

Editor's Introduction

The Purpose of This Study

The purpose of this study is to present, in summary form, the paranormal claims made about Indian guru and holy man Sri Sathya Sai Baba, and various investigations that have been done of them.

The summary is intended for two audiences: those who have heard of Sathya Sai Baba through the second-hand stories told by devotees, but who have not looked at the original sources of these stories; and those who are familiar with some of the writings of devotees but not with the literature of those who have made investigations of his claims.

For those who have a nodding acquaintance with the claims made by devotees, it may be helpful to have gathered in one place original sources of some of these stories. What follows is my collection of texts referred to by those who promote the claims of Sai Baba's psychic powers. Of course it is an abridgement; and any editor's selection is open to charges of bias. My rationale in selecting just this much of a much larger literature is that I am interested in just the paranormal claims, not the dogma of the religion. For the latter, the reader must refer to the sources listed in the bibliography.

For those who are already familiar with the literature put out by the Sai Baba organisation and his devotees, this abridgement will be useful for assessing the claims made about Sai Baba's psychic powers. It will be helpful to have these writings detached from the theology. If the theology is sound, it will stand on its own. But the psychic claims also stand on their own, in the sense that we can raise the question whether these miracles ever occurred independently of discussing what they illustrate about Sai Baba's theology. And many readers who are familiar with Sai Baba's teachings have not had the opportunity to look at what the investigators have said. So, in this volume they will find a summary of what the investigators have had to say. Readers who wish to pursue these criticisms in more depth are again referred to the bibliography.

There are two distinct questions that should be addressed by those who are familiar with the stories of Sai Baba's powers. Several critics have questioned the occurrence of the miracles described by devotees, and have investigated the original reports. Is there any independent evidence -- ie., doctor's reports, hospital records, etc., for the occurrence of these events? I collate here some of these investigations, along with the original reports of the miracles. Second, where there is no doubt of the occurrence of these events, the explanation of these events has been questioned by some critics. Is there a natural explanation -- including the suggestion made by some that Sai Baba produces these effects in the same way a stage magician does -- or do we have good evidence of genuine paranormal powers from these accounts? By placing the accounts of believers and the investigations by researchers side by side, my intention is that readers will be in a better position to form their own opinions about what really happened in these situations.

There are what seem to be exceptions to the rule about avoiding theology in this collection. Chapter 3 cites Sai Baba's remarks on the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, and scholars' interpretations of the Bible. Chapter 7 deals with quotes from Sai Baba which purport to show that the Christian Bible foretells the arrival of Sathya Sai Baba. The point of these sections is not to dispute Sai Baba's divinity, but the evidence he presents for this claim. Those familiar with the complete passages from which our excerpts are taken will agree that Sai Baba is referring to the Scriptures to support his

claims. My point in including these passages, and the corresponding analyses by scholars is to dispute his accuracy in reading, and quoting the Christian Bible; not in his claimed first-hand knowledge of the events reported therein, or his interpretation of biblical passages. Readers who agree with Sai Baba's renderings, and disagree with the scholars' interpretations will no doubt have an explanation for why passages referred to by Sai Baba cannot be located, or why fifty generations of biblical scholars have a different interpretation than Sai Baba of the passages that are there. My point in presenting this material is merely to show that there are such disagreements.

Background Information About Sai Baba

Sri Sathya Sai Baba was born in South India in the tiny village of Puttaparthi in 1926. His given name was Satyanarayana and his family name was Raju. At the age of 14 he claimed that he was the reincarnation of an Indian saint who had died in 1918 named Shirdi Sai Baba. Satyanarayana Raju then proclaimed his mission, and began teaching on the basis of his newly announced Divine status. According to his followers there are currently about 6 million followers with over 2000 centres around the world devoted to the promulgation of the message of Sathya Sai Baba. In many major cities in North America and Western Europe there are organized Sathya Sai Baba groups with members often numbering in the hundreds. There are scores of publications associated with the Sai Baba movement. Many of these publications contain records of the public and private talks and discourses given by Sai Baba. But in a good many of the publications paranormal claims are made. What makes Sai Baba particularly interesting is the wide range of claims made about him by devotees, claims which he is, apparently, happy to endorse.

Claims Made About Sathya Sai Baba

Claims made about Sai Baba are as follows:

1. He is omnipotent and omniscient: "I am everything, everywhere, omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent, and so whatever I will instantly happens." (Sai Baba's words, quoted in Sandweiss, *Spirit and Mind*, p. 243).
2. He has resurrected two different people including one who was pronounced dead by two doctors, and whose corpse was placed in a storage room, his ears and nose plugged with cotton to await funeral rites. (Kanu, p. 12 and Hislop, *My Baba and I*, pp.28-31; etc.)
3. He has complete telepathic knowledge of all his devotees' doings, and can advise even scientists, physicians, engineers, etc. on their professional matters. (Hislop, *My Baba & I*, p. 74).
4. He has materialized countless small objects -- jewellery, rings, pendants, etc., as well as holy ash from his palms, and holy ash in amazingly large quantities from an empty urn. As well he has 'given birth' through his oesophagus to several inches in diameter egg-like objects, called 'lingams'. (These reports are detailed in scores of devotee accounts. See, eg., Murphet, *Man of Miracles* throughout, and Sandweiss, *Spirit and Mind*, p. 170, for a typical description of a lingam 'birth'.)
5. He has performed countless miracles of all and sundry sorts: he has turned water into gas when a car was empty of fuel; he once dropped petals onto the ground and they spelled out

a message in meticulous calligraphy upon landing on the ground; he has made carved glass bowls appear out of thin air; he has pulled statues out of sands; he has appeared in bodily form in two places at once; and on and on in a veritable cornucopia of anecdotes of the miraculous. (Murphet, Man Of Miracles, etc.)

6. He has performed countless paranormal healings and 'rescues at a distance' when devotees of his have been in danger. (Many devotee accounts refer to such healings and rescues, eg., Kanu and Hislop, works cited.)
7. His life fulfils ancient prophecies. (Kanu, Sai Baba, God Incarnate, p. 5, etc.)

Each of these claims will be the focus of a chapter to follow.

Format

A quick note on the format of the material that follows: [This has been changed slightly for the HTML version. --tp] I've presented source material as block quotes (indented left and right), and my own introductions, comments, and notes, as regular text. My adjustments within sources for clarity or explanation are indicated with square brackets. I have emphasized some passages within the sources for clarity of focus. Unless otherwise noted (with 'sic') the emphasis is mine, and not the original author's. Each source is indicated by a separate numbered heading, and the citation, including page number, follows. The full bibliographic reference is to be found at the end of this work.

The last page of this work contains a list of people to write to if you wish further information.

Acknowledgements

I have received information, advice and support from countless individuals for this project. Many do not wish to be named here, because they still have connexions with the Sai Baba organisation, or with friends or loved ones who are still involved. One person, however, who deserves special mention is B. Premanand, editor and publisher of the Indian Skeptic, and convenor of the Indian Committee for Scientific Investigation of the Paranormal, who has done more to investigate Sai Baba than anyone.

Sai Baba: Omniscient and Omnipotent?

Omniscience

To be omniscient is to be all knowing. Such a claim is impossible to confirm with certainty, for it would involve testing the person's knowledge about absolutely everything! But it is very easy to refute if it is a false claim. All that is required is to show that the person making the claim lacks some knowledge that it is possible for a person to have. For example, one who is omniscient will know all the human languages of the world. But Sai Baba, by his own admission and that of his followers, only knows two or three Indian languages fluently. And in a country where vast numbers of people speak fluent English, Sai Baba's English is too broken and unsteady for use in public discourses! In his letters to devotees, Sai Baba makes no pretences about this, and, for instance, excuses himself to one disciple for not having written earlier, explaining that he had no translator about so he could not get his letter translated:

1 - Sai Baba's Letter To Hislop, 8-9-69:

Hislop accept this shower of Love and Joy. I received all the letters you wrote, and felt happy, reading them. Since I could not get a moment of leisure, due to the various items of work connected with the Whitefield College, and since the hurdle of language had to be crossed that is to say, since I could not write to you directly in Telugu, and I did not have with me persons who could correctly translate what I write I had to send you this letter after so much delay.

Sai Baba's Letter Quoted in Hislop, My Baba & I, p. 235.

2 - Sai Baba's Letter To Hislop, 15-1-70:

Hislop, accept my blessings. The letters you sent have all been received. I have read them all...but, I was not able to send you replies, immediately. Many thousands of devotees had gathered during Dasara, the Birthday, and the All-India Conference of Office Bearers of Sathya Sai Organizations; and so, I could not avail myself of even a moment's leisure. Besides, since the building of the college has started, I have been at Bangalore, for about a month. Kasturi was at Prasanthi Nilayam, and letters to you had to be translated, and typed. So, the delay lengthened. This is what happened. Therefore, do not imagine that I have forgotten you. I shall never forget you...

Letter of Sai Baba quoted in Hislop, ibid., p. 238.

So, in Sai Baba's own words, he lacks the knowledge to do certain things--in short, he is not omniscient! How do we reconcile this obvious contradiction? One possibility would be for Sai Baba and his followers to show us that they mean something different by the term "omniscient" than the definition offered at the beginning of this section. In fact, there is evidence for this: V. K. Gokak, who for many years was a close disciple of Sai Baba, and an official interpreter of the Sai Baba message to the world, talks about the various false expectations Westerners are likely to have about Eastern gurus. One of them is put as follows:

3 - V.K. Gokak's Views

The idea that a Master is all-knowing is taken to mean that he must know every thing trivial about everything and every one beforehand and that he should be able to act on it.

Gokak, In Defense Of Jesus Christ And Other Avatars, M. Gulab Singh & Sons P Ltd Publisher. 1979, p. 17.

The definite implication is that for Sai Baba to claim omniscience is not to claim omniscience or complete knowledge in the ordinary sense. Elsewhere the same author states:

4 - More from Gokak:

Baba is not learned or highly educated. He is a non-matriculate playing with undergraduates in the Sathya Sai Colleges.

V K Gokak, Sri Sathya Sai Baba, The Man and The Avatar, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1975, p. 97

Of course, it would not be surprising to discover that someone who was omniscient was not educated in the usual manner of mere mortals; but the implication here is that Sai Baba behaves like the unlearned undergraduates in his college. If Gokak's interpretation is to be accepted, then at least we can be sure that Sai Baba's claim of omniscience, whatever it means, does not mean that he knows everything or is omniscient in the ordinary sense. It is clear, however, that most of Sai Baba's publications present his claim to omniscience as a claim to knowing everything in the ordinary sense. For example, Kanu, in *Sai Baba, God Incarnate*, states that Sai Baba as a boy had no need of schooling--he already knew everything:

5 - V. Kanu's Claims

At eight ... he was sent to the Higher Elementary School two and a half miles away from his house.... He attended the school solely to please his parents, and not because he needed a school education, for he was all-knowing.

Kanu, Sai Baba, God Incarnate, p. 28

And it is also to be observed that Sai Baba himself when asked about these matters confirms what Gokak says is the erroneous interpretation! For example, Hislop, as Sai Secretary for America, asked Sai Baba why Sai Baba needs to have his disciples actually write letters informing him of the various goings on in the Sai Centres. At this point it would have been a simple enough matter for Sai Baba to clarify, stating that daily matters are not known to him. Instead he denied lacking the knowledge, and justified the letter writing on the grounds that it was good for the disciples to write these letters, and, for example, to clear their conscience by writing. Here is the exchange reported by Hislop (JH is John Hislop, and SAI is Sai Baba):

6 - Sai Baba's Explanations:

JH: This question will sound silly to Swami, but it is serious to me.

SAI: What?

JH: I write many letters to Swami about activities, problems and accomplishments in the American Sai Organization. But often I think it is silly to describe problems and events, since I know from my own direct experience that Swami is omnipresent and knows all about the events.

SAI: There is much nonsense about Swami being omnipresent and omnipotent! People start to think they need do nothing, that Swami will do everything! Then they do not bother to do even their daily duty. In spiritual life, the relationship between you and Swami is heart to heart. But in worldly life, Swami has given you work to do. This requires work in the world, activity in the world. You are required to do your duty to the very limit of the task. So far as writing is concerned, the writing of letters to Swami is for your satisfaction.

JH: For my satisfaction, Swami?

SAI: Yes, for your satisfaction. You write to Swami, and your mind is then free of the matter. It is not that Swami does not know. Suppose you withhold some troublesome point, you then have a guilty feeling. But you tell Swami, and there is no guilty feeling. Do your duty fully and completely in the work which Swami has given to you.

Quoted in My Baba and I, pp 214, 215.

And this sort of remark by Sai Baba is not unusual. In a speech reprinted in the official organ of the Sai Baba movement, Sanathana Sarathi, Sai Baba states:

7 - Sai Baba Claims Omniscience:

Remember that Swami knows all that is happening though He may appear as if he knew nothing. Recognise the difference between the Divine and the human. Divinity, although all-knowing and all-powerful acts as if It does not know anything. The human being, though he is totally ignorant and incompetent, pretends to be all-knowing and all-powerful. Students should realise that Swami knows all about their misbehaviour...

Sanathana Sarathi, Vol 32, No. 8, Aug 1989, p. 211, quoting a speech given by Sai Baba on June 19 1989.

This last quotation is useful for the purpose of getting a sense of the reliability of Sai Baba's explanations of matters such as these. Consider Sai Baba's statement that "The human being, though he is totally ignorant and incompetent, pretends to be all-knowing and all-powerful." The reader need only ask, which human beings are totally ignorant and incompetent? Is that an accurate description of what it is to be a human being? "Totally ignorant and incompetent"? Also, which human beings actually pretend to be all-knowing and all-powerful? Isn't it true that most human beings recognize themselves as limited creatures, creatures who are not all-knowing, and not all-powerful. It is only a human being who pretends to be Divine who can be described this way.

Omnipotence

As far as omnipotence goes, Sai Baba, as we've seen, says "I was not able to send replies". This is not the statement of an omnipotent being. Also Sai Baba writes to Hislop to excuse himself for not being able to fulfil his promise to travel to America, and explains his inability saying that he had to attend to various matters in India:

8 - Sai Baba's Letter to Hislop, 8-9-69:

Hislop, though I wanted to come to America, there were some urgent matters in connection with the development of the Colleges here, that I had to attend to. The Colleges have correlations with the Government of India, and so, they have to be equipped accordingly; ...Therefore, I had to look into all these matters myself.

Sai Baba's letter quoted in Hislop, p. 235.

The only explanation given by Sai Baba himself or his devotees as to why someone who is omniscient and omnipotent doesn't know English well enough to translate his own letters, or give public discourses in English, is that Sai Baba is merely pretending to be ordinary in these respects! This can hardly be counted as evidence of omniscience or omnipotence. Although we have yet to consider various specific paranormal powers claims, there is decisive evidence from Sai Baba's everyday behaviour that he is neither all-knowing nor all-powerful in the ordinary sense, the sense in which both he and his disciples (other than Gokak) claim he is.

Did Sai Baba Resurrect Someone From The Dead?

The Radhakrishna Case

9 - Kanu's Account:

Mr. Radhakrishna had been dead for three days. On the third day, his body was cold, stiff and dark and decomposition was starting to set in. There was weeping and wailing in the house. That afternoon, at about half past two, Sai Baba went to the room and closed the door after him. In a few minutes, he opened the door and called the people back in, and they saw Radhakrishna sitting up in bed, looking very well and smiling. Baba said to the wife, 'I have given your husband back to you. Now, give him a hot drink.'

Kanu, Sai Baba, God Incarnate, p. 55.

10 - Murphet's Account:

One Evening Radhakrishna went into a coma and his breathing was that of a dying man. Alarmed, the wife dashed off to see Swami. The latter came to the room, looked at the patient, said, "Don't worry. Everything will be all right," and left. On the next day the patient was still unconscious. Mr. K. S. Hemchand, the son-in-law, brought a male nurse of the district who, after failing to find any pulse and making other examinations, gave as his opinion that Mr. Radhakrishna was so near death that there was no possibility of saving him.

About an hour after this the patient became very cold. The three anxious relatives heard what they thought was the 'death rattle' in his throat and watched him turning blue and stiff. Vijaya and her mother went to see Baba who was at the time upstairs in his dining room. When they told him that Radhakrishna seemed to be dead, he laughed and walked away to his bedroom. Vijaya and her mother returned to the room of the 'dead' man and waited. After a while, Swami came in and looked at the body, but went away again without saying or doing anything. That was on the evening of the second day since Mr. Radhakrishna had become unconscious. The whole of the next night passed while the three stayed awake and anxiously watched for any signs of returning life. There were no signs. Yet they still had faith that Baba would somehow or other, in his own way, save Radhakrishna, for had he not said that everything would be alright?

On the morning of the third day the body was more than ever like a corpse dark, cold, quite stiff and beginning to smell. Other people who came to see and sympathise told Mrs. Radhakrishna that she should have the corpse removed from the ashram. But she replied, 'Not unless Swami orders it.' Some even went to Baba and suggested that, as the man was dead and the body smelling of decomposition, it should either be sent back to Kuppam, or cremated at Puttaparti. Swami simply replied, 'We'll see!'

When Mrs. Radhakrishna went upstairs again to tell Baba what people were saying to her, and ask him what she must do, he answered: 'Do not listen to them, and have no fear; I am here.' Then he said that he would come down to see her husband soon.

She went downstairs again and waited, with her daughter and son-in-law by the body. The minutes dragged by an hour passed but Swami did not come. Then, when they were beginning to despair

entirely, the door opened and there stood Baba in his red robe, copious hair, and shining smile. It was then about half past two in the afternoon of the third day. Mrs. Radhakrishna went towards Baba and burst into tears. Vijaya too began to cry. They were like Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus, weeping before their lord who, they thought, had come too late.

Gently Baba asked the tearful women and sorrowful Mr. Hemchand to leave the room. As they left, he closed the door behind them. They do not know no man knows what happened in that room where there were only Swami and the 'dead' man.

But after a few minutes Baba opened the door and beckoned the waiting ones in. There on the bed Radhakrishna was looking up at them and smiling. Amazingly the stiffness of death had vanished and his natural colour was returning. Baba went over, stroked the patient's head and said to him, 'Talk to them; they're worried.'

'Why worried?' asked Radhakrishna, puzzled. 'I'm all right. You are here.'

Swami turned to the wife: 'I have given your husband back to you', he said, 'Now get him a hot drink'

When she brought it, Swami himself fed it to Radhakrishna slowly with a spoon ... Next day the patient was strong enough to walk to bhajan [devotional singing ed.]. On the third day he wrote a seven page letter to one of his daughters who was abroad in Italy. The family stayed a few more days at Prasanti Nilayam, then with Baba's permission returned to their home in Kuppam. The bad gastric ulcers and complications had vanished forever...

...When Mr. N. Kasturi was a few years ago writing something about the incident of Mr. Radhakrishna being raised from the dead, Baba told him to put the word 'dead' in inverted commas. So maybe we should say here that Mr. Radhakrishna was very near to death, more than half-way through death's door, when Baba called him back to life.

Howard Murphet, Sai Baba, Man Of Miracles, pp.132 -134.

11 - Dr. Gokak's Endorsement:

Amongst innumerable miracles which have emanated from Bhagavan all these years, the following are worth recording.

During the latter part of the year 1953 Bhagavan brought back to life one V. Radhakrishna, a well-known citizen of Kuppam, whose body had started decomposing at Prasanthi Nilayam.

V. K. Gokak, Sri Sathya Sai Baba, The Man And The Avatar, p. 303.

12 - Mrs. Radhakrishna's Account, As Reported by Dr. Haraldsson:

During a stay in Puttaparti in the early 1950's, Mr. Radhakrishna had become seriously ill with gastric trouble so that he could not pass his urine and also had further complications. The next day he became semiconscious and his condition was very critical. The following morning around 11:00 he lost consciousness. According to Mrs. Radhakrishna, no life signs, including breathing and pulse,

could be detected, and the members of his family who were present (she and Mr. Hemchand) firmly believed that he had expired.

By the next morning, the body had become cold and there had been no observable signs of life for over 20 hours. But Baba told them that they should not worry, that nothing had happened. When he at last came down from his room, he asked them all to leave the room where Mr. Radhakrishna was lying; he then closed the door and was alone with him for a minute or two. When he opened the door, the group standing outside saw Mr. Radhakrishna sitting up in his bed. 'People were so flabbergasted that everyone fell to his feet.' That was the oriental way in which Mrs Radhakrishna finished her account. Mr. Radhakrishna recovered on this occasion, but died a few years later apparently of the same disease.

Haraldsson, Miracles Are My Visiting Cards, p. 248, 249.

13 - Diary Record Kept by Vijaya Hemchand (Radhakrishna's Daughter):

During the previous night all of us gave up hopes regarding our father. That was a very horrible and frightening night, like that of cosmic dissolution (death). Our father was uttering the names of departed people and was saying that he too would join them. Neither was his speech coherent nor was he conscious. He had (long since) stopped taking food. All of us started weeping. In the midst of our agony and even in the face of this threat to his life, we took refuge in Lord Sai. We held his feet firmly in our minds and had strong faith in him. The moment we saw his beautiful enchanting face we forgot all our sufferings and became enthralled by bliss.

He came down and closed the doors to the room. He was inside for ten minutes. I could not control my grief. I was afraid of what others might think. All those in the shrine (Prashanti Nilayam) were staying there motionless and were anxiously waiting for the outcome. After ten minutes he opened the door...came out brushing his hands together, saw my mother, and told her: 'I have given life to your husband. I have given it to him. The hurdle is over, there is no more fear.' As he was saying this, we held his feet and washed them with our tears. 'Alas, my innocent mother! She is frightened!' So saying, he looked at our faces and said: 'None of you had faith that he was going to survive, did you? You go in and see.'

Our father, who had been lying unconscious for three days without speech and sight, looked at all of us and smiled.

Quoted in Haraldsson, p. 249-50.

Mrs. Hemchand's diary, written contemporaneously with the events, makes it clear how to interpret the remarks of the devotees that Radhakrishna was dead, including her own remark that her father had been lying 'unconscious for three days without speech and sight', despite having just stated that he was muttering names of the departed throughout the night, and saying that he would soon join them! Specifically, Mrs. Hemchand's diary makes it clear how to interpret Kanu's statement that Mr. Radhakrishna was dead three days. No sensible person can hold that Mr. Radhakrishna was dead in the medical sense during that night before Sai Baba supposedly resurrected him, for he was "uttering the names of departed people, and saying that he would join them." This is hardly the expected behaviour of a cold, blue corpse starting to decompose! If the family of Mr. Radhakrishna really thought he had died prior to that night, wouldn't the miracle have been the corpse muttering

through the night?! And if this isn't enough to indicate the lax standards of Sai Baba's devotees' descriptions of the `miraculous' events associated with the guru, consider Hislop's description of Radhakrishna's resurrection as told him by the Raja of Venkatigiri compared with Haraldsson's report of the Raja of Venkatigiri's account:

14 - Hislop's Account:

...Baba's powers of resurrection are known to other devotees. The Raja of Ventagiri [sic] told me of his experience when, some twenty or so years ago, he witnessed Baba's resurrection of a man dead some six days in whom body decomposition was taking its normal course. About these mysteries one can make no comment; they are outside the customary human experience.

Hislop, My Baba & I, p. 31.

