Tamil Siddhars – the Eighteen Siddhars, Thirumoolar's Thirumanthiram, the Reformist Voice of Siddhar Songs, Siddha Medicine and the National Institute of Siddha | TNPSC Notes

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The **Siddhars** are revered in the Tamil tradition both as masters of yoga, spiritual knowledge, medicine and alchemy and as reformist poets who questioned caste, ritual and outward show in worship in simple Tamil. Tradition speaks of the "**Eighteen Siddhars**" (Pathinen Siddhargal), but the list varies from text to text. The foundational text of the tradition is **Thirumoolar's Thirumanthiram** – about 3,000 verses in 9 tantras, the **10th Thirumurai** of the Saiva canon. **Siddha medicine**, which grew out of this tradition, is today one of the Government of India's **AYUSH** systems.

தமிழில் படிக்க

These notes are written for TNPSC Group 1, 2/2A and 4 aspirants. They serve the topics "Tamil literature" and "the Tamil tradition of social reform" in the unit on **History, Culture, Heritage and Socio-Political Movements of Tamil Nadu**, and the health portion (Indian systems of medicine) of the **Development Administration in Tamil Nadu** unit. See also the notes on Iyothee Thass Pandithar, a Siddha physician and reformer, and Vallalar, often seen as continuing the Siddhar tradition.

The Siddhar Tradition at a Glance

Feature	Details
Meaning	One who has attained "siddhi" (yogic power, perfection)
Number	Traditionally eighteen; the names vary between texts
Foundational text	Thirumoolar's Thirumanthiram – about 3,000 verses, 9 tantras, 10th Thirumurai
Themes	Yoga, philosophy of body and soul, opposition to caste and ritual, impermanence, medicine, alchemy
Style	Simple spoken Tamil, coded (symbolic) language, songs addressed to a listener (Pambe, Kudhambai, Maname)
Medical tradition	Siddha medicine – three humours (vatham, pitham, kabam), five-element theory, eight-fold diagnosis

The Eighteen Siddhars – Key Figures

There is no single list of the Eighteen Siddhars; names such as Thirumoolar, Agathiyar, Bogar, Korakkar, Pambatti, Kudhambai, Idaikkadar, Konganar, Sattaimuni and Karuvurar appear in most lists. Siddhar-tradition poets such as **Sivavakkiyar and Pattinathar** appear only in some lists.

Siddhar	Associated facts
Thirumoolar	Thirumanthiram (10th Thirumurai); one of the 63 Nayanmars
Agathiyar (Kumbamuni)	By tradition the father of Siddha medicine; associated with the Pothigai hills
Bogar	Associated with Palani; by tradition made the navapashanam idol of Murugan
Pambatti Siddhar	Songs beginning "Aadu Pambe" (dance, O snake) – the body and mind pictured as a snake
Kudhambai Siddhar	Songs addressed to "Kudhambai" – against ritualism
Idaikkattu Siddhar	Songs using images from the life of herders
Konganar, Korakkar, Sattaimuni, Karuvurar, Sundaranandar, Machamuni and others	Works on medicine, yoga and alchemy (rasavatham) circulate in their names

Thirumoolar and the Thirumanthiram

- **Structure:** about 3,000 verses (the count varies slightly by edition); **9 tantras**; the **10th Thirumurai** of the Saiva canon. Thirumoolar is one of the 63 Nayanmars.
- **Date:** not settled; scholars propose different periods – in the exam it is safest to write that the date is debated.
- **Famous lines:** "**Anbe Sivam**" – love and Shiva are not two; "**Ondre kulamum oruvane thevanum**" – one humanity, one God; "**Udambaar azhiyil uyiraar azhivar**" – if the body perishes the life perishes, hence care of the body ("I nurtured the body, and so nurtured the soul").
- **Content:** ashtanga yoga, Saiva Siddhanta ideas, ethics, health and wisdom – the base of later Siddhar literature and of Saiva Siddhanta.
- **Significance:** the Thirumanthiram is regarded as one of the earliest texts to use the term "Saiva Siddhanta".

The Reformist Voice of Siddhar Songs

- **Against caste:** many Siddhar songs stress that there is no high or low by birth; the Thirumanthiram's "one humanity" is the base.
- **Against ritual and outward show:** inner purity matters more than outward image worship, useless rituals, ritual bathing and external purity – the songs of Sivavakkiyar are a classic example.

