Hindu gurus (living and, especially, dead) whose teachings were making inroads into American society in the late 1960s. The chapter on SSB appears to be virtually unknown by SSB researchers although it was published only one year after the longer studies by devotee Murphet and screenwriter Schulman. Harper offers glimpses into ashram life in the late 1960s, including the difficulties facing travellers to the remote ashram and SSB's unselfconscious claims like "When someone asks you ... where the Lord is to be found ... [D]irect them to come to Puttaparthi and share your joy! Tell them He is here in the Prasanthi Nilayam." [*Sathya Sai Speaks*, II, p. 269]. (For those studying SSB's Discourses, Harper's account of the one he heard at the ashram will be of interest. See pp. 91-93.)

Harper also mentions Sathya Sai Baba's particular emphasis at that time on the restoration of traditional *Sanathana dharma* in India and the revival and propagation of Vedic studies with the creation of two specific institutions, the Veda Sastra Patasala (for Vedic and Sanskrit Study by young boys) and the "Akhila Bharatai Vidwanmahasabha" for pundits. Although the author accepts most of what he is told about SSB on his short visit to the

ashram, he also mentions (p. 80) that some Shirdi devotees deny that their guru predicted his reincarnation (as the SSB story strongly asserts) eight years after passing away. As a rare Western visitor at that time, Harper was very unlucky not to be given an interview. In his final chapter ('At the Feet of a Master'), his collective conclusion on the gurus he visited or studied is that "Hinduism is striking its roots deep into American soil." (p. 250)

### **Hummel, Reinhart**

1985a: 'Guru, Miracle Worker, Religious Founder: Sathya Sai Baba', *New Religious Movements*, 9, No. 3, September 1985, pp. 8-19. [See also [www.dci.dk/en/?article=572&emne=](http://www.dci.dk/en/?article=572&emne=) (from the Dialog Center in Denmark)]

The distinguished author of this essay (who died in February 2007) was a German Protestant Pastor with previous experience as Principal of a Theological College in India. He was also a researcher on Eastern religions, and was director of the 'Evangelische Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungsfragen' in Stuttgart. The original German version of this article first appeared in 'Materialdienst der EZW', 47 Jahrgang, 1 February 1984. The later English translation is by Linda W. Duddy.

This vital piece of early scholarly analysis is not widely known and, unfortunately, is rarely referred to. The main reason is, presumably, that the viewpoint and vigorous tone are those of Christian apologetics and many of the scholar's assertions and judgements are therefore less objective than those usually encountered in academic writing. Nevertheless, the penetrating analysis of Sathya Sai Baba's *modus operandi* and success as a charismatic guru brings up important detail and insights which need to be taken into consideration by scholars and others, even if they do not agree with all of Dr. Hummel's conclusions. In the belated opening up of academic research on Sathya Sai Baba, other assertions and conclusions will surely be recognised as reasonable enough to be officially recorded, albeit in softer language at times.

Abstract: "The article analyses the effectiveness of Sathya Sai Baba's powerfully charismatic self-presentation of himself as a miracle-making Purna Avatar with an ecumenical message in attracting a mass following of Hindus and followers of other major religions in India and overseas."

Excerpts:

"His career and activities demonstrate why a strong guru personality, under the conditions of contemporary India and the modern world, can win a mass of disciples and slip by in the role of a world redeemer and substitute Christ."

...

"It is important to see through Sai Baba's purpose in making people defenseless through his demonstrations of power. They are proselytizing miracles that should cause the potential devotee to accept Sai Baba as father God and "integral avatar"."

...

"For those to whom their own religious tradition appears stale and empty (that is present not only in India but even more so in the West), the encounter with a powerful, "charismatic" guru provides new experiences, and they are told that those experiences are exactly that which their own religion should have supplied them with but failed to do. One function of the guru consists in recharging and revitalizing the religious traditions which have become powerless, or are perceived as powerless, with his energy."

"A guru of Sathya Sai Baba's type represents a post-Christian form of Hinduism which has erected an insurmountable wall to the Christian faith. This type of guru presents himself consciously as substitute Christ. He replaces Christ and is, in that sense, an anti-Christ."

1985b: 'Guru, Miracle Worker, Religious Founder: Sathya Sai Baba', in *Update. A Quarterly*

*Journal on New Religious Movements* (Aarhus, Denmark), 9/3, pp. 8-19.

Arweck and Clarke, p. 129, Item 696: "A portrait of the Sathya Sai Baba movement which describes the role of the leader and what he claims to stand for, i.e. an incarnation of Sai [*sic*]. Looks at Sai Baba's childhood and family background, the activities of the organization, its meditation practices, and analyses the phenomenon from a functional approach. Examines its tenets in the light of traditional religious practices in India and Christianity." Originally published in German, 1984.

1987: 'Contemporary New Religions in the West', in *New Religious Movements and the Churches*, A. P. Brockway and J. P. Rajashekar (eds.), Geneva, WCC Publications, pp. 16-29.

Arweck and Clarke, p. 129, Item 700: "Argues that the new religious movements (NRMs) in the West, unlike those elsewhere, are not indigenous responses to influence from outside, but foreign imports. A typology grouping them into three clusters is presented: 1. those originating from within Christianity; 2. those that stress Eastern religious thinking, and 3. those based on Western psychology and therapeutic sub-cultures. Discusses the tensions between new religions and society, and analyses conflicts in terms of organizational structure and degree of commitment. The attitudes of members of New Religious Movements towards Christianity and to religious pluralism in general are examined."

1988: *Les gourous*, Paris, Le Cerf.

Arweck and Clarke, p. 131, Item 706: "Seeks to elucidate the question of which processes are involved in the relationship between guru and disciple. Links the writings of some gurus and their organisations with their practices and individual experiences. This is complemented by information drawn from interviews, occasional observation, and visits to European and Indian ashrams, especially those frequented by Western adepts. Among the movements considered are Sri Chinmoy, Sathya Sai Baba, the Hare Krishna movement (ISKCON), Transcendental Meditation, Ananda Marga, Eckankar, and Rajneeshism. The final chapter looks at the relationship between gurus and Christianity."

**I.C.S.A. (International Cultic Studies Association)** See Part 2 of this Bibliography.

*(The) Indian Skeptic*, Vols 1-2, 1988-1989, [www.indian-skeptic.org/html](http://www.indian-skeptic.org/html)

(See also under Premanand, B. in Part 2.)

These volumes contain a detailed correspondence about Haraldsson's book on SSB between B. Premanand, the then President of the Indian Rationalists (and for several decades an indefatigable critic and opponent of SSB) and Professor Erlendur Haraldsson, whose persistent but unsuccessful attempts to carry out professional parapsychological studies of SSB resulted in his well-known popular book and other academic papers, listed above. These early volumes of *The Indian Skeptic* also contain some relevant correspondence from Professor Dale Beyerstein to Haraldsson about the book on SSB.

**Kasturi, N.** See Part 3

**Kent, Alexandra:**

2000a: *Ambiguity and the Modern Order: the Sathya Sai Baba Movement in Malaysia*, PhD Thesis, University of Gothenburg, Sweden, 2000. [See also 2005 below.]

An excerpt from the author's Abstract from

<http://www.samfak.gu.se/Disputationer/disp0001/Kent.html>:

"This study examines the Malaysian following of the contemporary Indian godman Sathya Sai Baba, a neo-Hindu guru famed for his miracle-working. This religious innovation has broad appeal among non-Malays, but attempts to formalise and control it have evolved within



a middle-class subsection of the Indian community. My concern here is to examine its special and ambiguous formula for addressing the totalitarianism and intolerance of Malaysian modernity as it is wielded by the Malay-dominated government.”

2000b: ‘Creating Divine Unity. Chinese Recruitment in the Sathya Sai Baba Movement in Malaysia’, in *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 15, 1, 2000, pp. 5-27.

Abstract from:

<http://taylorandfrancis.metapress.com/app/home/contribution.asp?wasp=80003vutlr7wwe2jqift&referrer=parent&backto=issue,1,9;journal,13,13;linkingpublicationresults,1:104369,1>

“This paper examines Chinese participation in a neo-Hindu movement in Malaysia. The data, gathered in Kuala Lumpur 1995-1997, are examined with regard to their ethnic and political implications and in relation to the historical as well as the contemporary social features of Malaysia. The paper explores the way in which the Indian-dominated leadership of the Malaysian Sai Baba organisation attempts to include Chinese worshippers: while aiming to overcome ethnic boundaries, there is a tendency to reproduce them. Chinese inclusion plays a significant role in the organisation's attempt to establish a multi-ethnic and non-sectarian profile for the movement. Such a profile is relevant for the leadership's pursuit of moral legitimacy in a country where ethnicity and religion are inextricably linked to politics.”

2000c: ‘Unity in Diversity: Portraying the Visions of the Sathya Sai Baba Movement of Malaysia’, *Crossroads Journal*, 13 No 2, pp. 29-51.

[Not seen]

2004: ‘Divinity, Miracles and Charity in the Sathya Sai Baba Movement of Malaysia’, in *Ethnos*, 69, 1, 43-62. Published by Routledge for the National Museum of Ethnography of Sweden.

Abstract from:

<http://taylorandfrancis.metapress.com/app/home/contribution.asp?wasp=g2e72blxyr1wtw34gt7r&referrer=parent&backto=issue,3,7;journal,1,14;linkingpublicationresults,1:104703,1>

2004b, March: ‘Divinity, Miracles and Charity in the Sathya Sai Baba Movement of Malaysia’, in *Ethnos*, 69, 1, 43-62. Published by Routledge for the National Museum of Ethnography of Sweden.

[Abstract at:

<http://taylorandfrancis.metapress.com/app/home/contribution.asp?wasp=g2e72blxyr1wtw34gt7r&referrer=parent&backto=issue,3,7;journal,1,14;linkingpublicationresults,1:104703,1>]

2005: *Divinity and Diversity: A Hindu Revitalization Movement in Malaysia*, Copenhagen, NIAS Press. [Nordic Institute for Asian Studies]

The fieldwork for the original 2000 PhD thesis – on which this monograph is based – was carried out between 1996 and 1998.

Specialists will make their own judgements of Dr Kent's contribution to the anthropology of multiethnic Malaysia and the value of her insights into “transnational religious networks”, whose issues, we are told, have taken “centre stage” since ‘9/11’.

As a contribution to the general expository literature on SSB, this book's obvious strength flows from a year-long close observation and interaction with members of a Sathya Sai Baba Centre in metropolitan Malaysia. In Chapter 2 (pages 34-67), Dr Kent gives extensive coverage and analysis of both main aspects: the devotees (beliefs, attitudes, worship and behaviour) and Sathya Sai Baba (charismatic nature, teachings and, above all, the paramount importance of the alleged miracles). A short stay at Puttaparthi towards the end of the fieldwork enabled the writer to complement her local observations with the perceptive experience of ‘real’ darshans and ashram behaviour.

As for the importance of Sathya Sai Baba and his Organisation, Kent refers to A. Bharati's ‘pizza-effect’ and extrapolates the following implications of the work of the neo-Hindu gurus: “Although the reinvigoration of Hinduism by leaders such as Vivekananda,



Aurobindo, Chinmayananda, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and Sathya Sai Baba arouses criticism from among Indian intellectuals, it inspires many Westerners and Westernized Indians. Such leaders therefore ultimately propose the ultimate expansion of Hinduism's constituency" (p.11).

And yet, amid the thoughtful reporting and extrapolations, something essential is missed: the opportunity to get a little closer to the enigmatic avatar than devotees and devotee writers allow. On one occasion, the researcher comes close when she notes important contradictions between a Discourse in Volume 10 of *Sathya Sai Speaks* and other official Directives. Before quoting widely discrepant remarks by SSB about the need and character of an Organisation (pp. 64-65), she comments, "They [the Discourses] are often inconsistent and contradictory in details ..." but her immediate conclusion is "... and this opens a wide field of interpretative possibility for his followers." (p. 58) The opportunity to follow up this discovery up by checking some of the remaining 25 or more volumes available at the time (including the particularly revealing early volumes) is not taken. Indeed, Dr Kent (who cites only Volume 10 of the Discourses in her extensive Bibliography) appears not to understand the highly influential roles of the SSB Books and Publishing Trust (formerly known as *Sanathana Sarathi*) and the officially translated and edited Discourses in devotee life and in the expansion of the Sathya Sai Organisation; instead, she makes a vague reference to: "numerous publications published by devotees, containing his sermons and speeches" (p. 58). For all her other quotations of SSB's alleged words as examples or evidence, she relies on devotee writers like Jegadesan, Murphet, Sandweiss, and Ralli (who allegedly received his Messages directly from SSB), depriving herself of the chance to check the quotations and their contexts and dates (which are often not given in devotees' books). This lack of attention to the volumes of *Sathya Sai Speaks* closes the door on an important number and variety of discrepancies, contradictions and errors as well as other relevant characteristics of SSB's idiosyncratic storytelling style which need to be observed and examined at least as much as devotees' attitudes to and individual *interpretations* of the guru's rambling spontaneous Discourses.

Dr. Kent's website CV lists the following two articles in recent works of reference on NRMs: 'The Sathya Sai Baba Movement', in *Encyclopaedia of the World's Religions*. Ed Melton Gordon [*sic*] and Martin Baumann, Oxford: ABC-Clio Publishers, 2002. 'Sathya Sai Baba. The Sathya Sai Baba Movement' in *Encyclopaedia of New Religious Movements*, ed. Peter Clarke, London, Routledge, 2006. See the **Appendix**, 2002 and 2006.

**Klass, Morton**, *Singing with Sai Baba. The Politics of Revitalization in Trinidad*, Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 1991.

Publisher's Statement: "The book addresses such problems as changing ethnicity in an immigrant population; conflict in one of the now independent nations formed from what was once a "plural society" colony; and the attractions of Hindu-derived religious movements for people in the West." It is based on observations of the SSO Centres in Trinidad and Tobago.

In 1991 Klass's book was a major contribution to the newish sub-section of academic SSB literature dealing with the development and socio-political impact of the SSB Movement within or around Indian immigrant populations overseas, especially in ethnically diverse countries. (See also the work of Lee and Kent.)

Klass emphasises that his cultural anthropological viewpoint relates, in great detail, to a small geographic area with a long history of immigration and a special ethnic population mixture on which the development of the "Sai Baba movement" has had a strong but unique

effect: that of becoming a strong local alternative to the deeply entrenched traditional form of Hinduism (and thereby creating tensions) and a means of attracting ('revitalizing') disinterested or 'lapsed' Hindus back to an adapted form of their ancestral religion. By acting in this way, the Trinidad SSB Movement, unlike other national SSOs outside India, although solidly devoted to SSB, has largely ignored the basic SSB teaching of 'one religion', which encourages access to membership by people of other religious traditions – in this case, mainly the Afro-Trinidadians, who, although welcome, form a minute proportion of the membership and only become members if they are willing to accept the "rules of dress and diet and behavior" which "derive from India".

General researchers will probably be particularly interested in the discussion of non-traditional ethnic Indian devotees' strong feelings about SSB, their easy and total belief in his claims of Divinity (whose unique nature – even within Hindu tradition – Klass, unlike many academics, clearly outlines). In contrast, the groups of traditional local Hindus find it difficult or impossible to accept SSB's claims of being an avatar of the stature of a Krishna or Rama, as well as an incarnation of Shiva and Vishnu and the "representation on Earth of *Divinity*" (p. 81). The cultural ease with which most Indo-Trinidadian SSB devotees can accept the divine claims is also contrasted by Klass with "the all-consuming interest" shown by overseas devotees (for example, Murphet and Sandweiss) and its central importance in their writings (p. 83).

