

Introduction

Narayan Kasturi's Hagiographical Enterprise

Whereas a biography is understood to be based upon the sheer objectivity of the reality of history, a hagiography is aimed at revealing the truth of history, its ultimate meaning. Yet, despite their programmatic differences there is always an intriguing relation between biography and hagiography, the writing of a life and the writing of saintliness, given that within any hagiography there is an inextricable interweaving of myth and history.¹ As sacred biography, a hagiography is the recording of the holy life of an exceptional individual who is thought to have lived on both a human and transhuman plane at one and the same time, typically performing a great number of miracles.² Its goal is to afford direction toward the sacred, of being inspirational as a means for salvation.

In Hinduism there are three main genres of hagiographical writing—usually a male enterprise³—which are all characterized by the sentiment of *bhakti*, devotion, implying the reciprocity between the human and the divine: these are the *Purāṇas* (“Legends”), the *Caritas* (“Biographies”), and the *Kathās* (“Stories”), though such classification is never rigid or mutually exclusive but rather fluid.⁴ Whereas the *Purāṇas* of post-Vedic Hinduism are a huge body of scriptural texts, mostly in Sanskrit verse, which deal with the ancient past and relate the mythologies of the major gods (Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva, and the Goddess), also incorporating extensive genealogies and royal dynasties,⁵ the *Kathās* are narratives of a didactic content, both secular and religious, which are intended to be read or recited aloud in a conversational style more like folk tales.⁶ In turn, the *Caritas* (also spelled *Caritras*) tend to differ from both *Purāṇas* and *Kathās*, since they are concerned with the deeds of a specific individual. Their aim is to

extol their hero by recounting his or her exemplary life. *Caritas* have been written and continue to be written in all Indian languages, in Sanskrit as well as in vernacular idioms, and their characteristic is of being well-crafted, literary works, either in verse or prose.⁷ A *Carita* may also narrate the life of an ordinary human being, since its purpose may be secular. A famous example of a secular *Carita* is the *Harṣacarita* or “The Deeds of Harṣa,” written by Bāṇa in the seventh century CE as an account of the exploits of the North Indian emperor Harṣavardhana (c. 590–647).

Narayan Kasturi’s magnum opus *Sathyam Sivam Sundaram* is by all standards an example of a modern *Carita* (lit. “deeds”). Departing from tradition, he decided to write it in English. His choice of English for this and all his other books on Sathya Sai Baba (later to be translated into Telugu, Kannada, Hindi, etc.) was motivated by his willingness to reach out to the whole world, starting with the urban middle and upper classes/castes of India to whom he himself belonged and which he envisioned as his first, intended audience. From the very beginning of his interaction with the god-man of the village of Puttaparthi,⁸ Kasturi realized that the gospel of the *avatāra* of the age was not to be limited to India but was required to be spread to the entire world.

Sathyam Sivam Sundaram is a work of careful literary composition aimed at the glorification of its hero. Every action of the guru is represented as being pure and perfect, with none of the false turnings that characterize human existence. In fact, Kasturi’s work is the mirror image of a hagiography in its being the record of the public life of Sathya Sai Baba—the fullest incarnation of the divine (*pūrṇāvatāra*) in this degenerate Kali age (*yuga*)—in his interaction with ordinary men, not the life account of a human being who gradually achieved saintliness and a transcendent state.⁹ In Sanskrit literature, its prototype is represented by the tenth book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (ninth or early tenth century CE), which tells the story of the various deeds of the *avatāra* Kṛṣṇa.¹⁰ A paradigmatic example of a divine *Carita* is the *Rāmcaritmānas*, or “The Lake of the Deeds of Rām,” written in Avadhi by Tulsīdās (1532–1623), undoubtedly the most popular scripture in the Hindi-speaking region of North India.

As all *Caritas*, Kasturi’s opus is to be understood as an exercise in cognitive governance: its presentation of the god-man’s exemplary life calls for the implementation of the set-up objectives, at an individual level as well as at a social level. The values and virtues embodied by Sathya Sai Baba¹¹—one of whose favorite sayings was “My life is my message”—

require imitation, and Kasturi was fully conscious of the practical, disciplinarian function of his work, the exaltation of the guru-god and his teachings serving the purpose of orienting the minds and lifestyle of his readers, so as to inspire them to become part of the “Sai family” and eventually become members of the Sathya Sai Organization.