15 - The Rajah of Venkatigiri's Account, as Reported by Haraldsson:

The present Raja of Venkatigiri was in Puttaparti at that time. When asked about this incident, he told me that he remembered it well. He had been with the swami when Mr. Radhakrishna's relative came to tell Sai Baba that he was dying. About an hour after Mr. Radhakrishna allegedly died, the swami came down from his room at last and said to them: `Don't fear, nothing has happened.' They waited outside the room while the swami went in. When he opened the door and called them, they saw that Mr. Radhakrishna was alive and talking slowly. The Raja did not see Mr. Radhakrishna while he was allegedly dead.

Haraldsson, p. 249.

Given (1) that no medical doctor is supposed to have pronounced Radhakrishna dead at any time during the sequence of events in question, (2) the patient was muttering semi-coherently through the night before his alleged resurrection, and (3) even Murphet withdraws the claim that he was in the medical sense dead prior to Sai Baba's visit, the inescapable conclusion is that Mr. Radhakrishna was not in the medical sense dead prior to Sai Baba's visit. What is required, clearly, to establish a resurrection from the dead claim is a case in which it is at least alleged that the patient was found to have been dead by a doctor. These accounts of the Radhakrishna case, then, are of principal interest as an exhibit of the low standards in accuracy, consistency, and reliability of devotee reports of the miracles. He was dead three days, an hour, six days, and not at all. Somehow one expects a slightly higher standard of accuracy in reporting, if a claim is to be taken seriously by the scientific community; and if this is the best to be expected of oral reports and memories, one expects at the very least a higher standard of interest in sorting out what happened on the part of the devotees putting out the story for public consumption.

The Cowan Case

16 - Kanu's Account

Walter Cowan, an American, was pronounced dead by two separate and independent doctors: first, the European hotel doctor at the Madras hotel where Mr. Cowan died; the second, an Indian doctor at the hospital where the body was taken. The nurses prepared the corpse in their customary way. Mrs. Cowan and her friend rushed to Sai Baba and found him seated on his chair. Before she could

break the news to him, he said, 'Walter lives. Go back to the hospital. I will come at ten o'clock.' He went at the stated time and restored Walter Cowan back to life.

Kanu, Sai Baba, God Incarnate, p. 56.

17 - Hislop's Account

Early on the morning of December 25, a rumor quickly spread that an elderly American had died of a heart attack. My wife, Victoria, and I immediately thought of Walter. We went to the hotel and found Elsie there. Walter had fallen to the floor in the very early morning hours. Elsie had called Mrs. Ratanlal whose room was just down the corridor. The two women managed to lift Walter to the bed, and he passed away in Elsie's arms a few minutes later. An ambulance was called, the body was taken to a hospital, pronounced dead upon arrival, placed in an empty storage room, and covered with a sheet to await daylight and decisions about the funeral.

Elsie and Mrs. Ratanlal had already been to see Baba when we arrived. He had told them he would visit the hospital at 10 a.m. The two ladies were ready and waiting to join Baba at the appointed hour. They did go to the hospital, but Baba had arrived earlier and had already departed. To the joy of the ladies, but also to their total amazement, they found Walter alive and being attended to. Nobody saw Baba with Walter, nor has Baba chosen to say how or why Walter was resurrected, but on returning to the devotee family who were his hosts, Baba told the people there that he had brought Walter back to life.

Hislop, My Baba & I, p. 29-30.

18 - Dr. S. Sandweiss' Endorsation of Hislop's Account:

Documented accounts of Sai Baba's powers must number in the thousands. Many have been collected in Howard Murphet's exciting and informative book *Man of Miracles*. Following is one of the most dramatic stories that I have heard, related here because of its uniqueness and its bearing on what happened to me later...Dr. John Hislop, a former professor and corporate executive, now retired and living in Mexico, was a witness to this extraordinary drama. Here is a summary of his account:

Early Christmas morning, news spread among devotees gathered about Baba that an elderly American had suffered a fatal heart attack. Upon hearing the rumor, my wife and I at once went to the Cowans' hotel, where Elsie confirmed that her husband Walter had died. She had prayed to Sai Baba for help and with great self-control and recollection of human mortality had ended the prayer with, Let God's will be done.

Walter's body was taken to the hospital by ambulance. Later that day, when Elsie and her friend Mrs. Ratan Lal went to the hospital, they found that Sai Baba had already been there as well. To their utter amazement they found Walter alive.

Recognizing the need for documentation of Walter's death in the form of medical reports and witnesses' testimony, Dr. Hislop investigated the matter fully. At my request, Judge Damadar Rao of Madras interviewed the doctor who had attended Walter when he arrived at the hospital. The

doctor's statement was that Walter was indeed dead when he examined him, shortly after the ambulance arrived at the hospital. There was no sign of life.

He pronounced Walter dead, then stuffed his ears and nose with cotton. The body was covered with a sheet and moved to an empty room. The doctor then left the hospital and missed seeing Sai Baba while he was there. Upon returning to the hospital after Sai Baba had left, the doctor found Walter alive. He was unable to explain this.

Later that day Sai Baba informed his devotees that he had indeed brought Walter back to life. He did not disclose the reasons for doing so, however; this remains a mystery he has not yet chosen to explain.

Sandweiss, in Sai Baba, The Holy Man And The Psychiatrist, pp. 101,102.

This case is one of the most frequently cited anecdotes offered as proof of Sai Baba's powers, and his willingness to do good with them. For example, John Hislop, whose account was cited above, is Sai Baba's leading proponent in North America. I heard Dr. Hislop give this story at a meeting of Sai Baba followers in 1988 in Vancouver. B. Premanand, Convenor of Indian CSICOP, has done a thorough investigation of this incident, and what follows in the next five items will be the highlights of his investigations. Erlendur Haraldsson (Miracles Are My Visiting Cards, pp 244-248) also reports on statements from Cowan's doctors which contradict the recollections of Hislop and Elsie Cowan.

19 - Premanand's Comment on the Quality of Hislop's Reporting:

In the story of Walter Cowan's death and resurrection published in 1973 under the authorship of Hislop, Cowan is alleged to have died at the Connemara Hotel. No mention is made of the House Doctor of Connemara Hotel, Dr. O.G. C. Vaz seeing Cowan. The Superintendent of Lady Willingdon Nursing Home was R. B. Krishna Rao and Cowan's cardiologist, Dr. R. S. Rajagopalan. Also no mention of Dr. R. S. Rajagopalan was made in the articles. The name of the hospital was also not mentioned. But as Connemara Hotel's name was there, it was possible for me to trace the Hospital where Cowan was admitted and the doctors who treated him...."

B. Premanand, Indian Skeptic 1989 #13, p. 26.

20 - Letter from Dr. Vaz (Cowan's attending physician) to Premanand, 12-7-88:

Chevalier Dr. O.G.C. Vaz, K.S.G., M.B.B.S., D.G.O.
Madras

Mr. B. Premanand,

Dear Sir,

This is in reply to your letter dated 8.7.'88.

Mr. Walter R. Cowan was under my treatment for his illness you refer to from 25th Dec. '71. I was called to see him in the early hours of the morning at the Connemara Hotel. He was complaining of some difficulty in breathing and pain in the chest. He was perfectly conscious in bed. At no stage had I pronounced him dead then or later. I advised him to be admitted to Lady Wellington Nursing Home

for observation, investigation and treatment and accordingly he was admitted there. With medication in the Nursing Home, he showed rapid improvement. That morning Mrs. Cowan requested me whether there was any objection for Sai Baba, his spiritual guru to pray for him in the room for which I said he was most welcome and I was there when Sai Baba was offering prayers. Mr. Cowan was conscious then and also right through.

I am surprised at the story that has gone round that he was dead at the Hotel itself and his dead body was taken for admission to the Lady Willingdon Nursing Home and was admitted there. No Hospital or Nursing Home will ever admit a person after his death and his dead body will not be accepted into the Ward. So the question of my informing the American Embassy or the Health Authorities did not arise at all. As a matter of fact, I had enquiries about him from several persons who came to interview me personally on this subject and who had taped down the interview. They had been emphatically given the correct version that Mr. Cowan was not dead at all at any stage and he also had a normal recovery here.

Yours faithfully,

(signature)

Dr. Vaz

Indian Skeptic #13 (1989), pp.26-35.

(This letter, and the three which follow, are reproduced in facsimile in the *Indian Skeptic*.)

21 - Letter from Harish Khanna. General Manager, Connemara Hotel, to B. Premanand, 17-8-88:

Connemara Hotel
Madras India

Regd. Ack. Due.

Mr. B. Premanand

Thank you for your letter dated 22nd July 1988 and please accept my apologies for not replying to your letter earlier as I was indisposed and then travelled on official work for about ten days.

Probably you may be aware that Connemara Hotel was taken over by the Taj Group from April 1st 1984 and I took over as General Manager from June 1984 onwards. Hence do not have any clues about your letters dated 13th December 1979, 21st January and 13th February 1980.

I tried to find out the facts from old files and from Dr. O.G.C. Vaz who informed me exactly the same what he has written in his letter dated 12th July 1988 to you. I cannot say personally anything in this matter but only one thing that how can it be possible to remove a dead body from a hotel and a hospital of such repute admitting a dead man as no hospital would do so.

I am sending you this letter as desired by you under registered post with acknowledgement due. There would have been no need of you sending us the Postal Order for the mode and type of communication you want from the hotel and hence I am returning with this letter your Postal Order back to you.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely

(signature)

Harish Khanna
General Manager

Indian Skeptic #13 (1989), pp.26-35

22 - Letter to B. Premanand from Dr B. Krishna Rau, 13-7-88:

Dr. B. Krishna Rau M.S., F.R.C.S., Eng F.R.C.S. (Edin) F.I.A.M.S.
Lady Willingdon Nursing Home
Madras 600 006

Dear Mr. Premanand,

Thank you for your letter of 8th July 1988.

I have had many letters in the past regarding Mr. Walter Cowan. I am just repeating what I said in the past.

Mr. Walter Cowan was admitted with congestive cardiac failure and in a very bad condition. He had NOT at any time died in the medical terminology.

During his stay in the hospital, Sri Satya Sai Baba visited him when he was critically ill.

As for his ears and nose being plugged with cotton is not correct.

His general physician was Dr. O.G.C. Vaz and his Cardiologist was R. R.S. Rajagopalan.

I hope this gives you sufficient information.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

(signature)

B. Krishna Rau
BKR/cb.

Indian Skeptic #13 (1989), pp.26-35

23 - Letter to B. Premanand from Dr. R.S. Rajagopalan, 24-7-88:

Trinity Acute Care Hospital
Dr. R. S. Rajagopalan, M.D.D. T.M. (Cal)
Consultant Physician & Cardiologist

Dear Mr. Premanand,

Thank you very much for your letter dated 8.7.88 From memory I can say only that Mr. Cowan who was admitted to Lady Wellington Nursing Home had a cardiac arrest consequent to the underlying cardiac ailment he had. He was revived by employing standard cardio-respiratory resuscitative procedures. I can tell you that he was admitted to the hospital in a state of consciousness with a functioning heart, and developed cardiac arrest, while he was undergoing treatment for the cardiac ailment. I am returning the Indian Postal order to you which you kindly sent to me.

Thanking you,

Yours sincerely

(signature)

Indian Skeptic #13, pp. 28-35.

If the reader reaches the conclusion that the story of Walter Cowan's resurrection is false, the question then arises about how the false story may have come into circulation. Both Haraldsson and Premanand have speculations on this.

24 - Dr. Haraldsson's Hypothesis:

I have asked (over the phone) Judge Damodar Rao, a staunch devotee, about his involvement, since Dr Hislop's account reported that Judge Rao had interviewed Cowan's physician. He denied having made any investigation of this case. During our trip to India in 1975, Mr Eswar mentioned to Dr Osis that Sai Baba had told him 'to play the case down'. Furthermore it is of interest that Kasturi refers only briefly to this incident in his official biography of Baba; he cites, without any comment, only a few sentences by Elsie and Walter Cowan (1982, p. 23). This may indicate that the case was primarily built up by Mrs Cowan and she may have received only a half-hearted consenting nod from others around her. (The Cowans were staunch American devotees and donated the most imposing college building in Whitefield.)

Haraldsson, Miracles Are My Visiting Cards, p. 248.

25 - Premanand's Response to Haraldsson's Hypothesis:

I am giving below some extracts from the article "Turn Over To Me" authored by N. Kasturi published in Sanathana Sarathi, Vol. 16, No. 4, June 1973, pages 120 to 125:

The attending physician of the hospital, is well known to Sri G. K. Damodara Rao, Retired District & Sessions Judge. He told the Judge that Walter was indeed dead, when he examined him shortly after arrival. There was no sign of life. He said that he pronounced Walter as dead, that his ears and nose were stuffed with cotton, and that Walter was covered with a sheet and moved into an empty room. The doctor had then left the hospital on some professional duty and had missed seeing Sri Baba, when Sri Baba was in hospital. When the doctor returned to the hospital, Walter was alive.

I saw Sri Baba at his place of residence after he had returned from the hospital, continues Dr. Hislop. He told me and others within hearing that Walter Cowan had died and that the hospital had stuffed his ears and nose, and covered him with a sheet. Sri Baba said that he had brought Walter back to life.'

...Now again, let us see what Kasturi said about this incident in Sathyam Sivam Sundaram Part IV in first edition, 1980, page 179:

They asked Baba, "Baba, on what basis do you grant grace to persons?" Baba took the question very coolly and expounded his reply: "I grant Grace when the person has fully surrendered to me and the situation is such that he will be greatly helped. At Madras Walter had three attacks of heart failure, full and fatal, but I saved his life all the three times, for I wished to save Mrs. Cowan the pain and bother of taking her husband back home dead.

Quoted from Indian Skeptic No. 3 July 1988 pp. 30-32.

As I mentioned in the previous section, Hislop is the major proponent of this anecdote in North America. David Lane is a researcher and editor of the journal mentioned below in Hislop's letter. He is broadly sympathetic with religious aims and is concerned to separate the unreliable from the more reliable forms and claims of religion. When he read Haraldsson's book, he wrote Hislop, and Hislop gave this response.

26 - Hislop's Response to David Lane, 17-7-88:

Mr. David Christopher Lane
Del Mar Press
Del Mar CA 92014

Dear David:

It was very kind of you to send me the Research Issue of your most excellent journal *UNDERSTANDING CULTS AND SPIRITUAL MOVEMENTS*. Many thanks...

Dr. Heraldsson's conclusion is that the story is false because there is no objective evidence that Cowan died, and that statements made about the incident are themselves false. On the other hand, unless I am to be considered as either lying or in error when I quoted Sathya Sai Baba, there is the other side. Since I did quote Sathya Sai Baba correctly there being several conversations between us on the topic it really boils down to the issue of whether or not Sathya Sai Baba was lying. Dr. Heraldsson's conclusion has to be taken, I believe, that because of statements made by the hospital's doctor and by Judge Damadar Rao the proper conclusion is that Cowan did not die and therefore Baba lied when he told me (and others) that Cowan had died and had been brought back to life, not once only but on three occasions. I do not see how this inference can be escaped...

Two points placed into emphasis by Dr. Heraldsson were the denials of the doctor at the hospital in Madras, and the denial of Judge Damadar Rao. Mrs. Cowan told me that the doctor came to her at her hotel and demanded that she provide him with a ticket and with sponsorship to the USA. This she would not do and according to her, the doctor's denials arose thereafter. Judge Damadar Rao is a fine Indian gentleman, respected and admired by everyone who knows him. His son is the Principal of the Sathya Sai Men's College at Whitefield. The Judge and his Wife, long-time devotees of Sathya Sai Baba, are now living their retirement years in Baba's Ashram, Prasanthi Nilayam, at Puttaparthi. I do not see how Judge Damadar's statement and mine can ever be reconciled. When Dr. Heraldsson asked the Judge, some thirteen or fourteen years after the incident, the Judge's memory was as stated in Dr. Haraldsson's book. When I set forth my account, about a month after the event, my

memory was that the Judge told me he had independently gone to the hospital the day following Cowan's death and verified the circumstances of his admittance to the hospital. How can I now deny my memory of that time, and how can the Judge deny his present memory? Neither is possible. Each of us is saying the truth to the best of his knowledge. Thus, I can see no end to the different stories about Walter Cowan's `resurrection'....

Thanks again for the Journal, and for our past communications.

Sincerely yours,
Dr. John Hislop

Does Sai Baba Have Complete Telepathic Knowledge?

The telepathic claims are made about Sai Baba's `knowledge', which comes in three varieties: (1) Scientific, historical and technical expertise purportedly had by Sai Baba that he could not have come by in normal ways; (2) religious knowledge; and (3) apparently telepathic knowledge of the doings of Sai Baba's devotees. The first is hard for lay people to assess; and so if Sai Baba gets away with a few bloopers from time to time, the explanation may be twofold: either that the followers do not themselves *know* the facts, or that they don't *care*. However, while this explanation will work for many of Sai Baba's devotees, it strains credibility when applied to some very well educated followers. On the other hand, some readers may think that science according to Sai Baba would strain credibility even more.

Of course, all followers, even the best-educated ones, put their religion above other worldly concerns, so we should expect both Sai Baba and his followers to be specially on their toes when it comes to these claims. Now it will not do to criticise Sai Baba's religious pronouncements from the standpoint of a rival religion--this would simply beg the question. So in the section devoted to religion below, I concentrate on occasions where Sai Baba quotes or paraphrases from the Christian Bible, in order to examine how accurate he is about the passages themselves. It is, to be sure, possible that Sai Baba knows better than the scribes and translators of this document. I am not interested whether this is so. I am merely interested in whether he shows any awareness that his interpretation *differs from* the usual one. After all, this is an item of knowledge of which an omniscient being would be aware!

I should make it clear why I dwell on the truth or falsity of the claims when telepathy is supposed to be the issue under consideration. The claim that Sai Baba displays *telepathic powers* in his display of `knowledge' of any of the three sorts listed above, as made by his devotees, in turn consists of two sub-claims: First, that he has knowledge in these matters, and second that he gains this knowledge through means other than the way people normally gain knowledge i.e., other than through asking questions, reading others' accounts, one's own observation, inference, guessing, etc. Actually, Sai Baba's defenders never propose an account of how Sai Baba gains the knowledge he is said to have. Nowhere in the literature do we find an hypothesis of how Sai Baba's telepathy works. Nor do we find a systematic discussion of what Sai Baba's telepathic powers really amount to. So the evidence presented by Sai Baba's defenders for Sai Baba's telepathic powers has to be inferred from the always fulsome, and often incoherent reports of his putatively miraculous pronouncements. If I understand the logic of these accounts, what they are purporting to show is (a) that Sai Baba knows intimate details of his followers' lives, and historical facts--such as details about the life of Jesus of

Nazareth--that could not have been discerned through normal means; and (b) that Sai Baba knows so much about so many different things that no one would have time to learn these things through normal channels; and (c) that Sai Baba has such a 'deep understanding' of such things as science and religion that he must have access to ways of knowing that are denied mere mortals. In other words, their evidence for telepathy rests on their analysis of the knowledge itself.

Since we do not have an argument from devotees about how Sai Baba gets his claimed knowledge we have nothing to speculate on here about this. In what follows, I concentrate on the supposed knowledge itself. In the selections which follow, I quote devotees' reports of Sai Baba's pronouncements on a range of topics, and various responses and data from which the reader can judge for herself whether Sai Baba's statements really do constitute knowledge, and whether they are so profound and accurate. If the reader decides that Sai Baba's knowledge is not so impressive after all, perhaps she will not feel the lack of accounts of how these items could have been got by telepathy.

I also quote passages where Sai Baba reports his knowledge about his followers' lives, and the reader can judge how intimate Sai Baba's knowledge is. The purpose of these illustrations is to allow the reader to entertain an alternative hypothesis about where Sai Baba's 'knowledge' of these matters comes from.

I will not attempt to be systematic here, but will simply exhibit some of the obvious problems even a cursory examination of Sai Baba's speeches will reveal for any attempt to make good claims that Sai Baba has *complete* telepathic knowledge. If the reader thinks I am pushing over a straw man in this chapter, I remind him of the claims made by some of his most influential followers:

27 - Hislop's Claim For Sai Baba's Telepathic Knowledge:

Baba demonstrates again and again that nothing is concealed from him, that in fact he can give an immediate true answer to any question in any field of knowledge--spiritual or mundane. Even specialists bow to him because of his superior knowledge in their fields of expertise.

John Hislop, My Baba & I, p. 74.

British Wit

28 - Sai Baba on Winston Churchill:

You have to learn from the example of Churchill, who though he did not fare well at school, through sheer self-confidence and self-education, became the Prime Minister of England. He enlisted in the army at a young age. When he later entered politics, he trained himself to become an effective public speaker. Before going to a meeting, he would practise before a mirror how he would address the meeting and what kind of impression he would make on the audience by his gestures and movements. By correcting himself in this way, he developed great self-confidence and acquired an impressive public personality.

He became a master in the art of repartee. At an election meeting he was railing against the opposition without mincing words. A woman in the audience, who was greatly provoked by Churchill's attack, got up and shouted: 'Shut up.' She remarked: 'If I had been your wife I would have

administered poison to put an end to your life.' Churchill coolly replied: 'If I had been your husband, I would have thrust the cup of poison down your throat.' The woman was put to shame and remained silent thereafter.'

Sai Baba, quoted in the official organ of the Sai Baba organization, Sanathana Sarathi, February 1989, p. 32.

29 - Churchill's Wit, Represented by Everyone Else:

At a weekend party given by the Duke of Marlborough at Blenheim Palace, Churchill found himself seated next to Lady Astor. The beautiful American born Nancy had been angered at some of Churchill's savage attacks on the Baldwin government and had fought him in House of Commons debates. When coffee was served, the acid-tongued Nancy said, 'Winston, if I were your wife, I'd put poison in your coffee.' 'Nancy,' Churchill replied to the acid-tongued lady member of Parliament, 'If I were your husband, I'd drink it.'

James Humes, Churchill: Speaker Of The Century, Stein & Day, N. Y. 1980, p. 284.

Lady Astor: Winston, if I were your wife, I'd put poison in your coffee.

W.S.C.: If I were your husband, Nancy, I'd take it.

Kay Halle, Irrepressible Churchill, World Publishing, 1966 N.Y., p. 85.

Lady Astor neither gave nor asked for quarter, and she got none from him. At a dinner party she told him: 'Winston, if I were your wife I'd poison your soup.' He replied, 'Nancy, if I were your husband, I'd drink it.'

W. Manchester, Winston Spencer Churchill, Visions Of Glory, Little Brown and Co. Boston 1983, p. 34.

...Lady Astor said, 'Winston, if I were married to you, I'd put poison in your coffee.' Churchill responded, 'And if you were my wife, I'd drink it.'

C. Fadiman, ed., Little Brown Book Of Anecdotes, Little Brown, Boston, 1985, p. 122.

The battles between Winston and Lady Astor were long and furious. 'If I were your wife,' Lady Astor roared at him, 'I would put poison in your coffee'. To which Churchill replied with dignity, 'And if I were your husband I would drink it.'

Bocca, G., The Adventurous Life of Winston Churchill, Quoted in Man Of The Century, Little Brown Boston 1965, p. 130.

