

Oral Testimonies on Sai Baba

As Gathered During a Field Research in Shirdi and Other Locales
in October-November 1985

Antonio Rigopoulos

12 Shirdi-Bombay Saturday, October 26, 1985

Excerpts From My Diary

9 a.m., at my hotel room. Departure day. Early this morning I participated in the *kākaḍ ārtī* which was celebrated at 5:15 a.m. I packed all my stuff. Wrote a reference letter for my wonderful guide Swami Shekhar Rao, as he had asked me to do, emphasizing his righteousness, reliability, and exemplary conduct. Now I'll go down and have breakfast, pay my dues at the lobby, and check out. Then I'll go have *darshan* of all the important sites of Shirdi one last time and say goodbye to the people of the Sansthān.

11:30 a.m. Said goodbye to the people of the Sansthān and to everyone. It was a nice farewell. Got some more news on both Sri Narayan Baba and Basheer Baba. I visited for the last time all the sacred sites of the village: the Samādhi Mandir, the Leṇḍī gardens, the Gurusthān, the *masjid*/Dvārakāmāī, the *cāvaḍī*, the Marūtī temple, and the Lakṣmī temple. I also went to the *samādhi* of Lakshmibai Tukaram Shinde and had a brief conversation with her niece. Paid all my bills and dues. I'm now left with three hundred and thirty rupees. I bought another copy of the fundamental *Shri Sai Satcharita*, which is the 'Bible' for all Sai Baba devotees. Think I have done all that I was supposed to do. I'll have lunch around noon. My bus leaves Shirdi at 1 p.m. and the arrival in Bombay is scheduled at 9 p.m. Now I will go say goodbye to my guide Swami Shekhar Rao and reward him as he deserves.¹ Thus ends my stay in holy Shirdi, of which I'll always treasure unforgettable memories.

¹ When we said goodbye, Swami Shekhar Rao was so kind that he insisted on offering me a book which was among his few, most cherished possessions: the *Sāi Gītā* (*The Song of One, Immortal Life*).

Interviews of the day

In Shirdi, Sansthān headquarters, 9:45 a.m.

Information about Basheer Baba and Sri Narayan Baba furnished by members of the Shirdi Sansthān.

Basheer Baba died two or three years ago, in 1982 or 1983, we don't remember exactly. This is certain, because he was about to make a visit to Shirdi, coming from Hyderabad, as he often did. He died a few days before his departure. He wasn't very old; he couldn't have been more than forty-two or forty-three years old.

As to Sri Narayan Baba, we can give you this little leaflet that concerns his *yātrā*² of this year, 1985, his usual *yātrā*, since he does it every year.

These two persons are considered by us of the Sansthān as just devotees of Shirdi Sai Baba; as men who contribute, with their personalities, to diffuse the teaching, the figure, and the cult of Sai Baba in India and in the rest of the world.

As to the supposed supernatural contacts or medium relationship between them and Shirdi Baba, or even of an *avatāric* relationship of Basheer Baba with Sai Baba, we don't wish to talk about it. We maintain silence, that's all.

In Shirdi, Lakshmibai Tukaram Shinde's house, 10:30 a.m.

Brief conversation with the niece of Lakshmibai Tukaram Shinde, custodian of the house in which Lakshmibai lived. The house has been turned into a small temple dedicated to Lakshmibai, with photos of Baba and portraits of her. Lakshmibai came from the village of Yeola, in the Nasik District of Maharashtra.

T Lakshmibai died on a Thursday, around 7 p.m.

Lakshmibai's niece:

She died in 1963. Every day Lakshmibai celebrated here, in her house, *pūjā* and *ārtī* to Baba.

T She went daily to the *masjid* and cleaned and swept it. Sometimes she served food to Baba. Lakshmibai stayed with Baba for more than twenty-five years. When Baba took *samādhi* he gave her nine rupees. First he gave her five, then another four. Each coin has a meaning.

Q What is the significance of this gift of nine rupees to Lakshmibai?

A I don't know the significance of the gift of the nine rupees. I am only her niece. [she shows me the coins].³

T Lakshmibai's body is buried here. Her *samādhi* is right in front of the house.

I Thank you.

² Pilgrimage.