- **The body as temple:** the yogic view that God is to be realised within, not sought outside.
- **People's language:** simple spoken Tamil rather than learned diction, so the songs spread among ordinary people; some songs use a coded (symbolic) language.
- **Later influence:** the Siddhar tradition is seen as a forerunner of Vallalar's Samarasa Suddha Sanmargam and of 19th–20th century reformist thought.

Siddha Medicine

- **Basic theory:** the five elements (earth, water, fire, air, space); the **three humours** – vatham, pitham, kabam (disease is their imbalance); six tastes; 96 tattvas (principles).
- **Eight-fold diagnosis (envagai thervu):** pulse (naadi), touch, tongue, colour, speech, eyes, stools and urine – pulse reading is a special feature.
- **Medicines:** herbs as well as metal and mineral preparations (parpam, chendooram, etc.); varmam therapy, thokkanam (therapeutic massage), yoga and diet (pathiyam).
- **Public health use:** the Tamil Nadu Government distributed **Nilavembu kudineer** during dengue outbreaks and **Kabasura kudineer** during COVID-19.
- **AYUSH:** Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, **Siddha**, Sowa-Rigpa and Homoeopathy are the systems under the Ministry of Ayush.

Siddha Institutions

Institution	Details
Government Siddha Medical College, Palayamkottai	Established in 1964 (Tirunelveli)
National Institute of Siddha (NIS)	Established in 2005 at Tambaram Sanatorium, Chennai; the premier Siddha institute under the Ministry of Ayush; its hospital is the **Ayothidoss Pandithar Hospital**
Central Council for Research in Siddha (CCRS)	Headquarters in Chennai; Siddha research
Department of Indian Medicine and Homoeopathy, Government of Tamil Nadu	Runs Siddha hospitals and dispensaries in the State; co-organiser of Siddha Day events

- **Siddha Day:** observed every year by the Ministry of Ayush around the **Margazhi Ayilyam** star, the birth star of **Agathiyar**, regarded as the father of Siddha medicine.
- **9th Siddha Day:** inaugurated in Chennai on 3 January 2026 by Vice-President C.P. Radhakrishnan; theme "Siddha for Global Health".

Tamil Nadu Angle

- **Siddha is Tamil Nadu's own tradition:** its source texts are in Tamil; work is under way to preserve and digitise palm-leaf manuscripts.
- **Siddha wings in government hospitals:** the Tamil Nadu Government runs Siddha wings in many hospitals and primary health centres.

- **Palani, Sathuragiri, Pothigai:** places associated with the Siddhars – of cultural-tourism importance.
- **Challenges:** standardised clinical trials, drug quality control and the safety of metal-based medicines – scientific evidence needs to be strengthened.

Writing Mains Answers (Group 1 / Group 2)

The Siddhars – forerunners of Tamil social reform (about 150–250 words)

- **Introduction:** the Eighteen-Siddhar tradition; Thirumoolar – Thirumanthiram.
- **Against caste:** "Ondre kulamum oruvane thevanum".
- **Against ritualism:** songs of Sivavakkiyar and Kudhambai Siddhar; inner purity.
- **People's language:** simple Tamil – spread among the people.
- **Scientific contribution:** Siddha medicine and yoga.
- **Conclusion:** a line of Tamil thought running from the Siddhars through Vallalar to modern reformers.

Siddha medicine – tradition and present relevance (about 150 words)

- Basis: vatham, pitham, kabam; eight-fold diagnosis.
- Institutions: Palayamkottai (1964), National Institute of Siddha (2005), CCRS.
- Public health: Nilavembu and Kabasura kudineer.
- Way forward: research evidence, quality control, manuscript conservation.

Practice: Match the Following

Item	Match
Thirumanthiram	Thirumoolar – 10th Thirumurai
Father of Siddha medicine (tradition)	Agathiyar
Palani navapashanam idol (tradition)	Bogar
"Aadu Pambe"	Pambatti Siddhar
National Institute of Siddha	Tambaram, Chennai – 2005
Siddha Day	Margazhi Ayilyam – Agathiyar

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- Do not write that there is one fixed list of the Eighteen Siddhars – it varies between texts.
- The Thirumanthiram is the 10th Thirumurai; the 8th is the Thiruvasagam – do not confuse them.
- The date of the Thirumanthiram is not settled; do not state a fixed year.
- The National Institute of Siddha is at Tambaram, Chennai; the Government Siddha Medical College, Palayamkottai is a different institution.
- The three humours of Siddha (vatham, pitham, kabam) resemble a doctrine in Ayurveda, but the two are not the same system.

