



An Interview with Dr. Safaya **Director of Sri Sathya Sai Institute for Higher Medical Sciences**

Om Sri Sai Ram

You are listening to The Radio Sai Global Harmony. Radio Sai brings to you everyday the teachings and the universal message of Love of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

Radio Sai now brings you an interview with Dr. Safaya, Director of Sri Sathya Sai Institute for Higher Medical Sciences, Prashanthigram campus and the Whitefield campus. The interviewer is Prof. G.Venkataraman, former Vice-Chancellor of Sri Sathya Sai Institute Of Higher Learning.

Venkataraman: Sairam.

Safaya: Sairam.

V: Dr. Safaya, welcome to the studios of Radio Sai. Of course we all know you very well. So, may be there is no real introduction necessary. But one thing we that we do not know, most people do not know, I for example do not know, what brought you to Swami. People have different experiences that bring them to Swami. What brought you to Swami?

S: What brought me to Swami was purely because of my sojourn in the spiritual aspect of life and I wanted to get an answer to two straight questions, Is there God and divinity and if there is, how to find it?, because if the answers are 'yes' in both, then the rest of the working is immaterial or the context changes completely.

V: So these questions were with you always?

S: Always, since my childhood, I guess, and I tried to meet large number of people, saints, spiritual people, purely religious people, and not only Hindus, but of all religions, and the only thing that clicked with me was Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. So, I read a book, Howard Murphet's book, 'Sai Baba, The Man of Miracles'. This book was in Hindi, and I don't know Hindi that well, so I had read it like a schoolboy.

V: You were not aware that the book was published in English?

S: I was not at that time. It was given by a friend to me and he said, 'you give it to your wife and she'll read it out for you and you can finish it in a week or so and return it. Then when I started reading it, it was in the morning at breakfast time, and I forgot completely, as to where I was, what I was reading and my chores. I had to go to the hospital and I was teaching those days. It was so gripping and it was so interesting and not only that, I fell in love with Swami as I went on reading the book.

V: So your time had come?

S: My time had come and it just like a key and a lock, it opened up just like that and by the time I finished the book, I knew that I had found the person for whom I was waiting.

V: So you wanted to see Him?

S: I wanted to see Him.

V: And you came here?

S: So, I started coming to bhajans and all that and then I started coming here, and here, mind you, 1984, I asked told Bhagawan, 'there is a General hospital here, why don't I work here for these few days, I have got enough time in between darshan'. Swami said, 'No, No, time will come and I'll tell you what to do'.

V: 1984?

S: 84.

V: Seven years before?

<http://www.sathyasai.or.jp/>

© 2005 Sathya Sai Organization Japan © 2005 Sathya Sai Publications © 2002 Radio Sai Global Harmony



An Interview with Dr. Safaya **Director of Sri Sathya Sai Institute for Higher Medical Sciences**

S: Yes, and He told me, ‘I will call a meeting of all the doctors of the world and we’ll decide what is to be done. Wait for that time.’

V: Oh! Fantastic. What did you think of it when this was told to you?

S: It was my first interview, and I just got a little confused, I must say. A little overfilled. I was brimming with joy, love and all sorts of feelings and I didn’t understand. Later on I was concentrating on this sentence, ‘what is my role and what He has for me and when will this meeting of doctors take place’? I didn’t have any concept that a hospital is going to come up.

V: Who had? Nobody had.

S: Nobody. So, then suddenly, one day when I was sitting in a hospital in Delhi, I got telephone call, that, ‘you must come at once to Whitefield’.

V: Which year was that?

S: That was in 1990. Early 1990, and (I was told) ‘Bhagwan has formed an international committee for establishment of Superspeciality hospital at Prashanthi Nilayam and you are the chairman of that committee’. I was completely bowled over.

V: You had forgotten, but He remembered.

