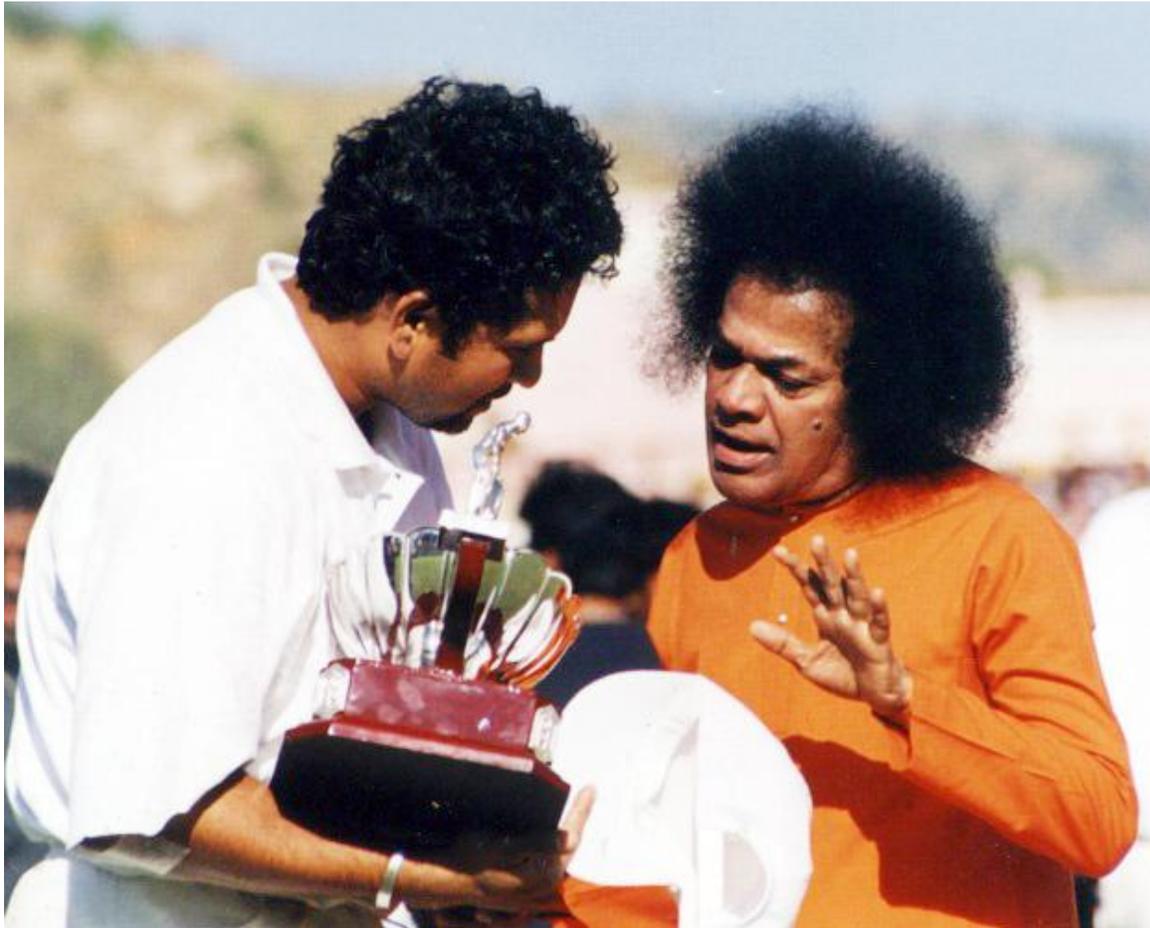


When Swami blessed Sachin

A.Prasanna Kumar



“Life is a game, play it, a simple yet complicated game, a complicated yet simple game,” famously said Sri Sathya Sai Baba in a message. The message itself is simple yet profound. When Sunil Gavaskar and Alvin Kallicharan, two ardent devotees of Sri Sathya Sai Baba, requested him to host an international cricket match, Swami was pleased to consider it favourably and he graciously chose the game of cricket to spread the message of unity and oneness. Things began to happen with rapid speed. EAS Prasanna came up with plans to

transform the Sathya Sai Hill View Stadium in Puttaparthi into a first class venue. On December 30, 1997 a One Day International Cricket match for Sri Sathya Sai Unity Cup was hosted between India XI led by Sachin Tendulkar and International XI led by 1996 World Cup Champion side's Captain Arjuna Ranatunga. The Unity Cup match, the first of its kind to be held anywhere, became a mega sporting event with the presence and participation of top cricketers, past and present, from almost all leading cricket playing countries. Thanks to ACA Secretary N.Venkata Rao I was also privileged to go there to witness the unique event. The previous evening Venkata Rao and I went to the ground where former India fast bowler G.Kasturirangan, along with Kallicharan, was supervising the ground preparations as per the advice of EAS Prasanna.

