

## Martial Arts Traditions: A Survey

‘Martial Arts’, as the name suggests, are popular art forms that give training in different kinds and dimensions of fighting — fighting with a spear or a sword, physical combat, resisting cavalry attack, single combat or combat with many, etc. As such, the martial arts apart from being sources of popular entertainment also provide training in skills required by professionals, including soldiers.

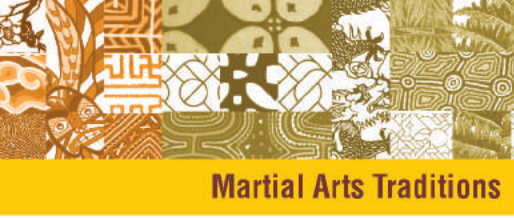
India has an ancient tradition in diverse martial arts. Nearly every part of India has evolved one or the other form of a popular martial art.

The Japanese and the Chinese trace the origins of their popular martial arts, karate and kung-fu, to India. Notably, according to Chinese texts and tradition, an Indian sage, Bodhidharma (5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century CE), who travelled from south India to north China and settled at the Shaolin Monastery in the Sung Mountain, meditated there for nine years and imparted some early techniques of Indian martial arts to his follower monks.

### Texts

Ancient Indian texts and the epics describe various martial arts that were then popular in the subcontinent. The *Dhanurveda*, an ancient treatise on the science of archery and the art of warfare, enumerates the rules of archery, rules of bow- and arrow-making, and describes the uses of weapons and the training of the army. The treatise also discusses martial arts in relation to the training of warriors, charioteers, cavalry, elephant warriors, infantry and wrestlers.

The *Yajurveda* highlights the importance of the science of archery and praises those who are well versed in it. Sections of the *Mahābhārata* describe wrestlers and wrestling and boxing bouts, such as Bhīma’s famous fights with Jarāsaṁdha and with



Duryodhana. According to the *Harivaṃśa Purāṇa*, both Sri Kṛṣṇa and his brother Balarāma were masters of the art of wrestling. Śarira bala (physical strength) was gained through various *krīḍa* (games) including the martial arts. Various disciplines such as *śaṣṭravidyā*, knowledge of arms, *dhanurvedyā*, archery, *khaḍgavidyā*, *aśvārohaṇa*, horse riding and fighting on horseback, and *gajaroḥaṇa*, fighting on elephant back, were widely practised. The *gadā* or mace was also used during these bouts.



A depiction of the battle between Bhīma and Duryodhana  
(source: Gorakhpur Geeta Press & Wikipedia)

*Mallayuddha* or wrestling was accorded the status of a respectable sport, pastime and method of warfare with a set of rules prescribed by the Mallas, a warrior clan mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* and the Buddhist texts. *Mallayuddha* enjoyed royal patronage and was one of the sixty-four arts that all could learn. So popular was



wrestling that a treatise, *Mallapurāṇa*, which was probably composed in Gujarat, listed various types and techniques of wrestling, besides giving detailed information on the arena, rules of engagement or the wrestlers' diet and training regime. Martial arts in India were perfected between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century CE when the Gurjara-Pratihāra, a warrior dynasty, ruled much of north India. Cālukyan king Someśvara III in his 11<sup>th</sup>-century treatise *Mānasollāsa*, an encyclopaedic work in Sanskrit, gives detailed information about various types of wrestlers and their training methods.

### Practice of Martial Arts

There were specific arenas for the practice of each martial art. The *Dhanurveda* describing the ground for weapons training says that such a ground should be free from ash, bones, dust, stones, thorns and thorny bushes and should be spacious and sufficiently broad in dimension and surrounded with a compound wall.

The wrestling arena was known as the *mallaśālā*. The *Manasollāsa* gives a detailed description of the wrestling pit and says that it should be filled with smooth village soil free from pebbles and other hard objects and should be levelled and kept slightly wet. The ground for combat was known as *khalaka*; it was to be high, round, even and strong and surrounded by a *vikṣaṇamaṇḍapa* (visitor's gallery). *Mallakriḍāmahotsava* or grand wrestling festivals were popular and periodically organized.

Apart from wrestling there were other exercises that were recommended in order to increase physical strength as a preparation to the mastering of martial arts. These exercises were, *bhāraśrama* or weightlifting both by hands and feet, *bhramaṇaśrama*, walking and running and taking brisk walks in the morning, *salilaśrama*, swimming in a tank, lake or river, *bāhupellanaśrama* was done to increase the strength of the grip of hands through friction by contacting the arms with the arms of a partner. *Stambhaśrama* was performed on a wooden pole (*stambha*)



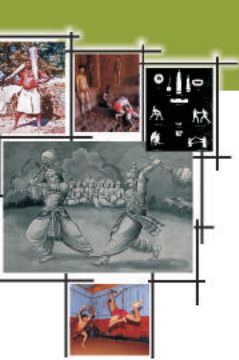
firmly fixed on the ground; the pillar had to be smooth and sliding, sufficiently thick for grasping and as high as the raised arm of the wrestler. The wrestler would grasp the pillar with his arms and legs, lift his body and encircle the pillar with twisting movements. This pillar exercise is prevalent even today and is known as *mallakhamba*.