A later section relates this conflictive situation to the ideas on 'The Hindu Renaissance' expounded by the well known Austrian Hindu ascetic and scholar, Aghananda Bharati (1970– see above) and compares and contrasts what White, Swallow and Babb have written on the topic. Not unsurprisingly, Klass finds that Swallow's preoccupation with the sexual connotations of Shiva (honey, ash and semen) is not consciously shared by Trinidadian Hindu devotees of SSB (p.138).

As a seasoned anthropologist (whose 1959 PhD also dealt with a small part of the Indian community of Trinidad), the author accompanies his observations with a detailed description of the minutiae and technicalities of the SSO structure and rules and also delineates the regular interaction of devotees, the forms of worship (especially bhaj an singing) and service to others in the SSB Centres in Trinidad.

**Kleine-Möllhoff, Uta**, 'Weltanschauung des Sathya Sai Baba Ashram' [The Cosmology of the Sai Baba Ashram], Marburg University, unpublished MA thesis, 1988.

Arweck and Clarke, p.1 54, Item 831: "A descriptive and phenomenological insight into the historic and contemporary background of Sai Baba, his ashram in India, the organisation of the movement and the theoretical structures of its underlying cosmology. Examines Sai Baba's claim to be an avatar and the importance of avatars in Hinduism."

**Knott, Kim**, 'Sorcery, Scientology, Swamis and Sea Monsters: Researchers Say Religion is Still Big News in the Media', *Religion Today*, 1 (2 & 3), 1984, pp. 13-14.

Arweck and Clarke, p. 155-6, Item 841. [Abstract not seen]

**Lane, David Christopher**: <http://vclass.mtsac.edu/940/dlane.2000contact.htm> and <http://vclass.mtsac.edu:940/dlane/saidebates.htm>

This entry might seem to be more suitable for Part 2 but Professor Lane's academic career serves as an example of how the two-way use of the Internet (for publishing and researching) became an essential part of academic activities during the 1990s. (It is repeated in Part 2.)

David Lane, an American Professor of Philosophy and Sociology, who had gained a popular reputation in New Age and student circles for exposing dubious activities and facts

about some NRMs and gurus, focussed some of his critical attention on SSB in the second half of the 1990s as host or moderator on a website set up for detailed criticisms of SSB and defensive debate by one or two unofficial spokespersons of SSB. Following Dale Beyerstein's Internet intervention in the early 1990s, Lane's critical web page was an important contribution to basic materials for research on SSB, even though the main emphasis was on unproven opinion and allegations. However, at first the discussions and revelations reached a relatively restricted section of the public since the Internet was still largely the preserve of the academic and student community. The audience grew rapidly as people flocked to the Web in the late 1990s. At that time, and until 2000, the few devotees who were Internet users tended to ignore or dismiss the whole debate.

Since those days his articles and postings on Sathya Sai Baba have been much more widely read and have influenced the spread of criticism of the official story of Sathya Sai Baba. After the release of the Bailey 'Findings' in 2000 Professor Lane set up a very vigorous popular Yahoo Discussion Group about alleged sexual interference by SSB, which, by acting as an escape valve for the very strong conflicting emotions of the time, attracted violent and sometimes scurrilous exchanges from both pro- and anti-groups. Like most of the 1990s contributors to the debate on SSB, Lane now seems to have abandoned the subject, judging by the outdated Bibliography and broken links offered on his current SSB pages.

The following webpage, or its successor, lists Lane's Sathya Sai Baba material for historians: <http://vclass.mtsac.edu:940/dlane/saidebates.htm>

On offer here are mainly annotated and lengthy correspondences from accusers and defenders of Sathya Sai Baba between 1996 and 1998. Basically, Lane acts here as a facilitator of debate. Two major features are the discussion of the killings in 1993 and the testimony of sexual interference made by ex-devotees Said Khorramshahgol and Jed Geyerhahn, accompanied by vigorous counter-argument by the prominent American devotee and debater, Bon Giovanni. Lane also posts defence statements by Bon Giovanni, and others.

This Internet site also hosted 'The SAI WARS' in May 1997 and the 'Sai Baba Debates', in September 1997, as well as a series on 'The Sai Baba Murder Mystery'.]

**Lee, Raymond L.M.**, 'Sai Baba, Salvation and Syncretism. Religious Change in a Hindu Movement in Urban Malaysia', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 16, No. 1 (Jan-June 1982), pp. 125-140.

Professor Lee's important early article is virtually unknown to SSB devotees and critics (except as a bibliographical reference passed on from writer to writer) because of its remote academic resting place.

Lee's comments refer only to the situation of the Sathya Sai Organisation in Malaysia but there are some extrapolations to the general Sathya Sai Baba story which can be made. His outside references are to the academic, Charles S. J. White, the standard hagiographers, Kasturi and Murphet and (for reasons which will become obvious below) the then fresh critical remarks and allegations by Tal Brooke (1979). (See Part 2)

Lee traces the beginning of the rise in SSB worship in multi-ethnic Malaysia to some of its middle-class urban Indian and Sri Lankan immigrants (1969-). Smaller but growing numbers of Chinese Malays (attracted especially by the healing stories) and native Malays also joined the Organisation.

Lee mentions serious conflicts within the ranks of the SSB Movement in Malaysia:

1. Over the leadership of the Organisation.
2. Over allegations spread by a number of young Malaysian Indian males that they were seduced by SSB and that some of his miracles are due to sleight-of-hand techniques (p. 131).

These specific allegations, although made individually by Tal Brooke in 1979, would not become more widely known in SSB circles until the mid-1990s for a handful of Internet enthusiasts or, for a larger number of devotees (but still far short of a majority), in the year 2000. Lee adds: “My informants also told me about the interviews with Baba’s elder brother and his neighbours in Puttaparthi, who do not regard him as an avatar” (p. 131, fn. 13). (This was *not* a current topic of conversation among devotees outside Malaysia at that time.) These allegations produced some defections and rationalisations on the part of loyal devotees in Malaysia (132).

Lee reveals compelling local reasons for such rationalising in favour of SSB [which may apply to NRIs (Non-Resident Indians) in other countries of the wide Indian diaspora]: Citing Weber and Chaudhuri as having briefly noted this point, he adds his contribution: Those westernised immigrant Indians who reject rigid classical Hindu worship tend to veer towards “cultic Hinduism” – within which he places SSB as a practitioner because he “claims to provide instantaneous satisfaction for his salvatory needs through miracle performances and popular discourses.” (133)

The controversy over SSB (in 1982) therefore threatened such Indian devotees in Malaysia with a “state of religious alienation” and partial loss of their ethnic identity. This induced them to rationalise the disquieting rumours and cling to their faith in SSB’s *bhakti* movement.

Chinese Malays are attracted by the ecumenical part of Sathya Sai Baba’s teachings and especially by the stories of his healing powers, which fit in with some of their own religious folk beliefs. [This special appeal is nowhere more evident than in Singapore, where the SSB Movement has flourished, not only among Singaporean Indians but significantly among sophisticated members of the majority ethnic Chinese population.]

Because of this there has been a spiritual cross-fertilization between the two ethnic groups of devotees, who are able to accept one another. However, this sets them further apart from the dominant ethnic Malay population, which is Muslim.

Lee’s conclusion to the topic is that over 50 years, the ethnic immigrant Indian population of Malaysia has tended to relinquish rigid traditional Hindu beliefs and practices in favour of the more populist and syncretistic form of worship offered by SSB, which has shown itself to be more attractive to a dynamic multi-ethnic contemporary society.

With hindsight, Lee’s fears of lasting adverse effects of the 1980 controversy and backlash within the Malaysian SSO do not seem to have been realised. Given the special characteristics of the predominantly Hindu-Chinese mix of devotees there, it is even possible that the much stronger current (2000-) worldwide controversies about SSB will have no major impact in Malaysia either – for the reasons explained by Lee.

Since this early article, Lee has written several books in partnership with Susan E. Ackerman on broader but related topics, especially that of ‘Re-enchantment’. For example, in 1997: *Modernity and Religious Transformation in Malaysia*, University of South Carolina: “Lee and Ackerman suggest that Malaysia’s rapidly modernizing society offers an ideal setting in which to study the dynamics of religious and social change. They examine the development and practice of Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity and from their analyses provide insight about how established and charismatic religions fit into the framework of modernization and secularization throughout the world.”

(See also <http://www.arsdisputandi.org/publish/articles/000101/index.html> for a very critical review of: Lee, Raymond L.M. and Ackerman, Susan E., *The Challenge of Religion After Modernity: Beyond Disenchantment*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002.)

*Love is My Form* See under Padmanaban, R.

**McKean, Lise**, *Divine Enterprise: Gurus and the Hindu Nationalist Movement*, Chicago, University of Chicago, 1996

See especially Chapter 1, 'Sumptuary Spirituality', which includes an analysis of gurus' powers in a background of increasing globalisation of the Indian economy in the 1980s and early 90s. On pp. 3-4, SSB is quoted as one guru whose authority depends on "followers' belief in proven or potential powers". On pages 20-23, McKean gives her commentary on Babb (1986), stressing SSB's emphasis on traditional Hindu culture. She also notes M. Balse's clear distinction between SSB as the "genuine grain" and "derisive comment on the [SSO] organization's personnel" (McKean, 22; Balse, 52). On pp. 187-193, she gives her observations of life in the Sivananda ashram at Rishikesh.

**Madan, T. N.**, *Modern Myths, Locked Minds. Secularism and Fundamentalism in India*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 198-9.

In a passage on the idea of a unified Hinduism, Madan observes briefly but suggestively that the "The Hindu religious tradition has been pluralist in character by reasons of both internal dynamics and external challenges, but in its own hierarchical fashion. Even today, in the closing years of the twentieth century, when the notion of a unified Hinduism has been abroad for well over a century, and is acknowledged widely in principle, it is equally widely denied in practice. The last hundred years have witnessed the birth of [a] new goddess (e.g. Santosh Ma) or godman (e.g. Satya Sai Baba) cults, and more significantly new religious communities such as the Radhasoami Satsang" as well as "the continual rise of new religions within the country like Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism, all of which emerged as critiques of Brahmanical orthodoxy and ritualism, and the arrival of Christianity and Islam from abroad have contributed to a spirit of religious liberality ... But this liberality too operates within a hierarchical framework. In other words, difference is hierarchised: it is neither abolished nor translated into an ideology of equality."

**Mangalwadi, Vishal**, *The World of Gurus*, 2nd ed., New Delhi, Nivedit, 1987. [1977, Vikas] [Also listed in Arweck and Clarke, p. 186, Item 1027. Later editions (according to Alexandra Nagel): *The World of Gurus. A Critical Look at the Philosophies of India's Influential Gurus and Mystics*, Chicago, 1992 and New Delhi, 1997.]

On pages 175-197 of the 2nd Edition, the author (who is an Indian scholar with a Christian apologetic viewpoint) focusses on the paramount importance of miracles in attracting SSB's devotees and comes to the conclusion that SSB can be neither the reincarnation of Shirdi Sai Baba nor a Full Avatar (as claimed) because we "merely have his claim and his claim is against the weight of the entire Hindu tradition [where, for example, it is Vishnu who goes through reincarnation, not Shiva] and Christian scriptures." (p. 191) Also: "... to believe that Sai Baba is an *avatar*, greater than Rama and Krishna, one has to go directly against classical Hinduism." The author also quotes sexual allegations by Tal Brooke (noting that Brooke was not sued for defamation) and he adds a Post Script on the discovery of a fake 'miracle vibuthi' child by Professor Narasimhaiah's 1976 Committee which sought unsuccessfully to investigate SSB's miracles.

Some of the detail of Mangalwadi's evidence for this interesting but not well known contribution to the Sathya Sai Baba debate is as follows:

"There are many "miracle-doers" in India today, as there have always been. [There] ... are well-known gurus who claim to perform miracles of materialization, healing, etc. ... Then there are any number of magicians in India who can "produce" *vibuthi*, sweets, rings, statues, watches, etc. from "nowhere". If miracles prove *avatarhood* then all these would be *avatars*. In fact, some of them ... do claim to be God. But Baba says he alone is the *avatar* in this age."

“The Avatar is one only, and only this body is taken by the Avatar.” [Footnote 18: Hislop, *Conversations*, 1976: 9]

“He claims to be the only *avatar* today and also the only true guru. [*Op. cit*, 12] If miracles do not prove divinity, as Baba himself acknowledges, then what proofs are there of his *avatarhood*? None at all! We merely have his claim and his claim is against the weight of the entire Hindu tradition and Christian scriptures.

Hinduism has traditionally believed (*Bhagavata* being an exception) that Vishnu (never Shiva) takes ten *avatars* .....Therefore Sai Baba’s claim to be an incarnation of Shiva-Shakti has no support in Hindu scriptures or traditions. The idea that any god (including Vishnu) will take three consecutive incarnations within a century, or two, has no parallel in Hindu history or mythology. Therefore to believe that Sai Baba is an *avatar*, greater than Rama and Krishna, one has to go directly against classical Hinduism.”

Mangalwadi continues on pp.192-3 to argue against SSB’s claim to be the reincarnation of Shirdi Sai Baba:

“If Sathya Sai Baba cannot be an *avatar*, could he possibly be a reincarnation of Sai Baba of Shirdi? This too is logically impossible. For liberation according to Sathya Sai Baba means merging of our soul into Brahman, just as a river merges into the ocean. If the Sai Baba of Shirdi had attained liberation, how could he be reincarnated? Can a river come back after merging into the ocean?” [The same might be asked in connection with those disciples of SSB whom he has first accepted as merging with him at their death and later announced that they will return (or have returned) to attend to Prema Sai Baba, his next reincarnation, announced for 2022 or thereabouts.] Mangalwadi concludes: “If Sathya Sai Baba’s claims to be an *avatar* and a reincarnation of Shirdi Baba cannot be true then they must be false.” (p. 193)

Mindful of the *siddhis* mentioned by so many people, which he dismisses as insufficient reason for claiming avatarhood, Mangalwadi makes a serious suggestion that perhaps Sathya Narayana’s parents were right in the first place in assuming that the prolonged “scorpion” trauma of the boy’s youth (together with subsequent incidents, like the trances of the early years of his Mission) was a case of possession, which should be taken seriously:

“If he is not an avatar then who is he? Could it be that the initial diagnosis of his parents was right? Could it be that the spirit that had possessed Sai Baba of Shirdi, came into him on March 8, 1940 [1943], and that, as he says, it wasn’t a scorpion that bit him, but that it was an experience of possession by a spirit?”

This has also been suggested by a few other commentators and is at least worthy of study, within Hindu traditions, however implausible it may seem to Western minds. If correct, the hypothesis might provide a partial explanation to the real (and vexed) question of SSB’s vaunted paranormal powers (in those cases where sleight-of-hand is not a plausible explanation).

**Menen, Aubrey**, *The New Mystics and the True Indian Tradition*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1974, 192-194.

