

Siddha philosophy in the Malaysian Indian Culture: A Historical Outlook

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Introduction

Siddhas are described as 'perfect beings' who had attained the spirituality zenith. The word Siddha can define on two perspectives. The first proof is based on root word evidence. The other is the internal evidences found in siddha literatures. An analysis of the root word of Siddha reveals the followings:-

- i) Citti - Received eight types of super powers¹ as a result of penance.
- ii) Citta - The one who can control his actions.
- iii) Cit - The one who had attained the ultimate level of knowledge and wisdom.

These are the explanations found for the word siddha (Kandasamy.S.N, 2004, 1). Besides, according to researchers, siddhas are those who had been liberated and are one with God (Marshall Govindan, 2007, 66).

The literature evidence shows that siddhas are those who had attained complete realisation of themselves (*Nyanakkovai*, Kallui Cittar Song: 22 & Akappeiy Cittar Song: 72), those under Yogasamadhi (*Tirumanthiram* 1490), the ones who realise themselves (*Subramaniyar Suttanyanam* 100, song: 98) are known as siddhas. Sivavakkiyar, an early siddhas himself says that siddhas are wise yogis (Kandasamy.S.N, 2004, 49). Based on the above mentioned explanations, siddhas can be defined as:-

- i) The one who had attained ultimate wisdom through penance and yogic practice.
- ii) The one who had achieved supreme purity and sacredness.
- iii) The one who had obtained eight types of abilities (super powers) and able to see the past, present and future.

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- iv) The one who had realised himself.
- v) Saints who had attained perfection.
- vi) The one who realise God (Sivan) is within; not without.
- vii) The one with God.

General Characteristics of Siddhas

The eight abilities of the siddhas are of God's nature. Therefore, siddhas are equally treated as God. This is cited by Pambatti Cittar in his song, *Cittar Vallabam (Nyanakkovai)*. Here, it is explained that siddhas could perform the actionsⁱⁱ of God.

All the civilisations in this world claim that human body is perishable. Contradictorily, siddhas discovered immortality by not only preaching it but also by practicing it. This action, of course amazed the world's renowned scientists (Srinivasan.C, 2006, 32-36). The best evidence for this fact is the life history of Ramalingga Vallalar (*Thiruvavur* 134 Maranamilla Peruvazhvu 1:2310). An incident happened on 30th January, 1874, Friday at midnight in Mettukuppam, Tamil Nadu. At that time, Vallalar was 51. He entered into one of the rooms of Citti palace and locked himself. According to historical proofs, he vanished and became light. Prior to entering the room, he gave instruction to his disciples not to open the door as he would be invisible even if the door is opened. Despite that, a few days later, a British officer produced official permission to open and inspect the room. According to the report provided by the officer, the room was found to be empty when opened.

Tamil Cittars

These prominent siddhas are not bound by any religion, race or faith. They have projected themselves in various parts of the world (Marshall Govindan, 2007, 66). Lord Buddha (Kandasamy S.N, 2003, 290) and Lord Jesus are also bound by the characteristics of siddhas (Marshall Govindan, 2007).

The focus of this research is based on the Tamil siddhas. Therefore, as far as Tamil siddhas are concerned, there are 18 siddhas on the list. So far, there are three lists based on these 18 siddhasⁱⁱⁱ. Among those in these lists, most of them were found to take place in all three lists except for a few. As such, scholars find it almost impossible to

categorise the 18 siddhas accordingly as a conclusion could not be reached (Sivapalan.G, 2006, 147). Apart from this, in the culture of Tamil siddhas, there's a practice of dividing the siddhas based on Thirumoolar convention and Agasthiyar convention (Kandasamy.S.N, 2004, 4).

Period of cittars

The period of siddhas can be divided into two categories, namely Literature period and Spiritual period. According to scholars in Literature, siddhas period began from 5th century A.C which is from the period of Thirumoolar. Defiantly, based on *Tolkappiyam (Puratthinai: 75, Ceiyuliyal Cootthiram: 165)*, which was written before Christ, the existence of the word 'Arivar' is found which refers to siddhas. As such, it is evident that siddhas exists prior to 5th century A.C. Besides their palm scripts also serve as proofs that the siddhas existed before Christ.