Early 20th Century Britain

30 - Sai Baba on Ramsay Macdonald:

In Britain, there was a poor lad who used to make a living by writing addresses on covers for illiterate persons and to give tuitions to children. Each time he wrote an address, he used to say: "May God bless you." He used to tell the young children before they went back to their homes after their lessons: "May God shower His grace on you." He had firm faith that some day God would raise him

to a position where he would be able to render service to the people. He always told his young students: "Have faith in God." He himself had firm faith in God.

In course of time, he became the Prime Minister of Britain. He was James Ramsay Macdonald. From a poor address writer to the Prime Ministership of Great Britain what a change in fortune wrought by the grace of God!

Quoted in Sanathana Sarathi, August 1986 from a Discourse given 21-7-1986.

What was Ramsay Macdonald's job? Sai Baba suggests that address writing was a principal source of employment for the young Ramsay Macdonald, and that the reason he was addressing covers was because the letters were being sent on behalf of illiterate persons who could not write their own envelopes. Here is the information from two biographies which make clear that the envelope addressing was very brief, and in any case, the members of a Cyclists' Touring Club were not illiterate senders of mail whom Ramsay Macdonald would be kind enough to bless! Since Ramsay Macdonald was doing stenographic work for the Cycling Society he would not have had any opportunity to offer the blessings with which Sai Baba so colourfully and generously embellishes the story. Here is what two biographers of Ramsay Macdonald have to say about the same time in his life.

31 - Biographers of Ramsay Macdonald on the Same Incident:

...He tramped the streets of London in search of work, eking out the few pounds he had somehow contrived to save at Bristol, living on oatmeal sent from home, an occasional threepenny beefsteak pudding, and hot water in place of tea or coffee. When he was almost at the end of his meagre resources he found a job addressing envelopes at the National Cyclists' Union in Fleet Street, at 10s. a week. But this was only a temporary refuge, and another period of unemployment followed, until he found a post as an invoice clerk in the city at 12s. 6d. a week, rising to 15s.

David Marquand, Ramsay MacDonald, Jonathan Cape, London, 1977, p. 19.

It is said that it was on the afternoon of the last day on which it was possible to keep the struggle going that he found employment. It was the addressing of envelopes at ten shillings a week, for the newly formed Cyclist Touring Club. And so, though he had been within a few hours of failure, he had survived. He had not been driven back from the gates of opportunity. Ten shillings a week and the envelopes of the Cyclists' Touring Club had ensured him a political career. Not that the Cyclists afforded an economic anchorage for long. It was temporary work, and there was another trying hiatus before he was taken on, this time at fifteen shillings a week, as invoice-clerk in a warehouse.

Lord Elton, The Life Of J. Ramsay Macdonald, Collins 1939, London, p. 53.

Thomas Edison

32 - Sai Baba's Explanation of Edison's Deafness:

The Example of Edison

Students need both faith in God and determination (deeksha) for success in life. There is the example of the great American scientist, Thomas Alva Edison. He was born in a poor family on February 11, 1847, in the State of Ohio. Although he made no progress in his studies, he became a

great inventor, thanks to his supreme self-confidence and his perseverance and determination in the pursuit of his experiments. His early experiments had untoward results, which provoked his parents to punish him and ultimately to send him out of the home. For a time he earned a living by selling sweets in trains. Once, a guard slapped him for causing an explosion in the closet of a train. His hearing was affected thereby. A benefactor came into his life after he had saved a child from being run over by a train. He got a job in a telegraph company and was free to carry on his experiments...

Satya Sai Baba, quoted in Sanathana Sarathi, February 1989. The subtitle was given by the editor of the journal.

33 - Edison Biographer M. Josephson's Debunking of this Myth:

The earlier stories of his (Edison's) boyhood done long ago in the Horatio Alger style, have much pathos but are misleading. From the symptoms of his deafness, as described by himself and others as well, it seems to have been traceable to the aftereffects of scarlatina suffered in childhood, and to have developed through periodic infection of the middle ear that was unattended.

In the earlier tales of how his deafness arose he is described as having been busy one day in his baggage-car laboratory. In those times the iron-plated tracks were so unpredictable that they sometimes curled up and pierced the floors --and seats!-- of passing cars. At all events, the train suddenly gave a violent lurch, and a jar holding some sticks of phosphorus in water fell from the shelves to the floor; on being uncovered and exposed to the air the phosphorus soon ignited with a startling white light and burst into flames. The wooden floor of the car took fire, while the boy struggled vainly to smother the flames. The conductor, one Alexander Stevenson, sometimes described as a 'dour Scot', came forward in time to douse the little fire. Then, it is related, he lost his head, 'cursed Edison roundly and boxed his ears' with such 'brutal blows' that the boy soon afterward became deaf. 'When a few minutes later the train stopped at Smith's Creek station, the conductor threw the boy overboard, and after him his whole laboratory and printing press.' Tom Edison was left weeping beside the railroad track, and permanently injured as well.

The details of this story, however--and it has become a legend--are broadly inaccurate. Edison himself tried to recapitulate things toward the end of his life, so as to correct the more romanticized accounts of his boyhood misfortunes. According to these later recollections, he was delayed in getting to the train one morning; it was already leaving the station. 'I was trying to climb into the freight car with both arms full of heavy bundles of papers...I ran after it and caught the rear step, hardly able to lift myself. A trainman reached over and grabbed me by the ears and lifted me...I felt something snap inside my head, and the deafness started from that time and has progressed ever since.' He remembered that at first he could hear only 'a few words now and then,' after which he 'settled down to a steady deafness.'

In retelling the story to his intimates of later years, he also roundly declared that the ear-boxing incident never happened. 'If it was that man who lifted me by the ears who injured me, he did it to save my life.'

Matthew Josephson, Edison, A Biography, McGraw Hill, NY 1959, pp. 30- 31

Albert Einstein

34 - Sai Baba on Einstein's Kindness to a Little Girl:

In the ward in which Einstein was living, there was a girl who was weak in mathematics and was repeatedly failing in that subject. A friend suggested to her that if she went to Einstein, the greatest living mathematician, he would help her to learn the subject well. The girl approached Einstein and he readily agreed to give her tuition everyday. The girl was immensely grateful and gained confidence from Einstein's offer. The girl's mother, who had observed her daughter going to the great mathematician for tuition everyday, felt that the little girl was wasting Einstein's time by asking him to teach her elementary mathematics. She went one day to Einstein and apologized to him for her daughter's intrusion on his valuable time. Einstein told her: "Do not think I am just teaching mathematics to her. I am learning as many things from her as I am teaching her."

Sai Baba, discourse of Aug. 16 1987, published in Sanathana Sarathi, September 1987, quoted from reprint in Soham, (Vancouver B.C. Sai Baba newsletter) p. 17, Nov. 1987.

35 - Ronald Clark Debunks This Story:

With the 'great stir' [Einstein's sudden fame--ed.] there started the Einstein mythology, the complex structure of story and half-story, half-truth, quarter-truth, adorned exaggeration, and plain lie, which from now onwards increasingly surrounded his activities. ...There were many reasons for the mythology which developed from 1920 onwards. One was that inventions had good ground to grow in. Immersed in his work in Berlin, Einstein did on one occasion use a check as a bookmark; it was therefore pardonable that the story would surface as the account of how he had placed a \$1,500 check into a book and then lost the book. ... His character was kindly and gentle, and he was at least once asked by a neighbor's small girl to help with her sums; after that, small girls all over the world had Einstein doing their homework despite the fact that he had refused the request on the grounds that it would not be fair. The legends themselves, melting in the harsh light of investigation, show not so much what sort of man he really was as what kind of man the world thought him.

Ronald W. Clark, Einstein, The Life and Times, (Avon books, N.Y., 1972 p. 310.

36 - Sai Baba on Judgment of Character:

Einstein attached great importance to the kind of associates with whom one moved. He used to say: 'Tell me what company you keep and I shall tell you what you are.' If you associate with good persons you become good; if you move with wicked persons, you become bad.

Sai Baba, same discourse as above, Sanathana Sarathi, Sept. 1987, quoted from p. 17, Soham, November 1987.

This quotation bears no resemblance to the well documented quotations of Einstein on such matters. Einstein was a fierce individualist, and this quotation appears to be entirely fictitious without even any pretext or half-truth to justify it! As in the previous quote, Sai Baba appears to be far more interested in the moral of the story than the morality of telling the story inaccurately. For Einstein's attitudes on these matters, see Clark, *ibid*, throughout.

History of India

Of course it is no reflection on Sai Baba's intelligence that he appears to be ignorant of customs and habits of a foreign country, or of biographical details about foreigners. What I am suggesting is that the above items, cited by supporters of Sai Baba, seem to indicate beliefs picked up from casual reading and misremembered many years later, or from anecdotes heard swapped by people in casual conversation in the past, already garbled and subject to worse garbling once memory plays its normal tricks. Of course we are all subject to these flaws--however, most of us do not claim to be omniscient, with telepathic powers! Most of us do better when the items in question concern important incidents in our own country's history. Let us see how Sai Baba does with such an item.

37 - Sai Baba on Alexander the Great:

India Then and Now

...By following the advice of one country or other India has made a hash of its economy and finances. In ancient times, India served as an example to other countries. A king from Greece came to India to study the conditions here, especially in regard to education and religion, after visiting other countries in Asia. He was impressed by the gurukula system of education and the kind of relations that existed between the guru and the sishyas. The ashram of every guru was a veritable university, without any of the paraphernalia of modern universities. The students were prepared for all kinds of hardship to acquire knowledge from the gurus. He noted also the discipline and high character of the students. He collected books like the Upanishads and the Gita and realised what values Indians attached to truth and integrity. He made a study of the Bible, the Quran and Buddhist texts and found that all of them laid emphasis on Truth. He noted that the Bible declared: "Righteousness exalteth a nation." In the Quran he found that only by adherence to Truth can one be a real man. He noted the essential truth which was common to all faiths and recognised that in Bharat there was religious toleration and harmony as part of the people's code of ethics. He decided to follow India's example in Greece. Alexander the Great, who came to India at the behest of his teacher, on his way back to Greece took with him a lump of Indian earth, a vessel full of Ganges water, copies of the Bhagavad Gita and Mahabharata and the blessings of an Indian sage.

Quoted from a Discourse given 21-8-1986, in Sanathana Sarathi September 1986. (The subtitle, "India Then and Now" was given by the editor of the journal.)

38 - Comment by Dr. Anthony Barrett, Professor of Classics, the University of British Columbia:

The University Of British Columbia

Department Of Classics

February 3, 1990

I have read the section from "India Then and Now" relating to Alexander the Great.

While it is true that Alexander reached India, and would have taken an interest in the life and customs there, I am aware of no ancient documentary evidence to support the claims made about him in the text. In my opinion the allusions to the study of the bible and Buddhist texts and to the copies of sacred Indian texts are inherently implausible. The allusion to the Quran (no earlier than 7th Century AD) having been studied by Alexander the Great (4th century BC) is clearly erroneous.

(Signature)

Anthony A. Barrett

Professor

The New Testament and the Life of Jesus of Nazareth

39 - Sai Baba's Claims About the Time Of Jesus's Birth:

Mary and Joseph made their way along the road toward Bethlehem. Mary was with child. The pains began. They knew no one nearby, so they took refuge in a cow shed. Joseph made a space between two cows. It was midnight. He went out to find a woman who could help. Then he heard a baby cry. Christ was born. A huge aura of splendour filled the sky with light...

Sai Baba, quoted in Eastern View Of Jesus Christ, Sai Publications, London, 1982, p. 6.

However during his Christmas discourse of 1979, Sai Baba said that Jesus was born at 3:15 am, rather than within minutes of midnight:

Jesus was born early in the morning at 3:15 a.m. on December 24th one thousand nine hundred and eighty years ago. It was Sunday.

Sai Baba, Eastern View Of Jesus Christ, p. 156.

These two statements about the time of Jesus' birth do not appear to be consistent. However, it might be said that 'midnight' in the first passage quoted simply means 'the middle of the night'. It is the second passage which provides truly specific details, and so it is the information contained in that passage which we must look at for possible accuracy.

The Month and Day of Jesus' Birth

Sai Baba says that Jesus was born on December 24th. Here is a quotation of the earliest recorded comments on the subject of Jesus' birthday.

40 - Clement of Alexandria on the Month and Day of Jesus's Birth:

...there are those who have determined not only the year of our Lord's birth, but also the day; and they say that it took place in the 28th year of Augustus, and in the 25th day of Pachon. And the followers of Basilides hold the day of his baptism as a festival, passing the night before in readings. And they say that it was the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar, the fifteenth day of the month of Tubi, and some say that it was the 11th of the same month.

Quoted in Bond, J.J., Handy-book Of Rules and Tables For Verifying Dates, George Bell & Sons, London, 1889, p. 22

The same source explains that the 25th of Pachon works out to the 20th of May, the fifteenth of Tubi works out to the 10th of January, and the 11th of Tubi works out to the 6th of January. (Ibid., p. 22.) The consensus among scholars is that the celebration of the birth of Jesus at the time of the winter solstice was an accommodation to pagan custom.

Sai Baba's statement that Jesus was born "on December 24th one thousand nine hundred and eighty years ago" was spoken in December 1979. There being no `0' year between the year 1 B.C. and the year 1 A.D., Sai Baba is referring to the year which is known as 2 B.C. (See Handy-book For Verifying Dates p. 321 with regard to the absence of the `0' year.) Let us turn to scholarly opinion on this matter. We know that there is disagreement on this question; but there are some dates for Jesus's birth which many scholars agree, even if there is no date on which all agree. Thus, any plausible date would be one on which at least one reputable scholar who is aware of the recent literature has argued for. Let us see to see if anyone agrees with Sai Baba on the date of `his' birth:

41 - J.A.S. Evans, Head, Classics Department, the University of British Columbia, on Sai Baba's Dating Jesus's Birth at 2 B.C.:

**The University Of British Columbia
Department Of Classics**

I find the statement, apparently unsupported, placing Jesus' birth in 2 B.C. difficult. It would mean that King Herod was already dead, and hence the story that connects Herod with the Three Wise Men would have to be rejected.

This story, incidentally, seems to be a transplant from Magian propaganda, for if Magi in the east saw a star in the east and followed it, it would not bring them to Bethlehem which was west of their starting-point. It would, however, bring them to Persepolis. But the part of the story which places Jesus' birth within the reign of Herod the Great may be a nugget of historical truth.

(Signature)

J.A.S. Evans

Professor and Head

42 - Paul Mosca, Professor Of Hebrew, UBC, on Sai Baba's Dating of 2 B.C.:

Although the `divine discourses' of Sathya Sai Baba entitled An Eastern View of Jesus Christ are largely composed of instruction and exhortation concerning ethics, prayer, etc., they do occasionally venture into the historical realm. And whatever one may think of Sai Baba's advice in spiritual matters, his assertions regarding historical events are of questionable value. A few examples must suffice.

I. On page 6, Sai Baba's account of the birth of Jesus opens with the claim that "King Herod ordered a census." This is at best a misleading statement. According to Luke's Gospel (2:1), Caesar Augustus ordered a census to be taken; and it is implied that the decree was transmitted through the Roman legate in Syria. We still lack any independent evidence for such a decree, and the accuracy of the Lucan claim has not gone unchallenged. But for an Augustan census we at least have an ancient witness however unreliable Luke. For a census ordered by Herod we have no evidence whatsoever. The Jewish historian Josephus has left us two detailed accounts of Herod's reign (Book I of the Jewish War and Books XV-XVII of the Jewish Antiquities). Neither even hints at such a census, nor does any other ancient source.

II. If the statement on page 6 is inaccurate regarding the census, at least it is probably right to date the birth of Jesus to Herod's reign (compare Matthew 2:1; Luke 2:1) It is, therefore, quite surprising

to find that page 156, #172 (from the 1979 Christmas discourse) unwittingly contradicts the assertion of page 6. The 1979 discourse claims that Jesus was born "one thousand nine hundred and eighty years ago" (i.e., in 2 B.C.). Not only did Herod order the census; he did so from beyond the grave! For it is clear from Josephus' accounts that Herod died in March/April of 4 B.C., 1982 years before the 1979 Christmas discourse.

Excerpt of letter by Dr. Paul Mosca of 13 September 1990, original with the editor.

The consensus amongst scholars is that Jesus was in all likelihood born before, or at the latest, during, the year 4 B.C. (See also, Michael Grant, *Jesus, An Historian's Review Of The Gospels*, Scribner's New York, p. 71; Ian Wilson, *Jesus, The Evidence*; etc.)

We also can examine the correspondence between the day of the week and the year, month, and day of the month presupposed by Sai Baba's pronouncement. Although Sai Baba may not have realized it when he made his statement concerning the precise time of day, day of the week, day of the month, month, and year of birth of Jesus, there are tables listing correspondences between day of the week and the month, day of the month, and year. Was the December 24th of 2 B.C. a Sunday, as Sai Baba says it was?

43 - Paul Mosca's Comment on Sai Baba' Claim that Jesus's Birthday Was a Sunday:

... [In the Eastern View Of Jesus Christ collection of Sai Baba discourses--ed.] on page 156, #'s 172-173, December 24 of 2 B.C. is identified as a Sunday. According to John J. Bond's Handy-Book of Rules and Tables for verifying Dates with the Christian Era, it was a Thursday, in both the Julian and Gregorian calendars! (December 24 fell on a Sunday in 6 B.C., and not again until 2 A.D.)

Dr. Paul Mosca, letter of September 13 1990

The reader may wish to consult Bond's Handy-Book directly. The book should be readily available through any good university library or inter-library loan system. The reader who checks it out will find that p. 34, gives us the information that the pattern of the calendar of 2 B.C. is given in the table of the "D" year. The calendar for the "D" year is given on p. 58 of the same work, and indicates that December 24th of that year was a Thursday, not a Sunday.

The confusions do not end here. Next we examine Sai Baba's interpretation(s) of the Star of Bethlehem story: There are two accounts concerning the Star of Bethlehem given by Sathya Sai Baba in the Eastern View collection of his discourses:

44 - Sai Baba's First Statement About the Meaning of the Star of Bethlehem:

Christ was born. A huge aura of splendour filled the sky with light. This was a sign that He had overcome the darkness of evil and ignorance. The light of Love had come into the world. it was the dawn of the era of Divine Guidance.

Sai Baba, quoted in Eastern View, p. 6.

45 - Sai Baba's Second Statement About the Meaning of the Star of Bethlehem:

The bright star that appeared on His Birthday was the same bright star which appears once every 800 years. The bright star appeared because of its own natural pattern, not because of Jesus. Emotional people say this star appeared for Jesus. There is no rule that bright stars must appear when divine energies or Divine Incarnations descend to earth. In their emotion about God devotees spread sentimental stories.

Eastern View, p. 156.

The Religious Practices of Judea

Was Jesus opposed to the sacrificial system of the Jerusalem temple? In his 1977 Christmas discourse, Sathya Sai Baba depicts Jesus as a revolutionary out to abolish the animal sacrifice system of the Jerusalem Temple:

46 - Sai Baba on Jesus's Attitude Toward Temple Ritual:

At that time in Jerusalem Jewish religious custom routinely involved blood sacrifices of goats or other living animals...Jesus Christ saw pigeons and other animals being sold inside the temple. Money-lenders shared their profits with the priests. Every worshipper was forced to bring or buy animals and join in the slaughter. No one was spared. Jesus announced that bloodshed, money-lending, and corruption have no place in a temple built in God's name.

Sai Baba, quoted in Eastern View p. 98.

According to Sathya Sai Baba, Jesus held that 'bloodshed', that is, animal sacrifice, had no place in the Temple. However the idea that Jesus was opposed not only to the money-changers in the Temple courts, but also to the very practice of sacrifice is not supported by any ancient materials at all. It is, rather, contradicted by the ancient materials. However opposed Jesus may have been to the commercialization of the Temple courts, he is quoted several times in the Gospels instructing disciples to offer sacrifice. At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus is depicted as instructing a leper to bring the animal sacrifice offering as required by Mosaic law to the Temple:

47 - The Gospels On Jesus's Attitude Toward Temple Rituals:

Jesus said to him: See to it that you tell no one. Go and show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses prescribed.

Gospel According To Matthew 8:4. (See also Mark 1:44 and Luke 5:14)

In the middle of his ministry, Jesus also endorsed the Temple sacrifice system:

48 - Jesus Endorsing Sacrifice at the Temple:

If you bring your gift to the altar and there recall that your brother has anything against you leave your gift at the altar, go first to be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Gospel According To Matthew, 5:23,24.

As for his attitude at the end of his ministry, the Gospels depict Jesus as instructing his disciples to make sure that the Passover sacrifice is performed on his behalf. The Passover sacrifice was

performed in the city of Jerusalem at the Temple precincts so as to associate the sacrifice with the Temple.

49 - Jesus Endorsing Sacrifice at the End of His Ministry:

On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the paschal lamb, his disciples said to him, Where do you wish us to go to prepare the Passover supper for you? He sent two of his disciples with these instructions: Go into the city and you will come upon a man carrying a water jar. Follow him. Whatever house he enters, say to the owner, The teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples? Then he will show you an upstairs room, spacious, furnished, and all in order. That is the place you are to get ready for us. The disciples went off. When they reached the city they found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover supper.

Gospel According To Mark, 14:12-16. (see also Matthew 26:17-19; Luke 22: 7-13).

50 - Paul Mosca's View of Jesus's Position on Sacrifice:

...Nor do the remarks on pages 98-99 regarding Jesus' opposition to animal sacrifice have any greater claim to accuracy. Whatever else he may have been, Jesus was a Jew. That both he and his family participated in the sacrificial system demanded by the Mosaic code is clear from such passages as Luke 2:22-24; Matthew 5:23-24; and Matthew 8:4//Mark 1:44//Luke 5: 14.

Excerpt from Dr. Mosca's Sept. 13 1990 letter.

In §46, Sai Baba talks about `money lenders':

Money-lenders shared their profits with the priests. (ibid)

This is a minor point perhaps, but Sathya Sai Baba seems to be confusing `money changers' with `money lenders'. The two activities are quite distinct, especially in the context of Jewish law of the time. Here is what Mark reports about Jesus's activities:

51 - Jesus and Money-changers, According to Mark:

When they reached Jerusalem he entered the temple precincts and began to drive out those who were engaged in buying and selling. He overturned the money-changers' tables, and the stalls of the men selling doves. Moreover, he would not permit anyone to carry things through the temple area.

Gospel According To Mark, 11:15-16

Sathya Sai Baba seems to be under the erroneous impression that Judea at the time had many temples, just as India in ancient and modern times has many temples. The following two passages show this:

52 - Sai Baba on Temples (1):

In a temple in Jerusalem, pigeons were being sold. Jesus entered the temple and objected to the traffic in birds in a sacred temple. The priests jointly questioned Jesus about his authority to raise such an objection...' Priests and teachers are proclaiming that they are adhering to the injunctions of

the scriptures, but in actual practice are not following them...' declared Jesus. The priests got angry and levelled a number of charges against Jesus.

Sathya Sai Baba, quoted in Sanathana Sarathi, Aug. 1989, p. 206.

53 - Sai Baba on Temples (2):

Due to the efforts of selfish egoistic men who dedicated their lives to atrocities and lawbreaking, evil crept into the holy temples in Jerusalem. Businesses and impure practices sprang up.

Sai Baba, quoted in Eastern View p. 141.