A superficial and very flattering brief presentation of SSB. Error: “He is a tall ... man ...” Uncritical repetition: “Sai Baba performs miracles as a routine. ...” [a reference to sacred ash production]. “Another miracle has great charm ... It is *he* who presents the book to distinguished visitors. The visitor turns to the flyleaf hoping to find his name. It is blank. Smilingly, Sai Baba invites him to close the book, and makes conversation about other matters. Then he asks the visitor to open the book once more. Lo! on the title page is a dedication in the swami’s own hand.” (p. 194)



**Michaels, Axel**, *Hinduism. Past and Present*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2004. [Original German edition, 1998]

There is no mention of Shirdi Sai Baba but in a section on modern Hinduism, dealing with the recent decisive influence of the mass media and the Internet, Michaels comments, “Moreover, recently, a Western oriented and especially active proselytizing Hinduism has emerged, which I call “Guruism”. The best-known representatives of that include Krishnamurti, Maharishi (Transcendental Meditation), Sai Baba [*sic*], Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, Balyogeshwar (Divine Light Mission) and Rajneesh (Sannyasis)” (p. 46). (See also pages 252-259 for background on Bhakti Movements.)

### **Nagel, Alexandra H. M.**

(Based on her experiences in the ashram in 1990, the 1993 killings and, in 2000, the Bailey ‘Findings’, Nagel became one of the first scholarly critics of SSB and was for a time at the forefront of the so-called Exposé. Although some of her work is in Dutch, most of her major articles are in English.)

1994: ‘De Sai Paradox. Tegenstrijdigheden van en rondom Sathya Sai Baba’ in ‘*Sekten* [Sects], ed. Reender Kranenborg, Amsterdam, VU Uitgeverij, Series: *Religieuze Bewegingen in Nederland*, No. 29, pp. 123-153.

(Available on: <http://home.hetnet.nl/~ex-baba/artikelen/paradox.html>)

Arweck and Clarke, p. 212, Item 1179: “Examines and discusses recent controversies about Sathya Sai Baba. Includes a short biography of Sathya Sai Baba.” Also mentioned on p. 166, Item 903, Kranenborg.

In fact, this early work is worth special attention as the most analytical item in a flurry of critical discussion about Sathya Sai Baba which took place among devotees and ex-devotees in Holland in the early 1990s, six to eight years before the English-speaking world (outside of India) became involved. There was a TV documentary as well as many newspaper and journal articles, notably by the psychologist Piet Vroon. In this long article, Nagel gives background information about SSB and his Mission and considers many of the controversial topics which would become prominent on the Internet and world media in 2000, in particular his divine claims and the sexual allegations raised against him by Tal Brooke (in the 1970s) and more recently by Nagel’s friend, Keith Ord. The killings of 1993 are also briefly mentioned. Sathya Sai Baba’s persistent Indian critic, B. Premanand, and Dale Beyerstein’s recent (1992) study are also featured as is, in more detail, the essay by D. Swallow on the Shiva claim. A translation into English would enable English-speaking researchers of the present and future to study this early research on the controversial guru.

2001a (August): *A Guru Accused. Sai Baba, from Avatar to Homo-paedophile*, on [www.exbaba.com](http://www.exbaba.com) and [www.saiguru.net](http://www.saiguru.net).

An early detailed and well-referenced pioneering commentary on the sexual allegations of 2000. (See D. Bailey, in Part 2.)

2001b: *For and Against Sathya Sai Baba on the Internet*, on [www.exbaba.com](http://www.exbaba.com)

Another useful early account of the new burst of critical activity in the late 1990s and, in particular, 2000. As usual, the wide-ranging bibliographical references are valuable for researchers.

2001c: *Sai Baba as Shiva-Shakti: a Created Myth? Or?*, on [www.exbaba.com](http://www.exbaba.com)

An interesting prolongation and updating of Swallow’s study, perceptively relevant to the growing SSB controversy following the Bailey revelations and allegations.

2003: ‘Sai Baba. God of Goeroe?’ [Sai Baba – God or Guru?], in *Bres*, No. 221, Aug-Sept. 2003, pp. 75-87.

This article reviews and comments on a book by Geesje Lunshof, *Sai Baba, Vlam van levende liefde* [Flame of Living Love], in which Lunshof comments on the 2000 Internet

controversy about Sai Baba but professes her unwavering faith in SSB with whom she still has “inner conversations”. Nagel counters Lunshof’s charge that recent critics have defamed SSB with the suggestion that they have presented new facts which deserve to be examined. 2004: ‘Wolf Messing, an enigmatic ‘psychic entertainer’ whom Sathya Sai Baba claims to have encountered’, from an unpublished MA Thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2004. See [www.exbaba.com](http://www.exbaba.com) for 10 November 2004.

Although linked to the topic of Sathya Sai Baba’s story-telling techniques, the article is otherwise peripheral to this bibliographical list but it is a fascinating piece of academic detective work, which could lead to further discoveries about Wolf Messing, if elusive Russian sources can be traced and translated.

2005: ‘Een mysterieuze ontmoeting: Sri Sathya Sai Baba en Wolf Messing’ [A Mysterious Meeting: Sri Sathya Sai Baba and Wolf Messing], in *Tijdschrift voor Parapsychologie / Journal for Parapsychology*, Vol. 72 No. 4, Dec. 2005, pp. 14-17.

This short article in a Dutch parapsychology journal offers further background information and references for the subject of one of SSB’s extraordinary repeated personal anecdotes. A scan of this article is available in the Dutch section of exbaba:

<http://home.hetnet.nl/~ex-baba/dutch.html>

### **Narasimhaiah, H.**

An early critic of Sathya Sai Baba’s miracles. A nuclear physicist and for four years Vice-Chancellor of Bangalore University. E. Haraldsson (pp. 199-205), who interviewed Narasimhaiah, recounts the story of the Vice-Chancellor of Bangalore University setting up a committee in 1976 to investigate miracles and other superstitions. Sathya Sai Baba refused to answer their invitations and they were refused entry to SSB’s ashram. The newspaper controversy lasted for several months. (See also S. P. Ruhela, 1977)

“During his tenure as Vice-Chancellor, he constituted and chaired *The Committee to Investigate Miracles and Other Verifiable Superstitions*, to scientifically investigate claims of miracles and paranormal phenomena. The committee challenged the claims of Sathya Sai Baba, one of the most prominent godmen of India, who said that he could materialize holy ash and gold chain from nothing. A public controversy ensued, causing some of the godman’s followers to desert him. The committee was also involved in a controversy with Sai Krishna of Pandavapura (a tiny village near Mysore), a *mini-avatar* and an alleged protégé of Sathya Sai Baba. In 1983, he was elected the President of Indian Rationalist Association.”

(downloaded from Answers.com: [www.answers.com](http://www.answers.com))

1976a: ‘Sathya Sai Baba: God or Fraud?’, *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, 3 [or 31] October, 1976, pp. 19, 21, and 23.

Reported in Ruhela, 1997, pp. 24-25:

“We are not asking for an explanation of this materialization. That explanation, if the act is true may be beyond the sphere of science. We would like to see it for ourselves and be convinced of its truth. ... What we need is direct verification. Quoting from books written by his devotees and narration of their personal experience are no substitute for this.” (See also V. Mangalwadi, *World of Gurus*, p. 197.)

1976b: Letters to SSB published in *Sunday* on 2 June and in September 1976 as Chairman of the investigation committee. SSB declined invitations to meet with them.

1987: (ed.) *Science, Non-Science and Paranormal*, Bangalore Science Forum.

[Not seen]

**Newcombe, Suzanne**, ‘Bibliography on Sai Baba’, [www.montclair.edu/risa/biblio/b-SaiBaba.html](http://www.montclair.edu/risa/biblio/b-SaiBaba.html), Fall 2006. (See also Appendix, under 2007 INFORM.)

A brief but useful bibliography of recent writing for students and academics, posted

on the website of the Religion in South Asia Section (RISA) of the *American Academy of Religion* (AAR).

**Osis, Karlis** See under Christopher, Milbourne and Haraldsson, Erlendur

**Osis, Karlis and Haraldsson, Erlendur**

1973: 'Survey of Deathbed Visions in India', Roll, W. G. *et al* (eds.), *Research in Parapsychology*, 1973, Metuchen, NJ, Scarecrow Press, 1974, pp. 20-22. [abstract]  
1976: 'OBE's in Indian Swamis: Sathya Sai Baba and Dadaji', in J.D.Morris *et al* (eds.), *Research in Parapsychology 1975*, Metuchen, NJ, Scarecrow Press, 1976. {Not seen}  
1977: *At the Hour of Death*, New York, Avon Books. [Revised: 1986 and 1990, Hastings House.]

This is the major professional publication resulting from the Osis-Haraldsson partnership on parapsychological research.

1979: 'Parapsychological Phenomena Associated with Sathya Sai Baba', *The Christian Parapsychologist*, 3 (1979), 159-163.

Although I have not been able to locate this article the following appears to be a reference to it (or to a similar item by Professor Osis) by an Indian writer. Because of its extraordinary content, I tentatively include the reference here for consideration.

In his book on the two Sai Babas, G. R. Sholapurkar includes a chapter on 'Main Biographers and Devotees'. Along with much more familiar names, he includes a short section on Osis's two visits to Sathya Sai Baba (with "D.E. Heraldson"):

"This is what he [Osis] has to say in the article, 'Satya Sai Baba and Parapsychology': "Baba commented to us, The same stuff that is present in you (potentially) as a small spark, in me is a full flame!" Continuing, he further says, "Why do I, a New York based scientist, envisage so decisive a role for an Indian? I have been an active researcher for twenty five years, have travelled widely, and nowhere have I found a phenomenon which points so clearly and forcibly to spiritual reality as do the daily miracles around Baba. The psychic phenomena we find in New York or London are not strong enough to do this job." In the concluding paragraph, Dr Osis expresses his fond hopes in the following words: "Of course in the scientific community as in every establishemnt, there is inertia, conservatism and hostility to anything radically new. I personally am convinced that such thought habits will be overcome because Baba's powers are so strong that he could provide the definitive experimental facts which no one with integrity would be able to explain away. Good scientists have integrity and science is built on it. They will try to tear apart anything as 'outrageous' as Baba's miracles. But if the facts prevail in spite of the closest scrutiny, science will incorporate them in its modern world view, which would be more liable [= viable?] than the present one." (*Foot-prints at Shirdi and Puttaparthi*, Delhi, Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan, 1989, 117)

If this is a genuine quotation, it is breathtaking and throws further light on that fact that the Sathya Sai Organisation and many devotees have always referred to Osis and Haraldsson as *endorsers* of Sathya Sai Baba's paranormal powers, in spite of the guarded conclusions of Haraldsson's book. A further relevant biographically recorded fact is that Osis, the senior member of the original research team, had been more receptive to paranormal experiences since childhood.

**Padmanaban, R. et al**, *Love is My Form. Vol. 1 The Advent (1926-1950)*. Prasanthi Nilayam, Sai Towers, 2000. [Often referred to as *LIMF*]

Written by a team of devotees headed by a phenomenally successful Puttaparthi publisher of Sathya Sai Baba books, this is not an academic book. But, for the following

reasons, it cannot be ignored by academics.

It was intended to be the first of a series of definitive biographies of SSB and although basically hagiographical (and derivative of Kasturi's work), it is also well researched and contains some essential *new* information about Sathya Sai Baba, including photocopies and a wealth of old photographs. Some of this new material (including the photographs) contradicts or challenges official data, especially when taken in conjunction with other scraps of evidence available in the memoirs of early devotees of SSB and one or two other writers. Examples of these important new insights are: 1990s recorded interviews with (aged) early devotees; the years of Sathya Sai Baba's schooling; the date of the two Declarations of Sathya Sai Baba's Mission before leaving school in Uravakonda (which turns out to be 1943, not 1940), the dating of some early photographs of SSB, local knowledge about Shirdi Sai Baba in the 1940s and a few other details from the remote early years of Sathya Sai Baba's Mission for which Kasturi's first volume had hitherto been the main flimsy source (and much-quoted 'Gospel').

In spite of its archival importance, the book has so far received scant attention from academics, critics and devotees. (Some of the latter, aware of the new information, voiced disapproval of the volume in the ashram as soon as it was published. A recent SSB apologist and propagandist has tried to discredit the volume on the grounds that it is a 'commercial' publication with a scandalously high price.) This ambitious project to publish five more volumes of this biographical series (one per decade of the guru's life), which was well advanced, was abruptly abandoned a year or two after the publication of this sole volume, to the incalculable detriment of independent research.

**Palmer, Norris W.**, 'Baba's World: A Global Guru and His Movement', in *Gurus in America*, ed. Thomas A. Forsthoefel and Cynthia Ann Humes, Albany, SUNY Press, 2005, 97-122.

This comprehensive and up-to-date 25-page presentation of the impact of SSB and his Movement on American devotees is welcome. It appears in a collection of post-9/11 essays specifically aimed at presenting not only the impact of a foreign spiritual ideology (in this case, nine transnational neo-Hindu 'mahagurus') on American society but also the reciprocal influence of the latter on the ideology and its transnational presentation and growth.

The mahagurus chosen (from Maharishi to Ammachi, including the idiosyncratic home-grown guru Adi Da, in his 10 incarnations to date) represent the "second wave of gurus in America", following the initial wave spearheaded by Swami Vivekananda in 1893.

To the stated parameters of the book, Dr Palmer perceptively chose to add another one: the portrayal of the guru (SSB) through the eyes of his devotees, basing this decision on the correct impression that this is how most devotees are introduced to SSB. To most of those who have studied the complex SSB phenomenon (already characterised as "the enigmatic and controversial spiritual teacher" in the Introduction), this choice may appear perfectly reasonable. Nevertheless, my impression is that the author's exclusive focus on devotees coupled with his close interaction over a period of years with the members of an American Sathya Sai Baba Centre, in Stockton, California has prevented him from adequately balancing this detailed analysis with an attempt to penetrate the enigma by examining relevant available evidence on SSB's charismatic self-presentation, especially as propagated in many official publications and selected hagiographic accounts by his Puttaparthi contemporaries and other devotees and described by observers and critics (especially since 2000).

Strengths:

A good general up-to-date survey of the Sathya Sai Baba Movement.

A very clear picture of the enchanted devotee world (with acknowledgements to Babb), their trusting and satisfying surrender to SSB's teachings as well as an excellent

portrayal of devotees' unquestioning acceptance of SSB's alleged divinity, their rationalisations and (detailed) total rejection of the possibility of any valid criticisms of the divine guru.

An excellent description of worship in Sathya Sai Baba Centres in America and (following devotee sources) in ashram life.

An introduction to the two branches of the Sathya Sai Organisation and a mention of their sudden massive presence on the Internet.

The global dichotomy presented on the one hand by SSB's promotion of Hinduism's traditional spiritual preeminence (and his mission to restore *Sanathana Dharma*, highly applauded by right-wing Hindu politicians) and, on the other hand, by his public advocacy of an appealing inclusivist acceptance of all religions, but under the umbrella of Hinduism. Several brief acknowledgements of the existence of old and current controversies about SSB and devotees' faith-based imperviousness to and dismissal of these.

In need of further attention:

The unquestioning acceptance of old hagiography (Kasturi is still seen as an "excellent resource") and the evasion of a personal study of SSB through abundant material currently available. (Notably: *Sathya Sai Speaks* (1955-2004), *Love is my Form* (2000), Beyerstein (1994) and recent Internet sources (merely hinted at in the article).

No direct mention or investigation of the crucial (and uncontroversial) Sathya Sai Baba charisma factor.

No mention of the participation and importance of NRIs in the American and global expansion of the Sathya Sai Organisation.

