Excerpts From My Diary

11:45 p.m. Early this morning I said goodbye to Mr. H.J. Agrawal thanking him for his wonderful hospitality and around 7:20 a.m. I left Khamgaon by car, together with Mr. Hanu and the Agrawals’ driver. The weather was fine. On the way we made various stops, took some time to visit the beautiful sites of Ajanta and Ellora, and in the evening, in a pitch-dark countryside, we shortly halted at a farmer’s house whose wife kindly served us something to eat. They were really nice to us and we talked a little about Sai Baba and my intended research.

After an adventurous trip through quite difficult, bumpy roads we finally arrived in Shirdi around 11 p.m. Though Mr. Agrawal had told me that it would take 7 hours to reach Shirdi from Khamgaon by car, in fact it took us...
Oral Testimonies on Sai Baba, 17-20

Figure 1  I and H.J. Agrawal at the ashram of Panchlegaonkar Maharaj in Khamgaon

Figure 2  On the road toward Shirdi with H.J. Agrawal’s driver (left) and Hanu (right)
Figure 3  The Godavari River
around 16 hours altogether! I am totally exhausted and given accommodation by a clerk of the Shirdi Organization, the Sansthān, in a small room of a lodging for pilgrims located near the main temple of the Samādhi Man- dir, where Sai Baba’s tomb is venerated. Grateful for having reached Sai Baba’s abode safely on the very day of the saint’s demise (October 15, 1918) I go to bed around midnight.\(^3\)

Among other things, during my stay in Khamgaon I visited the ashram and school of Pandhe Gu- ruji, eighty-seven years old, a local teacher and a fine sculpture who was a staunch follower of M.K. Gandhi’s ideals of truth and nonviolence and also of his khādī practice, i.e. the domestic production of hand-spun cloth as a means to achieve swadeshi or independence (Gandhi passed through Khamgaon at least twice during his satyāgraha campaigns and apparently Pandhe Guruji knew him well). I also visited the small ashram dedicated to Dattātreya of Panchlegaonkar Maharaj, believed to exercise perfect control over snakes through his powerful mantras (their poison is extracted for preparing āyurvedic medicines) and who actually met Sai Baba when he was about ten years old. He also met Bhagawan Shri Sathya Sai Baba two or three times and had personal interviews with him at Puttaparthi. Unfortunately Panchlegaonkar Maharaj, who was around eighty-eight years old, was in Nagpur at the time and thus I couldn’t talk to him. At his ashram I was garlanded with cobras since the guru’s inmates insisted that it would be auspicious for my research trip. There were plenty of snakes around Khamgaon: on the day of my arrival a cobra was found near my bungalow and for safety reasons a mongoose was placed in my room during the night.

While I was there I also visited the big and well-kept ashram of Gajanan Maharaj (d. 1910), which is located in Shegaon, only 15 km away from Khamgaon. The cleanliness of the place with its bright orange walls and the intense devotion of the numerous bhaktos made a strong impression on me. The śaiva ascetic Gajanan Maharaj is very popular in the area and in the whole of the Vidarbha region, being venerated as a great saint and miracle-worker. There seems to have been a connection between Gajanan Maharaj and Sai Baba. The day he passed away in Shegaon, Sai Baba, in Shirdi, is said to have exclaimed: “My Gajanan is gone”.\(^3\)