



KALARIPAYATTU: THE TRADITIONAL MARTIAL ART OF KERALA

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Abstract

Thus kalaripayattu, the traditional martial art of Kerala, is a proud heritage handed down the centuries by our forefathers and it has many admirers in home land and abroad. Through, the origin and development of kalaripayattu still remains as a moot question, the oral traditions and the foreign travelogues left detailed notes on its practices and the socio-political and cultural settings in which this art is deep rooted. As an age-old institution it has greatly influenced the culture of Kerala.

Keywords: Martial Art, Silambam, Fitness.

Introduction

The resurgence of public interest in kalaripayattu began in the 1920s in Thalassery, as part of a wave of rediscovery of the traditional arts throughout south India and continued through the 1970s surge of general worldwide interest in martial arts. In recent years, efforts have been made to further popularise the art, with it featuring in international and Indian films such as Ondanodu Kaladalli (Kannada) (1978), Asoka (2001), The Myth (2005), The Last Legion (2007), Manasara (2010), Commando (2013) and Baaghi (2016). There are several lineages/styles (sampradayam), including arappukai, pillatanni vattantirippu and thulunadan. In olden times, students went to Tulunadu kalari's to overcome their defects (kuttam theerkkal). There are schools which teach more than one of these traditions. Some traditional kalari around Kannur for example teach a blend of arappukai, pillatanni, and katanath styles.

As mentioned in the preface, the origin and growth of kalaripayattu is shrouded in mystery. Also, the history of kalaripayattu, like the history of Kerala, do not have shown any continuity. We have three source traditions to recreate the history of kalaripayattu-the Legend associated with Parasurama found in the works like keralopathi, Kerala Mahatmyam and in the northern ballads, Tamil Dravidian Traditions dating from the early Sangam culture, and the Sanskrit Dhanurvedic Traditions. The early period of the history of South India, of which Kerala was a part, known as Sangam Age was heroic in nature. The anthologies like the Akananuru and Purananuru had left detailed notes on the martial spirit of the people and their war exploits. The envious position enjoyed by the martial hero in the Sangam Age is evident in the deification of fallen heroes through the planting of Virakkal or Nattukkal which inscribed with the name of the hero and his valorous deeds and worshipped by the

common people of the locality. To Sangam people, war was considered as a sacrifice of honour and memorial stones were erected to fallen heroic.

The Brahmin immigration and their consequent settlement in Kerala constitute a landmark in the history of Kerala in general and history of kalaripayattu in particular. These Brahmin migrants established temples and educational institutions called salai's or ghatikas. The students of salai were trained in Vedas and were undergone military training which might be on the Dhanur Vedic line. It can be seen that, by the time of Second Chera Empire, the two parallel martial training systems of salais and kalaries might come into existence for all sections of the people. In course of time, adjustments might have occurred in the martial techniques and the peculiar socio-political conditions seem to have played a vital role in their perfect assimilation. Thus the Dhanur Vedic Traditions are so much closely intertwined with kalari system is that the former is inseparable from the latter. These factors lead us to conclude that kalaripayattu originated during the Sangam period, days of the early Christian era, and was later strengthened by the influences of salais, Dhanurveda, Ayurveda and Yoga brought about by the Brahmin migrants.

Conclusion

Kalaripayattu, which has references running from folk-sayings to foreign documents, was the pulse beat of Kerala's social life. More and more in depth studies correlating the Kalari connected information from Kerala and outside are to be done in this area. There is no doubt that these studies are inevitable in thoroughly understanding Kerala, especially medieval Kerala period.

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