The scanty amount of bibliographical information offered on useful sources of information (scholarly, hagiographical and critical). For instance, a minimum requirement for Internet Sathya Sai Baba "cyberography" would seem to be a list of the URLs for the four SSB official sites and, as an example of recent critical work on SSB, at the very least, the Dutch-based site [www.exbaba.com](http://www.exbaba.com) (rather than the single reference to the 2001 article by M. Goldberg on [www.salon.com](http://www.salon.com)).

Palmer interprets the increased worldwide Internet publicity for SSB as indicating unimpeded global growth of the Movement in spite of ongoing controversies. It could equally be argued that the feverish cyber activity stems from a costly organisational promotion and damage control campaigns to counter adverse media publicity and the loss of overseas devotees since 2000. Mention should also be made of the increasing infirmity and reduced mobility of Sathya Sai Baba in the last few years which has coincided with a much more public role for the Sathya Sai Organisations and its Internet offshoots and has radically reduced the unique close darshan experience so treasured by visiting devotees.

**Premanand, B.** See under (*The*) *Indian Skeptic* and in Part 2

**Priddy, Robert** See Parts 2 and 3

This retired academic and ex-SSB devotee and Sathya Sai Organisation official is by far the most prolific of the post-2000 critics of SSB and the SSO. His recently opened blogspot is <http://robertpriddy.wordpress.com>

**Rigopoulos, Antonio**, *The Life and Teachings of Sai Baba of Shirdi*, New York, State University of New York Press, 1993.

From the author's PhD on Shirdi Sai. During the course of his research Rigopoulos also visited Sathya Sai Baba's ashram (in the Autumn of 1991). Like so many others, he



accepts much of what he saw there with few questions, including Kasturi's standard hagiography of SSB. Although it closely affects the main object of his research (Shirdi Sai), Rigopoulos pays scant attention to Sathya Sai Baba's extraordinary claim to be the reincarnation of Shirdi Sai or to his landmark assertion in a constantly publicised 1963 Discourse that SSB's alleged triple incarnation was the result of a boon granted by Shiva and Shakti to his claimed ancestor, the sage Bharadwaj. See also the PhD-derived Shirdi Sai Baba book by the late Marianne Warren, listed below.

**Rothstein, Mikael**, 'Patterns of Diffusion and Religious Globalization. An Empirical Survey of New Religious Movements', *Temenos* 32, 1996, 195-220.

[<http://www.abo.fi/comprel/temenos/temeno32/rothsten.htm>]

Referring to the recent spread of academic interest in NRMs from Departments of Sociology to Departments of Religion, Rothstein begins by quoting a call for papers for a 1995 Conference of the International Association for the History of Religions:

"Wherever you find new and nonconventional religions, be they the Unification Church, The Family, Sai Baba, ISKCON, TM, Scientology, various Theosophical off-shoots and many others, their missionary organizations and colonies are very often the same throughout the world. Thus, the diffusion and globalization of new and nonconventional religions is an important factor in recent and contemporary religious history."

In his preliminary theoretical study of what might constitute globalisation and internationalisation, he examines the NRM situation in Denmark, and, after pointing out that often the *lingua franca* in global NRMs is English, he makes the following pertinent reference to Sathya Sai Baba's devotees (numbering only 100 in Denmark at the time):

"We may also include the disciples of Sathya Sai Baba here. During the weekly meetings of this group, the believers sing the same songs (bajahns) as their fellow believers in other countries at exactly the same time. They behold the same images (including a garment similar to that worn by Sathya Sai Baba himself), and they all receive a small amount of "vibuhti", a sacred substance (a powder of some sort) said to be produced by Baba, just as believers elsewhere, including those present in Baba's ashram in India."

Since 1996, this academic interest in global NRMs has greatly increased and spread to other university departments. Many of its products in relation to the Sathya Sai Baba Movement are listed in this bibliography.

### **Ruhela, S. P.**

An Indian academic and a longtime devotee of both Shirdi and Sathya. A prolific writer of more than twenty books on both of these gurus. Although not the most rigorous of scholars, editors or proofreaders, Ruhela's thirty years of diligent searching and reporting, combined with his knowledge of ashram life (and politics – which kept him unhappily "on the outer" for many years) makes his books worth combing through for nuggets of information, particularly on SSB bibliography (both pro and con) and on the power and personal foibles of the ashram apparatchiks. For academic study, a short cut to Ruhela's main contributions are: his 1976 / 1985 compilation with Robinson, and his books on Research (1996) and the Press (1997).

(I am extremely indebted to Professor Ruhela's work for many useful bibliographical leads.)

1985: Ruhela, Sathya Pal and Duane Robinson (eds.), *Sai Baba and His Message. A Challenge to Behavioural Science*, 7th ed., New Delhi, Arnold Heinemann, 1985. [1st Ed., Vikas, 1976]

An early selection of articles by Ruhela, Robinson, C.S.J. White, D. Dhairyam, S. Sandweiss, Mayah Balse, B.S. Goel, and others. Not all of these are reproduced in the 1985 edition.

1996: *In Search of Sai Divine. A Comprehensive Research Review of Writings and Researches on Sri Sathya Sai Baba Avatar*, New Delhi, MD Publications, 1996.



An attempt by an academic devotee of SSB to review all the SSB literature which might be considered as research, or of special interest to researchers. Ruhela examines the writings of groups of professional writers like sociologists, philosophers, psychologists, educationists, etc. His selection corroborates his initial statement that academic interest in SSB has been rather sparse. However, his partisan approach is demonstrated in his assertion that the weight of serious writing and evidence available is sufficient to establish SSB's divinity to any intellectual with an open mind.

1997: *Sri Sathya Sai Baba and the Press (1972-1996)*, New Delhi, MD Publications.

The only collection of critical (and a few other) Indian press articles and summaries to date. I have found it invaluable for Part 2 of this Bibliography.

Although it contains vital articles and information about the 1970s, nearly three quarters of this annotated compilation deals with media attention during the 1990s, thus reflecting the enormous increase in Indian media interest in Sathya Sai Baba in that decade. Most of the pieces selected are pro-S SB but a few other references and the forty pages devoted to the extensive Press coverage of the ashram killings in June 1993, as well as some other short pieces, serve to remind non-Indians in particular that, although immensely popular in parts of India, SSB is *not* held in universal esteem there. The final long eulogistic defence of the professor's guru shows his basic apologist stance, which I have reason to believe he may have finally abandoned in the early 2000s.

**Sandweiss, Samuel** See Part 3

**Sharma, Arvind**, 'New Hindu Movements in India', in James A. Beckford (ed.), *New Religious Movements and Rapid Social Change, [N.P.]*, UNESCO, 1991, 220-239. [The pages referring to the Sai Baba Movement are 228-23 1]

Professor Sharma proposes a sociological classification of the many Hindu NRMs that have arisen since Independence in 1947. Putting the 'Sai Baba Movement' into Category 3 with other groups like ISKCON, which are traditional Hindu in orientation, with later overseas expansion, the writer goes on to summarise very briefly Swallow's main points about the Shiva claim in 1963.

**Shepherd, Kevin R.D.**

1986: *Gurus Rediscovered: Biographies of Sai Baba of Shirdi and Upasni Maharaj of Sakori*, Cambridge, Anthropographia Publications, 1986.

An important scholarly study of Shirdi Sai and a disciple. He refers very briefly and disparagingly to Sathya Sai Baba's claim to be a reincarnation of Shirdi Sai. Of more than anecdotal interest is his (and other scholars') etymology of the title 'Sāi' (two syllables) as Persian for 'saint', not 'Divine Mother' as Sathya Sai Baba has repeatedly claimed. 2005 a: *Pointed observations : critical reflections of a citizen philosopher on contemporary pseudomysticism, alternative therapy, David Hume, Spinoza, and other subjects*, Dorset: Citizen Initiative. (ISBN-10: 0952508915 ; ISBN-13: 978-0952508915)

In a short section of this wide-ranging study ('On Indian Gurus: Deceptions and Perceptions'), Shepherd raises the issue of deception by Indian gurus, citing three examples since 1960: Muktananda and Rajneesh (very briefly) and Sathya Sai Baba in more detail, questioning the authenticity of Sathya Sai Baba's claim to be a reincarnation of Shirdi Sai Baba and citing recent new evidence available on the Internet (pp. 93-105).

2005b: *Investigating the Sai Baba Movement. A Clarification of Misrepresented Saints and Opportunism*, Dorset, Citizen Initiative. (ISBN 09525089 3)

This is a revised and extended version of the author's 1986 work (*Gurus Rediscovered ...*), which dealt with Sai Baba of Shirdi and Upasni Maharaj of Sakori.



### Srinivas, Smriti:

1999a: 'The Brahmin and the Fakir: Suburban Religiosity in the Cult of Shirdi Sai Baba', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, Vol 14, No. 2, May, pp 245-261.

Although peripheral to her more recent Sathya Sai Baba studies, Dr Srinivas's Abstract merits a mention on this list. Especially relevant here is her fleeting reference to Sathya Sai Baba on p. 250 and her acceptance on p. 247 of Rigopoulos's [and others'] definition of 'Sai' as Persian for 'holy one'.

Abstract (p. 245):

"Shirdi Sai Baba (?- 1918), whose cult in Bangalore city, India is the case study of this paper, was a Maharashtran saint closely identified with both the Pandharpur tradition of Vaishnavite devotion and Sufi genealogies in the region. My thesis is that in the cult of Shirdi Sai Baba, the holy mendicant/saint (*fakir/sant*) paradigm was associated historically with non-urban locations; the paradigm of the spiritual guide (*guru*) and, in later years, the incarnation (*avatar*), is to be found associated with suburban and urban sites. The religious imagination of a cult is a behavioural, communicational and spatial model that creates particular kinds of topological domains in different historical and social milieus. It achieves its coherence within these contexts through certain 'root paradigms', cultural codes in the minds of carriers of traditions that shape relationships, practices, and life stances of individuals. While it is common to identify an urban location by certain social science variables, such as the size of a settlement, industrialisation or a sophisticated communication system, I will instead view the urban topos of Bangalore through the paradigms of a religious cult."

1999b: 'Traditions in the Transmission of the Cult of Sai Baba of Shirdi: guru, sant, avatar', in Hugh Van Skyhawk and Alexander Henn (eds.), *Doctrines and Dialogues,; Syncretic Torrents in the Religions of South Asia*, Heidelberg, South Asia Institute.

[Not seen]

1999c: 'Sai Baba: La double utilisation de l'écriture et de l'oralité dans un mouvement religieux moderne en Asie du Sud', *Diogenes* 187, Juillet-Septembre, 114-129.

This is a very specialised article for experts. However, from the point of view of SSB biography, there are unsatisfactory aspects.

Without quibbling over the use of the word 'movement', the presentation of the Sai Baba Movement as a *single unit* ("... ses centres majeurs, qui incluent aujourd'hui la ville de Shirdi ... et la ville de Puttaparthi ...") is misleading.

From page 123 on, Dr Srinivas brings Sathya Sai Baba into the story with brief biographical details (including errors or important gaps, like the unacknowledged 1945 ashram and the twelve [*sic*] volumes of *Sathya Sai Speaks*). Further, the author's careful *smriti* /*sruti* distinction between the spoken and written works of SSB seems superfluous, since his (spoken) Discourses and talks are usually translated and rendered into print by his editors.

As for the phases of Sathya Sai Baba's Mission, although Srinivas adds a further stage from 1958 to 1968 (following his successful tour of North India in 1957), she, like most other scholars, ignores the years 1954-1962 when SSB made his Divine and avataric claims quite clear, as a careful study of the first two volumes of *Sathya Sai Speaks* reveals. The author is also silent on the beginning of the 'Christian' phase which began in the early 1970s as the international expansion speeded up.

2000: 'Saint, Guru and Avatar: Iconic Representations and the Politics of Modernity in the Sai Baba Movement', at the Annual Conference on South Asia, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

[Not seen.]

2001: 'The Advent of the Avatar: The Urban Following of Sathya Sai Baba and its

Construction of Tradition', in Vasudha Dalmia, Angelika Malinar and Martin Christof-Fuechsle (eds.), *Charisma and Canon. Essays on the Religious History of the Indian Subcontinent*, Oxford University Press, pp. 293-309.

Whatever the specialist merits of this article, the author's introductory presentation of SSB contains inaccuracies (especially about the guru's divine claims between 1953 and 1962) and important gaps (most notably, the appearance of the 'Jesus factor' from 1970 onward), indicating an inadequate attention to vital source material (SSB's translated and edited Discourses, in particular) as well as uncritical acceptance of official SSO and devotee source material.

2005: 'Sai Baba Movement', in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, ed. Lindsay Jones *et al*, Vol. 12, Macmillan Reference USA (Thomson Gale), 2005, pp 8026-29.

In the much-proclaimed prodigious predecessor to this edition, edited by Mircea Eliade (1988), there was no entry for Sathya Sai Baba. This new entry offers a detailed and up to date reference overview of Sathya Sai Baba's life, Mission and Organisation. It is preceded by a valuable general presentation of the life and teachings of the preceding Sai Baba of Shirdi (mainly following Gunaji and Rigopoulos) which led to a very wide national following in India and later internationally for the Sai Sansthan.

While acknowledging the significance of miracles in the story of both Sais, Dr Srinivas chooses to devote her attention to "specific institutions, processes, texts, and practices of the Sai Baba movement" (thus leaving the miracles and charisma to Babb and the hagiographers). These facts are meticulously recorded, presenting a skeleton for others to flesh out.

#### Critical observations

1. The choice of the term 'Sai Baba Movement' is open to dispute since it implies a non-existent unity between two completely separate organisations with Centres in India and overseas. Although SSB and his Organisation freely recognise and honour Shirdi Sai Baba, the Shirdi Sai Organisation (created in 1922) and most devotees affiliated to it have never reciprocated the acknowledgement. So the 'Movement' functions in one direction only. It would, in fact, be kinder and more realistic to speak of two 'Sai Baba Movements' or, better, the Shirdi Sai Baba and Sathya Sai Baba Movements (or, why not?, Organisations). I make these observations in full knowledge that Sathya Sai is by far the more famous guru *outside* of India and that his acknowledged devotion to Shirdi Sai (as his alleged avataric predecessor) has drawn many of his followers to worship Shirdi Sai as well. But the fact remains: the two Organisations are completely separate.

2. The Bibliography consulted, although academically respectable (Babb, Gokak, Kasturi, Klass, Rigopoulos, Shepherd, Srinivas, Swallow and White), reveals four important gaps.

The first missing essential source, available since 2000, is *Love is My Form*, Volume 1 [*LIMF*] (ed. R. Padmanaban and his devotee research team). This large-format 600 page work has already proved to be more essential for research on SSB for the years 1926-1950 than the first volume of Kasturi's simplistic hagiography. For example, it sheds new light on the chronology of Sathya Narayana's childhood, schooling and his Avataric Declarations (1943, not 1940). Although a hagiography, the volume is nevertheless full of useful references, photos and new material, including many interviews with early devotees.

The second major gap is some sort of reference to the longstanding existence of writing critical of SSB (from the Indian Rationalists and newspaper reports in India, to Beyerstein (1994) and the growing body of (mixed) Internet contributions since 2000 which have attracted much attention and discussion, especially on [www.exbaba.com](http://www.exbaba.com)). In fact, Dr Srinivas's article does not make any reference to the Internet, not even to the three or four massive promotional websites run by the SSO.

The third research gap is Dr Marianne Warren's important study of Shirdi Sai Baba

(based on her Toronto PhD), *Unravelling the Enigma. Shirdi Sai Baba in the Light of Sufism* (1999 and slightly but significantly revised in 2004 – see below).

