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Insights of *Kalaripayattu* W.R.T. *Marma Shastra*

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Abstract

In ancient history of India, *Kalaripayattu* is believed to be one of the oldest surviving martial art forms. The main objective of this art-form is to attain physical flexibility and mental strength. The first mention of *Karalipayattu* is observed in historical literature of *Dravidian* culture. *Kalaripayattu* is associated with *Dhanurveda* a branch of *Yajurveda*.

The word *Kalaripayattu* is divided as '*Kalari*' referring to the training place or where the knowledge is taught and '*Payattu*' refers to the training.

Practitioners of *Kalaripayattu* should have an intricate knowledge of *Marma*, which are points where *Prana* resides. *Kalari Chikitsa* provide the treatment protocol to treat injuries and wound during war combat. The training involve four steps which equip the practitioner to use weapons. The training also include the *Marma Shastra* in order to equip the practitioner to attack on the *Marma* points of opponent's along with defence of his own *Marma* during combat.

Kalari Uzhichil (application of oil) are used in neuromuscular and musculoskeletal disorders.

Keywords: *Kalaripayattu*, *Kalari Chikitsa*, *Marma Shastra*, *Kalari Uzhichil*, *Kalari* Movement therapy, neuromuscular disorders, musculoskeletal disorders

Introduction

The word *Kalari* is originated from the *Sanskrit* word '*Khaloorika*' meaning the place where martial art is practiced. This art form has deep correlation with martial training in *Dhanurveda*.

Kalaripayattu is traditional as well as the oldest martial art developed in the southern Kerala by sage *Pasuram* enabling the warrior to equip him with combat strategy during war. The word *Kalaripayattu* is divided as '*Kalari*' referring to the training place or where the knowledge is taught and '*Payattu*' refers to the training.

Kalari is considered as a place where physical cultural training benefits the individual mentally, physically and spiritually.

The *Kalari* abode is designed as per *Vastu Shastra* where about two feet width, four feet long and five feet deep handmade pit is dug out of the ground while the roof is thatched roof. The entrance faces the East. *Kalari* arena is served as a temple where sacred rituals are carried out on the southwest corner of the pit where *Poothara*, which is seven tired platform and where the guide guardian deity of *Kalari* resides. The seven steps of deity place symbolises strength, patience, commanding power, posture, training, expression and sound. *Poothara Pranam* is important and foremost feature in *Kalari* where disciples start practising only after salutation of *Kalaripayattu* i.e. *Poothara Pranam*.

Stages of *Kalaripayattu* ^[1]

The training of *Kalaripayattu* is carried out in 4 stages- *Meipayattu*, *Kolthari*, *Ankathari* and *Verumkai*.

1. *Meipayattu* (Physical Exercise *Angasadagathvam* i.e. Leg Exercises):

This stage consists of twelve exercises required for neuromuscular coordination, balance and flexibility followed by basic postures of the body. It includes regress physical exercises involving complex twists, stances, jumps, turns and other physical sequences. Practising *Meipayattu* stretches the muscles thereby improving the balance of individual.

2. *Kolthari*:

After attaining the physical strength, the discipline is introduced to fight with wooden weapons. The first wooden weapon is called *Kettukari* which is usually of same height as of the discipline. Expertizing the fight with *Kettukari* is the preliminary phase for learning the art of fight with spear.

The second weapon is *Cheruvadi* or *Muchan* which is wooden stick of length about three palms or about two and half feet long. It is a comparatively much shorter exercise regime but requires more care and precision. This stage involves rapid movements and that too in quicker successions (around hundred blows within a minute).

The third weapon taught is *Otta Kol*, which is a curved wooden stick around eighteen to twenty inches long with knob at the end point thereby resembling the tusk of an elephant. The knob of this weapon is rounded and is used

to attack the *Marma* (vulnerable points) of the opponent's body at close encounters. This tool is considered as the master weapon and hence the training in *Otta* consists of eighteen sequences in order to develop skill, stamina, agility and most importantly the power in the disciples.