Next, on the spiritual level, it is said that Thirumoolar had written 3000 songs by producing one each year. As such, it is impossible to claim that he belongs to 5th century A.C. On the other hand, one of the 18 siddhas, Boogar cited that Agasthiyar is a siddha who had lived on for four aeons (*Boogar 7000: 5757*). As such, even now it is quite difficult to determine the period of siddhas (Sivapalan.G, 2006, 147). Despite that, there have been claims that siddhas from ancient period appearing and blessing the deserved ones in the present days. According to P. Kamalakannan in his book entitled *Chathuragiriyil Korakka cittar*, he was blessed by the appearance of Korakka cittar before him (Kamalakkannan.P, 2006, 221). Ramalingga Vallalar is also said to have appeared and bestowed blessings after taking upon the light form (Marshall Govindan, 2007, 68-69). Generally speaking the blessings and appearance of the siddhas are only prevalent to those who are practicing the siddhas philosophy. Even then, the siddhas would definitely bless those who follow the siddha principles as well as abide by *dharma* (righteousness). This is an evidence of their immortality and existence.

Siddha Principle

The Tamil siddhas were against the text religion and whenever possible criticised the rituals and religious practices. They uphold the principle of being united with nature (Marshall Govindan, 2007, 66). They discovered the secret of life and delivered the message in the simplest way possible to people (Shanmugavadivu. 2007, 1-2). The siddhas denounced the caste system. Though the caste system was created by the society, during that time, caste system was embedded into the religious practice of the society. As siddhas were against such practices, they were portrayed as rebels and outcast of the society. Society also looks at the siddhas as people who go against the Veda. Therefore, the temples gave priority to the *Nayanmaar* (the top of all the Saivite devotees) and the *Aalvaar* (the top of all the Vaishnavite devotees) and denied any recognition to the siddhas. Only Thirumoolar who practiced Saivite was given recognition and accepted among the Saivites and uplifted as one of the *Nayanmaar* but not as a siddha (Marshall Govindan, 2007, 69-71).

Despite that fact, some of the siddhas great Samadhi^v has currently become well known temples. Among the well known temples, Konkana siddha's Samadhi in Thirupathi, Idaikaattu siddha's Samadhi in Thiruannamalai, Boogar and Pulippaani siddhas Samadhi in Palani, Paambatti siddha's Samadhi in Marudhamalai, Sundarananthar siddha's Samadhi in Madhurai and Karuvoor siddha's Samadhi in Karuvoor (Kamalakkannan.P, 2006, 5).

Society appreciates and welcomes the knowledge of Yoga practice and siddhas medicine introduced by these siddhas. Cittars who lived centuries ago left valuable knowledge on papyrus leaves for the current community. The siddhas effort had attained extreme devotion for the siddhas among the Malaysian Hindu community and is spreading widely as the practice is also being updated regularly by siddhas philosophy practitioners from India.

The Development of Hinduism in Malaysia

Majority of Indians migrated from India in the end of 19th century and beginnings of 20th century were non-professional villagers (Sandhu.K, 1969, 3-4). Apart from this group, there was a minority group migrant from India who settled for civil service and trade industry. This group found their settlement in the urban areas. The urban people followed the religious principle by building proper temples; generally temples for the deity Lord Muruga and performed their religious practice. On the other hand, the group that settled in estates performed their religious practice by building temples based on the soil they brought back from their village. Such practice produced temples for deity Goddess Mariamman, Muthu Mariamman and Karumariamman. Malaya attained its independence in 1957. As the British were returning home, they sold off the estates on lots as there weren't any financially strong people to buy off the estates from the British. As such, many estate workers lost their jobs and were displaced. In search of jobs, many were forced to look for jobs in the cities (Janaki Raman.M, 2009, 122-125). These people started their own temples in the cities as well and most of the temples built by them were devoted to Goddess Amman.

The introduction of New Economic policy in the 70's, development in education system, economy, politic, jobs, business opportunities and so forth further contributed for rural migration to urban and cities (Sinnapah Arasaratnam, 1994 & Jain Ravindran.K, 1970). Further development in the 80's and 90's demanded for labourers in the areas such as construction, maids and building roads. As the locals were not keen in these areas, employers gave priority to the immigrant workers as they neither demanded high wages nor facilities. The current situation sees foreign workers in estates especially from Indonesia, Bangladesh, India, Nepal as well as Burma.

As such, presently, majority of Indian Malaysians have settled in urban and cities. Though Indians have gained from the government's economic policies, these gains are quite insufficient as it didn't reach the majority. Despite the fact, development in the lives of Indians in Malaysia did contribute towards the progress in the religious aspect as many are showing keen interest in knowing the substance and essence of their religious

practice. Due to this, many religious movements started booming in Malaysia (Rajantharan.M & Manimaran.S, 1994, 1-3).

