

An Appraisal of Kalaripayattu and Its Association with the Culture of Kerala

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Abstract

Culture of a society or a community cannot be attributed to a single entity; it is the amalgamation of many things including food, dressing style, rituals, traditional arts and martial forms. Silambam is a popular and traditional art form of Tamil Nadu which originated from the Sangam literature in the 1000 BCE. This art form is practiced in various parts of Tamil Nadu and it has been adopted to many films especially the films of the veteran actor MGR (M.G Ramachandran). Likewise in India there are many and varied Martial art forms which are very much associated with the history and culture of respective regions. This paper titled as "A Discourse on Kalaripayattu, the Martial Art form of Kerala and its Role in the Modern Era" deals with the history and development of Kalaripayattu and its influential role in the present day.

Keywords: martial arts, kerala culture, northern and southern schools, ayurveda

Kalaripayattu is one of the most famous and surviving martial art forms of India originated in Kerala. It has a long history and association with the culture of Kerala. It is also called as the mother of all martial arts because of its legendary history. It is believed that it originated in 3rd BCE. The chief aim of teaching or learning this martial art is to make a sense of compassion and discipline in learner's life. The teacher- student relationship in Kalaripayattu schools is very important. Irrespective of age and gender, anyone can join for this art. Vadakkan Pattukal is considered as the ballads of Northern Kerala. These ballads give much emphasis on various aspects of Kalaripayattu.

Kalaripayattu is learnt by many people in different spheres of life. In Kalaripayattu there will be a guru who is the master of the art. He will train his shishya, the student. The guru or the master of Kalaripayattu is known as Asan or Gurukkal. The role of the Asan (Master) is not only to impart some techniques but also to help the Shishya to

understand the world and to develop both his physical and mental well being. The knowledge and experience gathered through years of experience make the Asan or Gurukkal of Kalaripayattu capable of providing treatments to those people with bone and nervous problems.

Kalaripayattu training can be started at the age of seven and at that time the body will be sufficiently strong and flexible to learn the techniques. So in Kerala learners practice Kaalari at a very young age. In the initial time itself, they learn many Meythari or body exercises and those learners will be very strong and they will have good stamina and strength. The training of Kalaripayattu starts with a ritual where the Shishya or the learner gets the blessing of the Asan and accepts him as the master. So the bond between the master and the learner is stronger and it brings many good changes and developments in the learner or Shishya. Kalari training is divided into four stages namely, Meythari, Kolthari, Ankathari and Verumkai

Every learner of Kalaripayattu starts his training with Meythari. Once the learners acquire the techniques of Meythari they go to the other stages. Meythari consists of serious of body exercises which make the learner feel more comfortable and flexible. A learner with a good physical and mental stamina can only go to the next stages of Kalaripayattu. So this Meythari can be considered as the foundation of Kalaripayattu training and it also determines the success of other two stages.

Weapons are the integral part of the Kalaripayattu. The training for using weapons is given in the second stage of Kalaripayattu and it is called Kolthari. The method and purpose of each weapon are different. To handle the weapons the learner has to be strong. Both defensive and attacking techniques are taught in this stage. Handling wooden weapons is the core of this stage. This stage requires more effort and concentration.

Once the learners successfully complete or thoroughly learn the techniques of using wooden sticks or weapons he or she can go to the next stage which is more advanced and skilful than the two previous stages. In Kolthari wooden weapons are used but in the third stage called Ankathari, metallic weapons are introduced. Managing sharp sword and other weapons need more concentration. Therefore only the powerful learners who successfully complete the first two stages are introduced to this stage.

Verumkai is the fourth and final stage of Kalaripayattu which focuses on training the techniques for protecting and defending oneself without using weapons. In this stage techniques like locking, gripping and throwing are taught by the Gurukkal. This step or the stage requires high discipline. The knowledge one gathers through these stages should be used ethically and it should not be used to harm others. That moral aspect is also imparted in Kalaripayattu training.

Kalaripayattu is also very significant in sports field; the athlete needs more physical fitness and many people in the athletic field practice Kalaripayattu for making them fit and strong. The marma treatment is also very effective and widely used for treating the fractures and muscular problems faced by the athletes during their events in sports. Even in this modern era people approach Gurukkal to get better and effective treatments.

Kerala is blessed with beautiful landscape and is considered as the top tourist destination in India. The health tourism is also growing faster in Kerala, especially Kerala Ayurveda and Marma Treatments are popular all around the world. Since Kalaripayattu is for body and mind people love to join for learning Kalaripayattu. The age and gender are not barriers to learn and understand Kalaripayattu. It makes Kalaripayattu more acceptable and popular. Many experienced trainers or Gurukkal are available in Kerala for teaching Kalaripayattu, through whom the legacy and glory of Kalaripayattu spread all around the world.

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