The businesses and impure practices which Sathya Sai Baba is referring to are those of the money changers in connection with the animal sacrifices. Judean synagogues, which might incorrectly be referred to as 'temples' by someone ignorant of the difference between the Jerusalem Temple and the synagogue (a house of study, a school, essentially) cannot be the reference Sathya Sai Baba is making. No ritual sacrifices could be brought except to the one Jerusalem Temple. It follows clearly that Sathya Sai Baba has in mind that there were many temples in Jerusalem where "businesses and impure practices sprang up" in conjunction with animal sacrifice. Anyone with even a passing acquaintance of the situation in Judea at the time knows that there were no such "holy temples in Jerusalem" but only the one Jerusalem Temple.

54 - Paul Mosca on the Temple of Jerusalem:

The reference to 'the holy temples in Jerusalem' (page 141, #47) is simply wrong. There was only one temple in Jerusalem, the one rebuilt after the Babylonian exile, embellished by Herod, and destroyed (in 70 A.D.) by the Romans.

Dr. Mosca, letter of Sept. 13 1990.

Sai Baba's reference to impure business practices occurring in "the holy temples in Jerusalem" shows an astonishing ignorance of the Jewish religion at the time. Does he do any better on the events surrounding Jesus's crucifixion?

Jesus' Crucifixion

The personal name of the betrayer of Jesus is very widely known: Judas. But what was his second name, or the name which singled him out among the many Judas' of his time? Anyone familiar with the Christian literature knows that he is referred to as Judas Iscariot.

Sathya Sai Baba, however, refers to him as 'Judas Simon':

55 - Sai Baba on Judas Iscariot's Name (1):

Judas Simon is well known today as the disciple who was treacherous to his spiritual guide and guardian.

Sai Baba, quoted in Eastern View, p. 111

Once again, Sai Baba's sloppiness with basic elements of the Jesus narratives is cause for astonishment. No one today knows Judas Iscariot as 'Judas Simon', and so the statement is plain wrong that "Judas Simon is well known today as the disciple who was treacherous..." Equally important, in Gospel materials, the betrayer of Jesus is referred to simply as 'Judas', or as 'Judas Iscariot', or as the son of a man named 'Simon Iscariot'. Ancient materials do not recognize Judas Iscariot as 'Judas Simon' any more than people today do. Another disciple of Jesus, however, was named Peter Simon (see for example, Mark 14: 37) and it appears that Sai Baba has gotten these various names confused. In any case the erroneous reference to 'Judas Simon' as the betrayer of Jesus is not just a single slip. Prior to the passage quoted, Sai Baba says:

56 - Sai Baba on Judas Iscariot's Name (2):

Jesus Christ had twelve foremost disciples. Among the twelve only Judas Simon would injure Jesus, their teacher and spiritual saviour.

Sai Baba, Eastern View, p. 111

Sai Baba's notions of what happened at the time of Jesus's crucifixion are in conflict with the reports in the New Testament. Believers, however, may simply prefer Sai Baba's account, on the grounds that he (in some sense) was really there. In any event, Sai Baba's remarks here occur in the context of his 'materializing' a crucifix, supposedly out of thin air. Materializations are Sai Baba's stock in trade, and I provide more on this in §§85 and 93-105. But our present concern is with Sai Baba's knowledge of the crucifixion, as demonstrated by the crucifix he 'created' and what he says about it.

57 - Sai Baba's Claim that Jesus was on an Eight-Day Fast Prior to the Crucifixion:

This shows Christ as he really was at the time he left his body, not as artists have imagined him or as historians have told about him. His stomach is pulled in and his ribs are all showing. He had no food for eight days.

Sai Baba, quoted in John Hislop, My Baba & I, p. 19

However the Gospels not only make no mention of this eight day fast of Jesus prior to the crucifixion, but also they positively inform us that Jesus instructed his disciples to prepare the Passover meal for him, and that Jesus participated in the ritual feast universally known as the Last Supper the night before his crucifixion!

58 - Another Version Of Sai Baba's Remark:

In 1973, Sai Baba produced a small crucifix, gave it to his disciple named Dr. Hislop, and, according to Dr. Hislop, said, "this shows Christ as He really was at the time when He left his body. No writer or artist has imagined him this way before."

Eastern View, p. 7

As for the claim Sai Baba makes that the crucifix "shows Christ as he really was at the time he left his body, not as artists have imagined him or as historians have told about him", and "no writer or artist has imagined him this way before," the following are comments from Uno Langmann, a highly reputable art, antique, and curio dealer headquartered in Vancouver B.C., and Dr. William S. Dale,

Professor Emeritus in Fine Arts at the University of Western Ontario, upon inspection of the full page magnified colour photograph of the crucifix reproduced at p. xi (Plate 2) of Dr. Hislop's book, *My Baba & I*:

59 - Uno Langmann's Comments on the Crucifix:

Judging from the photograph, the sculpture would be an ordinary inexpensive crucifixion depiction. The material of the Christ figure would probably be of soft metal such as pewter or lead. Of course this is hard to tell from a photograph. It might be bronze or conceivably silver, but neither of these is likely. The casting is cheap and not very skillful, which supports the idea that the material would be lead perhaps. You can see little air bubbles around the feet which indicates that it was made by cheap plaster of Paris mold. The sculpture is affixed to the wood by small manufactured nails. The rendering of the feet and toes is especially coarse, which also indicates the cheapness of the piece. The wood appears to be low-grade hardwood of some sort. Finally, as to the image itself, it is a typical artistic conception of the crucifixion. I believe I have seen this sculpture image before. I would guess that it's a medieval European representation originally perhaps 12th or 13th century. At least that would be a period to check. In this miniature reproduction form it would not be a particularly interesting piece.

Uno Langmann, personal communication, 1988

60 - William S. Dale's Comments on the Crucifix:

Dear Friends,

Your letter of February 8, enclosing the material on Sai Baba and the miraculously-produced crucifix, has arrived, and I have studied it with great interest.

From the photograph it is quite clear that the metal figure closely resembles those on crucifixes of the 19th and early 20th centuries (As is normal with these, the *suppedaneum* is cast in one piece with the figure.) Its small scale suggests that it may once have been attached to a rosary.

Contrary to Sai Baba's claim, there is nothing unusual about the iconography of the piece. The representation of the dead Christ, his body sagging, his head drooping onto his right shoulder, and his eyes closed, is frequently found in monumental crucifixes after the 10th century. From the late 12th century one foot is placed over the other, and a single nail is used to fasten both to the cross, instead of one for each foot. By the middle of the 13th century the braided crown of thorns becomes a prominent feature, and in some examples the stomach is drawn in, showing the ribs.

As for the statement that this crucifix "shows Christ as he really was at the time he left his body", it has been demonstrated that nails through the palms of the hands, as in the artistic convention followed here, could not have supported the weight of Jesus' body on the cross. Instead, it has been suggested that the nails would have to go through the wrists, as the image on the Holy Shroud of Turin seems to indicate.

With mass-produced objects such as this it would be impossible to pin down any single source of inspiration, since it draws on such a long and rich tradition. In any case it seems unnecessary.

Yours sincerely,

(signature)

William S.A. Dale, Ph.D.,

Professor Emeritus

P.S. A good basic reference for the iconography of the crucifix is Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art* (Lund Humphries, 1972) Vol. 2.

William S. Dale, personal communication

The crucifix given to John Hislop was supposed to have been materialized by the paranormal powers of Sai Baba. The question might also be raised as to the plausibility of a true materialization which reproduces such details as air bubbles identical with those caused by techniques of inexpensive mass reproduction, and standard but historically inaccurate iconographic features such as nails through palms.

Indian Classical Music

Sai Baba's claim is that he knows Indian Classical music since he is the author and composer of all the pieces:

61 - Mrs. Kamala Sarathy's Description of Sai Baba's Knowledge of Music:

When I first came to Puttaparti, Swami used to sing many songs of classical Indian music as an experienced, trained singer. Our family and the Kuppam family were both trained in music, but still Swami would sometimes correct us, also on the text of the songs and the timing of the music. He was a very good singer. My late music teacher, Mr. Chidambara Iyer, who was a violinist with All India Radio in Delhi and once went with me to Swami, was much impressed with his outstanding knowledge of music, although he had never had a music teacher. Sometimes he would sing some rare compositions of Thyagaraja that only learned musicians would know.

Now they no longer sing classical songs at bhajans, only popular bhajan songs. In the evenings when my music teacher used to massage Swamiji's legs, Baba would often sing some rare compositions of Thyagaraja. So my music teacher asked him: 'Where did you learn these songs?' Baba then answered: 'Thyagaraja had these songs from me, Thyagaraja was inspired by Rama', meaning that Swami was the origin of Thyagaraja's music.

Quoted in Haraldsson, Miracles Are My Visiting Cards, p. 150.

Where did Sai Baba learn this music? An hypothesis suggests itself when we read the previous page of Haraldsson:

Mrs Kamala Sarathy...first met Swami in 1949...

Haraldsson, ibid., p. 149.

This information, along with the following, makes Sai Baba's feats seem much less remarkable.

62 - Data for Alternate Hypothesis, As Reported by Mrs. Sarathy:

The twin brothers Mr. B. V. Lakshmanan and Mr. B. V. Raman are by profession singers of classical Indian music. They came to know Sai Baba in February 1948 when they were asked to sing at the inauguration of a temple by Sai Baba in Guindy Madras. After the inauguration Baba came to them and asked if they would come to Puttaparti for the Sivaratri festival...`We stayed for a while around Sivaratri and were frequently in Puttaparti after that.'...The singers became very close to Baba and served as personal attendants of a kind. From 1949 to 1963, they stayed with him several months a year and led the singing of the bhajans. When Baba went on visits, for example, to Madras or Venkatagiri, then they, especially Raman, would accompany him.

Haraldsson, ibid. p. 156.

Mrs. Sarathy's music teacher, Mr. Iyer `once went for a visit'. It is obvious that if Mrs Sarathy began visiting Sai Baba in 1949, then Mr. Iyer's visit must have been no earlier than that. Yet beginning in 1948 the classical musicians were spending prolonged periods of time playing music together with Sai Baba. Plainly, Sai Baba had plenty of opportunity to learn classical Indian music from Laskshmanan and Raman, if not from others even earlier. In investigations of supposedly paranormal feats or abilities, one should always be cautious of claims like, "He couldn't have learned it through normal means." People who believe these claims without investigating them will themselves learn very little through normal means; and one hopes for their sakes that there are paranormal ways of acquiring knowledge--otherwise they will be very ignorant!

Physical Sciences

63 - Sai Baba's Knowledge of Geology, and Its Relationship to Chemistry, Physics and Botany:

SAI: At the center everything is liquid.

RB: Does Swami mean the world?

SAI: Yes, everything is melted. No temperature.

RB: No heat, Swami?

SAI: No temperature. Everything is liquid. Like water. Gold, iron, silver, gems, all are liquid. Next there is solid. Then trees.

JH: Trees, Swami? Trees like we see around us?

SAI: Yes, trees. Then human beings and animals. At the very center is the Divine. It is the support of everything. First is liquid, chemistry. Then solid, physics. Then trees, botany. Then man, the pinnacle of life. But at the center, supporting all, is the Divine. Without the Divine, where is chemistry, physics, botany? Like this will be the teaching of all courses at the University. The students will understand the full picture.

Sai Baba, quoted (as Sai) in Hislop, My Baba & I, p. 197.

64 - Sai Baba's Comprehension of the Meanings of Scientific Terms:

Mine is no escapism but the fundamental and eternal truth. I say so not because I am unsure of my own divinity. It is my confidence in its absolute and total authenticity that makes me affirm this fact. It is the scientists who are so unsure of themselves that they indulge in escapist theories.

For example, they say that the moon is lifeless. Simultaneously, they maintain that all matter consists of moving atoms. Now isn't the moon also a conglomerate of the same moving atoms? Then how can it be lifeless? There is no matter which does not consist of atoms, electrons, neutrons and protons, which are all constantly moving. This energy, too, is God."

Sai Baba, quoted in Sandweiss, Spirit And Mind, p. 254.

Patent Law

Sai Baba is well known for his materializations of watches. This will be the subject of §§93 - 99. However, our immediate concern is with Sai Baba's understanding of the legality of what he is doing.

65 - Sai Baba on Patent Law:

BABA: Most people desire talismans symbolic of my protection. So I provide them. When they are in trouble they feel the grip of the ring, bracelet or watch to remember me, and call me to their rescue so that I can help them. On the other hand, if I give them something that they cannot wear, they are likely to store it and forget about it.

The main thing is that these trinkets or talismans, by whatever name you call them, give people a sense of security and protection they need in time of trouble or crisis and create a symbolic link covering the long distances between them and myself. When the devotees need me, these objects flash the message as if by wireless and I instantly come to their rescue.

Q: I am sorry to be so persistent, Swamiji, but isn't the gift of an Omega or HMT watch an act of cheating the company or breach of its patent?

BABA: I assure you there is no such thing. It would be cheating the company or breaching the patent if it were a case of transfer of the watch from one place or the other. But I do not transfer; I totally create. Whatever I will, instantly materializes. I know of no company that has complained about any breach of patent.

Quoted in Samuel Sandweiss, Spirit And Mind, Birth Day Publishing, San Diego 1985, p. 241. (The Questioner is Mr. R. K. Karanjia of Blitz magazine. The interview was originally published in 1976 in that Indian journal.)

66 - T. Ganesh U. Pai in Conversation With A Sai Baba Devotee Who Is a Lawyer:

I told him, "The godman you mentioned had given a Swiss watch, allegedly produced from thin air by waving his apparently empty hands, to one of my brothers. Any dispute on this?"

"No", he replied.

"Then let us go into the facts about the watch so produced." I said. "One of the possibilities explained is that, prior to giving this watch, the godman transforms himself into another form and appears in Switzerland, Hongkong, Japan or such other place, lands in a watch shop, buys the watch

and then reappears in his original form before his devotee and presents the watch. Mind you all this is supposed to have happened in a split of a second."

I added, "Granting this was true, then the godman did not go through customs and immigrations before he left his country. He purchased a watch paying foreign currency not released by the reserve Bank of India and again returned without the knowledge of customs and immigration authorities. This would amount to smuggling the watch. It is not only to my brother that he had presented the watch. He had given to thousands of others. Would this not lead to the fact that your godman is involved in a smuggling racket?"

"If this is not the version, the second possibility explained is that on account of his divine powers, he is able to move things from one place to another. If this be so, I added, "You all say that your god man does not accept anything from any one and if he has no other business or occupation, he could not possibly have any possessions, and so it should be concluded that this watch did not belong to him. Still he has managed to produce it, and it amounts to stealing the same from somewhere."

"The third possibility is that as he has claimed to be the Creator himself, he has the power to materialise this watch from thin air! If this is true," I said, "had he created his own brand, possibly we could not have said anything. But he has created duplicate watches of well known foreign companies with their monogram, serial number etc., without their knowledge, consent or license to produce. This amounts to infringement of their patent rights."

"The only possibility I can think of," I said, "is that some devotee like you might have presented him one watch which he hid somewhere in his person and brought it out mysteriously as a magician would do. But you all deny he would do so. If his production is not like that of a magician, the other methods, if true, would amount to a fraud! That is all, your honour", I said.

The lawyer, not being able to give me any logical explanations to the questions posed by me, left the place, remarking, "You are incorrigible."

From an article by T. Ganesh U. Pai, in Indian Skeptic #1 May 1988 pp. 23-25.

Sanskrit

67 - Lawrence Babb On Sai Baba's Knowledge of Sanskrit:

Sathya Sai Baba is, among other things, a teacher. He is a frequent giver of discourses, now compiled in several volumes. He usually speaks in Telugu, and before a Hindi-speaking audience an interpreter is required. One of his most characteristic rhetorical devices is the ad hoc (and often false) etymology. For example, he has stated that Hindu means 'one who is nonviolent' by the combination of hinsa (violence) and dur (distant).

Lawrence A. Babb, Redemptive Encounters P. 171.

68 - Sai Baba on 'Dharma':

There were rules of correct conduct for every being. These form the Dharma.

The word Dharma is derived from the root, Dhr, meaning 'wear'; Dharma is that which is worn...As clothes maintain the dignity of the person who wears them, so, Dharma is the measure of the dignity of a people.

Sathya Sai Baba, Gita Vahini, Shri Sathya Sai Education and Publication Foundation, 1974, p. 56.

69 - Joseph Campbell on 'Dharma':

The noun dharma is from a verbal root dhri ("to hold, to bear, to support").

Joseph Campbell, The Inner Reaches, Harper and Row 1988, p. 39.

70 - The Origin of 'Guru' According to Sai Baba:

The guru is called so because the 'gu' signifies one who has transcended the three qualities in nature, and 'ru' signifies one who has graphed the formless aspect of the Godhead.

Sai Baba, quoted in Teachings of Sri Satya Sai Baba, Sri Satya Sai Baba Book Centre Of America, 1974, p. 101.

What Accounts for Sai Baba's Mistakes?

71 - H. Murphet Quoting from Dr. Bhagavantam on Sai Baba's Attitude Toward Books:

Dr. Bhagavantam is a keen observer, and does not brush aside facts just because they do not fit into the current framework of science...Another fact: 'It's common knowledge that Baba's formal schooling did not extend beyond the first grade of high school yet with great acumen he advises the scientists, doctors, lawyers and businessmen who come to him for counsel on their practical affairs. Furthermore, though he never reads--never, indeed has time to read, the Indian and world scriptures, he quotes from all of them.'

Murphet, Avatar, Sai Books Birth Day Publishing 1977, pp. 55-56.

Indeed he does--but does he quote accurately? The above quotes demonstrate that he doesn't. But Murphet's quote is revealing, not because it points out that Sai Baba has no intellectual love of literature, a prerequisite for caring about accurate citation. Nor is it revealing to be told that Sai Baba has no formal education. What is important in this passage is that Sai Baba followers hold up these facts about Sai Baba as if they were virtues. The tone of this passage captures the attitude of so many Western devotees: they have stereotypes of the uneducated Indian; and when they meet one that is a lot more intelligent than they bargained for, they are so impressed that they ignore the howlers presented in this chapter. But there is another reason: Sai Baba's devotees are not, by a long shot, as interested in physics or Hindu theology as they are in themselves. So, when Sai Baba talks about them, this overshadows all else. So I now turn to Sai Baba's knowledge of the details of his devotees' and of visitors' lives.

Knowledge of Devotees' Lives

72 - Kanu's Claim:

Sai Baba....knows the past, present, and future of every soul living on the earthly plane...He reveals the life history of those who go to him, and he shapes their future.

Kanu, Sai Baba, God Incarnate, p. 47

Also, we have noted Hislop making similar extreme claims. How do these claims stack up against others' assessments?

73 - Haraldsson's Survey of Devotees:

26 of 29 interviewees had observed Baba exercise mind-reading on themselves. 19 reported he had done so fully correctly, 5 only partially correctly whereas 2 ex-devotees considered his endeavours sheer clever guessing.

There is no reason to doubt that Baba sometimes goes wrong in his statements when exercising his mind-reading. I recall one Australian lady, probably in her late thirties, who I met in Puttaparti a few years ago. One day at darshan time Baba briefly spoke to her. "You should get married", he said. In fact she was married, and as I met her just after that darshan she was walking towards the bus to Bangalore to receive her husband at the airport as he was flying in from Australia. Baba did not know this woman, and had only seen her a few times.

Haraldsson, Miracles Are My Visiting Cards, pp. 285-286.

74 - Haraldsson on Sai Baba's Predictions:

Predictions are not a prominent feature with Sai Baba. Only to half of the 29 interviewees of our survey had he made predictions about their future. To 9 of these interviewees Baba's statements were reported as fully correct but with 4 of them he proved either partially or fully wrong. To one lady devotee hoping for a baby he had predicted that she would have one but she never did. He advised a close devotee to let his brother go to Delhi for a job interview. Contrary to Baba's predictions the brother did not get the job, only costly travel expenses.

Haraldsson, ibid. p. 287.

75 - Premanand's Account of Ramaswamy's Audience With Sai Baba:

Baba spoke to [Ramaswamy, editor of the Indian weekly journal, *Nasthikam*] in Telugu. It is said that Baba would speak to each person in their own [Indian--ed.] language by knowing with his divine powers what the mother tongue of the person interviewed was. Ramaswamy did not speak a word till the end. When Baba stopped talking, he said that he did not know Telugu! With a finger on his nose and a stare at him, he talked in Tamil.

Premanand, Lure of Miracles, p. 92.

Premanand continues in this passage to relate how Sai Baba repeated back to Ramaswamy information about his situation which Ramaswamy had divulged to Baba's attendants. Sai Baba, however, failed to touch upon the actual reason for Ramaswamy's visit to the ashram, information which Ramaswamy had not divulged to the attendants. This fact will not be lost on those who have studied the ways of faith healers and psychics, who unashamedly use confederates to gather

evidence about their clients before having an audience with them. Those trusting souls who doubt that this practice is widespread should consult James Randi, *The Faith Healers* (especially Chapter 9) about American faith healers, and Randi's *The Truth About Uri Geller*, and M. Lamar Keene's *The Psychic Mafia* about psychics and spiritualist mediums respectively.

However, getting information through confederates is not the only way of seeming to know a lot about someone else. The following passages unwittingly illustrate another method at work:

76 - Transcript of Audiences With Sai Baba, By Devotee Annemarie Marwah:

He then called me inside. I first requested His permission to touch His Lotusfeet which He granted. He then sat down in His chair and I placed myself at His Feet.

He allowed me to ask questions.

"Swami, how can I serve you?" I asked.

Swami (with great earnestness): "Open a centre."

Delhi being already a big centre, I did not understand why He wanted me to open a centre. And so I said: "But, Swami, I live in Delhi."

Swami (His face lit up): "Delhi! I shall come to Delhi in March. I shall see you there. I shall come to your house in March. Very soon I shall come to your house, very soon." He repeated this five times.

I: "Oh Swami, really! Will you come?"

Swami: "Yes, I shall come."

I said--a little sad: "But how can I meet you in Delhi. There are so many people and all the VIP's will surround you. In Delhi you are very distant."

Swami: "Why? I will call and will give you an interview and I shall give lockets to the children. How many children?"

I: "Swami, two."

Swami: "Yes, I know, a little girl. I will give locket."...

Then I remembered the mantra.

"Swami, you said that you would give me a mantra?" I asked.

Swami: "You got mantra from...Tell me your mantra."

I repeated the mantra and Swami was repeating it with me. Then He said: "But it's a beautiful mantra! Why do you want to change? You know there is no difference at all."

I said: "Yes, Swami, I know but..."

Swami cut in and said: "I know what you mean." Then He changed the mantra slightly by adding His name. He laid His hand on my head and I fell at His Lotusfeet. He blessed me profusely, and I knew that He had accepted me formally. What a moment!"

Annemarie Marwah, And The Greatest Is Love, Published by Author 1985, pp. 63, 64

At 4 P.M. we were sitting in the darshan line when a lady volunteer called me and asked me to take from her the books. At the same time she told me to go and sit in the verandah of the temple since Baba would be seeing me. I could not believe my ears and started crying with joy. Was it really true that Swami had again answered my most earnest prayers?

I held the books in my hand and he did not realize that they were already signed....