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

தமிழ்	English
சித்தர்	Siddhar (perfected yogi-poet)
பதினெண் சித்தர்கள்	The Eighteen Siddhars
திருமந்திரம்	Thirumanthiram (Thirumoolar's work)
தந்திரம்	Section (of the Thirumanthiram)
முக்குற்றம் / மூன்று தோடங்கள்	Three humours (vatham, pitham, kabam)
எண்வகைத் தேர்வு	Eight-fold diagnosis
நாடி	Pulse
இரசவாதம்	Alchemy
வர்மம்	Varmam (vital-point therapy)

Quick Revision Table

Year / period	Event
Date debated	Thirumoolar – Thirumanthiram (10th Thirumurai)
Medieval – later period	Songs and medical texts of the Eighteen-Siddhar tradition
1964	Government Siddha Medical College, Palayamkottai
2005	National Institute of Siddha opened at Tambaram, Chennai
23 December 2021	5th Siddha Day – "Strength of Siddha Medicine for Communicable Diseases"
3 January 2026	9th Siddha Day, Chennai – "Siddha for Global Health"

TNPSC Key Points (PYQ-style facts)

- Eighteen Siddhars – a traditional number; the list varies.
- Thirumanthiram – Thirumoolar – about 3,000 verses – 9 tantras – 10th Thirumurai.
- "Anbe Sivam" and "Ondre kulamum oruvane thevanum" – Thirumanthiram.
- Father of Siddha medicine – Agathiyar (tradition).
- Palani navapashanam Murugan idol – Bogar (tradition).
- Three humours – vatham, pitham, kabam; eight-fold diagnosis – from pulse to urine.
- National Institute of Siddha – Tambaram, Chennai – 2005; hospital – Ayothidoss Pandithar Hospital.
- Government Siddha Medical College – Palayamkottai – 1964.
- Siddha Day – Margazhi Ayilyam (Agathiyar's birth star) – Ministry of Ayush.
- Kabasura kudineer – COVID-19; Nilavembu kudineer – dengue.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who were the Siddhars?

They are revered in the Tamil tradition as masters of yoga, spiritual knowledge, medicine and alchemy, and as reformist poets who criticised caste, ritual and outward show in simple Tamil. Tradition speaks of the "Eighteen Siddhars", but the list varies from text to text.

What is special about the Thirumanthiram?

Thirumoolar's Thirumanthiram has about 3,000 verses in 9 tantras and is the 10th Thirumurai of the Saiva canon. Through lines such as "Anbe Sivam" and "Ondre kulamum oruvane thevanum" it stresses love and human equality; it also deals with yoga, health and Saiva Siddhanta ideas.

What is the basic theory of Siddha medicine?

Based on the five-element theory, health is the balance of the three humours – vatham, pitham and kabam – and disease is their imbalance. Diagnosis uses the eight-fold examination: pulse, touch, tongue, colour, speech, eyes, stools and urine.

Where is the National Institute of Siddha?

The National Institute of Siddha, opened in 2005 at Tambaram Sanatorium, Chennai, is the premier academic institute for Siddha under the Ministry of Ayush. Its hospital is named after Ayothidoss Pandithar.

When is Siddha Day observed?

The Ministry of Ayush observes Siddha Day every year around the Margazhi Ayilyam star, the birth star of Agathiyar, regarded as the father of Siddha medicine. The 9th Siddha Day was held in Chennai on 3 January 2026.

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Practice questions

1. Who composed the Thirumanthiram?

A. Thirumoolar
B. Agathiyar
C. Bogar
D. Sivavakkiyar

2. Which Thirumurai is the Thirumanthiram?

A. 8
B. 9
C. 10
D. 12

3. How many tantras does the Thirumanthiram have?

A. 7
B. 9
C. 12
D. 18

4. In which work does the line "Ondre kulamum oruvane thevanum" occur?

A. Thiruvasagam
B. Thirukkural
C. Thevaram
D. Thirumanthiram

5. Who is traditionally revered as the father of Siddha medicine?

A. Agathiyar
B. Thirumoolar
C. Korakkar
D. Bogar

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6. Who, by tradition, made the navapashanam idol of Murugan at Palani?