One must also bear in mind that any hagiography stands in an inevitable competition with the hagiographies written on other god-men, and indeed Kasturi had to put all his literary and theological talents to use in order to convince his audience that Sathya Sai Baba was above and beyond all other gurus and Swamis of his times. As Françoise Mallison observes: “Hagiographies are weapons for earning followers, securing an idol, defending a doctrinal point, etc.”¹²

There are various factors that need to be taken into consideration in the production of any hagiography. In particular, three of these are of utmost significance: the person or institution, if any, that commissioned the work; the hagiographer’s cultural background and his characteristics as a writer; the destination of the work, namely, its target audience. In the case of *Sathyam Sivam Sundaram*, it will be seen how it was the young god-man himself who asked Kasturi to write his *Carita* on their very first meeting. Kasturi was stunned at hearing the guru’s words, since he had never dreamt of writing his life and such an assignment was to worry him a lot over the years of its preparation. Thus, it was not any other individual or institution that took the initiative of commissioning the work nor was it Kasturi’s plan: it was the guru who selected him as his chosen instrument, also giving instruction on how he should proceed in his research and referring him to the people he should interview so as to acquire firsthand information. He told him: “I shall tell you whom to consult for details—parents, brothers, kinsmen, neighbors, teachers, etc. I shall also help.”¹³

The fact of Kasturi being a contemporary of Sathya Sai Baba who daily interacted with him is also noteworthy given that the hagiographer is frequently someone who appears on the scene at a later date and who may have never known the saint in person. A hagiographer’s aim is to present the deeds of the god-man either according to the wishes and ideological concerns of the individual or institution who commissioned the work to him/her or according to the agenda and vested interests of the community/caste to which he/she belongs. Thus, what needs to be understood is the underlying politics of any religious biography.¹⁴ Furthermore the

hagiographer, who is often an anonymous figure, does not usually stand in isolation but is part of a literary group and of a hagiographical tradition, since he/she produces his/her opus by taking into account the discourses of the hagiographers that preceded him/her, imitating them in terms of style and literary conventions.¹⁵ Of course, there can be disagreements among hagiographers and the same saint can be viewed differently by different writers, given the competing visions of the communities/castes to which they belong, be they contemporaries or belonging to different times and contexts.¹⁶

Kasturi was not the heir of any particular hagiographical tradition and wrote his opus following his own ideas and narrative style, though always under the guru's supervision, he being in the company of Sathya Sai Baba almost every day starting in 1948. If he was no doubt affected by the guru's will (*samkalpa*) and mentality, still it should be stressed that the god-man and the hagiographer both shared the same religiosity, to such an extent that they successfully complemented each other by never ever having any kind of theological disagreement.

While the leading force behind the construction of a saint's renown is either a hagiographer or a group of hagiographers, in Sathya Sai Baba's case Kasturi acted more as a collaborator with the guru, given that the latter exercised full control over the presentation and dissemination of his own charisma, also deciding when it would be the right moment to publish Kasturi's opus. For instance, whereas Robin Rinehart has pointed out the decisive role of hagiographers in the making of Swami Ram Tirtha (1873–1906) as a modern holy man—"and so . . . the man who resisted all attempts to found an institution in his name, the man who fled to a lonely mountain cave to escape the adulation of his admirers, sending away even his closest disciples, is now an avatar and supersaint whose memory lives on in ways he could not possibly have imagined"¹⁷—Kasturi's role was in fact subsidiary to that of his master. Here we witness a reversal of the more common situation, since it was Sathya Sai Baba who selected and "moulded" the hagiographer, and the hagiographer, in turn, acted as his assistant in the enterprise of spreading his fame as the ultimate godhead.

Having said this, Kasturi's crucial function as disseminator of his guru's renown through *Sathyam Sivam Sundaram* and through all his remarkable talents cannot be underestimated. It is my contention that his contribution was outstanding, particularly in his role as a creative theologian in his own right. Indeed, he was second only to the guru's own

promotion of himself, which he fostered primarily through the “visiting cards” of his innumerable, purported miracles. Kasturi’s presentation of Sathya Sai Baba’s life and teachings has been an inspirational model for all the numerous books that have been published on the guru of Puttaparthi. Perhaps inevitably, most authors—devotees as well as non-devotees—have followed in Kasturi’s steps.¹⁸ This is precisely what happens in the case of the most successful *Caritas*, which become *exempla* for all future hagiographers/biographers to follow.

