

# Shirdi Saibaba's Spiritual Legacy: Mastering the Eight Siddhis

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## ABSTRACT

*This article explores the world of Siddha Yogis, with a focus on the Ashtā Siddhīs, extraordinary powers that enable them to understand the universe and access supernatural abilities. Shirdi Saibaba, an eminent Maha Siddha Yogi, plays a central role in this discussion, embodying profound spiritual insights and guiding seekers on the path to divine realization. The Siddha Yogi tradition emphasizes the dual nature of these beings, helping individuals transcend worldly desires and attain oneness with the divine. Shirdi Saibaba's mission revolves around promoting the path of bhakti, highlighting different levels of loving devotion and inner rituals. The paper also examines the mystical concept of the astral body, astral travel, and the Ashtā Siddhīs' role in divine interventions. Shirdi Saibaba's mastery of these Siddhis, including Anīmā, Māhīmā, and others, showcases their relevance in yogic practices and Vedic wisdom. In conclusion, the paper underscores the importance of the Ashtā Siddhīs within the Siddha Yogi tradition and how they represent a bridge between the ordinary and the divine. The legacy of Shirdi Saibaba continues to inspire and guide individuals on their spiritual journeys, emphasizing devotion, inner rituals, and the relationship between imagination and genuine worship.*

**Keyword** Shirdi Saibaba, Ashta Siddhis, Yogi tradition, Siddha Yogis, Sāgunā, Nīrgunā

## 1. SHIRDI SAIBABA'S SPIRITUAL LEGACY: MASTERING THE EIGHT SIDDHIS

In Hindu spirituality, Siddha Yogis are revered individuals who embody Ashtā Siddhīs, which are extraordinary powers that enable them to know, act, fly, see near and far, perceive the past and present, become invisible, and understand the nature of the body and the cosmos. These powers, described in the Yogāsutra (4.1), are attained by certain Yogis through their birthright and represent mastery over the elements, perfection of the body, and resistance to the qualities of matter. These Siddha Yogis possess the common abilities of smallness (ānīmā), lightness (lāghīmā), greatness (māhīmā), attainment (prāptī), irresistible will (prākamyā), subjugation (vāsītvā), lordship (īśīrtvā), and mastery of desire (kāmasāyītvā). Their actions in the world transcend ordinary human virtue and are rooted in the realm of the meditatively constructed mind (nīrmāna-cīttā).

**1.1 The Dual Nature of Siddha Yogis:** Siddha Yogis are often associated with guiding individuals toward a state of transcendent freedom by shedding worldly desires, attachments, and even physical embodiment. With their profound power of divine vision and the possession of numinous abilities, they assist others in breaking free from the cycle of samsara, the cycle of birth and rebirth [1]. This process leads to human divinization, where the boundaries between the individual soul and the universal soul are dissolved, culminating in a state of oneness free from worldly limitations.

Though the Siddha Yogi traditions vary but share a common principle of transforming potentiality into real performance. These Yogis possess the ability to manifest reality through Vedic powers or siddhis, which can bring motivation, events, results, protection, right actions, or liberation. Shirdi Saibaba emphasizes the power of "bhāvanā," the ability to bring immediate recollections of past impressions buried in memory.

## 2. SHIRDI SAIBABA'S LEGACY

Our understanding of Siddha Yogis in India remains incomplete due to the vastness and complexity of their teachings. Some of these enlightened beings, well-versed in the ancient Vedas and Upanishads, have translated the doctrines of ancient wisdom into accessible solutions for truth seekers, offering answers to a multitude of life's questions. Among them, Shirdi Saibaba, a Maha Siddha Yogi from the eighteenth century (1838-1918), stands as an embodiment of divine wisdom [2]. He is closely associated with the traditions of God and divine manifestations and has left a profound spiritual legacy.

Shirdi Saibaba's divine realm and profound spiritual insights empowered his followers to embrace systematic theology as a path to liberation. His teachings often revolve around theological works describing the Ashta Siddhis (eight supernatural powers) and his divine acts, exemplifying the qualities of a Divine doctor. His primary goal was to inspire, promote, and demonstrate the tradition of bhakti, a profound devotion to the divine. Shirdi Sai Baba, an enigmatic figure of the nineteenth century, has garnered both popular devotion and scholarly interest in recent decades. The academic exploration of Shirdi Sai Baba has grown alongside the surge in his pan-Indian and global following, as scholars of South Asian religion delved into the study of revered saints and spiritual leaders. Within the tradition of bhakti, two distinct intensities of pure loving participation are recognized: prema bhakti, which embodies love, and bhava bhakti, which encapsulates emotion. The understanding of these experiences, bhava, prema, and priti bhakti, provides a roadmap for practitioners to elevate their pure devotion.

