



CHAPTER 1

Introduction



Introduction

The famous novel *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens begins with the words:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way...

.....
**IT IS POETS, WRITERS
AND ABOVE ALL
PHILOSOPHERS WHO
SEEK TO AWAKEN
OUR LARGER SENSE
OF AWARENESS AND
BREAK OUT OF THIS
“PRISON” OF LIMITED
CONSCIOUSNESS.**
.....

While the book itself was written in 1859, the period referred to in the opening paragraph goes back to 1775, when strikingly different conditions prevailed in England and in France. While England enjoyed peace and (relative) prosperity, France presented a stark contrast. Centuries of authoritarian rule by absolute monarchs supported by a small but powerful aristocracy had not only condemned most people to abject poverty and utter misery, but also converted the country into a huge mental prison bounded by walls of fear. In short, France was a powder keg waiting to explode.

Centuries have passed, and both England and France have leapt forward to become advanced industrialized countries that enable their citizens to have not only a decent standard of living but also universal healthcare. That said, the vast and deep chasm between the haves and the have-nots highlighted by Dickens continues to prevail in large swaths of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Interestingly, even America, hailed throughout the twentieth century as the ultimate example of a country where anyone could, through hard work, daring and enterprise, rise from rags to riches or even become the President, has now become almost segmented into two contrasting but coexisting “worlds.” Lately both China and India, each with a population of more than a billion, have begun to look like one country with two nations, one of them affluent and the other poor.

In many respects the situation that humanity now faces seems like a paradox, making one wonder: “Has humankind lost its way? With all the progress - material, technological and scientific - why are humans unable to abolish poverty and wipe every tear from every eye? Or is it that those with the knowledge, the resources and the ability to lift fellow humans out of misery are simply not bothered? Does that in turn mean that the world is forever doomed to be divided into two sharply contrasting parts, with periodic conflicts of some kind between the two? Is this the way ‘God has thrown the dice’ or has such a segmentation been created by the ‘winners,’ who thereafter seek to perpetuate their advantage via the philosophy that the winner necessarily takes all or at least most of it, leaving maybe some crumbs for the others?”

The crisis of inequity has been faced several times in the past. The present crisis, however, is qualitatively different, for never before in history has humanity been driven



Shown above are eight icons that represent the Millennium Development Goals, which were adopted in 2000 after a summit meeting at the U.N.

almost to the edge of the cliff. True, not everyone buys this idea. There are many (safely ensconced in their respective comfort zones) who flatly deny any crisis. According to them, all the noise about inequity is just an unreasonable cry for undeserved entitlements. At the same time, careful studies by many experts and think tanks clearly point out that exponential growth in world population combined with the rapid depletion of renewable resources plus the prospect of drastic climate change would, in the not-too-distant future, affect everyone without exception, the haves as well as the have-nots.

Resolving to do something about the looming crisis, world leaders gathered at the United Nations at the turn of the century to deliberate in depth. From these extended meetings emerged a series of Millennium Declarations that urged all countries to take the necessary corrective steps so as to arrest the impending disaster. It would thus appear that, at last, people are beginning to wake up from their “slumber.” However, the fundamental question remains whether current approaches can, even in principle, produce any meaningful solution to the massive problems now being confronted.

The doubt just expressed arises because currently all man-made problems are viewed almost exclusively from the

socioeconomic angle. Where problem solving is concerned, there is heavy reliance on socioeconomic analysis and technology. Stated differently, it is the Head that creates all the problems, and it is that same Head that is also used for finding solutions. In a book titled *Thought as a System*, the eminent physicist David Bohm says:

Thought is constantly creating problems that way and then trying to solve them. But as it tries to solve them it makes it worse because it doesn't notice that it's creating them, and the more it thinks, the more problems it creates.

In other words, if real solutions are to be found to current problems, then one must go far beyond the realm of the Head, since most of the large-scale problems now being faced are largely due to selfishness and self-interest.

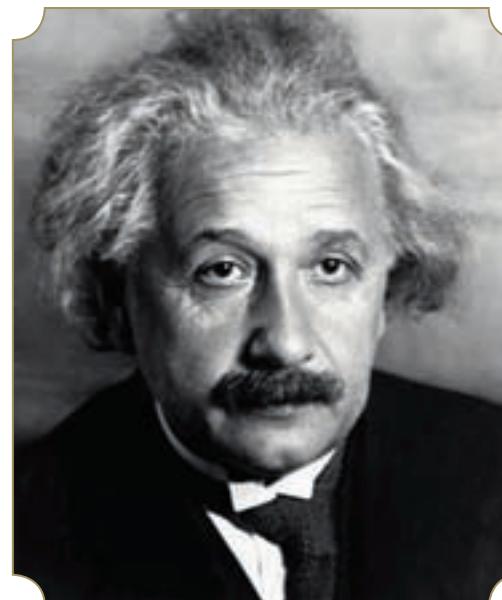
The question now becomes: “If the Head can only create problems but is helpless when it comes to solving problems, where does one turn?” While ancient philosophers have provided the answers, it is interesting that Einstein has independently outlined a clear way of getting out of the difficulty noted by Bohm. Einstein observed:

A human being is a part of the whole world, called by us “universe,” a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest - a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. The striving to free oneself from this delusion is the one issue of true religion. Not to nourish it but to try to overcome it is the way to reach the attainable measure of peace of mind.

This is an extract from a letter that Einstein wrote (in 1952) to a bereaved person. The point here is that often human thought is confined to a relatively small domain, limited by the individual’s perceptions, prejudices, selfishness, self-interest and misconceptions. A mind constrained by a narrow vision becomes a prison. As the writer Gore Vidal once remarked, few of us are aware that we are all born into some kind of an invisible prison. It is poets, writers and above all philosophers who seek to awaken our larger sense of awareness and break out of this “prison” of limited consciousness. Einstein is more explicit because he says that without such a breakout, peace of mind is not possible. The two quotes offered at the beginning of this book make this even clearer. First there is Albert Schweitzer, who said



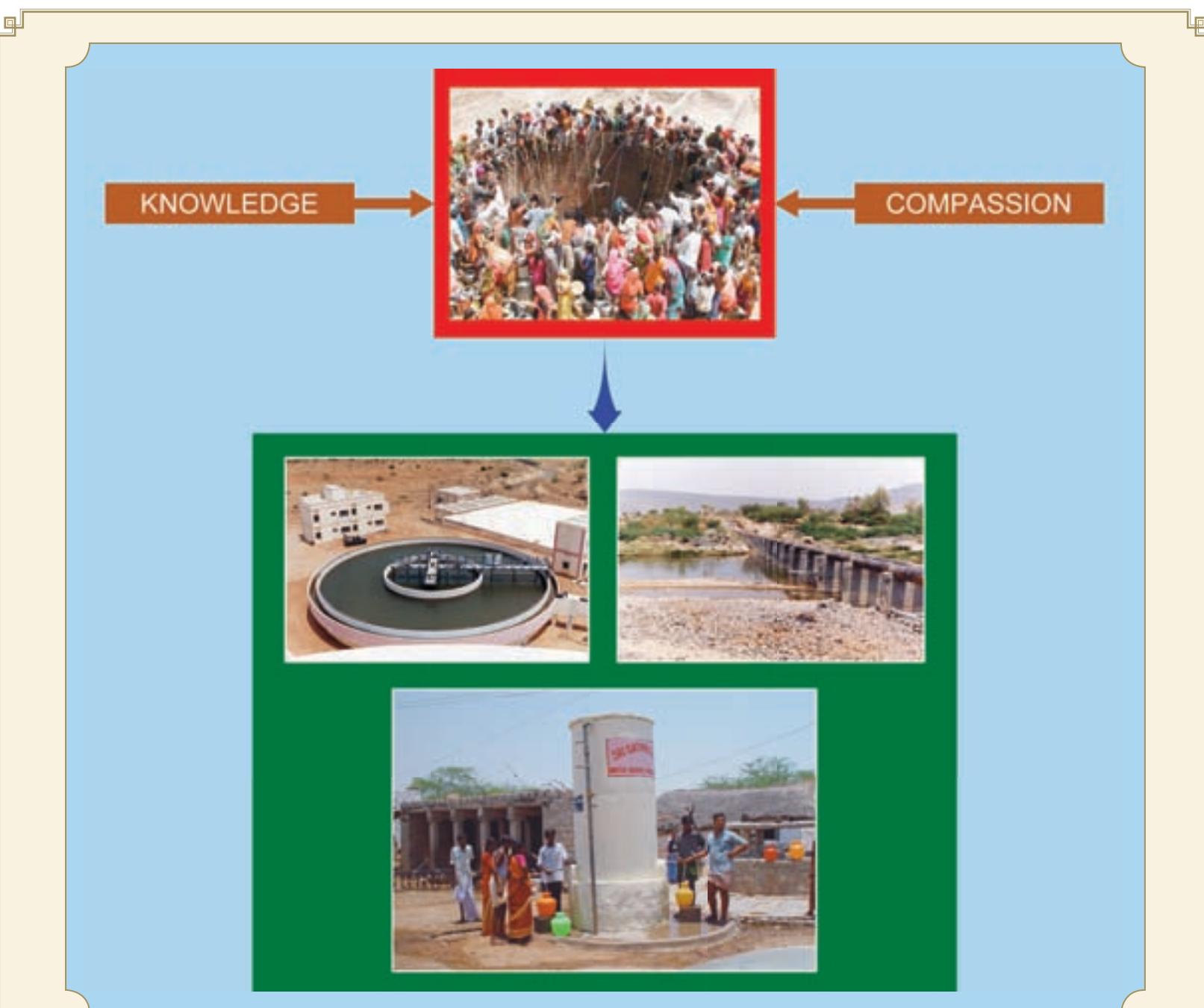
This graphic seeks to amplify Einstein's remark quoted in the text. Basically what Einstein says is that our perception of the Universe is limited by the feeling that we are separate from the Universe. If, however, the individual connects directly to consciousness (shown in blue above), then he/she can break the barrier of separation. In fact, the individual then becomes one with consciousness, and what was earlier seen as a part of the "outside" now becomes internal. More will be said on this subject in the last chapter.



that until humans extend their circle of compassion to all living beings, they will not find peace. Add to that the other opening quote from Victor Weisskopf, who identifies (worldly) knowledge and compassion as the two pillars of human civilization. It then becomes evident that in the rush toward rapid material advancement and wealth multiplication, modern society has, in a sense, lost contact with its inner roots as well as higher consciousness, in particular the virtue of compassion.

At a more practical level, it is abundantly clear that unless the individual curtails his/her personal selfishness and self-interest, it will be impossible to discover the power of compassion and further enlarge the circle of consciousness as Albert Schweitzer strongly recommends. It is such a breakthrough that would help us appreciate the importance of both knowledge and compassion that Weisskopf refers to. In other words, solutions cannot be based solely on (worldly) knowledge or compassion; what is needed is a proper blend of both. The time has come to abandon the strategy of trying to solve man-made problems relying solely on the Head. An out-of-the-box approach is needed, wherein the Head (read worldly knowledge) and the Heart (read compassion) come together in harmonious union to solve problems of inequity, conflict and mass poverty. Humans are not lifeless pawns to be moved around by remote think tanks, based on statistical data, optimization strategies, efficient resource management, etc. Like the haves, the have-nots, too, have feelings. They are not mere numbers; nor is poverty a mere parameter whose value is to be fed into complex computer programs.

It is well to remember that while humans might seek to differentiate themselves in terms of race, religion, ethnicity, language, etc., everything in our Universe was united at the



The graphic above brings together the two opening quotes of this book. As explained in the text, many problems are created largely by the human mind, which is easily corrupted by selfishness and self-interest. On the other hand, there is plenty of technology available today which, if properly applied, can solve problems. However, this is not possible unless selfishness and self-interest are abandoned and compassion is felt for those who suffer. The top photo shows how people in India often struggle to get water. The pictures at the bottom illustrate how when technology is harnessed and suitably blended with compassion, it can actually solve problems. As we shall see in detail later, Baba did this throughout his life.

instant of Creation, referred to by scientists as the Big Bang. However, when one goes beyond the mere physical to higher dimensions of human existence dealing with pain, anguish, fear, insecurity, joy, happiness, satisfaction and so on, no instrument devised by man can measure them. It is the Heart that has the key to these dimensions, the key of compassion.

Sathya Sai Baba, who is the subject of this book, showed how one must search for this key and then use it to unlock powers that can help solve problems that otherwise appear intractable. His fascinating story begins in the next chapter, which is titled *The Early Years*.

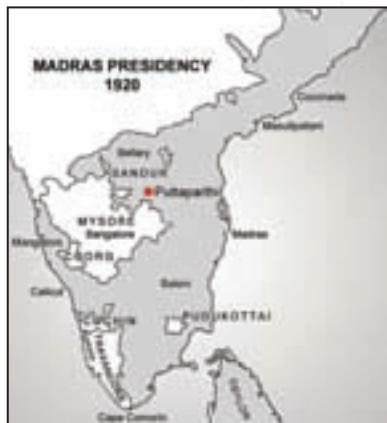


CHAPTER 2

The Early Years

1926-1950

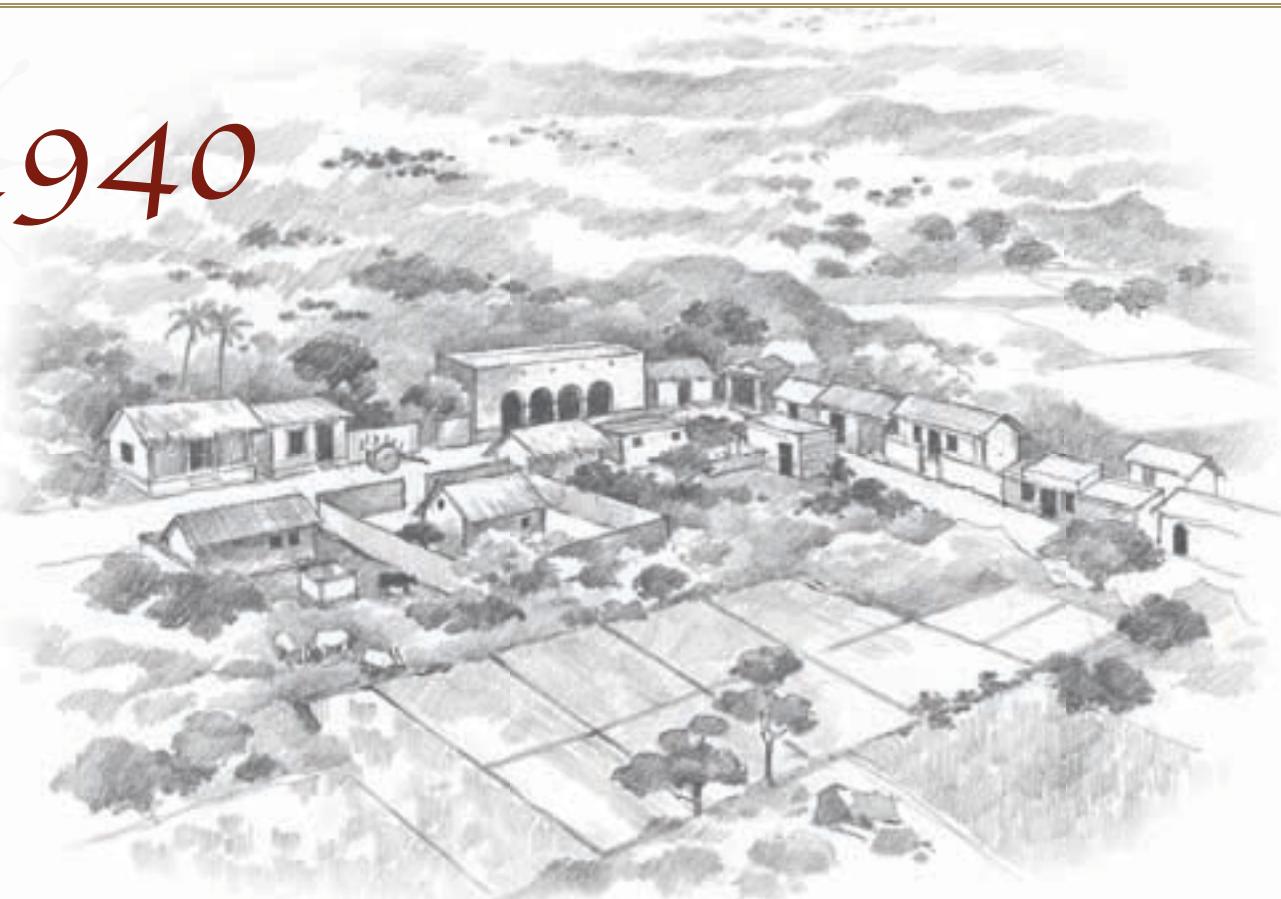
1926-1940



A map of Madras Presidency as it was at the time of Baba's birth.



Photo of the street where the house in which Baba was born was located. The hut can be seen on the left within the circle; adjacent to it is a room which served as a small shop that was run by Baba's father.



The date was November 23, 1926. On that day, in a tiny hamlet named Puttaparthi in Anantapur District of Madras Presidency in British India was born a little boy in the family of the Rajus. While the birth of a charming baby was no doubt wonderful news for the family, it was hardly noticed beyond the family and the hamlet at best.

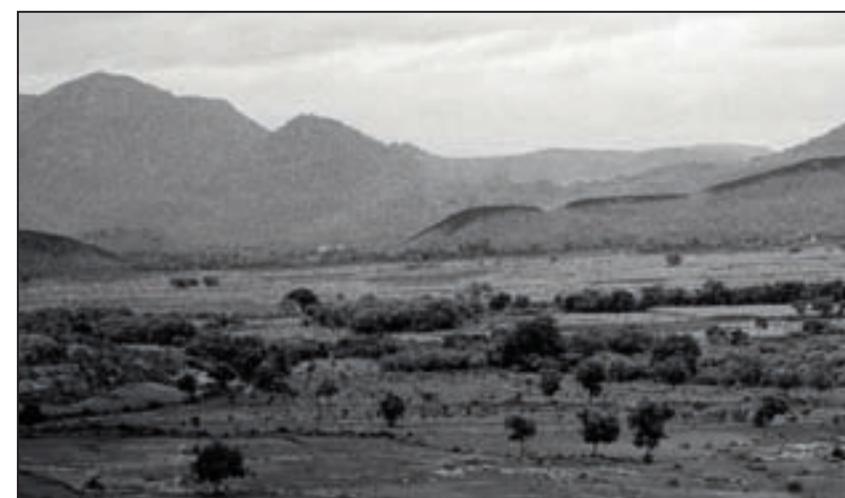
At that time, as someone later described Puttaparthi, the hamlet was just two lanes roughly at right angles, around which were clustered an assorted collection of mud huts plus a few brick-and-mortar houses. The population was around 200, and the hamlet was located not far from the Chitravathi River, which carried little water except during the rainy season. There was no direct road leading to the hamlet. To reach it, one had to first come to a village named Karnataka Nagepalli on the other side of the river and then cross the river either by a bullock cart or just walk across the sand and wade through the water, if there was any.



The backyard of Baba's house.



This picture taken several decades ago shows a bullock cart crossing the river.



A panoramic view of the landscape around Puttaparthi.

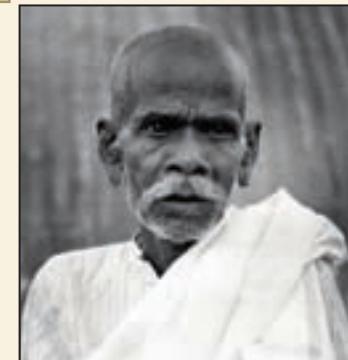
Left, an artist's sketch of an aerial view of Puttaparthi as it was in 1926, the year of Baba's birth. Back then, it was a hamlet with two short lanes roughly forming a right angle. At the junction was the property that belonged to the Raju family, consisting of a hut and a small shop adjacent to it. Seen prominently to the left of the hut is a house with arches in the front. As will be seen later in the chapter, that house belonged to Karnam Lakshminarayana, who was the head of the village. The hamlet consisted of about 50 residences, a mixture of huts and brick-and-mortar construction; the population was around 200.

Centuries ago, Puttaparthi was part of the famous Vijayanagaram Kingdom, one of whose founders was Bukka Raya. The rulers of this dynasty built many forts and monuments; the photo below shows one near Puttaparthi as it was about half a century ago.

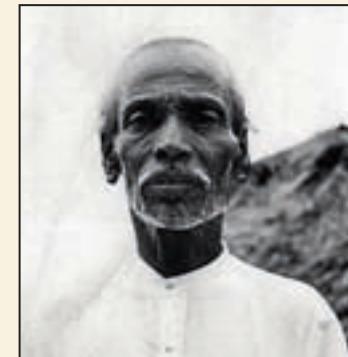
The region was generally dry and arid with many hills, largely covered with scrub forest; the river flowed in a valley among the hills. British records going back nearly 150 years note that Puttaparthi was on an elephant migration path from a region northwest to a region southeast; probably the river was a watering hole. As late as the 1940s, visitors to Puttaparthi reported occasionally seeing cheetahs drinking water in the river. There exists to this day in the scrub forest an old building known as Inspection Bungalow; during the British days it served as a resting place for forest officials on inspection duty.

The new addition to the Raju family was the son of Pedda Venkama Raju (father) and Easwaramma (mother). The baby boy was named Sathyanarayana Raju, since everyone believed that the child was truly a gift of Lord Sathyanarayana, whom the mother had ardently worshipped earlier. The family called him Sathya. Later when he grew up and had friends, they always addressed him as Raju. The Rajus were a large family, presided over by Sathya's grandfather, Kondama Raju. Though poor, the Rajus were held in high regard by the entire village, thanks largely to the matchless integrity of Kondama Raju, who was the de facto patriarch of Puttaparthi.

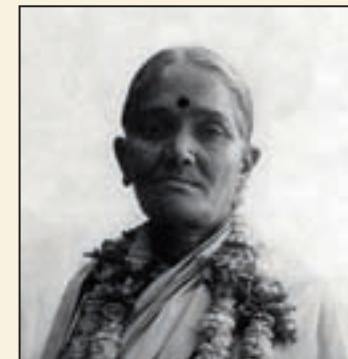
It was time for Sathya to go to school. Being what it was, Puttaparthi could afford nothing more than a pale apology for a primary school. After trying it out for a brief period, Sathya was admitted to a school in the neighboring village of Bukkapatnam. By road (i.e., via Karnataka Nagepalli on the other side of the river) the distance was about 4 miles (approximately 6 kilometers). However, all children going to the Bukkapatnam school would take a shortcut walking across open terrain and past fields. Sathya did the same, sometimes along with his friends.



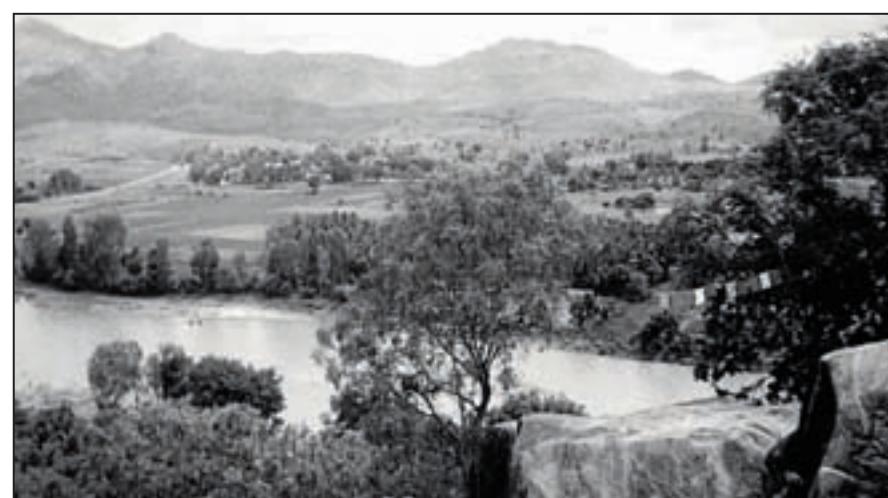
Grandfather, Kondama Raju.



Father, Pedda Venkama Raju.



Mother, Easwaramma.



A scenic view of the Chitravathi River and its surroundings.

By nature Sathya was kind and compassionate, ever ready to help. On one occasion when an old beggar appeared in front of the house and cried out that he was hungry, Sathya ran inside and brought some food that his mother had cooked but not yet served. Later when his mother, Easwaramma, noted that some food was missing, Sathya readily admitted that it was he who gave it away to an old and hungry beggar.

Taken aback, Easwaramma said, "Sathya, that food was meant for all of us. Now there is a shortage; how am I going to feed all of you at lunchtime?"

With a smile Sathya replied, "Mother, don't worry about me for I have already eaten."

"You have already eaten? How can that be? I have not served lunch yet."

"You see, Mother, when that old man ate, I ate too!"

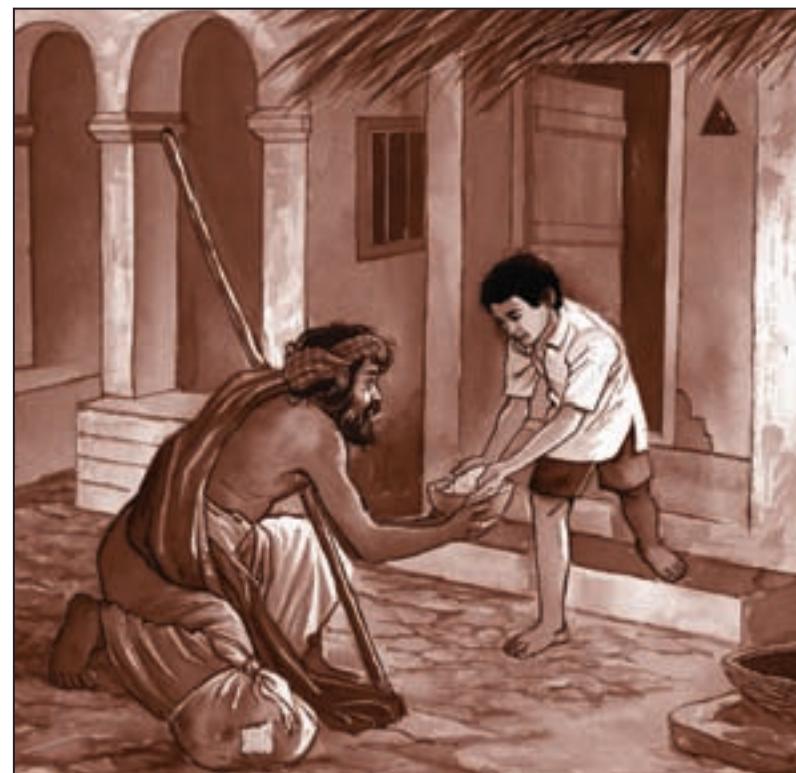
That is why you do not have to serve me food at lunchtime; what is left ought to be sufficient for the others!"

"Sathya, you are talking in riddles as you often do. I just don't understand what you are saying. All I know is that all of us will have to go a little hungry this morning."

Sathya's compassion constantly played out in various ways, often in the community. Most members of the family thought Sathya should mind his business and not get involved in outside matters. However, his grandfather Kondama Raju supported Sathya because he understood him better. Wise as he was, Kondama could easily see that Sathya was exceptional in many ways and would shape his life in a manner quite different from what people expected of the young lad.

Sathya excelled in studies. That, together with his charming disposition and the respect he unfailingly showed to elders, made him extremely popular with all, both teachers and fellow students. The latter in particular doted on Sathya because he was ever ready to help, especially by explaining lessons they found difficult to understand.

Toward the late 1930s, Sathya's elder brother, Seshama Raju, was accepted as a teacher-trainee in a respected school in a small town named Kamalapuram to the northeast of Puttaparthi and located in the neighboring Cuddapah District. Seshama had just gotten married, and his in-laws lived in Kamalapuram. Keenly conscious of Sathya's scholastic abilities, Seshama managed to convince his father that Sathya would be better off if he were admitted to the school



Sathya giving food to a beggar.

in Kamalapuram where he (Seshama) would be undergoing training. Sathya could live with him in the house of his in-laws.

Easwaramma was unhappy about this idea since she did not want Sathya to be away from her. Sathya's father, on the other hand, shared the common dream of the family that Sathya would one day go to college, get a degree and thereafter a good government job. Back then, that was the



Sathya advising villagers to desist from cockfighting since it is a cruel sport.



*Young Sathya on his way to school in the neighboring village of Bukkapatnam.
Pictures below depict how Sathya was proactive in promoting values.*

royal road to eternal job security and freedom from poverty. And so to Kamalapuram Sathya went, along with his elder brother.

Seshama Raju's in-laws were financially much better off than the Raju family and did not like the idea of Sathya living with them. However, the little lad had to be accepted since he had come with their son-in-law, who, according to existing custom, enjoyed some privileges. The dislike for the unwelcome

addition was, however, emphatically conveyed by imposing on Sathya a variety of household chores. Among these was the difficult task of bringing good drinking water daily from a well that served most people in that part of the town. It was a long haul, and since Sathya had to attend school, he had to get up early. Every day around four in the morning, a train would pass through the town without stopping. As it did, the driver of the (steam) engine would blow the whistle as a cautionary note to people walking on the track; that was Sathya's wake-up call. Quickly he would rush to the well and come back with two pots full of water. For one who was still a child, it was indeed an arduous task, especially in winter, but Sathya bore it silently and cheerfully, so as not to upset his brother.

Thanks to all the chores Sathya was burdened with, there was little time for study. However, being brilliant, he continued to shine as a student. Thus, as in Bukkapatnam, Sathya quickly became loved by all, both teachers and students. The drill master of the school, who also doubled as the scoutmaster, took a particular liking to Sathya and encouraged him to join the scout movement.



Sathya conducting a class for the uneducated youth of the hamlet.



Sathya advising a village elder to give up smoking since it is harmful.



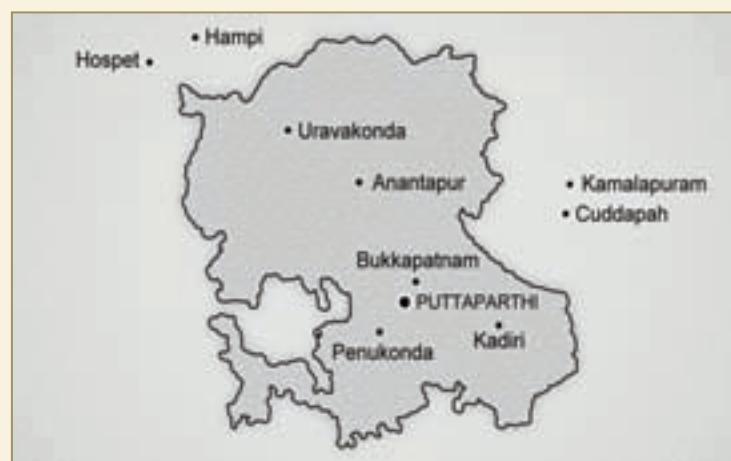
Sathya in Kamalapuram drawing drinking water from a well. He had to do this early in the morning so as not to be late for school.



Sathya carrying water back home.

Located among the hills near Kamalapuram was a small town named Pushpagiri, where a cattle fair was held every year. Although the main purpose of that fair was to encourage the sale and purchase of cattle, it also served as a small festive occasion where people came looking for some fun and bargains in the little market that always sprang up. Keeping the crowds in mind, the scoutmaster of the Kamalapuram school decided that there would be a scout camp in Pushpagiri where his boys would render service to the people attending the cattle fair. The boys were excited, and everyone assumed

that Sathya would be part of the group. However, Sathya had two problems. First, he did not have a scout uniform, and second, he had hardly any money. There was the bus fare and the meals that had to be paid for, and money was an absolute necessity. Sathya did not want to ask his elder brother for money because Seshama Raju was already supporting his education and stay. Thus, while all the other boys were excitedly discussing the forthcoming camp, Sathya remained silent and somewhat aloof. One of his classmates whose father was well off pulled Sathya aside and whispered that he could



Sketch map of Anantapur District showing some of the places connected to the early life of Baba (both within and outside the district).



The temple in Pushpagiri (above). At the top of the next page is a panoramic view of the annual cattle fair. What the photograph does not show is the bazaar that was always part of the fair, which attracted visitors. When Sathya was studying in Kamalapuram, the scoutmaster of the school arranged a service camp at the time of the fair. The text describes the difficulties Sathya had to face while going to the camp.



get a uniform stitched for Sathya while he was getting one made for himself. Sathya was deeply touched but promptly refused the offer saying, "Friendship cannot and must not be based on material give and take. If I accept your gift, it would spoil the beautiful bond of Love between you and me. I am sure you do not want that to happen."

As the day for the trip to Pushpagiri approached, the boys pestered Sathya to confirm that he would come along. Dodging them with smiles, Sathya merely said, "Let us see!" Sathya was in a quandary. He had no money; at the same time he did not want to disappoint his friends. Eventually he decided that, come what may, he would attend the camp, even if he did not have the uniform. However, he still needed money for the bus fare and the food, but where to find it?

Sathya had with him the books he had used in the previous standard/grade (the sixth), which were in very good condition. There was a boy who had just entered the sixth grade; he wanted books but could not afford to buy new ones. When he learned that he could get those books secondhand from Sathya, he straightaway offered 15 rupees for the entire collection. Appreciating the offer, Sathya replied that 5 rupees would do. The other boy was surprised but accepted the deal. Paying the amount asked for, he collected the books and left, while Sathya came back home with 5 rupees in his pocket. The moment Sathya entered the house, Seshama Raju's mother-in-law heard the jingling sound made by the coins. Realizing that Sathya had money with him, she promptly accused him of stealing the money from the house and took it all away.

That left Sathya back where he had been originally - no uniform and no cash either. Meanwhile his friends were clamoring, "Raju, come on; tell us that you are coming."

Sathya smiled and replied, "Yes, I shall come. But you go ahead first; I shall join you later." The boys were disappointed that Sathya would not be traveling with them, but at least he had said that he would be coming.

On the evening of the day before the fair Sathya left home and started walking toward Pushpagiri. By dawn he reached the outskirts of the town, and, spotting a pond, he had a wash. While walking away, he saw a small-denomination coin lying on the ground. Picking up the coin, Sathya proceeded to where the cattle fair was being held. A lottery game was in progress, and Sathya invested the coin he had earlier picked up. Thanks to a wonderful run, he won 12 times what he had first invested. It was not much, but at least something to go by. Suddenly Sathya felt that he should not have gambled and promptly returned all the money to the man running the lottery game. The latter was astounded because who would ever do such a thing? Deeply impressed, the man returned the winnings, but Sathya refused to accept the money. The owner then said, "Listen, boy, this is a game of chance. You not only won fair and square but did something unheard of, namely, return your winnings. Maybe you felt that you should not have played this game. Don't worry; lots of people who come to this fair try it because they just want some fun. If I took back your money, it would amount to cheating. You appear to be a nice boy, and you do not look as if you have a lot of money on you. Come on, take this money and along with it also my good wishes; I am sure the cash would be useful to you, at least for buying something to eat." Sathya reluctantly agreed, took back the money, and left the spot to look for his friends. Turning to those who were around him, the lottery man said, "Strange boy! I can't understand why he wanted to return the money he had won. But this much I can say – he is a very good lad."

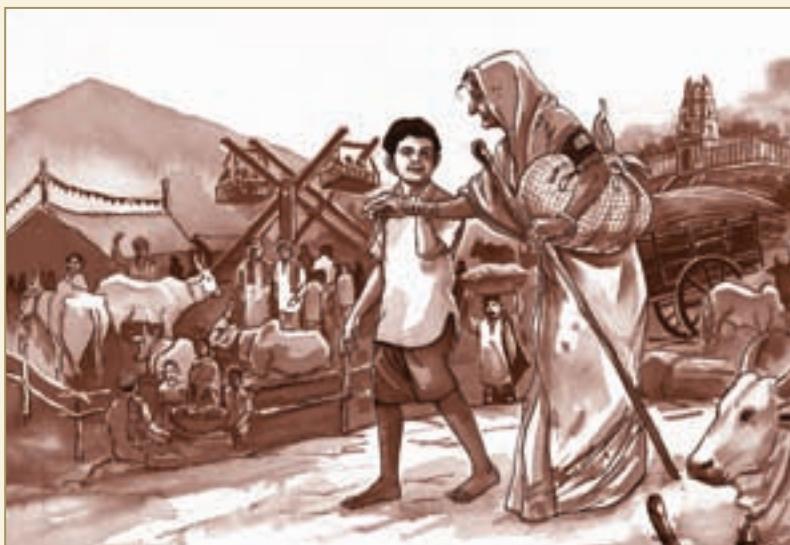
When Sathya met with his scout troop, everyone was very happy, including the scoutmaster. The master gave some instructions, after which the scouts split into small groups and plunged into service. Though not in uniform, Sathya felt very much a scout and served with great enthusiasm. At mealtime, however, Sathya would quietly slip away, for he did not have the money to buy the kind of food the other boys ate. All he had were a few coins, which he had to stretch for the entire duration of the camp. He was very frugal, spent little on food, and skipped many meals, drinking water to fill his stomach.