Given his cultural background, Kasturi was especially suited for the task of writing Sathya Sai Baba’s biography. Professionally, he was both a university professor of history as well as a litterateur and a poet. He was familiar with the practice of historical research, of collecting and organizing data, and at the same time he was a fine writer with noticeable rhetorical skills. Religiously, he had been a follower of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda since his early days and had imbibed the Vivekanandian neo-Hindu outlook. Thus, he asserted universalism while advocating the supremacy of Advaita Vedānta: he emphasized devotionism (*bhakti*) and the practice of service (*sevā*) to one’s fellow men and the society at large, a form of *karmayoga* understood as a “practical Vedānta,” that is to say, a socially applied nondualism. These characteristics, coupled with his fluency in English, made him an ideal promoter of Sathya Sai Baba’s image among the Indian bourgeoisie as well as among Westerners. The young guru immediately recognized the professor’s qualities, and this is the reason why he decided to appoint him as his future biographer as early as July 1948.

Vivekananda’s spirituality was a key factor, which influenced Kasturi both consciously as well as unconsciously. In those days his neo-Hindu mentality was shared by the majority of the urban, English-speaking, politically moderate middle and upper classes/castes, which Kasturi viewed as the chief audience of his *Sathyam Sivam Sundaram*. He knew what these people were looking for and what they needed: the outlining of a loving, charismatic guru endowed with the fullness of an *avatāra*’s powers in whom they could recognize their compassionate father and lord, be it Viṣṇu, Śiva, or the Goddess; not a revolutionary or a fundamentalist, but a moderate capable of accommodating within his all-encompassing persona both traditionalism and modernity, who would be suited for the modern times while being rooted in his own village of Puttaparthi and the traditions of rural Hinduism; a god-man who would deliver a Vedānta teaching that all might be able to understand and practice: a lay spirituality

based on the love of god and the brotherhood of man, on service rather than on renunciation (*samnyāsa*) and the performance of esoteric rituals. And all this, undeniably, was what Kasturi had ultimately found at the feet of Sathya Sai Baba.

In his presentation of his lord's life he could not but document on almost every page what the guru's most striking characteristic was that attracted the masses toward him: that of being a miracle worker who would perform all sorts of "materializations" and wonders.¹⁹ Thus, Kasturi presents the god-man's purported powers in detail, especially the ones he judges to be crucial for the unfolding of his narrative, although he cautions his readers by repeatedly pointing out that the miraculous should not be given too much weight, it being negligible in the *avatāra*'s mission of restoring *dharmā*. To counter the criticisms of those who denounced such display of powers as nothing but magical tricks and the objections of those who viewed them as an inappropriate exhibition of *siddhis* (albeit conceding their genuineness), Kasturi emphasizes the authenticity of the guru's faculties by insisting that they were not acquired through any yogic practice or Tantric *sādhana*, being rather an inborn characteristic of his full *avatārahood*, a charisma he was endowed with from birth.²⁰

Along with the defense of the guru's powers, another major task of Kasturi's hagiography is to convince his audience that the god-man of Puttaparthi is none other than Sai Baba, the popular *faqīr* from the village of Shirdi in Maharashtra who had "left the body" on October 15, 1918, and of whom Ratnākaram Sathyanārāyaṇa Rāju alias Sathya Sai Baba, officially born on November 23, 1926, claimed to be the reincarnation. The latter's appropriation of Sai Baba's icon, paradigm of an integrative spirituality, was a most powerful way to legitimate himself throughout India. By doing so he was able to elude his humble origins and the absence of any authoritative *guruparamparā*, positing himself at an altogether higher level, creatively combining his *avatāraness* with his Sai Babaness.

Despite all of Sathya Sai Baba's and Kasturi's efforts, along the years only a minority of Shirdi Sai Baba devotees came to acknowledge the god-man of Andhra Pradesh as being the same as their lord. But this in no way diminished the attractiveness of the guru of Puttaparthi, since his presentation from his early years as Sai Baba and *stricto sensu* a full (*pūrṇa*) *avatāra* proved extremely successful. Moreover, his claim that the Sai Baba *avatāra* will be characterized by a triple incarnation, so that some years after his death he will reappear as Prema Sai Baba—upholding the

religion of universal love and bringing his mission to completion—proves his ability to bypass the thorny issue of succession by assuring that he himself will come back in another body to fulfill his task: a *longue durée* spanning more than two centuries, having begun with Shirdi Sai Baba's birth sometime around the midpoint of the nineteenth century.