A. Agathiyar
B. Bogar
C. Idaikkadar
D. Sattaimuni

7. Which Siddhar sang the "Aadu Pambe" songs?

A. Kudhambai Siddhar
B. Idaikkattu Siddhar
C. Pambatti Siddhar
D. Konganar

8. What are the three humours of Siddha medicine?

A. Pulse, tongue, eyes
B. Earth, water, fire
C. Sattva, rajas, tamas
D. Vatham, pitham, kabam

9. Which is NOT part of the eight-fold diagnosis in Siddha?

A. Sphygmomanometer reading
B. Eyes
C. Pulse
D. Tongue

10. Where is the National Institute of Siddha located?

A. Palayamkottai
B. Tambaram, Chennai
C. Madurai
D. Coimbatore

11. In which year was the National Institute of Siddha established?

A. 1964
B. 1995
C. 2005
D. 2014

12. The hospital of the National Institute of Siddha is named after whom?

A. Vallalar
B. Thirumoolar
C. Agathiyar
D. Ayothidoss Pandithar

13. In which year was the Government Siddha Medical College, Palayamkottai established?

A. 1947
B. 1964
C. 1985
D. 2005

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14. Siddha Day is linked to which star?

A. Chithirai Thiruvathirai
B. Margazhi Ayilyam
C. Thai Poosam
D. Vaikasi Visakam

15. Which Siddha preparation did the Tamil Nadu Government distribute during COVID-19?

A. Nilavembu kudineer
B. Thiriphala chooranam
C. Kabasura kudineer
D. Amukkara chooranam

16. Which work states the idea "Anbe Sivam" (love is Shiva)?

A. Silappathikaram
B. Periya Puranam
C. Kantha Puranam
D. Thirumanthiram

17. Which system does NOT come under the Ministry of Ayush?

A. Allopathy
B. Unani
C. Sowa-Rigpa
D. Siddha

18. What is a key feature of Siddhar songs?

A. Sanskrit diction
B. Opposition to caste and ritual in simple Tamil
C. Praise of kings
D. Description of war

19. Where was the 9th Siddha Day (3 January 2026) held?

A. New Delhi
B. Madurai
C. Chennai
D. Puducherry

20. Where is the headquarters of the Central Council for Research in Siddha (CCRS)?

A. Bengaluru
B. New Delhi
C. Jamnagar
D. Chennai

Answers with explanations

1. A) Thirumoolar – Thirumanthiram – Thirumoolar.

2. C) 10 – The Thirumanthiram is the 10th Thirumurai.

3. B) 9 – 9 tantras, about 3,000 verses.

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4. D) Thirumanthiram – Thirumoolar's Thirumanthiram – human equality.

5. A) Agathiyar – Agathiyar; Siddha Day is linked to his birth star.

6. B) Bogar – Bogar – Palani.

7. C) Pambatti Siddhar – Pambatti Siddhar – body and mind as a snake.

8. D) Vatham, pitham, kabam – Vatham, pitham, kabam – disease is their imbalance.

9. A) Sphygmomanometer reading – The eight: pulse, touch, tongue, colour, speech, eyes, stools, urine.

10. B) Tambaram, Chennai – Tambaram Sanatorium, Chennai – 2005.

11. C) 2005 – 2005; the Palayamkottai college dates from 1964.

12. D) Ayothidoss Pandithar – Ayothidoss Pandithar Hospital.

13. B) 1964 – 1964 (30 November).

14. B) Margazhi Ayilyam – Margazhi Ayilyam – Agathiyar's birth star.

15. C) Kabasura kudineer – Kabasura kudineer – COVID-19; Nilavembu – dengue.

16. D) Thirumanthiram – Thirumanthiram.

17. A) Allopathy – Allopathy (modern medicine) is outside AYUSH.

18. B) Opposition to caste and ritual in simple Tamil – Opposition to caste, ritual and outward show in simple Tamil.

19. C) Chennai – Chennai; inaugurated by Vice-President C.P. Radhakrishnan.

20. D) Chennai – CCRS – Chennai.

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