

# A critical study of *Ashta Siddhi* Super normal Powers in *Yogashāstra*, *Ayurveda* and *Pāli* literature

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## Abstract:

*Siddhis* are spiritual, paranormal, supernatural, magical powers, abilities and attainments that are the products of spiritual advancement through *sādhanas* such as meditation. The Eight *Siddhis* are described in *Yogashāstra*. *Animā* – The Power to Become Small *Mahimā* – The Power to Become Vast, *Garimā* – The Power to Become Heavy, *Laghimā* – The Power to Become Light, *Prāpti* – The Power to Attain Anything, *Prakamya* – The Power to Achieve Anything by Will, *Isatva* – The Power to Control Nature and *Vashitva* – The Power to Control Others.

*Buddhism* specifically lists six higher knowledges that is *abhijñā* attained through deep meditation that is *Iddhi-vidha* means the ability to display various psychic powers, such as levitation, teleportation, and walking on water. *Dibba-sota*: The ability to hear sounds from a great distance, or what is called "divine ear". *Cheto-pariya-ñāṇa*: The ability to know the thoughts of others or "mind-penetration". *Pubbe-nivāsānussati-ñāṇa*: The ability to remember past lives. *Dibba-chakkhu*: The "divine eye," the ability to see from afar, including the karmic consequences of actions. *Āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa*: The final and most important knowledge: the ability to "eradicate the effluents" (mental defilements), which leads to enlightenment. These powers are generally viewed as byproducts of deep concentration, not the main goal of *Buddhist* practice. The true aim is to achieve a state of liberation from suffering by eliminating greed, hatred, and delusion.

**Keywords:** *Siddhis*, *Animā*, *Mahimā*, *Garimā*, *Laghimā*, *Prāpti*, *Prakamya*, *Isatva*, *Vashitva*, : *Iddhi-vidha*, *Dibba-sota*, *Cheto-pariya-ñāṇa*, *Pubbe-nivāsānussati-ñāṇa*, *Dibba-chakkhu*, *Āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa*

**Aim:** To Understand and know the philosophy of *siddhis* (Super normal Powers) as elucidated by *Yogashāstra*, *Ayurveda* and in *Pāli* Literature.

**Objectives:** To know the concept of *Siddhis* in *yoga* along with Ayurveda and *Pāli* Literature and to do critical analysis of *siddhis* (Super normal Powers) as elucidated by *Yogashastra*, *Ayurveda* and in *Pāli* Literature.

**Introduction:** The term “*siddhi*” comes from the Sanskrit root “*siddhi*” meaning “to accomplish” or “to perfect. *Siddhis* (Super normal Powers) are spiritual, paranormal, supernatural, magical powers, abilities and attainments that are the products of spiritual advancement through *sadhanas* such as meditation. The Eight *Siddhis* are in described in *Yogashāstra*. In *Ayurveda*, *Acharya Charaka* has mentioned *Ashta Siddhis* which can be achieved by regular practice of *Yoga* in *Charak Samhita Sharir sthan* first chapter. The *Buddha* ordainsthat six higher powers called six higher knowledges (*abhijñā*) *Buddhism* specifically lists six higher knowledges (*abhijñā*) attained through deep meditation: *Iddhi-vidha*.

**Discussion:** There are varying Perspectives on *Siddhis*. The origin of *Siddhis* can be understood in different ways depending on the philosophical and cultural context. Here are a few perspectives: as per *yogic* Perspective: According to the *Yoga Sutras* of *Patanjali*, one of the foundational texts of classical *yoga*, *Siddhis* arise as the mind becomes more focused, disciplined, and purified through *yogic* practices. As the mind becomes calm and one-pointed, the practitioner gains access to deeper levels of consciousness and experiences the unfoldment of innate abilities or potentials. As per energetic Perspective: In some traditions, *Siddhis* are seen as manifestations of subtle energies or forces within the body and mind. Through various *yogic* practices, such as *prāṇayama* (breath control), *āsanas* (physical postures), and meditation, these energies are harnessed and directed, leading to the development of *Siddhis*.