It should be noted that like Sathya Sai Baba even Shirdi Sai Baba had given similar methodological advice on how to write his *Carita* to his hagiographer Govind Raghunath Dabholkar, alias Hemadpant (1859–1929),²¹ also saying that he would be his chosen instrument.²² Here, however, it was Dabholkar who took the initiative and asked him for the permission and blessings to write his biography in Marāṭhī. The outcome was the *Śrī Sāi Saccarita*, a work subdivided into fifty-three chapters and comprising 9,308 verses, the veritable “Bible” for all Shirdi Sai Baba's devotees. The holy man is reported to have said: “Make a collection of all the authentic stories, experiences, conversations and talks, etc. It is better to keep a record. He [Dabholkar] has my full support. He is but the instrument; I myself will write my own story.”²³ Significantly, Kasturi liked to compare himself to Dabholkar viewing himself as nothing but an instrument in the guru's hands. He must certainly have read the *Śrī Sāi Saccarita* or an abridged version of it in English, Telugu, or Kannada translation, deriving inspiration from it.

Although both the hagiographers' works are replete with the miracles and astounding feats (*līlās*) performed by their respective heroes, stylistically they are very different, reflecting their own times and intended audiences. Dabholkar's versified Marāṭhī opus is said to follow the traditional style of the renowned *Eknāthī Bhāgavata* of the Maharashtrian poet-saint Eknāth (1533–1599),²⁴ narrating the saint's wondrous deeds with little care for chronological accuracy. The literary model of the *Śrī Sāi Saccarita* is believed to be the *Gurucaritra*, the founding text of the *Dattasampradāya* (lit. “the tradition of the Datta/Dattātreya [followers]”) composed around the middle of the sixteenth century by Sarasvatī Gaṅgādhara, which tells the deeds of the Brahmin gurus Śrīpād Śrīvallabh (c. 1323–1353) and Nṛsiṃha Sarasvatī (c. 1378–1458) venerated as the first “historical” *avatāras* of the god Dattātreya. On the other hand, Kasturi's is a modern work in plain English prose which takes pains to articulate a careful chronological order of the god-man's life along the lines of a neo-Hindu discourse. Whereas the *Śrī Sāi Saccarita* was intended for a local, Maharashtrian audience, and consciously aimed at being identified as part and parcel of its time-honored

hagiographic tradition, *Sathyam Sivam Sundaram* is an autonomous text with no apparent link to any local tradition of hagiographical writing, its aim being that of reaching out to the middle and upper classes/castes of India and to the entire world.

When Kasturi first reached Puttaparthi there already existed a short Telugu poem presenting Sathya Sai Baba as the reincarnation of Shirdi Sai Baba and offering information on Shirdi Sai Baba's birth and early years in a distinct Purāṇic fashion: the *Sri Sayeeshuni Charitra*, published in Dharmavaram in 1944 by V. C. Kondappa, who had been a school teacher of the young guru at the Bukkapatnam Higher Elementary School.²⁵ In his Preface, Kondappa says that it was Sathya Sai Baba himself who one night called him and revealed "Sai's story" to him.²⁶ It is reported that the young guru took keen interest in the preparation of the text and that, after it was released, asked one M. L. Leela to read it in his presence at the nearby Chitravathi riverbed, on which occasion he would have granted a vision of himself as Shirdi Sai Baba.²⁷ This was the first work ever composed on him, and naturally Kasturi took careful notice of its contents in the preparation of his "official biography," though he consciously departed from its traditional style of hagiographical writing. The *Sri Sayeeshuni Charitra* also took the form of a *śataka*, a devotional composition in a hundred verses known as the *Sri Sai Sathakamu*, which is frequently memorized and chanted by *bhaktas*.²⁸

If a "divine" *Carita* bears the characteristics of its own genre and does not need to justify the documentary sources upon which it may—or may not—depend given that ultimately its value lies in its "theological truth" and intrinsic literary quality, in the case of *Sathyam Sivam Sundaram* this is only partially true, given that Kasturi repeatedly underlines the factual, historical foundation upon which his opus is grounded, it being a biography based upon many years of dedicated research and the interviewing of dozens of witnesses. His aim is to present the public life of Sathya Sai Baba as accurately as possible, chronologically documenting the breaking in of the metahistorical dimension of the guru-god within the world. In other words, his objective is to offer a vivid, eyewitness report of the presence of the divine, literally accounting for the historical "descent" (*avatāra*) of a god into the world of men.