There were other martial exercises that were popularly practised such as *śastrāśrama*, performed with various weapons or *dhanuhśrama*, performed with the bow: pulling the bow string several times, bending the heavy bow and fixing the string to the bow were all considered heavy exercises (remember the story of Rama shattering the mighty Śiva bow?). The other exercises performed with weapons were *asiśrama* (with a heavy sword), *śaktiśrama* (with short spears), *cakraśrama* (with a weapon called *cakra*), *sellakalā* (with heavy lances) and *parśuśrama* (with an axe, *parśu*).

Varanasi was known since ancient times as a centre for wrestling and *muṣṭi-yuddha*, a traditional form of boxing. *Ankavinoda*, duel or combats, were also popular martial sports in India. A person fighting another who carried the same weapon was known as *aṅka*. The fights in this category were at times fierce, leading to bloodshed.

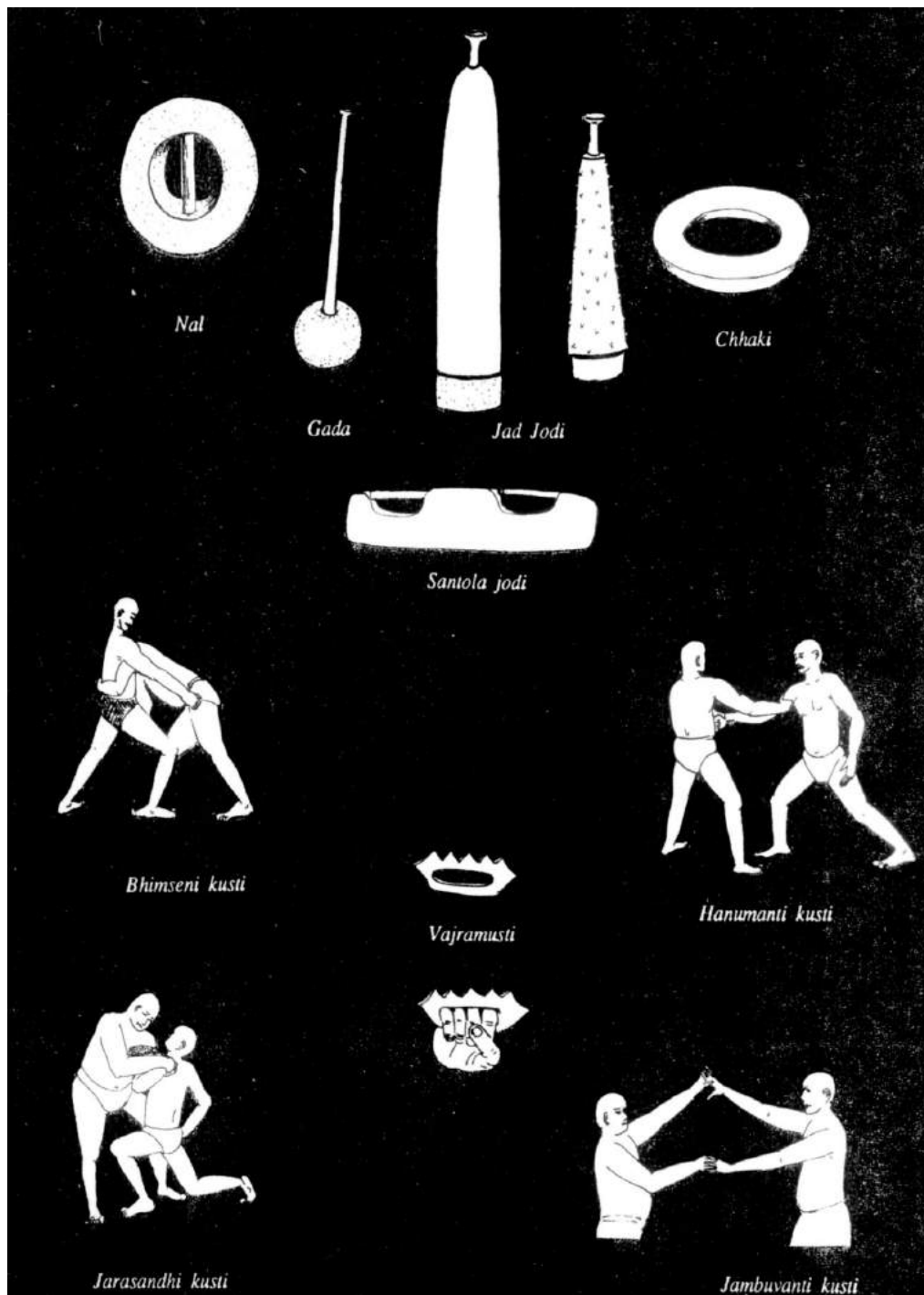
Several warrior clans in India were adepts at martial art. Thus the Jyeṣṭhīmallas ('great fighters') of medieval India were experts in a style of wrestling called *vajra-muṣṭi*, which was performed with knuckle-dusters; they were spread mainly over Gujarat, Rajasthan and Maharashtra. The Paikas of Odisha were fierce warriors who developed a particular martial technique called the *paika ākhādā*. The Meitis of Manipur practised a distinct martial technique called *thang-ta*, which remains a popular martial art in Manipur and in which a spear and a sword are the primary weapons.