Sitting now in the verandah of the temple--with Swami still inside His quarters--I was engulfed in a cloud of jasmine smell. Shortly afterwards there was very strong vibhuti smell. I inhaled both, being conscious of the grace of Swami. Then Baba appeared and made His round in the darshan circle. He called some more devotees for interview. There was a group of twenty Swedes (all men) and a mother with her two sons, a foreign lady and I. When Swami came back into the temple verandah He asked me what I was holding in my hand and smiled mischievously. I held up my parcel to Him and said:

"Baba, please sign these books."

He said: "Give me--only one book."

"Only one? Can't you sign all three?" I pleaded. "Only one," He said firmly. I gave Him one book: He opened it as if He did not know, then closed it and gave it back to me saying "already signed". Only then I looked at the books properly, finding on the first page with big letters written WITH LOVE Sri Sathya Sai Baba and the date.

He then ushered us into the interview room....I was sitting on Baba's left side just next to His chair at His Lotusfeet. He asked:

"Do you do any jappa?"

I said: "Yes Swami".

He asked: "What name?"

I answered: "Swami, you have given me a mantra."

Then He asked me "What do you want?" And quickly answered His own question: "Jappamala?"

I quickly said: "Oh yes, Swami, I want a jappamala."

He waved His hand and there appeared a jappamala...

Annemarie Marwah, ibid. p. 79

In the room I had endless arguments with my husband who had returned to his negative mood and he was blaming and accusing me [for staying with Baba instead of staying in Delhi with her husband-

-ed.] I was very miserable and cried a lot. The next morning at darshan I could give Swami a letter which He took willingly. In this I had written to Him that I had to know what He wanted me to do. I said in it that if He wanted me to stay I would gladly do so. I said that I had burnt my boats and that I would only go back to Delhi and to my family if He would tell me to do so. I was keen to do what He wanted me to, but I was being so much attacked with accusations that I could not judge what I should do. I begged Him to show to my husband some of His Divinity so that he could understand me.

Swami must have read this letter very carefully, because in the evening darshan He called me for interview. With this my husband got an interview automatically. Was I glad!

When Swami came into the verandah after making His round, He started another Leela of His...!

He saw my husband come into the verandah and asked, "Hare! Ye pakora kaun hai?" (Who is this Pfannkuchen?) My husband said that He had called his wife for interview. Swami asked: "Are you from Madras?"

Husband: "No, Swami, from Delhi".

Swami: "Delhi?" (and looked at me.)

I made sign to Swami that he was connected with me.

So Swami asked him: "Tumhara naam kya?" (What is your name?)

My husband told his name.

Swami (inquiringly looking at me) asked: "What is your name?"

I told him my name.

Then Swami led us all into the interview room. I sat down next to Swami's chair. ...Then Swami sat down in His chair and looking at me searchingly asked: "You are fighting?" I just looked at Swami with an open face and He said very softly and lovingly, "No, you are not fighting. He is fighting with you." And then turning to my husband He asked: "Why, why are you fighting with her? She is very good, you know." My husband did not say anything. After the first batch of devotees had come out of the second interview room, Swami called us inside. He sat in His chair and both of us knelt down in front of Him. He again said to my husband: "Why are you fighting with her? Why are you troubling her? She is very good!"

My husband said: "Yes, Swami, but she does not come home whenever she comes here. She always comes back late. She must come back in time!" Then pleading with Swami he said: "Please, Swami, send her back with me, we need her job."

Swami asked him: "What about your work?"

Husband: "Not very good."

Swami: "Not very good, but not very bad either. Lot of money coming and lot of money going, coming, going coming, going. Nevermind, I shall bless your work."

Husband: "Please Swami send her back, I give both my hands."

Swami: "(snaps): "I don't want anything, I want only love."

Husband: "Please send her back, I love her so much and the children are crying."

Swami: "Malum hai, malum hai baccha rota." (I know, I know, Baby is crying.)

Husband: "Swami, please send my wife back with me. Let all her bad karma come upon me."

Swami: (quickly) "I know, you are a very good man," and turning to me, Swami said pleadingly: "You go with him."

At that moment my husband fell down at Swami's Lotusfeet seemingly moved and repeating three times: "Swami, you have saved my family."

Swami looked at me and smilingly pointing to my husband at His charan as if to say, 'see , see what I have done.'..

Swami: "I bless you both, be happy." and with these words He laid His hands on our heads blessing us. Then He turned once more to my husband and said: "You know, your health is not so good. Your liver is bad." ...It was the 12th of April 1983..

After the interview my husband was in no way peaceful, but argued with me about Swami's ability to know everything. He was very sarcastic and the next few days were very difficult for me....

The coming months showed us the value of ...surrender. Our financial situation deteriorated considerably. My husband repeatedly remarked sarcastically: "Well, Swami has blessed my work, he is responsible."

Not only did all our efforts fail to recover from the continuing financial loss but we also received notice from our bank requesting us to repay the loan which had been granted over the years, and its interest which had amounted to a substantial sum. They threatened to go to court against us...

My husband, outwardly calm, must have had sleepless nights. The situation was not at all good. Something had to happen, but I could not imagine from which quarter help would come.

On the 1st October 1983--six months after the interview with Swami--my husband started his new job as executive engineer with a large company. (It was a newly created job.) We all knew that this was the outcome of Swami 'blessing his work'...

Ten days later, however, he fell ill. It was later diagnosed as an attack caused by gallbladder stones.

Again we remembered Swami's words. "Your health is not good. Your liver is bad."

He recovered from this attack and went back to work after about ten days....

Marwah, ibid. p. 120-124

The reader can easily assess the amount of information Sai Baba requests, and the number of errors he makes as he goes, from the above.

Magicians and self-styled psychics are familiar with the techniques of gathering information from a subject and feeding it back later, when the subject has forgotten that she said it, asking questions disguised as statements, or simply nodding sagely when the subject tells them something, so as to leave the impression that they knew it all along. One wouldn't think that such techniques, along with vague statements which could apply to anything, would leave the impression of having psychic powers with anyone with an IQ above 50. But these techniques, collectively called cold reading, have impressed many very intelligent people that have witnessed a psychic perform. Two readily available sources on this technique are Ray Hyman, "Cold Reading: How to Convince Strangers You Know All About Them", and Ronald Schwartz, "Slight of Tongue", both to be found in Kendrick Frazier (ed.), *Paranormal Borderlands of Science*, Buffalo, Prometheus Press, 1981.

Sai Baba's ability to follow the information given by his devotees, while covering for mistakes or impressions the devotee is unwilling to accept, is shown in many devotee accounts. A typical example from another devotee follows:

77 - Audience with Phyllis Krystal:

I was feeling more and more embarrassed and would have like nothing better than to become invisible but since I could not hide from Baba I would have to hear him out. Then without warning he swung around abruptly to face me, and wagging his forefinger like a school teacher said with mock anger 'You are lazy.' I promptly burst into tears...now his accusation of laziness [was] the last straw. I blurted out, 'Oh Baba! No, not lazy! You yourself say I am a hard worker'. When he saw my distress he smiled and with immense love and gentleness like a mother comforting a troubled child, he almost crooned, 'That was only my joke. Don't cry. You must have self control.' I quickly pulled myself together.

Phyllis Krystal, The Ultimate Experience, Sawbridge Enterprises, 1985, p. 155.

Materializations

Lingams

Lingams are egg-like objects representing the mystery of cosmic creation. On special occasions witnessed by thousands of people Sai Baba has interrupted his own talking to 'give birth' through his mouth to one or more lingams.

78 - Sandweiss' Description of a Lingam Birth:

At about 8 o'clock Mahashivarathri evening, while Baba was giving a discourse in the Poornachandra Auditorium, suddenly he began to choke and weave back and forth as if in pain. To see our great Lord in the throes of what are, in fact, 'birth' pains brought me to tears. To me this incredible act represents a sacrifice, the holiest gift of selfless love, through which the Lord personally beckons us to merge with him. Through the love that wells up in our hearts, as our hearts reach out to the supreme master, one experiences the yearning for, and the bliss of merging.

Some say the lingam is formed out of unconditional love in the region of Baba's spiritual heart. The birth itself is very physical as well as ethereal. The lingam is brought up the esophagus and delivered

through the mouth in a divine paroxysm- much like the birth spasm accompanying a corporeal birth. I don't know why I should be sad, because this sacrifice is so glorious serving to make the devotee more firmly resolved to surrender more and more of himself to God. Nevertheless, to see Baba in this state was uncomfortable for me. He rocked back and forth, then swallowed some water. Suddenly, in a convulsive burst, a glistening, crystal-clear lingam, perfectly spherical and almost three inches in diameter, erupted from his mouth into his hand. In this supremely holy moment, the Lord allowed his devotees to witness the mystery of the creation of the universe.

Then Sai Baba spoke and Dr. Bhagavantam translated his words:

'The lingam which has just been generated is called the Prutree Lingam. The five elemental substances which constitute the creation of the world are present in this Prutree Lingam. In the past, lingams have been named according to the various attributes which they contained. This Prutree Lingam, signifying the entire creation, holds within it the basis of all creation.'

Too much mystery for me to comprehend, I could nevertheless sense the holiness of the moment.

S. Sandweiss, Spirit And Mind, pp. 170-171.

79 - Hislop's Description:

The lingam has been seen by the writer a number of times. On the occasion of one Mahasivarathi night, I was sitting quite close to Baba. When the moment came, I saw a flash of gold come from his mouth and saw the lingam caught in the silk handkerchief held by his hands. It was of gold. How an object that size came up Sri Baba's throat cannot be explained.

John Hislop, My Baba & I, p. 18

80 - Kasturi's Description:

Siva-ratri, the Night of the Siva, is also an equally important festival. Since 1950, Siva-ratri has been celebrated at Puttaparthi, and each year since the declaration of the manifestation, Sivalingams have materialized within His body. Baba has said He often finds it very difficult to postpone or prevent the formations of lingams within Him. In the evening Baba gives Darshan during prayers, and after an hour or so, He begins His discourses. Very often he is interrupted by spasmodic struggles in the stomach. He continues with the speech until the region of the struggle changes to the upper part of the chest and the neck. He seems to be undergoing some kind of physical tension, and suddenly, to the joyous wonder of all, lingams fall from His Mouth....They are about an inch and a half in height...They are then generally placed on the image of Sai Baba of Shirdi, and after the celebrations end, are given by Baba to devotees to be worshipped according to instruction...This producing of the lingams is indeed a unique and mysterious manifestation of the Divine Will.

Kasturi, Sai Baba, Vol. 1 American Edition, 1969, pp. 108-109.

Sai Baba states that the lingams form within him. Sai Baba devotees, as is evident above, hold the production of the lingam to be a 'birth', 'generation', or 'materialization' which is inexplicable. However, Baba devotees have not even begun to apply the scientific literature to their question. Houdini in *Miracle Mongers and Their Methods*, Chari, in "Regurgitation, Mediumship and Yoga", and others have presented many examples of individuals who have publicly performed similar feats.

It has been clearly established that individuals can voluntarily control the regurgitation response. In fact yogis teach voluntary control of regurgitation as part of standard yoga training, even for the lay practitioner. Here is an example from a widely available hatha yoga textbook:

81 - Satchidananda's Instructions for Jala or Water Dhauti:

Technique: Drink four or five glasses of lukewarm water, preferably with a little salt in it. After a few minutes, do rigorous Uddhiyana Banda [stomach lift]. Shake the intestines well. Press the stomach with the hand and then vomit out the water. If the water will not come out naturally, use the fingers to get it out.

Benefits: All impurities, phlegm, and bile will be washed out.

Satchidananda, Integral Yoga Hatha, Holt Rinehart and Winston, NY 1970, p. 169.

The reader may not be terribly surprised to learn that regurgitation can be controlled at will; but what about regurgitation of an object the size of an egg? Around the turn of the century, when North American audiences were less squeamish than now, circus performers regurgitated all kinds of large objects. Here is Houdini on how it is done:

82 - Houdini on Regurgitating Objects at Will

A number of years ago, in London, I watched several performances of one of these chaps who swallowed a hatful of stones, nearly the size of hen's eggs, and then jumped up and down, to make them rattle in his stomach. I could discover no fake in the performance, and I finally gave him two and six for his secret, which was simple enough. He merely took a dose of powerful physic [emetic--ed.] to clear himself of the stones, and then was ready for the next performance.

During my engagement in 1895 with Welsh Bros. Circus I became quite well acquainted with a [Japanese] of the San Kitchy Akimoto troupe and from him I learned the method of swallowing quite large objects and bringing them up at will. For practice very small potatoes are used at first, to guard against accident; and after one has mastered the art of bringing these up, the size is increased gradually till objects as large as the throat will receive can be swallowed and returned.

Houdini, Miracle Mongers and their Methods, Coles 1980, (reprint), pp. 160-161.

In order to produce an effect such as the production of the lingam, all that is required is the swallowing of the lingam ahead of time, and its regurgitation at the appropriate point in the ceremony. Note that the description of Sai Baba's swallowing of water prior to the regurgitation, and the churning of the stomach muscles both correspond to the standard hatha yoga technique described by Swami Satchidananda.

The reader interested in further information which bears on this might enjoy reading the Chari article referred to above. In it Chari describes a scientifically studied street performer who makes his living doing regurgitations. He is able to swallow as many as 10 live snakes at a time, and regurgitate them in a 'reptilian ball with a diameter of about 5 inches' (Chari, op. cit., p. 168).

Sai Baba performed this lingam ceremony until 1976. Why did he stop? Here are three explanations, not mutually exclusive, for why:

83 - Sandweiss's Explanation:

On the morning that ended Mahashivarathri, Baba said that he had to deliver sad news. This would be the last time Mahashivarathri would be celebrated like this; the crowds were becoming too unruly devotees were being injured in the commotion.

Sandweiss, Spirit And The Mind, p.171.

84 - Donald Taylor's Explanation:

The production of a crystal lingam from within himself is performed by so many other holy men that Sai Baba announced in 1976 that he would discontinue the practice.

Donald Taylor, "Authority in the Sathya Sai Baba Movement", Hinduism In Great Britain, Tavistock, London, 1987 p. 130.

In addition to the reason given by Donald Taylor, the reader may also want to take note of the factor that in 1976, Sai Baba was about to turn fifty. The regurgitation of the lingam is a physically trying ceremony, and it is common sense to consider that Sai Baba upon turning fifty may have also wished to relieve himself of the physical stresses of performing this ceremony.

Other Materializations

85 - Magicians' Analysis of Supposed Paranormal Phenomena of Indian 'God-Man' Sathya Sai Baba

by

*Dale Beyerstein, Leon Mandrake, Lou Crockett,
Lon Mandrake and Velvet Mandrake*

Parapsychologists often lament the fact that the people who come to their attention because of their putative paranormal powers will not subject themselves to study and experiment under rigorously controlled conditions. This is especially true of psychics who are involved in a religion, as opposed to those who simply claim paranormal powers. Such religious psychics often imply that it is in some way 'sacriligious' to subject these gifts to scientific scrutiny. Of course, the parapsychologist does not wish to be accused of this, and realises that further requests for controlled experiments might well cause a rift with the psychic. The parapsychologist then might not be able to gather any further evidence. The result is a dilemma: on the one hand the evidence gathered from anecdotes and from uncontrolled observation is interesting enough to share in print with the public. On the other hand, the parapsychologist does not wish to be accused of simple naivety for endorsing a psychic on the basis of flimsy evidence.

Erlendur Haraldsson faced this dilemma in his study of the Indian 'God-man', Sathya Sai Baba. In his 1987 study, *Miracles Are My Visiting Cards*, subtitled, 'An Investigative Report On The Psychic Phenomena Associated With Sathya Sai Baba', Haraldsson investigates several reports of Sai Baba appearing in two places at once, resurrecting people from the dead, knowing things by telepathy, materialising objects, and displaying other wondrous powers. He and Dr. Karlis Osis also witnessed on several occasions Sai Baba supposedly materialising objects out of thin air. However, Haraldsson points out throughout the book (pp. 25, 26, 31, 32, 49-51, 289) that Sai Baba repeatedly rebuffed his

requests for controlled scientific studies. Thus, Haraldsson ends up with a `on the one hand..., but on the other' judgement about Sai Baba's psychic powers:

Experimental science has one way of approaching the truth; descriptive science another. Our judicial systems have evolved interrogation and corroboration of witnesses, investigating relevant contemporary documents and so on, as ways of accruing evidence...In dealing with... well-known weaknesses of human testimony our courts rely primarily on quantity of testimony or on the reliability of witnesses. This has been our approach. Numerous followers and critics as well with extensive observations of Sai Baba, arrive at a general consensus about the paranormality of the frequent appearance of objects in his presence or on his body on certain occasions...Of course any vigilant skeptic will certainly come up with the sleight of hand hypothesis. During a brief visit to Puttaparti [the village with Sai Baba's main residence ed.] an amateur magician viewed Baba from a distance as he produced vibuthi [holy ash, the `materialisation' of which is a staple of Sai Baba's ed.] by a wave of his hand. Such a poor observation sufficed him to conclude that Baba used sleight of hand, though another skillful amateur magician, Dr. Fanibunda, with his plentiful experience of Baba considers this hypothesis absurd. In my view, such a meagre, poor observation does not prove anything either way... This example shows how easily one may come to quick superficial solutions pro or contra by a shallow weighing of only a tiny portion of the available evidence. (pp. 290-1).

Haraldsson's advice not to jump to hasty conclusions is well taken, but we maintain that it is possible to follow his courtroom analogy more rigorously. If this is done, it is possible to arrive at a more definite conclusion than Haraldsson was able to do in this work.

First of all, Haraldsson's many witnesses of materialisation of objects only testify as to the general effects which the scientist wishes to explain. This is roughly equivalent in the legal analogy to a multiplicity of witnesses confirming that at such and such a time gunfire shots rang out, and somebody then fell to the ground dead, apparently of gunshot wounds. If the question is whether the shots which killed the person came from the East or the West, ballistic experts must be called in to examine the bullets, the location of the wounds in the body, etc. In this case expert magicians, not amateurs, must be brought in to examine the evidence.

Second, Haraldsson mentions using contemporary documents. The advantage of this, of course, is that it alleviates to some extent the fallibility of memory. The best document for the purpose of studying Sathya Sai Baba's claims would be a videotape of his materialisations. A videotape has the advantage of being a direct record of the event rather than a verbal description. And even more, a videotape can be examined using the pause button, so that the hand positions can be studied in detail. In this way one can obtain the best assessment of the situation possible given Sai Baba's steadfast refusal to be tested under controlled magic-proof conditions.

Now, it just so happens that there is a videotape ready to hand, produced by Richard Bock, a Sai Baba devotee residing in Los Angeles, until his recent death. The video is called Christ In Kashmir, The Hidden Years, and has been circulating amongst Sai Baba devotees and the curious for several years. It is commercially available through Sai Baba centres and elsewhere. We obtained a copy of it through an Oregon distributor which makes available a wide variety of religious articles, meditation aids, videos, and the like. Haraldsson makes no reference to this tape in his book, nor does he give any information which would enable the reader acquainted with sleight of hand technique to acquire any film records of Sai Baba materialisations.

Also we should state our qualifications at this point: four of the five authors of this paper (DB is the exception) are more than amateur magicians. One of the authors Leon Mandrake has for 50 years been a professional magician, performing under the name "Mandrake The Magician", and has exposed countless alleged psychics over the years. Lou Crockett has performed professionally for years under the stage name 'Taylor Steele'. And both Lon Mandrake, and Velvet Mandrake have years of solid professional performance experience in sleight of hand, and magic in general.

A careful examination of this videotape, using the 'pause mode' feature reveals several instances of by professional standards, very elementary sleight of hand routines used by Sai Baba in producing his 'materialisations'.

And the three-minute segment showing one of Sai Baba's most famous materialisations, that of vibhuti from a supposedly empty upturned urn, and the causing of the vibhuti to pour all over a statue, provides good evidence for the normal explanation as well.

In this paper, then, we present our analysis of those segments of the Richard Bock videotape which show Sai Baba 'materialising' objects or streams of vibhuti from the 'empty' upturned jug.

I.

Sai Baba has performed countless 'materializations' of pieces of jewellery. The Indian magician and Chairman of the Indian Committee for the Scientific Claims of the Paranormal, B. Premanand has published a nine page list of pieces of gold jewellery and other precious gems allegedly materialized by Sai Baba, representing only those pieces whose production is on record in Sai devotee publications. (See B. Premanand, Satya Sai Baba and Gold Control Act, pp. 24-32). There is no doubt that there is a good deal of gold changing hands around Sai Baba (as well as other gems), and the question is, how is it produced?

As it happens, there are a number of examples of necklace and pendant materializations in the Bock video, and it is possible for the reader familiar with the basic methods of stage conjuring and sleight of hand to play the tape, stopping at the crucial moment in 'pause mode', and observe Sai Baba's techniques of 'materialization' at work.

In the first materialization, of a necklace (at the 33 min. point in the tape) Sai Baba enters holding his left arm with his right hand. This is a most odd walking position, but it is extremely convenient if he happens to have the object to be 'materialized' in the palm of the right hand, and otherwise in danger of falling at the wrong time, being spotted in the hand, or arousing questions about why his hand is fisted. In this case, the finger positions during the materialization are fully consistent with sleight of hand technique. However the thumb is on the wrong side of the camera, so it is best to review the finger positions in describing 'materializations' in which the thumb positions are visible.

At the 38 minute point in the film a second necklace is produced. However, the editor of the film has chosen to cut out the wave of the hand which usually precedes Sai Baba's 'materializations' and shows the necklace only after it has been produced. Given the results of an analysis of the hand waves in other 'materializations' in which the thumb activity is visible, one cannot help but wonder why the editor of the film chose to eliminate the hand wave in this case!

The third 'materialization' of a small object occurs at the 44-minute point in the film. Sai Baba produces a necklace with a little circling of the hand. The pause mode analysis of this circling of the hand, however, shows definite evidence that Sai Baba has 'thumb palmed' the necklace. The thumb is held tightly against the palm of the hand in a manner whose significance will not be lost on anyone familiar with the art of the magician. The fingers are relatively free, as is to be expected, and stretched out to maximize the effect. After some circling, the fingers begin to fist, so that the thumb-palmed object may be held in a finger palm briefly. Now, for the first time, the thumb is seen to be free from the side of the palm, which confirms that a transfer from thumb palm to finger palm has taken place. The hand with fingers curled now turns upright, and the edge of the object begins to be visible. Of particular significance is the fact that the thumb begins to push the object forward. The necklace had been gathered in a bunch in order to palmable effectively, and so it appears as though a dab of glue or small thread might have been used to keep the necklace bunched up. The pressuring motions of the thumb not only push the object down onto the fingers, but also ensure the breaking of the thread if it has not been broken by the handling. The thumb having accomplished its task, we then see Sai Baba flick the necklace open. The 'miraculous' production is complete, and a smiling Sai Baba presents his gift.

The fourth object produced is a ring, also at the 44 minute point. The editing and camera angles make it difficult to see the relevant aspects of this event. However, it is clear that ample opportunity was available for a transfer of the object finger-clipped in the left hand to be dropped into the right hand, which 'takes the load' just prior to the production of the ring.

