Poompuhar (Kaveripoompattinam) – Chola Port, Pattinappalai, Silappathikaram, Kilaiyur Wharf, Pallavanesvaram Vihara & Marine Archaeology from 1981 to 2025 | TNPSC Notes

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Poompuhar (Puhar, **Kaveripoompattinam**) lies in Mayiladuthurai district **where the Kaveri meets the sea**; in the Sangam age it was **the capital and great port of the early Cholas**. Kadiyalur Uruthirangannanar's **Pattinappalai** (Pathuppattu) describes its markets and customs; Ilango Adigal's **Silappathikaram** opens here; and Seethalai Sathanar's **Manimekalai** says the sea swallowed Puhar because the Indra festival was not held. Greek writers called it **Kamara** (Periplus) and **Khaberis** (Ptolemy). On land, excavations by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) found a **brick wharf at Kilaiyur**, a **Buddhist vihara at Pallavanesvaram** and a **water-channel structure at Vanagiri**. From **1981**, underwater surveys by the Tamil Nadu Archaeology Department and the **National Institute of Oceanography (NIO)**, Goa, found rows of structures in shallow water about 200–300 m from the shore. After a gap of more than two decades, the State Department began a fresh underwater survey with the **Indian Maritime University** on **19 September 2025**.

தமிழில் படிக்க

These notes are written for TNPSC Group 1, 2/2A and 4 aspirants. Poompuhar is a high-scoring topic because it comes under **History, Culture, Heritage of Tamil Nadu** (Sangam Cholas, ports, archaeology), **General Tamil / Tamil literature** (Pattinappalai, Silappathikaram, Manimekalai), **History of India** (Buddhism, Indo-Roman trade) and **Current Events** (the 2025 underwater survey). For an overview see Porunai civilisation and Tamil Nadu excavation sites; for the literary background see Sangam literature.

Poompuhar at a Glance

Aspect	Details
Location	Mayiladuthurai district (Nagapattinam district until 2020); Kaveri estuary on the Bay of Bengal.
Names	Puhar, Poompuhar, Kaveripoompattinam, Kaveripattinam; Periplus – Kamara; Ptolemy – Khaberis.
Sangam-age role	Capital and great port of the early Cholas; famous in the age of Karikala Chola.
Literature	Pattinappalai (Kadiyalur Uruthirangannanar), Silappathikaram (Ilango Adigal), Manimekalai (Seethalai Sathanar); references in Akananuru and Purananuru.

Land excavations	ASI: Kilaiyur (brick wharf), Pallavanesvaram (Buddhist vihara, Buddha image), Vanagiri (water-channel structure); State Department: 1994-95, 1997-98.
Underwater surveys	State Department + NIO, Goa (from 1981); State Department + Indian Maritime University (from 19 September 2025).
Museum	Underwater Archaeological Museum at Poompuhar; Silappathikaram Art Gallery.

Puhar in Literature

Work	Author	What it says about Puhar
Pattinappalai (Pathuppattu)	Kadiyalur Uruthirangannanar	Praises Karikala Chola; goods piled up in the port, cargo arriving by sea and by land; customs officers stamped the **tiger emblem** on goods before sending them out.
Silappathikaram	Ilango Adigal	The story begins in Puhar (Puhar Kandam); Kovalan and Kannagi; the city's two parts – **Maruvurppakkam** (seaside quarter of merchants and Yavanas) and **Pattinappakkam** (quarter of the king and nobles); description of the **Indra festival**.
Manimekalai	Seethalai Sathanar	The story that the sea swallowed Puhar by the curse of the goddess Manimekala because the Indra festival was not held – seen as a memory of sea erosion or a sea surge.
Periplus (1st century CE)	A Greek merchant	East-coast market towns – Kamara, Poduke, Sopatma.
Ptolemy (2nd century CE)	Geographer	Khaberis emporion – the market at the Kaveri mouth.