The fourth vital source of information, acknowledged as “central to the movement” but, as in so many other cases, unexplored beyond Volume 1 (in cursory fashion), is the series of more than 30 volumes of officially translated and edited Discourses of SSB (*Sathya Sai Speaks*), which are vital to a better understanding of SSB himself, his storytelling style and his Mission. These volumes reveal, for example, that in addition to the two reincarnation declarations mentioned in most academic writing, Shirdi Sai (1940) [= 1943] and Shiva-Shakti (1963), there are many avataric claims and pronouncements in the Discourses for 1953-1962 as well as an equally important third ‘Declaration’ (the first of an annual series, in fact) during Christmas 1972, when SSB claimed, in highly dramatic, and somewhat surreal, terms, to be a reincarnation of the Father of Jesus Christ. This has relevance not only to his avataric claims but also to his subsequent international success. (Incidentally, all the 36 volumes of Discourses are available online for study or downloading or may be purchased, now as well as in the past, from many SSO Centres and the Indian ashrams. Researchers have no excuse for not consulting them.)

2008 (forthcoming): *In the Presence of Sai Baba. Body, City, and Memory in a Global Religious Movement*, Brill, Leiden & Boston.

According to the promotional introduction on the Brill website, this specialised academic study (to be published in January 2008) is about the ‘Sai Baba movement’, cultural memory and globalization processes. Judgement must necessarily be suspended until the book (or a review of it) can be seen. However, *prima facie*, the use of “Sai Baba” in both the title and the synopsis, with reference to the international career and influence of *Sathya Sai Baba* seems less than felicitous. Although worship of *Shirdi Sai Baba* is encouraged in *Sathya Sai Baba*’s ashrams as an extra option as a result of his early reincarnation claim, his Organisation (presumably out of deference to the *Shirdi Sai Baba Association*) calls itself the *Sathya Sai Organisation*. It will be interesting to see whether the Association of the senior *Sai Baba* (also a prominent international ‘movement’, with its totally separate organisation, traditions, hundreds of thousands of followers and its independent literature and websites) is subsumed by Dr Srinivas under this ambiguous label and what separate consideration the *Shirdi Sai Baba* ‘movement’ (which has had to endure many irrelevant and embarrassing ‘Sai Baba’ references in recent years) is accorded in her latest scholarly work.

(See also **Appendix**, 2005.)

**Srinivas, Tulasi**, *Sacred Webs: Globalization, Religion and the Transnational Sathya Sai Movement* (in preparation for 2008)

It is to be hoped that this new work in preparation may contain fresh academic insights into the *Sathya Sai Baba* story.

**Steel, Brian**, <http://bdsteel.tripod.com/More> See also Parts 2 and 3

In addition to these annotated Bibliographies, four Dossiers offer detailed summaries of the main aspects of the author’s website-published research into SSB based on extensive study of much of the vast SSB literature in English, including the first 30 volumes of *Sathya Sai Speaks*:

‘Dossier 1: *Sathya Sai Baba* as Storyteller’

‘Dossier 2: *Sathya Sai Baba*’s Claims of Divinity and Divine Powers’

‘Dossier 3: The Packaging of *Sathya Sai Baba*’s Telugu Discourses. A Stronger Case’

‘Dossier 4: Discrepancies in the Official *Sathya Sai Baba* Story: The Early Years’

**Swallow, D[eborah]. A.**, 'Ashes and Powers: Myth, Rite, and Miracle in an Indian Godman's Cult', *Modern Asian Studies*, 16 (1982), pp.123-158.

The originality of Dr Swallow's much-quoted article is her detailed analysis of suggested symbolic connotations and ceremonial aspects of SSB's claim to be a reincarnation of Shiva [and Shakti]. However, Swallow does not comment on the highly idiosyncratic nature of this claim. (See Mangalwadi (1977 / 1987) for further important evidence relevant to SSB's reincarnational and avataric claims.)

Other points of interest:

This was the first detailed academic introduction to SSB with some background attention to Shirdi Sai.

The analysis suggests that SSB benefits from the claimed Shiva connection because, with his magical powers already locally recognised, the story enhanced his Hindu credentials and gave him "respectability and authority" (p. 135), particularly since the story indirectly asserts "his Brahman status despite his non-Brahman origins." (p. 136).

The suggestion that the SSB 'Movement' was in tune with the needs of urban middle class Indians, who were experiencing anxiety in coping with the modernisation of their country. Swallow argues (and Babb and others agree) that SSB was especially attractive to this wide section of the Indian population partly because of his comforting emphasis on the need to reviving and maintaining a strong Hindu tradition.

Critical comment:

As far as I am aware, this is Dr Swallow's only published work on SSB, but I assume it to be a by-product of her 1976 Cambridge PhD thesis in social anthropology, 'Living Saints and Their Devotees'. Since 1974, she has pursued a very distinguished career in Museums in UK.

Her fieldwork for this 1982 paper was carried out in two northern Indian SSO Centres between 1972 and 1973. There is no indication that she attended either of the ashrams in southern India. Her main bibliography for SSB was White, Kasturi and Murphet [only one 't'], the latter pair for "raw ethnographic material". (She also mentions, but does not list, the official magazine of the SSO, *Sanathana Sarathi*.)

Swallow's leap from SSB's astonishing 1940 Sai Baba Declaration to the sensational Shiva-Shakti claims twenty three years later does not take into account evidence to be found in Volume 1 of SSB's Discourses (1953 to 1960), some of which also contain unequivocal divine and avataric claims and references. The author's intense concentration on interpreting the significance for SSB and for Hindus of the Shiva claim also seems to have caused her to miss the highly unusual 'Jesus' Discourse of December 1972, and its significance for a further widening of the SSB Mission.

In addition to the above, Swallow's uncritical repetition of pieces of the "raw ethnographic material" occasionally leads to error or unwitting endorsement of errors and discrepancies:

p. 126: "By 1947, he was sufficiently well known in South India to be called upon to preside over that year's All India Divine Life Conference." It is true that this event and other subsequent ones changed the course of SSB's Mission, but the circumstances need more careful explanation, and, in any case, the (non-controversial) date should be **1957** not 1947. SSB's Presidency over the proceedings was promoted by an influential aristocratic devotee (also a leading light in the Divine Life Society), the Raja of Venkatagiri. At first the proposal was looked on askance by Swami Sivananda's emissaries, but SSB quickly charmed them (according to Kasturi) and they even spent some time in his ashram. This led to the visit by SSB and his entourage to the venerable Sivananda's ashram in North India later that year, also described in triumphalistic detail by Kasturi. Nevertheless, in a Discourse at the Divine Life Conference in (or near) Venkatagiri the following year, SSB complained about not being



invited to speak.

p. 6: “Cult literature gives the name of Sai as ‘the Supreme Mother of all’” (p. 125) To be more exact, both SSB and his commentators (deferring to his alleged infallibility) define Sai as ‘Divine Mother’. But, as we have seen, this etymology is incorrect. The original Persian epithet given to SSB’s alleged “previous body” is ‘saint’.

p. 128: [Shirdi] Sai Baba was “virtually unknown to the people of Puttaparthi”. Another example of unquestioning acceptance of the official story. There is ample evidence from some accounts by early devotees and, more especially, from recent research carried out by the (devotee) research team which produced *Love is My Form* (Vol 1), that this is, at best, an oversimplification.]

In conclusion: Recent evidence on SSB’s *storytelling* habits and techniques suggests that a re-examination of SSB’s many extraordinary claims, including this much-publicised “Shiva-Shakti Discourse” of 1963, is long overdue.

**Talbot, Michael**, *The Holographic Universe*, New York, HarperCollins, 1991.

Although Talbot’s references to Sathya Sai Baba are minimal (pp. 150-152, pp.160-161 and p. 256), they are inspired by his interpretation of Erlendur Haraldsson’s findings in his 1987 book on paranormal events associated with Sathya Sai Baba. Talbot’s conclusion is that, even if, after ten years of study, “Haralds son admits he cannot prove conclusively that Sai Baba’s productions are not the result of deception and sleight of hand, he offers a large amount of evidence that strongly suggests something supernatural is taking place.” This is sufficient for Talbot to tie SSB in with the themes of his stimulating bestseller and to quote some of the more spectacular of the alleged materialisations, even extrapolating later (on p. 256): “Indeed, Sai Baba’s abilities suggest that we can even materialize food simply by wishing for it ..” In a similar way, Talbot refers to a few alleged events of the remote past (reported by Haraldsson after reading the available literature and interviewing early devotees from the 1940s and 1950s) as if they were still commonly witnessed by devotees fifty years later. Again Talbot extrapolates: “According to Haraldsson, Sai Baba does bilocation one better. Numerous witnesses have reported him snap his fingers and vanish, instantly reappearing one hundred or more yards away” (p. 160). While SSB is indeed alleged by many other devotees and writers to have performed such feats in his youth, they are relying mainly on legendary accounts presented by Kasturi (and a few other early biographers or devotees) of young Sathya Narayana Raju playing with (or leading) the other village children in remote Puttaparthi in the late 1930s. No such public incidents have been reported in the ashram in recent memory. (Inevitably, perhaps, on [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com)’s promotional page for *The Holographic Universe*, one of the key phrases associated with it is ‘Sai Baba.’)

**Taylor, Donald**,

1984: ‘The Sai Baba Movement and Multi-Ethnic Education in Britain,’ *Religion Today*, 1 (2 &3), pp. 13-14.

Arweck and Clarke, p. 281, Item 1590: “Sheds light on the ‘cultural wing’ of the Sathya Sai Baba Movement in Britain, which operates as The Education in Human Values Society. The article explains what the Society can offer the state education system and what bearing it has on the Sai Baba Movement as a whole.”

1986: ‘Phenomenal: The Significance of Miracles in the Sathya Sai Baba Movement’, *Religion Today*, pp. 9-11.

Arweck and Clarke, p. 282, Item 1591: “Discusses the nature and function of the miracles in the Sathya Sai Baba movement, as well as their role in sustaining the power and authority of the leader.”

1987a: ‘Charismatic Authority in the Sathya Sai Baba Movement’, in Richard Burghart (ed.),

*Hinduism in Great Britain. The Perpetuation of Religion in an Alien Cultural Milieu*, London, Tavistock, 1987, pp. 119-133.

Good on theory, unreliable on some of the detail, especially the exaggerated estimate of 100,000 SSB followers in UK in the 1980s (p. 119) and 1968 as the (belated) date of SSB's open claim to be God.

Taylor, quoting Weber's 1968 tripartite classification of authority, describes two classes of authority within the SSB Movement: SSB's charismatic authority, which is paramount, and the "legal-rational authority" of the SSO itself. Devotees submit to both types, thus ensuring a feeling of personal relationship with SSB and participation in the local or wider SSB group through charitable and other positive activities. So far SSB's charismatic authority has overcome challenges but Taylor's narrative then becomes tenuous. To begin with, SSB's authority until relatively recently was rock-solidly firm because of his devotees' belief in his miracles and divine powers (of which he reminded them frequently in his Discourses). Taylor then claims without real evidence that devotees produce ash and effect cures, thus challenging SSB's authority. Also, Taylor states that prominent former associates Drs Bhagavantam and Gokak (and others) have left the ashram. Indeed, highly plausible rumours and much gossip have been heard in devotee circles, and it is a fact that both of these eminent Indians did eventually leave the ashram (quietly). However, I have not come across any firm evidence of Bhagavantam's or Gokak's alleged 'defection' (much less any specific criticism by them of their erstwhile guru) in the SSB literature and certainly nothing to suggest, as Taylor does, presumably on the basis of a single newspaper article by journalist C. Rajghatta (1985: See Part 2), that Gokak "has tried to demolish the myths that surround Sai Baba." (p. 130). Taylor's further unsupported quotation from Rajghatta that "many more devotees including most foreigners have already deserted the flock" is simply ludicrous. (In the mid-1980s?) Nevertheless, if real evidence were to appear one day, as it may, to prove Taylor's (and Rajghatta's) allegations, it would further compromise the already dubious official SSB biography.

This compilation also offers relevant research information in the Introduction, by Richard Burghart, on the growth of the SSB Mission in UK from the 1960s onwards. On pp. 6-8 of the Introduction, Burghart estimates that at the end of the Second World War (in 1945) there were only 7,000 Indians legally resident in Great Britain (Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs). Postwar immigration, predominantly from the States of Punjab and Gujarat, increased this figure tenfold by the end of the 1950s, to 70,000. In 1972, further substantial extra immigration was caused by the expulsion by the infamous Ugandan dictator Idi Amin of all South Asians with British passports. This sudden refugee influx was predominantly of Gujarati Indians. By 1977, when the SSO was in a phase of rapid expansion in the UK, there were 307,000 resident Indians, 70% of them from the State of Gujarat.

1987b: 'Sathya Sai Baba Movement in Great Britain: Aims and Methods', in *The New Evangelists: Recruitment, Methods and Aims of New Religious Movements*, ed. P. B. Clarke, London, Ethnografica, 77-93.

Arweck and Clarke, p. 282, Item 1592: "Sees a shift in the aims and methods of the Sai Baba movement in Britain since its beginnings in the mid-1960s. Shows that to start with, the movement was almost completely Hindu-oriented, with devotees mainly adjusting to their immigration experience. Non-Hindu devotees regarded their devotions as an alternative form of religiosity. From the mid-1970s onwards, the Hindu character of the movement's activities received less emphasis. The change is interpreted as part of the movement's response to the secular and urbanised situation found in Britain and the West."

**Thalbourne, M.A.,**

'The Supposed Paranormal Abilities of Sri Sathya Sai Baba', *Journal of Religious and*

*Psychical Studies*, 5 (1982), 62-4.

A well-earned, firm but polite rebuke to Ellison (q.v.) for his uncritical acceptance of many of the superlatives applied to SSB by associates and devotees (based on a one week stay in the ashram) and, particularly, his breathtakingly unjustified claim (often trumpeted by SSB's associates and devotees) that

“Sai Baba has been under direct, continuous, highly qualified scientific observation for more than a quarter of a century. His acts have by now been seen and verified by so large and distinguished a coterie of awed and now reverent world scientific dignitaries that the authenticity of his miracles is no longer open to doubt.”

Dr. Thalbourne agrees that a number of highly qualified scientists have indeed met SSB and have come away convinced of his paranormal powers and that it would be a good idea to investigate these phenomena if possible but he also points out that before a reliable expert verdict can be pronounced on such phenomena, careful testing of such claims under controlled conditions is essential. [As Professors Haraldsson and Osiris have made quite clear, requests for this sort of testing were continually ignored by SSB.]

**Thomas, Caroline M.**, ‘God Men, Myths, Materializations and the Kalās of Immortality’, in *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 55, No. 816, 377-403, July 1989.

The starting and finishing point of this long article is an inconclusive search for a possible paranormal origin of samples of sacred ash (*vibhuti*). The samples are from two Indian gurus who claim to be Avatars and to have full Divine powers, Swami Premananda and SSB. The samples originate from an interview with Premananda in London and more indirectly from SSB (via Prof. Haraldsson, and on a portrait in the SSB Centre in London). Although the researcher mentions in her Abstract that “Vibhuti (holy ash) flows from their hands and stone lingams (phalli) are regurgitated from their mouths” and later deals at some length with lingams as an aspect of Hindu tradition and symbology, her experiment does not include a much needed investigation of this other alleged paranormal phenomenon associated with the two gurus in question, which could surely have been captured on film. (For decades, Koor, B. Premanand and other Indian Rationalists have been denouncing both types of materialisations as fakes – see Part 2. In recent years films have been made, most recently in the BBC documentary ‘Secret Swami’ and on ‘YouTube’. See also Beyerstein’s study.)