S: He remembered. So, I took the next plane and landed myself in Whitefield. Swami was in Whitefield. And there was Mr. Tigret and Joga Rao, who met me at the airport, and I was driven straight to the ashram and the thing started. And there I met already present large number of doctors, Indian as well as overseas doctors, many of whose names I was familiar with but hadn’t met before. That was the international committee.

V: So in 1991 you finally made the shift to this place, when this hospital was built. So, how was it coming from a big hospital in a big city to what was then still a village and to work in a very different kind of hospital?

S: Yes, it was a great challenge in a way. To establish a hospital at a place, which is 160 kilometers away from the main city, where everything is available and here nothing is available. So, you had to have a complete teamwork of people drawing up the lists and not missing anything, even a needle. And so, literally speaking it took us some time to get adjusted in establishing a hospital in rural setting. Even now the hospital’s next-door neighbor is a thatched hut. Basic amenities not being available for the people and for your own team. I remember people who were engaged in planning, and advising the engineers, we were all having tea along with the laborers in a L&T canteen. So, that was the state of affairs. And gradually things started taking shape and my people, workers and colleagues, started getting used to the surroundings and the idea. But one thing was, there was a tremendous amount of dedication from everybody, not only from those who were associated with the hospital, who realized what a hospital is, but even with the basic L&T worker who was carrying a crow-bar, or pieces of cement, or bricks – the construction laborers. All that went into it. The culture of the hospital started, I think, the day the stone was laid down.

V: Needless to say you got your inspiration from Swami, because otherwise it would have been very frustrating.

S: Yes, not only I, but also everybody.

V: Did He come often?

S: He used to come very often – sometimes twice a day.

V: And He is so meticulous. He’ll go all round.

S: All round instructing and encouraging and inspiring. Because He was there, we were forced to show the next day morning some improvement, some achievement.



An Interview with Dr. Safaya Director of Sri Sathya Sai Institute for Higher Medical Sciences

V: But you came through it all and you have sailed through 10 years. So, how does it look now when you look back? How does it appear?

S: It is almost a miracle. Prof. Venkatraman, the hospital was supposed to be inaugurated on the 22nd (November 1991) and two days before, I gave up, and I fell down on my bed and at about 12 midnight, I said 'I cannot go any further, because the hospital will not be ready to be inaugurated. And for operations to be done, the conditions are not sterile. Scientifically, we are not ready. I have failed my Master', to my wife and I started weeping in my bed, which I have never done before in the presence of my wife. She got alarmed and she encouraged me, 'if you believe that Swami is a God, he'll do something, don't worry. The divine Sankalpa has to be completed and it shall get completed', and lo and behold, it did get completed. And so on 22nd when the inauguration was to be held, right at 9 am, He had predicted that the knife shall touch the skin, and that is what exactly happened.

V: In a small way I went through this experience. We had to start this radio service on 23rd November this year, and we got very little notice, and I never thought it was going to happen. But it did happen; because He willed it and I couldn't believe that it had happened.

S: Divine Sankalpa.

V: It is just marvelous being swept along by that magic.

S: And also it is the physical impact of Swami.

V: Yes, yes that makes it happen.

S: And the image that a person has about Swami, that does it and beyond that I think there is something supernatural and divine.

V: Yes, it seems difficult to solve, and then somehow it all happens.

