

Impermanence in Siddhar Songs

Dr.SALMA MAHAJABEEN T M
Associate Professor
Department of Tamil and
Research Centre.
Govt. College , Chittur.
Palakkad, Kerala

Abstract

This article explores the concept of impermanence (நிலையாமை) as expressed in Siddhar songs, one of the foundational components of Tamil spiritual literature. Siddhars, known for their deep wisdom and simple living, used powerful imagery to describe the temporary nature of the human body, wealth, beauty, emotions, and worldly achievements. Through verses by Pattinathar, Sivavakkiyar, Agathiyar, Bogar, and other Siddhars, the article highlights how life is compared to bubbles, fading flowers, and ashes to illustrate that all material experiences are short-lived. The philosophical purpose behind these teachings is also examined—showing that understanding impermanence leads to spiritual clarity, detachment, humility, and inner peace. By presenting examples from classical Siddhar poetry, this article shows that the awareness of life's changing nature forms the core of Siddhar philosophy and serves as a guide for living a meaningful and liberated life.

Introduction

Siddhar literature represents the wisdom of Tamil spiritual masters who lived beyond the boundaries of caste, religion, or society. Their songs, known as Siddhar Padalgal, are poetic expressions of truth, self-realization, nature, and inner liberation. One of their most repeated messages is the concept of impermanence (நிலையாமை). Through sharp, simple, and realistic verses, the Siddhars remind human beings that life is short, changing, and uncertain.

They believed that only by understanding impermanence can a person rise above ignorance and reach spiritual clarity.

Keywords – Impermanence - Impermanence of the Body - Wealth and Position - Youth and Beauty - Emotions and Relationships- impermanence to create fear or negativity- Path to Enlightenment.

I. What Impermanence Means According to Siddhars

For Siddhars, impermanence means:

- The body is temporary
- Wealth and relationships change
- Beauty and youth fade
- Pleasure and pain come and go
- Even thoughts and emotions are unstable
- Only the soul and truth are permanent

Their songs urge people to see the world as it really is—not through attachment or illusion, but through wisdom.

II. Impermanence of the Body

Siddhars often use strong imagery to show that the human body has no lasting nature.

1. Pattinathar Siddhar

“காலையில் தாழை, மாலையில் பாழை.”

“Fresh in the morning, but may turn into a corpse by evening.”

Meaning: Life can end at any moment.

2. Pattinathar again

“உடம்பு கருகரு சாம்பல்.”

“This body will burn and become ashes.”

Meaning: We should not be proud of something that will one day turn into ash.

3. Sivavakkiyar

“உடம்பை நம்பினால் ஊனமாய் போம்.”

“If you trust the body, you will end up in sorrow.”

Explanation: Since the body is unstable, depending fully on it leads to pain.

III. Impermanence of Wealth and Position

Siddhars strongly criticize excessive attachment to money.

1. Pattinathar

“பொருள் எடுத்து சென்றாரைப் பார்த்தாயோ?”

“Has anyone taken their wealth after death?”

This line mocks the illusion of permanent wealth.

2. Karuvurar Siddhar

“நாள் நாளுக்கும் உணவும் உடையும் மாறும்.”

“Even daily food and clothing change from day to day.”

Meaning: Wealth brings temporary comfort but nothing permanent.

3. Agathiyar

“பொன்னும் பொய்யே, பொருளும் பொய்யே.”

“Gold is false; possessions are false.”

Gold does not remain with us forever—the value is created by the mind.

IV. Impermanence of Youth and Beauty

Siddhars attack the pride people have in physical appearance.

1. Konganar Siddhar

“இளமை பொய்ம்மை, அழகு பொய்மை.”
“Youth is a lie; beauty is a lie.”

Meaning: They both fade with time.

2. Sivavakkiyar

“அழகெனும் அம்மி கீழ்ப்போய் விடுமே.”
“Beauty will sink like a stone in water.”

Beauty is temporary and cannot be held forever.

V. Impermanence of Emotions and Relationships

Feelings change constantly, and the Siddhars teach us not to be trapped by them.

Siddhar Song

“காதல் கொதிக்கும்; கோபம் கொதிக்கும்; எல்லாம் மாறும்.”
“Love rises, anger rises, everything changes.”

Meaning: Even our strongest emotions are not stable.

VI. Impermanence in Nature (Using Nature as Example)

The Siddhars use nature to teach the idea of change.

1. Agathiyar

“ஆயுள் நுரைபோல் வெளுக்கி விடுமே.”
“Life melts away like foam.”

Foam forms and disappears instantly—just like life.

2. Bogar Sidhar

“பூக்கள் பூத்து உதிரும்; அதுபோல் மனிதன் வாழ்வு.”
“Flowers bloom and fall; so does human life.”

Meaning: Blooming represents birth; falling represents death.

3. Korakkar Siddhar

“காற்றினை போல் மனிதன் நிலை மாறும்.”
“Human life changes like the wind.”

Everything is momentary.

VII. Philosophical Meaning Behind Impermanence

Siddhars do not teach impermanence to create fear or negativity. Their purpose is awakening.

They want humans to understand:

1. Attachment causes suffering
2. Wisdom comes when we accept change
3. Arrogance becomes meaningless
4. Spiritual life becomes important
5. Contentment grows when expectations reduce
6. Only the soul (Atma) is permanent

Once a person sees impermanence clearly, the mind becomes calm and free.

VIII. Impermanence as a Path to Enlightenment

According to the Siddhars:

Body → impermanent

Mind → impermanent

Thoughts → impermanent

Emotions → impermanent

Worldly success → impermanent

Recognizing this leads to:

- Detachment
- Clarity
- Fearlessness
- Compassion
- Inner peace

When the mind is free from clinging, one reaches the state of Gnana (true wisdom).

Sivavakkiyar says:

“நிலையாமை அறிந்தே நிற்கின்றார் சுத்தர்.”

“The pure ones are those who understand impermanence.”

IX. How Siddhars Want Us to Live After Understanding Impermanence

The Siddhar teachings say that once we accept the changing nature of life, we should:

- Live simply

- Avoid pride
- Reduce anger and jealousy
- Speak truth
- Be kind
- Seek inner realization
- Understand the soul
- Meditate on the eternal

They believed that a peaceful life comes not from possession but from perception.

Siddhar songs are not ordinary poems—they are mirrors that show the true nature of life. Their teachings on impermanence are practical, poetic, and profound.

Through examples of:

- bubbles that burst
- flowers that fade
- bodies that turn to ash
- beauty that declines
- wealth that does not follow us

The Siddhars remind us that nothing in the world is permanent.

When we deeply understand this, we live with:

- less fear
- less attachment
- more peace
- more wisdom

This is the heart of Siddhar philosophy.

Conclusion

Siddhar songs are filled with deep wisdom about human life. Through examples of bubbles, flowers, dust, and the changing body, they powerfully explain that nothing in the world is permanent. By understanding impermanence, the Siddhars say, a person becomes free from unnecessary attachments and lives with clarity and inner peace.

Their teachings remain relevant even today, reminding us to live wisely and focus on the eternal truth within us.

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