
9 **Shirdi**

Wednesday, October 23, 1985

Excerpts From My Diary

12:35 p.m., at my hotel room. It was an excellent morning. I was able to interview another old man who knew Sai Baba. His name is Shri Pandharinath Bhagavant Gonkar and he was just twelve years old when Sai Baba took *samādhi*. This is the sixth old man that we have been able to identify who met Sai Baba in the old days! We had a pleasant conversation. Afterward, I and Swami Shekhar Rao went to visit the keeper of the Mārutī or Hanumān temple, whose name is Shri Ramdas Vithobaji Hajare. He is fifty-five years old and has been living here for the past fifteen years. It was a fine conversation during which he told us how he was called to Shirdi. I then interviewed for the second time Uddhao Madhavrao Deshpande, Shyama's son. This was an excellent interview; it lasted more than half an hour during which he narrated various incidents and anecdotes. I thus started recording my sixth mini-cassette, having recorded more than nine hours of interviews. Though it really took a lot of work, these hard-earned tapes are most precious and indeed priceless given their special contents.

I then participated in the final ceremonies of Puṇyatithi. Some very nice *kīrtans* in Kṛṣṇa's praise were sung, followed by dances and acrobatic feats. The atmosphere was very joyous and fraternal. Then, at noon sharp, the festival was officially brought to a close with the symbolic breaking of a pot containing curds, sweets, and other things by means of a long, red stick. A beautiful flower garland was hung inside the Samādhi Mandir. I took a few photos. This was a wonderful ceremony and a huge crowd attended it. Now the crowds should diminish, given that many devotees are expected to leave after Puṇyatithi.

Swami Shekhar Rao thinks that during the last three days about fifty thousand people came to Shirdi for attending the solemn celebrations. According to him, an average of two thousand people come to Shirdi on any

ordinary day. It's quite a sustained influx of pilgrims and I'm inclined to believe him given his long experience as a resident. The weather is always nice and sunny; it is hot but the heat is bearable. I'm quite tired due to the intense rhythm of the work and our constant moving around but I'm very pleased with the results. In a short while I'll go down to the restaurant and have lunch. I'll then have a rest until 4 p.m.

5:20 p.m. We tried to interview Homi Baba but couldn't meet him because there were too many people at his place, it was really so busy. Will give it another try tomorrow around 8 a.m. Homi Baba is bizarre. He claims that Sai Baba's image is discernible on his chest's hair, in the seat of the heart, and thus he shows his chest to everyone as if he is giving a *darshan* of sorts. I couldn't 'see' it frankly. In a short while we should go pay a visit to Appa Saheb Borawke's son at his house.

11:15 p.m., at my hotel room. Together with Baldev Girme, we had a very pleasant and instructive evening at the house of Vasant Shankar Borawke, Appa Saheb Borawke's son. It looks like Appa does not like the Sakuri *ashram* very much but the reason is unclear. They showed us various slides of their trips to Delhi, Shimla, and Kashmir. Had a good dinner. The house is beautiful, very big, and they look like a nice and happy family. They are certainly quite rich, being landowners. In this area their main cultivation is that of sugarcane. I told them about me and my research, and the atmosphere was cheerful and relaxed. They were all pleased to meet me and curious to know about my interest in Sai Baba and Indian religion. Got back to my hotel room around 11 p.m. I'm really exhausted and go straight to bed.

Interviews of the day

In Shirdi, Shri Pandharinath Bhagavant Gonkar's house, 8:15 a.m.

Conversation with Shri Pandharinath Bhagavant Gonkar. He was twelve years old when Sai Baba passed away.

Q What do you remember of the time when Baba took *samādhi*?

T He used to see Baba every day...

Pandharinath Bhagavant Gonkar:

Baba used to give me *prasād* only. Not money or other things.

Q Did you ever have the chance of speaking to Baba? Did Baba ever tell you anything?

A When I went to the *masjid* to meet Baba, Baba gave me *prasād* and told me to sit in the *masjid* for a while.

Q He told you this only? To sit?

T Yes, to sit... Baba was very loving with him. Baba would say to Mister Gonkar to sit down and rest in the *masjid* for a while.

Q What did Baba use to do in those days? What was his daily routine?

A I was very young at the time, so I went to the *masjid* only every once in a while. I would meet Baba and then go back.

Q Do you remember anything in particular which you think would be of importance about Baba?

A No. Baba would only give me *prasād*. Nothing else.