S: I'll tell you, government of India was not ready to relieve me. And there are documents to prove it. My ultimate relief order from the president of the institute says, 'I reluctantly accept the resignation of Dr. Safaya'. The word 'reluctantly' was significant. The president of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences is the Union Health Minister. In spite of all the pressures on him, from the president and prime minister of India, he was not ready to relieve me. Ultimately, I went to Bhagawan on my last day and my director had told me that I would not be able to get any further leaves and that I would not be able to leave now and that I have to stay in Delhi. So, I told Bhagawan that all else has failed and that my personal efforts have come to an end. I told Him, 'now if you want me here Bhagawan, you have to intervene at the divine level'. Bhagawan smiled and said 'do not worry, you will be relieved on 1st of February'. On 31st January at 6:00pm I was giving farewell to a person who was retiring that same day, and he was my deputy. Eventually, the health minister asked me if I was sure I wanted to go, and I replied, 'yes, this is my Guru's adesh (command), whatever you say is correct in its own way, but because of Guru and shishya parampada, I have to get his command fulfilled. Therefore you have to let me go'. He reluctantly picked up his pen and put these very words, 'I reluctantly accept Dr. Safaya's request. So, this happened at 7:00pm, and I told the health minister to call the director of the institute and ask him not to relieve this gentleman, my deputy, because he has to take over my job, and hence relieve me. At 8:00pm this gentleman, Dr. Varma got the news from the director that he has been given a 1-year extension, which he gladly accepted. The next morning I went and handed over my resignation. This is the point that I wanted to make in the entire story, which the divine sankalpa takes care of it, when all else has failed.

V: This is a wonderful story. I am glad we got it out of you and now it is there for posterity. Now getting down to some mundane things, can you tell us about the kind of treatment that is being given in the Puttaparthi hospital? It is called a Superspecialty hospital, what are the specialties that are being catered to?

S: Bhagawan had made the announcement that he shall make this hospital and it shall deal with the specialties of the heart, brain, kidney, lungs and cancer – 5 things. Out of these He started with the heart at Puttaparthi. Then came the kidney, followed by the transplant programs of kidney. Then came the department of eye – ophthalmology. So we right now practice the diagnosis and treatment of the diseases of the heart, kidney and the eye, and all the treatments are done using high technology in these superspecialties. So, though the Puttaparthi hospital is now 10 years old, it still is the best all over the country in these specialties.

<http://www.sathyasai.or.jp/>

© 2005 Sathya Sai Organization Japan © 2005 Sathya Sai Publications © 2002 Radio Sai Global Harmony



An Interview with Dr. Safaya **Director of Sri Sathya Sai Institute for Higher Medical Sciences**

V: And Puttaparthi is still relatively a remote place. You said that your next door neighbor is a thatched hut, even today. That brings me to the next question, what kind of patients come here and from where do they come?

S: There are all types – middle class, lower middle class and the poor. Most of them are villagers.

V: How do they hear about this hospital?

S: One of the ways is through the Sathya Sai Organization that reaches out to the villagers in various parts of the country. Then the people are so poor that even after knowing about the hospital, they don't have the money, will or determination to travel in order to get their child or patient treated. So, if all these things are fulfilled, they land up over here. That is reflected in the kind of population that you see early in the morning in front of the gate.

V: Can you recall any one particular case of one poor person who was really desperate and who got treatment in this hospital?

S: In fact I remember the very first case. We had just opened the Cath lab two days before the operations were done and we opened the OPD two days before that. The patient examination had started 4 days before the inauguration.

V: How many patients had come at that time?

S: At that time we had about 2 dozen patients. We had this one gentleman from Ananthpur. I think his name was Rajashekar Reddy.

V: How old was he?

S: I think he was 15 years old – a young boy. His father was a petty shop keeper. He had a heart problem – he had a hole in the heart that needed major surgery. He was the only child and so the only hope of the family. The parents were very much depressed and poor indeed. We had to give the father some kind of encouragement in the way of food and money to make him stay for all these days till the boy could actually be operated upon. This is usually the story of most of the patients. All the four operations that were performed that day were successful and had no complications. There was no mortality or morbidity in all the operations that were done that month.

V: I remember on the 23rd, the day following the hospital opening, Swami announcing in the Hill View stadium, that all operations were very successful.

S: Bhagawan came one day earlier, (He used to come twice a day), he came in the evening, and materialized vibhuti and gave it to all the proposed patients. You have to bear in mind that these patients all come from poor families and are not in healthy conditions. Though the ability of their bodies to repair damaged tissue is quite low, they still did very well after the operations.