Sathya's mysterious absences at mealtime did not go unnoticed, and everyone worried whether he was starving. One day, the scoutmaster bluntly asked, "Raju, where were you at mealtime? All of us were looking for you. Did you have anything to eat?" Sathya had hardly eaten but gave a clever reply, "Sir, please smell my hand." The teacher bent down and smelled Sathya's hand and did smell food. The scoutmaster understood that Sathya had eaten something but was not convinced that he had had enough. However,

conscious of Sathya's sensitivity, the master left it at that.

The fair was finally over, and it was time to return. Addressing the scouts, the master praised their work and said, "Boys, if you want, you can pick up some small souvenirs to take home with you. But you must come back within half an hour, because we have to leave." Thrilled by this permission, the boys ran away merrily to do their shopping. As for Sathya, he still had some money left of the meager cash he had started with – that was how frugal he had been during his stay at the camp. With the remaining money, he decided that he would buy some small gifts for his sister-in-law, who was then expecting a baby.

After making the purchases, Sathya quietly peeled off from the shopping crowd and started the long walk back to Kamalapuram. Upon return he received a stormy welcome instead of appreciation for his gifts. Sathya's absence had created an acute water problem at home, and he was severely punished. The tiny hands were badly wounded, but throughout the beating, he did not cry or even say a word.



Sathya rendering service in the scout camp during the cattle fair.



Sathya's enraged sister-in-law rejecting gifts.

Shortly after this Seshama Raju's wife delivered, but the baby did not survive. Seshama Raju then sent a telegram to his father in Puttaparthi, conveying the sad news. Upon receiving it, his father, Venkama Raju, rushed to Kamalapuram to console his son, and that was when he saw the bandage on Sathya's hand. The father was disturbed but chose to remain silent for the moment. Later, when he heard grim stories about how Sathya was being cruelly treated, the father just couldn't bear it. Offering some reason, Venkama Raju took Sathya away in the evening to a quiet spot far from home and asked, "Sathya, the neighbors here tell me that you are being ill treated. Is that true? Why is there a bandage on your hand?" Sathya skillfully dodged answering his father's questions, which only heightened his father's suspicions. With tears in his eyes, the father said, "Sathya, your mother and I both love you dearly. I may not be rich, but if need be I am ready to beg to support you. Please come back, because I just cannot bear to see you suffer like this. After all, where is the need?" Calmly Sathya replied, "Father, I very well understand

how you feel; but then please consider the other side of the picture. Firstly, brother Seshama has brought me here with the best of intentions. Secondly, he and his wife have suffered a tragedy with their firstborn passing away soon after birth. Is it good for me to walk away at this painful juncture? Moreover, if I were to come back, what sort of a signal would that send to friends and relatives of the family? These problems are part of life; for the sake of family honor, they must just be borne. We cannot give up our honor, can we?" The father was far from convinced, but there was little he could do. Quietly he returned to Puttaparthi, deeply troubled.

Seshama Raju's teacher training in Kamalapuram was about to be over when he obtained a job as a Telugu teacher in a school in Uravakonda, a small town to the northwest of Puttaparthi. And so Sathya went to join yet another school, this time in Uravakonda. In many respects, life remained the same, though the nightmare of bringing drinking water before dawn from long distances was no longer there. As earlier, Sathya was the model student loved by all.



Sathya being punished by his elder brother.



Father examining the injured hand of Sathya with concern.

The year was 1940...



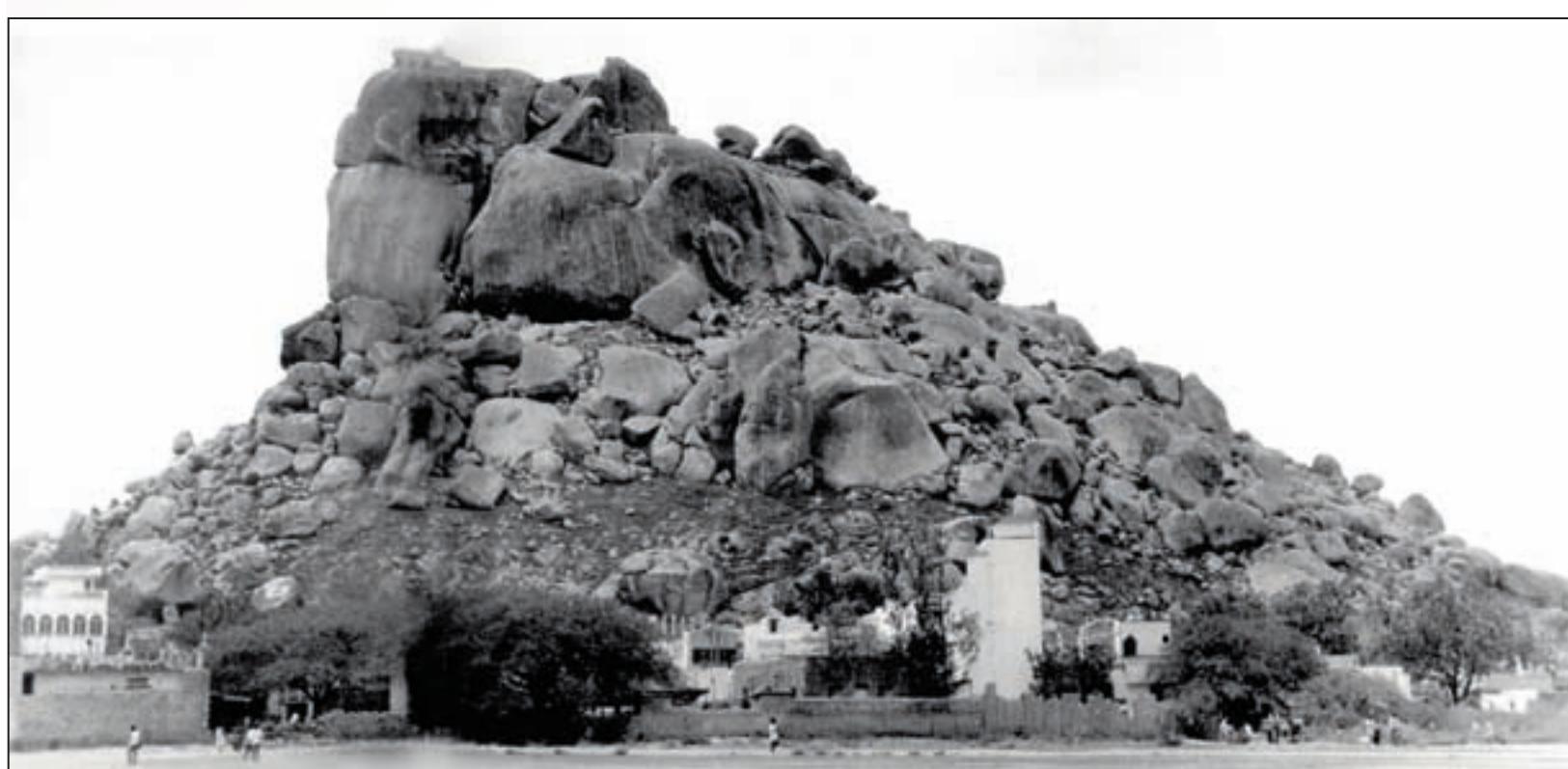
Street in Uravakonda where Seshama Raju lived. The circle shows his house.



The school where Sathya studied. This picture was taken long after Sathya left, during which time several modifications and extensions were made.

World War II had broken out, and, being a colony, India was automatically dragged into the war to fight alongside Britain. India might have been far from the theater of conflict, but wartime shortages soon made life difficult, especially so for people in the rural areas, since both food and kerosene (needed for lighting lamps) were now strictly rationed. Meanwhile, Sathya, now about 14, began to show signs of extreme restlessness. Often he withdrew into himself. Inevitably, everyone around him noticed this distinctive change, and naturally they were also worried. As if to reinforce their anxiety, Sathya often refused food and remained silent for long spells. News about all this soon reached Sathya's parents in Puttaparthi. Alarmed, they promptly rushed to Uravakonda, and when they saw their dear Sathyam, they really became quite scared - he was so different from what they knew him to be.

The district medical officer (DMO) of Anantapur District happened to be camping in Uravakonda around that time, and his advice was sought. After examining Sathya he said, "It is all due to hysteria. Just give the boy this medicine, and he will become normal in no time." The DMO's medicine was administered, but nothing happened; Sathya continued to remain just as before.



A rocky hill that is the "signature" of Uravakonda.

From doctors, the anxious parents turned to astrologers. Their view was that the problem lay in the house in which Seshama Raju was living. "It is in the control of unholy spirits, which must be driven out," they said. Priests, too, were consulted, and according to them the problem had arisen because the gods were displeased. Every consultant gave his own diagnosis and cure, all of which were duly tried, but nothing worked. Quite disheartened, Sathya's parents then took him away with them to Puttaparthi. The school having closed for summer vacation, there was no problem with Sathya missing classes. Both his father and mother hoped that maybe a change of place would do some good.

One day someone in Puttaparthi told Venkama Raju, "The problem with Sathya is that he has been seized by evil spirits; acting from within, they are the ones that are causing all the trouble. There is only one solution - those evil spirits must be driven out. There is a very good witch doctor in Kadri. Get Sathya treated by him, and everything will be fine." Desperate as they were, the family was also willing to give this suggestion a try. Traveling by a bullock cart, Sathya was taken to Kadri, escorted by a few members of the family.

The so-called witch doctor looked absolutely evil and wicked, his very appearance striking fear. Everyone in the party except Sathya was scared. They wanted to go back immediately, but the witch doctor prevented that. Dragging Sathya and without wasting a moment, the witch doctor began his satanic rituals. The "treatment" commenced with horrible chants and frightening rituals that included animal sacrifice. Using the blood of the slaughtered animal, the witch doctor next drew a big circle and made Sathya sit in the middle of that circle, continuing with his strange chants all along. He then shaved Sathya's head, exposing the scalp,

following which he made three huge gashes on Sathya's head with a sharp knife. Blood gushed out even as everyone screamed, except Sathya. The witch doctor tried to calm them, saying, "Don't worry. This blood flow will drain the evil spirit inside, and soon this boy will become normal; you will see it for yourself."

Noticing that Sathya bore all punishment stoically, the witch doctor now began hurling abuses, supposedly at the devil inside, and topped it off by pouring lime juice into the wounds. This was really like pouring acid, but, as earlier, Sathya continued to remain absolutely silent. Extremely angry, the witch doctor then grabbed a stick and began beating Sathya brutally, claiming all the while that he was just beating the devil inside! Unable to take this cruel nonsense any further, the elders who had brought Sathya for "treatment" somehow managed to make a getaway, taking the suffering boy with them. The nightmare was over, but the scars of the wounds inflicted on his head remained and could be seen until the very end.

Every possible cure had been tried, but nothing seemed to work. Sathya's parents were now totally lost, not knowing what to do next. Meanwhile, several events that occurred during the following weeks made not only Sathya's parents but also many others in Puttaparthi realize that Sathya was not the usual village boy. Clearly, there was an exceptionally strong spiritual streak within him that set him apart from others of his age. He appeared to have objectives of his own and intent on achieving them; however, he kept his ideas and plans to himself. Realizing this, his parents reluctantly decided that it was best to leave Sathya alone, allowing him to discover himself.



Witch doctor torturing Sathya.



Sathya during the trip to Hampi staying aloof and not joining the picnic party (description on page 18).

Meanwhile, elder brother, Seshama Raju, was getting increasingly worried. Summer vacation was coming to an end, and Sathya had to return to school. His younger brother was really talented and under no circumstance must his schooling be interrupted; after all, he was the hope of the family. How could one allow those legitimate hopes to be dashed? One simply had to bite the bullet and rough it out. Thus when June arrived and the school reopened, Seshama promptly brought Sathya back from Puttaparthi to Uravakonda to attend classes once more. Sathya did not resist and quietly went back with his elder brother. Even so, he continued to remain withdrawn.

Soon came the *Navarathri* festival (which usually occurs in late September to mid-October), and the school closed for the festival holidays. Seshama Raju felt that it might not be a bad idea to take Sathya on a trip. Not far from Uravakonda was the town of Hospet, close to which were the famous ruins of the Vijayanagaram Kingdom in Hampi; perhaps a picnic to that place would help. Thus Seshama Raju took Sathya to Hospet, where he met with some friends, following which the entire group went to Hampi to see the archaeological attractions there. While everyone enjoyed the trip, Sathya remained rather aloof and disinterested.

The excursion to Hampi over, Sathya and his brother returned to Uravakonda. A few days passed. It was October 20, 1940, and the day started as usual with Sathya leaving for school early. Halfway he turned, started walking back, reached home and slowly opened the front door. Hearing the creaking noises made by the door, Seshama Raju and his wife came out and saw Sathya standing there with his schoolbag. This was unexpected. Was Sathya not feeling well? Even before they could ask a question, Sathya said slowly but firmly, "I am no longer your Sathya. I have work to do, and people are waiting for me. I am quitting school and leaving the family as well. From now on humanity is my family!" Sathya then dropped the schoolbag, symbolic of his total break with the past, and walked away briskly. Seshama Raju could not quite understand what was happening, but he certainly knew how he felt; it was as if he had suddenly been hit by a ton of bricks. Slowly he sank to the floor. Sathya had left them forever, and his dream of seeing Sathya rise to a big position now lay shattered.

From Seshama Raju's house, Sathya walked straight to the house of Mr. Anjaneyulu, a government official. Earlier, having noticed the spiritual side of Sathya, Anjaneyulu had become quite attached to him. In front of Anjaneyulu's house



Sathya on his way to school on the morning of October 20, 1940.



Sathya changes his mind and returns home without going to school.



Sathya dropping his schoolbag and announcing his resolution to give up personal bonds as well as attachments and serve humanity.

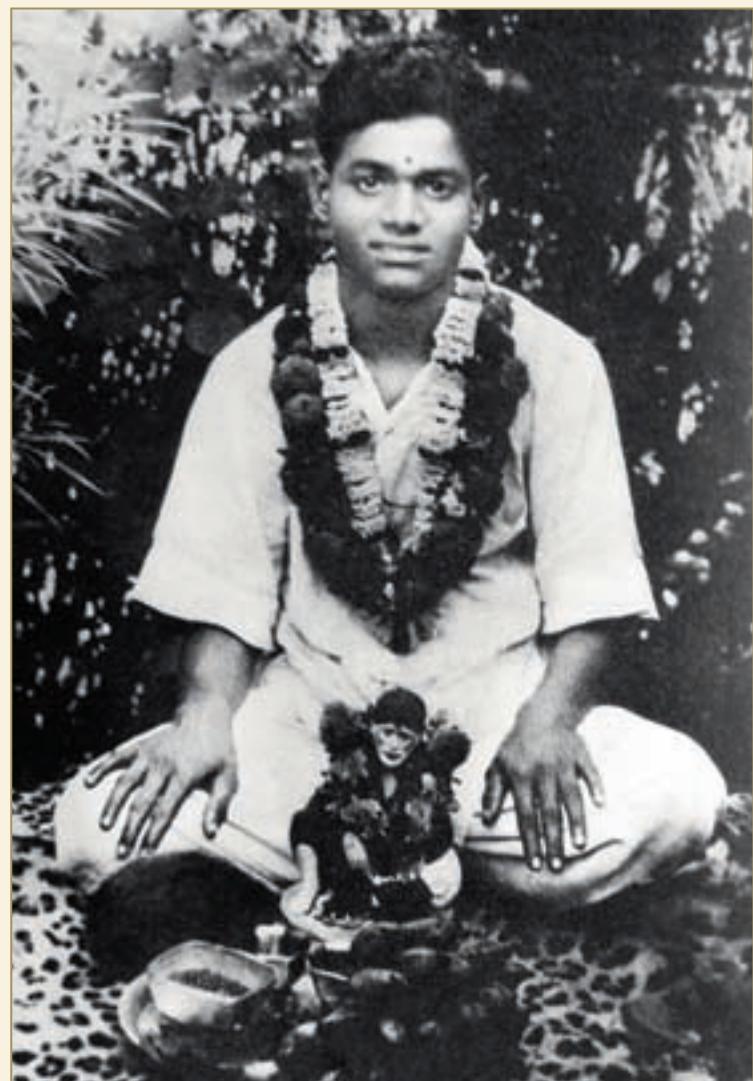
there was a small garden in which there was a small rock. Sathya just sat on the rock without saying a word. Already, like Anjaneyulu, many in Uravakonda were aware of the exceptional nature of this boy. News rapidly spread that Sathya had left home and was about to speak; soon a crowd collected in Anjaneyulu's garden.

Everyone expected Sathya to speak; instead, he led them in a group song (known in India as *bhajan*) composed by him on the spot. Sathya would lead by singing every line, which the crowd would then repeat. The song contained a profound message, which, upon looking back, is no surprise. This was Sathya's

first message to the world, to whose service he had dedicated himself. The essence of that message was:

**OH HUMANS! WHY ARE YOU WASTING TIME AND LIFE
BY BECOMING IMMersed IN TRIVIALITIES? OFFER
YOURSELF AT THE FEET OF THE DIVINE MASTER, WHO
WOULD BE YOUR GUIDE AND LEAD YOU THROUGH THE
TURBULENCES OF LIFE!**

The refrain was similar to the psalm in the Bible, asking humans to place themselves under the care of the Lord, the Good Shepherd.



Two photos taken in Anjaneyulu's garden, after Sathya dropped out of school on October 20, 1940 and began leading the crowd in bhajans. Thereafter, Sathya was accepted by the gathering as a young spiritual master. That also was when he began to be called Sathya Sai Baba, by comparison with Shirdi Baba (to whom a reference has been made in the Preface).



Baba with his parents in Uravakonda. They urge him to come back to Puttaparthi and live there, leading his life the way he wanted.

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**ONE THING NOW
BECAME QUITE
CLEAR – SATHYA'S
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AN IMPORTANT
COMPONENT OF IT.**

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Sathya did not make any speeches; after he finished the song, the crowd melted away. Anjaneyulu was quite taken aback by this strange turn of events; nevertheless, he had the presence of mind to invite Sathya inside. Sathya stayed with Anjaneyulu and did not go back to his brother's house, even though Seshama Raju came personally to plead; his mind was made up. Thereafter every day a crowd would gather, and Sathya, after addressing them on matters spiritual and the importance of love, compassion and sacrifice, would conclude with a *bhajan* - that became the daily routine. One thing now became quite clear - Sathya's immediate priority was to make people aware of their spiritual roots so that they could lead a purposeful life, with service to others being an important component of it.

Meanwhile, a desperate Seshama fired off a telegram to his father about what had happened, who then rushed to Uravakonda along with his wife, Easwaramma. After learning that Sathya was staying with Anjaneyulu, they immediately went to the officer's residence. There they heard about the daily prayer meetings, whereupon Easwaramma became deeply worried. Her concern was that Sathya might become a wandering monk; after all, India had a long and rich history of people who renounced the world, became lost in meditation, visited holy places, bathed in sacred rivers and subsisted largely on charity. Wanting to make sure that her favorite son would not choose this path, Easwaramma said, "Sathya, you were born after so many prayers of mine. I do not object to your leaving school, nor am I bothered about your desire to lead a spiritual

life - maybe it is Divinely ordained. However, I just cannot bear your being far away from me. You have to promise me here and now that whatever you do, you will always live in Puttaparthi." Sathya gave that assurance, and his parents heaved a big sigh of relief. Plans to return to Puttaparthi were immediately made, as if to make sure that Sathya would not have any chance to change his mind.

The curtain had finally come down on Sathya's schooling and also on Seshama's cherished dream. At the same time, it was also the beginning of something beautiful, though none was aware of it then. He might have been in his teens, but already many began to see in Sathya a young spiritual master and started addressing him as Sathya Sai Baba, "Sai Baba" being a reference to Shirdi Baba (to whom a brief reference was made in the Preface). Sathya had a heavy agenda before him that he would unfold later, slowly and over the years. But first, he had to go back to where he came from.



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SPIRITUAL MASTER.



1940-1950

He left as Sathyanarayana Raju but returned to his native hamlet as Sathya Sai Baba, traveling with his father and mother by a bullock cart. Meanwhile, news about a saintly boy from Puttaparthi spread fast, and all along the route people gathered to have a glimpse of the young spiritual master. India has a long tradition of people seeking to have a *Darshan* of masters and *gurus*. *Darshan* meant not merely seeing but having an entire spiritual experience that involved physically seeing the master, offering obeisance to him, communing with him and seeking his blessings. Even before he returned and settled down, Baba had to start giving *Darshans*; from then on, *Darshans* never stopped until he gave up his earthly body.

Baba's return to Puttaparthi was not without its social problems and practical difficulties. Back in Uravakonda he had declared that he was detaching himself from family so as to engage in public service; yet here he was back in his parents' house, where he had started. However, Baba did not see this as a big difficulty; it was just a passing phase and soon he would have his own living quarters. More immediate was the problem of dealing with a steady stream of callers, since Pedda Venkama Raju's house was too small to handle them. However, thanks to the generosity of a neighbor, Karnam Lakshminarayana, this difficulty was solved quickly.



Karnam Lakshminarayana
The village chieftain.

Subbamma
The Karnam's first wife.

Kamalamma
The Karnam's second wife.



House of Karnam Lakshminarayana.



The west-facing window in the Karnam's house that looked into the backyard of the house where Baba lived as a boy.

Back then (and to a certain extent even now) village administration in India was managed largely by two officials, the Munsif, or the village headman, and the Karnam, who assisted the Munsif. Together they collected taxes, maintained registers of births and deaths, etc. During the British period, village administration was considerably strengthened since taxes came mainly from the villages via crops. Puttaparthi being just a hamlet, the Karnam was the top official.

Karnam Lakshminarayana's house was not only next to that of Pedda Venkama Raju, but there was even a window that looked into the backyard of Venakama Raju's hut. The Karnam, as he was often referred to, had two wives, Subbamma, whom he married first, and a second wife named Kamalamma, whom he married sometime later since there were no children from the first marriage. (It turned out that Kamalamma also was childless, and eventually the Karnam had to adopt a son.)

Though they were neighbors, there were two social factors that stood between the families of the Karnam and Venkama Raju, namely, caste and financial status, each important in its own way. The Karnam was a Brahmin, which placed him in the upper caste, while the Rajus belonged to a somewhat lower caste; back then, the caste barrier was quite strong. If one added to that the social status associated with wealth, there should have been little contact between the neighboring families. However, that was not so, largely because of Subbamma, who always loved Sathya as if he was her own son. Nevertheless, on account of the prevailing social taboo, Subbamma was discreet, using the window to occasionally pass on something special she had prepared for young Sathya to eat.



During the first half of the 1940s, Baba often traveled to various places in order to decrease Subbamma's hospitality duties. All trips were in response to invitations, some of which came from highly placed people, including princes. Above can be seen a palace of one of the members of the royal family of Mysore (a major princely state in British India). Members of the royal family were all devotees of Baba.



Baba with one of the members of the family of the Maharaja of Mysore.

Things changed dramatically when Sathya returned from Uravakonda as Sathya Sai Baba. He was now a spiritual *guru* sought by seekers, and, as a pious woman, Subbamma asserted her right to serve him. She even persuaded her husband to allow Baba to spend the day in their house, which was spacious and convenient for the young master to meet seekers, besides granting private interviews. In turn this increased the number of visitors, placing a great burden on Subbamma, who tirelessly extended hospitality to everyone, sometimes late into the night. Decades later, Baba would frequently recall how kind, considerate and devoted Subbamma was to him throughout her life, not complaining even once.

This went on for some time, with Baba spending the entire day in the Karnam's house and going "home" only to sleep. The arrangement, while practical, always bothered Baba as he was extremely uncomfortable about the load Subbamma had to bear, although she always looked upon service to Baba as a great blessing. By way of sparing her at least to some extent, Baba began accepting invitations and spending long periods away from Puttaparthi. He went to cities like Bangalore, Mysore and Madras (capital of Madras Presidency), and also to smaller towns like Karur in the south and Masulipatam (now Machilipatnam) on the east coast. Those who sought him included ordinary people, the well-to-do and even princes and *rajas*.

All along, Baba was trying hard to see if he could find someplace where he could live independently without being a burden to others, but it was not easy. At one point he moved to a small cave across the river. Subbamma was so upset that every day she would carry food for him. Baba was deeply touched but also pained that he was troubling Subbamma even more. Subbamma pleaded with Baba to return to Puttaparthi and use her house as earlier, but he refused. She then asked him to at least use a vacant plot of land belonging to her husband on which there was a hut; perhaps Baba could live there. This Baba agreed to. However, when he moved there, some miscreants tried to set fire to the hut, which alarmed Subbamma greatly.



Baba at the house of Thangavelu Mudaliar, a wealthy resident of Bangalore.



Photo taken when Baba visited Venkatasamy Mudaliar, a wealthy gentleman residing in Bangalore.



Baba with local hosts during a visit to Masulipatam on the east coast. It appears that the photo was taken on the beach.



Registered copy of the original deed (in Telugu language) through which a vacant plot of land near the river was formally transferred to Sai Baba Matam (Matam roughly meaning spiritual headquarters) so that a place could be built for Baba to live in. Top right, a group photo taken at the time of the groundbreaking ceremony, before the construction of an ashram that would become Baba's home for five years. To the right is the ashram as it appeared after construction. It was just a cluster of tin sheds, the biggest of which (a prayer hall) is seen in the picture. Behind the large shed in the front were the living quarters, with a well that provided water.



.....
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.....

Meanwhile Karnam Lakshminarayana passed away. Subbamma and Kamalamma then decided that they would formally transfer the land to Baba, but he did not want to own any property. His father Venkama Raju then agreed to act as a manager of the land, and legal papers were signed arranging for the transfer. The two widows did not have enough money to build a house for Baba, but others pitched in and a small tin shed with an annex for Baba to live in soon came into existence. This was Baba's first *ashram*, and it was inaugurated on December 14, 1945.

Baba now felt far more comfortable, and the *ashram* functioned somewhat like a commune with a constant flux of visitors who came from various places. Travel to Puttaparthi continued to remain as difficult as ever, with visitors having to make their way first to Karnataka Nagepalli across the river and then travel the last part of the journey by bullock cart. Those were days when visitors were few, and Baba could give quality time as well as attention to everyone. His outlook was entirely spiritual and his interactions most loving. The highlight of every day was the evening trip to the sands of the river nearby. On reaching the riverbank, they would spread a blanket and

sit together. There would be small talk, group singing and conversation leading eventually to an informal discourse by Baba.

Baba understood that while the people who came to him were good souls, they were also quite worldly, preoccupied largely with their aspirations and desires. Nevertheless, Baba was always keen on making them conscious of higher values and principles at least to some extent, since in the long run it is values that shape human society. He therefore constantly stressed universal principles, the importance of service, sacrifice and compassion, and the selfless, transcendental Love that God the Creator has for all His children. Recalling those days, a woman who now lives in the United States and used to come with her mother back then to spend time with Baba said that time would fly since Baba would keep them busy doing all sorts of things. He was so lively, dynamic and full of love, but hardly anyone realized how much love Baba showered until it was time to go. "We would all cry," she said, adding, "it was only when we left that we would realize the great blessing we had received and how, while quietly smothering us with love and affection, Baba was also shaping each and every one of us in a manner best suited to our personality. He did so much to bring out the best in us."

As news about all this spread, more and more people began coming to Baba. The difficulty of traveling to Puttaparthi and the utter lack of facilities there for visitors were huge disincentives, but they came nevertheless because Baba's Love

A collection of photos taken during 1945-1950. What is evident is that many princes (who generally were quite pious) were attracted to Baba. On the right, Baba can be seen being welcomed according to traditional rites at the doorstep of the Sandur palace.



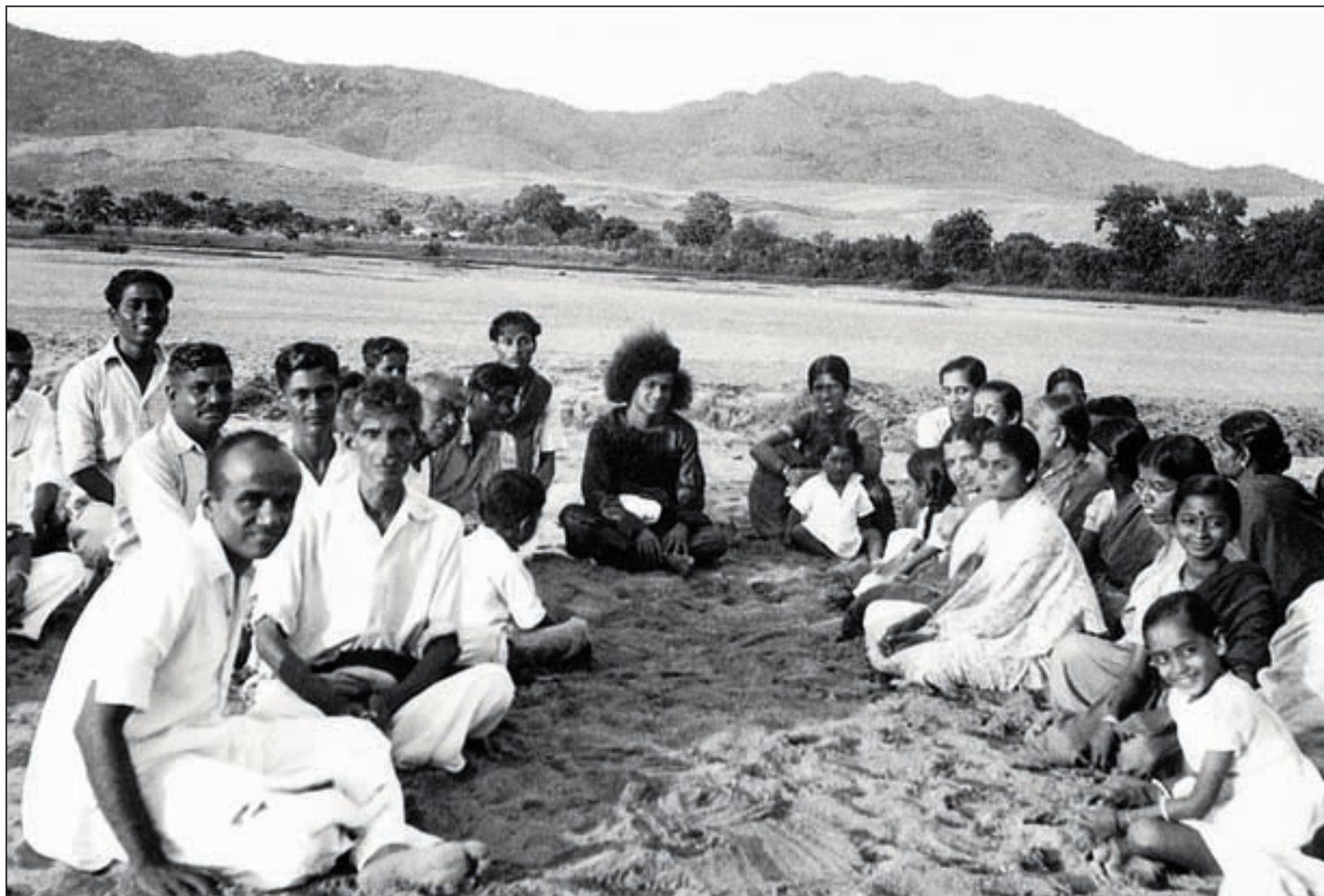
The Raja and Rani of Sandur.



Baba with the Rani of Chincholi (another small state) and her friends.



The palace of the Raja of Sandur.



Baba loved outings and used them skillfully to get his visitors to become interested in spirituality. On the top he is seen on the sands of the Chitravathi River. The evening trips to the sandy bed became famous and were eagerly looked forward to by Baba's devotees. Just above is a picnic scene, once again near the river.

drew them like a powerful magnet. Naturally, this generated more invitations, leading to more visits. Watching from afar, his elder brother, Seshama Raju, who never forgot what happened years back, felt even greater anguish. In his view, after throwing away a wonderful opportunity, his younger brother was now moving around as a spiritual master and basking in the attention of the rich and the wealthy. All this adulation was not only attracting adverse attention from certain sections of the public but, more importantly, it might suddenly evaporate. At that point, it would be impossible to recover lost ground. Pouring out his anguish, Seshama wrote a long and pained letter. On May 25, 1947, Baba wrote an equally long reply. Although addressed to his elder brother, the letter was in the nature of a testament. In that historical letter Baba said in part:

My Dear One!

I received all the communication that you sent. I found in it the surging floods of your devotion and affection, with the undercurrents of doubts and anxiety...

People are endowed with a variety of characteristics and mental attitudes; so, each one judges according to his own angle, talks and argues in the light of his own nature. But we have to stick to our own path, our own wisdom, and our own resolution, without getting affected by popular appraisal. As the proverb says, it is only the fruit-laden tree that receives the shower of stone from the passersby. The good always provoke the bad into calumny; the bad always provoke the good into doing more good; this is the nature of the world. One must be surprised if such things do not happen.

People have to be pitied rather than condemned. They do not know. They have no patience to judge correctly. They are too full of lust, anger, and conceit to see clearly and know fully. So, they write all sorts of things. If only they knew, they would refrain from writing or talking like that. We too should not attach any value to such comments and take them to heart, as you seem to do. Truth will certainly triumph someday. Untruth can never win. Untruth might appear to overpower Truth, but its victory would fade away and Truth would establish itself...

Why should you be affected by doubt and worry, so long as I am adhering to these two (Self-reliance and beneficial activity)? After all, praise and blame do not touch the Immortal Soul within; they can touch only the outer frame.

I have a Task: To foster all mankind, and ensure for all people lives full of Ananda (Bliss).

I have a Vow: To lead all who stray away from the straight path, back again into goodness and save them.

I am attached to a "Work" that I love: To remove the suffering of the poor and grant them what they lack.

I have a "reason to be proud": for, I rescue all who follow and adore me...

I will never give up those who attach themselves to me...

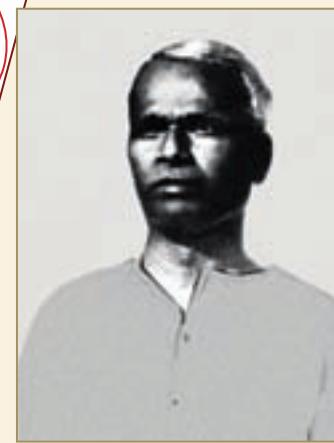
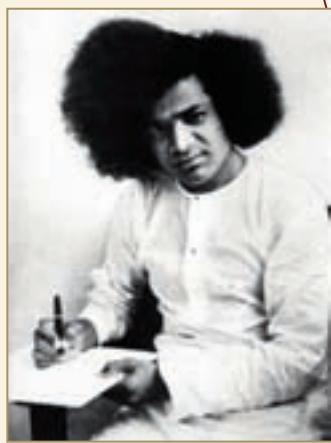
I will not give up my mission or my determination. I SHALL carry them out. I treat with equanimity the honor or dishonor that may result...

I do not belong to any place. I am not attached to any name. I have no sense of "mine" or "thine." I respond to whatever name you might use. I go wherever I am needed or called.

For me, the world is something afar and apart. I act and move only for the sake of Mankind.

I am not concerned, nor am I anxious that these facts should be made known. I have no need to write these words. I wrote them because I felt that you will be pained if I do not reply.

Thus, yours, Baba.



Baba (left) and his elder brother, Seshama Raju (right). Just above are photos of the pages of the long letter written by Baba responding to some anxiety that his elder brother felt. The red ellipse shows the place where Baba makes a firm and emphatic statement of what might be called mission objectives. Remarkably, he told his brother that the latter would himself see how these promises would be fulfilled in abundant measure. Unfortunately, Seshama Raju did not live to see the best part, which came only toward the end of the century.



If Subbamma and Kamalamma played a key role in helping Baba have his first ashram, Doddamane Sakamma played a similar role in establishing Baba's second ashram. It turned out that this ashram, after growing beyond recognition and gathering around it a modern township, also became Baba's final resting place. Clockwise: Sakamma; Sakamma's house in Coorg, a hilly region adjoining the former Mysore State, famous for coffee plantations; coffee processing plant in Bangalore owned by Sakamma.

Prophetically, Baba also mentioned in his letter that his brother would live to see his missions unfold in full measure. It was a daring statement to make, but Baba was fully aware and confident of what he would do and how.