Q How did Baba use to bless people? By imposing his hands?

A Yes, he would impose his hands. He would give *āsīrvād*, blessings. When blessing, Baba would say the words: "*Allāh barā karegā*", meaning 'God will do everything to help you'.

Q "*Allāh rakhegā*...?"

T "*Allāh barā karegā*". It means: 'God will do', 'He will help'.

Q In which language did Baba speak?

A Urdu and Marāṭhī.

Q Did he speak Hindī also?

T Yes, even Hindī.

Q Thus he could speak Urdu, Marāṭhī, and Hindī?

T Yes. Urdu, Marāṭhī, and Hindī. So Baba would speak to the people.

Q What happened soon after Sai Baba's *samādhi*?

A I don't remember, I was too young.

T He is only eighty years old...

Q Did you ever see Baba getting angry?

A Sometimes, if devotees made mistakes, only then did Baba get angry and also punish, beat [laughs]. He did so even to have fun, as a game. He didn't want to hurt.

Q Did Baba ever give you *udī*?

A Yes. Sometimes he gave me *udī*.

Q What's the power of *udī*?

A [laughing] As soon as Baba gave the *udī*, one would put it on the forehead, and then he would also eat some of it. Usually the *udī* was taken with water. So Baba used to bless. I've seen with my own eyes Baba giving daily fifty rupees to Tatyā Kote Patil.

- Q Fifty rupees?
- T Fifty rupees, to Tatya Kote Patil. Daily...
- Q Do you know anything about Upasni Maharaj?
- A I saw Upasni Baba stay here in Shirdi for about two years. Then Baba got angry with him, and sent him to Sakuri to live.
- Q Baba got angry with him?
- T Yes, he got angry with Upasni Maharaj and thus sent him to Sakuri.
- I I don't understand this. Everybody up till now has told me that Upasni Maharaj was a great *guru*...
- T I have heard that Upasni Baba did something here in Shirdi which wasn't good, so villagers developed a bad opinion about him. They went to Sai Baba and told him that Upasni Baba did this and that, and said he shouldn't remain any longer in Shirdi. "Otherwise we will teach him a lesson", so they said. Only then did Sai Baba send Upasni Maharaj to Sakuri.
- Q Can you tell me anything about Meher Baba?
- T No, he doesn't know anything about him.
- Q What about Basheer Baba or Narayan Baba?
- T No, he knows nothing about them.
- Q What did Baba do when he was inside the *masjid*? Did he contemplate the fire of the *dhūnī*, talk with people? What do you remember?
- A At that time I was only ten or twelve years old and so I don't remember much. Anyway, Baba used to sit near the fire of the *dhūnī*, reciting the names of God, or saying "Allāh Mālik" to himself. There were also many people who met with Baba.
- Q Were there many dogs, cats, and birds entering the *masjid*?
- A At that time there were several dogs, with Baba. Baba would give them food. Every time, at each meal, they would take food with Baba.
- Q What was the reason that brought you here to visit Shirdi Sai Baba?
- T But he is a villager of Shirdi...
- Q Oh, you are a Shirdi villager!
- A Yes.
- Q Do you remember any story about Baba?
- T He was too small at the time, thus he doesn't remember much.
- Q So then, four or five years after Baba's *samādhi*, who was responsible here for organizing things?
- A After Baba's *samādhi*, Tatya Kote Patil, Bayajibai, Lakshmibai Shinde and two other people were in charge of the upkeep of the *samādhi*.
- Q Thus these were the people who first got control of the situation.
- T Yes.
- Q At that time were there many devotees coming from outside Shirdi?
- A In those days, some devotees from outside came to have *darshan* of Baba and then they would return home.
- Q Were they coming from nearby villages?
- A Yes, from nearby villages but also from Bombay, from Gujarat, from Madras, from Nagpur...
- Q From lots of places then?
- T Yes, from lots of places. Many came from Madras, Nagpur, and especially Bombay. Now Mister Pandharinath Bhagavant Gonkar is tired, it's enough for today.
- I Thank you so much for your time and kindness.



Figure 78 Shri Pandharinath Bhagavant Gonkar

In Shirdi, in the Mārūtī temple, 10 a.m.

Conversation with Shri Ramdas Vithobaji Hajare, fifty-five years old, keeper of the Mārūtī¹ temple.