V: As Dr. Bhatt often says, the surgeon cuts and God heals. By the way, have you seen this first patient of your subsequently?

S: Yes.

V: When was that?

S: That was on this Birthday – 10th anniversary. He has heard that there was the 10th anniversary and he came from Ananthpur.

V: How does he look now?

S: He looks like a tall gentleman, well-built and healthy. I also had the good luck of Bhagawan coming to the hospital on that day and we presented the patient to Swami.

V: What did Swami say?

<http://www.sathyasai.or.jp/>

© 2005 Sathya Sai Organization Japan © 2005 Sathya Sai Publications © 2002 Radio Sai Global Harmony



An Interview with Dr. Safaya **Director of Sri Sathya Sai Institute for Higher Medical Sciences**

S: Swami was very happy to see him. He materialized vibhuti and gave it to him, and blessed him.

V: Were these people devotees before?

S: No. They knew about Bhagawan. But they were not devotees in the sense that they were coming to Prashanthi Nilayam. They were just trying to make the two ends meet.

V: So, really speaking the doors are open to anybody.

S: Yes, to anybody, irrespective of caste, creed, color, country and religion.

V: Have you had any patients from far off places?

S: Oh. Yes. We have had patients from Sikkim, Nepal, Bhutan and even Malaysia.

V: That is really far off places.

S: Yes, in fact in our computerized system, we give these people who are coming from so far a few extra points. We have also had patients from Sri Lanka and even patients for consultation from Pakistan.

V: Now I want to ask you something else – you know we have some of Swami's old students that are working in this hospital, and even the one in Bangalore. How do you feel about this?

S: I feel very proud of these people as my employees. They are a highly motivated group. Bhagawan, by establishing this hospital has not only added to the surgeries in the human population that is suffering from heart disease, but also created an experiment for mankind to look into and learn from it. One of the experiment is the implementation of a highly motivated group of young men into the technical field for obtaining results. These people are not only good in their own subjects from the University, but they have picked up medical sciences and have the right understanding of it. Right now, the so-called Swami's students, work as guides to the younger medical staff.

V: Do you think this motivation springs basically from a sense of deep love for Swami?

S: It springs from love, respect and dedication. They have practically very few interests besides Swami in their life. So, they are not distracted. They have even forgotten to marry.

V: And they express their love for Swami by their dedication to work and giving love to the patients.

S: Yes. You'll find very few of them standing in the bhajans or in the verandah and doing an apparent show of dedication.

V: So, you would give them extra marks for motivation and dedication?

S: Yes. The other day, the top Philips team visited our cardiac catheterization labs. When they saw the lab, they were astonished. Now, running in its 11th year, this cath lab is still one of the best in the country.

V: Now, how does Swami guide and support you?

S: He is giving ideas all the time, and you have to be very attentive to Him. The way He talks to you and what He is talking to you, His gestures and His not talking to you are all part of his language. All these are lessons in administration, whether you are taking the right decisions or not.

V: So, you have to be in tune with Him really?

S: Yes, and you have to surrender yourself and when you are helpless, Bhagawan will have a solution for you. Whenever you go to Him with a problem, He says, 'I know'. I have perfect proof that He knows.

V: Allow me to narrate an experience of mine. When I became the Vice Chancellor, Swami asked me some question. And I was naïve and said "Swami, you know everything". Swami said, 'I know, and I know whether you know or not, but I want you to know whether you know or not'.

S: Yes, and you have to go through the notions, and you have to tell Him about any trends that you observe. You have to obtain correcting solutions from Him.

<http://www.sathyasai.or.jp/>

© 2005 Sathya Sai Organization Japan © 2005 Sathya Sai Publications © 2002 Radio Sai Global Harmony



An Interview with Dr. Safaya **Director of Sri Sathya Sai Institute for Higher Medical Sciences**

V: So he guides and also inspires.

S: Yes. Nobody has taught me as much as He has taught me. I have been administrating All India Institute of Medical Sciences for 18 years and we have 35 medical specialties there.