Even the vast repertoire of divine personalities and astounding deeds to which Sathya Sai Baba's life is assimilated—such as Kṛṣṇa and his many *līlās*, as told in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*—are never thought of as purely

mythological but as thoroughly historical, as Sathya Sai Baba's own prodigies are believed to be. Thus, the wondrous *līlās* of the *avatāra* of this Kali age stand out as an implicit confirmation of the historical reality of Kṛṣṇa's *līlās* in the preceding Dvāpara age. And this notwithstanding their incredibility: in fact, it was the guru himself who in the early days told Kasturi to wait before publishing his biography on the grounds that the time was not yet ripe and that people would judge it a fairy-tale!

Kasturi's opus strikes the reader as a thoroughly modern *Carita*, concerned with facts and chronology while at the same time accounting for Sathya Sai Baba's deeds in terms of both a historical and a transhistorical reality. If, as Richard Barz observes, all of the episodes of the classic *Buddhacarita* ("The Deeds of the Buddha") by the great poet Aśvaghōṣa (first century CE, one of the first hagiographical works in Indian literature) are meant to instill Buddhist doctrine and "the manner and order in which the events actually occurred or the question of whether they happened at all are not issues of importance"²⁹—which is precisely what makes of Aśvaghōṣa "a typical hagiographer"³⁰—Kasturi's *Carita* is remarkably different, being based on the available documentation of Sathya Sai Baba's public life and teachings following a chronological sequence. The relationship of a hagiographer to historiography, which is generally thin and highly problematic,³¹ in our case is incontrovertibly strengthened by the fact that the hagiographer was a university professor of history, a brilliant intellectual who cultivated a critical mind and was professionally accustomed to verifying his sources by sifting through the evidence.

By the same token, true to the *Carita* genre Kasturi's opus was never intended as a scholarly presentation—he does not furnish us with a bibliography or details on the sources of his narrative—but as a devotional account inextricably mixing together the chronicling of the guru's deeds with the vast reservoirs of Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism treasured in the Epics and in the *Purāṇas*, wishing to reveal their hidden links so as to convince his audience that the guru's advent is to be understood as the fulfillment of the truths enshrined in those ancient texts. Ultimately, Kasturi aims at illuminating the god-man's biographical data through his own theological understanding of the import of his incarnation. *Sathyam Sivam Sundaram* is therefore neither a "scientific" treatise nor by any means a decontextualized, purely mythical account. It endeavors to demonstrate the purpose of god's descent on earth by chronicling his advent and the unfolding of the various phases of his biography or, better said, stages in his avatāric

career. These stages are thought to have a decisive impact on the world's future and humanity's destiny, given their eschatological relevance within the scheme of the threefold Sai Baba incarnation.

As with all hagiographies, *Sathyam Sivam Sundaram* is in itself a precious source of information on the social and religious concerns of the author who wrote it and of the people who read it. It is revelatory of the historical context in which it was conceived and produced, being a testimony of its own times. As in a game of mirrors, Kasturi's opus, notwithstanding the guru's supervision, reflects none other than Kasturi himself given that he inevitably displays his own Sathya Sai Baba, which is in all respects similar to him. The hagiographer highlights the expectations and needs of the community to which he himself belongs and to which his work is addressed. As Jean-Yves Tilliette has noted: "The society, to use a formula which has by now become classic, produces the saints it needs."³²