- Q How long have you been living in Shirdi?
 A It's fifteen years now.
 Q How did you happen to come here?
 T He is like a saint...
 A I came from Yeotmal. I came to Shirdi as a monk, to live here. I have always aspired to a life of saintliness. First I went to Shegaon, to have Gajanan Maharaj's *darshan*, then I came here via Nasik. While I was sleeping at the Mārūtī temple in Tryambakeshvar, I had a dream and heard a voice telling me to go to Shirdi.
 Q Did this happen in a Hanumān Mandir?
 T Yes, in a Hanumān Mandir. Then he came to Shirdi.
 Q Did he remain in Shirdi for a full fifteen years, till today?
 T Yes. And here in Shirdi Mister Ramdas Baba is the keeper of the Hanumān temple and lives in it.

Shri Ramdas remembers:

When I came to Shirdi the first time I lived outside the village underneath a tree, near another Hanumān temple. Then I met Swami Avadhut Maharaj, who was my *guru*, my teacher, and due to his grace I was able to come and stay in this Mārūtī temple in Shirdi. After this, the villagers have always helped me, giving me all that I need.

- Q Do you mean food, clothing, etcetera?
 T Yes. He got food and clothing from villagers and Baba devotees... Lots of devotees come here also, to visit the Hanumān temple.
 Q What do you feel for Sai Baba?
 A When I worked at the mill near Wardha as a laborer, I once saw a photo of Baba. That was the first time I saw him. Baba communicated something to me. So I decided to come to Shirdi. I passed through Shegaon so as to visit Gajanan Maharaj, then I passed through Nasik and there, at the Mārūtī temple in Tryambakeshvar, I had that vision. From there I came directly to Shirdi.
 Q What do you think is the most important teaching of Sai Baba?
 T You know, he never met with Baba himself...
 I Of course. But as a devotee, as a renunciant, he might have something to say on this.
 A I wouldn't know how to answer. It's only because of my faith that I am now here, living in this Mārūtī temple.
 Q How have things changed in Shirdi from the time you first came here?
 A Many things have changed in these fifteen years. There has been an increase in the number of devotees coming, the pilgrims are a lot more now.
 Q Thus there are many more nowadays?

¹ The usual Marāṭhī name for Hanumān, the monkey-hero of the *Rāmāyaṇ* epic, famous for his devotion to Rām. Every village in Maharashtra has a temple dedicated to this popular deity. Sai Baba seems to have held Mārūtī in high esteem and was occasionally possessed by him. It is reported that the saint once said: "My father dedicated me to Maruti. I make gestures before his temple telling him I am his brother"; Narasimhaswami, *Sri Sai Baba's Charters and Sayings*, 9.

- T Yes, more than in the past.
- Q Could you tell me what you think will be the future of this Sai Baba movement?
- A I don't think at all about the future. What has to happen will happen.
- Q So you don't worry about the future?
- T He doesn't think about the future or about his life or anything else.
- I He lives day by day...
- T Yes. He says: "Thanks to Baba's grace". So he says.
- I He means to say that everything is due to faith, *śraddhā*...
- T Yes, it's *śraddhā*. This is what really counts.
- Q Are there any other devotees you think we should meet here in Shirdi?
- A Lots of people come here from all over India, even from the West. They come here and ask me to tell them something about my personal experiences with Baba. And I always say the same things I have told you now. That's all. I only had that dream, that vision.
- Q Was that the most important event in your life, that dream or vision you had at Tryambakeshvar?
- T Yes. Only then did he come to Shirdi. And after having come here, his *guru* met him and blessed him, allowing him to remain here.

Shri Ramdas says:

Avadhut Maharaj told me not to worry about the future, and to stay here in Shirdi. So he blessed me.

Q He simply told you to remain in Shirdi and to have faith?

T Yes.

Shri Ramdas says:

Avadhut Maharaj's *pādukās*² are here in the Mārūtī temple. His sandals are kept here. He has given them to me. I have been with him always.

Q Did by any chance Avadhut Maharaj meet with Sai Baba?

A Avadhut Maharaj is still alive today.

I Oh, he's still alive...

T Yes, he's alive. He says he's now seventy years old.

I He's young!

T Yes, young. He was perhaps only three years old when Baba took *samādhi*.

I Thus he was very little...

T He only had the experience of faith in Sai Baba.

Q Does he live in Shirdi?

A Avadhut Maharaj stayed here with me in this Mārūtī temple for two years. Then he left and went back to his place: Tryambakeshvar, near Nasik. It is one of the twelve places in India where the *vyotirlingas* are kept.