The tin shed was no doubt a great improvement over earlier arrangements, but barely within a year, it proved inadequate. Baba did not speak about it, but others realized that something better and more permanent had to be arranged, and soon. The “tipping point” came with a flood that swept away many things from the *ashram*. That was when a woman named Doddamane Sakamma decided to step in and move things forward.

Sakamma was a wealthy resident of Bangalore. The wife of Doddamane Chikka Basappa, she was pious and well known as a philanthropist. She spoke Telugu (Baba's mother tongue) fluently, and the moment she heard about Baba she sought him and became an ardent follower. An elderly lady, she loved Baba like a child. She owned large coffee estates, but for Baba she was ready to cook and serve food like a mother would. When the issue of building a new *ashram* arose, Sakamma was ready to finance it. The problem was finding land near the hamlet. Sakamma realized that this difficulty was in fact a blessing. Looking far into the future, she realized that in years to come, Baba would draw huge crowds. It was therefore important to locate the new *ashram* in an open area some

distance from Puttaparthi, to allow room for a new satellite township to grow that would provide amenities to visitors. Keeping all this in view, in 1946 Sakamma purchased 3.86 acres of barren and rocky land some distance away from the tin shed. The seller charged what everyone felt was a very high price, but that did not deter Sakamma, who was focused entirely on the future. And what a wise decision that proved to be! Having acquired the land, Sakamma requested that Baba accept it for the purpose of constructing a new *ashram*. Baba agreed, and the land transfer took place in 1947, with construction scheduled to commence in 1948. As earlier, Baba refused personal ownership, and the new *ashram* also was administered by a duly appointed management.

Often when the occasion arises, the right people show up to play their chosen role. So it was with Malur Tirumala Iyengar (1897-1976), an engineer of distinction who was familiar with maintaining as well as constructing roads, bridges and even dams. Iyengar had met Baba earlier, and when the time came, Baba asked him to not only design the new building but also supervise its construction. A building of the size Baba was contemplating had never been built before in Puttaparthi, and Iyengar faced two big problems. First was the absence of skilled workers who could be hired for construction. An even greater difficulty was that all construction materials had to be obtained from Bangalore and elsewhere, not an easy task considering that there was no direct road leading to Puttaparthi. However, thanks to Baba's personal charm, many came forward to help, each in his/her own way. Thus, Raje Urs of Mysore City supplied timber, doors, door frames, windows, etc. Mobilizing workers and items like stones, cement and timber were manageable problems though difficult. What seemed impossible was to get huge steel girders 40 feet in length, needed for the central prayer hall.

This was a great opening for one of Baba's loyal followers, a gentleman named Venigala Hanumantha Rao, who was the transport commissioner for Madras. Hanumantha Rao was able to obtain the girders from Trichinopoly (now Tiruchirapalli), a town about 150 miles (approximately 240 kilometers) to the southwest of Madras. He even managed to have them transported by rail to the Penukonda station about 20 or so miles (approximately 30 kilometers) from Puttaparthi. However, transporting the girders from the Penukonda railway station to Puttaparthi was more than a



Malur Tirumala Iyengar, who supervised the construction of the new ashram.



Baba personally directing the operations during construction.



The “new ashram” as it appeared close to inauguration day (November 23, 1950). A close-up picture taken later, showing an entrance arch.



A view of the prayer hall, with Baba seated at the back to the right. Baba used this hall until the mid-1990s, after which he moved the assembly to a large amphitheater that formed the front of the building seen in the pictures above, almost eclipsing the original building! Baba named this building Prashanti Nilayam, meaning the “Abode of Peace.” Later the campus that grew around this building came to be called by this name.

THROUGHOUT THIS
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ENCOURAGEMENT
AS WELL AS MORAL
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IT CAME TO HOISTING
THE GIRDERs, IT WAS
HE WHO GAVE ALL
THE COMMANDS
SINCE THE LABORERS
COULD UNDERSTAND
ONLY THE LOCAL
LANGUAGE.



The new ashram, as it was in 1950.

challenging task, since the consignment had to be taken by a road that reduced to a narrow lane when it passed through villages on the way. Besides, there were dilapidated culverts that had to be negotiated; last but not least was the sandy bed of the Chitravathi River that had to be crossed.

Tirumala Iyengar handled all that. From somewhere a crane was hired, and miraculously it managed to bring the girders up to the village across the river. The crane was quite a sight for the people of the villages it passed through, and the final crossing of the river was an unparalleled event watched by all with great awe. The girders were finally delivered at the construction site, but now came the problem of hoisting them purely with ropes, pulleys and manual labor. Throughout this adventurous exercise, Baba was always around, giving encouragement as well as moral support; and when it came to hoisting the girders, it was he who gave all the commands since the laborers could understand only the local language.

Finally, on November 23, 1950 (which was also Baba's birthday), the new *ashram* was ready and Baba named it Prashanti Nilayam, meaning the "Abode of Peace." Unlike the earlier tin shed, this one had, besides the large prayer hall, just some cramped living space for Baba, but no room for visitors to stay. Although Prashanti Nilayam was just a little more than half a mile (a little less than a kilometer) from the earlier residence, back then it seemed as if it were in the middle of nowhere. One major advantage the new *ashram* had was that it was on high ground; there was thus little chance of it being affected by floods, and so it has been ever since then.



This is how it looked by the mid-1970s.

Initially, Prashanti Nilayam was a solitary building, and devotees who came to see Baba had to literally camp in the open. However, exactly as anticipated by Sakamma, as the crowds grew, so did the infrastructure. Today, Puttaparthi even has online banking and internet cafes. As for the *ashram* itself, a small township has grown around the original Prashanti Nilayam, with accommodations as well as various other facilities such as restaurants, a shopping complex, etc., serving the needs of visitors (including those from overseas) as well as permanent residents. In fact, the original building that represented the new *Mandir*, has itself transformed beyond recognition!

It is noteworthy that throughout his life Baba stayed in Puttaparthi, not only fulfilling the promise he gave to his mother but also slowly making it his headquarters for all his missions. The story of those missions begins in Chapter 4, but before that, we wish to take the reader on an interesting but very pertinent diversion. To know more, please turn to Chapter 3.

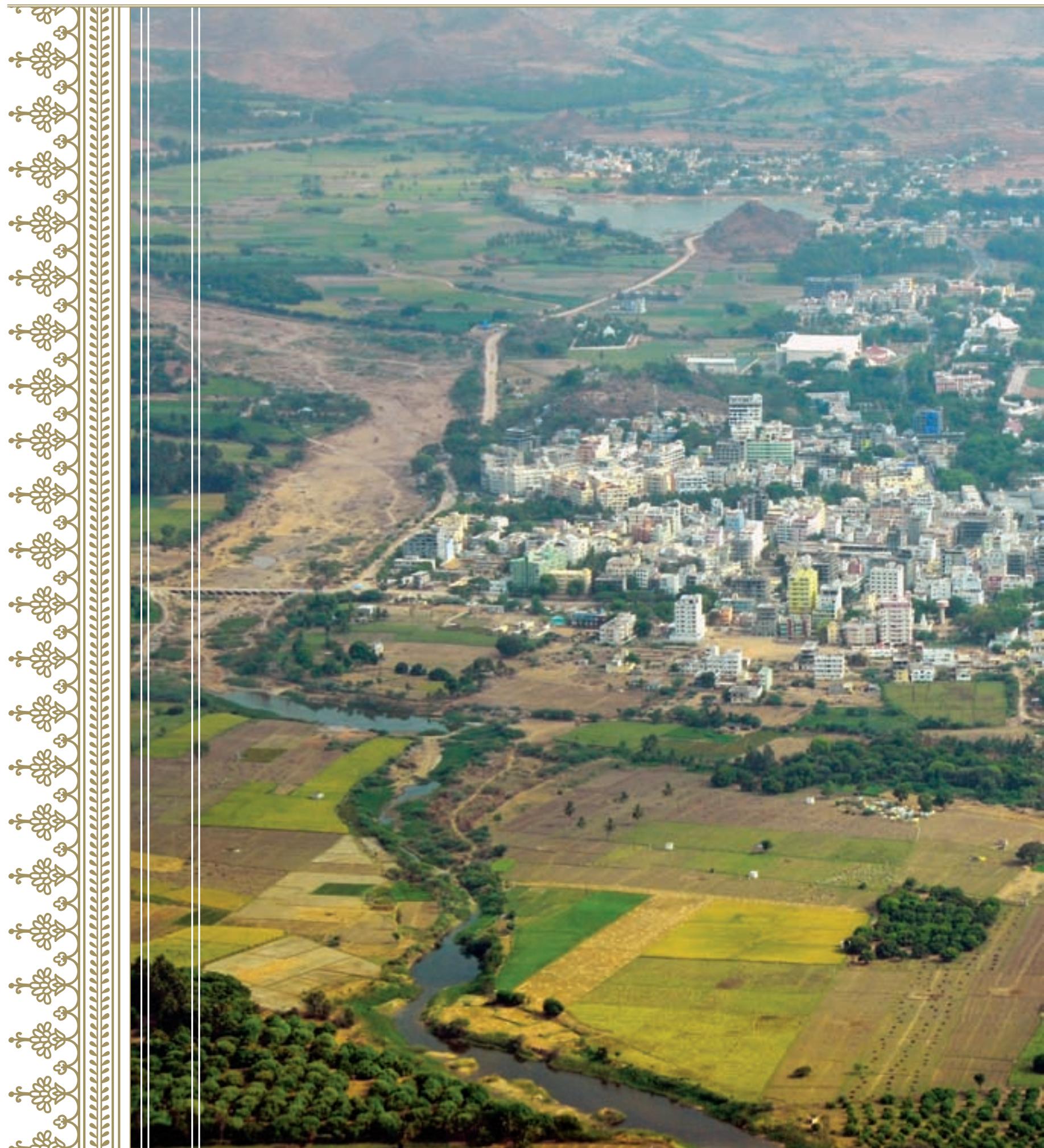




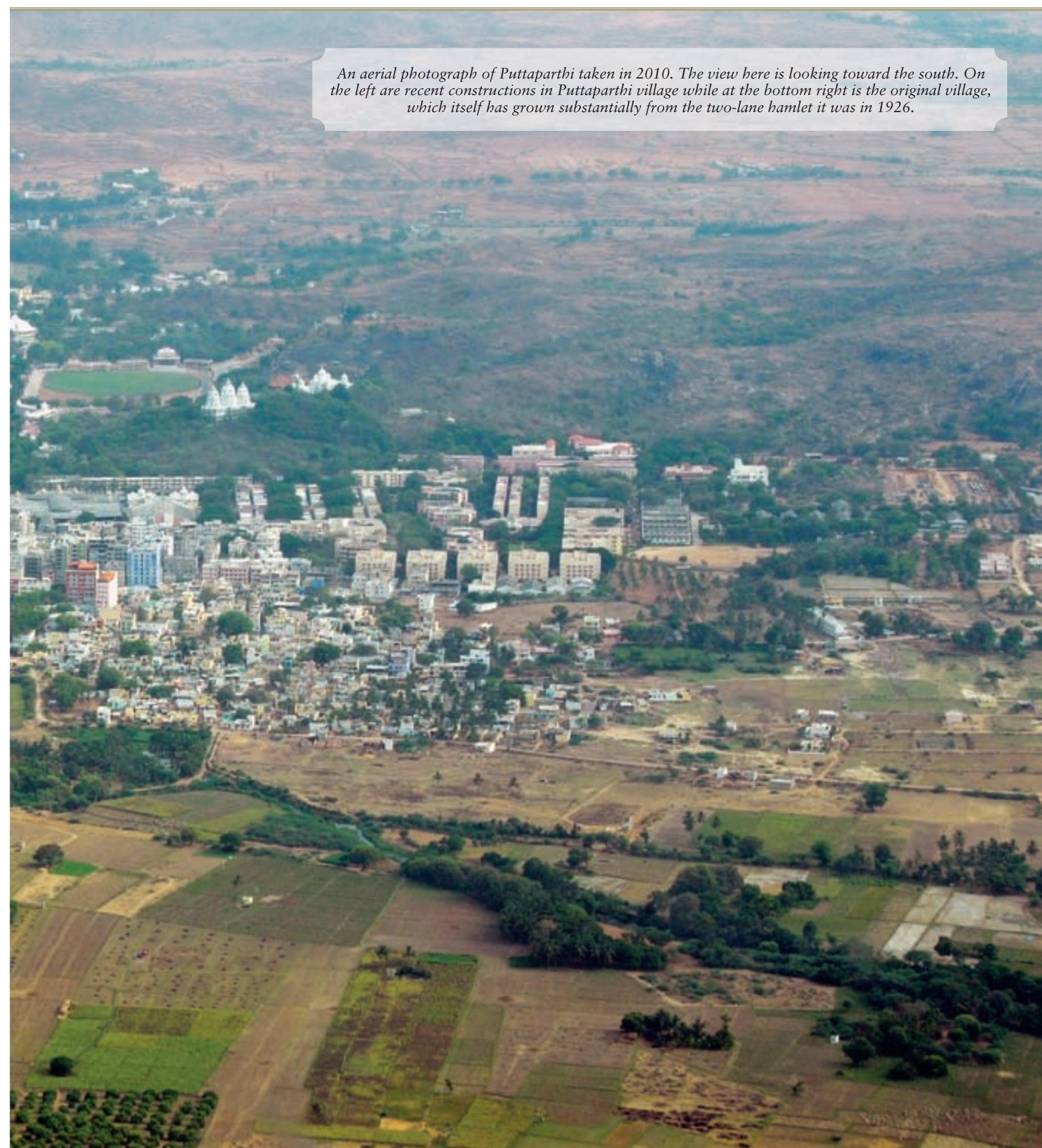
In the mid-1990s, a huge amphitheater was built in front of the original ashram building to serve as an assembly hall. Thereafter, Baba began giving daily Darshan to the public in this hall, as seen above. All festivals, including Christmas, were celebrated here.



At the top is a panoramic photo taken in the early 1970s from behind the ashram that Baba occupied in 1950. The photo shows that even in the 1970s, there was very little habitation around the ashram. Below that is a recent Google picture of Puttaparthi and its surroundings, showing how not only the ashram premises but also the entire village has grown into a small town. The arrows show important locations. (1) Baba's birthplace. (2) Baba's first ashram—the tin shed. (3) The original Prashanti Nilayam (new ashram). (4) Bridge across the Chitravathi River. (5) Village on the opposite side—Karnataka Nagepalli.



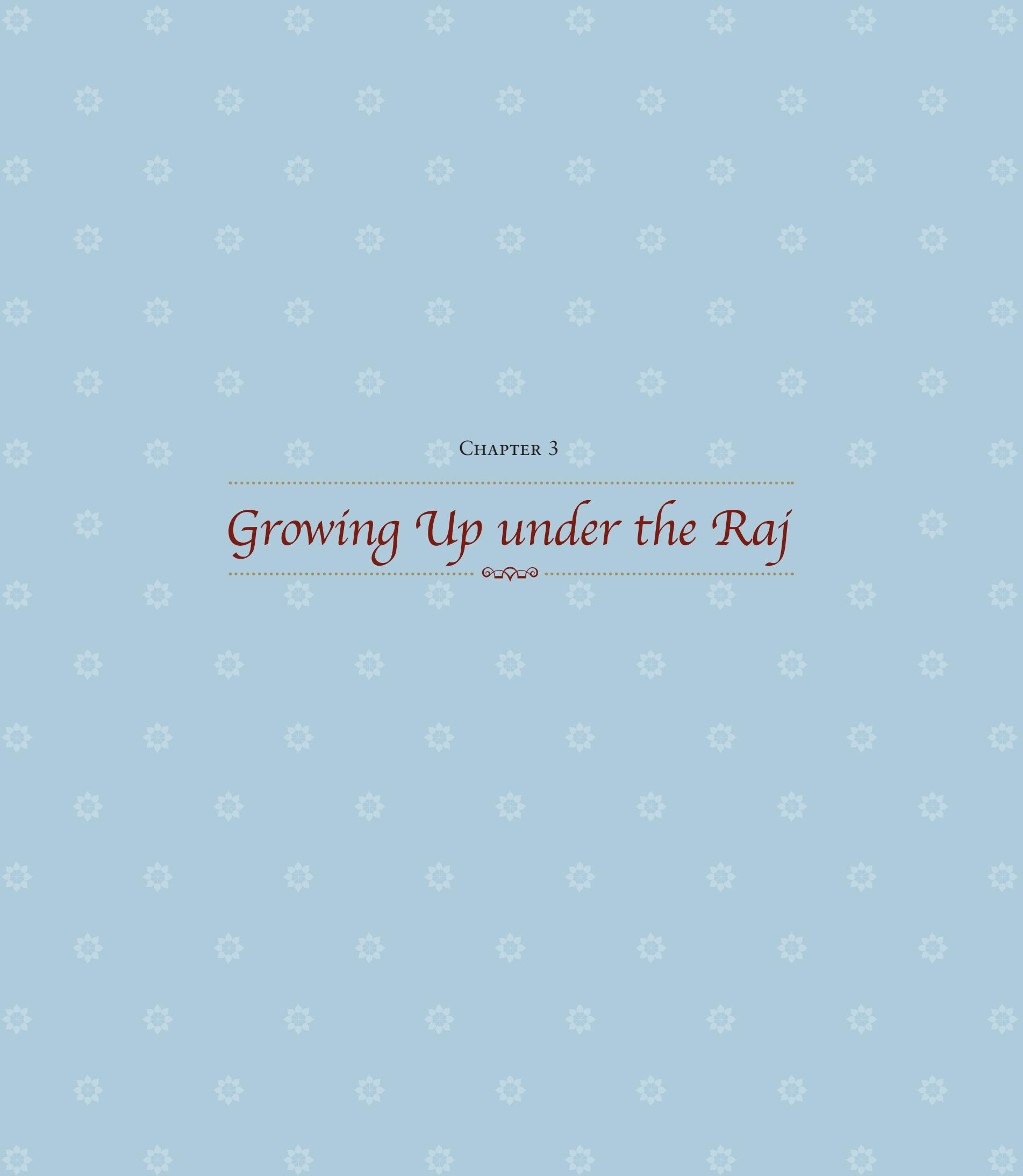
An aerial photograph of Puttaparthi taken in 2010. The view here is looking toward the south. On the left are recent constructions in Puttaparthi village while at the bottom right is the original village, which itself has grown substantially from the two-lane hamlet it was in 1926.





CHAPTER 3

Growing Up under the Raj



Growing Up under the Raj

Alexander the Great and his numerous conquests are famous in history, but few may be aware that in the course of his eastward march he not only swept through Afghanistan but also entered the Indian subcontinent, establishing his sway over the Swat and Buner valleys (now in Pakistan). Crossing the Indus, Alexander then fought and won an epic battle over King Porus. Eager for more conquests, Alexander wanted to advance further east beyond the Ganges. However, feeling utterly worn out, his army revolted, following which Alexander had to turn back.



Presently, the world sees India as a giant waking up from a long slumber and in a hurry to catch up with more advanced countries. In many respects, this widely held view has elements of truth in it. The country is strong in information technology and is able to build its own nuclear power plants, rockets, satellites, etc. When President Clinton wanted to launch a huge program to help people affected by human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) in Africa, it was to India that he turned for a large part of the supply of generic drugs. However, back in 1926, when Baba was born, India was almost entirely a rural country except for a few touches of modernity at the fringes, namely in a handful of towns and the capital cities of the large provinces. It is therefore important to have some idea of the ambience in which Baba grew up as a boy and as a young person, so that the missions of compassion that he undertook in later years can be placed in the proper context and better appreciated.

From ancient times India has always had some contact with Europe. Centuries before Christ, Alexander the Great even invaded India. However, reaching India by the land route was so arduous that for centuries thereafter European traders had to be content with buying spices from Arab merchants who regularly sailed across the Arabian Sea, picked up all the spices they wanted (especially from what is now the state of Kerala in southwest India) and resold them in Mediterranean countries for a much higher price. Wanting to avoid Arab middlemen, many countries in Europe then began searching for a sea route to India and the

Far East. It may be remembered that Columbus stumbled upon America in his attempt to reach India by sailing west; that was in October 1492. A few years later Vasco da Gama of Portugal did precisely what Columbus set out to do; however, he sailed around the Cape of Good Hope and managed to land in Calicut on the southwest coast of India in 1498.

Vasco da Gama found that Calicut, which was ruled by a Hindu prince, was teeming with Arab traders. Shrewdly paying whatever price was asked, Vasco da Gama returned with a huge load of pepper and ginger, the sale of which gave him a 3,000% profit. Word quickly spread, following which came the Portuguese, the Dutch, the Danes, the French and, of course, the British. No doubt they all came to trade. However, in the process of competing against each other they also became deeply involved in local political intrigues. In turn this led to many proxy wars between the European competitors, no doubt shaped by the alliances and

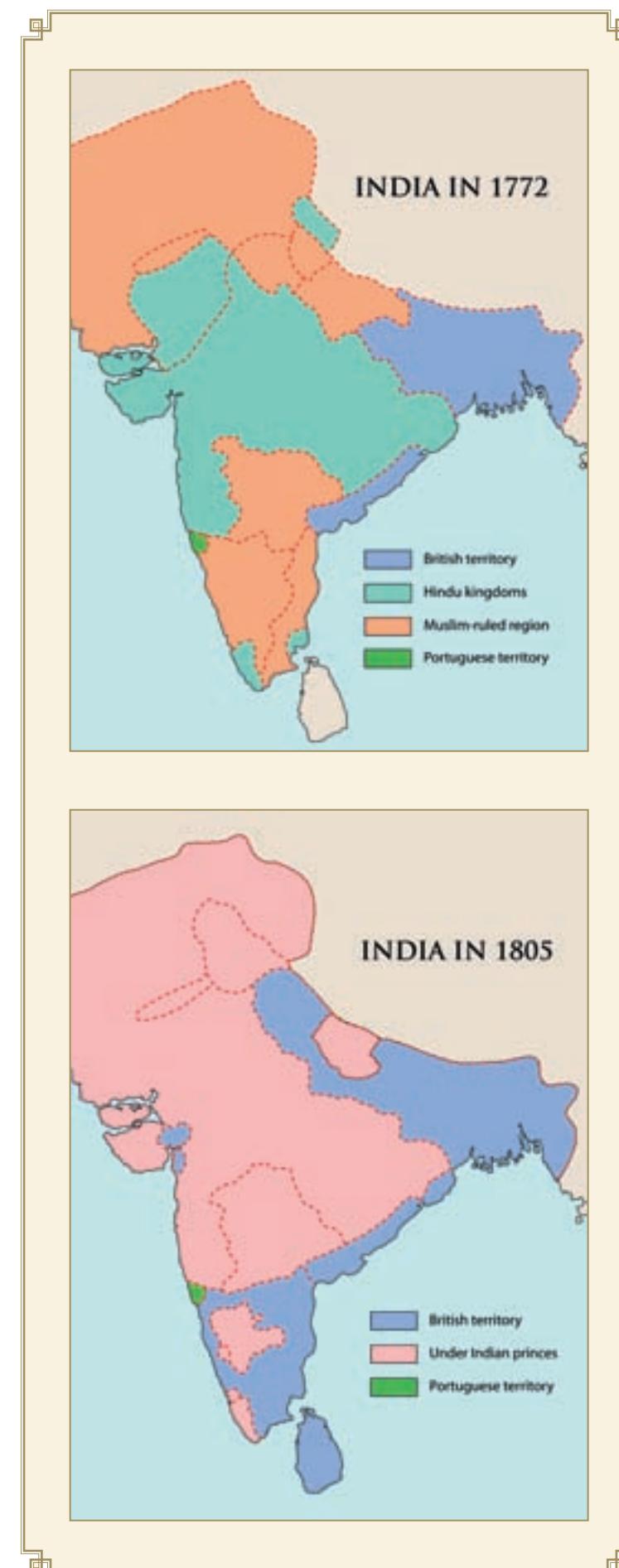
conflicts then prevailing in Europe. Soon proxy wars gave way to direct wars, with the British eventually emerging as the dominant force.

The story of the transformation of traders to occupiers is interesting. In a sense, it all began when about 80 members of the City of London met to form the London East India Company. Starting in 1611, when the British established their first factory in Masulipatam (now Machilipatnam) on the east coast, they quickly followed it up with another factory in Surat on the west coast in 1612. Later, in 1636, came a trading post (Fort St. George) in Madras (now Chennai), and from then on the British rapidly increased their penetration. At that time there were actually two rival English trading companies. However, in 1708 they merged to form what became the East India Company, popularly referred to as the John Company.

At this point the English began focusing on increasing their territory while simultaneously securing their interest in areas that they did not directly rule. By the early part of the nineteenth century they had established themselves over a large swath of the peninsula, from the Arabian Sea to the Bay of Bengal. The territories were divided into provinces, each under a Governor who reported to a Governor General. In addition, there were special regions that were under either a Lieutenant Governor or a Commissioner. All appointments were made by the Company headquarters in London. However, since the Company's position was that of "mortgagees in possession," the actual power was with the British government, which exercised control thanks to an act of Parliament passed in 1784. The Governor General was thus a political appointee.

To rule, one had to have an army, and the ruler being a company, the army was clearly a private one. Although the officers came from England, the soldiers were all recruited locally. This was not difficult because before the entry of the British, India was a network of kingdoms, each with its own army. Since there were Hindu as well as Muslim kings, the Company recruits were soldiers, or sepoy as they were called, of different faiths.

The Company ensured territorial integration not only through the use of its army but also by constructing a



network of railways. Political circumstances elsewhere further helped this process. For example, when America became independent, the mill owners in Britain lost their cotton source in America. Seizing the opportunity, the East India Company began supplying cotton from central India. Likewise, following the outbreak of the Crimean War, the supply of raw jute to England that had come from southern Russia was cut off; once again the Company came to the rescue by making Bengal the prime supplier. The importance of the telegraph was quickly realized, and soon there was a wide telegraphic network, particularly in northern India. Postal service also came to India during the Company Raj, greatly facilitating not only the sending of letters but also newspapers.

As it settled down to the business of ruling in a huge foreign land with great diversity and also a long history of

its own, a major issue that the Company faced was that of governance. It was one thing to trade but quite another to govern. Initially, the Company looked largely inward; preoccupied with its own security, it left the Indians alone and did not interfere with the fabric of Indian life. However, consequent to territorial expansion, a need was felt for a comprehensive governing philosophy. Some, like Sir Thomas Monroe (1761-1827), believed that human society was divided by natural law into rulers and the ruled. The British were clearly the rulers and the Indians the ruled. However, that did not mean the rulers should not be generous to their subjects. Monroe thus wrote:

Foreign conquerors have treated the natives with violence, and often with great cruelty. But none has treated them with so much scorn as we; none have stigmatized the whole people as unworthy of trust, as incapable of honesty, and as fit to be



This picture shows the grand railway terminus built at the site of the original station where the first passenger train service began. Known as the Victoria Terminus, it is a landmark building of Bombay, now Mumbai. Recently the terminus was renamed after the founder of the Maratha Empire.

Railways came to India in the mid-1800s, beginning quietly with a freight service that transported coal near Bengal. On April 16, 1853, regular passenger service commenced between Bombay and Thane (a district town slightly to the north), with a travel distance of 21 miles (approximately 34 kilometers). The inaugural train, consisting of 14 railway carriages and carrying about 400 guests, steamed off at 3:30 P.M. amid the loud applause of a large crowd and a 21-gun salute. It reached Thane at about 4:45 P.M. The guests returned to Bombay at 7:00 P.M. the next day, April 17. On April 18, 1853, Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy, Second Baronet, reserved the entire train and traveled from Bombay to Thane and back along with some members of his family and friends.

employed only where we cannot do without them. It seems to be not only ungenerous but impolitic, to debase the character of a people fallen under our dominion...

Lord Cornwallis (1738-1805), on the other hand, wanted to impose English ideas and institutions on Indian society. Closely related to this was the question of education. Funds were available for establishing schools in Company-held territory, and the question was what sort of a system should there be? In 1834, the British government sent Lord Macaulay (1800-1859) to serve on the Governor General's Council. Macaulay was convinced that British rule would be greatly served if Indians could be appointed to lower posts in the administration. There were many such posts, and it would be too expensive to fill all of them with people from England. The simplest way, Macaulay felt, was to introduce a Western system of education, with English as the medium of instruction at the higher levels. Offering his recommendations as a note (which has since become famous in Indian history), Macaulay wrote:

We have a fund to be employed as government shall direct for the intellectual improvement of the people of this country. The simple question is, what is the most useful way of employing it?...

We have to educate a people who cannot at present be



This photo taken in the late nineteenth century shows a school in Mangalore that came into existence as a result of Macaulay's education policy.

educated by means of their mother tongue. We must teach them some foreign language. The claim of our own language it is hardly necessary to recapitulate. It stands pre-eminent even among the languages of the West... In India, English is the language spoken by the ruling class. It is spoken by the higher class of natives at the seats of government. It is likely to become the language of commerce throughout the seas of the East. It is the language of two great European communities that are rising, the one in the south of Africa, the other in Australasia; communities which are every year becoming more important, and more closely connected with our Indian Empire. Whether we look at the intrinsic value of our literature, or at the particular situation of this country, we shall see the strongest reason to think that, of all foreign tongues, the English tongue is that which would be the most useful to our native subjects...

The funds which would thus be placed at our disposal would enable us to give larger encouragement to the Hindoo college at Calcutta, and to establish cities throughout the Presidencies of Fort William and Agra, schools in which the English might be well and thoroughly taught.

Macaulay's proposal was accepted, and soon schools and colleges were set up according to this model. Later, this move was to have far-reaching consequences.



The building on the left is the Elphinstone College in Bombay, established by the British. When India came under the Crown in 1857, three universities were established - in Madras, Calcutta and Bombay. This marked the beginning of the modern university system in India.



Group photo of soldiers of the Indian Army with their British officer.

In the wake of power came arrogance. Thus, while many statutes enacted by the Company were beneficial, there were also many that angered the public. In addition, the Company began blatantly ignoring the treaties it had signed with many small kingdoms, especially when it was advantageous to acquire the territory concerned. Tension among the ruled grew, and soon came the tipping point. Curiously enough, it came via a particular military order concerning the use of Enfield rifles that Company soldiers used, as opposed to the muzzle gun used by the armies of local rulers. Wanting to

cut down the firing time, the Company required the sepoys to spread grease containing pig and cow fat on the cartridges and then bite the tip off before inserting it into the rifle. Pig fat was anathema to the Muslims, while the Hindus, who revered the cow, could hardly be expected to taste its fat. Thus sepoys of both faiths took serious exception to this “firing” order, and the result was rebellion among the sepoy ranks.

The “sepoy mutiny,” as the British still refer to it, rapidly became a widespread war, with many rulers who resented

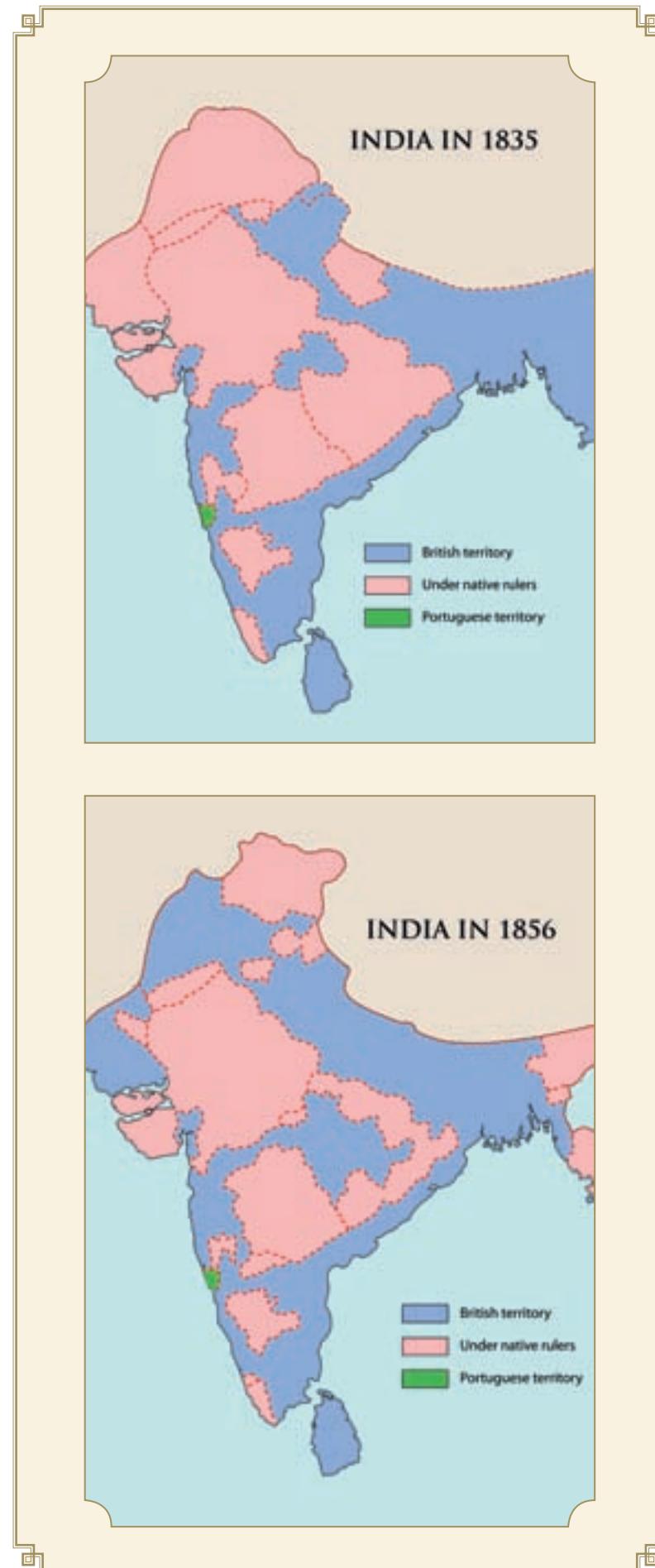
British intrusion into India joining in. Although the fighting was confined to the north, it was extensive and bloody. Eventually the Company got the upper hand, and on July 8, 1858, Governor General Lord Canning (1812-1862) proclaimed peace. Being of the opinion that enough was enough, on August 2 of the same year the British Parliament passed the Government of India Act transferring power from the Company to the British Crown. Thus began the official British Raj, with Lord Canning now serving not only as the Governor General but also the Viceroy of British India.

When the rulership passed from the Company to the Crown, India was a patchwork of territories, some directly controlled by the British and the rest under local rulers of various types, including *maharajas* and *nawabs*. Not only were there hundreds of these so-called states, but they also varied considerably in size, with the largest of them being bigger than some of the countries of Europe while the smallest were just a couple of hundred acres. Britain did not want to take direct charge of these states, for that might mean more wars of conquest. Further, even if those states came directly under the Crown, it would need a much bigger army to maintain control. Tactfully, the British entered into an agreement with those states whereby the Indian rulers “shared” their sovereignty with the British, with, of course, Britain being the paramount power. In return, the British offered “protection,” sweetening the deal by extending the courtesy of princely treatment according to rank and status. Later only those rulers entitled to a salute of 11 guns or more were accorded the princely treatment and addressed as “Highness.” All this was given formal expression through the Interpretation Act of 1889, which said in part:

The expression “India” shall mean British India, together with any territories of any native prince or chief under the suzerainty of Her Majesty...

For the British, India was no longer a vague term used in a cultural or geographical sense; it now had a political meaning, at least as far as they were concerned.

After the chaotic situation of the eighteenth century, the Viceroy’s regime established peace and also a strong foundation for a centralized government in India. In 1877, Queen Victoria declared herself to be the Empress of India,



The Proclamation of Queen Victoria as the Empress of India

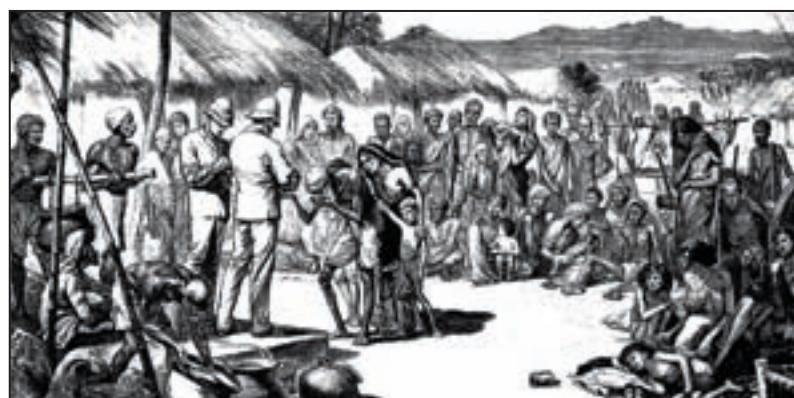
In 1874, Disraeli became the Prime Minister of Britain and pushed through the Royal Titles Act in 1876, as a result of which Queen Victoria of the United Kingdom also became the Empress of India. The new title was to be proclaimed in a special *durbar* in Delhi on January 1, 1877, and elaborate preparations were made for this "Imperial Assemblage." After all the guests, especially the princes, were seated, the Viceroy, Lord Lytton, arrived with all the pomp appropriate for the occasion. The chief herald was then commanded to read the proclamation, which said:

When, by the blessing of Providence, internal tranquility shall be restored, it is our earnest desire to stimulate the peaceful industry of India, to promote works of public utility and improvement, and to

administer the government for the benefit of all our subjects resident therein. In their prosperity will be our strength, in their contentment our security, and in their gratitude our best reward. And may the God of all power grant to us, and to those in authority under us, strength to carry out these our wishes for the good of our people.