3. **Ankathari:** *Ankathari* means war training and is done by metal weapons. This stage requires extreme concentration since usage of metal weapons make it lethal. The sequence of weapons used in training are:

Kadhara (Metal Dragger): It is about one foot long and is sharp on both the ends, hence, used for slashing, cutting and in defending oneself. It involves use of no shield hence the blows being parried with the dagger itself. The sharp end of dagger aims for the *Sira Marma* thereby causing the opponent to die due to haemorrhage.

Val and Paricha (Sword and Shield): in this stage, most of the techniques are derived from animal fights. The sword here symbolises *Lord Shiva* and shield symbolises *Goddess Shakti*.

Kuntham (Spear to Spear Fight): In this, the fighters use spear only. The sharp end of spear attacks the *Marma* of opponent. The spear is used to defend also.

Another form of Kuntham is *Marapidicha Kuntham* in which one is equipped with sword and shield while other is equipped with spear.

Another stage where different weapons are used is *Kathyum Thalayum* in which one warrior uses cloth while other is equipped with knife. The defendant with cloth defends himself with aide piece of cloth held in both hands in a peculiar way.

Urumi or Chuttuval (Flexible Sword): In this stage both defence and attack is done by using the sword measuring three to four feet in length and sharp on both sides. This combat technique is useful in mass encounter.

At the end of this stage, disciple specialise in usage of any one weapon thereby become an expert swordsman or stick fighter.

4. **Verumkai:** In this stage, self-defence with bare hands is practised using arm locks, grappling and *Marma Abhighat*.

Postures in Kalaripayattu

There are eight animal postures in *Kalaripayattu* called *Ashta Vadivu*. These are required for better control of body, focus and balance. These postures also allow the control of breath.

Following are the *Ashta Vadivu* mentioned in *Kalaripayattu*:

- i). *Gaja Vida* (Elephant)
- ii). *Simha Vadivu* (Lion)
- iii). *Aswa Vadivu* (Horse)
- iv). *Matsya Vadivu* (Fish)
- v). *Marjara Vadiva* (Cat)
- vi). *Varaha Vadivu* (Wild)
- vii). *Kukuda Vadivu* (Cock)
- viii). *Sarpa Vadivu* (Snake)

Therapeutic Use of Kalari Chikitsa: As discussed above *Kalari* can be practised not only by physically fit individual but can also be used in ailing stage. Various therapeutic methodology are developed for the management of orthopedic, sports medicine, neurological ailments. *Marma Chikitsa* plays vital role among these *Kalari Chikitsa* practices. *Kalari Chikitsa* is based on scientific reasoning of *Ayurveda*, *Yoga*, *Vastu Shastra* and *Tantra Shastra*.

The *Kalari Chikitsa* leads to the awareness about oneself in both wellness as well as ailing stage of any individual by the

disciple. Some of therapeutic uses of *Kalari Chikitsa* are as follows:

- a) **Kalari Massage (Kalari Uzhichil):** After completing the training in *Kalaripayattu*, the individual is then only allowed to execute *Kalari* massage. In *Kalari* massage the entire body of an individual is massaged with medicated oil where strokes are practiced in form of *Akshara Ketu* and *Akka Ketu* which means the strokes while massaging are executed in form of letters and numbers respectively. In *Kalari* massage the person is allow to execute the massage by his hands or by his feet.

The main distinguishing feature in *Kalari* massage is focus of therapy on *Marma*, while other feature include use of medicated *Ayurvedic* oils to pacify *Vata Dosha*.

The massage technique rectify and facilitates the flow of *Vata* thereby promoting healthy tissue conversion. The technique is useful in musculoskeletal as well neurological disorders such as inter-vertebral disc prolapses, cervical spondylitis, frozen shoulder and many more.

- b) **Asthi Bhagna Chikitsa of Kalari:** The injury of bone and joints are classified into categories in *Ayurveda Sandhow Bhagna* and *Asandhow Bhagna*^[2] where *Sandhow Bhagna* refers to joint dislocation and *Asandhow Bhagna* refers to bone fractures. As per *Ayurveda*, *Asandhow Bhagna* are classified into six^[3] *Utklishta*, *Vishishtam* (subluxation), *Avakshiptham* (downward displacement), *Atikshiptam* (complete dislocation), *Tiryak Kshiptam* and *Vivarthitam* (lateral displacement) whereas *Sandhow Bhagna* are categorised into twelve types^[4] *Karkatakam*, *Vakram*, *Spuritham*, *Vellitham*, *Asthichallikam*, *Aswakarnam*, *Pichitham*, *Daritham*, *Choornitham*, *Atipathitham*, *Seshitham* and *Majjanugatham*).