Progress of Siddha Philosophy in Malaysia.

Apparently, Siddha philosophy started in the beginning of 20th century in Malaysia. This is due to four major aspects:

1. Siddha medication.
2. Religious movements or societies.
3. Movies.
4. Individual effort.

Siddha Medication

Malaysians were firstly introduced to siddhas through siddhas medication and treatments. Some researchers suggest that siddha medications were firstly introduced in Malaysia in the 7th century. This is due to the archaeological findings in the form of artefacts at a place called Bukit Batu Pahat in Lembah Bujang, Kedah. The researcher himself had visited the site. Even then, there isn't much evidence to prove that these artefacts were indeed used for siddha medications. In the process of research, it had been discovered an unproved assumption that when the King Rajendra Chola 1 attacked Kedah in the 11th century (1012-1044) (Subramaniam.N, 1989, 230-231), siddhas medication practitioners had followed him.

Current research discovered that a man called Periya Thambi provided siddha medication service in the 1870's in Malaysia. This piece of information was gained from the descendent of that family, Seenivasan, a siddhas medical practitioner. He is the grandson of Annasamy, who served as a siddha medical practitioner to the royals at Tanjai palace in Kumbakonam. Periya Thambi came to Malaya at the age of five and he is identified as the family 'doctor' to the family of Sivaraja Yogi. At that time, it is said that he had approximately 50 students learning the trait from him. Even at that time,

apparently he used a van to provide medical services to the people. He died in 1943 at the age of 95.

The most important student of Periya Thambi was his son, Ganapathy. Ganapathy had served as a Headmaster of a Tamil school in Rawang in the state of Selangor. According to one of his disciple and son in-law, Mr. Seenivasan, Ganapathy attained Samadhi in 1986 and his followers are performing 'Guru' rituals and prayers for him. He operates a clinic in Old Town, Petaling Jaya and provides medical services to the needy people. On 13th February, 2009, Mr. Seenivasan gave a valuable talk to the student of University Malaya on siddhas medication. According to him, there were other siddha medical practitioners during Periya Thambi's period but he could hardly recall them. Through this piece of information, it is found that there are many more siddha medical practitioners in Malaysia besides Periya Thambi.

Subsequently, based on Tamil newspapers in the 60's, it is found that siddha clinics of R.M.K. Velusamy from Palani, India had been running their medical practices through their branches in Penang and Kuala Lumpur (Tamil Nesan, 18/06/1960, 6 and Tamil Murasu, 21/07/1960, 10). The above data proves that siddha medicines from this clinic had been available in Malaysia even at that period. Apart from this, some individuals in estates had also used herbs and provided siddha treatment based on their personal knowledge. At that point of time, awareness on siddha medication was higher compared to siddha philosophy among Malaysian Indians.

Societies and Movements Related to Siddhas Philosophy.

After some form awareness on siddha philosophy, people were slowly introduced to cittar philosophy through the emergence of some movements and societies that operated on small scale. As such, Ramakrishna Mission started in 1896; Singapore started their operation in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur in 1904 by initiating Vivekananda Ashram. 1949 marks the beginning of Sutta Samajam by Swami Sathyanandha in Puchong (Rajakrishnan Ramasamy, 1988, 131). Theiveeka Vazhkai Sanggam initiated in the year 1936 by Swami Sivanandha in Rishikesh took a strong root in Malaysia in 1953 (Ibid,

130). This centre teaches yoga exercise and meditation based on siddha philosophy. Apart from this, in the same year, the editor of Tamil Murasu press Muthu Valliappa invited Paranjothi Mahaan to Malaysia. His presence was used to form Paripoorana Nyana Sabai. Later, this movement grew and took form of World Peace Temple (Ulaga Samadhana Alayam) in 1969. Even at time, exercise of raising Kundalini was taught to the followers (www.gpmahan.com). Besides this, in 1955, K. Ramanatha Cettiyar and Swami Sathyanandha jointly started a spiritual society named Arul Neri Thirukootam (Rajakrishnan Ramasamy. 1988, pp. 132). Through these findings, it is found that prior to independence; there have been siddha societies and movements that preached siddha philosophy based on their practices. Despite that, the fact remains that majority of Malaysian Indians were residing in estates at that time. As such, according to various researches, they were more keen and comfortable in worshipping Mariamman, sub-deities and so forth (Rajantharan.M, 1997 & Manimaran Subramaniam. 1995).