Following the reading, a flourish of trumpets was sounded. The Viceroy then made a speech, after which the princes rose one by one to affirm their loyalty to the Crown. The essence of what the princes said was neatly captured by the *Maharaja* of Kashmir, who said that henceforth he would feel very secure under the protection of Her Majesty's benevolent care!

as a result of which Britain formally became an empire with India as the "crown jewel." While the centralized government was no doubt an improvement over Company Raj, the Crown also became an instrument of oppression and repression, both of which produced a strong counter-reaction in the form of Indian nationalism. Several factors contributed to this, prominent among these being Macaulay's educational system. Exposed to modern Western ideas, Indians became politically conscious in increasing numbers. In addition, thanks to education, many Indians also rose to the level of the lower middle class, and slowly they, too, began playing their own role in the demand for freedom from British rule.



A nineteenth-century engraving showing British officers distributing famine relief in a village in Madras Presidency.

Added to all this was the press. Initially it was the British who established and ran newspapers, but soon Indians also began doing the same, publishing newspapers both in English and various Indian languages. Thanks to the railways, newspapers could be distributed outside the towns in which they were printed. The railways and the telegraph thus allowed people to communicate more easily, facilitating further the growth of national consciousness. Adding fuel to fire were various acts of repression. Indiscriminate use of the Indian Army in fruitless expeditions (in Afghanistan, for example) and various disastrous policies soon exhausted the Indian treasury. This severely affected the Indian economy, and due to extreme poverty, there were periodic famines - millions starved, many of them to death, simply because they had no money to buy food. On top of it all was racial discrimination both blatant and subtle, especially in the matter of employment.

Decades rolled by, and while a new century dawned, India continued to remain in the shadow of occupation. What was earlier a mere awakening of national consciousness now became a fierce cry for freedom, with the ardent nationalist Bal Gangadhara Tilak proclaiming loudly, "*Swaraj* (self-rule) is my birthright!" The nationalist movement moved into a new gear in 1915 with the return to India of Gandhi, who until that time was in South Africa. Gandhi was concerned

about the future of India, but his philosophy, approach and methods were all rooted deeply in the past, that is to say in non-negotiable moral imperatives handed down from ancient times. More than anything else, in the midst of all his various political preoccupations, Gandhi was always focused on the poor of India, irrespective of their religion and caste. What always pained him was the suffering of others.

As political fervor grew, so did the nervousness of the British rulers. Slowly they began to realize that one day power would have to be transferred, leading to an independent India. At the same time, giving up power was not easy, and so the usual political game of divide and rule was also played. In practical terms, the British tried to drag on the political discussion, expressing all sorts of concerns about various minority groups, totally ignoring the fact that for centuries before the British came India had existed as one culturally united subcontinent, though with a highly diverse texture. Sadly, British policies fanned communal passions, which a smart lawyer named Mohammed Ali Jinnah (1876-1948) from Bombay took full advantage of. Though he shunned Muslim orthodoxy, Jinnah found the "Muslim identity" a shrewd card to play, which, of course, suited the British. In effect what Jinnah said was that if the British left, the Muslims of British India would not be safe and must therefore have their own homeland.

Meanwhile World War II broke out, and the independence movement was promptly curbed by invoking emergency powers; most of the leaders of the national movement were arrested and thrown in jail. Basically what the Viceroy said was: "No talk whatsoever of independence now; after the war, maybe." Shortly after the war ended there was a general election in Britain; Churchill the war hero was voted out, and Clement Atlee became the Prime Minister. Atlee quickly realized that Britain no longer had the money to maintain a big empire. It was nice to entertain nostalgic and imperialistic dreams, but Rule Britannia was no longer feasible at the practical level. The smart thing to do was to let the colonies become free, and Atlee decided to start with India. As part of this process, in August 1946 the Viceroy (at that time Lord Wavell) invited Jawaharlal Nehru to form an interim government, the idea being that when independence was granted, the interim government would take over the responsibility of governing India. That was when Jinnah's

communal cry became louder, demanding that before leaving the British must ensure a homeland for the Muslims of the subcontinent. In other words, Jinnah wanted British India to be partitioned.

Most people were against partition, including many Muslims. Gandhi in particular always believed strongly in the unity of all people, irrespective of religion, caste, etc., and he was totally opposed to partition since it went against everything he stood for. However, Jinnah was so adamant that partition had to be agreed to eventually by almost all, including those who had dreamed of one India.

Partition did not mean simply drawing a line on a map, declaring one segment to be India and the other to be Pakistan (the name Jinnah had selected for the Muslim homeland). Since the very idea of division was born out of strong communal passions and frenzy, the prospect of partition created a deep sense of insecurity in the minority communities living on either side of the soon-to-be international border. Thus on the eve of the event, as well as subsequently, there was a mass migration of millions of Hindus and Muslims, crossing over the border from both sides. Separatism was triggered by jealousy; from jealousy was born anger, which then transformed to hatred, morphing finally into insecurity. The wise saw it all coming and also warned of the dangers, but when the mind is deluded by extreme passion, the voice of



When World War II broke out, India, being a colony, was automatically dragged into the war. The leaders of the national movement protested, arguing that it was a sham to ask Indian soldiers to fight for freedom of people in the West, when their own country was being occupied. The leaders agreed that Fascism had to be defeated and that free India might even join the war; but India should not be made a participant as a colony. Talks were held with the Viceroy to persuade Britain to agree to the demand. The front page of *The Times of India* (published from Bombay) dated August 8, 1940, shows what the response of the Viceroy was.

the wise is seldom heard. Given the huge buildup of tension, along with partition also came violence on an unimaginable scale, with over a million perishing in the process.

This mass killing was not the result of a war between two powerful armies. Sadly, it was just ordinary people killing each other in blinding rage that drove them to temporary madness. It was an important lesson to humanity that whipping up passion through extreme inflammatory rhetoric could have dangerous consequences. One wonders though whether humanity has learned that lesson or ever will. Meanwhile, Gandhi was totally shattered by partition, especially its aftermath. Valiantly he tried his best to promote communal harmony, but in the charged atmosphere that prevailed, few heard his pleas. Eventually he fell to an assassin's bullet.

Mercifully, with the passage of time and the rise of new generations, partition has become somewhat of a dim memory. Following independence, India became a secular republic guaranteeing religious freedom to all, while Pakistan declared itself an Islamic republic. Interestingly, despite partition, India has more Muslims today than Pakistan; in a sense, that reflects the tradition of India.

The question can legitimately be asked: "This book is about Sathya Sai Baba; why bring in history? What has that got to do with Baba and his work?" I believe that there are valid reasons to do so. Without the background of this chapter, a person who is not aware of the prevailing history of those times might, from a reading of Chapter 2, get the impression that Baba, a partially educated person, was trying to serve humanity with little knowledge of the real world. That lingering view might well cloud the reader's opinion as he/she goes through chapters where Baba's various contributions and accomplishments are described in detail. Those achievements are so impressive that the narrative could well strain the reader's credulity. On the other hand, the background presented here, especially relating to imperial oppression and partition, will help in understanding how the prevailing ambience did have an influence on Baba, despite his apparent insulation from the mainstream.

The communal frenzy following partition was largely confined to the north; however, its impact was felt everywhere

and by almost everyone in some manner; how then could Baba remain untouched, especially when he was so passionate about harmony and love? Nevertheless, he refrained from making any public comments. Deep inside, he knew that the entire problem started in the human mind when the latter was hijacked by anger. Pure Love was the only antidote to anger and all related evil tendencies. Baba was well aware of how those problems ought to be dealt with; however, all that could not be done overnight. There was a long march ahead, and he needed time to prepare for it.

Let us examine this proposition in some detail, going back to the 1930s. Yes, Puttaparthi was quite isolated, almost in the middle of nowhere. However, everyone there knew about poverty because they all were born to it. They did not have to read books and newspapers to become aware of water shortages and drought because that was what they often experienced. Intelligent as he was, even as a young boy Baba understood what poverty, suffering and marginalization meant. Interestingly, Baba also knew the importance of education, which is why he ran a school for village adults as long as he was there. In the schools that Sathya attended, there were Muslim teachers who liked him immensely. That gave him firsthand experience of how a basic unity underlying the whole of humanity can build bridges connecting so-called divides. When he was studying in the school in Uravakonda (this was shortly before he quit school), the headmaster selected Sathya to lead the school in prayer. Sathya composed a special song, set it to music and sang it every morning during the general assembly. And what was that song all about? One nation united under God, transcending all man-made divisions. When Sathya dropped out of school, the headmaster selected a Muslim boy to lead the prayer. On the first day that this boy had to sing that song, he started off well, but halfway through he was so overcome with grief that he stopped singing and began to sob. All these may be small incidents, but they are enough to illustrate that in the world far from politics, people can and do bond together through love and understanding.

The problems of poverty, hunger, disunity - all these became firmly etched in young Sathya's mind. He also knew that outside of the rural areas there was a huge chasm, as a result of which people on the other side hardly bothered about the hardships rural India faced. That was why even at



A cattle fair in a village in North India.

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 SOLUTIONS.**

an early age, Baba was determined to find new and novel ways of dealing with those problems. So great was his passion that he even dared to drop out of school and leap far beyond routine education. He did not need school to teach him what neglect and marginalization were all about.

India has always had a large population. For example, at the time of partition, the population was about 300 million. Rural India was poor, but it was rural India that fed the country. The rest of the country took its food supply for granted but hardly bothered about rural India, the source of all that food. There was some development, but always dictated by the priorities of either the government or big business, and those priorities had little to do with the rural regions. (Sadly, rural India continues to receive far less attention than it really requires.)

Silently, Baba absorbed all these facets of life, the “progress” as well as the segmentation that such asymmetric growth produced. He not only understood the problems but also why they arose in the first place, which in turn also shaped his views about how these problems ought to be tackled. The planning, he realized, must start with the people who were supposed to benefit from the solutions. Unfortunately, public administration (in all countries, one might add) never works that way. Instead, administrators invariably use a top-down approach. A difficulty or problem on the ground gets reported to higher authorities via a long bureaucratic chain. If the pinch is felt at that level, some attention is given to solving the problem, but as seen through the prism of files, memos, statistics, financial constraints and maybe even political fallouts.



Carpenters working in a village.



A woman drawing water from a well in a village in North India.



A farmer in South India sifting rice after threshing.



A farmer plowing a field.

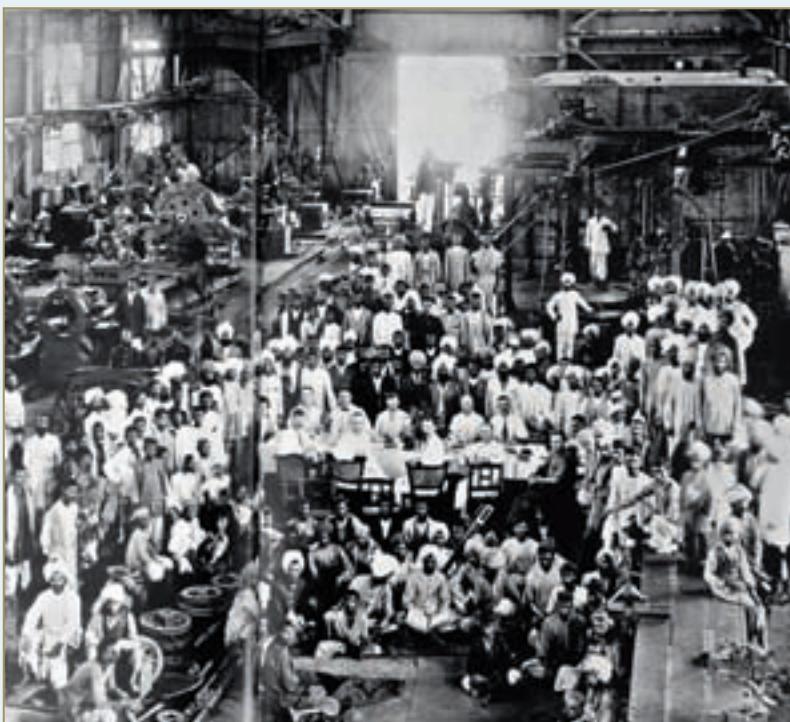


A village scene in Bengal.

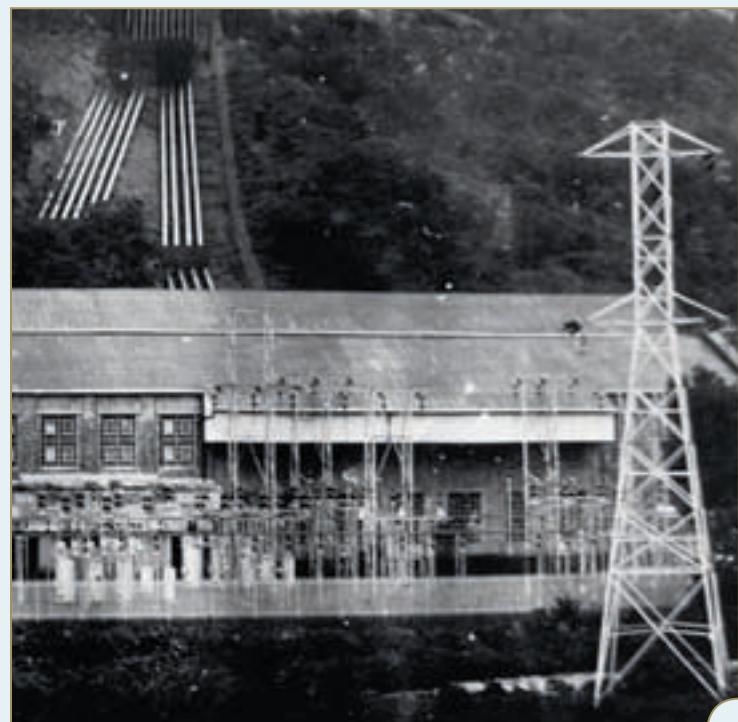
The pictures on this and the following page offer a brief glimpse of the two layers of India that coexisted in the early part of the twentieth century. On one side was rural India, which covered over 80% of the country. It was poor and neglected, but it fed the country. On the other side was industrial India, trying to advance, in part through the effort of the business community. Transport, manufacturing and energy production all conferred benefits of their own, including to the laborers, many of whom were migrants from rural areas. Baba belonged to rural India and also lived there; nevertheless, he felt the pulse of the whole of India.



A textile mill in Bombay.



Picture taken around 1914 during the opening of a factory. The officers are seated around a table, while a musical prayer group is sitting on the floor.



A power station near Bombay.



These two iconic pictures epitomize the two layers of British India, the rural and the industrial. The picture at the top was taken around 1900 somewhere in Madras Presidency; that below was taken in the mid-1930s at a small airport in Bombay. The airport photo is particularly striking since fuel was being delivered by bullock cart to the small plane behind, a mail carrier!

In a sense this is unavoidable. However, when it is a question of addressing the needs of people who have huge problems but little voice, the purely administrative, top-down approach often loses its way through layers of bureaucracy, failing to deliver the goods. Such failure, which is common all over the world, is frequently due to a lack of sensitivity on the part of the project planners as well as the implementers.

Every year, large sums of money are allocated by the government for building schools, setting up dispensaries, constructing roads, etc., in rural areas. Money is not only allocated but also spent, and something gets done, too. Nevertheless, what is done is mostly patchy and substandard. Why? Because the needs of the people and the problems they face are not properly taken into account. To give a rather common example, few rural schools have decent drinking water facilities or toilets.

It is in such matters that Baba's planning shows a wonderful difference. He understood very well the danger of the disconnect that could arise in the top-down approach. Thus, in everything he did, Baba always kept in mind the needs, the pain and the suffering of the people for whom he was doing a particular project. Simply put, he added sensitivity to project planning and execution. Linking to the opening quotations, one might say that Baba added the element of compassion to the traditional method that looked at solutions largely within the framework of administration, finance and technology. This was essentially a top-down approach. Baba balanced it by injection of a bottom-up angle, based on compassion, and the source of that compassion was Love.

As we shall see in the next two chapters, Baba approached everything by starting from Love, be it dealing with individuals on a one-to-one basis, or talking to a group of people like students and businessmen, or executing projects intended to benefit the public. None of this happened either suddenly or by accident. Rather, it was a culmination of a long process. During the first 14 years Baba, then known as Sathya, was, one might say, quietly preparing himself to break away from the trajectory along which he was being led by his elders. From 1940 to 1950, Baba moved forward to getting set, although superficially he appeared to be preoccupied with devotees who were slowly coming to him seeking Love.

Meanwhile, the country became free in 1947. No doubt it was now politically free, but huge problems connected with the eradication of poverty, disease and illiteracy lay around the corner. How was the new nation going to deal with them, given the fact that the country was still quite backward at that time? No one knew for sure. Baba, however, was absolutely sure that these and similar problems could not be tackled unless one started from the basics, namely, primary values such as Truth, Righteousness, Peace, Love and Nonviolence. As far as he was concerned, his first task was to gently draw more and more people to him, largely by arousing their interest in spirituality; the rest could come later.

It was in 1950, when he had a permanent base, that Baba began to slowly but steadily switch over to the mission mode, as we shall see in the next chapter. But this much can be said by way of concluding this chapter. Though apparently cut off in a physical sense from the rest of India during his formative years, Baba nevertheless always felt the pulse of the country. He did not need a classroom education to get that feel. On the contrary, realizing that standard education might push him into the traditional path of a career, possibly in government (which was the dream of most parents and possibly schoolboys as well), he dropped out, absolutely clear that very different attitudes were needed to tackle the problems that the country was then facing. In addition, he foresaw clearly that similar problems would also be faced following independence, since public administrations generally tend to have the same mindset. If problems affecting the poor and disadvantaged had to be really solved, an out-of-the-box solution was needed. Baba not only knew how those solutions must be crafted but also had with him the basic code for implementing such solutions, namely, *Prema* or selfless Love.

Summing up, the main purpose of taking a diversion in this chapter was to enable the reader to have a better appreciation of the following two chapters, which offer a comprehensive overview of Baba's Love in action. Superficially, the narrative to follow might appear to be a collection of different beneficial activities. If, however, one looks deeper, one will discover a common thread, namely that of Love and compassion delicately intertwined with scientific knowledge, for the larger good.

NOVEMBER 23, 1926



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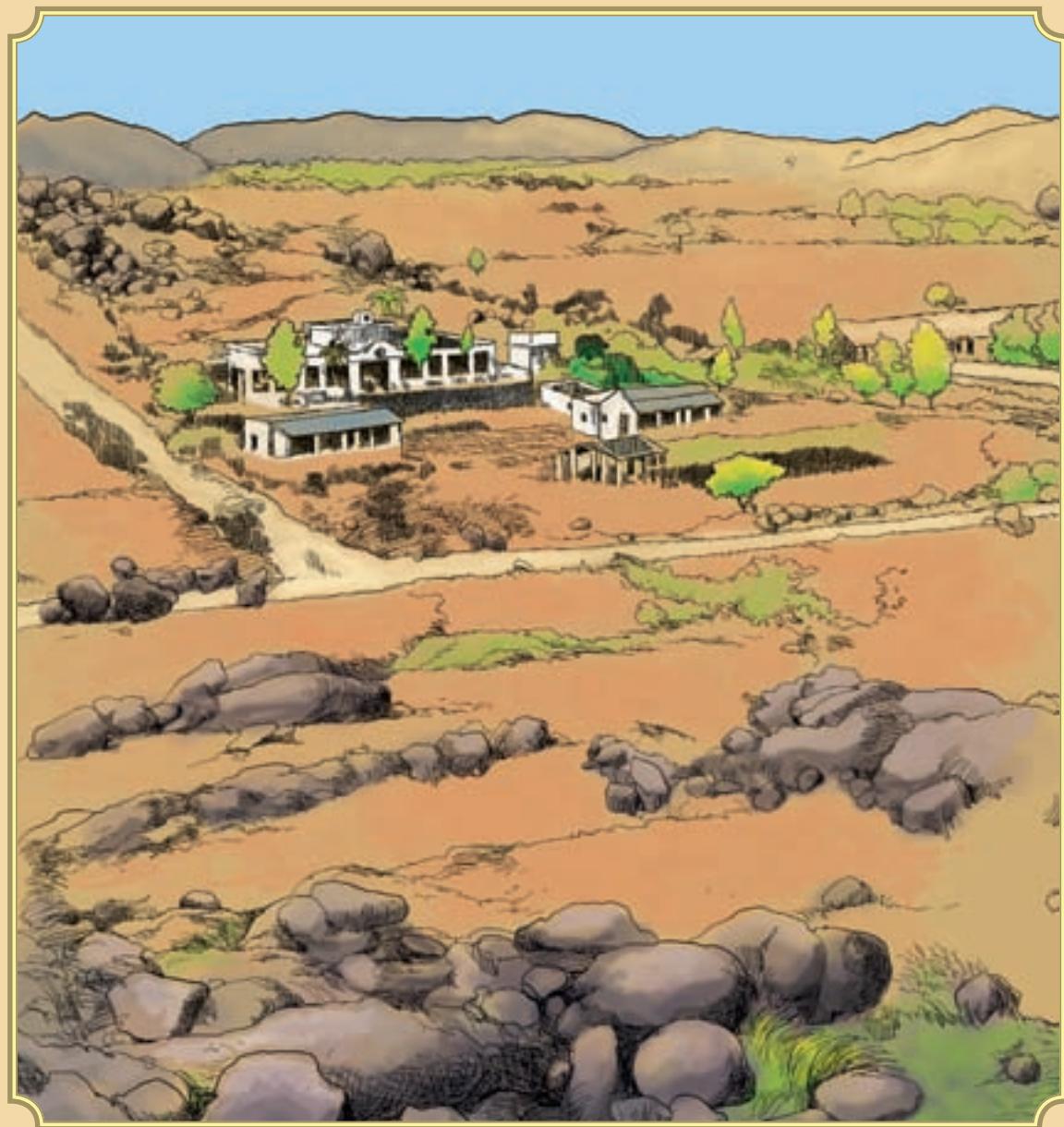


THE IMAGES HERE “CALIBRATE” LANDMARK DAYS IN BABA’S EARLY LIFE IN RELATION TO THE SITUATION OUTSIDE VIA NEWSPAPER HEADLINES. PHYSICALLY BABA MIGHT HAVE LED AN INSULATED LIFE IN RURAL INDIA, BUT EMOTIONALLY HE WAS IN TUNE WITH PEOPLE EVERYWHERE BECAUSE HIS LONG-TERM OBJECTIVE WAS TO SERVE HUMANITY AS A WHOLE. AND SERVE HE DID, ON A SCALE FEW COULD FORESEE.

NOVEMBER 23, 1950



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CHAPTER 4

Getting Started



Introduction



Baba occupied a small room on the top floor, on the right of the picture. Crowds are waiting to see him walk back to his room after lunch, which was served to him in a room on the left (not visible in the picture). Many lingered long after the morning Darshan to have just one more glimpse!



Baba seated in the bhajan hall, listening to devotees singing.

We pick up now from the end of Chapter 2, in November 1950, when Sai Baba moved into his new *ashram*, Prashanti Nilayam (meaning the Abode of Peace). Though barely a mile away from Baba's birthplace, the new residence seemed as if it was in the middle of nowhere—that was how small Puttaparthi was back then. In the tin shed where he lived earlier, Baba was able to accommodate a few devotees who came for an extended stay, but in the new *ashram*, there was no room for that. To make matters worse, there was absolutely no infrastructure to support visitors and devotees. How then did it all work out, particularly with regard to the promise Baba made and the vows he took? That narrative follows.

Anyone can dream big, but often it requires many people to make the dream come true, as, for example, when man had to be put on the Moon. Well aware of that, Baba made creating a large-scale thirst for goodness his first priority. Thanks to a long religious and cultural tradition, many in the country did yearn to be good and flocked to those who were ready to show the way. Keeping this in mind, Baba began by making *Darshan* and *bhajans* an important part of his daily routine.

Darshan is one of those words difficult to translate into European languages because of its close relationship to the local ethos, culture and tradition. Simply stated, *Darshan* means being in the presence of a holy one or a deity installed in a temple. Even today, thousands of people in India go to various places just to be in a serene and sacred ambience for a while and feel close to their soul. Alternately or in addition, they also seek realized souls so they can be in their presence, experience inner calm and, if lucky, speak to the master. All this might not make much sense to Westerners or those who have embraced Western culture. Nevertheless, the fact remains that people everywhere yearn to commune with something beyond and transcendental in order to feel uplifted. Some seek to achieve this through solitude or communion with nature. Others withdraw into themselves to discover



This picture, which was taken in the 1970s, shows Baba moving among the crowd and giving Darshan.

the creative aspects of the soul through art, literature, music, etc. At the highest level, such self-discovery finds expression through the manifestation of goodness, nobility and virtue. This indeed is what spirituality is all about, reaching out to that mysterious spirit within, symbolic of our transcendental roots. A long time ago, humans everywhere intuitively recognized this (though in small numbers), indeed much before the emergence of formal religions. Thus almost every major religion lays stress on the primacy of a virtuous life and doing good to others.

In India, there has been a long tradition of deep belief in compassion, tolerance and respect for all living forms, as well as living in harmony with others. That is how Christians, Jews and Muslims who first came to India more than a thousand years ago were able to live in peace and practice their respective faiths. It was the same spirit of tolerance that enabled many Zoroastrians of Persia to seek refuge in India during the eighth century. Religions like Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism, all of which were born in India, also reflect the same value system, i.e., unity in diversity. Given this background, Baba's unbounded Love immediately struck a chord and soon he began to draw increasingly large crowds.



More Darshan scenes, showing Baba interacting with the public.



Baba having a personal conversation with a devotee during Darshan. This is one of the many characteristics that made him very popular.



Baba accepting a letter from a devotee. Periodically Baba would give the letters collected to the person behind him, who would drop them into the bag in his hand. After Darshan was over, the bag would be given to Baba, who would then read all the letters later at his convenience.



Baba reaching to receive a letter.

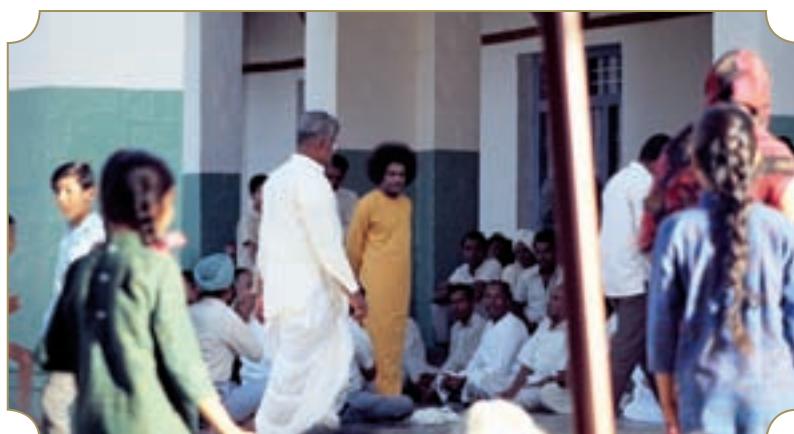


Baba selecting people and sending them for an interview.

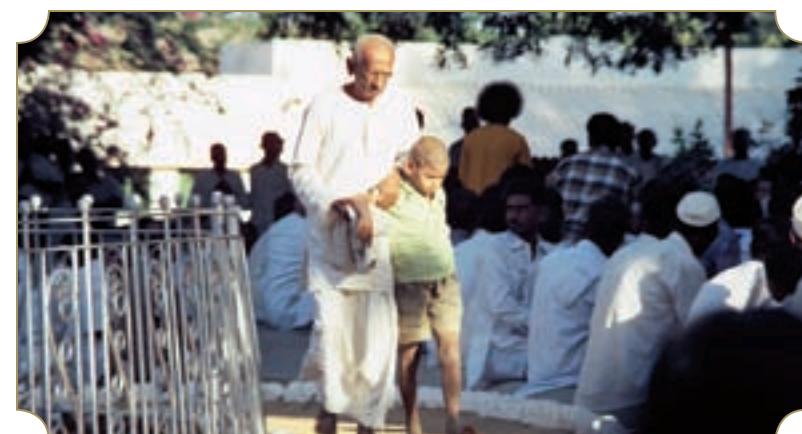
In those early days, reaching Puttaparthi was an arduous exercise, and after getting there, one had to accept the total absence of facilities for visitors. But the early seekers were undeterred, content to stay in the open space in front of the new *Mandir*, living under trees and cooking food using dry twigs to make fire. The moment they knew Baba was coming out for *Darshan*, they would rush to the building where he lived. Baba moved slowly around the crowd, talking to people and accepting letters from those who offered them. Soon

giving a letter to Baba became an institution, since the letter gave a chance for the devotee to express in detail his/her wish, aspirations and even anguish. Incidentally, Baba accepted letters to the very end.

Every day during *Darshan*, Baba would invite some people and take them to a room on the ground floor of the *Mandir* for an extended and personal chat. Known as the “interview,” this, too, became an institution and was eagerly

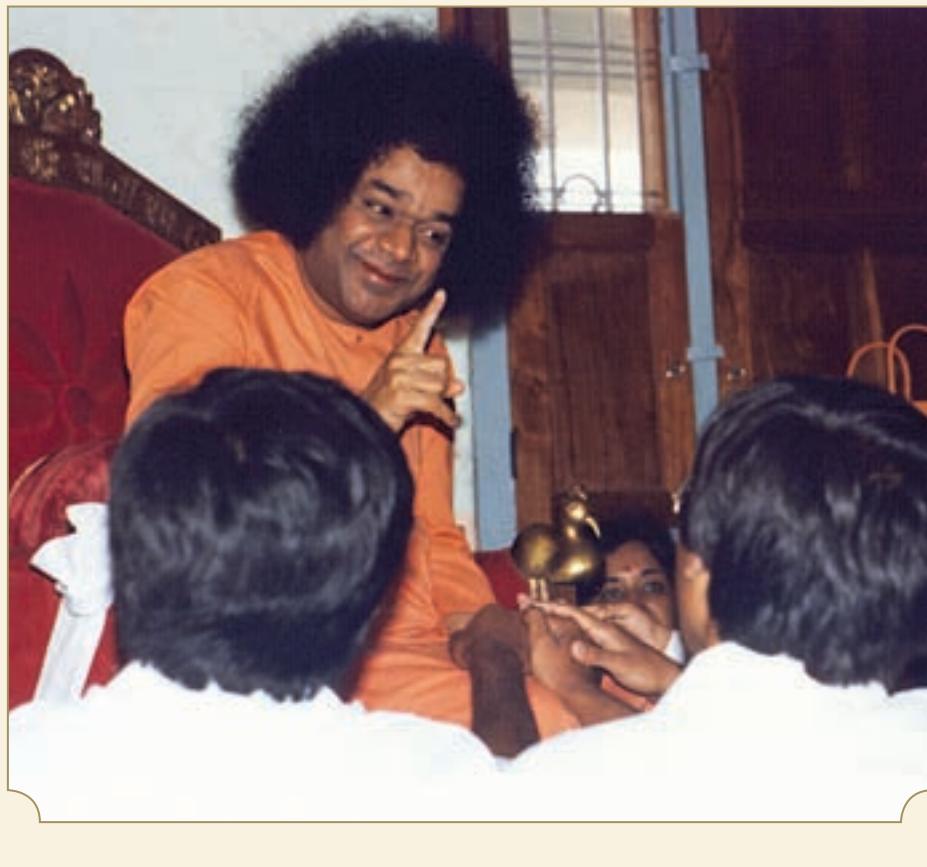


People walking to the interview room.





Scenes inside the interview room. The sessions were so lively that people hungered for interviews and came again and again, hoping they would be called in!



sought. Typically the interview would commence with Baba making small talk as soon as everyone was seated. He would, for example, ask everyone where he/she came from, which then would lead to a general discussion that Baba would make quite lively with humor, even as the peals of laughter inside fueled speculation in the crowd outside. For Baba, small talk was a mere prelude to giving spiritual guidance. He also gave personal advice to everyone called in, especially regarding the problems and difficulties that most interviewees had. For this, Baba would take every family in the group separately to an inner room so that they could bare their soul and unburden their problems without any reservation, which they always did because of their faith in Baba. Talking with Love, Baba unfailingly boosted their confidence, besides giving practical suggestions as appropriate. Baba loved helping others and never asked for anything from anyone at any time. That single act of selflessness played its own role in drawing more and more people to him.

Until about the mid-1950s, there was no direct road to Puttaparthi, but by the 1960s there was a dirt track that enabled motorists to drive there if they were tenacious enough; but where infrastructure was concerned, the situation had barely improved. In fact as late as 1968, Arnold Schulman of Hollywood described Puttaparthi as a village about 100 miles (approximately 160 kilometers) from Bangalore and 10 minutes past the Stone Age! And yet if hundreds came daily for Baba's *Darshan*, it was solely due to the power of Baba's Love.

For the public it might have seemed as if it was just *Darshans*, interviews and *bhajans*, but behind them all lay a clear master plan. On festival days when



Show here are pictures of Baba delivering discourses. In the early years, Baba spoke from the balcony on the top floor.



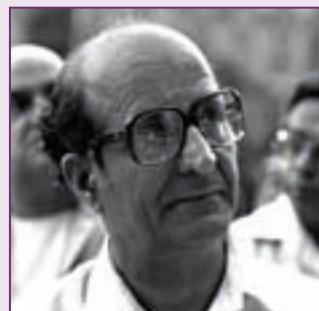
Baba is again speaking from the balcony. Notice the changes to the balcony with the passage of time.



Much later, Baba began speaking from the ground floor veranda.

there was always a large crowd, Baba invariably delivered a discourse packed with spiritual teachings. At that time the crowd consisted almost entirely of Hindus. Even so, Baba used his discourses to help devotees look beyond institutionalized religion into core principles encapsulated in five words, namely, *Sathya, Dharma, Shanti, Prema* and *Ahimsa*. These words are usually translated as Truth, Righteousness, Peace, Love and Nonviolence. Although good as a starting point, these translations hardly convey what the words stand for. Their exact meaning is explained separately (see box on next page). In subsequent years these core principles have come to be collectively referred to as human values. As Baba repeatedly pointed out, one cannot

Nani Palkhivala



One of best explanations of exactly what the five human values actually mean and imply was given by the eminent jurist Nani Palkhivala (1920-2002), who, among other positions, served as India's ambassador to the United States during the Carter administration. In 1982, Palkhivala delivered an address (in the United States this would be referred to as the commencement speech) at the time of the first convocation of the university established by Baba (the story of how this university came to be established comes shortly). This in part is how Palkhivala amplified what *Sathya*, *Dharma*, etc., actually mean, during that speech:

You will not find a word in English or French or German that will give you the full equivalent of the concept of Sathya. Sathya means truth, as in the maxim, "There is no religion higher than truth." But Sathya also means being true to yourself. It connotes intellectual integrity and acting according to your conscience. These various nuances of the word Sathya have not been encapsulated in a single English word. In our world today, truth seems to be in the background, and it is falsehood that is in the ascendant, and yet you never despair of truth.

*Truth forever on the scaffold,
Wrong forever on the throne;
Yet that scaffold sways the future,
And behind the dim unknown
Standeth God, beneath the shadow,
Keeping watch above from His own.*

No single word in any European language covers all the elements of *Dharma*. *Dharma* connotes righteousness, nobility, right conduct, a philosophy of life that makes you a worthy citizen of the world... Historians have been amazed at the fact that India for centuries has survived without a central government or any strong authority engaged in enforcing laws. What held

the nation together was the ideal of *Dharma*. It is perhaps the greatest, noblest ideal to which human conduct can aspire.

Shanti is not just peace. It is something that transcends peace. It is the calm of the mind, which makes you find inner peace and total stability within yourself. Shanti plays a great role in any integrated personality's life and conduct.

