

# SHIRDI SAI BABA MOVEMENT IN AUSTRALIA

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The spiritual Guru and redeemer of mankind, Sai Baba of Shirdi has been one of the greatest influencing Gurus of the Modern times. As among the most popular Indian saints with an ever growing following of devotees, Sai Baba inspires an unflinching faith on his devotees with his clearcut mission to provide not only a spiritual awakening, but also saving the mankind from suffering and ignorance. The devotees of Shirdi Sai Baba, no matter wherever they are, feel the presence and fragrance of Baba's love and gentle guiding hand always. One need not say much about the spread of Sai Movement either in India or Overseas. It is evident from the increasing number of temples of Baba that followers of Shirdi Sai Baba are building all over the World and it includes people from all nationalities and not just Indians.

## SAI BABA TEMPLES IN FOREIGN LAND

The credit for accomplishing Baba's work goes to Him alone for He knows how to get things done and by whom. Hemandpant mentions in *Satcharita* that "*In the Darbar of Shri Sai, many personalities appear and play their part*". So also various volunteers, devotees and patrons of the temple played their part in establishing Baba's temples in Australia. One must remember that the building of temples of Sai Baba is not the work of one individual or organisation but it is the collective work involving many a devotee. Building a temple in a foreign land is not a small task. It requires Baba's blessings and inspiration which is prime ingredient. Besides, it requires lot of planning, effort and monetary and human resources. Founders, Patrons or devotees are mere pawns in the hands of Baba. People come and go, but His work goes on uninterrupted and He chooses those whom He wants to use as His instruments to carry out His Mission and work.

## SHIRDI SAI BABA TEMPLES IN AUSTRALIA

### SYDNEY

Australia has six States and two Territories and out of this, Baba's temples exist in five States. The premier State to host Baba's place of worship is Sydney. In Sydney, a group of devotees joined together and conducted monthly bhajans at their houses, taking turns initially. As the numbers began to grow, by Baba's inspiration, a registered tax deductible charitable foundation was set up in 1999 called *Shirdi Sai Sansthan, Sydney*. Later, an old church was rented which currently houses the beautiful statue of Baba which was installed on Queen's Birthday long weekend in 2001 amidst the presence of thousands of devotees from Sydney and other States within Australia as well as Overseas. The statue was installed under the guidance of *Shri C.B. Satpathy*.

A number of selfless volunteers have been rendering yeoman service in maintaining this temple in best possible manner. This temple is located in *Strathfield* in a beautiful Chapel which is marked as a heritage building. A marvellous thing about this temple is that it is in huge enclosed complex wherein Baba's temple is housed in the old church on one side and a Muslim school or Madarasa on the other side symbolising Baba's teaching of unity of all religions and confirming *Sabka Malik EK*, meaning *God is one*. All four Arati's are conducted on significant festivals such as *Ram Navami*, *Guru Poornima*, *Dussera* and Baba's anniversary during Queen's birthday weekend. Dussera or Baba's *Punyathithi* is celebrated with great pomp and show with Palki procession taken around the temple with plays, dance and drama put on by the volunteers and performed by kids. The temple is open on weekdays from 6.00 P.M onwards and Dhoop arati and Shej arati are performed. On Saturday, the temple opens at 9.30 A.M with kakad Arati and then later from 6.00 P.M in the evening. Sunday is a big day where all the four arati's are performed and the evening is devoted to Sai bhajans from 5.30 P.M, followed by Dhoop Arati and Shej Arati. Shirdi Sai Sansthan, Sydney is very active in creating awareness about Baba among all the devotees in Australia. They regularly organise *bhajan sandhya*, cultural events to spread the divine glory of Sai Baba.

## CANBERRA

Canberra, otherwise called as Australian Capital Territory, is roughly about 250km away from Sydney. Similar to Sydney, the *bhajans* were initially conducted once a month by a group of devotees since 1999. Initially, devotees did the bhajan keeping a huge picture of Baba. Later with the help of Shirdi Sai Santhan, Sydney and few other local devotees and volunteers, Baba's statue was shipped from India. It was installed in Canberra at Hindu Temple and Cultural Centre (HTCC). As per the *agama* traditions, following 40 days prayers and rituals, the statue was installed on 6<sup>th</sup> December, 2003. The Hindu Temple and Cultural Centre is built as a place of worship and currently it houses all deities such as Ganesh, Vishnu, Shiva, Durga, Hanuman, Mahaveer, Buddha, Ayyappa and Shirdi Sai Baba. All festivals are celebrated in this temple in the traditional manner. The significant festivals relating to Baba such as *Ram Navami*, *Gurupoomnima* and *Dusserra* are celebrated with great enthusiasm by the devotees. Baba's anniversary is celebrated every year on first weekend in December. Anniversary is marked with *havan*, *bhajans*, *plays*, *dances*, *palki procession* with young and old enthusiastically participating in the event.

The temple is served by the priest who resides on the temple premises with the family. Regular Arati is held by the priest in the temple on the weekdays, while on Thursday Shej Arati is held at 8.00 P.M. The temple remains open daily from 7.00 A.M to 9.00 A.M and in the evening from 6.00 P.M to 8.00 P.M with arati performed at 7.30 in the morning and evening.