The lengthy technical details of the analyses of the vibhuti samples and of the interview with Swami Premananda are accompanied by a discursive essay on the Shiva-Shakti myth: “Inner Essences and Their Outer Manifestation” and “The Kalas of Immortality” [essences or colours]. However original and valuable *per se*, this perceptive presentation of complex Hindu symbology in this context has the effect of overshadowing the *inconclusive result* of this parapsychological experiment (which deals with only one – the least sexy, in both senses – of these ‘essences’: vibhuti), thereby probably bolstering the popular *belief* that the so-called materializations are of paranormal origin.

One or two other academics have also been attracted to the slippery Shiva-Shakti slope of SSB’s 1963 claim, possibly conferring undeserved (or, at least, unproven) kudos on the guru under examination.

*Note:*

Five years later, Professors Haraldsson and Houtkooper were able to report on a more conclusive parapsychological study of some of Swami Premananda's materializations, in which the guru was not able to replicate them under strictly controlled conditions. (See *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, 8, 1994, 381-397.)

**Urban, Hugh B.**, 'Avatar for Our Age: Sathya Sai Baba and the Cultural Contradictions of Late Capitalism', *Religion*, 33 (73-93), 2003.

Using a variety of familiar SSB sources (especially Babb and Swallow) and other references, Dr. Urban slowly builds his specialised case: that SSB, with his largely "upper middle-class, affluent urban clientele", his stalwart defence of traditional Hindu values and traditions and his condemnation of Western excesses and aberrations, presents yet another proof that, in adopting globalised capitalism, many local cultures are embedding subtle aspects of their own reality into it, thus modifying the process slightly.

The author suggests the need for further studies of religious movements in similar countries which are going through this phase of development.

The following are peripheral comments on the SSB content, which represents the more slender thread of Urban's essay:

There are brief references to B. Premanand and the Internet sexual allegations but no reference to D. Beyerstein. The References section needs more careful editing (Osborne's name for example), especially to clarify many confusing references in the text to "Kasturi 1970-77" and "Kasturi 1977" (for Kasturi 1981). In connection with the latter references, Urban only acknowledges the existence of nine of more than 30 volumes of *Sathya Sai Speaks*. Most of the references to the (estimated) demographic origins of SSB's following are similarly restricted to the 1970s, which predates the current globalising boom time for India and the exponential growth of the affluent sector of middle class Indians in the last ten to fifteen years, most of whom have *not* flocked to SSB and many of whom, especially in North India, view his miracle-making and notoriety with strong disapproval.

(A quote from Kasturi's hagiography (p. 79) should read: "I have come to ward off all your troubles" not "warn you of all your troubles".)

**Warrier, Maya**, *Hindu Selves in a Modern World. Guru Faith in the Mata Amritanandamayi Mission*, London & New York, Routledge, 2005.

After six decades of growing supremacy, the star (and physical health) of 81 year old SSB is on the wane. The fame of his younger avataric neighbour in the State of Kerala, Mata Amritanandamayi (also known as Ammachi or The Hugging Mother), has been rapidly increasing since the 1990s, not only in India but, enhanced by personal visits, also overseas, notably in California. The coincidental rise in popularity of the goddess phenomenon in the "West", as well as the backlash of opinion among many overseas devotees of SSB due to the 2000 sexual allegations against him and other recent controversies has further enhanced overseas interest in this new avatar of the age (see p.12 and Note 3, p.159).

This biography of Ammachi makes several references to SSB, not only to point out the similarities between the two theologically inclusivist self-proclaimed Hindu avatars and the background of India's increasing affluence and middle-class consumerism but also the subtle differences between the two popular gurus (both sponsored by the BJP Party).

Although many (healing) miracles are attributed to Mata Amritanandamayi, they do not seem to loom so large in devotees' minds as in the case of SSB and his devotees (pp. 80-81). What seems paramount for devotees is the individual physical contact with Ammachi. Incidentally, I am not aware of any comparable book-length study of SSB and his Organisation. (In the matter of SSB sources listed, Warrier's reliance on Chryssides (1999), and on two briefjournalistic references (p.159) rather than other available academic and other sources, is surprising.)

**Warren, Marianne**, *Unravelling the Enigma. Shirdi Sai Baba in the Light of Sufism*, New Delhi, Sterling, 1999. Revised edition, 2004. ISBN 81 207 2147 0.

This important study of Shirdi Sai Baba, first published in 1999, makes a very strong

and convincing case that Shirdi Sai's essential *Sufi* and Muslim characteristics have been replaced since his death by a strong Hindu overlay. Dr Warren offers much original and valuable evidence to reconstitute a balanced picture of this Indian holy man. The inclusion of a translation of Abdul's Notes will also be welcomed by other researchers. Although the 2004 edition appears to be only slightly revised, this is still the most thorough academic study of Shirdi Sai Baba that I have seen. The relative weaknesses of the main competitor, Rigopoulos, are briefly suggested on pp.18-19. It is therefore puzzling that Warren's book has been largely ignored in India and the West, while Rigopoulos's book is listed in all the relevant bibliographies and frequently cited by fellow academics.

Another major reason for mentioning the revised edition is that it is the first scholarly book to reflect, albeit briefly, the brisk winds of change affecting SSB research from 2000 on. Although there are few changes in the original text, a short section of the Author's Preface (pp. xvii-xviii) is significantly new. Whereas the original section had been basically pro-Sathya Sai Baba (of whom Dr Warren was a devotee), with mild reservations, the revised version contains brief but strong notes of criticism of Sathya's claim to be the incarnation of Shirdi. For example:

"... appropriated the persona, life story and to some extent the teaching of Shirdi Sai Baba ..."

"From an early age he chose to ride the coat-tails of the Maharashtran sage ..."

"He introduced typical puranic stories about the birth and life of Shirdi Sai which are not found in the extant literature ..."

"In later years Sathya Sai boldly developed the theme into a fanciful story, saying that his was a triple avatar or divine descent ..."

In view of such a robust change of viewpoint and tone, it is strange that Chapter 14 of the revision ('The Sathya Sai Baba Connection') appears to be unchanged, retaining Dr Warren's previous milder criticisms of SSB and making no mention of significant recent Internet revelations (since 1999) about the relationship between Sathya Sai Baba and Shirdi Sai Baba, which would have added strength to her new assertions.

### **White, Charles S.J.**

1972: 'The Sai Baba Movement: Approaches to the Study of Indian Saints', *Journal of Asian Studies*, XXXI, No. 4 (August 1972), 863-878. [Reprinted in Ruhela and Robinson (eds.), *Sai Baba and His Message*, 1976, pp. 40-66.]

This is the oldest Western scholarly article featuring SSB (albeit in a minor role at the age of 45) that I have seen and the first to mention the "Sai Baba Movement" (with clear reference to Sai Baba of Shirdi). The author's main concern is the need for a methodology for the study of Indian 'saints', particularly living saints. After preliminary definitions of terms like Guru, Avatar and Saint and introductions to historical predecessors like Dattatreya and Kabir (pp. 863-863), White presents, as an example for study, the Sai Baba Movement, "a homogeneous group" of gurus formed by Shirdi Sai Baba, his close disciple Upasani Baba, the latter's disciple, Mata Godavari, and the young SSB (pp. 868-874). The final four pages continue the methodological discussion.

Professor White points out the growing Indian following and status of the Maharashtran miracle-working saint (Shirdi Sai) who combined Hindu and Muslim practices: "he is becoming to be regarded as a major incarnation" (868) and is "considered by many followers to be the main incarnation of God in their eyes." (870). His description of SSB is much briefer and less satisfactory, even though it is partly based on a visit to the Whitefield ashram in 1969, where White was given materialised vibhuti by SSB during a group interview. Citing Kasturi and personal conversations with devotees, he mentions the frequent miracle and healing stories and touches briefly on the charisma and growing international

popularity of SSB, whom he sees as a young, glamorous and successful guru, who, White asserts, is being accepted “in the Sai Baba cult” as the successor of Shirdi Sai – apparently on the flimsy basis of evidence from a single Madras Shirdi Sai temple.

The author specifically remarks (p. 874) that “Apart from his name, there is no discernible Muslim influence in the Sathya Sai Baba cult”. Although this is not accompanied by a correct etymology for the ‘Sai’ part, most later academic writers (like SSB’s devotees) have not followed up this point, unquestioningly copying SSB’s own erroneous (non-Muslim) derivation of it as ‘Divine Mother’, rather than ‘saint’.)

White’s merely introductory mention of SSB left the field wide open for others to expand on. He says nothing, for example, of SSB’s repeated divine and avataric claims, nothing of his landmark 1963 Discourse with the ‘Shiva-Shakti’ claims, which were widely publicised by the SSO (and the official magazine, *Sanathana Sarathi* – The Eternal Charioteer’, which is mentioned by White in one footnote).

(See also the **Appendix** (1981) below, for White’s article ‘Satya Sai Baba’, in Crim, Keith *et al* (eds.), *Abingdon Dictionary of Living Religions*, Nashville, Abingdon, p. 659.)

**Wiseman, Richard and Haraldsson, Erlendur**, (1995) ‘Investigating macro PK in India: Swami Premananda’, *Journal of the Society for Psychological Research*, 60, No. 839, 193-202.

Unlike SSB, Swami Premananda agreed to submit to the parapsychologists’ videotaped tests of his claimed materialisations of vibuthi and small objects. Under these controlled conditions, the guru was unable on several occasions to perform what he had promised. When the control was removed, the ‘materialisations’ resumed. However, no specific evidence of fraud was found.

**Wiseman, Richard and Watt, Caroline (eds.)**, *Parapsychology*, Ashgate, UK and Burlington, USA, 2005.

On pages 173-184, this substantial anthology includes a reprint of Haraldsson and Osis (1977). On p.xvi the editors comment that the essay “illustrates some of the issues that arise when trying to assess an alleged psychic in a real world, and uncontrolled, situation.” They also point out, opportunely, that in the intervening 30 years several other researchers have written about SSSB’s alleged abilities.

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## Appendix

### Entries in works of reference, generic studies or surveys of Hinduism, and textbooks

Coverage of Shirdi Sai Baba and Sathya Sai Baba in these works gives an idea of how they have been perceived and publicised outside devotee circles in recent years. Such knowledge may be peripherally useful in the process of tracing the development and worldwide growth of both the Shirdi Sai Baba Organisation and the Sathya Sai Baba Organisation.

Many works of reference on world religions, New Religious Movements, New Age movements and groups, parapsychology, etc. were sampled for this study. Some of these works are expensive but may be found in public libraries; others (also expensive, or very expensive) are only to be found in a few university or theological libraries. A minority of those selected are of a more popular nature and to be found in mainstream bookshops (new and secondhand). Nearly all of these works may be considered accessible for research by academics. A few major entries from this reference category have already been included and annotated in the body of the preceding text of Part 1.

The quantity of such works is astonishing but the quality of the information offered, at least for the two subjects under review here, is very variable and, occasionally, closer to Chinese whispers than to documented facts or opinions. Such uncritical generalisations and repetitions of misleading information or inaccuracies is to be deplored. In the following brief analysis, therefore, credit is offered where credit is due and other observations where appropriate. The assessments relate to the entries (on SSB, Shirdi Sai Baba and, sometimes, the Sai Baba Movement) rather than to the whole work in which the entries are published.

\*\*

#### 1981

White, Charles, S.J. 'Satya Sai Baba', in Crim, Keith *et al* (eds.), *Abingdon Dictionary of Living Religions*, Nashville, Abingdon, 1981, p. 659.

A short account of the salient characteristics of a quarter of a century ago, when SSB had already been active for almost 40 years. White describes his instant rise to guru status after declaring himself to be (Shirdi) Sai Baba, the emphasis on miracles over teachings, the lack of proof of fraud, the charitable work, especially in the field of education, a growing overseas following because of SSB's charisma and the perceived similarities with Jesus Christ [claimed by SSB himself].

"More than through his teaching, Satya Sai Baba is famous because of his miracles ..." and "... he has an international following – including Westerners – for many of whom he resembles the Christian Savior. These followers seem drawn as much by his dynamic attractive personality as by the uncanny happenings which occur around him."

"It would appear that for his followers, Satya Sai Baba assumes the combined role of deity, guru, and saint not bound by the Hindu tradition alone. [SSB's unequivocal and repeated early direct claims of divinity go unmentioned by White.] Worship focused upon his portrait or idol is the practice of Satya Sai Baba groups scattered around the world."

#### 1984

*The Penguin Dictionary of Religions*, ed. John R. Hinnells, London, Penguin, p. 280.

A sketchy column of 11 lines, which mentions: "one of India's best-known gurus";

“has only a few followers in America and Europe”; the trauma followed by the Sai Baba Declaration; his fame is “largely due to miracles.” “These, he says, are merely to persuade people to learn of his real aim: which is the teaching and spread of DHARMA.” A short list of SSB’s moral teachings is offered.

### 1986

Braswell, George W., Jr., *Understanding Sectarian Groups in America*, Nashville, Broadman Press.

In a chapter on Hinduism in America, “Sai Baba” is mentioned as one of several Hindu-derived groups which were formed in USA after World War II (and especially in the 1960s and 1970s), and which “appealed to those seeking spirituality, therapeutic measures, consciousness-raising experiences” (p. 366).

### 1989

*The Rider Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion*, London, Rider, 1989.

*The Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion*, Boston, Shambhala, 1989.

[These are both from a translation of a 1986 German original.]

The only listing is of Sai Baba of Shirdi (p. 294), a good cameo portrait in a few lines, followed by a disclaimer: not to be confused with SSB (7 column lines), “his followers claim that he is a reincarnation of Sai Baba of Shirdi”. This common misconception that the followers rather than SSB himself are primarily responsible for the Divine identification is echoed in many works of reference.

### 1991

1. *Who’s Who of World Religions*, ed. John R. Hinnells, London, Macmillan, p. 355.

a) Sai Baba of Shirdi (1856?- 1918) (Iain M. P. Raeside)

A good concise description, ending with “The temple trust is one of the richest in Maharashtra. The current SATHYA SAI BABA built his reputation on a claim to be his reincarnation, and both are believed by their followers to be avatars of Dattatreya.” [This only hints at the fact that the two Associations are separate.]

b) Sai Baba, Sathya (Eileen Barker)

Another basically accurate introduction of 34 column lines.

“Possibly the best known of India’s ‘miracle-workers’, with an estimated 50 million devotees around the world.” [The figure seems excessive.]

His teachings and the attraction of darshan for visitors.

Childhood legends; trauma; declaration as Sai Baba of Shirdi. “Later he claimed to be Krishna incarnate.” Fame for miracles, healing, “raising the dead and, it is claimed, transcending the dimensions of space and time to bless seekers and sufferers in far-off places.”

2. *Harper’s Encyclopedia of Mystical and Paranormal Experience*, Rosemary Ellen Guiley, San Francisco, HarperSanFrancisco, 1991, pp. 525-527.

With a length of 1,200 words, this is by far the most detailed reference entry of the ones listed in this Appendix. Given the parameters of this work of reference, it is not surprising that most of the essay on ‘Sai Baba (b. 1926)’ is concerned with the types of alleged miracles and paranormal events described in the works of Haraldsson, Kasturi, Murphet, Schulman and Sandweiss (the references named at the end of the article). However, the accumulation of information presented here goes beyond that necessary in an independent work of reference.