The fifth small object materialization on the film occurs at the 45 minute point. Here, once again, we have direct and clear evidence of elementary, if not clumsy, sleight of hand. The details are functionally identical with those of the third materialization: the thumb is not free until the object has been transferred. However, in this materialization, the thumb, apparently, is unable to work the object free from its bunched up condition. This explains why Baba's left hand comes over to the rescue, working the chain free. When it is free, Baba holds the chain with his two hands, and offers it.

It is further instructive to notice the little kinks in the chain when it is being presented, confirming that it had been kept in a bunched up condition for some time, and was not freshly materialized in an unknicked condition as would be expected for a true materialization.

Finally it is instructive to observe that Sai Baba's right hand is open and visible at close range when he presents the chain. The hand then disappears and reappears shortly afterwards, but held fisted. After this, the right hand 'materializes' vibhuti. Thus the vibhuti has been picked up (by one of a variety of well known methods) just prior to its return in closed or fisted position.

There is one last materialization on the tape worth study. At the 44 and a half minute point, Sai Baba, with his back to the camera, produces a slightly larger than palm size object, a necklace chain with a crescent shaped pendant at the bottom. Watching the film at normal speed one's response is that the angle at which the film has been taken effectively prevents one from witnessing the 'materialization' as it would have appeared to its intended audience. Nonetheless, pause mode analysis is revealing. What we see is Sai Baba twisting his body position so that his left hand is for the briefest moment held behind his back, and so that his right hand which is making two large circles in the air is enabled to come closer to the edge of the wall at the left of Sai Baba than it would

otherwise have been able to do. The sequence reveals that at the point of the circling, Sai Baba is abutted adjacent to a window ledge. This area and the window ledge itself provide an ideal place for the pendant to have been concealed. Three or four possibilities immediately come to mind, all of them obvious, no doubt, to people familiar with the art of conjuring. All that is required is that Sai Baba get his right hand over to the window ledge in an apparently smooth and natural way, and the quick body shift, which is revealed clearly only in slowing down the video, would accomplish just that.

II.

The 'vibhuti abheshekam' is an annual ritual performed by Sai Baba. An urn is suspended upside down, held by an assistant. Sai Baba places his hand in the urn, and vibhuti, ie., holy ash, streams down from it onto a venerated religious statue, in apparently larger quantities than the urn can hold or so the devotees claim. The holy ash falls out of the urn only when Sai Baba's hand is in the urn; it stops when Sai Baba takes his hand out, or when he switches hands in the urn. At the beginning, Sai Baba's hand is barely into the jug, and he gently twirls his hand; but as the ceremony progresses, his hand goes farther into the jug, and his hand movements become more and more agitated.

The reader may well be entertained by learning to perform the 'miracle' of producing holy ash from an 'empty' jug. To do this, one need not experiment with such a large jug as is used in this ceremony. Familiarity with material that has the consistency of vibhuti will show how Sai Baba or anyone, for that matter can perform this ritual.

Vibhuti may be obtained from many Hindu temples and/or Sai Baba groups. Talcum powder available in any drug store has the same consistency for the purposes of demonstrating how this miracle may be done. Take about 100 ml of vibhuti or talcum powder and mix with just enough water to produce a paste. (Add the water bit by bit to ensure that it doesn't get too wet.) Fill one or two sockets of a muffin sheet with the paste. Place the muffin sheet in the oven and bake for an hour and a half to two hours at a medium or medium-low heat, or until the water is gone and the vibhuti paste has become a vibhuti (or talcum) cake. Allow it to cool. When the cake has cooled, you will find that you can hold the muffin sheet upside down and no vibhuti powder will be released. Someone who cannot see under the upside down sheet will conclude that it is empty. Now lightly brush the vibhuti cake with your finger while the sheet is upside down. Lo and behold! A stream of ash is produced. Now remove your hand. Lo and behold! The flow of ash has ceased. Now gently twirl again. Miracle upon miracle the flow of ash starts up again! You are a miracle worker, and have just performed the miracle of vibhuti abishekam in miniature.

An analysis of Bock's videotape supports the hypothesis that the vibhuti is in the jug from the start and that it is either all in cake form, stuck onto the sides of the jug, or some of it is in cake form, and some of it is in powder form in 'compartments' released by Baba in the course of the performance. This is the crucial point of what we mentioned earlier, that Sai Baba's hand is not far into the jug at the beginning of the ceremony but by the end his hand is placed very high up into the jug. This suggests that at the beginning of the performance he is scraping off the caked vibhuti around the lip, and as the performance proceeds, he has to reach farther into the jug to scrape off that which is farther up the sides and on the jug-bottom. The shape of the jug is such as to catch loose vibhuti even when upside down so that almost none will fall out when Baba's hand is removed.

Also a pause mode inspection of the falling stream reveals what appear to be larger chunks of vibhuti on one or two occasions, further suggesting that some of the vibhuti is in cake form in the jug, and is made to powder by the touch of Baba's hand.

Finally, experimentation with material of this consistency and the size of the jug in the film will establish beyond any doubt that a little vibhuti goes a long way and that the jug will easily contain the amount of vibhuti seen to be produced in the film record.

Of course, the question arises why the vibhuti is not noticed at the beginning of the ceremony. There are several simple answers. The faithful audience believes it has been shown an empty jug as soon as the jug has been held upside down and nothing comes out. (See, for example, the devotee's account in Haraldsson's book, p. 116: "There would be an empty vessel...Swami...would just put his hand into the upturned vessel...The vibhuti would start pouring out".) The lip is small relative to the rest of the jug, and so as long as nobody has a chance to shine a flashlight down it, it will be undetected especially in the context of a moving religious ceremony. Those who hold the jug might be fooled by the construction of the jug into thinking that it is heavier than it is. Alternatively, and far more likely, given human nature and given some of the remarks made by interviewees of Haraldsson, those close to Sai Baba know full well that there is vibhuti in the jug at the outset, and the `miracle' for them, if they think there is any at all, consists only in the amount produced. (See *ibid.* page 226.)

Our conclusion, then, is that there are a great many ways of doing the vibhuti abhishekam ceremony with few or even no assistants helping. The proffered miraculous explanation of the Sai Baba organisation is the least plausible of them.

III.

We have presented clear evidence of conjuring from the Sai Baba organisation's own evidence in Part I, and a natural explanation consistent with the visual evidence in Part II. We are also confident that more evidence for our conclusions would be forthcoming if we had a chance to examine the part of the original film or video left on the cutting room floor.

What does this evidence say about Sai Baba's putative paranormal feats in general, and the question whether he has any genuine powers? Must we rest content with Haraldsson's `wait-and see' attitude? We think not. By his own criterion, that of the analogy to evidence satisfactory in a court of law, we have examined the best evidence for Sai Baba's miracles that is available. At worst (the evidence from Part I) it is damning, and at best (a charitable interpretation of Part II) it is inconclusive. Given (1) no reliable evidence inconsistent with the sleight of hand hypothesis, (2) Sai Baba's steadfast refusal to be tested by scientists knowledgeable in magical tricks, and (3) direct evidence of frequent use of sleight of hand by Sai Baba in videotape material put out by the Sai Baba devotees themselves, Sai Baba's extensive reliance on sleight of hand in the materialization phenomena is established beyond reasonable doubt.

Beyerstein, Mandrake, Crockett, Mandrake, Mandrake: First published herein.

Haraldsson, in *Miracles are My Visiting Cards* (p. 213) summarizes his data relevant to determining whether Sai Baba is using conjuring methods in his materialization, suggesting that Sai Baba hasn't

been exposed as using sleight of hand during the performance of a ritual. Premanand, however, states that at least one such an incident occurred:

86 - Premanand's Report of a Public Exposure of Sai Baba Using Conjuring Methods:

In 1968 the god had to stop using thumbtip [a standard piece of magical apparatus --ed] because when he came to Kerala one of us went to the stage and removed his thumb suddenly, and people got so wild, thinking that our person had cut the finger, cut the thumb of the god. The thumb was shown. People thought God lost a thumb. But God didn't. He lost only the thumbtip. He stopped doing that, and now what he does is he keeps the ball [of holy ash, or vibhuti ed.] between the thumb and the pointing finger, like this...

B. Premanand, lecture sponsored by Science World, Vancouver B.C. Canada, Dec. 15 1988; videotape record with Science World.

Haraldsson also places emphasis in his summary of the evidence (for example, p. 290-1, quoted in ¹ 85 above) on the fact that Dr. Fanibunda, once an amateur magician, has found no evidence of fraud in Sai Baba's materializations. The degree of reliability of the checks made by Fanibunda can be gauged however, by the check made by Fanibunda of the Cowan resurrection story. The reader may wish to compare Fanibunda's account with ¹¹ 16 26 below. Here is his presentation of the Cowan resurrection events:

87 - E. Funibunda's Account of the Cowan Story:

Apart from listening to Divine discussion by Baba and attending other functions, the author witnessed a most remarkable incident which proved to him that Baba's omnipotence embraced not only the manifestation and control of the physical universe but also the very basis of existence, that is Life itself. Baba revived a dead man approximately five hours after he was dead. In brief, this is what happened. In the early hours of the morning of 25th December 1971, Walter Cowan an elderly American gentleman who was a devotee of Baba, died in the Connemara Hotel after a short illness of pneumonia. He was shifted to the hospital in Madras where the attending doctor certified him dead on arrival. After stuffing his ears and nostrils with cotton wool, the hospital authorities had kept his body in a separate room. At about 10 am. that day, Baba visited the Hospital and gave Walter Cowan back his life.

E. Fanibunda, "Vision of the Divine", as quoted in Indian Skeptic No. 3 p. 31, July 1988.

Sundry Miracles

The events in this chapter differ from those of the previous chapter in one respect: the ones in the former chapter were 'staged' in the sense that they were part of a religious ritual, whereas the latter appear to be 'spontaneous' in that they happened in normal circumstances. To the person innocent of magic, this latter fact gives added credibility to the event, because this person doesn't see any elaborate preparation going into them. But, as any student of magic knows, just because the spectator doesn't see any preparation by the magician or psychic does not mean that there was none. If the reader wishes to learn more about this, she can consult James Randi's *The Truth About Uri Geller*, or Uriah Fuller's *Confessions of a Psychic and Further Confessions of a Psychic*.

Also, normally a psychic who specializes in these 'spontaneous' productions has a ready excuse when confronted by a skeptic demanding replication of the event under controlled conditions: He can say, among other things, that the event was as much a surprise to him as to everyone else, and he cannot just reproduce it on command. Or he can maintain that the 'artificiality of the lab' is not conducive to psi powers; they happen in the normal course of events, not in the lab. However, neither excuse is open to Sai Baba, who claims to be omnipotent. If so, he could produce them anywhere! But Sai Baba has other excuses:

88 - Sai Baba's Excuse for Refusing Scientific Tests:

How can science which is bound to a physical and materialist outlook investigate transcendental phenomena beyond its scope, reach or comprehension? This is a fallacy on the face of it. One belongs to the material and the other to a spiritual plane. Science must confine its inquiry only to things belonging to the human senses, while spiritualism transcends the senses. If you want to understand the nature of spiritual power you can do so only through the path of spirituality and not science. What science has been able to unravel is merely a fraction of the cosmic phenomena; it tends, however, to exaggerate its contribution...

As I have said before, Dr. Narasimhiah and his group are like the Telugu men who to the cinema to see a Tamil film. They will see only the dancing, the fighting and violence, the heroes and villains, the star with a beautiful face and these kinds of superficial things, but they will lose the subtler aspects such as the music and the poetry, the plot, the dialogue, the jokes and the like.

However as I have said again and again, those who want to understand me are welcome here. It is the spirit of the investigation that is important. Foreign parapsychologists have come here and examined me in such a positive and constructive spirit. You have seen their reports. They do not write letters or make public demands.

Narasimhiah's approach was improper; that is why I rejected it. If it were not so, he would have been welcome.

Sai Baba, Interview with Karanjia, reprinted in Sandweiss, Spirit And Mind, pp. 252, 253.

The foreign parapsychologists and their reports referred to by Sai Baba would be Dr. Haraldsson and Dr. Osis, and the reports of their visits issued by them. Here is Haraldsson's report on Sai Baba's position:

89 - Haraldsson's Report of Sai Baba's Reasons for Refusal:

Baba went into a spirited discourse, aimed at us, attacking scientists. He said that scientists could not understand the spiritual, and he insisted that the spiritual starts where science ends. We found ourselves back to our earlier discourse on the need for experimentation and empirical research on paranormal phenomena, of which he was allegedly a master.

When we showed Baba the few things that we had brought with us to test the paranormality of his materializations experimentally, he politely put them aside. It would be black magic to exhibit his powers that way, he stated.

Haraldsson, Miracles are My Visiting Cards, p. 43.

Water Into Gas

According to the story, Sai Baba was in a car that would not start because the tank was empty. He ordered that water be poured into the gas tank. Water was poured in, and lo and behold, the car went for miles.

90 - Kanu's Account:

As Jesus Christ changed water into wine to satisfy a need, so Sai Baba turned water into petrol to satisfy a different need. It happened one day as Baba was being driven along a country road in India. The car suddenly stalled and stopped. The driver examined it and found that the fuel tank was empty. "There is no more petrol in the tank," said he. 'They have no wine,' said Jesus's mother (John 2:3). There was no filling station within sight and no passing traffic. Baba ordered that the petrol tank be filled with water from a nearby pond and this was done. The driver got back into the car with trepidation and nervously switched on the ignition, and the engine responded beautifully. He drove all the way to their destination hours away on a tank filled with pond water!

Kanu, Sai Baba, God Incarnate, p. 17.

Kanu was taught a lesson from this incident:

91 - Kanu's Claim About Power Over the Elements:

Sai Baba has caused the floods to recede in response to his command; he has multiplied food, and changed water into petrol.

Kanu, ibid., p. 16.

92 - Premanand's Response to These Claims:

...Baba dipped his finger in the can and ordered the contents of the can to be poured in the petrol tank.

All were surprised. What! Water into the petrol tank? The faithless forgot to check whether the water can contained petrol or water. The order was so instantaneous, the driver was so quick and he emptied the contents into the petrol tank. He switched on the ignition and the car started...The faithless did not want to be small minded and with limited intellects, and so they joined the faithful and sang his glories. "His divine will indeed can create anything anywhere and instantly." This incident happened 18 years ago.

On 30th May 1976 Baba went to Shrishaila in Kerala via Gudalur to lay foundation stone for a college there. Mathrubhum! reported that tens of thousands of people assembled there with longing in pouring rains to have a glance of him who had proclaimed himself 'God of Gods'....Though Baba did not desire publicity, the press had been invited with all paraphernalia to take photographs and report the function of the Sarvadaivathwa Swarupa. The land was transformed into a fairyland with decorations, but as Sathya Sai Baba did not like pomp and show, he ordered the rains to wash everything out. Though an elephant with well dressed girls on both sides with lights and 'thalappoli' waited to welcome the God, because the rains were heavy he could not be welcomed.

After the laying of the foundation, Baba returned to Ooty in full splendour of the great welcome of the devoted people of Kerala but on the hills the car would not move as even the car was thunderstruck by the heartfelt welcome at Shrishaila. As the car did not move, Baba could have waved his hand to repair the car with his genuine power which transformed earth into sky and sky into earth. But the car did not move, and he had to go by another car. Only after the mechanics from a well known workshop came and repaired it, the car returned to Baba's Nandanavanam...

Premanand, Lure Of Miracles, pp. 46-48.

The Seiko Watch Materialization

93 - Premanand's Introduction

The story of materialization of a Seiko watch was originally authored by Dr. S. Bhagavantam in 1973 and published in a Malayalam weekly titled Malayalandadu. The editor S. K. Nair and his wife were Sai Baba devotees and to neutralise the publicity got by Abraham Kovoov, S. K. Nair started a debate in his weekly on the spiritual powers of Satya Sai Baba. He first published Kovoov's article explaining that Satya Sai Baba is a hoax and then published a series of articles by Sai Baba devotees, which included a High court Judge and other well known personalities like Dr. Bhagawantam.

B. Premanand, Indian Skeptic #11, p. 2

94 - Dr. Bhagavantam's Response to Kovoov:

The wonderful experience some years ago, of the world famous Seiko watch manufacturer of Japan, while he was on a tour in India was awe-inspiring.

After completing the Seiko series of watches, he made the model of a more superior type and kept it in his safe for further tests. During his holiday in India he paid a visit to Puttaparti out of curiosity. On seeing the Japanese gentleman among the devotees, Sai Baba called him and gave him a small parcel materialised from the air. On opening the parcel he was astonished to see in it the new watch that was kept in his safe in Tokyo. When he saw, with the watch, the silk ribbon and the label with the name of the watch and its price marked on it, all his doubts about the divine powers of Sai Baba simply melted away. He fell prostrate at Sai Baba's feet and worshipped him. Since then he is an ardent devotee of the Bhagavan.

On his return to Tokyo, he was shocked to see that the watch he had kept in his safe was not there. What his personal secretary told him was still more startling. The secretary said that a divine-looking person with bushy hair walked into the office one day, opened the safe and walked away with the watch."

Excerpt of an article attributed to S. Bhagavantam, in Malayalanadu, ed. S.K. Nair, 1973, Engl. translation as quoted by A. Kovoov.

95 - Abraham Kovoov's Investigation:

A few months ago the editor of a mass-circulating weekly of India wrote me a letter saying that the Editorial Board of his weekly has decided to publish a symposium on "SATHYA SAI BABA IS HE AN INCARNATION OF GOD OR A CHARLATAN?" and wanted me to be the first contributor to the series.

My article was serialised in three issues. It was then followed by two articles countering my thesis by Dr. S. Bhagavantham, M.Sc., D.Sc., Ph.D., a former scientific adviser to the Government of India.

Dr. Bhagavantham started his article by saying that in his youth he was a rationalist like me, but after witnessing some of the `miracles' of Bhagawan Sathya Sai Baba, he had to give up his rationalism!

He then continued to describe numerous `miracles' said to have been performed by Sathya Sai Baba at various times in various places. There was absolutely no mention in the two articles of any one having conducted investigations to establish that they were all genuine miracles, and not conjurer's tricks. The two articles appeared to be clear examples of how unscientific even a good scientist can become if he is victim of religio-maniacal neurosis or avarice for lucre!

In the whole lot of the miracle stories mentioned by Dr. Bhagavantham, there was only one that was amenable to investigation. I quote below that story:...[as above ed.]...

Does Dr. Bhagavantham, who is the holder of covetable qualifications in science, think that a thesis of this nature to prove the miraculous powers of a man, by any scientist, will be accepted by an academic body of scientists if it is not backed by scientific investigations and fool-proof evidence?

Although Dr. Bhagavantham is reluctant to test the veracity of his Godman's miraculous powers, I decided to do it myself. With this aim in view I wrote the following letter to Dr. Bhagavantham:--

Sept. 11 1973

Dear Dr. Bhagavantam,

I read your story about a Japanese watch manufacturer getting his own watch that was kept in a safe in Japan, materialised in India from air by Sathya Sai Baba.

My scientific attitude does not permit me to accept this fantastic story as true without verification. My doubt is enhanced by the reported statement of his personal Secretary. The first reaction of a responsible Secretary when a stranger walks into the office and opens the safe, would be to raise the alarm and to summon the police.

As I feel it is unscientific even for a scientist to believe this type of cock-and-bull story without verification, I request you to kindly let me know the name and address of this Japanese so that I may verify the truth about it.

Your failure to help me to conduct this investigation, by withholding this information, will lead me to suspect your sincerity and honesty, and discard all what you have said about Sathya Sai Baba as utter falsehood deliberately propagated with ulterior motive and vested interest.

Yours in search of Truth,
Abraham T. Kovoov

As there was no response from Dr. Bhagavantham even after two months, I decided to pursue the matter on my own. The Japanese Embassy in Sri Lanka was kind enough to provide me with the name and address of the proprietor of the Seiko watch manufacturing firm.

In my letter dated 30th October, 1973 to Mr. Shoji Hattori, president of K. Hattori & Co. Ltd., the manufacturer's of Seiko watches, I reproduced Dr. Bhagavantham's story about the miracle, and requested him to provide me with answers to the following questions:--

1. Did you or any other partner of yours visit Sathya Sai Baba of India any time?
2. Did Sai Baba materialise a watch from air and present it to you or to any of your partners?
3. Did your personal Secretary tell you or any of your partners that a stranger opened the safe and walked away with a watch?
4. Are you or any of your partners a devotee of Sai Baba?

For the benefit of numerous innocent devotees of Godmen of India I reproduce below Mr. Hattori's reply. This I do with the sincere hope that they will be sensible enough to realise the truth that these charlatans who go about in the garb of holy men have numerous agents like Dr. Bhagavantham everywhere working in collusion to propagate the huge hoax and profit materially.

SEIKO
K. HATTORI & CO. LTD.
Tokyo

Nov. 8, 1973

Dear Dr. Kovoov,

Thank you for your letter of October 30th. I can appreciate your interest in conducting scientific research of paranormal claims, but I am in no way able to further your knowledge as regards the man mentioned in your letter, Mr. Sai Baba. Neither I nor any members of my staff have ever made the acquaintance of this individual. I am sure that these reports are completely unfounded I must therefore reply in the negative to all four of your questions concerning this incident.

Sincerely yours,
K. HATTORI & CO. LTD.
Shoji Hattori,
President.

On receipt of this letter I wrote the following letter to Dr. Bhagavantham enclosing a photostat copy of Mr. Shoji Hattori's letter.

Dear Dr. Bhagavantham,

Absence of any response from you to my request made over two months ago has made me suspect the veracity of your story about the Japanese watch manufacturer getting his own watch that was kept in his safe in Japan from Sai Baba. To pursue my investigation in the matter, I got the name and address of Seiko watch manufacturer from the Japanese Embassy in Sri Lanka.

In his reply to my enquiry, Mr. Shoji Hattori, President of K. Hattori & Co. Ltd., who are the manufacturers and proprietors of Seiko watches writes:--

"I can appreciate your interest in conducting scientific research of paranormal claims, but I am in no way able to further your knowledge as regards the man mentioned in your letter, Mr. Sai Baba. Neither I nor any members of my staff have ever made the acquaintance of this individual. I am sure that these reports are completely unfounded."

If Mr. Shoji Hattori is not the person concerned in your story, please let me know about it, and provide me with the correct name and address. Absence of any reply from you for this letter also, will only confirm my firm belief that you are an agent of Sathya Sai Baba doing propaganda for him with ulterior motive and vested interest.

Yours in search of Truth,
Abraham T. Kovoor

Since there was no reply so far to this letter also, I had to confirm my belief that Dr. Bhagavantham is in collusion with the charlatan Sathya Sai Baba to do false propaganda for him with ulterior motive and vested interest.

Abraham T. Kovoor, Begone Godmen! Chapter 3.

96 - Abraham Kovoor's Article in The Times of India, 12 September, 1976:

Of Scientists and Godmen

Several supporters of Sai Baba have written that scientists of international repute can be counted among his followers.

My dealings with one of the so-called 'scientists' of international repute among the followers of Sai Baba do not permit me to credit him with intellectual honesty or associate him in any way with science.

The chief editor of a mass-circulation weekly wrote, asking me to be the first to contribute to a symposium on "Sai Baba Incarnation Of God Or A Hoax".