Q Is he living there now?

T Yes.

I Thank you so much for your time.

² Wooden sandals.

In Shirdi, Uddhavrao Madhavrao Deshpande's house, 11:30 a.m.

Second conversation with Uddhavrao (Uddhao) Madhavrao Deshpande, seventy-nine years old, son of the deceased Madhavrao Deshpande alias Shyama who was among the closest devotees of Sai Baba, often acting as his intermediary.

Uddhao recounts:

When Baba liked to cook, vessels were brought inside the *masjid*. There is the fire of the *dhūnī* there, you must have seen it... A fellow called Madhav Phasle poured water into the vessels and helped Baba. Then Baba would cook the food. Madhav helped Baba to wash and cut the vegetables and Baba then placed them inside the vessels. Then he would mix the vegetables with the rice. Vegetables and rice together... for cooking. Baba also used to put sugar candies inside the vessels. He himself would put his hand in the vessel for mixing the food.

Q Didn't he burn his hand that way?

A Baba wanted to mix the food this way, up and down. Baba used his own hand, no utensils.

Q And didn't he burn himself?

A No, no. Nothing happened, it remained as it was. He did the mixing for about two or three minutes in a row. Nonetheless, he didn't suffer from any burns.

Q Do you remember any other incident you would like to mention?

A One of the *faqīrs*, of the Mohammedans, was here in those days. He came from Malegaon and he used to stay in Shirdi with Baba. Daily Baba would give him fifteen rupees. And he gave from thirty to fifty rupees to Tatyā Kote Patil. Sometimes thirty rupees, thirty-five, forty, and so on. Many people received from him ten rupees, five rupees, two rupees, fifteen rupees, etcetera. In this way they received money from Baba.

Q Was there a special time for Baba's distribution of money? For instance, did he do this in the evening or at some other time of the day?

A Only in the evening would he distribute the money.

Q So in the morning he would ask for *dakṣiṇā* and in the evening he would give away the money?

A Yes. Whatever the amount of *dakṣiṇā* Baba received, he would give it away in the evening. Baba used to go out for his round of begging around 8 a.m.³ He would go to certain houses. When doing this, Baba cried: "*Mā bhākrīān*", which means: 'Mother, give me some bread'.

Q Could you repeat this expression, please?

A He would say: "*Mā bhākrīān*", or "*Mā roṭīān*" meaning: 'Mother, give me some food, a piece of bread'. When Baba went out to beg for alms, Buti Saheb and Nana Saheb Nimonkar used to go with him.

Q What would they do then?

³ In his first interview, however, Uddhao stated that "Baba used to leave the *masjid* around 8 a.m. and wandered in the jungle till about 10. Then he began to beg for food and alms".

- A They would support him and help him walk. You know, Baba would go to certain houses and they went along with him in order to help him.
- Q Have you seen this yourself?
- A Yes. I have seen it with my own eyes.
- Q I know, from having read the books, that your father Shyama had a kind of privileged relationship with Baba. He was often the man who gave a devotee the opportunity of talking with Baba. Thus, he was very close to him, perhaps the closest of all.⁴ Do you remember anything about this relationship? Is it true?
- A A family from Hyderabad once came to Shirdi to see Baba. They couldn't have issue, so they came to Baba for his blessings, in order to have children. The first time they came, Baba refused to bless them. He said: "It depends upon your faith. I can't give you grace". When the couple came out of the *masjid*, they decided to go and see Shyama, my father. The two were weeping, and explained the situation to Shyama. They pleaded: "Ask him to bless us so that we can have children". Shyama then went to Baba and insistently asked that he bless the couple 'by any way'. After two days, Baba finally agreed to give them a coconut to eat...
- Q Was that symbolic of the birth of a child?
- A Yes. For having issue.
- Q And this happened because your father interceded for them?
- A Yes, he helped them that way. Baba gave them a whole coconut, and after twelve months a child was born. After this, they came back to Shirdi again to meet with Baba.⁵
- Q Was there any particular reason that Shyama was so close to Baba?
- A No, Baba didn't give him anything.
- Q What about the statue of Gaṇapati?
- A Yes, he was given that Gaṇeśa *mūrti* alone.
- Q That only?
- A Yes, that only.
- Q Did Baba ever give money to Shyama, as a gift?
- T At that time Shyama was well-to-do. He was a landlord, I think.
- A A landlord?
- T Yes. This is the reason why Baba never gave him money or other things. This *mūrti* of Gaṇeśa is an exception.