# Knowledge Traditions and Practices of India

## Martial Arts Traditions



A few weapons and postures used in traditional Indian wrestling  
(source: Vaidya V.B. Mhaikar, Vyayam Jnan Kosh)



# Knowledge Traditions and Practices of India

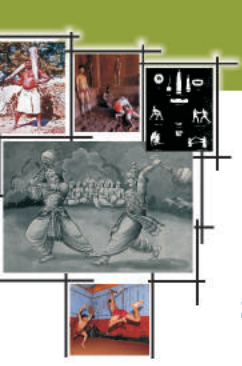


Living traditions of wrestling and combat survive in *kuṣṭi* (also called *pehlwani*), which has inputs from *mallayuddha* as well as Persian wrestling. *Kuṣṭi* remains widely practised in north India.

(Right) An Indian *kuṣṭi* wrestler exercising with clubs near Varanasi (source: John Hill & Wikipedia)

(Below) *Kuṣṭi* wrestlers training in a gymnasium, Maharashtra (source: Peter Adams & National Geographic)





### Stick Combat

*Lāthi khela*, stick play, is a very popular martial art, especially in north India. A polished stick typically six to eight feet long and at times metal-tipped is used to ward off the enemy through various wielding techniques, steps and posturing. At one time very popular in the Bihar and Bengal (including what is now Bangladesh), the sport has seen a decline over the years. The wielder of the *lāthi* is known as a *lethel* or *lāthiāl*. In *Nāṭyaśāstra* (Chapter 1), there is a reference to *jarjarā*, a staff used to control unruly sections of an audience.

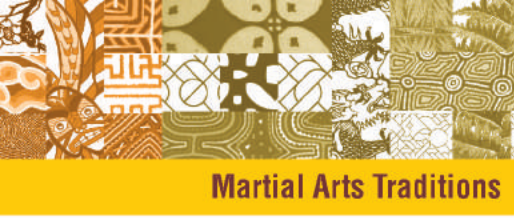
Similar to *lāthi khelā* is *silambam*, literally ‘bamboo fight’, a popular martial art of south India. *Silambam* was originally practised with bamboo sticks and later with steel swords and shields. The bamboo staff used is usually 5 feet in length and is swirled while attacking the enemy. It is also one kind of training in javelin or spear fighting.

Another popular martial sport of the region is *kurunṭāḍi*, which is played with short bamboo sticks roughly of two-palm length. *Kurunṭāḍi* is performed to the accompaniment of drums and music and each stroke is aimed at a particular *varṇam* or vital spots of the human body. It is an art that gives training in physical combat.

*Valari vīcu* uses a kind of boomerang made of wood, ivory or iron. It is a training in remote resistance of or attack on an enemy. It was very popular in the medieval period in the southern districts of Tamil Nadu and continued to be practised till the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. This particular weapon was very useful in resisting medieval cavalry charges.

*Gatkā* is one of the most popular and ancient martial art in the region of Punjab. A wooden stick and a shield are usually used in the sparring match and points are scored when vital spots in the body are touched. Swords and shields are also used in *gatkā* which is in fact a training in the professional use of swords. The





Sikh Gurus, many of whom were proponents of martial training, encouraged the growth of various martial arts techniques. Guru Gobind Singh was an adept at martial arts and established the martial tradition among the Sikhs. The Mughal Emperor Akbar, it is said, practised *gatkā* with sword and shield.

### *Kalarippayattu*

*Kalarippayattu* is believed to be one of the oldest martial arts in existence and to have originated in Kerala, where it flourished.

A *kalari* or 'gymnasium' is actually an underground training hall (of about 13 x 6.5 m). Its entrance is from the east with a prayer area consisting of seven steps in the south-west corner; students are initiated through a ceremony in front of this area known as *pūttara*. All the postures and exercises include offering prayers at this place. *Payattu* means to fight, exercise or practise. Therefore, *kalarippayattu* means the combat that is practised inside the traditional gymnasium called *kalari*.

In Kerala, three styles of *kalarippayattu* developed in different regions, the northern, southern and central styles, with distinct beliefs, practices and methods. The northern style traces its origin to Paraśurāma and its experts are called Gurukkaḷ. The southern style traces its origin to Agastya; its experts are referred to as Āśāns. The central style is practised on floor paths known as *kaḷams*.

The practice of *kalarippayattu* takes place in at least five stages. In the first, the focus is on body fitness. In the second, the student is trained in stick combat. In the third stage, the student is taught how to handle weapons. A student is initiated into the fourth stage only after he has been tested and proved to be trustworthy; this stage consists of training in hand combat. The final stage of training involves Ayurvedic treatments for body and mind, techniques of *marma* (vital points) and therapeutic massages. The student learns how to treat injuries and diseases resulting



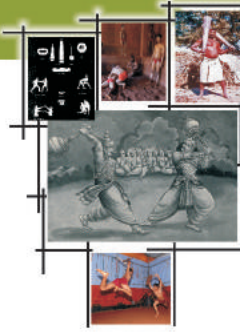
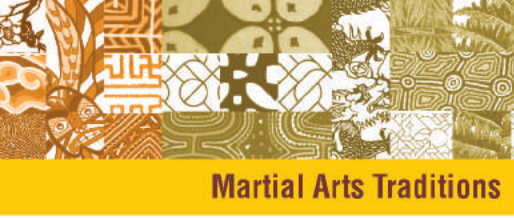


from trauma. After the training, the *kaḷari* expert also becomes a healer. Oiling the body is a prerequisite of *kaḷari* training, especially in phases that involve physical exercises.



*Kaḷarippayattu* fighters. Note the *pūtṭara* or the seven-step prayer area in the corner behind them (courtesy: Arya Vaidya Pharmacy, Coimbatore).