My article on Sai Baba was followed by an article by Dr. S. Bhagavantham, M.Sc., D.Sc., Ph.D., a former scientific adviser to the government of India. He began his article by saying that he was rationalist like me in his youth, but after witnessing the 'miracles' of Sai Baba he had to give up his rationalism as he realised the 'fact' that there were many things in life that could not be understood and explained by science. He then described about 30 miracles performed by Sai Baba and witnessed by him.

Of these miracles, I considered only one suitable for verification. This ran as follows:

"The wonderful experience, some years ago, of the world-famous Seiko watch manufacturer of Japan, while he was on a tour in India, was awe inspiring....[as above ed.]...The secretary said that a divine-looking person with bushy hair walked into the office one day, opened the safe and walked away with the watch."

My curiosity about the authenticity of this 'miracle' was roused because it was highly unlikely that the personal secretary would allow a stranger to open the safe and walk away with a watch, without

raising an alarm or summoning the police. Hence I decided to verify the truth and wrote a letter to Dr. Bhagavantham requesting him to let me know the name and address of this Japanese gentleman. Since I got no reply even after a month, I wrote another letter and sent it by registered post, care of the editor of the weekly journal.

Failing to get a reply to this also, I went to the Japanese embassy in Sri Lanka, and got the address of the proprietor and president of K. Hattori & Co., Ltd., the manufacturers of Seiko watches.

In the letter addressed to Mr. Shoji Hattori I sought answers to the following:

- Did you or any other partner of yours visit Sai Baba of India at any time?
- Did Sai Baba materialise a watch from the air and present it to you or any of your partners?
- Did your personal secretary tell you or any of your partners that a stranger opened the safe and walked away with a watch?
- Are you or any of your partners devotees of Sai Baba?

He wrote back to say: "I can appreciate your interest in conducting scientific research of paranormal claims, but I am in no way able to further your knowledge as regards the man mentioned in your letter, Mr. Sai Baba. Neither I, nor any members of my staff, have ever made the acquaintance of this individual. I am sure that these reports are completely unfounded. I must therefore reply in the negative to all four of your questions concerning this incident."

A photostat copy of the above letter was sent to Dr. Bhagavantham asking him for his comments and requesting him to inform me whether Mr. Shoji Hattori was actually the person mentioned in his article and if not, to provide me the name and address of the right person.

I concluded my letter thus: 'Absence of any reply from you to this letter, also will only confirm my firm belief that you are an agent of Sai Baba doing propaganda for him with an ulterior motive and vested interest.'

I am still awaiting a reply from this scientist of 'international repute'. It is a pity that credulous people are incapable of understanding the reason why these so-called scientists round Sai Baba are making frantic efforts to save their 'Bhagavan' from being exposed by the scientists of Bangalore University.

Who would like the goose that lays the golden eggs to be killed?

Abraham Kovoov, Times Of India, 12-9-1976 p. 8; Facsimile Reprint in Indian Skeptic No 11, pp. 5-6.

97 - Dr. Bhagavantam's Reply:

An Explanation

I have carefully read "Of Scientists and Godmen" September 12. The writer talks of an earlier article written by him on Sai Baba that was followed by an article allegedly written by me in a mass-circulation weekly and states that he is quoting from my article.

He goes on to give a long passage in quotations about the visit of a watch manufacturer of Japan to Puttaparthi. He also states that he had written to me some letters of which I have no knowledge. I heard earlier that such a story was being circulated about me but since it appeared that some people were getting innocent pleasure in repeating this fantastically untrue story, and others in listening to it, I did not think it worth while making any public statement about it.

Since the story has now appeared in your newspaper, I am writing to you expressing my utter surprise as none of what is contained in quotations, and allegedly written by me, had ever been written by me or even spoken by me at any place. The first time I heard of a Seiko watch manufacturer visiting Puttaparthi and my writing about this 'wonderful experience' is through such cooked-up reports.

Nevertheless an individual purportedly quotes from what he considers to be my writing and appears to be so sure about it that he takes the trouble of making detailed enquiries. I began scratching my head to see if there could be a possible explanation for such an error of judgement.

I recall that some years ago, a friend from Kerala sent me what he called an English translation of an article that appeared in Malayalam in one of the local papers containing an account of several miracles said to have been performed by Baba, and asked me if I had written that or any portion of it. I promptly replied that Malayalam is not my mother tongue, that I could not write in the language, and moreover the contents were so fantastic, untrue, and unrelated to my experience that I could not have written anything even remotely like it in either English or in any other language. Presumably, someone wrote that and put my name on the article and published in Malayalam.

Possibly the present writer thinks I had written it and is quoting from that, or a similar hoax perpetrated in my name. I can find no other explanation. I am not the author of the story regarding the visit of a Japanese watch manufacturer to Puttaparthi.

S. Bhagavantam
Bangalore.

S. Bhagavantam, Times Of India, 29-11-'76; Facsimile Reprint in Indian Skeptic No. 11 p. 7.

98 - Premanand's Comments on Bhagavantam's Reply:

From the explanation given by Dr. Bhagavantam in his published letter about the seiko watch story, several questions have to be answered by him which he did not answer while alive.

1. Is it necessary that one has to know Malayalam language for one's article to appear in Malayalam journals? If that be so how did his article in Malayalam and other languages appear in Sai Baba's journals 'Sanathana Sarathi' in different languages?
2. If the article published in Malayalanadu by the editor who is a Sai Baba follower is not his, why did he not refute it in the journal? And if the Editor refused to publish the same go to the Press Council whose chairman was also a Sai Baba devotee?

Dr. Bhagavantam was no exception to it. Just look to the fate of my letters dated 15-12-1981 and 17-3-1982 received by him on 15-1-1982 and 25-3-1982. Along with the letter I had sent Rs5/- postal order to him for sending his reply by registered post. Because the miracles published in that article

authored by him were proved false after investigation, he kept silent. I wanted to know whether he would refute the authorship of that article also and it was in English and published in several journals including Sanathana Sarathi the official magazine of Satya Sai Baba.

B. Premanand, Indian Skeptic #11, p. 3

99 - The Upshot of the Kovoov Bhagvantam Challenge?

Sathya Sai Baba's charismatic authority is vulnerable to challenge from both outside and within the movement. Outside the movement there are those who also claim to be holy men and who perform similar miracles... Others of rationalist conviction, such as Dr. Kovoov, denounced him as a 'fraudulent Godman whose miracles were nothing but plain magic' (Rajghatta 1985:48). To prove his point Dr Kovoov himself 'miraculously' produced a quantity of holy ash (vibhuti) which he distributed to eager recipients. He also challenged Sathya Sai Baba to allow his so-called miracles to be subjected to an investigation by a panel of like-minded rationalists, but Sai Baba refused, and lost a considerable amount of support in doing so.

Muted challenges from within the movement sometimes result in the withdrawal of membership. Dr Bhagavantham, formerly on the Council of Management of the Central Trust (also formerly scientific adviser to the Government of India) has recently left the movement; and another, Dr Gokak, formerly in charge of the education programme, has tried to demolish the myths that surround Sai Baba. Other Indian academics have also left; and it is claimed that 'many more devotees including most foreigners have already deserted the flock' (Rajghatta, 1985:48).

Donald Taylor, "Charismatic Authority In The Sathya Sai Baba Movement", Hinduism in Great Britain, ed. by Richard Burghart, Tavistock Publications, London, 1987, p. 130.

'Petal Calligraphy'

100 - Kanu's Account:

When he was a boy, someone asked Sai Baba for a sign: 'If you are Sai Baba, show us some proof now.' Baba replied, 'Yes, I shall. Place in my hands those jasmine flowers,' he commanded. It was done. With a quick gesture he threw them on the floor and said, 'Look!' They saw that the flowers he had so casually flung onto the floor had formed the name SAI BABA in Telugu

Kanu, Sai Baba, God Incarnate, p. 11.

101 - Murphet's Account:

Once...someone at a Thursday meeting voiced the desire that was in many minds. 'If you really are Sai Baba, show us a sign.'

Satya saw the need of this. 'Bring me those jasmine flowers', he said, pointing to a large bouquet in the room.

The flowers were placed in his hands, and with a quick gesture he threw them on the floor. All present looked in awe: the flowers had fallen to form the name 'Sai Baba' in Telugu script, the language spoken in the village. This flower-writing was not something that required imagination to

help; the words were strikingly clear, as if arranged with meticulous skill, all the curves and convolutions of the Telugu letters perfectly reproduced.

Murphet, Man Of Miracles, p. 59.

Kanu describes an event that occurred over forty years before he wrote, and the event Murphet describes occurred long enough in the past that reconstructing the exact sequences of events from the memories of witnesses would be futile in both cases. However, this effect is easily explained using basic principles of conjuring such as the highly histrionic Sai Baba had every opportunity to know about. Sai Baba was born into a theatrical family, and learnt stagecraft from his earliest childhood. (See Kasturi, Sai Baba, Vol I. pp 20-50; Premanand, Lure of Miracles p. 68). To create this effect he need only have prepared the calligraphic message in advance, and placed it on a length of material in a corner of the room, covered by a piece of similar material. Nothing at the time would have called attention to this apparently innocent piece of material on the floor. He may easily have hinted about 'signs' and 'proofs' that he was who he said he was in a suitably subtle way. For instance, he need only have denied that any sign or proof was necessary. Then one of his audience members would have been sure to question this, suggesting that he can't give a sign, or that he should give a sign. Having been given the request for a sign, he would issue the command to bring the flowers he had kept in the vase, and then throw them in view onto the apparently empty piece of material. He could then cover the flowers with another piece of material, and continue discoursing about something or other for a short while. Then he need only lift the covering cloth together with the strewn flowers by picking up the top two pieces of material together from the corners. Baba would then have stood back to reveal the jasmine flowers spelling 'Sai Baba'. All eyes would have been on the flower-spelling message which allows Baba ample time to appropriately dispose of the crumpled two pieces of material with strewn flowers inside. Of course no one would have thought to check that cloth at all.

Materialization of a Large Glass Bowl

102 - Murphet's Account:

Once, they said, on the birthday of Lord Krishna Baba was walking aimlessly, it seemed, about the sitting room of their Madras home. Suddenly he turned to Mrs. Hanumantha Rao and remarked: 'There are some devas (angels) here waiting to give me a bowl of sweets.'

As she looked, seeing nothing, he held out both hands and took from the air, as if from some invisible person, a large, carved-glass bowl. The bowl seemed suddenly to materialise. Baba handed it to Mrs. Hanumantha Rao.

Howard Murphet, Sai Baba, Man Of Miracles, pp. 73,74.

From an invisible person indeed! The details of this narration are consistent with Baba having received the glass bowl from an assistant stationed outside the window of the room in which the 'materialization' occurred. Sai Baba's pacing seemed odd, because the others were seated (and their full view of the outside of the window was obscured). By pacing about, Sai Baba was the only one aware of when the assistant was ready outside the window. Baba even made sure to provide verbal cover in case anyone were to have stood up at an inopportune time and seen the assistant. Had this

happened, Baba would have been able to cover easily, saying, "oh what an angel you are!" and so on. No one would have been the wiser.

Other Materializations

Candies from an empty bag; statues out of sand; light from Baba's forehead, etc.: The stories are very numerous. But it is plain that these 'miracles' are easily explained using basic principles of conjuring. For instance:

103 - Murphet's Account of 'Candies From An Empty Bag':

From an empty bag he would produce sweets or fruit. If a school friend had lost a pencil or rubber he would 'produce' one of those from the bag. If someone was sick he would bring out 'herbs from the Himalyas' and give these as a cure.

Murphet, Sai Baba, Man Of Miracles, p. 53.

Sai Baba's childhood techniques are those of many child magicians. These simple types of sleight of hand are often independently discovered by children with talent in this area; and of course, as I already mentioned, Sai Baba grew up amongst people who practised these sorts of things. Children who grow up to be magicians practice their skills constantly. For instance, the great Indian conjurer, P. Sorcar has written about his obsession with sleight of hand as a boy:

104 - P.C. Sorcar on His Childhood Magic:

I carried a pack of cards and other small articles in my pockets and went on practising with them all on my way to school.

P. C. Sorcar, Indian Magic, Hind Pocket Books Pvt Ltd., Delhi, (no date) p. 19.

Another standard manifestation of Sai Baba's powers, practised especially often in his earlier years, was producing various objects out of the sand by a river. Here is one account, from the Raja Of Venkatagiri:

105 - Producing Statues Out of the Sand:

On 10 or 11 September, we, a group of people in three or four cars, went from the Venkatagiri Palace to the Pellakur Garden on the bank of the Swarnamukhi River. There Swami produced from the sand a statue of Sri Rama. First he made a drawing on the sand in front of him, and then he took with his hands the statue out of the sand.

quoted in Haraldsson, Miracles Are My Visiting Cards, p. 89.

There is an obvious prosaic explanation for this one: Sai Baba leads people to the general area where the statues are to be produced from sand, for example. Of course the statue will have been previously placed there, and is simply produced, with suitable fanfare. Some may object to this as an explanation for all of these materializations, on the grounds that in some cases Sai Baba asks the 'subject' to select the spot to sit in. In this sort of case prearranging several statues in the sand in strategic places would allow the impression to be created of free choice of location on the part of the subject. But he need not go to such trouble. Magicians point out that laypeople are notoriously

bad at remembering important details that are needed to explain how the trick is done (on this, see Randi, *The Truth About Uri Geller*, and Fuller, *Confessions and Further Confessions*). If the devotee is told later by Sai Baba that she, the devotee chose the spot where they were sitting, that is the way she will *remember* the events later.

106 - Light Appearing From Baba's Forehead:

Just as we were looking at him on the top of the hill (from below the hill) we could see a brilliant light resembling the rising sun, and the rays of that light were unbearable. This brilliance of light started from his head and fell all over the place. There was suddenly a lot of light behind him as if the sun had risen.

Mrs Radhakrishna's description quoted in Haraldsson, op. cit., p. 251.

In these reports, Sai Baba is at the top of a hill at sunset, and he is being watched from below. What seems miraculous is that the light was so bright, even though it was twilight. But the report is consistent with Baba having a carefully arranged mirror or two banded onto his forehead which deflects the sun visible from the top of the hill, but not from the bottom, onto the spectators below, blinding them as per their descriptions. Amazing effects can be created with mirrors!

Bilocation

Haraldsson mentions two cases which he considers to be worthy of consideration. 'The Calicut case' (p. 264) is to my mind, very weak. Two people reported seeing Sai Baba in a hospital room, one a devotee of some standing who was told by Baba to expect him. She was just about to be operated on for cataract surgery not the ideal eyewitness! The other, a paramedical assistant, heard footsteps in the devotee's room, entered it, saw Baba and promptly fainted. If someone has previously seen pictures of Sai Baba, then has a vision of Sai Baba and faints, this cannot be taken to be evidence of genuine bilocation of Sai Baba, without at least having information about why he was subject to fainting. For all we know, the man was suffering from a neurological disorder that causes both fainting and hallucinations. This Haraldsson does not provide.

'The Manjeri case' (Haraldsson, *ibid.*, p. 267-284) is different in that it seems reasonably clear that a man actually came, behaved like Baba, and the question is the identity of the visitor. An excerpt of Haraldsson's description:

107 - The Manjeri Case

Early the next morning, 13 December, a stranger wearing a yellow robe appeared at the Rao's door, chanting, 'OM'. According to Mrs. Rao, who admitted him, he said, 'Don't get panicky. I am here to protect you, your husband, and your child.' He then asked for Sailaja and went to the corner of the veranda where she was lying. Sailaja told us he spoke to her in Malayalam (the national language of Kerala) saying: 'You called me last night and now I have come in the morning and will cure you.' Then the visitor demanded that he be seated in the puja room rather than in the waiting room where he had been invited to sit. He went there and sat beneath a portrait of Baba that hung among the pictures of several other deities and saints. Mrs Rao compared the visitor's appearance with Baba's picture and found them to be similar. Mr. Rao and Sailaja joined them. Baba waved his hand in his characteristic manner, produced vibhuti, and applied it to the girl's disfigured leg, saying that

she would be well in three days' time. He was very warm and reassuring about the problems of all three of the Raos, held little Sailaja on his lap and asked her to sing some Sai Baba songs. Since she knew none, he taught her songs of the kind that are sung at his ashram. With the distinctive wave of his hand, he produced a song book which was printed in the Malayalam language by a Sai Baba organization but which, we were told, had not yet been distributed in that area. Sai Baba asked them to invite their neighbours. Some came and they all joined him in bhajans."

Haraldsson, ibid., pp. 268-9.

In the light of the propensity for exaggeration, Mrs. Rao's comment that the visitor's appearance was similar to Sai Baba can virtually be taken to be a confirmation that the visitor did not seem to be the same person. The fact that Haraldsson's informants said that there were resemblances but none led off by plainly taking it or saying that the visitor simply was the person in the picture, indicates that the resemblances were not such as to suggest identity of the visitor with Sai Baba, but rather someone else of similar physical stature, with his hair more or less similar to Sai Baba's, wearing a robe in a similar way, and behaving like Sai Baba. He apparently came by bus (p. 270) and told people not to follow him when he left, (*ibid.*) further confirming the same suggestion. Also the only supposed identification of the visitor as Sai Baba in a 'blind test' cannot be properly called a blind test. "... in the spring of 1963, Panikker even performed a recognition test. Panikker told Dr Osis that he had approached the daughter of T. B. Moosad (the Raos' landlord), an eighth grade student who was supposed to have been present at the Rao's bhajan, when she was returning home from school. He showed her Baba's photo and asked: 'Have you seen this man anywhere?' When she replied affirmatively, he asked her where she had seen him. 'In this house' she said, pointing to it. 'He was singing bhajan and we all participated.' " (*Haraldsson p. 272*). This is listed by Haraldsson as a correct identification in a blind test. (Table I #11 p. 279). There are two fatal flaws in this: first, showing an eighth grade student a picture of Sai Baba and asking if he'd been around is totally inadequate. If Panikker had wanted to learn if the girl could identify the visitor as Sai Baba as opposed to an aspirant holy man dressed to look like Sai Baba, he needed to dress up five or six people who are of the same physical type and look as Sai Baba in Sai Baba-style robes, take photos of them in poses just like the pose of the photo of Sai Baba used, show the girl the various photos including the actual Sai Baba photo, and ask the girl to choose the photo of the man she saw singing bhajans. It also would have been helpful to dress these people up with both yellow robes and red robes, to see if a set of photos with one yellow robe would lead to the identification by the colour of the robe! Anyone who knows how easy it is for police to set up a line up which will lead the victim of a crime to falsely identify whichever suspect the police want the victim to identify by using secondary features, articles of clothing etc., will know that Panikker's method cannot be called a 'blind test'. Secondly, Panikker's investigation could not have been in the spring of 1963. The visitor is supposed to have appeared in December 1963, and Panikker only became involved in the case years later. Has this now become a case of backwards time travel on the part of Panikker as well as a case of bilocation? (The date given seems to be a typo, as is Premanand's date below of 1964, apparently, though in that case whose error this is not clear.) The importance of proper investigation is also made clear by Premanand's analysis of the Manjeri events.

108 - Premanand's Comments on the Manjeri Case:

A correspondent wrote in the Illustrated Weekly Of India of 3-10-1965, that Satya Sai Baba appeared on 13th and 28th of December 1964 in a house in Manjeri (Kerala) and stayed there for hours, talking, resting, singing, consoling, teaching and granting boons; all the while he was also at Venkatagiri and Whitefield.

Satya Sai Baba dismissed this phenomenon explaining that, though it may appear strange, it is his very nature and just his way. He says that when he wants anything, he just waves his hand, and when he wants to get anything done, he just wills it. When he wants to go to any place, he just goes. He says that unless we know the way the Universal and the infinite behaves, we cannot understand him...

In 1965 or thereabouts another person by name Neelakantha Baba appeared on the scene, and proclaimed himself an Avatar.

The editor of the Illustrated Weekly Of India describes the appearance of Neelakantha Baba in the issue of 10-12-1972. He says that there was a striking resemblance to Satya Sai Baba, with the same bee line mop of fuzzy hair on his head, the same bright eyes that hold you, the same gentle smile, the same saffron robes that drape him from his shoulders to the feet. He also performs similar miracles with the wave of his hands in the air and produces vibhuti. His followers claim that he heals the sick, even resurrected a devotee whose heart beats had stopped. This miracle man is bhagavan Sri Neelakantha Thathaji, who is about 37 years old whom his followers describe as Master, Guide, Guru and God Incarnate.

There is every probability that Neelakantha Baba or some one else knew the secrets of the Satya Sai Miracles, being trained to act as a double in such appearances at two places. It should be noted that while the Manjeri appearance uttered the words `Hari OM' while departing (the usual words of Neelakantha Baba) instead of `Sai Ram' (of Satya Sai Baba).

It will be interesting if we can find out whether Baba appeared at Manjeri, Venkatagiri, and Whitefield in the same car or whether they had different cars. While taking leave, the Baba who appeared at Manjeri ordered his disciples not to follow him further and they meekly obeyed him. This trick of appearing at two different places at the same time would have been quite risky if the secret of the appearance and the names of the places were disclosed or leaked...It is quite possible that the Satya Sai Organisations wisely thought it better to avoid these risks in future, and therefore did not repeat the trick again. On the other hand the double who was trained for such occasions, having tasted the pleasure and comfort of becoming another Avatar himself, with all the name, publicity, wealth and pleasure, left the organisation to become an independent Avatar, entirely autonomous in all respects, and continued to exhibit all the miracles of Satya Sai Baba.

Khuswant Singh says about Neelakantha Baba in a very interesting way, almost making us feel the humanly qualities. "He asked me to come near him. I edged forward. He rubbed his thumb on his palm and dropped a pinchful of ash in my hand. He repeated the gesture and a brown berry (Rudraksha) appeared in his hand. `Wear it around your neck' he advised me. He pinned a badge with his picture on my shirt, gave me one to fix on my car and slipped a ring (with his picture) on my finger...He invited us to his Ashram at Om Nagar in the Kurnool District of Andhra Pradesh, for his daughter's wedding next December, blessed us and gave us leave."

Healings and Rescues

Healings

To establish any credible claim of an ability to perform paranormal cures, supporting documentation of doctors' reports coupled with some measure of controlled investigations of the circumstance of cure by Sai Baba has to be provided. The reader who has followed the analysis given here so far will not be surprised to learn that devotees' claims of paranormal cures are of the loosest anecdotal type. Cures are attributed to 'Baba's grace' whether or not they were effected by standard medical means or could be explained as remissions of diseases well known to be subject to such remissions, etc. Doctors' reports are mostly not given, nor are the names of doctors or hospitals given, or where they are, so that an investigator can do further research. Most of the accounts in Sai Baba literature are of conditions in which remissions, in the absence of any kind of treatment, are not infrequent. No statistics are provided showing that Baba devotees are any more or less prone to certain diseases than the general population. There are in addition anecdotal accounts of Baba having promised to cure, and the patient subsequently dying, of doctors' complaining about Baba's meddling, and so on. What follows is a typical sampling of the evidence

109 - A Sample of Kanu's 'Evidence':

A pilgrim to Puttaparthi suddenly developed acute appendicitis. At the time, there was no hospital there nor was there a surgeon, so Sai Baba was asked to come to the room where the patient lay groaning. He waved his hand in the air and produced a surgical knife out of nowhere. A second wave materialized vibhuti which he used as an anaesthetic. With these aids he performed the operation to remove the inflamed appendix. Then the surgical knife vanished into thin air. He applied the vibhuti on the wound which healed immediately, leaving only a small scar.