As per spiritual Perspective: From a spiritual standpoint, *Siddhis* are often considered as expressions of spiritual progress and the awakening of dormant potentials. They can be seen as a reflection of the practitioner's alignment with higher states of consciousness or the divine and as per Psychic Perspective: In certain belief systems, *Siddhis* are associated with psychic or paranormal abilities. These abilities can range from clairvoyance, telepathy, and psychokinesis to levitation, astral projection, and more. Such perspectives suggest that *Siddhis* can be accessed through the activation of latent psychic capacities. The eight *siddhis* mentioned in classical texts such as the *Yoga Sutras* are regarded as the key supernatural powers that may manifest during advanced practice. In the *Yoga Sutras* of *Patanjali*, different types of *Siddhis*, or extraordinary powers, are mentioned in the *Vibhuti Pada* the third chapter. *Patanjali* categorizes these *Siddhis* into various groups. These are as follows<sup>1</sup>.

<i>Asht Siddhis</i>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Qualities</b>
<i>Animā</i>	The Power to become Small	Be humble
<i>Mahimā</i>	The Power to become Vast	Think big
<i>Garimā</i>	The Power to become Heavy	Stay committed
<i>Laghimā</i>	The Power to become Light	Forgive and forget
<i>Prāpti</i>	The Power to Attain Anything	Aim fulfilment
<i>Prakamya</i>	The Power to Achieve Anything by Will	Never say no
<i>Isatva</i>	The Power to Control Nature	Be motivated
<i>Vashitva</i>	The Power to Control Others	Self disciplin

अणिमा महिमा चैवलघिमा गरिमा तथा प्राप्तिः प्राकाम्यमीशित्वं वशित्वं चाष्ट सिद्धयः ॥

*Acharya Patanjali* in his *Yoga Sutra* treatise mentions in chapter four *Kaivalya Pāda* the ways or methods of attaining the supernatural powers i.e. *siddhis*. Below mentioned are the ways of attaining *Siddhi* as per *Patanjali*<sup>2</sup>

*Janma* (by birth) - The children who are born to those parents who are spiritually high receive the powers of spirituality through birth owing to the womb they are born in and also as a part of genetic trait (predisposition). Alternatively, it can be said that some people, by birth may have extraordinary powers to attain *siddhi* because of their attainments in their previous lives.

*Aushadhi* (medicine, herbs, drugs) - Miraculous and special powers (*siddhi*) can be attained by consuming various herbs and medicines.

*Mantra* (incantations) - Special powers can be attained by recitation (incantation) of mantras (sacred hymns which are powerful by nature).

*Tapah* (penance, self-discipline) - The clouds of ignorance in the mind are warded off by following penance and self-discipline. With this, one will be able to control the 5 elements of nature as and when he wishes to do. It is possible by un-perverted thinking. This will help in attaining *siddhi*.

*Samadhi* (oneness with consciousness) - One is granted with extraordinary *siddhi* when he achieves oneness with consciousness. This is a process of concentration of mind.

In *Ayurveda*, *ācharya Charaka* has mentioned *Ashta Siddhis* which can be achieved by regular practice of *Yoga*. *Acharya Charaka* says that the *Yogi* attains eight *siddhis* when he practices *Yoga* through the association of his *shuddha satva* (pure mind, devoid of *raja* and *tama* which contaminate mind). Eight *siddhis* can be achieved only by those who practice *Yoga* by associating their pure mind. Entering others body, thought reading, doing things at will, Super natural vision, super natural audition, miraculous memory, uncommon brilliance and invisibility when so desired these are the eight supernatural powers attained by those who practice *yoga*. All this is achieved through the purity of the mind when your mind is free from *rajas* and *tamas*.