*We see all sights from Pole to Pole
And glance and nod and bustle by,
And never once possess our soul
Before we die.*

Those who practice Shanti have learned how to possess their soul before the last hour arrives.

Take the last ideal, Ahimsa. Again there is no English single word that can be used as its equivalent... When you practice Ahimsa, you identify yourself with the entire created Universe. It is a feeling of kinship, of oneness, with all animate creatures. Ahimsa enjoins you to love your fellowmen, as well as animals and birds.

The question arises as to how one does a self-check regarding whether one is faithfully adhering in daily life to Truth, Righteousness, etc. This, in Indian tradition, is possible through the use of a faculty known as *Buddhi*, which is a term for not merely intellectual but also spiritual discrimination that enables one to clearly distinguish between real and false choices. This is how Palkhivala describes *Buddhi*.

Again, there is no equivalent for the word Buddhi in the European languages... Buddhi is that state of mind that makes you not merely wise but gives you an insight into the created Universe. A man of Buddhi is in harmony with his environment and in tune with the infinite. The five ideals can lead man to attain the state of Buddhi.

call oneself a human being merely because of the form, which is a sheer consequence of biology. A person merits being called human only when the person exhibits humane qualities. That, Baba asserted, calls for a principled and uncompromising adherence to the true meaning of Truth, Righteousness, Peace, Love and Nonviolence.

Baba did not restrict himself to reaching out to the general public. During his early travels, he made it a point to establish contact with scholars of the *Vedas* (the traditional scriptures of Hindus). These scholars were good men and of great piety but quite rigid and orthodox where religious practices were concerned. They held, for example, that the *Vedas* could be chanted only by male Brahmins (upper caste Hindus), although the *Vedas* do not make any such stipulation. There was a memorable occasion when Baba held in-depth discussions with Vedic scholars regarding the interpretation of the *Vedas*, which happened when Baba visited the princely state of Venkatagiri for the first time.

The *Raja* of Venkatagiri (the head of the state) was a curious mixture of the West and the East. Consequent to his relationship with fellow princes in the country and the British Empire, the *Raja* readily adopted many Western practices, like playing polo, for example. At the same time, as a devout Hindu, he actively encouraged religious scholars and enthusiastically supported the observance of all religious festivals. It was around 1950 that the *Raja* first came to know about Baba; and once the *Raja* saw him, he extended many invitations to Baba to visit Venkatagiri. Eventually Baba agreed, and it was during his first visit that the conversations with Vedic scholars took place. In the beginning the scholars were politely dismissive, but soon they realized that Baba understood the *Vedas* far better than they did. From Baba they learned that the subtle undercurrent of the hymns they routinely chanted pointed to a transcendental and sublime unity or a Super Consciousness, from which the Universe was born as a manifestation of the diversity underlying unity.

Convincing the orthodoxy to rise above its limited perspective and adopt a broader as well as a more universal outlook was no small matter. From a purely social and worldly point of view, Baba belonged to a “lower caste” and the scholars, being Brahmins, were not obliged to pay heed to what he said. Nevertheless, these orthodox scholars



Baba with the Raja of Venkatagiri.



The main building in the Venkatagiri palace complex. There was a huge courtyard in front of the palace.



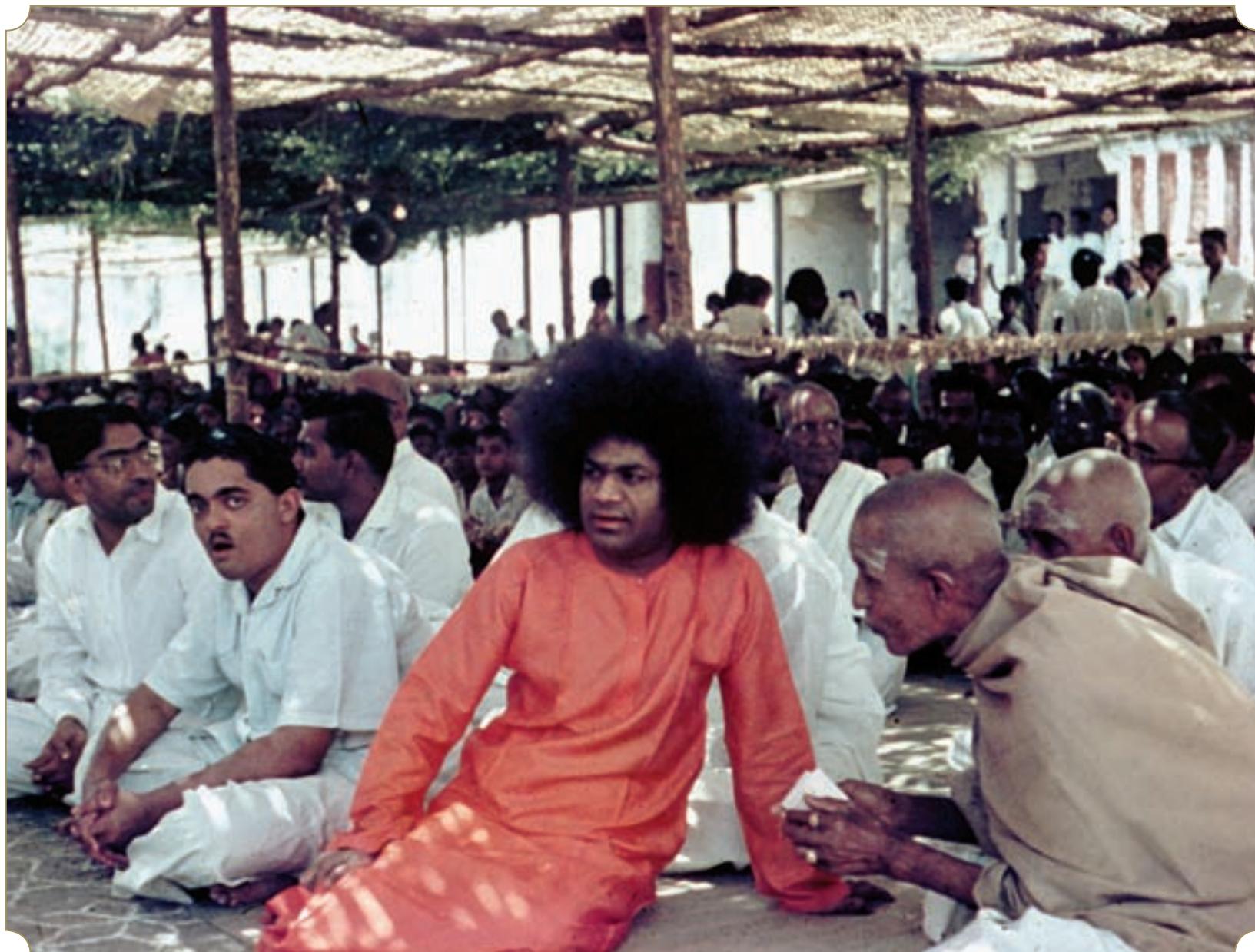
Baba in Venkatagiri. Here he is looking around while waiting for a major Vedic ritual to begin.

were also aware that scriptural knowledge was Divine, and because God was seated in all Hearts, any pure soul could access that knowledge, irrespective of man-made barriers such as caste. Thus when Baba explained clearly the subtler aspects of spiritual philosophy with which they had seldom bothered, these once-skeptical religious scholars bowed to his superior understanding. This scene was repeated on several occasions, particularly during Baba's travels in the coastal area of Andhra Pradesh, famed for its Vedic tradition and scholars. Among those whom Baba met there was a respected scholar known as Kamavadhani, who was keen to ascertain from personal experience whether Baba really understood the *Vedas*, as was being reported. Kamavadhani came, saw and was humbled, indeed to such an extent that he left home to be with Baba for the rest of his life, and he lived to the age of 100!

Serving as a resident priest and scholar in Prashanti Nilayam, Kamavadhani began training students in the chanting of *Vedas*, irrespective of their caste, something he would not have done earlier. He also enthusiastically extended

his support when Baba said that women, too, could chant the *Vedas*, despite the prevailing "ban" that had merely the sanction of tradition rather than that of the scriptures. Baba went even further to declare that since the *Vedas* proclaim a universal message, anyone could chant them if he/she wanted to and believed in that message. And the day did come when people from different parts of the world took pride in chanting the *Vedas* with the required tonal purity, appreciating at the same time its universal nature.

In brief, Baba began by gently injecting a spiritual motif into the lives of those who looked up to him for advice, after which he used discourses to draw attention to the universality that lay beyond traditional and institutionalized religion. Thus, in various ways that included private conversations as well as personal sessions in the interview room, Baba slowly created public awareness of a higher reality that transcends the physical and the mental planes. That reality, Baba further pointed out, could actually be experienced by leading a virtuous life on the one hand and by intensive self-inquiry on the other. Why should one bother about all this? Because,



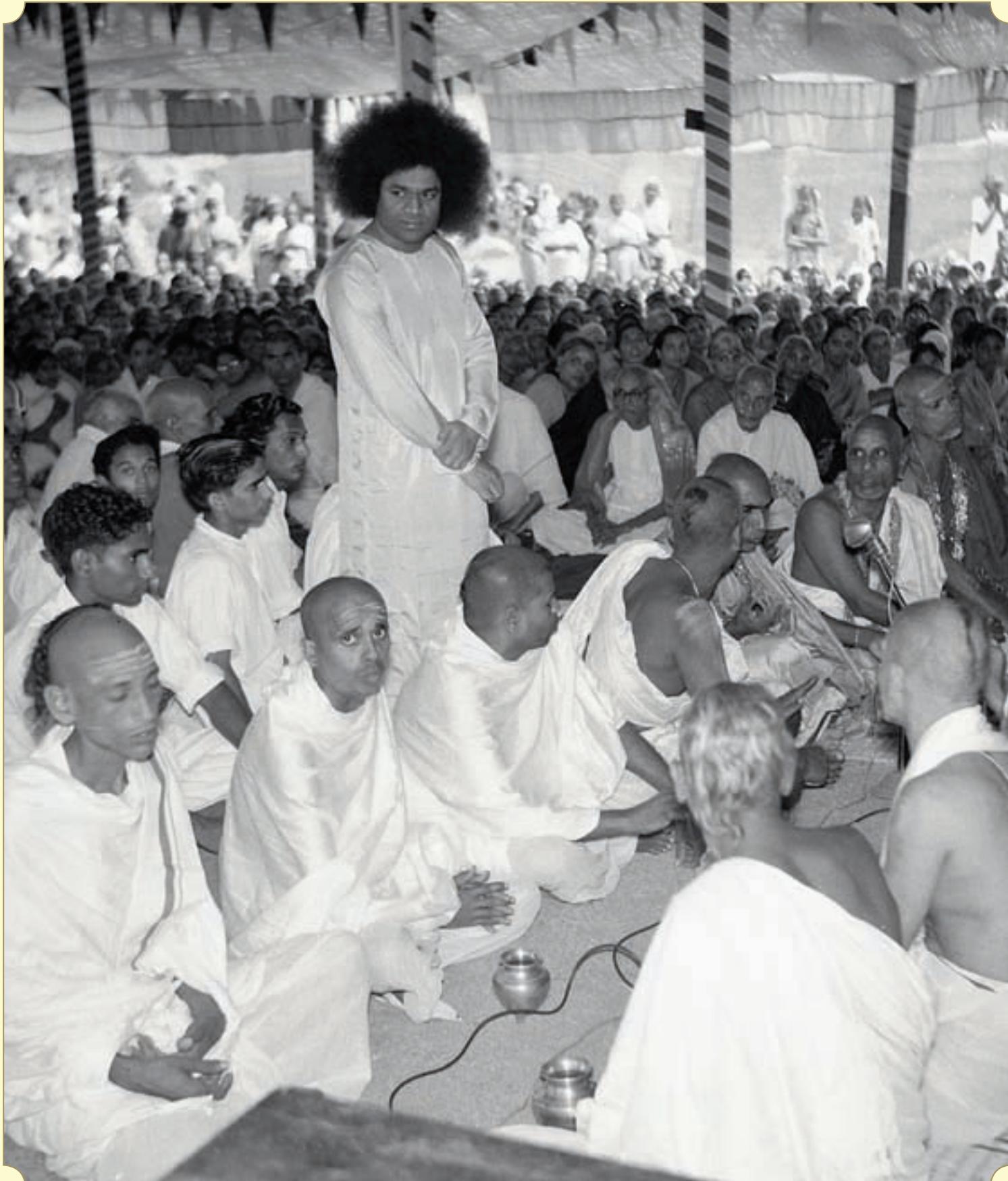
Baba watching the ritual in progress and listening at the same time to a Vedic scholar.



Seated with Vedic scholars.



In intense discussions with the scholars.



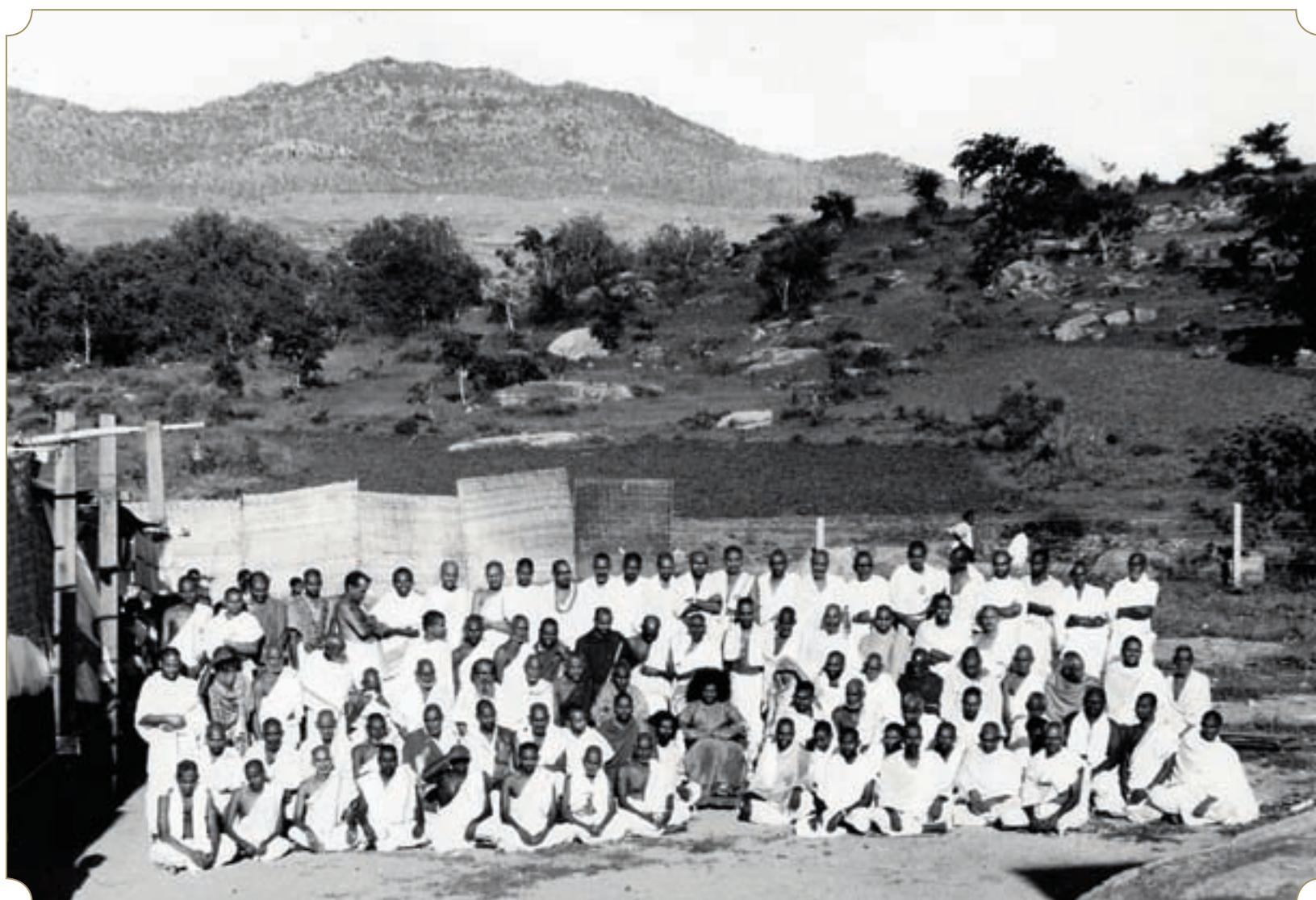
Baba standing and watching while a Vedic ritual is in progress.



This picture and the one below were taken in Puttaparthi when a big group of priests and Vedic scholars came to see him. Above, Baba is seen with the priests inside the bhajan hall; obviously, this happened after they had accepted Baba.

Baba explained, "Happiness is union with God," adding that by seeing God in all aspects of Creation and making every activity in life a service to Him, it is easy to achieve contentment and happiness. That should not come as a surprise since God is not really somewhere else but a resident of the Heart; this is why service to God fills the Heart with happiness. Inner happiness, Baba never failed to stress, is the best type of joy there is because it is connected with pleasing the soul.

Baba did not stay in his native village all the time and traveled on many occasions in response to invitations from devotees. In practical terms, this allowed him to take his message to a larger audience. Often he would go out of the way to do certain things just to please his followers. Thus, for example, when a few close devotees asked him to lead



Group photo of Baba with Vedic scholars.



Kamavadhani (with green shawl) leading a small procession of priests during a function. Kamavadhani came to Baba when he was in middle age, but by the time this picture was taken, he had aged considerably.



Portrait of Kamavadhani in his later days.

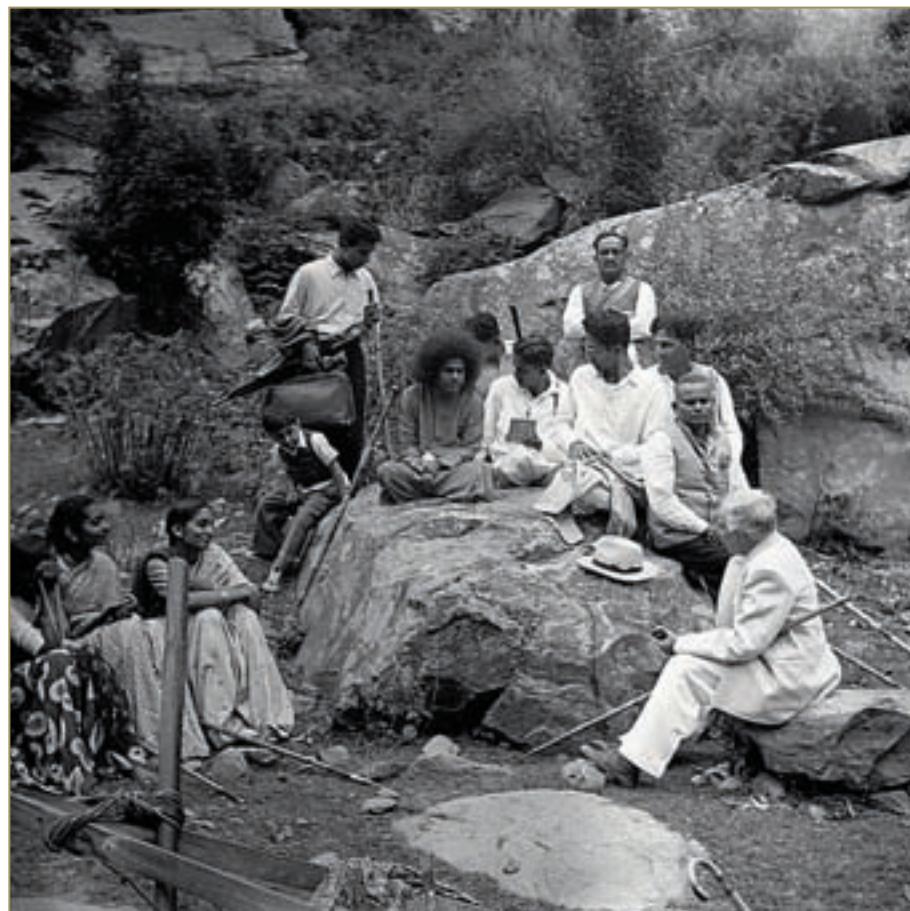
a group to the holy shrine of Badrinath in the Himalayas, Baba readily agreed. The last 20 miles (approximately 32 kilometers) or so of the journey had to be made on foot, and Baba led the team with much enthusiasm, enabling the elders to forget the hardship of climbing. At the same time, Baba constantly stressed that the Heart was the real temple of God and that He could always be reached there, if one was prepared to shed undesirable qualities such as anger, jealousy, greed, and, above all, ego, the greatest enemy of a human being. It was, of course, not easy to persuade people to go beyond the comfort zone of "tradition and rituals," but Baba was ready to be patient. As he often said, "I am ready to do what you ask of me so that one day you are ready to listen to what I wish to tell you, namely, how to find peace by communing with your soul!"

.....
**...BABA CONSTANTLY
STRESSED THAT THE
HEART WAS THE REAL
TEMPLE OF GOD
AND THAT HE COULD
ALWAYS BE REACHED
THERE...**



These pictures represent a brief fast-forward and show a big group from Japan proudly demonstrating their ability to chant the Vedas with the same purity of tone and pronunciation as the locals.





The pictures on this page and many that follow are wonderful, never-before-published photographs of the trip to Badrinath that Baba led in 1961. It is worth mentioning that this temple becomes snowbound in winter and is therefore closed from October to about March. We begin with a spectacular picture (on the left) of the party walking across a suspension bridge to cross a river.

The picture at the top of this page shows Baba and some of his walking companions; others in the group, including the women, came behind, while the elders were carried by porters. The picture alongside shows Baba and some members of the group taking a break.



Negotiating a narrow road in the mountains.



Coming out of the Badrinath temple.

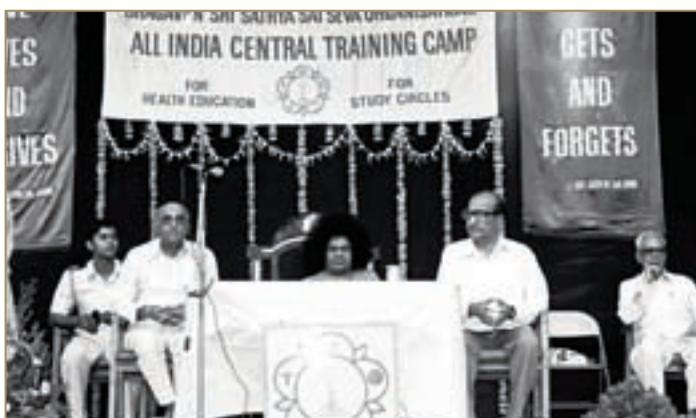


Group photograph of the party.

The Very First Institutions



A meeting convened in Bangalore to discuss the role of spirituality in daily life.



A meeting in progress, held as part of a training camp conducted in Bombay (now Mumbai).

Darshans, bhajans, interviews and discourses were mere curtain raisers; slowly Baba also began engaging devotees in activities that would help them to progress spiritually. To facilitate and accelerate this process, Baba founded in 1965 the Sri Sathya Sai Seva/Service Organization, *seva* being the Indian word for selfless service. For Baba service was not the end; rather, it was the first step in an individual's spiritual refinement. This sets Baba's Seva Organization apart from the other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in that it is a service organization with a spiritual foundation. Yes, Baba did ask the members of his organization to serve society without any distinctions based on caste, creed, race, religion and nationality, as most NGOs also demand. But Baba also wanted something more from his volunteers, namely, to engage in service with the specific objective of eliminating ego.



Baba addressing a conference of the Seva Organization in Puttaparthi.

Pictures on this page relate to various meetings and conferences held as part of the activities of the All India Sathya Sai Seva Organization.

.....
**BABA SAID: "ALWAYS
 SEE GOD IN THOSE
 WHOM YOU SERVE.
 THEN ALONE WOULD
 YOUR EGO COME
 DOWN!"**

The picture here and those on the following several pages highlight one particular kind of service that Baba often engaged in, namely, giving food to the poor. However, he always referred to it as Narayana Seva, literally meaning service to God (Narayana is one of the many names by which God was referred to in the Vedas). Of course, this was not the only way in which Baba served the poor, but, thanks to the example he set, offering food and clothing to the needy became a popular form of service among followers of Baba throughout the world.

Baba inspecting the food about to be distributed; he always insisted on doing this first, before the food was actually served.

Baba knew that hidden in everyone is a streak of love and compassion that easily motivates people to take to service, especially when they see that service brings joy to those being served. All that was needed was a trigger, and Baba used various strategies to provide it. As one speaker said while giving a talk in Baba's presence in Prashanti, "Our greatest reward comes from the smile on the face and sparkle in the eyes of those we serve." And since service brings together many for a good and common cause, differences as well as ego get pushed to the background. Baba himself set the example by regularly distributing food and clothes to the poor in the village. He never called it poor feeding but always referred to it as *Narayana Seva*, meaning service to God - the message to his followers was: "Always see God in those whom you serve; then alone would your ego come down!" Baba did not stop with occasionally serving food and giving clothes; slowly and steadily, he expanded the scope of his service in many ways via a variety of service-oriented projects. Already, he had established a free hospital (to be described later). He followed this up in 1975 by building houses for those who lost their homes during a devastating food; other projects would follow later, reaching people all over the country in various ways.





People seated in front of the Mandir, in preparation for Narayana Seva. Back then the number served was small; later it increased to thousands.



Food being distributed on the occasion of the inauguration of the Puttaparthi General Hospital (in 1956); that story comes later in this chapter.

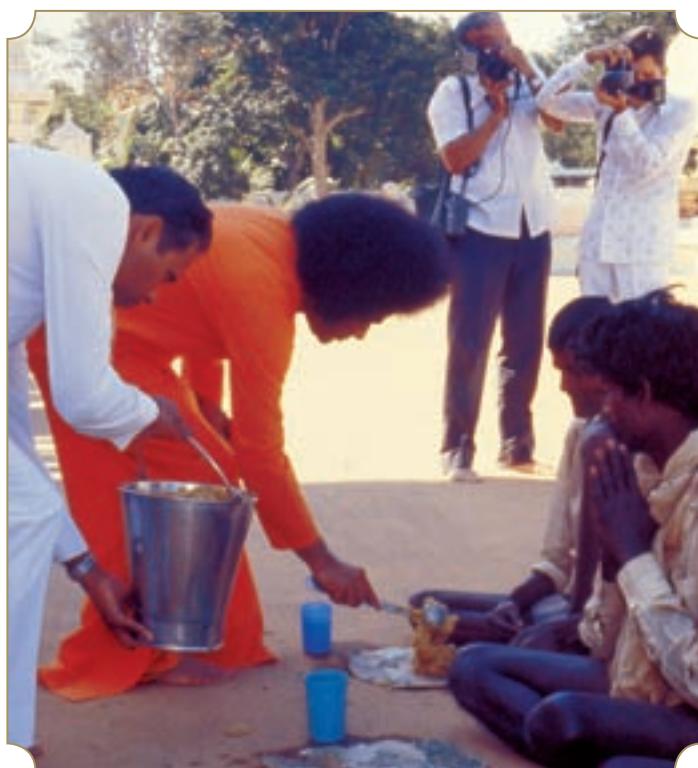
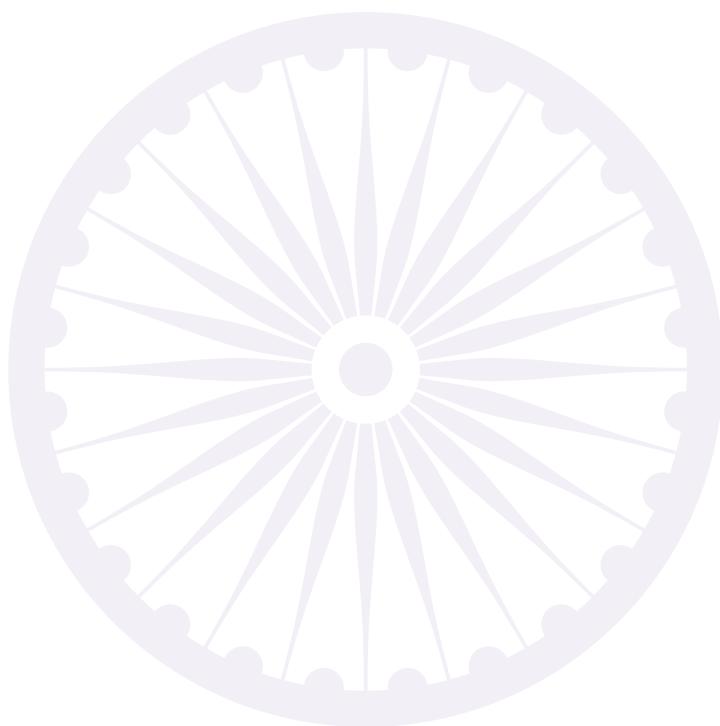


This picture is interesting in that the tin shed here later became a big hall, in fact the one seen in the picture on page 75.

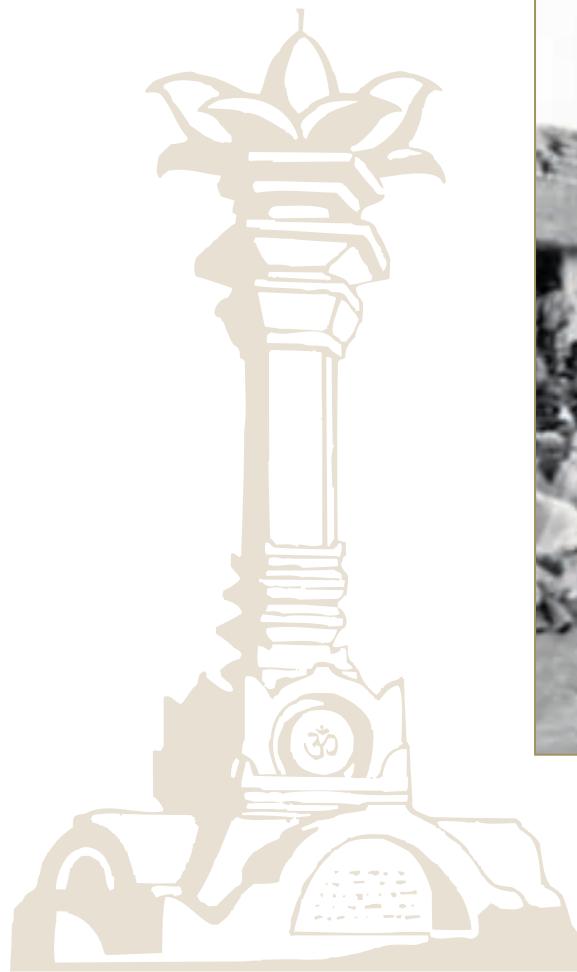


This too is an interesting picture. The clothing shows how poor the people are. Baba is obviously listening to their problems, even as someone is taking notes.

This double-spread picture provides a good view of the Narayana Seva in progress. In addition, the clothing worn by the beneficiaries indicates that abject poverty did not exist in the 1960s (when this picture was taken) as it had in the past. (Compare with the last picture on page 77.)







Baba engaged in Narayana Seva largely to motivate devotees that now and then they ought to think of less fortunate individuals who often go hungry. Where he was concerned, the poor and their welfare was always a priority. Thus in 1975, Baba arranged for over 100 houses to be built for people belonging to the lowest caste or Harijans (literally meaning people of God), as Gandhi used to refer to them. These houses were meant for the villagers of Puttaparthi whose huts had been washed away in a devastating flood. Above we see Baba addressing the beneficiaries.

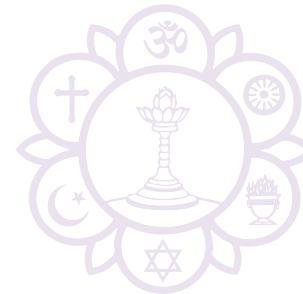


A view of the street with some of the houses ready to be occupied.



Baba distributing useful household items on the occasion.

Baba used every opportunity to not only mix with the public both in his village and elsewhere, but also reach out to children, the handicapped and those trying to uplift themselves in all possible ways. All these acts of Baba became pacesetters for those who wanted to spread his Love, triggering also the rapid growth of the Sathya Sai Service Organization. Presently the organization has branches not only in all the states of India, but in a number of other countries as well (as we shall see later in Chapter 6).



Baba loved all, especially those who needed help, and reached out whenever he could to the disabled, those in distress, and those who needed encouragement.



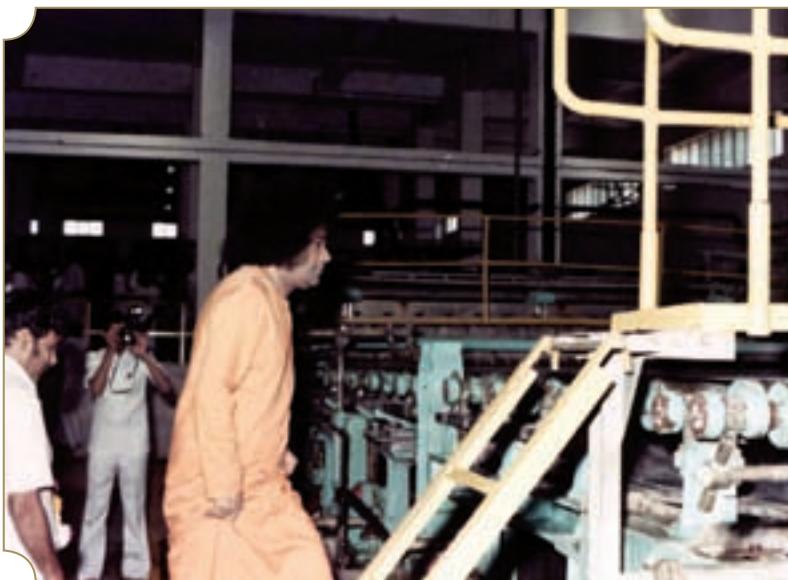
Here we see Baba with handicapped children.



Baba giving Darshan to prisoners. All of these pictures and those on the next page were taken during Baba's trip to Bombay in 1973.



Baba visiting a vocational school (during his Bombay trip), showing keen interest in the skills displayed by the young boys.



Pictures taken in Madras during a visit Baba paid to a factory. Baba not merely gave Darshan on the factory floor but also accepted letters. Aware that Baba was visiting, many workers had in fact brought letters to offer. Devotees always seemed to be ready with letters, often managing to give them to Baba in the unlikeliest of places!



Baba talking with Bal Vikas children.

It is said that if one does not know, one does not care; and if one does not care, one does not bother to act either. Baba understood this and in 1969 started what was called the *Bal Vikas* movement. In Sanskrit, *Bal Vikas* means blossoming of the child; Baba wanted children to flower through character development. Because life had become busy and parents did not have time enough for their children, the *Bal Vikas* movement was intended to be something of a supplement, rather like Sunday school. Young children were placed under the care of women volunteers, while boys and girls in their teens were guided separately by men and women, respectively. In keeping with the Indian tradition, all instructors participating in this program were referred to as *Bal Vikas gurus*. In due course the concept spread overseas, with appropriate adaptation of the curriculum to suit the local culture and traditions. Understandably, when they come of age, a large number of *Bal Vikas* trainees join the service organization, which obviously benefits the organization since the new recruits already have the right orientation for service.



Watching Bal Vikas children perform while on a visit to Madras.



Baba talking to a group of Bal Vikas children just after witnessing a program staged by them.



Addressing Bal Vikas teachers.



Delivering a major discourse at an all-India conference of Bal Vikas gurus in Bangalore.

Bringing a University to a Village

Given Baba's keenness to help individuals shape themselves into better human beings and also the special interest he took in founding the *Bal Vikas* movement, it was only a matter of time before Baba became involved with formal education as well. He did this in 1968 by establishing a college for women in Anantapur. It is interesting that in a country that was then (and some would say still is to some extent) male dominated, Baba began with a college for women. However, he had good reasons to do so. As he often pointed out, the mother's lap is the first university every child attends, even if the child is born in a tribal community living in the jungle. Moreover, argued Baba, women's education would not only promote education in the country since women make good teachers, but also benefit society by improving the quality of family life, because an educated woman would be able to better guide her children.

Having made the decision, Baba did not wait for all the buildings to be ready, arranging for the classes to be held in temporary locations; one could always move into those buildings later, he said. Indeed this is what he did in the case of every one of the three colleges he established between 1968 and 1980.



A view of the large crowd that had gathered to witness the formal opening of the buildings of the Anantapur College. The year was 1971, and the guest of honor was the then-President of India, V. V. Giri.