V: Why is that?

S: Here the God in this temple of healing, heals the patient. The patient is held at the highest regard. So whatever you do, think is for the benefit of the patient. Other hospitals also do the same, but may be it is motivated by money or personal ego. But, in this hospital there is none of those things involved.

V: So, at the end of the day you feel very happy, don't you?

S: Yes, we do feel.

V: Regarding money, one question that many people ask, is how does the hospital get money when it doesn't charge any?

S: There is a Sri Sathya Sai Medical Trust, to which people have donated money. The interest of that corpus fund keeps the hospital going. There are some donors also, who are ready to offer the equipment or money for particular equipment. It is Love that sustains the hospital.

V: So, basically, it is Love that sustains the hospital. It may come as money, equipment or service. You do have a lot of people that are serving there out of Love for Bhagawan.

S: Yes. That is another experiment which Swami has shown – community involvement. I have always thought of it ever since I became a medical student. But I have never seen it happen until I joined this hospital. There are 100 people (50 men and 50 women) that come here from different parts of the country at different times to do seva.

V: You are referring to the Seva Dals.

S: Yes, Seva Dals, working night and day for the patients, irrespective of what they are in their normal life.

V: I met a Professor from Indore who was pushing a wheel chair that was occupied by a poor villager, may be a cobbler.

S: Yes, right now if you go to the hospital, you'll see senior army officers, senior Professors and even doctors coming as seva dals and not sitting in the OPD and examining the patients, but pushing the trolleys, sweeping the floors and cleaning the plates and cups.

V: One last question that needs to be asked, especially now that many people are trying to build similar hospitals elsewhere – both governments and individuals. Do you think these two hospitals can be replicated?

S: If Swami does it, yes, you can replicate it. Basically Swami's intention of building these two hospitals is to create a model for everybody. The awareness that these hospitals, especially the one at Puttaparthi, has created all around the world, is that a very modern, fully equipped specialized hospital is functioning in India, a less developed country for the last 10 years.

V: So, Love and Dedication can work miracles. That is the main message of this hospital.

S: Yes.

V: And you don't have to think that it is not affordable etc.

S: No, the question of money is secondary – that is what I have come to realize now. If you have the will, and you have the Divine help it is possible.

V: Divine love will come if there is selfless love and dedication. So. Selfless love and dedication will make the hospital work.

<http://www.sathyasai.or.jp/>

© 2005 Sathya Sai Organization Japan © 2005 Sathya Sai Publications © 2002 Radio Sai Global Harmony



An Interview with Dr. Safaya **Director of Sri Sathya Sai Institute for Higher Medical Sciences**

S: This is a miracle of Love.

V: That is the real lesson.

S: It is a miracle of love in the process and also a miracle of love in the results.

V: And, I suppose the patients also learn what love is?

S: Yes, every patient goes home with a picture of Swami. I have to be rude sometimes, because they insist on pasting a picture of Swami on the wall besides their bed. They now have become devotees and now they know that someone cares. And Swami does take time off to visit the hospital and even the wards – at least one or two of them and bless the critically ill patients.

V: Thank you very much Dr. Safaya. It has been wonderful talking to you and I am sure our listeners have derived great joy and pleasure listening to you over the air, and you have told us so many things about the hospital that we did not know. I am one of them, I have been here for 10 years and have gone past the hospital so many a times, and also gone into the hospital, but I did not know many of the things that you have told today.

S: I feel very happy having spoken about this ‘Blossoming of Love’ experiment, the significance of which it realized completely yet in the medical annals, though the story of the Puttaparthi hospital has been published by the WHO in its bulletin that is supplied all over the world in 40 languages of the world. The world knows about it. A time is going to come when people are going to examine and learn lessons from this hospital.

V: I hope the day is not far off and both of us will have the pleasure of seeing it. Again, thank you very much. Sairam.

S: Sairam.