Thus, *Sathyam Sivam Sundaram* is replete with the spirit of tolerance and hierarchical inclusivism, as per Swami Vivekananda's lesson, positing nondual Vedānta, that is, its contemporary incarnation as Sathya Sai Baba, as the highest of the high. Its stress on the service of man and education in human values, its call to reform the school system and the entire society on the basis of *satya* (truth), *dharma* (righteousness), *śānti* (peace), *preman* (love), and *ahimsā* (nonviolence), while being motivated by religious concerns—the guru's and Kasturi's commitment toward the implementation of a "practical Vedānta"—was also the expression of a nationalistic pride, of a patriotic élan, which galvanized the youth and large sectors of Indian society in the postindependence period, especially the urban, educated middle and upper classes/castes, in an effort to contribute to the resurgence of "Mother India" as a nation. Even Kasturi's choice of writing *Sathyam Sivam Sundaram* in English was intended as a way to prove to his countrymen the worldwide significance of his hero: he enthusiastically portrays Sathya Sai Baba as India's gift to the world so as to make Hindus proud of their immemorial culture. His narrative is wholly consistent with the rhetoric of India's religious superiority from the time of the *Vedas*, Hinduism being extolled as the "Mother" of all world religions and Advaita Vedānta as personified in Sathya Sai Baba being magnified as the acme of truth and the ultimate revelation to mankind, thus, as the fulfillment of all religions.

For both the hagiographer and his primary audience, Sathya Sai Baba was the guru they had been waiting for, even without their being

aware of it, since he filled their nostalgia for a pure, idyllic past represented by village Hinduism. It functioned as a modern surrogate, which soothed their hearts and minds, meaning their often traumatic experience of uprootedness, many of them having been forced to leave their native locales in order to seek fortune in urban contexts. Such a rupture with their past inevitably determined a sense of loss, which devotion to the guru of Puttaparthi and belonging to the “new family” of his devotees—“the company of the good,” *satsaṅga*—promised to alleviate and compensate, reestablishing a connection with their often only imagined cultural roots.

Since 1961, *Sathyam Sivam Sundaram* has not only been silently read or proclaimed aloud by generations of *bhaktas* for devotional purposes—what is known as the individual or collective practice of *pothīpārāyaṇa*—but it has functioned as an object of veneration, being *the* authoritative repository of Sathya Sai Baba’s life. From its very appearance and through its many editions Kasturi’s opus has been recognized as the “Bible” by all of the guru’s *bhaktas*, on analogy with Dabholkar’s *Śrī Sāi Saccarita*.

A useful survey, which however exceeds the limits of the present monograph, would be to evaluate the history of *Sathyam Sivam Sundaram*’s reception, the different interpretations and emphases to which in the course of the past half-century it has been subject to in culturally specific contexts, both in India and in the West. Though hagiographies are never scrutinized as if they were *sūtras*, that is, works that require detailed explanatory commentaries (*bhāṣya*), a tentative history of both its “exegesis” and performative usage could tell us a lot about the life the text has enjoyed and continues to enjoy among the communities of the guru’s devotees.³³

Finally, it must be underlined how Kasturi was the guru’s righthand man for more than thirty years, being involved in a variety of strategic roles: as his personal secretary, as editor and English translator of the god-man’s public talks and writings, as editor of the monthly newsletter *Sanathana Sarathi*, as public speaker to both Indian and overseas devotees, and as the author of many other books on Sathya Sai Baba. He also accompanied the guru in most of his travels throughout India as well as in East Africa in 1968 and played a pivotal role in the rise and development of the Sathya Sai Organization.

All in all, Kasturi was definitely the most influential figure within the ashram of Prasanthi Nilayam, second only to his Swami. This is noteworthy since it proves the trust and esteem in which he was held by Sathya Sai

Baba: he knew he could always count on Kasturi and Kasturi, in turn, was totally devoted to him and to the promotion of his avatâric mission. Indeed, there was such a profound intimacy and complicity between the two that for Kasturi it was hard to bear the physical separation from his beloved, even for just a few days.

Kasturi's life shows us how the weight of being an "official biographer" may in fact exceed his function as writer of a *Carita*. Being Sathya Sai Baba's lieutenant, all devotees revered him as a unique mediator and often asked him to intercede with the guru on their behalf. If there was someone who could claim to be close to the god-man and to be able to understand him this was Kasturi, given that he alone had the privilege of spending several hours with him every day. This book is intended as a case study of the various functions a hagiographer may come to perform within a religious organization and of his capacity to influence its direction and overall goals, playing the role of a protagonist in its expansion. To be sure, an in-depth investigation of Kasturi's life and works is a mandatory task in order to try to come to terms with his unpredictable, elusive master.

But it is now time to immerse ourselves into Narayan Kasturi's biography, starting from his very birth and first life, before he knew anything about Sathya Sai Baba, so as to reconstruct his social and cultural roots and learn about his personality and notable achievements.