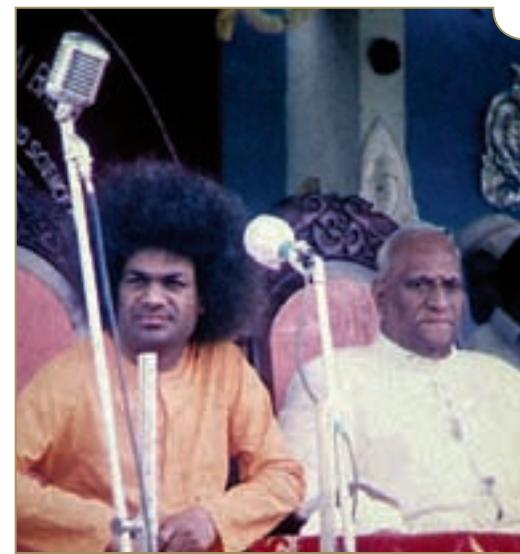


President Giri being welcomed in traditional style by Vedic priests; at left is the famed scholar Kamavadhani.

.....
THE MOTHER'S
LAP IS THE FIRST
UNIVERSITY EVERY
CHILD ATTENDS,
EVEN IF THE CHILD
IS BORN IN A TRIBAL
COMMUNITY LIVING
IN THE JUNGLE.
.....



Baba and Giri walking to the dais.



Baba and Giri seated on the dais.



Dr. V. K. Gokak delivering
the welcome address.



Some of the buildings that make up the Anantapur campus.

During the early days of the Anantapur College, Baba visited it often, since it was not too far from Puttaparthi. He did so not merely for “inspection” but more to spend quality time with the students and staff, using the opportunity to explain in detail why he was educating them and how he would like to see them use their knowledge later in life for the benefit of society. Baba was always quite clear about how the individual should

relate to society/humanity as a whole. In his view, the individual was like a man with a fruit-bearing tree in his garden; if the man took proper care of the tree, the latter in turn would benefit him in many ways. As he often told his students:

All that you are, you owe to society. You must show your gratitude to society by rendering service.



Baba on campus; these pictures were taken during the early days, when Baba used to make frequent visits.



Baba walking through a floral welcome arch while entering the campus.



Being welcomed as he enters.



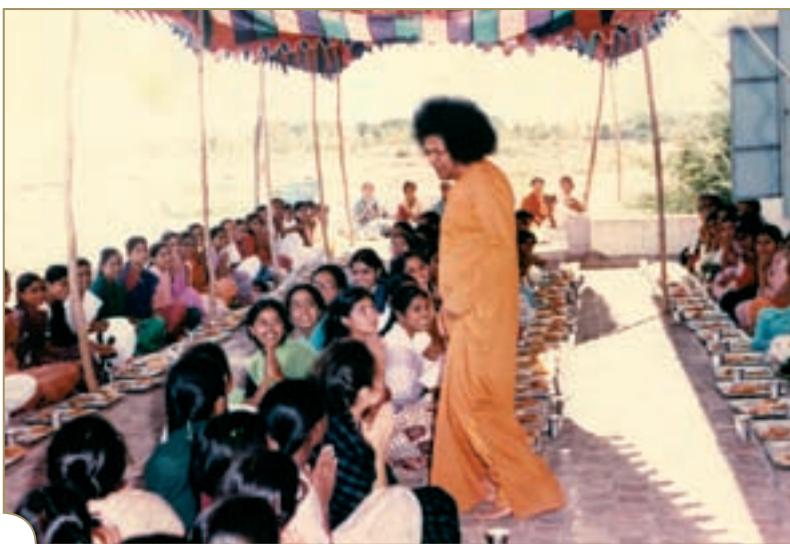
Watching some of the girls perform a ballet on roller skates.



Talking to the performers after the event.



Wherever Baba went, there was always great demand for a group photo; the Anantapur campus was no exception.



Having a meal with students and staff was always a big event during Baba's visits to the college. Baba would always insist on everyone being seated ahead, after which he would go around the room.



After making sure he had given attention to everyone, Baba would finally sit down at a table specially prepared for him. He ate very little but would always remain for quite a while so that others could be fed well!



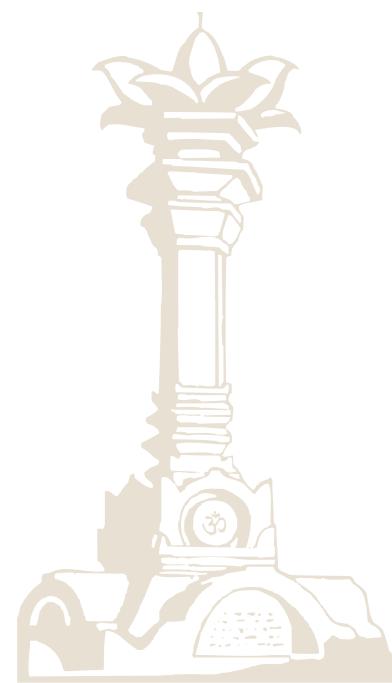
Baba raising a flag inside the campus, even as the bunting recall the years gone by.



Baba had a room in the college building. Here, he is going upstairs, presumably to rest for a while after fulfilling his engagements.

When Baba established colleges, he did not see them as just one more institution where students could get degrees. For him, they were to be model institutions that would demonstrate how to regenerate the educational system of the country, which was not only losing its original moorings but, worse still, was rapidly moving toward specialization and acting largely like a business.

It is pertinent at this stage to digress for a moment to inquire what education is really supposed to mean, as that would help in appreciating better Baba's educational philosophy. We begin with two root words in Latin related to education: (1) EDUCARE (pronounced EDOO KAARE) and (2) EDUCERE (pronounced EDOO KAERE). The former means to support and nurture the growth of, while the latter means to draw out. The former is the root for the word education as currently used, while the latter appears to have gone into oblivion. Baba resurrected the second root word and combined it with the first so that education implied something more than what people took it to mean. He then gave the name *educare* to this enlarged and enhanced vision of education. Educare, Baba explained, brought into play both the "drawing out" aspect and the "nurturing" aspect as well. What was to be drawn out were human values from the Heart, which then were to



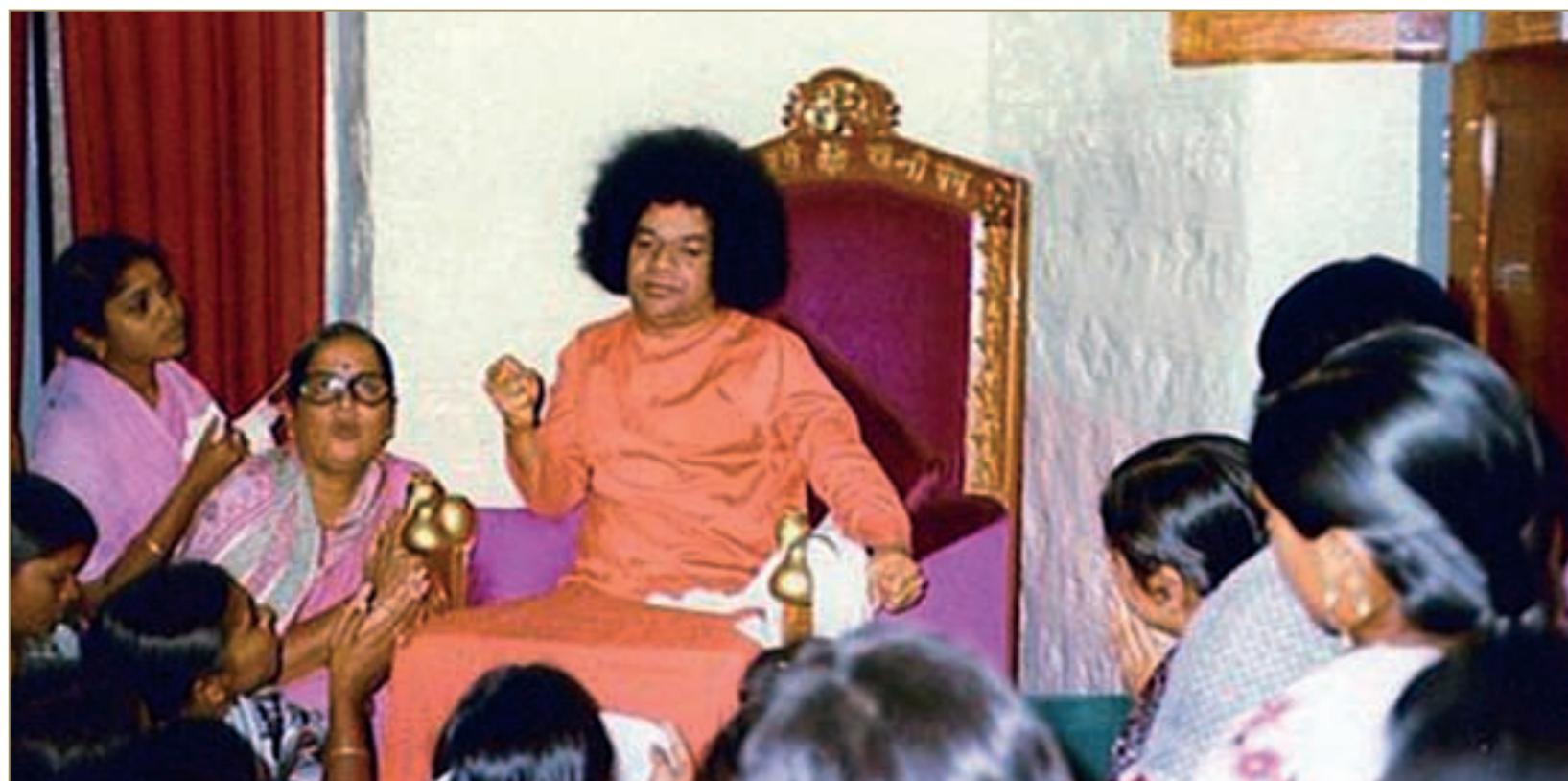
be blended with learning as normally understood. In other words, Baba's educare was a two-in-one package involving both the Heart and the Head, thus linking education to the two Latin root words introduced above. The educare philosophy has become quite popular among Baba's followers and is now being adopted by many schools, both in India and abroad.

Baba's point is simple and makes good sense as well. Since humans have both Head and Heart, progress and the development of human society should not be based solely on the Head, marginalizing the Heart in the process. In earlier times, great stress was laid on virtuous action, as a result of which character development received attention not only in the home but also in the school. Interestingly, this was true both in the East and also in the West. For example, Lord Nelson declared that England expected every man to do his duty. Similarly, young George Washington dared to speak the truth unmindful of the punishment he was bound to receive for a thoughtless act of his, and Abraham Lincoln became a legend in his own time for honesty and integrity.

That said, the rapid growth of scientific knowledge opened up opportunities for business, trade and commerce, which in turn made profit the dominant element in almost all aspects of human activity, including education. No wonder schools and colleges of today are focused largely on catering to the needs of the marketplace, since that is the easiest way to make money. Baba recognized this shortcoming early on, which was why he launched the *Bal Vikas* movement to make up for what the schools failed to provide. Wanting to go further, he began by setting up model colleges and a



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Baba with students and teachers from Anantapur but this time in Puttparthi. Baba in the interview room with some of the staff and students.

school where “secular knowledge” would be imparted but in the tradition of earlier days when character development was the primary goal rather than molding students to be mere “learning machines.”

Repeatedly and over the years, Baba emphasized that educare should replace the prevailing system of education. The latter’s excessive stress on the acquisition of worldly knowledge leads to young people entering life (knowingly or otherwise) without a moral anchor. Knowledge in the truest sense of the word is incomplete unless it includes aspects relating to the Inner World. No amount of delving into mathematics, physics and other worldly subjects can give a student any idea of what, for example, *Sathya* (Truth), *Dharma* (Righteousness), etc., are all about. Without the moral anchor human values provide, not only can the life of the individual go astray, but society itself could succumb to false dogmas and ideologies, to the detriment of humanity as a whole. That was why, argued Baba, that great stress must be laid on having an inclusive educational system that gives equal importance to worldly/secular knowledge and knowledge of the Inner World. More explicitly, schools and colleges must not only facilitate the development of the Head but also the nourishment of the Heart, in balanced proportion.

Shakespeare argued that justice must be tempered with mercy. Baba went much farther, declaring that knowledge of the external world must always be tempered with feelings originating in a pure Heart. Unless humans achieved this balance, knowledge could be grossly misused, as indeed it has been lately and at an alarming rate. It is this disconnect between the Head and the Heart that Victor Weisskopf draws attention to in one of the two quotations with which this book begins. Whereas Weisskopf merely stressed that scientific knowledge and compassion cannot be mutually exclusive, Baba did all he could to bond them together like the two strands of DNA, both in his *Bal Vikas* program and in the schools and colleges he founded.



Baba distributing saris to the students and staff of the Anantapur campus. He did this often, at least twice a year and at times even more.

Going back to the story of the colleges, in 1969 Baba established his second college, this one for men. He located it inside an *ashram* known as Brindavan, which he had established earlier in 1964 in a suburb of Bangalore called Whitefield—this, by the way, was Baba's second *ashram*. Unlike the Anantapur campus, which was about 50 miles (approximately 80 kilometers) or so from Puttaparthi, the college in Brindavan was right next door to Baba's residence. For a few short years, this allowed an unprecedented and unique personal relationship between Baba and his students, of a kind that has never been repeated. In 1979, Baba established a third college, this one also for men and in Puttaparthi. Until 1981, all of these colleges were affiliated with universities within whose jurisdiction they were located.

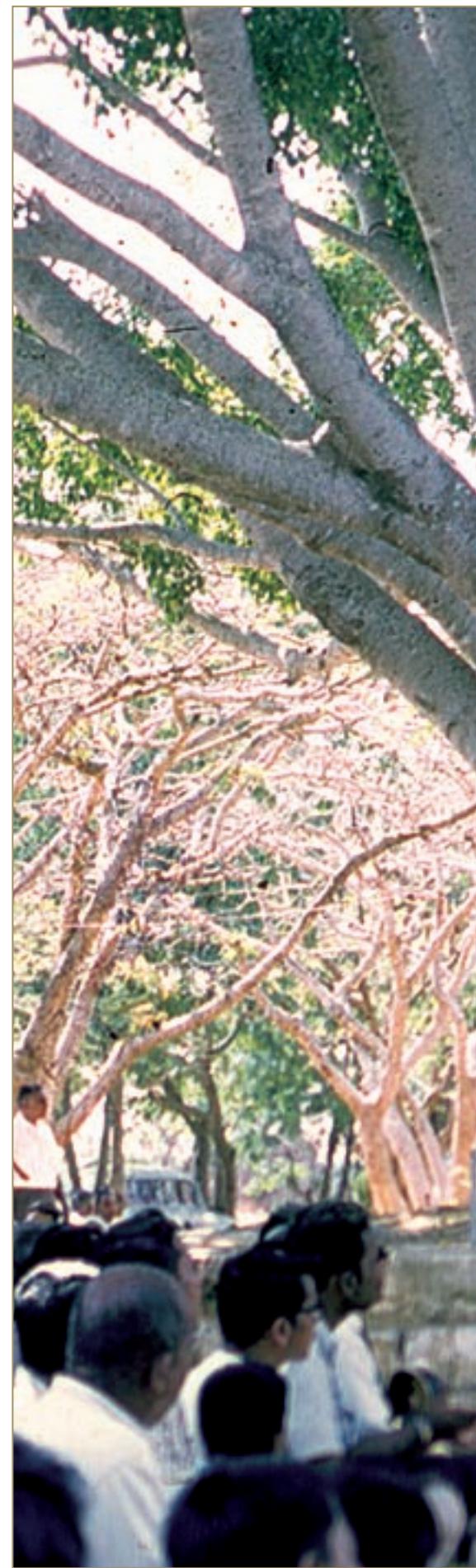
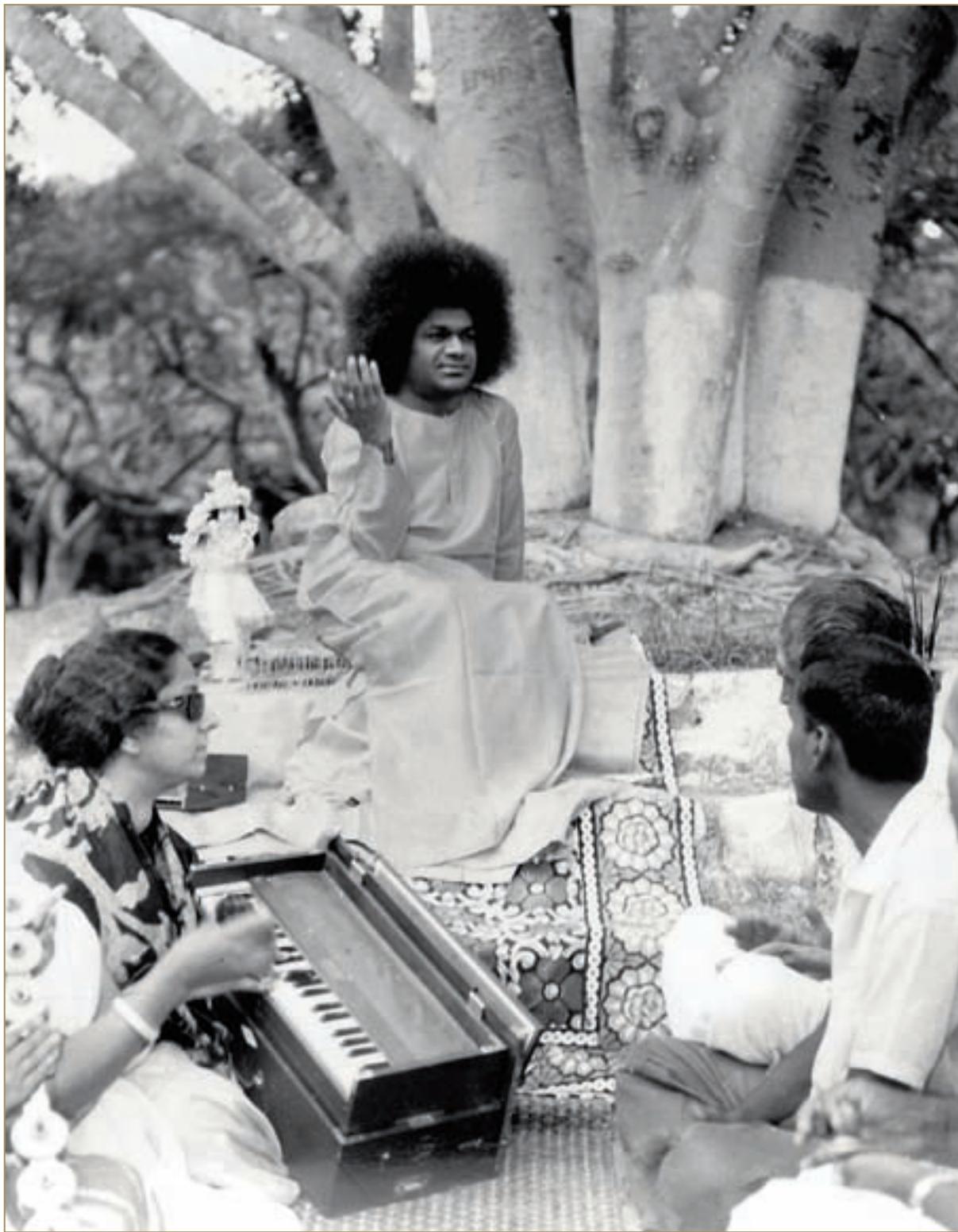
Since he often visited Bangalore (which was about 100 miles [approximately 160 kilometers] from Puttaparthi) in the early 1960s, Baba acquired a small piece of land with a house where he could stay when visiting that city. A devotee of Baba realized that the place was totally unsuited for giving Darshans and pleaded with Baba to exchange it for a bigger property he had, which also included a building that once belonged to the Nepalese royal family. Baba was reluctant but eventually agreed, and thus in 1964 Baba's second ashram came into existence, located in the suburb of Whitefield. Baba named it Brindavan.



Darshan scenes from Brindavan.



Brindavan was a beautiful place, full of trees, and Baba loved giving Darshan there. There was one big tree under which Baba would sit while devotees sang bhajans, as we see in the pictures here.

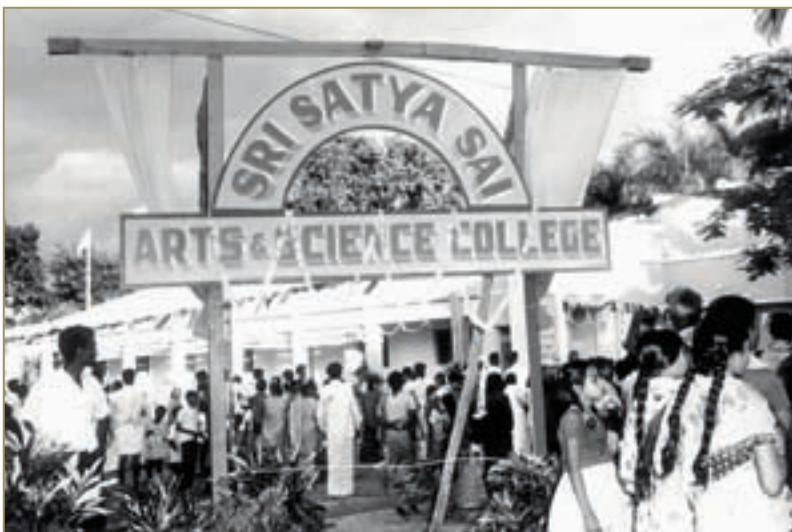






Later, Baba had a shed constructed under the tree so that it could serve as a shelter, especially when it rained. These pictures show Baba giving Darshan in this new setting. In the early 1990s the tree died and had to be cut down. The effects of growing urbanization began to be felt, and slowly Brindavan transformed from a wooded area to a nice built-up area, very convenient but lacking the natural beauty of the early days.





Picture taken on June 9, 1969, the day the college in Whitefield was inaugurated. At that time, the college was affiliated with the Bangalore University.



One of the ministers of the state government was the guest of honor on the occasion, and the picture shows the ribbon being cut, marking the opening of the college.



A portion of the crowd.



Baba speaking on that occasion.



At that time, the facilities were rudimentary and the supporting staff minimal. The hostel was therefore run like a commune, with students even farming, milking the cows, and cooking. Interestingly, boys loved doing all these chores since it gave them tremendous access to Baba. Many later recalled that those were the best years of their lives.



Mrs. Muriel Engle of the Foreign Students Office of the International Center of the University of California, Santa Barbara, a devotee of Baba, is raising the college flag.



This is a very interesting sequence of three pictures taken during the Republic Day, January 26, 1972. Here the college band is marching past.



Mrs. Engle addressing the students while Baba and others watch.



The original college building was next door to Baba's residence (in the Brindavan ashram). Later in 1978, Baba had a proper building built, as he did in Anantapur, complete with laboratories, libraries, a big auditorium and even a tennis court. This picture shows the front of the building.



Baba coming out of a building at the back that served as the college hostel at the time the college was first established. In terms of location, it was roughly "behind" the big tree under which Baba used to sit for bhajans (see page 95). In addition to the new college building, Baba also wanted to build a new hostel and began planning for it to be located next to the new building.

However, when the boys prayed for the location to be next to his residence, Baba yielded and agreed to relocate the hostel building close to where the old hostel was.



The new building just after completion. This relocation allowed the Brindavan students to be next door to Baba's residence, giving them plenty of opportunities for personal interactions, which is exactly what they wanted.



In 1979 Baba established a third college, this one in Puttaparthi. As always, it started functioning in temporary premises. But anxious that it must quickly have a proper building, Baba also simultaneously launched the construction. Above we see Baba in the foundation pit along with priests (which included Kamavadhani).



Baba breaking a coconut as part of the religious ceremony. Baba was very good at breaking coconuts. He would use one of the coconuts as a hammer and strike the other in such a manner that only the one that was struck broke into two pieces, almost right in the middle.





A long-shot view of the college building under construction. Notice how empty the entire neighborhood appears; one can even see the river in the background. Today, of course, the scene is very different.



The college building as it appears today.



A long-shot view of the college building.

In 1981, the University Grants Commission of India permitted all three colleges established by Baba to come together as constituent units of one entity, the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, having the full status of a university, with Baba as its Chancellor. Private educational institutions with university status were officially known as Deemed Universities, and at the time when Baba established his Institute, fewer than a dozen were granted that recognition. Baba was very particular that education in his Institute must be imparted absolutely free-no fees of any kind were to be charged for any course, including admission fees, tuition fees, laboratory fees, library fees, examination fees, etc. These fees are mandatory in all the other universities, particularly in the hundreds of for-profit universities that now have sprung up. Continuing to offer free education in today's highly commercial environment makes Baba's Institute truly exceptional.

Having brought all the colleges under the umbrella of an autonomous Institute with university status, Sai Baba was now in a position to actively implement the educare concept so that his university became a model for all to emulate. Integral Education was the name given to the practical implementation, implying a balanced attention to the development of the body, the mind and the soul. In 1982, Baba's university held its first convocation. Speaking on that occasion, Nani Palkhivala, the guest of honor, explained to the students and the world what the Institute really stood for.

I think Swamiji was far-sighted in concentrating on education for the regeneration of this country. There is no alternative to the profound education of the type that this Institute has been founded to impart. This is not merely a university-there are scores of universities, but they do not build the nation. This institute aims at becoming a nation-builder. To build a nation, you have to start with youth.



A view of the hill on top of which is located the main building of the Institute. To the right may be seen the towers of the building that houses the Heritage of Man Museum. At the lower left is another museum (largely dedicated to Baba's missions and his teachings), designed by a Chinese architect from Malaysia.



A close-up view of the university building.



One of Baba's great devotees was the Rajmata (Queen Mother) of the princely state of Nawanager (now a part of Gujarat). In their day, Indian princes collected paintings, hunting trophies, etc., and in her palace the Rajmata had a huge collection that had been accumulated over generations. When Baba established the Institute (of which she was a trustee), the Rajmata donated many of these so that they might add grandeur and class to the main building. Seen on this page is an original painting by Edwin Longsden Long (1829-1891), a British artist of renown who specialized, among other things, in depicting biblical scenes. Here Jesus is seen delivering a sermon on the Sea of Galilee.



The picture at the top shows the Academic Council Room with Baba in the chair, conducting a meeting.
Below that picture can be seen a stuffed buffalo and a painting by an English artist.



Picture taken at the time of the first convocation of the Institute. The guest of honor was Nani Palkhivala, a famous jurist, who was also a member of the Institute Trust. Here we see Palkhivala speaking. A brilliant speaker, he never used notes; his memory was so good that he could easily quote literally anything he had ever read, and this extraordinary ability of his always amazed all those who heard him in court.

The child is the father of man. It is what you learn when you are young that colors your entire life. Whether you will grow up to be a noble citizen or a traitor depends very much on what you learn when you are young.

*In ancient shadows and twilights
Where childhood had strayed,
The world's greatest sorrows are born
And its heroes were made.
In the boyhood of Judas
Christ was betrayed.*

For Baba, the end of education was not merely a degree, a job and a career; as he frequently declared and with great

emphasis, "The end of education is character." Drawing attention to this, Palkhivala observed:

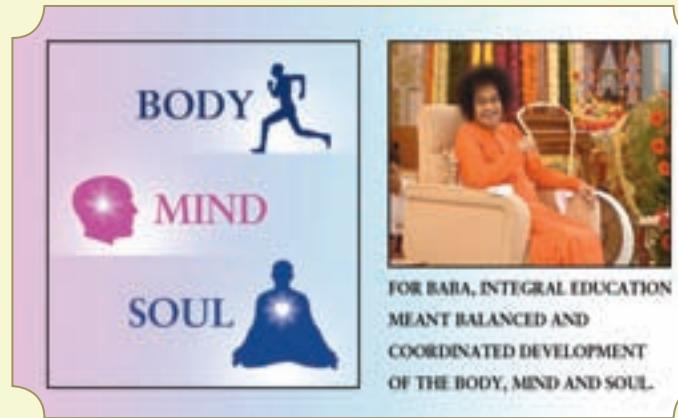
The eighteenth century French writer Montesquieu said that when a new society comes to birth, it is its leaders who produce institutions later; subsequently, it is the institutions which produce the leaders. Today, the moral and spiritual leader, Sri Sathya Sai Baba, has produced this Institute. His objective is that one day this Institute will produce leaders who would be able to lead this great nation to fulfillment of its glorious destiny... Swamiji has rightly emphasized that there is nothing more important than shaping and molding the character of youth... This is not a training institute. Animals can be trained; only human beings can be educated. In order

Integral Education

As mentioned in the main text, educare is a concept that stresses the importance of giving balanced attention to the Head and the Heart, especially in education, be it informal or formal. The question now becomes, "How does one translate the concept into actual practice?" That is the issue that Integral Education addresses.

For Baba, Integral Education meant essentially going back to ancient Indian tradition and modernizing it as required. In ancient times, young boys sought a *guru*, prayed to him for acceptance as a disciple and, if accepted, lived with him until they learned what they needed, after which they left. Where his Institute was concerned, Baba accepted all aspects of modern education that were needed but tweaked them with emphasis on values wherever required. Over and above this, he also played the role of the "traditional *guru*" for every single student on a one-on-one as well as collective basis; that role of Baba will unfold as the narrative proceeds.

In implementing Integral Education, Baba started with the fact that a human being is a synthesis of a body, a mind and the soul, each of which needs its own attention and nursing. The system devised must not only provide for this but also facilitate (1) the proper coordination between these three



entities and (2) an "operating system" that would make the soul the "commander in chief," the mind the "command and control center" and the body the "executing agency."

Bearing this in mind, Baba mandated that all his educational institutions be residential. The daily routine was to commence early in the morning with prayer,

followed by physical exercise-jogging or yoga, for example. Bath and breakfast were next, with students taking turns in serving (except at examination time, when resident teachers would take over for students). The students then went to college in an orderly fashion, the day in the college always beginning with a moral assembly. Academics were in full swing thereafter, but with all traditional practices (such as rising when the teacher enters the class) maintained. In the evening, all students would come for *Darshan*, which is when Baba would, in various ways, play the role of the *guru*. After *Darshan*, boys would return to the hostel, relax for a while, have dinner, study and retire early. Baba always insisted on time discipline, which compelled students to pace themselves and not tire out by postponing and then trying to do everything in a short time. In some sense, all this might sound like a school for cadets, but in truth it harked back to the ancient system in vogue in India, until about three centuries ago.



Shown on this and some of the pages that follow are pictures illustrating aspects of Integral Education. The pictures were taken in the various campuses of the Institute. Boys of the Puttaparthi campus participating in early morning prayers.



Going out for jogging.



Girls of the Anantapur campus serving food. Students do this on all campuses, of course, taking turns so that everyone learns the dignity of labor.



When it is time for classes, students go from the hostel to the college building in a line.



Students of the Anantapur campus at a college assembly with which working days always begin. Students are standing up to offer a prayer at the conclusion of the session.



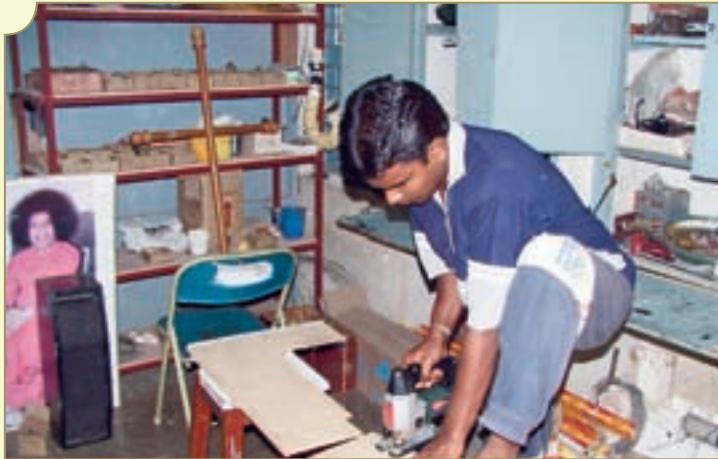
Students at work in a computer laboratory.

If the early part of the day is well laid out, so is the rest of it until bedtime, with a mix of classes, Darshan/alternate spiritual activities, games, dinner and study. A considerable amount of self-reliance is also built into the overall routine.

Depending on where Baba is, Darshan is part of the daily routine of the campus. Students on other campuses normally complement with spiritual activities of their own, such as participating in study circles. In any event, they make periodic visits to Prashanti Nilayam (where Baba spent most of his time in later years) to recharge their spiritual batteries with Darshan.



Whenever they have time, students relax playing games (which include badminton, basketball, volleyball and, of course, cricket, the most popular of them all).



Students engaged in extracurricular activities that enrich hostel life. The hostels employ very few subordinate staff, as a result of which students manage most of the hostel chores (except cooking and related jobs). Over the years this has enabled students to learn many skills such as plumbing, minor electrical repairs, carpentry and even welding and sewing, most of which come in handy at the time of major events like annual sports and dramatic productions. On such occasions, the students prepare the stage sets, sew the costumes, do the make-up, and organize the lighting, backdrops, special effects and so on. Lately, they are also involved in audio recording and video editing at advanced amateur levels. All of this gives them enormous self-confidence, which comes in very handy in later life.



On Sunday mornings, all students come together to clean the entire premises as part of the "social service program."



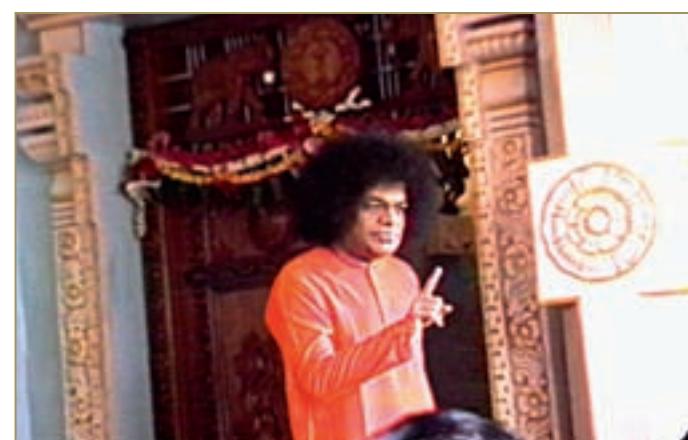
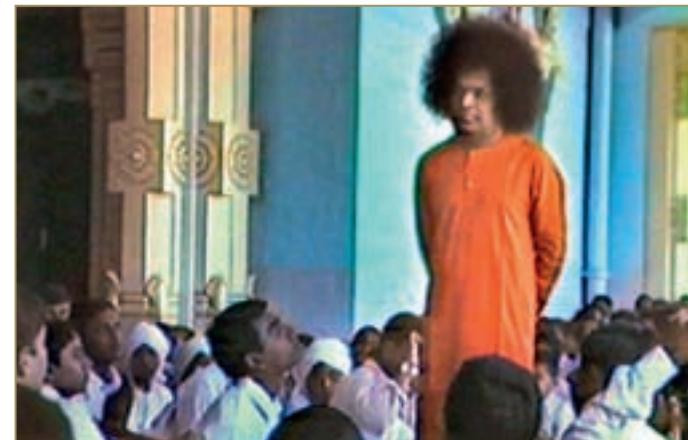
Students preparing special meals for those who are sick.

to acquire education, what is needed on the part of students is personal participation and transformation. Education cannot be given to anyone; it must be inwardly appropriated.

As he did earlier when the colleges were founded in Anantapur and in Whitefield, Baba began interacting closely with students in Puttaparthi. This campus was not as far as the one in Anantapur; at the same time, it was not next door either, as the college in Brindavan was (when first established). Besides, Baba now had so many more activities to manage and attend to that he became adaptive. One method that he unfailingly used was to walk on the veranda after the evening *Darshan*, moving among students and teachers and engaging them in casual conversation.

At times, he would ask a boy to give a short extemporaneous talk on some topic or the other, almost as if he was proving to the assembled crowd how smart his students were! He would even encourage a few senior devotees present to test the students by asking questions. Further, Baba got students actively involved in as many functions and spiritual activities as possible. And when very important guests came (like the President or the Vice President of the country), Baba made sure it was students who attended to the distinguished visitor. They also took care of all hospitality duties when seminars were organized by the Institute; that is how Baba prepared them, by exposing them to various responsibilities.

Occasionally Baba would drop in at the hostel, mostly without notice, which, of course, surprised the students; however, such impromptu visits also brought them close to him as that was when he could interact informally. Likewise, he would casually show up at the sports ground to watch a match in progress, in the company of teachers and non-playing students. Two things he made sure of: to have daily contact with students during *Darshan* and to talk to them individually, in groups and even all together, as frequently as possible.



Shown on this page are pictures of Baba interacting with students in Puttaparthi after the evening Darshan.



Students managing a buffet service during one of the meetings regularly held by the university as part of its academic calendar.



An aerial view of the courtyard of the guest house where guests now stay, showing guests seated and eating.