More suitable for hagiographical listing are the following:

a) some of the spectacular-sounding miracles, especially the production of liquids, postage stamps and business cards, which seem to be limited to early reports of SSB's activities. (Nevertheless, the mention of his frequently reported early trances is certainly worth recording when dealing with alleged paranormal activity).

b) isolated alleged examples like the following:

Two kilogrammes of vibhuti spilling out of 'Sai Baba's' (split) foot.

"Once he was found to have a nest of scorpions living in his bushy hair"; "business cards bearing his name appear to be freshly printed" – as if this were a frequent ongoing occurrence.

c) unreferenced major claims:

(i) "75 per cent of devotees claim to have seen or received apports" (p. 526).

(ii) "He produces a **steady stream of apports** with a wave of his hand. They include **huge quantities** of *vibuti* ..." (p. 526). [bold type added]

The final quarter of the essay is devoted to the many periods of patient fieldwork on SSB carried out over several years by parapsychologist Haraldsson with occasional assistance from a few academic colleagues. The following disclaimer is welcome, especially in view of the 'open' conclusions of Haraldsson's book, which have always been taken by SSB's devotees as proof of the genuineness of SSB's avataric omnipotence:

"He has been the object of limited study by Western psychical researchers, who have been unable to prove the validity of his paranormal feats, but have not uncovered any evidence of fraud." (p. 525) Later, the entry is more specific about the difficulties faced by the parapsychologists: "Sai Baba refused to submit to controlled experiments to test his psi abilities ..." (p. 527). In spite of this, Guiley reports that "the scientists witnessed twenty to forty apports per day", without mentioning a time frame (p. 527).

The brief biographical coverage calls for a few comments. The 'original Sai Baba' is dealt with too summarily as "a middle-class Brahmin fakir at the turn of the century" who had "produced astounding miracles", with no indication of his large following in India and elsewhere since 1918. However, in partial mitigation of this omission, this expository essay makes it quite clear, in explanation of the name Sathya Sai Baba, that "*Sai* is a Muslim term for "saint" and *baba* is a Hindi term of respect for "father" (p. 525).

As for Sathya Sai Baba, there is no mention of his divine claims, merely the familiar incomplete statement: "His followers believe he is God."

The following paragraph is an inaccurate conflation and paraphrase of different pieces of evidence: "From the 1950s to 1970s, Sai Baba had numerous opponents. A government investigation of him was proposed, but never undertaken. By the early 1970s, the criticism abated. [The *Bangalore University Committee* was not constituted until 1976.] At the same time, Sai Baba grew more serious and moody. He began to perform fewer miracles and spend more time preaching about the love of God."

In the final paragraph of the essay, the compiler correctly draws attention to Haraldsson's observation that "Sai Baba's precognitive predictions are not always accurate ... and ... not all his cures work." She could also have usefully added, as further evidence of the often neglected critical discoveries presented by Haraldsson in his much-read and quoted book, that in Chapter 26 he offers evidence which seriously questions two of the most spectacular paranormal claims constantly made in the hagiographical literature and by the SSO: the 'resurrections' of Ramakrishna and Cowan by SSB.

(The book has been reissued in 2006, with a new publisher and title: *Encyclopedia of the Strange, Mystical, and Unexplained*, New York, Gramercy.)

3. Berger, Arthur S. and Berger, Joyce, *The Encyclopedia of Parapsychology and Psychological Research*, New York, Paragon House, 1991, p. 377.

This is a more academically-oriented encyclopedia on paranormal matters but the SSB entry offers far less than the preceding 1991 entry by Guiley. The basics are quickly dealt with: the familiar half-truth: “is believed by many, especially in India, to be an avatar – a divine incarnation”. His 1940 trauma is reduced to “many hours”. Although the self-declaration as the reincarnation of Shirdi Sai Baba is acknowledged, SSB’s claims to be *the* avatar, Shiva, etc., slip under the academic radar here. The particular focus is on SSB’s miracles and the few parapsychological professionals who have tried to investigate SSB, most notably Haraldsson, but also Osis, Chari and Thalbourne. SSB’s refusal to submit to tests is mentioned as is the failure of the (inevitably non-scientific, in most cases) subsequent investigations to prove fraud. Other important investigations and reports like those of the Indian Rationalists go unmentioned.

In the same volume, there are useful potted biographies of the academic careers of Haraldsson, Osis and Chari, all of whom have written about SSB.

## 1992

1. *Contemporary Religions. A World Guide*, ed. Ian Harris *et al*, London, Longman. On p. 311, we find the following short entry: “Satya Sai Baba Satsang”:

“Satya Sai Baba claims to be the reincarnation of the nineteenth century mystic Sai Baba, and also an *avatar* of the Indian God Vishnu. His teaching is traditionally Hindu. However, he is best known as a “miracle worker” or magician who regularly “materializes” sacred ash and other objects ... including gold watches”.

“There are many tales of his supernatural powers, such as telepathy, precognition, and weather control, but some of these have been disproved.”

p. 55: (John Brockington) “In addition, a number of movements deriving more or less directly from Hinduism have established themselves in the Western world: the International Society for Krishna Consciousness ....., the followers of Satya Sai Baba or of Rajneesh and so on.”

p. 56, “While the majority of Hindu temples in Britain are based on mainstream Hindu practice ..., other represent different organizations (such as the Swaminarayan Hindu Mission, the Satya Sai Baba Fellowship [*sic*] ...”

2. *Chambers Dictionary of Beliefs and Religions*, Chambers, Edinburgh / New York, 1992. A few lines: “wonder-worker”, very popular, preaches an eclectic form of bhakti Hinduism. His miracles are a means to spread his teachings.

A mention of the (important) “trance-like religious experience at age 14” which lead to his claim to be the reincarnation of Shirdi Sai Baba (but no details of the latter saint).

On the debit side, the following statements ignore the well documented worldwide spread of SSB’s fame and influence: “he has never brought his teaching [*personally*] to the West”, “he remains with his sizeable following in India.”

3. Drury, Nevill, *Dictionary of Mysticism and the Esoteric Traditions*, Santa Barbara, ABC-CLIO.

A short piece on Shirdi Sai Baba, slightly enlarged in a different book in **2002 (q.v.)**.

## 1994

*Macmillan Dictionary of Religion*, ed. Michael Pye, London, Macmillan.

Sai Baba Movement (p. 233): a few lines:

“Focussed on the figure of Sathya Sai Baba”; “said to be both an incarnation of Shirdi

Sai Baba and of Shiva; “renowned for his thaumaturgical powers” with followers in India and abroad. References: Mangalwadi, Babb and Sharma (1986).

### 1995

*The Collins Dictionary of Religion*, San Francisco, HarperCollins, 1995.

“Satya Sai Baba: a modern Hindu religious leader. Born in South India and reported author of many miracles, **he is regarded by his followers** as a reincarnation of Sai Baba of Shirdi (a similar but earlier figure from Maharashtra) and an earthly manifestation of Shiva and Shakti.” [Bold type added.]

### 1996

1. Beyerstein. Dale, ‘Sai Baba’, in *The Encyclopedia of the Paranormal*, ed. G.Stein, New York, Prometheus, pp. 653-657. [See main text entry under Beyerstein.]

2. *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*, Vol 2, ed. J. Gordon Melton, Detroit, Gale.

SaiBaba (p.1120)

Half a column of useful description of Shirdi Sai Baba.

Satya Sai Baba (p.1129)

Two thirds of a column. A fair précis based on Murphet, Schulman, Haraldsson and others. Rare emphasis on the fact that that the spread of SSB’s fame owes a lot to his writings (Discourses) and books written about him (by devotees). On the debit side: no mention of SSB’s divine claims and, once again, the coy statement that “he is regarded by many devotees as a divine avatar”.

3. Ankerberg, John and Weldon, John, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*, Oregon, Harvest House. [Information taken from <http://www.apologeticsindex.org/s11.html>]

“Sai Baba is the founder of the Sathya Sai Baba Society, and is perhaps the dominant guru in India, having over 20,000,000 followers in that nation; through his writings [sic] he is also having an impact in America.”

4. Bilimoria, Purushottama, *The Hindus and Sikhs in Australia*, Canberra, Australian Government Publishing Service, pp. 34-35.

Listed as “perhaps the most popular guru among Hindus in Australia”, “not without his own controversies in India”, but with “supposed power to perform miracles”, SSB is seen as having appealing teachings and as stimulating educational and service activities.

### 1997

1. Hinnells, John R., *The New Penguin Handbook of Living Religions*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London, Penguin, 1997.

On p. 306, seven lines on Sathya Sai Baba, among a number of gurus: “often regarded by their followers as incarnations of the deity”; self-claimed incarnation of Shirdi Sai, renowned for miracles. Nil on Shirdi Sai Baba.

2. By the same editor and publisher, the equally bulky *Penguin Dictionary of Religions*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1997 (p. 441) offers a different 8 lines on “Sai Baba” by Eileen Barker which offer a reasonable thumbnail sketch but with no mention of divine claims. There is no entry for the academically more studied Shirdi Sai.

### 3. *Encyclopedia Britannica* (See also under 2006.)

In the 1997 printed edition of the 15th edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, neither Sathya, nor even the more (academically) established Shirdi, score a mention in the Index. In the CD-ROM version of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, one has to search a little before coming across a short reference, under 'Hinduism Abroad', where Sathya is linked with Rajneesh (Osho) in a rather Brahminical tone of dismissal:

"In recent years, many new gurus, such as Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh and Satya Sai Baba, have been successful in making converts in Europe and the United States. The very success of these gurus, however, has produced material profits that many people regard as incompatible with the ascetic attitude appropriate to a Hindu spiritual leader; in some cases, the profits have led to notoriety and even legal prosecution."

On that same page of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the Hare Krishna Movement is given 8 lines of space.

4. In *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, edited by John Bowker (1997), on p. 838, the heading 'Sai Baba' is followed by:

"1. Hindu spiritual guide and miracle (siddha/siddhi) worker. He died in 1918 and was recognised as one who had direct experience of reality and truth – so much so that many regard him as a manifestation (avatar) of God. He lived by paradox – e.g. neither writing nor reading, yet displaying mastery of texts – and exhibited the characteristics of a holy fool. He is known as Sai Baba of Shirdi to differentiate him from the following:

"2. Sai Baba (b. 1926) of the ashrama Prasanti Nilayam, who is believed by his followers (now worldwide) to be a reincarnation of the first Sai Baba. He too is well-known for his miraculous powers." (References: Murphet and Osborne)

### 1998

Klostermaier, Klaus K., *A Concise Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, Oxford, Oneworld, p. 167.

The short 100-word presentation of Sathya Sai Baba mentions his avataric claims, his miracles, his many followers and charitable works. A photograph of SSB at darshan takes up more space than the text. Of Shirdi Sai Baba there is no mention.

### 1999

Chryssides, George, *Exploring New Religions*, London, Cassell, 1999, pp. 179-192.

A substantial 13-page article on 'Sai Baba' appears in Chapter 5 ('New Religions in the Hindu Tradition') of this encyclopedic introductory textbook on New Religious Movements. It includes basic information on both gurus. This major essay has been included and annotated in the main body of the text of this Part of the Bibliography.

### 2000

Klostermaier, Klaus K., *Hinduism. A Short History*, Oxford, Oneworld, p. 276.

The scholarly author of this acclaimed study presents, without comment – possibly tongue-in-cheek, but how can one tell? – a paragraph on the miraculous claims of this 'colorful' contemporary saint. He occasionally drops the academically guarded 'claims to' and 'is said to' and appears to endorse SSB's claims with phrases like 'dispenses his miraculous powers'; "The 'sacred ashes' which he now creates ..."; and "he also creates photographs of his holy person out of nowhere..."



## 2001

1. Chryssides, George, *Historical Dictionary of New Religious Movements*, Lanham, Maryland, The Scarecrow Press.

In this comprehensive work of reference, the short articles on Sathya Sai Baba (pp. 285-286) and Shirdi Sai Baba (p. 296) are disappointing. They reveal the same weaknesses as the author's much longer 1999 essay, offering the half-truth that devotees believe that SSB is 'God incarnate' and 'divine', as if he himself had not vociferously and repeatedly proclaimed this decades ago and as if his SSO had not promoted this Divine image in their publications and publicity. Dr. Chryssides also repeats his previous error that SSB advocates four basic principles (instead of five).

In the short item on Shirdi Sai Baba, the author again makes inappropriate use of the cautious "is believed to be" construction rather than stating, as he does in his fascinating initial Chronology from 1744 to the present (on p. xxvi), that in 1940 SSB "proclaims himself as the returned Sai Baba of Shirdi".

Also, the (two item) Bibliography offered for Shirdi Sai Baba is inadequate in a work of this calibre and potential readership. It fails to take into account three scholarly works (by Rigopoulos, Shepherd and Warren) and a number of important Indian publications. Another very well known book on Shirdi Sai (that of Arthur Osborne) is wrongly included in the Sathya Sai Baba section.

This reference book was reprinted by the same publisher in 2006 as a paperback and under the new title *The A to Z of New Religious Movements*.

2. Bilimoria, Purushottama, 'The Making of the Hindu in Australia; A Diasporic Narrative', in T. S. Rukmani (ed.), *Hindu Diaspora. Global Perspectives*, Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal, 2001, pp. 3-33 (p. 23 on SSB)

A condensed repetition of the 1996 remarks at a 1997 conference.

## 2002

1. Lochtefeld, James G., *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, 2 vols., New York, Rosen Publishing Group, 2002.

This specialist work offers succinct and accurate information absent from many other reference works. In Vol. 2, p. 583, under 'Sai Baba', readers are conveniently warned that the name is used for two charismatic Hindu teachers, "now distinguished by the addition of other names". This alone could illuminate those who still insist on writing about *The Sai Baba Movement* as if it were a single entity.

The treatment of SSB (Vol. 2: 605), Shirdi Sai Baba (p. 631 – and *Ibid* a paragraph on the town of Shirdi, which has "become an important religious pilgrimage place"), and 'Godman' (p. V. 1: 253) are equally helpful, and, among the many reference book entries examined, offer special value for the price of the work.

In the succinct Godman article of two thirds of a column, descriptions like 'high-profile presence', 'claims to advanced spiritual attainments', 'sometimes claim to possess magic powers' and 'their success stems more from their personal qualities than the strength of their spiritual lineage', plus the observation that large numbers of foreign disciples can bring wealth and enhanced prestige are followed by the author's chosen contemporary example: SSB.

In two thirds of a column, Sathya Sai Baba is described as a "modern Hindu teacher and religious figure who presides as religious teacher (guru) over millions of devotees (*bhakta*), both Indian and foreign". His incarnation claim gave him "religious authority" and "obviated the need to accept a human guru and a spiritual lineage". Also covered are SSB's announcement of a third incarnation to succeed him, his "supposed magic powers,

particularly the ability to heal and to materialize objects from thin air” “as the basis of his fame”, and even the useful India-centric insight that “some observers are highly skeptical about his reputed powers and about [Sathya] Sai Baba in general”. (Three articles by L. Babb are cited.)

Shirdi Sai Baba (two thirds of a column) has also been given his due: “Hindu ascetic religious teacher”, “dressed in the manner of a Muslim **faqir**”. “Although he referred to himself as Sai Baba, he is now usually called Shirdi Sai Baba, to distinguish him from Sathya Sai Baba, another religious leader who claims to be Shirdi Sai Baba’s reincarnated form.”