*Kaḷarippayattu* brings tremendous flexibility to the body and fine tunes one's reflexes to such an extent that it is believed that the entire body of the trained person becomes his eyes, as it were (*meikkaṇṇu*). The practice of *kaḷari* involves training with sharp and dangerous weapons such as dagger, mace, sword, spear, fist dagger, deer horn dagger and the like. *Urumī* or the curling sword is worth a special mention: this flexible long sword made of steel is sharp enough to cut flesh but at the same time thin enough to be rolled into a coil. The training in wielding this weapon is given only in the end considering the danger involved to both the wielder and the opponent.



*Kalarippayattu* is not merely physical combat for self-defence. It is a complete personal development programme that aims to develop good physical and mental health and enhance agility, reflexes and skills for self-defence. The *kalari* training is a discipline for both body and mind, the goal being to gain control over one's aggressive tendencies and remove one's defects (*kuttam thirkkal*). The master of *kalari* is one who can withdraw at will even when he can strike a helpless opponent.

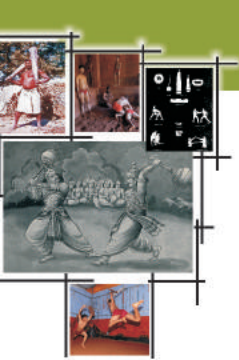
Often *kalarippayattu* was a preparation for advanced training in art forms like Kathakali. The flexibility gained from *kalarippayattu* would enable the student to develop the subtle skills required in other disciplines. It was also common for medical practitioners to train in *kalarippayattu*. In fact, there has been a vigorous exchange of medical knowledge, especially concerning *marmas*, massage and trauma management, between the traditions of Ayurveda and *kalarippayattu*.

Interestingly, *kalarippayattu* was not confined to men; women were also admitted for training and folklore tells stories of accomplished women warriors.

Schools of *kalarippayattu* still exist in Kerala although the popularity of this ancient system of physical combat is on the decline. It is an irony that other martial art forms like karate and judo have become more popular in Kerala, the land of *kalarippayattu*. On the other hand, *kalari* experts offer medical treatments for sprains and sports injuries in different parts of Kerala even today. There is great scope for promoting *kalarippayattu* in the field of sports. The great flexibility of the body, agility and sharp reflexes that are developed through its practice can make an individual excel in any kind of sports.

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India's rich martial arts traditions lend weight to the view that Indians have been a martial people who evolved martial arts as popular sports besides being a part of the training of professional players and soldiers.



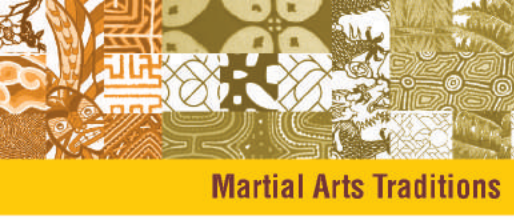
### Further Reading

1. Balakrishnan P. *Kalarippayattu: The Ancient Martial Art of Kerala*. Trivandrum CVN Kalar, 1995
2. Elgood, Robert. *Hindu Arms and Ritual: Arms and Armour from India 1400-1865*. Eburon Publishers, 2005
3. Majumdar, D.C. *Encyclopaedia of Indian Physical Culture: A comprehensive survey of the physical education in India profusely illustrating various activities of physical culture, games, exercises, etc., as handed over to us from our forefathers and practised in India*. Baroda: Sree Ram Vijaya Printing Press, 1950
4. Tilak, Moses. *Kalaripayat and Marma Adi (Varmam)*. Madras: Neil Publications, 1982
5. Zarilli, Philip B. *When the Body Becomes All Eyes*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000

### Internet Resources (all URLs accessed in May 2013)

- Extracts and images from D.C. Mujumdar's *Encyclopedia of Indian Physical Culture*: [www.sandowplus.co.uk/India/IndianClubs/clubs01.htm](http://www.sandowplus.co.uk/India/IndianClubs/clubs01.htm) etc.
- Documentary on pehlwan in Punjab: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ZURv5VAT4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ZURv5VAT4)
- Kuśtidangal : [www.youtube.com/watch?v=nWhbBLC2XX0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nWhbBLC2XX0)
- Kuśti exercises: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Km2Y4oVZipE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Km2Y4oVZipE)
- Mallakhamba (Malkhamb):  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1yp89VKPXQ&list=TL45ffvCvDamfUAnN0TexdcyPtW-Rj8\\_1J](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1yp89VKPXQ&list=TL45ffvCvDamfUAnN0TexdcyPtW-Rj8_1J)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=6FTBr.tifKYQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6FTBr.tifKYQ)
- Kalarippayattu (Doordarshan): [www.youtube.com/watch?v=CvOYtq3FaFw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CvOYtq3FaFw)
- Kalarippayattu: Unique martial art of Kerala (Kerala Tourism):  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=DCmcw5nynmQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DCmcw5nynmQ)





### Comprehension

1. Which ancient treatise mentions the rules of the art of warfare? Enumerate some of those rules.
2. In the *Mahābhārata*, who are the two individuals considered to be the masters in the art of wrestling (*śarira bala*)?
3. List out the names of famous Indian boxers and wrestlers.
4. Which were the popular physical disciplines practised in classical times?
5. If you wanted to be a wrestler, which treatise would you refer to and why?
6. What are the basic rules to be followed while preparing a training ground for martial arts?
7. To master the art of *dhanuśrama*, name any two heavy exercises to be performed with the bow.
8. Define *kaṭarippayattu*. Explain the three types of *kaṭarippayattu* and list their differences.
9. Define the following *śramas*:
  - *salilaśrama*
  - *bhāraśrama*
  - *bāhupellanaśrama*
  - *stambhaśrama*
  - *śastrāśrama*
  - *dhanuśrama*
  - *śaktiśrama*
  - *cakraśrama*
  - *sellakalā*
  - *parśuśrama*
  - *aṅkavinoda*



## Activities

- Complete the table by providing the required information:

Sport	Rules and key features	Eminent personalities	Brief history (origin, state etc.)