³ These nine coins are believed to represent the nine forms of devotion (*navāṅgāni*); see Rigopoulos, *The Life and Teachings of Sai Baba of Shirdi*, 274-84.

- OM SAI RAM -



ANNUAL SHIRDI YATRA-1985

Sat. the 16th Nov. 1985
to
Tuesday the 19th Nov. 1985

SRI BHAGAWATI SAI SAMSTHAN (REGD.)

H. Q. Plot No. 400/1, Panvel 410 206, Dist. Raigad,
Maharashtra, India Tel. 3331

CENTRES IN INDIA :- Kurla, Chembur, Thane, Khar, Bombay-
Central and New Delhi.

CENTRES ABROAD :- Las Vegas - U. S. A., New York, London
and Dubai.

The 'ANNUAL SHIRDI YATRA' organised by the Samsthan has been scheduled for Saturday the 16th November to Tuesday the 19th November 1985. An arrangement for nine special buses are made by the Samsthan for the yatra for the convenient transportation of the devotees. Devotees desirous of joining the yatra should give their names to their respective Area/Bus manager of the Samsthan on or before Sunday the 20th October along with a deposit of Rs. 100/- per head. Requisition for accommodation in the special buses after this date would not be entertained.

The deposit of Rs. 100/- includes the charges of (a) The bus fare to and fro Shirdi. (b) Accommodation at Shirdi. (c) Morning tea at 3.00 a.m.. (d) offering of Naivedya/Prasad in the temple and (e) Poor-feeding.

THE ORIGINATING AREA AND DEPARTURE TIME OF THE SPECIAL BUSES.

Bus no.	Originating Area	Area/Bus Manager	Tel. No.	Dep. Time
1.	Panvel: H. Q. Samsthan	Sri Rambhais Girda	3331	8.00 a.m.
2.	Thane, Prem Nagar Soc.	Sri Viju Navani	595379	6.15 a.m.
3.	-Do-	Sri Prakash Bhavnani	501364	6.15 a.m.
4.	Kurla (Ex Nehru Nagar Kurla Stn. East)	Sri D. R. Puthran	58 221	6.15 a.m.
5.	-Do-	Sri Kanayalal Chandwani	581795	6.15 a.m.
6.	Chambur Masiri-park	Smt Tara Katiyat	5519538	6.30 a.m.
7.	-Do-	Sri Ghanshyam G.		6.30 a.m.
8.	Khar, Upadesh bldg, 14th Road, Near Tel. exchange & Paramanand Bhandar	Sri Sham Lal Ahuja	546960	6.15 a.m.
9.	-Do-	Sri Parmanand Kewalramani	546860	6.15 a.m.



Figure 83 The depliant of Sri Narayan Baba's annual pilgrimage to Shirdi

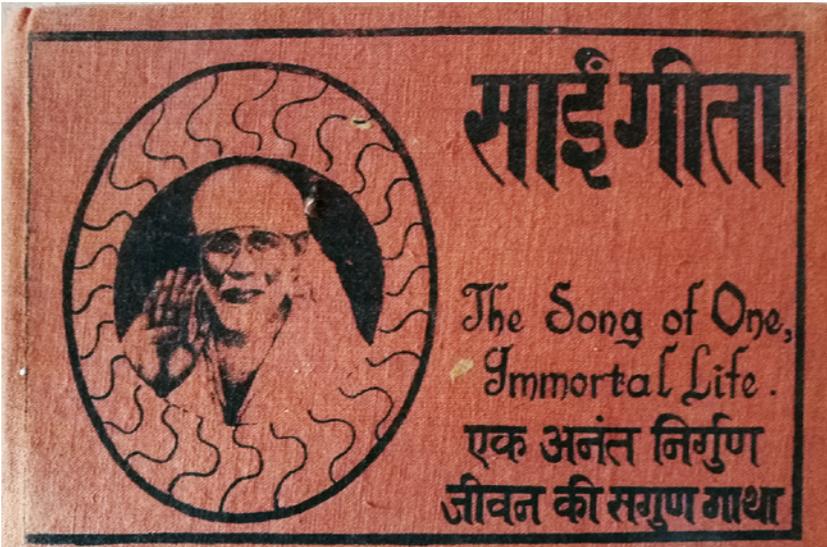


Figure 84 The book on Sai Baba gifted to me by Swami Shekhar Rao