Uddhao recounts:

I had a grandfather in Baba's times. He had some problems with his thighs, and was to be operated on by a doctor. My grandfather came to

⁴ On Shyama, Dabholkar writes: "Those who wished to have a quiet, undisturbed conversation with Baba, would always take Madhavrao with them, initially. He would then introduce the topic in soft sweet tones as to who had come, from where and for what purpose. On this introduction, Samartha [= Sai Baba] would then be induced to converse". Moreover: "It was he whom Baba liked better than anybody else; whose love for Baba defied comparison with anyone else's and whose authority too, was very great... For Madhavrao, Baba had an extraordinary affection - as if he was his own child"; *Shri Sai Satcharita: The Life and Teachings of Shirdi Sai Baba*, 492, ch. 30, vv. 51, 53. Apparently, Sai Baba once said that he had been associated with him for seventy-two generations; 600, ch. 36, v. 140. On Madhavrao Deshpande, see Narasimhaswami, *Devotees' Experiences of Sri Sai Baba*, 193-6; Shepherd, *Sai Baba of Shirdi: A Biographical Investigation*, 104-5; Chitluri, *Baba's Rinanubandh: Leelas During His Sojourn in Shirdi*, 149-62; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mCYiz_2kiXA.

⁵ A similar story is narrated in Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita: The Life and Teachings of Shirdi Sai Baba*, 599-602 (ch. 36, vv. 120-66).

Shirdi, met with Baba, told him he had to be operated on, and asked him what was to be done. Then Baba applied some leaves on his sick leg and wrapped it with a cloth. Three days after Baba's intervention he was cured from his illness, without the need of a doctor.

Q Was this a miracle of Sai?

A Yes, and I saw it in person.

Uddhao adds:

My grandfather had a daughter and wanted her to get married. Before the marriage he came to Shirdi and met with Baba, because of his health problems, as I said. It was on that occasion that Baba cured him in that way, in three days' time.

Q What about his daughter?

A She got married.

Q Did Baba celebrate the wedding?

A No, no. It was celebrated by other people.

Q Thus your grandfather came to Baba only for his leg problem and not for the wedding of his daughter?

A He came alone. He wanted to marry the girl in his own place. He came to Baba for his health problem. Baba cured him in three days and after that he returned home.

[Uddhao again tells the same story, explaining it further].

Q I read in Narasimhaswami's book *Sri Sai Baba's Charters and Sayings* that once Sai Baba explained a chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā* to your father, Shyama, which he was reciting aloud. After that, Baba told him to come every day to the *masjid* so that he would explain to him the following chapters.⁶ Do you remember this?

A It was not the *Bhagavadgītā*, it was the *Viṣṇusahasranām*.

Uddhao explains:

One other saint came here and went to stay in the Māruti temple. He had a book with him, the *Viṣṇusahasranām*. He came from Haridvar. Baba took the book from his sack while he was not present, that is, when he had gone to the bazaar. Baba then gave the book to my father Shyama, telling him to read it every day in the *masjid*. Baba said: "If you want any explanation or clarification ask me".

Q: When your father went to the *masjid* with the *Viṣṇusahasranām*, did Baba explain the meaning of the text to him, or rather did Shyama stay there reading it in silence?

A Sometimes, when Shyama wanted to understand the meaning of the *Viṣṇusahasranām* more deeply and wanted clarifications on some

⁶ Here my memory deceived me. The protagonist of the episode of Sai Baba's explanation of *Bhagavadgītā* 4.34 (a verse, not a chapter) was Nana Saheb Chandorkar and not Shyama Deshpande; see Narasimhaswami, *Sri Sai Baba's Charters and Sayings*, 63-9.

points, then he went to Baba and asked him. Baba would then answer and explain the meaning to him.

Q Baba would then explain the text?

T Yes, yes. He would explain it to him. He would clarify the meaning by saying: "It is so and so..."

Q Thus, it was a kind of teaching?

T Yes, a teaching for Shyama.⁷

Uddhao remembers:

When I was six years old my father was bitten by a snake. He was not able to reach the *masjid* alone, so the villagers went to Baba and told him what had happened. Baba said: "Come on, get him here. I will see to it". As soon as they brought Shyama to the *masjid*, Baba got angry with him, shouting: "I told you not to go to that house". Instead, Shyama had gone there and was bitten by the snake. Baba continued to shout with a loud voice for a long time. Then, after two or three hours the snake's poison came down and Shyama was cured. Baba cured him by shouting loudly, just like that.