The *Ashta Siddhis* are *Aavasha* ability to enter into the other person's body *Chetasojnaanam*-mind reading *Arthaanaamchandatahknayaa* - ability to control one's sense objects according to will (perception of sense objects i.e. vision, sound, touch, taste and smell at will, as and when needed) *Drushtihi*- ability to see the objects which are otherwise not perceivable by the eyes *Shrotram*- ability to hear sounds even made at long distances and otherwise not audible *Smrutih*-extraordinary memory *Kant*-extraordinary luster *Ishtatahadarshanam* - ability to become invisible and visible at will.<sup>3</sup>

Buddhism specifically lists six higher knowledges (*abhijñā*) attained through deep meditation described in *Digha Pathikavaggo* 11.1.7: *Iddhi-vidha*: The ability to display various psychic powers, such as levitation, teleportation, and walking on water. *Dibba-sota*: The ability to hear sounds from a great distance, or what is called "divine ear". *Cheto-pariya-ñāṇa*: The ability to know the thoughts of others or "mind-penetration". *Pubbenivāsānussati-ñāṇa*: The ability to remember past lives. *Dibba-chakkhu* The "divine eye," the ability to see from afar, including the karmic consequences of actions. *Āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa*: The final and most important knowledge the ability to "eradicate the effluents" (mental defilements), which leads to enlightenment. These powers are generally viewed as by products of deep concentration, not the main goal of *Buddhist* practice<sup>4</sup>.

1) Mystical powers (*iddhividha* - इद्धिविध) -From being one, one becomes manifold, and having become manifold, one becomes one; appearing and disappearing, one passes without any obstruction through a wall, a rampart, a mountain, as if through air, one sinks into the ground and emerges from it, as if it were water; one walks on water without dividing it, as if it were solid ground; cross-legged, one roves through the sky, like a winged bird; with one's hand one touches and strokes even these-theMoon and the Sun-so potent and mighty though they are and he travels in the body as far as the *Brahma*-world.

(2) Divine faculty of hearing (*dibba sotadhātu*-दिब्ब सोतधातु) -With a divine faculty of hearing, clear and surpassing that of human beings, one hears sounds both divine and human, whether far or near.

(3) Knowing the mind of another (*parassa cetopariyañāna* - परस्स चेतोपरियञ्जाण ) One knows the minds of other beings, of other persons, by penetrating them with one's own mind.

(4) Recalling previous states of existence (*pubbenivāsānussati*-पुब्बेनिवासानुस्सति) -One calls to mind in all their modes, details and various ways one's previous states of existence.

(5) Divine vision (*dibba cakkhu* - दिव्य चक्षु) -One beholds, with divine vision, clear and surpassing that of humans, beings passing away and arising, base and excellent, beautiful and ugly, gone to a happy state or gone to a woeful state, according to their deeds.

(6) Knowledge of extinction of defiling impulses (*āsavakkhaya karaṇāna*-आसवक्खयकरज्जाण) -By the destruction of the defiling impulses (*asava-s*) one enters on and abides in that emancipation of mind which is free from defiling impulses, having realised it by one's own super-knowledge even in one's present life.

The first five of these powers are mundane *lokiyaas* these are attainable through utmost perfection in mental concentration *samādhi* while the sixth one is super-mundane *lokuttara*, attainable as it is with penetrating insight (*vipassana*). While the other faculties might be possessed by others also, the last one can be attained only by an Enlightened Person, i.e., an *arhanta*. The Buddha and some of his distinguished disciples possessed all the six super-normal powers pre-eminently. That is why *Maha-kassapa* had to proclaim that if someone were to think that he could conceal the six super-normal While the actual process of attaining super-normal powers is not explained in the *Yoga-Sutras*. It may be, because of the sūtra-style which precludes lengthy treatment subject-matter. the Buddha, at times, does explain this process. Of Whenever, Ananda, the *Tathagata* concentrates body in mind and mind in body, and developing sense of ease and buoyancy abides therein, at such time, Ananda, the body of the *Tathāgata* is more buoyant, more placid, more pliable, and more radiant."Suppose, Ananda, a ball of iron is heated during the day. It becomes lighter, softer, more pliable, and more radiant. The same thing happens with the body of the *Tathāgata*<sup>5</sup>

"Now, Ananda, at the time when the *Tathāgata* but little difficulty rises from the earth into the sky, and He in concentrates body in mind and mind in body. His body with divers ways enjoys mystic powers, to wit being one He becomes manifold, and so forth, and He travels in the body as far as the Brahma world."