- List a few warrior clans in India and discuss their respective techniques/styles of dual fights. Examine the changes that have set in the sporting tradition.
- Hold a debate on the topic: Age-old traditions of various martial arts are obsolete / relevant in present times.
- Make a table of various italicized terms used in the Survey text. Define them and try to figure out their synonyms in your mother tongue.

## Projects

- *Lathi*, a polished bamboo stick is used to ward off the enemy through various wielding techniques, steps and posturing. Document how wielding this staff has been used as a distinct martial art in different parts of India.
- Make a project on *kalarippayattu*. Collect pictures of various stages of training and prepare a presentation. You may also download videos to share the information with your class.
- The roots of *mallakrīḍa* are found in villages. Have you ever visited any *mallakrīḍamahotsava* / *kuṣṭidāngal* fair? Make field visits to get first-hand



information. Prepare a project on *śarira bala* and investigate what efforts are being made by the Sports Authority of India to promote this sport.

- Many traditional games and sports are still practised today. Select any one such game and collect information for your project using the following hints:
  - training ground
  - kits or material used
  - famous Indians associated with it
  - elaborate your project with pictures and interviews.
- Make a project on awards and honours for achieving the highest standards in the field of sports and games in India or elsewhere. Apart from name, fame and monetary gains, what other facilities do the sports persons enjoy with their high-achiever profiles? Elaborate your project with various examples and case studies.

### Extended Activities

- Explore the potential of martial arts to popularize fitness, physical strength and self-defence skills among the youth. Make a poster highlighting the advantages.
- Identify well-known experts of various martial arts in your locality. Involve them and create a martial arts club in your school or nearby community centre to learn and promote the ancient traditional activities of fitness and strength.





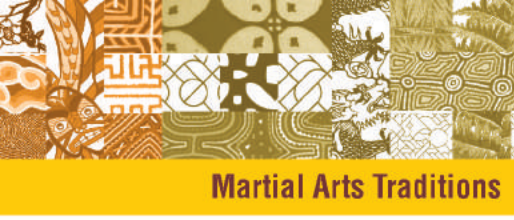


## Martial Arts Traditions: A Selection from Primary Texts

### Wrestling in the *Mahābhārata*

The *Mahābhārata* has several long descriptions of physical combat. Here is the fight between Bhīma, one of the Pāṇḍavas, and Jarāsaṁdha, the powerful king of Magadha:

... Then the monarch possessed of terrible prowess, addressing Bhīma, said, “I will fight with you. It is better to be vanquished by a superior person.” And saying this, Jarāsaṁdha rushed with great energy at Bhīmasena ... And the mighty Bhīmasena, on whose behalf the gods had been invoked by Kṛṣṇa, that cousin of his, advanced towards Jarāsaṁdha, impelled by the desire of fight. Then those tigers among men, those heroes of great prowess, with their bare arms as their only weapons, cheerfully engaged themselves in the encounter, each desirous of vanquishing the other. And seizing each other’s arms and twining each other’s legs, they slapped their arm-pits, causing the enclosure to tremble at the sound. And frequently seizing each other’s necks with their hands and dragging and pushing it with violence, and each pressing every limb of his body against every limb of the other, they continued to slap their arm-pits. And sometimes stretching their arms and sometimes drawing them close, and now raising them up and now dropping them down, they began to seize each other. And striking neck against neck and forehead against forehead, they caused fiery sparks to come out like flashes of lightning. And grasping each other in various ways by means of their arms, and kicking each other with such violence as to affect the innermost nerves, they struck at each other’s breasts with clenched fists. With bare arms as their only weapons, roaring like clouds, they grasped and struck



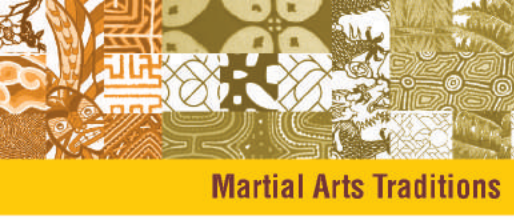
each other like two mad elephants encountering each other with their trunks. Incensed at each other's blow, they fought on dragging and pushing each other and fiercely looking at each other like two wrathful lions. And each striking every limb of the other with his own and using his arms also against the other, and catching hold of each other's waist, they hurled each other to a distance. Accomplished in wrestling, the two heroes clasping each other with their arms and each dragging the other unto himself, began to press each other with great violence. The heroes then performed those grandest of all feats in wrestling called *prṣṭabhanga*, which consisted in throwing each other down with face towards the earth and maintaining the one knocked down in that position as long as possible. And employing his arms, each also performed the feats called *sampūrṇa-murccha* and *pūrṇa-kumbha*. At times they twisted each other's arms and other limbs as if these were vegetable fibres that were to be twisted into chords. And with clenched fists they struck each other at times, pretending to aim at particular limbs while the blows descended upon other parts of the body. It was thus that those heroes fought with each other. The citizens consisting of thousands... [including] women and the aged, O tiger among men, came out and gathered there to behold the fight. And the crowd became so great that it was one solid mass of humanity with no space between body and body. The sound the wrestlers made by the slapping of their arms, the seizing of each other's necks for bringing each other down, and the grasping of each other's legs for dashing each other to the ground, became so loud that it resembled the roar of thunder or of falling cliffs. Both of them were foremost of mighty men, and both took great delight in such encounter. Desirous of vanquishing the other, each was on the alert for taking advantage of the