Pictures on this page capture scenes from a visit to the hostel by Baba. Above, he is walking into the courtyard of the Puttaparthi hostel.



Almost the very first thing Baba would do after coming to the hostel would be to inspect the kitchen. Whenever he came he would always invite some guests, and presumably he was anxious to be assured that the dinner or lunch would make the guests happy.



In the company of students, Baba was always informal, unless, of course, the occasion demanded otherwise (as during a university convocation, for example).



With the discourse over, it would be dinner/lunch next, and, before sitting down, Baba would go around the entire dining hall. Well aware of this, many boys would be ready with letters, which Baba would always accept.



Hostel visits invariably included a medley of presentations by students, after which there would be a discourse. Baba was always keen to speak to students, but often there would be a little play with Baba acting as if he was not interested and students begging him to speak; both sides went through this because it gave them a special feeling of closeness. Baba always spoke in Telugu, but since there were students from all over the country, he always had a translator.



Baba surrounded by boys while on his way to the car, giving students one more chance to give him a letter.

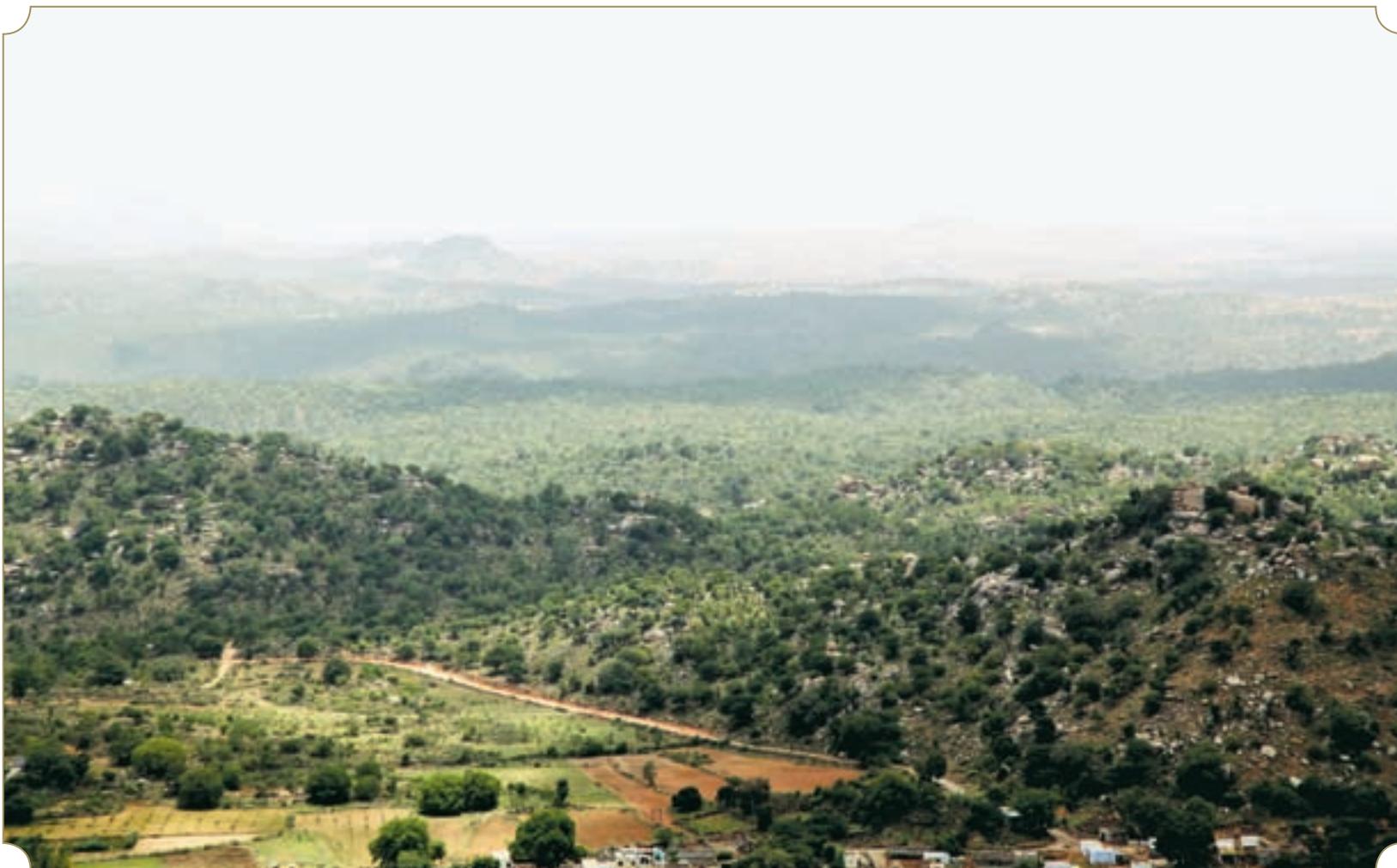


The big area adjoining the hill on which the main building of the university is located is a beautiful place bounded on the west by hills and sloping away to the river on the east. Today, because of development, that area sits like a bowl and has been converted into a huge open air stadium. In the early 1980s, it was not so, being just a large open space where boys would play games and Baba's birthday celebrations would be held to accommodate the huge crowds. Baba often visited the grounds, and slowly through voluntary effort on the part of students and Seva Dals, he got the ground cleared and leveled and later made it suitable for staging events by adding viewing galleries, etc. All that took over 10 years, but it began soon after the Institute came into existence. Here we see Baba making one of those regular visits, distributing apples to those engaged in clean-up work.

In May 1985, Baba did something which, at that time, did not seem particularly significant; in due course, however, it made the Institute even more unique (as we shall see in Chapter 5). During the summer of that year, Baba remained in Prashanti Nilayam, though it was quite hot. Wanting to be near Baba many students also stayed there instead of going home for vacation. One day, Baba announced that he was going to visit a nearby village called Amegundapalayam. To reach it one had to first cross the Chitravathi River, go south for a short distance along the riverbank, turn and then go up the hill through brush forest. The distance was just about 15 miles (approximately 24 kilometers), but the hill road, if it could be called that, was hardly passable, as I personally discovered while trying to go

there as late as in 2006. One can imagine how much more inaccessible that village must have been in 1985.

The moment Baba announced the visit, students and *Seva Dal* volunteers (who specially came in large numbers after hearing Baba's announcement) began improving the ragged dirt track leading to Amegundapalayam. Working for weeks, they made that hill track passable for Baba's car because they loved Baba and had a feeling that he was making the trip for an important reason. That was indeed so, and it was to make students aware of it that Baba took a large number of them along with him. Speaking in Amegundapalayam, Baba pointed out how difficult life was for people who were cut off



Pictures on this and the following page relate to Baba's visit in May 1985 to a village not far from Puttaparthi but rather cut off nevertheless. A panoramic view of the road going up the hill to the village of Amegundapalayam.



A view of the road as it crosses a small (dry) stream.



A view of the stream as it approaches the road to cut across it. When there are heavy rains, the stream brings with it large stones, which it then leaves scattered all over. There are many such streams crossing the road, and it is very difficult for a car or a bus to negotiate them. Since the area is part of a forest, road building was not allowed until very recently. All of this made life in the village very difficult. Baba decided to make a trip there to draw attention to this, taking busloads of students with him.

from all the conveniences that city dwellers took so much for granted. This was the case with most of the villages in India, and 70% of India still lived in villages. Stressing that neglect and indifference were the main reasons for the lack of development of rural India, Baba declared, "Villages are my eyes. You, too, should cultivate that feeling; only then would your heart beat for the real India and would you be able to do something for these people, but for whom you would not be able to eat!" Fifteen years later, Baba made village service an integral part of the educational program, adding further to the uniqueness of his Institute; but that story comes later.



A close-up view of the brush covering the hills.



Scenes showing Baba with the people of the village he visited.

In 1986 Baba established, as part of his Institute, the School of Business Administration and Management, whose task was to train students for the MBA degree. This was a significant move, not because of the global popularity of the MBA degree and the high salaries it could command; rather, Baba was keen to ensure that business education was imparted hand in hand with a strong dose of business ethics and morality. Baba took so much interest in this aspect that almost every Sunday he would go to the campus to specially address MBA students on the importance of values, integrity and honesty in business practices. Although it was common elsewhere, Baba did not permit campus recruitment (which usually took place before completion of the academic course). Many were unhappy with this restriction, but Baba was absolutely firm that as long as students were in the college, their minds should remain focused on studies and the objectives of the college rather than on job hunting; that could come later when students were on their own. As it turned out, no MBA graduate from Baba's university suffered because of the absence of campus recruitment. On the contrary, following a spate of corporate scandals, many



companies began to appreciate that graduates who were team players and not excessively consumed by personal ambition were preferable to graduates from brand-name colleges who insisted on being given the type of work they wanted rather than doing the work that the company wanted them to do, apart, of course, from receiving a generous paycheck. Slowly but surely the word got around that Baba's students are diligent, honest, hard working and excellent team players, as a result of which leading corporations in India have now begun seeking out "Baba MBAs."

Today there is a tendency to give too much importance to "knowledge and skills," meaning essentially expertise in a much-in-demand specialization plus the ability to "wheel and deal." Both have their pluses and might even be necessary in the corporate world. But can a major cardiac center, for example, be run by brilliant heart surgeons alone? Are not nurses and others who take care of the many support systems also necessary? Just as institutions need balance, so also does society. One cannot have a balanced society if those who shape it lack balance and wisdom to complement their knowledge and skills. In addition, today managers and administrators are required across a wide spectrum of society, which implies that management training must equip students with something more than mere "knowledge and skills." And that extra, Baba constantly emphasized, ought to be "balance and wisdom," both of which belong to the realm of the Heart. It is on account of the need to cater to the Heart as well as the Head that Baba created a totally different ambience in his university.

The uniqueness of Baba's university cannot be appreciated by using the norms and standard measures conventionally employed to rate performance. If, on the other hand, one uses parameters related to discipline, student behavior and character, then it would be difficult to find any of the 400 or so universities in the country coming anywhere close to Baba's university. For example, most universities tend to have irregular calendars; in Baba's university, on the other hand, the new academic year always begins on June 1, unless it happens to fall on a Sunday, in which case the opening is moved to the following day. Likewise, the university always holds its convocation on November 22, even when the guest is very important (like the President or the Prime Minister, many of whom have graced the occasion). Such strict adherence to the calendar is quite rare in most universities in India.

A little-noticed and yet spectacular difference in Baba's Institute is the total absence of ragging, the name given to an uncivilized, humiliating, often indecent and occasionally brutal "initiation" of new entrants to the university hostel by their seniors. Over the years, parental as well as public protest over ragging has become widespread, and everyone agrees that this practice is not only alien to Indian tradition but also a serious menace. Sadly, however, little has been done to deal seriously with the problem, barring the annual outcry at the time of the commencement of the academic year. Few are aware that ragging is totally unknown in Baba's university. During its 30 years of existence, there has not been a single case of ragging of any kind, even the most mild, at any of its campuses. Amazing as it may sound, seniors in Baba's university do not even think of ragging juniors; on the contrary, they go out of their way to make the freshmen feel comfortable and at home in their new surroundings. Let me stress that emphasis on character development does not have to be at the expense of academics. The fact that Baba's students are to be found in leading establishments (in both the private and public sectors) and in prominent educational and research centers in India and abroad is proof enough.

This unique track record in respect to discipline and committed adherence to values is no accident. For years, Baba organized a 10-day orientation course before the commencement of the academic year. Known as the Summer Course in Indian Culture and Spirituality, this event would take place during the closing days of May (after the university admissions were completed). The venue was the Whitefield campus (except on one occasion when the venue was moved to Ootacamund-Ooty for short-when a new students' hostel was under construction in Whitefield). Students from all campuses, including freshmen, would assemble there, and on the evening before the commencement of the course, Baba would personally distribute notebooks and pens for students to take notes. Baba also invited select guests to attend the course, some of whom would deliver lectures on topics dealing with education, the need for values in life and so on. Every course would have a special theme, chosen by Baba himself. Lectures by guests would take up most of the morning session. Following the lunch break, there would be break-out sessions with senior teachers explaining the objectives of the Institute, the rules and regulations, question and answer sessions and talks by senior students wrapping it all up. The highlight would come in the evening when Baba

would deliver a discourse relating to the main theme. Later, all the discourses delivered during the course would be compiled, edited and published as a book. The Institute's strong focus and commitment to ethics and morality has received national recognition on several occasions when the Institute has been chosen for various national seminars related to values. At a different level, drawn by Baba's Love on the one hand and the uniquely different atmosphere of the Institute on the other, several professors began coming regularly to Puttaparthi, particularly from America, to teach for short periods and to be in Baba's proximity for a while.



This picture taken during the summer course of 1977 shows Baba and Atal Behari Vajpayee, on the steps of the college in Bangalore. Mr. Vajpayee later rose to become the Prime Minister of India.



Baba began organizing summer courses long before the Institute came into existence, but once the Institute was established, he increased the frequency of the courses. Above we see Baba delivering a discourse on inauguration day of a course that was held in the early 1990s. Seated between the translator (on the extreme left) and Baba is Deve Gowda, who at that time was the Chief Minister of the State of Karnataka, where Bangalore is located. (For the record, the venue for all the courses except one was Baba's ashram in Bangalore.) Later, Mr. Gowda became the Prime Minister of India.



The inauguration of a meeting on the role of values and ethics in education, sponsored by the University Grants Commission, as part of its golden jubilee celebrations.





The inauguration of a seminar on the relationship between ethics and finance. It is interesting to note that this seminar was held after the famous Wall Street crash in 2008, caused, as is well known, largely by irresponsible behavior on the part of several leading investment banks.

The story of Baba's involvement with education would not be complete without a brief reference to the school he established to demonstrate how the educare principle ought to be applied right from the school stage. Initially, the school was located in Ooty, but once Baba was on the threshold of establishing a university, he moved the school from Ooty to Puttaparthi, locating it right in front of the college there. Although administratively the school and the college have no relationship to each other, many students of Baba's school continued their higher education in Baba's university, so that they could be in Baba's proximity for a few more years. Some stayed on even after graduation to serve in Baba's various institutions in order to have a lifelong association with him.





A picture of the primary school established by Baba. There is also a secondary school for students of higher grades. As in the university, school education also is free.



Scenes of primary school children playing.



Baba with the children of the primary school, at the conclusion of a program presented in the stadium.

I have had firsthand experience from 2001, when I visited the Institute for the first time. I was quite amazed to see the discipline among the students, spiritual as well as academic. We took about six students (master of business administration [MBA] graduates) from the Institute in 2001, and we were very happy with their performance. Over the last five years, we have hired more than 60 students.

The primary motive in today's world for taking a job is money. A difference that I have seen in the Institute boys is that for them, money is secondary. This is proven by the loyalty factor and the attrition rates, as compared to the other employees in the organization.

Further, Baba's students are willing to do whatever work is assigned to them, which makes a very big difference to the organization.

The most important difference is really a transformation process the boys brought to the organization, which is something unique. After the boys from the Sathya Sai Institute joined us, our organization started looking at social initiatives, in the form of service in the villages and education. We have taken up two projects already launched by the boys of the Institute. We are looking at taking up a third project now. On the whole, our experience has been excellent.



Samir Bhatia

Formerly of HDFC Bank and Barclays, now Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of Equifax Credit Information Services Pvt., Ltd.



David Gries

William L. Lewis Professor of Engineering, Cornell University, and Cornell Weiss Presidential Fellow.

I was drawn into the Sai fold by two apparent forces: my wife and Sai education.

In January 1981, I found myself spending two weeks co-teaching computer programming on a shaky portable computer to college boys in Brindavan. I had seen Swami only briefly before, in 1973, and this was the first experience I had not only of teaching in his university but of daily *Darshan*. Both had a profound impact, and I began going more regularly, offering to teach in Puttaparthi, and ending up spending two to six weeks every year as a guest professor in the math and computer science department.

What drew me in? The fact that the college boys learned about and practiced not only worldly things but also spirituality-and it showed! I wondered at their politeness, confidence, deep commitment, responsibility, sense of selfless service, knowledge-and love. In fact, everyone exhibited these qualities-vice chancellors, registrars, instructors, as well as students! This place was different, and I felt it.

I didn't know much about human values and educate when I started, and I learned more about living, about teaching and about spirituality every time I taught there. Swami used his university to teach me! I am grateful to him for bringing me to him in this fashion.



I came to Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning (SSSIHL) in 1984, and since then I have found teaching here to be a very inspiring experience. The reason for this is the students themselves; they have a very positive and eager attitude to learn, and also what is important is their attitude of respect. Generally elsewhere I do not think students have great respect for their teachers, and that is the reason why their learning is greatly affected, and as a result there is retardation in the development of their character.

The spirit of learning is fostered in an environment where there is openness and respect. And this is what I find here; there is so much more warmth in my interactions with the students here than elsewhere. Teaching here is a thoroughly satisfying experience.



George W. Ordal

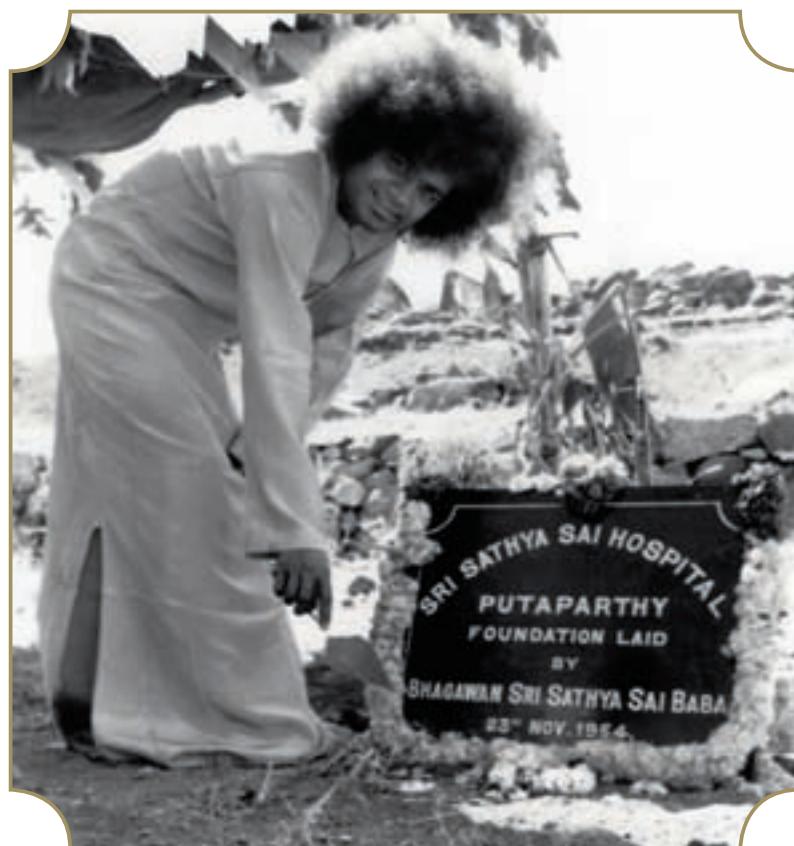
Professor Emeritus of Biochemistry and Medical Biochemistry, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Illinois.

The Beginning of the Healthcare Story

SOME DAYS, HE
WOULD STAY AT THE
SITE EVEN AFTER
WORK CEASED FOR
THE DAY, TALKING TO
THE VOLUNTEERS AND
SHOWERING LOVE.

Sai Baba always adopted a two-pronged approach while addressing the practical aspects of disseminating his message. One was to draw a large number of people and involve them in some kind of mass activity, the Sathya Sai Seva Organization and the *Bal Vikas* movement being two good examples of this approach. The other was to establish finely tuned values-based institutions that others could emulate. Thus Baba established not only a model school and a model university but also model hospitals. The first step in this direction was taken on November 23, 1954, when Baba laid the foundation stone for a small general hospital close to his *ashram*. For Puttaparthi of those days, this was a huge leap forward, because until then the nearest medical help available was several miles away in a dispensary established in 1914 in the neighboring village of Bukkapatnam.

The land selected for locating the hospital was hilly—it must be remembered that the total amount of land available to the *ashram* back then was just 3.86 acres (see Chapter 2), and Baba had to use whatever was available. Constructing a building on a hilly terrain was not easy, certainly not then, and Baba became fully involved in all aspects. Hiring bulldozers, Baba first had three terraces laid out on the rocky side of a hill. The hospital building was then built on the topmost terrace, most of the labor being contributed by devotees rendering voluntary service. Baba spent several hours every day supervising the construction, even as devotees formed a chain, passing bricks, water, sand, mortar, etc. Often, he would distribute fruits, sweets or juice to every volunteer. Some days, he would stay at the site even after work ceased for the day, talking to the volunteers and showering Love. So keen was Baba to have the work completed as quickly as possible that construction continued whenever there was moonlight (electrification came to Puttaparthi much later). The hospital was formally inaugurated on October 4, 1956, and initially it was intended to function largely



Baba posing next to the foundation plaque on the day groundbreaking was performed for the construction of the general hospital in Puttaparthi. The date is November 23, 1954, four years after he moved into the new Mandir.

as an outpatient hospital. Nevertheless, Baba thoughtfully provided 12 beds, many of them reserved for maternity cases. This made a significant difference, for at long last there was a hospital where women could deliver babies with proper medical attention. There was also provision for some general surgery, which greatly enhanced the utility of the hospital; all this was just the beginning.

Baba had much bigger plans for the hospital, and the way he built up the hospital is best described as Love in action; here is how it all worked out. Even as the construction of the hospital was going on, Baba began looking for a doctor to head it and eventually picked Dr. Subba Rao of Bangalore. Earlier, Dr. Rao had come in contact with Baba during one of his visits to that city and immediately felt drawn to Baba. Soon he was helping Baba in many ways in the hospital project, including providing some of the equipment needed. Thus when Baba asked Dr. Subba Rao to serve as its first medical superintendent, the latter readily agreed. Unfortunately,



Before Baba established the hospital in Puttaparthi, people of that village and the entire area had to go to a dispensary in Bukkapatnam village about 5 miles (approximately 8 kilometers) away. This dispensary was established during British rule. As for a hospital, the nearest one was in Anantapur, the district headquarters, but that was at least 50 miles (approximately 80 kilometers) away.



A view of the Bukkapatnam dispensary as it appears today.



The Puttaparthi General Hospital was inaugurated on October 4, 1956. Above, Baba is addressing the crowd. Seated to the right of Baba is B. Gopal Reddy, a Minister in the state government, who performed the formal inauguration.



A portion of the crowd.



A long-shot view of the hospital building, which also shows how the building was constructed on the top of one of the three terraces cut out of the hillside, as described in the main text.

he passed away just 15 days before inauguration, whereupon Baba turned to Dr. Bikkina Seetharamiah, a devotee and a regular visitor to the *ashram*. Having had a long medical career, Dr. Seetharamiah was looking forward to leading a spiritual life, guided by Baba. However, when Baba asked him to step in and fill the gap left by Dr. Subba Rao, Dr. Seetharamiah readily agreed. The job was most demanding, but Dr. Seetharamiah worked very hard, assisted in the beginning mainly by volunteers and occasionally by visiting doctors. Some months were to pass before even a regular nurse could be appointed. In 1957, Baba appointed Dr. V. Brahmam to assist Dr. Seetharamiah, after which the two together helped the hospital grow, both in terms of staff and in terms of equipment and facilities.

By the early 1980s it became clear that a major expansion program was required since the original hospital building was far from adequate to meet the growing needs. Baba then had two new buildings built in a neighboring location. The first of these became operational in 1984 and the second in 1991. The old building was torn down, and the two new wings constituted the upgraded version of the general hospital. This is a far cry from the modest hospital with one doctor, no nurse, and 12 beds that Baba began with in 1956. How much of an improvement the current hospital represents over the original one is described as a side story.



SRI SATHYA SAI BABA

Prashanthi Nilayam

PUTTAPARTHI



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With Blessings
Sri Satya Sai Baba.

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A reproduction of the original letter written by Baba in 1956 to Vittal Rao, Conservator of Forests in the former Mysore State, in which Baba says:
“When you come (from Bangalore), bring 100 small Sarava trees. The government has given us the hill behind the hospital, where we can plant trees. Also, find out if any other plants are available that can be planted on the hills, and bring them. I shall purchase them all.” This is typical of the very friendly and personal manner in which Baba related to people and made them part of his various missions.

Present General Hospital

The present general hospital in Puttaparthi is close to where the original hospital was in 1956 when it was inaugurated. However, in terms of facilities and the type of care offered, the hospital of today is not only a far cry from what Baba began with but also as good as the best hospital in India, in a rural town of the size of Puttaparthi. In fact, when the numbers are examined, one could even wonder whether any other such (private) hospital with comparable facilities and free treatment exists.

Here are some statistics that will allow the reader to form an independent opinion. Today there are 100 beds in the hospital, about 60 being reserved for obstetrics and gynecology cases. The total staff strength is 160, of which around 40 are doctors, 30 of whom serve in a voluntary capacity. The main areas in which service is provided include general medicine; obstetrics and gynecology; pediatrics and neonatal care; general surgery; ear, nose and throat (ENT) and ophthalmology; orthopedics; dental care; and physiotherapy. Needless to say, the hospital is well equipped to serve the needs of the various departments, including general surgeries of various types. There is also a 24-hour emergency department.

Let us turn to the numbers of patients receiving care. At the outpatient level, the number of cases handled averages about 350,000 per year, far more than when it was established. There are two reasons for this. First, there are now many more doctors as compared with the one doctor who had to take care of everything back then. Secondly, Puttaparthi is now easily reached by bus and auto-rickshaw, as a result of which patients come from as far as 50 miles (approximately 80 kilometers) away. The number of inpatients handled averages about 9,000 a year, of which about 2,000 are maternity cases.

Three other facts must be mentioned that would highlight the uniqueness of this hospital. First, thanks to an arrangement with the international unit of the seva organization, doctors from overseas have prepared a roster in accordance with which they take turns and offer services for short periods of about two weeks. This is a big help to the hospital, since the visiting doctors have diverse expertise and are able to supplement the already available services in an effective way.



This is particularly true of the department of dentistry, for example. Secondly, the general hospital has now become a referral hospital for Baba's Super Specialty Hospital (the story of which is narrated in the next chapter). Thirdly, and this too is important, the hospital handles about 300 snakebite cases every year. Most of the bite cases occur between May and September, when many villagers work in the fields. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), India has the highest number of deaths due to snakebites, with between 35,000 and 50,000 people dying every year. Many types of snakes found in India are venomous, but in almost all cases, the victim can be saved if brought to a hospital quickly. However, that seldom happens. In addition, most government-run hospitals do not



Two views of the general hospital as it is today. The top picture shows the entrance to the wing that was opened in 1984. To its right is the wing built later, part of which can be seen in the picture alongside.

This wing has its own entrance, located near the sign that can be seen under the tree on the left. The various departments are distributed between the two wings.



A portion of the large number of expectant mothers waiting to be seen.



A small family waiting under a tree.



The entrance to the newer block, referred to earlier.

have a 24-hour emergency service and do not stock anti-snake venom (ASV). Recognizing this as an important priority, Baba's general hospital is able to handle all snakebite cases, especially because those bringing the victim of the bite often also bring the dead snake. This greatly helps in beginning the correct treatment immediately. The snakes common to this region are vipers, kraits and the cobra; while vipers are hemotoxic, the krait and the cobra are neurotoxic. Therefore, knowledge of the type of snakebite greatly helps in administering focused treatment and enabling speedy recovery.

As should be obvious, the fingerprint of Baba's Love is to be seen all over. Otherwise, why should doctors from various parts of the world take time off to come here? Why should so many doctors and nurses offer to serve in a voluntary capacity? And why should one hospital alone do the obvious, namely, equip itself for treating snakebites, which is such a common occurrence in India?



Patients lined up along the corridor near the department where they will be having their examination.



A doctor examining a patient.



A patient being adjusted for an x-ray examination.



A patient undergoing an eye test.



A doctor making rounds in the ward and examining a patient.



A patient undergoing a dental procedure.



A doctor making rounds in the maternity ward.

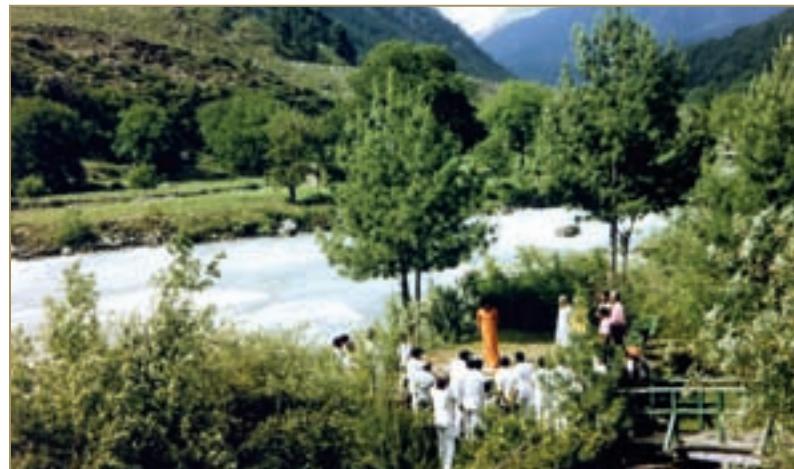


A view of the operation theater.

Filling in Some Gaps

I now wish to fill in some important details omitted thus far, beginning with a brief reference to some of Baba's trips, apart from those mentioned earlier. Barring two occasions, all of Baba's earlier travels were confined to the south because that is where the invitations came from at that time. After the 1960s, when devotees began coming from the north, Baba began to visit that part of the country also. He traveled frequently to Bombay (as Mumbai was then known) and occasionally to towns and cities near it. In response to a request from the *Rajmata* (Queen Mother) of the princely state of Nawanagar in Gujarat, Baba made an extended trip to that region. He also traveled a few times to Delhi and twice to Kashmir.

Interestingly, Baba never traveled overseas until 1968, when he made a brief trip to East Africa. Baba had many followers in East Africa, at that time mostly Indians, whose ancestors were taken there by the British to build railways from inland to the coast. After the original labor force was taken to East Africa, other Indians followed. These were primarily small-time traders and



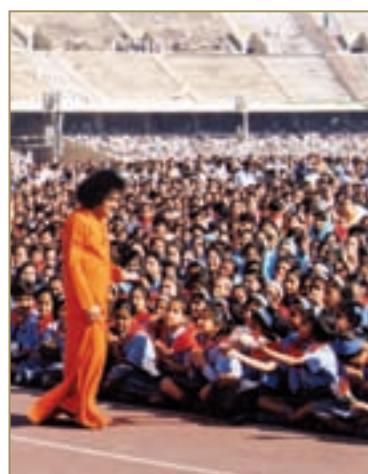
Baba in Kashmir during his trip in June 1980, along with guests and some students who accompanied him. The other pictures on this page offer glimpses of Baba's visit to Delhi in March 1999.



Baba walking around the Sri Sathya Sai International Centre, Delhi, which he had just inaugurated. To his left is Mr. Advani, who at that time was the Deputy Prime Minister of India.



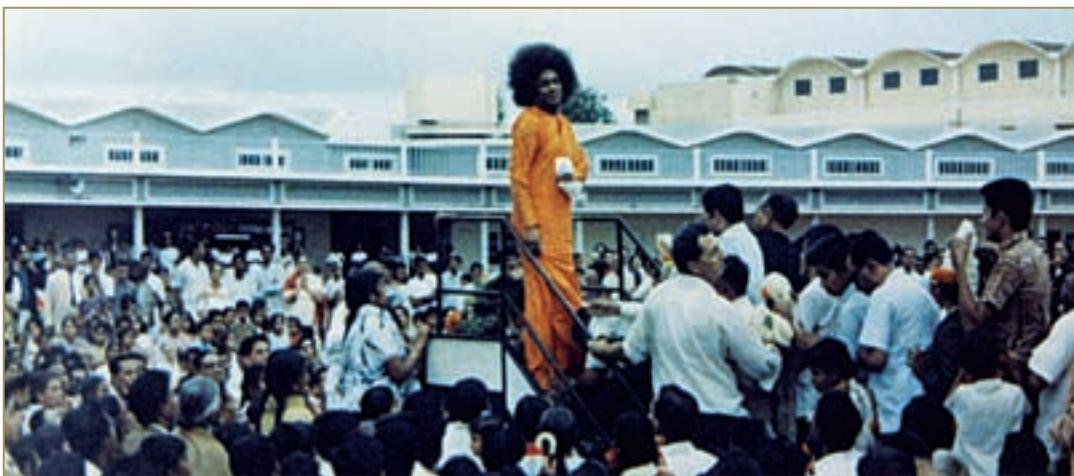
During the Delhi trip, Baba made a brief stopover at a small army camp, the premises of which had been made available for use by Seva Dals as a kitchen. The Sikh gentleman on Baba's right was at that time in charge of this camp, but he was off duty and hence not in uniform. After retirement, he settled in Puttaparthi and is currently in charge of a big indoor stadium that is part of the university.



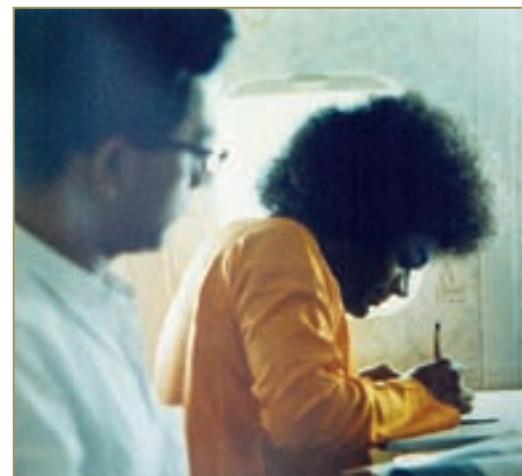
Baba giving Darshan to the public in a huge stadium.



A big volunteer force (Seva Dals) had been mobilized from various places in connection with this trip, and before leaving the city, Baba gave these Seva Dals a special Darshan; this picture was taken on that occasion.



Pictures on this and the following three pages all relate to Baba's trip to Africa in 1968. Baba addressing a crowd in Santa Cruz airport, Bombay, before boarding a plane bound for Nairobi. Back then, airport security was hardly known!



Writing a note while on board the Boeing 707.



Immediately after arrival at Nairobi airport.



Giving Darshan at Nairobi airport.



More Darshan scenes at Nairobi airport. For devotees Darshan was always important, and Baba always obliged wherever possible.





Listening to bhajans at the end of the airport Darshan.



Darshan at Kampala after midnight!



Getting out of the car on reaching Kampala after a long ride.



Even at that late hour, Baba gave Darshan and also received letters!



Giving Darshan early the next morning, despite a long and tiring drive the previous evening/night.

professionals who provided various services to the Indian community. (This happened in all colonies to which the British took Indian laborers, such as Fiji and South Africa.)

Dr. Chotubhai Govindbhai Patel was one such immigrant, and he went to Uganda to practice as a doctor. An ardent devotee of Baba, he frequently came to Puttaparthi for Baba's *Darshan* and requested several times that he visit Africa. Baba finally agreed and went on his only foreign trip.

Accompanied by a select few, Baba flew out of Bombay on June 29, 1968, seen off by a large crowd. On the flight was Bob Rayner of Los Angeles, who snapped a picture of Baba relaxing. Using an airline picture card, Baba sent Bob a note of affectionate admonition to which Bob responded with a short poem:

*The sky is blue,
The ocean too;
Our wish has come true,
And we are flying with you!*

Six hours after leaving Bombay, the Air India Boeing 707 touched down at Nairobi, Kenya, where Baba was given a welcome at the airport. After giving *Darshan* and sitting down for a brief session of *bhajans*, Baba drove on, skipping

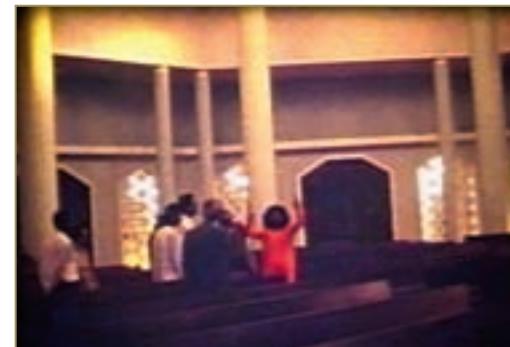
the city of Nairobi because Dr. Patel was anxious to take him to Kampala, the capital city of Uganda, where he lived and practiced. It was a 400-mile-long drive (approximately 650 kilometers), the road weaving through one country and entering another. By the time Baba reached his destination, it was well past midnight, and yet there was a sizeable gathering present to welcome him. Despite the late hour of arrival, Baba was out for *Darshan* at 6:30 A.M.; he knew people would have begun gathering before dawn and did not want to disappoint them with a long wait.