Accounts are available of a number of disciples of the Buddha who possessed super-normal powers in an exceptional degree. The Buddha himself named *Mahamoggallāna* as the foremost among such disciples amongst the males<sup>6</sup> and *Uppalavanna* amongst the females<sup>7</sup>. The super-normal powers acquired by *Anuruddha* find mention in a number of suttas<sup>8</sup>. The event of *Sariputta* continuing his meditation despite a severe blow on his head from a passing demon makes interesting reading<sup>9</sup>. *Patanjali* considers super-sensory powers as obstacles in *samādhi* but accomplishments of an exhibitiv mind<sup>10</sup>.

*Vacaspati Mishra* explains this as follows<sup>11</sup>:"For a man whose mind-stuff is exhibitiv thinks highly of these perfections, just as a man born in misery considers even a small bit of wealth a pile of wealth. But a yogi whose mind-stuff is concentrated must avoid these perfections even when brought near to him. One who longs for the final goal of life. the absolute assuagement of the threefold anguish, how could he have any affection for those perfections which go counter to the attainment of that goal?<sup>12</sup>

The *Buddha* also did not favour any obsession for super-normal powers. According to his dictum, such powers impediment for insight, though not for concentration, since these are obtained through concentration.<sup>13</sup>

The Buddha discouraged the display of super-normal powers for increasing in him the faith of the people<sup>14</sup>. According to him, the ability to perform miracles can be acquired by learning *Gandhari vijjā* also. It is, therefore, not proper to extol such performances. Sensing danger in them, these should rather be treated with contempt, shame and disgust. The *Buddha* was once staying at *Nalanda* in *Pāvārika's* mango-grove. There came to him Kevatta, a young householder, who said to him: "This *Nalanda* of ours, Sir, is rich, prosperous, populous, and full of people having faith in the Exalted One. If the Exalted One were to ask some monk to perform a miracle here, it would increase in Him the faith of the people."

To this the Exalted One replied: "I do not, O Kevatta, teach Dhamma to bhikkhus that they may go to the white-robed householders to demonstrate wonders of miraculous mystic powers."<sup>15</sup>

One of his disciples *Pindola* the *Bharadvaja*, who possessed super-normal powers to an eminent degree, rebuked by the Buddha for fetching down a costly bowl of sandalwood hung high up in the air by a wealthy merchant of Rajagir on the top of a series of bamboo-poles which no other recluse or brahmin could bring down. When presented before him, he asked the monks to smash this bowl into pieces. He forbade them from exhibiting to householders works of psychic powers and, if anybody did so, he should be deemed to have committed an offence of 'wrong-doing' that is called as *dukkata* in *Pāli*.<sup>16</sup>

The *Visuddhimagga* is one of the texts to give explicit details about how spiritual masters were thought to actually manifest supernormal abilities. It states that abilities such as flying through the air, walking through solid obstructions, diving into the ground, walking on water and so forth are achieved through changing one element, such as earth, into another element, such as air. The individual must master kasina meditation before this is possible.

**Conclusion:** The true aim of *Yoga, Ayurveda and Buddhist Pali Literature* is not to gain supernatural powers but to achieve spiritual liberation, transcendence of the ego. *Siddhis*, while a sign of progress, are ultimately distractions that can lead a practitioner away from the path of true liberation. It is essential for a yogi to cultivate wisdom, humility, and detachment in order to avoid the temptations of these powers and stay focused on the ultimate goal of *Nirvān* of Liberation. Supernormal powers are part and parcel on the path of liberation.