Land Excavations – What Was Found

Place	Find	Significance
Kilaiyur	A brick **wharf**; a wooden post near it dated to about the 3rd century BCE.	Direct evidence of Sangam-age port activity.
Pallavanesvaram	A **Buddhist vihara**, a Buddhist shrine, a Buddha image and a limestone Buddha-pada (footprints).	About the 4th–5th century CE; Buddhism flourished at Puhar – linking with the Manimekalai story.
Vanagiri	A sluice (water inlet/outlet) structure.	Knowledge of water management.
Several places	Pottery, beads, terracotta objects, animal bones.	Urban life and trade.

- **Excavators:** ASI archaeologists such as S.R. Rao, K.V. Soundara Rajan and K.V. Raman worked at these sites; the Tamil Nadu Archaeology Department also excavated in the 1994-95 and 1997-98 seasons.

Marine Archaeology – Puhar under the Sea

Period	Who	What
1981	Tamil Nadu Archaeology Department + National Institute of Oceanography (NIO), Goa	First underwater exploration; brick structures, sea-rolled pottery and remains of pier walls in the intertidal zone.
1980s – 1990s	State Department + NIO	A row of structures found in shallow water about **200–300 m** from the shore (Policy Note 2024-25).
19 September 2025	Tamil Nadu Archaeology Department + **Indian Maritime University (IMU)**; guided by archaeologist **K. Rajan** and Joint Director **R. Sivanantham**	A fresh underwater survey after more than two decades; the sea between Poompuhar and Nagapattinam; divers mapped features on the sea floor.

- **Why under the sea?** Historians think part of the city may have been lost to the sea through erosion, sea surges, floods or cyclones; the Manimekalai story also recalls this.
- **Museum:** an Underwater Archaeological Museum at Poompuhar displays objects and models from the underwater surveys.
- **All-India position:** the State policy note says only a few sites, such as Dwarka, Mamallapuram, Poompuhar and Muziris, have received attention on land and sea in Indian marine archaeology.
- **Caution:** media reports sometimes claim "a city thousands of years old under the sea"; in the exam, write only what government or research institutions have confirmed.

Decline of Poompuhar

- After the Sangam age the early Cholas weakened; under the later Cholas (from the 9th century CE) Thanjavur became the political centre and **Nagapattinam** the main port.
- Sea erosion and natural disasters may have forced the town to shift several times; today Poompuhar is a small coastal town.

Tamil Nadu Angle and Exam Angle

- **Tamil Nadu angle:** the cradle of Chola culture – Karikala Chola (Kallanai), Silappathikaram, the Indra festival; today a tourist site with the Silappathikaram Art Gallery and the beach.
- **Prelims:** author of Pattinappalai; Maruvurppakkam / Pattinappakkam; Kamara / Khaberis; Kilaiyur, Pallavanesvaram; NIO 1981; IMU 2025.
- **Mains:** Poompuhar is the best example for "Sangam port cities", "literature and archaeology" and "marine archaeology in Tamil Nadu".
- **Way forward:** sampling of underwater structures, scientific dating, coastal-erosion protection and upgrading the site museum.

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Writing Mains Answers (Group 1 / Group 2)

Poompuhar – literature and archaeology (about 200–250 words)

- **Introduction:** Kaveri estuary; capital-port of the early Cholas; Kamara / Khaberis.
- **Literature:** Pattinappalai – customs, tiger emblem; Silappathikaram – Maruvurppakkam, Pattinappakkam, Indra festival; Manimekalai – the city swallowed by the sea.
- **Land excavation:** Kilaiyur wharf (about the 3rd century BCE), Pallavanesvaram vihara, Vanagiri water channel.
- **Marine archaeology:** NIO from 1981; row of structures 200–300 m offshore; IMU survey 2025.
- **Conclusion:** proof on land and under the sea for the literary descriptions; continued scientific study is needed.