### 2.1 Sai's Conceptual Approach

Shirdi Saibaba's epistemic and conceptual approach to explaining Pārāmatām as Sāgunā and Nīrgunā encourages a deeper exploration of the relationship between imaginative depictions (murti) and genuine worship. Surrendering to a Guru enables one to realize the Atma, the self, which is hidden within the five Koshas (Hardiman 2015). This self-realization eventually leads to the reunion of the limited individual existence (Jīvātmā) with its source, Pārāmatām—the Absolute, universal Supreme Consciousness [3]. This journey signifies the attainment of "non-duality," transcending dualities like heat-cold, pain-pleasure, and good-bad. Toward the end of his treatise, he outlines the concept of Prītī-bhākti, which enables individuals to attain inner rituals through imagination, visualization, and connection to their inner selves. For ordinary bhaktas, the reality of Nīrgunā-kārā, which is ultimately a mind-independent reality, may not be attainable. Instead, Shirdi Saibaba recommends embracing Sāgunā-kārā, the reality generated through imaginative devotion, as the path to salvation.

## 3. INNER RITUALS: THE CONCEPT OF SĀGUNĀ AND NĪRGUNĀ:

The Vedas and Vedanta emphasize the presence of the Supreme Truth (Paramatma) dwelling within all beings and governing every aspect of creation. The Kāthā Upānīshād underscores the omnipresence of Paramatma across the cosmos, in all living beings, and throughout time. Sāgunā, which means "with qualities or gunas," signifies the manifestation of the Divine in a tangible form. Nīrgunā, derived from "nir" meaning "without" and "guna" meaning "qualities or properties," represents devotion to the formless Divine—the divine energy of the universe and the highest consciousness. Nīrgunā embodies the pure, unlimited, and undifferentiated living consciousness of the Universe. *Sāgunā and Nīrgunā: A Forward-Looking Practice: The interpretation of inner rituals as Sāgunā and Nīrgunā represents a forward-looking approach, emphasizing a constant awareness and focus on the ultimate goal of bhakti: the awakening of Shuddhā-Chaīṭanyā, pure consciousness. However, for ordinary practitioners, primary worshippers, or exegetes, the engagement with Nīrgunā or divine visualization may not serve its ultimate purpose.*

### 3.1 Shirdi Saibaba's Perspective

Shirdi Saibaba maintained that divine visualization fails when its images are viewed as mere products of the imagination [4]. He emphasized that Sāgunā bhakti is essential for generating images of the divine and justified this approach by privileging the power of the mind beyond physical reality. Shirdi Saibaba highlighted the significance of certain spiritually potent days when cosmic energy surges in the universe. Any spiritual practices undertaken on these days enhance divine energy in humans, enabling them to move from limitations to limitlessness. At the highest level, Nīrgunā Brahma embodies eternal, all-pervading, and omnipresent divine consciousness [5]. As the Yājur Veda states, "Nā Tāsyāā Prāīmā Astī," indicating that there is no image of Pārāmatām.

### 3.2 Grace-Given Special Vision

To underscore the importance of Sāgunā and Nīrgunā, the account of Megashyam, a devotee sent by his master Rao Bahadur Hari Vinayak Sathe to Shirdi Saibaba for spiritual advancement, exemplifies the Sāgunā-Nīrgunā state of manifestation. Megashyam's experience of seeing Pārāmatām in Saibaba and his divine dream of drawing a trident, along with Kakasaheb Dixit's vision of Lord Shiva, emphasize the potential for direct divine experiences [6]. These experiences suggest that individuals with clear minds can have direct visions of the divine, and a determined mind in a state of pure consciousness becomes suitable for such visions. Shirdi Saibaba's teachings shed light on the profound concepts of Sāgunā and Nīrgunā and their roles in the practice of bhakti [7]. His insights serve as a guide for spiritual seekers, emphasizing the importance of devotion, inner rituals, and the relationship between imagination and genuine worship. The legacy of Siddha Yogis, as exemplified by Shirdi Saibaba, continues to inspire and guide individuals on their spiritual journeys.