The ‘Introduction to Hinduism’ is also very useful (pp. vi-xii). In fact, Lochtefeld’s compendium came as a breath of fresh air in the investigation of this sub-genre.

2. Kent, Alexandra, ‘The Sathya Sai Baba Movement’, in *Encyclopaedia of the World’s Religions*, Ed. Melton Gordon [sic] and Martin Baumann, Oxford: ABC-Clio Publishers, 2002. [The title of this 4-volume work is in fact *Religions of the World. A Comprehensive Encyclopedia of Beliefs and Practices*, eds. J. Gordon Melton and Martin Baumann, Santa Barbara / Oxford, ABC-CLIO, 2002.]

A reasonable account (for 2002 – possibly written in 2000) of SSB’s teachings, the organisational framework behind him, the educational establishments and the forms of worship by his devotees in Malaysia. Clearly stated are SSB’s claim to be Shirdi Sai Baba, following a “seizure” and the author’s impression that “Above all, it is a conviction about Sai Baba’s paranormal powers that is the hallmark of a devotee”.

In a cautious short paragraph, about “some controversy”, Kent mentions “a personal crusade” by “at least one organisation in India” [the Rationalists], the release [on the Internet] of some videos of Sai Baba performing “faked” materialisations and “stories about sexual harassment”. She concludes that “Generally, the movement has been unmarred by these accusations”. On the debit side, there is no mention of SSB’s charisma or his insistent claims to be God and avatar, and no explanation that Shirdi Sai also has a strong following and a separate Association (or Movement). The Sources list is limited to four items: Kasturi [why only three volumes?] and the SSO Guidelines, plus 2 academic contributions (Bowen and Klass).

3. Lewis, James R., *The Encyclopedia of Cults, Sects, and New Religions*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., New York, Prometheus Books.

A very idiosyncratic presentation of highly selective data. The column on page 629 is only identified with the puzzling heading ‘The S. A. I. Foundation’ and the first paragraph, in addition to linking this organisation with Satya Sai Baba speaks of alleged “miracles and related miraculous visions”. This is followed by the information that “His followers identify Sai Baba as the Lord of Serpents, Sheshiasa” (an arcane Hindu morsel also offered by Chryssides in his 1999 essay, possibly obtained from his prominent devotee-writer informant, Dr. Gadhia). Lewis offers nothing on SSB’s divine claims, except that some of the remaining followers of Sai Baba of “Shridi’ [sic, twice] were impressed by SSB when he proclaimed his reincarnation. The four Hindu bases of the movement quoted by Lewis are not those most commonly cited and we are misinformed that darshans are only held on Thursdays in Prasanthi ‘Nidayan’ [Nilayam]. The origins of the American SSO are traced to lectures and a film at the University of California (Santa Barbara) in 1967, which seems to be a major telescoping of the varied events and encounters of that important period for the SSO. (Readers are offered a reference to the (first) SSO Internet website, but its URL is misspelled.)

4. Drury, Nevill, *The Dictionary of the Esoteric*, London, Watkins.

From the author of 40 books and guides in spiritual and New Age topics, comes a third of a column on Sai Baba [=Shirdi Sai] from 'Hisderabad'. It concentrates on the healing properties of the ash from his fire, miracles and the "ability to astral travel and predict the future". The shrine is a centre of pilgrimage.

**2003**

1. Smith, David, *Hinduism and Modernity*, Oxford, Blackwell.

Chapter 11 of this university textbook offers a general introduction on Gurus, who "may claim to be the supreme deity, or ... an *avatara* of the supreme deity" or of a previous guru ("which was the initial position of Sathya Sai Baba" with 'Sirdi [sic] Sai Baba' (p. 172). Smith later includes a paragraph of very basic information on SSB: "the most famous living godman" who performs "well-publicized miracles" to support his claims to be an incarnation of Shiva and Shakti (p. 179). His charitable works and worldwide following are also mentioned.

2. *World Religions. A Source Book*, London, Flame Tree.

In a 10 line section on Saints in this pocket handbook, the mention of Sai Baba on p. 28 may be taken, in context, as a reference to Shirdi Sai Baba only.

**2004**

1. *Encyclopedia of New Religions. New Religious Movements, Sects and Alternative Spiritualities*, ed. Christopher Partridge, Oxford, Lion, pp. 179-180.

'The Satya Sai Baba Society' (written by David Burnett) contains five paragraphs which need to be treated with caution (although after repeating some of the childhood legends, including the alleged miracles, the author adds helpfully, "though critics have queried their veracity").

Following rapid fame, SSB built an ashram in "a village outside Puttaparthi". The following seems overstated, or perhaps conflates remote SSB legends with the present situation. "Today, devotees come to experience 'Sai power' which not only manifests miracles, but also allows telepathy and spiritual surgery."

The worldwide following of SSB is incorrectly characterised, with the large and influential English-speaking membership totally ignored: "... millions of followers in India and among Asian communities in Europe and North America ..."

The entry contains a few unacknowledged debts to Chryssides' 1999 essay (including Chryssides' undetected typographical oversight in the name 'Sathyanarayana Rajuin' [for ... Rajuin...]).

"He is considered to be an incarnation of a previous guru ..."

There are five principles, not four.

The following debatable speculation is also directly inspired by a Chryssides paragraph: "The Satya Sai Baba Society has not had the same level of criticism as some groups, possibly because Sai Baba has fewer Western followers." (In fact, SSB has had many Western followers and Centres for over three decades but since the year 2000 some of them have left the fold and have been publishing critical analyses and allegations about SSB on the Internet.)

2. *Contemporary Hinduism. Ritual, Culture, and Practice*, ed. Robin Rinehart, Santa Barbara, ABC-CLIO.

This includes a few facts about the Hindu diaspora. The only specific reference to SSB followers is a brief mention of the establishment of the movement in Trinidad in the

mid-1970s (p. 389).

## 2005

### 1. Srinivas, Smriti

‘Sai Baba Movement’, in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, ed. Lindsay Jones *et al*, Vol. 12, Macmillan Reference USA (Thomson Gale), 2005, pp 8026-29.

This major essay is listed and annotated in the main body of Part 1.

### 2. Sharma, Arvind, *Modern Hindu Thought. An Introduction*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press.

A single point, very diplomatically phrased, on page 54, would seem to cast doubt on the Shiva reincarnation claim:

“Image-worship continues virtually unaffected, and the doctrine of incarnation has been extended to include non-Hindu figures such as Jesus Christ [footnote to K.M.Sen, *Hinduism*, p. 73] – it has gained a certain vogue in Saiva theology, which is traditionally less characterized by a doctrine of incarnation compared to the Vaisnava. The modern God-man, Sathya Sai Baba, for instance, is regarded as an incarnation of Siva.” [The footnote here is not to Swallow or others but to devotee H. Murphet’s *Sai Baba, Avatar, “passim”*.]

## 2006

### 1. Kent, Alexandra, ‘Sai Baba Movement’ and ‘Sai Baba, Sathya’ in *Encyclopedia of New Religious Movements*, ed. Peter Clarke, London, Routledge, 2006, pp. 495-498.

This small encyclopedia appears to be aimed at the general reader and will probably find its way onto the reference shelves of many Public Libraries. The section on the ‘Sai Baba Movement’ (“Founder: Sathya Sai Baba” – Shirdi Sai Baba is not mentioned) is a useful potted introduction to the ‘Sri Sathya Sai Organisation’, but with references to Babb (1983), Bowen, Kent (2000 PhD) and Klass, none of which is likely to be found in the average Public Library.

The following section on ‘Sai Baba, Sathya’ is also a fair presentation of the guru for the targetted general audience but the few references are not the most easy to obtain: Kasturi’s books and the academic article by Swallow are not normally found in Public Libraries. Missing: a reference to at least one of the freely available Internet websites of the SSO (for SSB’s Discourses and other information, including Kasturi’s book) and an equally accessible reference to the prevailing Internet controversies.

### 2. *Britannica Encyclopedia of World Religions*, Chicago [etc.], 2006.

This cutting edge publication reveals what the equally expensive online version of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* fails to divulge to its readers. (Online subscribers may not approve of this commercial packaging decision.)

Sathya Sai Baba (p. 971): A strange few lines, which take the miracles for granted, include at least two glaring inaccuracies but at least mention SSB’s charitable works and the fact that he has detractors.

Shirdi Sai Baba (p. 1002): This is a much more acceptable entry, possibly reflecting the greater academic ‘respectability’ of Shirdi Sai and the several penetrating scholarly studies of his life and work which are available. (However, the insistence on 1836 as “generally agreed” as Shirdi’s date of birth runs the risk of being disputed by Shirdi scholars.)

### 3. Rodrigues, Hillary P., *Introducing Hinduism*, New York, Routledge, 2006, pp. 332-333, and p. 337.

In this textbook for students of religion, the brief description of SSB is not included in

Chapter 16 (Hinduism and the West), which deals mainly with Indian spiritual leaders who personally took their messages to other countries (like Vivekananda, Yogananda, Maharishi, etc.) but in Chapter 17 (Select Themes in Hinduism).

pp. 332-3:

From a “virtually unlimited number of persons that might be discussed” under the author’s rubric ‘Some noteworthy figures in contemporary Hinduism’, two “relatively high profile” ones are chosen as Case Studies, “to whom Hindus turn for spiritual inspiration and guidance”. These are Satya Sai Baba (two paragraphs) and the Shankaracharyas (one paragraph)

In the first paragraph, Rodrigues notes SSB’s claim to be the incarnation of Sai Baba of Shirdi and offers a good brief introduction to the latter. In her 12-line description of SSB, she refers to his great fame, his apparent miracles and the “vast network” of social service organisations run by his Organisation in keeping with his teachings. The usual failure to acknowledge SSB’s self-proclaimed divinity (“devotees regard him as God”) is accompanied by brief references to current criticisms: “His detractors recognise [*his materialisations*] as simple magician’s tricks”, and sexual allegations which “continue to tarnish his image”.

The Further Reading list on p. 337 merely offers four items for students’ further enlightenment: two best-selling hagiographical accounts by Diane Baskin and Phyllis Krystal, Ruhela’s 1976 anthology of opinions and the first *seven* volumes of *Sathya Sai Speaks*. It is to the author’s credit to have mentioned SSB’s Discourses but as diligent students will discover for themselves, there are a further 28 volumes of *Sathya Sai Speaks*, all freely available on the Internet as part of the SSO’s massive recent international publicity drive for the guru who is on record as saying he doesn’t need the Internet.

(In the Discussion questions offered at the end of the chapter, there is one on SSB: “Why is Satya Sai Baba so important to contemporary Hinduism.”)

**4.** *The Brill Dictionary of Religion*, ed. Kocku von Stuckrad, Vols. II and IV, Leiden-Boston. In Vol II., p.929, Satya Sai Baba’s name is included in a group of “Missionizing NeoHindu Movements with consequences in the West”.

In Vol IV, p. 1945, under the double heading Veneration of Persons / Personality Cult, von Stuckrad offers this:

“A particular form of personality cult is found, for example, in Asia, in the manner of reverence or veneration of the religious teacher or ‘master’. In some traditions, one’s personal guru is regarded as an embodiment or incarnation of the divinity (*sad-guru*) from whom a direct transfer of power and salvation to the pupil is expected, and to whom a special reverence is accorded. Gurus like Satya Sai Baba in India, who lays claim to being a divine incarnation (Skt., *avatara*), or Sri Chinmoy ..., are not so much teachers for the few, as an object of veneration for the many.”

**5.** Guiley, Rosemary, *Encyclopedia of the Strange, Mystical, and Unexplained*, New York, Gramercy.

This is a facsimile reissue of *Harper’s Encyclopedia* (see under 1991) with a new cover and this new title.

**6.** Chryssides, George, *The A to Z of New Religious Movements*, Lanham, Maryland, The Scarecrow Press.

This is a paperback reprint of the 2001 item listed as *Historical Dictionary of New Religious Movements* by the same publisher.

## 7. (2005-2007) *Vox Populi*: The Internet Wikipedia article on Sathya Sai Baba

Wikipedia's kaleidoscopic offering on SSB became an endless series of battles of wills, where Wikipedians and a motley group of bystanders and agents provocateurs argued endlessly, not so much about evidence as about procedural points of order, like NPOV [Neutral Point of View], 'reliable sources', and other restrictive practices which ensure that the content of this and many other *controversial topics* on the shifting sands of Wikipedia are institutionally predestined to be incomplete and unreliable for researchers and the general public. After three or four voluminous Archives of 'Talk' (= Discussion) about these tactical exchanges had been bundled up and preserved for posterity, there was a final bitter fight which led to a call for an Arbitration Committee of Wikipedians to intervene and pronounce judgement on the situation. Eventually, two hyperactive antagonists, along with the beleaguered original Wikipedian author, were banished and it was left to another Wikipedian to oversee the improvement and balancing of the article, although original research will still be banned, as demanded by Wikipedia's arcane rules.

(This Wikipedia SSB controversy has had further ramifications: the unfairly penalised Wikipedian has taken refuge with his old Wikipedia materials and is preparing new articles on the Sai Baba Movement and on Sathya Sai Baba on the new Citizendium website, while his co-refugee, main adversary and tormentor has set up a separate website vigorously denouncing Wikipedia in retaliation for his expulsion while continuing to fulminate against *all* critics of SSB from his labyrinth of self-appointed apologetic websites.)

### 2007

**I.N.F.O.R.M.** [Information Network Focus on Religious Movements], London, 'About Sathya Sai Baba'. (See [www.inform.ac](http://www.inform.ac).)

This registered charity which gathers and disseminates general information about "new and / or alternative religious or spiritual movements" was founded in 1988 with funding from the British Government. It is based at the London School of Economics under the direction of Emeritus Professor Eileen Barker and is supported by the LSE with "major grants and donations from the mainstream religions, the London Metropolitan Police, Smith's Charity, J.P. Getty, the Nuffield and Wates foundations, the Jerusalem and Dulverton Trusts and other charitable organisations." It does not post its Database on the Internet but individuals are invited to write in for unbiased information on individual NRMs.

"INFORM produces a series of leaflets on movements about which it receives frequent enquiries. These include but are not limited to the Unification Church (Moonies), Paganism (Wicca and Druidry), Sai Baba, and School of Economic Science. Leaflets are available at a cost of £1 each from the INFORM office."

The updated 2-sided INFORM leaflet now offers a compact (1,500 word) introduction to Sathya Sai Baba, his devotees, worship and the worldwide Organisation. It also provides a very useful cross-section of 24 references divided into three sections: Devotional, Critical and Academic. Although the leaflet offers more (and clearer) information on post-2000 current controversies than any other short presentation in this Appendix, it fails to mention the documented criticism of SSB's Divine claims available in some of the end references. A brief reference to the significant change, after 50 years, of devotees' darshan experiences (of a wheelchair-bound SSB) in the last few years due to the guru's increasing frailty would offer a further glimpse of a changing dynamic and bring the introduction up to date.

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### **Additional References:**

Part 2 of the Sathya Sai Baba Bibliography:

<http://bdsteel.tripod.com/More/sbresearchbib2.htm>

Part 3 of the Sathya Sai Baba Bibliography:

<http://bdsteel.tripod.com/More/sbresearchbib3.htm>

‘New Factors for Researchers’:

<http://bdsteel.tripod.com/More/ssbresearchnewfactors.htm>

Home page for Sathya Sai Baba Studies: <http://bdsteel.tripod.com/More/>

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