Practice: Match the Following

Item	Match
Pattinappalai	Kadiyalur Uruthirangannanar
Maruvurppakkam	Seaside trading quarter of Puhar
Kilaiyur	Brick wharf
Pallavanesvaram	Buddhist vihara
NIO, Goa	1981 underwater survey
IMU	2025 underwater survey

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- Poompuhar is now in **Mayiladuthurai** district – older books say Nagapattinam district.
- Kamara = Kaveripoompattinam; Poduke = Arikamedu; Kolchi = Korkai.
- Pattinappalai is on Karikala – its author is Kadiyalur Uruthirangannanar (who also wrote Perumpanarruppadai).
- The story of the sea swallowing Puhar is in **Manimekalai**.
- The 2025 partner was the Indian Maritime University (IMU); the 1981 partner was NIO – do not swap them.

Key Terms – Tamil / English (for the bilingual paper)

Tamil	English
படகுத்துறை	Wharf / jetty
முகத்துவாரம்	Estuary / river mouth
விகாரை	Buddhist monastery (vihara)
கடல் தொல்லியல்	Marine / underwater archaeology

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ஓதப்பகுதி	Intertidal zone
கடல் அரிப்பு	Coastal erosion
சுங்கம்	Customs duty
இலச்சினை	Emblem / seal

Quick Revision Table

Period / year	Event
c. 3rd century BCE	Date of the wooden post at the Kilaiyur wharf
Sangam age	Capital-port of the early Cholas; Pattinappalai
1st century CE	Periplus – Kamara
2nd century CE	Ptolemy – Khaberis
c. 4th–5th century CE	Pallavanesvaram Buddhist vihara
1981	First underwater survey (State Department + NIO)
1994-95, 1997-98	State Department land excavations
2020	Mayiladuthurai becomes a separate district
19 Sep 2025	Fresh underwater survey (State Department + IMU)

TNPSC Key Points (PYQ-style facts)

- Poompuhar = Puhar = Kaveripoompattinam; Mayiladuthurai district; Kaveri estuary.
- Capital-port of the early Cholas; Pattinappalai – Kadiyalur Uruthirangannanar.
- Silappathikaram: Maruvurppakkam, Pattinappakkam; the Indra festival.
- Manimekalai: Puhar swallowed by the sea when the Indra festival was stopped.
- Kilaiyur – brick wharf; Pallavanesvaram – Buddhist vihara.
- Underwater surveys: 1981 (NIO); 19 September 2025 (IMU).

Related notes: Porunai civilisation and TN excavation sites, Sangam literature, Chola administration, Keeladi.

Frequently Asked Questions

Where is Poompuhar?

In Mayiladuthurai district, where the Kaveri joins the Bay of Bengal. Until Mayiladuthurai became a separate district in 2020, it was in Nagapattinam district.

What are the other names of Poompuhar?

Puhar, Kaveripoompattinam and Kaveripattinam. The Greek Periplus calls it Kamara and Ptolemy calls it Khaberis.

Which works describe Puhar?

Kadiyalur Uruthirangannanar's Pattinappalai (Karikala Chola, the port, customs), Ilango Adigal's Silappathikaram (Puhar Kandam, Maruvurppakkam and Pattinappakkam, the Indra festival) and Seethalai Sathanar's Manimekalai (the city swallowed by the sea).

What was found on land at Poompuhar?

A brick wharf at Kilaiyur (a wooden post dated to about the 3rd century BCE), a Buddhist vihara and a Buddha image at Pallavanesvaram, and a water-channel structure at Vanagiri.

When were the Poompuhar underwater surveys carried out?

From 1981 the Tamil Nadu Archaeology Department and the National Institute of Oceanography (NIO), Goa, surveyed the sea and found rows of structures 200–300 m from the shore. On 19 September 2025 the State Department began a fresh survey with the Indian Maritime University.