Kanu, Sai Baba, God Incarnate, p. 52.

Given that it was Kanu who solemnly reported that Cowan had been pronounced dead by two doctors, (see ¹16), this report, with neither name of patient, year of event, nor original source of the story is hardly to be regarded as reliable evidence. If there was no hospital at the time, nor surgeon present, who was qualified to determine that the stomach cramps the patient was suffering were indeed appendicitis? Was it Sai Baba who made the diagnosis? Perhaps the patient merely had gas.

We can get a sense of Sai Baba's diagnostic 'ability' from the following account which happened to John Hislop.

110 - Sai Baba's Misdiagnosis of John Hislop's Medical Condition:

While asleep in Brindavan in the month of October, 1978, without any prior warning to me, the prostate suddenly closed off the urethra. What happened then was agonizing, but nevertheless most comical. When Baba came down from his apartment, about 8 a.m., I told him that the urethra was closed and that already the bladder was very swollen. He smiled, said not to worry, and gave me vibhuti. About 11 a.m., he returned from inspecting some new construction and as he came to the

veranda, both Dr. Goldstein and I approached him saying that my condition seemed to be serious. Baba came up to me, looked in my eyes, patted me on the head and said not to worry, it was just the heat. Then at 4 p.m., when Baba usually came down after rest, I did not wait, but sent a note upstairs that the situation was steadily getting worse and that now severe pains were moving back and forth throughout my body. Baba came down immediately. In the group of devotees waiting for him, there were, as usual, several physicians, including Dr. Goldstein from California. Without any discussion, Baba told the doctors to take me at once to the hospital and operate if necessary.

Now the comedy quickened. We got into several cars and went to Baba's hospital for women in Whitefield. The Medical Officer-in-Charge, Dr. Mrs. C. Rajeswari, made an examination room available, and the assembled doctors tried some 20 or more times to insert various sizes of catheters into the bladder, but with total failure.

By now I was in agony, although I bit my tongue and kept silent. It was the immediate decision of the doctors that an emergency opening would have to be made through the wall of the abdomen...

At Bangalore, the job was botched by the resident surgeons; heavy infection set in, and in three days Baba ordered me back to Brindavan...Baba arranged for the operation at the Whitefield hospital...The care was magnificent...The entire inside of my abdominal cavity was filled with virulent infection, and the tissues were so rotted that standard operating procedures could not be used...

Why the big comedy in the whole affair? It took me some time to figure it out...Why the deadly complications at the Bangalore hospital?...Finally, at the time of another visit, I told Baba that I had figured the matter out. My conclusion was that I had come to the end of my natural life, Baba had let me go down to the final step, and at the last moment, he had reversed my natural death by giving me rebirth. Baba smiled and confirmed that what I said was true; he had given me new life. After returning home to Mexico in January, some continuing complications arose which took me into a Mexican hospital and then an American hospital. Baba sent word to not worry, that these were just rebirth pains.

John Hislop, My Baba & I, pp. 49-51.

111 - A Description of a Sai Baba `Tonsillectomy':

...I was present at an operation Swami performed in Hanumantha Rao's house in Madras on my friend Krishna, who had septic tonsils. Swami produced the knife from the air. I was shocked. (I am a doctor's son; my father was a surgeon.) Samiji just looked at me and smiled. I understood perfectly what he meant: `You still don't believe in me'. Then he put the knife into Krishna's throat. There was also with me another doctor friend of mine, Dr. Dakshina Murthy, who was shocked. But none of us could say anything. Swami just kept going.

Krishna suffered for one day. Next day we took him to my doctor Dr Das, the same doctor who was treating me. `Who are the fools meddling with your throat!' he said. `He is a great fool. What is wrong with him? This chap is going to get into a soup' he said. We were all a bit worried and kept going to the doctor for the next two days. Then on the second day the doctor asked: `What has happened?' for the pain had stopped, the septic tonsils had disappeared.; everything had gone. That is what Swami did. He didn't actually surgically remove the tonsils; all he did was make some

scratches with the knife. But after two days the tonsils disappeared. To my knowledge he (Krishna) did not have any problem with it afterwards.

Account of ex-Sai devotee, Mr Varadu, quoted in Haraldsson, Miracles are My Visiting Cards, p. 167.

112 - Mr. Krishna's `Tonsillectomy':

Once I had myself tonsillitis and a very sore throat. Then Swami said he would operate upon my tonsils. This happened in Hanumantha Rao's home in Madras. He waved his hand, and a knife came seemingly out of nowhere. He put his hand into my throat. I said that I could not see him cutting my tonsils, that I would get frightened, so I blindfolded myself with a handkerchief. If someone puts something into your mouth, you will naturally cough. He was saying that I was not allowing him to make the operation, but after I was blindfolded I was quieter, and he did something with my throat. When he said he had finished the operation and I opened my eyes, there was some blood on a tray that someone held.

That evening I went to a doctor friend of mine and said, `Look, Swamiji has removed my tonsils.' He remarked something like this: `What do you say? You are a fool and he is a liar.' The tonsils were still in my throat. A few years later, about 1959 or 1960, just before I moved to Hyderabad, the tonsils were removed by a medical doctor at Stanley Hospital in Madras. The medical record must still be there.

Mr. Krishna, quoted in Haraldsson, ibid., p. 176.

113 - `Curing' Rabies:

When his wife (Ananthappa's wife, a Sai Baba devotee) was bitten by a dog, which was suspected by the entire neighbourhood as mad, she refused to believe in Pasteur but cured herself through vibhuthi only. A large number of `peons' in Davangere town became Ananthappa's customers for the Vibhuthi he had placed before the portrait sent by Baba. They sat through his Bhajans and sang with him in order to deserve the gift.

Kasturi, Loving God, p. 134.

It is important to note that there is no record of anyone's examining the dog to see if it was in fact rabid. So, we have no evidence that there was anything to cure. Sai Baba's ministrations under these circumstances would thus appear to be harmless. But what of the cases where Sai Baba's ministrations are given instead of orthodox medicine, and the condition is serious?

114 - Consequences of Avoiding Medical Treatment for Rabies:

The husband of Swami's sister Venkamma was bitten by a dog, but nobody knew it was rabies-infected. When this news came to Madras, some of the doctors, like Dr. Dakshina Murthy, said it was always safer to take injections against rabies. But in the villages they do not follow such rules, and some of the baktas said: `Why do you talk like that? Swamiji is there'. If the dog has rabies, the effect will not be there till after some weeks, but once the disease is manifested there is no cure for it. Then suddenly this man became sick, and I was asked to take him to Penukonda, to the nearest hospital in these days. So I and some relative, Krishnappa, took him there. When the doctors found out that this gentleman was suffering from rabies, they told us we had brought him too late and

nothing could be done to save his life. Then we took Venkamma's husband back and to a hospital in Anantapur, where he passed away.

Mr. Krishna, quoted in Haraldsson, op. cit., p. 176.

115 - Joy Ziegler's Account

Then one day, out of the blue, 'SHE' approached me and said in broken English; 'I think you were here last year when I was. I remember you. Do you remember me?' I replied I in fact did remember her. Then I mentioned that she had received several interviews in a very short period of time immediately upon her 1984 arrival. Smiling, she said: 'Yes, I have a brain tumour. Swami touched my head and told me to think only of Him and not to worry, so I have done just that. I am back at work now and I don't worry. I listen to Swami.' Startled by what she said, I stammered: 'Did you return to the doctor? Did you have surgery?' 'No', she calmly replied, 'I never went back to the doctor. I only think of Him.' How courageous! How beautifully faithful!

Joy Ziegler, writing in Sanathana Sarathi, January 1986.

116 - Sai Baba on Cancer:

In a more recent interview Baba told me that cancer is one disease which can be cured only by God's grace and with love.

Krystal, The Ultimate Experience, p. 205.

It is one thing for a person to decide without prompting or encouragement to cease taking medical care. But for Sanathana Sarathi, a Sai Baba official journal, to give institutional sanction to the idea that the proper treatment of cancer is to abandon doctors in favour of whatever Sai Baba says, is cause for serious concern. This concern is further deepened by Sai Baba's continued ignorance on the subject of cancer. The plain fact is that vast numbers of cancers are thoroughly curable by routine medical procedures. Sai Baba's incomprehensible medical advice is readily documented, for instance, in the following quotation:

117 - Sai Baba Using Medical Jargon:

[Baba] then launched into a detailed diagnosis of my physical problems which Dr. Bhagavantam translated from Telugu into English. Baba spoke very fast and used complex medical terms which neither of us was able to comprehend and which I would not have been able to spell even if I had tried to take notes...

Krystal, ibid., p. 37.

I have already pointed out that the evidence for Sai Baba actually curing anything is extremely shoddy. Given that the burden of proof is on the one who claims that Sai Baba can cure paranormally, this ought to be sufficient to give one pause. However, the case is even stronger against Sai Baba: We also have evidence of failures to cure:

118 - Infantile Paralysis:

Swami has frequently promised cures and people did not get cured. For example, he told Mr and Mrs Hanumantha Rao that he would cure their son, who suffered from infantile paralysis. He never did.

Mr. Krishna, quoted in Haraldsson, ibid., p. 175.

119 - Narasimhaiah's Evidence:

I had two interviews with Dr. Narasimhaiah...There had ...been a few letters accusing Baba of promising healing that never occurred...

Haraldsson, ibid., p. 201.

120 - Cancer:

Asha was the only daughter of a diplomat with foreign assignments in Europe and her husband's first post in the foreign service was in Argentina. After three years, he was transferred back to New Delhi and after working there for a year he was scheduled to be posted to Middle East, when suddenly it was discovered that he had cancer of the ears and throat already so advanced, that it was considered incurable. A friend of a friend of Dr. Bhagavantam, the Scientific Advisor had described to Asha's aunt about Satya Sai Baba and his miraculous operation on a boy's spine who was born a cripple and later the boy was able to walk.

Hearing this, Asha left for Puttaparthi with the only hope of saving her husband and on the fourth day afternoon she was given an interview.

Before she had a chance to say a word Baba asked her not to cry, and that he will cure her husband's cancer.

He made the rotating motion with his open palm and transferred a handful of Vibhuti from his hand.

At precisely the moment Baba gave her the ashes, her husband sat up in bed, over eleven hundred miles away, and spoke for the first time in two weeks.

Baba said that he can hear her husband.

Months later a friend in New Delhi wrote that when Asha returned to New Delhi from Puttaparthi she followed Baba's instructions and gave her husband a pinch of vibhuti in water once a day for three days. Within three weeks the friend said that he was cured and back at his desk.

A year and a half later, the friend wrote that Asha's husband had been hospitalized for cancer of the lungs and three months later her husband died.

Premanand, summarizing a story in Arnold Schulman's account of Sai Baba. [The name 'Asha' is not the original name of the person, who wished anonymity.] Lure Of Miracles, p. 39.

121 - Cancer Again:

In the 'Sunday' weekly of 25-7-'76 Dr. A. Ganguly cites the case history of three patients who went to Satya Sai Baba, where his personal assurance of a cure were proved false. It is the case histories of a

25 year old youth who suffered from cancer, the second of a girl who suffered from leukemia, and a third a boy of 12, who had an attack of viral encephalitis. The first died, the second is in death bed, and the third without any hope.

B. Premanand, ibid., p. 42.

122 - Mental Retardation:

One of Dr. Bhagavantam's sons, an eleven year old boy was mentally retarded. Baba pierced his lumbar region of the spine to remove cerebro-spinal fluid to relieve pressure on the brain. When Murphet asked Bhagavantam whether he is any better, he answered saying that he was better and that his condition has improved though not remarkably. He said that if the puncture was not done by Bhagavan he did not know what would have been his son's condition. It might have been worse!

B. Premanand, ibid., p. 41.

Rescues

When a Sai Baba devotee has a close brush with disaster, the event ends up being interpreted as an act of Sai Baba's Divine Grace! No devotees have presented any evidence at all that Sai Baba devotees are any less or more prone to having close brushes with disaster than the general population, and without such evidence, the anecdotal accounts of cars nearly running into each other and so on, are of no particular scientific interest. A useful account of how Sai Baba devotees find omens of Sai Baba's interventions in nature virtually everywhere is found in L. A. Babb's *Redemptive Encounters*.

123 - Babb's Account of Sai Baba's Devotees' Attitude Towards Omens:

...for Sathya Sai Baba's followers everything that occurs does so by his ordainment. They speak of this constantly, even in connection with what may seem to be the most trivial events; nothing happens that he does not will...Their world is something like an enchanted garden. This is a point on which it is difficult to be ethnographically precise, but it is real enough. It emerges mainly in the tone...An informant reported an altercation with someone while staying at Baba's ashram; immediately upon leaving the room his eye lighted on a sign with some slogan about the evils of anger. Another informant reports longing for a guava, having seen a few unimpressive specimens for sale while on a motor trip. When her car halted, a man suddenly appeared by its side with two plump and juicy ones, which he sold her for eight annas. This, of course, was Baba himself. Another informant tells of how she was frightened by the dark clouds surrounding an aircraft in which she was descending for a landing at Nagpur. But then, just as the thought of Baba flashed through her mind, the plane passed through a momentary shaft of sunlight.

Lawrence Babb, Redemptive Encounters, pp. 198-199.

Does Sai Baba's Life Fulfil Ancient Prophecies?

I remind the reader of the reason I gave in the Introduction for including the material presented here. The point of this section is not to dispute Sai Baba's theology, but rather to point out that Sai Baba's reading of the Christian Bible, for example, is completely at variance with everyone else's reading of these passages, and that in some cases the passages he refers to are simply not to be

found. If Sai Baba, or his defenders wish to argue that he knows better about these interpretations or what was actually said and lost almost 2000 years ago, this is not my concern. My point is only that he cannot cite these passages as if they were undisputed, clear references. In so far as one already believes that Sai Baba is the reincarnation of Jesus Christ or the Omnipotent Supreme Being Incarnate, one will have no difficulty in accepting that Sai Baba is right and everyone else is wrong. However if one has not already arrived at this conclusion, one cannot look to these passages as evidence that Sai Baba is Jesus Christ or God Incarnate.

Did Jesus Foretell Sai Baba's Arrival?

124 - Sai Baba's Disclosure of the Miraculous Prophecy of Jesus:

Sai Baba's relationship with Jesus Christ becomes even clearer with his disclosure on Christmas Day 1972 of a certain event at the time that Jesus was dying. Speaking to a group of people at Puttaparthi that day, he (Sai Baba) said:

There is one point that I cannot but bring to your special notice today. At the time when Jesus was merging in the supreme principle of divinity, he communicated some news to his followers which has been interpreted in a variety of ways by commentators and by those who relish the piling of writings upon writings and meanings upon meanings, until it all swells up into a meaningless mass. The statement itself has been manipulated and tangled into a conundrum. The statement is simple:

"He who sent me among you will come again" and he pointed to a lamb.

The lamb is merely a symbol, a sign. It stands for the voice (the sound of bleating) ba ba; the announcement was of the advent of Baba. "His name will be Truth," Christ declared. Sathya means Truth. "He wears a robe of red, a blood red robe" Christ said. (Here Sai Baba pointed to the robe he was wearing). Christ said, "He will be short, with a crown (of hair)" The lamb is the sign and symbol of love. Christ did not declare that he would come again, he said, "He who has sent me will come again" That ba ba is this Baba.

quoted in V. Kanu's Sai Baba, God Incarnate, p. 5.

125 - Dietmar Neufeld's Analysis of Sai Baba's Claim:

The University Of British Columbia
Department Of Religious Studies

January 19, 1990

To whom this may concern:

In an attempt to legitimize his mission and person Sai Baba establishes continuity with Jesus by drawing on a spurious biblical statement disclosed "at the time when Jesus was merging in the supreme principle of Divinity" (Victor Kanu, Sai Baba: God Incarnate, 5). Sai Baba claims it as a prophetic albeit hidden reference to his name and a priori assumes that the name is a self designation and descriptive of his mission. Furthermore, Sai Baba contends that the 'news communicated' by Jesus has been distorted because it has been 'interpreted in a variety of ways by commentators and by those who relish the piling of writings upon writings and meanings upon

meanings.' The statement, he suggests, is quite simple; "'He who sent me among you will come again', and he pointed to a lamb". Indeed, says Sai Baba, "Christ did not declare that he would come again," rather he said, "He who has sent me will come again." By implication the reader is erroneously led to believe that the statement was uttered by Jesus Christ, that it was commented upon in a variety of ways by many commentators, and that innumerable commentaries exist. Sai Baba, however, does not cite his sources. The supposedly simple remark attributed to Jesus is not uttered anywhere in the New Testament, but rather represents a distortion of what the author of the Fourth Gospel records Jesus to have said: "But now I go to the one having sent me" (John 16:5). Along with a number of other similar references (John 1:33; 8:18, 28; 14:3, 18; 20:21b) the writer of the Fourth Gospel overwhelmingly captures the sentiment of the other gospel writers, namely, Jesus was the one sent by the Father and he would come again (Matthew 24:3,27,37,39; I Thessalonians 3:13; cf. 2:19; I Corinthians 1:8; 15:23; II Thessalonians 2:1, et al). To my knowledge the commentaries to which he refers are nowhere to be found, unless he is alluding to New Testament commentators he feels have "manipulated and tangled the statement into a conundrum". Of course they could not have tangled the statement to which he refers since it does not exist in the New Testament. While the designation 'lamb' appears frequently in the New Testament (John 1:29, 36; ...and 28 times in the Apocalypse) as a metaphorical reference to Jesus derived from the Old Testament (Isaiah 53:7,8) nowhere in the New Testament or the Hebrew scriptures is the 'lamb' merely a symbol for the sound of bleating, namely, ba ba; the declaration by Christ that Sai Baba's name will be 'truth' (Sathya). Whatever else Sai Baba may have thought and wherever he may have obtained the utterance it cannot be attributed to Jesus in order to validate that he is Sathya of which Jesus is the embodiment; i.e., that Sai Baba is the ultimate fulfilment of the one who was to come again.

Sincerely yours,
Dietmar Neufeld
Lecturer, New Testament Studies, (Ph.D. cand.)

original on file with the editor.

It is also clear that the other quotes attributed by Sai Baba to Jesus are equally impossible to attribute to Jesus. These are: (1) "'His name will be Truth' Christ said." (2) "'He wears a robe of red, a blood red robe' Christ said." and (3) "Christ said, 'He will be short, with a crown (of hair)'". These three statements clearly contain references to the contents of Revelations 19, and Kanu quotes the passage from Revelations and interprets it just prior to giving the quote of Sai Baba reproduced above to show the source. However Revelations does not purport to be presenting the words of Jesus, but rather of John of Patmos. In a typical introduction to the book of Revelations, we find:

126 - NAB Introduction to Revelations:

The author of the book calls himself John (1, 1.4.9;22,8), who because of his Christian faith has been exiled to the rocky island of Patmos. Although he never claims to be the apostle of the same name, many of the early church Fathers so identified him. This identification is not altogether certain. Vocabulary, grammar, and style make it doubtful that the book could have been put into its present form by the person(s) responsible for the fourth gospel. Nevertheless, there are definite linguistic and theological affinities between the two books. The tone of the letters to the seven churches (1,4-3,22) is indicative of the great authority the writer enjoyed over the Christian communities in Asia. It

is quite likely, therefore, that he was at least a disciple of the apostle John who also lived in that part of the world. The date of composition is probably near the end of the reign of Domitian (81-96 A.D.) a fierce persecutor of the Christians.

Editors, New American Bible, Thomas Nelson Inc., New Jersey, 1966, p. 1380.

Let us examine the paraphrases given by Sai Baba against the passages from Revelations:

Sai Baba: "His name will be Truth', Christ declared"	Rev: 19:11 : "And I saw heaven opened, and as I looked on, a white horse appeared; its rider was called, 'The Faithful and True'.	Given that this was a vision given to John, the author of Revelations, Sai Baba's claim "His name will be Truth' Christ declared" is incorrect.
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Sai Baba: "He wears a robe of red, a blood red robe', Christ said"	Rev: 19:13: "He wore a cloak that had been dipped in blood, and his name was the Word of God".	Sai Baba is mistaken in his attribution to Jesus here as well. There is a significant difference between wearing a cloak dipped in blood and wearing a red robe.
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Sai Baba: "Christ said, 'He will be short, with a crown (of hair)'"	Rev: 19: 12: "On his head were many diadems" ("..on his head were many crowns"--the translation Kanu gives).	Aside from the great leap from diadems or crowns to ringlets of hair, this is not a quote which is attributable to Christ. And nowhere is there a reference in the Revelations passage or in the Christian materials to a prophecy in which Christ says, "He will be short"!
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Sai Baba's sloppiness with the materials is equalled only by the inattention of his devotees. Even Kanu introduces the prophecy in the following terms:

127 - Kanu's Discussion of the Prophecy:

In Chapter 19, Saint John saw the vision of the Deliverer who was to come again and save mankind from the slippery pathway to self-destruction. That Deliverer is Sri Sathya Sai Baba, for Saint John's vision was as follows: "And I saw heaven opened..."

(Kanu, ibid., p. 3)

Mohammed's Prediction of Sai Baba's Arrival

A prophesy supposedly given by the prophet Mohammed is sometimes quoted as alluding to Sai Baba. This prophesy refers to 27 features of a future teacher, who will be short, whose hair will be profuse, face cleanshaven, with a mole on the cheek, flaming clothes, who will give gifts that are light in weight, etc. The paraphrase of the prophesy also states:

128 - The Prophecy from Mohammed:

Asked by his disciples whether he, Mohammed, was not "the master of the world," he said he was not, and that no prophet of God who had ever come to this world had come with the power with which he would come.

Soham, Feb. 1988 p. 19. Reprinted from Sathya Sai Newsletter, Fall 1983.

This prophecy is found, according to the Sai literature, in the 14th edition of the discourses of Mohammed in 25 volumes, called *The Ocean Of Light*, specifically, vol 13, "Mehedi Moudi". I have been unable to find any bibliographic reference to this collection, and have been advised that it is not part of the standard collections of the discourses of Mohammed. Moreover the contents of this prophecy are out of keeping with the general spirit of Mohammed's teaching. The book and its prophecy was supposedly stumbled upon somewhere in a near Eastern bookstore. Without a reliable historiographic treatment of the supposed document, there is no point in even beginning to look at the connections or lack of them between the figure supposedly prophesied by Mohammed and the life of Sai Baba. Needless to say, this treatment does not, at present, exist.

Conclusion

After wading through this collection of claims made by or on behalf of Sai Baba and the critics' responses, the reader should be in a position to reach his or her own conclusion about Sai Baba. Mine is based on the adage proposed by Marcello Truzzi, "extraordinary claims require extraordinary proof". The proponents of Sai Baba simply have not met this standard.

We might end with this "not proven" verdict. However, this would be too weak. We must remember that the onus of proof is not on the person who wishes to deny a claim, but on the person who makes it in the first place. The claim that Sai Baba has paranormal powers is no exception to this rule; and I think I have examined the best evidence put forward, and found it unconvincing. In fact, in §85 my magician colleagues have pointed out visible evidence of sleight of hand passed off as genuine paranormal power. The videotape we examined is available to anyone who wants to examine it for herself.

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