Siddha Philosophers

Despite the fact that people were not fully aware of siddhas, there was some information on siddha realised by the Malaysian Indians. The information reached the people through yogis and sages who lived at that period. A yogi by the name of Jeganatha Swami who lived and attained Samadhi in Tapah, Perak is a prominent example of siddha awareness in Malaysia. Just like him, many yogis had appeared in various places and preached siddha philosophy to the people at that period. These yogis took upon yogis, sadhus, and sages' teachings, lived by the principles of the teachings and preached the same to the people.

Siddha Principle and Movies

Apart from these great people, it is undeniable that in 1950's movies played a crucial role in creating awareness on siddha philosophy and principles. Characters such as Vasistar, Agasthiyar, Visvamitrar and Kalaikottu Munivar Viyasar known as Rishyasirunggar in movies based on stories from great epics such as *Ramayana* and *Mahabaratha* gave some form of siddha knowledge to people. Following this was the

production of movies entirely devoted to siddhas such as Agasthiyar, Pattinattar and Arunagirinathar. Through these movies, society gets more information and awareness on siddhas and their life. Despite that, research found that, though people became aware of siddha, they merely looked at them as sadhus, sages and people who had attained God's blessings and were not looking at the siddhas as someone they could be devoted to.

Awareness of Siddha Principles

Palm leave scripts played a major role in introducing siddhas to Malaysian Indians. The culture of reading palm scripts among the people started in the 70's and strengthens in the 80's. People truly felt that siddhas came in person to solve their problems through the scripts. As such, siddhas principle grew and attracted the society. It's not too much to say that the palm scripts provided a means to think about siddhas to a lay person. Apart from this, many societies associated with siddha provided services such as knowledge and education on siddha philosophy to people. By doing so, people were attracted to the siddha practice and became members of these societies. Even then, these people were showing their devotion towards the siddha by worshipping their pictures rather than focussing on their precious philosophies. Regardless of all this, it is evident that siddha philosophy spread among people through the palm leave scripts.

The Strengthening of Siddha Philosophy

Siddha philosophy that slowly took place among the society was strengthened and made popular by various siddha movements and societies that were operating here. Among the societies that played major role were Agasthiyar Sanmarka Sanggam initiated in 1992 in Dengkil (Tamilmani Subramaniam, 2005/2006) and in the same year Agasthiyar Sanmarka Gurukulam by Swami Tharmalingam (Vishnu Krishnan, 2006/2007). Principally, these societies were guided by some of similar societies in India. Apart from that, the societies also survived and performed charity activities through donations collected from people. Some of the money collected from the donations is also given to the societies in India. Besides that, activities such as providing food to the

devotees during Thaipusam festival by Agasthiyar Sanmarka Gurukulam in Batu Caves also enhance siddha awareness among people.

Apart from these societies, a society that operates under the name of Vallal Perumaganar Ramalinga Swamygal spreads siddha principles that are based on Vallalar to the people. Furthermore, these societies also perform 'guru pooja' to strengthen followers' devotion and conducts talks on siddha philosophy to increase followers' knowledge on cittar. This is also considered as a way of promoting siddha philosophy in Malaysia and increase awareness and curiosity on siddhas. As the pinnacle to the society's services and efforts, a conference on Vallalar was conducted in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 28th and 29th June, 2008. The conference was chaired by Dr Lalitha. Many Professors and researchers from India shared their views and presented papers during the conference.

Individual's Effort

Some individuals who were well versed on siddhas philosophy and principle performed guru pooja, pournami pooja and amavasai pooja. They also guided people who came to them for advice on siddha principles. These people were not associated with any siddha society or body but they had been dwelling with siddha philosophy for many years and became spiritual masters. This was also one of the ways as to how people were made aware to siddha philosophy.

The 1st World Conference on Siddha Philosophy

The peak of siddha awareness growth came in 2007 with the 1st World Conference on Siddha Philosophy which was hosted in Malaysia.

The conference was conducted for 3 days, May 25,26 and 27, 2007 at Perdana Siswa, University Malaya which was arranged by Malaysia Sri Agasthiyar Nyana Peedam. The participants who attended the conference were from various siddha organisations such as Thiru Agasthiyar Patinen Cittar Yoga Sangam from Ipoh, Hindu

Sangam from University Malaya as well as other siddha organisations from Malaysia and Singapore. The President of Sri Malaysia Agasthiyar Nyana Peedam, Mr. Apna Nagappan took the responsibility to organise this event. The keynote speaker for the conference was the President of Sri Agasthiyar Nyana Peddam, Thavayogi Thanggarasan Adigalar from Kallaru, Tamil Nadu. Various researchers from Malaysia, India, Sri Lanka, Singapore, South Africa and England submitted their papers and participated in this conference.