slightest lapse of the other. And the mighty Bhīma and Jarāsaṁdha fought terribly on in those lists, driving the crowd at times by the motions of their hands like Vṛtra and Vāsava of old. Thus two heroes, dragging each other forward and pressing each other backward and with sudden jerks throwing each other face downward and sideways, mangled each other dreadfully. And at times they struck each other with their knee-joints. And addressing each other loudly in stinging speeches, they struck each other with clenched fists, the blows descending like a mass of stone upon each other. With broad shoulders and long arms and both well-skilled in wrestling encounters, they struck each other with those long arms of theirs that were like maces of iron. That encounter of the heroes commenced on the first (lunar) day of the month of Kārttika (October) and the illustrious heroes fought on without intermission and food, day and night, till the thirteenth lunar day. It was on the night of the fourteenth of the lunar fortnight that the monarch of Magadha desisted from fatigue. ...

... Kṛṣṇa, desiring to encourage that hero to accomplish the death of Jarāsaṁdha without any delay, answered, “O Bhīma, exhibit today upon Jarāsaṁdha the strength you have luckily derived, the might you have obtained from (your father), the god Māruta.” Thus addressed by Kṛṣṇa, Bhīma, that slayer of foes, holding up in the air the powerful Jarāsaṁdha, began to whirl him on high. And, O bull of the Bhārata race, having so whirled him in the air full hundred times, Bhīma pressed his knee against Jarāsaṁdha’s backbone and broke his body in twain. And having killed him thus, the mighty Vṛkodara [Bhīma] uttered a terrible roar. And the roar of the Pāṇḍavas mingling with that death knell of Jarāsaṁdha, while he was being broken on Bhīma’s knee, caused a loud uproar that struck fear into





the heart of every creature. (*Mahābhārata*, adapted from tr. K.M. Ganguly, Sabha Parva, sections 23-24)

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### *Mallapurāṇa*

The *Mallapurāṇa* contains a wealth of information on the wrestling traditions of the Jyeṣṭhīmallas (see Survey text). The following extracts from the introduction by the editors of this Sanskrit text give the gist of *śramas* or exercises, combat techniques as well as details of diet, training regime, etc.

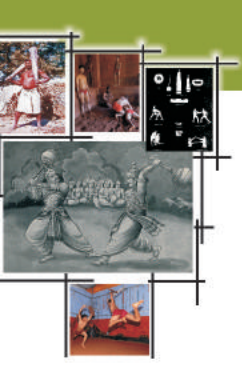
#### *Raṅgaśrama*

This is the wrestling proper and occurs in all the lists. It is considered to be the highest type of exercise as it leads to glory and wealth. Wrestling indeed is difficult and in traditional Indian Gymnasium far more weight is placed on the proficiency in this art, which requires courage, strength, skill and stamina. ...

#### *Sthambhaśrama*

It is the type of exercise on smooth wooden pillars of a number of varieties. To-day the *sthambhas* are either fixed in the ground or are left hanging. The hanging *sthambhas* have about four varieties. One is similar to that fixed on the ground. Other is a very small size *sthambha* almost like a baton. Its variant has two pairs hanging near each other. The fourth type is a long cane on which exercises are performed.

The *mallasthamabha* exercises are many but the *Mallapurāṇa* summarises them under the title *Stambhādhirohaṇam*. It takes place in three ways—



first by the strength of the arm, second by twisting the body and third by means of legs. (X. 16 ff.)

Exercise on *mallasthamabha* requires strength and stamina. It lays great emphasis on the turning and twisting of body and develops toughness. *Mallapurāṇa* notes that it develops the strength of the body, specifically shoulders, hands, arms, thighs, waist, leg-joints and makes the body tough and slim. ...

### ***Goṇitaka***

... *Goṇitaka* is divided in two varieties, the large and the small. ... This traditional stone ring occurs in two varieties. ... It requires to be lifted, swung, put on head etc. This large *goṇitaka* is useful in developing thigh, neck and the whole body. (XI. 16 ff.)

### ***Pramadā***

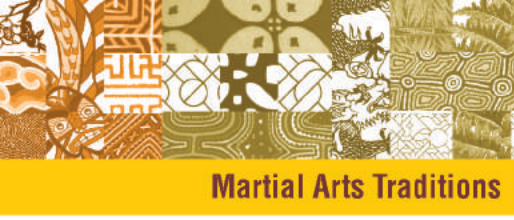
... The heavy *gadā*, *mudgara*, *kārelā* and other types of clubs are used for exercising arms, shoulders, wrists.

### ***Jalaśrama***

... Swimming is a good form of exercise, but it was not developed to a highly competitive stage to which it has reached to-day. It was more or less a complimentary exercise which developed chest and arms. This idea seems to exist as only the underwater breast-stroke, dog paddle, or the over-arm trudgen and back strokes were known. ...