Q Did Baba send the poison away with his shouts?

A Yes, by shouting loudly.⁸

Uddhao adds:

The little finger of Shyama's hand turned black, and remained black until he died.

Q Did it become black due to the snake's bite? Why did his little finger turn black?

T Because the snake had bitten him right in that point.

Q Did this cause him any trouble?

A Nothing. No trouble, no pain.⁹

Q Would you like to add anything else concerning Sai Baba, your father, or your own experiences?

Uddhao remembers:

Once, after my father's death, I went to Haridvar as I wanted to have *darshan* of the Himalayas and of Badrinath, Gangotri, Yamnotri, etcetera. But

⁷ For this episode, see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita: The Life and Teachings of Shirdi Sai Baba*, 438-44 (ch. 27, vv. 63-130). Shyama's devotion toward Sai Baba was extraordinary: he used to constantly repeat his name even during sleep. As G.S. Khaparde writes in his diary entry of 8 December, 1911: "Madhavrao Deshpande was here and fell asleep. I saw with my own eyes and heard with my own ears what I only read about but never experienced. With every outgoing and indrawing breath of Madhavrao Deshpande comes the clear sound of 'Sayin Nath Maharaj, Sayin Nath Baba'. This sound is as clear as can be and when Madhavrao snores the words can be heard at a distance. This is really wonderful"; *Shirdi Diary of the Hon'ble Mr. G.S. Khaparde*, 119-20. On the remembrance/repetition of Sai Baba's name even while sleeping, see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita: The Life and Teachings of Shirdi Sai Baba*, 155 (ch. 10, vv. 75-77). Sai Baba himself set the example by practicing the uninterrupted repetition of Allāh's name, day and night.

⁸ As in other accounts, the belief is that Sai Baba's shouts and foul language were directed toward the evil agent - in this case, the snake's poison - and that in this way he drove away all negativities.

⁹ This story is also found in the *Shri Sai Satcharita*; see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita: The Life and Teachings of Shirdi Sai Baba*, 374-6 (ch. 23, vv. 37-66).

half way my money finished and I was left with only ten or twelve rupees. At that time, the cost for the return ticket from Haridvar to Shirdi was of about fifty or sixty rupees. Therefore, I became very upset and worried. Every day I did the *pūjā* of the photo of Baba. As I prayed to him, I asked: "What shall I do now? I am left with only ten, twelve rupees, how shall I go back to Shirdi?". Then some people arrived from the Khandesh area, near Malegaon and Jalgaon. These people asked me: "What has happened to you? Where do you come from?". I was always weeping... Then I explained my situation to them. They told me not to worry and that they would arrange all things for me. After lunch I went to rest. Around noon a man came asking about my problem. He said: "Why do you cry and despair?". I again explained the situation. Then he said: "Don't you recognize me?". I said: "No, I have never seen you before". He replied: "I am from Shirdi!". He told me the name of his family, Chadubaya, and that he came from the village of Ardhanda, near Shirdi. He was also a devotee of Baba. He asked me how much money I needed, and then gave me two hundred rupees.

Q That was a lot of money then, wasn't it?

T Yes, a lot.

Uddhao continues:

I asked for his address, where he lived. He told me his name was Baburao Chadubaya of Ardhanda, and that his family was devoted to Baba. He then gave me his address. In this way, thanks to this man and the money he lent me, I was able to return to Shirdi. Once back, I sent a postal money order of two hundred rupees to repay my debt, but after ten to fifteen days the money order was returned to me.

Q How come?

A That man was not living there, at that address. Thus the money was sent back to me.

Q Did this happen because the man was simply absent or because he didn't live there at all?

A Because he didn't exist. There was nobody in that village by that name.

Q Then who do you think that man was?

A I was never able to find out. Once a Police Inspector came to Shirdi to have *darshan* of Baba and I asked him if he knew the man or that address in Ardhanda, but he confirmed to me that the address didn't exist.

Q Was this a *līlā*¹⁰ of Baba?

A Yes. *Līlā*, *līlā*.

T Uddhao thinks it was a miracle. A *līlā*.

Q And thus he got two hundred rupees?

T Yes, two hundred rupees.

Q When did all this happen?

A In 1944.

¹⁰ Lit. 'play', 'amusement'. A divine, miraculous act.