Many people supported this conference by providing financial support as they found it as a privilege to be able to be a part of a good deed activity. As such, this conference did not face finance as a constraint. Transportation was made available and free of charge to the participants, followers of siddha philosophy, as well as to guest of honours by the organiser. Besides, many well wishers came forward to take the visitors on tour of Malaysia without any charge. In short, finance was never an obstacle for a noble activity in uplifting spirituality.

Initially, the organising committee only wanted research papers to be presented in Tamil language. Later, it was found that many participants who were not well versed in Tamil language were keen to share their views, ideas and experience in the conference. As such, English language was allowed to be used in the conference. In this era, role of computer is undeniable. Taking this into consideration, organising committee came up with webpage and uploaded all information pertaining to the conference in it. This shows that besides uplifting language ability, this effort generated knowledge of citta philosophy among Malaysian Indians. This attempt also proves that new technology does play a role in disseminating information and creating awareness.

Another interesting point is that people from all walks of life and different religion took part in this conference. Dr. Kader Ibrahim, a Muslim presented a special speech for this conference. Among the activities for the conference was slide show on life history of siddhas such as Agasthiyar and Vallalar as well as exhibition of herbal/siddha medicines.

These activities attracted audience and they welcomed the exhibition conducted by Dr. Sarangabani. The exhibition covered all aspects from medicines to palm leaves. This enhanced peoples' knowledge on siddha and their philosophies.

Among the prominent figures who attended the conference were Swamy Oongaranantha, Vadaloor Ooranadigal, P. Kamalakkannan, Chevalier Mathivanan, Professor Arangga Ramalinggam and Professor T. N. Ganapathy. The guest of honour who officiate the conference was the Deputy Dean of Tanjai University. The closing ceremony for the event was carried out by the Director of National Land Finance Cooperative Tan Sri Somasundram.

In the closing speech, Deputy Dean S. Subramaniam said that he had never seen such an overwhelming support for a conference such as this conference. According to him, in most of the conferences, the number of people attending closing ceremony of a conference would be significantly small compared to the crowd attending the opening ceremony. Amazingly, this was the only conference where the crowd for the opening ceremony remained until the end of the event. Subsequently, Tan Sri Somasundram also expressed his delight over the success of this event and amazement at the amount of support received by this conference.

Conclusion

On the final day of the conference, it was confirmed that the World Conference on Siddha Philosophy will be properly planned and carried out every three years once. Despite that, taking into consideration the success of this event and peoples' passion towards siddha philosophy, the organisers arranged and carried out a similar conference in December 2008 on 26, 27 and 28 in Tamil Nadu, India. The organiser for this conference was Dr. M. S. Mathivanan and the Patron was Thavayogi Thanggarasan Adhigalar. Consequently, the organiser of this conference started to conduct siddha prayers during full moon of the month sittirai annually. This event receives overwhelming support from public.

Though initially the awareness on siddhas philosophy was low among Malaysian Indians, this situation is slowly changing to the extent of spreading the siddha knowledge to others. It can be safely said that in future, Malaysian Indians will contribute towards the development of siddha philosophy to the world.

ⁱ Anima- This *citti* is the ability to minute or shrink large objects or turn them into something finer than atom. Mahima- *Mahima* refers to the ability to transform something minute into something large or huge. Lahima- This means the ability to lighten heavy things. Karima- This is the ability of increasing the weight of something light. Piratti- This term means the ability to move about in different places and worlds without any constraints. Pirakamiyam- This refers to the ability to enter the body of another and appearing before anyone as and when one pleases. Eecattuvam- This is the ability to perform the five fold functions of God whereby everyone would pay homage to them. Vacittuvam- This term can be explained as the ability to bring the world to their feet.

ⁱⁱ Create, protect, destroy, hide, bless.

ⁱⁱⁱ Three citations on Karuvoorar's Attamacitti, Nijanantha Potham and Abhitana Cintamani were found in the list of 18 cittars.

^{iv} Four aeons (age) - Age of Kirutha 7,28,000 years. Age of Thirethaa 12, 96,000 years. Age of Thuvapara 8,64,000 years and Age of Kali 4,32,000 years.

^v Samadhi – A level equivalent to God.

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32. www.gpmahan.com
33. As an advisor to the 1st World conference of Siddha Philosophy in Malaysia, the researcher included much information in this paper through his personal experience and observation.