### ***Kuṇḍakāvartana***

This seems to be a form of exercise in which circular movements are entailed. The *vajramuṣṭī* exercises have a number of calisthenics in which



circular movements, tumbling etc. are involved and these exercises seem to have been noted here as their effects such as development of thighs, waist, building up wind-power and strengthening of heart are specially mentioned. The *vajramuṣṭī* circular movements are quite fast and they are something like the circuit exercises that are recently developed.

### *Svāsapreraṇikāśrama*

This does not seem to be any specific exercise, but it suggests the quality of exercises which develop stamina. These are running, skipping and related types that induce heavy breathing and train an individual to work hard under the conditions of 'oxygen debt'.

### *Uhāpohaśrama*

This is no exercise at all. It is only at the most discussion, planning and thinking. Even though this activity does not require any gymnastic or athletic ability, it is an extremely important part of the preparation. Instructions are given and plans are drawn for success in a meet. This activity includes a major part of theory and coaching hints.

### *Āmardakīśrama*

This exercise seems to indicate the effects of massage on the massagist. This inference is made possible because massage is noted as *mardanā* and a derivative from it may be the *āmardakīśrama*. It is well-known to the massagists that giving massage is quite a strenuous form of exercise. It might also mean the passive form of exercises felt while undergoing massage.





### *Anyatkṛtakaraśrama*

This seems to indicate the exercises in pairs. They are different from wrestling proper and include pulling, pushing and other movements. ...

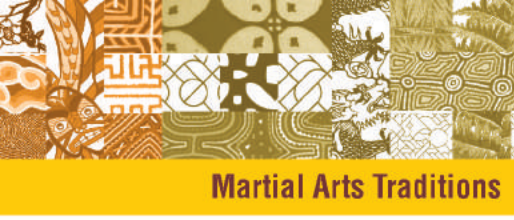
Physical exercises are not suitable at all times and in some cases may endanger health and life. The *mallas* have, therefore, enjoined, the following persons not to take exercise: *pinasa* (persons having nasal disease), *sofavān* (having swelling), *kāsa* (having dry coughing), *śvāsa* (having heavy breathing), *kṣudhātura* (hungry), *bhuktavān* (one who has eaten), *akṣam* (weak), *kṣīṇa* (emaciated), *vyagra*, *cintātura* (worried), *ajirṇavāna* (dyspeptic), *durbala* (without strength), *strisukṣīṇa* (weakened by sexual relation), *madapiḍita* (intoxicated), *sirorogārta* (troubled by disease of head), *bhrānta* (mad), *kṣudhāviṣṭo* (very hungry). Some of these disabilities are temporary and others of longer duration.

### *Alpaśrama*

*Alpaśrama* is noted as light exercise and it is defined as that form which does not lead to perspiration or heavy breathing. This definition suggests the amount rather than the type of exercises.

Such *alpaśrama* leads to the development of strength, improves digestion, feeling of lightness and enthusiasm, stops old age, keeps muscles firm and leads to general development (*bṛhaṇa*).

This is recommended for children, old people, persons weakened by fever, wounded people, man with eye-disease, sick, weak and suffering from weak digestion, *vāta*, heat and overwork. It is also recommended for persons, who have insufficient blood, who have observed fast and have deformed body (*kuśarīra*).



### ***Ardhaśrama***

*Ardhaśrama* is more strenuous than *alpaśrama*. It is defined as the exercise which leads to perspiration on the neck, face, armpits, hand and leg-joints and develops rather hard breathing.

*Ardhaśrama* develops pleasant mind (*saumanasa*), strength, nourishment, enthusiasm, joy, happiness and builds up strength and stamina. It removes fainting, fat, bile etc.

### ***Pūrṇaśrama***

This form leads to heavy perspiration all over the body and the eyes become red. It causes heavy breathing and may result in parching of throat, giddiness, fainting, thirst, loss of strength, vomiting, bleeding, burning in heart and even fever.

The good effects of this form of exercise is health, strength, destruction of diseases of heart, bile, worms, *kuṣṭa*. It leads to courage, endurance, good appetite and destruction of diseases. ...

### ***Time of exercise***

Daily exercises are recommended to be taken in the morning. The seasonal variations are also noted in *Mallapurāṇa*. The winter is recommended for *Pūrṇaśrama* (December-April). In the summer (May-June-July) only *Ardhaśrama* is recommended, whereas in monsoon light exercises are recommended.

Some days of rest are also enjoined. Specially *Aṣṭamī*, *Caturdaśī*; the lost *tithī*, the days of *Sutaka*, *Mahāṣṭamī*, *Srāddhapakṣa* (*Pitṛpakṣa*), *Akṣaya navamī*, eclipses, *Akṣayaṭṛtiyā*. These specifications generally mean that at least



once a week the rest day was observed and some times more days were observed as rest days, depending upon the situation.

### **Arena**

The arena is also described in the *Mallapurāṇa*. It is not the mat as is used to-day. The arena is known as *ākhāḍhaka*. It is high, levelled and low. Its dimensions are three *devamāna* (101 *hastas* or cubits), *daityamāna* (50 *hastas*) and *martyamāna* (21 *hastas*). It is square, triangular and circular. The earth with kankar, iron, wood, stone, thorn etc. should be avoided. It appears that the general dimension was 21 *hastas* which is equal to about 30 feet, and the *devamāna* and *daityamāna* seem to be more for rhetorics rather than actual use.