## 4. THE ROLE OF ASHTĀ SĪDDHĪS IN DIVINE INTERVENTIONS

Within the human body, alongside the physical form, exists a subtle body known as the Astral body. Astral travel, an out-of-body experience that explores the astral realm and accesses one's Akashic records, is central to many spiritual traditions. In Hinduism and other cultures, astral travel is associated with conscious efforts where the subtle or astral body separates from the physical body to journey through the astral plane in the universe [8, 9]. This mystical state exists between objective and subjective awareness, and the supernatural or spiritual power of astral projection is referred to as "Sīddhī." Siddhas, through practices such as meditation, pranayama, tantra, mantra, and yoga asanas, or under the guidance of a Guru, can attain this Siddhi. It is not for entertainment but represents the highest stage of meditation (known as jhānā) in which one can experience the presence of a divine entity within. This state helps in comprehending the true nature and balance of "prākṛitī" and "vikṛitī" in eternal existence. Shirdi Saibaba's primary focus is on Ashta Sīddhīs in relation to practitioners who seek affectionate knowledge and salvation [10, 11].

### 4.1 Exploring Ashtā Siddhīs

- i. **Anīmā:** Anīmā is the Siddhi that allows the Yogi to minimize the size of their body, even to the atomic level. Shirdi Saibaba's mastery of this Siddhi is evident in the story of Nanasahab Chadorkar where Saibaba said that he took his offering of sweet in the form of a fly.
- ii. **Māhīmā:** Māhīmā is the power to increase the size of one's body to a celestial level. Saibaba demonstrated this Siddhi when he revealed his universal form to a devotee at the moment of her death.
- iii. **Gārīmā:** Gārīmā empowers the Yogi to become infinitely heavy, rendering them immovable. Saibaba utilized this Siddhi to teach a lesson to a body massager who had become proud of his ability to lift and carry Saibaba.
- iv. **Lāghīmā:** Lāghīmā allows the Yogi to become weightless and gain the power of levitation. It imparts a feeling of lightness, akin to air or wind. Shirdi Saibaba's mastery of this Siddhi is evident when he slept on a narrow wooden plank hanged with old piece of cloths.
- v. **Prāptī:** Prāptī bestows the ability to create objects instantly from nature. Saibaba's use of this Siddhi is evident in incidents like the creation of water and fire for Chandbai who needed them to light Chillum.
- vi. **Prākāmyā:** Prākāmyā is the highest Siddhi, enabling a Yogi to travel anywhere at will, even entering another person's body. Saibaba hinted at his mastery of this Siddhi in the story of Megashyama who experienced Baba's presence even though the doors were closed and blessed with Akshintas and asked him to draw trident.
- vii. **Īśīrtvā:** Īśīrtvā grants the power to influence the entire creation or nature, making natural elements and phenomena obey the Yogi's will. Saibaba used this Siddhi to control rain, fire, and other natural forces.

viii. **Vāsītvā**: Vāsītvā allows the Yogi to control the minds of both humans and animals. Saibaba employed this Siddhi to calm down a fierce tiger and synchronize a snake's actions with his voice.

In addition to the Ashtā Sīddhīs, Shirdi Saibaba is believed to have possessed other Siddhis, including:

- Durashravan: The power of distant hearing, as seen in various incidents.
- Duradarshan: The power of distant vision, demonstrated in multiple episodes.
- Manojavah: The ability to travel at the speed of thought, as witnessed in his actions.
- Kamarupam: The power of omnipresence or the ability to change forms, as observed in several stories.
- Devanam Saha Krida Anudarshanam: The experience of engaging with divine beings, exemplified by Saibaba's interactions.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the attainment of Ashtā Sīddhīs or divine powers is often believed to be the result of past-life karma, and the powers acquired in a previous birth carry over into the present life. While these Siddhis may appear as miracles to ordinary practitioners, they are, in fact, Yogic powers or siddhis associated with cosmic abilities. According to Vedic texts, these powers can be acquired through birth, herbs, incantations, penance, and meditation. A Guru with Ashtā Sīddhī can lead practitioners to the astral universe, where they can unlock the latent power of the cosmic and individual minds to travel within and unfold their divine potential.

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