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Practice questions

1. In which district is Poompuhar today?

A. Mayiladuthurai
B. Nagapattinam
C. Cuddalore
D. Thanjavur

2. Poompuhar is at the mouth of which river?

A. Vaigai
B. Kaveri
C. Palar
D. Thamirabarani

3. Poompuhar was the capital-port of which Sangam dynasty?

A. Pandyas
B. Cheras
C. Cholas
D. Pallavas

4. Who wrote Pattinappalai?

A. Kapilar
B. Nakkeerar
C. Mangudi Maruthanar
D. Kadiyalur Uruthirangannanar

5. Which Chola king does Pattinappalai praise?

A. Karikala Chola
B. Kochenganan
C. Rajaraja I
D. Nalankilli

6. According to Pattinappalai, which emblem did customs officers stamp on goods?

A. Fish
B. Tiger
C. Bow
D. Elephant

7. According to Silappathikaram, which was the seaside trading quarter of Puhar?

A. Pattinappakkam
B. Nalangadi
C. Maruvurppakkam
D. Allangadi

8. Which work says the sea swallowed Puhar?

A. Silappathikaram
B. Purananuru
C. Pattinappalai
D. Manimekalai

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9. According to Manimekalai, the failure to hold which festival led to Puhar's destruction?

A. Indra festival
B. Pongal
C. Karthigai Deepam
D. Onam

10. By what name does the Periplus refer to Poompuhar?

A. Poduke
B. Kamara
C. Kolchi
D. Sopatma

11. How does Ptolemy refer to Poompuhar?

A. Muziris
B. Kolkhoi
C. Khaberis
D. Nikama

12. Where at Poompuhar was a brick wharf found?

A. Melaiyur
B. Pallavanesvaram
C. Vanagiri
D. Kilaiyur

13. Where at Poompuhar was a Buddhist vihara found?

A. Pallavanesvaram
B. Vanagiri
C. Kilaiyur
D. Thiruvenkadu

14. Which institution joined the State Department in the 1981 Poompuhar underwater survey?

A. NIOT, Chennai
B. NIO, Goa
C. Indian Maritime University
D. ISRO

15. On which date did the 2025 Poompuhar underwater survey begin?

A. 2 September 2022
B. 18 June 2024
C. 19 September 2025
D. 20 December 2025

16. Who was the partner in the 2025 Poompuhar underwater survey?

A. NIO, Goa
B. Anna University
C. ASI
D. Indian Maritime University

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17. As per the State policy note, how far from the Poompuhar shore was a row of structures found?

A. 200–300 m

B. 20–30 m

C. 2–3 km

D. 20–30 km

18. Which was the main port of the later Cholas?

A. Poompuhar

B. Nagapattinam

C. Korkai

D. Muziris

19. In Silappathikaram, which quarter of Puhar housed the king and nobles?

A. Maruvurppakkam

B. Vanagiri

C. Pattinappakkam

D. Kilaiyur

20. Statements: (1) Manimekalai was written by Seethalai Sathanar. (2) Silappathikaram begins in Madurai. Which is correct?

A. Neither

B. 2 only

C. Both

D. 1 only

Answers with explanations

1. A) Mayiladuthurai – Mayiladuthurai (Nagapattinam until 2020).

2. B) Kaveri – The Kaveri – Kaveripoompattinam.

3. C) Cholas – The early Cholas.

4. D) Kadiyalur Uruthirangannanar – A Pathuppattu work praising Karikala Chola.

5. A) Karikala Chola – Karikala Chola.

6. B) Tiger – The tiger, the Chola emblem.

7. C) Maruvurppakkam – Maruvurppakkam – merchants and Yavanas.

8. D) Manimekalai – Because the Indra festival was stopped – Manimekalai.

9. A) Indra festival – The Indra festival.

10. B) Kamara – Kamara = Kaveripoompattinam.

11. C) Khaberis – Khaberis emporion.

12. D) Kilaiyur – Kilaiyur – wooden post c. 3rd century BCE.

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13. A) Pallavanesvaram – Pallavanesvaram – c. 4th–5th century CE.

14. B) NIO, Goa – National Institute of Oceanography, Goa.

15. C) 19 September 2025 – 19 September 2025 – with IMU.

16. D) Indian Maritime University – Indian Maritime University (IMU).

17. A) 200–300 m – 200–300 m, in shallow water.

18. B) Nagapattinam – Nagapattinam; the capital was Thanjavur.

19. C) Pattinappakkam – Pattinappakkam.

20. D) 1 only – Silappathikaram begins in Puhar.

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