The earth must be pleasing to see and as soft as that required for seed-laying and should be a hand high and levelled. It should be worshipped and Hari should be placed there and a *bījapūraka* be placed in the centre of the arena. After worshipping 'Govinda' the king should see the wrestling.

### **Wrestling**

The wrestlers should put on the *āyudha* on the fingers. It should be knitted with thread. When the opponent is broken (defeated) the *malla* becomes victorious.

The *vajramuṣṭī* wrestling is free fight which includes kicking, pressing with knee, boxing on head, temple etc., but a hit below the chest is a foul game.

The wrestling is divided in four types (1) *dharaṇīpāta*, (2) *āṣura*, (3) *nara*, (4) *yuddha*.



## Martial Arts Traditions

### *Dharaṇīpāta*

*Dharaṇīpāta* is getting the opponent down on the earth. It is achieved by the force of palm, arm or by throwing one's self down and then bringing down the enemy. The fallen enemy is defeated.

*Dharaṇīpāta* type of wrestling seems to be the common wrestling where victory and defeat consists in turning the opponent on the back. The wrestling types such as *bhīmsenī* and *hanumanti* seem to be of this variety.

### *Āṣura*

This type is fiercer and seems to be a free-fight which includes injury to ear and nose, felling of teeth, biting, pulling of hair, throwing earth, scratching with nails, catching the neck, breaking of fingers, etc.

This type of wrestling is noted as *mathara*, *masura* also, it seems to be equivalent to the *jarāsandhī* variety known to-day. Such type leads to the fall of the *malla*, but he should not be killed. That is *dharmayuddha*. If a *malla* dies the king is responsible. Once a *malla* falls on the ground the wrestling is stopped. ...

### *Diet*

It is interesting to note that the *vajramuṣṭi* wrestlers of the present day are vegetarians. They take cereals, wheat, rice, bajri or jowar accompanied by pulses and green vegetables. They show special preference for milk, curds, ghee and other milk products. They used to consume large quantities of dry fruits both raw and as condiments in the food. Molasses are consumed with food or even as a drink by adding it in water. Similarly they use sugar and citrus fruits, specially lemon.





The *Mallapurāṇa* however clearly indicates their non-vegetarian diet by describing the qualities of a variety of meat. It is not known when the transition to pure vegetarian food habit took place.

They did not take either liquor or tobacco, and considered them injurious. (From Introduction to *Mallapurāṇa: A Rare Sanskrit Text on Indian Wrestling especially as practised by the Jyeṣṭhīmallas*, Bhogilal Jayachandbhai Sandesara and Ramanlal Nagarji Mehta, (eds), Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1964. Courtesy Prof. Siddharth Wakankar.)

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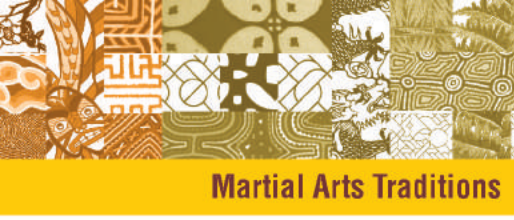
### *Marmaśāstram*

*Marmaśāstram* or the science of *marmas*, i.e., the body's vital points, is an integral part of *kaṭarippayattu*. This text describes an important *marma* and how it will react to a blow given in combat.

#### *Tilamarmam*

After the *Uccimarma* (crown of head, the anterior fontanelle), the next most important *marma* is *Tilamarmam*. The location of this *marma* is in the point where *Ājñācakra* is located in the science of Yoga. This is the second *marma* lying in the straight line drawn from the *Uccimarma*. Known by various names like *Sthapati*, *Poṭṭumarmam*, *Tilamarmam* and *Tilasakkālam*.

Location: This *marma* is located at a distance of one rice grain below the point of intersection of the centre of the eyebrows and the centre of the forehead. Above and below this point are the *Mūrtikkāla* and *Mīnveṭṭi marmas*. And on either side are the *Mantrakkāla marmas*. The *Piṅgaḷā Nāḍī* originates from the point of *Uccimarma* and after reaching the *Tilasakkāla* connects with the *marmas* on the four sides.



**Injury:** If the impact is very strong, then the mouth of the victim opens wide and the eyes look upwards and the eyeballs become fixed. There will be shivering in the body and cramps in the sides of the rib cage. Within three and three fourth *nāḍikās* [one *nāḍikā* is equal to 24 minutes], death may occur.

One must assess the pulse, breath and eyes to confirm whether the victim is alive and if there are signs of life, then treatment may be done.

**Manoeuvre:** The physician should keep the victim in the sitting position and then hit hard on the *Uccimarma* with the left hand. The ears and neck should be massaged softly. The *Cuziyāḍimarma* located on the opposite side of the *Tilasakkālam* should be pressed hard with the thumb. The lower jaw should be pressed upward and held.

Chewing dry ginger, one must blow into the ears of the patient repeatedly. Gruel prepared out of old rice grains should be given mixed with dry ginger.

**Treatment:** The galangal root, dry ginger, long pepper, *celastrus* seeds, *khus khus* and *loban* should be made into a decoction and taken twice a day for four days. This will give relief from the pain. (From *Marmasāstram* by Gaṅgādharaṇ Āśān, 8<sup>th</sup> ed., Thiruvananthapuram, pp. 88-91, translated from the Malayalam by P. Ram Manohar)