## BRISBANE

Sai Saileshwara Mandiram in Brishbane is housed in a beautifully converted garage. The environment is serene and peaceful. There were many invisible hands in raising this temple which got underway in 2008. A group of volunteers under the name of Sai Samaj, enthusiastically engaged themselves in shaping the temple. The temple was officially inaugurated on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2004, with installation of the main deity, Shri Shirdi Sai Baba amidst chanting and pooja to welcome Shri Sai Baba and Sri Ganesh into the temple. The final consecration was done on Guru Poomnima on 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 2004 when a three-day *Prana Pratishtha Ceremony* was performed to install the deities of the temple according to vedic rites. This temple is a "Platform not just to Shirdi Sai Baba, but to various other deities as well. In February 2006, the statue of *Ardhanareeswara* (Lord Shiva), arrived from India on St. Valentine's Day and was installed by Sai Samaj after a 40-day pooja. The various activities regularly conducted by the temple for the community are listed below:

- (i) On Monday, the focus is on the physical and spiritual health and well being through meditation and yoga and discourses are held every week from 7.30 P.M onwards.
- (ii) On Thursday *arati*'s are performed at 12.00 noon and evening at 7.30 followed by bhajans.
- (iii) *Bal Vikas Classes* for children held fortnightly on Sunday mornings. The main focus is on yoga, meditation, chanting of divine mantras and education in human values. Besides, on 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of each month, Baba's Abishekam is done.

## MELBOURNE

In April 2005 with the installation of a small idol of Baba for worship by a group of Sai devotees. Later, as the crowds started growing in number, a needs for having a bigger statue of Baba was felt. An organisation was registered to raise a temple of Baba for the devotees of Melbourne. Shirdi Sai Sansthan, Melbourne was registered in 2006 which initiated the work for installation of Baba's statue. The Shirdi Sai Sansthan, Sydney, played an active part and lend its helping hand in bringing a life-size statue of Baba to Melbourne. This is the only temple with such a huge life size statue with an endearing smile of Baba. This statue was installed in a traditional and ceremonious way on 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2006 under the guidance of Shri C.B. Satpathy. The idol is installed in a church in Camberwell with a fulltime Priest employed for it. The temple is open daily from 8.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m, seven days a week and in the evening from 5.30 p.m. to 9.00 p.m. However on Thursday, it is open till 9.30 p.m. Baba's Abhishek is performed on Thursday at 7.45 a.m and 10.30 a.m on Sunday. All important functions such as Ram Navami, Guru Poomnima, Dusserra and Temple anniversary are conducted with great enthusiasm by a huge number of devotees. A number of volunteers look after the cleanliness and maintenance of the temple and assist devotees who come to the temple. The temple has a small stall which sells spiritual books, magazines, Satcharita and other sacred pendants. Devotees purchase these items and after making an offering to Baba by placing them at His holy feet, they take them along.

## ADELAIDE

Baba's worship in Adelaide commenced in October 2005 when the idol and books of Shirdi Sai Baba were presented by Shirdi Sai Sansthan, Sydney. Initial Satsangs were held in devotee's homes. Later, as the crowds started to increase through the advertisement in the local newspapers and posters in various Indian shops and community notice boards, the devotees sought bigger premises for worship. Subsequently, the prayers were conducted in a carpeted shed located in the background of a devotee's home.

From 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2006, the weekly aratis were started on every Sunday with commencement of Kakad arati and Madhyaan arati. More activities were added to the regular schedule and festivals like *Dussera*, *Guru poornima*, *Sri Dattatreya Jayanti* were celebrated by conducting bhajans and aratis followed by Prasad distribution. Devotees were participating in large numbers and volunteering to cook food for large numbers on such festive occasions.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> of October, 2007, the Sansthan was legally registered with the Government of South Australia as “Shirdi Saibaba Community and Cultural Organisation of South Australia”. Following the registration of the organisation, the Sansthan signed a lease for a year on 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 2008 for bigger premises at 6 Blamey Avenue, Broad view to conduct regular Sunday prayers. The lease since then, has been renewed regularly and devotees found a heaven to worship Shirdi Sai Baba.

As the number of devotees began to swell, it wore a virtual festive atmosphere on all special occasions with their active participation and selfless service. The main functions are marked by Dhoop Arati, Bhajans, Baba’s Palki and Shej Arati, followed by Prasad distribution.

## PERTH

Under the guidance of Shri Satpathy, an Organisation was registered on 24<sup>th</sup> March, 2010 which happened to be the auspicious *Ram Navami* day by devotees of Shri Sai Baba. A place was rented in Bayswater for conducting the regular activities. In order to create more awareness about Sai Programmes in Perth, a good number of proactive steps such as, advertisements at grocers, community notice boards and emailing to the known and interested people were taken up by the small group of devotees who have formed the organisation in Perth.

Initially, it took a lot of effort and work by the organisers to start the activities and their effort bore fruit with Satsangs being conducted regularly on Sundays from 5.00 p.m to 7.30 p.m. On Guru Poomima day i.e., the 15<sup>th</sup> July 2011, the Satsang centre commenced arati on Thursday from 6.00 p.m. to 7.00 p.m. These Satsangs are well attended by a large number of people by the blessings of Baba. The main focus of the Satsang is to spread Baba’s teachings and values and is not merely about ritualistic worship.

An interesting aspect of this Satsang is the active participation of the younger generation who are enthusiastic and volunteering to run programs like Yoga classes, old age care etc. Apart from community work, the activities include arati, bhajans, discussion on topics on spirituality, reading of Satcharita and meditation. The major festivals celebrated by this group are *Guru Poornima*, *Dussera* and *Ram Navami*. The devotees had a reason to rejoice on *Dussera* as they had a new Baba Moorthi installed on that day.

Baba is unique among the great Saints of India. He did not remain aloof as a lofty Yogi in his ivory tower, nor did he remain lost in ecstasy. He exhibited powers not easily discovered in men. He commanded the elements, disincarnated spirit and brute creations, nay, controlled the minds of thousands of men and women near or remote. The thoughts of men could never be hidden from him and he exercised this remarkable power only for the benefit of humanity.

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