As per *Ayurvedic* treatment protocol, bandaging, correcting the dismantled broken bones by *Asthi Sandhana* (bringing back to their real position), retaining the same position with the *Varna Ropana* (application of herbal healing paste), splinting, bandaging and other ways. Oral intake of *Vedanasthapana* drugs (anti-inflammatory)^[5] and *Varna Ropana* drugs are prescribed to enhance wound healing.

For patient rehabilitation, modalities of *Kalari Chikitsa* are the treatment choice as these help to regain the health and strength of musculoskeletal of the individual. Post rehabilitation, the movement should be without any pain, deformity or any shortening of limb^[6].

Thus *Kalari Chikitsa* is used to heal any kind of bone fracture which are not in the category of surgical intervention like the fracture of skull.

- c) **Kalaripayatu Movement Therapy:** This is a movement based healing methodology aiming physical wellness. The body movements as per *Kalari* is classified as follows:

- i). *Chuvaduvu* (Feet movement)
- ii). *Vadivu* (Posture)
- iii). *Nila* (Stance)
- iv). *Neekam* (Forward movement)
- v). *Chattam* (Jumps)
- vi). *Adavu* (Tactics)

These movements are responsible for regaining the muscular strengthen since the principles of *Kalari Chikitsa* are developed on basis of *Yoga*, *Ayurveda* and *Tantra Shastra*.

KMT is highly recommend in

- Sports injuries including martial, dance and *Yoga*.
- Musculoskeletal injuries and imbalances.
- Acute and chronic pain.

- Back, neck, shoulder and knee pain
- Muscles and joint pain and stiffness.
- Frozen shoulder
- *Ghridrasi* (sciatica)
- Arthritis
- Plantar fasciitis
- Repetitive strain injuries.
- Improves the body image, self-esteem, attentiveness, and communication skills.
- For mental health it can also reduce stress, fears and anxieties.
- KMT has also been shown to benefit adolescent and adult psychiatric patients, the learning disabled, the mentally handicapped.

d) Marma Shastra and Kalaripayattu ^[7]: *Marma* is derived from “*Mru*” meaning death. As per *Ayurveda*, there are 107 vital spots in the human body that when injured in any way may lead to death. *Marma* are point of *Prana* thereby on application of pressure or insertion of needles (*Bhedan Karma*) the flow of *Prana* along the system of subtle channels called *Nadi* can be brought in balance. The knowledge of such vital points is studied in detail in *Marma Shastra*.

Marma Shastra in *Kalaripayattu* has three divisions according to their toughness effect and expertise.

- Thodu Marma* (by touching)
- Choondu Marma (by Pointing)**: In *Choondu Marma* the psychological powers of *Mantra* were used to fight the enemy.
- Noku Marma (by Looking)**: *Noku Marma* involves the use of the index finger and eyes pointing to the major *Marma*, through which enemy can be made motionless.

Conclusion

Kalaripayattu is an oldest self-defence martial art training where emphasis on proper posture which is essential for control of body, focus and balance. These postures also allow the control of breath.

Since *Kalaripayattu* was developed during war times hence it was essential for disciple to have knowledge of *Marma*, the vital points where the *Prana* resides, in order to attack on the *Marma* points of opponent’s along with defence of his own *Marma* during combat.

The physical training includes the practises to strengthen the lowest vertebral column (*Kundalini*).

Kalari massage (*Kalari Uzhichil*) relaxes the neuromuscular system of the body thereby overcome fatigue, renders nourishments, longevity. Amongst the *Dosha* of body *Kapha Dosha* and amongst *Dhatu*, *Medo Dhatu* are reduced and thereby help the individual to relax and get a sound sleep with sturdy physique.

The practise of physical exercises and *Uzhichil* are essential part of *Kalari movement* therapy which helps the patients with neuromuscular diseases or with arthritis and other musculoskeletal disorders.

Uzhichil improves the blood circulation thereby it helps in removal of obstruction of *Prana* at *Marma* points and hence help in repair of tissues.

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