The African sojourn was different in that the daily routine included quite a bit of sightseeing. Baba loved Nature, and in Africa there was abundant opportunity to enjoy Nature in all her glory. He flew in a small plane to have a wonderful aerial view of the Serengeti National Park and drove through the jungle for a closer glimpse of animals in the wild; he also went for a long boat ride on the Nile. In between, Baba delivered a major discourse in Kampala on July 10, which, the *Uganda Argus* reported, brought the message of unity and service to the African continent.

Baba left for India on the morning of July 14, flying first to Nairobi and transferring there to an Air India flight. En route to Bombay, the plane made a short stopover in Aden.



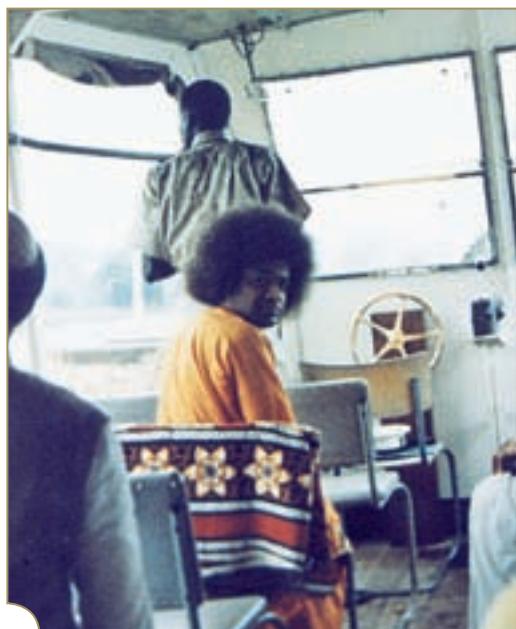
The government of Uganda most graciously provided a lot of logistic and police support for the entire visit, and here Baba is seen with some of those involved.



Baba doing a bit of sightseeing; here he is being shown around the local Bahai temple.



These pictures are unique, for this was the only time Baba had a good chance to see animals in the wild and in large numbers. Pictures taken before Baba flew in the nearby plane for an aerial survey.



Baba taking a boat ride on the Nile.

Word got around, and many Indian expatriates plus a few Arabs gathered at the airport to greet Baba. No one was allowed to leave the airplane, but a few devotees were permitted to go into the aircraft to see Baba. A couple of hours later, Baba was back in India. Brief though the visit was, it made a deep impact; today Baba's devotees are to be found all across the continent, including in West Africa; the majority are now Africans rather than Indians.

From travels I now turn to how Baba drew people to him, made a deep impression on them and motivated many to play roles in his various missions. Often such associations began rather casually, as it did in the case of Mr. Wellington of Kerala. In 1958 Baba toured the state of Kerala in the southwest of India, following an invitation from Dr. B. Ramakrishna Rao, who was not only a devotee but, at that time, also the Governor of that state. Interestingly, the ruling party happened to be the Communist Party of India. It came to power through the ballot box, the first time ever in India and perhaps in the world, an event that was widely applauded as a triumph of Indian democracy. Baba's engagements



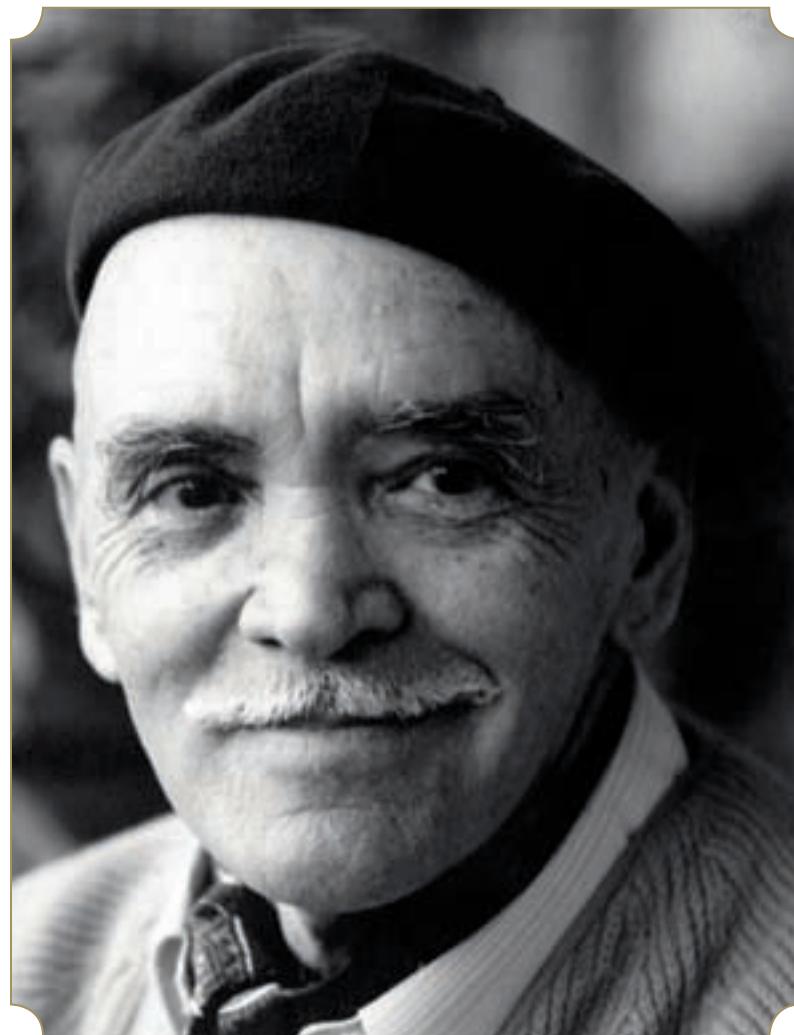
Baba enjoying Nature!



Murphet with friends in Puttaparthi.

included the opening of a local hospital, at which the Health Minister of the state, Mr. Wellington, was present as part of his official duties. Though a Christian, as a Marxist Wellington had almost turned atheist. He was thus quite uncomfortable about being anywhere near a spiritual master, but circumstances forced him to be. However, Baba not only made Wellington feel comfortable but also invited him to visit Puttaparthi.

Wellington accepted the offer and decided to go to Puttaparthi, albeit with many reservations. As he said in a talk given in Baba's presence many years later (during which I was present), Wellington admitted having serious misgivings as he entered Baba's *ashram* for the first time. Curiosity had drawn him there, but now he began to wonder whether it was all "part of a Hindu conspiracy" to convert him, as he put it. Baba welcomed Wellington and took him inside for an interview. Wellington recalled, "As soon as we went inside, Baba asked me to sit. We were alone, and there was no one else. Before I could say anything, Baba said to me, 'Wellington, be a good Christian!' I was shocked, for this was the last thing I expected. What struck me was that Baba did not want me to be a Christian in name but a good Christian; for me, that was a wake-up call." Realizing that Baba wanted nothing more from anybody other than for that person to be loving, caring and helping those in need, Wellington began paying close attention to what Baba said. Before long he became an ardent follower, actively engaging in service and spreading love as well as interfaith understanding, for which there was plenty of need in Kerala since the state had, besides a Hindu majority, also significant Christian and Muslim populations. Soon Wellington quit politics, and in his later



Portrait of Murphet in earlier times.

years he toured all over the state, speaking about Baba, his Love and his teachings and the way one ought to serve society.

Wellington's experience was far from exceptional. People from overseas also began to be drawn to Baba, beginning with Howard Murphet, an Australian and a World War II veteran. After the war, Murphet went to England with his wife. By this time, Murphet had become quite interested in oriental philosophy, theosophy, etc., which inevitably led him to India. That was in 1955, and here is Murphet's description of what happened thereafter.

After spending some time in Europe, my wife and I decided to stop for a while in India on our way home to Australia. We had two purposes in view. One was to go more deeply into theosophy by attending a six-month "School of Wisdom" at the International Headquarters of the Theosophical Society in Adyar, Madras... Our second purpose was to travel through the country to discover if there was any deeper spiritual



Hislop whispering something to Baba.

dimension to the life of modern India. Our search took us to several of the well-known ashrams throughout the length and breadth of India, and to a few little-known ones. We sat and talked with ascetics and hermits in their caves in the Himalayas. We met a good variety of sadhus (renunciates) and teachers of various types of yoga. From the Himalayas and the ashrams along the sacred Ganges, we came back to New Delhi. There, at a leading social club we met a top business executive who said, "So, you are looking for the spiritual life of India. There is none! All past. We are looking for what you have in the West-material progress." In another place, a professor of history also tried to dampen our enthusiasm. "Believe me," he said, "there is no spirituality left in this country. In the India of old there was, but it died a thousand years ago."

Murphet did not accept these negative views, for deep down he felt all these people were wrong. He continued visiting *ashrams* and talking to *yogis* as well as *sadhus*, one of whom suggested that Murphet should go to Sai Baba's *ashram* and see him. At the same time, the man who offered the suggestion also cautioned that Puttaparthi was "a difficult place to reach, being in the wilds of the interior; one had to do the last part of the journey on a bullock cart or foot over rough tracks." Murphet was not deterred; he went, he saw and was convinced that spirituality was not only alive and well in India but also eagerly sought by many. Murphet spent quite some time in Puttaparthi, seriously documenting all that he saw and absorbing the teachings of Baba. On his return he wrote a book that was the first ever by a Westerner on Baba. Thereafter, Murphet made several trips to Puttaparthi, even when he was well past 80, often bringing groups with him.



Picture of Hislop taken around the time he came to Baba.

Baba liked him very much and used to refer to him as the old Australian tiger!

Then there was John Hislop, who, like Murphet, also came to Baba via the theosophy route. As a young man of 18, Hislop went to Tahiti in the Pacific in search of adventure but instead became interested in theosophy, to which he was introduced by a priest. The moment Hislop returned to Los Angeles he joined the theosophical society and became actively involved with the movement. In between, Hislop went through college, earned a doctorate from the School of Higher Education, University of California, Los Angeles, taught for a while and then switched to business, where he was quite successful. Along the way, Hislop married Victoria, who shared his passion for philosophical enlightenment. Soon Hislop gave up business, after which he and his wife drifted from one *guru* to another, intensifying their practice of meditation. For a brief period, Hislop even went to Burma to learn the Buddhist style of meditation.

Twenty-five years passed, and Hislop found that something essential was still missing; that was when he heard about



Charles Penn.

Sathya Sai Baba. At that time Hislop was in America, but within a few days he arranged to travel to India to go to Baba's *ashram* and see him. This is how Hislop describes that first meeting:

Upon meeting Baba, I knew at once without a doubt, that for me, here was the true source of Wisdom... It is difficult and probably impossible to express in words the effect upon myself of that first meeting with Baba. My entire being was profoundly affected and changed. Immediately, Baba became the center of my life, and has remained so. In his presence at that first meeting, the world fell away from me; my entire consciousness was drawn inward and, at a most subtle level of awareness. Baba appeared in my Heart as Love. Love was unmistakable and that Baba was this Love was equally unmistakable.

From then until his death, Hislop remained not only very devoted to Baba but wrote many books explaining the essence of Baba's teachings, especially to a Western audience. He was also instrumental in beginning the American branch of Baba's service organization. Hislop toured and lectured extensively

on Baba even when he was quite ill; that was Hislop's way of responding to the enormous love Baba showered on him.

We turn next to another early overseas devotee, Charles Penn, who was born in Western Australia. Penn became involved with newspapers even as a teenager, when he began working for *The Daily News* published in Perth. His work exposed to him everything from being an office boy to cub reporting and helping the editor. In 1939 Penn went to America, where he lived thereafter. His introduction to Baba came in 1965 via a book by Kasturi, an ardent devotee of Baba. Highly impressed by Kasturi's book, Penn immediately wrote to Baba for permission to produce an edited version of the book that would be more easily understood by a Western audience. Baba granted the permission, and Penn was delighted. Swept by the depth and the profundity of Baba's teachings, Penn plunged into deep meditation through which he began to feel quite close to Baba, despite being on the other side of the globe.

In 1968, Penn was invited to address the First World Conference of the Sri Sathya Sai Baba Service Organization



Baba with the Cowans in 1972 inside his (old) residence in the Brindavan ashram, after performing a small ceremony celebrating their long marriage.

held in Bombay, which brought together members from all parts of India and also from countries in which the service activity had taken root. Thereafter, Charles Penn became active in giving talks about Baba's message and also writing books on Baba. In this way, Penn made his own contribution in introducing Baba to the West.

There were also the Cowans, Walter and Elsie. Walter Cowan was born in 1890, graduated from a trade school, got a job in an oil refinery and worked his way up to become an officer. He had many opportunities to use the knowledge gained from his job and make plenty of money on the side, but being scrupulously honest, he did not. After retirement, he built a refinery and bought oil wells and an 800-acre ranch.



Baba admiring a Polaroid picture being shown to him by Elsie while Walter watches. The picture was presumably taken by the person on the right who is holding the camera.

All this, however, was only one side of the story. Walter Cowan was always interested in Christian Science, theosophy, etc., and along with his wife, Elsie, focused on living according to religious principles at the most basic and moral level, rather than being tied to narrow dogma. Inevitably, the Cowans began looking for masters who would guide them, and in 1967, they came to Baba. From then to 1971, they made over a dozen visits to India to see Baba.

Walter Cowan loved Baba so much that, soon after coming to Baba, he opened (with Baba's permission) a book center in Tustin, California, that would hold and offer to the public books on Sai Baba. That center exists to this day, having grown considerably since then.

During one of their visits, the Cowans asked Baba for his advice about their ranch. They wanted to sell it, but taxes would take most of the money. When Walter asked Baba what he should do, Baba replied, "Throw it away!" Walter was naturally perplexed when Baba added, "If you quit worrying about it, I shall take care of the problem." When the Cowans returned from that trip, the phone was ringing as they entered their house. The caller was from a non-profit organization. It was to this group that the Cowans gave the ranch. Soon they realized that this was the best solution to their problem.

In 1972 Baba celebrated the long union of Walter and Elsie with a special event, making both of them very happy. Baba also named the hostel building of the Whitefield campus after Walter, and his picture can be seen there to this day.



The Stupa on inauguration day, with people awaiting the arrival of Baba.



A long-shot view of the pillar and the surrounding crowd.



A scenic view of the Stupa area, as it was around 2004. On the right can be seen domes on top of the original (new) Mandir building.

In 1975, Baba had a special monument built in celebration of the unity of faiths and called it the *Sarva Dharma Stupa*, which means the Multi-Faith Pillar. By locating the pillar in a prominent place in the *ashram*, Baba made sure that everyone saw it and also understood that, as far as he was concerned, all faiths lead to God. And, to reiterate that he loved equally

people of all faiths, he also had a mosque built in Puttaparthi. For the Muslims of the village, this was an immense boon, for until then, they had to travel miles to pray in a mosque. This mosque remains the only one in Puttaparthi, and over the years, attendance there has swelled considerably.



Two close-up shots of the base of the Stupa, showing the symbols associated with Buddhism and Islam, respectively, and sayings from the teachings of those religions in three languages, namely, English, Hindi and Telugu.



The Puttaparthi mosque as it was just before inauguration; that is why prayer is being offered on the roadside.



A rare picture of the inside, showing the Imam addressing the congregation.



Pictures taken later, when the top was covered.

One interesting aspect of Baba's missions has been how people with varying skills were drawn to him at the right time, almost as if by magic. The earliest example of this, as we noted in Chapter 2, was Malur Tirumala Iyengar, who designed and built the new *Mandir*. Subsequently, many others came to make varied contributions, all quite essential and appropriate at the particular time they made their appearance, rather like actors in a play. Clearly it is not possible to go through the entire list, but some who made a real difference do need to be mentioned. First there was N. Kasturi, a professor of history, writer, broadcaster and a great humorist who saw Baba for the first time in 1948. He moved to Puttaparthi in 1954 immediately after retirement and spent the rest of his life close to Baba doing many things. Above all he wrote extensively on Baba, thereby increasing Baba's visibility both in the country and also abroad. Kasturi was at his best as a speaker, who made spirituality come alive with wonderful anecdotal experiences

spiced with great wit and humor. No wonder he was in great demand, especially by the early foreigners; thanks to Kasturi, they could grasp better what Baba said in his discourses (all of which were in Telugu). Then there was Brig. Bose, a civil engineer by training, who saw action in World War II and served as the director of two prestigious technology institutes before coming to Baba. Once he did, he supervised most of the construction in the *ashram* as it went through its first phase of major expansion. Col. Joga Rao was another civil engineer with a military background who came to Baba and played a pivotal managerial role, especially in relation to the activities of Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust, which Baba formed in 1972. That early start given by Joga Rao came in handy later when the Trust embarked on several megaprojects, as we shall see in Chapter 5.

The prominent early followers also included Oxford-educated Dr. Vinayak Krishna Gokak, who began as a teacher

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Baba with Kasturi.



Baba with Brig. Bose to his right. On the left is Col. Bose, son of Brig. Bose, who, after retirement, settled in Puttaparthi to serve Baba and continues to do so.



Baba in earnest conversation with Col. Joga Rao while two others are watching.

of English, went on to become the Vice Chancellor of Bangalore University and later head of the Central Institute for English and Foreign Languages in Hyderabad. Dr. Gokak was also a distinguished writer in his native language, Kannada, with many awards to his credit. With such talents and laurels, it was natural that Baba selected Dr. Gokak to be the first Vice Chancellor of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning. Thanks to his rich academic experience, Gokak gave the new university the best beginning possible. It is worth noting that all the people mentioned above worked purely in a voluntary capacity, happy to be part of Baba's mission of service. Traditionally, the Vice Chancellor's post carries a handsome salary; in that respect, Dr. Gokak set a new tradition in the academic world by working in an honorary capacity, a tradition that has been maintained to this day by every Vice Chancellor who came later.

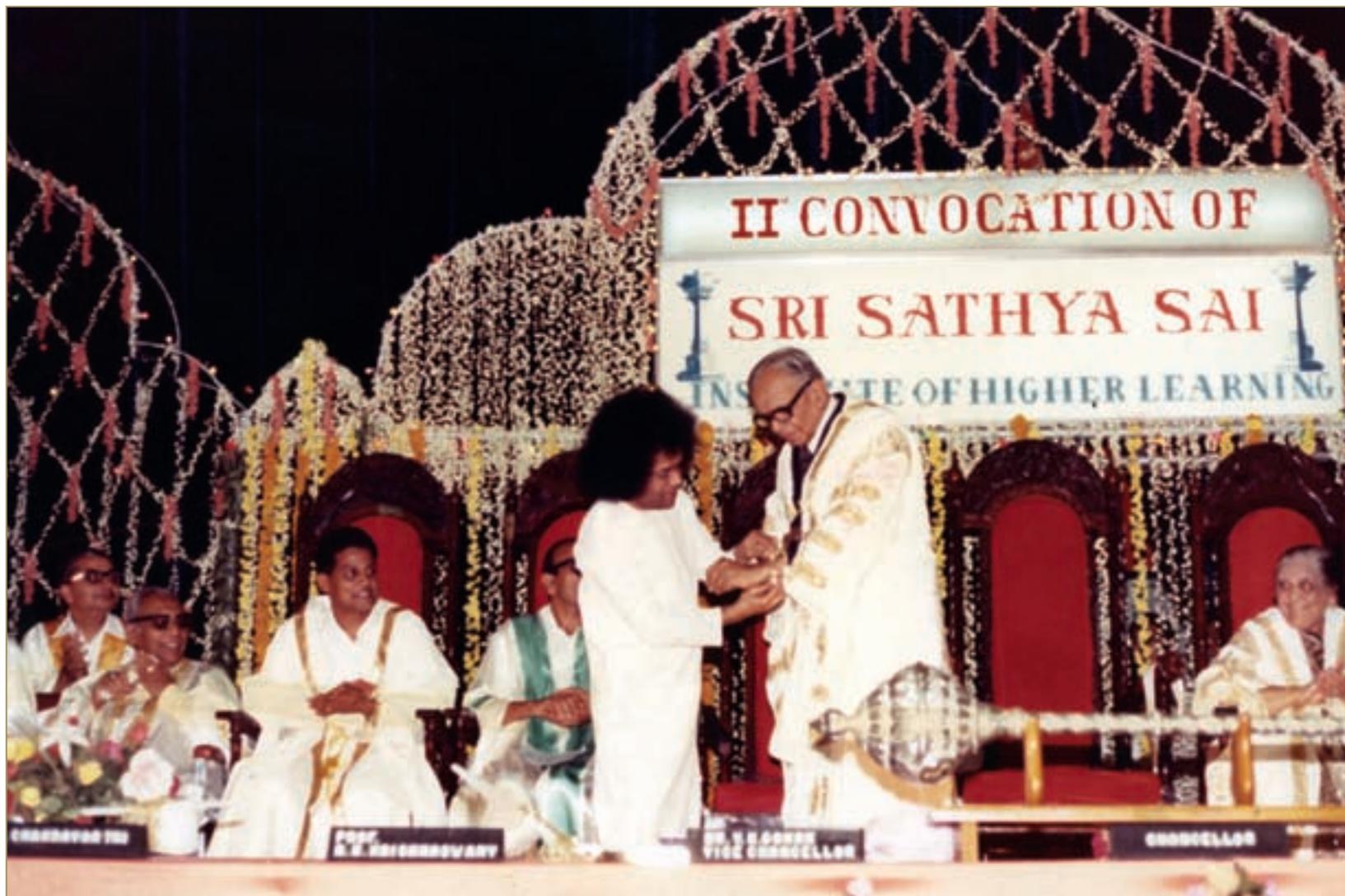
This trend of "the right people showing up at the right time" continued until the end. As Baba's missions multiplied and diversified, people from all walks of life began coming to Baba—doctors, professors, scientists, lawyers, bankers, men from the armed forces and the police, top administrators in the country, businessmen and so on—all drawn by Baba's Love. While most kept their relationship at a strictly personal level, others volunteered to be part of his missions as well. For his part, like a superb casting director, Baba fitted them all in, each according to



Dr. V. K. Gokak.



Below Baba is publicly honoring Dr. Gokak with a gold bracelet on the occasion of the second convocation in 1983. Many came forward on their own to serve Baba with dedication and in a voluntary capacity. Baba appreciated that but always made sure that he not only acknowledged their services with suitable honors and gifts but also publicly applauded their contributions. Baba was served by many and he acknowledged all service appropriately, Vice Chancellors being special in this respect.



his/her capability and skill. It was Baba who launched all the missions, but when it came to implementation, there was a special place for everyone who was willing to spare time and work for a good cause. Even people from overseas returned home to spread Baba's message in their native lands. Baba never forced anyone; if there was a willingness, he was always ready with the right task; that was the way it always happened.

Right from the beginning Baba silently demonstrated that missions meant to spread happiness cannot be run from air-conditioned offices. During the early days, he always led from the front and stayed personally involved, taking care of all the details until things stabilized, after which others would take over. People around him realized this when the new *Mandir* was built. Tirumala Iyengar was in charge of the design and construction, but Baba worked hard behind the scenes so that Iyengar could move fast. It was the same when the general hospital was first built. Not only was Baba at the construction site most of the time, but even after the hospital opened, he came there every day and spent several hours watching patients being examined and offered treatment. This gave him a personal idea of problems that needed attention. When Dr. Alreja of Bombay became the superintendent in 1975, Baba often had to serve as his interpreter as well.

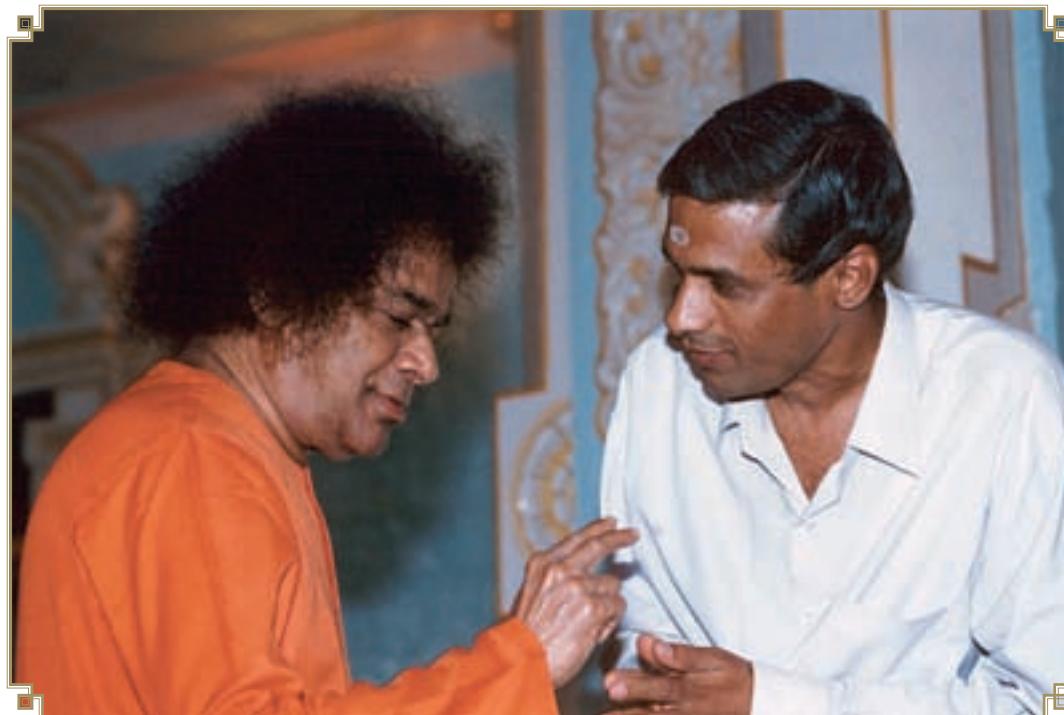
I received a similar description from Venkatachalam, who has been in charge of the college hostel in Puttaparthi since its inception. Venkatachalam used to work in Delhi but resigned from his position and came to Puttaparthi just to be near Baba. Baba accepted him but did not give him any particular assignment, although Venkatachalam constantly prayed that he be given one, whatever it might be. Baba just smiled and said nothing. One day after the hostel was established, Baba asked Venkatachalam to be in charge of the hostel, which he has been doing ever since. He has not taken even one day off. This is an amazing display of loyalty but not uncommon among Baba's devotees. Venkatachalam told me that during the early days of the hostel, Baba would come punctually at 10 in the morning and go around the entire hostel, including the kitchen and the bathrooms, just to see that everything was being taken care of properly, offering comments and stopping where necessary. He would then visit the sick boys, make kind inquiries and cheer them up by promising to send a doctor soon to see them and report to him. This went on for a couple of years, after which Baba stopped his daily visits. It was



Baba walking with Dr. Alreja down the corridor of the renovated and upgraded general hospital. This picture was taken in the mid-1990s, but Dr. Alreja came to Baba approximately three decades before then.

always that way—once the child learned to walk, he left the child alone!

Baba played a similar role during the formative years of the university. Since it was on the national stage and with a certain amount of visibility, Baba felt the need for direct personal involvement and keen attention to all the details so that the right traditions were set. Baba was the Chancellor, and by tradition all chancellors act remotely, apart from fulfilling a few ceremonial duties. In his case, having brought the university into existence, Baba felt deeply obligated to make sure his institution won the highest praise. It was quite common then for many committees to pay a visit to ensure that all the national norms were being duly met. Baba was always there to make sure that every visit went well. Although there were many others who, as elsewhere, would have taken care of all arrangements for the meetings and stay, Baba



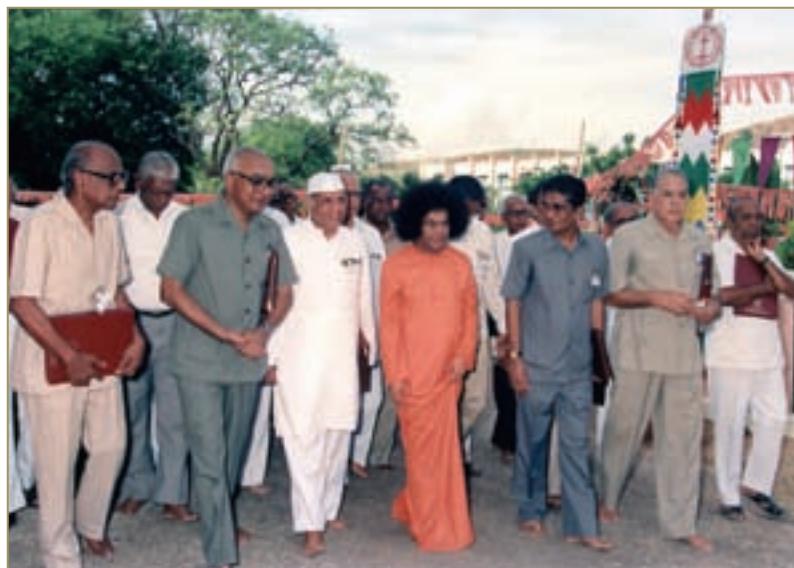
Baba teasing Venkatachalam during his daily afternoon informal session with students on the veranda. Every other day, Baba would inquire what was served for breakfast and lunch. Sometimes the discussion would veer off from there to questions about the nutritional content of what was served, but occasionally Baba would ask Venkatachalam about the size of an item, for example, a biscuit, that was served. When the latter answered, Baba would smile and say, "No! I know you want to save money and made it this small," and indicate a size as in the picture. Venkatachalam would try to politely hold his ground, whereupon Baba would up the ante by turning to students to support him. This exchange was frequent, but the way it went was always different, and therefore all eagerly looked forward to it, including the elders! This was the way Baba gently mixed inspection and getting reports with light-hearted conversation, while quietly stressing the do's and don'ts.

would personally make sure that all arrangements had been made. Thus, for example, every time guests were expected he would, before their arrival, not only inspect the rooms where they would stay but also all the hospitality arrangements, including when and where they would be received, who would be there, etc.

Once the routine was established, Baba withdrew to play a general supervisory role from a distance, with no more micro-supervision. However, he continued to expect from those in charge the same attention to details that he was always very particular about. I experienced this during the early days of my tenure as the Vice Chancellor. The academic year had begun a couple of months earlier, and the first mid-semester examination was in progress. I was expected to check everything and report to Baba. Having done the rounds, I went to see Baba and told him that everything went on smoothly without any glitches. He nodded and asked, "How many students were absent?" This was a detail I was not prepared for; hesitantly I replied that I would check with the principal and get back to him. Baba told me that he was not interested in that particular statistic; what he wanted was that those in charge must be well informed about all aspects of what was happening in their area. The message was loud and clear: "If you rely only on reports, you will find out about troubles only when they become big and at times even unmanageable. If, on the other hand, you always feel the pulse of the place, you will receive early indications of problems

that need fixing. A stitch in time always saves nine, and every manager ought to be conscious of it!"

Honestly, it was a shattering blow to my ego! During my long career I had set up and managed many laboratories in many places in the country, and in every case I prided myself on being on the "shop floor" as often as possible, paying attention to all sorts of details. But this incident taught me that my earlier experience had not trained me in also paying attention to administrative details, which earlier I used to leave to administrators. For Baba, no detail was unimportant enough to be left to others. I got a glimpse of this in 2004, when Baba took me along to a VVIP guest house located next to the *ashram*. The Prime Minister of Nepal was due to come for a visit, and he was to stay in the beautiful building we were headed for. With difficulty Baba climbed the few steps, entered the building, and rode the elevator to the top floor where the guest rooms were located. Baba entered the bathroom first, checked the switches, turned on the hot water heater to see if it was working, convinced himself that everything was clean and that there were towels, soap, etc. Next he entered the bedroom, made sure everything was as it should be, and moved on to the dining room to check the dinnerware. That done, Baba went on to inspect the rooms where the Prime Minister's staff would stay. There were any number of people to whom Baba could have delegated all this work, especially considering his age at that time, but he had to do it himself. The Prime Minister of another country



Pictures on this page were taken in the early days of the Institute when there was a meeting of leading educators held in Puttaparthi. Above Baba is walking along with some of the visitors.



The middle and bottom pictures show Baba moving around the dining table and talking to guests. Later, he, too, sat down and ate along with the guests. However, as he always did, he first had to make sure all were comfortable and well taken care of before he would sit down for the meal.

was visiting, and he was the nation's guest. Moreover, he was visiting Puttaparthi specially to see Baba, and therefore it was his duty to ensure that the hospitality arrangements were perfect. During all this, Baba did not say one word to me, but I did receive an update of a similar message given to me a decade earlier. This time it was: "If you are part of my service team, then you had better ensure that the service you render is nothing short of the best!"

In the Preface, I introduced Sathya Sai Baba as a spiritual master; I would now qualify that by adding that he was also an exceptional one. The traditional types withdrew to lead rather secluded lives, often in caves in the Himalayas. Others lived in towns and villages and sought seclusion largely by withdrawing into themselves, communicating with seekers only occasionally; Ramana Maharishi, mentioned in the Preface, was a classic example of this type.

Baba belonged to an entirely different genre, being different things to different people. To passionate seekers he was a *guru* in the traditional mold. To those who wanted their problems solved, he gave solutions that were in full conformity with morality. To those who wanted to serve, he offered plenty of options, each according to his/her aptitude. In every case, Baba did all he could to lead those who came to him along the path of Love, engage in selfless service to society, discover their true nature and, in the process, also gain inner strength.

Baba never compelled anyone and left alone those who found it difficult to adhere to a moral path to discover their preferences. He touched a wide spectrum of people, from ordinary villagers to highly educated urbanites of all shades and disposition. Everyone related to Baba, each according to his/her own framework of belief, understanding and attitude. What was common to all of them was that they were all drawn to Baba by his Love, which reached out to everyone without any reservation or restriction. That was his nature, and it remained unchanged from the very beginning to the very end.



Baba offering an apple to one of the guests.



Baba and the guests in general discussion.

Some Reflections

Speaking once at the Kennedy Center in Boston, *New York Times* commentator David Brooks observed:

The great philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre said we have the words of morality, words like honor and courage, vice, virtue, but we don't have an underlying system to organize these words.

ACTIVITY THAT IS
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HEART CAN NEVER
LEAD TO COMMON
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HAPPINESS TO ALL,
SINCE IT IS THE
HEART THAT IS THE
FOUNTAINHEAD
OF LOVE AND
COMPASSION.

To me it seems that between 1950 and 1990, Baba not only reminded society about the primacy of morality but also worked tirelessly for what in jurist Palkhivala's words might be regarded as the regeneration of the moral foundation of the country. In other words, Baba was already doing in 1950, what David Brooks advocated in 2010.

Like a pianist who plays several notes at the same time, Baba went about his mission launching many activities in parallel. Superficially, they might appear different, but below the surface there was one common undercurrent. Feelings are born in the Heart and trigger thoughts in the Head (read mind), the agency that controls the words spoken and/or the actions performed. Activity that is divorced from the Heart can never lead to common good and bring happiness to all, since it is the Heart that is the fountainhead of Love and compassion. Baba's bottom line was that no matter what we say or do, the roots of our actions always have to be spiritual. People often are frightened by the word spirituality; Baba stressed repeatedly that there was no need to be frightened. The essence of spirituality, he often told his students, could be summarized in two simple phrases: Help Ever, Hurt Never, and Love All, Serve All.

The teachings appear simple, but a deeper examination shows how revolutionary Baba's approach to spirituality was, compared to established tradition. It is normally believed that spiritual quest is an individual journey; in the ultimate analysis it always has to be that way. But Baba hardly ever pointed to that lonely road. Instead, he invariably encouraged everyone to be actively involved with society and, whenever possible, as a collective venture; that was the core of all his service programs. However, while engaged in a joint endeavor and serving society, one was always expected to look beyond the superficial

picture of diversity that society always presents and experience God, who is Omnipresent and thus also immanent in society. That experience is individual and draws one closer to the soul, slowly bringing the individual aspect of the quest to the fore. It is such experience, said Baba, which allows one to perceive a Cosmic thread weaving through the individual, humanity and Nature all the way to God. As the experience sharpens, the different "elements" lose their apparent distinct identities and fuse into one, revealing in the end a Cosmic Oneness that is the same as Self or the Immortal Soul within every one of us. Ancient seers reached the Self through an inward journey based on intense meditation. Baba gave an alternate route via society and Nature that is better suited for the times, especially given all the problems we have in society and the way humans are ravaging the ecosystem. If a worldly analogy is permitted, one might say that Baba "collectivized" spirituality even as Henry Ford moved car manufacturing from small private garages to massive assembly plants.

Viewed from the perspective of Baba's life in its entirety, what he accomplished until 1990 is best described as a mere prelude. The lift-off of a giant rocket always appears slow and labored, but once the rocket begins to accelerate, it rapidly soars high into the sky. Those words describe the essence of what follows in the next chapter, to which we now turn.

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