As the few of us were chatting away a limousine slid into the stadium. Lo behold! Bhgawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba came out of the car and behind him walked with folded hands Sunil Gavaskar, Arjuna Ranatunga and Sachin Tendulkar. Swami spent ten minutes with the organizers enquiring about details of the preparations, got back into the car along with the three star cricketers and drove away. Suddenly we noticed the car reversing and stopping at the nearby rest rooms. Swami stepped out of the car and went inside the building to check the upkeep of toilets as many of the visiting players were foreigners. We were stunned at the meticulous care Swami was taking of every aspect of arrangements and hospitality.

The next morning at 8.30 am Bhagavan drove in his open car to the stadium led by the students of Sri Sathya Sai Institute carrying flags of 86 countries. Shri I.K.Gujral, Prime Minister of India, hoisted the Sri Sathya Sai Unity Flag and Swami lit the Unity Torch. Among the guests

of honour were AP Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, Karnataka CM Shri J.H.Patel and Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Shri Lakshman Kadirgamar with Bhagavan, seated in the middle, watching the match throughout. During lunch break a cultural programme was presented by the students of Sri Sathya Sai Primary school. Sachin Tendulkar played brilliantly and led his team to a comfortable win over the International side.

At the presentation ceremony Bhagavan presented specially made silver cups to Clive Lloyd of West Indies, Hanif Mohammed of Pakistan and Sunil Gavaskar. It was a great moment for Sachin Tendulkar to receive the Unity Cup from Bhagavan's hands.

The next morning Swami addressed a gathering of devotees and cricket celebrities. He materialized a chain and presented it to an English cricketer and a glittering chain of emeralds to Pakistan's prolific run-getter Zaheer Abbas.

For Sachin Tendulkar who was then going through a rather lean patch in his otherwise brilliant career, the occasion was of utmost importance. Sunil Gavaskar appeared keen, right from the beginning, to see Sachin receiving Swami's blessings. So were Sachin's numerous fans present there. The more we expected Swami to turn his gaze on Sachin, the longer we had to wait as Bhagavan 'teased' us by deliberately moving away from Sachin everytime he came near him! Later Sachin was the proud recipient of the Unity Cup after batting brilliantly and leading India XI to victory over the International XI by a big margin. Still we wondered why Swami would not say a word to Sachin or present him with a chain. Then occurred what everyone had been longing for. As the function ended, Swami gently walked towards Sachin, put his hand on Sachin's shoulder and took him for a stroll on the ground. Bhagavan was seen saying something to Sachin

though no one could guess what the Divine Message was. The hand that soothed the shoulders of one of the greatest wielders of the willow and the words that inspired the twenty four year old legend to rise to the pinnacle of glory were perhaps not for Sachin Tendulkar only. They were for India and the rising younger generation. What followed is now history inscribed in letters of gold.

Sri Sathya Sai Baba's message conveyed through this match was ably summed up by Radio Sai E Magazine of October 15,2004.

" It is not only cricket, but in fact everything in this universe has a connection with spirituality. Five thousand years ago Krishna declared: "Any good act if lovingly offered to Me becomes sacred. This is the way to transform even ordinary work into Worship." Baba was reminding man of this timeless message by hinting that even a one-day international becomes spiritual, if it is played entirely for the pleasure of the Lord and offered to Him with Love." Sachin Tendulkar upheld the spirit of that message during his illustrious career. In his farewell message to the younger generation Sachin has again conveyed that message when he advised them to focus on the effort without bothering about the outcome. Sri Sathya Sai Baba chose and blessed Sachin Tendulkar on December 30,1997 to spread joy and peace through his genius. Sachin's domain of 22yards and dominance for twenty four years will now expand transcending the frontiers of space and time.



At last the most invaluable and the well deserved 'gift' --Bhagavan's blessing-- Sachin receiving at the end of historic event on December 30 1997.