As a sugar factory's main product is sugar, while key byproducts include bagasse (fibrous residue for fuel, paper), molasses (for alcohol, ethanol and animal feed), and pressmud/filter cake (fertilizer, compost) same way the main product on the path of liberation is *Nirvān* and supernormal powers are byproducts.

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2. जन्मौषधिमन्ततपःसमाधिजाः सिद्धयः|| 4.1 ||
3. आवेशश्चेतसो ज्ञानमर्थानां छन्दतः क्रिया। दृष्टिः श्रोत्रं स्मृतिः कान्तिरिष्टतश्चाप्यदर्शनम् ॥१४०॥ इत्यष्टविधमाख्यातं योगिनां बलमैश्वरम्। शुद्धसत्त्वसमाधानात्तत् सर्वमुपजायते ॥१४१॥Charak Sharir 1/140,141
4. *Digha Pathikavaggo*11.1.7
5. "Yasmim, Ananda, samaye tathāgato kāyam pi citte samodahati, cittam pi kāye samodahati... yāva brahmalokā pi kāyena vasam vatteti..." ti. ("यस्मिं, आनन्द, समये तथागतो कायं पि चित्ते समोदहति, चित्तं पि काये समोदहति. . . . याव ब्रह्मलोका पि कायेन वसं वत्तेति । . . . " ति।) (*Samyutta*. संयुत्त<sup>०</sup> - 51.22.22)
6. "Etadaggaṃ, bhikkhave, mama iddbimantanam yadidam Mahamoggallano." (एतदरगं, भिक्खवे, मम sāvakānam bhikkhanam सायकानं भिक्खूनं इद्धिमन्तानं यदिदं महामोग्गल्लानो।") (*Anguttara*, अङ्गुत्तर 1.14 क. 3)
7. "Etadaggaṃ, bhikkhave, mama sāvikānam bhikkhuninam iddhimantinam yadidam Uppalavanna". ("एतदरगं, भिक्खवे, मम साविकानं भिक्खुनीनं इद्धिमन्तीनं यदिदं उप्पलवण्णा।") (*Anguttara*, अङ्गुत्तर<sup>०</sup>-1.14 3.3)
8. *Samyutta*, संयुत्त<sup>०</sup>-52 (*Suttas*, सुत्त 12-24)
9. While meditating under the open sky with a freshly shaven head. which was so severe that it would, otherwise, have felled an elephant Sariputta could stand, without much discomfort, a demon's blow seven or seven-and-a-half cubits high, or might have split mountain-peak (See Udana. उदान<sup>०</sup>-4.4.10-12)
10. *Te samādhāvupasargā vyutthāne siddhayah.* (ते समाधायसर्गा व्यत्याने सिद्धयः ॥) (YS. III.37)
11. The author of *Tattva-vaiśāradi* (being a gloss on the *Yoga-bhāṣya*, the comment on Yoga-Sutras.
12. Translated by James Haughton Woods in "The Yoga-System of *Patanjali*" (Harvard Oriental Series-Vol. XVII).
13. *Visuddhi* (विसुद्धि) (III.56)
14. (*Digha. Silakkhandhavaggo* दीघ<sup>०</sup> सीलक्खन्धवग्गो 11.1.1)
15. "Imam kho aham, Kevatta, iddhipatihāriye ādinavam sampassamin iddhipatihāriyena attiyāmi harāyāmi jigucchāmi." ("इमं खौ अहं, केवा इद्धिपाटिहारिये आदीनवं सम्पस्समानो इद्धिपाटिहारियेन अठ्ठीयामि हरायानि जिगुच्छामि।") (*Digha. Silakkhandhavaggo* दीघ, सीलक्खन्धवग्गो। 11.2.4)
16. *Vinaya. Cullavagga*, विनय चुल्लवग्ग - 5.5.10 2.

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